



Milan and its gateways: Fiera Milano

The gateway of the economy

Fiera Milano is a living entity. It is a long time since it was first established in the early Twenties, when it was still a “trade fair” temporarily housed on the bulwarks between Porta Venezia and what is now known as Piazza della Repubblica. This “sample fair” gradually developed, especially during the Sixties and Seventies, into a series of specialised events, and continued to grow into what it is today: one of the most leading exhibition centres in the world.

By analysing the portfolio of over 80 events held at the two fieramilano exhibition complexes, reflecting the performance of the Italian economy, we can now say that it is:

- Leader in the machine tools, electrotechnics and mechanical components sectors, the driving forces of the technological part of the Italian economy, attracting 25% of foreign exhibitors and 27% of business visitors;
- Leader in the sectors classified as traditional, through incorporating an elevated content of design, that is, the entire design-furnishing-home system and the fashion system, with 30% of foreign exhibitors and a good 50% of business visitors;
- Emerging in the service sectors, such as urban areas, tourism and tourist companies, and environmental protection (shown in yellow) - attracting 20% of foreign exhibitors and 14% of foreign visitors - though more focused on the domestic market as regards events for R&D-intensive sectors - with 8% of foreign exhibitors and 2% of foreign visitors (shown in green).

This large and varied portfolio puts Fiera Milano into competition with all the main Italian and, especially, European exhibition centres; while there are points of excellence, generally speaking many of the events held at Fiera Milano are landmarks in their particular sectors. Especially because there is an event dedicated to all the links of the production chain. By simultaneously holding various events covering different production stages, we are further developing the exhibition sector by building up “system trade fairs”.

Fiera Milano is a showcase for the Italian economy and Italian production in particular. This affirmation can be supported by analysing figures relative to the design-furnishing and fashion system.

As regards the fashion system, the international competitors are Paris and Düsseldorf, even if both are positioned below Milan, as regards exhibitor and visitor numbers and square meters sold. Paris competes with Milan by attracting approximately 200.000 visitors a year.

Concerning the design-furnishing system, the only competitor that has a similarly complete portfolio in this sector (from semi-finished to finished products both for the residential and office sectors) is Cologne. But the Milan system prevails as regards visitors while the two are more or less balanced with respect to the number of exhibitors.

Fiera Milano attracts major flows of people, know-how and goods. On the one hand, it attracts local flows – from Milan and Lombardy – which prepare for trade fairs on their own. On the other hand, it attracts national and transnational flows. Its economic spin-offs take advantage of globalisation while its local impact stimulates and develops Milan and Lombardy.

Generally speaking, last year's figures show that 88 events were held in the two Fiera Milano exhibition complexes; 2.011.330 m² of exhibition area were sold; 32.405 exhibiting companies, attracted over 5.900.000 visitors – both the general public and business operators.

The events, both exhibitions and congresses, are spread out over most of the year, albeit with different intensities, apart from the summer months.

To fully understand the phenomenon of Fiera Milano and its impact on the city, it must be considered that each exhibitor mobilises a fair number of people in order to participate; hence, starting from the total number of exhibiting companies, more than 250.000 people are involved in trade fairs.

One of Fiera Milano's greatest impacts on the city, in terms of intangible wealth generated by the cultural exchange between different business worlds and tangible wealth generated by the presence of people attending exhibitions, derives from the vast numbers of visitors it attracts to the area. By reinterpreting the figures, therefore, to get some idea of overall phenomenon of Fiera Milano, the number of businessmen and businesswomen staying in Milan overnight for the purpose of attending events, either as exhibitors or as visitors, is estimated to be more than 2.4 million units. According to the Istat glossary, one unit is equal to one night spent by a person in a hotel or similar structure: this means that every night an average of 8.000 people stay in Milan overnight during the ten months of exhibition activities.

The profile of Fiera Milano exhibitor is the following:

- exhibitors from all over the world, more than 116 countries;
- 21% are medium enterprises while 8% are large;
- the average number of employees is 66;
- 25% export over 50% of production; only 10% do not export;
- 35% have a R&D structure; 24% hold patents; 36% co-operated in research projects with other companies/institutions/universities in the last two years;
- approximately 50% will introduce innovations following participation in the exhibition;
- 21% of companies from outside Milan come to the city by plane;
- 72.573 commercial vehicles entered the exhibition complex in the last year.

The companies visiting Fiera Milano are on average smaller than exhibitors though equally well structured.

- visitors from all over the world, more than 190 countries;
- 16% are medium enterprises while 9% are large;
- exhibitions are visited by corporate decision-makers, just 14% come to simply obtain information and report on their visit as they do not have decision-making powers;
- the average number of employees is 46;
- over 60% saw new products during their visits to exhibition;
- 31% of companies from outside Milan come to the city by plane and approximately 40% spend the night in the area after an event.

Fiera Milano is also extremely important for the younger age groups which most probably represent generational continuity and new entrepreneurship. Almost 60% of business visitors are aged under 40.

Why is Fiera Milano a gateway to the city of Milan and not just a large company like many others? We have given a partial answer to this question by describing the cultural and economic contribution made by exhibitors and visitors. But another factor must also be considered. The economic and social impact of a large exhibition complex on the entire region, in fact, is completely different from that of a big factory or a large infrastructure, such as an airport. The impact of Fiera Milano makes it a gateway, a transit point, and not just a dedicated location. It is a gateway that requires other gateways in Milan to be successful, while it is a stimulus it is also the outcome of external change. It is the phenomenon of a complex and connected urban system.

More specifically, analysis of the local impact of a large factory reveals that it is mainly limited to a number of medium companies that enjoy an almost exclusive relationship with it. These companies, amounting to just some tens, are generally located near the factory. The impact of an airport involves, on the one hand, commercial, leisure and entertainment activities inside the structure or within an identifiable boundary which mainly aim to help travellers “while away the time”, and, on the other hand, logistics services for the infrastructure itself, these too, similarly to a large factory, being fully identifiable and numerically limited. Things are very different for a large exhibition complex: exhibitors and visitors come to “work” and, after a day spent among the stands, they simply want to relax, enjoy themselves, get to know the city or carry on working in a different environment. Therefore, after leaving the exhibition centre, these people are “transformed” into business tourists with relevant decision-making and spending powers. They flood into the city along many different routes and each single business enterprise becomes a potential supplier and service provider to this army. The capacity of intercepting these people depends on the entrepreneurial spirit of each company. Remaining at the cutting-edge of the offer of services to people and business is an important element of the success of Milan and its Exhibition Complex.

The close link between Fiera Milano and its city and region ensures that the enlargement of its structure and the extension of its activities become a launch pad for the regional economy: various analyses have revealed that the presence of the exhibition complex in Milan and its extension have a major economic impact on the surrounding area, a truly important opportunity for Milan and the whole of Lombardy. The impact of exhibition activities and the increase generated by the enlargement of the exhibition complex is estimated to generate an annual production in excess of € 4.3 billion with an added value of € 2.4 billion, while around 43,000 jobs are connected with the exhibition sector.

This impact involves all economic sectors, especially the service sector; 34% of total production is absorbed by the hotel and commercial sector, 30% by corporate and other services; 12% by the transport and communications sector. The manufacturing sector absorbs 16% while building and energy both attract 3% and agriculture 2%.