

Milan

Design

(Eco)

System

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Milan Design (Eco) System

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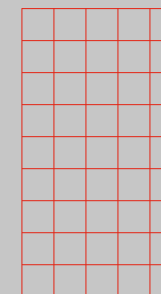
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Exhibitors and Events: Field Research, Analysis and Evidence

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During the Design Week 2024, the research group of the Department of Design of the Politecnico di Milano, in collaboration with its School of Design, conducted two research activities, a survey and a field observation, to explore the offering of events in the city.

For the survey the Politecnico research group received support from the communication design agency Studiolabo, which distributed the survey to the subscribers of Fuorisalone.it and integrated their standard form for event organizers with additional in-depth questions related to the research objectives. In parallel, to engage with an even wider sample of respondents, Politecnico di Milano also made the questions available through a Google Forms survey, that was then distributed to relevant subjects with the support of the Municipality of Milan¹.

The survey's questions were divided into six main sections, focused on collecting the following information:

1. Role of respondent;
2. The event for which the survey was filled out;
3. Event location;
4. Sustainability of the exhibition;
5. Management of the event and related services;
6. General information about the exhibitor.

The survey collected 260 valid responses corresponding to 260 events (about 19.9% of the total number of 1,326 events recorded by the Municipality of Milan - [Figure 3.1, p. 120](#)), respectively divided in 211 received through the Fuorisalone.it platform, and 49 via the survey distributed by the Politecnico through Google Forms.

This desk-based research was followed by field-research work curated by the School of Design – Politecnico di Milano, which involved Design and Architecture students through an extracurricular educational activity known as Passion in Action (PiA). Students were entrusted with conducting guided on-site observations of the Design Week's events and exhibitions, focusing primarily on sustainability and accessibility. The obser-

vations were guided by a shared protocol distributed to all 110 students enrolled in the PiA, which they could complete through a support tool online². Seventeen student teams were formed and assigned to the different Design Week's areas. Each team, coordinated by a team leader and supervised by Politecnico di Milano team researchers, received a list of 'target' exhibitions to investigate. Additionally, a second group of about 30 students enrolled in another PiA project, developed in collaboration with INTERNI Magazine, covered an additional set of events. The observation protocol (available in both Italian and English) included forty questions across four main sections covering the following points:

1. The student conducting the observation;
2. The event;
3. The exhibition;
4. The services related to the event.

This study examined a total of 468 events (about 35% of the 1,326 events officially recorded) through 530 individual observations³.

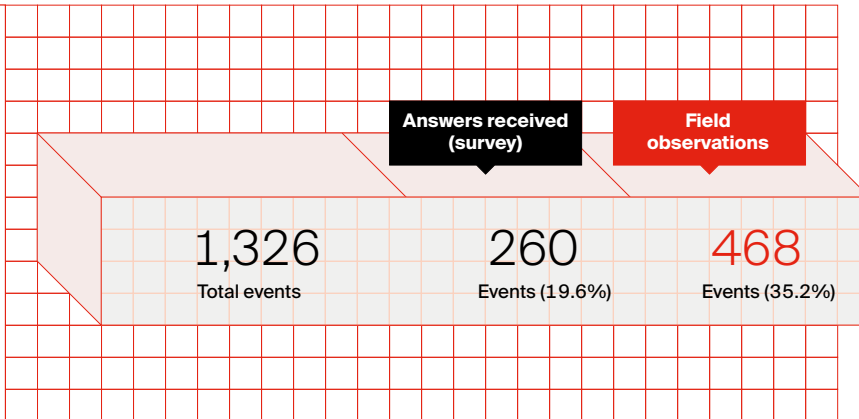
Although not statistically representative, the sample ([Figure 3.1, p. 120](#)) gathered from the survey responses and field observations is quantitatively significant and may be regarded as a meaningful first exploratory investigation.

The main results from this research are presented in the following pages. Since the survey and observation protocol investigated partially overlapping aspects, we opted for using survey data to specifically describe the events' organizational and logistical aspects, while observation data were used to derive information on those aspects directly observable as the event was taking place.

Students participating in the PiA were asked to check whether the 468 events were featured in the guides available online⁴. Their responses indicated Fuorisalone.it as the one portal listing

3.1 Design Week 2024 events sample

Distribution of the Design Week 2024 events sample across the two data collection methods adopted in the research.



the majority of the observed events (475 responses on 530). The student also pointed to YesMilano's (210 events observed) and the INTERNI's guide (168) as equally relevant for listing events and installations taking place in the city's central locations, as well as the main highlights of the other available events. The observations also mentioned popular guides among design and architecture professionals, such as Dezeen.com (60), Design Diffusion (DDN) (30), Archiproducts, Zero, and others.

Concerning the type of event organizer⁵ (Figure 3.2), we considered only the 328 responses by the 260 survey respondents, which appear more reliable in describing this particular aspect, as they are provided directly by the organizers. Responses indicated that the majority of events were organized by companies (164 responses; 50%), followed by design studios (49; 14.9%); creative collectives (32; 9.8%); architectural firms (24; 7.3%). This Cultural institutions are only 11. The multi-choice question showed us that 21 out of 164 companies co-organized an event with a design studio; and 13 out of 164 with an architectural firm.

3.2 Organiser types

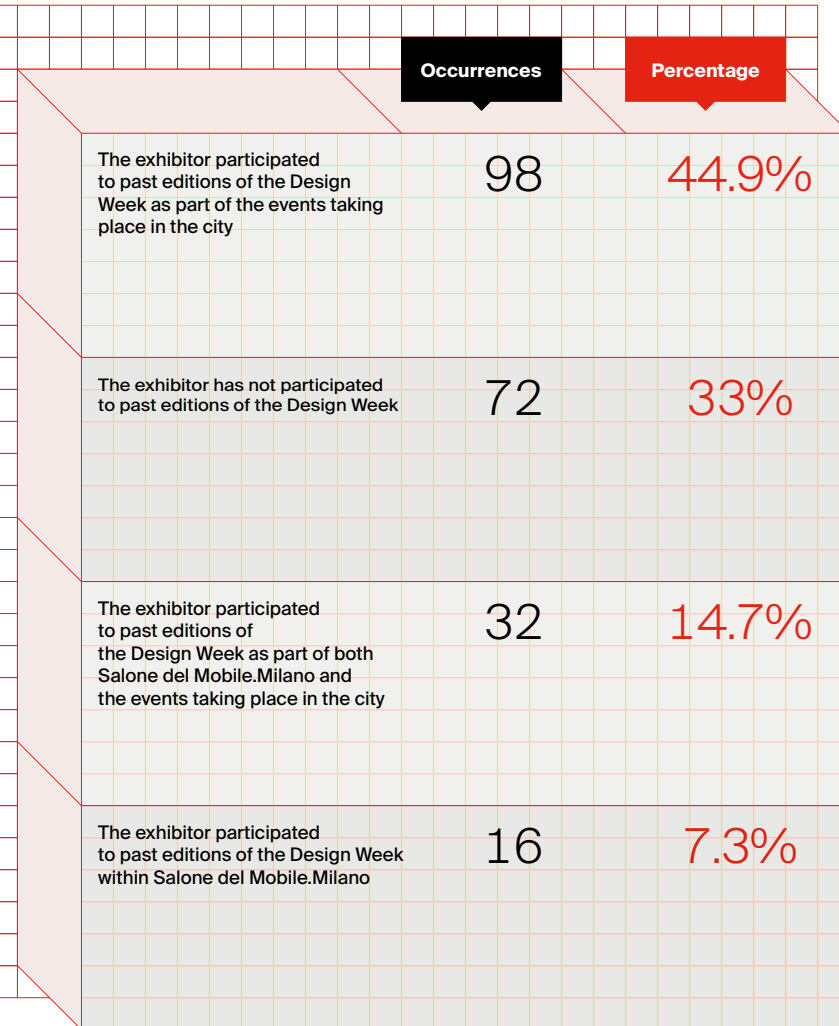
Type of events organiser for the Design Week 2024. Total respondents: 260. Percentages calculated on the total of valid responses (328) to multi-choice questions. Source: survey.

	Value	Percentage
Company	164	50%
Design studio	49	14.9%
Creative collective	32	9.8%
Architectural firm	24	7.3%
Cultural institution	11	3.4%
University	5	1.5%
Government organisation	5	1.5%
Other	38	11.6%

The survey also explored whether the event organizer had participated in past editions of Design Week⁶ (Figure 3.3, p. 122). The 218 responses received indicated that most organizers had already participated in one of the following ways: as part of the events taking place in the city (44.9%), as part of both Salone del Mobile.Milano and the events taking place in the city (14.7%), or only within Salone del Mobile.Milano (7.3%). Of the 218 valid responses, 72 events declared they participated in Design Week 2024 for the first time. This data suggests an expansion of the Design Week and a change of its proposal.

3.3 Participation in past editions of the Design Week

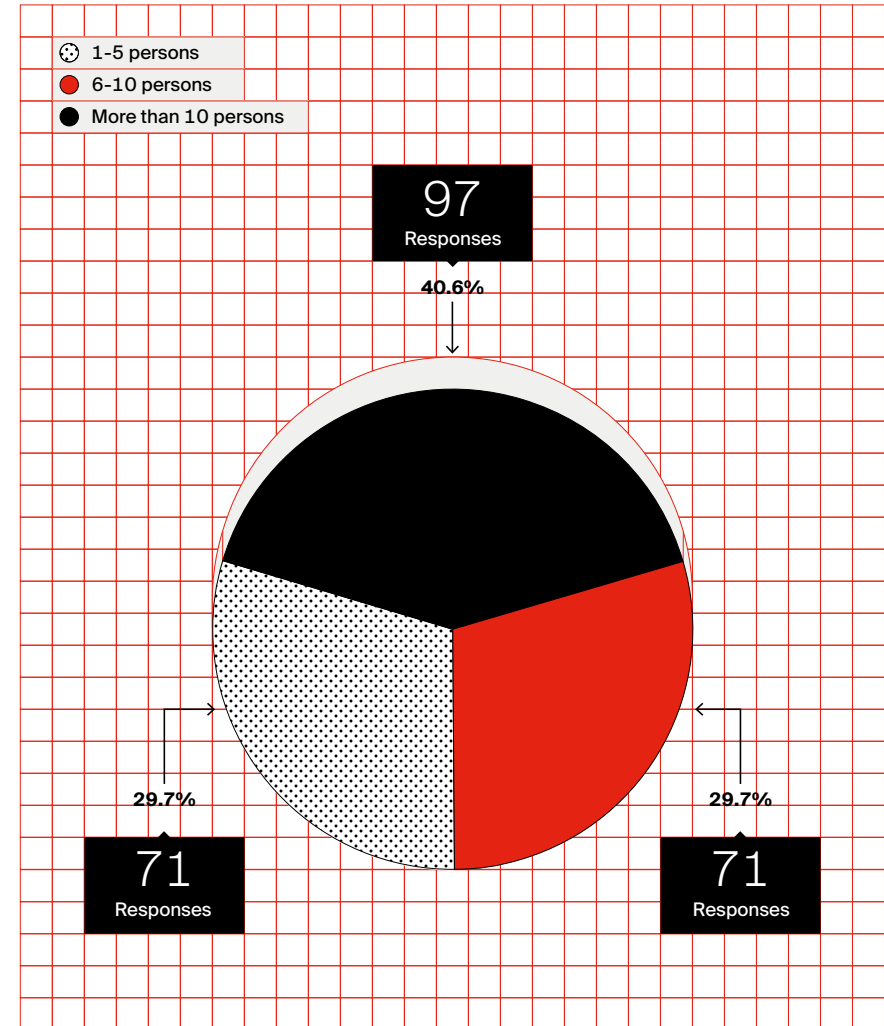
Organisers stating that they have taken part in past editions of the Design Week, divided for modality of participation (within Salone del Mobile. Milano and/ or events in the city). Total respondents: 260. Percentages calculated on the total number of valid responses (218). Null responses excluded: 24. Source: survey.



Respondents were then asked to estimate the number of people involved in the event's execution⁷ (Figure 3.4), considering all its phases, from design to exhibition setup, management, and disassembly. The 239 responses considered show the sample divided between events that involved less than ten people in the execution (specifically from 1 to 5 people: 29.7% and from 6 to 10 people: 29.7%), and those that involved more than ten people (40.6%). Data suggest that the number of people involved in the event realization had been directly proportional to the size of the exhibition space.

3.4 People involved in the realisation of the events

Number of people involved in the realisation of events during the Design Week 2024. Total respondents: 260. Percentages calculated on the total number of valid responses (239). Null responses excluded: 5. Source: survey.

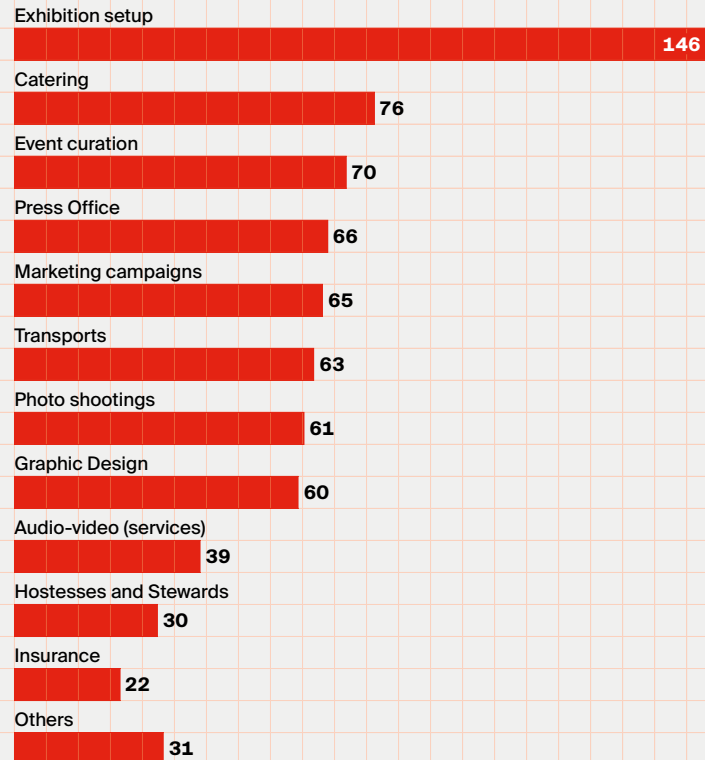


The survey further revealed that exhibitors primarily used external services for catering (85 responses), press office (81), exhibition setup and disassembly (79)⁸. When asked about the main expenditures, excluding location rental and the exhibition setup, respondents identified the following expenditures as the highest in realizing the event⁹, exhibition design (146 responses), catering (76), event curation (70), press office (66), and marketing campaigns (65) (Figure 3.5, p. 124).

An extensive use of catering services confirms that the extended 'party' dimension associated with Design Week is an initiative characterised primarily – but no longer exclusively – by networking and communication purposes.

3.5 Expenditures

Main expenditures reported by organisers for the Design Week 2024, excluding costs for location rental and exhibition setup. Total respondents: 260. Calculated on the total number of valid responses (729) to multiple-choice questions. Null responses excluded: 49. **Source:** survey.



In terms of content displayed¹⁰, the surveyed exhibitions featured a great variety (Figure 3.6). Survey respondents indicated, in descending order, a prevalence of exhibitions featuring one-off pieces or limited editions (143 responses; 32.4%), mass-produced products (88; 19.9%), site-specific installations (88; 19.9%), and research projects (62; 14%). The analysis of responses, coming from questions with multiple options, suggests that very few respondents selected 'research projects' as the only option to describe their displayed content (7). At the same time, this category is often associated with others, such as one-off pieces or limited editions, mass-produced products, and site-specific installations.

3.6 Exhibitions content

Category of content proposed by the Design Week 2024 events. Total respondents: 260. Percentages calculated on the total number of valid responses (442) to multiple-choice questions. Null responses excluded: 5. **Source:** survey.

	Occurrences	Percentage
One-off or limited edition pieces	143	32.4%
Mass-produced products	88	19.9%
Site-specific installations	88	19.9%
Research projects	62	14%
Educational projects	21	4.8%
Other	40	9%

3.7 Events target audiences

Categories of audience for the Design Week 2024 events. Total respondents: 260. Percentages calculated on the total number of valid responses (883) to multiple-choice questions. **Source:** survey.

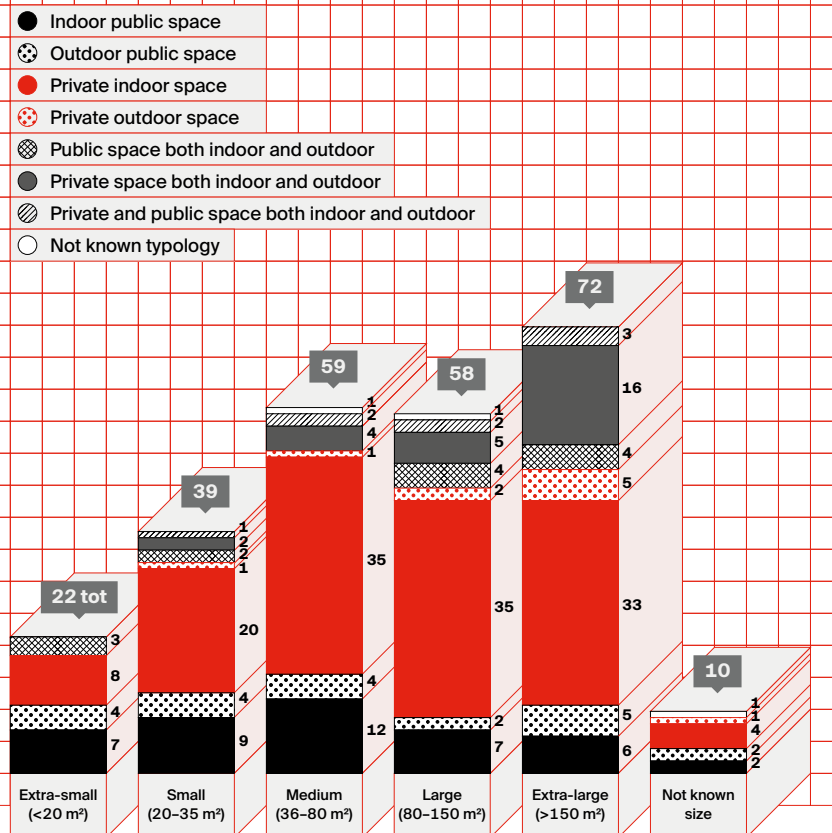
	Occurrences	Percentage
Architects and interior designers	197	22.3%
Design Lovers	172	19.5%
Journalists	146	16.5%
Buyers and retailers	132	14.9%
Contractors	88	10%
Students	85	9.6%
Others	63	7.1%

Survey data shows a wide variety of audiences targeted by organizers¹¹ (Figure 3.7). Architects and interior designers (197 responses; 22.3%) were indicated as the primary target category, followed by a general public audience, namely design lovers (172; 19.5%); journalists (146; 16.5%), and buyers and retailers (132; 14.9%) follow in the list. This data suggests that the events organized in the city are meant for a broad and equally divided audience.

Regarding the spatial dimension of exhibition locations (Figure 3.8), 'Extra-large spaces' (>150 m²) appear as the most common size reported in the sample (72; 27.7%), followed by 'Medium-sized spaces' (36-80 m²) (59; 22.7%) and 'Large-sized spaces' (80-150 m²) (58; 22.3%), which features similarly in the answers received. Only 39 events (15%) took place in 'Small-sized spaces' (20-35 m²)¹². Correspondence seems to exist between the reported space size and the type of location¹³. Events mostly took place in privately-owned indoor locations (135 responses), such as showrooms. Other events were organized in publicly owned indoor spaces (43) most of which fall within the Medium-sized range (between 36 and 80 m²) (12). Most survey respondents stated that the exhibition space had not been shared with other exhibitors (184; 70.8%) (Figure 3.9).

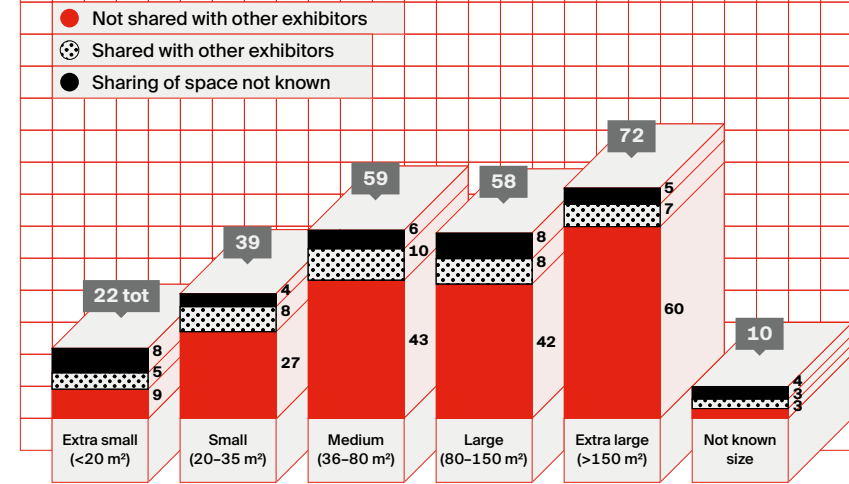
3.8 Size and typology of the exhibition spaces

Distribution of Design Week 2024 exhibitions by size of area occupied and typology of space. Total respondents: 260. Calculated on the total number of valid responses: 260. Source: survey.



3.9 Size and sharing modes of the exhibition spaces

Distribution of Design Week 2024 events by size of exhibition area occupied and space-sharing mode. Total respondents: 260. Calculated on the total number of valid responses: 260. Source: survey.

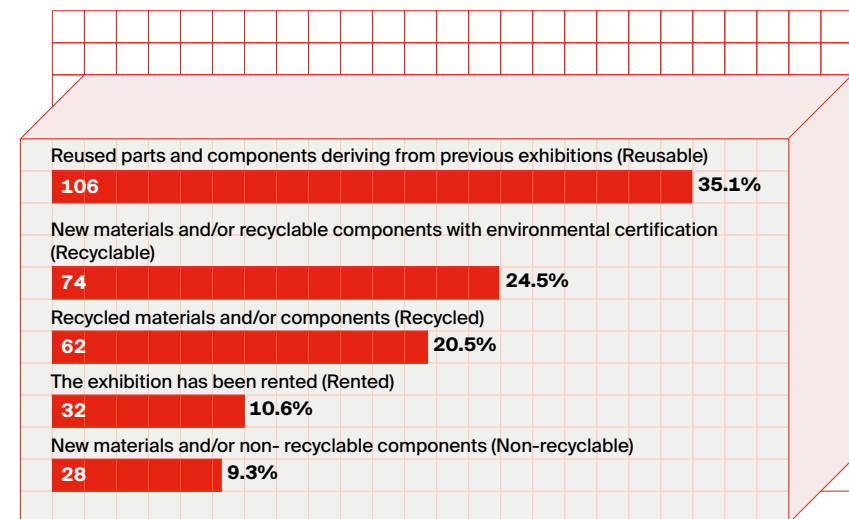


With regard to sustainability, the survey highlights a noticeable attention by organisers to the type of materials used for the exhibitions. Most respondents affirmed that the event exhibitions were constructed with reusable, recyclable and recycled components from previous exhibitions (Figure 3.10). Rented exhibitions were reported in 32 cases (10.6%). Only 9.3% reported the use of, non-recyclable materials and components (Non-recyclable Exhibitions)¹⁴.

This response appears confirmed by the fact that the vast majority of survey respondents indicated that the exhibitions would be completely (53.3%) or partially reused (28%); while an additional 14.2% stated that the exhibition would be either

3.10 Materials used for exhibitions

Distribution of Design Week 2024 events by type of materials employed for exhibitions. Total respondents: 260. Percentages calculated on the total number of valid responses (302) to multiple-choice questions. Null responses excluded: 62. Source: survey.

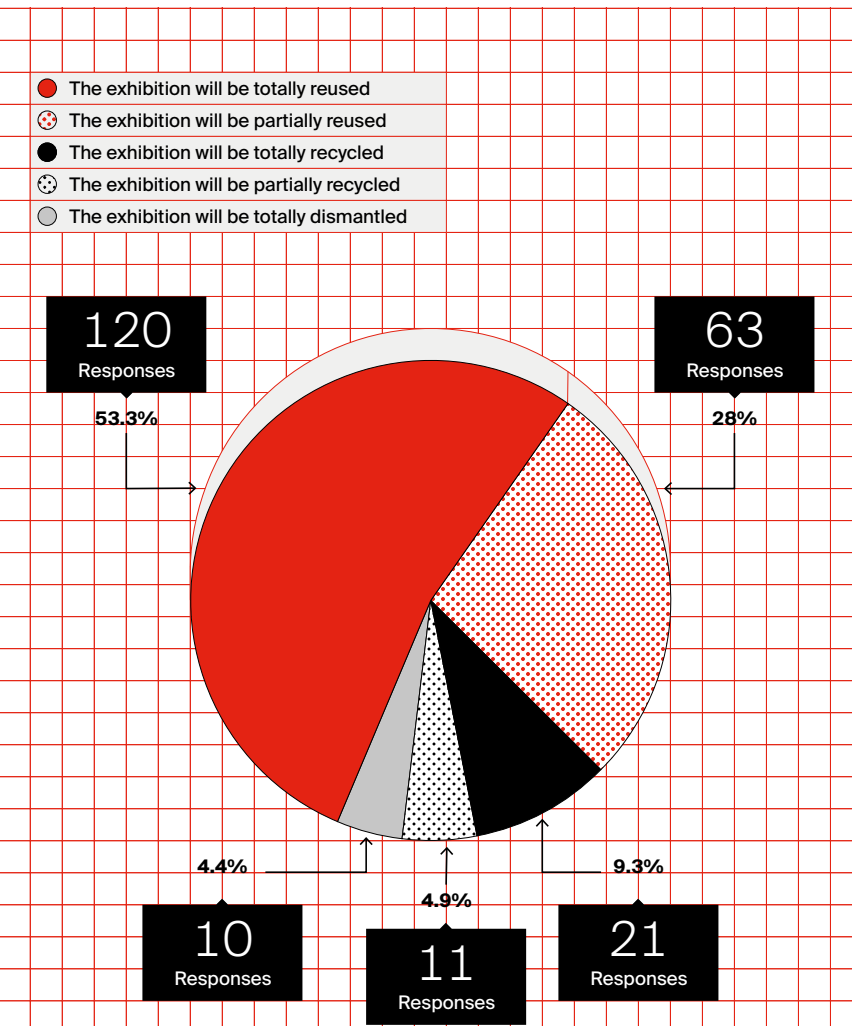


partially (4.9%) or completely recycled (9.3%). The low percentage of responses indicating that the exhibition would be entirely discarded (4.4%) is worth noticing as it demonstrates a commitment to environmental and economic sustainability among event organizers and the professionals involved.

When it comes to sustainability practices observed by the PiA students, limited or poorly communicated environmental awareness was noted within the exhibition contexts, even if not too low in terms of numbers (Figure 3.12). Firstly, students documented the presence of information material on sustainability

3.11 Exhibitions reuse and recycling

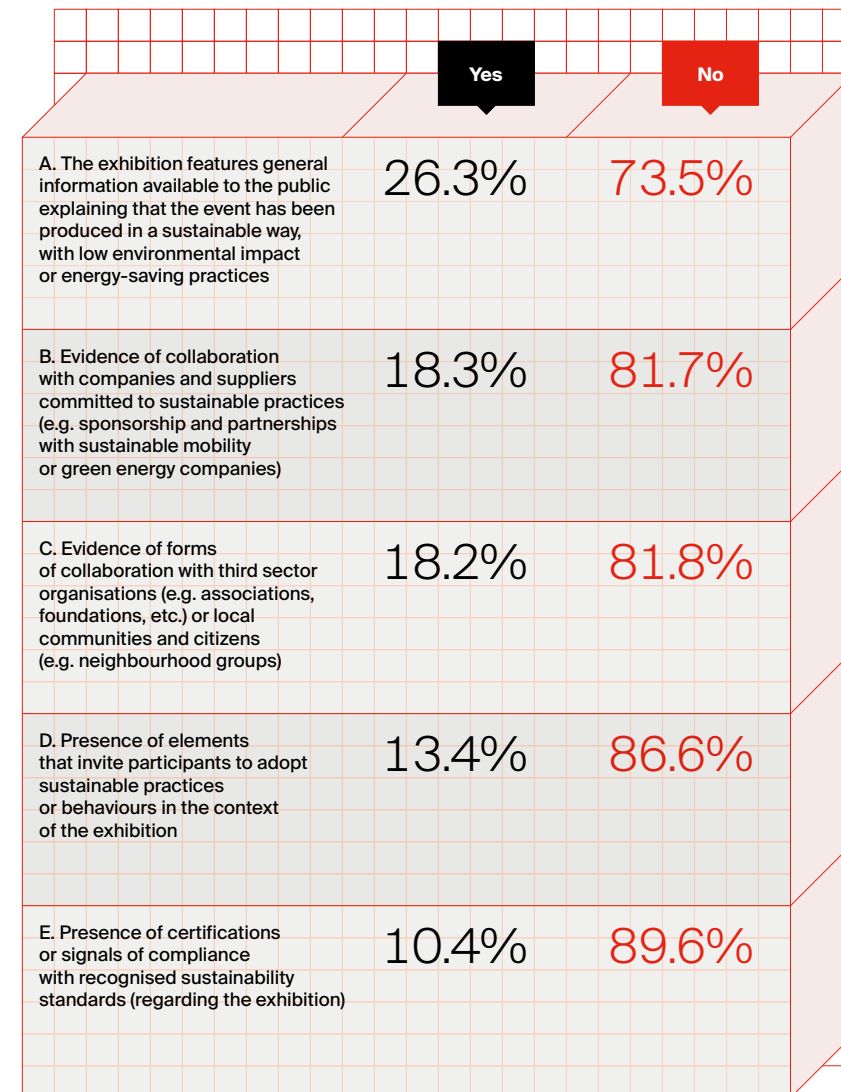
Distribution of Design Week 2024 events by after-use management mode (reuse, recycling, disposal). Total respondents: 260. Percentages calculated on the total number of valid responses (225). Null responses excluded: 35. Source: survey



practices adopted for realizing the event only for 26.5% of cases. The students also verified the presence of certifications or elements signalling compliance with sustainability standards within only 10.4% of observed exhibitions. Additionally, students were asked to verify whether the event explicitly encouraged its public to engage in sustainable practices or behaviour (13.4%). Environmental sustainability was also assessed in terms of collaboration with companies and suppliers committed to sustainable practices (18.3%). These types of collaboration aligned with the presence of events promoted in partnership with third sector organisations or local communities and citizens (18.2%); useful

3.12 Sustainability practices

Sustainability practices adopted and/or promoted within the context of the Design Week 2024 events. Percentages calculated on the total number of responses. Null responses excluded: Option A: 6; Option B: 10; Option C: 13; Option D: 8; Option E: 13. Source: observation.

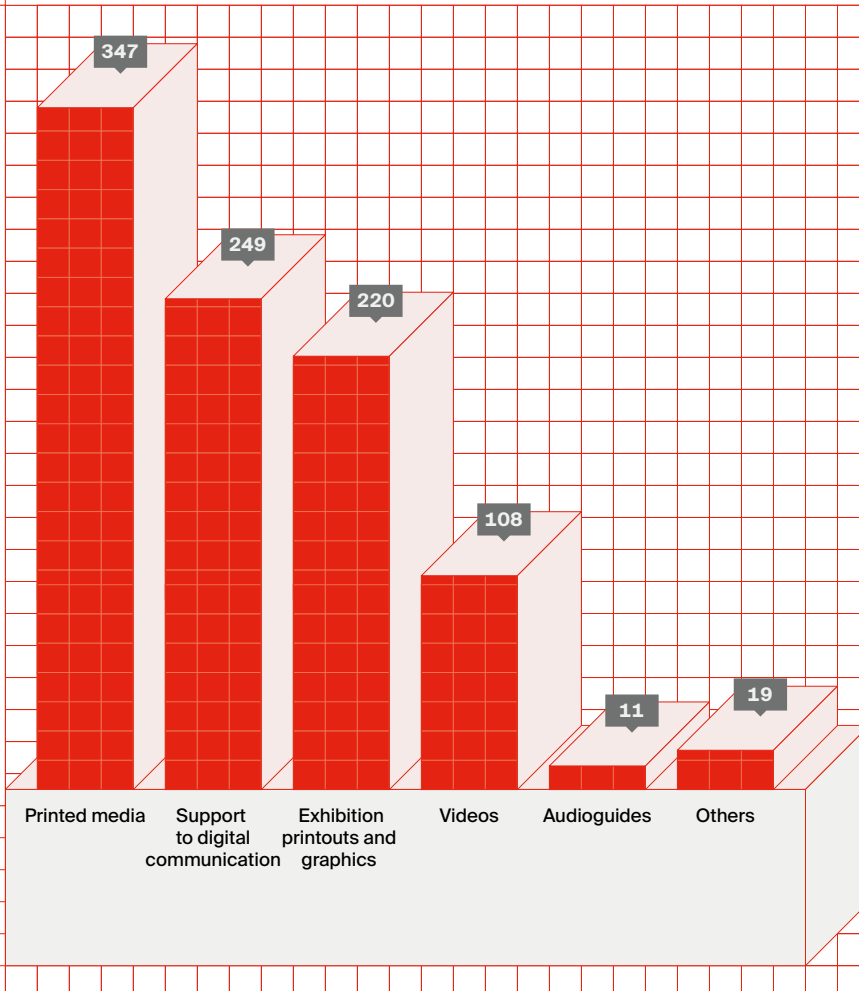


information that more precisely accounted for the social sustainability of these events and their connection with the city.

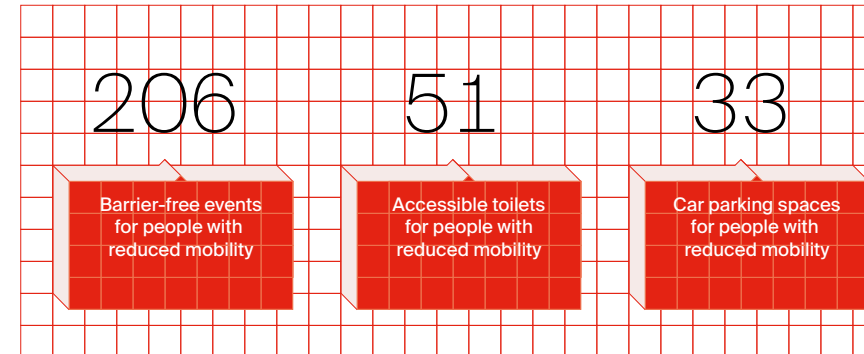
Regarding communication materials displayed within the event locations, the main types of media observed included traditional ones, for example various types of printed materials, like flyers or posters (347 responses); followed by digital communication supports, like 'QR codes', 'apps' (249) and exhibitions printouts and graphics (220) (Figure 3.13).

3.13 Communication materials

Types of communication material used for supplementary and promotional communication observed within the context of the events of the Design Week 2024. Total observations: 530. Total occurrences: 1010. Percentages calculated on the total number of valid responses (955) to multiple-choice questions. Null responses excluded: 57. Source: observation.



Field observations also allowed to inquire the events accessibility. Students observed that in the vast majority of cases, events were free and did not require advance booking or accreditation at the entrance (75.9% of observations). The event's inclusiveness was also verified by students observing that in many cases event entrances did not present barriers to people with reduced mobility (206). Accessible toilets for people with reduced mobility were observed in 51 cases, as well as reserved car parking spaces (33). (Figure 3.14).



3.14 Accessibility

Accessibility services and factors intended for people with reduced mobility and observed within the context of the Design Week 2024 events. Total observations: 530. Source: observation.

Milan Design (Eco) System is a research project promoted by the Salone del Mobile. Milano with the scientific oversight of the Politecnico di Milano. The focus of its research is a unique world phenomenon that has as its principal elements the Salone del Mobile. Milano and the city's Design Week, in connection with Milan Design System. This volume contains the data and interpretation of the results of the first phase of exploration of this great international event, which returns every year to transform Milan into a global metropolis. The objective: to inform the future of Milan, the Design Capital, by activating a permanent Observatory open to the city and for the city.

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