



Mediterranea Node

Summary of the first Design Justice
Mediterranea Meeting

October 13-15, 2019 in Pisa, Italy

The first meeting



Where?

Pisa, Italy

When?

October 13-15,
2019

Who?

Andrea Giuliano
Chiara Missikoff
Elena Silvestrini
Josep Almirall
Nadia Nadesan
Nushin Yazdani
Rafael Pascual-Leone
Thais Ruiz de Alda
Valeria Taddei
Victoria Barnett
Wes Taylor

The Design Justice Network encounter in Pisa brought together multiple organizations and actors committed to more just design practices and collaborating across borders to reclaim the Mediterranean geography to shift paradigms of power and cultural production.

Between the 12th and 14th October 2019, Design Justice Mediterranean was born! We are extremely proud and excited about what we have been able to get started over the last months and during this intensive weekend. Want to know more? Please read on!



The Pisa encounter: what was it?

This encounter has been the result of the work of many hands, minds, and hearts, collaborating over oceans with actors, organizations, and committed individuals. Each session and workshop has been developed and designed by thinkers, doers, and makers who have experience and a passion for participatory processes, are engaging in anti-oppression work, and are committed to greater justice especially in design around the Mediterranean region.

How did Design Justice Network Mediterranea come about?

The goals of the Pisa encounter were to:

- Begin to contextualize the Design Justice Principles to the Mediterranean through adapting and translating the principles into various languages and cultural contexts;
- Develop a governance structure to begin a Mediterranean node of the Design Justice Network;
- Learn and develop through knowledge and practice exchange with Design Justice Steering Committee members Wesley Taylor and Victoria Barnett;
- Get a first motor group started, identifying who is and is not in the room: engaging with an accountable process of intentional invitations for the months to come.

The idea originated from a group of 5 individuals from different organisations (Platoniq, Data Liqueen Lab, DigitalFems etc) who have met by the magic of the universe and the internet. When we met, we realized that we were all incredibly inspired by the Design Justice Network and wanted to do something that spoke to our experiences.



Design Justice Network draws its heritage from the Allied Media Conference where individuals, collectives, and organizations have historically come together to envision, create, and practice media for more just and holistic solutions. Those ideas have since spread across the globe and taken root as a means to practice more just design with greater accountability.

How did Design Justice Network Mediterranea come about?

We believe that there can be no end of exploitative, paternalistic and oppressive systems until all communities, marginalized groups and individuals get the chance to have a say in their matters. The experiences directly lived by communities and individuals are necessary for rethinking design processes, because no community issue can be solved without the active participation of those who are directly impacted. This is why Design Justice wants to build a network, connecting active communities and individuals. Our intersectional approach allows minorities, marginalized groups and individuals to exchange experiences, practices and aims – this contributes to the detection of common roots to the issues that oppress them. The fight against institutional indifference and human rights violations must be cohesive and farsighted - this is why we want to create synergy between people,

sharing knowledge and tools that can help them find new process design solutions based on their specific needs. Briefly, we strive to amplify the voices of those who were silenced.

One of the places where DJN has taken root was in Spain (for example during the Hackatò. As a result of a collective phenomena of an interest in stronger praxis for more just design within a cluster of intersectional feminist oriented design practitioners in the Spanish state during the summer of 2019 and thanks to the support of the Internet Festival organisers, the idea of hosting a Design Justice Mediterranea encounter was conceived and pushed forward. We started dreaming of a physical meet-up with members of the network in North America and circulated the call within our networks to create a first Mediterranean motor group.



Design Justice Mediterranea

The organisers of this event (Elena and Nadia from the Platoniq team, Josep and Marta from Liquen Data Lab and Thais from Digital Fems) invited activists, organizers, designers, facilitators, techies and the like to get together strive towards an intersectional lens and exercise the collective use of our knowledges, practices, and aspirations. Those who came and form now part of the group, and would love to have more people to join.



Why Mediterranean?



Our focus on the Mediterranean wanted and wants to reclaim an identity around this geography. In what ways can the original Northern American Design Justice discourse be enriched from our situated experiences? In our current political climate (especially concerning migration) we want to diverge from the Global North / South dichotomy and development narratives. We want to develop critical and creative practices to design processes starting from what is already working locally across the region. As part of our process we want to engage critically with the concept of fortress Europe and Europe as a monolithic entity. We acknowledge different routes to innovation, questioning power dynamic framing the Mediterranean and everything East and South as backward and powerless. We want to create more access to resources and collective intelligence and develop materials in languages other than English.





Why Pisa?



Through network connections the group mobilized the encounter based on the knowledge that Wesley Taylor and Victoria Barnett were coming to Pisa to deliver a talk at the Internet Festival, thanks to Fondazione Sistema Toscana. Through more network support and care, the group found a gracious host at the beautiful and cosy Villa Lazzarino in Pisa. As a result, Pisa was the most convenient space to host and base the encounter. Our host Valeria participated in the Design Justice Mediterranea sessions, together with her tiny bunnies.



Executive Summary

Achievements

The work and insights that we were able to generate in Pisa would not have been possible if not for the four years of collaboration, organisation, and work put in by the Design Justice Network and the Allied Media Conference decades before. As a result after our three day encounter we were able to agree on core values reflected in our

adopted community agreements that share a commitment towards safety, celebration of diversity, and justice based practices. Shortly after and importantly, we made had a rapid consensus to create the Design Justice Node in the Mediterranean and form its governance and decide upon a series of collaborative projects.



Governance

During the two and half day encounter we were able to establish a governance system with the support of Wes Taylor and Victoria Barnett and their experience. Two parallel systems were created: the steering committee and project groups. The steering committee will manage and check in on the health of the node and report to the steering committee in North America. The members of the committee will also periodically rotate. The projects groups will work on the ongoing internal and external projects within the node.



External Projects

One of the main achievements was setting the foundation for translating and contextualizing the Design Justice Principles in the Mediterranean. However, the work is far from done as we continue to translate, interpret, and add culture/language groups.

In addition, the other project the Design Justice Mediterranean Node will be pursuing is co-creating and organizing a space within the Sharing Cities Forum in Barcelona in November 2019.

The third project is to compile an online repository of tools and references to guide and inspire design practices that are consistent with the Design Justice Principles. These can include tools used to evaluate a design process; toolkits that embody the design justice principles; or isolated tips or best practices.

Examples:

880cities.org/resource-hub-tools/

designkit.org/methods

ethicscanvas.org

Newcomers

During the retreat theme throughout our workshops was the importance of holding space for who/what was absent and pushing for greater representation across communities, borders, and oceans especially from but not limited to communities and individuals with connections to Greece, the Balkans, countries in the Levant, and Northern Africa. From the beginning it was evident that the first retreat would be limited to those that could afford to travel to Pisa. However, we welcome interested individuals, organizations, and communities to make contact and collaborate regardless of attendance at the Pisa encounter. We intend to look for funds to be able to build in greater accessibility. Currently, we would love to have individuals who would like to work on adapting the Design Justice principles to the Mediterranean area, on our external projects and / or on communications for the node. To get in touch with us and collaborate, please email us at **djn-med@cryptolab.net**. Sign the Design Justice principles at **designjusticenetwork.org**.

Critical Insights



Context Matters

A cornerstone for this encounter was by and large because design as a concept and practice as well as the Design Justice Principles resonated with each of the participants. However, how we ground design within each participant's work and how the principles translate into each socio-economic, political, and cultural context matters. For instance, the settler colonial history of North America differs from the Mediterranean and in different parts of the Mediterranean. A present and salient question will be collaborating on our principles and resulting work to translate, footnote, or expand upon keywords within the principles such as: healing, liberation, accountability, indigeneity etc.

Design that connects and transforms

Design can be difficult to pin down. But while that makes creating taxonomies complicated, it also creates space for fluid connection between fields of work, thematic areas, and interaction points with communities, organizations, and individuals. Design in Pisa served as an important point to develop relationships because of its ability to be crosscutting and the commonly held belief that design can be used for social transformation and support movements for change.

Fuck Borders and Binaries

While in Pisa, it was clear that the encounter may have been inaccessible for a number of reasons from borders to funds. An important practice was to continually hold space for the communities and individuals who have yet to come to brainstorm, create, and collaborate. As part of this practice an ongoing project will be working on accessibility, looking for grants, and organizations to make more diversity possible as well as holding space for those not in the room. In addition, what was a speedy agreement was on our community agreement detailed later on how we envision community standards. Important to the space DJN Mediterranea is cultivating is with the common understanding that guiding principles revolve around intersectionality, feminism, and creating safe(r) spaces.



The Sessions

Community agreements

We began by coming together in a circle, and taking turns reading the Art-and-Feminism Safe Space/Brave Space policy, (bit.ly/afprinciple) which we then collectively agreed to adopt as community guidelines.

Mapping the room

Our next task was to begin connecting, trusting each other, and exploring who we are as a community. Each of us was given a pad of post-it notes. To help us understand ourselves, each other, and how we might already be connected, everyone was asked to spend a few minutes identifying writing key aspects of our identity, writing one on each post-it note.

Once everyone had finished their self-analysis, we took turns introducing ourselves, laying out

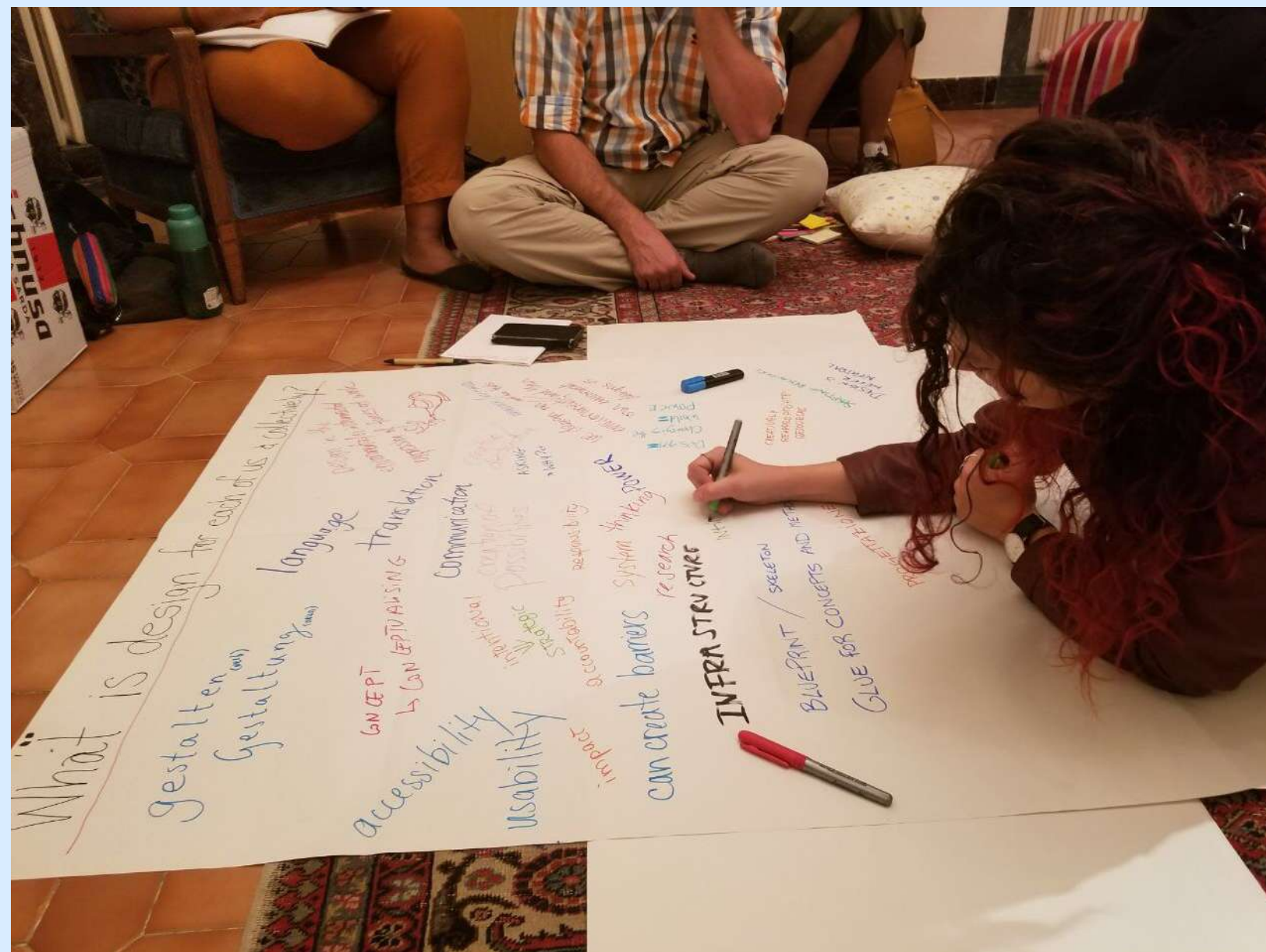
our post-it notes as we each shared important glimpses into who we are, where we come from, our studies and work, interests, and other key aspects of our identity.

Finally, we all joined forces in merging and clustering our collective post-it notes into 'islands' (representing themes of our work and how we connect). Thus, we created maps of our physical and affective geographies, and of where our skills and expertise meet. We also acknowledged who is and is not in the room, and began to think about how our next gathering might be made even more inclusive.



What is design for us?

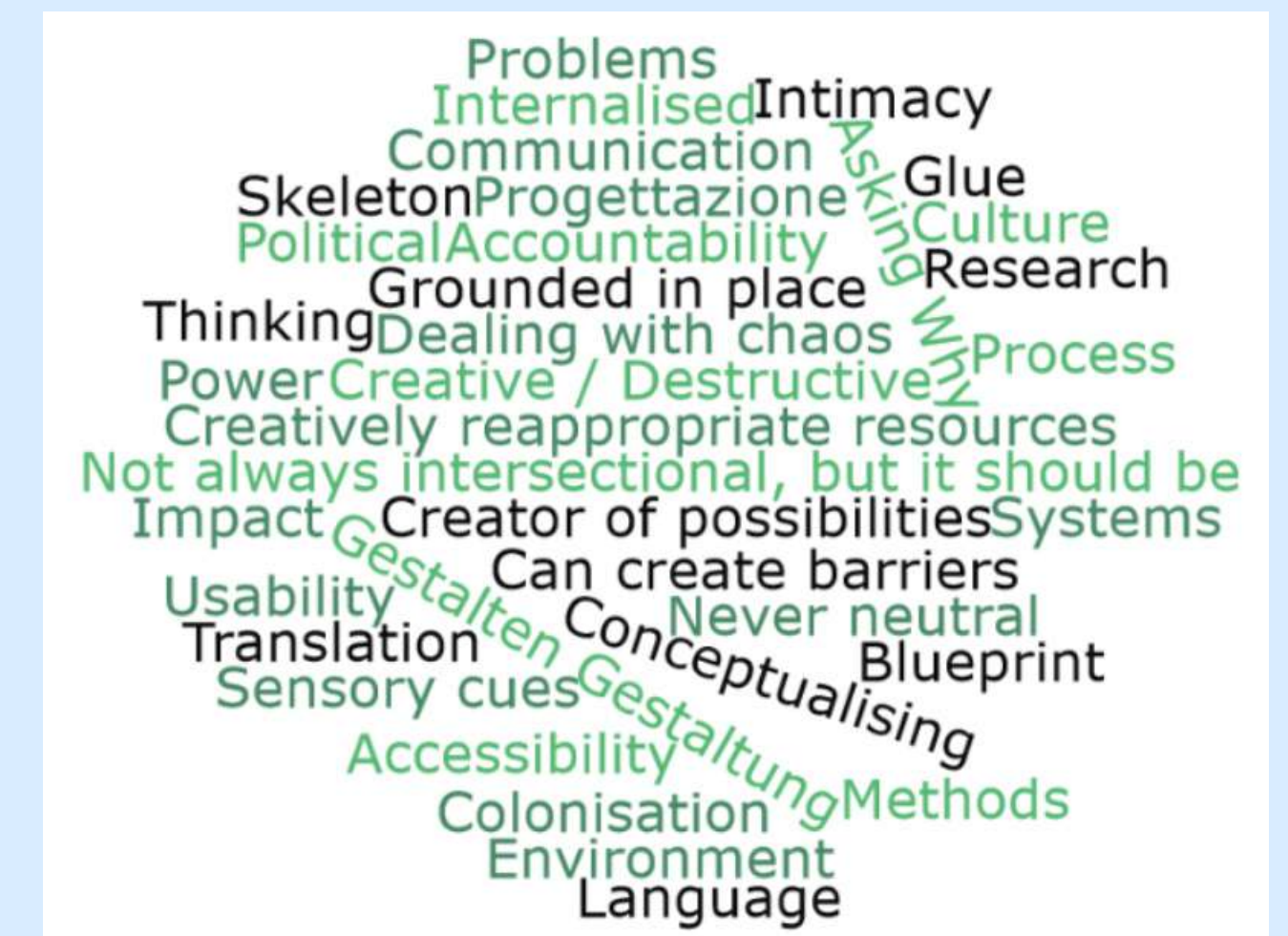
Then we collectively share our individual understanding of what design is to enricht a vision of the concept from a wider position. It was an emotional and bonding moment for the group. Thanks to the process we find a shared definition of how the Mediterranean network understands design. As a summary of the experience, we summarise in 3 sections the conclusions of the session.



We understand design through these keywords:

Design Is:

- Design is the engineering of “advancement” of society
- Design is a language: it expresses something
- Design is a vehicle of power. (Design is ‘the package’. Power is ‘the contents’.)
- Design is the visual, environmental or instrumental expression of forces at work
- Design is the translation of values into artifacts, tools, systems
- Design is a vehicle for power
- We design our environment and our tools, and then our environment designs us



Contradictions

We identify a contradiction between:

Simple, agile streamlined Vs.

Contextual, Intersectional; confronting systems of oppression, slow

Social movements work phenomenally; social research connecting phenomena

Learning from the experiences of the Design Justice Network

One of the highlights of the retreat was listening to experience and insight from members of the Design Justice Network in North America. Wes Taylor and Victoria Barnett recounted some of the history of the Design Justice Network (designjusticenetwork.org/about-us), and how it gradually emerged over several editions of the Allied Media Conference, through the collective expression of a diverse and distributed community of changemakers. Wes Taylor shared with us some of the essential qualities of that creative context through the powerful and poetic “Six emblems of Complex Movements” (designjusticenetwork.org/complex-movements).



Dandylion: resilience, resistance, regeneration, decentralization

Ant: cooperative work and collective sustainability

Fern: a fractal, applying the same principles with integrity and consistency at all scales

Mycelium: interconnectedness, remediation, detoxification

Starling: collective leadership and partnership, adaptability

Wavicle: valuing both process and outcome

Each of these six “emblems” includes provocative and generative questions that can help us tap into this spirit within our own (Mediterranean) contexts.



The Design Justice Principles

Continuing our engagement with the work of the Design Justice Network, we then turned our attention to the Ten Principles, assessing them from our Mediterranean context. With the principles written on a large sheet, everyone was invited to annotate them with any questions, concerns, or suggested changes. Ultimately, there was broad consensus that the ten principles proved remarkably suitable for the Mediterranean context, with only a few questions raised about translation and wording, transcribed here:



Annotating the Ten Principles of Design Justice:

1. We use design to **sustain, heal, and empower** our communities, as well as to seek liberation from exploitative and oppressive systems.
2. We **center the voices of those who are directly impacted** by the outcomes of the design process.
Directly impacted in Spanish doesn't translate well... "directamente afectadas"?
3. We **prioritize design's impact on the community** over the intentions of the designer.
4. We view **change as emergent from an accountable, accessible, and collaborative process**, rather than as a point at the end of a process.

#4 is too abstract. How does one translate 'accountable' into Spanish?

The Design Justice Principles

Annotating the Ten Principles of Design Justice *continued*:

5. We see the role of the **designer as a facilitator rather than an expert.**

- *acknowledge privilege*
- *Designer is not an accessible role or word*
- *Position of a designer is not neutral*

6. We believe that **everyone is an expert based on their own lived experience**, and that we all have unique and brilliant contributions to bring to a design process.

7. We **share design knowledge and tools** with our communities.
“open source”?

8. We work towards **sustainable, community-led and -controlled** outcomes.

9. We work towards **non-exploitative solutions** that reconnect us to the earth and to each other.

How does one translate “non-exploitative” into Spanish?



The Design Justice Principles

Annotating the Ten Principles of Design Justice *continued*:

10. Before seeking new design solutions, **we look for what is already working** at the community level. We honor and uplift traditional, indigenous, and local knowledge and practices.

- *What does 'indigenous' mean for the Mediterranean?*
- *Reclaiming lost, erased, and marginalised practices of disenfranchised communities*
- *Diaspora*
- *Going South/East of Europe*
- ***Culture - is scene as a monolith in many mediterranean contexts.*
Make it a moving and living concept; embrace positive contamination

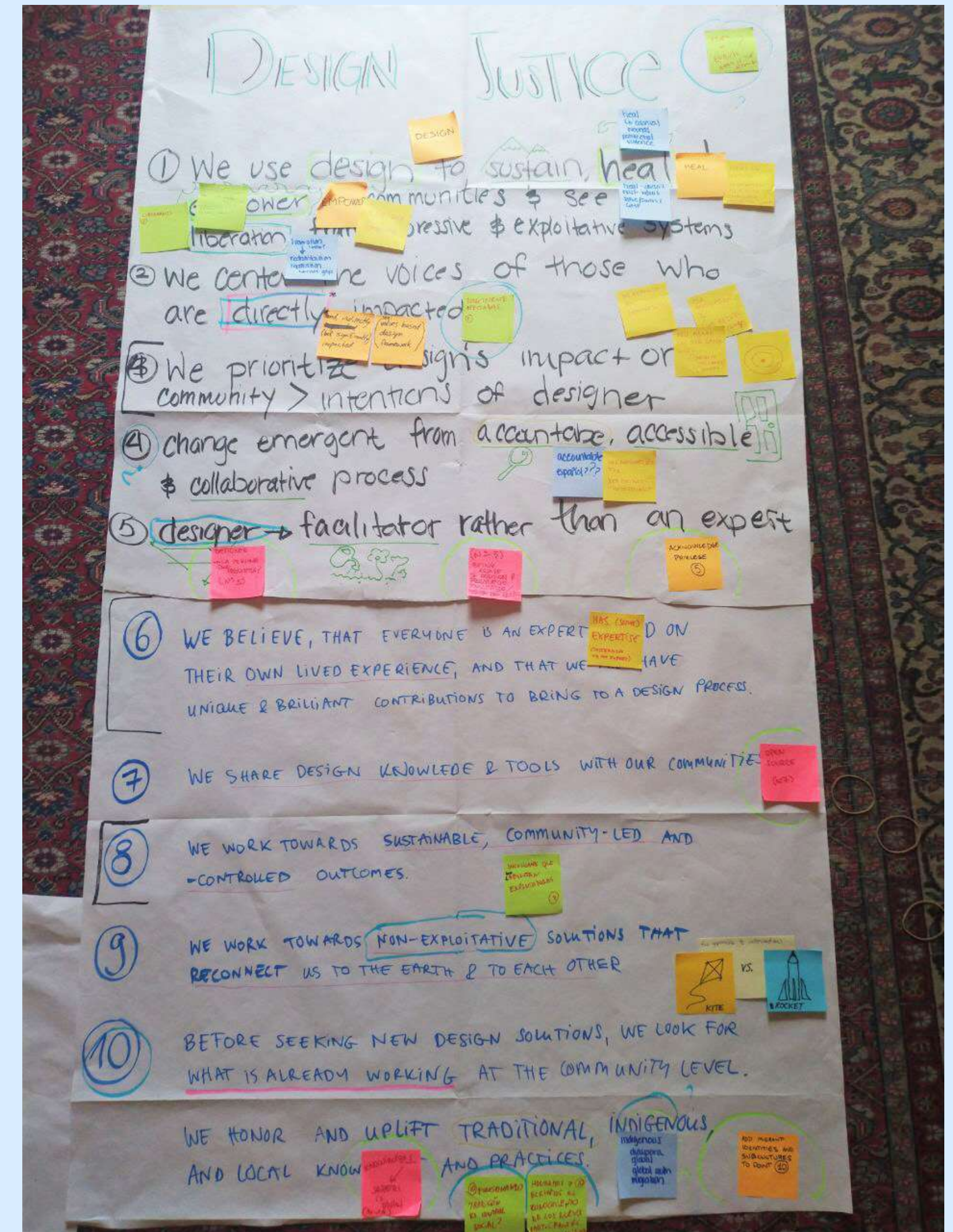
In summary, the following words may carry a different meaning in the Mediterranean context as compared to North America:

Empower - in the North american context it might mean handing over or sharing power from non-profit jargon alternatives might be channel, express power, visibilize

Liberation - For whom? Redistribution and reparation

Heal - heal colonial and patriarchal violence; there is no healing without Black and People of Color communities.

Design - can be a disempowering word, seems elite which is a contradiction if they define justice





Mediterranea Node

CONTACT INFORMATION

To get in touch with us and collaborate, please email us at

djn-med@cryptolab.net. Check us out online: **designjustice.org/djn-med**