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The work of San Donato's *Quartieri laboratory* was based on the assumption that it is possible to plan on a local scale in conjunction with the inhabitants, examining the territory from the neighbourhood standpoint. Like focus points in which to identify common issues, the sense of belonging, the community of reference and the community's premises, without consequently overlooking the new urban layout in general. Whilst aware of the fact that it is increasingly difficult to identify neighbourhoods in terms of their predetermined community and spatial configuration, this starting point made it possible to bring themes, subjects and methods into the plan which might otherwise have fallen by the wayside. In addition to the local scale, which formed the plan's framework, it made it possible to assume the viewpoint of the practices linked to ways of life, cohabitation conditions, the relational knit, the social history of the area and its proximity. The eleven neighbourhoods in which we worked were thus considered not as a field in which urban complexity was to be reduced, but on the contrary as a field in which all the conditions of areas undergoing transformation emerge. We felt that this very overtone, midway between the identities of the traditional neighbourhoods and the recent transformations, serves to encourage finding new forms of urban planning and interacting with society, starting with the redefinition of the neighbourhood in a plural sense. Acknowledgment of this plurality opened the way to

potential for starting a process of discussion with the territories geared towards giving a voice to a variety of individuals responsible for creating a common meaning for the neighbourhood. A meaning that is not predictable, but the result of research and interaction, ready to become active where the capacities and conditions exist for it to do so.

Reconstructing a problematic vision of the neighbourhoods
 Within these contexts, in which it becomes increasingly difficult to identify needs, problems and solutions in a general sense and in a unified manner, an attitude geared towards exploration has become pivotal. Through various systems of interaction, this has reconstructed the framework for salient issues by comparing different definitions and viewpoints. The problematic vision of the neighbourhoods (issues to be tackled, resources to be harnessed and opportunities to be seized) has been reconstructed through a variety of 'interactive exploration' activities. These have taken the form of listening activities, identifying and collecting data, as well as comparing notes with the various cultures within the given area. In this way, the framework of knowledge needed for planning has been formed by harnessing the various production channels: the technical analysis of designers and policy analysts, the practice of crossing the territory, the viewpoints of local operators and 'experts', and the experiences and day-to-day lives of the inhabitants. What emerged first and foremost was the acknowledgement of the fact that different perceptions and visions of the neighbourhoods coexist alongside one another. The

plan was able to render them legitimate, establishing itself not just as an activity geared towards general coherence but also the construction of different scenarios.

Local public events as container and content
 The process involved a quest to find the balance between the different dimensions involved: on the one hand the process opening up to large numbers of social groups, people and populations (not always directly geared towards constructing the plan); and on the other, the creation of common hypotheses, strategies and projects involving the neighbourhoods in structured opportunities for interaction. Our contribution also operated in three different ways: towards facilitating the process and organisation of interaction; on the planning side; on an entertainment and communication level. The 'local public events' (exhibitions, meetings and workshops that took place throughout the planning process), reflected the same approach, with lighter occasions and moments for gaining a greater understanding staged alongside one another, as well as others aimed at participation in planning. The exhibitions staged in the neighbourhoods provided the framework within which most of the participatory activities were concentrated. The displays, which were housed in central locations in the neighbourhoods, opened up the way to structured interaction by displaying materials that were partly processed and constructed, through preliminary initiatives for comparison with the context. The exhibition was not only viewed as a means of presenting work carried out, but also for representing an

intermediate state. The displays were not then a result or a conclusion as such, but the start of an open and collective discussion on the neighbourhoods. Their purpose was to suggest an elaboration (and therefore content) of what has been discovered, exploring the neighbourhood in an interactive way whilst at the same time acting as a container for exchanges, comparison and meetings to redefine the proposed content.