Creative Activism and Tactical Urbanism: Social Change in Milan through Colourful Squares

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1. Introduction

In the Western societies of the late 19th and early 20th Centuries, European cities were largely designed and planned by civil engineers, architects, and public health experts –fields dominated by wealthy men. Consequently, cities were, and still are, delineated along the lines of gender, as well as race and class (European Union, 2007). For several years, the *neutral user* of the city was based on an ideal type of inhabitant: adult, male, healthy, rich, educated and self-provided. This led male planners and designers - whether intentionally or unintentionally - to create urban spaces catered to their needs while reflecting and perpetuating the patriarchal norms of their society (The World Bank Group, 2020). This archetype, however, is as dominant as poorly representative: urban environments around the world became both products and drivers of inequities, not only towards women, but excluding many of the real communities living in the cities as well (Hanson, 2004).

Even nowadays, although some cities have made progress in addressing gender and biases in the built environment, the topography of the wider urban environment creates spaces of social exclusion and physical inaccessibility, and much work remains to be done. These urban planning traditions left the average citizen with a feeling of non-belonging to the public realm, that the space is not theirs. Therefore, it is important to recognize the dysfunctionalities of the conventional urban planning rules and procedures, and the urgent need to rethink the role of urban design, which has to become a tool for citizens' self-determination - rather than their exclusion (Boano, 2016).

Addressing the link between urban planning and structural inequalities is the starting point of movements that reclaim the streets. The protagonism of every inhabitant has to rise, especially the ones that are usually harder to involve in the discussion: women, the elderly, children, people with disabilities and marginalised communities. In fact, accessibility should be granted to anyone, and people with different abilities, sizes, and ages should be able to fully participate with the built environment (Institute for Transportation & Development Policy, 2020). Learning from the experience of the most disadvantaged will lead to the inspiration and empowerment of a new generation of engaged citizens, and new key actors in the transformation of their communities. This process demands re-making the city by micro-transforming and taking care of the spaces and services located below people's homes, on a neighbourhood scale. Subsequently, we aim to describe the state of the art of the current urban design of public spaces, underlining the importance of Public Art - and its most recent developments such as Tactical Urbanism - and how these bottom-up approaches of creative activism can help in creating waves of positive social change.

2. Art as a Tool for Integration and Regeneration Introduction

2.1. The Urbanism Practices: *Creative Activism* in Public Art

Cultural analyses of gentrification have identified in the individual artist an important agent in the initiation of rec-

lamation processes: since the 1980s Public Art has been increasingly advocated on the basis of a series of supposed contributions to urban regeneration. It has been claimed by many that Public Art can help develop a sense of identity, of belonging to a place and it contributes to civic identity. It can address community needs, tackle social exclusion, possess educational value, promote social change, and encourage economic development (Miwon 1997).

Contemporary urban regeneration has changed objectives, actors, methods, and tools, becoming a consequence of planning failures and following the progressive affirmation of environmental, economic, and social phenomena. The shift of meaning in the modern urban planning field went from the expansion of the consolidated city to the re-qualification of it, led by the desire of recovery, redevelopment and eventually regeneration, with attention to the reuse, reversibility, and temporariness of the interventions. In this cultural context, *Public Art* - and more generally the multiple forms of creative activism with temporary and permanent reuses of the existing city - is not a response to random circumstances, rather it is a method to address citizens' specific needs and the evolutions of the standard cities (Cariello, Ferorelli & Rotondo, 2021).

Public Art and *temporary urban experiments* are widely used in urban contexts under the banner of regeneration to achieve some degree of social impact. This is why it should not only be considered an aesthetic topic but a social and economic one too, thanks to the engagement of citizens in placemaking processes. These experiments are becoming more and more a diffused technique to face urban problems, concerning at the same time public spaces and streets, understood as mobility infrastructures, given the urge to bring health-safe and sustainable adaptations in the daily urban transportation (Roberts & Sykes 2000).

It is important to underline that there are various interpretations as to what can be considered *Public Art* and that the discussion is still alive. Kwon Miwon, in her essay *"For Hamburg: Public Art and Urban Identities" (1997)* distinguished three different paradigms of Public Art that could be schematically described in this way:

1. Art **in** *public places:* typically a modernist abstract sculpture placed outdoors to "decorate" or "enrich" urban spaces, especially plaza areas fronting federal buildings or corporate office towers;

2. Art **as** *public spaces:* it is a less object-oriented and more site-conscious art. It seeks greater integration between art, architecture and the landscape through the collaboration of artists with members of the urban managerial class (architects, landscape architects, city planners, urban designers, and city administrators) in the designing of permanent urban (re)development projects such as parks, plazas, buildings, promenades, neighbourhoods, etc;

3. Art **in** *the public* **interest***:* it is often temporary, with city-based programs focusing on social issues, rather than the built environment. It involves collaborations with marginalised social groups, such as the elderly, children, people with disabilities and marginalised communities (rather than design professionals), and it strives for the development of politically-conscious community events or programs.

Given these distinctions, Tactical Urbanism falls within that category of Public Art that is not only art **in** *public spaces,* but also, and especially, art *in the public sphere:* a kind of art that raises social, political and economic issues and that is able to activate the public debate. In choosing art and culture as an engine for the regeneration and gentrification of urban spaces, it is fundamental to not consider the public space as an empty space to be filled with whatever work of art, and to consider citizenship as an active part of the aesthetic processes (Lydon, Garcia, 2015). As said, cultural projects have played an important role in urban regeneration since the mid-1980s, and nowadays the increasing interest in participatory arts programmes can be explained by their low-cost nature, that is flexible and responsive to local needs. This use of Art and Culture coincides with a shift in cultural policies and regeneration strategies, which consider local people as the principal asset through which renewal has to be achieved.

2.2. Community involvement in Public Art

What is special about art? If we look at the dozens of examples in which arts programmes have brought a positive con-

tribution to local vitality and urban regeneration, renewal and gentrification, it is easy to find special characteristics and messages that the arts can convey (Harrebye, 2016). Art programmes engage people's creativity and so lead the problem to a solution, they enable dialogue between people and community, they encourage questioning and by doing so they offer the possibility to find solutions for a better future. A direct consequence of this is that arts programmes offer ways for self-expression, which is an essential part of active citizenship. Working with art and artists is intellectually stimulating and, at the same time, entertaining (Youkhana, 2014).

Nevertheless, it should be noted that arts programmes are not the only solution or an alternative to regeneration initiatives like environmental improvements, training schemes or youth development projects and initiatives, but they can be an important component of regeneration and gentrification policies and can have a significant effect. Finally, regeneration is not an end in itself; it is about people and the quality of their lives (Inti, 2019). For all these reasons, involving people in renewal and regeneration projects is not only essential for the long-term viability of the project but also to inspire further ideas and participation.

3. Tactical Urbanism: the Era of Asphalt Art

In the realm of Public Art, we can consider Tactical Urbanism as a citizen's acquired right to design site-specific interventions and reinvent the city according to collective needs. This independent, bottom-up movement, promotes the public and collective use of the city, with limited resources and low investments (Bazzu & Talu 2017). The concept *Tactical Urbanism* formally emerged following a meeting of the Next Generation of New Urbanism (NextGen) group in November 2010 in New Orleans. The purpose was to group together a set of interventions observed in North American cities in recent years. Its driving force is to put *individuals at the centre,* to take personal responsibility in creating sustainable buildings, streets, neighbourhoods, and cities. Therefore, it combines a development process with social interaction, and the goal is the enhancement of the quality of urban life by rethinking public space, which will then become a place of encounter and aggregation. Sometimes, it can carry strong critical political positions to the institutional action on the urban dimension, and support local communities to develop immediate solutions to the increasingly difficult economic and social conditions.

"Tactical Urbanism demonstrates the huge power of thinking small about our cities. It shows how, with little imagination and the resources at hand, cities can unlock the full potential of their streets" – Janette Sadik-Khan, 2015, Commissioner of the New York City Department of Transportation (2007-2013)

The virtuous cycle that inspired Tactical Urbanism to flourish comes from a series of first temporary and then permanent urban experiments. New York City was the first metropolis to experiment with tactical urbanism projects, even before the expression was coined by Lydon and Garcia (2015). The pedestrianisation of Times Square (Fig. 1) and the introduction of walkable plazas, by Janette Sadik-Khan, are two examples. These interventions not only made the area more beautiful and airy, but also resulted in more than a 60% drop in traffic accidents and pedestrian injuries at the interchange (Lydon, Garcia 2015).

3.1. Turning a Temporary Act into a Permanent Social Statement

Mike Lydon and Anthony Garcia, members of the NextGen group, are among the first prominent writers to define Tactical Urbanism and to promote various interventions to improve urban design and promote positive change in neighbourhoods and communities. In their book *"Tactical Urbanism: Short-term Action for Long-term Change"* (Lydon, Garcia, 2015) it is described as consisting of five pillars:
1. a deliberate phased approach to instigating change;
2. local solutions to local planning challenges;
3. a short-term commitment to a longer-term change;
4. potentially high rewards with low risks;
5. the development of social capital and organisational capacity between citizens, public and private institutions, and nonprofits.

When included in a public design process, tactical urbanism can quickly build trust among different groups and community stakeholders. In many instances, the initiators of the proj-

Figure 1. Times Square pedestrian intervention in New York City (United States of America), 2009. Photo credits: New York City Department of Transportation.

ects are associations or local governments that jointly show that *temporary* and *low-cost solutions* can facilitate change and bring benefits to the different actors involved. It considers citizenship as an active part of the aesthetic processes. For the citizens, it is a way to reorganise or transform public spaces, claiming the use in their everyday life, by allowing people to experience what's possible, rather than just looking at photos or renderings of what it could become. In this way, the spectator becomes 'spect-actor', and the artist becomes *'spect-author'* (Palermo 2014).

Collaboration between project coordinators, local residents, and the government is key to balance priorities and develop consensus around goals and the final design. Stakeholders representatives of the residents, instead, provide specific knowledge and insights that project facilitators may not possess. Capturing a variety of stakeholder voices is important to ensure that the project is not only designed for the local community, but *with the community*. Furthermore, engaging all potential stakeholders - especially those who are normally marginalised by the planning process - and securing their input on the project, can be a challenging experience and a chance of professional growth.

Tactical Urbanism is not the ending point in the design journey, it is what opens new possibilities of change: its efforts may be temporary, but the impacts may last for decades. This is why it's important to acknowledge it as part of a long-term strategy or vision, which includes making transitory interventions permanent, and scaling up successful projects to other neighbourhoods (Haydn, Temel, 2006). It is a tool cities can use to help achieve a larger vision of reallocating street space away from private vehicles and investing in safer, more comfortable environments for people.

The best way to get a sense of how a street or square changes, is for citizens to experience the new shared spaces firsthand. The success of the interventions can be measured, and thanks to the data collected and the lessons learned, the community can choose which of the temporary acts were effective and make them long lasting solutions (Lehtovuori, Ruoppila, 2012).

Through the critical analysis of some case studies, we want to underline how *participatory art* and *creative activism* have the ability to transform the living environment according to the *'build - measure - learn'* sequence (Bazzu, Talu, 2017). Regardless of whether it is a small town in the suburbs of underdeveloped countries or a neighbourhood in a large metropolis like the city of Milan, the case studies were chosen both for their differences and analogies. They allow the construction of a more general conclusion, that might be worthwhile for different contexts at a global scale. The common ground is how they implement *tactical urbanism* approaches to face the urban regeneration processes, and the cities' intention to learn from unturned approaches, and take their benefits into the institutional toolbox.

4. The Different Facets of Tactical Urbanism

Before focusing on how the city of Milan implemented the methods typical of Tactical Urbanism, some examples from different urban contexts will be shown. The projects that can be mentioned are abounding, but the attention will be focused on two case studies that illustrate Public Art as engines of urban regeneration to achieve some degree of social impact, which are developed in urban contexts that differ completely for social and economical development.

4.1. Breaking the Walls of Inequality through Colourful Murals

"Favela Painting" is the program by the Dutch artists Jeroen Koolhaas and Dre Urhahn, in collaboration with locals, aimed to affect the aesthetic of how favelas are perceived from within and outside.

The projects, placed in Rio de Janeiro Brazil, started in 2005 by training young community members in the process and epitomising an alternative and creative way to construct a sense of community in collaboration with local inhabitants. The representation of what favelas are, does not reflect the imaginary potential of what these spaces truly are and, above all, the way in which people who inhabit them represent them, and by doing so understand their own existence and environmental structures.

The colourful walls bring hope and deliver a different understanding of space and its people, inviting others to co-create and co-represent a much more constructive and positive life here (Fig. 2). In the designer's words, *"it breaks the poor stigmatisation image of favelados, so they can aspire to better education and other social and health necessities that can enrich their already complex reality and meaningful communities"* (Imas, Kosmala, 2010).

It brings a true potential for sustainability that proved to be significant in the fight against poverty, exclusion and deprivation of the faveladas. It allows to articulate a different discourse of social change, of engagement in contributing to improve life for favela dwellers. Both the local and global impact of this project inspired to continue creating large-scale community art movements across the world: over the years the initiative has developed into the *United Painting Foundation* (supporting their own and affiliate projects worldwide) that by now has become an institution with a fast growing international group of participants on many levels.

The second one is "Mural artivism: Breaking the walls of gender inequality" by the *UN Women* organisation (2021). As part of the Generation Equality campaign, UN Women has issued a global call for original artworks that visualise and celebrate activism for gender equality (Fig. 3). Seven distinguished local artists from all over the world (Turkey, Albania, Georgia, Kosovo, Moldova, North Macedonia, USA) promote new urban narratives and social change through art. A mural on the wall in a public space has the power to reach broad audiences and engage citizens in dialogue on social issues that are vital to the city or community. They seek to figuratively break down the walls of inequality, and to raise awareness about women rights. During online workshops held by Alice Mizrachi - a street artist from New York and an advocate of women rights - the artists exchanged experiences and efforts of equality that mould their art.

Collectively, these change-makers of all ages and genders can tackle the unfinished business of empowering women through a new multigenerational campaign. To foster a rich dialogue, each muralist selected young aspiring artists to

Figure 2. Favela Painting Project in Praça Cantão, Rio de Janeiro (Brasil), 2010. Photo credits: Favela Painting / Barcroft Media.

Figure 3. The inauguration of the mural "Half of the population = Half of the power" by Gökhan Tüfekçi in Ankara (Turkey), 2021. Photo credits: UN Women / Ender Baykuş.

help them with the mural. This intergenerational experience provided the artists with an opportunity to usher the next generation into a more sustainable and just future for all. The campaign demands equal pay, equal sharing of unpaid care and domestic work, an end to sexual harassment and all forms of violence against women and girls, healthcare services that respond to their needs, and their equal participation in political life and decision-making.

4.2. The Milanese Experiments

The city of Milan, in Italy, freely offers the possibility to investigate Tactical Urbanism techniques: it is a city that wants to always question and renew itself, and to not stagnate in its history. Unlike other cities in Italy, Milan's urban structure developed together with its transport infrastructures, whose role grew extremely important since the dawn of the Industrial Age. And to this day, regardless of the city's important progress towards an evermore efficient public transport network, its configuration shows a strong redundancy of street spaces, almost exclusively absorbed by private vehicular mobility (Ferrari 2015).

The superabundant quantity of parking places, even in neighbourhoods dating back to well before the wide diffusion of private motorised mobility, implies that those parking places were progressively subtracted to green areas or free pedestrian spaces. Even in central neighbourhoods, the typical experience of public space is averagely quite poor: the vast majority of sidewalks finish with plain asphalt, and large portions of high-quality residential buildings have no public uses on the ground levels. Worrying levels of pollution in the air quality complete the framework of the city, which never found a true dimension of shared public space.

But it is in the city's imperfections that one can find the engine to start thinking about experimenting new solutions. In fact, in recent years short-term interventions of Tactical Urbanism inspired associations and planning institutions to implement local-based initiatives. Considering Milan's attitude toward innovation, it's a perfect ground for the transformation of the urban fabric, through a process of community reconstruction and redevelopment of public spaces, increas-

ingly open to multiple and temporary uses.

4.2.1. "Piazze Aperte" Program in Milan

"Piazze Aperte" is a municipal program on which the city has been working since 2018, being a Milanese interpretation of the Tactical Urbanism movement. It is committed to converting former asphalted street spaces, dedicated to vehicular mobility, into pedestrian public spaces, using Tactical Urbanism techniques. The first projects were located on areas selected by the municipality, but since 2019 the program evolved into *"Piazze Aperte in Ogni Quartiere" (open squares in each neighbourhood)* and the active involvement of the citizens was extended to every step of the process, and it progressively consolidated the methodology.

Starting from a *selection phase*, the City issued a call open to citizens, informal groups, and associations, to propose urban transformations realisable within the tactical urbanism framework. Applicants were provided with a kit of admissible interventions (painting, urban furniture, and potted plants) and a list of 52 urban areas available to transform. In the *proposal phase*, citizens were asked to propose transformations concerning function, aesthetics, and furniture. Regardless of the technical quality or readiness, all proposals were accepted. Finally, the *co-design phase starts*, where citizens are involved in a common design process to refine their proposals and fulfil the urban safety and traffic management regulations. The city is progressively putting into practice all proposals.

The citizens' involvement process exceeded the expectations:
• it directly involved more than 200 actors in a short period of time;
• succeeded in collecting multiple proposals for the 52 available areas;
• it led the citizens themselves to request the addition of 11 new locations, all currently under advanced co-design phase, if not already completed.

It is remarkable how the city is embracing the opportunity to turn the temporal nature of these interventions into an ad-

Figure 4. Piazza Spoleto, No.Lo, Milan (Italy) - *Piazze Aperte* Program (2019). Photo credits: Comune di Milano.

Figure 5. Piazza Dergano, Milan (Italy) - *Piazze Aperte* Program (2018). Photo credits: Comune di Milano.

vantage. Some of the earliest Piazze Aperte projects are now being turned into permanent pedestrian squares, and have therefore ultimately entered the urban topography of Milan.

Among the various examples of urban redevelopment, one of the most successful was certainly the intervention carried out in the No.Lo. neighbourhood in 2019, between Via Spoleto, Via Venini and Via Martiri Oscuri (Fig. 4). The project, requested by numerous parents, was designed to secure the small square, located right in front of the entrance of an elementary school. The pavement was repainted in blue and yellow, following a design that, when viewed from above, represents a large whale, symbol of the neighbourhood. The road system was also completely rethought and implemented, with the aim of slowing down and diluting the traffic, through one-way streets, bicycle lanes and pedestrian crossings, which created new spaces for families living in the neighbourhood to socialise.

In piazza Dergano, after a twelve-month trial period and a positive dialogue with the inhabitants, the final project to redesign the square started in November 2018 (Fig. 5). The initial interventions were integrated with permanent structural works, expanding the project to the neighbouring streets as well. During the test phase, a qualitative survey (Municipality of Milan, 2018) was carried out that showed a 50% increase in the flow of pedestrians along Via Tartini, the adjacent street. It also showed that 72% of the surveyed people spent more time in the square, at least one hour a day, and 84% were in favour of making the interventions permanent. In the final design, benches, ping pong tables and picnic tables remained, and the redesign of the pedestrian area has further widened the flowerbeds and allocated space for eating areas. New potted trees meet the need for more greenery and play areas.

The intervention in Piazza Tito Minniti was created in 2021 in collaboration with the Italian artist Camilla Falsini, called to redesign one of the symbolic areas, in the Isola neighbourhood (Fig. 6). The new square, a central point of the area and home to the historic local market, features an explosion of colours and geometric images on the pavement, which creates the word "Isola." Its letters enclose references to some of the area's distinctive features, such as: the i recalls a skyscraper, symbolising the modern soul recently adopted by the area; the a is the shape of a house, to emphasise the strong residential character of the neighbourhood.

4.2.2. *"TrentaMi in Verde"* Program in Milan (2019)

TréntaMi in Verde is a temporary experimentation of sloweddown traffic zones, where cars can only drive up to 30 km/h (Fig. 9). It is designed by the joint forces of local associations (Genitori Antismog, FIAB Milano Ciclobby, NoLo Social District, MoBì collective), together with the City Council.One of the main areas of intervention is the square preceding Parco Trotter, situated in the north-eastern part of Milan. Thanks to the colourful design on the ground, they got rid of wildly parked cars and dangerous intersections (Fig. 7). The idea was to give continuity to the greenery of the park with planters and trees, and the consequent transformation of the square into a place for the people. These interventions helped people to experience and touch with their hands the better liveability and safety of the public space - thanks to the reduction of speed and noise - and thereby created the necessary consensus for the success of the intervention.All the phases foreseen have been taken into account and implemented to let the initiatives work smoothly. Communication plays a key role in this process of change, that shifted from a municipality-centred model to a community one, in which urban spaces are given back to a plurality of users.

As an example, the volunteers who helped in the construction of Via Rovereto and Parco Trotter were mainly from the *NoLo Social District* association. But some volunteers came directly "from the street", they spontaneously and independently joined the works, offering their willingness and help, stimulated by seeing other citizens - their 'neighbours' - engaged in building, painting, planting, cleaning. Moreover, many of the materials and tools that were used were donated or lent by local residents.

The new layouts have made it possible to obtain spaces for the insertion of new pedestrian furniture and plants of various sizes, to improve the quality of the street as a public

Figure 6. Piazza Tito Minniti, Milan (Italy) - *Piazze Aperte* Program (2021). Photo credits: Camilla Falsini / Jungle.

Figure 7. Parco Trotter, Milan (Italy) - *TrentaMi in Verde* Program (2019). Photo credits: Genitori AntiSmog Association / Trén-taMI in Verde.

Figure 8. Via Rovereto, Milan (Italy) - *TrentaMi in Verde* Program (2019). Photo credits: Genitori AntiSmog Association / TréntaMI in VerdeTréntaMI in Verde.

Figure 9. Via Rovereto, Milan (Italy) - *TrentaMi in Verde* Program (2019). Photo credits: Genitori AntiSmog Association / TréntaMI in Verde.

space, a shared space to live (Fig. 8). It transformed the area from an axis for vehicular traffic, to a space for inter-relations between a plurality of users (motorists, pedestrians, cyclists, residents...) and functions, and to transform the Parco Trotter exedra from an illegal car park to a real square, favouring liveability, coexistence and socialisation. The spaces were freed from cars and returned to the people, using colours as a tool for moderating speed and self-constructing the new street furniture, including new plants, games area and eating tables.

5. Learning from Tactical Urbanism Techniques for the Future Milan

The city of Milan embraced the interventions positively, as most of the earliest designs are now being turned into permanent pedestrian squares, and so have ultimately entered its urban topography. In this chapter, the authors want to present their own contribution to the experimentations in this socio-urban context: Bordin G. and Toso E. have been tutored by the professor Carvalho A. in the design of their master degree thesis, and by understanding the big impact of these case studies in the community's structure has inspired them to apply similar methodologies in their thesis design.

The picture in *Figure 10* depicts a mural art in Milan's neighbourhood Corvetto, that states *"Safe streets are made by the women who cross them"* (Andreoli & Muzzonigro 2021). It is relevant to include this statement because even though the thesis renovation project is located elsewhere in Milan, it shares with the Corvetto neighbourhood the same feeling of unsafety among users. Therefore, the re-design needs to address the issue of safety first.

The thesis project takes place in Via Emilio Gola in Milan, which has been defined as a case of '*suburbs*' in the centre: it is part of the central urban fabric, being located only two kilometres away from the Milan Cathedral, but it's totally unrelated to the context in which it's set in (Grecchi 2008). The visual and social contrast that characterised the neighbourhood is evident: the nearby Navigli area is enriched by elegant buildings, four-star hotels and renowned restaurants, while Via Emilio Gola emerges for a degraded, poorly maintained and untidy appearance. The press portrays it as a world parallel to the city, supporting the collective imagination of the Milanese population as being a place of degradation and danger, enhancing a shared sense of insecurity and distrust. This narrative seems to depict it only with negative connotations, while looking with more keen eyes, it is a place with a strong cultural identity, in which the lives of hundreds of people intertwine and confront each other (Fig. 11; Fig. 12). This creates a chaotic but fascinating effect, rich and full of experiences. (Agustoni 2003).

The thesis work presents an urban and architectural regeneration project of the street Via Emilio Gola (Fig. 13), and the social housing complex adjacent to it. Without getting too deep in the details of the project, that goes beyond the scope of this paper, part of the design strategy has been the imple-

Figure 10. Street art in Corvetto, Milan (Italy), 2021. Photo credits: Azzurra Muzzonigro.

mentation of the tactical urbanism techniques to reconnect Via Gola with its urban surroundings, and to make it a safe and liveable place for everyone.

As stated, there is a strong connection between how much a place is lived and used by people and how safe it is, and the previously shown experiments in the city of Milan proves this. The picture in *Figure 13* shows the current appearance of Via Emilio Gola, while the subsequent image (Fig. 14) is a graphical representation intended to show the future scenario of a regenerated, lively and dynamic urban environment, according to the thesis project. The starting point of the regeneration is the design of an inclusive Shared Space (Hamilton-Baillie, 2014) in the street, where safety and comfort are provided by places to stay for a prolonged period of time - rather than being an emptied traffic artery - giving back to the community a sense of belonging and security. Therefore, cars are allowed in the street for most of the day, but more close-up interventions are implemented, such as the design of a discontinuous non-straight aisle, to slow down the car speed, with the addition of natural elements and urban furniture like planters with trees and vegetation and seating, creating a street that allows the fluid coexistence of cars and pedestrians. The addition of a continuous mirror in the lower part of the buildings' elevations frames the street, giving it a new appealing personality, while naturally discouraging criminal acts (Duval, Wicklund, 1971), in the attempt to eliminate the criticalities linked to crime and drug dealing.

Unlike the Tactical Urbanism interventions in Milan, the pavement in Via Gola is designed to be a long-lasting solution, built with a sustainably sourced recycled rubber surfacing, which is water permeable and provides a porous rubber pathway. The result is a safe and continuous walking path, with no differences in heights that go from facade to facade, accessible to all categories of users: from people with motion impairments to parents with strollers, to bikes (Fig. 15). The bright colours and playful shapes make the new pavement an inviting playground for kids as well (Global Designing Cities Initiative, 2019).

Ensuring and strengthening the active use of the public realm generates more pedestrian friendly and flexible public spaces, and makes buildings more attractive by night (Fig.16). This approach also encourages the process of the *'night time economy'*, which facilitates the development of activities during the night, like in a normal working day. In the project, Via Gola is conceptualised as a people-centred street, where there is no conceptual space for marginalisation, and every inhabitant can co-live, including parents, children and disabled people. So the area, traditionally considered problematic, would be transformed thanks to creative activism and tactical urbanism, to drive lasting social improvements in the city.

While recognizing the dysfunctionality of the current urban and social situation, it was clear the urgent need to rethink the neighbouring piazza (Fig.17). The main intervention con-

Figure 11. Inhabitants having a meeting in Via Emilio Gola, Milan (Italy), 2021. Photo credits: Luisa Marzani.

Figure 12. Local residents in Via Emilio Gola, Milan (Italy), 2021. It's clear the sense of community and the residents' attempt to conquer the street space for social interaction and community building. Photo credits: Luisa Marzani.

sists of the removal of the cars' domain, and giving the space back to the community (Hamilton-Baillie, 2014). Since people are more likely to linger in a high-quality environment, the overall appearance is thoughtfully enhanced with urban furniture such as lighting, seating, cycle racks and open-air activities tools. These choices would lead to the empowerment of a newly engaged population, that will be new key actors in the transformation of their neighbourhood.

6. Conclusion

It has been highlighted in multiple case studies that Tactical Urbanism methods can have a big social and urban impact, even in highly developed realities, like the city of Milan, in Italy. The experimental interventions of urban requalification put in place by citizens, associations and the municipality created new possibilities for the city: reviving busy public spaces, taking space away from the dominance of cars, creating new open-air meeting places for youths and increasing security for pedestrians and cyclists.

Additionally, case studies like the regeneration of the area outside Parco Trotter or the colourful Piazza Spoleto empha-

sise how Creative Activism is effective in transforming areas traditionally considered problematic, starting with short-term, community-based projects, that have the power to drive lasting improvements in the city. In fact, both these interventions have recently been made permanent, by paving the area or inserting durable street furniture, thus demonstrating their effectiveness and satisfaction among citizens.

The positive outcome of these projects can also inspire change in new areas of the city, as was the case with the design of the author's master thesis proposal, or in other cities as well. Thus, one is left with the question of which cities are in the near future going to join this stream of social and urban developments, and how municipalities, urban planners, architects and citizens will find a way to implement interventions that learn from the successful Tactical Urbanism methodologies and help each other respecting the intrinsic values of our cities and their communities, while operating on big-scale urban projects.

References

Figure 13. Current appearance of Via Emilio Gola, Milan (Italy): a desert, asphalted street, that causes feeling of uncomfort and unsafety while crossing it. Photo credits: Google Maps.

Figure 14. Graphical representation of the project proposal for Via Emilio Gola, Milan (Italy). Image credits: Giovanna Bordin, Elisabetta Toso, 2022.

Figure 15. Axonometric views of the project proposal for Via Emilio Gola, Milan (Italy). Image credits: Giovanna Bordin, Elisabetta Toso, 2022.

Figure 16. Graphical representation of the urban environment during the night in Via Emilio Gola, Milan (Italy). Image credits: Giovanna Bordin, Elisabetta Toso, 2022.

Figure 17. Graphical representation of the piazza adjacent to Via Emilio Gola, Milan (Italy). Image credits: Giovanna Bordin, Elisabetta Toso, 2022.

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