



It is a time in which everything seems to be shifting at once. What this will lead to remains uncertain. Climate change, geopolitical and social tensions, and increasing scarcity of space, resources, and energy are placing systems across the world under immense strain. Yet precisely in this friction, a new momentum is surfacing. As long-standing structures reach their limits, renewed appreciation grows for what is close to home: the strength of local communities, regionally integrated approaches, ecological balance, renewable resources, and cooperative systems that restore rather than exhaust.

The 2026 International Architecture Biennale Rotterdam (IABR), SYSTEMS OF SUPPORT, invites everyone to explore this movement – to think ahead together, and to imagine and build a future in which locality once again sets the course.

For centuries, progress was defined by scaling up. Companies stretched supply chains across continents, outsourced production, and relied on a global economy driven by speed, margins, growth, and volume. Today, that system is faltering. The shift to renewable energy, clean food production, fair resource distribution, wellbeing, and livable cities for all demands a radically different way of seeing and acting.

This requires companies and governments to reconnect with the regions where people live and work. Space, water, energy, and materials can no longer be treated as limitless commodities; they must be understood as interdependent parts of regenerative systems. This shift is not only technological or economic – it's also social and cultural. It's a reorientation of what societies value.

Design plays a central role in this transition. Architecture has always been about more than buildings; it's about the relationships and systems that shape collective life. Too often, however, architecture has been reduced to a computational exercise or a real-estate product, subject to short-term logics.

The ambition of SYSTEMS OF SUPPORT is to reposition architecture as a public force – one that creates space for shared values, enables alternative economic models, and forges new connections. Here, designers are not only solvers, but shapers: individuals who can unlock stalled systems and spark the imagination needed to move societies forward.

The 2026 edition of the IABR explores how to build new economies. Which values should lead the transition away from a fossil-fuel-based, linear model? What opportunities arise from an economy rooted in regional contexts – one that reduces global risks and centers public interest? How might energy, water, food, infrastructure, and construction logistics together form a new foundation?

Crucially, how can designers help citizens, policymakers, and businesses understand, feel, and co-shape this shift? The biennale addresses these questions in tangible and accessible ways. Exhibitions, stories, prototypes, conversations, research, and tools reveal how design can contribute to an economy that generates value rather than depletes it – an economy that prioritizes public benefit, begins close to home, and reverberates outward.

SYSTEMS OF SUPPORT exposes the infrastructures that shape life today – data flows, logistics networks, energy grids – and shows how the future becomes visible in everyday environments: open-source hous-

ing, water-holding landscapes, shorter and cleaner supply chains. The IABR works with designers, researchers, thinkers, students, knowledge institutions, and social partners from the Netherlands and beyond.

With the new master class, Money Talks, IABR activates designers and financial experts to explore how business models, material flows, ownership structures, and long-term investments can become part of tomorrow's design toolkit. Design shapes the economy, and the economy shapes everyone – from port workers to tech developers, from farmers to city dwellers, and from policymakers to residents trying to understand the forces transforming their surroundings.

The biennale makes complex systems graspable by placing locality and connectivity at the forefront. It shows how daily choices intertwine with global dynamics. New systems can only function if people understand and can engage with them. Whether we consider the impact of drought on coffee prices, a stranded container ship disrupting world trade, or the material flows that shape cities, the message is clear: everyday life is embedded in global infrastructures – and design can help rebuild these systems on fairer, more balanced terms.

Beginning 17 September 2026, the IABR presents these explorations at a characteristic Rotterdam location where thinking, making, researching, and imagining come together. It is a place for experimentation, craft, resilience, and multiple forms of value creation. Here, a new perspective on tomorrow's economy comes into view – rooted, fair, and regenerative. An economy that calls for action and draws near, in every sense.

SYSTEMS OF SUPPORT invites us to move forward together – to see how the future takes shape when we reorganize economic systems, release old patterns, and rediscover design as a catalyst for collective transformative capacity. In this future, proximity becomes a force of connection rather than limitation. In this future, together we build a world that supports all forms of life.

The edition is curated by Wouter Veldhuis (former Dutch Government Advisor, architect, urban designer and co-founder of MUST) at the invitation of the IABR. He is joined by Carola Hein (professor of the history of architecture and urban design), and Martina Muzi (curator, designer, and educator).