

THE PROBLEM

symposium

studying
processing
communicating
wicked problems

We live in a global ecosystem marked by interconnected challenges, including climate change, social inequalities, urban transformations, health emergencies, digital transitions, and crises of care and living. These are complex problems with multiple interdependent factors, often in conflict with one another. Some are defined as "wicked problems" (Rittel & Webber, 1973) – "wicked" not because unsolvable, but because they defy stable definitions and demand situated, reflective approaches fostering dialogue across disciplines.

In this context, design itself – by its very nature an instrument for proposing scenarios, establishing relations, and opening directions – is called to rethink its aims and responsibilities. It should be conceived not merely as a resolutive gesture or linear response, but as a relational and open practice, capable of interpreting uncertainty, generating visions, and developing tools for reading and navigating contemporary complexity.

The symposium *The P(r)o(b)lem* – a title that recalls and reworks Anatol Knotek's visual poem *The Solution* (2020), in which problem and solution coincide in a linguistic gesture – aims to serve as a transdisciplinary forum to reflect on the idea that critical narration, the ability to tell and interpret, can itself constitute a response to wicked problems. From 'problem' to 'poem': rather than offering solutions, the symposium seeks to open critical and generative spaces that activate new research trajectories and foster encounters among heterogeneous forms of knowledge – humanistic, scientific, technological – and diverse practices, both analog and digital, within a framework of methodological and cultural cross-contamination.

Within this context, particular attention is given to the adoption of emerging tools – including generative artificial intelligence – not only as operational or design responses but also as speculative and critical resources. Such tools can contribute to scenario-building, the imagination of possible futures, and the experimentation with new languages and forms of representation.

The symposium invites the scientific community to contribute to this reflection through case studies, prototypes, and narratives that highlight the potential of design as a critical and transformative practice, capable of articulating the complexity of the present and opening possibilities for the future through new means. Contributions may follow three main lines of inquiry. These should not be regarded as rigidly separated domains but rather as possible orientations through which to interrogate contemporary complexity and to explore design as a critical, speculative, and transformative tool.

“The formulation of a wicked problem is the problem! The process of formulating the problem and of conceiving a solution (or re-solution) are identical, since every specification of the problem is a specification of the direction in which a treatment is considered.”

Ritter & Webber, 1973

STUDYING WICKED PROBLEMS

ANALYZING NETWORKS, RELATIONS, AND CONNECTIONS

Reflecting on how wicked problems can be read, interpreted, and understood through theoretical, methodological, and design tools. Studying complexity means recognizing the invisible connections linking apparently distant phenomena: from environmental systems to social dynamics, from urban structures to technological frameworks. We welcome contributions that explore mapping, visualization, and modeling methods for critical analyses, capable of revealing the interdependencies, emerging dynamics, and systemic forms of the contemporary world.

PROCESSING WICKED PROBLEMS

DESIGNING ADAPTIVE AND EXPERIMENTAL APPROACHES CAPABLE OF EMBRACING UNCERTAINTY

Investigating how design can operate within complexity without neglecting its inherent value. Processing does not mean simplifying, but rather embracing uncertainty as a structural condition and developing design strategies that are adaptive, iterative, and situated. We encourage contributions that present experimental processes, speculative approaches, co-design practices, prototypes, and design tools capable of acting on complex scenarios and generating open responses, susceptible to further transformation over time.

COMMUNICATING WICKED PROBLEMS

NARRATING AND REPRESENTING HIDDEN CONNECTIONS AND DEEP DYNAMICS

Conveying complexity means giving shape to articulated content through narrative languages (verbal, visual, performative, etc.) that activate awareness and dialogue. The challenge lies in making visible the deep connections, conflicts, and possible futures. Contributions are welcome that experiment with forms of representation (analog, digital, static, interactive, etc.) that can translate the density of reality and promote processes of sharing, learning, and action.

SOME PROBLEMS

ACCESSIBILITY AND USABILITY IN ARCHITECTURE AND DESIGN, EXPLORED IN THEIR THEMATIC AND SCALAR ARTICULATIONS

CARE AND RESPONSIBILITY IN DEFINING CONTENT AND COMMUNICATION PRACTICES

EDUCATION AND TRAINING (ONLINE AND OFFLINE) AS FOUNDATIONS FOR ETHICALLY READING AND INHABITING COMPLEXITY

ARCHIVES, MEMORIES, AND CONTEMPORARY HERITAGE, CONCEIVED AS OPEN, DYNAMIC, AND CONTROVERSIAL SYSTEMS

MATERIAL AND CULTURAL ECOLOGIES, BETWEEN SUSTAINABILITY, CONFLICTS, AND INTERDEPENDENCIES

INTERSECTIONS BETWEEN ANALOG, DIGITAL, AND ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE, IN THEIR DESIGN, ETHICAL, AND AESTHETIC IMPLICATIONS

Authors are invited to submit an original contribution developing a theoretical, critical, or design reflection consistent with the themes proposed by the symposium. Each contribution must include **a written text** and **an authorial image** that visually represents its contents.

The text should be between 8,000 and 10,000 characters (including spaces) and may be written in either Italian or English.

The image should be representative of the contribution and of original authorship, produced in a square format (80 × 80 cm) and in high resolution (300 dpi).

All materials must be submitted by email to **info@theproblem-symposium.com**. For detailed information on the submission files, contributors are required to consult the **Author Guidelines** and any updates available on the official website, **theproblem-symposium.com**. Additional content will be shared through the Instagram page **@theproblemsymposium**.

18/12/25

Launch of the call for papers and images

23/01/26

Deadline for contributions submission

06/02/26

Notification of peer review results

20/02/26

Submission of final contributions

06/03/26

Symposium

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