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COMMUNICATION DESIGN FOR URBAN ENVIRONMENT: CREATIVE PROJECTS TO EXPLORE THE CULTURES OF THE PLACES

Daniela Calabi　　　Dipartimento di Design, Politecnico di Milano　　　daniela.calabi@polimi.it

ABSTRACT

The paper describes DESIGN+CONTEXT: Design for innovative products/services for the promotion of urban environmental contexts *(D+C), a transmobility project promoted by Consorzio A.S.T. (Agenzia per lo Sviluppo Territoriale) of Vigevano and funded by European Union, Italy, Regione Lombardia in collaboration with Fondazione Cariplo.*

It regards the role of design within the domain of creative and cultural industries. D+C aims at the development of project proposals for enhancing the attractiveness of territory, its identity and cultural heritage, through a six months professional internship for 10 young designers.

The project involved also six European academic institutions which are interested in the field of design and/or territory, at different levels and with different perspectives.

The ten project proposals have been developed on the basis of the research carried on by DCxT (Design della Comunicazione per il Territorio), a research group of the Design Department at Politecnico di Milano, which activity focuses on communication design meant as an agent for the promotion of territory and place identity.

The paper describes D+C project, its aims and the context in which acts (between creative and cultural industries, design, and tourism). Paragraph two provides an overview of DCxT's research and paragraph three describes the main results of D+C, focusing on the ten project proposals.

Keywords: Communication, Design, Territory, Environmental Design

1 D+C : DESIGN PLUS CONTEXTS

DESIGN+CONTEXT: Design for innovative products/services for the promotion of urban environmental contexts (D+C) is a transmobility project promoted by Consorzio A.S.T. (Agenzia per lo Sviluppo Territoriale) of Vigevano and funded by European Union, Italy, Regione Lombardia in collaboration with Fondazione Cariplo under the call *Avviso pubblico per la presentazione di progetti di mobilità transnazionale rivolti a inoccupati/disoccupati per lo sviluppo di prodotti/servizi innovativi nell'ambito del settore culturale e creativo*.

It regards the domain of creative and cultural industries and aims at the development of innovative design solutions for enhancing the attractiveness of territory, its identity and cultural heritage, through a six months professional internship for 10 young designers.

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The output consists in 10 design projects (9 concepts and one prototype). Each pilot project proposal has been designed as a "format", that means they must be applicable to different European areas and not only Lombardy.

D+C also involved six European academic institutions (universities and research centres/groups) which are interested in the field of design and/or territory, at different levels and with different perspectives.

The institutions involved are:

— Mobile Life VINN Excellence Centre at Stockholm University (Sweden)
— University of Leeds – School of Design (UK)
— University of Brighton - Faculty of Arts (UK)
— Centro de Artes e Humanidades - Universidade da Madeira (Portugal)
— Laboratório da Cor - Universidade Lusíada de Lisboa - Centro de Investigação em Território, Arquitectura e Design (CITAD) (Portugal)
— Design della Comunicazione per il Territorio (DCxT Research group) – Politecnico di Milano – Dipartimento di Design (Italy)

For the academic viewpoint this project has been also an opportunity to start to set up a network between institutions involved and a common ground for sharing expertises and future collaboration opportunities.

The ten young designers has been divided in two-person groups and each group spent its period of internship at one of the universities in Portugal, Uk and Sweden. All these institutions supported the designers during their internship, providing their specific knowledge and skills to nurture the development of innovative solutions.

Consorzio A.S.T. (which collaborates with Dipartimento di Design of Politecnico di Milano under a framework agreement) assigned the role of coordinator to Daniela Calabi (Assistant Professor at Dipartimento di Design), member of DCxT research group which research activity focuses on communication design meant as an agent for the promotion of territory and place identity. DCxT trained the designers before the internship and supervised their activity during the period abroad, driving the development of the project proposals.

1.1   D+C AND CREATIVE INDUSTRIES

As stated above, the project focuses on creative and cultural industries making reference to the European Commission's *Green paper: Unlocking the potential of cultural and creative industries* (2010).

The document points out that in the last decades digital technologies and globalization have deeply changed the industrial production. In the digital economy "services factory" has replaced "product factory" to such an extent that today the value of the supply is measured in terms of "experience", and the market competitiveness depends on the ability to create social networking. In the current scenario, cultural and creative industries represent highly innovative companies with a great economic potential. Council of Europe «highlighted the need to strengthen the link between education, training and CCIs as well as to maximise the potential of SMEs in cultural and creative sectors» (2010, p.4.) in Europe. The *Green paper* defines cultural industries as «those industries which

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use culture as an input and have a cultural dimension». Furthermore, «they include architecture and design, which integrate creative elements into wider processes» (European Commission, 2010, p.6).

D+C project acts within this context. It aims at fostering innovative and creative design projects to enhance the identity of European territories, strengthening the link between citizens, tourists, artisans and SMEs. The project proposals developed concern different fields of design (communication, interior, product) and suggest actions for innovating local handicraft, promote culture, nature and history of places, and foster a kind of tourism which avoids stereotypes and mainstream icons.

The involvement of academic institutions has been relevant in the project both for their expertise in education and research. They has been selected for the relevance of their research topics which mainly regard: Communication Design and place identity, Colour Design, Architecture and landscape, human geography and perception of the city, wayfinding, products and services for tourism, social media and digital publishing.

2 THE ROLE OF COMMUNICATION DESIGN IN PROMOTION OF TERRITORY AND PLACE IDENTITY: AN OVERVIEW ABOUT DCXT RESEARCH

Giulio Carlo Argan has described the city as a complex «system of communication» (2002). Currently, the urban environment is involved in deep social and physical changes that determine powerful transformations in the landscape. Nowadays, these transformations are so quickly that people find difficult to understand and get used to the change, basically for two main reasons. On the one hand, memory needs continuity and a periodical revival. On the other hand, changes need the development of new attitudes in order to deal with the evolution of complexity. In those places where the sense of belonging starts to vanish, we can observe a progressive refusal by their inhabitants and therefore a consequent degradation of spaces that will be perceived as unfamiliar. In this scenario, the main aim of a design action should be strengthening the identity and the sense of belonging to places.

According to Scaramellini (2012), the decay of the territorial assets and the loss of what is generally considered as "identity of territories" start with «the deterioration of existing territorial assets and their subsequent re-composition according with the operational needs and organization models of new economic, social, cultural, urban realities». In this context, it is essential to communicate and then make accessible the cultural identities which have shaped the place over time.

In other words, to communicate the cultural identity of a place we must enhance the understanding of its deep reality, that means informing locals and tourists about the origins of local memory.

To this aim we have to make the "landscape" visible. "Landscape" is here intended according with the definition given by the Council of Europe in the article one of the European Landscape convention: «an area, as perceived by people, whose character is the result of the action and interaction of natural and/or human factors» (Council of Europe, 2000, p.9).

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A Landscape depicted in its deep characters can meet the need to get in touch with natural, cultural and social aspects of a place which is expressed by both locals and tourists.

Communication design process allows to re-think the way in which we promote territories, from content to formats passing by expressive languages. The development of relevant communication codes can help to deal with the fragmentation and loss of landscape semantics. Thus, communication design can enhance the ''aesthetic experience'' of the landscape which is considered as a perceptual phenomenon (D'Angelo, 2003).

This issue is related to the "aesthetics of relations" that is a matter of design. The design task consists in providing the necessary guidelines to rebuild the set of identities, as far as making visible what is invisible: memory and future.

2.1 THE COMMUNICATIVE ACCESS

The research carried on by "DCxT: Design della Comunicazione per il Territorio", a research group of the Department of Design at the Politecnico di Milano, is focused on the need to share different typology of documents, which together represent the heritage of memories of a territory: the traces of its identity.

These traces are made by text, video, audio, legends or oral traditions. They're like "footprints" left in the urban space by removed objects that, together with more traditional documents about the history of place, represent it intangible and tangible memories.

It is clear that there are a lot of historical content about European cities which can be collected, described and made visible; what we need are communication formats developed to represent both traces and documents in a coherent way.

The design process is a creative process able to create narratives: the *fil rouge* through which understand all the elements of place identity. Thus, Communication Design has an important function: it is a "decoding device" that can show original viewpoint. It could be seen as a "mediator" between physical and virtual/digital spaces that simplifies dissemination of knowledge and promotes new models of learning. It's able to drive users' choices and behaviours affecting their perception.

Since the role of Communication Design is to keep together different multimedia contents. It works as a sophisticated system of interconnected documents and services, and for this reason it can be defined as a "devices" (Agamben, 2006) that allows the ''communicative access'' to a wider audience. It allows to share contents through of different media and by means of different languages (audio and video, digital and traditional), connecting them.

Communicative access is the research topic of DCxT. The research group is focused on the development of communication formats able to create a relationship between places, tourists and inhabitants, from different point of view.

Those formats must satisfy two specific function. On the one hand, they have a "predictive function" therefore they're aimed to provide an overview of the territory before being there. On the other hand, they have also to guide people

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on site, satisfying both "informative and directive function" (Giannitrapani,
2010).

To this aim, the communication formats designed specifically for web have a
map-based interface. The map is a famous and ancient tool for the
communication of a place. It shows the physical and morphological aspects of an
area (zones and institutional boundaries, geographic elements) and is also an
instrument for representing various aspects of a place and of people who lives
there. The maps lie in between the representation of spaces and the creation of
new ones since they provide real paths and allow the access to those places that
better represent the identity of territory.

Since DCxT trained the designers before the internship and drove the
development of the project proposals during the period abroad, the research
described above is the main theoretical basis of the proposals designed under
D+C project.

In the next paragraph the ten project proposals will be briefly described. Each
description is accompanied by an illustrative image and a table that identify:

• the main design field of reference:

— communication;
— interior;
— product;

• the communication function satisfied

— predictive function: providing an overview of the territory (and a specific
viewpoint) before being there.
— informative function: providing (historical, social, etc.) information about
the area through different typologies of document and content (video, audio,
etc.).
— directive function: providing geographical information useful to find and
explore the area. This function is satisfied by all those projects that provide a
map and/or navigation tools.

• the domain of reference between those identified by Leadership European
Group on cultural statistics (2012):

—   heritage (museums, historical places, archeological sites, intangible
heritage);
—   archives;
—   libraries;
—   book and press;
—   visual arts (plastic arts, photography, design);
—   performing arts (music, dance, drama, combined arts and other live
show);
—   audiovisual and multimedia (film, radio, television, video, sound
recordings, multimedia works, videogames);
—   architecture;
—   advertising;
—   art crafts;

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- the proposed output.

3 RESULTS OF D+C PROJECT

The main result of D+C project consists in 10 project proposals concerning creative and cultural industries, aimed at the development of innovative design solutions (product and/or services) for enhancing the attractiveness of territory, its identity and cultural heritage.

At the end of the internship, the proposals has been presented to some delegates of Regione Lombardia and a panel of professionals or possible sponsors during an ad hoc event carried out at Sala dell'affresco of the Vigevano castle in May 2014. To disseminate the project has also been created a website that is still available at www.designpluscontex.org. D+C obtained such a positive response that Regione Lombardia has decided to fund a second edition of the project: Design+Context 2.0.

3.1 AQUAMUSA. ALL AROUND MEMORIES
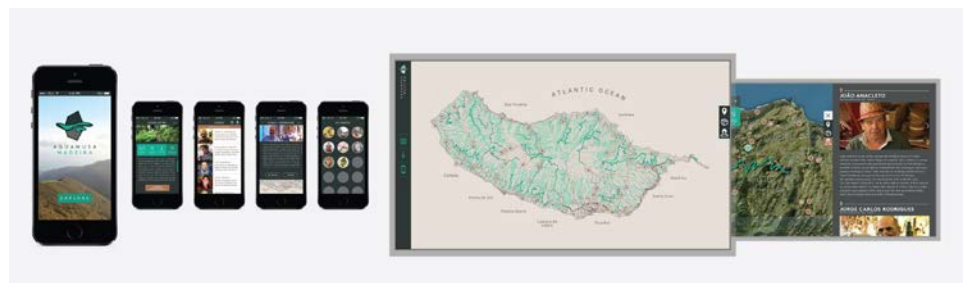
Designer: Andrea Di Nardo

Seat of internship: Universidade da Madeira

Aquamusa aims to promote and valorize the natural environment and the cultural/handicraft tradition. The communication system consists of a website and a mobile app. The contents are divided in two categories, "products" and "people". Each category of content is structured in "paths of water" (in the case of Madeira these paths follow the *Levadas*, a net of mini-canals). The website is

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richer in content and satisfies at the same time predictive, informative and directive function. The mobile app satisfies both directive and informative function, even if is mainly a navigation tool.

Aquamusa. All around memories	
design field	communication design
function	predictive; informative; directive
cultural domain	heritage; art crafts
output	digital travel guide (website and mobile app)

3.2 GENIUS LOCI. READY MADE OF KNOW-HOW

Designer: Lorenzo Goldaniga

Seat of internship: Universidade da Madeira

The project aims at revealing the hidden know-how of a territory in order to enhance the value of ancient culture and tradition. At the basis of Genius Loci there's the designer figure which can exploit its expertise to develop new products, connecting craftsmanship to small and medium-sized enterprises. For example, Madeira is well known for the ability of its luthiers but nowadays their know-how is getting lost. In order to preserve this heritage it should exploited to develop a different product that could be more appealing (in this case a pair of glasses has been prototyped).

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Genius loci. Ready made of know-how	
design field	communication design
function	predictive
cultural domain	heritage; art crafts
output	handicraft products

3.3 WALK AND TALK. EXPLORING THE PERCEIVED TERRITORY

Designer: Michela Grisi

Seat of internship: Mobile Life Centre

Walk On Talk is a communication format for the promotion of everyday territory. Considering the rise of social media and mobile location services, the project explores the possibility of working on data generated by the user on his/her territory. Walking around in a selected area, the user can contribute to define elements, landmarks and parts of the landscape which he considers representative of it, simply by using hashtags. The contents about the places identified are gathered through interviews and showed on the website. In this way the territory is explored in two different ways: by direct experience of users on field (walk) and communication of their contributions (talk).

Walk and talk. Exploring the perceived territory	
design field	communication design
function	predictive; informative; directive
cultural domain	audiovisual and multimedia
output	digital travel guide (website and mobile app)

3.4 TEXTILE CITY. DISCOVER TEXTILE TRACES IN YOUR CITY THROUGH PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE

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Designer: Silvia Leso

Seat of internship: University of Leeds

Textile City is an unconventional guide for discovering hidden traces and historical memories of textile industry. The guide allows people to freely discover the city using a system of devices: a mobile app, a website and blog, and a wayfinding system. It provides smart and quick curiosities about history and buildings through words and images. Contents about city and textile industry are divided in three categories: past, present and future. Textile city connects people allowing them to re-discover their city on the path of the textile heritage.

Textile city. Discover textile traces in your city through past, present and future	
design field	communication design
function	predictive; informative; directive
cultural domain	heritage; archives; architecture; art crafts
output	digital travel guide (website and mobile app); wayfinding system

3.5 URBAN COLOUR ARCHIVE

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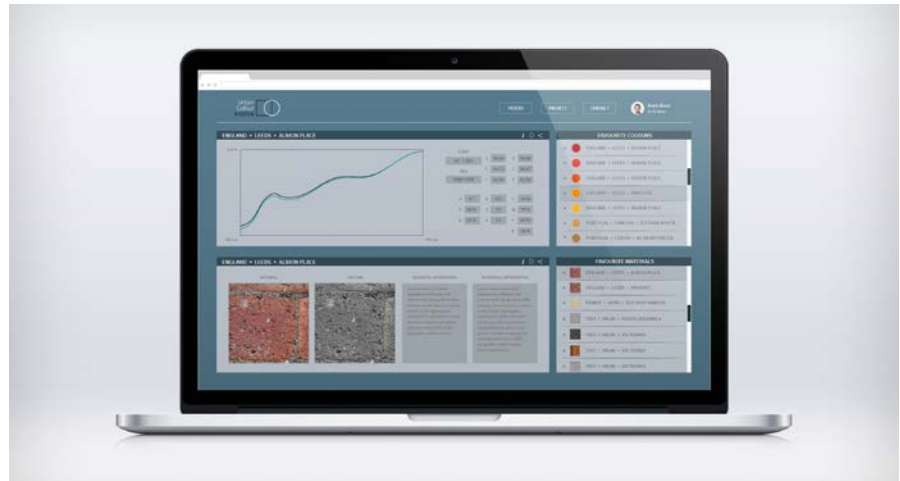
Designer: Enrico Luparello

Seat of internship: University of Leeds

Cities change continuously. Buildings, colours and materials are deeply connected with the city identities but all these elements might be lost, hidden by new constructions. Urban Colour Archive is a digital database that collects data about colours and materials of the city architecture and organize them on different maps, to provide different perceptions of the city. With several research filters the users can find the data that they're searching for and visualize them in a new way, easier to understand. This tool can help also designers and architects to design conscientious projects for the city, from urban planning to city communication.

Urban colour archive	
design field	communication design
function	predictive; informative; directive
cultural domain	visual arts; architecture
output	digital archive (colours and material of city architecture)

3.6 UNTRADITIONAL INDUSTRIAL LANDSCAPE. DESIGN PARASSITA

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Designer: Valeria Moliterno

Seat of internship: Universidade Lusíada de Lisboa

Untraditional industrial landscape is a project for the valorization of the industrial territory through its perceptive and chromatic requalification. Focusing on three design elements (interpretation of local history & traditions, chromatic interventions, application of contents in anamorphic ways), the project uses the industrial facades as a medium to communicate the identity of the territory. In the case of Lisbon's area, industries have been linked to the museums' reality and the design intervention shows the colonial past of the city: the geographical discovers are suggested through compositions of chromatic pixels applied on the facades on different layers. The aim is to create communicative contents about the identity of the place which can be visible - thanks to anamorphosis - from a specific point of view in the city: people are thus invited to re-discover and explore the landscape.

Untraditional industrial landscape. Design parassita	
design field	interior design
function	informative
cultural domain	heritage; architecture
output	physical intervention on industrial buildings

3.7 THE OTHER SIDE. STORIES SHARED FOR A SOCIAL UPGRADING

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Designer: Silvia Mondello

Seat of internship: Universidade Lusíada de Lisboa

The other side is a digital online archive that gathers and maps the industrial abandoned areas (in the case of Lisbon, those which lay along the river Tagus). The aim is enhancing their potential as cultural immaterial heritage and incubators of local identities. The archive conveys, in one single platform, a variety of information, institutional and not. The contents gathered for each industrial relict are both historical and analytic, iconic and emotional, in a continuous confrontation with those who live or pass by those places, who are invited to interact in every section of the website. The project has the goal to mend some of the cultural and social relations between human beings and their architectonical waste: a reason of being, a feeling of belonging and furthermore a future perspective can be found in the net of meanings, memories and imaginaries linked also to those places which have been removed from collective consciousness.

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The other side. Stories shared for a social upgrading	
design field	communication design
function	predictive; informative; directive
cultural domain	heritage; visual arts; architecture
output	digital archive of industrial areas

3.8 CYCLORAMACITY. FEEL THE LANDSCAPE
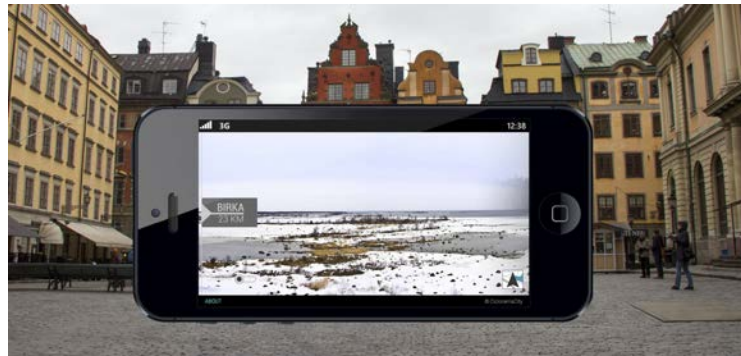
Designer: Serena Raschellà

Seat of internship: Mobile Life Centre

CycloramaCity is a digital guide to explore suburban and natural landscapes around the city centre. It consists of a website and a mobile app. Stockholm, and in particular the area around the city centre, is still largely characterized by natural landscapes where it is possible to find the essence of the culture, tradition and natural environment. The project proposal exploits the idea of cyclorama as a metaphor of representation. Using the AR mobile app from the city square, the user can look outside the urban area and discover "distant lands". Through the website it is also possible to discover more in depth the natural environment, its colours, sounds, and the changes occurring due the weather seasons.

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Cycloramacity. Feel the landscape	
design field	communication design
function	predictive; informative; directive
cultural domain	heritage; visual arts; architecture; advertising
output	digital travel guide (website and mobile app)

3.9 FLIP ON…! UNCONVENTIONAL TOURIST GUIDE TO EXPLORE THE URBAN STEREOTYPE
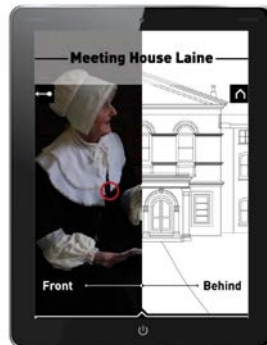
Designer: Aljosha Ratti

Seat of internship: University of Brighton

Flip On…! is an unconventional tourist guide. Designed as an urban game, it brings the visitors to the most conventional tourist markers. The project is based on the stereotyped destinations that a visitor would not miss when visiting a certain city and uses them as a starting point to generate new way of looking into the history/identity of places. It aims to enhance knowledge and awareness on the most relevant destinations but allows also the discovery of unconventional places. It consists of a mobile app and physical installations located in the city. The player will search and find the stereotyped places by playing the game and, once on site, will interact with the installation that augments the "perception" of that place. While playing the users can share his/her personal experience (pictures, videos, sounds and texts) with the other players.

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Flip on...! Unconventional tourist guide to explore the urban stereotype	
design field	communication design
function	predictive; informative; directive
cultural domain	heritage; architecture
output	digital travel guide (mobile app) and installations on site

3.10 CONVERGING ARTS. COMPASS FOR URBAN ART

Designer: Stephanie Sironi

Seat of internship: University of Brighton

This project proposal focuses on one of the most relevant characteristics of Brighton (but also several cities in Europe): the connection between arts and urban context. Converging Arts is a digital magazine, compass for the urban art scene. In the case of Brighton it focuses mainly on graffiti and urban sculptures but cinema, photography and arts&craft also play a key role in enriching the view on urban identity generated by a long history of overlapping factors between arts and context. This Magazine investigates those urban and social

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places where art, temporary and/or permanent, is experienced. By giving a new vision on arts, this tool brings the user to the places where people and art converge, showing the evolution and the influence that the urban environment has on art and vice versa.

Converging arts. Compass for urban art	
design field	communication design
function	predictive; informative; directive
cultural domain	heritage; visual arts; performing arts; audiovisual and multimedia; architecture
output	digital magazine/travel guide

4 CONCLUSIONS

D+C project represented an opportunity to experiment the application of design research in creative and cultural industries, especially in the field tourism and cultural promotion of territory. Even if none proposal has become an executive project, D+C obtained a positive response by professionals and local administrations also during the final presentation event. In this sense it has demonstrated the value of design research in creative and cultural industries.

D + C also has fostered the creation of a network between designers, researchers and academic institutions interested in the promotion of territory and culture. Now, the goal consists in consolidating this network in order to set up collaborations on wider research projects.

5 ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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