How Bulky Are We?

Cir4Fun · R-evolve · FRANCESCA

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On 20 April 2026, at the opening of Fuorisalone, OpenDot hosted an open, participatory debate on circularity in the furniture supply chain. In a circular-salon format — no stages, no presentations — key figures from the furniture industry reflected together on the sector's impact, from raw material to end of life, with the goal of building a shared vision.

The meeting took place as part of three European projects — Cir4Fun, R-evolve and FRANCESCA — which work on transforming the furniture supply chain from different, complementary perspectives, converging on a common goal: making the sector circular, systemic and measurable.

With this document, we share the reflections that emerged during the meeting: as a record, but above all as material for everyone to keep thinking about.

Introduction to the topic

Bulky waste ("ingombranti"). We chose this word not only because, in waste-management language, it refers to the items that create the greatest difficulties and costs — and the AMSA data speak clearly: Milan alone produces 20,000 tonnes of it a year, at a cost of 3 million euros.

We also chose this word because it is uncomfortable. No one wants to be "bulky" or "cumbersome." Not even our furniture. And yet it becomes exactly that.

But why? What makes us fall out of love with furniture and decide to throw it away? Is it our fault, as users? Or is it about how this furniture is designed, built and marketed? Or is it even a choice someone has made for us — making us unlearn the art of making do, building around us a world of ever-evolving aspirational desires?

These questions start from the user but shift the focus onto the supply chain. Because if we want to bring real change to the furniture sector — and we must, the European Commission tells us so — those who buy, use and discard furniture are only the last link in the chain. It is the responsibility of those who come before and after to make the right choice a no-brainer: easy to make, and easy to sustain. Reuse, repair, recondition, and only as an absolute last resort — after properly separating the various parts — recycle.

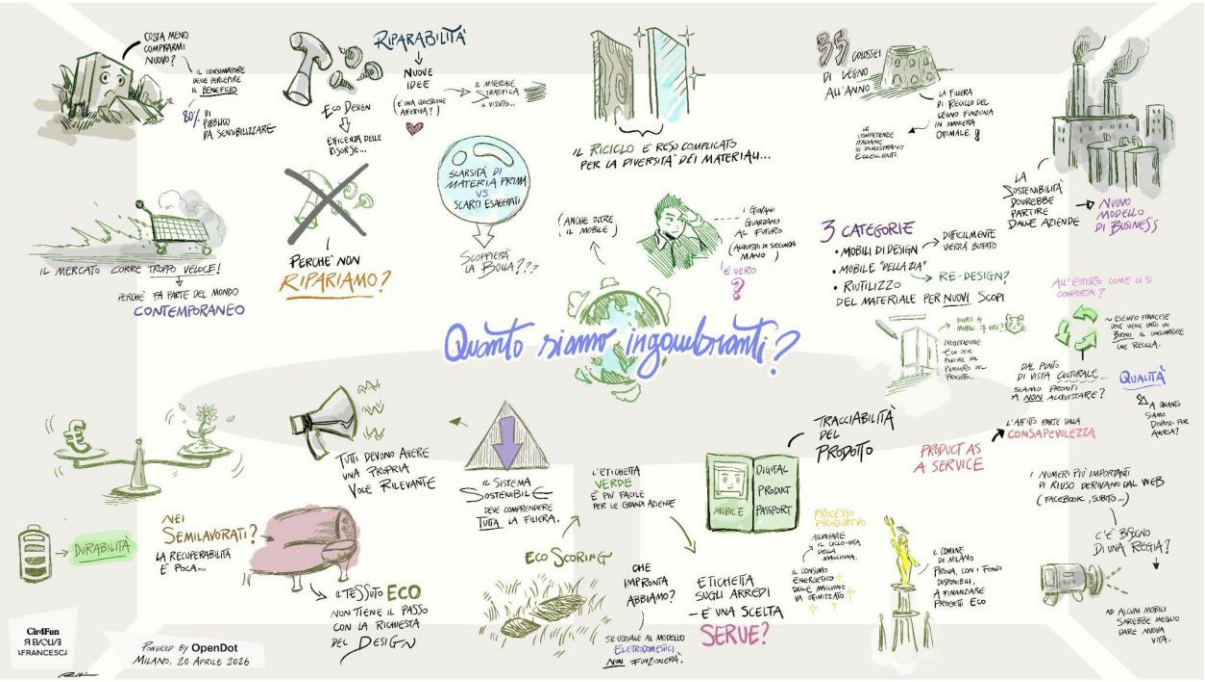

Illustration by Giorgio Maria Romanelli

Key points from the debate

Why furniture gets thrown away: emotion before function

Furniture is not discarded because it stops working: it is judged prematurely, for reasons that are more emotional than technical. The market has accelerated renewal cycles by pushing trends, fashions and new collections, creating an expectation of constant updating for a good that could last decades. The

proliferation of models prevents the emotional value from forming that would make an object durable in desire, even before it is durable in matter.

> *"Furniture is judged prematurely for reasons that are more emotional than technical. The market has pushed us toward very frequent renewal cycles. But furniture is a durable good, it can last decades. This contradiction generates the mass of bulky waste."*
> **Claudio Cachero, LAGO**

> *"If we keep renewing everything every season, there's never time to become attached. Albini's bookshelf became an icon because a company produced it for ten years."*
> **Lorenzo De Rosa, Sovrappensiero Design Studio**

The consumer and personal benefit: sustainability is not enough on its own

A recurring theme was the gap between intention and purchasing behaviour. 80% of consumers do not buy based on sustainability arguments in the abstract: they buy because something is beautiful, functional or convenient. The challenge is to translate environmental values into perceivable, concrete advantages. One practical example cited: communicating a lightweight door not as an ecological choice, but as a guarantee that the hinges won't fail after two years. Durability translates into economic savings for the consumer.

> *"Sustainability has to be turned into a personal benefit too. It's no longer enough to talk only about dematerialization, recyclability, long life: that technical detail needs to be connected to a concrete advantage for the user."*
> **Daniele Prosdocimo, Valcucine**

Repairability: design, materials and backward compatibility

Repair is currently disadvantaged on several fronts: economically, because environmental costs are not built into prices; culturally, because the practice has been lost; structurally, because many products are not designed to be disassembled or repaired.

When it comes to repairability, material choice plays a key role: natural materials such as wood and ceramic accumulate the marks of use over time, while technical materials such as glass or aluminium, once broken, push toward replacement. Backward compatibility of components is another essential lever: if spare parts can't be found after 15 years, the piece of furniture ends up in landfill.

> *"To give objects a second life, product design itself also needs to be rethought. If a piece of furniture is built with glued dowels and sealed boxes, a second life will be difficult."*
> **Luca Bergantini, SCM Group**

"If companies think on 10-20 year horizons and keep producing components compatible with previous models, repair becomes possible. Today, instead, the focus is on next year's collection."

Lorenzo De Rosa, Sovrappensiero Design Studio

The textile supply chain: an unresolved knot

The furnishing-textile sector presents specific challenges compared with other furniture components. Recovering textile is far more complex than, for example, metal — which reaches 90% recyclability. The technical complexity of fabrics, required to access high-end collections, clashes with ecodesign goals.

"The idea of sustainability applied to textiles is still a chimera today, hard to achieve without legislative intervention. We can't do it alone."

Matteo Pozzi, Pozzi Arturo S.p.A

Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR): regulation as a lever

One of the most concrete topics in the debate concerned building an Extended Producer Responsibility scheme for the furniture sector, modelled on what already exists for packaging, electronics and batteries.

Gino Schiona, of Riqualta - Consortium for Quality Reuse and Recycling in the Furniture System - presented sector data: around 2.5-3 million tonnes of furniture placed on the market every year, equal to 10% of urban waste. He reported on the establishment of the Riqualta Consortium, which aims to represent extended producer responsibility in the furniture sector, and for which recognition has been requested from the Ministry of the Environment and Energy Security, for managing the reuse, collection and recycling of post-consumer furniture. He also cited the similar French case of Ecomaison (formerly Ecomobilier) as a reference: the system provides repair vouchers that support local craftsmanship. In Italy, Rilegno already manages the collection and recycling of 2 million tonnes of wood a year, 90% of which returns as panelling for new furniture.

"Bulky waste is measured in millions of tonnes, and we can't leave the solution solely to consumer choice or company goodwill. Regulation can do a lot."

Omar Degoli, FederlegnoArredo

"Extended producer responsibility is the most effective tool, because it would also encourage design to make products more recyclable and easier to handle at end of life."

Antonio Bisignano, AMSA

"Wood has a potentially infinite life. We were the first in Europe to move in this direction precisely because of wood scarcity, and we've developed excellent expertise in sorting and separating materials."

Elena Lippi, Rilegno

Alternative business models: Product as a Service (PaaS)

The debate explored alternatives to individual product ownership, in particular Product as a Service (PaaS), already adopted on an experimental basis by some of the companies present.

The model allows the customer to access the product as an operating expense rather than a capital investment, with concrete value especially for startups and SMEs.

Prof. Francesco Zurlo (Politecnico di Milano) identified three types of obstacles to PaaS adoption: cultural-organizational (companies are product-oriented, not service-oriented), financial (no immediate capital receipt), and cultural on the consumer side (difficulty accepting access instead of ownership).

A systemic risk was also raised: that furniture-as-a-rent could generate a society structured around credit, potentially excluding lower income groups.

Local reuse: platforms, centres and exchange

Facebook Marketplace and *Subito* were identified as the main reuse infrastructure already operating in Italy, in terms of volume and accessibility. Alongside these, experiences such as reuse centres integrated into municipal collection centres, or exchange platforms based on time credits, show that alternative models rooted in local communities do exist. The common difficulty remains scalability.

> *"As a public administration, our role is not to intervene directly in the supply chain, but to act as an enabling and coordinating body: we have written a plan for the circular economy in the fashion and design sector, creating a vision for the city that keeps durability central over time."*
>
> **Serena Pelagallo, City of Milan**

The risk of a system for the few: SMEs, certifications and public procurement

A critical point, raised by several voices, concerns the risk that regulation ends up favouring those with greater financial capacity (such as large companies able to invest in certifications and green communication), penalizing SMEs that may be more virtuous but lack the resources to prove it.

The value of certifications and labels depends on their ability to create concrete, accessible advantages: access to public procurement, tax incentives, the possibility of selling in certain markets.

Public administration (six million people who purchase furniture under binding criteria) was identified as a major, still under-used lever.

System design: the missing direction

A common thread ran through the debate: individually virtuous behaviours — by companies, consumers, institutions — do not automatically add up to a virtuous system. Direction is missing. What's needed is an ecosystem of new players that

don't yet exist: financial operators for PaaS, reuse intermediaries, shared hygiene and safety standards for reconditioned products.

> *"Lots of right paths don't automatically make a right system. Direction is missing. This is a matter of system design, not just product design."*
> **Domenico Sturabotti, Fondazione Symbola**

Tools in development: the European projects

The debate concluded with the presentation of three tools developed within the Cir4Fun, R-evolve and FRANCESCA projects:

Digital Product Passport: a digital tool that lets furniture buyers know its composition, materials and end-of-life options — how to repair it, recycle it or recover it.

Ecodesign manual: a guide for designers and companies with guidance on designing for disassembly, recyclability, material efficiency and reduced energy footprint.

Eco-scoring system: an ecolabel — similar to the energy label on washing machines — that lets consumers factor a product's environmental impact, measured through Life Cycle Assessment, into their choice.

The European Commission's preparatory study on furniture is expected within a year; the criteria within two years. Ecodesign regulation for furniture is coming: the goal of the three projects is to align their activities as closely as possible with what emerges in the coming months.

Participants

AMSA, Antonio Bisignano, Marketing Director; **Arper**, Andrea Mulloni, Sustainability Manager; **City of Milan**, Serena Pelagallo, Project Management for Urban Economy, Fashion and Design; **Di Mano in Mano**, Massimiliano Besana, Marketing Director, and Matteo Castaldo, Digital Marketing; **FederlegnoArredo**, Omar Degoli, Head of Environment and Circularity; **Fondazione Symbola**, Domenico Sturabotti, Director; **LAGO**, Claudio Cachero, Technical Department Manager; **Matteo Ragni Design Studio**, Matteo Ragni, Designer; **OpenDot**, Alessandro Masserdotti, Co-founder; **Politecnico di Milano**, Prof. Francesco Zurlo, Dean of the School of Design; **Pozzi Arturo S.p.A**, Matteo Pozzi, Sales Director & Sustainability Expert; **Rilegno**, Elena Lippi, Communications and Sustainability Director; Gino Schiona, **Riqualta** - Consortium for Quality Reuse and Recycling in the Furniture System; **SARA,** Igor Saglini, CEO; **SCM Group**, Luca Bergantini, Business Unit Manager; **Sovrappensiero Design Studio**, Lorenzo De Rosa and Ernesto Iadevaia, Founders; **Laboratory of Design for Sustainability**, **University of Florence**, Paria Bagheri Moghaddam, Designer | Ph.D. Candidate; **Valcucine**, Daniele Prosdocimo, Marketing Manager.