

POLITECNICO DI MILANO
SCUOLA DI ARCHITETTURA E SOCIETÁ
MSC IN ARCHITECTURE

SQUATTING AND ITS ROLE IN THE PUBLIC SPACE
RE-QUALIFICATION OF PIAZZA STUPARICH

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ABSTRACT

Squatting as a reaction to the political and economical forces is a movement that entered the Italian scenario in the early '70, when the economy moved from industrial to a services driven model. By the end of the decade occupations started to show traces of the characteristics that identify them today as anarchical and counter-culture temples.

Over the years the subject has been studied and re-visited from perspectives such as sociology, economics and politics being few works analysing its spread and patterns of occupation over the city. Although squatting seems to be a statement against political figures and a struggling for better housing conditions, I believe behind stands a variable related with the distribution of vacant buildings throughout the city, leftover spaces and derelict structures plus a lack of social spaces makes for the perfect formula for squatting to arise.

After a quick review on the history and characteristics of social squatting in Italy I started an ethnographic research by visiting some of the most representative Social Centres in the city and studying where they stand regarding the use and management of public space. Through extensive mapping I analysed the evolution and displacement of occupations in Milan and contrasted it with demographics and land use variables to find patterns explaining the reasons behind the locations to occupy.

Upon analysis and classification of the results, an area over the western edge of the city was chosen to develop a more in-deep study on the associations and networking created between Social Centres and their links with the community. This chapter was conducted through frequent visits, interviews and participant observation. Findings would demonstrate that different from the traditional position adopted by Social Centres, in San Siro, the collaboration between Spazio Micene, Centro Sociale Cantiere and Spazio Mutuo Soccorso is aiming to gradually re-generate the urban fabric and re-appropriate the urban spaces through informal, bottom-up urban planning.

In what I have decided to call guerrilla urban planning, they ventured into an ambitious project of recovering from abandonment Piazza Stuparich, a former park torn down in favour of a city-scale project on public transportation. Under the name Riqualfichiamo Piazza Stuparich, a collective of activists, residents, volunteers and general public is working together on the planning and implementation of strategies to bring the park back to life.

The last part of my work takes on their initiative and refines it to propose a new methodology on design of urban spaces. A process for the development of a collaborative, open-source project, where the role of the architect or planner is secondary and the collective becomes the protagonist. Rather than proposing a design, I aim to set the guidelines and strategies, a framework of implementation tools, design phases and assessment of the results where the outcomes are never fixed and come in a full range of scenarios.

At the very end of this paper, you will find my conclusions and what I have learned from over six very didactic months full of experiences.

Why did I choose to develop this hybrid between theory and research rather than a project that would have exploited my creativity? Because I believe my ability as an architect lies beyond my skills to produce a structure worth of an international competition, but to test how design can be the channel to reinvigorate social structures and foster interactions. I, as an idealist, still believe my architecture one day will make the life of others more enjoyable.

Thank you for getting your hands on this thesis and I hope you find this effort insightful and entertaining.

ABSTRACT (Italiano)

L'occupazione abusiva come reazione alle forze politiche ed economiche è un movimento che è entrato nel panorama italiano agli inizi degli anni '70, quando l'economia si trasferì dalla industria a un modello di servizi. Entro la fine del decennio, le occupazioni iniziarono a mostrare tracce delle caratteristiche che li identificano oggi come templi dei movimenti anarchici e de contro-cultura

Nel corso degli anni l'argomento è stato studiato e rivisitato da prospettive diverse, come la sociologia, economia e politica, essendo pochi i lavori che analizzano lo squatting nella sua diffusione e spostamenti sul territorio urbano. Sebbene le occupazioni sono una reazione contro figure politiche e lotta per migliorare le condizioni abitative, credo che dietro ci sia un fattore legato con la distribuzione delle strutture vuote in città. Gli spazi abbandonati più una mancanza di spazi sociali rappresenta la formula perfetta per le occupazioni a nascere.

Dopo una rapida revisione sulla storia e le caratteristiche di la lotta sociale in Italia ho iniziato una ricerca etnografica, visitando alcuni dei Centri Sociali più noti della città ed a studiare i loro pensieri riguardanti l'uso e la gestione dello spazio pubblico. Attraverso una vasta mappatura ho analizzato l'evoluzione e lo spostamento delle occupazioni a Milano e l'ho confrontato con dati demografici e le variabili di uso del suolo, allo scopo di trovare un modello che spiegasse le motivazioni dietro i luoghi scelti.

Dopo l'analisi e classificazione dei risultati, è stata scelta una zona sul bordo occidentale della città per sviluppare uno studio più profondo sulle associazioni tra Centri Sociali e dei loro legami con la comunità. Tale fase della ricerca è stata condotta attraverso frequenti visite, interviste e osservazione partecipata. I risultati dimostrerebbero che diverso dalla metodologia tradizionale adottata da centri sociali, a San Siro, la collaborazione tra Spazio Micene, Centro Sociale Cantiere e Spazio Mutuo Soccorso cerca di rigenerare gradualmente il tessuto urbano e riappropriarsi degli spazi urbani attraverso una informale urbanistica pensata dal basso.

In quello che ho deciso di chiamare guerrilla urban planning, si avventurano in un ambizioso progetto di recupero dal abbandono di Piazza Stuparich, un ex parco abbattuto a favore di un progetto di miglioramento del percorso delle linee novanta e novantuno dei mezzi pubblici. Sotto il nome Riqualificazione Piazza Stuparich, un collettivo di attivisti, abitanti di quartiere e volontari sta lavorando insieme alla pianificazione e attuazione delle loro strategie per riportare il parco in vita.

L'ultima parte di questo lavoro prende la loro iniziativa e proporre una nuova metodologia sulla progettazione degli spazi urbani. Un progetto collaborativo ed open-source, in cui il ruolo del architetto o pianificatore è secondario dove il collettivo diventa protagonista. Piuttosto che proporre un progetto, mi propongo di impostare le linee guida e le strategie, strumenti di attuazione e valutazione dei risultati in cui gli esiti non sono mai determinati e ci sono disponibili tanti scenari possibili.

Alla fine di questo articolo, troverete le mie conclusioni e quello che ho imparato da oltre sei mesi molto didattici ed arricchenti.

Ma, perché ho scelto di sviluppare questo ibrido tra la teoria e la ricerca, piuttosto che un progetto che avrebbe sfruttato la mia creatività? Perché credo che la mia capacità come architetto sta oltre le mie abilità per produrre una struttura propria di un concorso internazionale, ma per testare come il design può essere il canale di rilanciare le strutture sociali e le interazioni tra la gente. Io, ancora un idealista, credo la mia architettura un giorno renderà la vita degli altri più piacevole.

Grazie per arrivare fino a questo punto e mi spero che troviate questo sforzo interessante e divertente

CONTENTS

- I. Introduction
- II. Scope of the research
- III. Theoretical frame
 - What is squatting? Definition and origins
 - Types of squats
 - Italy, the origin of self-managed Social Centres
 - Characteristics of Social Centres
 - Berlin's case
- IV. Experimental phase
 - Limits on the field research
 - Surveying and mapping squats in Milan
 - Implementation method
 - Mapping
 - Findings
 - Filtering and classification
 - Case studio. Squatting in San Siro
 - Centro Sociale Cantiere
 - Spazio Micene
 - Spazio Mutuo Soccorso
- V. Project phase. Riqualfichiamo Piazza Stuparich
 - Location
 - Definition of the project
 - Time-Line
 - Analysis
 - Strategy
 - Phases
- VI. Conclusions

STRUCTURE AND CALENDAR

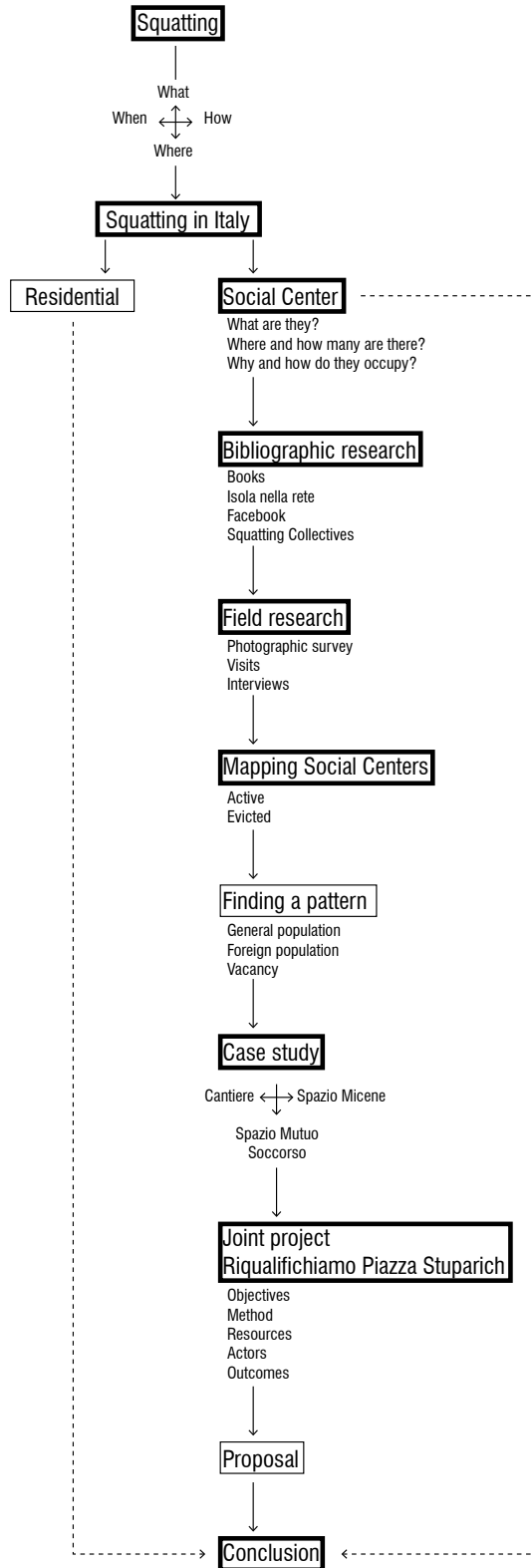
Calendar

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12/2014

02/2015



I. INTRODUCTION

Since its conception, the intention of this work was to study and understand urban squatting. What is it? Why does it arise or where does it come from? How do they operate and how are they organized? Do they take part of the community? How are they using or even modifying the public and private spaces? What can be learned from them? This movement is generally regarded as a taboo for the authorities and society and doesn't even take part on the contemporary architectural debate in Italy.

Here, is not only about the study of the phenomenon and its urban implications as it is for the personal achievement of putting in practice the set of skills acquired during my formation as an architect in the last years in this school. For these reasons I tried taking this dissertation to a greater extent, exploring all the opportunities the subject provided, allowing me to divide it into three main phases.

The theoretical frame, or research part if you will, developed at the beginning of the process, starting more than one year ago, offers a better understanding of what illegal occupation of buildings are. The reasons and methods, the places and evolution, the spaces and the actors, but essentially the achievements of urban squatting through the years.

The field research or experimental phase, over the course of six months approximately, where I visited and recorded the behaviours and patterns of few social centres, their visual identity, their position regarding institutions, integration with the community and use of the space, be the occupied building, the public spaces around or the city itself.

Finally an implementation or project phase is included. A collaborative project between social centres and the quarter to re-appropriate the urban space of Piazza Stuparich. Here, rather than give a simple design proposal, I bet for defining a methodology of an alternative urban design challenging the traditional and institutional approach. The project of Piazza Stuparich responds to the collective call rather than particular design decisions.

As you could perceive, the present work uses the "research" concept not only as a collection of bibliographic references. Instead, exploits the possibilities we have as architects to develop strategies through a method. In this particular case, deeply involved and feeding from the social context in which is inserted.

Let this thesis be a base for further research on these urban phenomena and what we can learn from their customs. Critiques and contributions are not only welcomed but encouraged.

II. SCOPE OF THE RESEARCH

To understand the nature of urban squatting and the necessary conditions to arise. The origins and ideologies behind the movement in Italy. The study focuses on the spatial aspects of the phenomenon. The relationship between the occupants and the building and how they extend to the public realm.

Generate an squatting database of the city, including current and past occupations, only those devoted to carry out social activities. Complemented by mapping and recording their spread throughout the territory of Milano.

Value and identify if Social Centres interact or make use of public space. What is the difference between their approach and the institutional one regarding decisions on urban planning and urban development.

Define and put in practice a methodology of alternative urban planning and collaborative design based upon personal experiences with Social Centres.

Here there is no intention to answer the question whether squatting is fair or not. My objective is to value if there is something that we as architects and planners can learn from self-managed and occupied spaces in regard of their use and integration on the public realm.

III. THEORETICAL FRAME

WHAT IS SQUATTING? DEFINITION AND ORIGINS

In plain terms, squatting (occupazione abusiva) is the use of a building without the consent of the owner. Generally intended as a housing alternative or as part of a broader social or political agenda. Is a common practice in Europe with exemplary cases in Germany, the Netherlands or France, with a long squatting tradition and a flexible legal framework that allows occupation under certain criteria, playing a key role on the identity of districts and important cities.

The controversy of the movement lies on the fact that occupations are illegal since they violate the Constitutional right of private property and ownership. Struggling at the same time for housing rights for the needy and impoverished. They fight to provide respectable places to live and coexist with the community.

Occupations are product of constant changes in economical models happening since the end of World War II, where the inner-city spaces in the developed, industrialized countries been gradually abandoned. The change from industrialization in the 50s and 60s to the process of post-modernization in the 70s and 80s, real estate speculation, failed planning projects, and even withdrawal of military units from numerous sites contributed as a form of vacancy.

Vacancy is the key condition for such phenomenon to arise. Every squat has its starting point in an empty building or disused sites that have been empty for, a usually long period of time. Former industrial areas, waterfronts, railway stations, unused commercial parks, empty residential neighbourhoods and public institutions constitute functionless zones that remain years and often decades in state of transition between their original use and new ones. Owners deliberately allow structures to become derelict with the expectation that they would be able to demolish and re-build or modernize them.

It is also product of the need for a political or counter-cultural statement against institutions or on favour of the needs of the community. The movement consists of elements that usually remain low-profile but can suddenly acquire importance depending on changes on the economical and political context. The biggest achievements of the squatting movement so far is they have managed to put the shortage of affordable housing in the political agenda.

Squatting can be seen both as a mean to achieve something or as an end, since is a movement created by the sum of different ideologies and each participant has their own reasons to take part on it. It is a mean to achieve social, political and economical independence from institutions and traditional systems, and is a goal for those who look for better spaces to live and create a community.

As an architect, I like to see it as an alternate vision for the development and management of the city beyond the functionalistic model adopted by institutions.

TYPES OF SQUATS

Squatting is not restrictive to any specific social group, even when it seems to be more appealing to certain sectors because of the appeal of doing something that lies on the edge of the law. There is not age, gender, sexual orientation, religion or any other preference that excludes anyone from being an active member or visitor of squats. There is a need and a desire to occupy. That renders the classification of squatting susceptible of different outputs:

In an exhaustive study Dutch sociologist Hans Pruijt defines five configurations of urban squatting according to their origin, goals and ideologies:

- Deprivation-based squatting
- Squatting as an alternative housing strategy
- Entrepreneurial squatting
- Conservational squatting
- Political squatting

For the sake of this studio, and the characteristics of occupations in Italy, I will refer to the typical distinction of urban squatting: As a way of meeting housing need and as a way of satisfying a counter-cultural or a political expression.

ITALY, THE ORIGINS OF SELF-MANAGED SOCIAL CENTRES

While in countries like Netherlands, Germany or France the role of social squats ranges from workshops for artists, galleries, discotheques, theatres, and in general spaces to carry out all types of cultural activities, its Italian counterpart differs from them as it originated with a political agenda.

The strategy of set up self-managed social centres was adopted by extreme left-wing groups, and revolutionized the political map with a series of social struggles aiming to gain control of existing spaces and conceive new ones.

One of the main achievements on the development and struggle of social centres is they have played a role in renovating private and public properties and with this they helped to focus attention on land use and housing allocation issues and re-appropriating social space.

On its origins in the early 70s the social centre was the legacy of the previous "casa del popolo" (community centres set up and managed by municipal authorities). During its origins, was an encounter space for political activity and the expression of a distinct social category.

With an Italy moving from an industrial economy towards economical activities based on finances, fashion and services, a second generation of social centres born. Starting in 1975 in Milan with Leoncavallo and Conchetta in 1976, they were pioneers in the movement. They were a revolution, the expression of an emerging class made of the young looking for self realization and political independence, they were laboratories of free thinking and protest. Occupations started responding two different needs: providing for a safe place to live in community and the claim of the anarchical groups for a base where to continue their activism from.

Today we can reliably consider a Social Centre an autonomous space whose objective is to create an open point of confrontation and encounter for those who are identified with their goals. They work on social and political context in a local scale.



Leoncavallo
Source: Corriere di Milano



COX 18
Source: Storia di un'autogestione

CHARACTERISTICS

Social centres propose an alternative way of use of the urban space. They promote cultural and social activities beyond the traditional and institutional limits, they represent an open place to talk about politics, drugs, social needs, etc. However, they represent also a problem for authorities and public actors.

BREAKING THE LAW. They are illegal because squatting violates the constitutional right of the private property. On the other hand, these communities provide spaces for social and cultural encounters that have been put at the bottom of the political agenda, and fight for the fundamental right of proper housing conditions for impoverished and vulnerable people. The social centre becomes a public problem of struggling between those two issues.

INCLUSIVE. The popular opinion is they are places that promote illegal activities and appealing to the marginalized, poor or immigrant. The reality is because of the broad range of initiatives they promote is hard to define a class origin of the participants. The mix varies in terms of age, gender, educational level and social class. In 1996 a studio reported that 36.1% of visitors of social centres in Milan had at least few years of university while 20.1% no more than the compulsory secondary education.

Important decisions for their management is are usually taken in meetings open to the public.

RECYCLERS. At urban level, their tactics often lead to the preservation of the cityscape or landscape. Preventing the transformation and pushing for the development and regeneration of the territory in an alternative direction.

They self-produce and self-manage social, political and cultural events and mainly rely on funds collected by those activities.

NETWORKING. They have formed a network based on similar ideologies. They usually have the support of sympathizers willing to collaborate when it comes to organize special events and against eviction threats. Each social centres can be described as the central node of a network of activists, sympathizers and occasional visitors where each one plays a role on defining a collective identity.

A deep gap separates social centres that are willing to accept dialogue with institutions from those who oppose such contact as part of their principles.

Some of the activities and services provided by social centres in Milan are:

Concerts featuring alternative bands an genres that find their opportunities in the Punk, Hip-Hop movement.

Funding dinners

Lectures and book presentations

Open meetings to discuss the management of the collective

Exhibitions

Manifestations

Squatting and legal advise

Language courses

Medical assistance

Farmers and used goods market

Gym and sport activities

Bike repair workshop

Rehearsal and sound room

Bar

Common or affordable kitchen

Bookshop, library and study rooms



Distribution of Social Centers 1985-2003
Source: Pierpaolo Mudu

BERLIN'S CASE

In 1979, after exhausting the institutional resources, a collective called S036 began organizing the so called “rehab squats”, adopting the practice of occupying houses and immediately starting their restructuring. With this, they achieved to make evident the state of decay and abandonment of the apartments as well as creating social acceptance within the community.

In the Kreuzberg district occupied an empty fire station to prevent its demolition and later a group of houses waiting to be razed. They wanted to preserve the social structures formed in the neighbourhood as well as the still usable housing stock. The occupations led to an eventual renovation of the building and prepare the way for a more sensitive approach on urban renewal taking in consideration the needs of the tenants.

They managed to preserve the social value of the district in the face of gentrification (low-income housing that is to be replaced for more profitable condominiums). As a movement aiming to preserve the cityscape is as much about looking for a common benefit as it is for getting in the way of the planned infrastructure.

In a second period of squatting, at the end of the 80s, in a city that underwent years of reconstruction. The housing problem was addressed by building residential blocks on the periphery, leaving the inner-city to devalue, and out of the range of town planning programs, started showing signs of structural decay. The WYDOX collective, a group focused in creating spaces helping other squatters to achieve self-realization started joining forces with individual squats. And leaving the housing strategy as a consequence in the equation, they focused on preventing the planned demolitions of old housing blocks and renovating them. After legalization, many of those former squats continued with structural improvements following their original strategy, this time often in the context of development programmes.

New policies of urban renewal came out of this criticism made by squats on redevelopment of space. With three main considerations for future plans: on construction, which meant preserving the building stock and modernizing one step at a time; a social caution, which involved preserving the composition of the social structures and allowing tenants in the redevelopment areas to stay in their houses; and finally a planning policy comprising involvement and participation of residents in renewal activities

The squats of the early 1980s played an important role on the implementation of a cautious urban renewal. They were the catalysts for a new model of urban renewal. The movement of “rehab squats” proved the demolition approach wrong, the squatted houses not only triggered a new policy of urban renewal, they were also a social laboratory where new instruments were tried and proposed.



Squatters in Berlin-Kreuzberg (1981)
Source: kreuzberged.com

IV. EXPERIMENTAL PHASE

LIMITS ON THE FIELD RESEARCH

This thesis project has been divided on a theoretical part, which has been presented on the previous pages, seeking to summarize and make you aware of the definition, evolution and conditions on which squatting arises.

The main part of this study, however, is comprised by a field research, geographically limited to the administrative limits of Milan. Neglecting squats located in the vicinity or the towns that form the metropolitan area.

Squatting is a well-studied urban movement, with multiple variables that makes it suitable for analyse from different perspectives (*political, sociological, economical, etc.*)

With that on mind, the research was focused on squats devoted to carry out social activities, and ultimately its involvement on the development and regeneration of the neighbourhood.

Is important to remark that my aim is no other than address the phenomenon from the perspective of the use of the space. Referring to the building itself (*the layout, functions, etc.*) and how they extend to the public realm (*such as squares, avenues, parks, etc.*). Even when the political preferences and ideologies play an important role on how the social centre is created and organized and how they connect with the neighbourhood, that is of little or no concern for this work.



SURVEYING AND MAPPING SQUATS IN MILAN

IMPLEMENTATION METHOD

During the last six months, I committed to the task of identify, map and visit the social centres in the city, in order to contrast their differences and be able to organize them and eventually classify them.

With a constant search on the internet, mainly on websites such as <http://milanoimovimento.com>, <http://milano.repubblica.it>, <http://it.squat.net> and <http://ecn.org>, also known as *Isola nella rete*, the website devoted to inform and connect the active members of the squatting and self-management movement.

A constant participation on social networks such as Facebook and Twitter was also necessary, because of the nature and target users of social centres, they prefer alternative methods of communication, where they can freely express their thoughts and organize and promote their multiple events.

This online research was complemented with a survey around social centres, through observation, and participation.

In two social centres I was able to conduct interviews, in order to understand the organization of the collectives and the relationship between squatters, humanitarian, non-governmental organizations, associations, housing developers, authorities and specially the neighbourhoods.

While I took part in several of their activities, with others squats I was limited to recognize the site: the conditions of the neighbourhood and the characteristics of the building.



Source: Centri Sociali: Geografie del desiderio (Aaster et al, 1996)

Map 1. Centri Sociali (1975-1978)

- 1 Leoncavallo
- 2 Colletivo Autonomo Ticinese
- 3 Correggio 18
- 4 CSOA Marta
- 5 Via Conchetta 18 & CSOA Anarchico
- 6 Via Argelati 38
- 7 Via Torricelli e CSOA Anarchico
- 8 CSOA Sempione
- 9 La fornace
- 10 CSOA Quartiere Isola
- 11 Via Lessona - Quarto Oggiaro
- 12 Fabbrikone Via Tortona
- 13 Casa Occupata e Colletivo Via dei Transiti
- 14 Casa Occupata Corso Garibaldi 89



Source: Centri Sociali: Geografie del desiderio (Aaster et al, 1996)

Map 2. Centri Sociali (Anni novanta)

- | | |
|----------------------------------|--|
| 1 CSOA COX 18 | 13 CSOA Torkiera |
| 2 Acquario | 14 Transiti (With Ambulatorio Autogestito) |
| 3 Adrenaline | 15 CSOA Micene |
| 4 Squott | 16 Villa Amantea |
| 5 Laboratorio Anarchico | 17 CSOA Garibaldi |
| 6 Cascina Vaiano Valle | 18 Centro Anarchico di Via Torricelli |
| 7 Leoncavallo (Via Macinelli) | 19 Piazza Aspromonte |
| 8 Leoncavallo (Via Salomone) | 20 Panetteria Occupata |
| 9 Leoncavallo (Via Watteau) | 21 CSA del Gratosoglio |
| 10 Pergola Tribe | 22 Associazione Golgoonoza |
| 11 San Antonio Rock Squot | 23 CSA Vittoria |
| 12 CSOA de Gallaratese. Kantiere | 24 Ponte della Ghisolfia |



Source: Personal survey

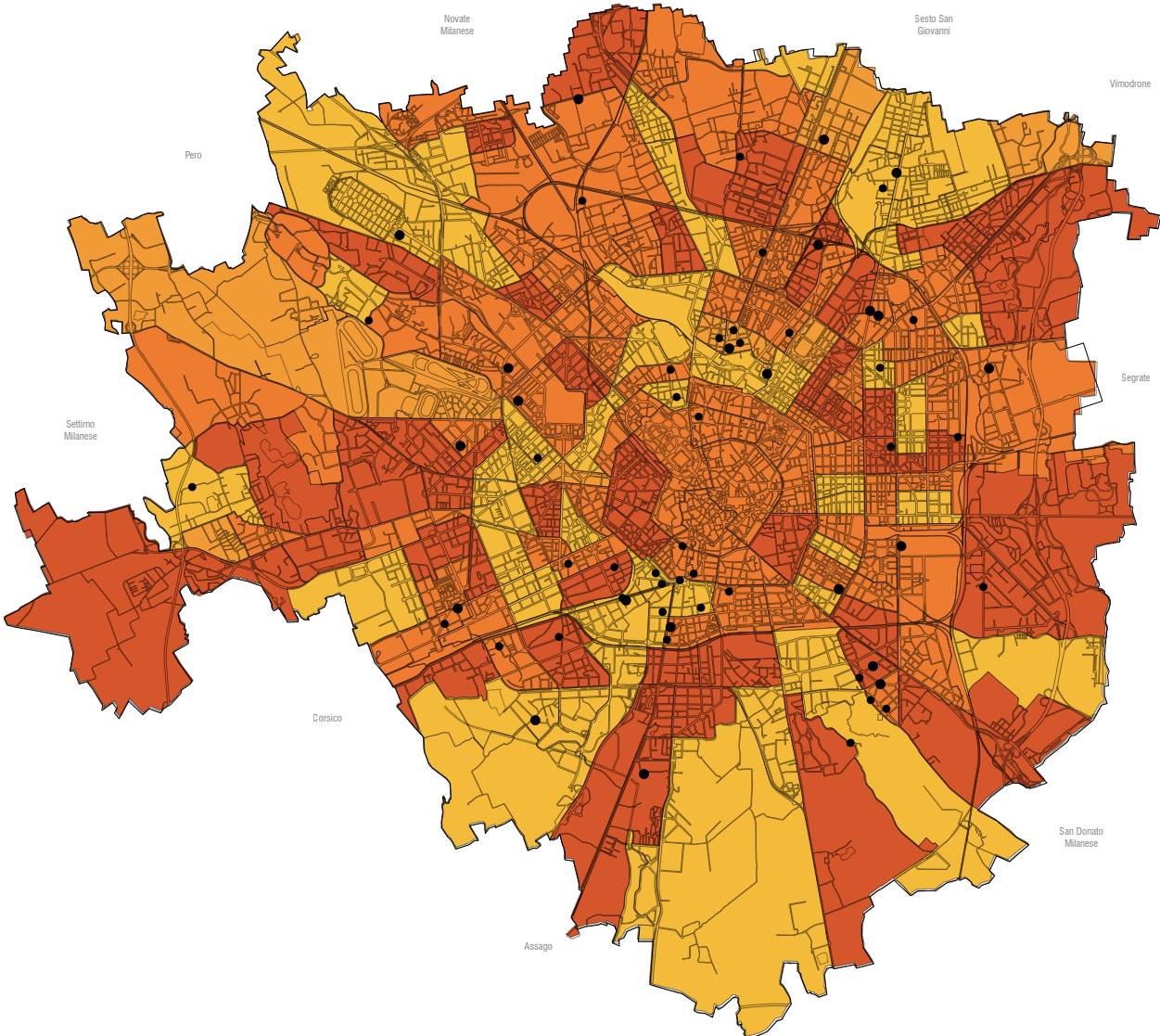
Map 3. Active Social Centres

- | | | | |
|----|-----------------------|----|------------------------------|
| 1 | Leoncavallo | 13 | Lambretta |
| 2 | COX 18 | 14 | Laboratorio Piano Terra |
| 3 | COA T28 | 15 | MACAO |
| 4 | Ambulatorio Popolare | 16 | CSA Vittoria |
| 5 | Panetteria Occupata | 17 | Malfattori |
| 6 | Ponte della Ghisolfa | 18 | Base di Soliedaretá Popolare |
| 7 | Cascina Torkiera | 19 | Rosa Nera |
| 8 | Spazio Micene | 20 | ZAM 4.0 |
| 9 | Cantiere | 21 | Barrio's |
| 10 | Spazio Mutuo Soccorso | 22 | Arci Corvetto |
| 11 | Villa Vegan Squat | | |
| 12 | Casa Loca | | |



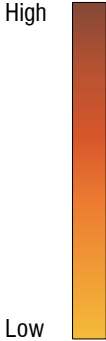
Map 4. Evicted Social Centres

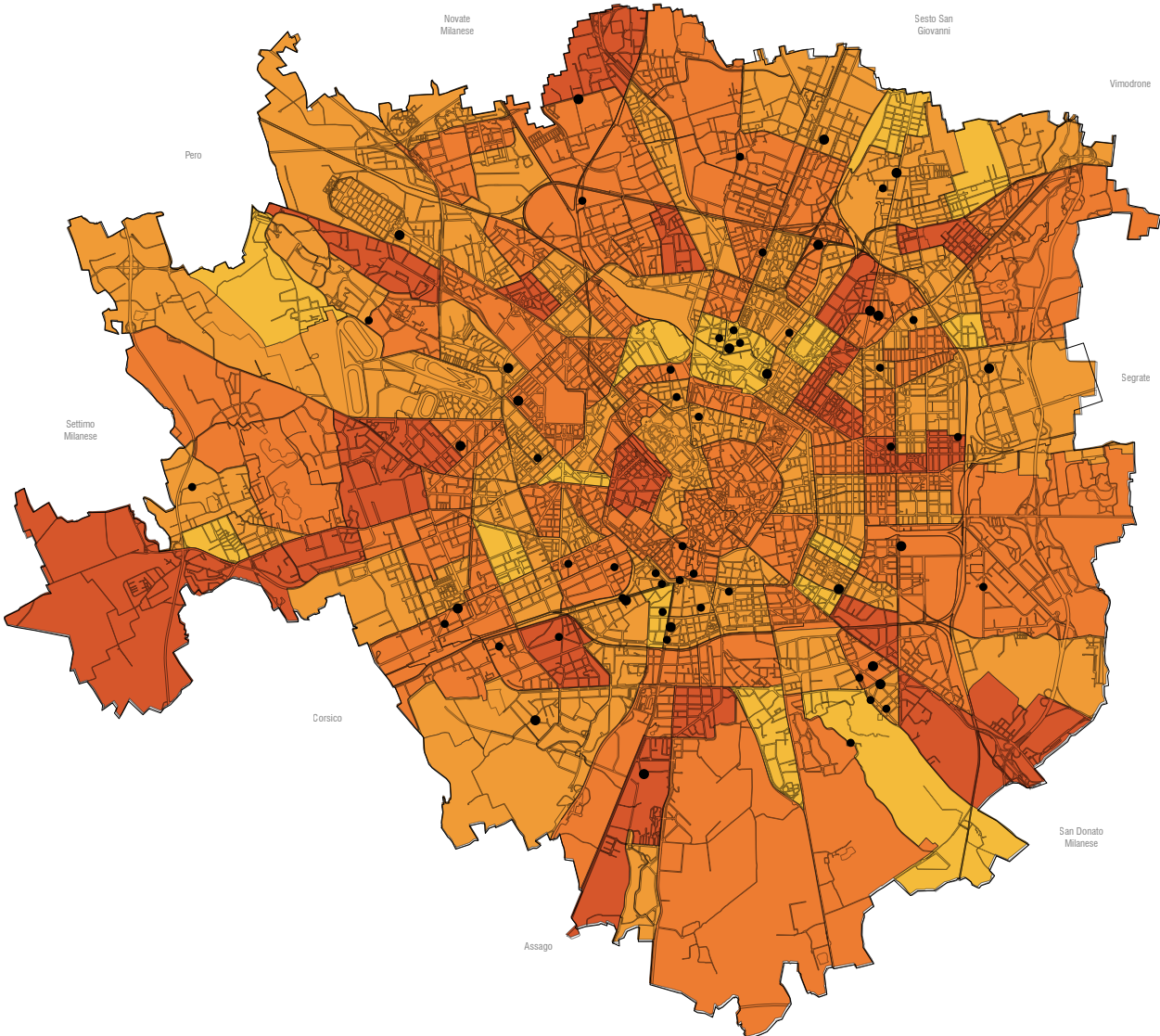
- | | |
|--|---|
| 1 Leoncavallo (Via Macinelli) | 20 Shesquat (Via Luigi Bianchi D'Espinosa) |
| 2 Leoncavallo (Via Salomone) | 21 Malamanera (Via Bovisasca 65) |
| 3 ZAM (Via Olgiati 12) | 22 Deposito Bulk (Via Niccolini 36) |
| 4 ZAM (Via Santacroce 19) | 23 La Cueva (Via Vigevano 2) |
| 5 ZAM (Piazza Lucrezio Caro) | 24 Adrenaline (Viale Gorizia 28) |
| 6 Latteria Occupata (Via Watt 6) | 25 Laboratorio Anarchico (Via de Amicis 2) |
| 7 Lato B (Piazza XXIV Maggio) | 26 Cascina Vaiano Valle |
| 8 Torre Galfa | 27 Kantiere (Via Omodeo 20) |
| 9 Spazzali (Via Amantea) | 28 SQUOTT (Viale Bligny 22) |
| 10 Rosa Nera (Via Ravenna 40) | 29 Mandragora (Via Lippi 45) |
| 11 Corvaccio (Via Ravenna 30) | 30 Golgonooza (Via Riva di Trento) |
| 12 Pizzeria del Popolo (Via Cola di Rienzo 48) | 31 Lambretta (Via Apollodoro) |
| 13 CSA Torricelli (Via Torricelli 19) | 32 Blackout (Via Valvassori Peroni 10) |
| 14 Metropolix (Viale Zara 129) | 33 ORSO (Via Gola 16) |
| 15 V33 (Via Volturmo 33) | 34 Lab Zero (Ripa di Porta Ticinese 83) |
| 16 Pergola Tribe (Via della Pergola 5) | 35 Bottigliera Occupata (Via Savona 18) |
| 17 Rock Squat (Via Garigliano 10) | 36 Spazio Libero Tortuga (Via Erodoto 16) |
| 18 CSOA Garibaldi (Corso Garibaldi 89) | 37 Base di Soliedaretà Popolare (Via Segneri) |
| 19 Stamperia Occupata (Via Giannone 8) | 38 Centro Sociale Virus (Via Correggio 18) |



Source: SICe

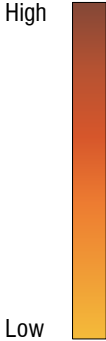
Map 5. Population by Functional Area 1991

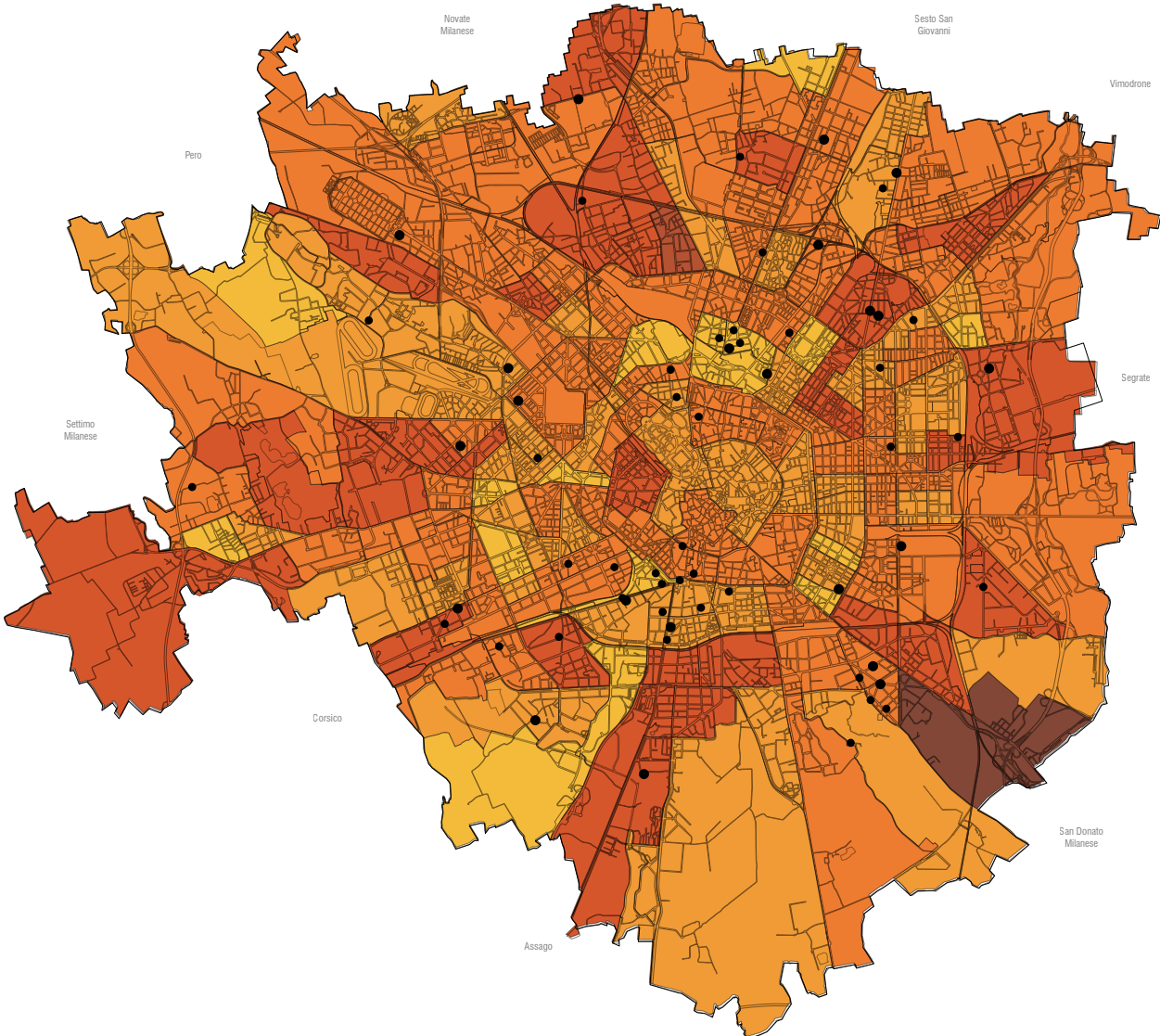




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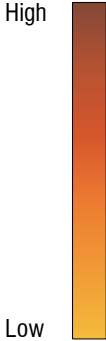
Map 6. Population by Functional Area 2001

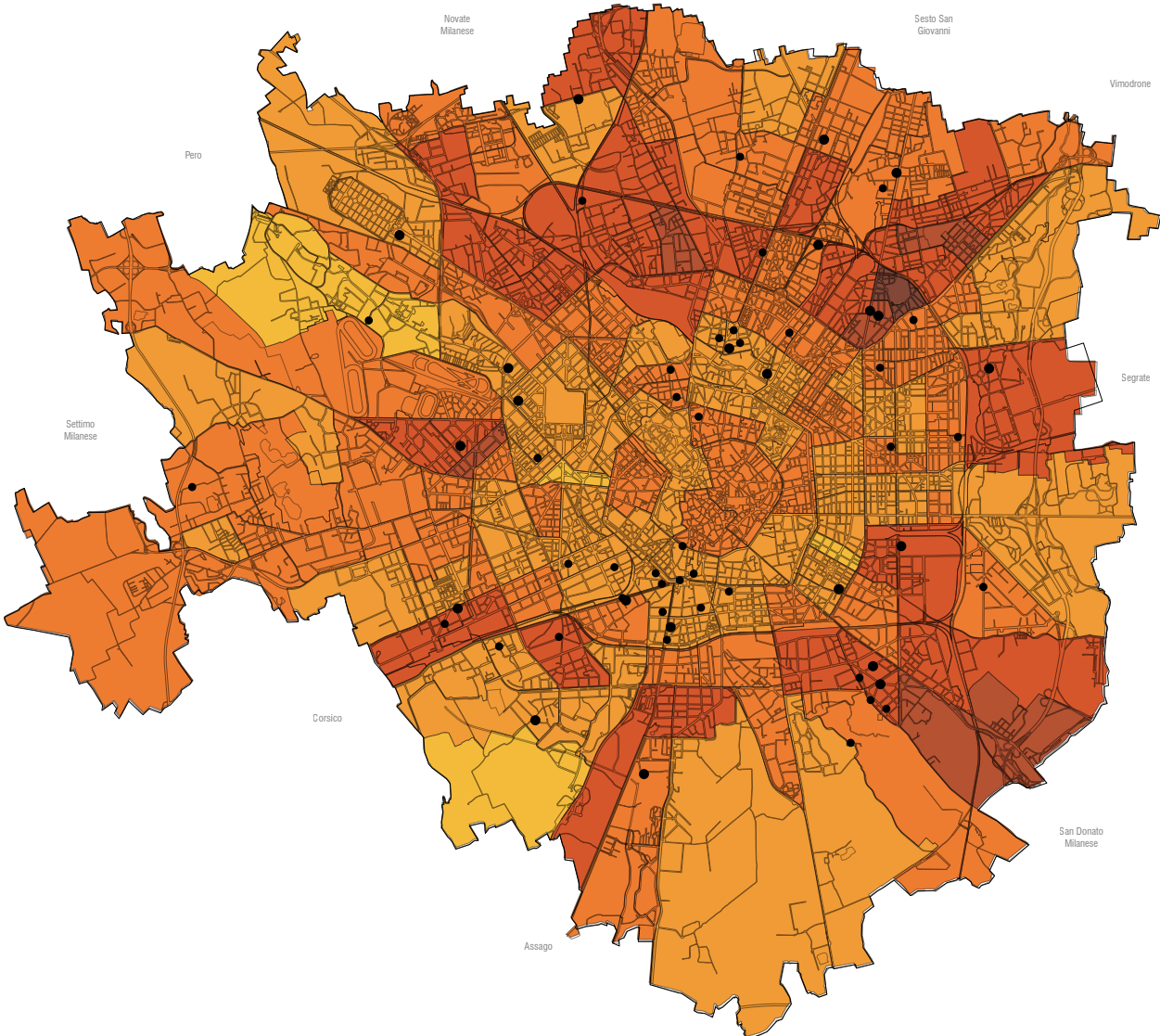




Source: SICE

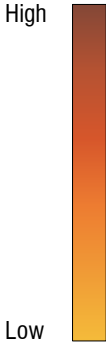
Map 7. Population by Functional Area 2013





Source: SICE

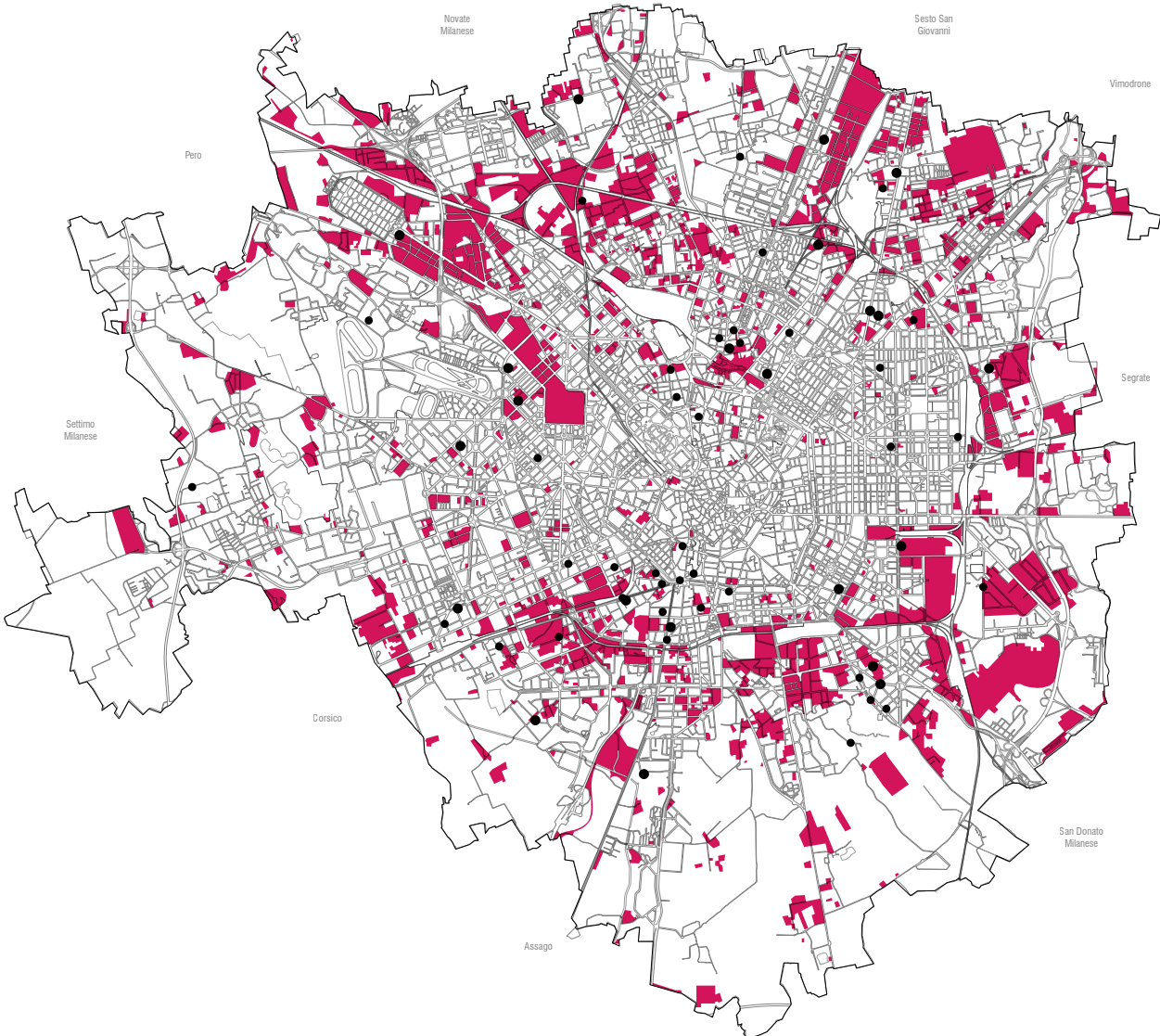
Map 8. Foreign population 2013





Source: Comune di Milano

Map 9. Monitoraggio ricognitivo degli edifici e delle aree in stato di degrado e inutilizzo. Updated 08/01/2015



Source: urbanobservatory.org

Map 10. Industrial land use

FINDINGS

In a study from 1996 conducted by consorzio Aaster in collaboration with Centro Sociale Conchetta, Leoncavallo and Primo Moroni, published as part of the book "Centri Sociali: Geografia del desiderio" was possible to find the first traces of the big picture of social centres and other social movements in Milan since their origins.

In a chapter titled "Un certo uso dello spazio urbano" through several maps of the city presents the location and evolution of social occupations.

They make it clear: rather than an exhaustive study, they see it as a supporting tool of how their displacement in the urban tissue intersects with a new approach of doing politics and the various and new forms of organization and be visible.

Map 1. Centri sociali (1975-1978) Is the first record of the location of social centres in Milan. Most of them inserted in the densest productive areas of the territory and almost all the cases with occupations of dismissed industrial structures inside popular districts. On this first map we find Leoncavallo opened originally in 1975; Fabbrikone, La Fornace from 1977; CSA Sempione from 1978, to mention a few. While some others refer to the occupation of complete buildings, featuring a mix of housing and social spaces, such as Conchetta and Torricelli from 1976 and the occupied palace in Via dei Transiti.

Even from its origins, the Social Centre proposes an original use of the territory, allowing the creation of networks. Diverse locations are indicative of diverse political preferences, alliances and initiatives. At the end of the 70s the North-Eastern triangle of the city, with Leoncavallo as pioneer, was oriented on favour the movement of centralità operaia, while the Southern area developed sympathy for the counter-culture and autonomia operaia diffusa movements.

Map 2. Centri Sociali (Anni novanta) shows Twenty-four squats, with Eighteen of them located in the North-East and South-East quadrants of the city, while the remaining, found in the North-West, were the last to appear. An explanation for this tendency can be found in the industrial history of Milan, with the greatest intensity of industrial settlements at the East of the city. On the other hand, the North-West is formed mainly by vast agglomerations of popular housing.

One of the main differences between the mono-class districts, either composed only by managers, workers, etc. (North-West of Milan) and those with a mix composition (North-East and South-East) is that while the first constitute a define style of life and low flexibility, the latter favour the generation of social entities and have a broader perception for opportunities.

The social and urban systems of the Eastern areas of Milan have historically represented an exemplary mixture of industrial, services and residential structures that continually alternated between social stratum.

Map 3. Active Social Centres is fruit of 6 months constantly mapping, updating, photo-recording most social centres being this the main outcome of my ethnographic research and the task was to find a spatial pattern explaining the location of squats. Why did they choose those areas of the city? Which was the criteria?

If there is a hint we can get at first sight is that compared with Map 2, social centres in the 90s, they are being displaced from the inner rings of the city towards the periphery. Besides that I perceive an even distribution in the whole territory of Milan.

As fore-mentioned, Social Centres greatly vary in scope and ideologies. Over the course of the last years, and even during the development of this study, several new spaces have been born, being evicted or re-occupied. Lambretta in Isola district (Formerly in Piazza Ferravilla) or ZAM in Abbiategrasso (Evicted three times from different places in the last year) see in squatting the opportunity be in continuous activism. Their claim is the recognition of social space through occupation. In 2013 in San Siro area, a building facing Piazza Stuparich was occupied giving birth to Spazio Mutuo Soccorso. Unlike the previous examples, SMS was thought to create links and associations responding to the social needs of the local context.

FINDINGS

Without a clear understanding of the factors determining the reasons for Social Centres to locate and arise on their current positions, I generated *Map 4. Evicted Social Centres* containing Thirty-eight former squats. When confronted with the active Social Centres, counting a total of Sixty, I obtained two important conclusions.

The first is we can actually perceive clusters of squats, at least at a geographical level. I individuated two important groups: On the Centre-North the cluster Isola/Garibaldi, with former occupations such as V33 (Via Volturno), Pergola Tribe (Via della Pergola), San Antonio Rock Squat (Via Garigliano), CSOA Garibaldi (Corso Garibaldi) among others.

On the Centre-South we see the Navigli cluster, with referents such as COX 18 (Via Conchetta), ZAM (Three previous evictions), La Cueva (Via Vigevano), Adrenaline (Viale Gorizia) to mention but a few. Navigli has been historically characterized by a mixture of artisans, popular classes, immigrants rendering the area a boundary zone between centre and periphery and between social centres.

My second thought is that the displacement and eviction of many squats in Porta Genova/Navigli area as well as Garibaldi/Isola is product of a less permissive legal framework but specially to a process of gentrification on such districts.

Still on this process of understanding how squatting has taken over the city. I used three additional variables to contrast with both active and evicted occupations. Is first compared with the evolution of the population in the last 25 years: general population in 1991, 2001 and 2013 as well as the last record of foreign population from 2013 (*Maps 5, 6, 7 and 8*). This variable was using regarding the stereotype and common opinion that Social Centres are places for the most vulnerable social sectors and for the immigrant.

Even though we might find relationship between the location of some Social Centres and the densest foreigner-populated area in Via Padova and Corvetto is not an indicator for the phenomenon. What I did find was that the population is leaving the historical centre and moving towards the outer rings of the city.

As a second variable, supported by a database provided by the site of Comune di Milano in abandoned and derelict buildings and spaces. *Map 9* was created to expose the presence of empty structures throughout the entire city. Let us remember that vacancy is the main detonator for squatting. Both those vacant spaces and the majority of Social Centres over the years have shown direct relation with former industrial areas as shown in *Map 10*.

This allows us to close the circle from what theory says on the rising of social squatting and our experimentation: During the developing of many European cities, the changing from one economical model to another has left empty and under-used spaces in the inner-city. It happens in Milan in the 70s-80s when it moved from an industrial driven economy to a model based on services. Leaving us with countless disused and derelict industrial zones all over the city and countless workshops at this school for their regeneration.

FILTERING AND CLASSIFICATION

	Bar	Cinema/Theatre	Concert	Dinner	Exhibition/Presentation	Farmers market	Graphic arts lab	Gym/Sports	Housing	Lecture/Workshop	Legal assistance	Library/Study room	Medical assistance	Children area	Rehearsal room	Used goods market
Centro Sociale Cantiere ●	●		●	●	●				●	●	●					
Spazio Mutuo Socorso ●	●	●			●	●	●	●	●	●		●	●	●	●	●
Spazio Micene ●					●					●	●					
CSA Vittoria ●		●	●	●	●					●						
Leoncavallo SPA ●	●	●	●		●		●		●	●	●	●			●	
COA T28 ●			●	●	●				●	●	●				●	
Ambulatorio Popolare ●				●	●						●		●			
MACAO ●		●	●	●	●		●			●		●				
Cascina Torchiera ●		●	●	●	●	●				●						
Lambretta ●	●		●	●	●					●						
ZAM ●		●	●	●	●			●		●		●			●	
Casa Loca ●		●	●	●	●				●			●				
COX 18 ●	●		●	●	●		●	●		●	●	●		●		●
Malfattori ●			●	●	●											
Villa Vegan Squat ●			●	●	●	●			●							●
Panetteria Occupata ●		●	●	●	●											
Laboratorio Piano Terra ●		●	●	●	●			●		●		●				
Ponte della Ghisolfia ●			●	●	●			●								
Soliedareta Popolare ●			●	●	●			●		●						●
Rosa Nera ●				●	●							●				

Table 1. Activities

Source: Personal survey

Table 1 shows the range of activities carried on by each Social Centre from the survey. Excluding activism and open meeting (adopted by principle by all of them) They offer to their visitors free venues such as concerts, exhibitions, cinema and theatre plays or legal assistance, as well as profitable activities (generally with funding purposes) such as dinners, markets, bar.

They were classified going from more activist to more cultural. Fitting in the activist group places such as COA T28 or Spazio Micene, in constant support to vulnerable social groups and other squatters. The green group, shows a balance between politically oriented and socio-cultural services provided such as lectures, concerts, rehearsal rooms. Examples are Lambretta, Cantiere and ZAM. Finally the blue zone groups spaces that favour a broad range of social and cultural activities, usually enjoying a long tradition and/or a solid acceptance from the community, occupations such as Leoncavallo and MACAO.

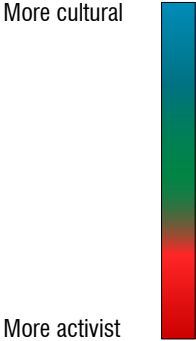
The resulting *Map 11* also gave me the first clue on which direction look at for the next phase of the research.

FILTERING AND CLASSIFICATION



Source: Personal survey

Map 11. Classification by activities



THE SAN SIRO SYSTEM



THE SAN SIRO SYSTEM

Once occupations were classified by activities, it was moment to push my research forward by getting to know better some examples of social squatting, learn how they work and if they do, how they create associations with other squats.

My last map pointed me towards the west of the city, where three different typologies work over a relatively small area. This region of the city, however, does not show a particular high density of industrial structures. Actually rates among the lowest of the whole survey. So here we are not in the presence of a case such as squats in Navigli area where the vicinity comes more from the vacancy in the area rather than a network of Social Centres existing together. I found the cases over San Siro being had a network of collaborations, most important they seem to work in a way to complement each other.

Beginning at the bottom of the Map, Spazio Micene since 2003, occupies a small structure in Via Privata Micene, right on the middle of a neighbourhood with a great mixture of popular housing and social classes. Micene's mission is more of a platform for the residents to express their concerns. Housing the Comitato Abitanti di San Siro is one of the few squats that welcomes contact and participation with institutions.

The committee provides legal assistance and squatting advice for vulnerable families and organizes encounters and lectures to keep residents updated on current policies and programs on popular housing stock and city planning.



Comitato Abitanti di San Siro. Elementary School at Via Paravia

Going north, in Via Monterosa, in a former cabaret left abandoned for over sixteen years, Centro Sociale Cantiere seems to host the headquarters of the squatting movement in the district. Occupied in 2001 by a group of youngsters, Cantiere keeps reinventing itself as a counter-cultural and activism laboratory. Nowadays is the house of several students' collectives and the well established Libreria Don Durito, a bookshop running for ten years so far.

Is an easy to get it and get around space where visitors are welcomed to the multiple activities such as free concerts and weekly dinners, exhibitions and lectures take place often in collaboration with intellectuals, artists and other social groups.



Centro Sociale Cantiere

THE SAN SIRO SYSTEM

The youngest of the system, Spazio Mutuo Soccorso in Piazza Stuparich, is a structure occupied in 2013 and restructured from the ground in a collaboration between Comitato Abitanti di San Siro and Cantiere giving origin to one of the most ambitious projects of occupation in Milan. Extending over three multi-storey palaces on a plot over three-thousand square metres (3500 m²) liven up with a mix of housing and cultural venues.

SMS, as called, has as a goal to create a community rather than just provide housing. During a chat with one occupant I was told they make what is necessary to behave properly and fit into the neighbourhood by not disturbing others and working together to make SMS a respectable place. Taking drugs and getting drunk is not allowed within the premises and they have already expelled few occupants because of their inappropriate behaviour. With a clean and organized image as their business card, they have never been threatened with eviction or received the visit of the police in more than two years of occupation.

SMS represents a new laboratory and is a revolution on squatting. I have personally witnessed some of the spaces and activities they offer. Through four main programs they offer services that otherwise residents would not have access in the area.

C-Rise is an exchange and used goods marketplace where money has little or no use since nothing is for sale. Take something and in return bring something, if you can is their motto. Università Popolare comprises lessons in Italian, Arabic, Spanish and English, a small library and a study room is found there and up to last year clarinet and saxophone practices were possible. C'era due volte is their initiative aiming to the young participants, a children area equipped with a nursery and featuring afternoon and evening workshops (doposcuola).

One of the few paid activities, if not the only one, is the gym, under the name of Palestra Popolare Hurricane offers sportive courses, boxing and martial arts among them, and lifting area. Is a space that slowly grew from collaborations from the participants and if you might not find pool or jacuzzi in there, you get to do some workout, which is the idea of a gym.

In the countless list of initiatives organized in there, we can find serigraph workshop, painting workshop, bike repair point, temporary and emergency housing working as a sort of hostel, and communal kitchen where they organize the donations and once per week a massive acquisition of products.



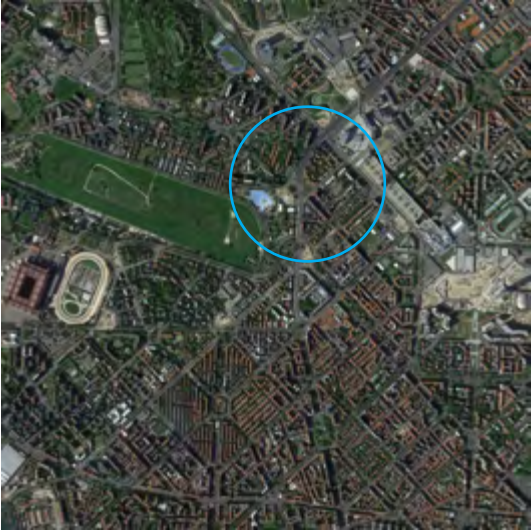
Spazio Mutuo Soccorso

After spending more time visiting the area of San Siro and its Social Centres than any other my interest grew since it seems they see squatting not only as a reaction to the housing policies and a political statement, but as a strategy for micro city planning and recovery and use of leftover space. Their latest project involves the re-appropriation and re-qualification of a former park in front of Spazio Mutuo Soccorso: Piazza Stuparich. Destroyed in 2011 as part of a project that would improve urban transportation on the area of Piazzale Lotto.

Naming their project Riqualfichiamo Piazza Stuparich, Social Centres in the west of Milan appear to have set in motion a plan in guerilla urban planning and the potential of self-managed public space and I plan to follow along that process.

V. PROJECT PHASE. RIQUALIFICHIAMO PIAZZA STUPARICH

LOCATION



DEFINITION OF THE PROJECT

Riqualifichiamo Piazza Stuparich, is an ongoing experiment on informal urban planning and re-generation of the space. A joint enterprise originally run by Centro Sociale Cantiere, Spazio Mutuo Soccorso and Comitato Abitanti di San Siro together with a network of students, neighbours and just about everyone interested in taking part on a laboratory of ideas to rebuild the park torn down in 2011.

The area was part of a project to improve the course of the urban routes 90 and 91. It implied the almost total destruction of the park to give space to a new roundabout that would improve the traffic flows. A pedestrian friendly space in the middle of a high-intensity avenue, to be filled with green and flower beds, according Comune di Milano's website. The works were started in 2011 but never finished, leaving an unusable and inaccessible park right at the start of the residential area.

Upon founding (occupation) of Spazio Mutuo Soccorso in 2013, the network of Social Centres set out Riqualifichiamo Piazza Stuparich to recover and give back a social space to the people. They started by coordinating encounters with the residents of the area and discussing the most appropriate working methods. Through workshops, markets, concerts and lectures they created awareness and an formed an active community looking after the project.

The last event took place on January 24 and one of the exercises was to give participants a template to design their park. Through the day lectures and workshops took place and a farmers market helped to attract the curious.

What I have found the most relevant on this issue, is how contrasting priorities in use of public space are. For the authorities this was a matter of providing better options for mobility and accessibility in one of the most congested transportation routes, planning in a city-scale. The approach of Social Centres was focused instead on a local scale, providing or struggling against the lack of social and public areas.

The approach of Riqualifichiamo Piazza Stuparich has been adopted by myself and developed to the extend of creating a methodology and a park design based on it as the closure of this thesis.

In the spirit of being faithful to the research made and what has been learned, the strategies and design decisions were taken following some of the principles of Social Centres and squatting. That means is not about proposing pavilions or structures going up in the air and you will not see undulating landscapes and cutting edge materials and surfaces. This exercise is about interpreting what the collective needs, asks for and can afford.

This will be a self-funded project, resources will be collected through events organized by the community. Associations and sponsorship are decided upon agreement of the participants.

It will encourage self-production and it will be developed in various stages where the time framework will be defined by implementation an evaluation tools in between phases. Evaluating along the whole process allows to have an open-source project and assures all voices to be heard.

Summing it up, people will design their own space, a self-managed, open-source public space that will inspire social, economical and ecological development of the quarter of San Siro and seek to be a model for its implementation in other areas of the city.

TIME-LINE

On **November 2011** is published the project that aims for a more efficient and faster public transportation in the segment Zavattari-Stuparich for the bus line 90 and 91, where they were expecting to “pass from 8 km/h to 24 km/h”.

The plan considered as the main intervention a roundabout for better vehicular flows. The rotonda would be pedestrian and cyclist accessible and filled with bed flowers. Other implications would include the plantation of trees and re-qualification of green areas. This would imply the partial destruction of Piazza Stuparich, favouring mobility on an urban-scale over social spaces on a more local scale.

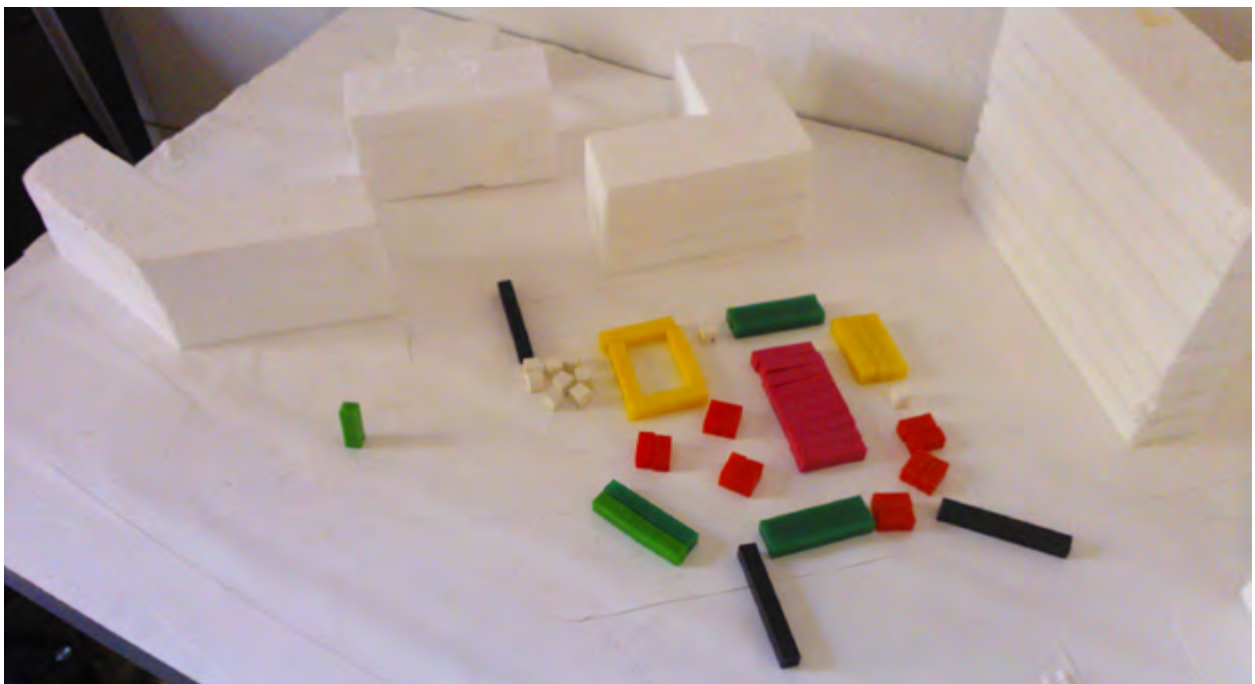
In **December**, works started with the destruction of the park and the sidewalks, by removing all existing vegetation but one tree and with excavations, they rendered the park unusable and inaccessible to the public.

The works were paused for almost two and a half years and in **June 2014**, as a reaction from the inhabitants of quartiere San Siro, a series of initiatives and meetings aiming to the re-appropriation of the square started to take place.

A collective formed by neighbours, students and volunteers led by Centro Sociale Cantiere, Spazio Mutuo Soccorso and Comitato Abitanti di San Siro started “Riqualifichiamo Piazza Stuparich”, a project that through meetings, workshops, self-funding events and above all collaboration between the parts is proposing an alternative process to regenerate an urban space they feel is theirs.

Events such as meetings, workshops, market, gardening were held on **June 19th, June 27th, July 11th, November 23rd in 2014** and **January 24th, 2015**

Recently, on **February the 2nd, 2015** the works have re-started, the data provided for the workers is they were instructed to restore the destroyed sidewalk to its previous state, as it was when Piazza Stuparich was used as a park. The works were to continue until first week of march. No further information was provided.



TIME-LINE



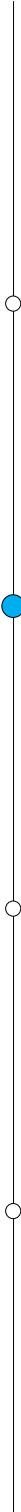
TIME-LINE

April 2008



Source: Google Maps

TIME-LINE

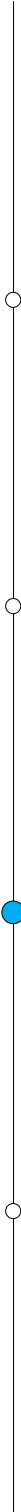


September 2010



Source: Google Maps

TIME-LINE

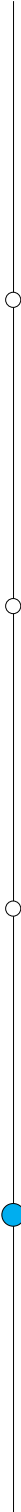


May 2012



Source: Google Maps

TIME-LINE



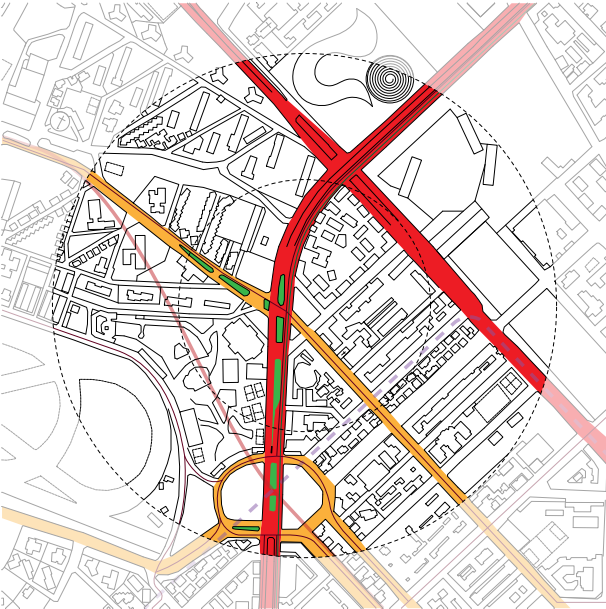
August 2014



Source: Google Maps

ANALYSIS

URBAN ANALYSIS



Mobility



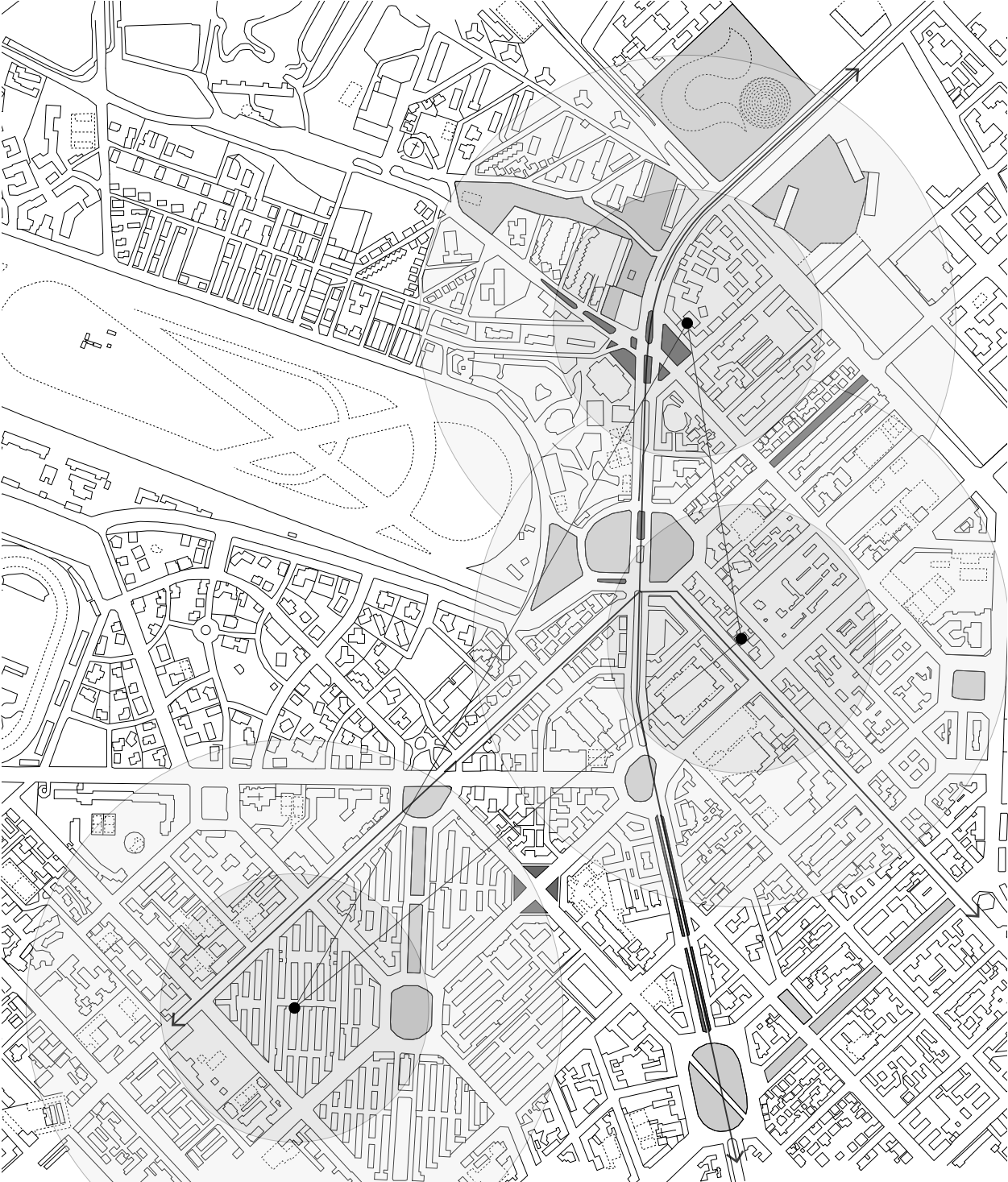
Pedestrian concentration



Green and parks

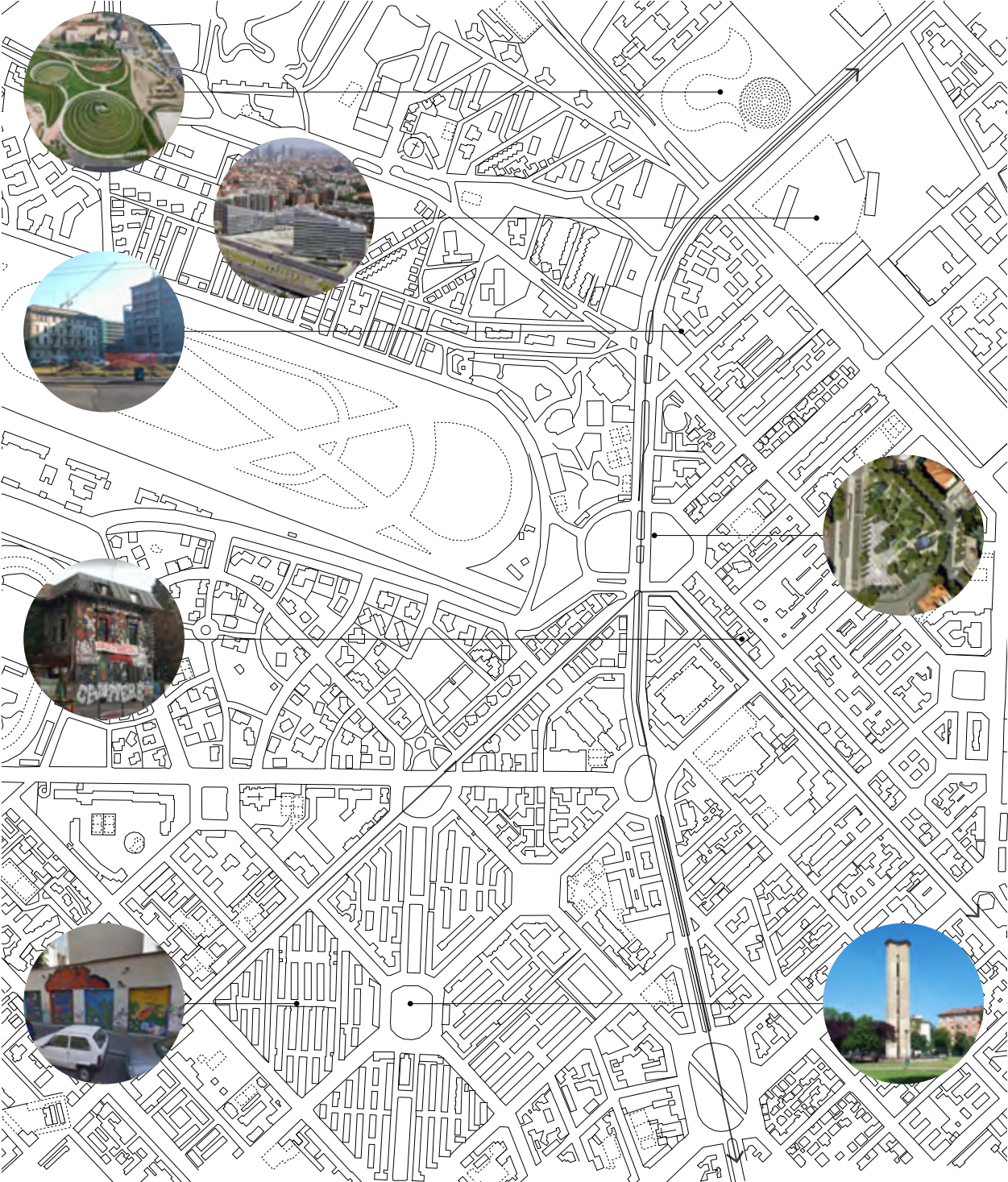


Uses and services



Public and open space

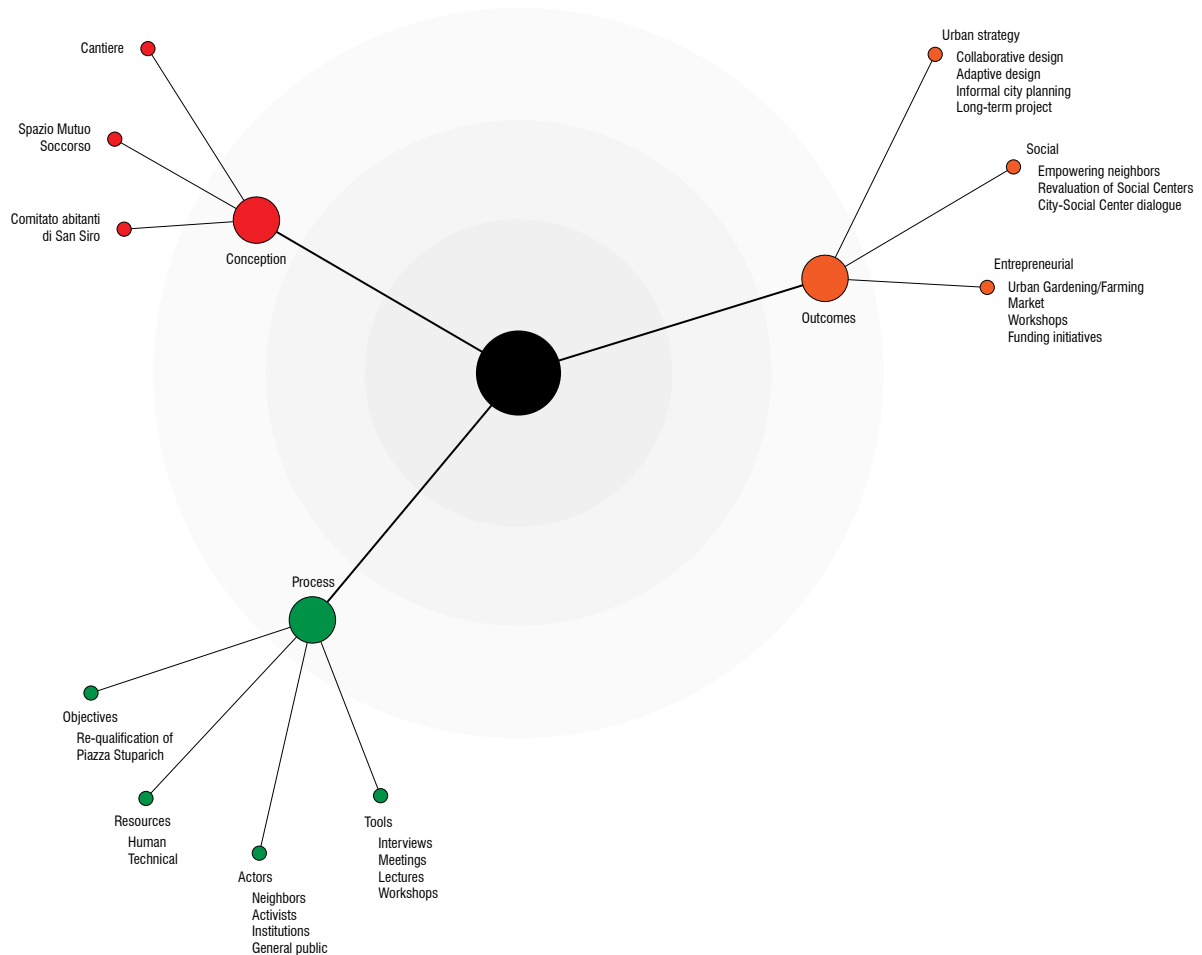
ANALYSIS



References and landmarks

STRATEGY

STRUCTURE OF THE PROJECT



This represents the evolving structure of a project based on a collaborative effort. A strategy for informal city planning and re-appropriation of the public space. A long-term re-qualification broken down in several phases to give birth to a place with identity created by the community and for the community.

Beyond recovering a two-thousand square meter public space, the goal of this social and entrepreneurial experiment is to empower neighbours in the decision-making of the spaces they use, setting in motion a revaluation of Social Centres and its dialogue with the city.

Conceived by a collaboration between three social squats in San Siro: Cantiere, Micene and Spazio Mutuo Soccorso, relies on the participations of the different actors involved. By creating associations with residents, students, occupants and the general public, human and technical resources will be assured, while the economical independence will be pursued through fund-raising events and self-production.

As an effort to be nourished by different voices, a laboratory for ideas is necessary. Interviews and meetings with the inhabitants of the area, activists and squatters, designers and the general public will take place. Workshops and exhibitions will be organized to create awareness, and combined with a range of social and cultural events will encourage everyone's participation on this synergy of thoughts

STRATEGY

I believe no designer can possibly know more of a place than the people working and living there and this strategy looks forward to set in motion a bottom-up development fed up with the multiplicity of ideas and concerns and the mixture of functions surrounding the place, creating a plan for immediate, mid-term and long-term actions to improve the site conditions and status. We aim to organize a proactive community versus the reactive attitude traditionally linked to Social Movements.

We want to recover the park and make it a landmark, an attractor for the vicinity and the district, thought in a local scale with potential to be replicated in other areas of the city. In the essence of creating a space for interactions to flourish, it will play social, economical and ecological roles within the community, that will set the bases for any future intervention.

As a social anchor will be the backdrop for neighborhood-scale initiatives. Since ever, self-managed spaces and spaces run by residents and activists collectives propose an alternative way to create and enjoy artistic and cultural performances such as cinema projections, theatre plays, concerts to mention but a few.

Its economical potential lays in the self-production and commercialization of goods. We could take as example the countless weekly markets around Milan such as Via Ampere, Lambrate or the Fiera di Slnigaglia in the Darsena to account the effectiveness of the informal trading channels.

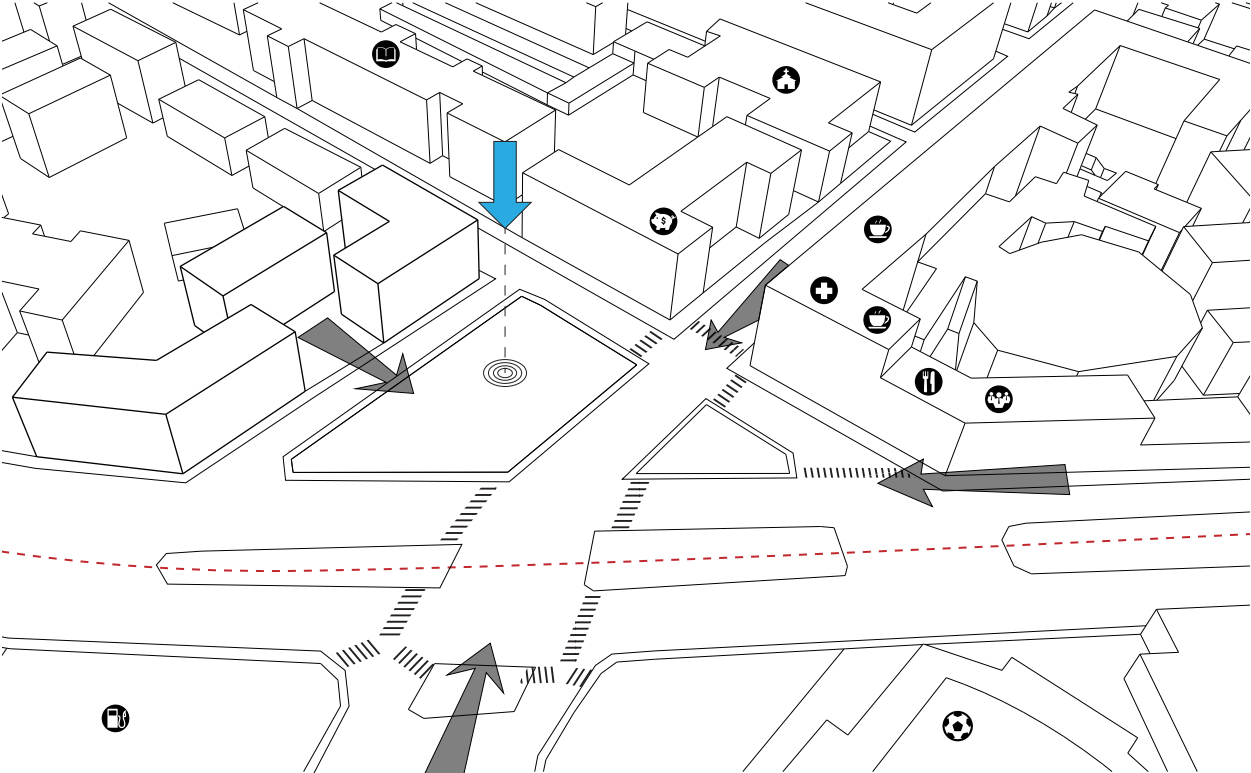
Finally this project involves an ecological approach, with actions as simple as the re-plantation of trees and lawn to a more ambitious extent such as urban farming and gardening for self-supply and commercialization.

Despite the “categorization” of the roles, everything is tied together striving for a sustainable and inclusive space. A single initiative such as a weekend market is easily within the range of the three potentials. Let us imagine the scenario of a Sunday flea market, with a peak in the social interaction and participation of the residents, the economical benefit of selling our products and the environmental impact of self-produced or recycled products.

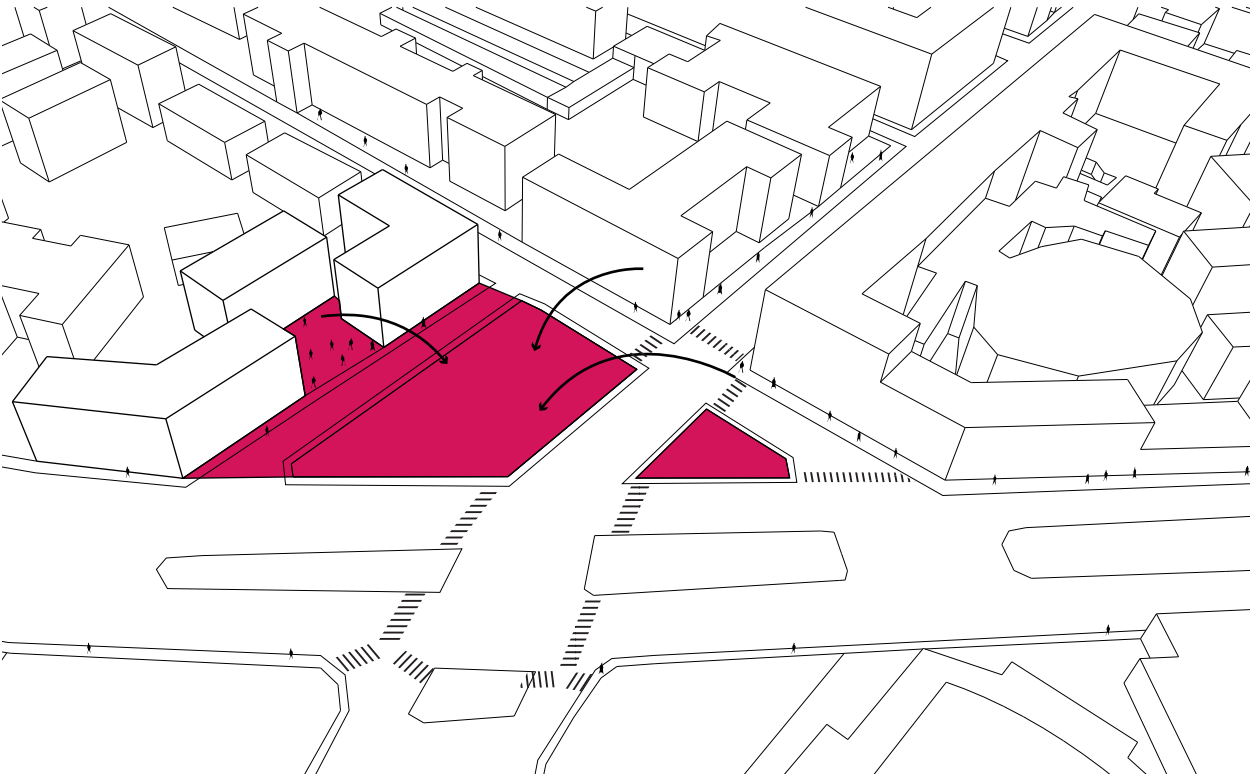
RANGE OF ACTIVITIES



OPPORTUNITIES

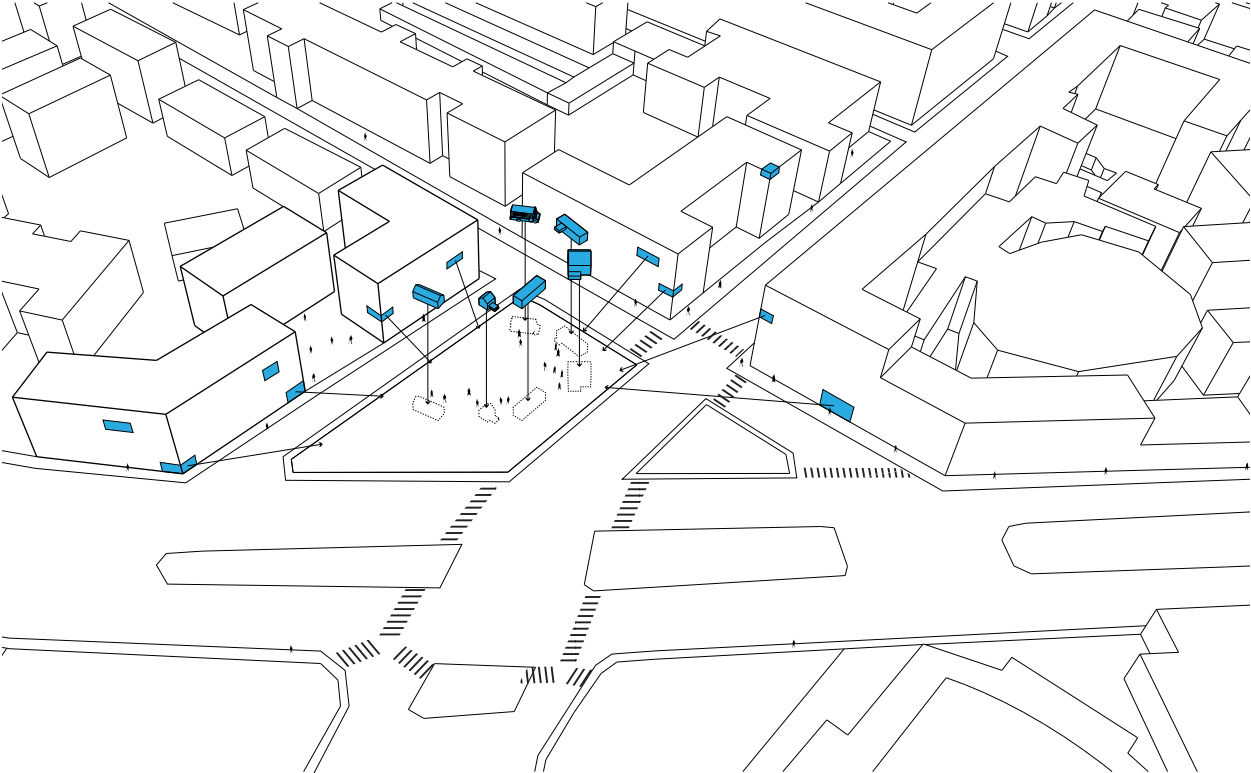


Discover the potential of the space

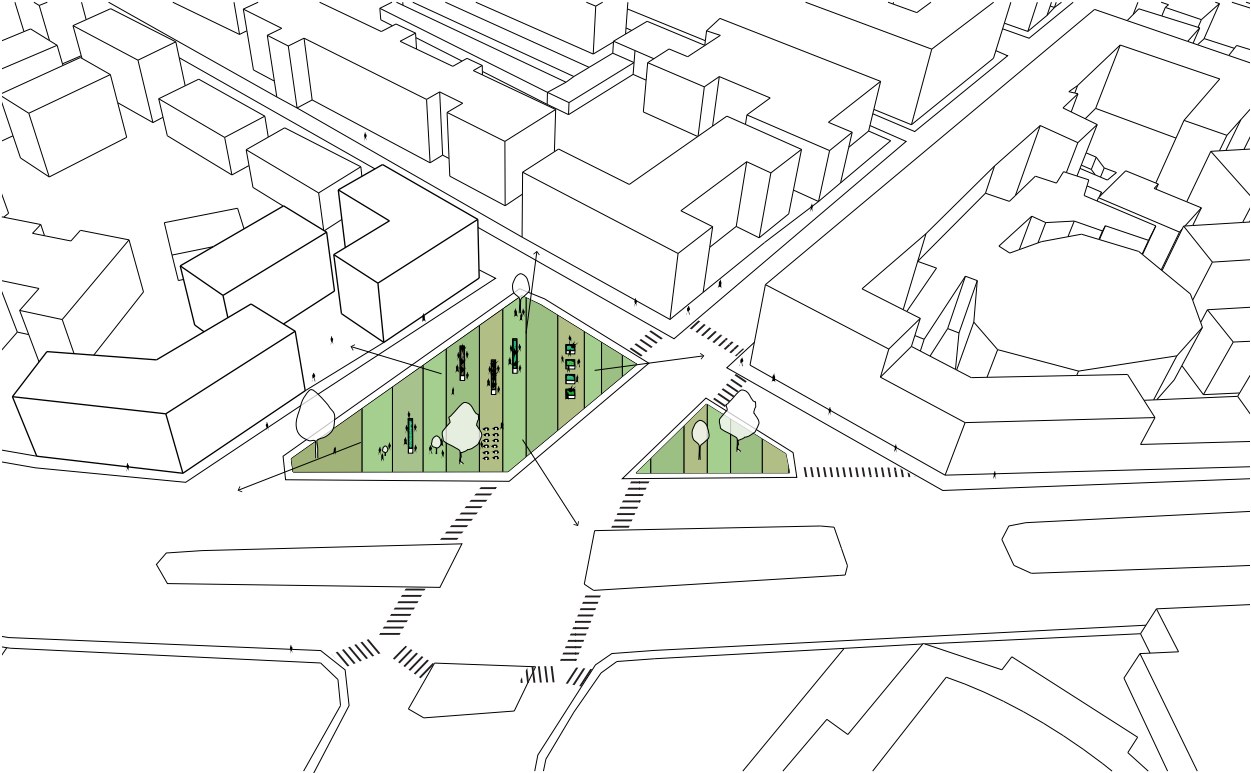


Social potential

OPPORTUNITIES



Economical potential



Ecological potential

PHASES

DEFINING A CLUSTER

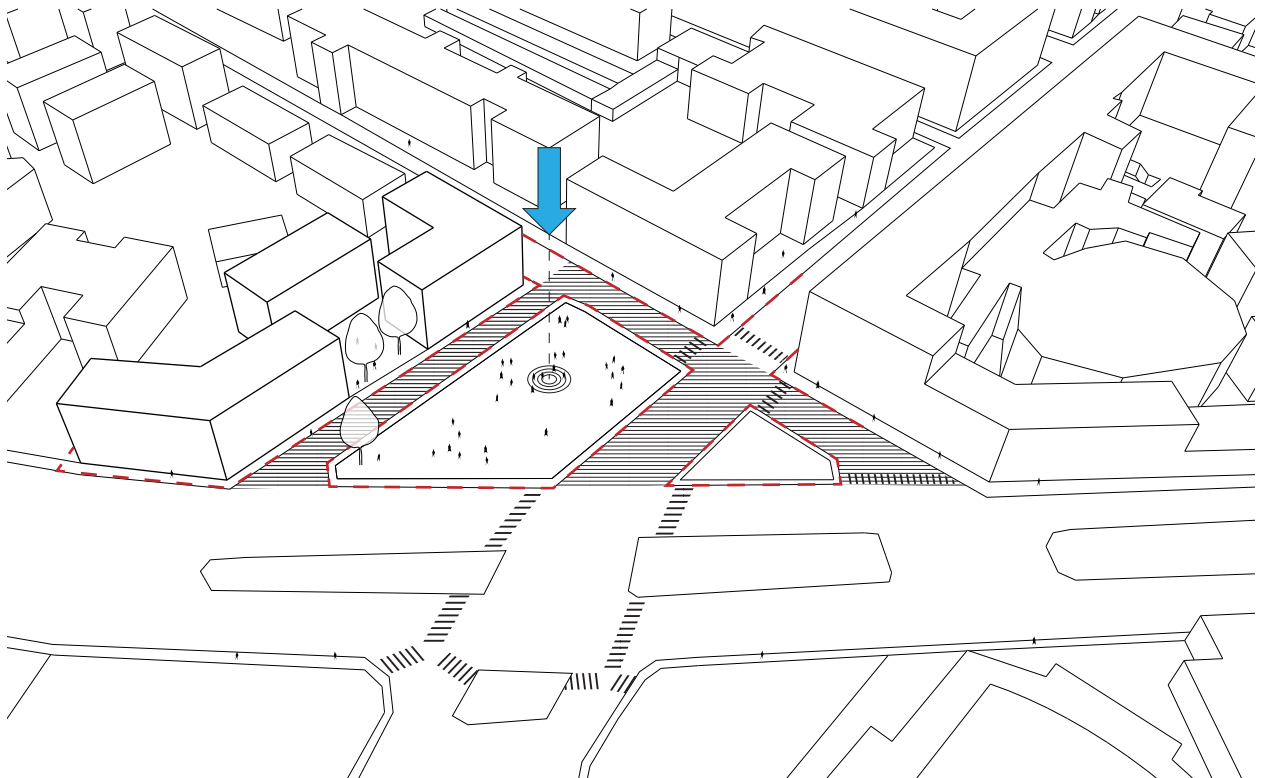
We started from a holistic method studying objectives, actors, resources, and expected outcomes and we developed it into a context-specific strategy. Those plans previously defined set the rules of the game. As we refine the project those rules were taken and given shape, they were translated into design strategies and propose the evolution of the space.

The first step is in part a synthesis of the previous strategy in the sense that involves the planning process, only this time is where the meetings and workshops take place. Here we decide the most adequate ways to for the interventions, the what, when and hows, as well as the best method to involve as much participants as possible.

Some part of that planning has already been done. As we learnt from our time-line, the network of Cantiere, Micene and Spazio Mutuo Soccorso have organized four encounters with the residents of the area and have followed up the evolution of the square since the works started through the decay of the area.

From then on, I took on their research and adapted for the next phases. Where I have identified fragments in the area we want to group together not only to re-qualify the square, but create a small cluster, extending Piazza Stuparich both physically and visually to the surrounding streets, and as it was stated before, create a unique place with its own identity and make it a reference and a gateway to access the district.

The cluster will improve pedestrian safety, accessibility and mobility and will make a more appealing space for all ages and needs. Together with Spazio Mutuo Soccorso will become a new breeding ground in the quarter of San Siro.



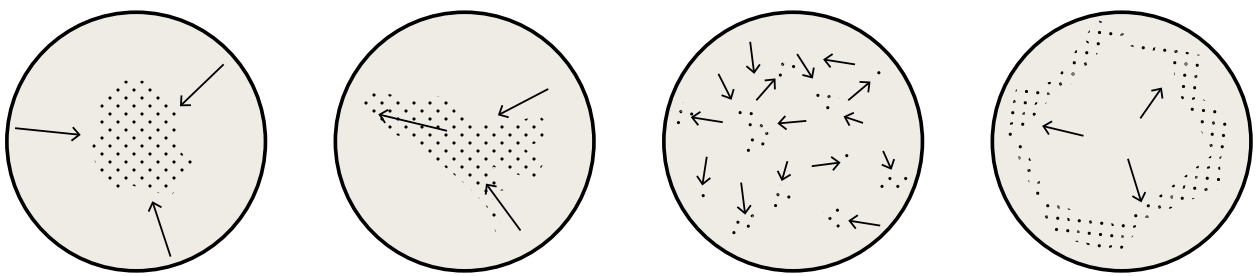
Cluster

RE-ACTIVATION OF THE SPACE

This means make the park suitable to use again, since that is the only condition to make it the stage of our public lives.

This stage involves the recovering of the site by cleaning it, healing the ground and re-planting of vegetation. Simple, short-term actions such as planting flowers is the perfect way to encourage others to think that small ideas matter, the planting of salad and tomatoes can be seen as an experiment for future steps in the design. We want to make a park that is linked to its surroundings, easily accessible and visible.

It is also about sociability, people working together and meeting their friends, greeting their neighbours and not only creating a sense of attachment with the place but building up a community. When the lack of money can be seen as an excuse for doing nothing we should think that the success of a public space is on the people that use it and the range of different activities we can perform on it.



Intensity on the use of the space

At this moment several activities can take place (some of them have already taken place despite the conditions of the area): Weekend flea market, workshops on urban farming and gardening, cinema projections and theatre plays, children playground, free public concerts, and about any activity that only requires an open space to be performed.

A time-frame is set by the actors based on implementation and evaluation tools at the beginning and the end of each phase correspondingly. Those will help to fix their goals before they adventure to the next stage as well as review the achievements of the previous one.

The strength of this approach is the architect or planner doesn't play the key role in the design of the space. I like to see it as if they are there to interpret into a spatial form the collective claim. This also makes the project susceptible to eventualities and changes depending on the outcome of the review and evaluation of objectives.

It also allows a broader range of activities to be hosted, such a list is getting extended and complete as we move towards a more refined design, where initiatives such as concerts or markets can still be carried on and are complemented with those that require a specific space or conditions to be performed, such as an equipped playground, benches to sit and read or small plots to grow vegetables.

Piazza Stuparich is a place to consolidate over the course of years creating associations and a "network of friends" along the way.

IMPLEMENTATION TOOL

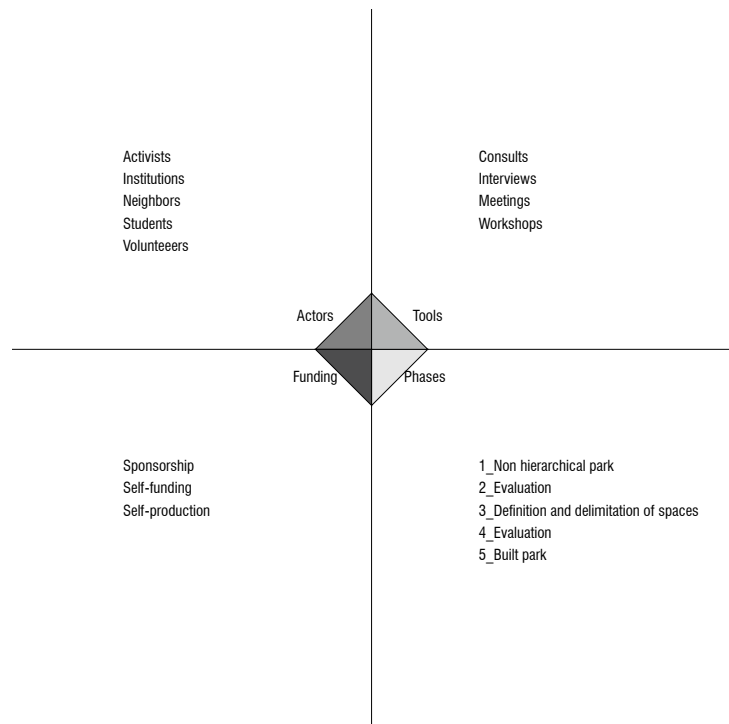
The implementation of every phase starts with its planning, whether is the starting of the whole project or a subsequent stage, this tool aims to optimizing resources: time, money and workforce.

It analyses the potential actors working into the developing of the concept, ideally neighbours, students, the general public and the network of Social Centres, and is decided if institutions and authorities collaboration will be permitted.

Through a rough master-plan is roughly defined the future phases of the project and the most adequate ways to fund the project are studied: self-funding events, contributions, sponsorship and so on.

This set of tools are discussed during meetings and workshops and consultation and interviews with the residents and participants.

The four fore-mentioned events organized under the name Riqualfichiamo Piazza Stuparich are part of the organization and early implementation strategy.



EVALUATION TOOL

A place is made of a intangible key attributes that make them impossible to measure but determine the success of a public space, they are related with the activities performed, the social interactions promoted, the accessibility and its overall image.

This tool will assess the performance of Piazza Stuparich when moving from one phase to another and its outcome will help to determine if the overall plan is working.

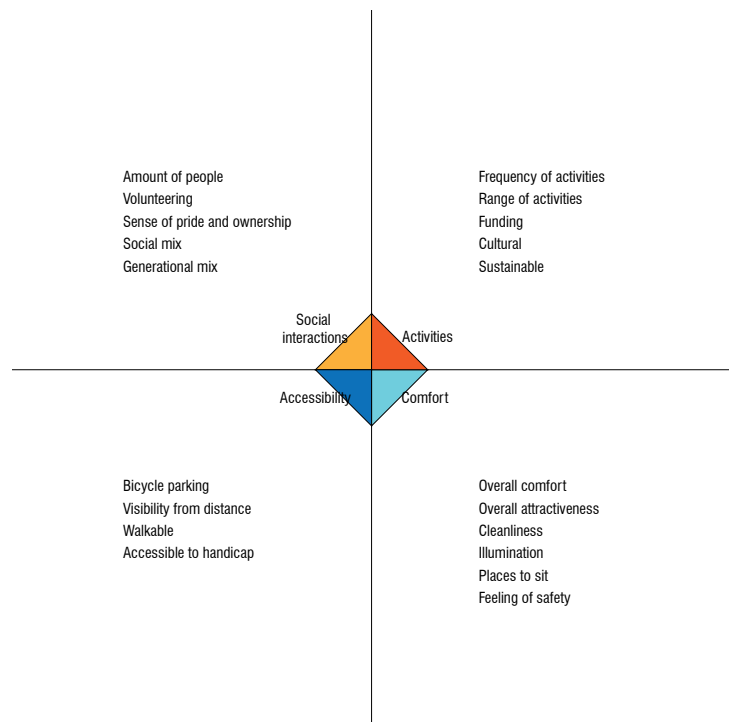
The evaluation of each of the four components (Social interactions, activities, accessibility and comfort) is carried on through consultations and simple questions related to each topic such as:

Regarding Social interactions and activities:

Will I find people if I go there? Is a place where I would meet my friend or take someone for a date? Is the place used by a specific range of age or social sector? Which activities take place there?

On Accessibility and comfort:

How do I find Piazza Stuparich? Is it easy to get in an out? Do you feel safe crossing the street? Is it suitable for people with special needs? Is it clean? Will I find trees or benches to sit?



SCENARIO X

Following the methodology we have defined, we can make use of it through a project scenario. Taking as a reference the conditions Piazza Stuparich was found at the end of January. Not suitable for use and inaccessible to the public, looking more a construction than a public space.

The first attempts are the weekends organized with the Social Centres to start the re-conditioning by cleaning the area, removing weeds and debris and preparing the ground for planting lawn or flowers. During a subsequent event the re-plantation of trees will take place. From this point on, more activities are carried on, such as free concerts or open-air exhibitions and markets to fund the project. Activities attract visitors and potential partners.

Once the first stage is completed is evaluated to assess its impact on the community and the coherence with the objectives fixed at the beginning.

The next step involves the definition and activation of specific zones for further and future development, such as division into small plots for urban farming or gardening, a central area for meetings and most cultural initiatives to take place or an area for a future playground for children that will be equipped on a future.

At the end of this process is necessary evaluate again the results. Are the outcomes as successful as we planned at the beginning? Is urban farming providing any benefit at social, economical or ecological level and how can be improved? What is our economic situation at this point? What is the level of participation and acceptance from the community?

Finally on this scenario, it comes the implementation of refined and functional design. By using pavements we define the different areas and functions, such as hard surfaces, playground, gardens, and physically extend the park to merge it with the Social Centre. With the use of graphics and paint we also extend our public realm visually creating an extended and easier to identify space.

For this to materialize, requires Piazza Stuparich to be an active space, boasting a full range of activities suitable for all ages, tastes or social groups, a place where I want to go during the weekend to enjoy a concert, buy a craft at the market or participate in a workshop. At this last stage, Piazza Stuparich will be an exemplary case of a space recovered by its users and built with their own hands, resulting in place with its own spirit and most important, a place that people see as theirs.

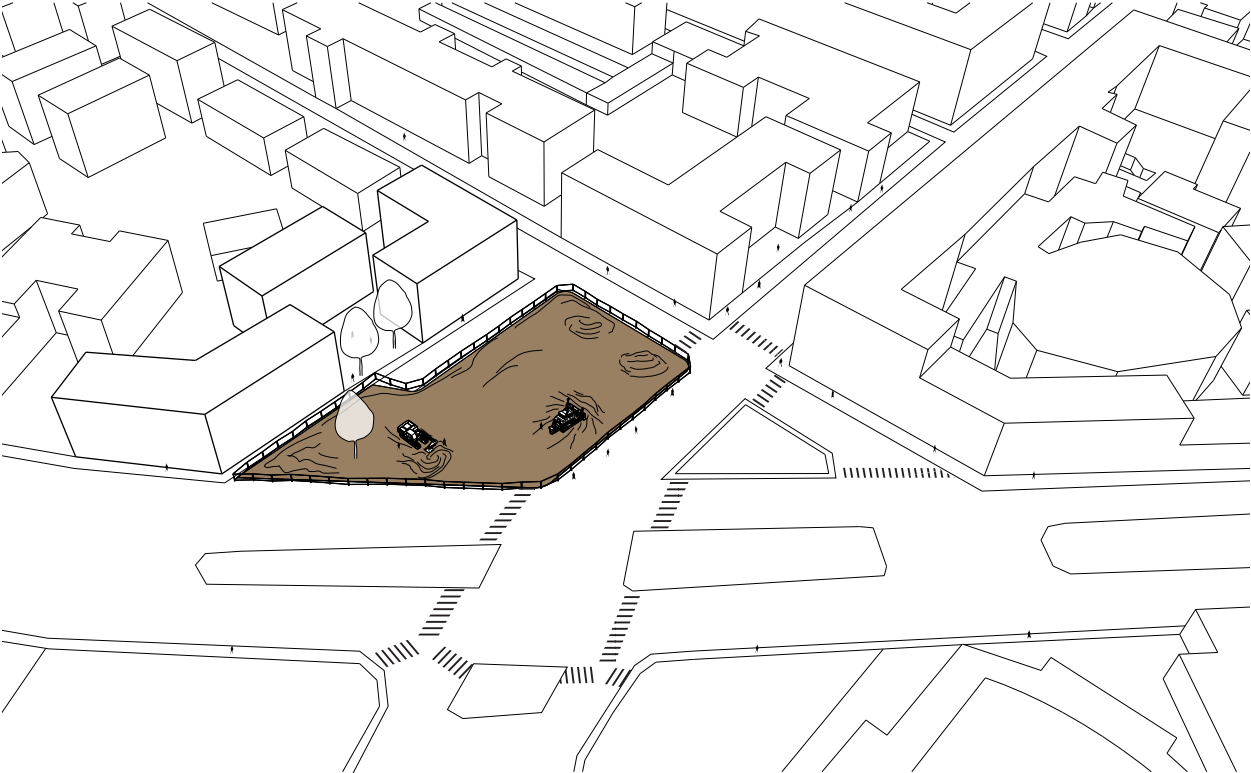
SO, WHAT IF...?

This exercise was to point out and test the potential of a project made in cooperation always facing uncertainty. An exercise where the designer plays a merely secondary role, since their task is to interpret the needs of the participants into spatial solutions, favouring the community beyond personal preferences or individual achievements.

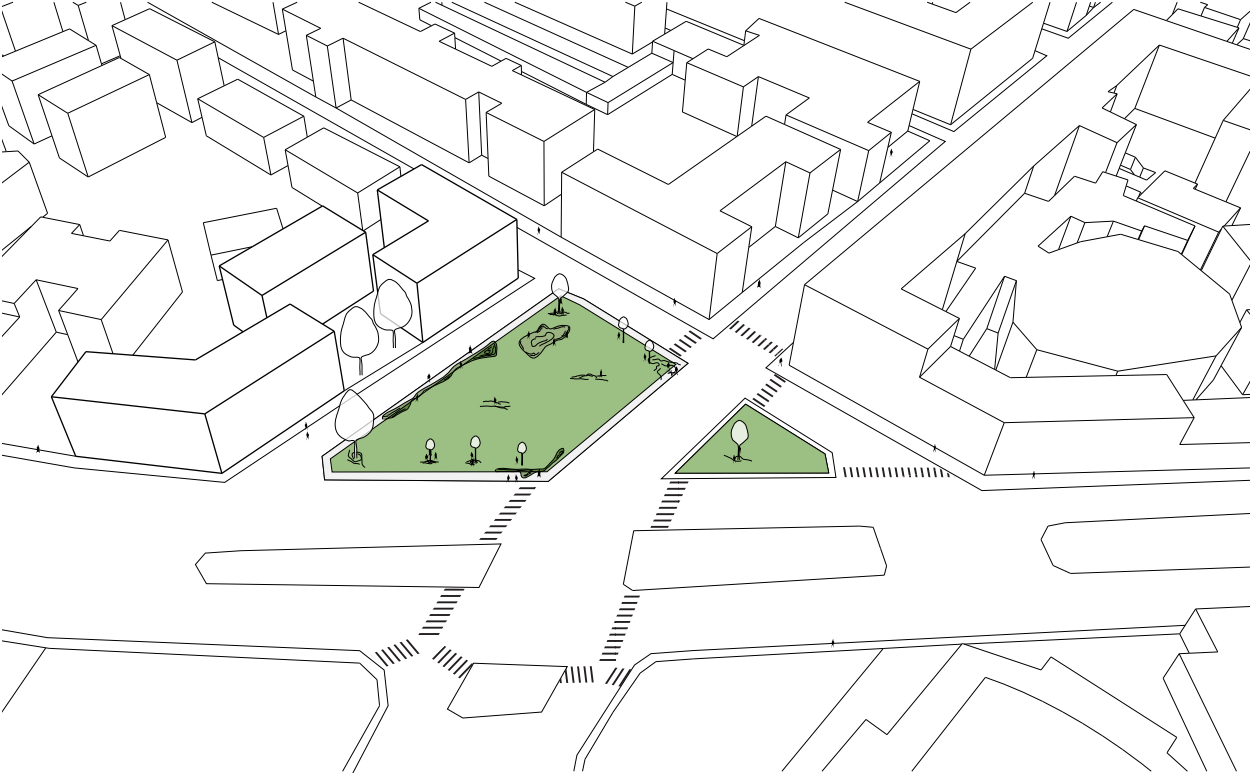
Under this perspective the outcomes of Piazza Stuparich can be diametrically different under different circumstances. During the planning and evaluation can be decided to build a football court instead of plots and gardens, the participants might want a park to sit and read a book or walk their dogs with a fountain in the middle, or with this EXPO spirit, they might as well decide they want to feed the world... spending less money.

There is no way to predict an outcome as there is no way to bind people behaviour to the will of the designer, there is a world full of good ideas out there and we are only trying to find a method to channel them.

SCENARIO X

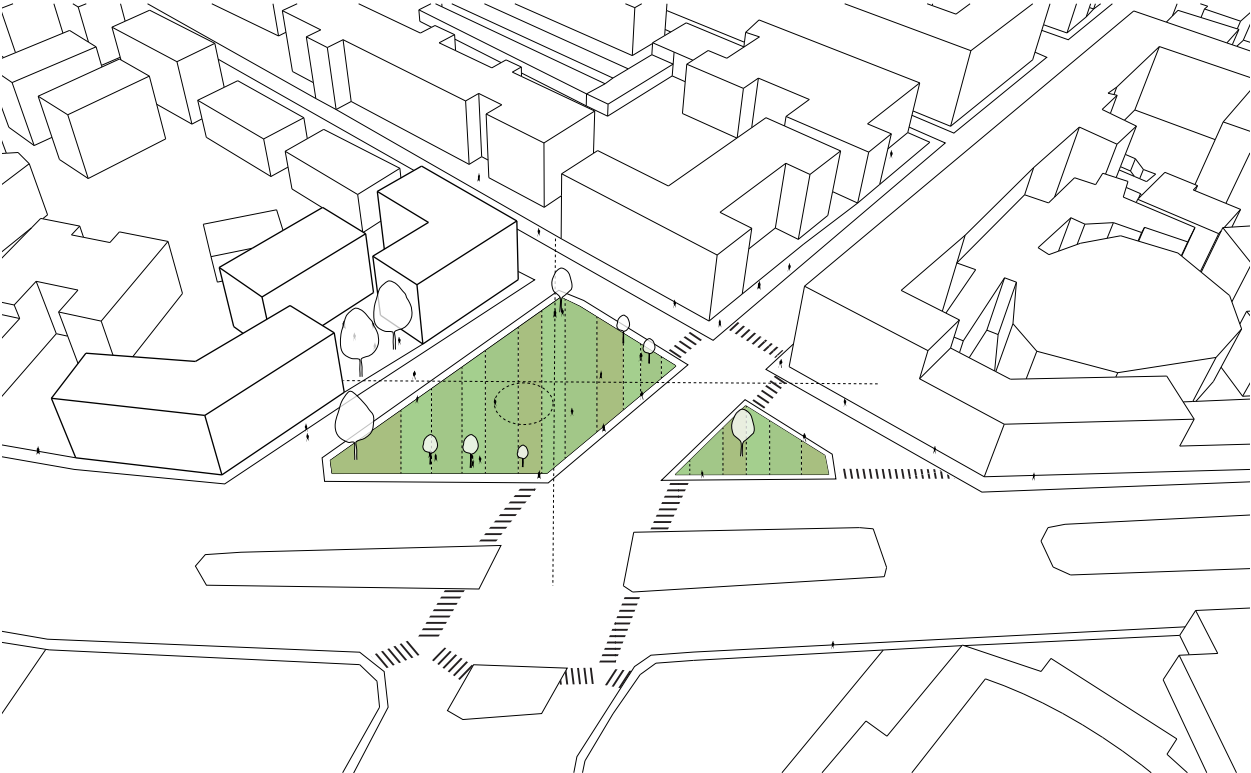


When works started (2011)

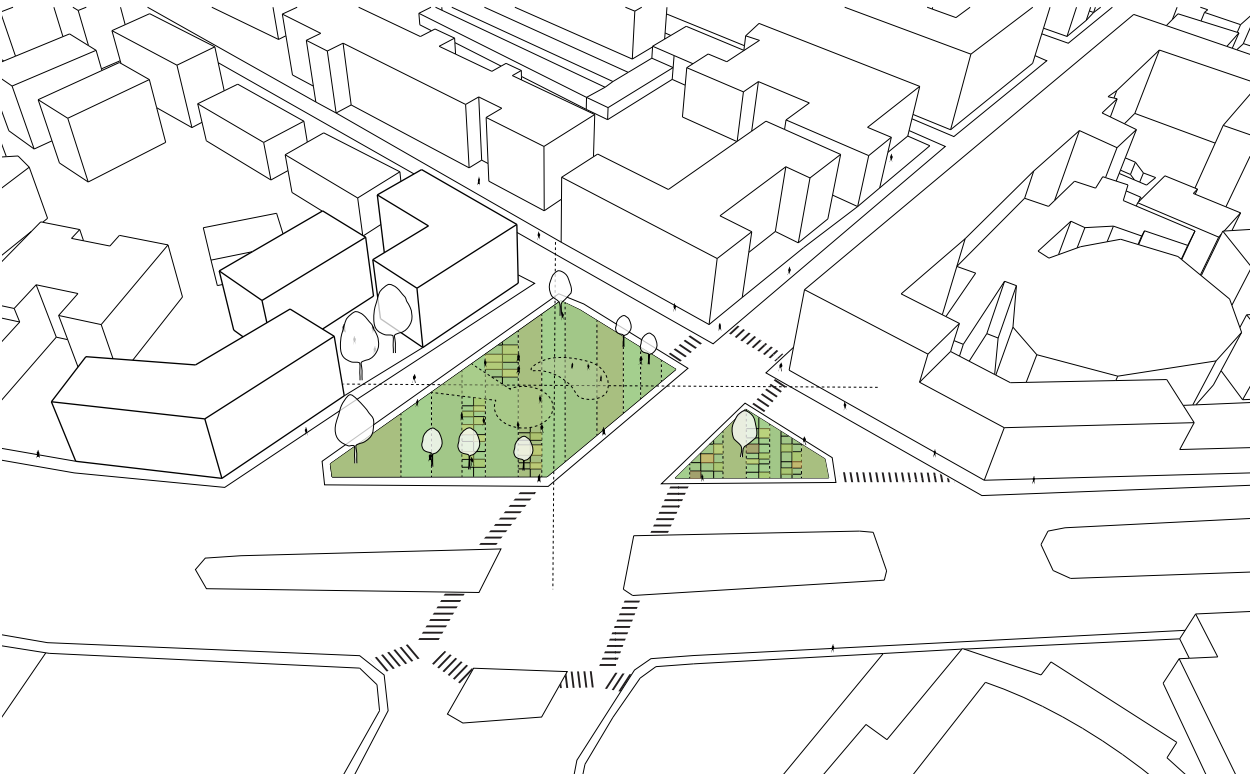


Recovery of the space

SCENARIO X

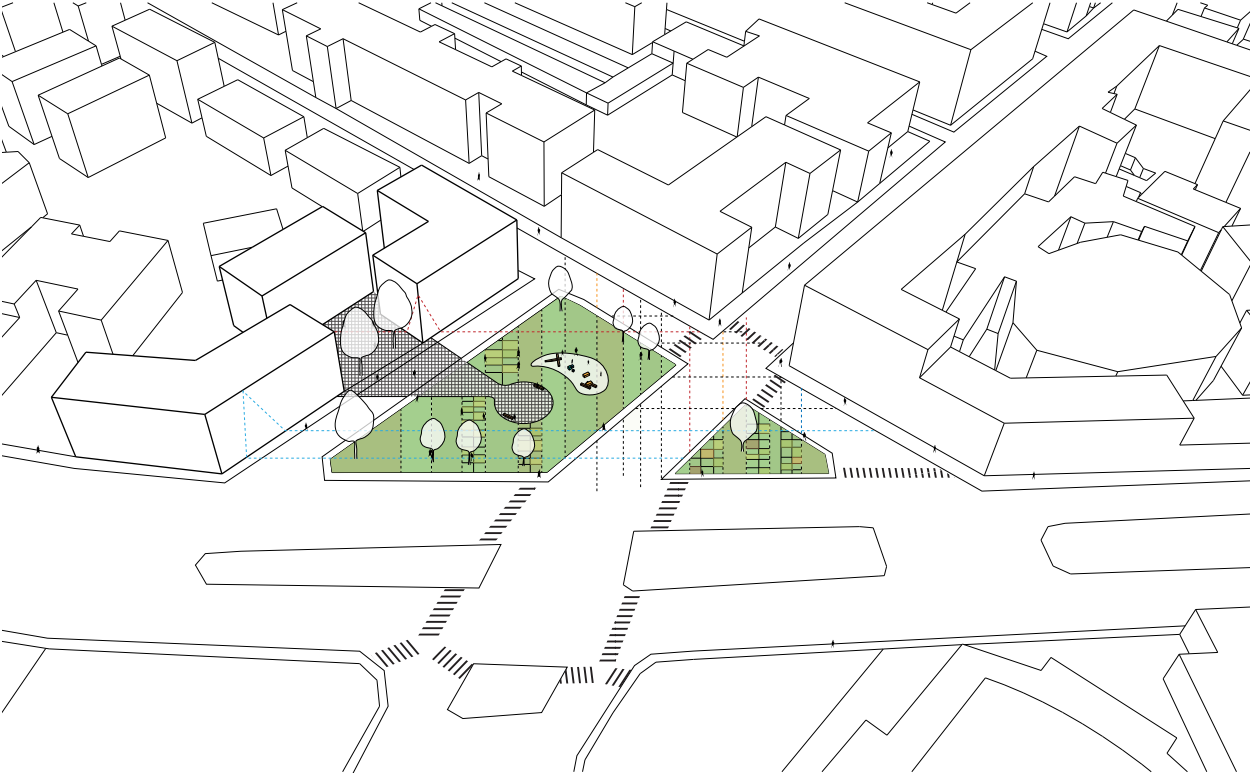


Assignment of areas

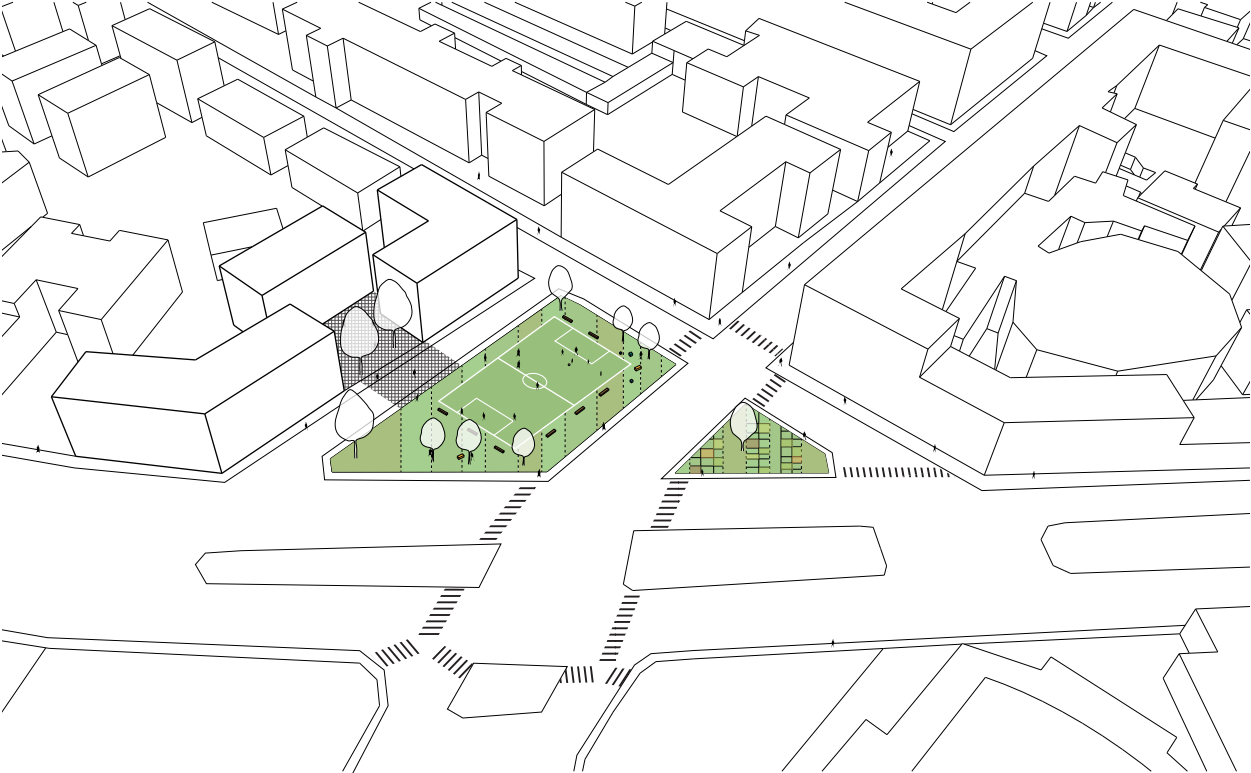


Activation of areas

SCENARIO X

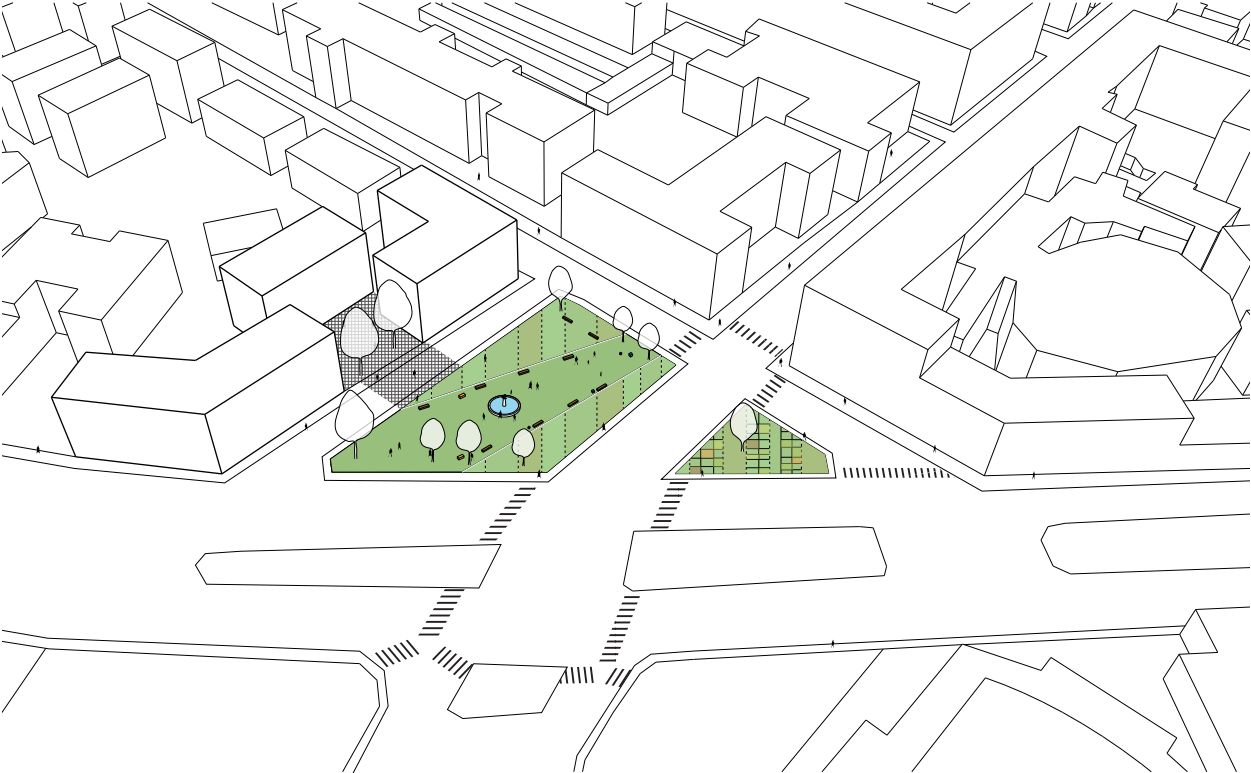


Possible outcome

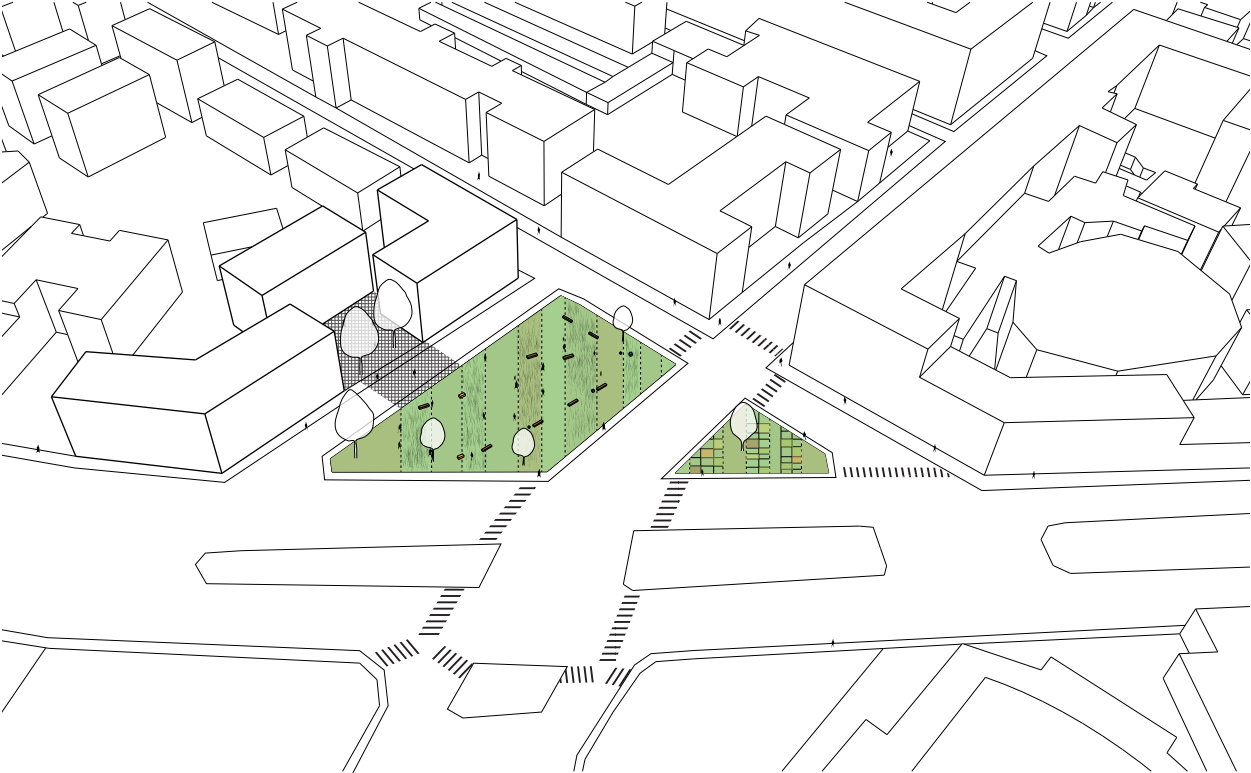


Possible outcome

SCENARIO X



Possible outcome



Possible outcome

VI. CONCLUSIONS

On the precedent work, broken down in, theory, experimentation and project phases, we have studied the origins and evolution of social squatting in Italy. A rough idea of studying the squatting phenomenon, rapidly grew into a field research and a comprehensive mapping of social occupations in Milan, where we learned the reasons and conditions for Social Centres to settle on specific areas of the city. Mapping helped us to understand how closely related occupations are with vacancy and industrial land use and finally gave us a hint on the diverse roles of Social Centres play in the urban space.

Later on, using that generated information, a group of three occupations were selected from the area of San Siro, I visited them several times over the course of four months and I got to know their practices and initiatives, being the re-qualification of Piazza Stuparich, the one that caught my interest for its open-source approach. A joint effort, collaboration between Social Centres and the neighbourhood, a project on re-appropriation of a public space relying on the cooperation of all the parts.

With that initiative as a basis, I started to develop the last phase of this thesis. More a process than a design proposal, I presented my methodology for the re-qualification of Piazza Stuparich, an idea to be implemented and constantly tested by the collective, structured as a long-term experiment always susceptible to change, always sensitive to the needs of the participants.

After all the work done, what have we learned from this interaction with Social Centres? Since I started this research I decided to stick to my objectives as an architect: to analyse their interaction with the public space beyond political beliefs. It is obvious that talking about illegal occupations remains a taboo in the general opinion, they are mistakenly regarded as places for the poor, drug-addicts, unemployed, and the list goes on, and that image is hard to remove from the collective.

They are in fact against almost any established system, political or economical models, and that includes having a different idea and priorities on the use of public space. The activist sees occupations as a means to free up spaces from decay and give them back to the city. They are openly against the explosion on new construction and the use of the territory to make profit of it rather than offering a better use to the existing stock and a better distribution of the social space.

As we saw in the example of Piazza Stuparich, authorities aimed for bigger benefit with their actions, they think globally, while Social Centres act locally and are part of small programs connecting with people.

San Siro represents a new opportunity to test the potential of squatting on its influence in the public space. They are the result of years of planning and organization and they seem to set the basis for a new type of public domain, where they empower the citizen on the decision making of the spaces they use.

I personally believe Social Centres great social laboratories, spaces to build up communities that the authorities have forgotten to create, up today, there is no legal framework that could offer a possibility of agreement between squatter and owner, on the contrary, laws seem to become more strict on abusive occupation. As I believe social occupation is necessary for a better community, I believe occupation as a housing alternative is to take advantage of the situation and does not solve the problem of housing shortage at all... But that is matter of another study.

I end up satisfied with the result of my research, conscious is nothing but a very shallow study and I expect it will be useful to someone in the future, as a reference to extend it or disqualify it.

I appreciate all the collaborations (Specially Elena Ruzza), that will probably never read this work. I actually doubt someone will reach this part at all. If you did it I appreciate your time and I hope you enjoyed reading it as much as I enjoyed writing it.

See you guys at the PhD.

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