

# DESIGN CULTURE(S)

Cumulus Conference Proceedings Roma 2021

Volume #2

ARTIFICIAL ARTIFICIAL  
LANGUAGES LIFE LIFE LIFE  
MAKING MAKING  
NEW NORMAL  
MULTIPLICITY  
PROXIMITY PROXIMITY  
RESILIENCE  
REVOLUTION  
THINKING THINKING

**Design Culture(s)  
Cumulus Conference  
Proceedings Roma 2021**

Volume #2

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# Co-Design processes for the inclusiveness of Rome's temporary communities

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**Abstract** | Social complexity is placing the role of Design in rethinking sociability in cities at the center of the debate. In contexts such as Rome - where urban communities are formed that share traditions, habits and ideas (Weber, 2005) - there is a need to build a change aimed at inclusion and integration. In fact, although these communities have managed to make some places their own, they still suffer from the lack of favorable environments for social innovation (Manzini, 2015).

From 2015 to 2018, the Research investigated this context by putting design good practices in contact with the temporary communities of Rome. Design becomes infrastructure (Morelli and Sbordone, 2018) to support initiatives that have developed products and services through Co-Design and Design Thinking approaches (Liedtka, 2018), resulting in a series of operations that have highlighted the role of Research in Design in connecting universities, citizens and municipalities.

**KEYWORDS | INCLUSIVENESS, SOCIAL INNOVATION, TEMPORARY COMMUNITIES,  
CO-DESIGN, DESIGN THINKING**

## 1. The city of Rome as a participatory Research field

The current political and economic condition, based on Capitalism and on the Neoliberal model, (Kempf, 2013; Klein, 2014) is progressively transforming the social models as known so far. This fact is favoring the social model of the commons, which veer towards a post-capitalist economy (Ostrom, 1990; Dardot & Laval, 2014; Hardt & Negri, 2014). Capitalism thus becomes both the cause of the Capitalistic model fall and the original point of the collaborative production growth that spontaneously came through network technology (Rifkin, 2014). In fact, technology has facilitated the formation of this model since it has given the possibility, quoting Mason (2016), to the educated and connected human being to act as "a new agent of change in history" (p. Xvii), tracing the footsteps of Cosmopolitan Localism (Manzini, 2014) and the interregional and planetary networking of place-based communities that share knowledge, technology and resources. This is contributing in make Design an autonomous discipline capable of "building the common as a design space" (Escobar, p. 186), thus overturning its capitalist and modernist heritage.

However, according to Fry (2015), lots of leaders and decision makers do not understand this quality of Design, making the communication work of academics and professionals more complex than it could be. The reflection on the methods and approaches that Design can adopt towards the different living communities starts from the hypothesis of Manzini (2018) that a virtuous circle can be triggered between social planning and "Politics" [1], in a set of various experiences that produce a change in the system where they operate (Transit, 2017). Consequently, designers would have to transform themselves into politicized agents of change (Fry, 2010) to overturn many deeply rooted political, economic, ideological and technological foundations. Self-generated movements provide practices and models that, with a view to preserving their social identity, must be able to be protected and cultivated by generating public services or even public policy (Selloni, 2018). In this sense, Design and Research are involved in the construction of co-design processes aimed to produce different outputs, depending on the reference context, in a form of social activism that develops a counter-narrative for social innovation (Fuad-Luke, 2009). Thus, a sort of Design activism develops that, according to Thorpe (2012), can become a tool in the public domain and a cultural, spatial and governmental tool.

Speaking of Commons, it is necessary to understand how the role of the designer, in a context of distributed and collaborative making, can design, modify and adapt products (like in the case of hacking design) and make them available to everyone.

Research tries to investigate the collaborative capacity of Design and its tools in a social context where the citizen is the core, but they have not been able to aggregate in a consistent form. This specific context is defined by the temporary communities of the city of Rome, where groups of people set up activities related to their interests or simply to their culture.



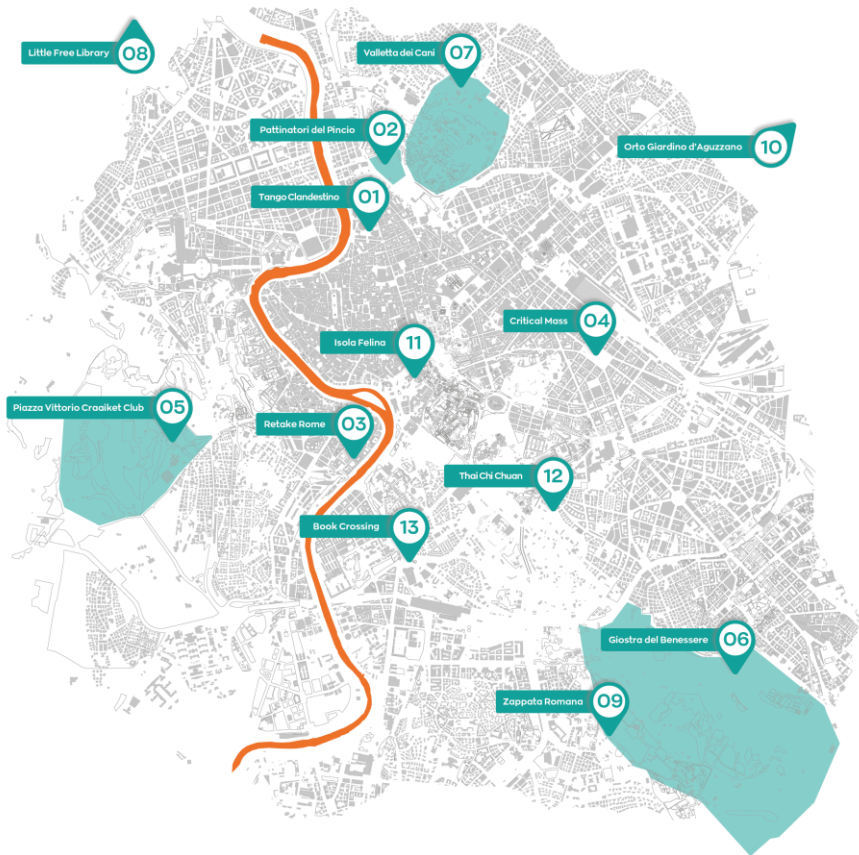


Figure 1. Mapping of the temporary communities involved by Design IN' Rome.

In this sense, Rome becomes an ideal field of investigation. Over the years, the City has in fact become a multicultural and multiethnic city. According to the 2015 CENSIS report, Rome has considerably increased its reception, as shown by the numbers that have described an increase in the number of foreigners registered in the registry, around + 115% compared to the same census in 2000 (Censis, 2015). This fact has consequently increased the constitution of temporary communities thus becoming an adequate experimentation field for this Research.

## 2. Design as a tool for the Capitoline temporary communities

According to a World Bank report (2013), social inclusion is the process of improving the conditions for the participation of individuals and groups in society, improving their skills, opportunities and dignity regardless of their identity. In other words, a given society becomes inclusive when all individuals are valued. It is in the face of situations of marginalization and exclusion that social innovation initiatives make sense in offering new alternatives. In recent years, this theme of social innovation has become an integral part of the vocabulary of urban regeneration, where space plays a radical role in the production of this innovation (Ostanel, 2017). Savoldi (2006) associates this inclination with a common distrust of institutions due to a reduction in forms of public investment.

Cellamare (2019) considers Rome as a paradigmatic case of this great process of retreat of the welfare state by insisting on the widespread and consolidated presence of alternative cultures and social experiences. Rome, as a "self-produced city" (S.M.U.R, 2014), constitutes an interesting context for developing reflections on redevelopment processes and forms of self-organization seen as a structural fact of contemporary cities.

In Rome, multicultural and cosmopolitan city, numerous urban realities and particular local actions were born; different forms of appropriation and reappropriation of the city and collective and organized urban practices, as forms of latent planning, in search of new conditions of mutualism. Public space and common goods - in a context that thrives on the delicate relationship between lawful and illegal - become informal places of change and innovation. Urban regeneration is a panacea for those solutions from above which over time have proved to be inefficient or deleterious, generating on the other hand a commodification of social life (Cellamare, 2018) which is accompanied by processes of gentrification (Semi, 2015) and disintegration of local cultures (Uitermark et al., 2007).

The Design'IN Rome workshop series promoted by the Faculty of Architecture of the University of Rome Sapienza has worked in close relationship with local communities on research-action projects, co-designing in different areas and neighborhoods of the capital. Design'IN Rome started from the Roman context, where urban communities share traditions, habits and ideas (Weber, 2005) with the aim of involving local communities in the design of specific solutions by exploiting technological discoveries (Smart objects and IoT) to improve livability in their areas.

From the assumptions thus presented, Design'IN Rome proposed to apply a series of design-driven methodologies for the design of solutions, including technologically advanced, for and with 13 temporary communities in Rome (fig. 1); the Aguzzano Garden, the agricultural community of Zappata Romana, the Little Free Library initiative, the Book Crossing community, the Thai Chi Chuan association, the Pattatatori del Pincio, the Critical Mass collective, the non-profit organization Retake Rome, the Isola Felina cat colony, the Valletta dei Cani municipal dog park, the independent outdoor gym Giostra del Benessere, the

independent sports community Cricket in villa Doria Pamphili and the collective of the flashmob Tango Clandestino initiative. 3 designers were assigned alongside each community

In a highly self-organized context such as that of Rome, design becomes a useful tool for understanding and developing social innovation by mediating public and private needs (Manzini, 2015). The city becomes a sort of laboratory for the development of ideas, products and services starting from the bottom and to support new behaviors and ways of aggregation to promote different forms of more sustainable urban life (both at an environmental and social level).

### 3. Ethnography, Experience and Speculation: action strategies for social innovation

Designers operated on three specific design levels, which guided the projects through three stages of evolution; a first phase of investigation, analytical and taxonomical of the context and of the assigned community, a second phase of experimentation and prototyping of project proposals, and a final phase of finalizing the new narratives established and project perspectives (fig. 2). Each design phase has been divided as follow.

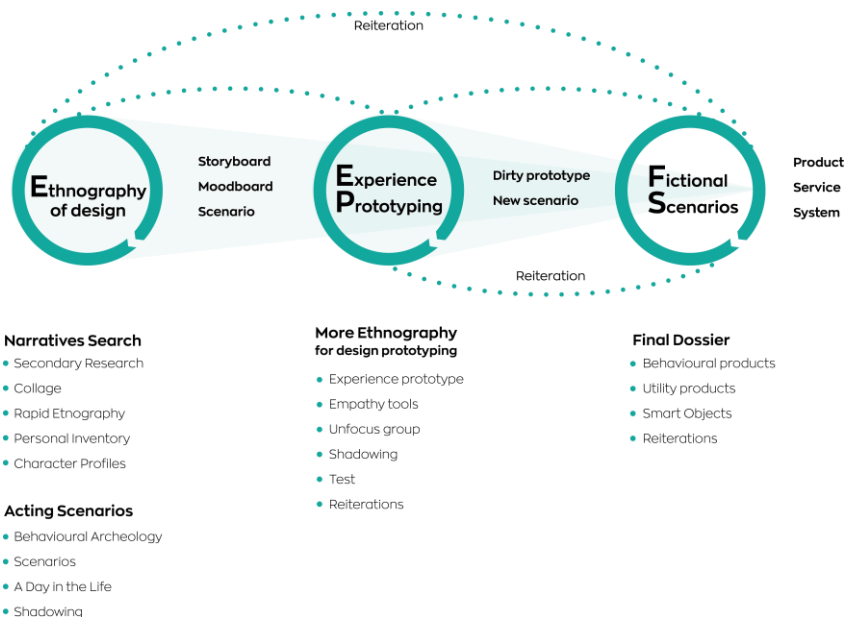


Figure 2. Schematic of the design methodologies applied during the Design IN' Rome laboratory.

### 3.1 Ethnography of Design

In the first phase the designers identify the narratives of the communities by adopting a restricted series of methodologies aimed at the ethnographic study by looking, interviewing and experimenting, developing a scenario that is as precise as possible. A man-on-the-street interview may not be immediately effective; therefore, a first phase of Desk Research is useful for the designer to prefigure timely and relevant questions for the reference community. People, places, actions and behaviors are then systematized by describing a general scenario of the community and highlighting the flows of interactions with objects and people, where micro-gestures become evidence of a lifestyle that reveals perceptions and values. The ethnographic study of the dynamics, rituals and meanings related to activities and artifacts results in intelligible storyboards, concept maps, behavioral archetypes (or personas) and moodboards composed of pre-existing artifacts.

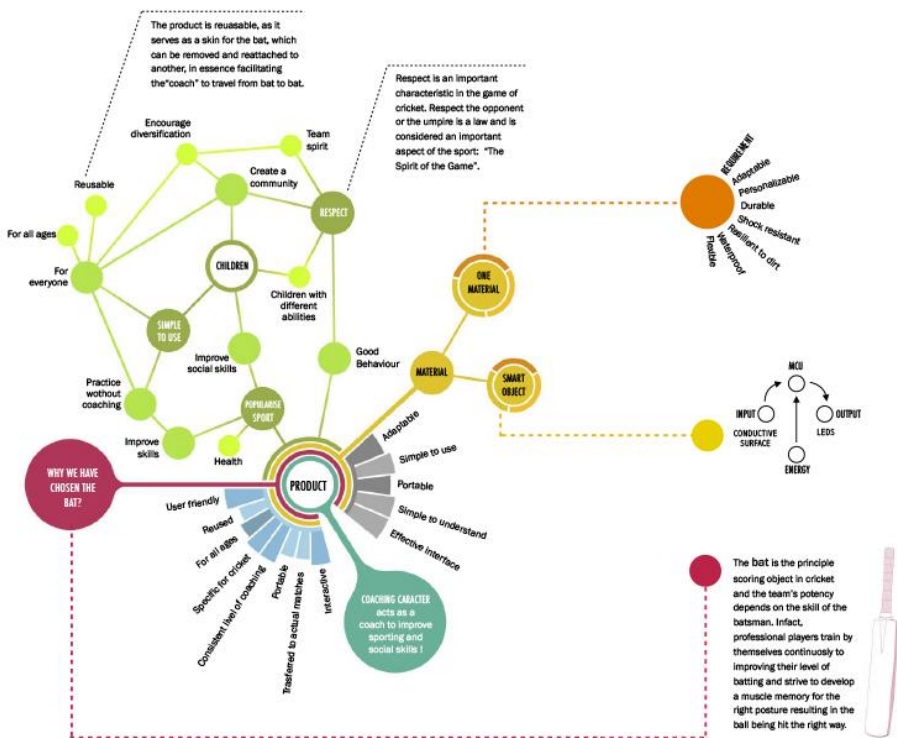


Figure 3. Concept map of the Nomi project by C. Rotondi, Anoop and M. Vasilena for the community of Cricket Players in Piazza Vittorio in Rome.

The *Noki* project by C. Rotondi, S. Anoop and M. Vasilena, has been able to identify the ethical and moral values of the historic game of Cricket, and the popular will of the community of Piazza Vittorio who practices this sport. The purpose of the community is to popularize sport and through this, to teach respect and integration among the people of the Roman community. The research activity of the team has identified within the game dynamics a potential connection with the younger generations who cohabit the surrounding public space, in search of leisure activities that know how to adapt to the frenetic rhythms of their daily lives (fig. 3).

### 3.2 Experience Prototyping

For the second phase, through fast implementation practices of physical models, experiential prototyping tools are introduced, through "dirty" and fast actions. Designers cannibalize and hack pre-existing products by operating through a series of iterations, bringing field experimentation together with communities through different research tools including Workshops, Empathy tools, Shadowing and Role play in order to produce a stimulating range of information fundamental to the of the project (Villari, 2013). Experiencing first-hand the difficulties of Roman cyclists during their own rally events, *Critical Barrier*, designed by D. Allotta, S. Ramezani, I. Demirsu and S. Negarestani, wanted to experiment with different ways of aggregation and reporting on the road, in order to make community events more visible in traffic and above all safer for its participants (fig. 4).

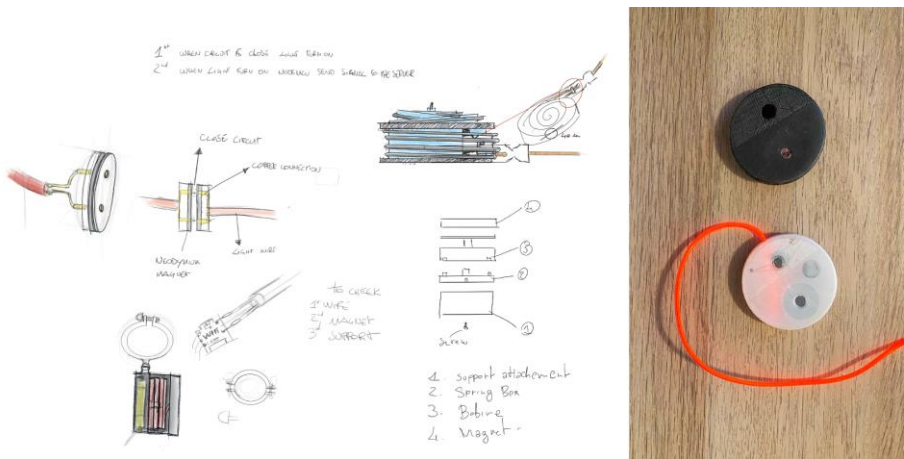


Figure 4. Sketching and prototypes of the *Critical Barrier* project by D. Allotta, S. Ramezani, I. Demirsu and S. Negarestani for the *Critical Mass* cycling community.

### 3.3 Fictional Scenarios



*Figure 5. U.S.O.project poster (Unidentified Skating Object) by L. D'Elia, S. Doustani and A for the community of Pincio Skaters in Rome. Sayifi. Photo courtesy: Paolo E. Cenciarelli.*

These documented experiences open up to new scenarios of use and behavior, identifying in the third and last phase "Fictional Scenario" the social and technological implications that the project brings with it. The designer therefore looks at the complexities of the community in a critical way as a prolific pool of behaviors and contradictions useful for an action of speculation that allows communities to visualize the real problems that are usually faced and considered as inevitable (Dunne & Raby, 2013 ), thus offering new possible solution scenarios. The critical view of the context implies a new awareness that is externalized and communicated through the products, services and systems generated by the co-design processes. The technological dimension takes over in response to the need to evolve and intensify an energy network (Rifkin, 2014).

The *U.S.O. (Unidentified Skating Object)*, designed by L. D'Elia, S. Doustani and A. Sayifi, wanted to speculate on the feeling of alienation experienced by the community of Pincio Skaters in their relationship with a public management that does not recognize the skater in the spaces shared neither as a pedestrian nor as a vehicle (such as a scooter or bicycle). Feeling "alien" and proud of this peculiarity, the project is dressed in attributes coming from the science fiction world to encourage new members and curious to a completely different



exercise activity, supported by new technologically enhanced actions and interactions (fig. 5).

## 4. Conclusions

The research and experimentation activities applied during the workshops have brought out from the Capitoline social fabric a latent planning of the communities and new design spaces which, together with the theme of social inclusion and the active role of the citizen, are issues addressed marginally by the Public Administration when it comes to social innovation (Balbo, 2015). In this open scenario, design can operate in order to reveal the needs and will of the community, transforming them into possible solutions of public utility. In 2016, the exhibition "Design'In Rome" at Casa della Città (fig. 6) exhibited the design results of the course, highlighting the role of academic research and design in connecting universities,

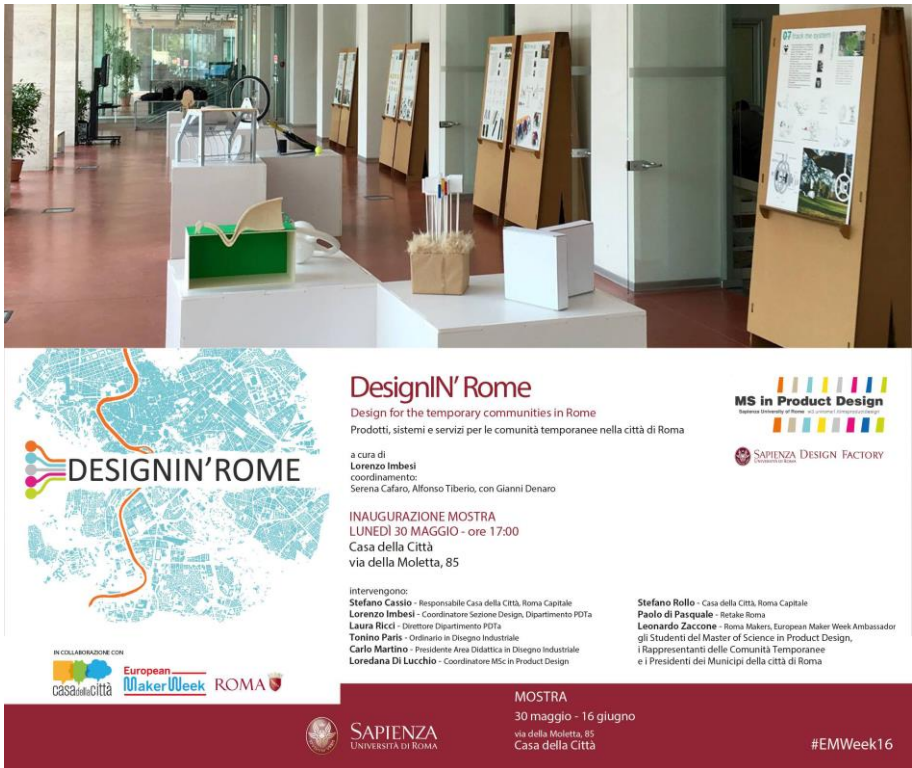


Figure 6. (above) Exhibition of the projects held at the Casa della Città, in Rome (below) Invitation made by (omitted for review) for the event.

citizens and municipalities, and in applying design knowledge in real contexts (Meyer & Norman, 2019). It is emphasized that research in design, in order to face the new ways of living in a social and innovative space, searches in the built spaces (both physical and virtual), products and services capable of taking into account the cultural value of the ethnic variety present in a cosmopolitan city like Rome, applying the best practices of Co-design and Action Research. This contribution presents an overview of alternative scenarios that are emerging and evolving on a global scale.

## Note

[1] Ezio Manzini in the working paper of the conference "Social and Political Planning", organized by cheFare at the Milan Triennale on 19 October 2018, defines Politics (with a capital P) as "the set of contents, organizations and methods that allow a company diversified and complex to exist and, if possible, progress towards higher forms of civilization".

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**Safouan Azouzi** My research interests focus on the relationship between design and socio-political issues, in particular the theory of the commons and its relationship with the territory and the resilience of communities to climate change.

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