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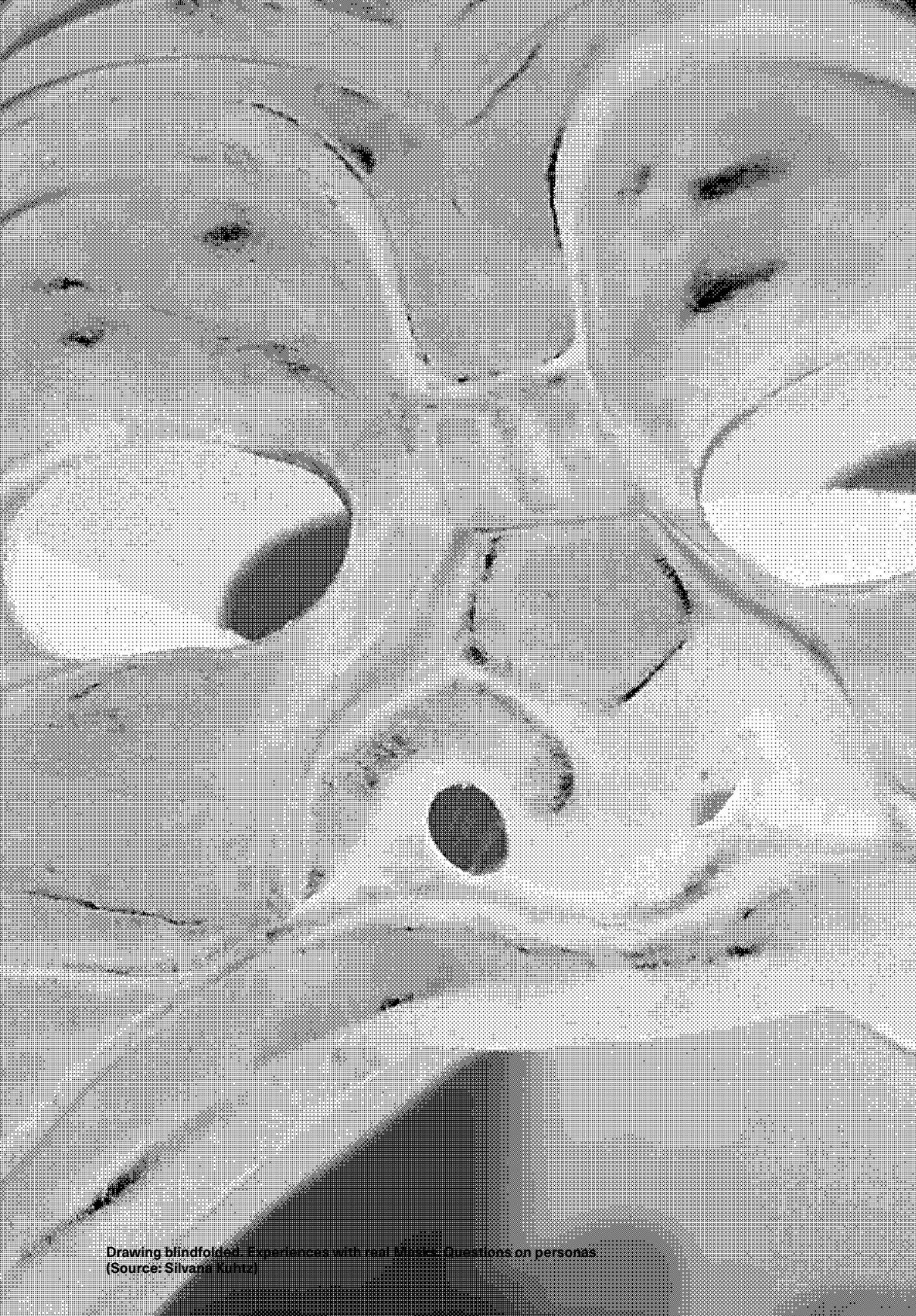
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Drawing blindfolded. Experiences with real Masks: Questions on personas
(Source: Silvana Kuitz)

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Students wear the mask they fabricated
(Source: Silvana Kuitiz)



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The image shows the exhibits and layout of the museum and one of the production stages at Ma.Vi. revealed during the phase of observation and interview
(Credits: Francesca Tosi, Maria Dolores Morelli, Alessia Brischetto, Ester Iacono, Alessandra Miano)

Mapping Excellence in Manufacturing Southern Italian Perspectives Between Design and Craftsmanship

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Abstract

The research project “DeinSite” – The Design System in the Southern Italy Territories investigates the strategic relationship between design and craftsmanship as a lever for local development in Southern Italy. An initial mapping phase conducted in the Campania region identified corporate museums, production districts, and artisanal SMEs, highlighting the interplay between heritage, innovation, and material culture. The article presents the methodology, selection criteria, and key findings of this mapping, offering a critical reflection on its limits and potential. Challenges included fragmented data collection, the heterogeneity of case studies, and the need to ensure the long-term sustainability of the digital platform created. Future developments include extending the mapping to other southern regions, activating workshops and exhibitions, and strengthening the platform as a shared infrastructure for connection and co-design. The contribution outlines a model for the integrated valorisation of local know-how, positioning design as a cultural mediator and catalyst for new territorial networks.

Keywords

**Handmade in Italy
Design and craftsmanship
Southern Italian production
districts
Territorial mapping
Creative networks**

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Introduction

The growing attention to the development of cultural and creative sectors on the national and international horizon is to be considered not only in terms of the economic impact they have in the local context, but in relation to their capacity to act as accelerators of the production system, promoting cross-sectoral collaboration practices and transformative strategies. The report titled *Io sono cultura* (Symbola, 2024) highlights how the value generated nationally by the cultural and creative sectors influences the impact of production, in the matter of: on the one hand, the articulation of the concept of Made in Italy; on the other, the collaboration of Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs) with the manufacturing sector. The sector comprising cultural and creative industries is defined as the “Creative Cultural Production System”, which has two main components to consider: *core* activities, categorised within seven sectors traditionally recognised as cultural and creative (Architecture and Design; Communication; Audiovisual and music; Software and video games; Publishing and printing; Performing and visual arts; Historical and artistic heritage), and *culture-driven activities*, which include those sectors that depend on the interaction between a core activity and a distinct economic component, generating innovation through their connection. This approach captures the inherently cross-sectoral nature of the national economy, prompting reflection on the opportunities for cultural professionals to be systematically integrated into the production processes of SMEs. The data highlights that this is a growing sector, not only in terms of its capacity to generate wealth and employment values (+104.3 billion euros in added value, +5.9% of total employment in 2023), but acting as a larger system of value production, through a *multiplier factor*, defined as the indirect benefit that each cultural and creative enterprise produces “not only in terms of direct production, but also through its interactions with other economic sectors” (Symbola, 2024, p. 86). This factor is not evenly distributed across the national territory, with significantly lower capacity in the regions of the South, where the sector is nonetheless experiencing growth from an economic and employment point of view.

The trend toward a cross-sectoral production system takes on a particular connotation, when considered alongside the topic of Made in Italy. The iconic nature of the term, intimately connected to national identity, can be interpreted from several different perspectives: on the one hand, it is an expression of an immaterial dimension, representative of a purely Italian lifestyle, “often based on intangible aspects of the territory, know-how, design ability and reputation” (Di Tommaso & Rubini, 2012); on the other hand, it is defined on the basis of qualitative standards, measurable through objective criteria. In this sense, ADI – Associazione per il Disegno Industriale (2023) defines the quality of Made in Italy on the basis of four categories: *materials*, in keeping with environmental sustainability; *design*, understood as innovation, usability and durability of the product; *packaging*, to optimize the handling, storage and protection of the product; *form/function* in terms of recognisability. While the terminology is complex, the defining aura associated with Made in Italy would seem to prevail

over a more static position, rooted in the past and unable to express an innovative spirit. This endemic bond, however, retains its most distinctive characteristic in expressing a transformative connotation of culture, relying on innovative collaboration between different agents in the field within a substrate rooted in local specificities. Gambardella (2020) coined the term “Handmade in Italy” to refer to an entrepreneurial spirit driven by an adaptive form of intuition — and not just a passive emulation of past models — which arises from the union between the know-how of craftsmanship and the design culture. This combination suggests that “we can therefore talk about *handmade in Italy* which could represent the other future of Italian production, deeply rooted in local territories, in an Italian productive geography that cannot be relocated because it is inextricably bound to a place in which it exists — that of the artisanal fabric of our Country — provided it stems from the relationship with design culture” (Gambardella, 2020, p. 105). Based on these premises, the project aims to address the subject within the context of manufacturing production in the Southern regions, beginning with an analysis of the state of the art within the territorial context. These data represent the starting point for developing connection strategies, supported by an expandable network which could be the backbone for a systematic process to reactivate manufacturing production. The originality of the research lies in the integration of territorial mapping with a design-driven approach aimed at connecting craftsmanship, cultural heritage and contemporary design practices within a digital platform. Rather than providing a purely descriptive inventory of local actors, the research frames mapping as a strategic design tool capable of identifying relational networks and potential collaborations between artisans, designers, and cultural institutions.

The Context of Handmade Production in Southern Italy: The DeinSite Project

Southern Italy boasts a rich and diverse artisanal tradition, deeply rooted in centuries of history and expressed in various artistic and manufacturing practices. From the ceramics of Vietri and Caltagirone to the fine textiles of Calabria, from Sicilian cabinetry to coral craftsmanship in Torre del Greco, artisanal know-how has evolved through the blending of cultures, the transmission of knowledge across generations, and technological innovation. Despite the intrinsic value of these productions, challenges such as globalisation, industrial delocalisation, and the gradual loss of traditional skills threaten the survival of many small and medium-sized artisanal enterprises. Nevertheless, there has been a growing awareness in recent years of the strategic role that design and innovation can play in enhancing local craftsmanship, strengthening the Made in Italy brand, and supporting the economic and cultural development of these territories.

This is the context for the research project The Design System in the Southern Italy Territories (DeinSite), which aims to create a virtuous ecosystem connecting designers, artisans, institutions, and businesses to promote a new development model based on the interaction between the Culture of Design and Artisanal Know-How.

The project aligns with European Commission policies for territorial development, seeking to build the local capital of the Southern Italian regions. This concept encompasses material and immaterial resources, such as cultural heritage, know-how, and technological innovation (Camagni & Dotti, 2010).

The enhancement of 'local capital' is pursued through the promotion of local traditions, historically at the core of the relationship between design and craftsmanship in Italy — a synergy that, since the days of Gio Ponti, has seen designers such as Branzi, La Pietra, and Sottsass develop new forms of design integrated with local artisanal practices. Ugo La Pietra coined the concept of "territorial design", emphasising the importance of developing products through local production. The Artidesign phenomenon, which merges craftsmanship with industrial design, is another example of how design fits into a tradition that values unique, limited-edition products that depart from the logic of mass production (Alison & De Fusco, 1991).

This approach is also consistent with the current trend toward 'on-demand' and 'glocal' production and with a human-centred design perspective (Tosi, 2020; Tosi et al., 2024) that leverages digital opportunities, as anticipated by Manzini's predictive thinking, in a context of high craftsmanship and design. Specifically, the DeinSite project aims to establish five Regional Museum Systems for Design and Applied Arts, both physical and virtual, distributed across the Southern Italian regions. These museums will be dynamic spaces, not limited to preservation but fostering innovation and enhancing local craftsmanship, creating a bridge between tradition and modernity.

In addition to serving as exhibition centres, the museums will engage young designers and small businesses, offering opportunities for training, collaboration, and international visibility. The goal is to transform Southern Italy into a cultural and productive hub, a District of Arts and Crafts capable of attracting talent, investment, and sustainable tourism. The project proposes to locate the museums in areas of significant value for tourism, such as archaeological and historical sites, creating a network that connects museums and participating businesses, as already implemented with the Campania System in Pompeii (Gambardella, 2020).

The project's overall objective is to strengthen the bond between design and craftsmanship, stimulating the economic and cultural development of the Southern regions. In short, it seeks to establish museums dedicated to contemporary design, privileged spaces for presenting Handmade in Italy products (Gambardella, 2020), born from the collaboration between design and craftsmanship.

The specific objectives of the project are: a) to create an advanced network among companies, designers, and innovators to foster the growth of high-quality craftsmanship; b) to raise local community awareness of the importance of both tangible and intangible cultural heritage; c) to promote the economic growth of small and medium-sized artisanal enterprises through design; d) to integrate digital technologies into artisanal production to enhance competitiveness; e) to promote Handmade in Italy internationally and

enhance territories by fostering cultural tourism; f) to offer employment opportunities to young designers and graduates in the field. To achieve these goals, the project will include the following operational research phases Fig. 1:

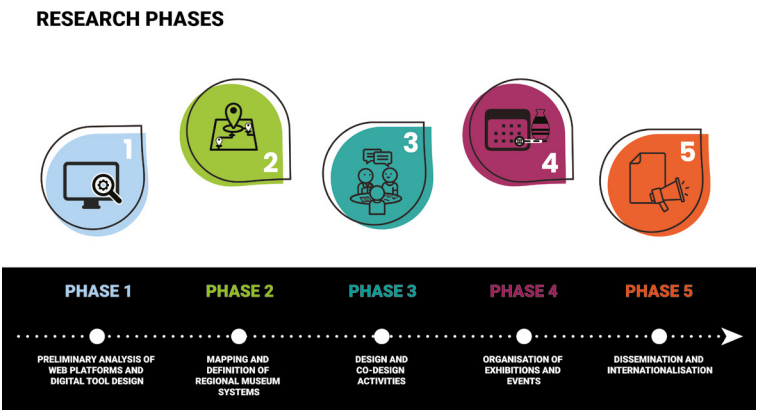


Fig. 1
Phases of the *DeinSite* project. The figure shows the schematic representation of the 5 phases of the project © The Authors, 2025.

- Phase 1 – Preliminary analysis of web platforms and digital tool design.
Initiating activities by analysing the state of the art, developing the digital platform, and defining criteria for building the database of distinctive local specialities to support subsequent phases.
- Phase 2 – Mapping and definition of Regional Museum Systems.
Surveying artisanal SMEs and museums related to craftsmanship in Campania, identifying centres of excellence (museums and companies) and the most suitable contexts for creating physical and digital Regional Museum Systems.
- Phase 3 – Design and co-design activities.
Involving young designers selected through a public call for co-design activities with artisanal businesses. Workshops will serve as the preferred operational setting to activate co-design processes aimed at product innovation, hybridising traditional knowledge and contemporary design approaches, and integrating digital technologies into production processes. The interaction between designers and artisans will create new professional connections and networks, strengthening the local productive and cultural fabric.
- Phase 4 – Organisation of exhibitions and events.
Setting up physical and digital exhibitions within the Regional Museum Systems, curated to enhance the narrative and design value of the products developed, including storytelling and digital communication tools.
- Phase 5 – Dissemination and internationalisation.
Developing an integrated communication strategy, including digital promotion, participation in conferences and fairs, and activating an international network to expand collaborations.

In this perspective, the DeinSite project aligns with the international debate on distributed manufacturing and 'glocal' production systems, where design acts as a catalyst for connecting local artisanal excellence with global networks. By adopting a Human-Centred Design (HCD) perspective — as detailed in the project's co-design framework — the research focuses on the needs of the actors involved (artisans, designers, and local communities), positioning Southern Italian territories as a laboratory for sustainable innovation. This approach moves beyond a purely conservative view of craftsmanship, framing it instead as a dynamic component of a multi-level production system that integrates traditional know-how with 4.0 technological opportunities. In this perspective, design is not only interpreted as a creative discipline but as a strategic mediator capable of activating relationships between cultural heritage, production systems, and innovation processes. This relational perspective is particularly relevant in territories such as Southern Italy, where fragmented artisanal ecosystems can benefit from structured networks and collaborative infrastructures.

Overview of the Mapping Phase

The specific in-depth investigation in Phase 2 of the mapping begins by focusing on the methodology, the phases of the mapping system and the identification of the selection and analysis criteria, providing the necessary context for interpreting the results. It is an experimental methodology, aimed at identifying: the museums which are an expression of the craft culture of excellence, represented both by tangible artifacts and by the practices, defined as intangible heritage to be preserved, linked to the identity of the territory (Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, 2003); the SMEs, that offer a type of production capable of representing the artisanal heritage, and of repositioning this culture through processes of innovation — formal, technological, material and organisational — open to the inclusion of new professional figures. The companies, most of which have inherited a historical family tradition rooted in the territory, preserve a heritage of artefacts, linked both to a production process and to archival collections, which stand as a living testament to a socio-cultural cross-section (Bosoni, 2024). Furthermore, the perspective of company museums may represent a field of experimentation, which can showcase their innovations, “[...] ‘exhibit’ not so much what already exists, but what is yet to be produced. In this sense, the museum becomes the ‘thinking head’ of the company” (Gambardella et al., 2012).

In this context, design acts as a mechanism for re-reading this system, identifying explicit or implicit relationships which can contribute to a cross-fertilisation between disciplines. The mapping process is therefore intended not merely as a geographical inventory of enterprises and museums, but as a relational and systemic investigation capable of identifying networks, cultural connections, and latent opportunities for collaboration. In this sense, the mapping phase becomes a design-oriented analytical tool supporting the development of future co-design activities within the DeinSite project.

It is possible to trigger a collaboration between SMEs, museums and designers in order to implement a production chain linked to the tradition of a territory, but guided by design processes, in a perspective of culture-driven innovation, considering cultural heritage as “real resource that can be activated” (Lupo, 2019, p. 192) with the contribution of stakeholders.

Methodology

Phase 2 of the mapping concerns the five Southern regions considered in the project. In this article, we delve into the methodological process of mapping of all regions, focusing on the results relating to the region of Campania. The *criteria of excellence* were applied as *a priori* parameters for all the regional mappings; however, the specific variety with which these areas of excellence are expressed in different territories has led to the development of a particularly broad and flexible model. This model is capable of tracking specific production districts while adapting to the unique cultural and manufacturing DNA of each region. In the case of Campania, the mapping allowed for the testing of the database's scalability, ensuring it could handle diverse scales of excellence — from historical micro-artisanship to industrial-scale manufacturing — before extending the process to the other four regions involved in the PRIN project.

The mapping is constructed according to a dual premise: it is a *topographical* mapping, as it takes into account the SMEs and museums located in the territories of the selected regions, and a *topological* mapping, filtering the agents in the field according to specific characteristics.

The starting point for the selection and analysis of museums and SMEs is the definition of the *criterion of excellence* of production, distinguishing the application between museums and companies, while still recognising a set of shared common principles. In order to define the criterion, we conducted focus groups, which delved into the concept of excellence starting from the literature review, the definition of Made in Italy (Di Tommaso & Rubini, 2012), in particular relating to the practical application in the update of L.206/2023, and furthermore considering the contributions of industry associations, such as ADI. In this sense, the main connotations can be divided into four areas, which can guide the analysis and reciprocal positioning of the agents in the field Fig. 2.

- 1 The quality of the products, extrapolated from the production techniques and materials used, in connection with the capacity for innovation and creativity. This criterion addresses the relationship between the handmade component and the use of mechanised approaches: maintaining a handcrafted process, enhanced by stages of digital integration, or implementing a largely technology-driven process in which some stages remain handcrafted. The focus on the production process is then analysed with reference to the principle of sustainability, with attention to recyclable and reusable solutions and the reduction of pollutants. In the case of museums, the quality refers to the display of collections and thus to the artefacts on display, as well as to a laboratory perspective.

- 2 The local heritage, defined both as history and reputation, expressed in the capacity to evoke, through the productive and cultural activity, the knowledge linked to the local identity and knowledge, and through direct involvement with the local community. The aim is to establish a process of recognition within a cultural heritage that connects companies within a given area, as well as companies and museums and other stakeholders.
- 3 The cross-sectoriality, understood as the openness to a relational dimension, expressed through the cross-pollination between different disciplines and a vocation for research and experimentation, both through the introduction of multidisciplinary figures, a necessary part of the team, as well as through external collaborations.
- 4 The acknowledgments, through awards and certifications, which identify an ability to narrate, display and innovate the activity over time, and which in the case of SMEs is defined more specifically with reference to management and economic capacity.



Fig. 2
Framing the principle of excellence. The image outlines the key concepts and framework defining excellence and its connections © The Authors, 2025.

The originality of this approach therefore lies in a reinterpretation of the concept of excellence, which connects the territorial dimension — the capacity to embody the know-how of a place — with innovation and creativity, filtered through a necessary cross-sectoral approach. Interest in mapping artisanal enterprises and translating the data into digital platforms may be found in various experiences, both partially at the level of the project's territorial context (*Le Mani di Napoli* www.manidinapoli.com) and at the national level (*Homo Faber* www.homofaber.com). However, this approach tends to focus primarily on the business dimension alone. Mapping within the project context, by contrast, is characterised by the potential to connect enterprises with museums and to link this knowledge to an extensive network of stakeholders. This model therefore carries not only analytical value but also a design-oriented approach.

In order to further explore these aspects, we developed a Google Form that could be shared online, differentiated between museums and companies, and organised into subsections conceived to intercept the required information and the digital maturity of the companies through the mapping of their production processes.

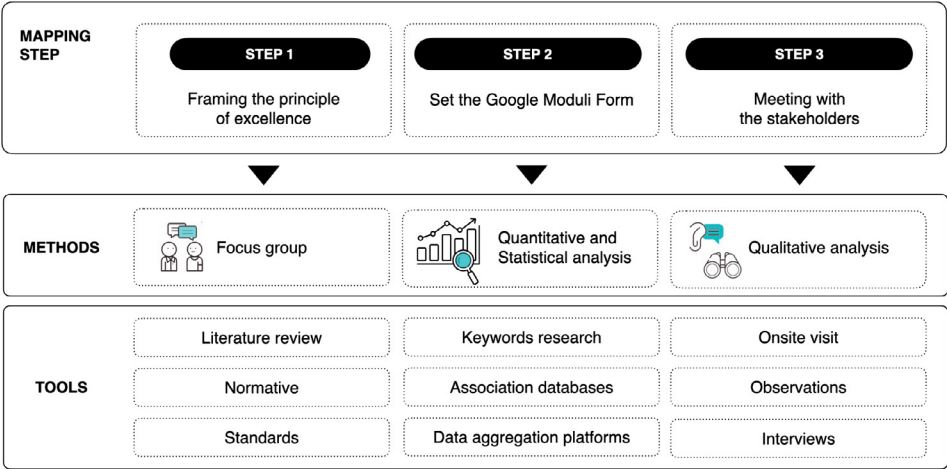
The reliability of the data collected through these digital surveys was ensured by a process of triangulation involving on-site visits, stakeholder interviews, and technical inspections conducted during the field research. This qualitative validation phase allowed for the correction of inconsistencies in self-reported data and provided a deeper understanding of the production contexts. Furthermore, the mapping criteria were strictly informed by the results of Phase 1 of the PRIN project, which identified specific design requirements for the digital infrastructure: the need for an ‘enabling environment’ capable of hosting not only a database but also shared work-spaces for co-design. The system was designed to bridge the gap between cultural heritage and digital accessibility, ensuring that the ‘hot data’ (qualitative and relational) could effectively support future collaborative processes.

Through literature and online research, using keywords research (Google), institutional and association databases (e.g. *Handmade Campania; Le mani di Napoli; Mater Ceramica; Unione Concerie Italiane*), market data aggregation platforms (e.g. atoka.it), and communication platforms (website; social media), this multi-source approach ensured the robustness of the mapping process by combining quantitative and qualitative data sources. The integration of desk research, digital surveys, field observations and stakeholder interviews allowed the research team to capture both the structural characteristics of the enterprises and the relational dynamics within the territorial ecosystem. These data were supplemented by on-site visits and interviews with stakeholders, establishing a co-design approach (Sanders & Stapper, 2007) for conducting the mapping.

Regarding the involvement of stakeholders, the selection primarily privileged territorial actors to respect the ‘glocal’ nature of the project, although the system remains open to future integrations with national trade associations to further expand the network.

This methodological system is based on a strategy of Research Through Design (Buchanan, 2001) in order to extrapolate design directions from the study of a series of applied case studies. Fig. 3

Fig. 3
Steps of the mapping phase. The image illustrates the sequential stages involved in the mapping process © The Authors, 2025.



The design of the Google Forms was differentiated to provide two types of forms, one for museums and one for SMEs. In both cases, the forms were divided into nine sections, which respond to different analysis criteria:

- 1 criteria related to *cold data*, through the description of anagraphic, legal and organizational characteristics (*Anagraphic Data Section, History, Characteristics, Organizational structure*);
- 2 criteria linked to *hot data*, through the identification of production techniques and technologies, the products in which the companies are specialized, starting with iconic production, collections and curatorial criteria for museums; relations with external stakeholders (for SMEs: *Activities, Products and services, Iconic products, Patents*; for museums: *Prominent typology of exhibits, Bibliography*; for SMEs and museums: *Relations*);
- 3 criterion of *excellence*, expressed in the four areas under analysis (*quality of products, link with local heritage, cross-sectoriality, acknowledgments*).

The disclosure of the *forms*, which took place online on the Google Forms platform, began in March 2024 and ended in March 2025. For the Campania region, a sample of 52 SMEs and 31 museums was analysed.

The data are catalogued via an online database, which will be transferred to the digital platform. This material is configured as a way to present the company and the museum, considered individually, but within a network of expandable connection. This approach allows us to work on a dual level: the histories of the company and the museum; the connections that take place between them viewed from a systemic perspective, which open up relationships with designers, creatives, craftsmen, researchers and other stakeholders.

Mapping Results for the Campania Region

In Campania, consider the presence of 24,524 companies in the manufacturing sector with 0-9 employees and 3,273 with 10-49 employees (Confindustria Campania, 2023). In light of this data, the aim is to map those SMEs which expressed a link with the craft tradition, reinterpreted through cross-sectorial collaboration processes, in order to stimulate potential innovation within the company system and in the formal and material components of their products.

While these relationships are distinct to each production district, it is possible to extrapolate certain common characteristics. With regard to museums, we began by mapping company museums, considering both permanent museum collections and temporary exhibitions. Furthermore, in mapping companies with a long family history, a central point was the existence of archival material, and this is both in terms of its preservation and display to the public. The map also includes museums dedicated to a specific industrial district and museums that contain just sections dedicated to the craft tradition.

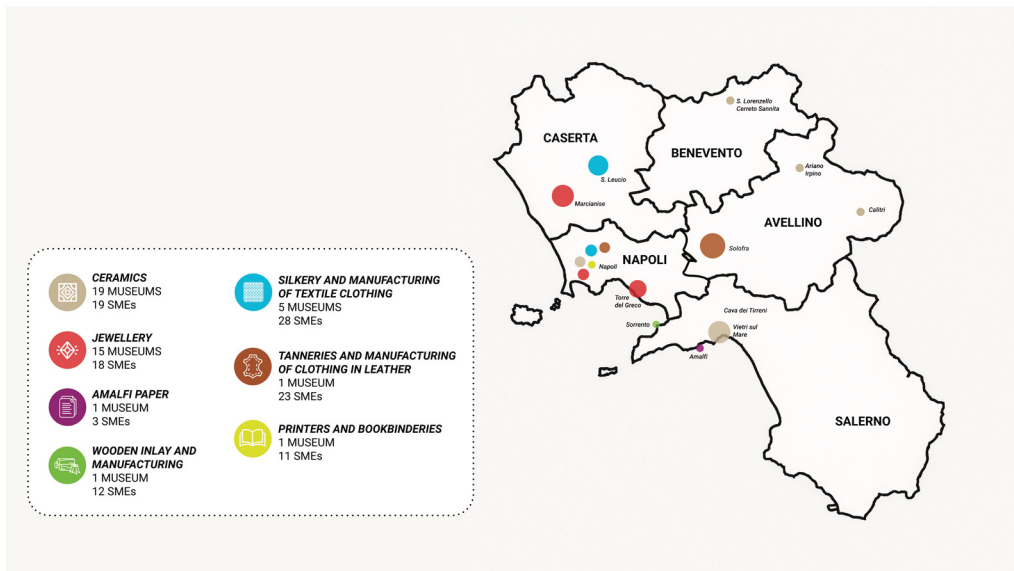


Fig. 4
Framing of industrial districts within Campania region. The image shows the distribution of industrial districts © The Authors, 2025.

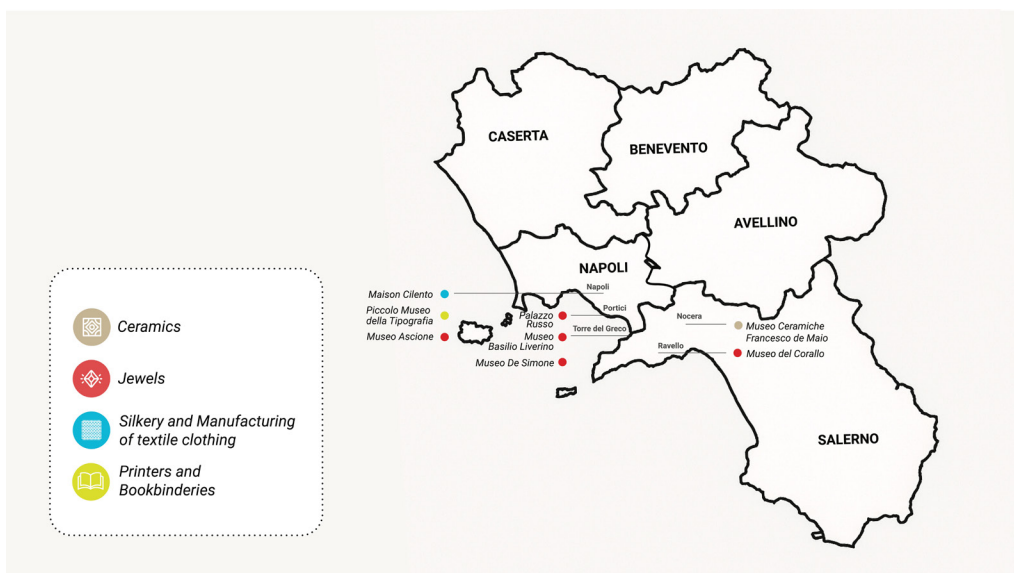


Fig. 5
Framing Company museums within the Campania region. The image shows the distribution of company museums in the region © The Authors, 2025.

More specifically, seven industrial districts have been identified: Ceramics; Jewellery; Amalfi Paper; Wood Inlay and Manufacturing; Silk production and Manufacturing of textile clothing; Tanneries and Manufacturing of leather clothing; Printers and Bookbinders. While their presence in the territory does not always exhibit the homogeneity characteristic of an industrial district, defined as “a cluster of geographically close and economically interconnected firms and institutions” (Viesti, 2003 as quoted in Buono, 2008, p. 93), there is a commonality of behaviour that can be seen as forming part of a connected system. It should be noted furthermore that Viesti (2003), in defining the industrial district, refers to the “depth” of the district, built through the variety and quality of the companies involved. In this regard, Buono (2008) draws a distinction between local production systems and industrial districts, the latter case being characterised by specialized production. Fig. 4

In the first phase of mapping, 43 museums were identified, considering company museums, specialised manufacturing museums, museum collections and temporary and permanent exhibitions. In the case of museums, the mapping aims to investigate the different manifestations of the artisanal component of excellence, linked to the territory, through artefacts — the tangible representation of different periods and styles that expresses the intangible dimension connected to the territorial context. In this sense, this traditional component has been mapped both with reference to the memory of the past and as a dynamic capacity to express the contemporary context. A further element to be considered is the presence of these museums in the territories that traditionally express such productive vocations, and this with a view to analysing the prospects for involving the communities. This process also allows us to consider the museum in that permeable dimension that fosters relationships within the urban context.

With respect to the first data, we have identified seven company museums in different industrial districts: one in ceramics; five in jewellery; one in silk production and the manufacturing of textile clothing. Fig. 5

In the *Ceramics* district, the company museum of Ceramica Francesco De Maio collects and displays representative artefacts of traditional craft production, telling the story of the family heritage since 1494. This cultural heritage is complemented by an evocation of the historic collaboration between the company and designers such as Gio Ponti, whose preliminary sketches leading to the famous series of 33 blue and white decorations are on display.

In the *Jewellery* district, five historical companies open to the public to showcase the family production collections: Museo del Corallo Ascione; Palazzo del Corallo Russo; Museo del Corallo De Simone; Museo del Corallo Basilio Liverino; Museo del Corallo Camo, demonstrating an aptitude to illustrate and preserve the historicity of the gold jewellery production. For both of these districts, we had mapped a large number of museums: eighteen dedicated to ceramics and fifteen to jewellery, mainly specialised museums, but we also considered museums that feature sections dedicated to artisanal production.

In the *Silk Production and Manufacturing of Textile Clothing* district, consider the company museum of the historic tailoring house Maisson Cilento, founded in the eighteenth century: it is the only museum among those selected acknowledged by the Museimpresa association. The district features two other museums worthy of note: the Museo della Seta, in the monumental complex of the Belvedere di S. Leucio, the historic heart of silk production in the territory, and the Museo della Moda in Naples, dedicated to the clothing culture, conveyed through a historic collection of garments donated by noble families and collections of pieces by contemporary designers.

The *Printing and Bookbinding* district is represented by the company museum Piccolo Museo della Tipografia Cervone, which was founded with the aim of reactivating ancient typography, typographic art and the fine art print in the cultural circuit, linking it to the traditional approach of the Tipografia di Carmine Cervone.

The *Amalfi Paper* district has one specialised museum, inside an old thirteenth-century paper mill. It displays production processes starting with the historical machines, and illustrates the different stages of processing.

The same applies to the *Wood Inlay* district, whose museum-workshop is characterized by both a didactic and exhibition vocation, rooted in both a nineteenth century and a contemporary tradition, exhibiting artefacts arising from collaborations with designers such as Alessandro Mendini and Filippo Alison.

The *Tanneries and Manufacturing of Leather Clothing* district is represented by a single specialised museum, dedicated to the production of traditional tanning, inside the Palazzo Ducale Orsini in Solofra. The Stazione Sperimentale per l'Industria delle Pelli e delle materie conciarie (SSIP) is a research institute whose role is to support SMEs, but it also systematically organises travelling exhibitions. In this direction, it is interesting to note that in both the tannery and silk production districts, some temporary exhibitions have been mapped, dedicated to a curatorial re-reading of artifacts focused on specific garments, such as leather gloves (*Mostra del Guanto*, Fondazione Banco di Napoli, organised by SSIP) or highlighting one aspect such as the colour red, based on the textiles of S. Leucio (*Trame, Il rosso corre sul filo*, Archivio di Stato).

As regards the mapping of enterprises, we have included about 100 enterprises, classified as micro, small and medium-sized enterprises, subdivided by production district. The objective was to identify exemplary cases of excellence in production, expressed through local knowledge.

The aim was not to create an exhaustive census of all existing enterprises, but rather to identify representative cases that could illustrate the diversity of production models and the different degrees of interaction between craftsmanship, technological innovation, and design culture.

In this sense, the aim was not merely to recognise a series of artisanal excellences that eloquently express the value through which the culture of know-how narrates a territory, but rather to consider how this artisanal component evolves over time, giving rise to a production open to processes of cross-pollination. The artefacts they produce reflect a variable composition of these criteria, manifesting an open-

ness to a formal or material innovation — whether through external collaborations or technological advancement — or preserving a traditional dimension but innovating the system's capacity for mass production.

Compared to the first data, the mapped companies are predominantly micro and small enterprises. In most cases, these companies communicate their being rooted in the craft tradition of the territory — through the transmission of knowledge from generation to generation — as a founding value, variously underscoring a change of course, which ranges from contemporary tradition to craft 4.0. This process of opening up unfolds according to a different hierarchy in the relationship between artisanal craftsmanship and the mechanization of production phases, as well as a varying propensity for cross-sectoral collaboration. The *Wood inlay* district retains a strongly artisanal character, tied to the cultural identity of Sorrento, in some cases remaining open to processes of formal and decorative innovation, which can support a potential, albeit limited, serial production (Biagio Barile). Also considered in this district was *Wood Manufacturing* more broadly, which has a more heterogeneous presence compared to the territorial tradition of wood inlay. These are companies that express a greater degree of innovation in their production processes, including through collaborations with designers (Hebanon). Like *Wood inlay*, the *Amalfi Paper* district retains a handmade approach, rooted in the heritage tradition of the Amalfi paper mills, while at the same time drawing on processes to speed up the production phases, for example through the use of rotary machines (Carteria Amatruda).

The process to modernise production by introducing technologically advanced phases is more pronounced in the case of the *Ceramics* district, within a system that nonetheless retains an essential manual skill, particularly in the decorating process. On the other hand, there are cases of innovation in production processes using digital 3D printing technologies (Bhumi). The product does not remain statically bound to the world of *riggirole*, but is transformed through a formal and material innovation, with changes ranging from new formats, to the introduction of more efficient materials such as maiolicato (Francesco De Maio). This system is accompanied by a natural tendency towards cross-sectoral collaboration (Ma.Vi.). In keeping with this trend, the *Jewellery* district maintains a variability of production, from an entirely handcrafted approach in the case of cameo (Enzo Liverino), to the introduction of mechanised processes, such as high precision cutting and the introduction of digital technologies (Roberto Giannotti), accompanied by ongoing material experimentation. Fig. 6

The *Silk Production* district, with the production centre at S. Leucio, offers an approach that integrates a perspective of innovation into the traditional production system, by adopting digital systems for the selection and processing of materials, alongside artisanal stages such as the warp, managed by computer-controlled technologically advanced machines (Alois Tessitura Serica). The *Manufacturing of Textile Clothing* displays a strong identity rooted in the tailoring tradition, especially in menswear, tied to the province of Naples (Liberti, 2010), and reinterpreted on the basis of production and organisational infrastructures open to cross-sectoriality and formal and material innovation (Kiton).



The *Tanneries* district, linked to the territory of Solofra, is defined by the most innovative production approach, moving towards a potential automation of its phases, and deliberately blurring the boundary between craft 4.0. and industry 4.0. In this district, the focus is on the search for sustainable material solutions and non-polluting production processes. The *Manufacturing of Leather Clothing* district extends across the Naples area, where historical companies of the territory (Mario Valentino) protect the knowledge embedded in the rituals of the manual production steps, while integrating technological innovation, as in the 15 stages of glove production implemented by digital laser cutting (Gala Gloves). The concentration of *Printers and Bookbinders* in the area of Naples has historical origins, “places that reveal a Neapolitan typographic art of ancient and prestigious tradition” (Piscitelli, 2020, p. 128). Artisanal techniques such as offset printing and typography, as well as binding techniques that use frames with linen threads on hemp ropes, are accompanied by processes of digitisation and automation, such as digital printing and the use of mechanical stapling and folding machines.

With the exception of company museums, it is generally difficult to establish systematic connections between museums and companies, even if they are located in the same territory. In addition, many companies report the presence of archives, only in some cases open to public consultation processes. The establishment of connections between companies both in relation to districts (such as the District of Campania Ceramics and the Orafo Campano District) and to product type (as in the case of the association Le mani di Napoli, the Chiroteca network for the production of gloves, or the San Leucio Silk brand for the production of silk textiles) reflects an associative will to recognize themselves in a specialised mode of practice, and to safeguard that practice.

Fig. 6
Field investigation at the Company Museum Francesco De Maio Ceramics, Nocera (SA) (left) and Ma.Vi, Cava dei Tirreni (SA) (right). The image shows the exhibits and layout of the museum and one of the production stages at Ma.Vi. revealed during the phase of observation and interview © The Authors, 2025.

Discussion and Conclusions

In terms of scientific transparency and data accessibility, the results of the mapping and the broader project activities are systematically shared on the official platform www.deinsite.it, which serves as the primary repository for the regional museum systems. A synthesis of the analytical findings reveals a significant trend: while traditional sectors such as wood inlay or *Amalfi paper* maintain a strongly artisanal character, others like the silk production or tannery districts are rapidly evolving towards a 'Craft 4.0' model. Districts such as jewellery and ceramics, on the other hand, are in a middle position, maintaining the handcrafted dimension that is required for specific steps (e.g. decoration) and working on updating materials, types and production methods. This confirms that the originality of the DeinSite mapping lies in its topological dimension: it does not merely geolocate companies but defines the relational quality and the innovation potential of the creative networks, providing a replicable model for other Mediterranean contexts currently under investigation in the subsequent phases of the project.

More specifically, the mapping phase highlighted three key aspects:

- 1 the persistence of strong craft-based knowledge deeply rooted in local territories;
- 2 the emergence of hybrid production models combining traditional craftsmanship with digital technologies and contemporary design approaches;
- 3 the strategic role that digital platforms can play in connecting fragmented actors and enabling collaborative networks between artisans, museums, designers, and cultural institutions.

The mapping phase of the DeinSite project, conducted in the Campania region, provided an articulated overview of the interactions between design culture and artisanal know-how. It aimed to highlight strategies for the valorization of both the tangible and intangible heritage associated with local production districts. This mapping enabled a systemic reading and recomposition of artisanal excellences, laying the groundwork for an initial territorial network connecting SMEs, corporate museums, cultural institutions, and designers.

However, the research phase also revealed several methodological and operational limitations. The strong uniqueness of the cases analysed — stemming from the specific histories of individual companies and museums — made it challenging to identify homogeneous and widely replicable criteria. Furthermore, data collection in the southern Italian context faced significant challenges due to informational heterogeneity and the fragmentation of sources, often linked to small-scale enterprises lacking consolidated communication structures. Another critical issue concerns the long-term sustainability of the digital platform developed within the project. While it serves as a strategic infrastructure for dissemination, networking, and collaborative design, it requires the definition of a management model capable of ensuring its self-sustainability over time. This aspect demands the continuous involvement of stakeholders, periodic data updates, sustainable business models, and a distributed

governance system to maintain the platform's vitality, preserve local networks beyond the project's conclusion, and enable collaborative management among museums, businesses, and cultural initiatives tied to craftsmanship. In order to enhance the scientific transparency of the research, the next stages will focus on the gradual development and sharing of a more systematic dataset, comprising qualitative information, georeferenced data and relationship maps of the stakeholders involved, thereby promoting greater clarity, verifiability and replicability of the results.

The project intends to broaden and strengthen the impact of the actions already undertaken along three main lines: positioning design as a strategic tool for activating territorial networks and fostering the shared valorisation of the cultural and productive heritage.

Looking ahead, the project envisages extending the mapping process to the southern regions of Calabria, Basilicata, Apulia, and Sicily. The goal is to build an interregional network of creative districts based on shared criteria of excellence, integrated across both digital and physical dimensions. This geographical expansion is not simply a matter of scale but represents a key step in constructing a collaborative cultural ecosystem oriented toward local development.

In parallel, two workshops conceived as co-design opportunities will be organized in Campania, involving artisans, young designers, and local cultural actors. These collaborative sessions aim to translate emerging synergies into tangible actions, generating prototypes, narratives, and shared visions. After each workshop, the outcomes will be publicly exhibited in selected museums, fostering a curatorial dialogue between material culture and contemporary design practices.

A further area of development lies in the evolution of the DeinSite digital platform into a dynamic and interactive infrastructure, acting as an archive, operational tool, and connection space among network participants. The objective is to transform the database into an enabling project environment capable of supporting the continuity of local networks, facilitating co-design processes, and promoting cultural development models based on distributed forms of governance and collaboration. In this way, the platform will drive local innovation, fostering collaborative models that integrate design, craftsmanship, and culture and generating new opportunities to co-create scalable and sustainable design solutions.

Thus, the DeinSite project positions itself as a foundational element in an expandable creative ecosystem in which design acts as a strategic lever for heritage valorisation, process innovation, and the activation of new territorial economies. In this perspective, the relationship between design and craftsmanship is not merely a conservative exercise but an opportunity to reactivate cultural and productive knowledge within a contemporary dimension.

Design, therefore, assumes the role of a cultural mediator, capable of connecting actors and territories and generating shared innovation processes. The work carried out represents an initial step towards building an integrated and participatory system for the manufacturing heritage of Southern Italy, in which local identity is interwoven with the challenges of contemporaneity.

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In summary, the analytical findings suggest that Campania's production districts cannot be interpreted as the result of a linear transition from tradition to innovation, but rather through a spectrum of adaptive trajectories shaped by local resources, institutional frameworks, and design-mediated processes. The mapping demonstrates that hybridisation is not an episodic phenomenon but a structural condition of contemporary craft-based economies, in which manual expertise, technological experimentation, and cultural narratives coexist in dynamic configurations. From a design research perspective, the study contributes to framing territorial ecosystems as relational infrastructures in which value is generated through connectivity, knowledge exchange, and collaborative project practices. The DeinSite experience therefore highlights the need to move beyond sectoral understandings of craft production and to adopt systemic and topological approaches capable of capturing the evolving interdependencies between cultural heritage, innovation processes, and regional development strategies.

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Authors' Contributions

Conceptualization, F.T., M.D.M.; methodology, E.I., A.M.; data curation, E.I., A.M.; writing—original draft preparation, E.I., A.M.; writing—review and editing - Section 1 All authors; Section 2 F.T., M.D.M.; Section 3 and 3.1 A.B., E.I., A.M.; Section 3.2 and 4 E.I., A.M.; Section 5 All authors; visualization, E.I., A.M.; supervision, F.T., M.D.M.; project administration, F.T., M.D.M. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

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For some time now, *diid* has been seeking to intercept transformation, focusing on Change Studies, because we are convinced that where design is able to grasp the change, there arises a demand for design, an explicit need, an urgency for answers, clients who require attention. Our editorial surveying is unable to keep pace with the acceleration that change is currently undergoing: the timescales of scientific publishing do not coincide with those of the reality we are living in. However it sometimes happens, as in issue 88, that we succeed in intercepting certain enduring islands in the contemporary debate such as the one in which design deals with the fuzzy front end of innovation. The designer produces synthesis, and the disorientation caused by the acceleration in the speed of change tends to produce blurred, subjective and sensationalistic images rather than verified and shared ones. This Open Debate explores the intersection between design, unpredictability and the development of emerging design skills.

Flaviano Celaschi

