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***EXPLORING UP TOWN:  
financialization, urban change and smart-and-green urban  
futures in periphery of Milan***

Doctoral Dissertation by  
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# Introduction

**Date: 12 April 2022**

**Time: from 9 am to 12 pm**

I have spent the night outside the neighbourhood, and I am driving home when by chance I pass by the Aler housing blocks on Froth Street. I see riot police vans, people on the street whooping and hollering, and a van with a basket-lift doing up and down from a balcony on the fourth floor of a building in the “Italians” compound.

I park quickly near my apartment; go inside for a moment to get the phone I use to take photographs and rush to the spot. On the way I meet Gina, salute her, and tell her “evictions have started in Froth Street, I have to go”. She looks at me slightly worried and asks me to report back to her later.

I reach Froth Street. I pass the parking lot that hosts three or four gypsy campers, approximately twenty parked cars (including a couple of luxury cars with foreign license plates), four riot police vans and two police cars. The courtyard of the complex is quite large and is enclosed by buildings that form a kind of L. The short side consists of numbers 38-40-42 and the long side of numbers 26-36. The eviction is at number 32. I approach a group of about thirty people, who stand (not compactly, in small groups) at the centre of the lawn. The first person I approach is a blond-haired guy, dressed in a green and gold tracksuit and a small handbag on which is written: “born in a tracksuit.” I ask him what is going on. He replies, “what do you think is happening, man? This is a clear-out, an eviction!” He smokes cigarettes and moves nervously up and down the lawn.

I walk and reach the larger group. There are a couple of guys my age, several younger guys, five or six women in their forties, ten or eleven men of the same age, and some older people. We are about forty people yelling at the truck with the basket lift and the cordon of plainclothes officers separating the group. A riot police squad stands near the doorway to the compound.

People around me are protesting the eviction. The main reason for the protest is that the police and Aler are evicting an Italian person’s house, whereas according to the people present they should start “from the gypsies” houses.”

The people are angry and speak loudly so that everyone can hear. One woman says, “today you have to stay here all day because we are staying here and if you leave who knows....” People openly talk about setting fire to campers parked during the night. They say these things in front of plainclothes officers. The same woman says, “I wasn’t racist, but you made me become one!” Another says, “we are living in the rubbish here and when they start to evict, they start with us!” Only one man, a person I immediately frame, a man in his forties with greying hair and a beard, wearing a covid mask, tries to dissuade the people around from the idea of organising a punitive expedition against the gypsies and shouts “but doesn’t the Aler have a heart?!” Another woman says, “we know we have to leave here sooner or later, but why to start with us?”

I think to myself “what a fucking shitty situation.”

I ask again and check if what is happening is the eviction of a squatted house or for non-payment of rent. A lady confirms to me “yes, it was squatting.” I say aloud “the Aler is to blame for this situation, the eviction is being done by the Aler and the police.” Some younger guys go to talk to the police officers. They ask about the meaning of the operation, without getting them. They go on asking why to start with

them “while the gypsies occupy the whole complex to the left.” A group of people talk to a woman police officer. they ask, “if we go *there* now [*they point to complex number 38-40-42, ndr*] and throw three families of them out, what do you do?” she replies, “we come there and put them back inside the houses.” She says this in an arrogant tone. The situation becomes electric. The riot police squad that was at the door of the compound number 32 comes forward near us and another squad gets out of the van behind us, but calmly. Now, people’s anger is also directed against the police, especially because the way they were doing things made people angry.

After five minutes of confusion, four five of the boys move away from the crowd and come closer to the compound, towards the entrance of number 40. In this area there are about fifteen people standing on the balconies watching the scene and others at the entrances. There is a throwing of a plastic bottle towards them. The same person who throws the small bottle shouts at someone on the balconies. Voices, shouting, confusion, insults: it seems that someone upstairs has laughed and made fun of the person. This is the breaking point: a group of people rush to enter the complex, a guy arms himself with a rake, a guy distracts his girlfriend who was holding him back and jumps in. However, plainclothes police officers find a way to interpose themselves between the group and the people in the compound. They grab the people who had entered and take them outside, back to the lawn. In the meantime, the anti-riot police manage to form a cordon between the entrance to the compound and the people. From that position the anti-riot police advance, and we all return to the lawn.

A boy (I find out later that he is 15 years old, although he looks older) says to a police officer, “can you see that you make people evil?”.

For about half an hour the crowd splits into small groups and a confused phase begins. Some people argue with the police, one guy is very angry about the presence of a policeman who had entered his house a few days earlier to search it “You!” he says, “You are here, and you broke into my house for two joints! For two fucking joints! You put your hands in my mother’s panties, you infamous!”. He is not the only one who had a confrontational relationship with the plainclothes policemen present. Another woman, speaking out loud, recounts that she has received visits from the police and states “you came to my house looking for what? You already took my husband to prison, what more did you want?”. There is tension and the police alternate dialogue with aggressive posturing and cordons. They are all wearing masks and their manner makes them clearly recognisable even if they are not in uniform.

I talk to a boy who tells me “we should have organised earlier: we should have placed ourselves in front before they arrived, now it’s all useless, it’s gone”. I talk to the 15-year-old boy I saw earlier. He tells me “I am fifteen, I must walk around with a blade in my pocket here because *they* [*he is talking about the inhabitants of compound number 38-40-42, ndr*] do what they want. Whatever they want, do you understand? Does it seem normal to you that I must walk around with a knife in my pocket because I’m risking my skin here?”. After a convulsive phase, two plainclothes policemen start talking to the crowd. One says, pointing at the other, “he’s the chief of the police station, you must trust me, you think I’m here to tell you a story to keep you quiet, but let’s organise a meeting with him at the police station: he’s someone who counts, there are no people above him. Make a delegation”. The crowd’s response is ambivalent: some trust, some try to justify their aggressiveness, some listen, some leave. Later, the policeman who has been referred to as the leader says “I understand your position, I understand the situation. Let’s organise a meeting, we will listen to you, I promise to pass on your voice”. The guy with the purse says, “I’m sorry, but I don’t believe you, I would like to believe you, but I no longer believe you”. The meeting is set Thursday morning. At this stage other people arrive, including one person who

stares at me and asks, “but him?”, another girl says “no, no, he came here to help us!” and he replies, “ah ok, I thought he was an undercover cop!”.

After a short time the anti-riot van, plainclothes police, and police car leave. During the night, given the unconcealed intentions of waging war against the gypsies, the streets around Froth Street will be under intensive surveillance.

I wander around to hear what people are saying and try to reiterate the notion that the responsibility belongs to the police and Aler, but I am rather confused. I pick up some information: it is the first time that an eviction has taken place in Froth Street, it has never happened before; some squatters have been contacted by Aler (I don't understand whether to warn about possible evictions or with a proposal for regularisation), but others clearly say that “they have never had the chance to regularise themselves in forty years”.

The person who has been evicted arrives on the square: she is furious. They all sympathise with her and promise to “help her immediately”. In about ten minutes, the person smiles and waves from the balcony.

In the meantime, Karl arrived. We spoke earlier on the phone.

Karl shows up with a pair of mirrored Ray-Bans. He has a beige jacket and is dressed in a more fashionable style than those present. He has a confident attitude. This confidence gives the impression that he always knows what he is saying and that he knows the neighbourhood well. People clearly notice this attitude. Some say “who is that a politician? Is he from Aler?” (They are not mistaken: Karl was a councillor for the local municipality years before). A group of people say to him in a mildly aggressive manner “who are you?” and he replies, “my name is Karl and what is your name?” Immediately afterwards he waves an arm to one of the boys. The boy is our age and played in the football team founded by Karl. The situation immediately calms down. The boy explains the situation to him. I greet him and explain as well. Karl strides resolutely into the middle of the group of adults, because the group of young people has moved and is standing at the border between the lawn and the car park, slightly away from the lawn and the entrance to the building where the eviction took place. Karl is very assertive and draws attention by saying this:

“There is a project here whereby they want to divide people into squatters and non-squatters, Italians and non-Italians and then evict them all and build new houses for other, richer people. We must organise ourselves and have breakfasts to prevent evictions, keep in touch. They will throw everybody out sooner or later, because there is a speculative project going on.”

The renovated farmstead, the landmark building of the new neighbourhood, is only five hundred and fifty metres away, a seven-to-eight-minute walk.

### *The Plan*

This research work is the result of an ethnographical exploration in an urban area on the outskirts of the city of Milan. This peripheral space is crossed by a freeway that connect the centre of the city with its north-west conurbation, formed by small towns and major centres that follow one another uninterruptedly for more than sixty kilometres up to the Lago Maggiore. The first little satellite city

is Pero, that delimitates the administrative border of the city and my investigation field in this direction. The northern border is bounded by two important city infrastructures: the railway line connecting Milan with Torino, and the highway. From this area and from a secondary motorway entrance, near the biggest cemetery of Milan, thousands of commute workers, couriers, and logistic operators reach the city beltway and the highway that connect the city to Torino and to Brescia, Bergamo, Verona, and Venice. At a first sight, this massively urbanised infrastructural landscape deeply divides an area that is only formally within the same local municipality. The urban fragmentation is particularly impressive here: the same urban facility that support one specific connection generates the effect of functional and economic disconnection for others. According to Graham and Marvin (2001), who analyse the growing importance of networked infrastructures in process of production of urban space at the beginning of this century, these sociotechnical connections have a pivotal role in the creation of ‘splintered cities’ and new spatial hierarchies, also related with process of uneven development and globalization. At the same time, the local process of urban sprawl is not only connected with global sociotechnical process but also with a more prosaically absence of political willingness to control building speculation and the effects of repeated building amnesties (see Pagliarin 2018).

I spent a year in this area, on the administrative borders between Milan, Rho, and Pero, to follow the process of new citizens moving into a large residential neighbourhood, built from scratch and still partly under construction. Today, classy auteur architecture towers rise in place of cultivated fields, abandoned spaces, and an old *Cascina*, a production structure dedicated to cultivation, cattle breeding and direct sales, typical of Lombardy (Bernareggi 2015). Like many interstitial areas in cities, that space described by many historical residents as “nothing” was populated by marginalised and stigmatised subjectivities as a ‘space of survival’ (Mitchell 2013): groups of Roma were distanced by private surveillance throughout the 1990s and early 2000s. The same private surveillance is now responsible for the security of the new neighbourhood. From here on we call it *the District*.

The District is currently the largest residential development projects in Milan. In this area, the developer acquired more than 900.000 sm. between 2006 and 2008. Firstly, it started a partnership with city municipality to elaborate an *Integrated Action Plan* (Piano Integrato di Intervento – PII)<sup>1</sup>. This planning instrument included several additional infrastructure costs and services to be provided by the developer: green areas, public parking, road junctions, two nursery school, and a large public-school complex. Called informally *Up Town School*, this complex will host five kindergarten sections, fifteen primary school classes, and nine secondary school classes. It will contain with a gymnasium

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<sup>1</sup>[https://www.comune.milano.it/documents/20126/100421460/All\\_B.11\\_Relazione\\_tecnica\\_PII.pdf/0ac1b925-7449-acec-c756-92ce6a09df16?t=1587996083851](https://www.comune.milano.it/documents/20126/100421460/All_B.11_Relazione_tecnica_PII.pdf/0ac1b925-7449-acec-c756-92ce6a09df16?t=1587996083851).



suitable for competitive activities, a multifunctional space (gymnasium for free-body activities/auditorium), two dining hall, nine laboratory classrooms, two spaces for supplementary and extracurricular activities, a library, outdoor sports facilities, a classroom for outdoor lessons, a teaching garden. Secondly, the developer signs a *Programme Agreement* (Accordo di Programma) together with all the principal political actors in the area: Municipality of Milan, Region of Lombardy, Municipality of Pero<sup>2</sup>. This agreement will be reviewed in 2016 through a *Supplementary Act to the Programme Agreement* (Atto integrativo all'Accordo di Programma)<sup>3</sup>. In 2022, the urbanistic data sheet provides six principal distinct functions<sup>4</sup>:

1. Free sale housing (136.005 – 166.005 sm.)
2. Subsidised housing (127.534 sm.)
3. Social Housing (59.959 sm.)
4. Retail (35.000 – 55.000)
5. Tertiary (5.000 – 15.000)
6. Accommodation Facility (10.000 – 15.000)

The District's masterplan (see fig.1) shows its shape and the spatial division between subsidized, social, and free sale housing. The developer sold the lot to construction companies for subsidised housing and realised social housing in agreement with a real estate fund and the municipality. During my fieldwork, the developer was building and selling the second part of the housing segment in free market regime, the company's core business in this operation. The story of the leading actor of the District is intertwined with one of the largest banks in Italy. As we will see in the first chapter, the bank not only rescued the developer from debt by informally taking full control of the company, but also financed many secondary actors in the neighbourhood.

Notably, the main entrance of the District is also symbolically characterized by the community centre of the neighbourhood, a renovated farmstead. This structure was acquired by the developer in 2008 and totally renovated: the three-building complex and the courtyard (see fig. 2) are the principal *set* of public initiatives and social interactions, as a Goffmanian *front stage* (Goffman 1959). In this open-but-private space, the developer plays a key role in the design of the public initiatives in coordination with other private actors, local associations, third-sector organisations. At the end of the research, this

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<sup>2</sup><http://www.consultazioniburl.servizirl.it/ConsultazioneBurl/ElencoBurl>. Serie Ordinata n.20, 20/05/2011.

<sup>3</sup><https://www.comune.milano.it/-/adp-cascina-merlata-atto-integrativo-all-accordo-di-programma-allegati-alla-deliberazione-del-c.c.-n.-46-del-22-12-2016>.

<sup>4</sup><https://www.comune.milano.it/documents/20126/434769303/Scheda+dati+tecnici+di+progetto+-+Cascina+Merlata+-+febbraio+2022.pdf/83367c7a-523d-0d52-597a-6b80f529a960?t=1643710225601>.

area was populated by more than four thousand households. At the end of the process, the new neighbourhood will have more than twelve thousand households, namely between twenty thousand and thirty thousand new inhabitants, depending on the design of residential buildings in the future.

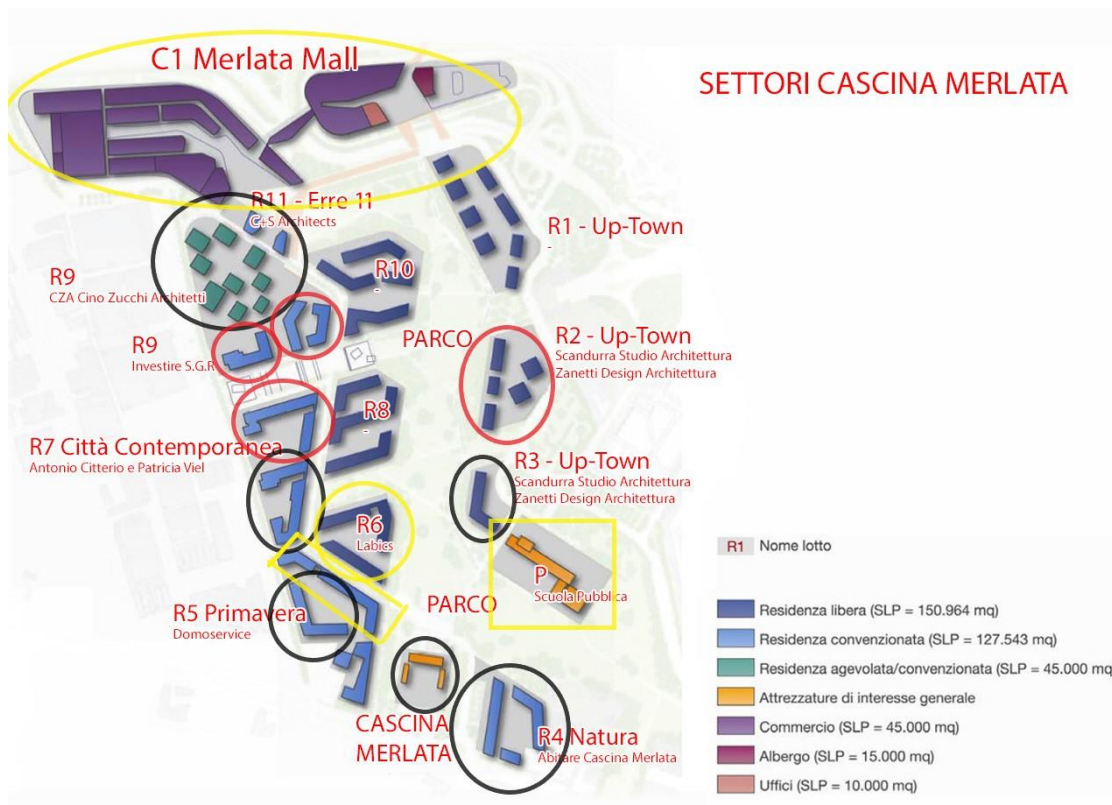


Figure 1. The Masterplan of the District. Black rings indicate buildings built and settled before the beginning of the research (June 2021). Red rings indicate buildings built and settled during the research (June 2021-August 2022). Yellow rings indicate buildings in construction during the last month of the fieldwork and ready for 2023-2024. The end of the construction process has been set for 2026-2027. The park was inaugurated in 2018. (source: [blog.urbanfile.org](http://blog.urbanfile.org))



Figure 2. An aerial view of Cascina Merlata, the community centre at the main entrance of the District. (source: [blog.urbanfile.org](http://blog.urbanfile.org))

In 2023, the most important opening will be the *Merlata Mall*, the District's shopping centre. The mall will be the largest shopping centre in Milan. The website page dedicated to the definition of the mall as a *lifestyle centre* advertises this new space in which "Retail, Gastronomy, Lifestyle are the conceptual components that take shape in Merlata Mall. Merlata Mall embodies many souls: it is a smart and innovative place that combines technology and sustainability, entertainment and services, everyday life, and commerce"<sup>5</sup>.

Sustainability, smart, technology, innovation, lifestyle: Merlata Mall's glittering marketing vocabulary has much in common with that of the District, especially in relation to *Up Town*, the housing segment in free market regime. The Up Town's website dedicates a section to the initiatives in the neighbourhood that constitutes "a journey to discover Italy's greenest and smartest district, a true housing ecosystem"<sup>6</sup>. The District, in the *lifestyle* section, is defined as "The heart of the Milan's new centrality". The neighbourhood is described as follows<sup>7</sup>:

"UpTown District is more than 900,000 square metres in size, a district with 300,000 square metres of public parkland crowned by exclusive residences designed by prominent names in modern architecture. In 2022, the shopping centre and one of the largest schools built in recent years in Italy will be completed. Already today, the inhabitants and the city of Milan can enjoy the many leisure and entertainment activities promoted in the Cascina's spaces and beautiful park. Created by EuroMilano, UpTown is a district in development in which people live, becoming themselves protagonists of the Wellbeing City concept, even before the technology that is also the protagonist of the district between zero-emission buildings, domotics and self-driving electric shuttles that will travel the district's boulevards."

The developer calls for a conceptual overcoming:

"Smart Cities means first and foremost smart citizens: whether it is a building, a residential complex or a district, our idea of Smart City is focused on sustainable development in which Information and Communication Technology (ICT) is at the service of good architecture and the enhancement of human relations, acting as an accelerator in the creation of a community. All this substantiates Euro Milano's vision that evolves the concept of Smart City towards that of Wellbeing City, in line with urban development trends worldwide." [translation by the author, ndr]

If the use of technology as an enabling factor is one element of the project's value proposition, the presence of green spaces and environmental sustainability is the cutting edge of the operation. The presence of the park (equipped with three play areas and three dog areas divided by size), the zero-

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<sup>5</sup><https://www.merlatabloommilano.com/lifestyle-center>.

<sup>6</sup><https://www.uptown-milano.it/blog/>.

<sup>7</sup><https://www.uptown-milano.it/lifestyle/>.

carbon emission, and the high class of every building in the district (social housing included) are very important motivations for buyers and renters in this area.

In addition, there is another relevant topic that stay at the core of the District marketing strategy: *the strategical value* of the District position, apparently at the border of the city. Indeed, Public-private partnership has been developing urban development project since early 2000s here. In 2005, just listed on the Italian stock exchange, Fiera Milano S.p.A inaugurates *Fieramilano*, the new fair trade exposition centre. Fieramilano was projected by the stararchitect Massimiliano Fuksas in place of an oil refinery closed in 1993. This structure hosts the most important trade exposition in Italy, as for example *Salone Internazionale del Mobile*. According to organization's data, the 2022 edition has attracted more than 250.000 visitators from 173 countries, despite the absence of Russian and Chinese citizens, more than 40.000 in 2019. In 2017, The Italian financial newspaper *Il Sole 24 Ore* calculated in 230 million of euro the broader economic impact of *Salone* for the city of Milan, also connected with the *Design Fashion Week* and *Fuorisalone*<sup>8</sup>. These events consist in a series of informal and cool events taking place in the central districts of Milan. One of the interviewees told me about this happening that “Fuorisalone ten years ago was different: many people ate at the aperitifs offered by the design and furniture firms for a week. If you knew how to do it – because it took some skill to do it – you ate and drank free of charge for a week in Milan, I swear!”

Near Fieramilano, an ex industrial site was chosen to be the site of the *World Exposition Milan 2015 (Expo 2015)*. The organisation of Expo 2015 received wide support from the Italian government and the press. This event was seen as a symbol of recovery from the global financial crisis and a driver of attraction for international tourism and investment. At the same time, several researchers interpret this event as a “*neoliberal regulatory experiment*” (Leonardi and Secchi 2016). Expo 2015, dedicated to the topic of food, can be seen as an experimental mega-machine that emphasises neoliberal political rationality, promotes new processes of accumulation and value extraction, and opens to new form of unpaid work relationship based on the neoliberal conception of self-valorisation as human capital. Moreover, the event was also politically contested: *Cascina Merlata* was occupied for a few days by the No-Expo movement.

In this context, the new centrality of the neighbourhood relates with the mega-project of renovation on the site of the exhibition citadel of Expo 2015, called *Mind, Milano Innovation District*. The District is conceived as the residential area of Mind, inaugurated on 30 April of 2022. Mind is large more than one million of square metres and the number of future daily visitors is estimated to be

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<sup>8</sup><https://www.ilsole24ore.com/art/dal-salone-mobile-indotto-230-milioni-visitatori-dall-estero-incidono-il-90per cento-AE6PX3w>.

between sixty and seventy thousand<sup>9</sup>. Today, Mind contains one private health centre dedicated to biomedical research, innovation accelerator and incubator for private companies, one public research institute in life science, and important firm as *Mind Tenants* (e.g. AstraZeneca). Notably, all the science departments of University of Milan will be moved into Mind by 2028. The plan is financed by a public-private partnership: state and municipality provide one and a half billion, and more than two billion are invested by *Lendlease*, one of the global leading companies in urban redevelopment. The connection between the District, Fieramilano and Mind is directly publicised by the developer, who emphasises the creation of a value production and social reproduction cluster in an infrastructurally powered and hyper-fast environment (see fig. 3). This model is not new: technological-intensive economical cluster are globally widespread in contemporary metropolis (Rossi and Di Bella 2017). These complex ecosystems of actors specialising in innovation have a pivotal role in urban regeneration processes and constitutes new power elites (see e.g. Zukin 2020).

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<sup>9</sup>[https://milano.corriere.it/notizie/economia/22\\_aprile\\_13/mind-expo-milanoviaggio-citta-futuro-niente-auto-si-girera-bici-monopattino-navette-elettriche-e08a6920-ba35-11ec-ac09-3ceafb137606.shtml](https://milano.corriere.it/notizie/economia/22_aprile_13/mind-expo-milanoviaggio-citta-futuro-niente-auto-si-girera-bici-monopattino-navette-elettriche-e08a6920-ba35-11ec-ac09-3ceafb137606.shtml).



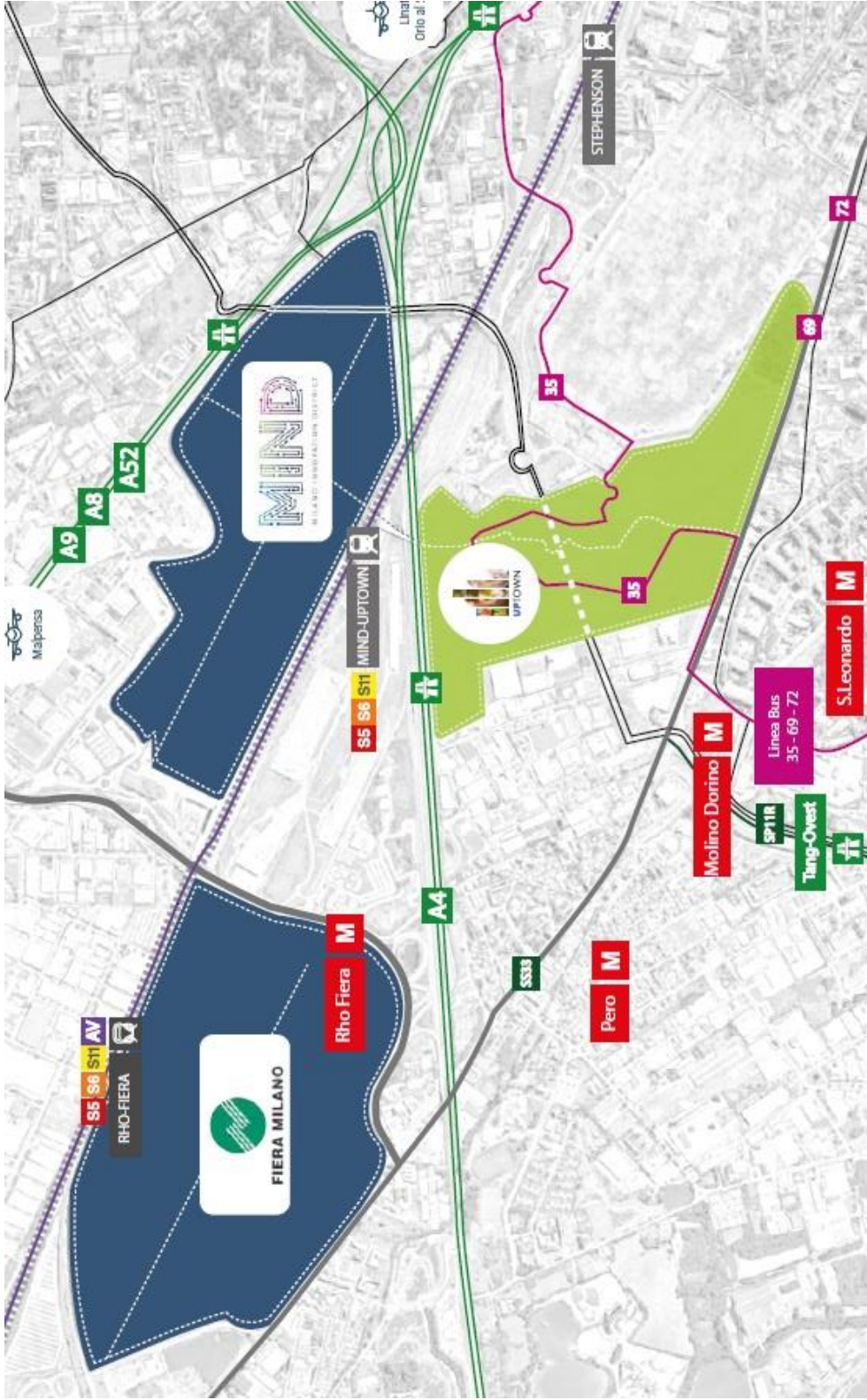


Figure 3. The developer representation of the area. Highway in green, autobus in purple, subway in red, suburban, and interregional train in dark purple, road in black. "Mind-UpTown" will be the new train stop in 2023.

### *Across the street: St. Leonard*

Despite being located on an urban interstice, the District is bordered by a residential area, which lies beyond the freeway described at the beginning of the introduction. This urban site constitutes the other side of our exploration and is called *St. Leonard*. St. Leonard is part of one of the largest public housing projects after World War II in Italy: the *Gallaratese* district. From now on we will call it the *Gal*.

The *Gal* was designed during the Italian “economic miracle years” (1950-1960) and completed in the 1975. Defined as “a satellite city of Milan” (Erba 1979), it was conceived as a large experimental public housing project not only for working-class families, but also for public and private employees and other middle-class professionals. The neighbourhood is made up of standardized blocks and towers (see fig. 4) and contains several buildings of national significance in the history of Italian architecture, such as the “*Monte Amiata complex*” by Aymonino and Rossi (see Conforti 1982). The *Gal*’s urban development history is complex and linked to conflicts between the autonomous housing institute of Milan (I.A.C.P.M) and the public housing committee (C.E.P.) (see Ivi, 1-18). The most important consequence was that the district was built in a more disorderly manner than planned and in absence of adequate public services. Throughout the first half of the 1960s, the neighbourhood had no public lighting or paved roads. A heavily polluted river made the air unbreathable, caused by the chemical industries of the Milan conurbation. Old residents spoke of their arrival as “*the moon landing*” (see below, Ch. 6). In the following years, the Popular Neighbourhood Committee (*Comitato Popolare di Quartiere*), formed by citizens and activists in both political parties and extra-parliamentary organizations, have played a key role in the improvement of the neighbourhood through occupations, demonstrations, political pamphlets and public meetings (*Comitato Popolare Quartiere Gallaratese* 1971). Since the 1990s, the neighbourhood’s citizens became gradually homeowners due to a systematic policy of public housing stock sale. According to several interviewees, this stock was sold in three cycles: the mid-1990s, the early 2000s and 2010-2011. Today, income indicators place the neighbourhood in a median position among the city’s neighbourhoods (see table 1). As we will see later, the contemporary problems of the neighbourhood are mainly related to ageing, social fragmentation, school dropouts, the absence of community spaces and local commercial areas. The lack of economic activities and meeting spaces has earned the neighbourhood the label of “dormitory suburb”: a residential area with scarcely used streets, where people mainly drive, park, and enter their homes.

Municipio	Zona	Contri- buenti	% Contrib. <10mila €	Reddito medio	Reddito I quinto	Reddito V quinto	Composizione % reddito					Indice concentr.	Rapporto Interquint.	
							Lav_Dip	Pensione	Lav_Aut	Imprendit.	Fabbric.			Partecipaz.
1	Brera, Castello	13.749	21	101.415	4.154	393.313	53	12	12	1	6	16	0,664	94,7
8	City Life, Pagano	12.943	18	81.265	4.901	283.979	55	15	12	2	5	11	0,611	57,9
1	Sant'Ambrogio, San Vittore	21.508	22	78.291	3.951	283.656	54	14	13	1	5	12	0,643	71,8
1	Duomo, Crocetta	29.450	34	62.146	4.374	234.439	53	15	13	2	7	11	0,693	53,6
3	Abruzzi, Dateo, Romagna	33.305	20	55.899	4.286	176.982	54	19	12	2	4	9	0,580	41,3
8	De Angeli, Lotto, Portello	21.995	19	53.882	4.739	167.116	59	19	9	2	4	7	0,569	35,3
3	Centrale, Buenos Aires	24.190	22	51.447	4.321	164.575	59	18	10	2	4	7	0,592	38,1
6	Porta Genova, Solari, Washington	24.765	19	49.482	4.338	147.571	57	20	10	2	4	7	0,548	34,0
4	Porta Romana, Umbria	23.717	19	45.376	4.558	131.364	60	19	10	1	3	6	0,530	28,8
8	Procaccini, Cenisio, Sempione	25.677	23	44.407	4.441	133.790	61	19	8	2	4	6	0,556	30,1
5	Bocconi, Tibaldi	12.407	23	40.749	4.482	120.523	58	21	10	1	4	6	0,541	26,9
3	Città studi, Politecnico	31.837	22	35.943	4.566	95.124	57	27	7	2	3	4	0,490	20,8
6	Lorenteggio, Frattini	43.308	22	34.756	4.654	91.380	58	27	6	2	3	3	0,491	19,6
3	Casoretto, Piola	29.476	24	34.057	4.652	90.669	60	25	7	2	4	3	0,500	19,5
6	Navigli, San Cristoforo	22.534	23	32.538	4.728	85.841	63	23	6	2	3	4	0,499	18,2
2	Gioia, viale Monza	28.341	25	31.379	4.677	80.461	61	26	6	2	3	3	0,488	17,2
7	San Siro, Segresta, Qt8	25.813	25	30.738	4.848	81.470	59	27	5	2	3	3	0,502	16,8
8	Gallaratese, Lampugnano	33.579	21	30.031	4.821	73.929	58	31	3	2	2	3	0,465	15,3
4	Porta Vittoria, Calvairate	19.009	25	29.972	4.858	74.830	61	26	6	2	3	3	0,475	15,4
5	Vigentino, Abbiategrasso	33.709	24	29.934	4.745	73.981	61	27	5	2	3	3	0,471	15,6
9	Stelvio, Maciachini, Isola	26.037	26	29.346	4.753	73.847	62	24	6	3	2	4	0,483	15,5
2	Greco-Bicocca	15.886	22	29.236	4.747	66.985	65	25	3	2	2	2	0,433	14,1
3	Lambrate, Ortica	15.096	22	28.926	4.531	64.956	63	27	3	1	3	2	0,426	14,3
8	Mac Mahon, Ghisolfi	18.596	26	28.349	4.786	68.977	61	26	4	3	3	2	0,466	14,4
6	Primateccio, Inganni	29.219	24	26.863	4.899	61.445	59	31	3	2	2	2	0,436	12,5
2	Precotto	21.836	24	25.771	4.773	57.116	65	24	3	3	2	2	0,421	12,0
4	Corvetto, Mazzini	33.149	26	25.621	5.002	60.432	62	28	4	2	2	2	0,449	12,1
9	Niguarda, Fulvio Testi	25.140	22	25.269	4.997	53.608	58	35	2	2	2	1	0,399	10,7
4	Forlanini, Ponte Lambro	24.737	24	24.997	4.854	54.330	66	27	2	2	2	2	0,411	11,2
2	via Padova-Loreto	27.461	29	24.887	4.865	59.838	63	25	5	2	3	3	0,461	12,3
9	Bovisa, Farini, Dergano	21.680	28	24.602	4.789	57.131	64	24	4	3	3	2	0,446	11,9
7	Baggio, Quinto romano	20.866	23	24.144	4.915	51.479	60	33	2	2	2	2	0,398	10,5
6	Barona, Gratosoglio	40.798	25	24.118	5.055	52.189	56	36	2	2	2	2	0,406	10,3
8	Villapizzone, Garegnano	16.054	27	23.984	4.921	54.865	60	29	3	3	2	2	0,435	11,1
2	Crescenzago, Palmanova	18.709	25	23.817	4.988	51.856	58	33	2	2	2	2	0,411	10,4
9	Affori, Comasina, Bovisa	34.605	26	23.722	4.942	51.840	61	30	3	3	2	2	0,414	10,5
7	Forze armate, Bisceglie	28.458	22	23.279	5.078	47.696	57	36	2	2	2	1	0,377	9,4
8	Quarto Oggiaro, Roserio	23.088	32	18.709	5.106	40.606	59	34	1	2	2	1	0,387	8,0
<b>Milano</b>		<b>1.003.624</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>35.145</b>	<b>4.521</b>	<b>101.027</b>	<b>59</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>0,545</b>	<b>22,3</b>

Table 1. Descriptive statistics of incomes in the city of Milan on a sub-municipal database (CAP based) and sorted by average income. The table shows the local municipality (1-9), the name of the district, the percentage of taxpayers under ten thousand euros, the average income, the value of the first and fifth quintiles, the percentage composition of incomes, the concentration index, and the inter-quintile ratio. Source: Ministry of Economy and Finance, elaboration by Mostacci (2020).

In this context, St. Leonard is the poorest part of the neighbourhood and the least furnished in terms of infrastructure and commercial space. This part of the district hosts two large compounds of new-generation public housing inhabited by citizens in economic and housing difficulties. The first compound is in front of the community centre of the new neighbourhood, inaugurated in 2008. The second compound is located closer to the rest of the Gal and was opened in 2014, although many assignees settled there later due to structural problems. St. Leonard also comprises the Froth street projects, which constitutes the context of the field note presented at the beginning of this introduction. Dating back to the 1980s, the Froth street projects constitute the “black sheep” of the neighbourhood. The large housing compound was built to accommodate both new tenants and old tenants of a fascist-era public housing compound called *Case Minime*, near the neighbourhood. By the 1990s, the Froth Street projects were already subtly stigmatised as the poorest and most criminogenic compound in the Gal. Starting in the mid-1990s, a series of informal property transfers occurred: organised groups of house dwellers sold their houses to another group. According to neighbourhood sources, this group originally came from a camp for Roma people not far from the research area. The camp was



dismantled and attacked several times by the police and the local authorities, starting in 2000. In 2010, a large eviction left dozens of people homeless, and the camp was closed<sup>10</sup>. In 2014, another eviction destroyed the settlement that had formed after the closure of the regular camp. In 2008, the Curia of Milan expressed about the evictions with these words “legality is sacrosanct, but the impression is that here we are falling far below the limits established by fundamental human rights, which would require, along with the deployment of the police in riot gear, a few cans of water, some milk for the children, a medical facility, some alternative solution for kids, sick people, and pregnant women”<sup>11</sup>. Similar to other socio-economic processes that occurred in the city, Expo 2015 produced an acceleration: the expulsion of poor and marginalised populations, especially in the heavily deindustrialised north-west, increased considerably (Maggioni and Off Topic 2013). In this case, the construction of a new road for the exhibition was a further justification for eliminating the camp<sup>12</sup>. The history of the Froth street projects will be dealt extensively in the section on poverty and social problems in St. Leonard (see below, chapter 6). Significantly, a major police operation led to the eviction of sixty families, both squatters and regulars, during the writing of this text. The houses are under renovation and the area is closed. The promise is that the houses should become public housing again. However, the former inhabitants have been relocated to houses outside the city. If St. Leonard is the most vulnerable part of the Gal, the entire area presents some strongly attractive elements. The neighbourhood is provided with efficient public services (metro, buses, etc.) and many public parks. One neighbourhood resident, living in the part closest to the rest of the city, reports a perceived shift within the city’s social geography:

J: I have the feelings that my part of the neighbourhood is much more central than when I was a kid. Now, I feel myself fully part of this metropolis. Before, I felt like I was living at the edge of the city, for two reasons. Firstly, it’s for the urbanization: now, there are lots of condominium, new streets, and infrastructure. Moreover, there are renewal projects, new commercial and cultural activities. More stuff in general, less social isolation. Secondly, for the people: the social fabric is changed in the past years. More young people, new families, and singles, more connected with the rest of the city. These people replaced who was the rests of the “90s and “80s. Man from the world of the past, real neighbourhood-based man. Our space is really changed: when I was a kid, there were always people in the streets. We smoke *cilum* all day long: dealers chucked hash from their terraces. We all knew that every hour, in the day and in the night, we can meet someone in the streets near our houses. Sincerely, I don’t know where the neighbourhood kids meet now. I’m sure that kids are still meeting in the streets: I simply don’t know where.

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<sup>10</sup> <https://www.ilgiorno.it/milano/cronaca/2010/05/23/335505-triboniano.shtml>.

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.repubblica.it/2007/12/sezioni/cronaca/rom/sgombero-milano/sgombero-milano.html>.

<sup>12</sup> [https://milano.corriere.it/notizie/cronaca/10\\_settembre\\_17/campo-nomadi-triboniano-1703781416548.shtml](https://milano.corriere.it/notizie/cronaca/10_settembre_17/campo-nomadi-triboniano-1703781416548.shtml)

The street that separates St. Leonard and the new smart-and-green District, the old and the new neighbourhood, is commonly described as “a wall”, “a boundary”.

*An ethnography of residential neighbourhoods in a financialised urban economy*

According with the seminal work of Henri Lefebvre (1974), social space is a social product. The way in which capitalist mode of production produces space not only influences the space itself but also everyday life, perceptions, and social practices of citizens. The production of space relies on a complex entanglement of practices, representations and conflicts between the dominant and the dominated. Lefebvre suggests analysing social space as the result of three levels (or 'moments'): the space conceived by dominant social groups that create representations of space; the space perceived daily by individuals in a society that produces a specific spatial practice; the space experienced through the representations of the inhabitants – from images and symbols to cultures and philosophical speculations – namely the space of representations.

Considered as a social product, each epoch and civilisation produce a specific social space with its own characteristics. According to Lefebvre, “if space is produced, if there is a productive process, then we are dealing with *history* [italics in the original text]” (Ivi, 46). A new production process of space-that-become-history is not caused by the causal chain of historical events, the sequence of ideals and new law or of socio-economic structures or institution (explicitly called “superstructures” by Lefebvre). Rather, the most decisive elements in the new production of space are the contradictions in social relations of production and the resulting transformation of modes of production, i.e. the combination of forces of production (for Lefebvre composed of nature, labour and the organisation of labour, technology and knowledge) and relations of production. The French philosopher warns that a new production of space occurs not only at the establishment of a new mode of production, but also in the transition between different modes. Although transformations of modes necessarily imply a change in the production of space, a mode of production should never be regarded as “a finished whole, or closed system” (Ivi, 46-47).

The underlying hypothesis of this research work is that an ethnographic exploration of two neighbourhoods - one under development and the other extensively built - can offer an interesting perspective to observe how several transformations in forms, actors and domains of capitalist production of value in the contemporary cities have consequences also on the production of urban residential space. In my interpretation, this process should be firstly linked to the spatial reorganisation of the city in relation to the global political economy, in terms of never fully completed

transition from the system of production and social regulation associated with Fordism (see e.g. Harvey 1989, chap. 8) to neoliberal financial capitalism (see e.g. Gallino 2011).

This research investigates the process of construction and transfer of new population in the District considered as a possible paradigm of a residential urban development in the context of a financialized economic centre of international relevance such as the city of Milan. This study focuses on the actors, practices and atmospheres in and around the District area. Investigating these processes with an ethnographic approach and from a sociological perspective allows to reconstruct some qualitative aspects that are still scarcely investigated. Specifically, opening up the black box of the District makes it possible to understand how an urban project designed completely from scratch by some specific actors and oriented towards the market becomes urban space, and how and why it attracts population. Moreover, this approach allows to analyse two aspects that seem less investigated in the international scientific literature and that can contribute to the debate on urban studies in Italy.

First, this approach reveals the local specificities behind the District project. Although this project explicitly follows models already in place in cities such as New York and Paris, its history is deeply intertwined with actors and urban development models related to the city of Milan. As will be illustrated during the research, the functioning of the District as an attractive product is based on place-making strategies involving civil society actors, the support of banking foundations and the strength of financialised actors. Several authors have emphasised how the transformations in neighbourhood policies and the role assumed by the so-called third sector organisations have constituted two fundamental aspects for understanding the processes of urban change in the city of Milan (e.g. Tricarico and Pacchi 2019; Citroni and Coppola 2021; Coppola and Lucciarini 2023). Others emphasised that the Lombardy model of financialization of social housing production constitutes a specific strategy in this field, within social housing policies (Belotti and Caselli 2016; Fontana and Larena 2017; Belotti 2021a; Belotti and Arbaci 2021). Direct participation in initiatives in the District makes it possible to see how these projects work in practice and to hypothesise a model of urban regeneration that could become the standard in the city of Milan.

Secondly, a qualitative approach focusing on the new inhabitants of the District and their relationship with the old neighbourhood of St. Leonard, across the street, can be useful to analyse the motivations of the buyers and frame the actors in a sociological perspective. In fact, the analysis of this phase of the neighbourhood's development shows that the District's new residents are a rather homogeneous population, beyond the (also considerable) differences in entry prices in the free market, affordable housing and social housing. The new residents of the District bought houses in this area primarily making an economic and strategic assessment. However, the project contains within it a number of distinctive elements that attract new citizens. This something extra consists of a combination of

historical upper-middle class suburban values (e.g. the importance of family intimacy in a healthy environment) and new sensibilities related to technological innovation and environmental sustainability. I have called this plus *smart-and-green urban imaginary* and attempted to show its importance for buyers. As I will show in the central chapters of this work, smart-and-green is an unbalanced expression, because it equates two elements that do not have the same value for the new inhabitants of the District. While the technology in the District has certainly attracted citizens interested in home automation, data control rooms and apps for exclusive services, the real spearhead of the operation lies in the park and the energy efficiency of the houses. However, my analytical proposal is not to consider the smart-and-green urban imaginary only as an urban space valorisation strategy, but also as an atmosphere and outcome of a specific social design. The developer worked very carefully on the design of the park and the staging of the District's community centre activities. He hired specialised staff and focused on children's activities, quality food, theatre and live music, and keywords such as inclusiveness and environmental sustainability. However, the company completely controls the activities of the community centre, of which it is the sole owner. The district manager carefully selects his stakeholders and opposes cultural products that are incompatible with his proposal, such as football matches and trap music. The district is protected by a 24-hour private security service and some inhabitants dream of being able to close the park to non-residents. The District describes itself as an inclusive space open to all, but certain segments of the urban population are almost completely absent. Paradoxically, these segments are abundantly present right across the street in St. Leonard's: elderly people over 75, non-Italian migrant families in economic hardship, young teenagers bored in the parks of a dormitory neighbourhood. The populations of these two spaces observe each other with mixed feelings and some prejudice due to mutual reputation. Almost all the people I met in this research agree that the road separating the two neighbourhoods is an invisible barrier that is difficult to cross.

The ambiguous relations between the District and the surrounding area and the interesting differences that can be glimpsed between these two spaces are the reasons why I have dedicated part of this work to St. Leonard, an area of the larger neighbourhood called Gal. From a planning perspective, the Gal and the District have several similarities. First, these urban projects are both designed from scratch by a defined group of actors. Second, the projects are designed to have a specifically residential function, include a lot of green space and neighbourhood services. Third, the key architectural element of both projects is the large tower or line building, an apartment block that can accommodate dozens of families, and green spaces. However, St. Leonard is also one of the largest public housing projects ever built in Italy after World War II. As I will try to show in the last two chapters of this work, St. Leonard still seems to show traces of the history of the Fordist system of social regulation

of which it was a social product. I took advantage of the possibility of being able to observe at a distance of one hundred metres the conditions of two urban developments so close in physical space and so distant in time. However, to observe some differences, but also to highlight the political consequences of the rise of a smart-and-green urbanism dedicated to a specific population.

However, the ethnographic exploration in St. Leonard's also allowed me to observe the political consequences of urban policies dedicated to the rise of smart-and-green urbanism for specific sectors of the urban population. In the field of critical studies about relation between neoliberalism and space, Peck and Tickell (2002) call “roll-back and roll-out neoliberalism” two mechanisms of territorialization in reference to the logics of governmentality, first analysed by Michael Foucault in the late 1970s (2007 [1977-1978]; 2008 [1978-1979]). The authors refer to “roll-back” as the process of active deregulation of the market and dismantling of the welfare state that was dominant in the 1980s. On the contrary, they define “roll-out” as the process of actively producing a new conception of the state and public regulation. In more general terms, the “roll-out” phase concerns not only purely institutional transformations but is centred on a radical process of production of subjectivity and the development of a new political rationality (Lemke 2001; Dardot and Laval 2009; Brown 2015). Transposing this analytical distinction to contemporary economical and urban development in Milan, this work highlights the social consequences of the general dismantling of urban policies for segments of population less performing in contemporary capitalism and the emergence of new neighbourhood dedicated to workers in high value-added service economies. While the public housing city is gradually abandoned, stigmatized, or directly destroyed, the new financialized and smart-and-green city is rising.

In St. Leonard, we will know Karl and Lisa, the two gatekeepers of this research. Karl is a young man born and raised in the neighbourhood. Since his teenage years, he has experienced the student political movements and struggle collectives. Proudly communist (and proudly Milanese), he has never shared some of the movement's choices and has chosen a strategy that combines participation in political parties and institutions, associationism, and “street level activities” to pursue his ideas. Karl is the founder of a voluntary association and the president of a self-managed football team. He also plays an important role in the ultras group that follows the team, *the Gal Goodfellas*. The ultras group is not officially politicised and attracts many boys from the neighbourhood. However, many people in the curve come from a left-wing background and the rival ultras group is frequented by representatives of the city's neo-fascist groups. During my research period, I followed many matches, home and away. The boys' bar became a regular place, where I got to meet people of the neighbourhood and to be able to experience what Karl once described to me as “a sincere, genuine place”. For me, Karl also represented certain aspects of “Milanese spirit”: the self-confidence, a

problem-solving-oriented pragmatism, the idea of living in an important city where things happen and move in a more accelerated way than in the rest of Italy. According to the latter conception, Milan is a city that teaches how to live and those who were born and raised there can teach others how things should be done “in a proper way”. I coined an ironical expression for this attitude, borrowed from the practice of so-called “mansplaining”: *milanosplaining*, people from Milan that explain something that you probably know as well or maybe even better.

Lisa is a young woman with a different story. Born into an Apulian family in the province of Benevento, she moved to Milan in the 2006. Lisa is a competent, intelligent, and responsive social worker. During my fieldwork, she was the general manager of a project dedicated to assisting and promoting activities for the elderly. The project headquarters was under my apartment: a room on the ground floor of a building in the social housing belt between my house and the smart-and-green district. I spent long time with Lisa: I helped her and the other workers by carrying out what in the strange lexicon of the Italian third sector is defined as “local facilitator”, or I simply reviewed my notes using the space as a small office. In her work, Lisa was very good at building a network in a territory she had never experienced. Her communication skills and ability to adapt to the context made her a trusted person in the neighbourhood. Thanks to her, I have been able to get to know and interview people who are hard to find. However, Lisa no longer works in the neighbourhood. The progressive deterioration of working conditions in the last stage of the project convinced her to change cooperative and work for a social programme closer to home. Beyond her ever-smiling appearance, Lisa has two young children and experiences the most common drama of young parents in Milan: finding a bigger house in the most expensive housing markets in Southern Europe.

The neighbourhood where Lisa has been living for about fifteen years is a paradigmatic example: a former industrial and working-class periphery experiencing gentrification, where prices have increased by 44% on sales per square metre in less than ten years.

During my research, I followed Lisa and Karl in their social work for the neighbourhood and tried to understand what social fragilities could be glimpsed in an area with better economic indicators than most Milanese suburbs. Three aspects seemed relevant: the impoverishment of part of the population and the worsening of living conditions after the covid 19 crisis; the social fragmentation linked to conflicts between generations, the old Italian migrant population and the new non-Italian one; the progressive difficulty of the new generations in entering the labour market and becoming homeowners, with the risk of expulsion from the neighbourhood. The future of the area will not be independent from the transformations triggered by the District and the construction of MIND innovation centre.

The next sections of this introduction will be focused to the discussion of three topics that have been chosen in relation to the specificity of the case study.

The first section will be devoted to the *process of financialization* and specifically to the process of financialization of real estate and urban development. The District offers the opportunity to explore a neighbourhood being built from scratch and financed indirectly by one of the most important banks in Italy. The bank not only progressively took control of the listed company that designed the entire project, but also financed other actors in the area. The social housing projects are financed by a REIMF (*Real Estate Investment Mutual Fund*), specialised in this operation. Italian REIMF's investment in social rental housing can be interpreted as a specific Italian case of "financialization 2.0" (Wijburg, Aalbers, and Heeg 2018).

The second section will be dedicated to smart-and-green urbanism as urban policies growingly adopted or proposed in different urban context. The marketing strategies of the neighbourhood is centred around sustainability and technology: the District is sold as "the smartest and greenest district in Italy". Smart and green urban policies are at the centre of contemporary urban planning, of which they constitute a form of new orthodoxy (Connolly 2019). Supported by an inclusive rhetoric and spread all over the world, these policies can generate further inequality and trigger new processes of value extraction. Moreover, the technological and green city constitutes a powerful urban imaginary that represents a city ambiguously free of conflict and unregulated uses of space. Thirdly, the analysis of the District's citizens socio-economic trajectories shows several patterns of homogeneity in educational credentials and work sectors. At the same time, part of the interviewees shows a specific focus on security and the protection of common areas. In particular, the issue of the possible closure and privatisation of the public park and the desire to become independent from the educational institutions in the "old quarter" of St. Leonard's is particularly felt. Moreover, this neighbourhood is surveilled by private police in every common area. Urban studies on residential neighbourhoods have often associated these aspects with the model of gated community. According to Blakely and Snyder (1997), gated communities are:

"residential areas with restricted access in which normally public spaces are privatised. They are security developments with designated perimeters, usually walls or fences, and controlled entrances that are intended to prevent penetration by non-residents. They include new developments and older areas retrofitted with gates and fences, and they are found from the inner cities to the exurbs and from the richest neighbourhoods to the poorest." (2)

As observed by Roitman (2010), studies on gated communities emerged in the 1990s in correspondence with the global growth of these segregation models, especially on the American continent. As we will see later in this introduction, the critical literature on this topic has produced

some relevant innovations. On the one hand, scholars have proposed some interesting model of the ways in which class-and-status based groups give rise to forms of self-segregation. On the other, other authors have emphasised how contemporary forms of urban segregation are characterised more by ambiguity than by clear-cut separation.

The aim of the research is not only to analyse a specific case, but to generate a critical reflection on the directions and contradictions of the contemporary city and to anticipate some future prospects. As we will see in this exploration, the topic of urban futures is not only a social imaginary but a terrain of political conflict around the right to the city (Lefebvre 1968; Harvey 2003) and right to live outside the oppressing atmosphere of “capitalist realism” (Fisher 2009). The topics will be related to the specificities of the city of Milan, in order to outline some fundamental elements to understand the broader research context.

### *Financialization: the capitalization of the city*

The twelve months of my fieldwork, from July 2021 to July 2022, were marked by the recovery of the financial markets after the covid 19 crisis but the emergence of new uncertainties. According to international financial commentators, 2022 was a year of big drops in the markets<sup>13</sup>. After a rebound in the global economy in autumn 2021, 2022 was characterised by a sharp fall. The MSCI all country world index of stocks lost a fifth of its value, the worst performance in more than ten years<sup>14</sup>. According to the data stock collector *macrotrends*, which brings together data on the financial trends of all companies listed on US stock exchanges, the first five companies lost more than 36% of their share value on average<sup>15</sup>. The Bank of Italy summarizes the main factors for this instability in its latest Financial Stability Report 2022:

“The economic cycle was impacted by a combination of factors that will continue to affect activity in the coming months: high inflation and restrictive monetary policy in many jurisdictions; energy and food supply difficulties linked to the protracted conflict in Ukraine and exacerbated by the drought; the slowdown in growth in China due to measures to contain the pandemic and the crisis in the real estate sector; and the strengthening of the dollar, which is tightening financial conditions against a backdrop of increased market uncertainty and volatility” (7, translation by the author).

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<sup>13</sup><https://www.theguardian.com/business/2022/dec/30/inflation-tech-plunge-crypto-global-stock-markets-2022-shares-bonds-interest-rates>.

<sup>14</sup><https://www.msci.com/our-solutions/indexes/acwi>.

<sup>15</sup><https://www.macrotrends.net/stocks/stock-screener>.



The effects of inflation and energy crisis directly affect the population. In December 2022, the European Central Bank announces a rise in interest rates to slow down inflation. Again, the outcome of the rise in the cost of money are affecting prices of goods and variable-rate mortgages. The direct connection between the cost of living and the cost of money is one of the consequences of the *financialization*.

This process is at the centre of a critical literature from different disciplinary field: economics, geography, political science, interdisciplinary approach. Mader, Mertens and Van der Zwan (2020) observe that number of annually published journal articles on financialization has quadruple since 2010, from about 80 to more than 400. To map the vast archipelago of definitions of the financialization process, Van der Zwan (2014) proposes a taxonomy based on levels of analysis: macro, meso and micro.

Macro-level definitions refer to transformation of capitalist accumulation or changes in macroeconomic aggregates, often in relation with state/market dichotomy. This approach emphasises how financialization can be seen as a *new regime of accumulation*. In this framework, financialization could be defined as “a pattern of accumulation in which profits accrue primarily through financial channels rather than through trade and commodity production” (Krippner 2005, 174). Different indicators show this change. For example, financial assets held by institutional investors as a percentage of GDP grew rapidly in all OECD countries and represent more than 200% in countries like US and United Kingdom, increasing threefold (US) to tenfold (France) between 1980 and 2001 (see Deutschmann 2011, 353-355). According to Bank for International Settlement data (2008, cited in Serfati 2009) the global market for all derivative instruments “increased by a factor of 6 to \$1,285 trillion” (19). As noted by Gallino (2011) this value corresponded to 21,4 times the global year GDP. Scholars of the new regime of accumulation approach presents financialization as a political project “linked to the global spread of neoliberalism and the hegemony of the USA” (Van der Zwan 2014, 105). Brenner (2003) and Konings (2008) emphasise how the United States used financialization to counter a possible crisis of hegemony and to impose the globalisation of financial markets on favourable terms. Following this argument, an important interpretation in relationship between financialization and hegemony, interpreted as *a recurring process* in the history of capitalistic powers, relies on the work of Giovanni Arrighi (1994). According to Arrighi, the history of capitalism is substantially based on recurring systemic cycles of accumulation, leaded by a hegemonic power (i.e. a territorial state) that dominates the world market. Each cycle is composed by two phases. In the first phase, accumulation is based on material expansion: profits are related with commodities. In the second phase, the saturation of the market and growing competition trigger a switch to financial capital: profits are generated mainly by financial services and speculations. As observed by Robinson

(2011) “Arrighi follows Braudel, and departs from the classical Marxist account, in situating finance capital not as a particular twentieth-century stage in the development of world capitalism, but a recurrent, cyclical phenomenon dating back at least to the thirteenth-century Italian city-states” (7). However, this phase is interpreted by Arrighi as “a sign of autumn” and precedes a period of systemic chaos and finally leads to a *hegemonic transition*. One hegemony comes to an end while another is emerging.

Meso-level definitions emphasise how nonfinancial companies have changed their relationship with the financial markets and how management culture has shifted by absorbing the imperative of maximising shareholder value. Since the 1990s, generating value for shareholders has become a key lesson in new management and business schools (Boyer 2005). This conception relies on the principal-agency theory, proposed by financial economists to contrast the supposed lack of guarantee for investor in corporate strategies. It suggested to act in a twofold way: to promote shareholder activism and to introduce a performance-based executive compensation. The new orientation in management culture has led companies to favour “leveraged buyouts, stock repurchases, mergers, and acquisitions over long-term profitability or firm survival” (Aalbers 2019, 7). Scholars in this field (e.g. Crotty 2003; Lapavistas and Powell 2013) underline as the boundaries between financial and nonfinancial firms have become more blurred: increasingly monetary flows are directed to the financial sector from nonfinancial firm, that on the contrary derives profits from financial activity. The financial sector itself has been profoundly transformed, according to the so-called *financial services revolution* (Aalbers 2019, 6). This process is linked to a twofold process: the explosion of nonbanking financial institutions (e.g. pensions funds and mortgage companies) as lenders and financial operators, and the growing importance of financial activity for banks. Specifically, the latter have experienced a far-reaching transformation in the core business, centred on leveraging and charging fees. The leverage has allowed investors (e.g. speculative funds) to acquire borrowed capital in amounts exceeding many times their own capital. Bank’s revenues are increasingly linked to interest on this type of lent capital. In this framework, Orhangazi (2008) defines financialization as a set of processes that “designate the changes that haven taken place in the relationship between the non-financial corporate section and financial markets” (864). Again, this transformation has been interpreted as a political project of domination, more centred on class struggle than embedded in geopolitical hegemony. Indeed, the continuous production of shareholder value is directly linked to social inequality. The continuous restructuring of companies, constantly under market supervision, is often focused on maximising the surplus value extracted from the workforce through worsening working conditions and layoffs (see Lazonick and O’Sullivan 2000). At the same time, corporate CEOs have become the best paid positions in the world (Lin and Tomaskovic-Devey 2013).

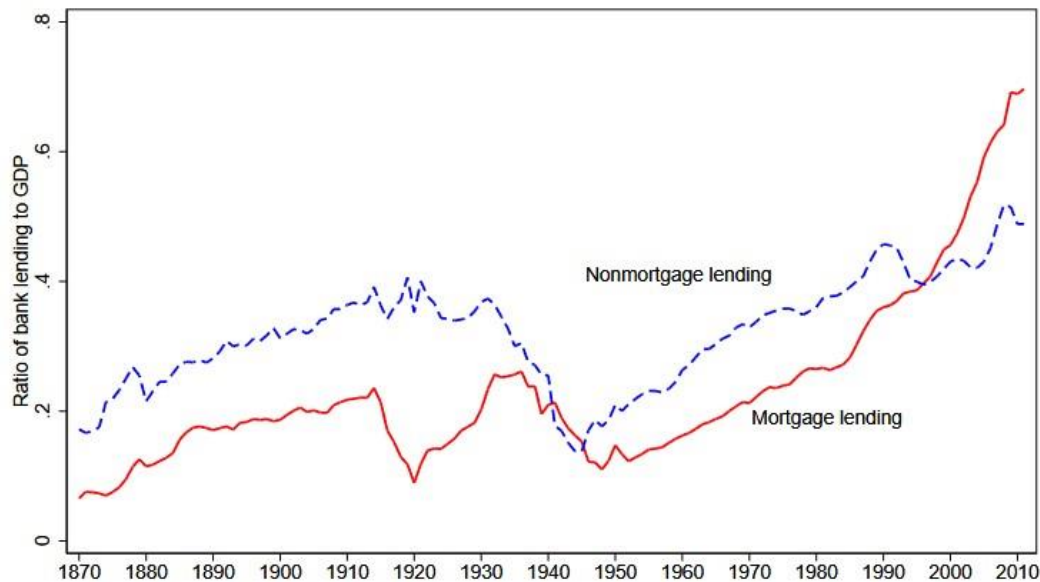
Finally, micro-level definitions emphasize the transition of finance into daily life. This process mainly assumes two forms: the increasing concrete use of financial devices in the management of the resources of individuals and households, and the spread of financial logic as a key principle for social action. In this framework, Langley (2009) underlines the growing relevance of financial arrangements in the resource management of families and individuals, while Martin (2002) defines financialization as a process that “insinuates an orientation towards accounting and risk management into all domains of life” (43). As noted by Langley (Langley 2020), this level of analysis is particularly influenced by the post-structural theorisations of power produced by Foucault and Deleuze. Specifically, several scholars have emphasised the existence of a nexus between finance and security around a common need: confronting an uncertain future (Boy, Burgess, and Leander 2011). In this framework, financial logics and techniques can be seen as part of a specific regime of neo-liberal governmentality, in which techniques of self-government through financialization take place in a context of market individualisation and deregulation. Scholars of this aspect of the process focus on forms of “popular finance” such as pension plans, home mortgages and other mass products (e.g. Waine 2006). more strictly Foucauldian research works focus on the production of subjectivity as the “investing subject” (Aitken 2007) and stressing the dimension of individual responsibility and calculative self-discipline inherent to discourse about financial education.

This research investigates the relationship between transformations of forms, actors and domains of the capitalist valorisation process and the production of urban space as a social product, in the specific context of a large residential project included in a development plan that comprises a shopping mall and an innovation centre. The rise of financial capitalism has strongly conditioned this kind of operation, in terms of the so-called *financialization of real estate*.

This expression defines a growing interdependence between finance and real estate, which can be defined as the “real estate-finance nexus”. In this condition “real estate became dominant on the balance sheets of household (the property as an asset and the debt as a liability) and financial institutions (the loans as an asset that enable banks to borrow more on the liability side), thereby altering the power relations and conditioning behaviour” (Aalbers, Fernandez, and Wijburg 2020). To analyse this process, it is possible to divide the domain of real estate financialization into two macro-areas.

The first areas focuses on the *financialization of housing* and corresponds to the exponential growth of mortgage debt and the financialization of the mortgage market (Aalbers 2016). As observed by Jordà, Schularick and Taylor (2014) in a study dedicated to 17 selected advanced economy, the ratio of mortgage-lending-to-gdp has grown dramatically between 1870 and 2010, with a specific surge between 1980 and 2010 (see graph. 1). In the same period, the volume of bank credit relative to gross

domestic product (GDP) increased from 62% in 1980 to 118% in 2010. At the same time, the US federal government pushed not only to shift the axis of lenders to non-depository institutions but also to securitise mortgages, de-regulating and re-regulating the mortgage market starting from the early nineties (Gotham 2006; 2009; Langley 2006).



Graph 1. Bank credit to the domestic economy, 1870–2011, with a comparison of data from three different sources: Average ratio to GDP by year for 17 countries (source: Jordà et al. 2014, 8)

The mortgage securitisation process has allowed the creation of a secondary market in which portfolios of mortgage-backed securities can be traded anywhere in the world. From the United States, techniques and processes for transforming mortgages into financial products spread to Europe (see e.g. Wainwright 2009; 2015). This transformation is particularly relevant because it contributes to a fundamental effect of the rise of financial capitalism, namely the production and generalisation of debt as a cornerstone of the system. According to Lazzarato (2013):

“The creditor/debtor relationship introduces a major discontinuity in the history of capitalism. For the first time since capitalism has existed, it is no longer the capital/labour relationship that is at the centre of economic, social and political life. In thirty years of financialization, the wage, from being an independent variable of the system, has been transformed into an adjustment variable (always downward for wages and upward for flexibility and working time)”. (10)

Garcia Lamarca and Kaika (2016) analyse how the mortgage mechanism plays a fundamental role in the financialization of both housing (to the extent that the housing market is increasingly dependent on financial resources) and the life of the inhabitant. As noted by the authors, the financialization of

everyday life passes through debt for a restructuring of the relationship between capital, life, and labour (see also French and Kneale 2012). This transformation creates form of “mortgaged lives” and particularly humiliating forms of domination in the case of households first drawn into the financial market before the 2008 crisis and then subjected to the pressures of the banks financial crunch afterwards. One of the most common explanations behind the triggering of the global financial crisis was precisely the use of high-risk loans granted under financially fragile conditions and forms of predatory lending that directly targeted the exploitation of vulnerable creditors (Aalbers 2008).

In Italy, Law 218 of 1990 triggered a radical reorganisation of the banking sector, with the transformation of public-law institutions into joint-stock companies with banking foundations as the main shareholders. The process of European integration accelerated the liberalisation of financial services leading to greater penetration of foreign banks into the Italian market and the creation of a market consistent with the European project, which in turn increased competition for mortgages by lowering average interest rates and facilitating credit (Filandri and Pauli 2018). As observed by Filandri, Olagnero and Semi (2020), Italian housing policies are characterised by the apparent paradox of a high rate of home ownership and the permanence of conditions of deprivation. The outcome of these policies is that they have kept the supply of rented houses low and the supply of sales high, partly channelling household savings into bank credit (see Ivi, chap. 4). Like many other European and non-European countries, the Italian government has actively facilitated housing access policies to promote the creation of the so-called “homeowners society”, a political and strategic objective of modern Western societies (Ronald 2008; Filandri 2015; Di Felicianantonio and Aalbers 2018). If these processes have increased mortgage debt among Italian households, several analyses have indicated how the distribution of these debts has become more concentrated among those with more than one house and more resources cumulatively (Dagnes 2010; 2018). Moreover, the reduction in access to credit following the 2008 crisis focused only on certain segments of the population, particularly young people and workers from non-EU countries (Felici, Manzoli, and Pico 2012).

While bank and non-bank lenders in major Western countries reduced their exposure to mortgage debt in the years after 2008, the overall financial sector introduced new strategies to extract value from housing, focalising on rental housing market. This process is connected with the numerical growth and importance of *Real Estate Investment Trusts* (REIT) in the sector. These players are companies, tending to be listed on the stock exchange, which operate in the real estate sector by investing in assets that guarantee a steady stream of income. Thus, investors can buy shares in this trust and secure a stable return without having to acquire real estate themselves. Wijburg, Aalbers, and Heeg (2018) emphasise the entry of these actors into the rental market sector as a strategy called *financialization 2.0*. This expression refers to a specific investment strategy focusing on housing as a

less remunerative investment in relation with retail and directional offices, but less risky in times of uncertainty. The case study proposed by the authors show the strategy of REITs in Germany, where many public housing companies have been privatised since reunification (see tab. 2).

Company structure	Social housing company	Private equity and hedge funds	Listed real estate companies/REITs
<i>Characteristics</i>			
Principal activity	Providing affordable housing for low- and moderate-income households	Buying low and selling high	Managing and maintaining income-producing real estate assets
Debt structure	Fiscal and financial subsidies, bank loans	Low equity and high debt, often through offshore finance (highly leveraged)	Capital markets and offshore finance
Profit versus risks	Non-profit, long-term	High risks, high profits, short-term	Medium profits, low to medium risks, long-term

Table 2. Transformation in investment strategies of listed real estate companies in Germany (source: Wijburg et al. 2018, 1104)

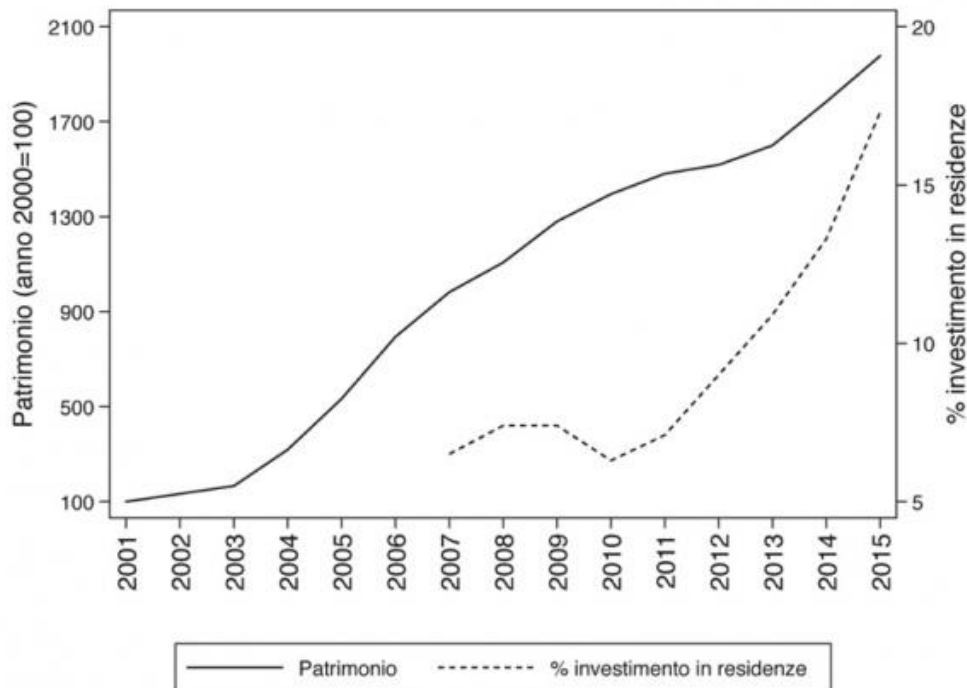
For the purposes of this research, an important insight from the analysis is that the financialization 2.0 strategy, as far as it focuses on steady streams of income and not pure speculation, implies an increased involvement of financial actors in the socio-spatial dynamics present in the areas they own or in which they have relevant economic interests. In the case of Vonovia in Elting:

“the company has entered into a public–private partnership with the City of Essen and other stakeholders to develop the neighbourhood by investing in the modernisation of the housing units. As such, Vonovia adopts a gentrification strategy to enhance the real estate values by gaming the system of rental housing regulations” (Ivi, 1108).

The emergence of REIT activity has often been associated with negative effects in terms of gentrification and the risk of displacement for the old tenant, under a new regime related to “financialized landlords” (August and Walks 2018; Chilton et al. 2018). In some cases, the rise of REITs has been seen as a specific post-crisis strategy for the management of toxic real estate assets and an excessive factor in exacerbating urban socio-spatial inequalities (Waldron 2018; García-Lamarca 2021).

In Italy, real estate funds have grown enormously from less than 50 in the early 2000s to over 250 in 2015. This increase is the second factor, besides access to credit, that has influenced the rise of national real estate prices. As can be observed, the increase in residential investment coincides with

the progressive interest in housing of real estate funds on a global scale (see graph.1; Filandri and Pauli 2018, 89).



Graph 2. REIF in Italy from 2001 to 2015 (source: Filandri e Pauli 2018; Assogestioni 2000-2015 data)

If Italy presents data confirming the international trend in the growth of REIFs in the rental market, the Italian case also presents a specific case: the financialization of social rent through the indirect participation of state financial institutions (Belotti and Caselli 2016; Fontana and Larena 2017; Caselli and Rucco 2018; Belotti 2021b; 2021a).

Belotti divides this process into three phases:

1. The opening of housing to governance, with on the one hand the end of the policy linked to public plans and the disengagement of the central government and on the other the emergence of complex contracts and the role of the European Union in remote governance operations.
2. The marketisation of social housing and the emergence of a local laboratory after the reform of Title V of the Italian Constitution on regional autonomies, the Lombardy Region. Particularly important in these developments is the transition to a new planning instrument, the PGT (*Piano di Governo del Territorio*). This plan anticipated the national legislative redefinition of social housing as a general economic interest. Subsequently, new fees and

regimes were introduced to encourage the liberalisation of the sector. In this phase, the role of regional actors emerged: the regional government, the non-profit sector and banking foundations. The region's most important foundation was instrumental in setting up the first fund focused on social housing.

3. The financialisation of social housing through the channelling and coordination activities of a financial institution of the Italian state, linked to postal savings, and the development of a national fund system – a financial infrastructures – for the entry of private actors in social housing. This institution was not only the creator and coordinator of the fund system, but created the fund that acted as an incentive for private initiative. Actors and forms of this operation will be discussed in more detail in the first chapter (see ch. 1).

The second macro-area focuses on the financialization of urban development in terms of the interest of financialised actors for more comprehensive urban development interventions related to the creation of commercial spaces and business services. This branch of financialization has been developing since the 1970s in the US and has gradually established itself first in European global cities and then also in smaller centres since the late 1990s (Allen and Pryke 1994; Rutland 2010). Here again, the key players are both banks as lending institutions but especially REIF, which in some large redevelopment projects in Europe have been directly created by the national government (Wijburg 2019). The financialization of urban development particularly fits the analyses of the nexus between capitalism and urbanisation, theorised in Harvey's pioneering studies (Harvey 1985). Real estate plays a key role as a store of value and as acting as a spatial fix for endemic states of capitalist over-accumulation. In this framework, the absorption of capital by real estate is a defining characteristic of what Aalber and Fernandez refer to as a “real-estate driven regime of accumulation” (2016, 73).

The city of Milan is a particularly important case study of the process of financialization of urban development in Italy. In the last ten years, two major financialised urban regeneration projects have affected two central areas of the city: the intervention on Porta Nuova and City Life (Conte and Anselmi 2022). As noted by the authors, the city's urban policies constitute an exemplary case of “urban growth through large-scale regeneration” and political openness to the increasing financialization of urban development. The transformation of these areas has created new political coalitions between financialised actors and local governments, with the establishment of a regime of real estate valorisation and development that can be defined as a “financialized growth machine” (Anselmi and Vicari 2020, 106). Conte and Anselmi's analysis suggest that there is a progressive and



general shift in the urban governance of the city, in order to attract new investors and ensure that they remain permanently involved in the urban development of the city. As the mega-projects in the city grow, so does the presence of national and international real estate funds, and local headquarters of leading global value-producing players (e.g. Samsung and Microsoft).

Moreover, Milan is an interesting case for looking at financialization because it has a relatively less important market than cities like London and Paris, but it seems to be on the rise and is being watched by international investors for its financial performance. A recent report produced by UBS bank (2022) highlights these perceived qualities using an index that calculates the risk of a real estate bubble bursting in 25 “global cities” (see fig. 4-5). Milan is among the four cities considered to be least affected by mispricing in a European market that especially in the north, except Warsaw, seems to be very risky. Read in reverse, this report can be interpreted as a ranking of cities where prices can rise without sudden collapses, in other words where there is a possible and relatively safe space for valorisation. This kind of market attracts speculative investors with a short-term attitude, but it is also very attractive for those looking for investments with not high, but steady and relatively safe returns.

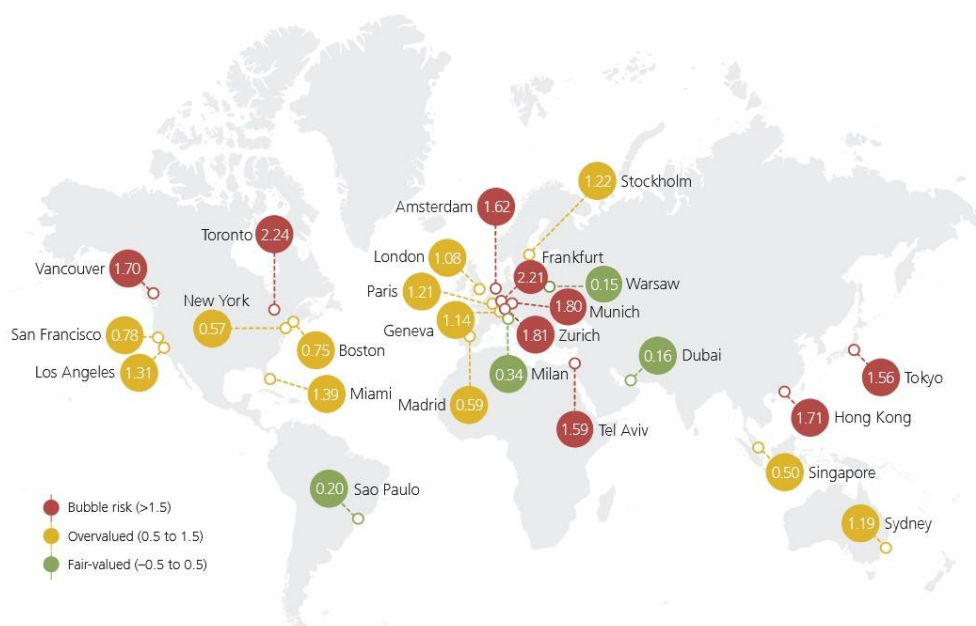
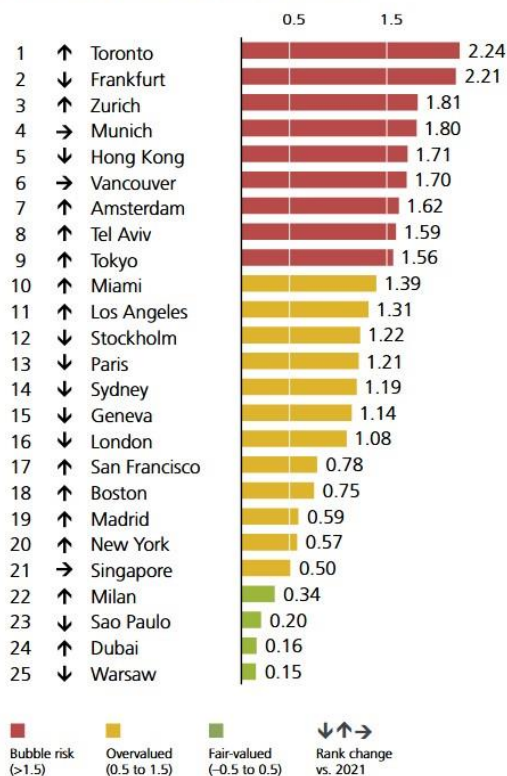


Figure 4. The geographical representation of the 25 cities observed by UBS to compose the real estate bubble risk index. (source: UBS Global Real Estate Bubble Index 2022)

## UBS Global Real Estate Bubble Index

Index scores for the housing markets of select cities, 2022



The index is constructed on some statistics that show very explicitly the socio-political construction of the data and the representation of urban society for this type of actors. For example, one indicator shows the number of years a skilled service worker needs to work to be able to buy 60 square meters flat near the city centre. Considering a skilled worker working in the service sector as the average citizen of the city already offers a specific representation of which kind of subject the city should be accessible to.

One interviewee, a long-time activist in a research-action group focused on urban change, describes this process in terms of transformations in the geography of city power:

Figure 5. The ranking of cities according to the UBS index. (source: UBS Global Real Estate Bubble Index 2022)

“I start from a fact that partly describes Milan. Two years ago or one year ago Blackstone bought real estate in Milan from a fund, real estate values - portions or entire properties - for a countervalue, if I remember correctly, of one billion and 300 million euros. These properties, or rather the partners of the fund who owned these properties - because the fund managed the properties on behalf of the owners - this owners, therefore those who sold, had surnames that, let’s say so, reminded us so much of the film “Fantozzi ” and therefore the Countess Serbelloni Mazzanti Vien dal Mare... in the sense that they all had at least two surnames, right? Fumagalli Carulli, Borromeo... in short, the historical rich families of the bourgeoisie, in the non-noble sense, a non-noble aristocracy, because Milan does not have a noble aristocracy unlike Turin or Rome... it has the rich and bourgeois aristocracy, secular even perhaps or Catholic... historical [...] there is a rich Milanese bourgeoisie that has survived over the years but is certainly increasingly marginal in determining the conditions of the city. The old players have almost all disappeared, the Cabassi family has survived in part, the Gabetti family in part, and the Bonomi family in part, but even they have much less weight. Inevitably, the power of the large industrial groups has diminished, the Falck and Pirelli families, and of course they are all still within the various financial conglomerates, newspapers, banks, but they have not... perhaps the only subjects that have had a certain continuity is the Cariplo Foundation, because it is a rich foundation, and the insurance world, especially the insurance industry, and Generali was present in Milan... and then the others are no longer the Ligresti, the Zunino, all these subjects that had dictated the law in Milanese real estate even up to fifteen years ago, are no longer there... in the meantime new subjects have emerged.”

The ability to attract financial capital is part of a broader economic context that makes Milan *the capital of Italian capitalism*. Bonomi (2012), building on Ranci and Torri (2007), identifies three distinct periods in the history of Milan's economic development:

1. The deindustrialisation years of the 1970s and 1980s, in which the city “detached itself from the history and narrative of the old industrial triangle” (17). In these years, the fashion, communication, and entertainment economy contributed to the opening of a new cycle of accumulation and the absorption of unemployment.
2. The completion of the tertiary transition in the 1990s and the relocation of the manufacturing sector “from the province to the region, to the entire North” (18). While finance and highly qualified strategic services remain within the city boundaries, the city grows in relation to a “network of new small and medium-sized centralities”, it becomes an “infinite city”. A huge production platform develops in this area, where “Fordism and district logic have merged with each other” (Ibidem). Milan assumes a central role in the creation of tertiary functions at the service of manufacturing and new forms of commerce hybridised with entertainment.
3. The internationalisation of the 2010s. The city became “a gateway linking the production platforms of the Po Valley megalopolis with the global markets [...] enhancing on the international arena its most valuable intangible asset, the historical heritage of a city in the middle between continental Europe and the Mediterranean, namely its long networks” (18-19).

Milan is considered as a global city “in the middle”: “deeply inserted in the communication flows and networks that structure the world economy, but at the same time still deeply rooted in the productive and geographical milieu of the north of the country” (19).

Moreover, the city is the business centre and the connecting space with global networks of a relevant “territorial platform” (Bonomi 2021) that runs along two axes: from Milan to Bologna and from Milan to Treviso. This area constitutes the new Italian production triangle in the northeast (towards Germany, the first importer of Italian manufacturing) that replaced the historical industrial Fordist triangle between Milan, Turin, and Genoa in the northwest. The ability of the city to remain central in the productive transformations of European capitalism and in Italy's economic geography has resulted in a level of income, employment and attractiveness that is incomparable to the rest of the country, a gap that has increased due to the process of capital centralisation and the acceleration of financial capitalism over the last fifteen years.

At the same time, Milan is *the Italian capital of inequality*. According to Faccini e Ranzini (2022), building from Assolombarda report (2019), one third of the city's wealth is held by the 9% of population and the average income in Milan's richest district (Brera-Castello, 100,489 euro per year) is five times higher than the poorest (Quarto Oggiaro 18,926 euro per year). Inequality has its focal point in the housing sector. The first results of the forthcoming report 2023 produced by the new Polytechnic's *Osservatorio Casa Affordable* (OCA) shows that the average purchase values outside the historic centre exceed 5000 euro per square metre for new homes/energy class A and B, 4000 euros for used homes in good condition and 3000 euros for used homes in need of renovation<sup>16</sup>. In this condition, OCA calculates that a person with a net salary of 1500 euros per month (a quarter of the population of Milan, with a 20-year mortgage) can afford to buy 18 square metres, 24 square metres and 31 square metres.

Moreover, Milan has a very low percentage of rental property stock, with only 29% compared to 70% in Brussels and 60% in Paris. This housing shortage is particularly acute in public housing. In this sector, the most recent real estate developments involve less than 1000 houses for public housing as opposed to more than 4000 for the private market. In the last 25 years, the city has lost more than 25,500 public housing units through selling-off. At the same time, more than 25,000 families were waiting for public housing in 2018.

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<sup>16</sup> See the long interview with Massimo Bricocoli from OCA available at the link: <https://www.cclcerchicasa.it/osservatorio-casa-affordable-mostra-laltro-lato-della-medaglia-milano-e-citta-sempre-piu-esclusiva-ed-escludente/>

*Smart-and-green: inequality, valorisation and imaginaries in the contemporary cities*

As mentioned in the first part of this introduction, an important part of the District's marketing strategy is based on the use of technology (e.g. domotics, neighbourhood app), high-energy class of buildings and the presence of the park as a green amenity available to residents. Over the past two decades, technology and environmental sustainability have assumed a central role in urban development processes and are at the centre of a vast critical literature coming not only from the multifaceted strand of urban studies, but also from approaches like science and technology studies, surveillance studies, political ecology, environmental justice.

As a starting point, it may be useful to emphasise that both concepts emerged in the context of the debate about *sustainable urban development*, an "urban spin-off" of the more general discussion about sustainable economic development. In the last century, the prodromes of this discussion and the geo-political orientation of the problem can be traced back to the research reports on resource scarcity commissioned by the US government at the beginning of the Cold War and the subsequent debates (see Krueger, Freytag, and Mössner 2019, 1–23)<sup>17</sup>. The US administration needed a comprehensive assessment of the resources available for defence and to meet the demand of western countries after the Second World War. In 1951, the US Congress appointed a commission, the Paley Commission, to estimate the resources needed until 1975. Two elements emerged in the final report that would return in later elaborations on sustainable development: the centrality of controlling existing resources to avoid moments of absolute scarcity and the importance of technological development to save or differentiate resources. The control of global resources became a key issue in US foreign policy. The US administration pursued this objective in two ways: on the one hand, it began mapping resources and interfered directly with local governments to gain an advantageous position, if not hegemony (e.g. copper in Chile, gold in South Africa, oil in the Middle East). On the other hand, it played a central role in the creation of actors such as the World Bank and the World Trade Organisation, specifically oriented to promote international economic development programmes for the so-called "third world".

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<sup>17</sup> As noted by the authors, the problem of the relationship between the human economy and natural resources was first posed in the late 18th and early 19th century, a fundamental period in the formation of the modern state. Population growth and the beginning of the process of industrialisation led various scholars between economics, philosophy and human sciences to address the problem in terms of scarcity and growth. Malthus book "Essay on Populations" (1798) is the first work to consider the unequal growth of population and natural resources, suggesting tight state control over population to prevent uncontrolled reproduction. Significantly, Malthus believed that control measures should focus on the poor, because the poor have no income to preserve after marriage, unlike the rich. Furthermore, Malthus did not believe in the possibility that technological change could affect the number and variety of resources needed to sustain the population.

The term “sustainable development” was first coined by the International Union of Conservation of Natural Resources in terms of species and biodiversity conservation. In 1987, the Brundtland Report, produced by the United Nations, is the first text to promote an idea of economic development that considers the link between economy, environment and society as central. The sustainability of development is directly linked to issues such as social justice and the future:

“A world in which poverty and inequity are endemic will always be prone to ecological and other crises. Sustainable development meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs”. (8)

The policy proposals contained in the report were central to the development agenda drawn up by the 1992 Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro. The summit was a particularly important event due to the number of participating nations and its political significance in the year of the “end of history” (Fukuyama 1992): with the fall of the Soviet Union, the earth became a universal good to be protected for the future of all. The participants adopted a series of measures that took the name “Agenda 21” and followed the guidelines of the Brundtland Report.

As Isenhour, McDonogh and Checker (2015) note:

“Consistent with neoliberal practices and ideas that devolved responsibility away from federal governments, Agenda 21 emphasized the role of “local authorities” in creating policies, regulations, and infrastructure that would advance sustainable goals [...] As sustainability discourse grew in popularity, neoliberal ideas also achieved prominence, solidifying into a range of policies that would restructure economies and governance in cities, states, and nations throughout the globe. In addition to favoring local – rather than national – governance, neoliberalism also promulgated the idea that if left to prosper unfettered, market-based economies would not only “lift all boats” (i.e., benefit all citizens) but also regulate themselves. From this perspective, the role of government should be to promote private economic development and allow the market itself to resolve the ecological and social concerns raised by the Brundtland Report”. (7)

The Habitat conferences of 1996, organised by the United Nations, confirmed this direction. But it is the Kyoto Protocol agreement (1997) that brings about fundamental innovations in the relationship between the environment and the market. Indeed, the Kyoto Protocol provides for the creation of an emissions credit market as a strategy to counter the climate crisis. This creates a connection between financial markets and carbon credits, which are traded through three regulatory mechanisms: *Emission Trading*, *Clean Development Mechanism* and *Joint Implementation*. The process of financialization of carbon credits can be seen as an example of the way in which “the work of financialization” is carried out (Chiapello 2019). This expression refers to an approach to the study of financialization that focuses on the practices and techniques that are implemented by actors to build

a new financial circuit. According to the author, financialization needs a preliminary work to function that consists of three operations (Chiapello 2020, 85):

1. *Problematization*: operations through which things and activities are redefined as questions of investment, which requires categorizing and interpreting the world using the words and perspectives of an investor.
2. *Tangibilization*: operations through which ideas, expectations or promises to take on an existence enabling them to be included in accounts or contracts.
3. *Financial structuring*: operations which organize monetary flows, such that the doors are open to money managed by profit-seeking financial investors. Private finance professionals play two roles in these circuits: either they act as professional service providers who receive fees for managing them (as fund managers) and servicing them (as accountants, lawyers or consultants); or they act as the target financial investors who are to be attracted and convinced to invest.

CO2 emissions become the subject of a recasting operation in which permits, and emission credits are transformed into a financially viable product, materialised into contracts and traded in a market regulated by specific mechanisms, instruments and certifications.

As discussed by Leonardi (2017), the emergence of the green economy is to be contextualised within the transformations of capitalism after the crisis of Fordism, in which, alongside the emergence of cognitive capitalism (Vercellone 2006), the productive becoming of social reproduction and the “metamorphosis of the composition of capital” (Hardt and Negri 2010, 137–55), financialization plays an essential role.

Along with these international policy-making and regulation cycles and structural capitalist transformation, smart and green urbanism is also the product of an urban planning culture known as the “urban sustainability movement” or “smart growth”, which emerged in the 1990s. This movement claimed for a more environmentally sustainable, more compact and more equitable city and was linked to the demands of grassroots movements. As Connolly (2019) notes, the “smart sustainable resilient city” has become a form of “contemporary planning orthodoxy” that has incorporated a disproportionate use of Jane Jacobs’s thinking and can lead to urban development that neglects the issue of social justice<sup>18</sup>.

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<sup>18</sup> We will return to Jane Jacobs’ theories later in this paper, because the American author is an important reference in the work of Marie, the district manager hired by the developer to develop public initiatives in the neighbourhood.

In this framework, we can define smart and green urban policies as measures aimed at limiting the most devastating aspects of urban development: land consumption, pollution, excessive consumption of resources. These measures include the *use of IC technologies* (smart) and *urban greening* (green). Smart urbanism and the more general concept of “smart city” has acquired significant relevance in urban policies also through the work of organisations such as *Smart City Stakeholders Platform* and programmes such as *Horizon 2020* and *Urban Innovative Action*, as well as a myriad of European and trans-European partnerships and programme agreements. According to the research paper of Giffinger, Fertner, Kramar and Kalasek (2007), we can distinguish six distinct characteristics able to compose a multifaceted definition of smart city, synthesized by Vanolo (Vanolo 2014, 887):

1. *Smart economy*: an aspect which the authors link to a spirit of innovation, entrepreneurialism, flexibility of the labour market, integration in the international market and the ability to transform.
2. *Smart mobility*: referred to local and supra-local accessibility, availability of ICTs, modern, sustainable and safe transport systems.
3. *Smart governance*: related to participation in decision-making processes, transparency of governance systems, availability of public services and quality of political strategies.
4. *Smart environment*: understood in terms of attractiveness of natural conditions, lack of pollution and sustainable management of resources.
5. *Smart living*: involving the quality of life, imagined and measured in terms of availability of cultural and educational services, tourist attractions, social cohesion, healthy environment, personal safety and housing.
6. *Smart people*: linked to the level of qualification of human and social capital, flexibility, creativity, tolerance, cosmopolitanism and participation in public life.

Besides the urban agenda mentioned above (e.g. smart growth, agenda 21), the smart city discourse incorporates the concept of intelligent city: a profound restructuring of urban space in relation to the use of ICT infrastructures and digital technologies. The latter aspect relates to the possibility of developing large databases of data, the famous “big data”, to provide “much more sophisticated, wider-scale, finer-grained, real-time understanding and control of urbanity” (Kitchin 2014, 3). For this reason, the smart city is also interpreted as a form of *data-driven networked urbanism* (Kitchin 2015). The city is imagined as an infrastructure of infrastructures that can be governed through a *control room*, a room in which flows can be visualised and spaces and times in the city can be controlled. In this way, the topic of technology as a means of making the distribution of resources



more efficient and the problem of control return after being posited by the Paley Commission in the 1950s. In recent years, this “totalitarian” version of the smart city has hybridised extensively with policies and imagery related to the sustainable city, making more difficult to draw a clear distinction (see e.g. Angelidou et al. 2018; Bibri and Krogstie 2017).

Green urbanism is more directly related to the developments in the sustainability debates mentioned above. In addition to limiting the most unsustainable effects of urban development in a future seen as growingly urbanised, the green urban agenda is promoted in particular to address the problematic inheritance of industrial modernity. As in the case of the smart city, the actors involved in the promotion, definition and implementation of green policies go far beyond international policy makers. They range from private foundations and consultancy agencies to non-profit associations and cooperatives. According to the report on municipal international policy trends and strategies for greening elaborated by BCNUEJ Lab (2018), greening activities can be defined as “initiatives involving the physical manifestation of green or natural spaces as well as public spaces that promote some of the same functions of relaxation, recreation, interaction and socialisation” (12). In this definition are included “planning initiatives and projects oriented toward the production, restoration, and renovation of the following green spaces, urban natural preserves, and green infrastructure” (Ibidem). Examples of green spaces are municipal parks and greened public square, green promenades and greenway, waterfronts, community gardens, greened utility corridors, urban wetlands. Specifically, we can observe several different strategies adopted by cities in western countries (see Ivi, 17-30). For example:

1. *Greening as tool for improving individual and public health*: this strategy focuses on the well-documented connection between nature and not only physical, but also psychological and social benefits (see e.g. Triguero-Mas et al. 2015). Cities that have adopted this perspective have created or improved green spaces at daily transit routes to relevant destinations and have promoted uses targeted at vulnerable groups, such as the elderly.
2. *Greening as downtown or economic development strategy*: this strategy focuses on greening as a means of economic revaluation, tourism and new residents attraction in historical industrial or deteriorated downtown. This process differs between Europe and the US due to the different historical urban stratification. However, several international studies have highlighted the connection between greening and rising property values (e.g. Conway et al. 2010), open green spaces and willingness to pay more housing investment (e.g. Brander and Koetse 2011).

3. *Greening as a tool for socially vulnerable neighbourhoods*: this strategy focuses on providing new green spaces as a form of social investment for vulnerable neighbourhoods. The lower-income segment of the population has historically had less access to quality green spaces (Dahmann et al. 2010) and less power to decide on their own territory in terms of the distribution and location of environmental pollution (see e.g. Walker 2009). Critical literature has emphasised how this and previous strategies expose the inner city and peripheral areas to potential processes of gentrification and expulsion from the neighbourhood (Dooling 2009; Quastel 2009; Gould and Lewis 2017).
4. *Greening as solution for post-industrial clean-up and redevelopment*: this strategy focuses on the development of new green areas to reclaim polluted former industrial areas and brownfield land. Again, the redevelopment of these areas is seen as an economic opportunity and the greening as a qualifying asset and an increase in the quality of life.
5. *Greening as tool for climate preparedness and resilience*: this strategy focuses on the use of green spaces as critical infrastructure that can increase urban resilience in the context of climate change and hydrogeological risk. For example, new blue-way and floodable green public spaces can improve rainwater drainage. These measures have become an important tool in engineering and urban design (see e.g. Mees et al. 2013) but can have long-term social impacts and increase inequalities (Anguelovski et al. 2016).
6. *Greening as ecosystem restoration and nature preservation strategy*: this strategy focuses on promoting green spaces to mitigate air pollution, sequester carbon emission or attenuate heat island. It is based on the long-term and wide-ranging positive effects of ecosystem and ecological services, including in socio-cultural terms (Elmqvist et al. 2015).

After having reconstructed the historical-political origin and strictly operational aspects of these policies, we now focus on three relevant macro dimensions.

First, smart and green urbanism can be seen *as strategies of value extraction and attraction of capital*. Critical smart city studies have emphasised in different ways how this set of policies and discourses constitutes a neoliberal construction. Scholars have focused on the process of privatisation of public services that is inherent in the cooptation of large hi-tech companies within the city's infrastructure (Lombardi and Vanolo 2015). New opportunities for profit are provided not only by public procurement, but also by data extraction. As proposed by Zuboff (2015; 2019) data-driven capitalism can be interpreted as a new regime of accumulation based on surveillance. By surveillance is meant here not the strictly security aspect, but the unprecedented ability to track and influence individual behaviour by subjecting it to strategic marketing processes. In this framework, hi-tech companies not

only assume the role of service providers but enter urban governance as value extractor equipped with powerful instruments of influencing. Moreover, scholars have emphasised the key role of IBM and Cisco in the production and circulation of the smart city discourse (e.g. Klauser, Paasche, and Söderström 2014). Datta (2015) shows how actors specialised in smart urbanisation programmes conceive the production of urban space directly as an entrepreneurial activity. Analyses on Masdar City and Songdo, the first smart-and-green city models developed between 2008 and 2014, show how market logic dominates urban space by creating a fragmented and anti-ecological urbanism (e.g. Halpern and Günel 2017; Cugurullo 2018). In terms of policy implementation, the smart city guidelines and “grey literature” emphasises business-oriented urban development in the same way that it emphasises the technological aspect (Hollands 2008). Together with green growth, discourses on the smart-led economy grew after the 2008 crisis, providing a policy boost (McCann 2013) in a context of austerity.

While smart urban policies are often caught between vague proposals and incomplete realisations, urban greening operations are at the centre of numerous redevelopment projects where green not only attracts capital but produces value. Investors, municipalities, and privileged residents are indeed able to identify potential forms of *green rent gaps* in spaces targeted by green development (Anguelovski et al. 2019; Smith 1987). In particular, the residential development dynamics have been conceptualised as an *urban green grabbing triangle* (García-Lamarca et al. 2022, 7, see fig. 6).

The triangle has the analytical aim of showing the dynamics created in gentrifying neighbourhoods from the point of view of the dominant actors: financial lenders, developers, high-end buyers and renters. According to the authors, the process of “value creation” is linked to two interconnected processes. The first is a process of appropriation of surplus value “from the productive labour-nature relationship through which urban green amenities are built”. Especially when this green infrastructure is created with public funds, part of the value generated by the municipality is appropriated by investors and developers. The second process is a process of rent extraction:

“Urban greening produces differential rent—additional rent created by the increase in utility of a particular plot of land—which developers extract via higher property prices. A green rent gap, in other words, is seized through higher prices charged to consumers and investors solely due to owning a building located next to a green amenity. Consumers and investors will in return be able to extract further rent as gentrification consolidates. State-driven greening strategies oftentimes generate the very possibility and conditions for developers to extract rent, as neighbourhoods that have suffered neglect and underinvestment for decades are targeting for greening” (Ibidem)

In addition, developers use urban greening as a guarantee of value for financial actors investing in the project and as a valuable asset for buyers. In this way, the positive effects of greening on health

and social relations are appropriated by citizens with higher incomes, social capital and socio-economic status.

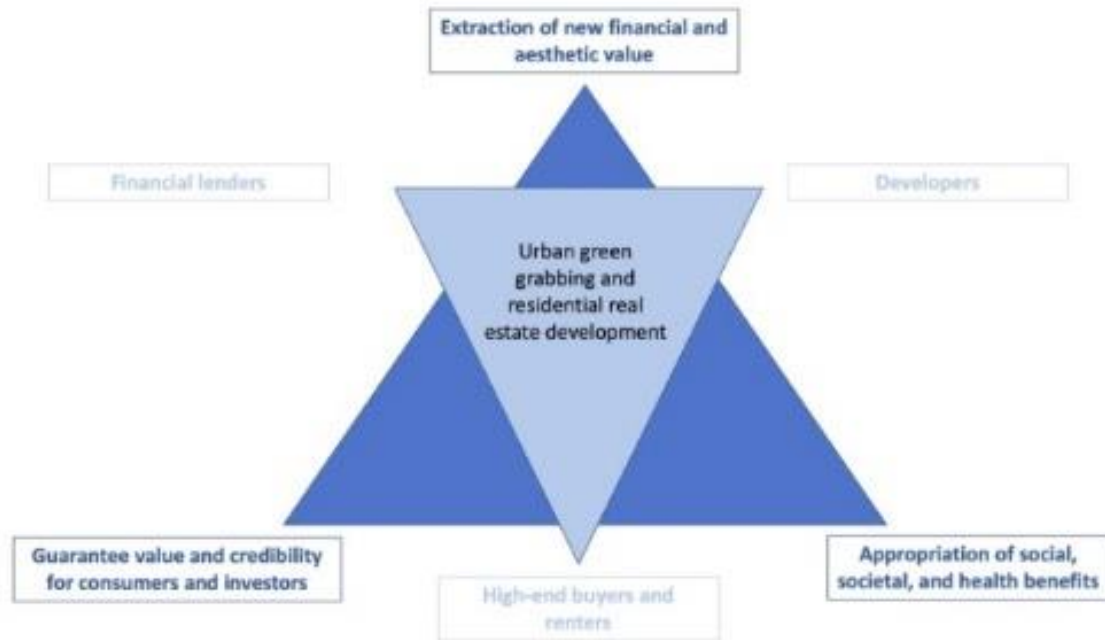


Figure 6. The urban green grabbing triangle: residential developer dynamics in Global North green gentrifying neighbourhoods (source: Garcia-Lamarca et al. 2022, 7).

This element relates to the second critical dimension of smart and green urbanism: despite a rhetoric focused on inclusivity, these policies seem to *produce and reproduce inequality and social injustice*. A specific line of research has highlighted how green urban policies have triggered *new processes of gentrification* (Quastel 2009; Dooling 2009). Dooling defines green gentrification as “the implementation of an environmental planning agenda related to public green spaces that leads to the exclusion of the most economically vulnerable human population while exposing an environmental ethic” (630). Specifically, Gould and Lewis (2017) consider green gentrification as “a subset of urban gentrification” (23) starting with an urban greening creation or restoration initiatives:

“In green gentrification, existing and potential environmental amenities price out the current group of residents and draw in a wealthier group. The displaced become a new form of “environmental refugee” who are forced to flee from enhanced environmental improvements which increase quality of life and property values simultaneously. In many instances, such green-led redevelopment is intentional, as investors and public officials create new or renewed green spaces as a means to raise property values and tax revenues” (24)

In this framework, urban greening initiatives that improve the environmental quality of marginalised neighbourhoods can become spaces of exclusion for the resident population, i.e. new form of green LULUs (locally unwanted land use) (Anguelovski 2016)<sup>19</sup>. New green spaces turn in “disruptive green landscapes” in which underprivileged residents experience unwelcomeness, higher control, loss of community cohesion (Triguero-Mas et al. 2021). At the same time, upper class citizens benefit environmental privilege: disproportionate access to green spaces, healthy homes, more efficient waste services (Park and Pellow 2011).

This process occurs in a context where the distribution of environmental goods is often unequal according to status, income levels and ethnicity prevailing in neighbourhoods (see e.g. Heynen, Perkins, and Roy 2006). This inequality is politically criticised in terms of environmental justice: the political principle that social groups should be able to access and have control over environmental resources (Bullard and Wright 1990; Bullard 1993). In this framework, the social position in terms of status, education, class, race and gender should be reconnected to the position each person occupies within the socio-ecological system. Other researchers have related green urban policies to the perpetuation of inequalities due to the urbanisation process itself, in terms of critique of sustainable urbanism and “urbanisation of nature” (Heynen, Kaika, and Swyngedouw 2006). This conception refers to “the process through which all manner of natures is socially mobilized, economically incorporated (commodified), and physically metabolized/transformed in order to support the urbanization process” (Swyngedouw and Kaika 2014, 3). The focus from the city to the urbanisation process is due to the influence of planetary urbanisation theory (Brenner e Schmid 2015; Schmid 2018). According to this theory, the urbanisation consists in a dynamic process of *implosion/explosion*. This concept refers to “the production and continual transformation of an industrialized urban fabric in which centres of agglomeration and their operational landscapes are woven together in mutually transformative ways while being co-articulated into a worldwide capitalist system” (Brenner 2014, 17). While the old mercantile and pre-capitalist city loses its functions in the centre (implosion), the city expands into the external territory forming an increasingly integrated logistical network and outsourcing some central functions (explosion). The city as a distinct socio-spatial entity loses its boundaries and the urban becomes a global and dynamic condition: there is no longer an outside of the urban. Even nature is incorporated into the urban: the urbanisation process exploits ecological systems and natural resources even far away from its points of agglomeration. All this generates or increases inequality. Indeed, planetary urbanisation is a

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<sup>19</sup> Locally unwanted land use is the traditional expression to define waste sites, refineries, and other contaminating industries within environmental justice studies.

political process: it creates centrality and peripheralisation, linked to unequal access to natural resources and social wealth. In this framework, sustainable urbanisation is an oxymoron.

The pro-growth agenda can be linked to the logic by which local municipalities, corporations and residents develop *green growth coalitions*, resulting in *green growth machines* (see e.g. Gould and Lewis 2017, 34-36). Developed from the urban growth machine model proposed by Logan and Molotch (1987), the green growth machine model highlights how instead of radically discussing urbanisation and urban development in terms of social justice, actors perceive urban greening as a win-win-win strategy.

Criticism of smart urban policies focused on social injustice in different ways. Some scholars have pointed out, through ethnographic research, how a line of continuity between the geography of digitization and the spatial configuration of urban inequality can be observed (e.g. Antenucci 2019). Other approaches focus on the study of the smart city starting from the diffusion of monitoring and surveillance technologies in the spaces of the intelligent city. This is the contribution of surveillance studies, in which the smart city is criticized as a place devoted to control and surveillance (Murakami Wood and Mackinnon 2019; Lippert and Murakami Wood 2012). In this framework, technological development has led to unprecedented possibilities for monitoring and tracking in urban and digital space, with unequal outcomes in terms of social profiling (see also Sadowski 2020, chap. 7). In this regard, several reports underline how the use of tools such as facial recognition, technological sensors and predictive policing tools have experienced a global development, partly independent of the different levels of economic development (e.g. Feldstein 2019).

From a Foucauldian perspective, Vanolo (2014) defines smart city as a *new disciplinary strategy* for the cities, a city that must transform itself and citizens to attract investment and human capital, function efficiently, promote equity and inclusiveness, and save resources. In this way, inequality is focused on the competition between cities and the massive use of benchmarking as a neoliberal practice of measuring the status of cities. This process puts citizens in the position of being “weak subjects” (Vanolo 2016), through a possible transformation in a passive sense of political citizenship and in a context of policies that have seemed partly post-human (Visser 2019). In this sense, smart policies seem to incorporate a kind of return to order for undisciplined cities (Cuppini 2020) and a logical neo-positivism according to which reality is perfectly measurable, scientifically knowable, and therefore controllable (Greenfield 2017).

The themes of power and citizenship in the city of the future reconnect with the third dimension: the smart-and-green city as an *urban imaginary* and forms of *experimental urbanism*.

Urban imaginaries are a complex set of representations, visions and cultural objects produced in and about cities. Urban imaginaries link cities and the human mind, influence our interpretation of what

we see and hear, but also how we should behave. They generate “a set of meanings about cities that arise in a specific historical and cultural space” (Zukin et al. 1998, 629). In part, urban imaginaries are atmospheres: something perceptible, but not measurable. Simmel’s (2013 [1903]) classic work on the life of the spirit in the metropolis is one of the first texts to analyse the relationship between the city, modernity and the human mind. For Simmel, the city is the place where there is an “intensification of nervous life” to which man responds by adopting an intellectualistic character as a means of defence. Intellectualism is opposed to the sentimentalistic attitude and is understood as a rational but cynical attitude. It is seen as deeply connected to the monetary economy, based on the calculation of mutual interests and not on mutual knowledge. The blasé attitude is the result of this combination of the operations of the human mind and urban economics. It indicates a general indifference to external stimuli, a widespread scepticism. Hyper-stimulated, the human mind ends up feeling nothing, particularly the difference between things. To the blasé individual “everything appears uniformly coloured, grey, dull, incapable of arousing preference. But this state is the faithful subjective reflection of the monetary economy when it has succeeded in penetrating all the way through” (6).

Kevin Lynch (1960) is the first author to attempt to systematically explore the role of imagination in the experience of the city (see Lindner and Meissner 2019, chap. 1). Lynch elaborates a theory of urban planning animated by the desire to construct a legible image of the city. Urban chaos is to be reordered according to structuring and coherent elements. According to him, the role of the urban planner must be to “shape the city for sensory enjoyment” (2). Lynch’s conception of urban planning encourages a top-down, totalising approach. In this perspective, modern master planner can and must organise the city into a predefined grammar.

Urban imaginaries are closely related to transformations in the economy and society. Contemporary imaginaries are not only influenced by phenomena such as neoliberal globalisation and the dizzying growth of ICTs, but also by crises and catastrophes that marked the beginning of the 21st century. At the same time, they are not just representations: they produce real and tangible social effects, shaping the expectations and desires of the city’s inhabitants and tourists. These can differ considerably, because cities are partly fantasy spaces that contain dimensions beyond the representable (Vanolo 2016; Thrift 2008). Moreover, urban imaginaries can reproduce existing socio-spatial conditions and reinforce them: for example, the stigmatised imaginary of the “ghetto” can worsen conflicts in a socially vulnerable neighbourhood. In this sense, the symbolic power of imaginaries can directly influence social change in urban space by influencing “real” (in the materialist sense of “economically objective”) processes of growth and decline (Zukin et al. 1998).

Urban imaginaries play a central role in the definition of a *politics of urban imagination* (Lindner and Meissner 2019). “Politics” is understood here as the process of “making sense” of the socio-spatial conditions that surround us, according to the theories of Rancière (Rancière 2009 [2000]) According to Rancière, aesthetics describes the process of “making sense of a sense given” (Ivi, 1). The act of making sense involves “what is seen and what can be said about it, around who has the ability to see and the talent to speak, around the properties of spaces and the possibilities of time” (Ivi, 13). At the same time, urban imaginaries are also related to the concept of “post-politics” in the terms discussed by Swyngedouw and Wilson (Swyngedouw 2011; Wilson and Swyngedouw 2014). This concept describes the way in which political issues concerning the deeper aspects of living together become issues to be administered through the simple game of institutional regulation. In this framework, focusing on shared images and meanings in the city becomes relevant, as far as it is possible to see which subjectivities, issues and visions are included or excluded from representation.

In general, urban imaginaries often have to do with visions of the future and urban future-ing practices. Contemporary smart-and-sustainable urban imaginaries tend to incorporate salvific visions in reaction to catastrophic futures. The smart city has also been defined for this as a socio-technical imaginary, i.e. “collectively held, institutionally stabilised, and publicly performed visions of desirable futures, animated by shared understandings of forms of social life and social order attainable through, and supportive of, advances in science and technology” (Jasanoff 2015, 6). The solutions of science and technology will help cities cope with the insecurity of the future: the consequences of urbanisation, the competition of fiscal austerity and climate catastrophe. In this key, cities need technology both for a better future and to better control themselves. Therefore, the smart city imaginary is “both reactionary and visionary” (Sadowski and Bendor 2019). Cugurullo (Cugurullo 2021) analyses the history of the smart city and eco-city as forms of experimental urbanism, in which urban imaginaries and theories of urban society merge. Experimental urbanism refers to the development of an alternative model to try to address the problems of unsustainability in cities. This literature tends to focus on the search for an urban equation: a set of factors that can generate positive effects for the city and its inhabitants. This theme is related to the ideal city:

“In the context of the ideal-city phenomenon, the word ideal has a double meaning with only a tenuous connection to aesthetics. Ideal as an adjective referring to the best and most desirable city and, most importantly, ideal as a set of ideas of society and politics, upon which the genesis of the city is based” (10).

The idea of building ideal cities to constitute ideal societies combines urban imagery and social imagery. Developed from the Renaissance to modernity (e.g. Howard’s Garden City, see Fishman 1982), the history of experimental urbanism contains recurring elements (Ivi, 12-14):



1. Experimental urbanism seeks to develop alternative spatial forms, to develop alternative socio-political forms.
2. Urban experiments can be “highly subjective visions” independent from collective inquiry or public political debate.
3. The experimental form of the city should aim to eliminate what is undesirable in cities and replace it with what, for the master mind, is right, good, and desirable.
4. This result can be achieved through the application of scientific methodologies, although an experiment is by definition an event under controlled conditions. The extension into social reality is possible and controllable.

One of the hypotheses of this research is that smart-and-green urban imagery has *selective* and *exclusionary effects*. Something seems to be missing in the representations of the smart-and-green society. In particular:

1. The relationship between city and economy, politics and social history becomes marginal and loses importance in understanding the urban.
2. Unplanned uses of space and informal elements of social and economic life disappear from the representation (e.g. urban subcultures).
3. The representation of the social as an equation eliminates historical depth and consequently blocks ex-ante processes of social change.

Wachsmuth and Angelo (2018) defined urban sustainability policy from the colours of its prevailing imagery: green and grey (see fig.).

Green urban nature is the return of nature to the city in its most verdant form. It is signified by street trees and urban gardens, local food and farmers’ markets, vertical farming, and greened postindustrial landscapes. In policy it is mobilized in a range of different urban sustainability strategies that leverage self-evidently natural nature, from green walls, bioswales, and urban agriculture up to large-scale landscaping initiatives such as soft coastlines and new parks. Gray urban nature, by contrast, is the concept of social, technological urban space as already inherently sustainable. It is signified by dense urban cores, high-speed public transit, and energy-efficient buildings”. (3)

Renderings are a particularly important product in the production of smart-and-green imagery, often related to urban redevelopment and renewal plans. The rendering of the Quayside redevelopment project on Toronto’s waterfront shows some extremely common insights into smart-and-green

renderings (see fig. 7). The project was developed by Sidewalk Labs, an Alphabet Group company promoting a smart-and-green promenade for the city. The project was fiercely contested by activists in the city for its problems with privacy, surveillance and inequality: the company officially withdrew the project in 2020. The *smart-and-green rendering society* presents several characteristics:

- Absence of rubbish: waste from urban metabolism and related structures are never present in renderings.
- Absence of manual work: manual labour and manual workers are not present in the renderings.
- Never-ending summer: renderings are always set in the warm seasons and when the plants are greening.
- Urban homogeneity: improper uses (including artistic, e.g. murals) of public space are absent.



Figure 7. a rendering of the Sidewalk Lab project. (source: <https://www.sidewalklabs.com/toronto>)



Figure 8. a rendering of the District project. (source: <https://editions.fuorisalone.it/2020/it/percorso/55/uptown-district>)

In the city of Milan, real estate development plans linked to smart and green urban imagery and policies are increasingly widespread and particularly focused on residential construction. Primarily, the city is making extensive use of the “reinventing cities” call, an international call promoted by the “C40 - Cities Climate Leadership Group”, a coordination representing nearly one hundred international cities and focused on combating climate change. According to the description of the Milan municipality:

“The international programme Reinventing Cities, structured in two phases (PHASE I “Expression of Interest” and PHASE II “Final Proposals”) sees the involvement of Cities in identifying abandoned or underused publicly owned sites, ready to be valorised, and of private subjects, organised in multidisciplinary Teams, in presenting proposals for the redevelopment of sites by finding solutions to the following 10 climate challenges Energy efficiency and low-emission energy, life-cycle assessment and sustainable management of building materials, low-emission mobility, climate resilience and adaptation, green land services and green jobs, sustainable water management, sustainable waste management, biodiversity, urban reforestation and agriculture, inclusive actions, social benefits and community engagement, and innovative architecture and urban design”.

The call for tenders provides for the transfer of building rights to the winners to transform the competition sites into “examples of sustainability and resilience”.

The first two editions of reinventing cities were marked by several wins by some of the most active players in the local real estate sector, including many real estate funds. The projects involved, for example, the redevelopment of railway yards and the redevelopment of important transit sites in the



city. One example is Scalo di Greco, won by Investire SGR, the same company that developed the social housing part of the District. On a total area of 24000 square metres, 21000 will be allocated to social housing and 3000 to commercial activities, coworking and “sustainable supermarkets”. The district will be home to 400 new social housing units and 300 student beds. Another example is the redevelopment of Piazzale Loreto by LOC, Loreto Open Community, a partnership led by the Italian fund operator Ceetrus, active mainly in retail. The project will host co-working spaces and “sustainable and green architectures”, three new buildings under construction. This new green space aims to become “Nolo’s new urban business district” and is centred around a square on three levels (see fig. 10). Together with the projects related to the “reinventing cities” call, smart-and-green residential development plans are spreading in various parts of the city, such as Syre Milano, Martesana Green, Forrest in Town. The projects are very similar to those of the Districts: green cohorts, eco-sustainability, private residential and communal spaces, “exclusivity” (see fig.). Prices vary between 5000 euro and 6500 per square metre. As mentioned in the introduction, the smart-and-green city is emerging.



Figure 9. a rendering of LOC Loreto (source: <https://www.milanocittastato.it/rinasci-milano/loc-il-nuovo-piazzale-loreto-ecco-progetto-e-rendering/>)



*Figure 10. a rendering of Syre Milano (<https://www.syremilano.it/>)*

### *Residential segregation: social groups and space in the city*

The “old” and “new” neighbourhoods, which are the objects of this research, present a different social composition. The “old” neighbourhood was mainly built for the immigrant working class in Milan in the 1950s and 1960s. However, it was also inhabited by office workers, teachers and non-manual workers already in the first phase of its construction. As we will see later, this mixture of working class and non-manual workers was an important factor in the social struggles of the 1970s. The growth of the Italian economy in the 1980s and policies of selling off public housing made a large part of the population owners. The main social divide in St. Leonard is between the older generation of migrants and the new migrants of the 2000s. The latter inhabit the last genuinely public houses, are not owners and have various economic problems, partly aggravated by the covid-19 crisis. This difference also develops along colour lines: new migrants are predominantly of non-Italian origin or suffer from racialisation processes.

In contrast, most of the respondents from the smart-and-green district have permanent contracts and perceive themselves to be in a secure position in the labour market. They work in insurance, banking, large corporations, but also in public administration and hospitals. They have high educational qualifications and are predominantly young, often new families. They are largely white, skilled Italian migrants. Moreover, the neighbourhood has an ambiguous relationship between public and private space. The park, for example, is public but the administration is private: residents pay for its maintenance through condominium fees. Some residents would like not to return the park and others support the idea of restricting it to non-residents. Security in the park is managed by a private security service, which is hiring more and more staff. A control room is being built in the community centre; a model inspired by smart urban policies. Residents have mixed ideas about the assessment of St. Leonard across the street. Some fear it, others ignore it, still others appreciate it. All see themselves as something completely new.

Sociological studies of the urban population have recognised homogeneity of social positions and local micro-politics oriented towards spatial delimitation as indicators of *urban segregation*. As we have seen above, there are many ways of looking at the urban: the relationship between the city and transformations in the global political economy, the influence of urban imaginaries, the complex entanglement of ecology, justice and urban politics. In this section we will concentrate on social actors and dynamics, focusing on the relationship between social groups and urban space: a founding theme of urban sociology. This topic is at the core of the first research programmes developed in the context of the Sociology Department at the University of Chicago. This generation of researchers is part of a research tradition that will historically be called the “Chicago School”, or more precisely the “*first*

*Chicago School*". The School's researchers came from diverse backgrounds and were profoundly influenced by the incredible urban growth of the city of Chicago, which grew from about 4500 inhabitants in 1840 to over 3 million in 1930. As Semi (2006) argues "what only later came to be called the "Chicago School" is nothing more than the fortunate conjunction of certain biographical paths with the institutionalisation of sociology as an academic discipline in the United States and with the strong demand for social intervention that came from the public and private reformist milieus of the city itself" (4, translation by the author). Park and his colleagues have a conception of the city as a product of a non-programmable process, in which the drives of private interests prevent a unified vision and organisation. However, they see this as evidence of the naturalness of the urban process. For these researchers "the city is the outcome, in constant change, of the spontaneous action of individual, cultural and economic forces; hence of an independent and natural, non-political process [...] it can be said that the urban analysis of the Chicago School does not ask how the power relations between the forces in the field are" (Avallone 2015, 54, translation by the author). In this interpretative framework, studying social groups in the city means adopting an *ecological approach*, linked to human ecology. The latter is understood as "the study of the spatial and temporal relations of human beings as affected by the selective, distributive, and accommodative forces of the environment [...] these spatial relationships of human beings are the products of competition and selection, and are continuously in process of change" (McKenzie 1925, 63–64). Influenced by the botanical and ecological research, these authors believe that social groups occupy urban space according to a logic similar to that of plants. However, "the power of locomotion" (Ibidem) and communication tools enable humans to select, control and modify habitats. Urban expansion and segregation are then based on a cycle of invasion, reaction, influence. As described by Burgess (1928):

"Succession as a process has been studied and its main course charted as (1) *invasion*, beginning often as an unnoticed or gradual penetration, followed by (2) *reaction*, or the resistance mild or violent of the inhabitants of the community, ultimately resulting in (3) the *influx* of newcomers and the rapid abandonment of the area by its old-time residents, and (4) *climax* or the achievement of a new equilibrium of communal stability. Every residential community offers resistance to the intrusion of a new group of imputed inferior status whether on the basis of race, economic standing, or cultural difference" (112, cited in Avallone 2015, 3).

This dynamic of invasion and stabilisation is based on the principle of natural competition and the defence of social existence. It is neither intentional nor political: it is automatic and natural, though not programmable. The city is thus conceptualised as "a mosaic of little worlds which touch but do not interpenetrate" (Park 1915, 608). For the Chicago researchers, the concept of segregation describes the formation of these specific areas, also called "natural areas". Natural areas are

homogeneous areas defined by three factors: racial and ethnic-national affiliation, economic value and symbolic value. The first factor was particularly felt in Chicago, in a context of African American and intercontinental mass immigration. The second factor relates mainly to the differentiation of land values and the tendency of groups to concentrate according to economic position. The third has a twofold significance: symbolic value of the area and the groups inhabiting it.

Areas characterised by low symbolic and economic values often play the role of a space for the last entrants and, at the same time, the first place to be abandoned. In this sense, the most segregated areas show not only the highest levels of mobility, but also social disorganisation and instability. In particular, changes in socio-economic position seem to have the most important consequences for spatial mobility. Some research published in the late 1920s showed how the pressure towards socio-spatial differentiation on an economic basis tended to be greater than the ties of cultural commonality (e.g. Wirth 1928). Frazier (1932) showed how citizens of high social class defended their areas not only from those who were “different” in ethnic-racial terms, but also from those who were related by community of origin but of lower social class.

In conclusion, this tradition of research considers the phenomenon of segregation as an inevitable result related to the growth of the city and affecting almost only migrants. According to the evolutionary conception that influenced the researchers, segregated areas are spaces out of the ordinary in which a state of partial disorganisation and crisis of order corresponds to a future reorganisation. In this conception, segregation is a stage in the process of adaptation to the city, an organism that also develops from those who lose the competition. Inequality is naturalised and “the evolutionary and assimilationist perspective saves society and urban organisation and condemns some of its protagonists” (Avallone 2015, 12, translation by the author).

A general study on the phenomenon of segregation in contemporary cities is developed by Oberti and Prêteceille (Oberti, Prêteceille, and Milocco 2017). They emphasise the ambivalence of the term “segregation”, which indicates both the action of separating and the state of separation. On the one hand, it refers to the will to exclude, on the other hand to the idea of groups separated in space. Urban segregation can be generically defined as “the unequal distribution of social groups among the neighbourhoods of a city” (Ivi, 18; translation by the author).

Analysing segregation in a rigorous manner requires a clear overview of all neighbourhoods in a city and determining the relevant social segmentations. In the debate on urban segregation, the latter are typically two: socio-economic characteristics and ethno-racial discrimination. On this point, US and European studies show some differences. First, the racial issue is at the centre of studies on segregation in American cities, in the specific terms of the black-white dichotomy. The history of this country has profoundly influenced the use of this categorisation, also used in terms of social criticism.



In Europe, such classifications are increasingly used but with caution, even though the specific mechanisms of discrimination based on this social segmentation are widely recognised in the literature. Second, socio-economic differences are detected with income levels in the United States and in terms of social classes and/or socio-occupational status in Europe. The use of incomes is not only related to the weak relevance of the occupation classification system. It also depends on a continuist conception of the socio-economic structure “which is described by hierarchical stratification and is often reduced to a series of binary oppositions between the poor and others, or between the bottom decile and the top decile of the income distribution” (Ivi, 27; translation by the author). Instead, the use of social classes presupposes a more structured conception of society. European social class studies are the product of two traditions that regard Marx and Weber as the first fundamental references (see e.g. Abercrombie and Urry 1983; Savage et al. 2015; Bagnasco 2016). The Marxian conception of class is based on the position of individuals in the relations of production and recognises two major groups: the working class, which generates surplus value and provides wage labour, and the capitalist class, which capitalises the surplus value and reinvests the capital by retaining part of the profits. This predominantly dichotomous conception makes it difficult to grasp the intermediate figures and created problems already in the last century, in a context of increasing complexity in the organisation of labour. The Weberian conception considers class as only one of the three dimensions of social stratification. Weber distinguishes between *class*, *status* and *party*. Class is rearticulated: it is defined in relation to specific market situations in a context with multiple markets (of labour, money and goods). Class is constituted by individuals with similar market situations and common material interests. Status refers to social prestige and a specific, shared lifestyle, controlled by social restrictions and sometimes protected by legal restrictions. An extreme form of status group is that generated in the caste system. Party refers to political power, the possibility of dominating the political arena and the ability to defend interests politically. Weber’s elaboration and the related tradition of studies allows for a more detailed recognition of intermediate levels. For example, the method developed by Erikson and Goldthorpe (1992) was used to analyse segregation. A combination of stratificationist and classist elements form the basis of the Insee socio-occupational categories used in France.

Segregation is mainly analysed using two methods: the case study and statistical analysis. The former is more frequent but presents risks in heuristic and epistemological terms. In particular, the risk is that of reproducing the generalisation of stigmatising expressions widespread in the media (think “banlieue”) or of not correctly estimating the exemplariness of the case. The second uses four major sets of methods (see Oberti and Préteceille 2017, 38-56): indices, factor analysis, typologies and models. For example, indices can provide a measure of the intensity of a group in a given

neighbourhood (e.g. dissimilarity index, segregation index, isolation index). Factor analysis, on the other hand, provides a synthetic representation from variables or modes of variables through factors that summarise part of the information. It is based on factorial analysis of correspondences (or binary correspondence analysis). Factor analysis makes it possible to extract a few factors that can partially explain the variance of, for example, the spatial distribution of socio-occupational categories according to place of residence. This makes it possible to identify the degree of polarisation of the categories by reading the histogram of the values associated with the factors.

The causes of segregation are multiple. The critical debate on the subject recognises three explanatory frameworks: *voluntary exclusion* of a specific group, the result of *structural processes* triggered by social and political economic dynamics, and the cumulative effect of *individual decisions*. Within these frameworks, we can see three groups of logics: *economic*, *institutional*, *individual* (Ch. 2). The economic logics refer primarily to the structured inequality typical of the capitalist mode of production. Capitalism generates income inequality and access to housing is regulated by a market system in which house prices are determined by various factors, including location. The consequence is that “inequalities in access to the housing market result in a very precise material and symbolic hierarchisation of urban spaces” (Ivi, 59; translation by the author). However, the relationship between income and access to housing is mediated by many factors. For example, welfare regimes may mitigate or increase the impact of the income difference between actors competing in the market. Moreover, income is not the only variable that contributes to the possibility of access to housing: personal wealth and intergenerational solidarity can play a determining role. The calculation of the value of a house and/or location also depends on many factors, the weight of which varies greatly depending on the socio-demographic characteristics of the actors (e.g. young vs. elderly). Like demand, also housing supply depends on several factors, first of all the real estate production system. In the private production system, housing developers are the key actors of the system: they “record and reproduce the state of social division of space, while integrating the quantitative and qualitative transformations of demand” (Ivi, 62; translation by the author). Small developers can anticipate and accelerate the transformation of the social profile of neighbourhoods, but in relative terms. Large developers, on the other hand, can undertake far-reaching operations and significantly change the social profile of neighbourhoods, even building completely new ones with the support of public authorities. The variety and typology of housing in cities are also influenced by the prevalence of certain socio-professional categories: as Sassen (Sassen 1991) pointed out, cities where advanced tertiary functions and control of financial flows are concentrated present particularly exclusive spaces. This element may be in continuity or discontinuity with the economic and urban planning history of the city, which in turn influences the characteristics of the built-up area and its inhabitants.

Institutional logics are linked to the role of public action, which acts in several ways on urban space. First, public action finances, manages and regulates infrastructure, services and facilities that influence the attractiveness of spaces. Second, municipalities regulate the land market through urban planning instruments (e.g. land-use plan, building restrictions, etc.). Urban policies are an important element in the hierarchical structuring of urban spaces because they also regulate relevant but less obvious aspects. For example, they concern the management of land occupation, permit allocation policy and energy supply. Third, public action is central to the production of social housing and its location in the city. It may follow a policy related either to price control or to urban planning. In the first case, “projects” are built where the land has less value: this is the case of the large public housing estates that guaranteed access to housing for the lowest incomes, but also increased segregation. In the second case, social housing is built in attractive neighbourhoods. These interventions actually decrease segregation but require the public institution to have the political will and resources to intervene in an expensive market. In fact, this dichotomy presents several intermediate cases in which “social housing neighbourhoods built in spaces that were initially very devalorised but whose “urban status” has changed over time [...] the transport network and good public facilities built over the years have made them attractive, or, more generally, the growth of the city has incorporated them, enhancing their value” (Ivi, 64; translation by the author). Public intervention in social housing does not only concern the construction phase, but also the maintenance, redevelopment and eventual destruction phase. The demolition of large social housing estates is common in the United States and growing in Europe. Demolition programmes have profound effects on the social profile of the neighbourhood because they often involve relocations of population. Moreover, they have symbolic and identity consequences for those who witness the destruction of a historical part of their social emotional landscape.

Public action can also produce explicitly segregating policies. These occur especially in contexts of political regimes based on the separation of blacks and whites (e.g. South Africa during apartheid, Southern USA until the 1970s) or in situations of strong regional conflicts (e.g. Palestine, Northern Ireland). However, a policy of economic development on the territory can also produce explicit segregating effects: for example, the city of Paris has repeatedly been hit by cycles of transformation of working-class neighbourhoods and concentration of prestigious functions in the centre. These transformations have led to the systematic segregation of the working classes in the conurbation. Among development policies that are not explicitly segregating but are potentially influential, large infrastructural interventions (e.g. airports, motorways, detention centres, incinerators, universities) can influence segregation with direct, indirect and/or long-lasting effects.

Finally, individual logics concern the preferences of actors and the symbolic meanings they attribute to their place of residence. Differentiation in patterns of perception and judgement on the various dimensions of home generates differentiation in the attribution of comforts and inconveniences. In the context of segregation studies, these logics are translated into two modes: logics of convergence that produce aggregation between specific individuals and logics of distancing from a specific group. The logic of convergence refers to the tendency to prefer spaces in cohabitation with those who show shared values, practices, resources. It is based both on dynamics mediated by social class and on rational-choice search strategies that aim to obtain various advantages (social, cultural, educational) also in terms of social reproduction and distinction. The logic of distancing aims to distance from or keep away a population that is perceived as undesirable. The social construction of undesirability is complex, can change over time and is highly context dependent. In the United States, distancing has a marked racial-based characterisation. In Europe, for example, the upper middle classes tend to avoid cohabitation with poorer migrants and those in precarious and difficult housing conditions.

we will now focus on the general characteristics of residential segregation of the middle and upper classes, the most useful for this research.

Historically, the so-called research of *entre-soi* has concerned the bourgeoisie, which tends towards a very selective sociality and a specifically segregated urban lifestyle. This “historical” social class has given rise to the bourgeois quarters, typical of European cities and with an ancient urban history. These neighbourhoods can be located close to the centre but also in suburban areas, where they are distinguished from more recent urban residential developments.

An extreme and more recent form of *entre-soi* relates to model of the so-called gated communities. According to the definition of Blakely and Snyder (1997), gated communities are “residential areas with restricted access in which normally public spaces are privatised. They are security developments with designated perimeters, usually walls or fences, and controlled entrances that are intended to prevent penetration by non-residents” (2). Gated communities are not only based on fortification of space, but also on a specific legal framework, which tie the residents to a code of conduct and allow extra taxations for common services, infrastructures, rubbish collection, surveillance (Atkinson 2006). Blakely and Snyder present a general typology of gated communities, summarised by Grant and Mittelsteadt (Grant and Mittelsteadt 2004, 915 see table 2) and based on “lifestyle”, “prestige” and “security zone”.

Type	Features	Subtypes	Characteristics
Lifestyle	These projects emphasize common amenities and cater to a leisure class with shared interests; may reflect small-town nostalgia; may be urban villages, luxury villages, or resort villages.	Retirement	age-related complexes with suite of amenities and activities
		Golf and leisure	shared access to amenities for an active lifestyle
		Suburban new town	master-planned project with suite of amenities and facilities; often in the Sunbelt
Prestige	These projects reflect desire for image, privacy, and control; they focus on exclusivity over community; few shared facilities and amenities.	Enclaves of rich and famous	secured and guarded privacy to restrict access for celebrities and very wealthy; attractive locations
		Top-fifth developments	secured access for the nouveau riche; often have guards.
		Executive middle class	restricted access; usually without guards
Security zone	These projects reflect fear; involve retrofitting fences and gates on public streets; controlling access	City perch	restricted public access in inner city area to limit crime or traffic
		Suburban perch	restricted public access in inner city area to limit crime or traffic
		Barricade perch	closed access to some streets to limit through traffic

Table 3. The typology Blakely and Snyder's typology of gated community. (source: Grant and Mittelstead 2004, 915)

This model relies on *community functions*, in which “lifestyle communities attract those for whom common activities and interests prompt home choice. Prestige communities appeal to those for whom status and privacy are paramount concerns. Security zones reflect the fears of neighbourhoods in troubled cities” (Ivi, 917). The model of gated communities is historically widespread in countries with a more recent urban history and a development of capitalism less mediated by class struggle, such as South American countries and South Africa (Caldeira 2000).

Over the past two decades, new forms of residential segregation have grown in Europe. Atkinson and Blandy (2005) observe how forms of defensible space have spread through urban space according to a “continuum of gating” (178) in both material and symbolic terms.

However, this form of segregation has assumed specific aspects in the context of contemporary transformations in the relation between upper classes and city (Atkinson and Flint 2004; Forrest, Koh, and Wissink 2017).

Firstly, the European urban landscape of super-richness has been profoundly influenced by the migration of new super-rich (Webber and Burrows 2016). These nouveaux riches have not only increased competition for the most exclusive locations, but also have different preferences and patterns of international mobility. Moreover, it has been observed how the global upper classes appeared to be in a process of partial social and political withdrawal from the city, in terms of “secession of the successful”. In relation to these transformations, Atkinson and Ho (2020) identify three areas of interest in the discussion of the super-rich: secessionist movement, partial exit, time-

space trajectories of segregation. Secessionist movement refers to process in which “wealthy geographical communities become self-interested and isolated from urban public realms that they deem to offer poor-quality services and risks associated with disorder and crime” (Ivi, 293). Partial exit describes a subtle pattern of in-out engagement, in which the use of city services, forms of involvement and processes of distancing coexist. This pattern has been observed in particular for middle and upper-level managers, namely the segment below the super-rich (Andreotti, Le Galès, and Moreno Fuentes 2015). Time-space trajectories of segregation refers to exclusive pattern of mobility and privileged access to strategic resources. Exclusive car parks, preferential access to luxury shops, but also clubs and other elite institutions extend segregation outside strictly residential spaces.

The socio-spatial patterns of the middle and upper-middle classes follows a trajectory more similar to that described by Donzelot’s “three speed city” (Donzelot, Epstein, and Simoes 2009), who identifies three types of spaces/ processes, “relegation” (exclusion-stigmatization), “périurbanisation” (outer suburbanization) and gentrification. A comparative analysis between São Paulo, Rio de Janeiro and Paris (Préteceille and Cardoso 2020) showed that there is a clear difference between different segment of middle classes: upper-middle classes tends to be close to the upper class and distant from the working classes, while middle and lower-middle classes tend to be more mixed with all the others. A significant dimension linking segregation and social upgrading of neighbourhoods is the effect of residential property development expressly focused on high and upper-middle incomes (Davidson and Lees 2010; Cousin 2012; 2013). Cousin analyses patterns of spatial segregation in neighbourhoods that have been built from scratch, redefining the area through a re-foundation operation. From this analysis, he develops a fourth ideal type in relation to Donzelot’s tripartite model, which presents these qualities (see table 4):

- The space concerned by the upgrading is a working-class and industrial area now close to new business centres.
- The predominant housing type is new, homogenous, standardised multi-family buildings.
- The use of the space is predominantly residential.
- The main population consists of private sector managers and upper-class employees with predominant economic capital.
- The historical memory of the place is erased or reinvented.
- The relationship with the social mix is based on rejection.
- The local social bond represents a competitive community of destiny.
- The local conditions of identity construction follow a sequential order.
- The relationship between form and function of spaces is linear.

- The relationship of residents to mobility in the city is functional and minimised under constraints.
- The conditions of accessibility to the neighbourhood are regulated by physical barriers and sometimes fences.

Cousin develops his analysis from qualitative research in the city of Milan, in the neighbourhoods of San Felice and Milano 2. These neighbourhoods have been strongholds of the right-wing party led by Silvio Berlusconi, who has built part of his economic and political fortune by developing the Milano 2 neighbourhood in the 1970s and 1980s. The recent history of the city of Milan presents several attempts of “city within a city” oriented real estate development. One example is the Santa Giulia district, analysed by Savoldi (2010). In this case, the marketing strategy was based on efficient connections, quietness and the ability to attract prestigious facilities. However, the district did not develop as planned due to a lack of coordination between developers and promoters and serious problems with land decontamination. The smart-and-green district that is the subject of this research seems to show hybrid aspects in relation with the typology proposed by Cousin and contemporary developments in the city.

	Embourgeoisement et préservation d'un entre-soi bourgeois	Gentrification	Refondation	Sécession périurbaine
Type de quartier concerné	Communes ou quartiers bourgeois traditionnels	Anciens quartiers populaires et moyens du centre-ville ; quartiers historiques des anciennes communes populaires de proche banlieue	Anciens espaces populaires et industriels désormais à proximité des nouveaux centres d'affaires	Grande banlieue
Type d'habitat prédominant	Demeures ou immeubles anciens	Immeubles collectifs et maisons de ville réhabilités	Immeubles collectifs neufs (habitat homogène et standardisé)	Maisons individuelles neuves
Usage de l'espace	Mixte (pour les quartiers centraux) ou résidentiel (pour les communes périphériques)	Mixte	Résidentiel (essentiellement)	Résidentiel
Population principale à l'origine du processus	Bourgeoisie patrimoniale	Classes supérieures à capital culturel prédominant	Cadres du privé, classes supérieures salariées à capital économique prédominant	Classes moyennes et classes populaires stables
Rapport à la mémoire des lieux	Valorisation : accumulation de capital symbolique autour d'une « griffe spatiale » à préserver	Valorisation	Effacement et réinvention	Valorisation ou réinvention
Rapport revendiqué à la mixité sociale	Refus	Valorisation	Refus	Refus
Représentation du lien social local	Entre-soi de classe	Village urbain (sociabilité transversale et effervescente)	Communauté concurrentielle de destinée	Voisinage paisible (parce qu'homogène) visé pour lui-même
Conditions locales de construction identitaire	Perpétuation d'une conscience de classe bourgeoise	Hybridité	Ordre séquentiel	Ordre séquentiel
Relation entre forme et fonction des espaces	Négociée entre les résidents et les entreprises exploitant le capital symbolique local (pour éviter tout processus de <i>boulevardisation</i> )	Narrative	Linéaire	Négociée entre les résidents
Rapport des habitants à la mobilité dans la ville	Résidentialité urbaine avec (minimisation de la mobilité comme critère premier)	Urbanité résidentielle (choix d'habiter dans un quartier où l'on cumule/combine tous les usages de la ville)	Mobilité fonctionnelle minimisée sous contraintes	Hypermobilité contrainte
Conditions d'accessibilité au quartier	Barrières symboliques (parfois physiques)	Pas de barrières	Barrières physiques (parfois enclosure)	Isolement (parfois barrières physiques)

Table 4. The Cousin's typology of upper-class urban segregation (source: Cousin 2013, 13).



### *Research methodology and structure:*

This research project is the result of an exploratory ethnography conducted over twelve months, between September 2021 and July 2022. Swedberg (2020, 38) elaborates five types of exploratory design:

1. A version of what may be called the standard exploratory study, which has as its goal to make a first inroad into an area that is currently little known.
2. A second version of the standard exploratory study, which has as its goal the development of new hypotheses for a topic that is already known.
3. The informal exploratory study that aims at maximizing the development of new ideas.
4. The informal exploratory study/ pilot study for dissertations.
5. Exploratory studies used in student exercises, to learn theorizing.

This research adopts the second approach using ethnographic exploration with the aim of building new knowledge and new hypotheses on phenomena known in the literature, but whose presence and intensity in specific urban projects has not been analysed in Milan. Moreover, the exploratory approach is also useful for the St. Leonard neighbourhood and the Gal area, an area of the city that has not been the subject of specific sociological studies since 1979 (Pettignano 1979). From the point of view of the logics adopted, the construction of knowledge about the research area was possible using inductive logic, but also moments of abduction (Timmermans and Tavory 2012). The abductive logic, i.e. theory building from surprising research evidence, was fundamental to hypothesising some dynamics at work in the District as a result of financial logics.

In terms of research techniques, the project is based on 56 discursive interviews and the writing of field notes, referring to both naturalistic observation and participant observation (sometimes in a hybrid form between shadowing and participation). Although not very present in the following pages, the observation also extended to groups and facebook pages of the District, St. Leonard and City Hall 8. The 56 interviews are divided into 3 groups. The first group (31) consists of residents of the District. This sample was formed taking into account the number of flats presented in the district between houses in subsidised housing, subsidized housing and free-sale housing. The interviews followed a fixed outline, which changed over time on some specific issues but maintained stability. The interviews focused on the research topics: socio-biographical trajectories, value attributed to smart and green, distinctive elements of the

neighbourhood, safety, perception of the surrounding area, problems and future prospects. The second group (21) consisted of citizens and members of associations operating in St. Leonard. In this case, the interviews followed a more variable outline and with a more investigative approach, oriented towards understanding the history of the neighbourhood, the presence and extent of any processes of social change in the area, socio-economic problems, the relationship with the District and future prospects. The third group (4) consists of prominent personalities from the District's leading company, the developer, and local political actors.

The fieldwork lasted one year, including ten months directly in the research area in a house on the border between St. Leonard and the District, in a former public housing estate built in the 1970s. This street is called Pyranees Street. The names of the protagonists of this story and the main streets present invented names, both to preserve anonymity and as a stylistic choice. However, the links in the notes present more precise information on the actors with a public profile.

The empirical section of this work is organised in six chapters.

The first chapter focuses on the creation of the District and the operations that preceded its urban development: Expo 2015 and the social housing complex. Next, we will present the story of the developer and a key player in the community centre, Urban Seahorse.

The second chapter focuses on the new citizens of the District, a community of mainly smart workers embedded in Milan's urban economy. In this section, we will present the main socio-economic characteristics and socio-living trajectories that these actors have in common.

The third chapter focuses on analysing the distinctive factors of the District's value proposition: the neighbourhood park, the energy class of the buildings and smart technologies. These elements play a central role in making the project attractive, are the result of specific design, and trigger defence and selection dynamics on entry.

The fourth chapter focuses on everyday life in the district, with a specific focus on the farmstead, the district's community centre. This space is permeated by a precise and designed atmosphere, which will be critically analysed. Furthermore, we will focus on one of the developer's most important activities: the coordination of cultural activities in the neighbourhood and the activities of placemaking. Finally, this section will deal with the problems of daily life of the residents and their relationship with St. Leonard, the neighbourhood across the street.

The fifth chapter will focus on the past and present of St. Leonard, the most marginal part of the Gal, a neighbourhood deeply connected to the post-World War II urban and social developments in Milan. This section will reconstruct the history of the neighbourhood's

development from the post-World War II period to the 1990s. Next, the activities of the neighbourhood associations and Karl, one of the research gatekeepers, will be presented.

The sixth chapter focuses on the emerging economic fragilities in the St. Leonard neighbourhood. Specifically, the section discusses the economic problems of the neighbourhood's most vulnerable population and the limitations of programmes to combat poverty and social isolation. Finally, the chapter concludes with a reconstruction of the events that led to the destruction of 156 public housing houses in the Froth Street blocks, the poorest and most conflict-affected area in the research context.

## **Refounding a space: the development of the District between finance, great events, and renewal coalitions.**

As we saw in the introduction, the District is one of the largest private residential development plans ever undertaken in the city. More than twenty buildings now stand in a formerly abandoned space, an urban interstice that divides this part of the city from the ring highway. The District consists of three distinct areas: The renovated farmstead that functions as a community centre, the residential area with the park, and a large shopping centre under construction at the end of the district, close to where the Milano Innovation District will rise. The rendering of the overall project offers a useful representation to imagine its spaces (see fig. 11). However, this representation does not correspond to reality. At the time of the fieldwork, dozens of mechanical cranes and four large construction sites occupied the residential area. The construction sites will continue until 2028. This incompleteness creates a continuously bounded space full of contrasts. On the one hand, the newly completed buildings and the park give the area a polished, orderly and artificial appearance. On the other, the constant shifting of earth, the noises of drills and the continuous passage of workers convey an idea of dirty materiality and live, tiring work. During the summer of 2021, dust from the construction sites invaded the homes of the new inhabitants, soiled parked cars and created swirls of sand. In March 2022, at the worst time of one of the most severe droughts in sixty years, the grass on the lawn in front of the farmhouse had turned yellow and dry. Climatic phenomena unrelated to the design of the neighbourhood create a disorienting effect that disrupts a space that tries to faithfully replicate its masterplan. Extreme climatic phenomena, even more unexpected, look like glitches in the programming of an almost computerised space.



*Figure 11. A rendering of the District. The buildings and areas circled in black were construction sites from the beginning to the end of the fieldwork period.*

The renovated farmhouse is the district's community centre (see fig. 12). It is the space for sociality and informality in the district. The organisation of the space of the farmstead is pleasantly based on symmetry: the tree-lined avenue, squares and rectangles of greenery are arranged symmetrically, from the street to the farmstead. Two rectangular structures are arranged symmetrically and form the short sides of a U. The farmstead proper is a taller and larger rectangular building. The façade has nine vaults and the external walkway leading to the rooms on the first floor runs horizontally dividing the façade into two parts. Trees are planted in series both in the spaces outside the U and around it, following a regular pattern. The pleasantness of this place is based on simple but effective elements. The level of order and cleanliness contributes to creating a place that stands out from the rest of the area. St. Leonard and the Gal have many parks and green spaces, but also tower and blocks that hardly meet contemporary architectural tastes, builded between the 1960s and 1970s.



*Figure 12. The farmstead, the District's community centre.*

This chapter is dedicated to the key actors and operations that led to the creation of the District. The new neighbourhood was created in a previously abandoned space by a complex group of actors, whose history shows two processes related to the theory employed and the research hypotheses. The first process is related to the progressive financialization of actors connected to urban development. To illustrate this process, this section will deal with the history of the developer, general contractor and project designer of the neighbourhood, and the history of the creation of the social housing village, the first complex that anticipated the rest of the

development plan. The second process refers to the creation of a coalition of actors promoting redevelopment projects in the city of Milan. This coalition involves not only real estate actors, but also actors promoting activation, community making and cultural development. In this field, the most important actor in the District is the pub-restaurant-cultural association Urban Seahorse. This actor plays a decisive role in the development of the District. Moreover, it has already been involved in other regeneration process in Milan and will be involved in major projects in the future. In order to frame this operation, however, it is necessary to start at the beginning: what was there before the new District, in front of the public housing in St. Leonard?

*Piazza pulita: the District area before and after Expo 2015*

When I arrived in the research area, I quickly realised how few people remembered exactly what was in the District area behind the half-destroyed farmstead. The classic answer to my question was “nothing”. A photo of the area in the 1970s shows a shepherd with his flock crossing a field of tall grass. In the background, you can see the 1970s social housing blocks where I lived for eleven months. Until fifteen years ago, the only formally visible activity in what was to become the District was the sale of eggs and agricultural products. Some old farmers and breeders stopped in front of the farmstead to sell their produce, following an ancient habit. Curiously, the only people who have a clear idea of what was going on in this area are the District’s security guards. This security service has been guarding the farmhouse and the large space behind it for over 25 years. The history of their activity is intertwined with the major transformations that have taken place in the area:

I’ve been here since 1997-1998, because this area here was practically completely abandoned, it was all a disused area, here it was all forest: it seems impossible for those who see it now and I still don’t believe it, but here it was all forest! There was nothing. There was this farmstead that was completely abandoned, falling to pieces. Here everything was closed, fenced off, because no one could enter. There was only one road here, which was Capo Rizzuto Avenue, which went from Rooster Street down to Bartolini’s [famous Italian shipping company] warehouse, a road that even Bartolini’s vehicles had a hard time going down. It was so narrow that it was hardly passable.

Together with the forest, the area contained a small lake. In this part of the city, the water table is very high: the rain formed vast swampy areas. Even today, water still rises from the excavated ground by the bulldozers and still forms small pools of water inside the neighbourhood’s

construction sites. One of these has attracted some migratory birds: the developer's communications manager took me to see them on my first visit to the District.

In this context of relative informality, the area contained numerous settlements: urban gardens, small gardens with self-built ovens and tool sheds. These spaces tended by individuals (often elderly) and families coexisted with a large informal settlement of Roma populations. The District security dedicated much of its existence to the systematic removal of these populations from the area. The men describe the settlement as follows:

S1: The whole area behind Bartolini was occupied by Roma, there was a village of Roma: not a few, there must have been ten thousand. With the little houses under construction, they had made themselves villas, where they are now making the shopping centre. But there was a sea of people! A tide. And so people were also afraid to come in here and go that way because they owned the neighbourhood, it was their neighbourhood.

S2: A gypsy town!

The District security men came to this area for an assignment related to this settlement. After a serious incident related to a sexual assault that took place in the area, the city's quaestor resigned, and the next quaestor ordered the eviction. This man knew the owners of the security service, who had a relative in the police. This mix of family and friendship ties led to an assignment for a "special mission":

I was managing all the bouncers of every club in Lake Town during those years. I had all the bouncers: very huge men, bigger than wardrobes... All the bouncers in the province of Lake Town. To make a long story short, I was ordered to evict these guys, but the police themselves said «we are not going to deal with these guys, then we have families, these are all people...» and then they called me because the new police commissioner had worked in Lake Town and knew that I had more than a hundred men, all bouncers. They called me to organise with the police the clearing of this area. So, although I was not very enthusiastic because I come from Lake Town, I arrive here and I see all this stuff... but I was told me «do this favour, then we'll see».

Although without enthusiasm, the security chiefs supported the police in the eviction of the area. In truth, the destruction of the settlement caused it to move a couple of kilometres towards the city centre. However, "Roma are like ants", I was told, "you send them away, they go to the side and then come back". The area was owned by an architect who owned a hotel in the city centre and had no interest in the area. The police had given him a specific order: "clean up".

This man hired the security service for a permanent stakeout. In this way, a special mission lasting only a few days became the main activity of the security service.

From 1997 to 2005, the District area was patrolled by pairs of men dressed as military personnel in two jeeps without number plates purchased by the estate, in an area where the state police never entered. This dress code was due to the fact that “they wanted a service, but they did not want a security service”. Security would signal people to hide in the woods or take them back to the main road in agreement with the police, who would only pick them up there. The security guards lived camped out in the half-destroyed farmhouse in a way that is now described as “unthinkable... we had created lodgings, and we lived here, and we lived well! You lived in Milan, but you were in the middle of nature”.

In the District farmhouse there is a fresco of a Madonna, near the delivery restaurant that sells hamburgers and sushi. That Madonna is the only evidence of the farmstead’s past. That fresco is not there because of its artistic value, but because a security guard is fond of it:

One night we went to get some junkies who were up on the second floor: three of us went up, ten of them were inside. They came out onto the wooden balcony, which was all broken: with the weight of thirteen people we came down from above, we fell. One of them broke his legs, one of ours broke his back and I fell right under the Madonna. There was a lady with chickens who had put straw underneath, and I fell on the straw... and I saw this Madonna! Which is still there and you could not see it clearly because there was all that undergrowth. When I fell down, I really saw the Madonna and I said “Fuck, it’s over!”. In fact, this Madonna, which you can see outside, is one of the few things that remains and which I have tried to maintain because they wanted to cover it up, but for me and also for others in the neighbourhood, it has remained an important image, because of this fact that happened here, plus others.

The District area was bought by the developer between 2006 and 2008. This period coincided with a particular moment for Milanese real estate and for the city of Milan. In fact, the early 2000s presented two apparently contrasting local trends. On the one hand, the long post-Tangentopoli period seemed to have deprived the city of political direction and an overall vision (Bolocan Goldstein and Bonfantini 2007). On the other hand, the period from 1997 to 2007 was marked by a phase of “real estate boom”: a period of extraordinary growth linked to the local transformation of urban planning instruments and a general reorganisation of the network of actors (see Pasqui 2019). The boom was based on large interventions in extended areas, micro-interventions in central districts and a generalised growth in real estate development operations. Urban planning instruments became more flexible: the city administration developed “Piani Integrati di Intervento” (PII) as implementation tools for urban transformations. As noted in the



introduction, the emergence of PII is part of the development of the so-called “complex contracts”, which have been the key instrument for the re-regulation of urban planning in a more market-open direction. These instruments, promoted by private initiative, allow a simplified procedure for the municipal administration. As a consequence, the average price index of real estate rose from 100 to 182 between 2000 and 2007. In the same period, PII private requests amounted to almost 7 million square metres of total area. The city’s real estate market experienced a reorganisation of power: new specialised private players emerged and financial actors started to operate more massively in the city. At the same time, the 2015 World Expo became a reality.

On 16 September 2006, Milan Mayor Letizia Moratti and Prime Minister Romano Prodi announced Italy’s candidature. On 31 March 2008, Milan won the international bid. In 2007, a private agreement between few key actors allocated a large industrial area owned by the Fiera foundation to build the site for the exhibition. For the first time in the history of universal exhibitions, the site area is not public, but private. The developer found himself in the fortunate coincidence of having purchased an abandoned area right next to the new World Expo site. A circumstance that is probably not coincidental: one of the country’s most important banks is both a partner of the exhibition and a majority shareholder of the developer. The great transformation started in 2011: the developer signed an PII with the municipality of Milan for the District area. From 2013 to 2015, the area was invested by a radical infrastructure process. After a moment of stalemate and confusion, security took over the contracts for the surveillance of the construction sites and the entire area, becoming the District’s security today. When work began for Expo, the area still contained informal grazing areas, small, cultivated plots and vineyards. The security men shared a space of more than a square kilometre with a few actors: shepherds, chicken breeders, small farmers. The arrival of investments provoked a new wave of evictions and a new generation of enclosures in the area, after those placed by the security against “the Roma”. The latter were also attacked and evicted again from the second settlement. It was located a couple of kilometres from the District area, but on the route from the city centre to the World Expo site. According to the surveillance officers, this twice evicted population moved for the third time to the houses on Froth street, mentioned in the introduction and the note that opens this work. This is a simplification: as has been confirmed by sources close to the old settlements, the repeated evictions led the community to a diaspora in which only the weakest remained in the area. As many authors working on the study of marginal communities observe (e.g. Bourgois and Schonberg 2009), the evictions devastatingly worsened the hygienic and social conditions of the populations. The population that arrived in the Froth street houses

between 2013 and 2015 was not the same population that had formed the first settlement in the 1990s.

From 2013 to 2015, the Expo works completely changed the area where the District is now located: it became the arrival point for organised trips, school groups, individual visitors. The spontaneous vegetation was completely razed to the ground. The developer became the general contractor for the first buildings in the area: the towers that now constitute the social housing part of the district.

Expo 2015 was a pivotal event in Milan's recent history. The winning of the international competition in 2008 had a strong symbolic value. It constituted an end point in a process of construction of an urban imaginary driven by the construction boom. For critics of the city's model of urban development, the narrative constituted "the resumption of a certain way of telling the city that Milan had already known in the famous years of Craxism, the so-called *Milano da bere*, of the commercials, which was restarting with a new narrative of the city". This vision "was the same one that led to seeing in Expo what would be the flywheel of a new miracle in Milan" [St. Leonard resident, political activist].

Leonardi and Secchi (2016) have defined Expo as a laboratory for neo-liberalisation, referring in particular to the dynamics involved in the construction, regulation and forms of labour connected to the big event. On the strictly urban aspects, there are three elements to consider (see also Off Topic and Maggioni 2013).

First, the complex public-private coalition that governed the Expo contained multiple elements that could be ascribed to a conflict of interest. Actors such as the Fondazione Fiera played a dual role as sellers of the areas involved and acquirers as members of the organising committee. Second, the coalition promoted numerous publicly financed infrastructural interventions with two aims: to increase the attractiveness for private investment and to raise the real estate values of the areas. Thirdly, Expo 2015 was accompanied by a massive dose of urban green branding aimed at raising the attractiveness of the city and the international fair grounds. The hidden history of the research area shows the triggering of a long-term operation of building speculation and the violence of a process of social cleansing and environmental devastation. This predatory aspect is reminiscent of the despoliation process identified by Harvey as a hallmark of contemporary capitalist accumulation (Harvey 2004).

This event also had consequences for St Leonard's, the neighbourhood across the street. My gatekeeper, Karl, pointed out that with the Expo "the city discovered that there was a liveable, park-filled neighbourhood in this area of Milan, where there were no attractions, simply half the city had never seen". The Expo was an event contested by the city's social movements, but

it was also a great success for the group that had promoted it. The city's image was greatly enhanced by the Expo as one of the few Italian cities to successfully overcome the 2008 crisis. Expo 2015 Commissioner Giuseppe Sala became mayor of the city in 2016.

The years between Expo and Covid 19 were marked by widespread enthusiasm involving newspapers, businesses, and institutional actors. The city was celebrated as a model capable of combining social inclusion and economic growth: the so-called "Milan model" (Bortolotti 2020)(Bortolotti 2020). Andreotti and Le Galès speak of a "new euphoria" (Andreotti and Le Galès 2019, 16) connected to a city that now has a wider cultural offer, greater tourist attractiveness, a skyline renewed by new symbolic buildings such as the vertical forest and the new skyscrapers of City Life. The city has also changed political orientation: after twenty years of centre-right government, Milan's voters have been electing mayors or "civic" candidates from the centre-left since 2011. This enthusiastic narrative hides some particularly serious social problems in the city, such as child poverty and social and ethnic segregation (Pacchi and Ranci 2017) and has been criticised for its almost caricatured tones (Cancellato 2017). However, Mayor Sala won the 2022 elections by a wide margin and the city is preparing to host another major event: the 2026 Winter Olympics, planned between Milan and Cortina d'Ampezzo.

Expo 2015 made the mayor's political fortunes and triggered a new narrative for the city after the global crisis of 2008. At the same time, it also made the fortunes of the District and its developer.

### *The financialization of an Expo heritage: the social housing village*

As mentioned in the introduction, the developer purchased the areas surrounding the Expo site between 2006 and 2008. The first operation that the developer completed in the area was the construction of the structures that hosted the delegations for the international exposition. Subsequently, the developer completely renovated and refurbished the structures of the so-called "Expo village" in order to fulfil the obligations of the PII, the integrated intervention plan that provided for an intervention dedicated to social housing in the District area. To develop this intervention, the developer acted on behalf of a closed real estate investment fund, called *Fondo Housing Sociale Cascina Merlata*, managed by *InvestiRE SGR*, an asset management company. The fund's advisor is the *Fondazione Housing Sociale* (FHS). It is possible to read on its website, the FHS was created by the *Cariplo Foundation* and the support of the Lombardy Region and ANCI Lombardy in 2009. Today, this institution operates throughout the country in

collaboration with institutional partners, other banking foundations and the sector of cooperatives<sup>20</sup>. The District's social housing fund is 60 per cent owned by the national fund *FIA - Fondo Investimenti per l'Abitare* (managed by *CDP Investimenti SGR*, Cassa Depositi e Prestiti Group), by the *Cassa Cnpadc* and the *Fondo Crono* and by the developer itself. CDP Investimenti, InvestiRE SGR and Fondazione Housing Sociale are decisive players in the process of financialization of Italian social rented housing (Belotti 2021a; 2021b; Belotti and Caselli 2016). CDP, a financial institution of the Italian State linked to postal savings, is the main promoter of the financial architecture of real estate funds that has enabled the pooling of public and private investments in social housing, namely the SIF (Sistema Integrato dei Fondi Immobiliari per l'Housing Sociale). Moreover, in 2009, CDP set up the FIA, the fund that acted as an incentive for private initiative and raised one billion of euro from private investors. The fund related to the construction of social housing village is one of 29 local funds in which investors have channelled investments (see fig. 1; see also Belotti 2021a, 646–58).

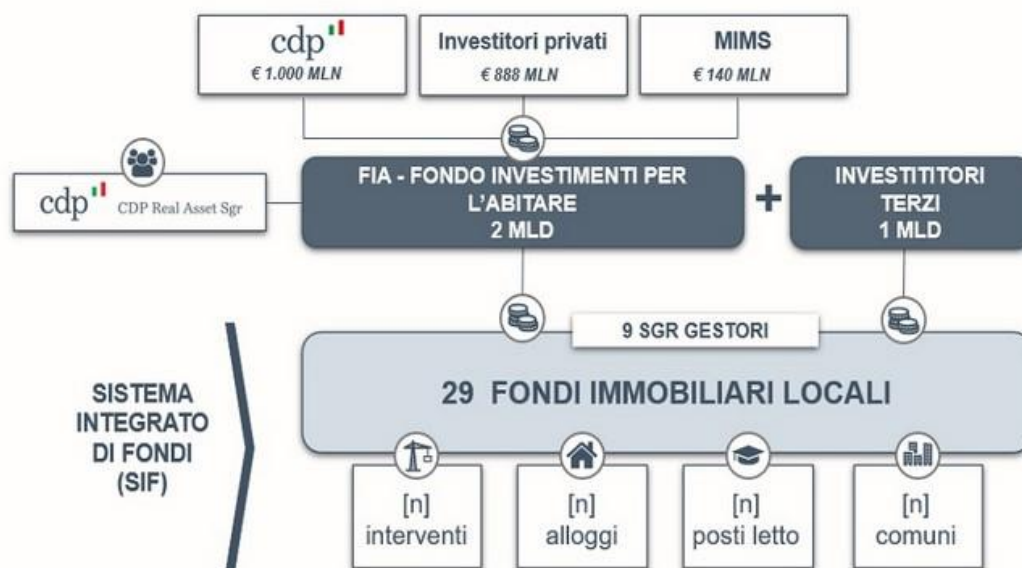


Figure 13. The FIA operating model within the SIF fund system (source: <https://www.cdprealasset.it/social-housing/fia/piano-nazionale-edilizia/index.html>)

InvestiRE SGR is one of the most important Italian asset management companies and currently manages 11 of the 29 local real estate funds connected to the SIF. InvestiRE is the result of a

<sup>20</sup> <https://www.fhs.it/progetti/>

merger involving national and international players, including the Cariplo Foundation. As mentioned before, Cariplo created the Fondazione Housing Sociale in 2009, which set up the first social housing fund in Lombardy, FAS (Fondo Abitare Sociale), open to public and qualified investors. The creation of this fund and its financial infrastructure is considered the forerunner of the SIF system and the process that led to the fund that financed the social housing village in the District. The period in which the developer began to define the agreements with the municipality of Milan coincided with the development of a system of financialization in which the financial policies of the state played a decisive role.

This housing does not correspond at all to public housing. Firstly, there is no access list on ISEE criteria and in relation with community services, but a public call for applications to which any citizen who meets the eligibility criteria can respond. Specifically, there is no relationship between the management of the social housing village and the traditional welfare services sector. As already pointed out by studies on the Italian financialization model of social rented housing, two cooperatives connected to the non-profit sector take over the role of property management.

Secondly, the supply of houses in the social housing village is divided into three parts: rent, rent-to-buy, direct sale. This tripartition is not only completely different from traditional public housing, which is mainly oriented towards rent or rent-to-buy in certain specific cases, But the percentage of houses for sale (present or future) is much higher than houses for rent. Specifically, only 32 per cent of the supply is for rent (218 out of 687) and almost 70 per cent of which are houses for direct sale or after eight years (469 out of 687).

Thirdly, the eligibility criteria indicate a tendency to favour middle and middle-high incomes and to select low incomes through conditionality mechanisms. In fact, houses for sale have considerable maximum income requirements: only households with a total income of more than 95.000 euro per year cannot buy a house in District's social housing. In addition to income, it is necessary not to own other flats on the national territory and to be resident in Milan. The rules change for renting: the offer is intended for households with an ISEE between 15.000 and 40.000 euro and conditionality mechanisms protect the project from the risks of lodging tenants who have previously had problems with public housing (see also Costarelli, Kleinhans, and Mugnano 2021). For example, the criteria prohibit those who have been evicted for arrears or have been the recipient of a single order and/or injunction in the last five years from applying.

The combination of these elements shows how policies of social selection and financialization are visible from the very first intervention of the District's housing development. This selection has created a partially fictitious social mix, where only a very minimal part of the neighbourhood's population has low incomes. At the moment of my research, the valorisation operation on social housing was almost complete: the below-market prices, the selection and the quality of the built offer guaranteed the success of the operation.

*A lucky strike and a business card: the developer and the District*

The developer's headquarters are not far from the District. Precisely, the company's headquarters are located in an area formerly occupied by industrial plants that characterised the north-western sector of the city of Milan. Precisely, the company is based in the same district where Lisa, the gatekeeper referred in the introduction, resides. In this area, the developer has developed a branch office of the Milan Polytechnic, keeping part of the built structures for itself. The developer is a limited company specialising in large urban redevelopment operations: as it says of itself, it is "a city designer". The company has adopted its modern name since 1986 but was founded much earlier.

It is possible to divide the company's history into three phases. The first phase corresponds to the golden years of industrial capitalism in Milan. In this phase, the company involves local players and portfolios:

This company is over ninety years old, but it was a family vehicle company for the first sixty. These families used the company more as a property company, in which they managed their properties. Then at some point the last of these families, probably due to financial problems, left Milan. The entity that had financed this family, namely Lombardy Bank, today Northern Bank, decided not to close the company and therefore put it into liquidation. Instead, it decided to involve some partners to create an entity that would deal precisely with the regeneration and real estate development of areas of the city, as part of the various moments that the city of Milan has had precisely in terms of urban regeneration.

This first transformation is a local example of restructuring that has taken place all over the world, in connection with the financialization of real estate actors. From the late 1980s onwards, the company moved from family capital and individual investors to predominantly financial capital and institutional investors. In the company "there is no Mr. Caltagirone or Mr. Ligresti [surnames of famous builders active in Milan especially in the 1980s and 1990s] but there is the first bank in the country, there is the second real estate development company listed on the

Italian market, there is the last vehicle company of the constitutional arch of cooperatives: both the red and the white ones”.

In addition, the company stopped being a property company and switched to promoting and developing real estate through urban transformation and urban regeneration. Until 2015, the company “transformed areas and, once it had obtained the urban planning instrument, it sold the volumes to builders of, for example, a supermarket in the retail sector, or to cooperatives for subsidised or social housing”. In some cases, the company was also involved in the transformation and sale of future assets as a general contractor. The extraction of value was based on the purchase of the land, acquisition of the planning instrument, sale of the volumes, payment of debts, and new investment. In the meantime, the developer would carry out all the works foreseen by the urbanisation charges: infrastructure, roads, other works agreed with the public actor.

For the developer, the District marks a moment of transition between this second phase and the third phase of its life, after a serious crisis. In fact, the District is defined as “a lucky strike”, because the developer was lucky enough to be able to use the District to gain credibility in front of the Northern Bank, the main lender. This bank, which was the families’ lender in the first phase and then major shareholder in the second, recapitalised the company on the brink of bankruptcy in the years following the 2008 real estate crisis. In this affair, the history of the Expo and that of the District are intertwined:

In 2015, when I arrived here, the company was in serious difficulty. It was more dead than alive, it was effectively bankrupt. This company had had a couple of lucky breaks. The first stroke of luck, a bit like Lucky Strike cigarettes, was related to the fact that Expo 2015 had Northern Bank as a shareholder. Northern Bank was our shareholder and creditor because it had provided financing, but it was also at Expo’s bedside. In 2013/14 Expo went through a particularly difficult time, they had arrested people who were there to deal with it and there was a risk that we would not arrive in time for the universal exhibition. In that turmoil they had mostly forgotten about a couple of small things. The first, where to house the delegations who were coming to experience the event and who had to work in the Expo. The second, where to get the buses and chauffeur-driven hirers, so there was a lack of parking and a lack of a landing point at Expo. So Northern Bank, which was at our bedside and as a system bank at the bedside of the government, the region and the municipality, was called in to find a solution. That is the first stroke of luck. The second stroke of luck was that we had areas right in front of Expo and we had an approved PII. These areas were ready to be able to temporarily build an Expo village, and the Expo village was none other than the social housing village under the “social housing” designation. So there was already this urban planning instrument ready. Northern Bank put its hand on its heart and wallet and recapitalised this company.

In this situation, the company's management proposed to the bank to use the free sale housing in the District to repay debts and avoid bankruptcy as it entered the third phase of its business. It is important to note how the bank not only gradually became the company's main hidden controller, but also financed the other builders in the district. Everything that was built in the district was mainly financed by asset management companies or by this financial institution. The third phase is the company's future: from a real estate development company to a real estate development service platform for international capital, which is increasingly prominent in Milan. This means:

Going to seize what I saw in the market, which was starting to happen: international investors were starting to arrive because Italy and especially Milan was the biggest place where investors had not extracted value, after they had been first in Spain, then in France then in England, then in Holland, then in Germany, where they had extracted a lot of value. In Italy they had not extracted it because we were the last to enter the crisis but we were also the last to exit the crisis, both macroeconomic but also real estate. And so having an entity like us could be an opportunity for these investors who, when they go to countries, need entities that have the expertise in real estate development, especially in a complex country like Italy.

The developer has already tried to experiment with this new vocation by applying to the calls for *reinventing cities*, which was referred to in the introduction. In that situation, the developer represented a group of foreign investors. In this new guise, the developer becomes a multi-service platform. It provides the know-how to international real estate funds but also includes new branches such as property and facility management services. Where an actor invests in the residential part of a large redevelopment project, the developer has learnt to manage short or long-term rentals, concierge, reception. In addition, he now possesses the knowledge to directly develop real estate products whereas he used to stop at volumes.

In this framework, the District assumes a value beyond "simple" monetisation in the real estate market, debt repayment to the bank and profit generation. First, the developer used and still uses the District as an important space for learning, experimenting and acquiring new skills. The developer capitalises on a behavioural surplus, a form of surplus he obtains by learning from reactions to his initiatives, from unexpected events, from "good practices" produced by other actors in the district.

Second, the developer sees the district as a business card. The new district is a demonstration of credibility in front of the bank and especially international investors. With this operation, the developer intends to demonstrate its ability to manage complex redevelopments in a country where the functioning of the state machine has a bad international reputation. Consequently, the



District is designed to attract other international investors to the city: it is a financial flagship project, which also generates value in reputational terms.

The competition between market-rate housing sold by the developer, subsidized housing and social housing forced the developer to “study a product”. In the District, subsidised housing starts at 2500-3000 euro per square metre and social housing is sold from 2100 euro per square metre or under a covenant of future sale at 100 euro per square metre per year. Thus, the company’s team visited places such as Canary Wharf in London, La Défense in Paris, the Rotterdam waterfront and the Dumbo district in New York. The construction of the client-type is based on the identification of clusters:

We had barriers to entry and we had to understand what kind of people we had to bring in. So, we also did some sociological studies to try to understand what was the cluster of clients we could go and collect, and that cluster you were saying before, the people who had flats in the first-second circle were the people who: high rate of schooling, arrived in Milan to study, stopped in Milan to work and maybe bought the two-room apartment. Married, had a family, city centre but a bit of a problem because no terraces, small flats, obsolete flats. They were selling in the centre to buy somewhere nicer with the services around promised, so ours was a promise we had to make and then we are keeping. Innovative concepts of both environmental and energy sustainability but also economic sustainability and a more beautiful real estate product, with terraces, flexible, larger than what you would buy in the centre and with all the services around it, the shopping centre and the services at the foot of the buildings, which also allowed for economic savings as well as in the running costs of cooling, heating and whatever else.

The developer targeted buyers on the basis of economic criteria and socio-spatial trajectories but combined these criteria with the identification of value-based sub-clusters. These shared values are related to themes such as “community, environment, innovation, technology”. The idea is that “between the traditional family with children and the gay or lesbian family that espouses the theme of environment, inclusiveness and community, what difference is there? Few, and we go and find the dots that unite the identity of values of these particular clusters and thus of people speaking the same language”.

The developer’s vision revolves around the idea of the wellbeing city, an evolution of the smart city where technology, environmental sustainability, urban planning and architecture combine to create quality urban development. Beyond technological gadgets, the smart city is seen as innovative “in the tradition that starts from two fundamental factors from our point of view: the human factor, human capital, which is the first essential element, and planning, landscape and

urbanism". In the developer's idea of urban development, the social mix also plays an important role:

Obviously, we have an interest in creating a place that can allow us to return on our investment, but precisely because we take into account the urban planning aspects of architecture we go on to create places within which the concept of mixite is fundamental. Mixite in the sense of not creating an enclave for the rich, not creating a ghetto for the poor, but recreating what Italy is famous for, that is, the typical Italian urbanity within which people from, let's say, an entry level segment of the population, a medium level segment of the population, and a high level segment of the population live in Italian villages.

In the years prior to the covid-19 crisis, the developer's marketing strategy was based on innovative elements in the area of real estate promotion. Unfortunately, this part of the marketing campaign came to a halt with the pandemic. However, it is possible to give some interpretations on the goals of these initiatives.

Firstly, the company organised concerts and parties in the District's park and around the construction sites, which were open and could be visited. These initiatives aimed at enhancing the potential of the area in terms of sociality, conveying a feeling that is often mentioned by the interviewed residents: the idea of the district as a holiday village, a place to relax outside the urban chaos. Secondly, the developer organised special invitational auctions. This action focused on conveying an aura of exclusivity to the project. Third, the company made extensive use of simulations such as models of the neighbourhood, virtual renderings and mock-ups, 1:1 scale reproductions of flats for sale in the neighbourhood. In this case, the marketing campaign worked on imagery and the smart-and-green urban future, of which it was possible to become an integral part.

This first phase of the marketing campaign was a huge success: between 2017 and 2018, the developer sold all 126 free-sale houses of the first lot, the South Towers. These houses constitute the inhabited free-sale segment from 2019. Between 2018 and 2020, the company sold another 295 flats in the second lot, the East Towers. According to data released by the company, the developer realised a turnover of 150 million euros and the price of the houses increased by 40 per cent, from 2900 to 4100 euros/sqm.

In September 2021, when I arrived in the field, the phase of the first marketing campaign was over, but a second phase was opening: the community centre was becoming fully operational and the actors were setting up in the former farmhouse. After the years of anti-covid measures and restrictions, the work of the district manager was entering into full swing. The district

manager is a woman in her forties and her name is Marie. In the coming chapters, it will be possible to glimpse her figure between the lines of the story. The analysis of Marie's work will be the subject of a specific chapter devoted to the staging of daily life in the district (see below, Ch. 4).

### *Food, culture and territory: Urban Seahorse in the District*

Urban Seahorse occupies a large wing of the community centre. This two-floor venue, with a large outdoor dehor and two stages (one outside and one inside), offers a lunch, dinner, aperitif, pub and evening concert hall service. Its speciality is pizza, made in a wood-fired oven and with refined and untraditional ingredients. Prices are very similar to those in the city centre districts. The average price of a pizza is 11.5 euro, with the cheapest pizza at 6.5 and the most expensive at 14. Beers, usually mainstream artisanal imports or selected local breweries, start at 6 euro for a pint.

On its website, Urban Seahorse has published a manifesto, which unintentionally makes several references to “Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement” of Pierre Bourdieu’s most important works (1979):

We believe in the ritual value of food, which is realised when a meal becomes an opportunity for encounter and exchange.

We believe that a meal can become a collective experience of identification.

We believe that taste has a strong social essence.

We believe in taste and smell landscapes: a world evoked by flavours and smells that remind us of home, a journey, a loved one.

We believe that cooking is the need to speak through a flavour.

We want food to always have an identity value and to transmit cultural values and cultural habits.

We want to nourish not only the body but also the spirit.

Contrary to what it may seem, the developer did not name this actor in the District for food, but because Urban Seahorse is an actor specialised in organising cultural events and territorial activation. Its headquarters are not in the District, but in the western part of Milan, within a social housing project. It is important to emphasise that this social housing project was financed

by the first fund developed by the Cariplo foundation for social housing, which preceded the integrated fund system that financed the District's social housing. Urban Seahorse is therefore a selected local actor that has already participated in urban development operations with similar characteristics to the District, but smaller and more experimental.

Founded in 2013, this actor joined several organisations in the social innovation sector between 2015 and 2017: social impact co-working networks, local partnerships focused on the sharing economy, coalitions for cultural innovation. Its headquarters consists of a multifunctional facility with a catering service, a co-working space, brewery and art spaces. Due to these characteristics, Urban Seahorse's headquarters and its detachment in the District can be defined as a "social innovation hub" (Borreani 2021). This expression defines a multitude of different experiences that seek to combine economic profit and social value in their activities. This is not the place to make a detailed examination of this sector. However, it must be said that these experiences have often been on the topic of urban regeneration and local development. Vicari and Moulaert (2009) use the term social innovation to define the activities of organisations that are concretely committed to promoting social inclusion and institutional change through their actions, which came into being between the 1980s and early 2000s. This strand of studies on social innovation takes on a connotation that Barbera and Parisi (2019) defines as "critical-movementist" (Moulaert and MacCallum 2019). These works emphasise how virtuous dynamics of cooperation and collective empowerment are triggered within social innovation processes in opposition to the neoliberal model based solely on market logic. In this key, social innovation hubs are fundamental elements to promote integrated territorial development and trigger urban regeneration processes alternative to those typically inspired by neoliberal policies. Integrated territorial development is outlined as a form of alternative development, based on guaranteed access to basic goods, attention to the problems of the most disadvantaged populations, and a broad conception of human needs, according to the idea of capabilities (Sen 1994). The main actors are informal groups, committees, informal and formal associations, cooperatives, community-owned enterprises. In Italy, examples are the Quartieri Spagnoli Association, active in Naples, but also the Leoncavallo social centre in Milan and the Olinda cooperative in the Milanese metropolitan area. In Europe, we find actors such as the association Alentour, in Roubaix, City Mine(d) and LimiteLimite in Brussels, Kommunales Forum Wedding in Berlin. The organisations' activities are manifold: networking of actors and resources for the promotion of projects, social services, creation of social spaces, creation of participatory decision-making contexts, production of goods and services for the market, job creation, training and reintegration into the labour market. Although not all organisations

constitute real hubs, the spaces where they carry out most of their activities are mainly multifunctional structures where, along with the provision of services to people, relationships are created and demands are built from below. The start of the organisations' activities and the opening of a multifunctional structure can also occur in different timeframes, as in the case of the Olinda cooperative. Active since 1996, Olinda was founded as an association to overcome the former Paolo Pini psychiatric hospital in Milan through awareness-raising initiatives, and in 1999 it opened its own multi-purpose space, the Olinda Factory, establishing itself as a cooperative. The building houses a restaurant, a theatre, a bistro, a hostel and the association's spaces.

Urban Seahorse is an actor that we can frame on a path somewhere between social innovation and culture-led urban regeneration. The reference to the sea is part of a communicative strategy that wants to communicate the idea of holidays, of liveability, of an "urban waterfront". The organisation's desire for expansion met the developer's interest in having a specialised actor in territorial activation within the District:

We arrived in the district in 2020, with a series of projects already active in 2019. The developer was looking for partners who could bring both a food service, a refreshment service but at the same time also a reality that could help them to animate and create territorial activations. Partners that could in some way both offer new services and activities to the new people arriving there to live, but at the same time also help them connect with everything that was the historic Gallarate district. We were born with all the projects of urban regeneration, human regeneration, community activation, and the developer saw in us, let's say, a partner that could somehow respond to this need of theirs and so they made us this proposal.

Urban Seahorse started out as a social enterprise, but at the moment it is split between a company that deals with the commercial side and a cultural association that deals with artistic programming and territorial activation. The latter has been slowed down by the pandemic, but in the year of the research it was in full swing. The developer and Urban Seahorse signed a simple lease agreement but have an informal agreement on planning and sharing goals. The company left full freedom to the organisation, although in the above-mentioned case of the rap concerts, it made some criticisms.

Urban Seahorse's activities at the District are divided into two parts: cultural festivals and neighbourhood initiatives. The former consist mainly of concerts and theatre initiatives. After dinner, this actor organises live music concerts every Friday and a DJ set (not for dancing) on Saturdays. During the week, he organises karaoke and a traditional music moment for the elderly, in collaboration with Lisa, one of my gatekeepers in the old quarter. On Saturdays and

Sundays, the second floor hosts a workshop for children between 0 and 9 years old. The children create small objects inspired by artistic movements or make small cooking recipes. The concerts and workshops are usually free of charge. These activities play a central role in creating a sophisticated yet sparkling, youthful atmosphere, in communication with both the rest of the world and the city centre. The artistic direction of this space favours refined pop music and selects emerging groups of high quality. Between October and December 2021, the venue proposed a world music festival on Fridays dedicated to live music, mainly from South America and Africa. The urban design of the farmhouse, the sophisticated lighting, the music and the clean, green space create a very different atmosphere from the rest of the area, especially during the months when live music can be heard outside.



*Figure 14. A concert on the Urban Seahorse outdoor stage in May 2022.*

**Date: 1 october 2021**

**Time: from 8.30 am to 11 pm**

It's a fairly cool evening but still, shall we say, late summer. There are mostly tables of young people, but also mixed tables (young and old) and the classic tables of young couples with children.

The atmosphere is quiet and relaxed, even though it is already getting dark early. Summer is over. I arrive when it is already dark.

Not knowing what to do before the start of the concert, I take a walk around the district park and take some photos of the South Towers and the subsidized housing with the lighted windows and the park. The work on the developer's new buildings is progressing fast and it is becoming evident that the size of the park will no longer be what it seemed in the previous phase of construction, when I came to see the field last year. There is scarcely anyone in the park: the only people I meet are a tall man with a dog and the security service patrolling the area with a caddy. If they are not with the caddy, the vigilantes usually stand in the courtyard of the farmstead and do laps around there. They don't get too close to the rectangular wings that make up the short sides of the farmstead, where there is the Sicilian bar on one side and Urban Seahorse on the other.

9pm, the concert begins. The stage is lit with amber lights and consists of a guy on percussion (African drums, cymbals and electric pads) and a girl with synthesisers, samplers and maybe some pads. They both sing: they often do overlapping vocal lines with chants and backing vocals.

They play a mixture of cumbia, African percussion-based pieces, afrobeat, rhythms close to lambada. Occasionally they encroach on electronic club music. The group plays well and creates a fresh atmosphere, full of African sounds but with long techno and afrobeat sequences. She is beautiful, dressed in a pair of black trousers and a black blouse. He has a black tank top and various African paraphernalia (pendants with the African continent and various red, yellow and green things). He plays percussion instruments consisting of electronic pads and amber-coloured African drums with black and reddish veins. Between songs, the duo introduces the tracks. For example, the boy tells about the origin of a song he wrote with a Senegalese artist. The song has a title in Wolof and is about living in peace between different communities. From the colour of the skin of those present, the only ones who have a good chance of being born in Africa are the pizza makers from Urban Seahorse.

The audience is rather cold and does not get very involved: people drink beer, eat pizza, chat with each other. However, the more time passes, the more the group manages to engage the audience. Although no one dances, groups of young people follow the rhythm more explicitly. The audience attends the concert sitting at Urban Seahorse's large rectangular tables or on the circular tables with chairs. This group of tables and chairs are those of the "100 red chairs" initiative, set up by Marie. There are about a hundred of us between those outside the pizzeria and those inside.

Over time, the average age drops: we definitely move towards the 25-35 age group. The children almost disappear, groups of people begin to materialise who come for an after-dinner drink at the Sicilian ice-cream parlour. The mealtime is coming to an end. I see a group of people over 55-60 return towards the District. At 10.30 p.m. the music is over. At first glance, it seems to me that there are also several people from St. Leonard and not just people from the District. I don't think the numbers will increase that much, because a fairly cold air has risen, which seems to have surprised everyone.

On my way home, I cross the road that separates the District and St. Leonard and enter the area of the grey houses, the public housing estate halfway between the farmhouse and the 1970s houses where I live. The complex, consisting of four large grey buildings, is elevated and separated from the street by a wall with a blue mural. There are several entrances: you can get to the houses via a

dirt slope or up a wide flight of stairs with very low steps and very little slope – which can also be cycled, with care.

The buildings of the grey house complex are separated by green, rectangular spaces– bisected by the rammed-earth road that joins the various blocks of flats. The apartment blocks form a belt of buildings between the District and Pyreness Street, my street. These green spaces consist of a lawn with trees four, maximum five metres tall and a wooden paved area with benches, a children’s playground and the entrances to some of the garages. Two groups of young boys of an age group absent in the District – boys between fifteen and eighteen years old – smoke joints and cigarettes occupy the benches and children’s playground. The kids listen to trap music at a not too high volume from smartphones. The whole area is dimly lit. A broken road sign pole with a circular blue sign lies horizontally on the ground. There is a lot of rubbish outside a bin.

Beside it, the pizzeria in front is open, on the ground floor of one of the grey towers. Two mopeds are parked at the entrance. I see one of the couriers leave after putting the pizzas in the pizza box behind the saddle. Outside the pizzeria there are two small tables. At one of them, two people in their forties are drinking Moretti beer in 66-centilitre bottles, smoking and waiting for their pizza. Here, the pizza is 30 per cent cheaper than the pizza at Urban Seahorse, which is about two hundred metres away, but across the street.

Urban Seahorse carries out some activities for the neighbourhood, in dialogue with the associations of St. Leonard. It carries out this activity in two ways: it supports the local associations by conceding space and providing logistical assistance, or it carries out its own initiatives. For example, it has produced *Pagine Galle*, a sticker album in which the whole of the large Gal district (so not just St. Leonard) is divided into five areas. In each area, the businesses that have joined the initiative tell something in boxes. The game consists of collecting stickers of all the activities and pasting them into the right boxes. In this way, an album of the neighbourhood is composed. The aim of the action was to make it easier for the new residents of the District to understand what was in the old neighbourhood:

Bringing more than sixteen thousand people into the neighbourhood, people who know nothing about what they have next door, as well as for the people who instead live in the old neighbourhood to see all these new people arrive, let’s say it’s an operation... it’s complex. It has potential, because actually having sixteen thousand people next door can be important and also be an added value for businesses and associations in the historic district. It can be an opportunity for everyone. At the same time, however, creating this connection is by no means easy, and in fact the *Pagine Galle* project wanted to go in this direction here, to make newcomers aware of the realities that are on the other side of the street: both commercial realities, shops, tie-up businesses, but also associative activities that offer a range of services. I am thinking of children’s workshops and activities for children or families that are there, or for the elderly.



Those responsible for this initiative emphasise that “compared to other neighbourhoods, the Gal already has a very active network of associations, we have arrived on tiptoe and we have joined realities. We lent a hand when there were activities to be carried out because we had the capacity to do certain things and slightly larger projects”. The associations in the neighbourhood that do not reside in the community centre do not often use its spaces, but in these cases Urban Seahorse is the point of support. Marie told me several times that she perceived mistrust towards it. In reality, the people interviewed appreciate this space and criticism of the developer’s overall project is quite limited. However, it is clear that almost none of the users of the associations’ services (e.g. the elderly, children of non-Italian migrants, families taking a food parcel) live in the new neighbourhood. In addition, Marie’s work is clearly ambiguous: she wants to make the farmstead a more socially active space, but on the one hand she is “the newcomer to the neighbourhood”, on the other hand she is not doing it out of political choice or passion. She works for the developer who is selling the neighbourhood. In this framework, Urban Seahorse is seen as a good mediator between the parties and a trusted partner.

The role of this actor in Milan’s urban regeneration processes is growing. This is also because it is a very eclectic actor, able to stay within very different situations. In the District, Urban Seahorse supports some neighbourhood activities, but otherwise it is a simple pub-pizzeria with an articulated cultural programme, live music, and a careful storytelling strategy. In other situations, its role is more specifically to take care of the artistic direction: this is the case with the *reinventing cities* call, mentioned in the introduction.

We are also in the new Reinventing Cities project for the former slaughterhouse. There too there will be not everything but a good slice of flats in social housing, with Fondazione Housing Sociale and Redo SGR. We will also have a space there, which will be very large. That will be a much, but much bigger project, and it will be much, but much more related to art because the physical space will also allow us to do bigger things. The project in the District is a food hub, that is, it started as a service and restaurant space where we then make other things happen. Instead, in the new Reinventing Cities project in the former slaughterhouse area, there we will have a larger space that will allow us to shift the percentage of activity to the artistic side, to activation and cultural design... and we will also have a bar. This will be reversed: we will have a space with a predominance of art and culture projects plus a bar.

In the District, the politicised character that traditionally concerns “movementist” social innovation actors is completely absent. Urban Seahorse limits political messages to a minimum, although it has an ethical delivery system and actively promotes the labour inclusion of people

with legal problems within the District's restaurant. The pizzeria is often used as a probationary placement for people in foster homes or coming out of prison.

From the point of view of its relationship with politics, Urban Seahorse has an excellent relationship with the public administration and especially with the Municipalities, the local political administrations of the nine macro-areas that make up the city of Milan. The institutional role of some members of the organisation seems to help them develop a critical reflexivity on their own role and on the socio-spatial trends of the city.

Look, I'm also in a bit of a peculiar position because I'm actually a councillor in City Hall 9, so I also have an institutional role in quotes and a political one, and I can tell you that... it's becoming a city unfortunately not for everyone, it's becoming a bit exclusionary, and housing is the big issue. There is a risk that even projects like this, of regenerating spaces and creating communities, in reality these projects somehow help all those gentrification processes that then push people away from certain places. This is stuff that needs to be worked on. It's complicated, but if you on the one hand try to activate dynamics on certain territories and create gathering spaces that allow you to create that sense of community, at the same time however you are also feeding what is the gentrification process. This will lead to an increase in house prices and therefore to push out people who came there in certain contexts because they were simply areas where you paid less rent. So that's why I say to you that cohousing projects are important and it's right that they should be there, but at the same time they have to be governed.

Urban Seahorse is part of an ecosystem of actors that seems to be recurring in urban regeneration in the city of Milan. These processes increasingly follow a predefined pattern. First, the lead partner is often an Italian or international REIF. Second, the operation is carried out by a coalition in which there is always an actor in the social housing financialized sector. These actors win the tender and close the PII with the administration, which obliges them to allocate a part of the building to social housing. Thirdly, the coalition utilize partners specialised in cultural organisation, social accompaniment and territorial activation. The entire project has the highest environmental certifications and meets strict eco-sustainability principles: in this sense, it is a "green" project. Moreover, it is not only technologically advanced but also proposes an idea of community and inclusiveness that is positive but also innovative: in this sense it is "smart". The district is an innovative project because the developer has understood the trends of the contemporary real estate market and the trends of demand (both from buyers and institutional policy) before almost anyone else in the city of Milan. What he is realising in this area represents a possible future of almost all the interventions planned in Milan in the coming years. Thanks to what it is learning in the District, the developer aims to gain an

advantage over its competitors and becomes the most important intermediary between the city real estate ecosystem of actor and international investors.

## **Smart workers and the city: the new residents of the district in the urban economy**

During my time in the field, walking through the district's large park and common areas was an estranging experience. On sunny days, the light floods the district with a dazzling white glow. In the hours closer to sunset, the light of the descending sun hits the buildings with an oblique slant. The static nature of the large buildings with their elegantly fringed geometries gives the scene an unreal, dreamy monumentality, suspended in a desolate space. The interplay of light, shadow and perspective in the neighbourhood immediately reminded me of a style of painting I particularly appreciate: Metaphysical Painting, made famous by Giorgio de Chirico (1888-1978) and developed from 1910 onwards between Italy and France. I was not the only one to notice this: even a local blog specialising in urban exploration speaks of a "metaphysical atmosphere"<sup>21</sup>. One of the main characteristics of metaphysical painting is the representation of anthropic elements in a space where individuals are almost absent. However, the few subjects present stand out through the use of distorted perspectives and the long shadows they generate on the scene. Even in the district, especially in the winter months, the few people present on the scene are particularly noticeable: young women with a pushchair, a man jogging, a few people taking their dog for a walk in the park. Car traffic, especially in the morning but also during the lunch hours, is rarefied: few cars cross the neighbourhood streets. Two types of vehicles are particularly present: the vehicles of the construction workers move frantically around the building sites, and the ever-present home shopping and delivery vans for goods bought online. The centrality of home delivery is dictated by factors that go beyond the absence of proximity services in a neighbourhood relatively far from shopping centres. Some citizens of the neighbourhood link this trend to the young age of the residents, needs related to work organisation and changes in consumption styles accelerated by the pandemic:

Here we do a lot of our shopping online: there's an almost permanent Esselunga truck, Amazon is always here every three hours. The average population is young, so they're young, they buy a lot online, with covid this stuff has become... the doorman before covid 19 used to catalogue parcels. After the pandemic he told me "I can't catalogue anything anymore, every time Amazon downloads 30-40 parcels a day and it arrives several times a day". At Christmas it was non-stop, the courier unloaded a bunch of parcels outside the porter's lodge, they didn't enter the building. This is also dictated by the age group: with covid everyone bought more on the

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<sup>21</sup> <https://blog.urbanfile.org/2021/09/16/milano-cascina-merlata-r11-erre11-settembre-2021-completato/>

internet, young people already buy more than older people on the internet and automatically... [subsidised housing, resident since 2017]

We were looking for a situation where we didn't lack anything around. Then we checked - and this is an important piece of information - that Just Eat was coming: it seems banal but when you do a job like ours and you're always in meetings and we're both working... I cook or she cooks - she cooks more, I'm honest - but when we can't, we order. [free sale housing, resident since 2020]

The mobility of residents in and out of the neighbourhood increases in the afternoon hours, when the street that separates the District from St. Leonard and reaches the entrance to the ring road also becomes busier. However, the movement of people and cars in the neighbourhood is rather low between 7 and 8 am, a time when I have visited the area several times and where the differences from one side of the street to the other become more pronounced.

**Date: 29 April 2022**

**Time: from 6.30 am to 8.30 am**

I took a tour of the farmhouse and the district. It's 6.50 am and I've been around for about twenty minutes. I skirted the road from behind the farmstead took the road that passes under the South Towers and cut through the unpaved road that leads to the Village. There are many road signs torn down this morning. Bent over or really off the ground. I have seen many road signs in this state in the area. I don't know what happened: whether it is because of the wind or human actions. Like the road signs, some plants are also leaning towards the ground, like the roses and flowers on the shrubs in the park. The sun has risen but is covered by clouds: it is behind the buildings of South Towers, specifically behind some dark and distant, vaguely gloomy buildings owned by a chain of hotels.

I haven't seen anyone around, perhaps because it is late to take the dogs out. There is very little movement. Only a small group of about fifteen people have taken the bus that connects the District to the Metro line at the northern edge of St. Leonard. The only people present and active in the area are the construction workers who were already here when I arrived, at half past six.

It is 7 a.m. I walk around the neighbourhood and try to see if and how many people are coming out of the houses. For now, there is hardly any movement.

At 7.20 a.m. there starts to be more movement: a couple comes out of the social housing blocks on the left-hand side of the neighbourhood, a family comes out of the next building. Some take the car parked in the driveway, others wait for a carload of colleagues. There is traffic, but it is small compared to the same thing in St. Leonard. Nevertheless, about twenty cars pass in the avenue.

At 7.40 a.m. I go to the courtyard of the farmstead, where the bar is. The gardeners and the farmhouse cleaners have arrived in the courtyard. They are working with vacuum cleaners and brooms. I watch them for a moment and enter the bar, which is completely empty. There are four people there at the moment. I have breakfast around 7.45 am. At 7.50 there are still four people. This bar is the only one in the district that serves breakfast.

It is 8.20. The bar is busier: the hustle and bustle has involved about forty people. Compared to the endless queues that form at this place during the afternoon, the flow of people has been disposed of quickly. The dehors, consisting of fifteen small tables surrounding the entrance and the front of the bar, is half-empty.

At the same time, 300 metres from the District but across the street, the bar-restaurant owned by an Apulian family is always crowded. It is renowned for its Salento pastries and its fixed-price lunch with a wide choice and canteen service. The bar-restaurant's biggest customers are the workers of the companies occupying the area's numerous warehouses, specialising in vehicle services. The entire area on the border between Milan and the small town of Pero is dotted with mechanics, body shops, tyre shops, firms specialising in certain classes of vehicles (e.g. motorbikes, trucks). These workers are recognisable by their fleece and jackets with the company names stamped on them ("Edilpero", "f.lli Grondona"), their safety shoes, the almost total absence of female workers in the small groups at the tables. Apart from them, vans of plumbers and movers pull up in the car park behind the place. Clerks and people without work clothes, more frequent at lunchtime, park their cars or walk to the underground after their coffee. This café opens at 5.30 am, closes immediately after lunch at 3 pm and reopens at 5 pm. Like 85% of the bars in St. Leonard and the Gal in general, it closes around 7.30 pm. According to Karl, my gatekeeper in St. Leonard, "people start work early and finish at 5:30-6 pm... so, apart from our bar, if you're looking for a drink in this area at 7:30 pm at night, you won't find it very easily".

In the District, in addition to the Sicilian bar mentioned above, the pizzeria-bar Urban Seahorse opens at noon and closes at midnight, serving lunch, aperitifs, dinner and after-dinner drinks, without breakfast. The District's spaces come alive at a different rhythm than those of St. Leonard, a residential neighbourhood where the seniority rate is the highest in the city and more than 30 per cent of residents are over 65. But there is another factor that may partly explain this low relative mobility. In the ten months I spent in the field, from September 2021 to July 2022, the District's population formed a predominantly smart-working community, a factor that may partly explain lower mobility from inside to outside the district in traditional working hours. In the District, more than 80 per cent of the people I met worked from home at least two out of five days. Some workers in the District were using hybrid forms of remote working even before covid-19 and others took advantage of the situation to close their office or contract this form of work. This research cannot indicate a precise trend because the fieldwork was carried out at a still emergency stage. The prevalence of smart working should be contextualised within the

pandemic crisis: the winter of 2021-2022 was the last in which Italy put in place containment measures for the pandemic, based mainly on the possession of the green pass. The containment system gave the possibility of using “agile” forms of work without bargaining with the employer. This possibility was rediscussed for the public administration in the winter of 2022, but continued in the private market in various forms. However, the relationship between residency and remote working will necessarily have to be analysed in the future. In the year of the research, the District was a place of value production, not just a residential district: a transition that offers empirical substance to the shift from smart city to platform urbanism as the ultimate development of the intelligent city. From this point of view, The District is obviously equipped with the best of the connection technologies available in Italy: fibre optics in all the buildings and working wi-fi in all the spaces of the district, obtainable in exchange for personal data.

The relationship between new residents and work is useful to provide an exploratory representation of the District’s population in the context of the city’s urban economy. Being a full-time worker is one of the most unifying conditions of the District’s population, which is predominantly made up of people permanently in the labour market. Those who are less present in the labour market in terms of age are less represented in the area: adults over 65 (especially those over 75, almost absent), teenagers (14-19) and young adults (20-27). The importance of having a medium to high income is a prerequisite for access to property in the neighbourhood, as is clearly indicated by the steadily increasing property values in the area.

Between 2017 and 2020, the neighbourhood had property values ranging from 2100 euro/sqm in the Village (social housing, sold between 2017 and 2020 and now sold out) to 4500 euro/sqm in the East Towers (free sale housing). In this phase, the central part of the sales concerned subsidised housing, with average values around 3200-3400 euro/sqm.

Between 2021 and 2023, houses for sale on paper in the highest segment of the District, the Free Towers, start at 4200 and go up to 5500 euro/sqm for penthouses with terraces and/or private green spaces. The subsidised housing still for sale in the neighbourhood presents average values between 3400 and 3600 euro/sqm. The District does not yet have its own statistical identity and is included in a larger area. However, the increase in prices between 2022 and 2023 is almost twice as fast as in the Gal and St. Leonard (5.5% vs. 9.3%, OMI data). In the near future, everything that will be sold in the District in a systematic manner will concern the free sale part sold directly by the developer. This part is called *Up Town* and is often used to define the entire District.

To identify the minimum entry costs to become a resident of the neighbourhood, it is possible to focus on rental housing in the social housing village. Social housing rent units are rented at 65 euro/sqm per year without condominium expenses. This is how the Village social manager summarises the practical criterion and access requirement for a person like me who is interested in renting a house in the neighbourhood:

If the rent weighs more than a third of his total income, watch out because he risks becoming morose: it means that the rent is too expensive for his pocket. And, frankly, in some properties this is very important because it is actually called “prevention of arrears”: I don’t give you a house that costs 15,000 euro a year if I know you earn 25,000, because I know that with 10,000 euro you don’t live in Milan. You pay the bills, you pay the groceries. But it is simply a criterion for the sustainability of the proposal, it is not an access requirement: the access requirement is to have an ISEE/ERP greater than thirteen thousand euro. Indirectly, I am saying to you: if your income is too low, we cannot offer you a house. You need an intermediate income: if it’s too high, it’s no good, if it’s too low, it’s no good.

In the year of the research, the flats available for rent were priced at around 650 euro for a two-room apartment of 50 square metres at a cost of about 13 euro per square metre per month. This price is 30% lower than the average in the city of Milan and 14% lower than the prices in the research area (respectively 19 and 15 euro/sqm, observation in January 2022, OMI data). Tripling the cost of rent according to the criteria adopted by the administration, the threshold is around net incomes of around 22.000 euro per year. Considering that the houses for sale in social housing were all sold between 2017 and 2020, the housing offer is currently focused on home ownership in subsidized housing and free-sale housing, thus between 3500 and 5500 euro/sqm.

*Open-ended contracts, homeowners, young families, indebted: an explorative account of the new residents*

The conditions of access to the neighbourhood and its development from scratch relate to the socio-economic conditions of the respondents, who are predominantly homeowners with permanent contracts or self-employed with VAT (see fig. 14-15)<sup>22</sup>. They generally describe their current and five-year employment status prior to the research as stable.

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<sup>22</sup> The different sample sizes depend on the composition of the households and the willingness to provide information on the employment status and contract of the partner in the case of households consisting of more than one participant.



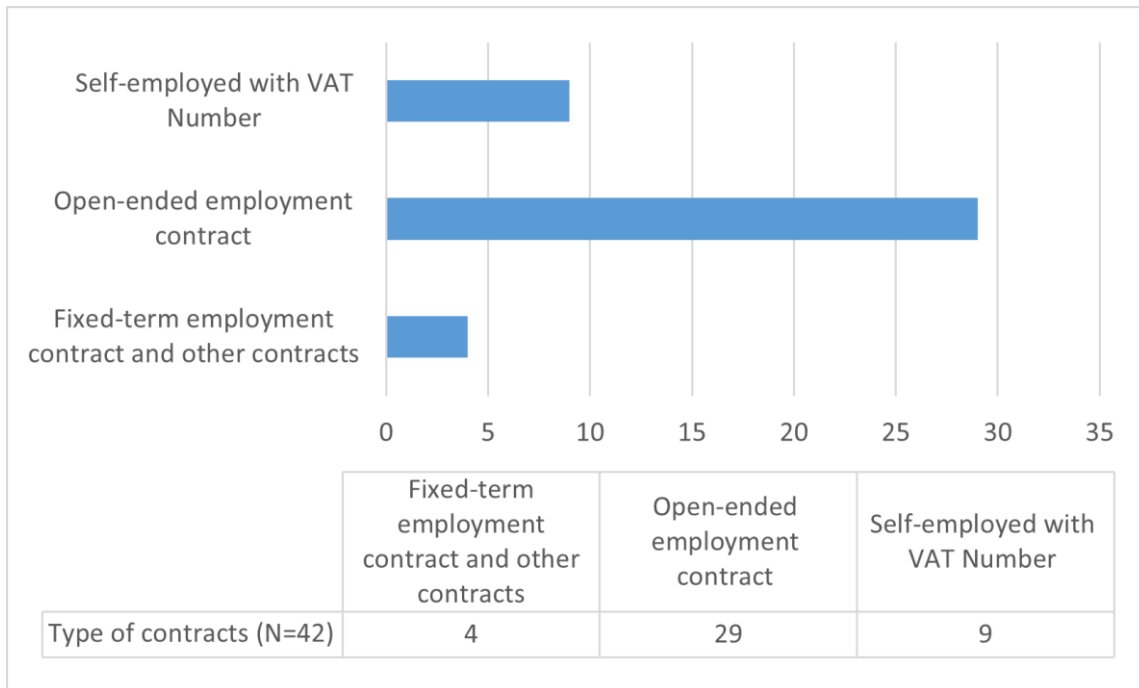


Figure 15. Bar graph of the distribution of form of contract in the sample of interviewees in the District (N=42).

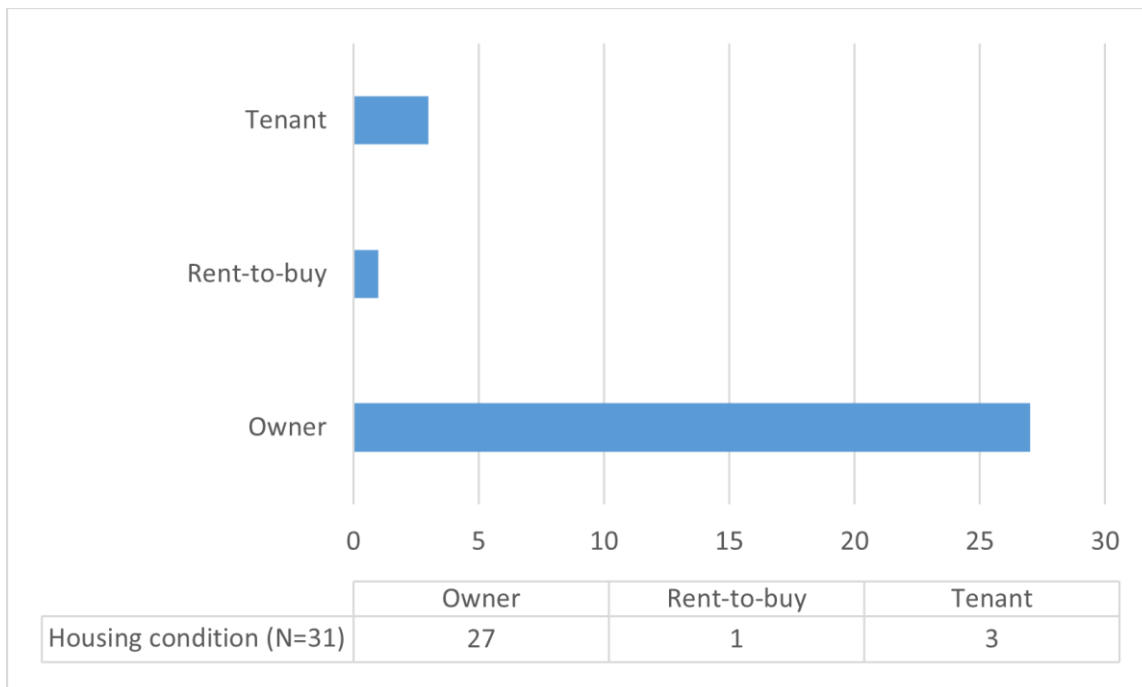


Figure 16. Bar graph of the distribution of housing condition in the sample of interviewees in the District (N=31).

The few unstable positions are either being stabilised or are related to activities that suffered slowdowns or interruptions during the pandemic and are recovering:

I am a show caller. I work in show business basically I do live direction. So I call the cameras the lights the music and the video starts and people come on stage. And the last few years obviously haven't gone very well for us, I've had very little turnover, I've been almost at a standstill since 2020. But let's say that we took a little bit of a chance and we had a child, so consequently also because of that and also because work was struggling to pick up, I worked very little even in 2021. And anyway I'm a worker with a VAT number and now it's all back on and hopefully it will last and I mean... I don't think we'll get back to the age we were but let's see what we have. [subsidised housing, resident since 2022].

Right now, at this very moment I'm still very precarious, I'm a researcher at the IEO, the European Institute of Oncology. But next month I'll change jobs, I'll go to the company to stabilise. [subsidised housing, resident since 2022].

I am a researcher. I was working at Bicocca University until October last year: a three-year European project that ended. I accepted a job offer elsewhere. I had continuity in my work, but until last year they were all projects with contract renewals every two to three years, now I have a permanent position. [subsidised housing, resident since 2021].

According to ISTAT's Nomenclature and Classification of Professional Units, based on the International Classification of Occupations (ISCO), the district's workers predominantly occupy the first four occupational groups: managers, highly specialised intellectual and scientific occupations, technical occupations, and executive occupations in office work. In this group, only 4 out of 42 respondents hold managerial positions in large companies or are business owners. The central part of the group can be divided into two subgroups: the first, smaller (9), is employed in the public sector. This group works in the public administration of important city institutions (e.g. court), in high and middle school, and in university research. The second, larger group (27) is employed in the private sector or carries out their professional activities in the private sector. They mainly work as employees in some of the city's most important economic sectors: finance and insurance, fashion industry, communication and marketing, banking. The dynamism of the Milanese market with respect to emerging sectors and the presence of leading companies in the city is represented in the interviewee's testimonies:

My husband and I are between 40 and 42 years old and work in two leading companies in their field. My husband works in the restaurant industry, in one of the most important brands in the catering world, he deals with behavioural-psychological training: sales techniques, effective communication. While I work in

one of the biggest multinationals in the clothing industry, I mainly deal with marketing, so everything that is communication in the sense of advertising, and lately also loyalty, customer centricity, customer care. [subsidised housing, resident since 2019].

I have been a permanent employee since 2017, working in a fashion company, e-commerce sector. This sector in Milan is doing very well, it is very dynamic, I am specialising in this area. I've been working in the e-commerce world for seven years, I like it and it's dynamic, enterprising... I'm going down this road and I'd like to continue to evolve in this sector, which is constantly changing. [social housing, resident since 2017].

Among the job positions observed, only 1 out of 42 is connected to strictly manual work and only 2 are connected to the so-called "third sector" (e.g. social worker, non-profit). The respondents in the District possess rather high educational credentials and not only obtained through a course in the public university, but also achieved through specialisation, masters and certification courses. Out of the 38 educational credentials observed or traceable, 5 respondents hold a PhD.

Resident's perceptions of their fellow citizen's income, professional status and educational credentials partly confirm the observation, but add some elements.

First, the presence of skilled and less skilled workers in the District was confirmed on several occasions in my daily life in St. Leonard, both by Karl and other residents of the old district. Several residents of the public housing across from the District explicitly told me about their tenants being transferred to social housing in the new district (without giving me contact details or further explanation). This is particularly plausible in the first round of allocation, when condominium fees were cheaper, and demand was lower.

Second, the number of highly qualified professionals (e.g. engineers, architects, doctors, lawyers) seems to be underrepresented, especially in a future perspective. This is particularly evident in the highest market segment of the district, free-sale housing, which represents the core business of the developer in the district. At the time of the research, free-sale housing consisted of proportionally far fewer houses than the other two categories (130 compared to 697 in social and about 800 in subsidised housing). However, the free-sale housing constitutes the future of the development process: the developer will build more than fifteen towers in the next five years. The perception of the residents in the free-sale housing is a "social mix" oriented towards residents with higher capital income and/or high qualifications:

Here it's extremely varied... it's very heterogeneous: from lawyers to engineers, architects, office workers, hairdressers... there's everything. Retired people... there really is everything, it's very diverse. Also because the price range is desirable, from people of normal class to people like the president of the company that created the district and lives here, people who look beyond the price, which certainly doesn't concern him eheh [laughs]... it's a compound that both for the view and also for the substance also attracts professionals of a certain level. The fact that you have the coworking, the gym, they are benefits of a certain level, which you pay for, but it is convenient to have them and that a certain type of person demands them, looks for them [free sale housing, resident since 2017].

In my opinion most of them are entrepreneurs with a diploma or a degree, they are not intellectuals, they are more entrepreneurs, maybe not the big entrepreneur, because the big entrepreneur gets the villa in Arese. Professionals: the successful personal trainer who works well and earns good money, the psychologist who earns good money, the doctor, the yoga instructor eheh [laughs]... or those who have a small business that invoices, I don't know, from three hundred thousand to two, three million euro [free sale housing, resident since 2020]

Young tenants, not too much but maybe in their thirties and forties, or with careers in hi-tech in my opinion, from what I've seen in social networking and facebook groups, or freelancers and employees in emerging sectors: e-commerce, online sales... the target is medium-high as a level of education [free sale housing, resident since 2022]

This last testimony introduces a common perception in the district: the idea that the district is essentially composed of "young couples", between the ages of thirty-five and fifty. The interviews in the district seem to confirm this tendency: out of 31 households interviewed, only 3 are made up of individuals over 55 and only 6 live alone.

Again, the Village (social housing) seems to be the landing place for younger households, while subsidized housing and free-sale housing show a more varied demographic picture. This aspect is linked to a fundamental dimension in the neighbourhood: parenthood. The temporal succession of house purchase, settlement and birth of a child is a common socio-biographical pattern widely observed by residents. The placemaking and community development partnership focuses many initiatives on children between the ages of zero and nine. This dimension is also decisive in the housing choices of some interviewees, who left their previous home with the idea of becoming parents for the first or second time:

Let's say that what I see around here is the age of the children. Good or bad 4 or 5 years old, some younger who were born recently. The reality is that many conceived when they arrived here, rightly so: a new neighbourhood, new house, getting married and having a family. My girls I think were the oldest, if not the oldest, when we

arrived here. I have a 15-year-old daughter and a 12-year-old daughter. [subsidised housing, resident since 2017].

We lived in the centre in via Goldoni, in the Porta Venezia area, because I was renting there. My partner has another daughter who is 14 and lives with us permanently. Then this other child was born, but even before Luca was born we were looking for a four-room apartment because we wanted to have a child and the idea was that we needed space basically. [free sale housing, resident since 2022].

Here it's mostly young couples, young couples buying their first home or with small children... that's the main target audience. Small children, very small children: they come in who are expecting or have just been born. More or less the times are like that. [social housing, resident since 2017].

Being a first-time homeowner is probably a common condition in the neighbourhood. However, households in which at least one member has already been a landlord are about 1/3 of the total respondents. On this aspect, social housing and free-sale housing might show relevant differences, especially in the future. This distinction is useful to connect to another relevant aspect of the respondents' profile: the majority of the households bought a house with a mortgage. Excluding those who live in rented accommodation or have benefited from a future sale covenant (4), only 6 out of 27 households have not entered into agreements with banks. In these cases, the sale of the previously purchased house in the city, especially in central areas and recently redeveloped neighbourhoods, was a decisive contribution to entry into the neighbourhood:

We bought a house in the East Towers. We bought two, one for me and one for my son, who is in his thirties. We bought here by selling one house in City Life and the other in De Angeli... eh well, it went well, we sold them well and here we have many services that we didn't have before: there's coworking, a gym... we bought at 3500 on paper: in our opinion a very good price. [free sale housing, incoming tenants]

My family and I had a big house, in QT8, where we all lived together: now we all live here. With that house we succeeded in getting two houses in this neighbourhood, one for me and one for my mum. My brother also moved here: he took a small mortgage for his house... of course they are all much smaller houses but we are happy with our choice. [social housing, resident since 2020]

*Between residential suburbanization and displacement: the housing trajectories of the residents and the city of Milan*

The place of origin and the socio-biographical trajectories of the interviewed households is obviously very variable, but has some common features: firstly, the interviewees were all born in Italy. Informal testimonies and observation of daily life in the neighbourhood confirm a clear prevalence of Italians in a “white” neighbourhood. This element marks a divide between the neighbourhood and the public housing on the other side of the street that is not only socio-spatial, but also takes place along the lines of skin colour. The proportion between “natives” and Italian immigrants seems quite variable and does not provide a clear indication of an existing trend. Among migrants, the residents of the neighbourhood seem to come mainly from the southern Italian regions (Campania, Sicily and Calabria).

Secondly, almost all of the respondents have been living in Milan permanently since at least 2018, and most have been residing in the city for more than ten years. Only 4 households have moved directly to the neighbourhood and in 3 cases the households already had relations with the city previously. Moreover, most of the respondents lived in more central areas: choosing to live in the District meant a shift to a more peripheral area, which many new inhabitants did not know before arriving in the district. This process of peripheralization must be framed within the development process of the district and the specificities of the city of Milan. The city has the best metro and suburban transport system in Italy. The proximity to the metro, with two stops equidistant at about one kilometre, provides an essential connection for most of the District’s residents. Using the metro, it is possible to reach the Duomo and several central areas of the city in about thirty minutes. This connection will be supplemented by a suburban railway line, which will serve the District and the MIND innovation centre from 2024-2025. When all the district’s infrastructure, which is a sore point in the district’s daily life, is completed, the new inhabitants should benefit from a hyper-connected environment. The suburban line will be in addition to the metro, the railway, the motorway and ring road junctions built for Expo 2015. The connection is not only physical, but also digital. The district is entirely wired with fibre optics and wi-fi is free throughout the area, as the large advertising screen placed at the entrance of the community centre, in front of the road dividing the District and St. Leonard, reads once every two minutes. Beyond some complaints (which we will discuss later), the future connections and services diminish the perception of the area as suburban in the negative terms of “unconnected”.

Being in the periphery is a condition contested and questioned by more than one actor in the neighbourhood. The concepts of centre and periphery do not only express a quantitative or topographical dimension, but are predominantly socio-spatial concepts, full of political and economic significance (see e.g. Petrillo 2018). The developer has invested and still invests heavily in the symbolic and discursive refounding of the area, focusing precisely on the centre-periphery relationship. On the one hand, it publicises the neighbourhood as a place closer to the centre than it appears. On the other, it promotes the neighbourhood as the residential space of a new centre in a framework of emerging urban polycentrism.

Residents of the neighbourhood tend to take a realistic stance on living in less central areas than before. Among the interviewees, we can identify two groups. A first group claims to have voluntarily moved away from central areas or to have no particular interests, especially in connection with parenthood:

Having a small child redirects activities. As long as we were engaged or newly married and renting in much more central areas, we really liked being able to live Loreto, Nolo, via Padova before or even Lambrate and Città Studi, lively areas where we could go out and do things very easily. However, since we have a little girl, we have been living in the neighbourhood in a quieter way, but we have a lot of services, because having the cascina [the District community centre] nearer is a very good reference point... we don't feel isolated... or maybe that's what we need right now in this moment of our lives. [subsidised housing, resident since 2021].

I've given up maybe staying in Navigli where there's more nightlife, rather than in another neighbourhood where maybe the costs would be even higher: I don't know, Wagner, De Angeli. I work on Via Turati, around Turati there are many residential situations. But I preferred being a little further away but having this kind of space rather than having a smaller house and being close to work. Close in the sense that instead of a 25-minute metro ride I would walk 15 minutes. Here, I can't walk to work, I have to take a vehicle. And so I preferred the park, I preferred the schools and I preferred the tranquillity, I preferred the park... [subsidised housing, resident since 2019].

A second group speaks of their move away from the centre as a forced choice, a necessary condition to become owners:

We were not looking for more residential accommodation: it was an economic factor, it was the only area accessible to our... pockets. Then we actually liked the project: it was a good compromise between affordability and the development potential of the area. Then of course, if with the same money I could have bought where I was renting, I would definitely have bought there. [subsidised housing, resident since 2022].

I wanted to buy: I was tired of paying after ten years of renting. My wish was to be more in the centre, but with the unaffordable prices I chose this area, more for that. Anyway, I knew people here: it's a bit more... family-oriented, but I also felt it was well connected and I could carry on with my old life. [subsidised housing, resident since 2022].

These two positions should not be seen as dichotomous but constitute two poles of a continuum that is also temporally dynamic. Some residents are not interested in living in more central areas of Milan but would have chosen another residential area if they could. Other respondents have learned to appreciate the area over time and only bought homes after overcoming certain prejudices:

In hindsight I say to you... I was forced because of the housing market, very true. I am happy to be here, but I was a bit reluctant in the beginning. In fact, I was convinced by my mother and my wife, who had been telling me for a long time “go see the District”, having also grown up not too far away... Before I didn't have a family, so I liked being around, being a viveur, going around, things like that. And so I always preferred the areas that were a bit more semi-central or central. I had a girlfriend here in the Gal and so I knew this area very well, but with my own eyes since Expo was here I hadn't come to physically see what the situation was like, you know? and so I thought: “no but there's the cemetery, no there are gypsies”... I was thinking all these damn mental restrictions. Then I came to see: when I came to see, in three months I bought a house. But of course at first I would have said no. But then it's great. [social housing, resident since 2018].

In some interviews with residents on this topic, a suspicious look would assume an ex-ante adjustment of preferences within a framework of structural constraints, i.e. the sour grape mechanism (Elster 1989). Actors rearrange their preferences and devalue or overvalue their housing choice in the context of a very difficult housing market. A common idea among the interviewees is that moving away from the centre is the price to pay to become the owner of a home of a much higher quality than one obtainable in other areas.

Housing conditions and urban transformations in the city are very influential in the respondent's choice. The first aspect emphasised by many is the harshness of the housing market. Milanese citizens speak of a problem “that has always been there, historic”, non-Milanese “of a qualitative offer, but very expensive”. Others simply consider it “madness”. The difficulty is not only related to the very high prices, but also to the speed with which the best houses leave the market. The second aspect is less trivial and is related to the appeal of the District and less central areas in the development of the city's north-west quadrant. Impressive urban



development operations have relaunched this area, especially thanks to the redevelopment of City Life, the area of the former Milano Fiera that has become an icon of the new post-Expo 2015 course. In addition to specific projects, many interviewees believe that the “central areas” are expanding:

When I arrived there was no Nolo, there was no City Life, there was not even Gae Aulenti, which were areas that I was told were not so much dangerous but ill-famed areas, for example they told me that in Gae Aulenti the circus used to go there to do shows, so not the best area in Milan. Certainly there has been a strong evolution from this point of view, the peripheries that were considered a bit borderline, maybe even dangerous, eventually became integrated with the city and in the end you find all social classes there. In some areas there may be a concentration of certain types of not very recommendable people, but in general there has been a lot of mixing, it is no longer just “I live within the ring road [“dentro la circonvallazione” - circular road that historically delimits the most central areas of Milan]. [social housing, resident since 2017].

Definitely this area has changed a lot, I remember a few years ago... they were really inaccessible areas, this whole area here and also City Life... it was an area you didn't even consider at all. [subsidised housing, resident since 2022]

The urban development operations of this quadrant of the city are obviously also publicised by the developer, who emphasises the axis of transformation that first involved the Isola district and the area around Stazione Garibaldi, and then moved outwards to arrive at the District (see fig. 16).

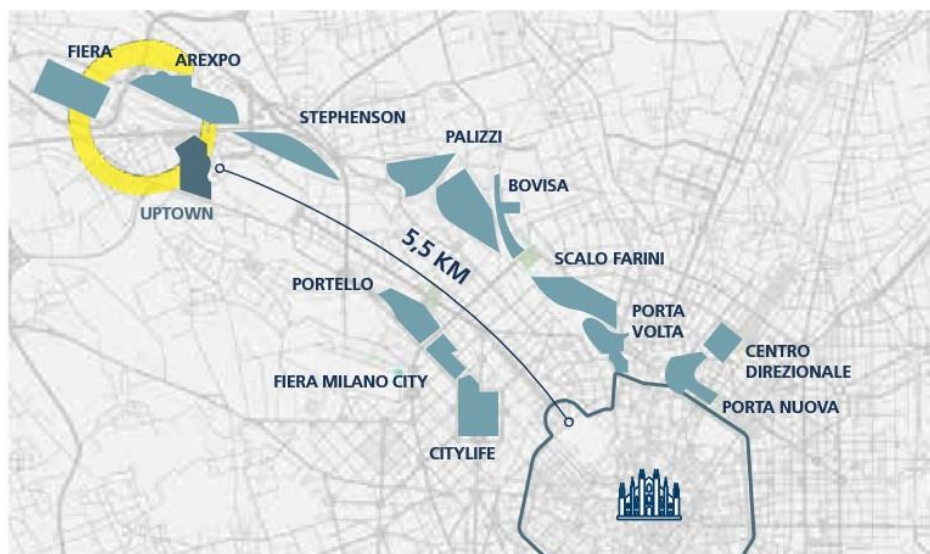


Figure 17. Milan's north-west urban regeneration axis. The areas in blue are those targeted for redevelopment, the last areas enclosed by the yellow circle represent the Expo area, the Milan Trade Fair and the District as a connected district. (source: <https://www.euromilano.net/>)

The transformation of this area of the city has not only lent credibility to the entire District project, but has accelerated the creation of Mind, the Milan Innovation District that will house the scientific faculties of the University of Milan from 2026. A large proportion of those interviewed bought their homes before Mind officially became a reality and now find themselves with an almost unexpected rent. If the District's location in a growing area has encouraged purchases, Milan's position in an international scenario is a further strength that has convinced many families to invest in the city.

However, the transformations that have taken place over the last twenty years in Milan have triggered moves that do not precisely respond to an economic logic or changes in the life course of households:

I bought a house in Via Varesina, a street leading towards Quarto Oggiaro, I found a very nice cohort house.... and then the people who came to live there suddenly started to change so much, so I realised for myself that there was really a problem of integration. It has nothing to do with racism... It's simply a problem of integration: I had neighbours who were wonderful people who brought me food, very nice, in so many ways, but you realise that you were born in completely different contexts, so I don't know, someone who's used to South America, maybe, who turns the music up in the morning and dances... when then you have him as a neighbour the first week you laugh, the second week you laugh, the third week you start having problems until after months you quarrel, because you are used to your way of life. Then other people arrived, always from other races, with whom I always got along very well from a human point of view, I like them a lot, it was always an interesting exchange. But I repeat, when you live side by side with them, it's really a problem of integration; that is, of relating between people. In everyday life you realise that you have a lot of problems. And so from there I started thinking that I could no longer stay where I was: I had to change.

This thing I thought, I realised that clearly a lot of people thought it, why am I saying this? Because apart from the fact that I found people who used to live in my street who also moved here, and then I also noticed another thing: that this whole area is mainly populated by Italians. For me it could have been inhabited by Indians, Africans, for me it's not a problem: zero! But I wondered why this was so, and I realised that all the people I met here brought me my experience: the fact of having houses in a fairly peripheral area of Milan, you find yourself interacting with people who have habits different from yours, and so you struggle! You struggle, you struggle, you clash until at some point you decide to move! And you move here, and in fact if you look at this area here, it's a little bit of a higher level and I was surprised and I said to myself "but they're all Italians here! How is it possible that we are all Italians?" and then talking to people I found this speech here. [subsidised housing, resident since 2019]

The displacement of residents belonging to the dominant and/or native social group towards a residential area more inhabited by their peers and less inhabited by immigrants of lower status is a social fact known as white flight in American studies on segregation (e.g. Duncan and Duncan 1957; Massey and Denton 1988; Kye 2018). In Milan, this phenomenon has been studied in a volume edited by Pacchi and Ranci (2017), which focuses on segregation in compulsory schools. As will be seen later, the failure to build the District School, scheduled for 2019 and still under construction, is the biggest disappointment for the families of the neighbourhood, who had hoped to have a school dedicated to them. The eco-sustainable, futuristic school complex will house five kindergarten sections, 15 primary and nine secondary school classes.

In this chapter we have presented a profile of the new citizens of the district in relation to the socio-demographic characteristics they have in common and their relationship with the transformations of the city of Milan. In this presentation, we anticipated the first motivations of buyers: the quality-price ratio of houses and the development perspective of the area in an economical growing city.

Before concluding this chapter, it is possible to draw an initial comparison between the socio-biographical trajectories and socio-economic characteristics of the residents and the model of refounded spaces proposed by Cousin's analysis, connected to the neighbourhoods of Milan 2 and San Felice. Cousin proposed a model that focused on the analysis of neighbourhoods connected mainly to managers in the private sector and employees in the high-ranking private sector. These actors had chosen Milan 2 with the explicit desire to reject the social mix, considering themselves elites. An exploratory analysis of socio-economic characteristics and motivations to buy a house in the District shows a different pattern.

First, the employment conditions of the interviewed population mainly occupy the higher positions of the ISTAT classification related to professional activities but levelled downwards. The population in this first phase of the District's population appears to be mainly made up of the upper segment of the middle classes, and only secondarily of managers and business executives. The levelling upwards seems more to describe the future of the District, where the supply of houses will stabilise at 5500 euro per square metre.

Secondly, respondents in the District have generally not decided to join this project out of a desire to segregate themselves from other social groups, but primarily out of a mix of market-related constraints and opportunities. The city's expensive housing market determined the choices of several respondents, who were attracted by the opportunities in the neighbourhood. However, a minority part of the district also saw this project as an opportunity to distance

themselves. Thirdly, the District respondents also chose to invest in this project by imagining a future development for the area. This dimension is relevant because it also influences the ambiguous relations between the residents and the rest of the area.

However, the design of the District is not only related to pure market conditions, but to some specific characteristics of the project. In the next chapter, we will focus on the value of the smart-and-green urbanism, as mix of infrastructures, environmental sensibility and valuable features of buildings in the neighbourhood. The smart city dimension is under construction and makes a secondary contribution to the construction of a distinctive space. But the green dimension provides the surplus that attracts and enhances the entire neighbourhood.

## **Something more, something different: the value of smart-and-green urbanism in the district**

**Date: 16 April 2022**

**Time: from 16 pm to 18 pm**

It is 5.30 p.m. It is a spring day with few clouds, lots of sunshine and blue sky.

I worked for a couple of hours at the farmstead and afterwards approached a small organic market, consisting of five stands placed in the part of the square between the farmstead and the road. They were placed next to the neighbourhood farm shop. They were called by Francis, the farmer who runs the shop. I already knew that it was his intention to organise more and more markets after the winter.

The stands sell honey, bread, wine, cheese and other products that do not need refrigeration. I spoke to some wine producers. They are a family from Ziano Piacentino, a small town in the province of Piacenza, not far from Milan. They tell me some things about their business and their small town that I did not know. They explain to me that they are trying to intensify their activities here in the farmstead, but they have had some problems because it is not very clear where the public space begins and where the private one ends. They want to be in the public space because they don't like the idea of occupying a private space without having precise agreements. They explained to me that according to their calculations the public space starts right after the two short wings of the farmstead: that is why they are there.

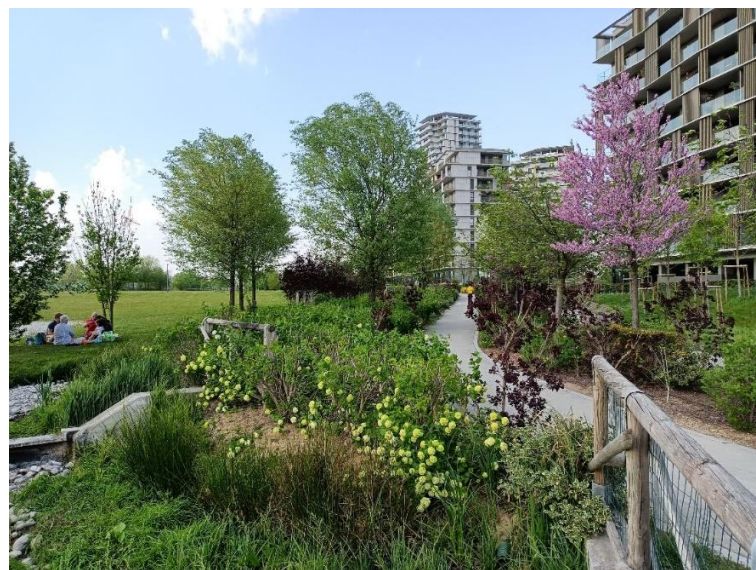
I move away from the area and return to the centre of the courtyard of the community centre. I observe the situation. There are about eighty people, scattered between the bar and the benches set up in the courtyard. There are about ten children between the ages of 3 and 9, two prams, people chatting, music playing in the background. The people in the scene, mainly young people but also some elderly people, appear relaxed and serene. They are distributed according to the uniform, geometric order produced by the street furniture in the farmhouse courtyard. Children are playing football, a couple of bicycles are leaning against the trees in the centre of the courtyard, a man is walking a dog. People are dressed in an ordinary way, without any fancy or garish clothes. The lawn and small trees are green, the sky is blue, with a few clouds on the horizon. All the elements in the scene give me a strong feeling of being inside a rendering.

I take some photos with a camera of a low-end, but almost new smartphone. I shoot with the automatic settings of the smartphone, as a user not interested in photographic technique would do. Consequently I shoot in HDR, a technology that reduces the different light exposures of elements in the scene. On a sunny day, this technique reduces the parts that are overexposed, i.e. "burnt" by white light. I look at the images: the combination of HDR and the particularly "digital" paste of the camera enhances this feeling of being inside a representation created with computer graphics.

I continue on: I pass the farmstead and enter the park. It is a very windy day. I turn my back to the High Towers construction site, which at this moment is a huge hole where workers are working on the foundations of what will be the most prestigious buildings in the neighbourhood. I look at the East and South Towers, the part for free sale which currently has a market value of between 3500 and 4500 euros per square metre. The park is very spacious and takes up the whole scene. The eye

is free to reach the horizon and the buildings stand out in an almost monumental way. I walk further, enter the park. Two small groups of children are playing football, while a group of fairly young boys is in the shade. It is Saturday. There is something relaxing and protective in this park today. This place conveys a sense of harmony that I have rarely felt in other places.

I take a walk and snap a few photos. Two children are playing football with an adult, their bikes are leaning against a tree and a bench. They are against the light in a large, semi-empty green space. I count about eighty people in the park, but the park is now 250,000 square metres in size, so it never feels crowded. I go back and take another photo, this time of a family picnicking under the trees next to the artificial stream that cuts through the park. The stream is full of water and the aquatic plants that have been carefully arranged at its banks are lush.



I look carefully at this section of the stream and see small holes: they are rabbit holes. I have learnt to recognise them because more than once these small animals have jumped out of the holes, fleeing at my approach. As I walk back towards the Cascina, a very large cloud of dust rises up from the



dirt roads and covers part of the park. The wind sways the trees and makes the situation more realistic. Five minutes earlier I had the feeling that I was in a dream: the wind and the sand bring me back to reality.

The District park is a vast rectangular area extending like a green telescope from the community centre to the shopping centre under construction and the walkway connecting the district and MIND, the innovation district in the Expo 2015 area (see fig. 17). Inaugurated in 2018, it was realised in agreement with the municipality of Milan by the developer, according to the programme agreement signed by the parties in 2012. The agreement stipulates that maintenance costs will be paid by the developer and the citizens of the District, who pay for the park with their condominium fees. In 2026, the park will return under the management of the Milan municipality. The first phase of construction of the park was completed in extremis before the universal exhibition, while the equipped areas were completed later, at the close of the event. To date, the park is 25 hectares large, including 159,000 square metres of turf and 15,000 of shrubs.



Figure 18. The District park map. The circled areas indicate buildings not yet under construction. Buildings within the park constitute the market segment in free sale (source: <https://www.verdisegni.org/2019/05/30/visita-del-parco-cascina-merlata-31-05/>).

From a design point of view, the park consists of a large lawn bordered by densely wooded parts forming backdrops, with longitudinal pedestrian and bicycle paths on one side and on the other. The park has a large number of trees and is equipped with 5 children's play areas and 3 dog areas, divided by size. The distribution of these areas is not homogeneous but is unbalanced in favour of free-sale housing, which has the green spaces and more equipped areas under the buildings. The park is the result of a great design effort: the District areas were historically an area of kilns, which used wood from the forest as fuel for production. The soil was particularly suited to this type of activity because it is full of clay. This material prevents plants from taking root and creates problems with water drainage. To create a park from scratch in this area, the landscape architects had to overcome serious agronomic problems:

There was a lot of work in the field, but the clay is in great depth, you couldn't replace such massive layers of soil, so we had to opt for a wide range of plant species, so that it would be easier to take root, and also provide for an underground drainage network, which you can't see today but regulates all the water absorption and conveyance.

The park is criss-crossed by a stream that cuts through the long right side, below the East and South towers. This stream and its source are an excellent example of the most interesting aspects of this green space and the value it represents.

The stream is a watercourse created by landscapers and is fed by a natural *fontanile*. Fontanili, also known as *risorgive*, are particular water sources between the Upper and Lower Po Valley and Veneto. In these areas, the water table gradually comes closer to the ground surface until it emerges because the clay substrate is practically impermeable. The water emerges from a ditch two to three metres deep, which is called a "head". It then forms streams, the "rods", which collect into larger watercourses. Fontanili were used for hundreds of years, until the evolution of agricultural techniques caused the abandonment of these watercourses and their reduction. In the district, the fontanile head is near the area where Marie, the district manager, has had several beehives installed and where the annual urban beekeeping workshops are held, with online meetings and practical workshops. In summer, children from the social housing solar camps clean the fontanile of algae when there is water and are rewarded as "keepers of the fontanile". The fontanile and its watercourse are distinctive elements of the park. These natural elements have a specific section in the factsheet dedicated to the park, on the Milan municipality website: "the water of the fontanile is very precious" it is written "because it flows continuously throughout the year and, coming directly from the underground water table, has a constant temperature of around 10° C, which does not freeze during the winter". Furthermore, it is



written that “around risorgive, very special environments are created, typical of wetlands and rich in biodiversity”<sup>23</sup>. The continuity of the water flow is one of the most surprising aspects of the fontanile. During a winter characterised by the most severe drought in the last seventy years in northern Italy, and in Lombardy in particular, the District’s stream flowed alternately, but continuously. This is because, as mentioned earlier, the water table is very high here. The group of St. Leonard elders with whom I used to take walks in the District also confirmed the presence of old canals, a lot of water and fontanili.

Because of all this feedback (the website of both the community centre and the municipality, the elderly residents of the old district, the district manager Marie) I initially paid little attention to this element of the park, concentrating on other aspects. When I paid more attention to the stream, it took me little time to realise that this natural fontanile story was blatantly false. I had my first doubts at the end of April, when for a few days the channel was completely empty in a strange way, as if someone had turned off a tap. In early July, I took a tour of the park and was struck by how healthy the 7500 water plants were. Six days earlier, the mayor had signed an ordinance banning the watering of a large part of the city’s green areas, banning the washing of private vehicles, banning the filling of ornamental fountains and other restrictions<sup>24</sup>. The city’s parks were suffering greatly: it had rained in the spring but not enough, the winter had been a disaster. How much water could there be under the ground? At that time I noted to myself “it is time to seriously try to find out what is going on with this stream: the park is lush, the stream and the fontanile are full of water. I think this is the place with the highest amount of water in the entire region”. A precise question to one of the two landscape architects hired by the developer solved this little mystery:

The canal is totally artificial, but it has been reintroduced because water is important in fostering both plant and animal biodiversity and also within the park, because of the landscape role it plays. There were no fontanile, to be honest, in this area. There were ditches... because the old fontanili had all been interrupted by the highway, the railway, the trade fair, all the infrastructure that had been built over the years. And this fontanile today is fed by the well that feeds the entire irrigation system, but in the future it will be fed by the surplus water from the air conditioning of the shopping centre, it will have its own supply.

Using surplus water from air conditioning systems seems a very innovative way to create a stream. For some people, it might even be more interesting than an old fontanile. The idea of a

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<sup>23</sup> <https://www.comune.milano.it/aree-tematiche/verde/verde-pubblico/parchi-cittadini/parco-cascina-merlata>,

<sup>24</sup> <https://www.comune.milano.it/-/emergenza-idrica.-firmata-ordinanza-sindacale-per-contrastare-sprechi-e-favorire-risparmio-dell-acqua>

man who dominates matter through his genius and creates biodiversity and life by turning air into water. A father-of-the-flood developer, a son generated by technology in the citadels of the triumph of prosperity and well-being. However, this kind of discourse does not seem to have much demand in the contemporary market for urban imagery. On the contrary, the design and storytelling of this park is based on *naturalness*: a “green authenticity” that generates valorising distinction. The park in this neighbourhood is different from that of City Life, the reference of many residents interviewed, where houses cost three times as much and everything is “plastic”. In a neighbourhood dominated by financial logic, this park is a valuable asset also because it has something more than the other parks, it distinguishes itself from the others: it is a well-designed park and is “real” in terms of “natural”. It is full of animals, of plants, of biodiversity. The views of the houses on the green are more carefully designed than in other contexts. An excerpt from an interview with a couple living in the houses sold directly by the developer illustrates this feature. The design of the park is an essential factor for the quality of the District’s housing offer, as is the connection to the city and the price:

I: so, let’s say among the aspects, the elements that convinced you most about the project, there is this thing of a location slightly outside the city with living space and green conditions...

R1: the green, the green!

R2: the space, the greenery: yes, that’s essential... That’s what brought us here, and what convinced us was the fact that even though we were outside Milan, we were well connected...

R1: and that it’s a real green, in my opinion...

R2: yes, it’s not the one in City Life...

R1: it’s not the one in City Life, which we looked at there too, but it’s really plasticised, between the fake vegetable garden and the shopping centre attached...

R2: that’s right, the fake vegetable garden! ahahah [laughs]... City Life is a totally different condition because first of all there are the towers, it already feels like being in the city and not outside the city. The houses in City Life are made so that you see the other houses, you don’t have the garden in front of you. They didn’t conceptualise the garden in the middle very well, but here they made a much bigger park, they probably have different spaces. There is much more greenery here in front. Even if they are building in front of it, there is still a nice piece of green, which you can see. Then there are no railings, it’s all transparent glass. We’re on the fourth floor: I turn around, look out the window and see all the green and that makes all the difference.

R1: There’s also something else, but then again, thinking about the research I conduct on the emotions conveyed by digital, virtual nature, etc... I deal a lot with the sublime and profound wonder and how certain types of natural environments are able to convey it. The bests are those, let’s say, that convey a sense of vastness in terms of breadth, and here this concept has been fully exploited

because the very fact that there is such a wide view of a park and that perceptions of boundaries, especially artificial ones, are broken down a bit is very helpful. On the other hand, when we went to see City Life, let's say that the vastness was exploited in terms of height and you still had the same feeling of being enclosed and therefore of being surrounded

R2: The buildings are beautiful as shapes, as dynamism even inside the buildings and so on, but then as a context they get lost so much. People then don't live inside their houses, they live in a context. Even when you are inside your house you look outside and you look at the context you have, you feel in a different context, more squeezed. And then it's really the area of.... I don't know, maybe it's because they were the first ones: it's just the air of fiction, with these buildings that are a bit estranging... it all seems fake. It all seems plastic, it's like being inside a plastic model, it's like when you see that film you end up inside the model... it's like you're inside the model, even the vegetable gardens that are there: you say "damn but if you live here anyway there's a lot of money what the heck is the vegetable garden for". They send maybe the Peruvian to go and cultivate the vegetable garden.

I: yes, according to you it seems more like a representation here, than a place... a kind of staging of a place rather than a place.

R1: exactly!

R2: that's fine for Fedez and Ferragni. If, however, you have a cultural level that goes beyond money but concerns ways of life, of true well-being that is not related to money is related precisely to how well you live...

R1: less hedonic.

R2: yes exactly. Then surely there is an abyss between here and City Life.

I: and you here have less of that feeling, that it's a bit more... real?

R2: Nooo, it's really real here!

R1: 100%

R2: it's really real, they've also made a good variety of vegetation, they've taken great care of the microsystem, they've put bee houses... they are silly, but they make a difference to you, because they create... they create a difference to you. There really are squirrels, you might even get a grass snake, but it's part of the natural environment.

The landscaping and the creation of an ecosystem within the park are the result of high-level planning. In contrast to other similar interventions, the park was included in the urban planning of the District from the very beginning: park and buildings were designed together. Furthermore, the developer made specific choices and was actively involved in the design process of the park. For example, the developer proposed to treat the undeveloped areas by sowing them with flower meadows and letting them flood due to the very high-water table and rain. The result is twofold. Firstly, the park looks much bigger than it will be when the project

is completed because these areas become part of the park's environment. Second, the flower meadows work very well ecologically: so many different species of plants increase the variety within the park and when they flood, they become wetlands. The wetlands attract microfauna, especially migratory birds. The first day I visited the district, the company's corporate communications manager immediately took me to see a heron in one of these areas, on board a caddy similar to those used in golf clubs. In the outermost area of the park, where the district borders Milan's *Cimitero Maggiore*, the design follows the same logic but with even more brilliance:

The park is slightly downhill, because the Milanese plain slopes slightly from north-west to south-east, and here over the development of one kilometre it slopes quite a bit. And so we anticipated that there would be floodable meadows in this area. Here precisely, we opted for a more naturalistic arrangement and slightly excavated a large meadow and a smaller meadow. It happened that in times of torrential rains they actually acted as a drainage basin and it worked like a charm. There's reeds, some moisture, so even there from the point of view of variety and biodiversity and vegetation... it's important because I mean, at the best of times we have mallards, we have some microfauna, we have amphibians.

The landscape architect emphasises that “we must not mythologise this green space, we are not in the Ticino park”, but at the same time it has “markedly naturalistic features” and is “a park with less facilities for activities than other parks in Milan, very different from City Life”.

Marie also promotes and enhances the naturalness of the park and the values of environmental sustainability. To measure the park's biodiversity, the district manager contacted a biologist who carried out environmental monitoring in 2019 and 2021. The results of the monitoring form a short text available on the community centre website, together with a dedicated video. The park was found to have a good presence of birds related to agricultural environments “which are among the most threatened in Europe”. This fact constitutes “an unusual element in the city, which is explained by the spread of undisturbed open environments, flanked by lawns that are not mowed regularly”. Species to be mentioned include “the house martin, goldfinch, swallow and tree sparrow, all of which are in decline in large parts of Italy”. Between 2019 and 2021, there was a large increase in butterfly species and flowering plants “with positive effects”. The number of resident or visiting birds “also increased from 19 to 25 species”. The message is very clear: this park is precious.

As part of the promotion of green and environmentally sustainable behaviour, the developer and Marie, the district manager, organise a specific event each year, the Green Week. This initiative consists of a week of public meetings, initiatives for adults and children, theatre

performances and music. In 2021, Green Week brought to the community centre a play about the sexual habits of insects and animals living in the park, green-themed DJ sets on the Urban Seahorse stage, an apiculture workshop, visits to the park with biologists and nature photographers, and an “urban farm” day.

In my daily explorations in the District, the results of the planned “wildification” of the park only partly emerge. In the course of a year, I have actually encountered the micro-fauna that has been so busily publicised several times: rabbits, birds, mice, snakes, butterflies. Water plays a central role in this: the abundance of water in all seasons, in a context of drought, attracts animals. Naturalistic and pseudo-bucolic elements are intertwined with a functional and orderly floral composition: the cycle-pedestrian path is sown with plants that are repeated in series for a kilometre (see fig. 18).

An element influencing the greater number of “bucolic” elements compared to other urban green spaces is its underuse. In spite of residents’ complaints about the “crowding of the park on weekends”, I can say with relative certainty that this park, between September 2021 and July 2022, was always much less utilised than the other green spaces I frequented in Milan and St. Leonard. The issue of “little equipment” plays a central role: for example, there is not a single table or picnic area in the entire park. The practices that are fully permitted in the park are rather limited: walking the dog (three areas tailored to the size of the pet), letting the children play (five equipped and completely new areas), walking.



*Figure 19. The cycling and walking route in the District park.*

These activities seem to be sufficient for the interviewed households, who see the park as the neighbourhood's big plus, beyond the initiatives in the community centre, which are nevertheless appreciated. For some, the park was the element that revalued a move towards the city's fringes:

In Milan, we really missed the green. Personally, I was so used to living in the city that I didn't, but my boyfriend, who used to live outside Milan and found himself inside the buildings, missed the air, as it were. Instead here we found a peace that I also appreciated, I who was more of a city centre dweller and instead I revalued a lot. [subsidised housing, resident since 2021]

You know, I'm from the San Siro area, which is a neighbourhood, not a periphery, but almost... when I lived in Sempione it was already semi-central, it was already different. But I have re-evaluated it because, yes, as soon as I came here, the first thing that impressed me... well, you have to know that the social village was already there, some CMB [subsidised housing] things were already there, but the building site for the shopping centre was not there. So the thing that struck me was the park. I'm telling you, I'm honest: green is our sea of cities, you know. The thing that struck me was that, because then thinking in perspective of my children, the children, I said to myself "the park is essential, isn't it?". [social housing, resident since 2018].

The perception that well-kept green spaces are important for the healthy growth of children and for the period of pregnancy is a common trait in many interviews in the District. Some households interviewed attend or have attended a St. Leonard community centre dedicated to parenting in the past. When the community centre began to populate with new residents and businesses, the association moved some of its summer activities to the community centre courtyard. During the summer months, a dozen women about to give birth gather in the courtyard centre to spend time together or to receive some guidance from a psychomotor therapist specialising in children in the 0-1 age group. Several recent studies in the field of environmental health have pointed out that exposure to healthy green spaces decreases the risk of problems during pregnancy such as premature birth and low birth weight (see e.g. Lee et al. 2020; Sun et al. 2020).

Another particularly interesting element related to the relationship between park and health is the increase in positive park-related perceptions during the pandemic. A significant proportion of respondents emphasised that during the pandemic, the park proved to be a valuable and unforeseen resource. The possibility of using a large park in a relatively low-density housing context benefited the mental health of residents, who were able to have more social relationships and benefit from large spaces:

Look, I tell you as a mother of two children that this house and this neighbourhood saved my life during the lockdown but also afterwards. We were given the opportunity to move around even during the lockdown, because having the park underneath the house even just going around the building, which was allowed, gave us a bit more outlet than having to stay on crowded pavements. The yoga classes rather than the runners I think could be considered satisfied. Of course it would be nice to keep it that way and instead unfortunately there will be other housing developments and so the space will probably shrink, but for young people and new families I think it's absolutely [emphasises in voice] an optimal solution. [free sale housing, resident since 2018].

We for example have experienced covid quite well and so everyone who has lived here. Firstly for the comfort of the house because the house became fundamental, so those who have a more comfortable house live better, there is no comparison. And then in my opinion what changed so much was that there was the park and this park was a release valve, both for the young and not so young, as well as a meeting point because then the only thing you could do was go to the park. If you lived in the city you had less space than we had, proportionally speaking, maybe in the future we will have less too because of all the buildings that are coming, but right now we enjoyed a certain "freedom in the covid", leaving aside the first months when we were locked in. The fact that we can still be in a park that is quiet with children and bikes... is not trivial. [subsidised housing, resident since 2019].

According to some interviewees, covid "has benefited the neighbourhood" because it has increased the value of a residential and green urban development project. In a neighbourhood where "everyone is in smart" it is not so necessary to be served by shops and in any case "shopping is done online"<sup>25</sup>.

In order to analyse in more detail the process of rent extraction and value production connected to the park and the strategies of developer, it is possible to return to the theoretical reflections proposed in the introduction on the urban green grabbing triangle, an analytical tool that aims to describe the dynamics connecting financialised lenders, developers and buyers in gentrifying green neighbourhoods.

According to the analyses of Garcia-Lamarca et. al. (2022), the creation of new green spaces in urban development contexts (especially residential) follows dynamics based on three processes: the extraction of new financial and aesthetic value, the assurance of value and credibility for consumers and investors, and the appropriation of social and health-related benefits. The

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<sup>25</sup> Regarding a possible "covid effect" on the "green" peripheralisation processes of District residents, this research cannot give a clear indication. Unfortunately, almost all respondents had bought or chosen to live in this district before the outbreak of the pandemic, often buying on paper. However, the one household that decided to live in the District after the pandemic sees the lockdown experience as central. The very high rent prices in the city and the lack of space led this family to "break" with the centre of Milan and move almost outside the city, to a location with more green space.

dynamics of value production and rent extraction are connected to a dual process. The first is the appropriation by developers and investors of surplus value generated by the productive relationship between labour and nature through the construction of the park, especially in a context of public funding. The second is the extraction of a differential rent, i.e. an additional rent created by the increased utility of a particular unit of land, which is extracted through higher property prices. In my interpretation, the case and the dynamics connected to the District park follows these dynamics but also contains some specificities.

First, the developer did not appropriate the value generated by the creation of the park by other actors but developed the park himself as an urbanisation charge. This has not meant a loss for two reasons. The first is quite clear: the urbanisation charge is much lower than the value of the whole operation, which is based on capturing a rent differential between the areas purchased between 2006 and 2009 and the closing of the sale of its free-sale segment (in addition to the collection of the shares of the closed social housing fund), by 2030. The second reason is that the company could design the park according to its needs and dedicate specific attention to distinctive elements that would allow it to beat competition from other urban development projects in the city.

Second, the developer must maintain the park's distinctive features over time because the urban development process of the district will be long and, as we have seen, the park is a fundamental part of the quality of the offer. In this sense, the park is the developer's flagship asset, an element that generates stable income flows. Therefore, at this early stage of the project, the developer is willing to invest a lot of resources in the park even though it no longer formally holds the property rights to it. Residents benefit from the use value of the park with which they associate a several positive features, but they also pay for this maintenance and are partly involved in the project as investors. This intertwining of economic interests, status defence and symbolic values contributes to creating the subtle selection at entry whose dynamics will be described in the next section.

As planned in the urbanisation project, the gradual and inexorable decrease of green space is one of the aspects that worries the citizens of the District, “I hope they build as slowly as possible” I was once told, “the more the developer is late, the happier I am”. Indeed, it is no secret that the District’s leading developer is missing more than half of the houses. Everyone is well aware that it is only a matter of time before the developer builds the last three large lots for free sale. At South Towers, which will be built in 2019, they say “the tower” for vertical buildings and “the line” for rectangular buildings that run horizontally. According to the master plan, eight towers and seven lines are missing. Using what is already built as a benchmark, the



District still lacks between 1,200 and 1,500 flats, all to be built in what is now parkland. It will be difficult for the most endangered birds in Europe, as the park biologist calls them, to finally find a permanent refuge in the district.

In 2013, in this area there was the semi-abandoned farmstead and shacks self-built by Italian and non-Italian immigrants. In 2030, 17 years later, there could be between 45 and 50 buildings, not counting a school for 900 people and an 80,000-square-metre shopping centre. The project should have between 16,000 and 20,000 inhabitants, but according to some calculations that will depend on the square footage of the houses, it could reach 25,000 to 30,000. The district has all the credentials to become the largest private residential building speculation in the city's history. Among them, it is certainly the greenest.

*Gated temptations: the district's green spaces between public property and private management*

The District park is not only distinguished by its microfauna and flora, but also by its conditions. In the hottest months of the year, the difference between this green space and the parks of St. Leonard, one of the greenest neighbourhoods in Milan, is striking. The park's maintenance workers are very present: almost every day, several pick-up trucks can be seen mowing the grass and checking the growth of the shrubs. The fact that the park is "very well maintained" is clear to all interviewees. The reason for this is also clear: this park is maintained by the developer and the residents of the District, who pay for the maintenance through condominium fees. The agreement with the City of Milan is unclear: the management of the park should return to the City between 2028 and 2030, depending on the costs. The poor maintenance of the public park by the administration and the idea of prolonging private management are emphasised both in private and on public occasions:

**Date: 8 may 2022**

**Time: from 2 to 4 p.m.**

We have gathered in the courtyard of the Cascina for the first edition of Jane's Walk, a walk inspired by the work and activities of Jane Jacobs. It is a grey and muggy day, but not too hot. We are about fifteen people: there are some architects, the girls from the "Red Gloves" association (which promotes sign language for the deaf), Stephanie and her family (her husband and two little girls), other people I don't know.

The initiative works like this: we take short walks interspersed with moments of explanation about the neighbourhood and chats about how to "activate space from below" through citizen action.

In the first part, in the courtyard of the farmhouse, Marie told the story of the District and let an architect introduce the figure of Jane Jacobs. In the second part, we spent a quarter of an hour in the space behind the farmstead, which Marie calls the South Square. I recorded what we said and made some short videos. In the walks, I chat with Stephanie and her husband, who tell me that We Are The Village, the association of social housing residents of which Stephanie is president, are organising summer camps for the children. Today she is also here to present what they did the previous year. Marie was keen on her presence and that of others from the Village.

In the third part we enter the park. Marie starts to tell about the management:

“The management of the park is a management delegated to a super-condominium that takes on the management of the park: the inhabitants in a millesimal way and the developer take on a small piece of the maintenance. This is a commitment that has a duration and the park will go to the municipality afterwards.”

The architect, who up to now has been counterpointing Marie by commenting on her orations with some theoretical notes (e.g. “it is not important what initiative is done, but that something is done to activate social relations in these spaces: through initiatives, relations are activated”) asks “how long is the duration?”

Marie replies: “eeeh... it depends on the costs... let’s say another six years, seven years”. The architect remarks mockingly, “well, then he’ll burn up all the grass!”. Marie replies “well, it depends on what we want to do”. Stephanie intervenes “But actually I know that someone asked to extend it because that’s what gives value to the neighbourhood”. “yes... There are a lot of... opinions on that,” Marie comments. The architect says “eh, there is an awareness that once it passes to the municipality the maintenance...”. Marie replies and closes, “for example, you can see this difference very well because the small squares already belong to the municipality and they are all dry. However, apart from this thing on which we open bureaucratic issues of which I don’t have too much information...”. Marie starts telling about the insect houses, diverting the conversation to another topic.

Marie was never too clear on this aspect: in my understanding, the maintenance of the park is an investment, but also a major cost for the company, which does not want to make public promises without an agreement with the residents. The interviewees never stated that they wanted to retain management of the park or close it, but they often complained about wild parking during events in the community centre and, in some cases, “crowding” at weekends. Some interviewees, who are particularly interested in the issue of public safety, are concerned about how this green space might become in the future and what the consequences of the initiatives in the community centre might be for the daily lives of residents:

When I go home at the moment I find a neighbourhood that is still clean with no strange people around. For this we also have to give credit to the security service: even if I don’t particularly like them, we have to recognise the work of the people. I can say that my little girls can go to the farmhouse safely or take a walk in the park

without finding any shady individuals, or you can still enjoy a pleasant walk. It's still a livable place, for the time being. the future is unknown, but there was already a mega brawl a while back during a concert at Urban Seahorse and there's already someone taking their beers and pizza to the middle of the park. [subsidised housing, resident since 2019].

I'm happy because this neighbourhood is expanding, even if certain promises have been broken. But it's good. It's also good that people from outside come to the initiatives, but it creates complicated situations with parking and... some people come here and vandalise everything they find. So I'm happy with the initiatives, but let's say, I'm happy up to a certain point. [subsidised housing, resident since 2020].

As mentioned earlier, the activities fully permitted in the park are few and rather limited. In other parks in Milan, as is often the case, the uses of green spaces respond to complex and stratified logics, both micro (e.g. forms of interaction, customs) and macro (e.g. overall urban policies) (see Barchetta 2021). For example, the association and football team run by Karl in St. Leonard often organises initiatives in two historical parks in the west of Milan: the "Montagnetta" of San Siro and the Trenno park. These initiatives are technically not legal, in the sense that Karl and his friends self-organise the event and take care of cleaning the area afterwards. The administration of City Hall 8 knows Karl and does not oppose these initiatives, partly because Karl has been a councillor in the municipality and is careful about diplomacy. Karl has two political opponents in the neighbourhood who try to ban his initiatives every year: an extreme right-wing politician and another, more moderate politician, who bases his political activity on urban decency and legality. These characters are very active on social networks through a facebook group dedicated to "initiatives and actions" for City Hall 8. The purpose of this group is basically to criticise the local (centre-left) city hall administration on the issues of decorum, park maintenance and security. Precisely these two actors are trying to infiltrate the District's facebook groups: they saw a pool of potential voters looking for representation on these issues.

While informal social activities in the parks are already the subject of small political battles where they are historically present, in the District they are nipped in the bud or selected by the neighbourhood watch service. The way in which this organisation operates and the perceptions of the area by security staff show the complexity of the intertwining of social dynamics that, in the end, generates selection on entry. The security men are not many, but they provide a constant 24/7 presence and have been in the area since 1997. Their security service has changed since the early 2000s, when they patrolled the park spaces dressed as soldiers, handing over people

and “the gypsies” dogs to the police, who did not enter the area. “it’s different now”, they told me, “now the police come here, we cooperate with the neighbourhood police station and the carabinieri, it’s their job to sort things out, we can’t go overboard”. The security men do their job in a much less police-like manner than they used to, but the socio-spatial dynamics of this area have changed profoundly. From 1997 to 2008, the area was clearly private. Since 2008, the ownership of the area became with the developer who, according to programme agreements with the administration, opened the public park in 2018. However, the management remains private, and the developer is not only the public face of the whole operation, but also owns the community centre and pays for the security of the park since it bought the area in 2008. Within this framework, the security service enforces the municipal regulation of public parks in the city of Milan, but at the same time considers that there is also the interest of “the owner”, i.e. the developer. The developer seems to be the owner of the whole area as it has been for years, but this legally not true. Two decisive elements are added to this situation.

The first is the pressure of some residents on the security service. The security men have a very definite opinion on the attitude of the residents of the district towards the park:

For the people who live here now they would even be inclined to fence everything off and create an enclosed area, as they did in City Life. For them it is their backyard.

This pressure is amplified by the neighbourhood’s facebook groups, which don’t focus on security but occasionally touch on it. The security people hate this kind of communication:

Mamma mia... I am totally against it, and it becomes a problem for us too. Sometimes they post those things... ‘scandal, scandal! There’s...’. Then you go and look and say “what the fuck?!”. Actually, people get problematic, they post crazy stuff, you hear about those things you say “what’s the big deal?”. A lady some time ago posted that the water in the fountains was open. I tell her “but ma’am, what are you writing? There’s a huge well, it’s all water that is recycled, it’s not running water, in fact this recycling has to be there”. You consider that they have created huge tanks to recycle water. Then she reposted to another group “the security man told me that the water from the fountains is recycled, so it will be full of germs, it’s harmful! Let’s have the water analysed! Children drink water from the fountain that is full of diseases”. People here are unsatisfiable. Maybe there’s a gypsy boy around now, and it’s not good according to them. But the gypsy boy can wander around, they’ve bought a house here and so according to them the gypsy boy can’t wander around. “there are three gypsies passing by” and what do we do? We don’t let them pass? Or others come here and say “I saw a swarm of mosquitoes”, and so what? What do we do? They post it on social media. “in the park I saw a swarm of dangerous mosquitoes”, another “I saw a snake”... I don’t know, what should we do?

The second aspect is this actor's perception of the neighbourhoods around the district, namely St. Leonard. According to numerous testimonies, St. Leonard had a bad reputation in the 1980s and 1990s. All the interviewees who were born and raised in Milan spoke to me of "a heavy neighbourhood" [un quartiere pesante], an expression used to define an area with petty crime and a medium to high level of violence. Specifically, Froth street, the street mentioned several times in this text, and Pyrenees street, the street parallel to the street that divides the District and St. Leonard, still enjoy a bad reputation. I lived on Pyrenees street for a year and can confirm that this reputation does not correspond to an actual reality (see fig. 19). However, this connotation and the prejudices of the surveillance men ends up creating real effects and unwarranted attention to the difference between the District and the old quarter:

I am a little doubtful when it will become totally municipal tomorrow. Because now it has to be said that the developer has invested a lot in construction, but it is this company that pays a lot of expenses and a lot of things. When you leave here and the park becomes municipal, I don't know how it will be managed because there are so many problems. I mean, we are here, but... the problem is this: because this is an evolving area, new construction, all the people from Pyreness street, all the people from Froth street, all the people from St. Leonard tend to come here. They try to get out of there which is a little bit less neighbourhood, to come here because it's nicer... and so we find them here. Initially they wanted to, they thought... but now they have understood. However, this remains a new neighbourhood with a fairly bad neighbourhood around it.



*Figure 20. Pyrenees Street. On the left, the 1970s red public housing houses where I lived for a year. On the right, the new public housing houses, inaugurated in 2009. The district's community centre is two hundred metres beyond the grey houses.*

The combination of these factors generates exclusivity. The security service claims to have turned away from the park people drinking beer and listening to music, two behaviours that are perfectly legal according to municipal regulations. In one case, this led to a conflict between District institutions and a day care centre in St. Leonard, run by a woman named Sandra. Sandra is a street social worker with a great experience in dealing with minors and young adults with legal problems. The day care centre is located in one of the big grey public housing buildings on Pyreness Street, in front of my house. These buildings are the last unbought public housing buildings in the neighbourhood, together with the Froth Street buildings and the Moon Street complex next to Froth Street.

In that case, Sandra had taken the boys and girls from the centre to play volleyball in the park, planting a net. Security had intervened to try to send them away, making her very angry:

Last year we planted the net in the municipal park that the guards came to send us away. I got very angry because they told us it was private, instead it is communal, in fact I can plant them now. I argued with the person in charge [who is Marie], who in fact told me “absolutely”. The fact is that that park there is not for everyone’s peaceful use. If I had been stupid, I would have been scared “gosh, I can’t play volleyball here”, luckily I’m not, I can read the signs and above all I remain silent. I went to the manager. I said to her “excuse me, they told me this, what are we going to do about it?” because either you write it clearly or I report it to the Milan municipality. I was working for the Milan City Council. There is seriously a control, which was not due, because we were not smoking a joint on a bench, but we were playing, very cleanly and quietly with kids. That park is not so open to the public.

This episode, which was resolved positively, shows how the use of the park is governed by a complex and ambiguous dynamic. Nobody really wants to prevent visitors from entering the park, but the system of governance of this space creates social selection pressure. The reason why I have always noticed a certain underutilisation of the space may be related to the fact that this selection was already quite strong when I arrived in the field. As we will see in later chapters, the vast majority of citizens interviewed in St. Leonard do not feel excluded from the District. Rather, as a neighbourhood resident once told me at a Christmas party, “that place has nothing to do with us: it’s just another place”. The redevelopment of the District area does not seem to include St. Leonard residents, but the growth of property values in the area is likely to affect them anyway.

### *Beyond the park: smart-and-green houses in the District*

The design of the park are not the only distinctive green aspects of the ‘smartest and greenest district in Italy’. The logic of value-enhancing distinction permeates the District’s buildings and flats, beyond the market segment in which the dwellings are located. The common elements in subsidised housing, social housing and free-sale housing are not random, but the result of a masterplan inspired by a unified vision: the developer’s vision. This “doing it differently” started with the masterplan and the first buildings in the neighbourhood: social housing.

One of our distinguishing features is that we always hold competitions to select architects. We did them both for the masterplan, which was designed in advance, and for the social housing, where architects were selected from several towers: a mix of architects. But the architects were the most important architects, so Cucinella, Cino Zucchi, Cappai and Segantini, so the less prestigious housing was designed by top architects. The cooperatives also chose Citterio and Viel to design the social housing.

The towers of the social village were built in different periods and designed by different architectural firms. However, an attempt was made to maintain an underlying coherence in the textures of the façades, which have a refined appearance. The textures of the buildings are complex and particular. Zucchi’s towers, for example, have a “stepped” profile. The top floors have a smaller area than the base. The façade is composed of an interplay of white triangular pilasters, dark breakthroughs and teal parapets. Single windows alternate with double windows and balconies. In general, the basic theme of the village is movement: the windows are staggered from floor to floor and the balconies at the corners seem to cut through the structures themselves. This absence of symmetry between the floors makes the profile of the façades and the structures themselves irregular, creating original textures (see fig. 20-21).

The architecture of the district is completely different from the public housing buildings across the street in St. Leonard. They distinguish themselves from the rest of the district, marking a socio-spatial difference inscribed in the architecture, an architecture of distinction. However, the District’s respondents did not buy a house in the district only because of what they see from the outside, but mainly because of what’s inside: very high energy class, no gas, geothermal, indoor cooling, home automation, exclusive services. The search for a low-energy house is an ecological choice that encourages savings and facilitates access to credit through green mortgages. Cooling and underfloor heating work efficiently and exclusive services are very rare in this price range.





*Figure 21. Examples of architecture in the Village (social housing). Left, the towers by Cino Zucchi; right, one of the first towers built before the Expo, in 2014.*



*Figure 22. The skyline of the Village (Social Housing)*



The District is the first in Italy to be awarded gold certification by Green Building Council Italia. This non-profit association is the Italian branch of an international network of 75 councils around the world, the World Green Building Council. The association's mission is "to transform the building and construction sector across three strategic areas - climate action; health, equity & resilience; and resources & circularity". The network is part of UN Global Compact, a "global movement" focused on promoting corporate social and environmental responsibility. The certification issued by GBC Italia rewards the energy-environmental protocol of the District's masterplan. On 6 March 2023, the developer celebrated obtaining the certification together with the company responsible for the Milan Innovation District and the developer of the new shopping centre. The conference was entitled "From Expo Milano 2015 to the ESG pole of excellence". ESG stands for Environmental, Social and Governance. This expression refers to international standards that affect a company and its business. These criteria concern the preservation of the natural environment, the creation of an inclusive social environment with a high quality of life, transparency and balance in corporate governance. ESG criteria have been developed in the financial sector as a metric for SRI: social responsible investment. This approach seems to be growing in manager's preferences and performs well in terms of return on investment (see e.g. Syed 2017). All District respondents were looking for "new" houses, and the smart-and-green distinctive features of the building were very important for their investment. The quality of cooling and district heating are highly valued, especially in a smart-working context:

The fact that there are shutters that go up and down with home automation for me is an important thing, I like it, I like the home automation, I like the smart home. I'll tell you the truth, the fact that there are these things is maybe less important, but the fact that it's class A4 or A3, for us it's become essential. Even where we were before we were in A1-A2, but class A makes a difference: why does it make a difference? Not so much for comfort, it makes a difference for two factors that are essential for us. The first is the heating: we don't want to feel cold in the house, basically. The second is soundproofing: I want to be able to scream at home. Here I can play the drums and nobody notices. I don't hear a baby crying and I have a baby on the left and a baby on the right. I never hear them: here it's absolute silence and this soundproofing is given by class A. And even the heating... in Milan, I've seen a lot of very hot houses with radiators set to a thousand, but this is good heating, it's all underfloor heating, it's homogeneous. You enter an environment that is not heated: it's really warm. [free sale housing, resident since 2020].

We were fascinated by having a class A house... nowadays it's little talked about but having a class A house in 2017 was no small thing... By the way, we are quite technological: my partner in particular likes home automation and it was a big plus

for him. I, on the other hand, made it more about the energy class. Not just for comfort, because that's there too, but I say it: these houses are worth more for cooling. Whoever tries the cooling in this house is unlikely to then think of changing to live in a different house, also considering how hot it is in Milan and if you don't have the chance to go away for three months. Change your perspective. The cooling works as if you were in an office: you don't feel hot, you don't feel cold, you don't feel the air from the air conditioner that you have to turn off after a while. You feel good. The heating comes from the floor, you don't have the air jet, if you regulate it well, you're fine. [subsidised housing, resident since 2018].

Home automation in homes is the only fully developed “smart” feature in the “smartest district in Italy”. However, a not insignificant part of the buyers in the district is interested in home automation or has had previous experience in smart homes or even in a “smart district”:

In Abruzzo, when we bought a house in 2011, my husband designed all the home automation in the flat. We had a heat pump and we had applied to put solar panels in, so even within a block of flats we were already energy self-sufficient. We already had an underfloor system and then he designed an application, so we could use it to open and close the shutters from a tablet or start the underfloor heating, again from a tablet. When we came here we asked for the minimum because we realised that most of the things are useless. [free sale housing, resident since 2022]

We lived in Seoul, in a very high-density residential area. Seoul has 13 million inhabitants so it's a different city, but the flat was not too different from here: it was a so-called smart district there too, renovated everything in 2021 and consigned, everything. For my wife who is from there, it made a difference that it was all new in a technologically advanced development. In South Korea, there is not the Italian mentality of valorisation and preserving historical buildings also because everything was destroyed with the Korean War or the Japanese occupation before that. So there is nothing to preserve. [subsidised housing, resident since 2021]

A feature not related to technology but which many interviewees emphasised as “smart” is the presence of collective services and small facilities inside the buildings. Social housing has a communal gymnasium, a library that can be rented for private parties, a “bar” space with a counter and a small kitchen, a cycle workshop and a children's space. In addition, each tower has a fridge from which it can buy basic necessities that can be paid for through an app. The free-sale houses have similar but more exclusive spaces: in the social housing there is a gym for almost 700 flats, in the South Towers there are two gyms for 140 flats. In the free-sale housing, booking access to communal spaces is possible through a specific section of the neighbourhood app, an excellent example of the incompleteness of smart facilities in the District.



Figure 23. the first screen of the District app, in “non-resident” mode.

The neighbourhood app is a developer-curated app that can be used in two modes: resident and non-resident. As a non-resident, the app is basically a promotional portal about the District and the developer’s homes for sale (see fig. 22). It offers information on events in the community centre, weather conditions, flats for sale and the area in general (e.g. the park). In the resident mode, which can be unlocked with a code, the app provides access to exclusive services. As mentioned, the houses sold by the developer have some common services: co-working, gym, children’s space, party space. The lot under construction, the most expensive one (between 4800 and 5500 euro/square metre) will also have a swimming pool, a SPA, a squash court, a reserved cinema room. The use of the app is again a distinguishing feature: it is exclusive to free housing. In fact, social housing residents use more conventional digital noticeboards and social housing has no relevant communal spaces.

The app is supposed to be used to reserve spaces and access “on-call” services in the higher segment of the

neighbourhood, but some residents complain of problems in its operation and excessive costs for the services offered:

Look at the app, it’s incommentable, it’s really incommentable. it’s absolutely not up to what it should be. In the sense that none of us use it. We can’t do anything more than what you have. We can look at the home automation in our house, but we also do it through the direct channel that you go on the bridge of the company... it doesn’t change anything at all. We can’t book the coworking rooms and the hall.... there’s the menu but it’s not really aligned with the actual calendar which is in the digital agenda. The app doesn’t talk to the digital noticeboard that we have and in 2022 it’s really embarrassing. [free sale housing, resident since 2017].

With respect to the app in my opinion they still have to profile the user base a little bit. There are prices in my opinion that are really much higher than the services that are offered and there is a lot of attention to organic, assuming that the people who live here predominantly appreciate organic when it’s not necessarily the case, also because if you delve into organic it’s good up to a certain point you don’t always have to look for it in all the purchases we make and for all the products we select. My impression is that they have in mind a certain type of user who is very affluent and very unconcerned about the expenses he or she may face on a daily basis and

who prefers to have something quick, perhaps even at three times the price at which it can be found because he or she doesn't have time to devote to it. [free sale housing, resident since 2020].

Partially developed, the application is not useful for anyone: residents and non-residents equally.

## The Place to Be: the staging of smart-and-green urban futures and everyday life in the neighbourhood

**Date:** 12 February 2022

**Time:** from 11 am to 3.30 pm

It's Saturday morning and I go out for a walk around eleven o'clock. It's a sunny day, not very hot but still mild, in the wake of the good weather of the last two weeks (the last two in January, on the other hand, were something else: cold, grey, at times full of a thick fog like I'd never seen). I get off and it's Pyranees street. The street is quite empty. The yellow bin for collecting used clothes to donate is in its correct position today: a couple of weeks ago a group of kids had knocked it over, around one in the morning.

I head to the café in the St. Leonard shopping area to have breakfast. Today the area is quite populated. This complex consists of pagodas, low, rectangular grey concrete barracks, connected with raised green metal rectangles and square benches, with trees in the middle. It is paved with paved concrete squares. The whole area is owned by the Milan municipality. Usually the area conveys a feeling of abandonment: the rubbish bins are always overflowing, there are lots of shards and things abandoned on the ground, especially rubbish related to take-away food. I have often seen crows, who are very present in the neighbourhood, pulling things that are still edible out of the bins. Few shops are open, and many establishments are closed with visible metallic shutters. There are a number of murals on peace among peoples, done who knows how long ago. A blog I use for research speaks badly of this place<sup>26</sup>.



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<sup>26</sup> <https://blog.urbanfile.org/2019/11/28/milano-gallaratese-il-mercato-di-via-visconti-triste-e-sciatto/>

The bar is at the far right, entering from the car park amidst the 1970s public housing. In front of the bar, people enter and exit the pharmacy. On the other side, towards the metro stop, the discount store whose walls are owned by the municipality of Milan is in full swing.

I arrive at the bar. I see a boy from an association based in the premises entering with a teenager. I greet him, he is working.

I go in and order a cappuccino. Today, the bar is quite crowded. There are three of us at the counter, two at the machines hidden in a small room carved out of a section of the central hall, and a few people sitting at the tables, both inside and outside. In the bar, a seated old man drinks a “bianchino”, a small glass of sparkling wine that costs one euro fifty in this bar. The other people sitting at the small tables inside the bar watch television. This television usually shows draws and updates on Lotto and Super Enalotto. Two men buy cigarettes and scratch cards to consume both outside the bar, sitting on the area’s “benches”: squares of concrete and brick with little trees in the middle. I look around: two thirds of those present are playing a coupon or a scratch card, plus the man at the slot machines. Legalised gambling is the favourite activity of the bar’s patrons. In fact, the place looks more like a betting shop/tabacconist/mini-slots room than a bar where alcohol and food are consumed. It certainly does not serve lunch: it has a kind of buffet area with completely empty food racks.

The age of the bar’s patrons is very variable, but heavily skewed towards the over 40s. There are several non-white people present, first, second or third generation immigrants. They seem to come mainly from Eastern Europe and North Africa. The “style” and clothes worn by the people give the impression of those who came down from home almost “in their pyjamas”. Others are dressed for working class jobs. Elderly people are dressed like old people. I notice that some have a look that I associate with the “old tamarro” in the “periphery” version [vecchio tamarro, not translatable in English] (little jackets, flashy Nike shoes).

I go for a walk beyond Rooster Avenue, the expressway that divides St. Leonard and the District. In less than a five-minute walk, I arrive in the courtyard of the farmhouse, the community centre of the new district. It is a quarter to twelve and there are about sixty people there, distributed between the Sicilian bar on the right, the Urban Seahorse tables on the left and the Sushi-Burger takeaway restaurant under the larger building that forms the long side of the farmhouse. The situation is very different from the one a hundred metres before: a table of people in their thirties are drinking beers and spritzes sitting at the Urban Seahorse tables, couples in their fifties dressed quite nicely are sunbathing on the bar chairs, about twenty people are having breakfast. The Sicilian bar has city centre prices: for example, a normal arancino costs 3.50 euro, one with “nero di seppia” costs 4 euro.

There are at least ten very young children, and four prams with even younger children. There are three dogs: I don’t understand enough about them to know if they are special breeds, but they are well looked after. Jazz music is playing in the background and the whole courtyard is illuminated by sunlight, which hits the farmhouse practically all day long and is currently at its zenith.

A cold wind rises. The sunlight is very strong and illuminates the farmstead frontally. The combination of the cold wind and fairly warm sun, the winter clothes of those present and the widespread relaxation reminds me of the relaxed situation in a bar-restaurant on the ski slopes during a skiing week.

I pass the farmstead and take a Mi-Bike, a car-sharing car that the developer inaugurated last summer: the station is new and unlike most of the stations in the city it is sponsored by Up Town, the brand that unites all the free-sale houses sold by the developer. I look at the advertising logos. There is a sign saying, “Up Town: the first wellness district in Italy” and a picture with a woman cycling on the park’s bike path.

I take my bike and go for a ride. The park is, as I have always seen, heavily underused: there are no more than fifty people using a huge public park. People let their dogs play, they jog, they take their children to play in the park. All the children are small: they are either under six or in prams or swaddling clothes.

While I write these notes, in the afternoon, the farmhouse on a Saturday like this is always full of people. The sunshine makes everything livelier, compared to the winter weeks and the autumn just past. Adults spend time together at the bar and dozens of children from zero to seven to eight years old play in the courtyard. The private security van “Merlata security” is parked almost in the middle of the paved cross that cuts the lawn of the farmyard into four quadrants: it has been there since morning and has been parked there all day (it is probably empty).

At 3.30 p.m., while the farmstead courtyard is full of people (I can see it from the balcony), I go down again. The bar in the St. Leonard shopping area is empty: the adult people in the neighbourhood who are not at home wander around the green areas near the buildings. The only structure with an open space teeming with life is the parish, about five hundred metres from my house: a large group of kids play on the football pitch and swarm in the areas in front of the church entrance.

Jazz or electronic music plays in the background from the Sicilian coffee bar, which sells coffee, granitas, ice cream, arancini and ready-made dishes; Urban Seahorse sells craft beers and spritzes and a pizza that has been left to rise for 36 hours. Francis the farmer has carefully displayed in wooden crates all the vegetables and fruit produced on his farm, thirty kilometres from Milan. The container next to the Sicilian bar where he keeps his things is set up in a way similar to an old barn. He opens on Tuesdays and Thursdays for half days, but on Saturdays he goes all day: from 9.30 am to 6.30 pm. Children, lots of them, play in the farmyard. There are no teenagers: they are all small or very small children. The yard is far from the road, almost a hundred metres. It is almost impossible for a ball to reach there: the parents can stay relaxed. The sunlight is dazzling and bathes the farmstead in its white light: the temperature of the light will gradually decrease as the sun begins to set, turning a golden yellow. The farmstead is exposed to the light almost all day long. Its buildings are two colours: white and a warm shade of rust red. The sky is blue, the lawn is green.

Further on, the neighbourhood park: neat, tidy, lush. The old fontanile stream, “which also has a sonorous value”, as I am told, flows through the middle of the park. A rabbit escapes from its burrow and takes refuge in the tall grass. Here too, children play in dedicated areas: purple,



green and orange slides and rocking horses. The glossy paint shines in the sunlight because it is not even five years old. The shockproof floor is in perfect condition. Young couples kiss: whoever does not have a child, usually has a dog.

On certain days, when the weather is all right, The District really feels like “the place to be”, as the developer’s motto goes: a place where it is good to be (see fig. 23). In the community centre, even more than in the park, wellness and relaxation become spectacle, mise en scene. The construction sites and dozens of cranes stand behind the farmhouse but cannot be seen from the courtyard: the backstage of a frontstage that looks out over the rest of the area.



Figure 24. Two photos taken in the community centre between spring and summer.



District respondents defined the neighbourhood in emotional terms by associating it with emotions such as “serenity”, “tranquillity” and “well-being”. Some compared the district to a holiday village, far away from the chaos of the city:

I sometimes jokingly say: it feels like being on holiday in a holiday village! It gives me this feeling... Even this winter, on cold days, I worked at home and then went down for a chocolate here. I felt a little bit like I was on holiday, all the more so if it was sunny. So lightness, a sense of light-heartedness. [subsidised housing, resident since 2021].

Do you want to take a nice walk, do you want to run? We have a garden, a really nice park, very well kept. I don't know, I have the impression when I arrive here, when I get to the roundabout, that I'm walking around, even though it's still an open-air construction site, but you're almost in a situation of, of, of... of a holiday! I don't know how to say, even the square, the farmhouse, all the greenery, the park, you're in the city but with, in my opinion, wellbeing, because wellbeing: you enjoy lots of green, well kept green. [social housing, resident since 2021].

In one case, daily life in the neighbourhood is described as a reward after years of economic instability and hardship:

Emotionally... it's very sunny as an environment. I like the fact that there are open spaces, it gives me this atmosphere of freedom and almost idealisation of Italy as the garden of Europe in which to live. Maybe it's also because in the last year the temperatures have always been mild and we've had so many opportunities to be outside and therefore also the feeling of living a little idyll. This is also linked to the fact that as a life trajectory before were years of a bit more sacrifices and difficulties, while the moment we moved here there was already perhaps a greater job tranquillity and stability. So let's say I associated the broader professional life trajectory with the move: and so there is this overlap of personal success and place that makes me feel this area and this house as a moment of peace, of tranquillity. [subsidised housing, resident since 2021].

The most persistent element of daily life in the neighbourhood, especially in the community centre and when time permits, is the presence of something that is difficult to explain with words, and which is not easy to document with a photograph: it is an atmosphere, something all-encompassing that tinges a scene with emotional colours.

Critical reflection on atmospheres originated with Gernolt Böhme's reflections on contemporary aesthetic theory in the early 1990s (Böhme 1993). According to this author, philosophical reflection on aesthetics is too anchored in the position of Immanuel Kant, who conceived the criticism of art essentially as a judgement, based on discussion. The consequence of this legacy is that aesthetics has become a branch of philosophical enquiry dominated by

semiotics and language. It has become “languages of art” (Ivi, 115). In this way, aesthetics quickly became a theory about art and the work of art, assuming a strongly normative orientation that focuses on high, true, authentic art. The fact that aesthetic value is a broader phenomenon becomes marginal.

To overcome the problematic elements of these positions, Böhme proposes a new general theory of aesthetic work as the production of atmospheres. “As regards reception” he writes, “it is a theory of perception in the full sense of the term, in which perception is understood as the experience of the presence of persons, objects and environments” (Ivi, 116).

His theory is influenced by Walter Benjamin’s work on the concept of the “Aura” (2001[1935]) and the philosophy of the body by Hermann Schmitz, a philosopher with a phenomenological approach (1964). From the former, Böhme takes up the idea of aura as something that is absorbed by the body: the reception of aura is bodily, and not only works of art emit this kind of force. Auras can be emitted, for example, by natural objects. From the second, he retrieves some aspects of an outline of a philosophical theory on the atmosphere within a broader reflection on bodily experience. In this analysis, Schmitz uses the concept of “reality of images”, taken up by Ludwig Klages, to emphasise how images possess a dimension of reality and power independent of their source. For Böhme “In his concept of atmosphere Schmitz takes over two aspects of Klages’s idea of the reality of images: on the one hand their relative independence in relation to things, and on the other their role as active instances of feeling which press in from outside the affective power”. Schmitz’s merit is twofold: on the one hand he develops the spatial character of atmospheres as “affective powers of feeling, spatial bearers of moods” (ibidem). On the other, he definitively uncouples this concept from the dichotomy between subject and object, in accordance with the phenomenological approach that gives primacy to experience and its aim of producing a philosophy of the body. However, the problem with Schmitz’s reflection is that this disengagement is total: the production of atmospheres becomes completely detached from objects and they become almost wandering entities.

According to Böhme, atmospheres must be freed from the subject-object dichotomy. From the point of view of the subject, it is time to abandon the idea of the soul and conceive of the human as a body in an environment. At the same time, the common conception of the object must also be modified. Specifically, Böhme proposes to consider the qualities of objects not as determinations, “in terms of its closure”, but as the “ecstasy of the thing”, i.e. as being able to throw off their own qualities. Objects affect subjects, they are able to emit their perception, they are not perceived by a subject who perceives them in terms of “closed” determinations. In this way, it is possible to conceive of atmospheres as spaces “tinctured through the presence of

things, of persons or environmental constellations, that is, through their ecstasies. They are themselves spheres of the presence of something, their reality in space” (Ivi, 121-122). Furthermore, the atmospheres have a synthetic function because they constitute “the reality of the perceived as the sphere of its presence and the reality of the perceiver, insofar as in sensing the atmosphere s/he is bodily present in a certain way” (Ivi, 122). In this framework, aesthetic work consists of giving environments and things properties “from which something can proceed”, i.e. working to ensure that objects radiate their presence. In addition to the production of recognised works of art, aesthetic work is an “art of the stage set”, a specific work of producing atmospheres (Böhme 2013).

Edensor and Sumartojo (2015) reflect on this aesthetic work in terms of “designing”. They underline two essential points: first, the role of participants “in anticipating, being primed and co-producing atmosphere” (252) should not be underestimated. Second, atmospheres are not only “affective fields” (Conradson and Latham 2007, 238) but are deeply connected to the social, cultural and political context in which they appear. Thus, atmospheres are not only emitted by natural objects, but are also social products developed by professionals in a specific context (as Böhme had already glimpsed). Thibaud (2015) elaborates a set of operational modes to describe how atmospheres pervade the urban environment, starting with the concept of *ambiance*. *Ambiance* and *atmosphere* are almost two synonyms. Similar to the concept of *atmosphere*, *ambiance* expresses an “affective tonality”, is based on a multisensory experience, distances itself from a normative approach and can be located between environment and lived experience. However, *ambiance* “tends to emphasize more the situated, the built and the social dimensions of sensory experience while *atmosphere* is more affective, aerial and political oriented” (Ivi, 40). Moreover, “*ambiance* already has a long tradition of fieldwork, interdisciplinary tools and design activity while *atmosphere* is more grounded on philosophical, ontological and geographical issues” (Ibidem). In a precedent work, Thibaud defines the concept of *ambiance* as “the quality of a situation” (Thibaud 2011, 204). This definition originates from the philosophical reflection of John Dewey on experience in relation to “*environing experienced world*”. According to Dewey, our experience of the world is never related to a single object or event but about a “contextual whole”, i.e. a “situation” (Dewey 1938, 66, cited in Thibaud 2011, 205). What unifies a situation is its “pervasive quality”, a quality based on three components: Unity, Mood and Dynamic Process. Unity refers to the property of a situation to be “qualitative” and “qualificative”, namely to be unduplicable and to penetrate every object and events in the experience. Mood refers to “the pre-reflective dimension of the experience” (Ivi, 206): we grasp intuitively reality before a process of conceptualization occurs. Dynamic process is a concept

related to inquiry, the process of transforming an indetermined situation into something clearly defined, converting distinct elements of a situation into a whole. The dynamicity of this process calls for action. In this sense “ambiance triggers a certain form of tension in the body that requires action and this underpins a praxeological approach to perception” (Ivi, 208).

Returning to Thibaud’s elaboration on backstage atmospheres as a process, he distinguishes five operational modes. The first is related with establishing sensory as a field of action by paying attention to the medium: air, sound and light are the means by which we perceive. The second is to color the set with affective tonalities. Medium is never neutral but “always involves specific affective tonalities” (Thibaud 2015, 41). The keyword of this operation is resonance, namely the possibility to vibrate with the surroundings. The third operational mode refers to the act of give consistency to a urban situation making several distinct factors come together as a whole. The keyword in this process is coalescence. An example is the construction of ambiance in a shopping centre:

“Playing carefully prepared background music, maintaining a constant average temperature, with even lighting for optimal showcasing of products, strict control over the rules of behaviour and ways of being, direction of pedestrian streams and spatial layout of merchandise, and so on. All these forms of expression combine, react with and interpenetrate one another to set the ambiance of the place. In this case every effort is made to neutralize the perception of passing time and the existence of a city outside. There reigns a general sense of floating wholly directed towards selling and purchasing”. (Ivi, 43)

After these three modes, it is necessary to maintain the space in time through everyday work. the keyword of this fourth mode of operation is upkeep. Maintaining the situation can not only involve the front and most spectacular parts, but also the wings. In Goffmanian terms, not only the front stage, but also the backstage. Thibaud emphasises the importance of the cleaning and waste management service as a key element in the long-term care of the situation. Finally, the last operation relates to playing with imperceptible transformations. According with Thibaud “setting the ambiance of territories consists of a process of impregnation” (Ivi, 44). This process regards “how a space inhabits us” and is “made of nuance, slowness, and constancy” (ibidem). Critical reflection on atmospheres is particularly useful for interpreting what is staged daily in the District’s community centre, a place where the setting has been carefully constructed in relation to the neighbourhood’s target audience. As we saw in the first chapter, this target group is defined by “sociological” socio-economic variables and a clustering based on common values and consumption. On the one hand fairly young families, with good educational qualifications,

often coming out of the central areas of Milan. On the other, households that might have been interested in the themes of inclusiveness, environmental sustainability, new technologies and healthier living.

It is possible to find all these elements in the actors that constitute the commercial fabric of the district: the Sicilian ice-cream parlour-bar that sells healthy, characteristically “Sicilian” and high-quality products, the farmer from a farm outside Milan who has his own farm shop selling organic products at almost zero-kilometre, Urban Seahorse with its theatre initiatives and craft beers. From the interviews, it is clear that none of these aspects is decisive taken individually: it is the whole scene that “works” and together with the park generates that “plus” that residents “feel” in the neighbourhood, in addition to the quality of the built environment and the high but competitive market prices. Using Thibaud’s terminology, this situation is kept up by particularly efficient cleaning and waste management because it is privatised. The upkeep phase is not only guaranteed by this work, but by the neighbourhood watch, which is also privatised. This service ultimately ensures that the elements of the scene can, to use Böhme’s expression, generate ecstasy and affect anyone who enters the field of action of the community centre atmosphere. However, this spectacle cannot function in the same way all year round. For example, the grey winter of the metropolis has a devastating effect on the District’s atmosphere, which expresses its strength especially in the spring and summer months (see fig. 25). It is no coincidence that the developer precisely uses the warmer months for his advertising campaigns and organised tours of the District, limiting his direct marketing activities to the bare minimum in the winter months. The neighbourhood valorisation season is the never-ending summer of rendering (see fig. 24).



Figure 25. A photo of the East Tower and a rendering of the project (source: <https://www.euromilano.net/>).





*Figure 26. Two photos of the community centre taken from the balcony of my house in winter and between spring and summer*

However, everyday life in the District is not just a staging of an atmosphere based on objects, colours, sounds, lights. The District's community centre and park are populated by the citizens of the new district and, less frequently, by residents of St. Leonard and the small town of Pero, whose borders are only a few hundred metres away. Citizens are an integral part of this prosumer atmosphere: producers and consumers together. On the overall, the District radiates distinction: a distinction that is based both on the atmospheric elements in the narrow sense and on consumption. The atmosphere that is perceived in the community centre is also a form of defence: the barriers that are built between the new district and the old district are also atmospheric, as well as undeniably material. In this sense, the accessibility of consumption is tied to a price that consistently surpasses consumption in the desertified commercial fabric of St. Leonard by 50 per cent: almost everything in the community centre costs twice as much as the same things across the street.

*Vision, promotion, selection: the role of the district manager*

As already mentioned above, the district manager's name is Marie and she was called by the developer in 2016, after Expo 2015. The renovation of the farmhouse had left a refurbished space, but without any activity. The manager is also the District's marketing manager but seems to have played a minor role in the previous phase, which she never mentioned to me directly. This woman of about forty-five has a master's degree as a planner and manager of urban commercial systems and specialises in "town centre management". TCM is a protocol for urban liveability and redevelopment of town centres, which was particularly popular in the UK and Europe in the early 2000s (see e.g. Coca-Stefaniak et al. 2009). This model focuses on preserving the competitiveness of historic centres from the spread of large shopping centres in suburban areas. TCM prescribes the enhancement of historic centre areas through strategic planning based on cooperation between local stakeholders: public, private and voluntary sectors (Warnaby, Alexander, and Medway 1998). In this framework, one of the functions of the district manager is precisely that of fostering cooperation while maintaining an overall vision:

A technician who is not an all-rounder but a technician who understands that he or she is in some way acting as the space. In the sense that here too there is a technical sector, there is the community and everyone carrying out their work. What is missing or useful is not to advance the interest, goal or mode of a single sector. I am a bit super partes and what interests me is to do the good of the place. There is a theory let's say of this very mechanism that the Daisy theory in the sense that there is a

point of contact within the interests of all the actors that experience a place. So the tourist, the visitor, the trade” ... everyone. But also our technicians, OK? The link, let’s say, of all these stakeholders is theoretically held by the manager, who knows a little bit about everything, understands the needs of everyone, but brings them together into a, let’s say, unified vision.

The idea is to adopt a “holistic approach” and to be a “synthesis interface”, in accordance with the less authoritarian conception and more linked to the idea of a common vision or mission, typical of the management of the last thirty years (Boltanski and Chiapello 1999). To coordinate the district’s activities that go beyond the construction of the buildings, the developer and Marie created a partnership in the form of a BID, business improvement district. BIDs assume a project underwritten by the majority of companies in the area and a common fund. The main objectives of BIDs are the preservation of property values, the development of commercial activities, and the support of independent initiative by individual citizens, associations and businesses in the realisation of services. This model is widespread in the United States and is the first time it has been proposed in Italy. In the District, the programme’s interventions focused on the creation of a park maintenance service paid for by residents, security, infrastructure (e.g. bike sharing station), communication and marketing. This partnership was active between 2017 and 2019, the years of the marketing campaign described above. Using the pooled funds, Marie promoted and organised placemaking-oriented initiatives, such as 100 red benches, a service promoted in the community centre to foster interactions “in the same way as Bryant Park and connected to the discourse of red benches against violence against women”. Since 2017, it has mapped neighbourhood activities by identifying initiatives that could be transferred to the park, such as yoga classes and gyms for young new mothers. It also promoted an appreciation of the area’s past to generate a refounding of the place:

We instructed a tour guide to do an in-depth study to understand what the history of the farmstead was. We discovered, which was already known, but we gave a form and a coherence to the fact that there were two brigands hiding in here: for example, one was the “legorino” because he was like a hare that ran away fast and frequented a trattoria behind here. During the Second World War, this farmstead was also a refuge for partisans. We brought out these elements and started free rides in the park, always full of people.

This refounding also involved the square in front of the farmstead, which was inaugurated by the mayor and named after Giovanni Pesce, an important figure in the history of the Resistance and the history of the Italian communist parties. He emigrated to France when he was very young, participated in the Spanish Civil War from 1936 to 1939 and became a partisan



commander in the 1940s. He is not the only politically left-wing character in the toponymy of the district: the main street is dedicated to Pier Paolo Pasolini. The BID between the builders of the district ended in 2019. This happened both because a first phase of the project had ended and because the developer's competitors complained of favouritism in the management of events in favour of the leading company.

When I arrived in the field, the district manager was specifically in charge of the park and community centre, which was owned by the developer. In the first months of research, Marie gave the many empty rooms of the farmhouse on loan for use to a number of organisations: associations dedicated to the care of the elderly (*Auser Milano*, *Spi-Cgil*), accessibility for the disabled (*Guanti Rossi*), cultural promotion (*Cadà*), public and private medical services. Activities such as the *Università della Terza Età* and English language courses enhance the cultural offer of the place, increase the footfall in the area and create a bridge between the community centre and the wider context. In addition, the district manager grants the empty rooms to citizens who want to organise activities (e.g. dance classes, yoga, condo meetings), in exchange for an almost symbolic rent. This support for bottom-up initiatives also extends outside the community centre. For example, Marie often helps the association We Are The Village, the citizen's association in social housing towers. This is not only related to the district manager's vision but probably also to the developer's interests in the real estate fund that designed the social housing, in which he is a shareholder.

This activity of support and collaboration with the realities of the territory is a fundamental element of the policy for the territory promoted by Marie. Her fundamental ideological reference is the work of the New York activist Jane Jacobs, in particular the first part of her reflection limits of top-down urban planning (1961). The district manager has dedicated a specific initiative, Jane's Walk, to the memory and ideas of Jacobs. The aim of this walk is "to develop a tradition and **urban education** [bolded in the original text], as well as a planning approach based on consultation with the community, encouraging citizen-led walks designed to observe, reflect, share, discuss and collectively re-imagine the places where they live, work and play". This approach also influences his ideas on safety:

From a security point of view one of the very first things we did was to call in a passive surveillance company so we have two people at night walking around the farmstead park with the little electric car and one person during the day staying in the farmstead. We manage the security by bringing people in. Jane Jacobs teaches if you have people walking around you have a guard and so you avoid having police everywhere. For example, in one part of the park there is less passage precisely because there are no houses. So I want to bring in a Calisthenics facility and a bicycle

track to have more footfall and not just the usual strolling, because there was a problem, an attempted assault one afternoon that was fortunately solved because the guard was passing by and that time it went well.

On this issue, the developer has financed a video surveillance and data collection system, in collaboration with leading ICTs companies, which will be ready in the next few years and includes the installation of a control room: as mentioned in the introduction, the idea of the control room is typical of the first generation of smart city practices. If the administration of the park were to pass to the Milan municipality between 2026 and 2028, as envisaged in the programme agreement, this room would have to be managed by the local police. For now, only the eleven towers in social housing have smart grids to monitor data. But Marie would like to be able to connect all the buildings so that “we can have data on every building and try to put the various buildings in competition to say, “you consume a lot of water you consume less: do you guys understand why you are consuming more water than the others?”.

The district manager’s activities mainly focus on what he defines as “the holy days”: collective festivals such as Halloween, carnival or Christmas. On these occasions, the manager collaborates with specialised event management agencies (e.g. Christmas markets) or other actors in the community centre. An example of this promotional activity is the organisation of Christmas celebrations, or as the manager calls them “the Christmas theme”. At Christmas 2019, Marie organised the arrival and stay of a reindeer, called Rudolf. This is part of her “space activation” activity. In the year of research, she has had a large tree installed consisting of golden lights that light up at night, in a fairly dark area. The choice is promotional: “we always wanted a tree a little bigger than the ones around,” he told me, “so that people would talk about us”. The highlight of the Christmas festivities is the gift exchange and the visit of Santa Claus in the courtyard of the community centre, which takes place the week before Christmas:

**Date: 19 December 2021**

**Time: from 4 pm to 7 pm**

It’s a sunny day, but the sun leaves early and when it does, it’s cold at this time of year.

The Christmas party in the farmstead is mainly associated with the presence of Santa Claus and his elf friend. The elf is dressed in funny shoes in the shape of a frog, red trousers, a green long-sleeved shirt, a green tie and an open waistcoat, a kind of waistcoat, multicoloured. He has funny glasses and an equally funny hat. Father Christmas is in his classic suit. The set of the show is in front of the central gate of the farmhouse, and consists of a red cloth, a red “throne” style chair, a red letterbox, red balloons, balloons a little further away. The premises on the short sides of the Cascina

have no special decorations: only the Graffetta [the neighbourhood stationery shop] is open and sells Christmas-themed stationery with a stall outside.

The ceremony goes like this: arrival of the elf, waiting for Santa Claus with collection of letters, arrival of Santa Claus to distribute the presents, in handbags. Marie is also present, talking agitatedly on the phone. She later tells me that “the presents were put in by both us and the parents, we just acted as a middleman”. There are lots of children and their parents, but there are not so many of us: I would say a total of seventy to eighty people.

I inquire about the handbags, as they are given to all the families. I am told by a parent that they are “bags are given to all the children with presents inside, there is a little notebook with crayons”. They are orange bags with “ViviSmart” and “aBCD” and “Cooperativa Barilla” and “Danone Foundation” written on them. The slogan is “eat, move, live better”. The bag promotes an initiative by the Barilla Coop Danone alliance [famous Italian retail brands], namely aBCD. I check with my phone what the initiative consists of. I read: “ViviSmart is the new play-educational path for primary schools and families promoted by the unprecedented aBCD alliance of Barilla, Coop and Danone who, by combining their expertise, work together to grow the culture of correct nutrition and healthy lifestyles in school children and their parents”. After receiving the presents, the group disperses and Father Christmas stays with the elf in the red tarp area, with the elf playing “jingle bells” on the accordion and other Christmas songs. It is cold, the sun has been gone for a while. The children, as always in great numbers, play in the meadows between the farmstead and the road. After about half an hour, people move away from the farmstead. I return home and wait about an hour for the second event: Christmas carols.

By the time I return to the farmstead, it is dark. The tree illuminates the courtyard of the farmstead where the situation has now completely changed. A group of 15-18 people are singing secular Christmas songs alternating with songs from the Christian tradition (e.g. “Gloria in Excelsis Deo”). The females are wearing white shawls, the males orange. The way the shawls are worn and their shape is reminiscent of that used by altar boys. There are about twenty-five people listening. The average age is much higher than the usual District audience. Young parents are very few, children are absent. Many people are over fifty. These people are older than the average user I usually see in the district.

While the choir is performing, I talk to Marie. She tells me that in her opinion “we had to organise everything between three and five o’clock, now it’s freezing cold” and that “we don’t say that, but objectively the covid has really annoyed me”. That however “things are progressing”.

The choir introduces itself, before the last song: it is a group that meets in the parish church Regina Pacis, in St. Leonard. For a few years they have been singing around the neighbourhood during festivals and today they are in the farmhouse. They are here “not for a performance, but to share a moment of joy and serenity”.

They sing: “we wish you a merry Christmas”.

The song ends, people applaud. I say goodbye to Marie, take some photos of the farmstead at night and return home.

The combination of pleasure activities and the active involvement of civil society in placemaking activities is analysed by Coppola and Citroni as one of the aspects that characterise the transformation of the urban government of the city of Milan (2021). In the case of the spread of urban initiatives and events in the gentrifying neighbourhood of Nolo, the authors worked on the groups that, outside political institutions, bring their initiatives into the public and digital space. Many of the activities promoted by Marie and Urban Seahorse, the restaurant-pub-cultural centre whose work was analysed in the first chapter, have similar characteristics: they are initiatives linked to generic, shareable values that are difficult to criticise. According to the authors, these urban events can reinforce exclusionary effects to the extent that they “act as effective weapons of cultural power, as they invite participation in pursuit of general goals while at the same time allowing events’ organisers to subtly control the specific meanings of the goals they are pursuing, given that the latter are necessarily specified only when the events actually take place, through apparently irrelevant details” (Ivi, 124-125). The organisation of Christmas celebrations shows some distinctive aspects of the way the district manager organises his initiatives and conveys messages. First, Marie privileges actors from the corporate sector, but collaborates with actors from different fields: the third sector (the bank foundations), event professionals (Father Christmas and his elf friend), informal groups living in the area (the parish choir). Secondly, it always tries to convey messages that are within its vision, as in the case of “ViviSmart” (with a “smart district” theme) and the theme of food education for children and healthy food. Thirdly, she has a main target group, the family with children, one of the main targets of this phase of the project but shows flexibility and eclecticism. Compared to the organisations analysed by Coppola and Citroni, there is an important difference: Marie works for the company that has to sell houses in the neighbourhood.

Marie coordinates most of the activities in the community centre and in fact plays the role of general supervisor. Her power derives from the fact that the developer has purchased the entire farmhouse and the large, open, walkable courtyard that constitutes the public square. The developer does not own all the green spaces around the community centre, but the public spaces are close to the road and on the sides of the farmstead. Therefore, they are less usable. By purchasing all the enclosed spaces in the area, the developer has a decisive advantage in terms of land governance: the power to select the incoming actors. This element is decisive for the construction of an urban imaginary that is the result of a controllable selection. In a space that seems public but is private and devoid of urban history, the developer can construct identity from his vision, exercising what is in fact a para-political power in the neighbourhood. His position as a referent is in turn a powerful form of marketing: everyone in the neighbourhood

knows the developer, even those who have officially bought a house from another developer (e.g. the subsidised housing consisting of 5 compounds and almost 800 dwellings). This company governs the territory, and the district manager is the human and inclusive face of this form of government. This form becomes even more evident when it comes to excluding something that is not in line with its vision.

Indeed, Marie is a flexible and open manager but she refuses to bring two topics into the district: football and rap music. The former is a point of hers that she described on one occasion as “scientific”:

I never talk about football: talking about football is the easiest way. If I want people and the square fills up, I show football matches, but what do I create? I create a model that already exists. We organised a human table football tournament for the opening of the ice cream parlour. At six o'clock people arrived and started fighting with the children, and we had to close. The first time everything went well, the second time it didn't. We realised it could go badly and in fact it became aggressive immediately.

On another occasion, Marie told me about these people in relation to St. Leonard, the old district. On this aspect, the district manager strongly believes in dialogue with the rest of the area, which she says is used by many historical residents. However, the issue of rap is also related to people from “outside”. On that occasion, the restaurant-pub-cultural association Urban Seahorse, which occupies a wing of the community centre, had organised contests, one of which had ended in a brawl. “I told them no! Bring other content, bring new content! On Wednesdays now we have a beautiful jazz festival, from Novara they bring a super refined selection of jazz. Not difficult things, but other things... I don't put myself in the stereotype that already exists, otherwise I wouldn't do a neighbourhood like this: I don't want to be a snob but you don't have to look for the easy way.”

Marie is a key actor in the District. The district manager governs the complex operation of coordination, selection and promotion of the district which is aimed at generating an increase in the quality of the District's commercial offer in terms of leisure activities, sociability, culture, distinctive consumption. In my interpretation, the developer's strategy is can be connected to those identified in the literature in cases of “financialization 2.0”, where financialised actors intervene directly on their investment to increase the possibility of value extraction, namely the housing prices for access to the neighbourhood. In the case of the placemaking initiatives in the community centre, the developer uses informal groups, artistic initiatives and local associations to generate this increase. These forms of socialisation, communication, symbols that take place

outside its ownership and its main profit-generating channels. This capture and valorisation of the local social resources is combined with the generation of a distinctive atmosphere that is created collectively but capitalised on by only a few actors: the developer, the local commercial fabric, the sellers of subsidized housing and the real estate fund connected to social housing.

*A place for families: the centrality of parenthood in the life of the neighbourhood*

In the introduction to a volume dedicated to the history of suburbs in England and the United States, urban planner Robert Fishman invites us to consider the importance of the relationship between specific forms of urbanism and specific values embodied by social classes. According to Fishman, the urban form of the Anglo-Saxon suburbs, which he defines as suburbia, represents much more than just a dense cluster of single-family houses:

“It was founded on that primacy of the family and domestic life which was the equivalent in bourgeois society of the intense civic life celebrated by the public architecture of the ancient city. However modest each suburban house might be, suburbia represents a collective assertion of class wealth and privilege as impressive as any medieval castle. Most importantly, suburbia embodies a new ideal of family life, and idea so emotionally charged that it made the home more sacred to the bourgeoisie than any place of worship. [...] Suburbia is more than a collection of residential buildings; it expresses values so deeply embedded in bourgeois culture that it might also be called the bourgeois utopia” (R. M. Fishman 1987, 3–4).

The District is not an American suburb. It is a neighbourhood that is fully integrated into the city and consists of large buildings with more than a hundred flats each. However, the values identified by Fishman resonate powerfully in the words of a resident of the District, who was asked, like those at the beginning of the chapter, to describe the neighbourhood in emotional terms.

Serenity, the fact that there is green, the fact that there is... I feel safe. I think my son will walk to school, in power. I think that I will be able to walk my son to the front door and he will be able to go to primary school on his own, you know? That my child will be able to say “I’m going to the café to get ice cream with friends” or “I’m going for a bike ride” or “I’m going to study at Leone’s house in tower B or ladder C”. This is what I like. It’s family. It’s sharing, I know that I can go to the park and I can meet Alessandro’s mum friend, and I’m like “ah well I have to pick up Carlotta” and the other one says “leave Alessandro here and we’ll wait for you there”. For me it’s family and serenity, on Sunday you go down and have breakfast at the farmstead. My doctor stays at the farmstead, if I feel like eating something out I go to Urban Seahorse. This is really my social fabric and I live it with great enthusiasm. Both my husband and I experience everything that happens with great

enthusiasm: from the kite event to the fact that Kap Food has opened. Everything is beautiful: I don't know how to say it. [subsidised housing, resident since 2018].

“The kite event” is an event celebrated at the farmhouse during the spring or early summer months: children create kites with the help of a specialised Milanese artist and then fly them in the air. Kites are present in many smart-and-green renderings, such as the one related to the waterfront redevelopment in Toronto, promoted by Alphabet (see fig. 26). They have a strong symbolic value connected to a serene atmosphere and the joy of children.



Figure 27. a rendering of the Sidewalk Labs project in Toronto (source: <https://www.sidewalklabs.com/toronto>)

Using Thibaud's terminology expressively, the district is a place impregnated with parenthood. Children are at the centre of the project: they are an integral part of the District's atmosphere and dictate the daily life of so many residents. Most of the activities are aimed at them.

The District is a powerful accelerator of social reproduction: almost all interviewees explicitly state that young first-time families come to this neighbourhood and become parents after a short time. “Between September or November”, says one respondent, “four families on my floor became parents”. This trend is particularly pronounced in the Village, the nine social housing towers. Here, the percentage of residents in the 28-40 age group and first-time homeowners seems to be higher than in subsidised housing and free-sale housing. This aspect results in the creation of social ties between people who feel they are at the same point in life, in a context of social support facilities and services that seek to encourage sociability and where a citizen

association is active. The combination of these factors probably influences the impressions of the neighbourhood held by some citizens of the Village, which differ from those commonly felt. These citizens talk about the neighbourhood by focusing on the social aspects rather than on their own individual condition of serenity:

I find this neighbourhood supportive and cheerful, in the sense that compared to other parts... it's also the first time I've lived in such a context, a bit more, how should I say, a bit like a community, even if you don't want to be in the community but there is this kind of aggregation, then everyone does what they want. But already in the other condominiums it was not like that. As soon as you enter the farmhouse, there's this tree-lined avenue that makes you feel like you're not in Milan. Then compared to the other houses, social housing is more oriented towards this. [social housing, resident since 2018].

So to me it reminds me a lot of my grandmother's village where I grew up. I used to spend summers at my grandmother's house, who lives in a small village of 900 people in the mountains in Puglia, lost in the middle of nowhere where everyone knows you, where children play in the streets. It reminds me a lot of that context that I lost when I came to Milan, and which I didn't even have in the city where I lived with my family, because it was a bigger place, a slightly different context. It certainly changes between summer and winter, because in winter there's almost nothing to do, but it's a bit like Milan, so in the end there are no clubs or special services, so in the end you stay at home... when I arrived there wasn't even just eat so... but in the summer it's a different story. [social housing, resident since 2018]

On this aspect, which will be taken up in the conclusions, parenting may not have played a central but relevant role.

Everyday life in the community centre is so full of children that some interviewees, both from the district and from St. Leonard, do not attend because they do not appreciate this situation or hope that one day the activities in the farmstead will change their focus:

I still have to acclimatise here, but I fit in well. I would like there to be a few more activities at the farmstead for those who don't have families. I live alone and I see that for those without children there is not much here at the moment. The concerts and shows at Urban Seahorse are interesting, but many things here are mainly for children. It would be nice if there were activities also for those who are, let's say, not interested in children. [subsidised housing, resident since 2021].

The farmstead was our schoolmates' farmstead, where we used to go to buy eggs, chickens, there were pigs, so we experienced it in every way. Now, if you tell me about the farmstead, yes, sometimes you go for ice cream. But I used to go there much more willingly, we all used to go there much more willingly, maybe a couple



of years ago. Now it's like going to kindergarten, all these people, these meadows, these children. Maybe it's because I hate children, so after ten minutes it's not my place... with these parents, with these mobile phones, such rudeness that I would do a mass sterilisation. Have you done one? Not the second one, we'll close your tubes. [St. Leonard, Pyranees Street, resident since 1967]

The presence of children is a further component of the selective atmosphere of the District, which seems to reject those who do not correspond to certain characteristics. In general, the actors' deep commitment to the work of social reproduction places certain limitations on interactions. The combination of full-time work and social reproduction seems to take up a lot of residents' time and generate fatigue. Consequently, not many citizens of the neighbourhood had the will and time to devote to my research, or at least simulated this state as a form of deterrence.

The actors in the commercial fabric of the neighbourhood are equipped and/or have developed specific skills to meet the demand for non-adult services. The girls in the neighbourhood stationery shop, for example, are also children's entertainers. Marie, as always, promotes broad partnerships involving all actors between themed menus and animations. These elements converge in one of the most popular initiatives in the neighbourhood: the carnival.

**Date: 4 March 2022**

**Time: from 4 to 6 pm**

I arrive at the Cascina at 4 pm.

There are lots of people. I have never seen so many people in the farmstead: the only situation comparable to this, in terms of attendance, is the autumn festival of the neighbourhood associations. The flyer reads "carnival party [...] offered by Cascina Merlata, Lop-Lop [an association that runs workshops for children in the district] and la Graffetta [the stationery shop]".

Children are the absolute protagonists and the target of the initiative. There are a lot of them: at least eighty to ninety. The ages of the little ones range from zero to ten, with a predominance of zero to six. Streamers and confetti are everywhere, especially on the floor. The boys and girls are dressed up as princesses, princes, superheroes, bugs, tigers, lions, elves and gnomes. The highlight of the day is the carnival show, which is run by the stationery shop. The entertainers sing and dance to songs and the children follow the rhythm, singing and dancing in a circle. The songs are taken from a typical group dance repertoire, such as the classic "Gioca jouer" and repetitive songs with tunes for small children. The animation is very popular but only involves a part of the children present: the rest chase each other, throw confetti and coloured balls, shout and jump. It is a situation of pure carnival ecstasy.



Outside the circle and all around dozens of parents are filming with their phones, smiling, waiting for it to be over. They are young parents: thirty-five to forty-five, fifty at the most. Some of the parents are also dressed for carnival: I notice a man dressed as a clown - red nose, wig, dressed in a dress with a pattern of coloured diamonds - and a woman dressed as an elf, with a green jacket and hat. Others, in a more sober manner, have a brightly coloured wig or a large multi-coloured minstrel's hat.

The scene also includes a balloon seller, in the centre of the square, and a stand selling Nutella crepes, candy floss and candy.

I am eager to better understand where all these people come from and how they came to this initiative. I talk to a parent: he lives in Viale Certosa and knows about this initiative because of the newsletter that the developer sends out weekly or monthly about initiatives in Cascina. He appreciates this newsletter and follows the initiatives promoted by the developer with pleasure. Later, I talk to two other parents: they both live in the Gal, further away from St. Leonard. They came by car for the initiative, but do not live in the District. They confirm the fact that many people from neighbouring districts attend these babmini initiatives. I know a fourth person who lives in the District, who tells me that:

“I have lived in Contemporary City for four years. I am happy to live here but some promises have been broken: especially the school. I understand that people who are not from the neighbourhood come to this initiative, but there is a parking problem here, and when all these people come here, they stack one on top of the other... they come from outside and vandalise everything here.

I spend some more time in the Cascina space and quickly realise how radically off target I am: I am the only 30-year-old man in the square and I have neither children nor a family in town. The tiring physical and emotional labour of this crowd of parents is alien to me and I struggle to interface with people who are very busy at the moment.

The boys' and girls' parade begins: in groups of ten, the little ones are paraded and prizes are awarded for the best costumes. It is a rather lengthy process, complicated by a numbering system to which the children obviously respond at random. Not only do the little ones parade: other children from upstairs in the Cascina throw confetti and streamers downstairs every time the presenter, the stationer, calls out the numbers with a microphone.

As the children's parade comes to an end, the sun is setting. It is a very cold March, coming after an extraordinarily warm February. Parents start complaining to their children because they want to go home.

I have the privilege of autonomy: I go for a walk in the District park.

It takes little to notice that cars are parked completely at random, in places where they shouldn't be and where I have never seen cars. The issue of wild parking is central to the complaints of the residents of the district.

Some of the information contained in this field note provides a good link to two problematic aspects of life in the neighbourhood: the delay in the construction of the Up Town School, the institution that will house around 700 pupils between kindergarten, primary and middle school, and the chronic lack of parking.

*The car and the school: the everyday problems of the district between public and private*

Everyday life in the district is not only composed of walks in the park, food, social play and relaxation, but is affected by problems and contradictions concerning two major issues: the contradictory relationship between public and private in PIIs (integrated intervention plans) and the contradictory aspects of an ecological transition based simply on building greener neighbourhoods. These two elements are deeply intertwined in the District's problems: the temporary absence of the long-desired school and the parking problem.

Starting with the second problem, all residents complain about the chronic lack of parking and the problem of using cars to get around. Connections between the District and the rest of the city are provided by the underground lines and a bus, which, however, runs at reduced frequency during field work. The Milan municipality's public transport company rented buses from other companies (e.g. flixbus) to guarantee service in this area, which is still officially uncovered because it is newly built. The problem of connections and parking is particularly felt in the neighbourhood, also because, beyond personal perceptions, the neighbourhood is located on the edge of the city and has no real neighbourhood commercial fabric. Residents are eagerly

awaiting the opening of the large shopping centre. The result is that many respondents use their cars much more than they did before they lived in the district:

I moved in January and I use my car every day. In Sesto San Giovanni I had the possibility of walking my children to school, the school under my house, here I use the car six times a day. There are no neighbourhood shops: if you need a litre of milk, you don't know where to go. There is this small café, but we need a hairdresser, a barber, a bakery, a tobacconist, a pharmacy... there is nothing here. Here in the East Towers [free sale housing] we have the wellness area, the gym and the laundry, but there are no commercial premises. So now I use the car a lot and in Sesto San Giovanni I didn't use it. In fact, now we have two cars whereas before we only had one. [free sale housing, resident since 2021].

Marie attributes this responsibility to the City of Milan “which has minimised the number of parking spaces within the planning, leaving just the right number of parking spaces according to the standards within the residential buildings, all of which have compulsory boxes”. The problem becomes particularly evident during events, organised in large part by her or the District's partner actors, to the point that the district manager has put up a sign prohibiting parking in the park areas and has arranged for security to enforce it<sup>27</sup>. During the Jane's Walk we saw in the previous chapter, Marie made it clear that a shuttle service for residents is not possible, due to cost. “an alternative would be to try a self-driving shuttle service,” she added, “but the municipality has not installed the track that would be needed. This situation is linked to some contradictions: the Milan municipality is cutting back on public wheeled mobility services and has no real interest in providing the area with something additional to the metro and the rail loop that will arrive in 2025. The developer has no formal agreements on public mobility, even though it has sold the neighbourhood on miraculous “driverless car experiments”. Like most private operators, the developer does not want to pay for an expensive mobility service that does not bring him a direct and obvious profit, as in the case of the park. A complex urban policy operation such as really reducing car traffic, perhaps using these neighbourhoods as a testbed, is approached approximately by all actors, who are dominated by an essentially financial rationality.

Residents at the higher end of the market on average have high expectations and have partly believed the urban imagery proposed by the developer, without considering the technical problems. Moreover, many residents do not want to and cannot give up private car mobility. The urban design that favoured a separation with the rest of the neighbourhood, together with

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<sup>27</sup> This dynamic also shows how the power of the developer flows from the community center to the public park, considering that putting up such a sign would be illegal.

the attitude of a part of the residents, contributes to making St. Leonard few services less utilised than they could be. The parking problem could be solved by the shopping centre, where a large parking area should also be allocated to residents.

The second problem, however, is more specific and concerns the District's great unfulfilled expectation: the construction of the Up Town School, after the name by which the developer calls his free-sale project in the district. The school has been referred to as "the scandal stone" and indeed many residents have chosen to live in the District with the specific idea of sending their children to the school. As previously mentioned, the school will be equipped with a multifunctional space (gymnasium for free-body activities/auditorium), 2 canteen spaces, 9 laboratory classrooms, 2 spaces for supplementary and extracurricular activities, a library, outdoor sports facilities (volleyball and basketball courts, athletics track), an outdoor classroom, and an educational vegetable garden/fruit garden. Planned for 2018, the school will probably open in the school year 2024/2025. Again, the developer claims that the delays are due to public bureaucracy and subsequently to problems with Covid-19. The local politicians, City Hall 8, believe that the delays are due to "the operator, bureaucratic complexity, and some problems, which are recurring, related to raw materials". This last issue is particularly important to understand some of the delays in the urban development of the District. The winter between 2021 and 2022 was characterised by rising commodity prices and inflation. The scarcity and rising price of building materials in Italy is also due to the renovation incentive policies, the 110% home superbonus, active from 2020 to 2022 and under review in 2023. This bonus provided a 110% credit transfer to the state, with the possible intermediation of banks, for structural renovation works. This policy focused on energy class upgrades, building facades, and earthquake-resistant interventions. The aim of these policies is to stimulate the building sector and to revive the economy after an economic shock (in this case the pandemic). This strategy is not new, but rather played a key role in the post-World War II period in all Western countries, as well as in the countries of the former socialist bloc (see Filandri, Olagnero, Manuela, and Semi 2020; Aalbers and Christophers 2014). The restart of world economies and the structural dysfunctionality of global value chains post-pandemic, however, have generated a supply crisis and a rise in prices. Between 2022 and 2023, the war between Ukraine and Russia further exacerbated energy supply problems, exacerbated by financial speculation. The combination of these problems and the general framework of uncertainty probably prompted the developer to postpone this operation, as part of an incompletely defined timetable.

This point is highly criticised by the citizens of the District, who saw the school as a strong point in the neighbourhood. Almost all citizens interviewed with school-age children are quite

satisfied with the schools in St. Leonard, but their expectation was to send their children to the Up Town School. However, some openly complain about the condition of the school facilities, which do not seem to have a very good reputation.

We appreciated the old quarter because there are also historical inhabitants, there are problems but also a lot of good people, we also have a lot of relationships with those who live in the old quarter because the interchange was facilitated by the schools. Of course, it is not always the case that the school facilities in the old quarter are in line with the expectations of those who have bought a house with all the comforts, because if one buys a house like that, the first thing is that one would like to give all the comforts to one's children as well. Instead, the basin school in this neighbourhood is currently a dilapidated school, in fact I had threatened the developer by saying "next time I put the basin school on the site, I'll advertise it so you do class a3 houses and basin school in class minus f". [subsidised housing, resident since 2018].

I didn't know the area across the street however on social media and walking around I realised that gypsies live behind there, it's not a good neighbourhood for school choice either, I had to move away because I was advised against it here. I once took part in a Sunday in 2019 in a trip organised by a group, Milano Visita i Cantieri, on that occasion we got to know so many things about Gal and St. Leonard. It seems to me an area... there are few shops there too... I've heard bad things about it, then I spend many days there by car and it doesn't seem so bad. Even compared to what I lived elsewhere, I had all sorts of things going on under my house: it's a big city, there's a bit of everything. [free sale housing, resident since 2020].

The issue of expectations in the District is one of the elements in which residents of free-sale housing and subsidized housing tend to want to distinguish themselves from social housing. Different modes of access and volume of investment influence the expectations of the actors, who demand more having paid, sometimes, much more than social housing. "Those who have invested thousands of euros expect certain things," I was told, "those who are still paying 300, 400 euros per month in rent rather than 1200 as they should be paying, why should they demand more? It's normal and I don't make it a question of class". This difference is confirmed in the interviews: social housing residents tend to have a more positive outlook on the shortcomings and everyday problems in the neighbourhood.

*Across the street: St. Leonard and Froth Street in the perceptions of District residents*

As can be understood from what has been analysed so far, the District is a place built in such a way as to distinguish itself from the rest of the area. The caesura with the rest of the district consists of a freeway that divides the two neighbourhoods, marking the border. The impression that this road is “a barrier” and “a wall” is shared by everyone: citizens of St. Leonard, citizens of the District, members of associations and local political actors.

As we saw in the introduction, St. Leonard is the most marginal part of the Gal, a neighbourhood with much higher average incomes than other peripheries in Milan. The Gal is a neighbourhood that was created for the working class and white-collar middle classes after World War II but benefited from the upward mobility typical of the best years of Fordism. The neighbourhood’s population arrived here in the 1960s and almost always became homeowners either in the 1990s or in the early 2000s.

However, St. Leonard differs from the Gal for two reasons: firstly, it is the only area in the neighbourhood where there is still a significant proportion of public housing that has not been converted to owner-occupied housing, dating back to the 1980s. Among these complexes, there are also those on Froth Street, which we have referred to several times in this text. The Froth street complexes are highly stigmatised because three large buildings on the street have many houses occupied by a population of Gypsy groups, mainly from Romania, Serbia and Bosnia. As we will see in the following chapters, the situation between this group and the rest of the neighbourhood has become more and more difficult over the years.

Secondly, St. Leonard is home to two large new complexes of public housing: the Pyranees Street grey house complex and the Moon Street complex, built between 2008 and 2018. These complexes form a belt of buildings that together with other structures form the built-up areas directly bordering the road that divides the District and the old neighbourhood. In particular, the grey houses on Pyranees Street are directly in front of the community centre (see fig. 27).

The residents interviewed in the District have different opinions about the old neighbourhood: it is possible to divide them into three groups according to their frequentation of the area, which obviously influences their ideas.



*Figure 28. The new generation of public housing on Pyranee Street, inaugurated in 2009.*

The first group, consisting of about a third of those interviewed, is not familiar with it: they have either arrived in the area too recently to get an idea about the neighbourhood or are simply used to going to other neighbouring areas to do their shopping. This group only uses the underground, the pharmacy and rarely the post office in St. Leonard. Like almost all respondents, they have never frequented the area before arriving in the neighbourhood. They do not pass judgement on St. Leonard, although they know Froth Street's bad reputation from facebook groups, word of mouth and articles they have read in the local media.

The second group of respondents lives in the area enough to know St. Leonard: they spend time in the area and in some cases take their children to schools in the neighbourhood. They have a fairly good opinion of the area, which they consider neglected but which they frequent:

It's an area, let's say, a bit abandoned to itself, which could be revalued by other real estate investments, a bit here, an area developed in the sixties-seventies until the eighties and then abandoned a bit to itself, as abandoned as an area built in Milan can be eh? [social housing, resident since 2018].

Apart from these buildings in front, which are a bit scary... I wouldn't want to pass judgement because I would never dare. Aside from this wall, which is the street and the wall of the buildings that doesn't allow us to see behind... it's beautiful, it's very green, it's full of spaces that could be put to even better use. I didn't know it. There,



I'm sorry to see some things that were perhaps thought of in one way from an urban planning point of view and that are now left to themselves, deteriorated. I often go to the pharmacy here in the commercial area of St Leonard and I mean... it's a pity. [free sale housing, resident since 2019]

The third part of the respondents, a clear minority, is particularly critical of the abandonment of the area, which they consider rather dangerous. This part of the respondents believes that the area should be better controlled by the police: often in this opinion there is a focus on separating the red houses (former public housing bought back) from the grey houses (new public housing) and the area around Froth Street.

We were not familiar with the problems in the neighbourhood: in fact, we found it to be quite abandoned. We always saw it as a very green neighbourhood and it seemed very family-friendly. So, we were a bit negatively affected by the neglect of the neighbourhood, because it is a beautiful neighbourhood. I think probably nicer than Milan because of the greenery it has and the big spaces.... a pity. There in front of the primary school from 7pm onwards it's no man's land. Decay brings decay. It doesn't get better, it just gets worse. It would be enough just to have a presence, a presidium in the areas.... [subsidised housing, resident since 2020].

Beyond these groups, the District interviewees have some particularly important points in common. First, almost all District respondents do not feel part of the St. Leonard and Gal's context but of something different. If the new neighbourhood now depends on the services of the old neighbourhood, the opening of the shopping centre and the Milan Innovation District will tend to reorient the District axis in the opposite direction to St. Leonard:

This is a new neighbourhood that has nothing to do with it.... So much so that there are many more people from there who come here to walk the dog, eat pizza, get ice cream, than the other way around... I know this because when I talk to people, many say to me "I come from there"... this neighbourhood has nothing to do with it. [social housing, resident since 2017]

A good question... in my opinion it's really a new neighbourhood: it sounds bad to say it, because this neighbourhood was built to actually redevelop this area of Gallarate, of San Leonardo. But I see it as a bit distant, at least as far as I am concerned. I do not find a connection: it is as if they were two completely different neighbourhoods. It's a shame because the aim of the municipality of Milan is to create a connection between these two neighbourhoods. [social housing, resident since 2018].

This part is really a separate part, and I say unfortunately because in my opinion the area around here is a nice area. We contaminate ourselves because obviously I imagine that they come from there and we by necessity go there but if we had an

underground here nobody would think of going there. And because there is nothing characteristic that drives me to go there other than the metro or the pharmacy but if I had it under my house I wouldn't move. I think it's designed that way because even putting the mall exactly on the other side... the convenience is there but it's inevitable we're all going to move, we're all going to look that way. [free sale housing, resident since 2018].

Second, many respondents tend to conceive of the relationship between the new and the old neighbourhood as one that will enhance the old neighbourhood, and certainly not the other way around. If there is a shared future for the area, which for many is an unrealistic prospect, St. Leonard will be a more attractive place due to economic development and the reflected light of the District. However, this can only happen after the Froth Street situation has been resolved, i.e. by expelling “gypsies” and other people from the area:

I've seen interventions, this thing of putting all this graffiti right on the buildings on Froth Street, right? So, city quarter, super graffiti. The desire to make this thing a bit underground, but this thing can never be underground if there are wires hanging outside, you know? With hanging clothes, I mean this thing will change when you redevelop that area, so you kick out all the people in it, because that is, and redevelop that area. Or alternatively the District will continue to be this world, in quotes, glittering, because then it is a beautiful district, it is not City Life and it is not the Bosco Verticale eh, but it is a beautiful district that remains an ecosystem that lives by its own light despite having those streets two hundred metres away. Two hundred metres... those who live in the buildings of the District on that side have it under their house... [subsidised housing, resident since 2020].

In my opinion, if they solve certain problems, the historic district could be driven by the new district as it already is for me. In my opinion, the neighbourhood also revalued the old neighbourhood. They would have to remove some strong structural problems, they would have to act on certain areas, but in my opinion this towing of the new neighbourhood can only be good for the old neighbourhood as well, because then between the new and the old there is one thing: the old neighbourhood is needed to reach the metro, and that is no small thing! If I wanted, the project could also be extended, in my opinion, to the old quarter in terms of renovation, refurbishment. [subsidised housing, resident since 2021].

On 3 November 2022, the eviction took place, after almost ten years of political controversy. 156 flats were cleared, families with minors were taken to other public housing outside Milan. We will deal in the next chapters with the details of this story, which was considered a successful and positive operation for the neighbourhood. The 156 houses were all destroyed. At the time of the eviction, the Lombardy Housing Company (Azienda Lombarda per l'Edilizia Residenziale – Aler) declared that the new houses in energy class A3 would all be reassigned

as public housing<sup>28</sup>. In 2023, a table was opened with a proposal to transform more than 10,000 vacant houses from public housing to social housing, the same type of building as in the District. There is no direct connection between the District and the destruction of the Froth Street houses because there is never a pure causal relationship in such a dynamic. The relationship between social change and urban transformation is more like an alignment between planets: when several planets, even very different from each other, bigger and smaller, align, something happens. Froth Street is the first intervention: the next ones should be the Aler houses in Via Gola and the Aler complexes in San Siro neighbourhood.

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<sup>28</sup> <https://www.milanotoday.it/attualita/riqualificazione-via-bolla-sopralluogo-dicembre.html>

## The other side: a portrait of St. Leonard and the Gal

As seen in the previous chapters, St. Leonard is a part of the Gal district, one of the largest public housing projects after World War II. Three elements dominate the neighbourhood's landscape: the buildings constructed in the 1970s and 1980s, the large shopping centre with its civic centre, and the numerous public parks. For all those interviewed in the neighbourhood, the key word to define the Gal is "liveability": the connection to the city is provided by the red metro line, green spaces abound, and the housing density is "vertical" and among the lowest among neighbourhoods with more than ten thousand inhabitants (see fig.).

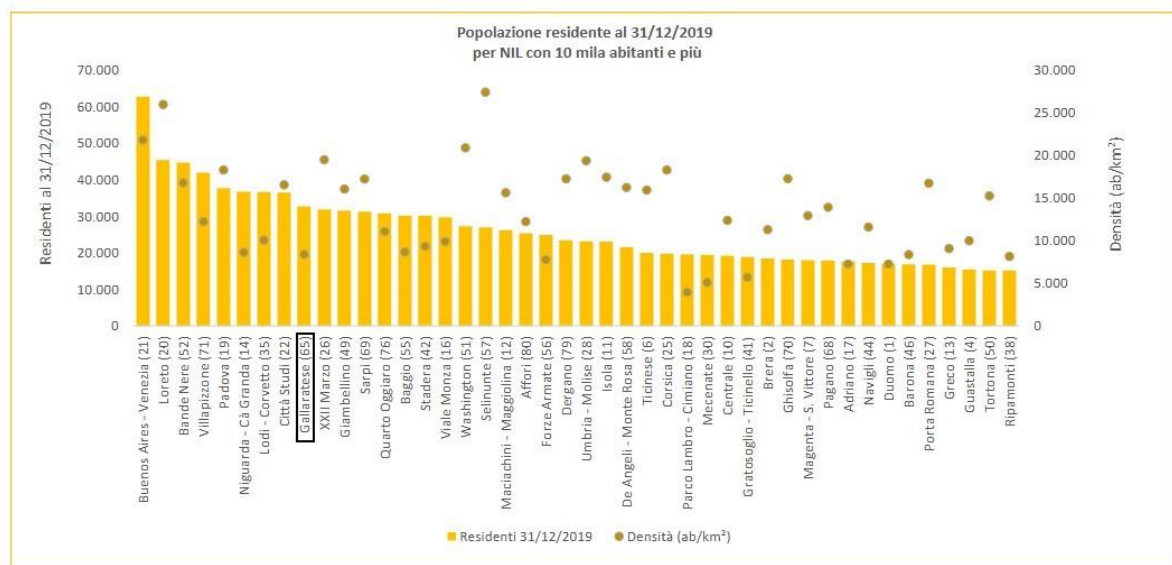


Figure 29. Graph bar of the density and number of population for neighbourhood with more of 10.000 residents in Milan (source: Rossi et al. 2020).

The historical residents of the Gal are proud of this neighbourhood, which they consider to be among the most beautiful in the city. Among those interviewed, many emphasise how the quality of life in the neighbourhood attracts the younger generation, who tend to purchase the house where they grew up or return with their family after a period away. Those who were not born in the neighbourhood celebrate its amenities, but perceive the difference between themselves and the rest of the neighbourhood:

At first I felt a bit cramped there, it seemed a strange place. It has a very particular identity: this neighbourhood is a bit like a village. It is very uniform, in the sense that this neighbourhood was clearly born in the late 1960s, it was established that almost all immigrants came to live here. They were all more or less of the same social class, same occupations, few categories represented. So you can feel this

uniformity, then, they almost all know each other. Many live in this neighbourhood without perhaps knowing the centre, without ever going to the centre, they consider the centre something else. [resident since 2005].

Erba (1979) defined the Gal as an attempt to build a “satellite city of Milan” on the model of New Towns. New Towns are a model of urban development that originated in England after the Second World War (see Clapson 2017). Developed from a number of important pieces of legislation in 1946-1947, this model envisaged the construction of new urban cores according to planning principles inspired by the Garden Cities model proposed by Ebenezer Howard. According to Erba (1979), “the Gal, although based on appropriate programmes seasoned with good intentions, is jammed in the politics, in the unpredictability in the imagination, the “Italian-style fantasy” which, incidentally, can also lead to positive results” (IX). He adds that the neighbourhood “in comparison with similar realisations in northern Europe appears less monotonous, more alive and vital, less dormitory and more self-sufficient, more suited to young and old, more human” (ibidem, translation by the author). It is not only the design fantasy that differentiates the New Towns and the Gal: this neighbourhood was never intended to be economically independent, unlike the English model. It was built without public lighting services and without paved roads. It was built by actors such as the *Autonomous Popular Housing Institute of Milan* (Istituto Autonomo delle Case Popolari di Milano – IACPM), the *Workers’ Home Management Fund* (Fondo per le Gestione Case per i Lavoratori – Gescal), and the *National Institute for State Employees’ Homes* (Istituto Nazionale per le Case degli Impiegati Statali – Incis). The Gal is a product of Italian Fordism and the social conflict that marked the years from 1968 to 1977, the years of the “Golden Horde” (Balestrini and Moroni 1988). The Gal workers’ struggle committee played a central role in shaping the urban space of the district, decisively influencing local development plans.

*A Fordist Story: the development of the neighbourhood from the 1960s to the present day*

The history of the district’s development has its roots in the 1950s and 1960s. This history is reconstructed in issue 119 of the magazine “Edilizia Popolare”, published in 1974. This publication constitutes the primary source for all subsequent publications (Erba 1979, Conforti 1981, Carmelo 1979). It is possible to divide the Gal’s urban development into six key steps:

1. **The Costanzo Ciano Neighbourhood (1940):** Conceived during the Fascist period, the Gal is part of an intervention plan that decisively shifts the construction of low-cost housing outside

the city, envisaged by the IACPM. The four planned neighbourhoods bear the names of Arnaldo Mussolini, Guglielmo Oberdan, Italo Balbo and Costanzo Ciano. The district is designed by prominent figures in Milanese rationalist architecture, such as Renato Camus and Franco Albini. The project became part of the city's reconstruction plans after the Second World War.

2. **The Prg of Milan (1953):** the General Regulatory Plan (Piano Regolatore Generale) envisages residential expansion for the north-west area of the city, comprising three areas: G1 and G2 (the Gal) and Q.T.8. G1 and G2 are conceived as cores separated from each other by about 100 hectares of public green space. To the north, the two cores are separated from the industrial areas by a green belt. The Gal area is subjected to a specific plan analysis, drawn up by a group of town planners, including architect Piero Bottoni.
3. **Architect Bottoni's project (1956):** this project envisages overcoming the isolation of G1 and G2 through the creation of a "vital street" and overcoming the uniformity of social class of the population and building types. The idea of the "strada vitale" goes back to the observation of building characteristics in other Italian cities and the Milanese example of Corso Buenos Aires. The design envisages the vital street as a central axis for collective services, public buildings and offices, commercial housing, middle-class and luxury residences, and local road network. Popular housing is located in the external areas, in green spaces. The inhabitants were divided into G1 (50,000) and G2 (30,000). A green area remains between the two areas for various uses: sports, space for public utility buildings, separation device. A road to the north and a service artery to the south ensures efficient traffic flows.
4. **Opposition to Bottoni's project and C.E.P. proposal (1957):** the project is heavily criticised by the IACPM's technical advisor and councillor for Public Works of the Province of Milan, arch. Ratti. He criticised the overly generic urban planning approach for a district of 80,000 inhabitants, the poverty of functions of the "vital street" and the presence of luxury houses only on it (he spoke of "a street for the rich and a neighbourhood for the poor"). Above all, Ratti believes that private mobility by car will be significantly greater than public mobility by rail and road. Therefore, he criticises the central road axis as too limited to handle the city's traffic and the organisation of the access roads to the sub-neighbourhoods. On these criticisms, Venegoni and Costantino (1974) state that:

“it was above all the IACPM that criticised the Bottoni plan and counterposed alternatives to it that, in truth, came about casually, not because of urban planning requirements, but simply because of the need to include as much land owned by the Institute as possible in the draft revision of Milan’s Prg” (14, translation by the author)

After Bottoni’s election as a municipal councillor in the Italian Communist Party and his resignation as auditor of the urban development plan, the IACPM began planning the exploitation of the land in core G1, which it owned, while the municipality renounced its regulatory role. Between 1956 and 1957, the institute ended its agreement with the C.E.P., the new institution set up on the initiative of the Ministry of Public Works to coordinate national building activities. In March 1957, the C.E.P. concluded the agreement for the construction of the G1 with the interested agencies. The connection between G1 and G2 is left undetermined. The first core is planned with a single centre equipped with public, commercial and representative buildings. The suggestion of the “vital street” is ignored: the linear centre is broken in two. The second core is not designed. The lack of attention to G2 is a constant throughout the neighbourhood’s planning history. In the 1960s, the area will be named St. Leonard, after the local parish.

5. **Start of work and project for C.E.P. G1 neighbourhood:** the project is submitted to a technical arbitration commission because of the controversy between Bottoni and the IACPM. In September 1957, the commission decides in favour of Bottoni’s proposal but incorporates some of the IACPM’s proposals. However, the Institute resumed control of operations in October 1957, after the commission’s work was completed. The first urbanisation works in the district are carried out illegally, without the approval of the City Council, between 1958 and 1959. Part of G1 is built in an agricultural green area, according to the 1953 Prg. In 1959, the IACPM presents the study of the Detailed Plan of the G1 sector. The nucleus is presented as an entity detached from the rest of the territory: it consists of three units clustered around a raised Civic Centre. Each unit is divided into three sub-areas, in turn organised around an area for collective services (e.g. parishes and kindergartens). The road structure has wide roadways and the large east-west roadway divides the district into a north and a south sector. The civic centre is regarded as a “huge car split” (Ivi, 16). This fracture is exacerbated by the red metro line project, which includes tracks on the road and thus creates another barrier.

6. **The variant to the Prg in 1960 and the acceleration of the works through Law 167:** The legal situation of the neighbourhood is rectified through a variant to the Master Plan. A group of architects presented a compromise project, on which political polemics arose. In 1962, the law of 18 April, known as “law 167”, allowed the public operator to acquire land more quickly and the urbanisation of the neighbourhood became more intense and rapid. Between 1964 and 1967, the IACPM built thirty-five buildings and began the expropriation of some land on which the rest of the neighbourhood would be built. The Milan City Council and the Institute purchased this land at half the price set by the Treasury.

In the second half of the 1960s, the urban development of the Gal consisted of large, prefabricated buildings in an area crossed by the Olona river, heavily polluted by the industrial production of the Milanese hinterland. The neighbourhood grew in a disorderly manner and in the almost total absence of public services, “when you came home, in the 1960s, the only way to find your way around was a blue cross on a shack where we had made a kind of church: there was an incredible fog” [historical resident, 82]. During a reminiscence day about the neighbourhood, initiated by Lisa, a social worker in a project for the elderly, old residents of the neighbourhood compared their arrival at the Gal to the moon landing in 1969 (see fig. 29).



*Figure 30. The Gal in the 1960s (source: author unknown, “TrevisanI’ photo archive)*

Starting in 1966, citizens began to politically organise and demonstrate to demand the most basic urbanisation services: paved roads, pavements, public lighting, and the burying of the river. In addition to these demands, the committees demanded the undergrounding of the metro



and the preservation of the central strip of greenery that ran through the neighbourhood. In the meantime, the first local representative body was born: the Provisional Neighbourhood Council, which would become the Area Council in 1968. In 1969, the Neighbourhood People's Committee (Comitato Popolare del Quartiere) was founded. The following years were marked by rent strikes, demonstrations and occupations. On 25 September 1970, 15 working-class families with women and children occupied an unoccupied building owned by the IACPM. The police intervened and there were clashes with the families and a demonstration by the neighbourhood tenants. On 5 April 1971, a procession of 1,200 people in 400 cars arrives at Palazzo Marino to demand a special commission for the neighbourhood's land planning. The work of the Popular Committee and the other political actors is based on a constant communication campaign with the neighbourhood and the accurate study of the missing projects (see fig. ).

**LAVORATORE, STUDENTE, CASALINGA, PENSIONATO!**

ti presentiamo la scandalosa situazione dei servizi nel Quartiere Gallarate, abitato da 60.000 persone.  
Ecco perché dobbiamo lottare per porre fine alla speculazione edilizia impedendo la costruzione di nuove abitazioni.  
**Case per abitazione: in 10 anni ne sono state costruite per 60.000 abitanti.**

Servizio	Costruiti in 10 anni	Previsti dal Consiglio Naz. delle ricerche	(nuclei) Tutt'ora mancanti
Asili nido . . . . .	1	24	23
Scuole materne . . . . .	11	24	13
Scuole elementari . . . . .	7	12	5
Scuole medie . . . . .	4	8	4
Scuole superiori . . . . .	zero	3	tutti
Poliambulatorio . . . . .	zero	1	tutti
Pronto Soccorso . . . . .	zero	1	tutti
Ospedale . . . . .	zero	1	tutti
Centro comunitario . . . . .	zero	2	tutti
Biblioteca . . . . .	zero	5	tutti
Campi gioco . . . . .	zero	12	tutti
Parchi di quartiere . . . . .	zero	6	tutti
Cinema . . . . .	zero	2	tutti
Centro civico . . . . .	zero	1	tutti
Teatri . . . . .	zero	1	tutti
Mercati comunali . . . . .	1	6	5
Grandi magazzini . . . . .	zero	1	tutti
Uffici postali . . . . .	zero	3	tutti
Infrastrutture artigianali (garage, officine meccaniche, laboratori) . . . . .	zero	5	tutti

**Il Comitato Popolare di Quartiere**  
Milano, 29 Maggio 1971

Figure 31. An excerpt from the leaflet of the Popular Neighbourhood Committee (source: CPQ 1971)

In the spring of 1971, a long occupation led to a breakthrough in the negotiations between the Popular Committee and the Milan municipality. As one resident of the neighbourhood writes in a private writing:

“In the spring of 1971 a symbolic occupation of Gallarate took place, represented by a tent erected at the entrance to the neighbourhood and manned day and night, to which citizens from other areas of Milan and representatives of the nearby factories - Italtel and Alfa Romeo - brought their solidarity and adhesion, and lasted fifteen days, culminating in a popular assembly held at the beginning of June during which the final decision of the Municipal Administration to make the request of the inhabitants of Gallarate its own was made official: To commission a quatern of professionals, working in Milan, to study the “General variant to the P. R.G. for the Gallarate district and neighbouring areas”. The quality and quantity of the functions to be settled were to be defined in the drafting of the urban planning instrument, functions that were not only to be linked to the life of the neighbourhood but, some of them, were to take on the value of a junction with the city and neighbouring municipalities”

The two-year period 1972-1973 is characterised by the political discussion on the specific plan desired by the Committee. In the meantime, demonstrations and occupations of semi-abandoned spaces continue, in the IACPM buildings and on construction sites. The plan requested by the Popular Committee is approved in 1976. The plan includes the burying of the metro, the preservation of the central strip, and an established timetable for services. In 1980, the underground arrived in St. Leonard, radically changing the life of an area of the Gal that was disconnected with the rest of the city.

The neighbourhood struggle in the 1970s is characterised by three elements that are decisive for the outcomes of the campaign. The first is the protagonism of the neighbourhood's citizens within a social context where political organisations were rooted in the area. Social protagonism and political organisation enabled a disconnected social fabric formed by Italian immigrants to form a united and combative social bloc:

The committee was formed spontaneously, out of the need of so many people who were here. There were organisations linked to the oratories and the church, there were parties that were beginning to give themselves a structure. These people from different backgrounds and ideologies came together to build something for everyone. There was no spark: the spark was need. The necessity of the need. [historical resident, 78].

The social ties... I would say that in those years there if there had been no political organisations it would have been all very, very, complicated... also because you were coming from a situation politically, a bit anonymous. The struggles certainly led to

a unity of intentions, obviously not of everyone, at the time it was difficult to relate to each other, I didn't know where to go, what to do, the subsequent evolution led to an integration of people [historical resident, 72 years old].

The second element is the union between the working class and the emerging middle classes after the Second World War: the Gal district was not born as a suburb inhabited only by workers. The only two sociological surveys on the district, drawn up in the 1970s, also highlight this aspect statistically (Tagliaferri 1974, Carmelo 1979). The Gal of those years is a district in which entrepreneurs and managers are almost absent (2.9 per cent), but white and blue-collar workers represent 47 per cent and 46 per cent of the active workforce respectively.

Certainly there was this unity of purpose that was perceptible from the strategic alliances that led to a common struggle. You could range from the office worker to the worker, to the student. Everyone was aware that it was going to be a fundamental battle for the quality of life in the neighbourhood. And there all the political forces also intersected. They ranged from centre right to centre left and extreme left. The common idea was to stay united. [historical resident, 78].

The third element is connected to the other two: the class composition of the movement and the political organisation allowed the struggle not to focus on small, specific aspects but to demand and obtain an overall plan covering the entire neighbourhood.

The genius of the neighbourhood struggle was that instead of demanding "we want to fill in this pothole, we want to make the tram stop", instead the demand was to plan the whole neighbourhood, which was revolutionary for those times. [ibidem]

The broad and overall focus on improving the neighbourhood also included public housing. Many of the association spaces I encountered in St. Leonard exist because the popular movement of the 1970s occupied them, kept them standing and gained institutional recognition while maintaining their autonomy.

I don't know what public housing would be like now without the struggles of associations and political organisations in the 1970s and 1980s. The houses on Pyranee Street [referring to historic public housing] are a clear example here in St. Leonard. All the spaces on the ground floor, where there are now the headquarters of some associations, were occupied in the 1970s and then officially recognised [historical resident, 68].

The 1980s and 1990s are marked by some very important passages for understanding the deep socio-economic dynamics of the neighbourhood.

In the 1980s, the quality of life in the neighbourhood was consolidated. The metro now runs through the entire neighbourhood, and some important works are realised. The most important is a large building that dominates the centre of the neighbourhood, built at the end of the central strip that had been earmarked for a park and collective services by the planning committee. This structure consists of two parts: on the one hand, the public services area, with a civic centre, an auditorium, a public library and the offices of City Hall 8. On the other, the first shopping centre in Milan, open since 1988, which houses one of the first Coop stores in Lombardy. This shopping centre, warm in winter and cold in summer, has been a very important socialising place for the neighbourhood's historical residents.

It is a neighbourhood that began as a dormitory, because it was all people who worked elsewhere and then came here in the evening. Slowly, even as it grew older, it began to have its own sociality. Now, you'll say "but when does it go back to?", if I told you when the shopping centre was built, you might reply "no, shit, you can't say that a shopping centre brings people to socialise". In a neighbourhood where there is no square, the shopping centre has become a square. [resident since 1986, 60 years old].

The change of course came with the late 1980s and early 1990s, with the construction of the shopping centre and civic services. They were seen as the usual things that spring up in Italy, the "non-places", as a university professor used to say. But this non-place compared to other shopping centres is different. This one has become a meeting place: it's crazy, you go inside and find people talking, socialising, it has radically changed the way people live and relate to each other. It was a very important thing, I tell you because one of my bookshops was there, I experienced it fully. [historical resident, 68 years old].

However, the impact of the shopping centre on the commercial fabric of the neighbourhood was devastating: the small commercial spaces under the buildings in the neighbourhood quickly became deserted. In the commercial area of St. Leonard, described in the previous chapter, "there was a stationery shop of Mr. Riccardo, who had the Porsche, because rightly there were seven billion children who bought in that stationery shop, there was Mr. Piero who was the butcher, there was a butcher shop" [historical resident, 62 years old]. Another important event took place in St. Leonard: new council houses were built, intended for evictees from other areas of the city and for a nucleus of people from the so-called "minimum houses", public housing promoted during fascism. Part of these groups went to live in the new houses on Froth Street, while another moved to the northern edge of St. Leonard. According to the interviewees' testimonies, the growth of public services in this area went at a different speed than in the rest of the neighbourhood:

When I arrived this neighbourhood was right on the margins, as you heard the old guys talking about the Gal in the sixties and seventies... well here it could have been like there in 1970, that's it! [resident since 1986, 60 years old].

Here in St. Leonard the was still open country compared to where I lived on Venezuela Street or Uruguay Street [parts of the Gal closer to the mall and the rest of the city]. There are photographs that clearly testify to this: here in the 1980s people were still cutting wheat in front of the road. [historical resident, 63 years old].

As we have seen above, the St. Leonard area was already loosely planned in the development plans of the 1960s, where it was called G2. This vagueness and the presence of large building spaces made the neighbourhood an ideal place to place segments of the population in economic distress, which happened in the 1980s and then in the 2000s. It is possible to assume that the population that arrived here in the 1980s was in greater economic difficulty than the citizens of the first round of transfers to the Gal in the 1960s. The latter had started almost from scratch, but had benefited from the economic growth of the years of the "Italian economic miracle", between the 1950s and the early 1970s. The 1980s were marked by deindustrialisation processes and the reconversion of Milan's urban economy (see e.g. Mocarrelli 2011; Bigatti 2020). For example, the Alfa Romeo plant in Portello closed in 1985. This factory is mentioned by many interviewees as one of the most important employers for the working class in the neighbourhood. In this context, an urban suburb like St. Leonard may have particularly suffered from this transformation in production structures. Karl, my gatekeeper, told me that "now everybody is mad at the gypsies, but Froth Street wasn't such a great place before either. I remember it when I was a kid: it was always a special situation in the neighbourhood". Another witness, who came to St Leonard's in the 1980s, reported to me that the number of occupied houses "was much higher than people think around". This situation came to an end in 2015, the year in which an important part of the public housing stock passed from the Lombardy Region to the City of Milan, which began a very violent policy of evictions. This policy led to very few reassignments: on the floor where this person lives, only two out of five houses are occupied. "They say they will assign them," he told me, "but for now nothing."

The 1990s and 2000s were a turning point in the history of the Gal, because a huge number of council houses were bought by the inhabitants themselves: the Gal became a neighbourhood of owners. From 1991 to 2011, the number of owner-occupied dwellings for every 100 dwellings occupied by residents increases by 33 per cent, while renting decreases by 47 per cent. In absolute terms, the Gal becomes Milan's sixth largest neighbourhood in terms of number of owner-occupied dwellings (73 per 100) among the 69 neighbourhoods with more than 3,000

residents. Considering that the net majority of the built-up land was built as public housing, this transition signals a process of systematic divestment that should be further investigated and framed in the city's urban policies.

The process of selling social housing has developed in two ways: the first is rent with right of redemption, which was a fairly common form in the neighbourhood. The second consists of a systematic sales campaign. *Lombardy Housing Company* (Azienda Lombarda per L'Edilizia Residenziale – Aler) began systematically offering for sale its houses from the early 1990s until at least 2010-2011. The precise desire to dispose of the houses as quickly as possible can be perceived in the agreements and off-market offers that were made to residents:

My house was assigned and it wasn't a house in rent-to-buy: they didn't care how many years you had been there, how much rent you had paid so far. It was simply a political plan to sell the housing stock and build again. And the proposal they made to us, in 2010, was around EUR 1,000 per square metre, so for EUR 80,000 we bought the house. [historical resident, 30 years].

Here in my staircase with 14 flats, there are four that have remained with the municipality of Milan, but when Aler sold this property at the time, the agreements were that the unsold houses would obviously remain for rent, but when the tenant died, these houses would be put up for sale or auctioned, but in any case owners would come in. This was not the case and there were some problems afterwards, because a couple were not paying. [historical resident, 57].

This process of selling Aler social housing continues today. Several interviewees testify that in St. Leonard there is a large number of houses sold at auction. This happens because Aler systematically sells at auction the flats vacated by elderly people who go to a retirement home or die without becoming owners.

The transformation of the Gal into a predominantly owner-occupied neighbourhood is a change that all interviewees perceive as fundamentally homogeneous and homogenising. According to many people, the conquest of ownership has affected practically everyone and has further diminished social inequalities. In fact, several situations of historical social housing that has not been purchased have been reported to me, precisely in St. Leonard. Moreover, the rental share is underestimated: in 2011 it represented 22%, a low number but not as low as it seems from residents' accounts.

The arrival of property is followed by another phenomenon central to understanding the neighbourhood: the ageing population. According to 2021 data, Gal is the first neighbourhood in Milan for the presence of people over 85 and has the highest value of the old-age index, which measures the presence of elderly people over 65 in relation to the presence of young

people from 0-14. The youngest people in the neighbourhood claim that the Gal has been statistically named “the oldest neighbourhood in Europe” and that “there is a percentage of elderly people here that is kind of higher than a Japanese neighbourhood with the most elderly people in the world”. Certainly it is the neighbourhood with the most elderly people in a city whose ageing population is a major welfare problem.

Those involved in neighbourhood politics point to two dynamics that are related to both ageing and ownership. The first is a transformation in the political orientation of many residents, who have changed their outlook and orientation over time:

When the neighbourhood was born in the 1960s and 1970s, a lot of young families came here. The houses that used to be all council houses were redeemed and people grew older. There was a social evolution, in the sense that everyone was working, they were able to buy the Aler houses where they were renting. Some were also able to afford to take a second home. There was an evolution at the economic level and then at the social and political level. There was a change from people who were more centre-left oriented, because there were houses for less affluent people, to people who then got a middle economic level, and then moved more to security issues. Many apartment blocks were closed. The danger, I don't know, of going out at night. [historical resident, 68 years old, member of a local cooperative association].

The second dynamic is related to the difficulties in accessing the neighbourhood and finding meeting spaces for young people:

The problems of the Gal tend to be twofold: the first is that it is a dormitory district. There is a lack of gathering and social spaces. This is due to the damn shopping centre, which among its urbanisation charges has built the civic centre but desertified the Gal. The second problem is that a neighbourhood that has a tendency towards non-existent mobility: why is the average age now so high? Because that immigration from the centre south that constituted the economic engine of this city has settled here, with an almost Fordist criterion linked to the factories. People have stayed here. And they don't leave! And so there are no houses at the Gal for those who want to come from outside. And this vicious circle has been self-feeding because it is more difficult for a family to choose it if there are fewer families. [historical resident, 28 years old, representative of City Hall 8].

Finally, St. Leonard has seen the arrival of dozens of families who occupied the new social housing complexes on Pyranees Street in 2008 and Moon Street in 2017. These families are assignees of rented houses and are predominantly composed of non-Italian immigrants. In 2012, the Gal was the “whitest” neighbourhood in Milan: foreign residents were about 8% compared to the city average of 19%. In the 2012-2022 decade, the presence of foreign citizens rose from 8% to 14.5%, an increase of 43%, the highest growth in the entire city. This growth is to be

contextualised in relation to the previous data: foreign citizens are growing a lot because they were previously an extremely small number for the city of Milan. In particular, the comparison with other peripheries is impressive: considering neighbourhoods where the historical presence of non-Italian migrant networks is historically less strong, such as Giambellino and Corvetto, the number of foreigners is more than double. In the neighbouring districts of San Siro and Quarto Oggiaro, the number almost triples.

The new neighbourhood population is concentrated in St. Leonard, in the large complexes that are closest to the District and form a segregation belt. The citizens of the new housing estates struggle to integrate into the tertiarised economy of Milan, where they are often forced into precarious jobs. As we will see in the next chapter, dedicated to emerging fragilities in St. Leonard, the new poverty in the neighbourhood is that of the working poor, a form that affects young people, migrant families and children (Saraceno, Benassi and Morlicchio 2020; Filandri 2022).

### *St. Leonard today: the network of neighbourhood associations*

The St. Leonard neighbourhood looks like a dense array of large buildings punctuated by green spaces, paved streets and car parks. Parking in St. Leonard's is all metered, but the residential nature of the neighbourhood is so pronounced that no one checks: in a year I have never gotten a ticket, regularly parking in front of my house, in the large parking areas that are public, but look private. My roommate, a guy who works in a *Residenza Sanitaria Assistenziale (RSA)*, a facility dedicated to non-self-sufficient elderly people for whom this neighbourhood is obviously a considerable source of profit, told me "I have lived here for eight years, and I have never got a fine". During the day, the neighbourhood is traversed by a few people walking to and from home, at night, apart from a few groups of kids hanging around in the little parks that every large building has under its roof, it is deserted. The atmosphere of the neighbourhood is dominated by quietness and a feeling of immobility. Karl told me one day, "our neighbourhood has one precious thing in Milan: it is a neighbourhood where everything flows more slowly, it is less frenetic, it has a different speed". The District and San Leonard come from opposite histories but share the dream of a garden city far from urban chaos. However, care and maintenance suffer from the difference between public and private: at certain times, the St. Leonard area appears slightly dirty, with rubbish on the streets and abandoned objects. St. Leonard is a much cleaner and tidier neighbourhood than most of the city's peripheral neighbourhoods, but it is always quite empty: in this situation, the rubbish seems to become



more evident. The old, semi-abandoned shopping area in the neighbourhood is illustrative of the process of partial devalorisation that has taken place in the area over the past two decades, along with the cutback in public spending (see fig. 31). A major problem in the neighbourhood is the administrative fragmentation of urban spaces, which generates an easy shift of responsibility:

On some aspects Aler intervenes, on others MM, on others the Municipality of Milan, on others the Municipality of Milan 8... these competences are not clear and there is a game of passing the buck. The work they are doing in the St. Leonard commercial area is funny: the paving will be done in pieces, a puzzle some pieces are done and others are not because the competence lies with others, unbelievable! No one wants to get the money out and until something serious happens, things are slow. [non-resident, 40 years old, association network: homework support and educational activities for boys 12-20]



Figure 32. Two photos of St. Leonard: on the left the pedestrian area of Pyranees Street, on the right the neighbourhood commercial area.

I interpreted this slightly decadent atmosphere as a sign of the social fragmentation that has overtaken this community, not without veins of racism: social ties in the neighbourhood are complicated by differences in income, skin colour, age groups. “In my opinion,” I was told, “the main problem here is the disintegration of the social fabric. The concrete strip dividing the new houses from the old council houses on Pyranees Street, where I lived, is a silent boundary between two communities that do not really want to talk to each other: the elderly migrants who have been residents since the 1970s and the young migrants who have been residents for a decade. The communication problems add up to resentment for a neighbourhood that is less

clean than before, because the population has doubled but the services have remained the same. Mutual rancour, in a situation of economic fragility for some, fuels indifference.

Sandra, the girl working in the day care centre for minors whom we met in the chapter on the park, clearly underlines this problem:

There was a change with the construction of houses on Moon Street in 2017. There was a huge increase in population in one year. The schools here have seen despair: now, in fact, the reporting of minors is done more by the schools. This thing here has changed the neighbourhood dynamics so much. It has worsened here. But just the neighbourhood here was much cleaner, it was very different, it didn't even look like public housing. The population increased even more, the services didn't, but the population did. There was a big influx of people.

Sandra's day care centre, located in the public service spaces on the ground floor of the Pyranees Street houses, is not the only social activity taking place under the houses of St. Leonard. The neighbourhood is animated by a very extensive and rather united, if almost invisible, network of associations, social cooperatives and informal groups. It was only with the help of Karl and Lisa, my two gatekeepers, that I was able to get in touch with these groups. By the end of my research, I knew of activities in places that most of the resident interviewees had never heard of: the popular Kick Boxing gym under the houses on Moon Street, the activities for the elderly run by Lisa, the photography class in the Pyranees Street club, the neighbourhood ultras bar and the football matches every Sunday. The network of neighbourhood associations participates in a project funded by the Cariplo Foundation, the QB project. This project is dedicated to combating child poverty in Milan and one of its objectives is to cement relations between the associations. "You know," Karl told me, "this QB thing is useful to us, because there is also a lot of money involved: we can do a lot of things with this network. The network of associations was formed from an informal network created in 2010:

Yes, there were practically eight of us in the network, but it was always an informal network. The QB project required us to be formal. Afterwards it expanded very naturally, in the sense that the first year, when we wrote the project, there was a call to arms. it is a project that was quite successful quite early on. There are all the realities that were already working with families with minors aged 0-18, so it covers a very wide range. After the first months, the first year of the project, other realities joined in. Now we are about forty. [historical resident, 30 years, network of associations: parenting]

The associations in the QB project deal with different things: parenting, educational games for children, combating poverty, basic services. The network of associations in the neighbourhood

was established informally and in dialogue with local political actors: some interviewees from St. Leonard, not from the neighbourhood, emphasise how the local administration has an eye on this area. A malicious glance might suggest that, given the socio-economic characteristics of the area, this neighbourhood constitutes a valuable electoral pool. The Gal is a stronghold of the centre-left, which has always governed this area. Some interviewees confided in me that “on the third sector, we must say that the Pisapia council in Milan gave a big push, here in the neighbourhood we had Z. [a local politician from the Democratic Party] who supported us a lot”. Political activity between institutions and the third sector is the terrain in which Karl, my gatekeeper, also moves. Karl has chosen to do politics at the Gal because he doesn’t share some of the choices of the “classic” social movements in the city, from which he comes.

Many militants in Milan focus on the underproletariat, but they tend to take what the struggles give and take it home without moving forward... I understand that, eh, they are people in a very difficult situation in which it is complicated to do things another way. What I like here is that there is a circle of people like that with whom you can build community, talking about wages and not business.

Karl devotes time and attention to the network of associations in the neighbourhood, even though he is not particularly fond of the language of the third sector, which he considers to be pragmatic. “In my opinion,” he once told me, “you can see that a lot of people who do things in associationism grew up through the culture of ‘68, I’m beginning to appreciate Stalinism about organisation: less big words, more concrete facts. Who does what? How do we organise ourselves? At meetings we tell ourselves that we must do services not to the person, but for the person... but what does that mean?”.

What differentiates Karl from the others is that his commitment is twofold: he has an association linked to young people in the neighbourhood, the 18-30 bracket, called “Staying at the Gal”, and he is the president of a popular football team, Partizan Gal. This team proposes an idea of “popular football”, which develops from the bottom up and has no investors, only a few sponsors. Karl uses the team and the association in a politicised way: for example, he and the other guys have worked to keep out of the neighbourhood a security committee animated by a neo-fascist far-right group, which was about to open a headquarters in the neighbourhood.

We had the problem in this neighbourhood in 2017. The “Comitato Gal Sicuro” wanted to join our network and had found political backing in Lealtà e Azione [a neo-fascist group particularly active in Milan]. They held a procession with a banner reading “GAL: RIALZA LA TESTA”, which is the typical motto of Lealtà e Azione in this kind of campaign for safety in neighbourhoods. We did well to smear them

through communication on social media and various videos, we were successful in excluding them from the network of neighbourhood associations by making it clear to everyone that these were friends of jackal neo-fascists.

The moments when the network of associations is most visible in the district are the collective festivals, which follow the seasons: autumn, spring, winter, summer. The autumn festival was the first one I attended, and it was held in the District's community centre. The relationship between the District and St. Leonard's associations is still being defined. As was pointed out earlier, District Manager Marie wants to involve the network, with a specific objective:

They are very interested in understanding, how to break down a bit this barrier of Rooster Street, the street that divides the two neighbourhoods. Marie and the others told us that the houses in the District are considered to be inhabited by rich families. Yes, it's true, with the new houses there will certainly be families with a much higher standard of living, but they are also very keen on the fact that there are also subsidised housing. They say that there is also a middle class, let's say, so there is a tendency to think of the District as something inaccessible and absolutely different from the Gal, when in fact... they care a lot about this, I mean, they have really made it explicit. [historical resident, 28 years old, association network: migrant women's assistance]

Like almost all the interviewees in the district, the members of the association network have a fairly positive idea of the district, which they often associate with order, cleanliness and beauty. However, they would not bet on everyone in St. Leonard attending it and are doubtful about bringing their activities to the new neighbourhood:

In my opinion the citizens here are not familiar with the project, the first few times they asked us "what are they doing there?". It's as if people are used to the fact that something is going on around them but it doesn't change much for them. However, the feeling is that the place attracts the attention of younger people: families with young children and teenagers. I have never heard the District mentioned in the words of the elderly in the neighbourhood, they seem to perceive it little. [non-resident, 40 years old, association network: homework support and educational activities for children 12-20].

We had the October party which turned out very well. But how many people were there from the target group of the QB project? 10%... you know, we ask questions, I use money from a grant that is for the poor and then the people who come are all from... Up Town. There were a lot of people, but I prefer to do it more loser like last Saturday, with less people, but there it was 100% our target audience. [non-resident, 42 years old, association network: local radio and music education services]

One of the first Ludobus we did in the District, we were asked us to ask for the e-mails of the people who came to contact them for other events. We also used to do Ludobuses near the school and shopping area in St. Leonard back in the day. A few people from both neighbourhoods came but when we had to get the email for the mailing list... you realise there's a giant gap: they don't have email, if they do they have difficulty writing. [non-resident, 36 years old, network of associations: promoting recreational-educational activities and historical games].

The different level of digitisation is an aspect that emerges very clearly and is related to the language difficulties of many users. The services offered by the QB network are never based on this type of tool: initiatives are communicated by phone or voice, on a case-by-case basis. In the District, all communication is digitalised: events are sponsored on social networks and above all on a newsletter that arrives by e-mail. Flyers are present in both activities, but those in the District are better formatted and with more attention to graphics. Some of St. Leonard's flyers are clearly formatted by people using "old-fashioned" programmes such as Microsoft Paint. The differences between the two different ways of conducting activities can be seen in the festivities, such as the Christmas party, which was discussed in the first chapter with regard to the District.

**Date: 18 december 2021**

**Time: from 3.30 to 19 pm**

Arrival around 3.30 p.m. in the St. Leonard's shopping area. The party was organised around the spaces between the pharmacy, the bar, the bakery and the toy library, which occupies two spaces, one in front of the other. It is a cold day and a thick fog surrounds the city of Milan and much of Lombardy. I go for a coffee at the bar. The bar is as usual: run by a Chinese girl and a boy, it acts as a betting shop and tobacconist, it has a somewhat hidden area full of slots and many small tables inside.

The outdoor areas of the market are often frequented by a group of local boys and girls who also stay all day in the area to "piazze", as they say in Milan. Karl once told me that the people who hang out there in the area are "the area's thugs". The company I've seen over the last couple of months has a few fixed spots and a revolving round of people. They usually chat, smoke and drink beer. They stay close to the party but don't get into it.

The party has been going on for an hour or so and is in full swing: the guys from the local radio station put on live music, a guy with a guitar will perform live, children and parents play a game based on bond-building (weaving of fabrics, offered by an association) or the games of Spluf, the association specialising in educational games. From 5pm, the magician will perform a show for children. There are some families of non-Italian migrants, mainly Arabs. Also present is Lisa, who has brought some books collected from the elderly for a gift book stall that SottoDiciotto, an association based right here in the former market, runs. Around 15.45, Karl arrives and sets up the

banquet with mulled wine, a classic of his association, which often takes care of the refreshments at this type of initiative.

The members of the associations set up the stalls, bringing the material from their own premises and helping each other. The set-up is, aesthetically, similar to a village festival or an old political party fest: practicality is taken care of, there are no pretensions in terms of elegance and there are not many decorations. The people present from the associations are here on a voluntary basis and in some cases are not directly involved in the organisation but support the network of associations in the neighbourhood. Furthermore, the party does not have the typical Christmas characters (red, references to Father Christmas, Christmas balls, trees, reindeer, elves). The magician's show is not linked to Christmas references and the magician himself does not appear to be a professional.



Stefano, a tall guy in an eskimo, short white hair and a cap, also arrives at the banquet. He is the head of the local radio station, and he has brought some young guys to the initiative for practice. We make small talk about my project and he tells me “it’s a topic that interests us too...”. I knew about their interest from a podcast he did for the Autumn festival, which is entitled “Gal: the QB network stitches up the margins”. He tells me “Rooster Stret in a sense is a wall” and talks to me about a similar project in San Siro, either already passed or proposed.

I shuttle between Karl’s stall and some stalls to chat and make contacts. I meet Marta, a girl from the SottoDiciotto association, who is about forty years old. They now give books as gifts, in collaboration with the Rimargina project and the neighbourhood elders who have made Christmas packages and made the books available, which are available for both adults and children. He tells me that where there were the so-called “Pyramids”, an area next to the municipal market, until ten years ago “there were only junkies”. He also tells me that the difference between the world of the

third sector here and that of other cities is that “the third sector is strong where there is money: here we make profits, even if they are few”.

I leave and go back to Karl’s “stand”, which consists of a table and two benches. The mulled wine is ready despite problems with the gas cylinder and burner, which sometimes goes out. The situation at “our” stall has changed: people swarm around the mulled wine and stay a little longer in our area, which has spontaneously become the social area.

It’s getting dark and it’s almost 6 p.m. A few people are saying goodbye and others are drinking mulled wine, since we’ve also made the other five litres and now have to finish them.

Karl introduces me (to get him out of the way) to a guy who doesn’t seem to have anything to do with the associations or even the situation. He has curly black hair, a scar on his nose, a flushed face and is dressed in a leather jacket. He is slightly unkempt and has a very small dog that always runs after a ball. His name is Davide, he is in his fifties and likes to talk about his neighbourhood, where he grew up. Davide speaks a little rambling, partly because he is slightly drunk, but he tells a lot about the neighbourhood.

Davide lives nearby and says that this neighbourhood “we built it all”. To confirm this totality, he often points to the tiles in the area. He points out how the people who arrived here when the neighbourhood was built, the generation before him, “didn’t have shit... they didn’t know how to eat”. He tells me that here “when the metro arrived, it was like Jesus Christ had arrived”. He gives me a speech to which he returns several times:

“This is a clean neighbourhood, you know? People have worked hard to keep this neighbourhood clean. This is not like Quarto Oggiaro or like Baggio, certain things don’t happen. I always leave my car unlocked, my car is always unlocked. Because here there really is no culture of stealing cars. There has always been very little street dealing here. Now? Now, yes, but very little. If you want a five euro smoke, you take a five euro smoke without any problems, but things are done in a certain way”.

These are allusive speeches, delivered with a mix of discretion and moments of very direct sincerity. He tells me a rambling story about a person in Quarto Oggiaro or Baggio who pulled a gun on him. These things, according to him, would never happen here at the Gal.

He is enthusiastic about my research and comments “but this is a great thing!”. I fail to explain to him that this is not a reportage but university research. When I allude to the fact that I am researching the District, he takes offence:

“what the fuck is there to say about the new neighbourhood? Nothing, there’s nothing to say”.

“are they different people?”

“mmmh [thoughtful] ... no, they are not different. But we are talking about another world, this is another world”.

This long field note shows some differences between the way social activities are conducted in St. Leonard and the District. St. Leonard’s associations celebrate Christmas in a way that is less directly related to Christmas imagery, using a small budget and in a do it yourself manner,



relying on the informal strength of the group. The games and activities proposed have a more educational purpose and are less related to the exchange of gifts (absent here, central in the District). The families participating in the Christmas day are the users of the network's services, migrant families, often non-Italian, and other families from the area. In addition, the atmosphere is more inclusive: even "men from the street" can become part of the celebration, which is less strictly connected to children and family. Christmas in the District is organised by a company that develops large real estate projects, while Christmas in St. Leonard is organised by an informal group of third-sector associations with the support of the centre-left administration. The political messages launched by Christmas in the District are neutral, in St. Leonard they are implicitly left-wing.

However, there is one actor common to both: the banking foundations. Those who finance the QB project and those who financed the children's gifts in the District are all bank or corporate foundations, such as the Cariplo Foundation and the Danone Foundation. As we will see in the next chapter, the most important element of systematic fragility in projects to combat poverty and social isolation in the District is the "project-centric" logic that animates the third sector: when the money runs out, the project disappears.

### *Forza Partizan: traces of working-class and football culture in the neighbourhood*

My field experience did not only involve walking and supporting Lisa's elders (which we will discuss in the next chapter), and art exhibitions, concerts and interviews in the District. A quantitatively marginal, but qualitatively relevant part of my time was spent in a bar. The bars in St. Leonard and the Gal are, like many other things, hidden on the ground floor of the big buildings in the district. Some bars seem completely private, and I wondered several times how they managed to survive inside courtyards partially enclosed by fences and access barriers. As was mentioned before, many bars in the neighbourhood close very early and are not meant for "aperitifs" but for getting there at 5pm and leaving at 7.30pm. There is one bar that is different from the others, and that is the "boys" bar". The bar occupies a space at the end of a long building in a street near the Gal shopping centre. This building is much lower than the classic buildings in the neighbourhood: it has only two floors. The building houses various businesses, all on the ground floor: a pharmacy, a pastry shop, a delicatessen-grocery, a hairdresser's, a travel agency, an estate agent and the bar, which is on the corner. The bar can be accessed through the main entrance but also through a secondary door that connects the bar to its dehors, a space enclosed by a hedge with tables and parasols. Behind the dehors is a tiny children's



playground with a slide and other facilities. The bar is run by a very nice Chinese couple who have hired a boy from the neighbourhood as a third bartender. The head of the bar is the woman, not the man. Everyone calls her Lily, and this is in fact the bar “at Lily’s”, even though on the Internet the bar is only called an “ice-cream bar”.

This bar has a back door covered with football team stickers, from four different teams: AC Milan, Inter, Albenga, Partizan Gal. There is a certain disproportion between the footballing importance of the first two teams and the other two: two of the most important teams in the history of football, a team from a town of 25,000 inhabitants in Liguria, and Partizan Gal. The bar is frequented by many young people from the neighbourhood, mostly between 18 and 35 years old. The other patrons are older, with a predominance of neighbourhood people between 40 and 45 years old.



*Figure 33. The Lily's Bar*

Some of the older patrons often have T-shirts related to the Milan and Inter supporters. One of them almost always has the same shirt, which says “Loyal Ultras, Ideal Man”. The ultras of Partizan Gal, the team created by Karl and his friends as the football rib of the Sag association “Staying at the Gal”, meet in this bar. Every Thursday the weekly meeting of the group is held in this bar: the people present decide how and what to write on the banners, how to organise trips, how to organise long-term commitments. Every Sunday, the ultras follow the match at a stadium near the San Siro stadium, which is owned by another football club. Otherwise, the

ultras form a caravan of cars and go on away trips. Partizan Gal is the only team to represent a large district of Milan, while the other teams represent local parishes or small towns in the Milanese conurbation. Remembering the names of the teams in Partizan's league is an exercise in local geography: Cornaredo, Villapizzone, Cesano Boscone, Trezzano, Pero, Rho. The Partizan ultras sing this difference in a chorus that curiously emphasises two aspects of Gal that even the elderly in the neighbourhood like to remember: the underground and the shopping centre.

[on the melody of "Sotto questo sole" by Francesco Baccini]

We have the metro  
The shopping centre  
You  
Only the fog

We have the metro  
The shopping centre  
You  
are a fucking shithole!

Usually, these two verses close a long "repeat" chorus: the chorus leader, who is usually a tall guy wearing a light, tight-fitting black jacket and a Partizan cap, launches the verse and the rest of the group has to repeat what he says. The theme of the chorus is ironic and is musically based on the fact that the names of some of the shops in the shopping centre rhyme with typical Milanese expressions and common names for various drugs. The message is that whatever drugs you need, you can find them in the shopping centre, which is obviously untrue. Not only the shopping centre, but also the streets and roads of the neighbourhood are featured in the choreographies of the Partizan ultras (see fig. 33).

Milan is not just any city in the history of the world ultras movement: the Fossa dei Leoni, the historic Milan football club supporters group disbanded in 2005, is considered the first ultras group in the history of the whole movement, born in 1968. Some Partizan ultras have older brothers who were part of this group, which is historically left-wing oriented, although not openly politicised.



Figure 34. A Partizan choreography: in addition to the banner saying “symbol of these streets” and flags, people have a two-pole banner with the names of the neighbourhood streets. BRB is the acronym of Goodfellas Gal.

The ultras movement was born in the late 1960s, coinciding with the social unrest of 1968-1969. Balestri and Viganò (2004) identify three distinctive characteristics of this “style revolt” that are still valid today. The first is the involvement of very young boys who take over the most popular areas of the stadium (the curva) and begin to follow their team even when away. The second is the search for visibility and prominence, which is expressed through various collective practices (large banners, flags and choreographic displays, drums) and individual practices (team gadgets, hats, shirts). Aggressive behaviour can also result from these practices. The third is the contamination between ultras culture and political or pre-political experiences. Organised political groups can enter the corners being familiar with the principles of organisation and dedication to a cause. Although this aspect is slowly disappearing and is often secondary to internal dynamics of ultras culture, many historical rivalries between Italian ultras groups are also rooted in opposing political views. The ultras were born as an evolution of the organised clubs, but they distance themselves from the non-ultras public who turn their attention to the game and not to cheering. Moreover, they compete with opposing fans, according to a perennial challenge with the other fans. As Dal Lago (1990) notes, a match “is not just the encounter between two football teams. For the organised fans of a team, the match is the occasion of a

ritual confrontation of friends/enemies, which can turn, under ritually predictable or ordered circumstances, into a physical clash” (12, translation by the author).

This is not the appropriate place for a sociological discussion on the ultras phenomenon, which constitutes one of the most important mass social phenomena in Italian social history. The sociological literature on organised cheering was born in the 1970s in England, in conjunction with the phenomenon of hooligans (e.g. Clarke 1973). However, the English cheering tradition is very different from the Italian one, which spread to dozens of countries around the world and began to be studied in the 1980s and 1990s (e.g. Giulianotti, Bonney, and Hepworth 1994). Today, cheering is only a part of the broad field of Football Studies, in which the phenomenon of football is framed within broader processes: globalisation (e.g. Giulianotti 2009), the transformation of urban politics (S. Tosi 2018), popular culture in a broader sense (Millar et al. 2021), and financialisation (Morrow 2003).

The Partizan Gal experience is part of a circuit of organisations, especially football clubs, that is growing in Italy known as the People’s Football Movement (see Androus and Giudici 2018). People’s sport was born with the intention of implementing a decommercialisation and deprofessionalisation of football through fan activism and a cooperative, non-profit corporate structure. Partizan was born as a reality among friends and became a football club active first in a secondary league, the UISP championship, and later in the lower categories of the Figc, the Italian Football Federation:

The history of Partizan started among friends who used to meet every Sunday to play seven-a-side football in the neighbourhood. Then Karl came along and a core group was formed, the idea came from him. We decided to participate in this popular league where other teams were born: Santa, Ardità Giambellino. After this experience we said “why don’t we try”? Karl wanted to start in the FIGC, he’s an enthusiastic guy. But we joined UISP and while we knew the guys from the curva, we reconnected with these guys who I had known for thirty years but had lost touch with. We met Gheb, the coach of the eleven and we took the next step: we moved up to the third category. [historical resident, 32 years old, Partizan manager].

Partizan does not pay anyone to play: players have to pay 150 euros to register. The management receives no reimbursements and activities are financed mainly through self-financing parties that are organised in neighbourhood parks. In the beginning, Partizan was an offshoot of Sag, the association of Karl and the neighbourhood guys focused on youth aggregation. Later, the team took an autonomous path also thanks to Gal Goodfellas, the team’s supporters:

In the beginning Partizan coincided with Sag, because many who participated in Sag then actually played in the first Partizan: they were realities that almost coincided. Afterwards some initiatives became almost completely run by the curve: the distribution of food packs during the pandemic was almost all done by the fans, who organised themselves. [ibidem]

Karl and the ultras coordinated the distribution of food packs, a widespread practice throughout Italy and particularly in Milan during the pandemic. At its worst, between February and June 2020, there were more than 200 requests in the neighbourhood. This activity still continues today, but in a more institutional form and within spaces dedicated to the third sector. The precariousness of this service and conditionality are part and parcel of the emerging fragilities in St. Leonard, which we will see in the next chapter.

Partizan is not only a football project, but also Karl's political project, the activity he devotes most time to outside of work. Karl has often pointed out to me how the forms and organisational culture of the ultras have many similarities with that of the Italian social movements: practices such as "making the banner" to communicate a message, marching to the stadium, the use of smoke bombs and torches, the weekly meeting bring together these two worlds, which have become increasingly separated over the last twenty years. Karl blames left-wing militants, who in his opinion are increasingly distant "from the popular world" and "from the neighbourhoods". He founded Partizan precisely because he believes it is necessary to bridge this gap, at the cost of creating a reality that is much less politicised than other teams in the city, but more inclusive. Unlike other city clubs, politics is not directly present in the Partizan fanbase: everyone knows the ideas of the president (Karl) but there is no direct reference to anti-fascist or radical leftist values and symbols. The relationship between politics and ultras is much more subtle and complex than the expression of a symbol. In my personal experience I have known ultras groups that are explicitly left-wing, but also organised in a more traditionally hierarchical manner. The fact of not being a right-wing oriented group can be clearly perceived by the symbols, but also by the style.

For example, the Goodfellas Gal have a board made up of some people from the curve who have more responsibility than others, but no leader. In one case, the group had to make an important decision that was related to a match against the rival supporter's team. During the meeting, the guys decided to have a round-table discussion on the subject, which involved everyone, including me. Like all social groups, there are leaders who are more respected than others, but no one has the final say. The merits of leaders are essentially operational: they are bolder than average, they are nicer than average, they can make banners and graffiti better than



average. This style can also be seen on the streets: the parades of Partizan ultras to the stadium are organised, but they do not resemble military parades. Partizan fans have no problem clashing with other fans and have demonstrated this in various circumstances, but no one is a body-builder or prepares for the clash in a militaristic manner. Finally, there is an explicit political agreement: racist chants and insults are not permissible, nor is the presence of (or even obvious friendship with) people militant in neo-fascist organisations.

For the purposes of this research, the Partizan experience is interesting insofar as it indicates three important differences between St. Leonard and the District.

First, Partizan ultras are almost all manual workers: skilled technicians, maintenance workers, warehousemen, dispatchers. There are a number of higher category professionals, but they are a minority. This part of the population, present in St. Leonard, is the opposite of that present in the District, insofar as they occupy mirror positions on the ISTAT occupational nomenclature. Although a minority, the traditional Italian working class is still present in St. Leonard. However, many young people in the Goodfellas Gal face a labour market that now demands higher qualifications than anyone else and pays far less than would be required to live in Milan. Secondly, football culture is an important element in the daily lives of young people in periphery neighbourhoods like St. Leonard. The experiment and the level of involvement of Partizan Gal shows that there is a demand for aggregation, prominence and identity in the suburbs, which is partly satisfied by this kind of experience. It is significant that Marie categorically forbade any football-related activities in the district. The ethnographic experience shows how this choice is profoundly political: to remove football culture from the urban imaginary of a place like the north-west periphery of Milan is to remove, in an imaginary way, a part of its inhabitants from the picture.

Thirdly, Partizan's experience (and in this case also that of the associations) shows an action that is very rare in the District: acting on the territory, transforming urban imagery and physical places, following a logic of action that is not based on the extraction of value, but on other values. The ultras and the District team carry out their activities out of passion, and not for profit. At Christmas, the ultras financed a tree for the neighbourhood in the Gal's most important underground exit. Together, they painted the entire roundabout with a large Partizan mural (see fig. . Like the District Christmas tree, they probably also did it "so that people would talk about them", but without any commercial purpose. On this aspect, the action of the District associations will be crucial in the future, especially those that have come to the district from St. Leonard and the social housing parents association. Although limited in some respects, the work

of social organizations is in fact a way towards a possible autonomous and social territorialisation, and not only directly or indirectly economic, of the spaces in the new district.



Figure 35. The Partizan Christmas tree and the pedestrian roundabout mural.

## Emerging fragilities: working poor, ageing and expulsions in the neighbourhood.

**Date: 27 January 2011**

**Time: from 5 to 7 pm**

I arrive at 5pm at the hub where food parcels are distributed by Karl's association.

The hub is located within the social housing complex managed by MM, the institution of the Milan municipality (and not Aler, the company of the Lombardy region). This white and dark red housing complex is made up of large structures on different floors and connected by ramps, tunnels, stairs. It looks like a labyrinth: it is very difficult to understand the correspondence between house numbers and buildings. The ground floors almost always have social activities: the women's desk of an association I know, a venue for Lisa's project for the elderly, the kick boxing gym where I go occasionally. The latter is particularly hidden: you have to climb a flight of stairs, go through a gap under a building and arrive at a small square. I understand why a young architect I interviewed once told me "I don't understand how they could win a competition, they did everything they tell you not to do in the first years of urban planning and architecture".

I manage to find the multifunctional space, which is called "space in defence of families". This space is bigger than all the ones I have seen under the council houses on Pyranes Street and Moon Street. It opened a few months ago and you can see it: everything is brand new. A group of writers recently decorated the façade of the building with warm colours and some writing.



At the entrance to this space, there is a shelf with gift books and leaflets. Above, there is a noticeboard with some leaflets summarising the services available to people: on Monday there is the orientation desk for services in the area, run by QB; on Tuesday there are Italian language



courses, homework help and the psychological desk, run by Sag and Mitades, Karl's association and another association in the neighbourhood; on Wednesday there is the mothers' group and the legal desk. The whole week is full of activities in the morning and afternoon.

The "space in defence of families" consists of three macro-initiatives: the Solidarity Market, the Gal Food Hub, and the multi-service centre. I go through the Solidarity Market, a room full of shelves with food that can be bought through points. People have a card and can shop at reduced prices using points. Canned tuna costs 6 points, pasta costs 3 points, canned beans cost 2 points. I arrive in the rectangular room from which the food parcels are distributed. I notice that one of the two entrance doors has recently been temporarily repaired with a panel instead of a metal dial. Karl confirms to me that someone has entered during the night to steal what the room holds: dozens of boxes of foodstuffs, stacked on pallets with sheets on which is written the name of the association that is responsible. The vegetables are kept in a huge cold storage room in the next room.

Once I enter the room I find Karl and Marco, the two distribution managers, and three younger guys helping them do the job. Karl paces up and down: he does not do the parcels because he is busy with comparing printed Excel sheets, with figures and names, swearing quite loudly. He tells me that:

We, as Sag, are the managers of the food aid, which comes mainly from the Red Cross' Agea programme with European funds and partly through TDH [NGO responsible for the whole space] for the fresh ... this programme works like this: you have to present an up-to-date Isee and have dependent minor children. Today they messed up my lists because they superimposed this aid on those who already use the solidarity shop, again here, and you can't do both.

He cried several times and told me, "look, next year I'm not doing this any more, they'll probably cut our funding too, so that's it, I'm not willing to do it any more, I'm quitting".

Until 5.30 p.m., we pack, cardboard boxes with basic necessities: coffee, pasta, oil, ready canned food. The fresh food is already prepared. At 5.25pm there are already about ten people outside. Karl has opened the door and placed a table at the entrance. At 17.30 we start.

The distribution, from an operational point of view, runs smoothly. Karl and Marco are the frontmen of the service: they deliver the packs to people, cross out the names of those who have already arrived, give information about any changes in the service. The younger guys and I put the packs in columns next to the table and keep making more to go. In a fortnight, the service will be repeated identically.

I look at the people in line: I recognise a girl I often see around the neighbourhood and a couple of people walking their dogs under my house. Seventy per cent of the families look like migrants not of Italian origin, but there are also several people who were clearly born and raised in Italy. A blond girl greets Karl and Marco by calling them by name, another asks if there are any baby food. Today there are.

Karl and Marco move very confidently into the situation. It is evident that they have been doing this for a long time. They are polite with the users, but also bureaucratic and hurried about the rules of the game. Karl reminds people who have not yet submitted their isee for the new year that it is

necessary to do so. “Make sure you bring me the isee,” he says, “because otherwise we have to cut you off in the next list.”

At one point, the flow stops: Karl and I go outside for a cigarette. While we are chatting, a man arrives in a blue moncler-type jacket, quite a prominent belly, grey hair pulled back with hairspray. His name is Andrea and he is an old user. He explains to Karl that he has problems with the isee because his Colombian wife does not yet have her papers in order and it is she who is carrying the child. Karl assures them that there will be no problems, that they will find a solution. Together they criticise the work of the institutions. Andrea says “that is out of the question”. Karl says “the law is not the same for everyone, my mother is a lawyer and when she takes people to do their papers, if it’s Japanese perfect, if it’s a darker not”.

Andrea lives in the houses on Froth Street. We talk about the situation. Andrea says “Gypsies do whatever the fuck they want in the meantime, whatever they want... one time a policeman during an intervention told me to fuck off” .

Karl begins a long speech summarising his position on the Froth Street issue: he tries to convince Andrea that it is not an ethnic issue, but an issue of power and organised crime:

The police must make a serious investigation into organised crime in Milan: they come here to arrest those who come to buy things and maybe some soldiers, but it doesn’t work like that. You have to cut off the heads of the bosses... in Froth Street there is organised crime, it’s not a question of Roma or non-Roma... when they arrived, they started robbing flats and picking pockets, then their bosses told them “stop bullshitting” and in fact they haven’t been doing that for years.

Karl also argues that however “it’s not that Froth Street was nice before they arrived, there were the people who sold the houses to the people who are there now”. Andrea is convinced; however, he is insistent that “there was more respect before, the delinquency before had more respect”. We finish our cigarette, Andrea says goodbye. He was one of the last, it’s 7.30 p.m., we close up everything and go our separate ways.

This field note describes a situation that has been repeated once every fortnight for about two years: the distribution of food packs in the neighbourhood. This initiative is just one of the activities to combat poverty and support the most fragile population of St. Leonard and the Gal. I followed these activities on a daily basis during the research, with a special focus on the distribution of food packs, an annual project to support lonely elderly people (the Rimargina project) and the situation of Froth Street and the public housing in the neighbourhood.

Socio-economic fragility in the St. Leonard neighbourhood concerns a specific population composed of three main groups: lonely elderly people, Italian and non-Italian migrant families who are often (but not always) beneficiaries of public housing, and young people aged between 18 and 30.

The causes of this fragility are complex and multidimensional but can find a point of synthesis in two dynamics: the negative consequences of neoliberal urban policies and the transformation of the labour market in the city of Milan.

Neoliberal urban policies, made disruptive by the force of financial flows, can be interpreted as policies of differentiated valorisation. The social space, which is social because it is not only territory but also population and set of social relations, is the object of a process of disinvestment and investment based on the criterion of economic efficiency. The government of the territory is affected by what Leghissa (Leghissa 2012) has defined as the “corporatisation of the social”, that is, “the tendency to govern every social practice and every process of subjectivation according to the same rules and techniques of government that apply to and within the company” (Ivi, 117; translation by the author).

The logic of finance deepens this dynamic by emphasising more strongly the issue of remuneration. Social spaces capable of generating remuneration are given specific attention, while others are gradually abandoned. The public actor is crucial in this process: austerity policies have contributed enormously to the downsizing of the “universalist” commitment of the public administration, in conjunction with the entrepreneurial turn now consolidated in public action (see Peck and Tickell 2002; Harvey 1989). Within this framework, local welfare and the management of unproductive public property constitute irrational expenditure in the absence of social conflict and/or political representation. Systematically funding support for elderly people who are coming to the end of their lives or maintaining a run-down housing stock will never be a priority of neoliberal rationality. On the contrary, it is a mistake and a political problem. However, the social costs of this non-intervention need mediation, which is carried out by the third sector, the real operating engine of local welfare in St. Leonard. Financed by bank foundations or European funds, it is the third sector that promotes activities for the elderly and offers additional help for the neighbourhood’s poverty. The problem is that in St. Leonard a major round of funding, some promoted after the pandemic crisis, is ending.

The transformation of the labour market in Milan is the other side of the emerging fragilities in the neighbourhood. An important part of the actors encountered during this ethnographic exploration among those in difficulty belong to social sectors that cannot or do not manage to participate in the city’s tertiarised service economy. For these workers, the relationship with the labour market can be defined as differential inclusion: they are integrated into the market as working poor, engaged in precarious and intermittent activities.

I married a guy from the neighbourhood, and we have been married for 24 years, we separated 5 years ago. I have three children, aged 28, 26 and 11. I live with my 11-year-old son. I work as a domestic helper for 10 families, I divide my work from Monday to Friday, at different times, unfortunately I work illegally so that my son doesn't miss anything... I earn more or less 1000 euros a month. My ex-husband had decided to open a company with a work colleague but he didn't listen to anyone and found himself with a lot of debts, good and bad debt recovery at his heels. I worked for quite a while to support the family. Then it ended well. But it wasn't easy. [historical resident, 49 years old].

Most of the dads we work with work three jobs: labourers, painters and catering, pizza makers a lot. But they are often casual jobs. Mothers often don't work, partly by their own choice, partly by their husbands' choice, partly because they don't know how to go about the search. It is very common that mothers have never entered the labour market before becoming mothers. In general, these are not continuous jobs. The hottest areas are in social housing, but it is very mixed. [historical resident, 30 years old, parenting support associations].

The difficulty in entering the labour market does not only affect adults, but also many young people in the neighbourhood. Partizan ultras, for example, almost all of them work in blue-collar jobs and are rather integrated into the labour market, albeit sometimes in a precarious position with low wages. For the young people in the neighbourhood, the possibility of a minimum of upward mobility is blocked by low qualifications and an educational career interrupted too early:

I was born in 2000... the people who live in this neighbourhood that I know are all workers: a few work in other situations. I work in the ATM, I do maintenance. They're hiring there, but they want a diploma. Here in the neighbourhood a lot of kids my age didn't finish high school, they got lost. There are so many of them, I think there are more of us than those born in "98-"97-"96... It's a problem because it's not like it used to be. Now they all want a diploma. [historical resident, age 22]

Talking about the problem of school drop-outs, Karl pointed out to me that the closure of some schools has caused many children in the neighbourhood to drop out of education and look for another school. The closure of schools is probably related to the decreasing school population in a neighbourhood that developed between the 1960s and 1980s. However, for some, this was enough to end their educational experience.

In this situation of low wages and precariousness, more than one person confided in me that he had considered a job offer from the cocaine retail sector. In Milan, an important part of drug dealing is run as a normal delivery service, which respects predefined working hours and guarantees a good salary. A receptionist sorts orders to workers who move around in their own

cars or scooters. Organised in this way, the cocaine trade does not generate social alarm and no large drug markets are created. The young men I spoke to about this possibility seem to have considered it only in the most complicated moments of their lives, only to give up because they know they have no protection in case of arrest.

The economic fragilities present in the neighbourhood are to be contextualised within a context of widespread home ownership and higher incomes than the rest of the Milanese periphery. Those interviewed in the neighbourhood almost all agreed that there are no noticeable processes of impoverishment taking place within the neighbourhood. The economic problems in St. Leonard are very localised in specific pockets of poverty and in certain segments of the youth population. The elderly do not seem to have this problem: many are simply isolated. Although the research was conducted at a time still too close to the events, the pandemic has certainly exacerbated these conditions:

The families we target are in a situation of chronic poverty, which has not much worsened with the lockdown because it can't get any worse. In short, they are situations that have been followed by social services for generations. Let's say that the number of families that have slipped from a grey band into a dark grey band, tending towards black, has increased. But I would also say that in the last few months someone has started to find work again, someone has been taken back into their previous job. [non-resident, 40 years old, social cooperative].

For the elderly in the neighbourhood here the covid was a big blow. Not just because of the thing itself, but because a lot of services were digitised and so the needs aspect... elderly people who don't know how to use computers or mobile phones and the internet. Because you couldn't go anywhere in the offices so many people came here to ask us for information. The offices have all evolved, you have to make an appointment for anything. [resident, 55 years old, social cooperative].

The problems and limits of the system to combat social fragility also emerge in the case of care for the lonely elderly. In 2022, the elderly over 75 constituted almost 8 per cent of the population (SISI data - Milan City Council) of the Gal, the highest number in the city.

### *Nice while it lasted: the Rimargina project*

The Rimargina project was created precisely with the intention of assisting the elderly and adults with disabilities in the Gal. Rimargina is part of ReAction, financed by European funds and the Lombardy region, an urban regeneration programme in three Milan neighbourhoods.

The project lasted two years but was concentrated in the year of my research because of the covid. The main headquarters was under my house.

The Rimargina project focuses on caring for the elderly and non-elderly disabled adults. It experiments with two new figures: the social community manager, a figure who links operators and social services, and the community nurse, a role that disappeared with the dismantling of community medicine and offers advice and guidance in local care facilities. Street-level operators are the “Custodi Sociali”: workers from a social cooperative who organise activities for users referred by social services. The services are many and last the whole week: group activities (theatre, walks, board games, knitting), physical activity, orientation to digital services, medical counselling. In addition, Rimargina uses other places in the neighbourhood, called pop-ups, in which to carry out some of its activities. For example, Urban Seahorse hosts an afternoon of group dances, while a local cooperative, founded by political groups close to the PCI and the extra-parliamentary left, has hosted photography workshops and training sessions on preventive medicine. The initiative involved about forty elderly people over 75.

The Rimargina project was of particular interest for research purposes because it provided some information on the district’s past and how the elderly perceive the District’s presence. This was made possible by two activities.

The first is called “postcards from the neighbourhood” and consists of a participatory photo workshop in which the elderly took photographs of the neighbourhood and compared the photos with some photos from the 1970s and 1980s, and then constructed short stories about their experience arriving in the area (see fig. 35). From this initiative comes the analogy of the moon landing, i.e. comparing arriving in the haphazardly built neighbourhood without services as the landing of the first man on the moon in 1969.

The presentation of the project in the Urban Seahorse space in the District is part of the collaboration between the project and the restaurant-pub-cultural association in the new neighbourhood. Here, some elderly people told stories. These stories tell a lot about the development of the neighbourhood. They tell of the difficulties in finding furniture and shopping in the first phase of the neighbourhood, where the new citizens had to deal with price speculation by merchants who exploited their monopoly in the neighbourhood. They emphasise the presence of the terrible and polluted Olona river, which was filled in thanks to the residents’ struggles. Moreover, the stories of the elderly describe a world where work guaranteed a possibility of upward mobility that perhaps Italian capitalism was only able to provide in this period (1955-1985). Work enabled the elderly not only to improve their living conditions, but also to guarantee an education for their children. In addition, work allowed women a chance

for emancipation from domestic work and the possibility of discovering new places and feeling “inside history”.



Figure 36. A poster from the “postcards from the neighbourhood” initiative on the relationship between neighbours in 1960s Gal.

In this sense, the story of Pinuccia, an immigrant who arrived from Apulia and after some work experience was forced into a life as a mother that clearly did not satisfy her, is memorable. Re-entering the labour market in 1983, at the age of forty, after hearing on the radio “that anyone who wanted to at forty could get a job because it was easy”, Pinuccia ended up working as a dressmaker at La Scala, the city’s most important theatre. It was in this context that she met President Pertini and went on international trips, including one to Japan. The sense of wonder and personal fulfilment with which Pinuccia tells this story is a sign of the profound strength of the capitalism of the “30 glorious years” and the possibilities it could guarantee to people who came “from nothing”.

The second activity consisted of walks in the District, organised by Lisa every Wednesday morning (see fig. 36). These walks involved a small group of the elderly. The elderly in the district are very habitual and for them, as we saw in the previous chapter, the square is the commercial centre. Visiting the District, probably because it was built in a space that had been

abandoned for decades, is seen as a deviation from their habits and a quasi-touristic operation.

Lisa sums up their orientation efficiently:

They are very curious about the fact that these buildings come up like mushrooms, and they look at it as a mixture of admiration and fear. They say “look at this beauty, look at these gyms...” but they realise that it is not something they have thought about or that speaks to them, they go there like they are on a trip, a tourist thing. They look at the beauty of the driveways and bike lanes. They praise the future: they look at it with a very futuristic attitude! Futurist attitude in the true sense of the word: like the futurists of the early 20th century. They are confident, they perceive it as the beautiful advancing, as better than what has gone before.



*Figure 37. A walk with Lisa and the elderly in the District on a particularly foggy day*

However, on one occasion when I was not present, Lisa told me about a significant incident involving the group and the developer’s sales office:

One day we found the sales office open, where the models are. Then Marco, who is old but has been a photographer and has travelled around South-East Asia. A person of culture, who has travelled the world. He says “nice, let’s go and see what this quarter will be like, we always see it from below”, so we go in. We go in and there was the lady who didn’t even look up. I said “excuse me, can we have a look? Can you explain to us for a moment what the neighbourhood will be like?”. She looked up and said “if you have to buy yes, otherwise I don’t have time to waste”. We were really disappointed, we went out and stopped for coffee. We were disappointed because we are a part of the neighbourhood, we have seen it change, what the fuck does that mean?



Like the security in the park episode, the actors around district manager Marie do not behave in the same inclusive and reassuring way but perform their selection functions in an exclusionary manner.

I participated in the Rimargina project as a “social facilitator”, a figure which is then counted in the final reports of the project and becomes a useful score to understand how much the service “worked”. Beyond the procedures of quantifying and measuring social impact, terminologies and techniques typical of social innovation initiatives, my impression is that this initiative brought very positive effects on the elderly who participated in the project. The elderly did not miss a single opportunity to socialise and carry out activities together. “They don’t miss anything, they want to participate in everything, it’s always a good opportunity,” Lisa told me, “when we have to divide the groups, they tell us “but only one hour?”.

On several occasions I witnessed moments when the project was clearly benefiting the people present:

### **9 March 2022**

Today we are playing “Dixit”. We are on a table made up of two white rectangular tables. There are twelve of us: except for me and the narrator, they are all women over 70, with the exception of Lisa and the other girl from an association.

Dixit is a game in which players are given some cards with a picture on them. The storyteller calls out a theme, a phrase, something - e.g. “sleep” - that he sees in a particular way in one of his cards. The participants must also look for something in their cards that inspires a match. They must hand this card to the narrator. The narrator shuffles them and places them back on the table. Each person has a marker and must point to the card that seems to indicate the theme given by the narrator the most. The other players who manage to be chosen also get points.

Each player explains why they voted for the card: in this way, they compare fantasies with each other. Ivana presented a picture that was not chosen by anyone because according to her it represented a sleepwalker. She is right in fact, but no one noticed. Pino continued to choose himself, eliminating himself from the game. The next turn it is the turn of “the draw”: it will count for both the fruit and the action of drawing. Pino at that point chooses a card that was difficult to understand: he sees Father John, who “goes fishing”. The elders are involved and are very amused. Leona says “it’s nice this game, it really gets the imagination going”.

At the end, we count the points: Ivana wins.

## 11 May 2022

A very young girl, dressed in black, makes the elders sit in a circle. It is the start of the theatre course. The programme is based on physical theatre: the girl turns on a stereo, makes the elderly dance in a fantasy context and then they talk about the feelings they have experienced. After about thirty seconds spent dancing and twirling to cheerful, light-hearted music, people sit down again.

One woman - who appears to be the youngest of the group of over seventy-five - says that dancing “reminded me of my husband’s first dance when we were engaged. I was fifteen and he was eighteen. I danced with Nunzia and it felt like dancing with my husband”. Nunzia laughs and says “well it’s the emotion!”. Another lady says that “one impression I had was that when there was this music and I was hovering like a butterfly [she makes soft gestures with her hands to simulate flight] I was thinking “I love life!” [she spreads her shoulders making circles with her hands]”. The girl who leads the theatre activities nods and says “well yes, love for life... does she still want to say something?” Vito stands up and recounts his emotion, cutting out all the final vowels as is his usual way: “I have an emotion from “92 ... [brief pause due to emotion] I went dancing in Ragnadore with my poor wife and we did a waltz that was the end of the world”. A lady sums up “I think many of us thought of those who are no longer here, and me too: of my husband, who has gone to heaven”. A man gets up and simulates a waltz by getting into position and spinning in the middle of the circle, he says “I felt like doing a waltz like in my school days”.

At the end of the activity a lady says “thank you for this activity: it made me think of so many beautiful things in my life and I travelled with memories. It was beautiful, thank you”.

## 13 May 2022

Today is the inauguration of the green area in front of hub 92. The area consists of a wooden walkway and some furniture with planters. At the end of the walkway, there is a two-metre high wooden structure in the shape of a right triangle that acts as both a planter and a “sculpture”. The area was designed and created by Eugenio of Gallab [an association that runs carpentry and ceramics courses] with the help of some people from Spluf [an association of educational games]. Gina told me in a message “damn you Eugenio, more than a month late!”.

In the context of the inauguration today we try to play Cornhall, the game that the elders built. We have all arranged ourselves in a U-shaped semicircle. There are about thirty of us: there’s me, the social workers of the project, the whole group of elderly people and some relatives. People are laughing, joking with each other and following the game. People with a closed sack of rice try to hit the Cornhall, an inclined plane with a hole in it. It is a warm spring: there is an almost summer-like atmosphere.

It is not so easy to hit the target. The most commonly used throwing technique is similar to the throwing of balls in the game of bocce. An eighty-year-old lady from the province of Foggia, Linda, hits the hole directly, without even touching the wooden surface. The audience explodes in thunderous applause. It is objectively a great shot, and it is the first hit of the day.

Socialising, improving physical mobility, exercising the imagination, observing and reflecting on the environment. It does not require specialised expertise on ageing to realise that the project had a positive effect. However, the Rimargina project like all such local welfare projects has an end. After this, activities for the elderly will return to their normal routine promoted by the Custodi Sociali, whose funding has been cut over the years. The final meeting of the project clearly shows how the discursive registers of territorial activation and participative co-planning conflict with the simple end of available resources.

**Date: 21 June 2022**

**Time: From 3 to 4 pm**

I am at the final meeting of the organisations that participated in the Rimargina project. This “round table” is made up of people working in the project’s six pop-up points [places that collaborated on the project] and some representatives of the neighbourhood network.

The people are arranged in a large semicircle, there are almost thirty of us. The social community manager writes the “report” on a large A3 sheet placed on a blackboard. The sheet is divided into columns marked with words: “opportunities”, “activation”, “projectuality”. We do a round of introductions: we say our name and the organisation we work for. She writes on the board and nods with big expressions of assent when a girl from the associations talks about a digital neighbourhood platform, SuperGalla. He then starts the meeting with the facts: the aim is to understand “what can remain of the project on the ground because the project is finished”. For now, the social service will remain to manage the future of hub 92 [the project’s main space] while the cooperatives that collaborated (such as the Lisa cooperative) leave management. He emphasises the importance of what remains on the territory, namely “the knowledge network we have formed, the skills generated, the social community manager who is a new and important figure, the cooperation agreements”.

People nod but the interventions of those present underline some practical aspects. A girl from an association says that “we can do our activity if we are covered, because otherwise it’s voluntary work, which is fine but it’s something else”. The two Labriola [local cooperative] representatives say that “the activities have aroused interest, there is the will to continue if we can”. To these and other interventions, the social service manager replies: “we no longer have the funding [in a serious and dry tone, ]. But sure, let’s see! [in a more cheerful tone]”. Beyond the funding, which seems to be there and not there at the same time, the project leaders believe that it is very important that “projectualities have been activated” and that there is the possibility of convening a discussion “to think specifically about the resources that can be put in place”.

The meeting ends early because the elderly people of the project arrived very early and talking becomes complicated and also rather awkward. The coordinators laugh and say: “well, let’s not lose sight of each other!”. They all laugh and clap together. Lisa reminds us that the final project party is about to begin.

We all get up. I immediately go over to her, who tells me in a low voice “it’s all going to social services, so nothing won’t happen!”. We start getting food and drink from a caterer who has set up refreshments. I also talk to Paola who explains to me how the call for the elderly and community

care will be separated with a change in the accreditation procedure. She comments saying “we”re going back to lock-in: fewer activities with fewer resources... we had all these hours, guaranteed by the project, now it will be everyone in their own”.

Today, Lisa no longer works in the neighbourhood because a reorganisation of the service reduced her hours with a lower salary. A mother of two growing children, Lisa is in despair about the real estate market in Milan. “I can’t work for five euros an hour, you know? It’s frustrating, in my neighbourhood the houses have become so expensive and we can’t manage to live with four people in the house we are staying in anymore”. As was mentioned in the introduction, Lisa’s neighbourhood is the same one where the developer has carried out a major redevelopment operation and which from January 2018 to January 2023 has seen a 44% increase in the price of real estate per square metre. Again, the complex intertwining of macro and micro dynamics built the conditions for which an rooted and experienced social worker had to leave the neighbourhood.

### *The cancer of the neighbourhood: the story of the Froth Street housing projects*

The Froth street compounds are a public housing project built in the early 1980s to accommodate people transferred from the Case Minime in Quarto Oggiaro, a periphery neighbourhood near the Gal. The Case Minime were a public housing programme promoted during Fascism: in the case of the Quarto Oggiaro houses, demolition began in 1984.

This complex consists of four large buildings and forms a U with a green space in front. The houses have blue roofs and are pink and yellow. Concrete balconies protrude from the facades composed of squares (see fig. 38).

As we have seen above, the houses on Froth Street since the 1990s have never enjoyed a good reputation within the neighbourhood. However, since 2012, a different population has systematically begun to occupy the houses in two complexes, cohabiting with the previous population. This dynamic was facilitated by a process of sale and support from other actors present in the houses, who moved elsewhere. From that moment and until the operation that led to the destruction of the houses in November 2022, the situation on Froth Street was marked by perpetual conflict between the new inhabitants of the houses on the one hand, and the immediate neighbours and the whole neighbourhood on the other. The whole Froth Street housing estate has become notorious in the city for being “a black hole”, “a disgrace”, “a favelas”. Everyone

interviewed in the area agreed that it was a serious problem, many called it “a cancer” or “a metastasis”. For many, Froth Street was the only problem in a perfect neighbourhood.



*Figure 38. The Froth Street public housing compound. The black circle indicates the two complexes that were evicted in November 2022 and where the flats were destroyed. left, the Moon Street public housing complex.*

I spent a limited but significant amount of time around the houses on Froth Street to understand what was going on and why this stigmatisation was happening so violently. To represent this place, it is first necessary to divide the atmosphere and visual spectacle offered by the behaviour and activities that took place in the area.

The Froth Street area was indeed characterised by the systematic abandonment of rubbish and objects on the street and in the green area in front of the houses. Rubbish, whether it consisted of small objects and waste paper, or furniture, household appliances, car parts, dominated the scene. The atmosphere of Froth Street was the opposite of that of the District: it conveyed abandonment and decadence. If the slightly decadent atmosphere of St. Leonard’s, in my interpretation, bore (among other things) signs of a progressive deterioration of social relations between the old and the new housing estates, in Froth Street the message took on the tones of open war. Mutual contempt and stigmatisation generated a level of disregard and carelessness for social relations that in Froth Street assumed gigantic proportions.



*Figure 39. Abandoned objects in front of the yellow houses on Froth Street*

The feeling of deep social resentment and deteriorating social relations in public housing is not only a topic limited to Froth Street, but also involves the new public housing on Pyranées Street and Moon Street, as well as other public housing houses still in the neighbourhood.

Residents interviewed in the new public housing project of 2000s tend to tell of a much worse situation than one can superficially see or perceive, and in general their stories are different from those told by other actors in the neighbourhood. This condition takes on a political dimension, especially among the Italians, who feel they have lost power in their neighbourhood. The disappearance of the old criminal organisations of the 1980s and 1990s generates the impression that in the area “nobody commands any more” and that the social order, based on the power of white Italians, is no longer guaranteed. The issue is clearly connected to the change of who, for the most part, lives in the street: from Italian migrants to non-Italian migrants. The problem of power and legitimacy in the street life of periphery neighbourhoods is complex and profound and cannot be treated only as a question of pure racism, which is clearly present. When not posed in these terms, residents of public housing nevertheless complain of a continuous disregard for the commons and the rapid degradation of any attempt at communal initiative.

They are beasts, it's inhuman. You can't understand, here they smash everything all the time. This neighbourhood was like the Bronx in the eighties, there was more delinquency but there was more... how can I tell you, we could be quieter, because we were more protected. Now there's so much delinquency and you have to buy a



gun. Total delinquency, all the gypsies on Froth street. The Moroccans in the Casa del Giovane [community for unaccompanied minor migrants] kill each other. If you go \*\*\* there is still someone in charge. [historical resident, 46, Pyranees Street].

Now that there are so many people living here and they've turned it into a shithole, nobody cares: clotheslines and things lying everywhere. Then the young kids started breaking everything: the post box, the light bulb outside the courtyard. I've been here for four years and now there's everything: people who sublet, people who live with other people, people who don't pay, who deal. There are guys who go around with guns, then there are the gypsies who do whatever they want and live next door. [non-historical resident, 40 years old, Moon Street].

In general, respondents in public housing tended to have different attitudes to members of associations and historical citizens of 1970s housing. Many feel that economic conditions have worsened in the neighbourhood and in Milan. Until fifteen years ago, there seemed to be much more and better paid work for this segment of the population. Moreover, many denounce the neglect on the part of MM and Aler, which make little effort to maintain the houses. In the case of the Moon Street public housing complex, the houses were built directly in an area with major flooding problems and the basements flood all the time. Opened in 2017, these houses are the result of a series of delays, bureaucratic problems and bankruptcies of construction firms during the 2008-2010 crisis.

These conflicts and hardships are amplified to the maximum power in the Froth Street houses, where for years a silent war seems to have been waged: on one side, the tenants in the pink houses and the few remaining in the yellow houses and on the other side, the new tenants in the yellow houses. This war is made up of petty rants, provocations, threats, repeated and often unanswered calls to the police, and rancour. A conflict that is often summed up by everyone in the neighbourhood in this way: the "Italians" in the pink flats versus the "gypsies" in the yellow flats.

The "Italians" represent a heterogeneous population but within which I have seen the most difficult situations I have encountered in St. Leonard. Families in complex situations, struggling with unemployment, disabilities and legal problems. In addition to the objectively difficult situations, living on Froth Street is a discriminatory factor for young people who have been discarded in the labour market simply because they live there. This general process of impoverishment was completely ignored in the dynamics that led to the eviction of the "gypsies" yellow flats. The structural dimension of the area's economic problems is rendered invisible by the clash between this two groups.

The relationship between Milan and that complex web of nationalities and cultures that constitutes what is called “gypsy populations” has been the subject of a number of research agendas and reports, especially between 2005 and 2015 (A. Tosi and Ambrosini 2007; Vitale 2009; NAGA 2015). The authors denounced the systematic racism of Italian public policies, the aggravation of the situation through the establishment of “nomad camps” (the Froth Street houses are also referred to in the newspapers as “vertical camps”), the continuous discrimination in access to the labour market. Vitale (2014) proposed seven programming principles to implement a policy to overcome nomadic camps: real housing alternatives for all subjects, confirmation of allocations, variety of instruments, direct negotiation with families, budgets allocated on the basis of households, a strategic plan and an office to follow up the implementation of policies, a continuous dialogue with the city in question.

It is sadly ironic to note that everything that sociological reflection has suggested in order to set up public policies and cultural mediation work for the benefit of the Roma population has been a completely absent agenda in Froth Street for almost ten years.

I personally followed some key moments of the process that led to the eviction of the Froth Street houses with Mario, one of the last remaining tenants in the stigmatized “gypsies” houses, and to a friend of Karl’s, who lives in the pink “Italian” houses.

Mario is a character whose story seems perfect for a neighbourhood like St. Leonard, so connected to the processes of industrialisation and the social conflicts of those years.

I started doing politics in 1964. I frequented the oldest anarchist circle in Milan, in Brera. A person from Massa had founded it - you know, anarchism in Italy was born in Massa. We did the French May and then we brought it to Italy... then I took part in the revolution in Portugal, but after 1978 there was a putsch by the right, and I did 6 years, 3 months and 11 days in prison... to me the only thing I regret is that we were fighting for a better world, but we left the new generations a world worse than the one we were born into.

A tall, big man, inveterate smoker, white hair and green eyes, my time with Mario was punctuated by tales of famous episodes from the Milanese Sessantotto, key moments of the Portuguese revolution, imprisonments and escapes. Having arrived in Froth Street in the early 2000s, Mario has experienced the process of housing and social decay and knows the way in which the new population of the neighbourhood has replaced the old.

This story begins like this: there was a nomad camp behind the cemetery. Since the Expo was to open, the camp’s road led to one of the new entrances. The fascist deputy mayor De Corato did not want foreigners passing through on their way to the



Expo to realise that there were slums in Italy! So he brought in the bulldozers and paved them over. Obviously this is not the solution: this was moving the problem. They looked for another place. The first one went into Froth Street with the help of some Italians who were breaking down doors and selling them houses. After that, Aler didn't give a shit and people said "come here, nobody says anything here anyway!" and they started coming. The Italians opened the doors and they came in. Then they learned to break the doors themselves.

This story has been confirmed by various testimonies. As has already been pointed out in the introduction and in the first chapter, the Roma population in this area has been attacked and evicted several times. The first in 1998 in the District area, the second in 2010 (mentioned by Mario). From 2010 to 2013, the camp area became a completely informal settlement in which social conditions seemed to precipitate. A group of political activists present with an squat in the area had denounced this situation in 2014, explicitly linking the 2010 eviction to the opening of a phase in which other powers were exploiting the situation of extreme poverty<sup>29</sup>:

While there used to be a Roma camp, with which we interfaced several times, built relationships and shared moments of resistance and solidarity, its eviction is at the origin of today's situation. This has created an extremely fertile ground for the establishment of dynamics of exploitation of social discomfort and poverty in a mafia-type logic. The only solution implemented so far is the militarisation of the territory and the result is there for all to see. [translation by the author]

This seems to be the situation that came to Froth Street around 2012. However, during my repeated observations in the field I always struggled to understand what "the Roma" were doing that was so bad to deserve such resentment. According to residents' testimonies, there were basically three problems: littering, lack of dialogue and mutual respect, and damage to buildings through dangerous occupation practices. However, other actors took advantage of the situation. For example, the rubbish problem on Froth Street was mainly related to a perceived activity of receiving goods and sorting material for resale amidst loads of discarded goods. This activity brought many items to the Froth Street area which were sorted and abandoned on the street. This created a "dump effect" which, at times, took on truly gigantic proportions. But this was not only the responsibility of the hated residents:

Like a week ago this guy came, he came from the new buildings, throwing things, glass bags, but really full to the brim. I was down there and it was me and the other guys, my dad and everything. We went down there and said "look, you can't throw that here" and he said "but I'm doing well". and we said "no, you're not doing well

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<sup>29</sup> <https://torchiera.noblogs.org/2014/sgombero-rom/>

because in the end the ones who have to pay for all the rubbish, which can be up to 500€ a month, are us not you”. We pay for our rubbish, the rubbish of the gypsies and other people who come to throw away things that don’t really belong to us. [historic resident, 20 years old, Froth Street]

Mario has always emphasised more than the other residents that “it’s all the fault of Aler, which doesn’t give a damn about this situation”. The policy of Aler, the regional housing company, has been one of almost complete abandonment of the area, while the municipal institutions have continued to pass the buck to the supra-local level. In addition to episodes of informal “selling” of houses, Aler has never reassigned the flats of deceased assignees. “Most of the inhabitants who lived here were all old men, at some point they all started to die: and what did Aler do? Nothing”.

However, the winter of 2021-2022 marked a turning point in the history of Froth Street’s yellow houses. Aler began systematically moving all unoccupied residents to other houses, including Mario. The situation was accelerated by a fire that broke out in the cellar space, with partial flooding and precarious electricity connections. Mario, a seventy-year-old man with some mobility problems and a walker, risked intoxication. Aler showed up at the site 24 hours late, sending him into a rage, while journalists arrived earlier. Lisa, who is a friend of Mario’s, told me, “they talk about Froth Street as always in the wrong way and focus on the emergency”.

In April, Aler carried out an eviction, narrated in the field note that opens this research: the eviction is the first in the history of Froth Street and it is against the group of pink houses (in which there are several occupations). The perception of “starting with the Italians before the gypsies” had caused the protest to escalate and it had reached the point of physical confrontation, physically prevented by the police. Karl had intervened in the situation in a very incisive way: he had not convinced with his rhetoric of the speculative project against everyone, Italians and gypsies, but he had convinced many of the idea that they should oppose Aler’s evictions and that the gypsies had nothing to do with that day’s eviction. One boy had written with spray paint “stop evictions” under the building. After that day, probably also due to an implicit agreement between Aler and the local police headquarters, concerned by the tensions, the evictions came to a complete halt. However, the now definitely deteriorated relations between the groups, in a situation of risk and lack of a clear policy, led to a confrontation between the groups after a provocation. The news was spectacularised by newspapers and TV broadcasts: there was talk of a “brawl with spikes and sticks and knives between clans”. A video taken with a telephone clearly disproves this version: the confrontation was heated, but not very

violent. Since that day, the police have manned Froth Street for three days in a row without interruption, and then carried out a search and manned the area for another week.

On 3 November 2022, as mentioned above, a large police operation began the eviction of the yellow houses on Froth Street. A “soft” eviction, already announced to everyone. Everyone knew it was going to happen, and many people were not already living there on the day of the eviction. The Roma population was split up and assigned to public housing on a temporary basis. For 29 families there was no solution, because they did not want to split up. All the relocations are outside the city, even tens of kilometres away (e.g. Magenta). Everyone in the neighbourhood seems satisfied with the eviction operation, which took place without violence. However, the future for the 156 demolished public housing houses on Froth Street is still uncertain.

## Conclusion

In the previous chapters, we have tried to provide a dense description and some specific analyses of practices, discourses and atmospheres in the context of a large urban development operation in progress in the north-western periphery of Milan. Today, the project is in full swing, but still presents great risks. Limiting itself to the residential sector alone, the District developer closed the 2021 business year with a loss of approximately 11 million of euro (Chamber of Commerce data). The Covid 19 crisis and rising construction costs have slowed down work, while the rising cost of money is affecting the entire supply chain. According to media sources, the bank leading the operation has already prepared a loan of over 200 million euros. Confidence in the project remains high, as demonstrated by the latest public initiatives celebrating a triple deal, formed by the District, the shopping centre and Mind, the Milan Innovation District in which the first major players are already operational. However, the project's timeline is long and uncertain: it will last at least until 2028. Originally conceived in 2008, the District's operation will cover twenty years of economic history marked by a financial crisis, a pandemic crisis, the ecological crisis, the post-pandemic overheating of the global economy and the resurgence of armed conflicts within Europe. Optimism about the future, shared by many actors, hides a context of uncertainty that makes the outcomes of the project anything but certain. Milan's recent urban planning history presents several examples that were planned in this way and partly failed, such as Santa Giulia and Pompeo Leoni (Bricocoli and Savoldi 2010). From this point of view, it is significant to observe how the District also presents a scheme that "repeats itself almost unchanged: a residential section articulated in private, subsidised and social housing; a tertiary block; a large supermarket; a park" (Ivi, p. 38, translation by the author). The first case is perhaps closest to the District, with which it shares many rhetorics: the idea of an urban space potentially autonomous but integrated into the city, simultaneous distance from chaos and proximity to the centre, the presence of a mix of uses and a park.

The District's developer seems to have learnt from these cases to develop the neighbourhood: for instance, it kept almost total control of the master plan and did not try to attract tertiary functions under the control of other actors. In one case, where a construction company went bankrupt during the construction process of one of the subsidised housing buildings, it entered the operation and developed the building, which is inhabited today. The big difference between the District and these projects is based on two aspects. First, the District is designed with a cluster logic, which means that the residential space is different from the manufacturing and

tertiary spaces that will be in MIND, the Milan Innovation District. Second, the developer is not only a company controlled by a bank with a turnover of 20 billion euros per year, but the other leading players in the operations on MIND and the shopping centre are “big players”. The first is a multinational real estate development company specialising in large public-private redevelopment projects with a turnover of 8 billion euros per year<sup>30</sup>, the second is another player specialising in retail with estimated assets of over 9 billion and a direct link to French financial institutions<sup>31</sup>. This project therefore has a financial “firepower” that does not seem comparable to the aforementioned operations.

However, the District’s project has two specific weaknesses in addition to the context of global uncertainty, which is nevertheless a major problem. The first is the final population density in a district that is expected to be populated by an estimated 16,000 (the figure given by the developer) to 25,000 (the estimate of the town planning councillor of City Hall 8). This number will bring the District’s population density to be comparable to the centre of Milan. The second is the cost of access for the free housing that has yet to be built. Considering the cost of money, construction costs, rising energy prices and the increases in Milan’s real estate market in 2022-2023, the access threshold could rise to 6000-7000 euro/sqm. A family taking out a mortgage with today’s rates would have to earn 15000 euro gross per month to be able to afford a house in the District, or about 180000 euro per year. The existence of a population of buyers willing to make this purchase in the District cannot be taken for granted. Mind’s role as an attractive pole for highly qualified workers in need of temporary residence could be decisive in this operation. Beyond speculation, if “the golden age of Santa Giulia has never been” (Ivi, 58), the period photographed by the research seems to constitute a moment of confidence and satisfaction among the actors present.

The city of Milan is exceptional in the Italian context because it presents investment flows and market conditions that make such extensive urbanisation and redevelopment interventions imaginable. These interventions are already risky in the Italian economic capital and seem hardly conceivable in the rest of the country in the same forms. This element also constitutes a limitation in terms of the extensibility of the empirical results at a national level: Milan does not seem to be a synecdoche to represent Italy.

The city should be compared with its European competitors, with which it shares at least some distinctive aspects: the presence of a first-rate financial sector (Amsterdam), attractiveness on a global scale (Barcelona), a still large real estate value extraction space (Madrid).

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<sup>30</sup> <https://www.lendlease.com/au/>.

<sup>31</sup> <https://ceetrus.com/en/ceetrus-home>.

However, this urban development process not only does it reflect certain transformations that have taken place in the relation between contemporary capitalism and production of (residential) space on a local scale, but it implicitly launches a proposal on the city and the urban society of the future. This proposal clearly has a political dimension, connected to the selection of who should be the ideal citizen of a financial metropolis, which themes would be the basis for the development of a community, which actors should be privileged to govern the urban space.

In order to develop such a reflection, we must try to avoid a form of superficial determinism in the relationship between space and society. Lefebvre has effectively expressed this need in his reflection on “lived space” as a possible space of spontaneity and possibility within and against the “conceived” or “abstract” space, i.e. that created by Capital and the State through specialised urban actors. The relationship between capital and society in urban space is an open relationship, where spaces of agency and counter-uses are possible.

The citizens of the District fully represent that open relationship that “lived space” has with “conceived space”. Living in a space like the District, conceived according to certain principles, is completely different from sharing them or feeling them as one’s own. Citizens have different ideas about safety, about what to do with the park, about the population of St Leonard. Furthermore, there is a fairly marked difference between the social housing citizens and the others. The former, especially those who bought in 2017-2020, benefited from competitive prices, lower than St. Leonard houses. Although at the beginning of their neighbourhood life they lived in a virtually empty space, they see this project coming to realisation. The others are more demanding and feel less fortunate because their purchase was more expensive. They are all quite satisfied but there is a predictable directly proportional relationship between expectations and investment.

Ambivalence is a key term that can be used to describe many dynamics occurring in the research area. Some of the phenomena analysed in dialogue with the relevant literature must always be considered in relation to the context. One example is the critical reflection on green spaces as spaces of exclusion, also in relation to segregative and defensive tendencies. The case of the park in the District is exemplary: on the one hand, there is a part of the population of the new neighbourhood that would like to limit access to the park and that pushes for private management of the space in order to keep the distinctive and enhancing features intact. On the other hand, the citizens of St. Leonard’s show that they use the park space in various ways, despite an attempt to restrict it, especially for the often racialised youth group. Moreover, not all residents of the district are convinced of the need to restrict these uses. The developer

“navigates” between these positions, aware that he cannot and will not take responsibility for maintaining these conditions forever. There does not seem to be a unified and compact attempt to “padding the bunker” (Atkinson 2006), but rather pushes and tendencies in a space that is still socially being shaped.

With these premises in mind, the District offers some insights on the topics discussed in the introduction, which will now be developed in the conclusion of this research work.

### *The District as a social laboratory of local financialisation*

In the introduction to this work, it was hypothesised that the District can be considered as a paradigm for the production of urban residential space in a moment marked by the financialisation of urban economies and the diffusion of new spaces of value extraction based on the use of digital infrastructures and forms of urban greening. The empirical analysis shows how the presence of financial capital and financialised actors is a decisive element in the realisation of the District and has allowed the effective realisation of the operation through the recapitalisation of the developer, the financing of the subsidized housing and the use of a specific REIF for the construction of social housing.

However, the observation of this stage in the realisation of the neighbourhood also shows how, rather than considering the District as a paradigm, this urban development project can be interpreted as a social laboratory for the attraction of further financial capital e targeted new resident both in the research area and in the city of Milan. In this context, actors experiment new strategies for value extraction and for the construction of a real estate product that can be attractive to new local buyers and, at the same time, remunerative as a financial investment.

The history of the developer can be seen as a symbol of this transition: born as a company owned by a few families, it gradually becomes a real estate developer connected to institutional investors and is now a multi-service platform for large international real estate funds. This player constructs buildings in the free-sale property segment in a progressive manner, assessing at each stage both the market conditions and the response obtained from its placemaking operations. At the same time, it builds and tests a coalition of actors that can be proposed as a local coalition for international financial actors and that has gained the necessary experience to make operations financed by international capital profitable in the Italian context. Moreover, the developer builds the conditions to attract local buyers with high incomes and national and international funds specialised in real estate in the final stages of the project, characterised by a real estate price comparable to the semi-central areas of the city. The construction of the

District as a product therefore serves two different markets: the local real estate market and the international capital market. Product development is a key part of this social laboratory, and the developer has implemented a number of strategies to distinguish itself from the rest of the real estate market.

First, the developer invested resources not only in the neighbourhood park, but in the energy efficiency of all buildings and in certifications related to high environmental quality. The empirical analysis shows that these operations have been decisive in attracting the neighbourhood's population but can also be considered important flagships for financial investors who are increasingly interested in products conforming to higher environmental standards and “social impact” finance.

Secondly, although this work shows the decline of smart city-related technological proposals developed during the crisis years (e.g. home automation), the developer has invested in the technological infrastructure of the neighbourhood and, above all, has created shared workspaces in all the buildings under its jurisdiction. This creates value not so much as “smart technologies” but as enablers of and consistent with transformations in the organisation of remote cognitive work in the platform economy (Srnicsek 2017). This development is particularly interesting because it links a residential project to a potential production space and generates added value to the project.

Thirdly, the developer has invested in the creation of a community centre that emanates a specific atmosphere and in placemaking initiatives in which it utilises professional, but also associations, partners and non-profit associations to make its offer richer in terms of socialisation, cultural consumption and the supply of selected products. As has been observed in critical theory as a fundamental process of contemporary valorisation, the developer extracts income by utilising forms of cooperation and social resources found outside (Hardt and Negri 2009; Vercellone 2006; Fumagalli et al. 2019). Specifically, it captures a “plus” that is generated between the prices of houses sold if there were no specific atmosphere or Christmas parties in the community centre and the prices with the presence of these events.

This complex and long-term operation of urban development would not have been possible without the active support of local government and national government policies, which played a central role in the development of this first phase of the project. The research area is the object of a redevelopment process that has lasted over twenty years and has been based on massive public investments and the use of a reorganised regulatory framework aimed at allowing more and more space for private profits. Within a project that is described as the result of innovative strategies promoted by private actors betting on the development of the city, the real forerunner



of the initiative was a fund financed mainly by a state financial actor, which appears to be the true “venture capitalist” of the initiative. Public funding was decisive in the operation connected to Expo 2015 and will be decisive in the transition from Expo to the Milan Innovation District. This support does not only consist of investments and innovations in regulation, but also of specific allocative choices such as the relocation of the University of Milan's scientific department within MIND, planned for 2026. In this framework, the District's population appears to be the backbone of the human capital needed for a public-private strategy of progressive elevation of the city of Milan in the hierarchy of global cities. At this stage of the project, the new residents of the neighbourhood are not an urban elite (which cannot be a majority) but middle and upper-middle classes well integrated into local and international economic circuits, with high educational qualifications. The most common household in the District is a couple between 35 and 45 years old, with young children. Almost all of the respondents are full-time workers, with permanent or fixed-term contracts with high renewal guarantees. The high number of households with a mortgage in the observed population can be interpreted as a growth in the trend towards indebtedness, but also, as various analyses dedicated to the Italian market show, a symbol of the strength and reliability of these actors in financial terms.

On a more general level, it is interesting to note that the District's urban development operation is also the bet of financial actors and local governments on the future of the city of Milan. However, the increase in uncertainty due to the emergence of unpredictable events and geopolitical conflicts could greatly complicate the scenario of what appears to be an “urbanisation of the winners”. Indeed, it seems that become new resident in the neighbourhood is the culmination of great hardship and the beginning of a new family good life for several families in the District. Several times, within this exploration, I had the feeling that the actors were celebrating in front of me that they “succeeded” in entering the exclusive, young and select situation of the District. If this work raises some questions about the extent to which housing property in specific neighbourhoods can be an important factor for the acquisition of a higher status, if not a real factor of social mobility, empirical analysis has also shown processes of middle-class expulsion precisely in this access to property. The effort that public and private actors make to attract international financial funds and urban elites in the city of Milan could trigger expulsion processes that are not only focused on the lower and precarious classes, but also on these groups. The development process in the research area has shown how the acceleration of urban change can be triggered by great events that play a decisive role in valorisation and attraction processes. After Expo 2015, Milan will host the Winter Olympics in

2026. Observing the urban transformations foreseen by the Olympic event with the District in mind can be useful to understand if and how contemporary trends will be maintained over time.

*The smart-and-green urban future as a political fantasy*

As we saw in the introduction, the smart-and-green city is a set of proposals for the implementation of urban policies that arise as part of a political attempt to build the city from below and are, according to much literature, subsumed within the neoliberal framework. Moreover, the smart-and-green city constitutes a set of urban imaginaries, a complex set of representations, visions and cultural objects that influence the way we experience the city. However, the eco-city and the smart city do not only constitute a way of producing cities and visions about the city but belong to a history of urban design that is also social design. The idea is that building urban is also a way of building urban societies. This dimension is present in the District, which is also a more or less realistic attempt to constitute an urban micro-community within the city and proposes an idea of how a residential neighbourhood of the future should be built and designed. As a consequence, the District can be thought as a political fantasy that inherits social and class aspects from a long tradition of producing residential space as a “bourgeois utopia” and in dialogue with other utopian projects, such as the garden city. To highlight the most interesting aspects of this proposal on the society of the future, we can focus on several points.

First, the smart-and-green city of the future is a labour-based fantasy. The District is a neighbourhood that is bought by young families of working age. The labour dimension is central in the District, as it is central in any financial metropolis with a high cost of living. This “unspoken” in the District, combined with the mortgage and the costs of social reproduction, makes everyday life in the District a productivity-oriented life.

Second, the smart-and-green city is a space for citizens who tend to have a medium-high social and/or employment status. Manual workers and racialised people are a clear minority. The “poor” are simply absent.

Third, the smart-and-green city is made up of both what Cousin calls “linear spaces”, spaces that are fundamentally designed to be used in a functional way and in which it is difficult to elaborate counter-uses, and “narrative” spaces, spaces that instead tell a story and generate precise atmospheres. This way of producing urban space is absolutely not “cold” but presents warm and relaxed atmospheres. The messages launched in this space are connected to progressive values, such as inclusiveness, environmental sustainability, the promotion of art,

and healthy, zero-mile food. However, these messages assume a post-political connotation and do not go beyond a set of individual choices and correct behaviour. In this sense, smart-and-green urbanism as a political fantasy is a “warm” form of capitalist realism.

Fourth, the smart-and-green city is a space where the distinction between public and private becomes porous and seems to disappear in a “common” in favour of private residents. Private management sometimes takes on traits of spectacularisation, as in the case of the private management of the park, which assumes almost moral characteristics compared to the rest of the area.

### *The relationship between the District and St. Leonard between exclusion and gentrification*

In this research, we attempted to highlight the ambiguous relationship of inclusion and exclusion that binds the District and St. Leonard. On the one hand, the District area presents itself as relatively open to the flow of non-residents, on the other hand, forms of entry selection are sporadic, but present. However, this selection on entry has specific targets: young and racialised population in a direct way, elderly and off-target individuals in a more subtle way. The District’s defence system is both direct and above all atmospheric: it is the District’s atmosphere, together with the cost of access to consumer services, that differentiates this place from the rest of the context. The message here is clearly perceived by many St. Leonard residents as “a place that is not built for us”. It will be interesting to assess how the removal of the Froth Street houses will change the balance of the relationship between the two neighbourhoods and whether it is indeed true, as it seems from some testimonies, that this was the main obstacle to some social and housing developments in the area. What is clear from many interviews is that few actors believe that there is a possibility of developing a shared path, which in reality has no reason to be desirable at all. Moreover, many citizens of the District simply do not conceive that the relationship with the neighbourhood across the street can benefit them. In the context of the relationship between the two neighbourhoods, the history of Froth Street and the problems of public housing calls into question the issue of environmental justice: two very close neighbourhoods have an unequal distribution of economic and socio-spatial benefits in their surroundings. Therefore, the closure of the District park would represent an expropriation of a public place that should at least be discussed at a political and local level. St. Leonard actually has an incoming population that, however inconspicuous, is buying houses in the district by taking advantage of the many auctions that are organised by Aler, which

continues to sell public housing. The proportion of this divestment is still to be considered, but it is a clear sign of the way in which while the smart-and-green city is being developed in neighbourhoods and redevelopment projects in Milan, public housing institutions are moving in the direction of disinvestment. Moreover, St. Leonard and the entire Gal are portrayed as a rather immobile territory, but the truth is that hundreds of houses purchased by the neighbourhood's population will be without residents in the next ten years due to the death of elderly people over 65, who represent 30% of the population. At the beginning of 2023, in a context of constant growth of real estate values in Milan (increased by 38% from January 2018 to January 2023, OMI data), St. Leonard is on prices between 2200 and 2500 euros/sqm, 32-35% lower than the average of the other neighbourhoods in City Hall 8 (almost 60% lower than the city average, which, however, suffers too much from the overvaluation of central areas). Thus, there is ample room for an increase in property values, which, for now, do not seem to have been affected by the "District effect".

However, the presence of the District and especially Mind can greatly influence buying and especially renting in the area: specifically, the relocation of the scientific faculties of the University of Milan to Mind planned for 2025-2026 could significantly change the social composition of St. Leonard. The neighbourhood has huge spaces and lots of green areas: assets that this research indicates as fundamental in house purchases on the Milanese market. It is no coincidence that already some of St. Leonard's green spaces are under attack: actors also present in the District are expected to realise a residential operation with student halls in front of the metro. What would be interesting to evaluate is not if, but what gentrification will look like in the area, inevitably connected with the socio-demographic change that this area will have sooner or later. During the research, I met several of Karl's friends who are no longer able to buy a house in St. Leonard and have to move, even if they are permanent workers. This could foreshadow the future of the area as a space where there are few evictions on rents, but expulsions in terms of the inability of the younger generation in the neighbourhood to buy homes where they grew up, one of the "dreams in the drawer" of many in the neighbourhood. It is not unrealistic to think that the houses on Froth Street, which were destroyed to rebuild public housing, would be converted to social housing and end up housing Mind's science students. In the absence of political initiative, this prospect is very possible.

In general, the political dimension is crucial to generate an answer to the problems of the neighbourhood, where young people with low qualifications and migrant families (Italians and non-Italians) will have increasing problems integrating into the high-skilled labour market of the city of Milan. St. Leonard is an interesting example of an "open-air museum of Fordism".

The traces of the Fordist system of social regulation can still be found today, in the small things: the relationship between institutional politics and third sector actors, the presence of an Italian working class, the attitude of Karl himself, an “old-style” political militant who says he is doing “old things in a new way”. A more rigorous and historical analysis, outside the ethnographic exploratory interest of this research, could find in St. Leonard the historical stratification of a parabola, that of the Italian working class and middle classes of the 1960s in Milan, which from the economic boom to the present day has produced winners and losers.

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