



# **A CONNECTED WORLD**

**DESIGNING NEW METHODS, TOOLS AND SOLUTIONS  
TO LINK PEOPLE TOGETHER AND SAVE THE PLANET**

EDITED BY

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# A CONNECTED WORLD

## DESIGNING NEW METHODS, TOOLS AND SOLUTIONS TO LINK PEOPLE TOGETHER AND SAVE THE PLANET

This volume is the outcome of a discussion triggered by the 2022 World Information Architecture Day, the one-day a year event to encourage world-wide conversations about information architecture.

The 2022 topic was "A Connected World": *We connect with each other in digital, physical, and blended spaces. We connect with people, products, services, content, and the world in general. This connectedness can be wondrous and yet challenging.*

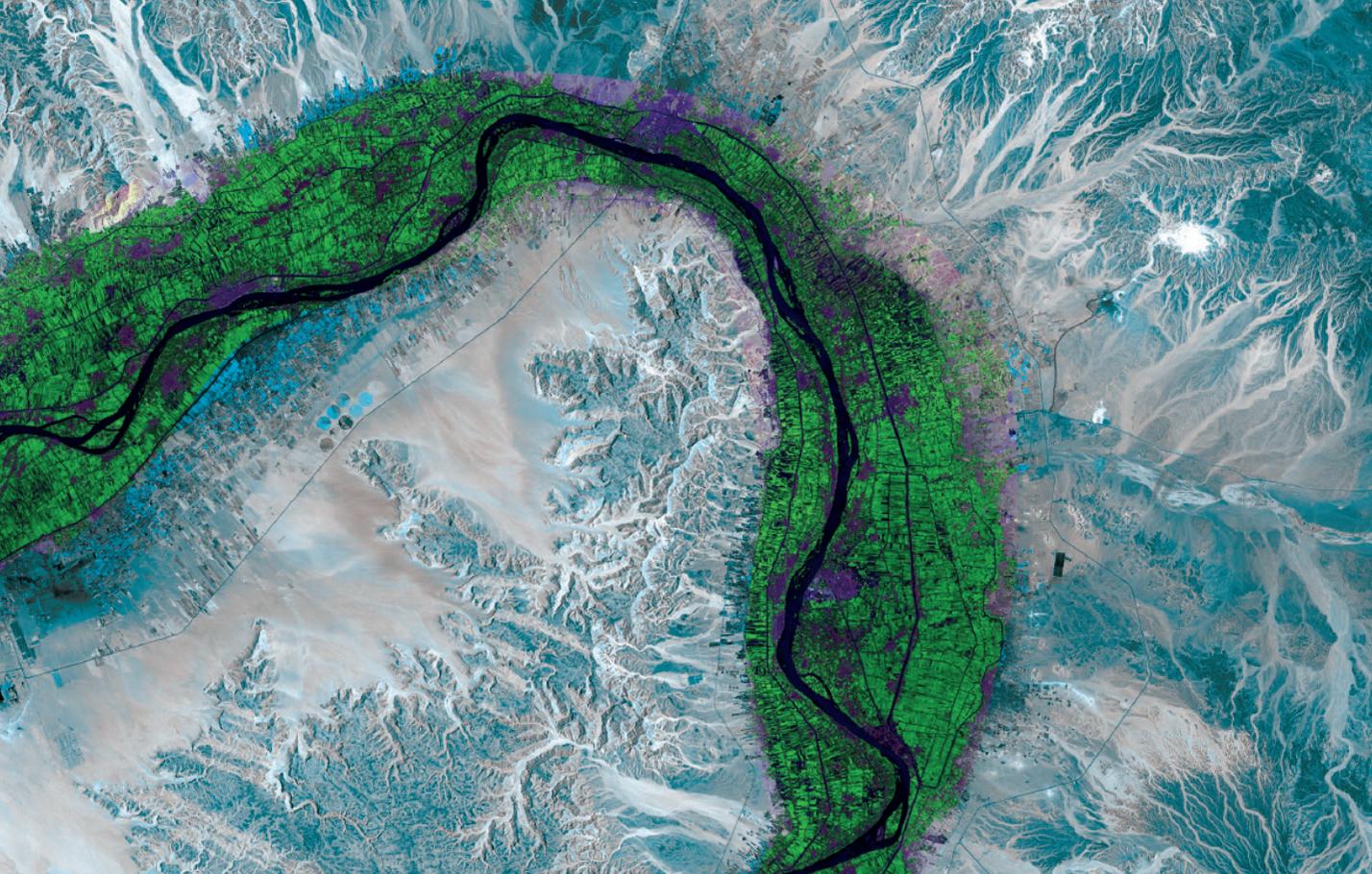
*Information architecture uncovers and creates new connections that we weren't aware of before. It can inspire us to make new discoveries*

*or reveal new relationships that may urge us to take constructive action, e.g. climate change, the global health crisis, or the supply chain disruption we have experienced during the pandemic. Information architecture contributes to making connections more relevant. It helps us understand which information is important and trustworthy. It provides guidance in a mess of information and helps fight against the disinformation of fake news. It allows us to steer better who and what we are connecting with. It creates places we enjoy being in where people and information meet.*

*In a world where we're connected yet distanced,*

*how do you facilitate connectedness? How do you help make sense of connections? What new connections have you made recently? How did you support others to discover new connections? In what ways do you think information and information architecture can be used to support, define, or create environments (digital, physical, virtual, or blended) to improve the lives and experiences of people in a connected world?*

The hybrid event organized on March 4th 2022 in Palermo by the University of Palermo, PUSH design lab and Arca, had the support of an international scientific



committee (Marika Aakesson, Cristian Campagnaro, Salvatore Di Dio, Nicola Morelli, Chiara Lorenza Remondino, Dario Russo, Paolo Tamborin) which selected blindly abstracts of scholars and professionals willing to contribute to the discussion.

Through the open call the scientific committee have selected abstracts from Luigi Farrauto, Danilo Costa, Roberto Anelli, Federica Ditta, Cristina Marino, Leonardo Moiso, Eleonora Fiore, Enrica Amplo, Andrea Arboleda, Antonio De Pasquale, Irene Fiesoli, Claudia Mastrantoni, Florian Myter, Caterina Bonora, Isabella Patti, Valeria Valeriano and Caterina Bonora.

The following conversation triggered by the event was therefore the starting point of a deeper discussion in the next month, and, thanks to the interest of Palermo University Press, curators of this volume invited all contributors to condense all further reflections in a fix peer-reviewed paper (David Kaplan, 2005 "How to Fix Peer Review", *The Scientist*, 19).

All contributions discussed in this essay focus on the potential of design and innovation to address important challenges facing humanity and the importance of inclusive design and sustainability in the digital age. The common characteristics

of the texts are that they all discuss design in relation to technology and innovation. They explore how design principles can be applied to various fields, such as education, public services, and sustainability, to create new solutions and opportunities. Authors also discuss the potential of using technology, such as data analysis and digital platforms, to improve design processes and outcomes. Additionally, the papers highlight the importance of inclusive and holistic approaches to design, and the need for collaboration and dialogue between different stakeholders in the design process.

# DESIGN AND CONNECTED HERITAGES FROM THE MEDITERRANEAN TO INFOSPHERE

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## ABSTRACT

On the occasion of *WIAD, World Information Architecture day*, the design and information architecture professional community met in Palermo for a day of theoretical reflection and sharing of projects and experiences on a global scale on the theme of *A Connected World*. This contribution - which also contains a reflection on the importance of the Mediterranean vocation to "liquid connections" based on exchange, coexistence and tolerance between cultures - is structured within a theoretical framework that investigates the complex relationships between "Connected Heritage" and design disciplines at the time and in the hybrid space of the infosphere. This part is followed by the presentation of an innovative and emblematic design experience, which traces a possible path of research and design practice, oriented to the generation of new "semantic, informational, constructional and datapoietic artifacts" that will populate our future (or present) habitats.

**DIGITAL TRANSITION, INFOSPHERE, DATAPOIETIC ARTIFACTS, SEMANTIC ARTIFACTS, CONNECTED HERITAGES,  
SOCIAL INNOVATION, INFORMATION DESIGN**

*This paper was reviewed by **Anna Catania**, Associate Professor at the Department of Architecture - University of Palermo and **Dario Mangano**, Full Professor at the Department of Culture and Society - University of Palermo. My sincere thanks to them!*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

On the occasion of the *WIAD*, *World Information Architecture day*, a large professional community gathers to share projects and experiences on a global scale, reflecting and debating around a specific theme of great interest, each year different, related to the great challenges of contemporaneity. A unique listening and comparison experience, shared with 40 other locations around the world whose central theme was the "connections": *A Connected World*. Through the articulated point of view of design disciplines and information architecture, today, in fact, you can explore and decode our hyperconnected world, our *Infosphere*, to discover "relevant connections" or reveal new relationships, original and more significant (between people and communities, people and things, people and places, etc.) able to find and activate possible, innovative solutions to the difficult and complex global challenges. It is on the basis of these brief premises that, for a day (March 4, 2022), Palermo is become an international laboratory of transdisciplinary research that, starting from the great challenges induced by the socio-economic changes of this time of planetary crisis (climate change, pandemic, misinformation, conflicts, etc.), reflected and debated on the issue of connections.

Multiple and interesting points of view emerged that find in the intersection between design, science, technology and humanities, the humus to feed possible and innovative trajectories of research and project able to significantly intervene on economic, social and cultural emergencies of our time.

From Information Architecture projects for fostering sustainability in new design solutions, to public programs for assistance and protection of the elderly population (in Portugal); from new frameworks for STEAM education, to social innovation collaborative platforms for communities and territories; from Information Architecture projects for new hybrid and proximity spaces generation, to "inclusive" design for digital public services; from data-driven platforms for the fashion system sustainability, to projects for the "Metaverso"; from new "semantic" and "datapoietic" artifacts design, to new various forms of archives and "digital spaces" for cultural heritage.

Community, common goods, education, heritages, inclusiveness, tolerance have become the keywords and recurring terms of a constructive and passionate debate held at ARCA's open innovation Hub<sup>1</sup>, in the heart of Palermo's University Campus, that - still in the hybrid dimension of post pandemic distance - has allowed to return to connect people and

community "lukewarmly" in the physical "proximity" of the city.

## 2. "LIQUID" CONNECTIONS AND MEDITERRANEAN PLOTS

In 1984 Fabrizio De Andrè released an experimental world music album (very successful and appreciated all over the world), entirely written and sung in a sort of "superlanguage" - a mix of Ligurian, Arabic and Turkish dialect - able to "play" as an idiom common to all the peoples of the Mediterranean. *Crèuza de mà*, title of the album and opening song, translatable from the Genoese dialect as "sea path", poetically refers to a particular condition of the sea perfectly calm on which you can see the streaks lighter or darker, generated from winds and surface currents, comparable to "roads" and real or imaginary paths. *Crèuze* of the sea, like those that "miraculously" sees Fernand Braudel (1998) from his seaplane that flies low to explore, "see" and know more and more in depth his "favorite" sea, the Mediterranean. Sea roads and streets, visible in the reality but traceable also in a "fantastic aerial map, made of memories arranged next to each other" (Braudel, 1998, p. 24; tba - translation by author), which tell of the very strong relationship between this great geo-anthropic system and the great history that (together with the multitudes of microstories

of the "humble") it has made it his favorite setting. It is also an imaginary map "of sea and land routes connected to each other, and therefore of cities that, from the most modest, to the medium, to the major ones, all hold hands" (Braudel, 1983. p. 348; tba).

An articulated and complex map of relations and connections that the "Mare Internum" has guaranteed over the centuries - through flows and ebbs, multiple signs of continuous, magmatic movement<sup>2</sup> - and that testifies to a specific, enormous human/cultural heritage resulting from the sedimentation of "a series of civilizations stacked on each other" (Braudel, 2010, p. 7-8; tba). A "liquid continent", formed by many seas "in the midst of lands", which has managed to bring together and mix multiple religions, languages, traditions, knowledge, rituals, cultures (material and immaterial). Civilisations and peoples that, despite their differences (sometimes even exaggerated, which have given rise to contrasts and even conflicts), have been able to interact, enrich and contaminate each other in time and space. In this Mediterranean that connects diversities, Sicily has been the centre, the "connecting interface" between west and east, north and south, simultaneously outpost and frontier. Conditions, these, that have allowed it to take on a mediation and integration role for various cultures,

allowing different civilisations to meet and not clash. A Sicily, microcosm at the centre of the Mediterranean sea "liquid plains", - "milieu du monde", to quote Braudel again - that for centuries has continued to be an extraordinary laboratory for investigating the processes of interaction between communities and cultures and, at the same time, a laboratory for re-writing and re-producing the identities and heritages of these communities.

Scholars and thinkers, artists and artisans, travelers, traders and pirates, the common people who belong to this "miniature continent" have prodigiously shown for centuries, what an immense treasure of civilization can spring from mutual understanding, tolerance, cooperative will and cultural exchange. Architecture, ceramics, fabrics, costumes, jewelry, everyday objects, myths and rituals, dialects and music, traditions and knowledge, information and ideas, have become real "treasures" that this common sensitivity and these "connections" have told and continue to tell.

Complex relationships between heritages, material and intangible, capable of generating an extraordinary and unique cultural landscape: the "continuum" (Settis, 2002), the context, or our most precious cultural asset. "Mediterranean plots"<sup>3</sup>, therefore, that generate a "solid" connective

tissue - landscape, cities, objects - and 'liquid' - the sea and communities (with their stories, dialects, rites, songs, traditions, knowledge, etc.). A sea that also preserves and conceals "submerged plots", such as those that Sebastiano Tusa<sup>4</sup> and the *Sovrintendenza del Mare*<sup>5</sup> - a unique Sicilian cultural institution and an extraordinary metaphor of this "connective" land - are trying to unveil through a visionary and original project with Unesco that makes submerged archaeological finds and areas, such as the one in the *Egadi Park*, accessible in situ. Or, again, like the 'living plots' that connect - in a temporal dimension between past and present/future - the sea to the city of Palermo through the "interface" of the *Mare Memoria Viva Urban Ecomuseum*. A young and dynamic institution (which we will talk more about later) that is configured as a sensitive and living place - like the memories it preserves and regenerates - a hub of active connection between sea, city and community.

### 3. DESIGN TO CONNECT HERITAGES AND COMMUNITIES

We have seen how the Mediterranean and its cities (and therefore also Sicily and Palermo), have in their DNA, in the peculiar traits of their identity, an extraordinary

propensity to "connection", to relationship, to dialogue. An extraordinary "interweaving of conversations", as Manzini reminds us (2018, p. 37) that "produce" communities and projects, starting from the strong and two-way correlation between places (understood as spaces with meaning) and communities (whose meaning is given by human conversations) that continuously re-generate them (Manzini, 2018, p. 45). In this sense, the reflections of Vincenzo Guarrasi (2014)<sup>6</sup> on the complex relationships and connections between the metropolises or the contemporary urban systems and the Baumanian liquid societies (with all their load of dystopian criticalities and related issues) that inhabit them, are very interest, which, today, find themselves facing an even more challenging and complex context and time, driven by digital hybridization and the domineering transit to the infosphere (Floridi, 2017) together with the global pandemic crisis and the renewed, probable "madness" of an imminent atomic world conflict.

To be able to face and act within this complexity, according to Guarrasi, it is essential to adopt a "cosmopolitan view" open to the diversity of cultures; a look that can change only thanks to a paradigm shift, generated by the scientific and thought communities responsible for the "construction" of new images

of society and the world. This "view" must be accompanied by a renewed cooperative approach and a rethinking of analysis tools, interpretative models, research protocols and design tools, aimed at overcoming a "methodological nationalism" that "permeates" the scientific communities. But it's not enough! For Guarrasi it is, in fact, necessary to add to the "cosmopolitan view" also a "Mediterranean lens" - pivotal tool for decoding the transition in progress, which in cities and metropolitan areas manifests itself more fully. "In a world that increasingly tends to organize itself by networks, flows and contact zones, Mediterranean cities could establish themselves as privileged places of emergency and formation of new cultures and identities" (Guarrasi, 2014, p. 44; tba). This "special" condition occurs for a complex of reasons that have to do with the intensity and duration of flows (mobility of people, migration, exchange of goods and information) the frequency of contacts/ variety of cultures and the stratification of a very strong shared cultural heritage. This heritage is manifested through an "endowment of devices of contact and intercultural understanding, accumulated and layered over time in large numbers and variety in a milieu of great thickness" (Guarrasi, 2014, p. 44; tba).

Open scientific communities, "cosmopolitan view", "Mediterranean lens" linked to

cities and its "urban devices of contact and intercultural understanding", become - in an open and polyphonic multidisciplinary framework - the fuel needed to power new trends in contemporary research<sup>7</sup>. This has also happened within the University of Palermo's design community, which has on several occasions hosted and accepted the intellectual challenge of confronting and debating about the contemporary great themes, in particular digital transition, to try to draw new research evolutionary lines and identify new possible disciplinary boundaries (which, by definition, remain for the design always in motion). *Design to connect | People, heritages, processes* and *A Connected World* clearly express a well-defined direction of research, which places the utmost attention on the complex "relationships" and "connections" of which we have spoken so far. And the cultural context of a Mediterranean city like Palermo, as Germak (2022) observes, seems to perfectly embody the above directions that design knows well and that has long translated into good design practices that are concretized towards "the social, cultural and economic inclusion of individuals and groups, the enhancement of heritage made of cultures, contexts and territories, the dissemination of models for more conscious and sustainable production and consumption processes"

(Germak, 2022, p. 15; tba). A city that "intertwines conversations" and generates new communities; a "city of welcome" and "exchange" that becomes a laboratory of experimentation that connects and regenerates heritages; a "city of connections", as defined by Viviana Trapani, which enables and activates innovative "processes of interaction between the most advanced scientific fields and a renewed centrality of humanities, between common good search and production, between territorial actors and project experts, especially around systemic innovation search forms, that can meet the complex environmental and social challenges" (Trapani, 2022, p. 24-25; tba). In short, "Connected Heritages", in which design becomes the director of the complex relationships between knowledge, communities, ideas, territories; it becomes an instrument of understanding and decoding; and, at the same time, it becomes an original and innovative solver of critical issues, but above all, generator of new sense, of new value (also economic), of new processes of "rewriting" of cultures and identities of communities and territories.

**An emblematic example:  
*U-DATInos | sensitive to water***

In the light of the reflections made so far and in relation to the idea of the complex "Mediterranean liquid

connections" of which we have spoken, the *U-DATInos - Sensitive to water* (Iaconesi & Persico, 2020) research/project experience, made in Palermo between 2019 and 2020, is particularly interesting and innovative. A return to water - which in this paper has become a significant and connective metaphor - materialized in an "info-esthetic" and "fragile technology" work, halfway between a "meditative" art installation and an augmented design object. *U-DATInos* (name translated from ancient Greek means *aquatic*), is an interesting project<sup>8</sup> by Oriana Persico and Salvatore Iaconesi (two researchers/ teachers, designers/ artists and Italian hacktivists) born from desire to take care of the Palermo south-east coast and the Oreto river. A sensitive city area on which there has been for few years the *Mare Memoria Viva* Urban Ecomuseum. An innovative design driven institution, that has become a cultural, educational and social presidium crucial for the territory. A perfect "device of contact and

intercultural understanding", (Guarrasi, 2014; tba), "marker of identity" (Settis, 2002) and fundamental connection hub between city and community. A sensitive and alive place, like the memories it preserves and regenerates, which lives of "proximity" and "care" (Manzini, 2021, p. 75), and which establishes strong relationships with the inhabitants who actively participate in its conception, its growth, its development. They become "guardian", like the Custodians of the Oreto River Water (*I Custodi dell'Acqua*), a group of citizens, students, researchers and activists who, amid a thousand difficulties (in the midst of a pandemic!), organize themselves in an innovative and poetic exploratory adventure to try to "give voice to the river". A new voice that comes thanks to a series of sensors that collect data and information on the health of the river. A new voice that comes thanks to a series of sensors that collect data and information on the health of the river (the Custodians have received a



**Figure 1.** *Custodi dell'Acqua* on the Oreto river in Palermo. Iaconesi & Persico. Credits: HER srl

kit for data collection). These data feed the installation within the Ecomuseum, thus allowing the experience of perception and understanding of a complex phenomenon of our environment: the dynamic state of health of the river and its ecosystem. (the dynamic state of health of the river and its ecosystem). An installation that is configured as a new kind of hybrid objects, in which the informative architectures that generated them, are made matter, the bits become atoms (Anderson, 2013) that give shape to a kind of "living digital plant", belonging to an unusual ecosystem, within which coexist, in a new delicate balance, all the actors strongly interconnected with each other: the well-being of the river, the Custodians and the "digital plants".

It is an innovative kind of hybrid artifacts - that the duo Iaconesi/Persico defines "datapoietic" (2019) - that, in a close and two-way relationship of coexistence environment-society, are configured as "semantic artifacts" (Floridi, 2021), that mix technology (data, sensors, cards, etc), innovative design practices and processes (speculative design, design for Future, etc.) and new cultural approaches based on open source, collaborative and active citizenship logics. In short, "people, heritages, processes" simultaneously connected by design that acts as a "fluidifier" (Mecca, 2016) - to return to the metaphor of the liquid



**Figure 2-3.** *U-DATInos* (Iaconesi & Persico. Credits: HER srl)

connection of this contribution - and, once again, as Flaviano Celaschi reminds us, as a "mediator between knowledge" (2008a, p. 19) and "between needs" (2008b, p. 40).

## 4. CONCLUSIONS DESIGNING INTO THE INFOSPHERE

Illustrating the *U-DATInos* | *Sensitive to water* project, we have seen how through data, computation and algorithms,

the social and psychological activation triggered by design and art, the project has managed to bring together in an absolutely innovative, original and contemporary form, Science, Technology and Society. This approach fully intercepts the themes and reflections on the theories and practices of design (of which we have spoken at length in this contribution) and connects them - in an original and innovative form that traces possible new directions of design research - theoretical reflections related to the multidisciplinary and "multidimensional" international debate on the digital transition. It does so by connecting, in particular, with the philosophical views and theories of Luciano Floridi (2017), according to whom we are increasingly immersed in a world dominated by information - the "infosphere" - in which the separation between the real world, offline, and the ICT open world, online, is getting thinner and thinner; a world in which we live an "OnLife" life, or a condition that represents the hybrid nature of our daily social, communicative, working and economic experiences, perpetually connected in a continuous relationship between material and concrete reality and intangible and interactive reality. A hyperconnected world in "which everybody constantly has to design and redesign their existence" (Manzini, 2015,

p. 1); a world in which we all live the dual, hybrid condition of designer, producers and consumers of information. A new habitat that needs to be continuously populated by a new kind of objects and artifacts, material or immaterial, that are capable of generating new knowledge: the "semantic artifacts" (Floridi, 2020, p. 110). It is a new kind of hybrid artifacts, borderline between analog and digital, "datapoietic" (Iaconesi & Persico, 2019), or objects (material or intangible) generated by data and computation that enter into strong relationship - in reticular, inclusive and peer-to-peer form - with different entities or agents strongly interconnected with each other (nature, people, communities, institutions, objects, data, artificial intelligence, software, etc.). "Semantic", "informational" and "constructionist" artifacts, such as *U-DATInos*, which Oriana Persico and Salvatore Iaconesi have been experimenting with for some years. "They are not only technical artifacts, but also cultural and existential ones, as they dive deep into contemporary culture and in human perception and understanding, creating new opportunities for social imagination. [...] New objects of art and design able to create new opportunities for the understanding of the world and its phenomena that, connecting to data sources, they animate themselves to allow their owners and the public to

establish new relationships with the great themes of contemporaneity and the planet: poverty, energy, climate, migration" (Iaconesi and Persico, 2019; tba). But there is more. The philosophy behind the

project is extremely interesting; that is, an absolutely, innovative approach in data collection/processing/use that transforms and reverses the usual "extractive" practice into a more ethical and human

## NOTES

- 1 The ARCA Consortium for the Application of Research and the Creation of Innovative Companies, active since 2003, is a partnership between the University of Palermo and the University Consortia of Agrigento, Trapani and Caltanissetta. Located within the university campus of Palermo, it is configured as a regional hub of innovation that, in a highly international context oriented to technological and social experimentation, develops activities and projects in the field of open innovation, technology transfer, innovation and sustainable growth, entrepreneurial culture and business creation.
- 2 "[...] All this because the Mediterranean is an ancient crossroads. For millennia everything has converged, complicating and enriching its history" (Braudel, 2010 p. 7 - 8; tba).
- 3 Here, the term refers to an original museum that represents an unprecedented and open interpretation of the cultural history of the Mediterranean, starting with the influences that came from the Middle East to North Africa and Europe via Sicily. Established in 1996 by the **Fondazione Orestiadi of Gibellina** (TP), the **Trame Mediterranee** Museum exhibits objects from different periods and origins and presents the evolution of the main decorative motifs developed in the visual arts, crafts and material culture of the Mediterranean.
- 4 Sebastiano Tusa was an internationally renowned Italian archaeologist, politician and academic, who was appointed **Sovrintendenza del Mare** by the Sicilian Region's Department of Cultural Heritage in 2004.
- 5 The establishment of the Sovrintendenza del Mare qualifies the Sicilian Region in its policies for the protection of its underwater archaeological resources, inspired by Greece, which - unique in Europe - has a similar structure. The multidisciplinary approach, which mixes archaeological, ethnoanthropological and naturalistic aspects, is an innovative feature that makes it unique in the European context.
- 6 Vincenzo Guarrasi is Professor Emeritus of the University of Palermo and Vice-President of the Italian Geographers Association. His research has ranged from the human geography of the Mediterranean to the evolution of mapping techniques. (PNRR), following step by step the implementation of the various funded projects.
- 7 Here the reference is to the national and international research activities that have involved, on several occasions, the Palermo's design community. The first in 2004 (**MeDesign Research**) focused on the relationship between design and Mediterranean cultures; the others, in times closer to us, in the midst of a pandemic, dealt with the theme of "connections": **Design to connect | People, heritages, processes** on the occasion of the **SID - Società Italiana di Design Annual Assembly** (25-26 February 2021); and, subsequently (4 March 2022), **A Connected World**, as part of **WIAD, World Information Architecture day**.
- 8 The project was the winner of the Creative Living Lab (II Ed.) competition, promoted by the Direzione generale Creatività contemporanea of Ministero per i Beni e le Attività Culturali.

generative practice, based on relationships, reciprocity and collaboration. This reversal is driven by art and design that allow data and computation to transform from dry technical matter to existential matter. As the Iaconesi/Persico duo say, art and design "can take the data and bring them into the midst of society, removing them from isolation, giving them to people and organizations so that they can be part of their lives" (Iaconesi & Persico, 2021b; tba). Data that, guided by a more ethical approach (typical of design), can leave an extractive or merely functional logic and arrive - through new rituals, practices and collective and connective actions - to new forms of expression and sensitivity.

We are, therefore, faced with a possible, innovative way, in which algorithms, artificial intelligence, big data and IoT, generate for people not only efficiency, but also sense and poetry. A new season - that Iaconesi imagines as a kind of neo-renaissance of the "made in Italy data-driven" - in which, a new artifacts generations will populate our habitats. New "semantic", "informational" and "constructionist" artifacts, "datapoietic" objects capable to activating thought, conveying meanings, producing sense; or rather, to put it in Mari's words (2011, p. 2), "producing intelligence".

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