

Promoting inclusive cities and safe mobility for vulnerable people: the case of “NoLo” district in Milan.

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Abstract.

In the past, cities have been designed for the movement of young and healthy people, but this has created discrimination in the use of means of transport based on age, gender, social status and health. Then, urban space, instead of promoting inclusion, became a place of inequality and social exclusion. New forms of urban design should start from the needs of the most fragile people to promote greater safety, accessibility to means of transport, and a more participatory decision-making process. The older population group (65+) is the one that has been growing the most in the last two decades, and for this reason it is essential to design friendlier urban spaces and transportation solutions, designed and conceived for their physical and psychological constraints. Focusing our approach on older people as a relevant fragile group, this also means that by solving the needs of the most fragile, everybody else's needs would be met.

Using bottom-up approaches, to promote the meeting between citizens and municipalities, more inclusive and sustainable urban planning and mobility programs can be triggered, some of which, such as “Tactical Urbanism”, have established themselves in major European cities thanks also to Art-driven processes. In recent years Milan has emerged as one of the most innovative pilot cities in the field of mobility and redevelopment, thanks to plans like the “PUMS”, “Piazze Aperte” (Open Streets), and “Just streets”.

This study investigates their impact in Milan, showcasing two of the successful pilot experiments (one in the north, another in the south) where the impact of the tactical intervention was translated into permanent solutions made of stone pavements, wider sidewalks, introduction of trees and flower beds, benches, play areas, bicycle lanes and bike parking. Finally, the more central “NoLo” district is brought to the spotlight for its social and cultural vibrancy and long gentrification process, where the mobility of fragile population groups, especially older people, is considered seeking solutions for a better public space for all citizens.

Keywords: Smart Mobility, Tactical Urbanism, Elder and Fragile People, Shared Spaces, Urban Regeneration

1 Introduction

The rapid urbanization around the world has had a significant impact on the design of urban spaces, particularly in the context of safe mobility. Over the last century, as cities have expanded, vehicles have increasingly occupied a central role in the urban context and, consequently, the figure of pedestrians and their right to move freely and safely on the streets has been “sacrificed”.

In this context, ensuring inclusive urban spaces and safe routes for all residents, especially the most vulnerable social groups on the streets, such as children, older people, people with impairments, and pregnant women (but also healthy people carrying loads or heavy shopping bags) has become an increasingly complex challenge [1]. This paper will focus on older people as vulnerable citizens, considering that many of them face displacement difficulties because of health or physical issues, often depending on mobility aids (wheelchairs, electric scooters, canes, walkers, etc.), therefore representing a vast number of people (regardless of age) who face special needs in the public space.

The concept of inclusive cities, where every resident, regardless of age, gender, ability or status, has access to safe and effective mobility, is a pressing issue for city governments. However, despite initiatives to address inequality, many urban areas are still designed for young and healthy people following traditional planning methods. This phenomenon has contributed to the creation of an urban environment that can seem hostile: a place where mobility, safety and accessibility are not universal, but depend on factors such as gender, age, health or income, promoting social exclusion and physical inaccessibility for the most vulnerable groups of the population [2]. Therefore, it is crucial to recognize the limitations of traditional urban planning rules and procedures. Redesigning urban spaces with inclusiveness as a guiding principle not only improves the quality of life for vulnerable groups from a physical and psychological point of view but also promotes a culture of participation and belonging that is essential for collective well-being [3].

As highlighted by Boano [4], urban design should be oriented to promote social justice, allowing each citizen to have access to the same opportunities for mobility and use of public spaces. In some European cities, attempts have been made to find alternative design methods that start from citizens and collective participation, such as Tactical Urbanism and other types of “bottom-up” approaches that manage to involve city public administrations on specific community problems [5].

In this article we will present and analyse two of the first pilot interventions in peripheral Milan (Piazza Dergano, in the north, and Piazza Angilberto II, in the south) and then focus on NoLo, a more central and expanded area of the city, which is undergoing a gentrification process where some programs (TréntaMI in Verde, Zona 30) and local associations are promoting interventions together with the municipality.

1.1 Road safety and mobility challenges

According to European Commission data [6], Italy has seen a decline in traffic-related fatalities in recent years, however, the numbers remain worrisome.

Road safety is a major concern for Milan municipal administrations, with particular attention to the protection of pedestrians and vulnerable groups, such as the elderly, children and people with disabilities. Every year the Municipality of Milan records many road accidents, many of which involve pedestrians; in fact, according to data provided by ACI, Automobile Club Italia, in 2023 there were 26 pedestrian deaths in Milan, and 1.816 were injured [7].

Given the worrisome growth in the number of accidents, in recent years several public policies have been launched with the aim of improving road safety. Among these strategies, one of the most important is the "National Road Safety Plan 2030" (PNSS 2030), which identifies pedestrians as the most at-risk category among road users and consequently seeks to develop new interventions for safe and sustainable mobility. The Plan is aimed at designing and implementing interventions for urban redevelopment in areas with high pedestrian density, such as the implementation of "zone 30" and "environmental islands", new and larger pedestrian areas, traffic-lighted crossings, speed bumps and interventions to increase their visibility [8]. These types of interventions aim to reduce the number of victims and make the streets safer, especially for vulnerable citizens, such as older people and children.

The high number of accidents and deaths among vulnerable road users is a symptom of the urgent need for new and innovative urban planning strategies, which, starting from the involvement of citizens, aim to design more democratic and inclusive urban spaces.

1.2 Vulnerable road users

In the urban context, the analysis of the travel methods of vulnerable users, especially children and older people, allows us to highlight both the critical issues and the potential of an evolving urban ecosystem.

According to data, most Italian children, 62%, are accompanied to school by car, only 27% travel on foot or by bicycle, while 10% use the school bus [9]. In Milan the situation is estimated to be similar. Initiatives such as "Piedibus", a service that accompanies children to school on foot following pre-established routes, promote active mobility among children, but the use of private cars for home-school travel remains significant. "Active mobility" refers to all forms of transport that do not involve the use of motor vehicles, thus favouring ecological and healthy modes [10]. As for older people, they tend to move mainly on foot and using public transport. In fact, according to some statistical analyses, in Milan 35.8% of the seniors move on foot, 30.8% move by public transport, 22.8% move by car or private vehicle and only 11% move by bicycle [11]. To support the mobility of senior citizens, the city of Milan offers several dedicated services, such as the "Solidarity Taxi": an initiative that provides free or discounted rides for 65+, dedicated to vaccinations and medical visits. However, significant challenges persist for older people in Milan, mainly related to the presence of architectural barriers, the lack of public benches along the streets [12], and the need for safe and accessible paths.

Another aspect to consider is the perception of safety on the streets in Milan, which is influenced by several factors, including the quality of urban infrastructure, the

presence of irregularly parked vehicles and sustainable mobility initiatives. The presence of cars parked on sidewalks, for example, forces pedestrians to walk on the road, increasing the risk of accidents. The “Via Libera” initiative has mapped over 64 thousand irregularly parked cars in Milan, highlighting the negative impact on road safety and accessibility for the most vulnerable. Children, due to their small stature, have greater difficulty seeing beyond parked cars and understanding concepts such as speed, distance and time. Risk perception is also particularly high for older people. The psycho-physical characteristics associated with advanced age, such as reduced mobility and reaction capacity, make older people more vulnerable to road accidents. According to a report by Polis Lombardia [13], the perception of risk in the road environment is fundamental for the safety of seniors. To address these critical issues, Milan has launched projects such as "Strade Aperte" (Open Streets), which aim to create safer and more accessible urban spaces for all.

In summary, although Milan is making progress in promoting safer and more inclusive mobility, significant challenges persist in ensuring the safety of children, older people and other frail citizens in the urban space, highlighting the need for integrated interventions.

2 Milan promotes a new safe and inclusive mobility

2.1 The new “Urban Plan for Sustainable Mobility”

In recent years, the city of Milan has established itself as one of the leading innovative urban centres in Europe in the field of sustainable mobility and urban regeneration. This result has been achieved thanks to a strategy of interventions oriented towards sustainability and inclusion, supported by advanced planning tools such as the “Piano Urbano per la Mobilità Sostenibile - PUMS” (Urban Plan for Sustainable Mobility), approved in 2018 by the Municipality of Milan [14], which supports a safer and more inclusive mobility.

The PUMS aims to reduce traffic congestion, decrease emissions and improve the quality of life for Milan residents, promoting sustainable forms of transport, such as walking, cycling and public transport. The plan addresses vulnerable groups, seeking to ensure that public spaces and transport systems are accessible and safe for everyone, regardless of their physical abilities or socio-economic status.

Milan is establishing itself as a "laboratory city" in which innovative urban solutions are tested, with a growing focus on the integration of mobility planning, environmental management and the quality of public space [15].

2.2 “Strade Aperte” Project

The “Open Streets” project in Milan, launched during the COVID-19 pandemic to promote active mobility, represents a complex response to the critical issues that emerged in the context of urban mobility and the safety of vulnerable road users. The main objectives include the improvement of urban infrastructure: the redevelopment

of sidewalks, the adaptation of signage, the extension of protected pedestrian and cycle paths, and the introduction of limited speed zones [16]. Since its activation, the project has significantly impacted the development of city cycle paths, which grew from around 140 km to over 320 km, partly thanks to rapid and temporary interventions such as the so-called “pop-up bike lanes” [17].

Another objective of the project was the expansion of the Zone 30, or those areas where the speed limit is limited to 30 km/h. This is a seemingly simple measure, but it has a huge impact on road safety, air quality and urban noise. With a lower speed, the streets become safer for pedestrians and cyclists, but also for motorists themselves [18]. In several neighbourhoods, such as Ortica or Città Studi, the creation of these zones has led to a review of the road system, the installation of highly visible signs and the reorganisation of spaces, thus encouraging more respectful mobility.

Not less important were the interventions to pedestrianize some central city streets, such as Piazza San Babila, and in proximity to schools, such as the ones in via Pizzigoni or in via Guido Reni, transforming the street in front into a real gathering space, where children can wait for their parents playing or reading, without the noise or danger of traffic. Streets such as Corso Buenos Aires and Corso Venezia were redesigned in a short time, using simple materials, thus allowing tens of thousands of people to walk or ride a bicycle, easily and safely.

Finally, the project had an important territorial declination, through targeted interventions in specific neighbourhoods such as Isola, Lazzaretto or Corvetto. In these areas, often already dynamic from a social and cultural point of view, it was decided to experiment with new forms of participation. Citizens were involved in the design of the spaces, with neighbourhood workshops, public meetings and moments of discussion [14]. The result was twofold: on the one hand, visible and functional urban transformations were achieved; on the other, the bond between inhabitants and territory and the dialogue between community and public administration was strengthened, making everyone participant in the process of city evolution.

3 Innovative Models of Urban Regeneration in Milan

3.1 Tactical Urbanism (TU) as a bottom-up artistic intervention

Since the 1980s, urban Public Art has been seen as a way to regenerate cities, to create a sense of identity and promoting education, social change and economic development [19]. Nowadays, in order to discourage land consumption and new constructions, urban regeneration should mainly focus on the recovery and reuse of existing spaces, considering the advantages of the temporariness and reversibility of interventions. In this scenario, Public Art and participatory forms of urban regeneration are methods designed to respond to the specific citizens' needs. These interventions, often temporary, are used to generate a concrete social impact and involve citizens in the processes that shape the urban space, also in relation to mobility and daily transportation.

Participatory art projects, being low-cost and flexible, can easily adapt to local needs and represent a key element in new urban regeneration strategies. Furthermore, traditional urban planning rules can make many citizens feel like strangers in public space, and for this reason it is necessary to rethink urban design as a tool for participation and self-determination [4].

Tactical Urbanism represents an opportunity for citizens to carry out targeted interventions and reinvent the city based on common needs. The key concept is to put the individual at the centre of decision-making and construction processes, taking personal responsibility for making buildings, streets and cities in general more sustainable and inclusive places. This movement of collective participation is a means for local communities to find quick solutions using limited resources and investments in response to growing social and urban difficulties.

Even if the interventions may be temporary, the impacts on communities can last decades; for this reason, it is important to include them in a long-term strategy, transforming good initiatives into permanent solutions and replicating them. This approach helps cities to rethink the use of street spaces, shifting the focus from private vehicles to safer and more comfortable spaces for people. When Tactical Urbanism is part of a public design process, it can quickly create trust among the community, making the citizen an active part of the aesthetic process. In this way, people are not simple spectators: they become "actors" within the changing city [20].

3.2 “Piazze Aperte” Project

The “Piazze Aperte” (Open Squares) project, promoted by the Municipality of Milan since 2018 and still ongoing, is aimed at pursuing the objectives of urban regeneration and mobility of the “Sustainable Urban Mobility Plan” (PUMS) for the regeneration of urban areas. The project aims, through the principle of Tactical Urbanism, to enhance public space as a place of aggregation in the centre of neighbourhoods, to expand pedestrian areas and to promote active and sustainable forms of mobility for the benefit of the environment and the quality of life in the city. The goal is to transform asphalted road spaces into pedestrian squares, to create a connection between people and their neighbourhoods, offering new ways of experiencing life outside home. The project has transformed vehicular areas into more loveable, healthier and car-free spaces, creating new cycle paths, spreading 30 km/h zones and encouraging the adoption of active modes of travel [21].

The project represents a change in the way citizens collaborate with the Municipalities for the conception, development and implementation of projects, as well as in the activation and care, according to the principles of shared administration, through the signing of “Collaboration Agreements”. These agreements allow active citizens and associations to collaborate with the Administration in the management, maintenance and improvement of public urban goods.

After the experimentation of the first Open Squares in 2018, a second phase of the project began, which took the name of “Piazze Aperte in ogni Quartiere” (Open Squares in Every District) to identify new spaces to be transformed directly by the communities in the area and to actively involve citizens in every phase.

By simply filling out a form on the website of the Municipality of Milan, the proponents were asked to identify the objectives of the proposed intervention, considering all types of users and possibly hypothesizing improvements to mobility for cyclists and pedestrians [22]. The promoters had to identify an applicable type of intervention among those proposed:

1. Creation of new squares and/or pedestrian areas through substantial changes to the road system, limiting vehicular access and creating new public spaces.
2. Activation of underused public spaces through new street furniture and new functions, with the aim of encouraging sociality and aggregative activities.
3. Extension and safety of pedestrian spaces through the narrowing of the roadway, removal of underused parking lots, adoption of speed moderation systems and creation of zones 30 to benefit gentle mobility.
4. Creation of cycle paths using lightweight prefabricated structures and horizontal and vertical signs, to encourage cycling.
5. Reuse of rest areas as "parklets" by transforming parking areas at the side of the road into small public "living rooms", meeting places whose use is open to all.

The projects can be implemented with some standard elements, such as pavement painting, benches, picnic and ping-pong tables and floor games, road signs, flower beds and containers for urban gardens.

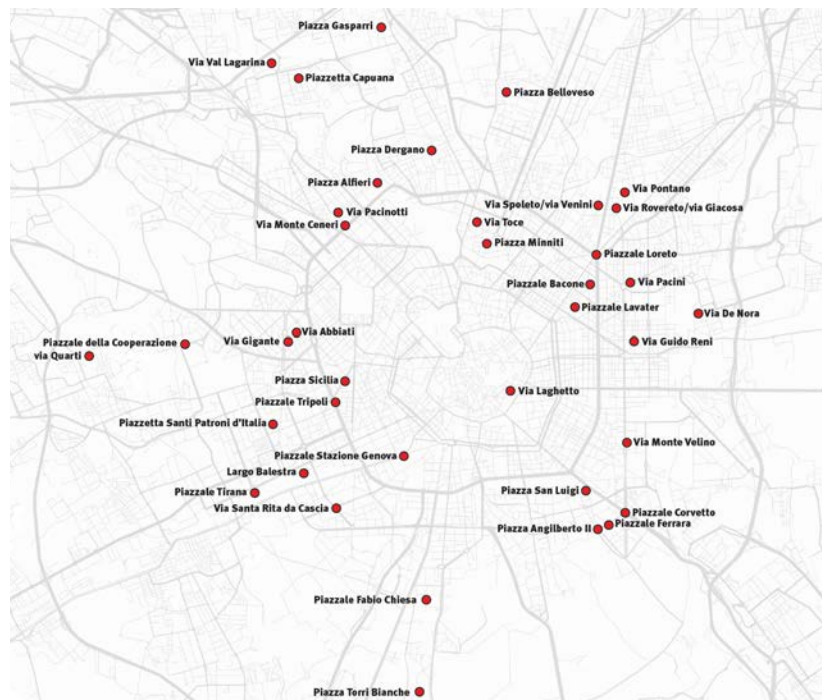


Fig. 1. Map of the main "Open Squares" projects developed in Milan (credits: Comune di Milano, 2025)

“Open Squares” has provided residents of different neighbourhoods, regardless of social class, age and origin, with new spaces to be together, where they can stop and sit, rest and socialize. By giving the spaces back to the citizens, they can, with activities, meetings or even simply “living” the area, return to giving full meaning to the term “piazza” as a place of relationships in the neighbourhood.

Up to April 2025, the Municipality of Milan has implemented 52 projects under the “Open Squares” program, transforming over 56,000 square meters of urban space into pedestrian and liveable areas [23]. In addition to these, 87 new proposals were presented in 2023 through the “Open Squares for every school” initiative, which aim to redevelop public spaces near schools.

3.3 The first pilot interventions

The creation of the first Open Squares began in September 2018 with the interventions in Piazza Dergano (in the north) and then in Piazza Angilberto II (in the south). It all began in the small district of Dergano on the outskirts of Milan, an urban area that over the years has experienced a phase of true social and commercial rebirth. However, until 2018 the district lacked a city aggregation centre: the historic square was in fact lifeless. The project involved the widening of the sidewalk on the north side to create a new colourful space in the centre of the square, a pedestrian and flexible area, available to residents for events and neighbourhood parties [21].



Fig. 2. On the left: Piazza Dergano during the tactical intervention of “Open Squares” (credits: Comune di Milano, 2018). On the right: the final project of the square (credits: Urbanfile.blog, 2025).

Previously occupied by parked cars, the space was redesigned to accommodate seats, ping-pong tables, new plants and racks for private and shared bicycles. The traffic flow was rationalized and the road sections of Via Conte Verde and Via Brivio along the square were reduced to moderate the speed of cars and ensure the safe use of the new pedestrian space. Today we can find a square that has returned to being lived in, to the benefit of citizens and the commercial activities that overlook the space. The initial paintings have been replaced by a definitive cobblestone pavement at level from façade to façade, including the narrow roadway that crosses it, conveying drivers the perception of crossing a pedestrian space.

Also in 2018, the second intervention involved the redevelopment of Piazza Angilberto II within the “Corvetto” neighbourhood, another peripheral area of Milan with various problems of crime and social integration.



Fig. 3. On the left: Piazza Angilberto II after the “Open Squares” project, 2018. On the right: the construction site of the final project of the square, 2025. (Credits: Urbanfile.blog)

The project area, which previously consisted of a simple intersection, was redesigned to create a new pedestrian space. By closing a redundant arm of the intersection to traffic, the sidewalks were widened to accommodate new seats, ping-pong tables, new plants and racks for private and shared bicycles.

Thanks to the pedestrianization between via Bessarione and via Comacchio, the application of enormous yellow “polka dots” on the pavement and furnishing elements including 80 flower boxes, the new square obtained different play and rest areas inside, protected from cars and noise. Small commercial activities directly overlook the new pedestrian space and can therefore be enjoyed safely. A new two-way cycle path has been inserted on via Comacchio that connects to Piazza Ferrara, increasing the number of cyclists by 47% and pedestrians by 30%. Once again, after the success of the “tactical colourful experiment”, the municipality converted the pedestrian areas into red stone pavement areas with green patches of bushes, flowers and trees, surrounded by public benches and ping-pong tables for residents and passersby creating a stable “piazza”.

4 NoLo district as a hub for urban innovation

The NoLo district, acronym for “North of Loreto”, represents one of the most dynamic and transforming areas of the city of Milan. Historically characterized by a strong cultural identity and lively artistic activity, NoLo has stood out for its ability to reinvent itself through urban regeneration interventions and active participation policies [24]. In recent years, the socio-urban context of NoLo has attracted the attention of urban planners, administrators and researchers, as the neighbourhood lends itself particularly well to the development of safe and inclusive mobility [25], with specific attention to the needs of vulnerable groups of the population.

4.1 The neighbourhood: history and evolution

The NoLo district is located north of Loreto, within the Municipio 2 of Milan. Originally developed as a peripheral industrial and working-class area, NoLo has undergone a redevelopment process that has led to the birth of new creative and cultural activities. The presence of alternative spaces, art workshops and design studios has helped to create a dynamic and multicultural environment, capable of attracting young professionals and artists from all over the world [24].

From a geographical point of view, the western side of the area is well delimited by the platforms of the Central Station, while, on the southern side, Viale Brianza and Piazzale Loreto represent a physical border. The northern boundary, marked by a railway overpass, is less defined, since it is permeable at Viale Monza, Via Padova and some minor roads. The eastern boundary, however, is not clearly marked.

Another level of delimitation of the area is the administrative one, characterized by the subdivision of the municipal territory into NIL or Local Identity Nuclei (40 in total for the city of Milan), introduced by the PGT (Land Management Plan) of 2013. The NoLo area belongs to NIL 20 (Loreto – Casoretto - NoLo).

The district has always been characterized by cultural and social heterogeneity, and its birth can be framed in the context of two migratory flows. The first one occurred after the end of the Second World War, following the formation of numerous industries in the area and the settlement of many workers around the workplaces.



Fig. 4. Map of the NoLo district, boundaries, main roads, landmarks, and recent interventions. (Credits: Ruzza, L. E., 2020 and additions by the authors)

The second migratory flow can instead be divided into two phases, the first in the 1980s, with the deindustrialization of the area and an increase in vacant housing, making it the ideal place for the settlement of foreign workers. Then, the second phase began in the 1990s, when the city of Milan was hit by a wave of migration from various countries. Furthermore, after the Real Estate Crisis in 2008, the neighbourhood experienced strong demographic expansion, exceeding the average population growth rates of the Municipality of Milan [25]. This phenomenon occurred, on the one hand, due to an increase in the foreign population at the city level and, on the other hand, due to the arrival of new citizens, encouraged by lower housing prices and the presence of numerous infrastructures and schools.

The brand "NoLo" dates back to 2013 as an acronym of the English words "North of Loreto"; a few years later, in 2016, the creation of "NoLo Social Street" took place: a virtual space that allowed some residents to interact in the neighbourhood space [26]. The revaluation of the district is also characterized by the arrival of new inhabitants, belonging to social and professional groups generally defined as "creative", and by the opening of new commercial businesses and entertainment spaces [27]. These factors have contributed to transforming, in a short period of time and thanks to intense media coverage, an area that in the past was the object of stigma, making it a symbol of innovation and positivity. The history of the district has also favoured the development of a cohesive and participatory community, which has been able to reinterpret and regenerate the urban ecosystem, making the neighbourhood an ideal laboratory for experimenting safe and inclusive mobility [28].

4.2 Urban Regeneration Interventions in NoLo

The urban fabric of NoLo is characterized by a network structure, with narrow streets and public spaces of variable size. This type of urban texture, if properly managed, offers numerous opportunities to develop active mobility solutions, as an alternative to the massive use of private cars. The accessibility and flexibility of the spaces also allow for adapting the interventions to the specific needs of vulnerable populations, ensuring their safety. The large presence of pedestrian areas, makes it possible to create safe routes for pedestrian transit, promoting active and sustainable mobility for children and old people [3].

The recent urban planning policies adopted by the Municipality of Milan have seen NoLo as a priority area for regeneration interventions. Projects such as the "Urban Plan for Urban Mobility" (PUMS) and the "TréntaMI in Verde" project have introduced innovative measures to reduce vehicular traffic and encourage the use of ecological and shared means of transport. Once more, the concept of "Tactical Urbanism", applied within social projects such as "Open Squares", has played a central role in the urban redevelopment of the district, allowing rapid and temporary interventions before adopting them definitively [4].

4.3 The “TréntaMI in Verde” Project

In April 2019, at the entrance to Trotter Park between Viale Monza and Via Rovereto, in the heart of the NoLo district, the neighbourhood associations “Genitori Antismog” and “FIAB Milano Ciclobby”, presented the initiative “TréntaMI in Verde” designed by the architect Matteo Dondè in collaboration with the Municipality of Milan [29]. The project follows the trail of the “Open Squares” projects, bringing together the citizens of NoLo district with the activists of the MoBi collective, and applying the strategies of Tactical Urbanism.

The project involved narrowing the carriageway of Via Rovereto to 5.5 meters, to discourage vehicle speed and make room for plants, new flowerbeds, and meeting places. The intersections with Viale Monza and Via Giacosa have been made safer thanks to the widening of the sidewalks, reducing the radius of curvature of the streets to prevent cars from turning too quickly and increasing mutual visibility between drivers and pedestrians [30].

The area in front of the entrance to Trotter Park and Via Rovereto, was redeveloped with new asphalt, coloured drawings, benches and plants. The success of these initiatives must be read within the phenomenon of the emergence of civil society in NoLo and the growing interaction with the public sector to request urban improvements, as well as in the approach to the management of the city through forms of "playful activism" [24].



Fig. 5. On the left: the entrance to Parco Trotter during the "TrentaMI in Verde" intervention, 2019. On the right: the definitive renovation, 2025. (Credits: Urbanfile.blog)

In its aftermath, given the widespread appreciation of the project by the local community and the decreased frequency of accidents, the project was affected by a definitive arrangement, with wide sidewalks (but no public benches unfortunately), bicycle and motorbike parking areas, flowerbeds and new trees. Entrance to Parco Trotter was transformed from a parking lot into a real pedestrian square, expanding the stone pavements to the opposite sidewalks of Via Giacosa, as well as on the carriageway (thereby slowing down the traffic speed), creating the sense of a place.

4.4 The “Piazza Arcobalena” Project

In the same year, in continuity with the experience of “Zona 30” and within the scope of the “Open Squares” project, a new intervention led to the redevelopment of another space in the neighbourhood: the creation of a new square between Via Spoleto and Via Venini, equipped with a yellow and blue coloured pavement, metal vases and flower boxes, benches, picnic and ping-pong tables, which was called “Piazza Arcobalena” because of the colours and the shape that recalls that of a whale.

This intervention was also characterized by the participatory planning process, which involved the Municipality, civil society and some international associations [30]. The new space, which welcomes the requests of the families of the Cerisola school, in front of the square, has the function of making the entrance and exit safer for the little ones, and of creating a new place of sociality and interaction for the citizens of the neighbourhood. The proposal also includes a reorganization of the road system that flows into the new square to favour soft mobility.



Fig. 6. Left: Piazza Arcobalena after the tactical intervention (credits: globaldesigningcities). Right: the state of conservation of the square today (credits: labsus).

The presentation of the project was welcomed with general enthusiasm by the population; however, unlike the interventions examined previously, a definitive project for the Piazza has not yet been started, nor even conceived. Starting from the two years following the realization, numerous critical issues have been highlighted by local citizens, who complain about night-time noise, acts of vandalism and waste abandonment [31]. This case highlights how the temporary nature of tactical interventions must necessarily be accompanied by structured definitive projects and shared management plans for the correct and lasting conservation of public spaces.

5 Conclusions and observations

Despite significant progress, the creation of completely safe and inclusive mobility for the most vulnerable population groups still presents many challenges in terms of urban planning and services. Among these, the need for continuous updating of existing infrastructures and the adaptation of urban policies to technological and demographic developments stands out, such as the phenomenon of aging population,

which is leading to a strong increase in the percentage of people over 65. Integrated data management and the ability to quickly adapt interventions to the new needs of citizens are therefore key elements for the long-term success of urban redevelopment in safe and sustainable active mobility projects.

Cities must offer to this growing sector of the population good conditions for active ageing, that is, to stimulate soft physical exercise, allowing them to age in place in their own neighbourhood. Being a quite flat city with asphalt sidewalks, Milan offers quite comfortable pavements to walk without stumbling. Nevertheless, public benches are totally absent from its streets, turning each daily outing a daring adventure for fragile people whose age requires not only some exercise but a network of resting places [12]. The Milanese tradition of locating public benches only in squares or parks must be questioned and reconsidered. Fragile people need some places to sit, not just in parks but along the streets they stroll in their daily life.

The transformation of public spaces, starting from “bottom-up” approaches, proves effective not only in terms of accessibility and safety, but also in reactivating citizens' sense of belonging and urban identity. However, alongside this participatory approach, there are also examples of an opposite approach, aimed at excluding people who practice different lifestyles [25]. In fact, at the end of 2018, following numerous reports of petty crime and degradation in the small gardens of Via dei Transiti, close to Pasteur metro station, a fence was installed to prevent access during the night, while the benches that allowed people to stop were removed. This type of intervention is linked to the complex issue of urban security, which should however be addressed within the renewed perspective of the ongoing transformations, to avoid interventions of social exclusion, but also reminding the old lesson of the “eyes on the street” [28], where residents casually look onto the street naturally surveying it.

Given its urban and socio-demographic characteristics, the NoLo district offers significant opportunities to experiment with innovative models. Future opportunities should include the adoption of advanced monitoring systems, the integration of "Big-Data" for the analysis of mobility dynamics and the development of digital platforms that facilitate communication. These innovations, combined with the experience gained in NoLo, show evidence of the transformative potential of collaboration between citizens, institutions and designers: a virtuous model to observe, enhance and replicate to create a safe and inclusive urban environment.

In conclusion, only by placing the needs of the most vulnerable at the centre of the design will it be possible to build a fair, accessible and truly inclusive city.

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