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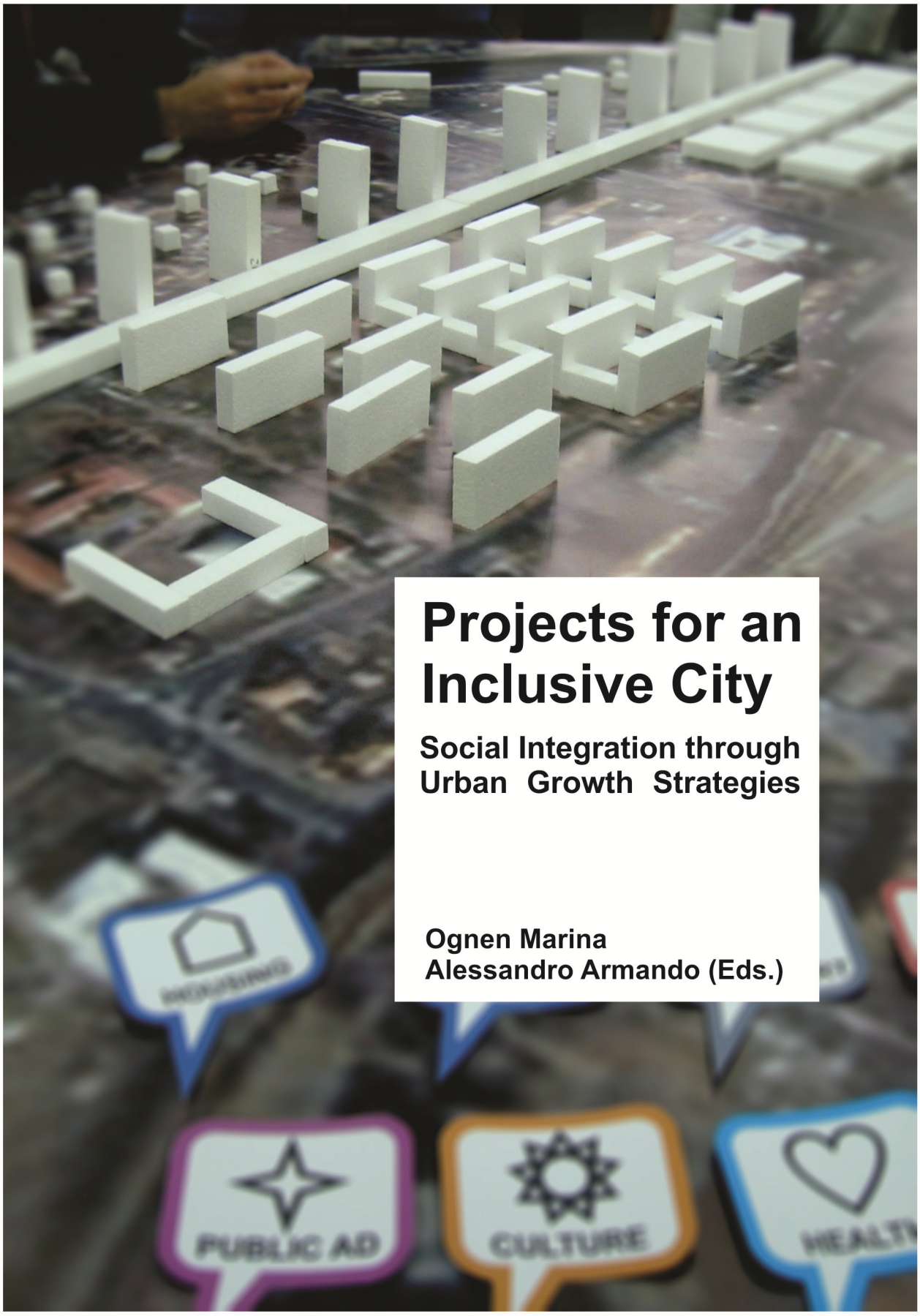
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28 November 2026



Projects for an Inclusive City

Social Integration through Urban Growth Strategies

Ognen Marina
Alessandro Armando (Eds.)

SINERGI Project

Social Integration through Urban Growth Strategies

The SINERGI Project (Social Integration through Urban Growth Strategies) is a network of twinned cities that provides exchange of knowledge, experience and good practices of partner cities, Universities, civic organizations and social groups enabling better social integration through joint development of urban growth strategies. The project has enriched the sense of identity and mutual understanding between European citizens by bringing upfront problems and issues of urban life that are shared among them, but also by sharing common values, history and culture in an open dialog.

The network organized two seminars as a platform for creative and open debate between local authorities, academics, experts, civil activists and citizens from local communities about the problem of social integration in ever-growing cities. The SINERGI Book One: “The Projects for an Inclusive City” is the result of these two seminars. The purpose of this book is to provoke decision-makers and citizens to challenge their perception of the city and, through critical understanding of mutual interests and shared values, to create a sustainable and lasting network of cities and active citizens.

Projects for an Inclusive City

Social Integration through Urban Growth Strategies

Edited by
Ognen Marina
Alessandro Armando

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Alessandro Armando

The XXI century periphery: Turin and the urban crisis

ABSTRACT:

The crisis affecting the city of Turin needs to be framed in the Italian situation for its general outlines: plunge of the building sector production, contraction of the real estate market, housing crisis. The major planned scenarios seem to be stuck, despite the best intentions of the city government in offering favourable conditions to entrepreneurs. Looking at the peripheral areas of the city, the situation seems to be particularly dramatic. In the increasing competition for localizing new opportunities of development along the urban territory, the suburbs seem to be condemned to exclusion. In absence of favourable benefits, the entire mechanism of urban transformation seems to stop irreparably. The planning tools and procedures have always implied a sort of automatic pressure coming from the development profits, which are now becoming widely uncertain. In a pessimistic projection, cities like Turin could find themselves in a situation of marginality within a globalized real estate market: a sort of XXI century periphery of the world capitalization, where the possibility of driving the public transformation by leveraging private investments is increasingly weakening. We can suppose that, in this situation, the role of urban design and planning should deeply change in order to provide new tools in governing the future development.

KEYWORDS: *urban crisis, inclusive urban design, suburbs, urban regeneration, city planning tools*

1 INTRODUCTION

The urban development in Turin has been facing a dramatic crisis since 2008/2009. Regardless of the possible predictions concerning a future recovery of the real estate market, the duration of this crisis made evident the weakness of urban policies based on the assumption of the unquestionable appeal of real estate investments. At first, the paper will focus on the general situation in which the present crisis emerged in Turin, mainly focusing on the difficulties in using the ordinary planning and design instruments to drive the urban transformation. In the second part, the case study of “Mirafiori sud” neighborhood will be analyzed, in order to describe a specific effect of this situation.

2 WEAKENING CITY, WEAKENING PROJECT

2.1 Five years of slowing down

The crisis affecting the city of Turin shows some features that can be referred to other European medium-large cities with around one million inhabitants, and it needs to be framed in the Italian situation for its general outlines: plunge of the building sector production, contraction of the real estate market in order to avoid the collapse of prices, housing crisis depending on many factors, mostly demographic. About the production, the Italian National Institute for Statistics (ISTAT) provides the *index of production in construction* (IPC) at the national scale, by measuring the variation in building production based on data from 2010. In September 2014 the IPC had a -10,6% annual rate, after a negative series which lasted for years: -8,8% in 2013, -15,4% in 2012, -6,8% in 2011, -3,5% in 2010.

Related to the real estate crisis, the National Association of Building Contractors (ANCE) provides the processing of a general frame about the variation of investments in the Italian building sector, estimating a -33,5% loss in the 2008-2015 period. ANCE estimates also a -53,6% decreasing rate of trade in the Italian housing market between 2007 and 2013. Even if, in the first semester 2014, after this long negative series, many cities started to get a positive trend reversal – among them Turin, with a +10,8% compared to the same 2013 period; but it still seems to be too early to consider it a permanent effect of recovery.

Related to the relationship between housing crisis and demographic factors, a recent report by ANCE (July 2014) describes the situation: «A high request of houses is still evident in Italy, fed by the population growth and, above all, by the number of families. Between 2006 and 2011, Italy registered a 1,6% increase of population. Yet, the growth of families has been higher: in the same period they had a 9% rate, with an average increase of 316.000 family units per year. In contrast with the strong increment of families, the housing production has been progressively and sensitive reduced , with a 59% decrease – according to data on building

permits (Istat). Therefore, between 2004 and 2011, there were 228.000 new houses built per year against the average yearly growth of 316.000 families. By comparing new houses to new families, the potential overall requirement is around 700.000 dwellings»

Beyond these general situation troubles, which are common to other major Italian cities, Turin features some specific effects of the crisis, such as 40.000 vacant flats (2011, Istat) and a large amount of already approved, but never started, executive plans for new developments. Above all, in Turin, the set of top-down scenarios of urban development struggles to go ahead according to strategic lines and priorities. Even the major projects considered as decisive to lead the urban transformation are having a hard time. Piedmont Region holds the Italian record for the unfinished major public works, waiting for a total amount of 293 million distributed on 25 projects (Ministry of Public Works data): actually this circumstance is mainly due to the lack of public funds from the national government.

The last branch of the “Spina Centrale” project – the main infrastructural work coming from the 1995 Master Plan of the city – is far from being complete, and the arrangement of the surface boulevard starts ten years after the completion of the first half: in December 2014 the first calls for tenders have been published and the completion work should be between March and May 2015. Nevertheless, the arrangement of the northern part of the boulevard is only provisional, renouncing to connect the infrastructure to the airport highway, as formerly designed in the main plan.

The metropolitan railway system (SFM) has been modified many times, but after twenty years of works, it still doesn’t manage to connect the main poles of the territory. The metropolitan railway network had been designed on five main lines, which now seem to be eight. However, the former representation of the network (2011) didn’t include some of the existing standard lines and provided for the connection with the airport, which is not available at present.

The main areas of strategic development such as those included in the “Variante 200” project are waiting to be implemented, because after many years no investors seem to be interested. All these projects which were considered as a priority struggle to become real. The infrastructural project for the western axis of Corso Marche, adopted by the Provincial Government in 2009, never went beyond concept. Both in the North-East (Corso Romania) and in the South-West Districts, the adoption of new plans didn’t enhance any initiatives by developers. The major scenarios seem to be stuck, despite the best intentions by the city government in offering favourable conditions to entrepreneurs. Even the in central city, usually considered as unquestionably attractive, the trades are going to become increasingly difficult, causing a downward trend in the numerous public auctions. The City Council is going to sell many public buildings, as the former Courthouse, together with other public offices located in the

city centre. At the same time there are many historical buildings for sale, which were transferred to the City by the State property: most of them are dismissed barracks, and in some cases there are very important monuments, such as the Cavallerizza Reale, part of the historic complex of the Savoia's Royal Palace.

Looking at the peripheral areas of the city, the situation seems to be even more dramatic. In the last twenty years the suburbs, particularly in the southern part of the city, have taken advantage from successful regeneration projects, mainly supported by EU funds. With the URBAN II programme European Union contributed 10.7 million euros to urban regeneration in the "Mirafiori Nord" suburban area of Torino. The goal of the URBAN Community Initiative was «economic and social regeneration of cities and of neighbourhoods in crisis in order to promote sustainable urban development». The second round of URBAN ("URBAN II") covered the period 2000-2006, supporting 70 deprived urban areas across the EU. Total funding from the EU alone was 728.3 million euros and this attracted as much again in matched funding from both public and private sectors.



Figure 1. Turin Metropolitan Area and its development areas: housing and mixed use (orange), services (yellow), industry (red), university (pink). (Urban Center Metropolitano 2011)

After the end of this positive phase, old, usual problems could re-emerge in the near future, since the City Government is reducing its compensative policies because of the critical situation of the public budget. The suburbs are becoming increasingly onerous for the urban policies, since they don't have anything to offer, especially in terms of real estate appraisal. Some areas have started to raise from the status of ghetto after many years of commitment and big public investments, but they risk to go back to their former condition. The reduction of local services (public transportation and maintenance, public surveillance); the low-value of the real estate stock, unfit to the present market

requirements; the empty flats and the general low rate of occupancy in many residential blocks; the increasing poverty and the rising of illegal uses in some marginal areas, such as temporary lodgings, unlawful activities, slums, vegetable gardens and dumps: these are all factors which have been reduced and are now starting to re-emerge, as if they were at an inertial point, kept back only by a contrasting, temporary effort. This trend could lead the suburbs back to the condition of non-autonomous places, requiring for a continuous assistance, incapable of producing their own economic and social stability.

2.2 Urban design is weakening

In a scenario of increasing competition for localizing new opportunities of development along the urban territory, the suburbs seem to be condemned to exclusion. Some scholars started to propose forms of "urban scrapping" (*rottamazione urbana*, Della Puppa 2007), trying to define when a development intervention of demolition and reconstruction can be considered economically sustainable by measuring urban density, real estate and land values: «In general, the low interest in demolition and reconstruction projects is evident where the buildings value has decreased, but is not cancelled. Therefore, the economic convenience to destroy the fraction of value still embedded in properties is advantageous if the zoning density can grow three or four times, nevertheless with transformations not necessarily coherent with planning goals and with the carrying capacity of the sites» (Micelli 2014). According to these hypotheses, the chances for a successful (and convenient) development would rise by increasing the planned densities. But there are many places where the increase of density wouldn't probably have any effects, since the real estate market is saturated.

In absence of favourable benefits, the entire mechanism of urban transformation seems to stop irreparably, both in terms of new economic enterprises and in terms of social inclusion and regeneration of the depressed areas of the city. The planning tools and procedures have always implied a sort of automatic pressure coming from the development profits and the real estate cumulative capitalization, which are now becoming widely uncertain. Until few years ago, the planning destination of urban zones to transformation – especially to residential and commercial uses – triggered almost immediately a process of investments, negotiations, constructions and trades. Between 1995 and 2010, the average yield of dwellings in the central parts of the greater Italian cities was 9,3%, and 8,1% in the midsized cities: that is more than the gold yield in the same period (8%) (CISS, 2011). Now, in Turin, this trend has definitely stopped. While the real estate market is recovering in Milan, like in most of the European "secondary capitals", many observers are forecasting a future of concentration of sales and investments which would exclude smaller centres from a real recovery, but even a faster transformation of the Real Estate economy on the global scale according to new demographic balances and distributions of wealth. To this extent,

the PwC Report about the 2020 situation focuses on the future growth of the world population: «Although Africa's population will still be growing fast in 2020, Europe's population growth will be stalling. The middle classes are projected to grow by 180% between 2010 and 2040, with the highest proportion of middle-class people set to live in Asia rather than Europe as soon as 2015. And between 2010 and 2020, more than one billion additional middle-class consumers will emerge globally». In a pessimistic projection, cities like Turin could find themselves in a situation of marginality within a globalized real estate market: a sort of XXI century periphery of the world capitalization, where the possibility of driving the public transformation by leveraging private investments is increasingly weakening. We can suppose that in this situation, the role of urban design and planning should deeply change in order to provide new tools in governing the future development.

2.3 Designing the (urban) effects

The decreasing economic advantage generated by the investments in the real estate market threatens the opportunities of defining the future physical form of the city collectively, through public processes of debate and inclusive actions of decision-making. Nevertheless, urban systems never stop transforming themselves even if they can get worse or better: Turin municipality will not give up designing and building its urban quality through tentative actions of development, recovering and renewal, despite the worst forecast about economic growth. The alternative option to development is not stillness, but decline. This challenge will involve not only design and planning disciplines, but also those fields of knowledge focused on the effectiveness of the implementation processes: asset, investment and construction management, decision-making and stakeholder analysis disciplines, economics, etc. Furthermore, when the opportunities and resources are scarce, urban design tools are useless to achieve the material process of development. In these cases, design tools cannot limit their effect in picturing the most desirable, rational, useful vision of transformation: that is, they cannot only propose the vision which would produce the best effects once achieved.

Rather, design tools should provide for changeable scenarios about relatively good solutions: that is a set of alternatives whose main virtue is, at least, the realistic possibility of being achieved.

The possible intervention on the built environment could not only be a strategy of maintenance, survival and low growth, according to less striking scenarios; but also, on the opposite, a strategy of planned speculation and exploitation of the available assets, whereas we can measure the effective chances to gain economic and social advantages from them. This approach implies to integrate the design practices to a set of instruments which can associate the economic feasibility to bureaucratic procedures and decision-making processes, in the course of time.

Among the various places which could be closely observed, trying to consider them as case studies for an experimentation about urban design tools, the southern periphery of Turin seems to be particularly appropriate. In the second part of this paper, I will describe the urban evolution of Mirafiori Sud, both in its criticalities and in the opportunities which the neighborhood can offer for the future transformation.

3 MIRAFIORI SUD: as a case study for public transformation processes

The southern suburbs of Turin, stuck between the huge factory platform of the FIAT, its logistic cluster and the Sangone River corridor, represent an emblematic case of how the European metropolitan peripheries are facing a new kind of problems in the last years. Some urban economists, like Ezio Micelli, are even starting to suggest that our cities will have a hierarchized development in the future, with the unavoidable crisis of a part of their territories: «Where the expectations of real estate appraisal cannot overcome the value of the existing asset, the hypothesis about the city scrapping (Dragotto, India, 2007) – that is the urban renovation throughout demolition and reconstruction – seems unlikely, while it is credible a more selective intervention aimed to increase the value of the existing building asset» (Micelli 2014 (2)). Considering this condition, what can we say of the destiny of those places with low appraisal, which never had benefits from the city governments neither in the phases of economic growth? Do we have to abandon them to collapse?

Mirafiori Sud has a very recognizable urban structure. There are some features which mark out the area, either as weaknesses or as opportunities, composing a singular physical territory with many internal grades of coherence. In this description I would like to consider this material space as the main subject, as the final reference of any recovering strategy we can imagine and propose. This concern is about the possibility of exploiting and recycling many local resources that, at present time, are underestimated by the contemporary urban policies.

3.1 The Sangone river and the evolution of the southern periphery

The industrial development of the city from the end of 19th century to the end of 20th century caused a huge urban expansion, but it progressively excluded the river areas from the city sight and plans. During the second part of 1900s, Turin has developed ignoring the natural opportunities offered by its watercourses (except for the historical waterfront of the Po River, or the Dora channel within the northern industrial city, then covered by the settlement of the steel factory district). The river area of Sangone has to be tackled through these traces. The area was the site of the XVI century royal palace of «Mirafiori» (then destroyed at the end of the XVIII century by the French army). In 1911 the site was developed as the first airport of the city and continued working until 1950. Since 1938, the district started being affected by the settlement of the new FIAT factory

“Mirafiori”, whose influence extended the whole city and territory at least until the 1970s.

The place we are considering around the Sangone River is not part of the urbanized territory until 1964-66, when some new blocks of social housing were built to host people coming from many different slums. They were mostly immigrants from southern Italy, which arrived to Torino hoping to work at the FIAT as factory workers, but there were also war refugees coming from the new Yugoslavian territories of Istria at the end of the 1940s. The social situation in the area continued to be very critical during the 1970s and 1980s. Despite some efforts in providing basic public services, the neighborhood was a place of exclusion and criminal concentration, where it could be even dangerous to enter. However, the 1970s were also a decade when the residents started to self-organize in neighborhood associations and councils, setting a formal interaction with the city administration. In 1976, the mayor Diego Novelli created 10 city districts, each with a local council, and this area became part of the “district 10”.

Until the early 1990s there were not any dedicated projects about the reclamation and the redesign of the riverbank. This stroke of Sangone was not accessible and it was surrounded by illegal vegetable gardens, huts, garbage and some small activities of gravel excavation from the river bed. In 1997 something started to change, thanks to the enhancement of a series of European programs and funding on the renewal of the suburbs. The City of Torino launched the “Suburbs Project” (*Progetto periferie*), and the “Artom” Urban Rehabilitation Program (PRU) was approved. The plan provided for many interventions on the park, on the buildings (some of them were demolished and rebuilt) and on new service facilities (for sports, leisure, social integration and assistance). But the most relevant issue was that the EU guidelines imposed that the new rehabilitation programs had to include a formalized agenda of negotiation and social inclusion (the PAS, *Plan for Social Negotiation*).

The phase in which the “Progetto periferie” started, corresponds to a period of wide rethinking about the strategies for developing the city. The surveys for a new general urban plan (Piano Regolatore Generale) by Vittorio Gregotti and Augusto Cagnardi started in 1989 and the Plan was approved in 1995. In 1998-2000 the First Strategic Plan (the first in Italy) was launched and adopted by the Municipalities of the Metropolitan Area, and in 2006 the second Strategic Plan was achieved. After having been chosen for the XX Olympic Winter Games in 1999, Torino opened the Olympics seven years later, on February 2006. (Figure 2 and 3).



Figure 2. Sangone River area in 2001. (Città di Torino, Settore Grandi Opere del Verde)



Figure 3. Sangone River Park project. (Città di Torino, Settore Grandi Opere del Verde)

3.2 The edge of the city along the river park, the green uses as an integration of neighborhood, infrastructures and landscape

The Sangone River Plan started being implemented in 2006 as well, and is still under development (the first lot ended in 2008). Today the river is accessible from the new Colonnetti Park, and the Artom neighbourhood has radically changed its appearance. The quality of the urban space, the presence of many service facilities and associations of citizens, as well as the improvement of the road infrastructures and of the bike paths enable this district to achieve a qualitative level of urban life that would have been unthinkable 25 years ago. The big effort made to achieve (and not simply regenerate) the Sangone riverbank is now starting to be noticeable at the territorial scale. The City plans for the Colonnetti and Sangone Parks, as well as the “river contracts” signed with the neighbour municipalities, are recomposing a continuous pattern of public green land, enabling the access to the river and the territorial connection by turning a physical barrier into a large-scale corridor. At the same time, those activities which had composed the edge of a separated riverbank – such as gardens, football fields, small cultivations – find themselves into a renovated and connected space. The project is still ongoing: a new bicycle path will be located on the western border of the FIAT factory, connecting Mirafiori to

the Grugliasco agricultural park; the Park will integrate the existing vegetable gardens on the south side of Strada del Drosso, as well as the agricultural areas at the Drosso Castle.

3.3 The strategic challenges of the area through the district plans

The so-called south-western district of the metropolitan area includes some important strategic previsions, which have still been waiting for some years to be implemented (and, maybe revised). Recently, the Society Torino Nuova Economia (TNE), which is responsible for the redevelopment of the former FIAT areas, has sold a lot in the B zone and a portion of 47.000 square meters in the C zone. In the A zone, where it has been already built the Design Center of the Politecnico, there are ongoing negotiations to develop a new 30.000 m2 commercial development. In the same A zone, the City is planning to develop other 7.000 m2 of university residence, according to the program "Torino University City" launched by the City government in 2013. The program tries to combine an integrated proposal of the Turin's Research and education offers, together with the promotion of a series of buildings and areas that should be sold and developed within the TUC program by private partners. Other initiatives are still facing the students' residential needs through the "Alloggiami" project by the ONG Fondazione Mirafiori.

The expected developments for transportation infrastructure, planned during the last ten years, don't seem to be implemented in the short term: neither the Corso Marche project, with the planned Mirafiori square, nor the extension of the second Metropolitan line in its southern branch are among the works to be financed in the medium term agenda. Nevertheless, it is possible that the future developments, both in the TNE areas and the new residential blocks on the northern side of the FIAT factory, could help a local recovery in the next years. In 2015 maybe the working activities inside the FIAT factory will increase, with the starting of a new line of production for the Maserati SUV "Levante". Still, all these strategic programs do not involve the urban areas on the southern edge of the district. Even thinking about a positive trend, capable to invert the present crisis, the neighborhood between Anselmetti street and the boulevard Unione Sovietica seem to remain in a sort of shadow, despite the important achievements about the Sangone River Park.

3.4 The quality of living and the identity of places

Looking at the micro-scale of the neighborhood other questions emerge: who are the inhabitants of Mirafiori Sud and what is their relationship with the neighborhood today? Did they keep a connection with the memory of the working-class identity? What kind of urban quality can we imagine in these places, what do people expect (or claim) to get for improving their use of the places where they live? How many ways of living are (or could be) there at present? The association Fondazione della Comunità di Mirafiori ONLUS has been enhanced since 2008. Moreover, the

involvement of the citizens in the renovation programs for the neighborhood is not only desirable in terms of social inclusion and democratic participation to decision-making phases. It is also a matter of effectiveness, especially if we consider the need to renew the residential asset of the area, which is owned mainly by the same inhabitants. If the public policies cannot offer any consistent funds for renovation according to the usual top-down processes of governance, any intervention on the existing buildings will require the pervasive interaction with these fragmented owners. To get an overall transformation it could be necessary to coordinate the cluster of small properties – too small to be considered individually, too many to be integrated in a standard project.



Figure 4. Mirafiori Sud neighborhood in 2014 (drawing by Elisa Taraglio).

4 CONCLUSIONS

The urban economic crisis in these last years doesn't allow for any imminent possibility of structural interventions on these suburbs and, in general, on those areas which would ask for compensations without being capable of giving back immediate profits to capital investments. This "low-voltage" dynamics produces situations in which the depressed areas continue to be such, until they become emergencies for the whole city. Today our industrial periphery, which has been the emblem of the Fordist city for decades, is emptying, the real estate prices are decreasing and the satellite activities of the automotive sector are dramatically shrinking. At present, there are no conditions of an economic, demographic or even

criminal pressure, that could bring these territories among the priorities of the urban development agenda. On the other side, there would be many resources, if it were possible to valorize the territorial capital: availability of empty buildings, low prices of the real estate stock, green areas with a good spatial quality, historical heritage, natural environments, proximity to the highway – and in the future also to the metropolitan line and to the railway. Are there any possibilities of combining the resources of this territory – its capital of buildings, green areas, land, facilities – in order to make it capable of redeveloping, starting from its own assets and powers? Or do we have to think about a future of certain decline, depending on compensative assistance coming from a weaker welfare system, always placed out of (and above) the local dimension? And, in the worst case, would it be possible to conceive a city which even shrinks along its edges, through a strategy and not only by reckless abandonment?

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Authors

Alessandro Armando
Alessandro Armando, architect, is an Assistant Professor of Architectural and Urban Design at the Department of Architecture and Design (DAD), at Politecnico di Torino. He received his PhD in architecture and building design in 2005 and he has worked as a project consultant for the Urban Center Metropolitano in Torino for nine years (2005-2014). His present research focuses on design theory and urban design. Among his publications, he wrote *La soglia dell'arte. Peter Eisenman, Robert Smithson e il problema dell'autore dopo le nuove avanguardie* (2009) and *Watersheds. A Narrative of Urban Recycle* (2014) with Michele Bonino and Francesca Frassoldati.

Marija Mano Velevski
She works as Assistant Professor at the Institute of Architectural Design at the Faculty of Architecture, University "Ss. Cyril and Methodius" in Skopje. The focus of her work refers on learning architecture by combining design practice and architecture theory. She is co-author of the book "Conversations".

Slobodan Velevski
He works as Assistant Professor at the Institute of Urbanism at the Faculty of Architecture, University "Ss. Cyril and Methodius" in Skopje. His main field of interest is in urban design and urban theory, focusing on their relevance into the realm of today contemporary urban context. He is co-author of the book "Conversations".

Ognen Marina
He is Associate Professor at Faculty of Architecture, University "Ss. Cyril and Methodius" in Skopje. His main field of interest is in dynamic 3D city models and novel structures in architecture. He is partner in many scientific research projects developing digital tools for spatial analysis of urban development and author of several publications related to analysis, assessment and modelling of urban development and structures in architecture. He was co-author of the Macedonian Pavillion at 14th International Architecture Exhibition la Biennale di Venezia.

Zrinka Barišić Marenić
She is an Assistant Professor at the University of Zagreb, Faculty of Architecture. She graduated from the Faculty of Architecture in 1996, where in 2002 she obtained her MSc and in 2007 her PhD within the field of Croatian modern architecture. She is a scientific adviser, and is lecturing courses Croatian Space and Architecture – Zagreb, CSA - Northwest Croatia, and Industrial Archaeology. In 2009 she received the Croatian Annual State Award for Science (with Uchytil & Kahrović). In

2014 she author – curator of Croatian exhibition: Fitting Abstraction, 1914-2014. (Commissioner: Karin Šerman) at 14th International Architecture Exhibition la Biennale di Venezia.

Giulia Mazza
Graduated in Architecture at *Politecnico di Torino* in 2013, she is currently dealing with refurbishments and interior design for a professional firm in Turin and before she collaborated with other two architectural firms in Turin and Paris. Always interested in architectural design and urban sustainability, she decided to graduate with a thesis in urban regeneration, after which she became a member of the *Roofscapes project* carried out by Politecnico di Torino.

Celeste Moiso
Graduated in Architecture at the Polytechnic of Turin in 2013, she is currently working as collaborator in architectural firms in Turin. She has always been interested in urban regeneration and zero soil consumption processes. As an undergraduate, she participated in some conferences and workshops concerning these issues, such as the "Roofscapes project"at the Polytechnic of Turin and "IFAC, the International festival of art & construction"in Spain.

Tihomir Jukic
He is professor of Urban Planning at the Faculty of Architecture, University in Zagreb. He has a PhD in Architecture and Urban Planning and a Technical Diploma in Architecture and Urban Planning. Prof. Jukic teaches courses of urban planning and city transformation at graduate and postgraduate studies at the University of Zagreb. He is especially dedicated to the theme of the city and its impact area. Either independently or in a team, he led or participated in the preparing of over 30 professional projects urban plans, landscape design and architectural projects. He is a member of the Academy of Engineering of Croatia, Croatian Architects Chamber.

Sanja Gašparović
She is assistant Professor at the Department of Urban and Spatial Planning and Landscape Architecture at the Faculty of Architecture in Zagreb, where she participates in teaching all training courses of undergraduate and graduate studies and gives lectures in course of Landscape planning. As a researcher assistant, she participated in several scientific projects being engaged in scientific work in the field of urban, spatial and landscape planning. In her professional work, she deals with urban and spatial planning, urban, architectural and landscape design.

Krunoslav Šmit
Associate Professor and Head of the Department of Urban and Spatial Planning and Landscape Architecture at the Faculty of Architecture in Zagreb where he participates in teaching all training courses of

undergraduate and graduate studies and gives lectures in courses of Urbanism and Tourism. He is currently involved in several scientific research projects. In his professional work he is dealing with urban and spatial planning, urban and architectural design. Member of the: Croatian Commission for Cooperation with the UNESCO; Governing Council of the Croatian Institute of Spatial Development; Council for the Strategy of the Spatial Development of Croatia.

Leonardo Ramondetti
He is an architect of the Polytechnic of Turin. He completed his masters' degree in December 2014 with the thesis *Chelas, Lisboa. Five Exploration* (Architettura Costruzione Città, Politecnico di Torino, A.A. 2014/2015, supervisor: Angelo Sampieri, thesis with right of publication). In June he took part of the *XVIII Conferenza Nazionale SIU (Italian Urbanists Society)*, *Italia '45 – '45, Radici, Condizioni, Prospettive,* in the Atelier 9 *Beni collettivi e protagonismo sociale*. He is now collaborating in the research, *Territori nella Crisi. Il riattrezzarsi di architettura e urbanistica a fronte del mutare delle logiche economiche e istituzionali* (Politecnico di Torino e l'Ecole Polytechnique Fédérale de Lausanne), led by Prof. Cristina Bianchetti; and he is also an assistant in the *Atelier of Urban Design* led by Prof. Angelo Sampieri and Prof. Silvia Crivello at Polytechnic of Turin.

Filipa Roseta
Diploma in Architecture, FAUTL, 1996. PhD, Royal College of Art, 2009. MPhil in Contemporary Architectural Culture, FAUTL, 2001. Auxiliary Professor of Architectural Design and Vice-President of the Scientific Council at FAUL. Member of the research centre CIAUD. Co-founder of Roseta Vaz Monteiro Arquitectos, an architectural studio where she co-authored the Boa Nova Church and Community Centre, a built project published worldwide and recipient of two relevant international awards: Honour award promoted by IFRAA, a knowledge community integrated in the American Institute of Architects (2014), and first place at "Abitare il Mediterraneo", award promoted by the Mediterranean Union of Architects (2013). Author and co-editor in the field of architecture and urban design, focusing on both sustainability and innovation.

Francisco Vaz Monteiro
Diploma in Architecture, FAUTL, 1997. Registered architect since 1998. Currently main partner of Roseta Vaz Monteiro Arquitectos, an architectural studio where he designed several typologies including the Boa Nova Church and Community Centre, a built project published worldwide and recipient of two relevant international awards: Honour award promoted by IFRAA, a knowledge community integrated in the American Institute of Architects (2014), and first place at "Abitare il Mediterraneo", award promoted by the Mediterranean Union of Architects (2013).Based in London, from 2006 to 2008, worked for Foster + Partners in projects for Moscow, London, Lusail and Lisbon. Worked for the Portuguese delegation of the international foundation World Monuments

Fund. Has a Postgraduate course in Architectural Detail/Construction Technologies in Instituto Superior Técnico.

Margarida Maurício
Master in Architecture, FAUTL, 2012. Registered Architect since 2014.

Roberto Falanga
He has earned the Master degree in Psychology with an investigation concerning psychology and participatory urban planning. In 2009 is PhD fellow at the Centre for Social Studies (University of Coimbra) and member of the Project OPtar on Participatory Budgeting in Portugal. After earning the PhD degree with an investigation concerning public administration and participatory processes, works as Assistant Professor of Social Sciences at the Catholic University of Viseu (Portugal). In 2014 is also contracted as Postdoc Fellow at the Institute of Social Sciences (University of Lisbon) for the FP7 Project MOPACT "Mobilising the Potential of Active Ageing in Europe".

Joana Braga
Architect and urban researcher. Currently a PhD candidate in Architecture at ISCTE-IUL with the Thesis *Geographies of the Common: imagining and reinterpreting urban space in European cities (2000-2014)*. Braga is a member of: DINAMIA (Centre of Studies on the Territory and Socio-economical Change, ISCTE-IUL), i2ads (Investigation Institute of Art, Design and Society, FBAUP) and Moving Image Research Laboratory (Mcgill University, Montreal). Graduated in 2005 from the Faculty of Architecture at the University of Lisbon (FAUL), she holds a Post-graduate degree in Bioclimatic Architecture at the same University (2012). Member of baldio | performance studies, she works as curator.

Joana Pestana Lages
Architect and urban researcher. Graduated in 2003 from the Faculty of Architecture at the University of Lisbon (FAUL). She was a trainee at Willy Müller Architects (Barcelona) and at Promontório Arquitectos (Lisbon). Later on she moved to London to join dRMM Architects. After London she joined the Renzo Piano team in Genoa, collaborating in a residential project for Lisbon. Back to Lisbon she was awarded a Master degree in Architecture and became a PhD candidate from FAUL with a doctoral fellowship from FCT since 2012, while collaborating with GESTUAL, a research group on the areas of self-produced areas, urban intervention policies and projects focusing the Right to The City.

Inês Veiga
Currently a PhD student at the Faculty of Architecture, University of Lisbon (Portugal), since 2013, carries an exploratory study about social design. As a researcher and freelance designer, has been collaborating with designers, architects, artists and anthropologists, as well as institutional actors and organizations, in experimental and formal social and cultural projects, entailing communication, participatory and social

change processes. In 2010, participates in !mpact Design for Social Change course, School of Visual Arts, New York (USA). Works at Thisislove studio (Lisbon) until 2013, since 2008, when graduates in Communication Design, from the Faculty of Fine Arts, University of Lisbon.

Jesenko Horvat
He graduated at the Faculty of Architecture, University of Zagreb. He achieved his MSc on the work titled “Freestanding Formative Elements in the Composition of City space” and obtained his PhD with dissertation research “Organising Public City Space as an Urban Planning Matter”. He is Associate Professor enrolled in education on Studies of architecture and urbanism. He is a research associate involved in urban planning and urban design topics. Beside pedagogic and scientific engagement, he deals with physical planning, urban design and architectural design. He is particularly devoted to public space and public domain in general.

Joana Martins
A qualified Architect since 2012, Joana has been part of MEDS since 2013 and an NC for Portugal since 2013. During MEDS workshops she was a co-tutor in Lisbon (2013) and in Dublin (2014). After completing an internship in the Public Space Department of the Lisbon City Council, Joana won a Leonardo Da Vinci grant. Between September - December 2014 she worked with Serrano and Baquero Studio in Granada, Spain. Since then, her work has focused on community projects, such as coordinating volunteers for projects with Trafaria Library and collaborating with FAS, in conjunction with the community of Castle S. Jorge.

Margarida Louro
Degree in Architecture from the Faculty of Architecture of the Technical University of Lisbon (FA-UTL - 1993), Master in Contemporary Architectural Culture and Construction of Modern Society (FA-UTL - 1998) and a PhD from the Polytechnic University of Catalonia (UPC - 2005). Developed a post-doctoral research in partnership with the ETSAB-UPC and the FA-UTL. Since 1997 teaches at FA-ULisboa, mainly project disciplines, and has developed scientific research in the Research Centre for Architecture, Urbanism and Design (CIAUD).

Francisco Oliveira
In 1993, graduated in architecture from the Faculty of Architecture of the Technical University of Lisbon (FA-UTL). Obtained the degree of Master of Housing Architecture, the FA-UTL in 2001. Between 2000 and 2008 attended the PhD program in Urban Planning at the Polytechnic University of Catalonia. In October 2008, obtained the degree of doctor in FA-UTL. Teaches at FA-ULisboa since 1999 in the area of technologies and has developed scientific research, together with other teachers of the FA-ULisboa in the Research Centre for Architecture, Urbanism and Design (CIAUD).

Martina Jakovčić
Studied geography and history at the Faculty of Humanities, University of Zagreb. In 2008 defended her PhD thesis titled “Development, typology and classification of retail centres in Croatia” at the Department of geography, Faculty of Science, University of Zagreb. Since 2004 employed at the Faculty of science, currently at the position of assistant professor and Deputy of the Head of Department for science and international cooperation. Worked as a researcher of three international and 3 domestic scientific and professional projects dealing with the spatial planning and development of the city of Zagreb. Currently a chief researcher of bilateral Croatian – Austrian scientific project Differences of Post-industrial and Post-socialist Brownfield Redevelopment and its Socio-spatial Impact on Current Urban Development Processes. A Comparative Analysis of Vienna and Zagreb

Nenad Buzjak
He is an associate professor at the Department of Geography, Faculty of Science, University of Zagreb. In 1994 he graduated in geography at the Department of Geography, Faculty of Science, University of Zagreb. In 2006 he defended his PhD thesis (Geomorphology and speleomorphology of Žumberak Mt. and geoecological evaluation of relief) also at the Department of Geography, Faculty of Science, University of Zagreb. His main research interests are geomorphology, karstology, speleology, geoecology, landscape ecology and nature protection. His skills are geomorphological mapping, cave surveying, environment monitoring (microclimate and hydrology), GIS, open water diving and cave diving (SSI Open Water Diver, ANDI Nitrox Diver and NACD Cave Diver - course in progress).

Tiago Duarte
He has a degree in Environmental Engineering, is PhD student in Urban Planning at Lusófona University, Lisbon, Portugal and student researcher at its Interdisciplinary Research Centre for Education and Development (CeiED). Member of the COST Action TU 1306 CyberParks.

Carlos Smaniotto Costa
He graduated and earned his PhD degree Landscape and Environmental Planning from the University of Hanover, Germany. He is professor of Urban Ecology and Landscape Design at Lusófona University and researcher at its Interdisciplinary Research Centre for Education and Development. His research activities deal with issues of sustainable urban development, strategies for open spaces and nature conservation in urban context. He is the Chair of the Action TU 1306 CyberParks.

Diogo Mateus
He has PhD, MsC, BsC in Urban Planning and Design, is researcher at Interdisciplinary Research Centre for Education and Development of Lusófona University, acts in urban planning & design, mostly on issues concerning urban (life) quality, practice and theory of urban

planning/design, European Policies on urban issues and territorial planning. He is a member and vice-president of scientific council of Portuguese Network for Territorial Development (Instituto do Território). Took part in scientific national and international projects and acts on territorial planning and design, evaluation and monitoring of territorial plans and policies including European founding programmes. Member of COST Action TU 1306 CyberParks.

Marluci Menezes
She is a Geographer, Master and PhD in Anthropology, Research Officer at LNEC (National Laboratory for Civil Engineering), Lisbon, where since 1991 she has been studying urban cultures of use and appropriation of space, the dynamics of adaptation to urban transformation processes, the use and conservation of heritage resources, and the relationship between tangible and intangible heritage. Member of COST Action TU 1306 CyberParks.

Alfonso Bahillo
He got his Telecommunications Engineering and PhD degrees at the University of Valladolid, Spain. He got the PMP certification at the PMI. He is senior researcher at the University of Deusto, and R&D project manager at the DeustoTech Mobility Research Unit. He has worked in more than 20 R&D projects. He is co-author of more than 17 JCR journals and 3 national patents. His interests include local positioning techniques, ambient assisted living, internet of things, and wireless networking. Member of COST Action TU 1306 CyberParks

Francesco Orsi
Architect, graduated cum laude from the Vienna University of Technology with a master thesis based on a parametric urban design system applied to Procida's vernacular heritage. Francesco Orsi is currently a Ph.D. candidate at the Universidade de Lisboa where he works on a research entitled "Generative patterns of reurbanization for sustainable Extensive towns" supervised by JoséNuno Beirão and JoséPinto Duarte. He is assistant of Professor JoséNuno Beirão and JoséPinto Duarte for the course "Projecto Urbano Parametrico". Since 2013 he has been granted a PhD scholarship from the Fundaçãopara a Ciência e a Tecnologia.

Stefano Fiorito
Graduated in architecture from the University of Genoa with a thesis focused on parametric urban design on Procida's vernacular architecture. At the same university, he taught a course in Introduction to 3D Modelling. He is currently a Ph.D. candidate at the Universidade de Lisboa where he works on a research entitled "Tradition proven architectural patterns for smart built environments" and he is assistant of Professor JoséNuno Beirão for the university course "Projecto Urbano Parametrico". From 2013 he has been granted a PhD scholarship from the Fundaçãopara a Ciência e a Tecnologia.

JoséNuno Beirão
Degree in Architecture, 1989 from the Faculty of Architecture, TU Lisbon. In 1998 founded the architecture firm Bquadrado architects (www.bquadrado.com). Master degree in Urban Design in 2005, at ISCTE-IUL, University Institute of Lisbon. PhD in Urban Design at TU Delft, Netherlands, in 2012. The theme of his dissertation is the development of design patterns for the establishment of computational platforms for urban design. In his thesis "CItyMaker: Designing for Urban Design Grammars" the acronym CIM stands for City Information Modelling stressing the emphasis of information support in urban design. Recent events involve the application of this model in real urban design assignments (www.measurb.org, http://dcg.fa.utl.pt/ and http://tarlabasidatascope.wordpress.com/2013/03/19/69/).

Jorge Gil: Architect and urban designer with an MSc in Virtual Environments from the Bartlett, UCL. Jorge is since 2009 researcher at the Department of Urbanism, TU Delft, working on the topic of regional urban form and sustainable mobility patterns. He has developed an integrated multi-modal network model for evaluating urban areas, using spatial analysis and data mining methods. Previously, he was Associate R&D at Space Syntax Ltd (2004-2009), developing GIS applications for the analysis of architectural and urban design projects. He was researcher on the “City Induction “project (2007-2011), TU Lisbon, responsible for prototyping an urban design evaluation module.

Marta Colombo
Lives and works in Torino. She graduated in architecture at the Politecnico di Torino in 1986. Freelance architect specializing in urban planning, land use planning, evaluation of technical and territorial sustainability, GIS and environmental assessment. Between 1999 e 2009 she were Council member (about planning, private construction, environment, real estate) of the City of Rivoli and administrator of the Agency for the Metropolitan Mobility. Since the endorsement of the new legislation on Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) she has been working in this field, cooperating with other specialists. She is registered in the Regional Energy Certifiers ‘list.

Eugenio Giachino
Degree in civil engineering, 1979 from Politecnico of Turin and Master degree in Business Administration, 1983 from SAA, School of management of the University of Turin. Project manager (also of GIS projects) in Fiat engineering (engineering company of FIAT Group), during years 1983-1990 and head and technical director of sector “Informatics, environment and territory”, head of management control, analyst of industrial investments, advisor for due diligence of industrial companies, in FISIA (environmental company of FIAT Group) during years 1990-1997. Shareholder, member of board of directors, general manager of a company of financial analysis, during years 1997-2003 and shareholder and member of Board of Directors of a company of advisory and service

for real estate's investments, from 2004 to 2006. Engineer and advisor from 1997 till now.

Dubravka Spevec
She was born in Zagreb, Croatia. In 2001 graduated Geography and in 2003 enrolled Postgraduate doctoral study at the Department of Geography, Faculty of Science, University of Zagreb. Since 2012 works as an Assistant Professor at the Department of Geography, Faculty of Science, University of Zagreb; teaches Cartography and Visualization of Spatial Data in GIS. Scientific and professional enhancement in GIS, Geomatics and Cartography at the University of Potsdam, Germany (2005 – 2009). She collaborates on several national and international scientific projects. Her scientific interest is related to Urban, Economic and Population Geography. She was the president of the Croatian Geographical Society from 2011 to 2014.

Slaven Kliček
Master of geography, Graduated Spatial Planning and Regional Development in 2013 at the Department of Geography, Faculty of Science, Zagreb. Participated in projects regarding brownfield redevelopment, urban participatory planning and socio-spatial integration issues of Roma. Contributor to web sites, magazines and voluntary platforms Failed Architecture, Geographical Horizon and Ars Publicae (Zagreb). Previous work experience at University of Zagreb as expert associate on EU projects. In 2015 became assistant at the Urbanex consultant office on projects regarding culture management and urban development. Currently working as associate for EU projects at the Center for Research, Development and Technology Transfer, University of Zagreb and Roma Atlas Developer at UNDP Croatia.

Sven Simov
Master in Geography. Completed graduate studies Planning and Regional Development at the Department of Geography of the Faculty of Science, University of Zagreb. Expert in spatial planning and regional development with experience of preparing and implementing a number of projects in tourism, urbanism, agriculture and social innovation. Experience in developing strategic documents in different spatial levels. Work experience in the implementation of projects financed by the EU through South East Europe Program (BUILD SEE and JEWEL).

Minas Bakalchev
He is an architect and professor at the University Ss. Cyril and Methodius, Faculty of Architecture, Skopje, BArch at Faculty of Architecture, Skopje, MSc at Faculty of Architecture, University in Beograd, PhD on technical science University Ss. Cyril and Methodius, Skopje. He was co-curator of Macedonian national pavilion on Venice Biennale 2006, and got mentioned for the project city of possible worlds, with Mitko Hadzi Pulja under the acronym MBMHP work together on architectural projects, workshops, exhibitions. Their work was acknowledged by many city and

national awards. He believes that architecture can change the world in a way the world changes us.

Mitko Hadzi Pulja
He is an architect and professor at the University Ss. Cyril and Methodius, Faculty of Architecture, Skopje, BArch at the Faculty of Architecture, Skopje, MSc at the Faculty of Architecture, University in Beograd, PhD on technical sciences at the University Ss. Cyril and Methodius, Skopje. He was co-curator of Macedonian national pavilion on Venice Biennale 2006, and received Mention for the project “City of possible worlds”, with Minas Bakalchev.

Sasa Tasic
He is an architect and assistant Professor at the University Ss. Cyril and Methodius, Faculty of Architecture, Skopje, BArch at the Faculty of Architecture, Skopje, MSc on technical sciences at University Ss Cyril and Methodius, Skopje. He was a participant on the Macedonian national pavilion on Venice Biennale 2006, and received Mention for the project “City of possible worlds”with Minas Bakalčev and Mitko Hadzi Pulja under the acronym METAMAK COLECTIVE working together on architectural projects, workshops and exhibitions.

Violeta Bakalčev
She obtained her MSc in the field of Architecture and Design at the University “American College Skopje”, School of Architecture & Design, Skopje, Macedonia. She is currently holding the position of Assistant Professor at University “American College Skopje” where she teaches subjects related to architectural design. She has worked on a number of projects and research in Macedonia and in the neighbouring countries. Her research interest is concentrated on the different aspects of the modern residential projects and their role as a reference level for the research of the permanence and variability of the spatial program basis of the modernity.

Miguel Baptista-Bastos
He studied at the Liceu Gil Vicente, Escola Artística Antonio Arroio and Architecture at Faculdade de Arquitectura da Universidade Técnica de Lisboa, where he graduated in Architecture. MPhil and PhD at FAUD at FAUL. Worked in several architectural practices and founded his office, designing and executing several projects. He is an auxiliary professor at the FAUL, since 1998, of "Architectural Design", and tutors other disciplines, such as "Set Design", "Set design and Exhibition", "Ephemeral Architectures", "Rehabilitation of coastal areas" and "urban requalification". He has national and international published articles and is the scientific coordinator of the "Cycle of Lectures of Architecture Faculty" and "FA - Cinema Cycle" and the scientific coordinator in the field of architecture of CIAUD (Research Centre for Architecture, Urbanism and Design FA).

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