

8. Design, Systems and Territorial Networks. The Experience of the *Wd_workshop Design* in Morcone (2001-2005)

Marina Parente¹, Vincenzo Cristallo², Alfonso Morone³

¹Department of Design, Politecnico di Milano

²Department of Architecture, Construction, Design, Politecnico di Bari

³Department of Architecture, Università degli Studi di Napoli Federico II

8.1 Bringing Design Culture to the Territories

The *Wd_workshop design* – proposing itself as a frontier laboratory in a specific productive and cultural context such as that of the internal areas of Southern Italy – represented one of the first tests of transfer of design on a territorial scale and, at the same time, a crucial step for the consolidation of the national academic network of design.

Conceived and organized by the University of Naples Federico II – coordinated by Ermanno Guida, Alfonso Morone, Vincenzo Cristallo and Marina Parente – the *Wd* immediately characterized itself as a collective and experimental experience, in which Politecnico di Milano took on an important role, both for the number of researchers involved and for the desire to field-test the methodologies that were being developed in those years on the theme of design for territories and local development. A recurring event, which took place in Morcone, a small hill town in the province of Benevento, from 2001 to 2005 (for five years

in the first week of September) with thematic editions aimed at the *de-sign-driven* development of local production and cultural realities, and which over the years has represented a model of cohesion on a scientific and relational level of a passionate and highly motivated academic community.

In this peripheral context, the various Italian design universities met annually, where the particular spatial-temporal-environmental conditions facilitated interdisciplinary and intergenerational dialogue and comparison processes. The complex program of initiatives within a convivial climate – whose critical and operational extension was subsequently formalized in a particular model, capable of concretizing the formula of a «participatory and collective design for the territory» – has made Morcone an extra-institutional occasion through which to support on a cultural and organizational level the nascent national design network strengthened by the *SDI Sistema Design Italia* research and the subsequent *Me.design* and *D.Cult.*

In line with the concept of action research currently being developed at Politecnico di Milano, the Milanese group has supported the Neapolitan coordination since the first edition in 2001, strongly characterising the scientific community involved in the organisational activity of the *Wd* [1](#) [2](#) [3](#).

A community that soon became an active and proactive part of the design workshops, evening debates and dissemination processes that were subsequently generated. Alberto Seassaro, Giuliano Simonelli, and Flaviano Celaschi as teachers; the then researchers Stefano Maffei, Francesco Zurlo, Mario Piazza, and Valeria Bucchetti; the professionals and teachers Marco Borsotti, Fulvia Premoli, Sezgin Aksu and Massimo Canali of Studio De Lucchi; the young designers, research fellows and PhD students, Beatrice Villari, Venanzio Arquilla, Antonella Castelli, Raffaella Trocchianesi, Eleonora Lupo, Arianna Vignati, Luciana Gunetti, Francesco E. Guida, Paolo Casati, Marco Sammiceli; in addition to the many graduates and students from the design courses at Politecnico, including designers who later became successful such as Odoardo Fioravanti, made up a team that was functional to interpreting a new dimension of design as a system established in the contexts in which it intended to act. Alongside these, the five editions have also seen the participation of many other protagonists of the disciplinary



1. *Wd2_Workshop design* a Morcone. Foto di gruppo dei docenti, dei curatori e dei partecipanti.
[Document →](#)



2. *Wd3_Workshop design* a Morcone. Alberto Seassar con Ermanno Guida.
[Document →](#)



3. *Wd3_Workshop design* a Morcone. Vanni Pasca con Ermanno Guida.
[Document →](#)

debate of academic and professional origin, including Vanni Pasca, Riccardo Dalisi, Benedetto Gravagnuolo, Patrizia Ranzo, Mimmo Jodice, Francois Jegou, Mike Ryan, Antonio Marano, Carlo Vannicola, Giancarlo Martino, Antonino Benincasa, Matteo Bazzicalupo, Paola Gambaro, Benedetta Spadolini, Vanni Codeluppi, Luciano Perondi.

8.2 The Historical Context: Design Places and Networks

The years between the birth of the first *Industrial Design* Degree program in Italy at Politecnico di Milano (1993) and the establishment of the Faculty of Design (2001) and the INDACO Department (2002) have been characterised by intense activity in building and consolidating the system of internal and external relations, with the Milanese and Lombardy regions and with other Italian university locations.

In fact, from the early stages, university education in design initiates a dialogue with the professional and productive, as well as academic, world, starting from the Milanese system and then expanding the network of relationships to various territories.

Antonella Penati describes well this critical objective in the design training system at Politecnico and, referring to the double location of Milan and Como, specifies that:

the decentralization of the links of the training chain [is finalized] for contact with specific local productive realities, developing differentiated activities in keeping with the different opportunities and traditional concentrations of the territorial context. This objective is a part of the more complex processes of decentralization that is taking place in the entire institute, in favor of an educational specialization capable of responding to the cultural particularities, the productive needs and the prospects for development in specific areas. (AA.VV., 1999, p. 126)

This quote is taken from the publication *Sistema Design Milano* (1999)

[4.1](#), which is one of the results of the first national-scale research funded by the Ministry of University and Scientific and



**4. *Sistema Design Milano*.
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Technological Research, briefly known as *Sistema Design Italia*, coordinated by prof. Ezio Manzini (1998-2000), which aimed to understand the state of the art of design in the national territory and its territorial declinations. Alberto Seassaro, in the preface to *I territori del design* 5, highlights the scope of this initiative led by Politecnico, which involved «17 unità di ricerca, distribuite presso 12 sedi universitarie sparse per tutta Italia, autentici *sensori* locali dei modi e delle opportunità di relazione tra design e sistemi produttivi del Made in Italy» (Maffei & Simonelli, 2002, pp. XI-XII) [Authors' translation: «17 research units, distributed across 12 university campuses throughout Italy, authentic local *sensors* of the ways and opportunities for relationships between design and the production systems of Made in Italy» (Maffei & Simonelli, 2002, pp. XI-XII)].

An unprecedented research because, as Giuliano Simonelli claims, «non sono mai state condotte indagini sistematiche che ci raccontino quali sono le condizioni e le caratteristiche strutturali attraverso cui il *genius loci* italiano si esprime» (Maffei & Simonelli, 2002, p. 3) [Authors' translation: «systematic investigations have never been conducted that tell us what are the conditions and structural characteristics through which the Italian *genius loci* expresses itself» (Maffei & Simonelli, 2002, p. 3)], which has also allowed «di osservare il carattere diffuso, non legato ad una dimensione esclusivamente *industriale* delle pratiche di design e di rintracciare esempi interessanti anche in aree territoriali che sembravano *a priori* toccate solo marginalmente dalla tematica del design» (Maffei & Simonelli, 2002, p. 5) [Authors' translation: «to observe the widespread character, not linked to an exclusively *industrial* dimension of design practices and to trace interesting examples even in territorial areas that seemed *a priori* to be only marginally touched by the theme of design» (Maffei & Simonelli, 2002, p. 5)].

A foundational research on what it means to do design in Italy, in a moment of great vivacity and enthusiasm of the young national design research community recently formed, which was consolidating in those years, but also an excellent opportunity for knowledge, comparison and exchange, the first step for understanding the peculiarities of the different territorial offices and the creation of a national network for the exchange of best practices and future collaborations in joint initiatives. In short, SDI research focuses on some distinctive points of

design in Italian territories, in addition to the need to consolidate the national network:

- the local dimension and declination of design;
- the value of the context, also from a social and relational point of view, in the processes of co-production of value;
- the openness to different forms of design, deriving from the local dimension [15](#).

At the end of the SDI research, the institutional path of building the Design System of Politecnico di Milano was also completed, with the establishment of the Faculty of Design (2001) and the INDACO Department (2002) alongside the POLI.design Consortium (1999) and the PhD in *Design* (established in 1990; from 2002, it will be part of the INDACO Department). A system that oversees and guarantees the relationships and connections between the world of education, business and culture in the Lombardy region.

The next step will be to expand the system of inter-university connections, which already started with the establishment of the national SDI Agency [65](#), the local SDI Agencies and the SDI review magazine [75](#).

The progressive transition from Design, to Design System, to Italian Design System can be said to have been concluded, at an academic and institutional as well as scientific level, with the establishment of the *Conference of Deans and Presidents of the Industrial Design Study Courses* (now CUID) and the birth of the University Association of Italian Design – AUDI (now SID), both in 2004 [25](#). In this climate, the first edition of the *Wd* in Morcone in 2001 was born, therefore, as an initiative of the territorial agency SDI I Napoli [85](#), also to continue – with different methods – that profitable meeting opportunity to which the SDI research, now concluded, had accustomed us. In fact, from the first edition, external teachers participated: Francesco Zurlo and Valeria Bucchetti for Politecnico di Milano, Vanni Pasca for the University of Palermo, Patrizia Ranzo for the Second University of Naples (now Vanvitelli University), in addition to teachers, designers and experts belonging to the

Note 1.

«Il caso emblematico è rappresentato dalle aree del Sud che hanno trovato nella capacità di riconfigurazione strategica della propria offerta economica complessiva, basata sulla valorizzazione di risorse turistiche, ambientali e agroalimentari, una chiave per sperimentare azioni di design quanto mai raffinate ed attuali, senza escludere tuttavia la possibilità di un confronto con tematiche dure quale per esempio il design di sistemi di comunicazione e trasporto» (G., Simonelli in Maffei & Simonelli, 2002, p. 6).

[Authors' translation: «the emblematic case is represented by the areas of the South that have found the ability to reconfigure their overall economic offer strategically, based on the valorization of tourist, environmental and agri-food resources, a key to experiment with extremely refined and current design actions, without excluding however the possibility of a comparison with difficult issues such as the design of communication and transport systems»].



6. Sistema Design Italia (SDI).

[Document →](#)



7. Dall'agenzia SDI alla rete SDI.

[Document →](#)

Note 2.

For further information, cf. Penati & Rebaglio, 2024, pp. 315-344.



8. Agenzie locali SDI I Sistema Design Italia.

[Document →](#)



9. Articolo del quotidiano IL MATTINO sul primo Wd a Morcone.

[Document →](#)

Note 3.

For the foundational research developed in those years, cf. Collina & Fassi, 2024, pp. 382-384.

10. *Mostra Me.design a Genova_ pannello di sintesi delle ricerche-azione territoriali.*
[Document →](#)



Note 4.

Cf. Bianchini & Villari, 2009, p. 108.

11. *Workshop Calabria Design.*
[Document →](#)



12. *Wd1_Seminario estivo di design dedicato al comparto ceramico.*
[Document →](#)



13. *Wd2_Seminario estivo di design applicato al settore agro-alimentare.*
[Document →](#)



14. *Wd3_Seminario estivo di design applicato ai Beni Culturali.*
[Document →](#)



15. *Wd4_Seminario estivo di design per la comunicazione e promozione dell'identità territoriale.*
[Document →](#)



16. *Wd5_Seminario estivo di design. Esporre loghi, luoghi, immagini, immaginari, materiali, tecniche.*
[Document →](#)



Neapolitan educational system (universities, academies and private design institutes), professional and institutional [9](#).

The geographical shift to a peripheral area of the now consolidated design system induced, on the one hand, a more excellent reflection and sensitivity towards the contextual, systemic and relational conditions of the place; on the other hand, it created the perfect conditions – a sort of space-time abstraction with the usual frenetic rhythms – for a discussion on the methodologies and objectives of the discipline.

A research-action method of design serving the needs of the territories was tested in the field, with the contribution of the scientific community that took turns in the various editions. It was a collective growth process for the workshop participants (students and young professionals), the staff of teachers, assistants, and experts who animated the evening discussions, and the community and the local partners involved (institutions and companies).

The experimental model of the *Wd* grows and evolves in parallel with national research [3](#) in a symbiotic process of exchange of knowledge and practices. The second and third editions take place in parallel with the national research *Me.design* (2001-2003, coordinated by prof. Giuliano Simonelli) [10](#) and the definition of *design methodologies for local development* [4](#), contributing significantly to the export of a model that will be used for the system of research workshops itself, where the *Morcone Wd3* will be joined by the experiences of *Calabria Design* [11](#), *Valdambra*, *Sanremo dei Fiori*, *Sant'Agata dei Goti*, *Riflettere Mantova* and *Workshop Ustica* (Villari, 2009, pp. 226-227).

With the last two editions of the *Wd* (2004 and 2005), we compare design, territory, and cultural heritage in parallel with the national research D.Cult. Design for the valorization of cultural heritage (2004-2006, coordinator prof. Benedetta Spadolini, with the support of Politecnico di Milano) [12](#) [13](#) [14](#) [15](#) [16](#).

8.3 The *Wd* Methodology

The *Wd* in Morcone was a place of experimentation and validation of project activities aimed at defining a new meaning of design for the territories that used action research [54](#) as an operational tool for local development. From this perspective, we could say that in Morcone, it happened: «la prima esperienza di progettazione territorialmente decentrata sui temi del design per i distretti, che ha definito un luogo-laboratorio reale di sperimentazione sul campo di contenuti e di formati, che sono stati via via poi perfezionati e trasferiti in mille sedi diverse» (Celaschi, 2006, p. 18) [Authors' : «the first experience of territorially decentralized design on the themes of design for districts, which defined a place-laboratory for field trials of contents and formats, which were then gradually perfected and transferred to a thousand different locations» (Celaschi, 2006, p. 18)].

This first experience carried up a *methodology in progress* which, in addition to field-testing a possible synthesis of research, education and training, tested the potential of a *participatory and shared design* capable of achieving bottom-up purposes through *empirical knowledge processes*. A knowledge for which the design process set up a forecasting device and activation tool in the contexts in which it acts.

In this framework, the speculative definition of an *on-site designer*, who works through an *adaptive design* to mediate the instances of contemporaneity with localisms interpreted by small companies or artisanal manufacturers, is born. These modes shape an inductive work: moving from concrete experiences to get a general definition. The *Wd* intended to develop a design research aimed at territorial development, envisaging the participation of a broad local network of institutions, companies, associations, and bodies flanked by students, tutors, researchers, teachers, designers, and planners. A design, therefore, functional to the growth of opportunities for local communities.

All these premises were translated into the hypothesis of a *design workshop*, defined as a melting point of interdisciplinary knowledge and skills and, therefore, capable of implementing the necessary integration between strategic, product-service, and communication models. This didactic training proposal has made it possible to examine the

Note 5.

Action research refers to a research practice aimed at producing transformations in the investigated context and, at the same time, setting in motion a process of awareness of these changes. This process makes explicit and finalised the engagement in the social environment in which it acts. This condition is typical of sociological, anthropological and educational investigations.

potential offered by so-called *concentrated training courses* in which the relationship between time and results must be controlled and qualified. Through this model, the design emerges as a concrete competitive factor for the material and immaterial capital of the territory. For these reasons, what took place in Morcone can be considered the first, and in some ways pioneering, project in Italy of a *localized design* by the figure of the *researcher-designer* who, following theoretical investigation, introduces the project as an explicit research activity, and then returns, updating it, to the original theoretical reflection, transferring the results obtained into new models.

Il focus di questa metodologia è l'azione, rivolta a una situazione concreta in cui la ricerca, come parte del processo, rappresenta uno sforzo consapevole mirato a generare nuova conoscenza. Una delle caratteristiche di questo approccio è la collaborazione, che favorisce la comprensione reciproca e la costruzione del consenso, che sono condizioni favorevoli per l'innovazione e il cambiamento. La ricerca-azione è un processo dinamico nel quale il ricercatore interviene come facilitatore, mediatore e *attivatore* di relazioni e allo stesso tempo portatore di competenze. (Simonelli & Vignati, 2003, p. 22) [Authors' translation: This methodology focuses on action, addressing a concrete situation where research, as part of the process, represents a conscious effort to generate new knowledge. One of the characteristics of this approach is collaboration, which fosters mutual understanding and consensus structures, which are favourable conditions for innovation and change. Action research is a dynamic process in which the researcher intervenes as a facilitator, mediator and *activator* of relationships and, at the same time, a bearer of expertise» (Simonelli & Vignati, 2003, p. 22)].

What we include in the definition of *action research* is then, first and foremost, a special theoretical-practical combination that, starting from the critical evaluation of the analyzed phenomena, proposes solutions shared by local actors and appropriate given the issues recognized on the ground. Identifying development opportunities for local communities through *action research* requires a prior understanding of local reality to lay the foundations for consensus actions with all

potential stakeholders. In other words, reading the *knowledge of the territories* requires the practice of dialogue and respect for diversity. These conditions experienced within the workshop built a *community of learning practices*. Such communities are based on relational values. These values play a decisive role in the effectiveness of action about the expected result. They also have the advantage of introducing the *human side of the experience*. This condition is essential to support research through the project. The workshop then becomes an interconnected set of physical and cognitive interactions supporting practical activities related to skills and knowledge.

This set of elements contributed to the formation of the *Wd* in Morcone schedule, whose actions are divided into:

A) knowledge and appropriation of territorial networks for the selection of case studies (listening to the territories):

- the network of governance;
- the network of category associations;
- the network of professional categories;
- the network of enterprises;
- the network of local manufactures (historical and new craftsmanship);
- the network of local cultural associations;
- the network of tangible and intangible cultural heritage.

B) Establishment of the scientific community (interdisciplinary expertise):

- university scientific network;
- scientific research network.

C) Design practices (workshops as incubators for new systemic proposals):

- two design laboratories with complementary classroom plans: product/service design (former Church of San Bernardino) and communication design (former Church of San Salvatore);
- project activities integrated with communications, seminars and round tables for in-depth professional development and research on specific topics supporting the laboratories [63](#).

D) Lab activities:

- visits and meetings with the community;

Note 6.

A widespread opinion among the participants of the *Wd* is that, among the fundamental places for the activities of dialogue and comparison with the territory, are to be included: the Bar Storico in the historic centre of Morcone, an essential stop to strengthen commitment and complicity between students and teachers, and the Di Fiore Farmhouse that hosted most of the participants, an environment that, especially during the evening dinner animated by the generosity of those who managed it, restored around the table the complete sense of a geographically complex community.

- context analysis and development of case study data;
- design briefs with the identification of several project scenarios;
- seminars to improve the project proposals in theoretical and practical terms;
- design concepts;
- representation and communication of results in a strategic manner.

Although not always predictable, the overall results of the *Wd* can be summarized in a few general points that constitute the whole meaning of that training and research experience conducted over twenty years ago. Mainly, the Morcone workshop certainly acted to:

- bring out unprecedented territorial knowledge;
- deepen original training questions addressed to students and teachers;
- realize innovative research models;
- contribute to the training of new researchers.

8.4 Geographies and Workshop Results: Connections, Networks and Numbers

Places play a decisive role in structuring this experience. Morcone is a small rural village, currently of around 4,500 inhabitants, which, following a destiny common to most inland areas, has seen its population halve in a century, reaching its peak of 9,578 a century ago in 1921.

Behind this collapse are macroeconomic reasons, which are difficult to interpret and reverse, and human and family histories of lack of prospects and immigration, common to many southern Italy regions.

The *Wd*, setting itself up as a systemic territorial laboratory, has tried to be the sensor of an emergency that first had to be understood in its data, trying to identify nuclei of resistance, around which, through a project culture, try to develop a community action.

In the preparatory stages, each year, through meetings with administrators, entrepreneurs and local actors, an attempt was made to focus on the territory and then to direct some of the emerging issues towards actions developed in the project workshops, finally trying to return micro-actions to the communities. Although the themes were





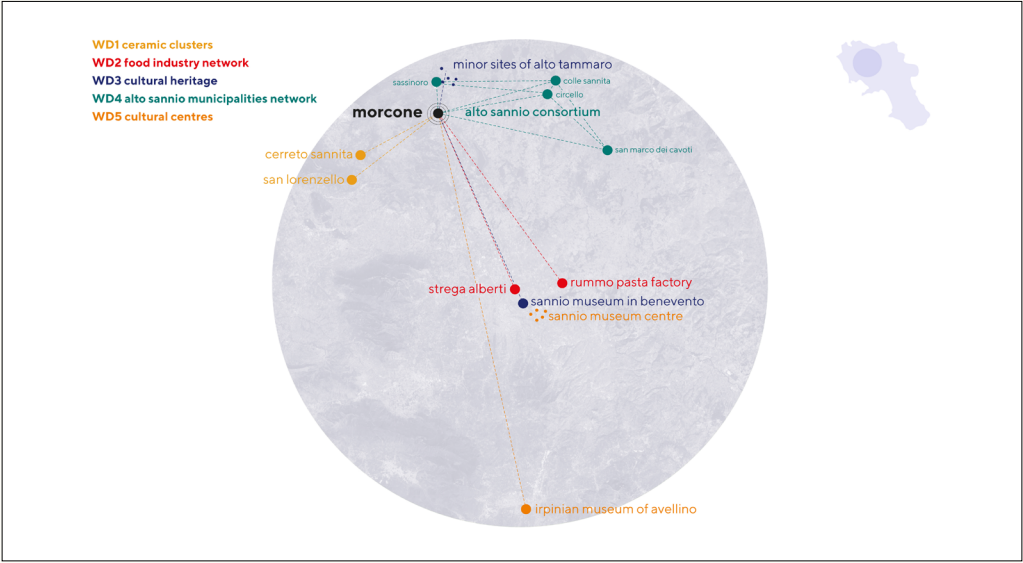
Figure 1.

A selection of images from the activities, curators, and participants of the 5 editions of the *Wd* (2001–2005). Among them: Venanzio Arquilla, Valeria Bucchetti, Flaviano Celaschi, Vincenzo Cristallo, Odo Fioravanti, Ermanno Guida, Francesco E. Guida, Stefano Maffei, Alfonso Morone, Marina Parente, Vanni Pasca, Giuliano Simonelli, Raffaella Trocchianesi, Beatrice Villari, Francesco Zurlo.

formally different in the various editions – craftsmanship, food production, cultural heritage, territorial promotion actions – the common binder was constant research on territorial identity.

However, alongside this superstructural and conceptual dimension of the territory with which the action-research mechanism was confronted, one must not overlook the more proper physical and experiential dimension. It is made up of places, such as the two deconsecrated churches in which the project workshops and seminars were set up, the exhibition spaces, the areas for performances and presentations in which the local community was involved, and the convivial spaces of the scattered agritourisms, in an effort of re-functionalisation and repopulation which itself represented a pilot experiment: a replicable model of integration between communities of different geographical, generational and cultural origins.

Figure 2.
Territorial actions.



The systemic dimension of the *Wd* also finds its clear exemplification in the data of the participants. In the five editions held from 2001 to 2005, a total of 215 students were involved, with a provenance that, in its variety, covered almost all Italian universities and a good part of the private para-university schools active in those years.

In terms of didactic organisation, each edition featured two project laboratories located in two different locations in the historic centre of Morcone. Each lab was under a supervisor's direction, with an average

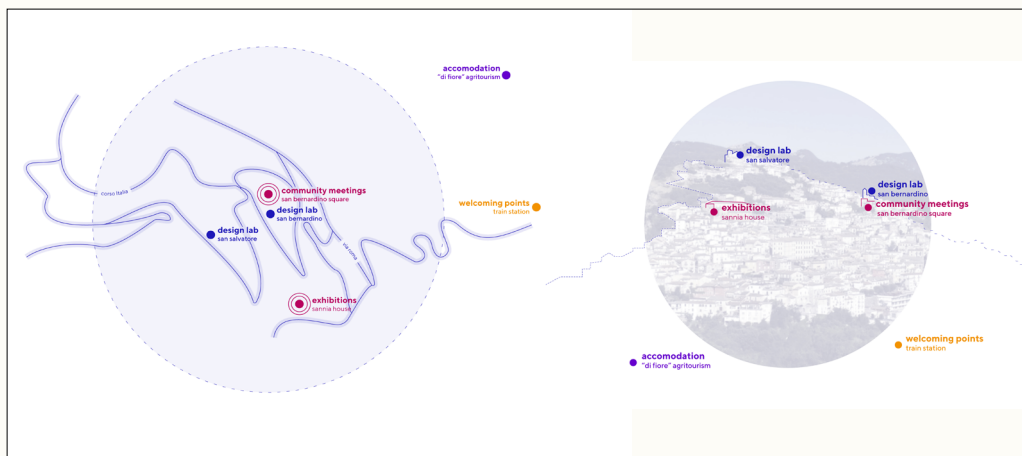


Figure 3.
Maps.

of five tutors for each workshop. To highlight the direct involvement of Politecnico di Milano in the didactic organisation, it is worth noting that out of five editions, three had Politecnico di Milano lecturers and researchers as heads of both laboratories, with a clear prevalence also in the presence of tutors.

The external lecturers and speakers at the seminars and meetings numbered 205 in the various editions. These were professionals, administrators, experts, and researchers selected yearly for their specific skills.

Beyond the numbers, the *Wd* constituted a sort of kick-off event in those years, immediately preceding the end of the summer break, which represented a sort of ritual for many.

Vanni Pasca never missed an edition, so much so that he earned his special room, always the same, in the *agriturismo* where most of the participants were hosted. Alberto Seassaro himself, together with Flaviano Celaschi, Valeria Bucchetti, Beatrice Villari, Venanzio Arquilla, Stefano Maffei and Francesco Zurlo, formed a group that was constantly involved in the subsequent dissemination of the results, as evidenced by many essays.

Many young researchers at the time found in the *Wd Workshop Design* in Morcone a moment of acceleration and integration that cemented a generational group, initiating customs and knowledge that still remain valid and strong today in integration between the human

17. *Wd_Workshop
design. Selezione al XX
Compasso d'oro ADI.*
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and professional dimensions, remaining as one of the strongest legacies of that experience. *Wd's* inclusive and collective character was widely recognised, so much so that it was in-

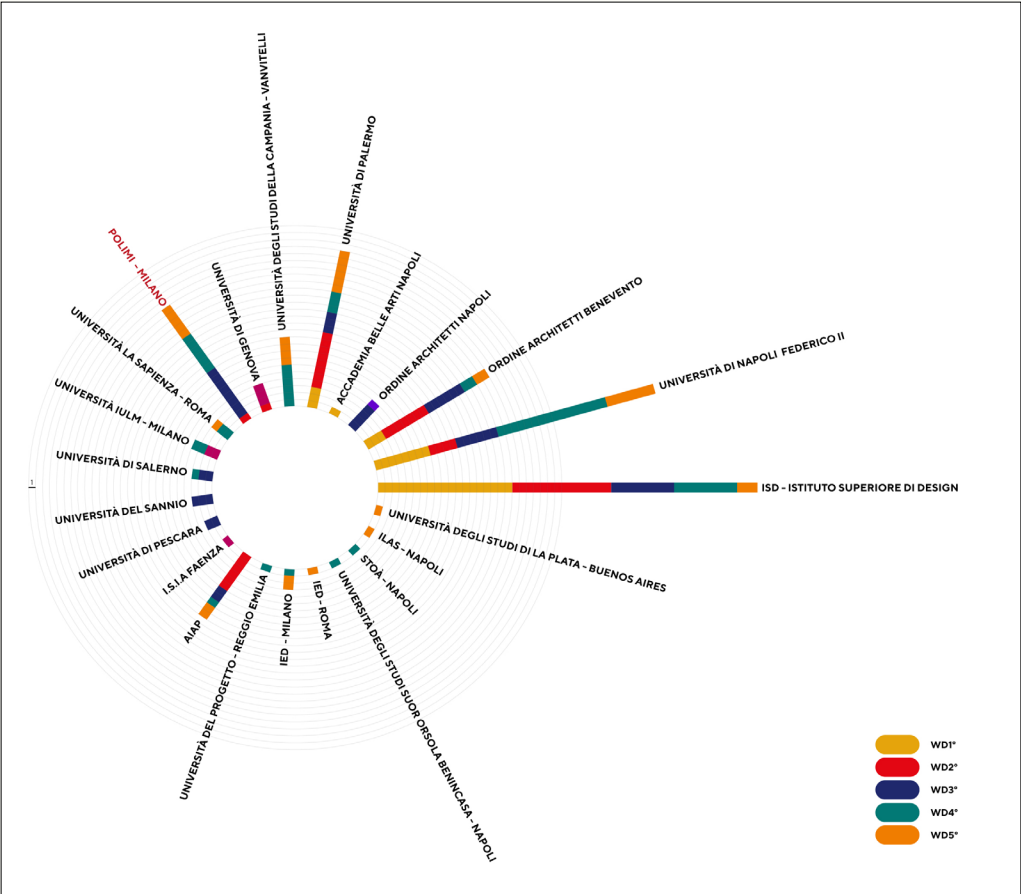


Figure 4.
Students' provenance.

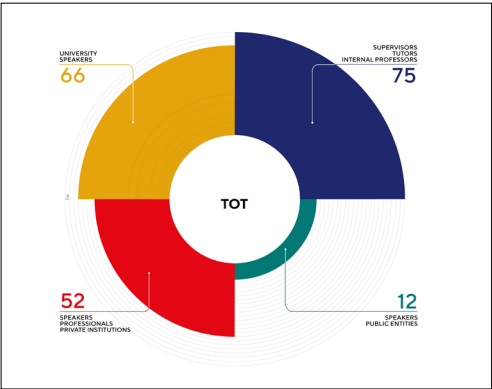


Figure 5.
Subjects involved.

cluded among the activities selected for the 20th *ADI Compasso d'Oro* Award 2004, section of Theoretical Research and Design Studies [17](#).

8.5 Conclusions

18. *Wd. Workshop design_2001.*
[Document →](#)



19. *Wd. Workshop design_2002.*
[Document →](#)



20. *Wd. Workshop design_2004.*
[Document →](#)



The *Wd* provided the first concrete case of an integrated research activity linked to the territories, a first example of *action research* balanced between theoretical elaborations and design process [18](#) [19](#) [20](#). So, what have we learned in these five editions? We have realized that it is necessary to:

- *involve public and private territorial stakeholders*, essential to fully understand the dynamics of local development (principles of sharing);
- *promote collaborative actions* to foster mutual understanding and consensus building. Working closely with the local community in its various forms and resources is a prerequisite for innovation processes and local changes (principles of correlation);
- *encourage collective projects* to generate *project communities* that overcome the condition of authorship as the only response to local development issues. The community, therefore, becomes the instrument and recipient of the project through an interdisciplinary and strategic orientation. Not only individual proposals but collective responses (principles of collegiality);
- *support appropriate actions*, that is, project proposals must arise from local knowledge, grasping *in situ* the requests posed by the local production system (principles of adaptation);
- *facilitate localized actions*, which is equivalent to promoting a *concentrated* dimension of work by a scientific community that *settles* temporarily in the territory for knowledge acquired in the field (principles of settlement);
- *explore training practices* through the osmosis of the actors' skills involved in the laboratory, specifying the points of the relationship, the professional specificities, and the potential derived from their role.

Suppose we wanted, in conclusion, to rely on a keyword capable of encapsulating Morcone's experience. In that case, it is not difficult to

identify the term *relationship* (Celaschi, 2006), an irreplaceable ingredient contained in the values dictated by the awareness of the roles of *space* (the places of activity distributed in several locations), of *time* (the time of interpersonal relations between all those who cross), of the *body* (nourished within a synaesthetic model of actions), of the *soul* (the empathy between people, places and what is not usually easy to classify).

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