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SKATEPARK ITALY

Executive summary

The Surface is the designed space for *SkatePark Italy* project, it is a strategical tool of urban regeneration through the construction of skate parks in peripheral urban areas: the skate park can act both as a *social stage* as well as a sportive platform and can trigger a process of reclaiming for neglected public spaces. It tackles the ever-expanding issue of **safety in peripheral urban areas**, and is a pilot project potentially replicable anywhere, through a set of guiding principles on how to start new activities on the territory in order to claim back urban spaces from criminal gangs and clans.

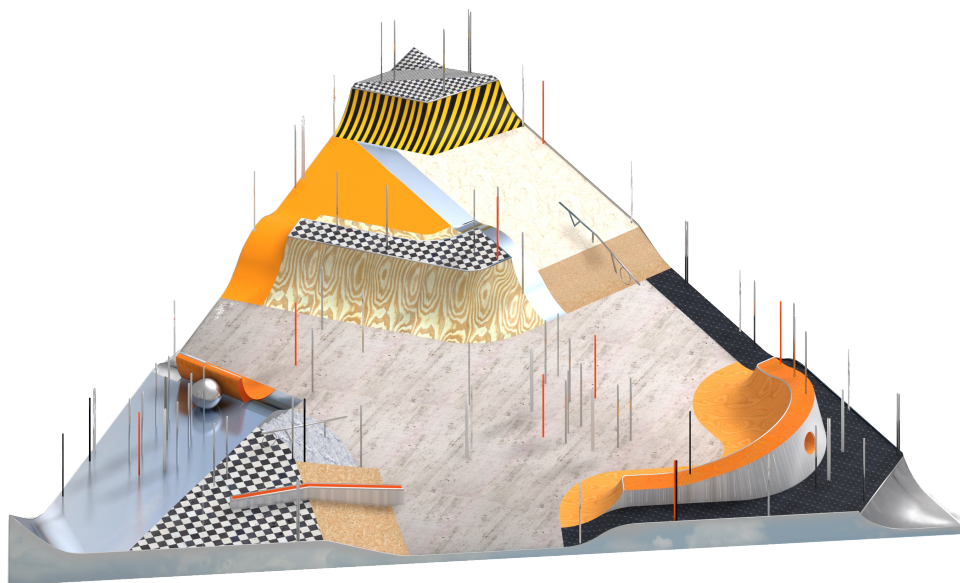
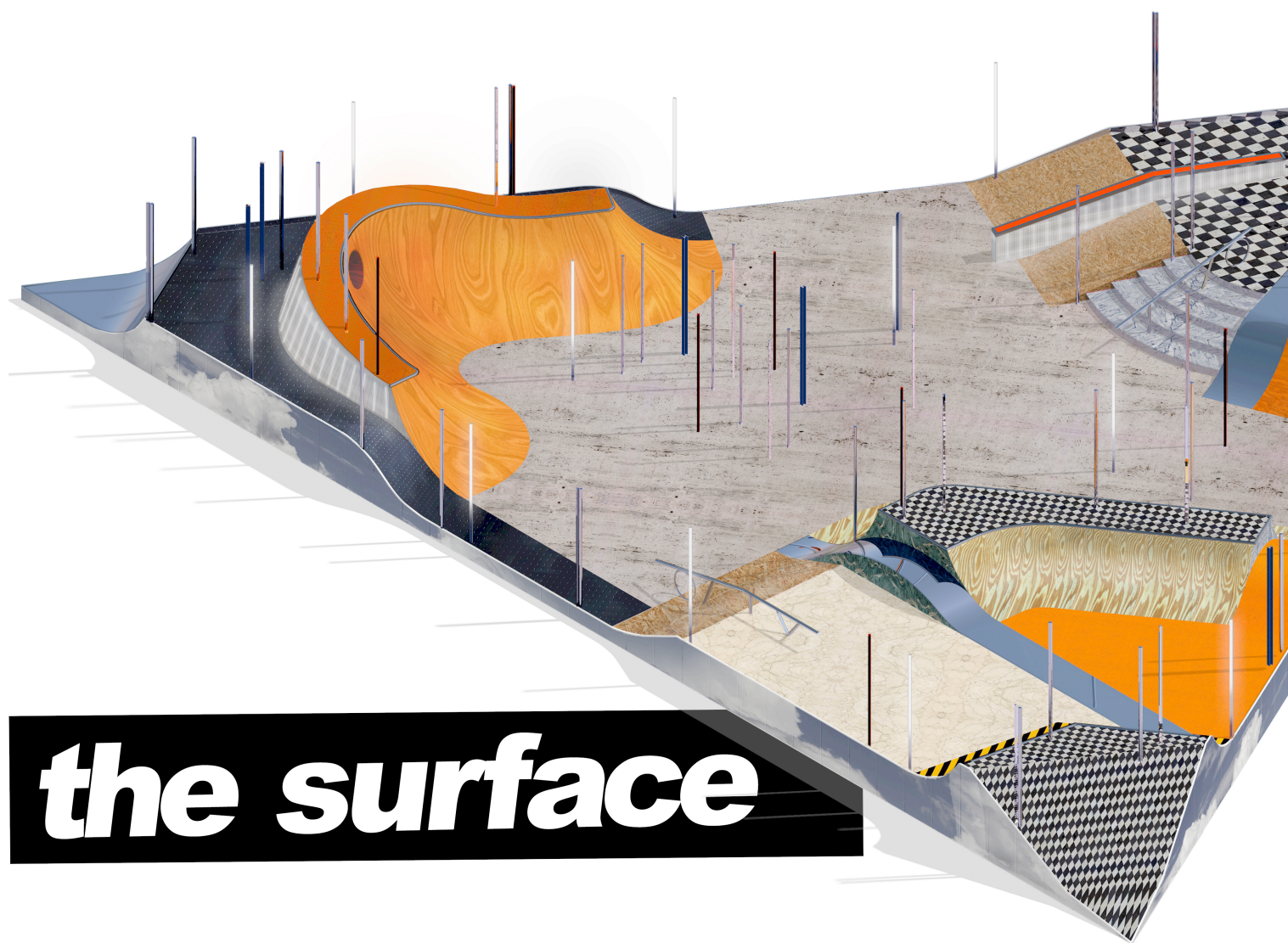
Although *The Surface* hasn't been constructed yet, one suburban area in Milan (chosen through a weighted criteria evaluating system) was selected as the most suitable for its first application. It is a strategy adaptable to peripheries of cities, based on the idea that the involvement of the citizens can be more effective than any institutional involvement in leading to crime reduction. For this reason it also raised the interest of the Department of Juvenile Justice and Community, which looked for a possible application of *The Surface's* framework inside jails and prisons, for the rehabilitation and reinsertion of past criminals into society.

Key Words

PERIPHERY, URBAN REGENERATION, SKATEBOARDING, SENSE OF COMMUNITY, SAFETY



Render of *The Surface* on Parco Franco Verga



Model of "the surface", the texture applied to the materials can be changed

**Project description
written by the
Principal Academic
Tutor**

"The SkatePark SkateParkItaly (S.P.I.) is a spin-off project from Gangcity, a cultural project supported by a program of scientific research that has completed studies, surveys and reflections on the complex world of the gangs and their spin-off cultures. It documents troubled peripheral urban areas, void of any form of control, to initiate regeneration, re-appropriation and upkeep of private and public spaces and to develop innovative and sustainable operative solutions for the problems of urban clusters. These represent the fertile terrain for the proliferation of gangs and criminal activity. SkateParkItaly is a pilot project organized by the Dipartimento di Giustizia Minorile e di Comunità (DGMG) of Ministero di Giustizia and Gangcity. Through sporting activities it identifies a model of inclusion and integration of marginalized and fragile young members of the communities. The plans can be corroborated by the creation of a common facility – the skate park – destined for leisure activities and sharing free time. A strong bond connects the educational vision of Ministero di Giustizia and Gangcity, that endorses the role of training and publicising through brainstorming between students, lecturers, artists, politicians and entrepreneurs, to join forces with the citizens to produce the mutations of the locations and to intervene on their aesthetic qualities; these can be described as actions of contrast and preventative opposition to the formation of gang cities, interpreted as undeniable 'alternative' devices of self-organisation from grassroots level of the physical spaces of the city and the relative social rules of management, and even dominance.

The re-appropriation of a social space or context using recognized and coded mechanisms facilitates the emergence of youths and groups that join together in a quest for an identity that has been denied. The participation in the construction process for a skateboard park and its associated essential services will create dialogue that is difficult to initiate and develop. It also facilitates the relationship dynamics between individuals – particularly adolescents – who do not belong to any gangs. The actions will develop on a few levels rich with implications; these are geared to the evolution of theoretical thinking, the practical experience and the ethical dimension of the gangs based in the urban environments, to produce programs and projects that can act as treatments to heal the urban environment, like devices for social control, as instruments of growth for the common good. The methodological approach offers multiple contamination options that touch on research disciplines and styles. It proposes a fertile meeting between architecture, design and art, in peripheral locations found in a condition, if not the geographical dimension, to welcome and integrate the gangs and their cultures with new cognitive forms. The objective is to replace at a grass roots level the control afforded by the groups with creative strategies and devices. This will redesign and upgrade the collective spaces through architecture and social design, art and sport, with innovative and visionary combinations of rules. This will drive initiatives of re-appropriation of the spaces under the banner of brotherhood, sharing and self-organization. "

- Prof. **Fabio Armao**

**Team description by
skill**

In the whole process we tended to be all involved in every activity, in order to have a multidisciplinary view of every aspect. However we defined a sort of "director" for each part of the process:

Luisa Viotti: team controller, budget and report

Luca Bussolino & Daniele Ricciardi: theoretical part and design of the architectural project

Marco Felicioni: stakeholder research, report supervision

Federica Pennino: founder of *CONTEXT* association, video and poster production

Seda Ayvazyan: local activities research and event organization

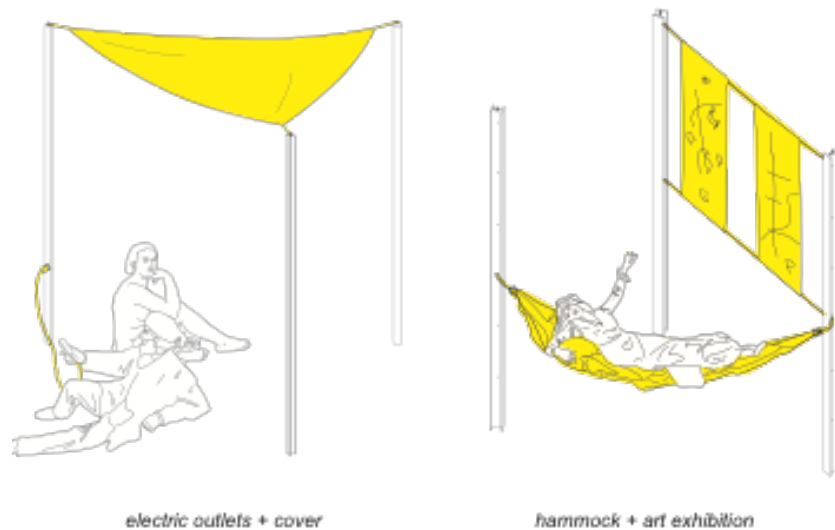
Aleksandra Katmerova: material research and development.

Goal

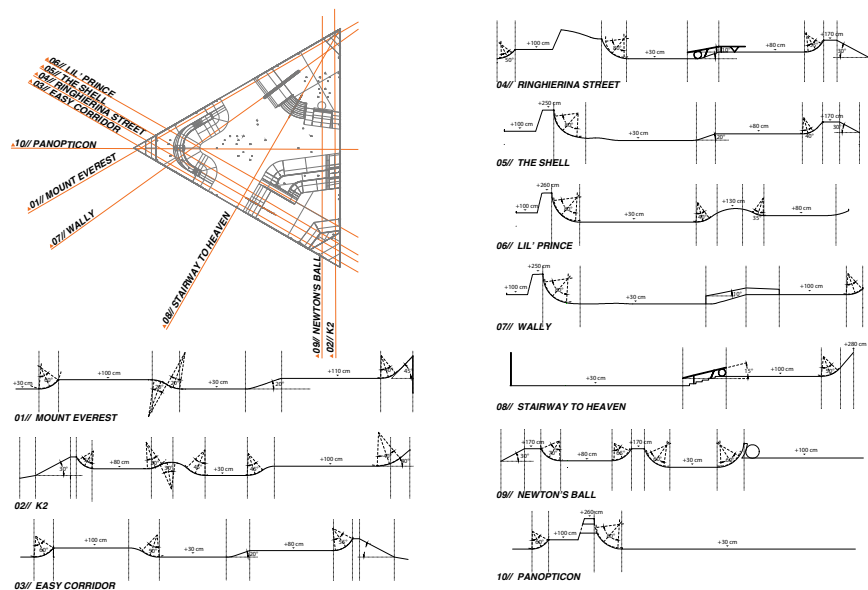
The project SkateParkItaly, in collaboration with DGMC, the associations of UISP - Unione Italiana Sport per tutti [The Italian Union of Sport for All], Milano Skateboarding, Kanikenhaus, and Gangcity attempts to trace a map for returning to the public some peripheral areas of Italian cities. The idea is to create skate parks as design devices that can call on the ethical and financial responsibility of the institutions and entice them to overwrite the existing structures and reconfigure the abandoned and damaged public spaces. The key factor is to proactively involve the multiple actors in the process. Our goal is to **develop a urban solution** that can create a synergy between skaters and citizens through the activities that can happen in this designed stage. *The Surface* encompassed extremely **feasible** operations, based on low-budget, easily mountable and dismountable interventions and guarantees attractiveness to skaters of any levels because the technical design of the ramps (inclinations, dispositions, etc...) has been aided by the external consultancies of designers who practice skateboarding, thus know the users' specific needs and expectations. *SkatePark Italy* envisions a **sustainable** methodology because it seeks the help of local associations active on the territory in safeguarding each intervention. The inhabitants of the neighbourhoods are not just spectators of the initiatives: they become part of it, being involved into performances or recreational activities. Once the designed initiative is ended, the associations and the sense of community projected on the space should therefore stay, leading the short-term output toward a long-term one, with lasting consequences (e.g. sense of belonging, resilience in the community).

Understanding the problem

"The gang phenomenon has been resolved in the past years in relation to the progressive reduction of the costs associated with welfare and the privatization of many publicly managed sectors. Taking advantage of the increase in civil conflict and social inequality, criminal groups practice expansionary "commercial" actions and transform entire urban areas into strategic hubs for the management of illicit goods traffics and the establishment of migrant groups with solid cohesion internal and a strong identity character." [Gangcity, About [Online] - Available at Gangcity.it [Accessed September 2018] In the outskirts of every city there are many problems related to **criminality**. Citizens often do not recognize any common space as a safe place to meet. Rather than focusing on crime punishment or on those who perpetrate violence, the project addresses the *spaces* in which such violence thrives. In fact, any strategy aiming at making a place safer through an enforcement, as in the case of *gated communities* where private forces are called upon to establish security, cannot possibly deal with the threat of internal enemies, such as gangs, terrorists, clans or any other *violent non-state actors*. Addressing these invisible threats requires that the urban space is made safer by the very presence of its citizens acting on it, hence a radical change in the way space is experienced and inhabited by the people.



Typology of activities supported by the pole forest in the stage



Skate movement analysis in the surface, considering the pole forest

Exploring the opportunities

Our model is a generic structure that can be adapted to any city. This allows *SkatePark Italy* to develop interventions in any suburb in Italy that requires our help. How can we find the right places? In the first place we answered to this question was to develop an online communication strategy that can involve a certain group of people: skaters and young citizens. We will ask them which kind of places will need our intervention and we will develop a specific solution based on our model. On the other hand we need a good group of designers, architects and engineers that could help for each solution, for this reason we founded "CONTEXT", a cultural association aimed to find urban solutions. This bottom up process can be the best way to find new opportunities.

Considering that the major innovative features of our project are essentially 3:

1. *The Surface* is an **itinerant object** that can revitalize the city in more than one site through an ephemeral intervention

2. Moreover it has **functional flexibility**, that is the ability to host at the same time multiple generationally and socially integrative activities LOL
3. The program is not only centered on skate parks, we create a **resilience** projected on the spot and this is the basis of a urban bottom up regeneration based on the self help logic

Generating a solution

The Surface is not merely an architectural project aiming at building skate parks: it is **innovative** in the sense that it is a social experiment, providing local communities with a clear strategy of urban appropriation: the building of a skate park is just a sparkle that generates attractiveness, but it necessarily has to be supported with the organization of activities and the involvement of communities. The project revolves around these three main points:

1. **Object** - the starting point for the regeneration process. It is made by a skateable itinerant wooden structure whose morphology has been mitigated to obtain a non-traditional carousel, within which numerous activities can be staged simultaneously. Above *The Surface* pole forests are planted, conceived as spatial devices able to generate a spatial overwriting, aiding exhibitions or supplemental activities through the implementation of electrical outlets or tensile structures. Some external structures, called *add-ons*, can be given to guarantee additional activities (bar/café, music pavilion, covered room, seating [...]), consisting of a light padded frame with panels of chosen materials, according to the preferred narrative.
2. **Place** - Considering the value of urban and social redevelopment, positioning places are chosen based on a weighted system of defined criteria (e.g. *social criteria*: age, income, multiculturalism - *architectural criteria*: feasibility, dimensions, geometry - *urban criteria*: location, accessibility, proximity to related services). Those instances are instrumental in the chain process that involves many city areas - since *The Surface* is expected to be mounted in several places over time - so the carousel can thus assume an itinerant value that can support the concept of resilience in as many areas as possible.
3. **Program** - any collateral activity that will be performed on and around the skate park. *The Surface* can be considered as a passive carousel when exclusively used as a skate park. It assumes an active role when a timeline of events is structured, closely related to the place in which it arises. This also means a great cooperation with local associations; this leads to different uses and a continuous management over time. This allows the structure to provide a schedule of intergenerational and inclusive activities that can make the community more compact, moreover, attract users from outside

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