

# P/REFERENCES OF DESIGN



## POLITICAL PAPER LAB, DESIGN FOR POLITICAL AWARENESS AND CIVIC ENGAGEMENT.

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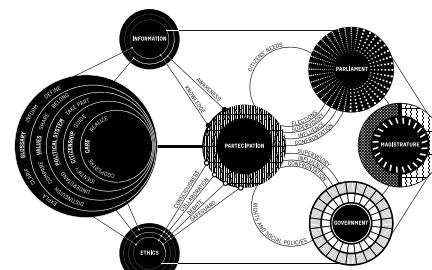


Contemporary democratic society is pervaded by a sense of powerlessness generated by changing factors that are reshaping our society. Citizens who are informed, empowered and can express their will, influencing the decisions of the representatives are fundamental for a healthier democratic system (Giglioli, 2015). It is necessary to rethink how we include youth in the collective dimension for the exercise of citizenship (Battini, 2013). In this regard, design can operate as "Design Humanism" by activating transformative processes and developing projects that promote empowerment (Bonsiepe, 2006).

According to an Istat Report focused on the political participation in Italy (2020), in 2019 people who never inquire about politics are 27.5 percent of the population (ages 14 and older). Considering young people between the ages of 14 and 17, the percentage rises to 48.5 percent. The European Commission's Eurydice Report highlights that active citizenship education must help students develop knowledge, skills, attitudes and values in the following four macro areas of competence: effective and constructive interaction with others; critical thinking; acting in a socially responsible manner; and acting democratically. Therefore, the Political Paper Lab (PPL) project studies learning modes that involve experience and interaction to foster change and action in citizens, such as the "Experiential Learning Cycle" (Kolb & Kolb, 2006) which considers four learning stages: experiencing, reflecting, thinking, and acting. The PPL is designed with the intention of providing Italian citizens with the competencies indicated by the European Commission for understanding their role in Italian society by fostering awareness and participatory behaviors in order to improve the democratic life of the country.



The project involves books that can be used by an individual user, in a workshop mode by a collective, or by a learning group led by a teacher or mentor. Each book is focused on a specific theme and is characterized by a peculiar graphic design and interaction modality designed to generate knowledge and awareness, helping the readers to fix information, generate debates and facilitate opinion sharing.



The book, as a physical object, allows an experience not only perceptual and intellectual, but also physical and tactile. The pedagogist Marco Dallari (2011) explains that the graphic book is a combination of five interacting codes: the iconic code (illustrations), the verbal code (text), the graphic code (layout, fonts...), the packaging code (materials, shape, binding...). The interaction of these codes reinforces the learning process and generates metacognition narratives capable of creating individual and collective identity consciousness.

Four basic elements have been identified in the path the users can undertake towards their own political and civic awareness: have a common vocabulary, know the basic principles stated in the first 12 articles of the Constitution, understand the forms and modes of exercising political power and be inspired by different forms of civic activism. Specific volumes have been created for each of these elements: Glossario (glossary), Valori (values), Ordinamento (political system) and Cittadinanza (citizenship).

The glossary provides the definitions of the fundamental words for understanding the Italian Constitution and political system. The volume is like an address book where words are placed in a visual and logical relationship.



The volume dedicated to the values shows the first 12 articles of the Italian Constitution. Each article is accompanied by two conflicting opinions, public statements by politicians and intellectuals; one opinion is in support and the other is contrary. At first glance, the red statements (in contrast with the constitutional dictates) are visible and cover the green ones (consistent with the Constitution), so that the latter are legible only with the help of a red filter. The filter is a metaphor for the work the citizen must do to properly navigate the political debate.



Political system's volume is a poster printed on both sides. On the first side an infographic shows the set of institutions that constitutes the division of powers. On the back there is a game board, designed to experience the legislative process of the Italian political system.



Finally, the volume dedicated to citizenship reports the stories of active civic participation. At first sight the pages are black, characterized by offensive utterances and violent news stories placed along the margins. By tearing the flaps, and therefore the sentences, the pages are opened and the stories of civic activism are revealed. Opening the pages through a tear means carrying out a non-canonical act of rupture and commitment that makes us free people in a plural society.



The laboratory will be tested with students between the ages of 14 and 25. Based on the study carried out by Pedone et al. (2023), meaningful experiences based on metaphorical, playful and interactive engagement and the co-construction of knowledge are fundamental elements for the maturation of human beings as citizens (Battini, 2013), so we expect the Political Paper Lab to foster learning and engagement in the democratic process.

The role of the designer is central to the debate on democracy because of the transformative power that designs can have on society (McCoy, 2003; Manzini & Margolin, 2017) and because he or she can contribute significantly to shaping collective values in which everyone identifies (Mari, 1997).

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