

# MIAAW

2010

## Re-appropriation

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# **MIAAW**

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workshop

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milano

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## **Milano Architectural International Workshop (MIAW) 2010**

is an initiative promoted by a multidisciplinary group of colleagues working in the Master of Science programs in Architecture and Urban Planning at the School of Architecture and Society of Politecnico di Milano that involves its students and a number of international guest tutors.

The focus of **MIAW** is the city of Milano.

The idea for 2010 edition was to develop design explorations along the definition of the key word 're-appropriation'.

Policy makers, architects and artists have more and more to deal with unexpected uses, raising demands for the use of spatial resources different from the one resulting from institutional planning rules or consolidated traditions and power assets. From the variety of spaces and situations, MIAW illustrated possible scenarios capable to revitalize these dormant places. The MIAW outcomes display different possibilities and contexts as well as a variety of design solutions, interventions, languages and expressive tools.

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# Concept

The first Milano International Architectural Workshop was held at the School of Architecture and Society of Politecnico di Milano in from September 27th to October 2nd 2010. The initiative has been jointly promoted by a multidisciplinary group of colleagues involved in the Master of Science programs in Architecture and Urban Planning with the aim of marking the start of the academic year with an initiative which could exploit the potentials of a School which covers a broad range of design fields and has significantly invested in attracting an international crowd of international students. The intention, in face of the current constraints affecting the university, was to develop this international dimension, involving a selected group of innovative and qualified foreign colleagues as guest professors. They have worked as a sort of temporary Faculty staff with different competences and specializations, creating the chance for students belonging to different educational programs to work together for a time in eight different workshops in groups of fifteen students each.

The concept in the launching of MIAW is to keep a focus on the city of Milano and to develop design explorations along the definition of a key word, to be identified and changed every year, and along a wish of working on the coupling of people and places. For the 2010 edition, the proposed key word was 're-appropriation'. Every year the group of promoters will change, allowing to a large number and to a variety of different profiles of colleagues to be involved, witnessing the plurality of competences and backgrounds that characterize our school.

A key note lecture by Andrea Branzi and a contribution by the Dean of the School, Pier Carlo Palermo, opened the first edition of MIAW, while the final outcomes of the workshops were displayed in the exhibition hall of the School for the week following the workshop.

# Theme

The theme selected for the first edition of MIAW workshops was “re-appropriation”. It has been interpreted as the set of physical and cultural processes by which a group reclaims - re-appropriates – terms, artifacts or public spaces that were previously used in a way disparaging of that group. The term re-appropriation can also extend to counter hegemonic re-purposing, such as citizens with no formal authority seizing unused public or private land for community use. And in this sense, we may consider the term re-appropriation as an extension of the term appropriation: a deliberate act of acquisition of something, often without the permission of the owner.

Architects, artists and policy makers have more and more to deal with the unexpected uses, raising questions and demands for the use of spatial resources in our cities different from the one resulting from formal and institutional planning rules or consolidated traditions and power assets. In a post-industrial city, such as Milano, we may observe controversial and contradictory processes in which new urban development turns appealing zones into marginal areas and vice versa, intensive and dominant functions are reducing the possibility of multiple and various uses of public spaces and spatial resources.

A prosperous and attractive place at a certain point may start to lose glamour, to get shabby and being forgotten; old factories have been swallowed by the city in its impetuous development; squares and promenades turned into places exclusively occupied by cars while other public places, in the city core or outside the city, not even found other values simply becoming forgotten spaces, *terrains vagues*.

The urban and metropolitan landscape is no longer defined as “secure and stable place of contemplation, but presents itself as a mobile device and is continually altered”. (Gravani, 2008, p. 9). Looking at our cities it is

possible to see weak but constant upheavals that tend to make explicit and visible some forms of resistance and action. Among such practices we can identify a cultural and historical model in the initial appropriation of public spaces developed by the Parisian flâneur and his walks through the labyrinthine passages, which had converted the streets into *intérieur*, or in the Situationist International drifts which used maps and topography of the transitional spaces, not just to “fix” the territory, but to radically change it, grounding the design process of architecture and city planning on the subjective perceptual experience. In the contemporary age, the city is increasingly seen as an experiential field (Scotini, 2003). These processes have become more mature and culturally aware, and sensitive as well as to read, interpret and implement the system of opportunities offered by the urban context.

While meta-design actions aim at the recognition of the value and potential of public spaces, through a descriptive approach (Dematteis, 1995) in reading, decoding and contextually providing new opportunities, more formal planning actions aim at activating these spaces. In this sense, dismissed space and abandoned places, neglected areas and brownfields, which use to be “swamped places” out of the official maps, become the paradigmatic examples of urban spaces which can regain with new meaning, value and shape; offering significant opportunities for creative re-signification and re-appropriation of the city. These occupation, re-appropriation and activation actions often tend to draw in the urban fabric a “minor geography” capable of giving visibility and responses to the needs and forgotten desires of an “insurgent” city (Scotini, 2003).

## Bibliography

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- Gravani V. (2008), *Paesaggi attivi. Saggio contro la contemplazione*, Costa&Nolan, Milano.
- Scotini M. (ed. by) (2003), *Networking city. Pratiche artistiche e trasformazione urbana*, Maschietto editore, Firenze.

# Outcomes

Participants to the MIAW workshop were invited to identify spaces in Milan that either have an unexpressed potentiality either lost their characteristics and importance for the community and have been, for several reasons, marginalized and excluded from everyday life. From the variety of spaces and situations inside the Politecnico di Milano campus to the large areas on the city margin, from the closest site of Piazza Leonardo da Vinci to the Milanese hinterland, the Workshop wished to illustrate possible scenarios of re-appropriation capable to revitalize these dormant places. In a 21st Century that is overwhelmed by image, information and dynamism, it is particularly important for architects and policy makers to recognize and assume the special role of a creative recovery of forgotten spaces and to make sense of places in a densely urbanized city. The outcomes of the eight workshops display a variety of situations and contexts as well as a variety of design solutions, interventions, languages and expressive tools. Some of the workshops produced visions and urban scenarios, some others set up projects and strategies; some others developed in the form of concrete actions aiming at materially setting a new different use of some places. In particular, two workshops realized within the School Campus installations that are still to be observed and which involved students not only in analysis and designing activities but also in the materiality of a construction process. Beside the proposals and projects that have been displayed as outcomes of the work, relevant results that the promoters as well as the students have detected and appreciated are very much related to the intensity of such a program. The academic calendar and the organization of curricular courses develop along a whole semester and definitely rely on a longer term for an incremental development of the learning process through accurate research, understanding and development of design proposals. At the contrary, an intensive workshop exploits the advantages which result from a narrow deadline in terms of the concentration of working activities and full involvement, and of the group dynamics that develop in a group of previously unknown people which are targeting and sharing a common objective. While this is definitely a competence that is highly required in the practice of many positions in working life, we are glad to leave the floor to the group of colleagues and to the students who will animate the 2011 MIAW edition.





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