

Designing Hybrid Spaces

ENVISIONING PLURAL ECOSYSTEMS AND SOCIO-CULTURAL
PRACTICES FOR REGENERATIVE URBAN FUTURES

Edited by

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Design International series

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PART 3

Cultural and Participatory synergies in reclaiming Public Spaces

14. Reimagining Public Assets: Cultural Practices as Strategies of Space, Care, and Design

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University of Palermo - Department of Architecture

ABSTRACT

This paper examines the role of cultural practices, when integrated into participatory design methodologies and bolstered by institutional collaboration, in reconceptualizing public spaces as commons. It posits that cultural practices, rather than serving merely as symbolic enhancements, function as infrastructural forces that facilitate civic engagement, activate underutilized urban resources, and promote ecosystemic relationships. By engaging with recent theoretical advancements in design and political theory, this study positions care as both a civic and spatial practice and design as a medium for co-production. The Italian context is particularly conducive to this exploration, notably through innovative public-civic partnerships that enable the temporary repurposing of public heritage assets. Through a reflection on the *Museum of the Cities of the World* in Palermo, developed within the national research-action project OSMOSI, this paper explores how hybrid cultural spaces can reframe the public sphere as a shared infrastructure for civic engagement and cultural imagination.

14.1 Introduction

Public spaces have always meant more than just physical places in a city, historically functioning as a platform for civic interaction, political expression, and the construction of collective meaning. From the ancient agora to today's city squares, public spaces have always played a vital role in shaping social life. They host everyday encounters and unexpected events, helping people build relationships and a sense of belonging. places where relationships grow and where a sense of belonging quietly takes root. But in recent years, something has changed. The democratic role of public space has been slowly eroded. More and more, urban planning treats it as something to be controlled or optimized and managed for efficiency, safety, or economic return. This approach often results in exclusionary design strategies that limit access and reduce the potential for diverse social interactions, particularly for those without economic or political power (Low & Smith, 2006; Sennett, 2018).

In response to this trend, cultural practices have emerged as powerful tools to reclaim the public dimension of urban space and to reconfigure it as a common. These interventions are not simply decorative or episodic additions to the built environment; rather, they constitute symbolic, relational, and spatially generative acts. Community performances, storytelling workshops, participatory installations, urban walks, and ephemeral architecture activate space through shared experiences and embodied expressions. By anchoring these practices in lived experience, they remind us that cities are lived places, shaped by memory, experience, and imagination (Carpenter & Horvat, 2022; Doucet, 2021).

Henri Lefebvre's concept of the «right to the city» (1968) provides a theoretical foundation for understanding these processes. His formulation extends beyond mere access to urban resources, proposing instead a radical redefinition of spatial production as a democratic endeavour. Harvey (2012) elaborates on the idea by asserting that the right to the city involves a communal effort to reclaim urban life, thereby confronting the prevailing systems of capital accumulation and technocratic governance. Within this framework, cultural practices operate as mean of resistance, situated knowledge, and civic imagi-

nation. They make space through coexistence and the articulation of alternative urban narratives.

What's important is that these initiatives usually don't follow a plan imposed from above. They grow from relationships, from listening, from caring. They reflect a grassroots logic based on collaboration, iteration, and care. Participatory cultural practices unfold through attentive listening, relational engagement, and responsiveness to local stories and needs. This approach redefines space not as a fixed container but as a dynamic and negotiated process. As academics like Fraser (1990) and Mouffe (2000) suggest, democracy doesn't mean avoiding conflict, it means dealing with it constructively. And public space can be a powerful arena for exactly that kind of engagement.

The COVID-19 pandemic acted as a revealing lens, exposing structural inequalities and underscoring the importance of public space as a site of care and social support. In those months of social fragmentation, cultural and participatory practices, from small-scale artistic gestures to broader community-led activations, emerged as crucial forms of civic imagination and support. These experiences not only addressed immediate needs but also offered prototypes of a more relational, adaptive, and inclusive use of shared spaces (Honey-Rosés *et al.*, 2020).

In this context, Design, especially when focused on social innovation, has a key role here. As the field has shifted from object-making to systems-thinking and relational processes (Björgvinsson *et al.*, 2012; Manzini, 2015), it has become a tool for imagining and testing different futures. Co-design methods, speculative tools, and community-based strategies create opportunities for people to come together and make sense of their environment in new ways. Nonetheless, the transformative power of cultural practices is inherently tied to their integration. Isolated, short-lived events might capture attention or provide aesthetic pleasure, but they lack the depth and continuity necessary for enduring change. In contrast, cultural commonsing is rooted in long-term relationships and adaptive processes, requiring temporal depth, contextual knowledge, and a readiness to engage with complexity and conflict. These attributes are often missing from standardized top-down cultural programming or place-making policies that prioritize visibility over substance. The commons

framework offers a way to articulate this alternative model. Instead of viewing public space as a resource to be consumed or regulated, the commons approach highlights collective governance, shared responsibility, and ongoing care (Bollier & Helfrich, 2012).

Commoning involves activities that sustain and rejuvenate community life, such as negotiation, maintenance, social engagement, and careful management. Cultural interventions enhance this system by revitalizing shared symbols, facilitating interactions, and strengthening relational structures. In this scenario, Massimo De Angelis (2017) discusses the concept of 'social cooperation beyond the market' as a form of value creation that emphasizes reciprocity, care, and mutual acknowledgment. Cultural practices, therefore, do more than just oppose neoliberal urbanism; they offer alternatives. They establish emotional economies and symbolic frameworks that reimagine space as a shared, lived, and nurtured commons. These practices serve as a reminder that cities are not merely physical structures but are collective relations continuously reshaped through daily actions and common goals.

14.2 Urban Care as a Cultural Practice

In recent years, the idea of care has gained renewed attention across fields like design, political theory and urban studies. Once thought of mainly as a private matter, something tied to the domestic sphere or understood as a personal virtue, care is now increasingly recognized as a political and spatial practice. It plays a role in shaping how societies distribute attention, responsibility, and resources. Tronto (1993; 2013) defines care as a series of interconnected activities: recognizing needs, taking responsibility, responding competently, and ensuring responsiveness. These are not merely individual acts of kindness; they are embedded in institutional arrangements and material infrastructures that shape our capacity to live together. Reframing care in this way, as a collective, civic undertaking, challenges many of the assumptions behind contemporary urban development and design.

Too often, the dominant paradigms in planning and design empha-

size speed, efficiency, and measurable outcomes, marginalising the slower, process-oriented, and relational dimensions that define caring practices. As Mattern (2021) argues, cities rely not only on technological systems and formal institutions but also on 'infrastructures of care' such as libraries, community centers, parks, informal support networks, and cultural initiatives that sustain the social and emotional life of communities. These are often overlooked or underfunded, while they play a crucial role in sustaining the emotional and social fabric of urban life. This perspective aligns with a growing body of research emphasising the strategic role of culture in activating new imaginaries for urban development, particularly in underutilised or marginal areas. Pier Luigi Sacco has argued that innovation, particularly when rooted in culture, is key to triggering regenerative processes with macro-level impacts that go well beyond the direct outputs of the cultural and creative sectors. When cultural participation is oriented toward social innovation, it becomes a powerful driver of urban change. The reactivation of disused heritage through cultural practice, for instance, can be the first step in transforming entire neighborhoods. These often-overlooked spaces hold the potential to reverse cycles of decline, if communities are given the opportunity to engage, imagine, and shape them. In doing so, people deepen their connection to place, weaving cultural expression into everyday life and future visions. From this vantage point, such places need to be re-read with care, allowing them to re-enter the urban narrative through intentional, context-sensitive strategies (La Scala, 2017).

Design, particularly when practiced through participatory or co-design approaches, can make a meaningful contribution to this kind of infrastructure. Moving beyond object-making, contemporary design operates as a form of mediation, scaffolding conversations, facilitating encounters, and helping to imagine shared futures. Thus, it becomes a tool for enabling collective agency, situated decision-making, and long-term stewardship. In this light, designers become less like problem-solvers and more like facilitators helping communities surface needs, articulate values, and collectively shape their spaces.

The potential of design to foster care-based urban transformation becomes especially visible in places where public space is fragmented, contested, or simply forgotten. Thus, design practices such as

prototyping, speculative mapping, and participatory scenario building provide ways to reclaim neglected areas, to make needs visible, and to co-create interventions with communities. Rather than offering pre-defined solutions, these tools support adaptive and iterative processes that take into account local capacities and limitations.

Culture is deeply intertwined with this approach. Cultural practices often work as reparative gestures, addressing the wounds of social fragmentation and historical erasure. They offer symbolic and emotional means of recognising one another, anchoring communities to place, and sparking the collective imagination. As Satta (2023) suggests, these practices are not just about representing identity, they create space for dialogue. In a world increasingly marked by what Han (2021) calls a 'crisis of attention', where hyper-productivity and self-exploitation erode relationships, cultural and design practices centered on care introduce different values: presence over acceleration, empathy over competition, continuity over disruption. They nurture environments of hospitality, recognition, and shared responsibility, core elements of democratic life.

Care, however, cannot rest solely on grassroots initiatives; it also requires institutional involvement. Providing infrastructures of care depends on long-term commitments, public investment, and supportive regulatory frameworks. When institutions recognise these practices – through access to space, funding, training, or aligned policies – they help embed care into the everyday governance of cities. In this way, care becomes not just a practice, but a principle of urban policy and planning.

Within this broader perspective, design emerges as a practice of civic care: attentive to lived experience, grounded in social relations, and open to transformation. It resists the abstraction of top-down approaches and instead anchors itself in proximity and mutual learning. Urban regeneration, from this point of view, is not a linear path toward growth but an ongoing process of repair and shared authorship (Mattern, 2021; Imrie & Kullmann, 2017). Care-oriented design and cultural practices are therefore not only reactive responses in moments of crisis; they also act as prefigurative practices that suggest new ways of inhabiting the city. By building relational infrastructures that sustain connection, dialogue, and participation, they shift the understanding

of the city – from a mere physical setting to a shared life that must be cultivated and continually reimagined in common.

This transformative potential becomes even more tangible in emerging hybrid cultural spaces, which lie at the crossroads of design, participation, and public policy. The following reflections emerge from both theoretical inquiry and field-based observation, developed through active participation in design processes and cultural activation in Palermo. These experiences have provided insights into the everyday challenges and potentials of hybrid spaces as infrastructures of care.

14.3 Hybrid Cultural Spaces as Laboratories of Urban Commons: a case-study in Palermo

The Italian context provides fertile ground for the emergence of hybrid cultural spaces, particularly due to the abundance of state-owned properties that remain vacant or underutilised. Hybrid cultural spaces are characterised by the intersection of functions, actors, and temporalities, operating at the boundary between formal institutions and informal practices, between permanence and experimentation. They foster new modes of spatial production by enabling cultural, social, and civic uses to coexist and interact within repurposed environments.

Estimates suggest that nearly 10% of the country's public real estate assets are disused, many of which are centrally located and of significant historical or symbolic value. While traditionally managed through bureaucratic or market-driven procedures, recent years have seen a shift toward more flexible and experimental models of temporary reuse. Among the key institutional actors fostering this transformation is the 'Agenzia del Demanio', Italy's State Property Agency, which has launched initiatives that enable public buildings to be temporarily repurposed for cultural, and social projects. This new institutional openness has facilitated concrete forms of collaboration between public bodies and cultural actors, repositioning public

assets as shared platforms for collective regeneration and cultural experimentation (Agenzia del Demanio 2023).

A recent example of this dynamic is the *Museum of World Cities*, a pilot project within the national research-action program OSMOSI. Located in the historic center of Palermo, the museum has just been opened inside the former Convento dei Crociferi, a heritage site temporarily granted for five years to the cultural organization Farm Cultural Park by the Agenzia del Demanio.

The collaboration between these two actors, a national public agency and an independent cultural initiative rooted in civic engagement, demonstrates how cross-sector partnerships can activate underused public spaces and support experimental cultural infrastructures. This is not a museum in the traditional sense. The *Museum of World Cities* is envisioned as a hybrid cultural platform dedicated to exploring the futures of cities. Rather than centering its activity on collections or static exhibitions, it is structured as a space built through listening, co-creation, and open-ended processes. Its identity and programming have taken shape through participatory practices involving local residents, designers, researchers, and cultural mediators. The early phases of the project included mapping stakeholders, engaging the community to surface needs and aspirations, and identifying local cultural references. These activities led to a range of co-design workshops: from intergenerational storytelling and the-



Figure 1.
Collecting insights during
one of the co-design
workshops. Photo of
Alessio Consoli.

matic discussions to collaborative sessions imagining the museum's potential roles. Participants came from across the social spectrum – local inhabitants, university students, cultural professionals, experts, and city administrators – creating a genuinely diverse constellation of voices. These practices served as a laboratory for experimenting with participatory methodologies, fostering trust among stakeholders and exploring shared modes of cultural and spatial imagination, while simultaneously laying the foundations for a governance model capable of remaining open and adaptive to the evolving needs of the communities.

In particular, the *Museum of World Cities* aims to foster relational infrastructure. Through exhibitions, public events, co-design practices, and temporary installations, it opens up a space where different forms of knowledge, memory, and imagination can meet. Themes like the right to the city, migration, ecological transition, and cultural heritage are not just discussed, they are spatially explored and collectively processed. In this way, the museum becomes both a seedbed and an amplifier for cultural practices that center care and civic engagement. Design methodologies, particularly those rooted in co-design and social innovation – play a critical role in scaffolding these processes. They support inclusive forms of spatial narration and enable the museum to remain open, porous, and responsive to its urban context.

This case exemplifies how hybrid cultural spaces can function as community laboratories and how the synergy between public institutions and civic-cultural organizations can generate not only physical reuse of public heritage, but also new governance models based on trust, co-responsibility and shared authorship, and sustained by a participatory co-design methodology, made possible through a methodological co-design approach that fosters dialogue and adaptive governance.

14.4 Towards a Culture-Led Vision of Common Futures

This article has explored how cultural practices, when embedded in participatory design methodologies and supported by institutional

collaboration, can reframe public space as a dynamic common. Far from being symbolic add-ons, these practices function as infrastructural forces: they activate relational ecologies, foster civic engagement, and reclaim underused public assets as spaces of shared imagination and co-creation (Crobe 2023; Manzini, 2015).

The case of the *Museum of the Cities of the World* in Palermo illustrates how temporary reuse, cultural activation, and design-based co-production could intersect to create inclusive and adaptive cultural infrastructures. The collaboration between Farm Cultural Park and the Italian State Property Agency demonstrates how public institutions, when open to new forms of flexibility and shared governance, can act as enablers of civic innovation. These experiments point to the emergence of new public-civic alliances that challenge conventional modes of value production, institutional engagement and urban regeneration.

Despite these efforts, many initiatives are still sustained by uncertain funding, informal labor, and short-lived agreements, which impede their continuity and long-term effectiveness. They frequently rely on the dedication of a small group of individuals as *local-heroes*, which raises concerns about their sustainability and dependence on institutions. These issues point to larger governance challenges: How can temporary uses be transformed into enduring stewardship models? What policies can guarantee long-term access to communal spaces? How can institutions be encouraged to recognize and support approaches to regeneration that are centered on care and culture? One potential solution is to develop legal and policy instruments, such as co-governance frameworks and public funding initiatives, that institutionalize the principles of participation, care, and cultural co-production. Equally important is the integration of these practices into formal urban planning as essential components of a sustainable and inclusive urban vision.

This approach is part of wider international currents in cultural placemaking. For instance, in London, the *Meanwhile Space* initiative shows how the temporary refunctioning of vacant buildings can bring communities together, encourage local enterprise, and widen the range of cultural and social activities available. Experiences like this point to a common thread: hybrid cultural spaces are not only symbol-



Figure 2.
Opening of the Museum
of World Cities. Photo of
Alessio Consoli.

ic arenas but also practical tools for reimagining urban life. And when such short-term uses are given strategic support, they can evolve into lasting forms of social and spatial value.

In conclusion, cultural practices offer more than symbolic enrichment; they provide concrete ways to care for shared spaces, negotiate urban futures, and cultivate democratic life. When embedded in co-design process and supported by public institutions, they generate new urban grammars grounded in reciprocity, proximity, collective authorship. Beyond the Palermo case, a set of general principles can be drawn that may guide similar projects in other contexts. Temporary concessions of public spaces, when accompanied by institutional openness, offer opportunities to test new forms of co-governance and cultural activation. Participatory design, sustained through dialogue with a wide range of community voices, helps ensure that spaces reflect multiple identities and needs. Equally important are frameworks of shared planning, in which institutions, cultural actors, and citizens shape events and uses together, fostering both belong-

ing and long-term commitment. When supported by policy tools that recognise culture as an infrastructure of care, these strategies can enable temporary arrangements to evolve into durable civic resources. Unlocking this potential requires not only innovative methods but also a renewed vision of the city, as an ecosystem of relationships where culture is treated as a public good to be sustained, protected, reimagined.

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Matteo Alteri: PhD student in Service Design for the Public Sector at the Department of Planning, Design, and Technology of Architecture, Sapienza University of Rome, Rome, Italy. Since 2018 I have collaborated on various urban-regeneration and social-innovation projects to develop urban policies and to create or strengthen socio-cultural spaces in the outskirts of large and medium-sized cities as well as in inner areas. Co-founder and, since 2019, board member of the social-promotion association *Il Giardino di Torricola*, I currently serve as a community-engagement specialist at Amnesty International Italy, where I promote participatory co-design processes for developing services and actions in defense of human rights.

Ambra Borin: PhD in Design (2024) with a dissertation titled «DESIGNING SYSTEMS OF PROXIMITY. Crystallisation of proximity practices from urban contexts to envision community-based design strategies in small and remote places», developed at the Department of Design of Politecnico di Milano. She is currently a Post-Doctoral Research Fellow of POLIMI DESIS Lab at Department of Design of Politecnico di Milano within the project OSMOSI, focusing on SCHS as drivers of urban experimentation and social inclusion through cultural and creative activities; Adjunct Professor in the Bachelor and Master programs in Interior and Spatial Design at the School of Design of Politecnico di Milano; and Tutor for the GIDE (Group for International Design Education) network.

Alessio Caccamo: Designer with a PhD in design and a postdoctoral research fellow (RtdA) at Sapienza University in Rome. As an expert in information design and data visualisation, and a professor, he coordinates the SID 'Design for Education' research network and participates in several European research projects. His research focuses on the principles and practices of information design and their impact on society, politics, and education. He was awarded the SID Research Award in 2019 and the Sapienza Best PhD Thesis Award in 2023. Since 2025, he has been the Information Design Lead for the *Civiltà dei Dati* journal and Co-Head of the *Progetto Grafico* journal's editorial board. In 2025, he was a visiting professor at the Elisava School of Design and Engineering under the Erasmus+ STA programme.

Lucilla Calogero: PhD, is a researcher in Design at Università Iuav di Venezia, where she also teaches Interaction design in the Interior design curriculum. Her research focuses on interaction design applied to the enhancement of cultural heritage, and on the design of interactive digital systems in visual and multimodal communication, with particular attention to information design and data visualisation. She earned her PhD in Design Sciences at Iuav with a thesis on interactive documentary. She has carried out research at Iuav and at the Digital Cultures Research Centre (DCRC), University of the West of England. She co-founded at Iuav the Master Course in Contract Design for Public Interiors, where she also served as Scientific Director.

Giulia Cantaluppi: Independent researcher and president of the Association Temporiuso.net. She has been a researcher for the Project Cultures Department of the Iuav University of Venice from 2019 to 2022. PhD in Territorial Planning and Public Policy at the University IUAV of Venice (IT), graduated in Contemporary Cultural Heritage at the University of Genova (IT), with a Master in New Exhibition Formats at Escola Elisaba of Barcelona (ES). She is also a board member of the Stecca3 cultural center, referent for grants application and management of space requests for sociocultural activities.

Giorgio Castellano: Architect and PhD in Architectural Technology whose research focuses on innovative construction systems using bio-based materials, digital fabrication technologies, and distributed production models. His work integrates technological experimentation, theoretical inquiry, and design practice, aiming to critically redefine sustainability in contemporary building processes. He is currently a Research Fellow at the Department of Architecture, Built Environment and Construction Engineering, Politecnico di Milano, within the Material Balance group. He has gained international academic and professional experience, with a focus on the relationship between materiality, technology, and architectural form.

Elisa Cinelli: PhD Candidate in Design at Politecnico di Milano and a member of the POLIMI DESIS Lab within the international DESIS network. She holds an MSc in Interior and Spatial Design, with a thesis on

accommodation systems for homeless people. Her research interests include social innovation processes, creative communities, services and public spaces, and participatory design. Her doctoral work focuses on rethinking urban public spaces through the lens of young children's rights, needs, and perspectives.

Stella Civardi: Degree in Modern Literature and Modern Philology from the University of Pavia, with a thesis entitled *La performance come dispositivo di rigenerazione urbana: il caso del borgo-quartiere di Chiaravalle milanese* (rel. prof. Fabrizio Fiaschini); she obtained a master's degree in *Eventi e comunicazione per la Cultura* at the Università Cattolica di Milano. She is *cultrice della materia* for the course in Event Dramaturgies at the Catholic University. In addition to studying and researching the performative device in processes of urban regeneration with a cultural basis, she has also gained field experience in the field of contemporary cultural design (Milan City Council - Culture Directorate).

Marta Corubolo: Researcher at the Polimi DESIS Lab, Department of Design - Politecnico di Milano. Her research interests focus on service design and design for social innovation, codesign methods and participative processes.

Salvatore Di Dio: Doctor of Environmental Physics, he is Associate Professor of Design at the University of Palermo. He co-founded the PUSH Design Lab, Piranesi Experience and MUV, entrepreneurial initiatives that intersect social innovation, urban sustainability and sustainable mobility through design. With a background in architecture, environmental sustainability and digital services, Prof. Di Dio has led international research teams in exploring the social and environmental impacts of design. He is committed to promoting ethical design practices and preparing a future generation of designers capable of tackling global challenges.

Roberto Falanga: Assistant Research professor at the Institute of Social Sciences, University of Lisbon. His research focuses on the participation of citizens in decision-making processes beyond the ballot

box. He has been Principal Investigator at the host institution and team member of several international and national research projects. He has published extensively in high-ranked international journals on participatory democracy and democratic innovations.

Marinella Ferrara: Professor of Industrial Design and History of Design and Technology at Politecnico di Milano, specializing in material innovation and design paradigms. Her research advances understanding of materials' role in contemporary design. She received the 2019 Top Innovation Award from the China Industrial Design Association and the Premio Eccellenza della Lombardia for her book *Material that Move. Smart Materials, Intelligent Design*. Ferrara directs the journal *PAD. Pages on Arts & Design*, promoting research on design, innovation, and sustainability. She serves on evaluation committees for institutions including the Netherlands Organization for Scientific Research and the French National Research Agency. Her work shapes industrial design education and circular design practices.

Laura Galluzzo: Laura Galluzzo, PhD in Design, is Associate Professor at the Design Department of Politecnico di Milano. She coordinates the POLIMI DESIS Lab, part of the international DESIS Network (Design for Social Innovation and Sustainability). Her research focuses on participatory projects concerning public spaces and services, with specific expertise in the co-design of spaces as activators of collaborative actions, community hubs, and incubators of social practices. She has participated in several national and international research projects on these topics. Her work investigates the relationship between Spaces and Services (S+S) design, with a strong interest in temporary interventions, domestic and urban transformations, queer-ing design processes, plural public spaces, and places of coexistence.

Isabella Inti: Founding member of *Temporiuso.net*, a network dedicated to the temporary reuse of vacant urban spaces and CEO of *Temporiuso srl*, which leads initiatives on revitalizing abandoned sites. An architect and landscape technician, she holds a PhD in Territorial Planning and Public Policies from IUAV. Inti currently teaches Urban Planning at Politecnico and co-directs the M-US-T Master in Tem-

porary Uses program, focusing on innovative strategies for activating unused spaces. She is currently president of Stecca3, a hybrid socio-cultural space in Milan focused on community engagement and cultural events, continuing her commitment to fostering inclusive and dynamic urban environments. Her work centers on revitalizing abandoned spaces and large brownfield sites.

Paola La Scala: Lecturer and Research Fellow in Design at the University of Palermo. An architect with a Ph.D. in Exhibition Design, her work explores the role of cultural practices in the reactivation of public space, with a particular focus on sustainable tourism, participatory design, and museum experiences in both physical and digital contexts. She has taken part in national and international projects involving traditional and advanced technologies for the enhancement of cultural and architectural heritage. Her recent research investigates how temporary architecture can serve as a catalyst for urban and social reactivation, especially in smaller towns, and how the design of cultural practices can foster community engagement and drive social innovation by enabling new forms of collective use, care, and re-appropriation of the urban environment.

Tecla Livi: PhD, senior expert in planning, monitoring, and evaluation of public policies, as well as in the strategic design of territorial development and cohesion policies. She has extensive experience in university teaching and socio-economic research and serves as a senior consultant for Public Administrations and social partners. Her research focuses on social and urban innovation policies, and she designs and supports processes of social innovation, urban regeneration, and place-based local development. From 2016 to 2023, she was a member of the Evaluation and Analysis Unit for Programming (Department for Cohesion Policies, Presidency of the Council of Ministers). Prior to this, she spent over fifteen years working on the planning and management of urban regeneration programs for the City of Turin.

Andrea Manciaracina: PhD in Design and Researcher at the Design Department of the Politecnico di Milano. His research focuses

on the relationship between communication and graphic design, public spaces and services through the mediation of technologies to experiment with visual communication systems that promote spaces and services, visual tools to implement strategies oriented towards social innovation, and communication systems that promote human interaction in spaces. Attentive to these issues, he contributes to the field of design by participating in researches and conferences, writing articles and publishing books.

Roberta Mastropirro: Born in Milan in 1974. She graduated in Architecture from the Politecnico di Milano and obtained a PhD in Architecture, Urban Planning, and Conservation of Living Places. With twenty years of experience in conserving and enhancing cultural heritage, she has led and collaborated on various international projects with Architetti senza Frontiere Italy and the Lerici Foundation, gaining expertise in transferring knowledge to local communities. Since 2018, she has been a Contract Professor at the Politecnico di Milano, teaching Built Heritage and Sustainable Development. She is also a board member of the Stecca3 cultural center, overseeing space management and programming, and since 2023, she has served as vice president.

Andréia Mesacasa: Associate Professor at the Federal Institute of Education, Science and Technology of Rio Grande do Sul (IFRS/Brazil) – Design Department. Postdoctoral researcher at the Santa Catarina State University (UDESC/Brazil). PhD in Design from the Federal University of Paraná (UFPR/Brazil). Master in Regional Development from the Federal Technological University of Paraná (UTFPR/Brazil). Graduated in Fashion from the State University of Santa Catarina (UDESC/Brazil); Her areas of interest are focused on the following themes: Fashion Design, Graphic Design, Product Development, Drawing and Illustration, Design for Sustainability.

Elton Moura Nickel: PhD in Production Engineering from Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina, specializing in Product and Process Engineering. With an undergraduate degree in Industrial Design, he bridges design and engineering to investigate organizational ergonomics and participatory design approaches that enhance the relationship

between environments and their users. Head of the Design Department and current Coordinator of the Graduate Program in Design at Universidade do Estado de Santa Catarina, he is also Editor-in-Chief of HFD – Human Factors in Design. His work focuses on transforming systems that improve human well-being and productivity.

Ingrid Paoletti: Full Professor in the Technology of Architecture at the Politecnico di Milano. She has a PhD in Building Technology from Milan's Polytechnic University and was an associated researcher at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. She is the founder of the research group in theoretical and design experimentation Material Balance, where she is involved in innovative technologies and materials to develop a new and responsible material culture. Since 2023 she has been the Rector's Delegate for Exhibitions and Events. Her books include: *L'innovazione consapevole* (Maggioli 2012), *Advanced Customization in Architectural Design and Construction* (con R. Naboni, Springer 2015), *Material Balance: A Design Equation* (Springer 2020) and *Siate Materialisti!* (Einaudi 2021).

Irene Patria: PhD candidate in Service Design for Public Administration at Sapienza University of Rome, supported by ART-ER. With a background in Advanced Design, curriculum in services, and hands-on experience in participatory projects across Europe and Kenya, she explores how design can foster inclusive and sustainable territorial development. Her work combines research, fieldwork, and co-design practices to support innovation in public services.

Elena Vittoria Pedrina: Architect and Adjunct Professor in Interior design at Università Iuav di Venezia. She studied architecture at Iuav di and completed her academic training at the Escuela Técnica Superior del Vallès (ETSAV) through the Erasmus program. In 2000, she co-founded the architecture firm C&P Architetti with Luca Cuzzolin, developing projects at various scales, ranging from interior design to the creation of retail and showroom spaces, as well as architectural design in the residential and workplace sectors. Since 2019, she has been involved in academia as an adjunct professor within the Bachelor's Degree Program in Product, Visual Communication and Interior Design (Interior Design Curriculum).

Federica Pradella: PhD Candidate in Technological and Environmental Design of Architecture and she's part of Material Balance Research team at Milan's Polytechnic University. She holds a Master's degree in Architecture – Built Environment – Interiors and a II level Master in Material Balance Design. She focuses on bio-based materials, design for disassembly strategies, and innovative construction workflows. One of her works, showcased at the Lucca Biennale Cartasia 2024, merges research with real-world applications. She has collaborated with Architecture firms as ATI Project and Lombardini22, gaining experience in both concept design and execution phases.

Sandra Regina Rech: Associate Professor at the Santa Catarina State University (UDESC/Brazil) - Fashion Department; Tenured Professor of the Graduate Program in Fashion (PPGMODA/UDESC) - Professional Master's Degree in Apparel and Fashion Design and Leader of the Research Group on Fashion Design and Technology (UDESC/CNPq). She was a Visiting Professor at the Politecnico di Milano (Italy). She is the Coordinator of the laboratory FPLab - Futuro do Presente (UDESC) and Collaborating Researcher at the University of Lisbon (CIAUD/Portugal). Her areas of interest are focused on the following themes: Fashion Design, Trend Studies, Scenarios, Consumer Culture, Qualitative Research, Methodologies.

Mariana Rosa: Lisbon-based designer and master's student in Design for Sustainability at the Faculty of Fine Arts, University of Lisbon. Her work focuses on social design, emphasizing the role of designers as catalysts for change through community engagement. Mariana is involved in the INSPIRE project, contributing with her knowledge of design and art-based methods for Lisbon's pilot project as a research grant holder at Instituto de Ciências Sociais. Drawing on her background in participatory design, in April 2024, Mariana took part in the New European Bauhaus (NEB) Festival in Brussels, where she co-presented a workshop based on her Entre_Laços project.

Caroline Santos da Silva: Master's student in the Graduate Program in Fashion and Apparel Design at the Santa Catarina State University (UDESC/Brazil) and a professor in the undergraduate Fashion Design

course. She graduated in Fashion and holds a postgraduate degree in Photography from Universidade do Vale do Itajaí (UNIVALI/Brazil). Her areas of interest include Fashion Image, Creative Processes, Performance, Visual Arts, and Cultural Landscape.

Carla Sadini: Associate Professor at the Department of Humanities, IULM University. A sociologist with a PhD in Quality of Life in the Information Society, she integrates social research and design to explore themes such as social innovation, territorial development, and cultural industries. Formerly Assistant Professor at Politecnico di Milano, she has contributed to national and international research projects and authored numerous publications. Her work focuses on participatory processes, strategic design, and inclusive urban transformation.

Daniela Selloni: Associate Professor and researcher at Polimi DESIS Lab, Department of Design - Politecnico di Milano. She works on service design, social innovation, placemaking and more specifically on how co-design can be experimented in public and private organizations.

Mathew Spialtini: Research Fellow at Università degli Studi di Milano and a Research Collaborator at the Polimi DESIS Lab, Politecnico di Milano. He holds a Master's in Product Service System Design (2024), with a thesis on multispecies design in hybrid urban spaces. He is also a Teaching Assistant at the School of Design, Politecnico di Milano.

Mara Soncin: Senior assistant professor at the Department of Management, Economics and Industrial Engineering at Politecnico di Milano. She obtained her PhD focusing on topics related to the evaluation of performance in digital learning within universities, and has since continued this line of research alongside themes related to the economics of education and public administration management. Additionally, she is involved in teaching activities both at the university level and in post-graduate courses.

Paulo Eduardo Tonin: PhD candidate in Design at Universidade do Estado de Santa Catarina, currently conducting research during a

visiting period at Politecnico di Milano. An architect and urban planner by training, his work integrates Cognitive Psychology, UX Design, Semiotics, Neuroscience and Anthropology to investigate Sensory Design and Human Experience within hybrid environments, with an emphasis on retail and exhibition spaces. Over the years, Paulo has engaged in studies at renowned institutions including University of Lisbon, Central Saint Martins, NYU, and Parsons. His research advances understanding of multisensory interactions to inform design strategies fostering meaningful and immersive environments.

Anna Turco: PhD student in Design at the Department of Planning, Design, Architecture Technology of Sapienza University of Rome. Her research focuses on Visual Communication Design, with particular attention to Environmental Graphic Design as a tool for the reactivation and regeneration of public space. Her work explores the intersection between graphics, environment and social dynamics, investigating the potential of the visual sign as a narrative, relational and transformative device in contemporary urban contexts.

Giulia Vaiani: PhD student at the Department of Management, Economics and Industrial Engineering at Politecnico di Milano. Her research interests focus on the use of digital technologies in school settings and on the quantitative analysis of educational processes.

Valentina Zaro: Urban planner and placemaker with more than 10 years of experience in community empowerment, community welfare, urban regeneration, service design, concept planning, communication, and facilitation of processes in the field of social housing. At Fondazione Housing Sociale, she is responsible for the Competence Center related to services and commerce in urban regeneration projects.

RESEARCH PROJECT



RESEARCH GROUP



DIPARTIMENTO DI DESIGN



DIPARTIMENTO
DI ARCHITETTURA
INGEGNERIA
DELLE COSTRUZIONI
E AMBIENTE COSTRUITO



DIPARTIMENTO
DI INGEGNERIA
GESTIONALE



NETWORK AND SUPPORT



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This volume investigates the potential of Socio-Cultural Hybrid Spaces as engines of urban regeneration, democratic participation, and cultural innovation. Emerging at the intersection of cultural production, social experimentation, and territorial transformation, these spaces challenge conventional boundaries between public and private, temporary and permanent, physical and digital. Through four main sections, the book develops a critical and impactful perspective on the functions, design and interdisciplinary approaches, and transformative potential of Socio-Cultural Hybrid Spaces. From their evolving role as plural ecosystems to their capacity to generate declinations of public value; from cultural and participatory practices that reclaim and reimagine the commons to the opportunities and challenges introduced by digital technologies; it offers a multifaceted lens on *hybrid practices* in contemporary urban and territorial contexts. By weaving together theoretical perspectives, empirical research, and case studies, this book provides critical reflections by and for scholars, practitioners, and institutions. How can cultural initiatives generate new alliances between institutions and communities? What forms of participation can strengthen the democratic role of public space? And what challenges arise in connecting physical and virtual dimensions for collective engagement?