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## CREATIVE CULTURAL DISTRICT; Co-Creativity for the ComOn Design industries

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### Abstract

The future of the global market and of the society we live in is increasingly influenced by creativity and the ability to generate ideas, knowledge, innovation.

The term "Creative Class" includes the following categories: entrepreneurs, public and private executives, managers, researchers, and professionals.

ComON Design was launched by initiative of the Como section of the Confederation of Italian Industries to allow young European creative talents to get to know the territorial industry and has laid the basis for a systemic cooperation between local enterprises on the one hand and training institutions on the other.

The project therefore transfers knowledge within the design sector and creates networks capable of promoting the strengths of the local area.

To this purpose, the best performing students of Milan Polytechnic's course in Industrial Design, divided into pairs, were assigned to several companies of the Como District (DESALTO, LEMA, LIMONTA, LIVING DIVANI, POLIFORM, RIVA 1920); the goal was to implement a joint design project that would involve market experts and harmonise production constraints and fresh creative energy. All the prototypes resulting from the projects were then displayed at the Triennale Design Museum of Milan.

The paper presents all the main aspects of this experience, creating a teaching model that integrates with the reference local manufacturing industry; a training model that has made to transfer the expertise and practical excellence of the local districts / clusters of creative companies.  
 KEYWORDS: Co-Creativity, Creative industries, Cultural district, Design Innovation.

### Introduction, Creativity and Territory

The Como and Brianza district is characterised by strong design and textile industries, whose production stands out for its high level of creativity.

This "colourful" culture "contaminates" the people living in the area that extends north of Milan – hard-working, resolute, proactive people.

The resulting industrial landscape is a close-knit network of dynamic companies capable of experiencing a specta-

cular development and where competition can be extremely challenging, but also ensures the district's constant evolution and competitiveness.

It was just from this creative-industrial "fabric" that ComON was born in 2008, with the aim of allowing young creative talents to get to know the design and textile professional sectors. We decided to open up, to show young people our world and to offer them a range of opportunities to express their creativity.

The result was really impressive, and we had a chance not only to teach, but also to learn a lot. This project documents this wonderful experience, mainly as regards the ComON 2011 Design section. It is meant to convey an optimistic message in a period of crisis like the one we are going through at the moment. Change is needed, we cannot resist: this is a challenge we have to, and want to, take up.

This project documents this wonderful experience, mainly as regards the ComON 2011 Design section. It is meant to convey an optimistic message in a period of crisis like the one we are going through at the moment.

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### Creativity Research/Actions:

**DESIGN\_** To this purpose, the best performing students of Milan Polytechnic's course in Industrial Design, divided into pairs, were assigned to several companies of the ComON circuit (DESALTO, LEMA, LIMONTA, LIVING DIVANI, POLIFORM, RIVA 1920); the goal was to implement a joint design project that would involve market experts and harmonise production constraints and fresh creative energy.

**FASHION\_** In parallel, similar initiatives were launched in the fashion sector. The students of the Fashion Design Laboratory of Milan Polytechnic's School of Design created 150 "travelling garments" in line with ComON's leading theme - Nomad Culture - using the fabrics made available by the textile companies of the Como district. The clothes were presented at the two exhibitions in Como and Milan.

**WORKSHOP\_** The various pairs, supported by the companies, developed the concepts of several prototypes in line with the leading theme of ComON 2011 - Nomad Culture. Every company selected and implemented one of the projects, under the supervision of an outstanding tutor, a designer and a Professor at Milan Polytechnic.

**EXHIBITION\_** The joint activities involved not only the individual projects, but the entire communication strategy as well as the promotion and dissemination of the results achieved. All the prototypes resulting from the projects were then displayed at the ComON Design.

Exhibition, which was held on the occasion of the launch



of the fourth edition of ComON. The exhibition was then moved to the Triennale of Milan, allowing for a cultural / geographical cross-contamination and further promoting the project and its important achievements.

### **Creativity Sharing**

The future of the global market and of the society we live in is increasingly influenced by creativity and the ability to generate ideas, knowledge, innovation.

The currently on-going transformation revolves around the crucial role of human intelligence, knowledge, creativity. It is a change that has been going on for years now, and will continue for many years to come. It is transforming not only our economies and our society, but also our life, our tastes and our preferences, as well as the geography of global and local competition, the structure of our cities, our land, and the processes that take place, develop, produce and are shared there.

Against this background, it is vital for the “local communities” not only to invest in and focus on their weakest and most threatened sectors: equally important - for all the stakeholders and the surrounding district as a whole – is not to act alone, but to join together in networks based on common and coordinated approaches and strategies, and to establish and strengthen relations and synergies with nearby districts and communities.

This project analyses the many different aspects of development and competitiveness in the Como area and the latter's relations with the world of education and research. The goal is to highlight the need for an innovative, multidisciplinary approach capable of providing a better understanding of our time, a useful investigation tool, and interesting food for thought to entrepreneurs, researchers, local authorities, politicians, and citizens alike.

This is obviously no perfect tool, and certainly leaves room for improvement. For this reason, it should not be considered as a goal met, but, rather, as a starting point. The ComON project team will keep studying, examining, sharing and cooperating with all the new players, organisations, universities, and companies that will be willing to join it.

### **Creativity Network**

The term “Creative Class” includes the following categories: entrepreneurs, public and private executives, managers, researchers, and professionals; through this term, a series of contradictions and difficulties is analysed, stemming from an economic system in which the knowledge and skills required “to be successful” are increasingly wider and higher and, consequently, within the reach of very few people.

The final objective is to achieve a system that recognises and enhances the social and economic value of knowledge and creativity, without, however, ignoring any potential negative sides implied by this type of growth. Far-sighted policies are thus required, aimed at a balanced develop-

ment drawing inspiration from diversity and using the latter as a creative lever for innovative applied research, the final goal being to promote the local area and its players, their stories and experiences.

ComON Design 2011 is set against this background: the ability to observe different cultures (“Nomad Culture”). The capability to share them as they constantly evolve becomes a vital element, a lever capable of developing, promoting and enhancing the local economic and cultural context in which experience develops, through a tangible, innovative, applicable research/action process.

The result is a totally new approach, whose innovative features also lie in the interaction between and among different cultures, in an attempt to establish a shared communication channel, with the final goal of being prepared to operate on a complex, dynamic and integrated market.

In this respect, Design implements the model of integration and - being a product innovation tool – it is expressed in the transfer of technology to products and from products to society, thus promoting interaction and creative sharing.

### **Creativity System**

The vital role played by technology in terms of growth and development has been recognised for a long time now. Technology offers people and companies the tools required to express and develop their ideas at best, to create new products, new services, new opportunities. Nowadays, no aspect of creativity can be “competitive” unless it is sustained by the best available technologies. It is therefore crucial to foster the technological and business sectors and the local innovative potential. Businesses, therefore, play a fundamental role in the development of a certain area, significantly contributing to its development through the promotion of existing excellences, the exploration of the most innovative solutions, and the enhancement of the experience sharing and the contamination between different cultures, thus opening up to new opportunities at an international level.

The relations between and among the stakeholders operating in a certain geographical area are constantly evolving and may be compared to a “complex living organism”. With this project, the Como district aims to “absorb” the needs, suggestions and proposals of the local community, so as to contribute – through new ideas - to the development of innovative projects and to offer an outstanding example of experimentation. This project consists in a research/action process that – while relying on the typically Italian “do it yourself” approach (a strength that, however, often turns into a constraint for the companies' growth and competitiveness) – favours the cooperation with the university and research sectors. The constant search for innovation and cultural contamination aims to open up new perspectives and promote the development of new opportunities and new creativity.



This is an ambitious project that keeps evolving year after year. It represents an effective method combining cultural, social and business excellence in a scientific, systematic, efficient way, capable of creating a new fruitful cooperation with the local institutions and business world. This bears witness to the will and ability to find a new approach and to promote networking, which is an innovative tool capable of attracting professionals and creative ideas from the outside, thus opening up new perspectives and synergies at an international level.

It would be too easy to develop and “patent” a winning recipe capable of ensuring that the companies resorting to it and adapting it will be successful. This is why this project mainly aims to highlight the need to prove the dynamism of the Como industrial sector, which is still capable of operating effectively and work on the development of local strengths by sharing creative ideas and integrating new processes and methods taken from the design world, while increasingly strengthening the relationship between product and services.

This project therefore embodies the Polytechnic’s concept of “Design”, which means: experimentation, research, the use of new materials and new technologies, a focus on more experimental, polytechnic design, including all those sectors in which design does not only imply creativity and inspiration, but also research, experimentation, and the harmonisation of technologies, craftsmanship and business.

### **Creativity Culture**

High-quality training in the design field, drawing inspiration from international ideas and proposals and a design stage reinterpreting the theme of Nomad Culture to create contemporary design objects: this approach gave both students and young designers an opportunity to specialise and to find out about specific local cultural aspects which they would never have discovered by working alone. The result was a new design community characterised by high added value that can be implemented and multiplied.

A teaching and research method, a path capable of integrating the knowledge of the academic world (the formal method), the know-how of workshops (the learning-by-doing method) and the technical knowledge typical of the manufacturing industry – a knowledge that can only be transferred by directly involving the companies into the training process: all this has allowed these young designers to grow, not only by developing new ideas, but also by taking part in all production stages within the companies, from conception to design, all the way to final prototyping.

ComON Design thus also means creating a teaching model that integrates with the reference local manufacturing industry; a training model that has made it possible, on the one hand, to fill the existing gap between the needs of the manufacturing system (which requires technical skills) and those of the academic world (increasingly oriented towards advanced design) and, on the other, to transfer

the expertise and practical excellence of the local districts / clusters of creative companies.

The ComON Design project therefore transfers knowledge within the design sector and creates networks capable of promoting the strengths of the local area. Against the current complex global scenario, introducing innovation into products and services is an absolute must in order to sustain, in the long term, the new challenges posed by global competition by seizing the opportunities offered by emerging markets.



Fig. 1. Creative industries: Riva 1920, Desalto, Limonta, Lema, Living Divani, Poliform.

### **Creative Communication**

Another essential aspect was the exploitation of all the new communication channels that have appeared following the evolution of the media and of communication languages in general. A multi-channel communication system was thus established which, by gathering a wide ran-



ge of documentation regarding the project's development, allowed to draw up an interesting reportage that does not simply describe the project, but can also be used to replicate its most significant and successful aspects.

The material gathered provides detailed information on various products and services, it shares stories and individual/collective experiences, and features a wide range of documentation on the entire project, its subsequent steps and the players involved – everything in a new fast and easy-to-share communication format, following the various project stages, meetings, and presentations step by step and describing them by directly involving the main actors: the designers, companies, the project team, and the institutional representatives involved.

Its production was entrusted to professional studio and to Milan Polytechnic's Movie Design Laboratory, which have also produced a multimedia product, putting across the complexity of a project like ComoOn on different types of media.

These promotion and dissemination channels have dramatically increased the visibility of the initiatives carried out and their results, benefitting both the participating designers and, particularly, the entire local district and the companies taking part in the project, which have thus strengthened their image and synergy with the local area, opening up to new international contaminations.

**Conclusion: develop industrial district, develop collaborative network.**

The challenge for all industries is to think creatively and re-invent themselves constantly. Today's enterprises need more innovative forms of management, marketing, problem-solving, and greater use of design inputs. One way to advance creativity and innovation is by promoting collaboration and convergence among different industries. These convergence centres enable the co-location of various organizations and individuals working in different but related sectors, breaking down silos thereby fostering 'collisions' that inspire new processes, ideas, products and companies. Such environments foster collaboration among different sectors and encourage firms to think creatively. Nascent creative talent and enterprise plays an important role in job creation, wealth generation and other social and economic spin-offs. By addressing the challenge facing the creative sector, a territorial district can reap the full benefit of its creative entrepreneurs and enterprises.

The project shows at last that to fill the distance between industries and technology through design means to fill the gap between industries and design itself through an involving learning experience where concrete action and activities intersect and produce real action, the project aims to improve the actual model of generating innovation and promoting education in design, developing, managing and supporting new knowledge-sharing processes. This is a concrete example how generating a collabora-

tive self-fed system keeping the research system and the industry closer and ready to face together any future challenge of the international context.

The design sector is an obvious strength of the regional economy with the potential both to contribute to the region's productivity and to become as internationally recognized needs:

- Strategic promotion of local design, locally and internationally.
- Promotion of the value of design to key industries.
- Promotion of design-related professions in schools.
- Inclusion of design in public sector innovation and commercialization strategies, where the current focus rests heavily on R&D and technology.
- Provision of incentives for incorporating design services.
- Strategic placement of designer-consultants in business incubators, convergence centres, and science and business parks.

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