

# 15

Chiara E, Ingaramo M, Dell'Acqua Bellavitis A

(2024)

Wake Up!. Design matchmaking" between students and young companies of the "New Made in Italy""

In: Academic and Practitioner Proceedings of the 2024 UIIN Conference series: Challenges and solutions for fostering entrepreneurial universities and collaborative innovation. p. 243-257,

ISBN: 9789-491-901-669

Madrid, 27-29/05/2024



# Academic and Practitioner Proceedings of the 2024 UIIN Conference: Challenges and solutions for fostering entrepreneurial universities and collaborative innovation

2024 UIIN Conference, hosted on 27<sup>th</sup> - 29<sup>th</sup> May at Madrid, Spain

**Academic and Practitioner Proceedings of the 2024  
UIIN Conference series: Challenges and solutions for  
fostering entrepreneurial universities and collaborative  
innovation**

**2024 UIIN Conference**  
Madrid, Spain  
May 27<sup>th</sup> – 29<sup>th</sup>, 2024



Academic and Practitioner Proceedings of the 2024 UIIN Conference series:  
Challenges and solutions for fostering entrepreneurial universities and  
collaborative innovation

ISBN 9789-491-901-669

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED. This book contains material protected under International and Federal Copyright Laws and Treaties. Any unauthorized reprint or use of this material is prohibited. No part of this book may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, or by any information storage and retrieval system without express written permission from the author of the specific chapter.

# Table of Content

<i>Isobel Cunningham, Helen Shiels, Edel Griffin</i> ACCESS - Appraise Curriculum Content for Entrepreneurship in Secondary Schools.....	06
<i>Phil O’Leary, Ann Ledwith, Lucy Hearne</i> A grounded theory study of the values, beliefs, and assumptions in the recognition of prior learning.....	20
<i>David B. Cameron, Laura Slaughter, Nilla Karlsen-Davies</i> Building a broad-based collaborative partner programme in digital technologies: The dScience Partner Programme.....	36
<i>Jasna Pocek, Charlotte Lorentz Hjorth, Katarina Scott, Peter Kisch</i> Developing an open innovation culture in Lund’s innovation district.....	48
<i>Alberto Díaz, Juan Manuel Hernández, María José Herrero</i> Developing innovative ecosystems: Municipality & innovation assets.....	64
<i>Anita Gaile, Arkādijs Zvaigzne, Paula Elksne</i> Establishing local innovation ecosystems through global partnerships.....	77
<i>Sandra Marin Ruiz, Will Metcalf</i> FAU and UofL's community-based innovation and industry engagement initiatives: Expanding outreach to underserved entrepreneurs and businesses.....	90
<i>Duygu Aktay Kantaroğlu, Aybüke Temel Çakir, Onur Jane</i> From Prototype to Perfection: A Journey of Improvement in HANGAR Campus Innovation Program.....	97
<i>Victor Schiller</i> How universities can leverage business partnerships to strengthen student entrepreneurship incubators.....	106
<i>Antionette Goh, Khairul Hafiz Sharkawi, Nur Hartini Mardan</i> Innovating deep tech and research valorisation in Sarawak Universities.....	126

<i>Hanna-Greta Puurtinen, Petri Pohjola</i> Knowledge valorisation embracing entrepreneurship and resilient growth.....	142
<i>Ulrike Riemer</i> Motivating industry to innovate with universities - Developing transfer relevant skills.....	154
<i>Marko Bahle, Dana Mietzner</i> Navigating startup success - The Inno Radar's role in streamlining academic incubation...	158
<i>Hannu Autti, Laura Pakarinen, Johanna Partio, Tuomo Eskelinen</i> Prospective Impact Assessment Process (PIAP) in Future Divercities Project (FDC).....	178
<i>Taru Mäki, Terhi Ojaniemi</i> Regional university model and business learning path model as innovators in developing business collaboration.....	192
<i>James Wilson, Emily Wise, Madeline Smith</i> Sharpen existing tools or get a new toolbox? Contemporary cluster initiatives and regional transformation.....	203
<i>Jennie Shorley, Chris Taylor, Claire Pattison</i> The Centre for Enterprise - forging leadership, growth and innovation in the UK's Northwest.....	220
<i>Ellen Farrell</i> Training women to ameliorate venture capital bias.....	227
<i>Eugenia Chiara, Matteo Ingaramo, Arturo Dell'Acqua Bellavitis</i> "Wake Up! Design matchmaking" between students and young companies of the "New Made in Italy" .....	243

# **"Wake Up! Design matchmaking" between students and young companies of the "New Made in Italy"**

Eugenia Chiara<sup>1</sup>, Matteo Ingaramo<sup>1</sup>, Arturo Dell'Acqua Bellavitis<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Department of Design, Polytechnic University of Milano

## **Abstract**

"Wake Up, Design Matchmaking" is a groundbreaking educational initiative spearheaded by Fiera di Parma, uniting 90 students from Politecnico di Milano with peers from two esteemed Chinese institutions, namely the Beijing Institute of Fashion Technology and Jingyan University. Together, they collaborated with 15 emerging talents from "New Made in Italy" companies.

Under the guidance of two professors of the Politecnico di Milano, along with two professionals from Fiera di Parma, and under the supervision of the Delegate of the School of Design for relations with companies, the primary objective was to bridge academia and industry, fostering innovation in fashion. The focus lay on nurturing a "New Made in Italy" ethos rooted in sustainability, cultural fusion, and contemporary craftsmanship.

This collaboration aimed to facilitate a knowledge exchange between students and companies. Students tackled real-world market challenges, while companies absorbed innovations from the academic sphere. Key areas of exploration included upcycling collections and platforms, sustainable practices in fashion design, digital manufacturing in fashion, the creation of innovative retail physical and virtual models and the development of digital viral communication strategies for European and Chinese markets.

This project stood as an extraordinary experimental creative forge, fostering collaboration and innovation in the "New Made in Italy" that transcended national boundaries. Students contributed tangibly to shaping this new paradigm, collaborating with small companies, creatives, entrepreneurs, and autoproducers committed to innovative, sustainable models rooted in Italian tradition.

Within this collaboration, university-generated knowledge intersected with contemporary productive reality, transforming students into dynamic catalysts for change in the national production landscape. Design students and professors acted as mediators between diverse cultures, facilitating a global and interconnected reality where different heritages coexisted in the local design process. As a result, this initiative propelled a new creative wave, amplifying the global impact of the "New Made in Italy".

The projects was completed thanks to the final exhibition held at the Parma fair, which was held together with two days of edutainment with talks and workshops on responsible fashion and the New Made in Italy. For this occasion, a practice-based publication showcasing the project's results has been produced, defining the main aspect of the New Made in Italy movement and underlining a replicable model in the field of university-companies cooperation.

This collaborative model holds potential as a replicable framework for universities in Italy and abroad. It applies across various design fields, connecting local companies with student innovations, fostering creativity and practical application.

The main goal of this paper is to analyse this framework in order to explore their possible further developments such as the implementation of other pilot projects in other design fields and countries and the creation of a design toolkit in the field of design for local impact.

## **Keywords**

Design matchmaking, New Made in Italy, creative networks, local impact design

# **1 Introduction**

The transformations that have occurred recently in the fashion industry, as a result of globalization, the rapid development of countries considered formerly of little economic interest, and the entry of the latter into the market at highly competitive prices, have generated a new global competitiveness. Hence the need to redevelop the territory and local realities through the enhancement of cultural resources and the creative class, which represent the soul of the city and the engine of economic development (Pagani 2010). The Italian territory has always been characterized by the presence of a network system of actors: companies, universities, fairs, and exhibitions, places of sales and promotion that collaborate in a creative collaboration typical of Made in Italy. In recent decades, there has been a shift from the concept of the traditional industrial district to that of collaborative networks, complex and integrated ecosystems where creative and productive enterprises work closely together, carrying forward common values and instances.

Being competitive in world markets and, at the same time, expressing the territory's identity is a very complex goal for companies of modest size (Bedeschi, Marseglia Trivellin 2008), which is why various entities such as universities and trade fairs are posing as promoters of the new territorial creative networks in the field of fashion and design.

The creation of experimental projects that feature excellent small businesses as protagonists allows them to make leaps in innovation that make them competitive with large, established brands. Expanding the system of territorial relationships appears increasingly necessary to meet contemporary technological and social challenges (Bedeschi, Marseglia Trivellin 2008).

Through research-action projects, bringing together international students with young creative companies, the School of Design of the Politecnico di Milano collaborates on the work of New Made in Italy business networks, infusing them with the innovation produced by the academic world in a perspective of promotion and development of the territory and an opening to international markets. "Wake up!" is an experimental research-action project that generates systematization, creative collaboration, promotion, and international development of New Made in Italy promoted by Fiere di Parma in collaboration with the Politecnico di Milano. The university, which has always collaborated with other universities in emerging countries, welcomes foreign students to work in contact with Italian companies, opening them up to the world of globalization and new growth markets, increasing their competitiveness worldwide. The Fair becomes the pivot of a territorial system generating experiences, contacts, links, and visibility in

local, national, and international contexts. Universities and fairs thus play the role of centers of innovation and promotion of small creative excellence in fashion and design, which through them come into contact with the challenges of global competition.

Through a practical experimentation in the fashion field the "Wake Up!" Project creates a new model of action research project based on the collaboration between universities creative networks of fashion and design companies and fairs of the territory in order to promote of the creative and productive reality of a country.

The main goal of this paper is to outline a replicable and exportable action-research model to be applied in many different design fields, territories and countries.

### 1.1 The structure of the paper

The structure of this paper consists of 7 different sections:

1. **Context definition:** This Section aims to explore the main aspects of the contemporary scenario in the Italian design-driven production in the fashion field and the role of design universities in innovating the Italian fashion system.
2. **Explicitation of the main goal of the paper:** This Section clarifies the primary goal of the paper, which is to define a replicable action research model in the field of design.
3. **Project framework** explanation: This section defines the method used to conduct the "Wake Up!" Project, its pillars, and aspects related to replicability.
4. **Empirical results:** This section highlights the practical outcomes of the "Wake Up!" Experimental workshop, such as the projects developed by the students, the exhibition and edutainment event, the publication of a book, and the creation of new job opportunities in the companies for the students.
5. **Main results:** In this chapter, the main goals of the project, such as the promotion through design of new sustainable and creative economies of a country, are underscored.
6. **Conclusions:** This section outlines a role for design universities and design students in promoting sustainable, productive, and creative networks within the territory.
7. **Limitations, recommendations** for similar projects, **further research**, and **new collaborations:** This section discusses limitations, offers recommendations for similar projects, suggests areas for further research, and proposes new collaborations.
8. **Future steps:** This section underlines the future steps of the project, its replicability in different design fields and territories, and potential partners.

## 2 Context definition

The delocalization of production, creative competition between countries, and emerging markets are reshaping the production and consumption scenario in the fashion and design fields. The Italian socio-productive fabric has historically been characterized by diffuse entrepreneurship based on small and medium-sized enterprises grouped in territorial districts, homogeneous by product category and carriers of widespread know-how. Notably, in the Emilia Romagna region, there's the productive district of Carpi known for knitwear and ready-to-wear production; in Tuscany, the Prato district is renowned for textiles, ready-to-wear, and leather; and in Campania, the sartorial district of Naples and the silk district of San Leucio. These traditional districts have evolved into creative and productive territorial networks, characterized by common values and practices.

In recent years, there has been growing interest in the Italian province, both from researchers exploring its peculiarities and from brands and companies seeking to engage with this territorial dimension. In the northern Italian productive areas, we observe the emergence of new promising artisanal brands related to urban subcultures. "In the field of creativity, urban subcultures are seen as innovation drivers in fashion and fashion trends" (Dell'Acqua, 2007). Subcultures in the fashion field are configuring as creative networks, composed of micro and small artisanal businesses with common features, connected by networking events and projects such as the "Wake Up!" Project.

Creative networks play a pivotal role in shaping trends, fostering collaboration, and driving innovation in the dynamic world of fashion. These networks encompass a diverse array of individuals, organizations, and platforms that come together to exchange ideas, share resources, and push the boundaries of creativity within the industry. At the heart of creative networks are designers, whose artistic vision and craftsmanship set the tone for the entire industry.

Fashion communities and networks extend beyond the virtual realm to physical spaces such as co-working studios, incubators, and fashion schools. These spaces provide emerging designers with resources, mentorship, and networking opportunities to help them grow their brands and navigate the complexities of the industry. Furthermore, events such as fashion weeks, trade shows, and industry conferences serve as gathering points where designers, buyers, media, and consumers celebrate creativity and foster collaboration.

In parallel, there's a growing emphasis on sustainability and ethical practices within the fashion industry. Sustainable fashion brands are emerging, prioritizing eco-friendly materials, ethical labour practices, and circular business models aimed at reducing waste and minimizing environmental harm. Moreover, there's a greater demand for diversity and inclusivity in the fashion industry, with calls for more representation of diverse body types, ethnicities, and cultures.

The first edition of the "Wake Up!" Project in 2023 brought together more than 180 emerging brands in a large fashion market and event at Fiere di Parma, becoming a significant networking moment for the new wave of Italian creativity in responsible fashion. It aimed to define a New Made in Italy movement based on the values of sustainability, heritage, and craftsmanship. The second edition is configured as an innovation lab, involving 15 selected brands and 3 universities: Politecnico of Milan, Beijing Institute of Fashion Technology, and Jiangnan University, School of Design. It matched 15 of the most promising brands from the first edition with 90 students from 16 different countries, divided into 15 multidisciplinary groups, to develop specific projects in fashion, communication, and interior design to address the needs of the brands. The second edition was an extraordinary experimental project culminating in an exhibition and two days of edutainment events featuring talks and workshops on responsible fashion and the New Made in Italy movement.

### **3 Project framework**

"Wake up! Design Matchmaking" is a project combining an academic workshop organised by the Politecnico di Milano with a public event taking place at the Mercante in Fiera di Parma. The learning path, starting from frontal teaching, develops into a creation, production and exhibition process.

"Wake up!" is an experimental contamination project addressed to 90 students from the Department of Design of Politecnico di Milano, the Beijing Institute of Fashion Technology and the Department of Design of Jiangnan University, coming from different educational backgrounds.

The project, launched in September 2023, involved 15 companies selected from over 100 emerging brands; it consisted of a six-month course divided into two phases: the university workshop followed by the set-up of an exhibition alongside a series of cultural events hosted by the Mercante in Fiera di Parma. The project aimed at strengthening the cooperation spirit as well as the development of innovative synergies, during the conception and production of design projects.

#### **3.1 Companies selection - A creative network in the field of ethical fashion: the New Made in Italy movement**

The project "Wake up! Design Matchmaking" has had as its main result the connection of the most promising subjects of the Italian emerging fashion that have been configured as a creative network capable of formulating projects of cultural depth together with the international students of the Politecnico.

The selection of the companies has been the strategic starting point of the whole projects, the companies that participated to the projects are:

The 15 companies selected to participate in the "Wake Up" project represent the excellence of the new wave of Italian fashion. Artisanal and innovative, digital and sustainable, they share common traits that enable the birth of creative collaborations and collective promotion and communication events.

The project could underline the characteristics of the New Made in Italy movement a new contexts in which design energies, digital fabrication tools, and alternative business, communication, and distribution models allowed a new generation of small realities to grow and influence the fashion system.

These projects have revealed common themes, shared values of what can be considered the New Made in Italy, composed no longer of traditional industrial production districts but of territorial creative networks with small productions of high aesthetic and cultural quality. A starting point of the companies' work is Heritage, the valorisation of tradition, symbols, and archives of Italian fashion, which is contaminated with cultural expressions peculiar to emerging countries, in this case, China. This gives rise to projects that are based on the cross-fertilization of cultures, the valorisation of local stylistic archetypes in a global perspective attentive to international market trends. The most significant cross-cultural aspect uniting the New Made in Italy companies is an ethical revolution in the way fashion is viewed and a critique of its development and promotion processes. The waste of resources, the accelerated seasonality of fast fashion, and unsustainable models of production and consumption are questioned. The theme of circularity in fashion emerges. Upcycling projects of materials such as leather and jeans are multiplying, giving rise to new businesses based on original models of producing unique pieces. No-season, no-size, and waste-free pattern collections are born. Service product systems based on garment rental are taking their place alongside the traditional concepts of buying and owning. Businesses are structured as networks, collaborative platforms are born that connect the different players in the fashion system: creative designers, freelancers, and local production companies. This creates new jobs related to innovative projects based on new ethical and collaborative business models. New Made in Italy companies are innovative startups that challenge old business models and invent new models of fashion production and consumption. The use of digital design and fabrication technologies revolutionizes how fashion is conceived and produced. 3D models and virtual showrooms present designs to the customer before they are actually produced and reduce warehouse and point-of-sale costs. New 3D printed elements become part of garments, contributing to a futuristic and futuristic aesthetic. Also, thanks to the use of these technologies, the small independent manufacturer becomes a great innovator, bringing new content to fashion that puts it on the same level as established brands. The enterprises of the new Made in Italy work in networks, exchanging contacts and information, creative cues, and promotional strategies. They use events such as the exhibition at the Fiera di Parma to present themselves to the public as active players in the area. They can express the full creative potential of a

country that has been able to renew itself and interact with the current social, ecological, and cultural challenges of the globalized world.



Fig. 2: Cantoprime company lookbook

### 3.2 Workshop development

The workshop lasted 4 months, from October 2023 to January 2023, involving the lifestyle and fashion course at the Department of Design of Politecnico di Milano, in collaboration with two Chinese universities: the Beijing Institute of Fashion Technology and Jiangnan University, Department of Design. Alongside the main workshop, students from the two Chinese partner universities attended a parallel workshop to deepen their understanding of the values of “Made in Italy” and its internationalization potential. Initially, 15 teams of 6 students were formed: heterogeneous groups with complementary skills in terms of sensibilities and specializations, "matched" with a brand. The 'balanced' lineup of the teams and streamlined management were critical factors.

In the first lesson, a co-design session took place where brands introduced themselves to students and explained their design needs, ranging from new product development to digital communication strategies for Italian and external markets, as well as promotion and sales space design. Subsequent lessons at Politecnico provided the appropriate habitat for turning creativity into products, fostering teamwork integrating experiences, cultures, and intuitions while working in line with sustainability goals.

The 15 teams interacted with important design-production companies and workshop partners of the involved brands. Four hours a week in the classroom were dedicated to

developing theoretical-practical aspects of works in progress, also discussed through professionals' storytelling. Student-brand interaction resulted in 36 projects, assessed during the university examination, covering textile and digital products, accessories, graphics and visual identity, commercial and web strategies.

At the final review, companies involved and the fair's team were impressed by the outputs of the students, which were coherent with the brands' style and values while bringing significant innovations. The output projects were presented at the Mercante in Fiera di Parma in March 2024 as part of a two-day cultural event. Students actively collaborated in designing the exhibition, finalizing layouts, graphic projects, catalogue writing, and social media content production, learning crucial presentation and promotion skills.

The teaching and coordination activities, in line with academic standards, enhanced young talents and impressed brands. By following the design match-making approach, students and companies pushed the boundaries of creativity, contributing to the development of a new sustainable concept of Made in Italy.

The parallel course continued collaboration with Italian companies, overcoming cultural and communication barriers and developing new fashion products based on values of cultural contamination and sustainability. Students also had theoretical lessons on ethical fashion movement, sustainable materials, and cultural heritage in fashion.

The final event at the fair included the exhibition with workshop results and two days of edutainment with talks and practical workshops on Made in Italy, sustainable fashion, and Italian heritage. At Fiera di Parma, students actively participated in building the exhibition and attending talks and workshops, solidifying their knowledge and collaboration with the New Made in Italy.

For all participants, "Wake Up!" was a very intense experience, from a creative, project-based, and human point of view, creating new collaborations and a real creative network within the companies.

As a conclusion of the process, Politecnico di Milano and Fiera di Parma published a practice-based book containing workshop results and theoretical contributions from Politecnico professors about the New Made in Italy and the definition of an action research model in the design and fashion field. The fair was satisfied because through this action and the edutainment event, they could assume a new cultural role in promoting the creative forces of the territory and repositioning their brand.

### **3.3 University-industry collaboration**

The matchmaking between companies and students in the "Wake Up!" project underscores the university's role as an innovation driver in a strategic sector like the fashion system in Made in Italy. University administrators must recognize the imperative to revitalize curricula, emphasizing real-world learning and providing a

contextual framework for developing updated social competencies. In today's competitive landscape, designers must possess not only creativity and innovation but also business competencies. Integrating design and business is critical for success, fostering superior dynamic performance across industries. It's evident that enhancing the interconnectedness of design and business in contemporary education is crucial.

There's ongoing discourse about strengthening ties between academia and industry, highlighting the vital role universities play in supporting the evolution of the design industry. Effective university-company collaboration is increasingly indispensable amid significant shifts in the design sector. However, there's acknowledgment of the growing gap between skills imparted in universities and those demanded by the labour market. Relevant education must be customized to meet students' needs and align with company needs. Departing from the current design education model, adopting a flexible and synergistic approach is necessary to accommodate today's students' study and work responsibilities.

The model proposed by the "Wake up!" project, involving real and consultative collaboration between Polytechnic students and New Made in Italy companies, aimed to align companies' current requests with students' skills. This provided students with valuable work experience, sometimes leading to actual collaborations and placements.

### **3.4 International universities collaboration and cultural contamination**

Another important element of the collaboration was the cultural exchange with the two Chinese universities that is the result of a long term collaboration agreement between university institutions in the field of fashion.

The spread of fashion across diverse global cultures mirrors the evolving contours of our daily lives and emerges as a remarkable indicator of cross-cultural interchange. This phenomenon captures the intricate interplay between commercial and cultural interests, serving as a reflective channel for each country's unique identity and preferences. In today's globalized world, the fashion industry has undergone noticeable transformations. Beyond the conventional pursuit of aesthetic appeal confined by geographic borders, it has evolved to encompass a global awareness of prevailing social, economic, and political trends. Concomitant with this transformation, the contemporary job market has also undergone notable shifts and introduced novel realities that have reverberated across our higher education system. This evolving landscape necessitates a comprehensive re-evaluation of educational frameworks to align them with the dynamic demands of the modern fashion industry.

Recognizing the potential advantages of cross-cultural collaboration, it would be advantageous for students from both national backgrounds to engage in collaborative endeavours. Such interactions would facilitate mutual learning, providing students with a broader perspective and enriching their skill sets by drawing upon the diverse strengths of both educational systems.

These reflections have taken shape in two distinctive international Italo-Chinese programs. The collaboration between Politecnico di Milano and the Beijing Institute of Fashion Technology as well as a second partnership between Politecnico di Milano and Jiangnan University. An internationalized curriculum model was conceived and implemented to ensure optimal educational delivery tailored to the participants' unique backgrounds. This model comprises two complementary intertwined modules: the "polytechnic module," designed to give students comprehensive fashion industry knowledge through immersive workshops, and the "personalized module," which aims to impart tacit knowledge, fostering the development of intercultural skills among students.

One representative example of this intercultural convergence and interaction emerges through the fashion project spearheaded by Nicole Carrasco, a young Italian fashion designer and founder of the namesake brand Carrasco, in collaboration with students from the three institutions mentioned above. In this project, Carrasco discovered intriguing parallels with the traditional attire of the student's country of origin: China. Together, they embarked on a comparative exploration to unveil resonances between Carrasco, an enthusiast of Made in Italy, and the students, who cautiously broached the subject of Made in China. The outcome of this conscious collaboration is a delicate interplay that elucidates diverse identities while simultaneously engendering questions about cultural barriers and the inherent tension between two distinct worlds.



*Fig. 3: Project of the students Xiang Chen, Jiangnan University, Xinyu Hu, Politecnico di Milano, Francesca Modini, Politecnico di Milano, Mariasole Musicco, Politecnico di Milano, Yuxuan Zhao, Politecnico di Milano, Jiaxin Liu, Beijing Institute Of Fashion Technology for the company Carrasco*

### **3.5 The role of exhibitions and fairs**

The final exhibition at Fiera di Parma and the accompanying edutainment event brought the results of the experimental project developed by the universities back to the territory. This activity showcased how a fairground, with its exhibitions and various artifacts, services, and concepts, can trigger positive spillover effects and serve as a

milestone for an entire community, including non-visitors. Fairgrounds, especially when deeply rooted in their context with specific creative and manufacturing capacities, could take on the challenge posed by the new 'Design Value Framework' by advancing their exhibition design. This involves becoming socially impactful with displays, promoting research, fostering cross-fertilization, and offering ground for new sustainable concepts, visions, and pilot projects.

Italian designers have long focused on exhibition design, enhancing the “style” of Italian commercial fairs and supporting their commissioners with new creative contents, strategies, and visions. This has helped them grow relevant international networks, as exemplified by events like Salone del Mobile, Cersaie, and Cosmoprof, which initially represented manufacturing districts and now attract visitors, creatives, producers, and concepts from around the world.

In this post-pandemic rebound, fairgrounds and exhibition design could foster not only the development of design-driven innovations for manufacturing districts but also create new experiences and a "new expressive language." Through temporary exhibitions, they have nurtured a generation of Italian designers, encouraging new beginnings after the war.



*Fig. 4: Farma282 company stand at Fiere di Parma*

## 4 Empirical results

The 90 students from the Lifestyle and Fashion course at Politecnico di Milano collaborated with 15 emerging New Made in Italy brands, developing 36 projects in various design areas: fashion, communication, and interiors. The interdisciplinary groups, comprising individuals from 16 different nationalities with a substantial Chinese component, were formed to match diverse technical skills and expertise with the varying needs of the involved companies.

Each company chose to focus on different aspects, primarily involving communication and fashion, as well as store design in both physical and virtual dimensions. In the communication realm, projects spanned from established activities such as rebranding company logos and corporate identities to redesigning websites for improved usability. Additionally, there was a strategic study of promotion through social networks in both European and Chinese markets. The students acted as real consultants for brands, enhancing their reputation on social media, producing promotional videos, and coherently aligning their aesthetic and cultural vision.

In the fashion domain, projects were developed under the banner of cultural contamination, where companies and students collaborated on archetypal garments from both cultures as inspiration for new designs aligned with global market trends. Many projects involved upcycling, including shoes crafted from leather scraps from the Prato district, new collections in recycled denim, and garments made from reused linen towels.

Interior designers focused on point-of-sale design, ranging from pop-up stores as low-cost promotional and sales tools with high communicative impact to virtual showrooms for the presentation of collections entirely made from 3-D modelling. Digital and digital fabrication technologies were widely used for the representation and design of products, such as shoes or statues, and integrated into the fashion project through the insertion of special 3D printed elements.

The students actively collaborated in the production of the exhibition, showcasing the creative energy of New Made Italy.

The student's projects, the exhibition, the book and the edutainment event are the most important empirical results of the project. They showcased to a whole public the innovations produced by the university in collaboration with the brands and they gather and promoted the New Made in Italy movement.

#### **4.1 Main results**

In recent years in Italy there has been an increasing interest in entrepreneurial projects in the fields of creativity (design, fashion, media and music) conducted above all by young people who, unlike the recent past, often manage professional activities with a managerial vocation built on basis of a careful and planning reading of the reference market (Casati, 2004)

This projects worked with new brands and creative networks that have a role of innovation engine in the fashion and design productive system.

University as well has the role of innovation driver in the cultural and productive panorama of a territory.

The main result of this paper is to define an action-research model in design and fashion field based on the collaboration of university with emerging creative networks and the promotion of the sustainable productive and creative wave of a territory.

Design students have become engines of innovation for a sustainable creative local economy and have taken on new roles in 'designing networks' based on the creative economy and local production.

Another important result is to identify new roles for a designer in local impact project:

- designer as creator of networks
- designer as innovator of businesses
- designer as creator of identity
- designer as local brand strategist

The paper is structured in in three main parts:

The contextualization of the project and definition of creative networks in fashion fields as innovation engines of the Italian cultural productive system.

The definition on an action-research model replicable model based on the experience of the "Wake Up!" Projects. The main pillars of the project are the collaboration between creative industries networks and students from the university in order to develop innovative solutions, the collaboration with international universities in order to introduce the companies to the global markets, the final exhibition and cultural event at the fair in order to give back the results of the project to the territory.

The results analysis and the final considerations about the replicability of this model to others local contexts and design fields.

In conclusion "Wake up!" has been much more than an experimental educational project; it has been a format of a territorial development project through design that can be replicated in different local and productive contexts featuring emerging creative enterprises, universities, and local fairs as protagonists. Several aspects ensure its success; firstly, a careful selection of the most promising creative enterprises in Italian emerging fashion carried out by Fiere di Parma as early as the 2023 edition. Next, the involvement of the university provides the innovation skills of its best international students and the relationship with Chinese universities. This leads to the creation of projects in the fields of fashion, communication, and interiors with high innovative and cultural potential. The continuous relationship with the productive territory on the one hand and with the world of research on the other allows the district to detect, process, and systematize the needs of enterprises and to filter, translate, and disseminate the potential for innovation offered by both research organizations and technologically advanced enterprises in a continuous matching activity at multiple levels and in differently codified ways (Bedeschi, Marseglia Trivellin 2008). New Made in Italy companies can, thanks to their relationship with the university, confront new market,

technological, and cultural challenges; in doing so, they overcome their own limitations and open up to the global competition of the fashion system. By adopting methods and tools proper to design research - interdisciplinary approach, design as a catalyst for different contributions, research/action, research/project relationships - the projects developed at the territorial level highlight how the main characteristic of the discipline is to address the complexity of the "polysystemic whole" (Zurlo, 2014). Students gain valuable formative experience, interacting directly with professional practice, leading them to be the protagonists of innovation in the Italian creative fabric. The combination of educational experience and exhibition-event at the Fiera di Parma contributes to the promotion of emerging brands to a wide audience. In parallel, it sees the dissemination of the culture of Design and Fashion carried out by the Politecnico in a non-academic sphere, close to the real needs of civil society. All actors involved in the process benefit. Emerging brands broaden their perspectives, network, gain visibility in the eyes of the public, and propose themselves as elements of innovation in the fashion system. The university confronts the real challenges of the productive fabric and globalization, leading students to be active agents of change in design and creative dynamics. The fair rises to a higher cultural level and assumes a role as an articulator of innovation projects in the territory.

#### **4.2 Limitations, recommendations for similar projects, further researches and new collaborations**

"Wake Up!" is just one of several projects made by the faculty of Politecnico that see the collaboration between design students and creative networks. The team of professors worked in different territories all over the world across the years, developing a defined methodology.

The first point of this methodology is the creation of a multidisciplinary team composed by a scientific director, a coordinator, a design or fashion expert, a local talent scout, an art director and communication expert, a representative of international universities, an exhibit reality.

The second important step is the selection of the brands, that should have an overall potential of quality, creativity, manufacturing knowhow and a strong relation with the cultural heritage of the territory involved.

The methodology of the workshop includes: companies analysis and assessment, briefing, concept generation, co-design sessions, concept development, prototyping, final presentation and exhibition.

An important role in this kind of projects is played by the coordinator that has the role to connect all the stakeholders and to facilitate the communication between different actors that can sometimes be difficult in an international context, with people with different background and focuses. It is also fundamental the activity of matchmaking

between companies and groups of students that should be correctly matched considering their skills, needs and specificities.

It is also important the identification of a fair as partner and promoter of the project and of the companies in a local and global context.

The communication of the project is fundamental, the creation of a brand that brings together the companies and define the project is the first promotion strategy for the creative productive networks in the local and global design and fashion panorama.

This action-research model is replicable in different contexts, countries, districts and territories in order to enhance the potential of the creative productive networks and innovate and internationalize the sustainable local manufacturing. A promising sector are the new fashion and design emerging brands involved in processes of circular economy that can be the driver for a transition toward a more sustainable productive paradigm.

A further research field is the creation of a design toolkit that can be applied to similar projects in different field of design and fashion and in different countries.

The main partners of this kind of research can be european and international universities, especially in the countries where are emerging new productive districts and networks, companies associations and networks, that want to start promotion and innovation processes through the collaboration with academia, local development agencies and local governments.

## **References**

### *Book*

Barucco M., Bulegato F., Vaccar A., (2020) Remanufacturing Italy Italy in the era of postproduction, Mimesis Edizioni

Bedeschi I, Marseglia M., Trivellin E. (2018) Territorial culture at the centre: production, research, training Md journal

Bertola P, Conti G. (2007) Fashion and design. The transfer of knowledge at the service of innovation, Poli.design

Casati, B., (2007) Creating a design business. Processes. Tools and actors for generating business in the design sector, Poli.design

Chiara, E., (2017) Design for local impact: global best practices, Mx Design Conference, Design frente al futuro

Chiara, E., Simonelli, G., Auricchio, V., ( 2016) Acre made in Amazonia, design for the development of sustainable communities, 12º Congresso Brasileiro de Pesquisa e Desenvolvimento em Design

Chiara, E., Dell'acqua Bellavitis, A., Morganti, L., Capurro, R., Pande, P., Yoshi, M., Guerrieri, P, (2017) Flying carpets glocal design: trends and traditions, development and innovation., Code Conference New Delhi

Ingaramo, M, (2012) PRODesign. Product Profession Project, Alinea Editrice

Pagani, S., Fashion over. (2010/2011) From industrial districts to collaborative networks. The network of creatives, businesses, institutions, fashion places, Politecnico di Milano

Parente, M., Sedini, C., (2018) D4T Design for the territories, 2018, Listlab

Simonelli, G., Chiara, E. (2016) ACRE Made in Amazonia, Politecnica cooperation stories 2011-2016, Poliscrypt

Trivellin E., Lotti G., (2018.) Design and territories, Md Journal

Zurlo Francesco, (2014) The strategies of design. Drawing value beyond the product, Libraccio Editore, ebook version

חווט