



REDUCING
HOUSING
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ReHousIn - Case Study Working Paper: Milan

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Author(s)	Massimo Bricocoli, Politecnico di Milano; Marco Peverini, Politecnico di Milano; Anita Susani, ÖGUT
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Contributor(s)	Constanze Wolfgring, Politecnico di Milano; Lorenzo Caresana, Politecnico di Milano.
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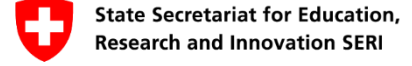


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1 Introduction

1.1 City profile, challenges around just (housing and ecological) transition

Milan is the capital city of the northern-Italian region of Lombardy, and the second largest city in the country (after Rome). The core municipality has around 1,4 million inhabitants (ISTAT, 2025) within a rather small area of around 181 km². However, it is part of the higher administrative level (in between the national and local level) of the greater Metropolitan Area of Milan (*Città Metropolitana di Milano*), which includes 133 municipalities with a total population of 3.247.623 inhabitants in 1.620 km² (ISTAT, 2025). As we will see in more detail, the Municipality of Milan highly depends on a vast hinterland for the localization of functions (e.g. residential, productive, commercial) which is not limited to the Metropolitan Area but encompasses a larger post-metropolitan “urban region” (see Balducci, 2016; Bricocoli et al., 2025). Moreover, Milan’s metropolitan region recorded the highest level of GDP per person employed (95.300 PPS) among Italian metropolitan regions, around 1.2 times higher than Rome (Eurostat, 2024). The per capita income is among the highest of the country, with almost € 38.000 per capita gross.

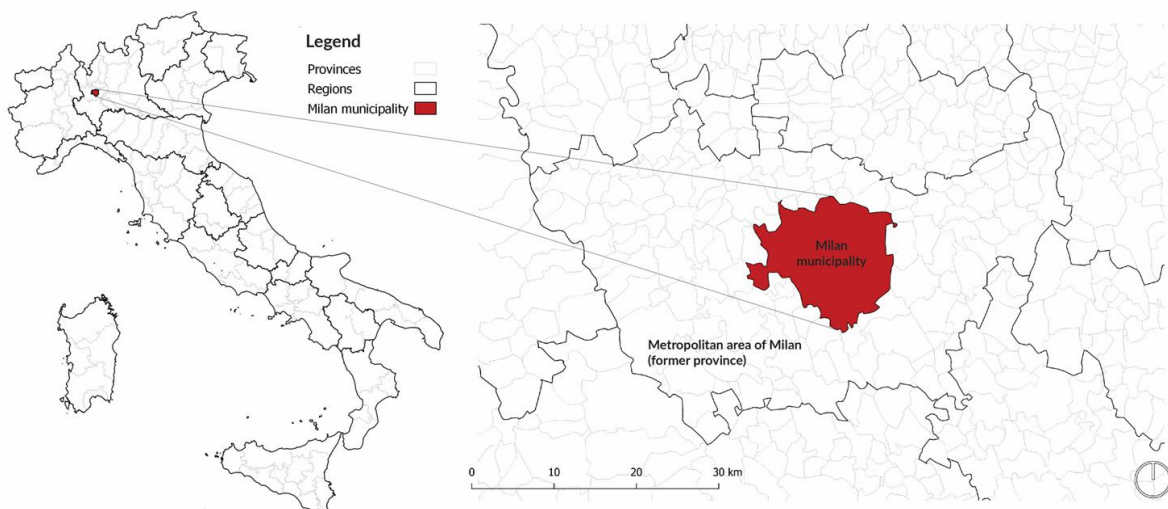


Figure 1: Milan and the Metropolitan area

The Milanese housing system¹ has followed a trajectory related to the economic and political developments of the country and to its specific role as one of the main poles in the 19th and early 20th century industrialization of the country, and one summit of the so-called “industrial

¹ The following paragraphs are based on Peverini (2023).

triangle” (*Triangolo Industriale*) with Turin and Genoa. The most intense population growth occurred during the post-WWII period, when reconstruction of the heavily bombed housing stock happened together with intense new expansion and housing construction and mass migration from the poorer regions of southern Italy and Veneto. In the 1950s and ‘60s, Milan was the most dynamic urban region in Italy and labelled as the “economic capital” of Italy (Dalmaso, 1972). In this period, private housing construction, though being prevalent, was complemented by the various public housing schemes of the period, creating a stock that still provides the city with a ratio of public housing higher than in most Italian cities.

Despite the Italian national context, Milan has pursued a more active role in the production of public and social housing in the past century, which is reflected by its significantly higher share of public housing stock in comparison to the national one (8% in Milan against 3% in Italy). This is in part due to the industrial past of the city and the peculiar nature of the local government, which has long invested in municipal welfare. Additionally, a land policy tool for public and affordable housing, based on compulsory purchase of plots at below market price, was introduced in the 1960s as an instrument to implement the PEEP plans *Piani di Edilizia Economica e Popolare* (Public and Economic housing programs). In that time, the private rental sector was still owning the largest part of the stock and was heavily rent regulated to prevent excessive social unrest (Padovani, 1996). The 1960s was also a decade of political mobilization and conflict, and in 1969 a general strike was organized around the housing issue.

From the mid 1970s, the city’s industrial role began to decline, with factories increasing delocalizing elsewhere together with part of the working-class population that relocated in the hinterland, mainly in the search of better environmental conditions and in the search of a more safe and protected living environment. In two decades, the core municipality lost almost half million inhabitants, most of which moved to the suburban areas in a suburbanization process due to a mix of many factors, among those: high housing costs in the core municipality; changed housing preferences and the congestion of the central core; labor market restructuring with decreasing manufacturing (blue collars in the municipality reduced around 40% between 1961 and 1981) and increasing tertiary-oriented local economy.

The increased importance of the hinterland, however, was always lacking effective governance and coordination and only recognized by the planning system as a voluntary-based form of cooperation among municipalities, through associations of municipalities for planning (Milan Intermunicipal Plan or PIM) and public housing (Intermunicipal Consortium of Milan for Public Housing or CIMEP). In later times, the transformation of the province into a “Metropolitan City” in 2014 did not improve the situation (Balducci et al., 2016). Yet the dependence of the central municipality to its hinterland in terms of relocation of functions has continued increasing during the 2000s: most employment growth concentrated in the core municipality and most population growth was hosted in the hinterland, producing an increasing phenomenon of commuting (Camagni, 2020).

The 1990s saw important changes in urban planning and housing policies, both at the national and local level. The production of public housing was drastically reduced, and urban regeneration became a main challenge. With many factories relocating out of Milan, **redeveloping brownfields and vacant industrial sites became a central theme of the local political debate**, affecting urban development until today. In this process, differential

land rent accumulated during the city expansion by now well-located industrial sites has been exploited by public authorities and real estate actors through the transformation into residential, commercial, and tertiary use (see Bricocoli, Savoldi, 2010; Bricocoli, Salento, 2019). The first major example of this is the conversion of the former Pirelli factory in the North of Milan into the new Bicocca neighborhood along with the foundation of Pirelli Real Estate, a daughter company focused on real estate and development, inaugurating a transformation of the productive sectors into a financial and real estate-oriented one (Kaika, Ruggiero, 2016).

In this process, public and affordable housing were not a main aim in the conversion of former factory sites, initially because municipalities could still count to develop housing on the remaining greenfield land of the existing PEEP plans in peripheral areas, and then due to a focus on “regeneration” at any cost – even that of allowing full appropriation of development gains by landowners and developers (Peverini, 2023). The “Clean Hands” (*mani pulite*)² investigations and the Tangentopoli corruption scandal within the locally ruling socialist party in 1993 – which evolved into a nation-wide scandal – paved the way for fifteen years of right-wing local government, until 2011. In this period, the real estate sector continued to grow in the framework of the booming real estate cycle (Bellicini, 2011) while the city undertook a series of strategies to re-centralize tertiary functions and middle-class residential development that was described as the dream to make the “downtown” of northern Italy (Bricocoli e Savoldi, 2010). One important part of this strategy is the introduction of the Integrated Intervention Plans (PII), local urban planning implementation instruments that act as variants of the general urban plan and are proposed by landowners and private developers, aimed at fostering redevelopment of the urban fabric of specific localized areas introduced under Law 179/1992 (Comune di Milano, 2005; 2006).

While the metropolitan dimension continued to be increasingly important, at the turn of the 21st century housing prices grew rapidly in Milan which determined polarized conditions of access to housing (Bellicini, 2011). On one side, home ownership increased, due to processes common to Southern European welfare systems, mainly: an increased role of the market in housing provision; and a huge growth of mortgage lending. On the other hand, households in the rental sector suffered from increasing problems due to rising rents and ceased public housing construction. Additionally, Milan became increasingly affected by important internal inequalities, both in terms of income and in real estate values (Manzoli, Mocetti, 2016). The consequences of social exclusion provoked by polarized conditions of access to housing were exacerbated by the financial crisis and the application of neoliberal policy recipes imposed during the crisis and the unleashed housing need in the aftermath of the crisis, including evictions.

Despite these dynamics, the city saw important trends of real estate acceleration following its international repositioning of Milan during the 2010s, now pushed by a center-left coalition,

² For reference: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mani_pulite

and especially following the momentum produced by the International Exposition *Expo 2015* (Bricocoli and Peverini, 2025). In this decade, the urban agglomeration of Milan experienced a new attractiveness for people and capital, especially due to a new role of finance and tertiary sector, tourism and real estate (Camagni, 2020). The housing market has since then observed skyrocketing housing prices in central locations and strongly hiking prices in former peripheral neighborhoods subject to requalification, while incomes and wages stagnated (Bricocoli and Peverini, 2025). **Gentrification has spread extensively, starting from the city core across many of the city districts.**

Within the framework of Italy's housing context, Milan represents nationwide a paradigmatic case as the city attractiveness fosters increasing unaffordability and housing inequalities in a national context featuring pronounced regional imbalances that foster depopulation and downward development trajectories. As Italy's most expensive housing market, Milan exhibits extreme tensions between housing costs and residents' purchasing power, with stagnant wages and increasingly polarized income distributions exacerbating the affordability crisis. This dynamic is acutely evident in the mismatch between rapidly rising housing prices—especially in the rental sector—and modest or declining real wages, with the average net cost of access to a minimum dwelling now often exceeding 30% of household income, a threshold commonly used to define affordability stress (Bricocoli et al., 2025). Milan, while active in the production of social housing operates within a marketized framework and is subject to national austerity measures which obstruct de-commodification, such as the reduction of public funding, re-commodification through right-to-buy policies, and prioritization of market-driven solutions.

As in the rest of the Country, policies aligned with a familistic welfare model have produced a high rate of homeownership also in Milan, which has been accelerated since the 90s due to changes in banking regulations that favored financial liberalization and privatization (from 51% in 1991 to 70% in 2021). Tenure has shifted further to owner-occupation while both rental tenure and public housing have shrunk (44% in 1991 to 17% in 2021 and 14,3% in 1991 to 7,1% in 2021, respectively). This re-commodification and erosion of the public housing stock, together with the decrease in rental tenure overall, has led to an increasingly residual rental sector, heavily concentrated among lower-income and more vulnerable populations. Moreover, given this scarcity of social housing stock and high market values, the middle-class people belonging to the so-called "gray strata" (*fascia grigia*, those whose income exceeds the public housing access limits, but doesn't suffice to afford housing at market rates) are increasingly facing unaffordability and economic distress due to housing expenses. This issue is particularly true in Milan, as one of the most attractive cities in Italy (Bricocoli & Peverini, 2024b).

Housing tenure (Milan, census)		1991	2001	2011	2021
Absolute value	Total households	576.777	583.335	604.507	720.523
	Owner Occupation	294.982	347.353	387.710	504.563
	Renting (PRS + SR)	255.231	203.419	174.542	183.227
	Other	26.564	32.563	42.255	32.733
	(Public housing)	82.343	70.759	54.215	57.498
%	% Owner Occupation	51,1%	59,5%	64,1%	70,0%
	% renting (PRS + SR)	44,3%	34,9%	28,9%	25,4%
	% other	4,6%	5,6%	7,0%	4,5%
	(% public housing)	14,3%	12,1%	9,0%	8,0%

Table 1: tenure in Milan (absolute and relative) 1991-2021. Source: authors' elaboration on census data.

More recently the city experimented with public-private partnerships and financial tools to produce social housing that have been upscaled to the national level, making Milan a breeding ground for policy innovation. However, while more active in the production of social housing, Milan still operates within a marketized framework and is subject to national austerity measures which obstruct de-commodification, such as the reduction of public funding, re-commodification through right-to-buy policies, and prioritization of market-driven solutions.

1.2 Green Transition Interventions in Milan

In the Italian context, the implementation of greening strategies such as densification, Nature-Based Solutions (NBS), and energy-efficient retrofitting reveals a fragmented and often contradictory landscape shaped by competing objectives, uneven governance capacities, and divergent socio-spatial outcomes. **While all three approaches are integral to the national and EU-level green transition agendas, their deployment often reflects a tension between ecological aspirations and market-oriented imperatives.**

- Densification, though formally embedded in the broader framework of "urban regeneration," frequently serves as a vehicle for valorizing urban land rather than enhancing housing equity, especially in metropolitan areas like Milan.
- NBS, increasingly promoted through both top-down and community-based initiatives, oscillates between inclusive public green spaces and exclusive, commodified developments.
- Energy-efficient retrofitting, meanwhile, has been propelled by ambitious fiscal incentives, such as the Superbonus 110%, yet has disproportionately benefited affluent homeowners and exacerbated regional and tenure-based inequalities.

Densification

Differently from other contexts, there is no clear definition of „urban densification“ in Italian policy, and it is instead included within the broader framework of “rigenerazione urbana“ (urban regeneration). This framing, while offering a certain degree of flexibility in addressing socio-spatial transformation, also reveals critical ambiguities in the objectives, instruments, and outcomes of densification policies. Especially when it is pursued as a process of financialization, involving large-scale, market-driven redevelopment projects, where densification takes place, but does not necessarily lead to increased housing accessibility, often causing the opposing effect of fueling gentrification. In some cases, policies involving

regeneration have revolved around peripheral and deteriorated urban areas and have involved public housing, with the intent of mitigating physical, social and economic shortcomings (Wolfgring, 2024). These cases are typically financed through public funds coming from the European, national or regional level, but rarely include densification interventions – and typically the number of public housing units is either maintained or reduced, rarely increased.

In the city of Milan, **intense regeneration and densification activity has sprung in recent decades**, much of which has taken place on brownfield sites formerly occupied by infrastructure or industry, aligning with sustainability goals articulated in both local and national planning frameworks. Yet, this process has been deeply shaped by market logics and international capital flows, producing highly uneven effects on housing affordability, social inclusion, and access to green amenities (Lanzani, 2024).

On one hand, large-scale projects, such as the **Porta Nuova redevelopment (case 1)**, illustrate a paradigm of top-down, market-led densification. Initially a publicly owned railyard, the area was transferred to private developers, most notably the multinational Developer Hines, under favorable regulatory conditions. The resulting transformation led to a new development with high densities, accompanied by high-profile architectural interventions and green infrastructure such as the privately managed BAM Park (Biblioteca degli Alberi Milano) the core green development in the Porta Nuova development. While such interventions are frequently presented as successful models of sustainable urbanism, they have also been critiqued for catalyzing processes of socio-spatial exclusion and green gentrification (Di Paola, 2021), particularly given the absence of affordable housing provisions and the privatized nature of public space management. Furthermore, criticism on ambiguous and superficial ecological framing point to a vague reference to sustainability which is often deemed as greenwashing. These dynamics raise important questions regarding the redistributive capacity of densification policies when aligned primarily with real estate valorization.

On the other hand, alternative models of densification rooted in civic engagement and negotiated planning have also emerged in Milan. The case of the **Baden Powell and Segantini parks, in the Navigli neighborhood (case 2)**, exemplifies how community-led resistance to speculative redevelopment can yield inclusive outcomes. Originally slated for high-density residential construction, the site was reclaimed through the activism of local associations, resulting in a system of two connected public parks and a significantly reduced building footprint. Notably, the surrounding area includes public housing (ERP) and cooperative housing, allowing for a more socially mixed urban environment. This case highlights the potential of participatory planning processes to reshape the spatial logic of densification, orienting it towards social equity and ecological integration rather than exclusive value extraction. However, such examples remain exceptions rather than the rule and are contingent on strong civil society's mobilization and political responsiveness.

In sum, in Milan, densification has primarily operated as a vehicle for urban valorization, often at the expense of inclusivity and long-term affordability. Nonetheless, emergent practices of civic engagement and alternative governance models suggest that more equitable and sustainable pathways are possible, provided that densification is conceived not merely as a quantitative increase in built form but as a qualitatively transformative process grounded in principles of social and environmental justice, putting ecological concerns in the center of regeneration efforts.

Greening and Nature Based Solutions

In recent years, green interventions in urban areas – rarely framed as Nature-Based Solutions (NBS) in the public discourse – have gained some increased interest in Italy. Laws such as

Law 10/2013 have led to urban greening and forestation interventions to grow notably, especially in metropolitan areas such as Milan. The data suggests that this law has led to increasing municipal efforts in terms of urban greening, as the number of greening initiatives has increased from less than 30 in 2014 to more than 60 between 2014 and 2021. At the metropolitan scale, Milan has also engaged in broader ecological planning through citizens' and local initiatives such as the pioneering cases of "Boscoincittà", initiated and implemented by Italia Nostra in the 1970s, an NGO engaged in the protection, promotion and valorization of cultural heritage (<https://www.boscoincitta.it/>), and the Parco Nord, experimenting effective intercommunal cooperation in the northern area of the city (<https://parconord.milano.it/>). More recently, "Forestami", a project promoted by Politecnico di Milano in 2018, activated partnerships with public administrations, private foundations and social cooperatives that up to now have planted 45.000 trees in 20 hectares across the metropolitan city of Milan (<https://forestami.org/>).

The case of Milan reveals also a hybrid landscape of NBS implementation, characterized by a mix of high-profile, market-aligned greening projects and more grassroots, participatory interventions. One of the most emblematic examples is the Biblioteca degli Alberi di Milano (BAM), part of the Porta Nuova redevelopment—a NBS-labelled park developed in the context of one of Europe's largest privately funded urban regeneration projects. Although BAM contributed to provide better open spaces in a formerly vacant area —by introducing some green and offering recreational space—, many question its ecological value, being basically a "giardino urbano", in the definition of the municipality, which is stressing more an ornamental character rather than a public park. Moreover, its private management and location within a luxury real estate enclave are recurrently questioned. As such, it exemplifies the commodification of green under the guise of sustainability, raising critical concerns about the socio-spatial distribution of environmental benefits in contemporary NBS discourse.

The same can be said of the Bosco Verticale, two high-end residential towers with hanging gardens and planted terraces, designed by star architect Stefano Boeri and often celebrated as symbols of green architecture. Conversely, projects like Parco Segantini illustrate an alternative model of NBS deployment grounded in civic engagement and collaborative governance. Developed through a protracted participatory process led by residents and local associations, the Segantini park (studied under case study 2) transformed a former industrial site into an ecologically integrated public space. Crucially, the initiative resisted and mitigated speculative densification pressures and facilitated the creation of a green infrastructure that serves a socially mixed community—including adjacent public and cooperative housing complexes. This case underscores the capacity of NBS to function not merely as aesthetic or technical interventions, but as platforms for democratic engagement and spatial justice when embedded in inclusive governance frameworks. However, such participatory processes are challenged in a city increasingly shaped by private capital and top-down planning.

Finally, it is safe to say that housing policies and environmental policies in Italy are not strongly correlated, and although NBS programmes reflect a growing alignment between environmental and housing policies overall, there is no direct link between environmental policies and housing affordability policies. Moreover, according to some evidence, there is a weak association between the presence and growth of green spaces and the increase in housing prices

Retrofitting

Italy's residential sector accounts for a substantial share (27%) of the country's final energy consumption (Cresme 2024, p. 24). The high energy demand can be attributed to several factors, among which the fact that much of the housing stock is outdated, the predominance of single-family homes (51.7% of residential buildings) – which consume more energy

compared to multi-family buildings – and the fact that 42.9% of the residential buildings are located in climate zone E (covering northern regions such as Lombardy, Piedmont, and Veneto), where heating needs are significantly higher (ibid.). Important challenges thus persist, particularly in the post-war housing stock, which suffers from deteriorating building materials, substandard quality, and poor energy efficiency (Daglio/Zanfi 2023). This issue is further reinforced by the fact that 72% of residential buildings had been built before 1980, with almost all of these predating the introduction of Italy’s first energy efficiency law (373/1976) (Norme per il contenimento del consumo energetico per usi termici negli edifici – Regulations for reducing energy consumption for heating in buildings) (Cresme, 2024).

For this reason, retrofitting has become a critical policy lever in Italy’s response to the climate crisis, particularly in the residential sector. Furthermore, national policy frameworks have played a central role in shaping retrofitting trends in the whole country. Among these has been the **Superbonus 110%**, largely discussed in the recent housing debate, introduced by the "Decreto Rilancio" in 2020 as part of COVID 19 economic recovery efforts. This policy allowed for tax deductions exceeding the total value of retrofitting works—covering up to 110% of eligible expenses. **The measure triggered a significant surge in retrofit investments, with national figures reaching €67.1 billion in 2021 and peaking at €94.6 billion in 2022**, before being phased out in 2023 due to budgetary constraints and criticisms of inefficiency and inequity (Cresme, 2014). However, its main objective provided results as energy retrofitting incentives played a key role in the national economy, contributing 9,9% to GDP growth in 2021 and 25,8% in 2022 (ibid.)

Concerning this type of so-called ‘bonus edilizi’ (like the Ecobonus, Superbonus 110%, etc.), Zanfi et al. (2021) highlight that while their implementation has overall produced some positive results, interventions funded through these bonuses have generally been small-scale and sporadic. The authors moreover stress that these programmes have been distributed indiscriminately, without consideration for setting priorities and for specific regional or local contexts. **This has resulted in investments being concentrated in economically advantaged regions with robust real estate markets and more proactive recipients**, which risks exacerbating territorial inequalities by failing to address disadvantaged areas and the more energy-inefficient housing stock.

Regarding retrofitting, in Milan, as in other northern cities, the uptake of the Superbonus 110% - the main retrofitting policy - was highest among private homeowners with the financial capacity to front the costs or engage third-party credit institutions, thereby excluding low-income populations and public housing providers from full participation. Furthermore, incentives for energy retrofitting have predominantly focused on private housing stock rather than on public housing (Daglio, Zanfi 2023). **This reflects one of the key elements of criticism of retrofitting schemes, namely that they perpetuate social inequity among the recipients**. However, in recent years, the retrofit and regeneration of public housing has emerged as a relevant issue that has received some attention on the political agenda, and some programmes at national level have been set up accordingly (Wolfgring, 2024). Together with the National Recovery and Resilience Plan, national programmes, led by the Ministry for Infrastructures, have been targeting the retrofitting or regeneration of public and social housing. These include the “PINQuA” (Programma innovativo per la qualità dell’abitare) established in 2020 and the “Sicuro, verde, sociale” (safe, green, social) programme established in 2021.

In sum, national incentives such as the Superbonus 110% catalyzed unprecedented investment in building renovation. However, the governance architecture and socio-economic stratification of the housing system have restricted equitable access to these benefits. This manifests in Milan because of its status as a main metropolitan area and economic hub.

1.3 The Isola / Porta Nuova case

The Isola district is situated close to the north-west of the center of Milan; it has grown as a „central-peripheral“ industrial neighbourhood of Milan along most of the 20th Century, starting with the location of the TIBB (Tecnomasio Italiano Brown-Bovery) factory in 1908, stimulated by the presence of an important railway yard (Bottini, 2016). Isola has long been a working-class neighbourhood featuring the typical hallway-type small-sized dwellings in privately built housing courtyard buildings (*case di ringhiera*); its name means „island“ and derives precisely from the fact that it was isolated from the city by the railway network and for most of its history could only be reached from the more central Garibaldi district via a single bridge over the railway (Boffi et al., 1972). In such isolation, community life grew more than in other comparable districts: „a local culture is formed, with fairly strong roots, as demonstrated by the neighborhood's united opposition to fascism, participation in the resistance, and, in the postwar period, the population's attempts to oppose disruptive political interventions“(ibidem, p.75).

From the 1950s and 1960s many factories closed, causing significant concern among local governments. The first attempt to tackle the large abandoned area separating Isola from the city center dates back to the drafting of the 1953 General Urban Development Plan, in which the Municipality of Milan envisaged the construction of a new large business district, a visible sign of the city's transition from an industrial economy to one based on the service sector, that for long remained on paper also for the inhabitants' resistance (Bottini, 2016). The TIBB factory, a 22.000 square meter site, closed in 1965 and was later acquired by the public to create a green public space, much-demanded by the residents: meanwhile the residents' composition had been changing in a process described as „gentrification without exclusion“, pushed by a combination of proximity to the city center, new mobility connection and relatively low real estate value due to physical separation from the city center due to abandoned ex-industrial and railway plots (Diappi et al., 2013). In the 2001 urban plan, amidst the real estate boom, the Albertini center-right administration gave a new impulse to the plan by adopting a new urban development plan that foresaw a new fashion district and infrastructural investments, including a new urban highway on the Confalonieri green space that was stopped after residents' protests (Bottini, 2016). In this breeding ground, a very significant experience of creative occupation and self-organization of the abandoned space in the former TIBB factory by associations, artisans, and artists, known as “Stecca degli Artigiani” (artisans' slab), animated the area for some years (2001-2007).



Figure 1 The Confalonieri gardens and the Stecca building. Source: <https://www.lastecca.org/chi-siamo/>

While the fashion district project vanished, the real estate boom and the repositioning of Milan as a tertiary city attracted the attention of international investors, with the Texas-based real estate multinational Hines acquiring the area. An Agreement Program in 2004 and implementation agreement in 2005 with the Municipality of Milan finally kickstarted the redevelopment of the area following the Garibaldi-Repubblica Integrated Intervention Program³ (hereafter, the P.I.I.), a project labelled „Porta Nuova“ – alluding to the proximity to the more central adjacent district at the end of the recently requalified Corso Como commercial district –, which provided the following functional mix: 63% offices (public and private), 20% residential, 10% functions related to services of general interest and hospitality, and 7% commercial functions. The program covers an area of 300,000 square meters and provides for a maximum gross floor area of around 230.000 square meters, divided into three project coordination units: U1 Public and private office complex; U2 Institutional complex including the headquarters of the Lombardy Region and public and private offices; U3, which includes the public park. Transformation also involves the integrated redevelopment of the contiguous Isola De Castillia PII and the former Varesine area, covering a total area of approximately 290,000 square meters.

³ Citations in the following paragraphs are our translation by the official article in the website of the municipality of Milan: <https://www.comune.milano.it/argomenti/rigenerazione-urbana/mappa-dei-progetti-di-rigenerazione-urbana/garibaldi-repubblica-programma-integrato-di-intervento#stato-del-procedimento>

The main objectives stated in the P.I.I. are: „the creation of a place of great prestige for the city and the entire region; the creation of a new institutional hub; the creation of the Porta Nuova Gardens (*Giardini di Porta Nuova*), a modern urban garden designed on the model of the most qualified examples in the city and the best international examples; the enhancement of public transport and the improvement of the road network and parking system through a radical redesign that rationalizes and rebalances the current layout“ (Comune di Milano, 2024). The P.I.I. „has defined the new morphological structure of the area, focusing on principles of connectivity, pedestrianization, architectural excellence, and new centrality“ (Comune di Milano, 2024), also thanks to now consolidate public transportation infrastructures – including regional and suburban rail services, two metro lines (M2 and M5), and the local public transport network.

After some changes to the Implementation agreement in 2012, the plan is today in a very advanced stage of implementation, with only the intervention unit U2B remaining under realization. As in a municipal document, „The blocks and urban fabrics around the area overlap different rules and layouts, pre-existing traces and interrupted plans, which have found in the 90,000 m² urban garden [*giardino urbano* in the definition by the municipality, authors' note] the unifying and connecting element“ The unifying and connecting elements of the entire Plan are the public spaces, represented by Piazza Gae Aulenti and the new 'Biblioteca degli Alberi' (Library of Trees) urban garden“ (Comune di Milano, 2024) by the Dutch firm Inside-Outside, the latter the result of an international design competition, and hosts some functions of public interest, such as the Casa della Memoria (House of Memory) and the Stecca 3, and the Fondazione Riccardo Catella (Riccardo Catella Foundation), intended for socio-cultural activities.

The Administration has also committed for developing a Children's Pavilion („a playroom for all children and in particular for children with disabilities“), the Isola neighborhood Civic Center, and the redevelopment and repurposing of the Bussa Overpass – the remaining of an urban highway project that was abandoned – in an open public space. The Porta Nuova urban transformation has featured projects by star architects as a result of international design competitions, such as the master plan for Unit U1 by architect Cesar Pelli and the new headquarters of the Lombardy Region by the consortium led by Pei Cobb Freed & Partners Architects with Paolo Caputo. The latter was built on a plot formerly hosting the so called “Bosco di Gioia” (“Gioia forest”): what used to be a tree nursery donated by the landowner to a public hospital zoned as public green, and was later rezoned as part of the business center project and sold by the same hospital as part of the redevelopment – although it become a spontaneous forest, it was finally destined to be the new seat of the Lombardy Region, despite resistance of a local civic group⁴.

⁴ See: https://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bosco_di_Gioia ; <https://gianlucabresciablog.wordpress.com/2021/05/18/boschi-milanesi/>

Since the beginning, some residents and local civic groups manifested dissent with many aspects of the project: „Local associations became increasingly aggressive, and a lot of energy was used to defend the last remaining fragment of Isola's industrial past, the **Stecca degli Artigiani, or artisans' incubator, located on what remained of the historic TIBB**“ (Bottini, 2016: 100, authors' translation). Radically alternative visions emerged in the process: while the main objectives stated by the Municipality in the P.I.I. are „the creation of a place of great prestige for the city and the entire region ... focusing on principles of connectivity, pedestrianization, architectural excellence, and new centrality“, local civic groups “place affordability, inclusion, transparency and equality at the center of sustainability” (Di Paola, 2022: 32).

An alternative “Possible Park” project was presented in 2007, maintaining similar levels of cubage but a more extensive park and less towers, but this was ignored. Parallely to the demolition of the Stecca building and park, now hosting the famous “Bosco Verticale” (“vertical forest”) -a luxury housing building with a small public garden–, new (smaller) collective spaces were created right adjacent to the building site of Porta Nuova, such as:

- **Piano Terra** (“ground floor”) – an empty commercial space on the ground floor of a municipal housing building squatted by various countercultural collective, developing a multi-faceted critique and alternative to the adjacent “vertical” urban development –
- and **Isola Pepe Verde** – a community garden in a small municipal vacant plot squatted and then authorized for temporary use, developing initiatives around sociability and conviviality for the neighbors.

Instead, the Porta Nuova project included some part of the Stecca collecting by agreeing to find a new space within the new development, a sort of community space for local associations then named “Stecca 3.0”, in a process that was felt as divisive by many civic activists as some described it as “a political move of social washing” (Di Paola, 2022: 29) and pacification, as some journalist said that thought the new Stecca 3.0 “Isola has made peace with its [industrial] tradition”.

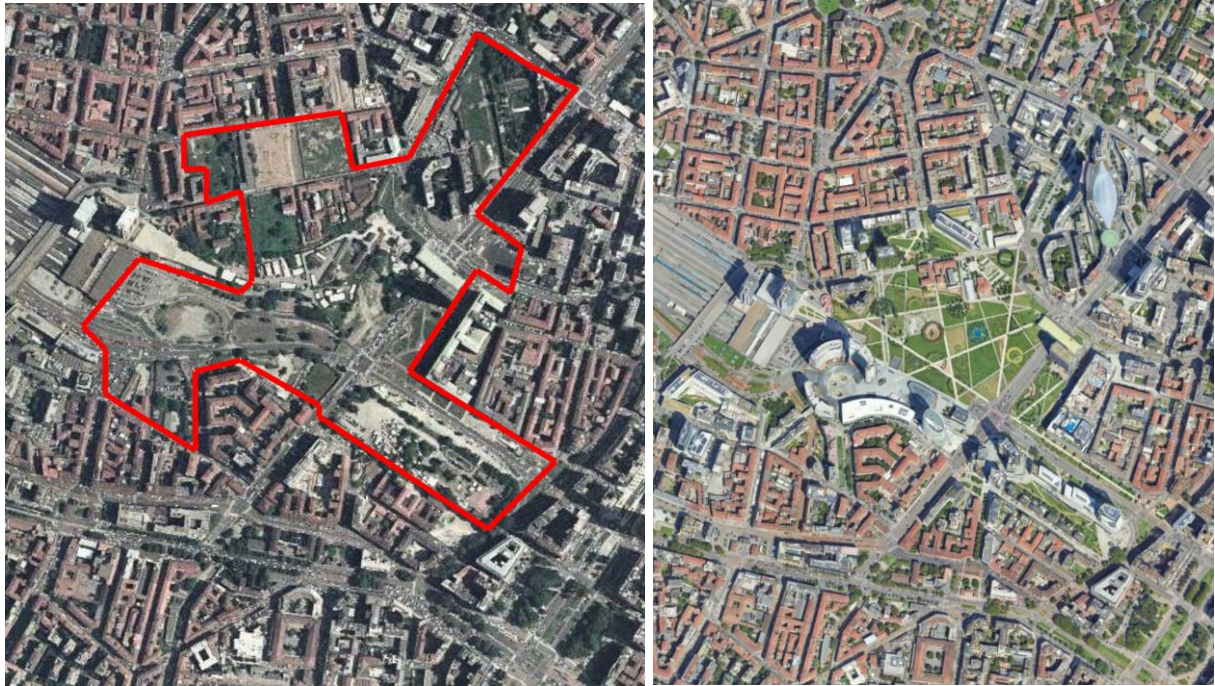


Figure 2 The Garibaldi-Repubblica Integrated Intervention Plan in 1998 and today. Source: Lombardy orthophoto and Google Earth

Regarding the relationship between the project and the Isola neighbourhood, scholars found evidence of gentrification going on already before the start of the redevelopment: Caselli and Ferreri (2013: 3-4), argue that

“the period from the 1960s to the early 1970s could be interpreted as a first wave of classic gentrification, which was limited by a combination of local resistance and interventions by the first left-wing city council, which implemented the Piano integrativo per l’edilizia popolare ... in the early 1980s several planning decisions began to have an impact on the neighbourhood. In 1984 the decision was taken to build the Passante Ferroviario (Milan’s urban railway) to connect Garibaldi station to Repubblica ... the idea of developing new transport infrastructures and increasing the connectivity of the area translates from the logic of the Passante to the M5 Underground line, which caused a direct increase in the value of residential properties, as observed by many local real estate agents”

Gentrification was still happening shortly before the start of redevelopment – when the only green area was being dismantled and the new urban garden was only a promise –, mainly through the “effects of social exclusion” of lower-income from the now heated housing market, rather than “expulsion” (Diappi et al., 2013) and a process of “soft densification” linked to a renewed interest in old-fashioned buildings and a specialization on “pleasure” (Semi, 2011): due to the high levels of owner-occupation even on lower-middle income households, the interest of young families and increase housing prices in the neighbourhood was often capitalized by housing owners willing to move to better flats in other/outer parts of the city. The role of the redevelopment project in this gentrification process has often been discussed, with different positions (See e.g.: Caselli and Ferreri, 2013; Garcia-Lamarca et al., 2019; Bottini, 2016; Diappi et al., 2013):

“Besides important shifts in urban governance, from the end of the 1990s until the first half of the 2000s, Milan was also marked by a staggering increase in real estate values ... At Isola, the consequences of these trends were particularly evident. From commercial to residential properties, from public green areas to common areas in apartment blocks, all social spaces were subjected to often conflictual

intervention that resulted from diverging views and interests expressed by different factions of the population on issues such as residential spaces, public spaces and leisure activities” (Caselli and Ferreri, 2013: 4)

“Today, the neighborhood has undergone profound physical, symbolic, and social changes, certainly due to the redevelopment project, but also through a contextual symbolic transformation that has led the neighborhood to become the recent urban reference point for cultural consumption oriented towards alternative culture. The reasonable hypothesis that can be put forward is that this allure seems to have been at the origin of the neighborhood’s renewed attractiveness, arousing the interest of populations completely different from those that constituted the social structure of the industrial island. The visible effect of this symbolic change has been a process that many have identified as a textbook example of gentrification, although the debate is still very much open” (Bottini, 2016: 101, authors’ translation).

Nowadays, the Porta Nuova or Garibaldi-Repubblica transformation can be considered a sort of “hinge” or gate between the city center (via the adjacent Corso Como) and Isola, that has become a new consumption district – with a big amount of new bars and restaurants that appeal to middle-income and affluent Milanese rather than neighbors (Semi, 2011) –, but also between other relevant transformations happening at a wider scale, such as: that of the square of Loreto, today a huge roundabout expected to become a new “green” commercial center, to the East; the big new mixed development on the Farini railway yard to the West.

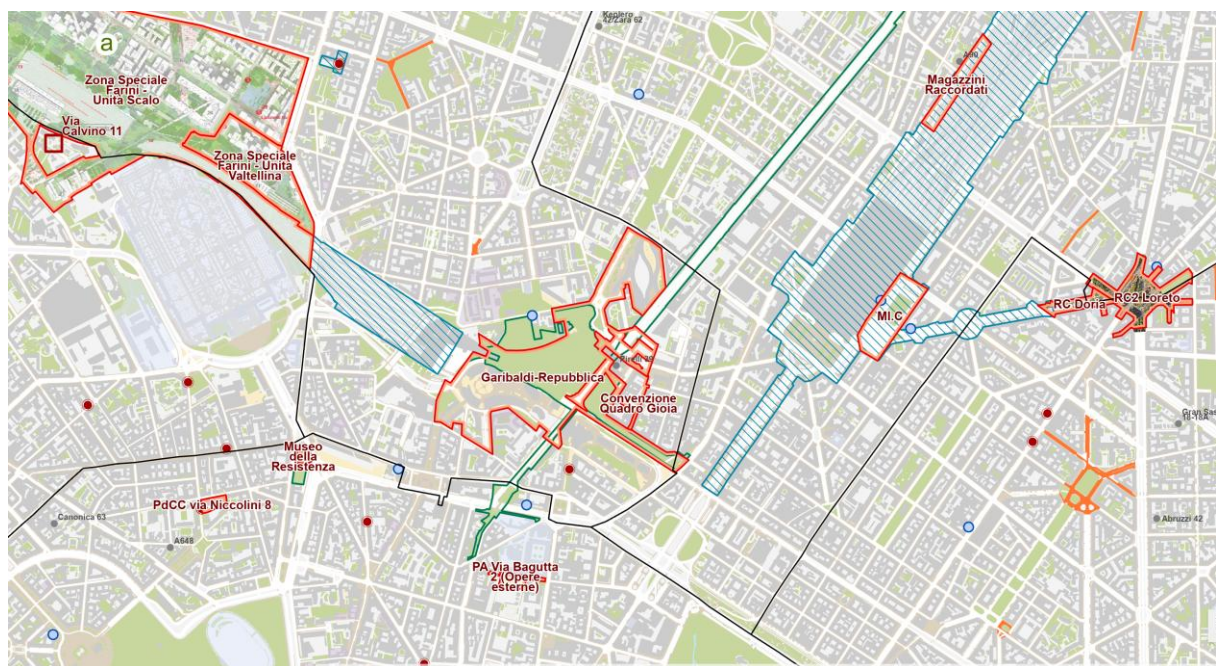


Figure 3 The Porta Nuova regeneration plans amidst the main urban transformations in the northern part of the center of Milan. Source: Municipality of Milan, Atlante della rigenerazione urbana.

1.4 The Baden Powell - Segantini / Navigli case



Figure 4 Aerial view of the Navigli District in 2003 and in 2021, with Baden-Powell Park and Segantini Park. Source: Ortofoto Regione Lombardia

The Navigli district extends within Municipality 6, south of the city centre, along the banks of the Naviglio Pavese and Naviglio Grande, the two navigable canals that converge to the north in the Darsena, the city's historic commercial port and a key node in the wider canal system that once served as a fundamental network for the transport and trade of goods and materials. The morphological configuration of the urban fabric is historically marked by irrigation ditches, canals, and water infrastructures. The Segantini–Navigli case study examines a portion of the city characterized by a process of regeneration and functional restructuring that has unfolded in successive stages, in a capillary manner, and through the involvement of a wide range of actors.

The green system composed today of the two parks — Baden Powell and Segantini (connected by a pedestrian–cycle path completed in 2024) — is located in an area historically lacking in green spaces, with a dense built fabric that in the past featured a high degree of functional mixture: dense working class and public housing buildings, industrial and manufacturing activities, widespread artisanal production, and local services. Among the most significant structures was the large complex of the Istituto Sieroterapico, a prestigious research institute for the production of serums and vaccines founded in 1896. The complex extended over a large land plot between the two canals and comprised a series of buildings (offices and laboratories) as well as stables and fields for the cultivation of forage for the animals involved in laboratory research. Over the course of the twentieth century, it developed into a centre of excellence, before going bankrupt in the 1990s. Further reinforcing the strong working-class character of the area—already marked by a substantial stock of private residential buildings for workers and lower middle classes—a large public housing estate (702 units) was built in the 30's across Via Gola, Via Pichi, and Via Orsi. This housing estate, almost entirely publicly owned (with only a portion sold off), is currently in state of physical decay and lack of maintenance and is partly subject to illegal occupation.



Figure 5 Image of the plan for Segantini. Source: *Piano di inquadramento operativo 1979-1982* (Comune di Milano, 1982).

In the 1980s a series of programs (*Piano di inquadramento operativo 1979-1982*) regulated the extensive renewal of several blocks that according to the analysis of the general city plan featured very poor housing conditions (overcrowding, no private wc, no central heating). The plan stands as one of the first programmes in which the city negotiated (through *Piani di recupero*, a negotiated planning implementation instrument) with private owners the benefits of public intervention in restructuring and renewal of the area in exchange of a ratio of dwellings and spaces for artisanal and small enterprises at moderate rent (Comune di Milano, 1982). Within the broader Plan, several areas were designated for new private housing developments, complemented by a substantial expansion of public services intended to enhance the overall provision of facilities for the growing residential population (including nurseries, a covered swimming pool near the existing open air one, and other services). As part of this public component, the western section of the former Sieroterapico compound was earmarked for conversion into a public park.

In the following decade, a key urban planning document for reconstructing the history of the area's transformation is the Detailed Plan "Parco Urbano dei Navigli", an implementation tool approved by the Milan City Council in 1991. It covers an area of historical and landscape value within the Navigli territory, with objectives related to the redevelopment, conservation, and enhancement of its historical and environmental heritage. Alongside the protection of historic structures along the canals, the plan prescribed the decommissioning and remediation of the former Istituto Sieroterapico and envisaged initial transformations aimed at recovering degraded areas, expanding green space and public accessibility through the creation of two

new parks (Baden Powell, inaugurated in 2005, and Segantini, in 2015), and enhancing the visual and landscape identity of the Navigli. The plan also established specific guidelines concerning restoration, conservation, and the introduction of compatible uses. In a densely built context, it declared among its objectives: ecological continuity, a balance between human activities and the protection of canal banks, and the integration of public, cultural, and recreational functions.

Over the years, urban regeneration in this context has been marked by a pervasive reuse of buildings and structures whose functions gradually shifted from industrial and artisanal activities toward residential uses and the creative and design-oriented tertiary sector. From the early 2000s, the area underwent significant change driven by new functions in the creative–cultural and educational sectors. Following the decline of manufacturing activities located along the Navigli, new uses emerged, particularly those linked to the so-called creative and innovative tertiary sector, associated with design and fashion, including niche clusters of artistic and artisanal production.

Within the urban context, the largest new development intervention concerns the former Istituto Sieroterapico area. In 2000, the complex was acquired by Brioschi Finanziaria, a company belonging to the Cabassi group (an established local family-owned real estate development company). The site was renovated and converted into office spaces and facilities for creative activities, as well as the new campus of the Nuova Accademia di Belle Arti (NABA), a higher education institution in design and fashion. The larger portion of the complex, located east of Via Segantini, experienced a more protracted development process and various project setbacks. Ultimately, following broad civic mobilization and an interesting co-design process, the site was transformed to include private residential buildings and the creation of Parco Segantini. Initially named “Parco del Sieroterapico,” the park was supposed to be built concurrently with the real estate development but remained incomplete for years and was only inaugurated in 2015.

Other residential redevelopment interventions in the area were carried out under the Magolfa redevelopment plan promoted by the City of Milan. These concerned former industrial buildings converted into residential units, artisanal spaces, and an underground parking facility. The project, known as Opificio di via Magolfa, restored historic structures, removed incongruous additions, and preserved the residential–artisanal character of the area. Works were completed between 2012 and 2017. The area was part of the 1991 Detailed Plan “Parco Urbano dei Navigli,” and the intervention comprised the redevelopment of small buildings and warehouses with roughly 1,300 m² allocated to a functional mix, including 21 public housing units (ERP). More recently, three additional housing projects have been promoted by housing cooperatives associated to the CCL consortium: overlooking Baden Powell Park (85 units, completed in 2021), towards Segantini Park (55 units, completed in 2022), and to the east, Via Pichi (30 units, completed in 2023). CCL constitutes a pillar of the governance framework. Through the 3 projects, the cooperative introduced approximately 170 new households into the area, mainly in below-cost owner-occupation, and sought to create connections with the surrounding neighborhood. In via Pichi, a privately owned but publicly accessible square was realized and is maintained by the condominium under a public use agreement.

In a formal presentation of the “Navigli urban commerce district”, the City of Milano labels the area as the “Mesopotamia Milanese,” a term coined in 2008 by an association founded that

year by businesses located between the Naviglio Grande and Naviglio Pavese. The association aimed to promote and influence the process of urban regeneration in the area enclosed by the two canals (Morandi, Rabbiosi, 2012). In 2008, the Lombardy Region had introduced the Urban Commerce Districts, a tool assigning urban revitalization to initiatives based on commercial reorganization achieved through cooperative networking among public and private actors (Morandi, Rabbiosi, 2008). Throughout 2007, the proponents of Mesopotamia Milanese organized numerous events to present the project and rally potential members. Their vision embodied an approach to bottom-up urban regeneration, a process through which, alongside the retreat of productive activities, a wide variety of individual and collective actors—representing institutional interests or simply civil society—came together to interact and pool resources.

Baden Powell Park is located on the right bank of the Naviglio Grande, between Ripa di Porta Ticinese and Via Argelati, and covers approximately 35,000 m². Until the early 2000s, the area was occupied by sheds, warehouses, informal activities, and widespread degradation in a neighbourhood lacking structured green spaces. The park was gradually reclaimed from informal and semi-private uses—such as a nursery—and from various additions that limited its full public accessibility. Development began in 2000 and was completed in 2005. Compared to Segantini Park, its design followed a more conventional and linear process, with typical landscape-architectural features: undulating terrain, winding pedestrian paths, a large, stepped connection to adjacent residences, a pergola structure, playground areas, and bocce courts. In the following years, however, the site suffered episodes of degradation and vandalism. In 2018, a group of residents and employees from the nearby “Samsung District” promoted cleanup initiatives, requalification efforts, and new plantings (including a bamboo grove), contributing to the enhancement of the park and supporting the vision of an ecological connection with Segantini Park, completed in 2024.

In the case of Segantini, the green area emerged from the intense activity of a citizen committee that advocated for preserving as public green space a large portion of the former Istituto Sieroterapico grounds, decommissioned in 1993 and later acquired by a private developer for a residential project that underwent multiple negotiations and revisions. The result is a green area of roughly 100,000 m² whose history dates to the 1980s and 1990s. During that time, a vigorous debate and strong confrontation arose between residents and the developer who had been granted permission by the municipality to build on the extensive open space previously used for forage cultivation supporting animals laboratory. The project was eventually halted, leaving the site in a state of degradation but also opening the possibility for its redefinition in favour of greater public interest.

The integrated urban plan (PII) approved in 2002 by the municipal administration envisaged the redevelopment of the area through the construction of an urban park of approximately 100,000 m², designed by landscape architect Michel Desvigne, together with predominantly residential developments. After many years and once the major construction and remediation works were completed around 2010, the municipality initiated the implementation of the park layout. The project was approved in 2013, following prolonged administrative procedures. It included: a large central lawn (“Radura”), a protected naturalistic area along the Roggia Boniforti, a wooded zone to the west, and a network of pedestrian–cycle paths. In the meantime, residents had mobilized to demand acceleration of the park’s realization, and the involvement of Italia Nostra – a nation-wide civic association focused on environment and

heritage protection – in redefining the project proved essential both as a mediator between citizen demands and the municipal technical-administrative structure, and in ensuring the quality of the process and its outcomes. The Segantini Committee was founded, later becoming the Associazione Parco Segantini ONLUS (ngo) in 2013. The association proposed a realistic project compatible with the limited public resources available and initiated a co-design process with the municipality, in which citizens played an active role in the care and transformation of the area and in the direct implementation and management of specific sections—such as the naturalistic area and edible gardens—supported, as required by the municipality, by expert stakeholders. **Today, the park stands as the green heart of a complex area, bordered by residences, productive activities, and educational institutions. Its location within a district strongly geared toward leisure and entertainment (Navigli, the renovated Darsena) enhances its role as a public asset of great value.**

The development of the Baden Powell–Segantini system of public parks is particularly interesting for our research also because the slow timelines and incremental implementation paradoxically fostered extensive civic engagement and a co-design process involving multiple actors in collaboration with the municipal administration. In both cases, though with different characteristics, the parks emerged within a densely built context by defending and enhancing open spaces preserved from construction yet strongly shaped by the surrounding environment.

Table 1. Key data on two case study areas in Milano (see Appendices 1 and 3).

	Isola - Porta Nuova	– Baden Powell – Segantini / Navigli
Neighborhood characteristics (general social type, economic activities, density etc)	<p>Dense built fabric, low-mid-rise housing (before 1960s), some public housing (around 1970s), mid-high rise buildings from the 2010s on.</p> <p>Medium degree of functional mixture: formerly, railway yards and medium-big industries and working-class housing; now, middle-class housing, manufacturing activities and artisanal production, creative industry.</p> <p>Dense population, around 22.000 inhabitants in the entire district of Isola.</p>	<p>Dense built fabric, low-mid-rise housing (before 1920s), public housing (1930-40s), mid-high rise buildings from the 1950s-1970s, coop housing.</p> <p>Medium degree of functional mixture: working class housing, manufacturing activities/artisanal production, creative industry, Art Academy.</p> <p>Sparse population preceding redevelopment: 1,137 in 2015, 2,800 in 2025; projected at 6,000 in 2027, 28,000 in mid-2030s.</p> <p>2015 population density: 3,100 per km² Projected density: 37,000 per km²</p>

	<p>Socio-economically transformed. Working class neighbourhood until the 1960s, then underwent a process of gentrification, now mixed income.</p> <p>Well-connected and central district, renown for leisure and night life and now full of corporate and office buildings</p>	<p>Socio-economically vulnerable area, residents more likely to have been born in Spain than city average. Low income and high unemployment rates.</p> <p>Well-connected and central district, renown for leisure and night life in the northern part</p>
Duration	<p>Strategy: ideas for a new business district there already in the 1953 urban plan, then various changes (e.g. „fashion city“) until early 2000s confirmation Implementation: from around 2008 to present. First completion around 2015, in advanced state (only some buildings remain under construction)</p>	<p>Strategy: 1991 General integrated plan and 2002 park project, Implementation: from 2008, opened in 2015 (still in completion)</p>
Institutional funding (counting right-of-use of public land, see glossary in Appendix 1)	City of Milano, Railway company, Lombardy Region (for the regional administration tower)	City of Milano
Actor constellation (in addition to “Institutional funding”)	<p>Hines Italia, then Coima (from 2015) International investors (the fund is 100% owned by the Qatar Investment Authority) Other minor landowners and developers Catella foundation for the park management Various civic groups</p>	<p>Associazione Parco Segantini Italia Nostra - Boscoincittà Comitato Navigli Brioschi – Cabassi group (developers) CCL (housing cooperative consortium) NABA (Art Academy)</p>
Aims and objectives	Redevelopment of a series of underutilized plots (mainly publicly owned) in a very central position. Realization of a new	Reuse of the abandoned premises of a research institute, recompositing of fragmented green areas, development of new private

	business district foreseen by urban plans since decades	and coop housing, reclaiming of a large park through extensive citizen engagement
Specific physical measures	Realization of a park/garden overpassing an urban highway	Decommissioning and remediation of a former Research Institute compound, recovering degraded areas, expanding green space and public accessibility through the creation of two new parks
Accompanying housing policy/regulatory measures (see Glossary in Appendix 1)	No, mainly luxury and market housing built by private developers	Cooperative and private actors building interspersed subsidized, and market-rate housing for sale.
Key social tensions or/and benefits between greening and housing	Relevant densification (mainly corporate offices, but also commercial and market housing) with positive and negative impacts on the neighbouring district of Isola	The development process of the main park and the maintainance of the green areas play a key role in reactivating social ties and intensive mixed use by different social groups

2 Methods

This case study draws on qualitative research conducted between Summer 2025 and the beginning of 2026 combining 19 semi-structured interviews, documentary analysis and participatory observation through on-site visits.

The methodological approach was designed to capture civic and institutional perceptions of green transition initiatives and their relationship to housing inequalities in Milan, with particular attention to governance processes and neighborhood-scale impacts.

The 19 interviews involved 21 respondents (one interview involved three interviewees). The interviewee sample included representatives from the public sector (public employees from the city administration, both in operational and political functions), members of civic associations and NGOs involved in environmental and/or social issues, activists from different associations, representatives from the private and real-estate sector and academic experts. All interviews were carried out in Italian. A more detailed account on the interview sample with anonymized profiles is provided in Appendix 2.

All interviews were audio recorded with participants' consent and transcribed using TurboScribe. The transcripts were coded deductively in MAXQDA based on a shared codebook developed within the research team. Where necessary, additional codes specific to the Milan context and to the two case studies were added inductively. The coding focused on recurring themes related to housing access and affordability, perceptions of green transition initiatives, participation and governance processes, distribution of benefits and burdens, and

neighborhood identity and recognition. The final code system, including coding frequencies, is provided in Appendix 3.

Following coding, transcripts and coded excerpts were anonymized to ensure participants' privacy. The research team then conducted an in-depth reading of the material to identify key themes and establish a shared analytical framing. Through collective discussion, recurring patterns and preliminary interpretations were refined.

An LLM tool was subsequently used as a complementary analytical support. The anonymized coding results were compiled into a Microsoft Word file containing all relevant quotes alongside their codes, with interviewees identified only by alphanumeric labels such as M1, M2, and M3. The table linking these labels to identities was stored securely and separately.

For each of the nine main codes, a team member reviewed the associated excerpts and summarized the main findings emerging from the interviews. A structured prompt was then developed, asking the LLM tool to draft a summary of interviewees' perspectives based exclusively on the anonymized empirical material. The tool was instructed to introduce new thematic insights only if supported by at least two distinct quotes.

The LLM output was carefully reviewed, edited, and expanded by the research team. All statements not clearly grounded in the empirical material were removed. In this way, the LLM functioned as an additional analytical agent that supported but did not replace the researchers' interpretative work.

Background research undertaken ahead of the interviews involved various sources, including academic publications, grey literature, legal and policy documents including, but not limited to, planning documents released by the municipality in recent years.

In addition, on April 11 2025 we conducted a policy lab where we invited representatives of key local actors of different types (see dedicated report) and collected suggestions about additional interviewees. Furthermore, fieldwork was conducted, including visits to sites of interest and photo documentation.

Limitations in the methodology include some lacks in the interviewees' sample, mainly:

- Public actors are less represented than civic actors (only 2 out of 19 interviews pertain to public actor representatives). Despite several attempts to arrange an interview, there was no availability from representatives of the City of Milano Department of Green and Environment;
- Some interviewees simultaneously held multiple roles during the processes examined, at times in a somewhat blurred way. For this reason, for the sake of clarity, we sought to ask for and highlight the main role they played in relation to the specific case study;
- Perceptions of members from more marginalized communities, such as social housing residents, have been collected only indirectly and may worth some extra and deeper analysis.

3 Stakeholder perspective on Green Initiatives in Case Study Areas: Isola - Porta Nuova

3.1 Precedents and Implementation

Interviewees consistently frame Isola as a historically working-class neighborhood, inhabited since the late nineteenth century by industrial workers and later shaped by strong internal migration flows from Southern Italy during the 1950s and 1960s (M9, 57-62). This socio-demographic background is described as foundational to the neighborhood's identity and to its collective memory. The physical separation of Isola from the rest of the city, due to the presence of a large urban void, reinforced this distinctiveness and contributed to the emergence of a particularly strong local identity (M7, 22-23).

“And the Isola neighborhood used to have characteristics that were very different from those it has today. It was a neighborhood that had always coexisted with the issue of urban void. The Porta Nuova project represented precisely a boundary of the neighborhood and a major rupture toward the city center. It was the typical large urban void in the middle of the city, which had long contributed to a certain isolation of Isola from the center. In fact, the so-called ‘cavalcavia Bussa,’ which historically crossed not only the railway but also this void, functioned as a sort of gateway from the center into the neighborhood.” Scholar and former Stecca degli Artigiani Activist (M4, 12)

At the beginning of the 2000s, the neighborhood is remembered as a dense ecosystem of self-organized spaces, political initiatives, and cultural activities. Several interviewees recall the presence of historical self-organized spaces dating back to the 1970s, as well as artists' studios and artisan workshops that were active in the area (M7, 9-12). The artistic community, which extended toward Corso Como, is described as having increased the attractiveness of the vacant areas, paradoxically enhancing the appeal of spaces that were otherwise perceived as marginal (M19, 17-25).

At the same time, accounts of the early 2000s highlight the coexistence of this vibrant socio-cultural fabric with narratives of insecurity. Some interviewees report on the presence of drug dealing and micro-criminality in the area (M19, 17-25). According to several accounts, the regeneration agenda was justified in part by portraying the neighborhood as unsafe and in need of “reclamation”. This framing played a significant role in legitimizing large-scale transformation projects.

The large urban void separating Isola from other parts of Milan became the focal point of multiple regeneration proposals from the early 2000s onward. The area's fragmented property structure made coordinated intervention difficult, contributing to uncertainty about the future of the Garibaldi–Repubblica area. Interviewees report that, over time, the municipality progressively transferred development rights for parts of the area to investment funds (M1, 9-10). Among these, Hines emerged as the primary interlocutor in the regeneration process. Several respondents recall participating in informational meetings organized by the municipality and the investment fund. Hines Italia, together with its CEO and the architect of the Bosco Verticale, are repeatedly identified as the key actors who took control of the

regeneration of the area and of the BAM Biblioteca degli Alberi Park. The BAM project was initially conceived with the expectation that, after land remediation, it would be managed by the municipality (M3, 23-25). Ultimately, however, it became the first example of a public park in Milan managed by a private actor.

Isola hosted many factories, including the former Brown Boveri (TIBB) steel factory, abandoned, acquired by the municipality and spontaneously transformed into a central socio-cultural hub in the early 2000s, including part of a public garden. Known as the “Stecca degli Artigiani,” (artisans’ slab) it hosted artisan workshops rented from the municipality, reflecting and renewing the neighborhood’s artisan tradition. From 2001 onward, a group of architect-activists organized in this space the event “La strada rovescia la Città,” presenting proposals for an inclusive regeneration of the neighborhood. Within three years, 14 to 15 groups were active there, and the space became increasingly self-organized. Activities ranged from artistic production to bicycle repair and organic markets.

Because it was a building owned by the municipality. The municipality had rented out spaces to artisans: there was someone who repaired shutters, a blacksmith, people who were truly craftspeople, and there was also an office of the old Communist Refoundation party. They all had regular rental contracts. But as you can see, it was an enormous space. It was a former Brown Boveri factory, with very large rooms spread over two or maybe three floors. The ground floor was mainly used by the artisans, while the upper floors remained empty. Gradually, those empty spaces were occupied by all kinds of cultural activities. There were initiatives teaching Italian to migrants and activities run by various cultural associations.” Activist and Association Representative (M9, 66–67)

Forum Isola, an activist group founded by parents from a nearby elementary school, also played a significant role. Aware of impending transformations, they mobilized to defend green areas and historical spaces in the neighborhood and organized exhibitions and public initiatives (M3, 25-32; M9, 66). Forum Isola opposed several regeneration proposals, through legal appeals to the administrative court. The Stecca also hosted an information point aimed at keeping residents informed about ongoing changes.

From 2005 onward, major regeneration actors communicated to the groups active in the Stecca their intention to demolish the former factory to make space for the Bosco Verticale and other components of the project. This announcement generated internal divisions among the activists, who were split in their positions toward the regeneration plans. Meanwhile, the public perception of problems related to drug dealing and criminality in the broader area intensified. In 2007, following an attempted occupation by activists, the former factory was cleared and later demolished. Interviewees identify this moment as a decisive turning point in the history of Isola’s regeneration.

“Therefore, in my view, the decisive moment here comes even before the opening of the park in 2014; it is 2007, the moment when Volturmo 33 [The historical base from the Communist party, which then was occupied by activists and has now been regenerated in a residential building] was cleared out and the Stecca was demolished. That is the point. The point of no return is 2007. It is also the year in which Pergola [another historical self-organized space] was lost, so it is the year when everything happened, in my opinion. Even if many other things occurred later, they happened subsequently.” Activist and District Resident (M7, 59–62)

“We all rushed there at six to watch them smashing everything. The night before, we had held a vernissage, we had organized an exhibition inside the Stecca degli Artigiani, with artworks including pieces by Pistoletto. So we had a fully installed exhibition, inaugurated just the day before. That was the moment when the bulldozers came in and started tearing everything down, ripping it open and destroying everything, including the art exhibition we had organized, with Pistoletto’s work, who was the most renowned among them. We documented everything: we filmed, we recorded, but it was useless. The Stecca was sealed off completely, no one could enter anymore, and the whole area of the small gardens remained a construction site for years. Forum Isola then found itself in the neighborhood without a space, without a place anymore. The museum was gone. There had been a neon sign above it reading ‘New Museum’; what we had created there was truly impressive.” Activist and Association Representative (M9, 99–104)

Subsequent developments demonstrate both conflict and negotiation. A group of architects engaged with institutions and private regeneration actors to negotiate the creation of a new space for their activities, which remains active today as a multifunctional space in the neighborhood (Stecca 3). Other Forum Isola activists searched for an alternative location and identified an abandoned municipal warehouse in Via Pepe. They proposed the creation of a self-organized garden, a project later approved by the municipality. This initiative, known as **Isola Pepe Verde**, remains active today as a biodynamic self-organized garden in the neighborhood. Both initiatives had to wait until 2013, with the arrival of the center-left municipal administration under Giuliano Pisapia, for their proposals to be formally approved and for relocation to take place (M9, 119-123).

Overall, stakeholder accounts reveal a regeneration trajectory characterized by strong tensions between grassroots initiatives and municipality-backed large private actors, evolving forms of negotiation, and shifting governance arrangements. Precedents of activism, self-organization, and local identity played a crucial role in shaping responses to implementation processes. At the same time, the consolidation of private-led regeneration, exemplified by the management model of BAM and the demolition of the Stecca, marked a structural transformation in the governance of urban space in Isola.

3.2 Participation and governance (procedural)

The institutional governance structure of the Isola district regeneration which is highlighted in the interviews is the one of a public-private partnership between the Municipality of Milan and the global real estate actors involved in the redevelopment of the area. Indeed, three key stakeholder groups are emerging from the interviews.

First, the main private stakeholder is the real estate company Coima Sgr, formerly Hines Italia, which managed the regeneration through three separate real estate investment funds corresponding to the areas Porta Nuova-Garibaldi, Varesine and Isola (M1, 4-6). These funds were established due to distinct ownership structures and administrative procedures. Over time, the sovereign wealth fund of Qatar progressively acquired the investment vehicles and

today represents the sole owner of the Porta Nuova-Garibaldi area and its assets (M1, 22). Coima acted as an asset manager and operational coordinator of the overall redevelopment.

Second, the key public actor was the Municipality of Milan, in particular the city directorate for Urban Planning, which oversaw planning instruments, negotiated agreements and formalized public-private arrangements.

Third, a broad constellation of civil society actors from the neighborhood played a significant role in the regeneration process and is still actively shaping the district's life through socio-political activities. From the interviews, several key groups emerge, including the association of architects Cantiere Isola active in the Stecca between 2003 and 2007 on themes of participative urban planning (M4, 24; M3, 35), the neighborhood association Forum Isola formed by merging multiple groups including the parents' committee Associazione Genitori Confalonieri and artistic collectives such as Out and Isola Art Center (M9, 29; M9, 32-34; M10, 5-6), the occupied and self-organized space Piano Terra (M7, 6-8), and the community garden Isola Pepe Verde (M9, 149-152). A more detailed outlook of the power dynamics between these stakeholders is given in section 4.7.

As far as participatory processes are concerned, most interviewees outline that consultation processes have been formally present in the first years of the Porta Nuova regeneration development but substantially limited in allowing civic actors to influence decision-making over the regeneration plan. A great number of "Participation tables" is reported to have been organized by the Urban Planning department of the municipality in partnership with the real estate company and its architects. These arenas are described as performative spaces in which citizen involvement was emphasised rhetorically, while perceived alignments between public authorities and project proponents undermined trust in the neutrality of the process (M9, 74-76).

"So, they would have us sit around a table like this, the Urban Planning Manager would show up [...] and we citizens would come too [...]. One time the Urban Planning Manager invited us, and the CEO of the real estate company was there as well. Before starting the presentations, he opened by saying: 'Good morning, let me introduce to you, the citizens, my friend, the CEO of the real estate company.' I mean, are you the friend of the CEO, or are you the friend of the citizens? Because at that moment, you're supposed to be representing me - you're there to defend me. Instead, he introduces himself as the CEO's friend. At that point we already felt like getting up and leaving that so-called participation table. There was absolutely nothing participatory about it." Activist and Association Representative (M9, 74-76)

As a result, some stakeholders gradually disengaged from official participatory forums, questioning their capacity to produce meaningful influence. Publicly promoted narratives of extensive consultation are described as misleading, especially where fundamental conflicts of interest remain unresolved:

"But the real-estate development firm's C.E.O was the one, the first - at least in this city - to say, before even arriving, before laying a single brick: I'll hold 300 meetings, I'll prove my ability to listen. This turned out to be a big sham, in the sense that not all interests are compatible. I mean, if I live here on the first floor, whether you build the skyscraper 22 or 25 stories high,

whether you price it at 18 or 30 thousand euros per square meter, I still won't see the sun anymore.” Activist and District Resident (M7, 18)

Members of la Stecca report to have been in contact with the real-estate company regarding its plans to demolish the ex-Brown Boveri factory and to have tried to negotiate solutions that maintain the old factory building and its green area, without success. One respondent recounts discussions regarding the potential demolition of the Stecca as a particularly difficult phase, highlighting the concentration of decision-making power in a small circle of actors (M4, 52). This perception frames participation as reactive rather than co-decisional.

In contrast, interviewees belonging to the world of associations and civil society attribute greater legitimacy to self-organised governance practices. Isola Pepe Verde, the self-organized garden born after the demolition of La Stecca, operates through open assemblies accessible to all participants, structured around consensus-building rather than majority voting. This approach is presented as inclusive and oriented toward maintaining cohesion, even though it requires extended deliberation and time investment (M9, 167-169). The maintenance of flexible, non-prescriptive spaces is also framed as a participatory principle, enabling adaptive and user-driven appropriation rather than predefined uses (M7, 114).

Overall, in the context of the Porta Nuova Regeneration, interviewed stakeholders perceive participation within urban governance as characterized by limited decision-making transfer, contested legitimacy and significant asymmetries of influence, while attributing stronger deliberative qualities to autonomous, community-based governance practices

3.3 (In)equity (distributional)

Interviewees consistently frame the regeneration of the Porta Nuova-Garibaldi area as a process characterized by uneven distribution of benefits and burdens. Perceived inequities relate to access to housing, the social selectivity of new public spaces, rising living costs, and differentiated impacts on vulnerable groups.

A central theme concerns the residential offer of the regenerated district. Respondents underline that the new residential towers were conceived and marketed as luxury products, with no quotas for social housing in key parts of the development (M1, 14). This absence of housing mix is described as a “total failure” from the perspective of those who had advocated for more inclusive outcomes (M3, 93-95). While some compensatory socio-cultural spaces were eventually delivered, the residential dimension remained almost exclusively market-oriented (M3, 93-95).

The resulting housing prices are perceived as structurally exclusionary. One respondent observes that apartments in the area were sold at prices starting at 9,000 euros per square meter and up to 25,000–30,000 euros, generating a service ecosystem calibrated to affluent residents and progressively filtering out lower-income groups (M7, 121). Another notes that, even when searching across the entire city, the regenerated area was already “completely out of scale” in terms of affordability (M5, 54-55).

The cumulative effect is described as a broader process of expulsion. Rising rents are said to have prevented previous residents from remaining in Isola (M5, 54-55), while the neighborhood

increasingly attracts affluent families drawn by new amenities and schools (M19, 48-49). This transformation is not perceived as neutral. As one interviewee remarks, the project “hit everyone,” but especially “the weaker groups because of the general increase in prices,” while also simplifying the cultural and commercial offer of the district (M7, 71).

The Biblioteca degli Alberi Park is at one central point of distributional critiques. Although formally public, it is widely perceived as embedded within a logic of private valorization. One interviewee states that the park functions as “the condominium garden of the real estate operations built around it,” financed through urbanization charges but primarily enhancing surrounding property values (M5, 54-55). The design itself is described as oriented towards representation rather than everyday use. One interviewee living in the district emphasizes that the park appears to have been conceived to be viewed from above, from the surrounding towers:

“That park was designed to be seen from above from the skyscrapers. To appreciate the project, it has to be viewed from above, obviously only by the private residents who can do so. This already makes it evident that the park was not designed with the public who would cross it in mind, but rather its visual representation for those who paid a lot of money.” Isola District Resident and Journalist (M19, 39-40)

This perception reinforces the idea that the space, while open, is symbolically aligned with affluent residents.

Moreover, the park’s governance model, based on private management under contract, is associated with an event-driven programming that partially subtracts space from everyday users (M7, 68; M19, 42). Events, installations and sponsored activities are described as occupying significant portions of the already limited green area, effectively reducing accessible space for residents (M19, 42).

Distributional concerns also relate to who can effectively use the park. While the area has become attractive to families with children (M19, 48-49), several interviewees underline the lack of basic facilities. As one respondent states:

“A child who needs to go to the bathroom doesn’t know where to go. Three weeks ago, an elderly woman was under the sun asking where she could find a toilet. The only solution was to buy a 3-euro coffee in a bar... And then, what are we talking about?” President of Citizens’ Committee (M10, 40)

The absence of public toilets and shaded areas is perceived as disadvantaging both children and elderly users (M10, 35; M10, 40). Although the park is frequently associated with families, its design and services are considered insufficiently inclusive for other groups, including teenagers and low-income residents.

Interviewees further note that designing spaces “for children” does not automatically translate into broader inclusivity. On the contrary, the emphasis on safety and decorum associated with affluent families is perceived as contributing to the expulsion of other fragile or marginal groups (M19, 54). In this sense, child-oriented design can inadvertently reinforce exclusionary dynamics.

The regeneration has also been accompanied by the generation of a vibrant nightlife in Isola, described as centered on high-consumption social groups (M19, 74). This nightlife affects residents through noise, overcrowding and tensions over public space use. Simultaneously, intensified use is said to degrade the green areas: lawns deteriorate; trees suffer, and cars encroach upon planted areas and open spaces (M19, 74).

Commercialization is perceived as another distributional mechanism. High-end residential development is described as producing an induced service landscape catering primarily to affluent consumers, with spillover effects on the wider neighborhood (M7, 121). Smaller retailers are perceived as struggling, mainly due to high rents, while standardized leisure-oriented retail formats – primarily bars and restaurants – expand (M7, 121).

Finally, several interviewees frame the transformation as an externally imposed rupture. The regeneration is described as a “project from above” that introduced “a million cubic meters of cement” into a historically working-class area (M9, 108-111). The cancellation of the former Bosco di Gioia, originally donated to remain a public forest, is cited as emblematic of broken promises regarding public green space (M7, 29-31).

3.4 Political mobilization

Interviewees describe the Isola district as characterized by sustained and high levels of political mobilization, both during the years of major regeneration and in more recent phases of transformation. Mobilization is framed as a constitutive feature of the neighborhood’s civic identity, emerging in response to perceived threats to green areas, public space, and the social fabric of a historically popular district.

During the regeneration years, political mobilization combined legal action, public campaigning, assemblies, and cultural initiatives. A key role is attributed to civic formations such as the *Comitato dei Mille*, which rapidly organized petitions and legal appeals when large-scale redevelopment proposals became public (M9, 30; M9, 32-34). As one interviewee explains:

“There is this Committee of the Thousand - why ‘of the Thousand’? Because they immediately collected a thousand signatures to strengthen themselves, to organize eight appeals to the Administrative Court, to create friction - I don’t call it struggle, I call it friction - against the project that was about to arrive from Hines America.” Activist and Association Representative (M9, 32-34)

Legal mobilization is remembered as financially demanding and logistically complex, yet also effective. Interviewees recount that multiple appeals to the administrative court contributed to preventing the realization of a fast-flow traffic artery that would have physically split the neighborhood (M9, 71). In this sense, recourse to institutional channels is presented as a central strategy of neighborhood advocacy.

Political mobilization also took more direct forms. At a critical juncture in the negotiations over land swaps and redevelopment plans, activists decided to occupy the Stecca degli Artigiani (M9, 77). This occupation is described as a symbolic and practical act aimed at asserting collective presence and contesting decisions perceived as imposed. The Stecca became a

nodal point of mobilization, hosting assemblies and serving as a platform for coordination among different associations.

Mobilization was not limited to reactive protests. It also involved structured practices of advocacy planning and counter-expertise. Interviewees recall how small groups of young professionals and residents studied masterplans in detail, drafted formal observations and created information points to translate technical planning documents into accessible language (M3, 20-22). As described in one account, the approach was to activate “different tools” simultaneously: traditional planning observations, public information campaigns and the development of alternative visions grounded in local knowledge (M3, 20-22). This process included mapping associations, engaging experts and non-experts, organizing public events to widen participation, and even drafting an alternative regeneration plan.

Communication and awareness-raising were central components of mobilization. Forum Isola organized assemblies, cineforums and conferences to inform residents about the transformations underway and their implications (M9, 63-64). The objective was to extend political consciousness across the neighborhood and to articulate a collective response to redevelopment proposals perceived as potentially disruptive for a working-class district adjacent to more affluent areas.

Over time, some mobilization practices evolved into stable forms of collective organization. The experience of Isola Pepe Verde illustrates how political mobilization transitioned into ongoing community governance. The garden is described as hosting open assemblies every two weeks, structured around consensus-based decision-making rather than majority voting (M9, 167-169). This organizational model is portrayed as demanding in terms of time and commitment, yet inclusive and cohesion oriented.

Interviewees also reflect the broader impacts of political mobilization on urban outcomes. Although one petition addressed to the municipality reportedly received a negative response and no institutional backing (M6, 15-17), civic action is nevertheless perceived as capable of influencing the trajectory of transformation. According to one perspective, the built environment today reflects the cumulative effects of conflict and negotiation. As one interviewee notes:

“The space that surrounds you does not resemble what it would have been if all these processes and conflicts had not taken place. It’s one thing to say they wanted to build a skyscraper and they built a skyscraper. But it could have been profoundly different.” Activist and District Resident (M7, 132-133)

From this viewpoint, even when mobilization does not fully prevent redevelopment, it shapes its form, timing, and conditions.

At the same time, some initiatives are interpreted as strategic concessions aimed at fragmenting collective resistance. The allocation of alternative spaces to selected groups is described by some as having “broken the front” of protest (M19, 56). This perception underscores that political mobilization unfolded within a dynamic field of negotiation, in which civic pressure, institutional responses, and private interests interacted.

Overall, stakeholder perceptions depict Isola as a district where political mobilization has been intense, diversified, and persistent. It has combined legal recourse, occupation, advocacy

planning, cultural programming, and consensus-based self-organization. While outcomes are assessed as uneven, mobilization is widely regarded as having left a tangible imprint on the regeneration process and on the present configuration of the neighborhood.

3.5 Socio-ecological impacts/benefits (positive)

Several positive socio-ecological impacts are associated by interviewees with the regeneration of the district, particularly in relation to improved walkability, enhanced accessibility, and the transformation of a former urban void into a large open garden. These impacts are described both in terms of spatial connectivity and in terms of social use and environmental quality.

A recurrent theme concerns the reconnection of the Isola district with the surrounding urban fabric. Historically perceived as physically separated, the area is described as having been reintegrated through new pedestrian infrastructures and spatial continuity. One interviewee emphasizes that the pedestrianization of the area above major traffic arteries represents a substantial qualitative shift:

“When you are on Gae Aulenti you are above one of the main east-west roads of Milan, where 6-7,000 cars pass per day, in total silence, in full pedestrian safety and with maximum security. There is a north-south connection from Corso Como to Isola in total safety and in a very soft way” Private Sector Representative (M1, 10).

The success of this intervention is framed as almost invisible in everyday perception, which is interpreted as a sign of its effective integration into daily life. Improved access is also described at a broader urban scale. The creation of a main entrance through the park is perceived as having reoriented flows from Corso Como toward Isola, contributing to a seamless connection between previously separated areas. As one interviewee explains, the project created “a main access, a gateway to the neighborhood,” connecting Isola’s urban fabric without interruptions and increasing its accessibility for residents and visitors alike (M1, 27-28). This reconnection is associated not only with physical permeability but also with an enlarged user base for local commerce and services.

The filling of what had long been an underused or infrastructural void with a garden surrounded by commercial spaces is acknowledged by part of interviewees as a qualitative upgrade. The new green space is described as offering facilities for families, children, and cultural activities. According to one account, families can now “bring their children to BAM to play, go to a concert in BAM, or walk to the supermarket,” indicating the emergence of a mixed-use, walkable environment where daily needs and leisure activities coexist (M1, 27-28). The garden is thus perceived as contributing to both environmental enhancement and everyday convenience.

Interviewees also highlight the garden’s programming and capacity to attract diverse publics. Cultural events, workshops, and large-scale installations are described as well attended and positively received. One respondent recalls events for children and families as “beautiful for the city and very well attended,” underlining both their popularity and their symbolic value as urban amenities (M2, 71-73). These activities are framed as contributing to social vitality and to a renewed image of the area. At the same time, the garden is now considered “self-sufficient” in terms of funding, as revenues from event started to fully cover the cost last year, saving money of the municipality (M1).

Environmental improvements are further mentioned in relation to vegetation and seasonal landscapes. Flowering meadows and reduced mowing practices are described as having altered the visual perception of the district. One interviewee remarks that in spring “*with those millions of square meters of flowering lawns, your heart opens,*” emphasizing the affective and perceptual dimension of the intervention (M2, 76-77).

Positive social impacts of green areas are also widely associated with the self-organized garden Isola Pepe Verde, which serves the neighborhood community as an area to gather, organize social events including birthdays, weddings and even funerals, and socialize, especially for elderly people and kids (M9, 149-152; M19, 55).

3.6 Socio-ecological impacts/harms (negative)

The regeneration of Porta Nuova is widely associated with processes of gentrification and pricing out. These dynamics are described as unevenly distributed, generating advantages for some groups while producing displacement and restructuring for others.

A first dimension concerns the appreciation of real estate values. The regeneration works are described by a private actor representative as having acted as a lever for further investments, enabling both major developers and third parties to reposition assets at significantly higher rental levels (M1,29). Rising property values are portrayed as beneficial primarily for owners and developers by most interviewees. The subdivision of larger flats into smaller units for resale or rent is mentioned as a typical effect of value increase. Conversely, tenants in private rental housing are described as particularly vulnerable. According to one account, “those who had private rental contracts were pushed out” (M19,27-29), indicating direct displacement linked to rent escalation.

Gentrification is reported as being felt most acutely at ground-floor level, where commercial activities are located. Interviewees distinguish clearly between those who owned their premises and those who rented. Property owners are described as having dramatically increased rents, in some cases attempting to multiply them rather than adjust them incrementally (M19,33-34). This dynamic is associated with the closure of historical artisans and neighborhood services. The disappearance of traditional crafts is described in stark terms:

“Of the artisans of Isola, apart from two goldsmiths, basically there is nothing left. Maybe one framemaker. That thing has disappeared. It remains written only in the Lonely Planet [travel guide, note by the authors], it doesn’t exist anymore.” Activist and District Resident (M7,65-65)

Similarly, the closure of a neighborhood bookstore, very active and central in the community, following a proposed tripling of rent is presented as emblematic of the new economic conditions (M7,66-67; M9,206-208). One account recalls that the bookstore, which had become a cultural reference point for the neighborhood, was asked to move from paying 2,000 euros per month to 6,000 euros, making continuation impossible (M9,206-208). Interviewees underline that such activities operate with fixed-price goods and limited margins, making them structurally unable to absorb sharp rent increases (M7,66-67). In parallel, a proliferation of bars and restaurants is described, contributing to a transformation of the commercial landscape and to what is framed as a simplification of the local economic ecosystem (M7,65-65; M9,209-211).

At the same time, not all ground-floor actors are portrayed as passive victims. Some second-generation entrepreneurs who had acquired their premises are described as resisting speculative offers, framing their presence as a form of self-organized containment of gentrification (M3,74-75). Nevertheless, this containment is depicted as fragile and dependent on ownership rather than public regulation (M3,75-75).

A further dimension relates to the interaction between environmental upgrading and real estate valorization. Some accounts explicitly connect the creation of the garden and of iconic green architecture to surrounding price increases. One interviewee recalls a statement made by an architect during the early phases of the project, which clarified the underlying logic:

“He told me that the cool thing about building the Bosco Verticale will be that when the park will be there, they will be the most beautiful houses in Milan.” District Resident and Journalist (M19,38-38)

In the interviewee’s narration, this sentence is presented as revealing the basic principle of that development model: public space and green amenities are not produced as independent collective goods, but as elements that enhance the value of adjacent private real estate (M19,38-38). In this perspective, green areas are interpreted as assets embedded within a real estate development strategy. Another account reinforces this view, suggesting that the garden functions less as a service to the wider city and more as an added value for surrounding investments, contributing to the steep rise of rents and sale prices in Isola (M5,54-55).

Finally, a paradox emerges in relation to community vitality. The presence of vibrant social and cultural spaces, including those that were critical of redevelopment, is reported to have increased the attractiveness of the area and therefore to have indirectly contributed to rising property values. As one interviewee notes, these actors risk becoming “*monkeys in a zoo*,” part of the aesthetic and symbolic capital that enhances the neighborhood’s market appeal (M3,82-83). This reflects the perception that gentrification is not driven exclusively by large investors, but also by cumulative processes of small-scale speculation and symbolic valorization (M3,82-83).

Several interviewees stress that sustainability-oriented interventions such as energy retrofitting upgrades or technological enhancements in housing buildings risk widening inequalities. Some highlight that high-tech systems increase maintenance costs and service charges, which fall heavily on lower income residents in mixed tenure buildings (M16, 131–135). Others stress that energy retrofits may increase property values, potentially pushing owner-occupiers to sell their flat and putting tenants at risk of eviction, also considering that improvements may also raise condominium costs, contributing to displacement of longstanding residents who cannot sustain rising fees (M19, 101–102).

3.7 Tensions and power dynamics between stakeholders/actors

The redevelopment of Isola-Porta Nuova-Garibaldi is described by interviewees as a field characterized by asymmetrical resources, hybrid governance arrangements, and shifting alliances between private capital, public authorities, and organized civil society.

A recurrent theme concerns the progressive centrality of large-scale real estate capital in steering the transformation process. The redevelopment was structured through three investment funds corresponding to different property areas, later consolidated under the control of the sovereign wealth fund of Qatar (M1, 4-6; M1, 22). This financial architecture concentrated ownership and operational coordination in the hands of a single private asset manager, strengthening its negotiating position vis-à-vis the municipality. The arrival of substantial international capital is described as a turning point that altered previous balances and reduced the margin of maneuver for actors who had previously operated in more informal or tolerated conditions (M3, 43).

The management of Biblioteca degli Alberi exemplifies the hybrid configuration of authority that emerged. Although the garden is publicly owned, its realization and ongoing management are based on a contractual arrangement with a foundation linked to the investment fund (M1, 22; M1, 25). Interviewees report that the municipality requested the private actor to implement the garden directly, citing administrative and maintenance constraints (M1, 25). Maintenance expenditure levels far exceed those typical of municipal parks, resulting in higher standards of upkeep and extensive cultural programming (M2, 66-70). At the same time, several accounts describe the garden as a “public” space with distinctive governance features, including intensive surveillance and regulated uses (M19, 42; M9, 254-255). Private sector representatives frame this model as a mechanism that simultaneously safeguards investment value and produces public benefits (M1, 49-50; M1, 35).

“The park is public, so normally it should be cleaned by the municipal waste company and maintained by the municipality. But there is a reason why other parks in Milan were fenced in the 1980s and 1990s: issues of nighttime security, vandalism, maintenance. A park like this could have turned into a boomerang. If it became a receptacle for micro-criminality, it would also deter property values. Managing it directly, investing money in it, gives an image of tranquility and safety that the municipality would not have been able to guarantee.” Private Sector Representative (M1, 22)

Critical voices interpret it as a strategy that reinforces asset valorization and shapes neighborhood perception through curated placemaking (M7, 69-70).

Relations between civil society and the municipality are portrayed as ambivalent. On the one hand, the municipality is depicted as having delegated substantial decision-making power to private actors during the main redevelopment phases. On the other hand, it is also described as having tolerated and, in part, enabled self-organized activities within the area, effectively “closing one eye” in certain periods (M19, 50-54). Civic actors report that their relationship with public authorities oscillates between cooperation and conflict. Dialogue tends to improve when associations coordinate and exercise collective pressure, suggesting that institutional responsiveness is linked to the capacity of civil society to act as a unified interlocutor (M19, 50-54).

The demolition of the Stecca degli Artigiani remains a central reference point in understanding power asymmetries. Negotiations over its preservation revealed both the concentration of decision-making authority and internal fractures within civic coalitions (M4, 29; M4, 62). The final demolition episode is described as abrupt and emblematic of the limited capacity of local

actors to counter decisions supported by aligned public and private interests (M9, 99-104). While the Stecca case is situated in the mid-2000s, it is repeatedly invoked to illustrate enduring asymmetries in bargaining power. One account reflects the perception that decisive regulatory choices ultimately rested with public authorities:

“It was up to the public authorities to set the rules, to require that there be a park and to maintain a share of public and social housing. If you do not put those rules in place, you cannot complain afterwards. Who was supposed to do it? Us from the Stecca? We tried, but we were told: ‘That’s how it is.’” Urban Planner and former Stecca degli Artigiani Activist (M3, 113)

Relatedly, the coexistence of public housing in the district within a rapidly appreciating environment is described as contradictory and insufficiently addressed by public policy (M10, 63). A further dimension concerns the governance of security, public space, and neighborhood image. The private management model integrates surveillance systems, control rooms, and coordinated services across publicly accessible areas (M1, 20; M19, 42). Some interviewees regard this as enhancing safety and functionality; others describe it as producing selective inclusion, with certain groups being discouraged from lingering in highly curated spaces (M9, 254-255).

Overall, stakeholder perceptions point to a governance landscape in which financial capacity and ownership concentration provide private actors with significant leverage, municipal authorities operate through negotiated and hybrid arrangements, and civil society influence depends largely on its ability to consolidate pressure and maintain visibility within a highly capitalized urban transformation process.

3.8 Innovative governance mechanisms

Milan⁵ is described as a city undergoing continuous regeneration, with former industrial and vacant areas progressively transformed through structured governance mechanisms. A central instrument frequently mentioned is the Integrated Intervention Plan, framed as a complex planning tool capable of aligning public and private actors within a shared regulatory framework. As one interviewee explains:

“The PII is a complex urban and territorial planning instrument. It brings numerous private and public actors to the table and requires environmental, mobility and infrastructural impact assessments in order to converge on a set of rules integrated into the city” (M1, 7). Private Sector Representative

⁵ Note: The accounts that refer to specific governance mechanisms for the Isola district are reported in section 3.2.

From this perspective, negotiated planning instruments are presented as a way to structure urban transformation through formalized procedures, impact assessments, and binding obligations.

Public private partnerships play a major role in regeneration processes, including that of Porta Nuova. Given the scale of the municipally-owned public housing stock, estimated at around 200 fully municipal complexes, full energy upgrading would require approximately one billion euros, a level of investment that cannot be covered solely by the municipal budget (M17, 86). Consequently, access to European, national, and regional funds is considered essential.

However, while institutional actors present partnerships as pragmatic solutions to fiscal constraints, other accounts in the broader material raise concerns about the imbalance of power between public authorities and large private developers. In flagship regeneration areas such as Porta Nuova, public private collaboration is perceived by some civic actors as asymmetrical, with private financial actors exerting significant influence over urban agendas. Thus, although governance mechanisms are described as innovative and structured, they remain embedded in contested power relations.

Green building and retrofit policies represent another key area of governance innovation. Interviewees underline that regulatory margins for maneuvering in new construction are limited. This distinction between marketing-oriented sustainability labels and legally mandated energy classes illustrates how regulatory frameworks shape development practices. Over time, increasingly stringent regional and municipal regulations have made high energy standards the norm rather than the exception (M1, 18). As one private actor states:

*“Today it is almost automatic to build at the highest energy standards. The LEED certification is more a marketing tool than pure energy efficiency. Energy certification is something else, embedded in legal requirements that measure actual dispersion and consumption” (M1, 18).
Private Sector Representative*

Overall, stakeholder perceptions from institutional and private actors portray Milan’s governance mechanisms as procedurally sophisticated and increasingly integrated. At the same time, critical perspectives highlight that these innovations operate within broader structural tensions, where financial capacity and regulatory power remain unevenly distributed among stakeholders.

3.9 Tourism and market pressures

This section is complementary to the sections on inequity and negative social impacts. While those sections addressed distributional imbalances and social displacement more broadly, the focus here is on the relationship between urban regeneration and intensified market pressure, particularly in relation to speculation, short-term rentals, and financialization dynamics. Within the wider city trajectory, Isola and Porta Nuova are repeatedly described as exemplary cases.

A first recurrent theme concerns the proliferation of short-term rentals and B&Bs. Interviewees stress that this phenomenon cannot be reduced to tourism alone but is embedded in regulatory gaps and speculative incentives. Attempts by local actors to engage with platforms and

institutions are portrayed as insufficient, as the scale of the issue exceeds local governance capacity. One interviewee underlines both the structural dimension of the problem and the lack of effective regulation:

“We had also met the top management of Airbnb and the administration, to understand whether there were possible ways to intervene. But it soon became clear that it is a problem too big for a single committee or even for a single district. Specific regulations would be needed, at a higher level. And there is another big issue: there is no complete public mapping of short-term rentals. It’s not just Airbnb; there are a thousand platforms, many of which are not controlled, sometimes not even controllable. So yes, there is a very strong phenomenon of speculation also from this point of view” Representative of a Citizens Committee (M10,64-65).

The absence of enforceable limits is described as enabling a dynamic in which the financial value of housing increasingly dominates its use value. Several accounts emphasize the loss of community life associated with this transformation. Long term residents describe a shift from stable neighborhood relations to transient occupancy patterns dominated by tourists. Others report that entire buildings have progressively turned into short term rentals, leaving only a handful of permanent residents and altering the social composition of the neighborhood (M8,112-114). Touristification is therefore linked not only to housing accessibility, but also to a perceived erosion of everyday relational networks. One interviewee explains:

“You go downstairs and you do not know who you will meet, because everything has become B&B. I am not against it, but I am describing a transition” (M10,37-38). *President of Citizen’s committee*

Speculative expectations are widely reported. Property owners frequently acknowledge that selling their apartments would generate substantial profits (M6,71; M6,124). Real estate agencies are described as persistently contacting residents with updated valuations, reinforcing a culture of continuous asset appreciation (M5,103). These dynamics are framed as the outcome of policies that prioritize valorization and attractiveness over housing rights (M6,98-101). An additional mechanism concerns the commodification of vibrant community life. Districts characterized by active associations, community gardens, and cultural initiatives, such as Isola, are increasingly marketed on this basis (M5,61-67; M5,149). This creates a paradox whereby community life and civic engagement become drivers of rising property values, potentially reinforcing gentrification pressures.

A second theme relates to the steep increase in real estate values and the resulting speculative environment. Interviewees describe dramatic appreciation of property prices over the last decade, with homeowners witnessing their apartments triple or quadruple in value (M3,71-71). While this created gains for some owners, it also generated a context in which buying or renting became increasingly inaccessible. In one detailed account, the district is described as subject to a *“very strong speculative push,”* with prices rising from approximately 2,000–2,500 euros per square meter to levels considered extraordinary and inaccessible (M10,56-60). This has led older residents to leave, heirs to monetize inherited properties, and new buyers to treat housing primarily as investment rather than long-term residence.

Speculation is not attributed exclusively to large-scale developers. On the contrary, several accounts emphasize the role of small agencies and individual landlords in inflating prices and pushing rents beyond sustainable levels. As one interviewee states:

“Speculators are not only the big investors. The big investors have already done their business and had to follow certain rules. The problem is the small sharks, who can cause a massacre. Gentrification is not made by one big investor; it is made by the many small ones who speculate. That’s why the public sector is fundamental” Urban Planner and former Stecca degli Artigiani Activist (M3,82-83).

This perspective frames gentrification as a cumulative process, driven by everyday speculative practices across multiple actors.

Green infrastructure is perceived as part of this broader speculative climate. While some actors defend projects such as BAM as environmentally beneficial regardless of their surroundings (M1,45-45), others interpret placemaking strategies, curated greenery, and event programming as embedded in investment logics aimed at enhancing property value and perceived attractiveness (M7,69-70). In this interpretation, ecological upgrading does not automatically generate exclusion, but it can function as leverage within an already financialized urban environment.

3.10 Gaps in perceptions between civic groups and public agencies

Across the material collected in this study, clear perception gaps emerge between institutional, private, and civic actors regarding the transformation of Isola and Porta Nuova. These gaps concern the interpretation of green infrastructure, the role of market dynamics, and the meaning of regeneration for the neighborhood community.

Institutional perspectives tend to frame the intervention in terms of environmental upgrade, public accessibility, and urban quality. Emphasis is placed on pedestrianization, programming, and aesthetic improvement. For instance, flowering meadows and reduced mowing are described as small but powerful elements that positively affect the perception of the city, with seasonal color seen as “priceless” for counterbalancing urban greyness (M2,76-77). Similarly, cultural events in BAM are portrayed as well-attended and beneficial for the city as a whole (M2,71-73). In this framing, green space is understood primarily as public amenity and environmental enhancement.

Private sector accounts highlight accessibility, connectivity, and ecosystem benefits, while also situating green infrastructure within broader development strategies. The regeneration is presented as having reconnected the district and increased its attractiveness and user base (M1,27-28). Green space is described as providing ecological value “*totally free in terms of opportunity cost*” (M1,45-45). This perspective acknowledges environmental gains but does not problematize their interaction with real estate valorization.

The green dimension is understood by most activists as a rather secondary factor in triggering urban transformations, while primary factors have been security and public order, the rise in property value, and a recurrent discourse about “unblocking” areas that had been vacant for

decades (e.g. the railway yards). Instead, many activist started seeing in these “blocked” areas the possibility for nature to grow.

In my opinion, the park did not appease people. If anything, paradoxically, it was another small park created by the same group of protesters that appeased people, namely the garden on Via Pepe... This garden has been managed in the Berlin style, making it very green and shaded with all these plants and trees... It is open to the neighborhood and, even before the other park was opened, it became the place where children's parties were held, for example (M19, 55, activist)

I don't believe that green spaces are a factor in gentrification. Whereas, for example, I think pedestrian zones are (M13, 220, Activist)

Now we are so crazy as to think that a park is made for gentrification. I mean, a park is a park. Before, there was a hole full of unexploded bombs, Roma camps, and drug dealing. Now there is a park! Then, of course, the value of the surrounding real estate increases. We ourselves probably increase property values, that bar increases property values, but without that bar, without the pool table, without a park, it's bad, in the sense of 'Do we want to be bad then?' and say that there is no gentrification, but then the ones who are doing well are the usual bourgeoisie who own property (M3, 108, Urban planning expert)

If we look at the major transformation processes of recent years, like Maciachini, Citylife, Porta Nuova, the railway yards and a few other projects earlier, I don't think that greening, outside of the discursive dimension, has played such a strong role (M14, 115, activist)

Civic actors articulate a markedly different interpretation. While not rejecting regeneration projects or new green spaces per se, they repeatedly link the regeneration of the Porta Nuova and Isola district interventions to speculation, displacement and social restructuring. One interviewee explicitly describes “*an enormous uncontrolled speculation*” driven by skyrocketing property values and short-term rentals, noting that apartments are increasingly converted into B&Bs and that long-term residents leave (M10,56-60). Another reflects on how small real estate agencies capitalize on neighborhood amenities, warning that “*gentrification is not driven by one large investor, it is driven by many small actors who speculate*” (M3,82-83). Here, green and cultural assets are seen as embedded in market pressures.

From the analysis, it also emerges that civic actors appear to struggle to clearly differentiate the financial actors involved in these processes. This difficulty can be linked to the complex and shifting ownership structures of the investment funds and development vehicles behind the projects, where layered shareholdings, international capital flows and frequent changes in fund management make lines of control and responsibility difficult to trace.

4 Stakeholder perspective on Green Initiatives in Case Study Areas: Baden Powell – Segantini / Navigli



4. 1 Precedents and implementation

The formation of the Baden Powell and Segantini parks is described by interviewees as the outcome of a long sequence of precedents, interrupted projects, and civic mobilization, rather than the linear delivery of a unitary and broad plan. Many accounts are provided by residents of the area, who recall both the historical functions of the site and the conditions that preceded the parks' realization. These narratives foreground a local memory of institutional decline, post-industrial decay, contested land use, and gradual implementation through negotiated and participatory arrangements.

A recurring reference point is the former Sieroterapico complex, described as a major research and production hub for anti-venom serums, linked to non-profit research and to a broad social life connected to the workplace. One resident recalls that the institution had extensive land holdings and hosted research facilities that included animal testing, with “vipers” and “monkeys” mentioned among the elements remembered from childhood visits (M11,6-7). Another account situates the Sieroterapico as a large employer and a socially meaningful institution, with a workers' recreational center and communal events, and interprets its decline as tied to financial fragility and structural shifts in the pharmaceutical sector (M11,11). These recollections frame the area not only as a vacant site later converted to new functions, housing and green space, but as a place marked by the disappearance of civic and high-end research functions.

Several interviewees also underline that the remediation and redevelopment of the large open – but yet fenced by high walls - spaces was not immediate, and that abandonment produced degradation for years. When civic actors approached the space, it was described as “degraded, full of rubble, waste, and informal settlements” (M12,15-18). The condition of neglect, together with uncertainty about ownership and redevelopment trajectories, is depicted as one of the factors that enabled residents to frame the park as a matter of collective entitlement, including in relation to urbanization charges and the responsibilities of both the municipality and the operator involved in surrounding developments (M12,15-18).

The area’s redevelopment is repeatedly linked to earlier private development proposals that included green space but were perceived as oriented toward closure or privatized control. One interviewee recalls that earlier schemes envisioned a park that was not clearly public and could have become “a private park in some way, through fences or similar devices” (M15,26). These plans are further connected to the wider political and judicial context of Milan in the 1990s. Multiple accounts describe how corruption scandals associated with the Clean Hands investigations and the Tangentopoli corruption scandal blocked and allowed deep revision of the proposed interventions, forcing changes in design teams and reducing building volumes relative to earlier proposals (M13,56; M15,25). In these narratives, legal disruption is not presented as an external episode but as a decisive precedent that allowed a review and more public-oriented and qualified balance between construction and open space.

Interviewees describe civic organization as pivotal in shifting the project trajectory. Accounts refer to committees mobilizing around the Sieroterapico area, developing protest actions and communication strategies, and later presenting concrete objectives to municipal representatives (M13,72-74; M15,43-45). This civic pressure is depicted as creating a context in which the municipality, when it re-entered the process after judicial events, had to confront both expressed public demands and pragmatic proposals developed by residents (M15,26).

A key perception emerging from the accounts is that the difficulty of “making the park” was not primarily technical planting work, but the elaboration of a coherent project addressing future uses and beneficiaries. This theme is strongly articulated through references to an earlier best practice, the Boscoincittà, a large urban forest park in western Milan, Italy’s first major urban reforestation project, created in 1974 by the ngo Italia Nostra. One main actor involved in that experience explains that simple requests for planting trees often concealed more complex social and governance questions, and argues how relevant it was to set up a more qualified debate and project that required decisions about users, management, and desired or discouraged uses, not only a formal drawing (M12,11-12). This understanding is mirrored in narratives of the Segantini Park’s implementation, where early interventions began with cleaning, selective ordering of the terrain, and building collective attachment before any stable design was possible (M12,15-18).

“I remember saying, provocatively, that planting trees is the most useless thing in the world. Not because trees are not needed, but because if you leave a piece of land as it is, in this climate, it becomes a forest anyway. The point is not to plant trees, but to understand where, which ones, and with what project.” Park NGO Representative (M12,11-12)

Implementation is also described as incremental and adaptive, shaped by limited funding and by learning through practice. One account emphasizes that civic promoters advanced a simplified and feasible plan precisely because “there was no money,” proposing a progressive park, to be built piece by piece over time and privileging temporary, reversible solutions over fixed infrastructures (M15,43-45). This approach is framed as politically effective because it countered the institutional argument that lack of funds implied inaction. The “process” dimension is repeatedly contrasted with earlier large-scale design proposals that remained unrealized, including a major project commissioned to Michel Desvigne that was perceived as ambitious but ultimately unsupported by municipal resources (M13,73-74).

Finally, several narratives stress that the Baden Powell and Segantini parks emerged within a broader landscape of dense urbanization and contested connections between parks, water systems, small vacant industrial plots and new residential development. Institutional actors highlight that the two projects were valued for their potential to connect with nearby parks and waterways, even as housing built around the area is explicitly described as high end rather than socially regulated (M2,57). In this sense, Segantini is perceived as both a local civic achievement and a negotiated element within wider redevelopment pressures.

“We arrived at a meeting with the deputy mayors with a projector, maps, and a project, while they had nothing in hand. Our proposal was based on two ideas: progressivity, because there was no money, and temporariness, because the territory and its users change over time.” Park NGO Representative (M15,43-45)

Best practice examples such as Bosco in Città are reported to have provided both practical guidance and a conceptual frame, shifting the focus from tree planting to governance, use, and long-term stewardship as the core challenges of implementation (M12,11-12; M12,15-18).

4.2 Participation and governance

While in the interviews a main focus is on the Segantini Park, the involvement of citizens and civic actors in the development of the district is very broad. By some interviewees, individual and collective commitment has been devoluted to a variety of initiatives across the district, with the aim of controlling and preserving green areas and a slow pace of development in a time of deep and extensive restructuring of the district.

More specifically, stakeholders describe Segantini Park as a paradigmatic example of a “parco partecipato”, a participatory park developed through sustained collaboration between municipal actors, civic initiatives, and cooperative housing developers. The governance framework that emerged in this context is portrayed as both contingent and innovative, shaped by mutual adaptation between bottom-up mobilization and institutional openness. Interviewees identify three main actor groups as central to the park’s realization and management: the municipality, the civic committee and subsequent association linked to Segantini park, and the housing cooperative CCL, which developed adjacent housing complexes. According to one institutional actor, the process evolved into a fully shared design approach. This perception is echoed in accounts that describe how the initial municipal stance, oriented toward waiting for funding, was gradually replaced by an incremental logic made possible by dialogue with citizens and technical staff (M12,28-30).

“For Segantini, the Municipality was forced to change approach. Not being able to develop everything at once, we started step by step, as in Bosconciattà or Parco Nord, creating a synergy between institutions, citizens and technicians.” Park NGO Representative (M12,28-30)

Civic actors are consistently portrayed as agenda setters. Their mobilization after the judicial and planning controversies created a context in which municipal authorities had to engage with organized citizen proposals and “good ideas” (M15,26). Interviewees underline that this interaction was not merely oppositional but constructive. The civic committees contributed to defining design priorities and governance arrangements and later formalized its role through an association that obtained a concession to manage parts of the park (M14,40).

The association’s activities extend beyond maintenance. Shared urban gardens constitute a core element of the participatory model. As one member explains, cultivation of the shared community gardens is collective rather than individual, and distribution of products becomes an occasion for social interaction and community building (M14,40). This emphasis on relational value is reinforced by collaborations with external actors. The association has worked with Italia Nostra and with prison institutions for the realization of specific areas, including the shared gardens (M13,90).

We had just been to Amsterdam and The Hague, where we saw urban gardens even in front of the Queen's palace. And we thought, 'Let's do that here too'. When we started proposing them, from 1985 to 1988, we found ourselves up against everyone: politicians, officials, even some of our own volunteers. The gardens were seen as a legacy of poverty, something to be ashamed of. People need to get their hands dirty in nature: some came to volunteer at Bosco in Città, others cultivated a vegetable garden. In those contexts, we learned that more than “participatory design,” what is needed is the ability to read the territory: to understand that if a vegetable garden springs up spontaneously in an abandoned area, then there is a real need there (M12, 13-14, activist)

More recently, it has been involved in a European research project on pollinators and biodiversity with a university department, which is perceived as recognition of its growing competence and legitimacy (M14,41). The work with primary schools especially is of interest as the aim is to involve children living in vulnerable neighbourhoods and to provide that they can benefit from open air and nature-related activities. At the same time, several interviewees acknowledge the fragility of volunteer-based governance. The original core group is described as cohesive and highly motivated, but generational turnover is proving difficult (M12,34). Maintaining long term engagement, recruiting new members, and sustaining the energy required for management tasks represent ongoing challenges. Despite these difficulties, the park is widely perceived as functioning effectively and as offering a high level of shared quality (M13,335-344).

For several cooperative members, proximity to Segantini Park represented a decisive factor in choosing to live there (M16,29). In this sense, the park operates both as a collectively managed green space and as a structuring element of residential attractiveness. Nevertheless, participation is not evenly distributed across adjacent areas. One interviewee notes that nearby social housing zones remain weakly connected to park activities, despite broader territorial

initiatives (M14,61). This indicates that while the participatory model has achieved internal cohesion, its capacity to bridge socio spatial divides remains partial.

Overall, stakeholder perceptions portray Segantini Park as the product of a virtuous collaboration between the municipality and civic associations. The case illustrates how participatory arrangements can reshape institutional routines, generate hybrid management forms, and embed research and community practices within an urban green space. At the same time, long term sustainability depends on maintaining volunteer commitment and on extending inclusion beyond the most active constituencies.

4.1 (In)equity (distribution)

Accounts related to Segantini Park and the adjacent Baden Powell Park largely converge on the perception that the green areas function as an inclusive and widely appreciated public space. Interviewees consistently describe them as highly frequented, socially mixed, and accessible to diverse groups, with no major processes of exclusion reported.

Several respondents emphasize the parks' everyday inclusiveness. It is described as intensely used by families, children, dog owners, and residents of surrounding streets. One interviewee characterizes it as a particularly virtuous operation that has generated strong local aggregation:

“It has created an incredible aggregation of mothers and children. The park is extremely well used, and I think it is very much loved. It coexists with artisans, a capoeira gym, and dog owners. There is still a very nice exchange.” Activist and District Resident (M8,50-51)

The physical design and maintenance of the park are frequently mentioned as contributing to its inclusive character. Interviewees refer to benches, shaded areas, paths through bamboo groves, and well-maintained but loosely designed green areas as elements that encourage diverse forms of use (M8,50-51; M8,83-85). The presence of dog areas, urban gardens, and informal spaces for teenagers is seen as supporting coexistence among different age groups. Although one account suggests that young people may be less present in Segantini compared to Baden Powell (M12,37-38), other testimonies highlight the strong youth presence in the broader park system, particularly at Baden Powell, which is described as highly frequented by diverse groups of young people, including university students (M16,39-41).

Perceptions of exclusion are generally minimal. One interviewee explicitly states: *“My feeling is that no one is excluded”* (M12,37-38). Even when acknowledging that the association managing the gardens has a somewhat closed internal structure, respondents underline that the park as a physical space remains open and accessible to anyone (M12,39-40). The active presence of volunteers is perceived as an additional layer of informal oversight rather than a mechanism of control.

At the same time, interviewees recognize that proximity matters. Residents whose homes overlook the park benefit more directly in terms of daily access and increased property values (M12,37-38; M15,80-81). However, these advantages are not framed as structural inequalities. One respondent questions whether having to walk a few hundred meters should be considered

a real form of disadvantage (M15,80-81). The overall tone suggests that while benefits are unevenly distributed in spatial terms, this does not translate into systematic exclusion.

The surrounding area is described as socially heterogeneous. Interviewees repeatedly refer to the public housing estate in Via Gola, known for social vulnerability, squatted housing, and criminality (M14,61). Other nearby zones include cooperative housing, newly built middle-class housing, higher education facilities such as NABA, and more affluent developments (M14,61-63). This diversity is presented as a defining feature of the park's context. However, participation from the most vulnerable parts of the neighborhood appears limited, with only a few residents from Via Gola reportedly engaging regularly with park activities (M14,61).

Educational initiatives and collaborations with local schools further contribute to perceptions of inclusiveness. A school with a high percentage of children from migrant backgrounds is described as one of the most successful partners in environmental and garden related activities (M14,115). This is interpreted as evidence that social diversity does not prevent active participation.

Finally, interviewees acknowledge that aggregation can generate tensions, particularly in the evenings when public spaces attract different forms of use. Nevertheless, such dynamics are framed as inherent to open public spaces rather than as evidence of exclusion (M14,131-132).

Overall, stakeholder perceptions indicate that Segantini Park distributes socio ecological benefits broadly across social groups. While proximity and real estate appreciation create differentiated advantages, no significant patterns of exclusion emerge in the interviews. The park is widely regarded as appreciated, frequented, and socially mixed within a highly heterogeneous urban environment.

4.2 Political mobilization

Stakeholder accounts situate the Segantini case within a broader Milanese context characterized by active neighborhood committees and sustained civic engagement across districts. Political mobilization around the former Sieroterapico area is described as decisive for the creation and public character of the park. Interviewees consistently emphasize that without persistent collective action, the area would likely have followed a different trajectory.

Early mobilization took the form of public demonstrations, symbolic actions, and direct confrontation with institutional actors. One interviewee recalls organizing protests and staging a demonstration with a coffin to symbolize the “death of a park,” adding that without the Tangentopoli investigations the speculative project might not have been halted (M13,72). In retrospect, this phase is framed as a turning point in which civic pressure intersected with judicial developments, strengthening the demand for a public green space.

Grassroots initiatives combined protest with neighborhood organizing. Residents describe posting notices on building doors, organizing Sunday meetings, and forming groups with distinct motivations, ranging from property-related interests to broader civic promotion of a public park (M15,32-33). Over time, a shared objective consolidated: ensuring that the area

would remain green and become publicly accessible. As one interviewee summarizes, “We had to fight so that it remained green and became public green” (M13,90).

Mobilization also extended to environmental monitoring and air quality advocacy. Residents collaborated with research institutions and used portable monitoring devices to collect data on fine particulate matter, questioning official measurements and pressing authorities for action (M8,141). More recent initiatives aim to aggregate schools and associations around localized air quality mapping to support municipal decision making (M14,176-181).

Overall, political mobilization is portrayed as the enabling condition of the park’s existence. It combined protest, negotiation, and technical advocacy, embedding Segantini Park within Milan’s broader tradition of neighborhood environmental activism.

4.3 Socio-ecological impacts/benefits (positive)

Stakeholders’ accounts concerning the transformations in the Segantini Park and surrounding Navigli area consistently emphasize a range of positive socio-ecological impacts. These relate to strengthened community life, improved access to affordable housing, environmental quality, and the park’s role as a site for education and biodiversity enhancement.

A central theme concerns the park’s capacity to foster socialization and everyday interaction. Interviewees describe it as a highly frequented and socially vibrant space, used by families, dog owners, and young people. The park is portrayed as one of the few open spaces in the area where different groups regularly encounter each other. As one participant notes:

“It is one of the few places in Milan where you see the sky because it is open. It is a place where families bring children to play, where dog owners meet every morning.” Park NGO Representative (M14,52)

This spatial openness and accessibility are perceived as generating informal social networks and recurring interactions. The park is described as a setting where diverse social backgrounds converge and where professional or economic status becomes secondary to shared use of space (M14,42). The experience of proximity to green space is associated with everyday well-being and a sense of joy, particularly for residents living in adjacent housing (M14,41).

Several accounts emphasize the park’s contribution to a broader sense of neighborhood community. Green spaces are framed as anchors that transform potentially anonymous residential developments into recognizable places of encounter. According to one interviewee, parks contribute to making urban areas “less like dormitory neighborhoods” and more community-oriented (M16,99). The integration of Segantini Park with the nearby Baden Powell Park further strengthens its role within a larger system of public spaces that attract users of different ages, including younger groups and teenagers (M13,335-344).

Housing affordability emerges as another important positive impact. Cooperative housing initiatives developed in proximity to the park are described as having enabled long-term residents to remain in the district despite increasing real estate values. One interviewee

reflects that the cooperative intervention provided “the opportunity to remain in the neighborhood” for people who would otherwise have been forced to move due to the city’s rising prices (M16,74). In this perspective, the cooperative model acted as a counterbalance to exclusionary market dynamics, aligning with principles of affordability and social continuity.

Environmental benefits are also highlighted. Stakeholders refer to measurable microclimatic improvements linked to the presence of extensive greenery. As reported by one interviewee involved in environmental monitoring, the area experiences a summer temperature reduction of three to four degrees and a winter increase of two to three degrees compared to surrounding built-up zones (M15,88). These climatic effects are interpreted as collective gains, benefiting both frequent users and residents living nearby.

The park also functions as an educational and research platform. Citizen science initiatives and collaborations with universities have focused on pollinators, biodiversity and air pollution measurements (M14,41). Educational projects with schools and potential collaborations with higher education institutions such as NABA are described as contributing to environmental awareness and intergenerational exchange (M14,41).

4.4 Socio-ecological impacts/harms (negative)

Stakeholder accounts concerning Segantini Park and the Navigli area identify limited negative socio-ecological impacts directly attributable to the park itself. Rather, concerns focus on broader processes of urban transformation and housing market dynamics that characterize the district and the city.

Several interviewees describe the Navigli area as historically working class and since years featuring strong gentrification pressures. One respondent notes that the neighborhood, once composed largely of modest housing from the early twentieth century, has undergone “very accentuated gentrification dynamics” linked to intense urbanization and speculative pressures (M10,9). Rising housing prices are perceived as generating a form of housing emergency, with costs sometimes considered disproportionate to building quality and environmental performance (M10,9). In this perspective, displacement and pricing-out are understood as structural dynamics affecting the wider district.

At the same time, stakeholders tend to distinguish these processes from the specific role of Segantini Park. While acknowledging that the park has contributed to increased real estate values in its immediate vicinity, most accounts reject the idea that it constitutes an example of green gentrification. As one interviewee explicitly states: “Using green space for real estate development is not automatically gentrification. It depends on what kind of green you create and how you create it. A green space like Segantini does not produce gentrification” (M15,55). The participatory governance model and the public ownership of the green area are seen as crucial differences from other cases where parks are embedded in private development logics (M15,58-61).

Nevertheless, interviewees recognize that the park has been used symbolically in real estate marketing. Online advertisements highlighting “apartments with park view” illustrate how green amenities can be mobilized commercially (M15,58-61). One respondent remarks the

substantial increase in property values over time, asking to what extent this increment is due to the park itself or to broader improvements in southern Milan (M15,70). This uncertainty underscores the difficulty of isolating the park’s specific economic impact from metropolitan trends.

Another perspective emphasizes that structural urban factors, such as public transport infrastructure, may have had a stronger influence on property values than the park (M15,85-86). In this sense, the Segantini Park is portrayed less as a driver of transformation and more as an amenity inserted into an already changing urban context.

Overall, stakeholder perceptions suggest that while the Navigli district is embedded in wider gentrification processes, Segantini Park is not viewed as a primary cause of exclusion. Its public character and participatory governance are instead framed as mitigating factors within a broader, speculative urban environment.

4.5 Tensions and power dynamics between stakeholders/actors

Stakeholder accounts identify tensions primarily in relation to everyday management issues and the division of responsibilities between citizen volunteers and public authorities. While Segantini Park is widely described as a successful example of participatory governance, its implementation and construction took long time and civic efforts, while maintenance reveals not always straightforward institutional arrangements and blurred boundaries between public and associative domains.

A recurrent source of tension concerns waste management and the practical consequences of the park’s open and natural character. As a public space, the park attracts diverse uses, including informal settlements and nighttime activities, which generate additional maintenance burdens. One institutional actor reflects on the recurring dilemma:

“Every time something is thrown in: who cleans it? Who removes it? Who puts it back? There is water, isn’t there water?... It is a place that needs to be kept under close control and every intervention is complex, both for the administration and for the volunteers, who continue with enthusiasm”. City Manager in Public Greening (M2,62-63).

Similarly, volunteers report ongoing coordination difficulties with municipal services, MM, AMSA (the municipal waste management company), and the police in relation to waste, drug residues, and dog management (M14,48). The association’s role often extends beyond its formal mandate, leading to ambiguities about where civic responsibility ends, and public duty begins. Such administrative complexity translates into practical uncertainty regarding maintenance responsibilities.

At a broader scale, some contrast the Navigli and Porta Genova context with highly financialized regeneration areas such as Porta Nuova. While criticizing Milan’s political leadership as increasingly aligned with real estate finance (M8,146), interviewees note that their neighborhood has been less directly affected by those large-scale dynamics. Overall, tensions in Segantini appear more operational than structural, centered on governance coordination rather than on pronounced conflicts over urban transformation.

4.6 Innovative governance mechanisms

The accounts that refer to specific governance mechanisms for the Segantini and Navigli area are reported in section 4.2.

4.7 Tourism and market pressures

Stakeholder accounts situate the Segantini Park and Navigli area within broader dynamics of tourism growth and real estate speculation affecting Milan. The Navigli district is described as independently gentrified (mostly by tourism and nightlife) and increasingly shaped by short term rentals, student mobility, and investment-driven housing markets. These pressures are perceived as structural features of the area rather than direct consequences of the park itself.

Short-term rentals are frequently mentioned as a visible sign of transformation. One interviewee describes a progressive “heavy distortion” of residential life, noting that many former long-term units have been converted into Airbnb apartments:

“They buy them, gather them, and then put them on Airbnb... we were only two fixed tenants left and all the others with their trolleys” Activist and District Resident (M8,112-114).

This process is associated with a loss of neighborhood continuity and a weakening of collective identity. Interviewees underline that these dynamics are not counterbalanced by strong collective resistance, and that collective awareness around housing issues remains fragmented (M8,112-114).

Beyond tourism, speculative pressures are also linked to large scale urban projects and university expansions in the wider quadrant of the city. Past conflicts around development proposals, including projects near the Navigli and university campuses, are recalled as moments where green spaces were defended against privatization or infrastructural encroachment (M13,54). These accounts suggest that public green areas are often embedded in broader negotiations over land value and institutional expansion.

Financial mechanisms underlying housing production are described as central drivers of speculation. As one interviewee states:

“If upstream I set up a financial mechanism that must produce returns, then I will find those returns everywhere” Park NGO Representative (M15,75-77).

This perspective frames market pressures as structurally embedded in funding models rather than as effects of specific amenities.

Housing cooperatives are portrayed ambivalently. While intended to provide affordable access to housing, some units (delivered at below-market costs but under free market legal conditions) were later resold at significantly higher prices, generating private gains (M16,82; M16,90).

These speculative episodes are acknowledged as distortive effects of broader market conditions, but not as directly caused by the presence of Segantini Park. Meanwhile, following the episode, the housing cooperative has started reflecting on whether to adopt countermeasures aimed at safeguarding its mutualistic values and preventing any similar speculative behavior by cooperative members in the future.

4.8 Gaps in perceptions between civic groups and public agencies

In comparison to the other case study, the Segantini experience is characterized by relatively limited divergences in perception between public stakeholders and civic groups. Nonetheless, some nuanced differences emerge regarding the origin of the park, the interpretation of governance processes, and the relationship between green space and broader urban dynamics.

Public stakeholders, particularly municipal representatives, tend to frame Segantini Park as the outcome of a constructive and shared governance process. Emphasis is placed on collaboration between the Municipality, designers, and local associations. In this narrative, the park is presented as a virtuous example of participatory planning embedded within institutional procedures.

Civic actors acknowledge this collaboration but place stronger emphasis on the earlier phase of conflict and mobilization that preceded institutional alignment. From their perspective, the park would not exist in its current form without sustained grassroots pressure. As one interviewee recalls, “We had to fight so that it remained green and that it became public green” (M13,90). The role of protests, neighborhood committees, and even the broader political context is highlighted as decisive in shaping municipal decisions (M13,72; M15,26-27). Nevertheless, the long-term closure of the adjacent public swimming pool (Piscina Argelati) has created tensions and protests among citizens, increasingly claiming for larger and better public investment in public accessible and affordable summer facilities, while arguing that the municipality has favoured privatization and the development of private profit-driven swimming pools. More broadly, some interviewees highlighted a gap in the perception of green between citizens and civic groups – expressing and organizing the need for appropriable green space – and public officials and politicians – rather attached to an aesthetic vision of green spaces.

We had just been to Amsterdam and The Hague, where we saw urban gardens even in front of the Queen's palace. And we thought, 'Let's do that here too'. When we started proposing them, from 1985 to 1988, we found ourselves up against everyone: politicians, officials, even some of our own volunteers. The gardens were seen as a legacy of poverty, something to be ashamed of. People need to get their hands dirty in nature: some came to volunteer at Bosco in Città, others cultivated a vegetable garden. In those contexts, we learned that more than “participatory design,” what is needed is the ability to read the territory: to understand that if a vegetable garden springs up spontaneously in an abandoned area, then there is a real need there (M12, 13-14, activist)

I saw, I think two or three years ago, an advertisement for “forestami” [an urban forestation project in Milan], which explicitly stated that more greenery increased property values...That is, more explicit than that, how can we not make the ecological transition desirable? (M5, 118, Activist)

Urban voids are not only physical, morphological, and spatial opportunities, but also opportunities to create cities. And creating cities means first and foremost understanding what the right to the city is. Everyone must have the right to the city, and therefore that “mixité” and those buildings within a public service - as a park must always be publicly owned... Depending on where you are, of course, understanding the desires of citizens, but also those who already know the area, so understanding “there’s no swimming pool, no nursery school, no...” and then rebuilding that area with a park at its center and an urban fabric that has these kinds of characteristics (M3, 13, Resident and Activist)

A further difference concerns market dynamics. While public actors focus on the inclusiveness and shared management of the park, civic voices are more attentive to speculative pressures and the risk of symbolic appropriation of the park in real estate narratives (M15,58-61). However, even here, perceptions converge on the idea that Segantini has not generated exclusionary dynamics comparable to other areas.

Overall, the Segantini case displays a relatively high degree of alignment between institutional and civic narratives. Differences concern emphasis and interpretation rather than fundamentally conflicting visions.

5 Critical Analysis: Milan

Milan is nationally and widely considered the “*city in the forefront*”: anything that may happen nationwide is likely to occur first in Milan. In many respects, within a national landscape marked by widening disparities between attractive regions and cities on the one hand, and peripheral or shrinking contexts on the other, Milan stands out as an emblematic case of attractive city where inequalities are rising, starting with housing inequalities (Coppola et al. 2021; Bricocoli and Peverini, 2024). In these notes, we leave in the background the pervasive effects that energy efficiency policies – first and foremost the Superbonus 110% scheme – have produced throughout the country, and therefore also in Milan, in terms of distributing benefits according to technical and economic capacities rather than social and technical priorities⁶. In these

⁶ Milan makes no exception, despite its substantial public housing stock, which could have enabled the allocation of public expenditure towards durable and socially just investments on public assets, often in poor condition, and for the benefit of the most vulnerable groups. Huge energy efficiency interventions remain challenging for the public housing stock: financial challenges (1 bn euros would be needed solely for the municipal ERP), displacement challenges, and educational challenges (teaching tenants how to use new technologies and ensuring their engagement).

concluding notes, we focus instead on the critical issues emerging in relation to urban regeneration and interventions aimed at expanding the supply of green and public spaces.

5.1 Intervention Typologies, Stressors, and the Uneven Production of Housing Justice

Many interviewees agree that in Milan there is an increasing housing crisis, that includes mechanisms of gentrification.

Milan expels people and only welcomes those who can afford it. [...] it's so obvious now in all areas, absolutely all of them. They're all gentrified now. So it expands and expels and creates commuters. So there's been a lot of that here, and certainly, how can I put it, neighborhood life has suffered as a result... Unfortunately, it is a slow death (M8, 96, Activist)

Besides common sense narratives, Milan has indeed experienced multiple seasons of intense change and transformation. Our analysis has examined projects which, in several ways, have challenged the very possibility for urban planning to remain under the direct governance and leadership of the city administration. In the increasingly close interaction with large-scale actors and financially driven economic players, the capacity of the municipal administration to effectively regulate the public benefits of private investments is significantly tested. Equally complex is the distribution of the effects and the benefits produced by housing supply and the public services and amenities delivered through such projects. **Investments deployed through urban regeneration processes in Milan do create extraordinary, high-quality spaces, including public and green areas, yet they can also contribute to increasing polarization between the attractive central city and the broader urban region, where those who can no longer afford to live in the central areas are progressively displaced,** with the risk of exacerbating inequalities that already characterize the city and its wider urban region. **This depends on various factors – landownership, nature of capital invested and developed, etc. – as well as on the process deployed and the civic involvement in the planning and implementation phase.**

The green dimension is understood by most activists as a rather secondary factor in triggering negative impact of urban transformations, while primary factors are identified in land speculation backed by claims for security and public order, the rise in property value, and a recurrent discourse about “unblocking” areas that had been vacant for decades (e.g. the railway yards). Instead, many activist started seeing in these “blocked” areas the possibility for nature to grow and for promoting public green areas, public facilities and public housing. Some interviewees highlighted a gap in the perception of green between citizens and civic groups – expressing and organizing the need for appropriable green space – and public officials and politicians – rather attached to an aesthetic vision of green spaces.

Densification is primarily performed by private developers, mostly as brownfield redevelopment projects and change of zoning from industrial to residential. In this sense, it is uncommon that housing buildings are densified, except for some extra floor elevation contextual to renovation of roofs. Within public housing providers, densification is an almost unknown practice, and the few cases of demolition and reconstruction most of the time only preserve the number of units of public housing stock, without increasing it. Private actors have

a major role in regeneration projects in Milan, compared to other Italian case studies. Developers and forefront Real Estate actors are increasingly connected to big financial actors and take up decisional and managerial roles in shaping the city. The cases of densification and green amenities administered by private actors raises some questions of equity. While privately managed spaces can deliver high-quality maintenance and programming, they may also reinforce spatial hierarchies, access control, and value capture dynamics linked to surrounding real estate. More balanced projects in terms of equity, like the case that brought to the Segantini Park are instead achieved with a less performative and more substantial collaboration between the municipality and civil society actors. The role of green spaces in a community and its positive impacts are given by the fact that you can use this space in a spontaneous way, that you feel it like a public space and not as a perfect green space that looks like a postcard and is controlled with cameras.

5.2 Policy Leverage Points for Aligning Green Transition and Housing Justice

With reference to the two case studies examined, a series of critical questions emerge that are particularly relevant for research and its future directions.

Is it possible to increase equity in the distribution of green value (especially when co-produced with private developers)? When the delivery of public services, public spaces, and green areas is strongly and directly connected to private developers, there is a clear risk that such spaces will be built only in proximity and functional to the development projects. It is evident that in more peripheral areas, which are less suited to new investment opportunities, the creation and maintenance of public and green spaces fall disproportionately on the public administration, with significant differences in spending capacity. The *resource asymmetry* in park management is striking in terms of magnitude: a key difference concerns financial investment and maintenance capacity resulting in constant maintenance, seasonal reseeded, and permanent on-site workers, producing an aesthetically “perfect” and highly programmed park. In a context in which public–private partnerships continue to expand, it appears crucial to explore whether and how the city’s negotiation capacity in urban planning can be strengthened so as to redirect private contributions to the production and management of public/green spaces also in less valuable parts of the city. The case of Porta Nuova, promoted and administered by private actors, is a good example for raising questions of equity. Some interviews have highlighted a gap in the perception of green spaces between citizens and civic groups – expressing and organizing the need for appropriable green space – and public officials and politicians – rather attached to an aesthetic vision of green spaces, that could be linked to the Italian concept of “decoro” as conceptualized by Tamar Pitch (2013) (“decorum,” “public decency”) to describe how contemporary governments deploy moral language to justify forms of social control, especially targeting marginalized groups. While privately managed spaces can deliver high-quality maintenance and programming, they may also reinforce spatial hierarchies, access control, and value capture dynamics connected to surrounding real estate.

What conditions make it possible to safeguard project quality and promote greater equity in the distribution of the benefits produced by green investments?

The Baden Powell – Segantini case is emblematic of a wide convergence among different stakeholders regarding its strong public function and the significant contributions of the green area in enhancing living conditions and cohesion across a wide range of populations and a territorial scope extending beyond the park’s perimeter. Many of the initiatives undertaken benefit students and residents in disadvantaged contexts nearby. It is important to consider how decisive the long-term mobilization, and a rather positive attitude by the municipality to modify projects according to citizens’ demand has been in creating the conditions for substantial co-design and in constraining design choices with respect to accessibility requirements for all. These valuable features, however, do not conceal the fact that **in the absence of regulation capable of introducing land value capture, the benefits of improved public and green spaces automatically reward those living closest to the intervention**. In this respect, Milan had been a forerunner back in the 1950s and 1960s, when it introduced the so-called “*tassa di miglioria*” (Improvement tax), a value-capture mechanism that enabled the municipality to require property owners in areas benefiting from the arrival of transportation improvements (e.g., a new metro line) to contribute financially in proportion to the increased land value generated by the infrastructure.

Yet it should also be noted that, in the absence of any form of rent regulation and given the increasing prevalence of short- and medium-term private rental contracts, increases in property values easily translate into higher rents. In this sense, the Milan case complicates the discourse on the greening–gentrification nexus – for which broader and more structural drivers are clearly at play beyond the impact of new green areas – and points instead to the need to identify mechanisms for distributing the benefits that green amenities can generate, as well as to scrutinize the extensive use of greening strategies to produce urban flagships in what often amounts to *greenwashing* of projects that have little genuinely green or sustainable content. Some interviewees involved as activists, argue that a fundamental missing point is that greening policies – and, more in general, policies aimed at qualifying public space – should be accompanied by a contextual housing policy, as in the following examples:

The basic idea is that we want beautiful neighborhoods, but beautiful for those who live there, not those who invest in them (M5, 7-8, activist).

Our presence in that context helped many people who already lived there, who had lived in the neighborhood and who, because they had grown up there and why not, but who were inevitably being expelled from the neighborhood at that time because they were no longer in a position to buy, to buy a house...From this point of view, the intervention of cooperatives has not been exclusionary but, on the contrary, welcoming, or if you like, offering the possibility of remaining in one's own neighborhood (M16, 74, representative of housing cooperative)

So, if I could insist on something with the municipality, I would say build more public housing because we need teachers, bus drivers, nurses, and they need a place to live (M14, 87, Park NGO Representative)

One of the proposals was that Milan should have a public agency with broader powers, which would set higher goals and be able to take over, if not entire buildings, then at least apartments scattered throughout the most problematic condominiums in the area ... That is, you build that little square if you have the money to build the little square plus 30% - for example - to invest in the acquisition of empty apartments abandoned at auction, or you buy 10 apartments to put up for social rent so that in some

way you are trying to compensate for the expulsion mechanisms that can be generated by such an intervention (M5, 21-89, activist)

5.3 Cross-Case Synthesis: Typology, Governance, and the Production of (In)Justice

Through our interviews, we identified three greening and densification models and related governance logics. The comparison between Segantini Park, BAM (Biblioteca degli Alberi Milano), and Isola Pepe Verde highlights three distinct approaches to nature-based solutions: a participatory public-driven residential park (Segantini), a privately managed flagship park (BAM), and a self-organized community garden (Isola Pepe Verde):

- **Segantini as participatory and residential park:** Segantini Park is embedded in a residential context and developed through participatory processes (M2,64-65). It represents a model where green infrastructure is closely tied to everyday neighborhood life and co-design practices.
- **BAM as privately managed “perfect” garden:** BAM is described as a highly curated, privately managed green space surrounded primarily by offices, banks, and tertiary-sector functions rather than residential uses. It is characterized by intensive maintenance, hyper-surveillance, non-native plant species, digital advertising totems, and the presence of private security. High school students are reportedly often removed by security guards.
- **Isola Pepe Verde as self-organized alternative green space:** In contrast, Isola Pepe Verde operates as a biodynamic, self-managed garden organized by consensus rather than majority voting. It embodies a model of collective stewardship, informality, and low-budget maintenance. Governance is horizontal, and access is not mediated by private security.

Resource asymmetry in park management: A key difference concerns financial investment and maintenance capacity. As one account notes, private management invests approximately 10–12 euros per square meter, compared to about 1 euro per square meter under standard public contracts. This results in constant maintenance, seasonal reseeded, and permanent on-site workers, producing an aesthetically “perfect” and heavily programmed park. Another critique concerns spatial design and symbolic orientation, suggesting that it responds to real estate valorization and representation logics rather than to everyday use and needs.

Unlike the park at the Biblioteca degli Alberi, which is cold and impersonal, designed by a Dutch lady wearing high-heeled shoes, Segantini is a place where there are souls, people, life. And the design, the idea for the park was also adopted here not by architects, but by designers who were also citizens. (M15, 57, Park NGO Representative)

The comparison also points to two different conceptions of “publicness”: a “governed spontaneity” in privately managed parks with high institutional capacity, and grassroots autonomy in self-organized spaces that rely on voluntary labor and shared norms.

5.4 Implications for Just Transition Debates in Milan

The Milanese cases analyzed shows that the green transition cannot be decoupled from broader questions of sociospatial justice, particularly in a context where financialized development, speculative pressures, and uneven governance capacities shape how environmental interventions unfold across neighbourhoods. The two case studies illustrate distinct governance models whose outcomes carry important implications for national and international discussions on how a just transition should be conceived and implemented. Milan's experience illustrates the limits of transition strategies that rely heavily on private actors. While public-private partnerships can deliver high-quality spaces, they also risk consolidating power asymmetries and spatial hierarchies. Conversely, civic-driven models (as in Segantini or Isola Pepe Verde, as well as many other Milanese cases) show the potential of community stewardship but also its difficulties in growing in the absence of sustained support and protection from speculative pressures.

The Milan case underscores that green transition interventions inserted into highly financialized urban transformation processes risk reproducing or intensifying inequalities, and not contributing to residents' needs. In Porta Nuova, densification and green amenities contribute to the production of an aesthetically appealing environment, making it attractive for a city-wide and even global audience, while reinforcing value capture mechanisms: privately managed buildings and greenery, curated programming, and tightly controlled public space feed into rising real estate prices. Here, environmental upgrading becomes part of a broader regime of urban valorization, where ecological narratives are folded into investment strategies and the symbolic capital of "sustainable" design. The resulting benefits (such as enhanced walkability, well designed open spaces, cultural events) are real, yet they disproportionately accrue to affluent residents and investors, while inhabitants and lower-income groups face displacement pressures and shrinking affordability. This dynamic highlights a critical tension in just transition debates: without binding redistribution mechanisms, green improvements can become instruments of exclusion – depending on the overall project they are part of. The Navigli–Segantini case suggests that more equitable pathways are possible when environmental efforts align with longterm civic mobilization, participatory governance, and public regulatory commitments. The emergence of Segantini Park (rooted in decades of activism, negotiation, and incremental implementation) illustrates how communities can have a voice in urban transformation, and how this creates the condition to bend processes in order to meet everyday needs, especially when institutional actors adopt flexible and (truly) collaborative approaches. Governance here is grounded in shared stewardship, lowcost interventions, and an ecological sensibility focused on use value rather than market valorization. This model suggests that just transition requires not only densification and environmental upgrading but also social infrastructures capable of distributing benefits across heterogeneous populations, together with housing policy mechanisms to mitigate or prevent displacement pressure and unaffordability.

5.5 Implications for Policy and Comparative Research

Ultimately, our analysis of Milan suggests that a just transition depends on integrating environmental goals with housing affordability, democratic governance, and landvalue redistribution, confirming and adding evidence to existing literature (Camagni, 2016; Carrosio and

Cogliati Dezza, 2025). A first implication concerns the need to integrate environmental and housing policies more systematically, as proposed by many interviewees quoted above. In Milan, green transition interventions (from flagship parks to building retrofits) tend to operate within an increasingly financialized development system and housing market, where affordability gap with incomes/salaries is enlarging (Bricocoli and Peverini, 2024) and displacement pressures increasingly jeopardizes residents' ability to benefit from ecological improvements. Our empirical material suggests that densification and new green spaces, when implemented without redistributive mechanisms or affordability safeguards, can unintentionally contribute to exclusionary dynamics – often by exacerbating processes that are linked to an increasingly tensed housing market. This highlights the need for a policy framework that explicitly connects densification strategies and greening to actions that promote housing security, tenure protections, antispeculation measures, and public or cooperative housing provision. There are already many civic initiatives in Milan that are reflecting and engaging people around a claim for such a policy framework: even though they do not yet mobilize very large crowds, they are slowly building a popular narrative combining environmental and housing objectives that could be upscaled by local and regional policymakers. Further research could stress on understanding their claims and proposals, while comparative research could explore how in cities with stronger rental regulations or land value capture mechanisms the exclusionary effects of green transformation are mitigated in processes of densification and greening. Conversely, however, it could explore how in cities characterized by weaker housing policy (e.g., no public housing) these processes are even more intense, highlighting the need to protect and strengthen existing redistributive and housing policy mechanisms.

The case of Milan underscores a central tension in contemporary urban governance: the growing role of private actors, particularly investment funds and real estate developers, in delivering key components of the (broader understood) ecological transition. While such actors can mobilize significant capital and deliver densification and high quality public spaces, their involvement often embeds value capture logics, limiting (or even jeopardizing) the redistributive potential of urban transformation processes. While Milan has previously had policy mechanisms ensuring redistribution based on taxing windfall gains (*Tassa di miglioria*) or via direct housing provision through compulsory land purchase (*Piani di Edilizia Economica e Popolare*), now these kinds of policy instruments appear to be weakened and not often enforced. A broad reflection over the role of public administrations in managing and delivering equitable urban transformations in Milan that benefit most citizen – and not only investors – appears necessary in the light of stakeholders' perspectives expressed in this report. One key component suggested by the interviews regards the weight of public administrations (and especially the municipality) in planning and implementing urban transformations: in the Porta Nuova case, the protagonism of a single big developer seems with the municipality in a secondary role of negotiator seems to have weakened redistribution. Comparative research could examine variations in public–private governance models across European cities, identifying which institutional configurations allow municipalities and civic actors to negotiate stronger public returns, whether through binding affordability quotas, longterm public management of green spaces, more transparent planning agreements, or different land property/tenure systems. At the same time, our empirical material shows the value of civic and collaborative governance models, particularly in the Segantini case, where a more nuanced

role of developers and municipality let civic demands emerge and have a role in defining objectives and implementation of the process. Longterm mobilization, coalition building, and the involvement of NGOs and cooperatives enabled an alternative transformation process to emerge: one articulated around everyday use, inclusivity, and ecological stewardship rather than symbolic urban branding. This suggests that participatory processes, when empowered rather than merely consultative, can shape more equitable environmental outcomes. Comparative research could therefore explore the conditions under which citizens' initiatives effectively influence urban transformation processes, and how these conditions differ in contexts with varying state capacities and political cultures.

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6 Appendix 1 – Glossary

6.1 Abbreviations

BAM	Biblioteca degli Alberi Milano is the main green area in the Porta Nuova development
CIMEP	“Intermunicipal Consortium of Milan for Public Housing” was a public intermunicipal body established in 1965 to plan, acquire, and develop land for affordable and public housing across the Milan metropolitan area.
MM	Metropolitana Milanese, is a publicly owned company of the Municipality of Milan that operates the subway and manages the public housing (ERP) stock owned by the city, water infrastructure, and engineering services.
NABA	Nuova Accademia di Belle Arti, Art and Design Academy.
NRRP / PNRR	National Recovery and Resilience Plan.
PEEP	Piani di Edilizia Economico Popolare, are urban development plans introduced in Italy by Law 167/1962 and further regulated by Law 65/1971, designed to identify, acquire, and regulate areas allocated for the construction of public, low-cost, or subsidized housing.
P.I.I.	Integrated Intervention Plans (PII) are local urban planning instruments aimed at redeveloping and improving the urban, architectural, and environmental fabric of specific areas (introduced under Law 179/1992).
PIM	The Milan Intermunicipal Plan was a strategic intermunicipal urban planning framework created to coordinate the spatial development of

Milan and its surrounding municipalities, now restructured as a technical consulting institute.

ERP Edilizia Residenziale Pubblica – public housing, allocated on the basis of income and needs criteria, owned and managed by public bodies (public housing agencies and municipalities).

6.2 Terms and Concepts

Superbonus 110% EU funded national energy retrofitting program National instrument (partly funded through the NRRP) incentivising retrofitting in the residential sector.

7 Appendix 2 – Key interview data

#	Pseudonym & Position of Interviewee	Sector/Organization	Date of interview	Modality
M1	Private Sector Representative	Real Estate Development Isola – Porta Nuova District	27/01/2026	In person
M2	City Manager in Public Greening	Municipality of Milan	20/01/2026	In person
M3	Urban Planner and former Stecca degli Artigiani Activist	Network of socio-cultural associations, with basis in the Isola Porta Nuova District.	09/10/2025	In person
M4	Affordable Housing Scholar and former Stecca degli Artigiani Activist	Scholar in Housing Policy and Urban Transformations	18/11/2025	Online
M5	Activist on affordable housing for district-based association	Activist association on housing affordability in North-east Milan	26/06/2025	In person
M6	Activist on affordable housing for district-based association	Activist association on housing affordability in North-east Milan	24/06/2025	In person

M7	Activist and District Resident	Self-organized socio-cultural space in Isola district	24/06/2025	In person
M8	Activist and District Resident	Freelance professional	11/06/2025	In person
M9	Activist and Association Representative	Self-organized green space in Isola District	16/12/2025	In person
M10	President of Citizen's committee	Citizen's committee in Isola District	14/04/2025	Online
M11	Navigli District Resident and Private Sector Representative	Architectural and Engineering Studio in the Navigli area	17/06/2025	In person
M12	Park NGO Representative	NGO managing Green Spaces in South of Milan	03/07/2025	In person
M13	Navigli District Resident and Activist	Member of citizens committees involved in the creation of Segantini Park	10/09/2025	In person
M14	Park NGO Representative	Association Managing Segantini Park	03/10/2025	In person
M15	Park NGO Representative	Association Managing Segantini Park	13/09/2025	Online
M16	Representative of Housing Cooperative in Navigli district	Housing Cooperative in the Navigli district, in the vicinity of Segantini Park	04/09/2025	In person
M17	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Civil Servant in social housing management unit 	Municipality of Milan-Directorate for housing	14/10/2025	In person

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Civil Servant in energy efficiency of social housing stock unit • Assistant to City Manager 			
M18	Bar Owner in Isola District (not coded)	Gastronomy Business in Isola District	23/09/2025	In person
M19	Isola District Resident and Journalist	Journalist/Scholar in Urban Transformations	14/07/2025	In person

8 Appendix 3 – Code system and Code frequencies

Code System	Frequency
Codes and Sub-codes	550
Milan-Specific Codes	
Milano housing system	17
Climate policy	4
Green Interventions	
NBS - Parks and Green Spaces	8
BAM	2
Segantini Park	14
Isola pepe verde	7
Urban Regeneration/ Densification	14
Isola district Regeneration	15
Retrofit / BONUS 110	10
HISTORY & IMPLEMENTATION	
Political Stability/Change	0
early development timeline	3
Segantini history	20
Isola history	15
Stecca history	15
Isola pepe verde history	2
triggers or catalysts for action	6
role of pilot or legacy projects	9

PARTICIPATION & GOVERNANCE	
quality of consultation/participation process	6
impacts of policy/legal frameworks	1
civic inclusion/exclusion	5
Impacts of civil action on institutional policies	5
(IN)JUSTICE & (IN)EQUITY	
effects on vulnerable groups	1
Isola effects on vulnerable groups	6
distribution of benefits and burdens	33
Isola distribution of benefits and burdens	17
Segantini distribution of benefits and burdens	9
perceived (un)fairness	7
POLITICAL MOBILIZATION	
protests and/or campaigns	1
Isola protests and/or campaigns	2
neighborhood advocacy	10
mobilization around housing rights	9
mobilization around environmental themes	6
SOCIAL IMPACTS - POSITIVE	
improved housing accessibility	1
green space and/or service upgrades	5
Segantini green space and/or service upgrade	3
Isola green space and/or service upgrade	8
improved health/social wellbeing	8
SOCIAL IMPACTS - NEGATIVE	
gentrification- displacement or pricing out	12
Segantini area gentrification- displacement and or pricing out	6
Isola gentrification-displacement or pricing out	17
construction disruption	4
Isola construction disruption	1
reduced housing accessibility	1
CONTRADICTIONS & TENSIONS	
mixed or unclear messaging	4
disputes between actors	6
Segantini disputes between actors	3
Isola disputes between actors	14
conflicting goals (e.g. green vs. affordable)	10
Segantini conflicting goals	2
Isola conflicting goals	4
regulatory and competency barriers	16
STAKEHOLDERS & DYNAMICS	
main actors involved	0
Milano main actors	6

Isola main actors	13
Segantini main actors	11
role of NGO or co-ops	14
institutional coordination or conflict	12
Isola institutional coordination	4
Segantini institutional coordination/conflict	3
private sector influence	3
isola private sector influence	15
TOOLS & INNOVATIONS	
public-private and public -commons/co-op models	6
green building and retrofit techniques	5
legal/policy instruments for housing security	16
TOURISM/MARKET PRESSURES	
short-term rentals/AirBnB	4
second/holiday home pressures	0
market speculation/financialization	34