

DESIGNING A Hybrid
Service Ecosystem for
Youth Employment
Support: The BRIDGE
Platform

BRIDGE

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Abstract (ENG)

The issue of youth unemployment has been a constant problem in Europe. In August 2025, the number of unemployed young people under the age of 25 in the European Union reached 2.819 million, which corresponds to a youth unemployment rate of 14.6%, whereas Italy showed much higher figures, at 21.6% in May 2025, among people aged 15 to 29 (Eurostat, 2025; Sergi et al., 2018 in Cuzzocrea et al., 2020). Meanwhile, many young people are NEETs, meaning they are neither in employment nor in education or training; in Italy, this phenomenon involves many individuals aged 15 to 29. This indicates social exclusion and a more precarious path towards a stable position in the labour market.

This thesis develops BRIDGE, an integrated model of employment guidance services in Milan, based on the integration of a digital platform with a network of physical sites called Career Spots. This initiative aims to improve guidance services in terms of orientation, skills development, and continuity by incorporating personalised pathways, micro-credentials, and networking with potential employers. One distinctive aspect of this proposal is its connection between skills training and community participation, whereby young people are able to earn credits through structured volunteering activities, thus developing their employability skills as well as their community links.

In methodological terms, the study adopts a human-centred approach to service and system design, including desk research on policies and services, analysis of the Milan youth employment ecosystem, comparative case studies, and concept generation based on stakeholder engagement and co-design. This thesis makes two contributions: first, an integrated reading of the Milan youth employment ecosystem, together with its access barriers; and second, a hybrid service proposal through which digital and physical infrastructures can work together to overcome fragmentation in youth employment transition pathways.

Keywords: youth employment; youth guidance; service ecosystem; hybrid spaces and services; public service innovation.

Abstract (ITA)

La disoccupazione giovanile rappresenta da tempo un problema costante in Europa. Nell'agosto 2025, il numero di giovani disoccupati sotto i 25 anni nell'Unione Europea ha raggiunto i 2,819 milioni, corrispondenti a un tasso di disoccupazione giovanile del 14,6%, mentre l'Italia ha mostrato valori molto più alti, pari al 21,6% nel maggio 2025 tra le persone di età compresa tra i 15 e i 24 anni (Eurostat, 2025; Sergi et al., 2018 in Cuzzocrea et al., 2020). Allo stesso tempo, molti giovani si trovano in condizione di NEET, cioè non occupati né inseriti in percorsi di istruzione o formazione; in Italia, questa condizione continua a coinvolgere una quota significativa della popolazione giovanile. Questa situazione indica un rischio di esclusione sociale e un percorso più precario verso una posizione stabile nel mercato del lavoro.

Questa tesi sviluppa BRIDGE, un modello integrato di servizi di orientamento al lavoro a Milano, basato sull'integrazione di una piattaforma digitale con una rete di punti fisici chiamati Career Spots. L'iniziativa mira a migliorare i servizi di orientamento in termini di direzione, sviluppo delle competenze e continuità del supporto, attraverso percorsi personalizzati, micro-credenziali e connessioni con potenziali datori di lavoro. Un aspetto distintivo della proposta è il legame tra sviluppo delle competenze e partecipazione alla comunità, attraverso il quale i giovani possono ottenere crediti prendendo parte ad attività di volontariato strutturato, sviluppando così sia la propria occupabilità sia il proprio legame con la comunità.

Dal punto di vista metodologico, lo studio adotta un approccio human-centred al service e system design, includendo desk research su politiche e servizi, analisi dell'ecosistema milanese del supporto all'occupazione giovanile, comparative case studies e sviluppo del concept basato sul coinvolgimento degli stakeholder e sul co-design. Questa tesi offre due contributi principali: primo, una lettura integrata dell'ecosistema milanese del supporto all'occupazione giovanile, insieme alle sue barriere di accesso; secondo, una proposta di servizio ibrida attraverso cui infrastrutture digitali e fisiche possono lavorare insieme per ridurre la frammentazione nei percorsi di transizione verso il lavoro.

Keywords: occupazione giovanile; orientamento giovanile; ecosistema dei servizi; spazi e servizi ibridi; innovazione nei servizi pubblici.

Chapter 1

1 Research Context and Problem Definition

1.1 Youth Unemployment and NEETs in Italy and Europe

Young adults in Italy face difficulties resulting from poor socio-economic conditions. As of May 2025, youth unemployment among persons under 25 years old is estimated to be around 20%, in comparison with the European Union's average of 14.5%, whereas the European Union's NEET rate for people usually aged between 15 to 29 is 11.0% (Eurostat, 2025; Sergi et al., 2018 as cited in Cuzzocrea et al., 2020). continues to lag behind EU standards, implying that the connection between education and employment should be viewed as an important target rather than a temporary phenomenon.

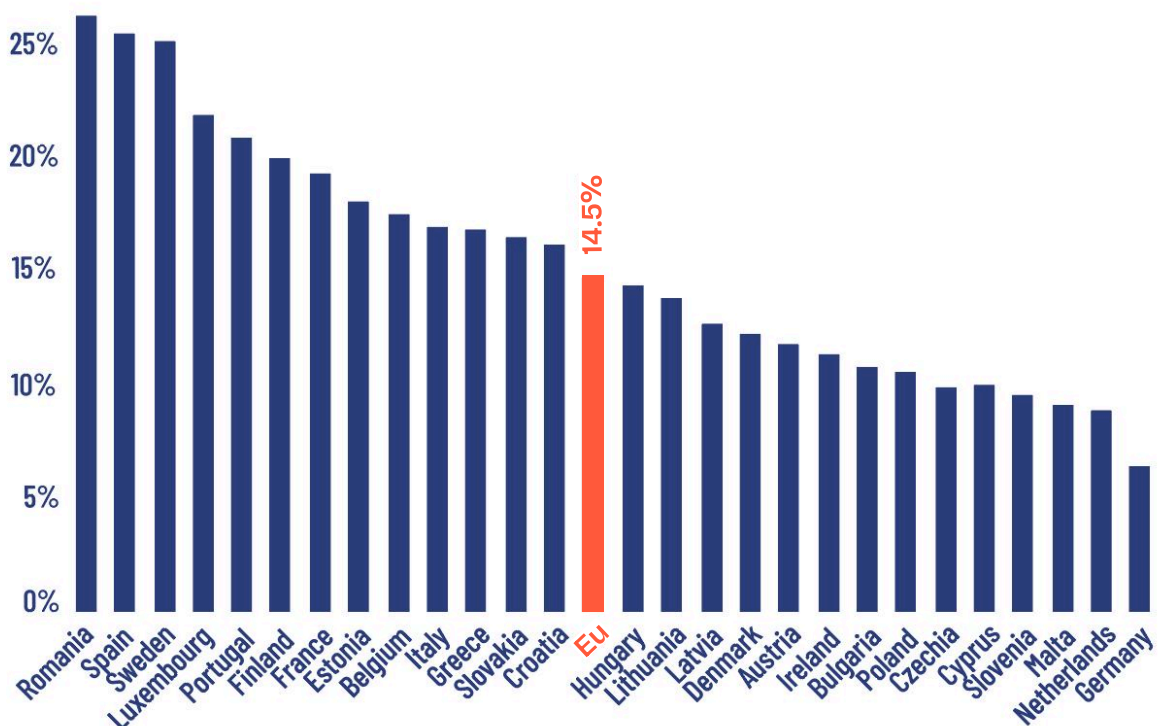


Figure 1. Youth unemployment rate in Italy compared with the EU average.
(Source: Eurostat (2025).

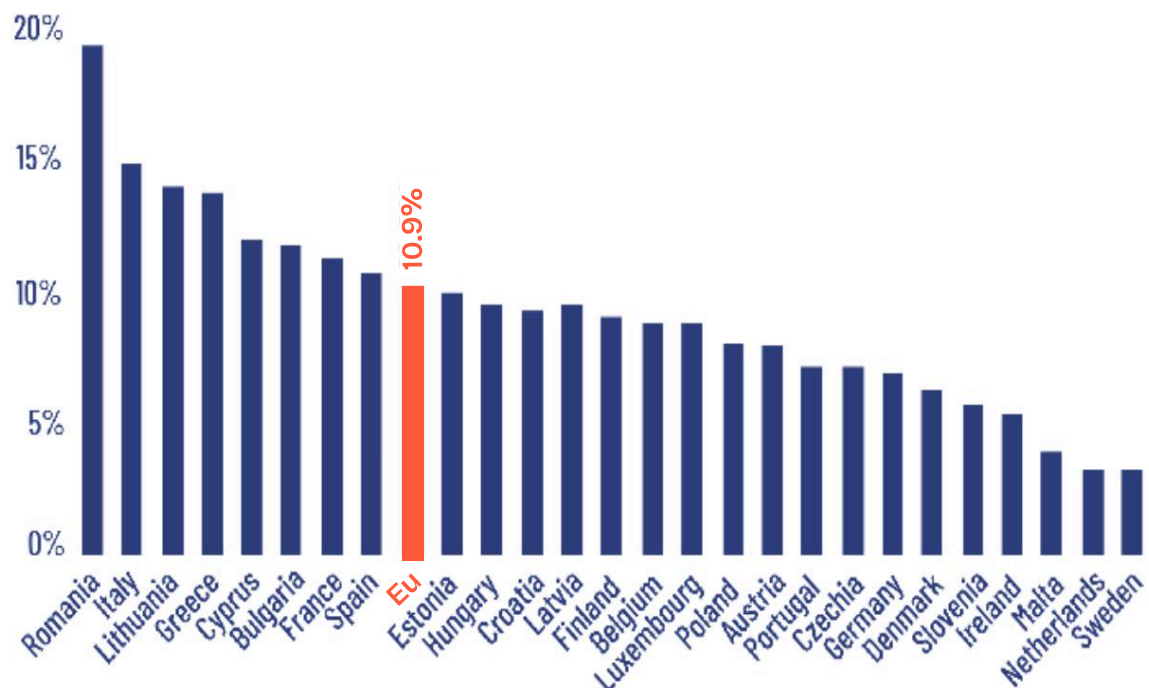


Figure 2: Young people (aged 15–29) neither in employment nor in education and training, 2014 and 2024. Source: Eurostat (2025)

Some causes of this phenomenon are the role of the family, the status of young people in the labour market and work experience, and more significant matters of identity, citizenship, and participation (Cuzzocrea et al., 2020). Therefore, there is an urgency for the Italian government to improve the state of its young people.

The elevated youth unemployment and NEET rates in Italy highlight a persistent "youth experience gap" where "high youth unemployment remains a serious problem in many OECD countries" (Quintini et al., 2007). One major policy reaction at the European level has involved the fortification of activation and transition measures aimed at alleviating the experience gap. The Youth Guarantee is a European policy inspired by Scandinavian models (O'Reilly et al., 2015). The declared aim of this strategy is to guarantee that young people aged between 15 and 24 (even though in Italy this range has been extended to those aged 29) who are out of work, and are not in education or training (the so-called 'NEETs'), are given the opportunity to receive a quality offer of employment or training. One of the means through which the Italian government is able to cater to its young people is through youth policy,

which is defined as the overarching framework of governmental activities directed at, for, and with young people (Williamson, 2011, as cited in Mazzoni et al., 2018). Despite being a relatively new sector compared to other public policies in Italy, youth policy is increasingly gaining prominence as the Italian government has been improving and encouraging more initiatives and innovations in this sector, especially in the city of Milan. However, the results of the Italian implementation indicate that the desired policy goals cannot be directly translated into effective support pathways; therefore, the empirical evidence suggests a limited coverage and quality of the implementation.

On the other hand, the resources allocated to the Youth Guarantee were not enough to properly meet the needs of (according to the Italian Institute of Statistics' estimates for 2014) Italy's some 2.4 million NEETs. As a matter of fact, 18 months after the launch of the Italian YG, there were about 900,000 NEETs registered for this programme, but the funding available was only sufficient to cover the needs of some 600,000 users. In the same period, only 27.5 per cent (31.8 per cent of cancellations). This gap between registrations, funding capacity, and actual offers has been widely discussed in the Italian policy debate of registered NEETs who actually received a job or training offer, while little is known of the quality of such offers. These figures have led Italian experts and media to strongly criticise the Youth Guarantee from the very outset. Nevertheless, while this programme has often been described as a failed initiative, some scholars and senior public administration officials have also underlined its potentialities, in particular when taking into consideration the situation before to Youth Guarantee implementation (Vesan & Lizzi, 2017).

This gap between registrations, funding capacity, and actual offers has been widely discussed in the Italian policy debate. Youth empowerment matters because prolonged joblessness not only perpetuates economic disadvantage but also youth unemployment is related to a decrease in physical and mental health and an increase in smoking and alcohol consumption (Hammer, 1993). Although undertheorized in the psychological literature, youth empowerment can be described as a process through which individuals and groups acquire more control over access to the conditions and resources on which their lives depend (Rappaport, 1981).

In the case of the youth, this can be in both material terms as well as the stories, policies, services, and discourses that are pertinent to them (Rappaport, 1995). Empowerment platforms could facilitate overcoming the aforementioned gap by allowing young adults to obtain labor market-oriented competencies and regain a sense of empowerment and significance via participation in various training courses, obtaining certificates, and fostering stronger community connections (European Youth Forum, 2023). The importance of this framework in solving the problems that arise out of the broader context and helping disadvantaged youth enhance employment opportunities is essential.

Despite its frequent application in the statistical and policy-making practices of the European Union, the term NEET (not in employment, education, or training) is considered problematic because it may act as a stigma and incorporate a wide range of situations.

To gain more insight into the complex vulnerability of young adults within this emerging landscape, a novel measurement tool emerged in the European policy scene in 2010: the NEET was used to represent all young adults who were "not in employment, education, or training." (Mascherini et al., 2012).

The concept was not new: it first emerged in the 1990s in the UK as an alternative way of categorising young people who were not accumulating human capital through the traditional, formal means of either work or learning (Istance et al, 1994; SEU, 1999). The term was first coined to describe young people aged 16–17 and used to help develop targeted policies to tackle youth unemployment and the social exclusion of young people (MacDonald, 2011). The concept then entered the policy sphere of several other Member States. When it was decided that a common definition was needed for European policymakers, in 2010, the Employment Committee and its indicator group agreed on a methodology for the creation of a standardised indicator to measure the size of the population of young people outside employment, education, or training (European Commission, 2011b). NEET was the term used as a commonly agreed label for this definition. It was operationalised by Eurostat through the EU Labour Force Survey and broadened to include

all applicable people between the ages of 15 and 24. Reducing the proportion of NEETs in the overall population of young people became the common denominator of several initiatives of the European Commission, the European Parliament, and the Council of the European Union. More recently, reducing the size of the NEET population has become the target of the Youth Guarantee (Council of the European Union, 2013). In this thesis, the term is used primarily as a policy and monitoring category (aligned with Eurostat/EU policy usage), while the writing avoids treating it as an identity label.

— 1.2 Youth Employment Services as a Systemic Challenge

NEET status and youth unemployment can be viewed as a systemic challenge of the policy and service provision, as opposed to a one-sector labour market issue, in that it is a product of a series of dynamic interactions between education, welfare, labour regulation, local economies, and social participation. In that regard, youth employment can be characterized as something that the traditional policy design literature terms as a wicked problem: it is multi-causal, has a variety of stakeholders with conflicting interests, and cannot be solved via single-minded interventions (Rittel & Webber, 1973). For Italy, this systemic character is reinforced by structural inequalities between territories and by the strong interdependence between family support, welfare arrangements, and young people's labour-market entry conditions. Due to this complexity, policy responses to youth unemployment are becoming more susceptible to being seen not merely as labour-market responses, but as interventions in the form of coordinated services.

Youth Guarantee is a rights-based approach towards youth employment where it is assumed that government, regions, public employment services, and youth organizations should ensure that all young citizens have the chance to get quality employment, training, and retraining when leaving their educational establishments or being unemployed, as explained by Williamson, H., & Zentner, M. (2014). The main idea behind the Youth Guarantee is that the initiative represents a rights-based approach towards youth employment while recognizing the right of young people to receive certain services from the state and from society

as a whole. In this regard, the importance of the concept of the Youth Guarantee does not lie only in its promise but also in provoking questions about access and inclusiveness.

In this view, the applicability of the Youth Guarantee has more to do with the provision of offers; it is also dependent on what principles should govern access, quality, and inclusion. The Youth Guarantee should not be limited to some young people or to those who already have all the necessary skills, but are struggling to find a job. It should be universal and applicable to all young people from different educational and social backgrounds up to the age of 30. The Youth Guarantee should also include resources to reintroduce long-term unemployed young people into education, further training, or new employment. A youth guarantee system should focus on connecting young people to jobs that match their level of education and should ensure that young people are not forced into low-paid work to maintain their social benefits. The aim is to create quality jobs for young people, better connect young people with public employment services, and address generational imbalances in the labour market. Particular attention should be paid to the rights of young people exposed to multiple forms of discrimination, for example, young people with disabilities or young people with a migrant background.

However, the existence of EU frameworks does not automatically translate into coherent user experiences in practice. In reality, the system of services young people encounter is a set of various access points and providers – public employment services (PES), municipal services, training agencies, schools and universities, third sector actors, and private or semi-private intermediaries – with varied eligibility policies, referral logics, and communication channels (Ricucci et al., 2018). This disconnect between the policy purpose and the service experience is especially critical in the field of youth employment, where poor continuity is very quickly translated into a lack of engagement and dropout.

Youth Employment as a System Challenge

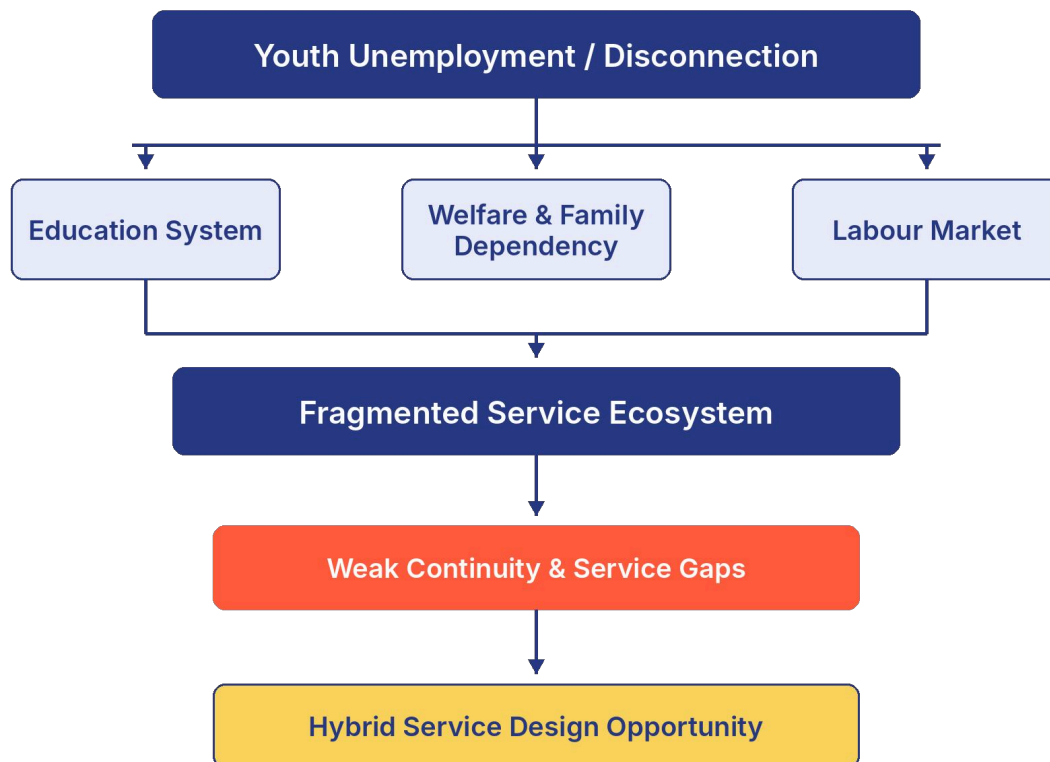


Figure 3. Youth employment as a systemic service challenge .
Source: Author's elaboration based on Rittel & Webber (1973); Ricucci et al. (2018).

Consistent with EU policy directions that emphasise activation and quality offers (Council of the European Union, 2020), and with evidence on fragmentation in the Italian context (Ricucci et al., 2018), an opportunity emerges for solutions that strengthen orientation, capability-building, and continuity. In this thesis, the idea of pursuing a hybrid service pathway, between digital availability and physical proximity-related assistance, since digital channels can aid increased outreach and level of customization, whereas physical areas can aid in the development of trust, guidance, and continued interaction, in youth most likely to be frequently underexplored by online-only services. This service direction forms the conceptual basis of the thesis and frames the project as a design response to fragmentation, discontinuity, and unequal access. Based on this service and systemic conceptualization of youth unemployment, the thesis will re-position the problem as a design

question, in the context of the city of Milan. This project-based thesis attempts to learn about the services and aspects that affect youth unemployment and NEETs in Milan by providing a platform as a digital-physical approach to becoming more powerful and inclusive. This would include an assessment of the current youth services and policies, including the results of the Youth Guarantee, to find gaps. It also entails mapping disparities in skills acquisition, access to work, and social activities. Finally, it is intended to develop a hybrid platform that incorporates training, certifications, youth empowerment, and networking to narrow the gap in the youth experience and meet the various needs of the Italian youth.

To respond to these systemic conditions in a research-through-design framework, the thesis adopts a multi-stage methodological process. To achieve these objectives, the research follows a multi-stage process combining desk research and field-based inquiry. First, a literature review and document analysis examine youth unemployment, NEET-related policies (including the Youth Guarantee), and the current service landscape in Milan. Second, the use of comparative case studies of international and European platforms is conducted to establish transferable service models and engagement strategies. Third, qualitative interviews and involvement of stakeholders (e.g., NEET young people, service providers, policymakers, and employers) are held to uncover barriers, unmet needs, and gaps in services. Lastly, co-designing with youth and local associates helps in the conceptualisation and refinement of the platform, embodied and prototyped using service design visualisations (e.g., Actor map, system map, service blueprint, user journeys) and an early prototype.

— 1.3 Research Objectives, Questions, and Methodology

In this project-based thesis, the idea is to identify how the youth employment support in Milan can be empowered by adopting an integrated service-system approach with a special focus on NEET and unemployed youths aged between 15–29.

Continuing the problem framing in Sections 1.1–1.2, the thesis elaborates a scenario that is almost a year in the future where a hybrid service model is developed, which involves a digital platform in addition to a group of physical access points (Career Spots). The overall purpose consists of lessening the disjointure among current programmes, enhancing availability and continuity of advice, and aiding the youngsters in developing skills and chances to engage in the labour market. With this framing, the thesis is an analytical and design inquiry that seeks to understand systemic challenges and translate them into a response that is a service.

The study is guided by one overarching research question: how can a hybrid digital–physical service system improve access, guidance, and empowerment for NEET and unemployed youth in Milan? To answer this question, the thesis investigates five connected aspects of the current situation and the design opportunity. The research questions for this project are organized around a number of interrelated sub-questions assessing both the current situation regarding the service ecosystem, as well as the design opportunity: 1) the structure of the existing service ecosystem in Milan, i.e. its constituent actors, governance mechanisms, programs, and referral flows; 2) the points at which barriers manifest themselves during service journeys followed by youth, considering factors related to information, criteria of eligibility, bureaucratic procedures, trust issues, motivation, and digital literacy; 3) the role of the European Union and national-level policies in shaping priorities, target definitions and mechanisms of operation of youth employment services; 4) what lessons can be learned from other European and international youth employment services (platforms, hybrid models, outreach models) and in what circumstances these components can be adopted by Milan; and 5) the design of a feasible hybrid architecture – actor-, touchpoint-, and interaction-wise – that can alleviate fragmentation and improve continuity of service provision and how the performance of this architecture should be assessed on prototype level. As illustrated in Figure 4, the research moves from problem framing and analytical investigation toward the development of a hybrid service proposal.

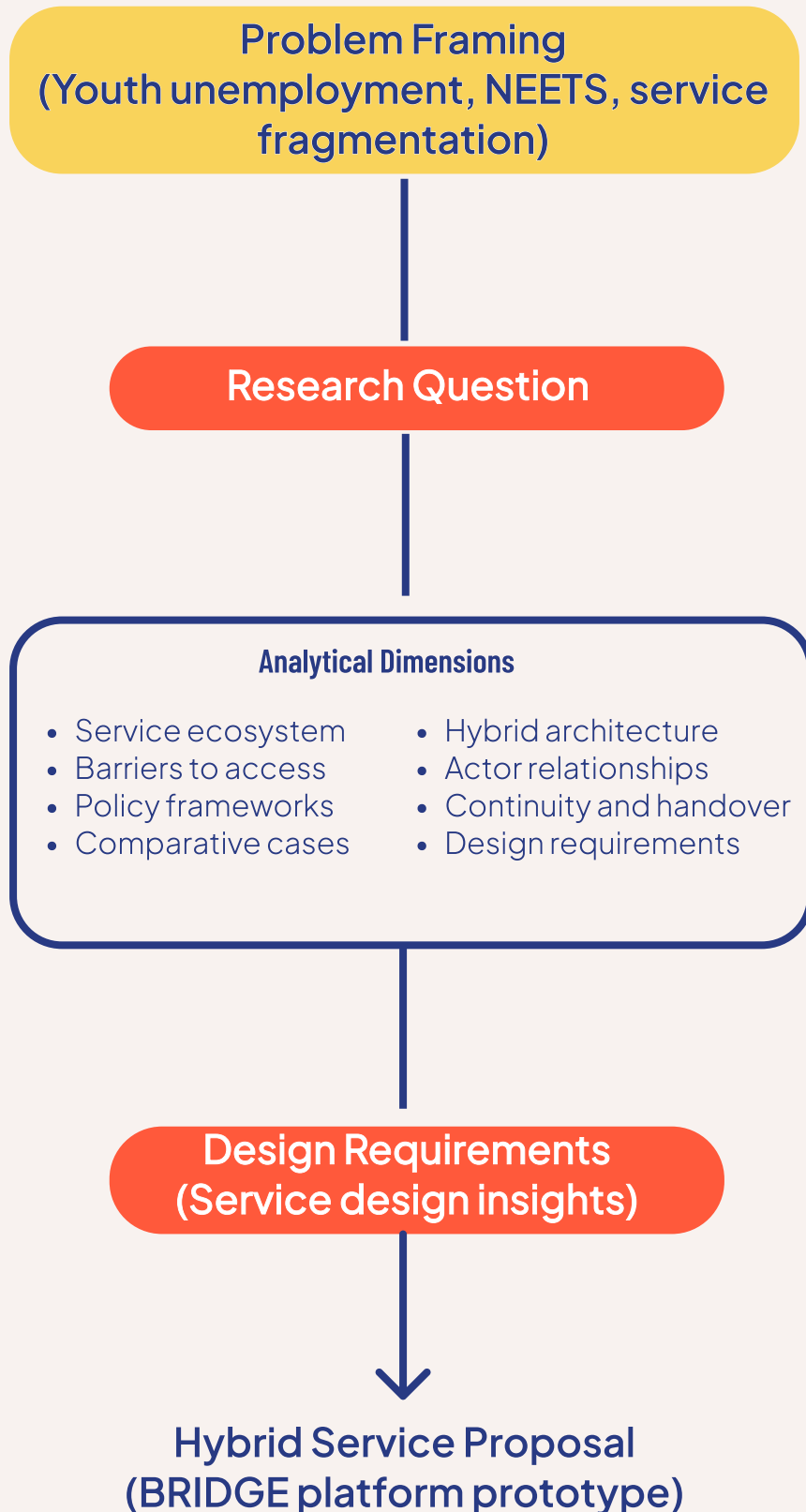


Figure 4. Research framework of the thesis.
The diagram shows how the research moves from problem framing and analytical investigation toward the definition of design requirements and the development of the BRIDGE hybrid service proposal.
Source: Author's elaboration.

To answer these research questions, a research design will be used in four stages that combine desk research, field inquiry, and design development. The stages are complementary and inform the next stage of the design process. First, a literature review and document analysis establish the institutional and policy context and reconstruct the current service landscape in Milan. This desk-based phase is complemented by service ecosystem mapping to visualise key stakeholders, value exchanges, and the navigation logic between programmes and organisations. This initial phase provides the contextual and systemic understanding necessary to frame the design problem.

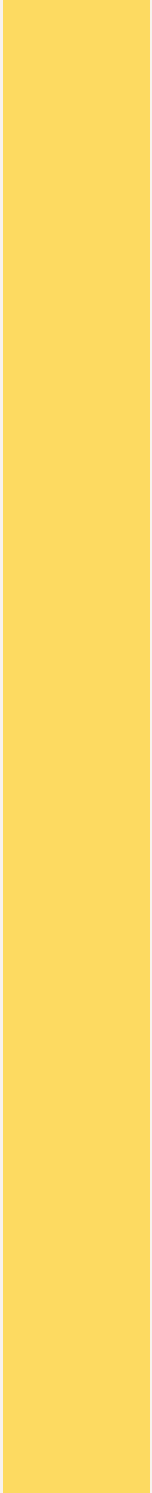
Second, comparative case studies give the structured points of reference in the form of service components and engagement strategies that have been effective in other settings, and contribute to the identification of principles of design and transferable mechanisms. The comparative phase extends this understanding by identifying mechanisms and service models that may be adapted to the Milan context.

Third, qualitative field research, such as interviewing NEET/unemployed youth as well as relevant stakeholders like service providers, municipalities, and employers, assists in creating an informed picture of the barriers, gaps, and limitations faced by the service provision process. This evidence-based knowledge is used to take the analysis phase to the design phase.

Lastly, findings from these phases are used to determine design considerations and are further developed using co-design techniques and prototyping. The idea is made tangible in the form of service design deliverables (stakeholder map, system map, user journey map, service blueprint) and is judged by its clarity, accessibility, inclusivity, and feasibility.

Overall, all these methodologies result in analytical and design-related outcomes. The outputs of the thesis include a mapped representation of Milan's youth employment service ecosystem, an analysis of access mechanisms and barriers, a set of design requirements and principles derived from policy, case studies, and field insights, and a hybrid service

Proposal with a prototype that illustrates the key interactions and touchpoints. The scope is deliberately constrained to Milan as the main case study, and to prototype-level validation, to avoid institutional deployment and longitudinal assessment, which are considered to be out of the scope of this thesis and would take a longer time to be implemented.



Chapter 2

2 Service and System Design

Approaches for Youth Employment

— 2.1 Youth Employment as a Service Ecosystem

This chapter establishes the theoretical framework that supports the thesis. It introduces the concepts of service ecosystems, hybrid physical–digital service delivery, and design for social innovation in public services in order to build the conceptual basis for the BRIDGE proposal. Together, these perspectives help explain why youth employment support should be understood not as a single service, but as a coordinated system of actors, touchpoints, and relationships.

This thesis is based on service-dominant logic and views youth employment support not as an individual program but as a service ecosystem: a relatively closed, self-regulating system of resource-integrating actors linked by common institutional structures and value co-creation in the form of service exchange (Vargo & Lusch, 2016; Akaka, Koskela-Huotari, & Vargo, 2019).

In this sense, the results of youth employment are a result of a complex interaction between various actors (e.g., young people, public employment services, municipal offices, training providers, employers, and third-sector organisations), and the formal and informal rules of the game that influence access, eligibility, trust, and participation.

The support that young people get to get into work can be better described as an ecosystem of interdependent services than a single programme or office, because the transitions of young people into work are influenced by a multiplicity of actors (public, private, and third sector), a multiplicity of resources (skills, information, networks, benefits), and a multiplicity of institutional rules (eligibility, governance levels, accountability). This kind of arrangement is represented in service theory by the notion of a service ecosystem, which is typically viewed as a self-regulating system of resource-combining actors, whose interactions are facilitated and limited by common institutions and institutional structures (Vargo & Lusch, 2016; Akaka et al., 2013).

The view does not center on the separate services, but rather on the notion of relational and institutional structures that form the experience of support. A service-ecosystem view on value implies that the ecosystem, formed through service-based interaction among multiple actors, is driven by the need to exchange resources in order to survive and thrive. Complexity, emergence, and self-organization are critical components of service ecosystems (Vargo & Lusch, 2017). Through complex interactions among multiple actors, shaped by various institutional arrangements, value is continually co-created and co-destroyed and cannot be determined ex-ante. In this way, value is an emergent property that comes into view temporally and contextually. The service ecosystem perspective requires oscillating perspectives (i.e., both zooming in and zooming out) for studying value, which makes more evident the whole-is-more-than-the-sum-of-its-parts nature of systems. That is, it more readily reveals emergent properties of systems, such as value (Vargo & Lusch, 2017).

The basic logic of the service ecosystem perspective is illustrated in Figure 5, which summarises how value co-creation emerges through the interaction between actors, resource integration, service exchange, and institutional arrangements.

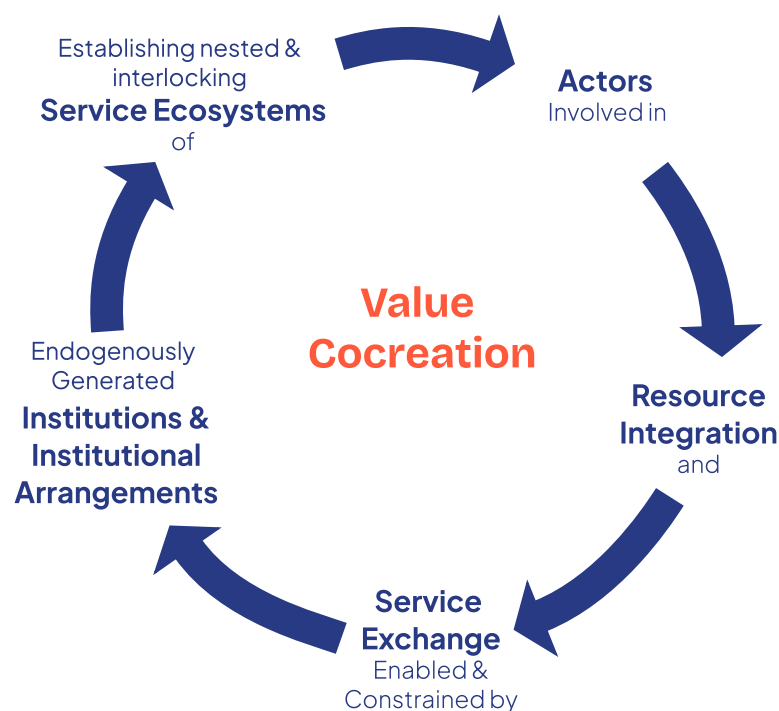


Figure 5. The narrative and process of S-D logic . Source: adapted from Vargo and Lusch (2016, 2017).

Service ecosystems do not constitute linear service chains but constellations of actors, resources, and institutions that are dynamic, as illustrated in Figure 5. This view holds that value is not created by one provider, but rather arises out of the interaction of various actors over time. This theoretical prism is particularly applicable in the case of youth employment, in which results are determined by the alignment of various actors and touchpoints in relation to the needs of young people.

This change is significant to youth employment services since the performance of various actors in coordinating around the pathway of the young person is important in determining the outcomes of employability, inclusion, and capability-building, and not the performance of a single organisation. In this connection, youth employment may be seen as the product of a single organisation rather than as the outcome of mutual interactions within an interdependent support system.

Youth employment in Milan can be conceptualised as a service ecosystem in which various actors (youth, PES/municipality, NGOs, employers, training bodies) combine resources and share services according to institutional rules (policies, eligibility, funding, norms) with value outputs (employment, capabilities, inclusion) being realised over time. The context of Milan, thus, presents a tangible environment where the abstract logic of service ecosystems can be implemented and tested concerning the context of youth employment support.

The most important variables that affect youth and employment policies rather than top-down delivery are coordination, funding priorities, and common policy instruments at the European level. EU Youth Strategy 2019–2027 provides a broad outline; rather, it is the Member States that are to concentrate on areas of inclusion, participation, and easier transitions into adulthood, and the implementation is to be left to the national and local institutions. EU influence in employment policy is frequently exercised via common objectives and tools that promote similar directions, tracking, and service expectations among nations. Such policy arrangements are important since service ecosystems are never entirely local: they are framed by upper-level structures that establish priorities, target audiences, and operational expectations.

One of the key tools of this policy architecture is the (reinforced) The creation of an expectation among young people that they should be offered a good-quality offer, further education, or an apprenticeship/traineeship within a relatively short time after becoming out of work or leaving school is also a Youth Guarantee. The reinforced Youth Guarantee, as defined by the European Commission, is for young individuals (under 30) and emphasizes timely, high-quality offers. Instruments of this type are important as they influence the way national and local delivery systems conceptualise eligibility, what is considered an offer, how outreach is structured, and what performance logics guide providers. In other words, policy instruments do not only define goals; they also configure the service conditions through which young people encounter support.

The governance of youth policy in Italy is typified by multi-level orientation and subsidiarity: the youth policy is shared between the State and the Regions, and the local authorities and third-sector actors play a significant role. According to the description of Youth Wiki of Italy, there is concurrent jurisdiction between the State and Regions and the Presidency of the Department of Youth Policies of the Presidency of the Council of Ministers, as well as coordination forums, including the Unified Conference, which includes the national government, regions, autonomous provinces, and municipal/provincial associations (European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA). This governance structure is relevant to youth employment services because it increases the number of actors, entry points, and institutional “handoffs” that young people may encounter. This multi-level structure is particularly relevant in service terms because it multiplies both access points and coordination requirements across the system. Italy’s National Youth Strategy, approved on 20 December 2023, sets guiding principles including inclusion, participation, and a “dual approach” (mainstreaming youth needs across policy areas while also supporting youth-specific initiatives) (EECEA, 2024). It targets young people aged 14–35, explicitly includes those with fewer opportunities (including NEET situations), and recognises youth work as a support mechanism; it also emphasises dissemination of youth-friendly information through the GIOVANI2030¹ platform. Collectively, these EU

¹ Giovani2030, piattaforma nazionale promossa dal Dipartimento per le Politiche Giovanili e il Servizio Civile Universale, <https://giovani2030.it/>, consultato a giugno 2026.

and Italian governance arrangements constitute the institutional environment in which local service ecosystems (including those of Milan) exist- defining what services are available and how well young people can make their way through them.

Public services as ecosystems: co-production, public value, and institutional complexity. With the public services as the ecosystem lens, the issue of coordination is centralized since the public services are influenced by multi-level governance, public accountability, and the necessity to balance efficiency with equity and inclusion. This governance form in youth employment is translated into a system of delivery in which the user experience is co-assembled among several providers and touchpoints, and in which institutional arrangements (rules, routines, eligibility requirements, and funding limitations) may facilitate continuity or create fragmentation and drop-offs (European Commission, n.d.). Accordingly, the question is not only which services exist, but how they connect from the perspective of the young person moving through the system.

In this context, the service that a young person undergoes is frequently bundled together in a variety of touchpoints: public employment services, municipal youth services, education and training providers, employers and intermediaries, and community organisations. The unity of this compiled journey hinges on the fact that institutional arrangements (rules, routines, eligibility conditions, funding constraints, data practices) facilitate continuity or rather lead to fragmentation and drop-offs (Vargo & Lusch, 2016).

The youth-employment ecosystem: participants, resources, and value transactions. Youth employment as a service ecosystem should be further elaborated on the actors' key roles and what resources they can provide to the ecosystem. The simplified ecosystem map usually includes: Young people (NEET/ unengaged youth) as primary resource integrators, with their goals, constraints, lived experience, informal skills, motivation and need for access to information, guidance and trust building interactions. The institutional rules and performance targets are the public employment services and policy bodies which provide the activation measures, counselling, matching, benefits

conditionality and labour market programmes. Education and training providers that add skills development, credentials and bridging programmes. Employer/employer association provision of vacancies, work-based learning and skills demand signalling. Third-sector and community organisations which frequently offer outreach, relational support, inclusion work, and bridging social capital. Information infrastructures and digital platforms that define discoverability, onboarding, matching and continuity of service over time and channels. According to this ecosystem perspective, access is not a single gate but a series of interactions, with failure at any stage (information, eligibility, trust, documentation, transport, digital literacy, stigma) potentially disrupting (European Commission, n.d.).

On the EU level, the Youth Guarantee strategy is placed as a tool to accelerate transitions by providing a structured entry point into the labour market, education, apprenticeship or traineeship, with EU coordination and funding tools. Nevertheless, according to the ecosystem view, the success of these frameworks is determined by the local service capacity, outreach practices, and the quality and sustainability of offers at the territories and institutions (European Commission, n.d.; OECD, 2019). Viewed in this light, youth employment support access is not a one-time affair, but a series of interactions whose success hinges on the alignment of actors, resources, and institutional rules.

Why the system becomes fragmented: institutional silos and territorial variation. Ecosystem analysis is particularly relevant in Italy because youth employment and activation policies intersect with a governance structure in which responsibilities and implementation practices vary across territorial levels, producing uneven service availability and different “rules-in-use” across regions and cities (Monti, 2022). Moreover, institutional reforms and reorganisations in national skills and employment governance may influence the way coordination is executed and by whom, which supports the necessity to consider service continuity as a design issue instead of assuming a stable institutional architecture (Cedefop, 2024). Such territorial and institutional differences imply that youth can find themselves in vastly different service pathways based on their entry points into the system and their location.

Service-design fragmentation can take the form of redundant or conflicting channel information, onboarding and documentation requests, unclear eligibility levels, and handover between services, and feedback loops back into outcome improvement. In ecosystem terms, these failures can be interpreted as misalignments between actor goals and institutional arrangements (Vargo & Lusch, 2016). For young users, such misalignments may appear as confusion, duplication, or dropout rather than as visible institutional problems.

When youth employment support is viewed as an ecosystem, the purpose of design is not simply to enhance individual touchpoints but to enhance orchestration, continuity, and accessibility throughout the journey assembled. This thesis, thus, positions youth employment services in Milan as an ecosystem where the results are determined by the compatibility of institutional regulations, roles of actors, and touchpoints with users. Continuing on this ecosystem framing, When youth employment support is viewed as an ecosystem, the purpose of design is not simply to enhance individual touchpoints but to enhance orchestration, continuity, and accessibility throughout the journey assembled. This thesis, thus, positions youth employment services in Milan as an ecosystem where the results are determined by the compatibility of institutional regulations, roles of actors, and touchpoints with users. Continuing on this ecosystem framing,

— 2.2 Hybrid Physical–Digital Services

It has seen digital channels to become dominant in a range of industries, often to the disruption of traditional intermediaries and compelling organisations to re-evaluate how they engage with customers through a number of touchpoints (Christensen and Raynor, 2003). This has led to the development of multi-channel research, whereby channels are visualised as points of contact with the customers where the organisations and the users interact. The managerial role, in this respect, entails designing, coordinating, and assessing these channels with the view of increasing acquisition, retention, and overall value creation (Neslin et al., 2006). Later research has also focused on the interchangeability of the channel used, such as searching in one channel and making purchases

in another, and that value depends not on a single channel but on the interaction and coordination of the channels used (Verhoeff et al., 2007). Even though all these debates were primarily created in the settings of the private sector, the logic can be applied to the services of the state. Although these debates emerged in the context of the private sector, the logic can be applied to the context of public services: the support of youth employment also depends on the multiple touchpoints (digital and physical) and needs to be carefully integrated to decrease the drop-offs and enhance the continuity of support (Neslin et al., 2006; Verhoef et al., 2015). This change of channel-specific thinking to cross-channel coordination is especially applicable in the context of public services, where users tend to switch between institutional, digital, and interpersonal touchpoints in the same journey.

The newer development in this evolution is omni-channel management, where channels are viewed as a system and not as lanes. According to Verhoff, Kannan, and Inman, omni-channel management can be defined as a synergistic approach of managing many channels and customer touchpoints, which optimises the experience of channels and the overall performance. That is, the change to be introduced is no longer having many channels but creating continuity across them (shared information, handovers, and consistent support). This difference is summarised in The distinction between multi-channel and omni-channel management is summarised in Table 1.

	Multi-channel	Omni-channel
Channel focus	Interactive channels only	Interactive and mass-communication channels
Channel scope	Retail channels: store, online website, and direct marketing (catalog)	Retail + mobile (smartphones, tablets, apps), social media, and mass-communication touchpoints (TV, radio, print, C2C)
Separation of channels	Separate channels with no overlap	Integrated channels, seamless retail experiences
Customer relationship focus	Customer – Retail channel focus	Customer – Retail channel – Brand focus
Channel management	Per channel	Cross-channel objectives
Objectives	Channel objectives (sales & experience per channel)	Overall retail customer experience; total sales over channels

Table 1. Comparison between multi-channel and omni-channel management .
Source: based on Verhoef, Kannan, and Inman (2015).

Table 1 demonstrates that, according to omni-channel management, the spectrum of channels is increased, and the focus is on cross-channel integration and integrated experience, as opposed to channel-specific focus. Another consequence of omni-channel thinking is the fact that the system of service channels is not only a transactional channel (e.g., the site or the office counter), but also a more encompassing channel that has the potential to influence expectations and decision-making, such as mobile, social media, and informational channels. This is important in youth employment services, since the process may take place long before the formal registration, through informal information seeking, peer networks, messaging apps, schools, community organisations or municipal communications. Hybrid services should, thus, be modeled on actual user paths and not on institutional points of entry. In this sense, omni-channel logic shifts the focus from the existence of multiple channels to the design of continuity across them.

Though they were developed to a large extent in the retail and private sectors, the logic applied in this case is applicable in the public sector, where individuals have to balance several points of access. Youth employment assistance usually deals with disjointed trips through portals, telephone support, face-to-face offices, third-sector players, and informal networks. Here, the term hybrid can be interpreted as a combined system of service where physical and digital touchpoints are used complementarily to each other (self-service, guided support, trust-building, follow-up), and where the transfer of touchpoints is carefully constructed to minimise drop-offs and redundant administrative efforts. This interpretation is especially important in youth employment support, where many users do not enter the system through formal institutional gateways, but through dispersed and uneven pathways.

The public employment services (PES) evidence shows that technology use has increased access to job search and matching, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic, but delivery models are not entirely digital. According to the ILO global survey (2020), most PES (52%) used technology to select services alone (only), others used technology to deliver most of their services (28%), and still, some of them used technology to deliver most to customers in person (20%). Such a distribution suggests that systems still have hybrid configurations in

Such a distribution suggests that systems still have hybrid configurations in place, even in the areas where digital tools are common, to satisfy the diverse needs of users and the truths of operation (ILO, Technology Adoption in Public Employment Services: Catching Up with the Future). Figure 6 illustrates the diversity of technology adoption and delivery models across public employment services, showing that hybrid and mixed configurations remain common.

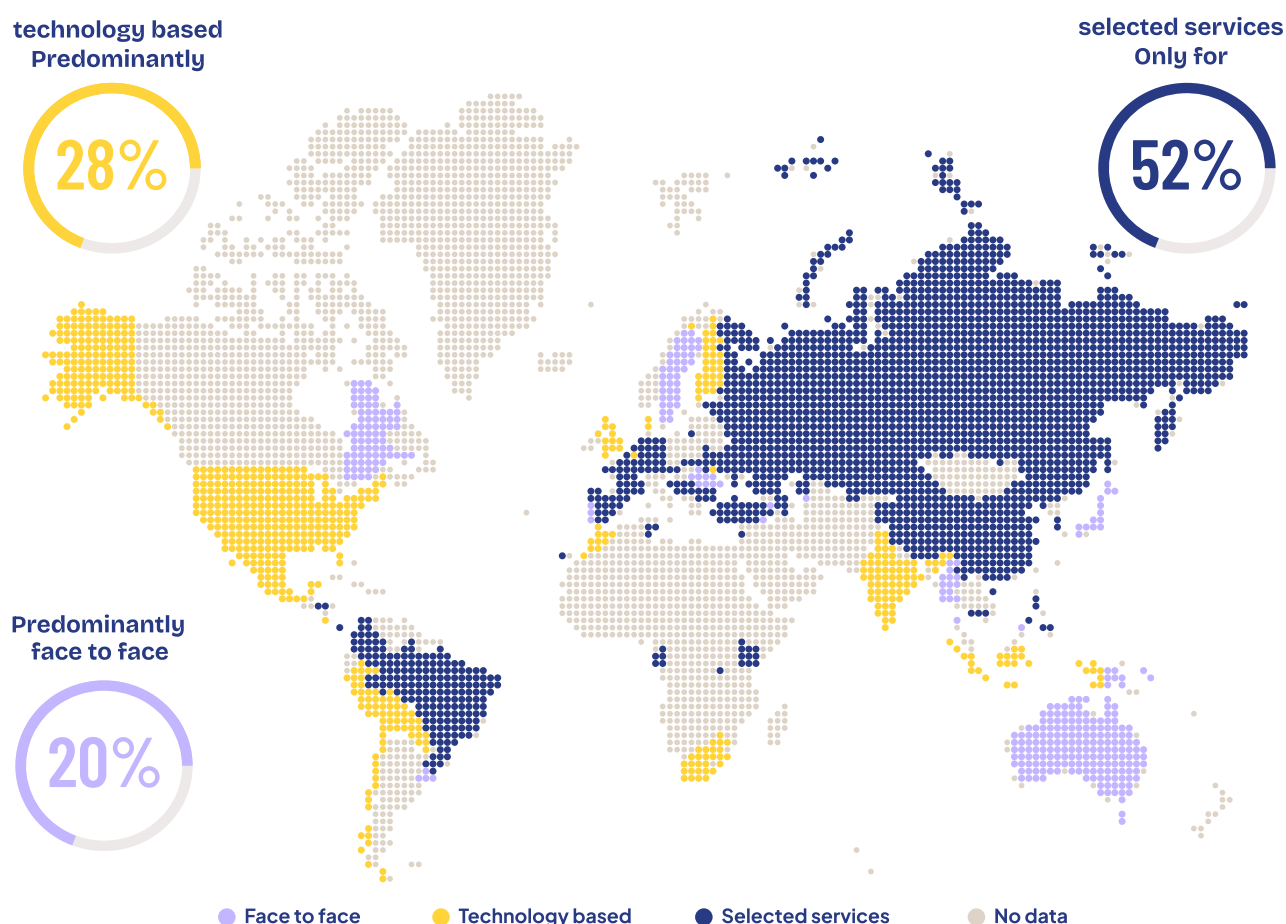


Figure 6. Delivery models in public employment services: technology uptake and adoption, 2020.
Source: International Labour Organisation (2022), based on the 2020 global survey on the use of technology in public employment services.

	World	High income	Upper-middle income	Lower-middle income
Only in selected services	52	47	60	50
Predominantly technology based	28	30	24	29
Face-to-face	20	23	16	21

Table 2 · Approach to delivering services, by income group (2020) . Source: ILO 2020 global survey on the use of technology by public employment services, 69 valid responses.

The need to have hybrid delivery is not just a transition state of things, as the same report points out. A number of PES continued to have walk-in or assisted services to preserve access with low-digital literacy or connectivity users and the report emphasises that multi-channel delivery raises the stakes of consistency: the response should be consistent across phone, email, portals, and automated tools in order to prevent disjointed experiences and user dissatisfaction.

It also suggests the possibility of enhancing delivery to young people and other communities through technology, and that not all vulnerable groups have access to digital benefits, and that this is supported by the need to continue human mediation and face-to-face guidance to users facing layered employability barriers (ILO, 2020 global survey; see Tables 4, 9 and 6 Figure in the report). Figure 7 further highlights that technology-facilitated services are unevenly relevant across user groups, reinforcing the need to combine digital provision with human support for more vulnerable populations.

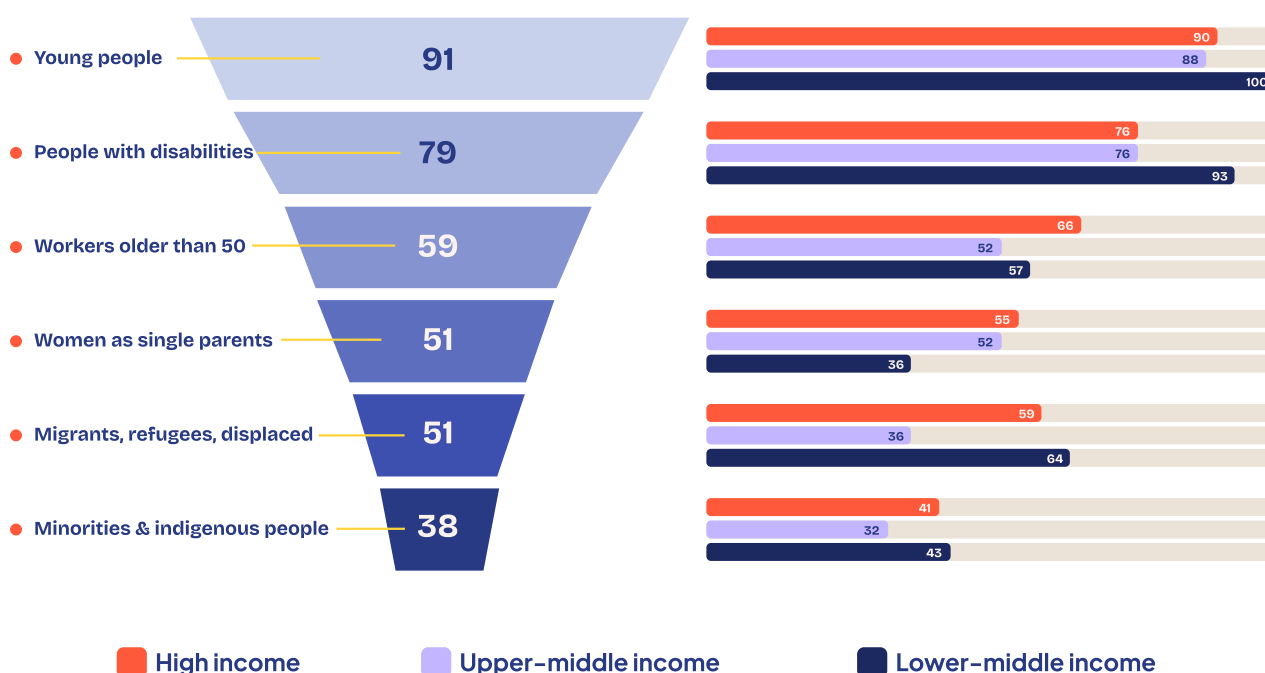


Figure 7. Relevance of technology-mediated services across user groups. The figure highlights differences across user groups, reinforcing the need to combine digital delivery with human support for more vulnerable populations.

Source: International Labour Organization (2022), based on the 2020 global survey on the use of technology in public employment services.

In terms of service design, a physical-digital model is not just a site + a place, but a synchronised system with each of the touchpoints serving a specific purpose (self-service, guidance, trust building, follow-up) and transitions purposely designed to avoid drop-offs. This entails uniformity of information channels; handover instances (digital - in- person and back); interoperable information and tools; and facilitated routes to users who may require human intervention (e.g., language, confidence, bureaucracy, motivation).

Hybrid delivery is important in youth employment, since the task of delivering jobs and activation is often done through various stages and institutions (guidance, training, benefits, employers, third-sector actors). Some of the obstacles that young people may encounter are not necessarily informational but motivational, social, and administrative. The PES Network emphasizes that it is possible to be more reachable and more responsive through the use of digital services, yet the success of inclusion, especially of vulnerable job seekers, often relies on the integration of digital resources with human assistance, on the coordination of outreach and service delivery as opposed to the elimination of relational interaction. Physical touchpoints play a role in that they allow the development of a relationship, trust, and customised advice, which can be essential in situations where young people encounter multi-dimensional barriers (e.g., unstable housing, lack of confidence, discontinuous work histories, or inability to navigate bureaucracies). They may also serve as low-entry points where personnel assist users to make sense of opportunities, achieve steps that are difficult to accomplish alone, and link to local networks (training providers, employers, community organisations). This is how the physical layer reinforces the service ecosystem to be able to retain and sustain users that may not interact exclusively via digital mediums (European Commission, 2024).

Within the framework of the hybrid method in the proposed platform, the proposed platform is considered an omni-channel youth employment support network: a single digital platform (information, career pathing, booking, tracking their progress, community access) with a physical point of access that offers orientation, guidance, and facilitated navigation of opportunities.

The aim is not to displace institutional services but enhance continuity or accessibility and engagement, particularly among NEET and unemployed youths who are most susceptible to fragmentation among providers and programmes.

— 2.3 Design for Social Innovation in Public Employment Services

The academic literature on social innovation goes back to Max Weber, who defined the relationship between the social order and innovation by the impact on social change of behaviours initially considered to be abnormal. Emile Durkheim also, in 1893, upheld that social regulation was important to consider for the development of the division of labour which went with technical change (social cohesion). Their understanding of social innovation was then referred to innovations in the organisation of work and of society. In 1932, Joseph Schumpeter created another theoretical landmark by establishing the fundamental role of innovation and structural change in the organisation of society and the role of the entrepreneur as a driver of development. The complementary concepts of ‘social economy’ and the ‘third sector’, which have repeatedly come to the fore since then, all date back to the 19th century with the development of big industries, rapid urbanisation, and the rise of the labour movement (at the time of Robert Owen and Pierre-Joseph Proudhon). They identify social innovations as systems based on solidarity and reciprocity and actors’ response to change. Social innovation re-emerged as a concept and practice in the 1990s as a way to cope with the consequences of economic restructuring, changes introduced by IT developments, and mass unemployment. The continued development of new communication technologies and their use by the younger generation, together with the development of socially and ethically responsible initiatives, added to the polarised discourse on old-fashioned public services v/s the dynamism of the market, and the spread of cooperative and network arrangements in social and economic organisations which have been at the origin of a revival of the concept. The financial crisis has further enhanced this new interest as a promise for the creation of quality and meaningful jobs and affordable solutions to address the challenges

of shrinking budgets and increased social needs.

In this new context, social innovation has returned to the fore with a broader meaning: ‘social innovations can be macro or micro, structural or local, they are introduced by an entrepreneurial spirit and through solidarity, either to improve the functioning of the organisation or to transform the organisation into a social enterprise, an enterprise with social objectives, an organisation pursuing social objectives or to empower it with a more participatory governance system’ (Nussbaumer and Moulaert 2007). This leaves the door open to a variety of actors and interpretations. This historical trajectory is useful for situating the concept, but for this thesis the focus is on how social innovation is operationalised in public service systems, where outcomes depend on coordination and co-production across multiple actors.

In public-sector contexts, social innovation is often discussed not only as “new ideas” but also as new configurations of relationships, roles, and collaborations that change how services are produced and experienced. This is important because many outcomes of social policy, such as employability, inclusion, or wellbeing, cannot be “produced” by any one organisation and are generated through interactions between institutions, service professionals and citizens. The literature on co-production in public services illustrates this: citizens and communities are not just passive consumers but can be co-producers of services, which can mobilise assets, increase trust, and increase responsiveness to needs if done properly (Tony Bovaird, 2019).

Social innovation, a fairly new term in theory and practice, is a key component of the Europe 2020 strategy for inclusive and sustainable growth (EC, 2013). According to the (European Commission, 2011) Social innovation relates to new responses to pressing social demands by means that affect the process of social interactions. It is aimed at improving well-being. The Renewed Social Agenda, which was adopted by the European Commission in June 2008, created an opportunity to shape Europe’s response to new social realities and challenges (climate change, ageing, rising unemployment, etc.). The global crisis has exacerbated these challenges. If we defined Social Innovation as Social innovations are innovations that are social in both their ends and their

means. More specifically, we define social innovations as new ideas (products, services and models) that simultaneously satisfy social needs (better than existing solutions) and lead to new social collaborations or relationships. They are innovations that are not only good for society but also enhance society's capacity to act. Social innovation is a risk-taking operation that requires imagination, perseverance, and confidence to develop a creative idea of a product or service, and then implement a participative process and establish strong partnerships for its implementation and subsequent scaling-up. Social innovators are confronted with barriers that are often linked to an incompatible audit or regulatory culture.

“

I believe that in the current economic turmoil, where the financial crisis has already had serious consequences on employment and public budgets, we have to mobilise all our strengths to alleviate the negative impacts on the most vulnerable populations. Social innovation is not a panacea but if encouraged and valued it can bring immediate solutions to the pressing social issues with which citizens are confronted. In the long term, I see social innovation as part of the new culture of empowerment that we are trying to promote.

President Barroso

European Commission · 31 March 2009

For employment and activation services, co-production and social innovation are particularly relevant because service delivery unfolds as a longitudinal process—from information and registration to guidance, training, matching, and follow-up. Results are determined by the continued participation and motivation across several contact points. The systematic reviews of co-creation/co-production in the context of public services suggest that these methods are frequently utilized to improve the quality, effectiveness, and legitimacy of the provided services, but they are constrained by unequal participation, gaps in capabilities, and institutional constraints, which are aspects that

are relatively problematic when it comes to vulnerable groups. The conceptualization of the role of employment support as a territory of social innovation thus suggests the structuring of not only new offers but also the circumstances permitting involvement, such as coherence, access, faith, and sustainability across organisations and channels (Voorberg et al., 2014).

For youth employment and NEET inclusion, taking into account the implications of social innovation and its impact on society, this definition is particularly relevant because the issue is both economic (skills, vacancies, transitions) and social (confidence, trust, identity, information and networks), and therefore needs to increase opportunity and agency.

The pace of technological transformation and globalization is having significant social and dramatic employment consequences. This is raising the skill level required and creating a divide between the skilled and unskilled. The long-term social challenge is how to skill people to provide them with the best opportunity in the new economy as employees, entrepreneurs, and consumers. Social demands are increasing at a rapid pace, both in the short and long term, and the recent crises have reinforced these. Meanwhile, the social sectors and governments have significant fiscal constraints and need to get better outcomes with constrained budgets. The market, the state and the civil sector cannot tackle today's complex social challenges with the traditional solutions they have to offer. Existing approaches are not enough. Social innovation is needed because it provides alternative approaches to addressing social challenges, directly engaging citizens, communities and the various sectors of society. Rather than solely relying on institutions, it engages people as a resource. By generating primarily social value and building social capital (trust, collaboration and participation), social innovation supports society and makes solutions more efficient, equitable and sustainable.

The role of public employment services is conclusively placed in the field of social innovation since the creation of jobs is rarely facilitated by the work of one actor or channel.

Processes produce outcomes which involve government agencies, third sector organisations, educational and training institutions, employers, informal networks, and also because of the involvement of the youth. This is a co-production paradigm in which service results are based on interactions and coordination between more than one actor and interface, not on single programme elements.

Thus, the upgrading of youth service employment goes beyond the increase of the resources to the services; it is about changing the relationship between the guidance, access, motivation, and opportunities on the ecosystem level.

Design methodologies are often seen as an effective approach to create and execute social innovation in public services as they enable teams to work with complexity and to keep the focus on human experience. In public service, design is used to visualise service systems (stakeholders, interactions, handovers), to identify points of friction in a system, and to prototype alternatives to test with stakeholders before scaling up. This is especially useful in systems with multiple actors that are fragmented and have isolated responsibilities, which results in different information, onboarding, or service drop-offs when people switch providers. Design-for-policy and policy-lab work also stresses that design not only provides methods (journeys, prototypes) but different types of inquiry, iterative framing, experimenting and learning across organisational boundaries (Lucy Kimbell, 2015).

On the specific relationship between Social Innovation and Design Thinking (DT), only recently has Social Innovation (SI) been recognised as a product, a service, a process that can be designed in order to produce solutions that can be more stable and robust in the market from its beginning (Mulgan, 2007). In this scenario, DT (Brown, 2009) is being interpreted as a means to generate innovative solutions, to reshape services and to change the ways in which they are conceived and delivered. In this perspective, DT appears the most suitable approach to SI design because of two main reasons:

1. It conceives the process of innovation development to proceed through the co-design activities that, when adopted in the development of new solutions, can be seen as systems enabling scaling up Processes.

2. If implemented throughout the design-experimenting and redesign phases, it can foster valuable triple loop learning, which is valuable when referring to innovation and complex organizations.

According to (Manzini & Rizzo, 2012), when DT is applied to social challenges, a large number of actors and stakeholders are involved in the context of apparent tensions or conflicts. The common idea is expanded to include two main aspects:

1. the relationship between the context of the problem to be addressed and the design of the network that will co-produce the solution;
2. the experimentation of different configurations of that network until a robust partnership is identified and established in an institutional form.

Many projects are particularly evidence of this new kind of design practice; they exemplify a new development in the relationship between design and societal challenges: design is definitely moving toward the design of complex systems, gaining a standing as a discipline that can impact society and the real quality of life of people as a culture of innovation that transforms contexts. (Rizzo et al., 2017) Note that social innovation and public sector innovation are intricately linked, as they both draw on co-creation and engagement with citizens to improve public services, particularly where state and market responses are ineffective.

Design for Social Innovation offers methods for designing more coherent, usable and inclusive public service systems. Service design approaches take a starting point in people's experiences rather than institutional arrangements, and then translate this knowledge into system change via ecosystem mapping, service blueprints and prototyping. Design-led public service innovation is often framed as a method for managing complexity by facilitating learning through iteration, experimentation and stakeholder testing, and new partnerships to achieve common goals. For employment services, this can address a common pitfall: disjointed interactions that lead to user and provider drop-offs, confusion or duplication. This perspective provides the conceptual foundation for analysing how these dynamics unfold in practice within the Milan context, which is examined in the next section.



Chapter 3

3 Current Youth Employment Services In Milan

— 3.1 Institutional and Municipal Services

This chapter examines the current youth employment support landscape in Milan by situating local services within their institutional and policy context. It first outlines the main institutional and municipal layers of support, then considers the wider European and Italian policy framework, and finally analyses how access is experienced in practice through procedures, touchpoints, and barriers. In this way, the chapter moves from system structure to user experience in order to clarify where the main gaps of the Milan ecosystem emerge.

Youth employment support in Milan is delivered through a multi-level service landscape in which national frameworks and funding instruments are implemented through regional labour-market institutions and complemented by municipal youth services and third-sector organisations (EACEA, 2024). In the Italian context, youth-related measures also vary by target group and legal field, since “youth” does not have a single fixed legal definition and age ranges differ across programmes and administrations. Institutional variability is not only a governance issue but also an impediment to the operations of young people trying to understand how support systems are organized. As a result, young people who are unemployed or at risk of NEET status often encounter a system composed of multiple entry points (institutional, municipal, and community-based), each providing only part of the overall support pathway.

A first major layer of this landscape is the institutional employment-service system. At the institutional level, employment-related services are primarily channelled through the Public Employment Services (PES) ecosystem, which covers functions such as access to labour-market information, registration and profiling, job matching, counselling, and connections to training opportunities. Recent international evidence on PES digitalisation shows that these services are increasingly provided through mixed delivery models combining web-based tools, phone-

This chapter examines the current youth employment support landscape in Milan by situating local services within their institutional and policy context. It first outlines the main institutional and municipal layers of support, then considers the wider European and Italian policy framework, and finally analyses how access is experienced in practice through procedures, touchpoints, and barriers. In this way, the chapter moves from system structure to user experience in order to clarify where the main gaps of the Milan ecosystem emerge. Besides this institutional layer, the Municipality of Milan provides a set of services that are more oriented towards the youth and often more easily accessible. At the municipal level, the Municipality of Milan contributes to youth employability through youth-oriented hubs and programmes that combine guidance, information, activation initiatives, and partnership-based opportunities across education, work orientation, and civic participation. Municipal service infrastructures are often linked to wider city networks and spaces dedicated to young people, where activities may include counselling formats, workshops, events, and facilitated access to opportunities provided by external partners. This municipal layer is particularly relevant for young people who may not immediately approach PES channels, or who require confidence-building, orientation, and community-based engagement before they can effectively use formal labour-market services (Comune di Milano, n.d)

The support landscape for youth extends beyond municipal programs to include youth work environments and youth centres as informal relational infrastructure in Milan. A further component of the Milan landscape is represented by youth work and youth centres, which operate as “soft entry points” that can prevent exclusion by offering informal support, social participation opportunities, and trusted relationships with youth workers. In Italy, youth work is not uniformly defined in national law, yet youth centres and youth aggregation services are widely used in practice to support young people’s development and participation. In Milan, municipal documentation also reflects how youth spaces and youth aggregation services are managed through mixed governance arrangements involving public administration and external entities. Figure 8 summarises the main institutional and municipal layers of youth employment support in Milan, highlighting the multiple entry points through which young people may encounter the system.

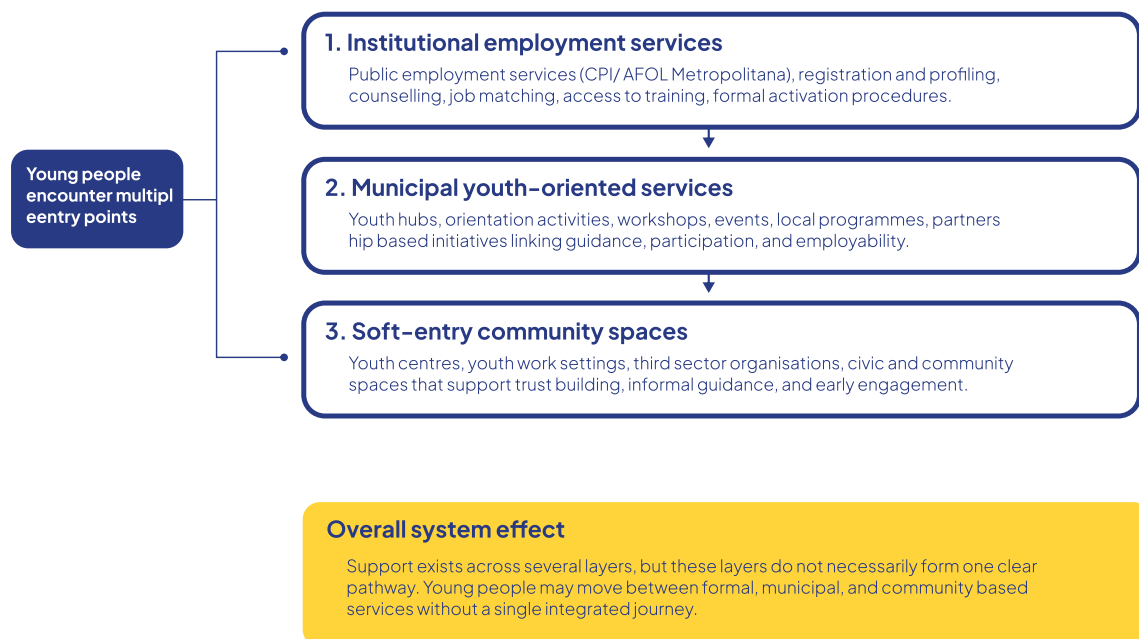


Figure 8. Institutional and municipal layers of youth employment support in Milan.
Source: Author's elaboration based on EACEA (2024), Comune di Milano (n.d.), and the Milan service mapping developed in this thesis

As figure 8 shows, the Milanese landscape is not characterised by a lack of services, but by the coexistence of multiple partially connected access layers. Overall, Milan offers a wide range of institutional and municipal resources, but the presence of many actors and touchpoints also produces a navigation problem for NEET and unemployed youth: understanding where to start, how to move between services, and how to maintain continuity over time. This reading of the Milan landscape provides the local institutional basis for the next section, which situates these services within the wider European and Italian youth-employment policy framework, before examining access mechanisms and barriers in more detail (EACEA, 2024).

— 3.2 European and Italian Youth Employment Policies

Mechanisms, shared priorities, and non-binding instruments that steer national and local delivery rather than replacing it. The EU Youth Strategy 2019–2027, based on the Council Resolution of 26 November 2018, sets a general policy direction around participation, inclusion, and

empowerment, supported through cooperation tools and work plans. In November 2017, the European Parliament, the Council, and the Commission proclaimed the European Pillar of Social Rights. In youth employment policy, more specifically, the key operational reference remains the reinforced Youth Guarantee (Council Recommendation on “A Bridge to Jobs”), which encourages Member States to ensure that young people receive a good-quality offer of employment, continued education, apprenticeship, or traineeship within a relatively short timeframe after becoming unemployed or leaving education. Beyond its legal form, this instrument matters for service delivery because it shapes practical implementation choices: who is prioritised, what counts as an “offer”, how outreach is organised, and which performance and monitoring logics are used to steer providers.

At the national level, these European orientations are translated into a more complex multi-level governance structure. In Italy, youth policy governance is structurally multi-level. Youth policies are described as relatively recent compared to other policy fields and are shaped by concurrent jurisdiction between the State and Regions and by the subsidiarity principle, with an active role for local authorities and third-sector organisations (European Commission, 2019). The Youth Wiki overview of Italy highlights the coordinating role of the Department for Youth Policies and the Universal Civic Service within the Presidency of the Council of Ministers, alongside a broader governance landscape where regions and local actors contribute to design and implementation (European Commission, 2019). This governance arrangement is relevant for youth employment support because it increases the number of programmes and entry points that may coexist within one city, and it can amplify variation in eligibility rules, referral practices, and communication channels.

A recent reference point for the youth field is Italy’s National Youth Strategy, approved on 20 December 2023, which identifies inclusion and participation as guiding principles and adopts a dual logic: mainstreaming youth needs across policy areas while also supporting targeted youth initiatives (European Commission, n.d.). The strategy also emphasises dissemination of youth-related opportunities and information through national channels (including *Giovani2030*),

suggesting an institutional effort to reduce information gaps and improve discoverability across dispersed programmes. To reduce information gaps and improve discoverability across dispersed programmes.

Taken together, EU steering instruments (such as the reinforced Youth Guarantee) and Italy's multi-level youth governance help explain why the local service environment in Milan is multi-actor and multi-channel: services are assembled across employment offices, municipal initiatives, training providers, and third-sector organisations, each operating under distinct institutional logics and constraints. This policy architecture, therefore, sets the background for the next section (3.3), which examines how young people encounter the system in practice—through access mechanisms, touchpoints, and barriers that can produce fragmentation and drop-offs along the pathway.

— 3.3 Access Mechanisms, Touchpoints, and Barriers for NEET and Unemployed Youth in Milan

In Milan, as in the broader Italian activation system, access to public employment support depends not only on a young person's need for work, but also on passing through a formal eligibility track. According to the Ministero del Lavoro e delle Politiche Sociali, the key administrative step is the Dichiarazione di Immediata Disponibilità al lavoro (DID), which formally establishes unemployment status and opens access to activation and reintegration services. The Ministry defines the DID as a declaration that can be submitted through the national active labour policies portal, through regional portals where available, or directly through the Centro per l'Impiego (CPI). It also clarifies that an online DID is initially registered subject to reservation and later validated through contact with the CPI and identity verification.

Beyond institutional procedures, user behaviour provides an additional perspective on how access is experienced in practice. To complete the institutional analysis, a short-scale questionnaire was administered to young people living in Milan to examine users' perceptions and use of employment services.

These findings indicate a significant gap between the provision of public employment services and their actual use. Based on a questionnaire administered to 15 young people in Milan, a quarter of respondents reported using public or institutional employment services, 62.5 per cent reported never using such services, and 12.5 per cent were not aware of their existence. These results suggest that barriers to access do not exist only at the level of procedural complexity, but also include low awareness and limited visibility of the services already available.

At the regional level, Regione Lombardia presents the Dichiarazione di Immediata Disponibilità al lavoro (DID) as the first step for entering the public employment service system. It states that the procedure can be completed online through the regional portal using national digital identity tools such as SPID, CNS, or CRS, or, where necessary, in person at a CPI. The process also involves documentation and verification requirements, which may include residence-related checks for non-EU citizens. This procedural framing is particularly relevant for young people because it turns the entry to support into an administrative sequence—forms, identity verification, documentation, and appointment management—before the relational phase of guidance, counselling, and matching begins.

In Milan, the CPI process is delivered through AFOL Metropolitana, and access is largely organised through appointment-based systems rather than walk-in procedures. AFOL Metropolitana has various booking modalities that are telephonic, electronic mail, and digital, which is why the system of access is organized as a series of coordinated steps instead of as a point of contact. This paradigm of localized delivery supports the idea that enrollment in employment support is a multi-stage process, during which the users first have to find the necessary service, and then determine the most adequate channel to be used in each stage of the procedure. Figure 9 abstracts the key access pathway that the young people might have to undertake before getting substantive employment support.

However, evidence collected through a questionnaire given to youth in Milan shows that these institutional routes do not play a major role in practice. The vast majority of the respondents (87.5 per cent) stated that

They use online job platforms mostly, with 12.5 per cent utilising social media instead of the former, and no one using public or institutional services as their main access point. Among the range of platforms used, LinkedIn (87.5' 87.5%), Indeed (62.5%), and InfoJobs (25%) were the most mentioned. Conversely, the institutional methods like Informagiovani, Public Employment Centres, and Youth Guarantee programmes were not cited as leading job searching devices. The implications of such findings are that young people are more likely to seek jobs through market-based digital channels instead of the institutional channels, thus highlighting the continuing problem of poor discoverability of public services in the current system.



Figure 9. Main administrative access chain for youth employment support in Milan. The diagram illustrates the sequence of entry steps that may precede guidance and activation services, highlighting where delay, confusion, or dropout may occur.

Source: Author's elaboration based on Ministero del Lavoro e delle Politiche Sociali (n.d.), Regione Lombardia (n.d.), and AFOL Metropolitana (2024).

As the figure 9 suggests, access barriers are produced not only by the existence of procedures, but by the accumulation of procedural steps before support actually begins.

The concept of administrative burden in public administration helps explain why these access steps matter. It shows that the costs individuals face when interacting with the state are cumulative and shape their ability to obtain services. These costs include knowledge-acquisition costs (figuring out what to do), compliance costs (forms and documentary requirements), and psychological costs (stress, stigma, or fear of making mistakes). These burdens are not distributed equally: people with fewer resources—such as time, literacy, housing stability, or social support—often face a disproportionately higher burden in achieving the same eligibility outcome (Moynihan et al., 2015).

From a service-ecosystem perspective, the “service” experienced by young people is not limited to one programme name or one office, but consists of the wider journey created across multiple touchpoints. In the Milan context, these touchpoints can be grouped into four main clusters: public employment-service touchpoints, municipal and youth-oriented touchpoints, education-to-work touchpoints, and informal or platform-based touchpoints. This distinction is useful because it shows that access depends not on one channel alone, but on how young people move between several partially connected points of contact.

A. Public employment-service touchpoints (CPI/AFOL-facing). These include information provision and submission of the DID, booking and triage, initial interviews, follow-up counselling, referral to measures such as training, matching, and incentives, and later follow-up interaction. The DID process itself shows that access is often multi-step and cross-channel, requiring online submission together with identity verification during the first CPI contact (ANPAL / Ministero del Lavoro e delle Politiche Sociali, n.d.). According to AFOL Metropolitana (2024), the appointment-based contact model in Milan illustrates how AFOL access extends beyond the physical counter and requires users to understand which channel should be used for each step of the procedure.

B. Other municipal contact points include guidance, information, and participation. Given the central role of CPI, many young people do not start with it. Often, they start through the activities that municipal youth do, getting to know the people of the institution, as well as organizations

That work for young people and voluntary/civil service channels, and other social groups or informal institutions. These actors continually engage in what may be described as a process of pre-access facilitation: mediation of institutional language, helping with paperwork, arranging appointments, and developing enough trust to see through to the end. This facilitation is especially important to such demographics that feel that governmental institutions are both remote and confusing, and judgmental.

C. Education to work contact points (schools, training organizations, universities). Referral infrastructures are often career counselling offices, apprenticeship systems, vocational training agencies, and university liaison services. Nevertheless, those who have left education too soon, have recently moved, or lack housing stability, might not be able to access these referral routes, which increases their reliance on the CPI and the importance of navigational clarity and relational support.

D. Informal and platform touchpoints (search, social media, messaging). Juvenile paths are usually initiated by the process of informal information seeking before any form of formalised registration. Failure to discover public service information not oriented to the young audience and with inconsistencies across digital and social media platforms may end the process on the first stage, leaving the participants with no chance to determine the next steps. So the youth employment experience in Milan is typified by a structurally multi-touchpoint and multi-provider environment, and sustainability depends on the effectiveness of handover processes among these clusters.

Access barriers are not isolated obstacles; in public-service systems, they are often structural effects produced by institutional organisation, channel design, and weak coordination between providers. In the Milan youth employment system, six types of barriers appear particularly significant.

1) Discoverability and Information Asymmetry. In cases where services are distributed in various portals, offices, and organisations, young people incur high learning expenses, as seen in queries like: which service would be appropriate for me?

What is the first step of the procedure? What type of documents do I need? The administrative burden is empirically studied, and the learning costs are viewed as one of the major mechanisms according to which people do not receive benefits and services before compliance begins (Moynihan, Herd, & Harvey, 2015). This issue is also reflected in the findings of the questionnaire, which revealed that the participants were unsure about the starting point and the criteria that define relevant services. Although a small percentage of the respondents chose this option specifically, the overall trend showing the lack of institutional involvement is that discoverability remains one of the major obstacles.

2) Administrative burden (papers, documentation, duplication, time expenditure). The DID route illustrates how access is subject to compliance procedures; online submission could be performed with the condition of a reserve nature and requires further identity authentication in the CPI. To the user, this would be expressed in the form of protracted processes, increased uncertainty, and the possibility of delays, especially in cases where eligibility depends on documentation, scheduling, or institutional verification. The literature on administrative burden highlights that these barriers may lead to the creation of unequal access, with the barriers disproportionately hindering people facing uncertain temporal assets, reduced support systems, or unstable living situations (Moynihan, Herd, & Harvey, 2015).

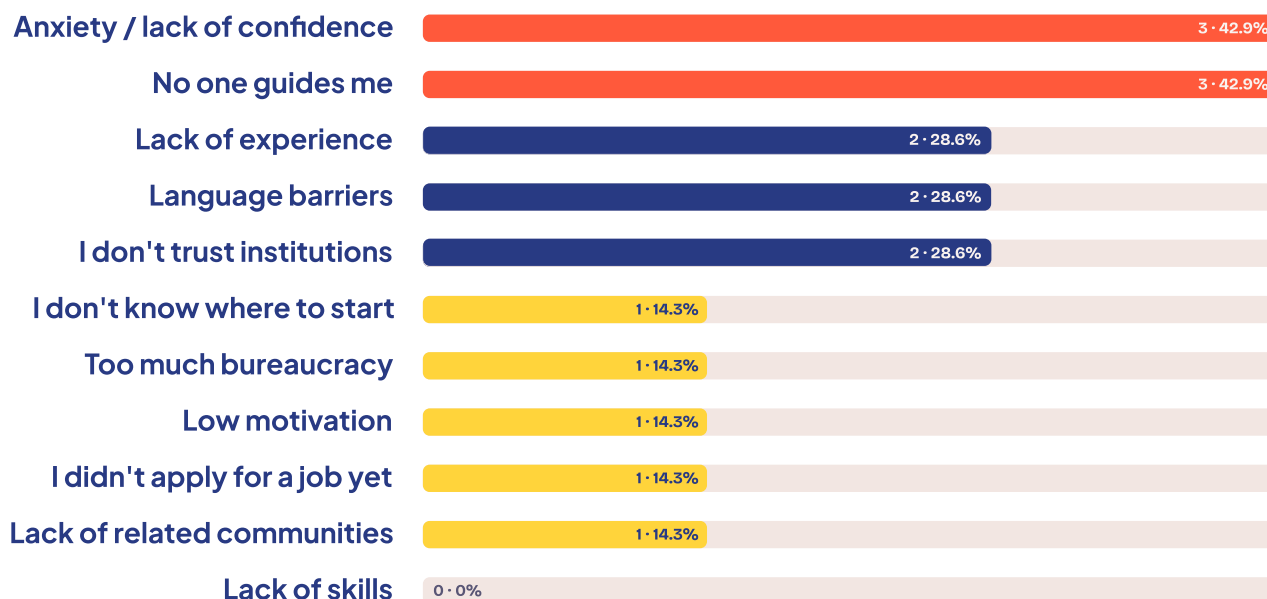
3) Digital barriers (identity instruments, usability, accessibility, confidence). Digital channels have the capability to reach farther; however, they also present a new point of entry with identity verification tools, bureaucratic interfaces, device accessibility, and digital literacy needs. The availability of Digital Identity Documents in the Lombardy setting is strictly connected with digital pathways and identity mechanisms, but other means are present, requiring extra navigation efforts (European Commission, 2023). Practically, defeating exclusion through a hybrid access model is only possible when connecting mechanisms are built with clear specifications, facilitated channels, and uniform dispersion of information through all channels.

4) Fragmentation and handover breakdowns (multiple providers and weak continuity). Fragmentation often appears through repeated onboarding procedures, situations in which young people have to explain the same story several times, inconsistencies between instructions provided across different communication channels, and uncertainty about who is responsible for follow-up. Multi-channel contact structures may broaden accessibility, but they also increase coordination requirements. For this reason, the system needs to ensure informational consistency, smoother transitions between services, and a reliable distribution of follow-up responsibilities. This is why customer-centred delivery, service mapping, reduction of fragmentation, and stronger outreach have become increasingly important in European Union guidance on public employment services, especially in relation to more disengaged groups, including young people outside work, education, and training (European Commission, 2023).

5) Trust, stigma, and relational access. For many young people, the main barrier is not only practical, but also relational. This may include fear of being judged, previous negative experiences with services, or the perception that institutional support is not intended for people like them. This is also reflected in the literature on NEET categorisation: when such categories are constructed as deficit identities, they can reinforce stigma and reduce participation (Yates & Payne, 2007). As a result, touchpoints that build trust — such as youth-friendly desks, outreach organisations, and peer intermediaries — become especially important because they lower the emotional threshold of first contact. The questionnaire results also highlighted the importance of these relational and trust-based aspects. As shown in Figure 10, the most frequently reported barriers were lack of guidance (42.9%), anxiety or lack of confidence (42.9%), lack of experience (28.6%), and language barriers (28.6%). In addition, 28.6 per cent of respondents reported that they did not trust institutions. These findings suggest that access to employment support is not only a procedural issue, but also a relational and emotional one. In this sense, lack of guidance and the absence of trusted intermediaries can significantly hinder access to formal services.

► What makes it difficult to find work or training?

SURVEY • 15 RESPONSES • MULTI-SELECT



Top barriers are emotional & navigational — "no one guides me" and lack of confidence — not lack of skills.

Figure 10. Perceived barriers to accessing employment and training opportunities.
The chart highlights key barriers reported by respondents, including lack of guidance, anxiety or low confidence, lack of experience, and low trust in institutions.
Source: Author's questionnaire (n=15).

6) Logistical limitations (time, transportation, timetables, life instability). Planned entry can ensure more effective work, but this system can be prejudiced against the young individuals who are involved in unstable work, informal labour, taking care of others, or facing unstable housing conditions. Missing an appointment may trigger delays, attrition, or even the need to engage in expensive re-engagement (restart costs). Accessibility to AFOL through the appointment-based model proves that access is often conditional upon the successful passing of the scheduling processes and channel directions. Overall, the questionnaire findings support the ecosystem analysis developed in this chapter. While services are available across multiple institutional and organisational actors, young people tend to rely primarily on digital platforms and

informal channels. This reinforces the need to improve the visibility, accessibility, and relational dimension of public employment services, as well as to create clearer pathways between different touchpoints within the system.

Overall, the chapter has shown that the Milan youth employment ecosystem is not defined by the absence of services, but by the difficulty of navigating them as a continuous support journey. Administrative requirements, fragmented touchpoints, weak handovers, and relational barriers all contribute to a system in which access remains uneven and continuity fragile. These findings provide the empirical basis for the next chapter, which turns to comparative case studies in order to identify service logics and mechanisms that may help address these gaps in the Milan context.

Chapter 4

4 Comparative Case Studies

— 4.1 Youth Guidance Systems in Milan and the Italian Context

This chapter expands the analysis beyond the Milan context by examining a set of European and international case studies in youth employment support. The purpose is not to identify one model to replicate directly, but to extract transferable mechanisms that may help address the gaps identified in Milan, especially those related to fragmented entry points, weak continuity, limited guidance, and poor transitions between support and opportunity.

Youth Guidance systems play a central role in supporting young people's transitions from education to employment. In policy literature, guidance is understood not only as career counselling but as a broader set of services that help individuals identify opportunities, navigate institutional pathways, and make informed decisions regarding education, training, and work (Cedefop, n.d.). This broader understanding is important in the Italian context, where guidance has developed through multiple institutional layers rather than through a single unified system.

Until 2012, Italy lacked a formal national framework for connecting education, training, and guidance. This was mainly because of legal and organisational complexities due to the distribution of institutional competences for vocational guidance between the central level and the regional level, and between the education system and services at work. In 2012, the Italian government, together with regional and local authorities, drafted an agreement that aimed to integrate guidance activities. Its main goals were to promote a common national strategy for lifelong guidance in education, training, and employment, as well as to form an interinstitutional working group with extended responsibilities.

In 2014, ministries and regions issued the National standards for lifelong guidance, a technical document that describes services, quality The new guidance system fosters cooperation among national and regional

levels, but the National guidelines for lifelong guidance leave the institutions free to organise activities and services with great autonomy. This broader understanding is important in the Italian context, where guidance has developed through multiple institutional layers rather than through a single unified system. There is no single body responsible for lifelong guidance and counselling, but several institutions are involved. Career guidance is mainly provided by public employment services, schools, municipal vocational guidance centres, and information centres (Informagiovani). At the local level, the role of regions is central to defining regional guidelines, providing funding, and supporting local guidance systems. In 2014, the Ministry of Education issued Guidelines for lifelong guidance to promote the new strategic concept of guidance within the national school system. The document identified several key aspects, including career management skills, the role of a dedicated teacher, the potential of new technologies for career guidance, the relationship with social mobility, and social inclusion processes.

One of the main aims of the National Guidelines on lifelong guidance is to improve the accessibility of guidance services to all citizens in Italy. This objective is reflected in a shared institutional delivery structure. The coordination of the main guidance initiatives, campaigns, and information events (study fairs and career days) is shared between the Ministry of Education, University and Research (MIUR)¹ and the Ministry of Labour and Social Policies². Both ministries have developed dedicated webpages and web portals for information and guidance. The national public employment services (PES) provide career information and guidance to all citizens, following national standards and guidelines, including the labour market reform introduced by Legislative Decree No. 150/2015³, and with the support of the national agency for employment, ANPAL⁴. Each region manages these services at the local level through a network of regional employment offices. In Italy, there are 556 employment offices, with about 8,700 practitioners, although only around 6,200 of them are involved in front-office activities.

¹ Ministero dell'Istruzione, dell'Università e della Ricerca (MIUR), official institutional reference.

² Ministero del Lavoro e delle Politiche Sociali, official website: <https://www.lavoro.gov.it/>, accessed June 2026.

³ Decreto Legislativo 14 settembre 2015, n. 150, Disposizioni per il riordino della normativa in materia di servizi per il lavoro e di politiche attive, in attuazione della Legge 10 dicembre 2014, n. 183.

⁴ Agenzia Nazionale per le Politiche Attive del Lavoro (ANPAL), official website: <https://www.anpal.gov.it/>, accessed June 2026.

Alongside this national framework, Regional stakeholders have more autonomy in developing projects and programmes which tackle youth unemployment. Career guidance services provided in schools focus more on increasing the employability of their graduates and on preparing them for the transition between different education levels and from education to the world of work.

Beyond the education system, guidance is also embedded within employment services. In 2017, the Ministry of Education launched an ESF-funded national programme (PON Orientamento) to support the development of innovative guidance services in schools. builds on the standards approved in 2014. It includes career education courses and modules, guidance information, actions, and support actions for career choice and employability development.

Within this broader framework, regional stakeholders are linked to the various educational pathways. Regional stakeholders can be engaged through partnerships which may include central and local administrations, associations, foundations, third sector organisations, universities, research centres, and networks. Services provided include tutelage by representatives of the world of work, technical training providers, and universities. Students are acquainted with local job offers, working environments, and available training offers. Growing occupations and activities are particularly emphasised. Relevant actions include information to students on all available routes to qualification, acquaintance with changing technologies at work, career workshops to understand the reality of careers and training environments, clarification of stereotypes about careers and VET, as well as clarification of personal preferences in career choices. The guidance and validation can be offered by a variety of services, which include the PES and other accredited employment agencies.

Young people receive support in job search, CV writing, and job application drafting. If the public employment services assess that further guidance or support is needed, more tailored measures may be made available. Those considered ready for work after initial screening and guidance are included in the PES job-matching database. Young people with lower levels of readiness may also be enrolled in labour insertion or

This chapter expands the analysis beyond the Milan context by examining a set of European and international case studies in youth employment support. The purpose is not to identify one model to replicate directly, but to extract transferable mechanisms that may help address the gaps identified in Milan, especially those related to fragmented entry points, weak continuity, limited guidance, and poor transitions between support and opportunity. Youth Guarantee, in their procedural elaboration, digital access mechanisms, and service integration. Within this broader national and regional architecture, Milan's metropolitan employment services are delivered through AFOL Metropolitana. The metropolitan employment services in Milan are offered by AFOL Metropolitana, which is in charge of Centri per l'Impiego and related activation measures. These services usually demand the official declaration of unemployment by means of the Dichiarazione di Immediata Disponibilità (DID), and profiling and creation of an individual service contract; this administrative entry point is the first step in the Public Employment Service (PES) routes.

At the same time, the municipal government of Milan, as mentioned in the «Rete Giovani Milano», promotes youth-related spaces, information desks, and network-based projects that would contribute to improving the opportunities of youth orientation and civic participation throughout the metropolitan region. The overlap between institutional employment service and municipal/third-sector youth services is a way of demonstrating how guidance can be provided as an ecosystem in Milan.

Young people face various entry points: administrative (e.g. CPI), educational institutions, youth centres, or community organisations. Although this plurality can widen reach and inclusivity, it will also require proper coordination in order to maintain continuity across touchpoints. Practically speaking, the transitions between actors do not always go as smoothly, and follow-up responsibility can be diffused.

Thus, the Italian and Milanese systems of youth guidance can be described as structurally broad but organisationally complex. Their strengths lie in the range of actors involved and in the presence of formalised access processes; their weaknesses concern navigability, coordination, and the possible fragmentation of user experience. In the Milan case, diverging governance structures can therefore result in uneven continuity and inconsistent user experiences.

— 4.2 European and International Case Studies in Youth Employment Support

This section reviews a set of European and international initiatives that address youth transitions through different service logics. It explores one-stop guidance systems, place-based employability hubs, university-associated digital platforms, exchange time-credit models, and youth-led civic and cultural systems. The objective is not to rank these interventions, but rather to identify transferable mechanisms that could be applied to Milan, particularly those that could reduce navigational barriers, strengthen the coherence of service touchpoints, and better connect information, skill development, and access to opportunities.

The selected case studies are:

- Ohjaamo (Finland) – one-stop youth guidance centres
- MyGo (Ipswich, UK) – place-based youth employment hub
- Youth Employability Service / YES (Brighton & Hove, UK) – hybrid employability support
- JobTeaser (France / Europe) – digital career platform
- Time Banking / Time Credits – reciprocity-based participation model
- Scomodo (Rome, Italy) – youth-led civic and cultural infrastructure

The cases were selected because they respond to challenges similar to those identified in Milan, namely: (1) fragmentation of entry points; (2) institutional or administrative barriers to engagement; (3) difficulties in sustaining engagement over time; and (4) weak transitions between guidance, training, and employment. Taken together, these cases provide a comparative foundation for identifying design principles relevant to a hybrid intervention in Milan, including low-threshold access, coordinated referrals, and channel integration (Clayton & Williams, 2014).



Figure 11. ohjamo space in Finland
Source: [ohjamo website](https://ohjamo.fi/)

1. Ohjaamo | Finland | 2014

- **Role in the system:**

One-stop youth guidance centre integrating employment, education, wellbeing, and everyday support.

3 · 42.9%

- **Target:**

Young people under 30.

2 · 28.6%

- **Delivery type:**

Mainly physical, with hybrid extensions such as e-guidance and remote support.

2 · 28.6%

- **Main mechanism:**

A single front door supported by cross-sector staff, coordinated referrals, and low-threshold access.

- **How it works:**

Ohjaamo is widely cited as a one-stop-shop guidance model designed for young people under 30. It was initiated by the Finnish Public Employment Service in 2014 with the support of trade unions and several ministries under the Youth Guarantee scheme. Rather than treating job search as a standalone issue, the model assumes that barriers often overlap—such as skills, housing, wellbeing, paperwork, and family conditions—and therefore brings multiple competences behind one entry point.

- **Support provided:**

Support may include life management and career planning, social skills, health and social security advice, education guidance, recruitment events, and housing-related support. Beneficiaries can also access remote and e-guidance services alongside face-to-face support.

- **Why this is interesting:**

The key value of Ohjaamo lies in the way guidance is organised, not only as counselling but as orchestration. Triage, referral, and follow-up are built into one joined-up service experience rather than being left to young people to coordinate on their own.

- **Why is it relevant for Milan?**

In a context where young people face multiple providers—employment services, municipal youth spaces, NGOs, and training bodies—the main transferable lesson is not copying Finland's institutions, but replicating the mechanism of integrated entry plus coordinated handover.

- **Strength:**

Reduces the cognitive burden of “where to start” and makes access more youth-friendly.

- **Limitation:**

Depends on strong coordination between public services and local actors.

- **Design lesson for Milan:**

The system should coordinate internally so that young people do not have to self-navigate fragmented institutions.



Figure 12. MyGo - Suffolk Jobs
Source: [Their Social media post](#)

2. MyGo | Ipswich, UK | 2014

- **Role in the system:**

Dedicated youth employment centre linking local needs with national employment structures.

- **Target:**

Young people aged 16–24.

- **Delivery type:**

Mainly a physical hub with local employer links and personalised support.

- **Main mechanism:**

Local hub plus caseworker-style assistance plus employer engagement.

How it works:

MyGo illustrates a place-based youth employment centre created to fill gaps in national provision through local partnership arrangements. It functions as a dedicated access point where young people can receive training, career support, and intensive personalised assistance, while also connecting to employers and local opportunities.

- **Why this is interesting:**

A key feature of MyGo is its explicit collaboration with national employment actors, such as Jobcentre Plus, combined with local outreach and employer engagement. In service-system terms, this reduces the risk that youth support remains only motivational or informational and instead strengthens the pathway from guidance to concrete opportunities.

- **Why is it relevant for Milan?**

It shows how a local hub can act as a service integrator, not only as a venue. This is especially relevant in Milan, where services already exist but handovers between providers are often weak.

- **Strength:**

Creates a clearer pathway from guidance to opportunities and improves handover quality between youth support and labour-market demand.

- **Limitation:**

Strongly place-based and dependent on local partnership and funding capacity.

- **Design lesson for Milan:**

Employer outreach and opportunity brokerage should be built into the support model, not added as an afterthought.



Figure 13. Brighton & Hove Visitor Economy engagement sessions
Source: [LinkedIn post](#)

3. Youth Employability Service (YES) | Brighton & Hove, UK | 2011

- **Role in the system:**

One-stop youth guidance centre integrating employment, education, wellbeing, and everyday support.

- **Target:**

Youth (16–24) employment programmes

- **Delivery type:**

Hybrid: distributed drop-ins, social media, digital communication, and app-based support.

- **Main mechanism:**

Hybrid touchpoints plus outreach plus continuity through tracking.

- **How it works:**

The Youth Employability Service in Brighton & Hove combines physical access points with digital outreach and practical employability support such as CV writing, applications, and interview preparation. The service is notable for its use of multiple communication channels and for its emphasis on tracking progression and reducing the number of “unknown” young people.

- **Why this is interesting:**

The distinctive element here is not simply the combination of physical and digital channels, but the operational discipline around continuity. Adviser relationships, tracking, and follow-up create an accountability structure across the journey from information to guidance, training, placement, and later progression.

- **Why is it relevant for Milan?**

This directly addresses one of the main Milan problems already identified in the thesis: support may exist, but continuity is weak, and the burden of reconnecting often falls on the young person.

- **Strength:**

Supports continuity and accountability across the service journey.

- **Limitation:**

Requires active management, live information, and staff capacity.

- **Design lesson for Milan:**

Hybrid channels should support follow-up and continuity, not only information broadcasting.

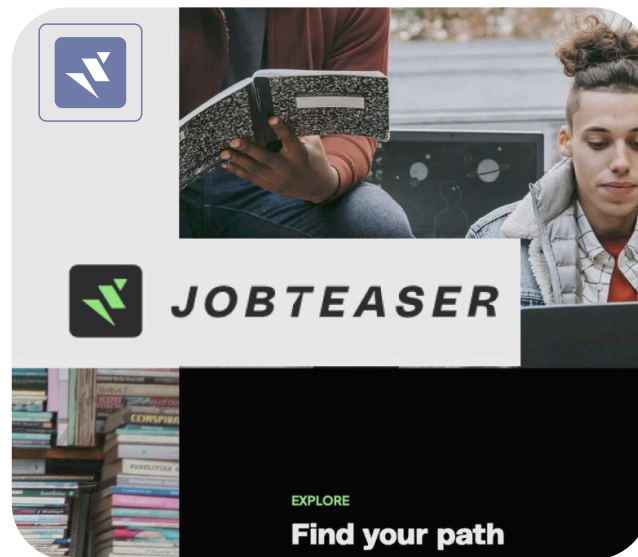


Figure 14. Digital job platform
Source: [Landing page](#)

4. JobTeaser | France | 2008

- **Role in the system:**

University-linked digital career platform.

- **Target:**

Students and recent graduates in education-connected pathways.

- **Delivery type:**

Mainly digital.

- **Main mechanism:**

Scalable digital access to vacancies, employer profiles, career resources, webinars, and application tools.

- **How it works:**

JobTeaser represents an education-embedded digital career platform that connects students and recent graduates with job listings, employers, career content, and application tools. It is designed to operate at scale and to provide a convenient digital interface for users who are already relatively prepared to enter internships or work opportunities.

- **Why this is interesting:**

JobTeaser offers an important contrast to public and municipal service models because it shows the strengths of digital-only delivery in terms of speed, scale, and convenience.

- **Why is it relevant for Milan?**

It helps clarify what digital platforms do well and where their limitations begin. In the Milan context, this is useful because it shows that a digital layer can improve reach and usability, but cannot, by itself, solve the needs of more vulnerable or disengaged youth.

- **Strength:**

High reach, speed, and convenience for ready users.

- **Limitation:**

Assumes that users are already connected to education systems, digitally confident, and able to self-navigate.

- **Design lesson for Milan:**

Digital platforms are powerful, but more vulnerable youth often still need human mediation and guided pathways.



Figure 15. Meeting from time banking
Source: [Home page](#)

4. Time Banking | Time Credits | 2002

- **Role in the system:**

Reciprocity-based model in which participation and contribution are exchanged as time-based values.

- **Target:**

People with limited financial resources but available time, skills, care, or community contribution.

- **Delivery type:**

Can be physical, digital, or hybrid depending on the scheme.

- **Main mechanism:**

“Pay with time” logic that converts participation into exchangeable value.

- **How it works:**

Time banking and time credits represent an alternative model in which individuals exchange services using time as the unit of value. One hour of contribution can generate a one-time credit, which can then be redeemed for support, activities, or reciprocal services. In community-exchange literature, these models are described as mechanisms that can build reciprocity, social cohesion, and engagement.

- **Why this is interesting:**

This case is especially relevant to the BRIDGE concept because it operationalises the idea that access and value can be built through participation rather than only through money. It also highlights how contribution can strengthen belonging, motivation, confidence, and social connection.

- **Why is it relevant for Milan?**

It directly connects to the thesis idea of enabling young people to gain value and opportunity through civic or structured participation. It is particularly useful for thinking about youth who may not have financial resources but can contribute time, skills, and effort.

- **Strength:**

Lowers financial barriers and can strengthen inclusion, confidence, and belonging.

- **Limitation:**

It does not automatically produce recognised employability outcomes or formal labour-market access.

- **Design lesson for Milan:**

Time-credit logic becomes meaningful when it is linked to recognised skills, references, micro-credentials, or structured progression pathways.



Figure 16. The Photos of the Meeting with Youth
Source: [Scomodo page](#)

6. Scomodo | Rome, Italy | 2016

- **Role in the system:**

Youth-led cultural and civic infrastructure organised around shared spaces and participation.

- **Target:**

Young people are engaging in culture, place-making, participation, and community life.

- **Delivery type:**

Physical spaces combined with media, editorial production, events, and hybrid communication.

- **Main mechanism:**

Youth-led engagement through cultural hubs, community identity, and active participation.

- **How it works:**

Scomodo represents a youth-led cultural hub model in which shared spaces, events, publishing, and community activities are used to support engagement and belonging. The case shows how youth-oriented spaces can function as low-threshold entry points even when employment is not the explicit first topic of interaction.

- **Why this is interesting:**

It highlights how trust, identity, and participation can be strengthened through a space that feels culturally relevant and socially open to young people.

- **Why is it relevant for Milan?**

This is particularly important in relation to youth who distrust institutional channels or do not initially approach employment services through formal administrative pathways.

- **Strength:**

Builds motivation, ownership, and strong active participation.

- **Limitation:**

Weaker direct link to labour-market outcomes unless intentionally connected to training, certification, and opportunities.

- **Design lesson for Milan:**

Youth-friendly spaces can work as trust-building infrastructures, but they need intentional links to employability pathways.

To compare the selected cases more systematically, Table 3 summarises their role, target group, delivery logic, and the main lesson relevant to Milan.

Case	Role	Target	Delivery	Achievement
Ohjaamo	One-stop guidance	Under 30	Physical + hybrid	No-wrong-door entry + integrated handover
MyGo	Youth employment hub	16–24	Mainly physical	Hub as service integrator + employer links
YES Brighton	Hybrid guidance service	Youth at risk / NEET	Hybrid	Tracking and continuity matter
JobTeaser	Digital career platform	Students / grads	Digital-only	Scale is useful but excludes unready users
Time banking	Reciprocity model	Low-resource contributors	Varies	Participation must link to recognised progression
Scomodo	Youth-led cultural hub	Young participants	Hybrid	Trust and belonging can be entry mechanisms
DYS Spaces	Hybrid youth engagement	Younger / reluctant youth	Hybrid	Digital can be a relational pre-entry space

Table 3. Comparative synthesis of selected youth employment support case studies.
Source: Author's elaboration based on the case-study sources reviewed in this section.

As the table 3 shows, the cases differ in delivery mode and service logic, but they converge around a common challenge: reducing fragmentation while improving continuity and meaningful access. To compare the selected cases more visually, Figure 17 positions them according to their dominant delivery mode and their typical form of user participation.

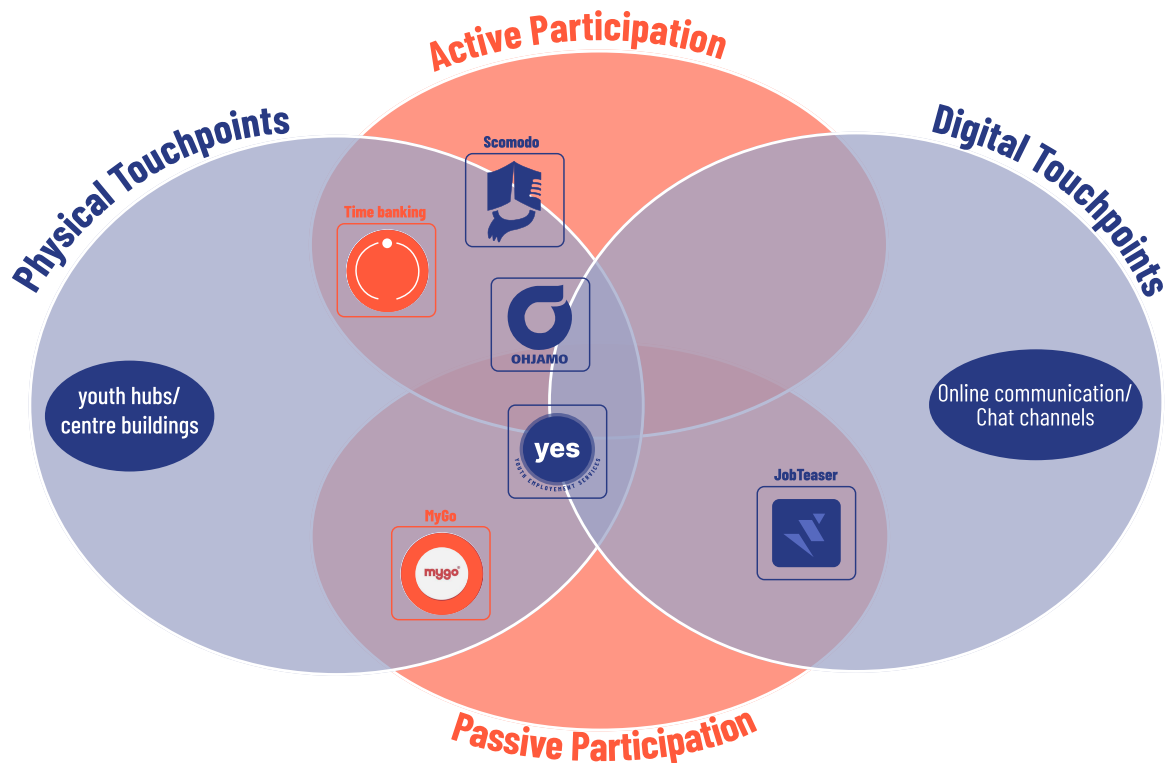


Figure 17. Comparative positioning of selected case studies by dominant delivery platform and typical user participation.
Source: Author's elaboration.

The positions are approximate and reflect the dominant service logic of each case rather than quantitative measurement.

What these case studies collectively suggest for Milan Across the selected cases, a consistent pattern emerges: effective youth employment support reduces navigation burden, makes handovers explicit, and combines digital reach with relational and trust-building forms of support. The most transferable lesson for Milan is not any single programme, but the combination of three elements: a clear front door, continuity mechanisms such as tracking or coordinated follow-up, and hybrid touchpoints that connect information and participation to meaningful opportunities.

Taken together, the cases suggest that a future service for Milan should reduce navigation burden across actors, make handovers more explicit between soft-entry and hard-entry services, strengthen continuity from information to skills and opportunities, and combine digital scale with physical trust-building. In this sense, the comparative analysis supports the development of a hybrid service ecosystem rather than a stand-alone digital app.

Although these cases differ in institutional setting, delivery model, and target group, they can be read comparatively in relation to a shared set of service questions: how young people enter support, how continuity is maintained, how participation is encouraged, and how pathways are connected to opportunities. On this basis, the next section brings the cases together in a cross-case analysis in order to extract the key lessons most relevant to the design challenge in Milan.

4.3 Cross-Case Analysis and Key Insights

This section synthesises insights from the comparative cases by focusing on how young people access support, participate, and maintain continuity across different delivery models within the different delivery models. The analysis is based on a framework of hybrid services: rather than viewing each initiative as a separate programme, it will look at how touchpoints (physical, digital, and outreach) are configured and how users can participate (from lower-intensity participation through attendance to higher-intensity forms such as co-production). This method is in line with the European guidance debates that theorize lifelong guidance as a system that helps individuals to negotiate transitions throughout education, training, and employment instead of a single counselling session. This perspective supports reading the cases not as isolated examples, but as comparable configurations of access, participation, and continuity.

The main activities that promote long-term engagement, including workshops, educational interventions, walk-in support, and informal relational contact, are, in almost all six cases, operationalised through physical settings such as drop-in hubs and youth-friendly centres. This trend is consistent with empirical findings of integrated youth service models, which suggest that one-stop and youth-friendly centres reduce barriers to access by offering low-threshold access points, human mediation, and continuity of support. Physical environments, therefore, act not as a spatial locus, but as a social infrastructure which enables trust, motivation, and follow-through, qualities difficult to achieve in an exclusively digital environment.

Within the case set, the physical perimeter also emerges as more flexible in accommodating different intensities of participation. Passive participation, which is attendance at a workshop or face-to-face support, is observed in youth development and youth wellness hubs models, and active participation is evidenced by the dynamics of co-organisation and co-production (e.g., reconfiguring spaces, co-designing activities, or fundraising). The indication is that hybrid youth guidance services should typically treat physical touchpoints as the “relational anchor” and position digital tools as a support layer for accessibility, continuity, and follow-up rather than as the primary site of engagement.

A second finding concerns where participation happens. Although there is a high representation of physical delivery of services, a significant proportion of these activities remains concentrated in specific buildings, such as youth centres, hubs, and walk-in service locations. Hubs and walk-in locations of services. By contrast, “public-space first” approaches—where outreach and participation are designed to occur in everyday urban places—appear less explicitly developed in the selected set. It is significant for Milan, as previous studies have shown that there are many entry points (institutional offices, municipal points, third-sector organizations) for youth in Milan, but what links these places together is often lacking. Design-wise, it would help if there were an attempt to improve connections, and proximate, low-threshold micro-access points (including public or semi-public spaces) can reduce navigation burden and support continuity for young people who do not easily enter formal institutional pathways.

The third lesson derived from cross-case studies concerns the role of digital channels in hybrid support systems. Compared with physical environments, which are usually the primary sources of trust, participatory interaction, and long-term adherence to compliance, digital touchpoints operate on a different paradigm: they extend their reach, provide flexible access to information, and maintain contact both across time and space. The diagram also suggests a clearer interpretation of what digital channels do well. Digital touchpoints can expand reach beyond geography, support asynchronous participation, and reduce friction for information access, particularly in early stages when young people are

uncertain, comparing options, or reluctant to approach institutions. This logic is consistent with research on digital transitions in lifelong guidance, which emphasises that digital tools can widen access and support career learning, but their effectiveness depends on integration with human support and coherent service journeys. In practice, “digital-only” risks excluding those with lower digital confidence, language barriers, or fragile life conditions; therefore, a hybrid configuration should prioritise well-designed handoffs between online steps (information, booking, profiling, learning) and in-person steps (orientation, coaching, trust building).

This insight is reinforced by employment-oriented one-stop models such as Ohjaamo and city-level youth employability programmes, which combine face-to-face guidance with coordinated multi-agency services and outreach. Their value lies less in “digitising everything” and more in reducing fragmentation through coordinated access, referral, and follow-up across actors—precisely the continuity challenge identified in Milan’s ecosystem.

Lastly, there are a few examples of participatory practices that extend far beyond service consumption (being supported) to participation as contribution (co-organising, volunteering, peer support). This relates to existing research showing how volunteering and civic engagement can improve mental well-being and social cohesion, as well as develop skills around employability. Time credit schemes (“time banks”) represent one such pathway; they treat contribution as something valuable that can be exchanged and can promote inclusion of individuals with low incomes through this kind of practice. But at the same time, such schemes tend to be informal and disconnected from credentialing or progression processes.

Based on the cross-case synthesis, a robust hybrid architecture for Milan would allocate functions by what each channel is best at, rather than duplicating everything everywhere. A practical implication is to keep relational guidance and trust-building primarily in physical “Career Spots”, while using the app for continuity and scaffolding (pre-access orientation, booking, progress tracking, learning modules, reminders, and lightweight follow-up). Outreach or “micro-touchpoints” in proximate urban spaces can extend the physical layer for young people who are least likely to enter

formal offices. This channel logic directly addresses the gap identified in Milan: In other words, the issue is not the absence of services, but the weak connections between the different stages of support. Information, guidance, skills development, and access to opportunities are often distributed across separate actors and channels, without clear continuity between them. As a result, young people may begin a pathway but struggle to move from one step to the next. The main gap, therefore, lies in the lack of coordinated handovers and continuity across the support journey.

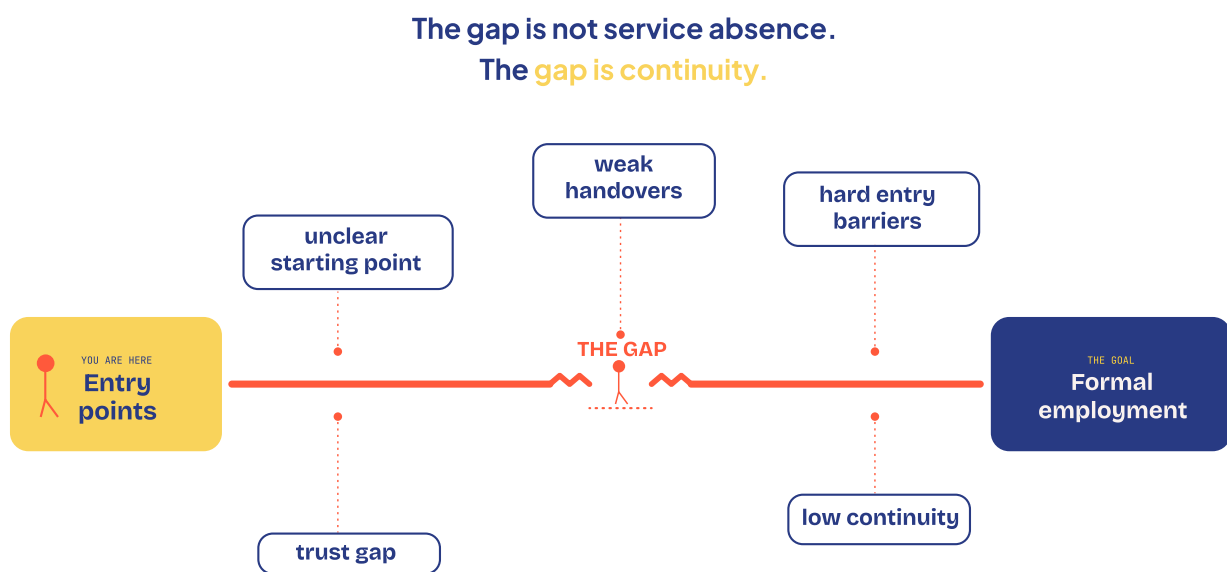
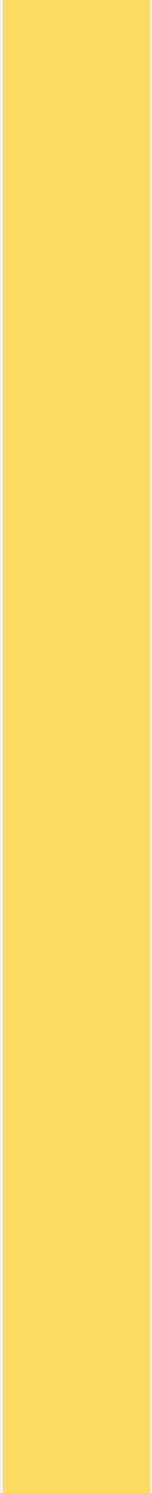


Figure 18 . synthesises this continuity gap by showing how weak handovers, hard-entry barriers, trust-related issues, and low continuity interrupt the pathway between entry points and formal employment.

As shown in Figure 18, the main weakness of the current system lies in the transitions between stages rather than in the absence of support itself. This reinforces the need for a hybrid intervention capable of improving handovers, continuity, and progression across the youth support journey. Taken together, the comparative analysis shows that effective youth employment support depends not only on the presence of services, but on how clearly entry is organised, how continuity is maintained, and how guidance, participation, and opportunities are connected across the journey. These findings reinforce the idea that Milan's main challenge is not service absence, but weak coordination and fragile transitions between existing actors and touchpoints. On this basis, the next chapter defines the design challenge more explicitly by translating the analytical findings into the key issues that the BRIDGE proposal must address.



Chapter 5

5 Defining the Design Challenge

— 5.1 Key Issues to Be Addressed Through Design

Building on the empirical analysis of Milan and the comparative insights developed in the previous chapters, this chapter translates the research findings into a clearer design problem. Rather than introducing the proposal immediately, it identifies the key issues that must be addressed through design, distinguishes between structural and service-level obstacles, and formulates the specific challenge to which BRIDGE responds.

The analysis conducted in chapters 3 and 4 indicates that the problem faced by the city of Milan does not merely relate to the lack of youth employment services but rather to the distribution of support amongst many actors, channels, and institutional logics. Youth employment services are provided via a system of services, which consists of public employment services, municipal youth services, training agencies, NGOs, and digital tools. Following the logic of service ecosystems, it could be argued that employability, inclusion, and continuity of support depend on the interaction of these actors rather than individual programmes or institutions (Vargo & Lusch, 2016). Therefore, what needs to be designed for improving the situation is the coherence of the journey made by young people in such an environment. The key problems raised through this synthesis are presented below.

The first important issue is the fragmentation between different services and entry points. Mapping the Milan ecosystem revealed that young people might experience a range of entry points that partly overlap: formal entry points to the labour market via CPI/AFOL Metropolitana, city advice hubs, youth centres, third-sector initiatives, and market-driven digital platforms. While the diversity of available options could enhance the system's accessibility, it might also make it harder to navigate. In particular, young people might not be aware of where to start, whose responsibility is what, and how each step links to the other. Consequently, coordination becomes the burden of users themselves. This challenge

corresponds to the understanding of the service-ecosystem proposed above, according to which fragmentation is both an organizational and user experience issue (Vargo & Lusch, 2016).

A second issue concerns hard-entry administrative barriers in formal employment services. As discussed in Chapter 3, access to the public employment system of Lombardy involves procedures such as DID (Dichiarazione di Immediata Disponibilità), the use of digital identity mechanisms, validations, and appointment-based access through CPI services (Ministero del Lavoro e delle Politiche Sociali, n.d., Regione Lombardia, n.d.; AFOLMet, 2024). These procedures are necessary due to institutional reasons, but on the user side, there is an access process before getting any help. In practice, young people must first understand the correct entry point, complete administrative requirements, and successfully move through verification and scheduling procedures before they can access counselling, matching, or training opportunities. This makes access conditional not only on need, but also on procedural capacity.

Beyond the existence of formal procedures, a third key issue concerns the unequal burdens those procedures generate. This leads to a third key issue: administrative burden and unequal accessibility. Public administration research shows that interactions with the state generate learning costs, compliance costs, and psychological costs for users (Moynihan, Herd, & Harvey, 2015). In the Milan case, these burdens are visible in the need to interpret fragmented information, prepare documents, manage digital identity tools, and comply with appointments and verification steps. These are not equally shared burdens. Young people who lack familiarity with the institutions, have weak social networks, live precariously, or do not feel confident using technology will be more vulnerable to delay, disorientation, and dropping out of the process. Design must therefore take into account not just the availability of services but also the challenge of getting into the system.

The fourth problem lies in poor transitions between soft-entry and hard-entry services. As the ecosystem map revealed, a lot of young people initially access support from non-institutional settings such as youth centres, municipalities, civil society organisations, or civic activities as

opposed to employment offices. These soft entry points are valuable because they build trust, reduce stigma, and provide an accessible first point of contact. However, the transition from these relational environments to more formal activation systems is often weak or unclear.

In many cases, support remains local, project-based, or informal, while the next institutional step requires a very different language, procedure, and level of self-navigation. As a result, handovers between actors are often fragile, and continuity depends too much on the young person's own ability to reconnect the system.

A fifth issue is the gap between digital reach and relational support. Chapters 2 and 3 revealed the potential of digital tools to increase access to information, opportunities, and communication, but at the same time revealed that young people's employment cannot be based exclusively on digital communication channels. Indeed, international literature on public employment services revealed that the need to have hybrid delivery systems still remains in place because digitalization has not made human mediation any less important in the case of employability barriers that are multifaceted (International Labour Organization, 2022). Similarly, European guidance on customer-centred service delivery stresses that digital systems must be complemented by coordinated, understandable, and humanly supported pathways (European Commission, 2023). In Milan, there are some existing digital points of contact like portals, job boards, and booking systems, but they do not guarantee continuity, trust, and a follow-up process. Therefore, it seems that it is important not to try to substitute physical services with an application, but to create a hybrid system.

A sixth issue concerns trust, stigma, and motivational engagement. The literature on NEET categorisation has shown that deficit-oriented framings can increase stigma and reduce participation in services (Yates & Payne, 2006). This is particularly relevant for youth employment support, where many young people do not approach services only as rational jobseekers, but also as individuals dealing with uncertainty, low confidence, prior negative experiences with institutions, or weak senses of belonging. The comparative case studies examined in Chapter 4 reinforce this point: models such as Ohjaamo and local youth

employment hubs work effectively not only because they provide information, but because they reduce the burden of “where do I start?”, combine guidance with human mediation, and make coordinated handovers more visible (European Social Fund Plus, n.d.; Clayton & Williams, 2014). In other words, support becomes more effective when the service feels navigable, welcoming, and continuous. Figure 19 summarises the main issues identified in the Milan youth employment ecosystem, highlighting how fragmentation, access barriers, trust-related difficulties, and weak continuity combine to shape the design challenge.



Figure 19. Key issues in the current Milan ecosystem (synthesis)
Source: Author's elaboration based on Chapters 3 and 4.

As such, the implications of this research suggest that the challenges in question are not stand-alone difficulties, but rather conditions in a system: fragmentation among the actors, rigid entry processes into administration, unequal burden, poor handover, inadequate continuity, and misalignment of the scale of digital technology with relational capacity. The task for the BRIDGE platform is thus to minimize navigation burden, enhance handover between soft entry and hard entry, increase continuity from information to opportunity, and combine digital accessibility with trust-building physical support. In this sense, the design task is not to invent an entirely new service from scratch, but to create a hybrid service ecosystem that helps young people move more clearly and confidently through the support structures that already exist.

— 5.2 Structural and Service-Level Obstacles Identified Through Analysis

As the analyses above (Chapter 3 and Chapter 4) illustrate, the key issues of the youth employment scenario in the city of Milan become evident on two interconnected levels: a structural level, which refers to the governance structures and institutional functions, as well as the overall configuration of the service system, which allows the accessibility and presentation of the support provided at different points of interaction between young people and services; which concerns the communicative, accessibility, and experience aspects of the support offered at various points of interaction between the youth. These levels are also interconnected, and most of the shortcomings in the services reported by the user can be directly linked to structural factors rather than to specific operational procedures. This distinction helps clarify how system-level conditions translate into user-level experiences.

The first structural obstacle concerns the multi-tiered, multi-actor organisation that shapes the provision of employment support to youth in Italy and Milan. The implementation of policies related to youth and their employment support is functionally organised into an overlapping system of national, regional, metropolitan, municipal, and third-sector schemes that possess different competences, priorities, and functional logics (European Commission, 2019; European Education and Culture Executive Agency, 2024).

The implication in Milan is that all of the sources of youth transitions are provided by public employment services, municipal youth services, educational institutions, community organisations, and digital platforms, but not necessarily working as a coordinated system. This distributed environment, in the view of a service-ecosystem, makes continuity conditional on the quality of alignment between actors as opposed to the presence of any programme (Vargo and Lusch, 2016).

A second structural obstacle is the hard-entry character of formal activation systems. As shown in Chapter 3, access to the public employment services in Lombardy is structured through formal procedures such as the Dichiarazione di Immediata Disponibilità (DID),

digital identity tools, validation requirements, and appointment-based access through employment services (Ministero del Lavoro e delle Politiche Sociali, n.d.; Regione Lombardia, n.d.; AFOLMet, 2024).

Although these procedures are institutionally necessary, they also make access conditional on procedural compliance before relational support begins. In practice, this means that young people often face an administrative threshold before they encounter actual guidance, counselling, or matching services. This creates a structural asymmetry between services that are formally central but difficult to enter, and softer youth-facing environments that are easier to approach but not always well connected to labour-market pathways. As a result, accessibility and effectiveness are distributed unevenly across the system.

The third structural impediment deals with the poor integration of soft-entry services and hard-entry services. The mapping of the Milan ecosystem has shown that young people often first encounter support in low-threshold spaces like youth centres, municipal hubs, and community organisations rather than through public employment services. Although they may help develop trust, minimize stigma, and achieve premature engagement, their transitions into formal activation systems are frequently weak, informal, and highly dependent on individual initiative. There are comparative examples analyzed in Chapter 4, indicating that effective systems internalize coordinated entry, referral, and follow-up in the service fabric itself, and do not put such a responsibility on young people (European Social Fund Plus, n.d.; Clayton & Williams, 2014).

One of the main barriers at the service level relates to the poor discoverability and information transparency. Services are spread across numerous platforms, which include websites, portals, municipal communication, employment offices, third-sector organisations, and informal peer networks. Therefore, young people must first inform themselves of the services available, identify what service would be of relevance to their circumstances, and what the first action should be. Empirical studies of the administrative burden point to the cognitive costs of these learning processes being one of the main reasons that are pushing people away when it comes to using services prior to formal compliance becoming a fact (Moynihan, Herd, and Harvey, 2015).

In the Milan case, this comes out through questions like: Which services are relevant to me? Is there a requirement for a digital identity (DID)? Is this a civic opportunity or a community job agency? What happens after the initial contact? These ambiguities make navigation difficult and more likely to make the young people uninterested before they can receive substantive support.

A further service-level obstacle is the fragmentation of the user journey across channels and providers. A young person may move between digital search engines, online reservation, youth hubs, employment offices, and community organisations without coherent handover processes or follow-up, thus creating a repetitive onboarding process, inconsistent advice, and uncertainty about who is responsible for taking the next step. European recommendations on customer-centred public employment services have been pointing at the following issues as the primary impediments to effective service, especially among disengaged youth (European Commission, 2023).

One more service-level barrier is related to the connection between online accessibility and human services. Digital tools have the potential to enhance coverage and provide quicker and easier access to information, although international experience demonstrates that public employment services do not often become fully digital since many users still need human mediation, advice, and face-to-face assistance (International Labour Organization, 2022).

This applies particularly to those youths who have little digital confidence, low institutional familiarity, language barriers, or unstable living circumstances. Digital channels can become more efficient for a group of users and add more barriers to others in these situations. That is why the design issue does not lie in the question of the services being digital or physical, but the question of whether the system establishes transparent areas of digital self-service and relational support.

Another service-level barrier is related to trust and stigma and motivational engagement. Young people have not only procedural, but also emotional and relational access to youth employment services. Empirical studies on the NEET label have revealed that deficit-based

framings have the propensity of stepping up stigma and decreasing involvement in the support system (Yates and Payne, 2006).

Many young individuals find that the issue is not just bureaucracy, but that their fears of being judged, lack of confidence, or feeling that the institutional service is not for them get in their way. Youth-friendly desks, intermediary figures, outreach organizations, and low-threshold community settings are vital because they lower the emotional barriers at first contact and turn interest into commitment.

Taken together, these findings show that Milan's youth employment ecosystem is constrained by a combination of structural and service-level obstacles. Structural fragmentation generates service-level problems in navigation, continuity, and accessibility; service-level failures, in turn, make structural weaknesses visible through user experiences of confusion, mistrust, repeated effort, and dropout. The design implication is therefore not only to improve isolated touchpoints, but to intervene in the relationship between system architecture and lived service experience. This synthesis prepares the next section, in which the design challenge is formulated more explicitly. Figure 20 synthesises how the identified obstacles operate across two interconnected levels—structural system conditions and service-level user experience failures.

This distinction between structural and service-level obstacles helps clarify that the main difficulty in Milan is not simply the presence of barriers, but the way these barriers are produced and reinforced by the wider organisation of the support system. In this sense, the need for intervention is not limited to improving isolated touchpoints, but concerns the design of clearer relationships between system architecture and lived service experience. On this basis, the next section formulates the design challenge more directly.

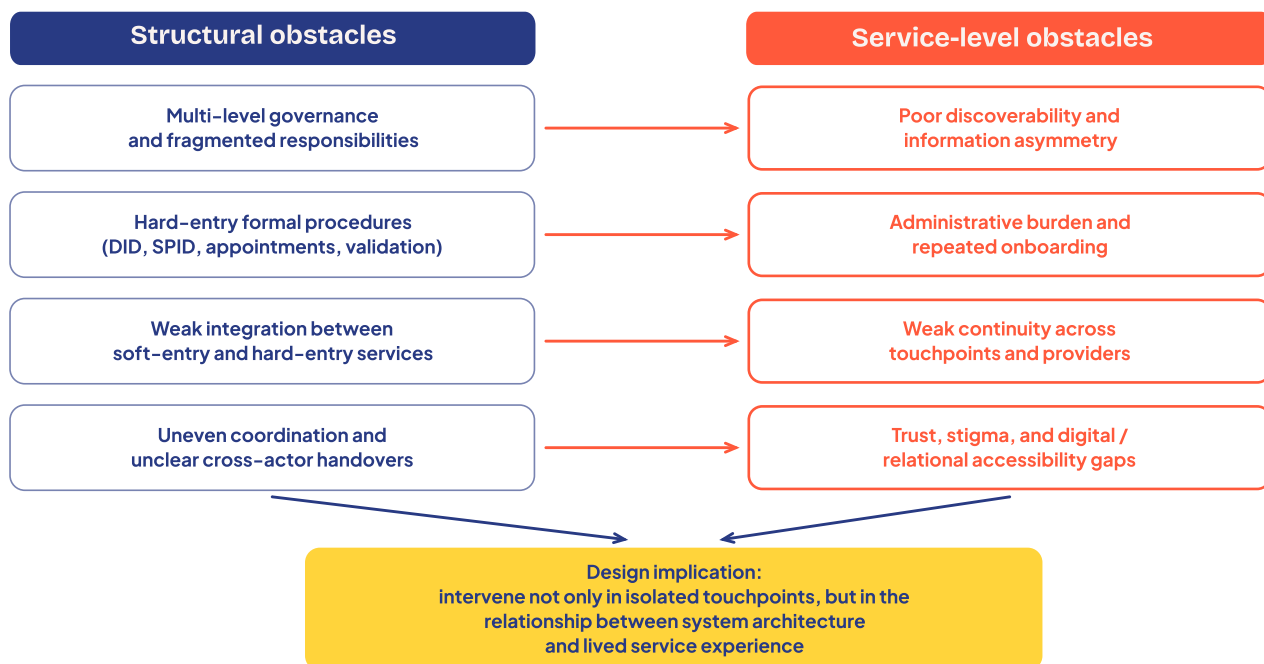


Figure 20. Structural and service-level obstacles identified through the analysis — system-level conditions generate the user-facing barriers. Source: Author's elaboration based on Chapters 3 and 4

5.3 Design Challenge Statement

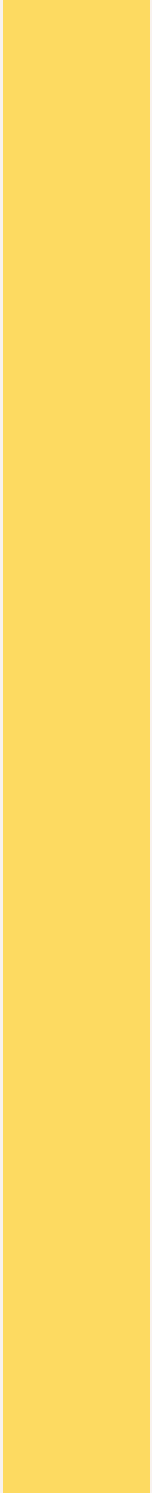
Based on the findings of Chapters 3 and 4, it becomes clear that one of the current problems in Milan is not that there is a lack of support to help young people in employment; however, it is rather the fragmentation in how support is organised, accessed, and experienced. The young people in the city are exposed to a landscape of public employment services, city schemes, training agencies, third-sector organisations, and web-based platforms that provide such relevant services, although through other entry points, processes, and institutional logics. The availability of these kinds of services, however, does not necessarily result in a coherent pathway. Rather, young people are often required to construct this pathway on their own by locating entry points, connections between services, and discontinuities between touchpoints. This effectively shifts the responsibility for navigating the system from services to the individual.

This condition is particularly critical because youth employment support is not based on a single point of contact when providing employment services, but rather on a process that unfolds over time. Accessing opportunities often requires moving through a sequence of steps to get access

to opportunities, including information search, eligibility, administration, guidance, skills development, and connection with employment-related opportunities. In Milan, this journey is rarely experienced as continuous. Formal services are more likely to be characterised by hard-entry procedures and institutional requirements, but softer and more accessible environments, such as youth centres, municipal hubs, and community organisations, are not always effectively connected to formal labour-market opportunities. As a result, the responsibility for maintaining continuity is often placed on the young person rather than being upheld by the service system itself.

For this reason, the issue cannot be taken as a policy or governance problem, but as a service and system design problem. Fragmentation is felt by users as a sense of uncertainty, repetition, poor handover, lack of discoverability, and a high probability of drop-out from one step to another. It's not about adding another programme or digital touch point, but about making sure the already established ecosystem works well in terms of navigation, continuity, and coherence. What is needed as an intervention that may reduce the burden of navigation, improve transitions between the soft-entry and hard-entry of the services, and create better visibility of continuity between the first engagement, guidance, skills development, and access to opportunities? In this sense, the problem is not a lack of services, but a lack of coordination between them.

The design challenge addressed in this thesis is, therefore, how to design a hybrid service ecosystem to support unemployed and vulnerable young people in Milan to navigate the existing support environment that includes the first point of contact, orientation, skills training, and employment-related opportunities. In particular, the design project is aimed at reducing the levels of fragmentation between actors and touchpoints, improving transitions between relational and formal services, and integrating digital tools with the credibility and guidance of physical support. It does not mean that the project is going to replace the other public employment services, city programmes, and third-party organisations; however, this is supposed to strengthen their relationships and make them more coordinated and user-centred in a less obstructive, youth-centred, and continuous channel. In this sense, the design response focuses on service orchestration rather than substitution.



Chapter 6

6 Design Vision

— 6.1 Vision and Guiding Principles

Following the definition of the design challenge, this chapter introduces the vision and guiding principles of the BRIDGE proposal. Rather than describing the final system in full detail, it outlines the conceptual direction of the intervention by explaining what kind of support logic BRIDGE aims to create and how digital and physical touchpoints are intended to work together within that logic.

The BRIDGE project vision is to reframe how youth employment services are delivered to the youth in Milan, and that a fragmented set of entry points needs to be changed into a more integrated and navigable hybrid support system that supports continuity across the service journey. Instead of requiring young people to organise their own pathways through the existing employment services available in the community, the municipal services, community organisations, and digital platforms, the project suggests that the first contact, guidance, skills development, and access to opportunities will become more interconnected over time. This vision is also grounded in empirical findings collected through a questionnaire among the youth in Milan. According to the results, the majority of users rely on digital platforms of LinkedIn and Indeed as their entry point, and public services are rarely used or even known. At the same time, it was reported that the respondents required guidance, clarity, and practical connections to opportunities. All these findings affirm the need to have a hybrid system that allows physical environments to reinforce digital tools and complement the accessibility of digital tools.

In this regard, the project is founded on the premise that support becomes more effective when it is understood as a continuous journey rather than a series of disconnected interactions within institutions and platforms. This kind of orientation is also aligned with the service-ecosystem theory, where outcomes are not produced by a single provider of services but as the consequence of the interactions among different actors, and aligns with the European concept of lifelong guidance as a system of supports that integrates information,

counselling, mentoring, and career development across transitions (Lusch and Webster 2011).

BRIDGE is not conceived as a substitute for existing services; instead, it is considered an enabling layer that would assist young people to interact with and navigate services. The project is anchored on empirical data that the risks associated with youth unemployment can be mitigated through employment services that comprise guidance, job seeking support, skills training, and mentoring. Nevertheless, the majority of young people do not get any formal assistance as they do not know about it, do not trust public institutions, or perceive them as inaccessible or irrelevant. According to this, OECD recommendations emphasise that employment services among the youth need to be strengthened, that targeted support for high-risk groups is needed, and there must be an investment in available digital and mobile platforms where possible. Simultaneously, the principles of European PES focus on the advantages of one-stop solutions, outreach initiatives, service provision centered on customers, and maintaining the human factor regardless of the constantly increasing central role of technology (OECD, 2024). The project is guided by the principle of low-threshold access. Young people need to be able to get support services without necessarily having to navigate complex institutional structures. Consequently, the access points are supposed to be understandable, youth-friendly, and accessible at multiple, yet connected, levels.

The second principle is the principle of hybrid continuity: digital tools will be capable of expanding the coverage, offering orientation, and allowing booking in a physical space and human assistance, which will be capable of supporting trust-building, clarifying what follows, and sustaining long-term engagement. The latter tenet can be justified by the existing European and international evidence that digitisation enables the expansion of the capabilities of delivery, yet does not exclude the necessity to interact with people, particularly in situations with users who have a multilayered barrier (European Commission, 2023).

The third principle centers around the aspect of guidance as a continuous process rather than a one-time intervention. The project is grounded in the point that the mechanisms of change between young people cannot

be attained by information dissemination only and should be facilitated by assistance in the clarification of the current opportunities, self-assessment of skills, building of confidence, and connecting learning processes to real opportunities.

The fourth principle promotes service orchestration and not service substitution. BRIDGE is not intended to replace the current public employment services, municipal programmes, and third sector initiatives. Rather, it is geared toward strengthening handovers, decreasing fragmentation, and creating clearer connections between informal or soft-entry and more formal job opportunities.

The fifth principle focuses on capability-building. Consequently, through learning pathways, documented experience, micro-credentials, and participation in civic activities, documented experience, micro-credentials and civic or community participation the project aims to strengthen long-term employability and agency. This can be analyzed in accordance with the overall policy on advice, skills training, and personalized assistance of youth in different working conditions in the labor market (Cedefop, n.d.).

Lastly, the final principle concerns inclusion and relational trust. The barriers that have been cited in Milan are not confined to the administrative barriers, but also the emotional and relationship barriers, such as the factor of uncertainty, no confidence, fear of judgment, and lack of knowledge regarding the institutional structures. As such, the system to be suggested must not only be efficient but also user-friendly, understandable, accessible, and supportive.

The importance of physical Career Spots to the hybrid ecosystem, therefore, goes beyond simply providing an additional service point; these serve as approachable relational anchor points that can lessen the distance between the youth and the broader employment support system. The BRIDGE design vision would therefore be to make the ecosystem more open, more integrated, and youth-friendly, whereby the digital and physical touchpoints would be aligned to enable smoother transitions between the initial touch and guidance, skills acquisition, and access to employment opportunities.

These guiding principles clarify the overall direction of the proposal: BRIDGE is conceived as a low-threshold, hybrid, and continuity-oriented support system that strengthens handovers rather than replacing existing services. To make this vision more concrete, the following section examines how physical and digital touchpoints perform different but complementary roles within the system.

6.2 Role of Physical and Digital Touchpoints in the System

The BRIDGE system is conceived as a hybrid service ecosystem where digital and physical touchpoints play complementary and coordinated roles in the user experience. Instead of defining digitalisation as a replacement of face-to-face interactions, the system is based on the assumption that there are different modalities of interaction that are obligatory at different steps of interaction, specifically in the case of young people with heterogeneous constraints in accessing a job. This methodological position reflects the wider changes in general practices in the field of public employment services, where hybrid delivery models are increasingly recognised as the key to balancing scalability and personalised delivery (International Labour Organization, 2022; European Commission, 2023). The importance of digital touchpoints in early engagement is also confirmed by the questionnaire findings. Most respondents reported using online job platforms as their primary search channel, indicating that digital environments play a crucial role in the initial stages of interaction.

However, the same data also reveals significant gaps in guidance, trust, and relational support, suggesting that digital access alone is not sufficient. This reinforces the need for complementary physical touchpoints that can provide personalised support and facilitate meaningful engagement.

In the BRIDGE system, the digital platform is the central access, continuity, and coordination point. It makes it easy to find opportunities, navigate through the services available, and create individualized channels over time amongst the youth. These digital spaces are especially successful at the very beginning of the engagement when

people might feel uncertain and undergo option comparison, or show an unwillingness to reach institutional services directly. Some of the functions supported by the platform are access to information, onboarding, booking, tracking progress, and involvement in learning or community-based experiences. In this regard, it alleviates the cognitive and logistical load of fragmented service landscapes through which users can maintain continuity in the interaction. This role is consistent with the current literature on digital guidance systems, which proves that digital guidance systems, which proves that digital solutions could be used to expand access to and facilitate career learning when included in the larger service journeys, rather than when applied as isolated solutions (Cedefop, 2021).

At the same time, physical touchpoints, which in the BRIDGE model are defined as the so-called Career Spots, also play a completely different, but no less important role. These spaces are designed to provide relational assistance, trust, and guided interaction, particularly among the persons who are facing issues of self-confidence, institutional literacy, or complex situations in life.

Physical environments provide a way of interaction that is difficult to recreate in the digital environment, such as personalised counselling, motivational support, and contextual interpretation of opportunities. In addition, they act as low-level access points, allowing the young people to receive help without necessarily going through formal administrative procedures.

Empirical evidence on the conditions in other countries shows that even in the most digitised labour market structures, face-to-face services remain essential to people with layered employability disadvantages (International Labour Organization, 2022). To better clarify how digital and physical touchpoints perform different but complementary roles within the BRIDGE system, Figure 21 illustrates their functional distribution.

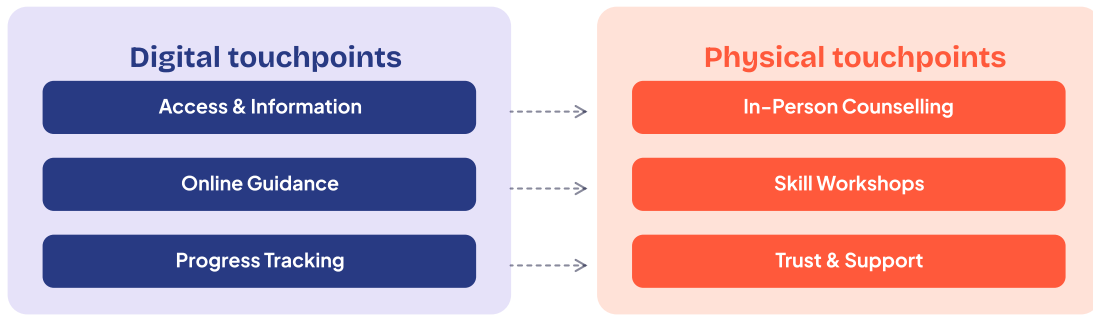


Figure 21. Complementary roles of digital and physical touchpoints in the BRIDGE system. The diagram shows how digital touchpoints support access, navigation, and continuity, while physical touchpoints provide guidance, trust-building, and relational support. Source: Author's elaboration.

As shown in Figure 21, the system does not rely on one dominant channel, but on the coordination between distinct interaction modes that address different user needs.

A lack of coordination between the existing touchpoints is not an absence of services, but is one of the major problems in the framework of the current context in Milan, which is outlined in Chapters 3 and 4. Municipal initiatives, digital platforms, public employment services, and third-sector organisations often serve as single portals that the government places users in the position of filling in the blanks on their own. This fragmentation becomes particularly visible when analysing how young people move across different stages of the service journey.



Figure 22. Distribution of digital and physical touchpoints across the user journey. The diagram shows how digital tools are more relevant in early and follow-up stages, while physical touchpoints are essential during guidance and decision-making phases. Source: Author's elaboration.

This highlights the importance of aligning touchpoints with specific stages of engagement rather than treating all channels as interchangeable.

The BRIDGE system attempts to fill this gap by functioning as a bridging

infrastructure that provides digital accessibility and physical assistance. Instead of adding a new isolated service, it creates a hybrid structure that results in improvements in the way that existing resources are discovered, connected, and experienced. A key aspect of this hybrid approach is not only the presence of multiple touchpoints, but the way users transition between them.



Figure 23. Transitions between digital and physical touchpoints.
The diagram illustrates how users move between digital and physical environments through actions such as booking, referral, and follow-up, ensuring continuity across the service journey.
Source: Author's elaboration.

As shown in Figure 23, the system does not rely on one dominant channel, but on the coordination between distinct interaction modes that address different user needs.

A lack of coordination between the existing touchpoints is not an absence of services, but is one of the major problems in the framework of the current context in Milan, which is outlined in Chapters 3 and 4. Municipal initiatives, digital platforms, public employment services, and third-sector organisations often serve as single portals that the government places users in the position of filling in the blanks on their own. This fragmentation becomes particularly visible when analysing how young people move across different stages of the service journey.

Designing these transitions explicitly is essential to reduce drop-off, avoid repeated onboarding, and ensure continuity across fragmented service interactions.

In turn, the design role goes beyond the creation of interface and into the organization of services: organizing relationships among touchpoints, clarifying pathways, and creating continuity within the ecosystem.



Chapter 7

7 Design Proposal

— 7.1 Concept Overview

This chapter presents the BRIDGE proposal in detail by translating the vision and principles defined in the previous chapter into a concrete service-system concept. It explains the overall logic of the proposal, the actors and relationships that structure it, the user journeys through which it is experienced, the role of the Career Spot as a physical hub, and the way the system could develop over time. In this way, the chapter moves from conceptual definition to operational explanation.

The BRIDGE concept is designed to address the systemic issues that have been described in the previous chapters, especially the fragmentation of youth employment support in Milan, the lack of continuity among these services, and the difficulties that young people experience in accessing support in a clear and continuous manner. As the analysis has shown, the issue is not the lack of support services, but rather the fragmentation of these services among different actors, platforms, and institutional logics that require young people to navigate the support landscape on their own. This situation is especially challenging for young people with limited familiarity with the institutional framework, low self-confidence, lack of guidance, and low trust in the formal support services.

In response to the current situation, the BRIDGE concept is proposed to provide a service response to support unemployed and vulnerable young people in Milan. The solution is based on the idea of developing a hybrid service ecosystem that will enable young people to access, navigate, and receive guidance within the current support landscape. Instead of duplicating the efforts of the current support services, such as public employment services, municipal programmes, training organizations, and third-sector organizations, the BRIDGE concept is designed to function as a bridging infrastructure among these services. The solution is based on the idea of developing both a digital and physical interface to provide better support to young people. The physical interface will be based on the idea of developing Career Spots to provide better access to the support services.

The ultimate goal of the BRIDGE concept is to reduce navigation burden and improve the continuity of the youth employment journey. The concept is, therefore, designed to enable young people to gain a clearer sense of direction, identify the opportunities relevant to them, and ensure they are guided through the process while maintaining their engagement and avoiding the risk of dropping out. The proposal, therefore, considers not only access to employment-related information but the entire process through which young people gain confidence, develop their capabilities, document their experiences, and eventually progress towards employability. The BRIDGE concept, therefore, emerges as a service response to structural fragmentation and relational challenges. The conceptual model of the BRIDGE system consists of two main components. The first is the digital platform, while the second is the physical layer, which is composed of the Career Spots. The value of the hybrid model is the complementarity between the two components, as the digital touchpoints enhance flexibility and continuity, while the physical touchpoints are essential in creating the conditions for building trust and contextual interpretation, especially for young people who are not well served by digital-only systems. Figure 24 provides an overview of the BRIDGE concept. At a conceptual level, the BRIDGE system is designed to enable five main functions across the support journey: navigation, guidance, capability development, handover, and continuity. These functions reflect the key gaps identified in the previous chapters and frame the proposal not as a single isolated intervention, but as a coordinated support system accompanying young people from first access to longer-term employability development.

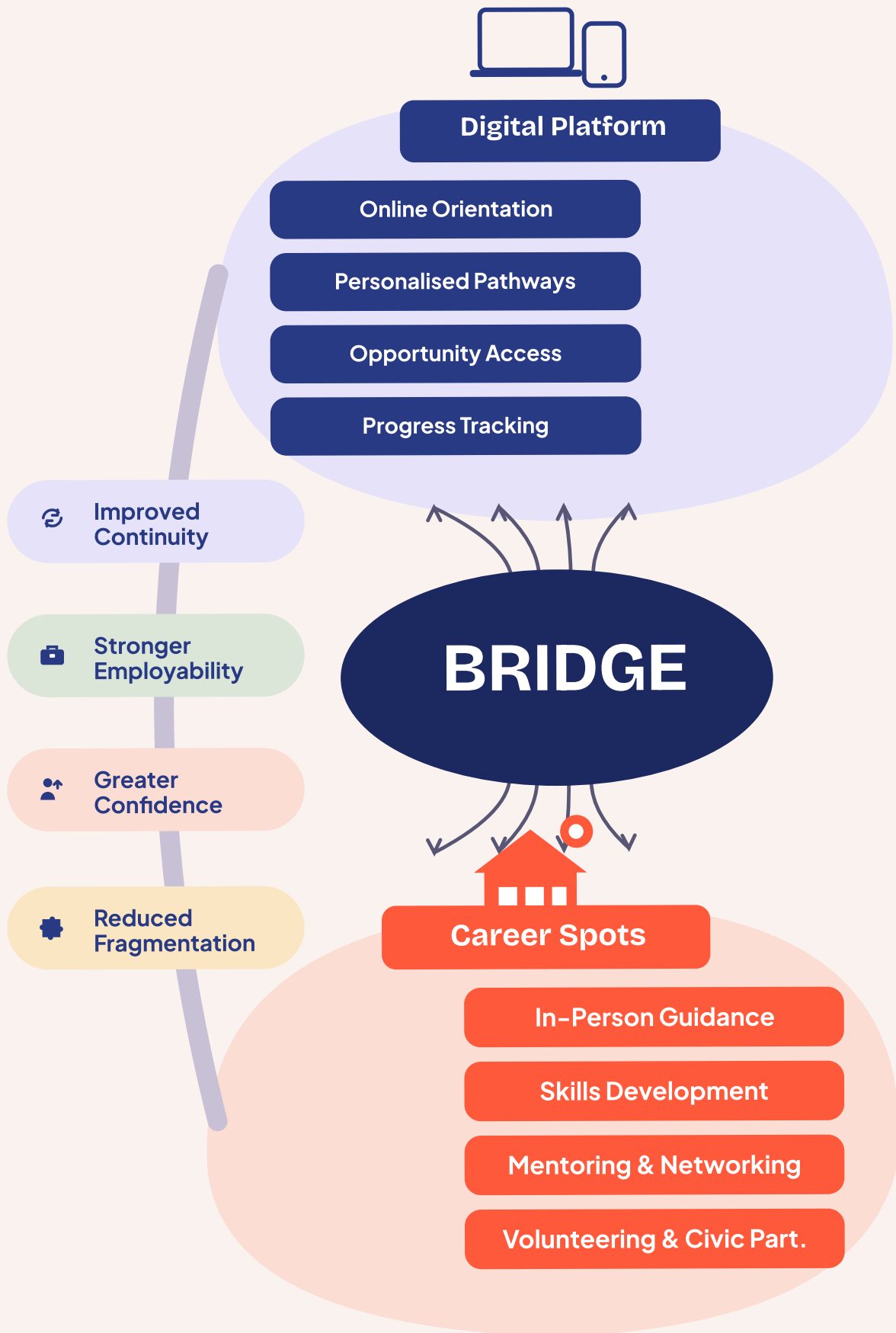


Figure 24. Concept Overview of the BRIDGE Hybrid Service Ecosystem. The diagram shows the hybrid nature of the BRIDGE system, consisting of a digital platform and physical Career Spots, to support orientation, continuity, capability development, and access to opportunities for young people in Milan. Source: Author's elaboration.

As shown in Figure 24, the structure of the BRIDGE system is a hybrid service ecosystem consisting of digital and physical components with the aim of supporting young people's progression from first access to capability development. BRIDGE is also positioned within the existing youth support ecosystem in Milan as an intermediary and enabling layer rather than a substitute for current services. In this sense, the concept connects soft-entry actors such as youth hubs, municipal spaces, and community organisations with more formal labour-market actors such as public employment services, training organisations, employers, and opportunity platforms. Its role is to make transitions between these actors more visible, supported, and continuous for young people. A distinctive aspect of the BRIDGE system is the fact that the system is able to link the concepts of employability with capability development and participation. This means that the system is designed not just to offer access to various sources of information and employment support services but also to support the development of capabilities and recognised forms of value among young people in Milan. It also includes the ability of young people to access various sources of learning, mentoring, and networking opportunities as well as the ability to participate in various civic and community-based activities. In this way, the system is designed to empower young people in Milan and thus provides a platform where they can gradually develop a sense of agency, a sense of belonging, and a sense of connection with opportunities and the community.

In this sense, the BRIDGE system is a response to the main design challenge presented in the thesis and provides a platform where young people in Milan can access different forms of employment support without duplicating existing sources of support.

The following section provides a detailed explanation of the BRIDGE system by presenting the system architecture and actor relationships, as well as the role of the Career Spot and the interactions of young people with the system.

7.2 Service System Architecture and Actors

This section presents the service-system architecture of BRIDGE and the main actors involved in its functioning. The idea stems from a hybrid service ecosystem, which integrates digital and physical service touchpoints, and a coordination layer that links already existing services and does not replace them. In this way, BRIDGE is a system within a system that facilitates the visibility and manageability of access, referral, and continuity in the complex youth employment support system in Milan. In this sense, BRIDGE is an intermediate system that contributes to making access, referral, and continuity more visible and more manageable in the complex system of youth employment support in Milan.

The three components of the BRIDGE hybrid service layer – the digital platform, the Career Spots, the facilitator/coordination function – lie at the heart of the proposal. The digital platform is the primary means of orientation, pathway visibility, booking, reminders, and continuity for interactions. The Career Spots serve as a physical location where youth can come and get walk-in coaching, document assistance, and referral and information on career and employment. In between these two layers, the BRIDGE facilitator is a key player in the system's operationalization, assisting users in navigating the system, coordinating support between actors, and ensuring continuity over time. The architecture of BRIDGE is not just about the integration of digital and physical elements, but about the dynamic interaction between them. The actor map in the presentation also structures BRIDGE in this way, showing the digital platform, Career Spots, and facilitators as the core service layer supported by a coordination unit and connected to a wider network of institutional and opportunity actors.

Around this core layer, the BRIDGE system involves a wider network of actors with distinct but connected roles. The Municipality of Milan is the public sponsor and source of strategic support and legitimacy of the proposal at the institutional level. A BRIDGE coordination unit, at the operational level, is responsible for platform administration, partnership management, and continuity oversight. The core is surrounded by a series of connected actors, who provide certain aspects of the support journey: municipal youth service providers for orientation and outreach; NGOs and third-sector organisations for mediation and support for more vulnerable

young people; CAGs and youth hubs for soft-entry, trust-based access; public employment service providers for formal activation, profiling and job matching; and training providers and employers for learning pathways, credentials, internships and employment opportunities. Young people themselves remain the central users of the system, interacting with BRIDGE through both digital and physical channels. This multi-actor structure is also visible in the actor map, which organises the proposal into institutional support, the BRIDGE core service layer, partner actors, and primary users.

Figure 25 presents the actor map of the BRIDGE system, showing the main institutional, operational, partner, and user actors involved in the proposal and the relationships between them.

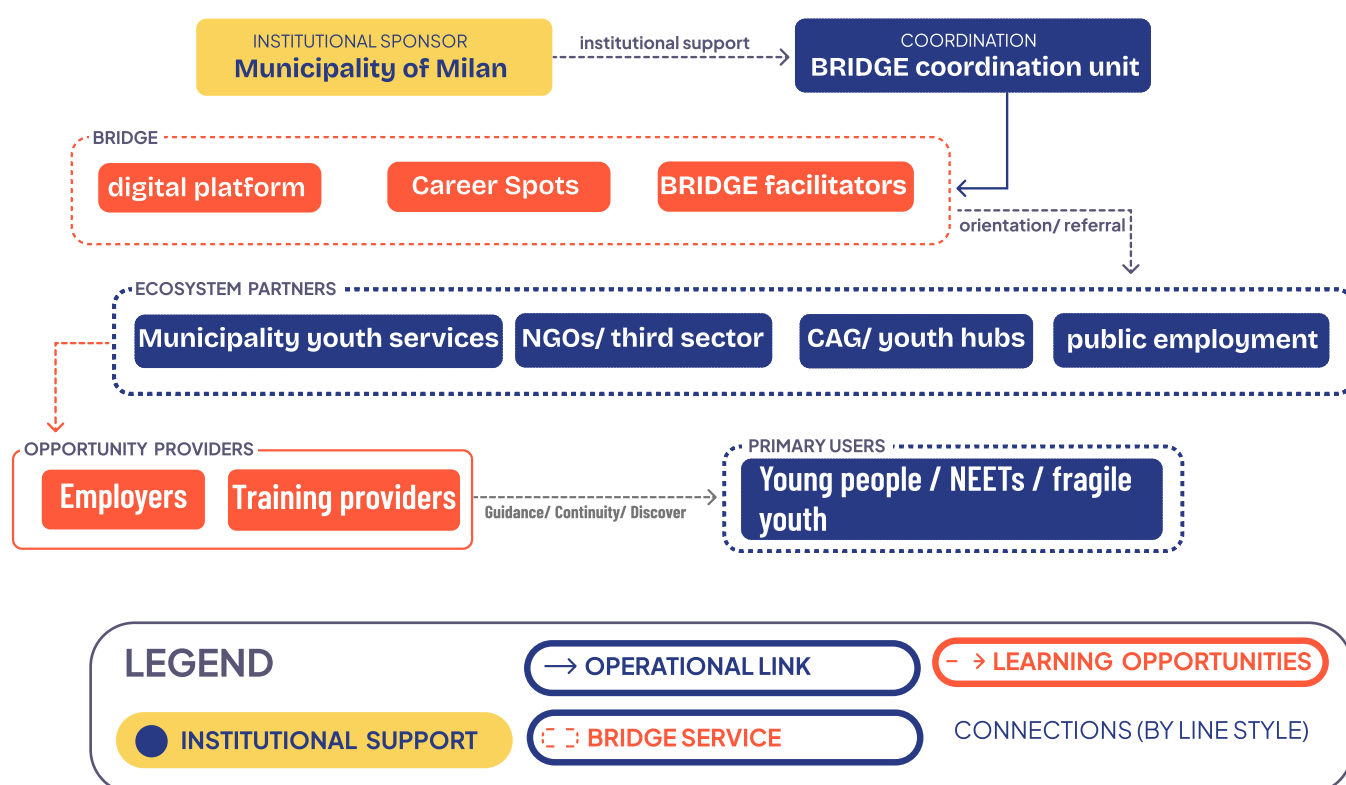


Figure 25. Actor map of the BRIDGE service system.

The diagram shows the institutional support, core BRIDGE layer, connected service actors, and primary users involved in the proposal, as well as their main roles within the hybrid service ecosystem.

Source: Author's elaboration.

As shown in Figure 25, the actor map clarifies that BRIDGE is not conceived as a stand-alone organisation, but as a system of relationships structured around a central coordination layer. The figure distinguishes between actors that support the proposal institutionally, actors that

operate the BRIDGE core, actors that provide complementary services and opportunities, and young people as the main users moving through the system. This distinction is important because it makes visible how the proposal depends on coordination between multiple actors rather than on the expansion of one service alone. In this sense, the actor map helps explain the systemic logic of BRIDGE: the proposal works by organising connections, referrals, and continuity across an already existing ecosystem rather than by duplicating it. The actor map also provides information on the distribution of specific roles, such as institutional endorsement by the Municipality of Milan, operational management by the BRIDGE coordination unit, soft-entry support by youth services and NGOs, formal activation by public employment services, and progression opportunities by employers and training providers.

The BRIDGE architecture is not only about who is doing what, but it's also about what flows are connecting them. Access to the system can be via social media, local youth services, local youth hubs, referral, or walk-in. These entry points lead them into the BRIDGE hybrid core, where they get orientation, clarity on pathways, book, remind, and receive face-to-face support from the platform. The system then links users to existing actors like public employment services, training providers, employers, and community organisations. One of the primary roles of the architecture is to facilitate these transitions in a more visible and manageable way via facilitated referral, warm handover, and continuity tracking. In this way, BRIDGE does not simply direct users toward isolated services, but helps organise progression across the wider support journey. This logic corresponds closely to the service system map in the presentation, which shows multiple entry routes, a hybrid BRIDGE core, connected actors, and outcomes such as clearer starting points, warm handovers, continuity over time, and access to skills and employment. Figure 26 presents the service system map of BRIDGE, illustrating how users enter the system, interact with the hybrid core, and move toward support, opportunities, and longer-term outcomes.

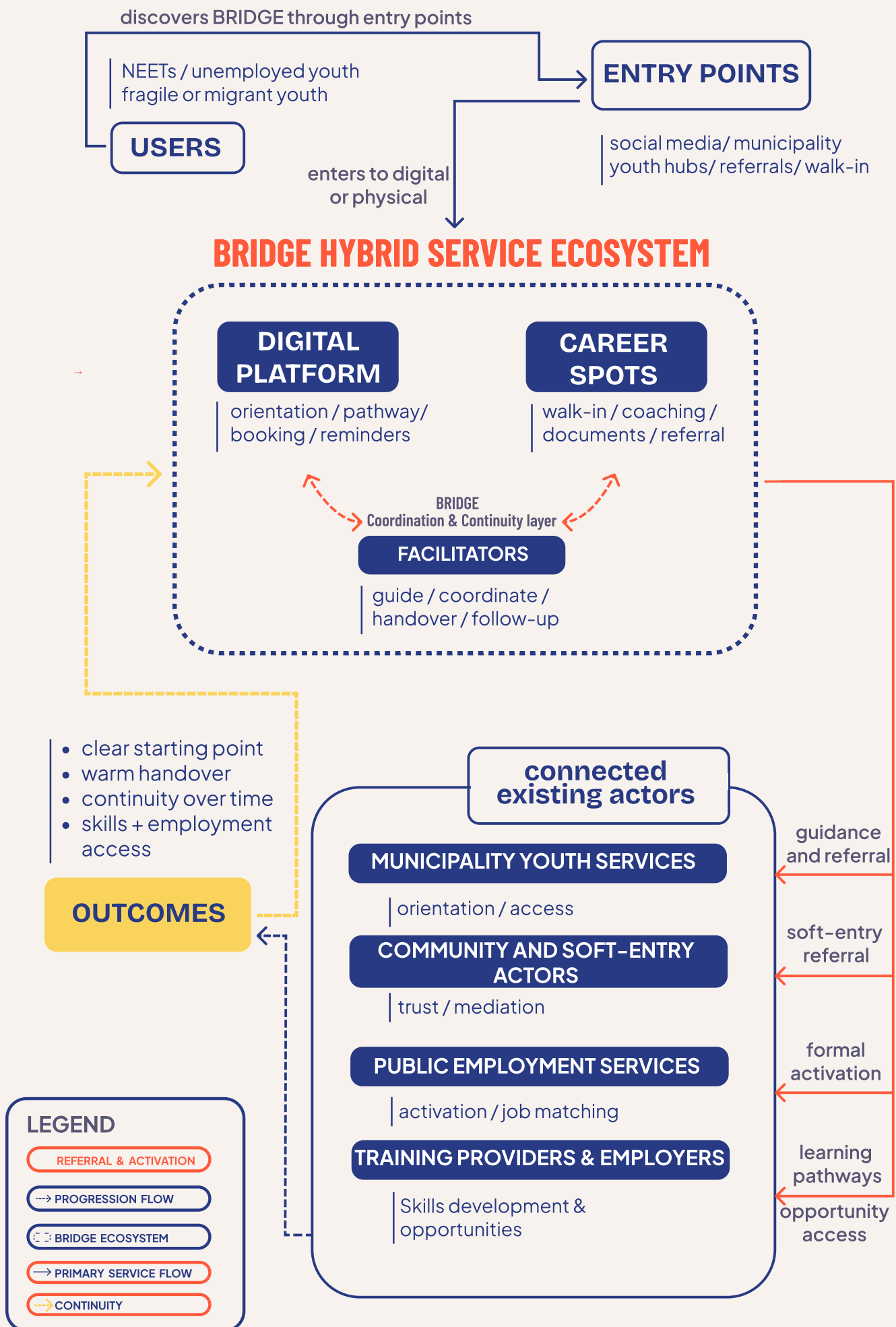


Figure 26. Service system map of the BRIDGE hybrid ecosystem.

The diagram illustrates the relationship between entry points, the BRIDGE hybrid core, connected actors, and key outcomes, highlighting the role of coordination, referral, and continuity across the support journey.

Source: Author's elaboration.

The service system map makes clear that BRIDGE functions through movement across the system rather than through one isolated point of delivery. Users may discover the service through municipal communication, youth hubs, referrals, social media, or direct contact with a Career Spot, and then move into a coordinated pathway combining digital and physical support. The figure also shows that continuity is not treated as a secondary feature but as a central system function: facilitators, reminders, referrals, and follow-up mechanisms are built into the architecture to reduce dropout between stages. This is especially important in the Milan context, where the wider service landscape is characterised less by the absence of services than by weak continuity between entry points, support spaces, and formal employment pathways. The evidence slides in the presentation emphasise exactly this problem, noting that Milan does not lack services but lacks continuity between them. In this sense, BRIDGE does not bring in a new isolated programme but a new way of navigating, transferring, and ensuring continuity. The proposal introduces one visible entry logic, reinforces the relationship between soft entry and hard entry services, assists users in navigating with guided referrals and document help, and keeps users engaged by providing reminders, tracking progress, and follow-up. It also extends the value of the support journey by connecting capability development with opportunities for learning, participation, certification, and access to employment. In this sense, the added value of BRIDGE lies in its ability to transform a fragmented landscape of services into a more readable and connected pathway for young people. This added-value logic is consistent with the “From Pain Points to BRIDGE Responses” and feasibility slides in the presentation, where the proposal is framed as a way to create one visible entry point, low-threshold support, warm referrals, and continuity tracking across the system.

The architectural function of BRIDGE will therefore be an intermediary and enabling layer in the existing youth support system in Milan. It is not intended to reproduce the roles of existing institutional, municipal, and third sector services, but to develop better connections between them, through navigation, handovers, and continuity on the journey. In a setting where there are several actors and not all of them are perceived by young people as a continuous pathway, this architectural logic plays a crucial role. By linking soft-entry and hard-entry services through a hybrid model, BRIDGE creates a more connected support structure while remaining grounded in what already exists. The following section develops this system logic further by showing how young people move through BRIDGE in practice through user journeys and service interactions.

While the actor map and service system map clarify how BRIDGE is structured at the systemic level, they do not yet show how the proposal is experienced by young people in practice. For this reason, the next section turns to user journeys and service interactions in order to illustrate how the hybrid logic of BRIDGE becomes visible across different pathways of access, support, and progression.

7.3 User Journeys and Service Interactions

How the BRIDGE system is experienced in practice through user journeys and service interactions. The previous section outlined the architecture of the proposal and the players that come into contact with the proposal during its delivery, but this section looks at the processes of young people interacting with the proposal through a range of digital and physical interactions. The goal is to demonstrate what BRIDGE can do to help share and clarify fragmented and uncertain experiences of support over time, through orientation, capability development, referral and follow-up. At the level of service interaction, BRIDGE is designed as a progressive journey rather than as a single point of contact. The proposal is structured around a sequence that moves from first encounter and orientation to preparation, handover, capability development, continuity, and progression toward employment. This journey logic is important because many young people in Milan do not begin from a stable or linear

pathway. Instead, they often enter through scattered channels such as social media, local youth hubs, municipal services, or informal referrals, and may disengage when the next step is not clear. BRIDGE addresses this by creating what the proposal describes as a ‘no wrong door’ logic, in which different entry points can still lead into one coordinated support pathway. The presentation material describes this journey as a seven-step process from ‘Encounter’ to ‘Progression,’ emphasising continuity instead of isolated interventions.

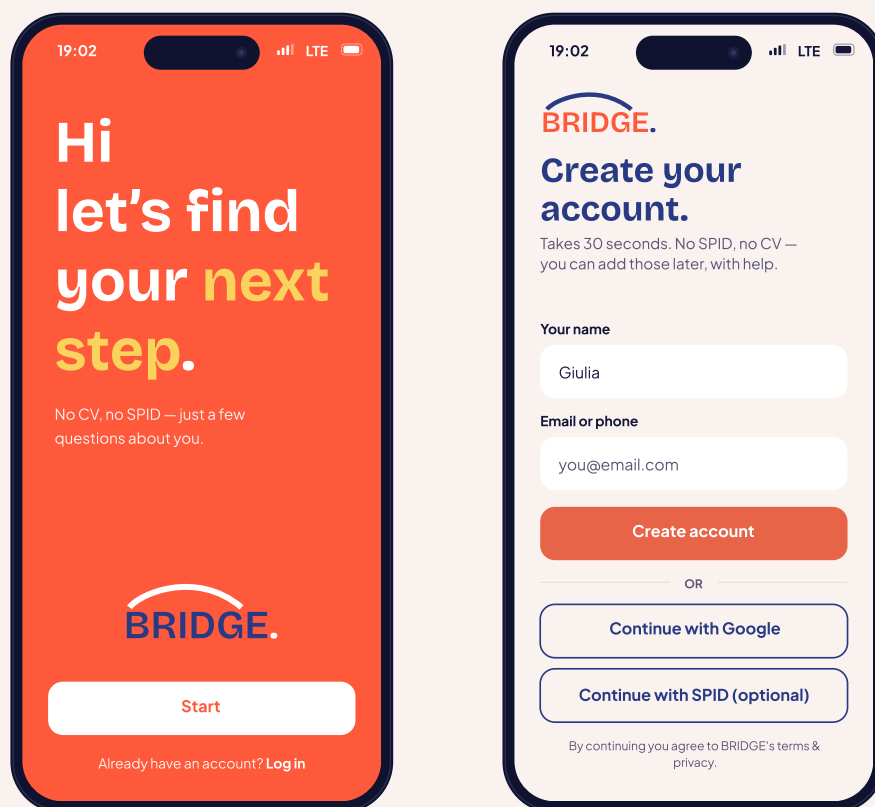


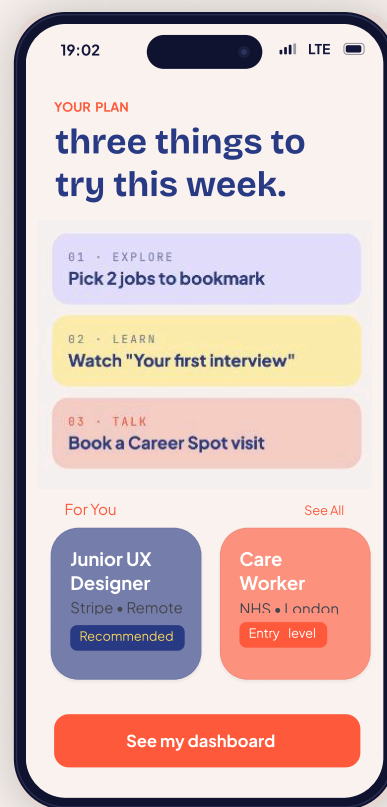
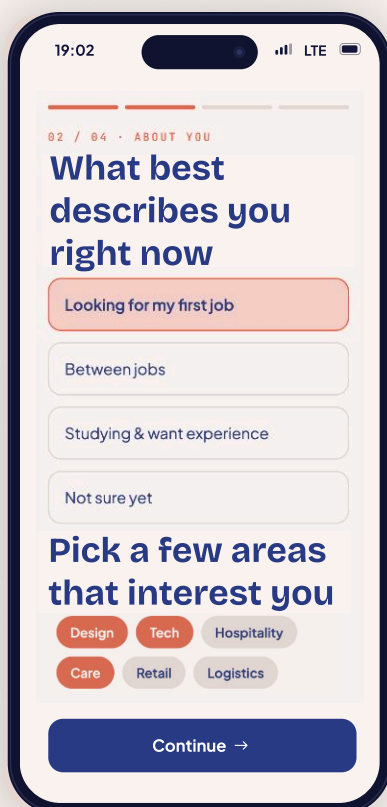
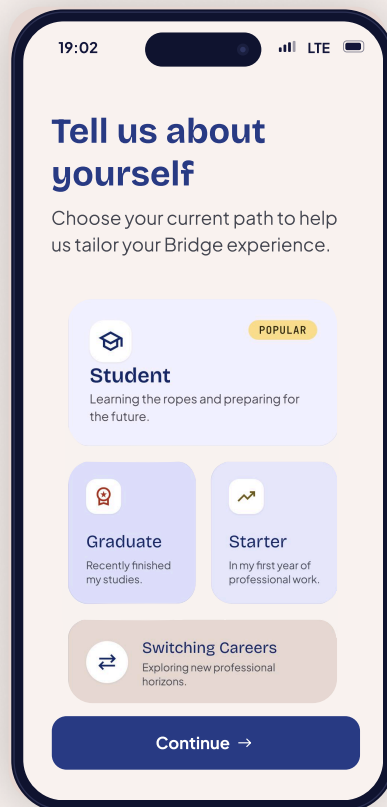
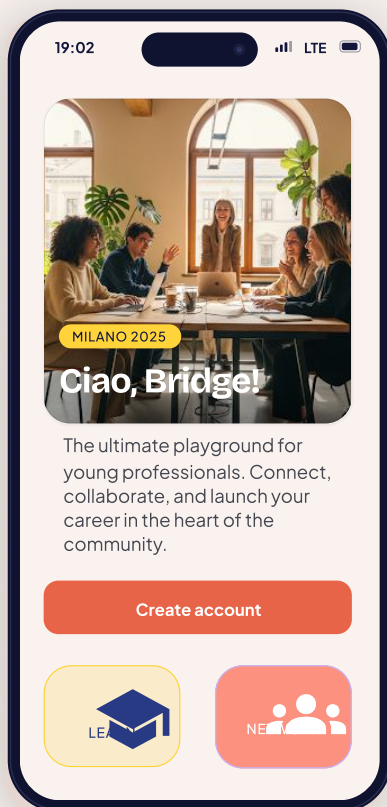
Figure 27. Overall user journey logic of BRIDGE.

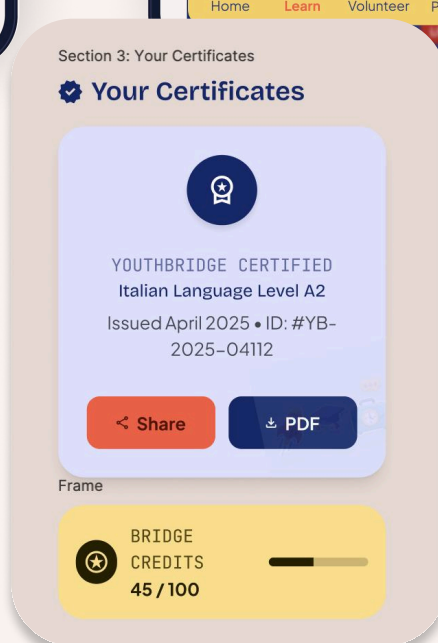
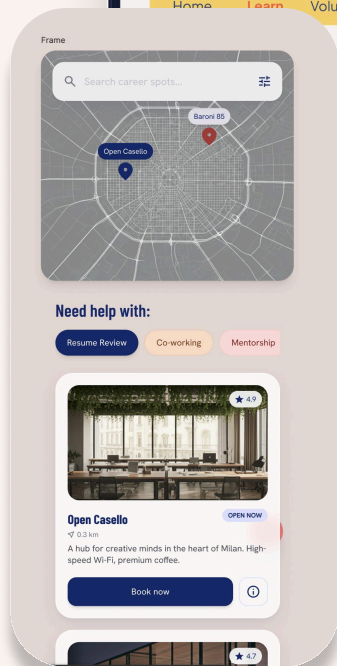
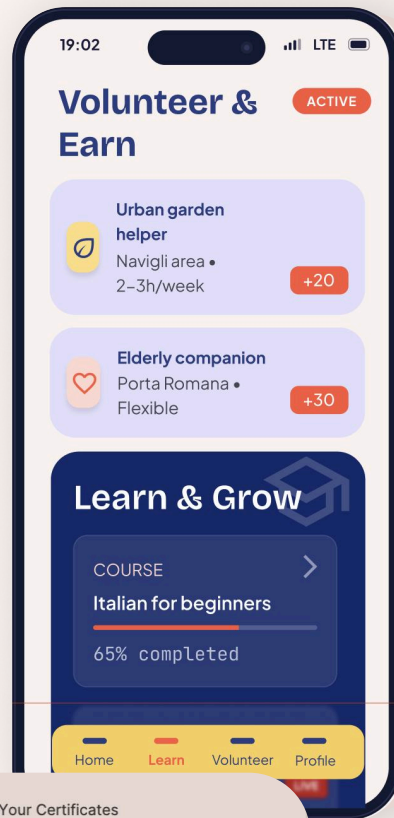
The diagram illustrates the seven-step progression through the BRIDGE system, from first encounter and orientation to preparation, handover, capability development, continuity, and progression toward employment. Source: Author's elaboration.

As shown in Figure 27, the value of the journey model lies in the fact that it makes progression visible. Instead of requiring young people to move alone between disconnected services, the system structures support as a continuous pathway in which each stage prepares the next. This is especially important in the Milan context, where the main problem identified earlier was not the lack of services, but weak continuity between them. The journey logic, therefore, functions as a way of reducing self-navigation burden and improving the visibility of possible next steps. In this process, the digital platform serves as the primary tool for initial engagement, personalization, and ongoing support. Users can establish an account, outline their situation and interests, and select an initial pathway, then start engaging with content and opportunities of interest. The interface assists with orientation by making sure that the user knows where to begin, and by allowing personalised journeys through onboarding questions, creating profiles, and selecting pathways. The digital layer facilitates ongoing interaction via dashboard functions, learning modules, certificates, volunteering opportunities, job matching, mentorship, and profile development. The platform becomes an active coordination interface, enabling young people to follow up on their progress and access opportunities, as well as keeping them engaged

over time, while simultaneously providing them with information. This is clearly illustrated in the onboarding process and the app sequence in the presentation, starting with account registration and path selection, moving on to learning, volunteering, certificates, mentorship, and job matching. To make the digital layer of BRIDGE more explicit, Figure 28 presents the platform as a visible entry point into the wider hybrid ecosystem. The website and app are designed not as isolated digital products, but as user-facing interfaces that help young people understand the service, begin a pathway, and connect to physical support when needed.







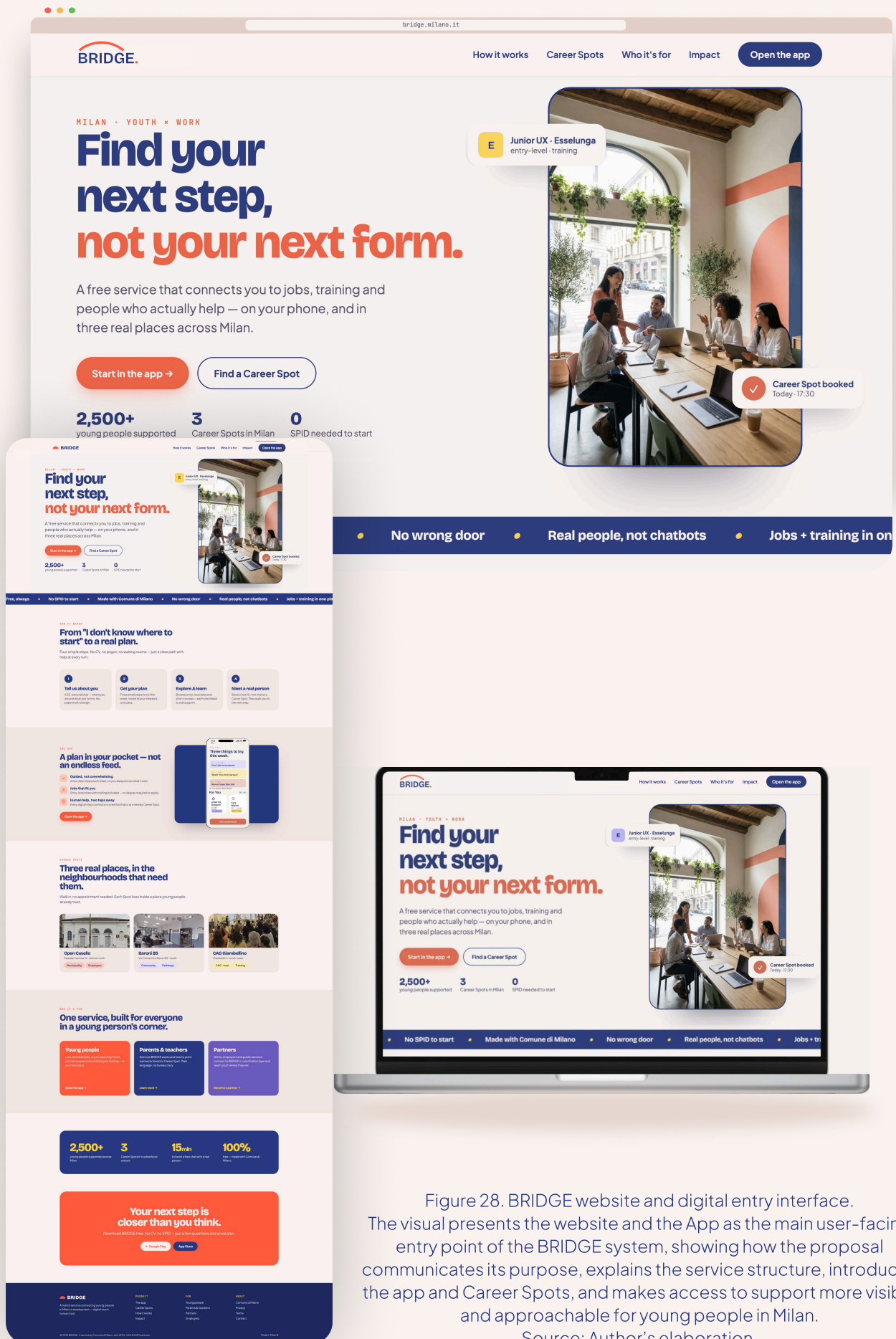


Figure 28. BRIDGE website and digital entry interface. The visual presents the website and the App as the main user-facing entry point of the BRIDGE system, showing how the proposal communicates its purpose, explains the service structure, introduces the app and Career Spots, and makes access to support more visible and approachable for young people in Milan. Source: Author's elaboration.

Figure 28 shows that digital interaction in BRIDGE is designed to lower the threshold of first access. Rather than asking users to understand the system in advance, the platform gradually helps them identify their interests, their current situation, and the next relevant step. This is important because many young people encounter uncertainty not only at the level of opportunities, but at the level of entry itself. By making onboarding simple and pathway-based, the platform supports early orientation while also preparing the conditions for later guidance, learning, and progression.

At the same time, BRIDGE is not conceived as a digital-only system. Physical touchpoints become essential when users need relational support, document help, interpretation, or guided transitions into more formal services. For this reason, the system includes Career Spots as physical support points that work in coordination with the digital platform. When digital guidance alone is not sufficient, users can be directed toward a nearby Career Spot for coaching, administrative support, document clarification, or warm referral. The presentation explicitly shows this digital-to-physical transition through the ‘Get Human Support’ interaction, where the app directs the user to local Career Spots such as Open Casello, Baroni 85, or CAG Giambellino. This interaction is particularly important because it demonstrates how BRIDGE turns digital guidance into supported human contact instead of leaving users to drop out at the point of difficulty.

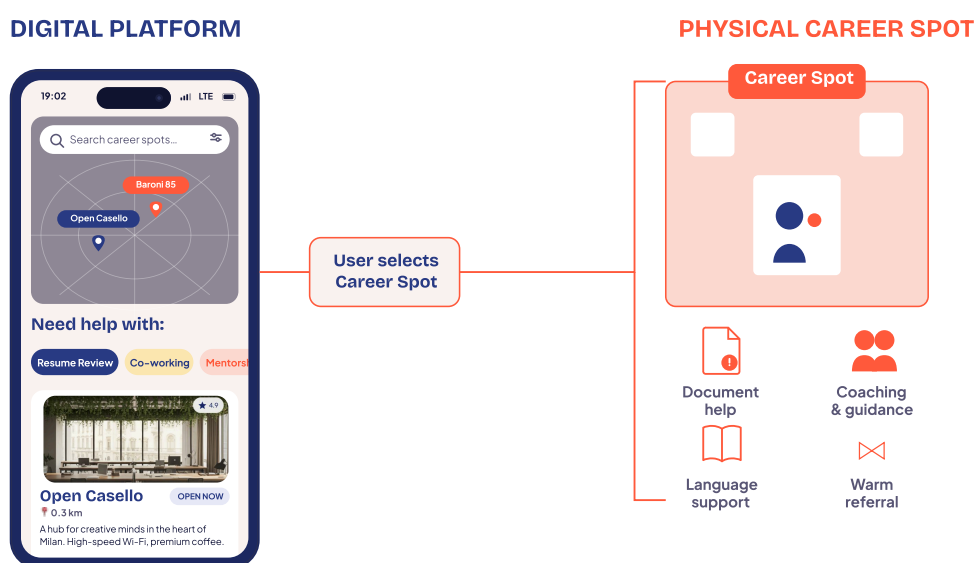


Figure 29. Transition from digital guidance to physical support through Career Spots
The interface shows how users are directed from the digital platform to a nearby Career Spot when human support, document help, or guided handover is needed.

Source: Author's elaboration.

As shown in Figure 29, the Career Spot is not a separate service detached from the platform, but part of the same service journey. Its function is to intervene at moments where trust-building, clarification, or relational support are needed in order to prevent interruption in the pathway. In this sense, physical interaction is embedded into the broader service logic of BRIDGE and helps make handover and continuity operational rather than merely aspirational.

To show how this service logic works for different users, the proposal is illustrated through two personas: Caroline and Brad. These personas do not represent all possible users, but they help demonstrate how BRIDGE responds to different patterns of vulnerability, entry, and support needs within the Milan context. Caroline represents a young person who experiences uncertainty, low trust, and dropout risk within a fragmented service landscape. Brad is a young person who has come to terms with a new, extra challenge in navigating the world of work: language barriers, document confusion, and the need for trusted mediation. The personas demonstrate how the same service architecture can be used to serve different users from various service paths to the same service logic of guidance, handover, and continuity. Caroline's journey illustrates how BRIDGE responds to confusion at the level of first access and motivation. In her current condition, she does not know where to start, encounters scattered entry points, and risks dropping out when portals are confusing or the next step is not clear. Through BRIDGE, however, her pathway becomes more visible and supported. She discovers the system, signs up, starts a small activity, uses credits to access workshops, receives coaching and document help through a Career Spot, and then enters a guided handover into the next pathway. The journey map in the presentation shows how the service shifts her experience from being lost and uncertain to becoming motivated, supported, and confident, while also making the service response visible at each stage: one visible entry, simple sign-up, credits for participation, courses and certificates, coaching and document help, warm referral, and reminders with progress tracking.

persona 01



19 · Milan

NEET · UNEMPLOYED · MILAN

Caroline

**“i don’t know where to start,
and when i try, i get lost.”**



CURRENT EXPERIENCE

DISCOVERS OPPORTUNITIES THROUGH INSTAGRAM AND MUNICIPAL PAGES
• USES JOB PORTALS ALONE, WITHOUT A CLEAR PATHWAY
• AVOIDS FORMAL OFFICES BECAUSE THEY FEEL TOO BUREAUCRATIC
• DROPS OUT WHEN NOBODY FOLLOWS UP



HOW SHE FEELS

LOST · OVERWHELMED · LOW TRUST



WHAT SHE NEEDS

A CLEAR FIRST STEP, HUMAN GUIDANCE, AND CONTINUITY OVER TIME.

persona 02



26 · Milan

MIGRANT YOUTH ·
UNEMPLOYED · MILAN

Brad

**“i get lost when the process
becomes administrative.”**



CURRENT EXPERIENCE

• ENTERS THROUGH NGOS, LOCAL HUBS, AND COMMUNITY TRUST NETWORKS
• STRUGGLES WITH LANGUAGE, DOCUMENTS, AND FORMAL PROCEDURES
• USES PHONE / WHATSAPP MORE THAN OFFICIAL WEBSITES
• AVOIDS FORMAL SERVICES WITHOUT TRUSTED MEDIATION



HOW HE FEELS

CAUTIOUS · CONFUSED · LOW CONFIDENCE



WHAT HE NEEDS

ACCESSIBLE LANGUAGE, DOCUMENT HELP, AND A TRUSTED HANDOVER INTO FORMAL SERVICES.

Discovery Access Activation

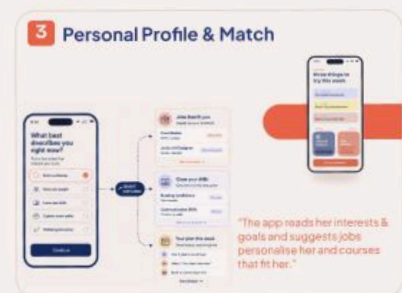
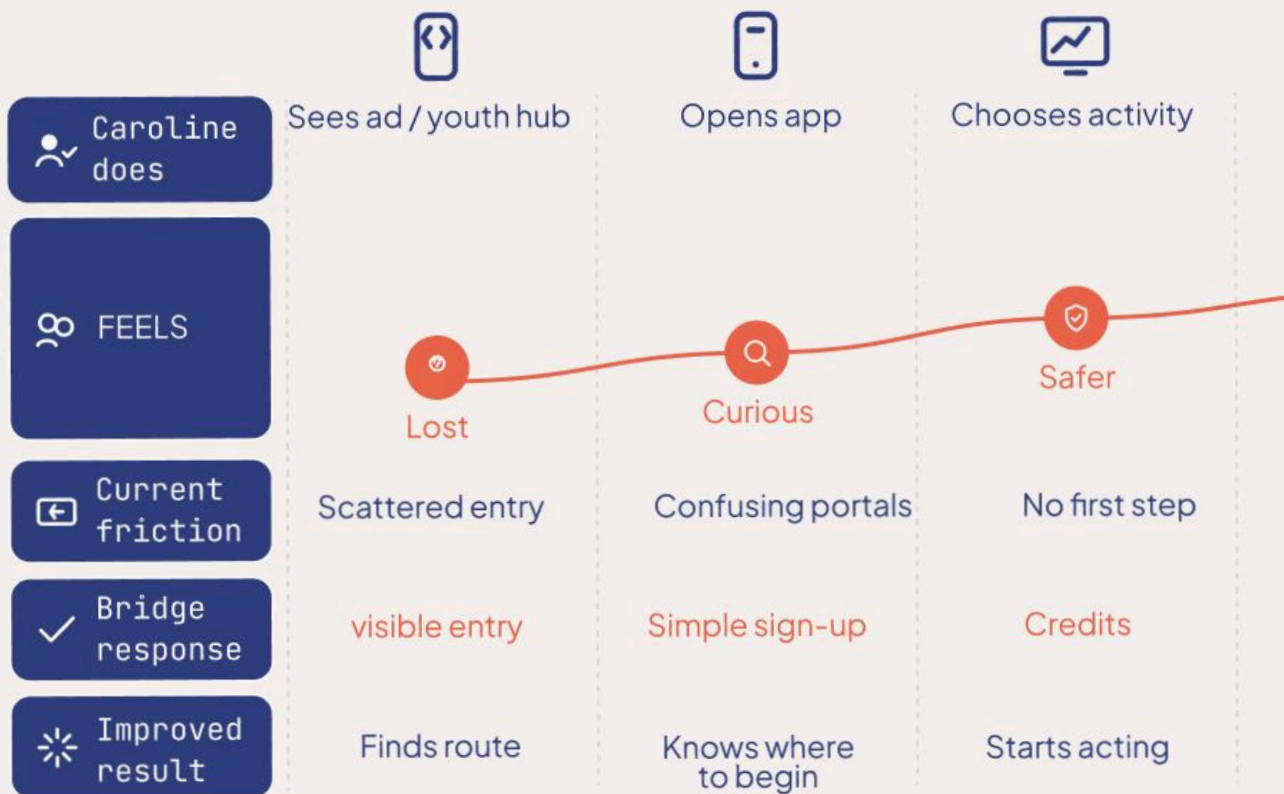
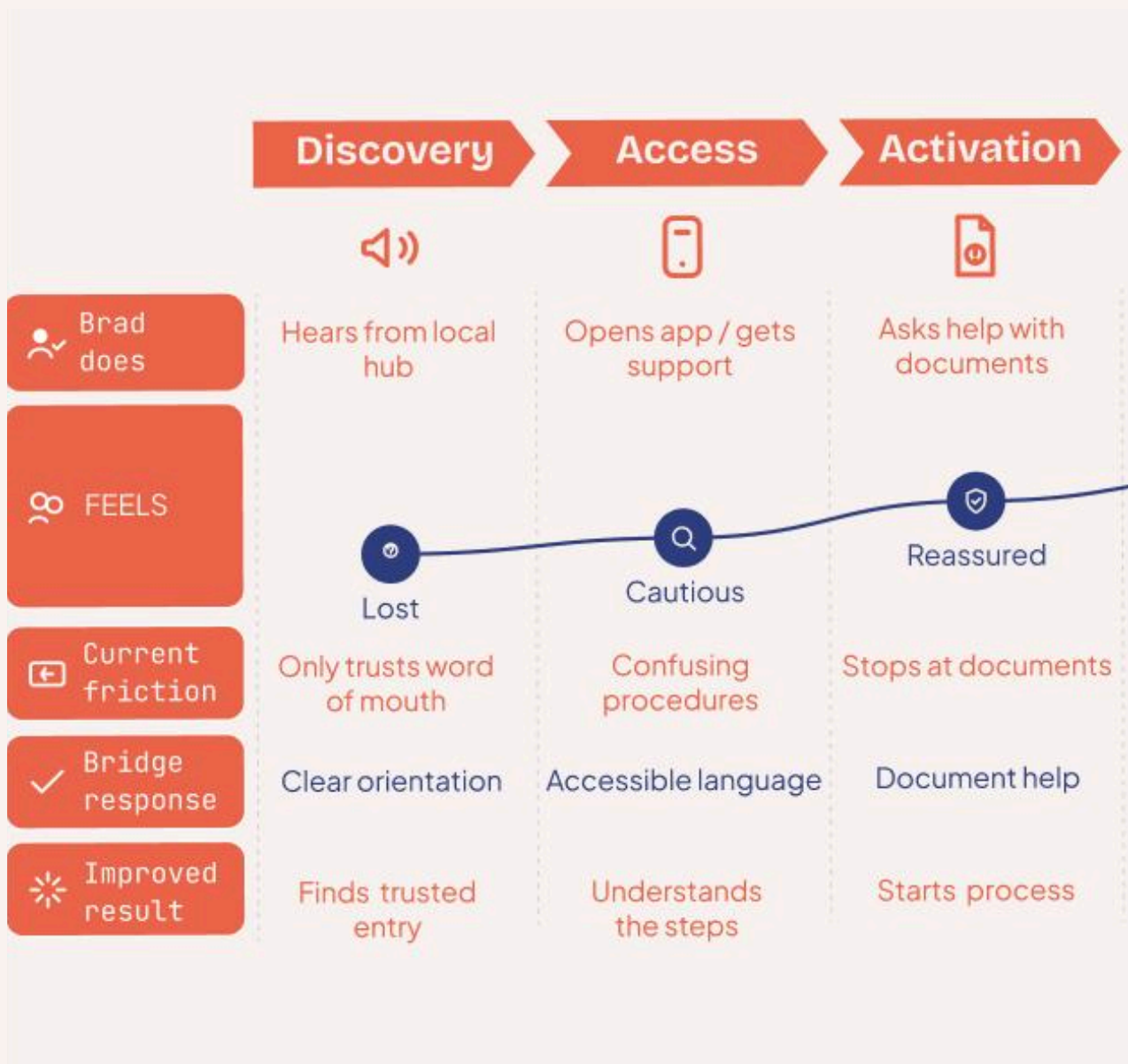




Figure 30. Caroline's user journey through BRIDGE.
The diagram shows how BRIDGE transforms Caroline's pathway from uncertainty and fragmented entry points toward supported progression through clearer access, Career Spot help, and continuity mechanisms.
Source: Author's elaboration.

Figure 30 demonstrates that the BRIDGE journey is not only about moving a user forward functionally, but also about changing the quality of the experience. The journey is structured so that confusion is replaced by clarity, scattered entry by visible access, and dropout risk by follow-up and continuity. This is particularly important for users like Caroline, whose main barrier is not the absence of opportunities but the difficulty of entering and staying connected to a pathway.

Brad's journey illustrates a different but equally important service condition: the need for trusted mediation and human support when formal procedures become difficult to navigate. In Brad's case, the main issues are accessible language, document support, and low confidence when dealing with institutions. His entry point is more likely to be a local hub or NGO than a formal service or online portal alone. Through BRIDGE, he receives clearer orientation, help with documents, access to language and training support, Career Spot assistance, and a guided handover into the next stage. The journey map shows that the BRIDGE response works by reducing confusion step by step: trusted entry, accessible language, document help, language and training, Career Spot support, warm referral, and reminders with progress tracking. As a result, Brad's experience changes from confusion and avoidance to understanding, supported engagement, and progression toward employment.



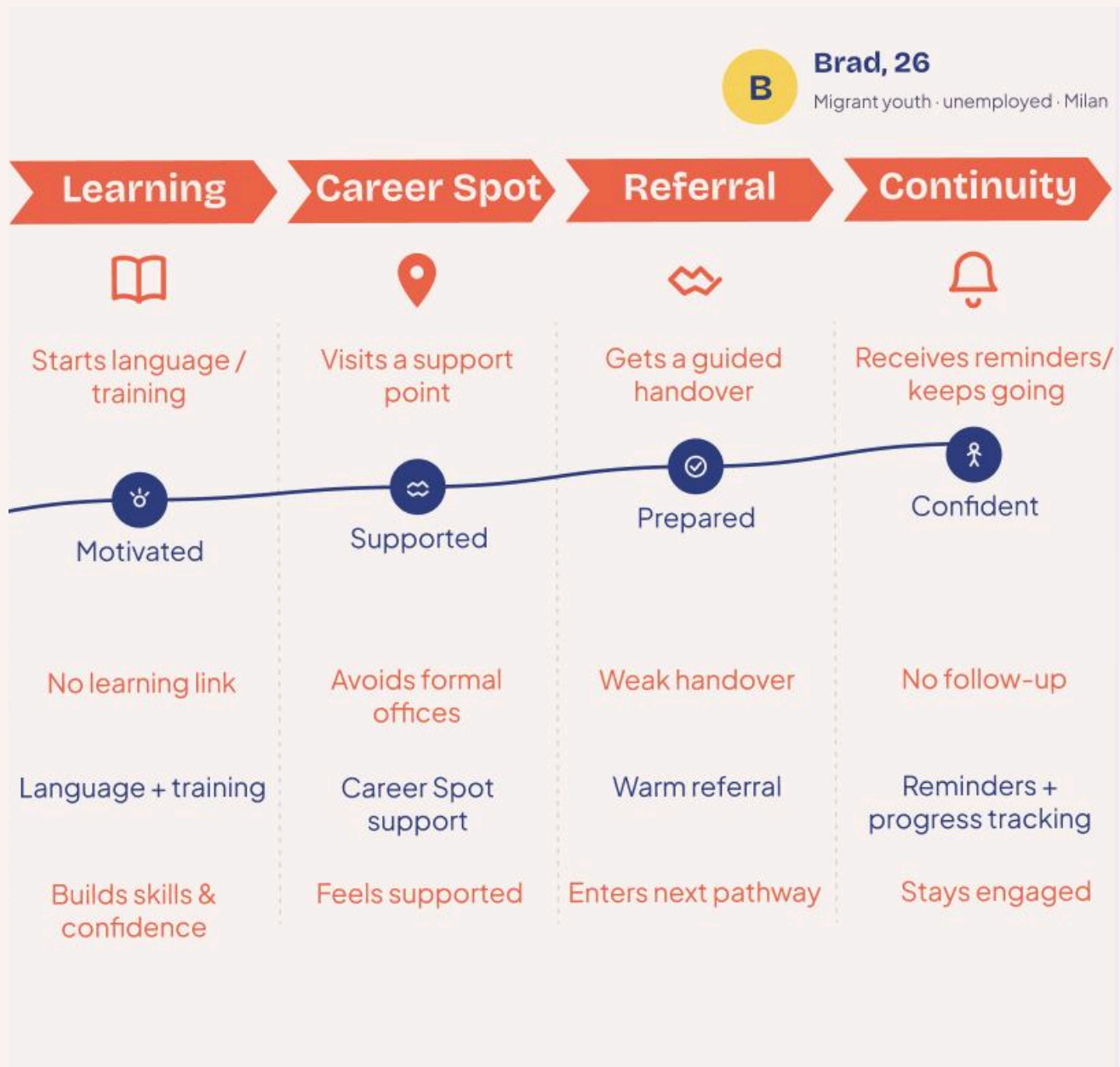


Figure 31. Brad's user journey through BRIDGE.
The diagram illustrates how BRIDGE supports Brad through accessible language, document help, Career Spot support, and continuity across the transition toward employment.
Source: Author's elaboration.

Taken together, the journeys of Caroline and Brad show that BRIDGE is designed not as a standardised one-size-fits-all pathway, but as a coordinated hybrid system capable of adapting to different needs while maintaining a shared logic of progression. What remains constant across both journeys is the presence of one visible entry, supported navigation, capability-building, relational guidance, warm handover, and continuity over time. In this sense, the main value of BRIDGE lies not in any single feature of the app or the Career Spot in isolation, but in the way digital and physical service interactions are combined into a pathway that young people can actually follow. The next section develops this logic further by focusing specifically on the Career Spot as the physical hub within the BRIDGE system.

The user journeys demonstrate that the value of BRIDGE lies not only in the presence of multiple features, but in the way digital and physical support are combined into a pathway that users can actually follow over time. Within this logic, the Career Spot plays a particularly important role as the physical point where guidance, trust-building, clarification, and handover become operational. The following section therefore focuses more specifically on the Career Spot as the physical hub of the BRIDGE system.

— 7.4 The Physical Hub: Career Spot

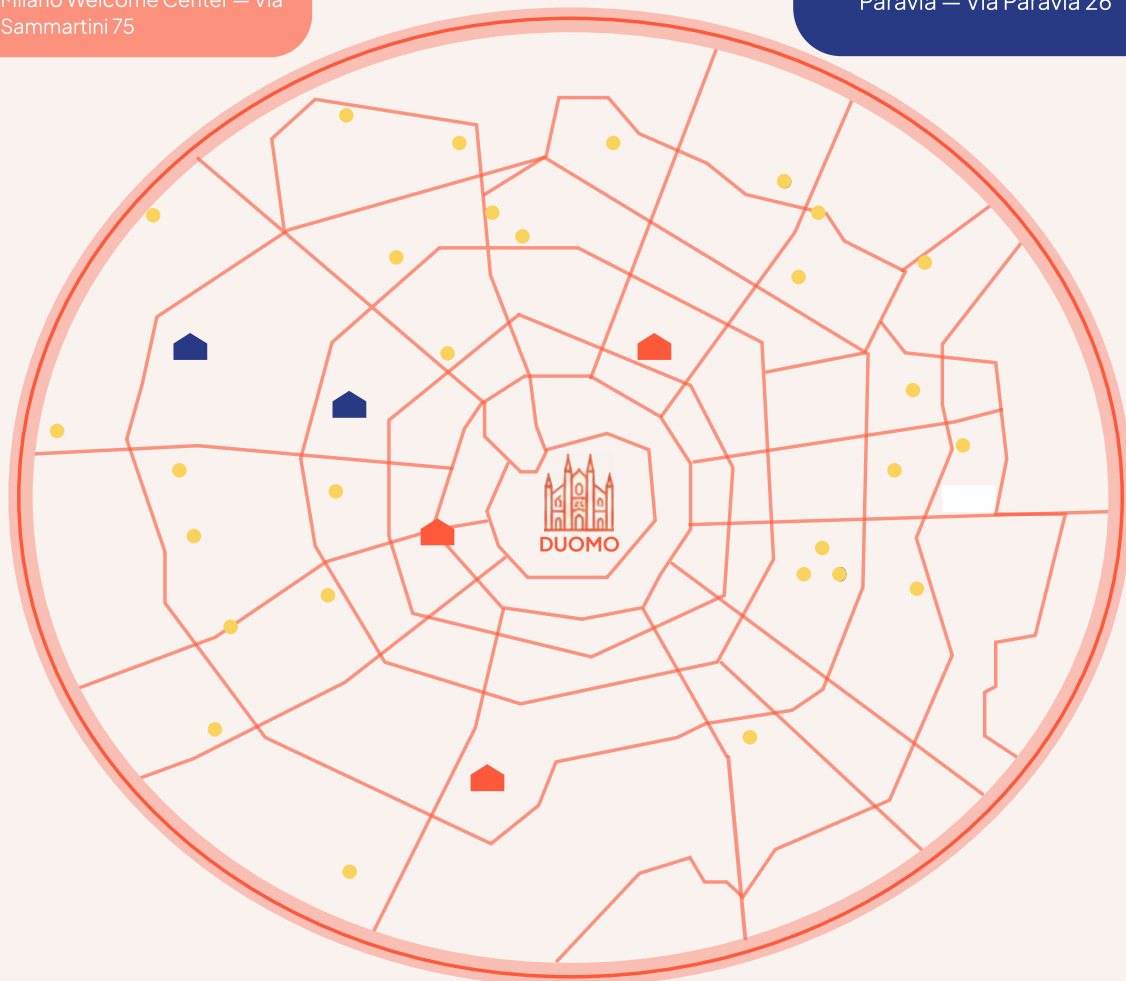
The physical hub of the BRIDGE system is developed through a distributed model of local access points called Career Spots. These are not designed as 'stand alone' employment centres, but as spaces for young people within the broader Milan context. They are meant to offer low-threshold, relational and place-based support, which will support young people in their wider journey of support, and complement the digital platform. The Career Spot is a physical extension of the BRIDGE hybrid logic: whilst the digital platform enables discoverability, pathway visibility, and continuity over time, the physical hub offers trust building, human interpretation, and guided handover for many users that is necessary to keep them engaged. The need for a physical layer emerges directly from the analysis developed in the previous chapters. The lack of services is not the problem, as in the Milan case, but the lack of a cohesive service organisation and delivery. The public employment

services, municipal youth spaces, youth hubs and third sector actors are present, but do not necessarily form a coherent and continuous pathway from the user's point of view. This is particularly relevant for young people who are uncertain, lack confidence, have difficulty accessing documents and/or distrust formal institutions. For these users, a physical support point is more than a point of assistance – it's a relational threshold that can help shorten the distance between initial contact and more formal activation.

The overall picture of the existing physical youth-support ecosystem in Milan is depicted in Figure 32, which includes the main youth-oriented spaces, public employment services and distributed youth work / soft entry actors already existing in the city.

- Municipality / public youth-oriented**
- Open Casello / Giovani Milano — Piazzale Cantore 14
 - Spazio Baroni 85 — Via Costantino Baroni 85
 - Milano Welcome Center — Via Sammartini 75

- Public employment / hard-entry**
- Centro per l'Impiego Milano — Via Strozzi 11
 - CPI Milano – sede decentrata Paravia — Via Paravia 26



LEGEND

- CAG · SOFT-ENTRY NETWORK
- 🏠 MUNICIPALITY · PUBLIC YOUTH
- 🏠 AFOL · HARD-ENTRY

- Youth work / soft-entry — official CAG network**
- | | | |
|---|--|---|
| <p>Municipio 2</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CAG Tarabella • CAG Cattabrega • CAG Città Nuova • CAG Mai Fermi • CAG ORPAS • CAG Tempo per il <p>third sector</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CAG Casa dei Giochi | <p>Municipio 5</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CAG Lo Scigno <p>Municipio 6</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CAG CD Giambellino • CAG IRDA • CAG CDE Creta • CAG CDE Paspertù <p>Municipio 7</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CAG CDE Olmi | <p>Municipio 8</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CAG Ottoemezzo • CAG Quattroquarti <p>Municipio 9</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CAG Abella • CAG Amico Charly • CAG La Lanterna • CAG Marcelline • CAG Il Sentiero • CAG Ciriè |
|---|--|---|
- Comunità del Giambellino — the CAG guide links the Giambellino center directly to the cooperative operating in that territory

Figure 32. Existing physical youth-support ecosystem in Milan. The map illustrates the broader support geography already present in Milan, including municipal youth-oriented services, public employment / hard-entry services, youth work and soft-entry spaces, and selected third-sector support points.

Source: Author's elaboration.

As shown in Figure 32, Milan already contains a distributed physical support geography rather than a complete absence of access points. Municipal and public youth-oriented services, AFOL / public employment offices, and the CAG network create multiple points of presence across the city, while selected third-sector actors also contribute localised support. However, the map also makes it clear that these places do not automatically function as a single integrated pathway. Their distribution is useful, but their relationships and handovers remain uneven. This broader physical ecosystem therefore provides the basis for identifying where BRIDGE should intervene: not everywhere, and not as a replacement structure, but as a connective layer inserted into existing geographies of access and support.

For this reason, the Career Spot model is based on selective placement rather than uniform duplication. BRIDGE does not attempt to build an entirely new physical network from scratch, but instead identifies strategic points where intervention can strengthen continuity, reduce navigation burden, and improve handover between actors. The purpose of the Career Spot is therefore not only spatial accessibility, but also service positioning: each location is selected because it can connect existing actors and address a specific weakness in the current support landscape. Figure 33 shows the selected BRIDGE integration points and the rationale behind their placement within the existing Milan ecosystem.

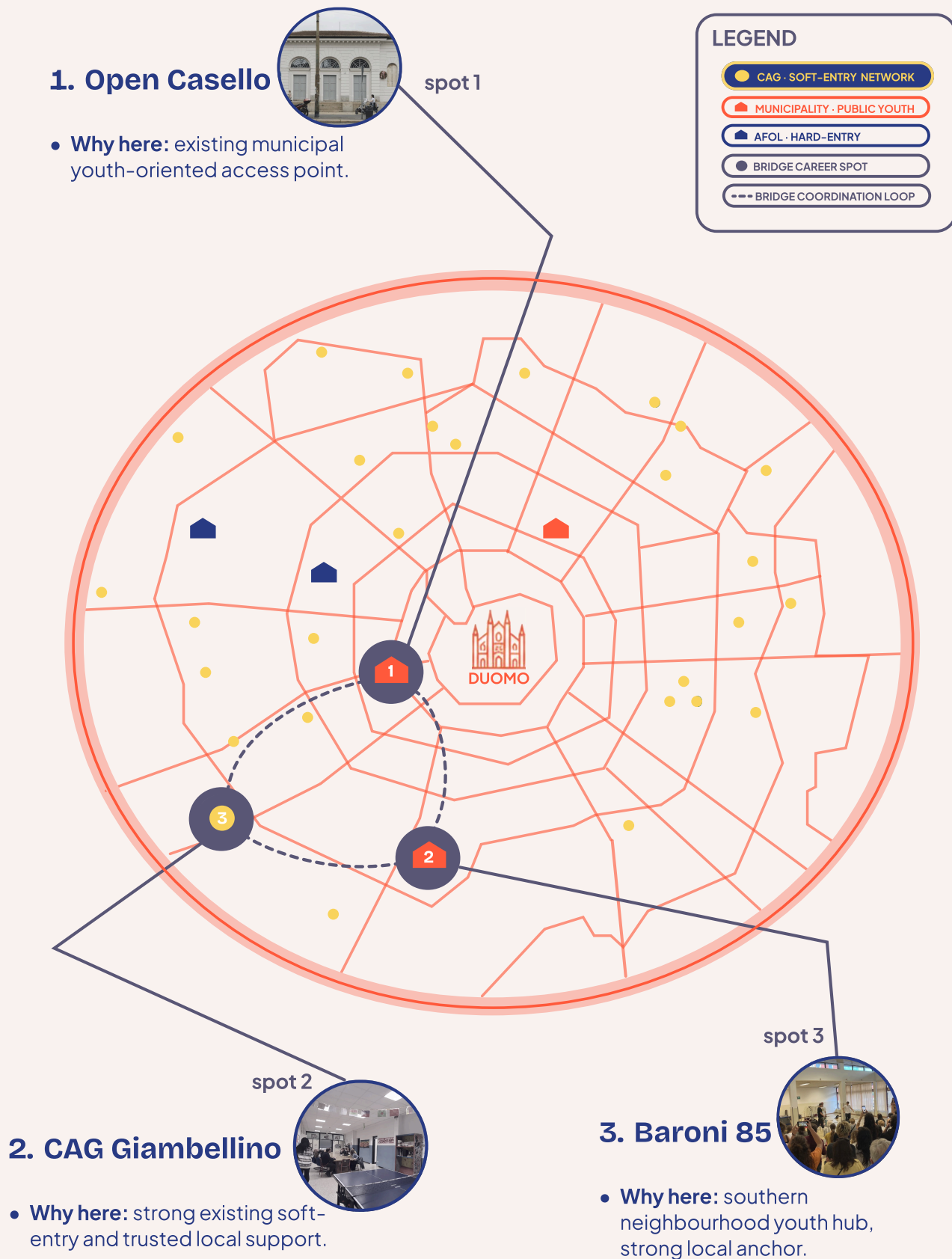


Figure 33. Placement of BRIDGE Career Spots within the Milan youth-support ecosystem. The diagram shows the three proposed BRIDGE Career Spots and the logic behind their selection, highlighting how each location responds to a specific gap in access, continuity, or progression within the existing system.

Source: Author's elaboration.



1. Open Casello

- **Why here:** existing municipal youth-oriented entry point
- **Gap addressed:** continuity from orientation toward training and employment
- **Connected actors:** municipality / CPI / employers / training



3. CAG Giambellino

- **Why here:** strong soft-entry and trusted local support
- **Gap addressed:** weak transition toward formal activation
- **Connected actors:** CAG / community support / CPI / training



2. Baroni 85

- **Why here:** southern neighbourhood youth hub, strong local anchor
- **Gap addressed:** uneven territorial access and weak progression
- **Connected actors:** community support / municipality / opportunity pathways

As shown in Figure 33, the proposal identifies three initial BRIDGE locations: Open Casello, Baroni 85, and CAG Giambellino. These sites are not chosen randomly, but according to three criteria: existing youth-facing access, weak continuity toward formal pathways, and territorial distribution across the city. Open Casello is selected because it already functions as a visible municipal youth-oriented entry point, yet continuity from orientation toward training and employment remains weak. Baroni 85 is positioned as a southern neighbourhood anchor capable of addressing uneven territorial access while linking community support with opportunity pathways. CAG Giambellino represents the soft-entry logic of the system: a trusted youth space with strong local support capacity, but weaker progression toward formal activation. Together, these three points show how the Career Spot model is distributed, relational, and strategically embedded in the city's existing support infrastructure.

Within the BRIDGE system, the Career Spot is designed to support a set of functions that are difficult to sustain through digital interaction alone. These include warm referrals to other actors in the ecosystem, motivational support, language support, document support, in-person guidance and coaching. The Career Spot is therefore a low threshold point for young people to seek help without having to face the administrative burden of formal services. It also serves as a platform for facilitating smoother transitions, including supporting users in understanding processes, creating documents, clarifying next steps, and linking them to training, public employment services, employers, or local opportunities, through guided handover. In this way, the physical hub becomes a continuity device as much as a support space.

The value of the Career Spot lies in its role within the hybrid architecture of BRIDGE. It is not separate from the platform, nor is it intended to function as an isolated local centre. Rather, it is part of a coordinated service journey, alongside the digital interface, to enable users to navigate between independent discovery, human support, formal activation and longer-term progression without having to navigate each transition on their own. From this point of view, the Career Spot is the materialization of the Career's ambition of BRIDGE, which is to make the support system

more visible, guided and continuous for young people in Milan.

The Career Spot therefore represents the spatial and relational dimension of BRIDGE, grounding the hybrid system in real places that can support guidance, mediation, and continuity across the wider ecosystem. At the same time, the proposal is not conceived as fixed or closed at the level of these three initial locations alone. For this reason, the next section considers how BRIDGE could develop over time through phased implementation, wider partnership-building, and citywide expansion.

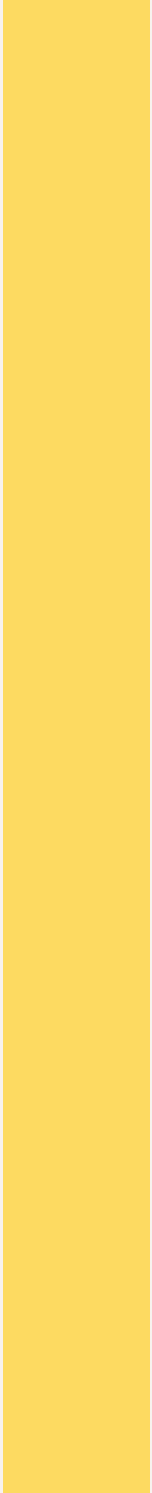
— 7.5 Future Development and Scalability

The BRIDGE proposal is conceived not as a fixed or fully closed system, but as a service model that can be developed incrementally over time. This is important because the proposal is based on the idea of strengthening existing support structures rather than replacing them with a completely new institutional system. For this reason, the future development of BRIDGE depends on a scalable logic in which the service can begin with a limited but operational core and then expand gradually through partnerships, wider territorial integration, and more advanced continuity mechanisms. In this sense, scalability is understood not only as growth in size, but as growth in connectivity, coordination, and service capacity across the Milan ecosystem.

A first phase of development can be structured as a pilot. In this phase, BRIDGE would begin with three Career Spots, a basic digital platform, and a small facilitator function capable of connecting users to selected services and opportunities. In the proposal, these pilot locations are Open Casello, Baroni 85, and CAG Giambellino. These are not random choices, but existing youth-facing spaces that already represent different access conditions within Milan. The objective at this point would not be to activate the full complexity of the system, but to test the core service logic, which is: one visible entry, hybrid support, guided handover, and continuity over time. The pilot phase is therefore designed to test the concept by implementing it in a more focused way, instead of implementing it on a large scale from the beginning. A second phase would focus on connection and partnership expansion. Once the pilot has

been tested, BRIDGE could increase its value by linking additional actors such as CAGs, NGOs, training providers, employers, and CPI / AFOLMet. During this stage, the system evolves from a pilot to a distributed coordination layer that can facilitate deeper referral relationships, increased opportunities for access, and more structured pathways for progression. This is especially significant because the success of BRIDGE relies on the quality of BRIDGE's interfaces as well as the quality and reliability of the relationships it can build with other actors in the ecosystem. In this regard, the second phase is a transformation of BRIDGE from a localised pilot to a connective service infrastructure. A third phase would involve wider Milan integration and service scaling. In this stage, the proposal could expand both territorially and functionally by increasing the number of connected locations, broadening the partner network, and strengthening the digital platform's capacity for shared pathway visibility, warm referrals, and continuity tracking. At a larger scale, BRIDGE could support a more coherent citywide infrastructure in which users are able to move more easily between entry points, support spaces, training opportunities, and formal labour-market pathways. Scalability in this sense does not mean centralisation into one large service, but the gradual development of a more connected and visible support network across the city.

At the same time, future development would require institutional alignment, operational resources, and long-term testing beyond the scope of this thesis. The current project therefore proposes BRIDGE at concept and prototype level, while recognising that a full implementation would depend on further collaboration with municipal actors, support organisations, training providers, and employers. Future work could explore broader neighbourhood integration, additional Career Spots, multilingual support expansion, stronger interoperability with existing employment and training systems, and more advanced forms of continuity tracking across the city. In this way, BRIDGE is presented not as a finished system, but as a scalable framework for building a more connected youth support ecosystem in Milan.



Chapter8

8 Conclusion and Future Perspectives

8.1 Findings and Reflections

This final chapter reflects on the main findings and contributions of the thesis by bringing together the research analysis and the project proposal. It first revisits the central argument that emerged from the study of the Milan ecosystem, then considers the broader implications of BRIDGE as a design response, and finally addresses the main limitations and future development possibilities of the proposal.

This thesis began from the observation that youth unemployment support in Milan cannot be understood only as a problem of service availability. The common trend in the research is that the city of Milan already provides a wide range of services for the youth, spaces for interaction, job structures, as well as online opportunities. However, these different elements are not experienced by the youth as a continuous chain. Thus, the problem does not lie in the lack of services, but in the discontinuity of their use by the youth. The research therefore showed that the main difficulty lies in the “missing middle” between soft-entry, trust-based spaces and the more formal pathways into employment, training, and activation. This interpretation is also reflected in the final presentation, which explicitly states that Milan does not lack youth services, but rather lacks the connection between them and the continuity between entry points and pathways.

A second important finding concerns the way this fragmentation is experienced at the user level. The analysis showed that official channels often require administrative steps, sign-up procedures, booking, interviews, and follow-up processes that are not always easy to navigate, especially for users with lower institutional familiarity or confidence. At the same time, ecosystem mapping and exploratory survey insights indicated that many services exist across different actors, but are not perceived as one continuous route, while users express a need for more guided and hybrid forms of support over time. This means that the problem is not only structural, but also experiential: fragmentation appears to young people

as uncertainty, weak handovers, low continuity, and a lack of visible progression from initial contact toward opportunities.

From this perspective, the thesis reframed youth employment support in Milan as a systemic service-design challenge rather than as a problem to be solved through one additional isolated programme. This reframing is one of the main contributions of the research part of the thesis. By combining literature on service ecosystems, hybrid services, and public-sector social innovation with ecosystem mapping, case studies, and local analysis, the thesis showed that the key design question is how to make an existing support landscape more legible, more connected, and more continuous for users. In other words, the research led to the understanding that the central design task is not to replace current institutions, but to improve the way young people move between them.

The project response developed through the thesis is BRIDGE: a hybrid service ecosystem composed of a digital platform, physical CareerSpots, and a coordination logic that connects existing actors rather than substituting them. The main contribution of BRIDGE is therefore not the creation of a parallel service system, but the introduction of a coordination layer that adds clearer navigation, stronger handovers, digital and physical continuity, trust-building support, document and booking help, and greater pathway visibility while existing services continue to provide orientation, activation, training, local support, and opportunities. This is one of the central arguments of the thesis: the proposal creates value not by duplicating services, but by strengthening the relationships and transitions between them. Figure 33 summarises the main contribution of BRIDGE to the existing youth support ecosystem in Milan.

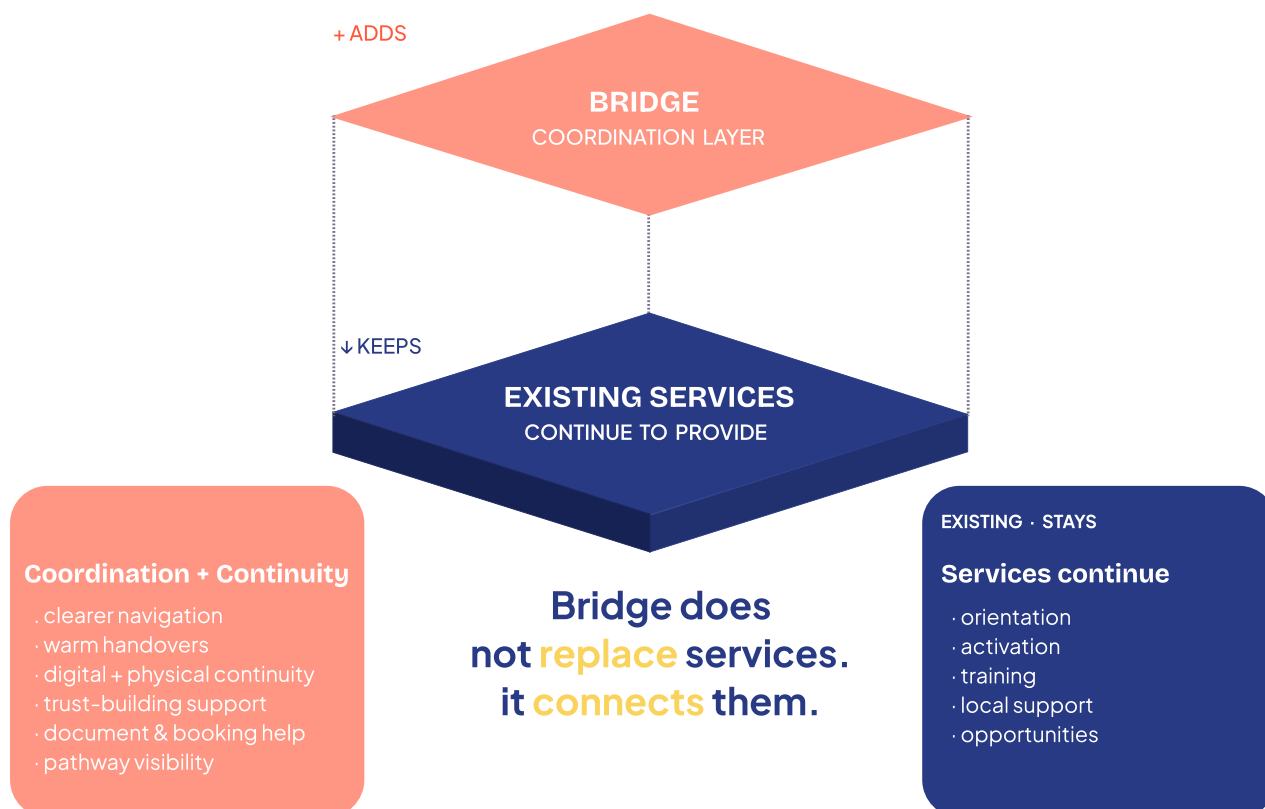


Figure 34. What BRIDGE adds to the existing youth support ecosystem.
The diagram summarises the main contribution of BRIDGE as a coordination layer that strengthens navigation, handovers, continuity, trust-building, and pathway visibility without replacing existing services.
Source: Author's elaboration.

As shown in Figure 34, the value of BRIDGE lies not in replacing current services, but in improving the continuity and coordination between them. Another key contribution of the project lies in the way it combines digital and physical support. The thesis showed that a purely digital solution would not be sufficient in a context where many users require trust-building, human interpretation, and guided help at moments of uncertainty. At the same time, a purely physical service would not adequately address issues of discoverability, continuity, and pathway visibility across a wider ecosystem. For this reason, BRIDGE was developed as a hybrid structure that allows young people to move between digital orientation and physical support according to their needs. The final presentation summarises this logic through the metaphor of a bridge: not as a building in itself,

but as a crossing between two banks that already exist — the soft-entry world of youth centres, NGOs, and community spaces, and the hard-entry world of public employment services, employers, and training pathways.

The user journeys developed in the project further clarified this contribution. Through Caroline and Brad, the thesis demonstrated that the same service architecture can respond to different barriers while maintaining a shared logic of progression. Caroline's journey shows how BRIDGE can reduce confusion, create one visible entry, support participation in learning and skill-building, and maintain continuity across the pathway. Brad's journey shows how the system can provide accessible language, document support, Career Spot assistance, and trusted handover into more formal pathways. In both cases, the proposal does not promise employment automatically, but it does create a more readable, guided, and supported route toward employment-related opportunities.

Reflecting on the thesis as a whole, the main contribution of this work is to show that service design can intervene meaningfully in a fragmented public-support ecosystem without replacing it. BRIDGE demonstrates that the role of design in this context is not only to create new interfaces or service touchpoints, but also to reorganise how existing actors, pathways, and support experiences connect over time. In this sense, the thesis argues that youth employment support should be understood not simply as the delivery of isolated offers, but as the design of continuity between entry, trust, preparation, guidance, learning, and progression. The project therefore offers both an analytical contribution — making visible the structural and experiential gaps in the Milan ecosystem — and a project contribution — proposing a hybrid coordination layer capable of making that ecosystem more accessible, legible, and continuous for young people.

Taken together, these reflections show that the value of BRIDGE lies not in creating a separate service structure, but in making the existing ecosystem more legible, coordinated, and continuous for young people. At the same time, the proposal should not be understood as complete or definitive. For this reason, the following section considers the main

limitations of the thesis and outlines the future perspectives through which BRIDGE could be tested, developed, and expanded over time.

— 8.2 Limitations and Future Perspectives

While the BRIDGE approach provides a framework for addressing the fragmentation of youth employment support in Milan, it also presents a number of important limitations that must be acknowledged. First, the effectiveness of the proposed system depends largely on the cooperation of multiple actors, including municipal services, youth centres, NGOs, training organisations, employment services, and employers. Since BRIDGE is not conceived as a self-sufficient stand-alone system, but rather as a coordination layer operating across existing networks, its success cannot depend on design quality alone. Its implementation would require sustained collaboration, shared commitment, and the ability of institutions and local actors to work together over time.

A second limitation concerns institutional support and operational capacity. The implementation of BRIDGE requires facilitators, accessible Career Spots, and a digital system capable of functioning as a visible and reliable entry point. These conditions imply the need for resources, staffing, and organisational support that remain beyond the scope of this thesis. Facilitation is especially important within the proposal, since continuity, guidance, and warm handovers rely not only on digital tools, but also on human support. Without appropriate facilitation, there is a risk that the proposal could reproduce some of the discontinuity that it is intended to resolve.

Another limitation relates to accessibility and the digital divide. Although the platform is designed to reduce barriers to access, digital engagement cannot be assumed for all users. Some young people may face difficulties related to device access, language, confidence in online systems, unstable life conditions, or distrust towards formal structures. For this reason, BRIDGE has consistently been developed as a hybrid model rather than an exclusively digital one. Even so, future implementation would need to carefully balance the advantages of digital accessibility

with the importance of physical support, in order to avoid excluding those who need the service the most.

Another important limitation concerns evaluation and impact. At the current stage, BRIDGE has been developed at the level of concept and prototype, supported by ecosystem analysis, comparative research, and design exploration. For this reason, the actual extent to which the proposal could reduce dropout, build trust, improve continuity, and support labour-market progression would need to be tested through implementation. The proposal may create conditions that improve access, handovers, and support journeys, but it cannot directly guarantee employment outcomes. Access to work remains shaped by wider structural conditions, including labour demand, economic inequality, and institutional capacity beyond the service itself.

Despite these limitations, BRIDGE also offers meaningful future perspectives because it is conceived as a phased and scalable system. In the short term, the proposal could be implemented as a pilot involving three Career Spots — Open Casello, Baroni 85, and CAG Giambellino — supported by a basic platform and a limited facilitation team. At this stage, the focus would be on testing the practical functioning of the service logic, including onboarding, referrals, guidance interactions, continuity mechanisms, and user feedback.

In the medium term, BRIDGE could expand by linking a wider network of actors, including more CAGs, NGOs, training organisations, employers, and employment services. At this level, the emphasis would shift toward building stronger partnerships, increasing the density of referral pathways, improving continuity tracking, and offering a broader range of learning, volunteering, mentoring, and employment-related opportunities through the BRIDGE network. Through these developments, BRIDGE could evolve from a pilot project into a more robust connective infrastructure within the wider Milan ecosystem.

In the long term, the proposal could develop toward broader Milan integration through a more visible citywide youth support layer. At this stage, BRIDGE could support greater pathway visibility across actors, stronger continuity between soft-entry and hard-entry services, and

closer alignment with public employment and training systems. Future development could also include expanded language support, additional Career Spots across neighbourhoods, improved interoperability of digital tools and information systems, and possible adaptation of the model to other urban contexts beyond Milan. In this sense, the future value of BRIDGE lies not only in the design concept itself, but also in its potential to operate as a replicable framework for strengthening fragmented youth support ecosystems. Figure 35 summarises the phased logic through which BRIDGE could move from pilot implementation to wider ecosystem integration over time.

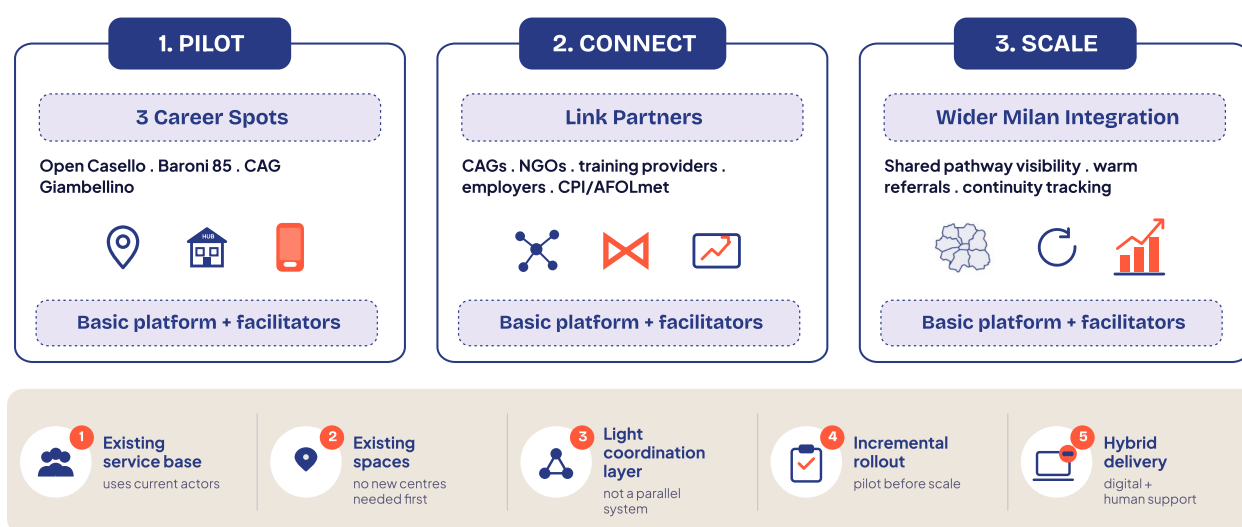


Figure 35. Phased model for the future development and feasibility of BRIDGE. The diagram illustrates how BRIDGE could develop over time through three stages — pilot, connect, and scale — while highlighting the key conditions that make the proposal feasible, including use of existing services, existing spaces, a light coordination layer, incremental rollout, and hybrid delivery.

Source: Author's elaboration.

As shown in Figure 35, the future development of BRIDGE is based not on immediate large-scale implementation, but on a gradual model that begins with testing, strengthens partnerships, and expands through coordination over time. Taken together, these limitations and future perspectives reinforce the main argument of the thesis. BRIDGE should not be understood as a final or fully resolved model, but rather as a design framework that increases legibility, connection, and continuity within an already existing system. Ultimately, the value of BRIDGE lies not in proposing an entirely new service in isolation, but in showing how an

existing and fragmented ecosystem can be made more navigable, connected, and continuous for young people. The project demonstrates that service design can operate as a strategic coordination tool, capable of strengthening handovers, clarifying pathways, and linking trust-based support with more formal employment opportunities. Although its real impact would depend on implementation, institutional collaboration, and long-term testing, BRIDGE provides a concrete framework for rethinking youth employment support in Milan as a hybrid and evolving system. In this sense, the thesis closes not with a definitive solution, but with a design direction that is realistic, scalable, and open to future development.

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BRIDGE.

