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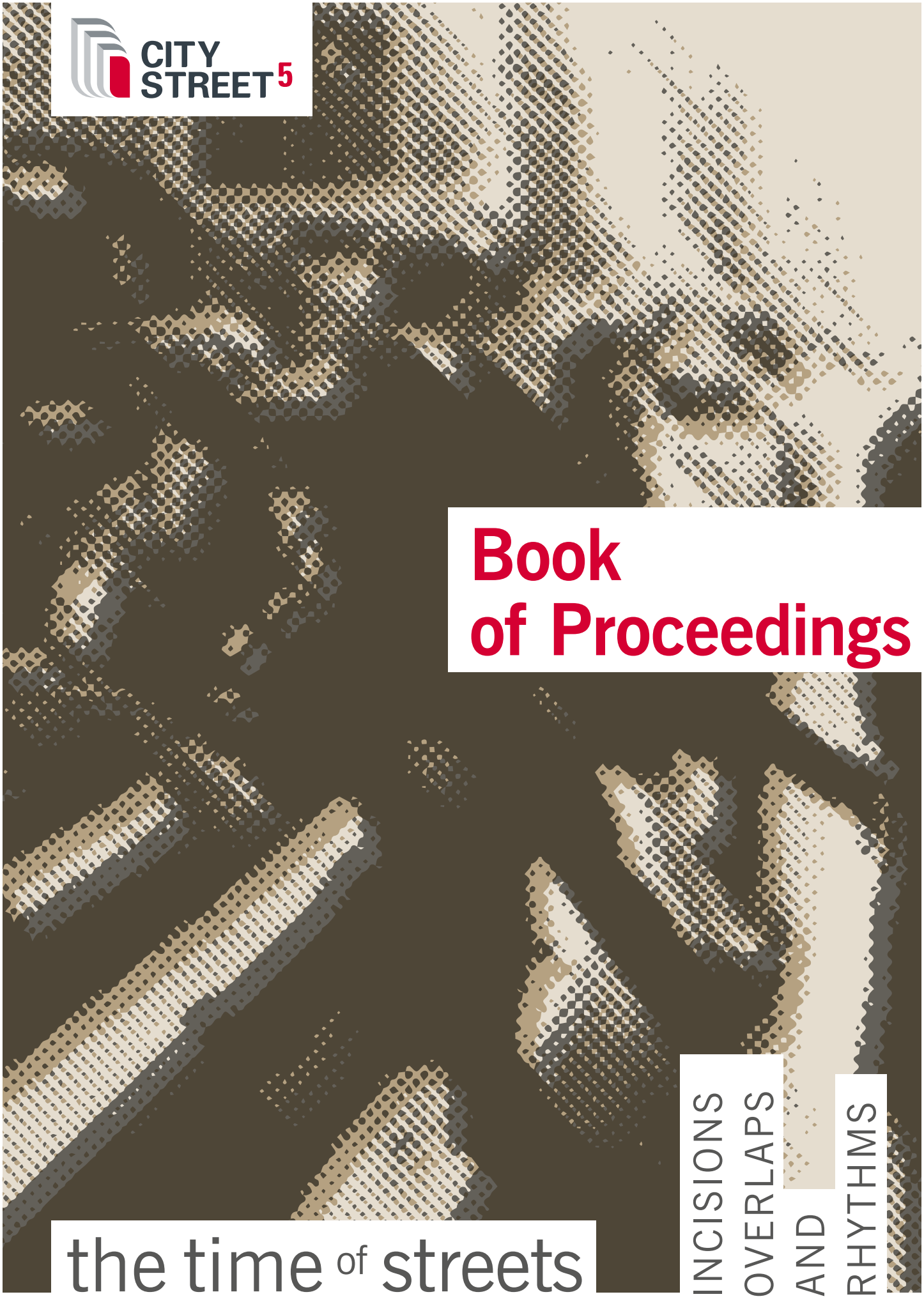
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19 November 2026

CITY STREET 5

Book of Proceedings



the time of streets

INCISIONS OVERLAPS AND RHYTHMS

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The time of streets:
incisions, overlaps and rhythms
Book of Proceedings

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CITY STREET 5

Book of Proceedings

the time of streets

INCISIONS OVERLAPS AND RHYTHMS

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Designing ordinary public space, between revealed potential and public stance. The case of Viale Ottavio Mai in Turin

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Abstract

As a space of collective interaction, the multi-dimensional streets allow investigating the adaptivity in terms of social, climate and use. While architecture projects and placemaking processes have been realised, ordinary residual open spaces in the urban environment are still misused or poorly executed. Which European actions and architectural design strategies can be adopted to create such public spaces?

From this perspective, the viale Mai case study in Turin shows contradictions between its hidden potential and its actual transformation. Located in a vibrant city, where university hubs and adaptive urban renovations occur, the viale Mai is an underused and awaiting transformation street close to the new University Campus Einaudi. The site has been assumed by an academic reflection with students during three years in a Design Studio at the Polytechnic of Turin as the topic. Today, it is a new public space project held by the municipality of Turin for the European program UIA - ToNITE.

The complexity of architectural projects, demonstrated by students' work based on the critical thinking of adaptive public space, climate change, and environmental comfort, appears to be in contrast with the results of public action. Indeed, to enhance the viale Mai potential, the contribution underlines the difference between two approaches: academia's problem-setting and the problem-solving led by public action.

Keywords
Ordinary street, adaptive open space, problem setting, interdisciplinary design studio, research by design.

Streets: the central role of ordinary public spaces

In cities, different groups cohabit within fragmented urban contexts affected by climatic, environmental, economic, and social phenomena[12]. In such increasing complexity, offering a space for coexistence and equality is a challenging objective to pursue. Therefore, a new transformative approach and methodological paradigms are required to enable urbanists and designers to set up resilient governance and spaces[3]. According to the "eulogy of discard" (*elogio dello scarto)*[4], this contribution aims to create a positive sense for the leftover city[5] through the ordinary public space[6]. Abandoned areas[7], drosscapes[8], *terrain vagues*[9] with an indeterminate shape, neglected most of the time within the prevailing patterns of urban use, reveal hidden but powerful resources of cities[10]. Related to the principles of everyday urbanism[11], such as a frame that holds together the ordinary and the extraordinary[12] the inverse city seeks its meaning in everyday life. As François Jullien also stated, "to make a discard (écart) means to set out from the norm, to advance in an unusual way, to shift from what is expected and conventional"[13]. The ordinary cities contain extraordinary "spaces of the possible" where the potential for transformation is unseen. Such space 'belongs' to everyone; city streets are the emblematic ordinary and shared spaces where exchange and expression occur[14]. In addition, every urban place has a spatial, economic and social specificity transferred to the street, making it take on unique forms and configurations[15].

The public space regeneration. Towards new attitude in design and policies.

European policies, national and local ones, are increasingly focused and funded on the re-generation of residual open public spaces[16]. Instead of the already exhausted problem-solving centred on the exploration of 'what' to do, European actions are oriented towards a 'problem-setting' approach, i.e. 'how' to act. Generally speaking, "through

the selection, from available means, of the one best, suited to established ends"[17] the problem solving approach handles problems recognised as already given. This problem-solving attitude was common in European urban design during the '80s. Public spaces projects, seen in cities like Barcelona, Berlin, and Lyon[18], responded to common functions and practices by formalizing new configurations through the modelling of soils and the placement of urban furniture and lighting.

On the other hand, in recent times, a heightened complexity has been acknowledged in various types of problems, particularly in urban matters. Trends related to mobility, liveability, interactions and uses, climate, and sustainability are increasingly compounding the complexity of the urban system. In such cases, the problem-solving approach is not sufficient because "a conflict of ends cannot be resolved by the use of techniques derived from applied research. It is rather through the nontechnical process of framing the problematic situation that we may organise and clarify both the ends to be achieved and the possible means of achieving them"[19]. When several issues are intertwined, it is mandatory to "set the problem" to frame the context and the goals before applying one or more solutions. Public spaces and streets are contexts in which the complexity and limitations of a problem-solving approach may be highlighted[20].

European action.

Everyday and tactical urbanism policies are widely supported within the 2021 and 2027 European programs. Several street space projects actively involve and encourage practices of stakeholder participation, co-design, citizen engagement, and bottom-up approach[21]. Within these self-management spaces, the layout is often simple so as to respond to simple needs, such as meeting, standing, playing, and urban gardening, in a mix between pedagogy and architecture[22]. One particularly remarkable program is the *NEB - New European Bauhaus*[23]. Its manifesto focuses on tactical urban practices, presenting a formula. This perspective not only regards sustainability as a goal-driven but also champions the inclusion of citizens and all potential actors. Moreover, it extends an invitation for proposals that embrace a landscape-based design approach submitted by artists, designers, architects, and engineers or young researchers, joined with institutions and communities and dense with immaterial meanings and values.

National and local action.

At the Italian national level, the NRRP[24], considers the historical/artistic vocations of our heritage without any opposition to the degradation of marginal areas within urban territories. In the recent past, ambitious plans, notably the City Plan (2012) and the Periphery Plan (2014), appear to have faltered due to an excessive focus on problem-solving rather than problem-setting, This is why defining and establishing design guidelines in alignment with the envolving urban context has proven to be challenging. More specifically, local urban contexts come with inherent limitations, including the substantial maintenance costs associated with public space and the lack of nonupgraded human resources at the municipal technical offices.

The outcomes of European Programmes in Turin. The impact on the territory.

Located in northwestern Italy and the regional capital of Piedmont, Turin is known for its historical significance as the political capital of the Savoy Empire and then the national republic. Notably, the city is recognised as a company town due to it was an industrial production hub in the early XX century. The key sectors included the mechanical industry, exemplified by the presence of the Lingotto and Mirafiori factories under the Fiat banner, along with textiles, food, rubber, and textile industries.[25] A period of deep deindustrialisation and widespread decommissioning in the early 1980s was contrasted in the first decade of the 2000s with a flourishing period of radical urban transformation[26]. The aim was to reshape Turin's image, making the city a destination that was both attractive to tourists and culturally vibrant. In fact, from the beginning of the XXI century to the present, Turin stands as a unique case in Italy having witnessed significant post-industry innovative policies for urban regeneration and participatory governance processes. This has resulted in the emergence of new spatial and social identities, as well as flexible and adaptive cultural perspectives[27]. Furthermore, the city has experienced fallout from such conjunction with implications on the quality of public space[28].

Substantial national and European funding marked the first innovative policies for pursuing the so-called 'complex' regeneration pro-

grams. These initiatives successfully balanced public-private collaborations and institutional initiatives in partnership with universities, placing Turin at the forefront of national urban development. [29]. Projects for the regulation and management of urban commons include the *Rete di Case del Quartiere*[30] project at the local scale and at the European level programs such as URBAN[31], UIA Co-City[32] and AxTO[33] projects. These multi-sectoral approaches and innovative models of urban co-governance empowered the administration to deal with complex urban challenges, leading to the creation of innovative co-design processes in a trustful interaction between the public and social actors[34]. This paper will consider the UIA Urban Security "ToNite"[35] instance, launched in February 2020. In conjunction with the Co-City civic involvement, this three-year European project focused on improving the liveability of underused sites in the Dora River area. Among 19 selected sites, the City of Turin's team of technicians identified two public spaces for rehabilitation projects. These strategic sites were chosen due to their inherent development potential. One of the two selected projects, Viale Mai a short section of street located close to the new University Campus Luigi Einaudi, serves as our case study.

Viale Ottavio Mai case study: from an unfinished urban axis towards a new urban street.

The street, named Viale Ottavio Mai, is a central segment of an urban axis that traverses one of Turin's rivers, the Dora Riparia, in the northern sector of the city[36]. The planning of Viale Mai is rooted in the Regulatory Plans of 1906 and 1926, maintaining continuity with the nineteenth-century urban plot. (fig.01)

However, the presence of industrial gasometers in the proximity, marking one of the city's earliest manufacturing sites, resulted in the road axis remaining uncompleted in the section between the Viale Farini (eastern sector) and Viale Verona (western sector). Based on the PRG by Gregotti & Associati in 1995, only the recent transformation programs allocated consistent university facilities on the site. (fig.02)

The dismission of the industrial site in the early ’80 and the reconversion into a university facilities complex has been possible thanks to the 2006 Winter Olympics when the Olympic Village Media was built. This area was subsequently reconverted into the EDISU university stu-



Fig.1 - Detail of Vanchiglia area and the Dora river. Above General Regulatory Plan of the Municipality of Turin, 1906-1908, and below a variant of 1926 PRG - Source: City of Turin 1906, 1926

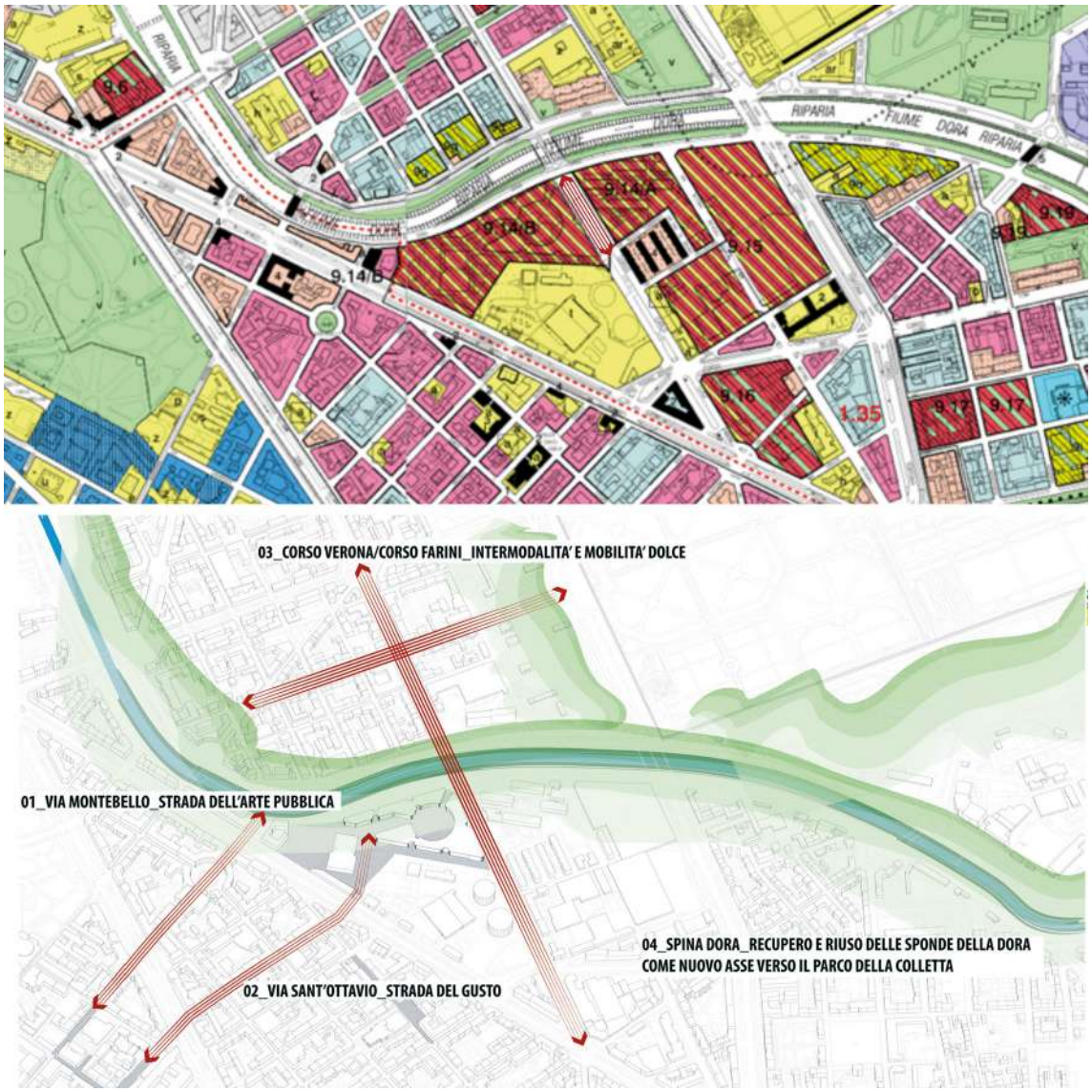


Fig.2 02 - Above: a detail of Vanchiglia area and the Dora river. General Regulatory Plan of the Municipality of Turin, Source: Gregotti Associati Studio, 1995; below axes and project opportunities in the relationship between Campus and city - source: Urban Center Metropolitano, Campus Luigi Einaudi, and territory: a working dossier, Source: UCM 2014

dent housing, and in 2012, the area was implemented with the University Campus "Luigi Einaudi',' designed by Sir Norman Foster. After more than a century, the urban plot was finally achieved. (fig.03)

The new urban layout represents a paradigmatic transformation process through building design, despite any vision of the surrounding public spaces. The completion of the east-west urban axis owes its achievement to two main factors. Firstly, the continuity through viale Ottavio Mai and the footbridge over the Dora Riparia river provide a vital link to the city centre (on the east side). Secondly, the Aurora district is transforming in the west. Together, they offer opportunities to to rediscover and reassign spaces with new roles. These facilitate collective urban practices related to social interactions, mobility, and urban living. Above all, they foster an understanding of the transformation processes and the values that may emerge.

The hundred-meter-long Viale Mai, alongside Foster's Campus Luigi Einaudi (shortly called CLE), plays a pivotal logistical role in mediating between the city, the university settlements, and environmental issues within the urban landscape. Despite these spatial conditions, the relationship between the open space fabric and the new university facilities remains unsettled. While the university student house EDISU is built as a closed perimeter and out of alignment with the dominant urban matrix, the CLE, despite its distinctive architectural quality, appears as an out-of-scale (or oversized) architectural object that remains somewhat indifferent to the surrounding urban periphery. Despite architectural developments, Viale Ottavio Mai has remained a construction site for over a decade, where a row of plantain trees was planted. The CLE project placed only a narrow greenbelt to create an elevation difference with the street, and the EDISU student housing complex lacked adequate street lighting. Fortunately, vehicular traffic was prohibited, yet no plans were made for students or alternative use of the public space. Moreover, any kind of activity - formal or informal - has been proposed or temporarily experimented with by the university or the municipality, which nevertheless has been it to public use. (fig.04)

A potentially empty open space near public buildings, linking two riverbanks and two neighbourhoods, lay unused, unsafe, and almost abandoned, producing a paradoxical urban condition. Nevertheless, the

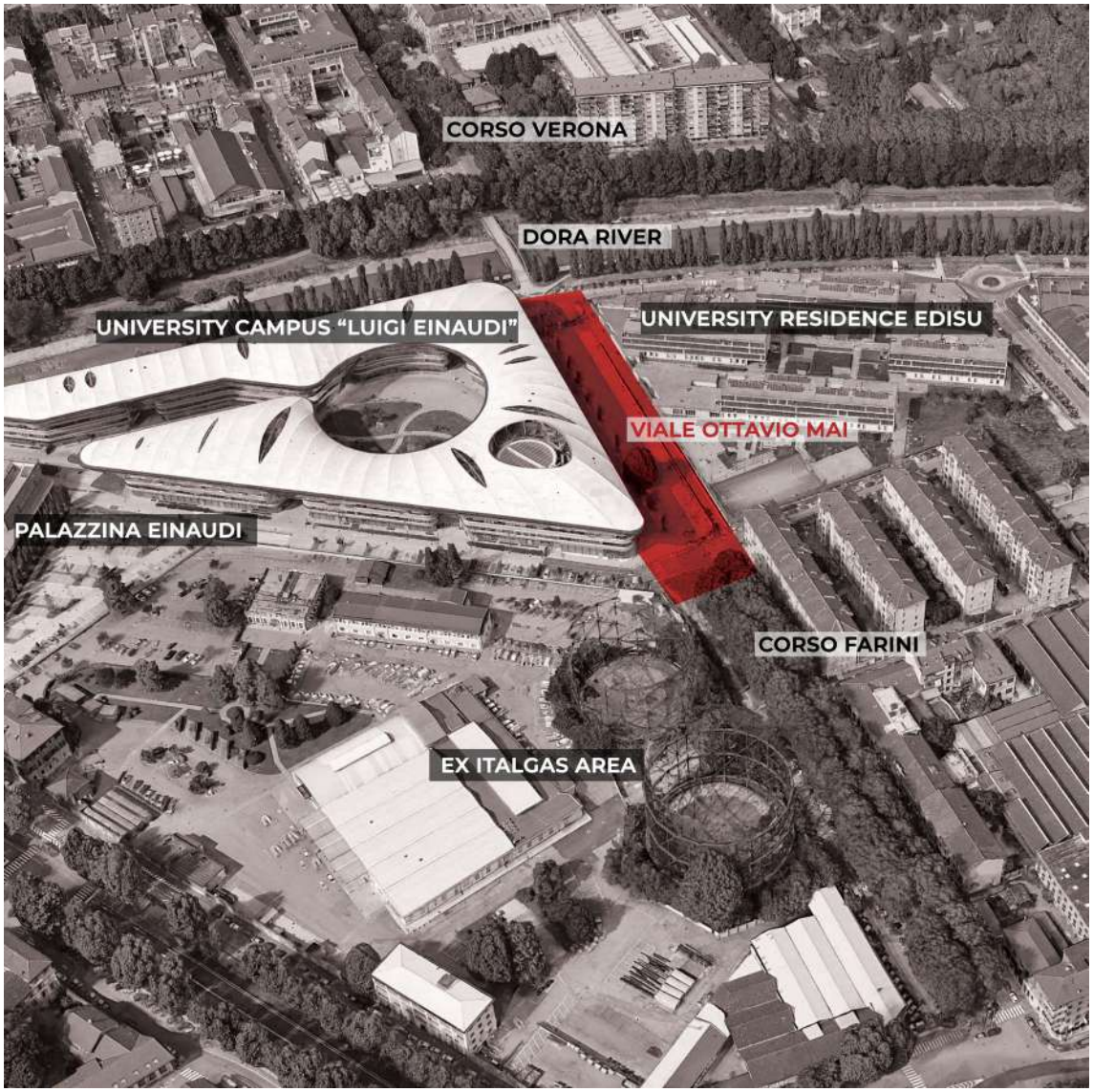


Fig.3 - Plan of the site with indications of the relevant existing buildings.- Source: Atelier INSIDE_OUTSIDE, 2016

new urban condition and the introduction of university facilities have quickly produced a functional, temporal and spatial gap. This gap has catalyzed a series of re-signification processes in the proximity areas where bottom-up re-appropriation practices and citizenship actions are related or not to the university. This phenomenon has raised the two local universities' interest. Following the inauguration of the CLE, a group of University of Turin lecturers, led by Professor Egidio Dansero, reflected on the relationship between the new university campus and the broader territory. This research initiative, named the "CLE e/è territorio" Research-Formation Observatory, evolved from this reflection. The CLE campus was assimilated into the territory as a "transitional space" undergoing transformation. It formed a network of both open and enclosed spaces where material and immaterial inhabitation practices took place[37]. Moreover, the past and future vocations of these places[38] raised new potential functions and ordinary social interactions.

Interdisciplinary landscapes. A teaching experience between pedagogy, questioning research, and design.

The core of research and educational interest for the INSIDE/OUTSIDE Design Studio (today Adaptive Open Spaces) at Polytechnic of Turin lies in the need to reflect and propose new urban spatial configurations that "reveal new scenarios where there is degradation and abandonment"[39]. With an integrated teaching model, three modules with different disciplinary fields shared the common view that the design actions need a cohesive vision to investigate complex settings to suggest a "change of state" for the public space design[40]. The design studio syllabus is training-oriented to explore the new role open space plays in urban regeneration processes, and its possible design transformations for public use, based on a thorough knowledge of the places - historical, geomorphological, built, social, and environmental[41]. The overarching objective is to envision multiple interpretations of the urban landscape[42] as culturally significant, systemically sustainable, and socially shared places. On these assumptions, a holistic approach synergises and enables the course to provide theoretical, methodological, and design insights encompassing architecture and urban design, environmental design, and technologies and energies for the environ-



Fig.4 - Viale Ottavio Mai in 2016 - Source: Authors, 2016

ment[43]. Although the strong bond, each discipline maintains its distinct identity. Architectural design explores the rehabilitation of urban public space through the lens of contemporary city ecological transitions, eco-systemic urban landscape, and adaptive and resilient open space. Environmental design aims to set up the urban scene through the principles of demanding design, systemic eco-design approach and contextually sensitive design. Technologies and energies for the environment furnish the tools to address the physical and technical challenges related to soundscape, lightscape and outdoor thermal and environmental comfort, all aligned with current regulations governing noise and light pollution control in outdoor settings. Over the span of three academic years, from 2016 to 2019, the Design Studio involved about one hundred master's students of architecture for three semesters. These students, working in groups of 2-3 members, carried out architectural investigations in public spaces within medium-small ordinary urban sites marked by contemporary critical issues: use practices, environmental and climate risks, feeling of safety, mobility issues, and outdoor wellbeing. The goal of "INSIDE/OUTSIDE" Design Studio aims to compare its design attitudes and investigate potential news assets with the more updated and troubling sites in the urban area of Turin, such as the public open spaces surrounding the two main urban universities campus in town: the brand new Campus Luigi Einaudi (design by Sir Norman Foster) by the University of Turin and the Cittadella Politecnica, the extension of Polytechnic of Turin reusing a dismissed railways fields. As almost entirely neglected by the architectural transformations, the potential of open spaces inside and around university spaces, were assumed for three academic years as design areas. Here, using architectural design as a testing tool[44], facilitates a problem-setting approach to the exploration of novel and unconventional appropriations of public space. Streets and residual urban spaces are considered as an "intermediate space to encourage a social space between general and particular public life" to encourage and imagine "the informal exchange (that) can often take place in these very ordinary spaces, precisely because such spaces could not explicitly belong to any specific group or institution."[49]

Evidence of complexities: the design studio's results.

With this framework, adaptive design solutions outcoming from the INSIDE/OUTSIDE Design Studio could offer alternative views of the city[4546]. Design solutions are oriented towards enhancing user integration and interaction between people and places and promoting environmental quality, from visual and thermo-acoustic well-being to appropriately using renewable energy and smart technologies. Utilising the research-by-design method, the students' projects aim to look beyond the micro-local scale in identifying conceptual and intervention models on urban public space that could confirm the identity character of Turin, both traditional and innovative. Four distinctive approaches for Viale Ottavio Mai have emerged from among the eighteen project proposals. They mainly focus on the adaptability of multiple practices, the remodelling of the ground as the main tactical design approach, the renaturalisation actions, and interactive and sharing interventions for sustainable urban regeneration. The selection of the following students' projects will illustrate these models.

An adaptable public space.

The open space is poorly infrastructure, providing the flexibility to accommodate and stimulate diversified uses, ordinary and alternative, over time, to drive innovative and disruptive practices thanks to temporary configurations and installations.
The project "The M.E. line. (The Multi-Ethnic line)" (fig.05) propose a deep understanding of the district's participatory "inside", made up of multicultural and intergenerational citizen, to determine "outside" design solutions not so relevant transformative as inclusive of the cultural diversity of the contest. Three main places, inspired by ethnic and multicultural influences, are formally interconnected by continuous pedestrian and bicycle paths, weaving together and providing cohesion to a fragmented and disconnected area.

Public space as a project of soil.

This concept envisions the place as an artificial orography that engages people in new practices within open spaces, offering an alternative to a traditional horizontal space to be equipped with urban furniture. Here viale Ottavio Mai is assumed as a flexible and uninterrupted continuity entity. This perspective of (micro) landscape reinforces its identity as a space in permanent mutation and redefini-



Fig.5 05 - Design Studio Project "The M.E. line. (The Multi-Ethnic line)" - Source: Dario Cangani and Beatrice Piccirillo, 2019

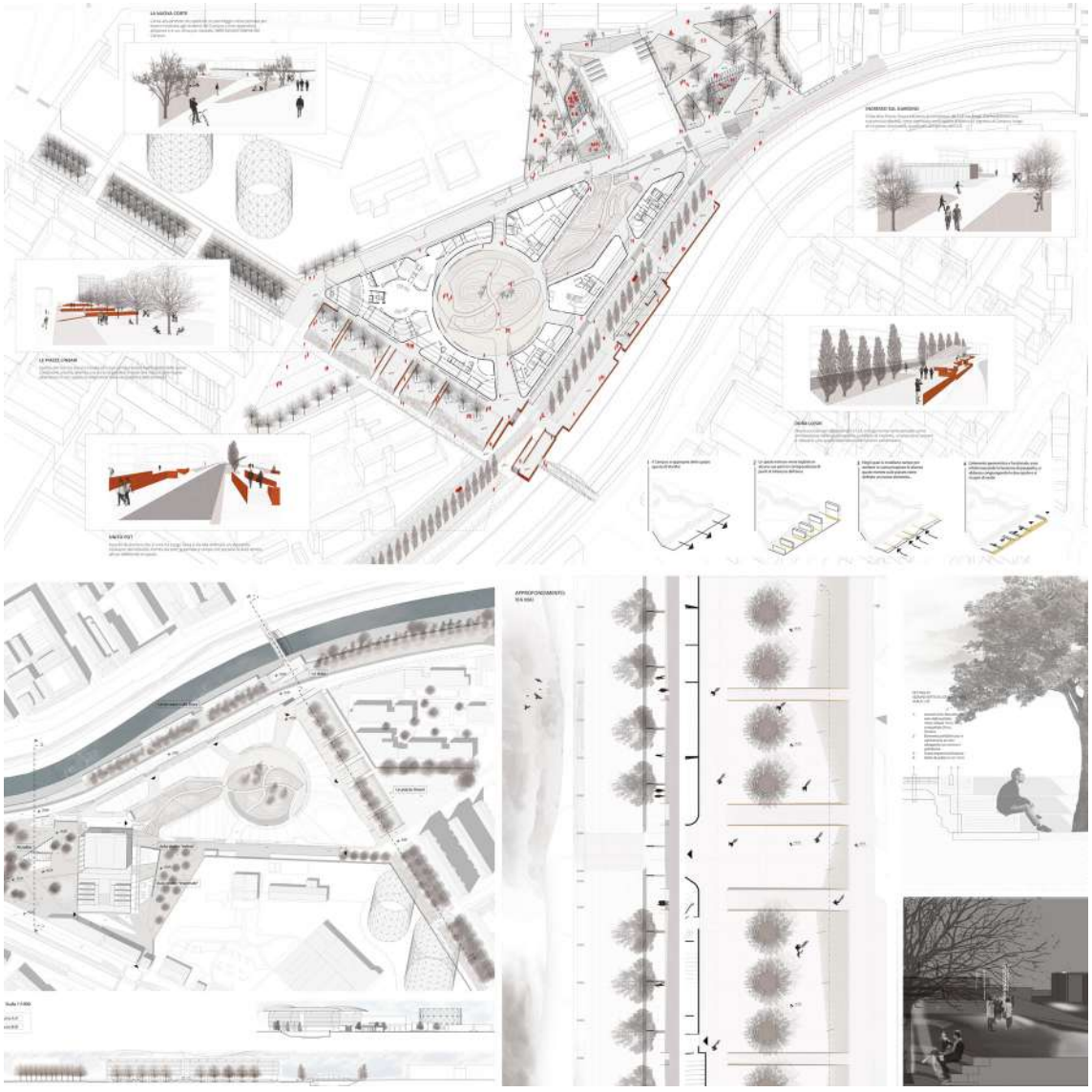


Fig.6 - Design Studio Project - "Trame in Campus" - Source: Camilla Maré, Silvia Meterc and Giulia Musso, 2017



Fig.7 - Design Studio Project "Re.vege.To" - Source: Paolo Bianco and Marcella Procaccini, 2019

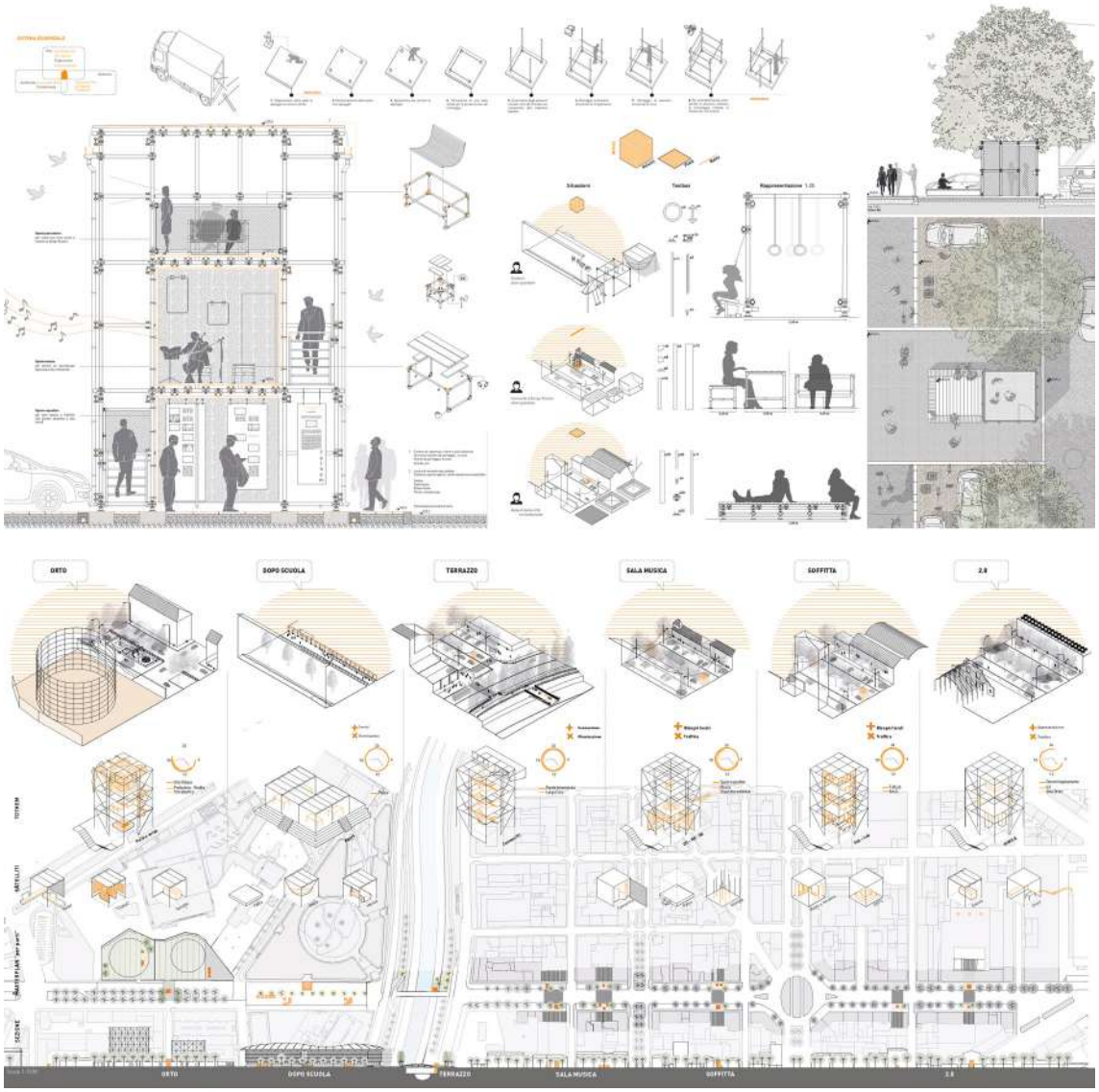


Fig.8 - Design Studio Project "Tot(h)em" - Source: Lucia Miglietta and Mattia Salvador, 2019

tion. “Trame in Campus” (fig.06) is a project that architecturally translates the articulation of the ground in the relationship between the university and the pedestrian axis. It achieves this through a system of linear squares and regulated floor levels, incorporating partitions, steps and ramps. At the same time, the path and the squares generate additional spaces for interaction, leisure and relaxation, defining flexible areas for recreational and outdoor activities.

Interactive and shared public space.

Freed from substantial spatial transformation and functional customization, the place is taken back to mixed communities' hybrid and flexible uses. The “Tot(h)em” (fig.08) project proposes a tactical urbanism approach declined through simple, modular and flexible small-architectural solutions able to offer micro-spaces distributed in the area, conceived according to reversible, temporary, and implementable systems. Also, this proposal works not through significant transformative interventions but with a project to provide an open space serving as both a social hub and a catalyst for unconventional practices, opportunities, and interaction among users, as well as cultural, artistic and social realities of the district.

ToNite, a design approach as a functional program response

The Polito design-based research groups presented the outcomes of the design studio to the Municipality of Turin and UniTo. Two exhibitions were held in the Main Hall of the CLE (fig.09) to formally contribute to developing new functional and innovative design solutions for the site. Moreover, in 2020, a public discussion forum was organized as part of the UIA "ToNite" design program. These meetings highlighted the necessity of finalizing the design phase, characterized by an unstructured and almost informal discussion on architectural aspects.

Nevertheless, the viale Ottavio Mai project was carried out by architects working in public technical offices, where usual working conditions are affected by time and technical staff shortages. Despite these conditions, the realised project, open to citizens on the 5th of October 2022, follows some programmatic guidelines that emerged from interactions with university groups and residents.

The main functions that have been confirmed were a small area for outdoor events, areas for street food, an outdoor study place, and a bar

corner. In addition, some nature-based solutions, as proposed in certain student scenarios - including a rain garden, depaving, and planting additional trees - were considered. Furthermore, the UIA "ToNite" program aimed to create a new equipped pedestrian area to enhance liveability and accessibility while preventing urban decay by developing "security by design" in areas close to the Dora River and the CLE.

The architectural concept devised by city designers involves the interconnection of specialized paths (pedestrian, bicycle, emergency road, etc.), formalized through a series of lines traced on the ground. (fig.10) On one side of the area, a linear rain garden and plantings of shrubs, hedges, and herbaceous species are distinctly separated from the adjacent cycle path. In front of the area, a double row of trees follows the existing Corso Farini double tree line. In this zone, street furniture for socialisation and leisure has been provided, including a 20-meter community table, various types of seating, ping pong tables, and shade structures. Lastly, a public lighting system has been installed, and the project features a continuous surface ground composed of different paving typologies, including incorporating asphalt, limestone, self-locking concrete blocks, and partial reuse of the existing crushed gravel paving.

Revealing or wasting the potential of a street. A design method to overcome.

As affirmed by existing literature and institutional funding policies, minor and underused streets or areas play a non-marginal role in the contemporary city's public space. However, public administration often overlooks these minor streets and short road segments despite their crucial role in the broader regeneration processes.

As evidenced by the case study of Viale Ottavio Mai, despite district-level functional and architectural development, the ordinary space of the street is invested with less strategic and design attention compared to the quality and architectural value given to the surrounding buildings.

Moreover, the relevance of this street section was only highlighted through academic inquiries, extending the attention of the City of Turin. As we pointed out, the official adopted design for Viale Ottavio Mai is based on the set up of specialised spaces and street furniture



Fig.9 - Poster of two exhibitions in the CLE main hall - Source: Authors 2018



Fig.10 - The Viale Ottavio Mai project - ToNite UIA Torino - Source: Città di Torino - Dipartimento Fondi Europei; designed by Divisione Ambiente, Verde e Protezione Civile - Area Trasformazione Periferie - Beni Comuni - Periferie e Arredo. Below photo source: authors, 2022

placement. Also, it is lacking integrated innovative solutions, both technical and architectural, to establish functional and formal issues.

Due to the inadequate consideration of complex university neighborhood dynamics, the project risks overlooking prevailing trends in contemporary public spaces. Today, in fact, the new collective practices, the climate change adaptive strategies, and the new forms of sustainable mobility are assuming a crucial role in the choice of architectural solutions, contrasting the authorial design approach of the latest decades.

Meanwhile, the Design Studio's projects developed by young students pointed out contemporary issues and visions with technical and formal solutions aligned with the innovative European programs. These solutions would have fostered new imaginaries of public space better suited to the urban needs and practices of the university community and, at the same time, to the inhabitants of the surrounding neighborhoods.

The case study of Viale Ottavio Mai highlights certain weaknesses linked to the usual "Public Works" design practice process. Without a broader dialogue with experts and a multidisciplinary academic design-based approach, projects tend to cater to existing forms of public space habitation. In contrast, adopting a problem-setting attitude and disciplinary integration could lead to more appropriate designs that enhance existing forms of inhabiting public space.

In conclusion, the students' projects are remarkable for unveiling the strategic potential role of streets in fostering a new identity and enhancing livability in a changing urban sector. It should be in the interest of the decisional and technical departments of the municipality of the city (Turin, in this case) to recognize and harness this untapped potential. To overcome this alternative approach - problem setting vs problem solving -, and to create more vibrant and responsive public spaces, the academic approach offers valuable insights for the more technical design solutions led by public offices.

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