BOOK OF PROCEEDINGS

1st International Conference on Built Environment

ICBE 2026

MAY 08th-09th, 2026
POLIS University, Tiranë

ISBN: 9789928347282

DOI: 10.37199/c4100031

CIP Katalogimi në botim BK Tiranë

Universiteti Polis

1st international conference on built environment (icbe) :

may 08th-09th, 2026 : book of proceedings / POLIS University,

Tirane. - Tiranë : Universiteti Polis, 2026. 1 burim në linjë (... f.)

ISBN 9789928347282

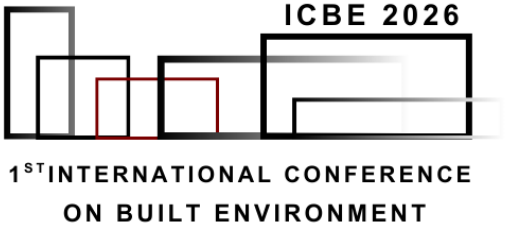
1.Arkitektura 2.Konferenca

72 (062)

BOOK OF PROCEEDINGS

1st International Conference on Built Environment

ICBE 2026



MAY 08th-09th, 2026
POLIS University, Tiranë

ISBN: 9789928347282

DOI: 10.37199/c4100031

1st International Conference on Built Environment

ICBE 2026

Conference Theme and Rationale

The 1st International Conference on Built Environment (ICBE 2026) was conceived as an international and interdisciplinary forum for advancing knowledge, critical discussion, and innovation across architecture, urban planning, engineering, construction, materials, design, and the wider built environment. Organized by POLIS University in collaboration with the National Agency for Scientific Research and Innovation in Albania (AKKSHI), the Academy of Sciences of Albania and the University of Ferrara in Italy, the conference brought together academics, researchers, practitioners, students, and industry representatives to exchange research findings, professional experience, and emerging perspectives on the transformation of contemporary cities and territories.

The conference theme reflected the increasingly complex challenges shaping the built environment, with particular attention to sustainability, resilience, technological innovation, heritage preservation, and socially responsive design. Contributions addressed sustainable architecture and green building, innovative construction technologies and materials, climate-responsive and energy-efficient design, disaster risk reduction, circular approaches to construction, and the integration of renewable energy. Equal emphasis was placed on digital transformation through Building Information Modeling, Geographic Information Systems, artificial intelligence, data analytics, automated solutions, digital fabrication, and advanced manufacturing.

ICBE 2026 also recognized that the future of the built environment cannot be approached through technological innovation alone. Urban transformation, cultural heritage, adaptive reuse, inclusive design, ecological thinking, art, and interdisciplinary research were therefore integral to the conference rationale. The scientific sessions examined topics ranging from seismic resilience, geotechnical engineering, and structural safety to urban fragmentation, public space, heritage conservation, adaptive environments, and new relationships between human and non-human systems.

Through keynote lectures, scientific presentations, case studies, and interdisciplinary debate, the conference encouraged connections between research and practice while promoting approaches capable of responding to environmental, social, cultural, and technological change. The breadth of contributions demonstrated the value of bringing engineering, architecture, urbanism, design, heritage, and emerging technologies into a shared academic framework for more resilient, sustainable, adaptive, and human-centered environments.

Held on 8-9 May 2026 at POLIS University in Tirana, with in-person and online participation, ICBE 2026 welcomed guest speakers and participants from Albanian and international universities, research institutions, professional organizations, and industry. Its sessions established a platform for presenting current research, exchanging expertise, strengthening meaningful collaboration, and identifying future directions for the built environment.

The event

The **1st International Conference on Built Environment (ICBE 2026)** is an interdisciplinary academic and professional forum dedicated to exploring contemporary challenges, emerging research, and innovative approaches shaping the future of the built environment. Bringing together researchers, academics, architects, engineers, urban planners, designers, practitioners, and industry professionals, the conference promotes the exchange of knowledge and encourages collaboration across traditionally interconnected disciplines. Its thematic scope encompasses sustainable and resilient construction, technological innovation, advanced building materials, urban transformation, cultural heritage, and interdisciplinary design approaches. Particular attention is given to the growing role of digital technologies, data-driven methodologies, intelligent design processes, and advanced analytical tools in supporting more informed and responsive approaches to architecture, engineering, and urban development. At the same time, ICBE 2026 recognizes the importance of environmental responsibility, cultural identity, social needs, and human-centered design in shaping contemporary cities and territories. Through keynote lectures, scientific sessions, case studies, and interdisciplinary exchange, the conference provides a platform for presenting current research, discussing professional experiences, and developing new perspectives capable of contributing to **safer, more sustainable, adaptive, inclusive, and resilient built environments**.

Objectives

- Promote interdisciplinary collaboration among researchers, academics, practitioners, and professionals in architecture, engineering, urban planning, construction, design, heritage, and related fields of the built environment.
- Advance the use of digital technologies and innovative methodologies, including BIM, GIS, artificial intelligence, data analytics, digital fabrication, and parametric approaches, in research and professional practice.
- Encourage sustainable, resilient, and climate-responsive approaches to architecture, construction, and urban development through innovative materials, energy-efficient strategies, and environmentally responsible design.
- Address contemporary challenges affecting cities, buildings, and infrastructure through scientific research, applied case studies, evidence-based approaches, and innovative design solutions.
- Promote the conservation, transformation, and adaptive reuse of cultural heritage, balancing cultural identity, contemporary needs, structural safety, and responsible urban development.
- Support human-centered and socially responsive urban transformation, considering public space, mobility, ecological systems, community needs, and the wider social and economic impacts of the built environment.
- Provide a platform for knowledge exchange and emerging research, enabling scholars, young researchers, professionals, and students to present innovative ideas, strengthen international collaboration, and contribute to future directions in the built environment.

Main Conference Themes

- Sustainable architecture and green building practices.
- Innovations in construction technologies and materials.
- Heritage preservation and adaptive reuse in the built environment.
- Digital tools and smart technologies in architecture and construction (e.g., BIM, GIS).
- Climate-responsive and energy-efficient design.
- Disaster risk reduction and resilience in the built environment.
- Circular economy approaches in construction and material usage.
- Integration of AI and data analytics in building design.
- Acoustic and thermal performance in building design.
- Renewable energy integration in building systems.
- Advanced manufacturing techniques in construction, such as 3D printing.
- Innovations in construction technologies and materials.
- Heritage preservation and adaptive reuse in the built environment.
- Disaster risk reduction and resilience in the built environment.
- Digital tools and smart technologies in architecture and construction.
- Advanced manufacturing techniques in construction.
- Geotechnical Engineering for Sustainable Development.
- Cartography and Geographic Information System.
- Computer Automated Solutions for Built Environment.
- Reliability in Civil Engineering.
- Urban planning strategies for resilient cities.
- Climate-responsive and energy-efficient design.
- Regulatory frameworks and policies impacting construction and urban development.
- Design in the Era of Anthropocene (Rethinking the Relation between Human and Non-Human Species)
- Speculative Design (with Attention to “Discursive” and “Critical” Design)
- Design and Cross-Disciplinarity (with Emphasis on Processes rather than Design Outputs)
- Inclusive Design
- Art and Urban Regeneration (Focus on Participatory, Collaborative, and Research-Based Practice)
- Relational Art and Architecture
- Monuments and ‘Anti-Monuments’ (Particular Attention to the Process of Designing and Building the City)

Committees

Scientific Committee

Prof. Dr. José Turmo / Universitat Politècnica de Catalunya · BarcelonaTech (UPC), Spain
Prof. Dr. José Antonio Lozano-Galant / University of Castilla-La Mancha (UCLM), Spain
Assoc. Prof. Dr. Francisco Javier Castilla Pascual / University of Castilla-La Mancha (UCLM), Spain
Prof. Emeritus Dr. Pantoleon Skayannis / University of Thessaly, Greece - POLIS University
Acad. Prof. Dr. Gëzim Hoxha / Academy of Sciences of Albania
Acad. Prof. Dr. Stefan Çapaliku / Center for Arts Studies, Academy of Sciences of Albania
Prof. Dr. Roberto Di Giulio / Department of Architecture, University of Ferrara, Italy
Assoc. Prof. Dr. Theo Zaffagnini / Department of Architecture, University of Ferrara, Italy
Prof. Emeritus Dr. Sherif Lushaj / POLIS University
Prof. Thoma Thomai / POLIS University
Prof. Dr. Besnik Aliaj / POLIS University
Assoc. Prof. Dr. Mario Ferrari / POLIS University
Dr. Elona Karafili / POLIS University
Assoc. Prof. Dr. Merita Toska / POLIS University
Dr. Manjola Hoxha / POLIS University
Assoc. Prof. Dr. Skënder Luarasi / POLIS University
Assoc. Prof. Dr. Llazar Kumaraku / POLIS University
Adjunct Prof. Dr. Svetlana Brzev / University of British Columbia, Canada
Andrew Charleson, Adjunct Research Fellow / Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand
Dr. Seyyed Behrad Emadi / Imperial College London
Dr. habil. Eng. Jarosław Górecki / Bydgoszcz University of Science and Technology, Poland
Prof. Giuseppe Mincolleli / Department of Architecture, University of Ferrara, Italy
Prof. Dr. Panagiotis Kyriatsis / University of Western Macedonia, Greece
Dr. Ledian Bregasi / POLIS University
Assoc. Prof. Dr. Merita Guri / POLIS University
Dr. Sonia Jojiç / POLIS University
Dr. Ilda Rusi / POLIS University
Dr. Klodjan Xhexhi / POLIS University
Dr. Keti Hoxha / POLIS University
Dr. Kristiana Meço / POLIS University
Dr. Endri Duro / POLIS University
Dr. Malvina Istrefaj / POLIS University
Dr. Ornela Sen / POLIS University
Dr. Nikolla Vesho / POLIS University
Dr. Blerim Nika / POLIS University
Dr. Genti Avdija / POLIS University
Dr. Marsela Plyku Demaj / POLIS University

Organizer Committee

Chairs:

Dr. Ilda Rusi / POLIS University

Dr. Klodjan Xhexhi / POLIS University

Dr. Sonia Jojiç / POLIS University

Co-Chairs:

Dr. Endri Duro / POLIS University

Dr. Kristiana Meço / POLIS University

Members:

Acad. Assoc. Prof. Dr. Rrapo Ormeni / Academy of Sciences of Albania

Acad. Prof. Dr. Gëzim Hoxha / Academy of Sciences of Albania

Acad. Prof. Dr. Stefan Çapaliku / Center for Arts Studies, Academy of Sciences of Albania

Mirela Muça, MA / General Director, National Agency of Scientific Research and Innovation (AKKSHI), Albania

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Sotir Dhamo / POLIS University

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Merita Guri / POLIS University

Dr. Ledian Bregasi / POLIS University

Keynote Speakers

Adjunct Prof. Dr. Svetlana Brzev / University of British Columbia, Canada

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Markel Baballëku / Polytechnic University of Tirana, Albania

Eng. Daniel Naterop / DNGeo Consulting - SISGEO, Switzerland

Eng. Skënder Allkja / ALTEA & GEOSTUDIO 2000, Albania

Dr. Stefano Romano / Center for Arts Studies, Academy of Sciences of Albania

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Alessandro Massarente / Department of Architecture, University of Ferrara, Italy

Industry & Construction Partners

Lindner Albania / Interior Fit-Out, Building Envelope & Construction Solutions

Saint-Gobain Albania / Sustainable Construction Materials & Building Solutions

ALUMIL Albania SHPK / Architectural Aluminum Systems & Building Envelope Solutions

Scientific Secretariat

Dr. Kristiana Meço / POLIS University

Msc. Eng. Erjon Çobani / POLIS University

Msc. Tekla Tasho / POLIS University

Msc. Vjola Ziu / POLIS University

Web Designer

Msc. Altin Sula / POLIS University

MSc. Nikol Doda / POLIS University

The conference is structured around six thematic sessions, each addressing a specific area of research and practice within the built environment.
Each session is coordinated by experts in the relevant disciplinary field and is open to professors, researchers, PhD candidates, and other scholars and professionals contributing to the conference themes.

SESSION I
Urban Planning and Societal Impact

Chair: Dr. Gent Avdija

This session examines the relationship between urban transformation, spatial development, and their social implications within contemporary cities. Contributions address rapid urbanization, urban fragmentation, the transformation and loss of public space, informal and spontaneous development, and the challenges associated with balancing growth and modernization with human-scale urban environments. Particular attention is given to the evolving conditions of Albanian cities and to planning approaches capable of supporting more inclusive, sustainable, socially responsive, and livable urban environments.

SESSION II
Sustainable Materials, Resilient Construction & Smart Design

Chair: Dr. Endri Duro

This session explores innovative approaches to sustainable construction, resilient structural systems, and environmentally responsive design. Particular attention is given to sustainable materials, energy-efficient and climate-responsive strategies, prefabricated and lightweight construction technologies, and human-centered approaches to structural and architectural design. The session investigates how material innovation, technological development, and responsible design practices can contribute to safer, more efficient, adaptable, and environmentally sustainable built environments.

SESSION III
Technological Advancements and Seismic Design for Resilient Places

Chairs: Dr. Seyyed Behrad Emadi & Dr. Ornela Şen

This session examines the role of technological innovation and advanced engineering methodologies in developing safer, more resilient, and adaptable built environments. Contributions address seismic hazard and risk assessment, digital fabrication, parametric and computational approaches, transformations of building envelopes and prefabricated housing systems, and emerging concepts for future urban mobility. The session highlights how the integration of engineering knowledge, digital technologies, and resilience-oriented design can strengthen the capacity of buildings, infrastructure, and urban environments to respond to contemporary and future challenges.

SESSION IV

Cultural Heritage

Chairs: Dr. Nikolla Vesho & Dr. Marsela Demaj

This session addresses the preservation, interpretation, and transformation of cultural heritage within contemporary architectural and urban contexts. Contributions explore conservation strategies for historic buildings and sacred architecture, seismic assessment and strengthening of heritage structures, adaptive reuse, and the social implications of urban regeneration and heritage loss. Particular emphasis is placed on achieving a responsible balance between conservation ethics, cultural identity, structural safety, and the evolving functional requirements of historic buildings and urban environments.

SESSION V

Spaces of Connection: Art and Design for an Interspecies and Interdisciplinary Environment

Chair: Dr. Francesco Scasciamacchia

This session explores the intersections of art, architecture, design, technology, and the built environment through interdisciplinary and experimental perspectives. It investigates changing relationships between human and non-human systems, spatial perception, adaptive reuse, post-industrial landscapes, urban representation, digital heritage, and environmentally and socially engaged design practices. Through critical, speculative, participatory, and research-based approaches, the session examines how art and design can generate new forms of connection, reinterpret existing environments, and contribute to emerging cultural and spatial narratives within contemporary cities.

SESSION VI

Next-Generation Pioneers of the Built Environment

Chair: Dr. Flogerta Krosi

This session provides a dedicated platform for emerging researchers and students to present innovative, experimental, and forward-looking approaches to the built environment. Contributions span architecture, engineering, urban planning, environmental resilience, design, and related creative disciplines, reflecting the interdisciplinary character of a new generation of researchers and practitioners. Through projects addressing topics such as bioclimatic design, flood-risk management, structural technologies, architecture-inspired design, and critical interpretations of objects and social space, the session encourages critical inquiry, experimentation, and new perspectives on the future of the built environment.

Layout & Design:

Dr. Kristiana Meço

Msc. Erjon Çobani

POLIS University Contact:

Rr. Bylis 12, Autostrada Tiranë-Durrës, Km 5, Kashar

Kodi Postar 1051, Kutia Postare 2995

Tiranë, Albania

Tel: +355.(0)4.2407420 / +355.(0)4.2407421

Fax: +355. (0)4.2407422

Mob: +355 (0) 69 40 88 111

Email: contact@universitetipolis.edu.al

Website: www.universitetipolis.edu.al

Table of Contents

SESSION I 14

Urban Planning and Societal Impact 14

The Fading Public Realm: 5

From Expansive Open Spaces to Morphological Compression in Durres' Rapid Urban Growth

Arjola SAVA 5

Spontaneous Architecture as Adaptive Metabolism in Post-Socialist Cities Renis Batalli 18

The ground floor as an urban interface: the human-building relationship and the Loss of Urban Contact Avrili MESHI 35

Urban Blueprint and Compatible Growth: 45

A Multi-Scalar Morphological Method for Sustainable Transformation in 45

Erseke, Albania **Mario DINE** 45

Examining the Internal Anatomy of Socialist-Era Hotels in Albania: 58

Spatial organisation, Geometry, Structure, Circulation, and Function**Malvina Istrefaj(KOLIÇI)** 58

Urban Construction Through Destruction Sotir DHAMO 73

SESSION II 87

Sustainable Materials, Resilient Construction & Smart Design 87

Human Centered Design in Civil Engineering Ilda RUSI, Albi ALLIAJ 88

The courtyard as a climate-responsive and resilient spatial strategy: the case of Novi Pazar Elma MAHMUTOVIĆ, Dragana KONSTANTINOVIĆ 103

Numerical assessment of the thermal performance of a heated and cooled floor containing upgraded phase change materials Oumayma BABAHARRA, Khadija CHOUKAIRY 121

Eco-Friendly Building Envelopes: 132

Thermal, Energy, Cost, and Time Performance of Prefabricated Lightweight MRC Panels in Residential Construction **Erjon ÇOBANI, Flogerta KROSI, Ornela ŞEN** 132

SESSION III 156

Technological Advancements and Seismic Design for Resilient Places 156

Identification and assessment of resident-driven façade interventions in prefabricated large panel buildings: 157

the case of Tirana Flogerta KROSI, Alma GJONAJ, Merita GURI, Ornela ŞEN, Endri DURO 157

Tirana_ toward a (non) resilient city of the future 173

Re-shaping mobility and bring back "La raison d'être of the city" **Ina MUSAI** 173

A Seismic Hazard Model of Albania 187

Case study: Kukes, Berat and Himarë **Anila XHAHYSA, Neki KUKA** 187

Phenomeno-Parametrism: 203

Translating Place Experience into Parametric **Markeljan LLESHI** 203

SESSION IV 217

Cultural Heritage 217

Preserving and Adapting Sacred Architecture: 218

A Case Study of the Jazak Monastery **Una RADIVOJEVIĆ**.....218

Monumentality Reconsidered: Heritage Preservation and Adaptive Reuse through the Theories of Robert Venturi and Aldo Rossi **Harika SHEHABI** 233

Seismic Performance Assessment of Historic Stone Masonry Buildings: 245

The Case of the Angonate Residence, Gjirokastër **Alma GJONAJ, Merita GURI, Endri DURO**... 245

Future Heritage by Design: 258

New Design Approaches to Heritage Reuse **Gregor ANDONI, Kristiana MEÇO** 258

SESSION V.....267

Spaces of Connection: Art and Design for an Interspecies and Interdisciplinary Environment 267

Heritage as Narrative:.....268

Building City Image Through Adaptive Reuse in Durrës **Vjola ZIU, Remijon PRONJA** 268

The Extraordinary Everyday Children's Spatial Agency as Anti Monumental Practice **Xhoi MUSLIAKA** 281

'Liminal Architectural Bodies' in Post-Industrial Kuçova:.....298

From an Ecological Perspective to an Aesthetic realm **Dorina XHERIMEJA, Aishe BITRI**.....298

IN Illyria, Episode I: Apollonia 311

A Pixel-Art Game Framework for Archaeological Interpretation and Cultural Heritage Learning **David KRYEMADHI, Nikolla VESHO, Skervi BAUSHI, Remijon PRONJA, Kujtim HALILI**.....311

In the Age of Material Transformation: Textile Design and Upcycling **Armela LAMAJ**.....326

AI as a Designer:.....336

The Future of Taste and Creativity in Automotive Design **Gregor ANDONI** 336

The Secondary Archive: 342

Collective Memory, Mental Images and AI-Assisted Representations in a Transforming Tirana **Dejvi DAUTI** 342

SESSION VI.....352

Next-Generation Pioneers of the Built Environment 352

Performance-Based Bioclimatic Design of a Kindergarten in Tirana: Integration of Passive Systems and Dynamic Simulation **Erald MEÇE, Afërdita MUHAMEDI, Verona HYSI, Klodjan XHEXHI**.....353

Integrated Flood Risk Management in Albania: 363

Human drivers, Basin dynamics and Policy gaps **Zejd BUSHATI, Esad MALAJ, Erjon ÇOBANI, Merita GURI** 363

Steel frame technology for residential buildings:.....383

A comparative thesis-antithesis study versus reinforced concrete systems **Elton AHMETAJ, Erjon ÇOBANI, Merita GURI** 383

DOUBLE SKIN:.....394

How does the "Double Skin" concept interact with our body in the field of fashion design? **Desara LLESHI**.....394

Chairs as instruments in the construction of social roles and human bodies Aurora BALLA 401

Autonomy as a Value:.....409

Design and Branding in the Post-Fordist Era **Irena ALIAJ, Erson RAMAJ**.....409

SESSION VI

Next-Generation Pioneers of the Built Environment

Emerging research and experimental design: Student research / Young scholars / Innovative methodologies / Experimental approaches to the built environment.

Sustainable and bioclimatic design: Bioclimatic architecture / Climate-responsive design / Environmental performance / Sustainable building concepts.

Resilience and risk management: Flood-risk management / Environmental resilience / Disaster-aware planning / Adaptive urban strategies.

Structural and technological innovation: Steel-frame technologies / Construction systems / Emerging building technologies / Engineering innovation.

Architecture, design and society: Architecture-inspired design / Fashion and spatial concepts / Objects and social space / Interdisciplinary creative practice.

Future-oriented thinking: Innovation / Critical inquiry / Interdisciplinary experimentation / New professional perspectives / Future built environments.

Autonomy as a Value:
Design and Branding in the Post-Fordist Era

DOI: 10.37199/c4100062

Irena ALIAJ
Art & Design Student, POLIS University, Albania
irena_aliaj@universitetipolis.edu.al

Erson RAMAJ
Art & Design Student, POLIS University, Albania
erson_ramaj@universitetipolis.edu.al

Abstract

For a long time, autonomy in art and cultural production has been understood as something that stands outside the market. According to this traditional view, when art becomes a commodity to be sold, creative freedom is undermined and controlled by the logic of profit. Industrialization and capitalism have been seen as forces that limit creativity.

However, in post-Fordist capitalism, the situation seems much more complicated. The question that arises is not whether autonomy has been lost, but how its form has changed. In contemporary economies, where value is created through communication, networks, and identity, autonomy does not disappear; it becomes part of the way value is produced. It is not enough to treat autonomy solely as a resistance to the market to understand its role today.

To examine this transformation, this article presents a critical analysis, drawing on the concept of the cultural field and the theoretical framework of project-oriented capitalism. These approaches show that autonomy functions within the economic system as a form of symbolic capital. In this context, branding takes on a key role, because it structures identities, stories and meanings, turning authenticity and creativity into economic value. Ultimately, autonomy is neither a complete illusion nor a complete freedom. It can be considered as a negotiated space, where creative freedom and market logic intertwine. To understand design today, we must stop asking whether autonomy has been lost. Instead, we must examine how autonomy produces value and how it is shaped by the structures that demand it. Branding is the mechanism that connects creative freedom with economic logic. In the post-Fordist era, autonomy is not lost. It is transformed.

Keywords: *Creative freedom, project-oriented capitalism, identity production, communication networks, transformation*

1. PAPER

For decades, debates about art and design have echoed an idea: once culture becomes fully commercialized, it loses its autonomy. According to this view, when everything becomes a commodity to be sold, creativity can no longer be free; it becomes a tool for marketing, audience, and profit. In an economy where success and performance are everything, “authenticity,” “originality,” and “personal voice” are more in demand than ever. Companies are looking for new ideas, brands are looking for powerful stories, and design is not just about creating beautiful forms, but also about shaping identities and meanings. This is especially visible in the built environment, where branding increasingly shapes not only products and images, but also buildings, interiors, urban experiences, and the symbolic identity of places.

An important question arises: how has it happened that autonomy, once understood as something separate from the market, has now become something upon which the market relies? Is autonomy just an illusion that hides new forms of control, or is it really a necessary part of cultural production in post-Fordist capitalism? In this essay, I argue that design does not lose autonomy; on the contrary, autonomy becomes an integral part of the way value is created. Branding is the means by which this value is organized and turned into identity and meaning. Design should therefore not be seen as a victim of the market, but as an active part of a system where autonomy and capital are not just opposites, but work closely together.

Several strands of critical theory suggest that autonomy in cultural production has been lost or has not been fully realized from the beginning. This position comes from the Frankfurt School, which was a critical theoretical movement that highlighted the effects that capitalism and mass production had on culture. One of the main thinkers of this school was Theodor W. Adorno, whose main argument was that culture was becoming a "culture industry", where art no longer seemed free but was introduced into a standard and was driven by the need for profits for businesses and mass consumption by citizens, which could lead to a weakening of creative autonomy and its critical power (Banks, 2010). According to this view, the industrialization of culture places creators under the logic of the market: art becomes repetitive, creativity is reduced to formulas, and profit becomes the main goal. Later, other thinkers, influenced by Michel Foucault, bring a warmer perspective to the situation, suggesting that autonomy does not disappear completely, but changes form (Banks, 2010). People may seem free, but much of this freedom is affected by the demands of the market. Rather than being directly controlled, they learn to regulate themselves to be flexible, creative and productive, because that is the price the system rewards them with. Mark Banks, a scholar of culture and the creative economy, argues that autonomy in cultural work is often seen as a key principle, but it can also act as a covert form of control (Banks, 2010). Thus, freedom does not always lie outside the system; sometimes, it becomes one of the system’s main ways of maintaining itself.

However, this position is not complete. Rather than saying that autonomy has been lost, the question should be asked: what role does it play today? While Adorno sees culture as controlled by the market and Foucault focuses on hidden forms of power and self-regulation, the French philosopher and sociologist Pierre Bourdieu offers a different approach. He doesn't see autonomy as something lost or just an illusion. Instead, he views it as a specia l place within the process of creating culture. According to Bourdieu, cultural production takes place in a “field,” where individuals compete not only for money but also for prestige and recognition (Bourdieu, 1983). Artistic autonomy does not mean standing outside the economy; it is a unique position within it. For example, when an artist puts aside immediate financial gain to focus on "art for art's sake," they can gain prestige and social acceptance. This, in turn, can lead to financial success later. Bourdieu calls this an "inverted economy," where success is measured not just by money, but also by symbolic recognition (Bourdieu, 1983). This shows that autonomy is not outside the system, but operates within it. It is how trust, authenticity and value are created in the cultural realm.

This idea becomes clearer when we see that cultural production does not function like an industrial factory. As Bill Ryan notes, the cultural sector is shaped by a contradiction: capital seeks control and standardization, but it also depends on innovation and originality. Mark Banks makes a similar point in his discussion of cultural labor, showing that while industrial production can divide, repeat, and replace labor more easily, cultural production relies on qualities such as talent, style, and personal voice (Banks, 2010). If autonomy is removed completely, the product risks losing the authenticity and distinction that make it valuable in the first place. For this reason, the market cannot fully eliminate autonomy; it must preserve a degree of it, because without distinction there is no value, and without value there is no profit. This does not mean that autonomy exists as pure freedom. Rather, it operates within limits set by the market and is continually negotiated, challenged, and redefined. It is better understood as a fluid space, where capital and creative practice remain in tension, but also depend on one another.

In his analysis of postmodern space, Fredric Jameson, a cultural theorist, uses the example of the Bonaventure Hotel in Los Angeles to illustrate how late capitalism creates a “hyperspace” that makes us lose our bearings (Jameson, 2016). Modern man, accustomed to understanding the city and the surrounding space, is confronted with an architecture that distorts him: the space seems closed, reflective, without clear points of orientation. According to Jameson, this is more than a question of architecture; it is a metaphor for our difficulty in understanding global capitalism as a whole. We live within a complex financial, technological and cultural system, but we fail to “map” it clearly. For this reason, he proposes the idea of “cognitive mapping”: we need cultural forms that help us understand our positions within this system (Jameson, 2016).

This is directly related to design and branding. Post-Fordist capitalism, which emerged in the latter part of the twentieth century, signifies a transition from the industrial mass production paradigm (Fordism) to more adaptable work structures centred on services, networks, and

innovation. This evolution is linked to the concept of "late capitalism," which underscores the intricate global nature of contemporary societies and the pre-eminence of financial, technological, and cultural influences within modern economic systems. If post-Fordist capitalism creates confusion, branding can act as a symbolic system that provides orientation. It provides identities, histories, and meanings that help individuals understand their place in a complex world. But this orientation has its drawbacks. While it helps us understand the structures around us, it can also obscure them, replacing critical thinking with a comfortable sense of belonging. In this way, design is not just about aesthetics; it influences the way we perceive and understand the world around us.

Jameson also discusses the "fashion of nostalgia." In late capitalism, the past is not presented as a real historical period, but as a style that can be reused (Jameson, 2016). Retro films, fashion, and trends don't bring us closer to real historical experiences. Instead, they create a general sense of "the past" through familiar images. As a result, the past becomes something we can choose and use, like a visual archive.

This is related to branding today. Many brands create their identity by emphasizing tradition, origin, and authenticity, even when these elements are simplified or reinterpreted. Vintage aesthetics, the use of old logos, and retro packaging are ways to turn the past into a story that can be consumed. In this context, creative autonomy does not disappear; it is used to create modern versions of the past that bring value to the present. Culture is not separate from capitalism; it is one of the ways in which capitalism reuses the past and turns it into value.

Maurizio Lazzarato, an Italian sociologist and philosopher, introduced the concept of “immaterial labor” to describe forms of work that produce non-physical outcomes, such as knowledge, communication, emotional engagement, and social relationships. This position, which originates from the post-operaismo or Italian Autonomia tradition, examines how work has changed in late capitalism, emphasizing the increasing role of subjectivity, collaboration, and communication in the creation of value. As Jason Del Gandio (2011), a scholar and activist, explains, in post-Fordist capitalism, value is increasingly created through communication, collaboration, creativity, and emotions. Work is no longer just about producing physical products; it also involves creating meanings and building relationships. Del Gandio takes this further, arguing that communication is not simply a reflection of reality, but a factor that shapes it (Del Gandio, 2011). Symbols and stories are not just add-ons; they shape the way we understand the world. Post-Fordist capitalism, then, not only uses our working time, but also our ability to create meaning through communication.

Maria Hynes (2023), a scholar of the creative economy and interdisciplinary practices, applies this idea to the creative sector, especially in collaborative work across disciplines. She states that value lies not only in the final product, but also in the process of creating the product itself, from building networks, exchanging ideas and collaborating across disciplines (Hynes, 2023). The artist or designer not only creates works; they also continually shape themselves as valuable figures within these networks, shaping their identities. The time spent communicating, nurturing relationships, applying for funding or publicly presenting

themselves becomes part of the production of the value of their work. In this context, autonomy is not only the freedom to create, but a need to be active, flexible and always present. Freedom becomes the standard of work.

Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello, French sociologists who study changes in contemporary capitalism, argue that the transition from industrial capitalism to network capitalism is not only an organizational change, but also a moral and normative change (Boltanski & Chiapello, 2005). In Fordist-industrial capitalism, success was linked to stability, a long career, positions in the hierarchy, and loyalty to the company. The value of the individual was measured by clear criteria: degrees, experience, and predictable advancement within a stable structure. In the new capitalism, these criteria have been weakened and replaced by others. The central figure is no longer the bureaucratic administrator, but the "project actor": a person who is flexible, mobile, capable of creating networks, and coordinating temporary collaborations.

This change is what Boltanski and Chiapello call the "Project-Oriented Cité": a new way of justifying value, where the value of the individual is measured by his or her ability to enter and exit projects, create connections and always stay active (Boltanski & Chiapello, 2005). In this world, stability is no longer seen as a virtue, but mobility is more important. Security is no longer linked to a long-term contract, but to "employability" – the ability to adapt to different networks and projects. This brings a new work ethic: the individual must be open, communicative, creative and always ready for change. Autonomy is no longer a privilege, but a requirement. Being autonomous means knowing how to self-organize, manage time and energy and produce value without constant external control.

In the new capitalism, the designer is a typical figure, who works on projects, collaborates with temporary teams, helps build a portfolio and reputation through networks, and is valued for his ability to generate ideas and communicate a vision. His autonomy is not simply artistic freedom, but part of the way work is organized. Autonomy becomes a key criterion of evaluation: can you manage yourself? Are you able to move between projects? Can you create a "personal brand"?

Boltanski and Chiapello emphasize that in this new system, the standards of evaluation are vaguer and more difficult to identify (Boltanski & Chiapello, 2005). In industrial capitalism, success was measured by clear and formal criteria. In a project-based system, value is assessed by reputation, networks, and the ability to communicate. As a result, power is diffused and harder to challenge. People feel constantly under pressure to remain active, visible, and not to fall out of the network. Autonomy has two aspects: one is freedom, and the other is anxiety and uncertainty. The freedom to move comes with the constant need to maintain mobility.

However, this does not mean that autonomy is a weakness. In fact, the system requires individuals who create, connect, and innovate, and therefore must provide space for initiative and uniqueness. The "Project-Oriented Cité" cannot function without those who create new ideas. In this way, autonomy still plays an important role in value creation, but it is part of a system where flexibility, networking, and performance are the norm. Design and branding

operate in this space, demanding creativity and originality, but also organizing and measuring them based on the logic of projects and the market.

According to Constantine V. Nakassis (2013), an expert in brand anthropology and culture, a brand is more than just a recognizable sign. It's a way to create value by connecting products with symbolic meanings. Value is not only in the product itself, but also in the history, image, and identity that is built around it. In a global economy where production can move from one place to another, the brand becomes an abstract asset that adds a symbolic "premium." It links production to consumption through identity. This shows that aesthetic autonomy does not disappear; it is organized and measured as "brand equity," that is, as symbolic capital that has economic value (Nakassis, 2013).

A useful example of this logic, also grounded in personal experience, is Fondazione Prada in Milan, which we visited during a study trip. Experiencing the project in person made it easier to understand how branding operates not only through products or visual identity, but through architecture, spatial atmosphere, and the transformation of existing urban fabric. Designed by OMA, Fondazione Prada is located in a former 1910 gin distillery within the Largo Isarco industrial complex and is conceived as a coexistence of regenerated and new buildings. What makes it especially relevant here is that the project does not erase the industrial past of the site; instead, it reworks it into a new cultural environment where heritage, design, and institutional identity are held together. In this sense, the value of the project lies not only in the exhibitions it hosts, but also in the way the space itself produces distinction, experience, and meaning. The Prada name clearly frames the institution, yet the project's force comes from how architecture turns this identity into a lived spatial condition. This makes Fondazione Prada a concrete example of how autonomy in design is not simply outside the market, but becomes part of the production of symbolic and economic value through the built environment.

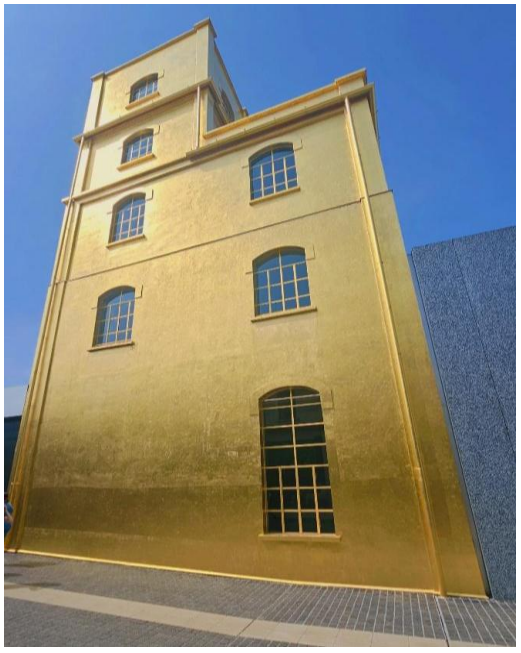


Figure 1. Fondazione Prada, Milan: exterior view of the gold-clad "Haunted House."[1]

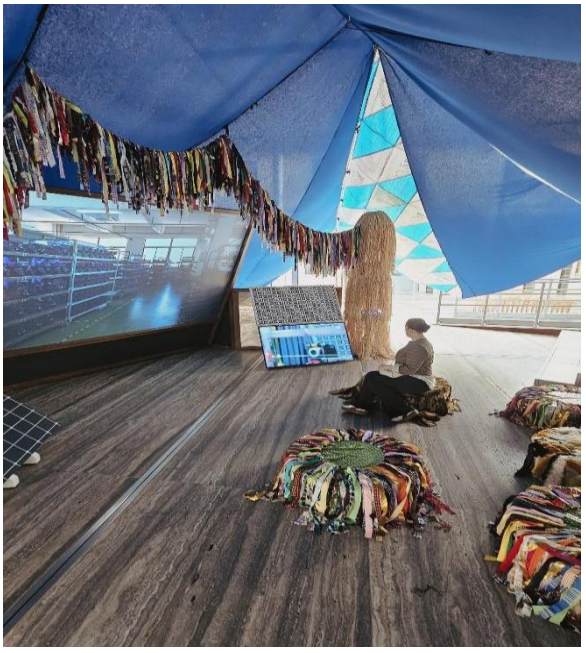


Figure 2. Cao Fei, Dash, Fondazione Prada, Milan: installation view of the rice-granary

[1] *Haunted House* is one of the most recognizable buildings within Fondazione Prada, where an existing structure from the former industrial complex is transformed into a cultural and symbolic landmark through architectural intervention. Its gold-leaf exterior makes visible the shift from industrial utility to aesthetic and institutional value, showing how architecture can

tent cinema.[2]

Dennis K. Mumby (2016), a scholar of organizational communication and critical theory, places branding within what he calls “communicative capitalism.” Today, value is created through the circulation of signs, stories, and emotions. The brand tries to stabilize a meaning in a reality where meanings are always unstable. But this stabilization is never complete. People can renegotiate, modify or even challenge the meanings associated with brands (Mumby, 2016). Thus, branding functions as a control mechanism and a space of tension (Mumby, 2016). It offers identities that seem ready to be accepted, but cannot fully dictate how they will be lived or understood.

So, design is not just a matter of form or appearance. As Guy Julier (2006), a researcher of design culture, argues, we need to move from the idea of “Visual Culture” to that of “Design Culture”. Design is not simply something we see and interpret; it is a system that organizes the circulation of products, our experience and everyday practices (Julier, 2006). In post-Fordism, branding is the clearest example of this. It doesn't just put a logo on a product, it shapes environments, services, ways of communication and ways of identification. In Julier’s terms, design should be understood not only as a visual object, but as part of a broader design culture shaped by value, circulation, and practice (Julier, 2006). From this perspective, branding can also be read as something that exceeds visual identity alone, since it operates through objects, spaces, and everyday forms of use.

There is a debate on participatory art, as analysed by Ditte Vilstrup Holm (2019), a scholar of art history and organizational studies, also shows that autonomy does not disappear, but takes on a different form. It moves from an idea of freedom, which is based on autonomy and stable institutions, to a form of freedom understood as opportunity, where individuals are expected to exploit opportunities within flexible networks and changing structures (Holm, 2019). Autonomy is no longer a protection guaranteed from the outside, but an ability to move and position oneself within the system. This makes it clear that today autonomy is not only an aesthetic issue; it is also an organizational and economic category.

If we bring all these analyses together, we can say that in the post-Fordist era, design does not lose autonomy. Capital relies on authenticity, innovation and differentiation, all of which require creative space. In contrast, branding shapes and controls this space, creating identities and meanings on a large scale. Autonomy isn't a complete illusion or total freedom; instead, it's a negotiated space where symbolic value is created and where meaning is debated.

Branding has become the main way through which post-Fordist capitalism creates not only products, but also forms of identity and ways of life. It influences how people understand themselves, what they want, and where they feel they belong. Design is deeply connected to

reframe the past while producing a new identity for the site. Source: Author’s photograph, 2026.

[2] *Dash* is an immersive multimedia installation by Cao Fei that examines the transformation of traditional agriculture through automation, drone technology, and AI in rural China and Southeast Asia. By bringing together ritual, technological change, and spatial experience, the work reflects on how contemporary systems of production reshape both everyday life and cultural meaning. Source: Author’s photograph, 2026.

the systems that make this possible. To understand design today, we need to look at how identities are formed through communication, emotions, and shared meanings. This is the crux of the argument: autonomy has not disappeared. It now acts as an important source of value and as a key condition for how branding works in contemporary capitalism.

When we connect Bourdieu's ideas with those of Boltanski and Chiapello and read them through the lens of branding today, it becomes easier to understand how autonomy functions in post-Fordist capitalism. Bourdieu explains that artistic autonomy is not something outside the economy, but a position within a field where symbolic and economic capital are always in tension with each other (Bourdieu, 1983). Boltanski & Chiapello show that the new capitalism has absorbed the critique of hierarchy and standardization and has turned autonomy into a working norm within the "world of projects" (Boltanski & Chiapello, 2005).

Branding works precisely at this point: it needs authenticity, style and distinction to create value in the market. Creative autonomy produces symbolic capital, while the brand is the means that stabilizes and turns this capital into economic value. In post-Fordist capitalism, design is not outside the logic of projects and networks; it is one of its most visible expressions.

Taking into account analyses ranging from Adorno's critique of cultural standardization, to Foucault's analyses of power and self-regulation, to Bourdieu's understanding of autonomy as a position within the field of cultural production and Boltanski and Chiapello's explanation of flexibility and project work, we can say that a common denominator emerges: autonomy does not disappear under capitalism, but takes on a new form, to adapt to new and changing systems, to coexist with them, without losing its value. This article argues that, in post-Fordist capitalism, autonomy becomes a condition for creating value. It is no longer outside the market, but something that the market needs, through originality, authenticity and creativity. In this context, branding is the main way to structure these qualities, linking them to identity and turning them into economic and symbolic value. This means that to understand design today, we should not focus on the recovery of lost autonomy, but on the way, autonomy is supported and shaped by an economy that increasingly depends on meaning, communication and identity.

2. REFERENCES

Banks, M. (2010). Autonomy guaranteed? Cultural work and the "art–commerce relation". Journal for Cultural research, 14(3), 251-269.

Boltanski, L., & Chiapello, E. (2005). The new spirit of capitalism. International journal of politics, culture, and society, 18(3), 161-188.

Bourdieu, P. (1983). The field of cultural production, or: The economic world reversed. Poetics, 12(4-5), 311-356.

Del Gandio, J. (2011). Rethinking Immaterial Labor. Radical philosophy review, 14(2), 121-138.

Holm, D. V. (2019). Between 'Freedom as Autonomy'and 'Freedom as Potentiality': Artistic

Work in a Participatory Culture. Conjunctions. Transdisciplinary Journal of Cultural Participation, 6(1).

Hynes, M. (2024). Interdisciplinarity, art and immaterial labour in the creative economy: Maurizio Lazzarato and the production of value in ArtScience practice. Journal of Sociology, 60(2), 382-398.

Jameson, F. (2016). Postmodernism, or the cultural logic of late capitalism. In Postmodernism (pp. 62-92). Routledge.

Julier, G. (2006). From visual culture to design culture. Design issues, 22(1), 64-76.

Mumby, D. K. (2016). Organizing beyond organization: Branding, discourse, and communicative capitalism. Organization, 23(6), 884-907.

Nakassis, C. V. (2013). Brands and their surfeits. Cultural Anthropology, 28(1), 111-126.