

DESIS Thematic Cluster

Collaborative Cities

Social innovation and design for city making

Draft 3 30.03.2018 - Ezio Manzini, - *not yet edited in English*

The following text is an up-dated version of an initial document (Draft1 – September 2017). This draft 3 has been written on the basis of formal and informal discussions and seminars on this topic that took place inside DESIS Network, in the period October 2017- March 2018. This text will be progressively up-dated and up-graded following the evolution of the whole Thematic Cluster project.

Theme and hypothesis of work

The world is changing fast. And cities are changing even faster. In this turbulent context the traditional city planning has progressively been paralleled by more flexible processes: city-making projects thanks to which different parts of the cities are conceived and realized, considering both their physical and social dimensions (See Annex 1).

This DESIS Thematic Cluster aims at investigating the nature and the possibilities of these city-making projects and, moving from there, at verifying their role in generating, or regenerating, urban fabric.

Working hypothesis. City-making projects have different social and political motivations and implications. That is, they can produce inequalities, segregation and commodification of the urban commons, or move in the opposite direction, reducing inequalities, creating a diversified and vibrant urban fabric. The projects moving in the first direction – that presently is the dominant one – are driven by the interests of who considers the city, in all its aspects, as a marketable good. The second direction is proposed by several cases of social innovation. They are driven by who see the city as a complex living entity, made of people, communities and places, the existence of which is based on a mesh of collaborative projects.

More than ten years of social innovation in the city teach us how to do to conceive and develop these city making projects: a *design approach* (how to look at the city and promote city making projects); some *design guidelines* (how to act in the city and to orient the projects towards sustainability); an *emerging scenario* (how to give different projects a common vision of the city and how to implement it).

This emerging scenario, called *the scenario of the collaborative city*, is based on 4 + 4 design guidelines:

Guidelines for City making

- *Multidimensionality.* How a project blends its physical, social, economic, cultural dimensions.

When all the different dimensions are well developed, the project itself becomes, at its own scale, a building block in the city making process (for instance: a neighbourhood garden can be conceived from the beginning as a place where different communities meet, a social enterprise of gardeners works, and kids have lessons on plants and gardening).

- *Interconnection.* How a project is connected with other projects and with a neighbourhood and/or the city in general.

When different projects collaborate and synergize, being rooted in a place, the system they generate becomes a larger building component of the city making process (for instance: different projects related to a garden, to migrant inclusion and to renewing school programs can be connected and coordinated by a framework project at the neighbourhood scale).

- *Openness.* How a project makes possible unforeseen events and initiatives to happen.

When the project leaves space to activities that are not, strictly speaking, included in its main goal, it contributes to the (social, cultural, and economic) dynamism of the city and, therefore, to its city-making processes (for instance: a neighbourhood garden is conceived – also- as a platform permitting and supporting different social and socioeconomic activities from open air schools, to spaces for cultural events).

- *Heritage*, What a temporary project leaves to the city after its end.

This heritage could be in continuity with the project original aims or not. This possibility to evolve in new, and initially unforeseen, initiatives can be seen as a special form of openness, contributing in time to the city dynamism (for instance, a neighbourhood festival, can create the interests and the energy to transform an empty lot in a garden, and/or its organiser can create a social enterprise to start and manage similar initiatives in other neighbourhoods).

Guidelines for City orienting

- *Collaborating: producing results and social values.*

Moving in this direction means to regenerate the city by developing collaborative projects. That is, by projects driven by collaboration between citizens, and between them and other social actors (as public administration, companies, non profit enterprises, associations, universities). It implies different forms of collaborations (blending horizontal and vertical collaborations), different motivations (blending economic and cultural motivations), and different positions in the innovation trajectory (from initial activism to different forms of normality).

Collaborating (i.e. producing at the same time practical results and social value) gives life to unprecedented economic and organizational models. At the same time, and for the same reasons, collaborating is a strategy to build the power for systemic changes and to produce and regenerate social commons.

- *Bridging: connecting diversities.*

Moving in this direction means to cultivate and connect diversities. That is, to develop projects capable to bridge elderly and young people; residents and migrants; rich and poor. And capable to integrate working and living spaces (as: residences, schools, offices, factories and workshops, farming and gardening, commerce, entertainment, sport, meeting spaces) creating more diverse and dynamic activities.

Bridging (i.e. connecting diversities) is an antidote to the on-going main trend towards gentrification, segregation and creation of communication bubbles. And, in positive, it is a way to improve the social and environmental resilience of the city.

- *Commoning: weaving people and places.*

Moving in this direction means creating spaces cared by communities. That is, to produce “third spaces”, between the private and the public ones. It also means regenerate social commons, as mutual trust, empathy, collaboration and shared knowledge and expertise. All of them can be the result of renewed traditions, or of unprecedented collaborative projects.

Commoning (i.e. the process of building commons) is antidote to main trends of city commodification and marketization. It implies to keep in account the different nature of commons and of the commoning processes.

- *Democratizing: supporting active participation.*

Moving in this direction means to develop a project-centred democracy. That is, a environment where individuals and communities can develop at best their life projects: an enabling ecosystem that is *also* a democratic ecosystem where citizens can take decisions and to make them real.

Democratizing (i.e. the process of improving the participative ecosystem) is an antidote to the on-going crisis of participative democracy (and of democracy in general). It implies a power shift towards citizens and communities.

Working hypothesis and design role.

- Each city-making project can be evaluated considering its *city making and collaborative profile* (where its city making and collaborative profile is given by its position in relation to the 4+4 guidelines/criteria proposed in the “Working hypotheses” section).
- Each contribution of each city-making project adds to similar ones (i.e. to the contributions made by other projects), enhancing the related dimension of the Collaborative City scenario and, therefore, becoming a driver of change towards a more resilient and sustainable city. Specific ‘transversal’ projects can be conceived to coordinate and integrate these contributions and make them more effective.

Design research can verify these hypotheses and to enrich them with more examples and in-depth observations. To do that two paths can be followed:

- To develop individual projects, improving their urban qualities, and therefore their city-making profile.
- To develop transversal projects, supporting and integrating urban qualities at a city-scale¹.

Methodology

1. To discuss the criteria and hypothesis of work, and to enrich them
2. To locally develop projects² considering the proposed criteria and the hypothesis of work; to highlight each project contribution to the different dimensions, corresponding to the different criteria.
3. To share these results with the Thematic Cluster partners and collaborate in drawing a map where commonalities and differences will be indicated and explained.

Roadmap

- October 2017- February 2018: definition of the teams and of the involved projects, and discussion of the Thematic Cluster criteria and working hypothesis (this document is the result of this first round of discussions and seminars)
 - February 2018 – April 2018: starting first round of projects and experience exchanges – first Thematic Cluster meeting.
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- April 2018 - August 2018: development of the first round of projects and results exchanges
 - August 2018 - December 2018: second round of projects and results exchanges
 - January 2019 – July 2019: discussions and results consolidation
 - August 2019 – December 2019: results presentations

Results

- *In progress*: they will be presented in a number of events (to be defined).
- *Final*: a digital book (similar to the ones done by other Thematic Clusters) will be edited.

Organization

A core group of DESIS Labs is created. Presently it includes the DESIS Lab of Elisava (Barcelona), Tongji (Shanghai), Politecnico (Milano), CSM (London), Luca (Genk), Parsons (NYC), UFRJ (Rio), Medea (Malmo). They are committed to contribute in a proactive way to the whole Thematic Cluster project and, in particular, to use the projects they will develop during the 2018, January – July period, to feed the whole TC discussion.

¹ In doing that, given the necessary and fundamental role of the public authorities, it will be useful to connect the activities of this Thematic Cluster with the ones of the previous DESIS Thematic Cluster: *"Public and Collaborative"*.

² The term *project* here is intended in a very large sense: it can be a result-oriented project or a infrastructuring one; it can propose new creative ideas and scenarios, or develop tools and procedures to support existing activities; it can be a short and light workshop or a well structured design research and, finally, it can be a brand new project or the up-grading of an existing one.

Given the variety of projects that can be considered, it is crucial that each involved team orients (part of) its work, and the resulting outputs, so that they can contribute to the collective discussion in the Thematic Cluster community.

Around this core group, other DESIS Labs aiming at being active in the Thematic Cluster Collaborative City will be added.

Some DESIS Partners could be involved too (a DESIS Partner is a design team that is not based in a design school, but is interested to the same theme on which the Cluster is working and agrees to collaborate adopting the same approach in terms of openness in the process and in the results).

The Thematic Cluster will feed a conversation in the whole DESIS Network and, in particular, the ones active in the Thematic Area Design and Cities.