

Imagining Together. Possible Image Sharing Methods for Spatial Transformation Practices [†]

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Abstract: The proposed research moves from the concept of collaborative imagination—deconstructed on the basis of the theorization by M.L. Bianca, trying to intersect the way in which processes of space production have changed their paradigms in the last 25 years. This change of paradigm produces the needing for a broader look on tools and instruments for architects and policy planners. In the paper are presented two case-studies used to underline this mutations that is strongly related both to professional practice and educational praxis.

Keywords: collaborative images and imagination; reactivations of abandoned spaces; process; images

1. Introduction

This paper is the first crystallization of an ongoing research, how imagery and imagery sharing can be defined as potential patrimony, if integrated into the design process of architectural design.

The application of the theoretical apparatus is circumscribed to two case-studies (Friche and Farm Cultural Park) belonging to a coherent basin, that of art-related production sites. The aim is to highlight how the mutation of communication platforms and sharing of a design idea can open to new tools and fields for project actions.

The paper is articulated in two descriptive moments. The first, introducing the first case study, provides ground to the second part defining the theoretical framework. Through the introduction of these contents the first case study is re-readed, making possible a comparison with the second.

The case studies dealt with make it possible to observe that the transformation of places can not be realized only by intervening on buildings, squares and streets; it is vital to make the places themselves more vital, solid, open to the possibilities of different productions, to the diversity and to the mutual contamination of cultures, styles and social opportunities. It is a real “collaborative imagination gymnastics” aimed at promoting the involvement of local communities and administrations, regional regeneration, prevention of degradation and the development of innovative activities that promote economic and social growth, designing and supporting multi-disciplinary projects.

In order to do it effectively, the interventions of the involved stakeholders must co-operate in the framework of economic, social and cultural activation processes and have to be associated to a work on the quality of sites and structures.

Taking this position into account, Friche’s case can be an example of a collaborative imagination process, meaning that this condition is now more strictly necessary for the construction of the project, as interpreted here in the dual meaning of design and construction.

This process could be described as a circular passage that by imagination (triggered by a single individual or a limited group) passes through the image (result of the imagination) and its exposure to the community (the time of the call to interact collectively by further imagining the image) before returning to a renegotiation phase of the initial image.

Expressed in these terms, this circularity would not differ in any way from the decision-making process of any project. Nothing differ until you decide to shift your attention to collaborativity in terms of collaborative formative thinking, thus bringing attention to the process analysis: “un tal fare che, mentre fa, inventa il modo di fare: produzione ch’è, al tempo stesso e indivisibilmente invenzione” [1] (p.18).

Since in each creative process the form itself is conceivable as the success of a “process” of formation, it is necessary to highlight and include the dynamic characteristics of the production process that originates it. That inevitably coincides with widening the field of interest from the immanent measurable effects of the project to all the possible networks of visible and invisible relationships that can coagulate around shared images.

2. La Friche la Belle de Mai in Marseilles

The old tobacco factory in the Belle de Mai district of Marseilles has been used as a cultural center since 1992 (Figure 1). Known as Friche, from the name of the theatrical company that has given birth to the whole process, is an effective example of how a process that is born by sharing an image, it can negotiate its value on a territorial scale by coming to define an imaginary of transformation.

The reuse of the former factory started as an informal attempt to reactivate an abandoned space in degraded conditions. However, the most relevant moment of the process seems to be when La Friche reached the most significant and glamorous phase of transformation, corresponding to the time when the city was radically transformed by EuroMed. The spark that triggered the final stage of the EuroMéditerranée process was the appointment of the city of Marseille to the European Capital of Culture. At that time, the group working in La Friche, in collaboration with the institutions, managed to exploit this new fund of public funds for the restructuring of the complex, also succeeding in diverting some of them (about 23 million euros) out of the center in a working class neighborhood. Architectural work by Patrick Bouchain and Mathieu Poitevin has provided the Friche with new spaces to accommodate a more demanding and wealthy public, the cultural elite of the old continent (Figure 2).

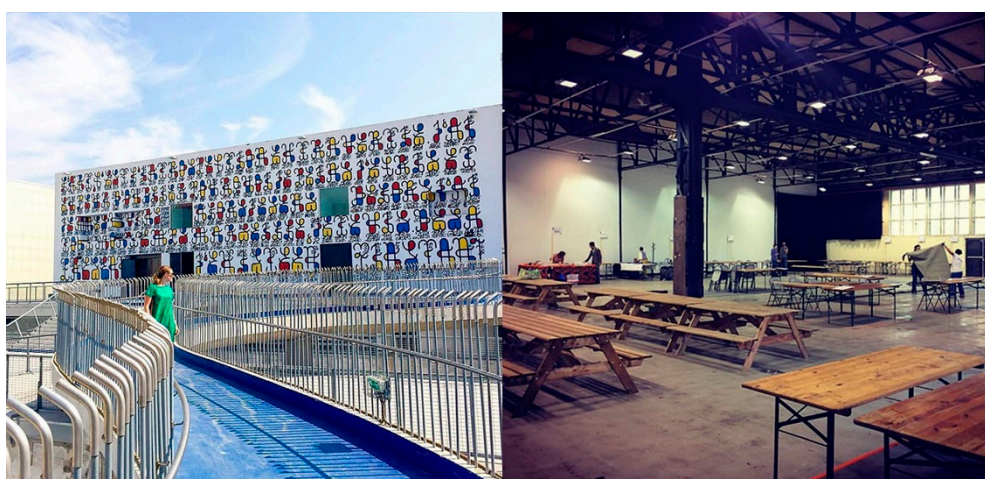


Figure 1. Two images from La friche instagram account. The first one is a repost from a follower. The second one is a promotional image for a coming soon event.



Figure 2. Two images from La friche instagram account. The pictures represent the same place before and after the architectural intervention by Patrick Bouchain and Mathieu Poitevin.

Contrary to what has happened in many other similar cases, the transformation of Friche did not lead to a substantial increase in the values of the surrounding properties, nor to a transformation of the social composition of the neighborhood population. Several researches raise the fact that from the very beginning Friche intervention has been configured as an autonomous action in its own context, essentially disconnected from the Marseillaise cultural networks, turning to international systems of cultural production [2].

The Friche project is therefore the result of an intersection of narratives that has been made possible by a continuous interaction between the actors of transformation—a cohesive and united group on a political/ideological basis—and the international context in which they operate.

Process management was born out of a series of discussions, corrections and compromises that allowed a fragile temporary job to take on the form of an important cultural institution, not so much within the city of Marseilles, but in the context of major centers of European cultural production. This has enabled Friche to be politically used by the institutions as the “cultural arm” of EuroMéditerranée, both in the production of consensus around the new cultural image of the city (outwardly), but also in obtaining the status of Capital of Culture, a crucial event in dismembering internal opposition to the city [3].

In this sense, the imaginative process that triggered the Friche event has produced a definable place through a spendable image as a design reference for other possible transformations linked to cultural production and creative classes.

It is also true, and it must be stated, that the Friche project, through the codification of its current image, is still today able to negotiate the granting of large public resources (about five million euros a year). It is therefore evident that the image produced is characterized by a remarkable solidity. Friche is read by private institutions and investors as a reliable subject, on which still has value investing capital [4].

3. Imagination, Sharing, Transcription: From the Production of an Image to Its Translation in Place

The following is a key through which to decrypt the creation process of La Friche. This will focus on the relationships that consist between the image that generated the knot of interest around the project and the outcome of the process itself. Starting from the interpretations-definitions that are expressed in M. L. Bianca (2009), we try to discretise the degree of collaboration that characterizes this process and puts it in its own context. Next, the same key will be applied to a different case that highlights the tremendous potential offered by broader collaboration platforms to image definition.

In *La mente immaginale. Immaginazione, immagini mentali, pensiero e pragmatica visuali* [5], the author defines “imaginative projective prefiguration” as the ability to generate mental images—or imaginary flows—that relate to a possible future condition of change. If such prefigurations are

solicited by specific motivations related to the achievement of a goal, they are defined as “project imaginative projections”. It’s as obvious to a designer to anticipate something, that has not yet been seen, and prefiguring images of something that is believed to be able to compete strategically to formulate actions and trigger processes related to the modification of current situations. It is equally evident that in architectural practice, starting from imaginative design projections, it is possible to develop figurative and technical transcriptions that allow to refine, modify, fine-tune, imaged mental images. The importance of the transcription of project images has a fundamental importance because of two reasons: on the one hand it is linked to the role of figurative externation of individual figurative mental contents, on the other hand, on these figurative images, a sharing process and the possible collaborative processing is defined by community.

The conceptual-creative function in the design field allows to formulate images that are ex-novo compared to those stored in memory; ideal images are the result of elaborations regarding previously memorized perceptual information (retrospective images) and the formation of new visual information (ideative images).

They are images directly related to objects, so that they can be useful for acting in specific ways, images related to real world scenarios and at the same time distanced from it for which they propose ex-novo scenarios; images that are in turn preconfigurations and designs.

The complexity of these images is due to the fact that retrospective images apply a re-activation and re-formulation of stored content with respect to current use, meaning that each reformulation is a new mental process that, in addition to searching for images, presents it in a diversified way depending on the mental conditions in which reformulation occurs. It is obvious that in this last step reference is made to the most current memory theories for which it is not intended as a storage tank previously stored and ready to be retrieved as needed as they have been assimilated but rather as process sets for which helps to redesign, more appropriately, a picture just as you try to remember it [6–8].

Ideal images for which we are interested in this essay—project images that become places—refer to the phenomenal world as they are able to define new informations compatible with the world and refer to conditions that are not yet implemented but could be implemented; their character is to be prefiguring, anticipating and ultimately designing.

By operating a selection of types, from the distinctive pattern proposed by M.L. Bianca, ideative images can be:

- Poietics/*Poietiche* (generated deliberately, explicitly and with intent. They are formulated to carry out pre-configuration and design actions or processes)
- Heteronyms/*Eteronime* (images present in the mind derived from cultural communicative experiences such as books, magazines, films ... are the part of the collective imagination)

Equally indicative is the distinction according to the content, so the ideative (non-perceptual) images can be characterized according to the content:

- images as memories of what has already been observed;
- Images that let you see what you have not seen yet;
- Edited images of what has already been seen;
- Images of things you never saw and that you could see;
- Images of actions that you will want to accomplish together with the scenario in which they are implemented, which includes things and people;
- Image of things, objects or events in order to realize a project;

As mentioned above, the transformation (encoding) of figurative contents—concerning mental images—in figurative content—which is imprinted on some material support—occurs through transcripts.

In architectural practice, figurative and technical transcriptions develop from imaginary design projections that allow refinement, modification, fine-tuning, and imaging. An example of a technical figurative transcript is the drawing up of all the works that serve to illustrate, share and make an architectural project.

Failing to see the phenomenal world, the absence of an external reference, or in the absence of the project you are imagining, the transcription of a creative image can be considered not only as a transcription, but as a setup or transformation of the ideative-fantastic image; in architecture the image of the transcription is the image being tested. During the transcription the non-perceptual image of the beginning takes on figurative completion characters; by selecting the attributes that specify it, the transcription redefines the image that will be stored as last.

For the completion character just described, the pathway to the transcription of a new image is similar to a processional-oriented “attempt” to discover and find the image you are looking for. The way in which the transcriptive passage from the mental image to the figurative is performed is a “fit-in” orientation that has obvious degrees of proximity to the theory of *formatività* the art field.

“Fare è veramente un formare solo quando non si limita ad eseguire un qualcosa di già ideato o a realizzare un progetto già stabilito o ad applicare una tecnica già predisposta o a seguire regole già fissate, ma nel corso stesso dell’operazione inventa il *modus operandi*, e definisce la regola dell’opera mentre la fa, e concepisce eseguendo, e progetta nell’atto stesso che realizza” [1] (p. 59).

Specifically, project-oriented images-in architecture-is not a transcript that seeks a mimicry with the mental image (such as that with retrospective images) but rather an interpretative coding that “sets up” ‘initial image. This type of constructive transcript, by the characteristics of its formulation, replaces the original mental image by becoming a figurative image autonomous from that one that is related to it. Simultaneously it becomes the image on which the collaborative processes, that lead to the ideational advancement and the completion of the project, are triggered. This progression is evident by recalling the procedurality that intervenes within the discipline of architecture from the ideational passage of a project to its constructive stage in place. The organization of the whole process, based on collaboration and ideational cooperation between subjects and skills, provides for a priori definition—defined by codes and codified procedures—of the degrees, and the interconnected collaboration constraints between different subjects at different phases of the project. Standards and procedures sanction the legitimacy and define the need for the participation of certain individuals in the project, thus defining a narrow community defined by the sharing of a scope.

Compared with what is said, Friche will be interpreted as the result of a collaborative imagination process addressed to a narrow group characterized by scope sharing.

Friche, understood as a place, was made from a constructive transcript aware of an original ideative image formulated with prefigural and design intent and oriented by other images already present in the mind as part of the collective imagination; then it could be defined in terms of a polyetheric-etherone image.

Surely it was an image of new content, consciously generated, project-oriented, and necessarily conditioned with the cultural contents of the reference community. This image allowed to see what, at the time of its formulation, had never been seen and simultaneously visualized the actions to be carried out at the same time as the things and people comprising scenario.

The Friche image, at the time of its production, finds its field of existence in a precise, defined and clearly bounded context. All of Friche’s ideological process was elaborated within a small group of personalities starting with the original idea of Philippe Foulquié dating back to the early 1990s. The French political context of the 1990s is the fertile ground for germinating the process. Likewise, the international vocation of Friche project emerges from the beginning, identifying as a target of interest a certain European cultural elite, which in those same years focused on conversion processes of large artifacts abandoned in districts of cultural production (Figure 3).

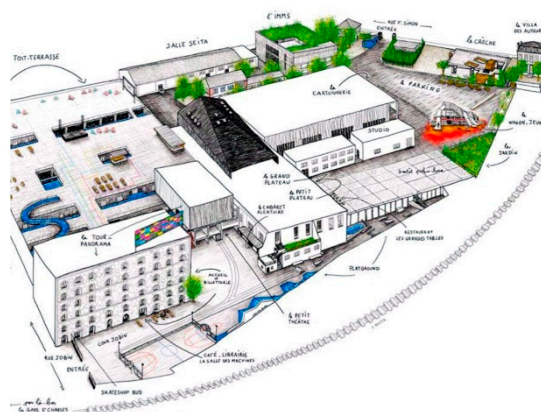


Figure 3. The image is from La friche instagram account. It is a work of art by the artist Emmanuelle Bentz (a Friche resident), prepared for La Friche website.

In summary, the process of collaborative imagination leading to the codification of the contemporary image of La Friche la Belle de Mai is a process that is fueled by a specific cultural and political context, combined on ideological bases and oriented to a possible vision for city development in the post-industrial era. In order to build the collaborative structure that allows the polyethereic-etherone image to translate into a new shared image and attributable to a precise imaginary, it is necessary to rely on a collective memory structure that allows, on the basis of a common heritage, to find the language codes necessary to communicate the proposition and, consequently, materialize it.

This sharing structure of intent based on a common heritage, well-integrated within a political-ideological infrastructure, has characterized many cultural background initiatives between the 20th and 21st centuries. Conversely, with the communication and sharing tools set up since the new millennium, it becomes possible to build collaborative platforms based on the sharing of images used for their metaphorical potential and through a process based on analogy. This frees the imagination collaborative process from an ideological-modern dimension and creates a higher return on an investment/yield level.

In this sense we will describe the case of Farm Cultural Park, in Favara, as a process of collaborative imagination that comes from a direct sharing of the scopes, but is articulated on the sharing of imagery and imagination.

4. The Farm Cultural Park in Favara

The initial image of Farm Cultural Park -FKP- is created with the aim of giving to the city of Favara, and neighboring territories, a new identity connected with the experimentation of new ways of thinking, dwelling and living through the constitution of a private cultural institution, committed to a social utility and sustainable development project. As happened to Friche, its image fits into the horizon of communicative-cultural origin images; as Friche it is a polyethereic-etherone image.

Starting from a history of abandonment linked to security and neglect factors, towards a site that seemed to have sanctioned complete abatement, in 2010, Favara is a punctual action that alters its perspective completely. In a few months, from March to June 2010, the first two Palaces of the Seven Courtyards were recovered, inaugurating, with thousands of people from all over Italy and from different parts of the world, transforming the Favara site into a new generation cultural center in which culture becomes a noble tool for the regeneration of a territory.

“Farm è un museo delle persone. Di quelle che hanno voglia di condividere. Condividere tutto quello che si ha. Risorse economiche, tempo, conoscenze, competenze, network, amicizie” [9]

As expressed directly in its mission, FKP is not a museum or art gallery, but rather aspires to be the model of a new generation cultural center. A new model refers to a new image, focused on the relational process that is set up among the people voluntarily engaged in the operation.

Affirming that Farm is a museum of people, it is defined as a powerful, rich image of meaning not characterized as a museum exhibition center of art, but rather as the place where people are exposed to processes that produce forms of gravitational activity around art.

It is clearly an image that allows you to approach a discrete form through a pre-configuration based on the condition of collaboration. A “wide” scenario calls for participation in the sharing of personal resources, for the implementation of an image whose original direct references are the Paris Palais de Paris (built in 1937, expanded in 2002 by Lacaton and Vassal), Camden Town, Place Jemaa el Fna in Marrakech [10] (Figure 4).



Figure 4. Three images from different Instagram accounts, selected with a geo-based research, that show the reference places declared by FKP.

Just the reference to these images, references declared by analogy [11–14], allows us to identify that the image of FKP refer simultaneously from one side to a certain image of a place of art, from the other to the role that the sharing assumes in the definition of the site itself [15–17].

FKP’s policy is that it encourages artists, architects, designers and creative people to move to Favara; there are properties that are sold for free, but others are few thousand euros. Seven years later, a number of communities around the Farm Cultural Park grew up: artists, new residents, artists and creators, young people and volunteers, and finally the web (to date the number of those who follow, participate and support the project with their suggestions and remarks, sharing all the initiatives with their personal network on Facebook has exceeded 61,000 units and about 10,000 Instagrams), Following this was born Farmidable, the first Community Cooperative.

5. Comparison and Conclusions

Admitting that, Friche and FKP are both deriving from the transcriptive intent of polyethereic-etherone images, we say that are a constructive transcendental consciousness of an original idea image formulated with prefigural intent and designed and oriented by other images already present in the mind, as part of the collective imagination. Let’s add that both refer to cases of new places, transformed through the image of cultural production centers. Within these similarities, cases show substantial elements of process differentiation.

The transcription and construction of Friche follows an imaginative process that is immediately geared towards the purpose, and therefore selects a priori and strategically the specific referents of this collaboration, to obtain a faithful project to the original image: to be a cultural production tool for the international art systems, substantially disconnected from the cultural networks of the Marseilles context. The collaborative dimension of Friche is the result of a small group of people who have defined it as the initial image of the focus—a center of artistic-theatrical production of international relevance—and which has allowed and consolidated its viability. The two faces relationship that links Friche to EuroMéditerranée allows the city of Marseilles to become the European Capital of Culture using as a benchmark the conversion of the former Tobacco factory without a substantial increase in the values of the surrounding properties. In the end it didn’t generate a transformation of the social composition of the neighborhood population.

Unlike Friche, collaboration in building and sharing the initial image and between people involved in FKP takes place in the widest sense possible. Starting from the initial image of the founders, the public call and willingness to offer houses at symbolic prices, and not solely for temporary use, is geared towards the construction of a site intended as a community of individuals whose commitment is in the process of economic, social and cultural activation aimed at the physical upgrading of Favara. This type of collaborative enlargement is also evident in the strategic change that has taken place during the years of activity that marks the transition from collection to production/promotion, whereby the value of the final product is not exclusively attributed to the work of art, but to the effect that the collaborative dimension of its production is can produce.

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