

Can the Impact of Hallmark Events Be Designed? Insights from the “Milan Design (Eco)System”

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Abstract: This paper provides an account of exploration of the impact of Milan Design Week in Milan (Italy), conducted as part of the research project “Milan Design (Eco)System”. The work is presented as a practice-based case study that developed an original multi-level investigation, in which the event’s impact is placed within the broader perspective of the “Milan Design System”, intended as the city’s economic and cultural network centred on design. By drawing connections across the different levels explored, we propose a framing of Milan Design Week, and similar “hallmark events”, as platforms for designing the sustainable development of urban areas. In this framing, the notion of “impact” is used as part of a pluralistic exploration of socio-technical systems in the city, with the aim of identifying opportunities and directions for sustainable development.

Keywords: City Design Weeks, Event-Led Sustainable Development, Event impact assessment, Sustainability transitions, Urban sustainability, Design Culture Studies, Milan

1. Introduction

This paper presents a practice-based case study derived from the research project “*Milan Design (Eco)System*” developed in the city of Milan (Italy) under the scientific supervision of the Department of Design at Politecnico di Milano between 2024 and 2025. The project aimed to build a data-centric inquiry, informed by a design perspective, into the impact of *Milan Design Week* (MDW), while simultaneously accounting for the broader economic and cultural design system of Milan, i.e., the *Milan Design System* (MDS). We propose this case as relevant to both areas of transition design and systemic design, as disciplines that are concerned with designing for paths and futures toward the sustainable change of territories (Pereno & Barbero, 2020; Gaziulusoy & Erdoğan Öztekin, 2019; Kossoff & Irwin, 2021).

In the following sections, we review relevant literature from event management and design to introduce the perspective later adopted in the case study. We then present the case study



framework, thus also accounting for the research project methodology and how the data-centric inquiry was concretely developed within it. Finally, we discuss a series of practice-based insights that emerged by engaging through this perspective with the project's topic throughout its development. These insights are grouped into five potential areas of intervention — often at the level of urban service systems (Ceschin, 2014) — from which to design and develop pathways for sustainable transition in the territory of Milan.

2. Literature review: large-scale events as drivers of territorial sustainability

Events have been described as “*temporary and purposive gatherings of people*” (Bladen et al., 2012, p. 31), which are purposefully planned to mobilize large numbers of individuals for economic, recreational, or other collective goals (e.g., political, religious). The relevance of event management as both a research field and a professional domain has led to several classifications of events, based on factors such as attendance numbers, recurrence, media exposure, type of content, and visitor experience. These classifications include widely recognized categories such as “mega-events” (Müller, 2018), used to define events of exceptional scale and visibility, such as the Olympic Games. In this literature, authors have explicitly engaged with the topic of sustainability (Mair & Smith, 2022).

The large-scale and temporary nature that characterises most major events implies they have an impact on their host territories (cities, regions) that is both significant and often discussed as “negative” and to be contained. This impact seems to mainly regard event-generated tourism in territories, and the need to reduce the related externalities (e.g., waste created, energy consumption, and infrastructures built and left after the event) (cf. Cavallin Toscani et al., 2024; Mair & Smith, 2022). Events' impact can also be framed and assessed from a perspective of “social sustainability” (Fredline et al., 2003; Smith, 2009). In this regard, scholars have suggested that events may generate several positive social outcomes, such as activating human capital — for instance, through volunteering — providing services to local communities, including cultural services, and strengthening a territory's collective identity (Mair et al., 2020; 2021). Within this perspective, Mair and Smith (2022) suggest that events should not be conceived merely as “bounded objects” to be organized according to sustainability principles, but rather as experimental platforms and drivers for the sustainable development of territories, for example by leveraging their capacity to activate sustainable behaviours.

However, while this proposed paradigm shift appears timely and relevant, it seems rarely matched by adequate practical approaches and methodologies for event impact assessment and evaluation. This area still seems to be largely dominated by economic approaches and frameworks (Meyrick et al., 2015; Wallstam, 2022; Schlenker, 2025), rooted in a conception of event value primarily based on the “internalistic” perspective of event organizers and public decision-makers (Wallstam, 2022). As a result, the assessment of event impact tends

to focus mainly on metrics such as visitor attendance numbers, economic returns or visitor satisfaction (Meyrick et al., 2015). Other complex and pluralistic dimensions of impact that would support the paradigm outlined above — for example, the value that communities and citizens may attribute to events — remain less explored.

The design fields of “transition design”, “design for sustainability”, and “systemic design” have a clear role to play in this discussion, given the perspectives they have developed on sustainable development at the urban and territorial scale (Pereno & Barbero, 2020; Gaziulusoy & Erdoğan Öztekin, 2019; Kossoff & Irwin, 2021), or on how socio-technical experimentation in urban services that can lead to urban transition (Ceschin, 2014). Design for sustainability transitions has emerged as a field concerned with long-term systemic change, rooted in the convergence between design for sustainability, transition studies, and systems thinking (Gaziulusoy & Erdoğan Öztekin, 2019). From this perspective, sustainability is addressed not only as a matter of improving isolated artefacts or services, but as a process of transforming socio-technical configurations, through everyday practices, institutions, and infrastructures. Transition design aligns with this orientation by explicitly addressing long-term societal transitions: designing through and for change, while also questioning what kinds of futures are being transitioned from and toward (Scupelli, 2015; Tonkinwise, 2015). This approach appears particularly important in urban contexts, where sustainability challenges are deeply interconnected (Kossoff & Irwin, 2021).

Despite this potential, these fields have thus far engaged only marginally with the idea of investigating large-scale events as means of transition in urban environments and their territories. More generally, few studies have deeply investigated events such as Milan Design Week or similar city design weeks. Some authors have considered how these events can be channelled towards long-term sustainability transitions by codifying emerging design-driven models (Han et al., 2024), how exhibitors in these contexts engage with and communicate their own sustainability (Gramegna et al., 2024), or how visitors behave within these events in terms of location choice, through innovative data analysis methods (Dane et al., 2020).

3. Case Study Framework: Milan Design Week and the Milan Design System

Against the gap outlined above, our research methodology investigated the Milan Design Week and Milan Design System as a two-level case study for transition-oriented inquiry. We start by acknowledging that a complex system can never be known in its entirety; rather, one can only interpret the emerging interactions among its internal subsystems, which themselves depend on the partial perspective of those attempting to understand them. This conceptual approach, which is characteristic of systemic and transition-oriented design approaches (Gaziulusoy & Erdoğan Öztekin, 2019; Jones, 2014), informed our approach. Accordingly, the case study presented here as an interaction between two complex and linked levels, that were explored in different ways during the research “Milan Design (Eco)System”.

At the first level stands the *Milan Design Week*, which represents an “international” system defined by the worldwide exposure and attractiveness that this event exerts on global tourism. The second level is the “local” territorial system, represented by the network of actors that constitute Milan’s economy and design culture — namely, the *Milan Design System*.

These two levels are connected insofar as the MDW acts as a temporary and partial expression of the Milan Design System, shaped by international interest and conceptions of what design is. By adopting a lens that extends beyond the event itself, we follow the approach of Design Culture Studies (Julier, 2025), which examines the material and contextual manifestations of design culture in places. Ours is also an attempt to read our object of inquiry through a comprehensive and nuanced spectrum of what design culture, within which the economy of the design industry and other expressions of design — e.g., a perspective toward sustainability transitions (Boehnert, 2014) — coexist.

3.1. Level 1: Milan Design Week as a “hallmark event”

Milan Design Week is one of the largest city design weeks worldwide, and peculiar in many senses (Han et al., 2024). The event, taking place since more than a decade during one of the last weeks of April in the territory of Milan (Italy), it is fueled by two main subsystems of events — happening simultaneously during this short period of time. The first is “Salone del Mobile.Milano”: an umbrella event that holds together several fair exhibitions focused on furniture, lighting and “Made in Italy” sectors; organized within the Rho-Fiera exhibition centre, slightly outside Milan (ibid.). In 2025, Salone del Mobile.Milano hosted more than 2000 exhibitors, and recorded more than 300.000 attendances (Salone del Mobile.Milano & Politecnico di Milano, 2025). Parallel to that, a constellation of events, exhibitions and installations, gets organized across the urban territory by a multitude of actors — from private brands, to local showroom, design studios and agencies, to even non-profit associations and independent groups. In 2025, around 1600 appointments were organized during that edition’s calendar (ibid.).

Over time, MDW has become deeply recognizable to citizens and local stakeholders, becoming closely intertwined with Milan’s identity as an international design capital (Crippa, 2022). This strong association between the event, the city, and its international image makes it particularly relevant to the category of *hallmark events*, defined as:

“ [...] those [events] that possess such significance, in terms of tradition, attractiveness, quality, or publicity, that the event provides the host venue, community, or destination with a competitive advantage. Over time, the event and destination images become inextricably linked. Hallmark events are, by definition, permanent institutions in their communities or societies.” (Getz & Page, 2024, p. 55).

Hallmark events include commercial, cultural, and entertainment events that enhance the attractiveness of the cities or urban areas hosting them for international tourism. Classic examples include the Rio and Venice Carnivals, Oktoberfest in Munich, and the Calgary

Stampede. Such events are often perceived by host communities as informal “permanent institutions” (ibid.). Understanding Milan Design Week as a hallmark event therefore requires examining not only its attractiveness in itself, but also the ways in which it temporarily reorganizes urban flows, services, and experiences across the city.

To investigate these dimensions of impact, we adopted an heuristic we labeled as *visitor journey*, used as a tool to guide a complex exploration of the event’s impacts on the city. The dimensions of event impact identified through the visitor journey emerged from an ideal-type reconstruction of the experiences of hundreds of thousands of visitors to the Milan Design Week. The divided into the following steps: 1. *arrival in Milan via the main air and rail transport hubs*; 2. *reception in different types of accommodation facilities in Milan and Lombardy*; 3. *the creation of economic value through tourist spending*; 4. *the use of public transport and urban mobility services to reach the events across the city*; and finally, urban management, which included 5. *potential negative externalities of a social nature (citizen complaints)* and 6. *environmental nature (waste and energy management)*. For each step, the research included relevant data, shared by public and private organizations on the territory engaged during the research (Table 1).

Table 1 Visitor journey stages, impact dimensions and related metrics/data

Visitor journey stage	Impact dimension and service scale	Metrics and datasets analysed
Arrival	Airport and railway hubs	Arrivals and departures from main airports; Passengers boarding and alighting from regional train services
Stay	Hospitality system	Number of accommodation facilities registered in Lombardy and in Milan; Tourist arrivals and overnight stays in Milan and its province
Spending	Tourist spending	Projections of tourism spending related to the event; Digital payments via credit cards
Movements	Urban mobility	Entrances in the metro system; Rentals from sharing mobility services (bike, car, scooter, e-scooter), Entries recorded by cameras in Restricted Traffic Zones
Critical social behaviors	Public perception of the event	Citizen complaints regarding public order issues (noise, littering, etc.)
Waste production and energy consumption	Environmental and energy management	Municipal solid waste produced, Electricity consumption

3.2. Level 2: The “Milan Design System”

At the second level, we moved beyond MDW — as a hallmark event with its impacts — by considering the surrounding local ecosystem, conceived as the *Milan Design System* (MDS). In doing so, we followed previous attempts to map design as both an economic and cultural system. This type of work has been conducted within several European countries (Boutin et al., 2010; Design Council, 2015; Engholm et al., 2017; Fondazione Symbola, 2026), that focused on the size, structure, and economic impact of the “design economy”, mostly through national-level assessments of the design profession (Cooper et al., 2009).

At the same time, we build on earlier conceptualizations of design as system that becomes intrinsic part and enhance a territory economic and productive development. This has long been an important research topic at Politecnico di Milano, beginning with national-level studies at the end of the 1990s, such as “*Sistema Design Italia*” (Maffei & Zurlo, 2000), and later evolving toward the study of the “*Sistema Design Milano*” (for a retracing cf. Bianchini, in Salone del Mobile.Milano and Department of Design, 2024). This latter research laid the foundations for understanding Milan’s design system as a distinctive configuration of relationships among human capital (i.e., design practitioners); businesses; cultural institutions; research and technological innovation; and the subjects and venues that allows a public display and perception of design (e.g., exhibitions venues, galleries, showrooms). Together, these elements contribute to what has been described as Milan’s design “success formula” (Manzini, 1999, pp. 15–16).

We conceptualized and measured the MDS through its main subsystems, as follows:

- 1. *Design Professions System*. Enterprises and professionals that provide design and design consultancy services to companies, public and private bodies and institutions;
- 2. *Assist System for Design System*. Companies and professionals from the creative and cultural industries, such as photographers, pattern makers, and advertising agencies, that work with design professionals and enterprises to provide them complementary services and activities;
- 3. *Design-Driven Enterprises System*. Manufacturing and service enterprises for which design represents a strategic resource, clearly identifiable within their products and services, production and organisational culture, and corporate philosophy. The subjects included in this system typically operate in the strategic supply chains of Made in Italy, such as home furnishings;
- 4. *Design Distribution System*. A group of companies that manage chains or single retail spaces, such as shops, showrooms, temporary shops, and design outlets, as well as online sales services, such as websites and e-commerce, for selling products and services closely related to design;

- *5. Design Fairs and Exhibit System.* Venues, trade fairs, and events for the promotion of design initiatives, companies, and professionals;
- *6. Design Cultural Offering System.* Places and events devoted to the culture of design, either permanent or temporary, including museums, art and design galleries, corporate archives, and events such as exhibitions, conferences, festivals;
- *7. Design Publishing and Communication System.* Publishers, printed or digital channels devoted to the dissemination of design;
- *8. Design Education System.* Universities, public and private schools, and other institutes that offer higher and vocational training education in the various disciplines and thematic areas of design;
- *9. Design Research and Innovation System.* Public and private subjects and actors who finance, promote, and develop competitive research or consultancy activities related to the design discipline in products, services, processes, and systems (also by developing patenting, creating start-ups, spin-offs, etc.).

We measured these subsystems by combining official economic and statistical datasets with other relevant data sources (in particular, data from the Italian Statistical Register of Active Enterprises, the Milan, Monza Brianza, and Lodi Chambers of Commerce, and the Italian Revenue Agency were used to provide figures on the Design Professions System).

4. Practice-Based Insights for Sustainable Transition

Each of the two level described in the previous section were used to develop specific analysis within the context of “Milan Design (Eco)System”: a research project and observatory commissioned by Salone del Mobile.Milano and developed under the scientific supervision of the Department of Design at Politecnico di Milano for the years 2024 and 2025.

The analysis were informed by data shared from public and private subjects on the territory involved during the research process. The data analysis allowed for an exploration of the impacts dimensions of Milan Design Week through the visitor journey steps; and to provide a measurement and understanding of the Milan Design System and its subsystems¹.

In this section, we reflect on this process to identify practice-based insights that emerged as the research unfolded across the two levels of the case study described above (Gaver et al., 2022). These insights point to possible areas of intervention that, by leveraging on the Milan Design Week as “hallmark event”, may support the sustainable transition of Milan and its territory. They are grouped around five main areas: 1. *calendar and programme coordination*; 2. *hospitality and accommodation*; 3. *transport and mobility services*; 4. *international attractiveness*; and 5. *event monitoring*.

¹ For reasons of space, the results of these data analyses are not included in this paper, but can be found in the 2024 and 2025 Annual Reports of Salone del Mobile.Milano, available online or upon request from the authors.

4.1. Calendar and program coordination

A first area of intervention emerged regards the improvement of the *legibility and coordination* of the event calendar and program. Data shared by the Municipality of Milan in the context of the research identified more than 1,600 appointments during MDW 2025 (i.e., events and exhibitions), organized by a wide variety of actors. This richness certainly represents one of MDW's distinctive features (Crippa, 2022). However, when considered as a single offer, the MDW calendar appears insufficiently organized, making it difficult for visitors to easily identify and access the initiatives most relevant to their interests. Given the self-organized nature of the event, the challenge appears not to centralize the organization, but to support the coordinated development and readability of the appointments in the MDW calendar, harmonizing its variety without increasing the burden on organizers or limiting their autonomy.

A second insight concerns the possibility of using programme coordination to support the spatial redistribution of events across the city. Through mobile data shared by TelCo providers involved during the research, it was possible to assess that visitor flows in the areas of Milan hosting Design Week events increased by up to 50% compared with average periods, with a much more visible increase in central areas. At the same time, examples exist of curated and well-communicated initiatives that have helped position peripheral venues as high-quality alternatives to more central locations within the overall MDW geography². This insight appears to challenge the idea that, in Design Weeks or similar events, distance is the primary factor shaping visitors' choice of locations to visit (Dane et al., 2020). A relevant opportunity therefore lies in organizing the MDW calendar in ways that redistribute visitor flows across the city, giving greater visibility to events in less central locations and helping reduce pressure on areas more exposed to saturation.

A third point in this area of intervention concerns *collaboration among exhibitors*. We could identify an average of around six exhibitors per event during Milan Design Week 2025. This figure suggests that many exhibitors need to present themselves collectively, possibly to increase their visibility and optimize participation costs within the crowded offer described above. Moreover, some venues and formats that have hosted collective events — such as *Superstudio Più* or *BASE Milano* — have increasingly become recognizable appointments within MDW, capable of offering visitors a clear and legible experience of visit. The opportunity, therefore, is to encourage collaboration among exhibitors interested in building common exhibition through solutions that support the proposal of joint events within the MDW calendar (e.g., matchmaking services).

4.2. Hospitality and accommodation

² A notable example is *Alcova Milano 2025*, hosted at Villa Bagatti Valsecchi in Varedo, outside Milan's city centre

A second area of intervention concerns sustainable solutions for *hospitality and accommodation*. Data hotel check-ins and overnight stays evaluated during the research indicate that, during MDW, accommodation demand extends beyond the city of Milan. For example, during the 2025 edition, a total of 543,565 overnight stays were recorded in hospitality facilities across the Province of Milan. At the same time, several provinces in the Lombardy Region, where Milan is located, show positive growth in hospitality offer, both in terms of structures (hotel and non-hotel) and available beds. This suggests the possibility of designing solutions that redistribute Design Week hospitality towards other regional locations, reducing pressure on Milan while directing tourism flows towards other destinations.

A further opportunity concerns the *deseasonalization* of turistic flows. The same data, if considered on a day-by-day basis, shows the potential of MDW to shift hospitality demand towards weekdays, instead of weekends. In Milan, from Tuesday to Thursday during the Design Week, the average overnight stays increased by 10.55% compared with the same days in the other weeks of the month. This suggests that the event is capable of activating demand patterns that differ from ordinary tourism cycles in the city. The challenge for intervening on this aspect is to understand how this potential can be used to encourage more distributed stays, including in the weeks before and after the event and according to different visitor profiles and needs.

A third insight concerns *hospitality solutions for domestic tourism* (i.e., national and regional). Data show that accommodation demand during Milan Design Week is predominantly international: in the Municipality of Milan, foreign overnight stays represent 81.7% of the total during this week. While domestic tourism currently represents a minority of hospitality demand, it may play a strategic and complementary role in relation to international flows, especially from a sustainability perspective. This raises the question of how to include forms of accommodation that can also respond to the needs and behaviours of domestic visitors, either permanent or temporary.

4.3. Transport and mobility services

A third area of intervention emerging from our insights concerns *transport and mobility services* in the city. The data work we conducted clearly shows that Milan Design Week represents the annual peak in the use of the local public transport network. This is especially evident for the city's underground system, the main mode of public transport in Milan, which recorded 9,246,755 total entries during MDW 2025. Since these figures are particularly high during the final days of the week, from Thursday onwards, the issue of potential conflict with ordinary users of this transport system emerges. Sustainable interventions in this area would therefore need to *reduce peak pressure through specific service-level solutions* (e.g., differentiated fare tickets).

The mobility needs generated by Milan Design Week are not limited to public transport. Rather, they affect the entire urban mobility system: shared mobility fleets, including bike,

e-scooter, and car sharing services run by private providers, recorded increases ranging from 45% to 73% compared with the yearly weekly average, depending on the type of vehicle. This suggests the need *to intervene on multimodality by improving or integrating different modes of transport*, making the overall system of events more accessible and better connected.

Together with the clear pressure placed on the city's transport systems, our work suggests the need for sustainable interventions on the systems through which international tourism reach Milan during the event. Data on airport passengers during Milan Design Week indicate the presence of business and high-spending visitors who reach Milan through business aviation. This dynamic points to the opportunity *to develop supplementary services that integrate the transport network for very specific publics* (e.g., dedicated services, wayfinding systems, and appropriate information guiding visitors from their arrival at Milan's main airport hubs to their final event locations).

4.4. International attractiveness

A fourth area of intervention concerns a central element of hallmark events: their symbolic value for international audiences and the way this value reflects on the host city (Getz & Page, 2024). MDW is characterized by immersive installations, brand experiences, and experiential formats. While these elements contribute to its visibility and appeal, the event also risks becoming saturated with communication and promotional messages, including from large brands not strictly connected to design that use it as a platform for visibility. This complexity may negatively affect the experience of those seeking content specifically related to design culture and to its manifestations beyond the design industry (Boehnert, 2014), particularly researchers, universities, and international design professionals. The challenge is therefore *to safeguard the cultural and professional value of the event* by making its design content more recognizable, especially in relation to more generalist experiences for the broader public or purely promotional brand initiatives.

To this end, the analysis of the Milan Design System points to another possible area of intervention. The research shows that Milan is a national hub for design economy, hosting 7,360 enterprises in this sector, about 14% of all such enterprises in Italy. This professional and productive capital supports the city's economy beyond the single week of the event. The question is therefore *how to communicate the Milan Design System effectively* to international audiences, showing that Milan Design Week is not only a temporary event, but also the visible expression of a broader and local design culture (Julier, 2025).

Another opportunity for intervention concerns the enhancement of Milan as a destination. Our work shows that Milan Design Week activates an urban heritage that is often not normally accessible: for the 2025 edition, we identified 257 events organized in spaces usually closed to the public, including professional studios, historic buildings, and former industrial spaces. This points to the possibility of developing a communication strategy capable of attracting international visitors by *highlighting the quality and variety of Milan as an urban cultural destination* to be experienced through Milan Design Week.

4.5. Event Monitoring

A final area of insight concerns the possibility of intervening in the monitoring of Milan Design Week. In line with the pluralistic and multidimensional view of impact outlined in this article, a sustainability perspective would require event monitoring *to involve different stakeholders in the definition of indicators*. These should address not only the usual measures of event success, such as attendance and spending, but also the urban externalities generated by the event, drawing on heterogeneous data sources (Wallace & Michopoulou, 2023) and following attempts such as the one experimented with the research here presented and in other studies (Dane et al., 2020).

From this follows *the need to develop data-sharing agreements and protocols*, moving towards the design of data governance solutions and forms of collaboration centred on data (Bartolomucci & Leoni, 2024). The significant variety of data holders possessing relevant information on Milan Design Week requires agreements and protocols capable of enabling a secure, coordinated, and mutually valuable exchange of data among all the actors involved in monitoring. Such solutions should support data exchange before, during, and after the event, allowing monitoring to become a continuous rather than episodic process.

A third point concerns *the public use of data* about the event by the media, public institutions, and research actors. These actors may need to access data on Milan Design Week for different purposes. It would therefore be necessary to develop a single access point through which institutions, media, researchers, and citizens can consult data describing the event. In this context, data quality must be protected regardless of the different analytical goals and specific interests of users. The challenge is therefore to develop and maintain shared solutions and dedicated consultation channels for monitoring data, avoiding fragmentation, duplication, and misleading interpretations.

5. Conclusion: Designing Impact Through Hallmark Events

The Milan Design Week represents a driver of local economic development and urban creativity, yet it also poses significant sustainability challenges. As with other city design weeks (Han et al., 2024), these are further exacerbated by this event taking place mostly in central neighborhoods of Milan - one of the densest urban areas in Italy - where the pressures of hundreds of thousands of visitors flowing into the city (for example, on mobility services), combined with the event being self-organized by numerous private and public actors, pose a hard-to-maintain equilibrium between private interests, citizens' well-being, and public management. MDW and similar events also raise important questions on their broader social and cultural values, and who is concretely benefiting from them (d'Ovidio, 2016). High costs of participation and competition for exhibiting in the available urban spaces may increasingly tend to favor well-resourced actors (e.g., brands), while smaller studios, independent designers, and universities — that represent relevant components of the Milan Design System and its culture — may increasingly struggle to gain access.

Reporting from the first-hand experience that is the basis of the case study, we aimed to show an original way to develop a systematic, data-informed inquiry that identifies, within the challenges posed by the event, leverage points across MDW and MDS upon which to design for sustainable transitions. By framing MDW as a hallmark event, we could bring to the forefront the role of “design” as both the central element of the event’s symbolic value, which visitors seek to experience, and a defining component of Milan’s image as a tourist destination (Getz & Page, 2024). In our view, discussing “design” as core element implies relating the event to the Milan Design System and considering the two dimensions jointly. It must also be noted that, as design researchers in Milan, we are active participants in this interdependence and are influenced by it. Accordingly, this research adopts an insider perspective aligned with systemic design and transition design principles (Scupelli, 2015).

Furthermore, our work aimed to revisit the notion of impact by evolving evaluation and assessment practices towards the sustainability paradigms emerging within event management (Mair & Smith, 2022). By bridging the issues outlined by this scholarship with design disciplines, we propose that hallmark events and their impacts can be understood as multidimensional and fundamentally designable constructs, encompassing social, cultural, symbolic, and environmental dimensions (Ceschin, 2014; Irwin & Kossoff, 2025).

It follows that the notion of “impact” is not a neutral one, but rather the outcome of negotiation among different value systems and interests involved through an event (Wallace & Michopoulou, 2023). Hence, there seems to be great potential to make impact assessment and evaluation part of the design process (Kim & Park, 2025; Foglieni et al., 2018), as well as of related data-centric processes of exploration, measuring and sense-making (Ausilio et al., 2024; Leoni et al., 2023; Mondal et al., 2026). These processes may shape policy learning, collective imaginaries, and governance choices concerning how hallmark events are managed and designed from a transition design perspective.

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