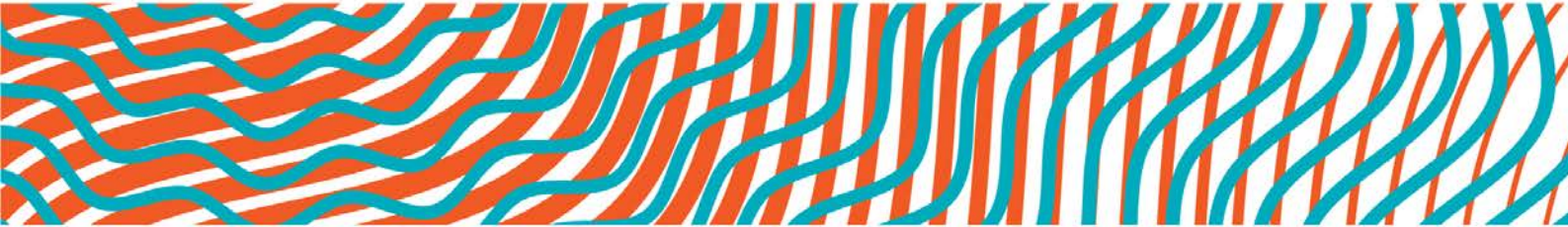


**transformative  
social innovation  
theory**



# **WP4 | CASE STUDY Report: [DEISIS Network]**

**Theme [ssh.2013.3.2-1][Social Innovation- Empowering People, changing societies]  
Project Full Title: “Transformative Social Innovation Theory project”  
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## 1 Introduction to *DESIS Network*

DESIS Network is an acronym for “Design for Social Innovation and Sustainability”. Its main aim is to use design to trigger, enable and scale-up social innovation through design thinking and design knowledge. With regard to social innovation, it means: to enhance its **potential**; to raise its **visibility**; to facilitate its **transferability**; to increase its **synergy**; and to stimulate **new initiatives**. It means to co-create, with local, regional and global partners, socially relevant scenarios, solutions and communication programs related to social innovation that are equal to the enormous challenges of contemporary society (from DESIS website<sup>1</sup>).

In design schools, the network finds a major driver for the development of the theory and practice on *design for social innovation*: “*In fact, design schools (and, more in general, all the design-oriented universities) can orient their didactic and research activities towards social innovation. That is, they can become design laboratories where new visions are generated, new tools are defined and tested and where new projects are started and supported*”. In terms of change, it is stated: “*If a worldwide movement towards sustainability calls for the best possible use of all existing resources, design schools, with all their potential in terms of students’ enthusiasm and faculty experience, should be considered a very promising social resource: a potentially powerful promoter of sustainable change*”(from DESIS Website).

**The international network.** The network consists of 48 schools (November 2014), which are more or less active in networking activities on a global level. 13 Labs are in Europe. Other labs: Chile (1), Colombia (3), Brazil (5), USA (4), Canada (1), Kenya (1), Botswana(1), South Africa (2), Japan (3), China (7), Australia (2), New Zealand(1), South Korea (2), India (1), Turkey(1).

In 2014, the network became a “cultural association” under Italian law, called “DESIS NETWORK – Design for Social Innovation and Sustainability Association”. The founding members (who signed the document founding the association) are: Politecnico di Milano (Italy), The New School (USA), University of Arts London (UK), Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro (Brazil), and Jiangnan University and Tongji University (China). The purpose of the association is “*to promote design for social innovation in higher education institutions with a design discipline so as to generate useful design knowledge and to create meaningful changes in collaboration with other stakeholders*”(from DESIS Network Agreement).

The network therefore includes in its operation partnerships with other networks and actors: “*DESIS Network collaborates with other networks whose focus (such as social innovation, quality of everyday life, design for sustainability, and design school coordination) is complementary to their own. DESIS also establishes special partnerships with private companies, non-profit organizations, foundations and government agencies that share similar views and are willing to co-develop open projects on topics and areas of common interest*”(DESIS Network website).

There are many collaborations at the local level (in the DESIS Labs), which are not formed or registered by the network’s leading core. Key international partnerships of DESIS network

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<sup>1</sup><http://www.desisnetwork.org>

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include: the International Association of Universities and Colleges of Design, Art and Media (CUMULUS) and Social Innovation Exchange (SIX). DESIS is endorsed by the United Nations Environment Program (UNEP). Other collaborations, described on the DESIS website, include the Learning Network on Sustainability (LeNS), Partnership for Education and Research about Responsible Living (PERL). NESTA (National Endowment for Science, Technology and the Arts) and the Young Foundation in the UK.

The President, the International Coordinator and the Platform Coordinator (in charge of the website and communications strategies), constitute the leading core of DESIS Network association. The members in charge are:

- the president, Ezio Manzini (former full professor at Politecnico di Milano and visiting professor at many universities around the world, working mainly with active DESIS Labs);
- the international coordinator, Anna Meroni (assistant professor at Politecnico di Milano and coordinator of Polimi DESIS Lab in Italy);
- the platform coordinator, Davide Fassi (researcher at Politecnico di Milano and member of Polimi DESIS Lab in Italy)

There is also an International coordination committee composed of a team of 8 - 10 people, from the most active DESIS Labs coordinators.

- China: Lou Yongqi - Tongji University; Miaosen Gong - Jiangnan University
- Belgium: Virginia Tassinari –(MAD) Media, Arts and Design faculty (MAD)
- South Africa: Mugendi M'Rithaa – Cape Peninsula University of Technology
- UK: Adam Thorpe and Lorraine Gamman - Central Saint Martin, University of Arts London
- USA: Eduardo Staszowsky – Parsons, The New School, New York
- Italy: Davide Fassi – Politecnico di Milano
- Portugal: Teresa Franqueira – Universidade de Aveiro
- Brazil: Carla Cipolla – Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro-Coppe

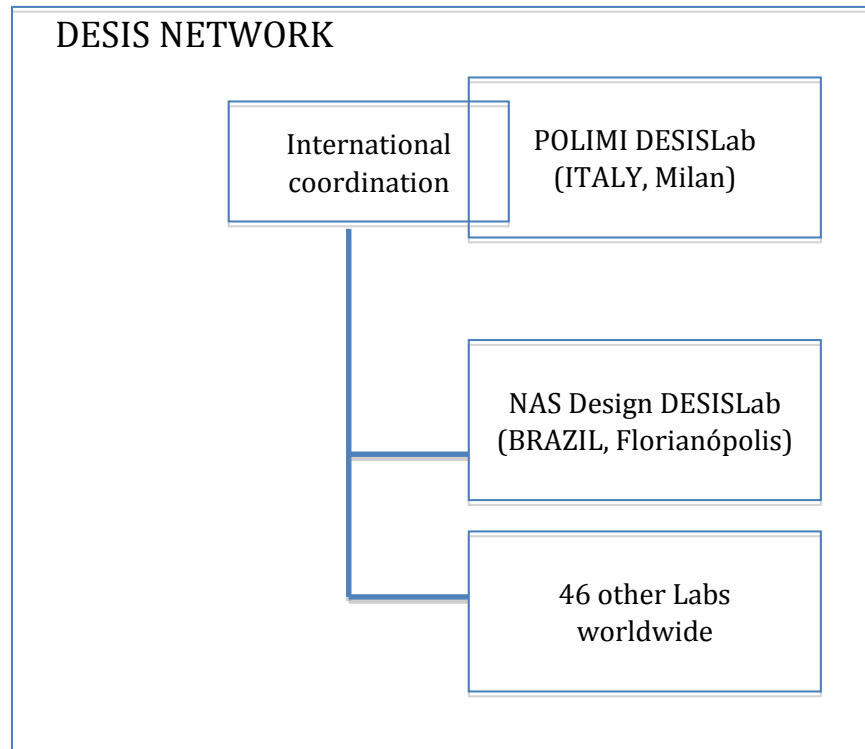
DESIS Network's higher ambition is to generate an Open Design Program to give different projects visibility, and to facilitate their alignments, collaborations and synergies. It means to produce knowledge with the contribution of different partners (open processes) that can be used by all stakeholders (open results) (from DESIS Website). This *“programme should be something of a novelty in the way it is conceived and conducted: it could develop a P2P approach, including schools, agencies and research centres from all over the world. It could be both open and collaborative, capable of self-regulation and self management; in total freedom”* (Manzini, 2008).

**The local initiatives.** This report includes the description and analysis of two local initiatives of DESIS Network (DESIS Labs), one located in Italy (Milan) and the other in Brazil (Florianopolis).

In Brazil, the local initiative (DESIS Lab) is situated in the Federal University of Santa Catarina. Its formal name is *Núcleo de Abordagem Sistêmica do Design – NAS DESIGN*, and it is coordinated by prof. Luiz Fernando Gonçalves de Figueiredo. In Italy, Polimi DESIS Lab is within the Politecnico di

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Milano. Its coordinator is prof. Anna Meroni, who is also currently international coordinator of the DESIS Network.



## 2 Methodology

### 2.1 Researchers' relations to the case

**Proximity vs. Distance.** Three researchers were involved in the case study: Carla Cipolla, Maíra Prestes and Rita Afonso. Carla Cipolla coordinated all the research and the case study on DESIS Network for TRANSIT. She was involved in the initial stages of DESIS Network, particularly in early projects that gave rise to the network and in other key periods of its development. Now she coordinates a DESIS Lab in Coppe- Federal University of Rio de Janeiro - one of the founding members of the DESIS Association. Maíra Prestes was in charge of DESIS Brazil in this report; she is a former member of the NAS Design DESIS Lab in the Federal University of Santa Catarina. Rita Afonso has never been involved with DESIS Network and is acting as an independent reviewer for this report.

**Normativity.** The involvement of TRANSIT researchers in DESIS Network could naturally favour a positive attitude towards the initiative. The involvement of a third researcher (Rita Afonso), external to DESIS Network and the interviews with external actors were key elements in minimizing this possibility.

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**Reciprocity.** The DESIS president and international coordinator were the key contacts for the development of this report and have expressed full interest in the final report. A meeting to present and discuss the results has been set in the agenda. This is the first time the DESIS Network has been placed under scrutiny. At the same time, DESIS Network is starting a more mature phase, being formalized as an association. This report is related to this process and we expect it to also provide elements for strategic consideration and planning of what the network is now and how it will be in the future.

**Research subject vs. research object.** Members of DESIS Network were mainly research objects. However, the research process for this report enabled many conversations (beyond registered participant observation and interviews) that were important in the process of self-awareness of the state of the DESIS Network today and its results, particularly for the researchers involved in this report.

## 2.2 Methods

### 2.2.1 Overall methodology

Methodological guidelines were followed. In the interviews, some questions were omitted due to a lack of time or understanding of the issue. Explanations were required for the set of questions about “game changers” and “system innovation”; these were provided in the glossary in the methodological guidelines. In Brazil, the set of questions about “system innovation” was considered particularly difficult to understand. The participation of TRANSIT researchers in DESIS Network facilitated the contacts and the interviews, but external actors were difficult to reach.

### 2.2.2 Interviews

#### For DESIS Network (transnational network)

Interviewees	Position	Date/duration
Actor 1	DESI Network member.	12 August 2014 01:26:04
Actor 2	DESI Network member.	2 September 2014 01:07:14
Actor 3	External actor from the academic field. No past or present collaborations with DESIS Network.	26 August 2014 00:39:16
Actor 4	DESI Network member.	2 September 2014 01:07:00



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## For DESIS Italy (POLIMI Desis Lab)

<b>Interviewees</b>	<b>Position</b>	<b>Date/duration</b>
Actor 5	Polimi DESIS Lab core team member.	10 October 2014 00:25:10
Actor 6	Polimi DESIS Lab core team member.	31 October 2014 01:02:23
Actor 7	External actor. Ongoing collaboration with Polimi DESIS Lab.	14 August 2014 00:50:27
Actor 8	Polimi DESIS Lab core team member.	3 September 2014 00:53:39
Actor 9	External actor, project partner with Polimi DESIS Lab.	7 October 2014 00:21:39
Actor 10	External actor, project partner with Polimi DESIS Lab.	7 October 2014 00:10:12
Actor 11	External actor, project partner with Polimi DESIS Lab.	7 October 2014 00:12:08
Actor 12	Polimi DESIS Lab core team member.	14/10/08 01:32:04

## For DESIS Brazil (NAS Design DESIS Lab)

<b>Interviewees</b>	<b>Position</b>	<b>Date/duration</b>
Actor 13	NAS DESIGN - DESIS lab member.	08/11/2014 01:05:00
Actor 14	External actor, project partner with NAS DESIGN - DESIS Lab	08/12/2014 00:25:02
Actor 15	External actor, social entrepreneur.	08/11/2014 01:35:34
Actor 16	External actor, project partner with NAS DESIGN - DESIS Lab.	08/08/2014 00:35:15
Actor 17	NAS DESIGN - DESIS Lab member.	08/14/2014 01:17:47
Actor 18	NAS DESIGN - DESIS Lab member.	08/14/2014 01:17:51
Actor 19	NAS DESIGN - DESIS Lab member.	08/12/2014 00:46:45
Actor 20	External actor from the academic field,	08/12/2014 01:42:23

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## 2.2.3 Participant observation

### For DESIS Network

Research activities undertaken: 11 hours of participant observation in two events ; one in Johannesburg, within the framework of the Cumulus Conference (the International Association of Universities and Colleges of Art, Design and Media); and another in Brazil, within the P&D Conference (Congresso de Pesquisa e Desenvolvimento em Design). DESIS international events usually happen side-by-side with Cumulus conferences (by agreement with the Cumulus Association), but they also can take place in other conferences.

22 September 2014 (3 hours) – Johannesburg (South Africa)

#### **1<sup>st</sup> Assembly of the DESIS Association.**

The first assembly of the newly formed association was an historical moment for DESIS Network, as, until 2014, DESIS Network had been run as an informal network. The objective was to observe the interactions between the network coordinators and leaders, and with other members (representatives of DESIS Labs all over the world).

23 September 2014 (3 hours) - Johannesburg (South Africa)

#### **IFC – Informal Formal Collaborative Thematic Cluster meeting**

The development of thematic clusters is a key activity in DESIS Network. It gathers different Labs around a common research question or project. The objective was to investigate the relations between the different DESIS Labs in this activity.

22 - 23 September 2014 - Johannesburg (South Africa)

#### **Cumulus Conference**

Participation in the conference that has brought together the core team of DESIS Network and representatives of different DESIS Labs around the world. It was an opportunity to observe interpersonal relations between members.

29 September 2014 (3 hours) - Gramado (Brazil)

#### **DESIS Showcase - P&D Conference**

DESIS Showcases are aimed to create and maintain an up-to-date overview on initiatives of design for social innovation taking place in design schools across the globe. Schools are invited to present their social innovation-related projects, using a simple standard format. These projects are shown at special events, i.e. the DESIS Showcases, which are organised back-to-back with international conferences. The objective was to observe the interactions between the five Brazilian DESIS Labs (all of which had sent representatives), other design school representatives and one of the key DESIS network leaders.

29 September 2014 (2 hours) - Gramado (Brazil)

#### **DESIS Brazilian Labs internal meeting**

There was a meeting between representatives of Brazilian DESIS Labs and other schools interested in taking part in DESIS Network. The meeting included the presentation of members' rights and duties, as established in the DESIS Network Association Agreement, that schools (old and new) are now asked to adopt. It was followed by a discussion session about common activities that could be developed by the Brazilian DESIS Network. The objective was to observe the changes introduced

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by the legal formalization of the DESIS Network and the synergies between the Brazilian DESIS Labs.

## For DESIS Italy (Polimi DESIS Lab)

Research activities undertaken: 22 hours of participant observation and shadowing:

6 October 2014 (8 hours) – Milan (Italy)

**Meeting of EU financed project TRANSITION** (<http://transitionproject.eu/>). Transnational Network for Social Innovation Incubation – TRANSITION. Polimi DESIS Lab is a partner and hosted the meeting in Politecnico di Milano. It was important to observe the role of Polimi DESIS Lab in a project about social innovation developed in partnership with other actors. Polimi DESIS Lab is developing its approach on social innovation incubation, also in interaction with other partners, experienced in innovation-based incubation (IBI).

7 October 2014 (4 hours) – Milan (Italy)

**Corporate Social Responsibility and Social Innovation Meeting / Il Salone della CSR e dell'innovazione sociale** (<http://www.csreinnovazionesociale.it/>)

A specific session in the event was organized by Polimi DESIS Lab and the title was “Incubation of social innovation in Europe and Italy”. Partners of the EU-financed project TRANSITION and Polimi DESIS Lab members were speakers. It was important to observe how Polimi DESIS Lab and other partners presented their tools and methods to the public. This involved a full presentation of the Polimi DESIS Lab methodology and its incubation process of social innovation.

9 October 2014 (4 hours) – Mantova (Italy)

**Fatti di Cultura** (<http://www.fattidicultura.it/>): an event to which the Polimi DESIS Lab coordinator was invited as a speaker. It was very useful to observe how the coordinator presented projects, tools and methodologies in the Italian context and how the international DESIS Network empowers (or disempowers) the local Lab activities.

11 October 2014 (6 hours) - - Milan (Italy)

**Experiment Days Milano 2014** (<http://www.housinglab.it/exdays/>): an event about Housing, specifically Co-Housing, which is a key area for the Polimi DESIS Lab. It included conferences, round-table sessions and a fair. It was significant to observe how co-housing is spreading in the city of Milan and the new demands this brings to the Polimi DESIS Lab, in comparison with the starting point of these activities, seven years ago (by the same Politecnico di Milano).

6-10 October 2014 - Milan (Italy)

**Shadowing with Polimi DESIS Lab coordinator.**

The Polimi DESIS Lab coordinator (and members) were shadowed for the period of a week, providing the opportunity for many informal talks.

## For DESIS Brazil (NAS Design DESIS Lab)

Research activities undertaken: 29 hours of participant observation in the NAS Design office, in Federal University of Santa Catarina, and shadowing the NAS Design coordinator:

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08 August 2014 (1:30 hours) – Rio do Sul (Santa Catarina – Brazil)

**Establishment of a partnership (1).** This event was important to see the interaction between external actors and NAS DESIGN. The group signed a partnership with AMPE (Association of the Micro and Small Entrepreneurs from the Alto Vale do Itajaí) and UNIDAVI (University Centre for the development of the Alto Vale do Itajaí). The idea was that the university would provide a space within its centre, for NAS DESIGN and AMPE to organize a service laboratory to work with micro-entrepreneurs in the region.

08 August 2014 (2:30 hours) – Ituporanga (Santa Catarina – Brazil)

**Establishment of a partnership (2).** This event was similarly important to see the interaction between external actors and NAS DESIGN. The researchers observed a meeting with the Secretary of Economic Development from AMPE and the Secretary of Economic Development from the Ituporanga City Hall, in order to settle a partnership among NAS DESIGN, AMPE and Ituporanga City Hall, and to develop a project of communication (visual identity) and strategic design for a group of micro-entrepreneurs in the city working in the food sector – restaurants and sale of food products.

18 August 2014 (5 hours) – Florianópolis (Santa Catarina - Brazil)

### **Shadowing 3: internal meetings**

Participation in the meetings of NAS DESIGN DESIS Lab, with the coordinator and other members, to observe the interactions between participants.

11 – 21 August 2014 (20 hours) – Florianópolis (Santa Catarina – Brazil)

### **Participant observation within the physical space**

Observation of how people work and communicate within the physical space of the laboratory. The aim was to understand the local governance and the process of social learning in the group.

## 2.2.4 Document reviews

**DEGIS Network.** The description of DEGIS Network considered the theoretical and methodological framework of the EU-funded project EMUDE (Emerging Users Demands for Sustainable Solutions) – 2004-2006, which is regarded as the starting point of the DEGIS Network. The framework developed in EMUDE fostered the overall identity of the DEGIS Network. The document review included also an in-depth analysis of the writings of Ezio Manzini, founder and president of the DEGIS Network, which are viewed as an “amplifier” (citing one of the interviews undertaken for this report) of the network. A collection of texts was analyzed between 2003 and 2014, but only those which answered the TRANSIT questions, clarified the history of the DEGIS network or dealt with specific issues. Other than these primary sources, secondary sources were included to investigate external views about the case study through on-line desk research. It was done through Google, academia.edu and sciELO, using the words/expressions/names (i.e. the names of the researchers and important partners from DEGIS Network).

**DEGIS Italy (Polimi DEGIS Lab).** The writings of the Polimi DEGIS Lab’s core team were considered, when they were interviewed or involved in the participant observations. The first level was to look for documents (primary sources) in order to clarify terms or projects mentioned in the

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interviews or participant observations. Desk research was done through secondary sources and other resources. There are many papers and other types of publication on the web, but priority was given to the most recent. Online desk research was done in the same manner as DESIS Network, but using names of researchers and partners of Polimi DESIS Lab. Keywords used were: DESIS, DESIS network, education and design / l'istruzione e la progettazione, design and social innovation / il design e l'innovazione sociale + DESIS, design for social innovation and sustainability / Design per l'innovazione sociale e la sostenibilità, Polimi DESIS LAB, social design / progettazione sociale, scenario building / costruzione di scenari, creative communities / comunità creative, collaborative services/ servizi collaborativi, and the names of Polimi DESIS Lab members. The research activity for Polimi DESIS Lab was useful for the overall understanding of DESIS Network, considering the leading role played by this specific Lab in the historical development of the network theory and practice.

**DESIS Brazil (NAS Design DESIS Lab).** The description of NAS DESIGN was mainly based on the interviews and on the understanding of the group's achievements through primary and secondary sources. The writings of the NAS DESIGN DESIS Lab' core team and others were considered, if available, when they were interviewed or involved in participant observations. The target was to clarify terms or projects mentioned by the team members. Additionally, desk research was done through secondary sources and other resources. Online desk research was done in the same manner as DESIS Network, but using names of researchers and partners of Polimi DESIS Lab. Scientific articles from NAS DESIGN members (primary sources), and newspaper articles (secondary sources) were analyzed. A video presenting the Lab's work was also an important reference.

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## 3 Analysis of transnational network(ing)

### 3.1 Transnational networking: *DESIS Network*

DESIS network is considered by one of its leaders to be the “*first network of schools dealing with Social Innovation, specifically in the Design field*”. It was also declared that the network aims to “*bring a contribution to what Design can do to support, trigger and help social innovation, especially bottom-up social innovation*” (Interview-actor1). The website describes DESIS as “*a network of design labs, based in design schools and design-oriented universities, actively involved in promoting and supporting sustainable change*” (DESIS website).

In organizational terms, DESIS is a transnational network of 48 Labs (local manifestations). DESIS network is a ‘discreet’ entity that exists only to support, promote and foster the DESIS Lab activities. A DESIS Lab is defined as a group of “*professors, researchers and students who orient their design and research activities towards social innovation. They can operate at the local scale with local partners and, in collaboration with other DESIS Labs, they can also engage in regional and global large-scale projects and programs. They are based in Design Schools and design-oriented universities and can be extensions of already existing entities or new, specifically established ones*” (DESIS website).

Specifically, “*DESIS Network’s basic activity is to support DESIS Labs’ projects, to facilitate their collaboration and to inform a larger audience on the potential of design for social innovation. More precisely:*

- *it supports Local Projects promoting visibility and collaboration and enhancing the circulation of experiences, results and design tools;*
- *it facilitates Regional and Global Projects creating arenas where the discussion can freely start, where the best partners can be found and where promising ideas can be incubated;*
- *it offers DESIS Labs and a larger audience relevant information on exemplary projects and case studies; programs of workshops, seminars and courses; calendars of cultural events and communication initiatives, as exhibitions, publications and broadcasts” (DESIS Website).*

The network is based on the following pillars, which synthetize its interest in the TRANSIT research project and the transformative social innovation theory it aims to develop:

**Design for Social Innovation.** DESIS is a network that promotes a design practice to foster sustainable change. It presupposes a change in the role of the design discipline itself, which brings it closer to social innovation cases and processes: “*moving from the idea of ‘designing to solve problems’ to one of ‘designing to enable people to live as they like’ while moving toward sustainability, implies also a change in the designer’s role. In short: they should not (try to) impose their ideas of what they think should be done, but they should actively and positively participate in the social processes where these new and promising ideas are emerging*” (Manzini, 2006). Social innovations are defined as solutions developed by people and communities who act outside the dominant thought and behaviour patterns, which are promising signs of sustainable ways of living. Designers are expected to act interlinked with such processes and solutions to promote

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sustainable change. Specifically, it means to “*promote new ways of living, in a kind of new system of solutions for people’s everyday life*” (Interview-actor2).

**Sustainability.** Sustainable change is described as a *vision* able to guide the network activities (or the *big scenario* the network strategically aims to promote) which is composed of three key concepts: distributed systems, cosmopolitan localism and resilience (to be dealt with in more detail later in this report). These concepts synthesize, on different levels, the characteristics of the many projects and initiatives promoted by the network. The transition towards sustainability is also understood as a large social learning process, in which designers have a specific role: “*designers have mainly been part of the (social and economical) problem that we now have to face. Moving from here to become part of the solution, to become active agents in the transition towards sustainable ways of living, designers must make a profound change in their culture and praxis. New conceptual and methodological tools need to be developed. New ideas, solutions and general visions need to be conceived. And an effort must be made to play a positive role in the social discourse on how to imagine and build a sustainable future*” (Manzini, 2007)

The investigation into DESIS Network reveals that its key focus is to prepare design students to perform such transformative roles and create - through the development of both a *new design knowledge* (Manzini, 2008) and effective projects - the conditions in which they would then be able to work. These professionals need new tools and a theoretical framework on which to base their new design practices. It also includes enabling them to follow the on-going changes towards sustainability, or which new design skills will be increasingly necessary. At the same time, it is essential to foster a society in which these new professionals are needed.

Therefore, DESIS Network is moving design skills and design research capabilities towards this mission, to educate students to be agents of change, and to shift the way of practising design by thus changing the students.

DESIS Network is based in universities, giving it four particular characteristics:

- it is focused on the **production of knowledge** about design for social innovation, required to consolidate and promote a new design practice;
- it is focused on **students**, to educate a new generation of designers able to foster sustainable change;
- it is focused on the **development of exemplary design activities**, which forms a set of pioneering projects and case studies targeted to creating a demand for these new professionals;

These points synthesize what was observed and interpreted (data collected by interviews and participant observation) to be the distinctive aspects that differentiate DESIS network from other social innovation networks.

**Production of knowledge.** In terms of production of knowledge, the aim is to consolidate a new comprehension of design practice and, at the same time, to equip students and professionals with theoretical and practical tools for their new role. One of the DESIS Network leaders stated: “*there is*

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*a desperate need for knowledge in relation to social innovation and in particular to design for social innovation" (...) "we need to succeed in producing knowledge". And also: "For sure, in the beginning we contribute to others to the definition of social innovation, but we were totally original in the beginning in developing design for social innovation, and in developing this knowledge (...) this more theoretical dimension was translated into tools and into something that could influence more directly the schools, in the teaching"(Interview-actor1). The knowledge produced by DESIS Network is diffused through the usual academic channels and generated through research activities. In addition, knowledge is produced through direct contact with the wider society (and social innovations) but using specific design skills. It includes the ability to give visual shape to knowledge, as for example scenario building (*design-oriented scenarios*) organized as visions of possible futures (Manzini, 2003; Jegou and Manzini, 2003; Jegou and Manzini, 2008), which can guide a social learning process and conversation between stakeholders towards a commonly recognized goal. Other examples include activities related to storytelling and videos.*

**Students.** Students are regarded as being the very heart of the DESIS Network: *"our main channel for impact is our raw material, and our raw material are the students and luckily we work with young generations. (They) will be the younger designers of the next generations, and after all it is for them that we try now to conceptualize what design for social innovation is, because we are in a way, saying that a designer is not anymore who it used to be. And if we insist to train and to educate young designers for this new way of being designers, then we have to create for them the condition to work and to exist in the society" (Interview-actor2). The mission is to educate students for their new role as professionals, but at the same time, and primarily, as agents of change; this includes undergraduate and graduate levels.*

**Development of exemplary design activities (design and research activity intertwined).** Research activity is focused on generating knowledge through design activities (action-research), i.e. "real" projects. The focus is also to open up the path for students, i.e., to create conditions for these students to work in. DESIS Labs at the local level generate pioneering projects and future visions and are able to create a demand for these new professionals: *"When we started working, at least here, with a public administration, a university working with design, what they expected from designers was totally different from what you delivered. They started to understand this issue that creativity is not only something you use to produce chairs. And also the same for others, I have been working with bigger organizations, or civic organizations here" (Interview-actor2). "The education element is still dominating the network (...) and participatory research by creating evidences of different applications of design. It creates awareness, of the role of design in different contexts, through light formats of projects, like students, but then those become an opportunity for bigger project intervention, research funded project (...), they started with one or more projects developed by students (PhD), so it is an activator also of research" (Interview-actor3).*

The main contribution of DESIS Network is to organize how it is possible to consider all the aspects involved in fostering a new professional profile able to promote the transition towards sustainability and the role of universities. It opens up the question about how other disciplines (such as Engineering, Sociology and Pedagogy) are educating new professional figures to promote changes and what would be the differences and similarities with DESIS Network. It is worth noting that DESIS Network involves 48 universities around the world, which brings its actions to a global scale.



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**Context, methodology and expected results.** DESIS Network and its Labs place its focus mainly on everyday activities in urban contexts, which includes the design of a diversified set of services and processes (as for example co-design and participatory processes) to be performed in urban settings. In terms of methodology, social innovation for sustainability is fostered through a design thinking approach. This is discussed further in this report, but means, in summary: (1) identifying social innovation (new behaviours) or contexts in need of social innovation; (2) gaining insights regarding behaviours, motivations, problems, and opportunities; (3) envisioning more sustainable scenarios; (4) developing envisioned solutions. Results are presented in terms of knowledge (research results, reported through academic channels) but also in terms of designed outputs: services, PSS (Product Service Systems), systems, processes. New issues for design practice are continuously emerging, including the intersection of design, social innovation and public policies. Currently, DESIS Network is working principally as an actor defining what the design discipline will be (or could be) in the future.

**DESI initiatives.** A DESIS Initiative can be defined as a group of DESIS Labs cooperating to realize a common cultural, didactic or research program. DESIS Initiatives can be categorized in different typologies:

- **Thematic and Regional Clusters:** *"initiatives promoted by groups of DESIS Labs that, having found a theme of common interest, or willing to reinforce the DESIS Network at a regional scale, agree to align and systemize their on-going, programmed activities, with the aim of creating the most favourable conditions to conceive and enhance, locally and/or internationally, new and stronger outcomes".*
- **DESI Showcases:** *"Showcase is a DESIS Project aiming to create and maintain an up-to-date overview on initiatives of design for social innovation taking place in design schools across the globe. Within the context of DESIS Showcase, schools are invited to present their social innovation-related projects, using a common lightweight format. These projects are shown at special events".*
- **DESI Philosophical Talks:** *"is a new initiative proposed by DESIS in order to enhance the dialogue between practice & theory, between design & philosophy. The idea is to match practical issues and topics emerging from design practice in the field of social innovation around the world with insights from the philosophical tradition".*

**The thematic clusters developed or under development by DESIS Labs are:**

- **Ageing & Ingenuity:** aims to investigate different design approaches that address the full spectrum of challenges around ageing.
- **Distributed & Open Production (DOP):** aims to investigate the role of design for new production processes and models in a social innovation perspective.
- **Informal, formal and collaborative (IFC):** aims to identify potential ideas for a new generation of services that could be designed from the perspective of underserved communities.
- **Public & Collaborative:** aims to investigate the intersection of design innovation and public policy.

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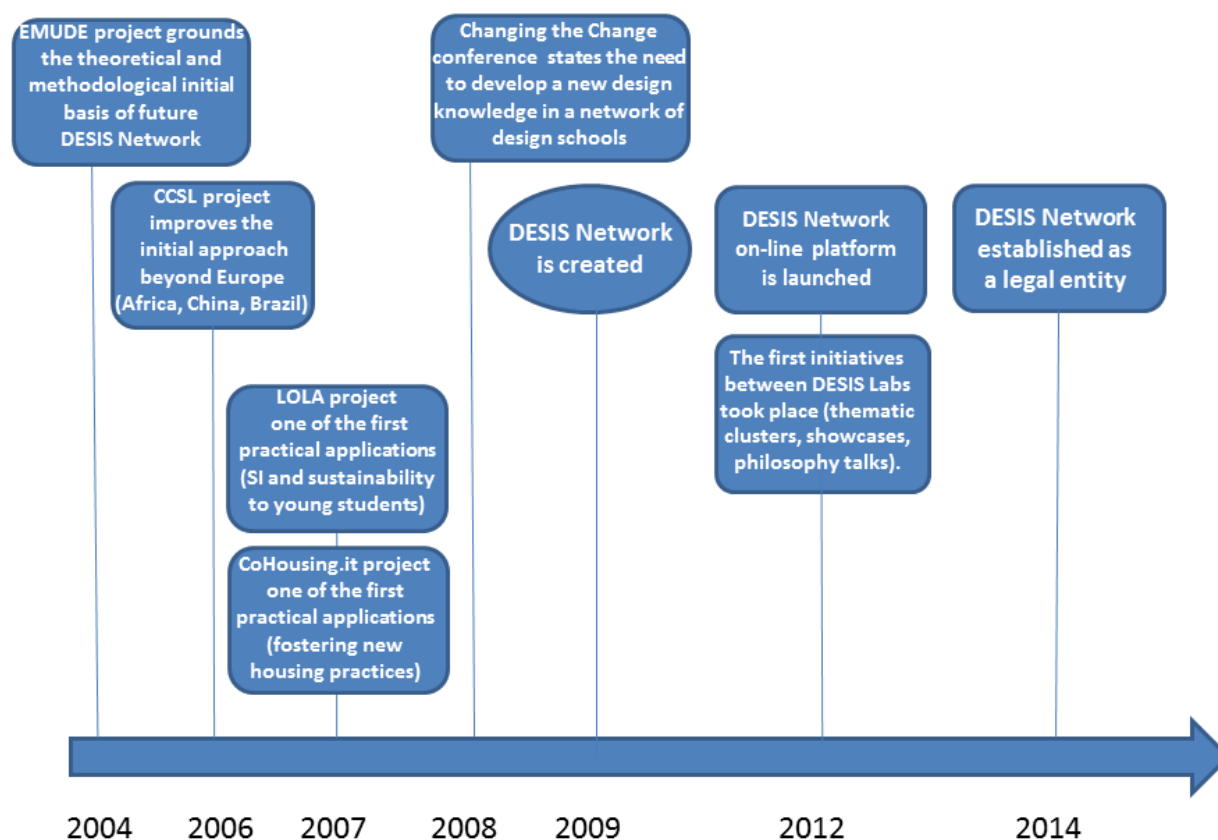
- Rural-Urban China: aims to investigate the interaction and exchange between city and countryside.
- Safer Places and Spaces: aims to investigate new forms of crime prevention that approach public safety in the city in a different way, applying social innovation approaches to catalyze, facilitate and support communities in the creation of safe, vital and sustainable neighbourhoods.

**External actors' views about DESIS Network.** Interviewees have declared the DESIS Network as the first organization to start developing projects on Design for Social Innovation, therefore it is one of the organizations that leads in this field. Other interviewees affirmed that DESIS Network brings together theory and practice, and the observation of how theory is applied in practice is very important in verifying the impact of social innovation.

**Future identity of the DESIS Network.** *"I did not know that would be DESIS 2.0. I know what was 1.0, and I know what is 2.0 and I do not know what will be 3.0. If it will become a huge international voluntary system, because we will be so good in creating the momentum and the vision that we will have people just coming to us and saying: 'I want to work with you, for you, for free' or I'm available to do this and that'. Sometimes something like this happens, because we have a lot of young researchers or students that are willing to collaborate also for free. But maybe we will become a sort of church, a social innovation church. Or, we will become more business oriented, in a good sense, meaning that we will become more functional in terms of creating the conditions for us to work: partnering with big companies, partnering with more specific projects, like developing projects for CSR(Corporate Social Responsibility) ... in the present time we are a little bit between different situations. I don't know what will be our main leverage in the future. This is another kind of collective brainstorming that we should do soon. Become a church, become the peacemaker that works together with big multinational governance systems, become a kind of bright side of business and so of the companies..." (Interview-actor2).*

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## Timeline and table:



Year / period	Important activities/changes/milestones in transnational networking <i>DESIS Network</i>	Importance in the development of DESIS Network	Who
2004-2006	<p>EU-funded project EMUDE (Emerging User Demands for Sustainable Solutions) was the starting point for DESIS Network. It was a program of activities to explore the potential of social innovation as a driver for technological and production innovation, in view of sustainability. EMUDE identified a large number of promising cases and, on this basis, developed a set of conceptual tools to deal with them, to orient policy makers and to define research and design guidelines in order to promote their consolidation and diffusion.</p> <p>EMUDE included as future prospects: the creation and expansion of a permanent network: “The role of the Antenna network does not stop with EMUDE, rather it aims to become a permanent structure that looks to offer a continuous service monitoring creative communities, the promising cases they set</p>	<p>EMUDE helps to consolidate the focus (from the product-service systems approach to sustainability or LCA analysis) on social innovations as a key issue to be considered in the transition towards sustainability, which is the main aim of DESIS Network. EMUDE projects have pioneered this approach and had set up the core of DESIS Network methodology and the idea of setting up a worldwide network of Design Schools (in EMUDE it was called Antenna Network)</p>	<p>Politecnico di Milano (Ezio Manzini, scientific coordinator and Anna Meroni) – leading roles.</p>

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	<p>up, new demands for products and services that emerge, and their potential both on the social and environmental side and on that of new markets and new business ideas.”</p>		
2006	<p>Creative Communities for Sustainable Lifestyles (CCSL) project is established to build on the results of EMUDE and to expand its activities outside Europe. It involved China, Brazil and India. It was financed by the Swedish Ministry for Sustainable Development in the framework of the Task Force on Sustainable Lifestyles within the 10 Year Framework of Programmes on Sustainable Consumption and Production, usually called the Marrakech Process. The Marrakech Process was led by the United Nations Environmental Programme (UNEP) and by the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA).</p>	<p>It consolidates and circulates the EMUDE methodology and theory outside Europe. It was particularly fruitful in Brazil and China, which have more than one active DESIS Lab today, but also in India, which also has a DESIS Lab.</p>	<p>Politecnico di Milano (Ezio Manzini, coordinator) and Strategic Design Scenario (consultancy based in Brussels, led by François Jégou).</p>
2007	<p>(2007-2009) LOLA – Looking for Likely Alternatives. A didactic tool to approach sustainability by investigating social innovation. It aimed to foster interests and involvement in education for sustainability and responsible living in national school curricula: LOLA started as a follow-up of EMUDE with this specific focus. Together with the Consumer Citizenship Network and financed by EU, it developed a didactic Teaching Pack to involve pupils and their teachers in this fruitful activity aligned with project-based education and action-learning outside the school. (2007) Project “Cohousing.it” develops a set of tools for community building and co-design activities to set up the shared services in co-housing condominiums.</p>	<p>The projects embedded the findings and tools of design for social innovation and sustainability in practice, disseminating the approach (for educational purposes in LOLA and to consolidate new housing practices in the Co-housing.it project)</p>	<p>LOLA: Politecnico di Milano, CCN-Consumer Citizenship Network and Strategic Design Scenarios (consultancy based on Brussels)  Cohousing.it: Politecnico di Milano and other partners.</p>
2008	<p>Changing the Change Conference. It aimed to make a significant contribution to a necessary transformation that involves changing the direction of current changes toward a sustainable future. It specifically intended to outline the state-of-the-art of design research in terms of visions, proposals and tools with which design can actively and positively take part in the wider social learning process that</p>	<p>It was an important step in starting to understand the “new design knowledge” required (and how to produce it) to support the new role designers are asked to perform to foster the transition towards sustainability. Ezio Manzini presented the idea that an open and collaborative program, developed by a multiplicity of</p>	<p>Politecnico di Milano and Politecnico di Torino (City of Torino as a World Design Capital) coordinates the event.</p>

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	will have to take place.	design schools, centres and agencies, would be required (Manzini, 2008).	
From 2008 on	<p>Former PhD students from Politecnico di Milano who have developed thesis or research activities related to Design for Social Innovation and took up positions in universities all over the world - for example: Miaosen Gong (China), Lara Penin (USA), Carla Cipolla (Brazil), Joon Sang Baek (Korea) and others - have been asked to set up local research groups and labs and have progressively set them up as DESIS Labs. It was also an opportunity to set up local networks as DESIS China and DESIS Brazil.</p> <p>The name DESIS – Design for Social Innovation and Sustainability was created in 2008 by Ezio Manzini. First DESIS Labs and groups were founded: DESIS research group based in Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro- Coppe was formally founded in 2008 and drew together researchers from other universities in Brazil. In 2009, Tongji University become one of the founding members of DESIS-China Network. Parsons DESIS Lab in New York was founded in 2009, and so on.</p>	<p>The core of the future DESIS network was set up. Based on the labs set by the first PhD students and the networking of Ezio Manzini, the network began to exist, in a very informal way, from 2009 on.</p>	<p>Former Politecnico di Milano PhD students and, later, with other researchers based in design-oriented schools.</p>
2012	<p>DESIS Network formal website and platform to enable collaborations between DESIS Labs was launched. The first transversal initiatives between DESIS Labs started to take place (thematic clusters, showcases, philosophy talks).</p> <p>The terms of affiliation with DESIS Network become informally stated. DESIS Network is not a legal entity yet, but an (informal) affiliation process takes place.</p>	<p>These two elements (the improvement of the online communication and the transversal initiatives) were key steps towards the formalization of the DESIS network.</p>	<p>Politecnico di Milano and Strategic Design Scenario (consultancy based in Brussels)</p>
2013	<p>Conclusion of the first thematic cluster of DESIS Network, called Public and Collaborative. It was an initiative that brought together government agencies, not-for-profit or charitable-sector organizations, and the DESIS network Labs to explore the intersection of design innovation and public policy. A major theme of this collaboration is to investigate how emerging social networks influence public services and innovation policies, and vice versa - how public services and innovation policies can trigger, empower, or direct emerging social networks</p>	<p>Thematic clusters are key elements in the consolidation of collaborations between DESIS Labs and reinforcement of the network. From that point, other thematic clusters have been organized (such as DOP- Distributed and Open Production, Aging and Ingenuity, IFC- Informal, Formal and Collaborative)</p>	<p>Parsons DESIS Lab (US); Polimi DESIS Lab (Italy); Aalto University (Finland); Art Center College of Design(US); Carnegie Mellon University; Central Saint Martins College of Arts and Design(UK); ENSCI-Les</p>

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			Ateliers (France); George Brown College (Canada); La Cambre and MadFaculty( Belgium); Malmo University(Swede n); Carnegie Mellon University (US)
2014	Establishment of DESIS Network as a legal entity under Italian Law. Polimi DESIS Lab had an active role in setting up the agreement and find out the potential legal form for the association.	DESIS Association agreement dictates the organizational form of the network: it has a very light leading core and it is not only non-profit, but the association excludes direct management of financial resources.	Signatories: Politecnico di Milano, University of Arts London, The New School, NY, Tongji University, Jiangnan University and Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro.

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## 3.2 Aspects of ‘innovation’ and ‘change’ of the transnational network(ing)

It is important to remember that the DESIS Network association itself is a very discreet organization that exists to support, promote and foster the DESIS Labs activities. It is done by organizing knowledge generated by the specific DESIS labs. For this reason, this section is largely based on a review of documents produced by its leaders, together with interviews and participant observations from the DESIS Labs analyzed for this report.

### 3.2.1 Relation with social innovation

The focus on social innovation is at the very heart of the DESIS Network and in its name. Social innovation was defined, in the origins of the DESIS Network (the definition behind the EMUDE Project), as “*changes in the way individuals or communities act to get a result (i.e. to solve a problem or to generate new opportunities). These innovations are driven by behaviour changes (more than by technology or market) and they emerge from bottom-up processes (more than from top-down ones)*” (Manzini, 2004). Creative communities, defined as “*people who are able to act outside the dominant thought and behaviour pattern*” (Manzini, 2006), set up social innovations. They are “*groups of innovative citizens organising themselves to solve a problem or to open a new possibility, and doing*

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*so as a positive step in the social learning process towards social and environmental sustainability” (Manzini & Jegou, 2003).*

Today the website presents the following definition, referred to by Mulgan (2006) as: *“Social innovation is a new idea that works in meeting social goals”*. It continues: *“In other words, social innovation can be seen as a process of change emerging from the creative re-combination of existing assets (social capital, historical heritage traditional craftsmanship, accessible advanced technology) and aiming at achieving socially recognized goals in new ways. A kind of innovation driven by social demands rather than by the market and/or autonomous techno-scientific research, and generated more by the actors involved than by specialists” (DESIS website).*

In this conceptual framework, DESIS Network uses design thinking and design knowledge to trigger, enable and scale-up social innovation (according to DESIS Network website and interviews). Specifically, the activities described below, in the historical trajectory of the network, have been more or less prevalent, and form its current (practical and theoretical) body of knowledge:

- to raise social innovation **visibility**: social innovation cases, which are analyzed and selected through a strategic approach, guided by specific qualitative criteria (see next sessions for details about the transformative approach DESIS Network aims to promote) can integrate communication programs, or can be specifically used for the development of scenarios (called “design oriented scenarios”). This process generates feasible “visions of possible worlds”, able to guide a conversation and a social learning process between different actors to foster the transition towards sustainability.
- to enhance social innovation **potential**, which means to consider social innovation cases as working prototypes, developed by people in their own contexts of life (the “creative communities”). The distinctive approach DESIS Network brings to light is to consider a social innovation case as a solution. Therefore, design is considered as an ability, possessed to some extent by everyone. Expert designers enhance social innovation potential by learning from social innovation cases and by using their professional abilities to consolidate these initiatives (sometimes informal or precarious, in organizational terms) in terms of furthering in its development, to structure it as a new kind of organization. Due to the intensive interpersonal collaboration patterns presented in social innovation, they are called “collaborative organizations” or “collaborative services” (Jegou & Manzini, 2008; Manzini, 2013).
- to facilitate social innovation **transferability**, which is related to the previous item. It means to make existing initiatives more effective, accessible and replicable in different contexts. The consolidation and transferability of social innovation cases is done by developing “enabling solutions” which *“refers to operative tools, able to help the user focus on a result and achieve it in a sustainable way. In carrying out this role they must bring a special type of intelligence into play: an intelligence that enables them to stimulate, develop and regenerate the ability and competence of those who use it (Manzini, 2004).* This definition is in line with the definition of social innovation as undertaken by active (and creative) minorities: solutions developed in relation to social innovation should retain this and other qualitative characteristics. One of the challenges for the DESIS theoretical and practical developments how to maintain original qualities in the process of developing solutions to consolidate and replicate social innovation cases (Cipolla & Manzini, 2009).

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- to increase social innovation **synergy**, by developing frameworks and platforms to connect the diverse local social innovation cases and new initiatives developed into larger projects. The promotion of this synergy is at the very core of the DESIS Network. The DESIS online platform is considered the “*organizational infrastructure of the whole Network*” (from DESIS Network Association agreement, glossary). If the “*globalisation and connectivity combined have caused a re-emergence of the local dimension*” it is acknowledged that the reinforcement of the connectivity empowers the locality (Manzini, Vugliano 2000). DESIS can “*integrate existing initiatives (...) There is a network, a sharing knowledge about best practices. There is a potential diffusion of these best practices in different contexts*” (Interview-actor3).
- to stimulate and design **new initiatives**, by identifying contexts in need of social innovation, to propose solutions to be developed in open, collaborative interactions with local communities and other involved actors. These are activities undertaken at the local level, in the DESIS Labs. The Lab teams work to develop social innovation cases in their localities. DESIS Network supports and connects these initiatives, as for example, by the development of the *thematic clusters*. This is considered to be one of the key benefits DESIS Network provides at the local level, i.e., giving visibility and connectivity to the work performed at DESIS Labs. An interpretative framework about activities on design for social innovation and sustainability are synthesized in the table below (Table 2) which are performed predominantly under a co-design approach. DESIS Lab projects, empowered by DESIS Network, can be classified in one or more sections of this framework.

**Table 2: Synthesis of possible design approaches towards social innovations (Cipolla and Moura, 2011)**

<b>Design as empowerer</b>	<b>Design as multiplier</b>	<b>Design as envisioner</b>	<b>Design as connector</b>
Identify social innovation cases; Map actors, contexts, activities and relationships; Gain insights regarding behaviours, motivations, problems and opportunities; Generate empowering ideas in a co-design process with local communities and other actors; Prototype and develop tools for supporting and scaling cases.	Identify social innovation extreme behaviours; Gain insights regarding motivations, problems and opportunities; Translate behaviours into solution ideas; Prototype and develop solutions; Replicate solutions in other contexts to solve social challenges.	Identify contexts in need of social innovation; Gain insights regarding behaviours, motivations, problems and opportunities; Envision more sustainable scenarios; Prototype and develop envisioned solutions; Continuously monitor and iterate solutions in context to favour a sustainable future.	Map physical, human and strategic resources that are necessary for social innovation; Understand and gain insights regarding interactions, problems and opportunities; Envision more sustainable relationships; Prototype and develop envisioned relationships as part of integrated system.

## 3.2.2 Relation with system innovation

**Social innovation as a driver for system innovation.** The idea of considering social innovation as a driver for system innovation was at the core of the origin of DESIS. The project that, historically, gave rise to the idea of building a Design for Social Innovation network(EMUDE) had as its main aim “*to explore the potential of social innovation as a driver for technological and production innovation, in view of sustainability. To this end, it seeks to shed more light on cases where*

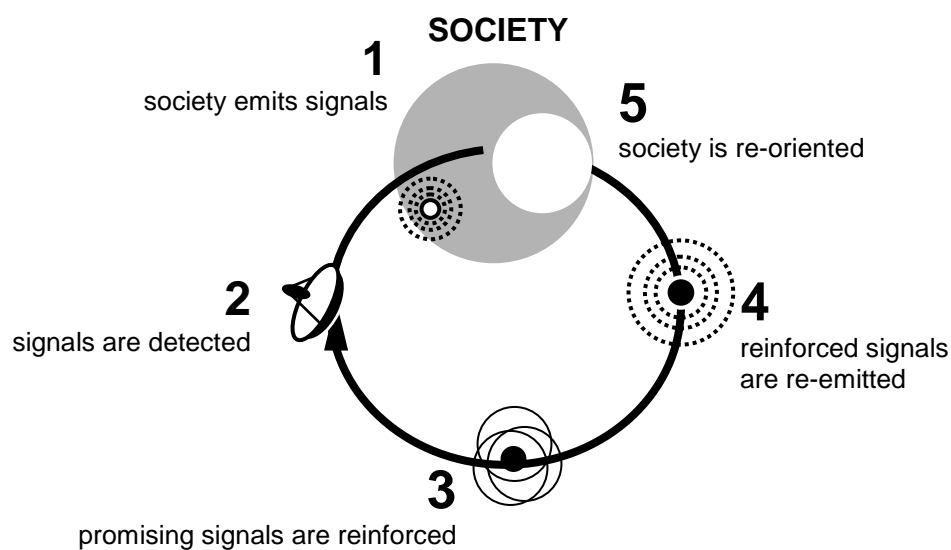


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*subjects and communities use existing resources in an original way to bring about system innovation”* (from EMUDE brochure).

Figure 1, below, synthesizes the process undertaken in EMUDE, and which now underlies DESIS Network activities about how design practices promote systemic innovation and change towards sustainability: it starts from social innovation cases (step 1); detected by a network of sensitive antennas (step 2); selected and reinforced by design professional and academic skills (steps 3 and 4). Steps 2, 3 and 4 are expected to be performed by DESIS Network and its labs.

**Figure 1: the EMUDE Process (2004), underlying DESIS Network actions regarding social innovation cases and how design activities can promote sustainable changes.**



Today, the DESIS website firmly reiterates this approach and description, which starts from social innovation: *“Over the past decade, social innovation has spread: a variety of social actors throughout the world (institutions, enterprises, non-profit organizations and, most of all, networks of collaborative people) have moved outside mainstream models of thinking and doing, generating a variety of promising initiatives such as community-supported agriculture, co-housing, carpooling, community gardens, neighbourhood care, talent exchange and time banks. These initiatives propose viable solutions to complex problems of the present (e.g., social cohesion, urban regeneration, healthy food accessibility, water and sustainable energy management) and, at the same time, they represent working prototypes of sustainable ways of living (...) Today, social innovation is generating a constellation of small initiatives. Nevertheless, if favourable conditions are created, these small, local social inventions and their working prototypes can spread. They can be scaled-up, consolidated, replicated and integrated with larger programs to generate large-scale sustainable changes”.* (DESIS website).

The examples below illustrate the approach adopted:

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**Example 1: From social innovation to system innovation, the case of cohousing.** An example on how the DESIS Network - through its DESIS labs - progressively fosters system innovation emerging from the development of co-housing in Italy. Seven years ago, Politecnico di Milano (a research group in a previous version of the Polimi DESIS Lab called DIS-Design and Innovation for Sustainability) identified cases in the housing sector, in the form of cohousing initiatives. At that time, there were no cohousing initiatives in Italy (2007). Cohousing is “*semi-communal housing consisting of a cluster of private homes and a shared community space (as for cooking or laundry facilities)*” (Merriam-Webster dictionary). Cohousing facilitates interaction among neighbours for social and practical benefits, economic and environmental benefits and it is considered to be a “transformational” practice (Sanguinetti, 2014)

After studying these social innovation cases, Politecnico di Milano became involved, with other actors, in developing the first initiative in Italy (Milan) the *Urban Village Bovisa* (<http://www.cohousing.it/portfolio/urban-village-bovisa/>) and, in addition, used its design skills to develop a complete set of tools and a process to foster new initiatives. This methodology involves community building and co-design processes, which were integrated in a business model that is still active today, called “Cohousing.it” (<http://www.cohousing.it>). Other cohousing initiatives were then developed in Italy, and new consultancies were established to operate in the same field, as the “Housing Lab” (<http://housinglab.wordpress.com/>), which was started in 2014 by former students of Politecnico di Milano, and still is related to Polimi DESIS Lab. The Fondazione Housing Sociale (<http://www.fhs.it/>) also started to operate using the cohousing principles. Thus, the influence of Politecnico di Milano professors and students extended to the field of social housing.

Now, seven years later, participant observation for this report reveals that the cohousing concept is widespread and is growing in Italy, as observed at the “Experiment Days Fair” (<http://www.experimentdays-milano.it/>) from 11-12 October 2014 in Milan. The fair presented modalities of self-organized and collaborative living, including cohousing. The company Electrolux was at the fair, presenting washing machines, customized to suit the specific demands of cohousing condominiums (based on their industrial washing machines). Electrolux also offers advice for the best use of these products, according to the demands of each cohousing community. Also at the fair was Valcucine (<http://www.valcucine.it/>), a large Italian kitchen company that identifies itself with sustainability. An interview with a Valcucine representative indicates that, despite their interest, they have not yet developed a specific design methodology to co-design shared kitchens for cohousing (which would differ from co-designing a kitchen for a single family).

**Example 2: The public sector, social innovation and collaborative services.** DESIS Network investigated the intersection of design innovation and public policies, specifically in the “Public and Collaborative” thematic cluster. This initiative brought together government agencies, not-for-profit or charitable-sector organizations, and the DESIS network of academic research labs. A major theme of this collaboration was to investigate how emerging social networks influence public services and innovation policies, and, conversely, how public services and innovation policies can trigger, empower, or direct emerging social networks, specifically through citizen participation and related social innovation initiatives. Participating DESIS labs explored how design can make this promising union more effective and fruitful (<http://www.desis-clusters.org>). It resulted in a series of initiatives at the local level, described in a publication, in which Parsons DESIS Lab played a major role.

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A good example of how DESIS Labs effectively promote system innovation, is Polimi DESIS Lab. For years (even before being called a DESIS Lab) Politecnico di Milano has been working at broadcasting the concept of “collaborative services”, services in which participants have an active role in achieving commonly recognized benefits. The identification and description of this service model emerged from the initial researches on Design for Social Innovation, (EMUDE project) and it was considered the key service model for social innovation cases. Polimi DESIS Lab was involved in a series of initiatives that revealed this service model, and developed tools to design them (or, rather, to enable co-design processes with involved actors). Today, an interview with a Polimi DESIS Lab member indicates that the concept of “collaborative service” entered the Milan Municipality agenda, as a key concept to develop and provide services to Expo 2015 (Interview-actor12). It is hard to confirm that this comes directly from the activities of Polimi DESIS Lab, but certainly, this lab is very well equipped with the tools and knowledge to develop and spread this kind of service and has developed the professional wherewithal to do so.

## **Other topics relating to system innovation:**

**Operation in universities as a limitation for DESIS Network to promote systemic changes and impact.** *“Because it is mainly focused on education, somehow that limits its sphere of action, so... it is quite strongly connected with universities and education, and projects students (develop) (...) That is a way of preventing growth because the university has limitations in terms of what students can do, time frames, resources (...) which prevent projects having a longer impact. If that relation to education is less important, then the value becomes something else. So maybe... becomes how it is funded... how it can support its activity, because at the moment it relies on resources from an individual university, this is a kind of limitation. Other limitations... it depends in what it wants to achieve somehow, because now at the moment it is about experimenting and connecting, and generating knowledge and evidence. So the limitations are related to how many people can see that and connect. But if the end is to create systemic change, if do you want to create a bigger impact, then it is about how you connect with other actors, other institutions, organizations, and then, in that sense, the limitation is how you can demonstrate the value of what DESIS can bring to that context. I don't think that is very clear. At the moment, it's maybe still connected to just experimenting projects, education... connecting, models... it could have a much bigger potential” (Interview-actor3).*

**Operation in universities and in the education field as an advantage to enter into partnership with DESIS Labs and DESIS Network. The advantages of being part of an international network for DESIS Labs.** *“Certainly the fact that it is an international network gives the possibility of dissemination, the possibility to get to know other similar opportunities around the world, this is the great advantage. If you need to know who does the same things, or similar things that can be integrated. And certainly the collaboration with the university is important from a scientific point of view, as a possible observation of our work and where to converge the results from our work. Our work (...) is also to promote knowledge, and the university is the main way to accomplish that, and an international network even more” (Interview-actor7).*

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## 3.2.3 Relation with game-changers

Interview and document analysis identified the game changers listed below. They are presented in relation to the DESIS Network activities.

- **Demographic change**

Desis Network is developing the thematic cluster “Aging and Ingenuity” (<http://www.desis-network.org/ageingandingenuity>)

- **Sharing economy**

It was mentioned as a game changer that has been widely accepted.

- **Diffusion of connectivity, connected society**

*“the tool for (DESIS) existing is mainly based in the diffusion of connectivity”, “if we are not in a connected society, if there is not the driver that creates connection, of course DESIS could not exist and probably all networks that are global networks”(Interview-actor1)*

Game changers were mentioned that have no relation to DESIS network activities: chronic diseases, terrorism, wars; economic impact, employment, alternative business models, pressures; the relation between specific identities and national identities, and pressures to find a balance; climate change, climate events.

## 3.2.4 Relation with societal transformation

DESIS Network promotes societal transformation through the following visions and activities.

**Transformation by enabling and fostering creativity.** *“I could say to save the world but it is not the question and the answer. In a way, I think that the big goal is really to apply creativity to everyday life. I’m not saying creativity in stupid terms, but really understanding that we can use our resources in completely different ways and not just environmental resources, I’m really talking about social resources, a different kind of assets we have in our life we don’t know, so I think the big goal is to introduce this kind of conscious creativity in the way we design our life. Again, we are a network of designers, think about the role of designers in society, because our customers in a way are the students, they are our main interlocutors, somehow. We work with them. So the way is to really train them to use creativity, out of the box, and off conventional creativity. So try to see, try to train ourselves to find the way to solve things also against the cultural trends we live in, and not to be too conditioned in a way, from the “must have” of society” (Interview-actor2).*

**Shifting design skills to create sustainable trends.** *“Until some years ago it was not cool at all (...) to go by bike. Now there is a kind of return of interest in bikes, it is very cool to have a bike, it is cool, even more, to have an old bike, that you fix in a way, it is very cool, even more, to use bike sharing... In a way we must be able to start this out of the box and out of the mainstream viewpoint in our young designers. The goal is to make them make cool something which is not cool but it is extremely smart and brilliant, and, go against what is the (buyers?) , what are the... as far we can succeed in this we will impact, because if you think about mobility, agriculture, a lot of things, that are not cool at all, are now coming back as an interest for young generations, so, for society. Designers are those who are able to make tangible your desires, to make something become cool. It is*

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*not only a chair. This goes against the mainstream but is driven by creativity and a kind of vision and wise vision of our future, this is what we should be doing” (Interview-actor2).*

**Design schools as laboratories.** *“Design for social innovation can find in the design schools a major driver for its application and diffusion. In fact, design schools (and, more in general, all the design-oriented universities) can orient their didactic and research activities towards social innovation. That is, they can become design laboratories where new visions are generated, new tools are defined and tested and where new projects are started and supported” (from DESIS website).*

**Resilience, cosmopolitan localism, distributed systems.** (about societal transformation) *“we want to make the revolution, this is enough. The serious low profile answer is (...)I think we are working to build a vision more or less explicitly recognized that there is one of the distributed system, cosmopolitan localism and resilience” (Interview-actor1).* These three pillars, stressed by this respondent, are described below in the description of the SLOC scenario (Manzini, 2010, 2013).

## 3.2.5 Relation with narratives of change

**DESIS Network should be at the edge of change (change as waves), to identify and foster change:** *“We are in a phase in the network that we need to remain on the edge. Four, five or six years ago when we started to talk about creative communities and whatever, it was absolutely astonishing for 99% of the people, taking about a purchasing group, car sharing... all together were astonished, but not only for ordinary people, but also for researchers and environmentalists. Today, all talk about it, sharing economy, collaborative economy. It is good. But I ask myself, what is the next step we have to take as DESIS Network to be really forward thinkers? Encouraging the work together of the different labs could be a way to start to understand, to start this kind of brainstorming because we need to be always at the edge of the research, and now everybody is talking about car sharing, but not only talking but practising car sharing as well. And so, what is the next challenge we need to try to research and try to explore? Now we need this transformation...the risk is to be surpassed by society. We need to be a step beyond (...) The issue is not to be surpassed by the real transformation of society but be always in a way waving at the edge of the change. Maybe one of the next big things will be understanding how all this really changes the policies and the relations between public and private and.. the welfare system in a bigger sense. The way we manage our role in the society, in the governance system”. (Interview-actor2)*

**Understand, respect and coexist with differences.** *“Today there is a lot of talking about transformation and change, and again, it is becoming a buzzword. This is not change for the sake of change, it is change because of what we are facing and what we see today, everyday, we can’t anymore, the world is changing, unfortunately in a way we can’t control.. These few months were scary for what is happening in Europe, in the Middle East. And... so, we can’t stay still. We need to change, in which direction? In the direction where we become collectively more able to understand the differences, and respect differences, and coexist with differences whatever the differences are. And to respect what we have (...)”(Interview-actor2).*

**Social innovation (and collaboration it brings) to avoid a polarized society.** *“So this is not change for change, but it is because we cannot pay the pensions to our retirees, we could be able to pay the salary... we cannot sustain anymore the public expenses, we cannot pay the health system,*

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*just simply we can. Or we find a solution, or we will become a more polarized society where we have someone that can and the others cannot... this is the way to create conflict. This is simply to question, to avoid to this kind of conflict to happen... and we are not talking about collectivism, it is a fair society where everybody contributes and has something in return with a social value, I mean social innovation is still social, It is a kind of perception of the value of the others, beside the individual, and beyond the individual” (Interview-actor2).*

**SLOC (Small, Local, Open and Connected) scenario: a tentative to create a DESIS Network strategic vision.** *“Thanks to the promising experiences accumulated to date we can outline a new scenario. This emerging scenario is given by the fact that it can be built at the intersection of three main innovation streams: the green revolution (and the highly environmental friendly systems it makes available); the spread of networks (and the distributed, open, peer-to-peer organisations it generates); the diffuse creativity (and the original answers to daily problems that a variety of social actors are conceiving and implementing). We will refer to it as the SLOC Scenario, where SLOC stands for small, local, open, connected. These four adjectives, in fact, synthesise very well the socio-technical system on which this scenario is based: a distributed production and consumption system where the global is a “network of locals”. That is, it is a mesh of connected local systems the small scale of which makes them comprehensible and controllable by individuals and communities. (...) These four words are meaningful because they are, at the same time, visionary, if considered as a whole (they generate a vision on how society could be), comprehensible, if considered one by one (their meanings and implications can be easily understood by everybody) and viable, because supported by major drivers of change (the emerging complex relationships between globalisation and localisation, the power of Internet and the diffusion of the new forms of organisation that makes it possible)” (Manzini, 2010). “More precisely, the SLOC Scenario is neither a dream nor a forecast of what the future will be. It is a motivating vision of what the future could be if a large number of social actors move in the direction that it indicates as viable and desirable (...). To be implemented, therefore, the SLOC Scenario requires a large number of converging design programs to focalize and develop an array of themes that, as a whole, outline a possible (and in my view necessary) design research program” (Manzini, 2013).*

## 3.3 Aspects of empowerment and disempowerment

### 3.3.1 Governance

#### 3.3.1.1 Internal governance

**DESIS Association.** *“DESIS operates as a constellation of Labs and Initiatives, supported by a Platform. Each one of these elements has its own organizational and administrative autonomy. The overall political, cultural and organizational direction of DESIS is given by the Assembly, the International Coordination Committee and the Platform (...)*

- *Assembly. This is the meeting of all the Lab Coordinators and the representatives of invited Partners. It takes place, in a virtual way, at least once a year (...)*

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- *President. He/she looks at the continuity of DESIS motivation, mission and goals (...) International Coordinator (IC). He/she is elected by the Assembly on the basis of his/her program and of his/her proposal for the International Coordination Committee and the Platform Team. He/she must be part of a DESIS Lab (...)*
- *International Coordination Committee (ICC). This is a team of 8 to 10 members selected from among the Labs' active participants and indicated by the IC. They collaborate with the IC in all transversal cultural and political issues (...)*
- *Platform Team. This is a team with the skills needed to manage, up-date and up-grade the Platform functioning. The Platform Team members are chosen by the IC and are based in his/her university" (from DESIS Association Agreement, signed in 2014).*

**DESIS Network is managed by a small group.** The network is managed by a core group of approximately 15 people (the exact number may vary according to specific initiatives). The other labs are affiliated but do not develop initiatives for the transnational network. The agreement, founded by the Association, states now that each affiliated lab is required to develop at least one specific activity per year to the DESIS Network. However, it was not defined any kind of control or penalty for the labs that will not do so.

**DESIS Network empowers design schools (DESIS Labs) and their new design practices at the institutional level.** *"I should also say that I think that DESIS helped the schools a lot to change something at the institutional level. Now finally the schools have started to think that design is not only to be considered traditionally and it helps to exchange the idea of what design can do, accepting in their program something that we can call service design, strategic design related to some social valuable issue, at least in the schools which have established a DESIS Lab... Change in the practice and change in the institution in the moment they recognize a DESIS Lab, they recognize that Design working with service design tools on social issues is Design, maybe it appears obvious to many, but in the beginning it was not obvious at all and in some schools it is still not obvious" (Interview-actor1).*

## 3.3.1.2 External governance

**Universities and DESIS Network and Labs.** Universities are somehow external and internal. DESIS Network is composed of DESIS Labs based in design schools that are situated in universities. Universities empower the network by giving it recognition: *"It is really a network; the centre is very weak. We try to create the condition for different people to collaborate horizontally and so the nature of this institution is quite original, I think, each lab is an extension of an existing school (university let's say), institutions that are very strong. It is a network of schools that are represented by the labs. Each one of these nodes has recognition, because it is part of a school. The network some months ago was very fluid, because we didn't have any kind of formal representation. In the last year, we worked to create an association, practically for now" (Interview-actor1).*

**Restrictions brought by a mono-disciplinary network.** *"We are perceived as competent, they were afraid that we work too much in a mono disciplinary way. This discourages people from working with us as a network. Then, I think that a very local level, and a very individual level of every lab, the situation is very different and can vary very much. This is always positive to show that you are not the only one doing this, so the network is still very positive and useful, but it is not necessarily the best*

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*choice to bring the network as such into the project. We have not found a situation in which we could propose a group of 5, 6 labs that are working together, in a funded project” (Interview-actor2)*

**DESIS Network partners’ characteristics.** *“These are different public and private organizations, sharing DESIS motivations and visions and supporting DESIS activities (Labs projects, international Initiatives, Platform improvements). They can be local, national or international partners, depending on the activity in which they are actively and/or economically involved” (from DESIS Association Agreement). There are no specific agreements or collaborations are currently active with companies, governments or policy makers. DESIS Network is endorsed by UNEP-United Nations Environmental Program.*

**Key formal agreements.** DESIS network looks for formal and informal agreements with other networks and institutions. *“Private or public organizations, sharing the DESIS vision and rules, can support specific projects (administrated by a DESIS Lab or a DESIS Initiative) and become DESIS Partners” (from DESIS Association agreement).*

## 3.3.2 Social learning

**Knowledge exchange between labs.** Key mechanisms for knowledge exchange and production between DESIS labs are the initiatives promoted by the transnational network: Thematic Clusters, Regional Clusters, DESIS Showcases and DESIS Philosophy Talks (<http://www.desis-network.org/content/initiatives>). In addition, it is considered that Ezio Manzini (DESIS President) now performs a key role in connecting the dots of the DESIS Network, promoting knowledge exchange between the DESIS Labs: *“Ezio is very charismatic. He has this role. He listens a lot. He is a great amplifier in a conscious and unconscious way. Sometimes I see him saying things that I have said. He absorbs. From this point-of-view, he is a good spokesperson because he can say things that you recognize yourself. He absorbs and makes a synthesis. This is a great dowry and will be fundamental for the DESIS Network” (Interview-actor2)*

**Collectively building the transversal knowledge of the DESIS Network.** The two year program of the first international coordinator (IC) of DESIS association, includes a strategy to collect, analyse and interpret how the DESIS Network is collectively building knowledge about design for social innovation: *“to start up a process for the DESIS Labs to analyse, through a common conceptual framework, their current and future projects and generate a ‘transversal knowledge’ that could reinforce the academic vision/mission of DESIS and make more explicit what design can do for social innovation (...) We propose that the concepts that we use for this framework are the same that we might use, from now on, to describe our projects and maybe to create new initiatives. Therefore, we suggest the following issues to focus on: governance and policymaking; activism and civic participation; social interactions and relations; city and environmental planning; production, distribution and consumption; skill training and design education; job creation; storytelling and visualisation. Almost every project or cluster of our DESIS Network can be discussed with reference to more than one of these issues and therefore **compared**, adopting some common concept. In other words, they can be used to orient the reflection toward the DESIS publication and to organise initiatives from now on. All together, these issues will help to define the **specific contribution and the role of design** in supporting and fostering social innovation” (DESIS website).*



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## **DESIS Network seen as a contribution to the social learning process towards sustainability.**

*“In the transition towards sustainability (...) new ideas on wellbeing, production and economy are needed and a new wave of innovation has to take place. As a whole, this movement can be seen as a broad social learning process: individuals, communities, institutions and companies involved in interwoven design activities. In turn, these emerging design networks seek new design knowledge: knowledge that circulates through these networks, feeding them with visions (of possible futures), proposals (of specific solutions), tools (to understand the state of things and implement design ideas) and reflections (on the sense of what has been done and/or could be done). At the moment, a large part of this necessary knowledge doesn't exist. Therefore, a vast research programme should be developed” (Manzini, 2010).*

### 3.3.3 Resources

#### **Empowerment of design schools as DESIS Network uses its usual activities as key resources.**

*“If a worldwide movement towards sustainability calls for the best possible use of all existing resources, design schools, with all their potential in terms of students' enthusiasm and faculty experience, should be considered a very promising social resource: a potentially powerful promoter of sustainable change” (from DESIS website).* The DESIS Network operates based on the normal activities undertaken by teachers, researchers and students in design schools. It means that many programs run with no financial support, but only by connecting and creating convergences between activities. For example, two professors who run a course on “Design for Social Innovation” can unite to develop a common activity in the framework of a DESIS thematic cluster. Key meetings of DESIS Network take place side-by-side with Conferences organized by Cumulus - the International Association of Universities and Colleges of Art, Design and Media. Cumulus (a DESIS Network partner). Coordinators of DESIS Labs are able to qualify for financial support for their travels by presenting a paper in the conference.

**Economic model.** *“DESIS Labs are administratively and economically autonomous entities: each one of them has its own budget and is administrated by the school where that Lab is based. DESIS Initiatives are administratively and economically autonomous entities too: each one of them has its own budget and is administrated by an ad hoc consortium of the involved schools. All the DESIS governance roles are pro bono. The only remunerated activities are the ones performed by the Platform Team, which are supported by the DESIS Labs' contributions”. Prior to the release of this report, these financial contributions were not being made by the DESIS Labs.*

**DESIS Network association does not aim to empower schools by raising funds and managing financial resources.** *“It is a very peculiar association because it is formally recognized but it cannot manage any money. So, it is not an association for profit nor without profit, or non-profit. How does this work? The idea is that every project we do is done by the labs, so the labs can connect with each other and make consortia and, at the same time, participate in some research. There is some money that circulates in DESIS but not through any coordination that creates the condition for projects to happen. The idea is to keep the network as manageable as possible. In the centre, we only manage the website and organize one assembly. All other activities are secondary systems and each initiative has*

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*its own responsibilities. It is a network of nodes with a network of activities and each of them has its own group to coordinate and a very large and flexible coordination of everything. I think it was interesting to say, because it is in my view quite original in relation to the others” (Interview-actor1).*

## 3.3.4 Monitoring and evaluation

**Brand management, quality and network identity.** *“Because in previous years we saw situations where the brand was, in a way, abused, which is not a problem because it is a social network, but if you still want to claim a kind of expertise, we need to have an internal system to guarantee this quality” (Interview-actor2).* Politecnico di Milano copyrighted the brand “DESIS”, which all affiliated labs have the right to use.

**First monitoring procedures are strongly related to two DESIS Network core activities: production of knowledge and design and research activities intertwined.** The first international coordinator (IC) has started to organize the characteristics of the design research activities undertaken in the DESIS Labs. This aims to strengthen the production of (a common) knowledge between the DESIS Labs (see 2.3.2 Social Learning) by placing them in a conceptual framework of analysis. This framework was also defined –implicitly – as a monitoring tool covering key areas for the evaluation of the impact of DESIS Network, beyond the educational field. It covers: *“governance and policymaking; activism and civic participation; social interactions and relations; city and environmental planning; production, distribution and consumption; skill training and design education; job creation; storytelling and visualisation” (from DESIS Website).*

**There is no monitoring system to evaluate the impact on students.** Interviews and participant observation reinforce that the core of the DESIS Network activity is to operate based in universities. This provides the network with the four characteristics described in the introduction (production of knowledge, students educated as a new generation of designers to foster changes and design and research activities intertwined). There is no monitoring system to assess or describe the impact of the DESIS Network activities and its Labs on the students.

## 3.4 Other issues about the transnational networking

**Network identity and this report.** DESIS’s declared aims in 2010 were: *“- support social innovation using design skills to make promising cases more visible and effective and to facilitate their replicability; - help companies and institutions understand the promising cases’ potentialities in terms of enabling services, products, and business ideas; - reinforce the design community’s role in the social innovation processes, operating both within the design community (developing dedicated design knowledge) and outside it (redefining design’s perceived role and capabilities)” (Manzini et al., 2010)* Although the importance of students has always been stated, the specific approach in design education and knowledge generation, specifically focused on enabling new professionals to foster sustainable changes, was now particularly highlighted in research activities for this report (interviews and participatory observations). It offered a key framework to describe the

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characteristics of DESIS Network. However, each time DESIS is mentioned, one of its three aspects is highlighted (production of knowledge, students' education or design and research activities) and other interpretative layers were added. For example, DESIS *"comprises a network of researchers adopting a strategic and systemic approach to design, with a specific focus on designing for services and design activism. It explores how design can enable people, communities, enterprises and organisations to kick off and manage innovation processes by co-designing and setting in place experiments of new services and solutions"* (Meroni, Fassi, Simeone, 2013).

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## 4 Local initiative 1: [Polimi DESIS Lab, Italy]

### 4.1 Overview of development in the local initiatives

The Polimi DESIS Lab is based in the Department of Design of Politecnico di Milano, where it is defined as a “research lab”. It presents as a key objective to explore “*how design can enable people, communities, enterprises and social actors to activate and manage innovation processes, aimed at experimenting with sustainable, convivial and collaborative ways of living and doing*” (from DESIS Website/Labs).

The presentation of the group states: “*it is composed of a group of researchers adopting a strategic and systemic approach to design, with a specific focus on design for services and design activism. It has a background in service and product-service-system design for sustainability and investigates the way design can support and trigger social innovation, combining creativity and visioning with the capability of engaging in co-design processes. The Lab operates in multicultural and multidisciplinary contexts, integrating various competences in systemic projects*” (from DESIS Website/Labs).

It develops local, national and international research projects (basic and applied research), and runs post-graduate courses and design studios in service design, product-service-system design, design for sustainability, local development and communication. It also includes international training collaborations and teaching exchanges. The Lab has considerable experience in organizing scientific symposiums, events and exhibitions.

The Lab is coordinated by Professor Anna Meroni, who is now also in charge of the international coordination of DESIS Network. She has a distinguished record in developing research activities and projects in the intersection of design with food production and consumption. This brings to Polimi DESIS Lab this particular, if not exclusive, focus. It is also stated that “*over the last decade, the group has been contributing to laying the foundations for the disciplines of strategic and service design*” (from DESIS website/Labs).

**Strategic and systemic approach to design.** Professor Anna Meroni synthesized the Polimi DESIS Lab approach: “*The very idea of design is fast changing and moving towards a more holistic and systemic approach, where processes, territories, competences and people are all elements to consider in the design action. The designer works more and more at the level of scenario producing powerful visions and making them desirable, sharable and possible so as to generate frameworks of sense for innovation. Strategic Design is about evolution and radical changes: it is a way to work with scenarios that can stimulate companies or social systems to new ways of thinking and designing their future, taking in account new criteria and values*” (Meroni, 2009).

**Methodology.** The Polimi DESIS Lab directly inherited the methodological framework that was developed in the initial research activities about design for social innovation at Politecnico di Milano (at that time in the called DIS research unit – Design and Innovation for Sustainability). The same methodological framework lies in the foundation of the DESIS Network itself, as described in this report. From this legacy, Polimi DESIS Lab has developed its own perspectives about how to design for social innovation, by answering the challenges brought by new research demands and

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projects. Polimi DESIS Lab's approach to design for social innovation is detailed in the paragraph 4.2.1 in this report.

## **Project cases from the group** (from DESIS Network website/Labs):

- “Coltivando – the convivial garden at the Politecnico di Milano”, (2011-ongoing, Politecnico di Milano, Human Cities). A community garden in the public areas of the Politecnico di Milano Bovisa Durando Campus open to the neighbourhood.
- “CampUS – Incubation and prototyping of social practices” (2014-ongoing, Polisocial Award) A multidisciplinary project aimed at incubating social innovation projects in the Politecnico di Milano Bovisa Durando Campus and allowing them to be self-sufficient in the neighbourhood by involving NEETs (not employed, not trained or educated) and over 75 residents.
- “SIMPACT. Boosting the Impact of Social Innovation in Europe through Economic Underpinnings”. (2014 – 2016, EC – FP7). A research collaboration that aims at understanding the economic foundation of social innovation targeting marginalised and vulnerable groups in society [www.simpact-project.eu/](http://www.simpact-project.eu/)
- “TRANSITION. Transnational Network for Social Innovation Incubators”. (2013-2016, EC – FP7). A 30-month project that supports the scaling-up of social innovations across Europe by developing a network of incubators, which brings together established partners within the fields of social innovation (SI) and innovation-based incubation <http://transitionproject.eu/>
- “Nutrire Milano. Energie per il cambiamento” - “Feeding Milan, energies for change” (2009 – 2014, Slow Food, Fondazione Cariplo). An applied research project aiming at creating a network of services of short food chain between the city of Milan and its productive peri-urban countryside. [www.nutrire milano.it](http://www.nutrire milano.it)
- “SPREAD 2050 – Social Platform identifying Research and Policy needs for Sustainable Lifestyles” (2011-2012, EC - FP7). Developing a scenario for sustainable lifestyles in 2050 and creating roadmaps for strategic action. <http://spread2050.ning.com>; [www.sustainable-lifestyles.eu](http://www.sustainable-lifestyles.eu)
- “Periphèria” (2011- 2014, EC – CIP Pilot action). Deploying convergent Future Internet (FI) platforms and services for the promotion of sustainable lifestyles in and across emergent networks of “smart” peripheral cities in Europe. [www.periphèria.eu](http://www.periphèria.eu)
- “Human Cities 1: Sustainable urban design” and “Human cities 2: Reclaiming the Public Space” (2007-2013, EC Action - "Culture"). A European Network in which partners develop specific themes around sustainable urban design and solutions to redefine the meaning of public space. [www.humancities.eu](http://www.humancities.eu)
- “Social and Collaborative Housing” (2008 – on going, Fondazione Housing Sociale and other actors). A number of projects and initiatives to support the creation of housing communities collaborating in the design and delivery of services and initiatives. [www.polidesign.net/housing](http://www.polidesign.net/housing)
- “TANGO. Towards A New intergenerational Openness” (2011-2013, in partnership with Aalto University, Fi - coordinator - and L'École de Design Nantes Atlantique, Fr). Product service system design to explore the issue of social inclusion of the elderly and intergenerational dialogue.
- “CCAlps - Creative Companies in Alpine Space”. (2011-2014) A strategic design project to create a real and virtual network of hubs in the Alps. It aims to push policy makers in thinking out specific regulations that can support CCIs in the Alpine Space.
- “Green Move”. (2011- 2013, financed by Regione Lombardia) A project with the objective of designing an electric vehicle-sharing system in Milan. The multi-owner flexible mobility solutions are based on a credit system to repay virtuous behaviours. The project aims at designing a full-scale service.
- “Coltivazioni Urbane” (2012-2014 - co-funded by Fondazione Cariplo; Lead partner ICEI). An action research project aimed at strengthening social cohesion and the regional networks in the Dergano neighbourhood (Milano).
- “Milano Design Camping” (2010-2011), Design competition for innovative units for low-cost hospitality, funded by the Municipality of Milan in partnership with Triennale di Milano

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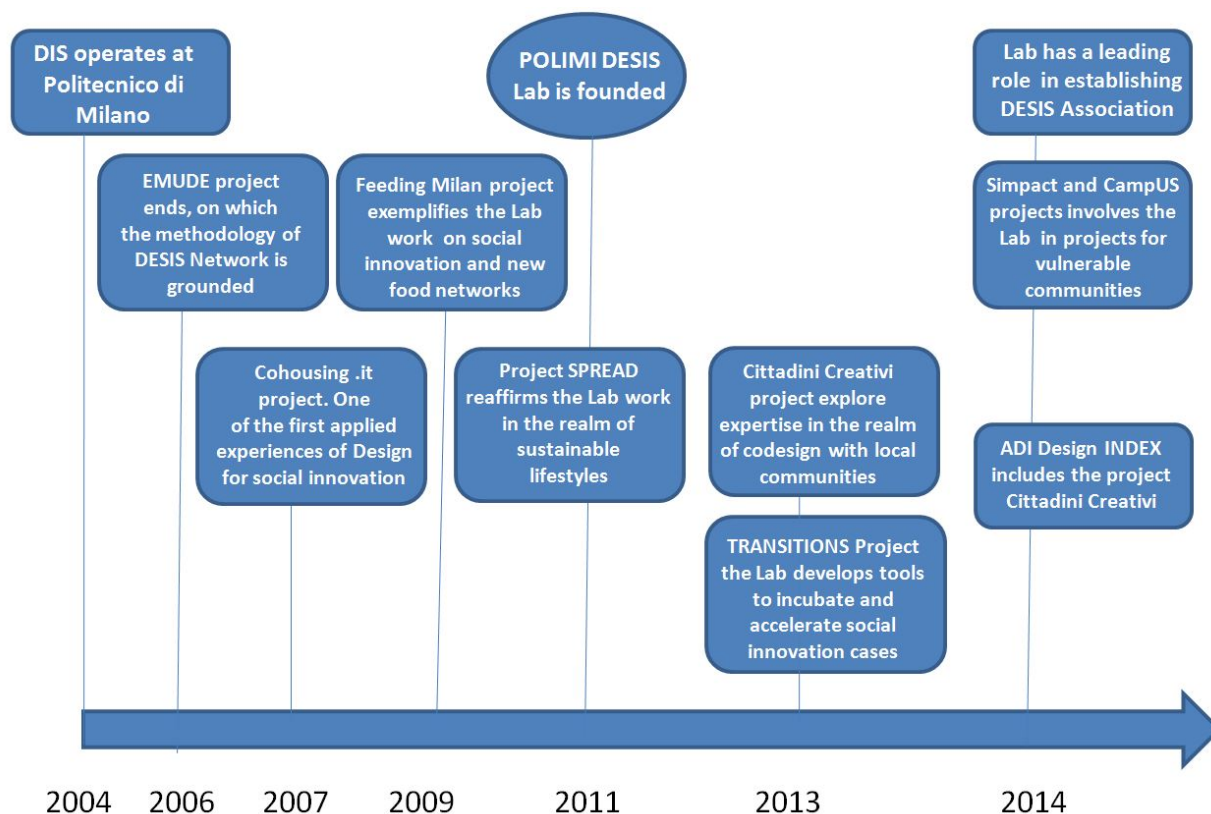
- “Temporary housing for Milan Expo 2015 staff at Cascina Merlata” (2012-2013), funded by Euromilano.

**Views and perspectives from the involved actors.** External actors (outside universities) described how they consider the contribution of Polimi DESIS Lab:

- **External actors learn about how to work directly with communities for design purposes.** *"We learned a lot from the DESIS network in terms of participatory co-design approach, for example, because the activities in the Polimi DESIS Lab are related to service design, strategies design, and design solutions coming from the collaborations with groups and communities and big users and so... this idea of looking for creativity outside the research community is useful"* (Interview-actor8).
- **External actors benefit from the production of knowledge (as a role of a lab based in a university) about their own work.** *"Certainly the collaboration with the university is important from a scientific point of view, as a possible observation of our work and where to converge the results from our work. (our objective) is also to promote knowledge, and the university is the main way to accomplish that, and is even more as an international network"* (Interview-actor7).
- **External actors benefit from the development of tools, methods and scientific research developed by the Lab.** One of the Polimi DESIS Lab partners declared that they contribute the *"Ideation of tools and methods, methodologies. The other is related to scientific research, diffusion and communication, the possibility to observe, to structure and describe a phenomenon and be able to diffuse and communicate"* (Interview-actor7).
- **The Lab supports a social innovator in Milan to learn about other similar initiatives all over the world.** It was also stated by a partner that *"Certainly the fact that it is an international network gives the possibility of dissemination, the possibility to get to know other similar opportunities around the world, this is the great advantage. If you need to know who's doing the same things, or similar things that can be integrated"* (Interview-actor7).

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## Timeline and table:



Year / period	Important activities/changes/milestones in local initiative <i>Polimi DESIS Lab at Politecnico di Milano (Italy)</i>	Important changes in context
2004-2008	<p>Research unit DIS – Design and Innovation for Sustainability operates at Politecnico di Milano. The leading core is composed by Ezio Manzini (coordinator) and Anna Meroni.</p> <p>From 2004-2006, DIS research unit develops the EU Project EMUDE, considered as the first step for the development of the future DESIS Network.</p> <p>Project “Cohousing.it” (2007), introduces the theme of co-housing to the city of Milan. DIS research unit</p>	<p>DIS research units develop important research activities that led to the creation of DESIS Network.</p> <p>In 2007, Anna Meroni edited “Creative Communities”, presenting the results of EMUDE project and important milestones in the developing of the design approach to social innovation.</p> <p>In 2008, François Jégou and Ezio Manzini edited “Collaborative Services”, which identified a new service model in social innovation cases called “collaborative services”.</p> <p>First initiative of designing collaborative services (for cohousing). It was an important</p>

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was actively involved and has the opportunity to develop a set of tools for community building and co-design activities to set up shared services in cohousing condominiums.

experiment in Design for Social Innovation and Sustainability. Starting from a social innovation case (cohousing) it shows how to use design skills for the consolidation and replication of a social innovation case/idea.

Polimi DESIS Lab participates in the development of the Master's Degree in "Social and Collaborative Housing" (2008 – ongoing), with Fondazione Housing Sociale and other actors. A number of projects and initiatives are developed to support the creation of housing communities. Polimi DESIS Lab brings its service design skills and tools to the Master's and related initiatives.  
(<http://www.polidesign.net/housing>)

It keeps Polimi DESIS Lab involved in **cohousing** activities.

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2009

The project "Nutrire Milano. Energie per il cambiamento" / "Feeding Milan, energies for change" (2009 – 2014, Slow Food, Fondazione Cariplo) starts. An applied research project aimed at creating a network of services of short food chain between the city of Milan and its productive peri-urban countryside.  
(<http://www.nutrire milano.it>)

"Nutrire Milano" consolidates further the collaborations with the Slow Food movement and the activities of design for social innovation and sustainability related to food. The objective is to be an example for Expo 2015 in Milan (that highlights the theme of Food).

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2011

Polimi DESIS Lab founded as a research lab in the Department of Design, Politecnico di Milano, coordinated by Anna Meroni (it embraces and continues the previous activities of the DIS research unit)

The Polimi DESIS Lab consolidates its role as a partner in projects related to design for social innovation and sustainability

Project "Coltivando – the convivial garden at the Politecnico di Milano", (2011-ongoing, Politecnico di Milano, Human Cities). A community garden in the public areas of the Politecnico di Milano Bovisa Durando Campus open to the neighbourhood.

"Coltivando" is another project that involves the expertise of Polimi DESIS Lab in food and design, a key characteristic of the research lab.

Project "SPREAD 2050 – Social Platform identifying Research and Policy needs for Sustainable Lifestyles" (2011-2012, EC - FP7). Developing a scenario for sustainable lifestyles in 2050 and creating roadmaps for strategic action.  
(<http://spread2050.ning.com>;

Polimi DESIS Lab continues its role as a partner in projects for the development of scenarios and solutions for the promotion of sustainable lifestyles (inheriting the role of DIS research unit).



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<http://www.sustainable-lifestyles.eu>

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2013	<p>Project “TRANSITION. Transnational Network for Social Innovation Incubators”. (2013-2016, EC – FP7). A 30-month project that supports the scaling-up of social innovations across Europe by developing a network of incubators which brings together established partners within the fields of social innovation (SI) and innovation-based incubation <a href="http://transitionproject.eu/">http://transitionproject.eu/</a></p> <p><i>Cittadini Creativi</i> originates within the Ph.D. research of Daniela Selloni at Politecnico di Milano, in the field of service design and design for social innovation, focusing on collaborative services and co-design with local communities. The initial idea is to carry out a research activity in direct contact with the city and its residents, specifically in Cascina Cuccagna, a farmhouse in Milan. The project responded to the call for the assignment of temporary spaces in the Cascina, presenting a programme focused on participatory design between designers and local communities, using the tools of service design research (<a href="http://www.cittadinicreativi.it/">http://www.cittadinicreativi.it/</a>)</p>	<p>Polimi DESIS Lab develops and refines design tools for promoting social innovation through incubation processes.</p> <p>Example of how students connect the nodes in the DESIS Network: Daniela Selloni spends a semester in the Parsons DESIS Lab in NY developing the theme of “services of public interest”. This is the same lab that coordinated the Thematic Cluster “Public and Collaborative” thematic cluster.</p>
2014	<p>Polimi DESIS Lab members work to establish the DESIS Association legally and assign its leadership roles: Anna Meroni as the international coordinator (IC) and Davide Fassi as member of the Platform team with other Polimi DESIS Lab members.</p> <p>Project “CampUS – Incubation and prototyping of social practices” (2014-ongoing, Polisocial Award) A multidisciplinary project aimed at incubating social innovation projects in the Politecnico di Milano Bovisa Durando Campus and allowing them to be self-sufficient in the neighbourhood by involving NEETs (not employed, not trained or educated) and over 75 residents.</p> <p>Project “SIMPACT. Boosting the Impact of Social Innovation in Europe through Economic Underpinnings”. (2014 – 2016, EC – FP7). A research collaboration that aims at understanding the economic foundation of social innovation</p>	<p>Polimi DESIS Lab leads the definition of the legal framework for the DESIS Network.</p> <p>The incubation of social innovation initiatives grows as one of the fields of Polimi DESIS Lab work.</p> <p>Polimi DESIS Lab moves towards working with pressing social issues (unemployment; marginalized and vulnerable groups)</p>

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targeting marginalized and vulnerable groups in society (<http://www.simpact-project.eu/>)

ADI Design INDEX includes the project Cittadini Creativi /Creative Citizens (see 2013) developed by the PhD student Daniela Selloni, in the Polimi DESIS Lab, in the section “Design for Social”. ADI Design Index is the publication of ADI – The Italian Association for Industrial Design that represents the best of Italian design.

The inclusion of the project Cittadini Creativi/Creative citizens, developed by a PhD Student in the Polimi DESIS Lab in the ADI Design Index, helps to consolidate the approach of service design for collaborative services in the design field.

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## 4.2 Aspects of ‘innovation’ and ‘change’ within the local initiative

### 4.2.1 Relation with social innovation

**From User-Centred to Community-Centred Design as an approach for Design for Social Innovation.** Community-Centred Design (CCD) was mentioned as a distinctive approach adopted by Polimi DESIS Lab in designing for social innovation (Interview-actor12). It is an approach that scales up the consolidated methods and tools of User-Centred Design to community size. Anna Meroni, Polimi DESIS Lab coordinator, proposes to define design processes as CCD, “*where understanding values and behaviours and collaborating with the most active social communities in conceiving and developing solutions (...) is the distinctive work of the designer*”. CCD is not focused on the single user but on the entire community as the enabler of local change, as a resource to be valorised and from which to learn” (Cantù, Corubolo, Simeone, 2012).

**Design activity in social innovation is not only to design “tangible things” but also to foster local citizen engagement and interpersonal relational qualities.** “*Innovate to me is to make certain upgrade on existing things, I mean, we are not saving the world, we are to do a step to there, by adding our skills, by sharing our competences on projects*” (Interview-actor6). For example, in the project *Coltivando – The Convivial Garden at Politecnico di Milano*, Polimi DESIS Lab involved local people to co-design the activities. This did not mean for Polimi DESIS Lab only to design “*tangible things, the way we develop the garden bags, the layout of the area, the tools to be used to manage the garden*” but also “*the software part of the story, so let’s say, the soft innovation*”. The Lab promoted the definition of each actor’s role, and “*this means to be more connected to people and let them be in charge of the activities that have to be done in the garden*”. It seems to be working well: “*This project is very big because it started 2 years ago and is still running and there is a group of people taking care of this vegetable garden every Saturday. I don’t know how many people are now committed in this activity, probably we are talking about 40 people. But, I mean, this is the level of most active people. They are urban heroes*” (Interview-actor6).

**Social innovations are defined as collaborative service models organized by creative communities.** Anna Meroni coordinates the Polimi DESIS Lab and had an active role in the

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EMUDE project (2004-2006). Therefore, she was involved in developing the concepts of: “creative communities” (as the communities developing social innovation initiatives by using their creative resources and best use of local resources); and “collaborative services” (the service model that emerged from the analysis of social innovation cases, and that became the particular contribution of design for social innovation to the service design field). These origins are still recognised today (Meroni, Fassi, Simeone, 2013).

**POLIMI Desis Lab develops tools and methodologies to social innovation.** External actors stated that POLIMI DESIS Lab has introduced a great deal of design thinking in the way they work with social innovations. Projects developed in 2007 (just after the end of the EMUDE research) about cohousing led to exploration of how design knowledge and tools would be useful in promoting the diffusion of social innovation ideas in the city of Milan. In fact, Politecnico di Milano (DIS research unit) was involved in the development of the process, tools and methods for the co-design of the shared services for the cohousing condominiums, and this initiative is still active (<http://www.cohousing.it>). Housing is still part of the Polimi DESIS Lab activities, particularly in collaboration with the Fondazione Housing Sociale. Many others projects followed this one, and other experiments were undertaken, mainly in the issue of production and consumption of food. Now, Polimi DESIS Lab is involved as a partner in the EU funded project, TRANSITION. This is focused on defining a set of tools and in incubating social innovations, and thus, is stimulating Polimi DESIS Lab to develop and organize its tools and methods in this direction.

**“Social innovation journey”: a process for the creation, prototype and incubation of social innovation initiatives.** One of the outputs of all these experiences can be exemplified in the development of the process and related tools of “Social Innovation Journey” by the Polimi DESIS Lab. *“It is an action format of design for social innovation, the ‘Social Innovation Journey’, structured on a non-linear sequence of steps and actions that progressively engage a community and help it to set up and prototype a social innovation. This happens through an event-like pilot initiative: a ‘farewell’ initiative that, while prototyping the innovation, releases its full ownership to the community”.*The first phase is to *“Raise awareness. Find and activate potential social innovators. This is an in-depth phase to be centred on the explicit or implicit awareness of the social innovators of their role and actions. It allows, in parallel, for light to be shed on hot topics. Awareness could be raised through direct contact with local initiatives and promoters, so as to present them with the possibility of supporting them through the design process/tools/output”*(Meroni, Fassi, Simeone, 2013). Intermediary phases are: Identify a topic for action; Involve pro-active people & experts; Generate & select ideas; Define timing, roles & exit strategy; Co-design with broader communities; Develop the solution: roles & rules; Produce an event-like prototype”. The last phase is: *“Take it to an incubator. After the prototype phase the solution might be taken to an incubator in order to evolve it as a structured venture or as a start-up. The incubator brings the skills that are likely to be missed, until that phase, into the process: namely business planning, system engineering, market analysis and so forth”* (Meroni, Fassi, Simeone, 2013).

**The major contribution of Polimi DESIS Lab is in the early stages of social innovation/social enterprises (prior to incubation).** Polimi DESIS Lab’s active involvement is in the first steps, to co-design the solutions with communities, prior to the incubation. An interviewee (Interview-actor9) interpreted this work as being undertaken directly with social innovators as a form of “coaching”, which helps to understand the initiatives and their needs, in order to restructure them (by using methods of community-centred design and participatory design).

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*"Another element I really appreciate is the variety of projects they manage (...) what does it mean (...) for example, cultural heritage projects (...) They went into specific and different areas of Milan directly approaching potential entrepreneurs and innovators (...) usually it is the inverse, innovators and social innovators come (...) looking for something" (Interview-actor9). The Polimi DESIS Lab team is regarded as being able to see people who are willing to develop their social business, even when they do not have a fully developed entrepreneurial knowledge.*

**It comprises the development of "easy to use" and simple tools for co-creation and co-design with people at a local level.** Polimi DESIS Lab places its focus on using specific tools for co-creation and co-design, and in using these tools in specific local contexts and communities. This includes existing tools and others developed by the Polimi DESIS Lab. Despite the variety of online tools available, one interviewee (Interview-actor9) was interested in the focus placed on paper-based tools, that is, those that people can work with manually (i.e. you do not need to log in somewhere to use them through the Internet) Therefore, these tools are very accessible to all participants, which is also coherent with the community-based approach adopted by the Polimi DESIS Lab.

**Labs based in universities have the advantage of identifying social innovations and developing them in an early stage.** *"Polimi DESIS Lab (...) their role (...) is clearly different in terms of outreach. In being related to university (...) we see stage projects earlier, even ideas and through Polimi there is a lot of involvement of citizens and informal groups, not only those that have already an entrepreneurial mindset, but those that are just enthusiastic, it could be a group of citizens, a group of students" (Interview-actor9).*

**A lot of (good) ideas (potential social enterprises) are produced by students but they do not become reality.** The activities on design for social innovation, developed with students (in the project TRANSITION or in regular courses), produced very interesting projects, but they never became reality: *"students are very young, it is a Master's, but they are very young, and they did not see this as an opportunity to set up a social enterprise" (Interview-actor12).*

**A new model of Design School.** About Polimi DESIS Lab: *"I think it is unique, because it is a mix of competences, skills, from the design field (communication, service, interior, products, and strategic design); all that are dealing with social innovation issues. I think that it is pretty unique. And the way (working) in contact with people, trying to be community-centred and not only user-centred; I think it is something quite special" (Interview-actor6).*

**Development of communication tools for social dialogues and social innovations (also about the future).** Polimi DESIS Lab is trying to understand how communication design can contribute to social innovation, working with external actors: *"Trying to understand and explore how audiovisual language and artefacts could be tools for social dialogues and social innovations (...) People and individuals have the opportunity to have access to digital media tools and so to producing content, images and express themselves in many different ways. It often (...) in a very spontaneous way but of course responding to specific expectations, and providing a specific solution for specific needs. So, we have to observe what is happening but also try to provide meaningful tools so trying to engage people in having ... may be the opportunity to express themselves (...) in terms of sharing and visualizing our ideas for the future, for example" (Interview-actor8). One example was the initiative "DESIS in the Mirror" (<http://desisinthemirror.imagishub.it/about/>)*

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## 4.2.2 Relation with system innovation

**Polimi DESIS Lab activities are strongly related to the city of Milan.** The main characteristic of the Polimi DESIS Lab is its strong connection with local communities. An interviewee felt that the Lab has competencies – in working with communities and groups - to create an understanding of what social innovation is and how people can work together to generate it. The Lab is considered to have developed knowledge of working directly with people (Interview-actor9).

**Emerging demands for Polimi DESIS Lab expertise: cities of Bologna and Milan included the theme of collaborative services in their agendas.** The concept of collaborative services was developed (and published) in 2008 by Politecnico di Milano. Since then, it is possible to observe that the term “collaborative services” has entered the public administration agenda. It is, however, not possible to confirm that this is due to the Polimi DESIS Lab activities, although the Lab has already developed an expertise in the development of this specific service model.

- The municipality of Bologna was the first to adopt the term in Italy, related to social innovation. Desk research revealed a call in which the term “social innovation” is mentioned and collaborative services are included as possible ways to set up collaborations between the municipality and its citizens (called active citizens), aimed at regenerating or providing maintenance for the public spaces (<http://www.comune.bologna.it/news/cittadinanza-attiva-il-bando-collaborare-con-lamministrazione-la-cura-dei-beni-comuni>). It includes collaborative norms to set up these collaborations between public administration and its citizens (<http://www.labsus.org/scarica-regolamento/>).
- Milan is following this example. It organized the event, *Sharexpo* (Milan, shared city for 2015), whose main goal was to bring the emerging topic of a sharing economy to the attention of institutions, economic players and grassroots bodies. The event included the definition of the strategies to facilitate the development and diffusion of collaborative services in Milan (beside public administration and other actors). A member of Polimi DESIS Lab worked on the *Sharexpo* committee.

**Dissemination of events about social innovation and collaborative services among public servants.** Polimi DESIS Lab develops many events around social innovation and collaborative services. One interviewee from Polimi DESIS Lab (Interview-actor12) stated that public servants – who are always invited – have been exposed to these concepts, and this could have an influence in the way Polimi DESIS Lab performed a role in inserting the theme of collaborative services in the agenda of the city of Milan.

**Institutions opening up their public spaces for the local community (the case of Campus Bovisa).**

Polimi DESIS Lab team, in the project *Cultivando*, works with the neighbourhood of the Campus Bovisa - Politecnico di Milano to develop a garden. Neighbours have started to work on the garden by themselves and to suggest other initiatives, such as events, and the possibility of involving other associations. A member of Polimi DESIS Lab believes that this initiative is fostering change, i.e., the idea of a university campus as a place open to its neighbourhood. It is considered a model that

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could be replicated to other public institutions, which could open their common areas for the use of citizens.

**Social innovation cases are considered as seeds, but systems have also to change to support social innovation.** In Italy, although there are social innovations responding to specific needs (ageing, underemployment, etc.), the system is not yet ready to receive these innovations; that is, the system also has to change: *"You're setting seeds, but the ground is not ready to grow them in systemic changes, transforming them into something bigger and actually systemic"* (Interview-actor9). Therefore, it is necessary to work not only with social innovators, but also with clients, institutions and financial supporters. It is necessary to create a culture around social innovation. This interviewee regards the work of Polimi DESIS Lab in the project TRANSITION (aimed to incubate social innovations) as a step in this direction, with projects focused on the city of Milan.

**Food and the city of Milan.** Polimi DESIS Lab was involved in the project, *Feeding Milan, energies for change* (2009 – 2014, Slow Food, Fondazione Cariplo). It was an applied research project aimed at creating a network of services of a short food chain between the city of Milan and its productive peri-urban countryside. The aim was to create a local sustainable food shed in the region of Milan, as an exemplary project for EXPO 2015 (which highlighted the theme of food). The Lab presented many activities in the field of food.

**Co-Housing.** Polimi DESIS Lab (and first, DIS research unit) was involved, and still are, in a number of projects and initiatives to support the creation of cohousing communities, developing specific processes and tools for the design and delivery of these initiatives, with particular focus on community building and co-design of the shared services required by these condominiums (<http://www.polidesign.net/housing>). A previous project ([www.cohousing.it](http://www.cohousing.it)) is still running. It was the first one, but the cohousing model spread in Milan and in Italy, generating demands for new professionals and new product offers for this specific typology of housing (see topic 2.2.2. in this report). It was stated (Interview-actor7) that the contribution of Polimi DESIS Lab in service design activities in this field will be increasingly needed; for example, there is significant work (and opportunities) at the local level, to set up a whole new set of services to reinforce the social urban fabric. The focus on the local level, specifically on the neighbourhood, was highlighted.

**Welfare crisis, the new service models and the role of the DESIS (as service designers).** *"This is a big issue (...) we are shifting from the welfare state, that has been the last century's state and now if people will collaborate more and if we will create a sort of participatory governance (...) we are shifting to something different (...) some researchers talk about entrepreneurial state (...) here in DESIS are many service designers, and design services currently are quite related to design services for welfare, so welfare services, and this is a big issue, because our government is not able to deliver welfare services as in the past, so the welfare state will be dead, because of the lack of money, so we have to find other solutions. This is a big systemic change in my opinion, to find new solutions without exploiting citizens. So, let's find the balance between collaboration and exploitation, there is a very fine line"* (Interview-actor12).

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## 4.2.3 Relation with game-changers

- **Sharing economy and collaborative economy**

Polimi DESIS Lab is involved in the promotion of collaborative services in the city of Milan in which the term “sharing economy” is being highlighted. There is an increasing tendency to be more collaborative instead of being focused on personal goals. Polimi DESIS Lab is already working in this direction: sharing space, garden, competences (Interviews-actors 5, 6,12).

- **Ageing**

Polimi DESIS Lab has been and is involved in projects related to ageing issues (Interview-actor12).

- **Smart city**

*“our interventions are the ‘living nodes’ that are able to re-establish the social fabric in the city, also that proposed the new practices, which are useful to revitalise the fabric. They are the vital nodes of a smart city that offers to the neighbourhood possibilities”* (Interview-actor7).

- **ICT**

*“The big transformations in our society and technologies, digital technologies effect (...) Looking at society, individuals are very engaged in the use of digital technology like individuals, but also as part as communities, that could be communities in terms of local communities but also communities of interest or communities of practice... So, if we think about our second life on the internet, on social networks, of course each one of us has multiple identities for all different interests, in different levels, in different moments”* (Interview-actor8).

- **(New) citizenship in a changing democracy**

*“(...) how people participate in governance is a big issue, and in my opinion, is one of the big topics of the future, in this participatory governance, how design can help democracy, because people want to have a voice and thanks to technology, thanks to social networks, all occupy movements, all the things in Europe and outside Europe, think of Hong Kong now... if you provide people with the right tools for participation, probably this dialogue...”* (Interview-actor12).

## 4.2.4 Relation with societal transformation

**Social transformation by activating people capabilities and skills, motivating them to be proactive.** According to a Polimi DESIS Lab member: *“To me, people would be more aware of their capabilities and skills. And the group gives tools to develop them and to be entrepreneurs”* (Interview-actor6). It is possible to see this as the key approach of the Polimi DESIS Lab activity, rather than setting up new businesses, but in a broader sense, to promote *“sustainable, convivial and collaborative ways of living and doing”* (from DESIS Website/Labs description).

**Stimulate people to take ownership of their own localities, their territory.** *“We stimulate, but it is not necessary to do so much, because people are already interested. Anyway, it means to take ownership of choices in the territory and this, generates positive effects. Because people become more present and more tolerant about the problems in the territory, because they become more responsible. It is a path to promote responsibility, more than collaboration. We collect the insights that come from people and that are delineating also like a new democracy, in a certain sense”* (Interview-actor7).

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**Empowering social transformative initiatives through the design process.** Polimi empowers people by offering support in upgrading actions, projects, and situations. *“The community garden started with 80% of our time and 20% of their time and now it is vice-versa. And now is less than 10% by us, it is just managing little things, but 90% of the time it is by them, they are dealing with their issues”* (Interview-actor6).

## 4.2.5 Relation with narratives of change

**Design for democracy.** *“(…) give the tools for people to participate in public life and to the government. There is a shift from “participatory design to design for participation (…)* how we can design the participation of people in the government (…) it is related to democracy. It is also a big issue. Designers, and we here in the Polimi DESIS Lab, we try to enhance participation of people in public life, in several ways (…) from a simple process of consultations (…), information, and you really co-design and co-produce services with people (…) how people participate in governance is a big issue, and in my opinion, is one of the big topics of the future, in this participatory governance, how design can help democracy” (Interview-actor12).

**Diffusion of design thinking approach among non-designers.** The design thinking approach is considered, in some ways as an optimistic approach. It is oriented to solving the problem, not to analyzing it: *“The mood changes completely towards a more opportunistic one (…)* The meaning of design is making projects, so when you approach an issue in a perspective not analyzing the issue, and find problems, not all problematizing, but always in a problem-solving (attitude), it is a big shift in the storytelling of the innovation” (Interview-actor12).

**Design can build narratives (1). It gives visual shape to the future, by creating bridges from memories, stories and images that come from people to something that could be part of everyday life. It is a collaborative effort, to build on a wide discourse, a common narrative.**

*“(…)in terms of sharing and visualizing our ideas for the future, the transformative power of our stories... we deal as researchers with storytelling in particular, it is a very powerful tool for shaping ideas and shaping memories and stories coming from people, and making them effective for many people. Collecting these stories and giving them a shape though visual means could help us to be a sort of... to bring us from the past to the future”.* This reinforces the importance of giving the opportunity to people, in the communities, to tell their stories. This has an important reflective, powerful, character that becomes part of a bigger discourse, a common narrative, one common macro-level speech of common people: *“We are trying to offer tools and opportunities for building bridges from (…)* the imagination to something that could be (…) really part of our everyday life” (Interview-actor8).

**Design can build narratives (2). It supports people in their dialogues and the way they collaboratively build design ideas or solutions.**

*“Our activities are very focused on finding ways for expressing, visualizing, prototyping values, design ideas or solutions, that have not at the moment a concrete opportunity to be widespread. Also, making things happen at the margins is much more visible and clear to a wider public and making different stakeholders dialogue in more consistent ways, making knowledge and values much more sharable”* (Interview-actor8). It makes people feel they are protagonists: *“(…) enthusiastic*



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*engagement of people in these kinds of activities because they are part of the communication process, communications systems, makes them part of a history, a big innovation (...) that is (...) for many people makes them feel protagonists" (Interview-actor8).*

**Consider people's capabilities and their ideas as key resources, and how design fosters change by empowering them and by developing solutions with people (in a co-design process).**

A key narrative of change is how design enables people to do things by themselves. It is considered that design is able to empower existing local initiatives (creative communities) or to foster new ones.

## 4.3 Aspects of empowerment and disempowerment of the local initiative

### 4.3.1 Governance

#### 4.3.1.1 Internal governance

**Two levels: core team and participants. Hierarchical and non-hierarchical relations.** Polimi DESIS Lab members are classified as a "core team" and "participants". Both levels include members from other Politecnico di Milano research groups, associate researchers and tenured professors (from DESIS Website/Labs description). Other members are PhD students and contract researchers from specific projects. It was acknowledged by a senior member that there is no hierarchy inside the group: people get together in meetings to exchange information about the projects and take decisions in a horizontal way. However, the Polimi DESIS Lab coordinator is a PhD advisor and is in charge of the projects developed in the Lab, and this generates hierarchical relations with PhD students and contract researchers. One of the junior members stated that they feel empowered by their participation in the Polimi DESIS Lab.

#### 4.3.1.2 External governance

**Relation with DESIS Network.** Like every DESIS Lab, Polimi has a coordinator and an operational manager. While the coordinator is the key actor (Anna Meroni) representing the Lab in the DESIS Network, the operational manager supports the coordinator in communication with the DESIS Network (transnational network) using the Platform (DESIS Website)

**Partnerships.** Formal partnerships are established project by project. Polimi DESIS Lab has a well-structured network of partners, particularly in the city of Milan, which are actively involved in projects and didactic collaborations: e.g., Slow Food Milan, and in Polenzo (University of Gastronomic Sciences); Make a Cube (incubator); Impact Hub Milan; and the public sector, particularly in the city of Milan.

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In European and other international projects, Polimi DESIS Lab benefits from the partnerships established by DESIS Network and the networking activities it enables. At the same time, Polimi DESIS Lab also helps DESIS Network to keep its international network active and to eventually expand (as all other DESIS Labs around the world).

## 4.3.2 Social learning

**Learning by doing together with citizens: *community-based design*.** Even when talking about how they promote social innovation, the tools used by Polimi DESIS Lab are recognised as allowing its members to experiment solutions with citizens: *"(...) not just promote in the traditional sense of promoting, (...) not make communication in a general meaning. Always to experiment (...) I mean (...) a wider approach that is called community centred design, probably you know... design for a community ... Probably the core of this approach (...) then, there is a set of methodologies and techniques - design, co-design, co-production - also the borders among these methodologies are not so clear because they are interconnected"* (Interview-actor12).

**Design students want to have experience in design for social innovation and have it in their CVs.** The Polimi DESIS Lab practice related to social innovation and, therefore, to its discourse became "desired" by students who want to experience this approach: *"These kinds of topics now are very fashionable. We are pioneers. In a few years, social innovation will be mainstream and (...) in Italy because of the crises. People have started to activate themselves more than before (...) several students understand this; the CVs are becoming more and more social"*(Interview-actor12).

**International projects and initiatives gives opportunities for social learning from grassroots experiences and activities:** *"At the international level... the opportunities to exchange experience in the design field, in the design practices that DESIS Lab is conducting, are very useful (...) This kind of sharing of knowledge impacts, improves, defines common research activities"* (Interview-actor8). Polimi DESIS Lab assembles grassroots experiences and activities, and is *"very good in building the network with very different groups and initiatives all over the world"* (Interview-actor8).

**Learning as exchange of information within the Polimi DESIS Lab.** It was mentioned that learning also occurs inside the Polimi DESIS Lab. The group is divided according to specialties: there are members in charge of the communication of the projects, others focused on the service design, and so forth (Interview-actor6). There are exchanges among these members and a mutual learning process happens, also an exchange of technical competences. It was observed that the Lab interacts with other groups in Politecnico di Milano and this reinforces this process.

**Learning within DESIS Network.** Polimi DESIS Lab benefits from DESIS Network, also in activities in which they are not directly involved. A good example are the Thematic Clusters in which a group of DESIS Labs develop research activities together, and produce a new design knowledge. The DESIS Network Platform (website) was mentioned as a tool for a mutual learning process. The interaction with other DESIS labs is done mostly online (e-mails, etc.). *"The opportunity to work live is starting from the online side"* (Interview-actor6). Polimi DESIS Lab is most often in contact with the six founders of DESIS Association (those that have signed the Association Agreement).

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## 4.3.3 Resources

**Financial resources.** Polimi DESIS Lab activities are financed by the developed research and design projects. Resources come from the European Union (the Lab participates as a partner in EU research projects funded by the European Commission), but also from institutions based in Italy:

- Fondazione Cariplo (a charitable foundation in Milan, created in 1991, when savings banks were required to divide into a not-for-profit foundation and a commercial banking arm) and Fondazione Housing Sociale - FHS (Fondazione Cariplo's ethical investment proposal to address the issue of disadvantaged conditions in housing took form through the creation of FHS together with other local actors)
- Italian region of Lombardia
- Municipality of Milan
- Polisocial award: the Social Responsibility Programme of Politecnico di Milano

PhD students receive scholarships. Their PhD activities include usually the development of projects (action research) and therefore, the scholarships are considered a resource for the development of local projects.

**Difficulties to find financial resources.** *"Unfortunately, there is a lot of mistrust and more from the academic world - that is not DESIS but the other ones - than the entrepreneurial world, which is more able to understand this structure, and this possibility given to people. The point is that (...) low value is given to research activities, a low economic value, so it is difficult to find the resources for projects aiming to organize people and the experimentation (...) working with community building, it is always considered very expensive. It is appreciated but it considered very expensive (and there is no tangible evidence)"* (Interview-actor7).

**DESIS Network is a very important resource for Polimi DESIS Lab.**

**(1) to set up international collaborations.** *"When we decide to apply to European calls it is very easy to setup a network because we have contacts all over the world. So, in a day, make some calls and we can setup a network and it is quite important"* (Interview-actor12).

**(2) To exchange knowledge with others working in the same topic.** The network helps to exchange knowledge too because of *"the facilities in connection with people working on the same topic"* (Interview-actor12).

**(3) The network helps in dissemination of Polimi DESIS Lab activities and fosters reputation at the local level.** The relation between DESIS Network and local labs is considered an advantage in dissemination and reputation: *"When you are connected with local communities and you say you are member of an international network, this is important because it adds an international character to your activity"* (Interview-actor12).

## 4.3.4 Monitoring and evaluation

**Impact in the university: it is difficult to be recognized.** A member mentioned that it is difficult to recognize the impacts inside Politecnico di Milano. *"(...) we are seen to be very specialized in sustainability and social innovation but now these topics are so broad that every designer can approach these topics"* (Interview-actor12). It was also stated that collaboration with other groups is starting to take place and this will be helpful, and that Polimi DESIS Lab is better recognized outside Politecnico di Milano.

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**Monitoring social innovation.** When collecting cases and experiences, Polimi DESIS Lab and DESIS Network are monitoring social innovation phenomena: *"Aligned to the idea of monitoring the evolution of social innovation... It is a good way of documenting and keeping the memory of what social innovation is and what is becoming"* (Interview-actor8).

**No formal monitoring methods.** Not yet. Informally, it was said that in *Coltivando* (community garden in the Bovisa Campus – Politecnico di Milano) it would be possible to create criteria to evaluate its impact, for example, the number of people working with them in the garden, or the number of likes on Facebook given to the project (Interview-actor6).

**Academic impact.** It was stated that there is an impact in academic terms. Many publications have been produced by Polimi DESIS Lab members in recent years about their work on design for social innovation. Interviewees have identified Polimi DESIS Lab's specialty in social design methodologies and how design can be related to social innovation, and how DESIS Network helps to improve the way organizations think about social innovation.

## 4.4 Other issues about the local initiative

**Change and transformation by passion.** *"What I see is that there are 4 or 5 groups inside (DESI Network) that are very passionate about what they do, without being fanatics. Passionate to follow projects that are a little bit visionary. (...) Truly passionate about that, as a culture of change, of transformation. (...) I see that all these projects are not considered in a rational way, on the contrary, they are done in a "irrational way" with a passion that is truly extraordinary. I have understood, going around the world, that it is not normal in academic research. I ask around: where does your heart beat? And I realize that they have never considered this question before. But no one has never asked it before, (...) does their heart beat for the initiatives they are involved in? This is a small change in the university. This seems to me a normal privilege of our work to make what we are passionate for, because you can create the conditions for that. But sometimes, this is not usual for others. When I spoke with PhD students in other countries I understand this is not usual at all"* (Interview-actor2).

**DESI as a movement** (regarding what has been stated above). *"This is the education that involves emotion. Yes, it is a "believe". It seems that the DESI Network is a kind of movement, of activism. (...) Also inside the university, if you see Transition Town... in the university has the spirit of a movement. Distinguished in the university, initiatives that are guided by emotion, by personal motivation, by vision. This is a disciplinary movement, people that feel themselves a different kind of designer. This is not like Transition Town. From what I have understood, it is the context in which Transition Town happens. TT wants to involve more people, parts of the population. Our view is more technical and professional; it is from a point of view of a specific discipline and job. Keeps the view in the tools of our job"* (Interview-actor5).

**Pioneers.** The interviewee feels empowered by pioneering the work with social innovation in the Polimi DESIS Lab: *"A new mindset for sure. And I was a pioneer in everything ... (...) we are pioneers and also is crazy... and now it is mainstream ... I think this empowered me"* (Interview-actor12).

## 5 Local initiative (2): [NAS DESIGN DESIS Lab, Brazil]

### 5.1 Overview of development in the local initiative

NAS DESIGN or Centre of Systemic Approach to Design is a research group at the Federal University of Santa Catarina (UFSC), in Florianopolis, Brazil, led by Professor Dr. Luiz Fernando Gonçalves de Figueiredo, *“the group seeks to conduct investigations and discussions about a systemic approach to design, in order to disseminate knowledge about its practical and theoretical dimensions. The group understands design as a holistic process, about which the lab studies issues related to social innovation, responsible design, creative communities and sustainability”* (CNPq directory, 2014)<sup>2</sup>. The activities of the group are divided into teaching, research and extension<sup>3</sup> activities, the three pillars of the Brazilian University system. The following actors form the group: Professor Luiz Fernando (group leader), graduate students (PhD and Master’s candidates) and undergraduate students.

**Goals.** The group aims at *“the promotion of the concept of design”*, and in this sense, *“there is a systemic approach, which is our view, and there is the goal of promotion and inclusion of design within contexts that have no access to design”* (Interview-actor13).

**Systemic approach to design: a definition.** The idea of systemic approach arises from the theory of communication and theory of systems (Interview-actor13). According to Muniz & Figueiredo (2009), the focus of design has widened towards a systematic perspective, the *“systemic approach to design”* that aims *“to consider the complexity of the system, which involves the institution or situation on which it lies as a whole, by dealing with the interrelation between the factors involved in this arrangement (...). This approach, however, is not related only to the physical aspects of the systems, but also to the information, which plays a crucial role in the communication process with the final user”*(p. 1089).

The authors relate the *systemic approach to design* to *social innovation*, as a way to promote solutions on different levels of a system (the levels of interrelations among actors, products, institutions, organizations and so on). *“Therefore, the systemic approach of Design can be set as one of the strategies to integrate the practices of social innovation that are happening in the contemporary everyday life, into Design, with its social responsibilities. Within this kind of approach, Design practice is not restricted to a specific kind of activity; it is used as a process that involves Industrial Design, Graphic Design and other areas. The main conclusion to be drawn is that the purpose of a Design project is not only the creation of a specific product, but the organization of a complex interaction system which can contribute to the integration of Design, in its several application fields, and to the integration of the interested members within the process, the stakeholders”*(ibid, p. 1091).

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<sup>2</sup>Available on: <http://dgp.cnpq.br/dgp/espelhogrupos/4527287498872740>

<sup>3</sup>Extension: in the Brazilian university system, extension activities are actions promoted by a university (projects, cultural events, etc.) in society which provides the external public with the knowledge gained from teaching and research developed in the university.

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**Methodology.** Within a systemic approach to design, the design work is developed as a holistic process. (Prestes et al., 2010). Within this process, the focus shifts from the product to the system. Therefore, it is possible to assume three forms of interaction, according to Manzini (2008): (a) Top-down: by the intervention of external institutions; (b) Peer-to-peer: exchange of information among peers; (c) Bottom-up: by active participation of interested people.

The work of NAS DESIGN “starts with the first form of interaction, “top-down”, in which NAS DESIGN (UFSC) goes to the external organization and intervenes in the community. Afterwards, NAS DESIGN does a second level of interaction, “peer-to-peer”, in which its team interacts with the community to know its situation in loco. In this degree of interaction, both community and laboratory team are at the same level. This permits an information exchange among peers more directly and effectively. New identifications are boosted by the third degree of interaction, “bottom-up”, in which the local actors have an effect on the external entity (NAS DESIGN). The latter situation demonstrates that there is a reversal change on the tendency ‘local is influenced by global’: the results of the community’s work and the skills of certain people – who has a know-how, different ways of thinking and also put different forms of organization in action – generate interference in the organization that is doing the analysis. This constitutes an innovation process and, therefore, may contribute for the creation of scientific and technical knowledge.”(Prestes et al., 2010). Therefore, the group uses the action research methodology (Interview-actor13).

## Project cases from the group

**Project 1: Alto Vale Project.** Alto Vale Project’s focus is on the territory of Alto Vale do Itajai, a region in the centre of the state of Santa Catarina, Brazil. This project involves partners from the civil, private and public sectors, in order to stimulate the development of associations (informal and formal) and micro-enterprises to promote income creation, in parallel with the encouragement of the local cultural identity (Kist et al., 2012). For that, the group works collaboratively with:

- **AMPE** (Association of the Micro and Small Entrepreneurs from the Alto Vale), a local non-profit association that aims to empower local communities and local entrepreneurs through capacity building and legal assistance;
- **Local city halls** that empowers local communities by means of infrastructure and contacts, for instance, offering courses related to hygiene with food;
- **Local communities**, characterized by European heritage, based mainly on German, Italian and Portuguese origins. This brings a cultural influence to their cities, whose families, in some cases, live or supplement their income through the sale of agricultural, artisanal and manufactured products such as jam, honey, pasta, rice and biscuits. Local communities are cooperatives, families and micro-businesses that connect with local organizations, such as city halls and associations. Examples of these communities are: (1) **Pogalski family**: a family from Trombudo Central, city of Santa Catarina (Brazil), which produces cachaça as an artisanal product. Cachaça is a distilled drinkable alcohol made from sugarcane juice (Cruz et al., 2012); (2) **Casa das Massas**: a women’s cooperative from Chapadão do Lageado (Santa Catarina, Brazil), which produces food products based on pasta.

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Regarding this project, it is possible to observe that the group works on a (a) product level and on a (b) systemic level:

**a) Product level (elements of the system):** The group creates visual identity and packaging for communities' products, which are based on a cultural knowledge passed through generations, thus valorising the usually food-based-products. Moreover, the products become formalized (with a brand; following technical requirements) to be sold in the market. As well, the group suggests ergonomic/human factor projects to improve the quality of the work process in some local cooperatives. Finally, the group suggests new products and services (especially tourism services), based on local opportunities.

**b) Systemic level:** On the systemic level, the group collaborates with different systems: first, with the university educational system (divided in Brazil into teaching, research and extension activities); second, with the local social system of Alto Vale do Itajaí (formed by the most influent social actors – families, cooperatives, associations, social entrepreneurs and mayors); third, with a familiar entrepreneurial system: which, fourth, is within a production and consumption system; that, fifth, is related to a local public management system. Within this context, the group acts directly with the local initiatives (and their related actors), aiming for an attitude change towards entrepreneurship and promotion of the local culture identity. For that, the group establishes relational and trust bonds with the local actors, in order to engage them in change. NAS DESIGN suggests an entrepreneurship model in terms of informal and formal associations. Informally, people start to organize in groups to achieve common goals, like establishing partnerships to collaborate in the food production. Formally, people organize themselves in cooperatives, in order to be able to buy and sell products legally.

**Project 2: COLIMAR.** The cooperative of women food producers from Governador Celso Ramos (Santa Catarina, Brazil) or COLIMAR is a women's cooperative that produces products based on seafood. NAS DESIGN developed specific projects for the cooperative, in graphic design and branding (visual identity and packaging for their products) and in ergonomics/human factors (signalization design for their factory, to orient the workflow). (Rosa, 2013).

**Other projects.** The group has also worked with the Cooperative of Women Producers of Taboa, in Guarda do Embau (Santa Catarina, Brazil), which produces products made from fibres of Taboa, a typical aquatic plant found in swamps. NAS DESIGN worked also with the Public Prosecutor's Office of Santa Catarina (a government organization that aims to monitor the compliance with the law, defending the rights of the society of Santa Catarina), and the University Hospital (both in Florianopolis, Santa Catarina, Brazil), in developing projects in graphic design and in ergonomics/human factors (signalization design).

**Views and perspectives from the involved actors.** A NAS DESIGN member declares that they work in order to *"open up the eyes of people about the importance and the need of the work of designers, and also it helps to improve the marketing aspects"* (Interview-actor18). Considering the two levels of NAS DESIGN activities:

- At the **product level** (elements of the system), a member claims that: *"People do not have an idea of what benefits design can offer, so the lab makes this approximation, applying design"*

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*thinking*"(Interview-actor18). A local entrepreneur viewed the work of NAS DESIGN as positive: *"The work they have done here was very important. This is because when we talk about Design we do not have the notion what it really is. It is almost related to better qualify our product, to have a better marketing of it (...) The design opened our mind in this sense: there is an order, a rule...and this helps us to follow the right patterns to work"* (Interview-actor14). Regarding signalization design for work environments: *"It gave a different notion for our work. Nowadays all the signs in the factory have been designed... and with the signalization design we have created an order in our work"* (ibid.).

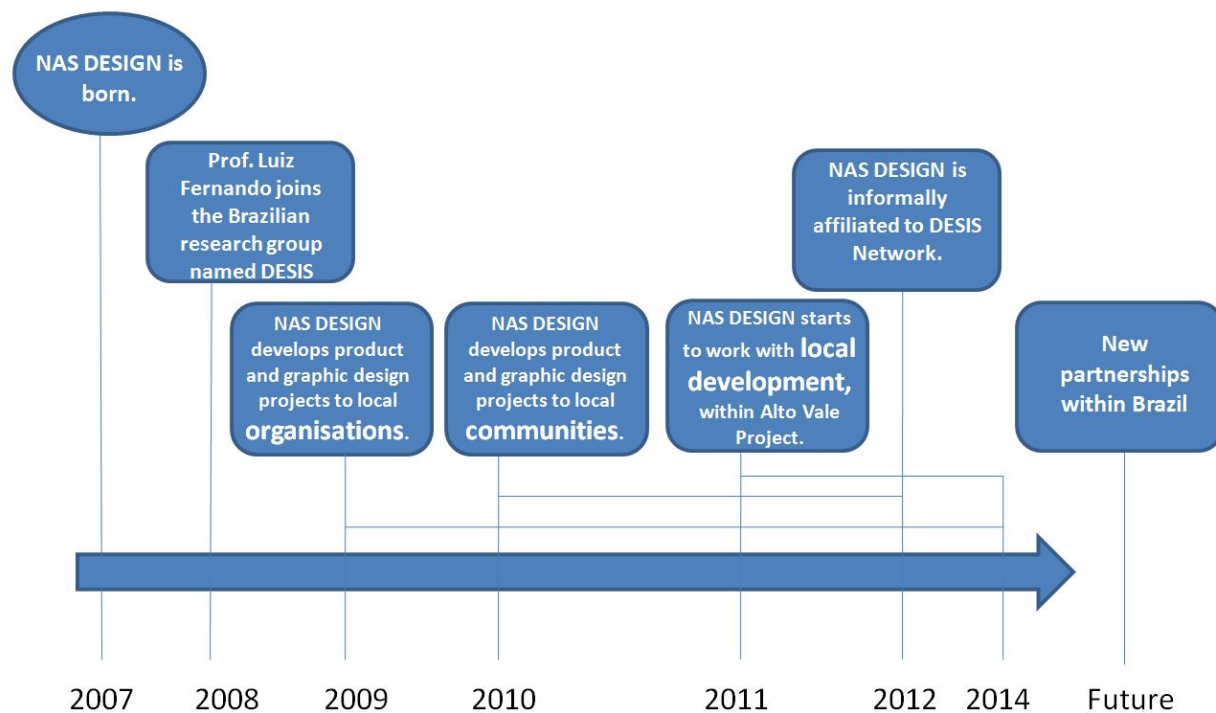
- At the **systemic level**, a member of the NAS DESIGN team considers an achievement of the group as passing from working only within isolated projects with communities (node), to seeing the whole system of initiatives and working with them systemically: *"I think it was a leap that we gave, instead of acting in the node, we are acting now on the network...this is an achievement for the systemic approach"*(Interview-actor17). In this sense: *"It is possible to say that we have raised the level from one punctual action to a more strategic and territorial action, so I believe this is a great achievement: go beyond the development of a single solution that solves a specific problem, to articulate something that involves more people, more companies, being able to benefit from the actions we do"* (ibid.). In fact, a member of the team sees the group as one of the pioneers in research about Design Management and Social Innovation. *"Regarding the topics of Design Management and Social Innovation, practically NAS DESIGN is the precursor"* (ibid.). It is worthwhile mentioning that the systemic approach to social innovation within territories has been discussed by other authors (Krucken, 2009).

**Future.** The group aims, in the future, to establish new partnerships within Brazil: *"Now we are leaving the state, going to Mato Grosso, Amazonas, and we will amplify the local network. The focus is still on local development, using technology"* (Interview-actor13).



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## Timeline and Table:



Year / period	Important activities/changes/milestones in local initiative <i>NAS DESIGN</i>	Important changes in context
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2007	NAS DESIGN is born.	The Master's Program in Design is created at UFSC, because of Professor Luiz Fernando's need for a specific research topic. At the same time, the group is registered as a CNPq (National Council for Scientific and Technological Development) group named Systemic Approach.
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2007-2009	NAS DESIGN participated in the project LOLA – Looking for Likely Alternatives. A didactic tool to approach sustainability by investigating social innovation. It aimed to foster interest and involvement in education for sustainability and responsible living in the national school curricula.	This didactic method was used by NAS DESIGN in design courses. It was the first direct contact of NAS DESIGN with the DESIS Network theoretical framework and approach.
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2008	Prof. Luiz Fernando joined the Brazilian research group named DESIS, founded in this same year and	Future president of DESIS Network (Ezio Manzini) gave lectures at the event,
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	based in the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro.	DESIGN.ISDS – Design for Social Innovation and Sustainable development, at COPPE – Federal University of Rio de Janeiro.
2009-2014	Partnership with external actor University Hospital (Florianopolis, Brazil).	The group developed visual communication projects for the organization.
2010-2012	Partnership with external actor Cooperative of Women Producers of Taboa.	The group developed a project, based on the creation of visual identity for cooperative products.
2010-2014	Partnership with external actor COLIMAR - Cooperative of the women producers of food from Governador Celso Ramos (Governador Celso Ramos, Brazil).	The group developed a project, based on visual identity, packaging design and ergonomic recommendations for the women's work.
2010	Partnership with external actor AMPE Alto Vale (Association of the Micro and Small Entrepreneurs from the Alto Vale).	NAS DESIGN started a partnership with AMPE.
2011	Partnership with city halls within Alto Vale do Itajai region, Santa Catarina, Brazil.	Mediated by AMPE, the group started to work with administrations of cities from Alto Vale do Itajai, through the Alto Vale Project. This project is divided into sub-projects with local initiatives, with the aim of stimulating local entrepreneurship and creating productive articulations within the same territory, in order to promote local development. The focus is to promote incremental innovation in system of production and consumption of this territory, as well as radical innovation through the creation of new local products.
2012	The terms of affiliation with DESIS Network become informally stated and NAS DESIGN took part in DESIS Network. DESIS Network is not a legal entity yet, but an (informal) affiliation process takes place.	NAS DESIGN goes through a validation process and joins the International DESIS Network, presenting local projects with cases of social innovation and sustainability on the DESIS website.
2012-2013	Project with the Public Prosecutor Office of Santa Catarina - MPSC (Florianopolis, Brazil).	Project based on the creation of the new visual identity for this organization.
2014	Affiliation with DESIS Network becomes official with the establishment of DESIS Association.	NAS DESIGN is member of DESIS Network and is asked to perform its rights and duties.

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Future	The future for the group is related to new partnerships within Brazil	The idea is to amplify NAS DESIGN's network, continuing the focus on local development.
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## 5.2 Aspects of 'innovation' and 'change' of the local initiative

### 5.2.1 Relation with social innovation

**Focus on specific design demands.** Not every project developed by NAS DESIGN is related to new ways of thinking and doing, since they are basically concerned in solving isolated design problems, like the creation of the visual identity for the Public Prosecutor Office of Santa Catarina. In other cases, it suggests innovation processes that might lead to social innovations, but these are conceptual and part of the students' work (Interview-actor13).

**Social innovation regarding new combinations within territory.** NAS DESIGN is part of a system of actors (university, communities, city halls, associations) that collaborate, in order to achieve socially recognized goals through projects. The group may be related to social innovation, when it influences the local contexts and gives importance to the small producers and actors within a big system. Within this context, there is a specific project developed by the group (Alto Vale Project) that promotes new relations among the Federal University of Santa Catarina, communities, families, companies and City Halls, in the region of Alto Vale do Itajai, in Santa Catarina, Brazil. *"Nowadays, we have been working with communities from the Alto Vale do Itajai (Santa Catarina), where we have a macro and a micro view regarding this territory"* (Interview-actor13). *"So, we integrate local communities, new actors, students, and other institutions to promote the local development"* (ibid.). The group refers to this integration through new connections among local actors as "articulations": *"For example, in the Casa das Massas, we created a new articulation for their production system, in order to optimize the use of energy, to improve the products..."* (Interview-actor13). The idea is to motivate the growth of associations, social entrepreneurship and, ultimately, local development of the region of Alto Vale do Itajai in Santa Catarina, Brazil (Kist et al., 2012). This project may lead to social innovation, because it aims at changes on a systemic scale, resulting in social and economic benefits; in this case, in the production system of local communities of Alto Vale do Itajai, through the suggestion of new forms of integration among local actors (associations, new relations among local public authorities and local residents) and new forms of generating income and creating jobs (social entrepreneurship).

### 5.2.2 Relation with system innovation

**Interventions at a systemic level.** At the systemic level, the group relates with different systems:

- first, with the university educational system (divided into teaching, researching and extension activities);
- second, with the local social system of Alto Vale do Itajai (formed by the most influential

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- social actors – families, cooperatives, associations, social entrepreneurs and mayors);
- third, with a familiar entrepreneurial system, that;
- fourth, is within a production and consumption system (for instance, production and consumption of artisanal food products);
- fifth, related to a local public management system (local City Halls) (Kist et al., 2012; Silva et al., 2012).

**University educational system.** The group may promote an educational innovation, because it connects the activities of teaching, researching and extension, so the output of one is the input of the other, being based on local human resources (students, teachers, researchers) to promote benefits for the communities (creation of new businesses, income generation, changes in attitude, regeneration of the local social fabric, etc.) (Participant observation, 2014). *“There is a change in the academic practice. Sometimes we stay only in the theory and there is not so much practice, so this is a shift in the attitude, when the academics seek this contact with the real world and see how they can help in this, and also have a view that we can learn with these people that are participating in the research activities. Not a superior view; a horizontal view”*(Interview-actor19).

**Territorial system.** The group promotes innovation within the production/consumption system of the Alto Vale do Itajai, because it stimulates the development of local businesses in the form of social entrepreneurship. *“NAS DESIGN has worked to change the consumption system, working with collaborative networks. So, for example, the group works in the Alto Vale do Itajai, promoting a local integration among actors, so they can exchange raw materials, form partnerships, and develop local networks. In this sense, the group helps to create new forms of production and consumption, through local networks. (...) And this is a change, it is an innovation, it is a social innovation. It is the change of vision, the view we have about consumption, about supply of raw materials, about design... This is a systemic view towards society”* (Interview-actor18).

**Public management system.** The group interacts with different City Halls and communities, which stimulates a rise in the work of the group: instead of acting in the node, they are now acting on the network, focusing in the production system of these communities. *“It is possible to say that we have raised the level from one punctual action to a more strategic and territorial action, so I believe this is a great achievement: the shift from designing a solution that solves a specific problem, to promote an articulation that involves more people, more companies, which are able to benefit from the actions we do”* (Interview-actor17). Actually, the systems cited above facilitate the group's work: *“We work from the part to the whole, in a general theory of systems”* (Interview-actor13).

## 5.2.3 Relation with game-changers

The group believes their work is related to the game-changers of **connectivity** (in the sense of creating new connections among systems and elements), and **collaboration** (in the sense of promoting new relations among actors, aiming at their active participation towards common goals).

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**Connectivity.** According to the group, connectivity can be put in practice by: *"identifying tendencies of connectivity and promoting their connection. It is the formation of articulations (i.e. the facilitation of new local networks). We need to generate tools for 'enabling platforms' (Manzini, 2008); these platforms generate connections. This idea impacts the group in the sense of understanding all the system and having a holistic view about what we are working with"*(Interview-actor13).

**Collaboration.** According to the group, within a context where the civil sector is working towards a collaborative and transparent organization of the society, the university has an important role, since it is training human capital to live and work in this society. *"I believe that the political system is being changed quickly...New systems are coming and are happening, and we have to spend energy on this, on improving these new systems. It is here where the University gets inserted, because it has a human capital ready, or getting prepared to work on these issues...The University has a lot of people full of hope for the world, with a renewed energy"* (Interview-actor15). These changes are important, in the sense of having more connections among actors, more dialogue, and union among different parts of the society (civil society, NGOs, enterprises).

A member of NAS DESIGN commented: *"the production means are increasingly democratized...this is the idea of the prosumer (producer + consumer)"* (Interview-actor17). NAS DESIGN is involved in research activities and projects in terms of collaborative and participative processes of co-design.

## 5.2.4 Relation with societal transformation

**Local development as societal transformation.** *"The only social transformation the group wants to generate is local development. Locally and then regionally. To start from the small to the whole"*(Interview-actor13). NAS DESIGN is engaged with the local development of the Alto Vale do Itajai region, and the social transformations are related to the work with local communities within the Alto Vale project: *"Not only agriculture, but also the social enterprises are from families. So, this work will influence the improvement of the conditions of family life. They can be more organized, they learn how to work in groups, what motivates the children to continue their family's work"* (Interview-actor16). This is exemplified by the case of the Pogalski family, where parents and children are working together (Cruz et al., 2012): *"And the father is very happy, because he is working with his family and producing their own livelihood"* (ibid.).

**Societal transformation through education.** Within the educational context, the social transformation is related to making people within communities understand what designers do. *"This is a conceptual revolution, or professional, or even a revolution of the consumption society"* (Interview-actor18), when design starts to be understood not only as it relates to aesthetics, but also to planning and, consequently, to the capacity to change the means of production and consumption of society.

Moreover, NAS DESIGN is related to new forms of education, those closer to society: *"NAS DESIGN aims to break the wall of the University; taking off this barrier and being more participative in society"* (Interview-actor15). In this sense, the group is related to university practices more

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engaged with citizenship and local social, economic and environmental issues, making people understand and develop their own design ability (ibid.).

## 5.2.5 Relation with narratives of change

**Focusing on local resources and local culture.** It was observed that NAS DESIGN group committed to promote change by identifying and promoting potential resources available in the local areas, based in the local cultural identity of communities. However, they are concerned not to break local cultural bonds: *“This is a caution that we always take, to never interfere culturally”* (Interview-actor13). The group’s work is mainly focused in the local development of the State of Santa Catarina, Brazil (ibid.).

**Sustainability.** The group engages in changing the discourse of consumption, stimulating a sustainable perspective of production systems; that is, awareness about the social, economic and environmental aspects related to systems of production and consumption. Within this context, the discourse of social innovation is also used, regarding the changing of perspectives and attitudes of people inside communities. Since the group applies a systemic approach to projects, this idea reflects on the practice of the group: *“We arrive at one place always with a multifaceted view”*(Interview-actor17), in the sense of observing social, environmental and economic aspects from the locality, as well as having different design perspectives - product, strategic and graphic design.

**Stimulating local micro-businesses.** The group believes one of the sources for local development comes from the promotion of local micro-businesses. This is why the group works mainly with micro-entrepreneurs within communities (Participatory observation, 2014).

**Changing the meaning of quality of life.** The group’s work is based on the systemic approach to design, which means having a holistic view of projects, identifying all the systems related to them and how they relate or could relate to one another. Within this context, it is claimed that quality of life does not need to be related to material consumption: *“I can consume relations, I can consume experiences... It is an economic model that is based on a consumption model. So, since it is based on consumption (this economic model), since it is already radicalized, let's see how it is the consumption of values, to convert it to a good thing”*(Interview-actor13).

## 5.3 Aspects of empowerment and disempowerment of the local initiative

### 5.3.1 Governance

The actors involved with NAS DESIGN can be divided in two groups: internal actors and external actors. The internal actors are the coordinator of the research group and the PhD, Masters and

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undergraduate students. The Masters and PhD candidates are enrolled as researchers within the group, receiving scholarships or working voluntarily. The undergraduate students can be engaged in the group as researchers or interns, whose work can be paid with scholarships from extension projects from the group or can be performed voluntarily. All these actors are part of the Program of Design at the Federal University of Santa Catarina (UFSC) (Participatory observation, 2014).

The external actors are the institutions that develop projects in collaboration with NAS DESIGN. These projects can be research projects, extension projects or both. It is evident that NAS DESIGN works particularly with the public sector and with social enterprises (cooperatives and social businesses) (ibid.).

## 5.3.1.1 Internal governance

**Internal procedures.** Decisions are taken with PhD students, who are in more direct contact with the research activities. The activities are divided among students within the group: strategic activities for PhD students, tactical activities for the Masters students and operational activities for the undergraduate students. Those students who want to participate more in the group also participate in the decision-making processes. But, everyone participates in the discussions at regular meetings. The group has created working groups, according to the research theme of each PhD student, and this is another way to organize the internal work of the group (Participant observation, 2014).

In summary, Professor Luiz Fernando is the central figure who defines the research lines of the group. Each PhD candidate is in charge of one line of research and they get support from undergraduate students. Finally, masters candidates have their own individual research projects.

**University.** However, there are people who view this governance process of the group in a conservative way. This is because the group is inside the University and the university is conservative. According to an external actor from NAS DESIGN: *"It is almost a feudal system. There is the professor, who is the feudal lord; there are the students. The student must develop his/her research and also help the professor with his projects. They must publish, because this is a demand from CAPES - Brazilian Federal Agency for the Support and Evaluation of Graduate Education. And after this, the student, now as professor, reproduces the same system with other students"*(Interview-actor20). So, the university's institutional system may actually disempower the group. For example, there are metrics to evaluate the Master and PhD candidates: if they publish together, they earn fewer points, so this is a discouragement for researchers to work and publish together: *"This discourages collaboration and favours competition"*(Interview-actor17).

## 5.3.1.2 External governance

**External governance established by agreements.** The relation with external actors is formally established through a written agreement between the Federal University of Santa Catarina and the other organization. The financial support usually exists as scholarships for students. In the case of

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Alto Vale Project, AMPE<sup>4</sup> came up with the request and the group developed the projects. But everyone together made the decisions: *“There is no hierarchy and we are always in contact. The meetings are scheduled by telephone and happen in person”* (Interview-actor16). The agreement between the two institutions (AMPE and NAS DESIGN) regarding their specific work duties is informal.

**Empowerment.** Social entrepreneurs are empowered by their participation in the decision process with NAS DESIGN, where everybody has space to give their opinions during meetings and discussions (Participatory observation, 2014). Moreover, the group is targeted to empower communities through the insertion of design knowledge in terms of form and function, design thinking, and strategic knowledge:

- **Form and function:** new products, packaging, visual identity.
- **Design thinking:** stimulus through conversation for planning, organization, test, identification of local potentials, etc.
- **Strategic knowledge:** new connections among local actors; value the local cultural identity; promote partnership among actors from different institutional levels (civil, public and private) to promote systemic change; mix theory with fieldwork; promote voluntary work by students.

**Disempowerment by external systems.** What seem to disempower the external partners are the systems in which they function. For example, interviewees from one cooperative complained about not having a steady demand for work (clients) to keep producing their products. This is an important issue for them, because they are afraid of having to close their factory. NAS DESIGN could not empower these actors, because it did not promote changes in the system of consumption of the cooperative, finding potential buyers for its products, creating partnerships, etc. On the other hand, in the Alto Vale Project, the group has been working on the system of production and consumption of the local initiatives, suggesting new local connections among actors. And, because of that, they are noticing changes in the form of new local productive networks.

## 5.3.2 Social learning

**Learning is empowered by a common physical space and by experience.** The basis of the learning process promoted by the group is experience, that is, to experience fieldwork, deal with communities and create design solutions for them. Moreover, the physical space of the group’s laboratory is a great catalyst for learning, because it is an area for promoting meetings, information exchange and conviviality: *“Always when I see something interesting I bring it to discussions with the professor, and the other participants in the laboratory, and they always have something to say and to contribute”*(Interview-actor19). Therefore, learning happens within the group, because students, researchers and the professor work closely in the group’s laboratory. This conviviality induces learning. Also, the Masters and PhD candidates have academic experience, teaching undergraduate design courses.

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<sup>4</sup>Association of the Micro and Small Entrepreneurs from the Alto Vale.



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**Fieldwork experience.** Visiting local communities and developing projects with them is especially interesting for students to work with real projects that respond to local demands. This experience is important for students, *"because they will live the fieldwork, they will live the facts they are witnessing; not staying only within the classroom, only thinking. So, they see the facts, and with the facts they see they can develop the projects"*(Interview-actor16).

**Learning by local intervention.** Finally, learning may happen inside society as a whole. This happens when the group produces knowledge and people start to have a different attitude. So, learning is organized, first informally, through observations and discussions, and then formally, with local interventions leading to changes in people's attitudes. According to an external actor: *"We have learned how the routine of work is, how it must be done, that there is doctrine, a rule, that must be followed"* (Interview-actor14). NAS DESIGN's work contributed to the improvement of the quality of products of this organization: *"...In the cleaning of the kitchen, in the form of working with an uniform...this gives a pattern of quality"* (ibid.).

**Learning may be disempowered by the university institution.** This learning process may be individual: *"This learning is individual, in the sense it depends on the will of each individual to happen. This learning process within the group could be improved. Nowadays, PhD candidates are concentrated on his or her research theme and there is not much exchange among them"* (Interview-actor17). This may happen because of lack of time and lack of institutional motivation/reward to exchange ideas.

## 5.3.3 Resources

**Human capital as resource.** Almost all the interviewees agreed that the most important resource of the group is the human resource: *"The most important resource from NAS DESIGN is the human resource. Since the group has a physical room to meet, there are people from different groups from the University that visit the lab and share information. The voluntary work performed many times by students is very important for the group and also for the students, because they help with operational activities at the same time they develop technical know-how"*(Interview-actor13). All these people together discuss ideas that build knowledge.

**Knowledge as resource.** Similarly, *"the most important resource from NAS DESIGN is knowledge"* (Interview-actor16). According to an external actor, this knowledge is shared with all the external partners the group has (AMPE, entrepreneurs, families, etc.) (ibid.). In parallel, knowledge is built during academic courses: *"There is a constant flux of researchers and research themes being developed. This potential is shared within the exchange of ideas. This happens also when the Masters and PhD candidates share ideas with the undergraduate students during courses"*(Interview-actor20).

**Financial resources.** The main source of financial resources of the group is the local City Halls of Alto Vale do Itajai (Santa Catarina, Brazil) that pay for student scholarships. In addition, PhD and Masters students receive scholarships from CAPES (Coordination for the Improvement of Higher

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Education Personnel) or CNPq (National Counsel of Technological and Scientific Development) to develop their research projects (Participant observation, 2014).

Therefore, the group is empowered by the technical quality and personal dedication of the people that form the group. In this sense, the human factor of demotivation may be one reason for disempowerment, which can be caused by the lack of financial and structural support. Moreover, the educational system, which privileges students who publish more and are the main authors of their work, may lead to a competitive system and a lack of quality in the published papers.

## 5.3.4 Monitoring and evaluation

**Informal monitoring.** *“There is no monitoring and formal evaluation of NAS DESIGN work”*(Interview-actor13). Informally, however, there is an increasing number of demands, which might indicate a perceived positive impact. Therefore, the monitoring is empirical and qualitative (from observations). It is possible to notice, for example, an attitude change when: *“They (social entrepreneurs)note the differences when, for example, a product changes its visual identity and packaging”*(Interview-actor16). In this sense: *“the group brings social benefits for people, helping them individually in their self-esteem. The results of the projects change the people’s attitudes”* (ibid.).

Within this context, and regarding the Alto Vale Project, it is possible to diagnose an impact on two levels, according to the interviews and participatory observations – (a) product level and (b) systemic level:

**a) Impact on a product level:** The group promotes product and process innovation as impacts within productive initiatives of communities (this innovation may be radical, with the design of products with new materials or services based on local relations); sales increase, and valorisation of the local cultural identity. Moreover, in some cases the production is also an expression of cultural identity. People produce pasta, jam, biscuits, cachaça, because this production knowledge has been passed down through generations. So, their production is also a way of keeping these traditions throughout the years, passing this knowledge to their children. Usually, children do not want to keep their families’ production, because it is not profitable. So, with the increased sales, children start to be more interested in working in the family production, instead of working in low-paid positions in bigger cities. This may influence the rural exodus process, by decreasing it. Plus, it motivates families to be together, which may bring indirect psychological and health benefits, besides strengthening the family social fabric.

**b) Impact on a systemic level:** in collaboration with AMPE and local mayors, the group establishes new productive connections among local social actors, in which the output of one production system becomes the input of the other production system, which leads to a local consumption and production process. This brings economic and environmental repercussions (the local networks develop the local economy and the reduction of transport distances of raw materials and products benefits the local environment). Finally, there is an impact in the educational system; within this case, the impact is related to new knowledge for students. Since the group directly applies theory in the fieldwork, students

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(undergraduate, Masters, and PhD) learn by experience to have a systemic view of design, as well as to see local possibilities as opportunities for their work.

**Metrics from university education system.** Since the group is within a university educational system, another metric could be the number of researchers who graduate or the number of publications in renowned scientific journals. This may reflect the quality of the groups' projects.

**Lack of monitoring leads to disempowerment.** The lack of monitoring disempowers the group, because it does not have a formal means of proving the efficiency of its work. The effectiveness of the work, on the other hand, may be proved by qualitative observation of the new local collaborations created and the performance of the local initiatives.

## 5.4 Other issues about the local initiative

**Conclusions about the relation of NAS DESIGN's work and social innovation.** According to the case study, it is possible to understand that NAS DESIGN is promoting new connections among actors with complementary production systems within the territory of Alto Vale do Itajai (Santa Catarina, Brazil). This project promotes new chains of local production and local consumption (produce and consume locally), valuing the local productions and changing the conditions of life of families and communities that improve their income and strengthen the local social fabric. This strengthening of the local social fabric is observed in the form of the improvement of the producers' self-esteem: they see their production being valued, and their work as a source of income generation and expression of identity within the community, since most of their productions related to their cultural heritage. NAS DESIGN seems not to have a clear definition of social innovation; what they express as social innovation is the work with communities within the territory of Alto Vale do Itajai, promoting integration among local actors, in order to create social and economic benefits.

**Relation within DESIS Network.** Prof. Luiz Fernando's first contact with the DESIS Network took place in 2008, when he participated in DESIGN.ISDS<sup>5</sup>. In 2012, this partnership became official, when the group went through a validation process and joined the International DESIS website, presenting local projects with cases of social innovation and sustainability (Interview-actor13).

Connection with the Network is through publications, participation in events (specially DESIS Showcases), and by the use of a common protocol to collect social innovation cases (Participatory observation, 2014). On the other hand, it is pointed out that there is not much exchange among groups: *"There is like a 'cloud DESIS', because in reality there is a discussion, we use the name of the network, we divulge what we do within the protocol of the network, but it is a one-direction via, there is no return of feedback"* (Interview-actor13). However, from personal experience of the author of this report, NAS DESIGN has already received feedback about its work during DESIS Showcases

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<sup>5</sup>Event DESIGN.ISDS – Design for Social Innovation and Sustainable development, at COPPE – Federal University of Rio de Janeiro.

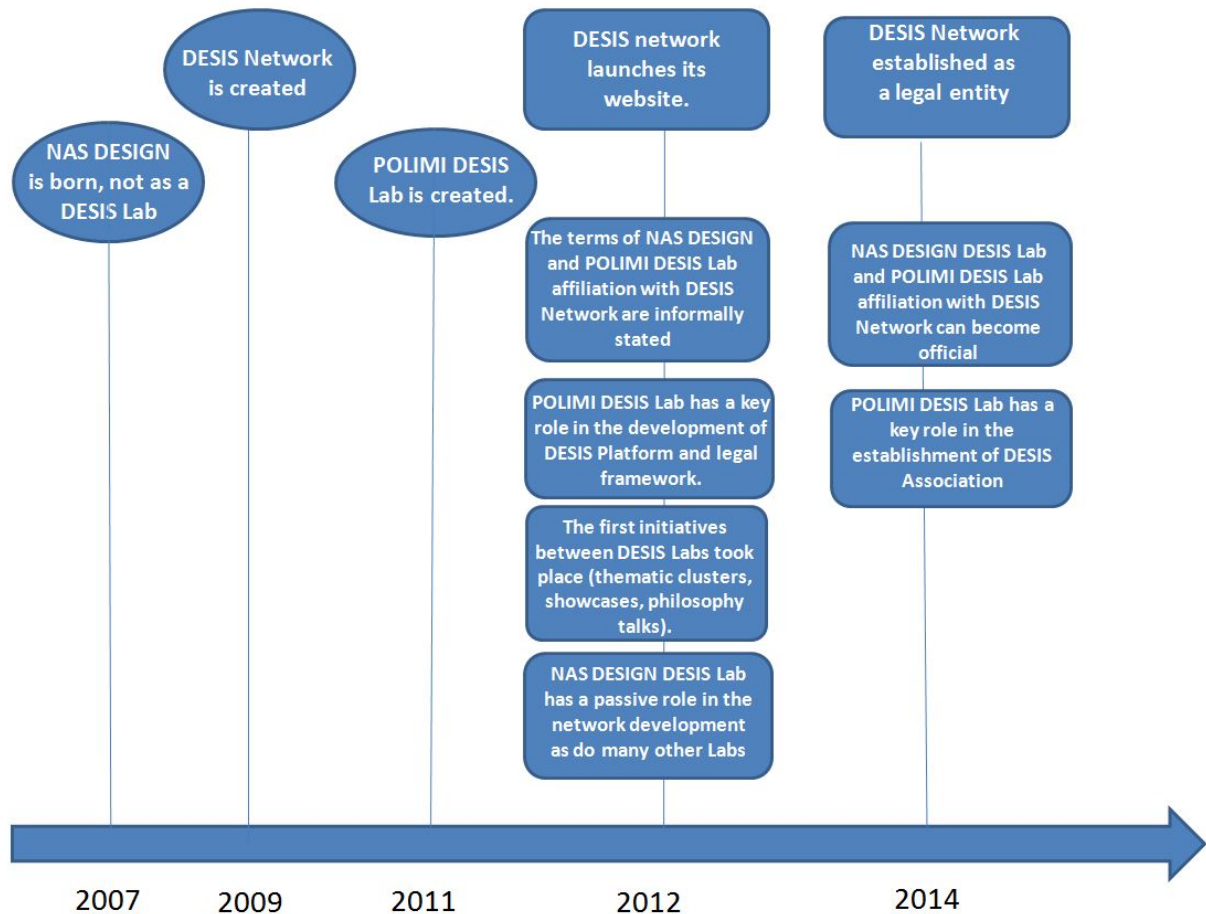
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(especially during the DESIS Showcase in Curitiba, Brazil, in 2012), highlighting the positive aspects of its work in the territory of Alto Vale do Itajai.

**Learning within DESIS Network.** According to NAS DESIGN members, learning may happen inside DESIS network, through the dissemination of information, on the platform of the association. Being able to use the proposed tools (the format and guidelines to collect cases of social innovation for exhibition in the DESIS Showcases events), facilitates an increase of knowledge through their application in the fieldwork (Interview-actor18; Interview-actor17). It is felt that learning inside the network could potentially be improved with more direct contact (virtual or face-to-face) among members.

## 6 Synthesis of case study

### 6.1 Condensed time-line



It is possible to see in the timeline the interactions established between the local manifestations and the transnational network. It also illustrates the milestones of the DESIS Network development.

From 2009 to 2012 the Network was in a “latent” period, from which it grows, with the opening of new Labs, mostly due to networking activities promoted by the DESIS Network founder, who, with some help, expounded, motivated and connected the dots. 2012 was very important for the Network’s development and consolidation, with the launch of an improved website, the online platform, the first initiatives, and the first steps to creating a legal framework. In 2014, the Network assumed a legal status, constituted as an association under Italian law.

#### **Relations between DESIS Network, NAS DESIGN DESIS Lab and Polimi DESIS Lab**

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DESIS Network has always been defined as a very “light organization” or an “enabling platform” in which all activities are undertaken freely by its members, or by election, as stated on the website and in the official document of the DESIS Association. For example, **regional and thematic clusters, showcases, and philosophical talks** are initiatives that were started and are organized autonomously and voluntarily by DESIS Lab members, using their own resources (some of these members are also part of the DESIS Association Advisory Committee), moved by a common interest. The same is true for the administrative work: the secretariat of DESIS Network is outlined among the DESIS Labs, and receives no financial support from the Network.

There is no direct relation between NAS DESIGN and POLIMI DESIS Lab, but this may happen indirectly through the visualization of each other’s projects and profile on the DESIS Network website. POLIMI DESIS Lab has been a key actor for the transnational network, since it supported the network in becoming established as an official association and it now manages the network administration. NAS DESIGN (like many other Labs) has not proposed an initiative, and has only participated in initiatives organized by other DESIS Lab members, particularly those which took place in Brazil. Interviews reveal that, from the point of view of NAS DESIGN, the relation with DESIS Network is considered top-down, with the transnational network asking for information about the local initiatives. It is expected that DESIS Network provides connections between members and centrally coordinates the interactions between them. Therefore, NAS DESIGN has a passive role in DESIS Network development.

Participatory observation and interviews seem to reveal that, behind these attitudes, different approaches exist in NAS DESIGN and POLIMI DESIS Lab.

NAS DESIGN has an approach that can be defined as “centralized”. Students are asked to work under specific coordination, which establishes a focus, and defines the themes and issues to be considered, the key theoretical and methodological frameworks to be adopted and the specific geographical areas to be considered. NAS DESIGN members work to consolidate and develop projects according to these criteria. The Lab presents an approach that is extremely focused on specific localities and communities.

POLIMI DESIS Lab’s approach, on the other hand, can be defined as “distributed”. It includes researchers and students asked to work under a coordination that generally gives direction, not focus, and students and researchers introduce new issues and themes. This generates the possibility to open up new perspectives, which constitutes the knowledge basis of Polimi DESIS Lab fed by these multiple contributions. Polimi DESIS Lab work is based in the city of Milan, but is well connected with other research groups and localities.

The reasons for these differences can surely be attributed to their institutional and geographical contexts, but the two approaches (called here ‘centralized’ and ‘distributed’) explain, in our view, the level involvement or lack of it of the two Labs in the development of DESIS Network. NAS DESIGN is waiting for a central coordination from the Network, and Polimi DESIS Lab is actively building the Network, which reveals its understanding of a network dynamics and its potential.

In addition, a barrier in NAS DESIGN’s relation with DESIS Network and POLIMI DESIS Lab is language. NAS DESIGN members, in general, do not fluently speak and write in English and translations are required. However, this is not limited to NAS DESIGN: many research groups in

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Brazil have the same restriction. This fact has led, for example, the Brazilian government to start the Programme “English without Borders”, related to the Student Mobility Programme called “Science Without Borders”, and aims to improve the English skills of Brazilian students and allow them to fully benefit from this international exchange opportunity.

The description of POLIMI DESIS Lab, in the following paragraphs, is closely aligned with the conceptual and methodological framework stated in the beginnings of DESIS Network. This Lab inherited the knowledge developed in the first research projects on design for social innovation, developed in the Politecnico di Milano. It would be interesting to explore how Labs, based in Latin America or Asia for example, are interpreting and developing this in their own local practices. The description of NAS DESIGN activities here is an example in Latin America. This analysis would also be useful in starting to understand differences in the transformative social innovation potential between Latin America and Europe, which can be further developed in TRANSIT research (and in DESIS Network itself).

## 6.2 Aspects of ‘innovation’ and ‘change’

Before comparing the two local initiatives, it is important to highlight their different aspects in terms of context, and what they mean by social, systemic and community.

First of all, NAS DESIGN has projects with public institutions (like University Hospital and Public Ministry of Santa Catarina), located in the urban area of Florianopolis and others in the rural area of Santa Catarina. This state, despite of having one of the best HDI<sup>6</sup> of Brazil, is still within the context of a developing country. In the last case (in the rural area of Santa Catarina) the group designs with local communities who mostly work in traditional agriculture and, often have a low educational level. Additionally, they present a strong local cultural identity (distinctly Italian, German and Portuguese heritage). This forms the basis of work for NAS DESIGN.

On the other hand, POLIMI DESIS Lab works mainly within the urban context of a developed country, which has better provision of basic services. This is reflected in the type of work done and the objectives achieved.

These backgrounds may affect the groups’ interpretation of ‘social’. According to BEPA (2011), within the understanding of social innovation, social may be interpreted as:

- a) *Social needs*, especially from excluded groups in society, not attended by the market or government;
- b) *Societal challenges*, where social becomes an opportunity, instead of a problem;
- c) *Structures of society*, meaning the institutions, strategies and other fundamental values that structure society.

NAS DESIGN works with groups of people focusing on their *social needs* (income and job, development) and sometimes opportunities (when thinking about their local culture as an opportunity). In contrast, POLIMI DESIS Lab is focused on *societal challenges* towards creating new

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<sup>6</sup>HDI – Human Development Index

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*structures to society.* The difference between the two contexts, Brazil and Italy, fostered the characteristics of social innovation and change that each Lab focuses on and is able to promote.

Similarly, it is important to point out what the groups mean by 'systemic'. Apparently, NAS DESIGN works with a local sense of system, i.e. territorial, production and consumption, and educational. Within these systems, the group opens up other small systems, i.e. enterprises, cooperatives, families, etc. On the other hand, POLIMI DESIS Lab develops projects that cross through the same systems, but start from another point, probably enabled by a European perspective, one that is more global, more cosmopolitan and more connected to the world, and which enables them to connect their local work with a broader perspective of change. Therefore, the POLIMI group intends to draw the *future* (including disruptive project themes) and NAS DESIGN intends to gather people for the *present*.

Hence, 'systemic' for the NAS DESIGNDESIS Lab means something local (from the territorial and cultural point of view), while for POLIMI DESIS Labit means something more amplified, more related to the global future and more connected to new structures of society.

When talking about 'community', it is possible to say that NAS DESIGN's discourse uses the term referring to specific groups of people in a specific territory (locality), considered to have a traditional knowledge and culture, and usually living in a situation of social exclusion. The way NAS DESIGNgroup perceives of the Brazilian context drives them to design "with" and "for" groups that may need empowerment, protection and help.

In contrast, POLIMI DESIS Lab uses the term 'community' disconnected from socially excluded groups. The term is used to define groups of people that share common interests, who are protagonists in processes of change in their localities. They are creative (the term "creative communities" is extensively used and is a key part of the DESIS theoretical framework). They can be "excluded" somehow, but, in these cases, it may happen because they are "active minorities" who behave differently and intend to change their local system.

It is worth noting that the analysis of POLIMI DESIS Lab projects reveals that the group is starting to work on projects, from 2014 on, involving the so-called NEETs (not employed, not trained or educated), and on another, aimed at understanding the economic foundation of social innovation targeting marginalized and vulnerable groups in society. This might lead to a future convergence and more intensive exchange about these challenges between DESIS Labs in Europe and in other countries.

## **Relation with social innovation**

DESIS Network saw the opportunity to amplify the potential of design practice towards the development of services, strategies and systems to promote social innovation in the view of more sustainable, collaborative and convivial ways of living and doing. Labs are invited to do that by raising social innovation visibility (developing new scenarios of futures based on social innovation cases); by applying design research and practice to enhance social innovation potential, diffusion, synergy and transferability; and by stimulating and designing new initiatives.



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From this perspective, the network is continuously developing its conceptual and methodological framework. This framework attracted Labs based in design-oriented schools with similar values, which initiated an international synergy and a multiplication of these ideas. Because of this large network, knowledge is created inside universities within a teaching-learning-researching-designing process.

It is not currently possible to describe how this approach is developed in all nodes of DESIS Network, but it is certainly effective, to some degree, in the core group of DESIS Network (mostly members of the international advisory committee).

The discourse about social innovation and sustainability influences the laboratories' practices that receive international endorsement for being part of the network. POLIMI DESIS Lab benefits from being part of DESIS Network, in terms of endorsement, more than NAS DESIGN, whose partners and associates are not involved or interested in international connections.

In comparing the innovations of the two local manifestations in Brazil and Italy, it is important to point out what the groups mean by 'social' and 'new' within their context of work. As described before, their meanings of social seem to be very different. NAS DESIGN is focused on solving social needs by identifying local social opportunities and new connections among them, while POLIMI DESIS Lab is focused on using social opportunities to create new structures for society in the view of a more sustainable future. Thus, the first promotes incremental innovation, creating new arrangements among actors locally (and consequently, creating new local production and consumption systems). The concept of 'new' is related to a local reality, through a recombination of existing means. The second group, POLIMI, beyond that, is also able to promote radical innovation, by creating new means for society and for the practice of design.

Within this context, NAS DESIGN creates a discourse around an ideal of creating local networks as a source of empowerment. However, for that, it focuses mainly on the design and redesign of products as a starting point to promote social and economic development. After this insertion of 'design thinking', the group sees its power of action to increase, when the group is able to suggest new local articulations and ways of improving environmental issues and local cultural identity. The NAS DESIGN process is immersed in knowing local everyday life and communities, to integrate local residents, new actors, students and other institutions to promote local development. The Lab has recently reached this level of design practice (from the development of specific products or ergonomics/human factors analysis, to systems and local development).

POLIMI DESIS Lab, on the other hand, works primarily to promote new ways of living everyday life from a sustainable point of view. This ideal lies behind all the Lab activities. It comprises the design of services, products and systems. It includes the development of tools and methodologies to promote the diffusion and consolidation of social innovations (one of the most recent was called a "social innovation journey"). The process is focused on intensive work at a community level in the districts, in which the tools of the POLIMI DESIS Lab are seen as very useful in fostering citizen engagement and participation, not only in the co-design of solutions, but also to keep people involved (called "community-based design"). Similar to NAS DESIGN, POLIMI supports people, organizations and institutions to develop, but this is highly focused on changing behaviours towards a more sustainable future.

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## Relation with system innovation

DESIS Network works within an educational system (universities), amplifying the role of designers in contributing to solving social issues (in the three levels suggested by BEPA, 2011) and to face new economic and environmental challenges. Using this approach, the Network intends to create a new design knowledge and change methods of teaching and learning to shift the discipline of design to promote changes through the development of new solutions for these challenges. Moreover, it may influence local political and public policies through Lab projects, using design tools and their potential to gather people around ideas. These aims are developed in the Italian and Brazilian Labs in different ways.

NAS DESIGN works mainly within a local and economic context, which may be related to social entrepreneurship, since it contributes to the formation of local associations especially with the goal of promoting local development. These associations are usually related to traditional communities, which highlights cultural identity as a source of empowerment. In addition, the group is linked with public management systems that support this local development through entrepreneurship promotion.

POLIMI DESIS Lab is engaged in different thematic projects, which connects the group to different systems, particularly *food* and *housing*. Regarding these two areas, the Lab has contributed and is contributing to the development of projects that are effectively changing the way people get food (through the development of new food networks) and homes (through development of cohousing and other social and collaborative housing solutions) in Milan.

In the city of Milan, POLIMI DESIS Lab has a role in mediating between society (and social innovations it gives rise to) and the public sector, even though a member of the group recognizes that this relation is many times "non-official", but comes also through the dissemination of knowledge about design for social innovation, which includes participation in or organization of events. The theme of "collaborative services" was included in the city of Milan's agenda in view of the development of solutions for Expo 2015. POLIMI DESIS Lab has the knowledge and tools for developing these kinds of services.

Also in regard to the mediation between society and public sector, the approach of NAS DESIGN seems to be effective, because the Lab seeks to be formally introduced within the local productive and political systems they work with (through agreements), taking them as key partners in the process of change together with local communities. NAS DESIGN promotes system innovation when working with public servants (technicians) to change a specific local context, however, by working with more basic tools of design, like graphic and product design.

Thus, POLIMI DESIS Lab and NAS DESIGN are aligned with the direction taken by the DESIS thematic cluster "Public and Collaborative", which sought to explore the intersection of design, social innovation and public policies. However, NAS DESIGN did not take an active part in this initiative.

Both groups work with the experimentation of ideas, while POLIMI seeks to amplify its range of action by fostering new design practices, knowledge and tools. Within this group, it seems students

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have more freedom to create their own projects. NAS DESIGN is concentrated within the territorial base of Santa Catarina, and projects from students are related to this context. DESIS Network seeks to educate a new generation of designers, able to foster sustainable changes. These differences in the way POLIMI DESIS Lab and NAS DESIGN DESIS Lab deal with the educational process for young designers, signifies the kind of system innovation they will be prepared to promote in the future.

## Relation with game changers

The differences between relations with game changers shown by POLIMI DESIS Lab and NAS DESIGN DESIS Lab accentuate the differences previously mentioned in this report.

NAS DESIGN DESIS Lab keeps its focus at a local level and does not have connections at the national and international levels, and it has mentioned two game changers – ‘connectivity’ and ‘collaboration’ – which were described more in terms of connections between local actors and the promotion of new local networks in a specific territory.

Members of both DESIS Network and POLIMI DESIS Lab have mentioned the game changers ‘connectivity’ and ‘collaboration’, but have mentioned them in broader terms.

In DESIS Network, ‘Connectivity’ was mentioned as the driver that led to the creation of the Network itself, connecting the nodes at a global level. ‘Collaboration’ was mentioned in relation to the emergence of ‘sharing economy’, another game changer influencing the DESIS Network and Polimi DESIS Lab. This is clear, for example, when considering the theory and practice of “collaborative services”, extensively developed over the years in DESIS Network and its labs, including POLIMI.

POLIMI DESIS Lab members mentioned ‘ICT’ and ‘Ageing’, which are related to specific projects they are currently developing. Another game changer mentioned was the ‘smart city’, which affects them specifically in their push to develop cohousing and other social and collaborative housing initiatives in Milan.

A member of the Italian Lab mentioned ‘(New) citizenship in a changing democracy’ as a game changer, in terms of the promotion of participatory governance and how design can help democracy, a theme included in the issues considered in DESIS Network’s first thematic cluster called “Public and Collaborative”. This game changer is related, in POLIMI DESIS Lab, to the project “Cittadini Creativi”, focusing on promoting a co-design process in which citizens design and produce a collaborative service. A NAS DESIGN member, vaguely referred to a similar game changer, generically calling it ‘collaboration’, mentioning that the ‘political system’ is being changed quickly, and that this change requires more connection and more dialogue, between different parts of society (civil society, NGO, enterprises) which is related to their definition and practice of the “systemic approach to design”

Although not mentioned in these terms, one of the NAS DESIGN members named a game changer as the “distributed and open production” which encompasses the way by which the production

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means are being increasingly democratized. The Brazilian Lab does not have any activity related to this game changer. DESIS Network, however, has a thematic cluster under development to explore this issue called “DOP-Distributed and Open Production”.

## Relation with societal transformation and narratives of change

It was stated that DESIS network is a kind of **‘movement’**, a disciplinary movement in which people feel themselves to be a ‘different kind of designers’. It is guided by a ‘technical and professional’ vision fostered (in students) and oriented (in professionals) to promote change. One of the interviews highlighted that this is the difference between DESIS and Transition Towns: DESIS Network has the point-of-view of a specific discipline and job.

**‘Passion’** was a keyword used in one of the interviews to describe the motivation that lies behind 4 or 5 groups inside DESIS Network. Passion to follow ‘visionary’ projects as expressions of a culture of change, of transformation. The interviewee is based in Italy, which indicates that these groups are probably all based in Europe.

It was also mentioned that DESIS Network wants to ‘make the **revolution’**. This grand statement is based in a vision, a new vision that intends to guide the Network as a whole and action of individual Labs. This vision was defined by its founder as the SLOC (Small, Local, Open and Connected) Scenario, which is a narrative of change, far from a dream or a forecast of what the future will be, but a motivating vision of what the future could be. The characteristics of this scenario were described earlier in this report. In synthesis, it encompasses the themes of ***distributed systems, cosmopolitan localism and resilience.***

It is not possible to describe if and how the DESIS Network Labs are aligned with this vision. It would require a specific research effort. The SLOC vision is proposed, not imposed. However, the vision can influence the work of laboratories, which can adapt these ideas to their local contexts.

DESIS Labs are regarded as the laboratories where new projects and tools are developed to bring this vision, or other visions they are able to develop, into reality. Here, it is possible for us to affirm (it is not stated in this way) that DESIS Labs are invited to: (1) **produce knowledge** about design for social innovation, required to consolidate and promote a new design practice; (2) **to educate a new generation of designers** able to foster sustainable changes; and (3) **to promote the development of exemplary design activities**, in a way to form a set of pioneering projects and case studies able to demonstrate the application of the new design knowledge and to create the demand for these new professionals.

Polimi DESIS Lab and NAS DESIGN DESIS Lab develop this vision and their role as a Lab in different ways.

A NAS DESIGN member states that the social transformation they want to achieve is **‘local development’**. Local development strategy is defined through the identification and promotion of local resources and local cultural identity. The valorisation of and respect for these aspects form a key narrative of change for the group, which seeks to promote change by identifying and developing the cultural, environmental and human resources in the territory.

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The Brazilian Lab seeks to affirm a new design practice that, for them, is defined far from the focus on aesthetics or fashion, but able to have an impact by changing the means of production and consumption of society, particularly working with vulnerable or socially excluded groups (many of them micro-entrepreneurs in need of design skills). Here, the NAS DESIGN role is highlighted in promoting social transformation through education, preparing students to perform a new design practice.

POLIMI DESIS Lab highlights their role in preparing students to promote **sustainable, convivial and collaborative ways of living and doing**. Students are considered to be at the centre of the process of social transformation. The Italian Lab is fully aligned with the activities expected from a DESIS Lab: to produce knowledge about design for social innovation; to educate a new generation of designers able to foster sustainable changes; to develop exemplary design activities.

The Lab also highlights the value of creativity, to foster this ability not only in students, but in the whole of society, as well to identify and empower creative solutions (i.e. social innovations) developed by non-professional designers (design is considered as a diffused ability possessed at some level by everyone). In this, POLIMI DESIS Lab emphasizes that social transformation comes also by activating and promoting people's own capability and skills, and motivating them to be proactive. In terms of narrative of change, the terms "sustainable, convivial and collaborative ways of living and doing" are used to guide the group activities, which manifest the value they give to the interaction at the local level with people involved in the design processes they promote.

The Italian Lab has the skills to develop visions, in terms of the so-called "design-oriented scenarios" but it has also been stated that there is a need to create the conditions for people to express their own visions, i.e., the possibility to autonomously build up the narratives of change able to guide the social transformations they want. It means for them to share and visualize their own ideas for the future. Design can support people in building up these narratives, based on their memories, stories and images.

## 6.3 Aspects of empowerment and disempowerment

### Governance

In 2014, DESIS Network becomes an Association (non-profit) under Italian Law. It is a constellation of Labs, supported by an online Platform. It is considered a very *light* organization, working on a voluntary basis, with a high level of autonomy. Now, under the Association's agreement, specific roles have been created: President, International Coordinator (IC), the International Coordinator Committee (ICC) and the Platform team, which manages the website. An approved form was developed to express the characteristics of DESIS Network, which reinforces the idea that legal frameworks are not always able to reinforce social innovation processes.

Around 15 people, representing their Labs, make up the core group of DESIS Network. Other Labs have a passive role in its development, despite the impressive expansion of the network over the

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years. They provide reputation and endorsement to the overall network, but do not perform any role in its development. It was observed, however, that DESIS Network has a role in endorsing new design practices developed in the Labs. This international endorsement can empower Labs locally in their processes to promote change and/or to empower their reputation.

Both NAS DESIGN and POLIMI DESIS Lab claim horizontality in their decision-making process. However, it is important to point out that all the Labs are part of an academic system - in universities - which embodies a hierarchical form of organization. In fact, this appears clearly in NAS DESIGN's internal governance, through its division of activities among PhD, Master and undergraduate students.

When thinking about external governance, in relation to partners, the same discourse about horizontality appears (where everybody takes part in the decision-making processes) specifically in NAS DESIGN. It develops an official relation with partners, especially from the public sector, establishing formal written agreements between them and the local university. POLIMI, in contrast, may have more difficulties in establishing formal agreements with the public sector. This may be explained due to the content of its projects, which are more disruptive, and conflict with public institutions' capacity to officially support them.

It is considered that a mono-disciplinary network, like DESIS, is disempowered in establishing collaboration with external partners and being funded. There was no situation in which a group of Labs of DESIS Network were funded to work together in a funded project. However, the geographical distribution of the Labs all over the world, and their focus on developing projects at a local level, could be better explored and understood as an advantage.

## Social learning

The Network promotes new ways of researching, teaching and learning design, when it motivates the creation of knowledge through real experimentation. In this sense, it is related to a worldwide tendency of opening up the classroom to seek and live experiences within society, instead of just listening to lectures from professors. So, education is more socially engaged and horizontal: both professors and students can learn from these new experiences, together with local communities. Therefore, the Network stimulates a more interactive education, that is, one developed more within social relations and conviviality.

The role of the DESIS President (and founder) was crucial at the beginning, and is still considered very important in connecting the dots of DESIS Network, by promoting the exchange of knowledge and synergies between Labs. He is considered a great amplifier, who absorbs knowledge by visiting the Labs and continuously synthesizes it as theoretical statements that express, register and reveal the knowledge being developed in the DESIS Network nodes. It is a way of building up the DESIS Network identity over time. This nuclear position the President for knowledge exchange (and as has been stated, his 'charisma') can be a significant problem for the future development of DESIS Network. Strategies to improve social learning processes between Labs will be increasingly required. In fact, from 2012, some mechanisms for knowledge exchange and combined production were set up, promoted and organized autonomously by some DESIS Labs: Thematic Clusters, Regional Clusters, DESIS Showcases and DESIS Philosophy Talks (<http://www.desis->

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[network.org/content/initiatives](https://www.desis-network.org/content/initiatives)). Initially, the theoretical framework for DESIS Network was the one developed by its President and founder. Now, with the thematic clusters and other initiatives, the Network is starting to collaboratively develop its own knowledge, through its first publications.

The basis of the process of learning promoted by NAS DESIGN is experience, that is, to experience fieldwork, deal with communities and create design solutions for them. Moreover, the physical space of the group's laboratory is a great catalyst for learning, because it is an area for promoting meetings, information exchange and conviviality. For NAS DESIGN, DESIS Network frames the approach (theory) and they apply the approach contextually. In fact, NAS DESIGN has no role in the building of DESIS Network's knowledge basis. As mentioned before, exchanges with other DESIS Labs are limited for NAS Design because of geographic distances and unfamiliarity with the English language.

POLIMI DESIS Lab also has the same social learning basis, in fieldwork. The Lab undertakes a process of learning by doing with citizens, "community-based design". Tools, methodology and theoretical frameworks are refined through these interactions. Internally, the different competences in the design field are seen by its members as an advantage for a mutual learning process. The Italian Lab is also a channel for their local partners to learn from grassroots experiences all over the world through their contact with DESIS Network. At the same time, local partners consider that POLIMI DESIS Lab is able to give to them international recognition. Regarding students, it was stated that the Lab practice is 'desired' by students who want to experience this approach and have it listed on their CVs. The kind of topics POLIMI deals with become very 'fashionable' with students who appreciate that they need to develop their CVs in a 'more and more social' way.

It was noticed that POLIMI DESIS Lab is promoting a larger production of knowledge, that is, larger and broader projects. Moreover, the themes are not traditional industrial design themes (creation of community gardens, for instance), which shows its position of launching approaches for new design practices.

## Resources

Although the Network is legally recognized as an Association under Italian Law, it is stated that it will not manage financial resources. Therefore, all the partnerships established with DESIS Network are done with specific DESIS Labs.

The DESIS Network operates based on the regular and usual activities undertaken by teachers, researchers and students in design schools, which have been oriented to focus on design for social innovation and sustainability. This means that DESIS Network can develop its programmes with no financial support. The Labs autonomously develop DESIS programmes by connecting and creating convergences between their activities and interests.

DESI Network itself is a resource, because it endorses the Labs activities and status, at a local level which facilitates the establishment of external partnerships and getting activities funded. This is particularly applicable to POLIMI DESIS Lab. It was possible to observe how the group benefits from DESIS Network affiliation at a local level, as a connector between local and international

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contexts. POLIMI DESIS Lab members performing the role of International Coordinator and managing the Platform online (Platform team) which means that the Lab makes its own resources available for the benefit of the overall network.

For NAS DESIGN, this international contact through affiliation to DESIS Network is not perceived as an advantage to empower their work with local communities and territories. However, it does provide endorsement and reputation in their academic institutions.

The financial resources of the Brazilian Lab come mainly from scholarships given by local City Halls and Brazilian educational institutions. Students are the key actors in the development of the NAS DESIGN projects, under the supervision of the Lab coordinator.

For POLIMI DESIS Lab, financial resources come from foundations (Fondazione Cariplo and Housing Sociale), the Municipality of Milan, the Lombardy Region and the European Commission (EU-funded projects). The projects are developed by students, but also by senior researchers, including those from other Labs in Politecnico di Milano, associated with POLIMI DESIS Lab.

## Monitoring and evaluation

The DESIS name and logo is now a trademark of Politecnico di Milano, and associated labs have the right to use it. It was argued that this has been done to preserve a certain level of coherence and quality between the different labs using the name, and preventing unknown Labs from using it.

DESIS Network has no quantitative methods to monitor its impact. When considering qualitative means of monitoring, the areas defined by the International Coordinator to classify design for social innovation projects developed by the DESIS Labs cover the following areas:

- governance and policymaking;
- activism and civic participation;
- social interactions and relations;
- city and environmental planning;
- planning production, distribution and consumption;
- skill training and design education;
- job creation;
- storytelling and visualization.

This will be a way to map how the DESIS Network impacts in these areas, and also to have an overview of the activities the Labs are performing at a local level. Labs have always been asked to send a description of their projects, but this is the first attempt to insert them into an interpretative framework.

Similarly, the local manifestations do not have any formal method to monitor their projects, or if interviews reveal that external actors respond positively to the work of both Labs, in Brazil and Italy. This lack of monitoring disempowers the groups, because they do not have any formal means of describing the impact of their work.



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## 6.4 Other issues

### **From DESIS 1.0 to DESIS 3.0: past, present and future of DESIS Network.**

A DESIS member raised a question about the future developments of DESIS Network. The constitution of the DESIS Network Association, and the consequent installation of an International Coordinator and an International Advisory Committee, create an auspicious moment for the Network to start to discuss its own future, and structure more mature strategies for its development. A Network composed of almost 50 Labs all over the world, has a huge potential and the key issue now is which direction to take:

*“I did not know that would be DESIS 2.0. I know what was 1.0, and I know what is 2.0 and I do not know what will be 3.0. If it will become a huge international voluntary system, because we will be so good in creating the momentum and the vision that we will have people just coming to us and saying I want to work with you, for you, for free. I’m available to do this and that. Sometimes something like this happens, because we have a lot of young researchers or students that are willing to collaborate also for free. But maybe we will become a sort of church, social innovation church. Or, we will become more business oriented, in a good sense, meaning that we will become more functional in terms of creating the conditions for us to work: partnering with big companies, partnering with more specific projects, like developing projects for CSR(Corporate Social Responsibility) ... in the present time we are a little bit between different situations. I don’t know what will be our main leverage in the future. This is another kind of collective brainstorming that we should do soon. Become a church, become the peacemaker that works together with big multinational governance systems, become a kind of bright side of business and so of the companies...” (Interview-actor2).*

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## Appendix 2: List of interviews

<b>Interviewee</b>	<b>Purpose of interview</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Duration of interview</b>	<b>Interviewer</b>
<i>Actor 1</i>	<i>Information about DESIS Network</i>	<i>12 August 2014</i>	<i>01:26:04</i>	<i>Carla Cipolla</i>
<i>Actor 2</i>	<i>Information about DESIS Network</i>	<i>2 September 2014</i>	<i>01:07:14</i>	<i>Carla Cipolla</i>
<i>Actor 3</i>	<i>Information from an external actor from DESIS Network, working in the academic (and design) field.</i>	<i>26 August 2014</i>	<i>00:39:16</i>	<i>Carla Cipolla</i>
<i>Actor 4</i>	<i>Information about DESIS Network</i>	<i>2 September 2014</i>	<i>01:07:00</i>	<i>Carla Cipolla</i>

### DESIS Italy (Polimi DESIS Lab)

<b>Interviewee</b>	<b>Purpose of interview</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Duration of interview</b>	<b>Interviewer</b>
<i>Actor 5</i>	<i>Information about Polimi DESIS Lab from a core team member</i>	<i>10 October 2014</i>	<i>00:25:10</i>	<i>Carla Cipolla</i>
<i>Actor 6</i>	<i>Information about Polimi DESIS Lab from a core team member.</i>	<i>31 October 2014</i>	<i>01:02:23</i>	<i>Maíra Prestes Joly</i>
<i>Actor 7</i>	<i>Information about Polimi DESIS Lab from an external actor, collaborating with Polimi DESIS Lab.</i>	<i>14 August 2014</i>	<i>00:50:27</i>	<i>Carla Cipolla</i>
<i>Actor 8</i>	<i>Information about Polimi DESIS Lab from a core team member.</i>	<i>3 September 2014</i>	<i>00:53:39</i>	<i>Carla Cipolla</i>
<i>Actor 9</i>	<i>Information from an external actor, who is collaborating with Polimi DESIS Lab in a specific project. The focus was to</i>	<i>7 October 2014</i>	<i>00:21:39</i>	<i>Carla Cipolla</i>

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*understand the specific contribution brought by Polimi DESIS Lab to the project.*

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<i>Actor 10</i>	<i>Information from an external actor, who is collaborating with Polimi DESIS Lab in a specific project. The focus was to understand the specific contribution brought by Polimi DESIS Lab to the project.</i>	<i>7 October 2014</i>	<i>00:10:12</i>	<i>Carla Cipolla</i>
<i>Actor 11</i>	<i>Information from an external actor, who is collaborating with Polimi DESIS Lab in a specific project. The focus was to understand the specific contribution brought by Polimi DESIS Lab to the project.</i>	<i>7 October 2014</i>	<i>00:12:08</i>	<i>Carla Cipolla</i>
<i>Actor 12</i>	<i>Information about Polimi DESIS Lab from a core team member.</i>	<i>8 October 2014</i>	<i>01:32:04</i>	<i>Carla Cipolla</i>

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## DESIS Brazil (NAS Design DESIS Lab)

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<b>Interviewee</b>	<b>Purpose of interview</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Duration of interview</b>	<b>Interviewer</b>
<i>Actor 13</i>	<i>Information about NAS Design DESIS Lab from a member.</i>	<i>11 August 2014</i>	<i>01:05:00</i>	<i>Maíra Prestes Joly</i>
<i>Actor 14</i>	<i>Information from an entrepreneur who has already developed projects with NAS DESIGN.</i>	<i>11 August 2014</i>	<i>01:35:34</i>	<i>Maíra Prestes Joly</i>
<i>Actor 15</i>	<i>Information from a social entrepreneur who has already developed projects with NAS DESIGN.</i>	<i>8 August 2014</i>	<i>00:35:15</i>	<i>Maíra Prestes Joly</i>
<i>Actor 16</i>	<i>Information from an entrepreneur who has already developed projects with NAS DESIGN.</i>	<i>12 August 2014</i>	<i>00:25:02</i>	<i>Maíra Prestes Joly</i>

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<i>Actor 17</i>	<i>Information about NAS Design DESIS Lab from a member.</i>	<i>14 August 2014</i>	<i>01:17:47</i>	<i>Maíra Prestes Joly</i>
<i>Actor 18</i>	<i>Information about NAS Design DESIS Lab from a member.</i>	<i>14 August 2014</i>	<i>01:17:51</i>	<i>Maíra Prestes Joly</i>
<i>Actor 19</i>	<i>Information about NAS Design DESIS Lab from a member.</i>	<i>12 August 2014</i>	<i>00:46:45</i>	<i>Maíra Prestes Joly</i>
<i>Actor 20</i>	<i>Information from an external actor from NAS Design DESIS Lab, working in the academic (and design) field.</i>	<i>12 August 2014</i>	<i>01:42:23</i>	<i>Maíra Prestes Joly</i>

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## Appendix 3: List of meetings and events attended

### DESIS NETWORK (transnational network)

Meeting and events attended as part of data collection, dialogues, etc.	Purpose of attending	Date and duration	Attending from the research group
<i>1st Assembly of the DESIS Association, in the framework of Cumulus Conference (Johannesburg – S.Africa)</i>	<i>The first assembly of the newborn association was an historical moment for DESIS Network. Until 2014, DESIS Network was managed as an informal network. Relations between the President, International Coordinator (IC) and Platform team – three key roles of the new organizational structure – were observed. It included also the observation of the interaction between DESIS Network members (representatives of other DESIS Labs all over the world).</i>	<i>22 September 2014 (3 hours)</i>	<i>Carla Cipolla</i>
<i>IFC – Informal Formal Collaborative Thematic Cluster meeting, in the framework of Cumulus Conference (Johannesburg – S. Africa)</i>	<i>The development of thematic clusters is a key activity in DESIS Network. It gathers different Labs around a common research question. The objective was to investigate the relations between the different DESIS Labs in this activity.</i>	<i>23 September 2014 (3 hours)</i>	<i>Carla Cipolla</i>
<i>Cumulus Conference</i>	<i>Participation in the conference that gathered the core team of DESIS Network and some representatives of different DESIS Labs around the world. It was an opportunity to observe the interpersonal relations between members.</i>	<i>22 - 23 September 2014 (two days)</i>	<i>Carla Cipolla</i>
<i>DESIS Showcase - P&amp;D Conference</i>	<i>DESIS showcases are activities of the DESIS Network aimed to create and maintain an up-to-date overview of initiatives of design for social innovation taking place in design schools across the globe. Schools are invited to present their social innovation-related projects, using a standard, simple format. These projects are shown at special events, i.e. the DESIS Showcases, which are organised back-to-back with conferences around the world. The DESIS Network President Ezio Manzini was in attendance. The objective was to observe the dynamics between the five Brazilian DESIS Labs (all of them sent</i>	<i>29 September 2014 (3 hours)</i>	<i>Carla Cipolla and Maíra Prestes Joly</i>



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representatives) and other design schools and their relations with the DESIS President.

<i>DESIS Brazilian Labs internal meeting</i>	<i>There was a meeting between representatives of Brazilian DESIS Labs and other schools interested in taking part in DESIS Network. The meeting included the presentation of the rights and duties established in the DESIS Network Association Agreement, that the schools (old and new) were invited to join and a discussion about common activities that could be developed by the Brazilian DESIS Network. The objective was to observe the new dynamics happening with the legal formalization of the DESIS Network and the synergy between Brazilian DESIS Labs.</i>	<i>29 September 2014 (2 hours)</i>	<i>Carla Cipolla and Maíra Prestes Joly</i>
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## DESIS Italy (Polimi DESIS Lab)

<b>Meeting and events attended as part of data collection, dialogues, etc.</b>	<b>Purpose of attending</b>	<b>Date and duration</b>	<b>Attending from the research group</b>
<i>Meeting of EU financed project TRANSITION</i>	<i>Transnational Network for Social Innovation Incubation – TRANSITION. Polimi DESIS Lab is a partner and hosted the meeting in Politecnico di Milano. It was important to observe the role of Polimi DESIS Lab in a project about social innovation developed in partnership with other actors. Polimi DESIS Lab is developing its approach on social innovation incubation, also in interaction with partners from innovation-based incubation (IBI).</i>	<i>6 October 2014 (8 hours)</i>	<i>Carla Cipolla</i>
<i>Corporate Social Responsibility and Social Innovation Meeting / Il Salone della CSR e dell'innovazione sociale</i>	<i>The event includes the participation of the partners of the EU-financed project TRANSITION and Polimi DESIS Lab team (Anna Meroni and Marta Corubolo) as speakers. The specific session in the event was organized by Polimi DESIS Lab and the title was "Incubation of social innovation in Europe and Italy. It was important to observe how Polimi DESIS Lab and other partners presented their tools and methods to the public. It was possible to have a full presentation of the</i>	<i>7 October 2014 (4 hours)</i>	<i>Carla Cipolla</i>

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	<i>Polimi DESIS Lab methodology and participation in the incubation process of social innovation.</i>		
<i>Fatti di Cultura</i>	<i>Italian event (in the city of Mantova) in which Anna Meroni (Polimi DESIS Lab coordinator) was a speaker. It was very useful to observe how Polimi DESIS Lab coordinator presents its own projects, tools and methodologies in the Italian context and how the international DESIS Network empowers or disempowers the local Lab activities in the whole country and in the city of Milan itself.</i>	<i>9 October 2014 (4 hours)</i>	<i>Carla Cipolla</i>
<i>Experiment Days Milano 2014</i>	<i>It was an event about Housing, specifically Co-Housing, which is one of the key areas for the Polimi DESIS Lab. It included conferences, round-tables and a fair with exhibitors related to the co-housing field. It was helpful in observing how co-housing has spread in the city of Milan, and the new demands it brings to the Polimi DESIS Lab in comparison with the starting point of these activities, seven years ago (by the same Politecnico di Milano).</i>	<i>11 October 2014 (6 hours)</i>	<i>Carla Cipolla</i>
<i>Shadowing with Polimi DESIS Lab coordinator.</i>	<i>The framework of the three events described was a week's shadowing of the coordinator of activities in the Politecnico di Milano. It was an opportunity for many informal talks (not registered) that clarified many issues related to this research activity.</i>	<i>6-10 October 2014</i>	<i>Carla Cipolla</i>

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## DESIS Brazil (NAS Design DESIS Lab)

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<b>Meeting and events attended as part of data collection, dialogues, etc.</b>	<b>Purpose of attending</b>	<b>Date and duration</b>	<b>Attending from the research group</b>
<i>Establishment of a partnership (1) in the city of Rio do Sul, Santa Catarina, Brazil</i>	<i>This event was important to see the interaction between external actors and NAS DESIGN. The group signed a partnership with AMPE (Association of the Micro and Small Entrepreneurs from the Alto Vale do Itajaí) and UNIDAVI (University Center for the development of the Alto Vale do Itajaí). The idea was that the university would provide a space within its center, so NAS DESIGN and AMPE could organize a service laboratory to work with micro-</i>	<i>8 August 2014 (1:30 hours)</i>	<i>Maíra Prestes Joly</i>

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*entrepreneurs in the region.*

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<i>Establishment of a partnership (2) in the city of Ituporanga, Santa Catarina, Brazil.</i>	<i>This event was important to see the interaction between external actors and NAS DESIGN. A meeting was observed with the Secretary of Economic Development from AMPE and the Secretary of Economic Development from the Ituporanga City Hall to settle a partnership among NAS DESIGN, AMPE and Ituporanga City Hall to develop a project of visual identity and strategic design for a group of micro-entrepreneurs in the city working in the food sector – restaurants and sale of food products.</i>	<i>8 August 2014 (2:30 hours)</i>	<i>Maíra Prestes Joly</i>
<i>Shadowing with NAS Design DESIS Lab coordinator</i>	<i>Following professor Luiz Fernando Figueiredo (NAS DESIGN coordinator) within meetings with researchers from the lab.</i>	<i>18 August 2014. (5 hours)</i>	<i>Maíra Prestes Joly</i>
<i>Participant observation within the laboratory</i>	<i>Observation of how people work and communicate within the physical space of the laboratory. The aim was to understand the local governance and the process of social learning in the group.</i>	<i>11 – 21 August 2014 (20 hours)</i>	<i>Maíra Prestes Joly</i>

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