

Design in Digital Cartography. Evolving Landscape Narrative Tools for Territorial Exploration and Enhancement of Local Heritage

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**PAD #17 | LANDSCAPE – ART VS DESIGN****O. EDITORIAL #17**

Towards a possible “liquid mapping” by Anna Mazzanti & Matilde Marzotto, *guest editors* **005**

**I. MAPPING THE MEDITERRANEAN. THE DESIGN THIRD SPACE**

Visual Territories and Communicative Landscapes. Mapping and Configuration of Complex Phenomena by Vincenzo Cristallo & Miriam Mariani **018**

The *Seascape* beyond the Physical Dimension. How Data Design could Display Complex Marine Environments by Matteo Aimini & Lucilla Calogero **036**

Design in Digital Cartography. Evolving Landscape Narrative Tools for Territorial Exploration and Enhancement of Local Heritage by Paola Menzardi & Pier Paolo Peruccio **060**

Places in Lieu. Mediterranean Sedentary and Nomadic Living Spaces by Alberto Bassi, Giuliana Califano & Tommaso Listo **077**

**II. DESIGN VS ART IN MEDITERRANEA AREA**

Ulysses Does Not Come back Home. From Maps of Migration, Small Constellations of Artistic Influences in the Mediterranean Landscape by Marco Borsotti & Sonia Pistidda **104**

Visual Grammar of the Mediterranean Landscape: Chromatic, Iconic and Object Identities by Raffaella Trocchianesi **133**

Drawing the Place’s Soul. Designing the Representation Experience in the Schist Villages by Graça Magalhães **160**

**III. DOCUMENTS. ARTISTIC PROJECTS FOR THE MEDITERRANEAN AREA**

Landscape is a Space of Action and Thought by Costanza Meli **183**

Becoming Garden. Notes on the Creation of a Planetary Garden by Miguel Georgieff, Michele Loiacono & Sergio Sanna **206**

Adrian Pac’s Art House in Shkodër: a Common and Shared Space between Cultures and Art by Martina Marolda **231**

**V. BIOGRAPHIES**

About the authors **257**

# **MAPPING THE MEDITERRANEAN THE DESIGN THIRD SPACE**

# Design in Digital Cartography. Evolving Landscape Narrative Tools for Territorial Exploration and Enhancement of Local Heritage

**Paola Menzardi & Pier Paolo Peruccio**

Politecnico di Torino, Department of Architecture and Design

## **Keywords**

Design for Territories, Digital Cartography, Participated Territorial Narratives, Active Landscape, Territorial Enhancement.

## **Abstract**

Design for territories expands its gaze to the entire spatial experience, which acts and feels in relation to a place. Here, space is a fluid and dynamic element “contaminated” by mutual interaction with human life. This interaction shapes both space and human experience, making them recipients and interlocutors of a project at the same time. One design approach in territorial enhancement is exploring the match between digital cartography and community mapping as tools for the promotion of territories starting from their local identities.

Visual narratives of the “active landscape” are thus probed to represent territories as places of submerged heritage worth discovering. Within this framework, the AtlasFor project is presented to create participatory storytelling of the territory, in order to stimulate interest in social capital and culture.

## 1. People and space, a relationship of symbiosis, planning and rediscovery

The relationship between mankind and space has something inherent and primordial that leads back to the fragile, but extraordinary, loneliness experienced by nomads when many territories and wildlife were still unknown. For thousands of years man has evolved as the errant traveler with the instinct to set out for a destination, to continuously look for new places. This was undoubtedly due to necessity for survival but is also an expression of a reaction to a natural-born need to discover, know, understand what exists beyond his own visible horizon.

No man can exist without an environment that can provide the conditions and contexts in which to live and from which new places could be explored. By the same token, there would be no physical space that could be penetrated and inhabited, without someone to take care of it, to make it suitable for himself, to preserve it. Space as territory, and as landscape, is the other, the first “individual” in a person’s life, so viscerally grafted within us that it is an inseparable element.

Man becomes active intervening in space in order to modify, design, build, transform it in another substance. Space is the first original subject of intervention, where man first created the right dimensions for living. From there on, he widened his action to other elements, to objects, instruments, buildings necessary to equip himself with the intelligence, albeit with its degrading effects, of which the pristine environment is naturally devoid.

More recently, man has recognized his ability to create what he needs with method. Historical times, technological development, culture and market laid the basis so that these circumstances rapidly accelerated and carried the mechanism almost to an extreme. In the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, man the inventor, creator and manipulator, took on a specific and recognized role as designer, alongside other professionals related to design, architects, engineers, urban planners. Design flourished in those years and dealt for the most part with objects and communication products. The concept of the man stripped of everything except of the space in which he is immersed, was replaced by the concepts of man in relation to anthropized space, gradually losing disintermediate contact with the pristine and original shape of its environment. As a sentiment of attachment, this concept has been recently rediscovered, and a remarkable phenomenon has highlighted an overall reactivation, a widespread engagement of citizens in the creation of geographic information (Goodchild, 2007).

The issue of communication is not restricted to geographic data and to physical aspects of the landscape: it concerns a widespread phenomenon of recapture and participation. The aim is to communicate the totality of local heritage in its uniqueness by using different tools (Summa, 2009). Experiences and experimentations have emerged in this regard to extend the modalities and the contents of the narrative of places to perceptions, symbolic and synesthetic dimensions. This means that the ways through which places are experienced are broadening as people are more aware that territory is made of different and overlapping factors.



This widespread phenomenon of user-generated contents in describing territory certainly involve an innovative improvement not merely of the Geographic Information System (GIS) but more generally in the overall relationship with the territory. New stances even from the field of cartography are opening up to the integration of ways of representing and visualizing territories to give haptic perceptions and the poetic intensity enclosed in them. These reflections bring current studies back to look at the approaches of psychogeography and design in particular to analyze the methodological possibilities based upon “drifting” and the experiential dimension (Krucken, 2018). Communicating and visualizing territory is reinterpreted to translate into a non-verbal but multidimensional reading. The world of design now extends an interested and proactive look at the territory, aware of a relationship that thinned out and was no longer exactly focused. This is a sign of a desire to rediscover the identity and the origins of places, a rediscovery of the potentialities, of the need to take charge of design and to turn it, towards the care and management of territories.

## **2. Design for the territories and the issue of promotion. The participatory cartography *AtlasFor* project, towards new ways of disseminating local identities**

The ways in which design has interpreted the concept of territory, have gone through several phases that have developed its intrinsic sense. The first approaches turned to “design *in* the territory”, referring to the context. They paid attention to what was going to be created in relation to a place that, due to its distinctive features, was considered an integral part of the act of

intervention. The territory was the scenario in which particular design and production were built based on the interpretation of local knowledge and materials, for planning that continued over time and was consistent with the spirit of the place. The intermediate step took place with the “design of the territory” and the design of products that were directly an expression of the values and specificities of the place, to be spread into other contexts to make them better known. Today’s design can be defined “design for the territory”, and has shifted the objective to an even higher level by dealing with the enhancement and development of places. It moves towards the recovery, knowledge and dissemination of local identities and resources with a view to promoting and preserving assets and empowering local communities (Parente & Sadini, 2017). It is interesting to note how the gaze on the territory, from the 1990s when the first reflections in the design field appeared (Parente, 2016), has been enriched by ever-increasing declinations and implications.

Design for the territory is engaged in the field of participatory digital cartography and explores, in the wake of these past experiences, decisive and effective methods for the revitalization of places. It proceeds on projects that combine atlas geography with contents that push to describe beyond what is visible, extending to specific aspects that have more to do with the emotional sphere, or elusive, fleeting, seasonal, sensorial, immaterial things. Indications on points of view of interest on landscape, points of observation of vegetation and fauna, suggestions on local events and activities in progress, narrations of stories and anecdotes, hints about people holding local knowledge to meet, it is all data included in

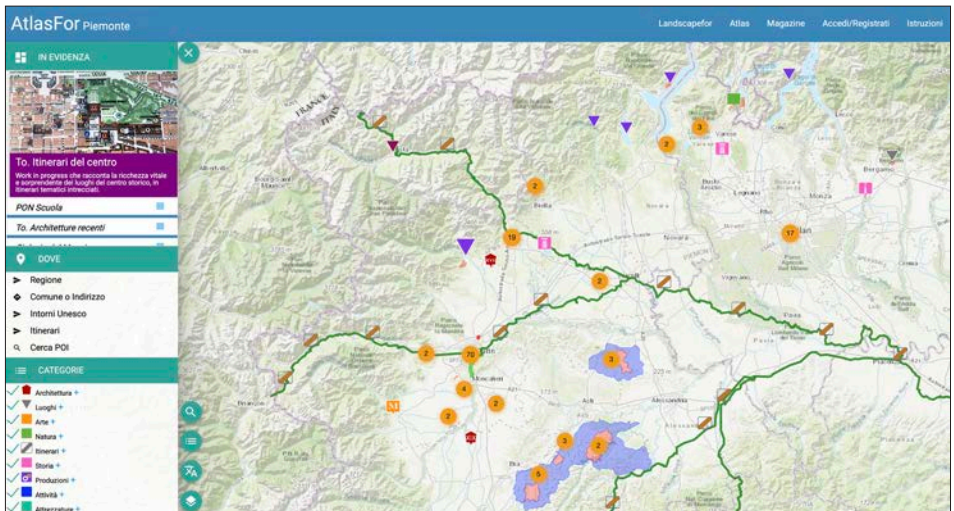
this new understanding. The aim is to succeed in producing a cartography of the “active landscape”, of the life and identity of territories capable of making known the multitude of their typical and unique traits in a representation that is a dynamic, participatory, interactive and continuous process. This way to intend cartography resumes along the line system maps (Jones & Bowes, 2017) with the purpose of representing relationships among parts and their complexity overcoming the limits of human understanding and visualization.

Thus, design relies on the fundamentals of the net. It proceeds in giving a systemic view of the many existing relationships generated by the correlation with the space. It also creates networks among public and private actors of territories. As a discipline that mediates among knowledge, it assumes a strategic value in the ability to generate, organize and manage activities designed to connect knowhow to places, to disseminate it and promote cooperative actions. Design for territories is intended to foster collective, participated and systemic processes which are at the basis of local development.

One of the projects carried out by Politecnico di Torino is *AtlasFor, Atlas of Heritage and Active Landscape*. It gives concreteness and implementation to community mapping through a digital platform of participated cartography.

The work, promoted by the LandscapeFor cultural association, is an open-source online georeferencing project of places of cultural interest, subjects and initiatives that constitute the so-called “active landscape”. It is accessed from the [landscapefor.eu](http://landscapefor.eu) website and is responsive for use by smartphones and tablets. Launched in 2017 together with the APPA (Atlas of Heri-

tage and Active Landscape) publishing project that collects materials, it is continuously updated with the goal to reach a larger number of Italian regions and Unesco sites in a few years. It is a real atlas based on visual language. The objective is to create a participatory storytelling of the territory starting from a basic cartographic level to which are added images, short texts and references to in-depth analysis. The narration includes news, traditions, music contents, filmography, and other unintelligible details. History, projects, activities, people are all active elements participating in this narrative. They contribute to make the landscape vital through services, productions, enhancement projects and initiatives for a better quality of life. This mapping includes, among the others, the most fleeting and ephemeral aspects, the impressions arose by both the overall and detailed views, and the seasonal characteristics.



**Figure 1.** LandscapeFor, AtlasFor, homepage of the AtlasFor platform. On the left, a pop-up menu allows to select information layers categorized in clusters of projects, places or themes. Retrieved from [atlas.landscapefor.eu](http://atlas.landscapefor.eu).

*AtlasFor* is a digital cartographic platform, organized into categories and sub-themes. The information presented concern architecture, places, art, nature, itineraries, history, productions, activities, receptivity and panoramic viewpoints. The toolbar allows to choose the regional level from which to enlarge or restrict the field or select from the other search options individual municipalities, routes or sites. The process is participatory and proceeds as a result of calls and meetings organized in order to involve communities, citizens and other actors. They contribute autonomously to *AtlasFor* with contents and even news such as in progress events. The aim is to rediscover local identities, strengthen relationships, enhance collaboration among people, promote knowledge and systemic practices (Peruccio, 2016). The atlas wants to reveal again awareness of diversities that give value to territories as well as the time to see hidden features, what landscape offers to the gaze of those who can grasp its physiognomy but also its character.

### **3. Territories from the perspective of design. Contaminations with cartography, mapping technologies and IT for new augmented narratives**

The term *design territoriale* (territorial design) was already used by Ugo La Pietra in 1988 at the exhibition *Genius Loci* in Verona, to recall the evocative power of local and material cultures able to interpret territories and define their identity. That exhibition opened again in 2019 during the Milan Design Week reiterating the interest in bringing out the great heritage enclosed by submerged culture of territories. It was intended to encourage the advancement of a territorial design, i.e. a design for a specific region, starting from the analysis of the

tangible and intangible local heritage. Ezio Manzini stated an analogous concept in reference to the territory as a project dimension and to design as an instrument of reading and action. He has identified this branch of design in its “ability to recognize potential resources, to transform them into effective resources, and to cultivate them in the perspective of their sustainability” (Manzini, 2005).

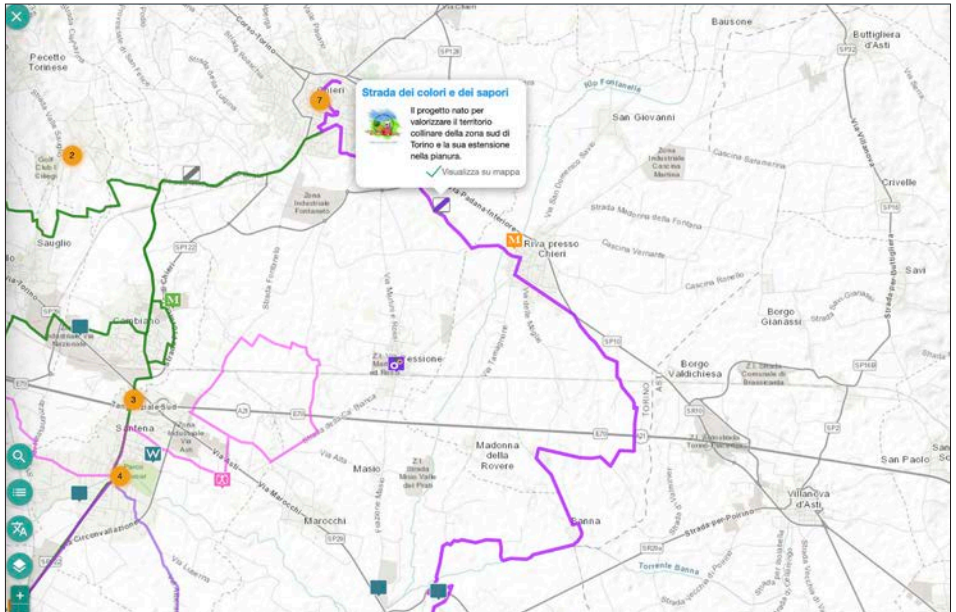
The first signs of a renovated care about territories as a vital element of human life, was driven by the degrowth of urban progress that in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century involved urban and industrial areas. They highlighted an image of the territory outside the city that basically had kept identity and authenticity alive. The built environment instead had lost and destroyed them. Citizens and intellectuals also realized that processes of change which had affected territories had also in some cases led them to become uniform, lacking their authentic particular identities (Castelnovi, 2015). At the same time, many disciplines (not only belonging to the area of architecture, urban planning and urban geography) started to deal with the topic of territory as a complex field of study.

They focused on mechanisms, relationships and systemic understanding of the territory as a whole given by its elements and interrelations (Magnaghi, 2000). A universe to be conceived more in terms of sustainable enhancement and responsible development instead of in terms of exploitation and production. Design at the beginning of the 2000s definitely focuses on its role as reader and interpreter of the territory, capable of identifying its meaning, its nuances, the intimate

soul in an approach that is analytical-perceptive-sensorial. The transdisciplinary design assumed a greater degree of importance over the years. It has been validated by the increasingly contamination and synergy with other disciplines in an integrated approach. If design is not assignable to a unique area of study (Deserti, 2011), design for territories occurs across several areas of expertise, building relationships and coordinating stakeholders also at the local level (Parente & Villari, 2010). It has many points in common with the fields of research of engineers and architects among others, who work on technologies and geo-location platforms. These cultures work together to reach a common vision of valorization of territories. From the known to the unknown, their purpose is to give value to the specificities as trigger factors able to rise interest in discovering territories. It concerns exploring invisible dimensions of the space with the appropriate data (Claudel & Ratti, 2018). These areas work in order to invite and lead people to places providing them with adequate geo-location tools. The presence of people and the evidence of interest in exploring territories are in opposition to phenomena of degradation, abandonment and impoverishment. On the one hand, territorial marketing strategies, services and infrastructures are put in place to be effective in allowing people to travel through places. On the other hand, tools help visitors to orient themselves. Design for territory has pointed out that all experiences may strengthen territorial promotion. Design in this frame play the role to enable the community to envision desirable concepts, design, act and communicate (Maffei, Villari, 2004). Culture, art and design, are together sharing the same objective: they accompany and teach peo-

ple how to develop scenarios and visions of possible worlds, to feel active and responsible part of it. They also contribute to understand and raise the profile of community values. In particular, design has the practical task to mediate, build collaborations, partnerships and networks. Moreover, it provides distinctive visualization to translate complexity for everyone like an elastic mind (Antonelli, 2008).

Design and cartography are no longer just geographical tools but instruments to enhance, by the use of digital and internet technologies, new narratives to encourage participation and collective actions. Today mapping projects for the narration and enhancement of territorial heritage have multiple roots in humanities and IT.



**Figure 2.** LandscapeFor, AtlasFor, detail of a cultural itinerary on the outskirts of Turin, “Strada dei colori e dei sapori”. Retrieved from [atlas.landscapefor.eu](https://atlas.landscapefor.eu).

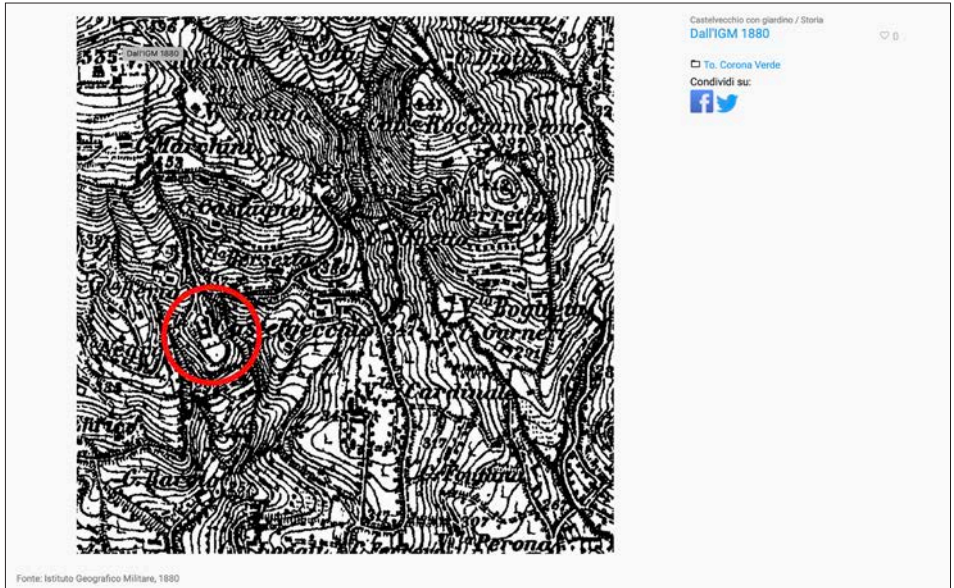


These new cartographies arose from the urban computing research and the amount of data produced by the collective use of devices. Lev Manovich defines “geo media” the location-based data on the behavior of people in relation to places where they have travelled (Resch, Britter & Ratti, 2012; Di Lorenzo, Reades, Calabrese & Ratti, 2012). It means that the data relating to the movement create new relationships between people and places, shared interactions and participation (Willis, Corino & Martin, 2012). They allow us to detect patterns of habits concerning movement and frequented places.

IT shapes patterns, influences them and directs experiences we perform with respect to the space that surrounds us (Dourish, Anderson & Nafus, 2007; Nabian, Ratti, Biderman & Grise, 2009). The term “social navigation” has been coined to define the way how people move by the influence of observed or known behaviors. These considerations not always have focused on the enhancement of territories, but they are framed within a broad reflection on the role that internet and technologies have as a means of cultural dissemination (Glaeser, Kolko, & Saiz, 2001). ICTs and Big Data, among others, are recognized as essential basis for destinations’ competitiveness, tourism development and territorial innovation. (Del Vecchio, Mele, Ndou, & Secundo, 2018). Locative media have developed digital and real environments able to enhance the knowledge of the place and create engagement, therefore social and cultural practices. In this way technology, design and territory became closely intertwined. Digital data and humanities offer opportunities for a better knowledge and discovery of territories (Formia & Zannoni, 2018) supported by the concepts of

“immaterial geography”, “subjective cartographies”, “emotional maps”, “psycho-geographical explorations”. These practices give the chance to experience places in a synesthetic dimension and explore different narrative modalities. And the promotion of these territories depends on a deep knowledge of the place (i.e. identity, language, material culture and symbols), a reading of digital cartography and other tools to navigate and get different stimuli from the site.

“Places have a great strength in their identities that actively intervenes in our personal and collective existence, in cognitive, linguistic, perceptual and sensorial processes, even though often as underlying elements.” (Magnaghi, 2000). AtlasFor is a practical platform in this direction.



**Figure 3.** LandscapeFor, AtlasFor, an example of documentary cartographic material relating to the territory of Castelvechio, retrieved from the local historical archives. Retrieved from [atlas.landscapefor.eu](http://atlas.landscapefor.eu).

The participatory attitude has become a key point in this context since the first half of the 2000s. Some experiments of digital mapping services began to add the possibility for users to publish feedbacks and new contents. The purpose is to increase the immersive relationship with the context giving the chance to interact in a totally different way. Particularly relevant are feedbacks about governance from the citizens and local people (Castelnovi, 2015). Design mediates at a local level, fosters a sense of community and promotes a public debate for a collective action plan.

#### 4. Conclusions

Designing for the territory and for its enhancement is an action that can take on multiple meanings and actions and implies a contribution extended to several areas that operate in a frame of reciprocal collaboration and contamination. Reactivating the lymph that gives life and future to the territories it is necessary also a general rethinking that includes a vision extended to qualities, values, and identity. It requires a sincere interest in their discovery. This paper aims at a vision of design for territories that goes far beyond physical resources, infrastructures and evidences of places. It presents territory as a subject that needs to be reactivated starting from its intangible social dimensions, giving identity and vigor to the social capital. New scenarios of relationship with territory are opening up by acting on processes that organize and display data, juxtaposing them to multiple levels of representation and language. This investigation has recognized a space of research-action about territory at the intersection of these spheres. It extends the cartographic possibilities to new inti-

mate, multisensorial experiences on the basis of fresh, innovative ways of mapping.

Design can contribute to the emergence of a system that is under track, configuring products-services for the understanding of territories. These interventions are in the long-term instrumental to the collective memory, and to generate cultural values for a positive impact on the territory and communities.

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**Miguel Georgieff**

Member of Coloco, an independent collective born in 1999. Since 2006 it formally constitutes a landscape firm that brings together landscape architects, urban planners, botanists, gardeners, artists who collaborate with a vast network of experts, from botanical activism to ecological engineering. Over time, the experience has led to discussions with professionals, local authorities, associations or singular personalities with the aim of creating and supporting integrated projects, bringing together public services, associations, activists and volunteers to explore new relationships in reflection and collective construction. Coloco also plays an important role in broadcasting and teaching in the form of seminars,



or both academic and informal public conferences. Exploration, strategy, activation, construction, transmission are the phases of Coloco's projects in order to support the relationship between people and the places where they live, all unique and all together. Situations and requests vary indefinitely, but commitment is the same: creating places whose quality is measured by their ability to accommodate the enormous diversity of life.

<https://www.coloco.org/>

### **Tommaso Listo**

Master degree in Philosophical Sciences at the University of Milan. Specialized in Digital Humanities at Ca' Foscari University of Venice. Research fellow in Design at Iuav University of Venice. From 2019/2020 PhD in Architecture, History and Project at Polytechnic of Turin.

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### **Michele Loiacono**

Scuola del Terzo Luogo was born and developed during several editions of Incontri del Terzo Luogo, moments of research on the "undecided" spaces of the city, spaces in which not everything is totally chaotic and wild, but where not everything is already planned. Starting in the fall of 2012, an informal group of people started a journey within these spaces that has facilitated comparison, actions on public space, experimentation, relations with the context and various forms of life with special regard to the topic of the garden. The reference place that gave life to this path, supporting it with its own resources, is Manifatture Knos, an undecided space in the city of Lecce, that has been recovered after a long period of abandonment and returned to the city as an independent cultural center. Scuola del Terzo Luogo wants to deal with new forms of pedagogy by challenging conventional teaching models, where giving political dignity to indecision becomes the modality of intervention on the common good, or the practice through which we take care of places.

[www.manifattureknos.org](http://www.manifattureknos.org)

### **Miriam Mariani**

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### **Martina Marolda**

She is currently working on the correspondence and on the publication of the sculptor Vico Consorti (1902-1979) at the University of Siena, following the assignment for the research project *Siena anni Trenta: ipotesi per una mostra* (2017). In 2016 she joined the national project *Diffondere la cultura visiva: l'arte contemporanea tra riviste, archivi e illustrazioni* (Progetto Nazionale FIRB 2012). In March 2016 she received her PhD at the University of Florence with a thesis titled *Le immagini al potere, le immagini del potere. La rappresentazione fotografica dell'architettura contemporanea nelle riviste italiane di settore (1928-1943)*. Graduated in Contemporary Art History at the University of Siena in 2011 with the thesis *Adrian Paci. Da Albanian Stories (1997) a The Encounter (2011)*, she is also specialized in video art. She is interested in the architecture of the Sixties in Italy and Europe, a theme that she has treated in her research *L'architettura pneumatica. Ricerche negli anni Sessanta tra avanguardia e utopia* (2007). Her recent research interests include new media in relation to visual arts, with special reference to architectural communication in Italian, French and German magazines in the Twenties and Thirties and in relation to power and totalitarianism.

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### **Matilde Marzotto**

She is an art historian. In 2007 she published "Arte Open Air. A Guide to Contemporary Art Parks in Italy". She curated lectures and workshops focusing on the relationship between aesthetics, art and landscape, in collaboration with FAI Fondo Ambiente Italiano, Fondazione La Raia and Orticola di Lombardia. In 2014 she founded 'lookaroundart', an entrepreneurial initiative aimed at bringing a wider audience closer to contemporary art. Currently, together with the management of the 'lookaroundart' project, she continues her teaching activity in public and private institutions such as IED-Istituto Europeo del Design and Politecnico di Milan.

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**Sergio Sanna**

Member of Ground Action, a collective of experts in the field of architecture, landscape and art, which is inspired by all those collective, active and participatory practices of space making such as, for example, the international experiences of the operational workshops. Its activity is configured as an on-site and open air research atelier, aimed at triggering or accelerating the re-evaluation processes for peculiar places, claiming the performative value of the action in the public space and in the landscape. It promotes sustainable design by using recycled materials and the direct and concrete realization of the installations using impromptu ways and forms. According to its method, Ground Action helps to create the opportunity for a dialogue with administrations, other local institutions and all those subjects active in the area capable of providing specific support and knowledge.

<https://www.groundaction.eu/>

**Raffaella Trocchianesi**

Architect and Associate Professor at Department of Design, Politecnico di Milano, she teaches Interior Design Studio at the School of Design and Design Research Context and Resources at the PhD Programme in Design. Director of the specialization Master IDEA\_Exhibition Design, she mainly deals with Design for Cultural Heritage in terms of museography and exhibition design, communication and enhancement of local areas, new models and narratives of cultural experiences, the relationship between design, humanities and arts.

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