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CULTURAL HERITAGE

Costanza Ferrarini 171 **Como at the Heart of the Italian Textile Valley**

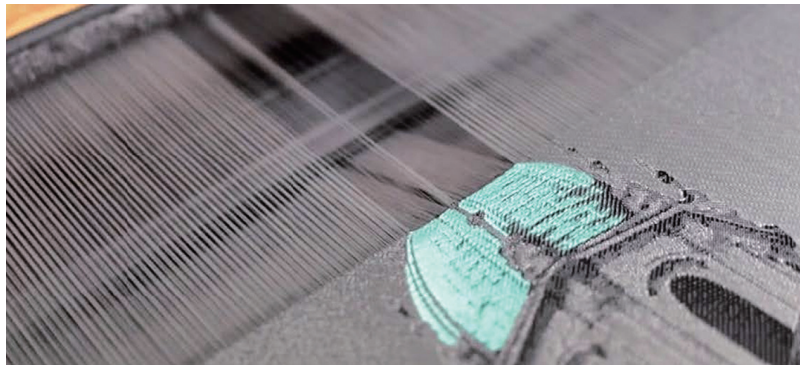
Como at the Heart of the Italian Textile Valley



In 2021, the city of Como was designated a UNESCO Creative City and joined the UNESCO Creative Cities Network (UCCN). Located at the heart of the Italian Textile Valley, Como is founded on its textile industry heritage. Craftsmanship and the textile industry played such a decisive role in characterising the landscape of the Como district that it can be considered the Italian Textile Valley due to its representation of the range of skills involved in textile manufacturing. In “Storia di Milano,” Alessandro Visconti states that Ludovico Sforza was called “il Moro” (the Moor) for having disseminated mulberry (*morus*) trees, crucial for cultivating silkworms. Manufacturing activity was established in the eighteenth century on the initiative of Maria Theresa of Austria. With the second industrial revolution, Como took leadership in the sector and underwent an architectonic shift: one fifth of the valley was occupied by factories, and the lake and valleys were filled with spinning mills. In the hills, mulberry trees to support sericulture were planted alongside the vines. The most prominent silk cocoon market in Brianza (located in Inverigo, a village nearby) remained active until the second half of the twentieth century.



The district's textile production chain is one of the most complete and varied in the world: production, washing, weaving, dyeing and of course packaging and selling of fabrics and finished products; all these processes developed in the Como area during the years making it one of the most important silk districts in the world. The District of Como has a great responsibility: to reach the future through the past, to protect the long-lasting legacy of previous generations and at the same time to continue to invest in research and innovation. Como is a leading city in the Italian textile industry. Today, it produces 70 percent of European and about 30 percent of the world's silk. The textile industry in Como has a deep tradition. Technical



and artistic skills are passed down from generation to generation and are constantly improved.

The pairing of craft and creativity is the cornerstone of the "Made in Italy" brand. It is the distinctive element and Como is at the heart of the Italian Textile Valley, an area founded on the textile industry. The textile sector is one of the fullest expressions of the "Cultura del Fare" (Culture of Making) and the importance of Made in Italy products. The textile industry has deep-rooted traditions and is regarded as a huge patrimony of experience and technical and artistic skills passed down from generation to generation, continuing to improve over time. This is thanks to the constant push for





innovation, which is ensured by the support of excellent training centers and promoted by the commitment and creativity of the industry's artisans and textile manufacturers.

Thanks to the engagement of all the institutional, entrepreneurial and scientific realities of the district, the vision for Como, the City of Sustainable Fashion, has been achieved. Como Creative City shines the spotlight on craftsmanship and the Culture of Making and puts strategies in place for a circular economy that will create opportunities for regeneration and inclusion. The industry focuses on intricate and complex production methods, where improvisation is not an option; the art of silk craft, along with the tradition of sericulture, plays a fundamental role.

The *Cultura del Fare* and the craftsmanship of Como's textile producers offer a viable starting point for protecting the Italian textile industry and the authenticity of its products. Given the current situation, the textile industry must be seen as intangible infrastructure, a patrimony of knowledge invaluable for recovery. Como is the most advanced city in Italy with regard to the variety of training opportunities, not only in the field of textile design but also in the technical and scientific fields related to the sector. The district has a robust student community which gathers a huge volume of students (over 3,000) of different age groups.

Como's textile vocation is backed by scientific input from a host of exceptional training institutions: the *Setificio* school, the oldest textile

school in Italy (1868) and the only one to offer a course in textile design; the University of Insubria, which promotes research, innovation, and sustainability in its textile chemistry courses; and the Silk Museum, which preserves the traditions of the industry's production methods.

In joining the Creative Cities Network, Como has pledged to place culture and creativity at the heart of its sustainable development. Como's efforts to integrate culture and creativity into its post-pandemic recovery plan which is particularly inspiring in this regard. Like all member cities, Como is expected to place the 2030 Agenda at the heart of its future development strategies and plans, especially SDG 11, "Make cities inclusive, safe and resilient."

As a Creative City of Crafts and Folk Art, the following steps will be important:

- Putting in place strategies for a circular economy that will create opportunities for urban regeneration and inclusion;
- Making its centers of creativity and innovation available to other UCCN member cities to expand opportunities for exchange and development of best practices; and
- Sharing experiences, knowledge, and best practices while collaborating within the UCCN on innovative projects.

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