Making Prestigious Places investigates the spatial dimension of luxury, both as a sector involving activities, operators and investments, and as a system of values acting as a catalyst for recent urban transformations. Luxury shares a well-established connection to the city, as a place of production, consumption and self-representation, and continues to grow despite economic difficulties. This edited collection includes case studies from Europe, North and South America, Asia and the Middle East to create a dialogue around these developments and the challenges presented, such as the tension between the idea of prestige and current values in urban planning, the discussion between academic reflections and operational practices, and how these interact with the long term economic and social dynamic of the city. With rich analysis and a preface written by Patsy Healey, this book will be an important addition to the discourse on luxury for urban planners and researchers.

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2 Two geographies of luxury projects
Opportunities, risks and challenges for public policies

*Paola Pucci and Giulia Fini*\(^1\)

The focus on the role of luxury projects in urban transformations is introduced with reference to two specific geographies recognizable in the Milan Urban Region.\(^2\) The first geography refers to consolidated urban fabrics where luxury projects create small-scale conversions and micro gentrification\(^3\) on a block or house basis, replacing older housing and shopping stock with new-built luxury developments. The second geography is characterized by exclusive segregated districts where luxury projects create new urban centralities for leisure activities or residential gated communities.

In order to propose a taxonomy, these two geographies are used to identify the main features of the heterogeneous and episodic processes of urban transformation driven by luxury projects and to discuss the challenges and consequences for the constitutive dimensions of urbanity in a specific urban context like the Milan Urban Region.

While these geographies of luxury projects represent only a small fraction of overall building activity, identifying ideal-typical models of luxury development makes it possible to reflect on what conceptions of urbanity are generated by these micro-scale transformations, as well as on how to integrate luxury into urban policies in order to enhance the positive effects of private investments undertaken to guarantee exclusive privileges and, at the same time, in order to assess the ‘flip side’ of luxury (i.e. gentrification processes, selection of urban populations and urban practices, transformation in the times of use of urban places).

In our approach, the reorganization of spaces through luxury developments is read from two viewpoints: as an attempt to produce and regulate particular behaviours and subjectivities (Huxley, 2006: 772) by introducing social separation and intensified security architectures; but, at the same time, as an opportunity to re-shape urban neighbourhoods and also to be used for real estate development purposes.

The rest of this chapter is structured as follows. In the first section, we propose two specific geographies of urban luxury projects and their main features in terms of scales of urban transformation and effects on open
spaces. Then, in the following section we test the ideal-typical models of luxury projects on our case study represented by the Milan Urban Region. Lastly, in the conclusion we reflect on the policy implications from two perspectives. The first concerns the conditions associated with the concepts of urbanity and publicness, and with them the role of the local authority in shaping public access to services and open spaces that have been privatized by growing private ownership. The second perspective concerns the relationship between the molecular transformations driven by private capital and the ability to bring them within a strategic framework in which the link between private exploitation and the common good is not lost.

Two geographies of luxury projects

The relationship between luxury and urban transformations, as well as the luxury and new or emerging lifestyles that change the material shape of portions of the city and their urban rhythms, can be understood in the Milan Urban Region in light of two specific geographies.

The first geography concerns a constellation of micro-settings consisting of consolidated urban blocks where luxury projects create small-scale restructuring on a house basis. As these ‘molecular’ transformations replace older housing and shopping stock in restricted areas of the city, they primarily appear as ‘high-profile visible products’ which create the meaning of quality as a deliverable objective founded on a mixture of financial, architectural and urban speculation where the description and pre-conception of a luxury product is often more important than the final result. Compared with ‘flagship projects’ as expensive and glamorous developments to change the image of an area, these projects are often less celebratory and iconic; but they are still able to play an influential and catalytic role in urban renewal, regenerating the urban economy and encouraging investments.

In many cases, these luxury projects create secluded places and a kind of micro gentrification pattern through perforation of the city. But at the same time they shape the way in which the city is imagined, representing a good opportunity to improve the urban landscape and the urban liveability of some neighbourhoods.

In this geography, the apparent ‘democratization’ of the luxury upgrading of parts of the consolidated urban districts gives new meaning to public spaces, introduces new urban rhythms determined by private operators, selects urban populations, and influences urban practices.

Besides the real estate development of blocks of the city, the joint creation of ‘quasi-public spaces’ provides space usable by viewers or consumers; these hybrid and compound spaces, which may not be completely closed or may be only internal, and which are neither totally public nor entirely private, become vehicles of gentrification, paths to consumption, and attempts at marketing within the context of globalizing cities. These are spaces where people are spectators and where public space becomes “a collective theater
where ‘something’ happens (because) there is no more ‘something’ of the collective” (Koolhaas, 2006: 23); the public space is monitored and privatized.

These interventions generate more and more privately-controlled spaces (Zukin, 2000; Mitchell, 1995; Davis, 1992; Sorkin, 1992) to guarantee the greater attractiveness of the city centre for new social classes considered crucial for place-based competition (Ranci, 2015).

By creating a set of new geographies within the city, luxury projects open up a field of actions (Marquardt et al., 2013: 1541) to re-shape the consolidated urban districts in three main ways.

The first set of actions comprises stereotypical solutions whereby luxury is presented in forms of housing and commercial spaces that encapsulate the values of the hyper-mobility society that created them, and whose users engage with the city through new forms of public and pseudo-public urban space.

The process of stylization in search of luxury, exclusivity and prestige that has spread worldwide is the social practice of distinction (Bourdieu, 1979) of living mobile lives (Elliott & Urry, 2010), the feeling of being at home of global élites wherever they are (Elliott & Urry, 2010; ch. 4). In this process, sites are branded, themed and collected.

According to T. Jefferies (2010: 325), the super-high-rise apartment and the new-built luxury space “were recapitulated as an object of desire, a Neo-modern icon (...) (made by) architectural objects with a remarkable homogenization of collective taste. (...) These new spaces rely on balancing lifestyle individuality and corporate identity, reflected in the architectural form of new building exteriors and the development and refinement of new forms of aesthetically commodified urban space, leveraged as a developer delivered by-product of lifestyle-led urban living”.

A second type of action pertains to archetypical solutions involving the reuse of buildings of architectural heritage with cultural value and representing the loci of the power and wealth of the 19th-century bourgeoisie. In this case, layering and imprinting are uneven: they range from historic buildings that regain use as representative spaces, through offices of private foundations, to industrial archeology transformed into exhibition spaces, and museums into private collections.

The third type introduces singular solutions, for which the value of a place as defined by its icons is a key feature, and which generates unexpected and bizarre results driven by the desire to produce ‘statement’ buildings and ‘quality’ places. The recent skyscrapers built in Milan seem driven by the intent to emphasize the uniqueness and exclusivity of their form, the brand that realizes them. They represent a collection of self-referring objects, only in some cases held together by the open spaces design.

Beyond the diversity of the projects in terms of features, scale of intervention, and developers pursuing different strategies (city-branding, self-promotion of a single operator, real estate investments), these three ideal-typical models of luxury transformation are the product of neoliberal
strategies for urban regeneration through public-private real estate projects, and often of self-promotion by one operator that colonizes spaces and changes them without any public urban programme, as evidenced by several projects in the Milan Urban Region.

These are incremental processes, ruled by private capital that transforms parts of the city, giving rise to exclusive private spaces next to facilities for the city: for instance, spaces for contemporary art like those created by Fondazione Prada in an old distillery built in the early 20th century in the southern sector of Milan, or the Armani/Silos, the new space-museum in Milan founded in a building originally used as a warehouse by a large multinational company.

In the renovation or rebuilding of new luxury spaces, central city locations and the driving force of commercial investors have been widened; the renewal and upgrading of peripheral neighborhoods have been initiated by private investors through interventions which are specific yet able to trigger widespread redevelopment processes and supported – sometimes with a delay – by local governments seeking, in the end, higher tax revenues, doing so on the basis of the so-called ‘third wave’ gentrification model (Hackworth & Smith, 2001).

These developments have intensified the ambiguity of urban nature as both an element inherent to the functional public realm, but also as a means to enhance property values because the management of hitherto public spaces has been increasingly taken over by quasi-public agencies or private foundations dependent on individual or corporate benefactors (Gandy, 2006: 69).

In an uncertain socio-economic and financial framework characterized by limited opportunities for public intervention, these schemes promoted by private investors have also been understood as operational spaces to restructure urban spaces, to participate “in the governing of urban populations” (Marquardt et al., 2013: 1552).

Although essential, these forms of public space provision and urban service management require rethinking the concept of ‘publicness’, as well as the relationship between a singular project promoted by large private developers and large-scale urban strategies.

Considering publicness as a relative concept that needs to be understood as a result of changing patterns of distribution of rights across urban spaces shaped by social, economic and historical processes in which societal objectives for public, semi-public and private spaces are negotiated, defined and secured, the alternative forms of public space provision and management have to be undertaken in a general legal framework where issues of rights, access, accountability and image have been addressed in the public space. In so doing, governance arrangements based on contracts, legal agreements and performance management mechanisms are needed, rather than traditional public sector processes of policy delivery and accountability.

The challenge for the local authority is to assess how publicness is constructed and maintained through these luxury arrangements and what
the implications are for the roles and nature of public spaces and services in the city.

The urgency of this assessment is also linked to the rhetoric often used and driven by private interests, such as the urban creativity discourse that serves as an umbrella concept to market the contemporary city and to foster its attractiveness (Vanolo, 2008: 381).

The second geography is characterized by exclusive enclaves where luxury projects can play a double role as new urban centralities for leisure or as residential gated communities expressing the so-called ‘secession of the rich’ in a privatopias perspective (McKenzie, 1994).

In this geography – where exclusive segregated districts disassociate themselves from the surrounding city – the distinctiveness leads to selection in terms of socio-economic status, as well as in terms of aspirations for a new urban lifestyle where comfort and security are pervasive in the design and amenities of buildings and private open spaces. Thus “privatization spreads across the urban landscape and the regional metropolis is embedded with a carceral archipelago of fortressed new enclosures” (Soja, 2011: 685).

The criterion used to construct these luxury districts is therefore exclusivity and its ‘spatialization’ (Lefebvre, 1976: 23), the purpose being to deliver a space appropriate to accommodate specific and exclusive activities and social practices, denying spatial fluidity in favour of a functional and symbolic privatization. The emergence of these exclusive segregated districts is explained in the literature on the basis of very different conditions and reasons:

- On the one hand, in the so-called ‘politics-driven approach’, these luxury enclaves are the result of an exclusive attitude which causes social polarization and territorial exclusion (Atkinson & Blandy, 2005). They are the material expression of an ecology of fear (Davis, 1992) emphasizing the segregation process, in which spatial boundaries are determined by the presence of militarized space and dichotomized (Davis, 1998). They thus produce two forms of ghettoization: the experienced form and the voluntary form (Bauman, 2000).
- On the other hand, according to the ‘market-driven approach’, a luxury district emerges as a result of a rational choice, as a response to the mechanisms of resource allocation and production of public goods and services. It is a market-led solution to benefit from certain assets following the principle of restriction (club economy).

This model – often stigmatized in the literature as a spread of neoliberal politics that opposes a new critical theory (Brenner et al., 2012; Brenner & Theodore 2002; Davis, 2002) – communicates adherence to shared morphological and functional aspects in space.

Unlike the previous geography, where “the distinctiveness of neighbourhoods is invoked as a catalytic environment that can be opened up and further used for real estate development purposes” (Marquardt et

Exclusivity and voluntary separation, implemented according to selection by high real estate values, are arranged through architectural solutions and distinctiveness services; these new luxury developments are often confined and bounded spaces, enclaves with controlled and restricted access, and a physical demarcation of the border between the private reality of housing and the ‘outside’.

The spatial appropriation processes transform local public goods into club goods where legal, economic or cultural norms are employed to exclude certain groups.

Even if, as Webster (2002: 397) argues, most of what we normally regard as ‘public’ could more accurately be regarded as the club realm, because “cities naturally fragment into many small publics, each of which may be thought of as a collective consumption club”, in these exclusive spaces, the manifestation of the club realm provides new forms of association and community organization, displaying new devices in a sort of ‘negative citizenship’ (Mazza, 2015: 155) based on the principle of non-interference in the rights of others, and on the pursuit of goals and private interests within the law.

Following McKenzie (1994), it deals with configurations of self-sovereignty characterized by common ownership of spaces, by accession of each buyer to the association of which s/he has become a member, as well as by a regime of restrictions defined according to internal regulations.

In this model, the sociability of individuals and the sharing of spaces, the production and the perception of safety, as well as the management of the common good, are based on internal institutions that serve as community organizations.

According to some authors (Secchi, 2013: 37), these places are in a “state of suspension of the legal institutions of the State to which they belong”; they are the places for new and ad hoc kinds of governance in the form of “community contracts” shared by their inhabitants through an agreement of mutual solidarity.

Within the Milan context, these self-selecting micro-residential districts arise from concentrations of high incomes in small areas, which give rise to a kaleidoscope of enclaves (Secchi, 2013: 48) that make the molecular geography of the Milan Urban Region more complex (Lanzani, 2011: 203).

Behind the two geographies of luxury projects: spaces and projects of transformation in the Milan Urban Region

Observation of the Milan Urban Region – an area of Italy important for the trade of luxury goods and products related to the Italian fashion and design
sectors at both national and international levels – enables identification of a
variety of situations and spatial conditions connected to the two geographies
of luxury projects presented above. These situations contribute strongly to
modifying the features and functions of the metropolitan area, as well as its
spaces, practices, and populations which frequent the places.

Since the 1970s the city of Milan and its surrounding territory have
played an important role in the production, design, and trade of luxury
goods, acting as a catalyst for many national companies, and since the
1980s, for international companies as well. It is therefore possible to
identify a variety of conditions due to the relations established between the
operators of the luxury sector and the Milan territory. Some of these consist
in transformation projects already carried out and concluded (which have
had a certain success and relevance in the international press); others are
transformations currently underway and characterized in an economic and
management condition partially different from those of the past.

The first geography: the reuse and transformation of buildings
and consolidated urban fabrics

With reference to the first geography of luxury projects – and, more
specifically, to the three ways in which projects and processes related to
luxury are changing the consolidated urban fabric – a variety of situations
are emerging in the Milan area in which operators related to the design,
production or commerce of luxury goods have contributed to transforming
the urban tissue.

In some areas, strict commercial specialization, i.e. related to high-range
and luxury products, has simplified the existing functions and activities in
the entire urban fabric and the related public spaces, as well as simplified
practices and uses of the area. As described below, this kind of situation has
arisen in the Montenapoleone district, where the space has been branded,
themed and colonized by high fashion and design brands and where the
limited residential environment is completely exclusive and separate from
the commercial context.

By contrast, in the Tortona district, which is the second case considered,
the luxury operators have contributed to a singular redevelopment of the
area which has gradually led to deep transformation of the features and
image of the urban fabric accompanied by soft phenomena of gentrification.
Whilst the first district (Montenapoleone) can be related to the ‘stereotypical
solution’, this second transformation process is identified as ‘archetypical’ in
that it relates to the recovery and reuse of buildings of architectural merit or
testimonial value.

In a less extensive and consistent, but nonetheless significant, manner, the
third type identified – the ‘singular’ one – identifies important transformations
which highlight the uniqueness and exclusivity of the operation, image and
form that are produced through a collection of singular objects. Linked to
this type are some of the exclusive residential projects under construction in Milan, as well as other important projects of requalification such as the recent Prada Foundation or Armani Silos.

With reference to these three modes of interaction between luxury operators and the urban fabric, some Milan experiences are now described in order to show different outcomes and the need to orient urban policy in relation to the construction of spaces and luxury issues.

**Stereotypical solution: Montenapoleone Fashion District**

The famous high-fashion district of Via Montenapoleone (delimited by the street of the same name, Via Manzoni, Via della Spiga, and Corso Venezia) is emblematic of the first transformation type: the stereotypical one. Located in the heart of Milan, a large number of high-class shops have been opened in the three streets and in those nearby during the past 30 years, thus making the Quadrilatero one of the most famous districts in the world; on its own, the area produces 12 per cent of the GNP of the city of Milan. Although it was already an important business street in the early 1950s, the area owes its success to the strategic alliance developed since the 1980s between the city administration and the fashion and design firms. This has resulted in remarkable levels of investment to favour and promote these activities as part of “Milan’s emphasis on fashion and design as a strategy of post-industrial change, consolidation of a new economy and of its brand identity as a world city” (Knox, 2012: 194).

The high-fashion operators located in the Montenapoleone fashion district are almost exclusively devoted to the sale of goods. Other recent hybrid commercial formats – with dedicated spaces for the display of products, organization of events, or the sale of food – have not been developed. If these format variations are present, they are nevertheless exclusively designed for specific users: those who already attend the show rooms or boutiques. They are not considered as hybrid modes to attract or diversify users.

The exclusive features of the district result in spatial and architectural solutions aimed at limiting access, marking the inside and the outside of boutiques, and showing the brand’s importance in the high-fashion market according to marketing and positioning strategies. Unlike the following case, the space division does not refer to, and no longer wants to reflect, the old production spaces; rather, it is intended to strengthen the images of wealth, exclusivity and richness: “this zone appeared and felt differently to other Milan central zones (...) the shops are unwelcoming and exclusive. They were not meant for normal shoppers, but for show, or for very rich tourists” (Foot, 2001: 129).

Over the years, this impression has partly diminished due to growth in the high-fashion market and the presence of tourists and users who are very diverse from each other but still attracted by luxury goods. It is, however, still largely accurate, and it is reflected in the multiple architectural solutions
of the singular interventions and of the public spaces. Only occasionally the boutique spaces are opened up to different types of activities or uses on behalf of different users. This is the case of exceptional events which take place during the Salone del Mobile week exhibition, the Milan Fashion Weeks, and the Vogue Fashion Night (although these events are very restricted, with each of them occurring only once or twice a year).

Moreover, the extreme specialization of high-fashion commerce has simplified the urban practices and has led to a paradoxical depletion of the public and connective space. Via Montenapoleone features these phenomena in all their extent and problematic issues, in a more emphatic manner compared with many shopping streets of other Italian cities.

The extreme specialization of the ground floors of buildings corresponds to a void on the floors above them, which are used for more exclusive and private business or trade, for goods storage, for multi-floor stores. The public space, carefully designed, controlled and monitored with video cameras and private security guards, simultaneously reveals a set of very limited practices, a completely fragmented use, and a strong standardization of people and rhythms. Real estate operators have promoted exclusive use of the space, whereas the real estate values have progressively selected the residents, business activities, services and offices that can support the district's exclusive vocation.

The opportunities and critical issues showed by this district are therefore twofold. On the one hand, the district plays an important economic role in the city, together with promoting a remarkable image of the territory acknowledged worldwide (connected to fashion, design, and excellence production). On the other hand, very strong sectoring has entailed a limited selection of activities not only connected to high-fashion business but also often supported by international finance and capital not directly related with the territory, its transformation processes and needs.

The interactions among the city, luxury operators and high-fashion business are revealed in its complicated aspects as well, although they are not immediately perceived as such. The creation of a no-friction zone, the removal of social and cultural conflicts, fragmentation and exclusiveness as elements characterizing the space and practices in fact define a suspension of, or a detachment from, a dense and structured notion of urbanity beneficial to a wider group of citizens.

Archetypical and alternative kinds of intervention: Tortona district

On the other hand, the urban development and the role of fashion and luxury operators have been quite different in the area known as Tortona in southwest Milan, an area close to Navigli and the Porta Genova railway station. Tortona was traditionally a manufacturing area, where the industrial past, with its spaces dedicated to production, storage and goods processing, is still recognizable in an urban fabric consisting of traditional case a ringhiera,
production spaces, walls and ‘factory fences’ that separated the interior work areas from the outside city spaces.

However, these urban fabrics have become the ideal location for the many Milanese fashion, luxury and design operators that are now located in the Tortona district. Initially, they moved into the area in a sporadic and intermittent manner, benefiting from the large abandoned production surfaces. Later, they deliberately chose this area as a creative and communications district for brands related to fashion, luxury goods and design, following an incremental and polarizing process that exploited the proximity of similar activities without a coherent general strategy (another typical aspect of the Milan planning and transformation processes, as shown by Bolocan, 2009). As a result, the Tortona district has become one of the emblems of the Milan de-industrialization process, characterized by the transition from a Fordist to a post-Fordist economy, that began in the 1980s. In Tortona, the productive fabric and the reservoir of knowledge related to design, fashion, high-artisanal and luxury products, have progressively redefined urban spaces and the spaces of the productive system, understood in this context as the various process factors (creativity, communication and marketing). In accordance with the classic de-industrialization process, the Tortona area has undergone gentrification and branding processes marked by the “agglomeration of fashion and design services, creative industries, and the related wider activities” (Knox, 2012: 266). Former areas of industrial production have become the headquarters of high-end Italian fashion and design companies. Integrating or replacing some areas with newly-created volumes, redefining the private interiors, new connections and forms of inside–outside separations have modernized the lots.

A number of fashion operators were forerunners of this process. Besides the important Superstudio transformation (by Ferri and Lucchini), Giorgio Armani redeveloped the former Nestlé industrial area as the location for its Armani Foundation. Redesigned by the Japanese architect Tadao Ando, the building is equipped with spaces for exhibitions, a theatre, catwalks and brand showrooms. During the 1990s – in this case thanks to the public administration of Milan – the former Ansaldo factory was turned into a service area for the Teatro della Scala, with spaces for storage, workshops and rehearsals. Alongside the early processes of gentrification there was also some major redevelopment of residential real estates: the Tortona 37 project designed by Matteo Thun; the redevelopment of Riva Calzoni designed by Antonio Citterio and Partners for Ermenegildo Zegna (with the construction of offices, laboratories and brand showrooms); and the latest creation of Superstudio+, 8000 sq.m of multifunctional spaces for events, exhibitions and conventions dedicated to fashion, communication, and design.

Consequently, the transformation of the Tortona area has seen a progressive functional aggregation of the established businesses benefitting from the spatial and productive ties created; the above-mentioned companies were joined by numerous other brands, e.g. Hugo Boss, Diesel, Esprit, as well as professionals
in the fashion and luxury products sector. Taking advantage of the large areas and new onsite services available in the reclaimed warehouses, other fashion industry operators set up their own businesses: showrooms, fitting areas, promotion and advertising spaces, fashion design schools and hotels, as well as exhibition spaces, including the Arnaldo Pomodoro Foundation.

The streets of the Tortona district and its adjacent neighbourhoods are thus now characterized by previous industrial spaces and buildings that have been modernized by fashion brands: mixed-use buildings where the former working class lived, along with new high-end residential projects. The result is a remarkable articulation of the urban fabric with alternating private and semi-public parts, the connections and the texture of the open spaces. It is a ‘porous’ district thanks to the presence of large reclaimed and articulated internal spaces – where, however, freedom of passage and accessibility are not always possible due to the limitations imposed by many private companies.

From the point of view of the people and businesses that reside in the district, it has certainly been subjected to processes of gentrification, so that it is difficult for the original residents and merchants to resist the changes and improvements made by the fashion and creative industries.

At the same time, these processes have also led to the settlement of a young generation of people connected in various ways with the production activities established in the district: fashion, but also photography, design, publishing, and events planning, in addition to the opening of new businesses and proximity to some private design and fashion universities. Perhaps the most evident result of this process – one which demonstrates how consolidated the change has been – is the Milanese Fuori Salone Week when the Tortona district becomes one of the busiest areas of the city, visited by tourists, the curious, and industry experts: a process that has grown and also been taken advantage of to the point that the same operators are now looking for new, alternative and more affordable areas.

Recent singular interventions

Besides the district transformations mentioned above, mention should be made of some very recent singular building or block conversions: the inauguration of Fondazione Prada (designed by OMA-Rem Koolhaas) and Armani Silos (design by Tadao Ando). In the former case, the project involved redevelopment of a former distillery; in the latter, recovery of the grain silos of the earlier Nestlé factory. The new surfaces (respectively 19,000 sq.m and 5,000 sq.m) are dedicated to company offices, art and cultural activities: in a broader sense in the former case, directly connected to the brand in the latter. These transformations can be identified as both archetypical, given the reuse of abandoned buildings, and as expressions of the singular intervention model, given the value of communication and marketing that they bring. Both are very important for the sequence of spaces reactivated,
the actors involved, as well as the iconographic, media and architectural dimensions that characterize the transformations (the opening ceremonies were reported by the international press and many newspapers).

In both cases, it is of interest to verify whether an attempt has been made to conceive more complex or inclusive spaces – through definition of common principles, rules, or specific requests by the Municipality – for such kinds of intervention, which are subject to the pressures of privatization and exclusivity even when they are open to the public. The first level of interaction between public and private actors should be the structuring of a sequence of spaces important on both the local and urban scale. A second issue is the identification of hybrid spaces and services offered by the Foundations but open to the community, in which the two spheres work together to redefine collective services and forms of management. On the other hand, the impacts on the territory and the structuring of relations with the surroundings can be observed over a longer period, since these interventions have just been concluded.

Moreover, the transformation of individual buildings through specific iconographic interventions is often ‘reclaimed’ by luxury operators as evidence of their economic contribution and added value to the territory. In this regard, however, the urban policies and a close-view technical analysis could clarify the distance between the private actors’ aspirations and the construction of the urban space. The spatial relationship within the city and its surroundings, the fine adjustment of functions and services, the containment of gentrification processes, constitute a new field of urban design and policies that can make the difference and add value from the mutual relations between the public and the luxury actors.

The second geography: archipelagos and enclaves of exclusive residential interventions

It is possible to recognize in the Milan urban region both consolidated experiences of exclusive residential districts and enclaves (created beginning in the 1970s, and initially promoted as exclusive residential areas) and a variety of more recent transformations in the urban tissue that contribute to defining a molecular geography of the territory. This specific urban area – characterized by economic investments at both national and international levels and by a high concentration of luxury operators in comparison to other Italian cities – therefore serves as a clear example for other European regions increasingly characterized by the presence of discrete and fragmented urban patterns, and which are taking shape as a set of archipelagos and enclaves in relation to different functional purposes – not only residential, but also commercial, logistic, and productive (see Secchi, 2007: XI–XV).

To describe the features and aims of the luxury and high-level residential clusters in the Milan urban region – comparing recent interventions and already completed projects – we focus on three main aspects:
Two geographies of luxury projects

- The relationships that exclusive residential interventions can establish with the surroundings (if these occur);
- The imagery and the values on which the projects are conceived and commercialized: the real estate and residential demands to which interventions want to respond;
- Finally, observation of the dynamics and nature of the already completed projects allows us to measure the distance between an academic debate, often sophisticated, and the effective conditions and trends of these residential clusters.

In the Milan urban area, there is a well-rooted presence of exclusive residential neighbourhoods intended to satisfy upper or middle-class demand. The projects implemented since the 1970s are sizeable and indicate a gradual selection of real estate companies able to handle large-scale transformations (De Pieri & Scrivano, 2001: 3). This group includes the cases of Milano San Felice (8,000 inhabitants, constructed in 1965–1970), Milano 2 (6,087 inhabitants, 1970–1978), and Milano 3 (10,500 inhabitants, 1970–1980) in the municipalities of the first belt suburbs. More recently, other unified and exclusive projects have been carried out in the Milan area: Cascina Vione (in the Basiglio area, built in 2008–2011), la Viscontina, and Rovido (in Buccinasco, during more recent years). In the consolidated urban fabric, recent areas of transformation such as City Life or Porta Nuova propose mainly high-level or luxury residential units, with a growing presence of international owners (in the case of Porta Nuova, rising from 2 per cent of the total market purchases in 2010 to 36 per cent in 2015).

Engaging in some generalizations, a part of the debate in the literature focuses on how suitable it is to identify some of these projects as gated communities, therefore highlighting the presence or absence of fences, the more or less accentuated separation from the surroundings, and the use of internal services and collective spaces by non-resident users. It would be more meaningful, instead, to ask a broader question about the type of urban fabric and society model that these settlements propose and are contributing to define (Bianchetti, 2014).

In the Milan area, in fact, it is possible to identify all the different varieties of districts that have a more or less exclusive status: exclusive residential enclaves and other housing developments – mainly based on economic selection related to the cost of the property and specific regulations concerning the use of common services and areas – but also ‘contractual communities’ (Brunetta & Moroni, 2011) that are more or less open or related to their surroundings.

The first group includes the projects already mentioned: Milano 2, Milano 3, and la Viscontina. These are isolated but not fenced, and also characterized by specific regulations concerning the use of fences. The category of contractual communities (leaving aside the issue of whether or not the term ‘gated communities’ is appropriate) includes the San Felice
project, where the contract concerns management of some services not provided by the municipality but on a voluntary or contract basis. This is also the situation in Cascina Vione and Rovido, two districts presenting a more limited dimension.

Some of the issues and solutions recurring in these exclusive settlements have already been underlined above when the second geography of luxury projects was illustrated. These features relate to the space design conceived to select and host only specific activities and practices, to the reduction in spatial fluidity, to the limitation of the public space in favour of forms of privatization or contractual relations.

In several cases, however, it is not only the technical and architectural choices in themselves that characterize the interventions, but also the use that is made of them: “the distinctive feature is rather the manipulation of architectural and urban design solutions, as part of a rhetoric and commercial message” (Ferrari, 2015; De Pieri, 2013). This communication is not only commercial, but also cultural, and therefore social and political. In other words, it is the construction of a specific narrative of the luxury residential interventions – with the goal of answering specific questions and social issues – which must be at the core of the reflection. Consequently, it is not sufficient to describe the space; it is necessary to reflect on the imagery that exclusive and luxury interventions aim to draw and implement, inquiring into what residential need has been satisfied, both in previous decades and more recently.

During the 1970s, the success of these projects was dictated by the choice of “living in a place that offers services and quality that cannot be found anywhere else in Milan” (De Pieri & Scrivano, 2001: 5). The desire to move away from ‘congestion and smog’ and to construct a new status was also present; moreover, the emphasis on exclusive and extremely comfortable flats or houses was very high in all cases. In the most recent projects, the same themes and rhetorical discourses are flanked by security, separation from strangers, protection, and the ‘community building’ desire and narrative.

A first element of differentiation is instead the model to which the exclusive residential projects explicitly refer. Milan 2, Milan 3 and San Felice follow the pattern of independent and autonomous neighbourhood units. The references are to the garden city or the suburban neighbourhoods of the United Kingdom and Scandinavia, created after World War II. Technical solutions – not related to any disciplinary research and often isolated from real needs – are used primarily to build and communicate an image of quality (Ferrari, 2015).

According to the layout solution, apartment buildings or villas are arranged along uniform secondary roads that branch off from the central core, where services or common green spaces accessible from the pedestrian level are located. The green surfaces, which are always large, are not only spaces for children but also places for meeting and socializing. Green and child spaces are kinds of surrogates for public space, considering that in these
projects schools and playgrounds are the real services offered to residents (De Pieri, 2013: 5). For smaller districts the models are the suburban villa (as in Viscontina) or historic farmhouse (as in Borgo Vione). Therefore, it is not the complexities and possibilities of the contemporary city – with also its risks and variety due to differences – that are recalled; rather, the message is that of a protected space, green, isolated and exclusive, where uniformity and affinity among residents are the bases of the new community.

The distance from the urban core, the role of the landscape, and the use of services by non-resident users are further elements of interest. The distance from the city centre is not just physical; it is a distinctive feature of the settlements and a constitutional aspect of exclusivity. The lack of historical or spatial relations with the territory is often deliberate. These settlements are not built along the main transport links with already urbanized areas; rather, they are separated and isolated districts, autonomous projects with new organic forms. The landscape is built from scratch; the lakes are created ad hoc, and the planting is artificial, not rooted. Because of a process of stylization and an aesthetic approach to nature, there are no spaces which mediate, filter and connect with the surrounding landscape and natural elements.

A final feature important for interpreting exclusive residential enclaves is the use of services and public or collective space by non-residents. To be noted is that there is considerable rhetoric regarding this issue (see e.g. Moroni & Brunetta, op. cit.), spaces and services are also presented by both promoters and scholars, as accessible for many users, inclusive and supporting for new forms of community. In some residential enclaves (e.g. Borgo Vione), only residents are allowed to use equipment, with occasional access by external users. In other cases, access is restricted to green equipment, commercial and educational services for children and young people, used by residents and outside users (Milano 2). The use of more composite services (e.g. sports facilities) is conditional on payment of an annual membership fee or related to condominium charges; for this reason, some enclaves are termed ‘super-condominiums’. In Milano San Felice services are private, but in some cases their public use is allowed, which demonstrates “the tension between the ambitions of settlement’s autonomy and the constraints imposed by our national legal system” (Beretta & Chiodelli, 2011: 23).

It should be verified if and how these projects are opportunities for territorial exchange and relations, as well as a real kind of service provision through contractual forms of community according to a horizontal subsidiarity approach (Moroni & Brunetta, op. cit.). The set of solutions, in fact, even if not completely gated, contributes to constructing an urban space that is fragmented and isolated. Society should thoroughly understand the fascination generated by these lifestyles and new forms of community. It is a field certainly to be explored with the observation of space, but even more with reflection on the interaction between the audience and luxury and high-range real estate actors. The aim is to clarify specific demands, ambitions and needs for reassembling weak opportunities and risks produced by these transformations.
Challenges for public policy

The above-described geographies of luxury developments and their physical translation into the experiences of the Milan Urban Region raise two challenges for public policies. The first concerns the conditions associated with the concepts of urbanity and publicness, and with them the role of local authorities in shaping public access to services and open spaces privatized by growing private ownership.

The second challenge is the relationship between the molecular transformations driven by private capital and the ability to bring them within a strategic perspective in which the link between private exploitation and the common good is not lost.

With reference to the first challenge, the constitutive dimensions of urbanity in both geographies of intensive and extensive transformation by luxury projects are called into question, with effects on the legitimacy of public action.

According to J. Lévy and M. Lussault (2003), urbanity is a combination of density and diversity. Reading their variable combinations in luxury projects aids understanding of the different gradients of urbanity in those projects. In the first geography – small-scale conversions and micro gentrification on a block or house basis within consolidated urban neighbourhoods – density and diversity can coexist in the open spaces created jointly with some of these interventions. In these open spaces, the disjunction between the public use of privately owned spaces introduces a domestication (Zukin, 1995) of these spaces, attractive to certain users but not others, thereby “reducing the risks of social difference and promoting the virtues of familiarity” (Jackson, 1998: 180).

According to J. Allen (2006: 453), domestication “is another version of an excluding power, rather than one which works through the more subtle means of inclusion. It is essentially about using urban design techniques to keep certain kinds of less civil elements out”.

The production of private spaces for public use, accompanied by a reduction of the public intervention in the production of the ‘public city’, has had effects on the shapes and uses of those spaces. These contrived spaces (Goss, 1993) re-shape the meaning of ‘public’, multiplying and diversifying the possibilities of private actors to be involved in the production of public spaces (Fleury, 2010). The condition characterizing these semi-public spaces is not only that they are confined or supervised/controlled spaces, often with restricted access, but also that power is exercised through “seductive spatial arrangements”, an expression of so-called ambient power (Allen, 2006: 442).

Recognizing the public sphere and transforming the concept of public good (Low & Smith, 2006) challenge the public policy in order to ensure stratified temporalities of uses in the open spaces produced by luxury projects as a condition for achieving the urbanity of those places.

Because open spaces are products of different uses over time that can pertain to different ‘communities of practices’ (Wenger, 1998), they can acquire multiple and multi-dimensional identities in the exclusive spaces of
luxury projects, only if they are inhabited by different urban populations\(^{12}\) (Martinotti, 1993).

The constitutive features of the open spaces – “always under construction; (...) always in the process of being made, never finished, never closed” (Massey, 2005: 9) and exposed to continuous changes – are re-written through user codes by luxury projects; the splinters of public\(^{13}\) in their temporary and changeable form are managed through spatial arrangements with which “possibilities are closed down by degree through their ambient qualities” (Allen, 2006: 445).\(^{14}\)

Different conditions ensure urbanity in exclusive segregated districts – our second geography – where also the urban metrics are rewritten as tools to measure and manage distances: measurement standards and modes of travel.

Whilst density can act as a condition to ensure a plurality of choices for a selected community, selection based on the homogeneity of status erases diversity.

The principle of co-optation as well as selective exclusion are manifest in a spatial device, to prevent the entry of some, and to give visibility to the group’s members, defining rules of behaviour within it (Secchi, 2013: 18).

These voluntary socio-spatial segregations interfere with the decision-making process regarding the control of and access to common spaces or services where the use of such facilities can be managed by one class that is politically more influential than another.

In these cases, determining if and how to integrate luxury into urban strategies can be an important opportunity to reflect on the tools with which to enhance the positive effects of private investments made to guarantee exclusive privileges and benefits. At the same time, it becomes an opportunity to assess also the flip side of luxury and the measures with which to manage it.

Hence the challenge for urban planning is to find mechanisms of regulation able to capture and re-invest, for the wider community, the increase in land value generated by these exclusive properties and their private goods, and which are inspired by the same mechanisms of self-regulation and self-provision of urban services and infrastructures that are adopted in these contractual communities.

The first challenge for public policy in luxury developments introduces the second one. This concerns the strategy for negotiating distributional shares of the prospective increases in land values.

Given that at a time of financial and economic crisis collaborative solutions may be important for transforming a scarcity of resources, especially for public actors, into opportunities, it should be recognized that public administrations can adopt transformative practices due the fact that they focus on the structural problems in society (Albrechts, 2010).

The challenge is to understand whether and how small-scale luxury projects, promoted by single developers, can be coordinated and can play a meaningful role on a large scale, as well as whether and how they can be driven by co-design processes to amplify the urban services supply.
Recent research has focused on the possibility of new partnerships, including government, the private sector and civil society, with the purpose of ‘valuing people’ in the implementation of urban services so as to innovate the way in which those services are financed and sustained (Denhardt & Denhardt, 2011: 42).

In this framework, it becomes necessary to assess not only the impacts that these new mechanisms may have on public finances, but also the public administration innovation process, because these transformations entail the renewal of urban service business models and public administration mechanisms and practices.

If the co-production of urban services in luxury developments could become the arena for discussing and changing the operational mechanism of the public administration, these possible mechanisms would be detached from the tried and tested forms of on-going collaboration among different stakeholders and the continuous adaptation of the strategies implemented through the learning and adjustment process.

The nature of investors and the ubiquity of their investments within a global geography require new skills in public administration and a re-thinking of public business models, because the production of services through luxury projects cannot be treated on the basis of traditional negotiation mechanisms.

Notes

1 This chapter is the outcome of joint reflection; Paola Pucci is the author of the first and third sections; Giulia Fini is the author of the second section.

2 The Milan Urban Region is an urbanized area which extends beyond the institutional borders of the metropolitan city of Milan. It is characterized by a complex settlement model and a plurality of settlement and living environments.

3 According to the first definition by R. Glass (1964), gentrification denoted simultaneous processes of physical, class and socio-cultural change and increases in the land value of central city neighbourhoods resulting in the direct displacement of lower-class households. The ensuing debate revealed more complex dimensions of the phenomenon influenced by factors such as social class and which drive process changes. Among these dimensions are the consumption preferences of certain middle-class households, or the role of the banks and real estate developers as the main investors (in N. Smith’s rent gap theory, 1979), or the so-called ‘third wave’ gentrification in which the renewal and upgrading of peripheral neighbourhoods are supported or even initiated by local governments seeking higher tax revenues (Hackworth & Smith, 2001).

4 “Privately owned but publicly used interior spaces found in shopping malls, airport terminals, the atrium lobbies of hotels and office buildings and convention centers” as defined by Cenzatti and Crawford (1993).

5 For example, consider all the issues related to the temporary reuse of certain buildings; the difficulty of following up urban transformations; the need to redefine public-private partnerships in service management; the role of creative activities and related spaces, which has grown substantially in recent years. These are spaces and issues related to the luxury transformation that the public administration and other institutions, together with private operators, must
directly promote or regulate with an increase in awareness and knowledge of the limits and opportunities of this type of relationship.

6 This district has been called a ‘semiotic district’ because of its specialization in “products whose economic value is based largely on the meaning people give them rather than their functionality” (Knox, 2012: 197).

7 This system was made up of private and public institutions, industries, designers, studios, warehouses, and a series of services linked to the production and advertising of design goods and ideas (Foot, 2001: 124).

8 For the projects realized in past decades see for example: Villaggio dei Giornalisti, Maggiolina district or ‘La Veridiana’ neighbourhood (Zanfi, 2013).

9 Studies on the privatization of public spaces take two aspects into account: the privatization of public space in relation to the role played by space consumption and enjoyment in social practices (Sennett, 1974; Walzer, 1983); the role of private actors in the production and management of public spaces (Sorkin, 1992; Zukin, 1995).

10 “Avec l’urbanité, on intègre l’espace public comme ressource cognitive et affective, l’engagement des corps qui s’y produit, la civilité qui permet leur gestion, l’exposition à l’alérité, la sérendipité, et la créativité que ces deux dernières rendent possible, tout un ensemble de liens faibles” (Granovetter, 1973).

11 The term ‘communities of practices’ is employed to focus attention on the fact that urban populations cannot be reduced to predefined and fixed categories since they belong to multiple categories. For this reason, it is important to consider populations not as static categories (inhabitants, commuters, city users, etc.), but as “groups of subjects that, temporarily and intermittently, share practices of daily life” (Pasqui, 2008: 148). Hence they can be considered communities of practices that generate particular space–time geographies.

12 Moving away from the classical approach of social ecology, Martinotti (1993: 137–139) suggests we “conceptualise metropolitan development and emerging social morphology as the progressive differentiation of four populations (inhabitants, commuters, city users, Metropolitan businessmen) that characterize the metropolis”.

13 Bianchetti (2011: 82) writes: “non vi è più ‘un’ pubblico, a partire dal quale definire – come era per il passato – orientamenti e legittimità del progetto, piuttosto ci sono schegge di pubblico”.

14 According to Allen (2006: 445), ambient qualities refer to “something about the character of an urban setting – a particular atmosphere, a specific mood, a certain feeling – that affects how we experience it and which in turn seeks to induce certain stances which we might otherwise have chosen not to adopt”.

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