

# Milano and the role of parks in shaping its recent urban development

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## **Abstract**

In the last decades, Milano has reinvented itself from industrial city to advanced tertiary global capital, more attentive to sustainable development, with a progressive change in the role and nature of planning tools and a controversial redefinition of the balance between public and private sectors in determining urban development through regeneration projects. Parks have a crucial role in this process, and landscape design has increased its importance in urban transformation projects, on the edge between fashionable greenification and the progressive affirmation of an ecological approach that interprets the landscape as a primary and structuring element of the urban and metropolitan sustainable development. A decisive milestone in this planning history, the project “Nine Parks for Milano”, envisaged in 1995 the launch of a broad strategy to restructure the city shape, starting from the configuration of nine urban parks. Moving from a historical overview on park-making in the city, the paper investigates some of the projects that were directly or indirectly generated by the “Nine Parks” vision, discussing planning tools, negotiation processes, design actions, and effective results, reflecting on the combined role of urban and landscape design and planning in shaping more sustainable and resilient metropolitan systems.

## **Keywords**

Milano, parks, landscape design, urban regeneration, sustainable development

## **How to cite**

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## INTRODUCTION

Cities are the primary research territory in which to act, as urban designers and planners, to experiment with forms of rebalancing the relationship between urbanisation and natural resources. According to data reported by the United Nations in support of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, today more than half of the world's population (which will be two-thirds by 2050) lives in urban settlements that occupy only 3% of the Earth's surface but are responsible for 75% of carbon emissions, significantly contributing to climate change and putting the planet's ecological balance at risk.

Urban parks originated at the end of the 18th century and the beginning of the 19th century as a space for environmental and social rebalancing, where one could find refuge from an overly congested urban space. This challenge soon became an urban planning issue, particularly in the Anglo-Saxon world, as evidenced in the work of Frederick Olmsted. The reflections of the Modern Movement attempted to radically alter the relationship between open and built spaces but planning logics have mostly remained tied to a rational-comprehensive quantitative urban planning approach, linking the presence of green spaces to surface area standards to be guaranteed. If urban parks are considered as part of the environmental resource system that ensures urban quality of life (if not its survival), and thus a common good, the core issue remains the balance of power between private and public actors in producing the city.

In the 1980s, Western Europe experienced a significant transition from an industrial economy to an advanced service economy, freeing up large spaces previously occupied by industries in urban areas that were once peripheral but then engulfed by urban expansion. This process represented a great opportunity for many cities to equip themselves with urban parks that alleviated the settlement pressure on these expanding areas, experimenting with both new forms of 'park' as a varied and complex social space with ecological value, and new forms of negotiation between public and private stakeholders to make the creation of these green areas possible while containing real estate appetites.

In this sense, Milano, which since it began expanding beyond its historic walls has seen the frequent predominance of private interests in construction over public investments, can be considered an interesting case study to examine how that transitional period of the 1980s and 90s was managed, what the outcomes were, and what possible lessons can be drawn for the present and future, also considering the rising worries about climate change effects and the spread of a 'greenification' wave that risks to banalize the role of urban design and planning.

## GREY TO GREEN MILANO: A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE PREMISES FOR A TRANSITION

Milano has grown and evolved over the centuries thanks to its unique geographical position, straddling the dry and wet plains and along the axis connecting central Italy, the Po Valley, and Central Europe. This strategic location fostered its development as a city-territory linked

to agricultural activities until the industrial revolution, when its rich network of waterways fuelled the industrial development that, during the 20th century, made Milano one of the most important industrial hubs in Italy and Europe<sup>1</sup>. Between 1870 and 1970, Milano's population surged from about 200,000 to approximately 1.7 million, a dramatic increase that, especially in the second after-war period, led to rapid urbanization dynamics. Despite some interesting experiments in urban design, this process generally resulted in poor-quality developments, lacking in consideration for public space and environmental systems<sup>2</sup>.

In the 1980s, when the challenge of managing significant industrial dismissions arose, the city was celebrating itself as a place of prosperity, fashion, and high life, despite social tensions and poor environmental quality also marked the era. The “Milano da Bere”<sup>3</sup> of those years, as depicted in films of the time, was actually a city in shades of grey, suffocated by traffic and pollution. As the demographic curve reversed, with people fleeing to the suburbs, the inefficacy of existing planning tools led, as in other European countries, to the alternative practice of “special projects”<sup>4</sup>, even if with limited effectiveness, as they merely expressed broad intentions without specific proposals for the physical transformation of places<sup>5</sup>.

The progressive urban deregulation of the 1980s, instead of fostering renewal, reinforced covert practices that enabled private real estate profits at the expense of collective urban well-being, resulting in fragmented and often incoherent urbanization. A major political and judicial scandal in the early 1990s revealed pervasive corruption within urbanization dynamics, spreading general distrust about the city's future and necessitating the redefinition of planning scenarios, tools, and procedures. During this period, continuing with a “city by projects” approach, the groundwork was laid for a radical transformation of the city's reputation and image, later culminating in the 2015 Expo. The symbolic document of this ambition to reinvent itself was the strategic planning document “Rebuilding Greater Milano” presented in 2000<sup>6</sup>, that tied the post-industrial city's development to its international role as a global city of creativity and advanced tertiary services. The spatialization of this vision reaffirmed some historical axes of urban development, confirming the necessity and opportunity to transform disused industrial areas, favouring special area projects where transformation terms could be directly negotiated with investors. The political objective was to introduce flexibility and subsidiarity in the planning process, reduce decision-making times, and involve external actors in the choices, aiming for greater transparency to limit corruption opportunities<sup>7</sup>. This phase in Milano's history, albeit not entirely linear and coherent, marks the beginning of the city's transition from grey to green.

## THE ROOTS OF GREEN MILANO AND THE ROLE OF THE “NINE PARKS FOR MILANO” PROJECT

Given that Milano was founded on the control of water systems and the exploitation of land for agricultural purposes, the city has always considered its open spaces as productive areas. Within the city, the waterways were canals and ports, while the green spaces within the historic core consisted of a few gardens of noble palaces and, between the Roman and Spanish walls, of fields and orchards tended by monasteries. It is precisely from some of these monas-

tic gardens that Milano's first public park, the Porta Venezia Gardens, originated. Designed in its initial form by Giuseppe Piermarini at the end of the 18th century, these gardens, along with the tree-lined walks on the city walls, formed a significant landscape structure, connecting public space and nature and kicking off the peculiar milanese urban landscape history<sup>8</sup>.

The Beruto Plan<sup>9</sup> at the end of the 19th century marked the beginning of imagining a structure of tree-lined avenues and squares, along with some neighbourhood parks, as elements to balance the building pressure. Results were limited as building interests were often winning on public space designation. Fortunately, this was not the case for the city's second most important park, Parco Sempione, designed by Alemagna on the site of the former parade ground, after several proposals discussed at the municipal level to exploit the area for building purposes. The Beruto Plan also influenced the creation of Parco Ravizza (1905) and Parco Solari (1935) and, following the same logic, subsequent urban plans preserved Giardino della Guastalla from development (1939) and established the first outskirts' park, Parco Lambro (1936), aiming to create a new relationship between the city and one of its natural rivers. In the post-war period, Parco Montestella (1960) was created, an idea by Piero Bottoni to transform the accumulation of debris from wartime bombings into the dream of a mountain for Milano. It also became a special nature oasis completing the green open spaces of the experimental QT8 district, which tested new settlement forms for the city's expansion related to the massive urbanization triggered by the industrial development.

To curb the urban sprawl during this period of significant expansion, the 1970s and 1980s saw the initiation of processes to create Parco Forlanini (1970), Parco di Trenno (1971), Parco delle Cave (1973), Bosco in Città (1974), Parco Nord (1983), and Parco Agricolo Sud (1990). These large metropolitan belt parks established buffer zones dedicated to nature to limit land consumption at the interface between Milano and its sprawling metropolitan area. It is within this historical context, where real estate pressure was intense, urban planning tools were weak, the city was governed through special projects and public-private negotiations, and attention to public interests was scarce, yet there was an awareness of the need to act to contain rapid environmental degradation, that an extremely interesting and relevant project for the future of the city emerged: the strategic project "Nine Parks for Milano"<sup>10</sup>.

Developed in 1995 on behalf of the Municipality of Milano by the Urban Design Laboratory, with the concept by architects Pierluigi Nicolini, Raffaello Cecchi, Vincenza Lima, and Pippo Traversi, this project began with the call to outline a program for the urban reorganization of some disused industrial areas and, more generally, the city as a whole. The key idea of the project was to set each of the urban transformations included in the strategy around a large central space to be designated as a park. In this perspective, the project thus envisaged the start of a broad strategy to restructure the shape of the city, starting with the configuration of nine urban parks and three promenades, with the aim of weakening the radiocentric monocentricity of Milano to open it up to a metropolitan dimension that symbolically reversed the logic of polarization by placing public open spaces at the core of new urban centralities. These spaces were envisioned as predominantly natural and with a well-defined and recognizable geometric shape, capable of becoming a reference point for a new urban mental map even in the fragmented and heterogeneous contexts of more recent disordered urbanization, within which they were proposed as structural elements of reorganization and recomposition<sup>11</sup>.



Fig. 1. The Nine Parks for Milano Strategic Plan (1995)

In a historical moment of great debate on the salvific role of strategic planning compared to traditional regulatory urbanism, the project of the Nine Parks for Milano (9PM) proposed itself as a strategic tool endowed with the peculiarity of being articulated into specific, spatially determined interventions which then as a whole draw a comprehensive strategy of urban transformation. This specificity, highlighted by Luigi Mazza, unfolds into three specific characteristics that are complementary and integrated with each other, namely the provision of a design that is: defined and comprehensive; flexible; and long-term<sup>12</sup>. Moreover, the strategy supported the trend of public-private negotiated urban transformation by placing the public interest at the centre in an unprecedented way.

The morphological proposals for the urban design of the different areas included in the strategic plan had no prescriptive value, but served a prefigurative purpose, useful for establishing dynamic and negotiable scenarios based on the permanence of the spatial layout and the criteria for designing the public space<sup>13</sup>. This approach was similar to what was being experimented, as Marinoni points out<sup>14</sup>, in the “coordinated urban projects” being tested in Europe at that time, such as the Olympic Village in Barcelona, the Bercy Park in Paris, and the Borneo Sporenburg in Amsterdam. The project was to be undertaken by a coordinating architect. In Milano, besides the designers who had conceived the overall plan, O.M. Ungers, R. Koolhaas, J. Navarro Baldeweg, A. Siza, and M. Solà-Morales were initially involved to fulfil this role<sup>15</sup>.

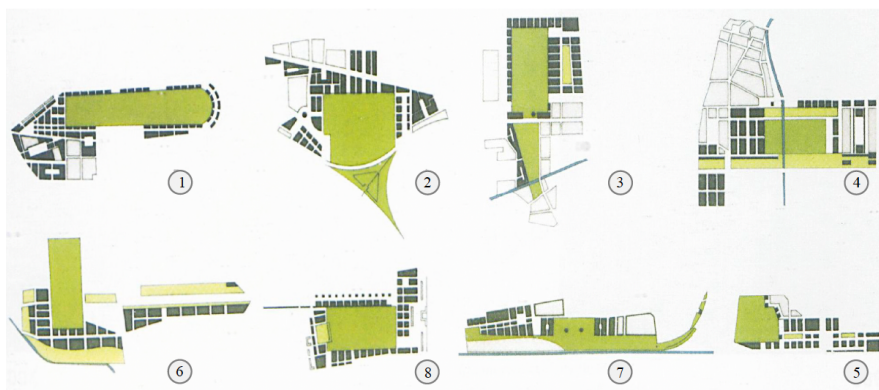


Fig. 2. Spatial layouts for eight of the nine parks: 1. Parco dell'Ippodromo; 2. Parco Certosa; 3. Parco della Martesana; 4. Parco dell'Acquabella; 5. Parco Liberty; 6. Parco Beruto; 7. Parco San Cristoforo; 8. Parco delle Rogge.

## THE NINE PARKS: WHAT HAPPENED TO THEM?

Despite having the characteristics to be a strategic plan that could be adopted as a true guiding tool and having been later cited in the strategic document “Rebuilding the Greater Milano” in 2000, the 9PM never properly became an urban planning tool. However, as often happens with urban visions, it remained in the city’s imagination and initially guided some of its contemporary urban transformations, supported by a national program for special urban redevelopment projects (PRU), and influenced many others (PII), although with not entirely convincing outcomes and without achieving the systemic urban effect envisioned at the beginning. A brief survey of what happened to the nine parks can be helpful in making some assessments<sup>16</sup>.

### PARCO DELL'IPPODROMO

The initial 9PM’s proposal envisioned to overcome the barrier created by the large fenced area of the gallop racetrack, built at the end of the 19th century on the outskirts of the city and now incorporated into the urban fabric, while maintaining the track and form of the sports facility as a structural morphological element of a new park, surrounded by mixed-use buildings. The area today still retains its sports function, and the transformation project never had any development, although significant transformation projects are underway in the immediate vicinity for the Trot area and the San Siro Stadium. The former is the subject of an intervention with intentions like those of the Parco dell'Ippodromo project, applied to the Trot racetrack area, that was closed in 2015. The San Siro area, on the other hand, has been at the centre of public debate for some years, concerning the possible demolition (recently banned) or reconfiguration of the stadium, one of the most important symbols of Italian and international football, seeking new forms of interaction with the city and enhancement of the adjacent public spaces. Such a strategic context, however, remains without a clear unified vision.



## PARCO CERTOSA

The Parco Certosa area, located northwest of Milano, was occupied for several decades by the Finalube oil depots, which created a physical and psychological separation between the working-class neighbourhood of Quarto Oggiaro and the city centre. The 9PM's project envisioned the redevelopment of the area through the construction of active edges to give a regular and recognizable shape to the new park. Despite the presence of significant barriers around it, the project aimed to enhance the connection with the local railway station through a tall public building, serving as a pivot for the public spaces at its base, and good permeability to urban systems to the north, symbolically and physically reconnecting Quarto Oggiaro to the city, and to the southeast, in anticipation of the regeneration of the Bovisa university area. The strategic position along the city's north-west development axis made Parco Certosa one of the first of the nine parks to be effectively realized. The PRU Fina Palizzi, was approved in 1997 and embraced the general approach of the 9PM strategy, with a large park area surrounded by building developments. However, the final project abandoned the role of reconnecting different parts of the city. These principles seem intentionally contradicted by the realized project<sup>17</sup>, with a deliberate distancing from the adjacent working-class neighbourhoods and a poor and ineffective system of urban relationships. The area, which has seen slow development and the abandonment of some potentially driving public functions, is now a tangle of barriers and fences that deny the large park (the second-largest fenced park in the city) and the new neighbourhood the possibility of being an effective multifunctional centrality for this urban sector.

## PARCO DELLA MARTESANA

Parco della Martesana was envisioned by 9PM as an opportunity to rethink the area of the large Magneti Marelli factory, a landmark of its neighbourhood since 1917 and at that time disused, as a new central organizing element for the surrounding fragmented and dispersed city fabric, also capable of connecting with the historical axis of the Martesana water canal. The effective project, changing its name in Parco Adriano, was limited to the northern part, foregoing the connection with the Martesana, and has been developed starting from 2006, the year of approval of the two Integrated Intervention Programs (PII) on a masterplan designed by Caputo. This was drafted from a scheme that denies the premise of the previous strategic project to give a complete and recognizable form to the park, now surrounded by towers and semi-courtyard buildings that fail to build a coherent and active edge system. The development of the new neighbourhood is proceeding slowly, both in terms of residential buildings and public facilities/mobility. The park, partially inaugurated in 2014 and enlarged in 2021, appears more as a large peripheral park rather than an urban park capable of establishing centrality for the neighbourhood, although it is appropriate to wait for the completion of the new developments to make further evaluations.

## PARCO DELL'ACQUABELLA

Parco dell'Acquabella, now partially realised as Parco della Lambretta, was envisioned as a catalyst for the regeneration of another large disused industrial area, the Maserati Innocenti factory, straddling the eastern ring road and the Lambro River. The 9PM project, proposing the under-grounding of the stretch of motorway that cuts across the area, envisioned a dense residential settlement to the west, in continuity with the historic neighbourhood of Lambrate, and the retention of two large industrial buildings to be converted to major attractive functions to the east, with the new large park acting as a hinge. The project, initiated thanks to a PRU approved in 1997, has only been realised in its western part, with a commercial square and a dense residential fabric organised along a public axis that leads eastwards to the completed section of the park, which passes under the elevated ring road, attempting a poetic dialogue with the infrastructural landscape. The completion has been hindered over time by the difficulty in identifying the major urban function to be established in the former industrial warehouses to the east, a situation recently resolved with a competition for the construction of the laboratories for the Teatro alla Scala, which also includes the completion of the park with an ecological water management function, in synergy with the Lambro River. This is an additional piece that it is hoped will help to revive the role of urban and metropolitan reconnection, which has so far not been achieved.

## PARCO LIBERTY

The location of Parco Liberty is particularly significant at the time in which the 9PM project takes shape because it corresponds to the disused and strategically important Porta Vittoria railway yard, where the underground railway line that was under development begins its passage through the city. The 9PM strategic vision is ambitious and aims to bury a section of the urban ring road to make the new park an extension of the historic Parco di Largo Marinai d'Italia. Abandoning the road burial and focusing solely on the railway yard, the PII Porta Vittoria was presented in 2000, with a masterplan by Vittorio Gregotti, later taken over by Studio Nonis with the supervision of Rafael Moneo. The project also included the European Library of Information and Culture (BEIC) as a driving public function of the new centrality, with a project awarded through an international competition won by Bolles+Wilson. Although the initial premises were promising, the project soon fell victim to delays, economic and judicial difficulties, and political decisions that led to the cancellation of the BEIC project, replaced by an urban park called Parco 8 Marzo, which partly returns to the original vision. The library project, relaunched through another competition in 2022 on an area further east, contiguous with the park and in a potentially connecting position with the ongoing project for the redevelopment of the former slaughterhouse area, testifies to the long-term vision of the 9PM, despite difficulties and partial interpretations.

## PARCO BERUTO

Parco Beruto was envisioned as a project capable of integrating the historic Parco Ravizza with the areas of the Om industrial plants and the Porta Romana railway yard, both to be transformed to become the most important centrality of the southern district of the city. Once



again abandoning the ambitions of burying road and railway infrastructure, the project saw the design of an initial section through the PRU Pompeo Leoni (1998), which completely overturned the 9PM concept, abandoning the idea of a large central park in continuity with Parco Ravizza and organizing all volumes along an east-west axis that separates two green areas of different character: the Parco delle Memorie Industriali to the north (still awaiting connection via an underpass with Parco Ravizza) and Parco della Vettabbia, enhancing an existing historic canal. Except for the northern connecting park, the intervention is complete, and the dismal poverty of public spaces and the urban relations system makes this place far from what was envisioned by the 9PM. More recently, the process for rethinking the Porta Romana railway yard has also been initiated, as part of a major urban regeneration project for the railway infrastructure areas, with far more significant ambitions in terms of representativeness and urban role.

### PARCO SAN CRISTOFORO

The area proposed by 9PM for Parco San Cristoforo included a linear system stretching from the location of Porta Genova Station, which is still under discussion for decommissioning, extending along the axis of the Naviglio Grande. The aim was to replace the existing industrial fabric with a linear park that would enhance the historic presence of the canal and order the expected practices of urban regeneration. The project never materialised, and the area has transformed through a disordered process of various small-scale redevelopment interventions. The area of the station and Porta Genova railway yard has been subject to new architectural prefigurations during the public debate on the future of the railway yards, as has the area of the San Cristoforo Yard, further west. In this area, a large linear park will be created, envisioned as a metropolitan ecological water management device, but without any building interventions or supporting urban functions.

### PARCO DELLE ROGGE

The last parade ground in the city, to the west of Milano, is still a vast green space with a regular shape that, due to its military connotation, has resisted speculative pressure. This reserve of open space and nature is still a topic of discussion regarding its future, with a conviction that it should retain much of its qualities as an urban oasis. In the 9PM project, the intervention area was envisioned as a large, regular park characterized by water, with construction limited to the edges, continuing the European and Milanese tradition (such as Parco Sempione) of transforming parade grounds into large urban parks capable of revitalising and redeveloping the peripheral areas in which they are located. After decades of waiting for the availability of the area, the project has recently returned to the spotlight, with new design investigations suggesting its imminent realisation according to principles similar to the original 9PM intentions.

Name Parks for Milan	Planning Tools		Masterplan		Park							
	original name	type and name	approval (year)	developer	planner/designer	UT index <sup>1</sup> (sqm/sqm)	current name	landscape	opening year	proposed surface by 9PM (sqm)	current surface (sqm)	current % of the masterplan area
1 Parco dell'ippodromo	unrealized and no plans to									250,678		
2 Parco Certosa	PRU - Palizzi		1996	Emontiano spa	A. Balzani, A. Barbieri, D. Caramiolo e A. Secchi	0.29	Parco Franco Verga	Diana Armstrong Ball	2007/ 2013	315,536	198,600	44%
3 Parco della Matresana	PII - Adriano Marcellì		2006	Adele srl e Geda srl	Cigno Partnership, V. Bonati	0.75	Giardino Franca Rame	Franco Giorgetta	2014		65,402	21%
	PII - Adriano Cascina San		2006	Gruppo Pasani	Cigno Partnership	0.19	Parco Sandra Mondadori e Rahnoldo Vanchello	Franco Giorgetta	2021/ n.c.	251,202	88,797	53%
4 Parco dell'Acquanella	PRU - Rubattino		1996	Rubattino 87 srl	A. Grilioni, A. Gallo, L. Imberti, Alpina Spa, Andreas Kipner	0.59	Parco della Lambretta <sup>2</sup>	Guido Ferraro Associati, Studio Land	2004	165,200	110,000	22%
5 Parco Liberty	PII - Porta Vittoria		2002	PII, Elia srl, Metropolis	Vittorio Gregotti, linee Studio Nouis with Rafael Moano	0.52	Parco 8 Marzo	Lama Gatti	2023	103,317 [including Parco Fontemmano]	28,000 [+ 72,300 Parco Fontemmano]	20%
6 Parco Bertino	PRU - ex Om-Pompeo Leoni		1997	Socetà PALERO, NEODIDORA, Cooperativa edilizia FIDUCIA, Esselunga	Ufficio tecnico Sernap (with V. Bonati, L. Imberti, A. Secchi)	0.58	Parco delle Memorie Industriali e Parco della Cultura	Christophe Girou, Studio Land	2004/ n.c.	186,697 [including Parco Ravizza]	70,400 [+ 62,300 Parco Ravizza]	27%
7 Parco San Cristoforo	PII - Zona Speciale San Cristoforo		ongoing	Hines-Preflex-ItacCredit	ONMA, Laboratorio Penumante <sup>3</sup>	0.4	to be defined	to be defined	-	143,693	140,199	100%
8 Parco delle Rogge	l.b.d. - Pazzia d'Armi		ongoing	Inviniti Spa	Leopoldo Forri <sup>4</sup>	0.7	to be defined	to be defined	-	162,724	270,000	50%
9 Parco Sempione	l.b.d. - Caidonia		ongoing	Cerinus Italy	Arcadis, Coris, Land, Mib, Stefano Bossi Architeti	l.b.d.	to be defined	to be defined	-	432,606 [including Parco Sempione]	-	-

1 UT index refers to the ratio between the total masterplan area and the buildable surface.  
 2 The park is under expansion. The surface is the one of the completed park.  
 3 Authors of the winning competition proposal.  
 4 All the buildable surface has been moved to the Forni Railway Yard area as part of an integrated project.  
 5 Author of a first prefiguration. The process is still ongoing (2024).

Table 1. Information and data about the nine parks, comparing proposals and effective realizations. Elaboration of the author on multiple sources cited in the bibliography.

## PARCO SEMPIONE

Parco Sempione, as previously mentioned, is the main historic park of the city, home to cultural institutions and a beloved landscape for the Milanese. The vision proposed by the 9PM plan envisaged extending the pedestrian area of the park to cover the railway tracks of Cadorna Station, with an intervention that would complete the western edge of the park with a system of public buildings dedicated to an international cultural centre in dialogue with the Triennale. The idea referred to the role of the park not only as a green area but as a cultural forum for the city, echoing the 19th-century plans for the Foro Bonaparte. The project was never realised, although the debate about covering the railway tracks has occasionally resurfaced. In 2023, a concrete development scenario for the project was announced. According to the initial information, the park's extension will be accompanied by the construction of residential and tertiary buildings, abandoning the predominantly public vocation of the original proposal.

To complete the vision of the 9PM, some of the parks were integrated with each other and with the existing urban system through three promenades. These promenades were intended to establish connections that would combine mobility themes and landscape quality in fostering a polycentric network of connections. None of these promenades have materialised as envisioned.

## THE NINE PARKS THIRTY YEARS ON: AN ASSESSMENT

Approximately thirty years after the project's presentation, it is possible to make some evaluations regarding the significance and legacy of this initiative for the city's development. Out of about 150 hectares of parks planned in the strategy<sup>18</sup>, around 50 hectares have been realised so far. Although comparison with some contemporary European experiences may seem discouraging (the Parc de la Villette in Paris alone, cited by 9PM as a prototype for the role of the contemporary park in transforming the city<sup>19</sup>, spans 55 hectares), the 9PM project effectively established a model for organising special urban transformation projects around a park. The 2000 planning document "Rebuilding Greater Milano" incorporated a regulation allowing the use of special planning tools (PII) to activate a negotiation and evaluation procedure for urban projects, starting from a basic building index of 0.65 sqm/sqm and allocating 50% of the area for public spaces including a park, to be ceded to the community. This approach characterised major subsequent urban transformation projects, not envisaged by the 9PM strategy, such as the PII Portello (2001), PII Santa Giulia (2002), PII Garibaldi Repubblica (2003), PII CityLife (2005), PII Calchi Taeggi, and PII Cascina Merlata (2009). In the last twenty years, following these initiatives, more than ten new parks have been inaugurated in Milano, contributing, along with the urban regeneration and construction boom and anti-pollution policies, to renewing the city's image. Milano has shifted from grey tones to greener hues, although with some critical issues and without developing a holistic city design idea, confirming the trend of episodic and project-based city development<sup>20</sup>.

Regarding the projects inspired by the 9PM suggestions, several key discussion points can be highlighted, which are useful for addressing the city's contemporary challenges. The idea

of developing new centralities through these projects has failed for several reasons. Milano has always struggled historically and politically to conceive itself as polycentric, remaining anchored to a Duomo-centric mindset. This has also affected the difficulty in finding or confirming significant public functions to drive the transformations of the eight 9PM's non-central areas, a challenge often compounded by the public administration's weak negotiating position, leading to complete reliance on private developers. Consequently, the economic viability of the interventions has been defined by private interests rather than public ones, reduced to mere compliance with urban planning parameters and the minimum green area requirements. The functional scheme juxtaposing residences – park – supermarket, aggregated according to very basic urban design principles, self-referential to the convenience of new private constructions, and with modest public space design, has resulted in outcomes far removed from the 9PM proposals and the selected European park projects cited there as references<sup>21</sup>. The actual projects, by more or less consistently overturning the 9PM prefiguration schemes, stripping the park of its recognisability and treating its edges in a way that did not define any urban relationship, have made them places primarily useful for views from the balconies of the residences and local uses, almost limited to the residents of the new housing. Despite the likely good intentions of the designers, the negotiation forms and methods between public and private were certainly critical, unsupported by clear guidelines regarding space quality and district plans managing the integration of new projects with the surroundings. In later cases in the 2000s this aspect improved, especially for parks located in more (and already) strategic areas.

The prolonged realisation times have also contributed to the described failure. Environmental remediation due to previous industrial use, completion of infrastructural works in some cases, and difficulty in identifying or financing supporting public functions, have meant that project completion processes were extremely protracted. During this extension, the areas delivered later (or not completed at all) were often the public ones, including parks. This overturned one of the 9PM principles, which envisaged each park as foundational and driving subsequent operations<sup>22</sup>. Again, this points to ineffective negotiation, better managed in later cases<sup>23</sup>.

Finally, the public space and parks design itself suffer from a peculiar Italian delay in considering the role of landscape design, lacking an integrated ecological vision of the relationship between built and unbuilt environments<sup>24</sup>, without indications on soil permeability, sustainable mobility traffic management, or the protection and promotion of ecosystem services linked to natural resources. The architectural and urban character of the 9PM prefigurations was misinterpreted, consolidating the practice of allocating a self-referential park plot for which a landscape professional (often foreign, given the low relevance of the discipline in Italy at the time) was consulted. A multidisciplinary vision including landscape aspects could have more effectively combined urban and ecological-environmental needs, ensuring both attractiveness and urban quality values and the continuity of natural systems. Only later, with the gradual spread of widespread awareness and the related economic return on investing in nature in the city, have Milano's urban transformation projects begun to consider the socio-ecological systemic role of parks. This attention has also made its way into urban planning tools, despite the limits of ineffective metropolitan-scale planning.

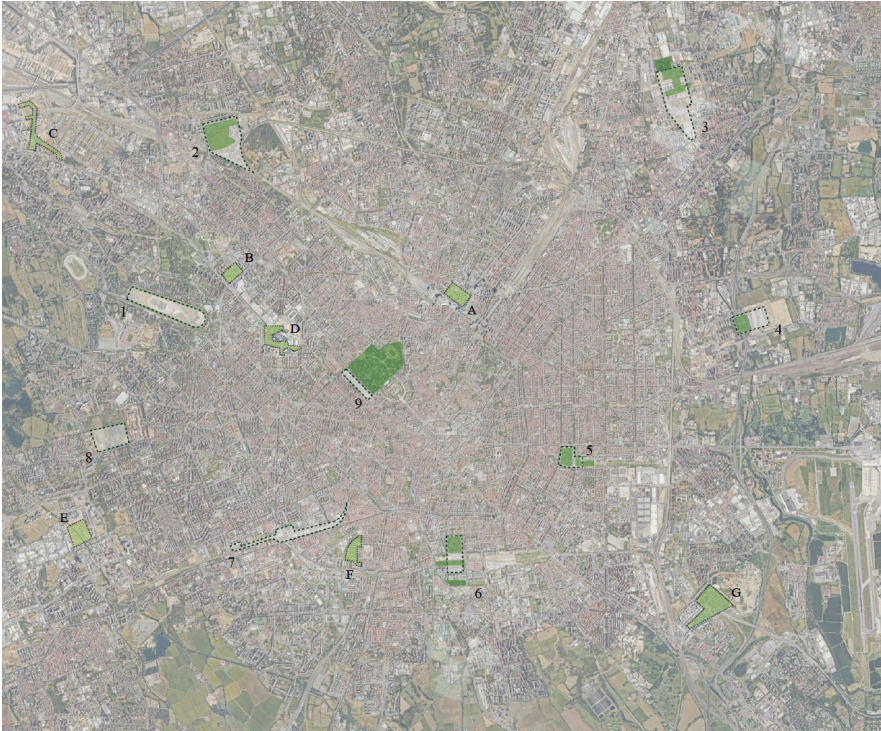


Fig. 3. Milano in 2024 with overlapped the shape of the 9PM parks (dashed outlines) and highlighted the correspondent existing/realized parks (green shapes): 1. Parco dell'Ippodromo; 2. Parco Certosa; 3. Parco della Martesana/Parco Mondaini Vianello e Giardino Rame; 4. Parco dell'Acquabella/Parco della Lambretta; 5. Parco Liberty/Parco 8 Marzo; 6. Parco Beruto/Parco delle Memorie Industriali e Parco della Vettabbia; 7. Parco San Cristoforo; 8. Parco delle Rogge; 9. Parco Sempione. In lighter green some other recent urban parks realized or under-construction following the same 'special projects' logic of negotiation: A. Biblioteca degli Alberi (PII Garibaldi Repubblica); B. Parco Alfa Romeo (PII Portello); C. Parco Cascina Merlata (PII Merlata); D. Parco Tre Torri (PII Citylife); E. Parco SeiMilano (PII Calchi Taeggi); F. Parco Segantini (PP Sieroterapico); G. Parco Santa Giulia (PII Santa Giulia).

Although Milano's modern urban history has often seen real estate interests and car traffic prevail over urban public space design, compromising the vision for a city of interconnected green centralities, the legacy of the 9PM project is valuable. It has established logics for safeguarding public areas, reserves of common good for the future city, which opportunities for new design, completion, or forms of redesign might still interpret more effectively concerning present and future needs. Moreover, it anticipated a vision for a greener city that became a crucial aspect of the city government two decades later, helping in facing the contemporary challenges.

#### DISCLOSURE STATEMENT

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.



## NOTES ON CONTRIBUTOR

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## ENDNOTES

2. For Milano's territorial and urban history through time: Gentili Tedeschi, Eugenio. Milano. I segni della storia. (Firenze: Alinea, 1988); Denti, Giovanni, and Annalisa Mauri. *Milano. L'ambiente, il territorio, la città*. (Firenze: Alinea, 2000); Morandi, Corinna. Milan. *The great transformation*. (Venezia: Marsilio, 2007).
3. Marinoni, Giuseppe. "Milano la Verde" In: *Milano la Verde (European Practice Vol. 30)*, edited by Giuseppe Marinoni. (Milano: SMownPublishing, 2019).
4. "Milano da bere", literally "Milano to drink" is a journalistic expression, originating from an advertising campaign, that defines Milano during the 1980s, a decade characterized by the perception of widespread prosperity, by the ambitious and ostentatious display of wealth by emerging social classes, and by a fashionable image.
5. In Milano it was crucial the role of the 1983 Passante Project and the 1989 Directive Document for Disused Industrial Areas. More details on the two plans and their effects in: Marinoni, Giuseppe. "Milano. Città in evoluzione/Milan. An Evolving City." Lotus, n.131 (2007):132- 141
6. Effects of these dynamics are described by witnesses of that period in: Balzani, Andrea, *La fantasia negata. Urbanistica a Milano negli anni ottanta*. (Venezia: Marsilio, 1995); Marinoni, Giuseppe. "Milano la Verde" In: *Milano la Verde (European Practice Vol. 30)*, edited by Giuseppe Marinoni. (Milano: SMownPublishing, 2019).
7. Comune di Milano, Assessorato allo Sviluppo del Territorio, "Ricostruire la Grande Milano – Documento di Inquadramento delle politiche urbanistiche comunali", Il sole 24 ore, 2001
8. Mazza, Luigi. *Prove parziali di riforma urbanistica*. (Milano: Franco Angeli, 2004)
9. For an history of parks in Milano: Vercelloni, Matteo. "Un atlante del verde pubblico a Milano." Casabella, n. 808 (2011): annex; Castellano, Aldo and Giulia Crespi, Luisa Toeaschi (eds). *Il verde a Milano: parchi, giardini, alberate, sistemi verdi della città e del suo territorio dal Cinquecento ad oggi*. (Milano: Abitare Segesta Cataloghi, 2007).
10. Gentili Tedeschi, Eugenio. Milano. I segni della storia. (Firenze: Alinea, 1988). 63.
11. Laboratorio di Progettazione Urbana. *Nove Parchi per Milano*. (Milano: Electa, 1995).
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14. Laboratorio di Progettazione Urbana. *Nove Parchi per Milano*. (Milano: Electa, 1995). 190.
15. Marinoni, Giuseppe. "Milano la Verde" In: *Milano la Verde (European Practice Vol. 30)*, edited by Giuseppe Marinoni. (Milano: SMownPublishing, 2019).
16. Idem.
17. Sources of the notes synthesized in the following paragraphs, when not coming from personal information, are: Balestreri, Isabella, Gianni Drago, Ottorino Meregalli, and Raffaella Neri. "Milano 1997-2007. La residenza, i quartieri, i grandi numeri." Quaderni del Dipartimento di Progettazione dell'Architettura del Politecnico di Milano, n. 24 (June 2009): 70-83; Grandi, Maurizio, and Attilio Pracchi. "Le vite degli altri. Osservazioni sull'edilizia residenziale milanese recente." Quaderni del Dipartimento di Progettazione dell'Architettura del Politecnico di Milano, n. 24 (June 2009): 84-103; Bolocan Goldstein, Matteo and Bertrand Bonfantini. *Milano incompiuta. Interpretazioni urbanistiche del mutamento*. (Milano: Franco Angeli, 2007); and from the online Atlas of Urban Regeneration of the Municipality of Milano and its archives (<https://www.comune.milano.it/aree-tematiche/rigenerazione-urbana-e-urbanistica/atlante>).
18. Grandi, Maurizio, and Attilio Pracchi. "Le vite degli altri. Osservazioni sull'edilizia residenziale milanese recente." Quaderni del Dipartimento di Progettazione dell'Architettura del Politecnico di Milano, n. 24 (June 2009): 84-103. 88.
19. Excluding existing ones that were included in the project calculations in Laboratorio di Progettazione Urbana. *Nove Parchi per Milano*. (Milano: Electa, 1995).
20. Laboratorio di Progettazione Urbana. *Nove Parchi per Milano*. (Milano: Electa, 1995). 163.
21. The only attempt to recompose Milan's open spaces into a more unified strategy was the project for the Raggi Verdi (Green Rays), included in the 2012 urban planning tool (PGT). This project, somewhat echoing the idea of urban and territorial scale green promenades, referred to a monocentric vision, proposing eight green force lines that radiate from the city centre towards the periphery, integrating existing



and future green spaces.

22. Laboratorio di Progettazione Urbana. *Nove Parchi per Milano*. (Milano: Electa, 1995). 160-163.

23. Ibid. 191.

24. Such as in PII Cascina Merlata (2009), where the municipality negotiated the competition of the park as the first step for the urban transformation.

25. Morandi, Corinna. "Strumenti urbanistici e politiche per la sostenibilita urbana. Il caso di Milano, Italia." In: *Ciudad, Territorio y Patrimonio*, edited by Alfonso Alvarez Mora, and Francisco Valverde Diaz de Leon. Puebla: Universidad Iberoamericana Puebla (2004): 291-329. 302, 314.

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## IMAGE SOURCES

Figure 1 Laboratorio di Progettazione Urbana. *Nove Parchi per Milano*. Milano: Electa, 1995

Figure 2 Vercelloni, Matteo. "Un atlante del verde pubblico a Milano." Casabella, n. 808 (2011): annex

Figure 3 Elaboration by the author, 2024

