



# Designing connected places

Places, identities and sustainable development  
*International Summer school*

## **Metadesign dossier**

### **Complexity Maps**

#### **Metadesign Team**

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#### **Local Partners**

Urban Center Metropolitano

#### **Project leader**

Christian Nold  
Jim Segers

## 1. Workshop description.

The forms of mapping and representation of the city are inadequate when compared to the possibility, and in many cases the need, to consider urban space as an organism, a complex system. The stratification of levels and modes of use and consequent tangible and intangible flows (the mobility of goods and people, trade, virtual interaction) demand forms of enquiry and synthesis that mirror the connections and inseparability of the levels. The image of the city assumes primary importance: capable of describing phenomena in their complexity without breaking them up, it becomes an irreplaceable instrument for depicting qualities of the systems otherwise not perceptible.

The representation of physical and social networks, of the emotional states of users who inhabit the urban fabric, and the definition of new models for the visualisation and thus understanding of the individual and collective life of the city are a new challenge for Communication Design.

### 1.1. The workshop hypothesis.

Moving from the problems pertaining to the role of communication design in understanding and visualizing Complex Systems, the purpose of the various activities that will be carried out is to investigate how creating visual models, by using *diagrams* useful to generate a new comprehension of the system in order to face complex environment in a more conscious way. Diagrams could be seen, in this framework, as an interface between knowledge and experience, more than a description of the reality, they are in form of images the mixed record of various impressions and information. In the last two decades the *mapping and diagramming* visual representation activities emerged as one of the most used way to manage the information age where we live in, due to the possibility that they offer to make the complex accessible, the invisible visible, the intangible palpable.

Diagramming is also a key competence of design activities: designing is foresee strategies for visualizing data, information and knowledge that make new interpretation of the world possible. We can find a supporting evidence in the increasing importance of the *information visualization* discipline. Visual representations are able to *connect the physical realm of spaces, cities and buildings* whit the *invisible world of communication*, social networks and human activities. To map, to trace a diagram is a “collective enabling enterprise”, as James Corner says, a sort of synthetic act to describe the world we live in, that “reveals and realizes hidden potential”. The potential application for communication design is now clear: the creation of a visual and diagrammatic language that facilitates the representation of the observed systems and the pinpointing of the emergent criticality.

### 1.2. The challenges.

The challenge lays in the use of the communication artifacts utilized for the definition of common objectives in a project to create pivots so as to work in a resourceful manner for the UCM supporting city administration endorsing process of new architectural projects. The opportunity offered by a new generation of diagrams and maps could be useful in the UCM planning consulting activities: enhancing the scenarios building work about the future transformation of Turin territory in order to explain a clear vision about the future assets of the metropolitan area, to ease interaction and to start having dialogue whit citizens and different political subjects.

The intervention area here proposed is the Stura river bank that could be seen as one of the district in which most profitably intervene: the coexistence of different communities and the fast development of a new infrastructural network and the different perceptions of the same territory open to a wide range of possibilities for the future of the area.

Envisioning, living and planning are the three main issue expected to be affect by the mapping intervention outcome:

- new mapping actions able to modify the perception of the sites, their relations and their actual use;
- new tools to share the perception of the sites with the people living there;
- new elements to provide strategic vision for the future and its transformation or preservation.

For this workshop we will be focusing on an area in the north of Torino at the confluence of two rivers as an example context. This area is the current focus of the Urban Centre who are starting to develop future plan for the development of the area. The Urban Centre function both the main stake holder in this project but also as an example of the type of organisations that mediate between governments, commerce and the general public.

### **1.3. Aim.**

The aim of the workshop is identify people thoughts, issues and desires. In particular the aim is to develop a means to engage with the local people who are living close to this area and find ways to represent them. The larger scale aim is to see how these processes of engagement and visualisation can be involved in process of political and cultural representation and reflect back onto the work of the Urban Centre. In conjunction with the Urban Centre how can we evolve a language that expresses the needs and desires of all the human and non-human actors involved in our location?

### **1.4. Team Composition.**

#### **Christian Nold.**

Christian Nold is an artist, designer and educator working to develop new participatory models for communal representation. In 2001 he wrote the well received book 'Mobile Vulgus', which examined the history of the political crowd and which set the tone for his research into participatory mapping. Since graduating from the Royal College of Art in 2004, Christian has led a number of large scale participatory projects and worked with a team on diverse academic research projects. In particular his 'Bio Mapping' project has received large amounts of international publicity and been staged in 16 different countries and over 1500 people have taken part in workshops and exhibitions. These participatory projects have a strong pedagogical basis and grew out of Christian's formal university teaching. He is currently based at the Bartlett, University College London.

#### **City Mine(d) (Jim Segers)**

City Mine(d) is a production house for urban interventions, committed to the development of new forms of urban citizenship, the re-appropriation of public space -roads, airwaves, stations, estates, parks, squares, virtual space- and the creation of cutting edge public artwork. The initially Belgian NGO now has agencies in Brussels, Barcelona and London, which are registered offices of the head office in Brussels.

City Mine(d)'s work has two strands: creating interventions in public spaces and supporting other people or initiatives who have a similar vision of the city. Its goals are to

- capture the imagination and the diverse creative potential of the city by encouraging cutting edge public artwork
- re-appropriate public space and make it the arena for social, cultural and artistic encounters; contribute to new forms of urban citizenship by combining the empowering qualities of culture with dynamic alliances and collaborations
- encourage the propagation of knowledge and experience acquired during development of the urban interventions.

The creation of the work brings together an unusual coalition of partners from the very local to the inter-city. This strategy enables City Mine(d) to tackle barriers to development,

and empower different participants to address their concerns regardless of the inequalities that otherwise prevent them from doing so. This way the urban interventions contribute to new forms of urban citizenship.

### **Urban Center.**

The structure was born towards the end of 2005, after a few years' experimentation with Officina Città di Torino ([Oct](#)), the first organisation in Torino to have dealt, since 2002, with issues concerning the contemporary city and landscape through communication and focus projects. Founded in September 2005 on the grounds of an agreement between Città di Torino, Torino's city council, Compagnia di San Paolo through Superior Institute for Territorial Innovation Systems ([SiTI](#)) and the association, [Associazione Torino Internazionale](#); Urban Center Metropolitano performs its activities in complete autonomy and independence. Consistent with indications of Torino's second strategic plan, Urban Center Metropolitano's mission is to become the milieu of a confrontation among the economic, social and cultural participants involved in the city's transformation processes and to provide the public administration, institutions or private sector companies with a morphologic consultancy service on operations of greater complexity and relevance concerning the territory.

The main tasks carried out by UCM - *design department* in its ordinary activities are:

- a. Architectural consulting for the city government of Turin: we support city administration in the endorsement process of the new architectural projects.
- b. Urban planning consulting: we provide the Metropolitan area of Turin with preliminary scenarios about the future transformation of the territory, in order to:
  - put together the different town plans, the technical plans about infrastructures, green areas, rivers, etc;
  - ease the interaction and the decision between different political subjects;
  - make clearer to the citizens the future assets of the metropolitan area;
  - interact and collaborate on setting the second strategical plan for the metropolitan area of Turin.

### **Density Design (Paolo Ciuccarelli, Donato Ricci).**

Density Design is a research framework and an experimental laboratory, born as a laboratory course in the final year of the Master Degree Course in Communication Design at the Politecnico di Milano.

Using complexity as a keyword to understand reality, combining it with a continuous research for information aesthetics and representation, DensityDesign explores the emergent relationships among communication design, information visualization and complex systems.

It moves in an emergent multidisciplinary field that could be called Space of Actions. Established in September 2004 DensityDesign is a platform for verifying the potential of communication artefacts in helping decision making processes and the Communication Design ability to facilitate dialogues within participatory actions. When acting within multi-organizational and multi-actorial contexts, where social interaction among stakeholders shows a highly complex behaviour, it is very important to build-up tools to share common perspectives and intention; these tools should take into account the conversational and dialogical nature of decision making processes.

In this framework we call these tools diagrams – maps, moodboard, storyboard, video scenarios: strategic (knowledge based) artefacts helping the decision makers to build-up a vision about:

- the elements of the (complex) system;
- the connections and the relationships among the elements;



- the behaviour of the system;
- the future evolutions of the systems.

In the DensityDesign course, the students use these tools to represent and understand a complex system; then, they are asked to identify some possible evolutions of the system (throughout scenarios), and to design a communication strategy to “activate” the evolution. The DensityDesign project is currently coordinated by Prof. Paolo Ciuccarelli (Politecnico di Milano - Department of Industrial Design, Arts, Communication and Fashion) and continuously developed through the PhD research activity.