

TITLE

## **Design the possible**

The construction of devices for the modification of critical contexts

NAME

**Gianfranco Orsenigo**

AFFILIATION

Politecnico di Milano

EMAIL ADDRESS

[gianfranco.orsenigo@polimi.it](mailto:gianfranco.orsenigo@polimi.it)

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ABSTRACT

How can the transformation of a street tell the story of the redevelopment project of an urban district (if it can) and therefore of a wider marginal territory?

How can a built pavilion tell about the redevelopment of a prison (if it can) and therefore of the Italian prison system? Starting from these two questions related to practical experiences<sup>1</sup>, I will try to explore empirically the nature (one of the possibilities) of the contemporary project in some realms of complexity. It is an investigation into how architectural design can equip itself to become one of the key stages of the transformations that involve marginal territories.

Nowadays, the development of a project often has to face complex and uncertain contexts. On the one hand, the contexts can be complex because of different and contrasting needs, fragmented responsibilities, multiple knowledge and unspecified problem issues. On the other hand, the contexts can be uncertain because of changing political intentions, lack of economic resources and the hesitant time of possible transformation. Inactivity seems to be an inevitable condition. To overcome this condition, design needs to be updated in order to become an *ecology of practices* (Stangers 2005), inside the society. In other words, it should have an innovative attitude capable of overcoming the traditional public-private economic system, applying to calls for grants, for example, working in partnership with several stakeholders, designing not only on problem-solving tasks but also on the definition of critical issues.

Following the process and the outcomes of two researches I have actively took part in, the attention will be focused on the elaborated documents, investigating possible innovative aspects.

Both experiences try to define devices to guide the possible transformation, experiencing punctual realizations. In this way, the strategic stage and the tactical action influence each other in a cyclic movement. An adaptive master plan for a marginal territory and a set of guidelines for the redevelopment of Italian prisons will allow us to reflect if it is possible and useful to design a *well-done document*, re-elaborating "*la tet bien faite*" by Morin (1999). This would not be a document that designs a model but a device that both places and answers questions and which has the criteria to put in relation the available elements. An open document that has the codes to change itself in accordance with the contingency, becoming something different, maintaining the same strategic orientation. However, the debate remains open.

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<sup>1</sup> They are two research in action, one on the marginal territories of Milan and one on the requalification of Italian prisons, in which I had the fortune to be part.