# Connecting People to Places

Shaping and Co-Designing the Social and Urban Fabric of the City

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Master's Thesis in Architecture for Sustainability Design



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Annem, Babam ve Anneannem'e Dedicated to my Mom, Dad and Grandmother

#### **Abstract**

The resilience of our society in the transformation to sustainability is directly linked to the territorial ecology of the diversity of places. communities and the cultural, social and ecological values they generate. Places are fundamental for our well-being, going beyond their ecological and physical qualities, and serving as social spheres, in which community and identity formation takes shape. A place-based approach to sustainable development acknowledges these unique characteristics, values, feelings, networks and actors that are operating in places. Furthermore, place-based approaches to sustainability can empower individuals and communities in decision-making, enhance transformative agency in re-negotiating their involvement in places, and foster collaborative and innovative urban development through practices of sustainable place-shaping. This collective effort can result in the collaborative practices between social actors, who become the co-designers and co-producers of the new urban and social fabric. Social actors are aligning their individual interests with the needs of the society at large, proposing alternative solutions to environmental and societal problems, re-defining the concept of well-being and supporting collaboration. Design and design experts can play a crucial role in supporting and triggering these processes, looking at places through the lens of the people who are operating there, re-defining spatial relationships and connecting people to places.

This thesis aims to answer the following questions: How can active citizenship contribute to larger transformations in the territory? How do place-based approaches to sustainable development trigger a series of open-ended participatory processes? What can co-design do to support social actors in these processes of shaping their physical and social environment? La resilienza della nostra società nella trasformazione verso la sostenibilità è direttamente connessa all'ecologia territoriale della diversità dei luoghi, delle comunità e dei valori culturali, sociali ed ecologici che essi generano. I luoghi sono fondamentali per il nostro benessere: al di là delle loro qualità ecologiche e fisiche, fungono da sfere sociali in cui la comunità e le identità prendono forma. Un approccio place-based allo sviluppo sostenibile riconosce queste caratteristiche uniche, i valori, i sentimenti, le reti e gli attori che operano nei luoghi. Inoltre, gli approcci place-based alla sostenibilità possono rafforzare gli individui e le comunità nel processo decisionale, accrescere l'agency trasformativa nel rinegoziare il loro coinvolgimento nei luoghi e promuovere uno sviluppo urbano collaborativo e innovativo attraverso pratiche di place-shaping sostenibile. Questo sforzo collettivo può sfociare in pratiche di collaborazione tra gli attori sociali, che diventano co-progettisti e co-produttori del nuovo tessuto urbano e sociale. Gli attori sociali stanno sempre più allineando i loro interessi individuali alle esigenze della società, proponendo soluzioni alternative ai problemi ambientali e sociali, ridefinendo il concetto di benessere e supportando la collaborazione. Il design e gli esperti di design possono svolgere un ruolo cruciale nel favorire e innescare questi processi, guardando ai luoghi attraverso la lente delle persone che vi operano, ridefinendo le relazioni spaziali e mettendo le persone in connessione con i luoghi.

Questa tesi ha l'obiettivo di rispondere alle seguenti domande: Come può la cittadinanza attiva contribuire a trasformazioni più ampie del territorio? In che modo gli approcci place-based allo sviluppo sostenibile innescano una serie di processi partecipativi aperti? Cosa può fare il co-design per sostenere gli attori sociali in questi processi di formazione del loro ambiente fisico e sociale?

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#### **Foreword**

Place dynamics are subject to constant change due to various global phenomena such as climate change, market dynamics, and politics of place. The effects of this global re-ordering can result in spatial differences, affecting the physical, social and cultural practices in places. Places are made up of several interconnected dimensions, becoming the physical and symbolic expressions of the interactions that are taking shape inside them. Given this dynamic, the sustainability of any place is constructed between actors in places and is inherently place-based.

The practices of sustainable place-shaping, central to this work, involves building people's capacities to reflect and act on their transformative agency, resulting in the built or symbolic environments in places. Driven by their values, feelings and motivations associated with places, these actors can activate the potentials of communities and places, demonstrating co-designed practices and processes between people and their environment. This work argues that sustainable place-shaping can be seen as a process of co-design, utilizing place-based assets and collaboration between diverse actors.

Furthermore, these social actors become the co-creators of planning processes and places through the re-evaluation of existing place-based assets and creating solutions to complex environmental and societal problems. These innovative models of operation align personal motivations with social and environmental goals, fostering collaboration and nurturing new forms of communities. As the roles of user and designer start to blur, new tools and a new design culture is needed. Social actors and intentional communities, driven by various values and motivations, can become the co-designers of the emerging social and urban fabric of the city, thanks to the design actions focused on them. The emerging cultures of design and designers can help in activating and fostering the initiatives of social actors. creating new sustainable values and contributing to the regeneration of the territory at large.

The presented body of work is divided in three parts. Part One explores the processes of connecting people to place, layer by layer, starting from the conceptualization of places and building on it through the introduction of concepts such as; place-based approaches to sustainability, sense of place and place values, the framework on sustainable place-shaping practices and the profiling of social actors.

Contemplating the question of who is really producing the city, Part Two explores the themes of shaping and co-designing the social and urban fabric of the city, with the analysis of the practices of; co-design, social innovation, emerging design cultures, designers and the study of several methodological frameworks and tools. Furthermore, this part elaborates on social actors and their organizational structure, discussing concepts such as governance and commoning.

Reflecting on the activity of various actors and communities and the emergence of a new social and physical infrastructure in the city, Part Three discusses the two selected case studies, highlighting the similarities and the differences between the theory and the empirical examples. This part of the work follows a story-telling format through the interviews with the key actors behind the case studies. Finally, identifying the tangible and intangible elements that go into these co-design initiatives in order to make them sustainable, a tool-kit is created for designers, communities and policy actors.

This thesis has been developed under the supervision and advice of Prof. Daniela Ciaffi and Prof. Maicol Negrello. A combination of qualitative methods, including empirical data and interviews, as well as quantitative methods of statistical data analysis and relevant literature reviews have been used to create the foundation of this work.

### "What is place?"

What is place? "Place" could mean various spatial constructs, ranging from neighborhoods and public spaces to entire towns and regions, each shaped by their own socio-ecological flows and dynamics (Horlings et al., 2019). Going beyond the physical realm - such as built volumes, physical infrastructure and green areas - places can also serve as "subjective experiences" (Horlings, 2018) and as social spheres where socio-spatial conversations take place, fostering community formation and identity shaping. It can be said that these relations that people build ultimately contribute to shaping their environment as well (Vanclay et al., 2008).

Places are also made. "Place-making" is the process of transforming "space" into meaningful "place" on several levels (Vanclay et al., 2008). Also described by Place-making Europe as "an approach to urban planning and design that focuses on the people who use a space, rather than just the physical structures or buildings. The idea is to create places that are not just functional, but also beautiful and meaningful to the people who live, work, and play there". When we create places, we do so in multiple ways. This description emphasizes the symbolic and social investments that go into these processes, along with the evident physical interventions.

Vanclay et al. (2008) argue that in the end it's individuals who "must connect with a locality and develop their personal attachment to place". Places exist when we can name them and when they hold personal meaning (ibid.).

However, place meanings are inherently diverse for different groups of people as places usually host different communities, values and interests. In this context, place emerges as "not a blank canvas", but as the result of the pre-existing physical dynamics, culture, historic and social interventions which could result in "spatial differentiating and inequalities" (Horlings et al., 2020).

Place dynamics are ever-changing due to processes such as globalization and modernization (Horlings et al., 2020). The effects of this re-ordering such as capitalism, climate change, policies and market dynamics can show differences from place to place, resulting in diverse impacts across different locations (Horlings et al., 2019). This spatial variability contributes to place diversity and can lead to sustainability challenges such as depletion of resources, economic disparities and social exclusion (Horlings et al., 2020). People have even questioned whether place identity has become less relevant over time. Globalization can result in phenomena like "erasure of place" and "non-places" or "place-lessness", which according to anthropologist Marc Augé can be described as places where individuals don't feel a sense of identity or social connection (Horlings, 2016). This further demonstrates how places appeal to people's sense of belonging (Horlings, 2018). Despite suggestions of places becoming less relevant over time and the increasing prevalence of placelessness in our society, place remains key to "our identity, sense of community and humanity" (Vanclay et al., 2008).

"Despite generic processes of globalization and modernization, places are still relevant as arenas of negotiation, in the context of sense-making, and as sites of public intervention and spatial planning."

(Horlings, 2018)

#### 1.1.2 Shaping Places

While places possess durability, they are also dynamic in their nature. As mentioned earlier, place dynamics undergo continuous change due to shifts in economics, institutional transformation and cultural trends. According to Horlings et al. (2020), the nature of a place transcends its internal features; it's interlinked with its connectivity with other places. Through this description, places become "nodes" in networks, connecting the local and the global (ibid.). Adopting a "relational approach" to places acknowledges and addresses the "temporal, spatial and multi-scale interlinkages of concrete issues in places" (ibid.).

#### "Places are nodes in a web of unbound relations"

(Horlings et al., 2020)

Similar to Horlings et al. (2020), Amin (2004, cited in Marsden, 2013) and Massey (1994, cited in Marsden, 2013) have also described cities and regions as "contingent bundles of relational networks" stating that "cities and regions are recast as nodes that gather flow and juxtapose diversity, as places of overlapping-but not necessarily locally connected-relational networks, as perforated entities... that come with no automatic promise of territorial or systematic integrity". Basically, they view places as complex systems made up of interconnected networks of relationships, where different elements can co-exist. It's important to note that these networks are not necessarily confined to local boundaries but rather they can extend beyond geographical boundaries. Additionally, "perforated entities" suggests that these relations are fluid and flexible with no promise of stability.

Echoing this idea of the relational approach to place, Pierce et al. (2011) emphasize the importance of understanding the politics of place and the networks that shape them in place-making. By focusing on the different actors and networks involved in the development of "place-frames" - the shared understanding that develops when people talk about how places are made or changed - we can gain more insight into the "dynamic and multi-scalar processes of place-making" (Pierce et al., 2011). Furthermore, Redclift (2005, cited in Marsden, 2013) highlights the significance of "acknowledging the material realities of living and working in places", despite their interconnected nature.

This perspective calls for a holistic understanding of places, which incorporates the ecological, economic and community spheres as suggested by Hudson (2005, cited in Marsden, 2013). Places then become the expressions of the interactions which take place within these connected spheres, rather than being dominated by a single dimension. Marsden (2013) argues for

"conceptions and models of place-making that can expose the energies and imaginations of the communities and the ecologies that occupy them". In order to achieve this, places must be recognized as the "meeting point between ecological, economic and social/cultural community relationships" (ibid.).

Places and the perceived identity of places are under constant construction. As mentioned before, they are continuously re-shaped by ongoing processes of change. Therefore we can talk about practices of "place-shaping" (Horlings et al., 2020). Place-shaping is often referred to as "the collective and deliberative process of re-imagining socio-spatial relations by building connections between the past and the future" (Shucksmith, 2010, cited in Rebelo et al., 2020). However, this approach has often been interpreted only in economic terms, leading to concerns about issues such as gentrification. So, going beyond the process of only "making", there is a need for "sustainable place-shaping" which aims to transform the relations between actors and the places they inhabit, empowering them to actively shape their environment based on their own values and needs (Rebelo et al., 2020).

Sustainable place-shaping is seen as a way to empower people and communities within specific places, acknowledging their ability to actively participate, collaborate, and demonstrate collective agency (Horlings et al., 2019). It assumes the idea that people hold the transformative capacity to influence the dynamics that shape their environment. These capacities manifest in tangible actions such as the built environment, urban design, and consumption patterns. By integrating these practices into the urban fabric, sustainable place-shaping aims to alter the relationships between individuals and their environment across multiple geographical scales. It's important to note that in this context, sustainability can be understood in different ways (Horlings et al., 2019).

#### 1.1.3

#### A "Place-Based" Approach

The current prevalent unsustainable patterns of living, consumption and production call for urgent transformations and new spatial development reconfigurations. Places can shape opportunities for these new configurations, though at the same time, could also act as barriers. The physical materiality of places, their existing infrastructure, ownership patterns and utilization significantly affect people's lives. They can either open new pathways for the future or create barriers that delay this progress (Horlings et al., 2020).

Transformations and changes are deeply connected to places. Transformation to sustainability must recognize and integrate the unique and heterogeneous characteristics of different places. This approach supports a "place-based approach" to development. Both Horlings et al. (2020) and Marsden (2013) emphasize the importance of a place-based approach to sustainability, meaning an approach that supports development strategies that are shaped according to the specific needs and attributes of each place. This is a crucial step in addressing problems in a meaningful and effective way. Through this description, dealing with sustainable places become extremely important in the context of sustainability science (Marsden, 2013).

In sustainability debates, the importance of place and space are often overlooked, resulting in "placeless" approach to sustainable transformations (Horlings et al., 2020). In this kind of approach the unique context and relationships between places are not considered. As opposed to this, a place-based approach is able to acknowledge the distinctiveness of each place and how it can contribute to the environmental, economical and social spheres in a more sustainable way (ibid.).

Over the last decade, place-based approaches have become more popular in science and policy (Horlings, 2015). It is argued that place-based approaches are able to adapt to vulnerabilites and unsustainability, and advance sustainable transformations more efficiently by recognizing and using the local resources and networks, as well as the capacities, activities and imaginations of people and communities in places (ibid.).

Marsden (2013) argues that while places are "fluid and relational" we also need to recognize that true sustainable transitions must be grounded in "real places and time frames". Drawing from existing knowledge, needs and values rooted in places, place-based approaches can realize long-term solutions for sustainable development (Horlings, 2015).

With that being said, place-based approaches can also involve local communities in public participation and negotiation, incorporating their existing knowledge and sense-making into planning and practices (Horlings et al., 2020). This approach recognizes people in places as not passive actors, but instead as "potential changeagents" (Horlings et al., 2019) who can proactively shape their environments. The connections between people and communities in places foster collaboration and collective agency. According to Woods (2007, cited in Horlings, 2018), actors at the local level reproduce and transform the identity of landscapes - whether intentionally or accidentally - resulting in the evolving identity of landscapes, blend of influences and characteristics (Horlings, 2018). To put it very simply, the "local" holds the power to shape the "global" (ibid.).

Grenni et al. (2019) have proposed that shaping sustainable places requires seeing sustainability as a "process" rather than the end-goal. This means how decisions are made in this process are just as important as the outcome of the decisions. Based on this description, sustainability becomes a "context-dependent construct, co-defined by the actors involved in the process" (Rotmans, cited in Grenni et al., 2019). Sustainability asks "What should the future look like?" through continuous discussions instead of focusing on a fixed solution. Although this question poses another series of questions. "Who gets to decide what kind of future the transformation should lead to? What does this future look like?" (Blythe et al., 2018, cited in Grenni et al., 2019) are crucial to answer as it can help us avoid the potential risks associated by sustainable transformations. Besides the environmental, economic and social spheres which will be affected by specific interventions, the values of communities ultimately decide if place-shaping efforts will be sustainable (Miller, 2013. cited by Grenni et al., 2019).

#### "In other words, sustainability itself is place-based." (Horlings 2018)

## Sustainability

### A (Very) Brief Introduction to Sustainability

Here's where we left things: Over the last decade place-based approaches have become more popular in science and policy, moving away from the place-less approaches that ignore local contexts and rely on technocratic solutions (Grenni et al., 2019). Today, more and more people have started to recognize sustainability transformations as place-based, acknowledging the need to understand the "people-place relationship" in order to be achieved (ibid.). As mentioned before, place-based approaches to sustainability recognize the unique resources, knowledge and cultural practices in places. Focusing on these place-based assets allows us to demonstrate context appropriate solutions that recognize "local specificities" (Barca, 2009, cited in Grenni et al., 2019).

With the growing focus on place in sustainability research and policy discourses, the discussions on transformation are also on the rise. Asara et al. (2015, cited in Grenni et al., 2019) have described transformation as the "active construction of new practices and new meanings", with the intention of changing the prevalent situation into a more beneficial state.

The increasing momentum of transformation to sustainability is continuing to gain more visibility in sustainability science, resulting in the "transformative turn" (Blythe et al., 2018, cited in Grenni et al., 2019) in the sustainability discourse. This marks the growing consensus among scholars who argue that small changes won't be sufficient to meet the sustainable development challenges and instead more fundamental changes will be needed in our practices and systems (Grenni et al., 2019)

#### 1.2.2

### Sustainability +/Place Debates

Let's take it back a bit. In 1972 we were introduced to the concept of sustainable development with the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment also known as the Stockholm Conference. The concept of sustainable development emerged from the need to preserve natural resources for present and future generations, followed by its first formal definition presented in the 1984 Brundtland Report:

"Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs"

(WCED, 1987)

Since then, sustainable development has evolved into a comprehensive framework addressing not only environmental issues such as pollution control, availability of resources and the protection of species and ecosystems, but also matters of social and human development such as social development, human rights and governance (Horlings, 2015b). However, in the Brundtland Report the connections between sustainability and the dimensions of Place, People and Permanence have been overlooked and underestimated (Horlings et al., 2020).

Since the argument here is that effective adaptation to sustainability challenges require more place-based approaches to development, these sustainable transitions themselves need to be grounded in real places and their respective time frames (Horlings, 2018).

Globalization has resulted in what could be called as "spatial slavery" where cities and regions are treated like businesses, competing for space and resources - out of the control of national planning (Horlings, 2018). In todays world a key question is whether place matters in governance and spatial debates, since cultural globalism is shaping our sense of place and place values. To be able to shape sustainable places, we need to be able to develop the capacity to change the relationships within which current practices of place-shaping are occurring (ibid.).

"Investigating and exploring the transformative capacity of sustainable place-shaping practices can reveal how unsustainability can be addressed and overcome, providing the ground for place-based sustainable development."

(Horlings et al., 2020)

Sustainable place-shaping as a concept argues that in order to change the relationship between people and their environment, we should "re-localize" and incorporate daily practices and realities within "socio-ecological systems and place-based assets" (Horlings et al., 2019). This basically means that this approach to sustainability is driven by the creativity and agency of the people while still being rooted in the unique ecologic characteristics of specific places. This perspective recognizes that social, cultural, political, economic and ecological relations are shaping daily life through the activities of the people in places (ibid.). Marsden (2013) also suggests that advancing sustainability science requires the engagement and involvement of non-scientists through transdisciplinary approaches, recognizing that diverse expertise is necessary for effective adaptation and transitions. But how are these dynamic interactions connecting ecological systems, social development and sustainability and how is their influence shaping the interaction between nature and society? (ibid.)

Previously, we had established places as the meeting point between ecological, economic and social/cultural community relationships (Marsden, 2013). This conceptualization of places must consider both the fixed and the dynamic place-based assets in order to deal with sustainability challenges. Achieving this calls for a sustainability science that is "critically normative" (ibid.), one that is able to accept ecological modernization as well as the complexities across ecological, economic and community spheres - therefore comprised of both objective and subjective dimensions (Horlings, 2015b). Hence, sustainability shouldn't be seen as a "value-free" science but as one that includes values and responsibilities (ibid.).

## The Inner Dimension

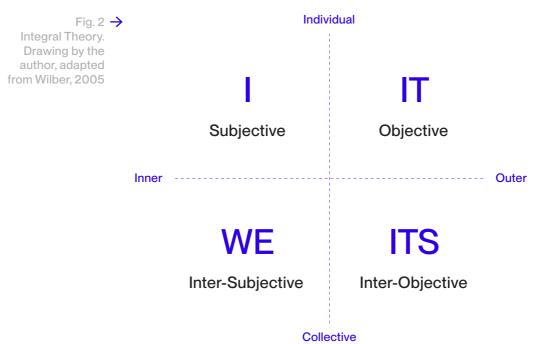
Transformation to sustainability is influenced by beliefs, values and paradigms that shape behaviors just as much as it's influenced by practices and political systems (Horlings, 2015). It encompasses physical changes in terms of structure, form and "meaning-making", as well as psycho-social processes dealing with people's capacities for commitment, care and positive change (Horlings, 2015b). Of course, this can (and usually does) represent different meanings for different groups of people and communities.

Fig.1 →
The Three Spheres
of Transformation.
Drawing by the
author, adapted
from O'Brien and
Sygna, 2013

Qeteonia Quitical

Introducing: the Three Spheres of Transformation. There's the "Practical" sphere involving behaviors and technical responses, the "Political" sphere with larger systems and structures, then finally there is the "Personal" sphere comprised of individual and collective beliefs, values and paradigms (Horlings, 2015b). This latter sphere is also known as the "inner dimension" of sustainability, which concerns the personal and collective cultural values of people when dealing with sustainable development (Horlings, 2016). Westley et al. (cited in Horlings, 2015b) have highlighted the importance of the inner dimension, stating that sustainability transitions "may require radical, systemic shifts in deeply held values and beliefs, patterns of social behaviour, and multi-level governance and management regimes".

ctical Sesuodsa / Rosinia large larger systems and structure beliefs, Values and paradioses Another framework based on this point which could help us visualize and conceptualize the different dimensions of transformation is the framework based on the Integral Theory (Wilber, 2005). Through this framework we are able categorize the affects of transformation, based on two dimensions (inner vs. outer and individual vs. collective) and resulting in four quadrants (Grenni et al., 2019):



Subjective (Inner-Individual): involving the personal aspect of transformation, concerning identities, feelings and mindsets:

Objective (Outer-Individual): dealing with the transformation of how people relate to and interact with the socio-political environment;

Inter-subjective (Inner-Collective): revolving around the transformation of collective thought patterns, culture and shared understandings in groups;

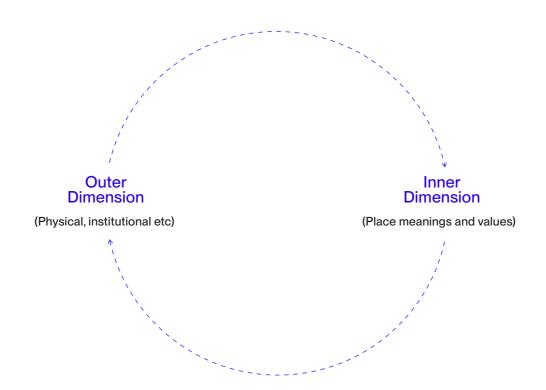
Inter-objective (Outer-Collective): involving the transformation of systemic structures that govern societies and institutions (Grenni et al., 2019).

This model, also adopted by a number of sustainability scholars (Grenni et al., 2019), presents the inter-subjective dimension into sustainability debates. The model itself doesn't specify how this transformation takes place but it can be argued that sustainable place-shaping practices could help us understand place-based transformations (ibid.). In this debate, place-shaping emerges as "a way to build people's capacity to reflect on and re-negotiate the conditions of their engagement in places" (Horlings and Roep, 2015, cited in Grenni et al., 2019).

Sustainable place-shaping involves both the process and explanation as to how people perceive their environment and attach values to places (Horlings, 2016). As people engage in place-shaping practices, materially or immaterially, they develop a better understanding of their connection to places and the values that they associate with them. A very important point to mention here is that the primary driving force in places and regions is "human intentionality in interaction with the environment", which could lead to issues but could also result in practices of sustainable place-shaping (Horlings, 2015). So, a value-oriented approach to place-shaping would benefit place-based transformations through exploring the place values people hold, further exposing what they feel responsible for and the practices they are willing to commit to (ibid.). To sum it up, place-shaping is seen as a transformative act that involves the inner dimension of transformation - any change to physical space impacts not only the material landscape but also the sociocultural relations (Jones and Evans, 2012, cited in Grenni et al., 2019).

Fig. 3 
The double process on sustainable place-shaping.
Drawing by the author, adapted from Grenni et al., 2019

Sustainable place-shaping involves a dual process. First, it can be understood as intentionally shaping place meanings and values in order to promote sustainable trends, such as inclusive, equitable or environmentally conscious values. At the same time, it involves ensuring that any alteration or intervention made to the physical environment is aligned with existing cultural and place values in this context. These aspects are interlinked, with the outer and the inner dimensions influencing and constructing each other in a circular way (Grenni et al., 2019).

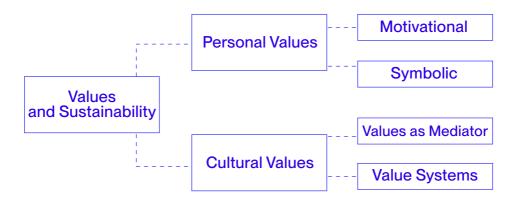


#### 1.2.4 Values

Values are context-determined and culturally varied concepts linked to our self/environmental perception (Horlings, 2015). Ioris (2012, cited in Grenni et al., 2019) also argues that values can only be understood in relational terms and they "emerge from the intersection of individual and collective preferences in specific contexts". Processes of sustainable place-shaping are influenced by values deeply rooted in culture (Horlings, 2015). Culture is the medium through which people give meaning and assign value to their environment - a key point in understanding human behavior. Cultural differences result in different behavior patterns which affect sustainability, expressed in places (ibid.). Davies (2001, cited in Horlings, 2015) describes this as values being constructed through the "interaction of people and structures in socio-institutional contexts in places". So. in this context, values are in fact what people consider important; their principles, priorities, value systems and how they make sense with their environment (Horlings, 2015). In this context, values can help us understand why people are actively trying to change their lives and the places they inhabit.

Fig. 4 ↓
Values and
sustainability.
Drawing by the
author, adapted from
Horlings, 2015b

The inner dimension of sustainability refers to the personal and cultural values (Horlings, 2015b). Personal values are people's motivational and symbolic values, as in the symbolic meanings they attach to their environment. Cultural values refer to the collective practices and behavior patterns, as well as world-views and value systems (ibid.).



We've seen that long-term commitment to sustainable development is rooted in people's motivations and intentionality. Cultural values mediate behaviors and shape narratives and place identities, playing a key role in "territorialization" (Horlings, 2015b). Territorialization, in this context, is related to the dynamics and processes in regional development, driven by collective human intentionality and enhanced by culture (Dessein et al., cited in Horlings, 2015b). So essentially, the natural environment and culture are interconnected and mutually influential - they're shaping each other reciprocally.

Appleton (2014, cited in Horlings, 2015) argues that values tied to culture are crucial for sustainable development in terms of engagement, implementation, strategies and planning. This approach brings its own set of challenges such as aligning multiple stakeholders while trying to implement these sustainable initiatives. Appleton suggests starting sustainable development projects with a Participant's Values Analysis (Appleton, 2014, cited in Horlings, 2015) in order to engage and develop participant values for building co-productive capacity. This approach understands values as "an ongoing process of learning by doing and doing by learning, in which all actors contribute to envisioning, agenda building, experimenting and evaluation" (Appleton, 2014, cited in Horlings, 2015).

Place-based approaches obviously have to deal with and consider the diverse actors in places. The challenge of a value-driven approach is to create a dialogue between actors who are aiming for a common goal. Such dialogue should be inclusive towards various dimensions of sustainability, considering long-term social, cultural and economic aspects and focusing on values such as social inclusion, solidarity, aesthetics, survival of species etc. just to name a few (Horlings. 2015). Lately, a value-driven perspective on sustainable place-shaping is gaining more relevance, as people and communities are expected to take more responsibility for their environment. We're witnessing the rise of concepts like self-organization, participative society and collaborative efforts such as co-designing with individuals and communities. These are the signs referring to "vital citizenship", where increasingly people are doings things themselves and act as "partners in policy" (ibid.).

As we've said in the beginning of this chapter, more fundamental changes will be needed in our practices and systems for dealing with sustainable development. Addressing the "temporal, historical, spatial, value-led and multi-scale aspects of sustainability in places" is a crucial step in this direction in order to nurture the "seeds of change" (Horlings, 2016).

"...how does place-shaping result in seeds of change, contributing to transformation to sustainability?"

(Horlings, 2016)

# Sense of Place

#### 1.3.1

### Sense of Place and Place Values

Sense of place is generally defined as the collection of meanings and emotions individuals and communities can attach to a place. Place values could be described as the feelings of significance connected to specific aspects of places. While these are overlapping ideas in social science literature, the main emphasis is on the relationship between people and places, focusing on the strong emotional bonds people can form with places (Grenni et al., 2019). Sense of place is an important driver of place-based sustainability transformation and place-shaping practices, as this dimension can highlight the symbolic and emotional aspects of places that are overlooked as opposed to the changes in physical materiality (ibid.).

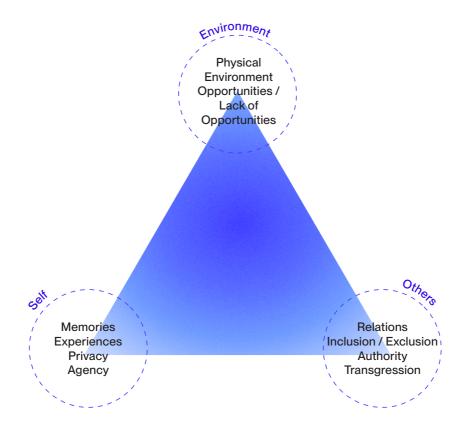
Sense of place is closely connected to both community and self perception (Vanclay et al., 2008). People engage with landscapes by either "reconstructing, representing, perceiving" them or people "name" landscapes in order to situate and then place themselves in it (Horlings, 2018). Convery et al. (2012, cited in Grenni et al., 2019) make the distinction between the two primary interpretations of sense of place:

### "Sense of place as the unique character of a place, shaped by its context"

### "Sense of place as the way people experience, use and understand places"

This plurality of meanings includes personal meanings, meanings related to a community and meanings attached to the environment whether natural, built, symbolic, historical or institutional (Gustafson, 2001, cited in Horlings, 2018). Importantly, sense of place is not seen as an inherent characteristic of a location but rather as an evolving process shaped over time through the relational processes that unfold in places (Grenni et al., 2019). As we've said before, place meanings are inherently diverse for different groups of people. These relational processes involve people, their setting, and their social worlds (Kyle and Chick, 2007, cited in Grenni et al., 2019).

Gustafson (2001, cited in Grenni et al., 2019) views sense of place as the interplay of self, others and environment. This model aims to "understand, organize and compare" place meanings.

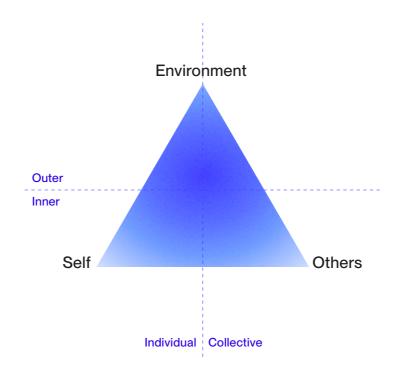


Grenni et al. (2019) note that in Gustafson's model, the three elements of self, others and environment are interconnected points within a fluid space, recognizing the relationship between these dynamics rather than seperating them. So, sense of place can be mapped along and between these three elements. Gustafson's model is effective for incorporating sense of place and place meanings into place-shaping studies as it is able to easily compare and help understand meanings across different settings and groups of people within the same place (Grenni et al., 2019).

Fig. 5 Meanings of place. Drawing by the author, adapted from Gustafson, 2001

Grenni et al., (2019) have proposed to integrate the four quadrant model of transformation with Gustafson's (2001) triangular model of self-others-environment.

Fig. 6 →
Analytical framework
on sense of place
and values.
Drawing by the
author, adapted from
Grenni et al., 2019



Through this they have obtained an analytical framework that positions sense of place and place values as the potential drivers for place-based transformations. The framework places the triangular model at the intersection of the four quadrants, illustrating the connections between transformation and factors that shape sense of place and place values. Through this framework, it becomes clear that sense of place and place values are not just tools for the inner dimensions of place, but they form the connection between the inner and outer worlds. This interconnectedness further emphasizes how changes in one particular area ultimately affects every other area (ibid.).

#### 1.3.2

#### A Call for Action

The argument here is that sense of place and place values are strongly linked to sustainable place-shaping processes. A strong sense of place can encourage pro-environmental behavior due to strong emotional bonds people have with places. Emotional bonds to places can be linked to the desire to preserve the valued characteristics of places, as well as the desire to engage in problem-solving in regards to environmental and spatial issues, helping to identify potential pathways of transformation rooted in the values and meanings which are important to people and communities (Grenni et al., 2019).

We had previously mentioned that place-shaping practices significantly influence the intangible dimensions of places such as the symbolic meanings, values and of course, sense of place. Recognizing the diverse meanings and values in places is crucial for effective transformations, whether its through formal planning interventions or bottom-up citizen and community initiatives (Horlings, 2015).

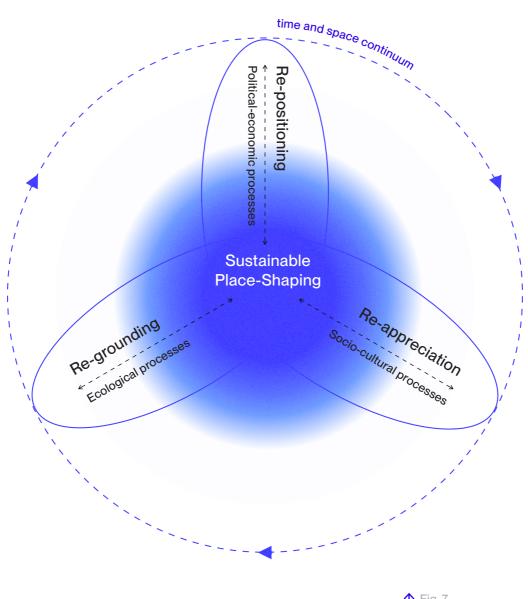
By becoming more aware of the intangible dimensions of places, people can become more involved within their respective communities, enhancing their agency in the process (Grenni et al., 2019). This creates the common ground for collective action and co-creation among various stakeholders. These processes and relations can help people in identifying potential intervention and transformation pathways, allowing for a diversity of voices to be heard in the debates on the futures of places (ibid.).

# Connecting People to Place

#### 1.4.1

## A Framework for Sustainable Place-Shaping

Effective place-based sustainable development rests on activating the full potential of places and communities (Horlings et al., 2020). In this context "collaboration, collective capacity-building and self-efficacy" become key measures to realise such processes. Sustainable place-shaping involves creating new narratives on places, implementing innovative and alternative models, forming new collectives and the co-creation of knowledge (ibid.). The essence of sustainable place-shaping is evident in the co-designed practices between people and their environment (Horlings, 2016). The framework by Horlings and Roep (2015) assumes that sustainable place-shaping practices are a transformative force. occurring through the interconnected processes of "re-appreciation, re-grounding and re-positioning" (Rebelo et al., 2020).



↑ Fig. 7
Framework on sustainable place-shaping.
Drawing by the author, adapted from Horlings, 2016

"Re-appreciation" can be described as people reflecting on the meanings and values they associate with places, enhancing their sense of place. As mentioned previously, sense of place can boost autonomy in actors and create agendas for the future of places based on place values (Horlings et al., 2019; 2020).

"Re-grounding" is the anchoring of practices in place-based assets, resources, traditions and specificities. We've previously explored how place-shaping practices are shaped by communities, cultural and individual values, built and natural assets of places. The challenge here is to develop collective solutions through engaging inhabitants, communities and stakeholders. This approach allows social actors to reflect on and re-negotiate their involvement in global processes, contributing to place-based sustainable development (Horlings et al., 2019; 2020).

"Re-positioning" involves re-defining and changing the established economic and political relationships in places, by creating experimental spaces. This process includes critically assessing the current dominant systems and exploring sustainable alternatives that can improve the quality of life in places. Re-positioning seeks to transform these relations through the introduction of a new social economy, value systems and alternative scenarios (Horlings et al., 2019; 2020).

These conscious interventions are important for building transformative capacity, altering people-place relationships through practices within spaces (ibid.).

So far we have explored the place, sustainability, sense of place and value dimensions that contribute to the transformation towards sustainability and sustainable place-shaping practices. Understanding these dimensions were fundamental for realizing that people inherently possess the capacities to be able to transform their environment on different levels, if they're not already doing so. The framework emerges as both an "analytical and heuristic tool" (Horlings et al., 2020), helpful in guiding people in addressing societal and environmental challenges in places.

Processes of sustainable place-shaping "connect people to place" (Horlings, 2016). Here, connecting people to place first and foremost refers to the processes of co-designing - where actors from different backgrounds and stakeholders can come together to help define what exactly needs to be understood and addressed within their specific contexts to make their place-based knowledge more relevant, useful, accessible and achievable when dealing with urban development. Moreover, we must recognize that social actors transform places through their meaningful actions and spatial interventions (Horlings, 2016). Through connecting social actors, sustainable transformation goes beyond individuals, spreading across communities and groups (ibid.).

This work argues that practices of sustainable place-shaping can be seen as a process of co-design. This collective effort builds on people's knowledge, fostering co-design and co-production of place-based development based on the strengths, assets, values and effective practices in places (Horlings, 2016). Place-shaping practices can be "identified, analyzed and re-introduced in places of social learning and experimentation" where professional, non-professional and policy actors can collaborate to facilitate transformative change (ibid.).

#### 1.4.2 Social Actors

Horlings et al. (2020) argue that people are already co-shaping their places of living through everyday practices. These social actors shouldn't be considered as the "passive victims" of ordering processes but instead their transformative agency in these processes and networks should be recognized (Horlings, 2018). According to Escobar (2002, cited in Marsden, 2013) various economic models are operating within any given place, alongside different groups of people and ecological resources. We've previously referred to places as the "meeting point" of the ecological, economic and community spheres (Hudson, 2005, cited in Marsden, 2013). However, places also must be able to navigate these dimensions and support their spatial integration and coherence.

Creswell (2004, cited in Marsden, 2013) suggests here that places have to be able to "perform". This performance could be called a rather "creative" performance that goes beyond conventional consumer culture, one that focuses on fostering new forms of human and social ecology that blends adaptability with sustainability (ibid.).

Nowadays, involving the local community in planning and design processes is considered essential. The act of participating in these processes not only comes from cities and official authorities but also, now more than ever, from an active community, interested organisations and associations who are looking to boost general welfare and create a new sustainable value system (Humann, 2020). Through their diverse projects in reproducing the urban fabric, these social actors enable direct participation in urban development processes, for themselves and for others. While doing so, they are able to develop new cultures of co-designing and co-producing but also raise questions about the future of places; concerning "co-living, community, self-organization, sustainable design and use of spaces, involvement and local cycles" (ibid.).

Co-design offers elements that are important in order to achieve sustainable place-shaping, thus creating sustainable change in the process. It can "map" interactions and values in places, "give voice" to a variety of actors and identify local knowledge, and finally it can "bring people together" to further explore innovative solutions (Horlings et al., 2019). Processes of co-design and co-productive urbanism exemplify a model for a city where questions like "How do we want to live in the future?" are integrated with place-based projects (Humann, 2020). Here co-design can be seen as the pre-condition to co-production, the process of implementing the idea proposed through co-design. These genuine processes place the community in the center, with professional and institutional actors serving supportive roles rather than controlling ones (ibid.).

> "Current efforts to re-design cities generally take greater account of local actors and the way in which they can activate spaces." (Humann, 2020)

## "Who produces the city?"

Co-creation of urban places can generate new values and opportunities for inclusivity and active co-design, resulting in "sustainable, inclusive and socially-just urbanism" (Humann, 2020). Social actors, who are bridging the gap between the civil society and social innovation, become the co-designers and co-producers of places. In fact, we are witnessing the rise of placebased development projects in which social actors are not only participants but also long-term initiators and supporters of these projects (ibid.).

The co-creation of urban places relies on the efforts of the social actors who are often not professional designers and architects and yet act as "do-it-yourself project developers" (Humann, 2020). Driven by personal, collective and place values, place-based assets, local knowledge and innovative spirit, these actors generate new values for their cities and regions. They are able to activate and shape places in a way external contributors might not be able to achieve. As they are newcomers in the field, they are able to bring new perspectives, challenge traditions, ask unconventional questions and uncover the gap between the designer and the user through collective processes of learning and designing together. This approach replaces top-down - often "placeless" - planning processes that ignore the existing uses and needs in places, aiming to ensure inclusivity and integrate goals focused on common welfare (Humann, 2020).

As we contemplate the future of our cities Humann (2020) asks "Who actually "produces" the city? Who controls and maintains the city of the future?". It's not just planners and policy makers, but also the users whose interests need to be identified and integrated in these processes. Collectively established goals and values, and structuring the way actors work together effectively, can serve as essential guidelines for successful co-design processes (ibid.). Horlings et al. (2020) suggest "re-thinking and empirically grounding the role of place-based social actions" in the context of transformation to sustainability. This involves understanding why certain actions succeed and last in the long-term. as well as identifying the skills and capacities required to "regenerate and re-appreciate" socio-ecological developments. As sustainability science progresses it generates new theories about places and their influence on societal dynamics, contributing to collective learning and a deeper understanding of the "spatial and place-based cognition", which encompass the diversity and transformative agency of place-shaping practices (ibid.).

# Social Innovation and Design

# (Another Brief) Introduction to Social Innovation

Previously, we explored how social actors and communities possess the transformative capacity to change their lives and their environment by asking unconventional questions, offering fresh perspectives, challenging traditions, and bridging the gap between designers and users. Motivated by their values, knowledge, and innovative spirits, social actors are able to create new values and practices for their cities and regions. They achieve this by re-evaluating existing place-based assets and creating solutions to complex problems. This dynamic process can also be referred to as social innovation.

Social innovation can be defined as new ideas, services, and models that meet societal needs while fostering new social relationships and collaborations (Manzini, 2015). They are innovations that benefit the society and enhance its capacity to act. Manzini (2015) explains that "social innovation has always existed but is, nowadays, becoming a widespread practice" due to the spread of information and communication technologies which enables new social forms and, also, the increasing need for people in various contexts to "re-invent their lives". Social innovation is driven by social demands rather than market forces, and it is generated more by the involved social actors rather than professionals (Manzini and Meroni, 2014). As societies are evolving, so is the nature of social innovation, opening up new possibilities for individuals, communities, NGOs and associations - who all have their respective roles to play in this collaborative dynamic (Manzini and Meroni, 2014; Manzini, 2015). In this context, social innovation emerges as a "powerful agent of change" which can encourage people to re-think their ways of living, their way of thinking and their conceptualization of general welfare (Manzini, 2015).

"We have already seen that, in practical terms, what these innovations do is to recombine existing resources and capabilities to create new functions and new meanings. In doing so, they introduce ways of thinking and problem-solving strategies that represent discontinuities with what is locally mainstream"

(Manzini, 2015)

This is also what social actors are doing, as mentioned in the previous chapter. Furthermore, the word "social" here, can also be used to indicate the societal transformations which are needed to move towards sustainability (Manzini and Meroni, 2014). The intersection of social and technical innovation changes the way people are thinking and behaving, leading to a cultural innovation that evolves at the same time. This leads to new patterns of behavior and values, challenging prevalent norms and helps in the redefinition of the idea of well-being and the values we act upon (Manzini, 2015). This is similar to how we previously defined culture as the medium through which people give meaning and assign value to their environment.

#### 2.1.2

### Innovation + Collaboration

According to Manzini and Meroni (2014), a quick look at cases of social innovation reveals how they are aligned with key sustainability principles. Although each case requires a detailed analysis to accurately assess its environmental and social impact, some fundamental qualities can be recognized: These innovations align individual interests with social and environmental goals; generating new values, strengthening the "social fabric", fostering sustainable ideas of well-being where the social and physical attributes of places are given more value, supporting collaborative actions and nurturing new forms of community and local identity (Manzini and Jegou, 2003, cited in Manzini and Meroni, 2014).

These promising innovations are driven by groups of people who have the collaborative vision and capability to effectively imagine, develop and manage solutions for new ways of living. These groups, referred to as "creative communities" (Manzini and Meroni, 2014), re-evaluate existing place-based assets without waiting for systemic changes in the economy, institutions or infrastructure (Meroni, 2007, cited in Manzini and Meroni, 2014). They address both everyday and radical questions that the dominant production and consumptions systems fail to answer, despite their overwhelming offering of products and services.

Creative communities arise from the unique combination of contemporary demands and opportunities, where demands are posed by everyday problems and opportunities present themselves as the combination of traditions and existing technologies (Manzini and Meroni, 2014). This is similar with "re-grounding", the anchoring of practices in place-based assets, resources, traditions and specificities (Horlings et al., 2019; 2020).

Cases of social innovations and their resulting solutions are quite complex, driven by the various motivations and values of the actors involved. This complexity is recognized and valued by producers and participants, as it enriches their experience and blurs the "traditional roles of designer, provider and user of a solution" (Manzini, 2015). At the same time, while this complexity grows, it is counter-balanced by a reduction in scale, making smaller-scale organizations more transparent, accessible and connected to the local communities. These small initiatives often link with similar or complementary projects, forming a distributed system that suggests a new concept of globalization, where production, decision-making and knowledge remains largely within the local communities (ibid.).

Here, increased complexity and offset in scale provide the foundation for re-shaping human activities. Producers and participants are re-evaluating work as a primary form of "human expression" (Manzini, 2015) with actors engaging in meaningful activities. This perspective contrasts with the mainstream system which typically views humans as consumers or passive actors (Horlings et al., 2019), and challenges traditional conceptualization of work by extending its definition to activities such as, care activities, place management and community building. These are the activities Manzini (2015) refers to as "meaningful work".

Through this re-evaluation of the conceptualization of work, the importance of collaboration is once again highlighted. Collaboration is the "pre-condition for making something happen" and empowering social actors to proactively shape their future and environments (Manzini, 2015; Horlings et al., 2019). Solutions are co-created by actors who are choosing to connect and work towards a common goal, resulting in "community-based innovations" as Manzini and Meroni (2014) describe it. The methods and motivations for collaboration are diverse, blending the practical effectiveness of collective agency with the "cultural value of sharing ideas and projects" (Manzini, 2015).

#### "The small scale and interconnectedness of social organizations allow them to be deeply rooted in a place." (Manzini, 2015)

This quote corresponds to the argument that effective sustainable transitions must be grounded in "real places and time frames" (Marsden, 2013) while re-evaluating place-based assets. Participants and producers try to find the find the balance between being simultaneously rooted in places and being globally open, resulting in a more "cosmopolitan localism creating a new sense of place" (Manzini, 2015). Consequently, places transform from isolated entities into nodes within short and long-distance networks, aligning with the definitions brought forward by Horlings et al. (2020) and Amin and Massey (2004; 1994; cited in Marsden, 2013) in the earlier chapters. So, within the presented framework, new, local and open activities are emerging, including the re-activation, "re-appreciation", "re-grounding" and "re-positioning" of places (Manzini, 2015; Horlings et al., 2019; 2020).

#### 2.1.3

### The Role of Design

Social innovation can help us change the world but achieving this requires a shift in our culture and practices; so Manzini (2015) argues that design has the potential to become this new paradigm through which we can change our world. However, in order to achieve this, design itself must evolve and become a more widespread activity. Design is how we build our environment and "has been (and still is) a fertile ground for social innovation" (ibid.).

The common perception of design often associates it with problem-solving, a tool to address issues ranging from everyday problems to the global scale. While this perspective is important and also prevalent in today's culture, it's not the only role design can play.

Going beyond problem-solving, design can play a key role in culture, influencing language and meaning (Manzini, 2015). Design is fundamentally about making sense of things, creating new and meaningful entities. This perspective views design's role as an active participant in the social construction of meaning and values. Design operates in both the "physical and biological world" where, Manzini (2015) explains, people live and work and problems are solved; and the "social world" where people converse and they create meaning. The roles of problem-solving and sense-making co-exist, emphasizing that design impacts both the physical world and the world of human interactions and meanings, similar to how social actors incorporate sense-making into planning and place-shaping practices (Horlings et al., 2020).

Manzini (2015) defines design as a culture and practice that questions how things should be in order to achieve the desired functions and meanings. This entire process is essentially a co-design process, in which all participants contribute in different ways. In order to assess the effectiveness and desirability of these design implementations, we need to determine whether the output offers more satisfaction as opposed to the current prevalent solutions. At this point, the involvement of social actors becomes key, as their transformative agency and meaningful contributions are crucial for ensuring that planning and design processes are sustainable and "satisfactory" (Grenni et al., 2019). While everyone can design and everyone holds the transformative capacity to influence the dynamics that shape their environment, whether tangible or intangible (Horlings et al., 2019), design experts can also play a crucial role in initiating and supporting these co-design processes (Manzini, 2015).

In the transformation towards sustainability, Manzini (2015) suggests that all design should be considered a form of research. This transition deals with a complex social learning process which requires the re-invention and re-evaluation of the mainstream practices and concepts of welfare. In order to do this, design knowledge must be disseminated to empower individuals, communities and institutions to develop innovative ways of living and operating (ibid.). Basically meaning, we need to develop a new cultural perspective on design's potential to benefit society. Through this perspective design can involve social conversations between social actors about solving problems and creating new opportunities. This conversation itself is a co-design activity where participants can contribute their specific knowledge and design capacities, also including the skills of professional designers (ibid.).

Design initiatives are results of the collaborative efforts of social actors who agree on the objectives and methods of the co-design and co-production processes (Manzini, 2015; Horlings, 2016). As we mentioned before, these collaborative and creative communities are formed through their shared values and interests. Throughout this process, they contribute to broader social conversations about specific projects but moreover, about the future of places, cities and regions (Humann, 2020). Social actors and their projects can start conversations, inspire new ideas, support ongoing conversations with "tools" and tangible results, or lay the foundation for new conversations in different contexts. Both social actors and design experts can assume different roles in these processes, as usually one thing triggers the other (ibid.).

# Co-Design

# Co-Design as We Know It

It's useful to take a quick look at the evolution of co-design. In 2008, Sanders and Stappers stated that designers were increasingly engaging with the future users of their designs and the "next new thing" in design practices was to co-design with the users, in order to achieve more sustainable ways of living in the future. In their work, they noted a transition from the design of product categories to designing for "people's purposes" (Sanders and Stappers, 2008). The emerging design practices were focused on addressing the needs of people and society, which requires a longer-term perspective and broader scope of analysis.

The traditional design disciplines focus on the designing of products	while the emerging design disciplines focus on designing for a purpose
Visual Communication Design Interior Space Design Communication Design Information Design Architecture Planning	Design for experiencing Design for emotion Design for interacting Design for sustainability Design for serving Design for transforming

<sup>↑</sup> Fig. 8 Traditional and emerging design practices.

Drawing by the author, adapted from Sanders and Stappers, 2008

Almost two decades have passed since this argument from Sanders and Stappers (2008). In the past decade, numerous activities have been referred to as "co-design" projects, dealing with various fields ranging from "technology, business, urban planning, community development and more; involving the private, public and third sectors" (Meroni et al., 2018). A series of participatory events such as co-designing sessions, public consultations, creative meetings and workshops have been gaining more prevalence in our society and organizational and institutional structures.

This is due to the belief that collective creativity is required for tackling complex societal issues, recalling Marsden's (2013) argument on recognizing diverse expertise is necessary for effective adaptation and transitions. The concept of co-design involves collaboration among different actors with diverse backgrounds (professionals and non-professionals) across the entire span of the design process (Meroni et al, 2018; Sanders and Stappers, 2008). While this practice has been around for nearly fifty years as "participatory design", "co-design" is a much recent term (Meroni et al., 2018).

↓ Fig. 9

Timeline of co-design practices

Drawing by the author

#### 1970-80s

The user-centered design approach, where the user is seen as the object of the study, emerges in the US. Here the users are being allowed more involvement in the early "informing, ideating and conceptualizing" phases of design processes (Sanders and Stappers, 2008).

The participatory approach, where the user is seen as a partner and expert of their own experience, emerges and is led by Northern Europeans (Sanders and Stappers, 2008).

#### 1990s

2000s

2010s

The user-centered approach becomes more widespread by the 1990s and proves to be very effective for product development and design (Sanders, 1992, cited in Sanders and Stappers, 2008). However, it's evident now that this approach can't address the scale and complexity of current challenges.

Sanders and Stappers (2008) connect co-design to the history of participatory practices, suggesting it is a blend of the US driven user-centered design and the Scandinavian participatory design (Meroni et al., 2018). They note that, today, designers are mainly concerned with designing experiences for people, communities and cultures who are more connected and informed (Sanders and Stappers, 2008).

Co-design is gaining more relevancy as an opportunity to create "third spaces" or "infrastructures", going beyond idea exploration and generation (Meroni et al., 2018). Muller (2008) describes the "third space" as a "fertile environment" for combining diverse knowledge from social actors (from public or private spheres, professionals and non-professionals) into new insights and planning processes (ibid.).

#### 2020s

Bjögvinsson, Ehn, and Hillgren (2012) talk about the value of co-design in creating "infrastructures" that can facilitate collaboration among social actors, covering the stages of co-design from idea generation to final implementation (Meroni et al., 2018).

Co-design covers various forms of participation that has allowed its expansion and broader application (Meroni et al., 2018). Bannon and Ehn (2012) attempt to frame the new challenges co-design is generating through "participatory productions" that are blurring its boundaries; including open innovation, makerspaces, public participation and social innovation (ibid.).

Manzini (2015) sees "users as resources". He highlights the role of co-design in social innovation projects, leading to a social conversations between different actors regarding solving problems and creating new opportunities.

Meroni et al. (2018) question one of the biggest challenges of co-design: going beyond simple consultations to the actual process of collaboration taking place, enabling complex ideas and proposals for the future to emerge, alongside opinions (ibid.).

#### Present

Busse et al. (2023) identify the key components of co-design processes and their corresponding study types.

Through an extensive literature review, Busse et al. (2023) have identified the key components in co-design processes in land-use related sustainability science. The key components are: "Process-orientation, practitioners as co-designers, design-orientation, joint problem-framing and solutions-orientation, learning and reflexivity, and finally, contribution to empowerment or deliberative democracy".

Key Components	Basically meaning:
Process-orientation	→ Co-design is an itirative process with various stages of collaboration, or it serves as the inital stage in a broader knowledge co-production
Practitioners as co-designers	Practicioners are involved as equal partners since the beginning and are included in decision-making
Design orientation	Co-design is a collaborative creative process, involving design-thinking and innovative solutions
Joint problem-framing and solutions orientation	Complex societal problems are addressed through collaborative processes of problem defining and idea generation
Learning and reflexivity	Co-design encompasses various forms of learning such as mutual, transformative and social learning, "learning stimuli" are provided upon reflecting and evaluating the co-design process
Contribution to empowerment or deliberative democracy	The power of co-design processes in empowering individuals or communities through involvement in decision-making and learning activities

Given the different perceptions of co-design processes, the authors categorized the studies into two main types based on their practical objectives. The first, "intervention type", dealing with collaboratively developing practical and problem-solving interventions or solutions in order to transform socio-ecological systems. The second, "co-created research designs", aims to collectively develop research questions or agendas in the transformation to sustainability. In both identified types, co-design refers to the collaboration between the practitioners and the stakeholders. Furthermore, the exploration of the intervention type revealed four sub-categories. Among those, the "design-led and practice-oriented interventions" follow the description given by Sanders and Stappers (2008) on co-creation and co-design. The motivations behind applying a co-design approach in these studies were rooted in transformative capacities, such as creating places "with" people rather than "for" people, fostering community engagement and agency, encouraging local ownership and facilitating social learning (Busse et al., 2023).

↑ Fig. 10

Key components in co-design processes.

Drawing by the author, adapted from Busse et al., 2023

More and more, we are witnessing an increase in the number of non-professional social actors who are, regardless of their background, skilled and experienced in design. These actors are collaborating with professionals while operating in "diffuse and competent" design modes, leading the way for a new co-design process. Manzini (2015) describes this co-design process as a "multi-faceted" social conversation between individuals and groups who are initiating design processes in the "nodes" of their respective networks, with actors interacting in different way for the creation of third spaces and infrastructures in order to realize such interventions (Meroni et al., 2018). In today's interconnected society, the separation of the design team and the users is no longer acceptable, especially when the design intervention in question concerns people, communities and existing values and practices in places. In addition to this, we are witnessing the new emerging design cultures from different actors with different backgrounds (Manzini, 2015).

"So, in a connected world, all designing processes are in fact co-designing processes, unless special barriers are set up to isolate the work of the design team from its context."

(Manzini, 2015)

#### 2.2.2

### **Emerging Cultures**

Manzini (2015) visualizes the "field of possibility for those who design" between two poles: diffuse design and expert design. Here, diffuse design is driven by non-expert social actors who are using their natural design capacity. Design experts are the people with professional backgrounds who are operating as designers. He explains, these poles are abstractions that highlight the range of possibilities and variations that appear within their respective fields. Having previously talked about the problem-solving and sense-making roles of design, by crossing these polarities with expert and diffuse design, we are able to obtain the "design mode map" (Manzini, 2015) and visualize the different ways of practicing design capacity.

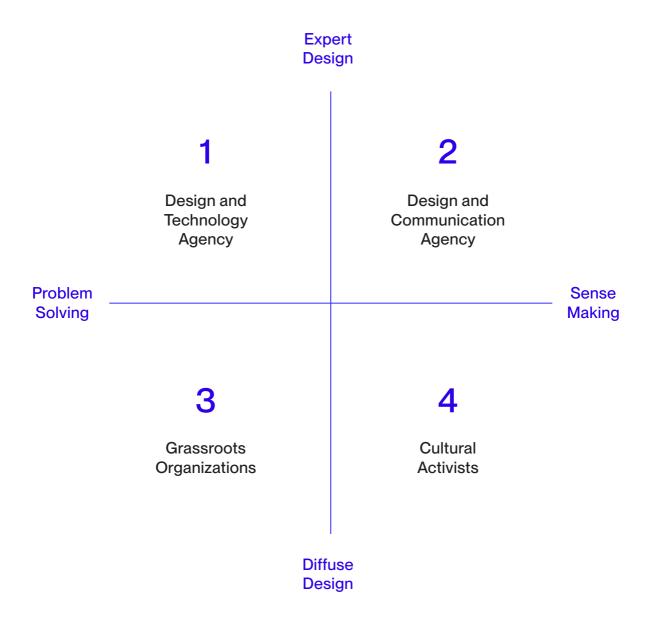


Fig. 11
Design mode map.
Drawing by the author,
adapted from Manzini, 2015

For further clarification of the map, Manzini (2015) includes some "classic" models for each design mode, an example of what has been happening until now and how things are evolving.

The intersection of social, technical and cultural innovation leads to new patterns of behavior and values, challenging prevalent norms and resulting in a series of emerging design cultures. Looking at the design mode map, we observe the boundaries between problem-solving and sense-making starting to blur - with new and radical design interventions implying new meanings and new meanings requiring new solutions (Manzini, 2015). Design modes that were initially concerned with problem-solving, whether operating through expert or diffuse design, are now increasingly incorporating sense-making into their practices (ibid.).

Social actors can be categorized alongside grassroots organizations. The close interaction between problem-solving and sense-making can be observed in the initiatives of grassroots organizations. They are not only proposing and implementing innovative solutions in answer to environmental and societal issues but at the same time, generating new values and ideas that are the cultural reflections of the way they operate.



These values and ideas are the start of a new sustainable culture that we can witness among the emerging design cultures (Manzini, 2015).

On the basis of the design mode map, we are now observing design experts from problem-solving and sense-making sides meeting at the center of the map to develop projects on local and regional scales through collaboration with institutions, associations and communities. Design experts are operating as "place-makers", with the problem-solving and sense-making dimensions coming together to co-produce new practices and cultures (Manzini, 2015). They are co-creating with "the local" in shaping and transforming places. re-defining spatial relationships, activating places and establishing social spheres rooted in communities. Historically expert design was considered as a "placeless" activity, however, we know now that should not be the case, having talked about the importance of adapting place-based approaches to sustainable transformations numerous times.

Another emerging design culture that can be observed on the design mode map shows cultural activists, grassroots organizations and design activists coming together to pursue design initiatives with the purpose of triggering interest in innovative solutions for societal and environmental issues. These initiatives may not necessarily "fix" an issue but it might lead to social conversations regarding the alternative solutions to dealing with design problems. These initiatives may include re-claiming public spaces, creating special events that requires specific design interventions where both experts and non-experts take part. Although these initiatives are mainly driven by cultural values and motivations, they also require the assistance of physical problem-solving capacities (Manzini, 2015).

Fig. 12
 Emerging cultures in design.
 Drawing by the author, adapted from Manzini, 2015

#### 2.2.3

## The Role of Designers

There are various strategies for developing places in a collaborative way, each different in their approach to dealing with place-based assets, the type of intervention, the co-creation of the design process as well as the co-design of the process. Co-design and co-creation is not about "author-centered" urban development, instead, the focus here is on translating this social conversation and negotiation processes "into the spatial dimension of cities" (Humann, 2020).

Manzini (2015) characterizes co-design processes as:

#### "Highly dynamic processes"

dealing with linear co-design methodologies and consensus-building approaches.

### "Creative and pro-active activities"

where design experts can take on the roles of a "mediator" balancing different interests or a "facilitator" of ideas and initiatives. Furthermore, design experts can use their own creativity and knowledge and use this to "trigger" the social conversation and spark interest in new ideas and a new culture.

#### "Complex design activities"

that require the use of "tools" which are helpful in visualizing ideas, which are created by the design expert. Furthermore, Manzini (2015) describes the way these processes take place by imagining a conceptual model in which various actors are operating independently from each other. However, since they are connected, they are operating as "design networks", in which both experts and non-experts are designing together. These design networks continuously evolve, resulting in the foundation of the co-design process. Within this conceptual framework, design experts are responsible for the creation and promotion of various design interventions across different points in the design network. These initiatives are structured design actions which are intended to initiate and support the ongoing co-design processes.

The results of these initiatives should be assessed on two levels: First, dealing with their impact on the specific co-design process and how well it has achieved its desired outcome, dealing with the physical output of the intervention. Second, dealing with their impact on a wider context, involving the local culture, institutions and shared visions (Manzini, 2015). In regards to the latter point, the role of design experts is crucial for they must collaborate in the creation of an environment in which diffuse designing capacities can emerge, grow and drive sustainable transformations. This means, instead of trying to identify needs and impose design solutions, design experts should focus on establishing conditions that enable social actors who are involved to develop and practice their own values and ways of living (ibid.).

#### "The onus is on designers to explore the potential of generative tools and to bring the languages of co-designing into their practice."

(Sanders and Stappers, 2008)

As Manzini (2015) stated, designers can act as facilitators, at the same time they can also act as triggers. In a similar way, designers can operate as members of co-design processes but they can also demonstrate design activism (Manzini and Rizzo, 2011). While the role of the facilitator is more mainstream, the role of designers as triggers is considered to be more promising in our world today. This is because these "triggers" can enable new initiatives and contribute to the social conversation about "what to do and how" (ibid.). In contrast. the second polarity requires different considerations. When dealing with local projects, design experts are usually operating as team members in co-design processes, while when dealing with larger-scale and more complex projects they operate as design activists. Either way, design experts play important and specific roles in these processes. Their role is crucial in promoting participation and inclusion in the transformation to sustainability, using their skills in order to achieve concrete results, and sustain the social conversation (Manzini and Rizzo, 2011).

# Tools and Framework

Building on the various roles of designers as both facilitators and triggers, it becomes evident that their participation is essential across the different scales and contexts of design projects. As discussed, designers' contributions can range from team members to design activists, emphasizing the importance of adaptability and the strategic application of their skills to foster participation.

In this context, Meroni et al. (2018) have created the Collaborative Design Framework by intercrossing two axes which result in four alternative intentions in which collaboration can take place: The two axes are the "Design Subject Matter" and the "Style of Guidance".

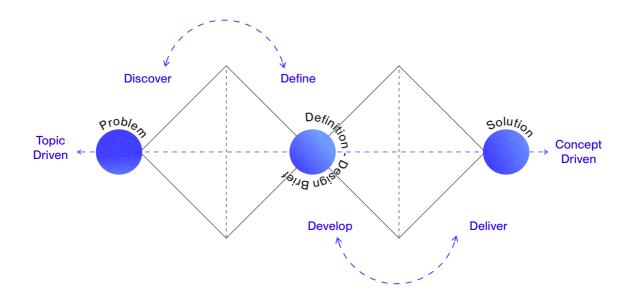


Fig. 13 ↑
Double diamond
and the polarities of
the design subject
matter.
Drawing by the
author, adapted from
Meroni et al., 2018

Taking the example of the Double Diamond (Design Council, 2014, cited in Meroni et al., 2018), they argue that all of the "divergent and convergent phases" can be carried out in a collaborative manner. Keeping in mind design processes are not necessarily "linear" as there is a lot of back-and-forth between the idea generation and implementation phases, they propose a two-pole axis, with the "topic-driven" and "concept-driven" sides (Meroni et al., 2018).

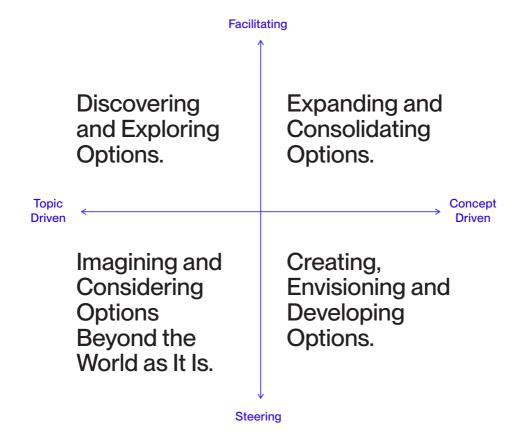
Topic-driven activities deal with the problem that's being addressed and explored through the project. They require the investigation of the issues at hand and gathering information helpful in defining the problem accurately. Concept-driven activities are centered on the direction and guidelines defined by the problem-solving brief. This involves developing ideas and concept that address the problem, guided by the goals and constraints of the project.

Style of guidance deals with how the practice of "joint inquiry and imagination" is conducted (Meroni et al., 2018). This is when actors from different backgrounds come together to explore and define the problem, as well as develop and evaluate solutions collectively. It is a process where social actors can build capacity to "reflect on and re-negotiate the conditions of their engagement in places" as mentioned before by Horlings and Roep (2015, cited in Grenni et al., 2019). On one side of the axis there is "(designerly) facilitation", dealing with the "active listening" style of guidance which allows for a free flow of thought and imagination (Meroni et al., 2018). On the other side, "(designerly) steering)", participants are guided to think about the critical aspects and opportunities of the given subject and envision the future (ibid.).

→ Fig. 14

The collaborative design framework.

Drawing by the author, adapted from Meroni et al., 2018





In the "topic-driven" and "facilitating" quadrant, co-design processes are revolving around understanding the needs and experiences of social actors and stakeholders. The aim is to gather insights and engage participants in the project by involving their input and placebased knowledge (Meroni et al., 2018)

In the "topic-driven" and "steering" quadrant, the focus is on envisioning innovative and alternative solutions. Collaborative activities are aimed at enhancing the transformative capacity of actors and stakeholders (ibid.).



In the "concept-driven" and "facilitating" quadrant, co-design initiatives aim to evaluate and explore given options, adding elements of "feasibility and concreteness" (ibid.).



Finally, in the "concept-driven" and "steering" quadrant, co-design processes deal with idea generation, development and visioning together. The aim here is to generate new alternatives or further explore existing options (ibid.).

Meroni et al. (2018) hereby establish a framework for "infrastructuring" (Bjögvinsson, Ehn, and Hillgren, 2012, cited in Meroni et al., 2018) collaboration between various actors and networks that share a common goal in addressing a challenge, opportunity or problem collectively. Translating this collaborative environment into taking action calls for understanding the values, practices and needs of different groups, similar to sustainable place-shaping practices. Community-centered design requires designers to be able to gain in-depth knowledge about a community and its environment, and the ability to collaborate with non-designers. This involves immersive, on-site experiences to enhance community engagement and co-design solutions (Manzini and Meroni, 2014).

Manzini and Rizzo (2011) categorize different tools within the co-design process, emphasizing their corresponding roles to the different roles taken on by the designers. They call them "design devices" and list them as such: subjects of conversation, tools for conversation and enablers of experience (ibid.). As mentioned before, this social conversation itself is a co-design activity between social actors and design expers where everyone can contribute their specific knowledge and design capacities (Manzini, 2015).

"Subjects of conversation" refer to the ideas or scenarios generated during the project with the aim of showing the different future possibilities to the participants. Manzini and Rizzo (2011) call them subjects of conversation due to the ability of these concepts to create reactions and initiate collaboration between various stakeholders. Subjects of conversation can be born out of workshops and seminars, shaping and generating visions for the future. Similarly, projects and design initiatives can become subjects of conversations as well, contributing to the social conversation on how to design cities.

"Tools for conversation" are the mediums through which subjects of conversation can be reached and engaged. These tools are designed to communicate and facilitate social interaction, ranging from simple formats such as posters to specially designed tools to enhance community engagement (Manzini and Rizzo, 2011). Place-branding practices utilize tools for conversation. Recently, there has been an emergence in the stakeholder-oriented perspective in place-branding, advocating for collaborative processes that re-define place meanings and values for various actors and stakeholders (Rebelo et al., 2020). These views promote socially inclusive approaches to place-branding. Rebelo et al. (2020) argue for the integration of sustainable place-shaping processes with the roles actors play in place-branding practices, enhancing community engagement and support through collective values and meanings. Tools for conversation are essential in this context as they can help with the inclusion and participation of various actors to develop ideas collaboratively. Similarly, inclusive place-branding practices can serve as tools for conversation.

Finally, "enablers of experience" are the tools or projects used in design initiatives which enable actors to actively participate and share their ideas and thoughts. These can be "smaller-scale experiments" to start the conversation and get feedback, "prototypes" which are more developed models to get more actors involved, and "full-scale pilot projects" that are almost finalized real and practical solutions (Manzini and Rizzo, 2011).

Before this chapter comes to an end, one important point that needs to be mentioned is that while we can't design the way people behave, it is possible to design and create the enabling conditions and "triggers" that encourage new active and participative ways of behaving (Manzini, 2015). The new emerging cultures of design, along with social innovation in design, have the common aim of creating a new infrastructure of connected yet autonomous design initiatives. Manzini (2015) argues that bringing this "infrastructure" into design could "move towards a more open-ended longterm process where diverse stakeholders can innovate together". While doing so, a new kind of governance is born and policy can become a part of the way cities are designed, in which social actors become the co-designers and co-producers of the new "public places" (ibid., Humann, 2020). Here, the role of the designers becomes developing and spreading this design culture that promotes new sustainable values, supporting diffuse design initiatives and making them visible (Manzini, 2015).

# "Making Things Happen"

### Places, Now

Previously, we talked about the emerging cultures in design, with people operating as place-makers as the sense-making and problem-solving sides of design coming together to co-produce new cultures and practices. Social actors and design experts are co-designing the new "public places". Manzini (2015) explains that people live in social and physical spaces simultaneously, with their interactions taking place in both spaces. Together, these interactions are forming a reciprocal relationship in which societies and environments shape each other. Therefore, collaborative organizations are linked to the "building of places and their new ecology" (ibid.).

Before, we have read Vanclay et al. (2008) describe places as "meaningful spaces". Manzini (2015) offers a similar point of view saying places are "spaces endowed with sense". Regarding his point, the physical space seems to become a place when people talk about it and decide to do something about it. He argues, traditionally this was just the resident community - people who live close by to a place and deal with similar place-based issues. Now in our society, we are witnessing a new kind of place-based collaborative organization who are co-designing and co-producing places, resulting in "intentional places" co-created by "intentional communities" (ibid.). It's important to mention here that there is a difference between the resident communities asking for place-based design interventions, and this new intentional community that will potentially emerge from an idea or design project in the future (Manzini and Meroni, 2014).

Fassi and Manzini (2022) elaborate on this idea of the intentional community, suggesting that the contemporary communities actually become communities as a result of their "project-based" nature. Basically, when networks of collaborative people design and produce a set of projects together to support their on-going existence (ibid.). Previously, we talked about creative communities. They are groups of people who have the collaborative vision and capability to effectively imagine, develop and manage solutions for new ways of living. These communities can grow and shape places with the help of the "design actions focused on them" (Manzini and Meroni, 2014).

Manzini (2015) makes an excellent point that basically summarizes everything we've been talking about until now. Building or re-building places is important for several reasons, first being the resident community. As mentioned before, places are key to our sense of belonging, humanity and well-being (Vanclay et al., 2008). Going beyond this, places and especially place diversity is the pre-condition of a more resilient ecological, social and production system that is able to adapt to global ordering processes. This resilience is crucial for the future of our societies and environment with the "re-building of places" playing a key role. Diverse and complex initiatives and communities are essential for ensuring this diversity and resilience for sustainability. Following his (Manzini, 2015) previous definition of place, the existence of a territory can not be separated from the communities that played a role in creating and sustaining it. This recalls how we described territorialization in the earlier chapters as being related to the dynamics and processes in regional development, driven by collective human intentionality and enhanced by culture (Dessein et al., cited in Horlings, 2015b). So, social actors are not only contributing to the creation and the shaping of places but they are simultaneously creating a new "territorial ecology" that is more resilient due to its enrichment with different places, communities, projects and their consequent social, economic and cultural values on the territory (Manzini, 2015).

Looking at places, now, they emerge from this argument as (Horlings, 2018):

# "As areas of place-based debates, power struggles and negotiations"

Places are shaped through ongoing negotiations and are never free from conflicting views (Vanclay et al., 2008). In this context, politics are involved in this negotiation over the uses of spaces, representation and participation. Networked politics in places involve different interactions, whether formal or informal, which emerge as a result of the competing ideas emphasizing the need to focus on the inequalities, exclusionary practices and diverse rationalities in places (Pierce et al., 2011; Horlings, 2018). The challenge here would be to "re-ground" and "re-position" the practices in places by involving the local communities in decision-making processes in order to enhance participation, collaboration and engagement. Horlings (2018) argues that sustainable place-shaping practices and grassroots initiatives should be recognized as forms of "social actions" and be supported through the creation of "policy spaces" (Grindle and Thomas, 1991, cited in Horlings, 2018). Policy spaces can reconfigure relationships between actors and introduce new opportunities, where self-governance and innovative practices can take shape (Kemp et al., 2001, cited in Horlings, 2018).

#### "In the context of subjective processes of sense-making"

The argument here is that people are involved in places whether they are part of a resident or intentional community, through practices of sustainable place-shaping and by "belonging to a place in the socio-cultural sense" (Horlings, 2018). As we said before. diverse and complex initiatives have grown and communites have become more dispersed, as a result of this ecological interdependence has decreased (Pollini, 2005, cited in Horlings, 2018). This leads us to focus on more "subjective" definitions of belonging. Places rely on their cultural significance and fostering a sense of belonging and community engagement among not only participants but also inhabitants, investors and social actors. The point here would be to "re-appreciate" places and tell their stories to "set the agenda towards sustainable development" (Horlings, 2018).

### "As objects of policy interventions and spatial planning"

Traditionally, places as objects of policy interventions and spatial planning have been viewed as a "bounded" spaces, defined by their administrative boundaries through top-down planning processes. These practices go against the relational approach to places that values networks and connectivities we talked about before. Place-making is very important in place-based approaches to sustainable development. Sustainable place-shaping practices encourages new institutional arrangements and collaborations through places (Horlings, 2018). Here the challenge is to align the transformative agency of social actors and institutions with the specific place-based requirements and opportunities to create "the right mix of formal and informal institutions, targeted to every specific place" (Rodriquez-Pose, 2013, cited in Horlings, 2018). As a result of this, institutions may need to re-organize themselves in order to be more "sensitive to place conditions" and respond better to evolving local initiatives and the opportunities they bring (ibid.).

# Policy and Governance

The increase in popularity regarding involving the local communities in decision-making processes comes from the desire to create more fair, sustainable and resilient societies when faced with complex problems public organisations are struggling to deal with (Rossi and Tuurnas, 2021, cited in Leino and Puumala, 2021). We previously talked about how the participatory methods have evolved and diversified over the past fifty years. As a result, co-design and co-production have started to gain more recognition in the policy-discourse and have been adapted in the "research and practice of urban development" (Duvernet and Kieling, 2013; Nevens et al., 2013, cited in Leino and Puumala, 2021).

Increasingly, cities have started using co-creation platforms more and more in order to deal with urban regeneration challenges. Policymakers often view co-creation as a method for developing "sustainability, services, public spaces, safety and urban planning" (Leino and Puumala, 2021). While the reasons for participation vary, they essentially result from the need for a change in our ways of living. With that being said, while the benefits of citizen participation are understood, local officials struggle to effectively implement co-creation and inclusively engage citizens in urban development processes (ibid.).

Having previously talked about the role of places and place diversity in ensuring resilient cities and communities, it's important to mention here that a consumption-based approach to public spaces dismisses opportunities for people to connect to places through activities such as producing, growing and decision-making - which are essential for fostering a sense of belonging and strengthening bonds for a more cohesive society. This approach can lead to the widening of the gap between those who can and those who can not participate in places in legitimate ways, resulting in unequal access and dissatisfaction. This divide is a serious problem for governments and developers, who need to allow for more inclusive models of designing and operating in public together that are beyond the market logic (Bingham-Hall, 2016).

Social actors are already demonstrating this collective participation in and ownership of places, which is also referred to as "urban commons" (Bingham-Hall, 2016). The need to common manifests itself in diverse contexts, but is often overshadowed by market and political dynamics. Bollier and Helfrich (2019) describe commons as "living social systems through which people address their shared problems in self-organized ways", a new social definition shaped through the initiatives of social actors and grassroots projects. Similar to how we previously described the practices of social actors and social innovation, commons meet needs while changing the culture and creating new values, influencing social practices, world views and consequently, politics. While Bollier and Helfrich (2019) describe commons as "one of a kind" there are some experiences and patterns that can be identified in their nature:

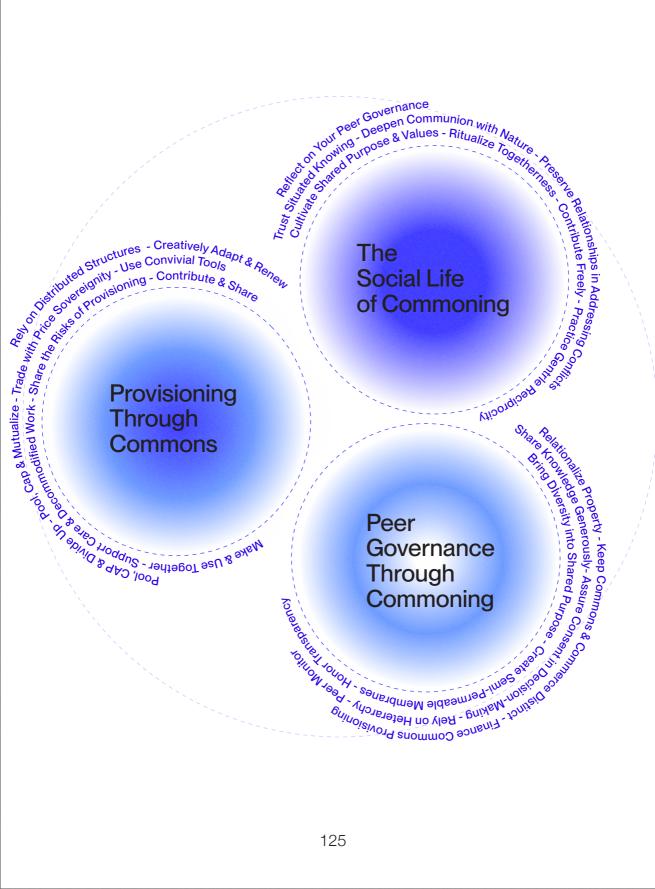
"Each commons depends on social processes, the sharing of knowledge, and physical resources. Each shares challenges in bringing together the social, the political (governance), and the economic (provisioning) into an integrated whole"

(Bollier and Helfrich, 2019)

In this discussion, commons are living social systems that change, adapt to different contexts over time and propose creative and innovative solutions. Based on Bollier and Helfrich's (2019) description of commons and commoners, there are evident similarities among commoners and the profile of the social actors we have portrayed in this work. First, we need to understand that essentially anyone can become a commoner. "Commoning" happens when everyday actors identify shared problems and decide to do something about it. manage common resources and wealth, and start build a community. What the authors describe as "drawing upon situated knowing in order to assess problems" is similar to how socials actors reflect on place meanings, values and specificities in order to explore transformative agency and create joint agendas for sustainable development. Commoning is not limited to communities but its practices can be extended to society as a whole (ibid.).

The Triad of Commoning (Bollier and Helfrich, 2019) is a framework that is based on the creation of "peer-governed, context-specific systems for free, fair and sustainable lives" among communities and wider networks, between humans and non-humans, between the past, present and future. At the core of the framework there are the three interconnected spheres of "Social Life, Peer Governance and Provisioning" (ibid.).

Fig. 15 
The Triad of
Commoning.
Drawing by the
author, adapted from Bollier and Helfrich, 2019



### The Social Life of Commoning:

The Social Life of Commoning explores patterns of co-operation, sharing and interpersonal relationships. A commons emerges when these social patterns reach a certain level of practice density, self-organization and continuous activity (Bollier and Helfrich, 2019). Some of the important patterns that we've also explored in the previous chapters can also be observed here. First and foremost, every commons start with shared values and purposes but can only arise when people contribute freely, connect with the community and places, and experience things together. Contributing freely is important for creating healthy commons as it reaffirms sharing and co-operation and leads to fostering a sense of belonging. This can be strengthened through "ritualizing togetherness" meaning building experiences and ways of being and doing things together, creating a "shared identity" (ibid.). Finally, it's important to note that commoning begins through "embodied and situated knowing and perception" (ibid.). Embodied experience relies on feelings, values, subconscious knowledge, traditions and historical knowledge to understand how to share resources and govern people, similar to re-appreciation and re-grounding practices in places, allowing social actors to reflect on and re-negotiate their involvement in places and wider networks.

#### Peer Governance Through Commoning:

Peer Governance is described as a generative process through which commoners can build relations and consequently develop stable and sustainable commons. Bollier and Helfrich (2019) refer to "peer" governance as it points to ongoing social conversations and self-organization. As much as formal structures are needed for any organization, open-ended living process are fundamental for commons. Commoning is an exploratory process where social actors identify their needs and create context-specific systems for "provisioning and governance" (ibid.). This process empowers people in places to employ transformative agency to address their issues through their existing knowledge. Peer governance can help in bringing different opinions together, forming a social system that is built upon relationship-building and collective decision-making. As we've seen before, people always have different ideas and motivations as their personalities and backgrounds vary. Commoning gradually fosters a shared purpose, which may not be clear from the beginning. This is one of the differences between the intentional communities and the resident communities we talked about before. depending on whether or not actors live in a shared space or rely on the same urban resources - which brings us to the pattern of "relationalizing property" (ibid.).

To "relationalize property" means to adopt a new understanding of property that acknowledges the networks, relationships, place values and meanings between the people and communities in places. In a commons, these relations are recognized and respected, challenging the traditional views that put individual and collective interests against one another. Relationalized property merges individual and collective interests into a new framework, allowing commoners to escape the dominant or dependent roles that are typical of traditional property rights. The aim of relationalized property is to establish connections between humans and non-humans, and the past and the future through design. Last but not least, Bollier and Helfrich (2019) note that in today's world, it's impossible to avoid the inevitable clash of "commons and commerce". So, we need to ask ourselves, what kind of money culture do commoners want? The answer should be that, this new culture should by no means transform a collaborative activity into a capitalist one. Commoning is an act of social self-organization and continuous learning, aimed at meeting people's needs through the co-design and co-production of things and services (ibid.).

### Provisioning Through Commons:

To provision through commons is to co-create useful and durable things that hold social meaning and significance to their producers and users, combining problem-solving and sense-making. Unlike traditional "goods" or "commodities", these practices foster a sense of belonging and form connections between people and places, which often become fundamental to the social life, culture and identity of communities (Bollier and Helfrich, 2019). Therefore, the aim of provisioning is not to prioritize economic growth, but to encourage a new culture and "territorial ecology" (Manzini, 2015) - one that addresses needs, provides stability, fosters a sense of belonging, connection and security, and "is a vision of advancing greater freedom, fairness and sustainability for all" (ibid.). "Making and using" together is an established way for people to meet their needs while sharing knowledge, tools and infrastructures. The conceptualization of work in a commons is an activity that is fueled by social actors' values and motivations. This very similar to what Manzini (2015) described as the notion of "meaningful work", as commons depend on personal and social energies and motivations that is contributed freely, especially in open networks where design, ideas and knowledge can grow and spread more as they are shared and adapted between different actors and communities (Bollier and Helfrich, 2019).

Similarly to this pattern, "using convivial tools", which are open-ended systems that can be adapted to specific purposes such as technologies, infrastructures and processes for provisioning, aims to enhance individual transformative agency while enriching relationships. Commons can function on larger and distributed scales. which involves creating infrastructures that can allows actors, communities and local nodes to connect and form "semi-autonomous spheres of self-provisioning and governance" (ibid.). Each sphere operates semi-autonomously while simultaneously coordinating with their respective semi-autonomous peers. Today, modern tools and infrastructures, such as policy and the internet, are being used to expand the size and scale of groups. But the challenge here is to transform these systems to support social and cultural empowerment and sustainable values instead of centralizing power and dismissing social actors and local knowledge (ibid.).

Within the context of this work having to re-think and relationalize property, or in our case, places, means that places must be able to support "social collaboration, ecological stewardship and non-reciprocal gifting" (Bollier and Helfrich, 2019). After the re-introduction of commoning as a concept (Ostrom, 1990), scholars began exploring its application beyond the natural world. This led to the idea of viewing the city as a whole as a common. Cities are complex systems made up of individuals, communities, institutions, various ordering processes and physical entities, which all create what we refer to as the urban and the social fabric, with its places, built infrastructure, culture, ecology and policy. The city emerges from the organic interactions between these parts as something we have in common and something we share, rather than something we co-own (Bingham-Hall, 2016). In this sense, what we consider as public is not necessarily "common" (ibid.).

Through relationalized property human, social and ecological relationships can grow naturally, moving away from the market logic. This helps in fostering and promoting several relationships that the privatization of property dismisses. First being the relationship we have with ourselves, helping to clarify the significance and meaning places hold in our lives, then the relationships we have with our peers by fostering mutually acceptable rights and responsibilities. Furthermore our lived experiences, place meanings, values, memories and traditions, connections to pre-existing physical dynamics, culture, historic and social interventions are all enhanced. This process helps in respecting, protecting and deepening these relationships through our use of property, or places, in a way that is not necessarily revolving around ownership or economic exchange. similar to processes of "re-positioning", allowing people to transform these relations through the introduction of a new social economy, value systems and alternative scenarios (Bollier and Helfrich, 2019).

"Urban commoning neither simply "happens" in urban space, nor does it simply produce urban space as a commodity to be distributed. Urban commoning treats and establishes urban space as a medium through which institutions of commoning take shape."

(Stavrides, 2014, cited in Bollier and Helfrich, 2019)

Designing places or platforms that can enable commoning should be seen as creating the mediums for social processes. Commoning, where people co-design and co-produce, benefit from and maintain places and resources can offer innovative solutions to issues within the urban culture and environment. These are usually market driven areas which can pose a serious threat to the resilience of communities among economic and social changes. Some urban interventions in public spaces consider communities only symbolically, encouraging co-presence in shared spaces, although this means of "being together" doesn't encourage and foster direct involvement and interaction. By making places adaptable and productive through social and personal investments, places can evolve beyond the consumption-based model. However this approach requires serious commitment from producers, public bodies and organizations (Bingham-Hall, 2016).

There is an important distinction between a public space, goods and the commons. Public spaces and goods have historically been managed managed by the state and public administration and while they do contribute to commons, they don't necessarily automatically become commons. Transforming these places into commons requires political actions by citizens. Thus, there are many ways in which we can consider urban as "common" instead of public or private. Bingham-Hall (2016) argues that it's important to bring this terminology into play as debates about state responsibility and private enterprises in city-making intensify. Bollier and Helfrich (2019) suggest that redefining policy and governance is essential. Bold statements are insufficient at this point, only actual social practices and living cultures can drive this change (ibid.). This power is not necessarily power over someone or something, rather it's the empowerment of one's own. This is what social actors are doing by re-negotiating their terms in these processes, bringing new perspectives, challenging traditions and proposing alternative ways of doing things together while generating new values for their cities and regions. The social work of commoners affect the power dynamics, as commoning helps re-distribute power (ibid.).

"Commoning creates new vessels of non-state power simply by bringing people together to collaborate."

(Bollier and Helfrich, 2019)

Applying co-creation to the public sector and bodies comes with big challenges, as these institutions are often of a large, complex and top-down nature. While collaboration is fundamental for addressing complex problems that public institutions can't solve alone, co-creation requires a multi-directional problem-solving that will dismantle the hierarchies between various stakeholders (Leino and Puumala, 2021). That is not to say the challenges end there. Several challenges arise when using co-creative processes for the involvement of citizens in urban development. These include the different backgrounds and resources of participants, the difficulty of designing the co-creative process due to its context-specific nature, the open-ended and flexible nature of the said process and the gap between knowledge creation and its application. Current practices in the public sector that focus on short-term efficiency and stability don't align with the nature of co-creation. For socially just ways of citizen participation, co-creation must take on diverse forms to meet the different expectations of different stakeholders, with the willingness to implement and discuss the results (ibid.). Leino and Puumala (2021) suggest that citizens should be encouraged to see the city as something they can collectively design and shape in an efficient, interactive, adaptive and flexible way. However, they add, in order to embrace co-creation public sector processes such as urban planning need to be "reset" and citizen participation should already be integrated into policy-making (ibid.).

#### 2.3.3 Infrastructuring

In the light of everything we have talked about until now, Manzini (2015) suggests that the whole of society should take on the role of being a "social laboratory" in the transformation to sustainability - an infrastructure that is capable of connecting different and dispersed initiatives, fostering constructive comparison and collecting the resulting knowledge, experience and awareness. With that being said, is the entire society fully equipped to become this laboratory? Not necessarily, but we have the possibility to create these "special places" that can trigger and support these learning processes. While these places can emerge through a series of unplanned and spontaneous events, we can also intentionally design them (ibid.).

As we said before, collaborative organizations and social actors are crucial in this dynamic as they are "making things happen" in the transformation to sustainability. The "small, local, open and connected" nature of collaborative organizations is one of the key elements in the building of this infrastructure, able to trigger various social actors, innovative alternative models and design initiatives (Manzini, 2015). Then, these ideas can spread to different groups and actors who can adapt them to their own context-specific solutions through a placebased approach to sustainable development. These place-based approaches are able to acknowledge the distinctiveness of each place and advance sustainable transformations more efficiently by recognizing and using the local physical resources and social networks, as well as the activities of actors in places (ibid.). While these are individual initiatives and can stand alone, through the emergence of similar initiatives in the cityscale a "constellation of interconnected design initiatives" are born, resulting in a new infrastructure in the shaping of the city and contributing to the new territorial ecology (Manzini and Rizzo, 2011).

So, in the emerging world small and interconnected entities are making the shift towards "light, flexible, context-specific distributed systems" (Manzini, 2015). Shaping these new places and communities is essential for a sustainable and resilient society. The "small, local, open and connected" scenario can align a series of actions towards the new territorial ecology we mentioned. making local places and initiatives part of a bigger infrastructure. This approach is also referred to as planning by projects, a bottom-up design intervention on the territorial scale, dealing first and foremost with the social actors, their motivations, values and investments and networks in places. Design experts are extremely important in this process as they can help in supporting and sustaining intentional communities in the making and shaping of places and contributing to the social conversation as to what the future could look like (ibid.).

To sum it up, planning by projects is a kind of regional planning, consisting of a series of actions and various actors. Each of these initiatives can serve as the prototype of how things could be like. It's important for us to recognize the importance of smaller-scale, place-based approaches to urban development and sustainability in which design experts and policy-actors collaborate with social actors who become the co-designers and co-producers of the new territory (Manzini, 2015).

# Case Studies

## Introduction to Case Studies

How can active citizenship contribute to larger transformations in the territory?

How do place-based approaches to sustainable development trigger a series of open-ended participatory processes?

What can co-design do to support social actors in these processes of shaping their physical and social environment?

In this context, design looks at places through the lens of the resident and intentional communities operating there, who want to align their personal motivations with cultural and sustainable values which contribute to the building of places and their new ecology (Manzini, 2015). This approach to territorial planning takes into consideration bottom-up approaches as much as the top-down, and establishes places in the city as the mediums through which social processes can take shape. These places and the communities that shape them can grow, become more visible and accessible thanks to the design actions focused on them, helping them in creating places that are rooted in their specific contexts while being open to and influencing larger flows of ideas, knowledge and people (ibid.).

#### Turin, Italy

The city of Turin has seen the emergence of various project-based communities and socio-cultural urban proposals in the recent past. The municipality is working towards the implementation of several plans and agendas for the future that are dealing with sustainable urban regeneration, social innovation, community engagement and inclusive development. While the involvement and the support of policy actors are important for the feasibility of any project, actual and sustainable change results from the initiatives and actions of people who are in the center of the intervention.

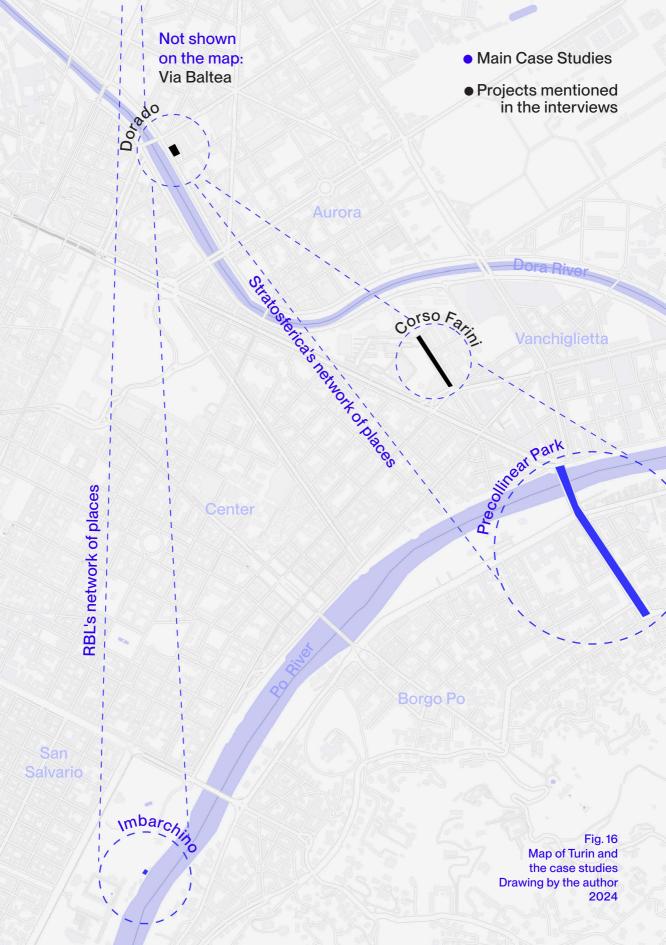
The emerging community ecosystem in Turin is comprised of the project-based communities we previously talked about. They are the social actors who have identified problems and opportunities in the urban fabric of the city and started shaping their environment according to their needs. These communities might emerge from a specific design proposal or they might simply aim to connect people, operating as the mediums for potential future projects. The resulting projects and communities may stand alone, but at the same time they are collectively co-designing the new social and urban infrastructure of the city (Fassi and Manzini, 2022).

The following case studies that are located in Turin, have some key characteristics in common (Manzini and Rizzo, 2011):

They are able to align personal motivations with social and environmental goals, generating new values for the city as a whole and strengthening the social fabric in the process.

They are looking to activate citizen participation, supporting collaborative processes and fostering new forms of belonging and identity in the city.

Finally, they have been driven by design initiatives that are aimed to shape and activate places for communities, developing and managing new ways of living and well-being.



# 

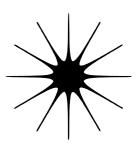
# tchino

The data presented in this case study has been sourced from multiple channels, including Imbarchino's social network platforms, their Social Impact Report and its associated statistical data (2022), as well as empirical data gathered through direct observations and interviews\* with Lorenzo Ricca, CEO and co-founder of Va Lentino SRL Società Benefit and the cultural coordinator of Imbarchino.

\*For the sake of readability and to avoid repetition, the interview has been edited to integrate smoothly into the narrative.

(imbarchino.space) @imbarchinovalentino

### Case Study ID Card



What: Urban regeneration project of an

abandoned landmark in the city.

Where: Parco del Valentino, Turin, Italy

When: 2019 - present

Actors: Amici dell'Imbarchino

Banda Larga AEGEE Torino

Va Lentino SRL Società Benefit

Citizens

Role of the Municipality: Enabler

Tools + Processes: Peer-Governance

**Municipality Concession** 

Crowdfunding

**Co-Design Processes** 

**Provisioning** 



## 3.2.1 Imbarchino Co-Designing the Process

Imbarchino is many things: A place to be together, home of the local community radio, a bar, a meeting point for social and cultural gatherings, a historic landmark and a fond memory for many.

But before any of this, it was a bar and former bathing establishment operating since the late 1970s in the city. Not only it is one of the most iconic places in the city, situated along the Po river in the Parco del Valentino, but it has also been a social catalyst with its commitment to inclusivity and bottom-up cultural proposal that has welcomed the diverse communities in the city.

In 2016, one month after the end of its previous concession, Imbarchino was severely damaged due to the flooding of the Po river. The increasing deterioration resulting from the property's abandonment during such a critical time made its reassignment much more challenging. On March 1st, 2019, the concession contract between (the Temporary Association of Purpose) Amici dell'Imbarchino and the City of Turin was signed (Imbarchino, 2022).

### Social Actions Social Actions

The actors behind this initiative started the project with the belief that cultural and social spaces significantly improve urban life, fostering opportunities for social interaction, learning, and recreation. Re-opening Imbarchino would mean addressing individual and community needs, aligned with social and cultural values at large, by giving the citizens an accessible, inclusive and safe place.

Three associations and a benefit corporation came together through a process of peer-governance in order to form a social system that formed the Temporary Association of Purpose, which won the public concession of the municipality and started with the restoration of the spaces, with the aim of re-activating Imbarchino and opening it to the public with a commercial activity that would align with the cultural proposal.

Starting with the 1st of May, 2019, a series of events took place in the lawn in front of Imbarchino, to gather the citizens and the community for further promoting the re-opening and the crowdfunding.

On July 24th, 2019, Imbarchino re-opened to the public and for the first time in its life, remained open every single day, with a cultural programming that operates all throughout the space. After an initial phase where the process of regeneration was still taking shape, especially during uncertain times in the year 2020, over the years the project has been transformed into an active place in which different communities are engaging and emerging (Imbarchino, 2022).

- **Z:** What was the problem or need being addressed with this project? Who identified it?
- LR: So, the need was quite clear and it was to re-open a place that is important for the local community. As a guy that was born in Torino, I knew that this was a very important place. It was also for me, when I was younger. So, there were a lot of people that used to frequent this place, and there was also a very **strong emotional commitment** from the community, about this place. Also, this particular need for Imbarchino, was actually part of a wider problem about this area that is from Parco del Valentino to Murazzi, because of several different reasons between 2012 and 2018 dealing with the closing of most of the venues and event spaces. And so, there was a strong need of these kind of spaces in this area.
  - **Z:** What were your personal motivations for your involvement in the project?
- LR: Yeah, I had a strong motivation to start this project also because when we started I was 28, and actually I arrived from a previous experience of a cooperative that failed. And I was looking around, but actually I wasn't motivated in taking part in the standard market of the work, so actually I was a bit apart from the core of the society, I was on my own way. Were you a bit skeptical?

Yes, I was skeptical about what moves most of the companies and organizations to produce stuff, and so I was also motivated in **creating a well-working alternative** to what I was seeing around.

- **Z:** How was the idea shaped over time and how did it become more concrete?
- LR: So it took more or less one year and a half. When we defined with a group of people that we wanted to start this project together, we started investigating about how to do it. We started also writing projects, starting with the crowdfunding, and more or less in one year and a half we arrived at the point that the structure of the complex governance of the space was more or less clear, and we had identified ways to fund the project, the start-up, and the first key members of the group.

- **Z:** Were there similar interventions happening in the city prior to this project or around the same time? What do you think Imbarchino achieved with this project given the social and urban fabric of the city at the time?
- LR: When we started, I have this feeling that we were kind of the pioneers of this new phase of re-opening, because we came in that moment of that long time of "closing" in the city. I can't remember other groups that started similar things, bottom-up, grassroots initiatives, at the time. Today, after 5 years, the municipality and other organizations in town started recognizing the value that we are bringing. At first it was mostly the local community, I had this feeling that people that were coming into Imbarchino were grateful. Lately, also now, a wider environment of organizations and public administrations are starting to recognize the value of these kinds of places.
  - **Z:** What were the values that you associated with Imbarchino at the time? Given the historical and cultural significance of the place, was there a shared "sense of place" among the collaborators or the locals? Do you think these feelings translated into the need to preserve the place? Is it the place that is strengthening these values or vice versa?
- LR: I would say that it was more the place that was pushing somebody to do something like this. Imbarchino has a history, it has been open as a gathering space, as a bar, since the late 70s and it has always been a space of artistic and social experimentation and innovation. I think it's one of the first places in town where disabled people were employed in a bar management. So, the place was sending a strong message and our group was matching with that.
  - **Z:** Did you encounter any difficulties dealing with a place of such history and significance in the city?
- **LR:** No, I have to say that we were helped by anybody, both the citizens and the municipality.
  - **Z:** Do you think establishing that crowdfunding helped develop more of a sense of belonging in the project?
- LR: Yes, for sure.





## Practices of Self-Organization and Peer-Governance

Today, a Benefit Society co-operating with a network of associations and citizens is working to keep the place active.

The property of Imbarchino is owned by the City of Turin. On March 1st, 2019 the concession was signed by the Temporary Association of Purpose comprised of Amici dell'Imbarchino, Banda Larga and AEGEE Torino. According to the project proposal submitted and specified in the contract with the city, the concessionary associations had to implement space management practices that were aligned with the stated cultural and community-focused objectives, with a focus on maintaining and ensuring ongoing communication and collaboration, particularly with the Departments of Culture, Youth Policies, and Green Initiatives.

Amici dell'Imbarchino and Banda Larga, along with five citizens went on to found Va Lentino SRL Società Benefit, with the group voluntarily adopting the status of a Benefit Society, as established in the Italian legal system by Decree Law 1882 of April 17, 2015, a decision that reflected the group's commitment to corporate social responsibility, emphasizing transparency and practices that promote the common good. These practices include caring for ecological systems and fostering strong, collaborative relationships with suppliers, customers, partners, and also competitors (Imbarchino, 2022).

#### **AEGEE-Torino**

#### 1992 Voluntary Association

AEGEE-Torino, a voluntary association established in 1992 by a group of students in Turin, is one of the local branches of AEGEE-Europe. AEGEE-Europe is a European network of interdisciplinary student associations with over 15,000 members and 217 branches across Europe. Locally, AEGEE-Torino is dedicated to promoting the association's core values, including sustainability and gender equality to young people in Turin and beyond. As a part of the Temporary Association of Purpose, AEGEE-Torino utilizes the Imbarchino spaces to offer study hall services and organize orientation activities for newly arrived international students.

#### Banda Larga

### 2013 Association of Social Promotion

Banda Larga was established in January 2013, evolving from an informal group that had been managing the online radio station Radio Banda Larga, initially launched at Imbarchino by the social cooperative Biloba during 2011-2012. Over time, the organization has refined its mission to create both physical and digital platforms that enable cultural production and foster relationships based on shared motivations and needs. Banda Larga uses tools such as an international online radio station. events and cultural centers to engage individuals in a creative community. Since 2019, the association has overseen the cultural programming at Imbarchino, collaborating with a network of partners to co-design a diverse and inclusive cultural program with associations, citizens, and institutions. Through co-management of the space, the association enhances the cultural and social values and the quality of Imbarchino and Parco del Valentino.

#### Amici dell'Imbarchino

Amici dell'Imbarchino (Friends of Imbarchino) was established in 2016 through Imbarchino's reassignment, involving Banda Larga and AEGEE-Torino to form the Temporary Association of Purpose in order to obtain the space in concession from the municipality. The aims of the group are to promote international sociality and culture, contribute to the cultural, environmental and individual growth of the entire community, and promote the re-development of the area. In 2019, the association conducted the "Riapriamo l'Imbarchino" crowdfunding campaign. Amici dell'Imbarchino is the leader of the Temporary Association of Purpose, the institutional contact person for Imbarchino, and cares for the place as a common good.

2016
Association of
Social Promotion

#### Va Lentino SRL Societa Benefit

Va Lentino SRL Società Benefit commissioned the restoration work on Imbarchino and established a food and beverage service. Founded as a benefit society, the group is committed to operating responsibly, sustainably, and transparently in relation to people, communities, territories, the environment, cultural and social assets, realities and other stakeholders. It aims to achieve various goals, including the regeneration and activation of the place, making spaces available to communities, cultural and social innovation, inclusion, and supporting activities aimed for the benefit of the society at large. Va Lentino ensures the daily operation of the place as a public establishment, provides human resources, and supports the activities organized by the associations both within Imbarchino and other venues.

2018 Benefit Society

- **Z:** Imbarchino is essentially an urban regeneration/place activation project. Is this the first time you and your collaborators took part in an urban intervention like this? If so, what are the benefits and difficulties of doing something like this for the first time? If you took part in similar cultural projects prior to this, what are the skills, experience and knowledge you brought into this experience?
- LR: Okay, so it wasn't the first time, and now I actually remember also another reason why I was so motivated about starting this project. It was that I was working in Imbarchino between 2009 and 2012, and that was the period when the Radio Banda Larga project was born in Imbarchino. Then that group was forced to leave this space.
  - **Z:** Why forced?
- LR: Because that group was renting the space from another big organization that failed, and that organization, when it failed, decided to sell the license of Imbarchino to other people. This was in 2012. And that other group managed Imbarchino until 2016, and then there was the new "gara". And so I had that previous experience. At that time I was very, very young, so I was not part of the management, but I could feel the atmosphere of this space, and it was a very nice group. And with that group we decided to found a new organization that was called "Articolo 4 Cooperativa", and started a new project that was consisting in managing different activities in town. There was a bakery, a restaurant, an ice cream shop.
  - **Z:** Like a network of places.
- LR: Exactly. In that project I took part in the management, I was on the board, and had the chance to see how not to run a project that failed after three or four years. So the values and the idea behind the project was very interesting and innovative, but the management and the business economic part was not well done, there was not a clear idea of how to handle. And also the entire management of the project has a lot of problems and lacks. And so it was a very nice experience for me, because I learned a lot from these errors, and tried not to bring it in Imbarchino. Actually, today I think that Imbarchino works very very well about the business management, especially recently in the last year. Maybe it's too good, now the people are starting to feel, "Ah, okay, we are good in doing business, we are recognized as professionals, let's earn money and..."

- **Z:** Where do you think that comes from (the business management)? Do you think it has to do with you (as a group) collaborating with multiple organizations that are aligned in this common goal?
- LR: I think that these results come from the fact that the project was really addressing a common issue. And it was also guite brave, because it was not easy to re-open this space, a lot of stuff about regulations and problems to be solved. Basically, the project was answering to a need of the local community in a way that was totally addressed to solve that problem, and not just to run another business. At the same time. I think we were very careful about creating a good offer, and we did it together with a lot of different organizations. So, yes, what you said is another pillar. So, Imbarchino is not one organization that is working to address a need of the community, but as a network approach. So, starting from the cultural programming, artistic programming, to also other parts of the offer of Imbarchino, it is co-produced with other groups. In this network, there are different kinds of entities, so there are other cultural organizations, there are collectives, informal groups of people, and also citizens. Also, another very important part in the success of the project was the fact that there were at least two very strong communities leading the process since the very beginning. One was Radio Banda Larga group, so all the people involved in the community radio project. And the other was the people that joined the crowdfunding campaign, that was 623 citizens. So, these two groups were very important in the very beginning start-up of the project.



Imbarchino, 1st of May →
Around 3000 in attendance
Author unknown, 2019



- **Z:** Do you think the collaboration and involvement of all the stakeholders were effectively ensured? When was the local community made aware of this project and did they have any suggestions? Were these suggestions taken into consideration?
- LR: I have to say, no. We had this idea of engaging a lot of people and organizations, and we did it somehow but it was a big mess. Now it's more organized and clear, but at the beginning all of this involvement was very, very chaotic.
  - **Z:** Was it more process-oriented in the beginning?
- LR: Yes, it was very practical because also at the very beginning, we were a few people. When we were in the phase of "progettazione" it was very clear but when we started we were always here, inside, trying to find a way to keep the place open every day. And for three to four years, we were always here. So this engagement was very physical and instinctive. In the end, this engagement was like, if you come here and you meet us, then you start to do things. But it was not so open and clear and transparent as we would've liked it to be in the beginning. Then it was changed because the people who were more interested in affectively use the space, live the space, organize things inside the space had the opportunity. They had to come here and say "Hey!".
  - **Z:** But were you making any "Call to Actions" to make sure actors from outside your organization got involved or that started in the later phases?
- **LR:** Once before the project started and then lately, after three, four years, we started to open the organization and be more open to everybody and communicate in a wider way.

- **Z:** Would you essentially describe this project as a "co-design" project with involvement from different actors?
- LR: It was a co-design project with very small group of people that was at the core of the management of everything. And a lot of organizations, citizens, public administrations, foundations etc. giving their input inside this small group. Now it's changing. Now the governance and the management of the project is changing. Also because, for that group it worked fine (at the time) but it was something like "mission impossible" because of time. We did it, but I don't know, it was a very particular condition. Also COVID influenced this, because after 6 months we were open the pandemic started so we couldn't open and enlarge the group the way we wanted to. So for a couple of years it was those wild, strange times and this core group remained the same. Then after COVID, the group became bigger, now there are 40 people working at Imbarchino and since some months the need of finding a way to organize all these different groups working inside Imbarchino is clear.
  - **Z:** So as time goes by, the input and the value of external contributors is becoming more clear?
- **LR:** Yes, in the beginning it was super important as support and as input, but in practice, it is more clear and affected, the participation of different contributors.



## 3.2.2 ImbarchinoSpace+ Sustainability

Imbarchino's self-proclaimed mission is to care for spaces, occupy them, live in them and make them come alive, creating new mediums for social and cultural actions and opportunities for active citizenship (Imbarchino, 2022).

Driven by the belief that open, accessible and inclusives places in the city significantly improve the social fabric and foster the well-being of its citizens, they are co-creating a model of an open and sustainable city by re-generating its place-based assets and re-establishing them as places of socialization, culture and integration.

Their aim is to make Imbarchino a commons in the urban and social fabric of the city, accessible by everyone and serving as a reference point for both the citizens and visitors alike.

- **Z:** As social actors with no technical design background, why was it important for you to activate a physical place for the cultivation of cultural and sustainable goals and values?
- LR: We had this need and feeling that it was important to be in a physical space since the very beginning. Banda Larga was born in 2012 inside Imbarchino and then lost it. So we were missing a place six months after we had started. And we started to look for places around the city. So RBL, was hosted by 10 different places in two or three years, then found a new base in Via Baltea, in Barriera di Milano.
  - **Z:** But that was before the re-opening of Imbarchino?
- LR: Yes, that was before the reopening of Imbarchino. And now, actually, that organization, Banda Larga, has two houses. One is Imbarchino and the other is Via Baltea. So I can not imagine an organization without a place. So it's hard to me to imagine an alternative without a place, physical or virtual.



← "Via Baltea 3" Community Hub torinocronaca.it

### The Space Overview (Imbarchino, 2022)

Total Area: 805 m<sup>2</sup>

distributed over three

descending levels towards the river, nearly touching the water.

Total Built Area: 177 m<sup>2</sup>

within two inter-connected

buildings.

First Building: 1F Bar, Kitchen, Radio Booth

GF WC, Storage, Dressing Room

**Second Building** 

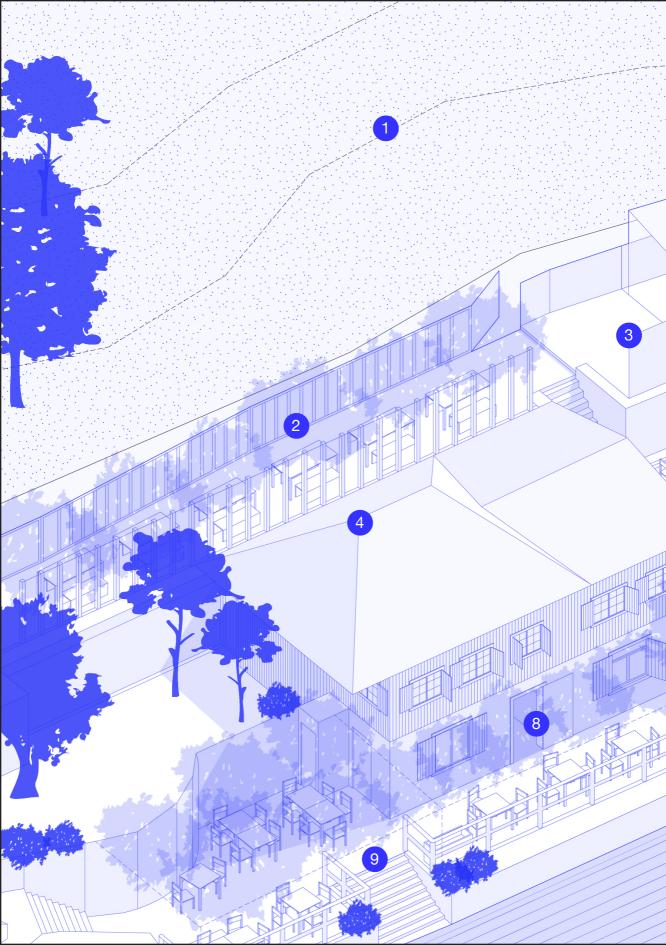
(Sala Remi): 45 m<sup>2</sup>

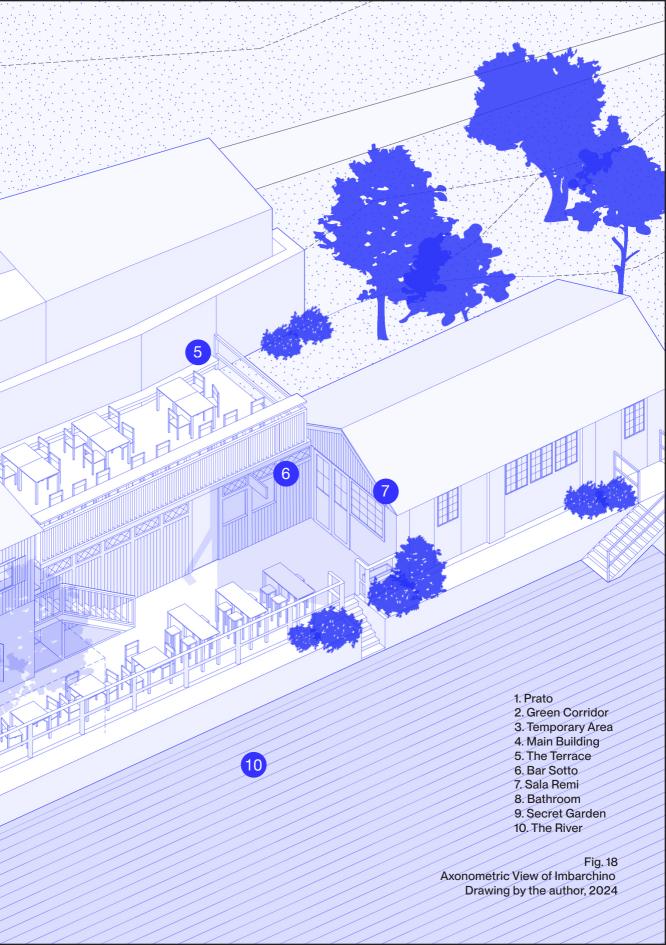
Renovated in 2020

Study Room / Event Space

Includes: Bar Sotto

Cost of the Intervention: 326.000 € (since 2019)





- **Z:** What were your priorities with the design intervention? Was this an open-ended or pre-determined process? If so, how were the goals identified and designed? Who identified them?
- LR: Okay. So, at the beginning, we identified a couple of pillars that were for us important to be fixed from the very beginning. And these two pillars were the bar and the radio. So we identified where to put those two things inside the space and designed that space together with a "geometra" that was taking care of all the process of renovation. And a design studio that is "Lamatilde". And we designed the radio booth, that is a space that had to be acoustically separated from the rest of the area. But at the same time, that was visible and in touch with the people. Actually, we had this need since a long time because until that moment, we never had our own space. So we were hosted by other spaces. And finally, we had the chance to develop a space that was based on that activity. And also, what we call Sala Remi, so the other indoor building. So we designed the space in a way that it was possible to run the bar and to have events inside. For the rest, it was a process that lasted three years.



← The renovation works inside (1F) Elite Ecobuilding elite-ecobuilding.it



The radio booth
 Photo by Lorenzo Ubertalli, 2023

#### 2019 2020 2021 2022

Overall area of the space regenerared (/360m²):	310 m <sup>2</sup>	360 m²	360 m²	360 m²
Investment in the place (€):	152K	144K	30K	34K
Days open without obligation to consume or membership (/365):	156	239	355	355

<sup>↑</sup> Fig. 19 Statistic data regarding the spaces Drawing by the author, (Imbarchino, 2022)

- **Z:** When you were working on the design intervention, did you also take part in the process along with the experts?
- LR: We did it ourselves. It was a "DIY" approach inside the group. In particular, it was at the beginning me and Stefania (Vulpi) working on it. Stefania is a designer. When you asked me before if there was a technical designer (in the team), she was more of an expert with other kinds of design rather than designing spaces. But she had experience in that. And I had the experience of being in this place and other cultural centers. So we did it ourselves mostly. Then, throughout time, other people started to join this group that now we call "Spazi". That is one of the groups that is taking care of the place.
  - Z: How is this group made up? What is the dynamic like?
- **LR:** From time to time, there were some trainees or volunteers that joined this group. But most of the work and thinking was made by people working for our group. And without the help of external (contributors).
  - **Z:** Were there some place-based assets that you utilized for the process? Like the existing infrastructure? Maybe the traditions, the existing practices and the influence of the previous communities?
- LR: Yes, it was in continuity with the former use of the space. We didn't change a lot. Also because it is not possible. Because we are in a place where you cannot build anything and change anything. Because in this place, there is the office of the superintendency, that is taking care of this area. And at the same time, we are on a risk of flood. And so you can not build anything new. If you put these two things together, you can do very, very little. You can work on the furniture, but not on the structure. The structure has to remain what it is.



The renovation works of the terrace (1F)
Elite Ecobuilding
elite-ecobuilding.it

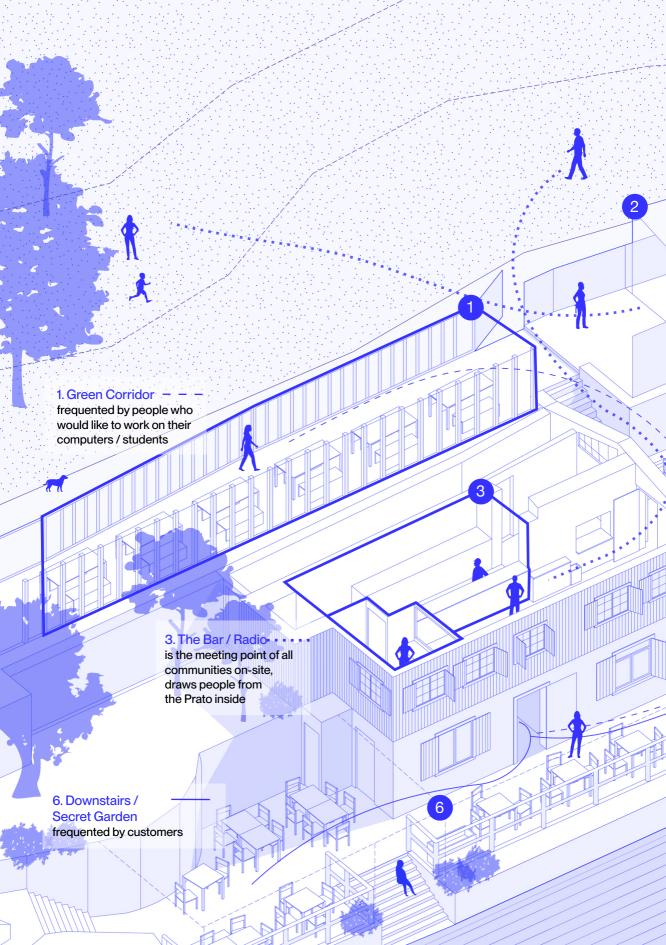


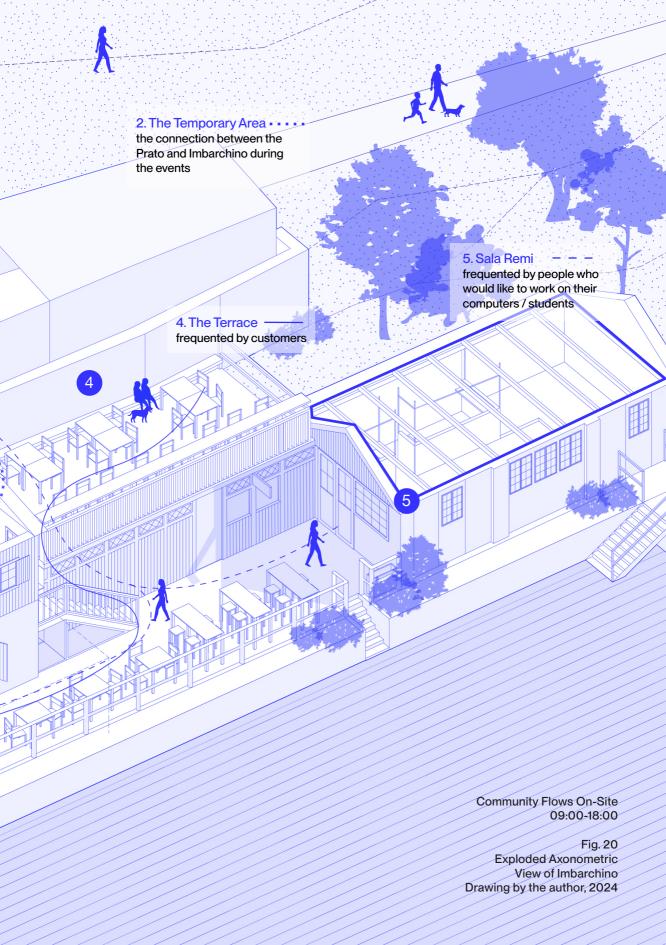
The Imbarchino Team → painting the details of the structure (GF)
Corriere Della Sera
2019
torino.corriere.it

- LR: (continuing from before, talking about the space)
  There is another part that is temporary. So, everything is temporary, but this is particular. At the entrance on the left, there is this area that was also place of an intervention by a group of students of Politecnico di Torino, that together with "Orizzontale" made an intervention in 2019, creating a structure that was aimed at both free usage of the citizens and stage for music events. And that part every year is changing. This structure lasted for three years, then we removed it.
  - **Z**: Why?
- LR: It was not made to last long. It was a temporary intervention. And so we re-designed it on our own. But, yeah, it's a part that is both free space at the entrance, so it's something like in between Imbarchino and the park. And so you can feel free to use it as you want, apart from the moment where we have artistic programming there. And then it becomes a stage.
  - **Z:** You don't necessarily have any design elements in the Prato, but you still have such a strong physical and "sensed" presence there. I'm curious whether you have the opportunity to build there, or is it out of limits for you?
- LR: We wanted to co-design that part with other citizens and organizations, with Patti di Collaborazione (Pacts of Collaboration). We had the first couple of brainstorming meetings, but then the project was blocked because the city was not interested in creating Patto di Collaborazione in that area. So we were stopped.

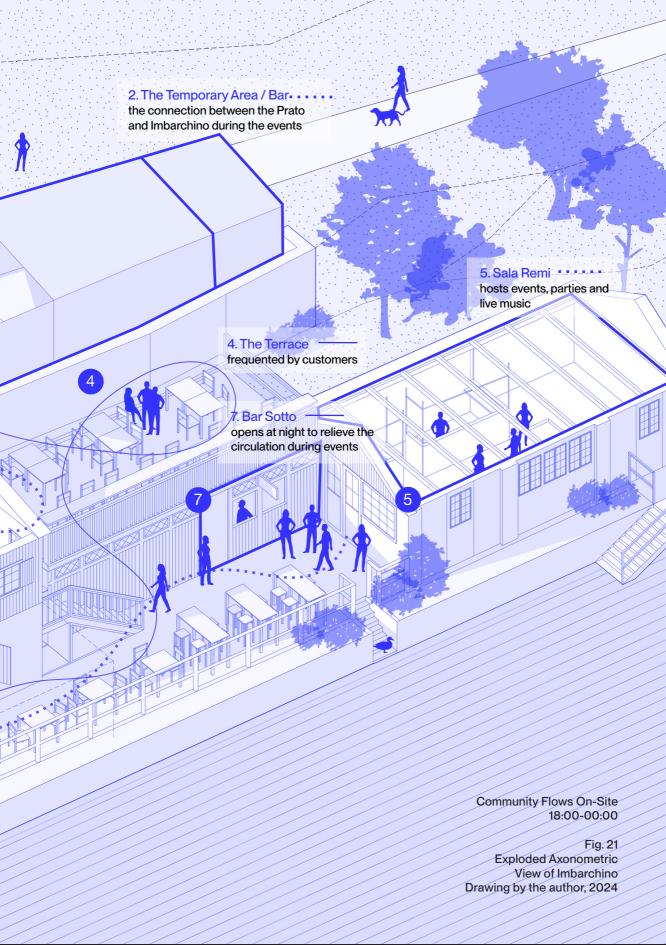
Now, since more or less one year and a half, we arrived to define how to use the different spaces. But in between, it was a process of constant change. So I think it was something like an agile way to work. **Because we were opening the space, looking at the people, watching people, observing how the people were using the space.** We tested different kinds of serving at the tables. Then saw that things were changing, the way people were behaving in the space. And we didn't like it, so we removed it. We were, I think, several times close to the limit when the people got crazy. Because they don't understand how it works and it changes all the time. So we spent a lot of time thinking about **how to communicate, how to use the space without being too much controlling.** But at the same time, to put some clear and basic rules about the use of the different spaces. It was designed in the years. Also, COVID influenced the time we spent to arrive at this point. Because during those two years, we had to change and review a lot of things.











- **Z:** How do these elements shape the use and circulation of the place and which communities benefit from them? Do you find that different groups are coming and going throughout the day? Is there a constant presence? How does that work?
- LR: They are melting all the day. It also depends on the season a bit. But the way we are dividing the use of the different spaces today is the result of something in between the natural way that people are using the space and a little bit of forcing by the management group to make it sustainable economically-wise. It's a mix of the two, and it was a process that lasted for three years, so it arrived to a balance. In this moment, for example, we are using a computer, and it would not be allowed, theoretically, in this space. There is this study-free table. If you want to use your computer or work, you have to go upstairs.
  - **Z:** But this is a special circumstance. (I took my role as an interviewer a bit too seriously)
- **LR:** If in this moment there would be other people that want to use this space, probably one of my colleagues would say, "Please go to another part of the space". But if there is nobody, you are not forced to go away.



 Communication tools on site: "This table is not a study area" Photo by the author, 2024





 Upstairs, study tables, "The Green Corridor" Photo by the author, 2024

**Z:** Are you guys changing the spatial layout and design elements of the space along with the changing needs of individuals and communities? Are you always improving things based on the feedback you get?

LR: Yes, we are. In the first years, also thanks to the pandemic, it was more continuous. As I already said, sometimes it was also a little bit difficult for the people to come here because every time they found new rules. sometimes you order with WhatsApp, and next time you have to go to the desk, and maybe you were used to study in a certain area, and they tell you that, "We think that it's better to do this kind of activity in another space". Then sometimes you do it anyway and nobody tells you anything, and the next time there is somebody that says something. But it's a process, and I think we are not super good in finding good solutions because we always fail and we have to find a new one, but once again, if it's clear that we are here to manage the space and find a good solution and we are able to explain to the people that are using the space, working for the organization or using the space as a customer or study room, it's a process. There are moments in which I think in the end that the good thing is to have moment of convergence in which you test a way to handle the space, then you do it for a time that you need to understand how is it working and to get feedbacks, and then once again, you modify, trying to modify not too much, otherwise, the people go crazy.

- **Z:** So how did you establish some of the main spaces and the purposes that they are going to hold? Without even trying some of these, let's say, combinations of different uses, what made you establish the different areas?
- LR: It starts from an observation of what is happening. We came into Imbarchino. We knew that we wanted it to be a bar, a radio studio, a study room, and event space. So we look at the space and we think, "Okay, we could handle the space in this way, let's open it". And the people come in, start using the spaces, and you observe how they are dealing with the space, which issues you are facing to run these activities smoothly, collect observations, feelings and feedbacks, and put them together and say, "Okay, let's change it". For example, we noticed that if we don't define areas where you can study and areas where you can stay together, drink, and enjoy your time with other people, it is strange and you risk to lose a part of the audience. For example, if you want to take a beer in the park and it's Saturday afternoon and you arrive in a space where all the tables are with people with computers, you think, "Maybe I will go to another place". For example, the two areas that are now used as a study room from 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. are the more quiet and also where there is less traffic. For example, downstairs, also people who want to use the space as customers usually want to stay close to the water. And also there is the toilets there, so a lot of people is going up and down and it would not be the best place to study. There is guiet, and you can go there and stay for a long time without anybody annoying you.
  - **Z:** So essentially, the placement of the elements and the circulation of the space can sustain a community on-site? For example, if I stay here studying, maybe I can just stay there, let's say until 6 p.m., without feeling the need to move to another place.
- LR: It is not perfect, because if you have to handle this complexity and there are different needs, sometimes there are also conflicts. So, for example, there are some students that still want to stay in a place we are not thinking it's the best place to stay, and we have to talk with them. And also it's not easy, there are 40 people working inside Imbarchino, and so it's not easy that everybody has the capacity to speak with the people and make a clear understanding of why we want them to use a certain area and not another one.





























- Z: I have two questions related to what you just told me, when you say you knew that you wanted Imbarchino to be a place for students and the radio, was it because of your stakeholders Banda Larga and AEGEE? And regarding this feedback, how do you receive it? What's that process like?
- LR: Okay. We answered to a call of the city, that wanted this space to be a space for youngsters, for students. So that was the need coming from the municipality that is the owner of the space. It was in continuity with how it was before. And also there was a campaign, I also joined that campaign, that was "Salviamo l'Imbarchino" in 2013. There was a campaign, because in a lot of places, there was this fear that Valentino would change and there would be new destination of the space, more restaurants, cocktail bar, and less music, gathering places, easy spaces. And so there was a campaign from the citizens, "Okay, Imbarchino will have a new management, but let's keep it as it is". So the municipality said, "Okay, we want this place to have this kind of destination". (continuing)

✓ "Salviamo l'Imbarchino" Campaign La Repubblica, 2012 torino.repubblica.it



Fig. 22 Survey Data Drawing by the author (Imbarchino, 2022)

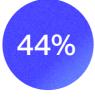
LR: Starting from this, there was a group, I wasn't part of that group in that moment, that decided to find the good organizations to create a common project to solve this need. So together they put Banda Larga for the engagement of young people, radio, music; AEGEE Torino for the engagement of students and foreign students. Amici dell'Imbarchino was part of a group of people that was also managing in that time the cooperative, Articolo 4 Cooperativa. Then, in the while of the discussion with the municipality about starting this project, this cooperative closed, and then Va Lentino was born. At the beginning, they thought it would be Articolo 4 to manage the workers and the bar.

So basically there is this idea of co-management of a space with different organizations, finding a way to work together to offer this kind of proposal to the people. Speaking with the leaders of the different organizations, creating a team, that basically has the mandate from the different organization to work on this project. And then this team, in the different times, decides how to go on. So sometimes this team needs to ask the different organizations, "Okay, is it okay to do it this way? Is it okay to give feedbacks of new guidelines to work on the projects?". Sometimes we ask the citizens, so survey. We did three surveys since 2019 and now to say, "Okay, how is it working, is it okay like this or what is not working fine for you?".

- And are the results satisfactory for you? Z:
- LR: Yes, they are. Also, last survey we did had a lot of answers, more than 1000 answers from citizens. And now we are going to launch a new one with a new focus that is on the Parco of Valentino and not only in Imbarchino, since the park is also changing.

#### Thanks to Imbarchino, based on 1040 responses\*

\*Survey: "Imbarchino Chiede Cose" 01.10 - 31.12.2022 (Imbarchino, 2022)



feel safer at night in the park



frequent the park more



frequent the park more during winter



















### **Environmental Values**

According to their Social Impact Report (Imbarchino, 2022), the vision for the place oversees a holistic approach in consideration of both human and non-human actors, emphasizing the need for care and attention to reduce negative impacts while promoting ecological practices and lifestyles. Through this vision is the goal of the promotion of Imbarchino as a commons, increasing the livability of the space and area even during the less frequented times of the year, for which they have remained open almost all year round, with constant cultural and social programming. This has resulted in the increased activity and the change in the perception of the park.

Additionally, they aim to promote the re-generation and transformation of the environments, establishing Imbarchino a place focused on environmental sustainability. This includes promoting values, actions, and management policies oriented towards ecology and respect for the environment.

Furthermore, in 2022 they have allocated part of their budget for the installation of a photovoltaic system, opening an unused area of the green space to the public, renovating the outer gate, and opening a kiosk. However, all these initiatives have been blocked at the preliminary stage by the city and the superintendence.

↓ Fig. 23
Environmental Data
(Imbarchino, 2022)



plastic-free in 2022 with the exclusion of product packaging









spent on local supplies + 7/12 suppliers want to co-develop social and environmental impact goals



# 3.2.3 Imbarchino Community

Through Imbarchino's cultural activation model, the citizens become the co-creators and co-producers of culture. Imbarchino believes that engaging in cultural production helps individuals better understand themselves, connect and build relationships based on their passions, foster new skills, and contribute to making their city lively and attractive, resulting in a strengthened social fabric. To this end, the space becomes a medium, offering a platform and the tools to citizens for the co-creation of culture, engaging with a creative community and finding a collaborator in the team and its extended network to co-design and implement various initiatives (Imbarchino, 2022).

- **Z:** In your experience, what are the elements that go into creating a place for communities and individuals, and how do you think the physical manifestation of Imbarkino is proposing alternative solutions to societal issues?
- LR: I think maybe the answer for both questions is to find a way, and it is a big challenge, to find the synergy between the need of the community, and the need of the individuals. Individuals are customers and the audience, workers, radio makers, so you have a group of people that in common has needs, and you have individual needs. And find a way to propose an alternative means to find new rules to make all these needs fit together well. And doing this means an entire life of work, and it never ends because the environment is always changing, the need of the people is always changing, and so managing a place and managing an organization and different organizations means to constantly have a clear understanding of these needs and find the best solution you can find to make it work fine together.
  - **Z:** During this process, you have also become the co-designers and co-producers of social and the urban fabric of the city. How do you think the physical and cultural presence of Imbarchino sustains these values and triggers active citizenship?
- LR: So I think that the main effect it has is to, and maybe you can say if this is true or not, but that if you look at this place and the group of people that started it again, you think, "Okay, it is possible to run a project that is answering to a need of the community, that is making an impact on the society and it works. They are working there, they get the salary, so it is possible to work for an alternative way of working". Is it true? Did you feel this thing coming to Imbarchino? (Now Lorenzo is interviewing me)
  - Z: I think that it's essentially a bottom-up approach that is coming from social actors and very strong cultural associations who have the right motivations to do this. You are activating a place to address problems but you are also putting some "sense" into it. And throughout this process, you're trying to include a lot of people in this process and you're actually considering their input and some of these ideas even get implemented.

- **Z:** For example, the Open Call you did, it's taking form in events and that essentially contributes to a new community that's emerging. So I think all in all, your management takes these values into consideration. I mean, not to speak on your behalf, but this is how I see it. (after delivering an entire monologue)
- LR: Cool, I'm happy to hear this. And recently, a nice experimentation is "Limo". That, well, basically, when we were watching how the RBL model of engagement was working very well with people that like music. But at the same time, we felt that there was the opportunity to also to engage other group that has different interests, not just music. And so Limo, that was co-designed with a group of people, young people that were taking part in the space as volunteers the year before. With them, we co-designed a call to action to identify other groups that were interested in using the space to gather different communities. And that call got a lot of answers and some groups are starting to meet Team Imbarchino and to develop new activities and share knowledge about other interesting and relevant aspects of the contemporary society.

Through this model the community engages in co-design and co-production, actively creating and promoting cultural and social values and practices. By reaching new audiences, it expands the cultural reach and fosters collaboration and sense of belonging, drawing more people to take part in these initiatives.

Furthermore, the community utilizes place-based assets and cultural benefits provided by Imbarchino and its network, transforming its community into active cultural producers and contributors, sustaining place-based engagement in the process (Imbarchino, 2022).

↑ Fig. 24
Cultural
Activation Model
Drawing by the
author, adapted from
(Imbarchino, 2022)





### **Network and Events**

Imbarchino's network operates in the public space alongsize various organizations, communities and citizens. Each organization that is participating in the management of Imbarchino is part of a network of other realities and communities, resulting in a constant flow of resources and knowledge, connecting the "local" with the "global". This network continues to evolve, involving a large number of individual actors and informal groups (Imbarchino, 2022).

# Association of Social Promotion

Banda Larga, as a representative of Imbarchino, is part of several entities, including: Dire Fare Baciare, involving youth engagement centers in Turin; Trans Europe Halles, a European network of over 120 cultural centers, and part of the community of the SPACE grant by Fondazione Compagnia di San Paolo.

Furthermore, Banda Larga as RBL Torino, is among the founders of the international network of Radio Banda Larga, uniting the hubs in Berlin, Barcelona and Istanbul.

## Association of Social Promotion

Amici dell'Imbarchino is part of the 365° San Salvario network, which includes various organizations and social and cultural spaces in the 8th District of Turin.

#### Voluntary Association

AEGEE-Torino is a part of the European network Association des États Généraux des Étudiants de l'Europe (AEGEE-Europe), also known as the European Students Forum, among the biggest interdisciplinary student associations in Europe. The resulting cultural programming at Imbarchino is the due to the collaborative work between Banda Larga and Va Lentino with cultural organizations, individuals and communities, who are using the resources provided to them to create a new formats that are capable of engaging a wide range of audiences.

#### Va Lentino: Benefit Society

One of the objectives identified in their Social Impact Report (Imbarchino, 2022) was to establish Imbarchino as a catalyst in the transformation of Turin into a culturally dynamic city. This includes co-designing cultural initiatives with citizens, artists, collectives, and cultural organizations; contributing to individual empowerment and the acquisition of new skills; promoting access to culture; and cultivating contemporary cultural expressions. To achieve this, they have collaborated with over 120 non-professionals from both local and international networks for the realization of free and accessible events, cultural programming, radio shows, and more, helping these groups reach new audiences.

↓ Fig. 25
Events Data
Drawing by the author,
(Imbarchino, 2022)



## The RBL Model of Place-Based Engagement

The radio is one of the main pillars of Imbarchino, engaging dozens of people weekly in producing radio programs that are broadcasted internationally and also within the Imbarchino spaces, accompanying and enriching its daily life and influencing the circulation and on-site engagement.

During the lockdown, due to the health emergency, cultural programming shifted online. Through this collaboration with Banda Larga, Imbarchino solidified its role as a reference point for Turin's creative community by continuing to stream shows and performances, during a very critical time in the world. This initiative provided work in the artistic sector, one of the most affected by the crisis (Imbarchino, 2022).

Though music is one of the main elements that define the space, events are not limited to it. While the radio model of engagement has a uniting force within the community, Imbarchino has hosted various experimental events over the years, becoming a place where diverse and innovative formats can thrive.



Lorenzo in the booth for Imbarchino's 3rd Birthday
 Photo by Analia Piacentini, 2022

















- **Z:** Is community engagement a crucial element of Imbarchino? Do you think the results would be the same without the engagement from the community? How does Imbarchino sustain this community and placebased engagement?
- LR: Okay, so the answer is yes. I think that the success of the entire "impresa" is a lot because of the engagement of communities. As I told you from the very beginning, there were two communities, the supporter of the crowdfunding and the Banda Larga communities. Then there were the students and groups of people with common interests that found a place here for community.
  - **Z:** Do you find that this community grew and resulted in a completely new one?
- LR: It is melting, but I would say no. Still, there are different groups inside. Recently, with Limo, this call to action to organize new events for communities was a way to say, because we were observing, "Okay, there are new groups inside of Imbarchino, not only the radio one, not only the people that at the beginning wanted Imbarchino to re-open, but there are new groups that are using the space. How can we give space to them and to work as a team to find a way to give them benefit from the use of this space?". And so the Limo call was this, and it came out with using the space to plant plants, using the space to discuss about queer questions, use the space for new reasons and formats. And so in this moment, I think that it's the end of the first cycle. Then you can not always be open to include, otherwise your organism breaks. But you have to observe and to have moments when you open the space and the organization to newcomers, to new urgencies, new needs. I was thinking now, thanks to your question, that it would be nice to organize also part of our "Bilancio Sociale" to make the community understand about economics, how much of the income we have are invested to benefit the community and not just the organization.

#### Z: Because that's how you sustain the cultural events, right?

LR: For example, the radio, the cultural events, but also the way you use the space for certain reasons and not just to earn money. But also it's fundamental to earn money, but then the fact is "how" you use that money.

#### In 2022 Imbarchino has,

Objectives:

- → Foster local economic development
- → Stimulate young people to stay in Turin
- → Attract economic resources to the area

Generated through the activity of the administration:

#### 1.7 Million €

Invested in cultural programming:

102K €

Attracted investment in the space:

45K €

from foundations and the City of Turin

#### Objectives:

- Create job opportunities
- Create a work environment of well-being
- Foster pathways to growth

#### **Employed:**

### 61 employees working in 6 teams



## 3.2.4 Imbarchino Imbarchino, Now

Today, Imbarchino is a hybrid space offering something for everyone, from every background and age. Since its re-opening, thanks to the group of social actors and networks involved, it has re-established itself as a landmark, a place for meeting and interaction, and a center for bottom-up social and cultural production.

It is a diverse ecosystem, made up of the complex interactions of its spaces, people and the ecological flows of its nature. It is defined as a regenerative force for the Park and the local community, the Turinese cultural system, for its stakeholders and the territory at large (Imbarchino, 2022).

The re-opening of Imbarchino and its physical and symbolic presence in the park has led to an increase in the attendance in the area, a part that was previously under-utilized due to the period which saw the closing of most of the venues in the vicinity, drastically changing the social fabric of the area.

Fig. 27 →
Statistic data regarding
the frequentation
Drawing by the author,
Survey: "Imbarchino
Chiede Cose",
(Imbarchino, 2022)

In 2022, they have calculated a total of 198.000 visits made up of:

62%	audience of the administration of the place
20%	audience of the cultural programming
8%	RBL Community of radio makers and volunteers
3%	students and workers
4%	tourists

Among which:

40%	doesn't live in Turin
80%	doesn't live close to Imbarchino or the area







### What's Next in the Future?

The first couple of years of Imbarchino's management has overseen the co-managing entities in collaboration with both local and international networks to develop complex, large-scale projects. Their efforts were consciously directed toward enhancing and promoting cultural access, fostering a sense of community and engagement and urban regeneration.

This experience, combined with the desire for further growth, has emphasized the need to strengthen the current governance model and to involve new individuals in leadership roles, starting from 2022. This "small, local, open and connected" approach aims to improve the management of the increasing complexity of the system and generate new sustainable values (Imbarchino, 2022).

To this end, they are planning to invest in the professional development of their team to ensure the sustainability of their activities, enhance the entity's professional appeal, improve organizational efficiency, resulting in greater and higher-quality impacts. Key future objectives include stabilizing and satisfying the central professional figures in our activities, with corresponding contractual advancements. And establishing a sustainable commercial activity that, once balanced annually, can allow for the team to initiate new activities, contributing to the growth of the project and the community's well-being.

Furthermore, in the future, they aim to increase active participation in the European networks of Trans Europe Halles and RBL Cosmos. This includes working in transnational teams and launching mobility projects focused on cultural centers, programming, and cultural production.

 ↓ Open Call, July 2024 Social Communication for "Common Grounds", Imbarchino's new project focusing on people who are working in cultural spaces (@imbarchinovalentino)



- **Z:** What are the lessons that you've learned from this project that translates into Imbarchino's current/future projects? Do you think, "Okay, we did this experiment here with Imbarchino, it went well, let's take it and apply it in another context". Do you think it's that easy or do you have to consider place-based assets, the existing communities, the needs of a different physical space? Can you tell me a bit about that?
- LR: It's super difficult, but yes, I'm sure that Imbarchino has the potential now to better understand and better define this new model of co-management of space and to make an "impresa" for the common good. And it's a little but big step because everything was very spontaneous. Now if you want to go over, you have to have a clear idea and design of how it works. The challenge now is to do this, so to clearly define and understand how this co-management is working about the organization, about the governance. And at the same time look to find new synergies with other groups of people in new spaces. And so we as a group evolve and take over new spaces and we as a group develop a clear methodology about how to co-manage space and tell other people that want to do this how to do it or share our experience because then every group has to find its own way, but it's more about inspiration. And I think if this happens, this experience can be generative and bring a wider alternative in our society. Otherwise, if we fail in this, we will have a nice space that is Imbarchino for the time it lasts.
  - **Z:** Are you currently looking into any spaces that you want to expand to?
- LR: Yes, we are. In particular, there is a clear need from the groups that are inside Imbarchino about the music because the music movement inside Imbarchino grow, grow, grow and now it's bigger than the space. And so we can no longer make it grow and also we are a little bit over for what we can do inside this space. And so that is the main need of the group inside Imbarchino. We started with a survey with what we call Sotto Bosco Musicale Torinese. There were 22 organizations or informal group collectives that answered to this and with an open question of "What is missing in town?", 19 out of 22 said that there is a need for new places for music, for underground music and so that is the main focus for a new place.

- **Z:** And finally, in your opinion, which elements are key to "activating" places?
- LR: I think it's a more existential answer that is, to be awake. If you are awake and you look at the reality, at the needs of the people and your needs, and you move, and your movement as a person and as a group is an answer to this observation, that you have to have your eye open for real. If you do that, then the rest is naturally spontaneous. So it's like the ability to understand the needs of different people and have the knowledge and, let's say, the experience to be able to provide it for them.

#### (continuing)

Yeah, it's super simple in the end. But, you know, if everybody would do this, we would be in a different world. So actually it's not so easy. And this is also one thing I was reflecting about. Maybe one of the aims of every organization in the world should be to answer to this need, that is to make the people awake. Then if they start to be awake, then they will find their way to act. And so you don't have to teach them, everybody in the world, how to work, how to do it. Just to take them away from these dark and sleepy times.



The team working on →
the final touches of the
place, 4 days before
the re-opening
Corriere Della Sera
2019
torino.corriere.it

# Precc

# olinear Park

The data presented in this case study has been sourced from multiple channels, including Stratosferica's social network platforms, project communication materials and its associated statistical data, as well as empirical data gathered through direct observations and interviews\* with Luca Ballarini, founder and director of Stratosferica, Marta Doria, graphic designer and project manager at Stratosferica, Gian Luca Mazza, freelance architect and project manager at Stratosferica.

\*For the sake of readability and to avoid repetition, the interviews have been edited to integrate smoothly into the narrative.

(torinostratosferica.it)
@stratosferica\_org\_

## Case Study ID Card



What: Place-making and activation project of an

abandoned tram line.

Where: "Precollina" Neighborhood, Turin, Italy

When: 2020-2023 Actors: Stratosferica

Citizens

Role of the Municipality: Enabler

Tools + Processes: Municipality Concession

Crowdfunding

Co-Design Processes

Call to Actions

Workshops Provisioning



# 3.3.1 Precollinear Park Co-Designing the Process

Precollinear Park is the first place-making initiative by the Turin-based collective Stratosferica, Urban Knowledge & Agency.

Born in June 2020, the project emerged as a response to the sociocultural climate of the time, with the goal of re-activating a previously abandoned and neglected space and returning it to the community. The initiative aimed to re-connect the four neighborhoods in Turin - Madonna del Pilone, Borgo Po, Vanchiglia, and Vanchiglietta - by emphasizing the care of public spaces, promoting outdoor activities during the lockdown period, and fostering a sense of belonging and community.

During its lifetime, Precollinear Park has had a significant impact, unlocking the potential of a space that went unnoticed by people, and paving the way for many more (Stratosferica, 2021).

### A Vision of a More "Stratospheric" Turin

Stratosferica is a collective initiative focused on reimagining the city through powerful imagery that enhances its potential and elevates its international profile, with their activities revolving around crafting visions of the future of the city and its people, places, activities, services, culture and perception.

2016 Non-Profit Cultural Organization Since 2014, they have gathered ideas and visions for the city through the engagement of individuals and organizations based in Turin through "Visioning Sessions". In 2016, Stratosferica officially became a non-profit cultural organization, with a mission to further promote city imaging and address the perceived shortcomings of the city.

Today, Stratosferica serves as a creative platform, fostering collective action, experimentation and research, both within local and international networks. Collaborations include individuals, professionals, associations, festivals, public and private organizations, expanding and strengthening these networks in the process.

Their projects operate within the urban and social fabric, encompassing architecture and urban design with attention to culture, creativity and innovation. Simultaneously, Stratosferica is a communication and branding project where names and claims play a crucial role.

Stratosferica follows a multi-disciplinary and experimental methodology. Their "Visioning Sessions" are a series of collective workshops joined by representatives from diverse contemporary cultures, brainstorming and analyzing imaginative scenarios. Furthermore, Stratosferica annually organizes "Utopian Hours", the international festival of city-making. This exploration is further enriched through discussions with notable figures who join them in the festival.

In 2019, during the third edition of Utopian Hours, Stratosferica curated the exhibition "Placemaking in Turin: Five Ideas for Five Different Neighborhoods." Among these five proposals was Precollinear Park (Torino Stratosferica, 2021).

## "Precol-Linear Park"

#### Il parco che fa pendenza

"For years, the tram has not passed by, and the Corso Gabetti headquarters has become a gently sloping green strip beloved by dogs and their companions. Everything is already in place: it would only take a few interventions to transform it into a true linear park, from Piazza Borromini to Piazza Hermada. An entrance portal, remove the barriers to create a new small square in the middle of the green strip (at the intersection with Piazza Gozzano and Via Moncalvo), perhaps a café that would take advantage of the now unused shelters: the Borgo Po and "Mad Pil" neighborhoods would have the first urban park in Turin's precollina (pre-hill)".\*

An idea by: Luca Ballarini

Translated from the original Italian description\*

← The original description of the project during the exhibiton for Utopian Hours, 2019 utopianhours.it

- **Z:** Can you tell me around when the idea for Precollinear Park was formed and who initiated the project, and what was the problem or need that was being addressed with this project?
- So actually, the project was first thought of, I think, around 2017-18 as an LB: idea. And it was more an idea I had, and it was related to the fact that I was already living in the area, and so this void was in front of my eyes. And this idea of doing something in that green stripe was in my head for some time. And then in 2019, for Utopian Hours, we wanted to try and do some place-making proposals. So the idea was to do, again, a Visioning Session with more people from the creative and cultural field coming into our office and brainstorming about the potential of some places to do a place-making project. And I remember that there was not such a deep knowledge of specific places in the audience, if you asked them specifically about something in a specific place, they were like, "I don't know". So it was not easy on that occasion to come up with ideas. And so I remember clearly saying, "Okay, so I break the ice, and I suggest one thing that's been in my mind for a while now, and it's this: Corso Gabetti, going down, you know, the tram is not there anymore, etc.". It was like a conversation starter. So people started to realize, "Okay, now I see what you mean", these sort of abandoned/neglected spaces that could be turned into something else.
  - **Z:** You brought it to people's attention.
- LB: Exactly. And it was also like saying, "Okay, I also have a personal suggestion", which is, of course, related to where I live. So it was like, "This is a proposal. You can judge it. Maybe it's cool. Maybe it's not, but it's an example". And so after that, other people came up with their ideas. And in the end, we were able to collect five ideas, which were later transformed into this exhibition. And one of them was Precollinear Park in the Precollina neighborhood. So it started as an example of placemaking in Turin and was later recalled during the lockdown of COVID in spring 2020 as something that we could start from if we were thinking of ourselves also as place-makers.

LB: So in that occasion, the idea changed and was more like, that COVID had this sort of "reset" impact on us. So everyone had this sort of reconsideration of themselves during those three months of lockdown because it was very powerful. And for us, it was also the idea of saying, "Okay, we activated so much thinking, so many proposals, so many ideas. So what now? Can we actually try to transform at least one of these proposals into reality? And if so, where would which one would we choose?". And so we said, "Okay, maybe Precollinear Park is the most feasible and doable". And that's how we reconnected with this idea that came out years before that was later transformed into at least a proposal into this exhibition. And that was so clear, so visible, so already thought up about that could be very easily transformed into at least a piece of action. That's how it all started.

- **MD:** I'm not hiding that Precollinear Park is very close to Luca's house, also because it was next to our studio. So maybe this is not a real motivation, but it was, like, much easier to control everything and have it very close to us so we can manage it easier.
  - **Z:** Since this was your first project, you're dealing with a lot of uncertainty. So it's understandable that you kind of kept it close to you in a, let's say, more or less controllable and familiar environment.
- MD: Yes, it's correct. But for this reason, we received some criticism because they were saying, like, "Oh, okay, it's easy to do place-making in Precollina or in Borgo Po. You can try to do place-making in Barriera di Milano, that's more difficult". But our answer was, "But we are not doing something bad, something negative. We're just regenerating a place that was abandoned".



### From Idea Generation to Implementation

In June 2020, Stratosferica self-funded its first place-making initiative, transforming the neglected and unused area into a park, addressing the need and importance of open spaces, green areas and community engagement during the time of the pandemic (Stratosferica, 2021).

- **Z:** When Stratosferica started, you guys weren't necessarily place-makers, but you were organizing Utopian Hours, a festival about city-making. So, from organizing this festival about city-making to actually making the city, how does this knowledge translate into action? Have you ever taken part in a project like this before? Do you have a technical background related to these kind of projects?
- LB: I think we combined the two things. On the one hand, the fact that we were collectors of examples and best practices and best cases that we have showcased in the festival in the previous years. And at the same time, of course, our track record as professionals in things related to design, communication, event, event design, all of these things were crucial in our mounting and fashioning of the process. So, I think that our methodology actually came out of that, "Try to be the most effective with your skills in that precise time and place that you're living". We started by saying, okay, we don't really have a background of this if you're looking for a specific placemaking initiative, but we have a lot of other tangential experiences that are definitely relevant to edit it together, to mount it together.

LB: So, for example, organizing an event was crucial because we started by organizing an event, a public event in the public space for the public. So, everything we knew about organizing an event was transferred to organizing a specific event for opening the eyes of citizens on a placemaking initiatives in the public space on a specific date and location, which was the same location of the intervention. And that was also very crucial. So, it's like showing something in the place where you are proposing to activate this. So, people can realize it by just looking around what you're talking about. It's not showing it elsewhere or through a PDF presentation or in another context. We were calling people to be in that square, it was June 20, 2020. And the idea was, now that you've come here, you can realize easily why this transformation is possible. And it's also very simple because it's already there in a way.

**GLM:** The intervention started with Stratosferica, but then all of the transformation, in progress transformation, was born like a collection of collective thinking.

**Z:** A co-design process.

GLM: Yeah, exactly. There was not a drawing of Precollinear Park. So it was more, "Okay, let's do something. What do we do?" - in a more practical way. "Let's start with some benches in that area, because maybe the "feeling" of that part of the park was very good for reading. For example, the bridge, you say, "Okay, it's like a very crowded bridge with a lot of traffic", but then when we stayed there in the middle, there was a quality of the space, during summer it's windy in a city which is not usually windy. Also Piazza Hermada is very quiet with those trees already there. So it was very connected to the quality of the space which was already there and there wasn't the need of building another quality.

Z: So you essentially unlocked a new sense of place in Precollinear Park.
GLM: Exactly, it's totally an unlocking project. It was only like an injection, like an "acupuncture" on a space where the qualities were already there. So Stratosferica and all of this design process just triggered this. If you think about it, it's different than designing a space. If you design a space, you design the quality. Of course you can start with what you have already there, but at the same time you design proper things. You can change it also. In that case, sometimes it was about enhancing that quality, but in another case it was just to gather people there to know more about it.





Between June and July 2020, Stratosferica hosted a series of public events to introduce the project to residents, citizens, local businesses, and institutions. These meetings attracted participants from across the city, learning about the project and contributing their ideas, comments, and suggestions for the park's development (Stratosferica, 2021).



Engaging in constructive dialogue with the city and several public departments, Torino Stratosferica successfully secured the concession of the area under Regulation n.389, which deals with countering urban decay and strengthening widespread forms of public-private partnerships (Comune di Torino, 2024). The grant gave Torino Stratosferica full responsibility for maintaining and managing the area.

↑ Fig. 29 Statistic data (Stratosferica, 2021)

- Z: Would you say the roles of your external actors and collaborators were thought of from the beginning or was it more like an instinctive process where you figured it out as you went? Also how do you think different inputs and opinions affected and shaped the overall process for you?
- LB: It was definitely important to discuss everything collectively. It was hard sometimes because, you know, this action in the public space is not really usual and so some people don't perceive it very well, you know, like it seems like you're using your power out of the usual border. It's not your home, it's the city, it's the public space, "What are you doing and why?". And most people were kind of skeptical about "why", "So, why are you doing it?". Some people were complaining about the fact that the tram ruined this magnificent boulevard, so it was like, you know, we were there and so they were talking to us because there was no one else to talk to. So they were complaining to us for something that it wasn't our fault, which is very usual, you know, because you stay in the public space so you're here to listen and everything that has to do with complaining, "I'm addressing you because I see you".









**Z:** Was there a meeting with the locals and the communities living in the area regarding the design interventions?

GLM: It's always about the needs. There were some meetings, but actually there weren't proper meetings with the local community. It was more like during the volunteering programs on Saturday, but also with people passing by and asking, or sending emails. We received a lot of emails during the first years, above all. Also against the project, for example. Of course, most of the project and most of the transformation activates also conflict between people. I remember a lot of conflict with people that assumed that it was our fault that the tram wasn't there anymore. Also, it's interesting that these interventions are not always so welcomed by people and I think it's part of the human being. Of course, the need is always very individualistic, usually. You just have to filter those needs and categorize them and say, "Okay, this is a community need. This is an individual need". That was the role of Stratosferica. It wasn't just creating needs, but more than creating, it was filtering them.

MD: I remember once that I said, "Luca, you can understand that people are criticizing this thing because we didn't do a lot of neighborhood meetings, so you have to expect it", because it was not very big on the community (at the time). The community was there, there were the volunteers, but they came after. I think that the criticism was right in some moments. I was not there (at the neighborhood meeting), but I remember that they said that they started criticizing all the things about the neighborhood and not putting down ideas for Precollinear Park. It became like a neighborhood meeting, not just for the project.

**Z:** How do you think all of the feedback you received, positive or negative, shaped the overall process? Were they taken into consideration?

**GLM:** Well, some of it also depends on the way of receiving some feedback.

**Z:** Whether or not you received constructive feedback, let's say.

**GLM:** Exactly, because sometimes, as I said, in this conflict, you have some feedbacks that are only like, complaints. Just complaints, without knowing the purpose of the project. Also, according to the knowledge of the place, one of the first interventions in Precollinear Park was explaining the project. In the bus stops, we created some graphics in the storytelling of the project. So there was the story of Precollinear Park, what was the project, the main goals, etc. **And it made a new sense of the place.** Of course, also we made mistakes, as it is an experimental project.



- LB: And so, it all started by organizing an event, but then later turned into community building, civic engagement, all things that we heard about, but we never actually put together around the same process. So, it was really engaging, really beautiful. And then there was another important fact. How do you promote an event which is addressing citizenship at large? And it's really important to have a place where you're already in the mood of talking to everybody, which is a crucial aspect of place-making. You have to be able to talk to everybody because not everyone can understand the same language you're talking to, you're using.
  - **Z:** Also, places mean different things to different people and communities.
- LB: Exactly. So, the idea was, by doing what we were doing, we were actually building a community that was belonging to the place. As you said, all our knowledge came as support to help us in understanding what could be done. And so, we put together all of these efforts and some of these things, of course, we knew from the beginning and some others we realized step by step, I would say.

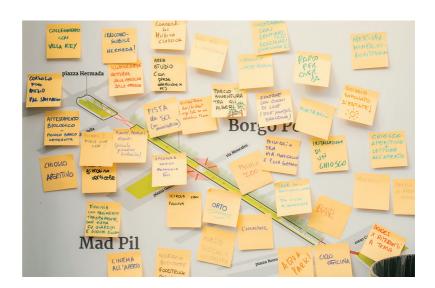
Starting from the inauguration event, a crowdfunding campaign was initiated, with many individuals showing their support both online and during the public events on-site.





- over the years\*
- ↑ Fig. 30 Crowfunding Data (Stratosferica, 2021)\*
- Donations on-site Photo by Federico Masini, 2020

Post-it's with ideas →
from the community,
covering the
communication
material on-site
Photo by Federico
Masini, 2020



The proposal for the project, although an open-ended and collaborative process, oversaw the implementation and activation of both tangible and intangible elements in various phases such as: The maintenance and care of green areas, new botanical intenventions, installation of urban furniture, soft and welcoming lighting, cultural programming and events, community building and social impact (Stratosferica, 2022).

### (continuing)

LB: There was not such a big design involved. It was just merely the fact that we could provide the place with these features. But more and more, we kind of made it as a collective. I mean, everything was collective in the fact that Stratosferica never acted like a design studio. We had proposals. We were reading through them with volunteers that were there since the first meeting. I mean, we started the volunteers right after the first event. The discussion within the people in the group was also very lively. Residents were immediately, you know, involved. They sent us emails. They sent us comments. So, immediately, people wanted to contribute, and by contributing, they suggested something. So, it was really a collective thing. We tried to do our best, of course, in terms of how to balance design solutions with needs that were highlighted through the first phases.









Starting from November 2020, Stratosferica launched a "call to action" on their social networks in order to create a team of volunteers to assist them in the maintenance of the project. Through this initiative "Saturdays at Precollinear Park" was born, a meeting format that was held on-site with more than 100 volunteers every Saturday morning. Given the restrictions following the pandemic at the time, these meetings became an important source of interaction and engagement in both the social and the physical spheres of the park. (Stratosferica, 2021).

- MD: I think that a positive aspect in the negativity of the moment was that we were one of the people who were doing something during the pandemic, for the people. And it was a very much appreciated project and intention because of this reason. In the city during that period, I don't think that so many things like this were happening. So, that was an achievement also because people were saying, "Okay, we are in a pandemic situation, where can we go?". And maybe this is why at the beginning, more than at the end of the project, we had so many volunteers who participated in the Saturday meetings. We just made a call to action on our social networks. It was like, "Do you want to work with us and help us to make this place better?", and they actually came. They were actually people who lived in the area, and we didn't know any one of them. They were all new people that became a part of the network of Stratosferica. Also today, some of them are continuing to come to the events.
  - **Z:** You created a community that was based on this project, and it grew from there. That's very important.
- MD: There was not just one time that they came during one Saturday, and we didn't see them anymore. They were continuing to come, so it was a very nice group of people. At the beginning it was mainly for, I think, the pandemic moment. All of us were living in it. But then we saw that those people started to go out together and become friends, and they were so much more interested in Precollinear Park. They were not just there to help us, but they were there during the events, during all the moments of social gathering.

The volunteers →
during one of the
Saturdays
Photo by Federico
Masini, 2021



GLM: Well, the volunteering program, of course, shaped the process in the way that it was the main core of the process. I mean, you can have a place, but without a community, you don't. So, if you don't have the community, you just have an abandoned place. And the call for volunteers, it's been crucial for the process, for the maintenance in a proper way, in a practical way. And, of course, the call for volunteers, and the call for everything actually, it was a way of enlarging the community, between different networks.

↓ Fig. 31
Engagement Statistics
Drawing by the author,
(Stratosferica, 2023)

# As of 2023\*, Precollinear Park had 219 volunteers since June 2020

(an average of 12 people present during the Saturday Meetings)

\*(Stratosferica, 2023)









# 3.3.2 Precollinear ParkSpace+ Sustainability

Stratosferica's self-proclaimed mission is to see Turin at its best, both in terms of the quality and sustainability of its physical environment and places, and in the social and cultural values it is able to convey and enhance.

Following the belief that "the city belongs to those who take it", they become the co-creators of places, encouraging active citizenship and fostering connections across different networks. The important themes of this mission include experimentation, the development of "third spaces," cost-effective initiatives (not borne by the city), ecological transition, urban and social mending, enhancement of public spaces, networking among local stakeholders, and improving the image of the city (Stratosferica, 2022).

- **Z:** Would you say, before you started with this intervention, there was a sense of place among the resident community relating to this green strip? How would you say people perceived it and what were your personal feelings towards it?
- LB: There was a story behind it, of course, that was kind of the problem inherent in this intervention. So, there was a beautiful tree-lined boulevard up until 1989. It was very beautiful. Then work began to construct the light underground, as we call it, Metropolitana Leggera, and there was a real turmoil. All of the people were against the destruction of this boulevard with trees into a barricaded railway line that would have not allowed people to enter it anymore. And the tram opened in 1989. So, for more than 20 years, 25 years, the memory of that place was a tram line, not a boulevard. So, when the tram was dismissed, it was nothing. It was just a strip of land. So, the memory of this boulevard was just for the old people. The memory of the tram was already kind of fading, because it was nearly 10 years of abandonment. So, it was really like a non-place, like without meaning. And maybe some of the people recognized the potential, but I think very few. And, well, the comment I heard more about Precollinear Park was, "Oh, this is a beautiful idea". And, of course, it was not "my" idea. It was an idea that is there. And we just took it and applied it in this nice space.

#### **Z:** What was the state of the site before the intervention?

**GLM:** It was the railway of the tram and it was abandoned and then the intervention started. It was interesting because it was this kind of linear park in the middle of the road. Before the intervention it was full of wild plants. It was actually very fascinating because it was a proper land-scape. So with all of these plants it was used like a dog area, like a huge dog area, but of course it wasn't enhanced in this quality. It had the fascination of a third landscape but it wasn't enhanced for people.

**Z:** It wasn't properly maintained by the municipality?

GLM: It wasn't maintained at all. So the maintenance didn't exist. At the same time it was interesting that people started to work along it, like with dogs and stuff. So actually the idea of the linear park started through just observing the people and how they were using the space. It was an abandoned space. There was not even this idea of reading it as a third landscape, of course. There was no Gilles Clement over there. (laughs)



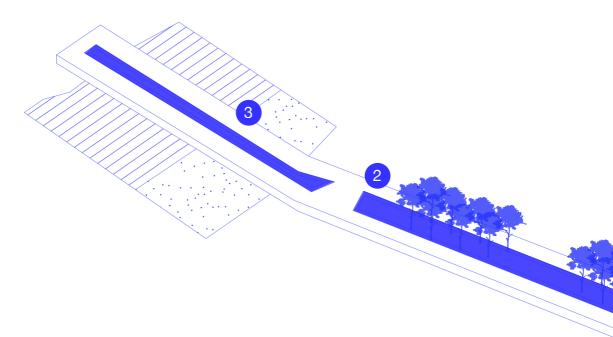
- **Z:** During the intervention, were place-based assets utilized? Such as the existing infrastructure, ecology, communities and practices in the site...
- **GLM:** Yes. There was this infrastructure. **We actually really focused on the qualities of that existing infrastructure.** The ecology was there in the sense of the ecological flows over there. The communities, the proper social practices were over there, although it was abandoned. So it wasn't so strict to be a proper assessment, but it was more like part of the intuition.
  - LB: In the case of the Precollinear Park, I mean, the community there, the resident community, was a little bit, how can I say, distracted by the fact that, I mean, they didn't really need the park, first of all. They already have green areas, park along the river, and so on. Secondly, there, the average is rather more affluent than the usual citizenship. So it was not needed as a resource for the residents. Nevertheless, so many people appreciated the fact that there was a cure for the place that made people fall in love with this action. It was much better, much more welcoming, curated, friendly, nice.
    - **Z:** It's both problem-solving and sense-making coming together.
  - LB: Exactly, and I'm glad you say that. It was also about making something nice out of nothing. So where there was nothing, now there's a beautiful or a very nice place where people can go and talk and read a book and meet and have a beer. All the intervention for planting flowers or seats, benches, chaise lounges, lights, and events were all in this idea of belonging and taking care of a place. So it was a great lesson of how much we can do with so little. So of course it's a win-win-win thing because the city gained a place which was loved, residents gained a place, we got a place. But I'm also, we were all somehow surprised to see that a new community was formed which was not made as again most of the narratives tells you, from residents, but it was made of people that came from other neighborhoods because they loved the idea.







# The Space Overview



Linear park extending over 800 meters, with very low density temporary built interventions.

## The project joins:

- 1. Piazza Hermada
- 2. Corso Gabetti and
- 3. Regina Margherita Bridge

# Timeline of Project Development

#### Phase 1 (20.06.2020 - 07.07.2020)

Piazza Hermada
Presentation of the project along with the
first interventions

#### Phase 2 (July - August 2020)

Corso Gabetti and Regina Margherita Bridge Implementation of first modular furniture and the beginning of events

# Phase 3 (September - October 2020) The park becomes a reality.

\*according to the first communication materials by Stratosferica, 2020

Fig. 32
Project diagram based on Stratosferica, 2020
Drawing by the author, 2024

Stratosferica began working on the first improvements and implementations on-site, small but effective steps in order to combat decay, enhance the livability of the space, and drastically change its perception. These small interventions include: taking care of the greenery, cleaning the area, communication of the project in the form of posters and installations, simple but efficient furniture such as pallets used as benches, chaise lounges, flowerbeds, and a small area for events (Stratosferica, 2021).

- **Z:** Since the project was a "temporary place-making" project, what were the priorities for the spatial intervention?
- **GLM:** Well, let's say that I have this idea that every project is temporary. And also because "temporary" is a complicated adjective. But of course, Precollinear Park was a temporary project. In a way, the main goal was that one. To enhance and to put the spotlight on an area which had the quality to be something else. Or just what it was, but not abandoned. To activate it. And I think it achieved this goal. Because I don't think it's a case that the Department of Mobility of Turin decided to put again the tram over there, against Precollinear Park. I think it's connected and it's one of the goals of a temporary project. You enhance the area and maybe you fulfil the area for that period which otherwise would be, like, a void. I think that was the main goal of the project in my point of view, to see temporariness as a mandatory quality for design. For example, we never designed something which was impossible to transport. So all of these things that we did in Precollinear Park are now in Corso Farini or in Dorado. So they've been transferred to other projects. **Because** they were site-specific, but not so much.
  - **Z:** Adaptable and repurposable.
- **GLM:** Exactly. So I think there is a strong difference between, for example, a landscape architecture or a landscape work of art that is very site-specific because it shapes the proper landscape of the area with a place-making project, for example. As I said, it doesn't work on composition but in superposition. So it's a different way of thinking. It's also composition but of elements. It's an elementary way of designing. And that's why I think the temporariness has to be always in our mind.



A flowerbed from 
Precollinear Park, now residing in Corso Farini (Although the state of its physical condition is debatable)
Photo by the author, 2024

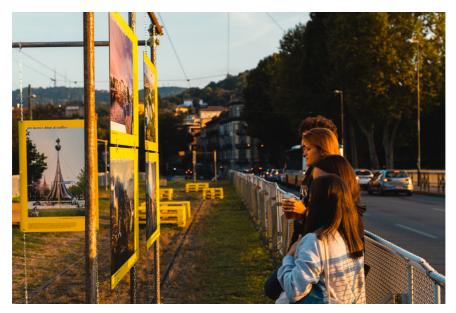
- **Z:** Was the process open-ended or were the end goals pre-determined? If so, how were the goals identified and designed? Who identified them?
- **GLM:** No, totally an open-ended project and process, there was nothing actually pre-determined. It was everything "in-progress". **And I think at the same time, it's very much like a feature of most of the creative process**, of most of the creative work.
  - **Z:** Especially, I feel, when you're dealing with so many different actors, it's so important to have that flexibility and not to have pre-determined end goals. Otherwise, it's a very structured process and there's no room for spontaneity, like you said.
- **GLM:** Yeah, I think in Precollinear Park, for me, it's been like a milieu of thinking about the softness of a project. So the flexibility, the durability of the project, but really the softness that the project can change during time. And I think it's very important in design, so you just, like, "hug" whatever arrives. I totally think it's not a pre-determined project. I don't think that any project is pre-determined. I mean, there was a time for a pre-determined projects and it didn't work. So actually, I think it's been a mistake of the last century to think about a project like something pre-determined.



- **Z:** Were the roles of external actors and contributors considered at the beginning of the design process? Were they involved later or in different phases of the process?
- **GLM:** Most of them, actually, were considered as an "in-progress" process. That "in-progress" way of thinking, implemented the (design) actors throughout the years. And also, there were not only corporate actors, but there were also institutional actors, for example, Politecnico di Torino. For example, the first year, that one area of Precollinear Park has been involved in the final exhibition of design units of an atelier. Also the events, exhibitions, exhibitions with CAMERA (Centro Italiano per la Fotografia) and Fringe Festival that used Precollinear Park as one of the venues.
  - MD: There were a lot of people that gravitated towards Stratosferica and that helped so much. We were influenced by some ideas, some thoughts, and also the Senior Angels Team was very helpful. It is a team made up by some people who worked in the municipality, but now they are retiring. And so we made up a team and it was helpful because they knew everything about the municipality and what you can do with the city and what you can not. I mean, it is different from Corso Farini because the municipality was not there from the beginning, but during the process they came closer to us.
    - **Z:** Do you think their collaboration and involvement were effectively ensured?
  - **MD:** Yes, because more and more people saw that more people were involved, so they were more brought to participate in the project. **We had established a dialogue.**

In dialogue with:
Public Green Department
Mobility Department
Culture Department
Commerce Department
Common Goods Department
Innovation Department

(Stratosferica, 2021)



Open-air exhibiton on the bridge (Stratosferica) Photo by Federico Masini, date unknown torinostratosferica.it

From July to October 2020, a series of cultural and recreational events took place in Precollinear Park, establishing it as a place for meeting, cultural exchange and community engagement. The events included talks, presentations, concerts with local artists, workshops, yoga and workout classes, further expanding Stratosferica's network and enlarging the community (Stratosferica, 2021).

Fig. 33 🔰
Engagement Statistics
Drawing by the author,
\*(Stratosferica, 2023)

## As of 2023\*, 142 free public events



The bridge during an event 

Photo by Federico Masini, date unknown

torinostratosferica.it

**Z:** In your opinion, how did the project change the perception of the site of the intervention at the time?

**GLM:** It's funny that my mom lives very close to Precollinear Park and since the last year when Precollinear Park has been dismantled, she always says, "Oh, it was so nice to see the bridge with a lot of people". Because it can change the perspective. You know, you got a habit in perceiving that "a bridge is just a bridge", for example, it's just an infrastructure that you just pass by with a car or bike or walking.

**Z:** It's a space, it's not necessarily a place.

GLM: Exactly, it's just a space. And when you trigger that, it's not a space, but it's a place, it's a proper place-making. And then, you trigger a different way of thinking, of seeing the space and seeing the city also.

The intervention facilitated partnerships with local utility providers, including a water system for maintaining the greenery, regular garbage disposal services, and installing electricity through three connection points and a lighting system that illuminates the entire area (Stratosferica, 2021). These installations significantly transformed the perception and identity of the spaces of the project.



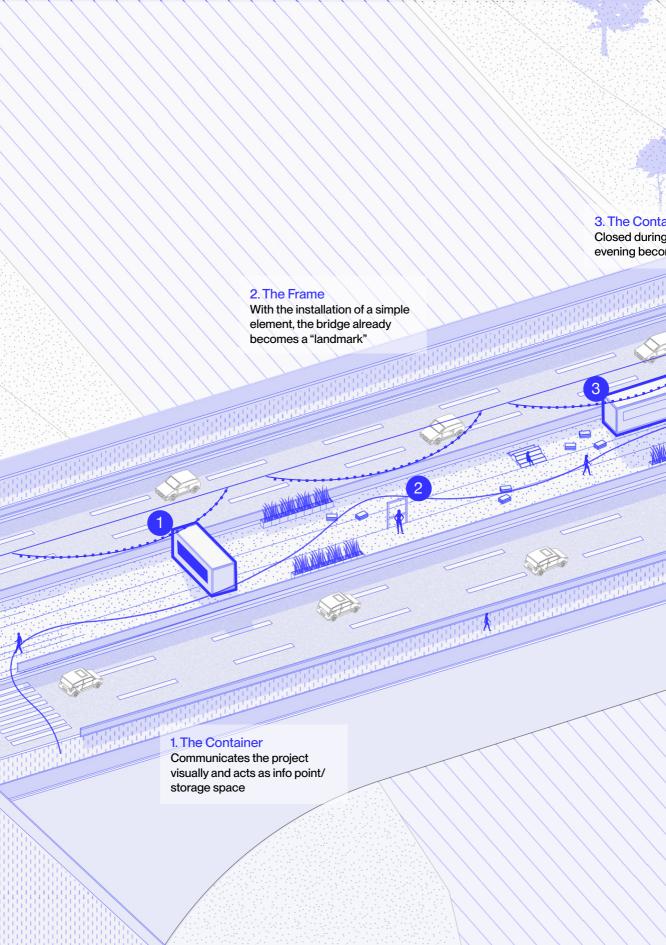
new trash bins

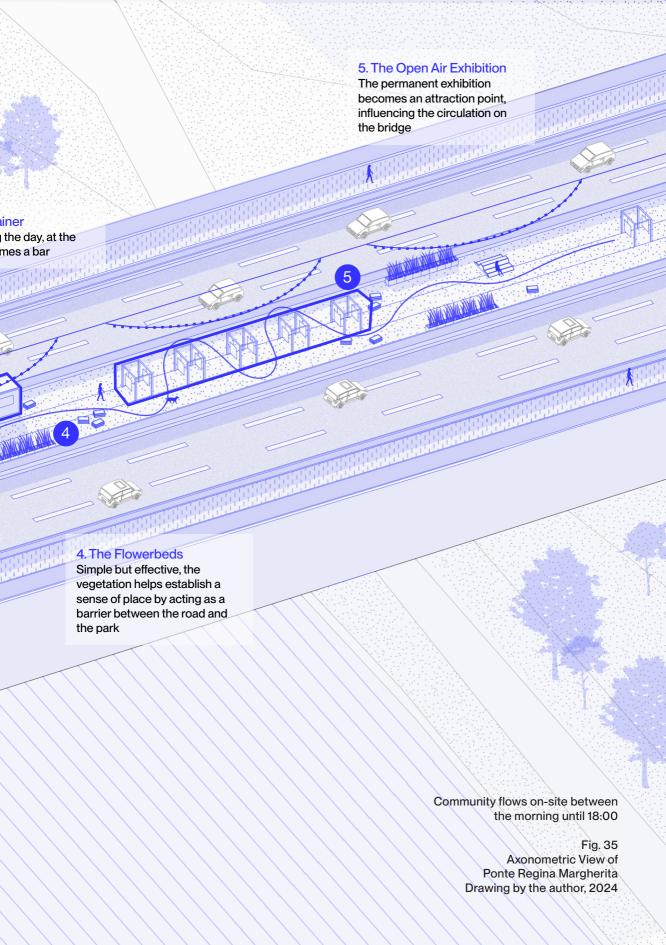


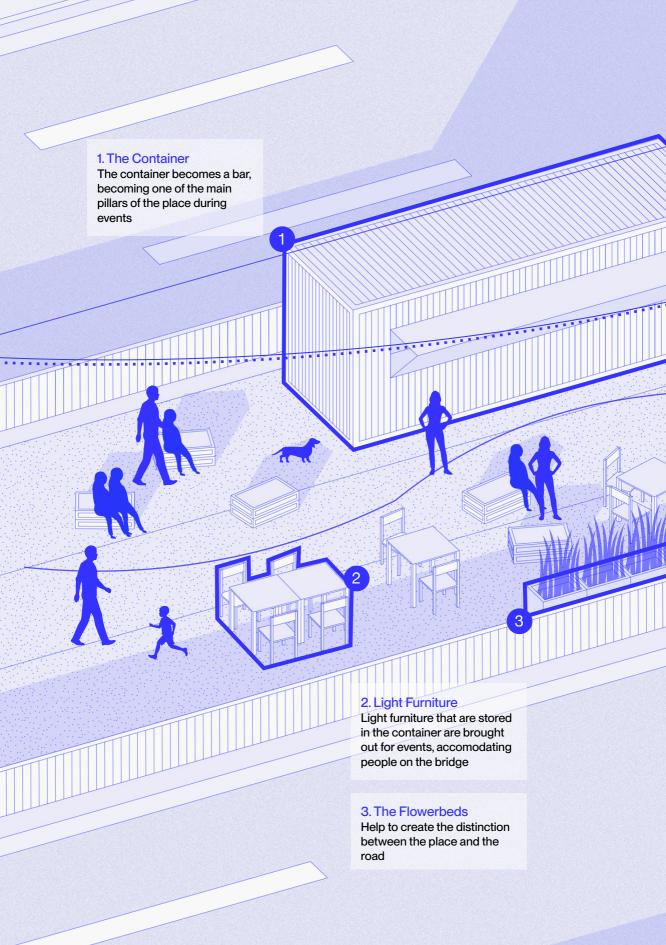
new public light bulbs

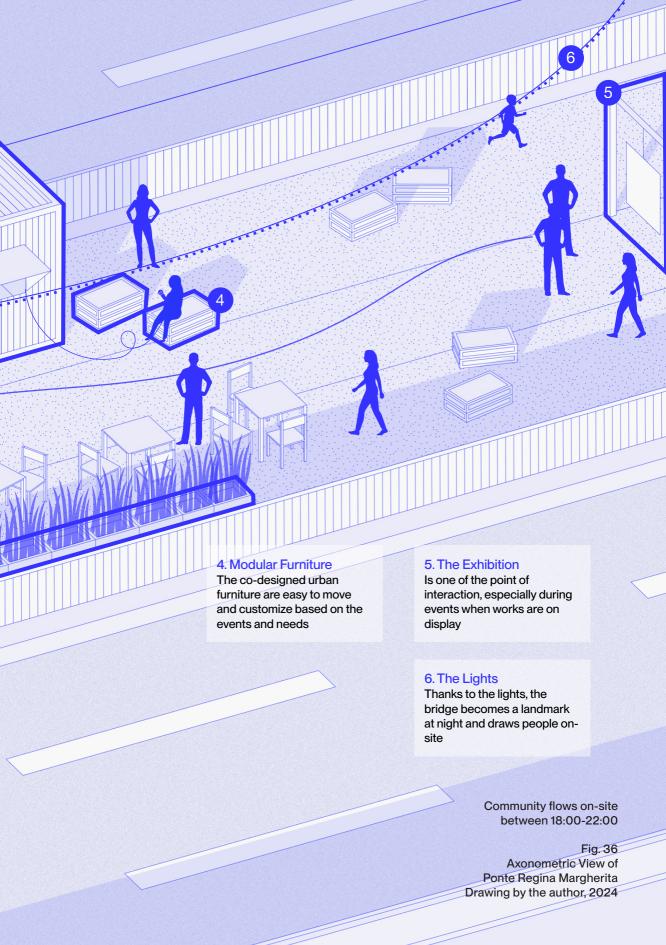
3
new electricity points

Fig. 34 Services activation Drawing by the author, adapted from (Stratosferica, 2023)









**Z:** Can you tell me about the main architectural and design elements on the site? How do you think these elements transformed this "space" into a "place"?

GLM: I think it's important to think that Stratosferica started working from graphic design and communication design. So the first intervention of Precollinear Park was declaring it "Precollinear Park". So all of the intervention of brand identity and branding of that space. And then it's been connected to all of the other things. Above all, for the containers, it was the cheapest way to have indoor spaces for tools, for the bar and everything. Also temporary, because they can be moved, and they've been moved. And also, they work also as billboards of Stratosferica.

The lights also. **The lights were a crucial architectural tool.** And also in that sense, the partnership with Creative Cables was very strong. Because if you think about an abandoned space and then you have a light, an abandoned space is completely different. For example, in Europe we are so good in lighting the former industrial structures, you know, gasometers for example. If you just light them, they become landmarks.

And the furniture, they had to be like temporary furniture that didn't have to be stuck on the ground, but at the same time not so light to be stolen. I think it's always very interesting for me as an architect to see that if you design the things that are not stuck into the ground, they are now an in-progress co-design process of the place.

MD: I think that it was nice because all the furniture and all the design elements were easily movable. So at the moment you could create your own place where to stay. So that, I think, helped people to use the place. Every time we came back to Precollinear Park, there was a different positioning or structure of the area.

**Z:** People were creating their own configurations of the place.

**GLM:** Exactly. So that's very interesting about the configuration. And not only as "furniture", but if they are movable, they can be like the props of a theater of the city.



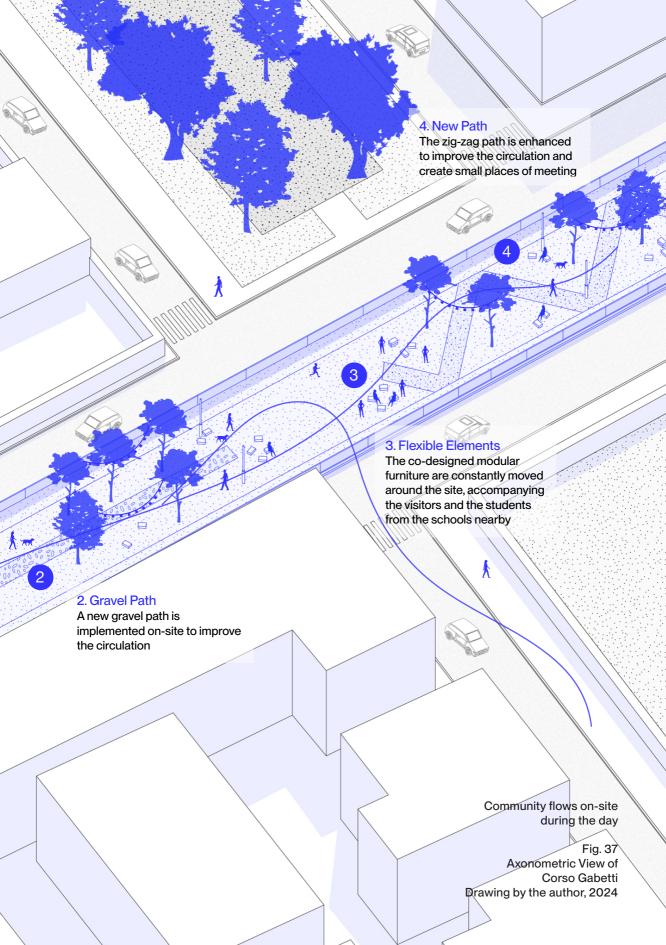










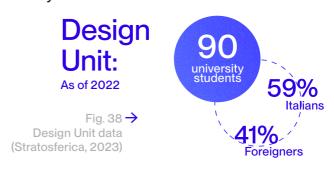


# Local Meets Global: The Workshops

In early 2022 Stratosferica connected with Cities4Forests, an organization that helps cities worldwide connect with and invest in urban, nearby, and distant forests, to finance a pilot intervention at Piazza Hermada as a part of the Precollinear Park project. This initiative resulted in the creation of several workshops and the formation of groups where expert designers collaborated with non-experts in the co-design process of on-site design elements (Stratosferica, 2023).

#### Z: Can you tell me about the formation of the Design Unit?

GLM: There was already this idea of having workshops, of involving people in the proper design of the space through the workshops. But then we had this chance to win that grant of Cities4Forest, which is a Canadian organization dealing with wood-making and trying to activate a connection between a sustainable chain of wood and the cities. So we said, "Well, that's perfect, that's the perfect occasion". And through that occasion, we developed the Design Unit. It lasted around three months. So, we had this grant, we had the material, and the Design Unit had to concentrate on the needs, and how to transfer the needs into objects. And then after three months, there were the three workshops. Because then it was divided, of course, so we had to use the wood as much as possible, and it was a lot, actually.



GLM: So students of design and architecture, usually, wanted to be part of the project. In a way, using their technical skills also, that maybe they want to train their skills through a realistic project. And I think it's very educative. So it's a very different way of educating, in a very practical way. You participate, and at the Design Unit, we're more like a meeting between people, saying, "Okay, what do we do? Okay, let's design together".

For example, I never saw myself as a professor of them. But I was part of the team. I was just the more trained one.

**Z:** Yeah, you were not like a facilitator, but more of a collaborator.

GLM: Exactly. I mean, there was not a person in charge, for example, of dealing with it, but it was more like, "Okay, let's captivate things around us". Usually, for example, co-design projects are very long in terms of time. In this sense, it was very brief because it was very simple. Me and Chiara, we were just like the simplifier of the process in a way.

**Z:** Like translating that (process) into technical knowledge and realizing what to do and assessing how to do it.

GLM: Yeah, you need a chair, but you don't have to spend a lot of time in designing a chair. You just have to do the most simple chair as possible. It's not true that it's about deleting the creative part because it's a lot about creativity, but I think it's really the sense of design. It was more like how to solve a problem through an object. I think that was really the main core of the way of thinking about co-design and self-assembling and self-building.

Luca, Scott →
Francisco (C4F)
and municipal actors at
the workshop with the
new communication
materials on-site
April 2022
Photo by Federico
Masini, 2022



**Z:** What was the role of the Design Unit in relation to dealing with the volunteers? What role did the expert-designers play in shaping this process?

GLM: The Design Unit was organized usually through meetings with people who wanted to join that unit. Actually some volunteers usually are also part of the design unit. It's a very porous system. People from Design Unit were like the managers of the process. So, it started like another integration between different people, because maybe people that joined the Design Unit weren't part of the volunteering program. Maybe they met, or so they fell in love, for example. We had a lot of people who fell in love in Precollinear Park, yes, a lot. Through the Design Unit, through the volunteering program and everything. (laughs)

**Z:** Oh, I will definitely keep this in the transcription. (laughs)

**GLM:** Exactly. And, of course my role, for example-

**Z:** Matchmaking?

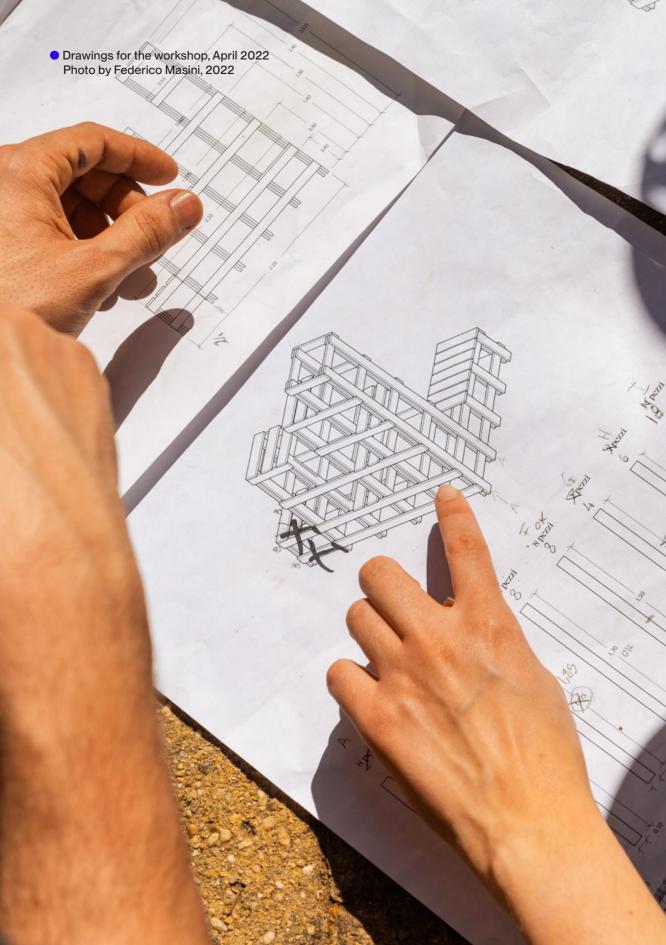
**GLM:** Matchmaking, yeah. (laughs)

For sure my role as expert designer was more about like being a guide through it. So I had to have in mind the process, the timing, the project management, and of course the design. It's interesting because in a Design Unit you don't have only like architects from a Master's degree. You have people from a lot of backgrounds, also non-designers, non-architects, and they have to be involved in the process.



 Members of the Design Unit at the workshop April 2022 Photo by Federico Masini, 2022





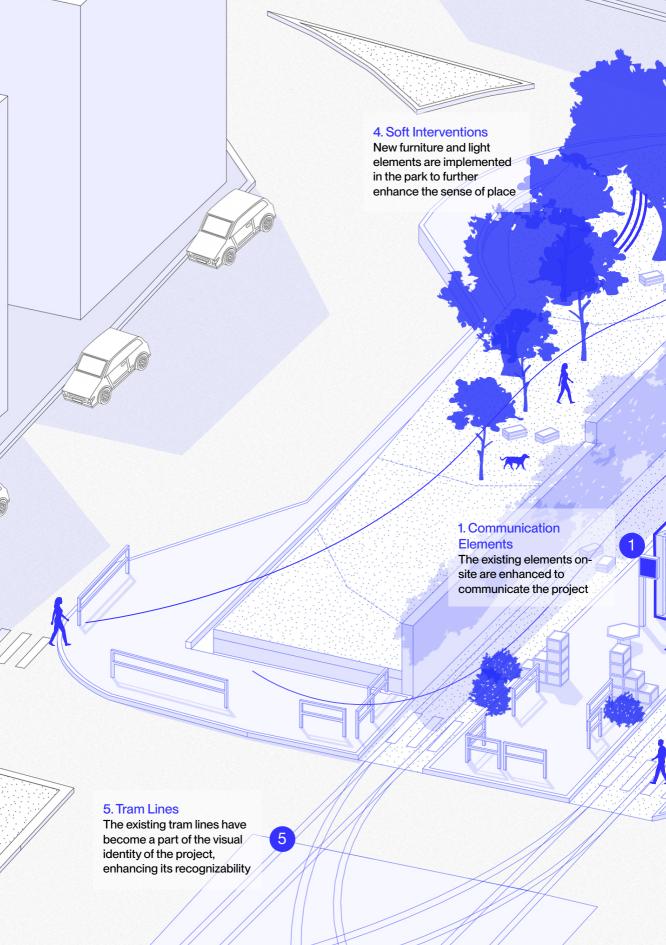






- **Z:** How did that translate into design capacities?
- GLM: For non-designers, I usually involve them probably in the first process of making a concept of what they want to do. So I usually try to involve them into the design process in a different way. "Okay, let's enhance your skills. What do you imagine?". Or maybe I make them try to work with references, for example, to work with a collage of references. Maybe they have ideas through them. If I think about it, it's very similar to my work as an interior designer with my private clients. I guide them to underline their ideas, and I have to translate them into something real.
  - **Z:** During this process of idea generation, were the ideas coming from non-designers taken into consideration, and how did their ideas shape the process, let's say?
- **GLM:** They shaped the process, maybe not the proper design. It would be silly to say that a non-designer then, of course, makes a very specific design of a chair or a table. **But at the same time, they're very much involved**, for example, asking them "What do you think about it?", because they will be the users. I mean, they are part of the proper users, which are not designers or architects. So they're very useful in that sense.
  - **Z:** They are resources.
- **GLM:** They are resources. They can tell you, "No, this is so architectural-oriented, nobody will use it".
  - **Z:** Which is also actually connected to my next question. How do you think these elements and the way they are built, can activate the use and circulation of different spaces, and how does that create and serve different communities?
- GLM: I think it's very connected to the flexibility idea. Because if you have like a "stuck" table, you can use it only as a table where it is. In Precollinear Park we started working with modular tables, modular chairs with the modularity. One time, in Precollinear Park, they organized a birthday party for kids, with 40 kids, and they could do like an imperial table of 5 meters. But the next day it was more like a study room, because there were people studying, and so they created another layout. I think it allows you the flexibility and the modularity to let the community show their own need and their own way of using the space. That's the core of flexibility, that you as a designer, don't design just with your idea, but you just have to be an open designer. It has to be open to other opportunities.





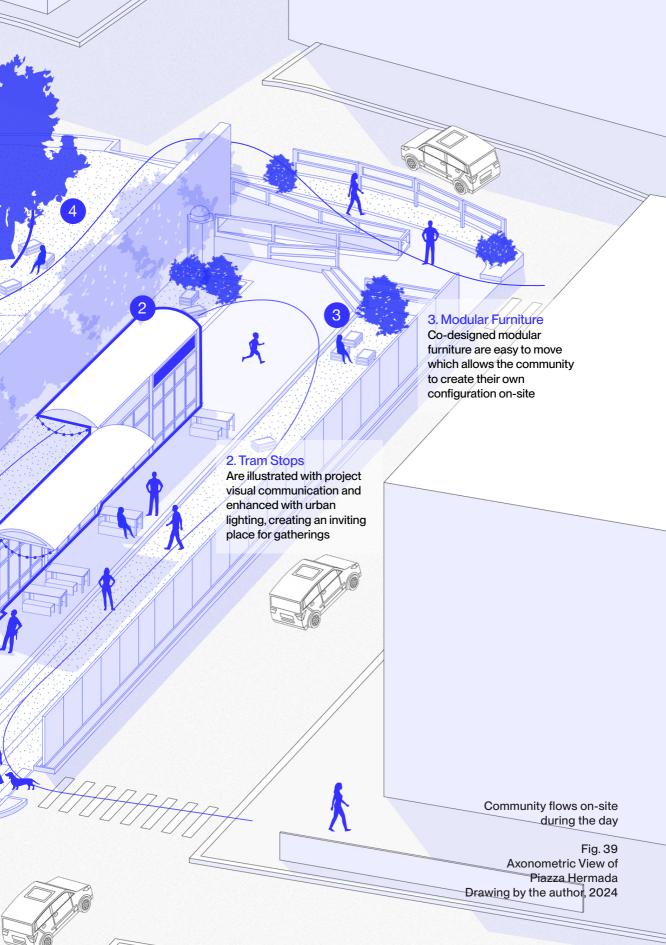


Fig. 41 →
Design data
(Stratosferica, 2023)

## Implementation of new urban furniture during the project:

#### Since June 2020

2 pavillions
40 benches
30 chairs
6 tables
8 chaise longues
45 flower beds
1 exhibiton area
2 containers
info point &

pop-up bar

- **Z:** Would you say designing and creating together has fostered "a sense of belonging" in the site?
- **MD:** I think so because the project evolved in a fast way, so people wanted to see it not "ending" but complete. So yes, during these Saturday mornings, people put a lot of effort in taking care of the place.
- GLM: Yes, for sure. Firstly, like I told you that if you have this very strong brand identity at the beginning, you always have the answer to it, get back to it. And then people immediately realize what it is, what the project is. And then they put it in their minds. That's why also, in Precollinear Park, we chose the yellow, you perceive it immediately as a color. And also, in this sense, for example, after only one year of Precollinear Park, there were people in the volunteers that started, using Precollinear Park like a meeting point. "Let's meet at Precollinear Park", rather than "Ponte di Corso Regina". Some friends of mine, also "Oh, yeah, let's meet in front of Precollinear Park".
  - **Z:** Also for me, I mean, I'm not from here but, I don't call it Ponte Regina Margherita, I call it Precollinear Park.
- GLM: It's still like this, so it's interesting. Because, for example, in Corso Farini, we used the name of the Corso, but because it was a forgotten name, nobody knew it was called Corso Farini, that part of the city. It was just an abandoned road. It was just a parking. So, I think that also in that act of naming something and enhancing it graphically, you already foster a sense of belonging. Because, of course, then it's connected with the community making, with the event production inside it, you activate memories in that space.
  - them by names, first of all. So everything has to be somehow reconnected to an idea. And yeah, of course I believe in this process because it's how we have come to make some things more appropriate, more meaningful, more heartfelt, more passionate for their conceivers and their users. First of all, verbal identity and then visual identity can be a meaningful, a powerful means to convey something. The intention is more that, you're trying to make something visible where there was no meaning or intention or presence.



# 3.3.3 Precollinear Park Community

↓ Fig. 42

Partnership data

(Stratosferica, 2023)

During its lifetime, Precollinear Park hosted many events and became the meeting place for many individuals and groups. The project network began to grow alongside the project, expanding into new partnerships and communities. Furthermore in 2022, the project was selected among the 52 finalists for the New European Bauhaus Prizes in the category of "regaining a sense of belonging" (Stratosferica, 2023).



- **Z:** Is community engagement a crucial element of Precollinear Park? Do you think the results would be the same without the engagement from the community?
- **GLM:** I think that **the community engagement is the project.** Because a place without people is a space, not a place. You can have a very good architecture from a composite point of view, but then if you don't have the engagement of the community, you don't have a good architecture. So, it's very engaged with the community which is already there.
  - MD: Yes, of course. It was a major part of the project and we recognized it also. For the people who helped us, we were taking care of them. Every volunteer had a free drink for every event. They had some t-shirts, some sweaters. They were invited to all our other events. This made the community stronger.

- LB: Well, again, we have to be very honest about the fact that the local community participated less because it was a place where there was not so much need of intervention, first. Second, I don't really believe that placemaking is more successful where there is more need. This is the usual way of thinking, and it has a lot to do with a lot of bias about participation, about social needs, social balance, and so on. People, basically, are not interested in the same things that you are interested in, and it's fine. So in this sort of very binary zero-one philosophy where either "I benefit from it or I just don't do it", placemaking has a very powerful statement to make, which is we have to be generous about our places and our urban places, because otherwise it would all be against us in the long run. And why? Because of course municipalities don't have enough skills, ideas, economic forces, people to care about our urban places properly. So that's why our agency is needed. So of course it has to be a collective or a co-design thing, because otherwise it would be wrong. But at the same time, we have to strengthen our ability to be designers in thinking of the needs and putting aside our ego and put in the sense of place and the sense of community and the beauty and participation that other people would bring. And that means that I have to open my proposal to other proposals.
- Z: How did Stratosferica sustain this community and place-based engagement in Precollinear Park? Was it through the network that they established or was it through the continuous cultural events, activities? I think both. I mean, there was the community building every week, and it has to be like that, because it was more about the community. It was really like a event to meet up on a Saturday morning to clean up the space. Then there were the events that enhanced the sense of belonging. It was through the interconnection between different networks, which was not only the volunteers. So, all of these connections between networks actually make the community. So, you have a lot of communities inside one community. And then, I really think that you have to have a lot of events that involve everybody.



## **Z:** Would you say there is an entirely new community that grew alongside this project?

**GLM:** Yeah, there was an entirely new community for Precollinear Park. I mean, of course, it was connected. And also, it started with the community of Stratosferica, through the organization, through the festival and everything. But, at the same time, the new community started with the practical work of volunteering program. And grew alongside the project completely. Because the project actually grew within. So, there wasn't a main driver. They were part of the same driver. Circular, almost. there was not only one network, but it was an intersection of networks.

#### **Z:** Like a constellation.

GLM: Yeah, exactly. A very different constellation. Because I remember in some events in Precollinear Park, you had the people of the, I would say, upper class community of Torino. And then the students of the elementary school or of the high school that was part of the community of the neighborhood. So you had these very different levels. Of course, Precollinear Park was the first attempt, also in a rich area. So, it didn't meet all of the difficulties that you could have in dealing with some similar projects, maybe in a weaker area. Other areas with more social issues with less empowered communities. So, the social issues were there, but not so much. So, then actually, of course, it kind of helped us to deal in a better way, I mean, as we were new to this project. I think now we are ready also to work on a different base. And Dorado, for example, or Farini, there has to be this "social" feature.



An event in Dorado,
the new community
hub by Stratosferica,
hosting several internatial communities
Photo by Federico
Masini, 2024

- Z: How does that translate into the usage of the site? Was the place still frequented by the community and locals even when there were no events?
- **MD:** The nice thing about this place was that you can use it also when it was not active, like the bar or the events. People could go there also at 7 in the morning or at midnight, even though we were closed. **So it was a place that worked continuously.**

GLM: You mean spontaneously using the space? For sure. In Precollinear Park, I remember, birthday parties of kids, graduation parties. Also exhibitions. I remember that I had to deal with an exhibition of a high school.But also the gardening workshops with the primary and secondary school next to it. At the beginning, some of them were completely spontaneous. They just sent us an email saying, "We are doing it", and we were replying, "Yes, okay". I remember then we also asked them, "But do you need something? Do you need a microphone? We have it. No worries if you need it". So, but also for the high school party, they asked us, for example, "Can we use your bar?". And we made a deal saying, "Okay, don't worry, We will manage the bar for your party". So it's interesting also in the sense that we kind of not only like "allowing" the use of the space, because that's public, but also we try to help them doing things. And it's very funny because imagine having a square where you can call someone, asking, "Do you have a microphone? Because I want to sing here". (laughs) It's a proper like way of seeing the public space as a theater rather than something else, you know, more strict. So this was very, like, typical in Precollinear Park. It was more like a theater.

### **Impact Value:**

Since June 2020

Fig. 44 → Impact data (Stratosferica, 2023)

Lunch breaks on site  $0 \rightarrow 150$ Daily visits  $20 \rightarrow 500$ Local economy  $5 \rightarrow 11$ 

(shops and restaurants on site)



**Z:** It's so interesting because in that way, the place can take on different forms and meanings based on the people who propose to do different things. It's so versatile and flexible.

GLM: I really think that Precollinear Park, but also a lot of other projects, have to be more considered as stage designs, I would say, rather than like rigid design or architecture. So that's why I think that Precollinear Park is a good example of it. Because, in a public space, but you have the possibility to contact someone to make you things, help you organize things. Or you just do it. It was just the process. And it's also connected to the thing of flexible design and modular design. For example, a very simple element, like a deck, can be used in multiple ways. So I really think that it has to be more like a stage, that you can do a lot of things, like sports, but also a theater and party and everything.

**Z:** And you show the community, through these various events, all of the different ways in which they can use the space and how they can activate the space.

GLM: Yes, you see all of the differences between the communities. And also, I think, you also understand the differences between the site-specific communities. For example, I really perceive the differences between Precollinear Park and Corso Farini. Because you have very different communities, and very different communities have very different habits. It depends on seeing what's going on in the space makes you perceive who is the community, what's the feature of that community.



 A Stratosferica event in Corso Farini Photo by the author, 2024





(continuing)

GLM: For sure the social sustainability is connected to the openness of a project like this, that it can be like an hotspot for intergenerational people, people from a lot of backgrounds. Also it can be like a meeting point. I think it's a good example to underline that in the volunteering program of Precollinear Park there were a lot of Erasmus people. So foreigners and students that arrive in the city without knowing anyone, and they found a community in Precollinear Park. So that's a part of that social sustainability. Because there is a contact between people that maybe they couldn't have met in any other way.

**Z:** So you guys were also able to establish a social sphere within the place?

GLM: Yes, and I think that is connected to cultural sustainability. So, because it's an open space, nothing was by invitation, for example. I think that if we talk about sustainability in a social or cultural way, it's very connected to an integration of that in a wider way.

MD: It's important to mention that I think that during the years, most of the volunteers started to use it less because they were used to being at Precollinear Park when COVID was there. In fact, it changed also the community because, some of the volunteers are still here but maybe they come just to events, they are not volunteers anymore. They are people who are close to Stratosferica. But then, like in 2021, 2022, people were different in the volunteers team.



The volunteers →
during the C4F
workshop in
Precollinear Park
Photo by Federico
Masini, 2022



# 3.3.4 Precollinear Park Precollinear Park Park, Now

In March 2023, the City of Turin announced that the tram line would be reactivated in 2024, therefore requesting Stratosferica to take down all of the interventions and materials on the site. This development led to the creation of a petition from the community to preserve the project to no avail. By September 2023, the project was completely removed (Stratosferica, 2023b).

- **Z:** What are your thoughts on the current state of Precollinear Park? What has changed in the perception of the site now that the project is no longer there?
- MD: I don't think that it's a good perception. I mean, it's abandoned, and also because no one is going to take care of it until the tram comes back. And I think it will be in some years, so it's very bad right now. I don't like it.
  - Z: Is it out of your limits at the moment?
- **MD:** It is out of our limits because the Department of Mobility told us to put everything away. Nothing could be there. And for the people, they have no motivation to go there anymore, because yes, it is a green area, but you have no place to walk. So they go on the street, and that's it.
  - **Z:** So, because of this intervention, it basically turned back into an abandoned space?
- MD: Yes

GLM: I can say that it's just a matter of seeing the city like a living organism, not something that is stuck in time. But you perceive it that maybe a tramway, can be transformed into a linear park and a community park, and then again a tramway, and then again whatever else, it helps you to understand that the city is a living organism. I really think that it can be helpful also for the municipalities to have rules for this kind of transformation in order to make them easier to be done. Instead of having this stuck system where everything is very difficult to be changed. It would be very helpful and it would create a more vibrant community who has more freedom to change their environment.

#### **Z:** What remains from the project, now that it's dismantled?

GLM: Well, for sure it remains. Like I told you that it (the project) worked, in the sense that it involved people. It became our first attempt to practically trigger a sense of belonging in a space through intuition. And that's very important for us because now we are activating new place-making projects. With pros and cons, of course, so with a lot of mistakes that we learned from it. And I think that we will learn from other projects. But at the same time, we perceived that it was possible to do it. That's very important, I think.

**MD:** The fact that the process is very important, that if you don't have a clear idea of what the project will be, it's fine. **It's just part of the process.** 



 The remaining communication material on-site Photo by the author, 2024













#### A Network of Places

Stratosferica continued its place-making efforts and extended their collaboration to other networks in 2023 with two significant projects. Through the collaborations with the City of Turin and Cities4Forests, the Corso Farini Project oversaw the re-activation of a degraded "green" area near the Campus Einaudi, re-establishing it as a public space with new design implementations, their events and cultural programming.

Later in the year, Stratosferica transformed a ware-house that belongs to Lavazza on Lungo Dora Firenze into a cultural and community hub, a reference point for the Aurora neighborhood. Dorado began hosting exhibitions for Utopian Hours and other cultural activities, through the support of the City and local realities (Stratosferica, 2023b).

Both projects followed the (at this point what could be described as) Stratosferica Methodology, involving co-design and self-building workshops in collaboration with various groups and social, institutional and cultural actors.

- What would you say are your main takeaways from this project that Z: you're taking into consideration when you're working on Farini and also Dorado?
- GLM: For sure the dealing of the conflicts in a better way, of the conflicts not only between citizens but also with all of the actors, not only the social but also the corporate and institutional. Also in terms of design, we are more capable of saying, "No, let's do this in this way because we already experimented and it doesn't work in that part". But also in how to engage with the city, for example, with the actors in that sense. How to engage with the events. What kind of events work more rather than others. And also in the workflow, working on that project from the inside, we really developed a new way of working that's kind of different from other sectors, let's say. So, I mean, that's also interesting from an internal part of it.
  - LB: So this is a fantastic lesson that we learned and that is very seldom heard or told about, so you have to accept the fact that you are like a public servant in the public space, so you have to listen to a lot of things that are not actually affecting you. So being a place-maker, you have to understand that you are going against the tide, the tide says, "You want to do something nice, do it in your private space, don't touch public space, that's the space of the city, it's out of your agency". Place-makers and place-making and city-making thinks the opposite, "Who's taking care of that space, nobody, not even the city, not even a private company, no one, so maybe I can do something for it". And so where's the benefit of this, is that we have showcased that it's possible, that a lot of people are taking care for this, that are investing, like you did, your time. You want to learn something, you want to be active in the public space, you want to make friendships or meet new interesting people by doing this, and you're proud of your action, of your agency.

- **MD:** Community building is so important, and you don't have to make it less important, because at the end, **the people are making the places.** Because you can do a very good place, very aesthetic, but if you don't do call to actions, you don't promote it on social media with printed materials, then it can't be used as a place.
  - **Z:** How does Stratosferica sustain this community and place-based engagement?
- MD: With keeping the place active, like even if we don't have cultural contents to propose, we always open the place to make it alive and to make people know that this place is there and will continue to be there. And also through digital communications on social media and online information, we keep it alive.





- **Z:** Do you think lessons learned from this specific project necessarily translates into replicability? How important is it to apply a place-based approach for sustainable transformations?
- MD: I think (when we started Corso Farini) that our idea was to "clone" Precollinear Park, but we noticed that it is a different place and it has different needs, because some things that worked in Precollinear Park didn't work for Corso Farini. Like the community of volunteers, they were like, I'm not joking, 150 in Precollinear Park, while in Corso Farini, during its entire life, I think they were less than 50. So I think that, it's right to take with you some of the knowledge you learned with the very first projects, but at the end you have to know how to transform them. I don't know how, because we didn't reach this knowledge yet, but it is important to also transform yourself as an initiator of the project. I mean, it's different because with Corso Farini we had Cities4Forests that helped us to make the network more international. But Precollinear Park was more of a local project, very local. So, we didn't have so many relationships with, like, the outside of Turin. Also now, Stratosferica became more international than before. But it started as a very local project, so it was less fast to make it international.
  - **Z:** So, basically, a local project has the power to also reach global networks through the networks you establish?
- MD: If you communicate it well, I think it has a lot of potential.



 Cities4Forests, the City of Turin and Stratosferica talking to the volunteers Photo by Federico Masini, 2023

Luca, Scott and the
municipal actors meet
again for the Corso Farini
workshops
Photo by Federico
Masini, 2023



LB: I mean, it all goes back to that, to the fact that we learn a lot step by step. So we took out a methodology from this. We actually strongly believe that this has a lot to teach to other organizations and places. We're actually following the same methodology every time. And of course, it's a learning-by-doing process, but I believe that we have put together, one by one, all the important pieces that were kind of successful in doing this. The idea of starting from the image of the city you want to project is very crucial. So the values that you are putting in your action. So I think that we're happy in following a sort of methodology that we somehow created ourselves by putting together observation, a lot of endeavor and time and responsibility, the best that we can do as designers, being very critical with our actions and the feedbacks that we receive from every action, in starting a dialogue with a lot of stakeholders and keeping it behind our usual rate of interest. Because if you're there in the public space, you have to be accountable for many different things. So you have to be smart in understanding how people will react and why, and being open in showing the real "why" you're doing it. So I'm happy and I'm at ease with this role because the why is very simple. It's not for profit. It's there to showcase that we are creative, that we are place-makers, we are all designers, we are all urbanites, and we care about the city. So that's how we operate and we think it's very powerful also in terms of opening people's eyes on how important and how crucial it is to, first of all, being aware of these dynamics. There's a lot of misconceptions and bias on how the city should work and how citizens should think. And secondly, on participating and try to become a little bit more involved than you usually are.

**Z:** In your opinion, what and who plays the biggest role in the sustainable expansion of these networks of places? Would you say it's the existing community, collaboration with different organizations/associations, events, effective communication, sustainable design implementations etc.

GLM: I would say a combination, but I really think events, in the sense that it's more like a gathering of a community. But also learning from existing communities, because as an architect, you can learn a lot from existing communities that maybe developed some technological solution that you never thought about. So I think that's very important, and it's more about working on genius loci rather than just being inspired by the façade around it. And also the emergence of a lot of organizations kind of changed the way of working on the city, because before it was only the municipality, and now it kind of changed, and the actors are a multitude of actors. It's not only the municipality dealing with the urban space.



LB: Well, good ideas, first of all. Second, being honest. Third, being not-forprofit. All of these are great assets. So you have to have a good idea. If it's a so-and-so idea, it's not easy to bring people on board. Second, you have to be honest. And most of the place-makers are not such because they have secondary objectives. And then being happy of working with people, for the people, but especially for the place itself. So I think that why we're so different is because we care about the city more than we care about the citizens. So citizens are transient. They come and go but the city stays. Corso Farini is much better now than before. And we've done it more for the city of Turin than for the citizens of that specific area. Then of course also for them. But I don't have to stop and ask them, "Are you happy?". It's for them, yes. But it's also for the city at large. And for people like you who don't live close by Corso Farini. So that's why I always say it has a lot to do about our care for the city. Do we care about the city as you care for your cat or your dog or your boyfriend or your mother and father? Yes. Okay, so go out and do something. Don't just think that other people will do something for you. Because that's not the case in urbanism. It's all driven by rules and regulations or money. But there's a lot of tiny, meaningful spaces where you can activate your imagination, your idea, your power to build something collectively. So that's the main lesson that we want to keep learning and also try to disseminate to others.

 Luca, Gian, Marta, the team and the volunteers at Precollinear Park Photo by Federico Masini, 2022

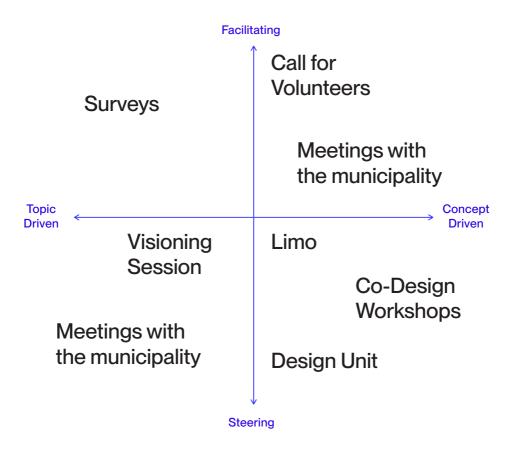
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# 3.4.1 To Conclude

After an extensive analysis, the presented case studies are clear examples of what we have previously referred to as "project-based communities". These projects and the actors behind them have been able to intentionally design the places that can trigger and support these learning processes in the transformation to sustainability, in which place and community diversity is crucial. Furthermore, both projects have been able to activate various actors in the realization of the projects, aligning their personal motivations with social and environmental goals, fostering collaboration and enabling the creation of new forms of communities.

The analysis of both case studies presents us with the various co-design processes which we can map along the Collaborative Design Framework by Meroni et al. (2018):



↑ Fig. 45

Analysis of the co-design processes of the case studies Drawing by the author, 2024

It is possible to observe practices of sustainable place-shaping in both cases, as both projects are driven by values, feelings and motivations associated with places, utilizing place-based assets in order to demonstrate co-designed practices between people and their environment. While Imbarchino has remained somewhat "closed" as a group in the inital phases of the project, Stratosferica has taken the term "transformative agency" quite literally, actively collaborating with external actors for the process design. It is important to note here that Imbarchino is coming from a more "social-dialogue" based background, having evident cultural significance and strong pre-existing communities in their organizational structure. What Precollinear Park has achieved during its lifetime was to create an intentional community that has grown alongside the project, re-appreciating a "non-place". In the end, both projects were able to foster a sense of belonging through placebased engagement as the communities that made up their ecology were able to find something that they felt like "a part of".

Furthermore, both projects involve actors re-negotiating their terms of engagement in place-based development, creating joint agendas for sustainability and demonstrating active citizenship. Both projects oversee people identifying problems and deciding to co-manage common resources and wealth, and building a community over it. In these cases, commoning brought people together for collaborative decision-making and consequently re-allocated power to social actors.

Although we can't deny that both projects were initiated through the support of policy processes, at a certain point several of their initiatives were hindered through the same process: whether it is Imbarchino's multiple projects being blocked by the municipality or the cancellation of Precollinear Park altogether. That is not to say, "This is good, this is bad", but in order for people to connect to places, policy needs to become a part of the way cities can be co-designed with various stakeholders.

In terms of design, we can highlight similar points in both projects. As we said before, both projects are using existing place-based assets, such as the existing physical infrastructure and existing communities and practices in places. In the case of Imbarchino, the sense of place and the place-based community were established, resulting in the huge support of their crowdfunding campaign, further strengthening a sense of belonging in the place. Though Imbarchino is currently made up of several communities, they are able to co-exist for now as the design thinking applied to the spatial design sustains their activities on-site with little interruption. As for Stratosferica, although we need to note that they do have a more technical background and they were guided by strong design actions, there wasn't an existing community to help advance their project. Through Precollinear Park, Stratosferica was able to expand their network and implement various actors over the years. helping them with the design interventions on-site. Furthermore, both projects follow open-ended processes in terms of design, embracing the temporariness and softness of interventions and prioritizing the engagement of the community with the place through their design actions. Through these initiatives and with the help of expert-design, both places were able to become "mediums" for various activities, further contributing to the sustainability of the social and cultural practices onsite and creating a strong network.

Though this is beyond the scope of this thesis, it is interesting to consider the different effects of the pandemic on both projects given the similar timelines. While Imbarchino had to close due to the lockdown and couldn't expand their organization outside of their core group, Precollinear Park and their community was born out of the same reality. And at the same time, while Imbarchino is growing as an establishment, the volunteers in Stratosferica's extended network have started to decrease in number. It is a strange reality given both initiatives were aimed to shape and activate places for communities, developing and managing new ways of living and "well-being".

#### 3.4.2

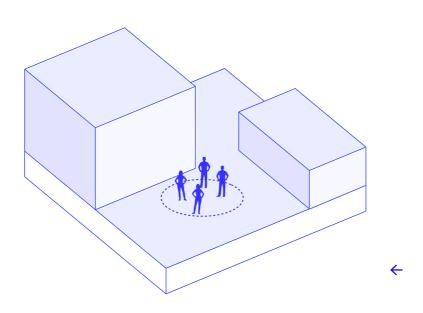
## Toolkit for Communities, Designers and Policy Actors

Based on the analysis of the theoretical chapters and the case studies, we are now able to recognize both the tangible and intangible elements that go into these processes of co-designing and shaping the social and urban fabric of the city. Through this, we can create a matrix of analysis which results in the creation of a tool-kit for designing our output.

## 1. You as a Group: Peer-Governance

Peer-governance can help in bringing different opinions together, forming a social system that is built upon relationship-building and collective decision-making. This process can empower people in places to explore their transformative agency to address issues through their existing knowledge. It's important to come together through shared values and motivations in order to align your needs as a group in addressing more complex problems.

Fig. 46 ↓
Drawing by the author, 2024



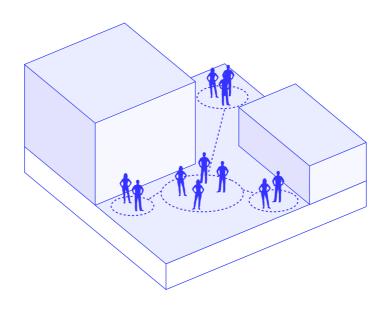
## 2. Your Group: Community

Shared values and motivations can result in an intentional community formed around intentional projects. It's important to make calls for actions, implementing various external actors and further expanding the community through **co-design processes**.

Furthermore it is also important here to **align various groups of people**, including your group, experts, institutional and policy actors.

↓ Fig. 47

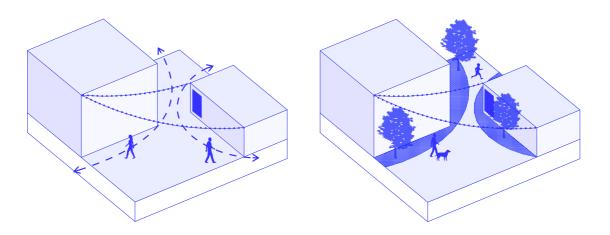
Drawing by the author, 2024



#### 3. Enhancing Existing Infrastructure

Whether dealing with a non-place or reactivating an existing building, it is important to recognize **place-based approaches to sustainability** and utilising physical assets, including the existing infrastructure and ecological flows on-site. Furthermore, existing communities and practices should be taken in consideration along with the values, meanings, embodied experiences in places. Enhancing the **sense of place** through inclusive place branding, visual narratives (even online) and small interventions such as lighting and vegetation can be effective.

Fig. 48 & 49 ↓
Drawing by the author, 2024

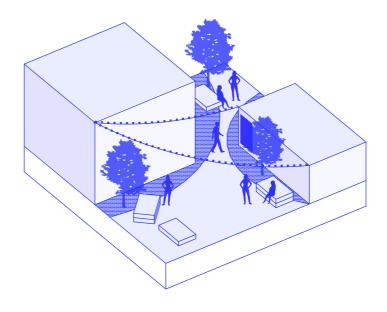


## 4. Flexible and Adaptable Design

When dealing with the needs of your group and the needs of much bigger and diverse groups, it is important not to impose any solutions through design and leaving the process open-ended rather than having pre-determined end-goals. This can allow for communities to engage with places based on their own needs, enabling the opportunity for further development and co-designed practices between different groups. It is important to implement temporary yet sustainable design interventions that can be changed based on the changing needs of different groups, and sustain place-based engagement.

→ Fig. 50

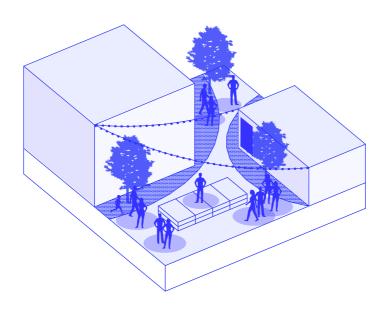
Drawing by the author, 2024



#### 5. Sustaining Place-Based Engagement

It is important to establish a social sphere and a **sense of belonging** in places. The spatial configuration of design elements on-site can enable and sustain the formation of communities. Furthermore, creating points of interaction, events, establishing a dialogue with different realities can enhance **community engagement** in places through "ritualizing togetherness" (Bollier and Helfrich, 2019). Furthermore, it is important here to note that while some activities in places may be commercial activities, it's crucial not to prioritize economic growth over co-creating and using together.

Fig. 51 ↓
Drawing by the author, 2024



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