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### ABSTRACT

*The care of public spaces in urban environments has always been an indicator of a nation's welfare, impacting greatly on people's behaviours. In these terms, design of public spaces performs a political action, related to common life, because it holds people's ideals. Designers need to tell the story of how design can play a significant role in creating social change*

*This paper reports on the activities of an alliance of academics, designers, architects, artists and activists in the development of a public campaign to speculate on how a city might act on its present and forecast its future: *Superelevata Foot[prints]*. It focuses on the topic of re-cycling and re-use of abandoned spaces, by testing resources and chances as prerequisites of an open working process through specific tools and design practices.*

*Is it possible to delineate a method and an innovation process by reading again these new spontaneous attitudes defined by the urgency to act? Is it possible to improve the political dimension of design action, conceiving the project as performance, as experienced in the '60 by radical groups?*

*If design comes out from the interaction between a practice, which requests to change the state of the things, and a culture, which makes sense of this change, how do the public design activities produce culture and behavioural change? How can this culture orientate and offer common horizons to the multiplicity of practices that take place in design activities?*

*Keywords: re-cycle, behavioural change, urban narrative, bottom up practices, abandoned spaces, design activism*

### EVERYDAY EMERGENCIES

The quality of our life is closely related to that of our living spaces. Inhabiting means to exist. Living is not only about the relationship with objects and spaces, but also with the social dimension. Through objects and spaces are incidental to the ideas of staying and acting. (Fiorani, 2012) The city is the space in which the characters of living are manifested more clearly, not only in a physical way, but also in a social one.

The unstable urban context offers itself as an experimental field for design. It has ceased being a mere functional process meant for a restricted market of sophisticated street furniture to become one of the fundamental activities for the contemporary city life. The rationalist idea of designing as the result of the dichotomy between form and function by identifying optimal and final products,

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makes way for design activities dedicated to realize temporary, reversible solutions. The goal is to increase people sensibility showing respect for the spaces where they live.

Urban context, open spaces, public places, even the street furniture, have become a part of the design field as an everyday life emergency. The interest on public can lead to changes in people's behaviour, and describes a form of design that seeks to investigate the designer's role in society by tackling community, political and social issues.

This field of research is tackled by many academies connecting to the Broken Windows theory, to social scientists Wilson and Kelling (1982). Since then it has been subject to great debate both within the social sciences and the public sphere. Social-political issues such as dwelling and urban accessibility are no longer relegated to mere technical applications; they are part of a city plan capable of widen the democracy horizon and to generate inhabitants. In this sense, design deals with public spaces and it works with what belongs to the shared life dimension and contains people ideals.

Even though the evident moment of economic, social and moral crisis that cities are currently undertaking, Italy is the country that has less reflected the practices of design activism and design for policy compared to the northern European countries.

Only in 2001 the Italian Constitution introduced the article 118 based on principle of subsidiarity, that recognizes the capability of citizens to activate independently in public interest, establishes the support of institutions and confirms the interest of people not only to solve individual problems but also the collectives ones. With this important legislative support, is it possible to intervene with design actions in this process of re-appropriation of living spaces? It's important to consider on one hand the praxis of research, and on the other hand the results of project actions.

Problem-solving is a topic faced by many researchers, influencing design studies in the last 50 years, among them Archer (1967), for whom "the design act consists of a problem-solving activity which is goal-directed (...)" and also Simon (1969), Cross (1992), Martin (2009).

In front of contemporary wicked problems, the responsive problem-solving approach is not any longer enough. Could, thence, a design approach, a "designerly way of doing", intervene on processes and orientate the outcomes? Donald Schön (1983) introduced the problem-setting, aiming to explore situations before they turn into problems. In this way social design opens up innovative ways of doing research and generating new knowledge. It spread during the radical social revolutions of the 1960s with pioneers like Victor Papanek (socially responsible design) and Jane Jacobs (urban activism). The Italian anti-design movement of the same era also instigated a lineage that fed through to the innovative thinking of Ezio Manzini. The history of social design shows that its formation has come through varied circumstances and exemplifies a range of approaches and political positions. It is notable, however, that it has received increased impetus at times of economic and social challenge (Armstrong et al., 2014). Associated with political discussion and protest, Design Activism intervenes into everyday lives while raising political consciousness concerning collective challenges (Markussen, 2013).

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In Italy there are 5 million of vacant buildings (Agenzia delle Entrate, 2012), about half a million of empty shops (ConfCommercio), two millions of public dismissed urban facilities (WWF, Campagna Riutilizziamo l'Italia, 2013). Today, a growing interest on self-organized and bottom-up interventions, with the claim to re-activate abandoned or dismissed spaces, is spreading among citizens in order to define new identities and possible uses. This concerns the field of designer-activist, a co-creator and a happener (someone who makes things happen). Everyone who believes that design (especially when we design together) is an essential human expression that will help us all to move towards more sustainable futures (Fuad-Luke, 2009).

The use of project to do research has an Italian origin in radical design. Since 1967 design groups as Ufo with an irreverent and ironic approach, intervening by actions, performances and happening in urban contexts, representing the origin of the project compliant to the logic "to do research and not to do products" that it distinguished the Italian design for a long period and it allows his evolution. The Ufo (fig.1) URBOEFFIMERI reflect on the contrast between lightness and heaviness, nomadism, transparency and temporary, and this is the last one that gives an use and effectiveness immediately communication.



Figure 1 – The Urboeffimeri UFO was a Situationist group founded in 1967 in Florence. Their intention was to operate a transformation of architecture into a show, an action of urban and environmental guerrilla.

The cities, the territory as theatre, presents a sort of ready-made (Fiorani, 2012). The spaces of event, of meeting give shape by actions of project, where activist image a way to rethink specific situations in degraded and abandoned spaces with temporary uses and events. One of the first researches that explore the thematic of temporary use is Urban Catalyst (2001-2003), the team explored in fact new forms of urban development where citizens would be the initiators rather than professional

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developers in five European countries. Urban Catalyst examines various ways in which city planning can incorporate informal processes and describes important lessons architects and city planners can learn from temporary users. Founded by Phillip Misselwitz, Phillip Oswald and Klaus Overmeyer the project was organised as an interdisciplinary platform for research and public interventions, using the city of Berlin as their site, Urban Catalyst organised a series of events, exhibitions, publications and workshops, in order to develop strategies for integrating such processes into the urban design of contemporary cities. (Oswald et al, 2013)

The activities carried out and carrying on within the Italian Priority National Research (PRIN) Re-cycle Italy are moving in this direction. They have, as content of action and consideration, the investigation and definition of new life cycles for those spaces, elements, parts of the city and the territory, which have lost a sense, use and attention. Recycling means putting the waste back in circulation, giving it a new value and meaning. (Ricci, 2012) The research involves 11 Italian Universities, 24 partners from abroad with the aim to study theories, policies and practices to imagine a strategy for city based on re-cycle, new cycles, not only for materials and spaces, but for urban policies. In the national team work a lot of architects and city planner, some economist, sociology, and few designers. Following this perspectives, the main research question is in which way a series of events, organized by a design activism method can modify the perception of citizens about the abandoned spaces and can contribute to the construction of new participated use of inhabitants for those spaces. The organizations of Re-cycle events can become an operative shared method to give new meaning to the spaces? It is possible to test a method, that starts from temporary activities of the dismissed or vacant spaces, to set on the policies and to update the city's governance, by offering at the same time a better life's quality for citizens?

### 21.9.2014 SUPERELEVATA FOOT[PRINTS]

With the event Superelevata Foot[prints] the research team of Re-cycle Italy, coordinated by Genoa's unit, comes down to the city and opens a space shut off to the public as dedicated to the shipyards within Genoa Port Authority area. It aims to be a demonstration event to foster a debate in order to show the citizens the capability to imagine new uses for urban spaces, even just for one day (fig.2).



Figure 2 – The new pedestrian entrance of the Harbour space of event.

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It is a great occasion for the city, a fair, a way to involve citizen in the matter of reuse, re-cycle, and to imagine a way to orient the urban policies.

The historical discovery of design as systematic anticipatory analysis and modeling as a unique form of human action roughly contemporaneous with the rise of modern science and technology uncovers a new way of being in the world. Carl Mitcham (1995) poses "the most fundamental ethical question concerning design: to what extent is this new way of being in the world desirable or good?" As Buchanan (1989) says "design involves the vivid expression of competing ideas about social life".

Designers, students, groups of citizens, social organizations, architects and artists participated to design for Superelevata, art installations, stages and manifestos starting from what exists and is not used, from what is available, with the purpose of telling a story. The project had been carried out with people, not for people, following the human centered design approach. In human centered design, things, situations, systems are in relationships with people, shaping how people can relate to each other (Buchanan, 1995). The bottom-up approaches influence socialization modes and they modify the way in which people act and interact, so they can be considered fundamentals for smart citizens.

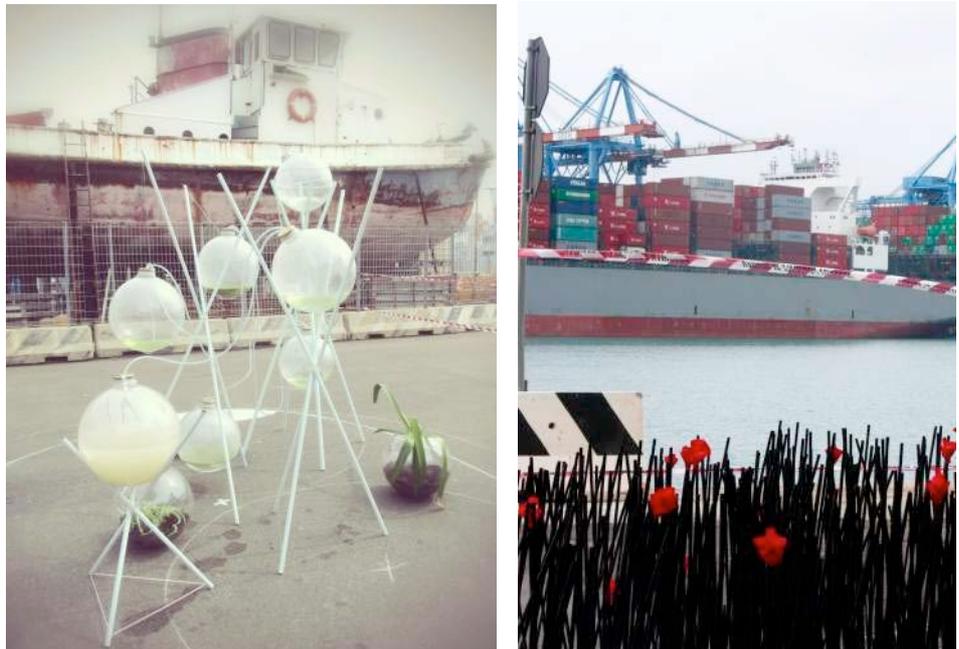


Figure 3 – The installations give a new sense and a new meaning to the area.

The exhibition displays more than 40 entries, (fig.3) concepts and ideas, often in a challenging way, and to call for all participants to express their opinion, a hint to promote a debate and talk about the spaces re-cycle subject. The narration takes shape for its heterogeneity. There are in fact art performances, some installations show the change is already feasible; other ones involve people to draw new visions by re-reading the present as a new story still to be told, simply to be revealed. The result does not focus on the installations quality and the

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produced performances, but with the creation of an opportunity to bring attention to re-cycle approach and to urban spaces and doing so by living it.

An equal dialogue among administrators, researchers, makers and public has been organized within this occasion. With this exchange, the research group wanted to take the opportunity of visibility given by the day, to clarify in a brief but very incisive way a set of suggestions and considerations.

The academic network, with the contribute of young researchers, developed the Manifesto (fig.4) a document containing 5+5 principles for simplify procedures in re-use, temporary use of neglected spaces and the re-cycle of disused buildings and paths. The act of delivering the Manifesto to the City administrator, aimed at sharing it not only with those who manage the city, but also with all people who live it and involving them in a possible virtuous circle of actions.



Figure 4 – The academic research team delivers the Manifesto to the City Authorities.

The research impact can be especially seen taking into account hints coming from the participatory sphere for an operational change. The action is meant as a study subject, the public act as its immediate consequence.

A tool or method comes to life when it's being used and when its effects start changing how people work. Our experience requires an on-going recognition but it offers something to learn and make it useful and re-usable. In this sense we can consider *Superelevata Foot[prints]* an action that deals with participatory design issues in the consciousness of the etymon of the word and its own structure; it is a practical activity related to the organization and administration of public life, to start a process of change that can generate new knowledge.

Is this performance, this event, something usable as a reference and replicable model? A design action unlikely has a logic that can force feed and can produce

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positive solutions without consider people, the way they act, what they expect, how they live in, or want to. The users are a part of generating the solution.

The organization, involving an alliance of academics, designers, architects, artists and community activists and City administrators, was challenging and the program, without funding, followed these steps (fig.5):

1. Theory and desk research, focusing to create a Re-cycle Italy Research point of view in design policies for reuse, to give a new life, a new cycle to abandoned places.
2. Study of the problem with stakeholders and co-working (researchers, city government)
3. Selection of place, ethnographic focus, survey (insightful and unexpected things to discover) and agreement with local institutions, city mayor, port authority. Meetings for security organization and traffic.
4. Create and tell a story – defining tools. We achieved it through a workshop activity, during 4 days, in which students, PhD students, teachers coming from the 14 university involved in the matter, and other local people or groups, work together, creating set from different cities, using their skills and attitudes for contribute to the story, to the action –research.
5. Performance, action day (the date coincided with the European day of sustainable mobility)
6. Ex post analysis, focusing on the impact, the drivers of change (economic, political, social and cultural, environmental...) with stakeholders. Analysis of outcomes, strengths and weaknesses.

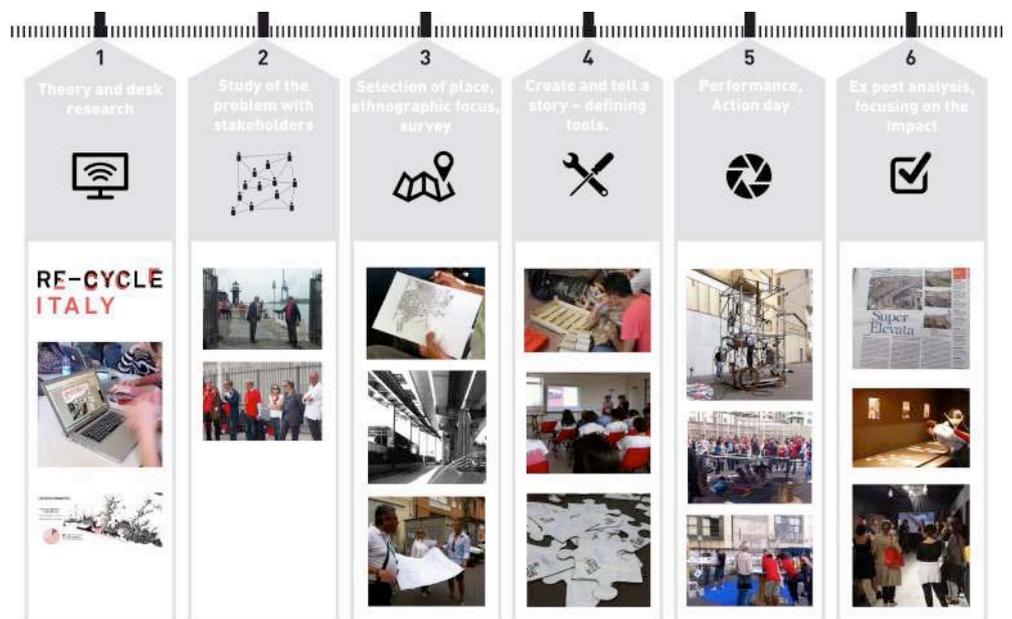


Figure 5 – Steps of the activity Superelevata Foot[prints]

With this program started a dialogue and a agreement with the institutions on topic of Temporary Re-cycle, the research’s team is commissioned to evaluate strengths and weaknesses, to study the simplification of procedures to reuse the abandoned spaces by temporary use.

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The Superelevata FOOT[PRINTS] and the following activities open some research opportunities according to two main factors:

- what**, i.e. the research topic and the kind of knowledge it can generate (including also make citizens aware of the issues and objectives of the research)
- how**, related to process and methods followed to answer the research question (experiencing a model of intervention, triggering a revision of policies)

### RE-CYCLE LEXICON

How is relevant the aesthetic quality of materials and of products to support these practices? (fig.6)

By prefiguring the interesting investigation area of recycling spaces as new fields to put into practice actions to trigger a behavioural change, new languages and intervention codes of design discipline also emerge.

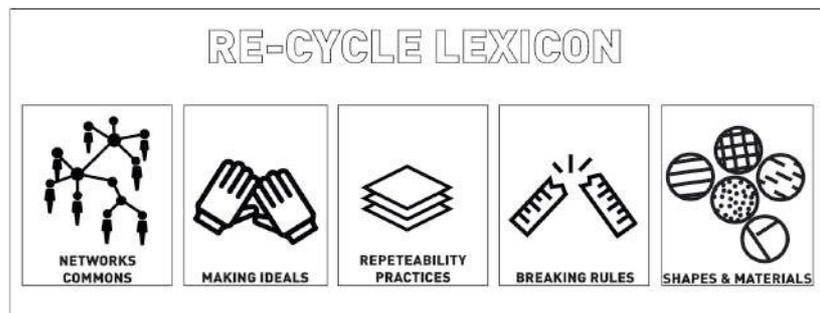


Figure 6 – Re-cycle lexicon

Borrowing from linguistics, recycling becomes the lemma of a terminology that a wide inflection of procedures and materials refers to what seems to encode the appearance of the phenomenon. The possibility to define a new recycling language (fig.7) prefigures itself, which goes beyond the widespread

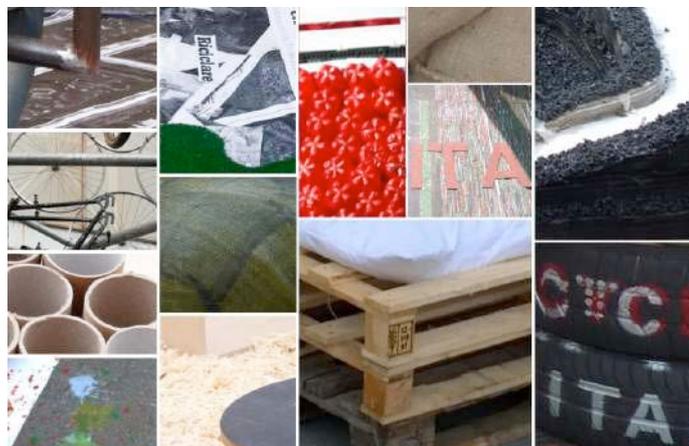


Figure 7 – How is it relevant the aesthetic quality of materials and of products to support these practices?

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use of benches, crates or plastic bottles, to become a pattern that works as a binder for the urban reactivation interventions.

### **OPEN SOURCE OPEN SPACE**

Open is a kind of paradigm for the social dimension of design. Open is collaborative dimension of research and participated action, open is dimension of space where it possible to develop this kind of practices.

Open concerns the opportunities and the limits of convergence of two phenomena that are changing and widen methods, tools and practices of design. On the one hand the gradual opening of project from the to the user, increasingly directly involved in a collaborative network, that define the characteristics of supply. On the other hand the increase of initiatives of bottom-up design.

From the world of open software, where users share and make a radical new approach to knowledge, it is opening the street of a new ethic of the project: the innovation is a common good, that it benefit more from diffusion and share that from protection.

This perspective can give to design new opportunities and new issues, in which the outcomes are not yet explored.

The collaborative networks represent the expression of a form of organization, that is spread in the last 10 years, both for their speed and success, and for capability to face complex problems e to involve several participants. Collaborative networks represent a mode of cooperation amplified compared to traditional forms of collaboration in both number participants and in reachable results (Menichinelli, 2005).

The individual dimension is lost, authorship too, in order to give space to plurality, to the resilient culture, which draws vigour from moments of crisis, when activism becomes the basis of the project, at the basis of its political role there is a moral aspiration to create relationships. To look at the dismissed heritage from a design viewpoint means to overturn the viewpoint, in order to observe it from the perspective of those who live in it, use it and not by the outsider who studies the territory. Within a design with social attitude, the consideration on the re-cycle issue becomes a survival action, as reaction to the environmental, political and economic crisis.

### **BEHAVIOURAL CHANGE**

The design act is not a boycott, strike, protest, demonstration, or some other political act; instead, it lends its power of resistance by being precisely a designerly way of intervening in people's lives (Markussen, 2013).

Considering public space as a mean to act inevitably entails placing at the centre of the consideration people as main actors of this stage; through their interfacing with the space they establish relationships, which load the different contexts with meaning and identity.

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The ability of taking care relates to the quality of the actions perceived by users. This means setting up a relationship, communicate a sense of belonging, respect and integration. Taking care of the visible also evidences faith in what is not visible (taking care of details, people, transparency of own actions) (Fagnoni, 2009). The environmental quality perceived is the visible component of the sensitivity of administrators. Resources, human and financial, invested in the care of the existing and respecting civil coexistence lead to better results than the use of repressive measures. On the contrary, the neglect of the urban environment transmits signals of deterioration, of selflessness and insecurity. (Wilson and Kelling, 1982)

**INNOVATING BY MAKING**

The action research proposed through the event *Superelevata Foot[prints]* holds its character as an experimental activity that aims to modify citizens feeling on disused spaces and to build a new use for them.

The applied method prefers praxis to theory, searching for results just after leading the action, trying to read a relationship between design and involved people's behaviour.

A real change in the way people live a space is possible through action, even if temporary: for one day citizens involved in the Port Authority area could freely access in a space usually precluded to look around with different eyes.

But what does it remain after the temporary dimension of the event? Did the actions implemented root in people's perception of their possible active role in the city's re-activation process? *Superelevata Foot[prints]*'s value is based on its experimental nature and on the reaction of who joined the action. It needs to be evaluated to develop tools, different methods of intervention and to define the role and the place of design in policy-making related to the topic of re-cycling urban spaces.

The awareness of a wide audience on the possibility to act on the reuse of underused areas and to add social value and new opportunities can be developed through demonstrative projects as the one described in this paper, trying to stimulate debate towards citizens and policy-makers.

A sociologist involved in the research read the event, putting in evidence how the reaction was positive, even if the communication plan had limitations related to the budget, but also how to participate were mainly people already made aware on the discussed issues. This interpretation was obtained through a series of questions posed to participants throughout the day.

By virtue of the interest of the people involved in the idea of being an active part in the transformation of the environment in which they live, the project has fostered the awareness in an audience that has not converted its attitude, but strengthened the perception of their own beliefs. Despite that, such an event conceived as a series of abstract performances together with the festive dimension and exceptional opening a part of the old Port, has meant that the range of the action could not be relevant as the size of an ordinary and everyday practice of reuse.

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What happened that day, has remained limited to the conceptual sphere and did not allow a real variation in the dimension of experimented practice. A special note for the fact that the space chosen for the testing was not a space totally abandoned, but rather a space of labour used for shipyards and still inhabited for other uses than those proposed by the event.

This did not allow the real behavioural change related to the direct action on the site, if it is believed to be essential for the achievement of the main goal related to the survey on the relationship between people's behaviour and design. To highlight is how the result is very different when you consider another group of stakeholders involved in the action by the research group: the policy-makers, represented by the municipality and the port authority, involved in an undefined role between proponents and public.

The success in terms of participation and positive feedback was a critical component in the evaluation of the day, an unexpected opportunity, that allowed the implementation of the demonstrative action even if for a short period of time.

The temporary dimension of the action of tactical urbanism is a sort of established tool for design practitioners and for who means design as a tool for addressing public problems and capturing opportunities for achieving better and more efficient societal outcomes. "Short term action, long term change" (Lydon et al, 2009). Tactical urbanism interventions create a laboratory for experimentation. Case studies from all over the world reveal of taking an incremental approach to the process of city making.

The recall to temporary dimension of the event is stated in our case as a tool for public service organizations and institutions to innovate and test ideas on reuse by participation.

This approach has suggested temporary design intervention as a resource for public management that wish to understand how to introduce and follow innovation.

This has brought design action more firmly on the public policy stage and opens a new perspective in the research for public managers to activate pilot projects based on the reuse through a strategy of temporary events.

### **PERSPECTIVES**

Within a present/future, design experiences the dimension of mass phenomenon, but not as a negative value. Mass because the masters era is over, as Branzi says (2006); mass because of the quantitative growth of the subjects involved, as planners have grown exponentially. Furthermore, mass for its role – within post-industrial society and in the ever-changing city – as an engine of a new social economy. This process, this new role has exceeded its elitist dimension linked to the masters' activities becoming the result of a creative activity expressed by an entire planning society.

Academic community must re-join the evolution of this scenario, proposing and accepting the project as operative method of research and defining the tools to manage it.

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From an epistemological point of view this opens a perspective for action research, carried out through the medium of the practitioner activity (Archer, 1995) that integrates methods from both research and practice.

The intervention on issues of policy making only with the construction of theoretical models may be understood in a restrictive manner just directed towards concrete action; it is necessary to refer to design action with the aim to achieve a result and at the same time generate knowledge. Design as a political act because it proposes practical action, which retrieves the political dimension of the project, the project as performance, experienced in the 60's by radical group, UFO who preferred the use of happening as a mean for spreading the idea of urban transformation.

Scenes of street theatre, kinetic paintings, temporarily altering the spaces, forced visitors to identify with new attitudes. Today, as then, every project, intended as a form of expression, has to find the ideal space to show itself, with the aim of spreading the change.

From a phenomenological point of view new perspectives may be implemented in studying the form and configuration of artefacts, and finding relation between products and context in terms of semantics, ergonomics, and environment, because the use of re-cycle practices is not only something economically or ecologically correct, but also one of the most interesting forms of expressive and meaningful research for designers.

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