

# Design for 'not-knowing'. Visual design for social inclusion

## Progettare per "not-knowing". Visual design per l'inclusione sociale

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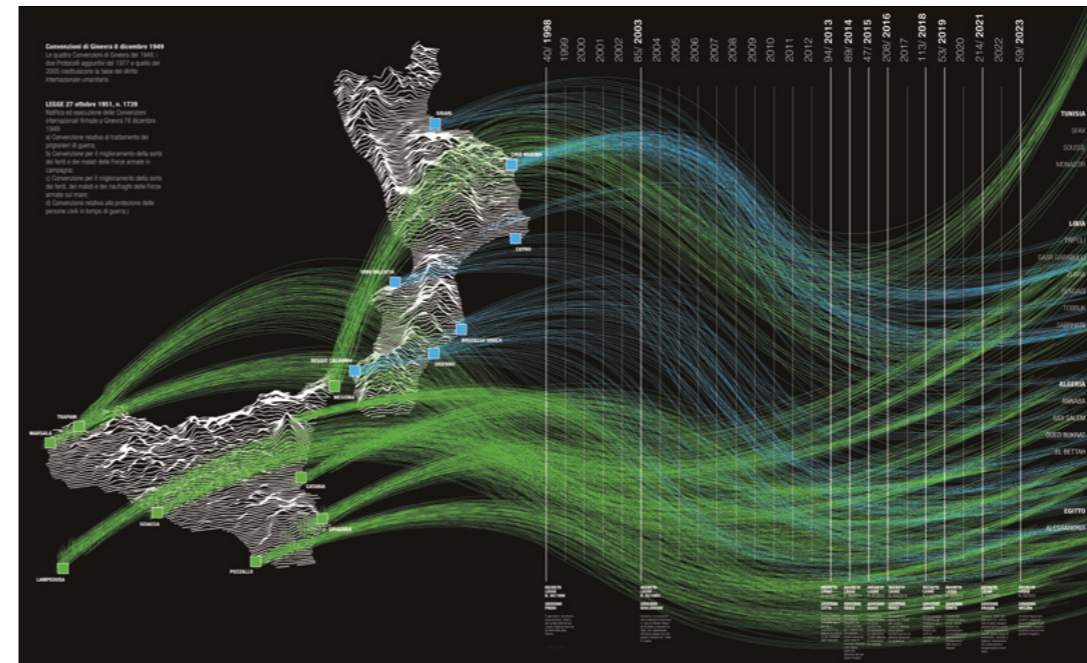
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Joining, as of 2022, the *School of not-knowing* a project of Civic-city directed by Ruedi and Vera Baur involved us in an international and transdisciplinary network, "*ou l'on apprend à reconnaître et à travailler*", that is, to represent what we don't know. The research carried out by Reggio Calabria University focused interest toward territories as palimpsests whose languages express a plurality of narrative and interpretive codes, capable of initiating the building of places that are more open to differences and configure themselves as plural expressions. And how they can become places of peace through right and equitable sharing of their culture. From the conduct of the two workshops titled "How can we design peace", in which universities and the civil world engaged in an open dialogue to share new ways and forms of knowledge and its representation, some lines of research emerged in which identity communication represents one of the main scientific contexts for peace education.

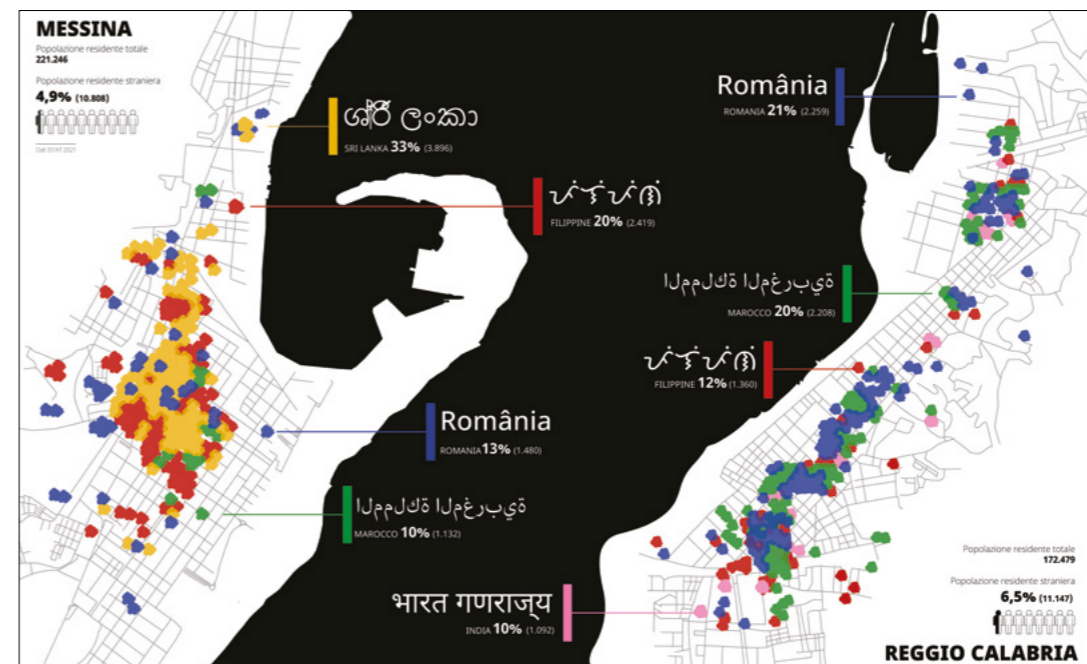
L'adesione, a partire dal 2022, alla *School of not-knowing* un progetto di Civic-city diretto da Ruedi e Vera Baur ci ha coinvolti in una rete internazionale e transdisciplinare, "*ou l'on apprend à reconnaître et à travailler*", ovvero rappresentare ciò che non conosciamo. La ricerca condotta dall'Università di Reggio Calabria ha focalizzato l'interesse verso i territori come palinsesti i cui linguaggi esprimono una pluralità di codici narrativi e interpretativi, capaci di avviare la costruzione di luoghi più aperti alle differenze e configurarsi come espressioni plurali e come possano diventare luoghi di pace attraverso la giusta ed equa condivisione della loro cultura. Dalla conduzione dei due workshop dal titolo "Come possiamo progettare la pace", in cui università e mondo civile si sono impegnati in un dialogo aperto per condividere nuovi modi e forme di conoscenza e la sua rappresentazione, sono emerse alcune linee di ricerca in cui la comunicazione identitaria rappresenta uno dei principali contesti scientifici per l'educazione alla pace.



01. E. Calaciuri, A.M Cuzzola, Mediterranean newcomers, Workshop How can we design Peace, 2023.



02. S. Iuliano, G. Oliva, E. Rullo, Freedom to migrate, right to stay, Workshop How can we design Peace, 2023.



03. F. Gaglioti, A. Oliva, U. Sansone, MR Spinelli, Ethnography of the Straits of Messina, Workshop How can we design Peace, 2023.

## KNOWING AND NOT-KNOWING

The invite to participate in the project *School of not-knowing* by Civic-city has involved us in an international, transdisciplinary network "of people imagining and conceptualizing a better world"<sup>01</sup>. Urban planners, designers, graphic designers, architects, sociologists, philosophers, and artists from around the world are mobilized voluntarily on the topics of social sciences, semiotics, culture, and ecology.

Civic-city is an autonomous institute for critical design research on social field. Founded and directed by Ruedi and Vera Baur, the institute, located in Paris, develops, among others, research projects on the uses of public space in fragile urban situations where mixed communities coexist. Among urban projects include the *Laboratoire d'Urbanisme Transitoire*, which aims to understand the methodologies and potentials of visual design in the contexts of marginalized urban spaces, with the goal of asking questions and creating conditions to influence political strategies for the well-being of inhabitants and their supportive relationship with places.

The same issues are addressed by the UNESCO Chair *Mediterranean Landscape in Context of Emergency* at Mediterranean University of Reggio Calabria, which deals specifically with contemporary Mediterranean migration and how the territories of landfall are predisposed to host large numbers of men and women moving in search of places to inhabit. The study of territories in transition leads to the development of proposals for shared habitation.

In 2022 Civic-city launched the project the *School of not-knowing*, a school where we learn to rebuild thus to represent what we do not know. "What one does not want to know, what society does not want one to know, but also what one does not yet know and what society has a duty to know"<sup>02</sup>. The goal was to communicate to everyone "ce que l'on affirmait savoir".

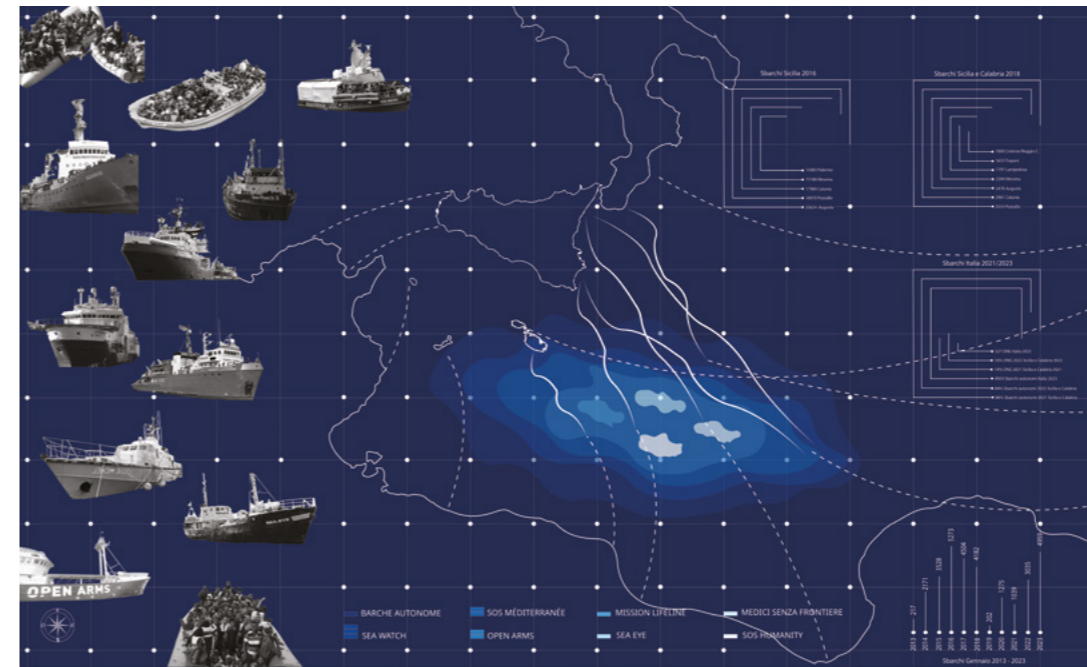
The project involved about 800 teachers, researchers and students from more than 30 university and design school around the world. Drawing and representation become the privileged tools of communication of what is obvious and what is not yet obvious.

Knowledge can be defined as "the totality of a person's or community's knowledge acquired through study, observation, learning and/or experience"<sup>03</sup>. But not knowledge becomes more difficult to define, yet we can consider "non knowledge as a cognitive possibility, an opening to other forms of intelligibility". The question being asked is "how can we shift our perspective to better perceive other possibilities of learning?"<sup>04</sup>.

To lend support to these questions Ruedi Baur is organizing Reflections around the project, a 24h open talk attended by experts from around the world who can speak at any time of the day, considering the hourly differences of the different places they come from, and make the considerations and suggestions. Others who participated included Manon Ménard, visual graphic designer, philosophers Suzanne Leblanc and Marie-José Mondzain, Christopher Dell theoretician in urban design and architecture. The summary of the talk is contained in a two-part table titled *Il est des choses que nous savons... et d'autres que nous ne savons pas* in which the issues that emerged are identified and represented.

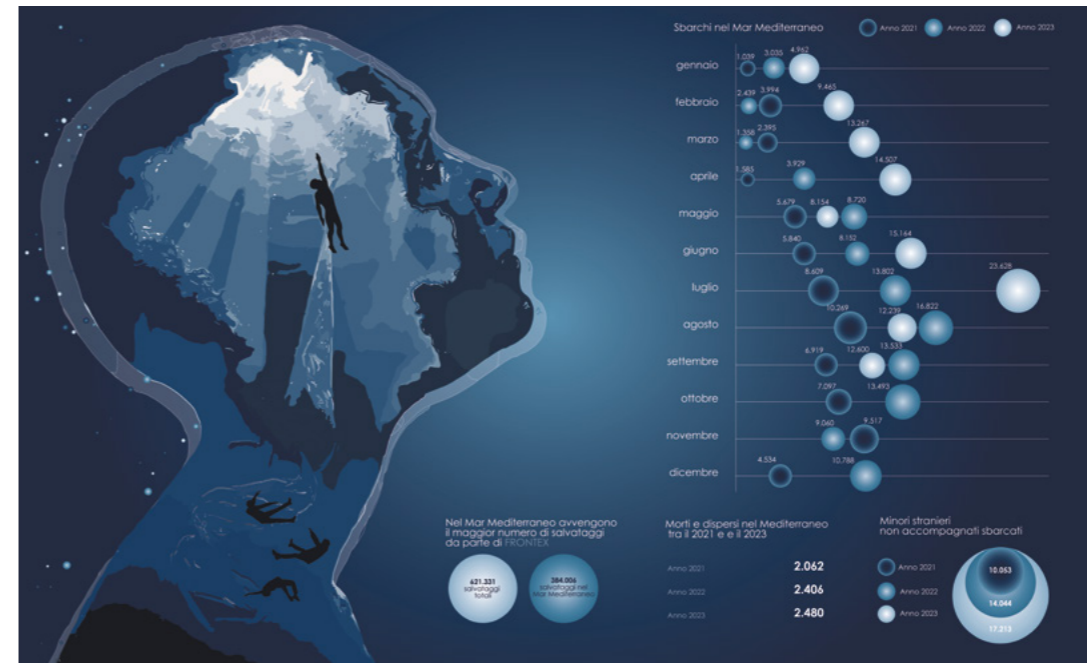
Based on these questions, workshops around the world are launched: "To work on the representation of 'non-knowledge' on the basis of the conviction that the dialogue between art, design, science and society is capable of proposing new horizons in understanding and learning about the world we know and the world yet to be discovered, to question the representations and modes of transmission of knowledge"<sup>05</sup>.

In this context, the *School of not-knowing* offered an opportunity to experiment with visual communication languages that relate different modes of expression to communicate social phenomena that are very often steeped in misunderstanding.



04.

J. Auddino, I. Palumbo, NGOs in the Mediterranean Sea, Workshop How can we design Peace, 2023.



05.

G. Cartella, A. Foti, G. Torcaso, Landings of hope, Workshop How can we design Peace, 2023.



06.

A. Doddis, M. Rotundo, G. Repaci, Mediterranean crossing, Workshop How can we design Peace, 2023.

**DONNE sbarcate anno 2021-2022**  
(dati ISTAT relativi alle donne richiedenti asilo, protezione umanitaria con permesso di soggiorno di breve durata)

**3.631**

**Donne / Somalia**

Persecuzioni  
Deportazioni  
Genocidi

**BAMBINI sbarcati anno 2021-2022**  
(dati openpolis)

**UOMINI sbarcati anno 2021-2022**  
(dati ISTAT relativi agli uomini richiedenti asilo, protezione umanitaria con permesso di soggiorno di breve durata)

**11.750**

**Donne / Guinea**

Violenza politica  
Tensioni etnico-nazionali  
Sviluppo economico

**47.504**

**Donne / Nigeria**

Repressioni diritti umani  
Genocidi  
Siccità

**1.320**

**Bambini / Pakistan**

Insicurezza sanitaria  
Insicurezza alimentare

**1.050**

**Bambini / Costa d'Avorio**

Instabilità economica  
Insicurezza alimentare  
Crisi ambientale

**38.750**

**Uomini / Guinea**

Guerra e persecuzioni  
Esecuzioni  
Torture e violenze

**21.752**

**Uomini / Tunisia**

Jiadismo  
Crisi sociale

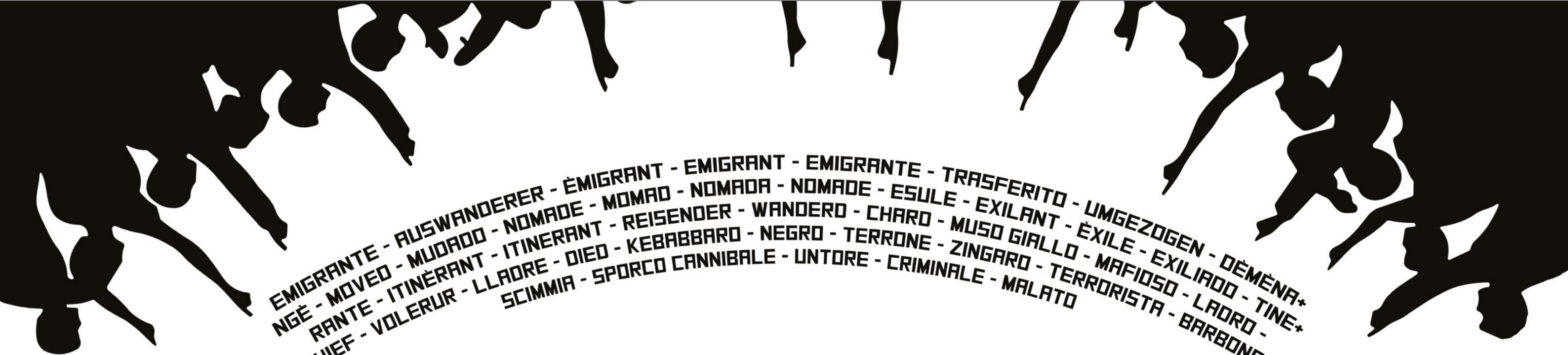


**26.089** dispersi in mare


periodo 2014-2023  
dati OIM Organizzazione internazionale per le migrazioni



Fonte: Dipartimento di Pubblica Sicurezza



EMIGRANTE - AUSWANDERER - ÉMIGRANT - EMIGRANT - EMIGRANTE - TRASFERITO - UMGEZOGEN - DEMÈNA-  
NGÈ - MOVED - MUDADO - NOMADE - MOMAD - NOMADA - NOMADE - ESULE - EXILANT - ÈXILE - EXILIADO - TINE-  
RANTE - ITINÉRANT - ITINERANT - REISENDER - WANDERD - CHARD - MUSO GIALLO - MAFIOSO - LADRO -  
THIEF - VOLERUR - LLADRE - DIED - KEBABBARD - NEGRO - TERRONE - ZINGARO - TERRORISTA - BARBONE -  
SCIMMIA - SPORCO CANNIBALE - UNTORE - CRIMINALE - MALATO



INSULSO - PUANT - STINKY - LURIDO - SCHMUTZIG - BRUT - SALE - FILTHY - VAPID  
- STERBEN - IGNORANTE - STINKED - STUPRATORE - VERGEWALTIGER - RAPIST - VIOLEUR - SPORCO - MUDRI  
ROUGH - ASPRE - RUGUEUX - IGNORANT - SCHIAVO - SLAVE - ESCLAVE - ESCLAU - SLAVE - LIMITATO - ROZZO -  
ABIETTO - CANE - PELLEGRINO - DISLOCATO - VERTRIEBENER - DEPLACE - DISPLACED - MANGIABANANE



composition manifests its expressive uniqueness in the mixture of writing and geometric and figurative elements.

The map of the continents separates each country to indicate a new redefinition of physical and social borders (Fig. 01.) associated with a flood of numerical data on histograms that quantify people in movement. A map is the visual basis of the geographical location of the landing points of migratory flows that indicate not only the points of origin but the graphic trend of legislative modification and integration (Fig. 02.). The color associated with a category of sets makes them immediately visible in their physical location determining their spatial visualization (Fig. 03.).

Conceptual maps and numerical diagrams are elaborated by the combination of elementary geometric patterns associated with a highly symbolic color that with intense shades marks the visual node of the entire composition balanced by figures that refer to the main focus (Figs. 04., 05.).

Developing dynamic balances between text and figures leads to the drafting of a comprehensive code of signs that is founded on the aesthetic component of the image and in the communication of a strong final emotional impact<sup>07</sup> (Figs. 06., 07.).

The visualization of the phonetic sign refers to the tracing of signs that correspond to sounds and are composed in figures that express a symbolic system of communication, "no longer a silent sign of convention but a living form among living forms, the letter can become one with the matter of representation"<sup>08</sup>. The characters of the writing in the dynamic composition become a vehicle of logical-visual communication in which the sign takes on the value of a signifier given by the coordination of all the elements that participate in the composition (Figs. 08., 09., 10.).

The compositions are never static even though they are built on an invisible basic grid, the perspective tensions impressed on the figures or letters, the use of spirals or radial movements, staggered and translated geometric shapes, indicate geometric directions, and the use of colour which refers to predominantly emotional symbolisms<sup>09</sup>.

## CONCLUSION

At the conclusion of the School of not-knowing project, two days of exhibition and presentation of the panels developed by all schools were organized on February 1 and 2, 2024 at the Conservatoire National des Art et Métiers (CNAM) in Paris and an exhibition at the Écoles Estienne. Finally, the outcomes are collected in *Les Cahiers de Civic City - 3. L'école du non-savoir. 245 propositions to visually explain what we don't know* edited by Ruedi Braur, Vera Braur, Susanna Cerri.

From the two *How can we design peace* workshops, in which universities, experts and the civil world engaged in an open dialogue to share new ways and forms of knowledge and its representation, some lines of research emerged in which visual communication represents one of the main scientific contexts for education and learning. Especially, taking territories as palimpsests whose languages express a plurality of narrative and interpretive codes capable of initiating the building of places that are more open to differences and configure themselves as plural expressions. This research is an open, unaccomplished research. The next question is "how can we respond to the needs of our world in crisis?".

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## NOTES

011 See: [www.civic-city.org](http://www.civic-city.org)

021 See: <https://civic-city.org/nonsapere/>

031 Baur R., Baur V., Cerri S. (2024). *Les Cahiers de Civic City-3. L'école du non-savoir. 245 propositions to visually explain what we don't know*, p. 11. Lublin: Dukarnia Akapit.

041 Baur R., Baur V., Cerri S. (2024). *Les Cahiers de Civic City-3. L'école du non-savoir. 245 propositions to visually explain what we don't know*, p. 11. Lublin: Dukarnia Akapit.

051 See: <https://plevy.fr/en/projects/school-of-not-knowing/>

061 Zerlenga O. (2007). *Dalla grafica all'infografica*. Foggia: Claudio Grenzi Editore.

071 Cerri S. (2022). *Segni urbani, design della comunicazione visiva e scrittura nello spazio pubblico*. Siracusa: LetteraVentidue.

081 Soffici A. (1920) *Principi di una estetica futurista*. Firenze: Vallecchi Editore 1920.

091 Rand P. (2016). *Pensieri sul design*. Milano: Postmedia.

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