



LINKING TERRITORIES

RURALITY, LANDSCAPE AND URBAN BORDERS

Edited by Antonella Bruzzese and Annarita Lapenna



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DIPARTIMENTO DI
ARCHITETTURA E
STUDI URBANI



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SECTION 2

PLACES AND POLICIES

WORKING ON THE WESTERN REGION OF MILAN

An aerial photograph of Milan, Italy, overlaid with a white line that traces a path through the city's urban and rural areas. The line starts in the upper left, moves south, then east, then south again, and finally east towards the bottom right. The background shows a mix of dense urban buildings and more open, agricultural-looking areas.

During the last half of the twentieth century, the city of Milan developed in a fragmented way and this affected the built environment, the services, the infrastructures and even the open spaces. In such a context, some projects have been able to interpret in a fascinating way, the role of open spaces, giving them a more general meaning.

Even if some of them are still unrealised or incomplete, these projects or, better, these visions, have built the palimpsest for pioneering interventions in the transformation of agricultural areas. In the western part of Milan, Boscoincittà, as well as Parco Nord are key examples of this idea.

The progressive consolidation of the agricultural milieu of Milan, may be interpreted as a strong indicator of a new phase of lending value to the authentic cultivation tradition. Milan's rural districts, by engaging in a suitable dialogue with the public administration and more generally with the settled community, are pursuing a shared strategy to enhance the rural matrix and attempting the integrated and sustainable development of urban settlements.

BOSCOINCITTÀ: NATURE, AGRICULTURE, SPACES OF FREEDOM. DIALOGUE WITH SILVIO ANDERLONI ABOUT THE CONSTRUCTION OF A PERI-URBAN PARK

Giulia Fini

Boscoincittà is a wide public park in the north-west of Milan, not far from San Siro and Gallarate districts and the areas of Figino, Quinto Romano and Quarto Cagnino. Located within the borders of Milan's southern Agricultural Park (Parco agricolo sud) – the large agricultural park running around the southern perimeter of the metropolis – Boscoincittà is one of its northernmost points and is part of a peri-urban area made up of social housing districts, unbuilt spaces, settlement of diffused urbanisation, important infrastructural elements, and agricultural wedges.

The first experimental example of urban "forestation" in Italy, Boscoincittà in Milan covers a surface area of 120 hectares, seven kilometres far from the city centre; it is part of a significant system of adjacent green areas, also including Parco delle Cave, Parco di Trenno, Parco dei Fontanili di Rho and Bosco della Giretta, overall covering 310 hectares of public parks in north-west Milan¹.

In 2014 Boscoincittà celebrated 40 years since its foundation: this contribution intends to summarise the innovative experience of the Bosco (its unique management and planning features, the areas that characterise it, etc.) based on the direct report by Silvio Anderloni, current director of the CFU – Centro di Forestazione Urbana of Italia Nostra and one of the main players behind the project². Through the both evocative and sharp report of one of its founding members, it is easy in fact to understand how Boscoincittà is completely unlike any other public parks in Milan or in Italy in general.

From the very moment of its foundation in 1974, Boscoincittà has represented an innovative space of planning and construction: thanks to its underlying concept of public park (not a "park" but a "wood"); the methods used and the context in which the project was defined, and finally as a precursor experience of a public property's agreement of management between an administration, a no-profit association and the local inhabitants: «innovative not only for its essence as woodland, and woodland created by an association, but also in the methods utilized in the planning, management and use of the area» (Anderloni, interview).

The actors involved in this experience - that has been ongoing now for over forty years - are the Municipality of Milan, the Association Italia Nostra with its CFU operative group, many volunteers who have participated in establishing the park, and the variety of collaborators which have nourished its many complex dimensions: «Boscoincittà seemed to gain meaning through a process of cooperation in which citizens and institutions worked together» (Lapenna and Toccafondi, 2017: 411)³

THE CONTEXT, THE ORIGINAL IDEA, AND THE STARTING PHASE

Anderloni's words clearly recall the socio-cultural context in which Boscoincittà experience started. It was a time – the early 1970s – when environmental sensitivity (and that of a more liveable urban space) was embryonic ideas, strong but not yet developed or deep-rooted as in other European countries. As Anderloni recounts, «we are in 1974, in the very middle of tumultuous urban development. Milan and its metropolitan area were amongst Italy's most polluted territories, also thanks to the dense real-estate development of previous decades. Some important interventions to realize open spaces had been carried out, such as Parco di Trenno and Parco Forlanini, but generally speaking environment and landscape's issues were greatly overlooked» (Anderloni, interview).

In the context of Milan, this new environmental sensitivity was linked to a number of specific conditions. The energy and oil crises of that time, within a general climate of austerity, had determined fewer weekend breaks in the surrounding areas (the countryside, the lakes, the coast or mountains, traditional weekend destinations of the Milan inhabitants). A more intense use of urban spaces drove many Milanese to pay greater attention to and be more aware of public services - such as green areas, sport or free time facilities - both in the city and in the immediate surroundings. In parallel, a new sensitivity emerged towards public spaces and parks throughout the city: on one hand a critical judgement about the "spotted green-green measles" (a wonderful expression coined by Guido Borella, designer and first director of Milan Parco Nord), on the other, the awareness that the expanded dimension of the urban fabric required larger, metropolitan-scale parks. Finally, the necessity for an economic green spaces deepened, so as to weigh less on the finances of the public administration: «green areas with not expensive realization or management, but rich of nature, life, biodiversity» (Anderloni, interview)

In Milan, Italia Nostra – a cultural association which until '70s had dealt mainly with the protection

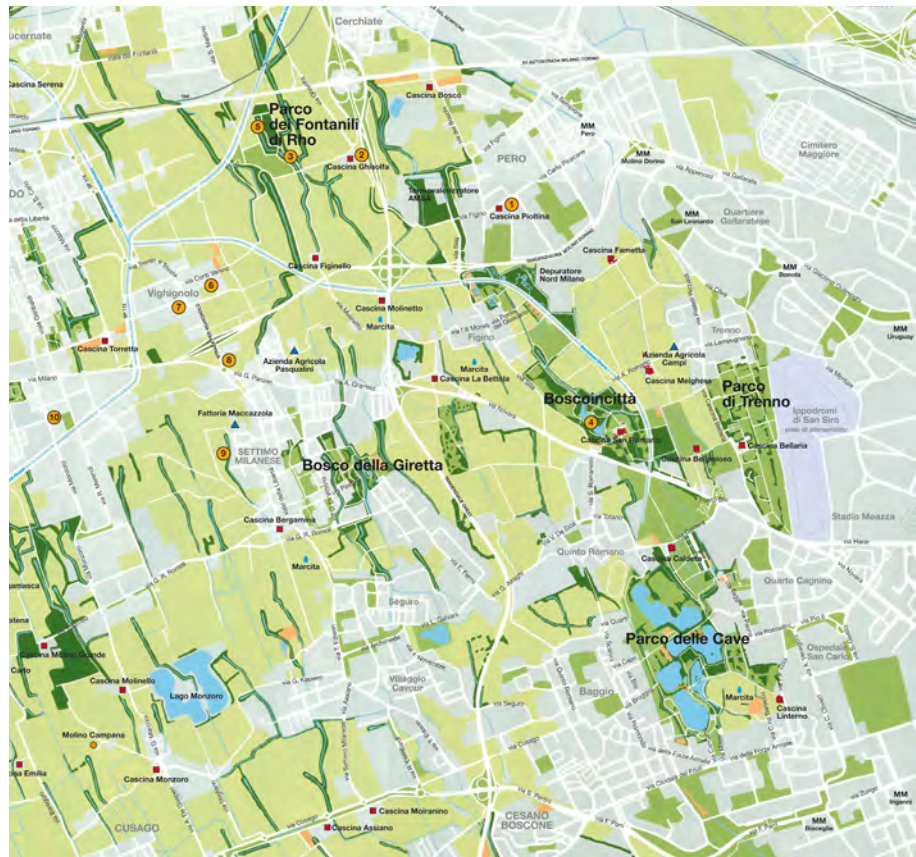


Figure 1 | Parks, settlements and agricultural areas in the north west of Milan. Source: CFU Italia Nostra, Author: Elena Pelizzoli

of historical and architectural heritage – undertook a series of initiatives sensitising and protesting against the metropolis' serious environmental conditions, while promoting the project of "new woodland" to be created through a community planting of trees in an area yet to be established⁴. The creation of Boscoincittà was made possible through an agreement that, following several failed attempts, was finally defined in 1974 between Italia Nostra and the Council of Milan regarding the area in which the Bosco was to grow: an abandoned agricultural site in Figino, whose water channels were completely dried up⁵. As well as the Council and Italia Nostra association a further two organisations were immediately involved in developing the project: Azienda Forestale dello Stato (National Forestry Agency) – which was responsible for donating the first plants – and the Minoprio Agricultural School which lent technical support in planting and building the park.

BOSCOINCITTÀ PROJECT

Other European metropolitan woodland experiences became the main reference points in establishing the new park, which in Italy was the first of its kind: first amongst them, the Woods of Amsterdam (the Amsterdamse Bos) which was created in the 1930s and which the founders of Boscoincittà had come to know during some trips abroad. More generally, as Anderloni tells us, «the culture of the wood belongs to many diverse northern European cultures and traditions, where the woods are not only places of fear and danger (as in Mediterranean cultures) but also of fascination, mystery, charitable and mysterious presences, etc.» (Anderloni, interview).

Architect Giulio Crespi drew up the Boscoincittà project, while the landscape and design criteria came largely from the ideas of Ugo Ratti, including:

- the territory and the park are conceived as a "green continuum": the clearings to be used are defined within the park; the edges of these clearings are conceived to increase the overall impression of the extension of the woods and to diversify the views;
- the trees used were not so much chosen for their suitability for the construction of the woods but also (and above all) for their "availability"⁶;
- it was decided to take the route of an "open process", or rather the study of a solution that could be easily modified and increased over time;
- the presence of water is another important element for its irrigation, landscape and natural functions.

As Anderloni highlights, the project and construction of Boscoincittà were not characterised by the presence of a single architect over the years, but more by the convergence of several ideas and expertise by an heterogeneous working group (the architect, the agronomist, gardeners, biologists, experts in farming and forestation techniques, etc.) and above all by a "continuous on-going work". Anderloni says «there was never the architect here (...) on the contrary, choices were made by



Figure 2 | The original project of Boscoincittà park. Source: CFU Italia Nostra Author: arch. Giulio Crespi

global consensus and supported by careful attention to social and territorial needs».

The first years of the wood construction, following its foundation in 1974, were characterised by campaigns to clean the territory and plant trees, together with renovations of San Romano farmstead (cascina San Romano). Immediately, the need emerged to restructure an efficient water system due to the precarious state of the existing one: «the area had not been irrigated for a long time as the channels - which up to fifteen years earlier had flowed abundantly with water - had dried up when the ground-water level dropped due to extensive urban development» (Ponti and Ponti, 1994: 35). Italia Nostra identified the Villoresi canal as the new main water source for the area, also in order to put a stop to water being taken from the Olona stream which at the time was worryingly polluted⁷.

Thus, Boscoincittà gradually expanded its borders: in 1984, at the end of the first convention with the Council of Milan, the area of the wood expanded to 50 hectares. With the second convention, the first vegetable gardens were established with about thirty lots (1988) and the start of construction of the main lake (1990). The third convention (1993-2002) expanded the area to further 30 hectares creating the water garden, the protected areas for children and other urban vegetable gardens. The penultimate convention (2003-2011) assigned the area of Via Caldera to the park, linking together Boscoincittà and Parco delle Cave and widening the wood to an overall surface of more than 120 hectares.

Today Boscoincittà is made up of some recognisable areas. In the initial nucleus of the park, the project has followed less strictly the elements of the context, which at the time of construction were greatly deteriorated. Via Novara entrance to Boscoincittà is characterised by the large San Romano farmstead, headquarters of the CFU and where many of the activities undertaken in the park are held or start. The trees species planted in the first phase of the project were supplied by the nurseries of the Azienda Forestale dello Stato (National Forestry Agency), and were almost exclusively exotic, quick-growing species for which a very large planting dimension was chosen.

The subsequent expansions of Boscoincittà were designed mainly following the morphology of the ground and the ancient canals, renovating the paths and the field's subdivision, but also the park's

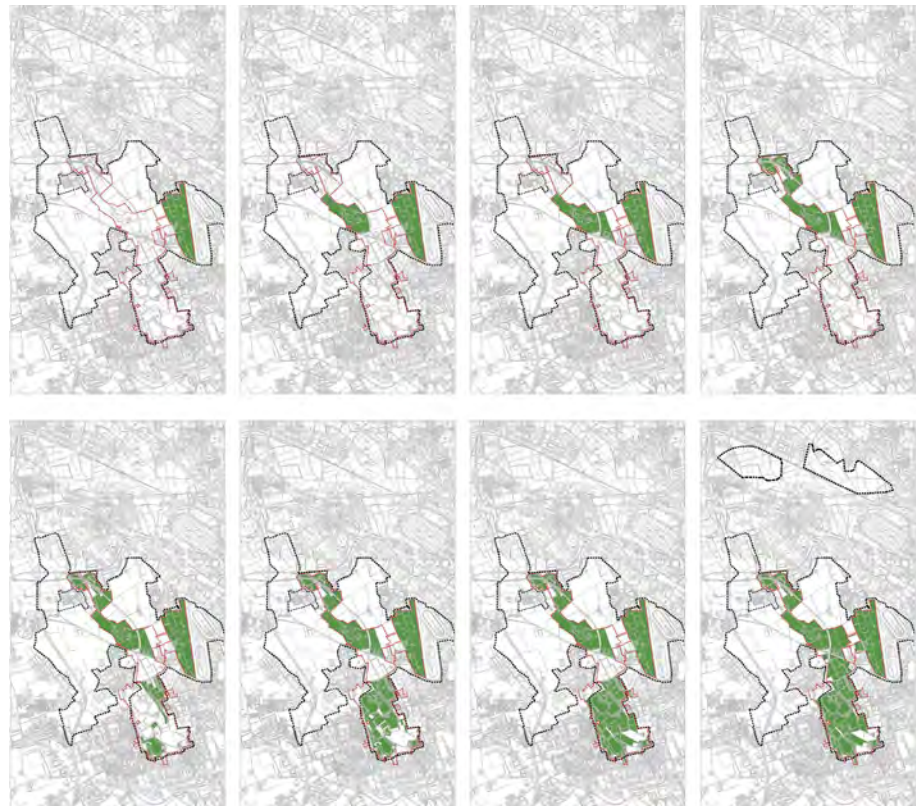


Figure 3 | Definition and enlargement of the parks in the western sector.
Source: CFU Italia Nostra

location within a wider idea. In 1994 the "Park of interrupted paths" (Parco dei Sentieri interrotti) was defined aiming to valorise and protect the agricultural areas in continuity with the urban or peri-urban green areas. In these years, an on-site nursery was established to make up for the lack of native species and the planting layout dimensions were reduced. In the northern part of the Bosco a Water Garden (Giardino d'acqua) was realized, in which aquatic flowers and plants are cultivated with an increase in environmental diversity. The edges of the park – nearest to the residential areas – are instead characterised by the presence of around 150 vegetable gardens, guided cultivation areas designed and created by the CFU which act as a service to the territory⁸. The vegetable gardens have multiple functions: located in particularly fragile areas, they move park's free uses away from residential areas, reducing situations of conflict and marginality. Overall however, the spaces mentioned here are secondary to the main area of the Bosco – made up of clearings, wide open spaces, cycle paths and horse-riding paths, water canals – which constitute the main focus of the project. The absence of signage in the park is also a reference to this principal idea, aiming to involve users in an experience in which the presence of human and artificial signs is reduced to a minimum.



Figure 4 | The system of open spaces composed by Parco di Trenno, Boscoincittà, and Parco delle Cave.
Source: CFU Italia Nostra,
Author: Elena Pelizzoli

PARK MANAGEMENT, ACTIVITIES, AND THE CONTRIBUTION OF VOLUNTEERS

Anderloni also highlights the original management method of the park, totally unlike that of the other green areas in the municipality of Milan. Starting with the foundation of Boscoincittà, the land was given in “direct management” to Italia Nostra.

Almost immediately an employee was identified to manage the daily activities of the park, such as field cleaning, organisation and scheduling of tasks, planting campaigns, relationships with volunteers, etc. «not a keeper, a worker, or a team that sometimes went to the park, but a person who contained all the functions in himself⁹» (Anderloni, interview). This approach thus allows the staff to move beyond the distinction between “extraordinary” and “ordinary activities” - which are often overlooked - regarding the green areas of Milan Council: not so much from the economic viewpoint and actions scheduling but more as a continue condition of care and work on the territory.

The park staff constitutes a constant and qualified “service” within the park which both controls the territory and supervises the process. The focus on a path of construction that gradually takes root itself is also documented by Ponti and Ponti (1994: 36) which explains the consolidation of relationships with all the actors surrounding the park: «it was fundamental to inform farmers about the motivations of the initiative, and it was also necessary to get rid of the widespread prejudice that the wood was ‘land stolen from agriculture’».

Italia Nostra Association also required an “ample mandate” from the Milan Council: a necessary condition to work within the territory of the park in relation to the many urgent situations that could occur and, in some cases, even regarding the rules of traditional management of the green areas by the Council.

The relationship between Italia Nostra and the Council is still today formalised by a management lease, renewed every nine years, and an economic contribution that is equal to an expenses refund. Italia Nostra covers all other expenses through private donations, sponsoring and Bosco’s small economic activities. The relationship with the Council of Milan has evolved over the years: from “a relative initial disinterest” to “moments characterized by some limitations”, up to “others period of great reliance” - an evolution that is also intertwined with the growth of subsidiarity relations in the management of public goods (see Puerari et al. 2014). The management experience by Italia Nostra which started with Boscoincittà has been in any case greatly appreciated and recognised. Moreover, it represents the starting point for other similar experiences throughout the territory:



Figure 5 | View of San Romano farmstead.
Source: CFU Italia Nostra

Italia Nostra has planned and contributed to the creation of via Valla vegetable gardens (on behalf of AEM, 1988), the Bergamella vegetable gardens in Sesto San Giovanni on behalf of the Council (2012-2014), the management of Parco delle Cave (since 1994), up to the recent commission for the redevelopment of Porto di Mare area, one of the areas with the greatest uncertain destination of the Milan territory, which today has fallen into a condition of serious abandonment.

Another significant resource marking the entire Boscoincittà experience is the contribution of volunteers in constructing the park from the very moment of its foundation. Since 1974, numerous volunteer groups have been involved in specific activities following a model of “active use” of the Bosco¹⁰. Under the coordination of directors and their direct collaborators, volunteers are involved in seasonal scheduled activities such as cleaning the land, the planting of new trees, the renovation of trenches and canals, and more recently care of vegetable gardens and the water garden.

These were important contributions that also proved problematical due, for example, to the need to create continuity of the work, availability that may fluctuate throughout the year, and also linked to need to coordinate the volunteers. As Anderloni highlights, the value of the volunteers’s involvement goes well beyond the practical or economic aspects linked to the contribution in which they are engaged. There is an “added value” related to the active participation, the transmission of knowledge (and savoir faire) within a wider social impact, the growth of sense of belonging and care of the park. These values are transmitted and maybe spread even further by volunteers themselves.

Currently, meetings have been organised with scout and school groups; courses for beekeepers, vegetable gardeners and other training courses; meetings and activities open to the public held throughout the year; in San Romano farmstead there is a party area (area delle feste) and guest-rooms available for users and volunteers of the park.

The catchment area of users and volunteers of Boscoincittà is however different from those of the nearby Parco delle Cave or Parco di Trenno: these parks have a more direct relationship with the residential areas of Quarto Cagnino, Baggio and Quinto Romano, all districts with green areas available, but whose parks cover the eastern borders. Boscoincittà has on the other hand always been a “catalyst” and a destination for users of the entire Milan municipality, an aspect that reflects the wide networks that Bosco has constructed over the years, but also Italia Nostra’s commitment to promotion and awareness at the entire urban scale.

Moreover, Boscoincittà constitutes a “container for free uses”, in which the predefined structures



Figure 6 | Park's activities close to vegetable gardens.

Source: CFU Italia Nostra

are limited: the aim is to cultivate a relationship between humankind and nature which can alter with the seasons, whether the park is visited in groups or alone.

An additional element to be considered is how the use of a public park presents its own seasons and various periods of use (Panzini, 1993). A similar condition was found also in Boscoincittà, with some very intense periods of use and others less intense¹¹. During the former, problems arose regarding the maintenance of the grass or the management of the activities in some communal areas; during the latter it was possible to recover some of the planted areas, undertake more in-depth work with the volunteers, the construction of new projects and ideas in the park, ready to open up to the public again.

THE TERRITORIAL DIMENSION

The final aspect that is important to recall is the territorial ambition of Boscoincittà and the nearby parks within the per-urban context in which they are located and the perimeter of the southern agricultural park of Milan. Anderloni says: «we are also searching to leave the 'shell' of the park: in almost a provocative way we can say that we should 'abolish the parks' and move on from looking after the park to looking after the entire territory».

The objective in which Boscoincittà is involved is to build a broader system with Parco delle Cave and Parco di Trenno which cover an overall surface area of more than 300 hectares of adjoining public parks, 400 hectares of agricultural areas managed by 32 farms businesses, over 100 hectares between race and training tracks of the nearby San Siro hippodromes. As a whole, these spaces constitute a system of areas and routes at the metropolitan scale that have a high value for uses, participation activities, as well as environmental and ecological dimensions. The system of the northwest parks in fact contributes to air mitigation (during the summer months) and a reduction in polluting factors during the whole year: two crucial factors of peri-urban parks in highly urbanized areas. Overall the west belt parks are frequently used, with the presence of 400 lots of urban vegetable gardens, picnic areas (30.000 users per year), jogging, horse-riding and tourist cycle paths, 32 agricultural farm businesses.

Silvio Anderloni's report on Boscoincittà is precise and evocative at the same time: the manager of CFU is able through his words to propose technical contents - on the Bosco's management and maintenance - together with reflections on what it means to build and protect this space every day



Figure 7 | Park's management activities with refugees.
Source: CFU Italia Nostra

and bring it to life, both as a work team as well as part of a wider community.

In view of this complexity the role of the individual architect and the "visions" - often evoked by town planners and architects speaking about green spaces at the territorial scale - fade into the background. On the other hand the report by Anderloni reveals a wealth of footprints, ideas, local knowledge and articulated skills¹²: a continuous work on the territory but the main challenge of which was, from its very foundation, that of being transmitted and extended towards the users and volunteers of the park.

Forty years after its foundation, Boscoincittà is a rich place with much to tell, and much to teach: a space of "nature, agriculture and freedom" (following the CFU main slogan), a place for a tenacious community in the contemporary metropolis.

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- Italia Nostra Onlus Sezione Milano Nord cintura metropolitana:
www.italianostra-milanonord.org
- Parco agricolo sud Milano:
www.parcoagricolosudmilano.it
www.cittametropolitana.mi.it/parco_agricolo_sud_milano

NOTES

- 1 Boscoincittà and the other parks referred are located «within the western sector of the Milan periphery, between the bypass road and the Meazza stadium (...) Beyond the bypass other intense urbanised areas have consumed large quantities of land in the councils of Rho and Settimo Milanese; beyond the stadium, toward the north, are instead located some of the most densely urbanised areas in Milan» (CFU - Italia Nostra, 2008: 6).
- 2 The interview with Silvio Anderloni was undertaken in autumn 2017 in the CFU - Centro di Forestazione Urbana headquarters.
- 3 The 40 years of Boscoincittà experience are documented in many publications. The main reference to understand the complexity of the park's construction is Toeschi (1984) which introduces the experiences referring to the entire process of constructing, but also to plant techniques and didactic initiatives, etc. In addition, there are several publicity materials and research reports published by the CFU on the specific themes (CFU 2008, 2009, 2014).
- 4 Within this context we can also find the initiatives of the Milanese section of Italia Nostra "Aria per Milano" (1969) and "Di verde si vive" (1972). These activities were soon joined by the desire to influence the context with concrete experiences: «the method is in fact this (...) to directly involve citizens in dealing together with a problem that the Council administration has found difficulty in overcoming» (Toeschi, 1984: 24).
- 5 «The area for the planting was finally identified: it was a semi-abandoned land near the Milano-Novara-Torino national road, almost adjacent to today's Trenno park, extending over approximately 35 hectares. Thus we reach the formal agreement with the Council of Milan (...) for a free contract of the identified land, committing the Association to restore it after nine years of planting so that it could be opened to the Milanese citizens as a public park» (Ivi, 22). The start of the urban forestation process was a completely new idea at the time, if we consider that as recently as the end of the 1950s, woodland areas were cut down to make way for agricultural land with redevelopment funding.
- 6 Anderloni tells: «all forestation techniques aimed at mountain reforestation or at planting quick-growing species in order to produce wood and cellulose. The nurseries of the Forest Guard only produced exotic species; they had no native species (...) So we started off with species that were not completely suitable».
- 7 The use of polluted water taken from Olona river by farmers led to widespread pollution in the area. The period of greatest pollution was between the 1950s and the 1970s when textile, paper and tanning industries dumped their waste into the river.
- 8 While vegetable gardens are today generally widely accepted and considered as beneficial, at the very beginning of the process they were considered places for emarginated people and as a legacy of "wartime vegetable gardens" (orti di guerra). The Bosco allotments are divided into four main areas (Maiera, Violè, Spinè e San Romanello), assigned to citizens upon request following a municipal waiting list. As well as looking after their own personal allotments, those assigned a plot collaborate with CFU in common planting and in managing the garden' activities.
- 9 The first Boscoincittà collaborator was Sergio Pellizzoni: «his position was different to that of other promoters. Pellizzoni initially entered the initiative through a part-time employment and then became the full-time operative manager of the Bosco (...) Basically, he was the main established reference point for all those who come into contact with the initiative of the woodland» (Ponti e Ponti, 1994: 30). Today the group of collaborators boasts 15 members, mostly part-time and all with different skills and abilities. The current manager and director of CFU is Silvio Anderloni.
- 10 «The group who initially established the initiative believed strongly in individual commitment and in finding solutions to a problem as a group. 1974 was again marked by a strong collective interest in forms of direct participation (...) but it was no longer so greatly characterised by the strong disputes of the first 1970s. But above all, it was the friendly but capillary approach in which volunteers were contacted - then regularly informed and encouraged - that was most influential» (Ponti and Ponti, 1994: 43-44).
- 11 «Right up to the 1980s the park was mainly known by volunteers, school groups and other groups of enthusiasts. In the mid-1980s there was an explosion in use resulting in huge density (...). More recently, the presence of widespread and well-equipped urban green areas has partly reduced the use of large extensive parks» (Anderloni, interview).
- 12 Also referring to this specific case, see the interesting reconstruction of Lapenna and Toccafondi (2017) about territory as a model of complexity and modifications recalling different authors (Morin, Corboz, Gregotti, Secchi, Settis, etc.): «The quantity of interactions and links between humans themselves and between humans and the environment makes the territory a model of complexity (...) If we intend the territory as a complex system in permanent transformation, where new relations are generated, the process of creating and supporting 'links' is a way of planning the territory» but also «An essential precondition in the design phase is therefore the ability (...) to understand the complexity and variety of this stratified 'historical experience'» (Lapenna and Toccafondi, 2017: 402-403).



This book collects the outcomes of the workshop “Linking territories. Rurality, landscape and urban borders” jointly organised by the PhD course in Urban Planning, Design and Policy (UPDP) at the Politecnico di Milano and the Post-Master “Architecture des Milieux” of the Ecole Spéciale d’Architecture de Paris. The workshop has had a double aim: to widen the view on the relationship between urban and rural areas, by involving different groups of research and practice, and to define experimental proposals able to imagine new spaces for the co-habitation of urban and rural ways of living, in the end redefining the concept of rurality and its relation with the urban condition.



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