

MILAN DESIGN (ECO) SYSTEM

Salone del Mobile.Milano
Annual Report 2025



Salone del Mobile.Milano



POLITECNICO
MILANO 1863 | SCUOLA
DEL DESIGN | DIPARTIMENTO
DI DESIGN

FEDERLEGNO ARREDO**EVENTI SPA****President**

Gianfranco Marinelli

Vice President

Claudio Feltrin

Salone del Mobile.Milano

President

Maria Porro

**Head of Special Project
& Public Relations**

Giulia Halabi

General Manager Salone del Mobile.

Milano

Marco Sabetta

Secretarial staff

Valentina Vesco

Exhibitions Director

Andrea Vaiani

Marketing & Communication Director

Paola Cavaggioni

**Ambassador of International
Relations**

Marva Griffin Wilshire

**ADMINISTRATION, HR, IT,
LEGAL OFFICE****Direttore Finanziario**

Gabriele Fraschini

HR Director

Paola Saitta

IT Manager

Paolo Bertoldi

Legal Affairs Manager

Sara Macchi

EXHIBITIONS**COMMERCIAL AREA****Coordinator**

Alessandro Rossi

International Furniture Exhibition**International Furnishing****Accessories Exhibition****Workplace3.0**

Pavilions 9-11, 14-18, 22-24

Manager

Tito Armellini

Greta Galotti (Italia/Estero)

Giovanna Ratti (Estero)

Barbara Zanellato (Italia)

Cinzia Baroni

Pavillions 1-3, 5-7, 13-15

Manager

Barbara Conte

Carmen Cassarino

Giovanna Ratti (Estero)

Barbara Zanellato (Italia)

Guido Paramithiotti

S.Project

Italy

Luca De Micheli

International

Greta Galotti

EuroCucina - FTK Technology**for the Kitchen****International Bathroom Exhibition****Euroluce, International Lighting****Exhibition****Manager**

Paola Magro

Claudia Spiniello

Angelo Discenza

Salone del Mobile.Milano Riyadh

Manager

Monica Molinari

Fabiano Serventi

**OPERATIONS SECRETARIAT
& INCOMING**

Elena Franconi

Valeria Scotti

Fabiano Serventi

**TECHNICAL DEPARTMENT -
RELATIONS WITH FIERA****Manager**

Elisabetta Gaiaschi

Vincenzo Memmola

Stefano Bertinaria

Ludovico La Badessa

Marilda Moretti

SALONESATELLITE

Marva Griffin Wilshire (advisor)

Porzia Bergamasco (advisor)

Chiara Ghilardi

MARKETING & COMMUNICATION**Press & Communication Strategy****Advisor**

Susanna Legrenzi

Editorial Director & Cultural Events**Advisor**

Annalisa Rosso

PRESS OFFICE**Head of Press Office Coordination**

Andrea Brega

Head of Global Press Office

Marilena Sobacchi

Martina Colombo

International Press & Cultural Events**Senior Support**

Vlatka Selakovic Zanoletti

Press Office Senior Expert

Patrizia Malfatti

International Press Incoming & Media**Buying Manager**

Patrizia Ventura

Luna Marconi

Operations Secretariat

Massimo Poggipollini

BRAND & DIGITAL CONTENT**Head of Brand & Digital Marketing**

Giovanna Ferrero

Francesca Giambarini

Giorgia Parrinello

Alice Oieni

Alessandro Mitola

Carlotta Primo

Graphic Department

Mara Timpano

Adriana Di Giorgio

Silvia Sghirinzetti

DIGITAL PRODUCT**Head of Digital Product**

Riccardo Gianni

Luisa Bentivegna

Viviana Giacich

Livia Accolla

Milan Design (Eco) System 2025

The *Milan Design (Eco) System* research project is a Salone del Mobile.Milano initiative, co-conceived and executed by the Salone del Mobile.Milano and the Department of Design of the Politecnico di Milano

Project and Report by

Susanna Legrenzi

Press & Communication Strategy Advisor

Salone del Mobile.Milano

Department of Design - Politecnico di Milano**Stefano Maffei**

Full Professor

Francesco Zurlo

Full Professor

Massimo Bianchini

Associate Professor

Francesco Leoni

Researcher

Filippo Parolini

Researcher

Graphic design

Giga

Photographic credits

© Salone del Mobile.Milano – SaloneSatellite 2025

© Ludovica Mangini – The Night Before – Objects, Chairs,

Opera © Diego RavierRobert – Robert Wilson. Mother

© Lucie Jansch – Es Devlin. *Library of Light* © Monica

Spezia – Paolo Sorrentino. La dolce attesa © Monica Spezia

– Pierre-Yves Rochon. Villa Héritage © Monica Spezia –

Drafting Futures. Conversations about Next Perspectives

© Giulia Copercini – The Euroluce International Lighting

Forum © Giulia Copercini e © Saverio Lombardi Vallauri

Translation

NTL – Nuovo Traduttore Letterario

Francesco Nevola

2025 Salone del Mobile.Milano

All rights reserved. Copyright

© Salone del Mobile.Milano.

Printed in Italy by

Grafiche Mariano

Mariano Comense (CO) Italia

ISBN

978 88 941 6748 1

To cite this research:

Legrenzi, S., Maffei, S., Zurlo, F., Bianchini M., Leoni, F., Parolini, F. (2025). *Milan Design (Eco) System. Salone del Mobile.Milano Annual Report 2025. Milano: Salone del Mobile.Milano*

A project supported by

Federlegno Arredo Eventi SpA

No part of this book may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means (electronic or mechanical including by photocopy, recording or any other form of reproduction) without the written permission of Salone del Mobile.Milano.

Giuseppe Sala Mayor of Milan	8
Attilio Fontana President of the Lombardy Region	10
Donatella Sciuto Rector, Politecnico di Milano	12
Gianfranco Marinelli President, Federlegno Arredo Eventi	24
Maria Porro President, Salone del Mobile.Milano	

Foreward	28
Tomás Maldonado	
Art and artifacts	
Interview with Hans Ulrich Obrist	

1 Salone del Mobile.Milano 2025

1.1 Infrastructure for the future	36
Maria Porro President, Salone del Mobile.Milano	
1.2 Salone, Milano and beyond	40
Marco Sabetta General Manager, Salone del Mobile.Milano	
1.3 Path to sustainability	44
Fiera Milano for environmental sustainability	47
Curated by Fiera Milano	
Green Guidelines	48
1.4 63 rd Salone del Mobile.Milano	50
Andrea Vaiani Exhibitions Director, Salone del Mobile.Milano	

1.5 Salone del Mobile.Milano 2025. Figures	56
1.6 Vision Project 2025	72
Laura Falcinelli Manager and SME, Native Strategy	
1.7 SaloneSatellite 2025	78
Marva Griffin Wilshire Curator and Founder, SaloneSatellite	
1.8 Thought for Humans.	82
1.9 Cultural Programme 2025	84
Annalisa Rosso Editorial Director & Cultural Events Advisor, Salone del Mobile.Milano	
1.10 The Night Before – Objects, Chairs, Opera	88
1.11 Robert Wilson. Mother	94
Robert Wilson Artist	
1.12 Es Devlin. Library of Light	100
Es Devlin Artist and Designer	
1.13 Paolo Sorrentino. La dolce attesa	106
Paolo Sorrentino Filmmaker	
1.14 Pierre-Yves Rochon. Villa Héritage	112
Pierre-Yves Rochon Founder and Global Design Director, PYR	
1.15 Drafting Futures. Conversations about Next Perspectives	118
1.16 The Euroluce International Lighting Forum	122
Carlo Urbinati President, Assoluce of FederlegnoArredo	

2 Milan Design Week 2025

- 2.1 Milano, Capital of design 132
Alessia Cappello
Councillor for Economic Development and Labour Policies,
with responsibility for Fashion and Design, Municipality of Milan
- 2.2 Milan Design Week 2025. Map 134
- 2.3 An inside view of Milan Design Week 136
Annibale D'Elia
Director of Urban Economy, Fashion and Design, Municipality of Milan
- 2.4 City in motion 140
Curated by Fastweb+Vodafone with the support of Motion Analytica
- 2.5 Fieldwork observation 152
Filippo Parolini
Researcher, Politecnico di Milano
- 2.6 The paradox of showing 170
Stefano Maffei
Full Professor, Politecnico di Milano
Francesco Zurlo
Full Professor, Politecnico di Milano

3 Milan Design System

- 3.1 Invisible infrastructure. Territorial competitiveness and the Milan Design System 178
Stefano Maffei
Full Professor, Politecnico di Milano
Francesco Zurlo
Full Professor, Politecnico di Milano
- 3.2 An updated mapping of the Milan Design System 184
Massimo Bianchini
Associate Professor, Politecnico di Milano

4 Design culture production in Milan

- 4.1 Enduring experiment. Design and the City of Milan 200
Tommaso Sacchi
Councillor for Culture, Municipality of Milan
- 4.2 Design culture: a history of encounters 202
Giampiero Bosoni
Full Professor, Politecnico di Milano
- 4.3 Capital and cultural production and the renewal of the Milan Design Ecosystem 208
Stefano Maffei
Full Professor, Politecnico di Milano
Francesco Zurlo
Full Professor, Politecnico di Milano
- 4.4 Design culture production: numbers and locations 214
Massimo Bianchini
Associate Professor, Politecnico di Milano

5 Salone del Mobile.Milano and Design Week: local impact

- 5.1 Salone del Mobile.Milano: a driving force for the international appeal of Lombardy 226
Debora Massari
Councillor for Tourism, Territorial Marketing and Fashion, Lombardy Region
- 5.2 City, impact, transition 228
Stefano Maffei
Full Professor, Politecnico di Milano
Francesco Zurlo
Full Professor, Politecnico di Milano

5.3	Methodological notes	232
	Francesco Leoni Researcher, Politecnico di Milano	
	Massimo Bianchini Associate Professor, Politecnico di Milano	
5.4	Air and train passengers	236
	Francesco Leoni Researcher, Politecnico di Milano	
5.5	Hospitality: supply and demand	244
	Francesco Leoni Researcher, Politecnico di Milano	
5.6	Economic impact	252
	Francesco Leoni Researcher, Politecnico di Milano	
5.7	Analysis of digital spending and OTA rates	256
	Curated by Regional Observatory of Tourism and Attractiveness of the Lombardy Region	
5.8	Urban mobility	262
	Francesco Leoni Researcher, Politecnico di Milano	
5.9	Public safety	268
	Francesco Leoni Researcher, Politecnico di Milano	
5.10	Circularity	270
	Francesco Leoni Researcher, Politecnico di Milano	
5.11	A journey to map impact: from global to local	272
	Francesco Leoni Researcher, Politecnico di Milano	
	Massimo Bianchini Associate Professor, Politecnico di Milano	

6 Made in Italy Wood-furnishing supply chain

6.1	FederlegnoArredo and Salone del Mobile.Milano chart the course. The role of industry bodies and trade fairs in driving the competitiveness of Italian design	276
	Claudio Feltrin President, FederlegnoArredo	
6.2	FederlegnoArredo. Financial statements 2024	278
	Curated by Centro Studi FederlegnoArredo	

7 Conclusions

7.1	A complex and dynamic journey involving the whole city	286
	Stefano Maffei Full Professor, Politecnico di Milano	
	Francesco Zurlo Full Professor, Politecnico di Milano	
7.2	The Salone as a model for observation	290
	Susanna Legrenzi Press & Communication Strategy Advisor, Salone del Mobile.Milano	

Appendix

Working Tables

Milan Design (Eco) System

Design Culture @Milano

Present and future of design's cultural production in Milan

Table 1	Cultural policies and governance of design culture Chiara Rostagno Deputy Director, Pinacoteca di Brera	294
Table 2	Milan in the global landscape of design cultures Marco Sammiceli Curator of Design, Fashion, Crafts Sector at Triennale Milano and Director of Museo del Design Italiano	296
Table 3	Spaces and infrastructures for design culture Isabella Inti Founder Temporiuso.org Co-director M-US-T Master Temporary Uses, Politecnico di Milano	298
Table 4	Design culture for and of sustainability Domenico Sturabotti Director, Fondazione Symbola	300
Table 5	New generations, alternative cultures and emerging practices Angela Rui Curator, Researcher, Head of Master of Arts, IED Milan	302
Table 6	The role of education and research in promoting design culture Stefano Micelli Full Professor, Università Ca' Foscari Venezia	304
Table 7	New narratives and the communication of design culture Walter Mariotti Editorial Director, Domus	306

Table 8	Culture as an asset for design-intensive creative industries Annibale D'Elia Director of Urban Economy, Fashion and Design, City of Milan	308
Table 9	The audiences of design: behaviour and new forms of engagement Andrea Rurale Director, Intensive Program in Art Markets and Finance, Università Luigi Bocconi	310
Table 10	Innovation networks among territorial ecosystems and design culture Luciano Galimberti President, ADI	312

Bibliography	314
--------------	-----

Acknowledgements	316
------------------	-----



Figures

Chapter 1

Salone del Mobile.Milano

Salone del Mobile.Milano. Figures pp. 56 – 71

- 1.1 Net Exhibition Area Occupied
- 1.2 Exhibitors Salone del Mobile.Milano
- 1.3 Italian and Foreign Exhibitors
- 1.4 Exhibitors – Countries of Origin
- 1.5 Visitor Attendance
- 1.6 Professionals – Countries of Origin
- 1.7 Press & Media – Countries of Origin
- 1.8 Visitor Attendance from Neighbouring Areas
- 1.9 Exhibition Contractors and Workers
- 1.10 Safety Indicators
- 1.11 CAM Events
- 1.12 Energy
- 1.13 Waste (kg/m²)
- 1.14 Differentiated and undifferentiated waste
- 1.15 Waste Transport Distance to Treatment Facilities (km/m²)
- 1.16 Public Transport
- 1.17 Types of Public or Collective Transport
- 1.18 Private Transport
- 1.19 Private Cars
- 1.20 Fiera Milano, Rho Entrances
- 1.21 Services for Inclusive Access
- 1.22 Online Ticket Sales
- 1.23 Digital Services
- 1.24 Catering
- 1.25 Press & Media
- 1.26 Key Performance Indicators

Vision Project 2025 pp. 72 – 77

- 1.27 Brand Reputation – Brand Recognition
- 1.28 Target Audience
- 1.29 Overall Satisfaction
- 1.30 Intention to Return
- 1.31 Community

Chapter 2

The Milan Design Week 2025

An inside view of Milan Design Week pp. 136 – 139

- 2.1 Initiatives Included in the Official Programme
- 2.2 Total Number of Events and Appointments
- 2.3 Event Quality (Rating good or very good)

City in motion pp. 140 – 151

- 2.4 Map of Italian and foreign SIMs – Design Week 2025 (7–13 April 2025) and % variation vs. previous week. Mobile network data by Local Identity Nucleus (NIL)
- 2.5 Maps of Italian and foreign SIMs – Design Week 2025 areas of interest (8–13 April 2025). Mobile network data by Local Identity Nucleus (NIL) and Areas of Interest (Aoi)
- 2.6 Points of Interest – Design Week 2025. Mobile network data by Areas of Interest (Aoi)
- 2.7 Co-visitation between Districts and Events – Design Week 2025. Mobile network data on mobility flows

Fieldwork observation pp. 152 – 169

- 2.8 Distribution of events by NILs
- 2.9 Mapped and observed events
- 2.10 Collective events
- 2.11 Individual and collective events
- 2.12 Type and use of locations
- 2.13 Special openings by location type
- 2.14 Organising entities of the events
- 2.15 Thematic variations across Districts
- 2.16 Content of the events in the Districts
- 2.17 Types of exhibition and space sharing arrangements
- 2.18 Types of communication artefacts
- 2.19 Temporary and permanent services and urban furnishings

Chapter 3

Milan Design System

An updated mapping of the Milan Design Ecosystem pp. 184 – 197

- 3.1 Design Professions System: companies in the design sector (Design Core) operating in Milan and its province
- 3.2 Design Professions System: companies dedicated to specialised design activities (Design Core) in Milan and its province and their employees
- 3.3 Design Professions System: historical trend of enterprises dedicated to specialized design activities (Design Core) in Milan and its province, 2009–2024 series
- 3.4 Design Professions System: enterprises dedicated to specialized design activities (Design Core), women, young people and foreigners-run, in Milan and its province with their employees
- 3.5 Design Professions System: territorial distribution of enterprises dedicated to specialized design activities (Design Core) in Milan and its province
- 3.6 Design Distribution System: territorial density of enterprises involved in the sale of design products in Milan and its province

- 3.7 Design Education System: students enrolled in universities and AFAM institutes in Milan and its province
- 3.8 Design Education System: graduates and diploma holders from universities and AFAM institutes in Milan and its province

Chapter 4

Design culture production in Milan

Design culture production: numbers and locations pp. 214 – 223

- 4.1 Design Cultural Producers in Milan
- 4.2 Design Cultural Producers in Milan: Archives

Chapter 5

Salone del Mobile.Milano and Design Week: local impact

Methodological notes pp. 232 – 235

- 5.1 Impact dimensions analysed through the visitor journey, with related datasets and data holders

Air and train passengers pp. 236 – 243

- 5.2 Air passengers (departures and arrivals, commercial aviation)
- 5.3 Air passengers (departures and arrivals, general aviation)
- 5.4 Rail Passengers (Week Comparison)
- 5.5 Rail Passengers (Day Comparison)

Hospitality: supply and demand pp. 244 – 251

- 5.6 Accommodation facilities in the provinces of Lombardy
- 5.7 Accommodation capacity in the Municipality of Milan
- 5.8 Registrations in the accommodation facilities of Milan and its province
- 5.9 Daily overnight stays in the accommodation facilities of the Municipality of Milan
- 5.10 Daily overnight stays in the accommodation facilities of the province of Milan

Economic impact pp. 252 – 255

- 5.11 Estimated total tourist expenditure for Design Week 2023, 2024 and 2025 (in millions of euros)
- 5.12 Estimated tourist expenditure during Design Week 2024 and 2025 (in millions of euros), by Italians and foreigners

Analysis of digital spending and OTA rates pp. 256 – 261

- 5.13 Daily spending volumes in Milan (31 March – 20 April 2025)
- 5.14 Geographic origin of spending volumes during Salone del Mobile.Milano 2025
- 5.15 Weekly spending volumes in Milan (April 20204 – May 2025)
- 5.16 Most relevant product categories by spending volumes during Salone del Mobile.Milano 2025
- 5.17 Hotel rates during Salone del Mobile.Milano 2025 and change compared to same week in April 2024
- 5.18 Houses or apartments rates during Salone del Mobile.Milano 2025 and change compared to same week in April 2024

Urban mobility pp. 262 – 267

- 5.19 Accesses to Milan Underground (all lines, M1)
- 5.20 Shared mobility services
- 5.21 Vehicle entries in Area B and Area C (Limited Traffic Zones)

Chapter 6

Made in Italy Wood-Furnishing Supply Chain

FederlegnoArredo – Financial statements 2024 pp. 278 – 283

- 6.1 Wood-Furnishing Supply Chain
- 6.2 Macrosystems
- 6.3 Production Turnover
- 6.4 Export Performance
- 6.5 Top 10 Export Countries
- 6.6 Export % by Country

Invisible infrastructure. Territorial competitiveness and the Milan Design System

Stefano Maffei

Full Professor, Politecnico di Milano

Francesco Zurlo

Full Professor, Politecnico di Milano

3.1

Ferruccio Resta has pointed out that ‘...territorial competitiveness does not depend exclusively on the volume of investment or the degree of technological development, but also on the density of interactions, the solidity of relations and the maturity of the collaborative architecture that constitute the invisible infrastructure...’ (Resta, *35° Rapporto Milano Produttiva 2025*, Chamber of Commerce of Milan, Monza, Brianza and Lodi, 2025, p. 189).¹ Such a perspective implies a systemic reading of the territory and economy, in line with the relational innovation and cultural clusters approach (Cooke, 2008). Milan offers confirmation of this model: the creative ecosystem is determined not so much by the amount of investment as by the capacity for networking, reciprocal trust and collaborative culture.

The ability of a given territory to attract and generate value does not just depend, then, on physical infrastructure or economic incentives, but on a dense web of social, cultural and professional connections that produce relational and cognitive capital. One of the principles that guides self-organisations, and which we highlighted in our interpretative reading of the 2024 Report (Salone del Mobile.Milano & Politecnico di Milano, 2024), is the *small-world* effect (ibidem, p. 110), which today, using a recurrent term, we might call the *hub-and-spoke* structure, where nodes in an ecosystem are firmly connected to each other at a local level and, in turn, are connected to other design nodes at an international level. The tension between the physical-material dimension of territories and their capacity to generate knowledge constitutes the relationship between the development of the *creative class* and the socioeconomic growth of urban ecosystems (Landry, 2000). As Scott (2014) and Howkins (2013) show, creativity emerges in contexts where the density of interaction is high, where innovators, artists, designers, teachers and entrepreneurs meet in both formal and informal places. Tarrus (1993) speaks of *circulatory territories of knowledge*. He is referring not merely to the geographical dimension, but to the spaces of interaction, exchange and learning where information and ideas circulate, are shared and renewed. In this process, knowledge is not just transmitted; it is enriched and it evolves through the active participation of individuals and groups. Le Moigne (1990) has analysed how complex systems emerge from dynamic interactions and self-organisation, concepts which are applicable to the study of territories characterised by continuous flows and transformations. It is effectively Resta’s *invisible infrastructure*: a combination of networks, trust and collective imaginations that transforms human capital into territorial capital. However, the creative class does not operate in a vacuum: its impact is proportional to the quality of the territorial ecosystem. Scott (2014) has pointed out that a concentration of human capital does not suffice on its own. What makes a *cultural cluster* vital (Bassett, 2002) is the intensity of relationships, access to networks of experimentation and the ability to translate tacit knowledge into diffuse innovation.² Milan is a prime example. Its competitiveness derives not only from the volume of investment and the high degree of technology applied to manufacturing, but from the way the city has managed to build a *stratified creative ecosystem*, nurtured by informal networks, meeting spaces and a diffuse *project culture*. It is here that the *creative class* meets the *invisible infrastructure*: a dense network of trust and reciprocity that transforms human capital into territorial capital. But does this still hold true today?

CULTURAL INFRASTRUCTURE AS A LIVING SYSTEM

Design-related cultural innovation is not, therefore, linked just to an episodic event (Design Week). It is a full-blown, complex and *permanent* infrastructure articulated in two intertwining dimensions. One is *material*, relating to the presence of cultural production spaces, design studios and laboratories as well as educational and research institutions. The other is *immaterial* and is associated with a cultural

climate, shared values, a focus on getting things done, an entrepreneurial mindset, and the capacity for risk-taking and experimentation. This resource does not stem from top-down planning, but from incremental processes over time, in which different agents, including designers, businesses, universities, public institutions and cultural communities, build a capital of trust. Milan has developed this ecosystem of infrastructure in an organic way, nurtured by a long tradition of creative manufacturing that has succeeded in balancing an *ethos of getting things done* with critical reflection. Models such as Terry Irwin's *Transition Design* (Irwin, 2015) propose an approach to addressing complex social and environmental changes through systemic design. Central to this is the backcasting scenario framework, which starts by imagining desirable futures and then designs measures in the present. This method guides communities (and designers) in creating sustainable, resilient and socially and environmentally integrated solutions. *Collaborative Creativity* (Quint, 2024) approaches also highlight how design can support alignment between multiple stakeholders and a range of complex social, economic and environmental transformations. They reveal the discipline's capacity to forge a shared understanding of problems, to drive collective *agency*, and to orchestrate innovation across organisational and sensory boundaries.

This infrastructure has emerged from the bottom up, favoured by several cultural conditions:

1. *Openness to experimentation*: the city has historically demonstrated a propensity to welcome experimental and exploratory practices, both on the part of companies and designers, and on that of the public, who have shown a willingness to embrace novelty. However, there is currently the risk of creative processes being *managerialised* in response to short-term metrics, or what we might describe as *the curse of the KPI – key performance indicator* (Evans, 2009).
2. *The emancipating ethos of getting things done*: following Maldonado's distinction between the structural and the superstructural dimension, Milan has promoted a *design culture* rooted in an ethos of getting things done, capable of generating social transformations through design practice (Maldonado, 1970).
3. *Attractiveness for capital and talent*: the city has successfully attracted investment and human capital, becoming a hub of cognitive migration both nationally and internationally (Florida, 2019).
4. *Tolerance and diversity*: a progressive orientation and cultural openness have fostered the combining of different forms of knowledge, a key element in social and cultural innovation (Scott, 2014).

Milan's creative infrastructure is currently at the centre of profound transformations due to four key factors: *sustainability and social justice, pressure towards sustainability, the digitisation of creative processes and increasing global interconnectedness*. These transition phenomena highlight both the potential and the fragility of the model. The digital challenge requires the integration of advanced technological skills within traditional *making practices*, without losing authenticity or the territorial roots that have made Milan such a unique ecosystem. At the same time, the urgency of environmental and social criteria is transforming aesthetic innovation into responsible innovation, with a demand for cultural infrastructure to incorporate deep sustainability dimensions (Manzini, 2015). In addition to these dynamics there is a need for systemic collaboration: the inability to aggregate different actors to generate critical mass in the face of complex changes creates the risk of weakening the overall resilience of the system, as underlined by recent reflections on creative cities and their ability to deal with shocks and transitions. An urban cultural infrastructure does not merely include institutional spaces or large-scale infrastructural investments: it is a fabric of social relations, informal

creativity and collaborative networks that is built from the bottom up. *CheFare*, an organisation founded in 2012, is a paradigmatic example of a social and cultural innovation platform, collaborating with communities, cultural and social organisations, public bodies and institutions to develop projects that promote culture as an instrument of social change. During Milan Design Week 2025, *CheFare* coordinated, together with the *Nieuwe Instituut*, the design of a *CIVICITY*, a design residency-intervention to rethink the social and environmental impact of design events on the host cities. It resulted in a research publication, *Da Spettacolo a Sostanza. Civicity come approccio* (From Spectacle to Substance. Civicity as an Approach) (cheFare, 2025), which expresses the idea that cultural resilience does not depend just on financial capacities, but on inclusive processes of urban activation. In her book *The Creative City Does Not Exist*, Marianna d'Ovidio critiques the romantic idea of the *creative city* as an automatic model of urban development. She argues that '...the promotion of urban growth through the use of culture is achieved with high social costs...', including tensions between populations, the displacement of artists and the disadvantaged, and an increase in real estate prices. Circuits of capital, she continues, shape the urban landscape, and they do so by interacting with and exploiting cultural circuits (d'Ovidio, 2016, p. 142). This shows the tension between policies for the creative economy and the need to govern spontaneous processes of social innovation processes in order to avoid *gentrification and marginalisation*. Other observers, including Sharon Zukin (2020), warn of the fragility of creative economies when they become detached from local needs and social goals. Pratt (2015) speaks of *cultural intermediaries* as network platforms that are essential for the functioning of creative ecosystems: '...Successful cultural production, and sustainable cultural production, relies upon the establishment of resilient intermediaries to bring the necessary agents together: cultural production is an ensemble work...' (Pratt, 2015, p. 63). In settings such as creative Milan, these reflections acquire concrete form in the distributed functioning of urban activation: informal hubs, communities of creative enterprises, independent festivals and designer networks make up an *invisible or quasi-visible* infrastructure of symbolic and social capital, which fuels culture and innovation. The *cheFare* experience shows that creating a network of emerging subjects can produce collective knowledge, visibility and new ways of inhabiting urban space, without depending exclusively on institutional budgets. The result is a more resilient and adaptive urban fabric, capable of improvising, experimenting and regenerating even in the event of external shocks or crises.

GOVERNANCE AND THE PACT BETWEEN STAKEHOLDERS

As discussed in Section 2.6, it is necessary to envision a *pact among stakeholders*, brands, public institutions, local communities and cultural operators to redistribute costs and benefits and to collectively manage this *cultural infrastructure as a common good*. The change in big cultural production systems, such as design and high-impact manifestations such as Design Week, can be imagined by creating a *transition arena* that promotes experimentation, co-creation and adaptive capacity: '...*Transition arena* is a setting that provides an informal but well-structured space for a group of change agents to critically reflect on the status quo and develop alternative ideas, practices and relations. Participants from diverse backgrounds (businesses, government, research institutes, citizens) engage in a series of meetings to jointly develop a shared visionary story, which they can link to their everyday practice. The arena outputs guide the search for strategies to transform existing structures, cultures, and practices, as well as to realise new projects, collaborations, and experiments...' (Roorda *et al.*, 2014, p.46). The construction of this arena can provide an informal and well-structured space where a group of change agents from different spheres (businesses, government,

research institutes, NGOs and citizens) can jointly articulate a transition challenge, draw up a long-term vision and develop transition pathways to realise a vision. It will probably be necessary to move away from an oversimplistic and exclusively *bottom-up* logic, establishing a *pact* for a *common good* that helps to drive the growth of cultural and social capital in an equitable manner, where the bottom-up drive of communities and emerging actors is integrated with the top-down ability of institutions and brands to guarantee resources, continuity and strategic vision. Only a hybrid governance, capable of balancing self-organised processes and institutional frameworks, can boost urban resilience and reduce the risks of appropriation or marginalisation. The *transition arena* thus becomes a place to experiment with co-creation and backcasting, translating desirable futures into shared practices and concrete projects. This pact is not just about redistributing resources, but also aims to build mutual trust and widespread responsibility, transforming culture into civic infrastructure. In this sense, design can act as a mediator between plural interests and the common good, making the invisible of the creative city visible.

¹ The 35° *Rapporto Milano Produttiva 2025* was produced by *Servizio Studi, Statistica e Programmazione della Camera di commercio di Milano Monza Brianza Lodi* (Research, Statistics, and Planning Office of the Milan Monza Brianza Lodi Chamber of Commerce). This Report provides an analysis of the economic, entrepreneurial, and innovative fabric of the Milan area.

² A *cultural cluster* is a geographically concentrated group of cultural and creative activities that interact with each other and with the surrounding area, generating synergies and innovation. These clusters promote economic growth, social cohesion, and the enhancement of local cultural heritage.