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Invisible Art

Redrawing the Map of Contemporary Art in Milan

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Invisible Art: Redrawing the Map of Contemporary Art in Milan

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Abstract: The article examines the contradictory features of art localization and accessibility in the metropolitan area of Milan, Italy. Economic growth often generates and sharpens new inequalities whose most evident symptom in cities is the increasing distance between the central areas and the suburban patchwork. Commuting workers prevail in the center, and residents crowd the suburbs. Nevertheless, works of art and cultural actions are concentrated in the center, widening the gap between social groups. Paradoxically, many works of art from museums endowments and private collections are locked in deposits and are therefore inaccessible even in the central areas. Thus, the cultural, commercial, and social maps of Milan prove contradictory and inconsistent. The study aims to understand the relationship between the contemporary art collections and the dynamics of urban life in Milan. The theoretical framework has its starting point in the tensions between conservation and enjoyment of artistic heritage and their legal implications, on which basis a database of contemporary art collections in Milan has been developed and translated into maps and eventually compared with the cultural urban fabric of the city. The analysis highlights the inconsistency of the maps that reflect a social loss, being the life of residents and the local economy detached from the contemporary art offer. The article explores the features of this dilemma, proposes a possible strategic outcome, and suggests guidelines for municipal action aimed at supporting its material realization and facilitating a more equilibrated presence of works of art, projects, and actions within the metropolitan framework.

Keywords: Art Collections, Urban Economics, Cultural Economics

Introduction: Urban Growth and Social Inequalities

Milan is a unique city, having combined in itself economic power and creative values over the course of many centuries. Made powerful and beautiful at the end of the fifteenth century by Leonardo Da Vinci and Ludovico Sforza, it has ridden the wave of industrial and fashion design since the late seventies. In the last few years, it has addressed new challenges, crafting new environmentally friendly residences, such as the Vertical Forest, and new exclusive buildings, such as the Zaha Hadid's transatlantic complex, and improving the quality of urban life.

Such a dynamic orientation ends up attracting new inflows of professionals and families, while also emphasizing the complexity of a growing, heterogeneous, and multicultural community. This is being reflected in the perceived gap among the various areas in which the metropolitan patchwork can be framed. New conflicts may arise among social groups because of their divergent views of space, time, and lifestyles; neglected areas may strengthen the perception of social isolation and distance from the urban and social backbone whose activity is located in central districts. Services may prove unevenly distributed in the various areas, with a strong density of everyday trade and socialization in the suburbs, where the majority of families live, and where art and culture appear to be substantially absent. Paradoxically, such an isolation is reciprocal: even the affluent and consolidated layer of Milan's community may appear like a closed club, where external and international relationships are more important and valuable than the internal urban dynamics. Despite its effective network of public services and social norms,

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which allow Milan to pay more attention to the emerging social and economic trends, there is a realistic risk of a social gap developing among the layers of the metropolitan communities, leading to conflict and disaffection. The challenge is therefore to experiment with rules and actions that can raise social capital and quality of life, countering such a risk.

The growing attention to suburban areas and their need for social cohesion is clearly visible in the policy orientations of the municipal administration and in the programs held by private institutions. The Invisible Art (IA) project began in 2016 as part of a program related to urban dynamics and quality of life. It unveils a two-sided dilemma: on the one hand, many works of art are being locked in deposits and therefore denied to public enjoyment, whereas, on the other, many specific peripheral areas of the city are suffering from the total absence of cultural supply. Moreover, artwork collections and population are unevenly distributed among the city's neighborhoods: in fact, whereas Milan's peripheral areas are the most populated, the cultural supply seems to be located in the city center.

The present study investigates the relationship between the contemporary art collections and the urban life features of Milan. Combining the theoretical approaches of urban economics and cultural economics, the technical and critical framework has its starting point in the tensions between conservation and enjoyment of artistic heritage and their legal implications. The particularly strict Italian normative framework tends to implement conservative policies aimed at preserving rather than opening access to the national cultural heritage (Donato and Travagli 2010). It is important to note that profit motives underlie this tension: whereas, on the one hand, a common belief seems to inscribe enhancing policies in a profit-oriented vision aimed at selling out the cultural heritage for cash-flow reasons, on the other hand there is a recurrent tendency to overprotect the artistic heritage on behalf of a common *super partes* interest of preservation and transmission to the next generations. Such a tension often results in a conflict of interest between the common good (public interest) and the common goods (Settis 2012).

Based on the foregoing, the IA project collected primary data on contemporary art collections in Milan in their latest update. In the second phase, which this article primarily focuses on, the database was enriched with geo-localization, whose output is maps of the collections located in Milan. Eventually, data on the local economy and urban life was collected and organized in maps too. This allowed for a comparison, the outcome of which is the recognition of contradictory maps. Our preliminary results will potentially allow for a correction of the distribution of the IA in the city in order to reduce the related social loss.

The project has been developed on the analysis of various maps of the metropolitan area of Milan, emphasizing the lack of coincidence and consistency among the cultural, commercial, and social maps of Milan and highlighting a sort of hierarchic overlapping whereby the distance between center and periphery is being multiplied by the recent growth of new art spaces and social convergence in the central area. Such a distance proves to be even wider if we consider the ratio between art spaces and resident population, whose density is much higher just in the suburban areas, where contemporary art is only weakly present or entirely absent.

A solution to both the invisibility of art collections and their distance from residents could be a simple relocation of (otherwise invisible) works of art in areas where their presence could change the relationship between local communities and the arts, opening a powerful channel to generate critical thought and representation of the self, effective sources for quality of life and social capital. Even though artwork relocation does not guarantee social participation, an even distribution of the cultural supply would present dwellers with an expanded choice of art consumption. The cultural and social impact of the arts in a neglected area is likely to prove wider and longer than in central areas, where art is among the conventional urban features. A strategic and equilibrated relocation of works of art on the metropolitan map could activate and strengthen the sense of belonging of residents while reducing the citizenry's gap between social groups. The project has undertaken a preliminary analysis of the art map in Milan. A further step would be to extract specific works of art from their deposits and relocate them in controversial areas where old conflictual atmospheres

may affect emerging multicultural communities, activating projects of artists' residences, workshops for the resident community, and new trails for urban life in order for contemporary art to respond to the urgency of self-representation of a complex society.

The article starts with a critical survey of the institutional framework in which urban actions for culture can be carried out, highlighting the importance of constraints in limiting the space for site- and time-specific policy. It investigates how the geography of culture can intersect the city map and the everyday human flows and paths. It then focuses on the centrality of culture and examines the features and accessibility of urban culture in the experience of Milan, pointing to the degree of "visibility" of the arts in the various areas and the particularities of visitors and emphasizing the importance of what we may define as a "cultural divide." The article analyzes the main social weaknesses and contradictions related to the territorial distribution of the arts in the urban fabric and the cultural dialogue between artwork and citizenship, with a specific emphasis on contemporary art whose semantic power is paralleled by less tight regulatory constraints. Finally, it notes the implications for policy and proposes guidelines for social action.

The Role of (Visible) Art in the City

The role of art in contemporary societies has been largely discussed over time, highlighting the importance of an open, accessible, and even democratic right to cultural participation (Argan 1980). The debate on the role of culture in everyday life has always involved policy makers, cultural professionals, artists, and social scientists. Indeed, using art to increase cultural participation can contribute to reducing inequalities, fostering a sense of belonging, and creating collective meanings (Martorana, Mazza, and Monaco 2017). As the visual arts put together elements of different nature and origin to animate a new pattern of encounters and exchanges, the same mechanism is reproduced within the arts' audience (Luatti 2004). Many are the actors committed to the purpose; among them are cultural institutions, libraries, schools, art galleries, art foundations, and grassroots organizations. Among those, owing to their recognized public role, museums are a fundamental infrastructure, and, for this reason, their functions are constantly being challenged and discussed. The aim of museums has been defined numerous times over the past decades, and recently the Italian parliament highlighted their role as an essential public service by recognizing the value of culture as a fundamental human right (Fontana 2016).

The role of museums proves quite similar to that of education and health, although the conventional view usually refers to constitutional principles and regulatory statements in order for protection to be granted and funded. Much less attention is devoted to the creative, active, and productive profiles of art, heritage, and creativity. Although at the international level a heated debate on the role of cultural institutions still falls short of a common agreement, in Italy the public debate often considers the diffusion and exchange of art a sort of trivial outcome, almost spoiling its needs for preservation, therefore weakening any perspectives of access, enjoyment, participation, and sustainability.

In this regard, museums and galleries should not be considered as mere (although needed and important) noble deposits aimed at protecting works of art but, rather, should activate and consolidate a dialogue between cultural supply and demand, generating critical thought, increasing knowledge, and stimulating shared enjoyment. In the present urban map, museums, galleries, and theaters and other cultural spaces are often isolated in ivory towers where conventional beauty drives out familiarity and ends up rejecting the many who could desire a more intensive and ordinary involvement in cultural experience. That is one of the reasons why the content is conventionally not indivisible from the container; it is not enough anymore to just collect and own works of art if this is not followed by measures that ensure their generous and virtuous visibility. Art and culture are tools for creating places of encounter and exchange, boosting inclusiveness, and increasing the sense of belonging and recognition. Assuming that this purpose is being carried on by the cultural sector, the risk is to make things happen only in a predefined and settled place.

Owing to spatial constraints, and also established hierarchies among different works of art or artists, many artistic creations do not find a suitable space on the walls and end up forming a notable amount of IA and generating a double cost²: on the one hand, organizations must undertake expensive maintenance activities to preserve them, resulting in their being considered a cost rather than an asset; on the other hand, IA imposes a serious social cost by depriving communities of the opportunity of enjoyment. This situation is the outcome of both a shortsighted managerial approach, where the club of initiated visitors prevails upon the whole society, which could express a wider and more versatile demand, and a tight and often Byzantine regulatory framework dominated by constraints and prohibitions that make every possible active choice controversial and weak.

Art and the City, Victims of Legal Barriers

In recent years, society has been undergoing a complex transformation whereby the usual and conventionally accepted hierarchic relationship between city center and suburban areas is being radically transformed. Within such a framework, suburbs are no longer simple minor territories of a city where manufacturing workers just spend rest times in order for their workforce to be renovated, but rather a fertile and magmatic cauldron, with its own strong identity, able to host new challenges in terms of creativity, growth, and development. Culture can be a tool that strengthens community participation and fuels the related transformation process that can lead suburbs to play a new role in society's cultural and civil growth.

Unfortunately, the Italian legal framework limits this development through its rigid, conservative, and often backward interpretation of the rules aimed at preserving and consolidating cultural heritage along a sustainable path. In fact, despite the enormous heritage that Italy is endowed with, the debate on conservation, enhancement, and enjoyment is still lively and often conflictual. It can be useful to focus on the technical (and therefore economic and political) meaning of the three key concepts related to public management of cultural heritage according to the Italian legislation: protection, enhancement, and enjoyment.

Protection of cultural heritage is the main concern of the Italian legislature. Within the *Urbani Code* (formally D.lgs. n 42, 22/01/2004) the article 2 states that "protection and enhancement contribute to preserve the memory of the national community and its own territory and to promote the development of culture."³ Protection and enhancement are therefore crucial not only in the interest of safeguarding the physical aspect of cultural goods, but also because they play the fundamental role of treasuring the intrinsic values of their own nature.

Moreover, Article 3 points out that protection consists in the performance of the functions of all activities aimed at detecting goods belonging to cultural heritage and at preserving their protection and conservation with the goal of public enjoyment. This article is fundamental, because it draws attention, for the very first time, to the notion of public enjoyment, which has been traditionally absent from the Italian legislature's glossary. The emphasis on protection as the needed action aimed at maintaining the physical integrity of goods reveals a sort of apocalyptic rationale that considers cultural heritage unavoidably bound to decay and destruction. Also, it raises problems insofar as it neglects the possibility of effective divulgation of its content, mostly rethinking the new public and private spaces from this perspective.

² Recently, reportedly an increasing number of art institutions have started opening their storage rooms letting in the public. Usually only a small share of items is on view, due to space and maintenance issues. For this reason, institutions try to make everything available for the audience: among the others, the Boijmans Depot in Rotterdam is a virtuous example. When completed in 2021, the Depot will contain the entire collection of the Boijmans van Beuningen Museum after the basement flooding damaged a big portion of the items collected. The first plan was to close the museums for the renovation works and export part of the collection, but eventually the entire collection was moved in order for visitors to walk along it. This approach is being followed by a number of institutions spread throughout the world as collections have grown in the last decades and the need of balancing protection and access to collections issues seems crucial.

³ D.lgs. n 42, 22/01/2004, Cultural Heritage Code, art.10, July 6, 2004.

Relocating the art collections seems increasingly important with regard to a more dynamic idea of culture as a tool able to increase civilization, as well as the spiritual and intellectual growth of the community (Macalli 2014).

The enhancement of cultural heritage is regulated by Articles 6 and 111 of the Urbani code as an action distinct from protection. It consists in exercising the functions and the activities that are provided to spread the knowledge of cultural heritage and to ensure its preservation in the best way for as long as possible to promote the development of culture in society. The “enhancement activities” allowed are strictly listed, with reference to resource management, technical skills, and financial dynamics. Public or private spaces, for instance, can work in meaningful boxes, able to host artwork and cultural goods that are kept out of the visible circuit. Moreover, according to the new wave of change that accompanies the contemporary role of suburbs, this kind of intervention should be increasingly adopted as the preferred solution.

Finally, enjoyment is the third layer of cultural experience. Article 112 describes the institutional map of cultural enjoyment, considering the strategic connections among public bodies, regions, local authorities, and private institutions. All the cultural goods belonging to public bodies can be enjoyed by society and supported by public action as a public service. This sounds quite contradictory: Public service should imply open and wide access and certainly cannot be granted effectively through material protection alone. Action is needed, and isolation should be overcome with a more diffused and equilibrated presence in the urban fabric. Principles and rules may appear encouraging, but the weight of formal constraints and substantial conventions acts as a contradictory limit. Moreover, there is no coordination among the territorial jurisdictions, and sometimes overlapping and even conflicts occur (Dugato 2007). Finally, Article 113 of the Urbani code regulates private action in enhancing the value of works of art and cultural heritage, thereby acknowledging their social value.

Although enhancement and enjoyment are strictly connected, they are kept formally separated in the code. Enjoyment should be substantially interpreted as the source of increase of cultural capital; protection and enhancement are necessary stages leading to enjoyment, which is considerably affected by personal experiences, subjective views, and sharing options. This makes the need for diffused enjoyment crucial, because it can have a positive and growing impact on various components of contemporary society where diversities are growing.

How the Geography of Culture Can Intersect the Urban Map

Talking about cities, ranging from planning to living, means activating dialogues with more and more heterogeneous features. In his book *Invisible Cities*, Italo Calvino writes: “I could tell you how many steps there are in the stair-like streets and the degrees of the portico arches, what zinc scales cover the roofs, but I know this would be like telling you nothing. This is not what the city is made of, it is made of the relationships between the dimensions of its space and the events of its past” (Calvino 1972, 10).

It means being able to face, handle, and argue not only themes with architectural features, concerning infrastructure, services, and buildings, but also human dimensions, somehow ephemeral, barely related to pure spatial and traditional paradigms. It means interacting with a complex system, with emerging qualities, which cannot be reduced to a merely static comprehension (Lupi 2013). It is the dynamic human grids, the multiplicity of the involved social interactions, information, people, and emotions that, in an intense and variegated exchange or game with the surrounding architecture, draft the tangible urban morphology.

The city is a multifaceted and multidimensional organism that has resulted from the interaction among several specific contexts. It is not open to simple comprehensions, but develops in different shades, levels, and behaviors. The attention is gradually shifted, from the single space and time to the procedural aspect of living and perceiving the public city. The city’s identity depends both on its cultural past and present and its hidden and revealed identities (Kavaratzis and Ashworth 2005). Fertile collective inheritances are collected. Possible futures are identified.

In the sixties, the architect Giancarlo De Carlo observed that inside a city the space for education and culture should not be a gated island but an integral part of the whole physical environment and urban fabric. It is an agent of change, a dynamic structure, an unstable configuration always recreated by the direct participation of the community that uses it, introducing the disorder of their unpredictable expressions (De Carlo 1969). On the contrary, culture seems certainly rooted in specific and crystallized sites. The cultural experience is afflicted with some problems of access (Da Milano 2014). First of all, there is a complicated admission to the structure, in terms of space from a social, economic, and urban point of view. Then, there could be a lack of active participation or a long-term relationship with the cultural goods.

Unfortunately, the cultural map appears detached from the social and urban one. Culture is defined conventionally by the places that host it, and not by the participation and the dialogic force of its contents. Its geography does not intersect our daily personal transfers and urban paths. Culture has been progressively abandoning society (Bourdieu and Darbel 1997), locating itself in a noble and isolated nowhere (Trimarchi 2012).

At the same time, culture tries to give a precise signal of its own special status, creating a self-referential framework and widening the gap between culture and society, the traditional significance of *urbs* and *civitas*, and their views and expectations. Until now a large slice of the European adult population has never been involved in any cultural experience, owing to the biased idea of thinking that only “initiated” individuals can enjoy and take part in it (Cicerchia 2014; Trimarchi 2014). A wide proportion of cultural supply is still shaped and managed as in the past, totally ignoring the deeper and more versatile perceptive abilities and expectations on the part of contemporary individuals (Bodo 2003; Peressut, Lanz, and Postiglione 2013).

An excessive self-referential cultural system, together with a low attention to the cultural audience’s requests and desires, are both cause and effect of a static perception of cultural phenomena. Cultural organizations are afraid of asking people what they really want, converting the relationship with the audience into a boring marriage of convenience. The diffused stress of performance ends up looking for cheap solutions: impressionists’ or blockbuster exhibitions, three tenors’ concerts, and the like. Conventions prevail over substance. Site-specificity disappears, and culture adopts a superficial global orientation. The cultural goods, as a result of the manufacturing society, have risked being conceived exclusively as commercial products while the cultural system still carries the wounds of a dimensional obsession (Trimarchi 2012).

Michel De Certeau (1980), in *L’Invention du Quotidien*, says that the consumers should not be identified or defined in relation to the product they consume; rather, how they use these products must be analyzed in itself. Instead, we usually only take into account the *what* and not the *how* (De Certeau 1980). In this regard, we should wonder: does the number of visits (acts of consumption) equal the number of visitors (consumers), or does it simply indicate a higher consumption by the same elite (Baricco 2009)? In essence, high attendance does not prevent the risk of low participation. Often, we stumble into the naïve assumption that more visitors automatically stand for more culture, without wondering about the dynamics of perception or understanding the work or initiative. We are used to believing that “more is better.” A central issue of cultural enjoyment emerges, defining not only a matter of quantity but also a matter of quality. Reality is quite different from an “embalmed” framework of analysis, because it presents a much more complex picture.

Audience analyses (usually conducted by marketing departments) focus on the sociodemographic profile of consumers, particularly on four core values: gender, age, education, and income (values that are not direct sources of cultural consumption motivation).⁴ These

⁴ In order to be more specific, the latest Audience analyses try to use introduce a qualitative approach and new form of audience segmentation. This kind of analysis typically distinguishes between central, occasional or potential audience, and non- audience (Bollo 2014). Later, in the final European Commission Report *Study on Audience Development* (Bollo et al. (2017), these three main audience categories have been renamed using more intuitive and easy-to-understand terms—Habit, Choice, and Surprise. It is an inspiring approach. However, it may still be too rooted in a concept of Audience where the group is considered as a single entity, paying all the attention to the three main subdivisions and not

analyses are often animated by a dimensional approach, limited to a record of pure numerical data, and built on a mechanical method that conceives culture as a homogeneous block aimed at a selected audience of clones (Trimarchi 2011).

In such a respect, cultural experience risks being regulated by ritual prescriptions and dictated by initiated experts. This makes it a sort of club consumption, with all the rigidities of a club. Now, in times of change the old highbrow versus lowbrow discrimination seems to have been transformed, according to different opportunities of access and maneuver within a multifaceted and chaotic offer. There are no spiritual benefits from the cultural experience but “only” a new emotional and cognitive impact.

Culture rises progressively in social exchanges, networks, and synergies fed by an ever-changing and fruitful human *humus*. Nowadays, society has started to reconquer the urban spaces, and culture can keep and enhance its value by reshaping its geographical structure. In our present, we find cultural options in many places, not necessarily in conventional ones. No longer special and difficult to appraise, culture works its way into the web or the sphere of new ephemeral and sharing approaches, such as festivals and temporary events. These are able to intercept the urban grids, coming back in our everyday life. A revolution: in Milan, events such as Piano City Milano and Design Week or cultural networks such as TeatroxCasa have sent clear signals to activate a relationship, an exchange with several layers of the entire society, as well as an experimental interactive dialogue with citizens, locals, newcomers, and visitors.

Maybe festivals will still not have a long life and will soon pass, but they have been able to demonstrate how culture is believed to be sculpted in bronze, objective and unchangeable. They have the honor of highlighting its necessity of becoming “normal” again. They reinforce the current tendency of some cultural institution to make a precious outreaching effort, going beyond their walls (physically and mentally) to get in touch with the outside community. In the program 2019 of Piano City one can read: “Under its ever-changing skin and shape, every corner of Milan hides villages and neighborhoods whose inhabitants come from all over the world. By wandering through its streets, Piano City Milano lost its center and borders, creating instead an infinite series of starting and arrival points.”⁵ No longer does the audience have to make an effort toward culture.

Mapping the Unseen: Interpreting City and Citizens through the Arts

We collected and analyzed data on the city of Milan, related to the years 2016 and 2017, along with contemporary art distribution and accessibility. Reconsidering the conventional system of cartography, which reduces a city to a simple set of signs, our contemporary arts categories and maps want to make us aware that the territory is not just an empty space on which one can indiscriminately lay any content. It is instead a highly diversified and continuously shifting space, with many layers and levels, and within which, beneath the surface, the thrust of invisible memories, forces, and energies are constantly at work, inducing a never-ending change. And it is these forces that have to be taken into account when planning the future (Decandia 2000, 2008).

The city visualizations restore the overlapping and layering of its intertwined data, analysis, and relationship, which climb to the surface out of a kind of latent depth. It reveals an ever growing past that has never ceased to be (Deleuze 1966). They examine different layers of

to the group as one single element: the vision is not yet punctual but organized in batches. It informs blocks of people but also single individuals: not fixed segments but rather permeable flows, not the single term audience but the plural one of consumers, visitors or “just” people.

⁵ Following a now well-established format, for the seventh consecutive year, Piano City Milan involves the entire city, its inhabitants, tourists, and most secret locations in a three-day piano festival. Homes, courtyards, metro stations, trams, museums, squares, gardens, and loads of venues are open to music and to the public for free concerts, involving hundreds of pianists and hordes of spectators. It is able to offer, in just one weekend, an unconventional way to experience and hear music, rediscovering the city, with all suburban areas, and sharing culture.

visibility, consumption, and significance of contemporary arts places and galleries and their impact on public spaces and a complex multidimensional urban evolution.

We developed a database of the contemporary art collections based in Milan, based on the degree of accessibility of the arts and their localization. The database has then been transferred into visualizations of contemporary art. We proposed a taxonomy of cultural spaces and organization in line with their capacity to be accessible and open to the presence and consumption on the part of the audience. We distinguished three main categories:

Visible Art: Institutions and collections that can be visited daily with regular opening hours.

Partially Visible Art: Institutions and collections that can be visited with limited access, or with compulsory booking, such as contemporary art archives that can be consulted only by appointment. They are present both in the historic center and in the peripheral areas but remain largely hidden and unknown to the general audience.

Invisible Art: Totally inaccessible collections. A lot of private venues, related to precise events, where art collections remain invisible and hidden behind closed doors, until a “formal invitation to the Palace.”

We immediately gained a few relevant insights. A lot of cultural institutions and organizations have a hybrid identity, belonging to more than one category. Milan shows a metropolitan fabric full of cultural spaces, regularly open to the general audience but with several hidden collections buried in depots; it then mixes a visible, partially visible, or invisible nature.

The visualizations also made it possible to understand the spatial distribution of contemporary art and the forms of audience visibility and consumption (see Appendix). A new plural urban mosaic is dotted by a set of maps and visualizations:

Map 1 represents the overall and present Milan portrait with all the hidden and revealed contemporary art identities.

Map 2 offers a disaggregated visualization of the previous map. It shows the three main categories in distinct layers, one at a time, in order to focus on each single thickening and to emphasize the imperfect overlapping of single layers.

Map 3 proposes a comparison between the geographical distribution of contemporary art spaces and a synoptic view of the resident population, pointing out their discrepancy. Areas with the highest demographic density are the ones most affected by the almost total absence of artistic offer and cultural options.

Map 4 highlights how art galleries are able to go beyond boundaries of central areas.

Map 5 investigates the distribution of libraries and cultural organizations, underlining their ability to offer a much more capillary service, with regard to the resident population distribution.

Map 6 displays the distribution of cultural, artistic, and commercial business.

The maps set the ground for the analysis of the interrelationship between residents, art collections, and culture-related urban fabric. In addition, the database of contemporary art institutions has been elaborated in order to unveil the qualities of the collections. This way, the maps can also offer a high degree of detail about the accessibility of the considered collections. As a final result, we noticed a clear dichotomy of “centre” and “periphery”: a center full of potential yet hidden cultural messages and contents, and a periphery full of people and fertile but not stimulated or encouraged.

Milan’s central areas are rich in symbolic public spaces and buildings, with a strong iconic standardization of cultural containers. Too often, their sacred significance prevails over the possibility of dialogue with visitors and the wider community; they are not able to ensure simple, interactive access, becoming barriers. Instead, Milan noncentral neighborhoods constitute a wide

portion of the urban map, both territorial and social, where we may find plenty of resources, factors, and critical situations but not many chances of cultural consumption. They identify with the local side of the city, where we are able to read the microsocial dynamics and express the relationship among citizens, social groups, and urban areas (Borlini, Memo, and Zajczyk 2008). There, public spaces and the urban fabric are not so obvious and idiosyncratic as in the center. They may be defined as a sort of hidden places, because citizens, tourists, or just usual walkers are not directly addressed to them and they could only discover them through an on-purpose access.

Indeed, we mapped hidden cultural contents and few residents in the urban core of the city, while the peripheral urban fabric is characterized by insufficiently valued public spaces, often not so visible or acknowledged by the local communities. An interesting field of experimentation in this context is the exploration of the possibility of the contemporary art collections to physically move into the city, toward the peripheries and their communities, bringing contemporary art into familiar spaces where the local community normally lives and acts, as well as new forms of public spaces and out of its enclosure.

Art and Demography: Whom Is Contemporary Art for?

Cultural heritage is meant to be valuable for citizens. Contemporary art, as a part of cultural heritage, is increasingly used instrumentally in urban projects aimed at social inclusion, integration, and urban regeneration and renewal (Landry and Bianchini 1995; Landry et al. 1996; Hall and Robertson 2001; Florida 2004; Miles and Paddison 2005; Lavanga 2009). These projects, however, do not come without some risks. When policies seek a development based on tourism exploitation or attraction of affluent young professionals, the residents are kicked off with serious consequences in terms of exclusion (their urban and social identity are denied).

When inhabitants of the neighborhood are not the primary addressees of urban renewal interventions, gentrification and marketization prevail, and the residents get expelled from their own neighborhood, following the well-known process of gentrification (Evans and Shaw 2004). On the one hand, as the news often reports, cities such as Venice, Amsterdam, and Barcelona are currently undergoing a process of repulsion of mass tourism, which in past decades turned the city centers into tourist playgrounds, pushing away their inhabitants—although sometimes they went away voluntarily. These processes are driven mainly by urban policies that are eventually stigmatized by connected cultural policies, and the result is not just a change in the shape of the city but also—and maybe most importantly if we are serious about taxpayers' quality of life—in the use of the city by its inhabitants. On the other hand, cultural institutions show an increasing interest in accessibility, proving their value to local and diverse communities, as in the case of the Van Gogh Museum, in Amsterdam (Vermeulen et al. 2019).

When the historic center of Milan becomes an inflow of cultural and artistic representation of the city, but its inhabitants stop having a stake in it, meaning that their everyday lives are shifted elsewhere, the question “whom is contemporary art for” gains more urgency. Cities have gradually become polycentric or diffused, and suburbs have attained identity values and independence. Conversely, cultural heritage has not followed such a trend. In Milan, the comparison between where people live and where contemporary art collections are is quite striking. Art and citizens are not neighbors, to put it bluntly. Such a comparison, focused on the different maps of Milan, pointed out a substantially negative nonoverlapping of them. As the objective of this study is to understand the relationship between contemporary art and contemporary life in Milan, we have seen that such a relationship is extremely limited. How can contemporary art interconnect with dwellers, trades, and cultural activities?

From the contemporary art maps of Milan, a very high concentration of visible art appears in the historic areas of the municipality, whereas in the rest of the city a general absence of visible art and art organizations is found. This contrast is further strengthened if we compare it with the distribution of residents. Milan is divided into 9 zones, or municipalities, 8 of which are placed in a ring around Zone 1, that is, the historic center. Population is distributed in the city in a way that

clearly proves to be the opposite of that of contemporary art institutions as recorded by this analysis. We can observe that a centripetal force pulls in the majority of cultural and arts institutions into the city center, whereas a centrifugal force pushes urban dwellers outside of it (i.e., Zone 1).

The historic center of Milan records a population of 105,200, or 8 percent of the total population (Table 1). After Zone 5,⁶ Zone 1 shows the lowest population, with a moderately high density because of its small area in square kilometers.⁷ Keeping in mind the question “whom is contemporary art for,” we compared population data with the distribution of contemporary art in the city. Table 2 shows the distribution of contemporary art institutions (not including art galleries and without making a distinction in terms of visibility). The historic center shows an unmistakable predominance of contemporary art places compared with all the other municipalities. Here, the contemporary art density is the highest and, furthermore, greatly exceeds those of other municipalities. In fact, contemporary art density (places/km²) is much lower than population density (persons/km²).

Such a configuration allows us to look more closely at the relationship between population and contemporary art. The comparison has been carried out between the center and the rest of the municipalities, whose residents have to commute to the city center if they wish to enjoy and share contemporary art. Because art is for the people, culturally and fiscally belonging to the city, we analyzed the ratio describing the relation between the population density and the contemporary art density: The contemporary art versus population ratio shows that all the marginal municipalities (from 2 to 9) are excluded from the artistic urban fabric of Milan. Municipality 1 has 68 contemporary art places and 105,200 inhabitants, that means 0.7 art places per 1,000 residents, the highest value, with a dramatic disparity between this value and the others (see Figure 1). Such a low concentration of contemporary art places is attributable to both a substantial absence of art places and a high population rate in marginal municipalities.

Table 1: Population and Municipalities of Milan

Municipalities	Population	Percentage	Land Area (km ²)	Density (Persons/km ²)
1	105,200	8	9.67	10,879
2	206,925	15	12.6	16,423
3	127,769	9	14.2	8,998
4	165,803	12	21	7,895
5	97,081	7	29.9	3,247
6	122,099	9	18.3	6,672
7	218,187	16	31.3	6,971
8	176,973	13	23.7	7,467
9	138,780	10	21.1	6,577
n/d*	1,088	<1	n/d	n/d
Total	1,359,905			

*negligible amount of population allotted to no municipality
 Source: Elaboration of the authors of Comune di Milano 2015

⁶ This area has the largest land extension and therefore the lowest density basically because of the morphology of the area, slightly built.

⁷ With respect to the provisional growth of population expected to increase steadily up to 2035, not reported in this article but in the report of the study, the population of Municipality 1 (and 5) is expected to get even lower.

Table 2: Contemporary Art Institutions per Municipality: Amount and Density

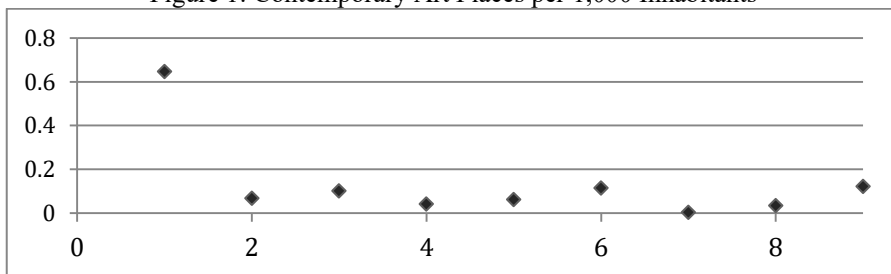
Municipalities	Land Area (km ²)	Contemporary Art Institution Amount	Density (Amount/km ²)
1	9.67	68	7.03
2	12.6	14	1.11
3	14.2	13	0.92
4	21	7	0.33
5	29.9	6	0.20
6	18.3	14	0.77
7	31.3	1	0.032
8	23.7	6	0.25
9	21.1	17	0.81
Total	181.77	146	

Source: Elaboration of the authors based on *Comune di Milano 2015* and on the contemporary art collections database built within the project "Arte Invisibile. Collezioni e Territorio: una nuova mappa per Milano," *Fondazione Cariplo 2017*

A first conceptual caveat entails the possibility of coupling the historic center and the respective other zones in order to carry out the analysis. Such a choice does not seem meaningful, considering that the historic center of the town is the cradle of a heritage that is relevant for the rest of the city. With respect to that, and also considering that we do not examine data on tourism, basing the comparison between the city centers, the one with the most contemporary art, with respectively the other zones, would have introduced a fictitious competition among municipalities.

The data collected portrays a situation in which a vast majority of the contemporary art collections in Milan are located in the city center and, moreover, many of them hold "invisible" depots, making them inaccessible, regardless their location. Even though this study does not entail a qualitative analysis of the audience, it is possible to contend that, based on the localization of contemporary art collections in Milan, there is little chance that contemporary art collections become part of the actively living urban fabric. This is simply because the neighborhoods where most of the residents live are very poor in such institutions, making it hard for residents to visit any contemporary art place close to where they live.

Figure 1: Contemporary Art Places per 1,000 Inhabitants



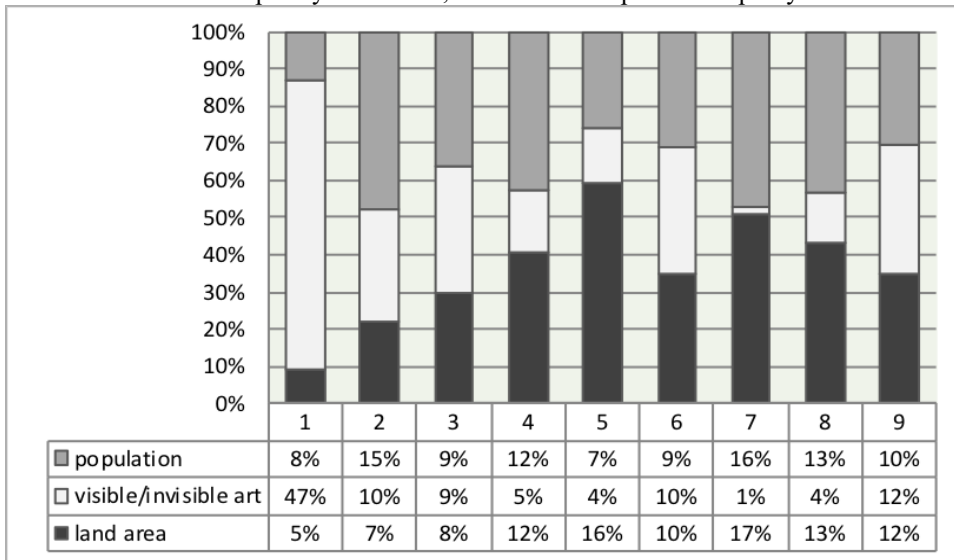
Source: Bollati et al.

It is also possible to compare all the data elaborated in a percentage comparison per municipality, as displayed in Figure 2. The most balanced configuration can be found in Zone 9, where 10 percent of the inhabitants live in 12 percent of the urban land area and where 10 percent of contemporary art places stand. The historic center is instead very unbalanced as well as Zones 5 and 7. If we are serious about the right to cultural participation, then the concentration of

contemporary art collections in the historic center (as high as 47%) should be subjected to possible actions aimed at rebalancing the contemporary art offer in a way that includes the cultural urban fabric and the neighborhood life.

In addition to population data, retail market statistics too have been considered, in an attempt to develop a proxy of the cultural urban fabric. The urban trade data set consists of 25,754 retailers (Comune di Milano 2015), which we grouped into the following categories: commercial business, artistic business, and cultural business. Artistic businesses are retailers of antiquities, art pieces, paintings, pictures, photography, design, engravings, and sculptures.⁸ Cultural retailers deal with press, books, musical instruments, audiovisuals, music records, DVDs, newspapers, and magazines. The residual set of retailers are classified as commercial business.⁹ This classification is useful to elaborate a map of the vocations of the retail market of Milan. Commercial retailers make up 91 percent of the total, whereas artistic and cultural retailers constitute, respectively, 5 and 4 percent. The result of this data is a lumpy concentration of all of three types of retail in the city center. This configuration consolidates the nonoverlapping of dwellers, consumers, and cultural spaces in the city.

Figure 2: A Percentage Comparison of Population, Visible and Invisible Contemporary Art Places, and Land Area per Municipality



Source: Bollati et al.

As much as 59 percent of cultural retailers and 28 percent of artistic retailers are located in the historic municipality, whereas the remaining 41 percent are distributed among the other 8 municipalities. The commercial businesses do not suffer from such an attraction to the historic center. Instead, their distribution follows that of the population. This means that Milanese residents can buy food and other supplies anywhere near their houses, but for books, music, design, or art pieces they must go downtown. It seems that consumption of cultural items is connected with, or, more appropriately, subordinated to the urban geography of cultural supply. The relationship identified here proves consistent with the idea of addictive consumption of art (Stigler and Becker 1977). People who just enjoyed contemporary art—in the city center—are more willing to return home (they normally do not live in the centre) with an increased cultural

⁸ Art galleries are not present here because they are considered among the contemporary art institutions.

⁹ Clothing, fabric, jewelry, sport, food, communication, cosmetics, furniture, household items, pets, cars.

capital that may include material cultural and artistic items as well as intangible ones such as awareness, critical views, knowledge, culture, and education.¹⁰

An additional layer can enrich the picture of Milan's urban fabric, that of bottom-up cultural activities and libraries. As the map displays, cultural associations¹¹ and public libraries are evenly distributed across the whole city land area. The importance of this map lies in the relevance of these institutions for the urban creative atmosphere and vibrancy. Libraries are very inclusive public institutions that make education, knowledge, and internet connections accessible for every social group (Scott 2011; Audunson et al. 2019). Moreover, they are often an opportunity to enhance the public use of buildings with historic, artistic, or architectural relevance. Additionally, cultural associations might be used to describe population cultural vibrancy and their interest in engaging in artistic matters.

A combination of the various layers offers a richer picture of the existing urban fabric in Milan. Its analysis leads to a synthetic conclusion:

Libraries and artistic associations are cultural institutions spread evenly across Milan in contrast to the contemporary art trend.

The previous pattern describes a vital approach of peripheral zones to the arts and culture that might justify possible interventions of delocalization of "invisible art."

A third element that refers to artists' ateliers can be introduced. Ateliers are widespread across the city with no apparent connection to artistic institutions, and this is possibly a further catalyst to local development interventions.

The maps of Milan display the distribution of contemporary art collections and their different degrees of accessibility, which, overall, highlight the presence of "invisible" art that is not accessible. Moreover, in terms of distribution, contemporary art locations are mostly concentrated where the fewest residents live. Even though that does not necessarily imply inaccessibility,¹² a comparison with a set of activities that work as a proxy for cultural urban fabric demonstrates that contemporary art collection, in view of its location, hardly belong to that. This can finally be interpreted as the impossibility for the residents of noncentral neighborhoods in Milan to experience a lively cultural neighborhood life. This study finds that, on the basis of the distribution of the comprehensive database built, considered, and analyzed, contemporary art cannot be incorporated in the citizens' everyday neighborhood lives.

Concluding Remarks: Extract, Relocate, Support, Participate, and Share

The evidence of a stark contradiction between commercial and cultural life in the metropolitan area of Milan may suggest many interpretations and leads to the elaboration of a strategic orientation aimed at narrowing the gap between the central and suburban areas. This would not only redress the uneven distribution of cultural options in the metropolitan fabric, but also substantially reduce the distance between the urban infrastructure, on the one hand, and its community, on the other. Although the data collected for this study has helped to picture the distribution of works of art within the district of Milan, further studies on qualitative and quantitative features of visitors' paths would enrich the exploration carried out in this article.

¹⁰ The presence of art institutions is not the only reason why the majority of shops dealing in art and cultural items stand in the historic center. Tourism and labor phenomena are also connected with such retail distribution.

¹¹ Cultural associations considered here are only those involved in the artistic domain.

¹² This study aims to understand the geographical distribution of contemporary art collections. The study could be extended by exploring questions such as the following: Are locals willing to travel outside their neighborhoods to see contemporary art? Hence, probably the most relevant subsequent question, again outside the scope of this research, entails the justification for aiming at a more balanced distribution of art locations where dwellers live. Will a more even distribution create more participation? This study is not focused on answering such a question. However, further research could attempt to understand the extent to which geographical location impacts accessibility.

The IA project was inspired by the simultaneous existence of two “absences”: on the one hand, much of the artwork included in private collections (the same holds for the endowment of public art museums) is simply buried in boxes, depots, and underground *caveaux*, not being perceived by even a restricted club of viewers; on the other hand, many suburban areas of Milan are simply denied the presence of spaces holding and exhibiting artwork. Both cases represent a cost to society: a missing opportunity for art supply to be located evenly in the urban fabric, as well as for the urban community to enjoy and share the arts in places of ordinary use.

The extraction of artwork from deposits and their relocation in suburban areas would require solid strategies and delicate actions. Public support may be helpful, albeit in the form of in-kind subsidies: infrastructure, technology, training, communication, and access to credit and markets; some regulation could also be required in order for rigid constraints to be released with specific reference to the programmed actions. Relocation is a necessary but not sufficient condition for any social feedback to be generated: actions should be located in familiar places such as elementary schools, where children and their families spend their time as an informal community, and the shape of the location would almost “absorb” any artwork in an everyday framework, facilitating their appraisal and appreciation.

Furthermore, artwork should be framed in a residence, workshop, and exchange project involving the local community and providing it with an intensive interaction, also stimulating creativity as the natural fallout of the program. The arts are thus not the final goal of the project but the sharp driver of a new interpretation of the urban districts on the part of their residents, who would “discover” new features and a wider fertility of its spaces, recording a likely increase in social capital because of the increased perception of belonging to a community and the related civic responsibility. As similar experiences have recorded,¹³ the perception of the quality of urban life may also be enhanced by the project, raising the degree of socialization and critical discussion among people. And some interdistrict exchange may occur, intensifying the connections among different areas of Milan.

Finally, the active relocation of contemporary works of art could prove a powerful driver in order for talent and creativity to emerge from the local communities, improving the quality of urban life and the value of human capital through such a channel, also reducing the social gap between center and suburbs, and properly extracting the emerging power of the suburban areas where less conventional and sharper bustles are in action.

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¹³ We can consider the opening of underground stations in Naples, designed by contemporary artists. Untested experience reports about old residents voluntarily spending time taking care of the safety of artistic creations.

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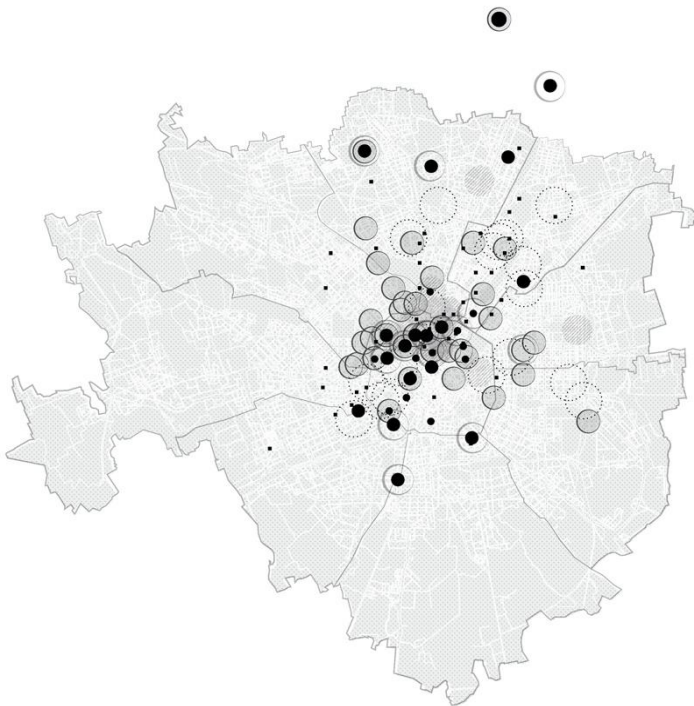
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Appendix

Accessibility and Consumption

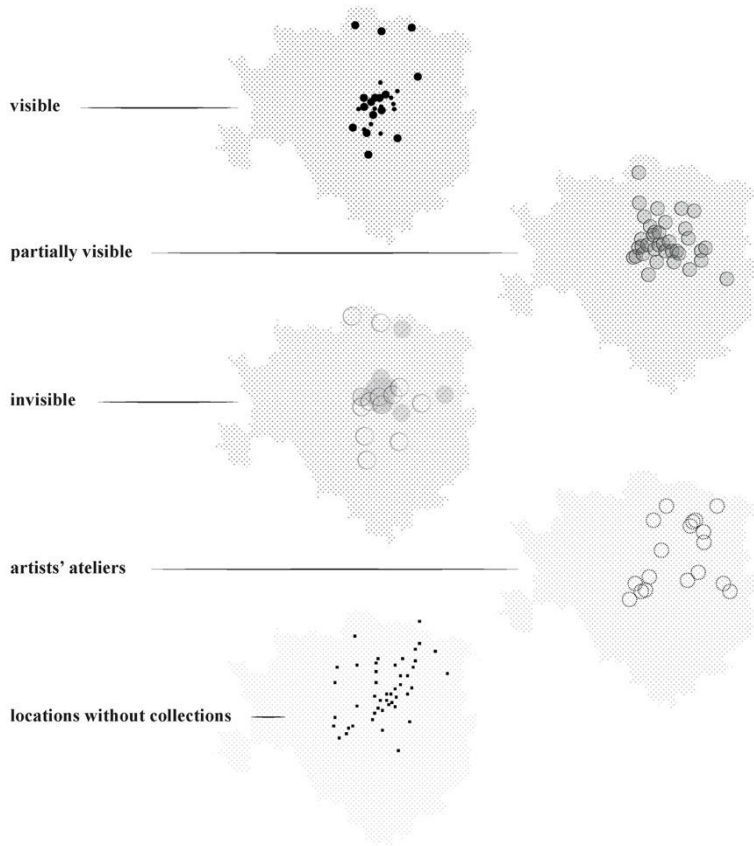
- visible art - Institutions and Collections that can be daily visited with regular opening hours
- visible art - Institutions and Collections that can be daily visited with regular opening hours only for temporary exhibitions
- partially visible art - Institutions and Collections that can be visited with limited access, or with compulsory booking
- invisible art - totally inaccessible collections inside depots
- invisible art - private venues, related with precise events with a 'formal' invitation
- invisible art - artists' ateliers
- locations without collections



Map 1: Represents the Overall and Present-Day Hidden and Revealed Contemporary Art Institutions
Source: Bollati et al.

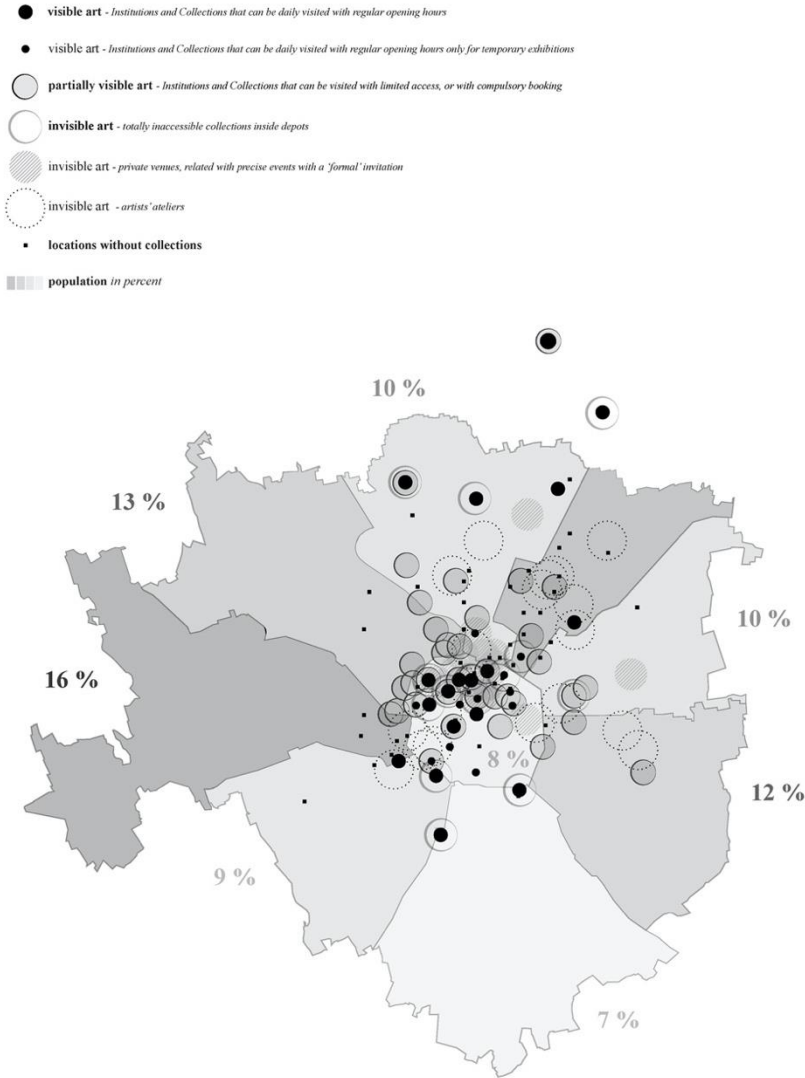
Accessibility and Consumption

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- **invisible art** - totally inaccessible collections inside depots
- **invisible art** - private venues, related with precise events with a 'formal' invitation
- **invisible art** - artists' ateliers
- **locations without collections**



Map 2: Shows the Main Categories in Distinct Layers
 Source: Bollati et al.

Population and Cultural Consumption



Map 3: Proposes a Comparison between the Geographical Distribution of Contemporary Art Spaces and a Synoptic View of the Resident Population
Source: Bollati et al.

Galleries

◆ visible art - galleries

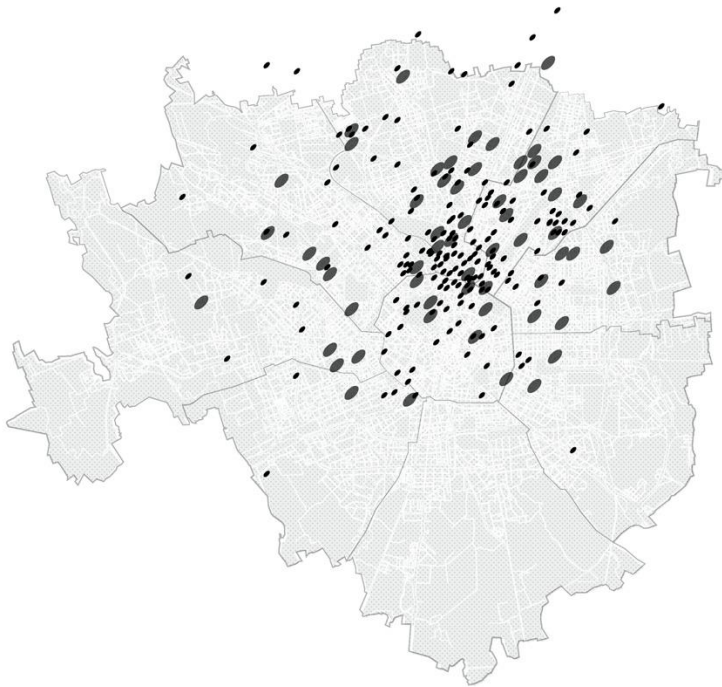


Map 4: Highlights the Distribution of Art Galleries
Source: Bollati et al.

Libraries and Cultural Organizations

source: dati.comune.milano.it

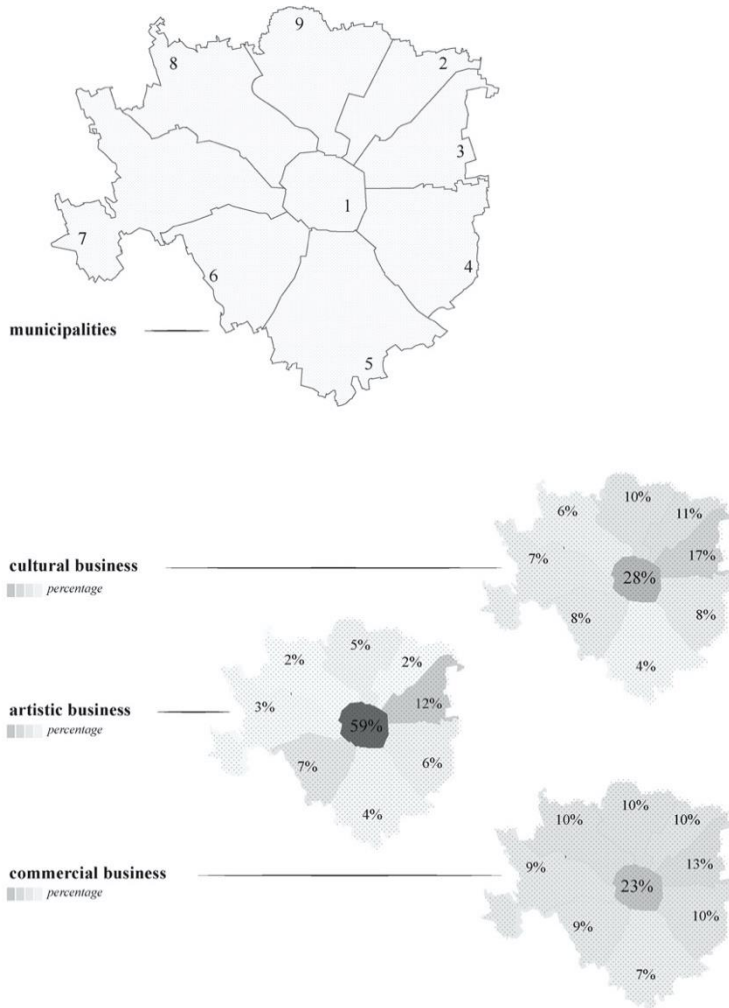
- cultural organizations
- libraries



Map 5: Investigates the Distribution of Libraries and Cultural Organizations
Source: Bollati et al.

Municipalities and Business

source: dati.comune.milano.it



Map 6: Displays the Distribution of Cultural, Artistic, and Commercial Business
Source: Bollati et al.

The International Journal of the Inclusive Museum

addresses the key question: How can the institution of the museum become more inclusive? The journal brings together academics, curators, museum and public administrators, cultural policy makers, and research students to engage in discussions about the historic character and future shape of the museum.

In addition to traditional scholarly papers, this journal invites case studies that take the form of presentations of museum practice—including documentation of organizational curatorial and community outreach practices and exegeses analyzing the effects of those practices.

The International Journal of the Inclusive Museum is a peer-reviewed, scholarly journal.