

Empowering vulnerable women by participatory design workshops

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Women's Creativity since the Modern Movement (1918–2018)

Toward a New Perception and Reception



WOMEN'S CREATIVITY SINCE
THE MODERN MOVEMENT



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Women's Creativity since the Modern Movement (1918-2018)

Toward a New Perception and Reception

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Foreword

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Women's creativity since the Modern Movement – MoMoWo is a large-scale cooperation cultural project co-financed by the European Union's Creative Culture Programme under the Culture Sub-Programme (Education, Audio-visual and Culture Executive Agency – EACEA). It considers an issue of contemporary cultural, social and economic importance from a European and interdisciplinary perspective namely women's achievements in the design professions. These achievements are in fields including architecture, civil engineering, urban planning, landscape design, interior design, furniture and furnishing design some of which are still perceived as traditionally male professions.

The project works towards the harmonious development of European society by removing disparities and increasing gender equality both in the workplace and beyond. MoMoWo aims to reveal and promote the contribution of women design professionals to European cultural heritage which, until now, has been significantly 'hidden from history'. At the same time –considering History as a 'living matter'– it aims to promote and increase the value of the works and achievements of past and present generations of women professionals to give strength to future generations of creative women.

After four years of successful activity of the project MoMoWo, and in accordance with its mission, the present e-book *Women's Creativity since the Modern Movement (1918–2018): Toward a New Perception and Reception* continues to increase the visibility of creative women, to foster in Europe and beyond, interdisciplinary and multicultural approaches to the study of the built environment. It brings together scientific contributions on the cultural and socio-economic importance of women's

achievements in the field of architecture, interior and industrial design, landscape architecture and urban planning from various historical periods until the present-day.

The e-book is divided in seven chapters in order to achieve a thematic balance that is able to provide an extensive oversight of the academic research and professional experiences, touching a variety of disciplines and approaches concerning the perception and reception of women's creativity, including the history of professions, the history and theory of architecture and design, historiography, landscape and urban planning and the protection and conservation of architecture and interior design. It comprises 142 peer-reviewed articles by 193 authors from 35 different countries, ranging from Europe to Asia and America, which were written in occasion of *International MoMoWo Symposium* held at Politecnico di Torino, Campus Lingotto, between 13 and 16 June 2018. Abstracts of the articles are available at http://www.momowo.eu/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/book_programme_abstracts_updated.pdf.

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Empowering Vulnerable Women by Participatory Design Workshops

This contribution addresses the issue of homeless women's empowerment through design workshops and according to the capability approach.¹ The paper presents small, ordinary stories of women that experience being designers. Besides the professional label, being a designer means to approach reality from the transformative perspective of pursuing a positive change. It also translates in claiming the space for the expression of a personal vision of the world, within a cooperative environment. It enables to experiment innovative strategies to solve problems and to pursue self-determination in practical activities.

The designers introduced in this paper are women with basic education and no experience in the creative sector, but they share the narrative of generative processes with their 'educated colleagues', rejecting stereotypes and battling to have their skills acknowledged by the rest of society. Within this debate, the position we intend to promote is that design as a discipline can and should foster environments where fragile women can discover, develop or reinforce their capabilities, as it happens in the case of the workshops described further.²

In order to do so, this paper will first introduce the topic of homelessness, pointing out how gender can impact on the difficulties experienced by the female population in the condition of being without a home. Then we will present the case of "Crafting Beauty," a Turin-based interdisciplinary project for the social inclusion of homeless women (and men) via Design-Anthropology, which led workshops

and participatory processes.³ After drawing a parallel with similar case studies, this article will concentrate on three creative workshops that were part of Crafting Beauty in order to highlight how these engage women and enhance creative thinking skills, practical abilities and resilience.

Homelessness and Women

The European Observatory on Homelessness developed the European Typology of Homelessness and housing exclusion that provides a common language for transnational exchanges on homelessness as a framework for debate, data collection purposes, policy purposes and monitoring purposes.⁴

For ETHOS typology, there are three domains which constitute a home: 'having an adequate dwelling (or space) over which a person and his/her family can exercise exclusive possession (physical domain); being able to maintain privacy and enjoy relations (social domain) and having a legal title to occupation (legal domain)'. These latter lead to the four concepts of rooflessness, houselessness, insecure housing and inadequate housing that indicate the absence of a home.

Housing exclusion is the result of a process that –in the absence of a home or a secure housing situation– is the main evidence of homeless vulnerability. The multidimensionality that characterizes homeless people deals with different forms of personal and human discomfort: problems with health or wellbeing, drug or alcohol problems, or the lack of a job. Homeless people seem to have lost the ability to provide adequate answers to personal needs (food, hygiene, clothes) to the extent of not being able to plan their life. Luigi Gui draws attention to the fact that many homeless people or adults in a state of severe exclusion are at a disadvantage due to the fact that they lack most of their endowments, also in terms of emotional relationships.⁵

According to Joanne Bretherton, evidence indicates that gender is consistently associated with differentiated trajectories through homelessness in Europe.⁶ In fact, women's pathways through

3 Wendy Gunn and Jared Donovan, "Design and Anthropology: An Introduction," *Design and Anthropology* edited by Wendy Gunn and Jared Donovan (England: Ashgate, 2012).

4 "ETHOS: Typology on Homelessness and Housing Exclusion," FEANTSA, <http://www.feantsa.org/spip.php?article120&lang=en> (accessed December 2014).

5 Luigi Gui, "Una ricerca di nuovi percorsi d'aiuto," *Servizio sociale e povertà estreme: Accompagnamento sociale e persone senza dimora*, edited by Maurizio Bergamaschi, Carlo Landuzzi and Giovanni Pieretti, (Milano: Franco Angeli, 2003).

6 Joanne Bretherton, "Reconsidering Gender in Homelessness," *European Journal of Homelessness* 11, no. 1 (2017), 1–21, https://www.feantsa.org/download/feantsa-ejh-11-1_a1-v045913941269604492255.pdf (accessed May 31, 2018).

1 Amartya Kumar Sen, *La disuguaglianza: Un riesame critico* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2000); Martha Craven Nussbaum, *Creating Capabilities: The Human Development Approach* (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 2011).

2 Kumar Sen, *La disuguaglianza*.

homelessness are primarily linked to domestic violence and cultural exclusion, rather than to the loss of a home. Women appear more likely to rely on relatives, friends and acquaintances to keep themselves accommodated, only approaching homelessness and other services when these supports are exhausted.⁷ This condition reflects an extreme fragility and solitude of homeless women, often marked with affective poverty. Since the researchers report the condition of fragile women as very specific, their natural abilities, talents and personal resources need of a specific approach. This approach can focus on the real needs of the population and it can frame the empowerment intervention into appropriate environments.

Within this panorama, the evolutionary relationships between design and the social opens perspectives for innovative interventions: the social appears the immediate object of design, which, instead of being altered via the design of products, services or signs, becomes the transformational subject in and of itself.

Design takes part in debates on urgent worldwide issues and achieves an active role in addressing the complexity of the contemporary world on many topics. According to Viktor Papanek 'all men are designers' where 'design is the conscious effort to impose meaningful order'.⁸ About design and its definition, Krippendorff states that design is 'making sense of things'.⁹ This new paradigm portrays design as a promising, comprehensive, holistic, inclusive, reflective process that can facilitate access of the most marginal users to welfare services and recovery processes, upholding basic human rights.¹⁰ In the meantime, policymakers are regarding these scenarios with interest and are increasingly taking up design as a promising field for partnerships and methodologies.

So what is the role that design can play for the enhancement of creative skills in vulnerable women?

Crafting Beauty: The Project

Crafting Beauty is a Design Anthropology-led project and it was set up in Turin in 2014.¹¹ The project started as an experiment focused on both the empowerment of homeless people and the development of skills in university students through participatory and interdisciplinary approaches.¹²

Crafting Beauty is managed by the architect and designer Cristian Campagnaro (Department of Architecture and Design of Polytechnic of Turin) and the anthropologist Valentina Porcellana (Department of Philosophy and Educational Science of Turin University) and it is part of an action research named *Abitare il dormitorio/Living in the dorm* on homelessness services set up in 2009.¹³

The project involves a complex network of actors from the public and the private sector, involved in the ongoing co-production of the daily processes.¹⁴

Crafting Beauty takes place in one of the six night shelters of the City of Turin and it brings together a variety of participants: homeless people; design students from the Polytechnic of Turin; anthropology and education students from the University of Turin; social workers from the Service for Adults in Difficulty (funding service against homelessness) of the City of Turin; educators from social cooperatives, which manage services for homeless; designers, craftsmen, creatives and citizens.

Through regularly organized design activities they experiment with new projects, languages and production techniques, also contributing to the redesigning of the indoor and outdoor spaces of the shelter.¹⁵

7 Marybeth Shinn, et al., "Efficient Targeting of Homelessness Prevention Services for Families," *American Journal of Public Health* 103, no. 2 (December 2013), 324–330, doi: 10.2105/AJPH.2013.301468 (accessed May 31, 2018); K. Reeve, R. Goudie and R. Casey, "Homeless Women: Homelessness Careers," *Homelessness Landscapes* (London: Crisis, 2007); Nicholas Pleace et al., *Statutory Homelessness in England: The Experience of Families and 16–17 Year Olds* (London: Department of Community and Local Government, 2008), <http://womenshomelessness.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/Statutory-Homlessness-in-England.The-Experiences-of-Families-and-16-17-Year-Olds.pdf> (accessed May 31, 2018); Paula Mayock and Sarah Sheridan, "Women's 'Journeys' to Homelessness: Key Findings from a Biographical Study of Homeless Women in Ireland," *Women and Homelessness in Ireland: Research Paper 1* (Dublin: School of Social Work and Social Policy and Children's Research Centre, Trinity College Dublin, 2012).

8 Viktor Papanek, *Design for the Real World: Human Ecology and Social Change* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1971).

9 Klaus Krippendorff, "Redesigning Design; An Invitation to a Responsible Future," *Design - Pleasure or Responsibility*, edited by Päivi Tahkokallio and Susan Vihma (Helsinki: University of Art and Design, 1995), 138–162, <https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/719f/c8477bcd6d2bd00ca0c2ba35ae0890f85127.pdf> (accessed May 31, 2018).

10 Alastair Fuad-Luke, *Slow Theory: A Paradigm for Living Sustainably?* (United Kingdom: Routledge, 2005); Campagnaro, Cristian, and Sara Ceraolo. "Fighting Food Waste towards a New Social Food Chain: The Egg of Columbus Workshop," *International Journal of Food Design* 2, no. 1 (2017), 103+, Academic OneFile (accessed May 31, 2018).

11 Gunn and Donovan, "Design and Anthropology."

12 Thomas Binder and Johan Redström, "Exemplary Design Research," *Wonderground: Design Research Society: International Conference 2006*, edited by Ken Friedman et al. (Lisbon: CEIADE, 2006), http://unidcom.iade.pt/drs2006/wonderground/proceedings/fullpapers/DRS2006_0152.pdf (accessed May 31, 2018); Kumar Sen, *La diseguaglianza*; Sylvia Margolin and Victor Margolin, "A 'Social Model' of Design: Issues of Practice and Research," *Design issues* 18, no. 4 (2002), 24–30, <https://doi.org/10.1162/074793602320827406> (accessed May 31, 2018).

13 *Abitare il dormitorio/Living in the dorm* is the action-research set up in 2009 and led by the anthropologist Valentina Porcellana from University of Turin and by the architect and designer Cristian Campagnaro from Polytechnic of Turin. The research is part of the activities scheduled in the framework of the protocol of intent (2013) between the two Departments and fio.PSD, Italian Federation of Bodies for Homeless People.

14 The project involves Service for Adults in difficulty of Turin Municipality, public and territorial social services, social cooperative Animazione Valdocco, volunteers organizations and no profit foundations (S-nodi, Turin; Fondazione Progetto Arca, Milan).

15 Ezio Manzini, *Design, When Everybody Designs: An Introduction to Design for Social Innovation* (Cambridge; London: MIT Press, 2015).

Crafting Beauty: The Workshop

The model of conduction of the intensive design actions of the workshops is inspired by the 'empowered peer education'.¹⁶ In the apparatus of the workshops, the dimension of 'doing together' finds the direction to build a long-term collaboration (that can last a few days, weeks or several months), in which design objects are no more the final goal but they are the enabling platform for working together: the most elaborate product springing from collective work is the ability to collaborate, in the hope that this skill becomes property of the actors involved and grows beyond the borders of the laboratory.¹⁷

The topics of the workshops are selected in connection to the capabilities of the homeless people (i.e. abilities coming from their previous working experience or personal interests and aspirations), involving creative realities from the area (i.e. artisans, designers, artists, associations).

Crafting Beauty: Sustainability

Homeless people enrol in the project for nine months in the form of a paid internship. The internship is a 'tool of engagement' developed by the Service for Adults in difficulty of City of Turin in order to test or recover (mostly) the relational skills towards their reintegration in society.

In Crafting Beauty, the internship takes on specific features. It offers an innovative opportunity for conducting the educational work with the homeless people, enhancing their capabilities: the project acts as an accelerator and amplifier, because of the high density of interaction between the heterogeneous group of participants and the variety of activities conducted in the laboratories.

According to Manzini and his co-authors, producing design interventions is a kind of activity entailing a multitude of processes such as learning, sharing, creating and experimenting which can result in generating shared values between designers and individuals from non-creative occupations or fields.¹⁸ This can affect an individual's motivation to collaborate and the motivation of a group to pursue common interest or benefits through which the sharing of knowledge is enhanced.

Since the beginning of the project, Crafting Beauty offers an appropriate context where to develop and test new initiatives for the benefits of the homeless people.

¹⁶ Alberto Pellai, Valentina Rinaldin and Barbara Tamborini, *Educazione tra pari: Manuale teorico-pratico di empowered peer education* (Trento: Erickson, 2002).

¹⁷ Richard Sennett, *Insieme: Rituali, piaceri, politiche della collaborazione* (Milano: Feltrinelli, 2014).

¹⁸ Roberto Verganti, *Design-Driven Innovation: Changing the Rules of Competition by Radically Innovating what Things Mean* (Harvard: Harvard Business Press, 2009); Nigel Cross, "Designerly Ways of Knowing," *Design studies*, Vol. 3 (Bucks: Design Discipline Open University, 1982).

The Three Female Workshops of Crafting Beauty

The first female laboratory of Crafting Beauty was named Microfoodworkshop and it consisted of a cooking workshop attended by homeless women, social workers, students, designers and anthropologists from the project's team.

The workshop was held in June 2014. It involved eight homeless women from a night shelter and its goal was to facilitate the dialogue between them and the local community which was affected by distrust and mutual hostility. The workshop coincided with European Neighbour's Day, where the women helped preparing food to share with other inhabitants.

In order to facilitate the creative process, the workshop was tutored by the chef and performer Sara Casiraghi. Sara Casiraghi's creative research focuses on the combination of gastronomy and storytelling. As tutor of the workshop, she coordinated the food design process through the collective redesign of the recipes, groceries shopping and meal cooking with a creative mind-set.

The workshop gave to the homeless women the chance to experience the normality of a kitchen, something that is remote to the life in the night shelter. Reconnecting to familiar gestures, they exercised the right to express themselves through food and to take care of someone else sharing the meal at the party. Within the framework of creative participatory process, the experience succeeded also as a powerful tool to create a sense of community and a positive connection with the surroundings.

Within this process, the food becomes a pretext to foster initiative of openness towards the neighbourhood, integrating group of citizens and contributing in supporting processes of community identity.

The second experience was the "Tex Paints" and it consisted in a one-month long workshop with the aim of creating a collective artwork. The workshop developed the topic of collective female imagination and personal expression. With the creative direction of Matteo Thiel, a Turin-based fashion designer, five homeless woman and two female design students tested innovative materials for the production of expressive volumes and shapes.

Matteo Thiel's positioning as tutor appeared to be crucial for the development of the creative process. The women perceived him as a powerful, charismatic and fascinating figure. They developed a communication based on a deep sense of trust and understanding, enabling the willingness to participate to an unusual creative process. Thanks to this empathic relationships and a to the ritual atmosphere, the participants committed themselves completely to the project, trusting their tutor and assuming the role of co-designers with pride.

The materials for the project were dismissed clothes that couldn't be reused or donate. Sharing with each other biographical memories, the group started manipulating the fabrics and working in teams. Within a high experimental approach, the group tested several techniques such as folding,

gluing, stitching and painting. Each shape was carried by a collective negotiation among the group in an evocative and ritual atmosphere that enhanced group's cohesion and the promotion of individual imagination. The process of Tex Paints workshop merged as a carefully designed method with the free artistic expression. This combination appeared to be highly educative for the participants: in one hand, they had the chance to recover their ability of divergent thinking and taking a challenge towards creative experimentation, and on the other hand, they appreciated how a well-designed plan of actions is necessary even for those activities that are apparently rule-less.

The third experience was named 'Un sacco di Sport' (a lot of sports') and it consisted of a sewing workshop whose protagonists were five homeless women and two female design students from the Politecnico di Torino. Tutored by a senior designer easing the co-production process, the group manufactured ten handbags designed by the students. The bags' manufacturing process was hosted inside the sewing laboratory of Crafting Beauty. There, going through the details of the production process together, the students and the artisans worked together to make adjustments in order to fit the abilities of the artisan that would produce each bag. In doing so, the students learned the designer's double-sided ability of both 'protecting' the essential elements of his/her project while, on the other hand, re-negotiating the details when confronting with the artisans in charge of the production.

Within the workshop, all the participants tested 'dialogic collaboration', mutually increasing their abilities.¹⁹ By the recognition of their capabilities, the homeless women experienced a sense of well-being, recognition of their value in terms of personal resources. On the other hand, the workshop offered students the opportunity to practice context reading and to develop strategies to achieve the project's goals.

International Examples

The three workshops held in Crafting Beauty for the female homeless participants can be framed in a wider picture, composed by similar experiences about social design projects that have marginal users' empowerment as main goal. In this paragraph, we present three case studies that have been selected following a coherence criteria with the topic of Crafting Beauty's female workshops: food and community engagement; artistic expression and self-determination; technical skills enhancement and co-production.

By this selection, our goal is to connect the cross-field strategy proposed by Crafting Beauty's female workshops to significant singular international creative interventions that enhance women's specific attributes, pursuing the same goal if in different contexts.

The first case study is Herrgårds Kvinnoförening,²⁰ a women's association born within the context of The Malmo Living Lab in Malmo, Sweden. The association is mainly consisting of women from Afghanistan, Iraq, Iran and Bosnia. The Malmo Living lab is exploring how new media services in combination with social innovation can enhance the activities of these women, making them into a resource for the public sphere and surrounding community (and in the long run possibly establishing and increasing business opportunities for them as a commercial cooperative). The experiments consist of a combination of physical gatherings where the women provide meals for the orphans and new media solutions that could support the children's integration in the Swedish society (e.g. video-material from the women such as cooking instructions and their personal experiences of coming to Sweden). The project shares with the Microfoodworkshop the idea that female manual activities can be tools to be part of the community.

The second case study is Normali Meraviglie,²¹ an occupational therapy laboratory in Cesano Boscone, Italy. The project involves disabled people in craft activities. Like in Crafting Beauty, the process is led by a creative professional: the charismatic designer Alessandro Guerriero directs the creative initiatives and the group produces expressive products and objects. One of the collection developed is called *Non so che cosa sono* (*I don't know what they are*). The collection gathers a variety of object (vases, sculpture, and wood toys) where the creativity of the artisans leaves a high impact on the expressiveness of the objects, by the choice of the final shapes, textures and colours.

The third case study is Tiny Miracles²², a non-profit organization working with a local female community in the slums of Mumbai. The goal of the project is to improve the women's socio-economic condition by manufacturing objects designed by Pepe Heykoop. The objects are designed to be hand manufactured using low-tech tools, developing and reinforcing the sewing skills of the participants as Crafting Beauty's workshop Un Sacco di Sport. The initiative aims at making the women of the community Pardeshi independent, ensuring a fair income, an educational program and health care assistance. Focusing on the resources of the users and on the social-

²⁰ Erling Björgvinsson, Pelle Ehn and Per-Anders Hillgren, "Participatory Design and Democratizing Innovation" in *Proceedings of the 11th Biennial Participatory Design Conference* (New York: ACM, 2010), 41–50, doi:10.1145/1900441.1900448.

²¹ "Non so cosa sono," Normali Meraviglie, <http://www.normalimeraviglie.it/non-so-cosa-sono/> (accessed January 2018).

²² Tiny Miracles, <http://www.tinymiracles.nl> (accessed January 2018).

¹⁹ Sennett, *Insieme*.

economic context, the designer developed high quality products that are also in coherence with the craftsmanship, so the women can recognize themselves in these.

Designing For Socially Sustainable Contexts

In conclusion, Crafting Beauty and the projects presented by the case studies offer examples of how Design and creativity can facilitate access of the most marginal users such as homeless women to welfare services from which they are often excluded.

In our experience, Design plays a double match: on one side, 'design as a discipline' promotes new interdisciplinary models to foster social cohesion and active citizenship; on the other side, 'design as an attitude' offers the women the opportunity to experiment 'designerly ways of knowing'. In particular, it offers the chance to practice a problem-solving mind-set focused on solutions, to approach 'constructive' thinking and to develop innate abilities in solving real-world, ill-defined problems.²³

In conclusion, these small design stories try to highlight the essence of design practice in its daily life management. Here, designing means to aspire for the better,²⁴ to approach the complex world with a critical and open mind-set and to acknowledge human being of their great power of innovating, both in society and in themselves. These meanings are the core of the creative actions promoted by the workshops from Crafting Beauty and they appear crucial to those fragile women in order to experiment the wellbeing conditions necessary to reactivate self-confidence, build meaningful relationships, flourish and recover skills for managing personal life.

²³ Nigel Cross, "Designerly Ways of Knowing," *Design Studies*, Vol. 3 (Bucks: Design Discipline Open University, 1982).

²⁴ Arjun Appadurai, "The Capacity to Aspire: Culture and the Terms of Recognition," *Culture and Public Action*, edited by Vijayendra Rao and Michael Walton (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2004).