Creative Citizens
A meeting space between designers, citizens, local stakeholders and institutions.

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Aknowledgements.
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Context.

ZONE 4, located in the south-east area of Milan, is a neighborhood characterized by a high number of bottom-up activities. The location hosting the project is Cascina Cuccagna, an old farmhouse symbol of Milanese activism, because it has been revived thanks to a citizens’ initiative. Now it is a piece of countryside within the city and a multi-functional centre hosting a variety of activities.
The project.
Creative Citizens project is a program of weekly co-design sessions dedicated to 4 different service clusters: food systems, services for sharing goods and skills, cultural services and legal and bureaucratic services. The program started in February 2013 until June 2013 (16 sessions of 2 hours), generating 6 co-designed services that are now evolving in different ways.
The design process.
| December 2012. Participation to the call for the assignment of temporary spaces at Cacina Cuccagna.
| February 2013. Open day to present the project to the community.
| March 2013. First Co-design session.
| June 2013. Presentation to the Municipality.
Creative Citizens project acted as a bridge between citizens and institutions: after the program citizens perceive themselves as a collective actor strong enough to get in touch with institutions and potential stakeholders. The project enhanced their capacity to collaborate with other strategic players, working on coalition building.
Activism and Civic Participation

The “Creative Citizens” are a group of veritable activists collaborating to co-design services for daily life in the neighborhood. They have been networking with other local associations and movements as Time Banks, Parents’ groups, purchasing groups and also with the Local Governance Board of Zone 4.

A group of committed people designing services for the neighbourhood network with local players

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Each co-design session can be considered as a social event, enhancing connections and relations. Some of the citizens are now partners in the service-start ups, establishing also entrepreneurial collaborations. Furthermore, special events as exhibitions and an Open Day were organized to interact with the local community.
Creative Citizens project appeared in a map developed by the Municipality showing the most successful initiatives in Zone 4. It is considered as a good practice of active citizenship and as a format to replicate in other neighborhoods and cities. It fostered a vision of the neighborhood is as a “public good” managed by citizens.
All the services generated within creative citizens are based on the principle of reducing any form of mediation between production and consumption. Another crucial factor deals with the shared use of resources in the neighborhood, meaning public and private spaces, objects, local knowhow and platforms.
Skill Training and Design Education

Creative Citizens used a set of participatory techniques as co-design and community centered design that are crucial to design services involving citizens. This forced designer to become a community coach, that is something more than facilitating: it is important to train designers to bring visions and share them with people.
Job Creation

The emergence of local service start-ups

Some participants considered Creative Citizens as an opportunity to create a form of complementary job. Three of the six services generated during the project are now start-ups run by citizens, aiming at becoming real social enterprises. The Regional Job Council contacted Creative Citizens to discuss possible forms of job creations by using participatory design techniques.
Storytelling, visualizations and physical mock-ups have been crucial to share ideas with the community. Designers are able to give substance to ideas by visualizing and prototyping them and this is particularly relevant if we consider services, which are intangible by definition. The ability of designers in creating visions and objects is important for managing a conversation among multiple actors, because it offers a common item on which to dialogue.