

Negotiating Public Space in Hyper-Diverse Contexts:

Institutional Models and Everyday Practices in
the case of Via Padova and Via dei Transiti

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Negotiating Public Space in Hyper-Diverse Contexts:

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Abstract

Via Padova has evolved as a migrant-receiving area marked by socio-spatial stigma and overlapping claims to public space. This study reconceptualises public space in hyper-diverse contexts not as a neutral container, but as a relational field shaped by the interaction between institutional models and everyday spatial practices. It adopts a multidimensional framework grounded in a “downscaling” logic, triangulating policy review, spatial mapping, and ethnographic observation. This approach contrasts the institutional “Representations of Space” produced by planners with the “Representational Space” lived by residents, focusing on the Via Padova–Via dei Transiti corridor.

The analysis identifies three structural tensions. First, regenerative–entrepreneurial logics rely on the assumption that physical upgrading can recalibrate behaviour and foster social mixing. However, ethnographic evidence reveals patterns of parallel coexistence, where spatial proximity does not produce social permeability and diversity is aestheticised as vibrancy rather than enabling integration.

Second, participatory governance frameworks presume a mobilisable civic subject capable of engaging through formal channels. In practice, governance is embedded in informal micro-territorial structures where commercial anchors and local actors operate as de facto spatial regulators. The tension lies not in the absence of participation, but in the mismatch between institutional engagement models and existing socio-spatial authority.

Third, regulatory approaches centered on decorum frame informal occupation as disorderly, overlooking its role as a compensatory extension of domestic space. Everyday appropriations of thresholds emerge as necessary extensions of domestic life rather than transgressive anomalies.

These tensions reflect structural conditions of governing hyper-diverse public space rather than mere implementation failures. Publicness in the corridor operates through layered, and only partially programmable spatial logics that coexist with, yet exceed, institutional representations. By reframing governance as the management of negotiated equilibrium, this study contributes to planning debates on engaging hyper-diversity without reducing its complexity.

Via Padova si è evoluta come area di arrivo dei migranti, caratterizzata da stigma socio-spaziale e rivendicazioni sovrapposte dello spazio pubblico. Questo studio riconsidera lo spazio pubblico in contesti iper-diversificati non come un contenitore neutro, ma come un campo relazionale modellato dall'interazione tra modelli istituzionali e pratiche spaziali quotidiane. Adotta un quadro multidimensionale basato su una logica di “downscaling”, triangolando la revisione delle politiche, la mappatura spaziale e l'osservazione etnografica. Questo approccio contrappone le “rappresentazioni dello spazio” istituzionali prodotte dai pianificatori allo “spazio di rappresentazione” vissuto dai residenti, concentrandosi sul corridoio Via Padova-Via dei Transiti.

L'analisi identifica tre tensioni strutturali. In primo luogo, le logiche rigenerative-imprenditoriali si basano sul presupposto che il miglioramento spaziale possa ricalibrare i comportamenti e favorire la mescolanza sociale. Tuttavia, le evidenze etnografiche rivelano modelli di coesistenza parallela, in cui la vicinanza spaziale non stimola permeabilità sociale e la diversità è estetizzata come vivacità piuttosto che come fattore di integrazione.

In secondo luogo, i modelli di governance partecipativa presuppongono l'esistenza di un soggetto civico mobilitabile e in grado di impegnarsi attraverso canali formali. Nella pratica, la governance è radicata in strutture micro-territoriali informali in cui gli attori commerciali e locali operano come regolatori spaziali de facto. La tensione non risiede nell'assenza di partecipazione, ma nel disallineamento tra i modelli di coinvolgimento istituzionale e l'autorità socio-spaziale esistente.

In terzo luogo, gli approcci normativi incentrati sul decoro inquadrano l'occupazione informale come disordinata, trascurando il suo ruolo di estensione compensativa dello spazio domestico. Le appropriazioni quotidiane delle soglie emergono come estensioni necessarie della vita domestica piuttosto che come anomalie trasgressive.

Queste tensioni riflettono le condizioni strutturali della gestione di uno spazio pubblico iper-diversificato piuttosto che semplici fallimenti di attuazione. Il carattere pubblico nel corridoio opera attraverso logiche spaziali stratificate e solo parzialmente programmabili che coesistono con le previsioni istituzionali, ma le superano. Riformulando la governance come gestione dell'equilibrio negoziato, questo studio contribuisce al dibattito sulla pianificazione per coinvolgere l'iper-diversità senza ridurre la complessità.

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Research Justification

Urban regeneration has become a discursive tool for contemporary cities to improve infrastructure, foster social integration, and enhance economic vitality. Yet, in hyper-diverse neighbourhoods, these initiatives often encounter complex social realities that normative planning models fail to capture. Public space in such contexts is not simply a backdrop for urban life but a relational arena where multiple populations negotiate access, visibility, and meaning. Misalignment between institutional visions of public space and the everyday practices of residents can exacerbate social tensions, marginalise vulnerable groups, and limit the effectiveness of regeneration programs.

Via Padova and Via dei Transiti are particularly suitable for investigating these dynamics. The area has been subject to multiple regeneration initiatives, ranging from physical redevelopment to social programs, providing a clear example of institutional models attempting to shape public space. Its high levels of cultural, linguistic, and socio-economic diversity, together with visible tensions and negotiations in public space, offer rich empirical evidence of how everyday practices intersect with institutional visions. Additionally, the availability of data, combined with the accessibility of the area for ethnographic observation, enables a rigorous multi-method investigation at the micro-scale.

Research Gap

Although public space is widely theorized as socially produced and hyper-diversity as relationally complex, limited research empirically examines how institutional regeneration programs interact with everyday spatial practices at the micro-scale. Consequently, planning frameworks often operate through a lens of normative legibility, relying on assumptions of 'standardized' public use that fail to account for informal and culturally embedded spatial dynamics.

Contribution

By systematically comparing institutional policies and lived practices within the strategic segments of Via Padova and Via dei Transiti, this research addresses a critical gap in urban planning scholarship. The study contributes to both theory and practice by revealing the micro-scale negotiations that shape lived urban life, assessing the limitations and opportunities of current planning frameworks, and providing evidence to inform inclusive, context-sensitive regeneration strategies that recognise informal practices as urban assets rather than obstacles.

Research Question & Objectives

Research Question

In what ways is public space in Via Padova shaped and negotiated through everyday spatial practices in relation to the models of public space promoted through institutional regeneration programs?

What does this reveal about the challenges urban planning frameworks face in engaging with super-diverse urban contexts?

General Objective

To examine the negotiation of public space in Via Padova, analysing how everyday spatial practices interact with institutional models (regulatory and physical) to reflect on the challenges of urban planning in super-diverse contexts.

Specific Objectives

- Document the lived production of public space to analyze how different groups inhabiting strategic segments of Via Padova and Via dei Transiti use, appropriate, and attribute meaning to public space in their everyday practices
- Map the spatial and semiotic configuration of the area to examine how commercial frontages, linguistic landscapes, and micro-spatial arrangements contribute to the material and symbolic configuration of public space.
- Analyse institutional models of public space to identify and interpret the models of public space promoted through institutional regeneration programs and media narratives.
- Analyse the limitations and opportunities of current urban planning frameworks in addressing the social complexity of super-diverse contexts, based on the observed negotiations.
- Recommend policy orientations and intervention principles that recognise informal dynamics, parallel uses, and symbolic negotiations as constitutive elements of public space in super-diverse contexts.

[The Framing]

From Negotiated Public Space to Ethnographic Translation

01

1.1 Con- cep- tual Lens

1.1.1 The Re- lational Field

Public Space & the Every- day City

Public space has long been framed within urban theory as the arena where collective life unfolds. Yet, understandings of what constitutes “public life” and how it is spatially supported have shifted significantly. Rather than treating public space as a purely formal or aesthetic component of urban design, this research aligns with traditions that conceptualise it as a lived, relational infrastructure shaped by ordinary practices, bodily presence, and informal social interaction.

In *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, Jane Jacobs famously challenged modernist planning by arguing that vibrant urban life emerges from the dense choreography of everyday street activity. For Jacobs, sidewalks are not residual circulation spaces but the “social organs” of the city, where safety and trust are produced incrementally through “eyes on the street.” Expanding on this human-centred perspective, Gehl (2011) argues that public life is not guaranteed by design intention alone; it depends on spatial affordances that enable lingering, proximity, and visibility. Public space must allow people to stay, not merely to pass.

More recently, Klinenberg (2018) has reframed these insights through the concept of social infrastructure. Unlike abstract notions of social capital, social

infrastructure refers to the physical places and institutions that structure everyday interaction. Libraries, parks, streets, and local shops are not simply backdrops to social life; they actively condition its possibility. When robust, they enable trust and mutual recognition; when neglected, social life fragments.

Framing public space as infrastructure allows us to adopt the lens of everyday urbanism. As articulated by Margaret Crawford (1999), this approach studies cities through the lens of ordinary practices rather than formal design intentions. It foregrounds provisional uses, small-scale adaptations, and improvised tactics through which urban space is actually inhabited. Public space is therefore not a finished product but an evolving process of occupation and reinterpretation.

This attention to appropriation is further conceptualised by Franck and Stevens (2007) in their notion of “loose space”: environments defined not by physical emptiness, but by the degree to which users can appropriate them beyond prescribed functions. Looseness enables adaptability, particularly where multiple social groups share space; however, it is not inherently harmonious. The very openness that permits diverse uses may also generate tension, ambiguity, and competing claims.

Similarly, Ray Oldenburg’s concept of the “third place” identifies informal gathering spaces (cafés, bars, local shops) as neutral grounds distinct from home and work. Their social vitality depends less on architectural spectacle than on repetition, familiarity, and the presence of “regulars”. Yet, as recent scholarship suggests, even within this model,



↑ Fig 1. The Relational Infrastructure of Public Space: A conceptual framework of the transition from spatial affordances to social outcomes. Source: Authors' own Elaboration.

neutrality cannot be assumed. The status of “regular” is often socially constructed, meaning that belonging is negotiated rather than given.

As Coppola (2019) observes in the context of Milan, certain micro-publics can be understood through a spectrum ranging from traditional spaces of “benign indifference,” which allow for a casual and diverse co-existence through a degree of invisibility, to newer “spaces of election,” where participants are invited into a more assertive performance of intimacy and belonging.

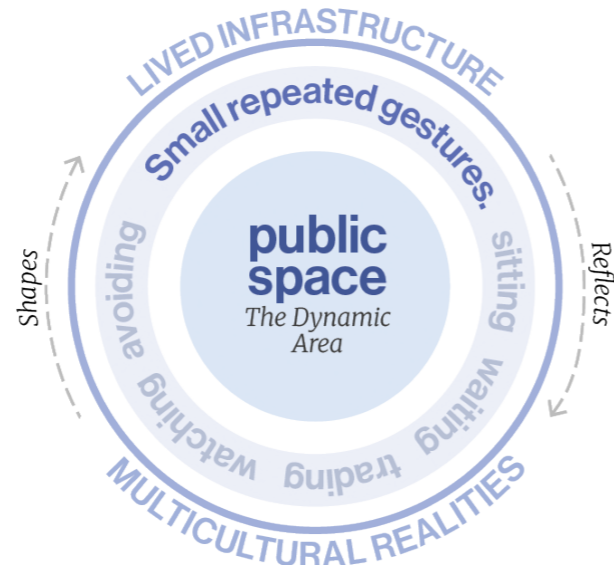
Taken together, these frameworks establish public space as a relational field rather than a neutral container. However, they often implicitly assume a relatively cohesive public, a shared social horizon within which interaction unfolds. In increasingly heterogeneous urban contexts, this assumption requires re-examination.

Recent scholarship suggests that public space functions less as a stage for collective unity and more as a terrain of ongoing negotiation. Rishbeth, Ganji, and Vodicka (2018) argue that users are frequently coded as “welcomed lingerers” or “unwelcomed loiterers” through racialised and classed perceptions embedded in spatial design and management practices. In these contexts, visibility, difference, and legitimacy may not be evenly distributed.

In this research, public space is therefore approached not as a symbolic abstraction, but as a dynamic arena where coexistence is enacted through small, repeated gestures: sitting, waiting, trading, watching, avoiding,

and greeting. These everyday acts form the micro-foundations of shared urban life.

Public space operates as lived infrastructure, a material and social condition through which diverse urban subjects encounter, interpret, and negotiate one another. Although public space has long been theorised as socially produced, through Lefebvre’s (1991) spatial triad, de Certeau’s (1984) emphasis on everyday tactics, and Crosta’s (2010) understanding of planning as a situated and conflictual practice, it can be argued that comparatively limited attention has been paid to how institutional regeneration programs interact with everyday spatial practices at the micro-scale.



↑ Fig 2. Public Space as a lived infrastructure and a dynamic arena. Source: Authors' own Elaboration.

→ Fig 3. Everyday urbanism in practice: informal gathering, recreation, and diverse co-existence at Parco della Martesana. Source: Photograph by the authors, 2025.



1.1.2 Negotiating the Diverse City

Hyper-Diversity

If public space operates as lived social infrastructure, the question becomes: infrastructure for whom? In contemporary urban contexts marked by complex migration histories and layered socio-economic differentiation, coexistence cannot be assumed to be harmonious, nor can diversity be reduced to ethnicity alone.

Early discussions of urban diversity were shaped by the concept of super-diversity, introduced by Steven Vertovec (2007). He argued that migration-driven urban change is characterised not merely by the presence of multiple ethnic groups, but by intersecting variables including legal status, migration channel, socio-economic position, religion, and differential access to rights. Diversity, in this sense, is multidimensional rather than additive. Social positioning cannot be understood through ethnicity alone.

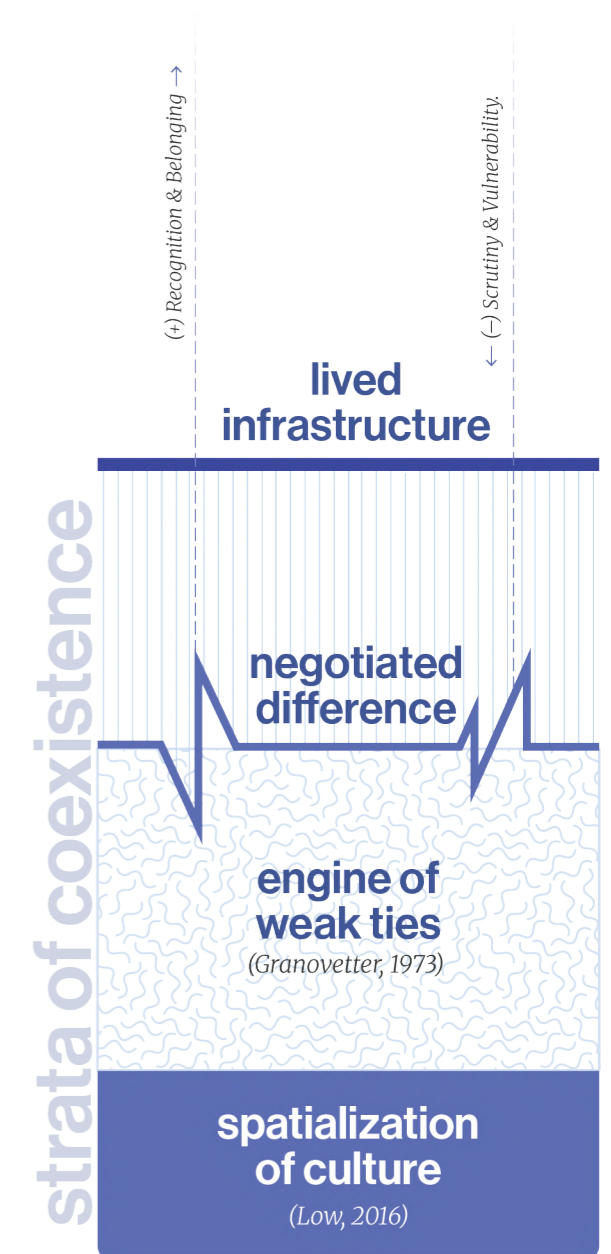
However, subsequent scholarship has suggested that even super-diversity insufficiently captures the full complexity of contemporary urban heterogeneity. The concept of hyper-diversity, developed by Tasan-Kok et al. (2014), extends the analytical lens beyond demographic descriptors to include lifestyles, attitudes, activity patterns, household compositions, and transnational orientations. Hyper-diversity emphasises that urban difference is not static or

group-bound, but fluid, intersectional, and spatially distributed. Individuals may share ethnic backgrounds yet diverge radically in economic position, cultural practice, or urban orientation. This shift is crucial. If diversity is multi-layered and dynamic, then public space cannot be understood as hosting a single “community,” but rather multiple, partially overlapping publics with differentiated claims to space.

Negotiated Coexistence

The spatial dimension complicates assumptions that contact naturally produces cohesion. While Contact Theory (Allport, 1954) suggests that intergroup interaction can reduce prejudice under certain conditions, proximity alone does not guarantee recognition. As Clare Rishbeth et al. (2018) demonstrate, the design and governance of public space can either enable meaningful interaction or reinforce separation. Different spatial typologies generate distinct modes of coexistence: markets, structured around transactional exchange, often create legitimate reasons for cross-cultural encounter, whereas parks may render specific cultural practices hyper-visible and subject to scrutiny.

Public space, therefore, regulates the formation of social capital. As Putnam (2000) distinguishes, it may support bonding ties (solidarity within groups) and bridging ties (connections across groups), yet its most consistent contribution in diverse contexts may lie in what Granovetter (1973) terms weak ties: low-intensity, fleeting encounters that establish a baseline of familiarity without demanding deep integration. In hyper-diverse neighbourhoods, such weak ties form the micro-foundations of pragmatic coexistence.



↑ Fig 4. The strata of coexistence: conceptualising how weak ties and negotiated difference build lived infrastructure within hyper-diverse spaces. Source: Authors' own Elaboration.

At the same time, these micro-interactions are conditioned by structural asymmetries. As Ash Amin (2002) argues, urban proximity does not automatically generate cosmopolitanism; it unfolds within political and economic hierarchies that shape who feels entitled to assert presence. Legal precarity, housing instability, and informal labour arrangements intersect to produce differentiated capacities to occupy and appropriate space. The negotiation of difference observed at street level is therefore embedded within broader relations of power.

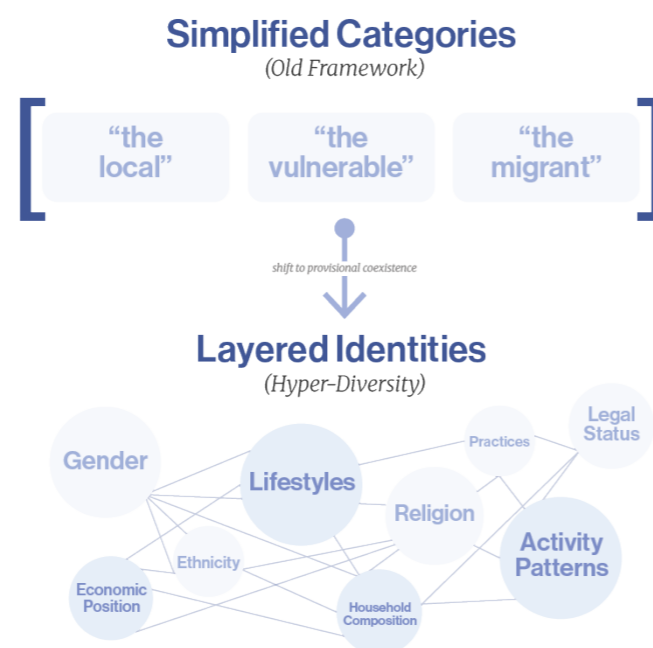
This embeddedness becomes visible through what Setha Low (2016) describes as the “spatialization of culture”: the process through which social norms, exclusions, and hierarchies are inscribed into the built environment. Public space is not a neutral platform but a socially interpreted environment where certain bodies are read as legitimate “users” and others as “loiterers.” Visibility, in this sense, is double-edged. It may signal recognition and belonging, but it may also expose minority groups to surveillance or stigmatisation.

Hyper-diversity thus reframes coexistence as a condition of negotiated difference rather than achieved harmony. It foregrounds the fluid, intersectional, and power-laden character of urban heterogeneity, while recognising that everyday proximity can still generate what Amin (2002) calls “habitual tolerance”: pragmatic accommodations that allow multiple ways of life to operate side by side without requiring consensus.

For this thesis, hyper-diversity is not treated as a celebratory label nor as a narrative of fragmentation,

but as an urban condition that complicates planning assumptions. It reveals the limits of simplified categories (“the migrant,” “the local,” “the vulnerable”) and highlights the need to attend to how difference is spatially negotiated in practice. Public space becomes the arena where these layered identities, inequalities, and orientations encounter one another, producing forms of coexistence that are provisional, situated, and continuously recalibrated.

The following section examines how planning rationalities attempt to govern such complexity, and why conventional normative frameworks often struggle to interpret or support negotiated urban coexistence under hyper-diverse conditions.



↑ Fig 5. The conceptual shift from rigid demographic categories to fluid, intersectional layered identities within hyper-diverse contexts. Source: Authors' own Elaboration.

Normative Planning Rationalities

If hyper-diversity destabilises the idea of a singular public, it also unsettles the epistemological foundations of planning practice. Urban governance does not operate in a conceptual vacuum; it is structured by normative planning rationalities: institutionalised ways of defining problems, categorising populations, and prescribing spatial order. These rationalities make urban life legible and governable, yet in hyper-diverse contexts, their assumptions of coherence, stability, and consensus can become increasingly fragile.

Planning theory has long grappled with the question of how collective decisions are justified. The communicative turn, most prominently articulated by Patsy Healey (1997), reframed planning as a collaborative and deliberative process in which diverse stakeholders negotiate shared futures. However, even communicative planning often depends on the production of relatively stable categories through which participation becomes structured and administratively manageable. Legibility remains a precondition of governance.

This reliance on consensus and institutional coherence has been critically examined by Susan Fainstein (2010), who argues that agreement

alone cannot serve as the normative foundation of planning. The assumption that diverse interests can be harmonised under a unified “public interest” risks obscuring structural inequalities and uneven capacities to participate.

Such tensions can become more pronounced in contexts marked by socio-economic fragmentation and intensified mobility. Drawing on cases from the Sub-Saharan Africa, Vanessa Watson (2009) introduces the notion of “conflicting rationalities” to describe situations in which formal planning logics coexist with informal survival strategies, translocal networks, and alternative normative orders. Planning institutions often privilege technocratic coherence and regulatory order, while everyday urban practices may operate through improvisation, ambiguity, and necessity. The friction between these rationalities can produce governance gaps: not simply failures of implementation, but mismatches between institutional categories and lived realities.

The question of informality further complicates this landscape. Ananya Roy (2005) argues that informality is not merely the absence of regulation but a mode of governance produced by the state itself. Through selective enforcement, authorities determine which forms of spatial occupation are tolerated and which are criminalised.

This selective recognition resonates with Oren Yiftachel’s (2009) concept of “gray spaces”, referring to zones, populations, and practices positioned between legality and illegality, recognition and eviction. Gray spacing describes how groups are neither fully integrated nor formally excluded, but

maintained in conditions of suspended belonging. In hyper-diverse urban contexts, many everyday practices, such as informal economies or collective lingering, often inhabit such ambiguous regulatory terrain.

Taken together, these perspectives reveal that planning rationalities rely on specific normative commitments: legibility, order, safety, activation, and consensus. Public space is expected to be safe yet vibrant, diverse yet orderly, inclusive yet regulated. Policy language frequently invokes activation, revitalisation, and regeneration as markers of success.

However, these terms often encode particular behavioural expectations: circulation rather than lingering, consumption rather than subsistence, visibility without disruption. The management of public space thus becomes a key site where normative assumptions are materialised. As everyday practices are translated into regulatory categories (misuse, disorder, incivility) adaptive strategies adopted by economically or legally precarious groups may be reframed as problems requiring intervention. Diversity may be welcomed insofar as it aligns with aestheticised multiculturalism or economic productivity; it becomes suspect when it exceeds established norms of spatial conduct.

In regeneration contexts, this dynamic may take the form of what can be described as sanitising renewal: interventions that seek to stabilise and reframe heterogeneous neighbourhoods through design improvements, increased surveillance, programmed events, and symbolic rebranding. Such strategies often operate through what might

be termed “governing at a distance” (Roy, 2011), shaping behaviour indirectly via spatial design and management practices rather than overt coercion. Order is pursued not solely through prohibition, but through the reconfiguration of visibility, affordances, and permissible uses.

Importantly, this critique does not suggest that planning institutions act with deliberate exclusionary intent. Rather, it highlights structural tensions embedded within normative frameworks developed under assumptions of relative social coherence. Hyper-diversity intensifies ambiguity: identities are fluid, legal statuses differentiated, and social practices translocal. When governance depends on bounded categories and predictable behaviours, negotiated forms of coexistence may remain partially illegible.

The tension, therefore, is not between planning and diversity per se, but between institutional rationalities oriented toward clarity and everyday urban life characterised by provisional negotiation. In such conditions, coexistence is enacted through small, repeated practices that exceed formal classification. Recognising these dynamics requires methodological approaches capable of capturing ambiguity without prematurely translating it into fixed categories.

The following section argues that urban ethnography offers such a translational lens, enabling the analysis of how normative planning rationalities encounter, and sometimes misrecognize, the micro-practices of negotiated coexistence in contexts such as Via Padova.

→ Fig 6. Lupe's tamales stall as a survival strategy in Viale dei Transiti. Source: Photograph by the authors, 2025.



1.1.3 The Translation- al Tool

Ethnography as a Bridge

If public space in hyper-diverse neighbourhoods is a terrain of ongoing negotiation, then the analytical tools used to interpret it must be capable of engaging with ambiguity rather than eliminating it. While normative planning instruments are indispensable for macro-level coordination, such instruments often translate complex social practices into administratively manageable abstractions. The risk, as discussed above, is not simply omission but misrecognition: adaptive forms of coexistence may be reframed as disorder, informality, or incivility.

As Briata (2023) argues, planning discourse frequently traps diversity within a binary logic, treating it either as a resource for place-branding or as a security concern. In hyper-diverse contexts, much of everyday social life unfolds within the previously defined “gray spaces”: zones and practices situated between legality and illegality, formal recognition and tolerated informality. A temporary street stall, a gendered gathering in a park corner, or prolonged occupation of a bench may not appear within institutional frameworks, yet these practices sustain what might be described as micro-publics: small-scale arenas in which social infrastructure is enacted and maintained.

To engage these dynamics without prematurely translating them into fixed categories, this research adopts urban ethnography as a translational

tool. Rather than generating another layer of abstraction, ethnography operates between planning representations and lived experience, mediating between conceived space and everyday spatial practice (Lefebvre, 1991). Its role is not merely descriptive, but interpretive and relational: to render visible the negotiations, hierarchies, and informal accommodations that exceed formal policy language.

Ethnography functions in this thesis through three complementary lenses. First, it exposes the gap between planning intentions and lived practices. Immersive observation and engagement uncover solidarities, informal support networks, and adaptive uses of space that may otherwise be interpreted as marginal or problematic (Briata, 2023). In doing so, ethnography reveals how normative planning rationalities produce particular visibilities while obscuring others, thereby clarifying the limits of consensus-oriented and order-driven governance frameworks.

Second, it decodes the embodied hierarchies embedded in spatial practice. Coexistence is not an abstract condition but a situated, bodily exercise requiring the negotiation of proximity, visibility, and territorial signals. Public space can operate simultaneously as convivial and secure for some groups while precarious or exclusionary for others. Ethnography makes these differentiated experiences analytically legible without collapsing them into unified narratives.

Third, ethnography informs reflection on intervention. Rather than presupposing coherent publics or stable communities, it documents the micro-practices

through which coexistence is enacted: gestures of avoidance, tacit agreements, rhythmic routines, and improvised accommodations. By grounding spatial strategies, such insights open the possibility for more responsive forms of planning, attentive to contingency and adaptability. In this sense, the notion of “loose space” (Franck & Stevens, 2007) acquires practical relevance, suggesting environments that allow negotiated uses to unfold rather than prescribing rigid behavioural norms.

In sum, ethnography in this research operates as a recalibrating mechanism. It does not reject planning rationalities, but places them in dialogue with everyday practices that exceed formal categorisation. By foregrounding lived negotiation within gray spaces, ethnography illuminates how governing at a distance is experienced, adapted, and sometimes subtly contested in hyper-diverse public environments.

Crucially, these negotiations are never abstract. They unfold within specific material, administrative, and regulatory contexts that shape what becomes visible, tolerated, or sanctioned. Concepts such as hyper-diversity and coexistence therefore acquire analytical force only when anchored in a defined urban fabric. The following chapter situates these theoretical insights within the socio-spatial configurations of north-eastern Milan, establishing the empirical foundation for analysing negotiated coexistence in strategic segments of Via Padova and Via dei Transiti.

1.2 Per- spec- tive

1.2.1 Transcalar Approach

The Inquiry Logic

The theoretical complexities of hyper-diversity and governance cannot be fully grasped through a top-down view of the city. This research employs a downscaling logic, shifting the analytical focus from the broad urban scale to the specific, micro-geographies of the street. By zooming into the “strategic segment,” we move from abstract policy categories to the actual material and social thresholds where coexistence is daily negotiated.

- **Phase I: Structural & Institutional Baseline (Macro-Reality)**

The first phase establishes a descriptive baseline of the study area by looking at the broader scale of the zone. This stage provides the necessary context to understand how the place has developed its specific identity within the city’s fabric.

- **Phase II: Analytical Delimitation & Meso-Comparison**

The second phase involves the spatial delimitation of the specific study area. Once the territory is defined, a comparative characterization is performed using demographic and economic indicators measured against the wider neighbourhood context.

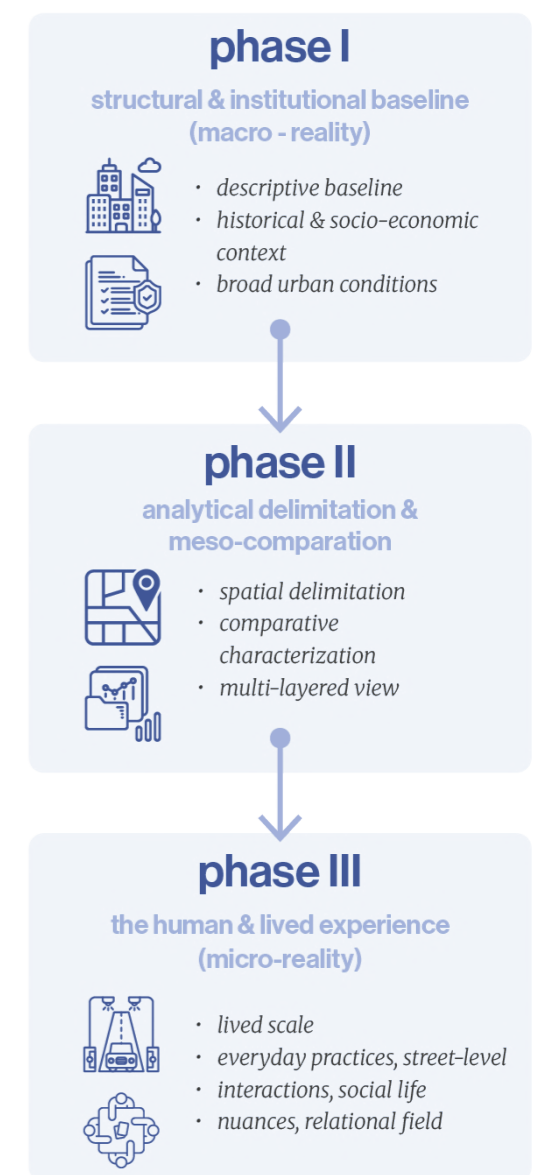
Additionally, it explores the digital narratives that frame the area’s reputation, providing a multi-layered view of the territory’s current transformation.

- **Phase III: Phase III: The Human & Lived Experience (Micro-Reality)**

The final phase downscales to the micro-level of the street. This stage focuses on the “lived scale” to decode the everyday practices that occur within the sidewalks, thresholds, and ground-floor interfaces. By shifting the focus to human-scale interactions and rhythms, the analysis captures the nuances of the relational field and the social life that constitutes the street’s infrastructure.

By navigating these three analytical scales, the inquiry bridges the gap between the neighborhood’s general context and the street’s specific social life. This transcalar progression ensures that the study area is not analyzed in isolation, but is understood as a site where historical backgrounds, socio-economic characteristics, and everyday human rhythms overlap.

Ultimately, this logic establishes a framework for documenting how broader urban conditions and insitutional models dialogue with the micro-practices and spatial negotiations of the street.



↑ Fig 7. Synthesis of the transcalar research phases. Source: Authors' own elaboration.

[

The Context

Understanding the area at the Macro-Scale

]

02

2.1 The area

2.1.1 An In- troduction

NILs 19 & 20

To operationalize this transcalar framework and establish the structural baseline outlined in Phase I, this chapter situates the research within its broader territorial context. Relying on a review of academic literature and municipal documents, this section provides a comprehensive, descriptive account of the area's historical trajectories and current dynamics.

These processes unfold within a specific sector of north-eastern Milan (Municipio 2). To anchor this broad historical and descriptive analysis within an official, data-driven framework, the research utilizes NIL 19 (Padova, Turro, Crescenzago) and NIL 20 (Loreto, Casoretto, NoLo) as its macro-reference.

The *Nuclei di Identità Locale* (NIL)

The *Nuclei di Identità Locale* (NIL), defined by the Municipality of Milan as a "territorial atlas" and an "analytical-provisional tool," operate as a spatial framework through which the city maps its demographic data and tracks forecasted urban transformations dictated by its broader urban plans. These units merge heterogeneous demographic data with territorial reality, allowing the Municipality to capture the local dynamism and the unique characteristics that distinguish each nucleus.

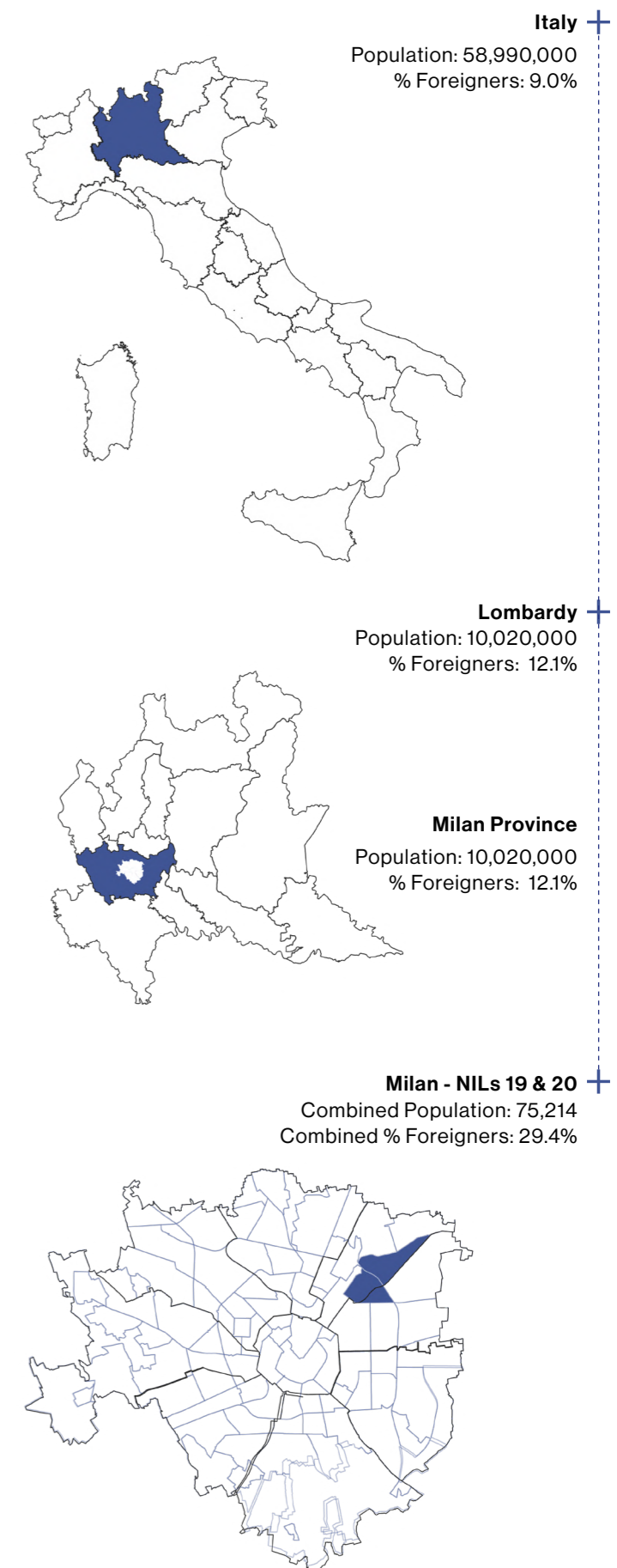
By combining a bibliographical review with the NILs' official information, this chapter constructs a robust macro-reality baseline.

In this research, NIL 19 and NIL 20 are not treated as the primary study area, but rather as the broader macro-reference frame necessary to establish the structural baseline of Phase I.

These units serve as an analytical lens to identify overarching trends related to housing, commerce, and population. Establishing this comprehensive macro-context directly enables the transcalar downscaling of the research (Phases II and III): moving from the meso-delimitation of a specific zone of interest down to the micro-scale of Via Padova and Via dei Transiti, where spatial tensions and everyday lived practices finally become visible through direct observation.

[THE PLACE PROFILE]

- + **Hyper-Diversity:** Nearly 30% foreign resident population, more than double the regional average of Lombardy.
- + **Institutional Focus:** The area is a primary target for ongoing municipal regeneration programs (including public space re-evaluations and the 'NoLo' district branding).
- + **Everyday Practices:** Characterised by complex, micro-scale negotiations of public space and overlapping cultural codes.



→ Fig 8. Situating NILs 19 and 20 within the administrative and demographic framework of Milan. Source: Authors' own Elaboration based on data by ISTAT, Censimento 2021.

2.1.2 History and Current Situation

A Brief History

Via Padova is an example of urban stratification in Milan, where different processes of annexation and industrialisation, along with successive migratory flows, have shaped its spatial and social character. Starting from Piazzale Loreto in the northeastern part of the city, the street crosses heterogeneous urban fabrics resulting from the incorporation of Turro, Gorla, and Crescenzago, and ends in the area of Cascina Gobba. These were originally autonomous municipalities structured around agricultural nuclei that were progressively integrated into the urban fabric and, consequently, underwent industrial and residential transformation (Angelin & Del Stabile, 2024).

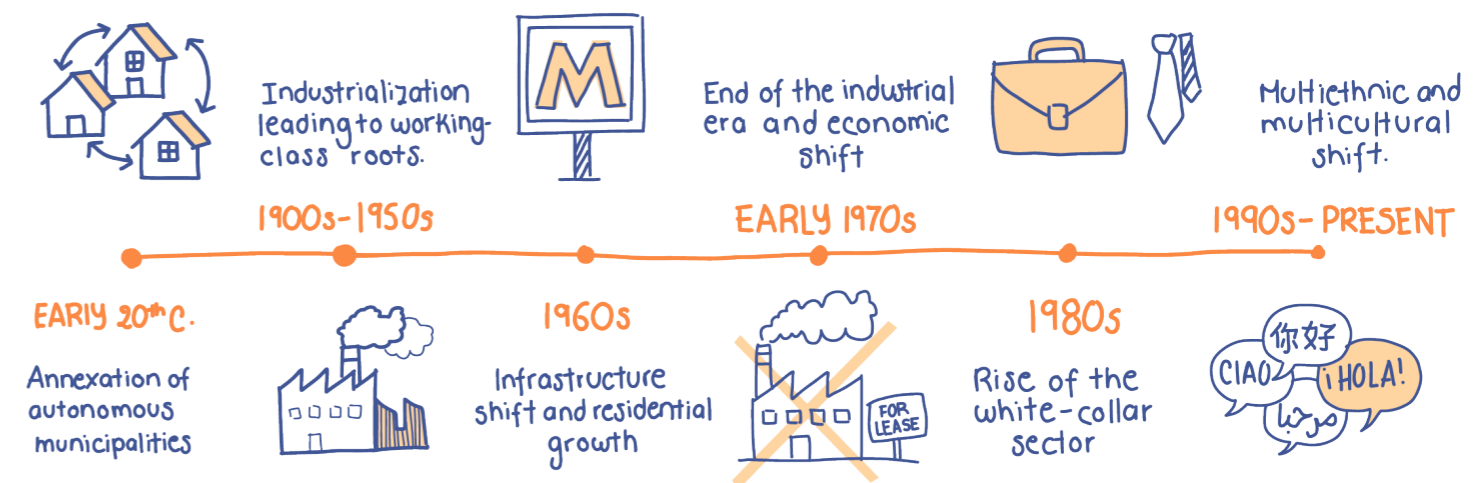
Throughout the first half of the twentieth century, Via Padova consolidated its role as an industrial sector of Milan. It was predominantly composed of working-class building fabric generated by land speculation, cooperative initiatives, and self-construction (De Michele & Mascherin, 2016). The area was marked by workers' housing and social agencies, such as parishes, Catholic groups, political parties, and trade unions. These organizations offered institutional support for social integration and community organization. Between the post-war period and the 1970s, this context attracted internal migration flows, mainly coming from southern Italy and the Pianura Padana, that were integrated into the labour market and benefited from these local association networks. The construction of the metro

line along Viale Monza, together with the development of residential projects in the 1960s, facilitated the settlement of middle-class households, which added to the distinctly working-class character that had defined the area until then (Angelin & Del Stabile, 2024).

However, at the beginning of the 1970s the neighbourhood experienced a reshaping of its socioeconomic profile, due to deindustrialisation, which brought an influx of foreign residents as well as an economic transformation. By the 1980s, a significant portion of the working-class population was replaced by white-collar workers and entrepreneurs, aligning the area more closely with the city's general demographic profile (De Michele & Mascherin, 2016). At the same time, new waves of

foreign migration started to consolidate, bringing with them new cultural and religious communities that the Catholic Church, the main remaining institution, struggled to integrate.

From the 1990s, international migration became one of the strongest drivers of change in the neighbourhood. Foreign communities gradually started to coexist with those of early Italian migrants, reinforcing and expanding Via Padova's multicultural identity. Today, a vast array of nationalities reside and work in the area, making it one of the most diverse urban contexts in Milan (Croset & Fontanella, 2021). Nevertheless, this diversity has come together with cohabitation tensions, housing conflicts, and the persistence of stigmatizing narratives that portray the area as a socially problematic hub.



↑ Fig 9. Time line of the main events shaping the area since the early twentieth century. Source: Authors' own Elaboration.

Infrastructure & Connectivity

Historical Background

The urban morphology of the Loreto and Via Padova area has been fundamentally shaped by its historical role as a strategic infrastructural corridor. Originally, the route corresponding to Via Padova served as the Via Orientale (or Postale Veneta), a crucial arterial road connecting Milan to the northeastern territories of Bergamo and Venice. This axis defined the early character of Piazzale Loreto, which originated in the 19th century as a Rondò, a grand crossroads marking the threshold between the consolidated city and the agricultural hinterland of independent municipalities like Turro and Crescenzago (Stagni, n.d.; Urbanfile, 2021).

In the late 19th century, this connectivity was industrialized with the advent of interurban steam tramways. Opening in 1878, the Milano-Gorgonzola-Vaprio line used the full length of the Via Padova axis to connect the city with its rapidly industrialising periphery (Cornolò, 1980). Affectionately known as the "Gamba de Legn," this infrastructure facilitated the movement of the growing industrial workforce for decades, consolidating the area's function as a transit corridor (Novak & Andriola, 2008).

A definitive shift in the area's physical structure occurred with the completion of Milan's new railway

belt (cintura ferroviaria) in 1931 (Chitti, 2020). While this massive infrastructural project reorganized the city's rail network and inaugurated the new Central Station, it introduced a physical barrier that compromised the urban continuity between Loreto and the northern neighbourhoods of Turro and Gorla. This intervention needed the creation of the underpasses that characterise the area today, creating a morphological fracture that persists in the contemporary urban fabric.

The modernization of the area was completed in the 1960s with the arrival of the subway system, which shifted the focus from surface industrial transit to mass commuter mobility. The opening of Line M1 (Red) in 1964, followed by Line M2 (Green) in 1969, transformed Loreto into one of Milan's primary interchange nodes (Beria, 2020). This accessibility sealed the area's status as a prime accessibility hub, spurring the intense residential densification of the surrounding districts.

In the wake of this modernisation, the surface transit network underwent a necessary reorganisation. The historic "Gamba de Legn" steam tram, rendered obsolete by the new underground lines and increasing vehicular traffic, was dismantled in the late 1950s and 1960s (Milano Città Stato, 2020). However, the demand for capillary surface transport along the corridor remained; this role was inherited by the municipal bus network, specifically Line 56. This line effectively replaced the urban function of the old tramway, maintaining the vital surface link along Via Padova that continues to serve local commuters today.

The Situation nowadays

In the contemporary urban context, the area remains defined by the infrastructure inherited from the 20th century, though its function and perception are undergoing a significant paradigm shift. Piazzale Loreto continues to serve as a critical node, managing massive daily flows of commuters between the M1 and M2 metro lines and surface transit. However, spatially, it operates as a "traffic island," a configuration that prioritizes high-speed vehicular flow over pedestrian usability, resulting in a fragmented and inhospitable urban experience at the neighbourhood's gateway (Cutieru, 2021).

While the metro provides mass transit capacity, the surface network remains vital for local connectivity. Bus Line 56 continues to operate as the high-frequency surface connection along Via Padova, effectively mirroring the path of the historic tramway. It provides capillary access to the neighbourhood that complements the subway system, serving the local residential fabric that lies between the widely spaced metro stations (Beria, 2020).

However, the current planning direction marks a decisive departure from the car-centric logic of the 1960s toward active mobility. The *Riquilificazione Asse Via Padova* project reflects this shift by physically reducing the vehicular carriageway to accommodate wider sidewalks and new cycling infrastructure.

→ Fig 10. Commuters arriving at Piazza Loreto on trains from the Milan-Gorgonzola suburban line along Via Padova, Milan, mid-1930s. Source: Corriere della Sera, 2017



This includes the creation of a 30 km/h zone and the integration of bike lanes that connect to the broader city network, explicitly aiming to downgrade the street's function from a high-speed arterial thoroughfare to a neighbourhood street (Comune di Milano, 2021).

Simultaneously, the physical division created by the 1931 railway belt persists as both a spatial and psychological fracture. The underpasses connecting the southern section of Via Padova to the northern neighbourhoods are frequently perceived as insecure and degraded environments. This condition is currently being addressed by the Tunnel Boulevard project, which seeks to mitigate the barrier effect by transforming these passages into active "cultural and mobility corridors." Through the integration of urban art and lighting, the initiative aims to "re-stitch" the urban fabric severed by the railway infrastructure (Comune di Milano, 2021; Valz-Gris, 2019). Furthermore, new tactical urbanism interventions, such as the bike lanes on Via Venini, have begun to weave a new micro-mobility network that bypasses the heaviest traffic, linking the area to the wider metropolitan cycle routes (Urbanfile, 2019).



→ Fig 11. Commuters transiting the Loreto M2 platform. Source: Photograph by the authors, 2025.

Housing & Urban Fabric

Historical Background

The area of Loreto and Via Padova underwent a significant transformation triggered by the rapid industrialization of the late 19th century. Prior to this, the area was a mosaic of agricultural land, cascine, and the independent district of Turro. Unlike the planned expansions of the city center (such as the Beruto Plan areas), the urbanization of Via Padova was chaotic. Early 20th-century city plans attempted to introduce a geometric grid with garden squares on the territory, but this design was never fully realized. Instead, development followed a strictly linear logic along the main axis, driven by private speculation tailored to the working class (Novak & Andriola, 2008). Although Turro was not officially incorporated until 1918, the urban sprawl had already bridged the gap, creating an uninterrupted continuum of speculative, working-class housing long before the political border was removed (Urbanfile, 2024).

At the time, the dominant typology became the "casa di ringhiera" (railing house). These are high-density multi-story buildings arranged around a central courtyard, whose design tended to prioritize affordability over comfort. The access to individual apartments is provided by long, shared balconies

running along the internal façade, which gave them their name. The apartments themselves were originally small (two rooms), often lacking internal sanitary facilities, which were shared at the end of the balcony.

The *casa di ringhiera* was a strong trigger of social interaction among residents. The shared spaces (courtyard, stairs, balconies) forced people to interact, thus creating robust support networks that were essential for the working class (Micoli, 2008). The courtyard functioned as an extension of the domestic sphere, where children played, and artisans worked, establishing a high degree of social control and mutual aid. By the mid-20th century, the area had transformed into an early industrial suburb, where the fast flow of trams was joined by the bicycles of workers commuting to the railway yards and the large Marelli factory north of the Martesana canal.

During the post-war economic boom, the role of the zone as a "reception basin" was solidified. The need to build new homes for displaced persons, the first migrations from Veneto and the valleys, then from the south, led to the consolidation of the place. The area became known as the "Red Periphery" due to the strong presence of the Italian Communist Party (PCI) and labor unions, rooted in the industrial workforce residing there. The housing stock was saturated during this period. The gaps between the 19th-century railing houses were filled with speculative concrete condominiums (*palazzine*) of the 1950s and 60s. These newer buildings offered better amenities but contributed to the extreme density and lack

of public green space that characterizes the district today (Micoli, 2008). The district became a “dormitory” for the factories of Sesto San Giovanni and Lambrate, functionally tied to the industrial production cycle.

Tensions within the housing system became visible already in the late 1970s, anticipating the deeper transformations that would follow. A key episode is the occupation of the residential building at Via dei Transiti 28, which dates back to 1978 and represents one of the longest-standing cases of housing occupation in the area. Originally part of the speculative working-class housing stock, the building became the object of informal reappropriation in response to the saturation of affordable housing and the growing mismatch between demand and institutional provision. Its long and continuous occupation signals the early emergence of housing exclusion in Via Padova, well before the large-scale deindustrialisation of the 1980s, and reveals how informal practices have historically functioned as compensatory mechanisms within a structurally constrained housing system.

The deindustrialisation of Milan in the 1980s and 90s stripped the area of its primary economic engine, leading to a profound social recomposition. As the Italian working class moved to the hinterland or aged, the affordable (and deteriorating) rental stock of Via Padova attracted the new wave of non-European immigrants. By the early 2000s, Via Padova had one of the highest concentrations of foreign residents in Milan.

→ Fig 12. The traditional “casa di ringhiera” as a catalyst for social interaction. Internal courtyard in via Arquà. Source: Photograph by Alberto Dedè and Bruno Pulici, 2019.



This demographic shift coincided with a period of intense media stigmatization, which depressed real estate values relative to the rest of the city and paradoxically delayed early processes of gentrification. The “rent gap” began to widen significantly, setting the stage for the speculative explosion that would follow (Bricocoli & Peverini, 2024).

The Situation nowadays

The current housing dynamics in the Via Padova and Loreto districts are marked by a strong polarization between rapid real estate revaluation and persistent socio-housing vulnerability, a condition that is increasingly inscribed in the transformation of the urban fabric itself. Following the “NoLo” (North of Loreto) rebranding, the area has experienced a process of symbolic and economic gentrification that has progressively detached housing costs from the income levels of long-term residents. While the rent gap mentioned in the historical background initially contributed to keeping prices relatively contained, recent market data point to a rapid alignment with semi-central values. By 2024, rental prices along the Loreto–NoLo axis had reached approximately €20.44 per square meter, with annual increases exceeding 9%—well above both inflation and wage growth in the metropolitan area (Immobiliare.it Insights, 2024; Nomisma, 2024). This trend has produced a “yield trap,” whereby high rental returns attract buy-to-let investment, further constraining access to homeownership for first-time buyers.

→ Fig 13. Protest signs claiming the right to housing and resisting gentrification. Source: Abitare in Via Padova Facebook Archive, 2025.



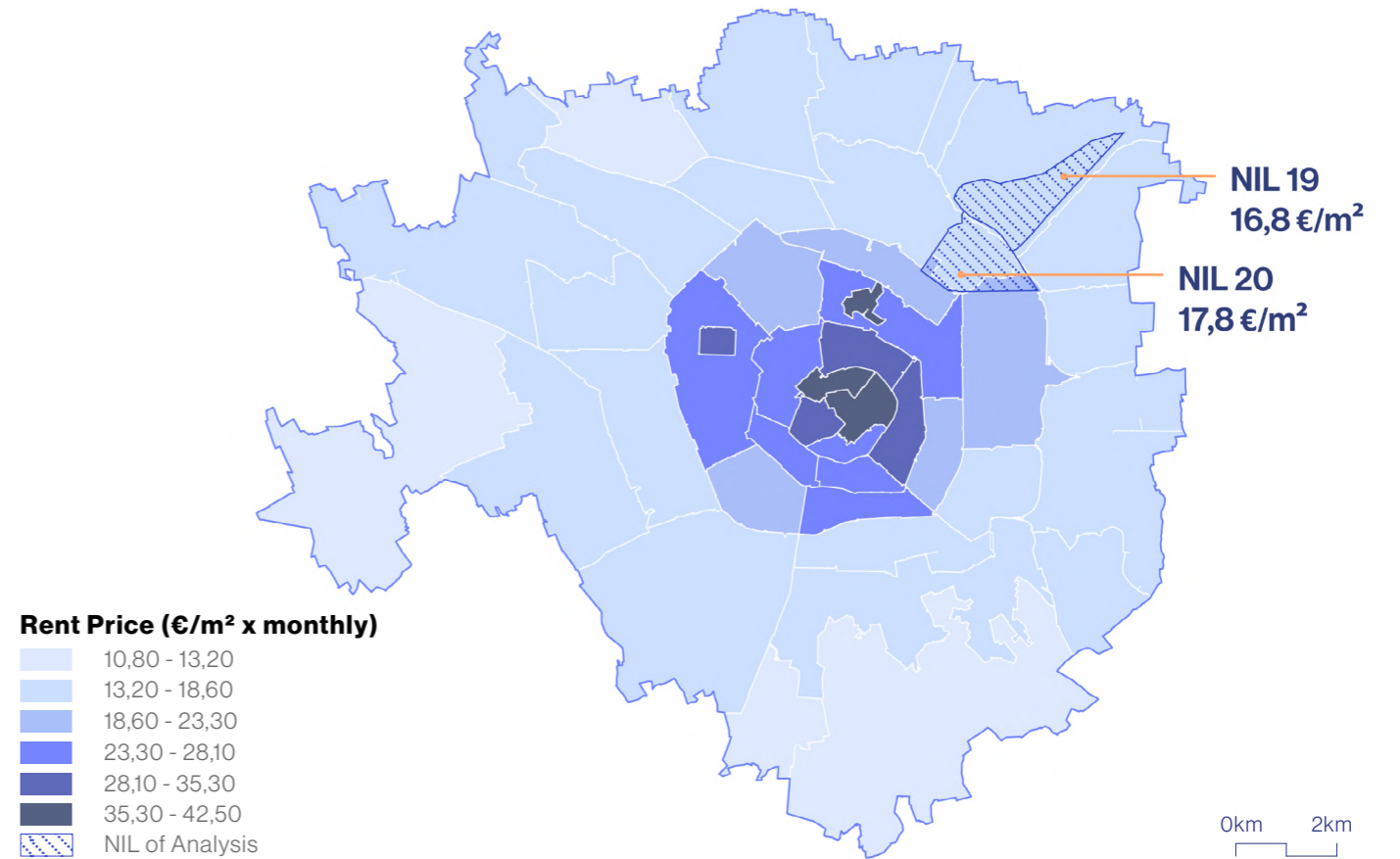
These market dynamics are reflected in the structure and use of the existing housing stock. Data from the 2021 Population and Housing Census, aggregated from census sections at the NIL level, reveal a marked divergence in occupancy patterns within the study area. In NIL 19, vacant dwellings or units occupied exclusively by non-residents account for approximately 4.4% of the total housing stock, while in NIL 20 this figure rises to nearly 9.6%. The significantly higher vacancy rate in the Loreto–NoLo sector suggests an increasing presence of temporary, investment-oriented, or non-resident uses, reinforcing the growing detachment between housing availability and the needs of the local residential population.

The historic case di ringhiera, once central to working-class life and everyday solidarity, are now being physically and socially repurposed. Shared balconies and internal courtyards (originally functional spaces supporting collective forms of living) are increasingly rebranded as markers of “authentic” urban lifestyles aimed at the creative class. This process has generated a fragmented pattern of transformation, in which renovated lofts and high-end units coexist with overcrowded and unrenovated dwellings within the same buildings (Bricocoli & Peverini, 2024). At the block scale, the fine-grained diversity of interior spaces, previously associated with informal growth and productive uses, is now valued for its adaptability. Former workshops, warehouses, and service spaces are systematically converted into residential lofts and home offices, aestheticizing the area’s industrial past and shifting development away from new construction toward incremental, “molecular” transformations of the existing fabric.

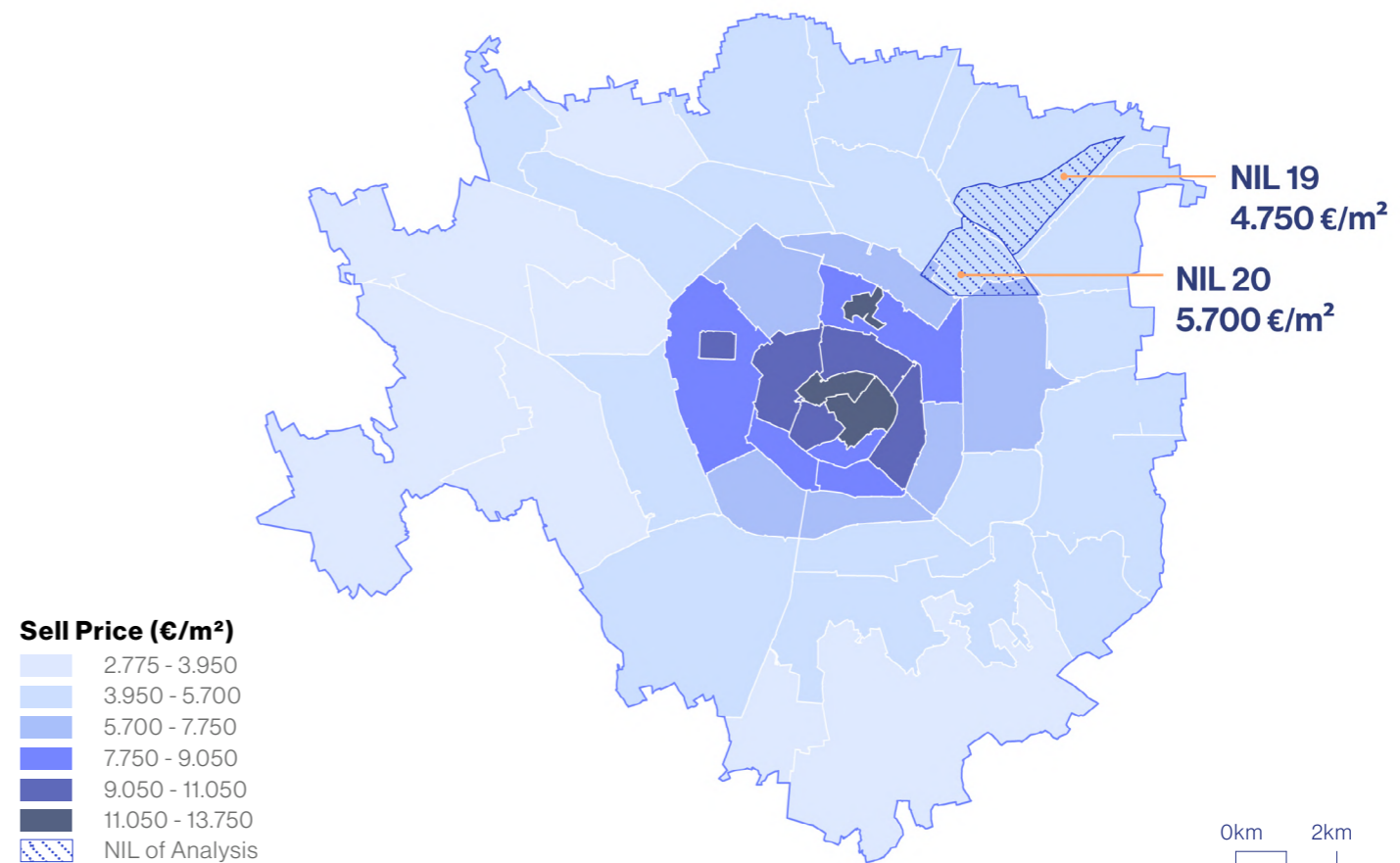
One of the factors contributing to the intensification of inflationary pressure (and to the reconfiguration of the neighborhood’s morphology) is “studentification”, which introduces a new and largely temporal residential typology. Proximity to major university hubs such as Città Studi and Bicocca has encouraged significant investment in purpose-built student accommodation (PBSA), reshaping the local housing landscape. New developments such as Collegiate Milan North on Via delle Leghe and Camplus Turro offer high-end amenities, establishing new price benchmarks for the surrounding area. The influx of a more mobile and comparatively affluent population produces a clear crowding-out effect: landlords are increasingly incentivized to subdivide family-sized apartments into shared student rentals or convert them into short-term tourist accommodation, progressively reducing the supply of long-term housing for households with children (Sansone, 2024).

As a result, the district is facing an acute housing emergency, reflected in a growing number of eviction proceedings, largely linked to cases of morosità incolpevole (innocent arrears). According to tenant unions, in many households within Municipio 2, rent now absorbs more than 40% of monthly income, leaving residents highly vulnerable to displacement following even minor economic shocks (SICET, 2024).

Given that rental prices are not distributed evenly, with high peaks, a concentration of average values, and significant outliers, as in the center of Milan, Jenks’s natural breaks classification was used, as it allows similar values to be grouped together, maximizes the real differences between areas, and highlights spatial patterns in the market.



↑ Fig 14. Average monthly rent prices in Milan by OMI zone. Source: Authors’ own elaboration based on Agenzia delle Entrate data (1st Semester 2025).



↑ Fig 15. Average sale prices in Milan by OMI zone. Source: Authors’ own elaboration based on Agenzia delle Entrate data (1st Semester 2025).

time, census data point to a growing internal polarisation of housing conditions. Average household sizes remain low (approximately 1.85 persons per dwelling in NIL 19 and 1.72 in NIL 20), a figure that masks the coexistence of single-person households, shared rentals, and situations of severe overcrowding within specific buildings. This statistical flattening obscures the uneven distribution of housing stress, which becomes visible only at the micro-scale. These dynamics become particularly visible in areas of severe housing degradation, such as the overcrowded tenement buildings along Via Arquà. Here, the failure of the formal housing market has contributed to the emergence of a grey housing sector characterized by safety hazards, informal control mechanisms, and poor sanitary conditions which stand in sharp contrast to the renovated lofts and creative spaces promoted within the broader NoLo narrative (La Repubblica, 2023; Milano Città Stato, 2023).

Urban planning responses to these tensions remain ambiguous, oscillating between objectives of regeneration and dynamics of displacement. The flagship intervention, Loreto Open Community (LOC), seeks to transform Piazzale Loreto into a greener and more permeable public space. While the project

promises improvements in environmental quality and urban connectivity, it has also been criticized as a potential accelerator of gentrification, as it unlocks additional real estate value without incorporating binding provisions for affordable or social housing within its immediate area of intervention (C40 Reinventing Cities, 2021). By contrast, projects like Via Padova 36 offer a more inclusive, though limited, counter-model within this landscape. Through a hybrid public–private governance framework, it rehabilitates traditional case di ringhiera while explicitly targeting the so-called “grey band” of residents (those who do not qualify for public housing yet are unable to access the free market). Nevertheless, initiatives of this kind remain isolated when compared to the scale and intensity of market-driven transformations currently reshaping the district.

Parallel to these projects, local advocacy groups such as Abitare in Via Padova have emerged to contest rising rents, evictions, and speculative vacancy, calling for stronger public intervention in affordable housing provision and regulation of the private rental market. Their action underscores the growing gap between institutional regeneration strategies and everyday housing needs.

Demographic Profile

Historical Background

To understand the present density and diversity of the area, it is necessary to examine the successive layers of migration and urbanisation that have shaped it for more than a century. Its demographic identity is not a static condition, but rather the cumulative result of continuous processes of substitution, stratification, and adaptation. Historically, the territory corresponding today to NILs 19 and 20 was located *extra moenia*, beyond the Spanish walls. Until the early 19th century, what is now Piazzale Loreto constituted a modest rural settlement organised around a chapel dedicated to Our Lady of Loreto, marking a liminal and border space between the consolidated urban core and the rural hinterland.

The first significant demographic expansion of the area was triggered by late 19th century industrialisation. The infrastructural axes of Viale Monza and Via Padova consolidated as the backbone of a predominantly working-class residential expansion. Unlike the bourgeois developments of the centre or the more regulated residential districts to the west, the housing stock that emerged here was characterised by dense, low-cost typologies. The

→ Fig 16. Internal migration flows reaching Milan during the economic miracle of the 1950s and 60s. Source: Fondazione ISEC, Archivio fotografico.



first major demographic shock occurred during the interwar period and accelerated markedly during the Italian “Economic Miracle” of the 1950s and 1960s, when massive internal migration redefined the social composition of the neighbourhood.

An initial wave of migrants from nearby regions (particularly Veneto and rural Lombardy) supplied labour for the expanding industrial economy and contributed to the consolidation of a working-class identity. This was followed, especially in the post-war decades, by the large-scale arrival of migrants from the *Mezzogiorno* (Southern Italy), which placed increasing pressure on an already saturated housing market. During this period, the area functioned as a reception mechanism: the *case di ringhiera* enabled flexible, though often precarious, living arrangements and facilitated the rapid accommodation of newcomers. As noted by Fornasin et al. (2021), these flows from rural areas to urban-industrial centres were driven by wage differentials and initially produced a demographic structure dominated by young men of working age, later balanced through processes of family reunification.

From the late 1970s onwards, Milan underwent a profound transformation from a predominantly industrial city to one increasingly oriented towards the service sector. This structural shift coincided with the beginning of a new phase of demographic change around Via Padova. As industrial employment declined and parts of the native working-class population gradually relocated to peripheral municipalities, the area began to attract international migrants, initially in relatively limited numbers.



↑ Fig 17. Temporal evolution of migration waves illustrating the shifting demographic layers of the area. Source: Authors' own Elaboration.

During the 1980s and early 1990s, the first significant arrivals of foreign residents (particularly from Eastern Europe and North Africa) settled in the neighbourhood, drawn by affordable rents, central accessibility, and the availability of subdivided housing units. These early international flows did not replace the existing population wholesale, but rather overlapped with it, reinforcing the area's long-standing role as an entry point for populations with limited economic resources and high spatial mobility.

From the late 1990s onwards, international migration intensified and diversified. Migrants from Latin America, South and Southeast Asia, and China joined earlier communities, contributing to a rapid increase in both the absolute number and the heterogeneity of foreign residents (Ferraro, 2020). By the early 2000s, the area had established itself as one of the districts with the highest concentration of foreign residents, with densities peaking near major infrastructural nodes such as Piazzale Loreto and Parco Trotter.

This period marked the consolidation of a distinctly multicultural and multiethnic demographic profile. The neighbourhood was no longer characterised solely by transitory populations, but increasingly by settled communities, family households, and second-generation residents. At the same time, residential turnover remained high, reflecting the persistent role of the area as a point of first arrival within broader migratory trajectories across the metropolitan region.

→ Fig 18. A migrant family in Via Padova reflecting the local demographic composition Source: Photograph by Arianna Forcella, 2021.



The situation nowadays

Today, the demographic structure of the area diverges markedly from the metropolitan average and is commonly described through the lens of super-diversity (Vertovec, 2007). The area is characterised not only by a high concentration of residents of foreign origin, but also by the coexistence of multiple nationalities, migratory trajectories, and socio-demographic profiles within a relatively limited spatial framework. Data from the 2021 Population and Housing Census, specifically from the census section (sezione di censimento) aggregated at the level of the Nuclei di Identità Locale (NIL) that comprise the area, confirm this demographic distinctiveness.

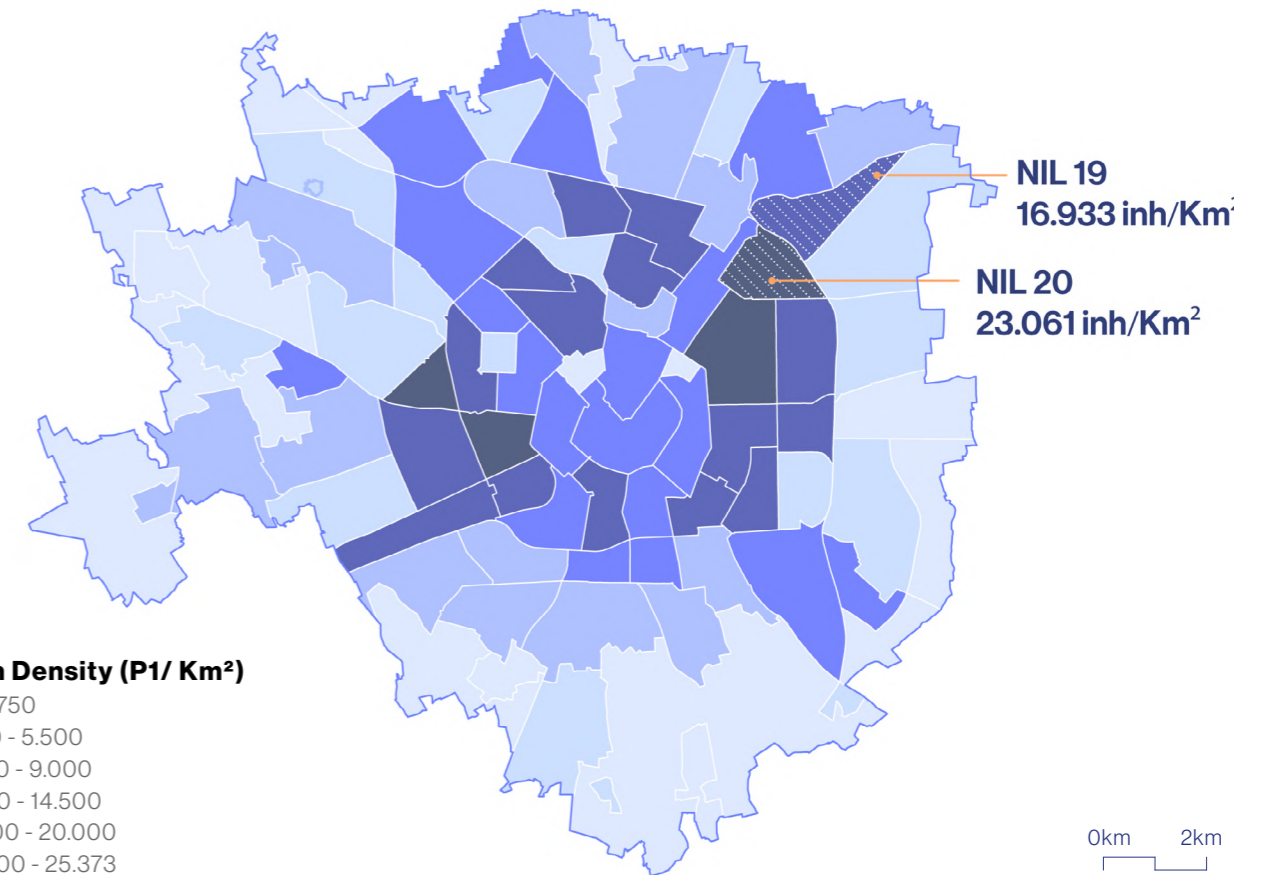
In NIL 19 (Padova–Turro–Crescenzago), residents classified as foreign citizens or stateless persons account for approximately 31.3% of the total population (10,922 out of 34,914 inhabitants). In NIL 20 (Loreto–Casoretto–NoLo), the share is slightly lower but still substantial, at around 27.9% (11,225 out of 40,300 inhabitants). Both values remain significantly higher than the municipal average, reinforcing the area's long-standing role as a primary point of arrival and settlement for international migration within Milan, even as overall proportions appear more moderated than those recorded in municipal registry data.

Rather than being dominated by a single national group, the foreign population is marked by a high degree of fragmentation. Certain communities, however, have established a more consolidated presence over time. Census data indicate that the

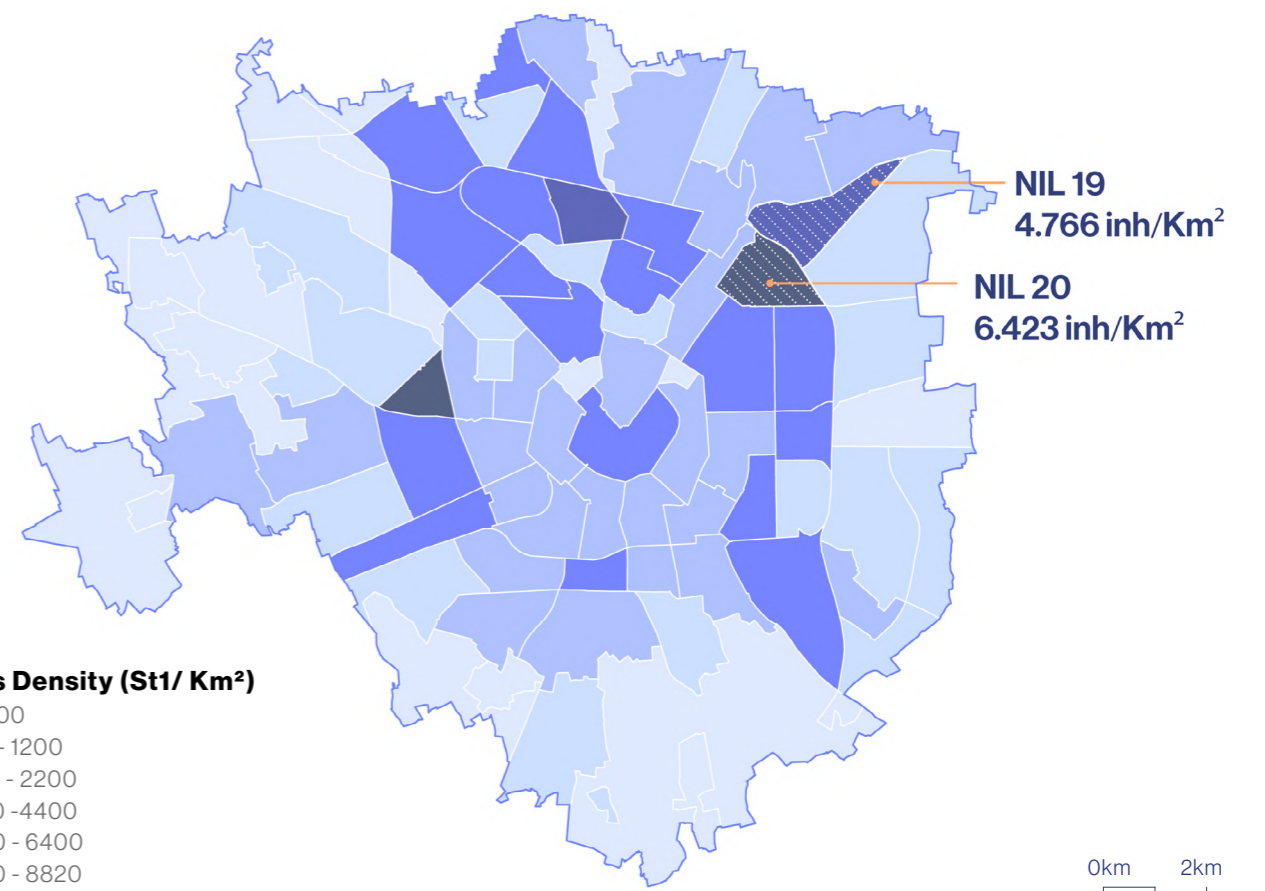
most represented nationalities in both NILs are Filipino, Egyptian, and Chinese residents, followed by groups from Bangladesh, Peru, Romania, Ecuador, and Sri Lanka. This layered composition differentiates Via Padova from other highly diverse districts in Milan, such as San Siro or Corvetto, and reflects the cumulative stratification of migration waves described in the historical background, rather than a single phase of concentrated inflow.

Population density closely follows the morphological structure of the urban fabric. The southern segment (NIL 20), characterised by a compact nineteenth- and early twentieth-century grid and a high concentration of case di ringhiera and mid-rise residential blocks, reaches a population density of approximately 23,700 inhabitants per square kilometre (40,300 residents over 1.7 km²). Moving northwards into NIL 19, where the urban fabric becomes more open and includes a greater share of post-war residential buildings, density decreases to around 16,600 inhabitants per square kilometre (34,914 residents over 2.1 km²). This gradient mirrors the spatial transition from a highly compact inner-peripheral condition to a more loosely built semi-peripheral morphology, reinforcing the close relationship between built form and demographic intensity along the Via Padova axis.

Household composition further reveals significant demographic specificities. The ratio between total population and occupied dwellings indicates an average household size of approximately 1.85 persons per dwelling in NIL 19 and 1.72 in NIL



↑ Fig 19. Total population density per NIL in the city of Milan. Source: Authors' own elaboration based on ISTAT Census data (2021).



↑ Fig 20. Concentration of foreign residents per NIL in the city of Milan. Source: Authors' own elaboration based on ISTAT Census data (2021).

20, both values remaining low in comparison with municipal and national averages. These figures point to a strong prevalence of single-person households and small household units, a pattern associated with the combined effects of studentification, labour-related mobility, ageing-in-place, and the diffusion of small or subdivided housing units. While the area continues to host migrant family households, it is increasingly characterised by transient populations, shared living arrangements, and non-traditional household forms, particularly in proximity to major infrastructural and transport nodes.

With regard to age structure, both NILs display a pronounced concentration of residents in working age. Census age distributions show a strong presence in the 30–55 age brackets, corresponding to the productive core of the neighbourhood and aligning with the area's role as a labour entry point for both Italian and foreign residents. At the same time, a substantial share of the population is aged 65 and over, particularly evident in the cohorts above 74 years of age. This confirms that the area is not exempt from the broader trend of demographic ageing affecting Milan as a whole. While the continuous inflow of younger residents partially mitigates this process, it does not fully offset the structural pressures associated with an ageing residential base.



→ Fig 21. Pedestrians of diverse origins navigating the shared public space of Via Padova. Source: The Global Grid, 2016.

Social Services & Welfare

Historical Background

The configuration of social services in the area has developed less through comprehensive institutional planning than through the gradual accumulation of local initiatives responding to specific social needs. From the early twentieth century onwards, welfare provision in the area emerged through a combination of workers' organisations, religious institutions, and educational experiments, forming a dense but fragmented support landscape embedded in everyday neighbourhood life.

During the first half of the twentieth century, the district was characterised by a strong presence of workers' associations, trade unions, and *Case del Popolo*, which provided social assistance, political organisation, and spaces for collective life (Foot, 2001). In parallel, Catholic parishes such as Santa Maria Beltrade and San Giovanni Crisostomo developed oratories and charitable services that played a crucial role in supporting internal migrants and low-income households, particularly through educational, recreational, and basic welfare activities.

A key moment in the consolidation of local social infrastructure was the transformation of the former

Trotter racecourse into the Casa del Sole school complex in the 1920s (Piccioni, 2018). Conceived as an experimental model combining education, health, and open-air pedagogy, the project positioned the area as a site of early public innovation in child welfare and inclusive schooling, reinforcing the role of education as a central pillar of neighbourhood life.

From the 1970s onwards, processes of deindustrialisation and institutional retreat reshaped the welfare landscape. Neighbourhood committees and grassroots groups became increasingly active in advocating for housing rights and public services, while cooperatives and non-profit organisations progressively took on functions previously covered by the public sector (Bifulco & Vitale, 2006). With the demographic changes of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, these existing structures were reoriented toward migration-related needs, including language support, legal assistance, and mediation services, further diversifying the forms and actors involved in local welfare provision.

The Current Situation

Today, social services in the area operate through a hybrid configuration in which public institutions, established third-sector organisations, and informal community networks coexist and overlap. Rather than forming a unified system, welfare provision is spatially dispersed and functionally differentiated, reflecting the heterogeneity of needs present in the area.

Public institutions continue to act as stabilising anchors. Schools (most notably the Istituto Comprensivo Giacosa connected to Parco Trotter) play a role that extends beyond education, functioning as everyday reference points for families and as spaces of social encounter (Pastore & Vitale, 2018). Local social service offices and family consultori manage a high volume of cases related to housing fragility, family care, and access to welfare benefits, often operating under conditions of structural pressure.

Alongside these, long-standing third-sector actors provide targeted and often low-threshold forms of support. Facilities such as Casa della Carità in the northern section of the area address situations of extreme marginality at a metropolitan scale, while a constellation of smaller associations, frequently hosted within parish spaces or adapted ground-floor premises, offer food distribution, basic assistance, and emergency support. These organisations often act as intermediaries between vulnerable populations and formal institutions (Bifulco & Vitale, 2006).

Informal welfare networks constitute a further layer of support. Religious spaces, including evangelical churches and Islamic cultural centres, frequently function as points of mutual aid, facilitating job connections, temporary housing solutions, and financial assistance within specific community networks (Petrillo, 2018; Cancellieri, 2017). In the southern part of the area, newer forms of

neighbourhood-based mutualism have emerged, often organised through “social street” initiatives and informal associations that mobilise residents around shared activities and everyday support practices (Fassi & Vergani, 2022; Mugnano & Miodini, 2021).

The spatial distribution of services reinforces these distinctions. Parco Trotter operates as a central social node, where educational, recreational, and community functions overlap in a relatively open and accessible environment. Moving northwards, welfare provision becomes more polarised, alternating between large institutional facilities and more hidden, inward-facing community spaces embedded within the residential fabric.

Temporal patterns further differentiate welfare practices. Formal services are largely structured around daytime and weekday schedules, while informal and community-based networks tend to activate during evenings and weekends, partially compensating for the limited temporal accessibility of public institutions. Within this landscape, spaces such as Mosso (opened in 2022 at the edge of Parco Trotter) illustrate the contemporary hybridisation of welfare, sociability, and cultural production. Developed through third-sector governance, Mosso combines food services, cultural programming, and community-oriented activities, operating as a low-threshold environment that complements more traditional forms of social support while contributing to the reconfiguration of local centralities.

→ Fig 22. Activation of community-oriented networks during an evening event at Mosso. Source: Mosso Milano official website.



Commerce

Historical Background

The commercial fabric of Via Padova and its surrounding areas has developed in close relation to successive phases of urbanisation and migration, reflecting broader socio-economic transformations in north-eastern Milan. From its early incorporation into the municipal territory, this part of the city evolved as a working-class urban periphery structured around infrastructural axes and industrial settlements, where commerce emerged primarily as a neighbourhood-based system embedded in the ground floors of residential buildings and oriented towards everyday needs.

During the first half of the twentieth century, commercial activity remained largely ancillary to industrial production, serving a predominantly working-class population employed in nearby factories. This model intensified in the post-war decades, when Via Padova became a primary point of settlement for internal migrants from Southern Italy. Small shops and food-related businesses multiplied, often founded by migrants themselves, functioning as both economic infrastructure and mechanisms of social anchoring within the neighbourhood.

From the late 1970s onwards, processes of deindustrialisation and economic restructuring

altered this equilibrium. The closure of major industrial plants and the conversion of former production sites into tertiary uses coincided with the arrival of new international migrant populations. By the 1990s and early 2000s, Via Padova's commercial landscape had become increasingly transnational, with small-scale retail activities specialising in imported food products, halal butchers, phone centres, and service-oriented businesses occupying ground-floor spaces previously associated with more traditional retail. This diversification did not entail a complete replacement of existing activities but rather a layering of new forms of commerce onto an already dense and fragmented commercial structure.

In the most recent phase, beginning in the 2010s, commercial change has followed divergent trajectories within the area. While Via Padova has largely retained its function as a dense, everyday-oriented commercial corridor serving a heterogeneous resident population, parts of the adjacent NIL 20 have undergone a process of symbolic and economic rebranding associated with the emergence of "NoLo." New commercial typologies oriented towards leisure, cultural consumption, and creative work have appeared, introducing a sharper contrast between curated spaces of regeneration and the long-standing, migrant-driven economy of Via Padova. The coexistence of these models underscores the enduring role of commerce as a key mediator of social change, visibility, and everyday urban life in the neighbourhood.

The Situation Nowadays

In the contemporary context, the commercial fabric of the area operates as a system of specialised urban centralities, distinct from the standard Milanese retail landscape. Within this system, Via Padova functions as the primary linear centrality, concentrating a high density of businesses oriented toward transnational practices and migrant life infrastructures, whose catchment area extends well beyond the neighbourhood scale. These activities do not function merely as local convenience retail but respond to metropolitan and even supra-local demand. Users travel from across the city and its hinterland to access specific goods and services (such as money transfer agencies, international shipping services, halal butcheries, and import-oriented food retail) creating a commercial ecosystem that remains relatively resilient to the broader crisis of small retail. This resilience is closely tied to the demographic structure of the area and to the persistence of everyday needs linked to migration, mobility, and cross-border family economies.

A defining feature of this commercial landscape is a strong degree of functional hybridisation. Unlike traditional Italian retail models, which are historically organised around single-function licences and clear categorical distinctions, many ground-floor spaces along Via Padova accommodate multiple services within the same unit. Internet points simultaneously function as mobile phone repair, money transfer services, and travel agencies. These hybrid spaces



→ Fig 23. Small-scale food retail and specialized commerce in the Via Padova area. Source: Photograph by the authors, 2025.

operate as logistical nodes within transnational networks, facilitating communication, remittances, and mobility while simultaneously functioning as informal spaces of social interaction. Their role extends beyond economic exchange, contributing to the everyday social infrastructure of the street.

Beyond spatial concentration, the commercial system of the area is characterised by a plurality of temporal rhythms (Lefebvre, 2004) that reflect the heterogeneity of its users. Certain activities (particularly services linked to transnational practices such as money transfer agencies, call centres, and food retail) tend to operate with extended or flexible opening times, responding to shift work, informal labour schedules, and the needs of a mobile population. At the same time, other segments of the commercial landscape, especially in the southern portion of the area, increasingly align with leisure-oriented temporalities, concentrated in the evening and weekend hours. These overlapping rhythms produce a condition of temporal stratification, in which different populations activate the same spaces at different moments of the day.

Beyond fixed retail, the area is periodically reconfigured by itinerant street markets like Mercato di Viale Monza and Mercato Marco Aurelio. Operating on fixed weekly schedules, these markets introduce cyclical intensifications that temporarily reshape the spatial hierarchy. Through the installation of stalls and partial pedestrianization, they reorganize urban flows and gathering points, attracting visitors from adjacent districts and reinforcing the neighborhood's role within a broader urban network.

Unlike the hybridised fixed retail along Via Padova, which operates through continuity and everyday repetition, itinerant markets function through periodic concentration. Their temporality is predictable yet discontinuous, generating moments of heightened density followed by spatial normalisation once the stalls are dismantled. This cyclical transformation contributes to what Lefebvre would define as polyrhythmic urban space: overlapping daily, weekly, and seasonal temporalities that coexist and sometimes compete within the same physical setting. The market thus operates not only as an economic device but as a temporal event that momentarily redefines public space.

The result is a dual-speed commercial system, structured both spatially and temporally. Along the arterial road, commerce remains closely tied to daily survival, mobility, and transnational practices, generating steady daytime and extended-hour activity. In contrast, the adjacent residential grid increasingly supports a consumption-led economy oriented toward leisure, sociability, and nightlife. This coexistence of divergent temporal rhythms contributes to the complexity of the area's contemporary identity and underlines the importance of time as a key dimension in understanding the relationship between commerce, public space, and everyday urban life.

← Fig 24. A group of women shopping at the itinerant stalls of Mercato Marco Aurelio. Source: Photograph by the authors, 2025.



2.1.3 Segregation and Stigma

Stigma over the years

Via Padova has long carried a strong stigma, closely linked to its identity as a multiethnic neighbourhood. The significant presence of migrant populations, together with broader societal fears surrounding migration and urban life, has contributed to its perception as a 'dangerous' area. As Wacquant (2007) explains, territorial stigmatisation proliferates through discourses that portray the neighbourhood negatively and are reinforced from multiple directions: 'from below,' in everyday interactions, and 'from above,' in media coverage, political statements, and bureaucratic practices.

In the case of Via Padova, urban neglect and limited institutional investment are reflected in the physical environment and have contributed to build an image of 'chaos'. These conditions interact with discursive dynamics, as the media has repeatedly labelled the area as a 'ghetto' and one of the 'troubled neighbourhoods' of Milan, further entrenching its negative reputation (De Michele & Mascherin, 2016). Events taking place in the area are often portrayed as exceptionally alarming, with little nuance or comparison to similar problems in other parts of the city. This kind of sensationalism has amplified and spread its reputation even beyond local scale.

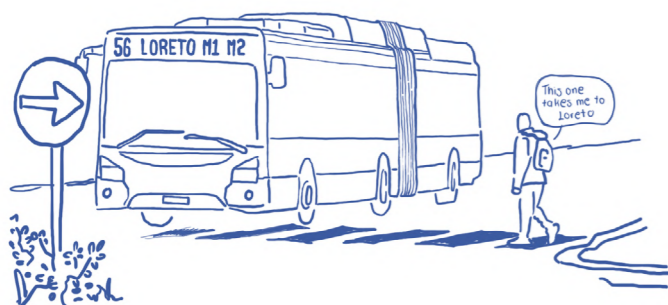
Nevertheless, it is necessary to acknowledge that some of these circumstances are real and are a matter

of attention. Issues such as drug dealing, petty crime, prostitution, and exploitative rental practices can be found concentrated in certain parts of the district. These dynamics are compounded by overcrowding and neglected public spaces, all of which contribute to the perception of disorder (De Michele & Mascherin, 2016).

In this context, stigma has progressively translated into concrete forms of spatial governance. In recent years, parts of Via Padova have been included within Milan's designated "zone rosse", areas subject to enhanced security measures and exceptional regulatory controls. These measures, ranging from intensified police presence to temporary restrictions on access, behaviour, and commercial activities, are officially framed as responses to safety concerns. However, they also institutionalise a reading of the neighbourhood as inherently problematic, reinforcing its symbolic association with disorder and risk. Rather than addressing structural causes such as housing

precarity or social marginalisation, these measures tend to regulate visibility and behaviour in public space, contributing to the normalisation of exceptional control in already stigmatised urban areas.

On a broader level, some scholars describe Via Padova as a "territory marked by social inequality" (Arrigoni, 2010, p. 179), where different forms of separation and segregation are visible. In this context, limited opportunities for social interaction can both cause and deepen tensions between long-term Italian residents and newer immigrant populations, creating a cycle of mistrust and conflict (Zajczyk et al., 2005, p. 61; Verga, 2015). Stigma, therefore, is not only imposed externally through media narratives and public discourse but also experienced and negotiated in everyday relations between the different groups cohabiting the neighbourhood.



↑ Fig 25. Local news headlines documenting the discourse of insecurity and urban decay. Source: Authors' own Elaboration.

2.1.4 Institutional Production of Public Space in Milan

Framing the Model

Over the past two decades, the institutional production of public space in Milan has undergone a significant transformation. No longer conceived primarily as residual infrastructure between buildings or as a neutral site of circulation, public space has become a strategic instrument within broader agendas of urban competitiveness, environmental transition, social cohesion, and urban security (Harvey, 1989; Brenner & Theodore, 2002). This shift reflects not merely a change in design priorities but a reconfiguration of planning rationalities, governance arrangements, and regulatory frameworks (Healey, 2007; Tasan-Kok & Baeten, 2012). Understanding the regeneration processes unfolding along Via Padova-Via dei Transiti therefore, requires situating them within this wider institutional evolution.

Between 2005 and 2025, Milan consolidated a hybrid model of urban governance characterized by entrepreneurial ambition, public-private collaboration, tactical experimentation, participatory instruments, and intensified regulatory control (Savini, 2016; Vicari Haddock, 2018; Balducci, Fedeli & Pasqui, 2011). These elements coexist (often productively, sometimes tensionally) within the same spatial contexts. Public space becomes the arena in which these rationalities intersect.

→ Fig 26. The contemporary urban profile of Milan under a clear sky.
Source: Adobe Stock.



Competitive Urbanism and the Strategic Repositioning of the City

A central feature of Milan's recent urban trajectory has been its embrace of competitive urbanism (Harvey, 1989; Brenner & Theodore, 2002). Particularly in the post-Expo 2015 period, the city has sought to reposition itself as a global hub of innovation, design, sustainability, and investment (Savini, 2016; Vicari Haddock & Moulaert, 2009; Pasqui, 2017; D'Ovidio, 2016). Within this framework, public space operates as both symbolic and economic infrastructure.

High-quality squares, pedestrian corridors, green boulevards, and climate-forward projects are mobilized to reinforce the city's attractiveness to international capital, creative industries, tourism, and skilled labor (Harvey, 1989; Florida, 2002).

Urban regeneration is not framed solely as neighborhood improvement but as metropolitan repositioning. Strategic projects are embedded within international networks and competitions such as the Reinventing Cities initiative promoted by C40 Cities, linking local interventions to global climate governance and branding circuits (Bulkeley et al., 2014). Public space becomes a visible marker of environmental leadership and urban modernity.

This competitive logic does not eliminate social objectives, but it situates them within a broader economic narrative. Investments in pedestrianization, greenery, and mobility are simultaneously justified in terms of sustainability and city attractiveness. The resulting spatial transformations carry dual functions: improving livability while enhancing market value and metropolitan image (Smith, 2002).

Public–Private Partnerships and the Hybridization of Urban Governance

Parallel to this competitive orientation, Milan has increasingly relied on public–private partnerships (PPPs) as mechanisms for delivering complex urban projects (Savini, 2016). Major regeneration initiatives integrate private capital, long-term concessions, and mixed-use development into the production of ostensibly public environments (Swyngedouw, Moulaert & Rodriguez, 2002).

This hybrid governance model modifies the institutional ecology of public space. Rather than being fully planned, financed, and managed by the municipality, contemporary public spaces often emerge through negotiated arrangements between the city administration and private developers. While ownership structures may remain formally public, design decisions, programming, maintenance regimes, and adjacent commercial uses are frequently shaped by private actors (Miraftab, 2004).

Such arrangements expand the financial capacity of the municipality and accelerate implementation timelines. However, they also introduce new power asymmetries. The public realm becomes entangled with real estate valorization strategies, raising questions about long-term accessibility, commercial influence, and symbolic ownership (Brenner & Theodore, 2002; Harvey, 2008). Public space is thus not withdrawn from state involvement but co-produced through market-oriented governance.

Tactical Urbanism and Incremental Transformation

Since the late 2010s, Milan has embraced tactical urbanism as a complementary planning approach. Through programs such as Piazze Aperte, the municipality has implemented temporary, low-cost interventions that reallocate road space to pedestrians and cyclists using paint, modular furniture, planters, and reversible materials (Lydon & Garcia, 2015).

Tactical urbanism reflects a shift toward incrementalism and adaptive governance (Lydon & Garcia, 2015). It allows the city to test spatial configurations, gather public feedback, and implement rapid change without the financial and procedural burdens of large-scale redevelopment (Beveridge & Koch, 2017). It also contributes to a broader cultural shift in mobility hierarchies, normalizing pedestrian priority and reduced car dominance (Sheller, 2018).

Yet tactical interventions are not politically neutral. By materially demonstrating alternative street uses, they prefigure more structural transformations and shape public expectations (Douglas, 2018). The temporary becomes pedagogical: it trains users to imagine different spatial orders. In this sense, tactical urbanism operates as both participatory experimentation and soft spatial prefiguration, subtly aligning everyday practices with longer-term strategic visions.

Participatory Governance and the Institutionalization of Co-Production

Alongside infrastructural and design innovations, Milan has expanded instruments of participatory governance, particularly through the adoption of “Patti di Collaborazione” (Collaboration Pacts), inspired by broader Italian experiments in urban commons regulation (Arena, 2015).

The shift from government to governance reframes public space as a co-produced resource (Healey, 2007). Residents, associations, and local organizations become partners in maintenance, programming, and stewardship. This approach aligns with broader European trends toward collaborative urbanism and civic engagement (Bianchi, 2018).

However, participatory governance also redistributes responsibility. The activation of underused spaces may depend on the organizational capacity and voluntary labor of local actors, potentially privileging groups with greater resources or institutional familiarity (Miraftab, 2004). Participation, while empowering for some, may simultaneously function as a mechanism of selective inclusion (Moulaert et al., 2013). The negotiation of public space thus extends beyond design to encompass the uneven capacities of civic engagement.

Regulation and Security-Oriented Urbanism

If one strand of Milan's institutional model emphasizes openness, greenery, and participation, another foregrounds regulation and security. Over the same period, the municipality has strengthened commercial zoning rules, introduced "elevated protection" areas for public establishments, and adopted ordinances regulating alcohol sales and nighttime activities (Comune di Milano, 2019b).

This regulatory turn reflects broader European tendencies toward security-oriented urban governance (De Giorgi, 2010; Foucault, 2007). Discourses of "decoro," public order, and quality of life justify interventions that structure the temporal and behavioral dimensions of urban life (Amendola, 2003). Nighttime economies are spatially filtered; commercial concentration is administratively managed; specific forms of sociability are restricted through time-based regulations.

The coexistence of inclusive regeneration rhetoric and intensified control measures reveals a paradox at the heart of contemporary urban governance (Swyngedouw, 2009). Public space is promoted as vibrant and accessible, yet simultaneously subjected to heightened surveillance and normative regulation. The institutional production of space thus operates through both enabling and constraining mechanisms.

Strategic Planning Documents and Policy Frameworks

These planning rationalities are codified in strategic and regulatory documents that shape the city's spatial agenda.

The *Piano di Governo del Territorio* (PGT) (Comune di Milano, 2012; 2019) establishes land-use frameworks, densification strategies, and mobility priorities that underpin regeneration initiatives. Its emphasis on mixed-use development, transit-oriented planning, and environmental sustainability provides a structural foundation for corridor redesigns and nodal transformations (Balducci et al., 2011).

The Patto per Milano (2016) targets complex, densely populated neighborhoods for infrastructural upgrading and public space enhancement, linking physical transformation to social equity objectives. At the same time, international initiatives such as the Reinventing Cities competition embed Milan within transnational climate governance networks (Bulkeley et al., 2014), reinforcing its commitment to environmental innovation.

Municipal security ordinances and commercial regulations complement these strategic plans by shaping the permissible uses of public space. Together, these instruments form a layered policy architecture through which public space is materially redesigned, economically leveraged, and behaviorally regulated.

Discursive Production: Regeneration, Decoro, and Attractiveness

Institutional production of public space is not limited to physical or legal mechanisms; it is also discursive (Hajer, 1995). Terms such as "urban regeneration," "decoro," "social cohesion," "sustainable mobility," and "city attractiveness" operate as legitimizing narratives (Bacqué & Biewener, 2013).

"Urban regeneration" frames intervention as repair and modernization, often obscuring potential displacement or socio-economic restructuring (Lees, Slater & Wyly, 2008). "Decoro" invokes cleanliness and order, but may implicitly target informal economies and non-normative occupations (Amendola, 2003). "Social cohesion" suggests integration and conflict mitigation, while potentially overlooking structural inequalities (Musterd, 2005). "Sustainable mobility" legitimizes street reallocation in environmental terms (Sheller, 2018), and "city attractiveness" links design quality to economic competitiveness (Harvey, 1989).

Through these discursive frames, the transformation of public space is rendered necessary, progressive, and widely beneficial. Yet the language of improvement can conceal the uneven distribution of gains and losses. Discourses do not merely describe urban change, they actively produce its normative horizon (Healey, 2007).

A Hybrid Institutional Model

Taken together, these dynamics reveal a hybrid institutional model of public space production in Milan. It combines:

- Entrepreneurial competitiveness
- Public–private collaboration
- Tactical incrementalism
- Participatory co-production
- Regulatory oversight

Rather than replacing one paradigm with another, Milan layers these rationalities within the same territories. Public space becomes a multi-functional platform: ecological infrastructure, mobility interface, economic catalyst, cultural stage, and regulated civic environment. This institutional backdrop is essential for interpreting the regeneration processes unfolding in Via Padova and Via dei Transiti. The transformations observed in that corridor are not isolated phenomena; they are localized expressions of broader urban governance shifts. The negotiation of public space in hyper-diverse contexts thus takes place within a dense field of institutional strategies, discursive frames, and regulatory mechanisms that structure both possibilities and constraints.

In the following section, Via Padova-Via dei Transiti are examined as a site where these institutional logics materialize and interact with everyday practices, revealing the relational production of public space.

→ Fig 27. Analytical Matrix of Institutional Production and Negotiation of Public Space in Milan. Source: Authors' own Elaboration.

Analytical Matrix

Institutional Production and Negotiation of Public Space in Milan

| Dimesion | Key Projects / Policies | Institutional Actors | Planning Approach / Rationality | Spatial Strategy / Material Effects | Negotiation with Everyday Practices |
|---|--|---|--|---|---|
| Physical Transformation | Piazzale Loreto (LOC) | Comune di Milano, Nhood, C40 | Competitive urbanism, PPP, iconic redevelopment | Pedestrianization, greening, mixed-use buildings, community space | Alters circulation, introduces new public hubs, may constrain informal street practices |
| | Via Padova Requalification | Comune di Milano, Municipio 2 | Infrastructural recalibration, Patto per Milano | Sidewalk widening, intersections redesign, micro-squares, mobility hierarchy | Impacts informal vending, street sociability, pedestrian flows |
| | Piazze Aperte / Via Pontano | Comune di Milano, AMAT | Tactical urbanism, participatory experimentation | Temporary plazas, painted asphalt, modular furniture | Prefigures permanent use, social acceptance, minor disruption to informal uses |
| Shared Governance / Co-Production | Patti di Collaborazione | Comune di Milano, civic associations, residents | Participatory governance, co-production | Maintenance and activation of micro-spaces | Relies on volunteer engagement; selective inclusion of active citizens |
| Policies | Affordable Housing / Social Housing Programs | Comune di Milano, regional authorities | Social equity, urban inclusion | Location-specific housing allocation; integrated with public space | Potentially supports community stability, may affect displacement |
| Land Use & Commerce Regulation | Elevated Tutela, Anti-Movida Ordinances, Alcohol Regulation | Comune di Milano, Municipal Police | Security-focused urbanism, regulation-driven control | Zoning of nightlife, regulated commercial activity, restriction of public behaviors | Reduces conflict, may limit informal or migrant businesses, selectively curates public life |
| Discursive / Symbolic Production | Urban regeneration campaigns, "decoro", "social cohesion", "city attractiveness" | Comune di Milano, local media | Narrative framing of regeneration | Guides aesthetic norms, influences design choices | Shapes perceptions of belonging, symbolic ownership of space |

2.1.5 Timeline: Relevant policies and projects in the area

The study area of Via Padova and Via dei Transito, with their direct surroundings, have been the focus of various multi-scalar urban policies, which have evolved through the distinct phases illustrated in the accompanying timeline. These interventions are primarily conceived to drive regeneration, elevate the quality of public space, and foster social cohesion. By mapping these projects chronologically, we can observe a shift from large-scale structural planning toward more localized, tactical interventions.

To provide a comprehensive understanding of the ongoing transformation and the processes of change shaping the area, the following section offers a review of key policies and projects.



→ Fig 28. Timeline of key policies and projects implemented in the study area. Source: Authors' own Elaboration.

Public Space Projects

LOC – LORETO OPEN COMMUNITY (Piazzale Loreto Redevelopment)

Status: On-going

Timeline: 2021–2027

Scale: Metropolitan / Node

Type: Urban regeneration project (Reinventing Cities)



↑ Fig 29. Visualization of the finalized stage for the Piazzale Loreto LOC project. Source: MIC-HUB.

The LOC – Loreto Open Community project is a large-scale, privately led urban regeneration initiative selected through the international Reinventing Cities competition promoted by the City of Milan and C40. It represents the most significant transformation affecting the southern entrance of Via Padova and redefines access, flows, and spatial hierarchies at the gateway of the study area

Objectives:

- Transform Piazzale Loreto from a traffic-dominated junction into a pedestrian-oriented public space
- Create a new civic and environmental centrality connecting Via Padova, Viale Monza, and Corso Buenos Aires
- Promote social inclusion, biodiversity, and sustainable mobility

Key Actions/Instruments:

- Pedestrian reorganisation of the square and potential pedestrianisation of the first stretch of Via Padova
- Urban reforestation (approx. 500 new trees; over 5,200 m² of planted surfaces)
- Construction of three new low-rise buildings with green terraces for mixed uses (commerce, offices, leisure)
- Integration of underground infrastructure and mobility access
- Creation of LOC as a community-oriented space for co-working, neighbourhood commerce, and social activities

Effects:

- Redefinition of a major infrastructural node as a civic space with increased pedestrian permeability and environmental quality
- Introduction of new mixed-use volumes and public functions

Via Padova Road and Urban Quality Requalification

Status: On-going

Timeline: 2023–present

Scale: Corridor / District

Type: Public space and mobility requalification



↑ Fig 30. Interventions for the enhancement of public space and urban quality in Via Padova. Source: Urbanfile, 2021.

The Via Padova requalification is implemented under the Patto per Milano, a strategic municipal programme targeting complex and densely populated urban areas. The project addresses a two-kilometre stretch of Via Padova, crossing the districts of NoLo, Casoretto, and Turro. It affects everyday mobility patterns, commercial frontages, and street-level social practices.

Objectives:

- Improve the quality and safety of public space
- Promote sustainable mobility and pedestrian accessibility
- Rebalance street uses between traffic, parking, and social life

Key Actions/Instruments:

- Creation of eight equipped neighbourhood squares
- Conversion of former parking areas into pedestrian and green spaces
- Enlargement of sidewalks and redesign of 22 intersections
- Installation of 35 raised pedestrian crossings and enforcement of a 30 km/h speed limit
- Reorganisation of parking and loading systems on adjacent streets
- Planting of over 230 new trees and new flowerbeds
- Road resurfacing and implementation of a dedicated public transport lane
- Tunnel Boulevard project: artistic transformation of railway underpasses

Effects:

- Increased pedestrian comfort and safety
- Redistribution of street space
- Enhanced environmental quality along a major urban axis

Shared Governance

PIAZZE APERTE

Status: On-going programme

Timeline: 2018–present

Scale: Neighbourhood

Type: Tactical urbanism programme



↑ Fig 31. Activation of public space and pedestrian areas in Piazza Spoleto. Source: Piazze Aperte Report, 2021.

Piazze Aperte is a municipal programme developed with AMAT, Bloomberg Associates, NACTO, and Global Designing Cities Initiative. It promotes the transformation of underused or traffic-dominated spaces into pedestrian-friendly public areas through temporary and experimental interventions.

Objectives:

- Expand pedestrian space within neighbourhoods
- Improve walkability and safety
- Test new public space configurations through tactical urbanism

Key Actions/Instruments:

- Temporary street redesigns using paint, furniture, and light infrastructure
- Experimental phases with evaluation before permanence
- Collaboration between municipal departments and local stakeholders

Local Implementation in the study area:

- **Piazzale Loreto (2020):** Small-scale placemaking intervention, introducing graphic pavement design, bicycle parking, and planted elements to reorganise pedestrian space.
- **Spoletto Square (2019):** Reconfiguration of a traffic-dominated intersection into a neighbourhood public space, improving pedestrian safety, walkability, and cycling connectivity.
- **Via Pontano (2020):** Surface-level tactical intervention along the railway corridor, aimed at strengthening pedestrian and cycling continuity.

Effects:

- Incremental pedestrianisation and new neighbourhood-scale public spaces
- Increased visibility of alternative street uses

PATTI DI COLLABORAZIONE

Status: On-going policy framework

Timeline: 2015–present

Scale: Local

Type: Governance and management instrument



↑ Fig 32. Shared governance and social activities at the Ex Piscine del Trotter. Source: Comune di Milano.

Patti di Collaborazione are formal agreements between active citizens and the Municipality of Milan for the shared regeneration and management of urban commons. They define responsibilities, activities, and long-term care arrangements.

Objectives:

- Promote civic engagement in public space management
- Enable collective stewardship of underused spaces
- Support social, cultural, and recreational activities

Key Actions/Instruments:

- Formal collaboration agreements
- Shared management and maintenance responsibilities
- Co-defined activity schedules and rules

Local Implementation in the study area:

- **Ex Piscine del Parco Trotter (2020):** Formalised reuse of the former swimming pool complex as a multifunctional space for sports, cultural, and recreational activities, managed collaboratively by local associations and the municipality.
- **1,2,3 Mosso (2020):** Collective management agreement for a public space along Via Mosso, establishing shared rules and responsibilities for its use as a neighbourhood social and cultural hub.

Effects:

- Activation of previously underused spaces
- Strengthening of local social networks
- Emergence of non-institutional public space management models

Housing Policies

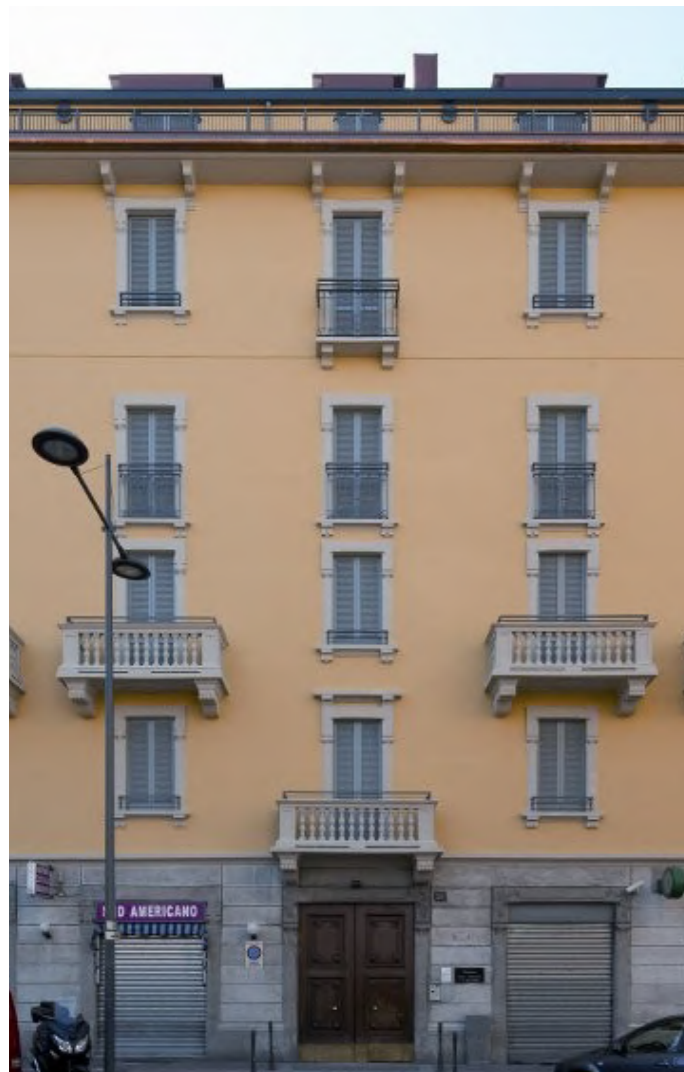
SOCIAL HOUSING (Policies, Programmes & Projects)

Status: On-going

Timeline: 2015–present

Scale: Municipal/Neighbourhood

Type: Housing and social policy framework



↑ Fig 33. The social housing intervention and residential redevelopment at Via Padova 36. Source: Fondazione Housing Sociale.

The Via Padova area has been subject to various housing-related policies and programmes addressing social vulnerability, housing degradation, and affordability, alongside growing concerns over displacement linked to urban transformation. Diverse initiatives have been implemented to support vulnerable residents and mitigate housing exclusion.

Objectives:

- Improve access to affordable housing
- Address housing degradation
- Foster social cohesion and inclusion

Key Actions/Instruments:

- **Social Housing Projects:** Projects aimed at social housing, such as the renovation of a residential building at Via Padova 36 into an accessible structure to meet the housing needs of families and individuals with limited access to the free market.
- **Social Housing Projects:** Projects aimed at social housing, such as the renovation of a residential building at Via Padova 36 into an accessible structure to meet the housing needs of families and individuals with limited access to the free market.
- **Community Programmes:** Initiatives like the “Lacittàintorno” programme, supported by Fondazione Cariplo, have been implemented in the Via Padova area to foster social cohesion, cultural co-production, and address housing degradation through collaborative housing models.

Effects:

- Partial improvement of housing conditions
- Support for community-based housing solutions
- Emergence of local advocacy networks

DECRETO SALVA CASA

Status: In force

Timeline: 2024 - present

Scale: National (locally mediated)

Type: Legislative measure



↑ Fig 34. Residential buildings in Milan under the framework of recent building amnesty laws. Source: Ordine degli Architetti di Milano.

The Decreto Salva Casa is a national law aimed at simplifying the regularisation of minor building non-conformities and facilitating functional adaptation of the existing building stock. Application is mediated by Milan’s PGT and Piano delle Regole, which retain authority to regulate conversions and limitations.

Objectives:

- Reduce bureaucratic barriers
- Enable regularisation of minor irregularities
- Facilitate changes in property use

Key Actions/Instruments:

- **Change of use:** Simplification of the procedure for changing intended use destination. It relies on the use of a simplified declaration (SCIA) instead of a full building permit in many cases.
- **Expanded Tolerance for Minor Irregularities:** Expanded tolerances allowed for minor differences between the actual state of the building and the officially filed plans. This makes it easier to legalize minor internal modifications without facing demolition orders or complex sanctions.
- **Abolition of the “Double Conformity” Requirement:** In specific cases of sanatoria (amnesties), the strict requirement for “double conformity” was partially relaxed.

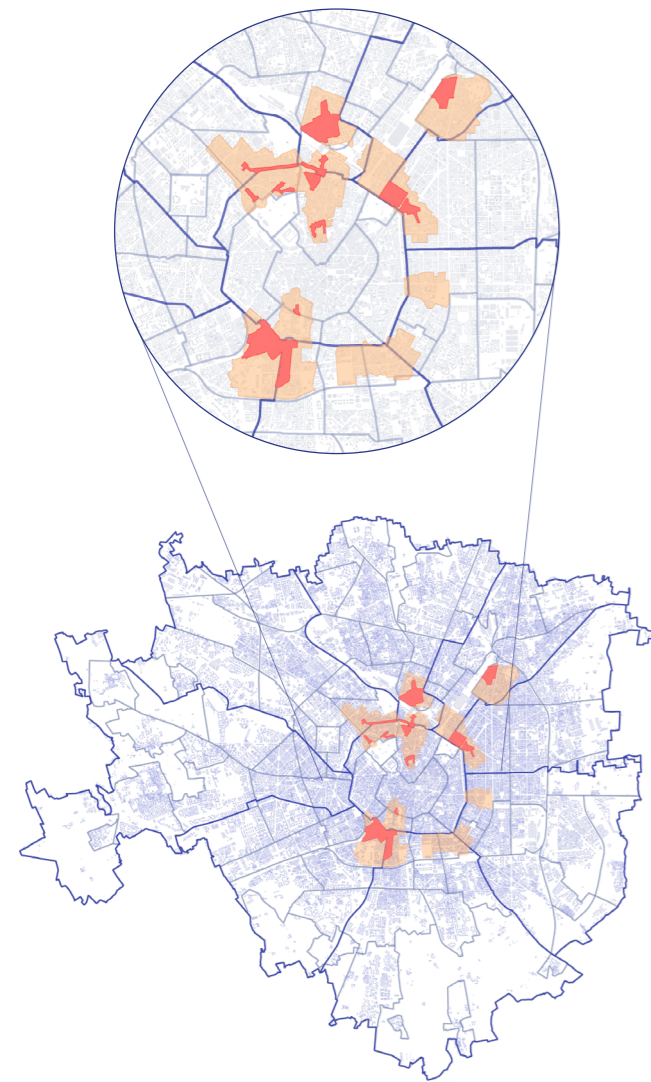
Effects:

- Increased flexibility in property adaptation
- Potential acceleration of functional changes at ground-floor level

Land Use & Commerce Regulation

REGULATION FOR PUBLIC ESTABLISHMENTS (Pubblici Esercizi – “Elevata Tutela”)

Status: In force
Timeline: 2024
Scale: Municipal
Type: Commercial Regulation



In May 2024, the Municipality of Milan approved a strict new regulation for the opening of new public establishments (bars, restaurants, pubs, artisan food producers) in nine zones across the city, and Via Padova/NoLo is explicitly included in this regulated area.

Objectives:

- Regulate commercial concentration
- Protect residential quality of life
- Limit uncontrolled nightlife expansion

Key Restrictions:

- **Need for Authorization:** To open a new venue in these areas, entrepreneurs can no longer rely solely on the SCIA (Certified Notification of Start of Activity, which is typically a quick self-certification). They must now apply for specific authorization from the municipal offices.
- **“Elevata Tutela” (High Protection) Zone:** The NoLo/Via Padova area is designated as a zone of “Elevata Tutela” (High Protection). This signifies a high concentration of existing issues (noise complaints, security concerns) and activities, triggering the highest level of scrutiny for new openings.
- **Prioritizing Daytime Activities:** The regulations are designed to favor the opening of new businesses that operate primarily during the daytime (between 6:00 AM and 8:00 PM), and to limit those that focus exclusively on late-night operations.

Effects:

- Increased control over commercial mix
- Restriction of late-night uses
- Institutional shaping of commercial rhythms

↑ Fig 35. Map of the designated areas of Elevata Tutela in Milan, for Source: Source: Authors' own Elaboration.

REGULATIONS ON ALCOHOL SALE AND OPENING HOURS (Anti-movida Ordinances)

Status: On-going (Temporary, recurrent)
Timeline: 2021–present (structural revision expected 2026)
Scale: Municipal
Type: Public Order and Commerce Regulation



↑ Fig 36. Nightlife crowds in the shared public spaces of the NoLo neighborhood. Source: Nolo Residenti committee archive.

Since 2021, the Comune di Milano has regulated nightlife in 15 critical zones, including NoLo, through seasonal ordinances aimed at protecting urban decorum and safety. These temporary measures, typically active from May to November, have been consistently renewed until the latest expiration on Nov. 5, 2025. The Municipality has announced a shift from temporary renewals to a structural revision, with a permanent regulatory framework expected in May 2026.

Objectives:

- Reduce noise and disorder
- Regulate alcohol consumption in public space
- Balance residential and commercial uses

Key Actions/Instruments:

- **Time-Based Limits on Alcohol Sales:** Takeaway alcohol sales are prohibited from midnight for all public establishments, while retail shops and vending machines face earlier restrictions starting at 22:00. The aim is limiting off-premise consumption in public space.
- **Regulation of Outdoor Commercial Use:** Outdoor seating areas (dehors) must close at 01:00 on weekdays and 02:00 on weekends and holidays. After this, all commercial activity is required to move indoors.
- **Control of Informal and Night-Time Street Commerce:** Itinerant and street vending is prohibited from 20:00 within designated nightlife zones. Seasonal bans on glass containers and cans further regulate late-night consumption in public space.
- **Restrictions on New Nightlife-Oriented Activities:** New commercial openings are subject to authorization and are oriented toward daytime uses. Nightlife-focused venues face limitations to prevent further saturation and conflict with residential uses.

Effects:

- Temporal regulation of commercial activity
- Reduced nighttime use of public space
- Reinforcement of time-based zoning

2.2 The Core Zone

2.2.1 Framing the place of interest

An overview

With its 4.2 km length, Via Padova crosses almost the entirety of Zone 2 in Milan, functioning as a key urban axis connecting Piazzale Loreto with the northern semi-peripheral areas of the city. Be it by foot, by bike or taking the bus number 56 along the street, it is possible to observe a succession of commercial activities, housing conditions, and building typologies that reflect a high degree of social and cultural diversity, as well as visible contrasts in the quality and maintenance of the urban fabric. These patterns are not limited to Via Padova alone but, to varying degrees, extend into adjacent streets, suggesting the presence of a broader urban cluster that will be progressively narrowed down in the following chapters.

Moving along Via Padova, the urban atmosphere shifts gradually. The southern section, immediately before the railway bridge, is characterised by a narrow street profile and an intense concentration of activities. Small shops, extended opening hours, and constant pedestrian movement generate a dense and vibrant street life, where everyday interactions unfold continuously throughout the day and into the night. Beyond the railway infrastructure, the street widens, buildings become more spaced out, and commercial activity appears more subdued, marking a transition toward a quieter and more residential environment.

The segment between Piazzale Loreto and the railway bridge occupies a particularly strategic position within the city. Its proximity to Piazzale Loreto

makes it a crucial point of convergence for local and metropolitan flows. At the same time, this area functions as a threshold between different urban conditions: between the consolidated inner city to the south and the more fragmented, semi-peripheral fabric to the north. This in-between condition contributes to the intensity of uses and encounters observed at street level.

Within this context, the high concentration of diverse migrant communities plays a central role in shaping the street's everyday life. The coexistence of multiple social groups contributes to the area's vitality, but also to its persistent stigmatisation, especially when contrasted with nearby neighbourhoods such as NoLo. Despite their geographical proximity, these areas display markedly different urban characters and social dynamics: while NoLo has undergone processes of symbolic and material gentrification, the section of Via Padova near the railway bridge remains associated with informality, density, and a more heterogeneous use of public space.

Importantly, the dynamics observed along Via Padova are not entirely confined to the street itself. In varying degrees, similar social and commercial patterns extend into adjacent streets, such as Via dei Transiti, particularly in proximity to key nodes and intersections. This suggests that Via Padova operates not only as a linear corridor but also as a catalyst for broader urban interactions within its immediate surroundings, forming a loosely connected urban

→ Fig 37. Daily rhythms of transit and sociability at the Pasteur metro station. Source: Photograph by the authors, 2025.



cluster characterised by intense everyday use of public space.

The combination of compact built form, mixed commercial offer, demographic diversity, and continuous street-level activity makes this area particularly significant within Milan's urban landscape. It is precisely this unique atmosphere (marked by vitality, tension, coexistence, and stigma) that motivates the focus of this research. By observing how public spaces, and especially streets, are used, negotiated, and appropriated in everyday life, the study aims to explore the relationship between urban form, social diversity, and lived practices.

In this sense, the research adopts the perspective of everyday multiculturalism, focusing on how diversity is experienced and negotiated through daily routines and informal interactions in specific urban contexts. As Briata (2023) suggests, this approach emphasizes a situated understanding of multiculturalism, one that attends to ordinary practices and spatial negotiations (de Certeau, 1984), revealing not only conflict and exclusion, but also forms of coexistence and adaptation that emerge within the fabric of everyday urban life.



→ Fig 38. Social interaction and hyper-diversity within the itinerant street markets. Source: Photograph by the authors, 2025.

The Challenge

Between tension, coexistence, and recognition

The vitality and intensity of everyday life observed in this area are accompanied by a set of recurring tensions that shape how public space is used, perceived, and regulated. A wide range of everyday practices (socializing, waiting, resting, informal work, and care-related activities) take place in public or semi-public spaces, contributing to a dense and continuous occupation of the street throughout the day.

These practices coexist with commercial activity, mobility flows, and residential uses, producing overlapping and sometimes competing claims on space. While such uses contribute to the area's liveliness and social richness, they also generate frictions between different expectations of public space: between circulation and permanence, informality and regulation, visibility and control. What is experienced by some as ordinary, necessary, or even supportive of social ties may be perceived by others as excessive, inappropriate, or disorderly.

In this context, social and cultural diversity is often framed primarily through the lens of conflict, security, or degradation. The everyday competencies required to navigate linguistic, cultural, and social differences

(along with the forms of mutual support, coexistence, and adaptation that emerge in daily interactions) tend to remain underrepresented in institutional narratives and planning discourses. As a result, the positive dimensions of living in a multicultural and multiethnic district are frequently overshadowed by problem-oriented readings of urban life.

At the same time, the spatial configuration of the area (characterised by high density, compact building typologies, limited access to open spaces, and a strong reliance on the street as a shared environment) intensifies encounters among different users. Adjacent streets, though displaying varying levels of activity, participate in this condition, suggesting that both tensions and forms of coexistence extend beyond a single street and are unevenly distributed across a broader urban cluster.

Rather than approaching these dynamics as inherently problematic, this research frames them as indicative of how urban space mediates diversity in everyday life. The core problem addressed by the study lies not in hyper-diversity itself, but in the mismatch between lived practices and the normative, regulatory, and representational frameworks through which public space is governed and interpreted. By examining how everyday interactions unfold within this context, across moments of tension as well as cooperation, the research seeks to challenge reductive narratives and to open up alternative ways of understanding and designing for multicultural urban environments.

[Methodology of Analysis]

Looking at the Meso-Scale

03

3.1 The idea

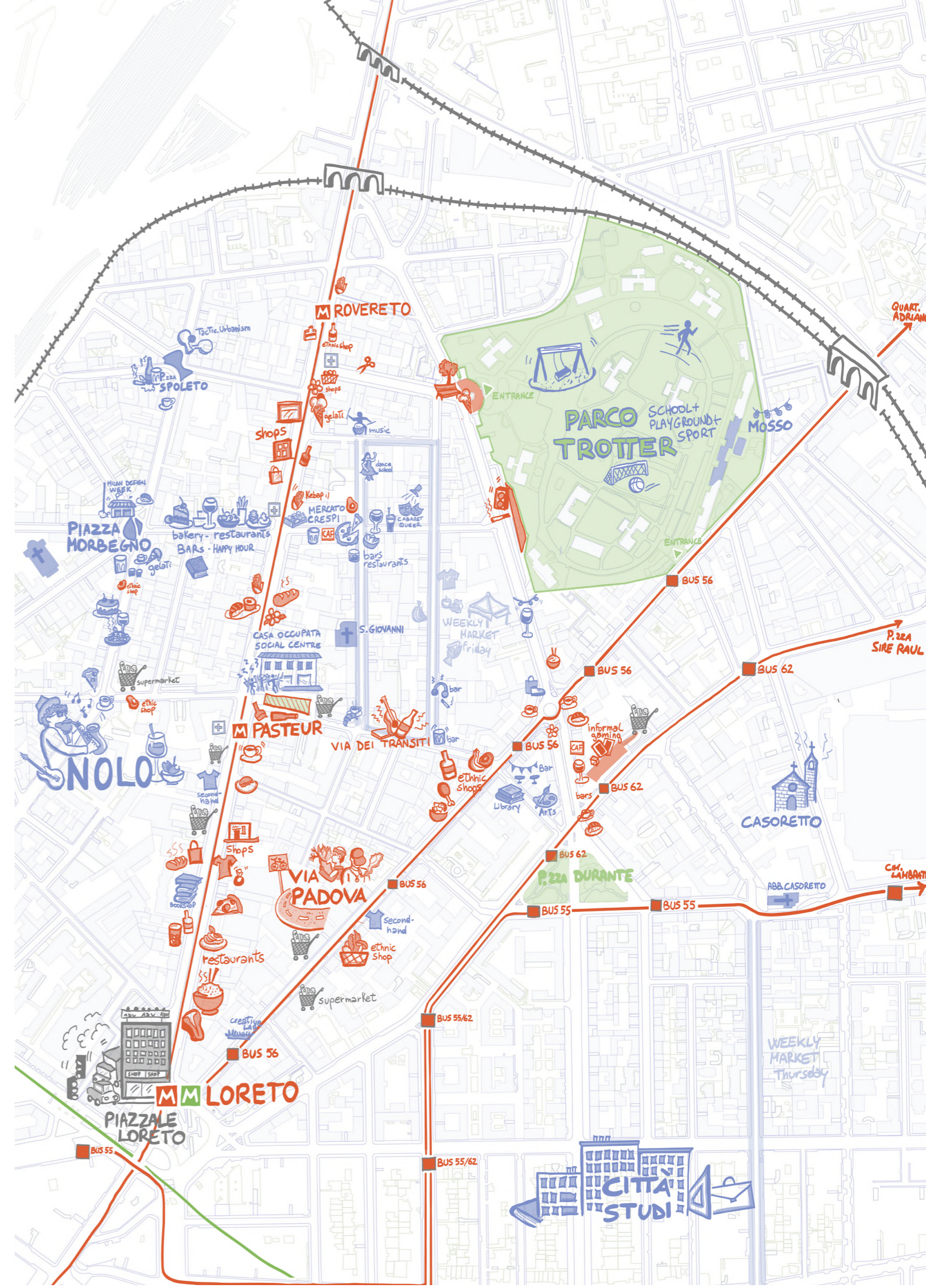
3.1.1 Hyper-Diversity as Analytical Lens

Multi-layering

The Via Padova and Via dei Transiti corridors can be understood through the analytical framework of hyper-diversity. Hyper-diversity moves beyond conventional notions of multiculturalism based on stable ethnic blocs and instead emphasizes the increasing diversification of migration channels, legal statuses, labor market positions, socio-economic conditions, and settlement patterns. In this perspective, diversity is not only about ethnicity but about the intersection of multiple variables such as legal precarity, class position, mobility patterns, generational differences, and access to housing and employment.

The empirical findings reflect precisely this complexity. The area of analysis is not simply "Italian versus migrant," nor reducible to a single ethnic concentration. Instead, it presents layered configurations of long-term internal migrants, Latin American groups, North African communities, international students, young workers, property-owning residents, and informal entrepreneurs. These groups interact unevenly across institutional, economic, and symbolic domains. The resulting public space is therefore not a shared multicultural commons but a fragmented field structured by differentiated access to rights, resources, and legitimacy. In this sense, the Padova–Transiti axis exemplifies how super-diversity materializes spatially: through segmented coexistence, overlapping mobilities, and unequal visibility in public space.

→ Fig 39. Interpretative map of the area's imaginary: activities, infrastructure and daily-life. Source: Authors' own Elaboration.



First approach to the study area

The definition of the study area began with the establishment of a preliminary observational framework, conceived to ensure analytical coherence and operational feasibility in the field. This first spatial delimitation was grounded in morphological, functional, and accessibility criteria, an approach consistent with conventional urban planning methodologies, in which territory is understood as a structured measurable entity composed of infrastructural systems, land-use distributions, and identifiable physical boundaries.

In its first configuration, the study area encompassed the longitudinal stretch of Via Padova between Piazzale Loreto and the railway tracks to the east. The railway infrastructure constitutes a physical, visual, and functional barrier, effectively defining a clear spatial edge and limiting eastward permeability. Transversally, Via dei Transiti and Via Giuseppe Giacosa were identified as principal axes due to their intensity of daily use and their role in local connectivity.

Viale Monza was established as a significant morphological and functional boundary. As one of Milan's primary thoroughfares, it operates not only as a major infrastructural corridor but also as a transitional threshold between the consolidated urban fabric of the Loreto–Pasteur area and the predominantly residential sectors extending westward. To the east, Via Andrea Costa was defined as the outer limit of observation, marking both a physical and perceptual edge associated with the boundary of Città Studi.

This initial perimeter largely coincides with the area popularly known as NoLo (North of Loreto), a toponym that has progressively shifted from informal designation to consolidated urban brand, reshaping both the symbolic representation and material trajectory of the neighbourhood. This transformation has been closely intertwined with forms of leisure activism and tactical urbanism. Cultural events, street festivals, temporary installations, and bottom-up initiatives have reactivated portions of public space, contributing to a new economy of visibility and attractiveness, shifting narratives of marginality and “problematic” diversity toward imaginaries of creativity, authenticity, and urban vibrancy. Within this context, the implementation of the *Piazze Aperte* programme, promoted by the municipality as a tactical urbanism strategy to pedestrianize and reconfigure underused street spaces; has played a significant role introducing new possibilities for lingering and social interaction.

However, from an ethnographic perspective, these interventions also reveal ambivalences. While they enhance walkability and create spaces of conviviality aligned with contemporary planning paradigms of liveability and sustainability, they simultaneously participate in processes of symbolic upgrading. The reconfiguration of public space may attract new users and commercial activities, potentially intensifying dynamics of exclusion or displacement. Thus, NoLo becomes a laboratory in which public space transformations reflect broader institutional models of urban regeneration, and sometimes collide, with the everyday practices of long-standing residents and migrant communities.

As fieldwork progressed, the limitations of the initial, cartographic and regulatory delimitation became increasingly evident. While the predefined boundaries facilitated systematic coverage, they reflected a predominantly top-down understanding of territory, aligned with what Henri Lefebvre conceptualizes as the “conceived space” of planners and institutions. This rational logic implicitly treated space as a fixed container for social processes, a morphology-based assumption that was progressively unsettled by the realities of the site.

Through early ethnographic methods: walking, lingering, and informal dialogue; a more fluid spatiality emerged. Practices of appropriation, informal economies, gendered patterns of occupation, and shifting temporal rhythms frequently extended beyond the cartographic perimeter, disrupting its perceived coherence. Consequently, the research transitioned toward a relational understanding of space, recognizing that public space is not a neutral backdrop but a social product continuously forged through everyday practices (Lefebvre, 1974; Massey, 2005).



↑ Fig 40. Diverse urban practices at the Via Predabissi bus stop. Drawing by the authors.

This prompted a critical reassessment of the study area's extent. The reduction and recalibration of the perimeter were not merely technical adjustments aimed at manageability; rather, they reflected a conceptual shift toward an understanding of territory as socially constructed and dynamically reproduced. In this sense, the methodological trajectory of the research mirrors the theoretical move from structural determinism toward a practice-oriented reading of urban space. The corridors and their surroundings were redefined as socially produced sites of super-diversity in which meanings, identities, and power relations are continuously enacted.

Within this revised framework, public space becomes a site of ongoing negotiation: between formal planning frameworks and informal appropriations. The analytical categories guiding the final delimitation were defined as: intensity and temporality of use, socio-cultural diversity, spatial and morphological characteristics, urban configuration and connectivity, and practical constraints encountered during data collection; therefore, emerged inductively from the field, rather than being imposed a priori. This layered approach reflects a hybrid methodological stance: combining the structural lens of urban planning with the situated attentiveness of ethnographic inquiry.

Definition of the Space

Socio-Cultural diversity

From a socio-demographic perspective, Via Padova is recognised as one of the areas with the highest migrant density and cultural heterogeneity in the city. The significantly high proportion of foreign residents, compared to other districts, results in a complex overlay of uses and urban practices: housing, ethnic commerce, places of worship, cultural associations, and informal social networks that shape a hybrid and dynamic urban landscape, making it highly relevant for understanding contemporary transformations in Milanese urban space.

This coexistence of heterogeneous practices and meanings not only transforms the materiality of the environment but also the everyday experience of public space, where boundaries between the local and the global are constantly negotiated and reconfigured. In this regard, De Michele and Mascherin (2015/2016) highlight that "the presence of different ethnic groups plays an important role in the social, cultural and economic dynamics affecting an area", emphasising the structuring role of diversity in the configuration of the territory.

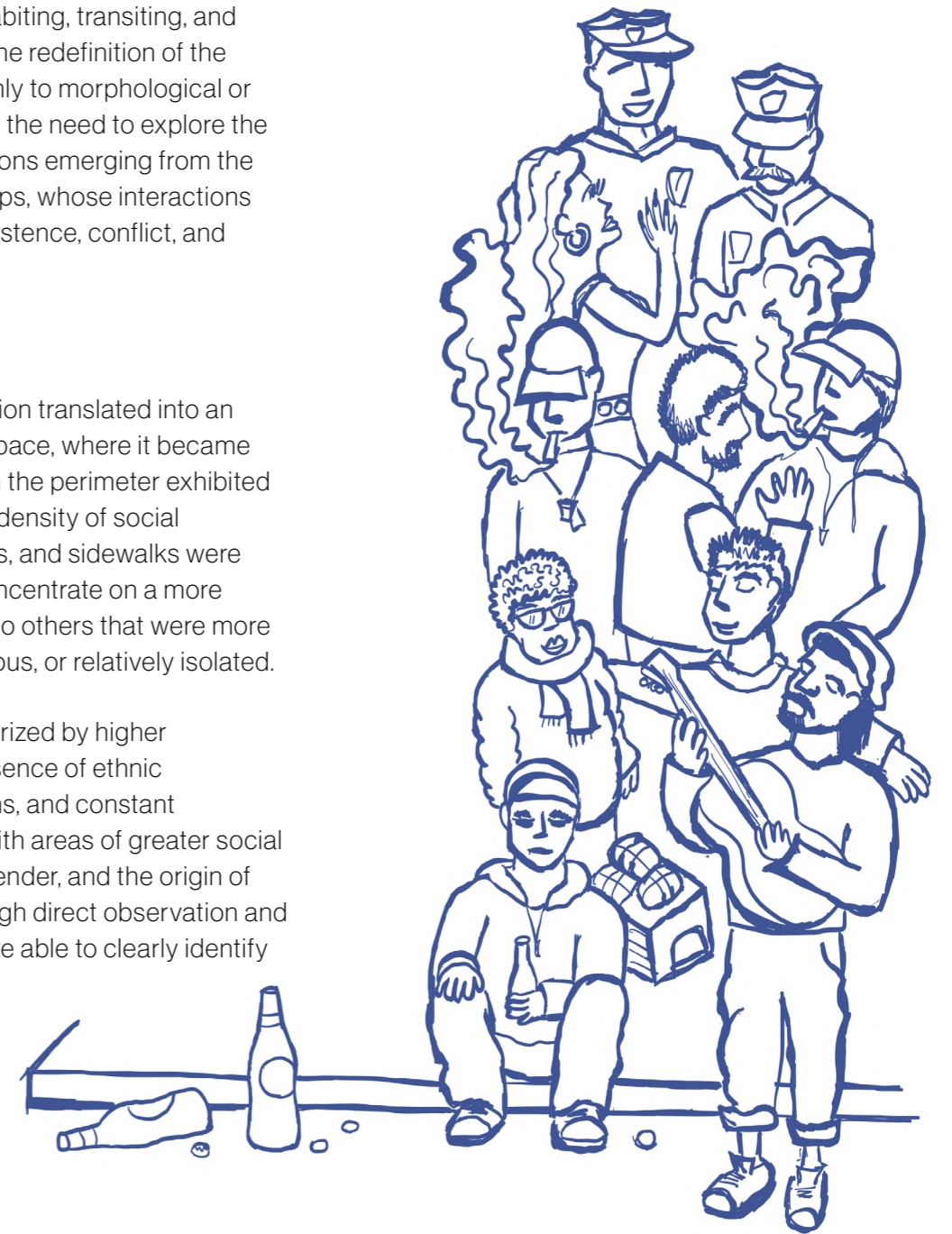
Recognising this unique character, Via Padova is conceived as an urban laboratory where it is possible to observe how cultural heterogeneity materialises

in everyday practices of inhabiting, transiting, and appropriating space. Thus, the redefinition of the study area responded not only to morphological or functional criteria but also to the need to explore the social and symbolic dimensions emerging from the coexistence of multiple groups, whose interactions generate new forms of coexistence, conflict, and territorial reinterpretation.

Intensity of Use

In the fieldwork, this orientation translated into an empirical reading of urban space, where it became clear that not all areas within the perimeter exhibited the same intensity of use or density of social actors. Certain zones, streets, and sidewalks were immediately observed to concentrate on a more active urban life, in contrast to others that were more monofunctional, homogeneous, or relatively isolated.

Particularly, streets characterized by higher commercial activity, the presence of ethnic commerce, local associations, and constant pedestrian flow coincided with areas of greater social diversity, considering age, gender, and the origin of residents and visitors. Through direct observation and systematic mapping, we were able to clearly identify



↑ Fig 41. Socio-cultural diversity and coexistence in the area. Source: Drawing by the authors.

the differences in terms of the kind of activities, type of users, temporalities and behaviours; in streets with high urban vitality, such as Via dei Transiti, and those with lower use, such as Via Sauli. This led to a set of preliminary hypotheses regarding the factors that could enhance these dynamics, including ground-floor activities and land-use configuration with its direct relation to adjacent public space, the quality and accessibility of public spaces, and proximity to mobility nodes such as the Pasteur metro station.

From an urban morphological perspective, the sector is characterized by a relatively dense and continuous fabric composed predominantly of mid-rise residential buildings with commercial premises at ground level. This configuration produces a condition of functional mixity—albeit fragmented—in which small-scale retail, proximity services, and housing coexist within a compact spatial structure (Coppola & Pacchi, 2021). Within the broader context, facilities such as Parco Trotter, socio-educational centres, neighbourhood associations, and public transport nodes act as relational anchors, reinforcing the intensity of everyday encounters and contributing to what Ash Amin would describe as the “micro-publics” of urban life—spaces where difference is not merely present but negotiated through routine interaction.

Spatial features & urban fabric configuration

Another relevant criterion was the analysis of spatial characteristics, physical features, and the configuration of urban spaces. It was observed that some of the streets with higher vitality had wider sidewalks, facilitating the gathering of people in front of commercial establishments and restaurants,

reflecting the close relationship between ground-floor land use, permeability and urban dynamism (Gehl, 2011; Mehta, 2014). Similarly, urban visibility, conditioned by physical conditions such as trees casting shadows or parked vehicles obstructing sightlines; was a key factor in the types of activities occurring in space. In areas with limited visibility, for instance, informal activities such as alcohol or drug consumption were more prevalent, highlighting the relationship between perceived safety, visibility, and public space use (Jacobs, 1961; Madanipour, 2013).

The presence of street furniture also served as a selection criterion. Benches and other resting elements were intensively used during the day by both men and women; however, at night, their use was almost exclusively by men, suggesting gendered dynamics in the appropriation of public space (Tonkiss, 2021). Additionally, in other stretches, even without formal street furniture, people used curbs, building edges, or chairs and benches placed by shops as spontaneous seating, effectively transforming the commercial frontage into an extension of public space.

Additionally, in other segments of the streets, even in the absence of formal furniture, pedestrians appropriated the urban environment, using curbs, building edges, bike parking infrastructures, or chairs and benches placed by shops as informal extensions of public space.

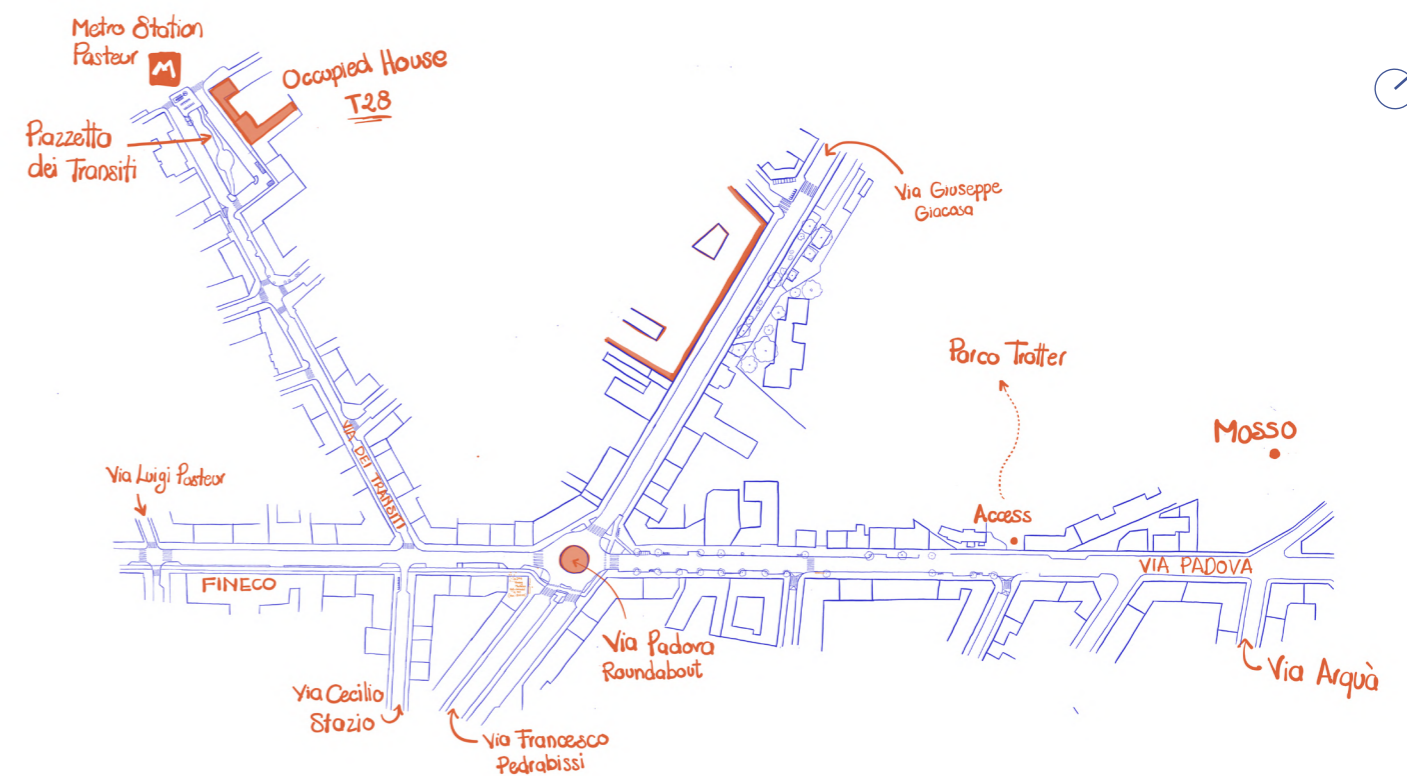
All these observations informed our research parameters to classify which streets were of greatest interest for analysis and which were not.

Limitations on the coverage of the area

Finally, another central criterion emerged from the spatial and temporal reconnaissance of the area during fieldwork. Systematic observation allowed us to define how much time should be dedicated to each significant space, aiming to capture sensory information through sight, hearing, and smell, while also dedicating time to take notes, photographs, and interact with people on site. After counting the total time required for the complete route, it became clear that the initial coverage area needed optimisation to ensure structured and systematic data

collection. Consequently, a smaller area and strategic observation and recording points were defined, making the fieldwork process more effective and manageable.

In particular, the segment of Via Padova between Via Marco D'Aviano and Via Fanfulla da Lodi, along with adjacent streets such as Via dei Transiti, Via Termopoli, Via Marco Aurelio, and a section of Via Giuseppe Giacosa, was prioritized as the new study area, where social heterogeneity and the intensity of everyday interactions were most pronounced.



↑ Fig 42. Defined Study Area inside the neighbourhood. Source: Authors' own Elaboration.

3.1.2 Baseline Assessment: The Socio- Spatial and Economic Dimensions

Analytical Foundations

To establish a rigorous analytical baseline for the Via Padova and Via dei Transiti corridor, this section synthesizes three distinct layers of data: a socio-demographic profile exploring the intersection of ethnicity and public space, a land-value analysis addressing the economic framework within the study area, and a digital discourse analysis to capture the area's mediated reputation.

This research adopts a transcalar analytical framework to facilitate a comprehensive understanding of the neighborhood's formation and its ongoing transformation (Brenner, 2004; Halbert & Rouanet, 2014). This approach posits that micro-local phenomena such as the social dynamics of Via dei Transiti and the broader NoLo district; are inextricably linked to processes unfolding at metropolitan and global scales. By integrating demographic shifts, property market fluctuations, and digital imaginaries, the analysis start by capturing the corridor not as an isolated pocket, but as a site where broader urban governance shifts and capital flows materialize.

→ Fig 43. Diverse users circulating in Via Padova. Source: Photograph by the authors, 2025.



Socio-Demographic Analysis: Ethnicity and Public Space

The first layer of inquiry traces the historical evolution and current composition of the inhabitants within the NIL of Loreto.

Utilizing municipality registry data and *Sezioni di Censimento* or census information, the study documents the area's legacy as a traditional migrant-receiving neighborhood (Coppola, 2018). This analysis specifically aims to identify the primary foreign groups to map their spatial concentration and residential patterns.

By capturing the dynamics of an area experiencing *bipolar change* with the coexistence of deep-seated multiethnic diversity alongside a rapid, market-driven gentrification (Ruzza, 2021; Bortolotti & Grassi, 2025) the quantitative data provides a baseline for the subsequent qualitative study. The objective is to identify remarkable socio-demographic patterns and determine if the specific practices observed in public spaces under the ethnographical approach (socializing, commerce, and movement) correlate directly with the ethnicity of the inhabitants or represent broader urban trends.

Land-Value Analysis: Economic in NIL Loreto

The second layer evaluates the economic dimensions of this transformation, specifically focusing on how housing sale and rental prices reflect the perceived differentiation between "NoLo" and "Via Padova" within the NIL Loreto. This analysis is oriented toward urban

planners and policymakers seeking to understand the extent to which symbolic neighborhood branding impacts real estate values.

The analysis correlates economic shifts with socio-spatial dynamics through two primary indicators. First, Economic Drivers track the trajectory of residential prices to identify the "rent gap" between current usage and speculative potential, highlighting the financial boundaries between the rebranded district and the historical artery. Second, Commercial Evolution maps changes in business typology, specifically the transition from ethnic-niche commerce to "creative-class" amenities (Mugnano, Tepeli Türel & Terenzi, 2022). This multi-dimensional approach reveals how the perception of "NoLo" acts as a frontier for gentrification, potentially segregating the district's economic profile from its multi-ethnic roots.

Digital Discourse Analysis

A digital discourse analysis approach is adopted to examine media narratives concerning the study area, based on a curated corpus of forty news articles and online publications published between 2021 and early 2026. The approach focuses on recurring narrative frames, lexical choices, and sentiment orientations, with particular attention to processes of stigmatisation and the emergence of counter-narratives.

Media Extraction

The analysis is based on the systematic extraction of recurring discursive elements from each article. The corpus was assembled through Google News searches using "Via Padova" as the primary term, alongside other relevant toponyms associated with the study area, including adjacent streets, squares,

and locally referenced locations. This strategy allowed the inclusion of articles that clearly refer to the area without explicitly naming Via Padova.

While relevance-based aggregation is neither neutral nor exhaustive, this approach captures narratives that achieved higher visibility within the public digital sphere, aligning the analysis with the objective of examining dominant and circulating representations rather than archival completeness. Rather than conducting full-text semantic analysis, the study prioritises headline framing, key lexical choices, and narrative emphasis, as these elements play a decisive role in shaping public perception in digital media environments. Each article was coded along four analytical dimensions:

- **Narrative theme:** Each article was classified according to its dominant narrative frame, defined as the primary lens through which the area is represented (e.g., danger, regeneration, cultural celebration). Where multiple themes were present, classification was based on the most prominent organising narrative.
- **Stigmatising and Counter-Narrative Language:** Key expressions were extracted and grouped into stigmatising language (terms framing the area as dangerous, degraded, or dysfunctional) and counter-narrative or neutral language, emphasising inclusion, vitality, regeneration, or social cohesion. When stigmatising terms appeared within otherwise positive articles, they were coded according to intent and framing rather than mere word presence.

- **Source typology:** Articles were categorised by source type (mainstream media, institutional press, activist platforms, cultural magazines), enabling cross-analysis between editorial positioning and narrative framing.
- **Sentiment Classification:** Each article was assigned an overall sentiment code based on narrative balance:
 - **Red:** predominantly negative framing focused on danger, crime, or decay
 - **Yellow:** ambivalent or mixed framing combining stigma with regeneration or cultural appreciation
 - **Green:** predominantly positive or counter-stigmatising framing emphasising coexistence, culture, or critical reflection on stigma

This system enables comparison across time and sources while highlighting narrative polarisation. While the classification inevitably involves interpretive judgment, consistent criteria ensure comparability and transparency. The objective is not to assess factual accuracy, but to examine how the area is discursively produced and stabilised within the public imagination, in line with critical urban and discourse analysis traditions that treat media narratives as active agents in the construction of space.

3.1.3 Learning from the Site:

Ethnographic Approach

Via Padova serves as a gateway for multiple waves of migration, which is why it is identified as a “global neighbourhood. The area possesses the highest density of trade firms in Milan, with a significant majority managed by entrepreneurs from the Maghreb (Egypt and Morocco), South Asia (Bangladesh and Pakistan) and Latin America (Peru); intertwined with the neighbouring growth of Chinese commerce (Morena et al. 2023). This concentration of diverse nationalities creates a complex socio-economic fabric where the “*New Locals*” or long-term international residents, have established deep-rooted community networks.

Territorial expression and linguistic landscape

The objective of this first analysis is to decode the socio-spatial configuration of the study area by analysing the relationship between ground-floor commercial activities and the cultural identity of the New Locals. To achieve this, the study adopts a mixed-method approach, integrating qualitative streetscape observations with quantitative spatial cluster analysis. This framework aim to unlock a multi-layered understanding of how ethnic entrepreneurship functions as a mechanism for territorial zoning and community resilience.

Phase I: Streetscape Audit and Ground-Floor Mapping

The initial phase consists of an exhaustive Streetscape Audit (Landry, 2000) by focusing specifically on the “active frontage” of the urban fabric. Every functional unit at the street level was georeferenced and categorized to capture the granular reality of the neighbourhood’s economic life. The audit focused on two primary variables:

- **Functional Typology:** A systematic classification distinguishing between retail-oriented commerce (commodity-based) and service-oriented establishments (labor or experience-based).
- **Hybridity and “Multi-Service” Nodes:** Identification of Hybrid Business Models (Rath, 2002). These are establishments that consolidate diverse services such as financial remittances, telecommunications, and ethnic grocery retail; into a single physical node. These hybrids are analysed as significant infrastructure that serves the multifaceted logistical and social needs of migrant populations.

Phase II: Linguistic Landscape and Target Audience Analysis

To determine the intended user base and the symbolic ownership of space, the study employs Linguistic Landscape (LL) analysis (Gorter & Cenoz, 2017). This phase analyze the semiotics of storefronts to identify the consumption habits of new locals, as they drive a specialized “niche economy.” The analysis involves:



↑ Fig 44. Semiotics of storefronts found in the study area. Source: Drawing by the authors.

- **Visual Communication and Semiotics:** Documenting the use of non-local languages, distinct alphabets (e.g., Arabic, Chinese), and cultural or religious symbols (e.g., Halal certification) that signal a specific cultural orientation.
- **Administrative Profiling:** To validate the correlation between service offering and cultural origin, data was collected regarding the cultural ethnicity of business administrators. This allows the research to map the enterprise control of the diasporas within the territory.

Phase III: Spatial Clustering and Territorial Zoning

The final phase interprets the gathered data through the lens of Ethnic Entrepreneurial Clusters (Sassen, 1991). The goal is to evaluate how individual establishments aggregate into a form of informal “territorial control” or de facto zoning, meaning the zoning that exists in practice, even if it is not officially established in planning instruments.

- **Cluster Mapping:** Utilizing georeferenced data to identify spatial concentrations of specific business types, which signal the formation of cultural enclaves.
- **Territorial Impact Analysis:** Assessing how these clusters influence the flow of pedestrians, social interactions, and the perceived identity of specific street segments. This phase investigates how the concentration of services (e.g., a cluster halal butchers) defines the “micro-territory” of the study area.



↑ Fig 45. Diverse users watching products from a store in via padova. Source: Drawing by the authors.

The neighborhood’s identity is visibly manifested through its Linguistic Landscape. As analyzed by Calvi (2019), the storefronts and signage in Via Padova serve as markers of territorial negotiation and cultural visibility. These signs do not merely offer products; they communicate belonging and provide specialized services that cater to the specific needs of the diaspora.

Collecting data through On-Site observation

Us as two Latin American students, migrating to a new city, in a new country, in a new continent. Prior to our arrival in Milan to continue our university studies, we were already aware of the controversy surrounding Via Padova, both through news articles encountered online while searching for housing and through comments from acquaintances living in the city. These accounts shared a predominantly negative and stigmatized perception of the area. Nevertheless, we approached the fieldwork with openness and a willingness to construct our own understanding of the territory.

Over a two-week period in mid-October 2025, we conducted a systematic survey of a section of Via Padova, from Piazzale Loreto to the railway tracks heading east, including the transversal streets and adjacent areas. During the initial days, we focused on observing space users, the physical environment, and the socio-spatial practices present in the area.

The first exploratory visits took place during the summer and early autumn, acknowledging that urban dynamics and everyday activities can vary

seasonally due to climatic, temporal, and sociocultural factors. With the arrival of autumn—marked by lower temperatures and the gradual return to urban routines—we structured a more systematic fieldwork process aligned with our research objectives. During this initial phase, we evaluated the most appropriate methods for data collection, using cameras, mobile phones, and field notebooks to record information and produce situated sketches.

Interactions in the field and certain reactions to our presence limited the possibility of obtaining direct photographic records, prompting us to adopt alternative strategies. We captured images and videos discreetly, often at a distance or while simulating the act of sending voice messages. This technique facilitated the documentation of everyday spatial practices without disrupting the social dynamics of the environment. At the same time, we maintained a continuous field diary in which we systematised contextual information, detailed descriptions, and preliminary analytical reflections.

Field visits were initially carried out across three time frames (8:00–10:00, 12:00–14:00, and 19:00–23:00) to capture the widest possible range of activities and spatial use patterns. Subsequently, we focused on specific days and time periods according to emerging research interests. Morning and midday dynamics during weekdays showed relative stability, whereas evening and nighttime activities varied significantly depending on the day and the sector observed. Fridays and weekends proved particularly relevant, revealing distinct configurations of public space. For instance, on Fridays between 7:30 and 14:00, the weekly market along Via Termopoli and Via Marco

Aurelio attracted a considerable flow of people of various ages, genders, and origins, generating intense social activity and coexistence. In contrast, certain sectors displayed more pronounced social issues at night or on Sundays, resulting in higher incidences of conflict. Conversely, other areas exhibited remarkable stability in user profiles and activities, with minimal variation between weekdays and weekends or between day and night.

Socio-Spatial dynamics of Semi-Public interiors

While the previous section examined the fluid and transient interactions unfolding along streets and sidewalks, this section shifts focus to the contained environments of local bars and cafés. Within urban ethnography, such spaces are often understood as semi-public interiors or, following Oldenburg (1999), as “Third Places”: settings that mediate between home and street and enable forms of sociality that are not easily observable in fully public space.

Rather than assuming these interiors as inherently integrative, this analysis approaches them as socio-spatial filters that structure proximity while simultaneously reproducing boundaries. Attention is therefore directed not only to who occupies these spaces, but also to where they position themselves, how long they remain, and under what interactional conditions. This perspective aligns with ethnographic

approaches that emphasize the micro-geographies of everyday life (Lofland, 1998; Low, 2016).



↑ Fig 46. Gathering inside “Third Places” inside the study Area. Source: Drawing by the authors.

Four bars inside the study area were selected as case studies due to their constant activity and role as neighbourhood hotspots: *Caffè Vecchi Tempi*, *Bar Rendez Vous*, *Bar Pacifico* and *Bar Rotatoria*. Their selection was based on strategic location and their observed capacity to attract heterogeneous populations.

Methodologically, the research shifted from mobile observation (used in the street analysis) to stationary observation by entering each establishment as customers and adopting a passive observational role in order to reduce observer effect. Observation sessions lasted between 45 and 60 minutes. In parallel, micro-spatial maps were produced to document:

- **Geometry of occupation** (central versus peripheral seating),
- **Interactional dynamics** (grouping, isolation, cross-group contact),
- **Atmospheric markers** (language use, music, and cultural codes).

Open and Semi-Structured interviews

Enriching the understanding of the socio-spatial complexity of the Via Padova and Via dei Transiti, the gathering of diverse perspectives of local actors regularly engaged with the area’s everyday dynamics was fundamental. To this end, the fieldwork was complemented with open or semi-structured interviews to selected residents, workers from commercial establishments and informal sellers allocated along the analysed streets, including both Italian nationals and migrants from various backgrounds. Although the interviews are not

intended to provide a statistically representative analysis, they provide insight into qualitative dynamics that complement spatial and economic analysis.

This study implemented the *go along* or walking interview technique. According to Kusenbach (2003), this method allows the researcher to accompany subjects on a journey through the study area, capturing *street phenomenology* in real time. On the axis of Via Padova and Via dei Transiti, walking with the actors revealed invisible boundaries, places of attachment, and spaces of conflict that do not always emerge in a static interview setting.

The sample and informant profiles were defined through a criterion-based sampling strategy, segmenting actors into four categories to reflect the diverse realities present in the study area. This selection aims to triangulate perceptions of public space, cohabitation dynamics, and urban change processes from diverse positions of power and territorial attachment.

Firstly, the research relied on *Long-term Residents*, defined as individuals with more than 15 years of residency in the neighborhood. Their participation was considered vital for reconstructing the historical memory of the Padova-Transiti axis and evaluating physical and social transformations through the years. In contrast, the study also includes *New Residents* (Gentrifiers), primarily composed of young professionals, artists, and students who have arrived within the last five years. This group allowed the identification of new forms of aesthetic and symbolic appropriation of space, as well as potential friction with traditional structures.

conceptual - methodological framework

Multi-Layered Triangulation

To address the socio-spatial complexity of the Via Padova and Via de Transiti corridors, this research focus on the integration of multiple data sources and analytical lenses to capture the “layered” reality of public space in contexts of hyper-diversity.

The diagram illustrates the triangulated research design developed to investigate the relational production of public space in Via Padova and Via dei Transiti. Three parallel empirical strands:

- a. Everyday spatial practices
- b. Semiotic and material configuration,
- c. Institutional and media models

These analytical dimensions are analysed through distinct but complementary methodological tools. Their thematic triangulation enables the identification of friction, negotiation, and asymmetrical coexistence between lived practices and institutional regeneration frameworks.

The synthesis provides the empirical and analytical basis for reflecting on the limitations of normative planning models in super-diverse contexts and for proposing inclusive urban policy guidelines.

→ Fig 47. Summary of the conceptual-methodological framework for the analyses. Source: Authors' own Elaboration.

01 Research question

How is public space in Via Padova negotiated between everyday spatial practices and institutional regeneration models, and what does this reveal about the limits of planning in hyper-diverse contexts?

02 Analytical Dimensions

| | a Everyday Spatial Practices | b Semiotic & Material Configuration | c Institutional & Media Models |
|---------------------------------|--|--|--|
| | <i>Lived production of space</i> | <i>Spatial and symbolic mapping</i> | <i>Conceived Space</i> |
| Methods | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ethnographic observation • Semi-structured Interviews • Informal conversations | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Linguistic Landscape mapping • Streetscape audit • Active frontage analysis • Micro-spatial documentation | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Policy review • Analysis of regeneration programs • Digital discourse analysis |
| Epistemological Position | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accessing “lived” and “perceived” space • Micro-scale negotiations | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reading space as material-symbolic assemblage | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Institutional production of space • Regulatory and narrative framing |
| Analytical Output | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Informal appropriations • Survival infrastructures • Tactical uses of public space • Situated spatial rationalities | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ethnic entrepreneurial clusters • Multilingual territorial markers • De facto zoning patterns • Symbolic constructions of belonging | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Normative models of public space • Branding strategies • Safety/decay narratives • Regulatory imaginaries |

03 Thematic Triangulation

| | |
|---------------------------------------|--|
| Comparative Analytical Process | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cross-reading practices, spatial configuration, and institutional models • Identifying overlaps, dissonances, and asymmetries • Interpreting friction between market-driven regeneration and informal survival economies |
| Synthesis Produces | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Negotiation mechanisms • Zones of regulatory friction • Invisible infrastructures of hyper-diversity • Structural blind spots of planning frameworks |

04 Interpretative & Normative Outcome

Reconstruction of Via Padova–Via dei Transiti as a contested regulatory

Implications for Urban Planning

- Identification of planning limitations in hyper-diverse contexts
- Criteria for inclusive and relational urban policy
- Recognition of informal dynamics as constitutive (not deviant)

Moving to the economic dimension and the intensive use of the street as a resource, the study examined the perceptions of *Commercial Operators*. Through interviews with owners or workers of long-standing businesses, new “trendy” establishments and ethnic shops, this approach seeks to unravel how the sidewalks function as a space of exchange between commercial activity and the public realm, as well as a site of social interaction and cultural visibility.

Finally, the sample for this study was completed with *Transient Users*. This profile encompasses individuals who, while not residing in the area, interact with it for work or leisure. Their accounts provided an external yet necessary perspective on the area’s vitality, and their urban legibility compared to other sectors of the city of Milan.

Acknowledging a previous understanding of the person in the context of research, a tailored script with key question for each of the informants was elaborated, serving as a flexible roadmap to guide the interview. The questions were ordered, going from the most general to the specific, while the answers were written keeping the language and expressions used by the informants.

All the collected information was processed through a *Thematic Analysis* (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This process involved the transcription of the interviews and the subsequent coding of data into emerging dimensions with the objective to triangulate the results across the narratives of the different actors.

[**Analysis & Results**]

A look at the practices, what happens and where?

04

4.1 Ba- seli- ne

4.1.1

Analytical Foundations

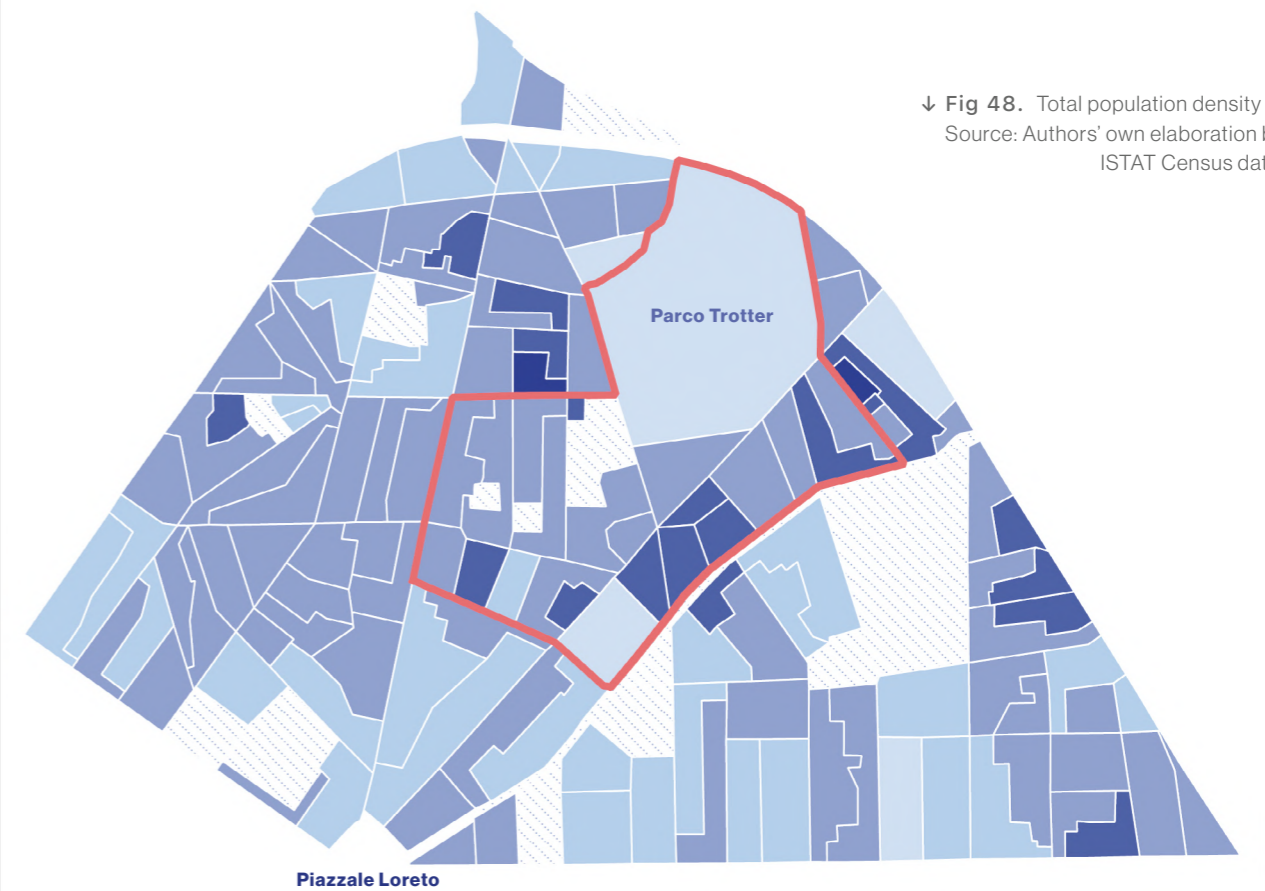
Demographic Conditions

For the sociodemographic analysis, data was drawn from the ISTAT 2021 Permanent Census at the granularity of the Sezione di Censimento (Census Section). This micro-scale approach allows for a reconstruction of the social fabric with a level of precision that standard district-level data often obscures.

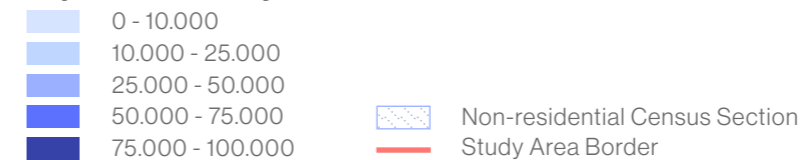
The analysis operates through a trans-scalar comparison between the NIL Loreto (the macro-context) and the Study Area (a transect of 27 census sections). Rather than seeking difference as an end in itself, this comparison is used to situate the Study Area within broader district dynamics, identifying how certain demographic patterns are spatially intensified or structurally concentrated. Indicators such as nationality, age structure, household composition, and employment are read together to establish a quantitative baseline for interpreting the public space practices and tensions explored in this chapter.

Demographic Intensification Rather Than Exception

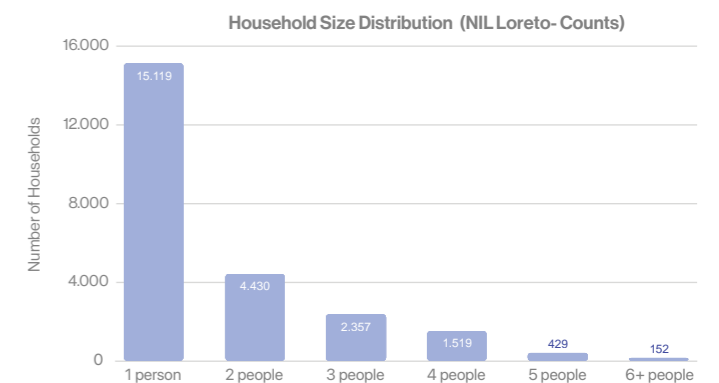
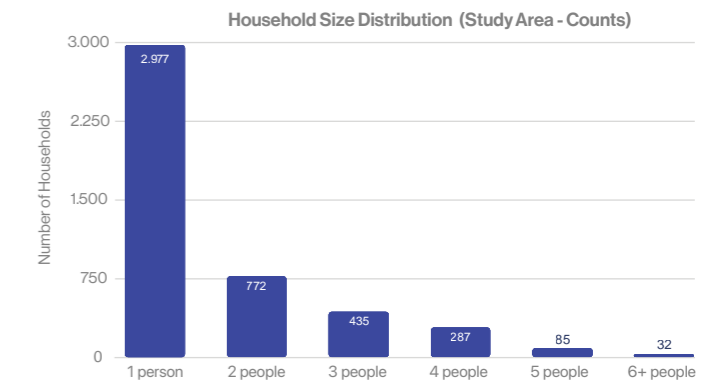
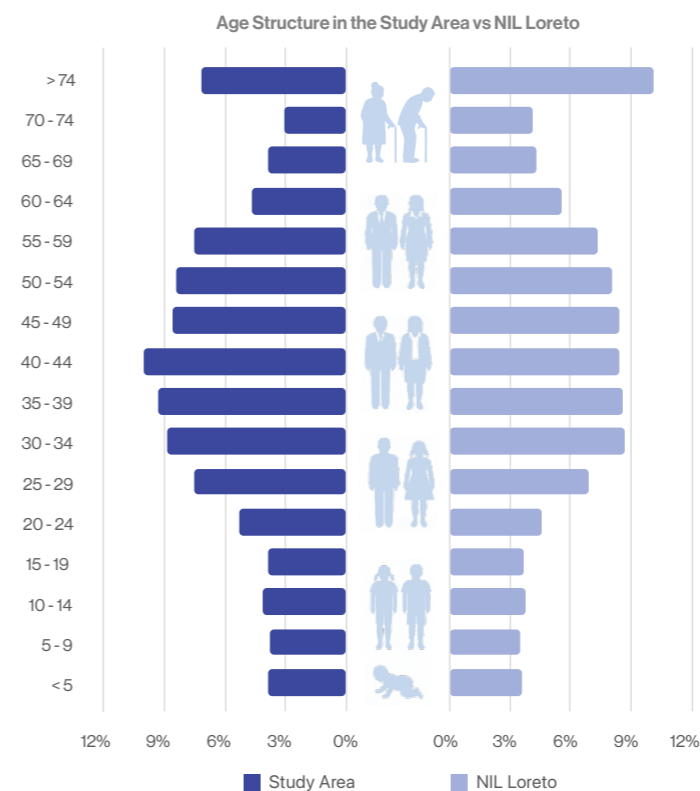
Following the ethnographic exploration of everyday public space practices, the quantitative analysis serves to ground these observations in the structural reality of the territory. Read through the trans-scalar methodology proposed by Brenner (2004), the

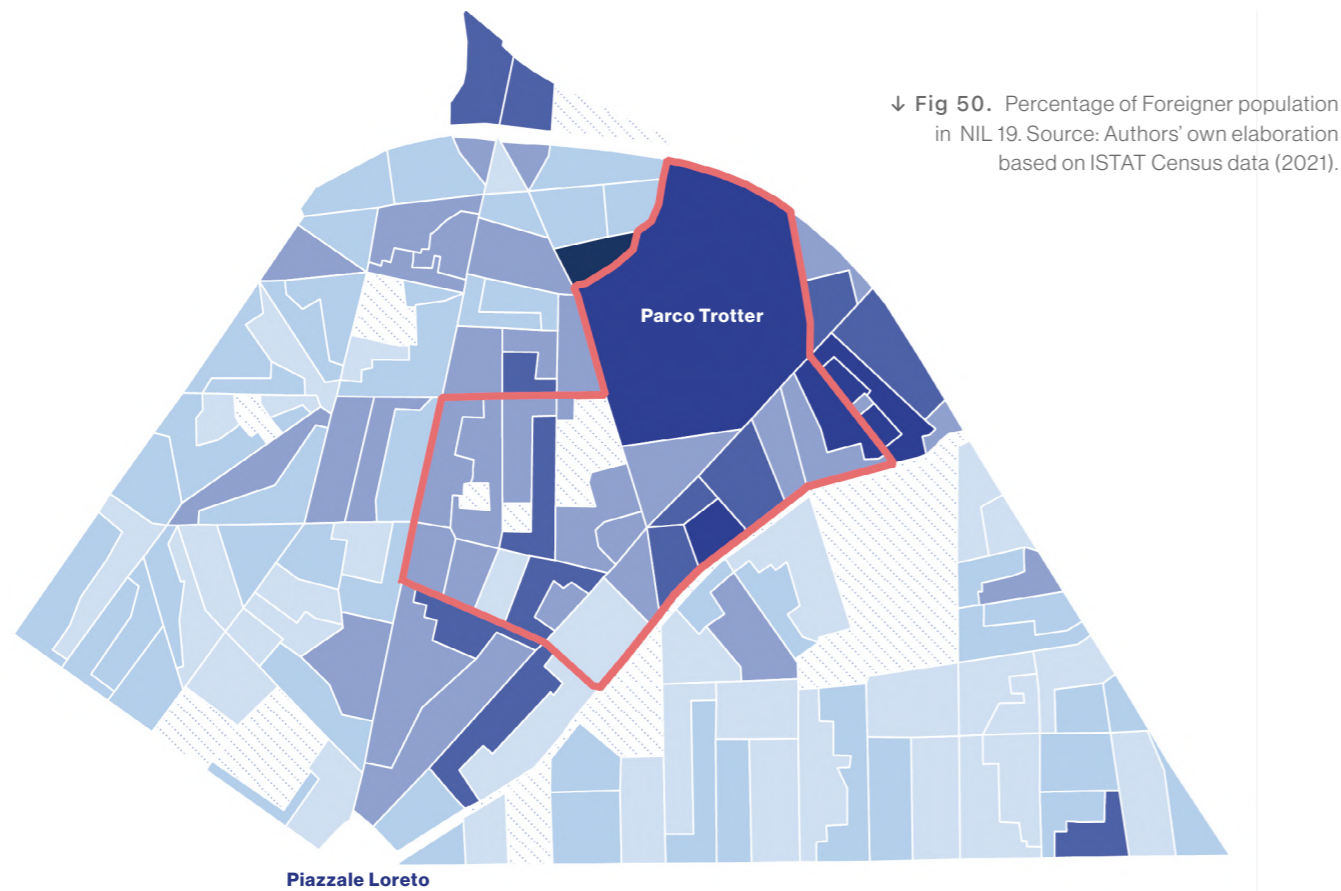


Population Density (St1/ Km²)



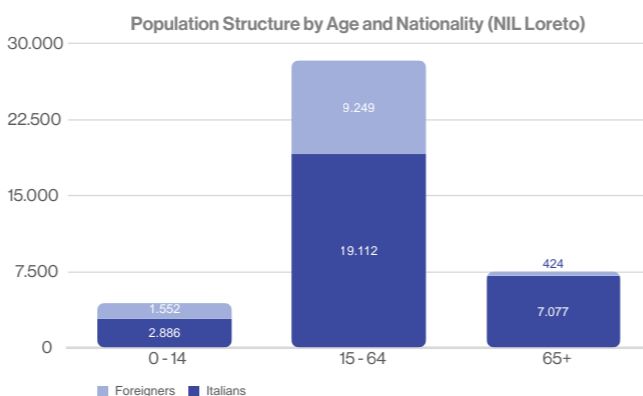
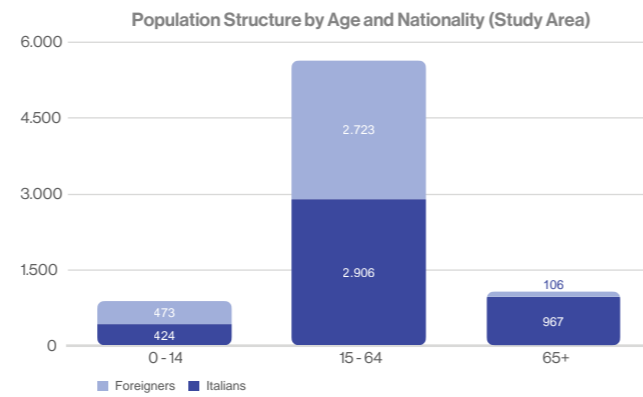
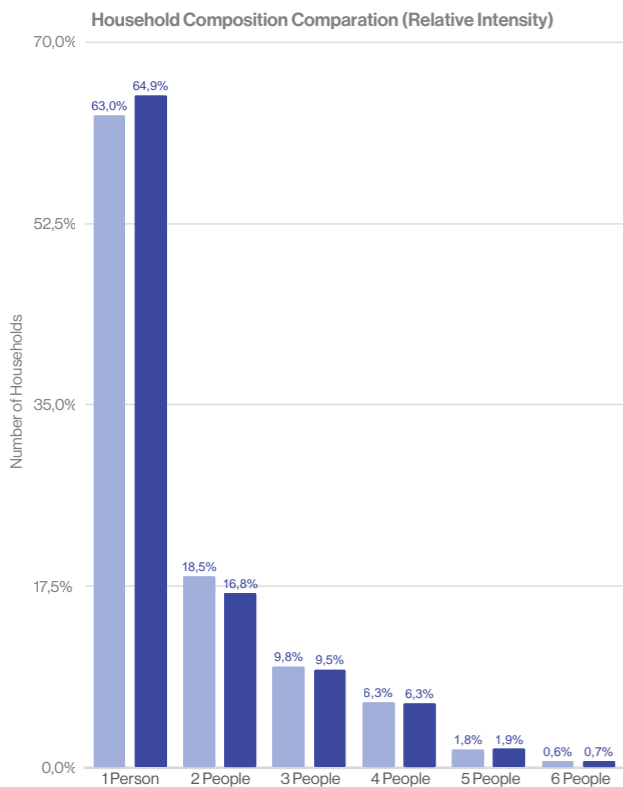
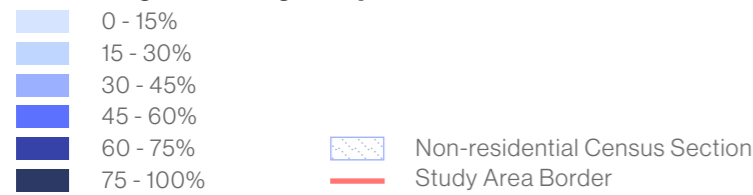
↓ Fig 49. Statistics of Age Structure and Household Size Distribution in the Study Area and NIL Loreto. Source: Authors' own elaboration based on ISTAT Census data (2021).





↓ Fig 50. Percentage of Foreigner population in NIL 19. Source: Authors' own elaboration based on ISTAT Census data (2021).

Percentage of Foreigners per Census Section



Study Area emerges not as a demographic anomaly within NIL Loreto, but as a zone of demographic intensification.

Although it comprises only 27 of the 144 census sections, the Study Area accommodates 7,599 residents, accounting for 18.9% of the NIL's total population. The demographic structure reflects trends present at the district scale, but in a heightened form. Foreign residents constitute 43.5% of the local population (3,302 individuals), compared to 27.8% at the NIL level, confirming that this urban transect carries a disproportionate share of the district's intercultural and demographic load. In this sense, the area functions as a demographic accelerator, where metropolitan patterns of diversity are structurally condensed rather than spatially dispersed.

A Consolidated Migrant-Receiving Core

The sociodemographic composition confirms the Study Area's role as a long-standing migrant-receiving zone, providing a structural context for the cultural appropriations of space observed ethnographically. The presence of foreign residents is neither marginal nor recent.

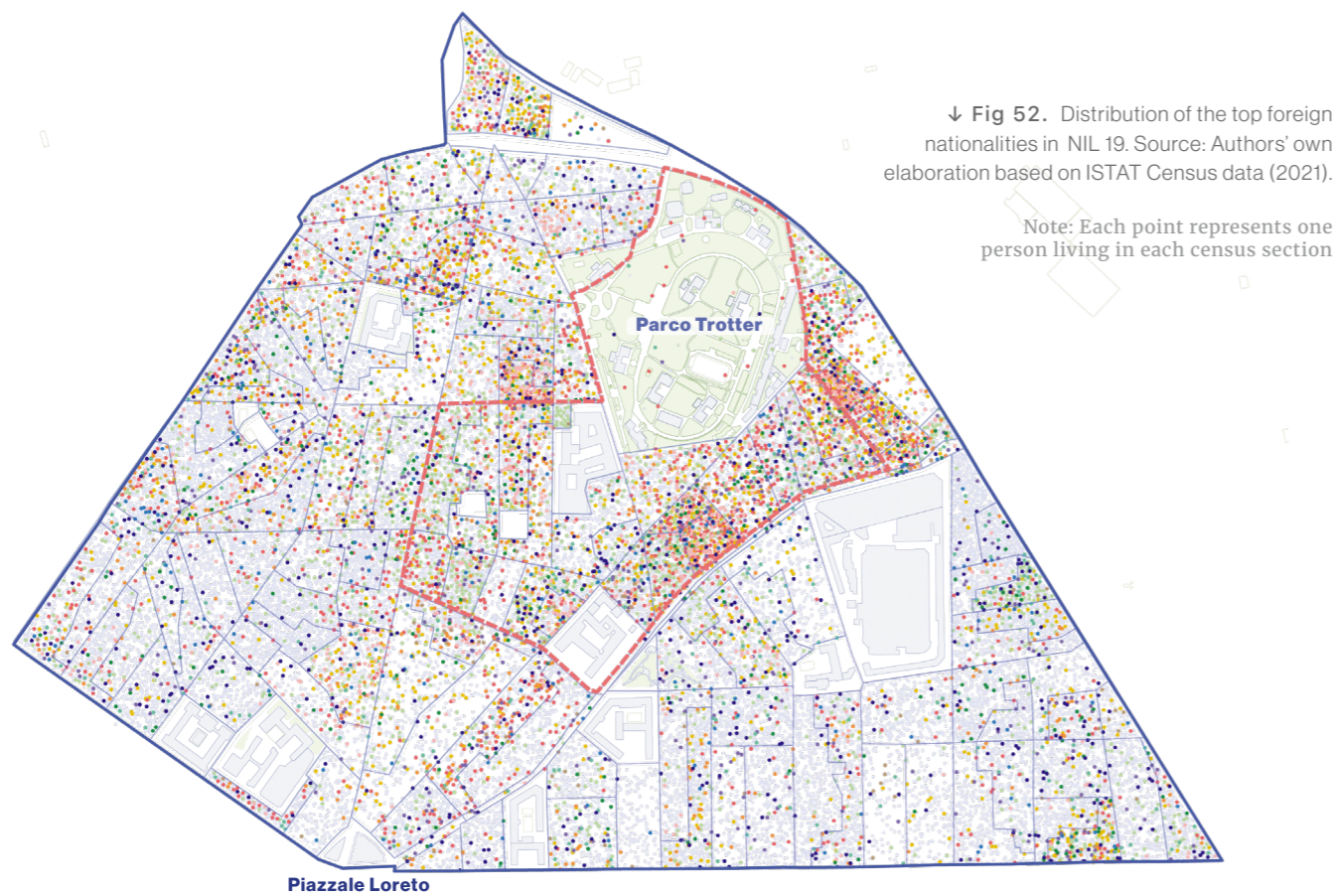
While the district is often broadly described as "multi-ethnic," the Study Area reveals a specific internal hierarchy of presence. The largest national groups are residents from the Philippines (774 individuals), China (498), and Egypt (463), followed closely

by Bangladesh (427). Sri Lankan and Peruvian communities, while smaller in absolute numbers, contribute to the area's granular heterogeneity. This configuration produces a condition of super-diversity (Vertovec, 2007), where no single group dominates the social landscape and multiple migratory trajectories coexist within a compact urban fabric.

Notably, these populations show higher levels of spatial concentration within the Study Area than at the district scale, suggesting that the social networks and support systems observed ethnographically (such as informal care practices, everyday meeting points, or community-oriented commercial and service activities) are closely linked to the spatial distribution of residents, although they are not limited to those who live within the area. These activities may involve foreign ownership, multilingual services, or communities that serve both residents and visitors, reflecting the social fabric rather than a purely ethnic distinction.

Narratives of transience are further challenged by the age structure of the foreign population. In the Study Area, 473 foreign residents are under the age of 14, while only 106 are over 65, indicating a demographic profile dominated by young families and active workers rather than temporary or single-adult migration. These characteristics align with the area's historical function as a point of settlement where social networks, services, and economic activities have accumulated over time.

← Fig 51. Statistics of Population Structure by Age and Nationality, and Household Composition in the Study Area and NIL Loreto. Source: Authors' own elaboration based on ISTAT Census data (2021).

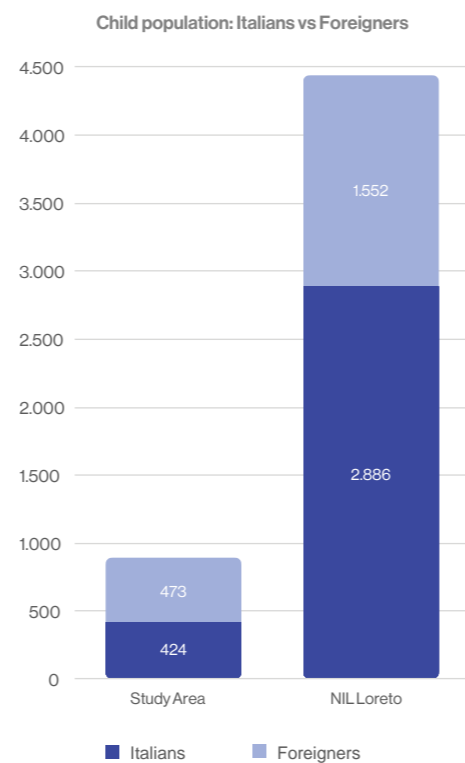
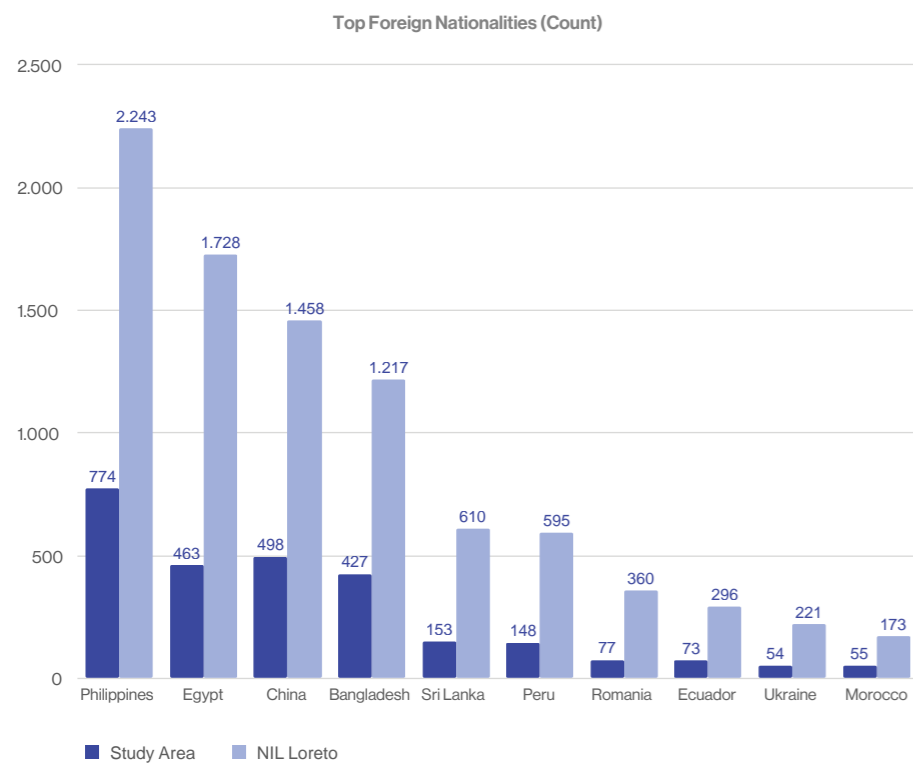


↓ Fig 52. Distribution of the top foreign nationalities in NIL 19. Source: Authors' own elaboration based on ISTAT Census data (2021).

Note: Each point represents one person living in each census section

Distribution of Top Foreigners Nationalities

- UE
- Ukraina
- Morocco
- Ecuador
- Bangladesh
- Romania
- Peru
- Sri Lanka
- China
- Philippines
- Egypt
- Italia
- Loreto NIL Border
- Study Area Border



Coexistence Without Demographic Replacement

Despite the high concentration of foreign residents, Italians remain the majority population within the Study Area (4,297 residents, 56.5%). This configuration does not suggest demographic replacement, but rather a layered form of coexistence.

A closer reading reveals overlapping demographic profiles within the same urban space. The Italian population is largely concentrated in the active age range, reflecting a residential pattern linked to metropolitan accessibility and proximity to employment and education networks. At the same time, the foreign population plays a central role in sustaining family structures, with a strong presence of children and a limited elderly population.

This overlap produces a dense social fabric in which different residential trajectories (established migrant families and mobile Italian professionals) coexist in close proximity. Their everyday practices intersect in shared streets, courtyards, and public spaces, intensifying the use and visibility of the public realm.

The Visibility Paradox of Demographic Density

The demographic conditions identified—youthfulness, a high concentration of working-age residents, and a prevalence of small households—produce an environment of intense public presence. In this

← Fig 53. Statistics of Top Foreign Nationalities and Child Population inside the Study Area and NIL Loreto. Source: Authors' own elaboration based on ISTAT Census data (2021).

context, practices such as socializing, care work, informal exchange, and waiting are more likely to occur in shared spaces, not as exceptional behaviors, but as structurally induced responses to density and housing conditions.

The paradox emerges not from the demographic reality itself, which is stable and economically active, but from the way this visibility is interpreted. While census data depicts a consolidated population, dominant institutional and media narratives continue to associate the area with disorder or marginality. The tension, therefore, lies between a statistically grounded demographic normality and its symbolic framing as a problem.

Demographic Conditions as Ground for Spatial

Rather than attributing observed public space practices to ethnicity alone, this analysis situates them within structural conditions observable in the demographic data: high population density, diverse household configurations, and a concentration of working-age residents within a constrained urban fabric. These conditions provide a structural backdrop that correlates with the patterns of spatial intensity documented ethnographically.

Subsequent analysis of the housing market shows how these demographic patterns intersect with economic pressures, where multicultural presence is increasingly 'priced in' as an aesthetic and economic asset, while the material conditions of long-term residents remain under pressure.

Price Uniformity

To complement the ethnographic and spatial analysis, housing prices were manually collected from online real estate platforms through a structured observation table. Immobiliare.it was used as the primary source due to its broader market coverage. Only residential sale listings located within the study area (particularly along Via Padova and Via dei Transiti) were included, according to predefined criteria. All values represent asking prices and are used for comparative and indicative purposes. Within the logic of this thesis, these data are not treated merely as indicators of market performance, but as expressions of an institutional and speculative rationality that actively contributes to the production of public space. Price formation is interpreted as part of the structural framework within which everyday spatial practices unfold and are negotiated.

The reconfiguration of symbolic and economic boundaries

The analysis of sales and rental prices used the Loreto OMI Zone (homogeneous territorial areas used for the market valuation of properties and rentals), revealing a significant transformation in the relational geography of the area: the economic boundary that historically differentiated the emerging NoLo brand from the more stigmatized segments of Via Padova has progressively blurred. What was once described

both materially and symbolically as a “wall”, appears to have weakened in economic terms.

In the past, this boundary functioned as a spatial and narrative device separating the “creative” rebranding of NoLo from the complex, hyper-diverse fabric of Via Padova. Current market data, however, indicate a growing price alignment across these areas. This convergence suggests that diversity is no longer framed primarily as a factor of devaluation within real estate logic. Instead, multiculturalism has been integrated into a new logic of *Commodified Authenticity* within new circuits of urban valorization.

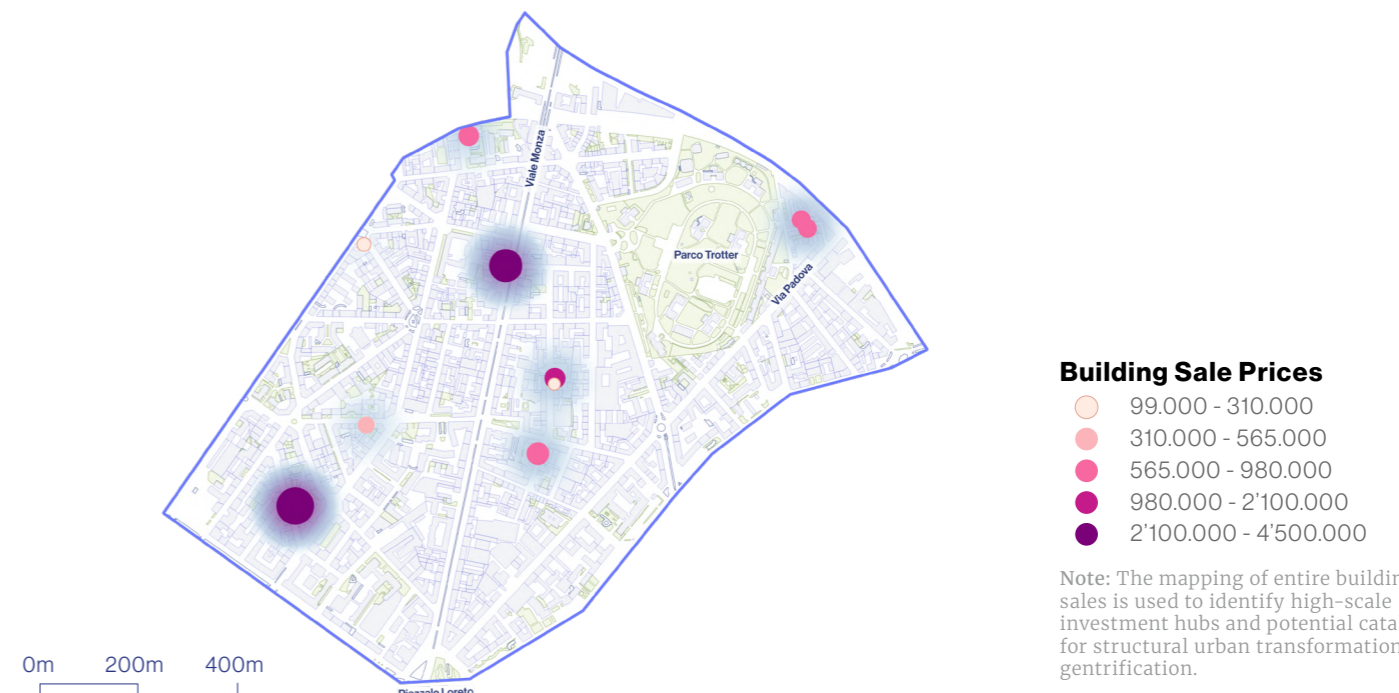
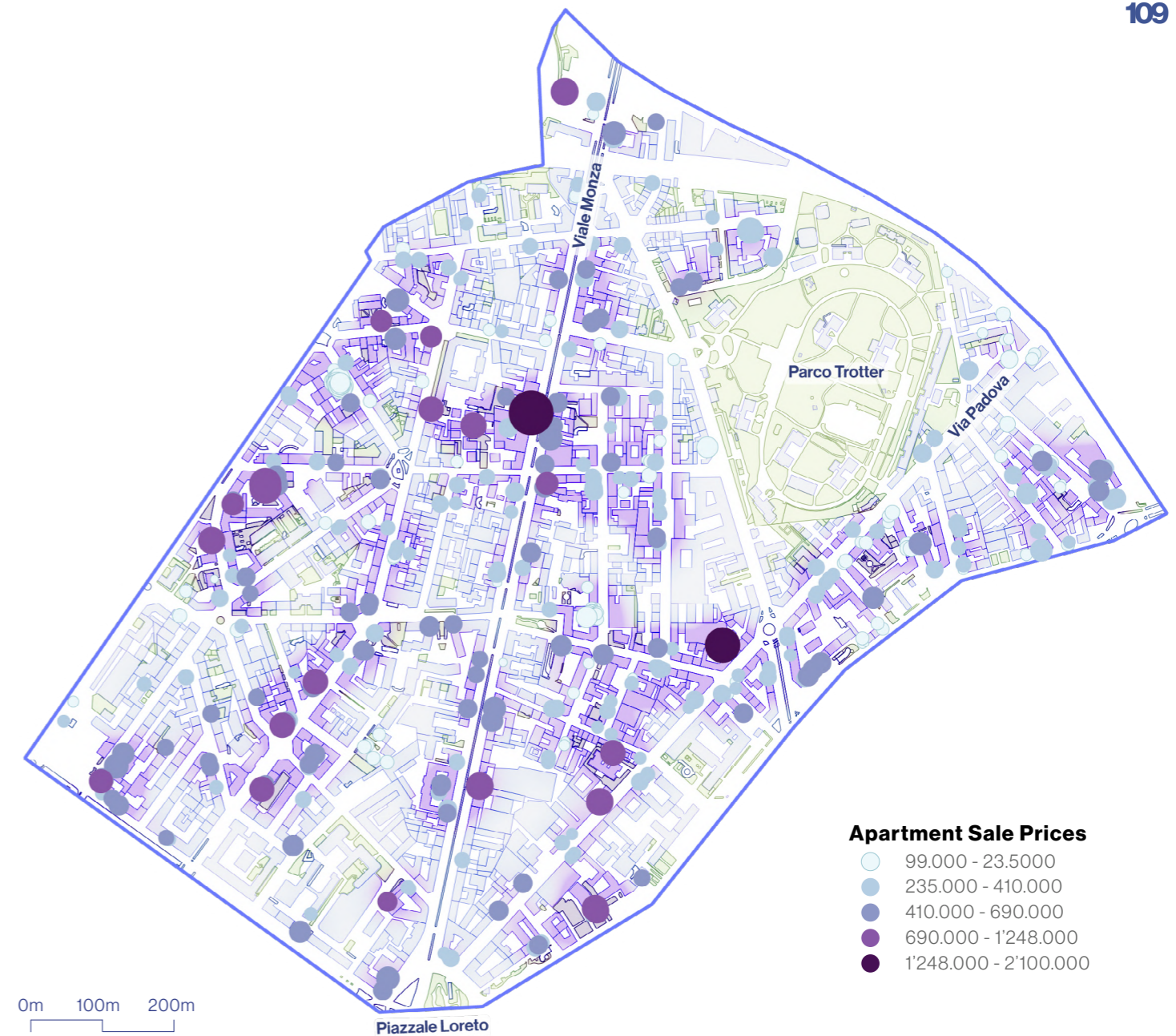
In this sense, the transformation can be interpreted through the lens of symbolic gentrification (Semi, 2015): while physical requalification projects have affected parts of Via Padova, the rebranding process associated with the NoLo label preceded and accompanied material interventions, reshaping the narrative of the district from marginality to creative cosmopolitanism. This narrative shift has contributed to redefining the symbolic meaning of local public space, influencing both perception and investment.

The Aestheticization of the “Other”

In line with arguments advanced by Sharon Zukin (2010), urban middle-class demand often privileges spaces perceived as “authentic.” Along Via Padova, authenticity is materially produced through

→ Fig 54. Average sale prices for individual residential units within the study area OMI zone. Source: Authors' own elaboration based on Immobiliare.it data.

→ Fig 55. Average sale prices for entire building assets within the study area OMI zone. Source: Authors' own elaboration based on Immobiliare.it data.



Note: The mapping of entire building sales is used to identify high-scale investment hubs and potential catalysts for structural urban transformation and gentrification.

multilingual signage, migrant entrepreneurship, informal social interactions, and micro-spatial appropriations of the street. However, the market does not integrate this complexity in its entirety.

In this end, aestheticization operates through a selective lens. Only specific forms of diversity, particularly those compatible with a cosmopolitan lifestyle narrative, are positively re-signified. Curated ethnic restaurants, hybrid cafés, and creative retail spaces tend to be aligned with the NoLo brand. Conversely, other everyday spatial practices of migrant residents such as informal gatherings or specialized migrant services, are often framed within institutional and media discourses as weaknesses to be managed rather than assets to be celebrated.

In this end, aestheticization operates through a selective lens. The market embraces only the commercial practices such as curated “ethnic” fusion restaurants, craft boutiques, or art galleries, that align with the NoLo brand’s image of cosmopolitan lifestyle. In doing so, it neglects the profound social richness of Via Padova and Via dei Transiti. The complex social networks and daily practices of migrant residents are often treated as weaknesses to be managed rather than assets to be celebrated.

The “Halo Effect” of new urban regeneration projects

Large-scale regeneration initiatives, including LOC – Loreto Open Community, contribute to this process by reshaping expectations about the district’s future through their “Halo Effect”. Beyond their material interventions, such projects operate anticipatorily,

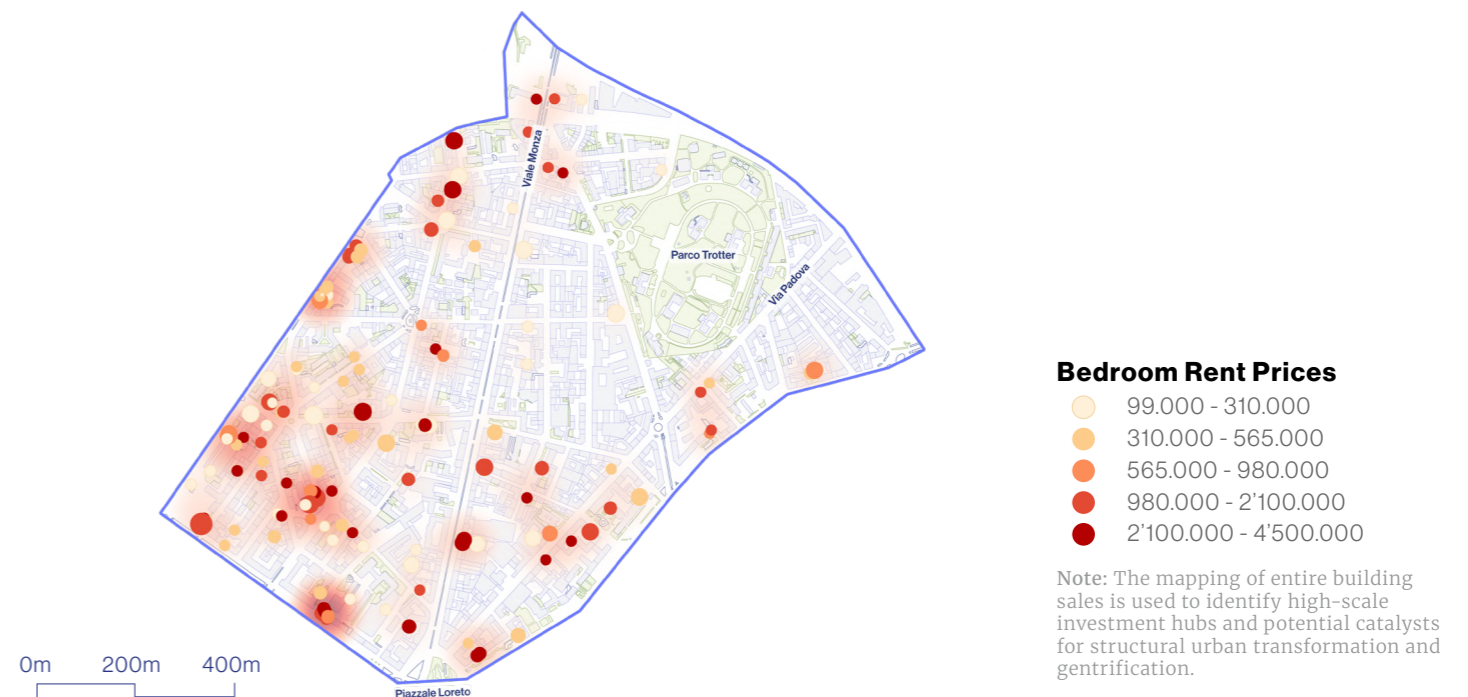
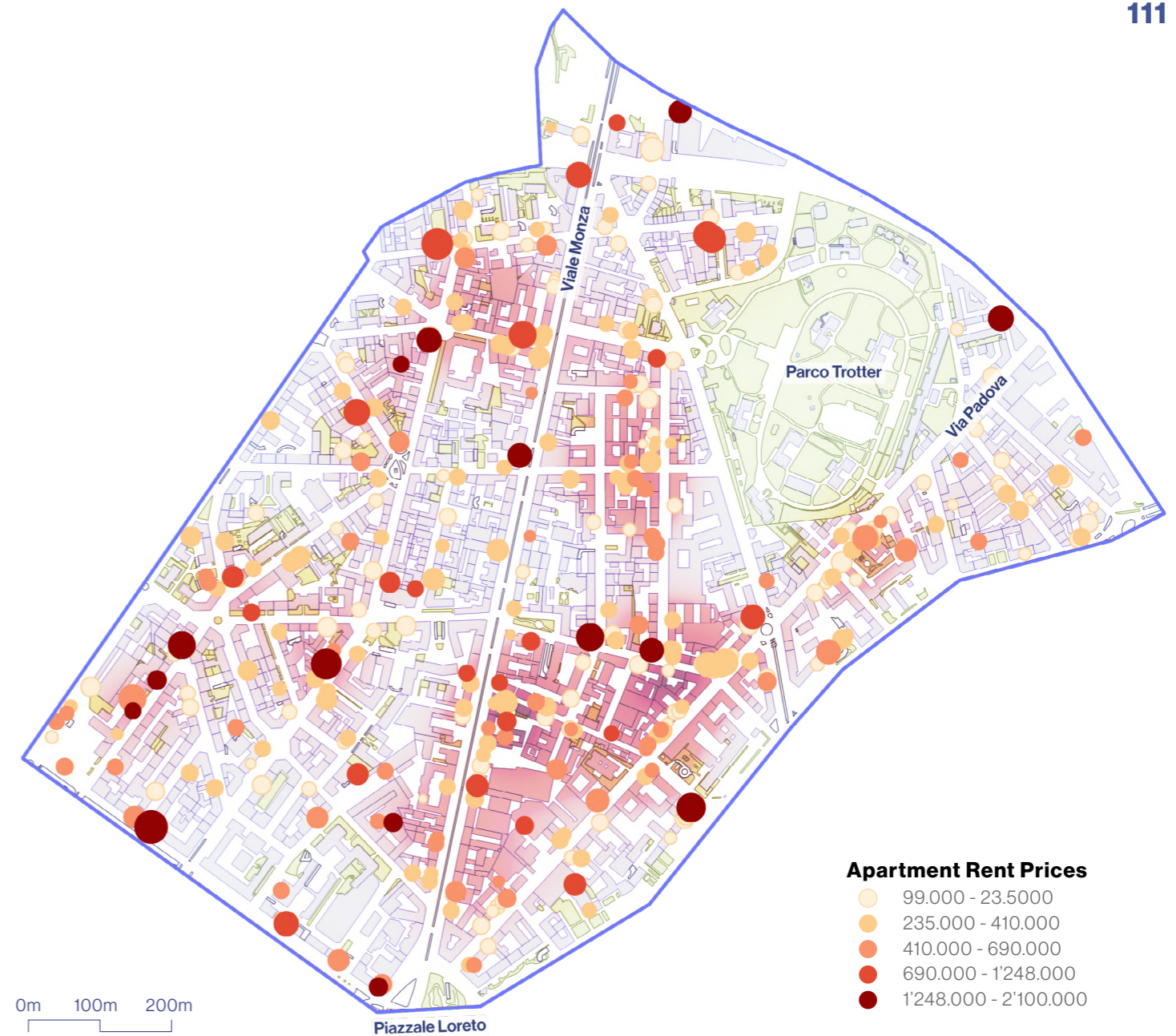
influencing market behaviour through projected transformations. The observed price alignment suggests that real estate actors increasingly price properties not solely on the basis of their immediate micro-context, but in relation to the anticipated revalorization of the broader Loreto area. This dynamic resonates with Neil Smith’s (1987) concept of the rent gap, understood as the disparity between actual and potential ground rent.

Historically, Via Padova offered a significant difference between existing land values and their perceived redevelopment potential. Today, the “NoLo” brand and LOC project have eliminated this “cheap” alternative and Via Padova has been economically integrated into an upscale trajectory of the neighborhood, forcing a standardization of costs that often ignores the lived reality of its long-term residents.

In this context, Via Padova risks evolving into a space of symbolic inclusion but material pressure. The multicultural character of the area may be celebrated within branding and regeneration discourses, yet the economic standardization of land values can constrain the capacity of existing populations to remain and reproduce their everyday spatial practices. In this dynamic, diversity is incorporated as symbolic capital, while the material and social conditions that sustain it remain insufficiently recognized within planning and regeneration frameworks.

→ Fig 56. Average apartment rent prices for individual residential units within the study area OMI zone. Source: Authors’ own elaboration based on Immobiliare.it data.

→ Fig 57. Average sale prices for entire apartment assets within the study area OMI zone. Source: Authors’ own elaboration based on Immobiliare.it data.



Note: The mapping of entire building sales is used to identify high-scale investment hubs and potential catalysts for structural urban transformation and gentrification.

4.1.2 Digital Discourse: Media Narratives

Dominant Narratives

Digital media plays a central role in shaping how urban spaces are perceived, governed, and inhabited. In the case of Via Padova and its surrounding area, online news outlets, institutional communications, cultural magazines, and activist platforms collectively construct a public narrative that extends far beyond the material reality of the street. These mediated representations influence external perceptions of the neighbourhood while simultaneously informing policy responses, security strategies, and regeneration agendas.

Danger and Disorder as the Primary Frame

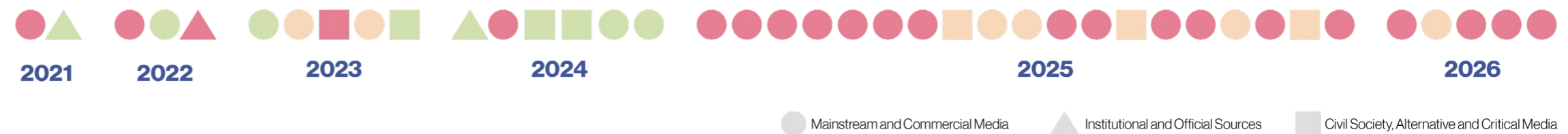
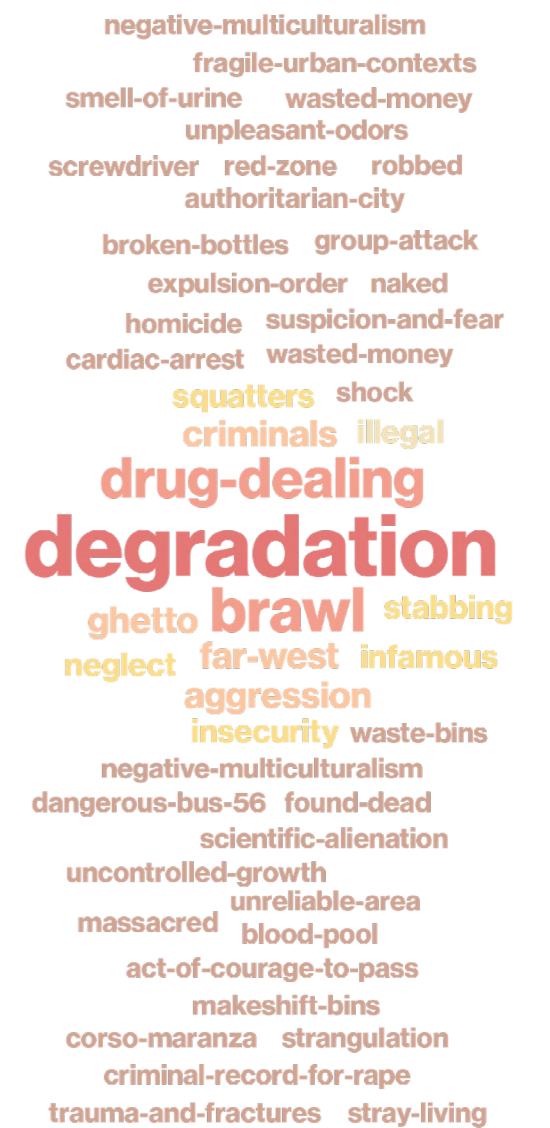
Across mainstream and local news outlets, the most recurrent narrative frame presents the study area as characterised by violence, criminality, and urban decay. Headlines are strongly event-driven, focusing on stabbings, brawls, robberies, evictions, and extreme incidents. Lexical choices emphasise shock and fear, frequently employing expressions such as “Far West,” “ghetto,” “battleground,” or “infamous area.”

This framing isolates individual events from their broader social and structural context, transforming episodic incidents into indicators of an inherent spatial pathology. Violence is portrayed as routine rather than exceptional, contributing to the normalisation of emergency-oriented interpretations of the neighbourhood.

Institutional Narratives: Regeneration, Order, and Control

Institutional communication constructs a parallel narrative centered on regeneration, safety, and spatial order. Via Padova is framed as an area in transformation through infrastructure upgrades, public services, and aesthetic interventions.

However, these narratives often abstract away everyday tensions, social conflict, and displacement. Terms such as “reappropriation of the territory,” “restoring legality,” and “red zones” reflect a managerial approach to urban space in which visual order and control are prioritized over lived complexity. Rather than directly countering stigmatization, institutional narratives frequently coexist with securitarian media discourse, indirectly legitimizing increased surveillance and exceptional governance measures.



↑ Fig 58. Semantic mapping of negative narratives where word size reflects relative frequency. Source: Authors' own Elaboration.

→ Fig 59. Timeline of analysed media discourse on the area by sentiment and source type. Source: Authors' own Elaboration.

Counter-Narratives and Discursive Resistance

Counter-narratives emerging from cultural, activist, and alternative media articulate a form of discursive resistance that challenges dominant representations of the study area as inherently dangerous or dysfunctional. These narratives reframe conflict and insecurity as outcomes of broader structural conditions (such as housing precarity, migration regimes, and uneven urban development) rather than as intrinsic qualities of the area.

Multiculturalism is presented not as an exceptional or problematic condition, but as a constitutive element of everyday social infrastructure, sustained through informal networks, collective practices, and the continuous use of public space. Importantly, these accounts often foreground residents' agency, emphasising practices of care, mutual support, and place-making that remain largely invisible in mainstream reporting. In several cases, counter-narratives also adopt a reflexive stance, explicitly naming and critiquing the persistence of stigma as a media construct rather than a lived reality.

At the same time, the analysis reveals a pronounced asymmetry in visibility: counter-narratives circulate primarily within niche or specialised platforms and tend to gain broader legitimacy only when they align with institutional regeneration agendas or cultural branding initiatives. As a result, while such narratives effectively destabilize stigmatizing frames, their capacity to reshape the dominant public image of the area remains structurally constrained.



↑ Fig 60. Semantic mapping of positive narratives where word size reflects relative frequency. Source: Authors' own Elaboration.

→ Fig 61. Sentiment distribution across the analyzed media articles. Source: Authors' own Elaboration.

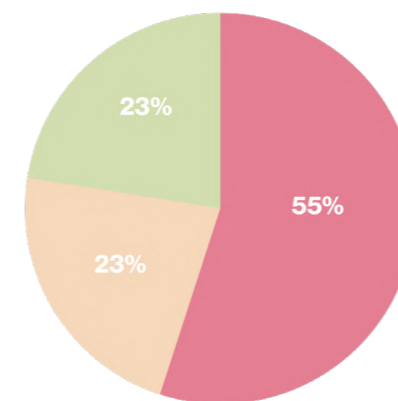
→ Fig 62. Prevalence of main narrative themes in news reporting. Source: Authors' own Elaboration.

Sentiment Distribution and Temporal Trends

Out of the forty analysed entries, the discourse is markedly polarized:

- **Red (Danger / Crime / Conflict):** 20 entries
- **Yellow (Transformation / Gentrification / Critical):** 10 entries
- **Green (Regeneration / Culture / Institutional):** 10 entries

While Green narratives peaked between 2023 and 2024, largely driven by institutional projects and cultural initiatives, the overall discourse shifts sharply back toward Red framing in 2025 and 2026. This quantitative reversal suggests that aesthetic regeneration has not displaced the area's criminalized reputation in media representations. Instead, regeneration and stigma coexist in what can be described as a condition of narrative polarization, where contrasting framings operate simultaneously without resolution.



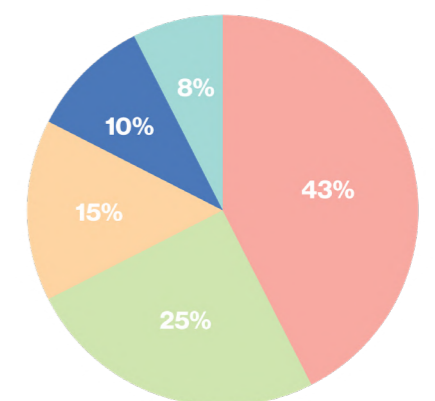
● Negative - Stigmatised
● Neutral - Mixed
● Positive - Counter narrative

Thematic Shifts Over Time (2021–2026)

Between 2021 and 2022, media discourse was marked by a phase of cultural exoticization, in which diversity was framed as an experience to be consumed, and stigma as a residual obstacle to be overcome through gastronomy and lifestyle narratives.

From 2023 to 2024, institutional narratives intensified, coinciding with the implementation of regeneration projects aimed at "normalizing" the area through physical and symbolic interventions.

From 2025 onward, the discourse shifted toward securitization and transnational visibility. The declaration of red zones and the occurrence of high-profile violent events intensified alarmist narratives, while international media outlets simultaneously reframed the area as an ethnic enclave characterized by both authenticity and danger. This dual framing reinforces the area's symbolic ambiguity rather than resolving it.

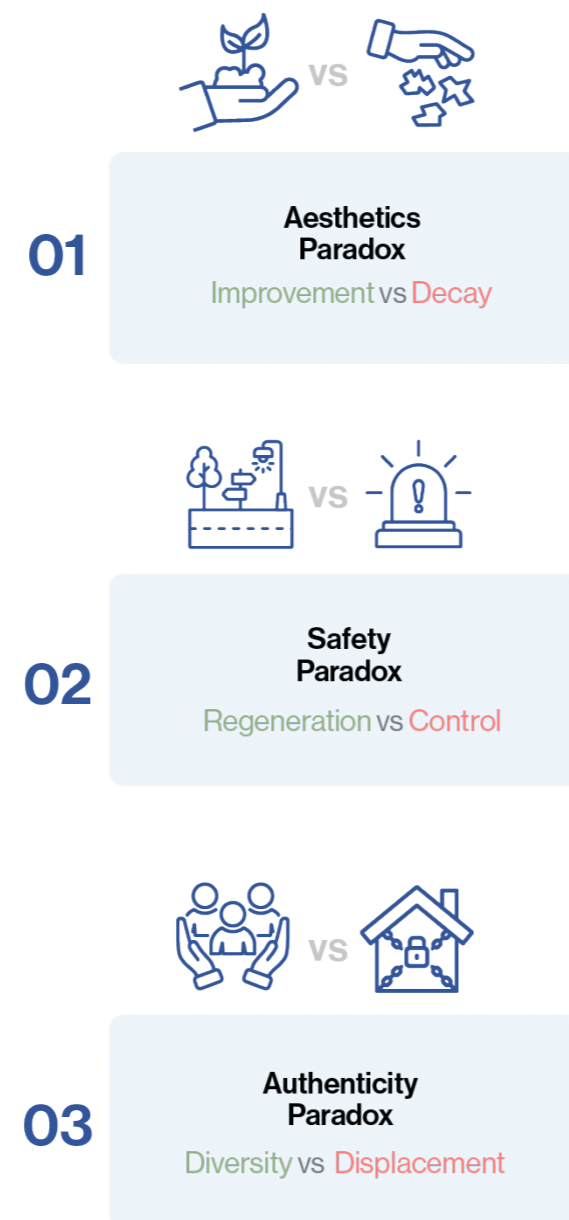


● Crime & Public Safety
● Urban Regeneration
● Social Conflict & Gentrification
● Culture & Multiethnicity
● Urban Decay & Maintenance

Discursive Paradoxes

Three central paradoxes emerge from the analysis:

- First, an **aesthetic paradox**, whereby visible physical improvements coexist with persistent narratives of decay and disorder. Despite public space upgrades and regeneration initiatives, media discourse continues to reproduce stigmatizing visual and lexical cues, suggesting that material transformation does not automatically translate into symbolic requalification.
- Second, a **safety paradox**, in which redevelopment is justified through discourses of security, while the area is simultaneously framed as a “red zone” requiring intensified policing. This dual narrative presents regeneration as both necessary and insufficient, reinforcing perceptions of chronic risk and legitimising exceptional control measures.
- Third, an **authenticity paradox**, whereby the multicultural vitality celebrated in cultural and international media contrasts with activist accounts of displacement and exclusion. Diversity is thus valorised as a symbolic asset, while the social conditions that sustain it are increasingly destabilised, revealing a gap between representation and lived experience.



↑ Fig 63. Semantic mapping of positive narratives where word size reflects relative frequency. Source: Authors' own Elaboration.

The Panorama

The digital discourse the study area reveals a neighbourhood suspended between hyper-visibility and persistent misrepresentation, where selective narratives circulate more widely than lived realities. While dominant media framings tend to foreground episodes of conflict, insecurity, and social fragmentation, alternative digital representations (often produced by residents, local associations, and informal networks) articulate a more layered urban condition grounded in everyday practices, mutual support, and relational proximity. These parallel narratives do not merely offer contrasting images of the neighbourhood; they actively shape how the place is perceived, governed, and intervened upon.

Media discourse thus functions as a key arena in which urban meaning is produced, negotiated, and contested, influencing both public opinion and institutional responses. The uneven visibility of certain themes over others contributes to a reductive understanding of complexity, obscuring forms of social infrastructure that are informal, embodied, and spatially dispersed. Situating ethnographic observations within this broader field of mediated urban imaginaries allows for a more critical reading of regeneration agendas, highlighting the gap between symbolic representations and everyday spatial practices. Recognising these discursive dynamics is therefore essential not only for interpreting Via Padova's present condition, but also for questioning how future transformations are legitimised, prioritised, and communicated.

4.1.3 The Eye- Level

Linguistic Landscape

The 'Granular' reality

While the land-value analysis suggests a district trending toward economic homogeneity, the Streetscape Audit of the ground-floor fabric provides a more granular and complex insight into the local reality. By georeferencing every "active frontage" unit, this analysis moves beyond speculative asking prices to examine the functional life of the Via Padova and Via dei Transiti corridor, decoding the neighborhood's economic landscape through a systematic classification of standardized retail and service models. Central to this fabric are the specialized "multi-service hubs" or ethnic-commerce nodes that serve as a form of "migrant infrastructure" (Rath, 2002) acting as essential mediators that facilitate the navigation of a new host country through linguistic accessibility and experiential knowledge that official institutions often lack. This infrastructure anchor the community's social framework and provide essential logistical services overlooked by the digital market.

These establishments, alongside the informal use of public space, act as primary sites of social resilience. Despite systemic pressures to treat the entire zone as a homogeneous block of value, the daily practices of the migrant community, maintain a distinct territorial identity that resists full assimilation into the "NoLo" brand. Observations of the linguistic



→ Fig 64. Commerce signs inside the study area. Source: Collage made with photographs by the authors.

landscapes suggest that while the price of a square meter is now uniform, the way that square meter is lived and perceived remains a site of profound cultural negotiation and resistance.

Functional distribution and a layered infrastructure for migration

The Streetscape Audit reveals a dense and diverse commercial landscape comprising 95 service-oriented units and 70 retail shops, founding the economic fabric of the study area. Mapping these establishments, distinguishing between ‘survival-based’ and ‘experience-based’ facilities, demonstrates a notable spatial equilibrium across Via Padova and Via dei Transiti. Rather than being confined to isolated pockets, these typologies are distributed in balanced clusters that ensure the district is exceptionally well-served by neighborhood facilities such as bakeries, supermarkets, restaurants, pharmacies, beauty centers, and more.

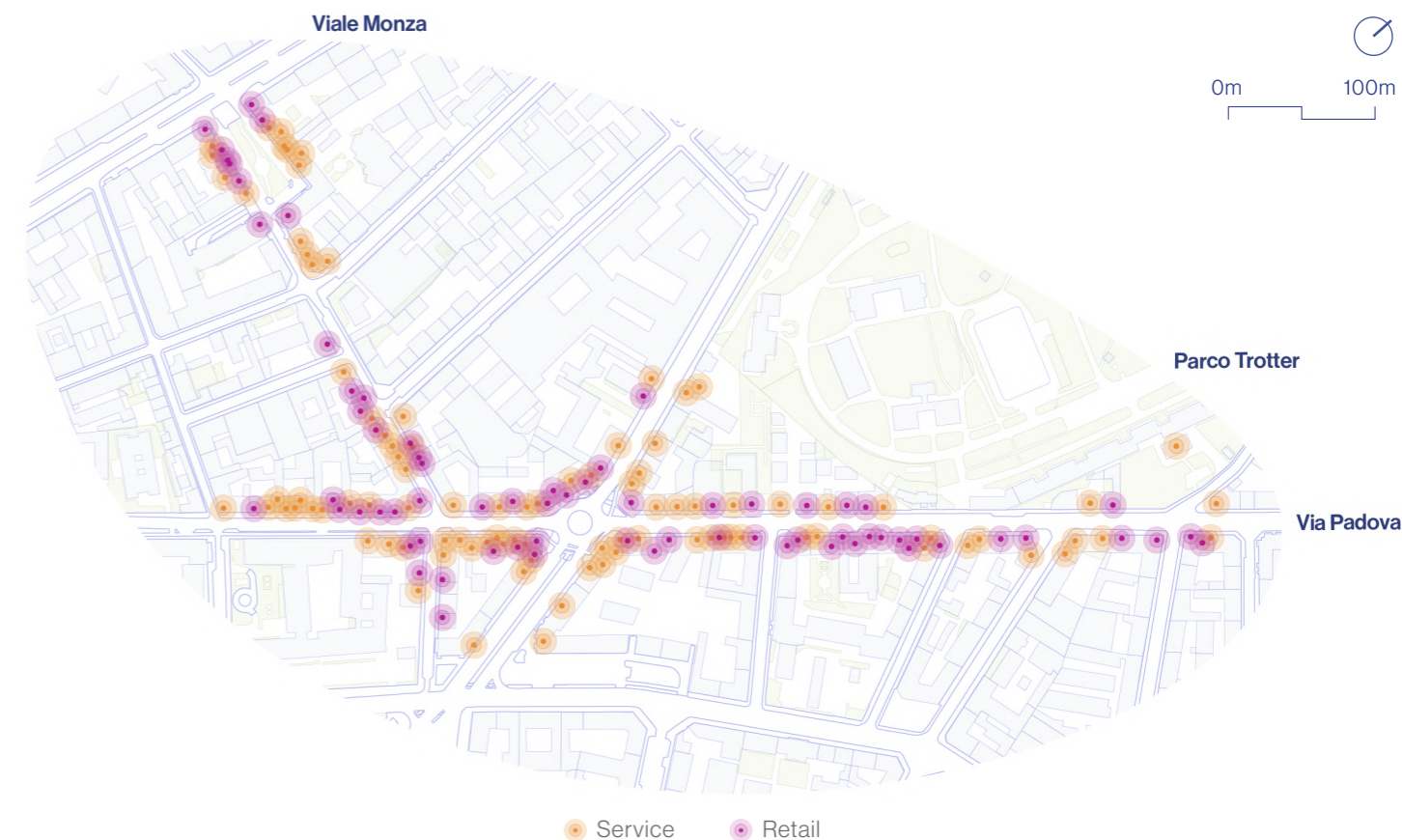
Beyond general commerce, observational research identifies neighborhood cafes and hairdressers as vital nodes of social exchange. For the multicultural population of Via Padova, these establishments function as “Third Places” (Oldenburg, 1989), neutral grounds where social hierarchies level out and informal dialogue builds community trust. Furthermore, these storefronts act as “Arrival Infrastructures” (Meeus et al., 2018); serving as a “social front door” to the city, they offer access to essential information regarding housing, employment, and legal status through informal word-of-mouth networks that are invisible to the digital market. Complementing these social hubs is a strong

presence of targeted ethnic commerce, such as specialized convenience stores and halal butchers. These businesses fulfill the specific dietary and cultural requirements of diverse migrant groups, ensuring the neighborhood functions as a self-sustaining ecosystem for both cultural and material reproduction. In the same manner, two medical centers focused on women and vulnerable migrant populations offer their facilities as a service and a safe space for foreigners who maybe cannot access to health facilities due to their residente irregularities.

A specific typology emerges as the cornerstone of the area’s multicultural identity: the multi-service hub. These establishments are characterized by a profound layering of functions, often consolidating money transfers, telecommunications, travel agencies, and administrative support (CAFs) within a single unit. Territorial mapping identifies these hubs as fundamental nodes that specifically address the multifaceted logistical and bureaucratic needs of migrant populations.

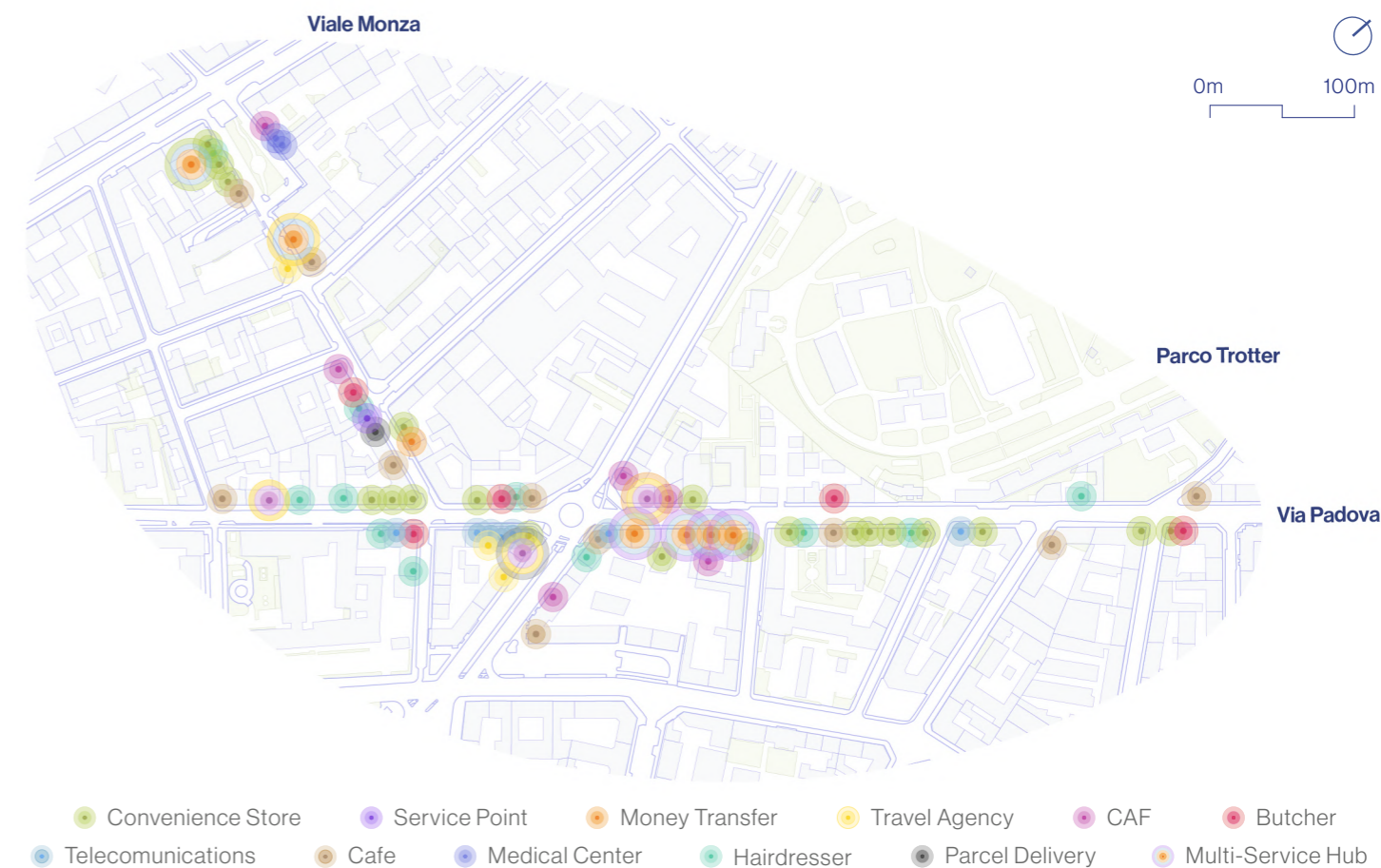
In Via Padova and Via dei Transiti, the mapping reveals a significant concentration of migrant infrastructure offering specialized services ranging from global parcel delivery to travel bookings, tailored to the Middle East, Africa, South Asia, and South America. This phenomenon reflects Appadurai’s (1996) concept of “Ethnoscapes,” where the urban fabric is reshaped by the practicalities of diaspora life, where global flows of people and capital creates a localized, yet transnational, urban reality. By offering indispensable services like bill payments and legal assistance alongside cultural goods, these nodes act as territorial anchors for a transnational life.

Functional Distribution



↑ Fig 65. Functional distribution of retail and services in the study area. Source: Authors’ own Elaboration.

Multi-Service Hubs and Infrastructure for Migration



↑ Fig 66. Infrastructures for migration and multi-service hubs within the study area. Source: Authors’ own Elaboration.

The architecture of diaspora control

The first map reveals the cultural origins of business administrators within Via Padova and Via dei Transiti, highlighting a unique concentration of diversity including actors from the Middle East, Africa, South Asia, China, and South America. However, the data reveals more than mere diversity; it uncovers specific patterns of ethnic niche entrepreneurship (Waldinger et al., 1990), where certain groups have secured market control over specific commercial sectors.

For example, the audit identifies a dominant presence of South Asian entrepreneurs, particularly from Bangladesh and Pakistan, who exert significant control over convenience stores and mobile phone shops offering a broader and more diversified range of global goods. While Latin American entrepreneurs are highly visible in the restaurant sector or specialized grocery stores offering a narrow range of regional products. Chinese entrepreneurs also maintain a substantial market presence, notably controlling traditional coffee shops. As it was identified during the in-door observation approach, these cafes function as vital nodes of social integration, gathering patrons of diverse origins, ages, and genders. Additionally, Chinese-led enterprises often specialize in household product retail.

Furthermore, the research identified emerging forms of inter-ethnic collaboration. In several instances, multi-service hubs and administrative offices (CAFs) are administered through shared ownership, for instance, between Latin American and Italian partners; or by hiring multilingual personnel from different backgrounds to serve a wider migrant base. This

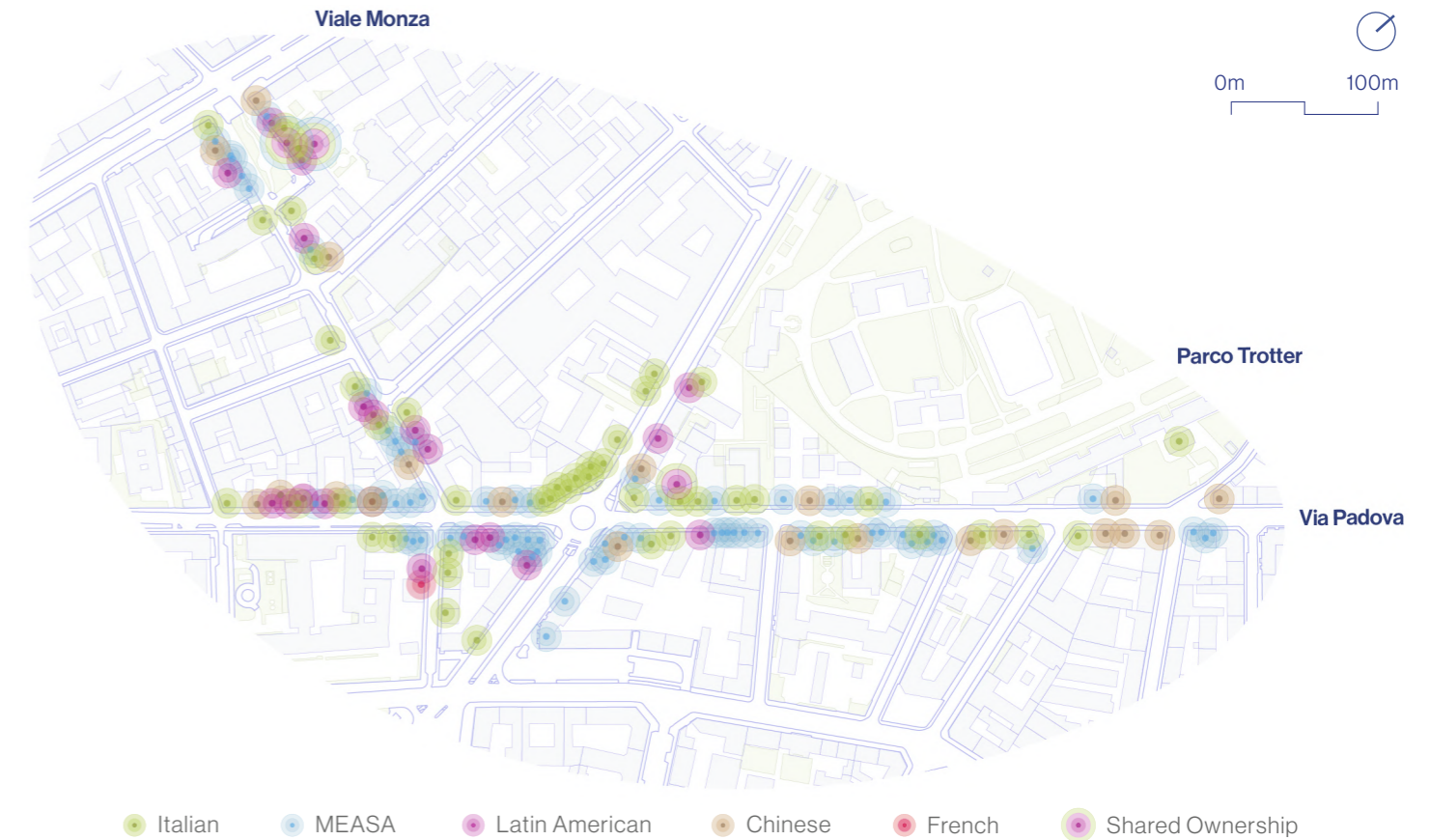
“collaborative entrepreneurship” suggests a transition from isolated ethnic enclaves to a more integrated, yet still migrant-led, urban economy.

The Intended User Base: Identity, Belonging, and Arrival Infrastructure

Mapping the Linguistic Landscape (LL) provides the most explicit evidence of a district’s symbolic ownership. This first layer of analysis begins by auditing storefront semiotics to identify the “intended user base” and the sociological intent behind such targeting. In areas like Via Padova, the use of non-local scripts such as Arabic, Chinese, or Spanish; does more than just advertise; it functions as a powerful tool for cultural signaling fostering a sense of belonging for migrant communities. These signs transform routine commercial transactions into moments of cultural reinforcement where social ties are extended and networks are forged. Consequently, the consumer here is not a transient seeker of aesthetic novelty, but a resident pursuing “Institutional Completeness” (Breton, 1964) within the urban fabric.

The sheer variety of languages present in the signage is a direct reflection of a complex socio-demographic reality. It evidences how diverse groups actively participate in the construction of this unique urban life, asserting their right to the city through visible, linguistic presence. These spaces prioritize the material and social ties of the diaspora, maintaining a polyphonic streetscape that resists the “NoLo” branding. In doing so, they safeguard the territory against a sanitized, English-language aesthetic that threatens to decouple the neighbourhood from its multicultural roots.

Ethnicity of Owners/Administrators



↑ Fig 67. Demographic profile of shop owners and administrators in the study area. Source: Authors' own Elaboration.

Intended User



↑ Fig 68. Targeted user groups and commercial vocation of local businesses. Source: Authors' own Elaboration.

Linguistic Analysis: Hybridity and Semiotic Bridges

The second layer of analysis examines the language by itself, documenting the specific combinations used on storefronts. The defining characteristic of the study area is its profound linguistic hybridity, featuring a complex layering of Italian, Arabic, Spanish, Chinese, and English. The mapping highlights three distinct linguistic strategies:

- **Monolingual Homophily:** The use of a single non-local language to create a specialized cultural enclave. This reinforces territorial visibility for specific groups, providing a clear marker of a "safe" and familiar space for the diaspora.
- **Bilingual Hybridity:** Pairings such as Italian-Arabic or Italian-Spanish are frequently found in multi-service hubs. These serve as "semiotic bridges", anchoring the local Italian administrative context within the cultural needs of the primary consumer base. Similarly, Chinese-Italian pairings in retail suggest a "middle-man" strategy aimed at facilitating trade between different cultural groups.
- **Trilingual Layering:** Combinations of ITA/ES/EN are often found in travel agencies or CAFs. These reflect the transnational nature of the neighbourhood's residents and the complex logistical needs of a globalised diaspora.

As analysed by Calvi (2019), this linguistic diversity is a tool for territorial negotiation. The Linguistic Landscape thus serves as the final evidence of a "de facto zoning," where overlapping languages create a resilient cultural barrier that prevents the full symbolic and economic homogenization of the NIL.

Temporal Resilience and the Friction of the Nighttime Economy

Finally, the study examines businesses operating during night hours, serving as a vital indicator of neighbourhood vibrancy and "natural surveillance" (Jacobs, 1961). However, field-work observations and interview data reveal that this temporal extension is a primary source of territorial conflict. While late-night establishments act as "eyes on the street," they also generate varying degrees of territorial tension and residential conflict.

In several segments of the study area, nighttime commerce operates within a controlled framework. In Via dei Transiti and Via Cecilio Stazione, bars manage the expansion of their activities by ensuring customers remain within the sidewalk perimeter of the venue. A similar equilibrium is observed in Via Padova, where fast-food establishments (kebab shops) and restaurants function until late hours without compromising the local environment's peace.

These regulated nodes provide a form of urban safety by keeping the street illuminated and inhabited, by attracting diverse users, including women and commuters waiting for public transport. This presence is particularly significant given the strong territorialisation of male predominance in Via Padova during late hours, which tend to generate feelings of insecurity. In these cases, the business acts as a safe harbor, balancing the "social heat" of the street with a structured commercial presence.

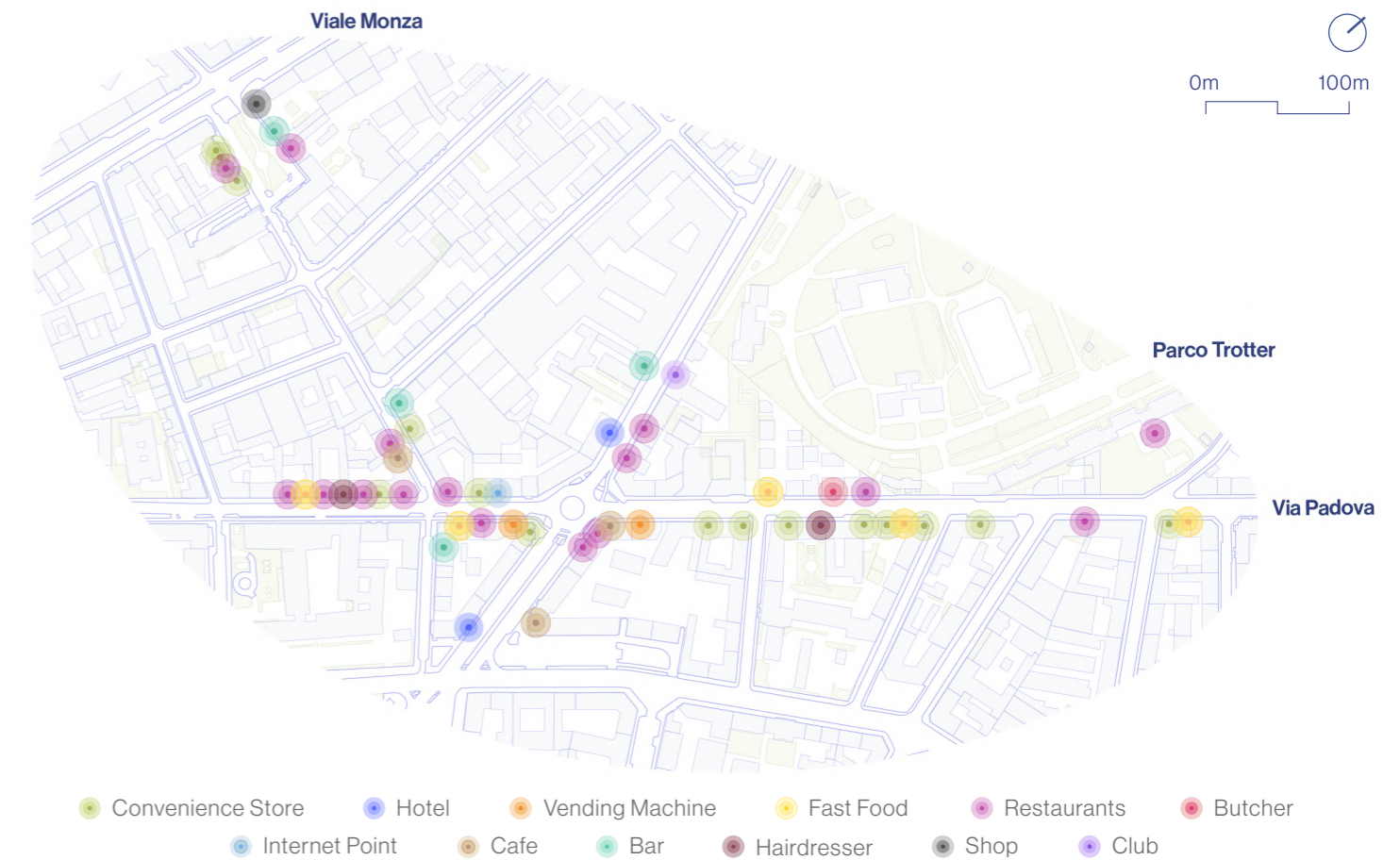
Conversely, the audit identified contradictory 'hot spots' where nighttime activity escapes formal control,

Streetscape Language



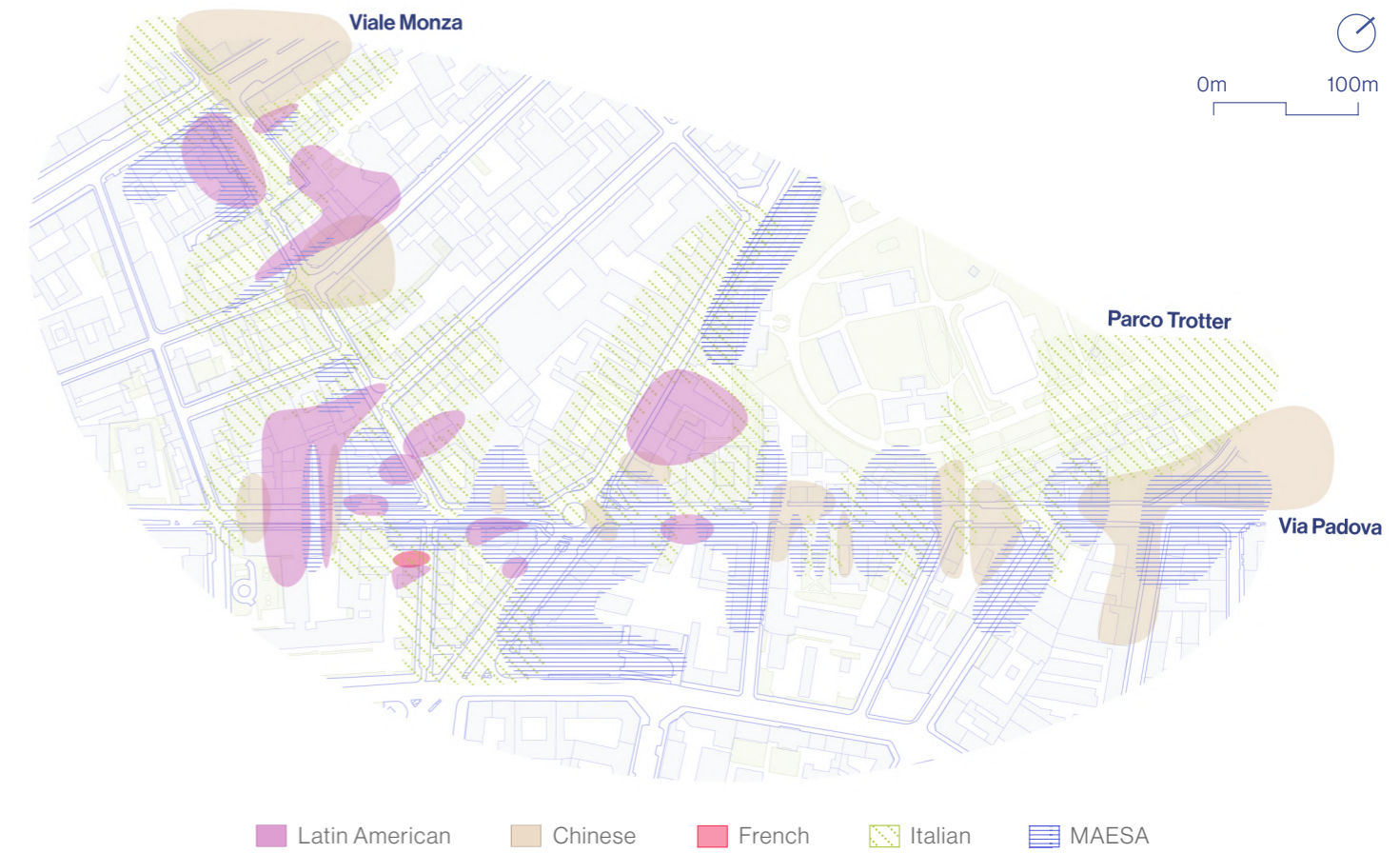
↑ Fig 69. Linguistic diversity and signage distribution across the study area. Source: Authors' own Elaboration.

Nighttime Establishments



↑ Fig 70. Location of nighttime establishments within the study area. Source: Authors' own Elaboration.

De Facto Zoning



Latin American Chinese French Italian MAESA

Territorial Zoning

The synthesis of linguistic and streetscape analysis provides significant evidence that the Via Padova and Via dei Transiti corridor is characterized by distinct Ethnic Entrepreneurial Clusters (Sassen, 1991). By overlaying business typologies with migration infrastructure and the linguistic landscape, a form of “De Facto Zoning” emerges. This represents a lived production of public space where spatial organization is dictated by the everyday market practices of these shops rather than formal urban planning.

This zoning manifests through “micro-territories” that exert informal control over the street’s identity, creating a symbolic configuration that often operates outside institutional frameworks. Mapping these territorial concentrations reveals how individual establishments function as migrant ecosystems. High densities of MEASA clusters (halal butchers, phone centers) and Latin American social anchors in Via dei Transiti create “Cultural Enclaves” (Wilson & Portes, 1980) that provide institutional completeness for the diaspora.

Following Hassen and Kaufman (2016), this concentration transforms public space into a functional extension of the shop.

→ Fig 71. De Facto Zoning Map of the Study Area. Source: Authors’ own Elaboration.

| Ethnic Group / Origin | Primary Business Niche (Market Control) | Secondary Activities | Consumer Targeting Strategy |
|---|--|--|---|
| South Asian (Bangladesh & Pakistan) | Convenience stores (alimentari), Mobile/Internet shops | Parcel delivery, specialized electronics | Hybrid: Wide-range global products for all foreign groups |
| Latin American (Peru, Bolivia & Ecuador) | Authentic restaurants, specialty grocery | Travel agencies, mixed-ownership CAFs | Homophilic: Focus on regional brands and specific cultural ties |
| Chinese | Traditional Coffee Shops (Bar), Household goods | Fashion retail, general convenience | Bridge: Multi-generational social nodes for all demographics |
| MAESA (Middle East, North Africa, South-Asia) | Halal Butchers, Multi-service Hubs | Barbershops, phone centers, Bakeries | Homophilic: High use of Arabic signage and Halal certification |
| European (Italian & French) | Niche “Creative” retail, Bookstores, Bistros, Bars | Professional services, Galleries | Symbolic: Targeted toward “New Locals” and the creative class |
| Mixed/Collaborative | CAFs | Legal/Administrative assistance | Universal Migrant: Multilingual personnel serving all diasporas |

The infrastructure for migration in Via Padova and Via dei Transiti do not just offer products; they communicate belonging, ensuring that the “lived square meter” remains a site of cultural resistance.

This spatial logic proves that the neighbourhood’s identity is not a chaotic mix but a structured system of territorial negotiation where the languages, the practices and the ethnicity of the actors define the social resilience of the community.

leading to what residents describe as the erosion of urban decorum. In specific nodes of Via dei Transiti, certain Latin American restaurants and convenience stores, specifically those providing easy access to alcohol, facilitate an uncontrolled appropriation of public space as established in the practice study,

These spaces are transformed into sites of street-level alcohol consumption, fueling behaviors that range from acoustic pollution to the degradation of the physical environment, persisting from post-work hours through the night and into weekend mornings. This “uncontrolled resilience” presents a notable systemic contradiction: while these businesses ensure the street is never truly dormant, the nature of their activity fosters a sense of disorder that alienates other inhabitants. As noted by Sandercock (2003), the success of multicultural spaces depends on the shared management of social norms; however, in NIL Loreto, this friction is exacerbated by a demographic mismatch. The individuals involved in these disruptive practices are often non-resident migrants, creating a direct clash with local dwellers.

This tension highlights how unregulated manifestations can erode the social fabric by prioritizing transient consumption over the right to domestic peace. The nighttime streetscape thus becomes a site of ongoing negotiation, balancing the vibrancy necessary for a safe and prosperous urban economy against the decorum essential to residential stability. This suggests that the “de facto zoning” of the study area is not just about what is commerce, but by the social behaviors encouraged, or failed to be regulated, by these commercial nodes.



Shops and Amenities



- Shop
- Convenience Store
- Restaurants
- Butcher
- Mobile Phone
- Cafe
- Bar
- Hotel
- Vending Machine
- Fast Food
- Hairdresser
- CAF
- Real Estate
- Supermarket
- Travel Agency
- Money Transfer
- Bakery
- Parcel Delivery
- Tailor
- Bank
- Club
- Car Repair
- Internet Point
- Electronics
- Pharmacy
- Medical Center
- Beauty Center

↑ Fig 72. Ground-floor amenities in the study area. Source: Authors' own Elaboration.

← Fig 73. Commerce signs inside the study area. Source: Collage made with photographs by the authors.

4.2 Practices

4.2.1 On-Street Observation

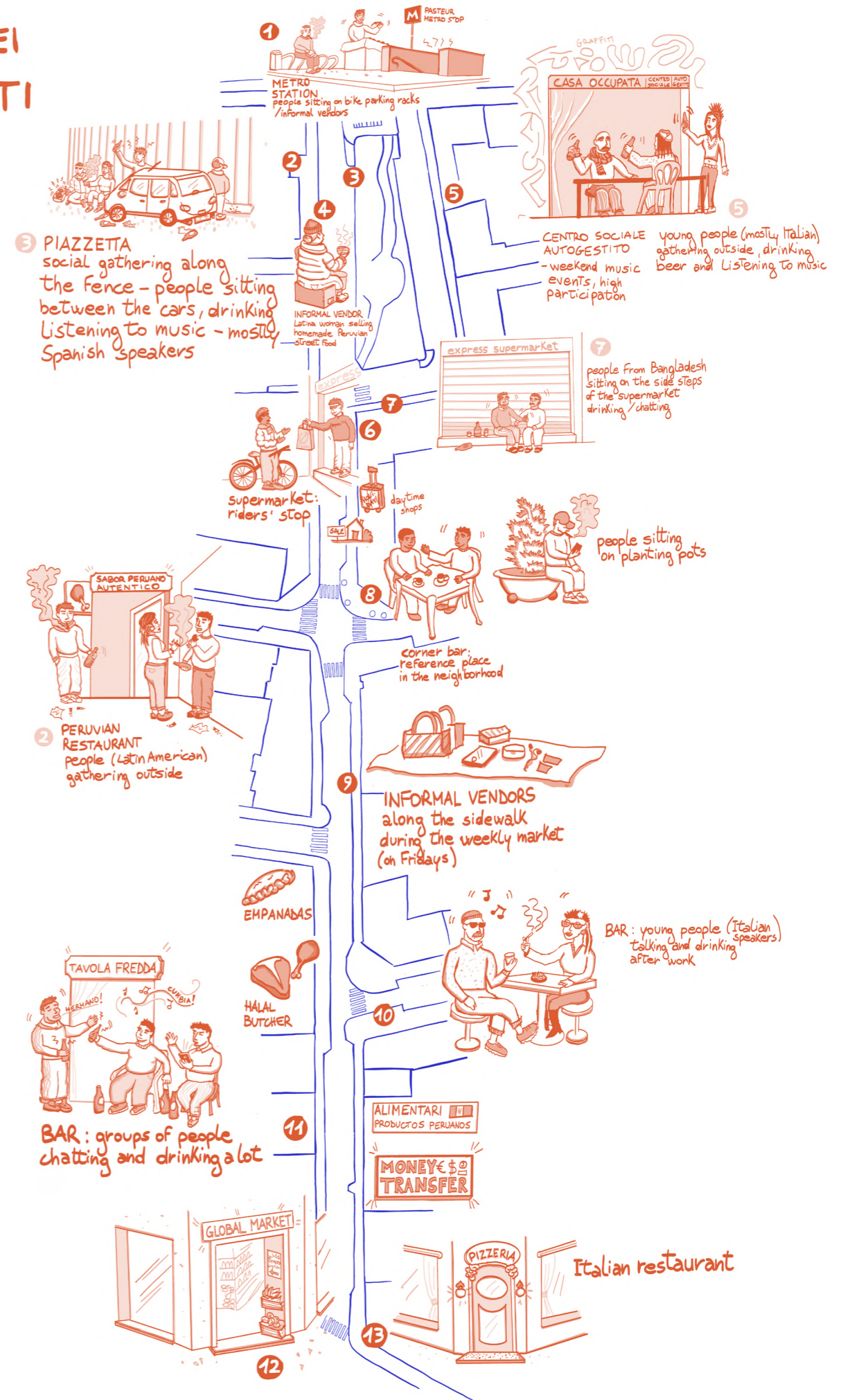
Via dei Transiti

Along Via dei Transiti, positioned between Viale Monza and Via Padova, is located a small urban square denominated Piazzetta dei Transiti. Constituted by two green areas and a pedestrian path that crosses it transversally, this area has been historically perceived as an under-utilised "non-place": a residual public void, neglected in spatial function, with minimal seating, poor environmental quality, and limited social appropriation. Its location at a confluence of major streets gave it potential as a local gateway and meeting point, yet everyday use was predominantly transient rather than collective.

In response to these shortcomings, the square was incorporated into the Luoghicomuni programme within the broader municipal strategy of civic collaboration and place-making. Through a Patto di Collaborazione, local residents and associations participated in the co-design and regeneration process, aiming to reconfigure the space as a site of encounter, shared use, and collective stewardship.

However, this transformation entailed a significant spatial and regulatory shift. The square was reconfigured from an open and continuously accessible public space into a protected and controlled area through the installation of a perimeter fence, which allows the space to be closed at 8:30 p.m. This physical intervention generate new

VIA DEI TRANSITI



→ Fig 74. Interpretative map of everyday practices taking place in Via dei Transiti. Source: Authors' own Elaboration.

negotiations over access, use, and everyday practices within the square and its immediate surroundings. Many of the activities that previously took place inside the park were displaced to its perimeter and the adjacent street, a shift that reflects the current patterns of occupation and appropriation observed during fieldwork. The enclosure altered not only patterns of circulation and occupation but it also the symbolic meaning of the space, raising questions about openness, inclusion, and the governance of publicness.

During the fieldwork, we could see that the square itself rarely attracted users. Aside from specific, prearranged events such as small concerts or meetings organized by the association regarding the occupied house (T28) or neighbors committee initiatives; most social life takes place outside the perimeter. In this context, groups of people, particularly migrants, tend to gather around the square, where three distinct zones of activity were identified, each characterised by specific dynamics, patterns of interaction, and user profiles.

The first area along Via dei Transiti is predominantly occupied by adults of varying ages, both men and women, who sit along the curb adjacent to the perimeter fence. The population, linguistically diverse with Italian rarely used, perform everyday social activities like eating, resting, talking; practices that can be considered socially normative within public space. However, the area also serves as a location for frequent alcohol consumption and occasional drug use, alongside behaviors such as public urination.

Groups often bring portable speakers, playing music while laughing and conversing in ways that evoke the atmosphere of a domestic living room temporarily transposed into the public realm. Despite the absence of a shared language or homogeneous cultural background, a distinctly multicultural environment emerges, dominated by Spanish-speaking individuals alongside people of various nationalities. Gatherings frequently take place between parked vehicles, which function as both visual and symbolic enclosures by partially shielding participants from the gaze of passersby and creating a sense of spatial intimacy within the street environment. These social patterns peak during evening hours and weekend periods. On Saturdays the use is especially prolonged, stretching from morning into the late evening, leaving physical traces left behind such as litter, bottles, and cigarette butts, which underscore the persistent nature of the site's occupation.

Conversely, the parallel sidewalk also attracts groups of people, albeit with a distinct spatial dynamic. Here, individuals tend to gather in front of restaurants and *alimentari* (convenience stores) to talk, eat, or drink. Occasional instances of drug consumption were also observed, appearing to constitute a socially normalised practice within the area. While users display profiles similar to those observed along the adjacent side, this sidewalk does not appear to encourage prolonged occupation. Rather, it functions primarily as a space of transit. Pedestrians, including Italian speakers and, at times, English speakers,

→ Fig 75. Graphic analysis of informal gatherings outside Piazzale dei Transiti. Source: Authors' own Elaboration.

→ Fig 76. Graphic analysis of gatherings and threshold occupation outside a restaurant in Via dei Transiti. Source: Authors' own Elaboration.



exit the nearby Pasteur metro station and move through the area, briefly pausing to look at shop windows, make small purchases, or exchange short conversations before continuing on their way

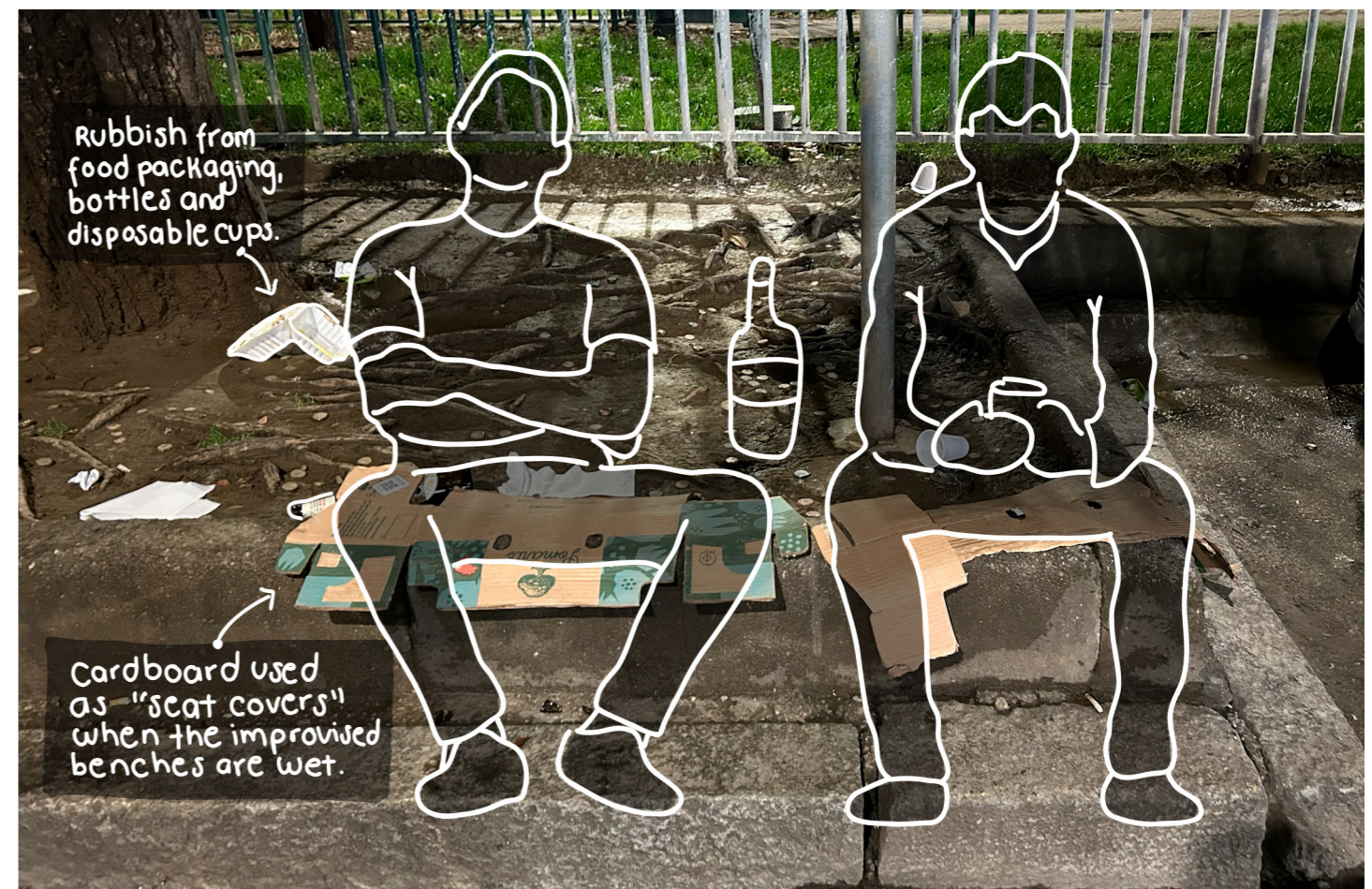
The second area of analysis is situated adjacent to the entrance of the Pasteur metro station. Despite its relatively limited spatial dimensions, this area accommodates a substantial and continuous flow of pedestrians throughout the day. It is equipped with multiple bicycle racks which, beyond serving their intended function as cycling infrastructure, are informally appropriated as seating elements. Field observations conducted at different times reveal that groups of users of diverse ages, genders, and origins occupy these structures as improvised benches. Individuals were observed pausing to converse, eat, check their mobile phones, smoke, or consume beverages. The presence of a fixed element with dimensions comparable to those of a bench appears to act as a catalyst for stationary occupation, enabling spontaneous and adaptable forms of everyday inhabitation.

A comparable pattern of use emerges along the edge of the square. In this instance, the perimeter railings function as backrests, while the lower curb height enhances the spatial comfort of the area. This configuration appears particularly attractive to younger users, who were observed occupying this edge condition with greater frequency. The spatial affordances of these elements thus facilitate informal appropriation and contribute to the diversification of micro-spaces for social interaction.

→ Fig 77. Graphic analysis of gatherings and activities outside Pasteur Metro Station. Source: Authors' own Elaboration.



↑ Fig 78. Graphic analysis of activities outside the Centro Occupato Autogestito T28. Source: Authors' own Elaboration.



→ Fig 79. Graphic analysis of informal gatherings and space appropriation tactics outside Piazzale dei Transiti. Source: Authors' own Elaboration.

Via Padova

The Urban Laboratory

Via Padova, despite its close proximity to Via dei Transiti, differs markedly in both user profiles and activities observed along the street. Fieldwork revealed multiple and overlapping layers of social, economic and cultural interaction, underscoring the corridor's intrinsically hyper-diverse character and its function as an informal urban laboratory of everyday practices. The street operates simultaneously as a space of transit, commerce, and social negotiation, where diverse groups articulate distinct yet intersecting modes of inhabitation.

The corridor is predominantly characterised by commercial establishments operated by migrant populations of Middle Eastern, African, and South Asian (MEASA), Chinese, and Latin American origin. These include restaurants, butcher shops, hairdressers, convenience stores, CAFs mobile phone shops, coffee bars, and other small-scale retail activities. A smaller number of restaurants and bars are Italian-owned. This commercial diversity manifests both temporally and spatially, generating a wide range of everyday scenarios and forms of appropriation in which the public realm unfolds informal interaction and prolonged presence.

To improve the collect of information, the whole analysed segment of Via Padova was divided in three strategic parts. This segmentation is grounded in

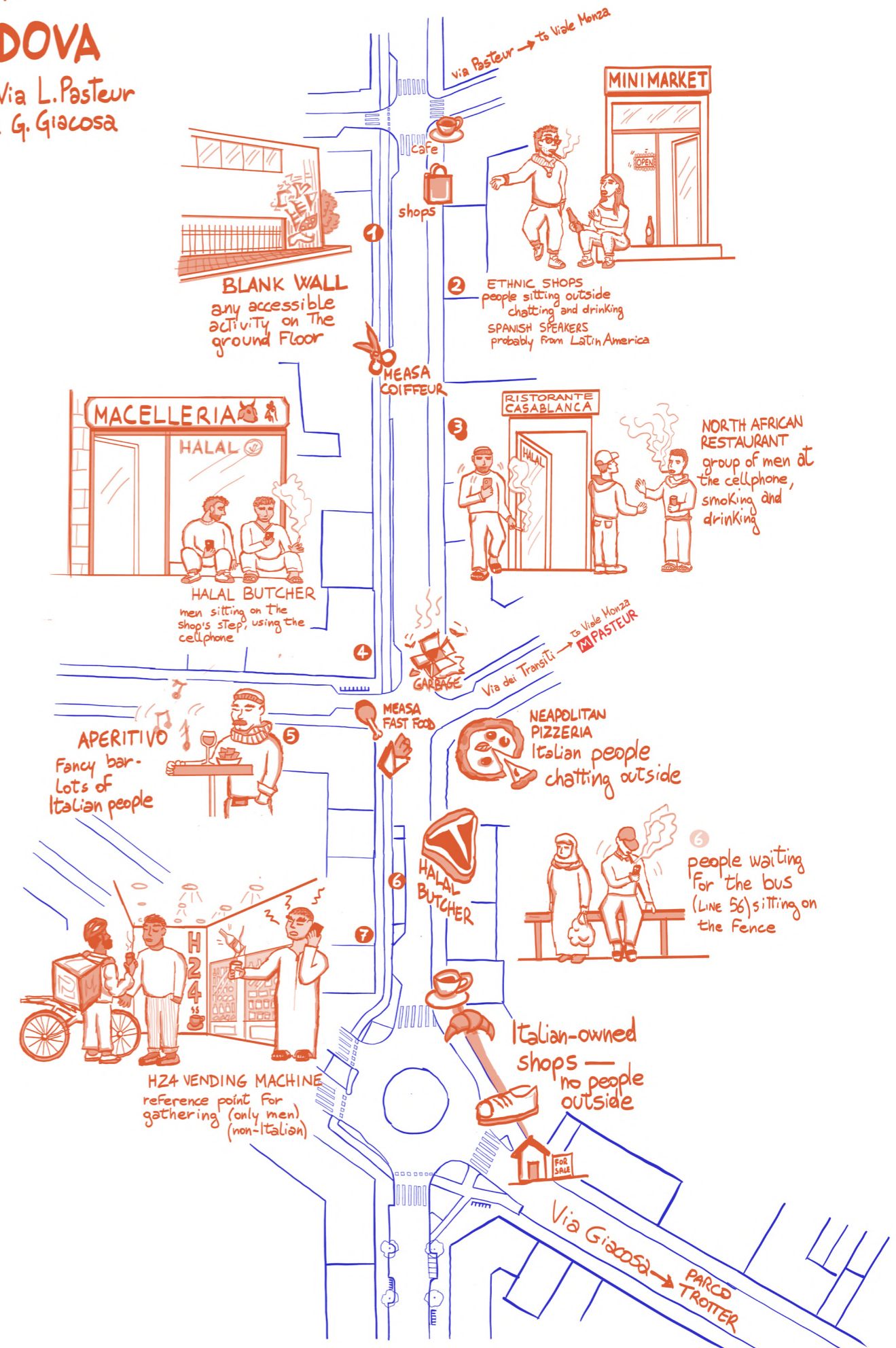
an interpretative reading constructed through tacit knowledge derived from interviews and informal conversations with local actors. Focusing on the first segment analysed between Via Luigi Pasteur and Via Giuseppe Giacosa; field observations revealed that, although quantitative socio-demographic data indicate an overall multicultural composition, individuals of Egypt and Bangladesh; origin maintain a predominant presence in the public realm. This discrepancy between statistical data indicating a higher presence of specific populations such as Filipino, Chinese, or Italian residents; and their comparatively limited spatial visibility in the public realm underscores how other groups become more perceptible through everyday patterns of occupation

During daytime hours, the corridor accommodates a heterogeneous population in terms of age, gender, religion, nationality, and language. Individuals were observed either circulating along the street or pausing at commercial establishments. On weekends, pedestrian flows intensified considerably, associated with shopping activities, waiting at bus stops, and families accessing Parco Trotter. In this sense, the corridor functions simultaneously as a commercial spine and as connective urban infrastructure, supporting both mobility and sociability.

However, a marked temporal shift occurs everyday after approximately 7:00 p.m., when patterns of occupation become significantly gendered. Sidewalk presence becomes almost exclusively male, with men typically observed smoking, conversing, or occasionally drinking or looking at the cellphone on

→ Fig 82. Interpretative map of everyday practices taking place in Via Padova - segment 1. Source: Authors' own Elaboration.

VIA PADOVA From Via L. Pasteur to Via G. Giacosa



benches along the street. The reduced visibility of women, most of whom were observed either waiting at bus stops or moving quickly through the area, produces a distinctly male-dominated nocturnal environment. Notably, Muslim women were not observed occupying the space during any phase of the fieldwork, except during the weekly market. This absence suggests that cultural norms, perceptions of safety, or gendered expectations may shape differential access to and use of public space, echoing findings by Low (2000) on the social production of space and by Madanipour (2010) on inclusion and exclusion in urban public realms.

The appropriation of space through digital practices emerged as another recurring pattern. Mobile phone use was particularly prominent among men, who frequently engaged in phone conversations in languages unfamiliar to the observers, often at elevated volumes. Older men tended to occupy benches, whereas younger men appropriated building thresholds to watch videos or interact digitally. These practices reflect what de Certeau (1984) conceptualises as everyday tactics of spatial appropriation, through which users adapt available physical elements to their immediate social and communicative needs.

In contrast, during daylight hours, areas equipped with urban furniture exhibited a more balanced gender presence. Men and women from diverse cultural backgrounds shared benches while conversing, checking their phones, resting, or eating. Multiple languages could be heard simultaneously, reinforcing the corridor's character as a multilingual and multicultural environment.

Commercial actors play a significant role in shaping these dynamics. Many businesses place informal seating like benches, stools, or chairs; outside their premises, creating spontaneous gathering points for customers and staff. These modest spatial interventions contribute to street activation by extending the duration of stay and fostering interaction. Interestingly, although two Italian-owned establishments along this segment also provided outdoor furniture, they did not generate comparable levels of collective appropriation. This contrasts with similar Italian-owned venues located on the transversal streets of Via Cecilio Stazio and Via Giuseppe Giacosa, where the concentration of Italian users is considerably higher and outdoor seating effectively supports sustained social occupation.

Another significant practice observed during fieldwork involved clusters of men gathering around 24-hour vending machine establishments. Users were seen eating, smoking, or drinking coffee purchased on-site while simultaneously engaging in conversation with other customers. The intensity of occupation in these locations was notable, with some individuals remaining for extended periods to interact in their native languages. The absence of formal staff appeared to reduce the implicit behavioural constraints typically associated with commercial venues, enabling users to occupy the space with a greater sense of informality and ease.

These vending sites can be also interpreted as 'third-places' situated between the private and the public domain allowing informal gathering distinct from home and work that facilitate sociability and community-building. Their continuous accessibility



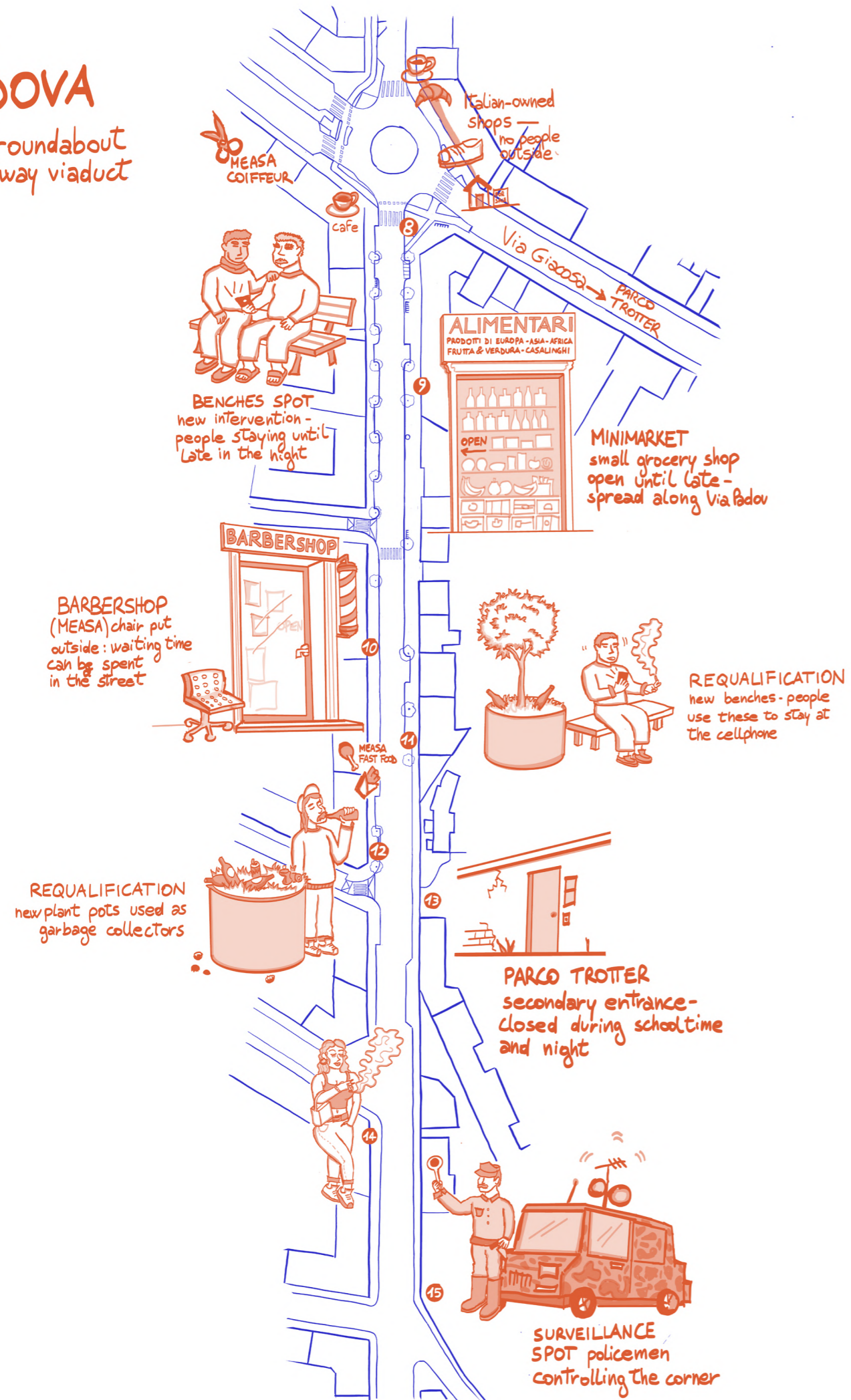
→ Fig 83. Graphic analysis of informal sociability and user gatherings around an automated 24/7 retail space. Source: Authors' own Elaboration.



→ Fig 84. Graphic analysis of sidewalk appropriation and activities at commercial thresholds along Via Padova. Source: Authors' own Elaboration.

VIA PADOVA

from roundabout to railway viaduct



undefined market identity and minimal regulation create conditions that resemble those of open public space. They function as low-threshold environments that facilitate informal sociability, particularly among groups whose presence may be more contested or scrutinised in other settings. The prolonged occupation observed suggests that such spaces operate as micro-infrastructures of everyday sociality, providing opportunities for the consolidation of social networks through co-proximity, routine encounters and shared linguistic or cultural references anchored in ordinary everyday practices.

Finally, one vending establishment displayed multilingual signage promoting the area as one of the most diverse and distinctive sections of Via Padova, branding it as the "Padova District" and highlighting the variety of shops and services available. This act of naming can be understood as a form of symbolic place-making similar to the one used for the NoLo branding. In contrast to the stigmatizing narratives, the signage constructs a positive and marketable identity grounded in diversity and uniqueness. By explicitly foregrounding plurality as an asset, the message participates in the discursive production of urban space, contributing to the negotiation of how the neighbourhood is perceived both internally and externally. Through this representational strategy, diversity is reframed not as a source of fragmentation but as a defining and distinctive characteristic, positioning the area as a unique urban enclave within Milan.

← Fig 85. Interpretative map of everyday practices taking place in Via Padova - segment 2. Source: Authors' own Elaboration.

→ Fig 86. Dynamic digital signage on Via Padova presenting a localized narrative of diversity. Source: Photograph by the authors, 2025.





NOTE: During day time both men and women can be found.

↑ Fig 87. Graphic analysis of everyday practices and activities in Via Padova. Source: Authors' own Elaboration.



NOTE: Only men seen during night time, mostly alone or in pairs while being on the phone.

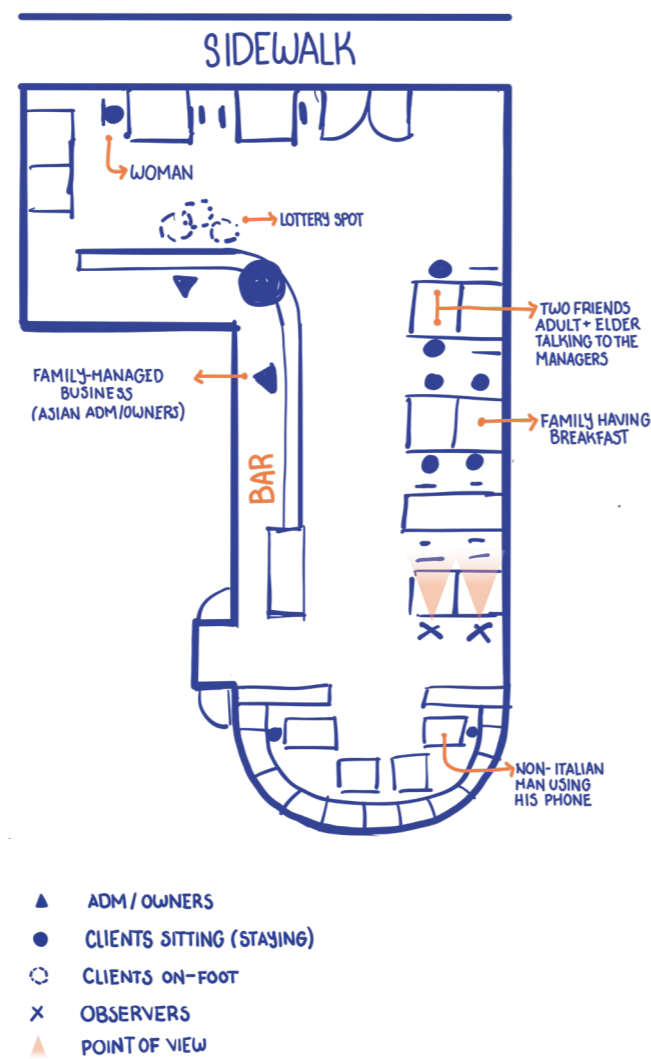
↑ Fig 88. Graphic analysis of everyday practices and transnational activities in Via Padova. Source: Authors' own Elaboration.

In-Door Observation

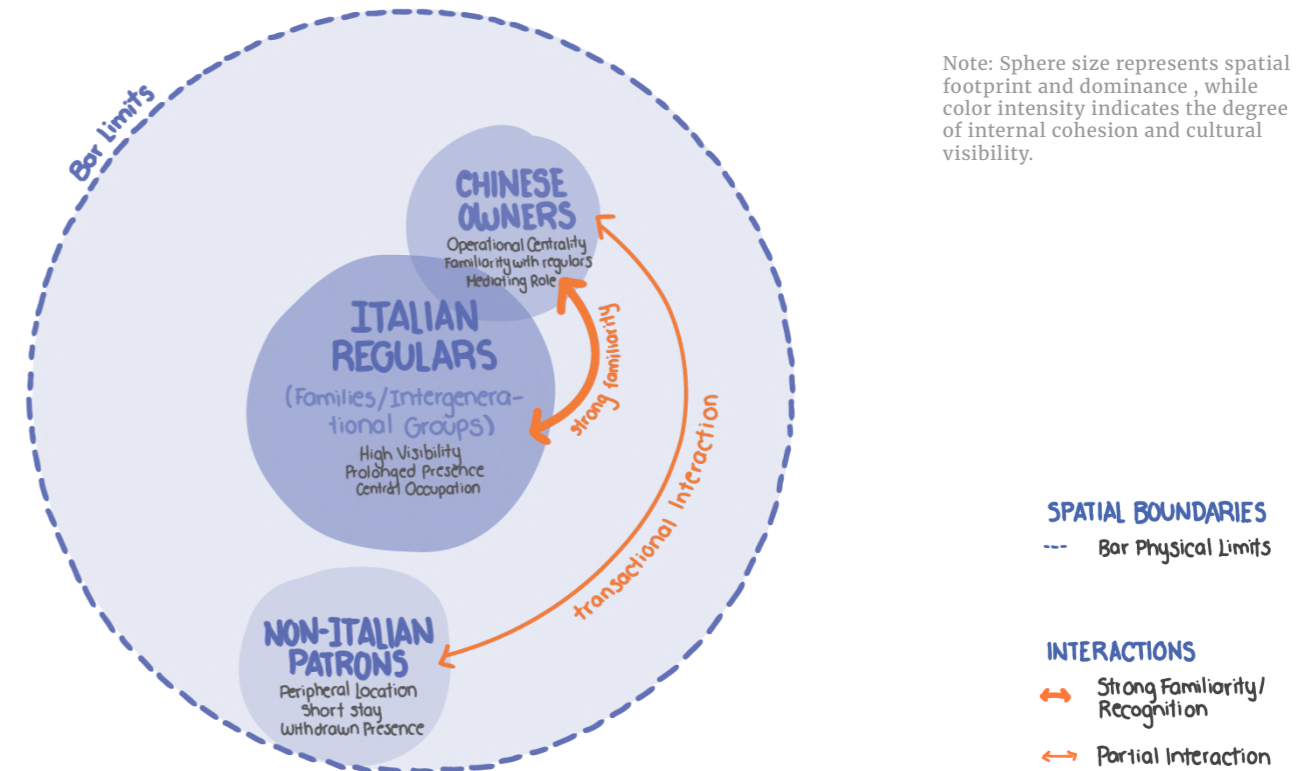
Case Study 1: Caffè Vecchi Tempi – Functional Familiarity

Caffè Vecchi Tempi operates as a regulated and familiar environment, characterised by short visits, habitual clientele, and limited interaction between groups. Although the bar is managed by a family of Chinese origin, the dominant social atmosphere is shaped by Italian regulars, whose familiarity with the owners is expressed through personal greetings and references to family life.

The spatial organisation of the interior subtly reinforces social stratification. Italian patrons consistently occupy the central and most visible areas, often in family or intergenerational groups, engaging in relaxed, high-context interaction. In contrast, non-Italian patrons (observed alone or in pairs) tend to position themselves in the rear of the café, in areas visually and socially segmented by furniture. Their limited interaction and frequent engagement with smartphones suggests a form of withdrawn presence: the use of the space for consumption or shelter while minimising social exposure. The bar functions primarily as a space of transit (espresso consumption, lottery purchases) rather than prolonged socialisation. Despite the ethnic diversity of its users, interaction remains structured by routine, familiarity, and implicit spatial hierarchies.

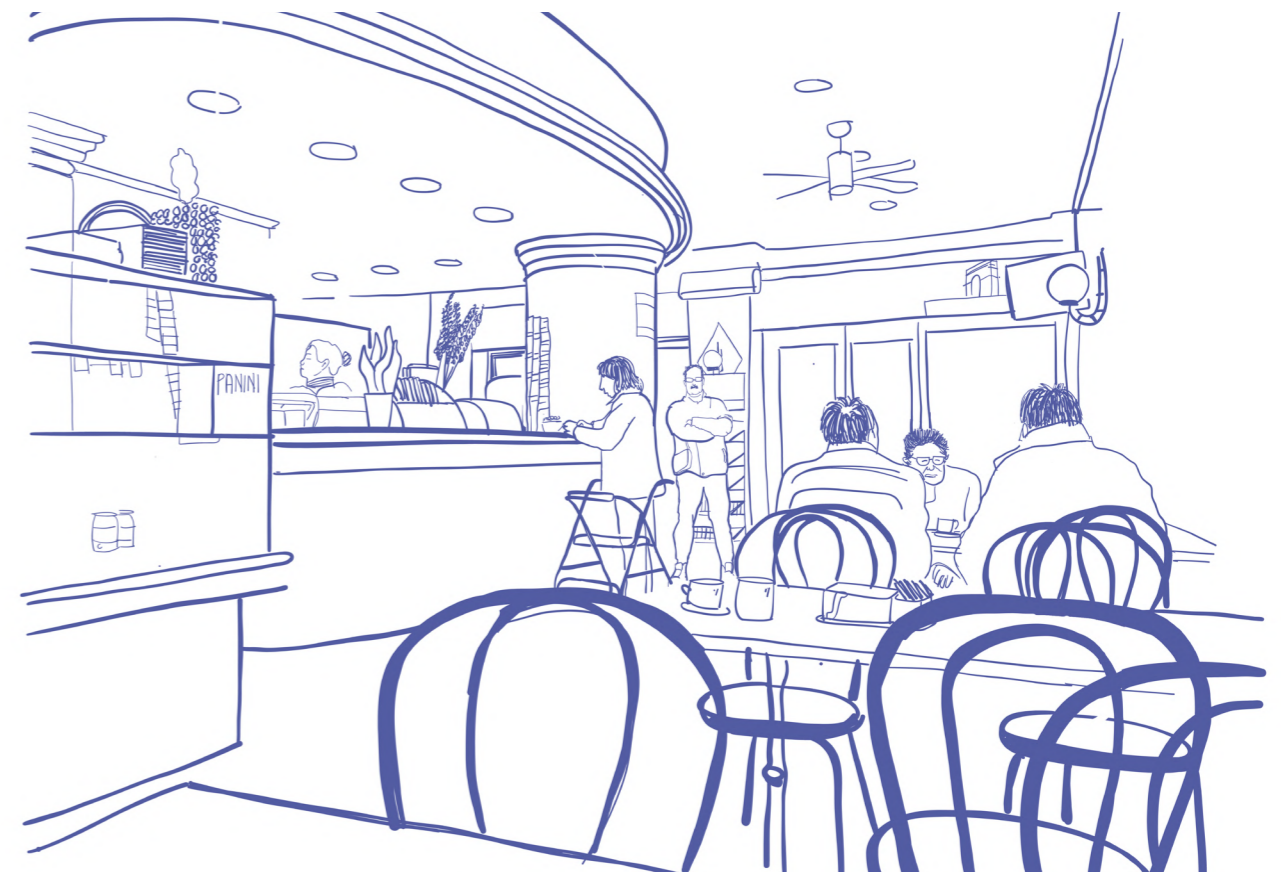


↑ Fig 89. Ethnographic mapping of socio-spatial dynamics within Caffè Vecchi Tempi. Source: Drawing by the authors.



Note: Sphere size represents spatial footprint and dominance, while color intensity indicates the degree of internal cohesion and cultural visibility.

↑ Fig 90. Relational mapping of intercultural interactions and social proximity within Caffè Vecchi Tempi. Source: Drawing by the authors.



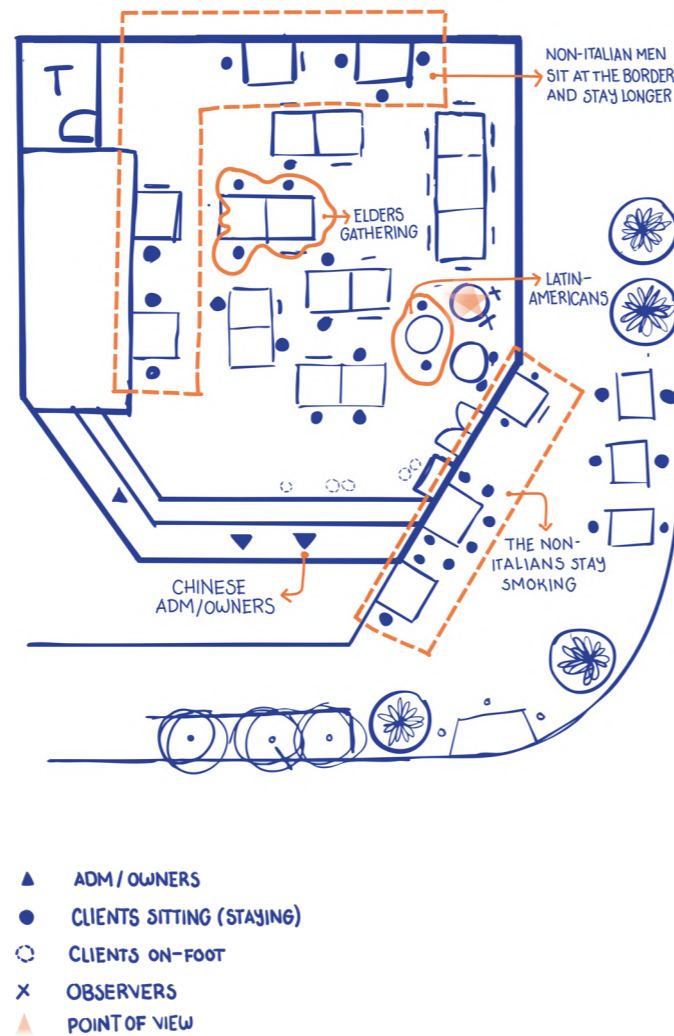
↑ Fig 91. Perspective view of the interior atmosphere and everyday social practices in Caffè Vecchi Tempi. Source: Drawing by the authors.

Case Study 2: Bar Rendez Vous – coexistence without integration

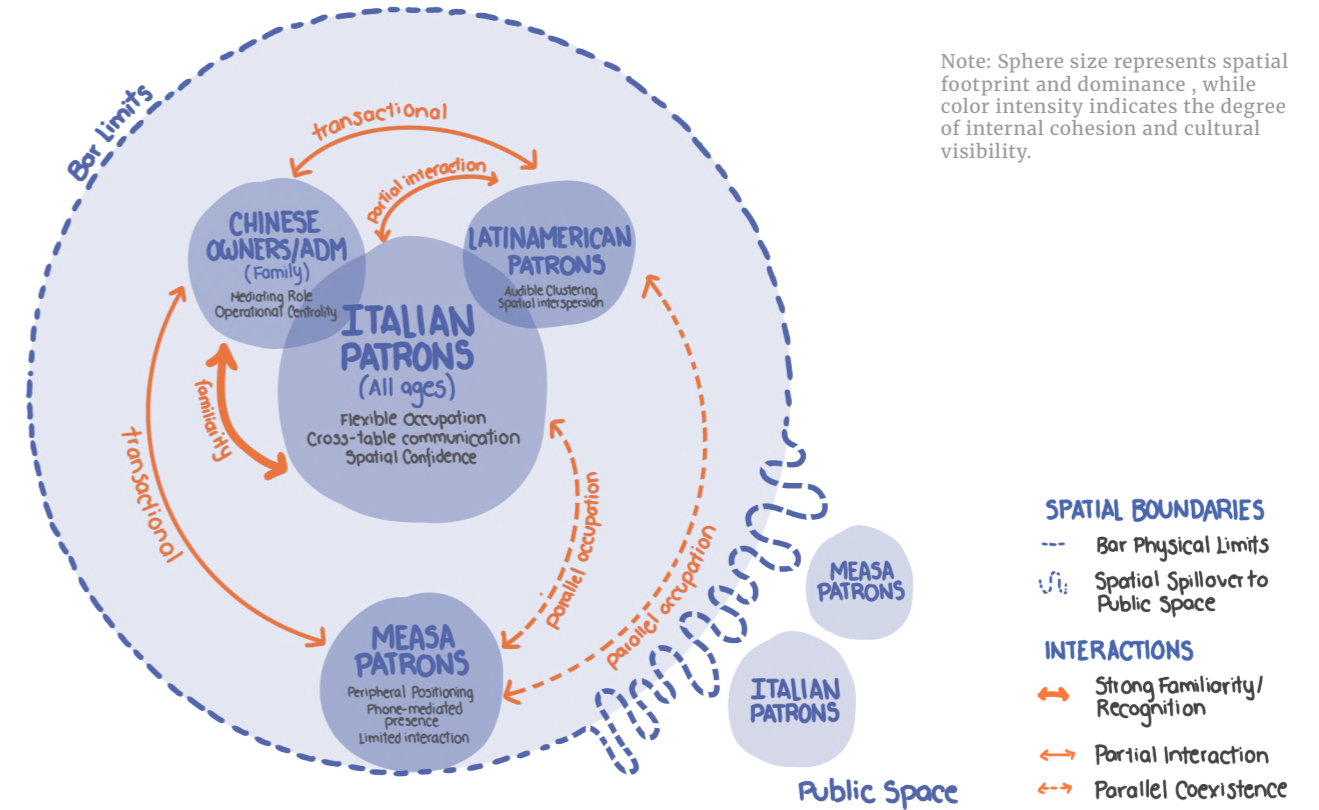
Bar Rendez Vous presents a more heterogeneous and socially layered environment. Its size, interior–exterior seating, and continuous activity throughout the day position it as a high-density container of neighborhood life. The intergenerational management by a Chinese family reflects the long-term presence of immigrant entrepreneurship in the area.

Despite this diversity, spatial mapping reveals a pattern of fragmented coexistence. Italian patrons (across all age groups) occupy the space with confidence and flexibility, often communicating across tables and reorganising seating arrangements. Latin American groups are spatially interspersed among Italians, forming audible clusters through shared language and visible social interaction.

By contrast, men identified as South Asian or Bangladeshi consistently occupy peripheral zones (edges and corners of the interior) either alone or in pairs. Their engagement with the space is limited, often mediated through phone use or private conversations in their own language. As in Caffè Vecchi Tempi, this pattern suggests that proximity does not necessarily translate into interaction; rather, the bar accommodates parallel social worlds that coexist without meaningful overlap.

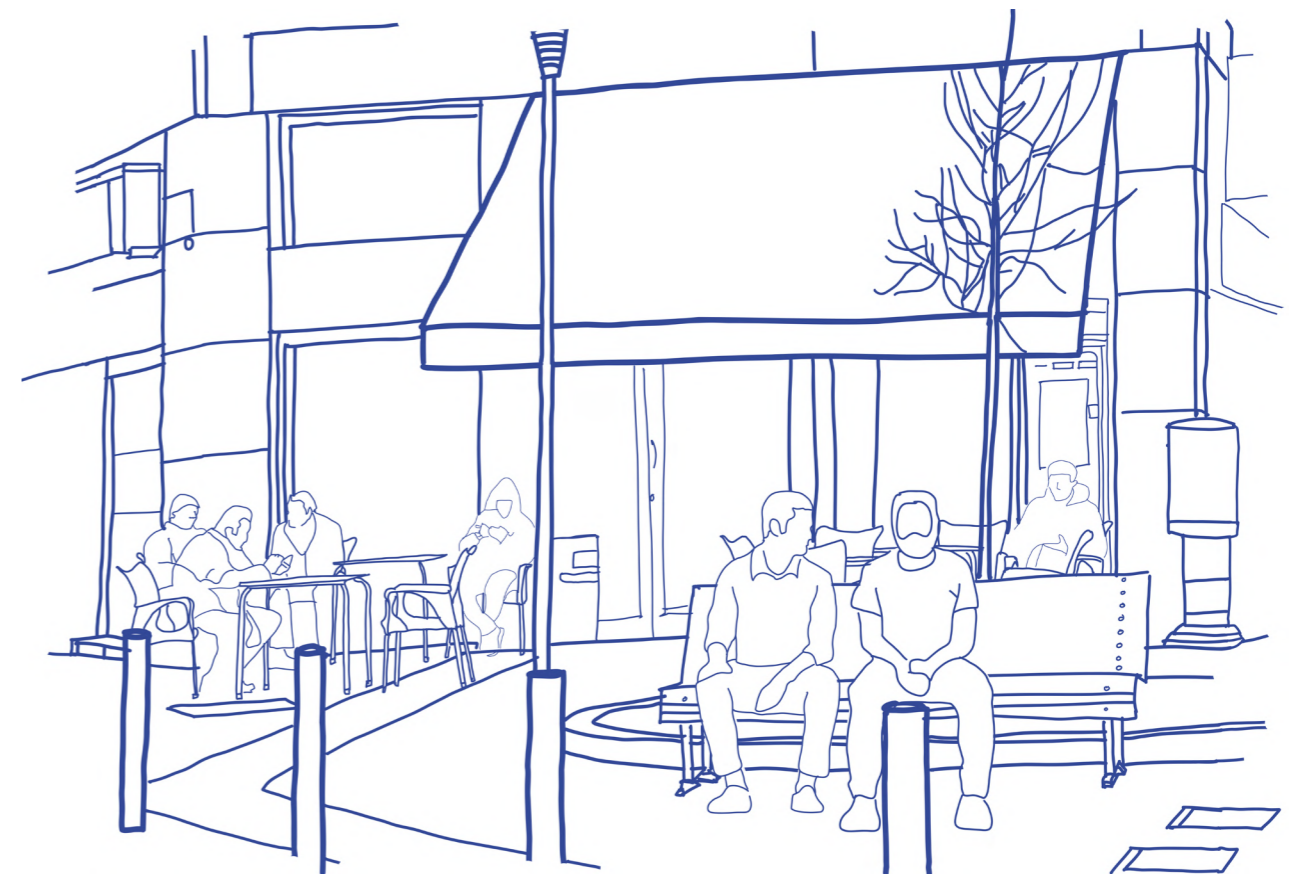


↑ Fig 92. Ethnographic mapping of socio-spatial dynamics within Bar Rendez Vous. Source: Drawing by the authors.



Note: Sphere size represents spatial footprint and dominance, while color intensity indicates the degree of internal cohesion and cultural visibility.

↑ Fig 93. Relational mapping of intercultural interactions and social proximity within Caffè Vecchi Tempi. Source: Drawing by the authors.



↑ Fig 94. Perspective view of the outside atmosphere and everyday social practices in Caffè Vecchi Tempi. Source: Drawing by the authors.

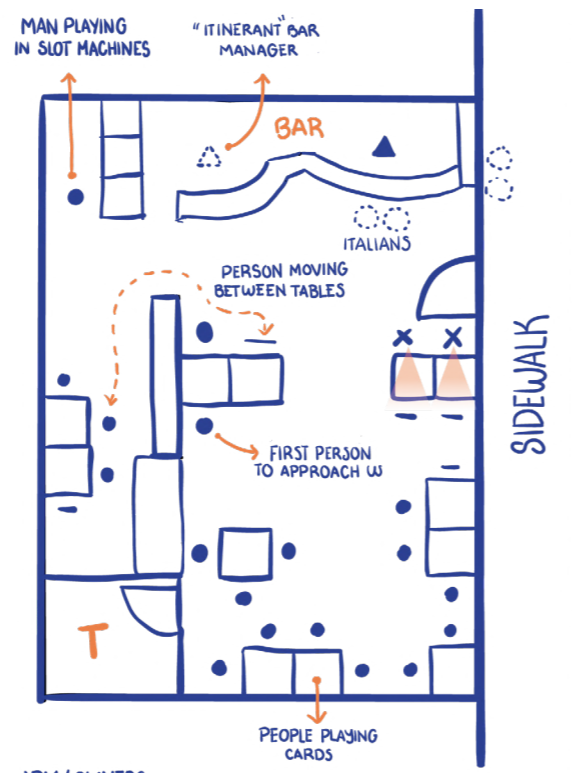
Case Study 3: Bar Pacifico – The cultural enclave

Bar Pacifico represents a clear typological shift from the previous cases. It functions not as a general neighbourhood meeting point, but as a cultural enclave oriented around Latin American identity. The sensory landscape (loud Latin music, beer consumption, card games) immediately signals a space governed by shared cultural codes.

The interior is densely occupied by predominantly Latin American men across a wide age range, many of whom appear to know one another well. Movement between tables, the bar counter, and gambling machines is fluid, indicating a high degree of mutual recognition and internal cohesion. Unlike the fragmented groupings observed elsewhere, social boundaries within the bar are minimal.

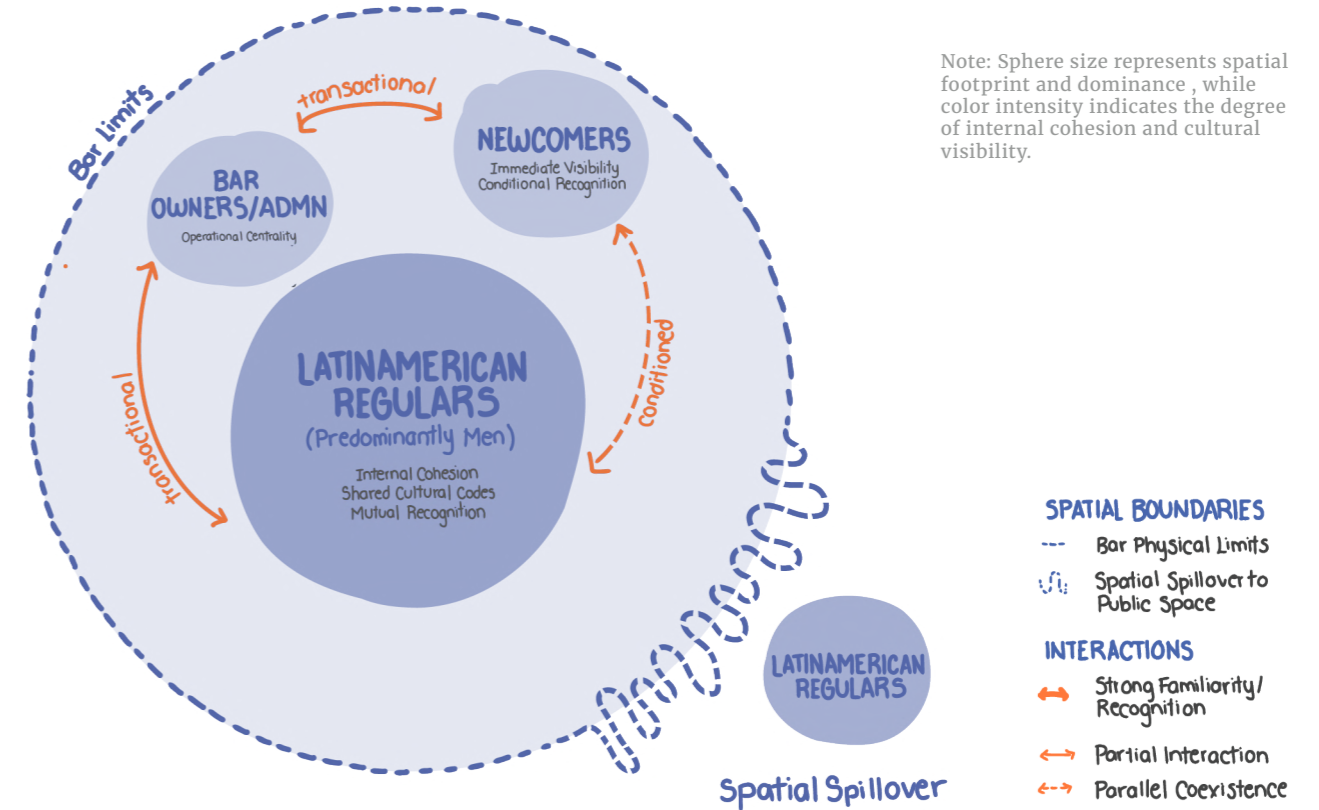
The entry of outsiders, including us, triggered immediate attention and momentary suspension of activity. Notably, this reaction occurred despite our Latin American background, indicating that recognition within the space was not immediate and depended on interaction rather than phenotypical or presumed cultural affinity. Subsequent interactions were initiated by patrons of the bar, who addressed us directly in Spanish and framed the encounter through an assumed shared nationality.

This moment of verbal engagement functioned as a mechanism of recognition, shifting our status from outsiders to provisional insiders. Explicit verbal assurances of safety (“here nobody will disrespect you”) further clarified the bar’s role as a protective

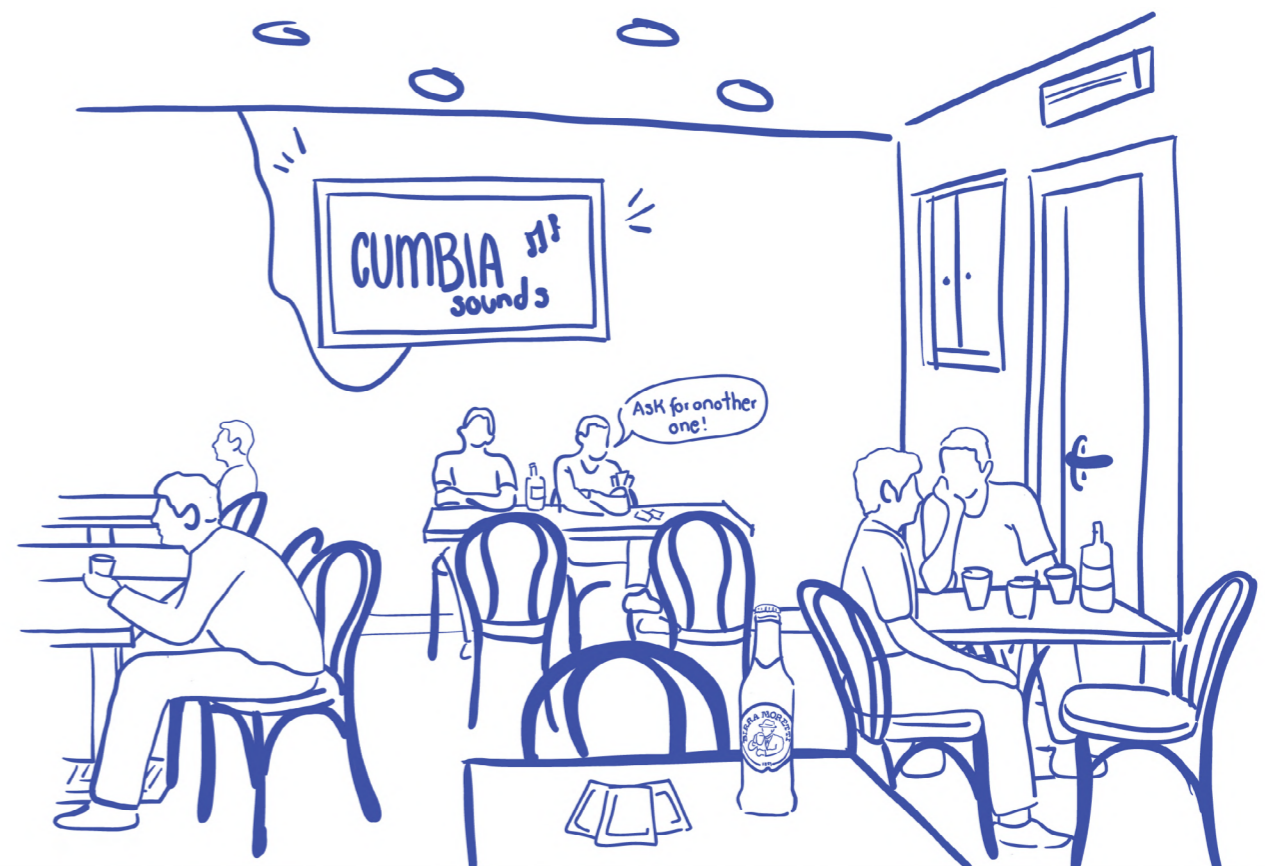


↑ Fig 95. Ethnographic mapping of socio-spatial dynamics within Bar Pacifico. Source: Drawing by the authors.

environment, where the need for constant social vigilance and negotiation typical of the wider city is temporarily suspended. Notably, this sense of enclosure extends beyond the interior. Regular patrons frequently gather and circulate on the adjacent sidewalk, despite the absence of formal outdoor seating. This interior–exterior continuity reinforces the bar’s role as a social node embedded in, rather than isolated from, the surrounding neighbourhood.



↑ Fig 96. Relational mapping of intercultural interactions and social proximity within Bar Pacifico. Source: Drawing by the authors.



↑ Fig 97. Perspective view of the interior atmosphere and everyday social practices in Bar Pacifico. Source: Drawing by the authors.

Note: Sphere size represents spatial footprint and dominance, while color intensity indicates the degree of internal cohesion and cultural visibility.

4.2.3 Interviews with local actors

Profiles

This section focuses on how public space is negotiated in the hyper-diverse corridors of Via Padova and Via dei Transiti, through the perspectives of local actors who interact with the area in structurally different ways. Rather than aiming for statistical representativeness, the research adopts a qualitative, actor-centered approach to capture the socio-spatial complexity embedded in everyday practices.

Building on open and semi-structured walking interviews, the analysis draws on a criterion-based sampling strategy designed to reflect differentiated positions in relation to space, power, and territorial attachment. The selected informants occupy distinct yet overlapping roles within the neighborhood's social and economic fabric. Their narratives allow for a triangulated reading of how public space is perceived, appropriated, regulated, and negotiated.

To capture the multiple dimensions of coexistence and transformation in the study area, four representative profiles were identified:

- **Long-term Resident (Domenico):** Serves as the longitudinal anchor of the study, representing the historical memory of a neighborhood defined by successive waves of demographic turnover and the evolution of local property ownership. His perspective was essential for documenting the shift from traditional migrant settlements to the contemporary "NoLo" (North of Loreto) branding strategy.

- **New Resident / "Creative Class" (Matteo):** Represents the "creative class" often associated with early-stage gentrification: young, student, and attracted by relative affordability combined with emerging cultural vibrancy.
- **Commercial Operator (Davide):** An employee at a local supermarket located near the Pasteur metro station, occupies a strategic observational position. His extended working hours, including late-night shifts, place him at the intersection of commercial activity, informal gatherings, and police intervention.
- **Informal Vendor (Lupe):** A migrant who sells traditional food in the street, embodies a different modality of territorial engagement. She does not reside permanently in the area but commutes weekly to serve a concentrated Latin American clientele. Her presence reflects what can be described as transient informality: economic practices anchored in specific diasporic geographies without formal institutional recognition.

Every piece of testimony was organized around the dimensions of everyday practices in the public space, layering of socio-economic positions, and institutional models. By reorganizing the information thematically the analysis moves from individual biography to a collective synthesis of Via Padova and Via dei Transiti as a site of asymmetrical coexistence.

Narratives in Context

Territorial Stigmatization & Imaginaries

The negotiation of public space along Via Padova and Via dei Transiti begins not with physical confrontation, but with a complex process of symbolic construction. Before conflict materializes in the public realm, the area is discursively constituted through narratives of danger, disorder, and alterity. Actors do not encounter a neutral territory; rather, they inherit sedimented representations that pre-structure perception and practice. The interviews demonstrate how the neighborhood is simultaneously stigmatized, historicized, and rebranded, generating competing socio-spatial imaginaries that inform everyday conduct.

For newly arrived residents, the encounter with Via Padova is preceded by a hegemonic narrative of insecurity, reproduced through media discourse and informal warning networks. As one interviewee recalls:

"Everyone says that the problem is exactly Via Padova (...) Even before moving to Milan I knew about this problem of Via Padova... sometimes they talk about it on the news."

Here, stigma operates externally, structuring decision-making prior to lived experience. The reputation of the area as "dangerous" was not grounded in personal

victimization but mediated through family, friends, and television. When searching for housing, he explains, he “tried to avoid the proposals that were on Via Padova because I knew about this reputation... as an unsafe area.” Importantly, he acknowledges that nothing ever happened to him, but the insecurity he describes is atmospheric and affective rather than experiential:

“When you pass in the middle of this group of persons who stay in Via dei Transiti, you feel very insecure... very drunk people... arguing among themselves.”

The neighborhood is thus interpreted through sensorial cues linked to noise, alcohol consumption, group gatherings; rather than longitudinal familiarity. This aligns with Loïc Bourgois’ reflections on the symbolic construction of “dangerous spaces,” where disorder becomes moralized and attached to visible forms of marginality rather than empirically verified threat (Bourgois, 2003). Fear circulates as a socially produced affect, embedded in what Henri Lefebvre would conceptualize as representations of space: conceived narratives that precede and discipline lived spatial practice (Lefebvre, 1974).

Long-term residents, however, re-situate contemporary tensions within a broader historical continuum of migration. Domenico reframes the current stigma as cyclical rather than exceptional:

“If you came fifty years ago... you could have made the same reasoning. Only instead of talking about South Americans... you would have talked about Pugliesi, Calabresi and Sicilians.”

He characterizes the neighborhood as structurally migratory:

“This has been, in the last fifty, sixty years, always a neighborhood with a very strong rate of immigration.”

Immigration is normalized as a constitutive feature of the area rather than an anomaly. What shifts is not the presence of newcomers, but their geographic origin and the discursive framing attached to them. He continues:

“This zone has remained with this characteristic of a first landing zone... Now predominantly they are immigrants coming from Africa, from Asia, from South America.”

On the other hand, the perception of Lupe, the informal vendor, embodies a modality of engagement defined by transient informality. For her, the neighborhood is not a stigmatized zone but a vital economic infrastructure.

“I’m come here because I know there’s a strong presence of Latin Americans, and they are my clients”

Lupe identifies the area as a reliable niche market embedded in social networks of familiarity and trust. Through her lens, the use of public space is a survival strategy. What institutional actors or residents may label as “disorder” is, for Lupe, a platform for community reproduction and economic opportunity. Her activity highlights the gendered dimensions of

migrant labor and how the street is claimed through the practice of everyday subsistence.

From these perspectives, stigma is persistent yet mutable as it is periodically redirected toward successive populations. This recalls Doreen Massey’s (1994) argument that places are not static containers but nodes within dynamic socio-economic trajectories. What is currently framed as a “Latino issue” echoes earlier moral panics surrounding Southern Italian internal migration. The target changes; the mechanism of othering remains.

Urban stigma, therefore, appears cyclical rather than exceptional. The neighborhood, recognized as a “first landing zone,” embedded within broader patterns of labor mobility and urban restructuring, is repeatedly re-coded as problematic depending on which bodies occupy visible public space. This process exemplifies the spatialization of social difference (Costa, 2021), whereby particular urban nodes become symbolically overloaded as sites of disorder, even when demographic turnover follows longstanding patterns.

The “NoLo” Strategy: Branding and Property Rationality

The emergence of “NoLo” (North of Loreto) introduces a counter-imaginary that does not eliminate stigma but overlays it. Domenico critiques this as an external imposition:

“This invention of ‘NoLo’... when I arrived it wasn’t there... it was an invention of some advertisers some years ago.”

He frames the branding process as externally driven and economically strategic:

“It was a real estate operation... to increase the value of the houses.”

As Paola Briata (2014) observes on the governance of diversity in Italian cities, such branding often attempts to commodify multiculturalism while failing to address the underlying marginalization. A strategic re-signification of space which attempts to reposition the area within circuits of cultural consumption and middle-class desirability. The same streets can therefore be simultaneously framed as a dangerous migrant corridor, an emerging cultural hotspot, and an affordable real estate opportunity. These representations do not replace one another; they coexist in tension.

For long-term owners, this symbolic shift is intimately tied to property rationality. The transition of the neighborhood into a “fashionable” district has tangible economic consequences:

“I was lucky because I bought this house two, three years before the neighborhood became fashionable... Now this house... is worth about double.”

Consequently, the negotiation of public space becomes an issue of investment security. In this logic, visible “disorder” (e.g., street drinking) is viewed through its impact on capital accumulation:

“If there is chaos... drunk people on the street... the value of the houses collapses.”

The perception of insecurity is thus refracted through capital accumulation. What appears as cultural difference to one actor materializes as financial risk to another. This reflects the asymmetrical negotiation between everyday tactics and institutional strategies described by Michel de Certeau (1984): while inhabitants appropriate space through informal gatherings and micro-economies, property owners interpret these practices through the lens of asset security and territorial control.

These competing imaginaries of risk, heritage, and value; are not sequential stages but concurrent regimes of meaning. Public space functions as an arena where symbolic capital, economic interest, and lived diversity intersect. For long-term residents, stigma is embedded within cyclical processes of class mobility and real estate valorization. For newer residents, stigma precedes experience and shapes perception through mediated narratives. Both perspectives, however, participate in the symbolic production of space layering new imaginaries onto older ones within an ongoing socio-spatial struggle over meaning and value.

Segmented Coexistence: Parallel Publics in Shared Space I

If stigma structures how the Via Padova and Via dei Transiti corridors are imagined, everyday practice reveals how it is materially inhabited. Across all actor profiles, a dominant socio-spatial pattern emerges: segmented coexistence. This configuration is characterized by the spatial proximity of distinct social groups who share the same urban environment without substantial interaction. A phenomenon that

origins where urban nodes become sites of intense physical encounter yet remain socially partitioned. In the study area diversity does not culminate in shared civic belonging; instead, it produces parallel publics whose interaction is structured through avoidance, tacit recognition, and micro-territorialization.

Micro-Territorialization and Tacit Boundaries

The interviews supported what was already observed during the ethnographic understanding of the practices in the public space: distinct social groups occupy spaces in close proximity yet socially disconnected. At night, male groups gather along low walls and outside ethnic businesses; Italian users of the occupied social center T28 organize cultural events in an adjacent segment; while nightlife associated with the branded “NoLo” unfolds in nearby streets but rarely overlaps with the central corridor.

Piazzetta dei Transiti, a small square near the Pasteur metro station, serves as a prime example of micro-territory. Domenico describes this arrangement as an informal yet stable territorial division:

“Over one side of the square are all the South Americans... On the other in front, where the social center is, there aren’t any. Absolutely there is no contact at all. [...] Those from the social center don’t go to the South American side. And on the side of the social center the South Americans don’t go.”

Despite the social center’s self-presentation as politically open and inclusive. This separation is not enforced through architectural barriers or explicit

prohibitions. Rather, it is maintained through tacit spatial codes and habitual recognition. (de Certeau, 1984). The square operates as a patchwork of micro-territories, each governed by implicit norms. In this sense, spatial proximity does not translate into social permeability:

“Two realities that coexist without contaminating each other much.”

The area is not merely divided conceptually; it is continuously reproduced as fragmented through patterned occupation, embodied routines, and mutual acknowledgment of hidden rules.

“If I have to go out for the night... I always tend to go to places that are near Via Padova, but not on Via Padova. There aren’t Italian bars where you can find outside a group of Italian people. Instead if you move already into the side streets... you can find them.”

As he also acknowledges that while groups never disturbed him when he passed, a sense of unease persists. This insecurity is less a reflection of direct aggression and more a result of entering a space socially coded as “belonging” to an “other.” As Massey (2005) argues, space is constituted through relational positioning; being situated within a space dominated by another social formation can generate affective estrangement without overt conflict.

From a commercial perspective, Davide reinforces this view of stable yet bounded group presence. Working in a supermarket nearby the square, he observes the

repetitive and internally contained nature of street dynamics:

“People arguing with other people. [...] These injured are always people who belong to that ethnic group that frequents that place.”

Moreover, the role of commercial infrastructure is vital in anchoring these parallel publics. Davide observes that ethnic clustering is physically tied to specific businesses:

“If there are groups of Arab people they are always near Arab shops... if there are communities of Latino people, it is because they are near Latino bars.”

Ethnically oriented businesses operate as anchors of public congregation. Public space extends the commercial interior outward, producing semi-informal territorialization without formal segregation.

Viewed from another perspective, Davide’s also notes that the supermarket as a unique site of inter-group convergence. Unlike the ethnically anchored bars or the politically coded social center, the supermarket functions as a neutral urban infrastructure attracting a heterogeneous range of users, from long-term Italian elderly residents to migrant families and the emerging student population who navigate the aisles simultaneously.

In this context, the supermarket can be understood as a “third space” that facilitates civil inattention (Goffman, 1963), where individuals recognize the presence of others without the need for social or

territorial confrontation. Davide's narrative suggests that the supermarket's identity is not "claimed" by any single group, thereby avoiding the intrinsic territorialization seen in the surrounding streets. In this "non-place" (Augé, 1995), social identity is momentarily suspended in favor of consumer practice. This neutrality allows the supermarket to serve as a rare node of passive conviviality, where the "parallel publics" of the neighborhood physically overlap without the friction of territorial defense occurring in the public space. Consequently, the supermarket acts as a socio-spatial stabilizer, providing a shared ground that is perceived as accessible by the neighborhood's diverse demographic spectrum.

Furthermore, the juxtaposition of different uses reveals how urban legitimacy is socially differentiated. Davide contrasts the informal gatherings of migrant groups with the events at the social center:

“On the weekend... there is this activity that concerns the occupied house... created by Italians... It is very particular this coexistence of these two activities that don't mix. [The Italians] are also a very numerous group... lively, but very safe... generally at 11 in the evening everything finishes.”

Here, noise, gathering, and occupation are not viewed as "disorder" or inherently problematic; their acceptability depends on who performs them and within what temporal regime. This asymmetry reflects that practices associated with marginalized groups are more readily coded as disorderly, while similar practices enacted by socially legitimate actors are normalized.

In consequence, the interviews show that the analyzed segments of Via Padova and Via dei Transiti operate through parallel publics: co-present social formations that occupy overlapping urban space while maintaining distinct interactional circuits. Rather than collapsing into open conflict, everyday stability is maintained through a "pragmatic arrangement" of mutual non-interference. Tensions surface only when specific practices exceed locally tolerated thresholds; otherwise, social distance is preserved through a series of unspoken mechanisms:

- Tacit Spatiality: Symbolic territorialization and informal codes.
- Strategic Avoidance: Preserving distance through physical proximity.
- Commercial Interdependence: Economic interaction stripped of relational intimacy.
- Temporal Rhythms: Differentiation of use across day and night cycles.

In this context, public space is again not a neutral commons but a continuously partitioned arena. Boundaries are upheld by habitual spatial patterns, linguistic clustering, and commercial anchors. Following de Certeau's (1984) framework, this configuration represents a tactical accommodation: inhabitants calibrate visibility and proximity to sustain coexistence without the necessity of integration.

Informality, Visibility, and the Politics of Order

While segmented coexistence structures the habitual spatial relations of the Via Padova and Via dei Transiti

corridors, tensions escalate when informal practices become highly visible, prolonged, and materially accumulative. In this hyper-diverse context, public space functions not merely as a site of encounter but as a critical infrastructure of survival for populations positioned at the margins of formal labor and housing markets. Friction does not stem from ethnic diversity per se; rather, it grows around practices perceived to exceed locally accepted thresholds of order, hygiene, and temporal discipline.

Interviewees repeatedly describe Piazzetta dei Transiti and the nearby sidewalks as extended living rooms for predominantly Latino groups, with steady presence of male and female. Practices documented include informal food vending, prolonged sidewalk socialization, outdoor alcohol consumption, and small-scale exchange. Domenico recounts:

“They arrive with bags full of beer... they sit there and stay for a couple of hours.”

Crucially, Domenico distinguishes between criminality and disturbance. "There isn't a problem of assaults... absolutely nothing," he clarifies. "The only problem is that they make a racket... they argue." Disorder is framed not as violence but as sensorial excess of noise, intoxication, and urination in public space. The perceived transgression lies in visibility and repetition. What troubles observers is not episodic gathering but the impression of continuous occupation.

Davide, whose late-night shifts provide a longitudinal view of these dynamics, reinforces this reading of stable, concentrated informality:

“There are always the same people... the same dynamics.”

Domenico also shifts part of the responsibility for street-level "disorder" onto local convenience shops. In his view, these businesses contribute to the situation by selling inexpensive alcohol to the groups who gather in late-night hours in the square. Disorder, therefore, is not produced solely by those occupying public space, but is sustained by a small commercial infrastructure that provisionally supports their presence.

He suggests that regulatory intervention may eventually target these shops rather than the drinkers themselves:

“Eventually this situation will have to change. One day or another they will decide that he doesn't have the license in order... they will make him close everything.”

This remark highlights how urban governance is imagined as operating through licensing and inspection. The convenience shop, although formally legal, becomes vulnerable if its activities are perceived to enable excessive or prolonged occupation of public space. In this sense, tensions around visibility and order extend beyond individual behavior to the economic circuits linking private commerce and public sociability.

Public space functions as a flexible economic platform: one that enables livelihood strategies for migrants excluded from formal employment while simultaneously exposing them to sanction. As Domenico, who volunteers in migrant support, notes

“Italy needs immigrants... but the law doesn’t allow [regularization] [...] The way to integrate is only one: work... The problem is that all the people who don’t work, stay always here drinking beer.”

Whether empirically exhaustive or not, this diagnosis situates informal occupation within broader legal and economic constraints as space is socially produced through material conditions; exclusion from formal labor channels pushes certain populations toward the street as residual infrastructure. Public space becomes both refuge and exposure.

Transient Informality and Economic Livelihood

Public space also sustains micro-economies that rely on diasporic density rather than formal licensing. Davide recounts the case of a Latina woman selling handcrafted fruit popsicles, illustrating a form of transient informality anchored in mobility and cultural networks. Domenico similarly describes a Peruvian vendor who for years operated with a small cart selling traditional dishes.

From Lupe’s position, however, the street is neither a site of disorder nor merely a fallback option. It is an entrepreneurial terrain structured by hyper-diversity. Lupe strategically navigates different nodes of the city according to temporal rhythms and diasporic concentrations:

“Every day, I sell my food on a specific part of the city, tomorrow I’ll be in Loreto and on Saturday, on the metro station of San Agostino [...] this has been my business for years now.”

Her practice exemplifies transient informality: highly mobile, time-bound, and calibrated to specific consumer publics. She positions herself at night, precisely when pedestrian flows intensify due to the end of work shifts. This temporal calibration is not incidental but deliberate; she aligns her presence with moments of peak circulation in order to maximize sales within a limited timeframe. She sells traditional food from Peru, and finishes all her products within an hour. Then she withdraws before attracting regulatory attention. Unlike the stationary gatherings described by residents, her occupation is ephemeral and economically purposeful. Visibility here is tactical rather than accumulative.

Importantly, Lupe’s enterprise has evolved into a family business. What began as an individual survival strategy has become intergenerational labor, supported by kinship networks and sustained by the purchasing power of co-ethnic and cross-ethnic clients. Moreover, through years of sustained street-level presence, Lupe has evolved into a localized communal anchor; her practice fosters a profound sense of belonging among the diaspora, as she maintains a dense network of social capital where residents engage her not only for subsistence, but as a trusted link to a shared cultural identity and specialized orders that reinforce collective memory within the host city.

Therefore, hyper-diversity produces market niches, proximity and the enhancement of social networks. The same populations whose presence is narrated as problematic by some residents constitute Lupe’s primary customer base. Diasporic density becomes economic opportunity.

From her perspective, public space is not a symptom of failed integration but an arena of active economic agency. While others interpret prolonged presence as stagnation or deviance, Lupe reads the street as a field of demand. Her mobility across specific neighborhoods such, demonstrates an intimate knowledge of urban rhythms, enforcement patterns, and consumer flows. Informality, in this sense, is not absence of order but alternative ordering: a system governed by tacit rules, timing, and relational trust.

Institutional Displacement and Reactive Governance

Institutional responses to these dynamics ranging from increased policing to the installation of physical barriers; often operate through displacement rather than structural transformation. Domenico cites the closure of a local park near the metro station as a failed “strategy” of containment:

“Before groups allocated inside the small park... then the town hall made the gates... and worsened the thing, because they invaded the street.”

This intervention exemplifies a pattern of governance aimed at reducing the visibility of marginalization. Here, police presence has intensified:

“For four, five years, I never saw the police. Now... two, three times a week.”

In the same way as in Via Padova, through the red zone regulations. These operations are characterized as temporary and reactive, causing a “desert” when

present but failing to alter the underlying socio-economic drivers of street occupation.

At the commercial level, the management of insecurity has shifted toward privatized security. Davide explains: “We had to hire a bodyguard... when I finish my evening shift I must no longer exit from the main door.” Here, responsibility for managing insecurity becomes individualized and market-based. The supermarket adapts defensively rather than relying solely on public authorities.

Ultimately, the negotiation of public space in Via Padova and Via dei Transiti unfolds through a multilayered governance linked to comprising municipal gating, police patrols, and private security (without mentioning the multiple infrastructure interventions inside the area), that primarily operates through visibility management.

Within this framework of asymmetrical coexistence, informality is not an anomaly but an embedded feature: it is neither fully criminalized nor legitimized, but rather displaced, monitored, and periodically disciplined. Consequently, public space functions simultaneously as a social infrastructure, an economic fallback, and a site of regulatory intervention.

Governance, therefore, does not eliminate informality; it continuously recalibrates its spatial boundaries through a process of displacement and surveillance, managing the symptoms of precarity while leaving the structural causes intact.

“If you came fifty years ago... you could have made the same reasoning. Only instead of talking about South Americans... you would have talked about Pugliesi, Calabresi and Sicilians.”

“This zone has remained with this characteristic of a first landing zone... Now predominantly they are immigrants coming from Africa, from Asia, from South America.”

“Everyone says that the problem is exactly Via Padova (...) Even before moving to Milan I knew about this... sometimes they talk about it on the news.”

“I tried to avoid the housing proposals that were on Via Padova because I knew about this reputation... as an unsafe area.”

“This invention of ‘NoLo’... when I arrived it wasn’t there... it was an invention of some advertisers some years ago.”

“There are always the same people... the same dynamics.”

“It was a real estate operation... to increase the value of the houses.”

“If there are groups of Arab people they are always near Arab shops... if there are communities of Latino people, it is because they are near Latino bars.”

“I was lucky because I bought this house two, three years before the neighborhood became fashionable... Now this house... is worth about double.”

“Over one side of the square are all the South Americans... On the other in front, where the social center is, there aren’t any, just Italians. Absolutely there is no contact at all. [...] Those from the social center don’t go to the South American side. And on the side of the social center the South Americans don’t go.”

“Two realities that coexist without contaminating each other much.”

“They arrive with bags full of beer... they sit there and stay for a couple of hours.”

“My customers are predominantly Mexican, Peruvian, and other Latin American migrants, but any Italians”

“Before groups allocated inside the small park... then the town hall made the gates... and worsened the thing, because they invaded the street.”

“I’m come here because I know there’s a strong presence of Latin Americans, and they are my clients”

“For four, five years, I never saw the police. Now... two, three times a week.”

“A lady used to buy some products here in the supermarket, then walking around the area I saw that she sells food like that in an informal way... handcrafted fruit popsicles”

“If there is chaos... drunk people on the street... the value of the houses collapses.”

“Eventually this situation will have to change. One day or another they will decide that he doesn’t have the license in order... they will make him close everything.”

“The way to integrate is only one: work... The problem is that all the people who don’t work, stay always here drinking beer.”

“Italy needs immigrants... but the law doesn’t allow [regularization].”

Negotiating Meanings

The empirical material collected along Via Padova and Via dei Transiti reveals that public space is not simply a neutral container of diversity, nor a battlefield of open conflict. Rather, it operates as a dynamic arena in which symbolic narratives, everyday practices, informal economies, and processes of urban revaluation intersect.

Across the dimensions explored: stigma, segmented coexistence, informality and governance, and gentrification; a common thread emerges: public space is continuously negotiated through visibility, legitimacy, and moral evaluation.

First, the area’s reputation demonstrates how urban imaginaries shape lived experience. For the long-term resident, stigma appears cyclical and historically recurrent, attached to successive waves of migration. For the new resident, stigma initially produces fear and distance, even as diversity becomes an object of attraction and consumption. The “invention” of NoLo illustrates how symbolic rebranding does not eliminate stigma but redistributes it, selectively valorizing certain forms of diversity while marginalizing others.

Second, everyday coexistence does not translate into deep integration. Instead, the area functions through segmented coexistence: parallel publics occupying shared territory while maintaining tacit boundaries.

Micro-geographies of belonging around ethnic shops, social centers, and street corners, structure patterns of proximity without intimacy. Negotiation here takes the form of avoidance, selective mobility, and mutual non-interference.

Third, when public space becomes an economic infrastructure for informal practices, negotiation intensifies. Street gatherings, alcohol consumption, and small-scale vending generate tensions not primarily because of ethnic difference, but because of their prolonged visibility and regulatory ambiguity. Consequently, institutional responses like park closures, increased patrols, private security; operate reactively, often displacing rather than resolving underlying socio-economic precarity.

Finally, gentrification introduces a moral reordering of space. Through branding, aesthetic transformation, and commercial upgrading, the neighborhood undergoes a process of selective revaluation. Informal uses become increasingly fragile, while organized, time-bound, and culturally packaged forms of vibrancy gain legitimacy. The moral economy of urban space recalibrates what counts as acceptable presence.

Therefore, public space is negotiated not only physically, but symbolically and morally through narratives of fear, value, order, and belonging. Rather than asking whether the neighborhood is integrated or conflictual, the analysis reveals a more complex condition: a continuously recalibrated equilibrium sustained through everyday adjustments, symbolic struggles, and institutional containment.

4.2.5 Institutional Models and Everyday Negotiation of Public Space

Triangulation of Results

This final part of the chapter analyses the institutional model governing public space production in relation to the empirically observed modes of everyday negotiation. Rather than assessing individual projects or policies, the objective is to examine how the overarching institutional model (understood as a structured configuration of governance instruments, spatial strategies, and regulatory mechanisms) addresses the social complexity of a hyper-diverse context.

To this end, public space in Via Padova and Via dei Transiti is considered not a static outcome of planning interventions, nor merely the spontaneous product of everyday practices. Rather, it emerges as a continuously negotiated field. The resulting analysis is diagnostic; it seeks to identify structural misalignments and latent capacities emerging from this interaction between institutional arrangements and the observed practices in public space.

The institutional production of public space in this context can be understood through dominant governing logics, each carrying embedded assumptions about how urban space should function. When triangulated against the ethnographic realities of the street, specific structural tensions and potential opportunities are revealed.

Empirically Observed Everyday Practices

Before detailing the structural tensions, it is essential to synthesize the primary modes through which public space is negotiated in the everyday life of the corridor. The ethnographic analysis identified three core typologies of practice:

Parallel Coexistence: In hyper-diverse settings, public space often functions through parallel social worlds. This is characterised by habitual tolerance and civil inattention rather than sustained interaction, where diversity manifests primarily as spatial proximity without deep social permeability.

Semiotic and Micro-Territorialisation:

Commercial anchors and informal socio-spatial practices generate semi-public zones with their own implicit governance structures. Small-scale retail and multi-service hubs act as vital “arrival infrastructures,” where publicness is partially mediated by economic actors. Through diverse linguistic landscapes, groups claim symbolic ownership and provide an “institutional completeness” that resists broader spatial homogenization.

Threshold and Public Space Appropriation:

Domestic and social activities frequently extend into the infrastructural margins, such as curbs, edges, and street furniture. In hyper-dense urban environments, these everyday practices often function as compensatory extensions of the domestic sphere, blurring the boundaries between private living and public sociability.

Reframing Public Space in Hyper-Diverse Contexts

1. Public Space as a Field of Negotiation

Over the past two decades, municipal policies, including regeneration programmes under the *Patto per Milano*, tactical urbanism initiatives such as *Piazze Aperte*, and participatory governance instruments like *Patti di Collaborazione*, have sought to reconfigure the corridor through spatial upgrading, pedestrian prioritisation, environmental improvement, and civic activation. These initiatives promote a normative vision of public space as inclusive, orderly, sustainable, and socially cohesive.

However, fieldwork conducted in Piazzetta dei Transiti and along Via Padova reveals a more complex and layered reality. Everyday publicness in the area is structured less by programmed design than by informal appropriation, migrant entrepreneurial infrastructures, gendered patterns of occupation, and symbolic struggles over legitimacy. The results suggest not a failure of planning per se, but a structural misalignment between institutional imaginaries of public space and the socio-spatial logics through which it is inhabited.

2. Controlled Regeneration and Displaced Publicness

Piazzetta dei Transiti represents a paradigmatic case of institutional intervention aimed at transforming a residual and underused “non-place” into a collectively managed civic space. Incorporated into the *Luoghicomuni* programme through a Patto di

Collaborazione, the square was reconfigured with the intention of fostering shared stewardship and enhancing its function as a neighbourhood meeting point. However, the intervention also intended to curb informal practices that had previously taken place within the square considered as 'disorder'.

Yet the physical and regulatory transformation, most notably the installation of a perimeter fence and the possibility of closure at 8:30 p.m.; produced a fundamental shift in the spatial logic of the site. What was previously an open though underutilised public void became a regulated and temporally bounded space.

Ethnographic observation indicates that this enclosure did not eliminate public life; rather, it displaced the activities happening in the inside into the outside, and reconfigured it. While the interior of the square is activated during organised events such as concerts, assemblies, or neighbourhood meetings; most spontaneous social activity occurs outside the fence, along the curb and adjacent sidewalks. The perimeter becomes the true site of negotiation.

Three distinct zones of occupation emerged during fieldwork:

- **The curb along Via dei Transiti:** where adults, predominantly migrants; sit, converse, consume food and alcohol.
- **The Pasteur metro entrance area:** where bicycle racks and railings are appropriated as informal seating infrastructures.

- **The street near the self-managed T28 centre:** where public life fluctuates according to commercial rhythms.

The fence thus operates not as a 'protective' device but as a spatial filter redefining the boundaries of legitimate presence. Publicness is reorganised into interior (regulated, event-based, time-bound) and exterior (informal, continuous, self-organised) domains. The intervention intended to strengthen collective ownership paradoxically intensifies informal appropriation in its margins.

This dynamic reflects a broader institutional tendency visible in Milan's regeneration strategies: public space is often conceived as programmable and governable through design. However, the observed practices suggest that publicness exceeds its designed container. Social life adapts tactically, appropriating available edges, infrastructures, and commercial thresholds.

3. Via Padova: Hyper-Diversity, Commercial Infrastructures, and Segmented Coexistence

While Via dei Transiti demonstrates displacement dynamics, Via Padova reveals a more extensive negotiation between institutional upgrading and everyday socio-economic infrastructures.

Recent municipal interventions such as sidewalk enlargement, traffic calming, tree planting, and the creation of micro-squares, have improved environmental quality and pedestrian safety. These measures align with broader strategic goals of sustainable mobility and urban decorum. Yet the social configuration of the corridor remains shaped

primarily by its dense network of migrant-owned commercial establishments that already structured the intensity and vibrancy of the street.

The linguistic landscape and business mapping analysis reveal the presence of Ethnic Entrepreneurial Clusters, particularly among Middle Eastern, African, South Asian, Chinese, and Latin American communities. These clusters generate what can be described as de facto zoning: spatial organisation driven not by formal planning instruments but by everyday market practices and diaspora infrastructures.

Shops extend into the public realm through informal seating, social spillover, and prolonged presence. Public space becomes an extension of commercial ecosystems. Halal butchers, phone centres, Latin American cafés, and 24-hour vending shops function as micro-anchors of sociability, enabling what interviews described as "parallel coexistence."

Despite quantitative demographic diversity, spatial visibility is uneven. Egyptian and Bangladeshi men dominate certain segments of the street in the evening hours, while women, particularly Muslim women, are largely absent after sunset. This gendered temporal pattern complicates institutional narratives of inclusivity.

The street therefore operates through segmented coexistence: multiple publics share territory while maintaining tacit boundaries structured by language, religion, commerce, and time. Co-presence does not necessarily entail integration. Instead, negotiation

takes the form of mutual tolerance, selective avoidance, and informal codes of conduct.

In this sense, the vibrancy frequently attributed to regeneration efforts is, in practice, largely generated by migrant entrepreneurial infrastructures that predate and exceed recent physical interventions. The street's intensity of use is less the product of design activation than of everyday socio-economic networks that continuously reproduce public life from below.

4. Informality and Micro-Infrastructures of Sociality

The triangulation of observations and interviews highlights the importance of informal infrastructures in sustaining public life. The 24-hour vending machines, for instance, function as low-threshold third places. Their minimal regulation and constant accessibility allow prolonged occupation and social interaction, particularly among groups whose presence may be more scrutinised elsewhere.

Similarly, the appropriation of curbs, thresholds, bicycle racks, and parked cars reveals adaptive spatial tactics. These practices align with de Certeau's notion of everyday strategies through which users reinterpret and reconfigure designed space. Public space is not passively consumed; it is continuously reassembled.

Institutional responses, however, often frame prolonged informal occupation, especially alcohol consumption and visible gatherings, as disorderly. Interviews indicate that regulatory measures such as park closures, police patrols, and security surveillance

operate reactively, addressing visibility rather than structural socio-economic conditions.

This tension illustrates a normative misalignment: institutional models prioritise order and decorum, whereas everyday users prioritise accessibility, sociality, and compensatory spatial extension in contexts of limited private domestic space. The vibrancy frequently attributed to regeneration efforts is, in practice, largely generated by migrant entrepreneurial infrastructures that predate and exceed recent physical interventions.

5. Symbolic Negotiation: Stigma, Branding, and Moral Reordering

Public space negotiation extends beyond physical occupation into symbolic production. Interviews reveal that the area's reputation has long been shaped by cycles of stigma associated with successive waves of migration. Regeneration initiatives and branding strategies, most notably the emergence of "NoLo" and signage referring to the "Padova District"; attempt to reposition diversity as an asset rather than a threat.

This symbolic revaluation does not eliminate stigma; rather, it redistributes it. Certain forms of diversity become marketable (gastronomy, cultural events, creative industries), while others, particularly informal street gatherings, remain morally contested.

Gentrification processes intensify this dynamic. As commercial upgrading and aesthetic improvements attract new residents, moral expectations of behaviour shift. While, the uniform land value and rents market become more uniform between the NoLo 'already

gentrified neighborhood' and the 'stigmatised; study area; organized, time-bound vibrancy gains legitimacy, while spontaneous, prolonged occupation becomes increasingly fragile.

Public space is therefore negotiated through moral evaluation: who belongs, who appears excessive, and which uses are deemed compatible with the emerging urban image.

6. Institutional Policies and Everyday Recalibration

The comparison between policy objectives and lived practices reveals several structural tensions:

- **Design vs. Social Autonomy:** Physical upgrading improves environmental conditions but does not automatically recalibrate social segmentation.
- **Participation vs. Informal Authority:** Formal collaborative instruments coexist with deeply embedded informal governance around commercial anchors.
- **Security vs. Adaptive Use:** Regulatory containment often displaces rather than resolves informal practices rooted in socio-economic necessity.
- **Attractiveness vs. Inclusion:** Branding strategies selectively valorise diversity while marginalising visible informality.

Rather than producing integration or conflict as binary outcomes, these processes generate a continuously recalibrated equilibrium. Public space operates as a flexible arena where institutional containment and everyday adaptation coexist in dynamic tension.



↑ Fig 98. Diverse users circulating in Via Padova. Source: Photograph by the authors, 2025.

4.2.6 Structural Tensions Between Institutional Models and Everyday Practices

In this context, three dominant logics shape institutional production of public space but face constant challenge from everyday practices.

The Limits of Spatial Determinism

The first logic, defined as Regenerative and Entrepreneurial Reconfiguration, frames public space as a strategic asset for spatial valorisation and urban repositioning. This approach inherently assumes that physical spatial transformation can effectively reshape social behaviour, and that improved public spaces naturally foster interaction and social cohesion. Within this framework, demographic diversity is frequently positioned as a contributor to urban vibrancy and attractiveness, acting simultaneously as a social instrument and an economic driver.

However, ethnographic observations of everyday practices challenge this spatial determinism. The dominant mode of social navigation observed is Parallel Coexistence, where public space functions through parallel social worlds characterised by habitual tolerance and civil inattention rather than sustained interaction. In this context, diversity manifests as spatial proximity without social permeability. The structural misalignment here lies in the overestimation of design's capacity to unilaterally produce social integration. By treating diversity primarily as aesthetic vibrancy, the institutional model may overlook the reality of structured social segmentation.

Asymmetries in Civic Engagement

The second dominant logic, Hybrid and Participatory Co-Production, conceptualises public space as a resource co-produced through partnerships and decentralised governance arrangements. This model rests on the assumption that citizens form a uniformly mobilisable public, and that responsibility for spatial activation can be equitably distributed. Consequently, the "publicness" of a space becomes partially dependent on the organised participation and partnership capacity of local actors.

When evaluated against the observed realities of Semiotic and Micro-Territorialisation, a distinct capacity gap emerges. Ethnographic data indicates that semi-public governance often emerges informally through commercial anchors, with small-scale retail and multi-service hubs acting as crucial "arrival infrastructures". Through the linguistic landscape, diverse groups claim symbolic ownership and provide an "institutional completeness" that resists broader homogenisation. The structural misalignment occurs because formal institutional frameworks insufficiently recognise this informal socio-spatial authority. The participatory model assumes a level of social coherence and civic capacity that is structurally differentiated, potentially excluding those who rely on informal networks rather than formal civic associations.

The Friction Between Order and Adaptation

Finally, the logic of Regulatory and Decorum Governance seeks to ensure quality of life through normative regulation, spatial controls, and time-based restrictions. This model assumes that safety and decorum are strict preconditions for publicness, and that informal or excessive occupation inherently destabilises urban order.

This regulatory framework frequently collides with the everyday practice of Threshold and Public Space Appropriation. In hyper-diverse and high-density contexts, domestic and social activities often extend into infrastructural margins, such as curbs and street furniture. These practices function as adaptive, compensatory extensions of the domestic sphere, rather than intentional disruptions of public order. The structural misalignment is profound: while the institutional model views informal occupation as an issue requiring containment, the lived reality frames it as a vital adaptive strategy. Consequently, regulatory mechanisms intended to enforce equal and neutral publicness may be applied unevenly, selectively affecting informal actors and thereby reinforcing existing territorial asymmetries.

By triangulating these institutional logics with observed practices, the analysis suggests that a central limitation of the examined planning frameworks lies in an underlying normative bias. The governing models frequently operate on the assumption of a relatively homogenous, mobilisable public that engages with space in alignment with programmed intentions.

However, this diagnostic analysis also points to latent opportunities. If the planning framework can shift its perspective to view phenomena like Threshold Appropriation not inherently as a failure of decorum, but as an indicator of unaddressed spatial needs, it could foster more responsive urban environments. Similarly, by acknowledging the implicit governance structures provided by Micro-Territorialisation, there is a latent capacity to broaden the definition of “co-production” to include the informal, everyday actors who actively contribute to navigating the social complexity of the neighbourhood.

Final Synthesis

Institutional Logics and Everyday Negotiations

| Institutional Model | Foundational Rationality (Embedded Assumptions) | Evidences from the Practices (Observed Conditions) | Limitation (Structural Misalignments) | Potential Opportunities (Latent Capacities) |
|---|---|--|--|--|
| Regenerative & Entrepreneurial Reconfiguration | Assumes spatial transformation can reshape social behaviour, improved public space fosters interaction, and diversity contributes to urban attractiveness | Parallel Coexistence & Threshold Appropriation: Diversity manifests as proximity without permeability. Adaptive spillover into infrastructural margins exceeds programmed spatial intentions. | Overestimation of design's capacity to produce social integration; diversity is treated primarily as aesthetic “vibrancy” rather than addressing structured social segmentation | Acknowledging that physical reconfiguration does not fully “script” behaviour offers the opportunity to design more flexible infrastructural margins that safely accommodate adaptive spillover. |
| Hybrid & Participatory Co-Production | Assumes citizens form a mobilisable public, engagement produces cohesion, and responsibility for activation can be formally distributed | Semiotic & Micro-Territorialisation: Interaction is uneven and selective. Semi-public governance emerges implicitly through commercial anchors and small-scale retail (“arrival infrastructures”) | Assumes a level of social coherence and civic capacity that is structurally differentiated. Institutional frameworks insufficiently recognise existing informal socio-spatial authority. | There is a potential to expand the definition of “partnership” to include and legitimise the informal, implicit governance structures provided by migrant commercial networks. |
| Regulatory & Decorum Governance | Assumes normative regulation is required to ensure coexistence, safety is a precondition for publicness, and informal occupation destabilises order. | Threshold / Curb Appropriation: Domestic and social activities extend into public margins as an adaptive, compensatory response to inadequate private space | Formal regulations intended to be “neutral” may unevenly and selectively affect informal actors, thereby reinforcing existing territorial and social asymmetries | By recognising threshold appropriation as a “compensatory extension” rather than a destabilising threat, enforcement could be calibrated to support coexistence rather than penalising spatial adaptation. |

→ Fig 99. Analytical Matrix of Institutional Logics and Everyday Negotiations. Source: Authors' own Elaboration.

[**Key Findings & Conclusions**]

Under development

05

5.1 To Wrap Up

Key Findings

The research identifies a structural misalignment between institutional design intentions and the actual socio-spatial appropriation of the neighborhood.

Displaced Publicness and the “Fence Enclosure”:

In Piazzetta dei Transiti, the regeneration through the Luoghicomuni program transformed an underused “non-place” into a fenced, regulated park. However, instead of fostering shared stewardship, the night closure and perimeter fence displaced spontaneous social life to the exterior. The “lived square meter” now exists primarily along the curbs and sidewalks outside the fence, where migrant groups gather to eat, talk, and consume alcohol; practices often read as “disorderly” by formal governance.

Ethnic Entrepreneurial Clusters as “Arrival Infrastructure”:

Along Via Padova, the corridor is structured by a dense network of migrant-owned shops (MEASA, Chinese, Latin American) that function as a “social front door” to the city. These establishments provide essential services such as money transfers, legal aid, and cultural goods; that constitute a “de facto zoning” system.

Threshold Appropriation as Domestic Extension:

In hyper-dense urban environments with housing precarity, the street serves as a compensatory extension of the domestic sphere and economic vulnerability. Residents use bicycle racks, shop steps, and curbs as improvised furniture for socialization and transnational communication. Informal occupation emerges as materially necessary rather than transgressive.

Gendered Temporal Rhythms:

A marked shift occurs at night hours. While the daytime street is heterogeneous, nighttime presence becomes almost exclusively male, particularly in Via Padova and around 24-hour vending machines which act as low-threshold “Third Places” for groups whose presence is otherwise scrutinized

Conclusions

Applying Lefebvre's Triad of Space, the study concludes that public space in Via Padova and Via dei Transiti is a contested relational field where different rationalities collide.

Conceived vs. Lived Space:

Institutional regeneration projects produce representations of space: coherent, legible, design-driven visions structured around activation, safety, and revitalisation. These representations often privilege circulation over lingering, consumption over subsistence and programmed use rather than ambiguity

Everyday spatial practices constitute: the repetitive, embodied routines of commuting, selling, waiting, sitting, and watching. These practices follow rhythms tied to labour precarity, housing constraints, and commercial survival.

Through these repeated gestures, residents produce a representational space: a lived urban field layered with symbolic markers, tacit territorial codes, and negotiated tolerances. This lived spatial order exceeds full programmability. It remains plural, stratified, and governed through tacit codes that operate alongside formal regulation.

The central finding of this research is that representational space in Via Padova and Via dei Transiti is not an unintended by-product of planning, but an alternative spatial order generated through everyday negotiation. It defies institutional representations not through confrontation, but through adaptive persistence. More broadly, the study reframes public space governance in hyper-diverse contexts as the management of negotiated equilibrium rather than the production of cohesion. It shows that urban publicness stabilises through tacit boundaries and informal infrastructures operating alongside institutional regulation.

Institutional **"Representations of Space"** or regeneration programs prioritize order, decorum, and "aestheticized multiculturalism" as mechanisms for urban repositioning. In contrast, the residents' **"Representational Space"** is produced through "Parallel Coexistence", a mode of navigation where diverse groups share physical proximity but maintain social distance through tacit spatial codes and mutual non-interference. This produces a condition of partial legibility. Planning frameworks encounter difficulty governing practices that remain only partially programmable. Everyday tactics, such as the use of multilingual signage as "semiotic bridges," assert a symbolic ownership that resists the homogenization of the neighbourhood and the effects of the "NoLo" brand.

Policy & Planning Recommendations

To transition from "static" to "relational urbanism," the Municipality of Milan should adopt the following criteria:

1. Designing for "Loose Space":

Future interventions should move away from rigid park enclosures toward "loose" infrastructures (adaptable seating, shaded gathering zones, adaptive curbs, and flexible street edges) that can safely accommodate "Threshold Appropriation" as a legitimate spatial need rather than a violation of decorum.

3. Calibrated Temporal Governance:

Instead of reactive "Red Zone" security and park closures that displace precarity, policy should focus on "natural surveillance" by supporting late-night establishments that act as "safe harbors" for diverse users. Regulation should be accompanied by social policy measures addressing housing precarity, economic vulnerability, and youth engagement.

2. Legitimizing Informal Socio-Spatial Authority:

Planning must expand the definition of "partnership" beyond formal civic associations. By recognizing commercial anchors and local shops as de facto spatial regulators, the city can incorporate existing informal governance structures into formal urban stewardship.

4. Couple Regeneration with Anti-Displacement Mechanisms

Public space improvements, particularly around Loreto, must be structurally linked to binding affordable housing provisions in adjacent blocks. Without this coupling, regeneration accelerates rent escalation and spatial substitution, intensifying the housing pressures already visible in Via dei Transiti.

Final Reflection

The study of Via Padova reveals a recurring tension within contemporary planning frameworks: efforts to include diversity through design and formal participation may inadvertently overlook or destabilize the everyday practices that sustain hyper-diverse life.

Public space in Via Padova and Via dei Transiti is not failing to integrate, nor resisting regeneration. It is operating according to a different logic than the one often assumed by institutional models. Planning frameworks conceive public space as a project programmable, governable, and capable of producing cohesion through design, everyday life reveals it as a condition: adaptive, layered, and continuously negotiated.

Urban planning often relies on an assumption of a "cohesive public" that does not exist in hyper-diverse contexts. Via Padova proves that true urban publicness is not a finished product of design, but a continuously recalibrated equilibrium. For planning to be effective in such contexts, it must learn to inhabit the "gray spaces" between legality and practice, acknowledging that informal survival infrastructures are not "deviant" but constitutive elements of the city.

Glossary

Urban Diversity and Complexity

Super-diversity: A concept describing the complex diversification of migrant populations, including differences in origin, legal status, migration trajectories, labor market position, and socio-economic background. The term emphasizes internal differentiation within migrant groups rather than simple ethnic plurality.

Hyper-diversity: A concept extending the analytical lens of urban difference beyond demographic descriptors to include lifestyles, attitudes, activity patterns, and transnational orientations. The term emphasizes that urban heterogeneity is fluid and intersectional, focusing on the radical internal divergence in cultural and economic practices among individuals even when they share similar backgrounds.

New Locals: In this research, the term refers to long-term international residents who have established deep-rooted community and socio-economic networks within an urban territory.

Negotiating Public Space

Social Infrastructure: The physical places and institutional settings that enable social interaction, such as libraries, parks, schools, and community spaces. Unlike technical infrastructure, social infrastructure shapes relational life and collective capacity.

Loose Space: Urban spaces that allow appropriation, reinterpretation, and unplanned uses beyond formal design intentions. Loose spaces

enable spontaneous, informal, and adaptive activities. technical infrastructure, social infrastructure shapes relational life and collective capacity.

Third Places: Informal gathering spaces distinct from home and work, such as cafés or bars, characterized by accessibility, regular use, and sociability.

Micro-publics: Small-scale arenas of interaction embedded in everyday urban settings where social relations are enacted and maintained.

Parallel Coexistence: A condition in which different social or cultural groups share the same urban space without sustained interaction or overlapping social networks. In this thesis, the term describes spatial proximity without relational integration.

Forms of Encounter and Coexistence

Contact Theory: A theory proposing that intergroup contact can reduce prejudice under specific conditions, including equal status, common goals, cooperation, and institutional support.

Habitual Tolerance: A form of everyday accommodation in multicultural cities characterized by routine civility and pragmatic coexistence rather than deep intercultural engagement.

Weak Ties: Social connections characterized by low emotional intensity and infrequent contact, yet crucial for information exchange and broader social integration. In public space, weak ties may emerge

through repeated casual encounters and contribute to forms of urban cohesion.

Institutional Visions and Everyday Logics

Conflicting Rationalities: The coexistence of multiple, often incompatible logics of spatial organization, such as technocratic planning frameworks and informal survival strategies. The concept frames tensions between institutional models of public space and everyday spatial practices.

Gray Spaces: Areas, populations, or practices positioned between legality and illegality, neither fully included nor fully excluded from formal systems.

Streetscape Audit: An evaluative method used to assess the physical, perceptual, and functional qualities of street environments.

Active Frontage: An urban design principle promoting transparent, permeable, and engaging ground-floor interfaces that encourage pedestrian interaction.

Tactical Urbanism: Low-cost, small-scale, and often temporary spatial interventions intended to test or catalyse long-term urban change.

Commercial and Symbolic Configurations

Hybrid Business Models: Forms of migrant entrepreneurship that combine ethnic resources with broader market integration, operating across cultural and economic networks.

Ethnic Entrepreneurial Clusters: Spatial concentrations of migrant or minority-owned businesses within urban economies.

Linguistic Landscape: The visible display of languages in public space through signage, advertisements, and commercial frontages. Linguistic landscapes reveal power relations, cultural presence, and symbolic claims to space.

Spatialization of Culture: The process through which cultural meanings, identities, and power relations become materialized and organized in space.

Reading Urban Life

Urban Ethnography: A qualitative research methodology based on immersive observation and relational interpretation of everyday urban life. In this thesis, ethnography functions as a mode of translation between lived spatial practices and planning discourse.

Everyday Urbanism: An approach that foregrounds ordinary, informal, and lived practices as central to the production of urban space. The concept informs the ethnographic reading of public space as continuously shaped through daily negotiation rather than solely through formal design.

Thematic Analysis: A systematic yet flexible qualitative method for identifying, analysing, and interpreting patterns (themes) within empirical data.

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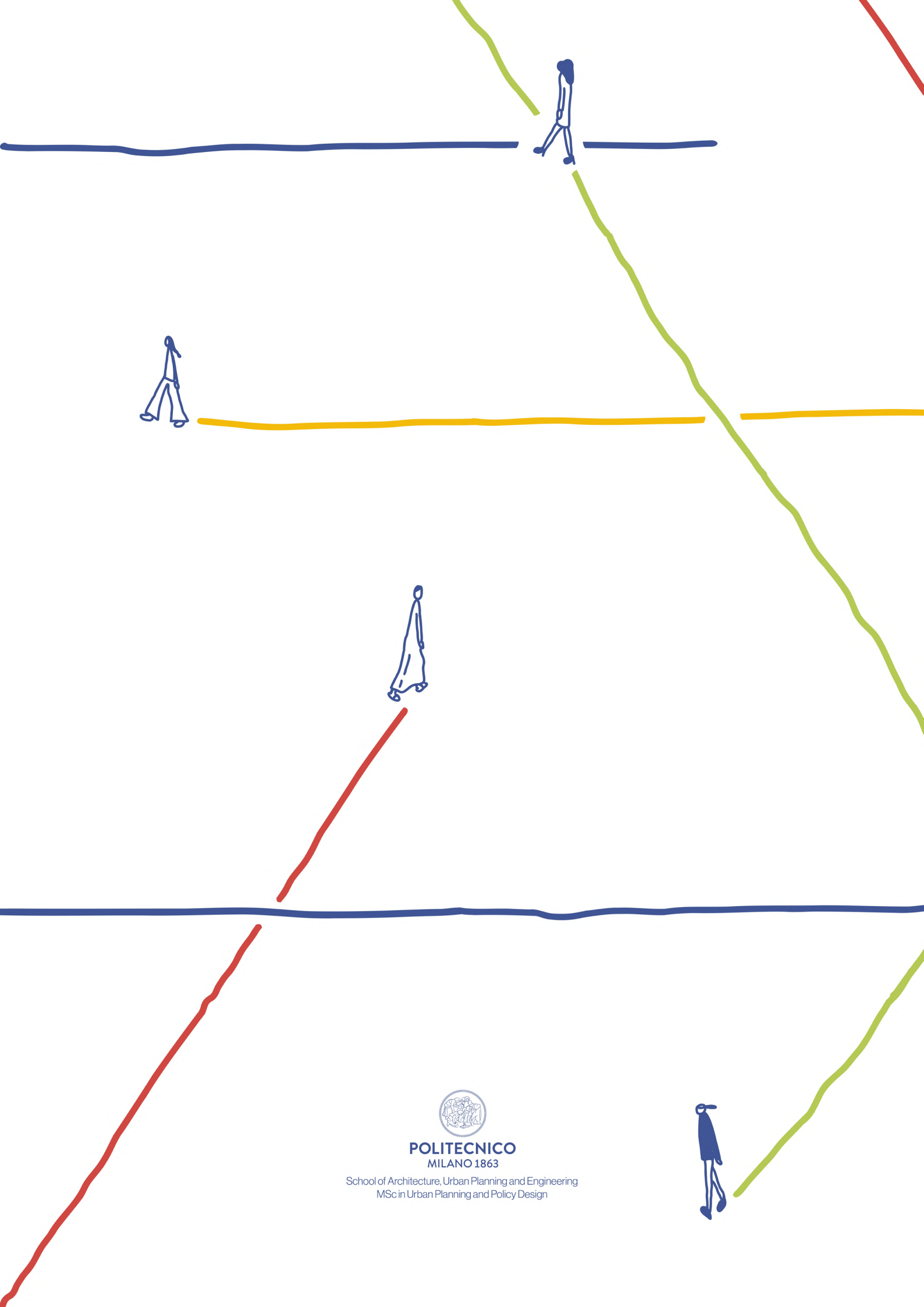
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