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Tommaso Vitale

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# City divide

Fighting urban inequalities

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Feltrinelli

Scenari 61

# Scenari 65

# **City divide**

## **Fighting Urban Inequalities**

Edited by  
Tommaso Vitale



## City Divide. Fighting Urban Inequalities

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# Introduciton

## In Cities and Metropolitan Regions, Extreme Inequality Is Not a Destiny

*Tommaso Vitale*<sup>1</sup>

A complex enigma unfolds in the dazzling lights of modern cities. Cities often seem to be the stage for a dramatic duality: on the one hand, they are the cradles of economic growth, magnets for investment, talent, and job opportunities; on the other hand, they often seem to be places where social inequalities increase, creating a widening gap between the rich and the poor. The reality, however, is much more nuanced.

Contrary to popular belief, it is not inevitable that inequalities will increase in cities. In fact, it is often in these urban centers that bold and redistributive policies are experimented and implemented, aimed at bringing different social groups closer together, sharing common goods and services, and redistributing resources and sometimes even power and agency.

Everything depends on the policies adopted, not only on the strategic choices made but also on the ability to establish inclusive governance on a day-to-day basis. This governance must be flexible enough to adapt to concrete achievements, monitor the timing, and limit the negative effects of the policies themselves, accounting for selective choices on what is governed and what is not governed (Le Galès, Vitale, 2015).

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<sup>1</sup> The video interview with Tommaso Vitale is available at the following link: <https://youtu.be/7Tfor7HkEXY>



Tackling inequalities requires enormous difficulty and political courage. Cities face significant challenges, especially when real estate markets are subject to speculation and climate change requires costly interventions to mitigate pollution and adapt to increasingly extreme weather conditions.

An eloquent example is the dramatic drought that hit Europe in 2022, the worst in the last 500 years. This disaster was triggered by rising temperatures caused by the climate crisis, which put unprecedented stress on Europe's water resources. Rivers dried up, and fires destroyed more than 400,000 hectares of meadows and forests. This situation paved the way for a deep and dangerous global food crisis, an issue that involves citizens more than state institutions and for which cities and regions are trying to develop new coordinated public policies.

We know that complex urban conglomerations appear in metropolises around the world. A wicked metropolitan reality has emerged and continues to emerge, especially in Italy, in search of capable institutions with decision-making and effective governance powers to address mobility issues that are still largely related to individual car transport. In the most dynamic metropolises, the population in the commuting areas is growing steadily, but even in cities with a declining population, the commuting areas continue to grow or shrink to a lesser extent than the city center, leading to a wider and more dispersed distribution of the metropolitan population. In these dense urban agglomerations, the dynamic of economic and demographic attractiveness is strong, with traditional activities and disruptive innovations coexisting. Especially in a phase where technological change reshapes the economy, the spatial clustering of disruptive innovations is massive with durable effects in terms of territorial inequalities, spatial output, and income inequality (Kemeny, Petralia, Storper, 2022).

Being attractive may generate a lot of positive externalities, resources to redistribute, and the provision of new amenities, collective goods, and ambitious programs of ecological transition. But also rents, inertia, lateness in coping with negative externalities, and various

types of well-known policy syndromes related to the topping of success and basking on one's laurels (Polizzi, Vitale, 2017). In fact, cities tend to be more polluted than less densely populated regions. Large cities and those with low incomes tend to have particularly high levels of air pollution, such as fine particulate matter (PM 2.5). Not surprisingly, people living in cities are less satisfied with air quality than those in smaller towns or rural areas. This is true even in high-income countries, where pollution levels tend to be lower. Cities are vulnerable to flooding, storms and rising sea levels. One in five urban dwellers is at risk of severe flooding. The urban population in low-lying coastal areas is growing faster than the urban population in other areas. Looking at OECD countries, 14% of the urban population lives in areas vulnerable to storm surges and sea level rise, compared to 10% in medium and small cities and 6% in rural areas (OECD, 2023).

Cities are grappling with the disruptions caused by the global pandemic, but they are also making progress in the green transition to a zero-carbon economy. In this context, low-density and remote regions have made significant strides in clean energy production, generating 40% of the OECD's clean electricity and thus emitting less CO<sub>2</sub>. On the other hand, families living in capital cities often have the lowest energy consumption and have managed to significantly reduce waste production over the past two decades.

Russia's aggression against Ukraine in early 2022 disrupted global markets, pushing up food and energy prices and adding to inflationary pressures at a time when the cost of living for families was already rising rapidly. Despite marked differences in inflation rates between countries, inflation in the OECD countries averaged 9.6% in 2022, more than double the rate in 2021 (4.0%) and the highest level since 1988. Despite widespread labor shortages, wage growth in most OECD countries has failed to keep pace with accelerating inflation, eroding families' purchasing power (OECD, 2023).

Rising food and energy prices are driving up the cost of other essential services, such as public transport and childcare.

The cost-of-living crisis could further exacerbate inequalities in cities, as the consequences of higher costs can fall disproportionately on low-income families. While the distributive impact of energy price increases on household budgets varies across countries, when inflation hits low-income families harder than higher-income families, vulnerable families are forced to cut spending on other essential needs, such as food and health.

Not all cities are affected in the same way. In the UK, for example, northern cities and metropolitan areas have been hit harder by the cost-of-living crisis than other parts of the country, due to higher energy consumption resulting from poorer home insulation and greater reliance on cars. In these cities, inflation has been as much as 30% higher than in southern cities.

Municipal governments are also facing rising energy costs that are straining their budgets, such as heating public buildings and facilities, and undermining their ability to provide or ensure essential public services. These higher costs have added to the pressure on budgets already strained by the COVID-19 crisis (Alteri, et al., 2021). As a result, many cities have taken steps to mitigate the impact of rising costs. For example, as part of its energy sobriety plan, the City of Paris has implemented a series of measures to achieve 10% energy savings, including lowering the temperature of all public buildings, lowering the temperature of municipal swimming pools by 1 degree, turning off the lights in all municipal buildings at 10 p.m., and even turning off the lights of the Eiffel Tower at 11:45 p.m. instead of 1 a.m. The City of Paris has also announced a 50% increase in local property taxes in 2023 to ensure the continuity of public services and accelerate the green transition.

The housing affordability crisis in cities is also a major concern. While house prices in many cities have fallen somewhat recently, they have still been rising steadily for several decades, outpacing income growth in most OECD countries. The most recent OECD report, from which the data I discuss here are drawn, is very clear and reliable (OECD, 2023). Real house prices increased by 77% between 1996 and

2022, compared with GDP per capita growth of 29%. This rapid growth in house prices may have created wealth effects for homeowners, but it has made homeownership increasingly unattainable for many families, especially considering that rising rents have made it more difficult for tenants to save for deposits. Moreover, rising rents have made them more vulnerable to shocks, as seen during the COVID-19 pandemic (Cafora, Larena, Vitale, 2024).

In addition to this long-term trend, housing-related expenses (including utilities, rent, maintenance, and repairs) in OECD countries increased by 20% per year in 2022, mainly due to rising energy prices. These housing-related costs, such as maintenance and utilities, increased at a time when 15% of households in the lowest income quintile in OECD countries (for which data are available) were already unable to afford adequate heating for their homes. These costs will remain high even if inflation falls in 2023, and are expected to fall further in 2024.

Long-term efforts to expand housing supply have been hampered by rising construction costs and higher financing costs for developers. Low- and middle-income families are bearing the brunt of these overlapping crises. Even before the current cost of living crisis, more than one-third of low-income renters in OECD countries spent 40% of their disposable income on rent alone. Due to the increased cost of living and higher interest rates, low- and middle-income families are facing growing difficulties in paying rent or mortgages, threatening their housing security. In many cities, this has led to an increase in evictions, especially as temporary eviction suspension measures and other emergency housing supports introduced during the COVID-19 crisis are gradually disappearing in many OECD countries.

In the case of the United States, low-income families have been pushed out of central cities, moving instead to peripheral suburbs at a higher rate than wealthier families (Rodríguez-Pose, Storper, 2020). Low-income families are also more likely to live in substandard or overcrowded housing and less likely to be able to afford regular maintenance or improvements to their homes, while facing barriers to moving to better housing.

In addition to the direct impact of higher housing costs on household budgets, the cost of living crisis and the high interest rate environment have further limited access to homeownership for low- and middle-income families, as it has become increasingly difficult to save for housing deposits or because the monthly payments on adjustable rate mortgages, which make up the majority of existing and new mortgages in several OECD countries, have become too costly.

Access to decent and affordable housing has become more difficult in recent years, especially for young adults. Today's young people, especially those on low incomes, often face greater difficulties than previous generations in accessing quality and affordable housing, and in many countries are increasingly struggling to become homeowners, limiting their ability to accumulate wealth (Vitale, Cafora, 2024).

Within countries, cities have become the epicenter of this crisis, with house prices and rents often rising faster than the national average. On average in 2020 and 2021, only 40% of urban residents in the OECD reported being satisfied with the availability of good quality, affordable housing in their area, compared with around 50% of rural residents.

In 2021, in 17 OECD countries with available data, buying a home in a metropolitan area was 40% more expensive than in a region far from a metropolitan area, and within metropolitan areas, city centers were on average 30% more expensive than suburbs. Low-income families have been hardest hit, but so-called "squeezed middle-class" families, whose incomes have not kept pace with rising housing costs, have often had to move to less expensive areas, away from job opportunities and access to basic services.

Several structural factors explain the increasing demand for housing in cities. These include urbanization and the tendency for populations (including refugees and migrants) to concentrate in urban centers in search of better opportunities and lifestyles. Declining marriage rates and rising divorce rates are creating additional demand for smaller housing units. Increased tourism and the proliferation of short-term

rentals through platforms such as Airbnb are also playing a role in some cities.

An increase in speculative investment in the real estate sector, coupled with low interest rates until 2022, has contributed to rising house prices in some locations, particularly in prime city locations. According to a recent study (Holm, et al., 2023), the rate at which institutional investors, such as private equity funds and pension funds, are acquiring residential real estate in major European cities has actually accelerated since the COVID-19 pandemic. European capitals have been the main location for these investments, with Berlin leading the way with over €40 billion of residential assets in institutional portfolios, followed by London, Amsterdam, Paris, and Vienna. While large cities tend to attract the majority of residential investment, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom have seen large institutional transactions in smaller cities. Overall, the financialization of housing risks making many housing units unavailable for rent and as places to live, exacerbating housing shortages.

In front of the crisis, we have assisted to a decade and more of fatalism. As if there was no more capacity to reduce inequalities, and urban planning and intentional spatial development were old and useless blunt weapons. But why such a fatalism? Systematic global comparative urban research tells us a completely different story, where there is simply no room for fatalism and a feelings of feelings of helplessness. Deep transformation in response to the climate crisis can be an opportunity to create new goods, services, and jobs, reduce inequalities, and fight poverty. However, this challenge requires careful analysis of the policy instruments used, a realistic view of the data, and an unwavering commitment to a more sustainable and inclusive future for all. These data underscore the urgency of addressing the cost-of-living crisis in cities, as well as a deep proficiency in spatially informed ‘strategic judgement’ (Albrechts 2004, Healey 2009). Social polarization and economic inequality are not inevitable. Cities can reduce poverty, they can fight poverty, but these problems need to be addressed seriously. Urban and regional plans are not enough, and they are re-

quired to be governed and implemented daily in endless contention. However, they are relevant instruments, made with clear rules, precise assumptions about cause and effect, and an analysis of the existing complexities, and they propose a visual representation of scenarios and their implications on regulatory procedures and investment budget-setting (Cremaschi, 2023). Obviously, reducing regional, urban, and social inequalities does not require just formal plans and political willingness, but a good governance capacity: so to say, durable coalitions and strategic policy-making to generate synergies, conflicts, connectivities, plans of metropolitan spatial organisation, and effective outcomes in unique patternings (Cremaschi, Le Galès, 2018). To promote stable coalitions, and durable policy efforts to reduce inequalities, such patternings must be recognised, ‘summoned up’ into attention (Healey, 2013), and become a symbolic setting for generating the mobilising force to continue implementing key interventions.

Because to redress inequalities, the point is not only what to do, or how to redistribute towards the less wealthy, but to decide where investing, where to locate infrastructure and job opportunities, which places require inclusive accessibility and improved mobility, what public spaces are disempowering people and ambushing their health and opportunities, which neighbourhood point for mobilising institutional investors in sustainable affordable housing as ‘carriers’ of the strategic redistributive intention, stabilising expectations of social mix (Vitale, 2007). Even regarding at environmental justice, control congestion and pollution, set up a reliable circular economy to reduce energy poverty and improve waste management public benefits, it always require unearthing and mobilising potential resourceful but still sceptical actors/agencies, locally-based economic interests and areas of existing capacity.

The main problem, also in progressive cities, is a political one, with attention and interest towards inequalities going up and down, and progressive coalitions remaining weak and too discontinuous in building a focus. Reducing inequalities requires a strategy, a large variety of policy instruments, budget implications and regulatory adjustmen-

ts, but even more the capacity to last and endure. A plea for flexible and adaptive institutional arrangements and plans can not become an intellectual reactionary excuse for punctuated (and ineffective) implementation (Vitale, 2009).

So, this is for governing with the scope of reducing inequalities and fostering the ecological transition. Urban, metropolitan and regional governance are prone to classical multilevel competition and contention among key agencies (Iammarino, Rodríguez-Pose, Storper, 2019). However, political competition may be based on accelerating the fight against inequality and seeking out coordination efficiencies and synergies for political reward. We are in a new 'age' of political behavior, where the reduction of territorial and personal inequalities is much more appreciated by the electoral body (Rodríguez-Pose, et al., 2024). Plans and policies are evaluated on the basis of clear achievements, collective goods creation and redistribution in the urban conglomerates, and a recognisable articulation of good balance between technical science and 'street science' based on citizens' experience and voice.

A prosperous city is one where its inhabitants, regardless of their social position, can benefit from its opportunities. The challenge of reducing inequalities and creating inclusive cities is not impossible, but it requires bold policies, and political culture is crucial. Cities that succeed in reducing inequalities and social polarization are governed with a spirit of social dialogue, using collegial governance to confront and mediate conflicts, and developing a strong capacity for compromise that challenges the power of the most entrenched interests. They are local governments that conceive the city as a place of continuous learning, where one of the key resources is the co-production of public knowledge, and where criticism and participation are essential democratic levers for governing change.



## **Section 1**

**The future of cities doesn't have to be  
marked by inequality**

# **The five types of urban-spatial inequality**

## **Cases, effects, prospects for betterment**

*Michael Storper*<sup>1</sup>

### **What are urban-spatial inequalities and why do they matter?**

Cities and regions are different in many ways, and some of these differences can be considered positive, as when they express different histories, traditions, or comparative advantages. A diverse world of cities, regions and territories is a desirable world in many ways. Less desirable, however, is when such differences become inequalities. By “spatial or urban inequalities” we mean differences that are hierarchical, where the people in some cities and regions and neighbourhoods are significantly better off than others, or more powerful than others, and where the fact of such spatial inequalities makes this so for people. In this short commentary, I will outline five types of spatial inequality that cause damage to people who are in some places as opposed to others, because those people are in those places. This specific set of conditions requires remediation. We do not mean to insist on absolute or perfect inequality (“convergence” in economics terminology), but rather a situation where spatial economic, well-being, or socio-political hierarchies are within a tolerable range; a tolerable range is where

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<sup>1</sup> The video interview with Michael Storper is available at the following link: <https://youtu.be/VbffKtY0JOo>

the prospects for human fulfilment of people in all regions are not too different from one another. Looked at over time, we can relax this criterion just a little, to say that it is desirable that the prospects for human fulfilment that depend on where one's life unfolds should, at the very least, be moving toward less difference rather than more, as a sign that the economic and political systems are functioning in the interest of sharing human fulfilment and betterment, rather than restricting them.

Importantly, while it may be possible for some individuals to escape the effects of some spatial inequalities through migration, in all the five types of inequality we will outline below, migration may help some people to escape, but it does not obviate the effects of spatial inequalities for those who remain or for future generations. In another way, it seems desirable to reduce what we might call "spatial privilege," meaning benefits that come from simply where one is. The reason to want to reduce such inequalities is both philosophical and practical. In practical terms, when spatial inequalities are very high or are growing or not being reduced, history shows that there will be mounting costly externalities, human suffering, and threats to political and social cohesion. Moreover, it will not claim merely that the long-term trend of territorial development is to reduce such inequalities if the starting level of inequalities is so high that the benefit from reduced inequalities is remote in the future. Today's inequalities can only be justified if their reduction is in the meaningful span of people's lives, not abstractly off in future generations; anything other than that is a camouflage of a process that is not working in a way that people will experience improvement in their lives. Finally, we can dispense with the old apologia for inequalities that "a rising tide lifts all boats," meaning that absolute improvements are all that people do care about or have the moral right to care about, because – as we show below – social science demonstrates that there are several kinds of inequality that hold back human achievement as such, whether or not absolute economic growth is occurring or not.

Now that we have dispensed with the usual apologia for spatial-urban inequalities, let's consider five main ones we should be concerned about:

- a) Inter-regional or territorial inequalities of development, between prosperous regions and Left Behind regions;
- b) Inequalities between people within cities (income, social status);
- c) Intra-city average income inequalities between neighbourhoods and their consequent "neighbourhood effects;"
- d) Inequalities of spatial experience, such as access to the city and its amenities, public goods and public "dignity" outside the home;
- e) inequality in intergenerational social mobility related to where one lives or where one migrates to or from: opportunity over time.

**Zooming Out: Inter-regional inequalities. The first of our major spatial inequalities is inter-regional.**

In the past 30 years, the differences between so-called Superstar urban regions and other territories have grown. These differences are measured in the widening gap of per-capita incomes, in widening gaps in wages for college-educated persons who locate in big cities compared to other places; and for the increasing gaps in amenities between these regions and other places, due to their ability to reinvest their increasing wealth in their own quality of life. The phenomenon underlying these inequalities is that there are very strong agglomeration economies for the skilled work of the economy that came into being from the 1980s onward. These agglomeration economies are different from in the past, where cities specialised in a single industry could do well; today the agglomeration economies cut across different inter-related sectors and reinforce the power of a relatively small number of, mostly very big, prosperous city regions. The high end of

the economy is bigger but more spatially concentrated than in the manufacturing era. This in turn feeds itself through migration of the skilled to such regions, away from other regions, and reinforces the attractiveness of the Superstars in a circular and cumulative manner, since it is better for skilled people to be around big groups of other skilled people. The Superstars have sharply increasing housing costs, due to the concentration of high income demand in them; but wages and incomes for the skilled more than compensate for the difference, such that the attraction of these places to skilled people is currently self-perpetuating and not abated by their high housing prices. Moreover, by locating in these city-regions, the lucky get access to the spatial privilege of locationally-concentrated cultural, environmental, political, and social amenities and networks. In some countries income is more concentrated in Superstar regions than others; some countries have unipolar urban systems (France, UK), while others have a group of Superstars instead of just one (Italy, Germany, USA). In the USA, the Superstars have per capita incomes that are three times the poorest regions, and about 165% those of other large and medium cities in the urban system. In all countries, the Superstar phenomenon generates a sharp split to other regions, the less prosperous, or more dramatically, the Left Behind. Why should we care about inter-regional inequalities? Though the Superstars are "winners," internally they tend to be overheated and gentrified: the "costs of success" can be significant inside Superstars. Costs are imposed mostly on the less skilled (working class people in general). This is because land and housing are positional goods, and the concentration of income among the highly skilled directly impacts the housing and neighbourhood choices of the less skilled. Outside the Superstars, regions lose young talented people, contributing to stagnation in their absolute or relative income and reducing their cultural prestige. Economists often reply to this situation by arguing that it represents an "optimal spatial allocation" of the skilled population, raising its productivity and producing economy-wide growth. This is a version of the classical "efficiency versus equity" problem, according to their thinking. But even though the

skilled might be more productive in big cities (up to a certain point), it is not clear that the current spatial concentration of the skilled is an economy- or society-wide optimum, economically, culturally or politically. For example, we have no proof that the skilled could not be spread over a greater number of middle-sized cities, where they would be just as productive, but their incomes and creativity would be spread among a higher number of regions. We also know that the current levels of concentration lead to decline in national cohesion and conflictual politics.

A more difficult question is: can we reduce inter regional inequalities? This is the toughest area of policymaking today and in the past. In the EU, we have structural funds and cohesion policy, which are the biggest parts of the European Union budget and policy effort. In Italy, there is a long history of trying (Cassa per il Mezzogiorno). UK regional policy is largely considered a failure. At the present time, we need fresh thinking about how we could better distribute economic development across more regions, but without losing the key efficiencies that come from urban size and concentration of the skilled. Without this, the middle- and end of the 21st century will consist of a landscape of hyper-urban concentration, surrounded by much poorer and less dynamic regions. This is as much a subject for debate in philosophy and politics as it is in economics.

## **Second type of inequality: between people within places**

Income inequality has risen in many parts of the world, particularly between 1980 and 2010; this has generated inequality levels that are similar to the early 20th century Gilded Age, before social programs and workers' rights reduced them in the post-1945 period. Generally speaking, in developed countries, the top third, those with university education, are more and more privileged relative to the other two thirds. In some countries (such as USA, UK), the "urban benefit" is higher for White people than for People of Color, meaning that inequality is driven by a combination of education, race/ethnicity, and urban

location. This overall situation generates higher levels of inequality in the most successful, big, high-income city regions, because the share of the skilled is higher there and their wages are pushed even further upward due to their productivity from interaction with other skilled, in turn manifested as the “urban size-skilled wage premium.” Thus, big cities have higher gini coefficients (index of inequality) than their respective national economies, not because they have a higher proportion of the poor, but because they have a higher proportion of the skilled, high-income (“upper tail inequality”). Greater Paris and London, for example, have ginis around 0.53 (before redistribution), which is around the same level as Brazil or South Africa or India. They are not unusual, but rather, typical, these days (compared to their national ginis of 0.40 and 0.36).

**What causes inequalities between people, especially in big prosperous cities?** They result from agglomeration economies for creative activities that pull in the skilled; the “skilled wage premium” raises their incomes; and the city magnifies this underlying condition by concentrating relatively lower wage service occupations, while middle-wage manufacturing occupations have moved out to smaller cities or have been globalised to developing countries. In addition, cities magnify the inequality of these two populations that are co-located, through competition for housing, where the competition favours the higher income, but who push costs upward for all people.

**Why is interpersonal inequality a problem?** These are successful rich cities, but the negative effects are due to “positionality,” notably in housing and other location dependent aspects of life. In other words, even though the high average (per capita) incomes do have certain benefits across groups, by funding opportunities for entrepreneurship in the service sector, and – if public policies are effective – by generating amenities that can be enjoyed by all, the core negative effect is through land and housing. The co-location of high- and low-income groups drives up housing costs in the best neighbourhoods of cities and spills over to squeeze other groups in other neighbourhoods. Gentrification

cuts into real incomes of the less skilled, can increase their commutes and lead to increasing segregation by income.

In sum, even though there are some positive effects of a big “upper tail” of earners: spillovers to the local economy through demand for services and luxury goods raise local wages.... but not enough for ensuring opportunity and quality of life for the vast majority of the non-university educated. Can we reduce interpersonal inequalities within prosperous city-regions? The answer to this question is “yes,” but many of the sources of these inequalities are economy-wide (technology, skills) and can only be shaped by national policy. It would be undesirable to limit in-migration of the skilled, as this would deprive them of core freedoms of a democratic society, although – as noted earlier – it would be desirable to spread out the places that would attract them, giving them a wider choice of places in which to exercise their skills. What we can do in cities is affect the cost of the main competitive-positional good, which is housing. This is because housing is the biggest component in urban cost of living. Nominal income inequality can either be magnified or attenuated by housing policy, as it becomes “real” income.

### **The Third type of inequality: between neighbourhoods**

The biggest spatial inequalities in cities are found at the inter-neighbourhood scale. In many big city-regions, incomes can vary on an order of 1:20 between the wealthiest and poorest neighbourhoods. This condition often correlates to big spatial gaps for educational attainment and other quality of life differences. Urban poverty is one expression of this, but urban inequality is a much bigger phenomenon than urban poverty.

What causes neighbourhood inequalities? Neighbourhoods translate and express structural socio-economic inequalities through the mechanism of people/household “sorting” according to income (and race/ethnicity in certain countries). Urban land and housing markets are the principal positional sorting mechanism of households by income,



race/ethnicity, because land rent is local. Why should we care about neighbourhood inequalities? The principal reason is because there exist “neighbourhood effects” on human development, biographical effects that can endure the life span, even for those who move away. Individual and family characteristics also have effects on people (education, family wealth, networks, heritage). But there are “ecological” effects of place on people in addition to these personal/family characteristics. In other words: it matters where one is born and raised: there is an effect of place on biography. It is not deterministic, but it can be very strong in a non-trivial percentage of cases. Moreover, though some people do escape bad neighbourhoods and somewhat attenuate their effects on their life-long fulfilment, many people can get trapped in bad neighbourhoods by virtue of income, social networks and other forces, even if they would prefer to leave.

What are the main effects of neighbourhood quality on people? The effects are bigger, and different, for lower income groups than higher. Higher income people have more spatial mobility and spatially broader and more diverse sources of contacts, education, experience. Lower-income people have more neighbourhood socialisation, “local ties” and hence more depend on neighbourhood for their well being than high-income people. The latter can be advantageous when cultures of solidarity and mutuality exist in neighbourhoods. But the same rootedness can turn sharply negative when neighbourhoods become traps of violence; bad schools; limited access to the city beyond the neighbourhood; and lowered personal horizons. Thus, spatial mobility may be an objective, but it isn’t available to everyone, and isn’t an all-purpose solution to this problem.

What can be done to reduce inter-neighborhood inequalities? Inter-Neighborhood inequality can be reduced principally through housing policy, creating more mixed-income neighbourhoods. The principal way to do this is to decommodify part of the urban land and housing market through public housing and allocation. The best example in the world today is Vienna. But it is politically difficult to reform housing because urban assets (land, housing) are the aspect of city spatial

privilege that the high-income people most want to preserve. Therefore, we also need neighbourhood development: physical (public goods and services); but also, institutional development, promoting neighbourhood-based “collective efficiency” to improve the neighbourhood from within, in order to best deploy and use resources provided from outside. But this latter situation is second-best. The long-term goal must be to create more mixed-income cities. Spatial inequality is incompatible with socio-economic and political equality in the long run.

### **The fourth type of urban inequality: experience, dignity and personal development**

Spatial experience is important to personal development and to social psychology, but our spatial experiences are very different; some experiences are hierarchically different because they are shaped by economic and social inequalities of the types described above. The founders of urban sociology (Simmel, Durkheim, Tonnies) understood experience as urban “socialisation,” and considered it to be different from socialisation in traditional, non-urban societies. Extending their concept, we can see that within the urban world, socialisation is not uniform, but highly differentiated according to the “where” of an individual’s life in complex differentiated urban spaces of life, work, and mobility. In general, mixing makes people more mature, less fearful, more open, and more aspirational, more tolerant; and this is true of all social classes and groups. But mixing can also be threatening. When it occurs under conditions of disorder, crime, and conflict, it can work the other way, promoting rejection of the “other” and reinforcing neurotic, anti-cosmopolitan and authoritarian attitudes.

What causes inequalities of experience? Social psychologists have established that who we mix with, how we mix, where we mix, or inversely, how we separate, has deep effects on our knowledge, attitudes, aspirations, fears and perceptions.

These are the specific mechanisms that generate different socializations when spatial neighbourhood inequality is high. Many elements

of socialisation, however, are not specifically or uniquely spatial in nature (such as education; culture; income). The specifically urban or spatial causes include: the quality and availability of public spaces; whether neighbourhoods and buildings are income-mixed, ethnic-race mixed; lifestyle mixed, inter alia.

Public transport is a key spatial site of potential mixing, because the need for mobility is universal. Schooling spaces and sport-leisure spaces are potential sites for mixing. Institutional sites of potential mixing include associationism that is not self-interested (not just professional, affinity-based), but cross-cutting and citizenship-based. But any of these can also become ineffective, as when groups withdraw from public transit or public schools. Is it possible to reduce inequalities of experience (spatial privilege). We are only now learning about this in research, but the answer appears to be yes. Cities can shape the urban causes of experiencing inequalities. High quality inclusive shared public space and public goods appear to be the main areas where shared positive experience opportunities can be expanded. This works best when coupled to other – non-urban – policy domains such as education; incomes, and to the primordial urban policy of housing, when those domains are set up to encourage mixing. It bears repeating that all these domains are challenged to not allow co-location to turn into proximate but fragmented or difference-based experience. In the laYer, conflict can erupt and negate the benefits of mixing, reinforcing experience differences and conflicts, and leading to withdrawal and vicious circles of self-segregation of the privilege and neglect of the rest. In practice, these policy domains involve difficult practical and philosophical choices about the relationship of commonality to difference (“we,” “them”), and to generating consensus about a desired common and shared inclusive public order.

## **The fifth main type of spatial inequalities: intergenerational mobility and life span**

All the previously mentioned inequalities can have effects over the long-run of life spans and multiple generations. They can become biographical and affect social structure. Where one is born, grows up, or moves influences the probability of being personally successful and of children being intergenerationally mobile. Place influences our income position, health, and many personal behaviours and achievements – in a good or bad way. As previously mentioned, the downside of “rootedness” is that it can trap us in social class, increase bad health, and propagate behaviours that contribute to “deaths of despair.” In other words, these are the dynamic version of “neighbourhood and regional effects,” i.e. over time.

**What are the urban or spatial causes of unequal intergenerational mobility?** Spatial positionality – the where of our lives – is pervasively important for who we become over generations: inter-regional spatial position (which region?); intra-regional income-class-race position; intra-regional neighbourhood position; experiential position. Again, not all is determined by urban or spatial position: in the four previously-mentioned inequalities I have purposely mentioned how individual/family determinants can be spatialized, becoming ecological or place determinants, but how they are not entirely ecological (sometimes not spatial). Therefore, it’s important not to believe that making a place pretty or well-serviced will, in and of itself, solve all these issues – this is the “planner’s and architect’s illusion” of “space” over “social and economic process as mediated by space.”

## **Can urban or place-based policies increase opportunities for intergenerational social mobility?**

Yes, by shaping housing and neighbourhood structure. Creating a healthy, inclusive mixed space of the city with active policies to create less segregation of housing, more equal quality of housing and mixed

neighbourhoods. Housing is very important not just in combating income inequality today, but in attempting to equalise inter-generational wealth accumulation through equal opportunity to make housing investments in positionally-good places – for private housing. However, public housing doesn't offer inter-generational wealth accumulation – so we need to invent new policy frameworks that compensate for this through collective inter-generational investment funds.

A real world example of reducing inequalities of several types: Vienna's *gemeindebauten* housing. Vienna has 43% market-insulated housing. This consists of about half social, half limited-profit public cooperatives. This housing is for all social classes (up to 70K euros income in a city of 57.7K median). Two-thirds of all Viennese housing is rent controlled and 80% of Viennese are renters. Market-insulated housing changes the private housing market by competing with private and thus driving private rents downward. As a result of this system, Viennese spend 8% pretax income on rent and 26% post-tax income on housing or rent. This compares to New Yorkers, who spend 36% of pre-tax income on rent. The result is that Viennese have more disposable income and lower real income inequality than in other Superstar Cities; more social mixing as well; and more disposable time because of less pressure to work to pay for housing. This is decommodification that works; and is economically efficient and inclusive. Vienna's market-insulated housing also has excellent satisfaction ratings and is considered widely to have world-class design and amenities.

There are other ways to reduce inequalities in spatial privilege, increase housing affordability, and promote socio-spatial mixity. For example, London and Paris have stimulated major new increases in housing supply in the last ten years, using a combination of: social housing; subsidies for investors to invest in market-rental housing; limited market insulation – price moderating policies; national programs to standardise and reduce construction costs; allocation of responsibility regionally to localities, but retaining significant local input and implementation, with national support for meeting goals (no “unfunded mandates”). Moreover, in London, the public land ownership is

never relinquished; it is only lease for private or mixed public-private use. The long-term of public policy is therefore not compromised, leaving the possibility of future public policies that are insulated from increases in land rent.

## **Conclusion**

Spatial and urban equity and efficiency, not equity versus efficiency. Big dynamic cities are not ideal “natural” settings for equality. This is because they are highly dynamic and generate outsized rewards to efficiency, new skills and productivity. Thus, they inherently spatially concentrate forces that are in tension with equality. But too much inequality undermines both their efficiency and dynamism, generating many social and individual costs. Inequality in cities can be brought within an acceptable range and this can be compatible with efficiency and even enhance it. The urban part of shaping inequality downward is about shaping the people effect of place by moderating positional spatial privilege. Architectural and urbanist ideas must be tested in a sociological, economic and political way, for their effects on inequality and spatial privilege. This requires substantial rethinking in urban planning, architecture, and urban policy circles. Likewise, urban activist communities should not reject considerations of efficiency, but consider how to advocate for policies that are good both for specific places as ecological environments, but also good for individuals who may want to stay or to move. The choice is not all-or-nothing between efficient spatial distributions and equitable spatial distributions, but finding the zones where they come together; and these zones are numerous and it is this possibility set that we should identify and bring into being.

## **Section 2**

# **Housing Crisis and Unequal Cities**

# Knowledge building of housing affordability vulnerabilities in Europe

*Marietta Haffner*<sup>1</sup>

I aim to present developments in housing affordability of citizens in Europe based on Eurostat (EU-SILC) data. I discussed different housing affordability dimensions as well as complexities proposing that knowledge building at different governance levels (project, city, national) will be crucial in order to work towards effective solutions. Starting with knowledge about outcomes and combining this knowledge with (negotiated) desired policy objectives will help to move from the current situation to the desired one (Schneider & Univ. of Basel New Media Center 2021).

## **Background**

Housing affordability is back on the agenda in many countries and particularly in cities that are doing well economically (Haffner & Hulse 2021) as recent citizen and student housing protests show in Italy, Ireland, Portugal, the Netherlands, among others.

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<sup>1</sup> The video interview with Marietta Haffner is available at the following link: <https://youtu.be/RVwq7logq2c>



## Housing affordability problems

Affordability problems in the European Union (EU) have been identified in the study of Krapp *et al.* (2022) as rent and price increases in some (urban) areas, as well as the lack of affordable and social housing. Moreover, household energy poverty has been named by policy makers: relatively higher energy costs, which potentially push households into poverty. Furthermore, of the EU population with a lower income (the so-called at-risk-of-poverty population), 20% were in arrears during the last 12 months, while this was seven percent of those not at-risk-of-poverty (Eurostat EU-SILC data for 2022).

In many EU countries, households are potentially confronted with housing affordability problems, given a so-called financial overburden, i.e., paying more than 40% of their income on housing and energy costs (Krapp *et al.* 2022; Eurostat). The affordability vulnerabilities can be specified further with Eurostat EU-SILC data for 2022, as Figure 1 shows. Of the EU-population this was over nine percent, while in 2020 this was almost eight percent. Furthermore, those living in cities, more than 11% were calculated to have a housing cost overburden in 2022, while of the population paying market rent the housing cost overburden amounted to more than one in five (almost 21%). For the at-risk of poverty population (Eurostat), more than one in three (34.2%) were confronted with a housing cost overburden in 2022. Last, but not least, EU-SILC (Eurostat) data show (not in Figure 1) that the young adults in many EU countries increasingly remained living at home, while they also increasingly moved into private/market renting (Dewilde & Haffner 2021, also based on EU-SILC calculations).

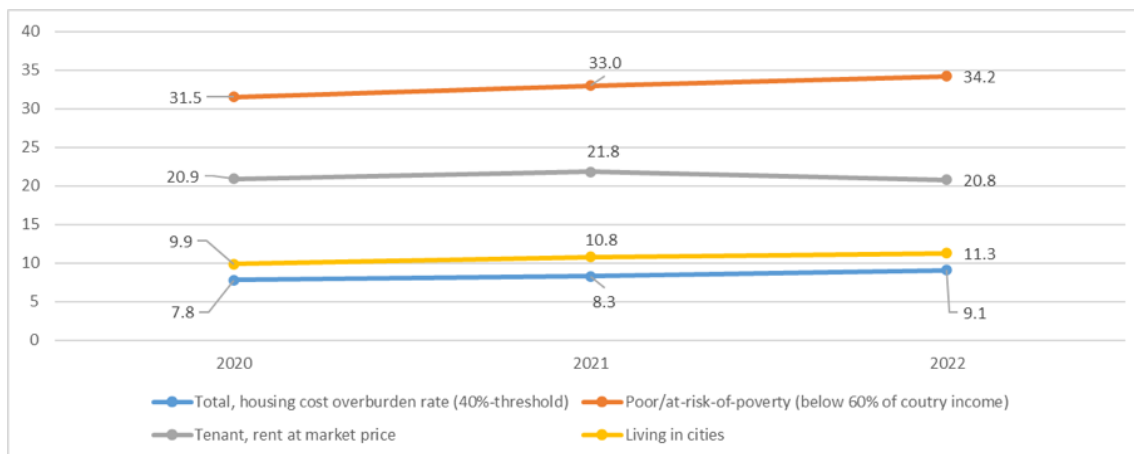


Figure 1 – Housing affordability: housing cost overburden rate by different groups (%), 2020-2022. Source: Eurostat - EU-SILC data, 27 countries, cross-sectional, series breaks.

Note1: “The housing cost overburden rate is the percentage of the population living in households where the total housing costs (‘net’ of housing allowances) represent more than 40 % of disposable income (‘net’ of housing allowances).” ([https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Glossary:Housing\\_cost\\_overburden\\_rate](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Glossary:Housing_cost_overburden_rate)).

Note 2: “The at-risk-of-poverty rate is the share of people with an equivalised disposable income (after social transfer) below the at-risk-of-poverty threshold, which is set at 60 % of the national median equivalised disposable income after social transfers.” ([https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Glossary:At-risk-of-poverty\\_rate#:~:text=The%20at%2Drisk%2Dof%2D,disposable%20income%20after%20social%20transfers.](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Glossary:At-risk-of-poverty_rate#:~:text=The%20at%2Drisk%2Dof%2D,disposable%20income%20after%20social%20transfers.)).

Note 3: Averages for all EU-countries ‘hide’ the distribution across the EU and within countries.

## Housing affordability dimensions and complexities

To tackle housing affordability, a number of dimensions and complexities need to be clarified. First, to determine what affordable is, a norm/standard is needed for the relation between housing cost and household income, while it also helps to know about the quality of the housing, whether society considers this adequate/decent (MacLennan & Williams 1990). Next to ‘adequate quality’, also the ‘availability’ and ‘accessibility of housing’ impact on the possibility to move into ‘affordable housing for a household in question’ (Ayala et al. 2019; Heckman & Rastigi 2023).

These different A-concepts will relate to the policy objectives that will impact on housing affordability; e.g., housing as a human right

versus other aims (Iglesias 2008). OECD (2021) for example distinguishes between three main housing objectives: sustainability, inclusiveness and market efficiency. Housing affordability is 'housed' in the overlap between the latter two objectives.

Another complexity relates to the types of policy to counter housing affordability problems. On the one hand, this depends on the causing types of cost components that make up the affordability measure, such as rent or mortgage cost, energy cost, and/or insufficient income (Haffner & Hulse 2021). Considerations about commuting costs may also be considered relevant in the case of housing affordability (Lucas 2012).

Finally, another complexity around housing affordability are the different types of actors involved and their orientation: formal/informal, public/private and non-profit/for-profit (Pestoff 1992). Some are more likely to provide affordable housing than others. Exchanging and bringing together knowledge about the context of housing affordability and relating the housing affordability challenge to the policy objective(s) will aim to facilitate generating a solution for the challenge.

## Cities at the Margins

### Addressing Housing Poverty in Europe Is Housing Still a Fundamental Right?

*Presidents: Marianna Tamborelli, Alessandro Salvadori*

*Rapporteurs: Pietro Salgarini, Silvia Cafora, Nicla Dattomo*

#### Overview

Participants from Dar Casa, Mutuo Soccorso Milano, Abitare in Via Padova, I ragazzi delle Tende, University's Union (UDU), University of Turin, Base Gaia Cohousing, Milano Abitare, KCity and IULM University among others divided in 2 working tables. The topics verged around the right to housing and accessibility, housing vulnerabilities and alternative forms of ownership.

The discussion started by acknowledging that the fragmentation of housing policy among regions, provinces, municipalities, and the city, makes urban planning inaccessible to the public. This is due to private entities' control over housing policies and the lack of public funds. For example, the National Recovery and Resilience Plan (PNRR) funds were invested in private student housing accommodations with “light” regulation. To curb private investments, a collaboration with the third sector could be beneficial in financially supporting initiatives such as student housing. Moreover, the lack of tax regime analysis and market rents often generates territorial and real estate capital gains. France, for instance, has introduced a tax on capital gains limiting this damage.

The group also discussed the theme of unlocking housing assets. About 50% of homeowners have single-family oversized houses compared to their needs. On this matter, the group focused on specific questions: Is it more cost-effective to redevelop or build a new house? Economically speaking, is demolishing and building new properties more advantageous than improving the existing ones? Do solutions that work “for all” really work?

Many realities in Italy require differentiation; when going through this process, the questions to focus on are: who undergoes redevelopment? What do residents think of the redevelopment intervention? Are market or urban well-being logics followed?

The revision of housing policies and forms comprehends, for example, a student choosing to live with an elderly to reduce his/her expenses or family-centred systems (Roma community).

Neighbourhood committees have effectively engaged in dialogues with citizens; one of the primary needs shared is the need for “socialisation”, creating a solid community in contact with institutions and organisation of initiatives with the presence of the administration where citizens share their viewpoints could be a possible solution. For instance, in Barcelona, if a private renovation project has some repercussions on the public space (such as renovating a building front or constructing a commercial establishment that increases traffic), there is a shared responsibility to think about the urban context and the impact the intervention could have on the public area. In Vienna, new construction projects are designed through zoning which comprehend the identification of the city’s areas that could generate value, investments and redevelopment improving the surrounding areas and benefitting the entire city. Moreover, the differentiation of rent levels and multiple entries are also considered.

The discussion also revolved around issues related to housing. For instance, the right to housing is not included in the Constitution, even though it contains multiple related rights such as work, health, education, or property. The right to housing is only guaranteed when owning a property (solo recognised housing model). The house is not always

synonymous with security, especially for vulnerable and marginalised classes (such as minors, migrants, or victims of domestic violence). Critical geography and urban sociology studies considered different solutions that attempt to evaluate these dynamics and the territorial divergences, which enclose the conformation of the territory and its relational dynamics. Another aspect to consider is welfare policies, which leave out a large part of the population that does not fall into the categories of minors, migrants, or victims of domestic violence but still represents a vulnerable category.

Nowadays, affording a basic standard of living is challenging. Therefore, the group agreed that cohousing and other alternative living forms represent an adequate solution to the increase in rental costs and properties. Cohousing in Milan is part of Social Housing RES and is entitled to discounts on development charges. There is a need to raise the question of what could be a reformulation of the public's role in facilitating and promoting relationships between those offering and those seeking homes with controlled rents. The departments in charge could be the housing, welfare and culture sectors. Some examples are the 'Diaconia Valdese', which produces social housing and community centres capable of covering temporary and extended stays, and 'Freak of Nature', which maps vacant spaces.

## **Recommendations:**

### *Housing Vulnerabilities*

- The group also discussed possible solutions to these matters, considering the right to housing directly connected to other rights, such as work, health, and parenthood. For instance, temporary work time implies accompanying the child to school and arriving at work. Considering these dynamics and building houses in strategic areas of the city could facilitate parenthood constraints.

- Moreover, the interaction of different disciplines (sociology, architecture, and urban planning), financial entities (the third sector, stakeholders, welfare policies, and private entities) and the community (social streets, neighbourhood committees, residents, workers, city users, and homeless individuals) can contribute in taking into account different dimensions building following a financially sustainable social well-being logic.
- Finally, building ad hoc projects comprehending the design's specific necessities can prevent problems derived from single design models. For instance, elderly people are firmly committed to their homes, which often burdens the family; establishing an ad hoc state agency can represent a solution to limit costs. The elderly could give the house to the agency, which provides a lifetime pension, receiving help to find another home more suitable to their increasing needs (smaller, more accessible, closer to other family members, etc.). Upon the person's death, his/her beneficiaries can choose to sell the property or keep the house and settle the debt with the agency.

### **Alternative forms of ownership**

- The group also discussed the controversy between land consumption and reconstruction. There is a need to imagine solutions to elevate housing tensions outside the capital cities by establishing social housing management, recovering vacant public properties, and implementing resident coops for rent only.
- Youth and Housing Emergency. Among the priorities of intervention to face the housing emergency, the group identified the necessity to create a database of public and private vacancies while enhancing large-sized accommodations and reclaiming private vacant spaces. Other ideas include the creation of a youth housing coalition. The suggestion is to avoid short-term tourist rentals and implement a national law on property

tax where everyone pays the same tax on property (1 house-25 house) due to the lack of a policy that sees housing as a common good and not an economic investment.

- Reinforce housing self-production. It entails the support of non-profit actors in housing production (cooperatives) by simplifying the administrative process to allocate decentralised public lands.



# **The right to housing and alternative forms of ownership**

## **A southern european perspective**

*Dimitra Siatitsa*<sup>1</sup>

The ongoing and severe housing affordability crisis of the last several years has triggered the debate on the limits of the dominant housing paradigm, increasingly commodified and financialised, and rekindled attention towards alternative models of housing provision and ownership. Alternatives that could provide affordable, decommodified, democratic and secure housing solutions in a global context characterised by increasing uncertainty and inequalities.

### **Debates and experimentations on alternative ownership models**

When discussing housing, alternative ownership models encompass a range of collective or shared ownership structures like housing cooperatives, community land trusts, limited equity coops, and tenant coops. These models stand in contrast to traditional public (state) or private property ownership. Cohabitation and cohousing projects promoted by intentional communities can be added to this spectrum,

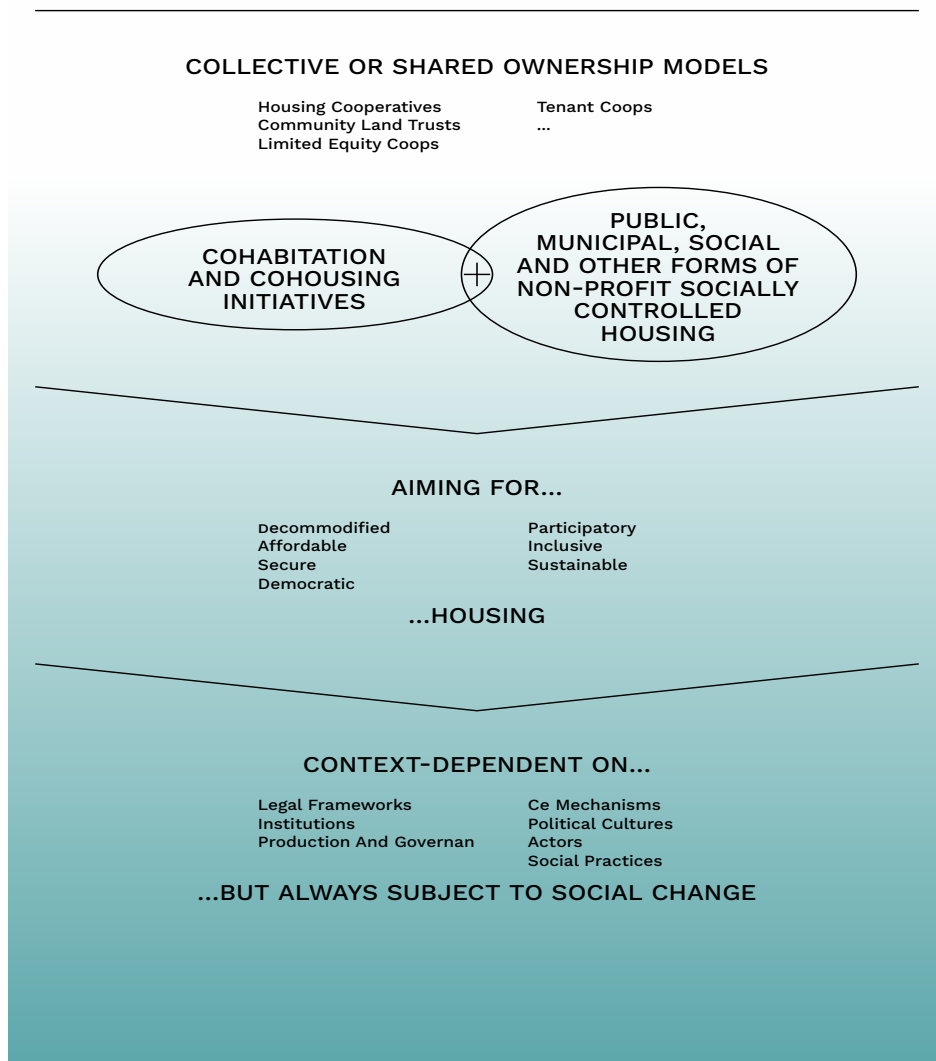
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<sup>1</sup> The video interview with Dimitra Siatitsa is available at the following link: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k0zhz\\_cVD3w](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k0zhz_cVD3w)

although they do not always question property relations and ownership rights.

Within the current context, where the significance of public as a common value is challenged by the predominance of private property and private interests (backed by state institutions), alternative definitions could also encompass diverse socially controlled housing models, including municipal and non-profit initiatives prioritising human rights, public benefit, and the common good. These alternatives challenge the mainstream market-driven housing paradigm, advocating for solutions beyond individualised access based on mortgage lending or personal wealth, claiming also a more prominent role for public

### What housing alternatives?



and collective/community social actors. Furthermore, such housing and ownership models can provide alternatives to social isolation and individualisation, to the current unsustainable model of urban development and consumption, to the disempowerment and misrecognition of minorities and vulnerable populations, to the power imbalances and limited social control over processes of urban transformation.

The term “alternative” implies a shift in the framing of property and ownership rights within housing systems. With an increasing dominance of actors driven by profit maximisation, houses are often treated as financial assets rather than dwellings. Emphasising the social purpose and use value of property over its exchange value, redefining property relations and ownership rights becomes crucial for political projects aiming to tackle social inequalities, curb wealth accumulation, and promote socially just urban and housing policies—as highlighted in works such as Piketty’s and debates on the commons.

Despite their important structural and internal limitations, such alternatives are increasingly recognised as integral components of the solution to growing housing inequalities and exclusions. Towards this end, there is extensive work dedicated to mapping, analysing, and generating in-depth knowledge about their specificities and increasing engagement in processes of policy and knowledge transfer, exchange, and mutual support, to understand how the emergence and co-creation of such models can be effectively supported in diverse contexts.

### **The role of context and conjuncture for the emergence of alternatives**

Alternatives are not isolated utopias imagined and created by pioneering groups/communities or by enlightened public authorities. On the contrary, they are embedded into broader societal structures, perceptions, practices and dynamics. The debate on alternative ownership models needs to be contextualised to elucidate the socio-political preconditions that facilitate the emergence of such alternatives within the collective imaginary at specific moments and places. This is of

particular relevance in contexts, such as the southern European one, where there is a strong domination of homeownership, not only in terms of high rates but also in terms of societal aspirations, institutional bias and broad political consensus towards this particular tenure.

Since 2008, Southern European countries have been found in the maelstrom of the financial crisis and austerity politics, which has strongly impacted housing conditions and housing policies in these countries. As Hall and Massey (2010) suggest, crises are unexpected critical moments that can produce important change, and indeed we can detect significant change in the housing regimes of southern European countries, but not in a uniform way. The diverse impacts and policy responses to the crisis produced very different social and political struggles, claims and practices in relation to the right to housing and potential alternatives, at different temporalities.

Perhaps, Spain and Barcelona in particular, are the most emblematic cases of a transforming housing movement strongly framed around the right to housing, since the mid-2000s throughout consecutive crises. The aggressive introduction of global financial players and corporate actors into the housing market in the aftermath of the financial crisis -stepping on the previous domination of large promoters and mortgage finance in housing production and consumption- has been key to this evolution. The movement -understood here as a constellation of groups, organisations and waves of collective action- has been very responsive to emerging housing issues at each (crisis) conjuncture, generating important social capital, knowledge, actors and networks. Most importantly, it has given a new potential to the interplay between social movements/claims with public policies, institutions and governance models, as part of the New Municipalism movement. Housing has been at the epicentre of municipal policies, advancing also the case for a new generation of housing cooperatives based on the grant-of-use model, as a small but crucial part of the local housing strategy (Anon, 2016). The development of the cohousing sector has been an experimentation and learning lab that pushed the boundaries of what can be done, empowering community and social and solidari-

ty economy actors, and providing inspiration and know-how for other cities. However, this has not been the case in all of Southern Europe (at least not until now). Despite rising needs and hardships, aggravated by the neoliberalisation and dismantling of social housing policies taking place already since the 90s, demand and aspirations for alternative housing and ownership models remain limited.

## The Right to Housing in Southern Europe

Common characteristics of Southern European Housing Systems, identified in comparative studies, include high homeownership rates and predisposition, a small social rental sector (0-5% nationally, up to 10% in some cities), a transient rental sector mostly led by private actors, a significant reliance on family networks for welfare and housing (thus characterised as familistic), housing policies focused on boosting construction and real estate, and elevated rates of second housing and unoccupied dwellings.

The cooperative housing sector, although embedded in a strong history of cooperatives, acted mostly as a non-profit or low-cost promoter in the market providing housing for owner occupation. Thus, only part of the residential stock produced by the different forms of housing/construction cooperatives has remained under collective ownership in Portugal and Italy, and none in Spain and Greece.

	HOUSING STOCK	EMPTY	TOTAL SOCIAL HOUSING	COOPERATIVE HOUSING UNITS
<i>ITALY</i>	31,208,161	7,072,984 (22.7%)	3.5-3.8% 850,000	Undivided co-ownership cooperatives 40,000
<i>SPAIN</i>	25.900.000	7,124.930 (28.3%)	2-3.3?% 270,000	New generation coops in BCN 434
<i>PORTUGAL</i>	5.968.000	1.868.428 (31.9%)	2% 130,000	3% 200,000
<i>GREECE</i>	6.371.901	2,249,813 (35.3%)	No social housing -	No cooperative housing -

Source: data from census 2011 and from *Housing Europe (2023) State of Housing in Europe 2023*, \* for Portugal data are from the 2021 *Housing Europe Report*.

The promotion of homeownership, as an alternative to larger public or social rental sectors, although often framed as a cultural issue related to the late urbanisation of southern European populations, has been a strategic political choice for political consent and social control/peace, with important societal implications. Access to homeownership has also played the role of a welfare substitute and safety net in very unstable and precarious socio-economic contexts.

Ownership of homes and multiple properties within the family economy, viewed as assets that can be utilised for various purposes over time to meet extended family needs, have influenced the perception of housing access as individualistic or family-bound. At the same time, this allowed households to profit from urban upgrading processes, containing conflicts around housing. In this sense, it is understandable to say that in Southern Europe “the right to housing” has been reframed as a “right to ownership” (Allen et al. 2004), while collective welfare rights have been defeated by individual interests (Arbaci, 2008). Thus, there are strong political, economic, material and cultural filters to the acknowledgement and legitimation of collective housing alternatives.

### **Differences that matter**

Still, there are significant differences among these “most similar contexts”, multiplied by regional and local variations (particularly in Spain and Italy which have much more federal/decentralised governance systems) and transformed by neoliberalisation and austerity, that shape perceptions of the right to housing and potentials for alternative housing ownership models to emerge. Four aspects of the housing regime can be highlighted as of particular importance (Siatitsa, 2014).

*The distribution of property and social structure of tenures.* Who owns and how is housing distributed? All southern European countries were characterised by relatively equal access to homeownership concerning Northern and Central European countries (Norris and Winston, 2012). However, income gap polarisation in owner occupation and access to

## CITY DIVIDE

mortgage since the 90s has produced more unequal patterns within different tenures, except Greece which still exhibits a rather equal distribution of income groups in all tenures.

Owner (total)	OWNER (TOTAL)			OWNER WITH MORTGAGE			TENANT FREE MARKET		
	Below 60%	Above 60%	Inequality index*	Below 60%	Above 60%	Inequality index*	Below 60%	Above 60%	Inequality index*
UE	50.8	72.7	0.70	9.9	27.6	0.36	28.5	18.6	1.53
GREECE	68.3	73.9	0.92	9.4	11.4	0.82	20.3	20.7	0.98
ITALY	60.8	77.6	0.78	8.0	16.3	0.49	24.8	14.6	1.70
SPAIN	65.7	81.0	0.70	18.3	33.6	0.54	28.7	12.1	2.37
PORTUGAL	65.1	80.3	0.81	21.9	39.2	0.56	16.7	10.4	1.61

Source: EU-SILC survey [ilc\_lvh02] data for 2022

\* The inequality index calculates the below/above 60% ratio. An index of 1 represents an equal distribution of poor and non-poor population in tenures. Values below 1 demonstrate higher presence of non-poor population in a tenure (homeownership). Values above 1 demonstrate higher presence of poor population (Free market rental)

Equally important is the type of landlord class, whether small or larger scale, individual or institutional. The concentration of residential property in the hands of public, private or social actors, thus the existence of any sort of collective, professionalised or corporate rented housing, makes a crucial difference in terms of collective claim-raising and political subjectification.

*The mechanisms of housing production.* Who participates in and who profits? What is the type/scale of housing promoters and the role of the financial sector? For example, access to homeownership has been much more dependent on mortgage lending in Spain and Portugal (more than 30% of households are homeowners with mortgages) in relation to Greece and Italy (less than 15%). Important differences also exist in terms of the actors involved in the construction sector (large-scale private and state promotion in Spain and Portugal, mixed public and small-scale self-promotion in Italy, and domination of small-scale actors in Greece), that have shaped the urban fabric and the structure of the housing stock (Allen, et al., 2004).

*The role of the state and policy responsiveness.* The presence of administrative structures and institutional infrastructures for housing policies that accommodate, even partially, emerging needs, and the degree of governance openness or closeness, especially at the local le-

vel, can influence social discontent, but also allow for experimentation on alternatives.

The existence of an ongoing public debate gives visibility and politicising housing issues. The availability of reliable data, research and analysis, and an active community of academics and experts that nurture the public dialogue, intervene in policy-making, and ally with social struggles and claim-making processes are key in generating alternative visions and practices. Political traditions and the history of previous housing struggles are also important in this matter.

### **Alternative Housing Perspectives in Southern Europe**

There is limited space in this short note to expand on all the above issues. Challenges for the right to housing and alternative ownership models in southern Europe have to do with both historical path-dependencies of the housing regimes at the national, regional or local level, but also with the reinforced trends of housing commodification and financialisation in the post-crisis period. The re-discovery and re-estimation of alternative ownership models in Southern European countries need to become part of a broader vision for the right to housing that attributes a central role in public and social actors, against the hegemony of market-based and financialised policy solutions.

As Ferreri and Vidal suggest (2022), collaborative and cooperative housing can become part of an array of public policies to enable affordable and accessible housing alternatives by building long-term alliances between state and cooperative actors. Familistic or individualistic dispositions could be curved by looking at the growing segment of outsiders to homeownership (including deceived middle classes) and unmet needs -precarious youth, low incomes, migrants, vulnerabilities etc. In this sense, social housing should not be understood as competing with pioneering alternatives, but rather as a common effort to develop institutional infrastructures and know-how that broadens the scope of available affordable and democratic housing solutions, particularly at the municipal level.



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The Southern European cultural and historical affiliations can provide a common ground for deepening such processes of knowledge exchange, networking and alliances towards a common goal.

**Section 3**  
**Climate transforming**  
**cities**

# **Inclusive urban regeneration: opportunities for an open city**

*Gonçalo Canto Moniz,<sup>1</sup> Isabel Ferreira,  
Beatriz Caetana and Nathalie Nunes*

## **About the conflicts in peripheral areas of the cities**

The peripheral areas of the cities are territories of conflict. This conflict results from a lack of dialogue between the peripheries and the city center. Usually, those who live within the peripheral areas of the cities are excluded from the center. Modern urban plans established specific areas for municipal housing developments, although there is a critical lack of urban infrastructure such as streets, roads, trains, and buses, among others. Ironically, in many cases, highways and train lines cross the territory, creating barriers. These barriers are physical and psychological walls that divide society into abyssal lines. (Sousa Santos, B. 2007) In this sense, the right to the quality of life is only in the central areas of the cities, where inclusion, accessibility, and harmony are not so much in danger. People are not heard in the periphery or the suburbs, and their voices are far from those of the decision-makers. Every time there is a societal challenge, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, it is in the periphery that people suffer more and lose the fragile conquests of their lives.

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<sup>1</sup> The video interview with Gonçalo Canto Moniz is available at the following link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AAwHik3dz6g>

Nevertheless, the peripheral areas of the cities result from different occupations and uses that are, in some way, contradictory. There is an opposition between agriculture and industry, old farms and social housing, old roads (Roman or medieval) and highways, green and grey areas, nature and pollution, etc. This palimpsest creates rich memories significant for the local communities, although not valorized by the center, by the outsider. In fact, “the periphery is the territory of opportunity,” as mentioned by Andreas Philippopoulos-Mihalopoulos in the About the City conference of 2018. It is where things can be done differently by correcting the mistake of massive urbanization. There are ruins of buildings from the past; urban voids are waiting to play an active role, there is still a relation with agriculture, there is still a relation with rural traditions, there is intense activism and associationism, there is an autochthonous flora, and a rich biodiversity.



Fig. 1 Accessibility to social housing neighborhoods, Falcão Neighbourhood, Campanhã, Porto. Photo by Carlos Barradas.

In this sense, the periphery is the territory for an inclusive urban regeneration where the local community can co-create solutions for their everyday challenges, taking nature and culture as a common goal. It aims to promote an inclusive public space that is at the center of the challenge of doing and living the city as an “open system” to encourage a democratic space based on three dimensions, as proposed

by Richard Sennett: “1. passage territories; 2. incomplete form; 3. development narratives”. (Sennett, R (2006))

To face the inclusive approach to urban regeneration, nature can be the leitmotif to engage the community towards a climate change attitude. Nature-based solutions (NBS), as proposed by the environmental sciences, “are actions which are inspired by, supported by or copied from nature. Some involve using and enhancing existing natural solutions to challenges, while others are exploring more novel solutions, for example, mimicking how non-human organisms and communities cope with environmental extremes” (European Commission, Directorate-General for Research and Innovation, 2015). But, this approach is not enough because the change happens when the community is also part of the solution. Research demonstrates “how NBSs may serve to sustain or challenge issues of inequity in urban planning and development processes, and whether alternative means of participation can overcome long-standing issues of exclusion” (Bulkeley, (2020).

### **Rethinking inclusive urban regeneration as an opportunity**

The inclusive urban regeneration strategy is not only a buzzword for dialogue with sustainable discourse. It needs to create the environment for co-production through the identification of actors interested in being involved, taking in consideration these four dimensions:

- a) Interdisciplinarity to integrate different complementary knowledge, to harmonise concepts and methodologies from different perspectives, to understand the distinct scientific position such as as Architecture, Landscape Architecture, Engineering, Sociology, Geography, Economy, Psychology, among other;
- b) Intersectoriality to involve different sectors of society, and to establish democratic relations between different actors, namely academia, local and regional government, third sector, companies (quadruple helix);

- c) Interculturality to share knowledge produced by different cultures and to explore North-South and East-West dialogue, namely North-South, East-West; Urban, Rural, Coastal, Forest;
- d) Intersectionality to promote the inclusion of different groups working in the field and to overcome social stigma, namely in terms of race, gender, age, geo-location, specificities.

In the frame of the URBiNAT H2020 project, inclusive urban regeneration is based on co-creating nature-based solutions by activating living labs. In this sense, inclusive urban regeneration puts in dialogue co-creation (participation), nature-based solutions (healthy corridors), living labs (co-governance), and public space (social practices) (Nunes, et al., 2021).

Co-creation means that the local community develops a participatory process to improve the quality of life in their territory. This participatory process is framed by the co-creation methodology that proposes an open and flexible process adapted to each participatory culture and is organized in four interactive stages: co-diagnostic to identify the uses and needs; co-design to suggest ideas and develop solutions; co-implementation to activate actions and build products; co-monitoring to evaluate the process and monitoring the effects of NBS. (Mateus, et al., 2021d)

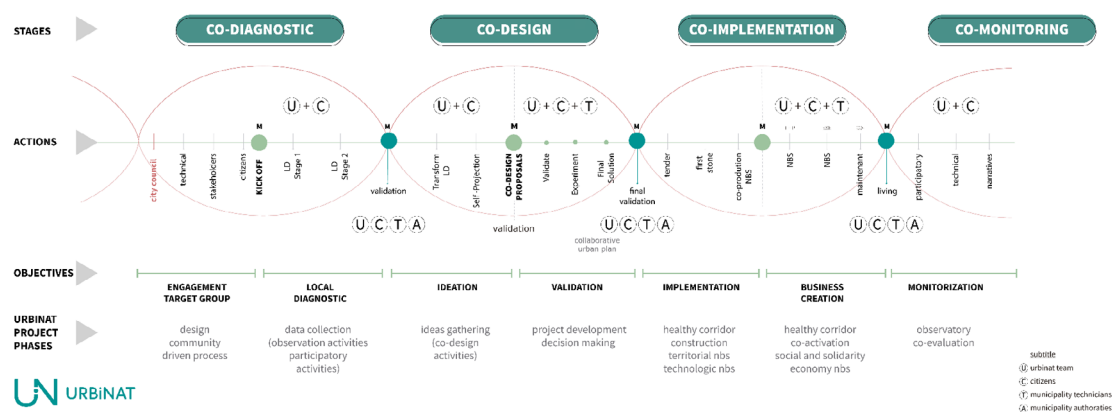


Fig. 2 URBiNAT co-creation process. Diagram by GUDA/CES

In the context of Nature-based solutions, the challenge of co-producing a healthy corridor (HC) is an opportunity to rethink the concept of NBS through a social approach. To inspire the co-production process, URBiNAT developed a living NBS catalog that organizes territorial and technological solutions, embracing products and infrastructures and a participatory, social, and solidarity economy comprising processes and services. (Conserva, et al., 2021c)

The co-production of the healthy corridor (HC) urban plan in URBiNAT was developed under the living labs framework, activated in each community to promote a bottom-up process, where citizens could gradually take control of the participatory process by developing solutions for their needs together with other actors. (Moniz, 2021a)

This co-governance model aims to establish a roadmap that supports solutions co-creation and creates a democratic decision platform. Political representatives, municipal technicians, academia, local associations, and citizens develop together a municipal committee for the healthy corridors to experiment with “new ways of working together; going beyond usual practices and comfort zones; and making the most of different understandings and knowledge for co-creation.” (Ferreira, et al., 2022)

## **Achievements and challenges toward an inclusive and “open city”**

The eight URBiNAT cities—Porto, Nantes, Sofia, Hoje-Taastrup, Brussels, Siena, Nova Gorica, and Khorramabad—developed an urban strategy for the healthy corridor according to the urban context and the local community’s needs and dreams. The urban plan’s analyses, taking into consideration Richard Sennett’s three dimensions, may reveal the healthy corridor as an open city.

The healthy corridors are “passage territories” where opportunities for change can occur. Three strategies were adopted: a park that organizes a green infrastructure (Porto and Nova Gorica); a path with several places for community interaction (Sofia, Hoje-Taastrup, Brus-

sels, and Khorramabad); and a circular path connecting NBS (Nantes and Siena). These corridors aim to overcome the abyssal lines with solutions that link not only urban areas but also people and projects.

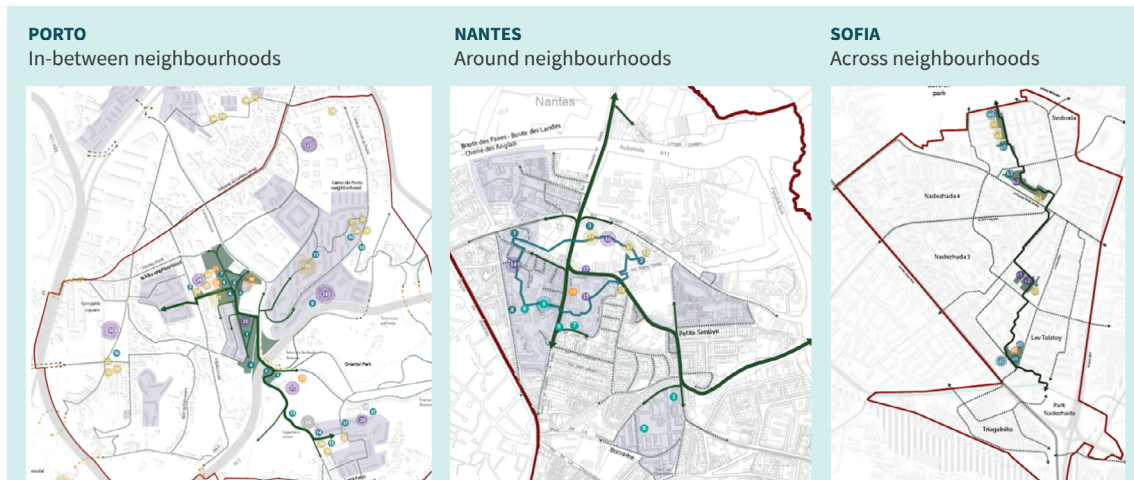


Fig. 3 URBiNAT healthy corridor strategies. Diagrams by Porto, NAntes and Sofia, with Vitório Leite (UC/CES)

The healthy corridors are clusters of NBS that combine material and immaterial solutions with “incomplete forms” in the sense that the use is as essential as the green structure. The proposals co-created with the citizens for these places take different shapes according to the activities that emerge from the living labs - a market, a pedagogical garden, a community farm, a heritage route with yoga in Porto, a theatre, a pedagogical winter garden, a playground, sports facilities in Sofia, benches to read and plant, community urban garden in Nantes, etc.

Each healthy corridor reinvents its “narrative” every day, depending on the actors who take the lead. Although these are territories of conflict and tension (between disciplines, sectors, cultures, and people), the solutions that emerge from participation are also opportunities for an open and inclusive future.

In this way, the open space can become public and inclusive of urban life, as Henri Lefebvre claimed, because “it is not only supported by social relations but is also produced and produced by social relations.” (Lefebvre, H., 1991)





Fig. 4 shows the Social market “Campmarket,” an activity to test future implementation with the local sellers Campanhã, Porto. Photo by Gonçalo Canto Moniz. The model and activity were created by Inês Reis, Vitório Leite, Gonçalo Canto Moniz, and Luís Miguel Correia.

# The Dynamic Interplay Between Cities and Climate Change

*Presidents: Ilaria Beretta, Alessandra Terenzi, Federico del Prete, Anna Geronetta*

*Rapporteurs: Niccolò Dazzi, Chiara Savanco, Eleonora Ciscato*

## Overview

Participants from C40, Legambiente Lombardia, Cittadini per l'aria, ForestaMi, We are Urban, Diciassette, University of Milano-Bicocca and the Catholic University of Sacred Heart divided in 3 working tables. The topics verged around resilience and adaptation to climate change, sustainable mobility and air pollution mitigation.

The discussion started with acknowledging existing projects for land management and climate change mitigation. Participants highlighted the efficacy of climate shelters, which refugees adapt to protect from heat waves. The focus shifted to observe more concrete projects like ForestaMi, which aims to increase tree capacity from the grassroots level through agreements with public administration.

The group analysed how public administration's interest varies depending on its objectives. The Person-Ecosystem relationship was explored as an alternative to the Man-Tree relationship, suggesting a mindset shift regarding environmental project development. The concept of green spaces in Italy, specifically in Milan, is still predominantly aesthetic rather than socially beneficial. Green care might involve less aesthetically curated but ecologically beneficial greenery,

exemplified by the wild and free green space in Piazza d'Armi, Baggio. Challenges in smaller municipalities were identified, emphasising the difficulty of transitioning. Examples from abroad, such as citizen activism in Rotterdam, highlighted the potential for direct citizen involvement in changing urban planning. The discussion also touched upon the importance of investing in revitalising existing local structures rather than new constructions, with the Italian example of the Urban Jungle in Prato.

Emphasis was also given to intervention priorities within the transport and heating energy sectors. Communication was considered essential due to the “invisible” nature of the issue. Proposed actions included the increase of media pressure to highlight the link between pollution and health, the emphasis on the positive aspects of interventions for well-being and the involvement of medical professionals.

Data collection initiatives involving private entities, businesses, merchants, and universities were suggested within schools and public places. Finally, the group discussed the theme of public transport, focusing specifically on the safety and efficiency of railways, which should implement extended opening and be multimodal, allowing the load of bikes with onboard racks.

Various points related to safety, mobility and accessibility in the city (with a prevalent but not exclusive focus on Milan) were also raised.

The safety aspect is linked to cycling mobility in general and the discussion of gender and personal safety of young women. At the same time, accessibility is related to costs and those who live in peripheral areas and, therefore, experience daily difficulties regarding delays, among others. The image of collective transport is still too negative and full of stigma. Therefore, the group proposed citizen collaboration for safer public transport, infrastructure development, and public policy planning to encourage sustainable mobility. They emphasised the need for local adaptation rather than copying models from the northern countries (Holland and Denmark). The importance of participatory democracy and the role of citizens in supporting policies and investments were highlighted to ensure alignment with actual de-

mand and users' needs. In summary, the discussions revolved around the challenges and opportunities in sustainable mobility, focusing on safety, accessibility, cultural perceptions, and the importance of involving citizens in the decision-making process.

## **Recommended steps**

### Sustainable Mobility:

- Implement greater controls and safety on board the vehicles, specifically re-evaluating the choice of automated surface lines.
- Focus on the creation of infrastructures and the strengthening of public services, such as underground lines, so that alternative means of transport to private cars are effectively accessible and convenient for a wide range of citizens.
- Increase cycle paths and teaching programs around the theme of riding bicycles.
- Plan and implement public policies through a process of co-creation with citizen participation to create and encourage new modes of sustainable mobility that are supported, have wide users and exploit local resources and technologies with attention paid to the geographical and cultural specificities of the city in question.
- Accessibility: Gentrifying effects of specific transportation modes: the bicycle as an exclusive means.
- Cultural barriers to change (privileging cars and considering public transportation second-rate)

### Air Pollution Mitigation:

- Priority intervention in transportation and the energy sector for heating
- Increase data collection and raise awareness effects of air pollution.

## CITY DIVIDE

- Involve everyone in data collection (shopkeepers, etc.) with an interdisciplinary approach.
- Development of railways and multimodal transportation.
- Depave urban areas.
- Mapping existing constraints in residential areas (installing solar panels, etc.).
- Communicate the connection between pollution/health and the positive aspects of living in an unpolluted city.

### Resilience and Adaptation to Climate Change:

- Climate shelters: resilience to survive heatwaves and create gathering spaces for communities
- Reduce asphalt coverage and create more open spaces with tree cover and reforestation. (For example, the Forestami project)
- Urban jungles: projects to be integrated as green islands (Prato di Boeri project).
- Cultural dimension: shift from a human-tree relationship to a person-ecosystem relationship that allows for compromises (eliminate parking, etc.)
- Green as an aesthetic enhancement factor: a meadow that grows undisturbed incorporates biodiversity: build a different concept of green that is aesthetic, beautiful, and practical.
- Citizen action (Netherlands: depaving sidewalks to create green islands by planting greenery)
- Building heritage: reconstruction of present buildings
- Mapping abandoned buildings

### Common Grounds:

- Raise awareness/communicate about themes and problems not yet known and explicit (invisible damage)
- Cultural dimensions (misconceptions: cars vs green spaces, etc.)
- Meaning and application of participation

- Adapt climate policies to social dimensions: actions in different contexts for interested social categories and areas (central/peripheral)
- Mapping
- Reduce asphalt coverage, depave
- Climate shelters: Urban jungles
- Eco-benefit

# The Health Co-Benefits of Urban Microclimate Mitigation

*Matteo Innocenti*

Climate change poses a threat to the ecological foundations of the planet and undermines the social, physical, and mental health of its inhabitants, exacerbating existing social, economic, and health inequalities. (Kjellstrom & McMichael, 2013)



Photo by Michele Lapini

To mitigate the impact of this crisis, it is crucial to develop and implement specific policies not only to slow the progression of climate change and its effects but also to enable as many people as possible to adapt and prepare adequately for new scenarios especially in urban areas. (Berkhout, 2013). These scenarios are marked by evident social, economic and infrastructural disparities which make the ability to respond to the effects of climate change heterogeneous and unequal (Innocenti, 2022).

Among the anthropogenic factors with the most significant impact on the social, physical, and psychological health of densely populated urban centres there are rising temperatures and increasing pollution. Only the implementation of mitigation policies can help reduce these effects. Planting trees, creating green spaces, and urging governments to limit the growth of cemented areas are some initiatives to counteract the effects of the urban heat island, a specific phenomenon of extreme heat in urban areas (Deilami, Kamruzzaman & Liu 2018).

The urban heat island effect leads to local overheating in cities, about 4-5°C higher than in rural areas due to the thermal and radiative characteristics of urban surfaces, such as asphalt and concrete (Santamouris, 2020). The primary cause of this effect is the lack of greenery and extensive cementing of urban surfaces, while the secondary cause is the waste heat generated by energy use, such as air conditioners and various types of exhaust hoods. The urban heat island effect contributes to increased drought in urban centres; it worsens water and air quality by increasing concentrations of pollutants such as ozone and PM2.5 (Fang & Gu 2022). Monthly precipitation is higher in rural areas compared to those in cities, in part due to this phenomenon.

In urban environments, heat and air pollution are responsible for extreme physical and psychological damage, while regarding pollution, major culprits include ultrafine particulate matter (PM2.5), fine particulate matter (PM10), ozone (O3), and nitrogen dioxide (NO2).

While most people understand that air pollution causes lung problems, few connect smog exposure to other conditions such as heart



attacks, strokes, dementia, kidney diseases, diabetes, or the harmful effects it has on the foetus during pregnancy. (Kampac & Castanas, 2008) These pollutants also seem to play a central role in the worsening of cognitive abilities, with PM2.5 estimated to be responsible for about 21% of neurodegenerative diseases worldwide and for the early exposure which affects the development of fundamental cognitive skills, memory, and auditory attention in children (Costa et al., 2020).

Water pollution, on the rise, has devastating effects on human health, caused not only by visible waste such as plastic but also by hidden contaminants such as industrial chemicals, petroleum derivatives, agricultural pesticides, heavy metals, and other toxic materials, including mercury, microplastics, and coal toxins that strongly contaminate the food chain (Schwarzenbach et al., 2010).

In regards to the effects of extreme temperatures, there is evidence that their increase negatively impacts emergency room accesses and hospitalisations for both general and specific mental health problems (Yoo, Eun-hye et al., 2021). The distress caused by the sensation of heat can also increase psychological suffering, especially in vulnerable individuals which leads them to require emergency room access or admission to mental health wards. Suicide rates also increases with rising temperatures, air pollution and increasingly extreme weather events such as downbursts and fires. (Heo, et al., 2021)

Furthermore, the reduction of cognitive function and attention due to the rise in temperature can increase levels of aggression and excitability, reduce emotional self-regulation capacity, and lead to the obsessive formulation of negative and hostile thoughts, generating a psychological condition potentially capable of compromising the human natural conflict mitigation capabilities that prevent the use of violence (Cedeño et al., 2018; Mahendran et al., 2021).

In addition to this, several studies show how heat and smog impact community health by reducing collective rational judgement and social cohesion, consequently leading to an exponential increase in crime rates. It has been demonstrated that in densely populated and cer-

tified urban centres, the implementation of prevention interventions, combined with the application of microclimate mitigation policies, can have a beneficial effect in reducing the intensity and frequency of such harmful responses (Harlan & Ruddell, 2011).

In light of the risks faced by urban centres, it is crucial to increase both their climate resilience and that of their citizens. While the implementation of mitigation policies protects citizens from the effects of the ongoing climate crisis, health prevention policies make them prepared to respond to its health-related effects. For example, an individual can become more resilient to pollution effects not only by lowering urban PM<sub>2.5</sub> levels but also through direct and preventive interventions on its lifestyle habits, such as quitting smoking or engaging in physical and/or motor activities. (Fernandez-Guzman et al., 2023)

Such virtuous behaviours are essential to preserve health and make individuals physically and mentally capable of responding to atmospheric stressors such as extreme heat or pollution. Moreover, it has been demonstrated that a joint intervention of health prevention and urban mitigation substantially impacts the city's economy, consequently reducing public health expenses.

In light of these considerations, massive and urgent urban interventions are needed in all sectors to ensure not only social, economic, and health equity but also fair opportunities for adaptation and resilience to climate change. Placing public health at the centre of the response to the climate crisis is the only way to ensure a healthier and more sustainable future for all. Efforts must be directed towards creating effective resources and implementing consciously and appropriately designed infrastructural plans as an effective response to citizens' vulnerability. Furthermore, it is necessary to increase these plans' resilience, preventing further socio-economic and health inequalities.

In this phase, in addition to discussing the climate crisis and ways to address it globally, it is important to carefully evaluate the effects and possible solutions within urban contexts. The success of mitigation

policies could lead to substantial economic benefits, allowing funds to be concentrated on other health issues requiring the same attention.

In this regard, it is important for health and urban planning professionals to work together synergistically to demonstrate the health and social impact of air pollution and rising air temperatures in urban areas and to increase awareness of the co-benefits that climate change mitigation policies can bring to urban areas. In this way, the health co-benefits of climate change mitigation policies can be presented as a strong argument to instigate policymakers to take action.

# **Section 4**

## **Rewriting the Fate of Cities**

# Capturing the Essence of Cities

## From Inequality to Interdependence

*Ronke Oluwadare*

On Friday, November 10th, I made my entrance to the Tate Modern Museum for an exhibition titled “A World in Common: Contemporary African Photography,” curated by Osei Bonsu. (Bonsu O., 2023) Many shots depict glimpses of cities in the African continent, and it’s impossible for me not to move from one work to another, carrying with me the title of the About a City festival I would attend the following Monday: Inequality is not the future of cities.

I am struck by a series of photographs titled “Mutation,” portraying Lagos (Esiebo A.). The author, Andrew Esiebo, describing what he sees through his lens, shows us that even in a city where very little is planned, especially with consideration for the basic needs of society and even less for the improvement of millions of people living below the poverty line, people will always find a way to survive. He continues to show us a Lagos where pedestrians without sidewalks create their walkways, weaving in and out of traffic; highways become parking lots for container trucks, and informal housing is repeatedly razed to make way for luxury real estate projects—homes are continually rebuilt by their resilient occupants.

The question that arises is: why resist the repulsive force of cities now characterised by high prices, pollution, and isolation? As early as 1982, Marris stated, “The relationships that have the greatest importance for us are those with particular people we love [...] and someti-

mes with particular places [...] that we invest with the same emotional quality” (Marris, 1982).

Each of us knows, in different shades, this particular emotional dimension, we all had some kind of relationship, pleasant or unpleasant, with a place in the present or in the past.

The themes of cognitive, affective, motivational, and identity processes that are built within the relationship between humans and the environment are fundamental not only for psychology but also for sociology, architecture, engineering, and geography.

Thanks to various studies, we know that for adults, the quality of activities offered by the residential community and their interest, emotional connection, propensity for engagement, and sense of belonging in both these activities and the residential space are determining factors.

However, in recent decades, we have built physical and social spaces that have pushed us toward what the Care Collective calls ‘organised loneliness’. Cities seem planned for efficiency and productivity, making us feel hyper-individualistic subjects in constant competition. In a context like the one just described, inequality inevitably worsens. Inequality impacts access to the satisfaction of basic needs and the complex relationship between people and their socio-physical environment.

If economists propose the remodelling of housing and neighbourhood structures to reduce inequalities, supporting the idea that creating mixed and inclusive spaces within cities increases the quality of life within them. Will it be sufficient to break down the social and individual costs of inequalities?

I believe that in our cities, we must return to feeling interdependent beings who act with mutual care and recognize themselves in their vulnerabilities. I borrow the words of Bell Hooks in “Teaching Community, A Pedagogy of Hope” to emphasise that “learning to live and work in a diversified community requires engaging in complex analysis, abandoning the desire for everything to be simple. Segregation simplifies; integration requires dealing with multiple modes of knowledge and interaction.” She adds, “We must learn to address our

differences, celebrating them when we can, and rigorously challenging tensions when they arise. It will always be more important, even necessary, to be aware that we are more than our differences, that it is not only what we share effortlessly that can unite us but what we come to have in common because we are committed to creating a community, to finding unity in differences, which requires solidarity within a framework of values, beliefs..” (hooks, 2003)

The author also says, “Difference enriches life. One must not confuse this statement with superficial notions of inclusivity or diversity experienced within privilege, which do not relate to those embodying that alterity. Instead, engaging, touching and transforming is necessary. The result of this transformation is called mutuality, relationship, and community.” (hooks, 2002)

# **The imperative is to (try to) be well!**

## **The imperative of new generations A pilot study by On! Social Enterprise for Feltrinelli**

*Sara Sampietro*

Taking care of oneself, inside and out, and being in relationships seems to be the recipe for those under twenty to live their daily lives and avoid the mistakes of adults. This is what emerges from the research conducted by On! Social Enterprise within the framework of the Playlist 5 project. A participatory process articulated in three phases of research, focused on the emotional and relational experiences of adolescents in relation to the environments they navigate in their daily lives - from the household to the school, from the familiar group of friends to the city. Initially, about forty individuals were involved within exploratory discussion groups. Following the emerging inspirations, the participants drafted a questionnaire to be issued to a larger sample (250 individuals between 16 and 20 years old, residents in Milan and within its province). The data outlined the profile of a generation with few certainties for the future but with a clear idea regarding the management of the present in terms of self-protection and care. The search for spaces and situations capable of generating well-being and facilitating the expression of one's talents also seems to be a possible key to rethinking urban consistency, favouring proximity to the needs of the younger generation.



## The pursuit of well-being

Achieving psychophysical well-being with particular attention and awareness regarding mental health is among the essential goals stated by the young interviewees. The aim is to maintain a balance, “take care” and “love each other” reducing, if possible, the causes of stress. “having a positive self-connection” “having good physical health” “having a good mental health” are the three factors that influence the most the perception of happiness, with an average score equal to or higher than 9 (fig.1). Another element capable of generating happiness is the opportunity to cultivate one’s interests, which can then evolve into satisfying educational or professional paths. Work is seen as an expression of one’s vocations and should not be interpreted solely from a duty-bound and functional perspective. There is also an aspiration for a profession that ensures a good “work-life balance,” which aims to value the time dedicated to family and friends. Enjoying a good economic condition is important, although it should not be approached from an exhibitionist perspective, in fact, success and goods possession are considered among the less relevant factors.

### HOW TO FEEL GOOD

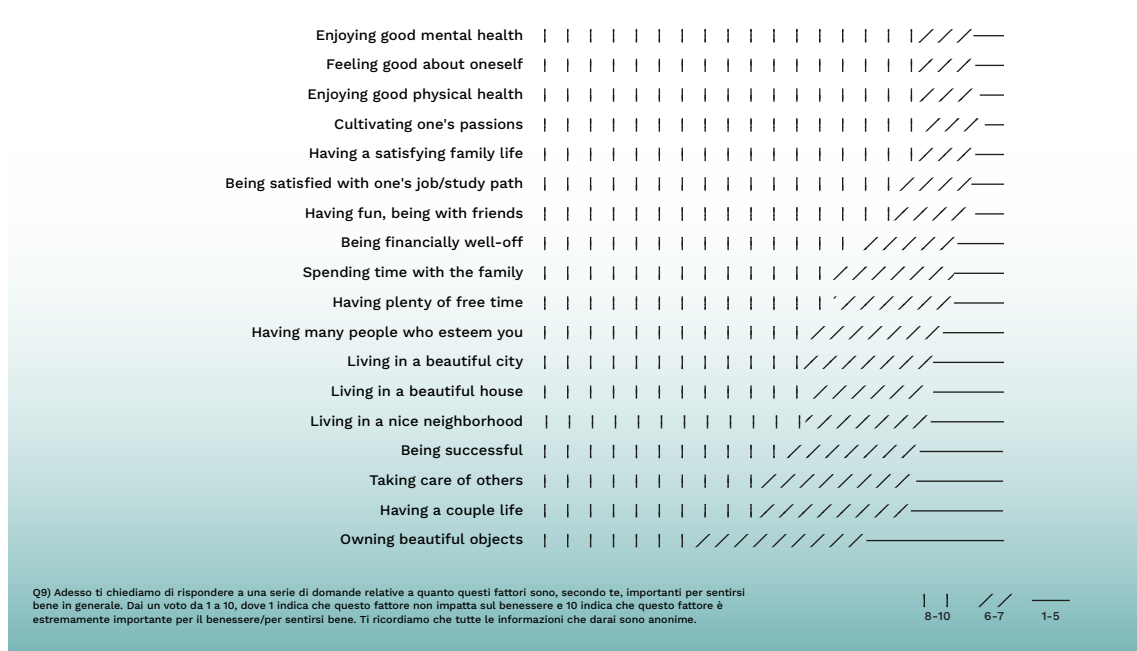


Figure 1

## I don't want to be like you

The young interviewees struggle to see adults as role models and sources of inspiration, perhaps because they often express impatience and dissatisfaction within their professional and private lives. Only 3% of the sample truly perceives the adult world as “close to them,” and only 6% believes it is fully capable of understanding the issues of the new generations. 50% reported feeling “fairly close”, but a significant 40% consider the adult world not in line with the new generations’ expectations and “how they would like to live.” Adolescents seem to avoid job dissatisfaction, burnout, and difficulty in handling healthy relationships, seeking models and life approaches that are more constructive and positive. “It does not seem to me that my parents are happy, nor their friends!” (female, 17 years); “Maybe we need to leave; my brother studied a lot and still has not found a job” (male, 17 years)

## THE RELATIONSHIP WITH THE ADULT WORLD

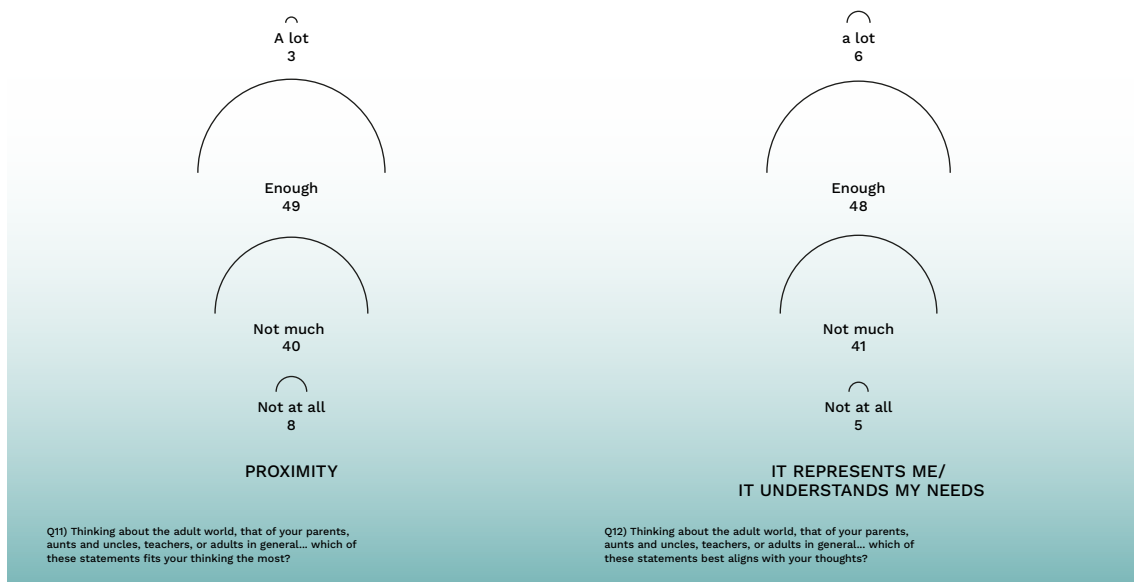


Figure 2

## An uncertain future

The lack of trust in adults is also connected to the youth’s low capacity to imagine their future: “Well, I do not know, right now I do not think about it!” (male, 13 years old). Only 20% (1 in 5 respondents) find it easy to imagine themselves “as adults,” while 46% choose ratings below 6 (considering it very difficult). There are no significant differences by gender and age, indicating a cross-cutting nature of the phenomenon (fig. 3).

## CHALLENGES IN ENVISIONING ONE’S OWN FUTURE

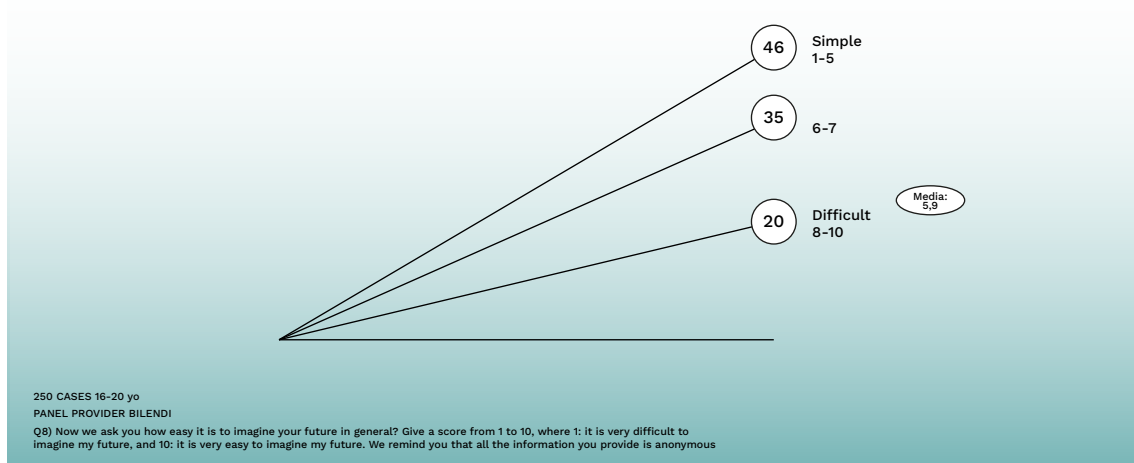


Figure 3

## Luckily, there are friends

In the face of daily life difficulties and doubts about the future, relationships represent an indispensable resource to draw upon for comfort and reassurance (fig. 4). In particular, friends convey a profound sense of understanding: “I have friends I am always with, my brothers, I would leave with them tomorrow, I can tell them everything!” (male, 17 years old). Family, on the other hand – despite the low trust in the adult world – is the place where they feel most comfortable: “In the end, even if you argue with your family, you are there, you have

always been there, and you can be yourself”; “My younger brother annoys me, but I love him” (male, 17 years old).

The school and the classroom often emerge as unwelcoming environments, frequently the stage for conflicts and episodes of exclusion, especially among the female target: “I do not talk to anyone at school; I just go there!” (male, 17 years old); “Last year at a certain point, no one in the class was talking to me anymore!” (female, 17 years old).

On the other hand, extracurricular activities can generate a strong sense of involvement and belonging. However, among the total sample, few boys/girls participate in volunteer associations (15%), sports teams (28%), and groups with common hobbies (18%) (low sample bases).

## RELATIONSHIP WITH SCHOOL, FAMILY, FRIENDS

Do you feel understood?

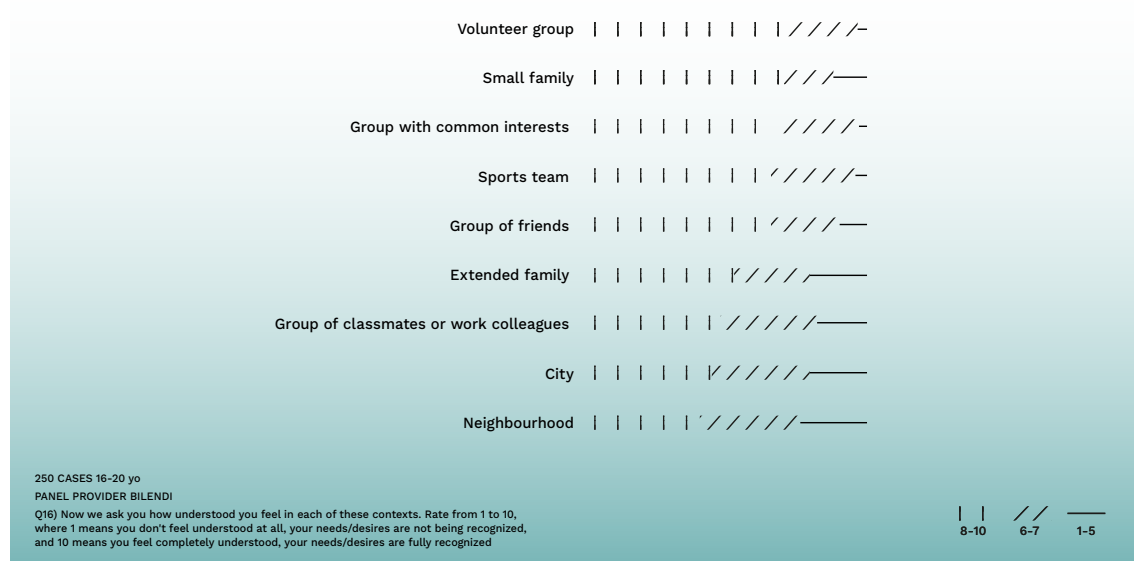


Figure 4

### A city is not always designed for the youth

The city does not seem entirely capable of meeting the expectations and needs of young people. In fact, in the perception of their city/town, satisfaction values are borderline, ranging from 5.7 to 6.6 (fig. 5). However, in Milan, compared to those living in the province, there is a greater alignment with the needs of the new generation (52%: top

2) and a higher appreciation of the possibilities and initiatives offered (54%: top 3).

## THE RELATIONSHIP WITH THE CITY

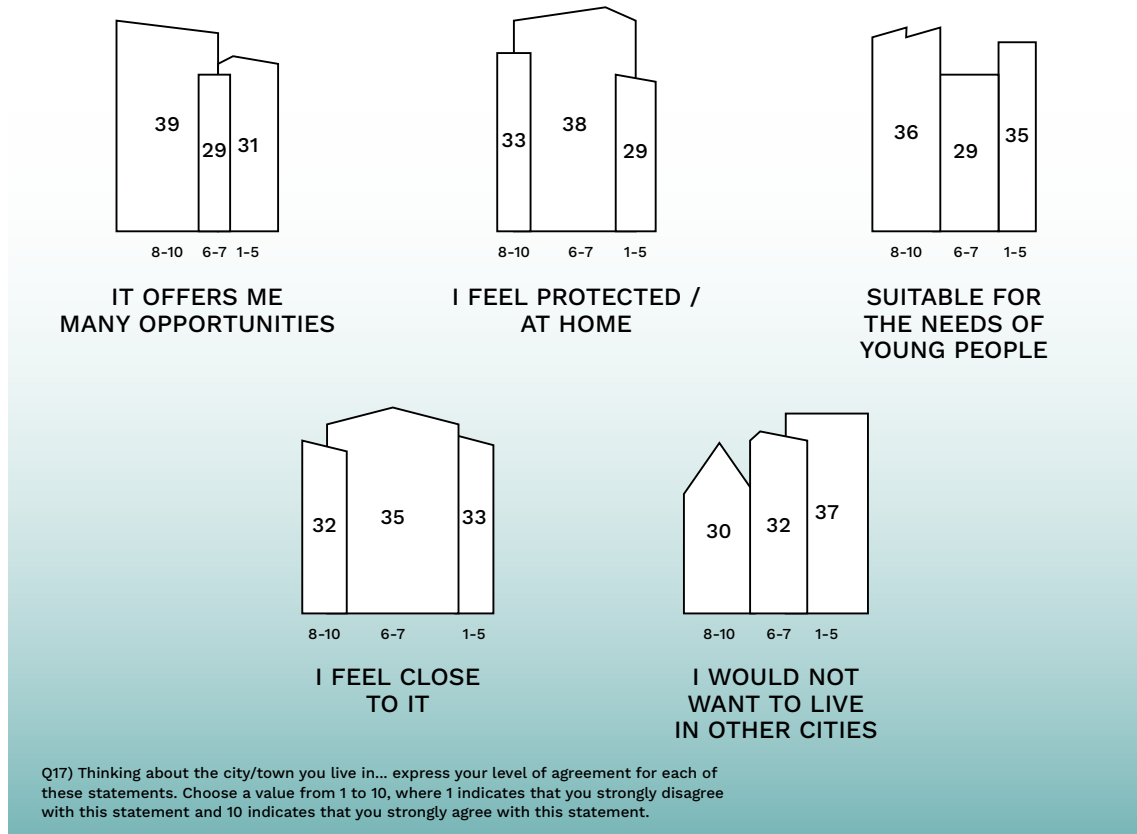


Figure 5

Moving from current experiences to future expectations (fig. 6), there is a notable desire for more multifunctional gathering spaces (43%) where individuals can spend time and express their passions: “Being in a place without necessarily having to follow a course or something!” (male, 16 years old); “Being free, without having to be outside on the street” (male, 15 years old).

Alongside the need for aggregation, there is a strong expectation for a broader (41%) yet more accessible calendar of concerts and events.

Also interesting is the request (30% overall) for job-related guidance programs rooted in the local community, with a pragmatic and fun-

THE IMPERATIVE IS TO (TRY TO) BE WELL!

ctional approach, and a more active involvement in city policies and redevelopment projects: “Learning to do something real that makes sense!” (male, 15 years old). The theme of urban redevelopment is particularly felt by those living within the city, concerning areas and neighbourhoods perceived as more degraded and “abandoned.”

The city imagined and anticipated by young people, in line with the values of their daily lives, is capable of listening, engaging, and leaving space for free expression. A city to be lived more actively, both in terms of entertainment activities, social and work experiences.

## INITIATIVES TO PROMOTE ACCORDING TO YOUTH

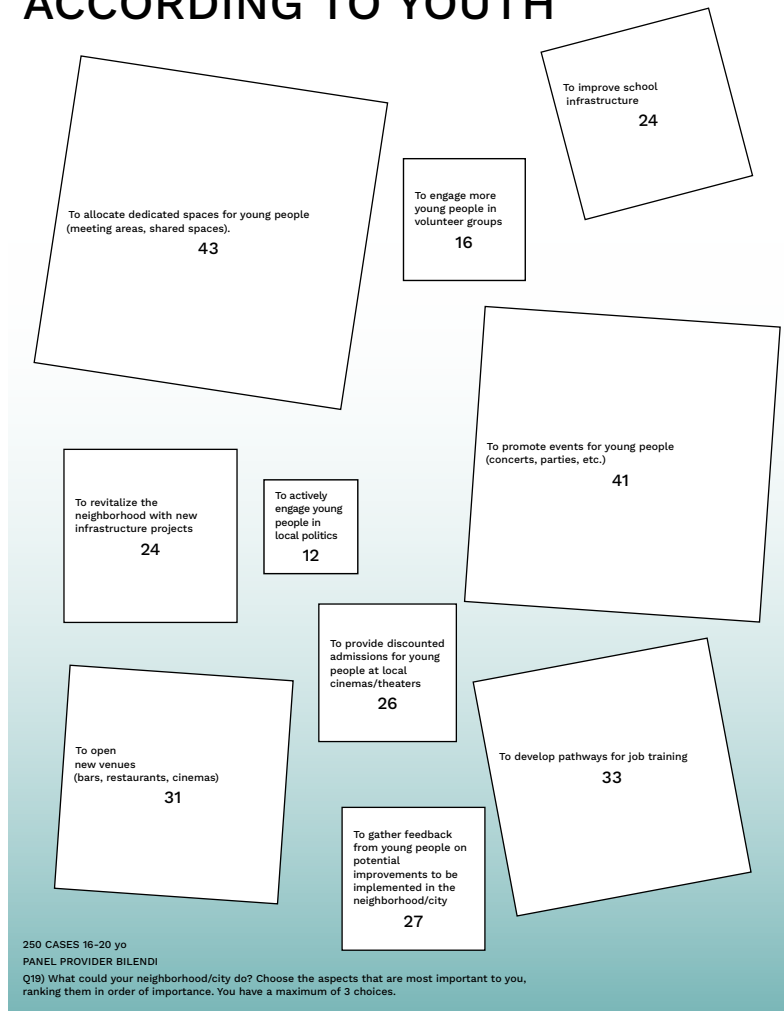


Figure 6

# City, relationships, and school

## Urban living through participatory research with young people

*Silvy Boccaletti, Maria Ratotti, Chiara Buzzacchi, Simone Colli Vignarelli, Chiara Carla Montà, Elisabetta Biffi, Stefano Malatesta*

### Youth, participation, and the city<sup>1</sup>

Living is a continuous and active interaction between citizens and the surrounding urban (and non-urban) spaces. It is a social act that shapes identities and the sense of place. The boundaries between public and private spaces, adult and youth spaces, and physical and virtual relationships are increasingly porous in contemporary cities. Thus, overly sharp distinctions often hinder or limit the understanding of social relationships that citizens incorporate in their daily lives.

Among the various urban actors inhabiting our cities, young people represent a component to which urban policies are paying increasing attention today. Attempts, not always with satisfactory results, are made to intercept the forms and places of young people's participation in public life.

Similarly, in the academic sector, the geographies of young people are an expanding area that investigates the world of young people, their way of being citizens, and the spaces and forms of youth partici-

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1 The choice to use both masculine and feminine forms was necessary to enhance the readability of the text. With this choice, the intention was not only to refer to cisgender individuals but also to address all other subjectivities that position themselves between masculine and feminine or elsewhere.

pation. In this perspective, pedagogical reflection questions young people's role in transforming urban areas, specifically focusing on urban public spaces as the centre of relationships and democratic participation for new generations. Cities are essential contexts for continuous learning through formal, non-formal, and informal education. In particular, in the horizon of public pedagogy (Biesta, 2012; 2014), young people's actions, practices, and narratives are seen as political acts (even manifestations of dissent) that take shape in public space.

While, on the one hand, cyberspace constitutes one of the privileged meeting places for socialising, conversing, working, or playing for younger generations, on the other hand, the physical spaces such as squares, streets, sports facilities, or schools, still represent crucial contexts to intercept new youth trends. Given these premises, the relationship between the youths and the city's urban spaces appears complex. As various studies have highlighted, new generations too often experience processes of erosion of their legitimate rights to occupy, socialise, and participate in public life. Above all, the processes of "adultification" of public spaces lay the groundwork for conflicts between young people and adults, imposing limitations on their mobility and opportunities for growth and exchange.

It is necessary today to question the different urban transformations together with the young generations, the protagonists of the cities of tomorrow, and, even more urgently, to recognize that they are already protagonists of our present.

In this perspective, the participation of youths does not coincide with their consultation. Giving voice to young people is not enough; it is necessary to accompany them in understanding the issues and give them tools to become real interlocutors in dialogue and negotiation with stakeholders and policymakers (Biffi, 2023; Montà, 2023).

## **B-YOUth Forum**

Within this framework, B-YOUth Forum is conceived as a research laboratory open to young people aged 16 to 25, which, with an inter-



disciplinary approach, that uses scientific research to support young people in understanding the ongoing transitions within societies and their territories. B-YOUth Forum is promoted by the University of Milano-Bicocca within the MUSA project (Multilayered Urban Sustainability Action - <https://musascarl.it/>), funded by the Ministry's University and Research as part of the National Recovery and Resilience Plan, which involves collaboration with 24 public and private entities and aims to transform the metropolitan area of Milan into an innovation ecosystem for sustainability and urban regeneration. B-YOUth Forum involves students from secondary schools, universities, educational services, civil service, interns, PhD students, postdocs, and researchers from the University of Milano-Bicocca, investing in new generations to produce a positive impact on territories in terms of sustainability, justice, and inclusion (Pippa, et al., 2021). Research is commonly considered a high-level technical activity practised by academic experts or those with specific qualifications. Rarely due consideration is given to its democratic potential, and neither is presented as a right (Appadurai, 2006). In this regard, the Committee on the Rights of the Child's (2009) General Comment No. 12 emphasises how the understanding of contexts and processes is crucial to promoting the right of children to participate in decision-making processes (UNCRC, art.12). If looked at with different eyes, research is the art of asking questions and navigating the most suitable paths (methods) to construct never definitive knowledge to be shared with others. If it is true that contemporaneity has placed great emphasis on knowledge and critical thinking as essential means to achieve emancipation, shouldn't we think of young people, from the beginning of their education, as co-constructors of knowledge capable of asking new questions and developing conceptual and practical frameworks to transform their and our world into a more accessible and fairer environment? To achieve this goal, B-YOUth Forum starts with a priority: democratising the processes of knowledge construction and management of the public good, creating meaningful opportunities and training spaces for young people to gain

competence and awareness regarding the decision-making processes that guide the transformations of territories and societies.

### **B-YOUth x About a City**

In About a City, the B-YOUth Forum involved young people from a Milanese secondary school. Within the workshop, the participants were divided into three working tables designed to facilitate the communication of matters that impact their daily life: school, relationships, and the city. Through an initial ice-breaking activity, facilitators and students had the opportunity to build their first relationships. Subsequently, the three workshops were set up, structured through the world café (Fouché, Light, 2011), a conversation that allows groups to engage in a discussion on central themes, such as those proposed, using free and fair methods to challenge traditional and self-directed methodologies. To support this phase, Cartesian plans were presented. The axes of the plans represented the themes of the meeting, namely the city, school, and relationships. In addition, the photographs provided to the young people allowed them to read the places, situations, and roles represented to critically question them about their being young citizens and inhabitants of an urban area. The ultimate goal of the work was the presentation of the specific forms of living in the city implemented by young people, paying particular attention to the dimension of places, relationships, and proximal spaces, such as schools, where new generations are the main political and social actors. The main themes and some of the words used in the workshop tables were discussed in a second phase by adults experts, professionals, academics, and decision-makers in the territory. The first data that emerged within the workshop represents research material for B-YOUth Forum, which will question in 2024 the times and spaces of youth urban living, starting from some case studies identified in the Bicocca neighbourhood.

# **‘Her City in Corvetto’**

## **Promote gender equality through urban regeneration**

*Giorgia Ziliani*

Gender inequality is increasing every year; despite the progress over the last decades, extensive forms of gender inequality persist and stagnate in social advancement. (United Nations, SDG 2023)

This trend is expected to continue due to the increase in urban population; by 2050, 70% of the world’s population will live in cities, generating enormous challenges, not least in terms of inequality. The accelerated demand for affordable housing and viable infrastructures for transport systems and essential services, in conjunction with the expansion of urban land consumption, will pressure land and natural resources, exposing cities to significant climate and disaster risks such as severe floods and epidemics (World Bank, 2023). Women play a critical role in disaster risk management with their extensive knowledge of communities, social roles and caring responsibilities. Empowering women to build green, resilient, inclusive cities is essential to mitigate these challenges (Asian Development Bank, 2014).

In order to promote gender equality, the targeted involvement of females in the urban development process is essential; women plan and design the public space with sensitivity, taking into account the needs of every member of the community, reflecting the diversity and requirements of men, disabled people, the elderly, children, and mino-

rities. Involving those who will be the users of the public space within the urban development process is one of the essential principles of the Her City project (UN-Habitat, 2022).

Her City provides tools and a step-by-step methodology to promote an inclusive city, integrating a gender perspective. Divided into nine blocks, the Her City digital toolbox describes the various phases of the urban development process, from the assessment to the design and implementation phase, so that cities can adopt sustainable and inclusive urban planning, facilitating the dialogue between professionals and citizens.<sup>2</sup> Public administrations, urban stakeholders, and female residents work together to develop innovative solutions to make the city and the neighbourhood in line with the desires and needs of its inhabitants (UN-Habitat, 2022).

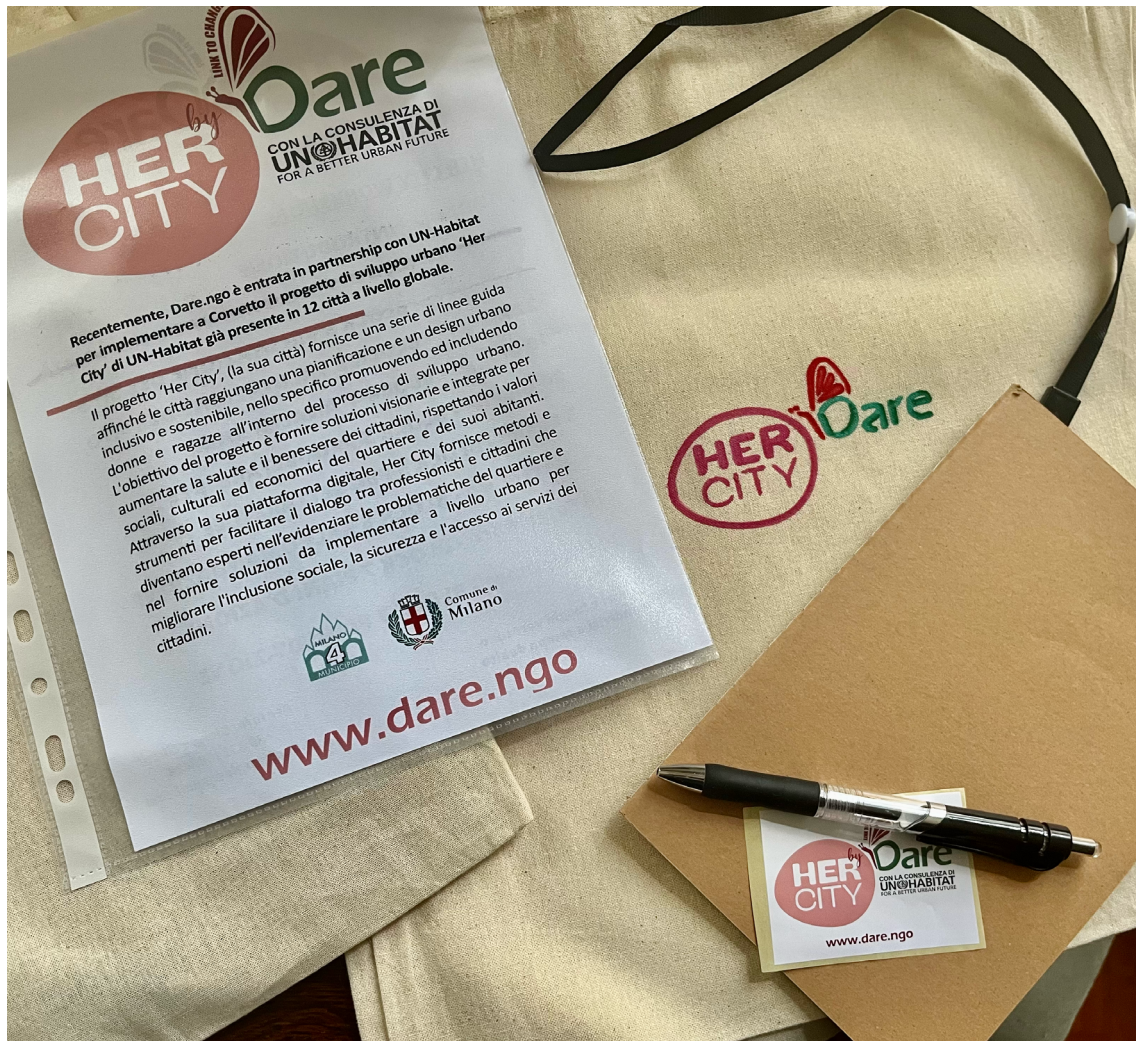
The Her City Toolbox is a joint initiative launched by UN-Habitat and the Shared City Foundation<sup>3</sup> (UN-Habitat, 2022). Her City has ongoing projects in Africa, the Middle East, Asia, Latin America, and Europe. The platform has over 1070 registered users and has reached 350 cities in 100 countries across 300 independent initiatives (UN-Habitat, 2023).

I lead the project ‘Her City in Corvetto’ as its project manager. It represents the first initiative developed in Italy thanks to the engagement of Dare.ngo, an organisation based in the area of Corvetto, Milan. Dare.ngo is a volunteering association. Volunteers work to support the diverse local multi-ethnic communities with the aim of combatting all forms of discrimination and increasing the sense of belonging, inclusion, and urban safety within the neighbourhood. (Dare.ngo 2020) With the support of UN-Habitat, 12 local organisations, and

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2 The Her City toolbox follows a unique process containing 9 building blocks: Block 1 Stakeholder engagement, Block 2 City wide assessment, Block 3 Site specific assessment, Block 4 Analysing challenges, Block 5 Designing Ideas, Block 6 Recommendations for action, Block 7 Action plans, Block 8 Sharing results, Block 9 Implementation and follow-up.

3 It is funded by the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida) and the Swedish Innovation Agency (Vinnova), with contributions from the Block by Block Foundation (Mojang/Minecraft/Microsoft), White Architects, the Swedish Union of Tenants, and MethodKit



The multicultural neighbourhood of Corvetto, located in the southeast periphery of Milan, has 35,900 inhabitants. The historic outskirts of public housing located on the agricultural edges of the city has always been associated with various forms of discomfort and degradation, a place of industrial development and affordable housing with low residential quality and education where ‘quality and urban decay are sometimes juxtaposed next to each other in the same street’ (Citroni, 2020). The high level of diversification within the area increased forms of prejudice and discrimination likewise the perception of urban safety, maintenance, and cleanliness is also linked to how places and spaces are patrolled (Portale dei Saperi 2021). Sociological studies document from a socio-economic point of view that the area is characterised by a growing ‘polarisation’ in its recent historical trajectory, an internal level of inequality in life conditions and opportunities that

is increasingly wider and more evident at a territorial level (Citroni, 2020).

Through ‘Her City in Corvetto’, Dare.ngo and I aim to fill these gaps that are increasingly causing vast distress by regenerating the area and making citizens part of these urban transformations while increasing their sense of belonging and empowerment to act with care and respect in support of the neighbourhood’s shared spaces.

Since April 2023, Her City in Corvetto has developed the first five blocks of the Her City guidelines, completing the analysis and planning phases of the urban development process. The organisation has involved women and girls of various ages, nationalities, and cultural backgrounds in 10 workshops and focus groups, collecting data and information to analyse and deepen the perceptions and difficulties that women experience daily in public spaces through exploratory walks, questionnaires, interviews, group discussions, and using photography, sketches, and interactive digital tools. These innovative participative social research tools represent the essential conditions to secure the success of these focus groups as they allow the exploration of individual representations, feelings, and opinions, favouring the emergence of authentic examples of concrete life experiences (Giorgi, et al., 2023).

The shared questionnaires investigated various topics, from public mobility to public spaces’ accessibility, night lighting and visibility, proximity to services, presence of green spaces and the women’s level of safety and comfort around the area while identifying the areas considered unsafe, especially for women.

The reflections and feedback obtained by the 150 participants have been crucial to identify the area to intervene. The historic Gabriele Rosa square is located in the heart of the Corvetto neighbourhood and represents both one of the main passage areas and a place of social aggregation and community integration. The square is bordered by various services, connects seven streets with the centre and contains a playground, a dog enclosure, a cycle path, and a large green area with benches.



The ideal place to build a transversal strategy favouring inclusion while recognising, listening and supporting the emerging forms of mutualism and collective actions. A virtuous platform for the city's government, its services, and infrastructure (Polizzi, Vitale, 2017).

Despite the cultural differences among the participants, the central theme that emerged during the various exchange meetings was security. In fact, many factors make the Gabriele Rosa Square risky for women who prefer to use public transport to cross the area or alternative parallel streets, especially during night-time hours. It is interesting to note how the perception of danger is linked to the use of green spaces: the higher the perception of danger, the less one frequents green spaces, a sign that the use and valorisation of green spaces are closely linked to the subject of safety (Colli, Citroni, 2020).

The participants, 20 to 60 years old, expressed significant concerns and fears about leaving their homes after 8 PM due to both the high level of local crime and the systematic presence of large groups of men who use the square's centre to socialise and consume alcoholic beverages. This consolidated fact in the neighbourhood causes significant discomfort, insecurity and high disturbance of public peace, which adds to the reduced lighting, maintenance, and cleanliness of the space, connected also to the scarce presence of police patrols in the area.

Among the proposed urban regeneration interventions there are the implementation of surveillance cameras, roadside emergency buttons, solar street lamps to increase night-time lighting, the planting of fruit trees, a community garden, a public bathroom, a drinking water fountain, stations for charging electronic devices, and a Wi-Fi connection. To increase community inclusion and repopulate the square, participants suggested the integration of fixed tables and chairs on the floor that would ease various activities such as playing chess and card games and the creation of areas to relax to encourage the evolution of a variety of physical activities such as courses of yoga and tai chi. In addition, the transformation of shops’ shutters around the square into artistic murals could create an open-air museum that would attract more tourism and provide greater visibility and a sense of security. Other proposed interventions instead require the renewal of the structures present in the public space, including the playground and the construction of a porch to allow its use when it rains, a better fence, and artificial bumps to reduce speed and traffic in the roundabout. One of the most significant challenges encountered in the realisation of this project is linked to the involvement of local women and girls. Unfortunately, two factors hinder participation; the first is the lack of trust in both institutions and projects of this nature, causing ordinary citizens to doubt that their perspectives will be genuinely considered. Additionally, the escalating instances of discrimination have resulted in disheartening incidents where participants have voiced prejudiced or derogatory comments, emphasising the urgent need to address concerns related to migrants and refugees within the neighbourhood. Overcoming these challenges is essential for fostering an inclusive and harmonious community-driven initiative.

The next step of the ‘Her City in Corvetto’ project will include the development of the Her City Toolbox’s last four blocks, which focus on the implementation phase.

Overall, this project promotes active citizenship through participatory processes targeting women. Citizens are empowered to make a difference in their neighbourhood and become an integral part of ur-



ban development. Seeing their ideas and proposals implemented increases their sense of inclusion and belonging and, consequently, their respect for the use of public space. The literature on the political dynamics of urban planning tends to emphasise controversies' virtues over public choices. These debates would make unsolved problems of urban life visible, allowing those minorities who usually do not actively enter the political life to access the public discourse. At the foundation of this setting, there is the belief that the greater participation of citizens in the public discussion represents itself as a necessary and sufficient condition of institutional innovation (Vitale, 2009). Furthermore, moments of exchange and group reflection are essential to foster a connection between different communities that, through this dialogue, eradicate forms of discrimination and exclusion. The success of 'Her City in Corvetto' led other municipalities to request the implementation of the Her City project in their neighbourhoods, which will start soon.

# Designing the Ideal City for the Youth: A Vision for Tomorrow

*Presidents: Elisabetta Biffi, Annabella Coiro*

*Rapporteurs: Silvy Boccaletti, Federica Rotondo*

## Overview

Participants from B-Youth Forum, QuBi, Save the Children, University Milano-Bicocca, Polytechnic of Milan, Labsus, Cooperativa Ripari, ON, Cariplo Foundation, Dare.ngo, Latitudo ArtProjects, Fondazione Bolton Hope, among others divided in 2 working tables. The topics verged around the young generations and their relation with the school and the city including their relation with social media.

The discussion started by evaluating the fact that nowadays the school space goes over the walls of the school building. Extracurricular activities, public spaces, and specific aggregation spaces are open and engage with the school and young generations in mutual exchange.

Projects such as the Save the Children's 'A neighbourhood to grow' tailored for primary and lower secondary schools focuses on preventing and contrasting school dropouts by constructing student participation spaces and strengthening the relationship with the community, advancing social innovation. QuBi is combating educational poverty by forming third-sector after-school networks in collaboration with the Municipality involving those children in socio-economic disad-

vantaged conditions. These educational agreements between the Municipality and the third-sector involve a close link between learning and participation spaces. Relevant experiments at the national level include the open school programme or the educational archipelago, which implies the opening of schools during the summer period, providing a continuity in learning. Similarly, SOUx Milano shared the children's school project, which includes towards the end of the activity a presentation by children of their acquired knowledge.

Finally, the Open Lab Scuola Sconfinata (unbounded school) focuses on the concept of participation, including activities based on the needs of the students; with a didactic kit and guidelines for "crossing boundaries", it aims to establish a close connection among teachers and students highlighting the relationship between the school and the community.

Strong coordination with local administrations and associations is necessary to reach this connection since working with the school means dealing with the school calendar and space organisation. In this context, the figure of Edumana (humanistic education regarding active non violence) is also essential within primary school to facilitate the relationship between children, teachers, and parents.

### **Recommendations:**

- Young individuals must be involved from the initial steps in the process of proposing and co-designing services with the aim of making them feel a sense of ownership. Within this process, decision-makers, administrations, representatives of educational institutions, and universities, should always be present to evaluate the youth's proposals.
- The proposed services (projects outlined above) should not be intermittent but continuous to positively affect children in disadvantaged situations. Spot services can create expectations and consequently frustrations among the youth.

- Services must be able to shape themselves and adapt to the continuous changes of the context with no rigidity.
- It is essential to constantly monitor the involvement of young people in these services/projects to evaluate their efficacy.
- Monitor the crucial role schools can play in ‘educating’ young people on the culture of participation in contrast to society that does not encourage participation inside and outside schools. The youths cannot always recognize their needs and necessities, therefore, it is essential to guide them in identifying their critical perspective, and create spaces and conditions for them to feel comfortable in participating and expressing their opinions. The design of tools as apps or websites tailored to facilitate youth participation could represent an innovative solution in connection to the analysis of youth content expressed on social media to reveal their specific needs and aspirations.
- Evaluate the drafting of a “book of failures” to understand and self-criticise what did not work in projects like “The City of Children,” “Youth Information,” and youth employment centres.
- Street education cannot solve what institutions fail to satisfy. Essential improvements in this context could be the premature grant of the right to vote in conjunction with economic autonomy, a key aspect to consider to improve youths’ participation and agency in urban policies and to minimise youths’ vulnerability and dependency on adults.
- Evaluate the possibility of having a workshop with working tables dedicated to “youth online/offline relationships” with youth participants together with school representatives alongside adults.

# Civic action in the unequal city

## Fighting for housing in Los Angeles

*Paul Lichterman*<sup>1</sup>

Can civic actors contribute to a more egalitarian destiny for large cities? Answering this question requires more than egalitarian plans on paper for mixed income neighbourhoods or accessible public goods. We must understand how civic actors construct urban conditions as problems to begin with, and how they organise urban dwellers around claims about problems. There is always more than one way to articulate problems and organise a constituency around them, and no strategy will please all urban stakeholders. To improve the prospects for “big” things like equality, solidarity and opportunity in cities, we benefit from an action-centred focus on the “small” world of everyday interaction where civic actors’ claims-making and constituency-building create their consequences.

Here I offer a few findings from my recent ethnographic study of housing advocates in a large metropolis, titled *How Civic Action Works: Fighting for Housing in Los Angeles* (Lichterman 2021). In short, housing advocates in LA engaged in two different styles of civic action. Each cultivated a different vision of “the city” itself and produced different ways of constructing housing problems and organising collecti-

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<sup>1</sup> The video interview with Paul Lichterman is available at the following link: [https://youtu.be/pK-1XlLu\\_MM](https://youtu.be/pK-1XlLu_MM)

ve actors to fight them. These came with different notions of “success,” and different trade-offs for the civic actors, with consequences for the city as a whole.

To offer a brief context to LA housing problems: Property developers’ plans often have been readily approved by city authorities who promote “growth.” Over the past several decades, developers have consistently built more housing for high-income people and less housing for lower-income people than is needed. Additionally, developers have renovated older buildings where working-class and racialized (non-white) people often live. Many current tenants are displaced, and replaced by more professional-class and often white tenants who can afford the higher rents that developers charge post-renovation. The “growth” strategy increases rents, property values and tax revenue—increasing inequality in housing opportunity too. Advocates have long called the resulting conditions a housing crisis. The crisis has included a high rate of unhoused living. Currently, about 49,000 people living in LA have no stable residence, in a city of 4 million.

My ethnographic research followed different kinds of civic responses to the housing crisis—in four affordable housing campaigns and four organisations that serve homeless people, during the period 2008-2012. Civic action is freely organised collective action to improve some social condition that actors construct as a problem deserving public attention. This includes the contentious action of social movement activists or citizen associations, and the non-contentious action of charitable volunteer groups who staff short-term shelters for unhoused people. Our focus here is on contentious collective action which includes protesting against landlords, pressuring city officials with testimonies at public hearings, or promoting “people’s plans” for development based on local residents’ desires.

Collective civic action unfolds in different “styles.” Style is a set of shared expectations about how to construct collective action for social change. These expectations concern how “we” imagine ourselves in relation to allies, adversaries and larger publics; and how “we” are obligated to each other. In any civil society there are relatively few

styles of civic action. The two pictured here may be different from those most common in Italian civic culture but still they reveal how powerful style is in determining how urban activists strategize, and what they imagine the city to be. Different styles have different capacities.

In the civic style that I call a *community of interest*, activists collaborate broadly with any groups willing to focus on a limited, shared proposal for institutional change. Acting in this style, activists imagine themselves in a field of competition with other collective actors. They obligate each other to be loyal to the shared interest when they are working together even if they pursue other interests in other forums. Example: In 2008-2010, a powerful coalition of tenant groups, affordable housing developers, and labour unions urged the City of LA to require reduced-rent housing units in all large apartment buildings. The coalition hoped to create mixed-income neighbourhoods across LA. This policy proposal was their shared interest. A community of interest agrees to a big, implicit trade-off only rarely spoken aloud: “we” must present a unified public voice when bargaining with gatekeepers and minimise participants’ differences of interest and identity. This modus operandi alienated coalition members representing socially marginalised people who felt erased by the coalition.

In the style I call a *community of identity*, activists collaborate selectively with groups who identify closely with each other. They present themselves as a distinct, racialized and/or class “community” that suffers many problems, not just one. They imagine themselves not competitors in a field of competition but fighters on a battleground, resisting elites who threaten their existence as a community. They obligate each other to protect the community’s identity and well-being over-all. Example: in 2008-2011, a neighbourhood coalition representing lower-income, Spanish-speaking people in South LA led two campaigns against residential displacement and inadequate medical care. They said big property developers disregarded the needs of the community by building luxury apartments, displacing long-time residents and, in one case, demolishing a low-cost medical clinic to

make room for new apartments. A community of identity privileges the solidarity of “the community” and demands loyalty to it. This *modus operandi* excluded potentially powerful participants, such as a labour leader who had an interest in pressuring big developers for fair labour policies but did not identify with the local community and its multiple issues.

Each style of civic action cultivates a different understanding of the city itself and creates different relationships with municipal officials. The community of interest imagined the city in terms of citizens in political jurisdictions and aimed to make the best deal with city officials, in competition with property developers. The community of identity imagined the city as “our community” poised against exploitative outsider elites. The community was roughly defined by the marginalised social status of its residents and not by political jurisdiction. It regarded most governmental officials warily unless they explicitly identified with the community.

How might city officials support civic action for housing? To support a community of interest, officials might lessen inequalities of competition by hosting forums where advocates and developers all can defend their vision to the public. To support a community of identity, officials might lessen misrecognition of marginalised people by soliciting development plans from self-identified communities, not only plans for administrative jurisdictions. They might also put plans in accessible, vernacular language.

Styles of civic action are a powerful part of the civic culture, guiding how actors define urban problems, organise collectively and interact with officials. They are not so easily changed at will. My research in Los Angeles suggests that campaigns for more affordable housing are most successful in the eyes of the collective actors when the campaigns judiciously combine both styles, shifting and compartmentalising at different stages of a campaign and in different social settings.



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