

Depicting concurrency between the participatory and the strategic design practice within the urban context

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Abstract

The context of everyday urban life is the cradle of more democratic social changes, and on which design practice aimed at the regeneration of urban space towards something more democratic, inclusive, participative and resilient has to focus. However, design practice within the city has hardly been successful from this perspective. In this paper a path to strengthening design practice within the urban context is presented by identifying the points of concurrency and enrichment between strategic design from the perspective of the ecosystem and the participatory design approach of infrastructuring agonistic public spaces. Political design and agonistic democracy are the theoretical thread running in the background of the discussion here presented that results in affirming the need to qualify metadesign, within strategic design, as infrastructuring agonistic public spaces when acting within the city, as well as to amplify the potentiality of the suggested practice through the integration of prototyping and scenario building.

Keywords: strategic design, infrastructuring, agonistic public spaces, urban context.

Introduction

As design researchers and practitioners, we are ever more frequently asking ourselves how we can contribute to the creation and consolidation of the conditions for more democratic and sustainable ways of life. We know that this change depends on a social learning process (Manzini, 2015), and that design-led innovation processes could catalyse and guide this process due to their potential for creating new meanings and resulting in socio-cultural changes (Verganti, 2008). From this perspective, based on previous design experiences and recent research activities undertaken within the design discipline, it is possible to identify some characteristics of design practice with greater potential to lead to more democratic and sustainable scenarios.

The focus on social innovation, for instance, emerges as an unavoidable feature. Social innovations are creative processes able to promote new forms of collaboration and relationship while solving social needs (Murray *et al.*, 2010). This means that they transform society by transforming those who take part in these processes. In actual fact, as presented by Sennett (2012), creative collaborative practice has the potentiality to redefine social relationships and the context of their implementation. Here lies the relevance of social innovation.

At the same time, if we consider the ecosystem dimension of the desired change, the urban space stands out as one of the elected contexts of action for a design practice seeking the development and implementation of local creative processes aimed at promoting social innovation (processes). Actually, taking action where everyday life takes place allows design to have a greater influence

on local social changes because it is the place where new habits, behaviours and relationships can be provoked and is therefore more open to the possibility of social and cultural changes. Moreover, within the context of everyday life, social innovations can more easily assert themselves and spread. Actually, designers in this context can observe and identify needs and new ways in which people deal with them, as well as experiment and promote new and more democratic, integrated and egalitarian social processes. In addition, everyday objects, services and practices consolidate, repeat and thus spread the meaning that they carry with themselves. For these reasons, design processes in an urban context need to be social learning processes bringing together several different actors to (re)think and (re)design the context itself (Franzato *et al.*, 2015).

A third feature comes from DiSalvo's (2010) reflections about the need to qualify how design encourages and feeds more democratic contexts that firstly entails determining which model of democracy the enacted design practice is based on and contributes to. The author explains this by presenting two main kinds of design practice related to democracy. The first one – design for politics – reinforces local present dynamics and governing mechanics through promoting consensus and reducing the local contentious dimension. Drawing from Mouffe (2000), the author points out the relevance of protest and conflict for changing and improving the *status quo* because they challenge existing hegemonies. The expression of differences and productive conflicts or contests is a main feature of a democratic behaviour according to the model of agonistic pluralism (Mouffe, 2000). Agonistic democracy is a model

of democracy that is not based on consensus and rational deliberation, but on allowing the expression of different voices, on their dispute and productive and tolerant organisation (Mouffe, 2000). Agonistic struggle is the basis of democracy. Democratic social processes and solutions come not from homogenizing different positions, but through dialogue and a different organisation of existing actors: this kind of process has the potential to challenge and change the present situation. The other approach – political design – has at its core agonistic democracy. It is a design practice that acts towards allowing and promoting the expression of dissent in order to reveal power relations and conflicts, and challenge common practices and discourses. The expression of differences is a key element of a democratic context. Without underestimating the relevance of design for politics, design practice that seeks to contribute to the generation and consolidation of the conditions for more democratic and sustainable contexts of life needs to assume agonistic pluralism as the model of democracy to give shape to its practices.

That said, the approach most used historically and generally in designing with and within the city has not been helpful to contributing and sustaining social cultural changes that will improve the sustainable and democratic dimension of society (Mitrašinović, 2016). In actual fact, even if the design activity relating to the city has already been object of several creative practices – architecture, art, urbanism – their *praxes* however have mostly been about “designing the city” and about supporting and maintaining the dominating organizational, political and economic system (Deutsche, 1998). They have not been helpful in provoking radical changes in behavioural and relational dynamics. Even the design discipline – the practice of which in this context is more recent – has often approached the public space more as “city planning” rather than as “place-making”. This means a more economic point of view has been applied instead of a social construction one – i.e. design for creative cities instead of for agonistic public spaces (Björgvinsson *et al.*, 2010), as will be better discussed later. The latter approach requires considering the action and participation of those who inhabit and comprise the urban context in the creative processes aimed at (re)defining the context itself. This approach constantly evolves according to the context’s evolving essence. Moreover, even design experiments implemented from the perspective of place-making have frequently reinforced the present *status quo* instead of promoting more democratic dynamics, due to the model of democracy consciously or unconsciously used to shape their course of action. In short, while city planning activities have been largely successful from the point of view of those who required them, on the contrary, place-making design processes are still an experimental, less practiced and less successful practice, which has not yet been consolidated.

Based on this, working towards promoting and fostering a design practice really able to contribute to making the context more democratic, to promoting social justice and social equity, and to enabling expression by socially excluded groups means strengthening its methodological dimension. Thus, several researchers are investigating and experimenting on how design can value local existing resources, promote interaction with local inhabitants, un-

derstand their needs and potentialities and mobilize them in a process of self-definition of their context of life.

When looking for a design practice to foster socio-cultural changes in the urban context through the re-definition of social relationships, as well as economic and political, in collaboration with local actors, strategic design from an ecosystem perspective stands out as important. Actually, such design focuses on the creation of strategies that involve the whole ecosystem in the creative process. These strategies seek the continuous reorganization of the relations among the ecosystem’s elements in order to allow the development of a design process embracing innovation and sustainability (Franzato *et al.*, 2015).

However, despite the latest advances within the field of strategic design and its emerging potentialities for organising ecosystem relations and working towards social innovation, strategic design is still lacking more methodological principles meant to qualify its practice within the urban context as described above – that is, meant to inform how it could and should reorganize the urban system and local relations. This is stressed, for instance, by Manzini and Staszowski (2013) in the publication, *Public and Collaborative. Exploring the intersection of design, social innovation and public policy* (2013), in which several experiences are presented, analysed and used to reflect on the existent lacunas and the extent of the achieved results. In the same way, it is possible to observe that the theoretical statement made by Franzato *et al.* (2015) seems to be an initial step towards cultural and social innovation as part of strategic design practice for creative ecosystems, but at the same time this statement needs further methodological developments in order to actually move towards more democratic scenarios. Drawing on DiSalvo’s position (2010), in order to contribute to the described scenario there is the need to qualify strategic design practice within the urban context: which model of democracy informs its course of action? At the present moment, as will be shown throughout this paper, strategic design lacks methodological principles guiding it towards being a political design practice. From this, questions arise: how can strategic design do it? Which are them?

Thus, this paper is about presenting a path towards strengthening strategic design practice within the urban space, specifically about amplifying its capacity to act in the transformation and regeneration of urban space in order to achieve social and political changes that will make it more inclusive, participative and resilient – therefore about characterizing strategic design practice in the urban context as political design. As such, the purpose of this paper is to discuss how it can actually redefine social, economic and political existing relationships from this perspective.

In order to do this, this paper suggests more intense dialogue and integration between strategic design and participatory design (PD). Specifically, it depicts the points of concurrency between infrastructuring and metadesign. Infrastructuring is an approach recently developed and discussed within the PD community for promoting more democratic social contexts – characterized within the theoretical framework of agonistic democracy, a key factor within the suggested integration. Infrastructuring has already been tied to metadesign by the PD community

(Ehn, 2008), however this has been done with metadesign as used in the interaction design tradition. Actually, within the field of design there are several different interpretations of the concept of metadesign: scholars both from interaction design, open and strategic design have used it with different understandings and conceptualizations. Here a different approximation is proposed: metadesign is characterized within the Latin strategic design tradition. As such, it is considered to be a specific kind of design process that characterizes the strategic design method.

In order to understand how the dialogue could happen, a theoretical review of strategic design, its evolution towards a creative ecosystems perspective and of metadesign will be the basis for understanding the potentiality of strategic design for social and cultural change within the city as well as for understanding its methodological lacunas. Subsequently, a review of the concepts of infrastructuring and agonistic public spaces will provide enlightenment on their relevance for the urban context and on the potentialities arising from integrating infrastructuring and strategic design. All this will be then used to discuss the points of concurrency between strategic design and infrastructuring and how they can reciprocally improve each other. Specifically, it is suggested that metadesign be qualified as infrastructuring when strategic design deals with the urban context; and the understanding of infrastructuring is enriched through the principle of displacement developed within metadesign in the Latin strategic design tradition.

Is strategic design for more democratic urban spaces?

After an extended review of the main theoretical studies related to the understanding of design as a strategic method, Freire (2014) defines strategic design as a process able to incite the different actors involved in the development of organizational strategies. She adds that it is a collective design activity that relies on identifying the distinctive competencies of an organization as well as the opportunities for action existing at the present moment. This is possible because designers have the ability to identify and interpret current societal and market signs, to visualize the potential space for action and to share this understanding within an organization in order to create meaning collectively, that is value offered by the organization that will allow it to obtain a competitive advantage.

However, even if it emerges from this that the strategic dimension of design is an intrinsic feature of it, only recently has this factor gained widespread recognition because for decades the design community has focused its attentions more on the outcome of design practice rather than on the design method (Franzato, 2016). This understanding started to emerge mostly at the end of the last century due to several changes that occurred within the discipline and society itself. As Freire (2014) presents in her review, the strategic dimension of design was understood firstly in the business field. It is within this framework that, at the end of the 1990s, some researchers identified the potentialities of design for contributing to the organizational learning process and to the development of organizational strategies.

One of the most crucial contributions came from Zurlo (1999) who rethought the concept of strategy within the paradigm of complexity and of networks for value co-creation. Within the scenario of a contemporary company, he defined strategy as “a collective process of meaning construction” (Zurlo, 1999, p. 186). Over the last 15 years, this idea has led to a rapid evolution and expansion of the understanding of what could be the contribution of the strategic potentialities of design –from the business field to society as a whole. In actual fact, Meroni projected it beyond the market by saying that strategic design “is needed by all those who have to deal with design decisions in a turbulent and uncertain context” (Meroni, 2008, p. 32), such as those who operate in public institutions, associations, governmental and non-governmental organisations. The relevance of strategic design lies in helping to understand their values and procedural dynamics, and to cope and to evolve according to the external environment. Together with (and for) a widespread interest in the redirection of the design practice towards an everyday and public context of life, the understanding of strategic design has continuously been expanded up till the recent affirmation of the study and application of strategic design from an ecosystem perspective, as presented by Franzato and Campelo (2016).

As part of this new framework, the design process occurs in an intangible space made of the interests of the different actors that comprise the operational ecosystem, and of the relationships they develop among themselves – these encompass the organizational context, the market, the society and the environment (Franzato *et al.*, 2015). In this space, the core interest of strategic design is the constant organisation of the set of relationships existing and developed within the ecosystem, which is made up of different organizations, such as consultancies, firms, institutions, governments, territories and associations.

The strategic dimension of design has always entailed design activity never limited to and within an organization, but rather in dialogue with society as a whole. However, through the above-presented evolution, it has recently become clear that design strategies have the potentiality and the objective to involve the whole ecosystem in a creative process and to feed the process itself. Considering the evolving essence of the ecosystem, these strategies constantly evolve too, and the designer has the role of organising, sustaining, facilitating and provoking their development involving human and non-human actors. According to Franzato *et al.* (2015), the designers’ skills become a trans-disciplinary platform supporting dialogical cooperation between the actors, and the collective ideation of organizational strategies for the creation, support and dissemination of innovation. Franzato (2016) affirms that the resulting innovations would be social innovations because of the ecosystem perspective and because design is about world transformation, and thus about the future. Within this framework, strategic design is proposed as the catalyst, promoter and feeder of a more sustainable paradigm.

According to the foregoing, strategic design can be of astonishing relevance for designers’ actions within an urban ecosystem because it can amplify the possibilities of promoting change and regeneration of the urban tissue.

In the process of defining how it could do this, it emerges that the strategic dialogue allows the building of a collective vision. Actually, one of the main pillars of design as a strategic practice is to enable dialogue between different actors who can inspire and guide their diverse perspectives towards the construction of a shared and plural vision. This collective dialogue –called strategic dialogue– is a key element in strategic design. This main feature of strategic design emerges and is explained in studies by Zurlo (1999) and Meroni (2008): the former stresses the dialogical essence of strategy that is based on dialogue, confrontation and negotiation among different actors towards a shared purpose; while the latter affirms that the strategic dialogue happens throughout the process and in a co-creative way.

One key activity for the promotion of the strategic dialogue is the construction of collective future scenarios (Manzini and Jégou, 2006): visual expression facilitates communication. Contradictions and conflicts between the different perspectives of actors involved emerge during the scenario-building process and the designer has the role of facilitating it by organising them towards a common and shared vision. The designer can do this because of the ability to connect different kinds of knowledge and to give shape to ideas. Future scenarios are the means by which strategic design suggests paths for innovation (Zurlo, 1999). As such, scenario building is presented as a key activity in strategic design practice within an ecosystem: it generates a creative space for productive dialogue where paths for more democratic and sustainable futures emerge.

Among the different methods for building design-oriented scenarios suggested by researchers, within the Latin strategic design tradition it is possible to identify the use of metadesign (see Celaschi and Deserti, 2007), understood as a design methodological approach (Franzato, 2014a). Drawing on Franzato's review (2014b), in which some characteristics of metadesign permeating the Latin tradition are highlighted, metadesign emerges as a reflective process that brings new, shared and enriched insights to the design process. These insights emerge from the contributions of other involved actors: it is never a designer's activity exclusively because it aims to provoke and promote the whole ecosystem's participation in the design process. At the same time, the design process never ends because metadesign always sets the basis of future and subsequent new metadesign and design processes –this is even more so from a creative ecosystems perspective according to which a design process happens and develops within a continuous net of design processes. It is never possible to foresee how a metadesign process will unfold.

There is one other recent understanding about the essence of metadesign conceived by Franzato (2014b) that is relevant within the context of this paper: he affirms that metadesign and the design process are autonomous. There is no temporal continuity between them; a design process does not precede a further design process, thus metadesign is not the “design of design” or an inquiry on future design processes, as affirmed by several researcher and practitioners (Giaccardi, 2005; Celaschi and Deserti, 2007; Moraes, 2010; Vassão, 2010). The author breaks with the perspective of temporal continuity and introduces

the principle of displacement: the metadesign and design process are on different levels, thus they are not interrelated by a temporal logic. Metadesign can be better understood as a process that pushes the design process forward: “metadesign is not a present and finite design process but a restless one, projected to the future of design” (Franzato, 2014b, p. 95).

Besides the potentialities of strategic design presented above, in their present form, the strategic dialogue, scenario-building activity and metadesign will not necessarily contribute to more democratic urban contexts. Drawing on DiSalvo (2010), having an ecosystem perspective and working towards social innovations are not enough. How does strategic design actually allow and promote agonistic pluralism if there is no methodological principle that will characterize design action towards this direction? Moreover, considering that the urban context and the ecosystem perspective are the latest proposition and advances of the discipline, how was the strategic design method adapted to work in this way? Strategic design needs to develop further its methodological approach and qualify how it will support democratic practices within the urban context, if it wants to be able to take action for a more democratic society. Metadesign emerges as a starting point of strategic design for further developments. Within the Latin strategic design tradition, metadesign is the methodological essence of strategic design and it acts both towards building future scenarios and as propulsion for the design process. Qualifying it emerges as unavoidable for qualifying strategic design as explained. A fruitful path from this perspective comes from the PD community with the concept of infrastructuring, which will be presented in the next section.

Infrastructuring agonistic public space

Since the last decade, the PD community has dealt with the redirection of design practice towards an everyday and public context of life, as well as with the relevance acquired by designing towards social innovation. Actually, even if PD is a term used to describe quite heterogeneous design practices that originated from and within several different movements of the second half of the last century with the common aim of making the design process more democratic, one of its strongest traditions is the one that emerged in Northern Europe in the 1970s with the purpose of fostering “democracy at work” (Robertson and Simonsen, 2013) – it was about the introduction of information technologies in the workplace and about how to support workers with that change. Thus, recently, several researchers have discussed and inquired about how to shift PD practice's focus towards contributing in and for open democratic public spaces, and how to strengthen this as a political design practice. They have done several experiments about how to re-contextualize PD practice, from which they tried to understand both its new configuration and challenges. Within this framework, the PD approach of “infrastructuring agonistic public spaces” stood out. In order to understand this concept, how it contributes to design for more democratic and sustainable contexts of life, and how it could dialogue with strategic design, specifically with metadesign, two concepts will be

presented: agonistic public spaces; and infrastructuring as conceptualized within PD.

Considering the purpose of promoting open democratic public spaces, agonistic democracy has always more frequently been assumed as the referential model of democracy for informing and adapting PD practice (see, for instance, DiSalvo (2010) and Hillgren *et al.* (2011), among the works of researchers from the “MEDEA Research Lab for Collaborative Media, Design, and Public” of Malmö University). Consequently, in general, the designer’s focus of action has become promoting agonistic public spaces. These spaces are social spaces. This means that they are both physical and abstract: they can be squares, streets, neighbourhoods, as well as intangible gathering places acting as arenas for questions and possibilities; or ultimately, the context in question itself.

Agonistic public spaces are a key element of a social innovation process and for the desired society because there the expression of diverging voices and perspectives is possible, as well as the constructive conflict among them through activities that mediate, mitigate and solve controversies (Hillgren *et al.*, 2011). However, the articulation of controversies among competitors does not happen, as probably expected, as a rational decision-making process, but as a creative innovation process (Mouffe, 2000). Thus, the creative process is the essential and dialogical element of these spaces: their creation is a never-ending process, they are never finished; creative processes that foster expression and discussion of controversies have to foster and feed them constantly, as well as needing to be intrinsic dynamics of the context itself. Subsequently, an approach directed towards more democratic and social innovation scenarios has to be essentially process-based.

Based on all the foregoing, the constitution and sustenance of agonistic public spaces is a social learning process that changes the context by provoking new creative and relational dynamics, and by transferring creative skills. Considering this and that relationships based on new creative and collaborative form of interactions are the essential elements of a social innovation process, the “relational infrastructure” of the context is therefore the constitutive and fundamental element of this kind of space, or even, the pursued space itself. Thus, among the several different interconnected processes that constitute and feed these spaces and on which a designer could focus, promoting the constitution and renovation of the relational infrastructure dominates in relevance. Despite the word “infrastructure”, this “relational infrastructure” is never fixed; on the contrary, it goes through a process of constant redefinition.

From this perspective, the relevance of the concept of infrastructuring emerges. Even if it is possible to trace the origins of the discussion about it back to the reconceptualization of “infrastructure” by Neumann and Star (1996), the concept of infrastructuring itself has actually recently been introduced and discussed in PD. Besides this, it is the object of rich discussion among several researchers who are reflecting on it and characterizing it from different perspectives. Ehn (2008) described it as the design of future design possibilities: specifically, the design of strategies aimed at creating flexible infrastructures for future unplanned design possibilities, that is,

future creative design actions. He explains it through the concepts of “design-for-design” and “design-after-design”: the designer’s action focuses on design-for-design (at the project time) that will allow design possibilities at time of use (design-after-design). Design-for-design is a design activity directed towards allowing and sustaining future design projects, on the other hand, design-after-design refers to the design possibilities that arise from the infrastructure for design developed by the designer. For developing the concept of infrastructure, he draws from Fischer and Scharff (2000) and Fischer and Giaccardi (2005) and their concept of meta-design: they consider use always as a design situation and suggest that design take “place ‘after’, ‘beyond’, or ‘with’ the design work at project time” (Telier, 2011, p. 171).

It is from this perspective that the concept infrastructuring agonistic public spaces has been introduced as the focus and guideline of design activity aimed at contributing to more democratic scenarios: to work towards infrastructuring agonistic public spaces means to stimulate dynamics that feed them, thus, as consequence, to continuously create conditions for them to happen. Researchers from MEDEA Research Lab (Björgvinsson *et al.*, 2010; Hillgren *et al.*, 2011) defined infrastructuring as an open, long-term and continuous process of building relationships between actors with different perspectives in order to promote an open-ended design structure. This structure has no predefined specific goal and, in the understanding of this paper, it is the relational infrastructure. According to them, the process and the open-ended design structure catalyse and feed agonistic public spaces by constantly seizing opportunities and organising actors and opinions. Over time, this will foster social change and innovation. This definition has strengthened the processual essence of infrastructuring. The “-ing form” underlines that the practice is open to the ecosystem, and to change and evolution.

Due to the recent introduction, infrastructuring is still an emerging concept at the centre of several experimental design experiences. However, within the framework of contributing towards a more democratic public space, several researchers have stressed the relevance of prototypes as a way to achieve them. According to Hillgren *et al.* (2011), prototypes are useful for transmitting capacities, for creating team and building skills, as well as for questioning the *status quo* and pointing out controversies and dilemmas:

It can be considered not only as a way to test potential solutions but also as ‘agonistic spaces’, where the different stakeholders do not necessarily reach a consensus but rather create an arena that reveals dilemmas and makes them more tangible (Hillgren et al., 2011, p. 179).

Thus, through prototypes and the dissemination of dissent and creative skills, PD gains the potential to participate in the democratization of design processes related to urban space and everyday life and to work in this context from the perspective of social innovation.

Based on the foregoing, the infrastructuring approach presented here has the potential to amplify the (agonistic) democratic participatory dimension of design processes

and makes it a characteristic of the context, thus allowing the constant emergence of opportunities for new creative participatory (democratic) processes at an ecosystem level. However, it is important to add that this potentiality is still part of an experimental process: in actual fact, design experiences undertaken using this approach (see for instance: Björgvinsson *et al.*, 2010) have not fully explored the misalignment potentialities of prototypes and, more broadly, of this approach, which are the most important in a democratizing process. The several points of concurrency with metadesign in the Latin strategic design tradition open a path for strengthening this dimension, as will be explained in the next section.

Discussion and final considerations

As seen above, strategic design happens at an ecosystem level and aims to develop strategies for organizing and reorganizing the elements of an ecosystem in order to involve it as a whole in the creative process. This is possible because it takes metadesign as a methodological approach, that is, for building future scenarios in which the strategic dialogue happens, and for the propulsion of the design process. The ecosystem perspective and the collaborative essence of the design process fostered by strategic design have the potentiality to lead to more democratic scenarios, but they are not enough to qualify it as a democratizing design practice, even when social innovation is its ultimate goal.

Based on that presented in the previous sections, a promising path seems to emerge by intersecting strategic design from an ecosystem perspective with PD, specifically, with the concept of infrastructuring and the reflections about promoting agonistic public spaces as a major design orientation. Several points of concurrency between infrastructuring and metadesign (in the Latin tradition) emerged that suggest that metadesign within strategic design has to be qualified as infrastructuring agonistic public spaces in the inquiry on the configuration of a design practice able to participate in the constitution and redefinition of urban democratic contexts. Those points of concurrency will be presented here, as well as how infrastructuring and metadesign can enrich each other, through some reflections about these two concepts.

First of all, infrastructuring is understood here as one of the possible forms that metadesign can take on in strategic design practice within the urban context. This is grounded on the understanding that infrastructuring, as a continuous design process aimed at the creation of flexible, open infrastructures for participatory design processes at the ecosystem level, acts as a constant impetus for design within the city. It is never-ending, constantly being put into action, and it constantly provokes and allows other design processes. Moreover, the latter are not necessarily future design processes because they happen at the same time as infrastructuring. Here it is possible to see that the displacement principle of metadesign of the Latin tradition brings a better understanding of how infrastructuring works and why it is important for strategic design. The designer's process of infrastructuring and the context process of infrastructuring –when started, infrastructuring agonistic public spaces becomes an autopoietic feature of

the context– overlap and happen on a specific level. On a different level and at the same time, specific design processes (that is where part of the context creative dialogue happens) occur and they are the (on-going) result of infrastructuring as well as resources for sustaining it.

Having understood this, it is important to stress that at the present moment strategic design in the urban space is not unavoidably oriented towards more democratic scenarios. It has no methodological principles that inform its practice towards this direction: a strategic dialogue that orientates different actors towards a shared purpose is not necessarily about productive conflicts or contests that will challenge existing systemic hegemonies. Agonistic pluralism within the city is the reference model of democracy for challenging them. Even when contradictions and conflicts arise during the scenario-building process, they are not the purpose of the process and, instead of valuing and sustaining the differences, the designer leads them towards a common and shared vision. On the contrary, the infrastructuring approach has at its core agonistic democracy as the democracy model of reference and the constitution of agonistic public spaces as its purpose. Based on them, it shapes its practice within the urban context. How does this actually happen? Largely, it is possible to say that the process of infrastructuring agonistic public space happens on one level aimed at setting conditions for the existence of agonistic public spaces, while the agonistic struggle on the other. These levels constantly communicate, and interact and exchange: agonistic struggle constantly feeds (infrastructuring) agonistic spaces, and vice versa. More specifically, it is possible to point out that the influence of this model of democracy on the PD practice manifests itself in: (i) the design process; (ii) the result of the design process; (iii) and the tools used.

The design process does not seek a shared vision, but to provoke the expression of conflicts and controversies. It is not focused on the organization of relationships, but on developing processes that could allow (and provoke) them and stimulate the expression of differences through stimulated creative skills. The object of the design process is not an artefact, or a platform, but rather the relationships among local actors and their skills (that is, the social fabric). The latter will act as platforms for other design processes and agonistic public spaces within the former (mentioned) design process itself. This means that the social tissue is the object of the design process, as well as its on-going result and platform. At the same time, relationships and skills are the points of concurrency between the two levels that constantly act to propel the design process. As such, creative innovation processes, as dialogical elements of these spaces, propagate at the ecosystem level and beyond the designer's range of action.

As part of this framework, the result of specific design processes loses importance compared to the dynamics that happen through them. In this paper, even more than in the research works of MEDEA's researchers, the relevance of the processual dimension of infrastructuring as well as of the process as process is affirmed: it is within the process and through the process that the desired change happens. Therefore, the designer has as major role in constantly provoking infrastructuring and focusing on the

process of constituting agonistic public spaces. As stated above, the participatory creative process is amplified to the whole context. All these processes do have not pre-defined goals or fixed timelines; it is impossible to foresee them and their development. These are some of the main differences with current strategic design practice within the city that show why intersecting strategic design and infrastructuring is meaningful.

Lastly, prototyping is one of the preferred forms through which designers act in an infrastructuring way. They are an agonistic space in themselves. Moreover, they are “make tools” and they allow transferring and stimulating design skills and actors participation easily through making and interacting (Sanders, 1999). They link the two described levels. They are not used to achieve a shared vision but to foster the expression of differences and conflicts, and affirm them. In their main purpose, they differ from design scenarios.

The propulsion of design, the ecosystem as an unpredictable process, the unfolding on two, constantly dialoguing levels, and the focus on the process are the connecting points between strategic design and infrastructuring. Agonistic pluralism as a model of democracy, the focus on strengthening the expression of divergences, relationships and skills as a design object to be provoked through creative activity, relationships and skills as a point of connection between metadesign and specific design process as propulsion of the design process, the amplification of the participatory dimension of the process to the whole ecosystem, and the use of prototypes as arenas of conflicts are the main contribution of the infrastructuring approach to metadesign (within strategic design) in its present form. Based on all this, once more, it is possible to confirm that metadesign has to be qualified as infrastructuring when taking action to achieve a more democratic public space. This will characterize the strategic design action as political design when practising place-making, thus amplifying its democratic and transformation potential.

However, much still has to be done within infrastructuring too: there is the need to amplify the misalignment dimension of the process that could contribute towards agonistic democracy more than alignment dimension. A more intense exchange with strategic design could be useful for this: the development of strategies for constant misalignment. At the same time, the pre-dissent and post-dissent expression needs to be better developed within infrastructuring and scenario building, as currently characterized, could be useful in this perspective: it could both reinforce counter-hegemonic forces in the expression of their position, as well as feed the local context dissent dimension through the visualization of different desired and undesired scenarios.

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