

Urban design for multilevel planning

An inclusive, multilevel planning experience to regenerate Milan metropolitan peripheries

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Abstract: “Metropolitan welfare and urban regeneration” is the project that the Metropolitan City Authority of Milan is carrying out thanks to a National fund by the Infrastructure Ministry of the Central State aiming at developing deprived areas in the country. The topic of inclusiveness is the key chosen by the Metropolitan City of Milan to interpret the issue of peripheries and the idea of urban regeneration. Its target is to transform marginal places into the pivots of a territorial and social infrastructure to build a new livability of the metropolitan suburbs, through a multilevel planning tool that involves the environmental level, such as the housing inclusion and the cultural and social promotion levels. It is mainly addressing the vulnerable population, and at the same time it aims at the construction of nodes of attractions for all the citizens. The paper presents the innovative approach of governance proposed by a program that experiments new relationships at the metropolitan scale, and the contents of the six different projects that compose the program interpreting the issue of integration as a fundamental criterion into planning tools aimed at responding to the current challenges.

Keywords: urban regeneration; welfare; metropolitan scale; peripheries.



Introduction

In 2016 the Metropolitan City of Milan participated to a national call for proposals for financing by the Infrastructure Ministry of the Central State (called ‘Bando Periferie’), aiming at developing deprived areas over the country. With the project “Metropolitan Welfare and Urban Regeneration. Overcoming emergencies and building new spaces of cohesion and hospitality”, the Metropolitan City of Milan has proposed to build a system of services and spaces for hospitality and social cohesion promoted and managed by a network of Municipalities that have identified places to allocate activities capable of taking care of the marginal context on their territory. Abandoned or never inhabited places have been identified, in order to turn them into the pivots of a territorial and social infrastructure able to aggregate diversified activities and to unite different subjects for the construction of a new livability of metropolitan suburbs. Through the networking of spaces, of actors, of planning by a multiplicity of aggregate administrations, a design logic defined as “open network” was introduced: a collaborative design that allows both to overcome the emergency logic with which complex problems like that of hospitality are faced, and to change the scale in which the issue of redevelopment is usually approached.

1. Metropolitan welfare as a design strategy

With the participation in the extraordinary program for the redevelopment of the peripheral areas [‘Extraordinary program of intervention for urban redevelopment and the security in the suburbs of metropolitan cities and provincial capital municipalities’ (ex D.P.C.M. 25/05/2016)], the Metropolitan City of Milan has embarked on a path that has marked a discontinuity with respect to the ordinary government practice for two reasons. The first relates to the interpretation of the issue ‘peripheries’ and the very idea of redevelopment, which has been focused on the paradigm of social inclusion; the second reason for novelty concerns the governance model that the Metropolitan City of Milan has started building, giving impetus to a planning experience based on an ‘open network’ logic.

From the point of view of the interpretation of the peripheral issue, the call for proposal ‘Bando Periferie’ urged us to ask ourselves questions about which territories should be considered peripheral, that is, on how to identify urban contexts towards which to direct the project proposals. In recent urban studies, the periphery has been described in different geo-political contexts and with different disciplinary approaches: it has been analyzed as dichotomous dependence of power on centrality (Kühn, Bernt, Colini, 2016), as a condition of spatial marginality and peripheralization (Naumann, Fischer-Tahir, 2013), as a socio-economic process of construction of the exclusion – ‘the making of marginality’ (Wacquant, 2015; Wacquant, Slater, Pereira, 2014), as a territory subject to financial predation strategies and a territory of conquest for urban growth (Bernt, Colini, Foerste, 2017). At the same time, public policies have turned their interest in the periphery within the framework of EU social cohesion policies, while central governments and local authorities have addressed it through national redevelopment programs (Soziale Stadt DE, Politique de la Ville FR, NDC in UK, Urbana ES, Bando Periferie Italia). On the basis of these analytical frameworks, it was highlighted how the theoretical analysis of urban disciplines has failed to effectively inform public policies and, vice versa, urban policies up to now interpreted only partially the theoretical-critical contribution. With the aim of starting to fill this gap, the Metropolitan City of Milan has built a project that focuses attention not only primarily on space, but on the social and economic processes that produce inequality.



The starting point was therefore to take periphery as a transversal issue to the different territories, identifying peripheral places as marginal due to social conditions, economic, cultural aspects of its inhabitants - even where these spaces were located geographically in a central area. The contents of the project derive directly from this definition of what can be considered periphery. Expanding the geographical horizon of what is peripheral has led to accepting the challenge of considering the whole Metropolitan area as peripheral; extending the semantic field means constructing a project for the redevelopment of the suburbs involving the different levels with which a program of urban redevelopment is called to measure itself: environmental and sustainable mobility on the territory, housing inclusion, social promotion.

Overall, the objective of the 'Metropolitan Welfare and Urban Regeneration' (MWUR) program is to trigger processes of redevelopment of spaces underutilized or abandoned through projects capable of responding to the housing demand of weak population and at the same time to the need for places for cultural and social activities aimed at supporting social inclusion: places open to the territory, spaces for welcoming and, at the same time, potential attractors for all metropolitan citizens, with functions of supra-municipal relevance. In particular, Metropolitan City has asked the Municipalities to develop projects that, declined in the context of living spaces rather than within the framework of an infrastructure upgrade, could combine within the same intervention the residential destination, or the public transport, with cultural or social service: integrated projects, suitable for diversifying the residential offer in relation to the specific needs of different types of inhabitants, or to identify actions to support living even independently of direct interventions on built environment.

2. A network logic for urban regeneration

From the point of view of the proposed governance model, the Metropolitan City of Milan has interpreted the participation to the extraordinary program for the redevelopment of the peripheral areas as an opportunity to transversally measure oneself with the fundamental questions of the metropolitan government and as an opportunity to define its own directing role with respect to themes and territories interested by the project. This planning orientation has been developed through promoting interdisciplinary work within the administration and initiating a practice of cooperation between different administrations and subjects involved in the projects. This perspective has been identified with the image of an 'open network': a strategic vision that responds to a logic of collaboration amongst groups of activities and subjects (not only institutions, but also associations, cooperatives, organizations) and which prefigures a progressive implementation of intervention programs.

In interpreting its directing role with respect to the planned territories, Metropolitan City proposed to the Municipalities to follow this logic, both through the consolidation of relationships between Municipalities that had already started shared projects on their territories, and through the activation of new networks able to work on strategic supra-municipal goals. Milan metropolitan territory is articulated in homogeneous areas - by geographical features, demographic, historical, economic and institutional - by the Strategic Plan approved with Council resolution of 12/05/2016 in order to aggregate decentralized metropolitan activities and services. This articulation constitutes a first, albeit embryonic, identification of 'territorial figures' (Gabellini, 2008, Pasqui, 2000), a reticular system aimed at promoting integration between similar services of single or associated Municipalities.

Following an open network logic meant triggering processes of urban regeneration within a collaborative design involving a plurality of actors, through the sharing of spaces and of planning by many aggregate administrations; it meant giving life to projects that involve repercussions, in terms of improvement urban quality, on different interrelated territorial contexts; it meant finally to put oneself in a perspective which provides for the replicability of virtuous models even on larger territories. The MWUR project is part of this vision. The proposal for a metropolitan welfare for urban regeneration is to build a system of services for welcoming and social cohesion promoted and managed by a network of Municipalities that have identified on their territory places to allocate these activities. Interventions for sustainable mobility, housing facilities, cultural nodes and programs for social inclusion are interconnected so that each Administration can draw, from the mutual relations that the different subjects involved will build, an advantage in terms of function, attractiveness and cost-effectiveness and therefore also in terms of a planning that can further develop and aggregate other projects giving rise to new territorial polarities.

3. An integrated program for a new habitability

Combining the residential destination with the cultural and social one within the same project, and diversifying the residential offer based on the specific needs of different types of inhabitants, mean designing places open to the territory: not just spaces for welcoming but also potential attractors for all metropolitan citizens, with functions of beyond-local relevance. The expected results of these processes involve several levels with which an urban redevelopment program is called to measure itself in the environmental and sustainable mobility level, the housing inclusion and the cultural and social promotion level.

From the urban environment point of view in which buildings or abandoned areas are inserted, an intervention of renovation focused on an inhabiting perspective that contains a wide spectrum of functions in addition to residence, will allow to transform marginal places – marginal because they are degraded or because they are excluded from privileged trajectories by the inhabitants –, in places of urban quality that can gradually become spaces of reference for social life of the territory. This transformation process is closely linked to accessibility through the existing public transport network and through forecasting or strengthening of a sustainable mobility system that can connect spaces and services not necessarily adjacent.

From the residential function point of view to which buildings will be mainly be used, the project responds to some of the most unresolved socio-economic emergencies of current events. Among them, the living of migrants, providing spaces for families or single people within a path of social integration; the cohabitation between different types of inhabitants, inserting accommodations for students, whose presence guarantees a continuous exchange between different cultures in addition to recalling activities able to revitalize the territorial context; the inclusion of vulnerable population, with the provision of rooms for the residence but also for a series of shared services, together with the identification of the most suitable forms of management.

Finally, from social promotion point of view, the redevelopment of abandoned places for living not separated from the creation of new public spaces, as well as the provision of services for integration and job opportunities (with refurbishing programs that include, for example, self-construction as a tool



3.2 Peripheries at the Center: redevelopment of the Pioltello Satellite district

The project involves the redevelopment of one of the areas most affected by marginalization processes in the entire metropolitan territory. Through a series of actions aimed at promoting social integration, a support policies for work, to enrich the offer of spaces and programs for recreational activities, the ‘Peripheries at the Center’ project aims to provide the Pioltello area, starting from refurbishment of a sports center and the opening of a housing support desk, by appropriate infrastructure for the inclusion of this geographical context in a broad system of multilevel relations that transform the condition of isolation in a condition of high urbanity.

3.3 Integration Machine

Starting from the redevelopment of three buildings in the Municipalities of Legnano, Rescaldina and Castano Primo, the project triggers a process of social inclusion that supports the creation of low-cost living spaces and related management plans, the participatory planning of some public places, the creation of new aggregation spaces, as well as job training for the young people. The project aims to consolidate an already existing collaboration between administrations and the third sector and to expand the network of actors involved also through participation processes, responding to the objective of the Strategic Plan to “implement policies aimed at sustainable social development and inclusive, guaranteeing all citizens equal opportunities”. The different nodes of this “integration machine” are networked not only through an integrated management system, but also geographically through the implementation of a local public transport line and the construction of a cycle path between the buildings to be redeveloped (figure 2).

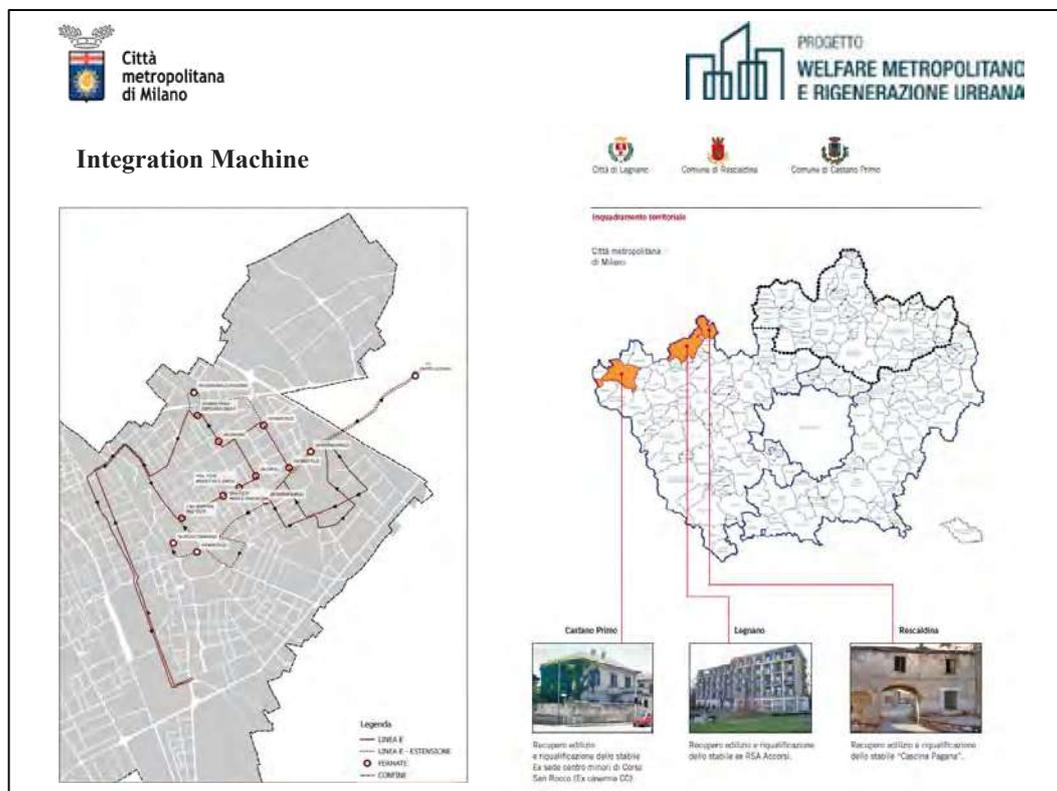


Figure 2: Integration Machine. Redevelopment of peripheries in the Northern part of the metropolitan territory

3.4 Urban regeneration in North Milan

The Municipalities of Cinisello Balsamo and Sesto San Giovanni present heterogeneous projects for the type of urban regeneration proposed, united by the intention of constructing a new identity of marginal contexts, because they are not easily accessible or they lack aggregation spaces of social and cultural services that distinguish them. There are two issues involved, the first of a predominantly social nature, the second marked by environmental requalification. The recovery and reuse of a historic farmhouse for a social housing intervention, the renovation of a school building, in addition to the creation of 'Citizenship houses' in which some of the projects related to the culture and sociality already present are put to system on the territory, are the projects aimed at promoting social inclusion. The creation of a cycling network of interchange between the Municipalities of Cinisello Balsamo, Milan, Sesto San Giovanni and Monza, and the project of a farmhouse and a rural park redevelopment, between the river system of the Lambro and the Parks of north-eastern Milan, instead propose to respectively enhance the nodes of interchange at the metropolitan scale, and to improve the landscape and environmental quality of what is today defined as a 'no land use' due to the presence, in particular, of a power line that is planned to be buried.

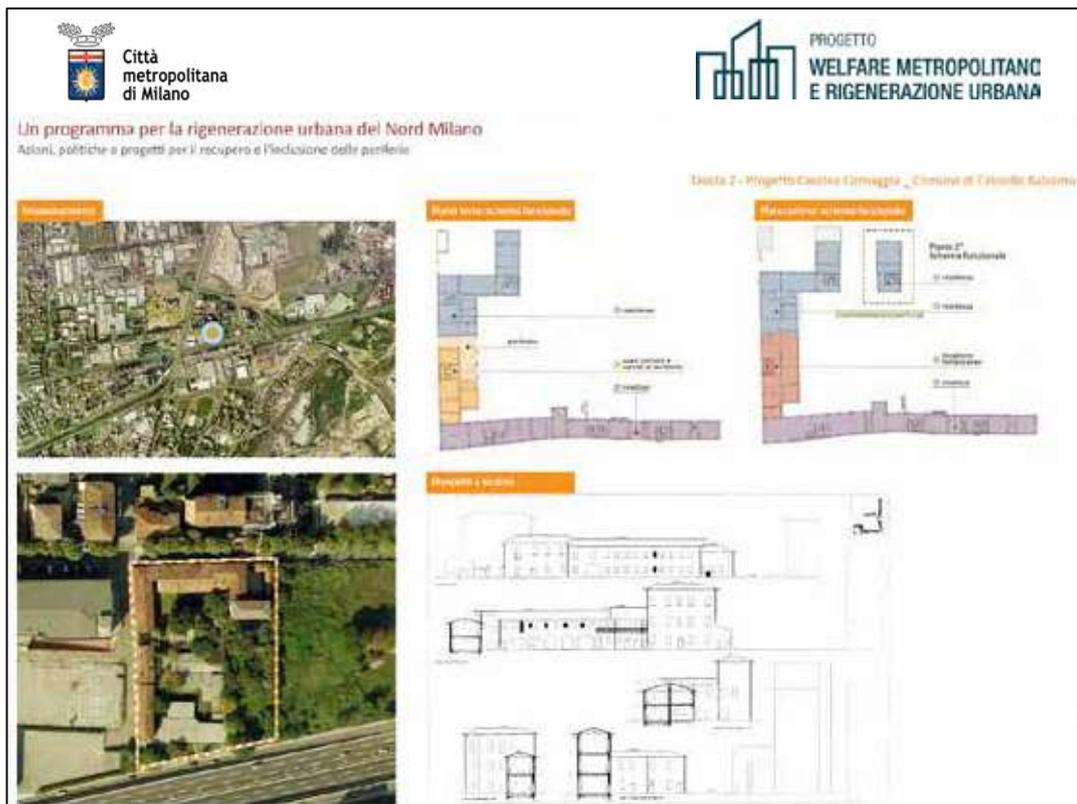


Figure 3: Urban regeneration in North Milan. The renovation of a farmhouse for social housing in Cinisello

3.5 RICA (Regenerating communities and living) towards Human Technopole

The project proposes interventions aimed at the social inclusion of various sectors of the population to generate new reference poles for the entire urban community. The recovery and re-functionalization of some buildings, including a road house owned by the metropolitan city, are designed to house elderly and an experimental didactic center for children, or an auditorium together with gathering places for the elderly and children, or the creation of a community hub and a space for living of weaker groups in the

same building. Regenerating peripheral spaces to integrate different functions related to living, through a project articulated in the territory of several Municipalities, answers the goal of the Strategic Plan to “promote, also through cooperation between the public and the public private, with particular reference to the third sector, a new generative welfare system, understood as a strategic lever for innovation”.

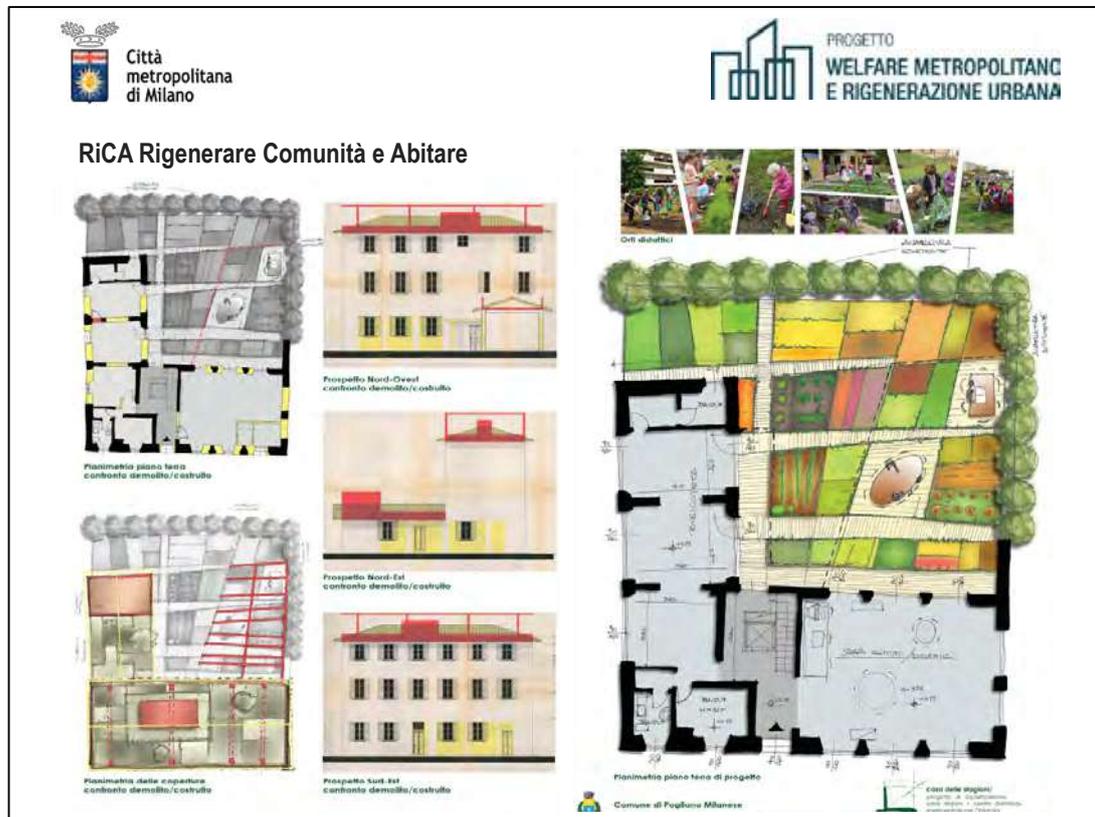


Figure 4: RiCA (Regenerating communities and living). The ‘Seasons House’ in Pogliano Milanese

3.6 For a city of us. Urban regeneration and socio-cultural development in the South West

In one of the most degraded socio-economic contexts of the Metropolitan City, the Municipalities of Pieve Emanuele and Rozzano propose to establish a stable organization in order to develop an inter-communal socio-cultural pole formed by three urban laboratories, redeveloping three existing public structures into one with a prevailing social characteristic, the other sportive, the last cultural. The project makes use of the consolidated collaboration between the two Municipalities to build a political, technical and associational coordination that promotes urban regeneration through measures to combat discomfort. The three laboratories are three incubators oriented towards promoting active citizenship and spreading social responsibility in city community, places of aggregation able to attract the talents and resources present on territory in order to build a neighborhood identity and to foster social relationships, responding to degradation problems related to high housing tension, a high rate of micro-crime and to the acute youthful unease that historically characterized this urban region.

Conclusions

The MWUR project can be read as an experiment of multilevel planning, as it has tried to stress the interaction between different levels of territorial government (the metropolitan and the municipal levels) and to implement the connections already existing from the geographical, infrastructural, social points of view, but which have not been acquired in urban planning yet. It has in fact proposed an articulated system of material and immaterial actions, considering the different levels involved in an urban redevelopment program: the environmental and sustainable mobility level, the housing inclusion and the cultural and social promotion level. Moreover, the projects have been realized by different actors, institutions, associations and stakeholders on the metropolitan territory, with the common goal of making urban regeneration, together with social inclusion, the core of a work of total rethinking of the metropolitan peripheries.

In light of the experience gained with this planning approach and after the first year of management of the MWUR project, it is possible to propose some suggestions in the perspective of moving from extraordinary planning to a new cycle in the governance at the metropolitan scale. The first suggestion concerns the process of renewal within the Metropolitan City of Milan, triggered by the project as it was conceived, and that could now be consolidated in the perspective of disseminating in other metropolitan areas the same multilevel approach expressed by the 31 Municipalities involved. The proposed interventions are guided by a unified interpretation of the issue of periphery and respond to the hypothesis that social inclusion can shape urban regeneration and that the redevelopment of the territory in turn is generative of social inclusion (Botto and Pezzoni, 2018). Both from the point of view of the issue that guided the redevelopment of the suburbs, and from the point of view of the experimented working method, the project MWUR marked a discontinuity with respect to the ordinary planning processes, indicating a possible direction of work in the practices of territorial government at the metropolitan scale. The conception of a project that made social inclusion the pivot around which to design the development of Milan's suburbs means going beyond the boundaries of traditional territorial planning sectors to respond more properly to the overall goal of *taking care* of areas considered marginal. On the other hand, a care of the territory that took into account the contextual criticalities required to diversify the interventions, focusing attention from time to time on aspects directly related to the physical space rather than on the difficulties of living connected to a specific urban context. Material and immaterial actions, variously combined in order to respond to the specific needs of each territory, have therefore designed the field of urban regeneration that has been defined in a close correlation with the conditions of marginality expressed by the territories themselves, as they were represented by the municipal administrations that have taken the theme proposed by the Metropolitan City into their projects. At the same time, the different interpretations of welfare, advanced by the metropolitan peripheries to rethink themselves, have made a concept explicit to be implemented, that of 'metropolitan welfare', which is the result of the opportunities for social inclusion identified in the single areas and networked with those of other contexts: a concept that cannot be separated from the intrinsic planning of each Municipality that has activated itself in transposing the questions of the territory and in proposing solutions open to fruition on the metropolitan scale. Finally, the general suggestion in the perspective to start a new cycle of governance at the metropolitan scale, based on an ordinary multilevel planning, is to strengthen and spread an approach to the entire urban region aimed at identifying the transformative potential of single places or the possibility of overcoming specific marginal conditions through integrated interventions that are inscribed in the broader design of a metropolitan welfare capable of regenerating the territory.

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