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### KEYWORDS

food as a tool; adaptive transformation; evolutionary uses; social activities; placemaking

### ABSTRACT

A successful urban project cannot be achieved without taking into account the sedimentary character of the places and the actions that take place there every day. We tried to read the mechanisms that trigger changes in order to plan the use of space through the spatial design of social activities related to food. In modern cities, moments of aggregation can be used as a design tool to create a "recipe" to re-analyse a place.

The research conducted applies the metaphor of food and its rituals as a tool to redefine street spaces and evolutionary relations between uses and the built environment in the city. Different devices are designed to bring participants to carry out the activities of their daily life in different spaces: the house is opening more and more to the city and vice-versa. It is a process that starts "from below," with simple and replicable technologies. It is not just a matter of building new spaces, but of highlighting and spatialising processes related to food. So, the project is not only a driver of change but also a key to understanding the complex relationships between the already existing urban devices and the processes that have always had a great influence on the city. The design devices go to work on the program of cities, introducing new spaces to eat together, in the street, they go to break those rigid boundaries that distinguish and separate uses based on ownership, introducing the hybrid form of sharing.

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# EAT (in) THE CITY. An Adaptive Process of Transformation Applying the Tool of the Food Metaphor

For a long time, food consumption was seen merely as a rational activity, linked only to implicit economic activity, thus excluding its social relevance from the analysis. This perspective on consumption is very different from the one we have today, where people consume more and more to differentiate themselves, their values, their vision of the world and of society; now, more than ever, in complex societies, a desire to participate can clearly be seen.<sup>1</sup>

## THEMES

The topic of this research is food and the relationships that it generates in the street; to show, to bring out the potential of this theme, we will proceed to break down the individual elements of rituals linked to food and reveal a complexity richer and more fascinating than the sum of their parts. Whether or not we care about food, the consequences of the way in which we eat have important external repercussions on life in cities and in particular on the streets. Whatever the size and shape of the city in which we live, we can use food as a tool of physical and social design, using it to exert a direct influence on our way of urban living. We can choose which type of food to buy, where and when to eat, with whom to eat and how. All these choices influence the locations in which we live, from their physical aspect, to the social fabric that regulates them and animates their daily life;<sup>2</sup> these will be the variables of the experiment that help us define rules to the process.

The research carried out by the *Politecnico di Torino* aims to read, interpret and therefore design the urban living space

using the metaphor of food. Food is seen as a design tool which can be defined as urban food. A city should have strong links with its surrounding area, through a structured food network, with active markets, shops selling local products and a strong sense of food identity. The kitchen is the place of aggregation par excellence in the house, and its space has expanded over time from a place of service to a place of sharing. Urban gardens – even on roofs and terraces – are an integral part of the urban planning of cities, and spaces dedicated to the shared consumption of meals animate our streets, in an even clearer and more impactful way in the wake of the pandemic. By recognising food as a socialisation tool, the city can use it to bring people together and to trigger transformation processes, capable of bringing physical and social benefits to its various living spaces, where the street is the star.<sup>3</sup>

The space is defined by elements with their own characteristics which generate a certain use, which can be hypothesised by the designer of those spaces, but determined only by those who live there, based upon the variety of requirements that evolve, increasingly rapidly, over time.

Working on a small scale guarantees a greater possibility of interaction with users, flexibility and sustainability, allowing them to identify themselves in the design and to make it their own.

The innovative mix of functions revitalises the space and stratifies the volumes through platforms, covers and equipment. Therefore, the elements identified to “equip” the space determine new dynamics, new places clinging to the buildings, grafted into residual areas or underused open spaces. The implementation in phases facilitates the monitoring of use of the device in such a way as to adjust the design depending on the reactions of the community: flexibility in progress and after the transformation prevent abandonment.

## METHODOLOGY

The proposed experiment aims to focus on abandoned or underused locations of the city streets, whose main users are the neighbourhood's inhabitants: it is therefore essential to stimulate the process of identification and appropriation of the places to ensure the intervention is effective and not ephemeral, participated and shared. A square thus becomes the dining room of the house, while the passers-by become diners, friends or even relatives. If these actions are able to stimulate the active use of a space, new habits and modifications will be created, while the new activities taking root will trigger community re-appropriation processes of the space. In order to generate a process of this nature, we began with the individual elements that constitute the narration of an urban design formulated through rituals of food. The elements were organised through a matrix. The combination of the elements of the matrix is the supporting methodology of the research; these combinations lead to the creation of rituals that materialise in designs of shared spaces for food consumption.

How are the elements identified and catalogued? How is the matrix created and combined? Which logics and principles

are followed?

To explain the elements that are used in the construction of the different scenarios of the experiment we will use words as a metaphor between food and the spatial elements of the architecture of the city. The elements can be divided into three classes: base, modules and atmosphere, to which the category of the type of food is added.

The base represents the urban components on which the device is built; it is the support that allows for the ritual to be constructed. This is the spatial component that generates the ritual.

The modules are elements that can be assembled and which are inserted in the base to define the specific space of the ritual; the components are modular and can be combined in different configurations to allow for their autonomous use, adaptable to different specific requirements. This is the tactile component of the ritual.

The atmosphere is the lightest and more ephemeral physical component; it includes lights and images that complete the device, immersing the participants in the urban experience. This is the visual component of the ritual.


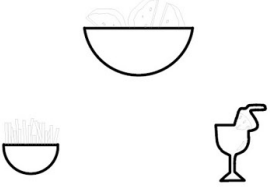
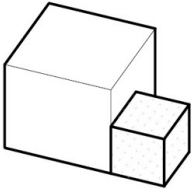
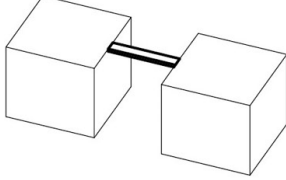
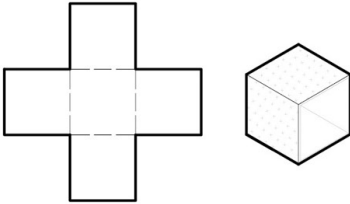
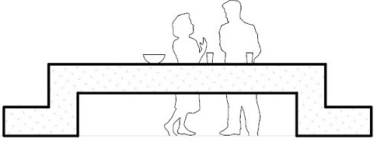

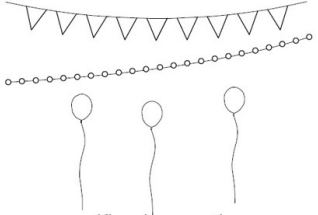
The composition is completed by the category of food: it does not relate to the foods consumed, but the manner in which they are served, namely the form in which they are consumed, whether in individual single-serve portions or in takeaway boxes, whether in the form of finger food or plated-up meals.

The combination of these elements has led to the reconstruction of the image of a domestic ritual of food in the urban dimension. The street is the location where the process takes place, where the new rituals are implemented; it is the space of experimentation, of expansion of meaning and of evolutionary uses capable of giving life to an innovative dimension. The hypothesised design experimentations are flexible and reproducible, so that they can be adapted to different areas, being characterised by way of the different combination of the individual elements. The possibility of increasing or differentiating the combinations facilitates transformations over time, in accordance with changing requirements. **Fig. 1 | 2**

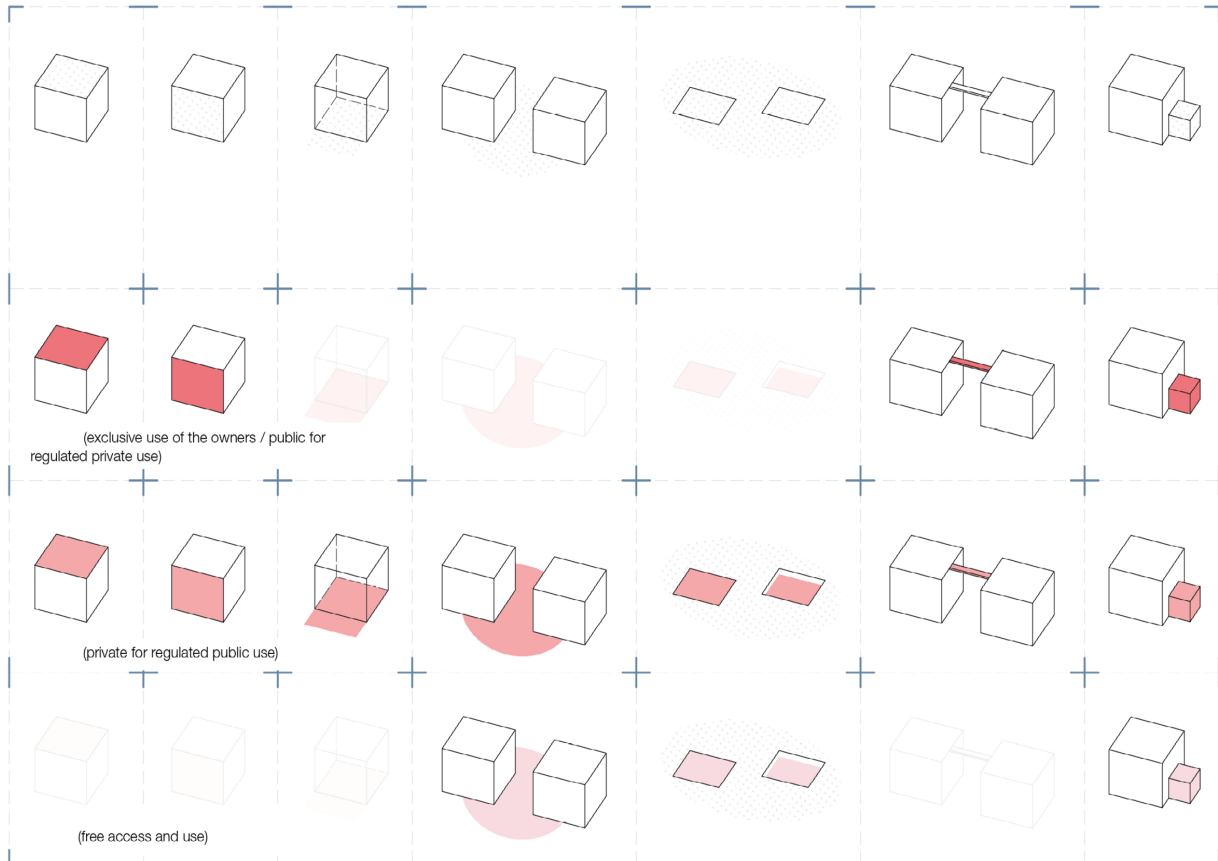
## EXPERIMENT

To emphasise the link between food and the street, we have used the metaphor of setting the table. The table and the room that surrounds it are two indivisible elements; the table represents an architectural device constructed on the slow sedimentation of habits, customs and popular beliefs, and thus also in their social structure and the rituals that form the foundation of daily life. The table represents the sharing of food and accordingly also the initial forms of socialisation and politics.<sup>4</sup> The domestic dining room is attributable to forms of public and collective space, when considering its organisational and functional role, not exclusively as a single element. The table is the domestic model through which the home is projected onto the city: A table and the room that surrounds it form one space inside another.<sup>5</sup>

The table embodies the encounter between matter and space; when this is not present, the same function is fulfilled

	dinner	aperitif
type of food	 <p>sophisticated plating</p>	 <p>finger food</p>
base	 <p>addition of new volumes</p>	 <p>physical and visual links</p>
modules\	 <p>new urban room</p>	 <p>sociale table</p>
atmosphere	 <p>home furniture</p>	 <p>specific decorations</p>

## STRATEGIES AND UNDER USED SPACES



2

by a tablecloth, as occurs during a picnic. The lawn that previously had no boundaries and specific attributes, through the simple gesture of laying a tablecloth on it, assumes the meaning of a place. The table is the fulcrum of the kitchen and the kitchen is the fulcrum of the house; the table is the place where the meal is consumed and around which the main social activities are carried out. Just like the table, the square is the fulcrum of the city; it is a place rich in diversity. Together with the street, it is the place where the main urban activities take place. Laying the table means organising the elements that enter into relationship and define the nature of the space and the activities that are performed there. Laying the table is an action able to stimulate different sensorial aspects; similarly, the construction of the image of a street will trigger relationships that lead to the definition of a specific use of the urban space.<sup>6</sup> **Fig. 3**

### TOOLS/RITUALS

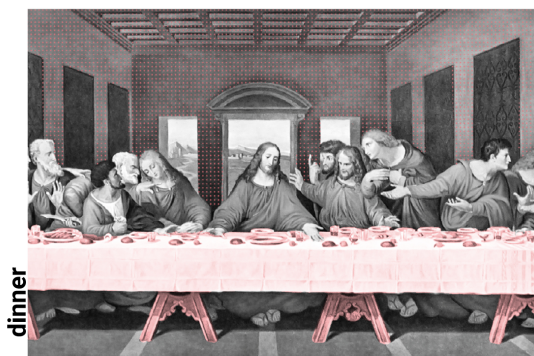
By placing within the city devices that evoke a domestic ritual, alluding to the rupture between private and public space, this identifies the city as a space to be furnished and to be lived in. Constructing the design of the space according to the changing habits of food consumption rituals, perhaps the oldest form of socialisation, leads to a change in perception

of the space itself.

The rituals that best define our way of eating in the city have been identified; they correspond to four macro-categories into which we can subdivide the various activities linked to food. They are distinguished by their physical components and the types of food they involve. The selected rituals – aperitif, dinner, picnic, breakfast – can be broken down even further into infinite hybrid forms that animate our houses and the city streets.

This does not merely concern the repetition of gestures, but a specific combination of visual, spatial and tactile elements that recall in the mind of the individual a profound meaning, culturally linked to the society to which they belong. **Fig. 4** Dinner, seen in its most classic form, has represented since antiquity the mirror of society. It is a moment of collective gathering that is not only aimed at satisfying the natural need to feed oneself but is the place for sharing experiences and thoughts. During dinner, a process of convergence and intimacy takes place, activating feelings of involvement; how and what we eat has a precise meaning in terms of identification, based upon a set of products and conventions. When the table is located outside of the house, it becomes a powerful instrument for translating the image of the kitchen into places that previously had distant and completely

## (( 4 Rituals ))



dinner

Leonardo da Vinci, "Ultima cena", 1494-1498, Santa Maria delle Grazie, Milano.



pic nic

Édouard Manet, "Colazione sull'erba", 1862-1863, Musée d'Orsay, Paris.



aperitif

"Nozze di Cana", Paolo Veronese, Museo del Louvre, Paris, 1562-1563.



breakfast

"I nottambuli", Edward Hopper, Art Institute, Chicago, 1942.

## (( + Street Food ))

3

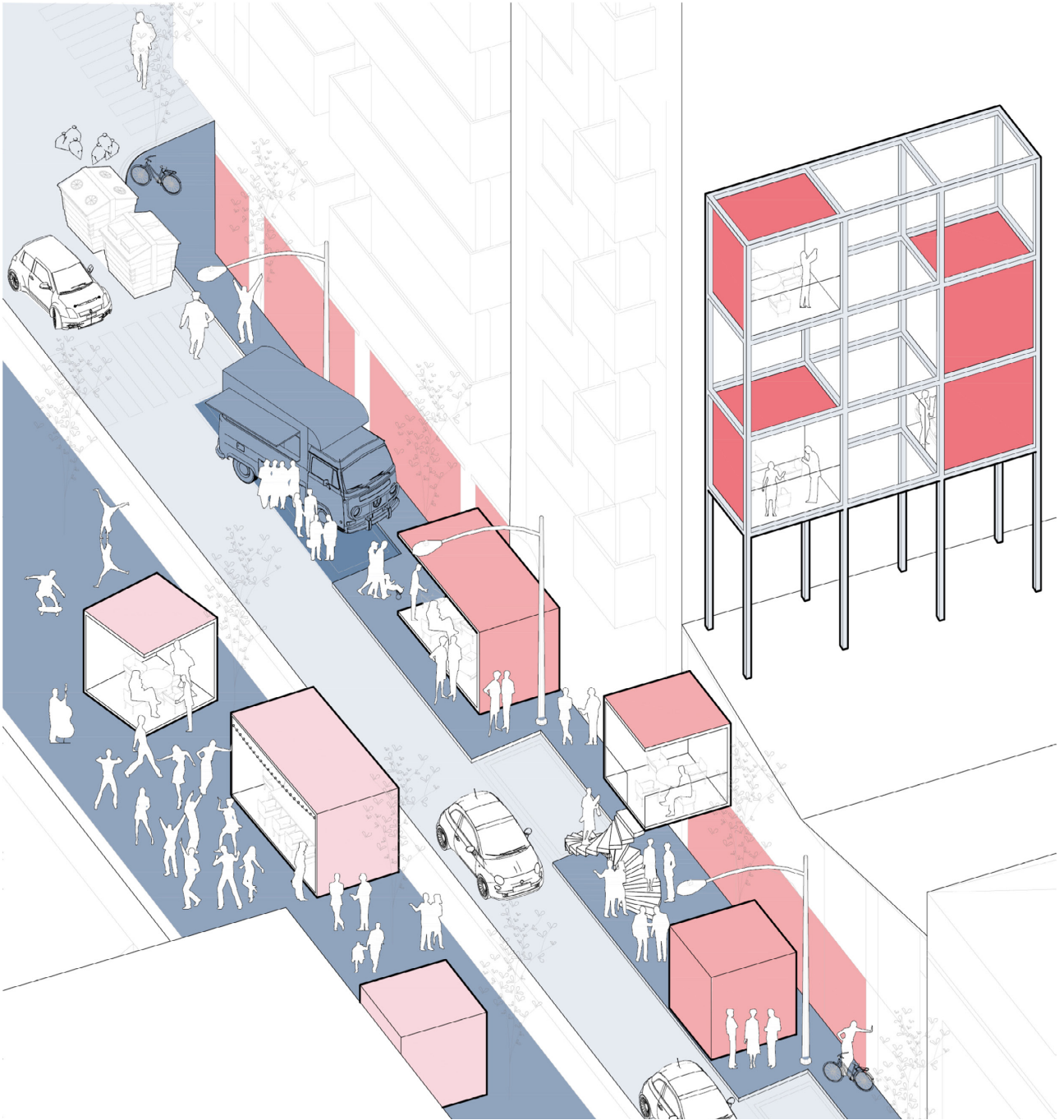
different meanings. The spatial sensation is given by the walls of a domestic room. Taste is a social product, as it can be shared and communicated.<sup>7</sup> In this sense, food sharing is at the origin of rituals of the table; it is the repetitiveness of the gestures that sediments the behaviours over time, transforming them into habits. The temporal cadence that regulates human actions, the order in which things happen – being repeated over time – is always determined inevitably by food.<sup>8</sup> **Fig. 5**

The aperitif is the main ritual of the big cities; it is that period of relaxation after work or university, that time to hang out informally to conclude the day. The aperitif was established in the city and is closely linked to it; it could not exist without the drinks served by pubs in the centre or without snacks from the neighbourhood bars. Generically, this ritual takes place between 6pm and 8pm; during those hours, the streets take on a different configuration, amidst the busy throng of people returning home, there are corners where people stop, a space in which the image of the city is animated with colourful glasses and background music. **Fig. 6**

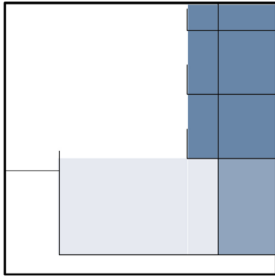
But what happens if we decide to have a picnic on a city street? The tablecloth becomes a permeable floor, akin to a tatami mat; the shade of the tree is provided by a curtain tied to the poles of a lightweight structure. Friends make a

date to consume a meal organised at the last minute, with food brought from home or with a sandwich bought from the bar next door. The ritual of the picnic is a moment of shared gathering to consume a meal in contact with nature; the predominant element is the tablecloth, a filter between people and the ground, lightweight and permeable. The picnic location is the shade of a tree, the bank of a river, a glimpse over the panorama. **Fig. 7**

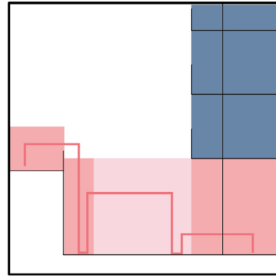
Breakfast is the meal with which the day begins; it is the initial interface with the city. We stop to enjoy a coffee before starting work, before studying, before meeting others... It is an activity that is often performed in solitude but it is also a good opportunity to socialise. Breakfast is that meal that can be consumed in any corner of the city, based upon routine and the specific events of the day. You can drink a coffee while standing, enjoy pancakes while seated at the kitchen table, or eat a croissant on the sofa while reading the newspaper or in bed on a weekend morning. The device represents an extension of the house externally, a passage to a greater degree of sharing.<sup>9</sup> The choice of location of this device embodies the moment that precedes the start of the activities in the city and constitutes the initial interface of the day between persons, the city and food.



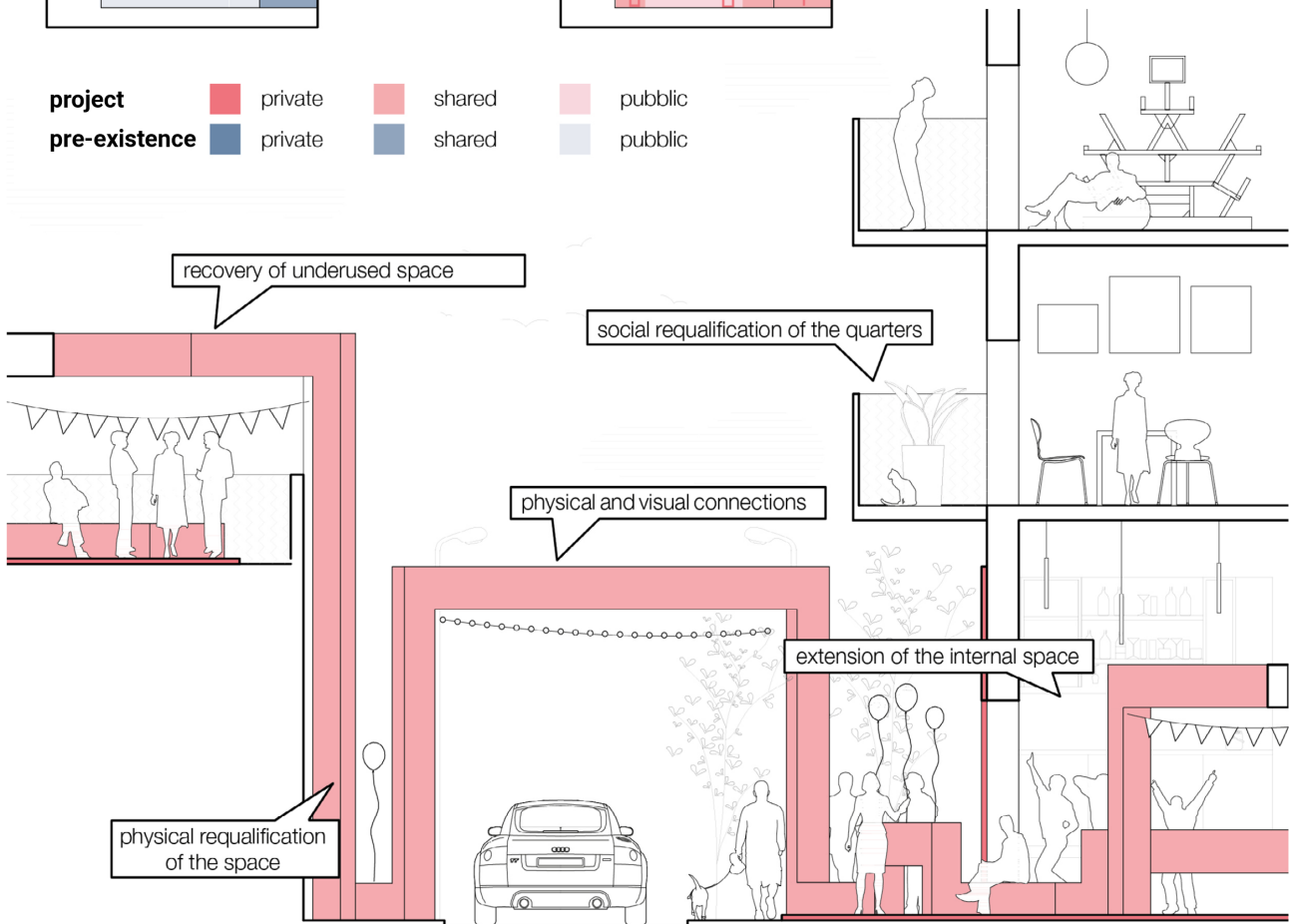
**PRE-EXISTENCE**



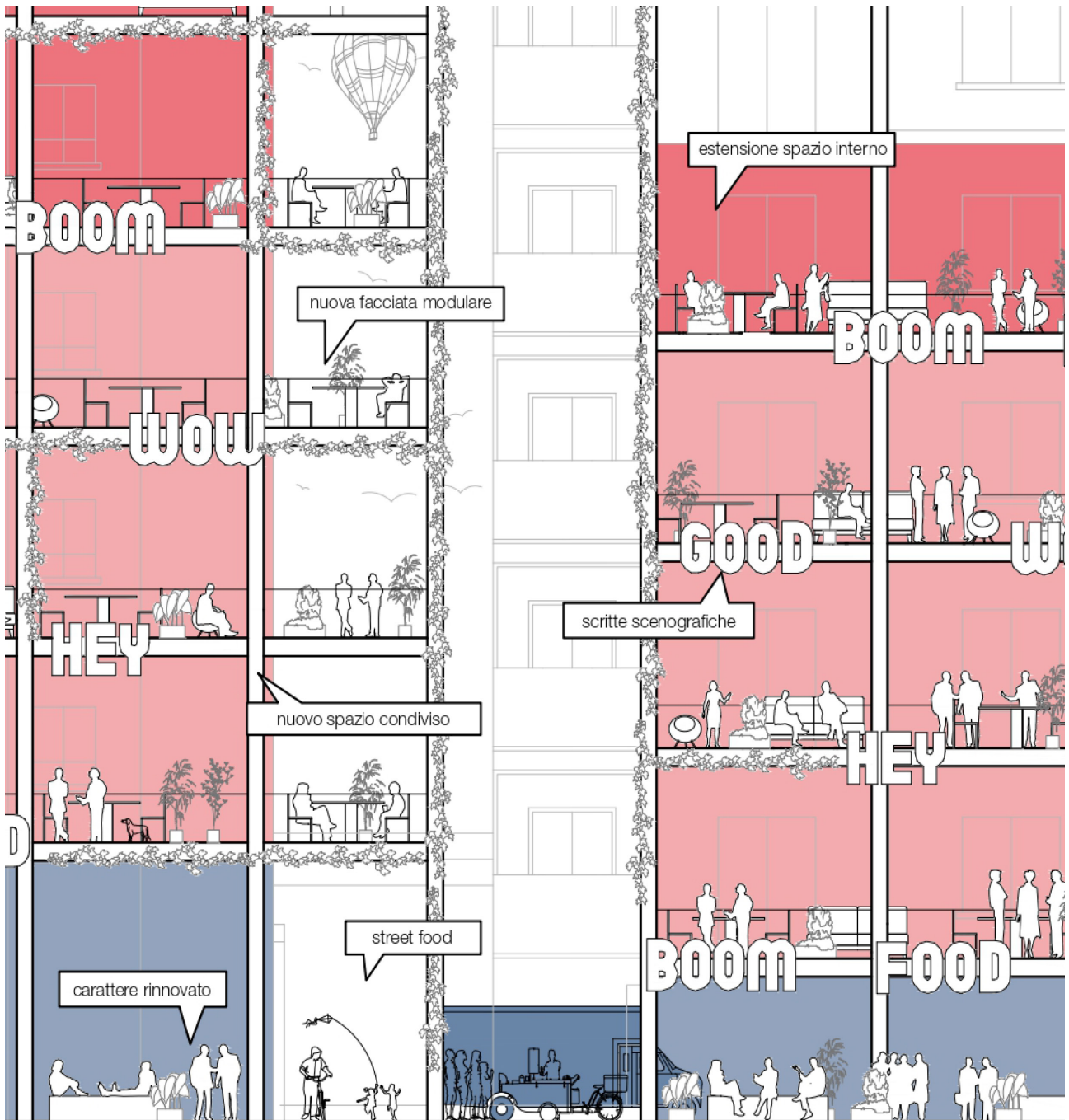
**PROJECT**



**project**    ■ private    ■ shared    ■ public  
**pre-existence**    ■ private    ■ shared    ■ public







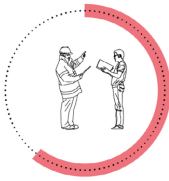
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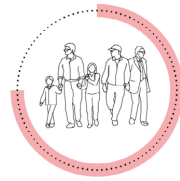
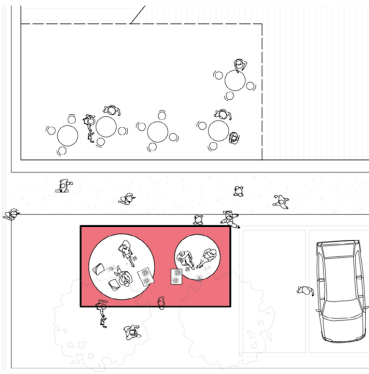
**Shared**



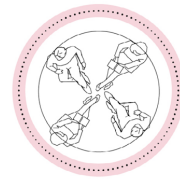
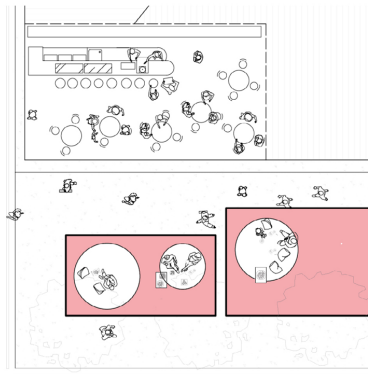
**Public**



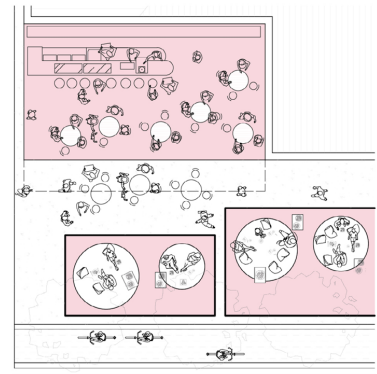
**Phase 2: Monitor the use**



**Phase 3: Stratification and densification**



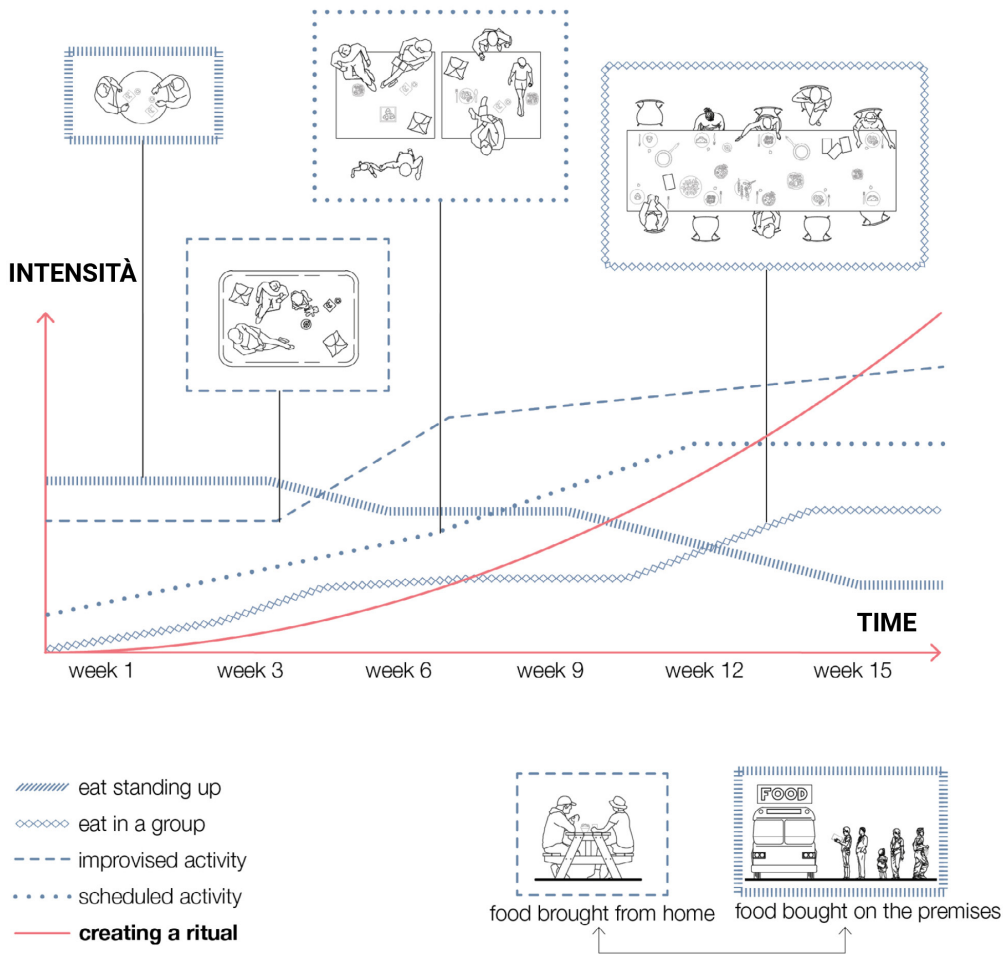
**Phase 4: Spatial modification,  
approval and participation**



7

- 2  
The elements to define the project (authors' edition, 2021).
- 3  
The 4 rituals (authors' edition, 2021).
- 4  
Rituals: "dinner" (authors' edition, 2021).
- 5  
Rituals: "aperitif" (authors' edition, 2021).
- 6  
Rituals: "pic-nic" (authors' edition, 2021).
- 7  
Rituals: "breakfast" (authors' edition, 2021).

## DYNAMIC PATTERN



8

## ANALYSIS

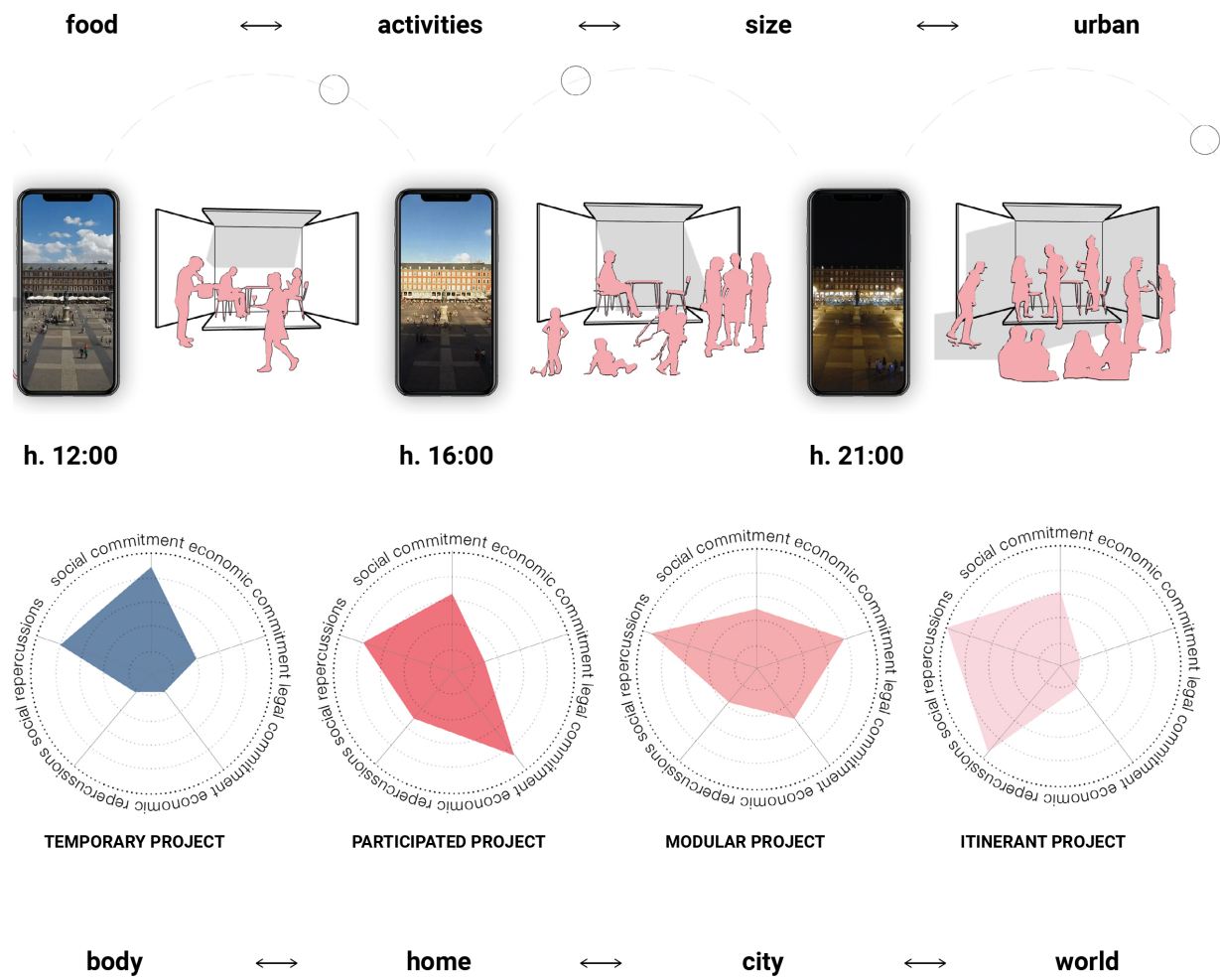
Despite the increasing lack of synchronisation of mealtimes in urban life and the global metastasis of some types of food model, such as the American one essentially based on high-calorie fast food, meal times continue to mark – particularly in southern Europe – the different speeds of life over the course of the day. Eating is an activity that is increasingly present in the city, and to a large extent also in the street which, at certain times, can be completely defined by this use. The rhythm in the succession of different breaks and their duration – and thus also their meaning – has undergone various fluctuations over history, according to different cultural models.

Aside from daytime hours, which are at the same time affected by work schedules, it is still possible to identify quite a few differences between the different days of the week and of the year in relation to the wide range of possibilities linked to the food phenomenon. The city, obviously, is not the same in spring, summer, autumn or winter. Besides, the year is also full of different specific holidays which, in one way or another, almost always revolve around a certain type of food, which often disappears during the rest of the year.

With the emergence of new lifestyles, consumers assume

more critical attitudes and also become interested in production processes as well as the choice of end product. Due to the abundance of food and a cultural pluralism, new food habits have spread; we eat more outside the house, alone or in the most disparate locations. The normal rituals of the past appear to have disappeared, although in actual fact they have simply multiplied. The standardisation of mealtimes occurs for different reasons, but paradoxically the least influential of all is the physiological need to feed ourselves at marked frequencies.<sup>10</sup> Obviously, we all need to eat, but there are different opinions on how many times a day and in what quantities. Without the influence of established times, the normal thing would be for significant imbalances to appear between the times when people become hungry. The majority of the studies that have been carried out in this regard reach the conclusion that “food synchronisation”<sup>11</sup> has more to do with practical, organisational, collaborative or cultural issues than physiological ones.<sup>12</sup> **Fig. 8**

The same device can be used for different purposes over the space of the day. If we stop for 24 hours in a square and observe what happens, we note that its image drastically changes based upon the different times of the day and the activities that take place there. In general, the early hours



of the morning are dedicated to restocking; we witness the comings and goings of vans and boxes supplying the stores with what is needed for the day. Towards lunchtime, the space fills with pavement cafes and tables for lunch and consequently the first groups arrive to animate the square. In the afternoon, the flows of people are variable; towards aperitif time, more people begin to stop in the area until the sun begins to set and the city lights come on. The image changes towards the colours of the night. **Fig. 9**

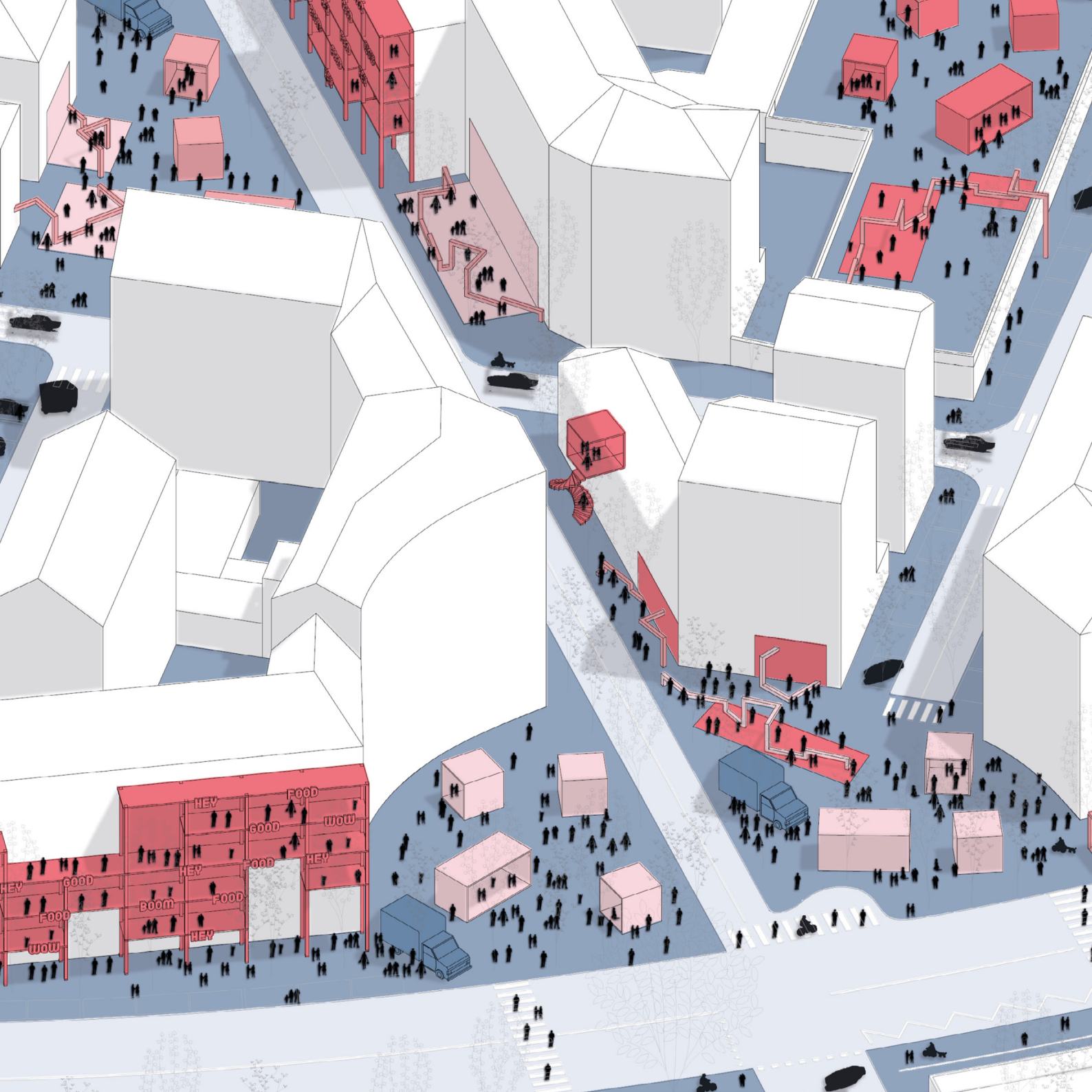
**CONCLUSIONS**

This experimentation has highlighted the complex system of relationships that exist between the living space of the house and the entire city; the intimate and private spatial dimension used as a key for reading and interpreting the space of sharing, whether public or private, can re-establish relational balances capable of constructing multiple and multifaceted identities.<sup>13</sup> Urban design is enriched with a vocabulary capable of re-interpreting and constructing dynamic, innovative and provocative uses, where the social dimension expands, offering new prospects of aggregation which were often subtended in manifestations of hybrid, informal and temporary uses. The kitchen is the starting point and the

final destination of the urban design, referring to this space at the same time as the main place of aggregation of the house and of connection with the city. The study of the urban phenomenon of food, however, invites us to see the house as an incomplete entity if not viewed from multidisciplinary perspectives.<sup>14</sup>

Taste is a social product,<sup>15</sup> as it can be shared and communicated. In this sense, the sharing of food is at the origin of table rituals; it is the repetitiveness of the gestures that sediments behaviours over time, transforming them into habits. The temporal cadence that regulates human actions, the order in which things happen – being repeated over time – is always determined inevitably by food. The passage of urban space-time can also be interpreted through the fragments of the day that we dedicate to the consumption of food which have inevitably ended up moulding the locations of urban life. Free time, work, and rest are activities in which food is the determining factor. The attention paid to setting the table, arranging food and dishes, forms part of the daily ritual. The ritual is a set of actions, whose repetition over time creates the cultural models of a society.

The city is the place of plurality and experimentation, which must be capable of offering non-standardised life



8  
Dynamic pattern (authors' edition, 2021).

9  
Devices' mutations during the daytime (authors' edition, 2021).

10  
The rituals applied to the neighbourhood Aurora in Turin – Urban  
regeneration (authors' edition, 2021).

opportunities. The street, following this interpretation, can increasingly be seen as part of the house,<sup>16</sup> with little importance given to the condition of public or private, where the proprietary dimension does not determine a formal dimension.<sup>17</sup> The design is inserted as a tool of regeneration that questions the boundary between private and public, generating new relationships between the existing spaces. Several examples of non-institutionalised spaces have led to significant outcomes, such as in the case of “Esto no es un solar,”<sup>18</sup> a project carried out in Zaragoza in 2006, following an experimentation established as part of a city festival of urban art “En la frontera.” The temporary collective use of public and private spaces within the city triggered virtuous re-appropriation processes of abandoned places, with few financial resources, yet with a strong social impact.

The project devices introduce into the city transformation programme new spaces where food becomes the opportunity and the excuse for aggregation, creating a mix of rituals that break down those rigid boundaries which distinguish the uses of the street based upon ownership, introducing the hybrid form of sharing.<sup>19</sup>

The project aims to activate a process of renewal, through a critical action on the built environment and on urban lifestyles. The fragments of the city in which to implement the project are all those underused urban spaces, where the street is just infrastructure and does not establish relationships, but merely performs an instrumental function. By hybridising different disciplines and themes, the architect is the coordinator of projects in which the space “in-between” is the main author and site of the transformation, ecological transition and social inclusion. **Fig. 10**

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<sup>1</sup> Xavier Monteys, ed., *Quaderns 271. About Buildings and Food* (Barcelona: COAC, 2018).

<sup>2</sup> Lim CJ, *Food City* (New York: Routledge, 2014).

<sup>3</sup> Domitilla Dardi, “Zoom. L’alimento come materia prima del progetto,” *L’architetto* (April 2015).

<sup>4</sup> Juan Cruz, *El tenedor: un cortesano en la mesa*, 2011.

<sup>5</sup> François Ascher, *Le Mangeur Hypermoderne* (Paris: Odile Jacob, 2005).

<sup>6</sup> Jamie Horwitz, and Paulette Singley, eds., *Eating Architecture* (Cambridge-London: The MIT Press, 2004).

<sup>7</sup> Claude Fischler, *El (h)omnívoro. El gusto, la cocina y el cuerpo* (Barcelona: Anagrama, 1995).

<sup>8</sup> K. Kumar, and E. Makarova, “Portable Home: The Domestication of Public Space,” *Sociological Theory* 26, no. 4 (December 2008): 324–43.

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# Mangiare (ne) la città. Un processo adattativo di trasformazione che applica lo strumento del cibo come metafora

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## PAROLE CHIAVE

cibo come strumento; trasformazioni adattive; usi innovativi; attività sociali creazione di luoghi

## ABSTRACT

*Un progetto urbano di successo non può essere realizzato senza tenere conto del carattere sedimentato dei luoghi e delle azioni che vi si svolgono quotidianamente. Abbiamo cercato di leggere i meccanismi che innescano i cambiamenti, per pianificare l'uso dello spazio attraverso la progettazione spaziale delle attività sociali legate al cibo. Nelle città moderne, i momenti di aggregazione possono essere utilizzati come strumento di progettazione per creare una "ricetta" per rianalizzare un luogo.*

*La ricerca condotta applica la metafora del cibo e dei suoi rituali come strumento per ridefinire gli spazi stradali e le relazioni evolutive tra gli usi e l'ambiente costruito nella città. Diversi dispositivi sono progettati per portare i partecipanti a svolgere le attività della loro vita quotidiana in spazi diversi: la casa si apre sempre più alla città e viceversa. È un processo che parte "dal basso," con tecnologie semplici e replicabili. Non si tratta solo di costruire nuovi spazi, ma di evidenziare e spazializzare i processi legati al cibo. Il progetto, quindi, non è solo un motore di cambiamento, ma anche una chiave per comprendere le complesse relazioni tra i dispositivi urbani già esistenti e i processi che hanno sempre avuto una grande influenza sulla città. I dispositivi di progettazione vanno a lavorare sul programma delle città, introducendo nuovi spazi per mangiare insieme, in strada, vanno a rompere quei confini rigidi che distinguono e separano gli usi in base alla proprietà, introducendo la forma ibrida della condizione.*

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