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Article

Designing Situated Vocabularies to Counter Social Polarizations: A Case Study of Nolo Neighbourhood, Milan

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Abstract
Many neighbourhoods are currently serving as laboratories where new methods are being explored for collaboratively redesigning cities and tackling the social, environmental, and cultural issues affecting them. These redesign processes are often supported by local communities who increasingly develop bottom-up initiatives to innovate and preserve the neighbourhood's "common goods." This is certainly the case of Nolo, an area in the city of Milan (Italy) that has recently undergone an urban regeneration process thanks to the presence of a proactive community of actors living and working in the neighbourhood. Despite effective social innovation practices enacted by part of the local community, several "voices" in Nolo—mainly belonging to marginalized communities—are still excluded from the current process of urban regeneration. This lack of attention is rather problematic for the whole community, as it is leading to increasing in rather than mitigating social polarization. To address this issue, we approached Nolo and its community through a participatory design experimentation, generating a series of collaborative platforms to enable those marginalized voices—humans as well as non-humans—to be heard, to enter into agonistic conversations with one another, and to question what they (should) all care about. What this (still ongoing) experimentation is currently showing is that to co-design collaborative platforms to counter polarization needs to be carefully balanced, negotiating between all the actors involved and acknowledging their thick entanglements to finally unravel how they radically inter-depend on one another. This kind of "ontologizing" practice is currently proving to be pivotal to counter "antagonisms" (and, therefore, mitigate social polarizations), and re-framing them in "agonistic" terms. This article reports how we operated this "ontologizing" practice in a particularly debated area of the neighbourhood by embracing the perspective of marginalized actors, encouraging them to collaborative and transformative actions for their own situated context.

Keywords
agonism; marginalized communities; participatory design; radical interdependence; situated knowledges; social polarization; urban regeneration

Issue
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1. Introduction

Many neighbourhoods across the globe are currently serving as laboratories where new methods are being explored for collaboratively re-designing cities and tackling the social, environmental, and cultural issues affecting them (Fassi & Vergani, 2022) from a community-centred perspective (Burayidi et al., 2020). Those "creative communities" (Meroni, 2007) supporting this exploration are increasingly developing initiatives to innovate and preserve the "common goods" (Marttila et al., 2014; Ostrom, 1990; Wall, 2005)—intended as resources or assets, such as streets, sidewalks, and parks, which are shared among community members—while producing

processes of inclusive and democratic, environmental, economic, and social regeneration (Fassi & Vergani, 2020; Manzini, 2019). In such neighbourhoods, this process is fueled by proactive people—those belonging to the "creative class" (Florida, 2002) or "professionals of the everyday" (Meroni, 2007) who tackle communities' issues—expressing their "voices" and proposing new initiatives for the sake of the community to which they belong. This process of "active involvement" is often triggered by the community's proactive fringe, which has easier access to sociocultural tools and resources. If this leads to the development of social innovation processes, it can also be problematic as it fails to include voices in the neighbourhood that are somehow silent or silenced (Vergani et al., 2022)—for instance, those in "under the radar" (Emilson et al., 2014) groups with a "low degree of social resilience" (Thorpe & Manzini, 2018) belonging to fragile communities (newcomers, the elderly, children, people with physical or mental disabilities), but also those of non-human agents, such as plants and animals, which tend to be completely excluded or marginalized from social innovation processes (Manzini & Tassinari, 2022).

In this framework, participatory design (PD) can play a critical role in promoting social cohesion, empowering citizens to tackle the challenges of living in urban contexts and envisioning alternatives (Smith et al., 2016). It can help to create inclusive and accessible spaces that facilitate community engagement, encouraging people to take an active role in shaping the spaces around them (Huybrechts et al., 2017). PD is often the primary approach driving this process, as it plays a fundamental role in enlarging the democratic arena (Huybrechts et al., 2017), embracing the participants' different points of view (Björgvinsson et al., 2010) while managing the divergences and complexities of those communities identified in the scale of the city by the dimension of "proximity" (Manzini, 2021). As a matter of fact, communities are places where different "voices" converge, creating a "pluralistic" (Mouffe, 2009) context in which "agonism'' (DiSalvo, 2010; DiSalvo & Lukens, 2011; Hillgren et al., 2016; Mouffe, 2000) comes into play. In this process of sharing and discussing the different points of view, PD can help to identify common "matters of care" (de la Bellacasa, 2017; Huybrechts et al., 2022b; Manzini & Tassinari, 2022), i.e., something we fundamentally all "care" about, as we recognize our own lives depend on it. de la Bellacasa's (2017) definition of care proves pivotal to the question of what may be in-between different kinds of publics—their common matters of care—without forcing them into a consensus. Care "includes everything that we do to maintain, continue and repair 'our world' so that we can live in it as well as possible" (de la Bellacasa, 2017, p. 3). However, what it explicitly means to design with "care" may prove problematic (Huybrechts et al., 2022b) as engaging situated communities in PD processes—maintaining an inclusive and ecosystemic perspective—may therefore raise some issues (von Busch & Palmås, 2023). While co-designing and co-producing more sustainable and just futures (Smith et al., 2016), it is complex to develop effective changes on a city scale (von Busch & Palmås, 2023) while also comprising the "radical interdependence" (Escobar, 2018) between all actors.

To trigger a process of transformation on a neighbourhood scale, several levels of engagement are required, ranging from bottom-up drivers promoted by local groups to top-down initiatives supported by institutional bodies (Fassi & Manzini, 2021; Fassi & Vergani, 2022). According to Tomitsch et al. (2021), within this range, a medium level of involvement can be described as "middle-out engagement," an approach that brings together representatives from bottom-up and top-down initiatives working to reach specific common goals. In this sense, local administrations often become more aware of the potential role of neighbourhood communities, developing open calls to invite citizens to develop, co-design, and co-produce new initiatives. These calls—which are often shared through digital tools—promote temporary design approaches in which "creative" (Meroni, 2007) or "project-based" (Fassi & Manzini, 2021) communities are directly involved in renewing public areas. Many of those experimentations are proving that it may be useful to form "coalitions" (Tomitsch et al., 2021) of local citizens, businesses, associations, and informal groups, as well as policymakers, institutions, and municipal bodies, to bring different perspectives into the picture.

In this framework, designers can play a fundamental role (Manzini & Rizzo, 2011), as their PD work might contribute to the simplification and integration of policies or other administrative regulations, drawing attention to specific scenarios which might spark fresh perspectives on given socio-environmental challenges (Fassi & Sedini, 2017). To do so, one needs to go beyond the solely human realm and expand the political agency we traditionally envision for PD (Binder et al., 2015; DiSalvo, 2010, p. 201) into a (cosmo)political one (Huybrechts et al., 2022b; Stengers, 1997). In design terms, this may translate into re-framing the PD approaches of "infrastructuring" (Björgvinsson et al., 2010; Ehn et al., 2014), "commoning" (Marttila et al., 2014; Seravalli, 2018; Teli et al., 2020), and "institutioning" (Foth & Turner, 2019; Huybrechts et al., 2017; Teli et al., 2020) from an "ontological perspective" (Huybrechts et al., 2022b; Willis, 2006). However, "ontologizing" PD processes (Huybrechts et al., 2022a) may prove difficult to implement. To counter PD's risk of working in an exclusionary and polarizing way, we propose here to address "agonism" from within the perspective of care, working to enable diverse publics to enter an agonistic debate, acknowledging how we inter-depend on one another. More specifically, recognizing how all human actors in a situated context inter-depend on non-human agents might help to embrace the need to preserve non-human communities (for instance, plants), and identify this as a

common matter of care binding initially polarized human publics together and enable them to act collaboratively.

The PD work addressed here describes a process of disarticulation and re-articulation of contesting points of view in Nolo (Milan, Italy), where not only human but also non-human voices have been considered. By articulating an ongoing case study, the authors are investigating PD's potential to enable more inclusive and eco-systemic processes of commoning, infrastructuring, and institutioning. This explicitly translates into developing "ontological mappings" and "collaborative platform building" (Huybrechts et al., 2022a), where the "platforms" are intended to be prompts "to bring together a diversity of actors to exchange knowledge and generate in dynamic ways a collective form of intelligence" (Huybrechts et al., 2022a) and not strictly as technological and digital urban platforms (Barns, 2020; Graham, 2020). In this sense, the tools here articulated are twofold: a *commoning tool*, in the form of ontological mapping, and an *infrastructuring tool*, a collaborative platform called Situated Vocabulary (SV) in which to converge, translate, and mediate the different situated knowledges (Haraway, 1988) coming from (ontologically) diverse communities of the same neighbourhood, thus countering antagonism (and therefore social polarizations) by prompting agonism. In addition, the article addresses a second collaborative platform we are currently using in this ontologizing process, an *institutioning and commoning tool* provided by the Municipality of Milan (called Collaborative Pact) to unpack the criticalities of Transiti Square, a small part of the Nolo neighbourhood.

By addressing the collaborative platforms of the SV and Collaborative Pact, and the ontological mapping developed thanks to the SV, this article aims to show how ontologizing the PD process might prove effective in:

- Countering polarizations of human communities in particularly critical situated contexts by embracing non-humans in the conversation;
- Prompting proactiveness in situated communities;
- Envisioning scenarios of future transformative actions to be later developed by situated communities.

2. A Literature Background on Participatory Design

As already outlined in the introduction, in the attempt to counter "antagonisms" (Mouffe, 2013) where polarizing forces are opposed to one another, PD processes sometimes tend to ultimately drive contesting opinions towards a convergence without a serious process of negotiation between the different parties, and this way often tends to oversimplify the complexity and diversity of contesting publics, cutting out what is at the fringes of the participatory process (Björgvinsson et al., 2010; Brodersen & Pedersen, 2019). When this happens, we mistake "antagonism" for "agonism" (Mouffe, 2013), whose "pluralisms" (Mouffe, 2009) keep democracy striving.

When we design without carefully balancing processes of negotiation, there is a risk of eventually promoting a culture of "consensus" rather than of "dissensus" (Mouffe, 2013; Rancière, 2015). When we do so, we miss the chance to counter social polarizations, as we underestimate the potential of dissensus to not only strengthen democracy but also to counter "antagonism" (Mouffe, 2013), and the polarizations that contribute to shaping it. This is finally where the concept of "agonism" (DiSalvo, 2010; DiSalvo & Lukens, 2011; Hillgren et al., 2016; Koskinen, 2016; Mouffe, 2000) comes into play. Mouffe's understanding of "agonism" as a "double moment of disarticulation/re-articulation" (Mouffe, 2013) points to the fact that agonistic counter-hegemonic practices might serve to question and challenge polarizing points of view—characterizing "antagonism" (Mouffe, 2013)—contesting the sedimentations of the meanings and values they underpin and bringing them into an open and dynamic confrontation by re-articulating new configurations.

From these new configurations, a reassessment of one's own points of view is always possible. This exercise of self-critique can eventually help to unmask the sedimentation of prejudices and misconceptions and therefore challenge the fundamental lack of empathy underpinning social polarizations leading to a form of "agonistic pluralism" (Mouffe, 1999), where diverse publics can listen to one another and eventually re-assess their contesting points of view, negotiating between them. If one follows Mouffe's line of reasoning, then PD interventions serving as agonistic counter-hegemonic practices have the potential to mitigate social polarization. Furthermore, if one investigates the misconceptions and sedimentations of meanings at the basis of many antagonistic points of view, one can see that there is often a lack of understanding of the complexity of the entanglements connecting diverse publics to one another. If one adds to this level of complexity the entanglements between human and non-human agents (Latour, 2018), then the entanglements between social and environmental issues also become evident. When entering an agonistic debate, the *double moment* of *disarticulation/re-articulation* of all parties involved might lead to reassessing some of these misconceptions and learning to acknowledge the relation of "radical interdependence," binding them with one another and with the other agents (not necessarily human ones). PD practices can prove pivotal there, in supporting those diverse publics to become more aware of this complexity, by mapping it and making it tangible. As argued by Brodersen and Pedersen (2019, p. 966), "in participatory design such negotiations are often carefully staged and navigated by a designer and draw attention towards the designer's ability to navigate the design process by staging, facilitating, and learning from/synthesising the results of negotiations." In other words, PD can enable and facilitate those processes of negotiation which are essential to an "agonistic" and pluralistic society (Binder

et al., 2015; Clark, 2008; Storni et al., 2015) and have the potential to counter "antagonism" (and, therefore, also social polarizations).

In this process of negotiation, PD may help identify some common "matters of care" (de la Bellacasa, 2017)—i.e., something we fundamentally all care about (de la Bellacasa, 2017)—around which to collectively assemble (Latour, 2018). However, to effectively address and preserve these "matters of care," it is essential to acquire the knowledge and skills needed to learn how to "care" (Huybrechts et al., 2022b). Yet, to learn to "care" means first to learn to recognize what needs *care*, as we interdepend from it: in other words, the entanglements which have been disrupted by anthropocentric choices, and yet are essential to our own life. What is really "in-between" (Arendt, 1958/2013; Tassinari & Staszowski, 2020) us is not just the political, but the "cosmo-political" (Stengers, 1997), the "radical interdependence" (Escobar, 2018) binding us all humans with one another, but also with non-human agents. To look for those interdependencies also means to re-assess the intimate, often mystified connection between the environmental and the social. To do so, PD needs to re-frame its politics in the light of the challenges of the Anthropocene and reconsider its political agency in terms of cosmo-politics, thus recognizing the "thick" (Tsing et al., 2020) entanglement between human and non-human agents.

When looking at "ontologizing" practices, the creation of platforms for mapping these thick entanglements in situated contexts might serve as a very real way to *ontologize infrastructuring* (the SV platform), *commoning* (the ontological mapping), and *institutioning* (the Collaborative Pact platform).

3. Methodology

Our case study is an ongoing experiment the research team POLIMI DESIS Lab developed in the urban living lab Off Campus Nolo. The living lab is hosted in the local municipal market of Nolo and is part of a wider initiative from the Politecnico di Milano, called "Polisocial," to make the university's presence in the city more tangible, providing the possibility for researchers and scholars to be more responsible, attentive to social challenges, and closer to the territory and its community. The SV is a participatory action research (Crouch & Pearce, 2012; Muratovski, 2015) that benefits from multiple co-designed sessions to collect data and produce a situated kind of knowledge to be further used in developing transformative actions for and by the local community. The research project was launched with the opening of Off Campus Nolo and aimed at understanding the complexity of the neighbourhood by gathering qualitative data through mapping "voices" and information from the different communities.

The founding idea of the project is that the SV starts as a collaborative platform in which to disarticulate and re-articulate contesting points of view, negotiating them to identify common "matters of care" (de la Bellacasa, 2017) thanks to a commoning process of "ontological mapping" (Huybrechts et al., 2022b), where the entanglements between all local stakeholders (human and more than human) start to be flashed out. The co-created SV takes the form of a physical artefact—a booklet, following the structure of a vocabulary to collect all the different meanings of the words—as well as an online podcast developed in collaboration with the neighbourhood participatory radio, managed by the local community, in which the vocabulary is translated in an oral format hosting the recorded voices of people. Both the booklet and the podcast should be considered as an "agonistic space" (Mouffe, 2007) for contesting voices, designed to also include the marginalized ones (such as children, the elderly, newcomers, and people with disabilities). The project is built around nine keywords (Public Space, Degradation, Common Good, Sense of Belonging, Memory, Fun, Commitment, Change, and Nolo) chosen by the neighbourhood during two co-design sessions conducted with part of the proactive community of Nolo (Vergani et al., 2022). Those words served as a basis for collecting those voices which had not yet been involved in the urban regeneration process. As those voices (for instance, of newcomers) are often polarized with the ones that are already part of the urban transformation process, we designed the SV platform to enable the beginning of a process of agonistic negotiation amongst them, bringing them into dialogue to map their common matters of care (and, particularly, how they all actually care for the plants in the public spaces), and demystifying the misconception that newcomers do not care for this common good.

The diverse voices included in the SV have been gathered through interviews, comments on social media, and co-design sessions with the Nolo community, but also linguists, philosophers, anthropologists, writers, artists, activists, botanists, zoologists, geologists, and microbiologists, who could, together with environmental activists and practitioners, bring in other points of view, such as those of non-human agents (Figure 1). The SV served as a basis to develop an ontological mapping, identifying the thick entanglements connecting all agents, in other words, the common "matters of care" (de la Bellacasa, 2017) binding them together, also trying to address and un-mask the polarizing misconceptions. Using tailor-made co-design sessions, each keyword of the SV addressed a specific marginalized community of Nolo. While Public Space was quite open to all the neighbourhood communities, Degradation paid specific attention to the voices of newcomers to the neighbourhood. Common Good focused on children and the points of view of non-human agents, and Sense of Belonging addressed the points of view of the elderly. All the data collected in this "ontological mapping" were later used to prompt collective actions by envisioning future "scenarios" (Carroll, 1995; Jégou & Manzini, 2008), taking this eco-systemic and social complexity into account.

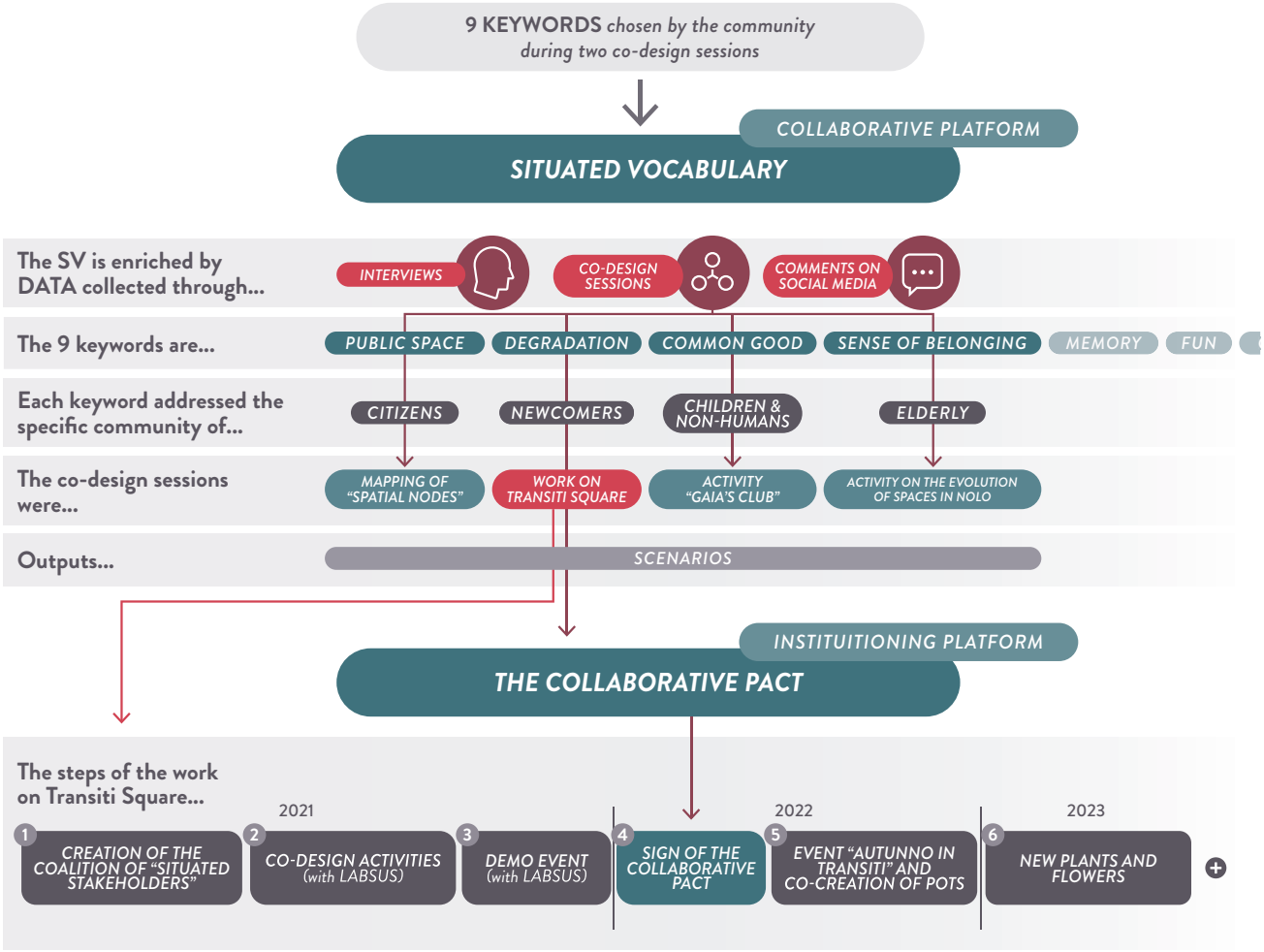

Figure 1. The methodological process for Transiti Square supported by the collaborative platforms of the SV and the Collaborative Pact.

4. The Case Study: The Situated Vocabulary

4.1. Mapping the Complexity and Fostering Agonism With the Situated Vocabulary

In the context of Nolo, we did not have to start from scratch. Many bottom-up initiatives—such as the community-managed Radio Nolo (the neighbourhood web radio from which we developed the SV podcast) or the Neighbourhood Breakfasts—were already in place (Fassi & Manzini, 2021). Also, the online Facebook group Nolo Social District (comprising more than 12,000 members) has in recent years produced a series of online and offline social innovation initiatives (Camocini & Fassi, 2017; Fassi & Manzini, 2021; Fassi & Vergani, 2022). However mainly for linguistic and socio-cultural reasons, many voices are still excluded from the initiatives launched by the local community. This lack of confrontation often translates into polarizations, where cultural minorities of new-coming communities from other contexts are seen as responsible for urban degradation processes. In the past, cultural misconceptions fostered the creation of social frictions, characterized by widespread degradation both from an environmental and social point of view. Those misconceptions, which in this context are particularly hard to get rid of, have been the starting point for our PD work. Because the context of Nolo is rather complex and diverse, it was necessary to be very cautious about how to represent those voices which are, for many different reasons, reluctant to participate (or simply cannot, as in the case of non-human agents; Huybrechts et al., 2022a). Since the opening of Off Campus Nolo, the SV has served as a compass to guide our work in the neighbourhood, defining a PD process which allowed us to know the community better and get in touch with both its visible as well as its hidden issues. Thanks to the work enacted with the first word of the SV, i.e., the one addressing the word 'Public Space, we identified the most critical "spatial nodes" (intended as neighbourhood public spaces to be redesigned; Fassi & Vergani, 2022) and started the ontological mapping of those nodes to identify common "matters of care" (de la Bellacasa, 2017; see Figure 2).

The mapping prompted by the words Public Space led us to identify a specific contested spatial node: Piazzetta Transiti (Transiti Square; Figure 3). This is a small

Figure 2. The spatial nodes identified in Nolo thanks to the co-design activity conducted at Off Campus Nolo with the neighbourhood communities.

park perceived as having been particularly degraded due to several issues, mainly focussing on marginalized communities of newcomers who are considered responsible for the process of local degradation. Over the last decade, there have been many frictions between the different local communities, which have been gradually configuring the spatial, and therefore social and environmental, assets of the space. The result of this process is that Transiti is currently a rather degraded public park surrounded by street-facing buildings and commercial activities and is quite congested during mornings and evenings mostly because of its proximity to the entrance of the subway, used by workers who commute every day. Also, the park polarizes the community between Italians and non-Italians, which misses out how some Italians are also an active part of the square's degradation process, as well as the fact that many non-Italians (such as a local association called "Para Todos," working for many years to help the community of newcomers to better integrate with the social tissue) are proactive stakeholders involved in many regenerative initiatives for the neighbourhood.

In the beginning, citizens used to gather and enjoy the park, making use of its street furniture to relax. In the last few years, the situation has slowly changed. The opening of kiosks for cheap food and drinks attracted new people to the area, transforming the square into a day and night shelter, especially for unemployed people (amongst whom were many jobless newcomers) who started to appear on the benches and sidewalks, making noise and leaving empty bottles and rubbish in the park. These behaviours annoyed many of the inhabitants around the park, who asked for the Municipality's intervention. Eventually, a high metal fence was built, converting the square into a park with strict opening and closing times, thus avoiding people gathering, especially at night. The intervention also led to the removal of the street furniture, making the park impractical not only for the "night community" (considered to be solely responsible for the degrading process) but also for those

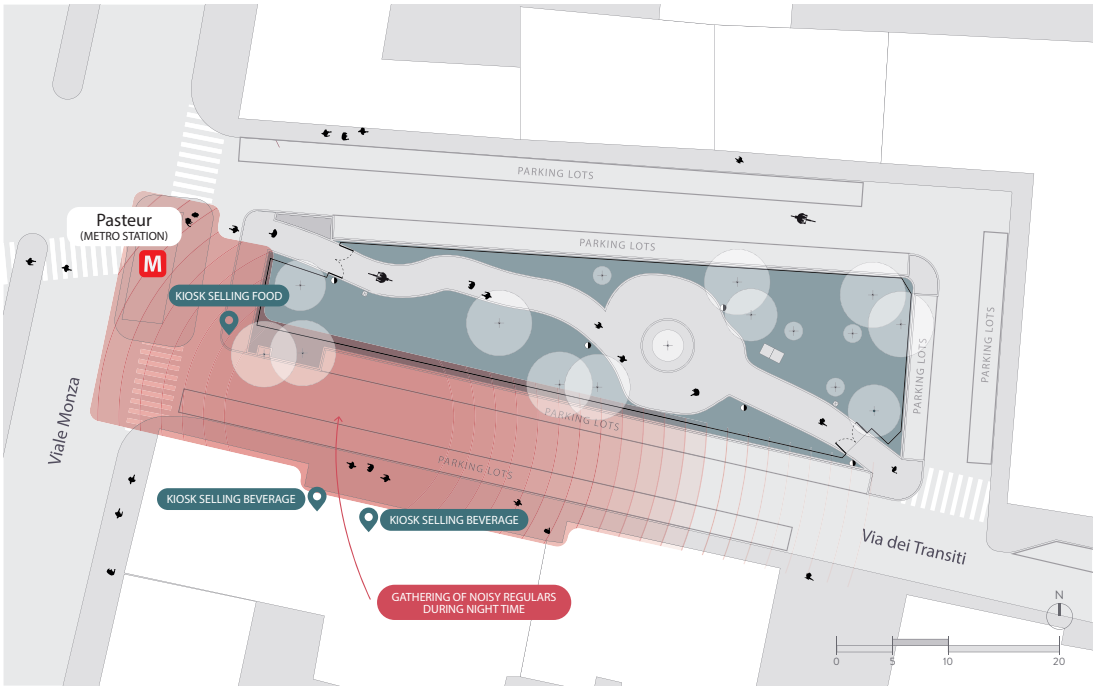

Figure 3. Transiti Square plan.

citizens—especially the elderly—who used to appropriate the space daily. This decision eventually led to the square no longer being an asset for the public, a common good, becoming instead a mere place to pass by. The square's transformation, on the one hand, satisfied part of the population, but on the other, ended up creating general discontent as it only moved the night issue outside the fence, giving the night regulars the opportunity to continue their behavior sitting on sidewalks or between parked cars. The park ended up becoming even more degraded and unsafe, attracting people from outside the neighbourhood—most of the time newcomers looking for spaces of sociality—to buy cheap drinks in the shops around the square and eventually vandalize it.

4.2. Identifying Misconceptions With the Word "Degradation" in Transiti Square

When we started working on Transiti Square we decided to use the word Degradation (the second out of nine keywords) as the main compass to guide our PD work. As previously described, the ontological mapping prompted by the SV addressing this word helped us to collect all the "voices" of the situated stakeholders around Transiti. Even if today the space seems quite desolated and currently represents a contested issue polarizing the local community into locals and newcomers, our field research enacted with the SV helped us to uncover the agonistic and, therefore, democratic potential that such a contested space might host. Transiti is indeed rich in pluralities and diversities and can be considered as a "friche" (Clément, 2016)—a residual area rich in biodiversity caused by the fragmentation of the landscape over time—as it is also a shelter for those agents (both human and non-human) that are often marginalized. Therefore, we had to be aware of this treasure without losing any of its potential.

The interviewees revealed polarizing memories of the park. Some remember it as a space where older people and families would spend time together, others as a place of micro-criminality and degradation. Some others blame the community of newcomers hanging out at the kiosks, others the homeless people frequenting the space. Parts of the community pointed their fingers at those living in the building illegally occupied in front of the square, while others addressed the social and cultural influence of the nearby arterial road with a high presence of newcomers. While there is indeed a significant number of newcomers who misuse the park and render it unsafe for kids to play, there is at the same time the Para Todos association representing a resource for countering the square's degradation, as well as the local shop owners, who are perceived as a serious part of the problem but were revealed as being interested in taking care of the square. Also, not all Italians are interested in this renovation process, as some are actually an active part of the problem. Yet, newcomers are often perceived as being a major part of the problem rather than contributing to looking for a solution and repurposing the square. This is the misconception addressed and disarticulated by the SV's work.

The ontological mapping enacted with the SV was pivotal as it led to envisioning several design scenarios—acknowledging the misuse of the square (and thus its social degradation) and connecting it to its eco-systemic degradation—aiming at improving the social and environmental conditions by bringing together the currently polarized communities (for instance, those who

wanted the fence and the newcomers who are unfairly seen as responsible for the degradation) to re-purpose the square. In more detail, we found out that the eco-systemic degradation made certain types of inappropriate use of the common good more probable and that actors who appeared polarized in the first instance, such as the neighbourhood's residents and newcomers, in fact, cared for the social and environmental situation of the square. As the initial focus on addressing social issues of the park was somehow sensitive—the risk of working only on the contested issue of the fence was rather high—we decided instead to focus first on the park's environmental issues, about which a diverse public clearly cares, so as to then engage them, in the second instance, in more sensitive social issues. These scenarios (Figure 4) were later disseminated to the neighbourhood through social networks (Facebook and Instagram) and displayed at Off Campus Nolo, and prompted us to return to Transiti after the mapping process to develop with the community a Collaborative Pact, an institutioning collaborative platform offered by the Municipality of Milan.

4.3. The Collaborative Pact

Ontologizing PD approaches implies the ability to develop collaborative platforms enabling ontological mapping when a specific context or specific publics require it (Huybrechts et al., 2022a). If SV is a platform enacted by the research team as an ontological infrastructuring tool, the platform Collaborative Pact represents for us an ontological institutioning as well as a commoning tool (Huybrechts et al., 2022a), as it serves to identify new commons by taking the eco-systemic and social entanglements into account and to find new ways to enable collaboration with institutions based on this acknowledgement.

The Collaborative Pacts are tools provided by the Municipality for the implementation of the shared administration of common goods through which one or more active citizens and public bodies define the terms of the collaboration for the care of both tangible as well as immaterial common goods. The pact gives the signatories the permission to act and take care of a specific space, carrying out initiatives and projects that would normally require longer bureaucratic times to be processed. This is thanks to the more direct relations with the municipal administrations, which are also signatories, that directly coordinate the bureaucracy of certain requests. Furthermore, some specific stakeholders (e.g., external supporters) may also provide resources and materials (in our case, plants and wooden containers) to be used for the co-imagined activities. However, Collaborative Pacts are not timeless, as their timeframe usually lasts between six months and three years. In this span of time, the signatories temporarily "adopt" the public space, envisioning and co-producing activities to be put in place with the aim of transforming (or reframing) the "spatial node" as an active common good. Therefore, the collective's commitment is essential and formal, as the co-envisioned actions must be completed in a limited amount of time. Once the pact is over, the common good returns to the Municipality's hands.

Figure 4. Several visual scenarios (made of collages) developed in the framework of the SV from the work on Degradation; from the top left: "Neighbourhood Collective," "Model Nolo," "Green Thread," and "Collaborative Pacts."

In PD practices with such a rich pool of agents, it is difficult to balance the complexity of institutioning processes (Huybrechts et al., 2017). Working with situated communities in public urban spaces on a neighbourhood scale means struggling with intricacies due to local policies limiting the actions of the stakeholders involved. Acting in the framework of Nolo helped us to reinforce our knowledge about those tools given by the Municipality to promote new institutioning and commoning practices (Huybrechts et al., 2017; Teli et al., 2020), paving the way for the creation of a specific group of situated stakeholders enriched by the collaboration of institutions and other political bodies. The involvement of those diverse actors took shape throughout a PD process in which we (co)designed and (co)produced local events, meant to generate a dialogue between key institutional actors, both on a micro scale (the neighbourhood), as well as on a meso scale (the city). The last of these events was the formalization of the new collective working to collaboratively take care of the square, where all the actors involved signed the Collaborative Pact. The new coalition formed by the actual signatories in Nolo, including different types of stakeholders such as inhabitants, associations, informal groups, and the Municipality (see the Acknowledgments section) also includes "representatives" (Latour, 2018) of non-human voices (activists and experts), reinforcing our will to be as open as possible in merging in the PD work social and environmental justice issues.

With the coalition, we continued our ontologizing process unpacking all those polarizing points of view directly in the field and organizing weekly meetings in the square to discuss the different ideas. Being physically present in Transiti helped us to prove that something was changing, and attracted citizens to freely express their own opinions about the space. In the loop of this re-iterative process of negotiation, and by comprising diverse actions in the field, we were able to facilitate the process of disarticulation of some of the polarizing points of view, fostering the development of a real agonistic discussion where all the stakeholders involved were able to democratically express their opinions. Some moments of friction in the process were registered, especially due to some stakeholders feeling that the hidden agenda behind the pact was to dismantle the presence of the metal fence. The process of negotiation proved to be particularly hard, and therefore it was pivotal for us to shift the focus of the discussion from the fence (a social issue) to possible actions to be done collectively to green the space (an environmental issue), intertwining discussions with actions. Here the environmental issues represented a Trojan horse for us to address the social ones avoiding ending up feeding polarizations that only focused on the fence.

The events we organized all aimed at providing the community with the possibility to work together, testing some activities, and experiencing the place in a different way, bringing the square back for a day to its main purpose—being a common good—and not as a mere space of passage (Figure 5). One of those events started with the cleaning of the park and saw citizens actively collaborate in taking care of the space by removing bottles, cans, and other rubbish thrown over the gate by regular night visitors. After the collaborative cleaning of the

Figure 5. Some of the events organized in Transiti Square; from the top left, a co-design session for the Pact, a summer event for children, a collection of ideas for the future of the square, and the cleaning of the park.

square, we organised two parallel activities. The first consisted of the co-construction of a *piñata* (built with the help of the community coming from South America, who were a section of the newcomers identified by the inhabitants as those having brought degradation to Transiti) with children from the neighbourhood. The second activity saw the situated stakeholders involving passers-by and curious citizens in creating a billboard to trace other ideas for the facilities to be designed and implemented in the square.

All these events, which take place throughout the year, are currently mitigating the polarizations not only in the square but also between single individuals of the pact, fostering the development of a shared, yet rich in pluralities, process to care about the place. However, while on the one hand, the community was revitalized thanks to the Pact and initially polarized social groups and individuals are now working together to take collaborative care of the square and its plants, on the other hand, the issue of night regulars is still yet to be tackled. Further processes of negotiations are required in which local associations like Para Todos and shop owners can play a significant role.

5. Conclusions

It is particularly difficult to evaluate currently active projects. And yet, what we have witnessed until now is that the PD work enacted with the two platforms has enabled us to map the complexity of this situated context, unpack and focus on specific issues affecting the community, and partially disarticulate the polarization by re-articulating the discussion towards a common goal. While the first step helped us to scratch the surface, bringing to light the antagonism present within the community and allowing an ontological mapping of both the community around the spatial node and the topic of the degradation in the area, the second was successful in re-packing, maintaining, and protecting the plurality of points of view, addressing them towards a productive flow that merged into the platform of the Pact. We noticed that action is fundamental in the processes of disarticulation and re-articulation from antagonism to agonism. We have clearly seen how remaining stuck in conversations continued to generate polarization while the actions triggered by the Pact helped to mitigate the discussions related to both cultural misconception and the metal fence, leading the stakeholders involved to feel more like a community. Moreover, we understood how drawing on matters of care identified in the non-human part of the neighbourhood community (plants and the greenery in Transiti) helped to develop a process to overcome antagonism and polarization.

The Collaborative Pact allowed a high fluidity of action for the stakeholders involved, who are free to enter and exit from the commitment and aggregate in different forms and purposes for the sake of the common goal. What we have realized so far is that to "ontologize" our PD process—(co)creating platforms designed as agonistic spaces from which to collaboratively map "radical interdependencies" and envision regenerative futures from this awareness—is currently helping us to better engage with the local community and address its complexity, confronting matters of exclusion and countering easy polarizations between members of the community, but also between social and environmental issues. In this sense, the experience has effectively triggered a democratic discourse, addressing criticism and polarizations into a process that, until today, struggled to be formalized as it ran aground on the issues (the metal fence and degradation) without focusing on the actions. However, there are still considerable critical issues that are emerging in the process. The group has not yet been able to fully integrate part of the community of newcomers who generated the degradation in Transiti. If, on the one hand, the community of newcomers is represented within the pool of the stakeholders, on the other, we see that this cultural misconception has shifted from a "locals/non-locals'' polarization to a collective action against those fringes of noisy newcomers and locals (those hanging out at the kiosks in the evenings). Unfortunately, the night regulars still perpetuate their actions outside the park, disturbing both inhabitants and passers-by. More PD work is needed here, to re-address the issue through new participatory actions. However, there are limits to what one can reach by means of PD actions. Here, institutioning practices and political bodies must also come into place in a more substantial way, taking some infrastructural decisions that might more significantly help to mitigate those phenomena, and helping grassroots initiatives that struggle alone to face such a deep-rooted social problem. In this sense, the benefits prompted by the Collaborative Pact might help the same institutions to be more present in the field and take braver actions strongly desired by the community of citizens aggregated in these forms of coalitions, such as the removal of the fence.

What we are currently experiencing is that to counter polarization we needed to stay in the situation, understand and engage with the context, learn from it, taking the time to (co)create agonistic platforms of contesting publics: polyphonic, "situated" (Haraway, 1988) communities where "consensus" is not the aim, but rather the agonistic and open-ended process of recognition of common matters of which to care about, as they interest all the actors involved, beyond previous misconceptions and crystallized opinions that might have led in the past (and might still lead) to polarizations. In these kinds of agonistic processes, new commons have been identified (Custers et al., 2020; Seravalli et al., 2015), and new, more transversal kinds of local collaborations have arisen to better address them (Akama et al., 2020). We are aware that issues of power and perspectives are still in play and this needs to be further problematized, particularly when it comes to the point of representing/translating some of those voices in the PD process

(Huybrechts et al., 2022b; Spivak, 2021). This is helping us somewhat to reassess our role as designers in the PD process and better engage with its fallibility. Besides, it is also helping us to protect the agonistic space we created, keeping the differences rather than forcing different voices into a convergence, a common language where in the end nobody is truly represented. We can only start to unpack, even if in a fallible and inconclusive way, the complexity of those relationships by identifying where we need to *care* for them, re-generating them, restoring them, re-framing them; and yet, we need to recognize that this exercise needs to be envisioned in an open-ended, fallible way (Huybrechts et al., 2022b).

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Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

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