

DESIGN AS A
MEDIATING
INSTRUMENT

RECLAIMING MULTIPLE IDENTITIES IN
FIERA-TREVISO BY AN ACTOR-ORIENTED
APPROACH

WENWEN SUN

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GRADUATION THESIS PLAN
URBANISM

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01/2015

Introduction: Draw simple, think complex On Postmodernism, Postfordism, and actors

Urban design, involved at the end of 1960s is regarded as a by-product of Postmodernism and to be a critique for the modernist architecture and urban planning, the functionalism and the international style. The largely centered zoning and the mega structure generate from mass production and industrialization in modern society. However, due to the structural changes of economy in postmodern era, from mass production for a mass society to flexible production for a fragmented society, new interests in the built environment have been brought to the stage. (Harvey 1990)

The main focuses of architecture and urban planning since then, had switched from producing good and functional forms to drawing inspirations from the mass culture, the social context, the local and the past. (Kumar 1995) It draws new attention to the unique local characters and the quality of urban space and urban life. The role of urban design therefore deserves a rethinking or a new way of being considered by professionals nowadays.

People of different backgrounds have different concerns and perceptions toward the physical urban environment, thus have different images of cities. These images create diversity in urban spaces and multiple faces of a city. This diversity is then interpreted in building the urban environment with multiple identities. When we talk about 'identities' of a city in urban design, we more or less refer to place identities which are diverse because of the diversity public realms possess. When we talk about people, we are referring to clients or agents including both public and private sectors who are also users of urban spaces. When we talk about urban design, we talk about the making of public realm in which diverse needs of diverse users need to be considered. This is truly similar to the policy making which is a process full of interactions between interdependent actors cooperating and exchanging information. (Kickert 1997)

However, the common gap between professionals and ordinary people is inevitable. This had already been understood since the rise of Postmodernism against Modernist architecture and planning. Ordinary people who don't have any knowledge about urban design or architecture also have their own images about urban spaces and their own ways of understanding and using public realms. Sometimes if these images and understandings are not in consistent with the designer's ideas, the gap occurs and may lead to wrong conditions. Urban space is complex, so is urban design process.

Therefore, to propose more cohesive ideas, we need to try our best to fill this gap by taking different actors and their wishes into account. Urban designers should be able to communicate with non-professionals by using tools of visualization and interpretation in a simple while understandable way. But the thinking behind their drawings is actually complex. They need to manipulate the complex structure with multiple meanings, multiple perspectives by taking in to account the collective decisions of different communities and make it deliverable for the simple daily usage. The end products should be as straightforward as images, simultaneously as meaningful as stories within a collective decision-making platform.

Treviso is a mid-size secondary European city in Veneto region located in North Italy. (figure 0.1) It is the capital city of Treviso province where industrialization researches a high level ranking the 2nd in Italy. The strategic position of TV in terms of economy in the region makes it a prototype of Post-fordism economy. (figure 0.2) During the 1970s and 1980s, there was a phenomenon called la Terza Italia, the Third Italy which was, by contrast, a dynamic area of small firms and workshops in the center and north-eastern regions of Italy. (Kumar 1995, 37) In economy, the effective units of production and regulation, flexible specialization and decentralization of production replaced mass marketing and mass production. In cultural and ideology, fragmentation and pluralism were values and life-styles, post-modernist eclecticism and populist approached to culture.

Veneto province is a representative of the 3rd Italy. In this regions, small workshops and factories with no more than 5-50 workers, often less than 10, constitute the core thriving 'industrial districts'. Each region specialized in a range of loosely related products. (Kumar 1995, 38) The main products are shoes (clothes), ceramics, plastic furniture, coffee machines, etc. (figure 0.3)

As Brusco addresses, the productive decentralization and social integration are the two main features of Post-fordist economy. (Brusco 1982) Most of the workshops and factories are 'high-technology cottage industries and the products are sophisticated and design-conscious, penetrating international and national markets. (Kumar 1995, 38) A dense system of subcontracting lies at the heart of the local economy. The 'rich and complex relationship' (Brusco 1989: 261) between clients and subcontractors indicates the special social relations within the networks. Collaborations also go further to the sharing of resources and the costs of expensive equipment. The resources were pooled to set up for the collective provision of marketing, accounting and technical services. (1995, 39)

These features also co-respond to the 'creative economy' and its associated characteristic. This type of new economy was constructed on the basis of new technology and large-scale public media since 1980s. Technological and organizational innovation enables new relationships with customers and the public that are not reliant on 'mass-production' models. (Cunningham 2002) (figure 0.4)

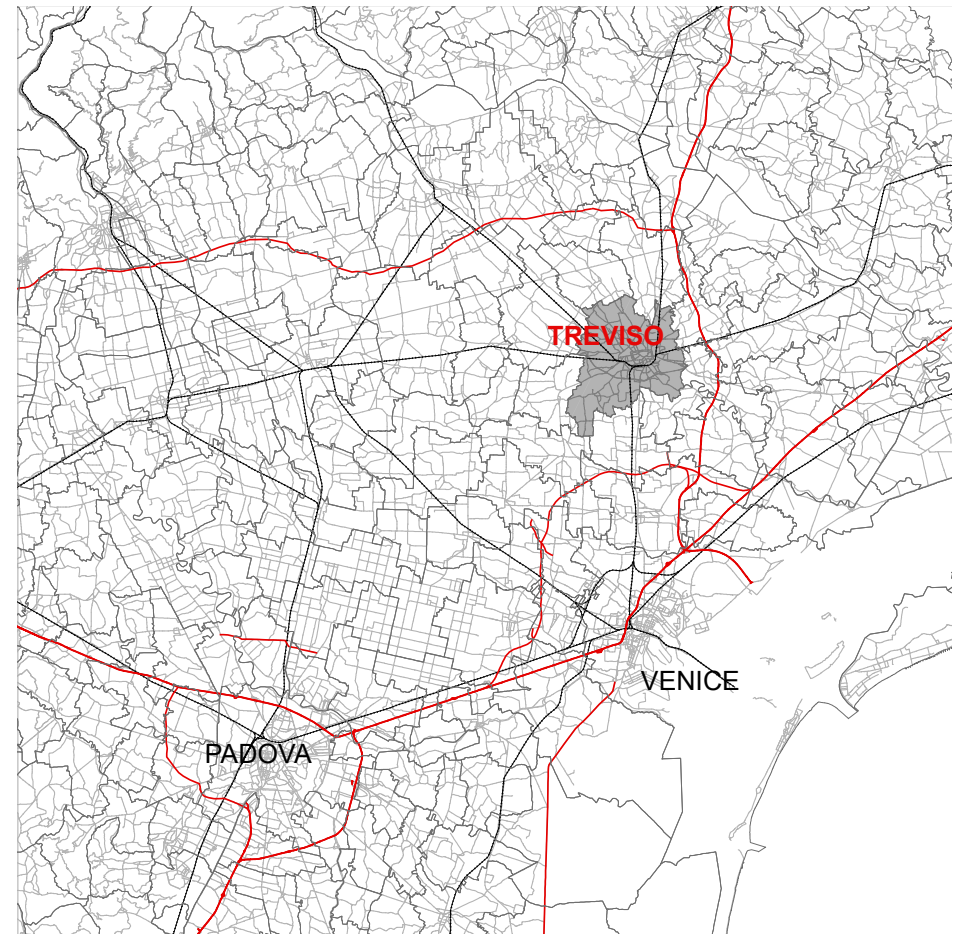


Figure 0.1: Treviso in Veneto region. Source: TV2020 smart city lab workshop Venice, 2014

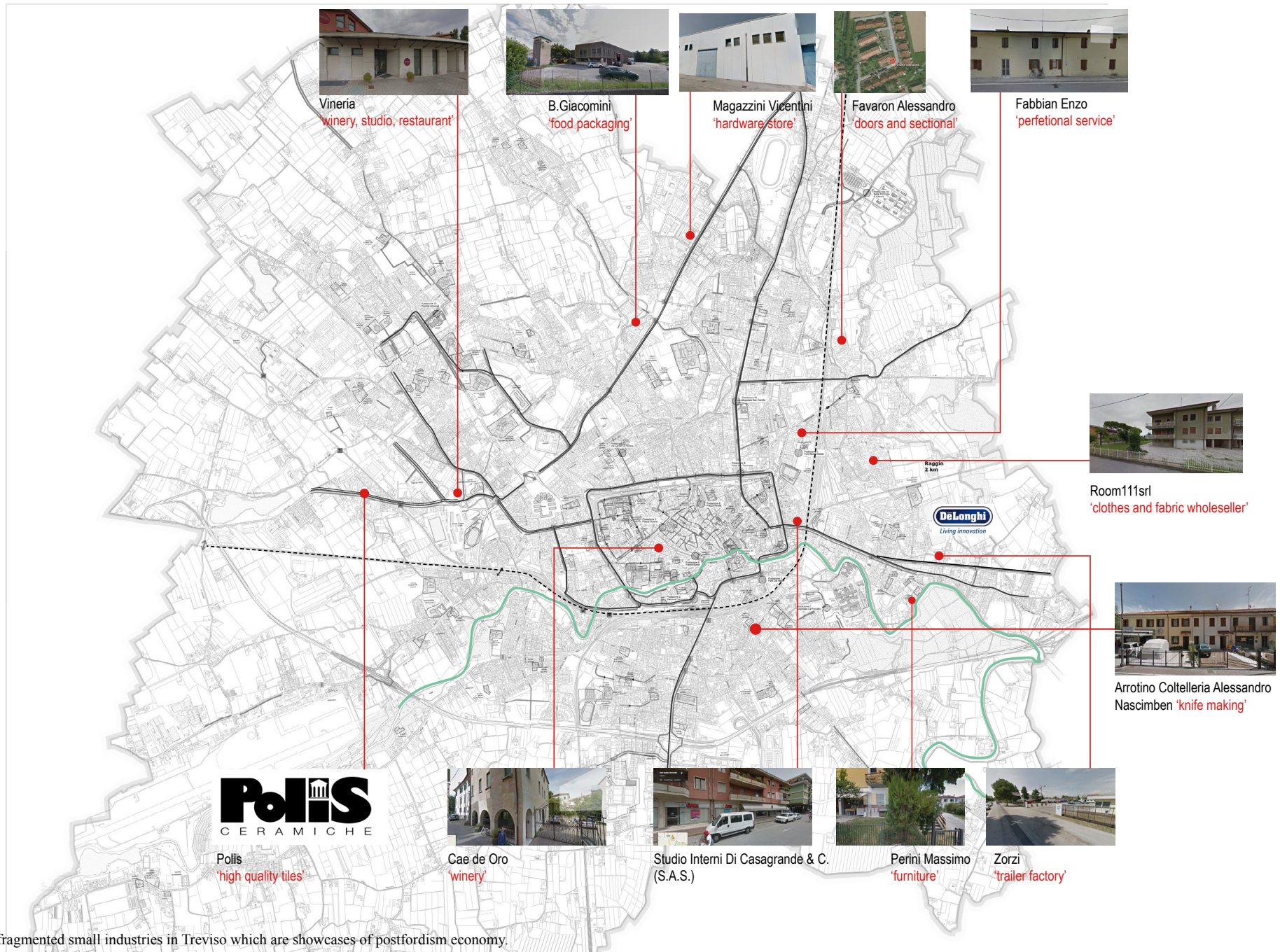


Figure 0.2: The fragmented small industries in Treviso which are showcases of postfordism economy.

To conclude, Treviso is a very suitable case for this 'complex thinking' of urban design and this 'multi-actor' approach because the fragmented, inter-related networks present a collective structure with a variety of collective business trying to reach the creative economy as an ongoing issue. There are many types of actors involved, namely agents, clients, users, contractors and workers.

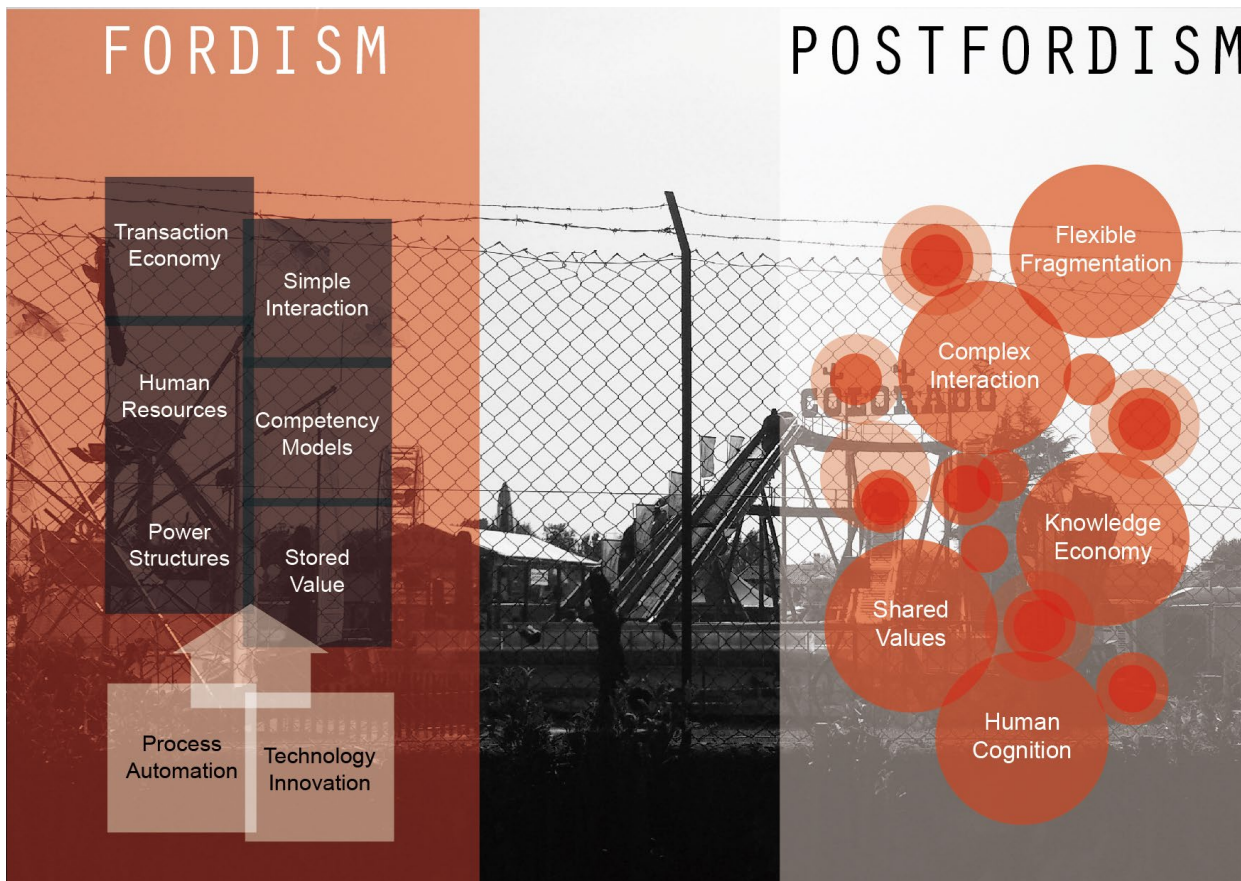


Figure 0.3: the contrast between Fordism and Postfordism economy model

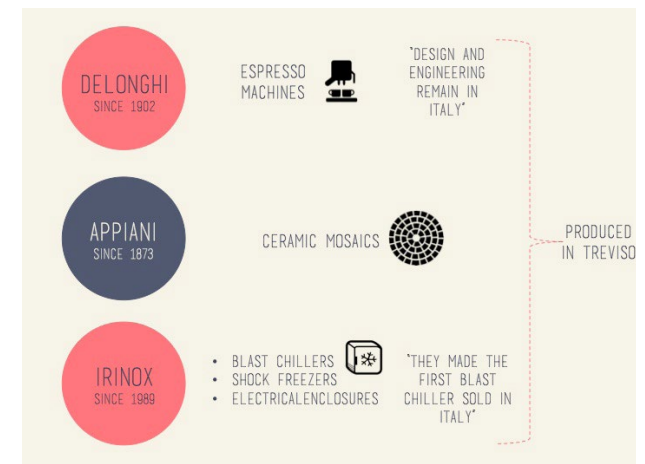


Figure 0.4: Main products in Treviso. Source: TV2020 smart city lab workshop Venice, 2014

1-Problem Statement

Some cities' common grounds have been appropriated by ordinary people in the time of urban growth. The public space is occupied for their individual and/or shared interests. It is a result of a rapid and compact urban growth in which publicly-owned space cannot always be traditionally governed by the public government.

The site called Fiera is a branch of urban sprawl, an extending area on the west of the old city which is enclosed by nature preserved landscape and agriculture land. (figure 1.1) Not like the old downtown of Treviso, the main identities could hardly be perceived in this area. First of all, the urban fabric of this area is different from the traditional one which Treviso has. It is very ordinarily built like many other suburban areas with mainly dwellings and big shopping malls. The street scale is bigger and the density is lower comparing with the old downtown of Treviso. The big area of industry and unoccupied land make you barely see the lively street life. Secondly, the historic site, big square in the South part with the name 'Fiera' which means exhibition in English is originally used for big event in history. However, as there aren't so many outdoor events happening nowadays, Fiera becomes a huge parking lot most of the time. This way of usage can neither benefit the public interests nor contribute to the local character and culture.

Even though at the moment, the area is somehow problematic, it promotes opportunities for new developments as well. The old Fiera site needs new strategies and plans to create a contrast from the other Fiera in Padova and to serve local residents with shared identities. The DeLonghi factory which is stranded searching for new interventions. Also, the river on the south boundary is an important ingredient for the pocket of spatial qualities in this area, but it requires better accessibility and more connections with public spaces to achieve that. The Fiera case indeed corresponds to the multi-actor situation in terms its problems as well as opportunities.

There has been an important loss of the shared knowledge that once let people build human environment in this area. It is hard to perceive from the spacial quality the translation of behavioral, collaborative theories into decisive, sustainable planning practices. This phenomenon thus evoked reconsiderations of different levels of urban spaces.

No doubt that the primary discipline of urban planning is dealing with these collective networks with different actors involved. This multiple relational networks should be incorporated when urban designers are trying to shape and frame a place.

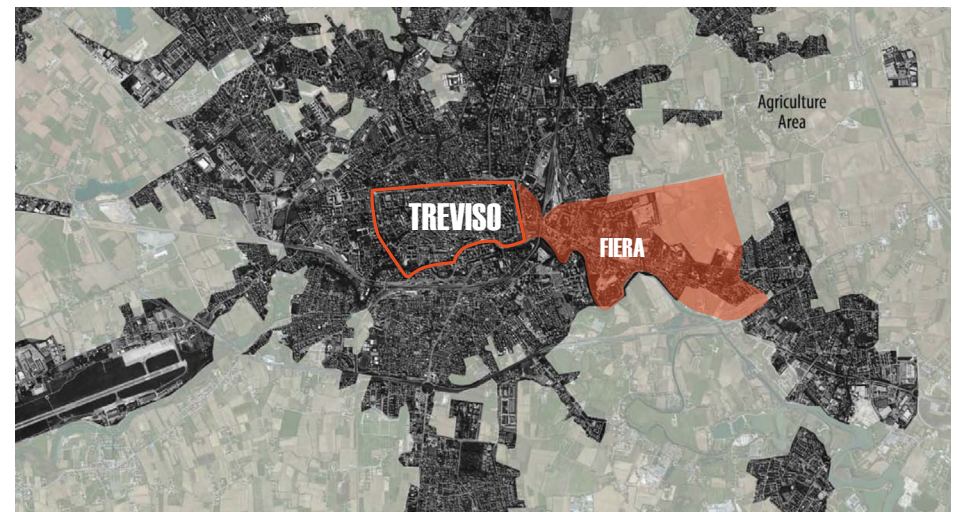


Figure 1.1: project location-Fiera area out of Treviso old city

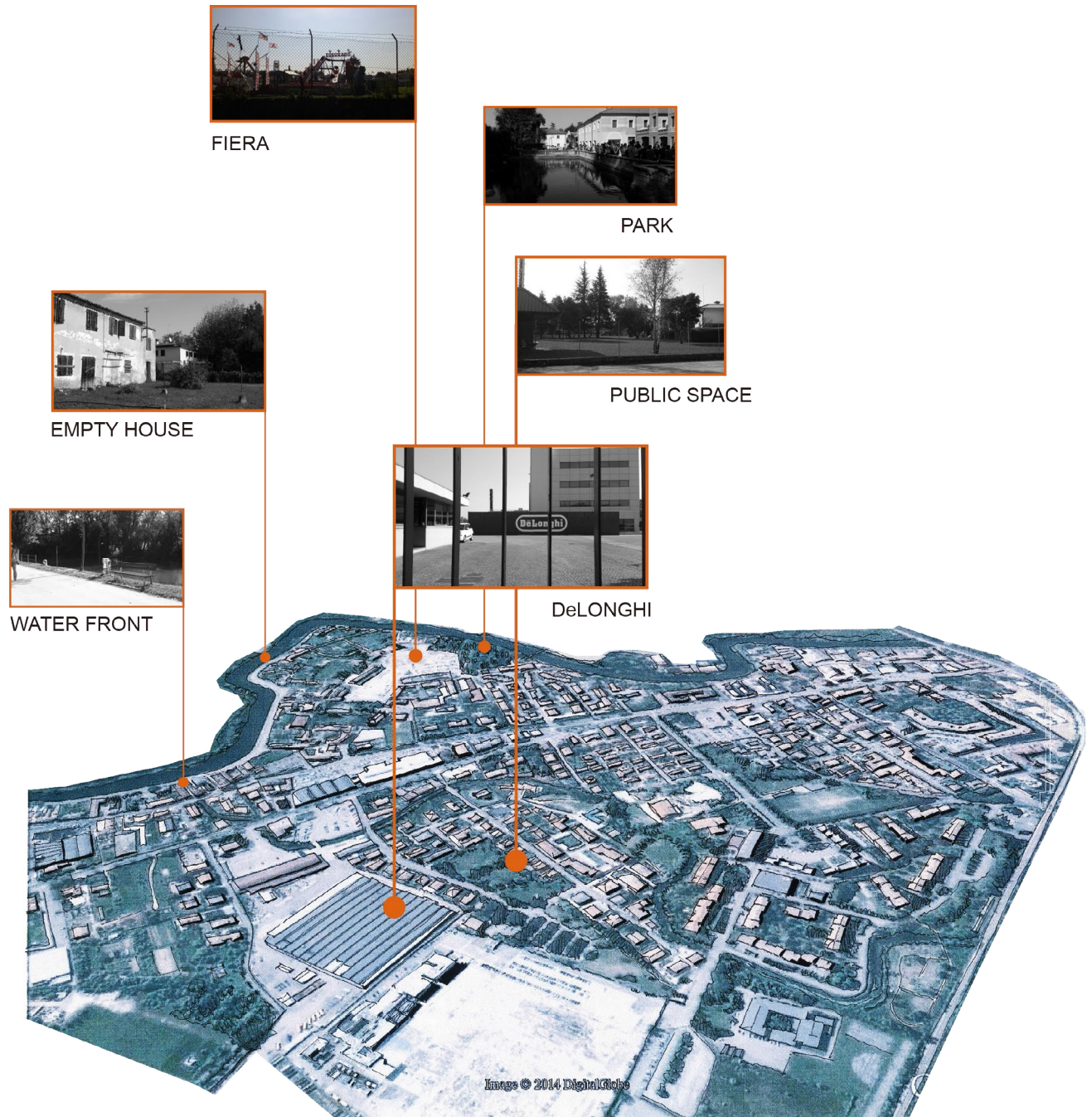


Figure 1.2: Spatial qualities of Fiera area, base on site observation

2-Research Motivation

As a matter of fact that the existing complexity in the urban structure and the social networks is clearly perceived in today's cities, the public interests are becoming more involved than ever before and urban designers are more engaged in people's daily life when trying to moderate different aims of agents in their design processes. Public interests therefore are of great values for urban design which enrich the experience of urban designers and broaden their views on complexity. This also provides more possibilities for building up effective and sustainable human environment.

This research and design project is aiming at filling the gap between non-professionals (ordinary people) and 'pro designer' (urbanists, architects) by an actor-oriented approach. It will be developed based on the following hypothesis: if a design solution could correspond to local conditions and make a balanced group dynamics of different actors, it will not only allow each social group to claim its own identity from a set of places, but also will evolve to make people's life better.

3-Research Question

A deep research on the integrating multiple actors and the built environment in the complex urban networks will be elaborated both theoretically and empirically. Therefore, the following questions are addressed to guide the extended research process and the finding of design solutions.

Main research question:

'How can actor-oriented urban design approach be elaborated in Fiera area to reclaim multiple identities?'

Sub-questions:

-How is 'identity' concerned in urban design?

-What are the shared identities of this area?

-Who are the leading 'actors' in Fiera and how do they appropriate the common ground? How their life stories are interpreted in Fiera?

-How can urban design process act as a mediating instrument to improve different actors' daily lives?

-How could design be framed to enhance a 'creative economy platform'?

4-Theoretical Framework

To set a specific view on the multiplicity in urban space, I pay the very attention on 'complex theory' and try to back up a system-thinking about old forms and social aspect. But at the same time, I pick up those studies that are relevant to my objects in urban study to avoid generosity in theories. For instance, Alexander's a city is not a tree is very stunning example which allows me to make an decisive progress in understanding the complex nature in urban forms, the ambiguity and tension in the physical and social networks. Then I do realise that the primary emergence of urban design is thus coordinating decisions and choices of multiple agents in the collective networks that are complex. This cognition contributes to the next step to the studies about actor and applying the multi-actor approaches in urban design process later on.

As is mentioned before, urban design is regarded as a phenomenon of Postmodernism. It comes along with the complex theory study in architecture and urban planning since 1960s. Therefore it is natural to set the background on the postmodern context and make development out of it. All in all, the theoretical framework is articulated in a way to address different schools which have been somehow related yet merged. (figure 4.1)

The main theories adopted are as follows:

1. Multi-actor approach: managing complex networks, actor-relational approach(2009), collective intelligence of urban design: Salingaros (2004)
2. Postmodernism design theories including Robert Venturi's 'both-and' approach (1966), Charles Jencks 'multiple coding' (1977)
3. Complex theories: Allen(1970s), Gershenson(2008)
Complexity theory in cities: Alexander 'semi-lattice'(1966)

Mediating Complexity A Multi-actor Approach for Urban Design

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January 9th 2015

Paper abstract – Began at the end of 1960s, urban design, or the making of public realm is concerned as a phenomenon of Postmodernism. It is used by Postmodernists to critic the architecture and urban planning based on the idea of modernity. Postmodernists treat the city as a stage and see the space differently as something autonomous. Later on in 1970s, complex theory was for the first time adopt in the field of urban study because complexity is discovered in time by academics the very nature of a naturally grown city geared to the postmodern ideologies and culture. A city is complex, in terms of structure, environment as well as social networks with diverse types of people involved and these people are actors performing on the big stage of a city. The primary emergence of urban design is thus coordinating decisions and choices of multiple agents in the collective networks that are complex. The main question raised in this paper is 'what should be the way that urban design interprets itself in this complex system of a city', and this question is answered in the conclusion after the discussion towards a variety of academic and empirical studies. This study aims to explore a proper way of positioning urban design in the complex urban system from multiple perspectives and to find a solution for designers to incorporate multiple actors in different levels of the society. This multi-actor approach addresses three levels of disciplines for urban design, namely individual principle, collective intelligence and network thinking. The nature of complexity of urban networks should be incorporated when urban designers are trying to shape and frame spaces with shared knowledge of a variety of actors.

Key words – urban design; postmodernism; complexity; multi-actor

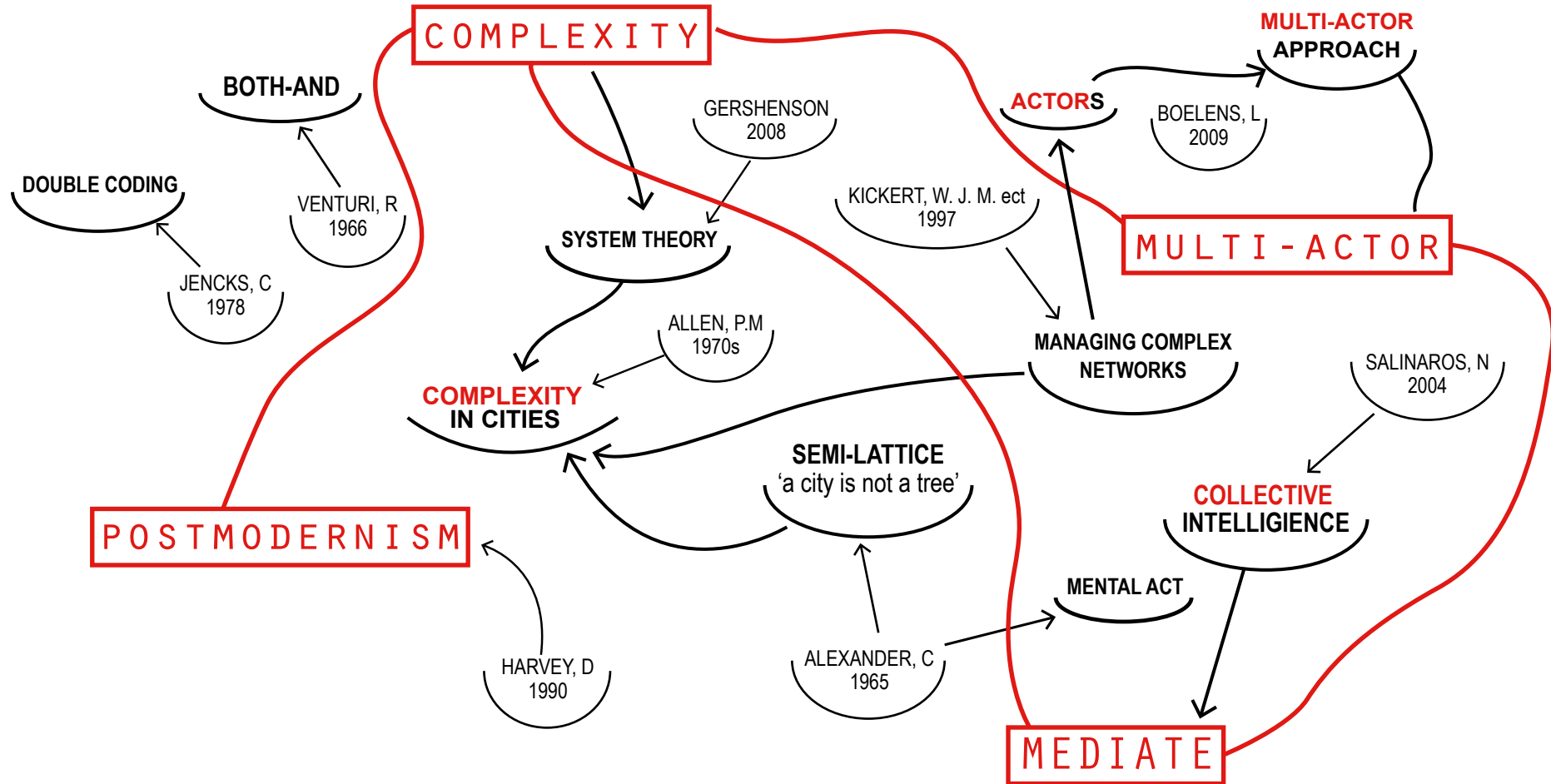


Figure 4.1: Theoretical framework

5-Relevance

5.1 Societal Relevance

There's a huge demand of better public service and higher life quality by different social groups in our cities. The public interests are of great values which arouse great attentions in the civic society because more and more people care about the public realms and want to build their own environment. It becomes more evident that urban design is closely related to daily lives in today's society especially in term of public realm design. (figure 5.1) Today some of the most transformative changes in cities are happening in public spaces. (Burden 2014) A successful design always depends on the very individual experience. (figure 5.2) It can even be found in some media like films which are about the tension between keep and rewind in urban transformation processes. (figure 5.3) It indicates the fact that participation and inclusive urbanization are drawing world's attention. This research and design project is aiming at solving real problems faced in practice. It is therefore relevant to the real on-going issues in building environment.

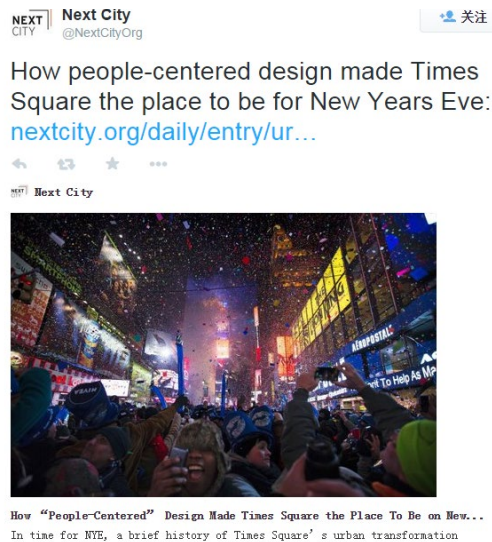


Figure 5.1: Next City on Twitter @NextCityOrg 'How people centred design made Times Square the place to be for New Years Eve. Source: <http://t.co/wuL2HoGD1p>

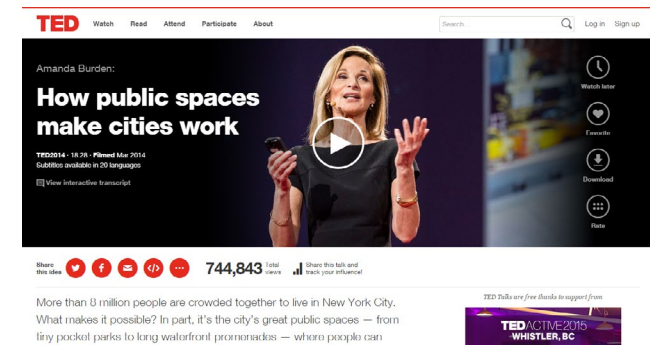


Figure 5.2: Amanda Burden: How public spaces make cities work. @TED2014 Source: http://www.ted.com/talks/amanda_burden_how_public_spaces_make_cities_work?language=en#t-385822



Figure 5.3: Movie: Be kind rewind (2008). Source: <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0799934/>

5.2 Scientific Relevance

This research and design project is trans-disciplinary which contributes to two fields of studies. One is the complex system study in cities which has been developed since 1970s when the postmodernism theory was developed in architecture and urban planning. It thus has relations with the postmodernist mentality, the values and culture, also concerns the complex nature of cities as a very emergence which should be incorporated in urban design thinking and practice. The other contribution of this project is putting the multi-actor approach once adopt in the policy networks into practice by a real urban design project which consists of complex networks of actors because of the economic units. Besides, it links the two fields of studies together and translates the abstract theories into concrete physical interventions. It allows an empirical approach to deal with public interests by a design thinking which is visible and perceptual.

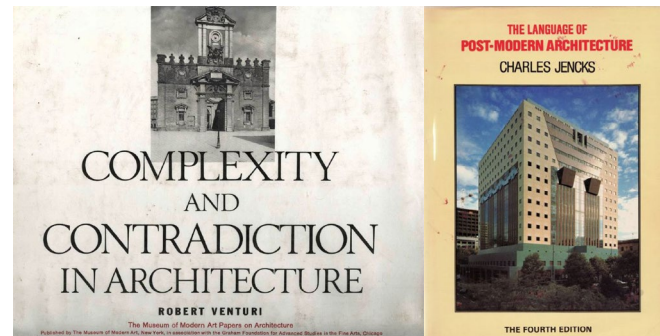


Figure 5.4: Venturi (1966) and Jencks(1977),Postmodernism in architecture

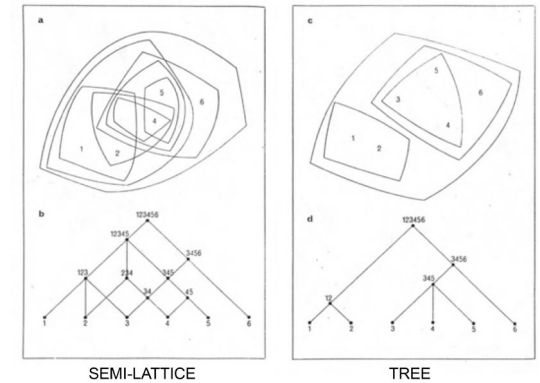


Figure 5.5: Semi-lattice vs, tree by Alexander (1965) He argues that a naturally grown city forms the 'semi-lattice' structure with the future of complexity. Source: <http://contentsmagazine.com/>

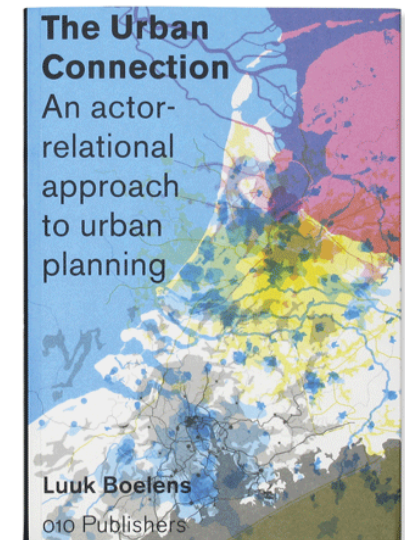


Figure 5.6: BOELENS, L. 2009. *The Urban Connection : an actor-relational approach to urban planning*

5.3 Relevance with Research Theme (Graduation Orientation)

How is my topic linked to the theme of urban fabric?

This is an urban design project. The main focus of this project is searching for the answer to the question 'how urban design is elaborate as a mediating instrument for reclaiming multiple identities that could be shared by different actors in this area through spatial interventions'. It deals with different schools of urban studies theoretically, such as complexity in cities, actor-relational approach for urban management and addresses the idea of postmodernism design as a knowledge and principle background.

The main aim of this research group Design of the Urban Fabric to understand throughout research and practice, how we could contribute to the making of sustainable, attractive and vital urban design. The research theme concerns first of all, strengthening urban design as a technical scientific discipline and developing tools for professional practice. Secondly, it aims to understand the complexity of the urban environment. A conclusion could be drawn that my research topic matches these aims properly because it discusses the role of urban design in practice, addressing urban design in the complex networks of cities to develop better understanding of how urban design could be elaborated as a mediating instrument to connect public interest with the built environment.

The scales of my design project ranges from urban level to neighbourhood scale. That is to say it is elaborated at the local level including the redesign of urban spaces and guidelines for urban developments. This is highly linked to the urban fabric research theme which introduces patterns and forms technically on one hand in relation to the context, the local condition.

The research theme also delivers a package of ideas from human perspectives. It considers the urban fabric as complex human environment where the multi-actor approach is supposed to be adopted.

Moreover, the main theories and literatures that have been applied in the project are geared to the main study realm of the research theme. For example, the background of the research is set in the postmodern context, specific in Postmodernism architecture and urban design. The main references are Robert Venturi's 'both-and' approach and Charles Jencks's 'double-coding' which indicate the complexity and multiplicity in architecture. Also, in the complexity theory part I made the reference to Alexander's 'semi-lattice' theory in *a city is not a tree*, which is an important branch of study about complexity in cities from the theory clusters of urban fabric studies.

6-Intended Research Approach (Methodology)

-On site workshop and site observation

To get the first idea of what the region is, its features and important issues going on

To get an overview of the project area, perceiving spatial qualities and social interactions in Fiera

-Literature review

Building theoretical framework

Create a theoretical backbone to support the research topic (see the 'theoretical framework' in Chapter 4)



Figure 6.1: 1st site observation in Fiera, Treviso

-Analysis and design:

1 - Spatial and social dimensions concerning the urban fabric and people's daily usage of spaces are analyzed in a scope of time. Then make a selection according to the overlapping of spatial influence and occupation. The selection process that generates a design solution is the result of action and decisions by a host of individual inputs. (Salingaros 2004)

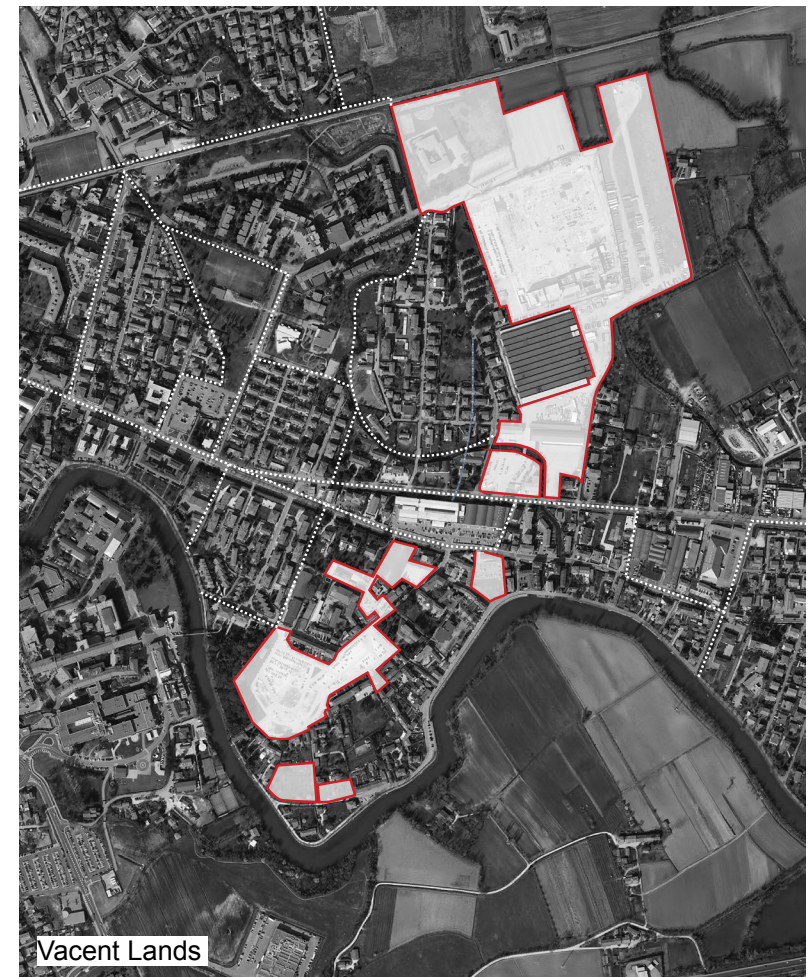


Figure 6.2: vacant lands

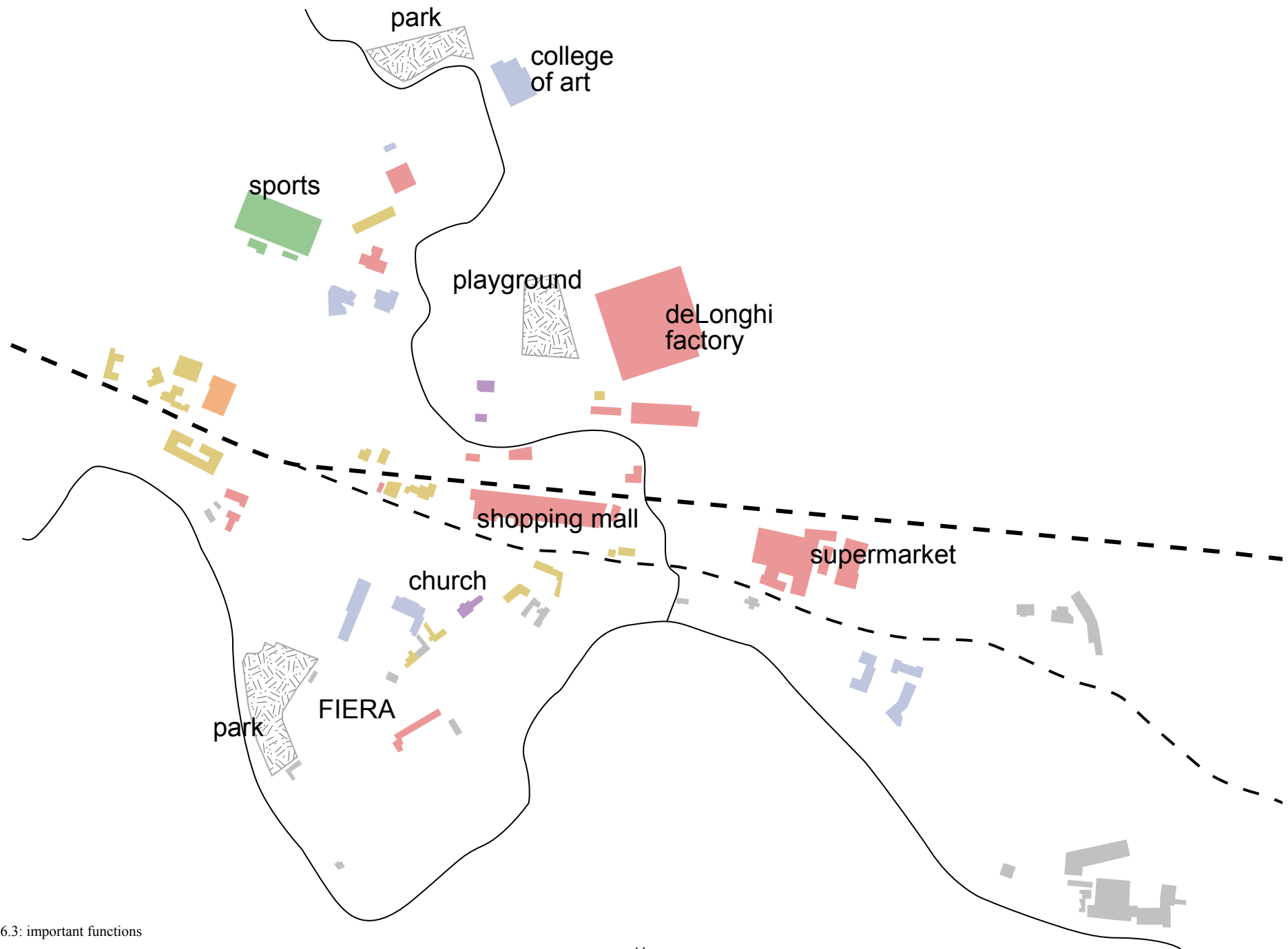


Figure 6.3: important functions

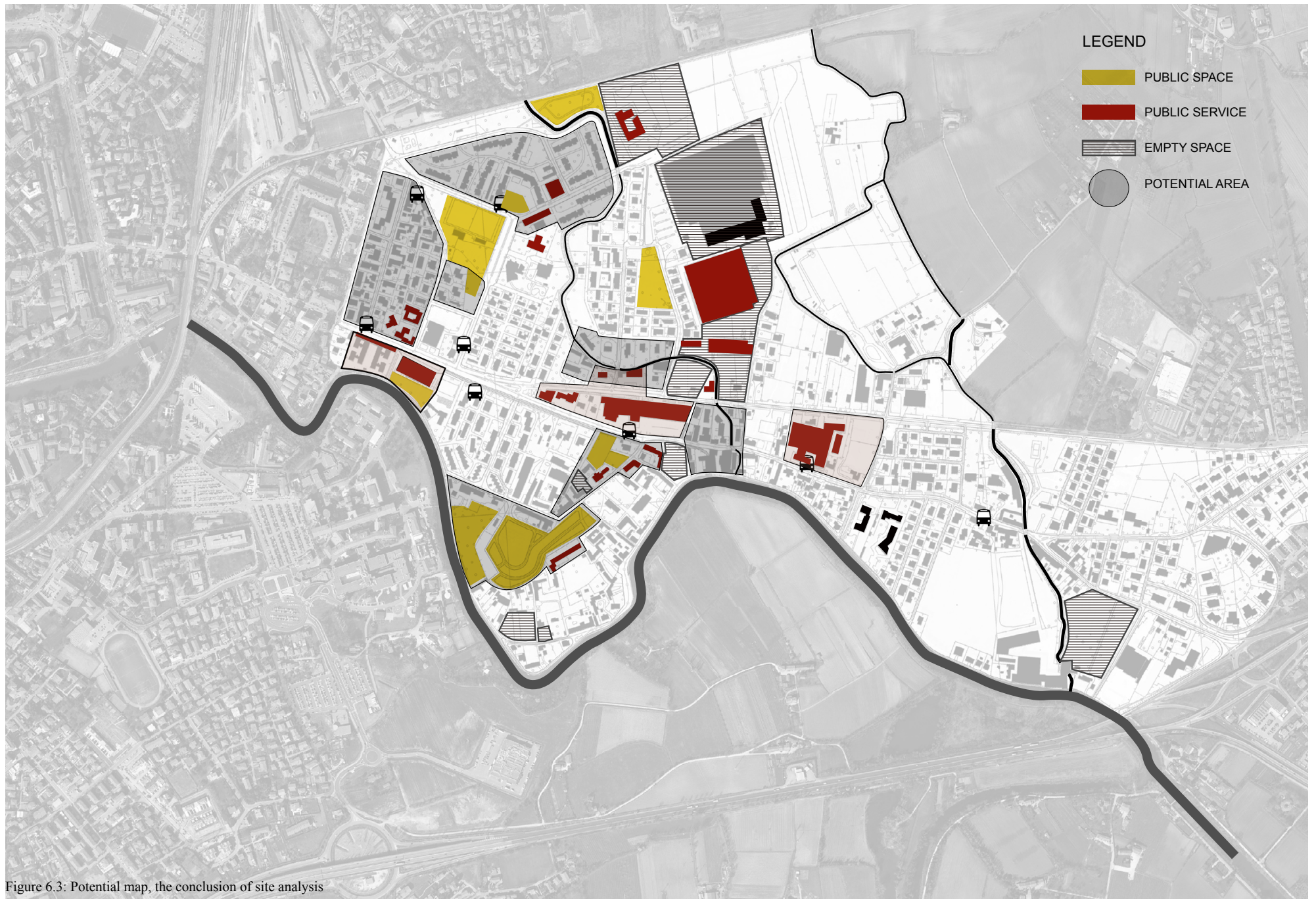


Figure 6.3: Potential map, the conclusion of site analysis

2 - Mapping daily life 'paths' of different actors (divided by social groups) on all of the possible constrains that provided by the environment and design interventions and their aims. This is an assumed session. It makes get into the actors faster and allows me to develop multiple mental acts from others' perspectives. (figure 6.1)

3 - Site observation and interview: test in reality. This session includes interview and observation of how local residents perceive and use space in their daily lives.

4 - Design process: choosing locations for key interventions

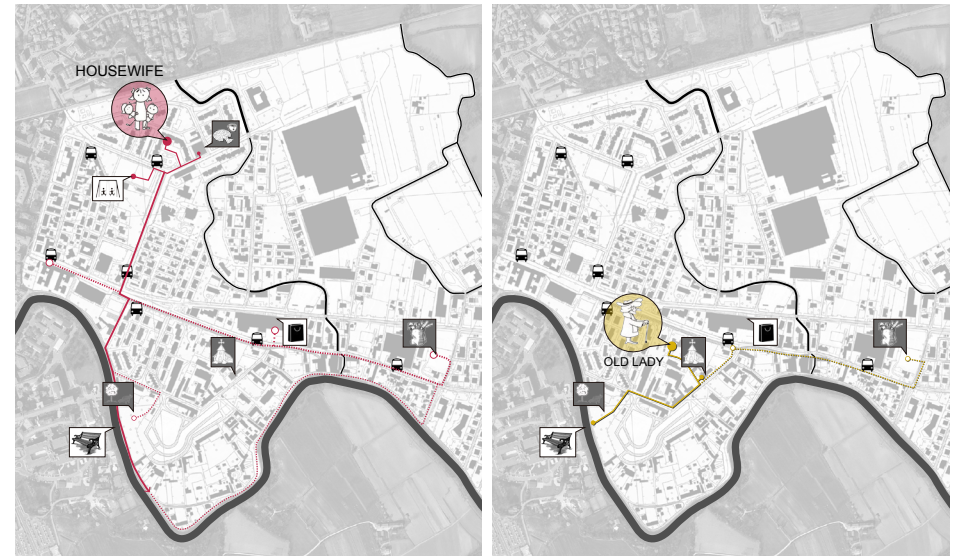
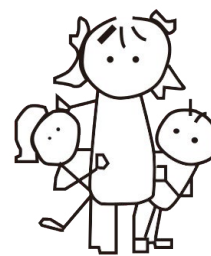
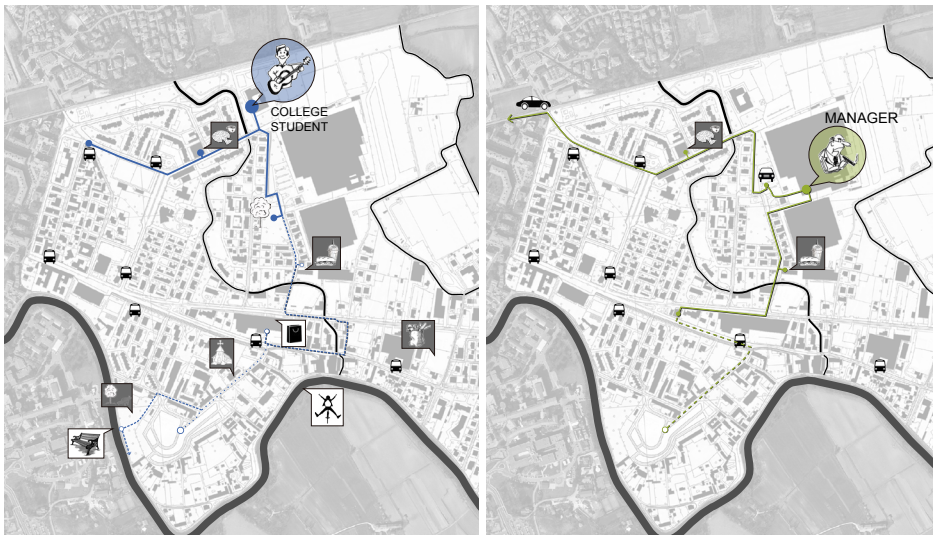


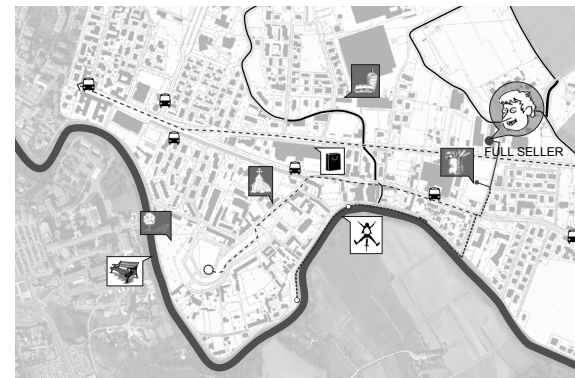
Figure 6.4 Dainly/Weekly(or longer) paths of the identified actors



Housewife: lives in a community apartment, has two kids



Old lady: lives in one of the private neighbourhoods



Whole seller: runs family business with his brother, works mailly at home



College student: study music in the local musical school



Manage: of the local factory, lives in Treviso

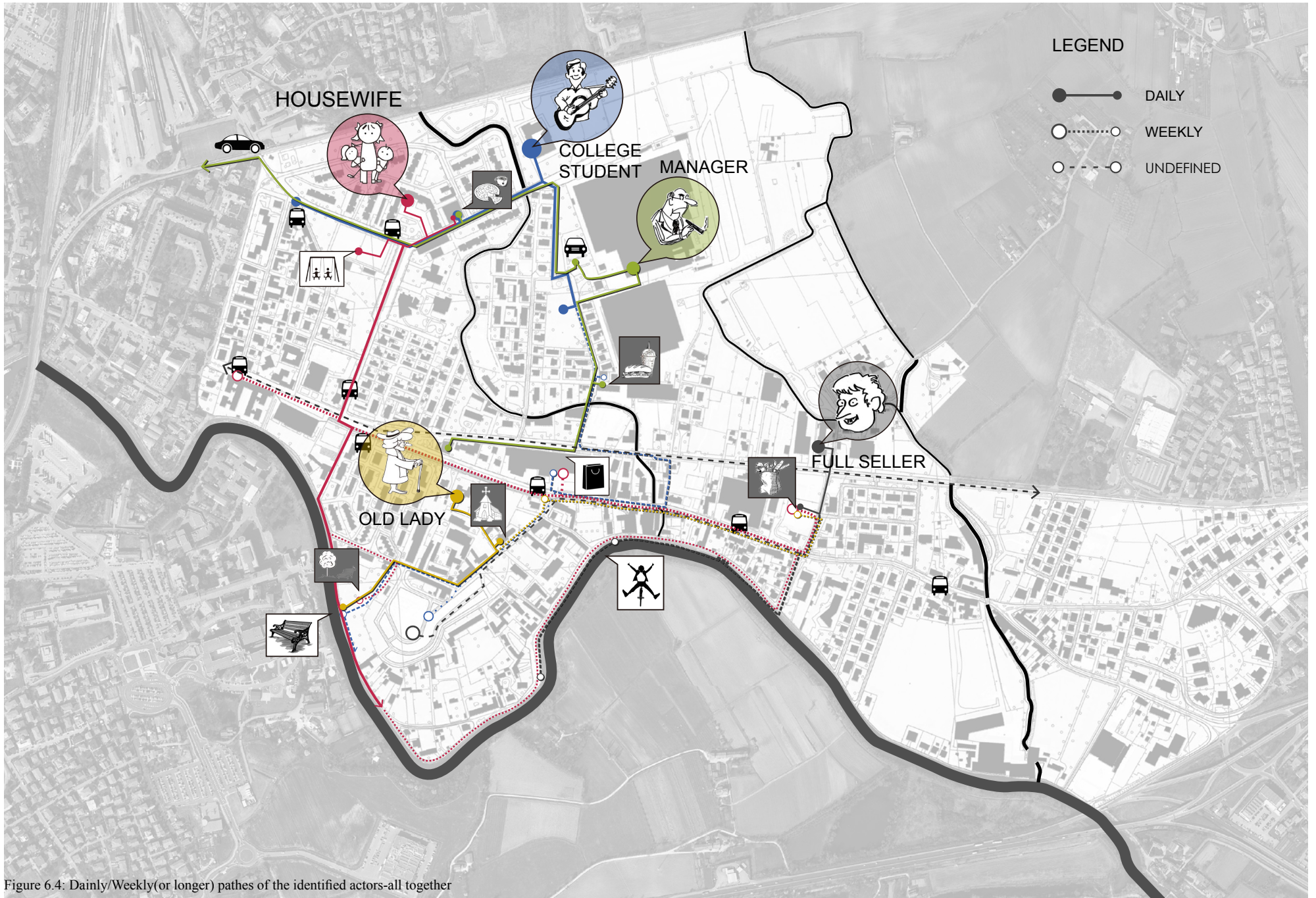


Figure 6.4: Dainly/Weekly(or longer) pathes of the identified actors-all together

7-Intended End Products

1. Urban strategies: city scale

At the urban level, aiming at reclaiming multiple identities and maintain the sharing goals of different actors, better networks should be elaborated concerning the local conditions and possible leading actors in the area, for instance, improving public transport and accessibility to the nature, and their relations to the urban spaces. (figure 7.2)

2. User-oriented programs: neighbourhood scale

A set of programs both architectural and urban will be addressed based on the local condition physically and socially. These programs are elaborated to create multi-functional, multi-perspective urban spaces. They contain a variety of characters, on the one hand to meet the needs and aims of actors and to improve their life story, on the other hand, to create shared identities and enhance the images that people have about this area. (figure 7.3)

3 . Reflections: assumed 'story telling' model based on reality

Life stories of people overlap and at certain spots could intertwine. This session will answer the question how design could influence human behavior and daily life in the end. It also addresses a reflection on what this project is essentially about, the multi-actor approach which enhances the mediating role of urban design.

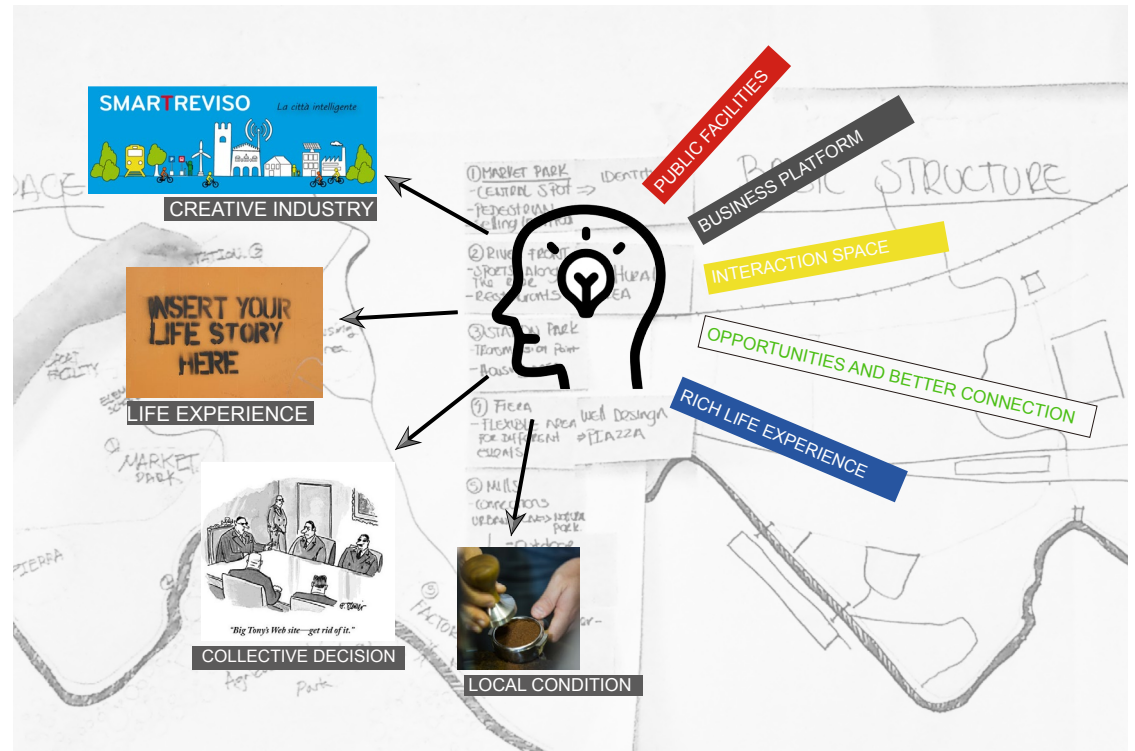




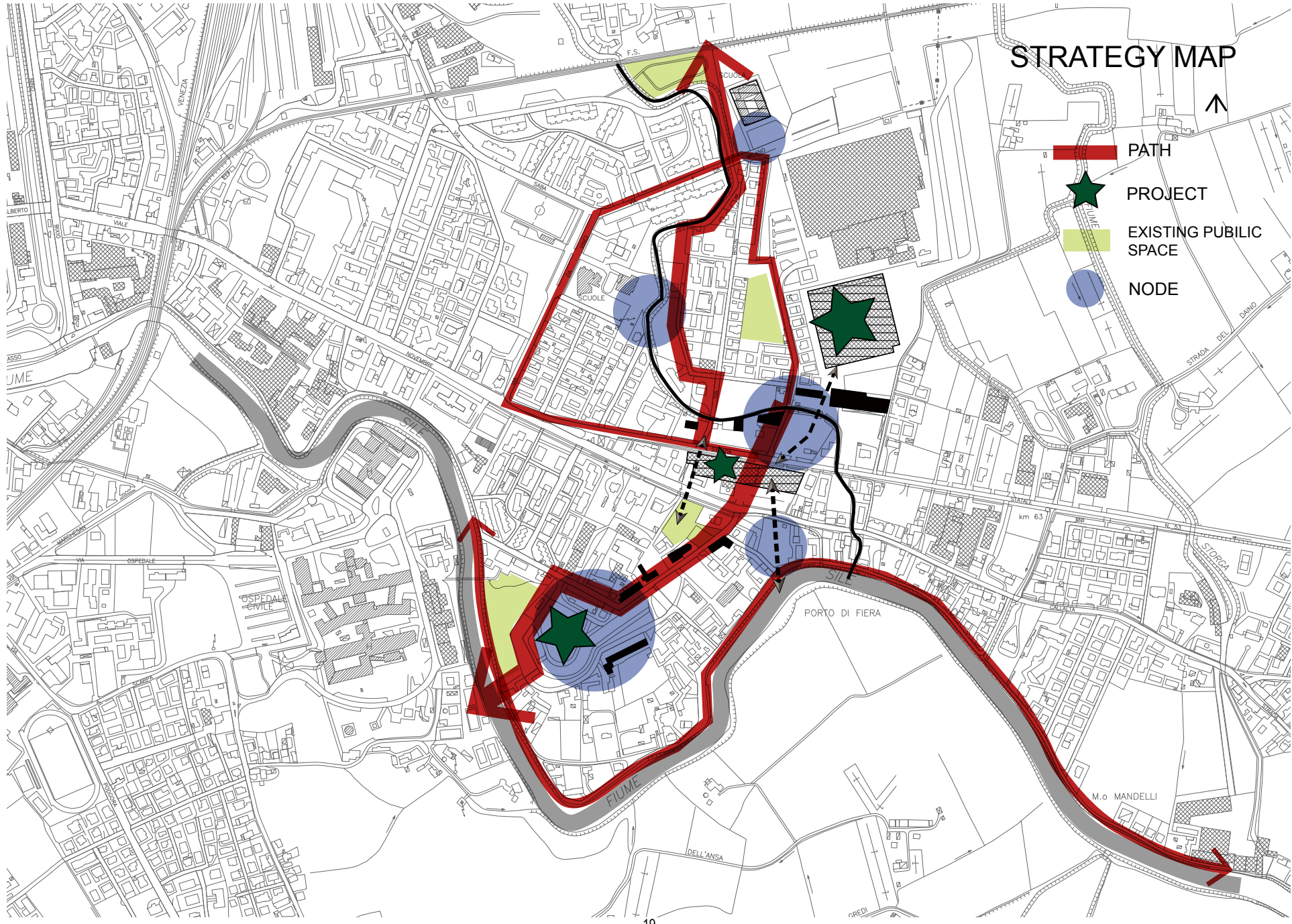


Figure 7.1: This diagram demonstrates the design goals next step in my mind. The designer need to on one hand keep the needs and aims of specific actor groups, on the other hand also think in context and reality. The aim of the design is creating a platform for collective decisions and creative economy which offers mutple choices and diversity of urban spaces and enhances the local condition and culture.

STRATEGY MAP



-  PATH
-  PROJECT
-  EXISTING PUBLIC SPACE
-  NODE





Paley Park (NYC): human scale and movable chairs make this small square one of the most popular public spaces in New York city.



Improving the water front by adding entertainment programs



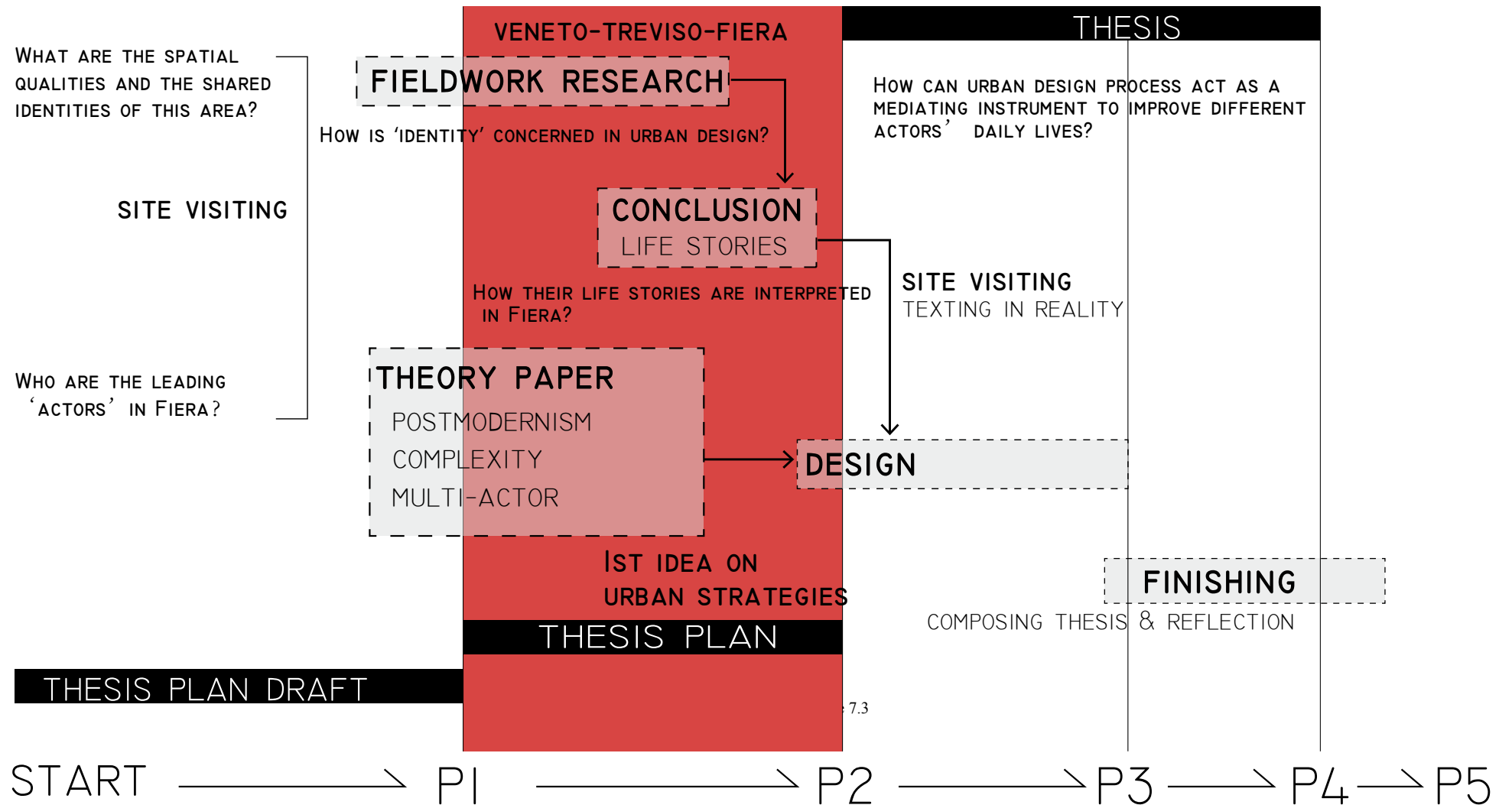
Rotterdam: good example of shopping street. The two-floor construction creates not only good accessibility and flows, but also a good more interesting walking experience.



Square in the city center of Mestre Venice, used for an open market on weekends that contributes to the livability of this kind of big open space

8-Time-working Schedule

HOW CAN ACTOR-ORIENTED URBAN DESIGN APPROACH BE ELABORATED IN FIERA AREA TO RECLAIM MULTIPLE IDENTITIES?



9-Relevant Bibliography

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