Prosuming Public Space: the UNPark project

The role of urban infrastructures in the regeneration of the in-between spaces

Paolo Carli

with contributions by Francesco Bruschi, Matteo Clementi, Davide Crippa, Luigi De Nardo, Barbara Di Prete, Carol Monticelli, Giulia Procaccini, Agnese Rebaglio and Patrizia Scrugli

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Prosuming Public Space: the UNPark project illustrates the experience of the Urban Nudging Park research project, funded by the social responsibility program of the Politecnico di Milano through the competitive call Polisocial Award 2019. The book returns the complexity that characterised UNPark: a research by design project, in the wake of tactical urbanism, on the theme of the role that urban infrastructures could have in the regenerative processes of the in-between spaces.
Indeed, UNPark has been a transdisciplinarity effort which took shape through a temporary urban tactical intervention and a study about the possibility of transforming the current parking under the Serra - Monte Ceneri Overpass, in Milan, into a multifunctional space equipped for social activities, including street sports.
Prosuming Public Space: the UNPark project is a monographic book, with thematic chapters by the members of the work team, that proposes, in addition to recalling the research work phases, reflections on the city during the pandemic, on the co-design, on the multifunctional regeneration of the urban infrastructures, and about the needed transdisciplinarity in any urban design intervention.

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XI. Prosuming Public Space

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XI.1 RESOURCES, CITIES AND INFRASTRUCTURES

Mobility infrastructure has always had crucial roles and purposes in the urban fabric, of which it occupies a significant area. Its function, first and foremost, is that of connecting different places, facilitating movement. Moreover, the development of cities and the changes to users' mobility have also led to the increasing emergence of infrastructure as a social connector (Bailey et alt., 2020). Tunnels, underpasses, car parks, bridges, and the Serra - Monte Ceneri Overpass itself, which has undergone special study as part of the UNPark research, cannot therefore be seen as mere structures facilitating movement and transport, but rather as urban elements that can offer added value to the city and its inhabitants. Furthermore, these structures often represent genuine physical barriers, producing areas that lack security and economic vitality; contributing to the creation of sub-optimal, or even run-down, urban spaces, which can weaken and, in the worst cases, destroy urban networks and impede the development of cities and their social capital (Jacobs 1961, Bairoch 1991, Glaeser 2011). Over the last two centuries in particular, mankind has built and transformed its habitat by relying on a guarantee of abundance: ever more

materials to use, ever more resources to consume, ever more land on which to build. The present-day reality of the modern city instead confronts us with the indisputable fact that urban resources, whether spatial, economic or environmental, are extremely limited (Wallace-Wells, 2019). The direct consequence is that solutions developed to optimise the use of the city and its infrastructure must be sustainable and adaptive in all these aspects. But that is not all. Indeed, as the density of urban centres increases, the spaces available become scarcer while the need for such spaces increases. The recent Coronavirus pandemic was an overwhelming example of this.

See also III.1 by Carli and Rebaglio

Imagining a resilient future for our cities with a view to a green transition therefore requires, first of all, a change to the socio-productive paradigm: from "consuming more" to "doing more with what we have". Indeed, as Scott Burnham suggests in his book "Reprogramming the City", if the cities' resources are finite, there is a potentially infinite number of ways in which we can use these resources.

Hence it is also important to rethink the way in which we use infrastructure, particularly mobility infrastructure, through 1) technological upgrades, 2) the integration of other compatible functions, or 3) the replacement of its original function, with the aim of creating new added value for the urban collective and experimenting with innovative, sustainable and adaptive solutions.

During the UNPark research, this urban planning approach for mobility infrastructure was called "multifunctional regeneration". Indeed, regardless of the structures in question, planning the city from the perspective of "doing more with what we have" allows the intrinsic capacities of the existing structures, areas and urban systems to show themselves not only for what

they are, but more importantly for what they *could* be. The aim is that of transforming the city's under-performing resources, helping them to reach their full potential.

XI.2 A SOCIOCULTURAL PROBLEM

In this area of urban research, the Serra - Monte Ceneri Overpass has been an exceptionally interesting case study to compare with many international regeneration projects for mobility infrastructure, with the aim of translating or scaling the most promising project and planning strategies to the context of our overpass, with regard to both its multifunctional regeneration, for long-term scenarios, and the active engagement of residents to create the temporary pilot project UNPark/FREESTYLE, and the creation of a shared, collective vision as a result of promoting other international experiences of transformations and projects carried out to mitigate the impacts that are produced under and around mobility infrastructure.

See also V by Scrugli and Procaccini

See also VIII by Monticelli and Scrugli

See also IX by Procaccini and Monticelli

This last aspect proved to be the most important pillar for UNPark since the Serra - Monte Ceneri Overpass represents a sociocultural problem first of all, as well as an urban planning and design issue. At this point it seems worth reiterating once again, perhaps more strongly, that however interesting the Serra - Monte Ceneri Overpass may be from an engineering perspective, it is no more than a typical, and for many citizens "squalid", flyover that extends for almost 2km alongside the outer ring-road (yet another traffic artery of notable impact), with two carriageways in each direction at the height of the first floors of the dense building curtain that faces it; while its underlying areas accommodate unpaid car parking spaces. The structure does not link different places, since there is nothing to directly connect in piazzale Stuparich and piazzale Lugano (the

See also II.6

two ends of the overpass), and it has therefore never acted as a "positive" social connector, serving only to relieve the traffic at the intersections of viale Scarampo, viale Certosa and via Mac Mahon.
Indeed, since its construction (previously viale Serra and Monte Ceneri were boulevards of linden trees, as many other areas of the outer ring-road still are), the overpass is an element of progressive urban deterioration of all of the areas that it crosses, with the only positive, local impact being the provision of free parking spaces underneath it. However, these spaces are used almost habitually to dispose of refuse, including dangerous and large refuse, by animals and humans to carry out bodily functions and for illicit and illegal uses that range from sleeping rough and antisocial behaviour to prostitution and the dealing and consumption of drugs. Despite these evident issues, the UNPark Team encountered a great deal of scepticism among residents at the beginning of its work in the field, in particular among business-owners but also from certain members of the public administration; both about the idea of working on a temporary project in the spaces under the overpass as well as the possibility of completely transforming the overpass in a multifunctional sense in the long-term.
No one loves the Serra - Monte Ceneri Overpass and yet almost no one is prepared to seriously discuss the problem that it presents. Over the years, an uninspiring debate has arisen from time to time regarding the potential destiny of the structure, fuelled more by local newspapers than by urban planners or industry experts and focussing mainly on three positions that are seemingly irreconcilable and somewhat superficial: 1) its transformation into a High Line "a la Milanese", 2) maintaining the current state of affairs (or rather the parking spaces and the road deck), 3) its complete demolition. These positions are the result of vague

XI.1

ideas and personal opinions rather than a serious and attentive analysis of the current situation along the entire overpass within the context of a long-term vision, not only of the infrastructure, but of the urban areas that it crosses and therefore the city of the next 30 years, which can be compared in a logical manner with other innovative experiences from across the globe.

FIGURE XI.1 – A view of the Serra – Monte Ceneri Overpass, 2021 (Source: UNPark/Matteo Di Giovanni)

XI.3 THE LACK OF AN OVERALL VISION

Despite what is said, at least from a broad urban planning point of view, Milan is still an inward-looking and not particularly international city where work continues to be carried out for individual instances "of neighbourhood" (however large these may be) which are often linked to private interests, the offsetting of which appears to be insufficient, (Massa, 2021) and without an overall environmental vision working towards green transition and the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

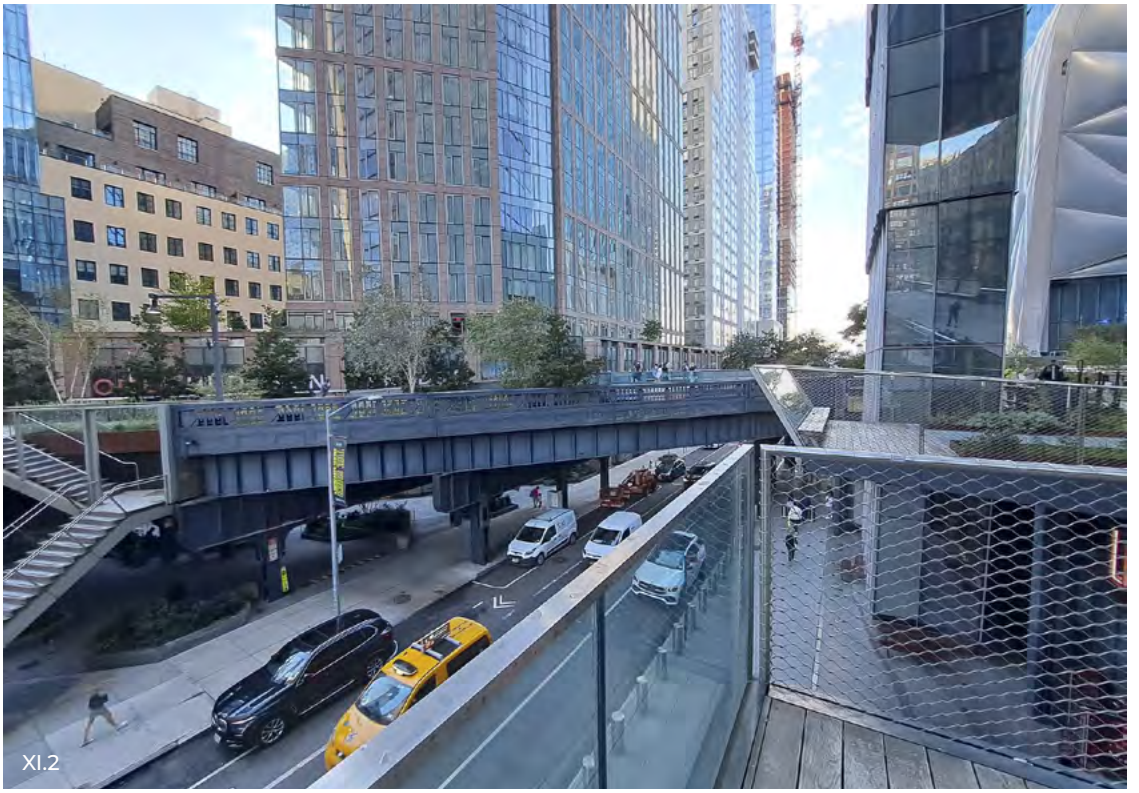
The overpass is yet another example of this. Surrounded as it is, and as it has been in recent years, by numerous large-scale regeneration and construction projects (the Portello residences, the shopping centre, piazza Gino Valle, the Alfa Romeo park, the transformation of Scalo Farini and Bovisa, the redevelopment of the National Target Shooting Centre and the Caracciolo Barracks), the Serra - Monte Ceneri Overpass continues to be overlooked and integrated into the various interventions, remaining as the imposing, monofunctional and isolated feature that it has always been. Furthermore, after three elections in Milan since 2011 and as many changes of the *Giunta* (municipal council), the political party that leads the city remains the same; that which incidentally, of all the parties, is the

biggest advocate of environmental and social causes. The *"Piano di Governo del Territorio al 2030"* (city's Territorial Zoning Plan to 2030) and the *"Piano Urbano per la Mobilità Sostenibile 2018"* (Urban Plan for Sustainable Mobility), together with many other sector-specific planning documents, do not provide an overall long-term vision for the city (Oliva, Ricci, 2017). While tactical urban planning, participatory budgeting and *"Piazze Aperte"* (Open Squares) are important initiatives, they occupy such a minute, local urban dimension, at the scale of the pedestrian albeit in a wider framework of policies and strategies, which impedes the active citizen and the designer's efforts to "scale up", from reclaiming a street for a different use to participating actively in political and social decisions with the aim of creating "new liveability" for the entire city.

"New liveability", "long-term urban vision", "smart city", "adaptive city" and "15-minute city", etc., are all theoretical expressions that refer back to the aforementioned lack of urban vision, or rather the practical need to have a strategy that is integrated, cross-scale and multifunctional, governed by the public, with the aim of "urban justice" and not only urban regeneration, in order to provide prospects of equity, quality and efficiency to the city and the public space (Oliva, Ricci, 2017).This strategy of regeneration, as is already the case in many European capitals, must also become the cornerstone of a national agenda for the city, across Italy and in Milan in particular, that impacts all the policies that pertain to territorial government for the purposes of rebuilding a leading ecosystem: those of settlement and infrastructure development; the protection and the improvement of the environment; landscape and culture of the territory; local, national and even international policies (Pinson, 2009; Ricci 2018).

XI.4 A HIGH LINE FOR MILAN?

In the absence of an overall vision intent on urban sustainability, for some years now in Milan (in parallel with the experience of EXPO between 2005 and 2015), the prevailing technical and political tool for the transformation of urban spaces seems to be the creation of an image. “Regeneration” increasingly means “refreshing the image” of entire sections of the city, risking the alienation of civic participation in urban processes by their mere promotion to the audience of citizens, according to dynamics more befitting social media managers than designers (Waal, Lange, 2019).
Likewise, urban spaces and buildings appear to be designed, transformed and managed by virtue of their potential value as financial assets rather than as communal assets for which to ensure universal rights of enjoyment; thereby resulting in the ability to exploit their value becoming completely dependent on the ability to control their image, communication and attribution of meaning. Often, the “regeneration of an area” is decided by the implementation of its symbolism and methodically measuring the engagement of residents in its regeneration in terms of crowdsourcing. Not even the Serra - Monte Ceneri Overpass can avoid this process of image control when its transformation into a Milanese High Line is suggested, however irrational this might be. This proposal is the result of a lack of a long-term vision for the entire city of Milan which, given that it does not provide clear and acceptable development guidelines which allow, for example, the inclusion of infrastructure in a horizon of sustainability by way of its multifunctional regeneration, instead continues to legitimise a case-by-case approach to the city which is devoid of the implications of the setting and almost

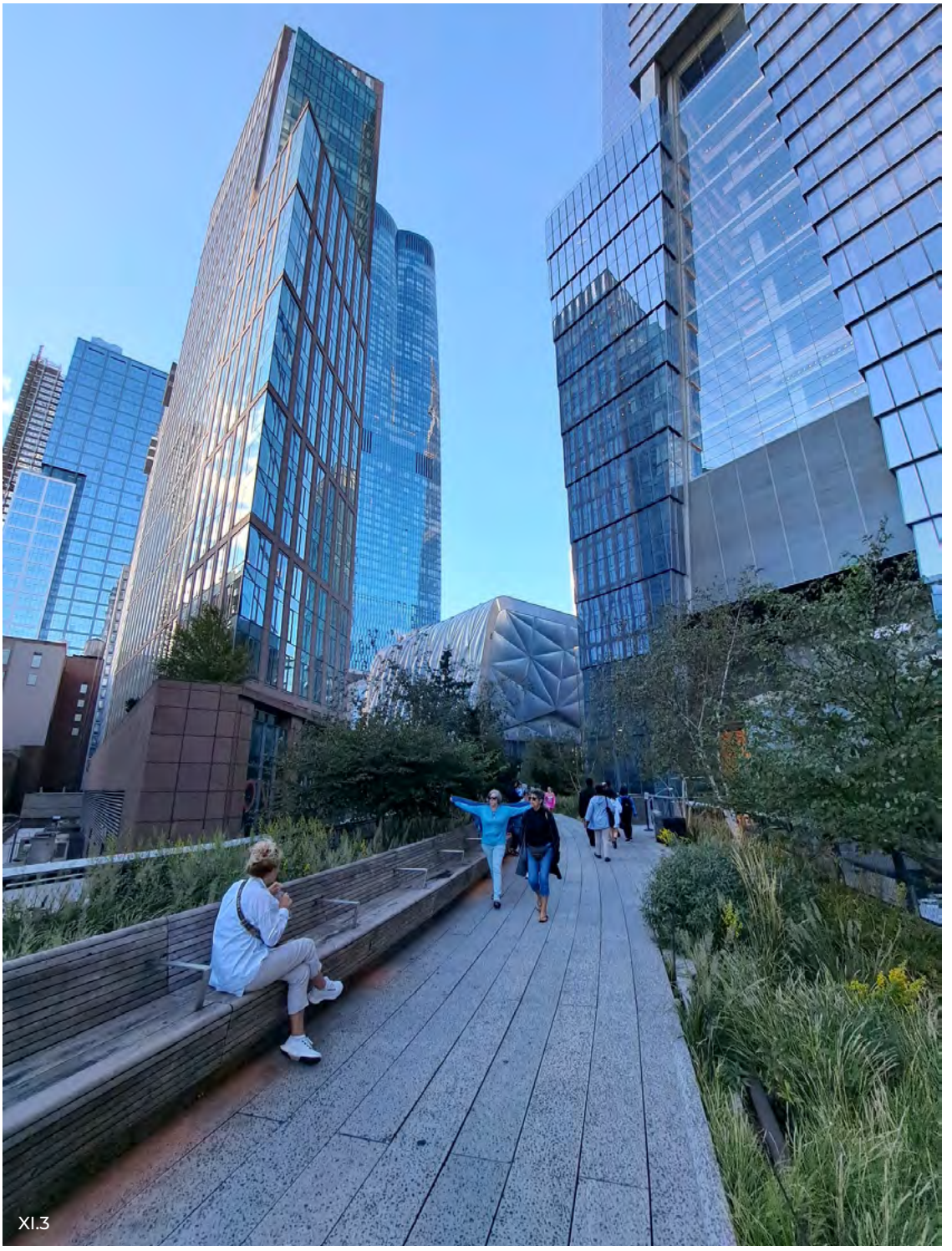


completely architectural in nature, resulting in work being carried out for individual, isolated projects, despite their interchangeability. Considering the transformation of the Serra - Monte Ceneri Overpass by means of the same criteria, processes and resources employed for the New York High Line means not taking into account the setting of the Serra - Monte Ceneri Overpass with regard to its resources, spaces, possibilities and issues. More importantly, once again, it means not having any design ideas for that which might occur "under" the overpass. More than the High Line, in the face of much scepticism and confusion encountered by the UNPark Team along the way, the *"Under the Elevated: Reclaiming Space, Connecting Communities"* fieldwork and research carried out by the *Design Trust for Public Space* in collaboration with *New York Department of Tran-*

See V by Scrugli and Procaccini

FIGURE XI.2 - The High Line in the Hudson Yards area, near the cultural center The Shed, 2022 (Source: UNPark)

FIGURE XI.3 - The deck of the High Line near the cultural center The Shed, 2022 (Source: UNPark)



XI.3

XI.4

sportation, has served to demonstrate how urgent and necessary our proposal for multifunctional regeneration of the Serra -Monte Ceneri Overpass is, and to better structure our project. The Under the Elevated (2013 - 2020) study, abbreviated to EL (and the corresponding EL Space, EL workshop, EL Toolkit, etc.) dealt with the more than 1,000km of spaces in New York that find themselves underneath infrastructure (bridges, subway lines, motorways and railways, flyovers, etc.), identifying some 7 types based on their environmental conditions, in order to then study the different development possibilities of each. Subsequently, collaborative workshops were conducted in order to seek input and feedback from members of the community from the “under” spaces identified, and temporary, site-specific installations were crea-

FIGURE XI.4 - The Overpass that faces, on both sides, a dense and almost continuous curtain of residential buildings, 2021
(Source: UNPark/ Matteo Di Giovanni)

FIGURE XI.5(1) - Sunset Park, Brooklyn. Before and after
(Source: New York City Department of Transportation)

XI.5(2)

XI.5(3)

FIGURE XI.5(2)(3) - Sunset Park, Brooklyn. Before and after (Source: New York City Department of Transportation)

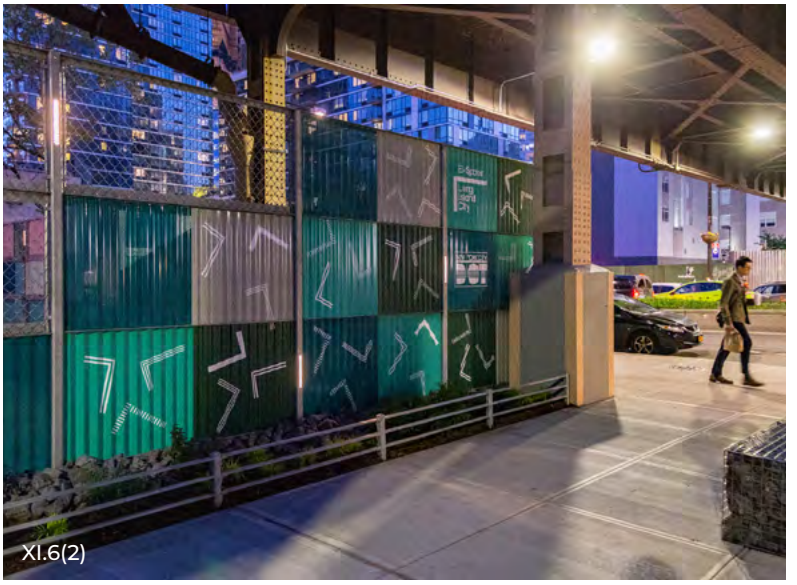


FIGURE XI.6(1)(2) - Dutch Kills Street, Long Island. Before and after (Source: New York City Department of Transportation)

ted in Chinatown and in the Bronx; ultimately developing guidelines for the design of these spaces to be used in the II phase, that is during the implementation of the works, such as the first EL Spaces: Sunset Park, Far Rockaway and Dutch Kills Street (Bauer et al., 2015). Besides being scalable to other settings and, in some way, open-source, thereby becoming an international, pioneering point of reference for our

XI.7(1)

XI.7(1)

UNPark research, the hallmark of the guidelines, EL Toolkits, is the re-imagination of the regeneration of in-between spaces in terms of environmental offsetting, by means of the extensive use of Nature Based Solutions (planting, water recovery, filtering surfaces, bioswales, etc.), the involvement of communities in the designs, and the proposal of incremental and time-based interventions for the purpose of gradually preparing the residents for the change.

FIGURE XI.7(1)(2) - Rockaway, Queens. Before and after (Source: New York City Department of Transportation)

XI.5 MAINTAINING THE STATUS QUO OR DEMOLISHING THE OVERPASS?

However, in Milan, in the face of macroscopic problems that affect the modern city, such as pollution, environmental issues, waste management, social injustice, difficulty in accessing housing, a lack of security, poverty, exclusion, etc., the only urban issue capable of garnering agreement and/or criticism seems to be free on-street parking for private motor vehicles. The removal of parking spaces is tantamount to violating a citizen's rights, "stealing" public space, even if for a depaving project which is useful from an environmental point of view for the whole collective, or the remodelling of a carriageway, which is necessary to make a street safer. Even under the Serra - Monte Ceneri Overpass, despite it evidently bringing more problems than benefits, the right to free parking is always invoked, wherever possible. It should be said that citizens are not to blame for thinking in these terms; cities are responsible for their circumstances and that which they offer their residents and city users. Namely, so little that parking becomes the most fetishised of all urban rights. Despite a restyling operation at the beginning of the 2000s and many safety measures introduced through lighting and video-surveillance (which were immedia-

tely vandalised), the spaces under the Serra - Monte Ceneri Overpass continue to be a pool of unsanitary and ill-reputed car parks. Even so, citizen-residents are the first to defend the status quo, even if it has widely demonstrated its limitations over the last 50 years, culminating in a situation which satisfies nobody.
It may seem paradoxical but, as the Indian anthropologist Arjun Appadurai teaches, the capacity to *"aspire to something better"* is not evenly distributed across society and nor is it across a city; and precisely where we expect it to be most apparent, for example in places that are run-down or even hostile, such as those close to the Serra - Monte Ceneri Overpass, we discover that this capacity does not exist. The capacity to "aspire to something better", like all intellectual faculties, relies on the information in our possession and the ability to reconcile it with our experience and link them to one another, transforming them into knowledge (Appadurai, 2004). For this reason, it was fundamental that the UNPark research project collected, analysed and then shared other experiences of multifunctional regeneration of urban mobility infrastructure, thereby providing citizens, and also many public officials, with the minimum information necessary to "aspire for improvement" by means of practical examples that had been put into practice, were functioning and, in some cases, had been ground breaking; and, at the same time, demonstrating, not only the existence of the problem, but also its urgency. Returning instead to the absence of a long-term vision which is failing Milan, the primacy of cars over pedestrians is an issue yet to be addressed and which, in reality, has very little to do with the parking spaces under the Serra - Monte Ceneri Overpass. Milan has one of the highest motorisation rates in Europe, with almost 50 passenger cars for every 100 residents (Copenhagen has 29, Berlin 33 and Barcelona 36), over an area of 181km^2 (Copenhagen

179; Berlin 891; Barcelona 102) and a density of 7,500 residents per km^2 (Copenhagen 4,400; Berlin 4,000; Barcelona 15,000) (Eurostat, 2021), which means having to deal with almost 1 million passenger cars each day at a statistical concentration of 3,500 per km^2; however many spaces there might be under the overpass, they do not represent a significant enough area to resolve this problem. The most stubborn element of Milan's urban landscape is, without doubt, the private motor vehicle. In the face of ample and inadequately utilised urban resources (Quinzii, Terna, 2021), there are however objectively too many cars occupying areas to the complete detriment of pedestrians and urban space, as wells as that of "soft" mobility, inhibiting any potential to use roads, pavements and car parks to implement techniques and strategies using permeable pavements, NBS, SuDS and planting.

Despite this and to create a relationship of solidarity with business-owners and residents, over the duration of the temporary UNPark - FREESTYLE project and its staging, the 21 spaces that could not be used for parking (in the section between via Bartolini and via Plana) were recouped elsewhere, courtesy of an outlet of an household appliance retailer near to the project's location which made 21 parking spaces available to residents free of charge; the same number that had been occupied by UNPark. It is surprising however, speaking to people involved in the UNPark process, how the presence of the parking spaces and their regulation in favour of the residents is a huge demand on the public administration, in comparison with the failure to respect the ban on travelling on the overpass at night (from 22:00 to 06:00) so as not to disturb those that live nearby. A ban which is not enforced provided that drivers do not exceed a speed limit of 70km/h. Yet again, the dominant role of the motor vehicle emerges, for which almost anything goes. In Milan, in order

See also VIII by Monticelli and Scrugli

to improve this oppressing sensation of being overcome by motor vehicles, it would suffice to enforce the traffic code (most importantly by limiting the speed of cars in the city), no longer tolerating parking on pavements or outside of designated spaces and enforcing bans, including on the Serra - Monte Ceneri Overpass.
In this ideological war that has been waged in Milan in recent years between the supporters of a different urban mobility and the proponents of the private vehicle as the only possible means of urban transport, the possibility of demolishing the overpass is something that - almost comically - everyone agrees upon. This is because it would be so far down the line that it cannot be seriously taken into consideration. A lack of information is also the main problem in this case. Indeed, the demolition the Corvetto Overpass has been planned since at least 2018 because of a lack of sufficient traffic volumes (PUMS, 2018) but has always been put off; nothing however is known about the traffic volumes of our overpass; particularly considering the major transformations that are affecting the northern-most urban area surrounding the structure.Despite the conviction that as many urban elements as possible must be re-utilised and refunctionalised before their demolition is considered, including because of the environmental costs of the demolitions themselves (inert waste, dust, pollution, the inability to recover many parts and materials, work timescales and inconvenience to residents, etc.) a scenario in which the overpass is decommissioned does not seem so far-fetched, especially in light of certain international cases and international experiences: Harbor Drive, Portland – USA (1974), Cheonggyecheon, Seoul – South Korea (2005), Madrid Río, Madrid (2007) and many others, especially outside of Europe (Shannon, Smets, 2010). However fascinating it may be, the possibility of demolition does not however currently seem feasible even in the long term, since

there is no modelling of the traffic levels on the overpass once the areas undergoing transformation (Farini and Bovisa) are finished and accessible, nor incidentally is there any modelling of its current usage. So, as improbable as it seems that a project with the allure of a High Line can be implemented in this zone of Milan, it seems equally difficult to hypothesise that the funds necessary can be found in the coming years for such a large demolition of a reinforced concrete structure almost 2km in length, meaning that maintaining the current status of the overpass is the most economical and simple alternative. UNPark - Urban Nudging Park has tried, through research and fieldwork, to slot into the space between these three positions, pushing and elbowing - as is implied by the title - in order to overcome them, so that the Serra - Monte Ceneri Overpass can finally be the topic of a serious and detailed debate which is also open to residents, by means of a coherent discussion of the solutions identified by other global capitals with respect to the same type of problems, in keeping with the three potential forms of multifunctional regeneration proposed by UNPark: technological upgrade, integration with other compatible functions, preservation and replacement of the original function.

XI.6 MULTIFUNCTIONAL REGENERATION THROUGH EXPERIMENTATION AND INNOVATION

In light of the work of UNPark, as emerges in the preceding chapters, there are many opportunities provided by the Serra - Monte Ceneri Overpass structure to imagine a multifunctional regeneration that can exploit its potential. Furthermore, using time-baseddesign and long-term scenarios, many “incremental” actions and interventions that could be put into practice immediately can be identified, with a relatively low cost

but significant results, especially in terms of offsetting and community-making. With regard to the spaces under the overpass that are at the heart of the UN-Park proposal, for example, experiments could begin immediately to look at the regulation of parking, and subsequently implemented using sensors and the IoT. Indeed, the configuration of the overpass allows for the organisation of a computerised car park which, using both smartphone apps and signage systems in situ, could inform drivers of the presence of available spaces (or the timescales in which they might become available), thereby reducing the circulation of vehicles searching for spaces and the corresponding CO_2 generated which stays in the zone, together with the particulates and other pollutants. Likewise, both as part of cleaning operations and in preparation for initiatives that require spaces, like for example UNPark/FREE-STYLE, the area under the overpass could easily be cleared of parked vehicles, in individual sections, thereby preventing the not uncommon issues of abandoned cars (whether stolen, broken down, uninsured, etc.).

Furthermore, bringing order to the chaotic situation of the car parking under the overpass by means of its computerisation would allow the shops that face viale Serra and viale Monte Ceneri to reclaim their bays for loading/unloading which instead currently takes place at the roadside on the outer ring-road, in particular in the lane reserved for the number 90/91 bus, causing significant narrowing and bottlenecks that cause congestion and traffic jams. Business owners are perhaps those that suffer most from the impacts of the overpass and its lack of care and maintenance, and as such it would be correct and important to revisit their needs, even in terms of community-making. However, the parking situation under the overpass, above all at night, is closely linked to

the use that is made of the upper level. Indeed, it is amazing that the Serra - Monte Ceneri Overpass is not physically closed to vehicular traffic at night. In San Paolo, Brazil, the Via Elevada Presidente João Goulart, universally known as the Minhocão (the Big Worm) was built a few years after our own overpass. As a structure, it is very similar to the Serra - Monte Ceneri in its geometry and the spaces generated, but much longer and of greater impact still. Since the first years after its construction, the Via Elevada Presidente João Goulart has been stringently closed to vehicular traffic at night, through the use of gates and physical closures in order to ensure rest for residents. In the following years, the citizens of San Paolo began to use the Minhocão during the evening and at night time as an informal sky garden on which to walk, run, practise sport or simply to entertain themselves. This use, which became increasingly common, meant that the closing hours of the structure were extended over time, to the point that today the Minhocão is closed to vehicular traffic, not only at night, but also for the entire weekend, from Friday evening to Monday morning, effectively transforming it into an urban park in which many social, recreational and sporting activities are possible (Hochuli, 2020). With little expense and short timescales, the Serra - Monte Ceneri Overpass could also be physically closed (by means of retractable bollards, gates and other systems) at night and at weekends, so that citizens could take ownership of it. It would be a ground-breaking intervention, at least in Italy, that would also reflect upon the underlying parking areas which, in addition to welcoming different and more varied uses, would become, if the initiative were successful, a space that is much more significant and "in demand", in which to deploy service facilitiesfor the new usage of the platform overhead. Another inter-

See again V by Scrugli and Procaccini

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vention that would be easy to implement and would generate many benefits is the renovation of the junctions and crossings of the overpass, even if merely by means of painting the ground and soft urban furniture, in the typical style of tactical urbanism, and the improvement of their lighting, with the aim of reclaiming the priority of pedestrians over passenger cars in addition to signalling the crossings better to increase safety, even on congested roads like the outer ring-road. In the medium- and long-term, the Serra - Monte Ceneri Overpass also presents an opportunity in terms of energy production, an improvement in air quality and a reduction in noise pollution. First of all, as evidenced in Chapter VII, the potential for energy production by photovoltaic resources applied to the overpass is a topic that should be explored in greater detail: from expensive "solar pavements" that are still in the experimental phase, to the integration of solar panels in the guard rails of the road platform or the structure's soffit.

Likewise, the soffit of the overpass seems to have the potential to support suspended hanging plants, for the purpose of improving the appearance of the almost 2km structure, as well as creating a barrier that might deflect the noise emitted from the parking areas under the overpass and amplified by the "wings" of the infrastructure's profile, which, according to residents, is more irritating than that which is produced by cars travelling on the platform above. In general, NBS and plants, the toolkit of the Under the Elevated research, the case study of the Via Verde (Greenway) in Mexico, and the topic of energy production are all possibilities of great interest but which presuppose a desire for large-scale transformation, which is not currently felt for the Serra - Monte Ceneri Overpass, as well as the long turnaround times and the subsequent high cost of maintenance, all due to

FIGURE XI.8 - A view of the Via Elevada Presidente João Goulart,aka the Minhocão (Big Worm), 2021
(Source: Gabriela Mattei)

See VII by Clementi and Bruschi

See IX by Procaccini and Monticelli

See V by Scrugli and Procaccini

See III by Carli and Rebaglio, and IV by Di Prete

the strong infrastructuring of the overpass and/or its underlying spaces. However, even interventions that merely require soft infrastructure such as temporary projects within the context of tactical urbanism, like UNPark/FREESTLYE itself, or simple artistic projects, such as that which has been coordinated across dozens of the overpass's pillars, mapping them among the 100 "Muri Liberi di Milano" (Free Walls in Milan) for street art activities, can, in their own small way, contribute to getting people to talk about the overpass and its potential fate, reshaping the perception of immutability and immanence that it elicits from citizens. Even easier to implement and almost without cost is the possibility of getting people to talk about the overpass in order that the debate about its fate may reach further still, through its use as a route or location for social and sporting events organised in Milan. The Serra - Monte Ceneri Overpass could

FIGURE XI.9 – A pillar of the Overpass, 2021 (Source: UNPark/Matteo Di Giovanni)

be a part of local marathon routes (StraMilano, PoliMI Run, DeeJay Run, etc.), just as the use of its underlying spaces could be granted for free during the weeks of FuoriSalone, Fashion Weeks, Digital Weeks, etc., completely transforming them.
Indeed, the first big lesson learnt during the months of work on UNPark was that changing the citizen-residents' collective perception of the configuration, use and features of an urban space, which has been consolidated by decades of passivity and inaction, is a much more difficult undertaking than could have been imagined, regardless of how problematic and degraded the spaces under the Serra - Monte Ceneri Overpass may be. For this reason, all those initiatives, interventions and projects in urban space that transform its use, appearance, access or content, even if only for a few hours or days, are welcomed, subverting the citizens' perception of it in order to demonstrate that the city is genuinely a living lab in which to experiment with innovative solutions and that - to paraphrase - the only urban certainty is change.

XI.7 FROM THE THEORY TO PRACTICE DURING THE PANDEMIC

As might have been clear from the introduction of this book, the UNPark team learnt the most important and formative lessons from UNPark/FREESTYLE, itself preceded by the MUE:SLI/FURNISH installation, and sometimes these lessons were learnt the really hard way. Fieldwork, for "academics", is always thrilling and incredibly fascinating, since it allows us to put into practice those theoretical concepts that we take for granted in our fields and which instead often prove to be difficult to implement, or are not deemed to be valid, or are needlessly complicated, niche or insignificant. At the

See VIII by Monticelli and Scrugli, and X by Crippa, Di Prete and De Nardo

same time, fieldwork presents “academics” with unavoidable problems, like immovable preconceptions, bureaucratic and financial issues, technical hair splitting and even the difficulty of identifying the correct points of contact in order to be able to work in an area amidst the “organised chaos”, both administrative and sector-specific, that governs the day-to-day life of the city. Unprepared but already conscious of the practical and feasibility difficulties that a proposal like UNPark could have encountered, in October 2019 the Team presented the Serra - Monte Ceneri Overpass as an area for work under the call *“Piazze Aperte in Ogni Quartiere del Comune di Milano”* (Open Squares in Every Neighbourhood of the Municipality of Milan), subsequently becoming area 42 of the 65 evaluated and approved by the Municipality of Milan, falling under the Piazze Aperte in its own right, despite representing an experimental case because of both the peculiarity of the area proposed and the project’s temporary and innovative nature; but at the same time finding legitimacy in the eyes of the public administration.

If tactical urbanism has partially lost its distinction as a temporary “stress-test” of an urban space, in view of its definitive transformation in light of the results obtained; similarly, its community-making component seems to have become secondary. Notably, in the most recent projects in Milan (2020/2021), tactical urbanism seems to be more of an end than a means from many points of view, beginning with the decision to give priority to interventions in “easy” areas which are already supported by cohesive communities, often surrounding top-level schools or in any case strong local catalysts (structured associations, bodies, etc.), frequently making use of groups organised outside the neighbourhood for the design, floor painting and staging works. Even current tactical urbanism, from the latest analysis, seems to fall under the aforementioned

global process in which “regeneration” of urban space is primarily a matter of “refreshing its image”, giving the impression that urban conflicts are addressed and resolved by the works, whereas the reality is instead very different (Graziano, 2021).
The UNPark research project, and in particular its field application FREESTYLE, instead attempted to push the possibilities offered by the Piazze Aperte initiative to its limits despite not having the ambition of either having a permanent effect on the overpass for reasons of the resources available and times, or that of resolving serious urban conflicts that can be found in the neighbourhoods impacted by the overpass. It has however proven that, with much effort and the participation of many, even the most neglected and maligned space can be used by citizens in a different way, instilling doubts and opening up a debate for residents. The Coronavirus pandemic, however, did not help the smooth and seamless execution of the UNPark project; the two coinciding perfectly back in March 2020. After more than two years of health emergency, lockdowns, infection updates and vaccine doses we are desensitised and accustomed to the situation, but in the spring of 2020 the uncertainty, distress and fear were palpable. Locked in our own houses, trying to juggle smart working, family, inadequate living conditions, external pressures and internal worries, it was truly difficult to keep the UNPark partnership together, most of all the least organised parts, let alone the relationships with the public administration which was occupied by much more pressing matters. Indeed, certain partners were lost along the way during those difficult months, either because of the emergence of other serious problems or simple disinterest; others instead joined us, particularly at the time of the Collaboration Agreement with the Municipality of Milan which was the basis for the UNPark/FREESTYLE temporary pilot

project. Similarly, other partners had to review their input into the project. For example, the schools in the neighbourhood (Liceo Scientifico Statale Piero Bottoni and ICS Rinnovata Pizzigoni), the main partners/beneficiaries of the research, really struggled in managing their everyday activities between remote learning, the digital divide, quarantines and the inadequacies of their facilities, etc. However, wherever possible, they tried to stay true to the commitments they had made despite their role as a vehicle for the research to the families of their students diminishing, or at any rate not being as effective as had been hoped.

XI.8 THE CHALLENGES OF UNPARK/FREESTYLE

The biggest obstacle encountered by the UNPark/FREESTYLE temporary pilot project was however of a technical-political nature, due to the postponement of the Municipality of Milan's administrative consultations from June to October 2021, again for reasons linked to the pandemic. At the most critical moment, having previously been supported and endorsed by the Municipality's outgoing *Giunta* (Municipal Council), and at an advanced stage of the process where it was necessary to determine roles and responsibilities for the fieldwork with the Municipality of Milan, UNPark found itself without the necessary political cover and representatives in the public administration during the transition period of ordinary administration that occurs between the exit of one *Giunta* (2016/2021) and the implementation of another (2021/2026), despite the political continuity resulting from Mayor Beppe Sala's two consecutive terms. If it was possible to deliver UNPark/FREESTYLE, it is only thanks to the determination and tenacity of the technical level of management at the Municipality of Milan that the UNPark Team mana-

ged to persuade to invest in the project, meaning that in the end they were almost its biggest supporters. It was therefore more the Technical Directors than the Assessors that permitted the smooth progress of the pilot project, albeit with some bumps along the way. In particular, it is worth reflecting on the request that we received in mid-July 2021 from AMAT/Officina Urbana (Agency for Mobility, Environment and Territory/Urban Workship) in their capacity as coordinators of the Piazze Aperte project, requesting that an application be made to the Sportello Unico degli Eventi (SUEV) (Event Management Desk) at the Municipality of Milan in order to obtain all of the permits for UNPark/FREESTYLE, something that had never been asked of any Piazze Aperte project before then.

See VIII by Monticelli and Scrugli

For the non-experts, which included the UNPark Team itself, the "pratica SUEV" (SUEV request) is the standard process through which entertainment and catering businesses ask for permits (land occupation, local health authority permits, fire service, local police, national police force, etc.) in order to carry out their business, whether in a single location or an itinerant basis. It is a request which is truly complicated and time-consuming, and extremely strict in terms of safety and personal criminal liability. UNPark/FREESTYLE was the result of both a series of meetings with citizens and actors in the research partnership for the co-design of the space, the determination of its functions and means of implementation and engagement, both internal and external, of the residents, of its content with respect to the programme of events, and all the activities associated with the pilot project; but equally it was also the result of numerous discussions with almost all sectors of public officials involved, in order to gradually obtain approvals and, finally, the clearance to deliver the project, by means of the constant updates to our staging design for the space under the over-

pass and compliance with the requests received on a case-by-case basis. At the risk of indulging in anecdotes, during one of the last inspections under the overpass before being informed of the need to present the SUEV request, there were at least 14 other people in attendance in addition to the UNPark Team, all of whom were representatives of the council, management, departments and companies owned by the Municipality of Milan and other institutions that were involved with the project in various capacities and were present to approve the definitive temporary project: Office of Participation, Mobility Directorate, Civic Services, Participation and Sport Directorate, Planning and Mobility Department, AMAT/Urban Workshop, Rapid Intervention Unit, ATS (Local Health Authority), AMSA (Milan Environmental Services Company), AMSA (Milan Transport Company), local and national police forces.
The UNPark Team, comprising of architects, urban designers, engineers and many other professionals, albeit working in the field of academic research, in any case found it very difficult to obtain all of the permits and certifications necessary, even with the help of their in-house expertise, professional networks and, not least, a financial budget that, however modest, not all proponents of grassroots projects for public space have available. It therefore seems very difficult that, despite the introduction of PIDS, citizen volunteers that do not have a technical background would be capable, under their own steam, of conducting intervention projects like FREESTYLE.
In this regard, it would seem equally difficult for genuine volunteer projects on a grassroots level for the transformation of public space and the city to gain traction and obtain the results that they set themselves, unless their supporters have significant in-house resources and a vast channel of communication. Nevertheless, the scarcity of resources, both material

and spatial, that cities will find themselves facing in coming years, will increasingly require active support by citizens; that which we decided to call “Prosuming public space” during UNPark. Staging, monitoring, cleaning, maintaining and managing urban space will increasingly become the responsibility of private parties (large companies, real estate companies, design and fashion districts, etc.) unless citizens retake the reins of the management of public space, taking a leading role themselves. The choice is between a city increasingly granted to private parties, like the beach front concessions along the country’s coasts, or a genuinely public city which however requires new responsibilities to be taken by citizens with regard to public space, as well as sacrifices, for example of the uncontrolled parking of private vehicles and their indiscriminate use, and of active engagement, for example organising activities and taking care of the spaces and even creating the spaces themselves. UNPark certainly has not achieved, not even remotely, this type of engagement of citizens in the project and its potential follow-ups. However, it has undoubtedly had the virtue of having made people the focus of design, with their desire to participate and discuss the decisions made by public administration, even during a pandemic, including in a setting like that of the Serra - Monte Ceneri Overpass.

XI.9 PROSUMING PUBLIC SPACE!

If on a theoretical, cultural and disciplinary level the UNPark - Urban Nudging Park research project has left (us) a great deal, the same cannot be said about the quality of the spaces under the Serra - Monte Ceneri Overpass on a material level. With the exception of an already faded design project for a crossing of the structure at via Plana and the installation of a bike

rack at the same junction, and the system of scalable anti-Covid seating constructed for the MUE:SLI/FURNISH project, unfortunately only photographs, articles in magazines, suggestions, memories, opinions and the comments received remain of the UNPark project.
On the final evening of UNPark/FREESTYLE, during a discussion in general terms of the work carried out in the field, certain functionaries from the Municipality of Milan said: *'It would be nice to do this every year!'* After an initial moment of dismay due to the thought of all the work that had been necessary, the UNPark Team replied: *'Then it would be even more interesting to transform it into a travelling festival which each year revives a different space that has been spurned/abandoned/neglected together with its citizens!'*.
From the perspective of research KPIs (Key Performance Indicators), this proposal by the public administration would itself seem to be an indicator of the fact that the first objective of UNPark had been reached. Thanks to the pandemic, the debate in the city around reclaiming public spaces and the evident conflict between walkability/bikeability and private vehicles has never been so open. But there are also positive KPIs for other aspects of the research.
For example, having had to set a limit of 60 people being present at any one time under the overpass during the evenings of the concert and the DJ set, the maximum capacity was easily reached, even to the point that some people were turned away. This is a demonstration of how even the most neglected space, if filled with interesting content and made safe, can become a public space for all intents and purposes, to be utilized, managed and enjoyed. Equally interesting were, even if on this point more could have been done, the numbers of citizens that participated in the journey of co-design, the various surveys and questionnaires, the outreach opportunities and in-person meetings.

Moving the focus of the discussion to pragmatic matters of a technical nature is in any case very difficult and even the most measured positions among residents reveal a deep distrust of change and a negative attitude of chronic inertia in imagining a future that is only made up of that which already exists.

There are, however, some comforting signs in this regard. For example, the experience of *"Non vediamo l'ora"* (We cannot wait): a proposal already mentioned in this paper as part of Milan's 2017/18 Participatory Budget regarding the creation of a cycle path on the Bacula Overpass (one of the three sections incorrectly believed to be part of the Serra - Monte Ceneri Overpass), which, despite having found broad support, and most importantly initial approval from the Municipality of Milan's technical offices, was held up for many years because of unforeseen costs which had not been accounted for relating to the movement of the electric line that powers the filobus 90/91 through a pantograph. The independent committee of *"We cannot wait"* (to have the cycle lane), supported once again by the citizen mobilisation campaign *"Sai che puoi?"* (Do you know you can?), by means of social media channels and the organisation of demonstrations and protests, as well as a self-produced survey of the levels of traffic on the Bacula Overpass carried out in accordance with accepted technical and scientific regulations, succeeded in making itself heard by the public administration, obtaining a place on the agenda for the cycle path and a guarantee that it will be created by the end of 2023.

From a methodological point of view, for the purpose of having an open-source strategy for the Prosuming of public space, UNPark instead created its own toolkit, taking inspiration from the EL research, of instrumen-

ts and strategies to use for future projects in the field and as a basic manual for future urban prosumers. The first tool is “Recognition”, that is understanding the area, as a precondition for its recapture, and the need to re-learn forms and forces that exist and are present, though obscured and tending to escape a first glance. Recognition can however only be achieved by using another tool: “Presence”, that is being physically present in the neighbourhood, in proximity to the areas undergoing the transformation. This makes it possible to give visibility to the initiatives that are planned, creating curiosity and allowing citizens to participate freely, thereby stimulating people to understand and collaborate, before then looking after the spaces themselves. The third tool, which is connected to the previous one, is the “Creation of Networks”; only within a network and in its creation and management, whether this is for the monitoring of environmental quality or for the co-design of solutions for a project like UNPark, can the topic of urban conflicts and their resolution be addressed by means of creating new, less formal relationships with the institutions and the new parties, resolving certain issues, that can be identified just by being in the neighbourhood. The fourth tool in the toolbox is “Comparison”, that is collecting case studies of national and international experiences to be critically reviewed in order to create shared knowledge of the social and spatial dynamics of other settings, sparking exchanges that create a methodical overview of the real possibilities of the places alongside the most innovative experiences of urban regeneration.

The humble hope while this work is being written is that it will be possible to use these tools on the Serra - Monte Ceneri Overpass and many other examples of urban infrastructures, in accordance with strategies of multifunctional regeneration for the upgrading, inte-

gration or replacement of the primary uses for which such infrastructure has been constructed, with a view to their synergy with the setting to which they must repay something after years of negative impacts and external effects.

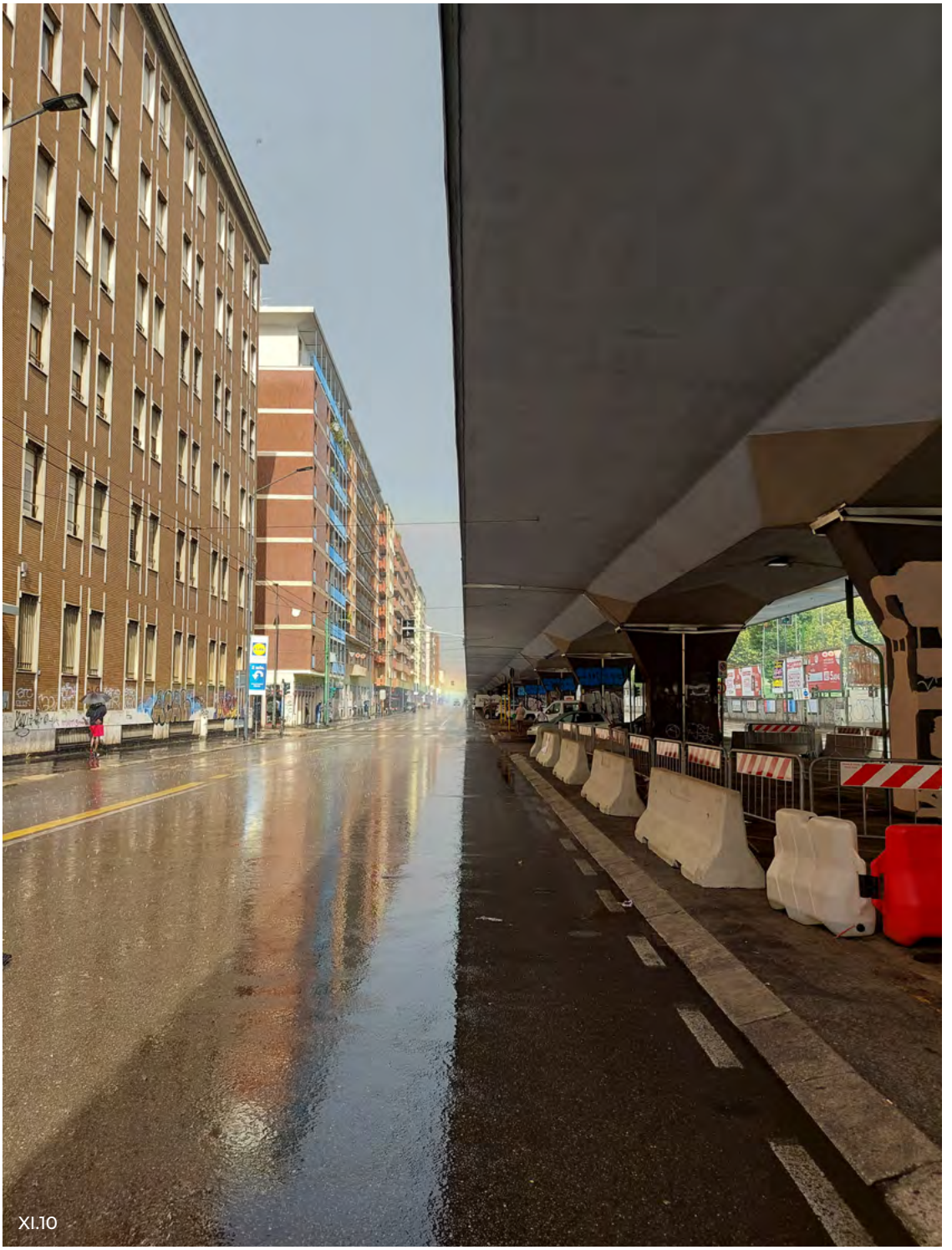
Although it lasted but a few days, UNPark/FREESTYLE was a completely loss-making event into which resources of all types were invested: human, energy, financial, etc. Economically, UNPark has not been a sustainable process. It would be impossible for private citizens, however well-organised, to succeed in putting on an event of this type. Likewise, the public administration does not have the human resources to invest in activities like this which, unless they are very simple to implement, instead need complicated procedures in order to obtain the go-ahead and the permits. Hence it is necessary to find a new approach to the problem that moves in the direction of prosuming of public space, supporting new forms of close collaboration between citizens and public administration. The UNPark research project is still ongoing, both because some follow-ups continue to be active, and because the UNPark Team's interest in trying to identify new multifunctional regeneration strategies for mobility infrastructures is pretty far from being exhausted.

The themes underlying UNPark, in fact, have never been as current as they are today: make a better use of the existing urban heritage; create new flexible and adaptive public spaces wherever possible; develop new models for the reuse and recycling of materials for the design of social spaces; experiment actions and activities for the engaging of the citizens in the urban regeneration processes; activate urban environmental quality monitoring networks by means of open data collected by volunteers; study the opportunities offe-

red by Nature Based Solutions (NBS), the IoT world, and that of technologies and lightweight textile components for environmental and acoustic mitigation. And we could go on ...

Those of UNPark have been almost 2 years, over 20 months, always lived in a hurry, always struggling to keep up with all the ideas and possibilities that have occurred over time. It was not a matter of bad planning or management of the activities, the work plan did in fact work well as expected. It has been 20 restless months because the ideas emerged, the opportunities to be exploited to expand the research, the calls reported to us along the way were unpredictable and innumerable, despite the Coronavirus lockdowns. Furthermore, without wishing to give too much weight to the responsibilities, including human ones, towards the Partnership and the citizens engaged in the project, which research such as UNPark, carried out during a pandemic, inevitably generates. A warm thanks must therefore be dedicated to citizens, associations, amateur sports associations and groups in the area who have made it possible to animate the Serra - Monte Ceneri Overpass, demonstrating their skills, getting involved before, during and after the UNPark/FREESTYLE Festival.
At the same time, it is not possible not to mention the Partners who were immediately able to grasp the challenging spirit of this ambitious project. UNPark has been defined in many ways: “brave”, “visionary” and even “innovative”. Certainly, however, UNPark and, above all, its interventions in the field under the Overpass did not go unnoticed and this was our main goal. The Serra - Monte Ceneri Overpass is configured as an opportunity for continuous experimentation, a permanent urban living laboratory: it is a problem that contains its own solution.

FIGURE XI.10 - Sun and rain under the Overpass, 2021 (Source: UNPark/ Paolo Carli)



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The UNPark project and its interventions on the field have been defined in many ways: “brave”, “visionary” and even “innovative”. Certainly UNPark did not go unnoticed, and this was the aim of the initiative. The Serra - Monte Ceneri Overpass is, in fact, an opportunity for continuous experimentation, and a permanent urban living-lab: it is a problem that contains its own solution within. UNPark has tried to demonstrate that even the most neglected and abandoned space, with the involvement of the inhabitants, can find its redemption. An heartfelt thanks must therefore be dedicated to the citizens, associations, amateur sports associations and the various and several local groups who have made it possible to animate the Serra - Monte Ceneri Overpass, demonstrating their skills, getting involved before, during and after UNPark/FREESTYLE. At the same time, it is impossible not to mention the partners of UNPark who immediately knew how to grasp the challenging spirit of this ambitious project. In fact, for almost 2 years UNPark has been working on highly topical issues such as: new models for the reuse and recycling of materials for the design of social spaces; actions and strategies for the engagement of the population in the urban regeneration processes; monitoring of air quality through open data collected by voluntary citizens; study of the opportunities offered by Nature Based Solutions (NBS) and the IoT world, technologies and light textile components for environmental and acoustic mitigation.

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Figures References

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