

1 **NINETEEN**

2 **Distributing, De-Synchronizing, Digitalizing: Dealing with**
3 **Milan Transport Inequalities in Post-COVID-19 Society**

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5 **Introduction**

6 The COVID-19 pandemic has impacted how we perceive and shape our living
7 environment (Klaus, [2020](#); Shenker, [2020](#)), questioning economic and social
8 inequalities in cities. As the pandemic spread, reflections proposed in the international
9 debate have suggested three possible effects for the future of cities.

10 The first – paraphrasing the title of an article by Arundhati Roy, ‘the pandemic
11 is a portal between one world and the next’ (Roy, [2020](#)) – interprets the pandemic as
12 an opportunity for rethinking the urban condition, spatial dimensions, and the forms
13 of conviviality, shedding new light on the social divide. In this perspective, the
14 measures ensuring social distancing tested during the emergency and then in the post-
15 lockdown can be thought of as policies to promote a lasting urban turn. The outcome
16 could be a city that is environmentally sustainable, de-carbonized, and more socially
17 just in terms of the distribution of services.

18 The second perspective considers the pandemic as an accelerator for
19 innovative projects that could be tested, thus taking advantage of the COVID-19

1 constraints. Some ‘temporary’ emergency measures implemented to deal with social
2 distancing may become permanent policies to improve urban quality from an
3 environmental and equity point of view.

4 The third interprets the pandemic as a lesson for addressing future disruptive
5 changes, refining our predictive tools for governing interrelated and complex
6 processes under emergency conditions. The changing conditions impose a reframing
7 of the urban scenarios and their evaluation on a different time horizon that calls into
8 question longer-term planning policy.

9 The chapter describes three approaches driving a Milan plan adopted in April
10 2020 to deal with the pandemic ([Chapter Twenty](#) also addresses adaptation to the
11 pandemic in Milan). One involves a ‘distribution’ of public space so as to reduce the
12 presence of the car and encourage other uses of road and parking space. The second
13 approach consists in ‘de-synchronizing’ activities so as to avoid rush hour crowding.
14 Finally, a ‘digitalizing’ strategy aims at improving access to electronic means of
15 communication. The chapter demonstrates that the plan echoed the orientation of an
16 earlier pre-pandemic document. In this sense, the pandemic is perceived as an
17 accelerator that propelled the implementation of measures that would have otherwise
18 taken much longer to see the day.

19 [Milan 2020 document: tactical strategies to deal with COVID-](#)

20 19

1 The City of Milan published in April ‘*Milano 2020. Strategia di Adattamento*’ (AS),¹
2 suggesting target scenarios and necessary conditions for the recovery and the
3 reactivation of the city in the coming phases of COVID-19. The proposed vision
4 concerns the affirmation of a ‘new ordinary’ in urban lifestyle and rhythms in
5 response to the limits induced by the pandemic, through a radical rethinking of the
6 city’s times, spaces, and supply, ensuring access to the primary services and
7 workplaces. Urban mobility and accessibility consequently become a central issue,
8 defining future scenarios of coexistence with the virus.

9 Three main goals to deal with the pandemic’s impact on mobility and
10 accessibility emerge and are summarized as the **3Ds**: the Distributing,
11 Desynchronizing, Digitalizing of Milan.

12 **Distributing** reflects on reorganizing public spaces and transport, promoting
13 active mobility, and proposing a change of scale in urban density inspired by the
14 ‘accessibility by proximity’ concept. **Social distancing**, including contact bans, has
15 become the key means of slowing the spread of the disease, putting the quality of
16 current urban life into question and challenging densification objectives by suggesting
17 measures of spatial dispersion. Following this constraint, the measures proposed in
18 Milan 2020 deal with a reprioritization of city street spaces, favoring active mobility
19 such as walking and cycling, a sharing of mobility services, and a decentralization of
20 activities. New bike lanes (35 km projected), in place of parking, are changing the
21 perception of public spaces, along with the reallocation of spaces from cars to

1 pedestrians, through a tactical urbanism project (*'Strade aperte'*) (see [Chapters Four](#)
2 and Fourteen). Simultaneously, measures have been introduced to implement
3 accessibility by proximity on a district scale. Following the idea that 'on the whole,
4 density is a good thing' (Sennett, in Shenker, [2020](#)), these measures may create the
5 conditions for a more inclusive city, supporting the spread and redistribution of urban
6 services at a neighborhood scale, based on the socio-demographic profiles of the
7 inhabitants and their needs, ultimately establishing a different relationship between
8 attractiveness and density.

9 **De-synchronizing** involves measures aimed at reorganizing the times of the
10 city, by promoting flexible schedules, coordinating the opening/closing times of urban
11 activities, and redistributing traffic flows over the day, in order to improve the
12 efficiency of transport networks.

13 Rethinking times and schedules of the city, distributing mobility demand, and
14 avoiding crowds through applications for queue management and heat mapping tools
15 are relevant goals for changing urban rhythms. As learned by the experience of *Piano*
16 *degli Orari*,² remodeling urban rhythms is a complex task, led by the municipality,
17 that requires integrated measures and a shared process among stakeholders.

18 In order to support this process, a partnership between Comune di Milano and
19 Politecnico di Milano has defined the conditions for a desynchronization policy,
20 involving municipal offices, some large firms, high schools, and universities to ensure
21 a safe reopening by reducing commuter crowds on the public transport system. These

1 conditions, which require negotiation processes between the various stakeholders,
2 find a fertile field of experimentation in Milan, based on previous experiences of
3 **“lavoro agile”** and coordination among local universities.

4 Last, **digitalizing** refers to measures that support digital technologies to reduce
5 journeys by increasing virtual mobility. These measures promote smart
6 working/learning, e-commerce, and delivery services. Consistent with the 2016 Plan
7 for digital transformation, these measures pose relevant challenges in terms of fair
8 access to digital devices. The pandemic highlighted the strong imbalances in the
9 access to digital networks which, in the case of Milan, refer largely to low levels of
10 digital literacy among some groups. Looking only at the distribution of users of on-
11 demand delivery services during the lockdown, we see a map of inequality similar to
12 the socio-economic geography of the city, although the shops offering on-demand
13 delivery during the lockdown³ are quite evenly distributed in the city. The offer of
14 digital networks and digital info-mobility platforms is insufficient on its own to assure
15 access to these delivery systems because digital literacy and the availability of digital
16 devices are also needed.

17 In addition to its proposals, the Milan 2020 AS promotes a participatory
18 process and provides both a short-term tactical dimension and a strategic longer-term
19 time perspective. If the tactical dimension emerges in the policies that were
20 implemented, the document defines strategic guidelines, mainly concerning the
21 transport system's organization, the design of public spaces, and the distribution and

1 functioning of urban activities. In this sense, the document is the first step of a process
2 in which citizens are directly involved in the definition of the interventions to be
3 implemented to deal with the COVID-19 crisis. Citizens' engagement is achieved
4 through an online portal created for this purpose. Milan 2020 AS aims to create a
5 participatory planning process whereby the tactical actions it proposes are in line with
6 the objectives of the statutory pre-pandemic plan.

7 **Two main coexistent perspectives for a more inclusive city**

8 Analyzing policy measures in Milan, we identify two main concurrent perspectives:
9 the implementation of time-effective and low-cost 'tactical' measures acting as
10 experiments (Neuens et al, [2013](#); Roorda et al, [2014](#)) and the adoption of a post-car
11 city strategic perspective that may change the understanding of the concept of Milan
12 as a 'more inclusive city' by introducing accessibility by proximity measures.

13 The pandemic has both revealed and exacerbated some of the city's critical
14 issues already known to planners and policy makers. The present goal can be to create
15 a portal to a more inclusive city. The implementation of this goal can thus be
16 perceived as an extraordinary challenge testing the resilience and flexibility of city
17 government when planning for the future, a window of opportunity to be seized to
18 accelerate an already shared vision for the future of Milan.

19 This vision has been described in the Milan *PGT Documento di Piano*,⁴ a
20 strategic plan defining the urban planning policy for Milan 2030 and approved a few

1 weeks before the lockdown. Even though Milan 2020 and Milan 2030 were produced
2 by the same government and adopted two months apart (Milan 2030 before Milan
3 2020), they base their assumptions on different circumstances. The PGT (the Milan
4 2030 strategic plan) was drawn up before the pandemic in a particularly successful
5 period for Milan in which, in addition to showing significant demographic, economic,
6 and urban growth compared to the rest of the country, the city had consolidated itself
7 as Italy's foremost representative in the network of global cities thanks to its ability to
8 attract people and generate innovation.

9 The prevailing narrative in the PGT presents Milan as a hub linking the
10 Lombardy region, Italy, and the world, as a multicentric city, made up of significant
11 poles of attraction and sectors of excellence, ensuring dynamism, concentrations of
12 available opportunities, and the ability to adapt to change. By Italian planning norms,
13 the PGT is flexible, promoting temporary reuse, densification in public transport
14 accessibility nodes, different forms of mobility, and mixed-use.

15 At the same time, the plan recognizes urban issues, such as the negative
16 effects of agglomeration, the economic and social gap between the center and
17 peripheries, differences in accessibility levels, and the unequal provision of public
18 services. For this reason, one of the main objectives of the PGT is to promote a more
19 inclusive city that can reap the benefits of the global network in which it is embedded
20 and redistribute them more evenly among city districts. Therefore, a more local vision
21 is also promoted (which sees the 88 neighborhoods, *NIL_Nuclei di Identità Locale*, as

1 the geographical and cultural contexts for the organization), as is the regeneration of
2 public spaces and services capable of guaranteeing an inclusive local life, in a logic of
3 proximity. Likewise, the plan highlights participation in the formulation of its
4 objectives and the provision of local services.

5 We can, therefore, observe a degree of continuity between the contents of
6 Milan 2020 AS and the PGT 2030. Similarities comprise socially inclusive mobility,
7 welfare, housing policy, as well as innovative planning tools and participative
8 measures, in line with international experiences (Barcelona, Paris, New York). These
9 proposals strengthen the city's image as a laboratory of global relevance for urban
10 experimentation and innovation (Laker, [2020](#)). Meanwhile, there are differences
11 between the two plans' narrative of the city and its future. In Milan 2020 AS, the role
12 of the city as a regional and global attractor seems to lose importance relative to a
13 focus on the local scale, where the operational solutions (the 3Ds) work to guarantee
14 material and immaterial access to urban opportunities for citizens in the COVID-19
15 era.

16 Accordingly, while Milan 2020 AS strengthens the guidelines of the PGT by
17 promoting visions and concrete actions inspired by the same values, as regards
18 implementation, the Milan 2020 AS is more radical, leveraging the temporary nature
19 of solutions, which could become permanent if their effectiveness is proven. In this
20 sense, the concept of accessibility by proximity and the goal of a post-car city, which
21 is a general PGT long-term guideline, are now translated into policies to be

1 implemented immediately. Thus Milan 2020 AS becomes an operational compendium
2 of the 2030 plan, enhancing its purpose.

3 Conclusion

4 Milan's experience shows that the city is pursuing an ambitious and challenging path
5 of innovation and renewal. Actions inspired by the 3Ds have addressed the problems
6 generated by the pandemic causing proposals that had been in the books to be
7 implemented earlier than otherwise. COVID-19, in this sense, has acted as an
8 accelerator for the experimentation of innovative solutions, legitimizing the use of a
9 bolder approach to urban policy making. In doing so, Milan 2020 AS is promoting a
10 more radical change in the lifestyle of residents, focusing on the local dimension, but
11 also experimenting with innovative solutions at different scales with the potential of
12 creating value and providing worldwide visibility to Milan. If this change of direction
13 proves to be durable, COVID-19 will have effectively represented a portal to a new,
14 more inclusive, and sustainable idea of the city.

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² The city of Milan developed in 2013 a time plan *piano degli orari* activating a
municipal control room and a technical committee to manage urban rhythms.

The plan focused on two strategic actions: *'progetto scuola'* and *'lavoro agile'*. Among the main outcomes of the plan: the implementation of a national law and the organization of the city smart working week every year, since 2014.

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