

Design in the urban context: a theoretical reflection on interferences and policies in the process of place branding

O design no contexto urbano: uma reflexão teórica
acerca das interferências e as políticas no processo
de place branding



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ABSTRACT

This article is a reflective study, which proposes to discuss the contemporary design in the context of urbanity, in the search for a space to act before the desire of singularity. In this sense, the focus is on place branding in its strength as an object concerning marketing actions applied to local development. The core of the text is to think that policies aimed at this practice should find encouragement and visibility by the most sensitive layers of the population, who can contribute to the construction of new modes of production closer to local culture and endemic behavior, plausible and compatible with the city. The study relies on a theoretical basis, in which it discusses issues related to city behavior with the support of authors such as Marshall Sahlins, Milton Santos, Simon Anholt, and Mihalis Kavaratzis; as well as the study of design as a tool for social innovation discussed by Ezio Manzini. The research highlights the complexity and diversity that encompasses the behavior of cities beyond branding, this being only one step in an identification process.

KEYWORDS

Design; Place Branding; Politics

RESUMO

O presente artigo trata-se de uma reflexão teórica, o qual se propõe discorrer sobre o design contemporâneo no contexto da urbanidade, na busca por um espaço de atuação diante do desejo da singularidade. Nesse sentido, foca-se na gestão da marca de lugares – place branding – em sua força como objeto no que tange a ações de marketing aplicadas para o desenvolvimento local. O fulcro do texto é pensar que as políticas voltadas a essa prática devem encontrar fomento e visibilidade pelas camadas mais sensíveis da população, que podem contribuir para a construção de novos modos de produção mais próximos da cultura local e do comportamento endêmico, plausíveis e compatíveis com a cidade. O estudo se apoia em uma base teórica, na qual discute questões relacionadas ao comportamento da cidade com o suporte de autores como Marshall Sahlins, Milton Santos, Simon Anholt e Mihalis Kavaratzis; bem como o estudo do design como ferramenta de inovação social debatido por Ezio Manzini. A pesquisa ressalta a complexidade e diversidade que engloba o




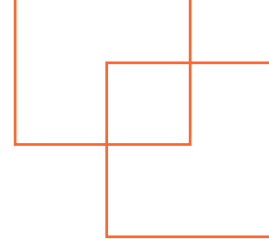
RESUMO

comportamento das cidades para além da marca, sendo esta apenas uma etapa de um processo identitário.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE

Design; Place Branding; Política





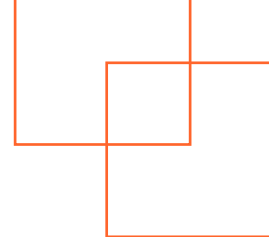
INTRODUCTION

The diversity of cities, in terms of their structure, is perceived in their different uses based on the complex contemporary way of life. The political, economic, cultural, and ideological actions in transformation order the new approaches to discuss and manage the collectivity. Success in the development of cities involves characteristics resulting from the flexibility and appropriation of different areas, such as design. Importantly, the desire for renewal stimulates the economy through creativity and innovation in different urban social contexts.

Design is a phenomenon based on social differences and its influence is spot-on when it comes to different behaviors, which need to provide basic structures for its development. Grovers (2013, p. 71) argues that place branding is not about logo design, but essentially about "making something identifiable as distinctive." Thus, it is necessary to reflect on the hegemonic competitive behavior of places supported by marketing actions - which gives rise to the Place Branding process - to attract tourists and various investments, as well as to maintain the basic system for residents.

This article deals with the main concepts and models for the theoretical discussion focused on design as a political activity and resource in the application of place branding, exerting a direct influence on the strengthening of local identities. The aim of the present study is to relate the design activity with the processes of communication, representation, and management that involve place branding, pointing out the responsibilities and solutions that the area and its evolution have brought to the development of urban contexts. Given this scenario, the study arises from some questions such as: how does image communication, through the place-brand, dialogue with social dynamics?

Initially, the bibliographical survey provided a comprehensive understanding of the concept of Place Branding and the practice of design, highlighting the thought about marketing actions present in the speech of Philip Kotler, in dialogue with the studies of the brand and its image in the context of cities addressed by authors such as Simon Anholt and Mihalis Kavaratizs. Complementing the reasoning, the concept of place by Milton Santos and the studies on design as social innovation by Ezio Manzini, besides its influence on contemporaneity from the view of Vitor Papanek



and Rafael Cardoso, were discussed.

2 METHODOLOGY

This is a reflection study with a theoretical basis, as well as the authors' perception of the subject in question. The aim was to discuss studies pertinent to the field and object of study. The text was organized into three parts covering the following themes: "The place as a product?", a debate about the reasons for and the application of policies to create and manage a brand for cities; "Local representativeness", which discusses the possible impacts related to the brand inserted in the social context, and "The role of design in the application of Place Branding", addressing the influence of design in the branding process.

3 URBAN CONTEMPORARY DIALOGUES

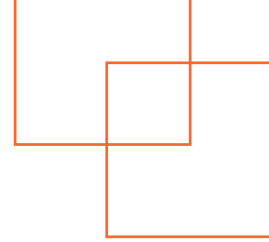
3.1 The place as a product?

Place as a field of dialogue between materiality and immateriality constantly revisits the numerous possibilities of use by humankind. The infinity of displacements and transfers compose a "mosaic" of human relations that overlap and complement each other (SANTOS, 2006, p. 216).

The complexity that surrounds places and its characteristic as a field of transformations in the face of social behavior brings with it a crucial point in its composition. When thinking about territorial arrangement and its sustainability, the number of elements and signs that make up cities become subsidies for analysis and strengthening of the territory as an attractiveness factor.

From the point of view of production and consumption established by the hegemonic capitalist culture, we have that the large metropolises and the used territory of the city confirm a sense of need to position and discern from other localities, not only to ensure their performance as an important spot of services and exchanges, but also to strengthen their characteristics. In this sense, differentiation would be proposed for the recognition of the territory as contemporary in the minds of those who "consume" it (KAVARATZIS; ASHWORTH, 2005).

This need presents itself as a reason for the search for the construction of the place-brand, or Place Branding, which is structured in



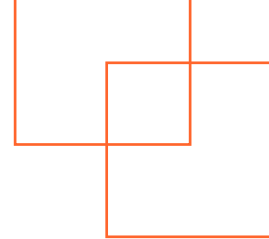
marketing and promotion practices inspired by industrially applied models, but with adaptations given the complexity of places. Kotler (2006) defines branding as a powerful tool for differentiating products and services through the brand. According to Perotto (2007, p. 131), "building the brand, invariably, is a process that seeks to produce some sense and to be significant". When related to localities, it can manage a reputation and propagate an identity (ANHOLT, 2007), encompassing the interests of different social actors, mainly the citizens themselves (INSCH; STUART, 2015).

Urban citizens, inserted in the context of branding their territory, have a relationship with their rights and values, directly associated with authority and reaffirmation of their historical context and their connection with the collective sense. Moreover, it is endowed with an understanding of their social functions and responsibilities and also the sum of the individual and collective sense. Papanek (2007, p. 120) reports that "the role of the community is to serve as a goal rather than a waypoint, an end rather than a means, a stop rather than a flow, a place to reach without having to cross it".

According to Harvey (1992), urban postmodernity understands cities in their fragmented character and symbolic diversity, and subjectivity drives transformations in social behavior. In response to the changes brought by this behavior and the upward modus operandi contained in globalization, localities, or cultural territories, seek to deviate from outdated planning practices and visions to conceive market and development objectives at different scales and investment fields.

Faced with this hegemonic behavior of large cities and countries based on the ambition for uniqueness and strengthening before the competitors, Place Branding gains strength when considering the applied actions that are not only focused on mass practices, inefficient strategies, or impotent actions without a precise foundation. This process aims primarily at the direct and noticeable involvement of different social actors, exalting the importance of the perception of local citizens about their image (INSCH; STUART, 2015).

The planning, management, and creation of public territories should be focused on civility and its openness to new flows, whether of people or businesses, and should consider the expected impacts. According to Papanek (2007), there is a clear incoherent endemic condition of the community groups present in the territories, once the act of a city becomes



commercially and aesthetically attractive, there is a noticeable trend in the influx of people from other regions. In this sense, although differentiation is essential for the growing development of several communities, cities, states, and regions in the world, this trend must be faced with caution, since "when the process begins, even the community itself will become overcrowded and head for eventual decay" (PAPANEK, 2007, p. 120-121).

It is noteworthy that the way in which small communities, different cities, and countries are perceived by their citizens will determine the direction and success in the planning and management of development, strengthening, and sustainability actions. In a context in which there is a dialogue through visuality and the aesthetic elements that are more tied to contemporary life (GASTAL, 2005), representation through images should be understood as a path of exchange and increase of interpersonal experiences.

When planning a location as a potential investment space, the perceptions in heterogeneous, multifaceted, and different interpreted environments, as well as its lack of management, can be relevant and decisive aspects, enabling the success or failure of any plan that is intended to come to fruition.

Still, as an aspect that holds the prerogative of communicating common sense, the image is the return of different messages assimilated by each individual (KAVARATZIS, 2004). This aspect, in its conception, distribution and management, is based on the association of personal opinion, context, and experience of the city that receives it and assimilates it according to its experience. What is understood by common sense, Geertz (1997, p.21) argues that the image:

is a cultural system; a body of beliefs and judgments, with vague but stronger connections than a simple relation of thoughts that are inevitably the same for all members of a group living in a community.

The author exposes that the characteristics of social thought have influenced changes in the way of thinking about the social. The image is shown as the essential compound for communication to be present and genuine, in addition to its characteristic as a long-lasting aspect, sustained by the individual perception of each receiver. It is worth noting that the forms of application are guided by standards that may favor only the layer that contains power, financial and/or political. Moreover, these policies

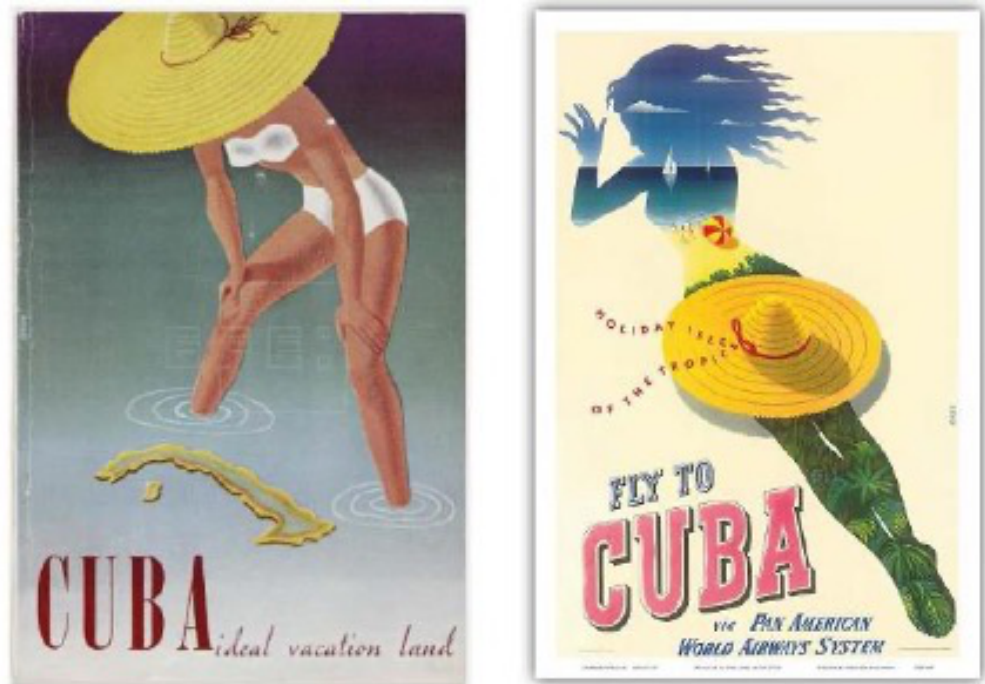
have been strategically installed and serve as a social tool to manipulate vision and investments, being a decisive part of urban planning.

The debate on the appropriation of design's power of influence in this process is open and constantly changing. In the next topic, based on what has already been discussed, the text proposes to recognize the impacts in the context of social flows and representations.

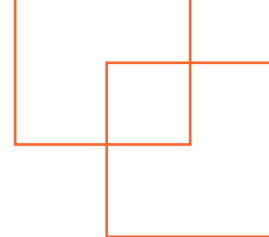
3.2 Local representativeness

When analyzed from the perspective of exogenous points of view, image communication is at the mercy of stereotypes and preconceived and rooted imaginaries. Different Latin American countries, such as Cuba (Figure 1), have had their image supported by looks aimed at the sexualization of the female body. In Brazil, as a response to the statements by the Federal Government in 2019, some states, including Alagoas and Pernambuco, started a campaign to combat the dissociation of imaginaries promoted in the movement to attract a flow of people to the country.

Figure 1 – Posters of the National Commission for the Promotion of Tourism in 1930 and 1940.



Source: Publicitur /MINTUR Cuba apud BARRIOS, REIS, 2019.



It is understood that society is not only made up of the individuals that compose it, the ground they occupy, the things they use, and the movements they perform, but, above all, it is the idea it forms of itself (SAHLINS, 2003, p. 129). The analysis of a city based on the interest of government levels, the third sector, or a research subject must identify the importance of citizen participation in the conception of the image, from the notion of idealization of a brand as a tool for collective representation and the perception of what is offered to them; being the consumers and managers of their context. The growing interest in visuality leads researchers, including philosophers and anthropologists, to discuss images and the need for literacy and awareness, which is expressed in different designations and social levels, among others those of Reading projections and the culture created from it.

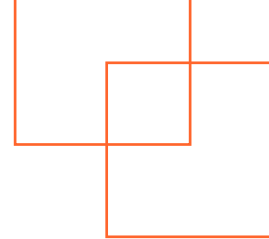
The city, connected with its citizens through different means, is still perceptible, created and lived by different classes, being unstable and changeable in its details. The dialogue of contemporary society is created and strengthened in the territory of the city, defining it as an important and decisive tool in the behavior of city dwellers (KAVARATZIS; ASHWORTH, 2005). It is noticed that, in the context of globalization, urban relations are increasingly transcultural and changeable.

Remarkably, these emerging practices of thinking about initiatives inserted in cultural aspects and organized independently by the community play a crucial role in rescuing the sense of collectivity that is characteristic of urban structures. These planning acts are also defined as tools to change the city attitude, encouraging the appropriation of the city as a territory conceived from being to being.

The following topic addresses the theoretical debate on design as a political resource in the application of place branding. The design solution is appropriate when thinking about the management of a city brand when the main priority is to develop a strategy that establishes social integration actions involving this practice.

3.3 The role of design in the application of Place Branding

Design, in its origin, can be understood from motivations and structures brought by the needs of a capitalist production system. In the current context, the activity faces different limits facing a new



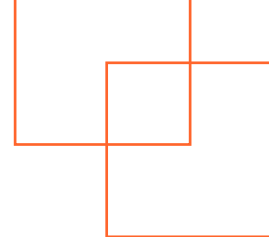
configuration of thinking goals and, at the same time, it embraces important features to play a supporting role in social innovations and emerging behaviors (MANZINI, 2015). Thus, it is important to understand how professionals can contribute to better localities, focusing on citizen's quality of life.

Cities can be perceived in their complexity as territories for the exchange of goods and services, governance, and displacement of people (UN, 2016). However, the organization of the city and its functioning demand local conformities and visions that go beyond commercial exchanges and economic growth. With respect to human conglomerates, "Aristotle asserted that men create communities not for justice, peace, defense, or traffic, but the sake of a good life. This good life has always meant the satisfaction of man's four basic desires: sociability, religion, artistic and intellectual development, and politics" (PAPANEK, 2007, p. 118).

The contemporaneity in the urban plot brought a break to the limits of time, physical, and affectiveness which were a limit of the processes of communication and expression of the content and substratum of urban centers, providing new internationalism as a strong internal differentiation in cities and societies based on place, function and social interest (HARVEY, 1992, p.69). The exponential growth of the city population in increasingly globalized countries is the main source of problems and challenges in the contemporary world (GEHL, 2010).

Regarding the importance of design in the applicability of Place Branding, it is seen that the debate lies in the precision of recognizing the scope of the area as a pertinent field for broader discussions about the behavior and social development of regions. Indeed, there is a valuable contribution of the area as a tool for the impulse and protagonism of city dwellers, based on the problematization of language and communication (MANZINI, 2015). Thus, the critical thinking evidenced by design studies proposes to contribute to the support of the importance of the area beyond aesthetics and its usual application in the image.

Once interpreted in the optics of brand management, from the perspective of Kavaratzis and Ashworth (2005), the dissimilarities between identity and image are evident, understood as relevant stages of the formation and cognition processes. Anholt (2007) adds to the argument that the image presents itself as the final stage, that is, the affirmation that the target, in this case, the locality, is present in the minds of those who



"consume" it. Additionally, the interpretation and recognition of the image depend on subjective and inherent factors to each person, as they are different from the relationship established with the identity. Anholt (2007, p. 5) argues that:

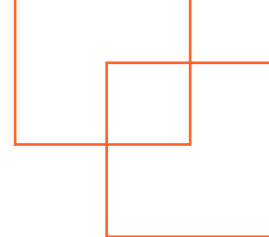
for products and services, it is what we see as consumers; a logo, a slogan, the packaging, the product design. This aspect of branding has some parallels with the idea of national identity, but its comparison is delicate. Brand communication techniques, such as graphic design, for example, do not have much relevance to countries, since countries are not just products or organizations that can be sold in this sense.

Nevertheless, designers as creators and brand managers must be understood beyond the preconceived behavior ruled by capitalist policies. Notably, the actions of cultural imagery implementation and creation should consider different levels of impact, positioning the designer as a determining factor. Cardoso (2012, p.203) adds in the discussion that:

[...] there is no longer any norm that can be applied to industrial production, there is no single causer of a crime, and responsibility is diluted to such an extent that we find ourselves effectively in a situation of absolute irresponsibility concerning those actions that proceed from industrial production.

Design has changed and kept a noticeable distance from the idea of more plausible and intelligent problem solving, especially in the late 80s, and approached more massified behaviors of lifestyles, the aestheticization of the contemporary world, and the glamorization of objects and services (BONSIEPE, 2011, p. 62). The performance in the area can no longer be seen with a single vision. The most efficient way for new approaches is not the future without the professionalization and critical thinking of the designer, but a convergence between trained professionals working in other areas of training capable of designing and participating in the design of the common territory (PACEY, 1992).

In the context of the development of the activity and to offer better conditions of social life in the constitution of contemporary society, design professionals must follow, according to Papanek (2007), some guidelines such as the reorganization of the hierarchical structure and values, considering the more critical planning of traffic in communities, not forgetting to consider the behavior of large and small businesses and in the community planning. Furthermore, and no less important, the designer must behave as a new "expert" of the actions previously thought so that there is greater sustainability and longevity.

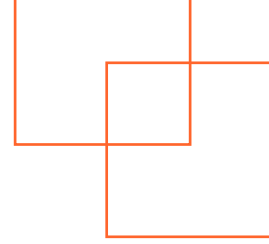


To understand design is to see it as a creative activity guided by the stipulation of different and interconnected virtues in the production of products, services, and complex systems (MANZINI, 2015). In this way, the area is the crucial factor of the humanization of technologies and interchange between cultures. Based on this conception, it is noted that the design capacity must be used in the development that arises from creativity, remodeling the context in which it is inserted and transforming the relations with the individual. Creativity drives to reflect and apply actions in everyday life in different ways, considering the individuality of each territory and population profile, thereby proposing a path and a point of arrival beyond the governing situation. Creativity aims for a deeper interpretation of social projects. These, finally, must be seen as essential for the correct functioning of operational means contained in society (LANDRY, 2000).

The insertion of the designer's thought and action in the planning of urban centers boosts the collaborative role of institutions to achieve a proposal of wide impact. Once operated in this way, these actors help not only for the establishment and strengthening in the creation of more livable places, but also for the construction of best practices in the regions in focus (MANZINI, 2015). Design, in this sense, contributes by exercising an effective role in what is understood as collective innovation, generating solutions through new models of social and economic structures, aiming at sustainability in terms of environmental impacts and social environment. Manzini (2015, p. 58) argues that:

To promote social innovation, design specialists must use their design skills and competencies to recognize promising cases when and where they appear and to strengthen them. That is, to help them to be more accessible, effective, lasting, and replicable.

Ethics and political intentionality must be assumptions inherent to socially applied design. The critical reflection made from "creative" industrial and economic patterns must be found when the final public is aware of them. These policies must be fostered and targeted by the most sensitive layers of the population and that can contribute to building new modes of production closer to the local culture and endemic behavior, plausible and compatible with the city. It should distance itself from practices that aim to strengthen capital speculation, which uses culture and the city as products and sources of profit.



The policies aimed to be instated in the cultural field have gained visibility in terms of irregular income distribution and political protagonism. The institutionalization of practices and concepts such as "creative industry" can explain a tenuous line that approaches the inequality of investments and the lack of planning and plastering of policies applied to the population, being the main source of creative and resilient cities (LANDRY, 2000).

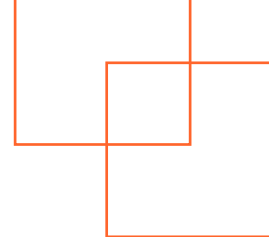
Considering the role of design as an area of extreme relevance in these concepts, it is necessary to visualize other ways of dealing that enable new moral and ethical precepts for the consolidation and sustainability of production, beyond the implementation of technologies and digital realities and massification, being proposed a development contaminated by creativity and more incisive participation of the community and basic needs. Design must remain politically and socially engaged, seeking to nurture new ways of thinking and acting. In its multiplicity, the process of Place Branding presents itself as a factor for valuing local actions and people and, at the same time, is liable to receive a strategic project structure.

The brand 'è Bologna' (Figure 2) captured architectural fragments of the main symbols of the city, with a technology that allowed words, names, and identities to be written with a pictographic alphabet generating a unique visual identity for each visitor, organization, or cultural product, but at the same time manifesting it as an expression of the city. Although graphic elements are relevant to the process, it is hard to imagine that this movement alone "will make much difference in the way that places generate collective consciousness and build their reputation" (GOVERS, 2013, p. 72).

Figure 2 – Place Branding project of the city of Bologna, Italy.



Source: Fondazione Innovazione Urbana.



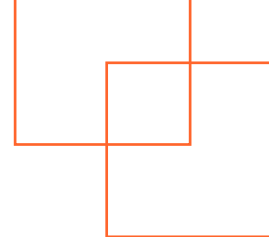
To resist and to oppose an idealization of the city as a commodity would not be the way out, since cultural practices existing in cities are increasingly seen as a driving factor. However, it is important to understand that the forms of application are guided by standards that favor only the layer that holds power. Moreover, these policies have been strategically instituted and serve as a social tool to manipulate vision and investments, and are a decisive part of urban planning.

Thus, in this context, it is necessary to guarantee that investments in public policies are accessible to the majority of the local population. The tension of this practice is focused on the use of the collective sense inherent to the city and points to new ways of building and inhabiting the city. The non-conformist part of social actors is more directly involved in the production of culture that unites through the common focal point to change and restructure urban territories.

The artistic activities that have strength in the discourse are the protagonists of the collective loom and are born in an isolated way from the pre-programmed intentions essentially applied by high-ranking managers. Notwithstanding that, several design projects are based on discourses of ideas that aim at the urban territory only as profitable and fertile for consumer behaviour, highlighting the need to be aware of the ideological thoughts of social projects.

Thus, design in its interdisciplinarity has tools that can add value to the practice of place branding, considering the complexity of the relationships that are established around the construction of a collective representation. Actions guided by a capitalist view of differentiation find success resulting in intangible values of the experience of the place from the viewpoint of its community.

A brand, beyond its graphic identity, must be the result of several movements that decode what a city or country needs to demonstrate. Place Branding turns to a gathering of the various elements that make up the local identity, with no room to disregard their meanings. Design, if made in a way to achieve its potential, whether in local architecture, visual communication, and others, can contribute in an indispensable manner to the building of the city's image.



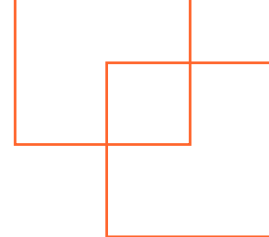
4 CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the present study revealed that there is a complexity and diversity that encompasses the behavior of cities, which is in constant change related to the need for competitiveness, and that the management of a brand is just one step in a larger and more complex chain of what can be understood as the identity formation of a place. It is important to emphasize that this process is successful in the long term when there is a genuine integration of all aspects and, especially, of the players who contribute and are part of the context. The contribution of design flourishes in its performance beyond the building of images and experiences, which requires a tangible and intangible structure for its development.

Thus, once established as a possible creative tool for the development of contemporary cities, design must go beyond the status brought by a title and encourage the effective involvement of the population mass and its cultural density. The purpose of this study was not to establish a definitive conclusion for the research problem, but to investigate it and approximate concepts to strengthen the debate on the multidisciplinary of the field in the academic environment. For this reason, although the findings proved to be significant, the interpretations are subject to discussion and different interpretations. Considering its limitations, the investigation may serve as a starting point and reference for future research.

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