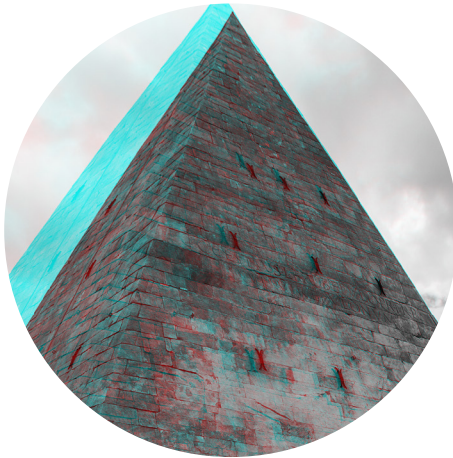


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DESIGN CULTURE(S) | CUMULUS ROMA 2021  
JUNE 08.09.10.11, SAPIENZA UNIVERSITY OF ROME

# Creativity as a Driver in Social Innovation Processes.

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**Abstract** | The value of culture and creativity in the development processes of post-industrial economies is internationally recognised and plays a decisive role for growth, competitiveness, sustainable development, innovation, employment, social cohesion, the sense of belonging and the spread of shared values. This takes the form of urban regeneration that become spaces in social aggregators, but also in social innovation practices as events, collaborative and aggregative projects, which provide contents and new meanings to territories that are often "unidentified" and "disidentifying", creating opportunities for relationships and networks between social actors, who in turn are bearers and propagators of new values and identities.

Richard Florida 15 years after the release of his first book (Florida, 2002), in the new essay "The New Urban Crisis" (2017), notes the consequences of the rise of the creative class in terms of gentrification and social inequality at the urban level, which have made large urban sections inaccessible to the popular classes with the expansion of the "service class with very little creative or qualified tasks. Perhaps the original sin of the Florida theory consists in not having considered that the "creative class" cannot be merely the engine of economic growth - albeit of a creative economy ... - but that it is necessary to rethink the role that the creatives must have with respect to the society, going to fill the educational role - if not even duty - advocated by Antonio Gramsci when he speaks of the intellectual class (Antonio Gramsci, Prison Notebooks, Einaudi, Turin 1975, vol. III, 1550-1551).

This concept is connected in some way to that "Design when everyone designs" by Manzini (2015) which recaps about the role of "creativity bearers", and specifically design, in contemporary society. A role that Manzini defines as that of an expert designer, facilitator of bottom innovation processes.

A facilitator therefore, and also an educator, who works to bring out those capabilities that the philosopher Amartya K. Sen defines as a fundamental piece to build a measure of well-being as an alternative to the so-called "GDP approach". The development, which Sen defines

in the Human Development Index, is primarily the development of people and communities and economic indicators are freedom, quality of life, justice: a fundamental paradigm shift in which the criteria for defining poverty are no longer attributable to a lack of resources but rather to an insufficient freedom to conduct adequate existences or a lack of capability (Sen 2000). Cultural production is closely linked to the territories in their complex anthropic and social stratification and it is impossible to think about the development of a territory without taking into consideration the social capital as a whole. Francesco Zurlo, about the concept of creativity, believes that this is a term that has now been abused and that it is, and must be, linked to a territory and a social capital.

A development that takes place through culture cannot therefore be considered only from an economic point of view, but rather in terms of increasing the skills of various kinds, distributed over a territory that thanks to creativity can grow in a virtuous process.

Perhaps this is the great challenge for the cultural and creative industries: to make an ethical choice according to the logic of social responsibility of culture, promoting actions that have a real social relevance, encouraging participation and placing the public at the centre. A choice therefore not dictated exclusively by the economic return but also by the intent to produce value by creating more active and aware communities.

**KEYWORDS | SOCIAL INNOVATION, FESTIVAL, CREATIVITY, CULTURE, ETHICAL & CIVIC DESIGN**

## 1. The value of culture and creativity in territories development

The value of culture and creativity in the development processes of post-industrial economies is now universally recognized at an international level. From the report on the economics of culture prepared for the European Commission by KEA – EUROPEAN AFFAIRS of 2006, to the "Unlocking the potential of cultural and creative industries, Green Paper" of 2010, it emerges that culture plays a decisive role for growth, competitiveness, sustainable development, innovation, employment, social cohesion, a sense of belonging and the dissemination of shared values. Cultural activities, in addition to the classical activities related to the cultural heritage, also include the creative sector (creative industries) which includes a set of functions linked in more or less direct forms to production, such as design, architecture, advertising, as well as a composite set of activities related to the information and communication industry.

The spread of well-being and the full satisfaction of basic needs make the "consumption" of culture possible and the demand for added value of consumer products increases more and more, with a demand for products and services in which the creative and innovative component becomes fundamental. In new economies, the symbolic value of material goods becomes increasingly important and the competitive factor of a product is increasingly linked to the quality, experience and meanings it is able to generate. Companies no longer invest in culture or design for merely promotional and communicative reasons but to create content and meanings.

According to Symbola's 2019 report "Io sono Cultura. L'Italia della qualità e della bellezza sfida la crisi.", it is precisely through creativity and design that Italian companies have shaped their products by redefining their meaning, connoting them culturally, strengthening their competitiveness and at the same time enriching a positive image of Italy, ensuring that products "Made in Italy" are among the best known brands in the world. It is even more important in the contemporary context, with the pervasiveness of technologies, to be able to count on "hybrid figures", on the "managers of complexity" as Piero Dominici defines them, "on curricular profiles that know how to hold together imagination and rationality, creativity and methodological rigour, the human and the technological aspects." (Interview with Piero Dominici in Morning Future, 2018 )

In Italy the studies and publications of the last decade on the role of creative classes and cultural districts (from Santagata to Sacco) highlight a paradigm shift and the expansion of the very concept of "culture" which is no longer limited only to the material, artistic and architectural heritage and to the level of education and innovation, but it opens up more and more onto territorial capital as a whole and onto human and social capital in particular. The interaction between culture, with its creative components, and the sustainable development of complex territorial systems clearly emerges in the words of Sacco and Blessi:

“In all the components of the economic, social and environmental reality, the role of culture is increasingly to operate as a synergistic agent capable of providing other sectors of the system with content, tools, creative practices and added value in terms of symbolic value and identity through the enhancement of local assets. Therefore, the importance of culture in the social growth processes of urban areas is also evident, whether they are subject to territorial upgrading processes or when it is necessary to complete the infrastructure planning action.” (Sacco, Blessi, 2005, p.3).

What has been said so far has materialised in the redeveloped spaces that become social containers and aggregators, engines of urban regeneration (not only on an infrastructural but also on a social level), and in the events that provide content to often disidentified and disidentifying territories, turning into occasions for relationships between individuals and for building networks between social actors, in their turn carriers and propagators of new values and identities.

However, it is true that creative processes alone are not sufficient to univocally determine territorial developments. If we think of powerful urban redevelopment and regeneration interventions such as those determined by international events such as EXPO and the Olympic Games or the recovery of industrial areas from the end of the 1980s in many cities in Northern Italy (two cases are the Bicocca in Milan and the Lingotto in Turin) it should be noted that these operations did not generate a real involvement of the communities, giving rise to phenomena of gentrification which further excluded the working classes from development. The local communities have not identified themselves with these operations and evidence of this is the recent refusals of the candidacies for the Turin and Rome Olympics.

Richard Florida in 2002 with the best-selling book "The Rise of the Creative Class" theorised the fundamental economic value of creativity and going beyond the concepts of information and knowledge economy, affirmed the birth of the "creative economy" and the rise of the "creative class" in advanced capitalist countries. The creative class, made up of scientists, engineers, university professors, artists, architects but also doctors, lawyers and managers, has the social function of generating new ideas, new technologies and / or creative content, revolutionising the old hierarchical and formal ways of managing the economy and work and becoming in fact the real engine of globalised development. New poles of development will be those urban centres which, based on the 3T (Technology, Talent and Tolerance) are able to attract this emerging social class.

Richard Florida's so-called "repentance" 15 years after the release of his book is dealt with in his new essay "The New Urban Crisis" (2017) in which he notes the consequences of the rise of the creative class in terms of urban social inequality with a strong gentrification, which has made large urban sections inaccessible to the working classes. In addition, the creative economy and outsourcing have seen the ranks of the "service class" swell, the employees of the services with very uncreative or unqualified occupations: waiters, carers, supermarket cashiers, and finally the well-known "riders". The spread of populisms that culminated in

Trump's rise in America and Brexit's victory in the UK, the returning illiteracy that seems to be getting stronger, actually appears to contradict Florida's optimistic vision: the three Ts, Technology Talent and Tolerance, which constituted the engine of the new creative economy, do not seem to have given rise to a similar response on a social level.

Perhaps the original sin of Florida's theory lies in not having considered that the "creative class" cannot be solely the engine for economic growth - albeit of a creative economy - but that it is necessary to think about the role that creatives must have with regard to society. The "creative people" has first and foremost an educational and ethical duty towards society as Gramsci stated in relation to the role of intellectuals:

"The way of being of the new intellectual can no longer consist in eloquence, the external and momentary engine of affections and passions, but in actively mixing with practical life, as a builder, organiser, persuader (...) When a distinction is made between intellectuals and non - Intellectuals in reality we refer only to the immediate social function of the professional category of intellectuals, that is, we take into account the direction in which the greatest weight of the specific professional activity is heading, whether in intellectual processing or in muscular-nervous effort. This means that if one can speak of intellectuals, one cannot speak of non-intellectuals, because non-intellectuals do not exist. There is no human activity from which any intellectual intervention can be excluded; homo faber cannot be separated from homo sapiens. Finally, every man, apart from his profession, has some intellectual activity, that is, he is a "philosopher", an artist, a man of taste, participates in a conception of the world, has a conscious moral course of conduct, therefore helps to support or to modify a conception of the world, that is to arouse new ways of thinking " (Gramsci, 1975, pp. 1550-1551).

This definition that - with a certain visionary nature, includes the creative class as a whole as formulated by Florida, is connected in some way to that "Design when everybody designs" by Manzini (2015) confirming the need to question the role of "Bearers of creativity", and specifically of design, in contemporary society. A role that Manzini defines as that of the expert designer, facilitator of innovation processes that arrive from below.

A facilitator therefore, but also an educator as advocated by Gramsci, who works to bring out those capabilities that the philosopher Amartya K. Sen defines as a fundamental element for building a measure of alternative well-being to the so-called "GDP approach", because in addition to this economic indicator there are freedom, quality of life and justice. Development, which Sen defines in the Human Development Index, is primarily the development of people and communities, and this implies a shift of attention from material goods and resources to skills and freedoms, proposing a fundamental change of paradigm in which the criteria for defining poverty are no longer attributable to a lack of resources but rather to an insufficient freedom to lead adequate lives or to a lack of capability (Sen 2000).

In fact, cultural production is closely linked to the territories in their complex anthropic and social stratification and it is impossible to think about the development of a territory without taking into account the social capital as a whole. Francesco Zurlo, wondering about the

concept of creativity, believes that this is a misused term and that it is, and must be, linked to a territory and a social capital.

In all this, Design and "design driven innovation" (Verganti, 2008, 2011), and therefore an innovation not driven by technological innovations or driven by the market, but connected to the "socio-cultural regimes" in force, appear among the mechanisms with the greatest thrust (Lombardi, Macchi, 2016): keeping the fluidity of knowledge, identifying new technological combinations and, above all, generating new meanings and new functions, helping to define new interaction strategies that meet not only territorial needs, but also and above all those of the end user.

A culture based development cannot therefore be considered only from an economic point of view, but rather in terms of increasing the skills of various types - distributed over a territory that thanks to creativity can grow in a virtuous process - of education - to complexity and critical thinking - and citizenship - respecting legality, differences and responsibility (Petrocelli, 2019).

And perhaps this is precisely the great challenge for the cultural and creative industries, that of making a choice that we could define as ethical according to the logic of the social responsibility of culture, promoting actions that have an effective social relevance, encouraging participation and placing the public in the centre. A choice therefore not dictated exclusively by an economic return but also by the intent to produce value by creating more active and aware communities.

If we think of an event like a Festival, a topic that we will discuss as a pilot project in the next paragraphs, the first level of value production is certainly that of the usable product / service, which, however, represents only a tool to achieve the second level of value production, or rather that of the participatory process, which has the most profound and strategic effect, aimed at stimulating community processes. On this second level, the main ingredient lies in the ability to activate territorial networks and alliances with the aim of encouraging the birth of a real urban cultural system that makes the impacts of the actions promoted sustainable over time. Last but not least the educational and training level, understood in its entirety and therefore not only as an expansion of knowledge but also as education for citizenship, aware of the need today, in the rapidity of technological and social evolution, of transversal skills, of flexibility, critical skills and to identify and solve complex problems, but also empathy and sharing. All these skills are constitutive of the designer, or rather of the "citizen designers" who "have both a social and a moral responsibility to use their visual language to address societal issues either within or in addition to their professional practices" (Resnick, 2019, p. 39).

## 2. Design Driven Innovation strategies for and with the territories, the case of COSè festival

"In Italy, as in all the other territories of the world, we make things. In our country particular things are produced: Italy is famous for Design and Fashion objects, with an increasingly high added value. In particular, the plain that stretches from Florence to the sea is a vast area where things are produced. A place, the place of things, therefore. Things that populate our homes and that sometimes, due to their ever-growing number, when they become waste, end up besieging us. Things must therefore be rethought: it is necessary to restore a deeper sense to objects, to recreate new emotional relationships with them, to extend their life (so as not to make them become waste). The challenge starts in childhood. Hence the idea of a festival for children and young people dedicated to education about things, because after all, the challenge for a new model of more sustainable development also starts from there".

These words written by Giuseppe Lotti in the press release (2016) contain the idea of the COSè Festival, which was held in two editions, in 2016 and 2017, between Calenzano, Campi Bisenzio and Sesto Fiorentino, in the middle of the plain between Florence and Prato. The festival was born and was created as an event aimed at local communities with a particular focus on the complex relationship we have with things and a target that ranged from children, to young people, to students of the Design Campus, but also to families and in general to the inhabitants of the plain.

This challenge certainly starts with young children, being more sensitive as well as easier to educate in practices focusing on safeguarding our ecosystem, in every sense. Hence the idea of a festival for children and adolescents dedicated to education about things that in the previous words gives a description of its mission and the starting point that effectively generated the executive project of the COSè Festival<sup>1</sup>.

The theme of the first edition (2016) was "us and things" - and was aimed at rethinking the objects that surround us and giving them a deeper sense, recreating new emotional relationships with them -, the 2017 edition instead worked on the theme of "the work behind things" - to be understood as the commitment, the stories, the times and the places behind the objects that surround us, but also the crafts that are no longer there.

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<sup>1</sup> The COSè Festiva was conceived and designed by the Design Laboratory for Sustainability of the University of Florence coordinated by prof. Giuseppe Lotti with an extended partnership that involved Convoi social cooperative; LibLab, Library-workshop for children and teenagers; the Municipality of Calenzano and with the involvement of many other territorial entities, including the main sponsor, Centro Commerciale I Gigli. In the 2014/2015 academic year, a thesis was developed: "COSè. us and things, the festival" - by Irene Fiesoli and Ambra Quercioli, Prof. Giuseppe Lotti (supervisor) - Master's Degree in Design, which analysed the theme and developed a coordinated image and graphics of the event.



Around these two macro-themes, programmes of events were organised, of which there were a great variety, both in type and in their reference target: they included workshops, exhibitions, meetings with book authors, open readings, guided tours to local companies, shows and events, some dedicated specifically to schools for all age groups and others open to the public at large. The different lines of action, the quality of the contents and the ability to stimulate users as regards contemporary issues and problems, (from compulsive purchasing, to the theme of migrants, to that of work, sustainability and many others) provided the elements for which the festival has managed to attract an ever wider audience, also involving a particular target such as young people, who recognised the event as an alternative cultural and social moment with respect to the predominantly commercial products that the territory offered<sup>2</sup>.



Figure 1. Workshop "Things with art", Fausto Gilberti, 2016 edition.

The primary educational goal of the Festival materialised in workshops on the theme of sustainability, with the desire to make people reflect on the fact that every day we buy

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<sup>2</sup> The festival in only two editions was able to involve 350 pupils from Nursery Schools, 350 pupils from Primary Schools, 350 pupils from Secondary Schools, 350 pupils from Secondary Schools. In addition to these, the festival has reached, thanks to the many open events: 2,000 citizens, 1,500 families, 1,800 young people and university students.

something by making choices that affect not only our lives, but also that of others: producers, workers, those who live in a certain area, future generations and that even in our small way we can choose quality products, opt for companies that respect workers' rights and the environment and avoid waste.

Among the laboratories that developed these themes certainly those that stand out are *How many things... WorkSHOPping!* (2016 edition), *I buy things...Therefore I am!* (2016 and 2017 edition), *Refuse or reuse?* (2017 edition) – held in collaboration with the CONVOI non-profit cooperative – which have analysed in depth the general theme, stimulating reflection on the role of the consumer, or better consumer-actor (Fabris, 2010), who chooses on the basis of his own wishes and no longer only his needs; they talked about compulsive shopping, an extremely topical subject for adolescents; they also tackled the theme of the reuse of waste in creative, practical laboratories.

Other events, on the other hand, were aimed at making children and adults aware of some social problems and in particular the transformations of an increasingly intercultural society, where the boundaries between people as well as the different cosmologies of objects - also coming from cultures remote from ours -, do not disappear but interact with each other:

Also on this subject were the workshop *Amo non amo: what can you do with a ball?* (2017 edition) inspired by Anna Baccellieri's book, which gave an insight into the differences that exist between children around the world, some who can play with a ball and others who simply don't have the time and are often employed in making toys that they will never use. Two very important exhibitions were organised on the same subject, both of them held in the main halls of I Gigli Shopping Centre. One is the exhibition "Work Right!", in collaboration with the International association Poster for Tomorrow, which has supplied 100 posters, by graphic designers from all over the world, winners of the competition dedicated to the Right to Work; an exhibition with a great visual and emotional impact that explores the theme of the second edition of the festival, "the work behind things". Lastly, a very important project, the exhibition "Le Cose degli Altri", in collaboration with Caritas Florence and 3 reception centres for refugees in Calenzano, Campi Bisenzio and Sesto Fiorentino, comprising portrait photographs of people seeking asylum in this country, accompanied by their life stories and the story about a particular "thing" that for the people interviewed represents their "home".

These objects of affection were then represented through their absence in the photos, filled with illustrations depicting the most similar possible version of the objects left at home or lost on the journey.

On this project apart from the exhibition there was the meeting Things from the sea, to discuss with experts and people directly involved the drama that many people have to suffer, people fleeing from wars and famine in search of a better future. At the end of the meeting, thanks to Giulio Carlo Vecchini, luthier, who made a guitar -- *Mare di Mezzo* – using

the fragments of the boats that arrived at Lampedusa, giving life to an evocative concert for guitar and voice.

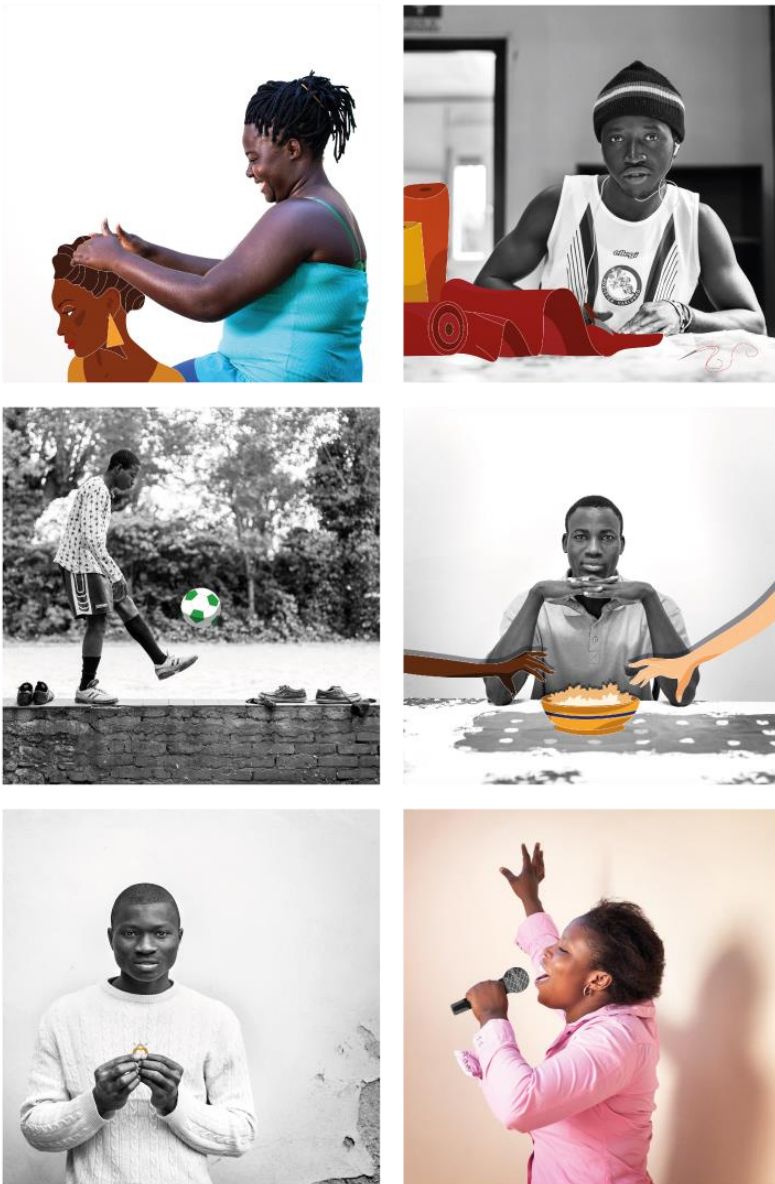


Figure 2. Selection of some photos protagonists of the photographic exhibition "Le cose degli altri".

Still other events were aimed at making known and reflecting the reference territorial context, through meetings and exhibitions relating the thousand forms that work takes today: from the craftsmanship of the artisan to robots, through visits to factories, events and meetings in collaboration with companies, associations such as ADI Association for Industrial Design or Artex.

It can be claimed that the main characteristic of the COSè Festival is that it is an “open festival”, in that in the two editions it succeeded in involving dozens of actors present in the area. It had an important role because it increased the level of social aggregation within the event in a territory through culture and creativity in a dimension that was not that of “selling”, to which the many events scattered in our territories have accustomed us, such as festivals and fairs and cultural events mainly used as a tool to promote tourism and trade.



*Figure 3. Merchandising COSè Festival.*

Certainly most of the events have been designed to address a public of children, seen as the users who could learn the most important topics for the future and put them into practice as they grow up. This is above all through play, as the basis for the teaching methodologies aimed at the world of childhood, as the child learns spontaneously, free from any constraints, becoming in some cases himself the creator of the game. In addition to this didactic and pedagogical character, play has always played a cultural role too, as through games and toys it is possible to trace a story from one era to the next, of the type of relationship between adults, children and society. *As La Cecla also underlines:*

“Games, toys [...] tell us about the image that adults have of children, the idea of children's ‘task’ in society. Of course, children also play alone; they invent ways to play with the world on their own, but adults ‘take advantage’ of the seriousness of child's play to guide it along the channels of what they expect from children. In this sense, toys are the matter of a relationship between two categories of humans who, although ‘familiar’, are foreign and divided. “(La Cecla, 2013, p. 62)

In the current transformation period, in which the relationship between adult and child must also be reviewed, it is fundamental to understand the importance of children's ability to "play with the remains of the world to recompose it in their own, new way" (La Cecla, 2013) which can become one of the truly innovative strategic levers to rethink the world of the future. Precisely because of the experience gained during the COSè Festival, we have understood that through some play-workshops it is possible to promote children's creativity and re-establish an adult-child relationship based on new principles; the smaller ones learn by playing and the older ones begin to reflect on a different future. So if for the little ones the "world of things" is approached in an exploratory way, for adults it is approached in a reflective way. In fact, the child explores the multitude of things in his objectivity; the adult instead reflects on them following more complex and elaborate processes. However, the form of learning that most characterised this festival experience and that was interesting in terms of social impact was that among peers, in which the child - as a social innovator - challenges the world as the adult has always known it. The child then poses questions to the adult that he had never thought of and cannot answer. In fact, the child can play this role of destroyer of schemes" because he lacks models inherited and / or imitated from the social context in which the adult is already immersed, and perhaps contaminated.



*Figure 4. Laboratory "I materiali delle cose" (2016 edition), on the themes of Sustainability: environmental, economic and socio-cultural.*

The COS'è festival therefore set itself as a tentative to catalyze and direct, through a Design Driven strategy, the energies and the various actors present in the territory in a sort of common platform of capabilities of individuals and society for the production and circulation of knowledge on the one hand and identity construction on the other. The visits and the involvement of manufacturing companies or other entrepreneurial entities ascribable to social entrepreneurship, the involvement of public institutions have in fact constituted an important attempt to give identity and meaning to the many "non-places" spread throughout the territory as is the emblematic case of the "I Gigli" shopping centre, the main sponsor of the Festival, which has become the theatre of exhibitions with a high social content and educational and recreational workshops that have involved " I Gigli" customers.

The festival therefore becomes the tool not only to produce tangible and accessible value, but also to generate aggregation, through participatory and formative processes, aimed at stimulating the community, understood as the set of bodies, structures, companies and people. It is an example of how it is possible to concretely try to activate, or reactivate, territorial networks that in some cases exist on the territory but that very often unfortunately find themselves with their nodes disconnected from each other, placing a small piece in trying to intervene on global problems that in one way or another affect us all.

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**Acknowledgements:** This contribution was shared and agreed between the authors in content and conclusions. Specifically, Irene Fiesoli edited paragraph 2.