

Preliminary report

THE CITY AS AN INVENTION FOR THE FUTURE

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Abstract

At the turn of the century, more precisely in 2005, the World Congress of Architects was held in Istanbul under the theme A Celebration of Cities. A vast number of ideas from around the world, translated into drawings and texts, testifying to the optimistic spirit of architects and urban planners. The presence of Zaha Hadid, renowned for her avant-garde concepts and realizations, contributed to the affirmation of the Congress's idea, which was focused on the urban society of the 21st century. This year marks the 20th anniversary of that event. It is quite difficult to assess where we stand today in relation to the plans and ideas presented back in 2005. It is worth recalling that the Grand Prix was awarded to the project Milano il centro intorno. Milan serves as an example through which we can discuss to what extent urban planning visions have become reality. In this note, we will present the most significant achievements of the new urban centers in Milan: City Life, Porta Nuova, Garibaldi, and Isola. Our goal is to critically examine these contemporary accomplishments in the fields of planning, urbanism, and architecture. Such an overview allows for a more comprehensive perspective on the crisis of civilization on one hand and the inspirations and utopian visions of architects on the other.

Key words: *UIA 2005, Milano, City Life, Porta Nuova, crisis of urban society*

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1. INTRODUCTION

One of the key issues recognized by urban planners in the second half of the 20th century was the question of the city's identity. In response, new planning strategies emerged that sought to preserve historical heritage, adapt to local contexts, and encourage greater public participation in shaping urban environments. The work of *Rob Krier* played a significant role in this shift, emphasizing the importance of traditional urban morphology and the quality of public space [1]. *Kevin Lynch* focused on exploring how people perceive and interact with cities. Rather than viewing cities as rationally constructed wholes, he proposed understanding them as multilayered urban structures filled with meaning, emotions, and relationships. At the heart of this space is the individual - not as a passive user of pre-defined urban solutions, but as an active participant in shaping their living environment [2].

Theoretical framework established by Henri Lefebvre in his seminal 1970 work, *The Urban Revolution* is particularly important. His call for a reversal of urban planning practices centers on activities oriented "not toward the traditional man, but toward the human being, newly observed and newly created—the man of urban society that is being formed" [3]. He was particularly critical of what he termed *urban implosion*. Lefebvre critiques industrial space as homogeneous, rationally planned, and strictly zoned—where the spatio-temporal structure is uniform. He contrasts this with a *differential space/time*, in which "each place and each moment exist only as part of a whole, through contrasts and oppositions that simultaneously connect them to, and differentiate them from, other places and moments" [3]. According to Lefebvre, urban life cannot be reduced to the city's functional aspects, such as transportation, infrastructure, and rational urban parameters. Rather, it must encompass the full spectrum of citizens' needs. Within this context, he underscores the phenomenon of alienation. In articulating his urban vision, Lefebvre distinguishes between places, territories, events, centers, corridors, isotopies, heterotopias, utopias, homogeneity, and difference. These conceptual distinctions highlight the imperative for urban planning and architectural practice to continuously engage with the deeper meanings and lived experiences embedded in space. We must recognize that *the right to the city*³ stands as one of the most significant contributions of his philosophy.

2. UIA WORLD CONGRESS 2005

The beginning of the 21st century was marked by a sense of optimism and hope for the advancement of humanity. An intensified global effort toward environmental recovery has introduced key concepts tailored to the demands of the new millennium: sustainability, ecology, accessible education, technological progress, poverty eradication, gender equality, and more. In honor of the new millennium—and as an homage to the previous one—avant-garde, high-cost structures began emerging around the world. In London alone, projects such as the *Millennium Footbridge* (Norman Foster), the *Millennium Dome* (Richard Rogers and Mike Davies), and the *Millennium Wheel* (a team of architects) were constructed. The entire planet was imbued with optimism, as collaboration and mutual understanding flourished across borders.

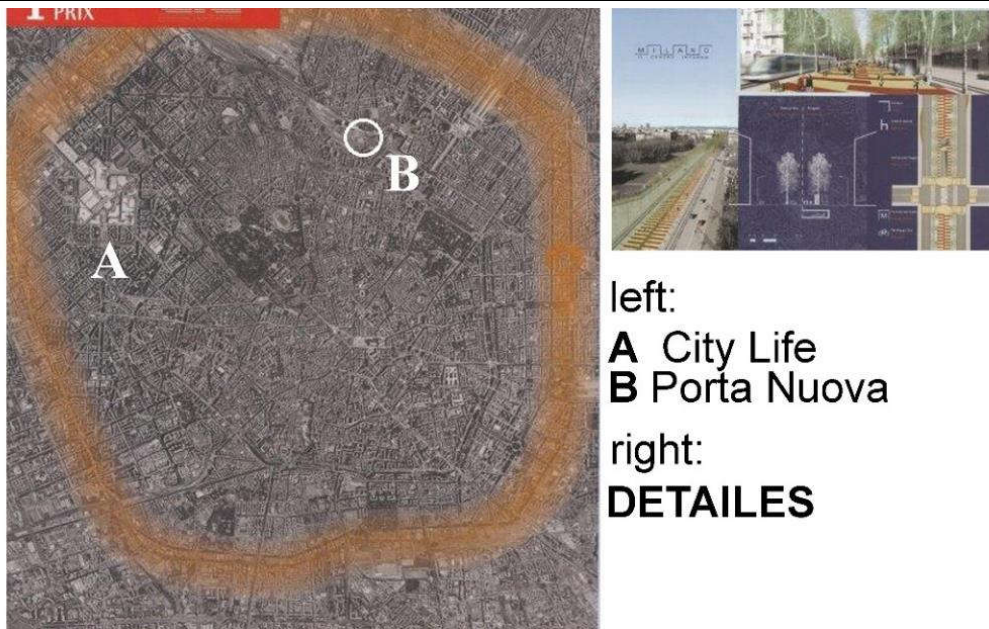
³ 1968. *Le Droit à la ville*, Paris: Anthropos (2nd ed.); Paris: Ed. du Seuil, Collection "Points"

In this spirit, the UIA World Congress of Architects was held in 2005 in Istanbul. The Congress organizers launched an international competition titled *Celebration of Cities*, initiated by the International Union of Architects (UIA) in June 2003. Confronted with the reality that more than half of the global population lives in urban environments and that poorly regulated urbanization continues, the architectural profession sought to initiate a dialogue between citizens and their social, aesthetic, physical, and economic environments. Once again, the fundamental question was raised: *What is a city?* It was emphasized that many existing cities often fail to communicate effectively and directly with the needs of their inhabitants. The competition was designed to encourage spatial interventions that would address both specific urban environments and universal issues of urban life. The aim was to propose models for improving local lifestyles, with special emphasis on sociological categories such as solidarity; psychological aspects like creativity; ethical values such as multiculturalism and gender equality. It was evident that extravagant and financially demanding solutions were not expected. Rather, the aim was to promote innovative and thoughtful approaches that embraced simplicity, functionality, accessibility, and public interest. Competition participants were informed that their projects could focus on the improvement of historic city centers, large residential complexes, substandard settlements and suburban areas [4].

2.1. Grand Prize for Milan

By decision of the professional jury, the Grand Prize of the international competition was awarded to the project by an Italian team of architects from Milan, titled *Reuniting Milan*. The authors of the project were Maurizio Marzi, Giorgio Morini, Marcello Ganassini, Francesca Scianna and Yewande A. Omotoso. The Milan project focuses on the transformation of the surrounding the Milan ring road—an infrastructural section 20 kilometers long and 40 meters wide, covering a total area of approximately 12,000 hectares. The ring road encircles the historical core and the inner urban area of the city, while simultaneously creating a physical divide that separates Milan into two spatial entities: Milan within and Milan beyond the ring. The authors proposed a concept aimed at re-establishing both spatial and symbolic integration between these two urban segments. They envisioned a wide pedestrian zone located between the dual carriageways, lined with rows of trees and equipped with modular urban furniture. The symbolic reconnection of the two sides—suggesting the reunification of previously separated parts of the city—was articulated through the pavement design, which took the form of a giant zipper. This paved surface was intended for pedestrians, cyclists, and scooter users. The proposal stood out for its simplicity, while also offering the possibility of transforming the ring road into a unique urban belt—not one dominated exclusively by vehicular traffic, as is currently the case [5] (*Figure 1*).

Unfortunately, the award-winning idea of the Milanese architects was never realized. On the other hand, another urban area, visible in the plan as a composition of white volumes encompassing the fairground complex and the *CityLife* zone, was successfully implemented. In close proximity lies another ultra-modern mixed-use urban and architectural complex known as *Porta Nuova, Garibaldi e Isola*—marked with a circle on the map (*Figure 1*). These two urban complexes are of exceptional significance, not only for the urban evolution of Milan and Italy but also within a broader European and global context.



left:
A City Life
B Porta Nuova
 right:
DETAILS

Figure 1. Milano il centro intorno UIA 2005.

3. MILAN AS A STAGE FOR 21ST-CENTURY ARCHITECTURE

Most Italian cities are open-air museums. This abundance of heritage has, in a way, overshadowed the significance of Italian architecture of the 20th and 21st centuries. Italy is rarely perceived as an environment open to extravagant and ultra-modern architectural and urban compositions. However, this perception does not reflect the reality, particularly in recent decades, during which cities such as Rome, Milan, Naples, Turin, and Genoa have become centers of numerous innovative urban-architectural interventions. The distinctiveness of architecture in Italy lies, among other things, in its cultivated respect for context. It seems that, in Italy, extravagant architectural forms within the built environment are almost considered taboo. Contemporary Italy appears somewhat isolated from the ideas of a new, anti-historical and anti-traditional reality. Fabio Severino discusses this phenomenon in his column *Ricominciamo sognare* ("Let Us Begin Dreaming Again"). He criticizes the citizens of Italian cities, stating that they dream little—if they dream at all. He highlights the need for the city to become the bearer of its own vision of development, with its identity and character. Citizens, led by a City mayor and professional teams, should cultivate an atmosphere that encourages visions of a peaceful and cohesive future. He offered particular praise to the then-mayor of Milan, under whose leadership the city became more open, more cheerful, and oriented toward its own renewal, in which the imperative "*I have, therefore I am*" (*Ho quindi sono*) had lost some of its former harshness. Numerous international events hosted in Milan contributed to this new spirit of optimism and progressiveness [6].

3.1. Milan and the Subtle Transformations of Historic Urban Space

Several projects stand out for their value in revitalizing old Milanese buildings through new purposes. One such example is *L'Ansaldo Base*⁴, opened in 2016 in Milan as a space for cultural progress, established through the renovation and reconstruction of a building considered as a significant monument of industrial archaeology. A similar concept underlies *Fondazione Elpis*⁵, a space intended for exhibitions, interdisciplinary laboratories, installations, and innovative projects. Originally, in the 19th century, the building served as a laundry facility; today, thanks to the vision of Marina Nissim, it has become a meeting point for young artists from different cultures. The center's themes are dedicated to contemporary social challenges, including migrations, climate change and cultural tensions [7].

In addition to cultural venues, social centers designed for broader groups of citizens are also of particular interest. One such example is the project *Cascina Case Nuove – il progetto di riqualificazione per un nuovo hub sociale*⁶, initiated by the *Terzo Luogo Foundation* in collaboration with the City of Milan. The project envisions the development of a comprehensive social complex in the San Siro district, on Alessandro Paravia Street. The plan involves the revitalization of dilapidated rural houses and the construction of new pavilions. With an investment of nearly 10 million euros, the goal is to create a gathering place for people of all generations and nationalities, offering programs that encourage creativity and social interaction. The existing area is to be transformed into an open social square, a local hub toward which the surrounding community will naturally gravitate. The center is structured around three functional units: a multimedia library, a creative space for children, and a creative zone for all age groups. The project promotes principles of collaboration, dialogue, and coexistence [8]. These examples illustrate the implementation of ideas promoted by the UIA 2005 Competition, emphasizing inclusivity, cultural diversity, and the reactivation of forgotten spaces through new functions. They confirm the sensitivity of Italian architects to context and the contemporary social need for spaces that encourage dialogue and creativity.

3.2. Milan: New Centers

In 2015, Milan hosted the World exhibition EXPO, under the theme "*Feeding the Planet, Energy for Life.*" Organizing such a complex event required comprehensive preparations involving all sectors of the city—from administration to architectural and urban planning. That year also served as a period for evaluating the success of the transformations Milan had undergone in the preceding decades. Many projects initiated in the late 1980s and 1990s were finally completed. Two ambitious and expensive urban complexes, *CityLife* and *Porta Nuova*, whose development began in the early 2000s, were finalized. In the previous period, the city had grown uncontrollably and hypertrophically. Like many other European cities, its expansion was largely driven by economic interests. The rapid growth resulted in localized infrastructural shortcomings and encroachments on agricultural land. Taking all of this into account, architects, urban planners, and the city administration have recognized the Milan area as one holding potential for balanced growth and the implementation of the principles of

⁴ <https://base.milano.it/en/casabase/>

⁵ <https://fondazioneelpis.org/en>

⁶ <https://www.wrp.polimi.it/cascina-case-nuove/>

sustainability. A key imperative for the future is the responsible use of natural resources and energy, as well as respect for the architectural heritage that shapes the inhabited space.

Milan has also faced challenges such as the progressive abandonment of certain parts of the city, urban decay, and the pressures of globalization. Professor Valente accurately pointed out that the city's reconstruction must recognize the paths, routes, and developmental flows that preserve the continuity of the city, while also respecting the logic of a certain spatial homogenization. Architects and urban planners are encouraged to direct their visions toward new perspectives in urban design. In this process, fundamental urban analysis should be place-oriented [9]. When comparing the transformations of two major Italian cities – Turin and Milan – *Simone Cola* observes that both cases involve a deep re-evaluation of developmental directions and methods. In Turin, transformation was strongly influenced by public initiatives, whereas in Milan, it was marked by large private investments that did not solely pursue profit. Milan occupies a unique place in the economic, political, cultural, and social context that is difficult to compare with any similar example within the country. Italian critics often emphasize that while the country has many architects – including highly skilled ones – there remains an unfulfilled potential to adequately valorize the wealth of knowledge rooted in its history and culture [10]. Milan's development has been guided by a series of master plans throughout the 21st century. Since the early 2000s, the city's comprehensive plan has been continuously reviewed and reorganized in a positive manner. The outcomes of these plans are being monitored, and the situation is now almost entirely consolidated. Although the city remains anchored to its institutional and administrative boundaries, it is evident that its developments resonate on both regional and international levels. Since 2013, the international scene has seen the emergence of the *Ri-formare* project—an educational and research initiative that has been well received. Promoted by the *Politecnico di Milano*, specifically the *School of Architecture* and *Società Edilizia Privata*, along with the *Agricultural Department of the City of Milan*, the project involved passionate participation from students and professors [11].

A series of notable projects have been implemented in Milan, undoubtedly supporting the creation of new centers and architecture emblematic of the 21st century. One such example is the *Museo delle Culture di Milano*⁷ (David Chipperfield), which repurposes a former industrial warehouse complex located on the edge of the greater central area of Milan. Another prominent project is the new headquarters of the *Fondazione Feltrinelli*⁸, designed by the architecture studio Herzog & de Meuron, whose form and landscaping innovatively explore architectural contextualism. The path of Milan's transformation is clearly articulated in the project by Rem Koolhaas / OMA,⁹ who designed the new *Fondazione Prada* headquarters, located in a former industrial area near the historic city's core, close to the important territorial axis *Corso Lodi*. Numerous other contemporary interventions exist, both on pre-existing structures and undeveloped sites, such as the new *Bocconi University Campus*¹⁰ (SANAA), which spans 35,000 square meters along the city's ring road [11].

⁷ <https://davidchipperfield.com/projects/mudec>

⁸ <https://www.herzogdemeuron.com/projects/327-porta-volta-fondazione-feltrinelli/>

⁹ <https://www.oma.com/projects/oma-amo-for-with-prada>

¹⁰ <https://www.archdaily.com/975778/new-urban-campus-for-bocconi-university-sanaa>

3.2.1. Porta Nuova Garibaldi and City Life

We can state that Milan is undergoing a continuous process of transforming formerly neglected urban zones into dynamic, multifunctional spaces, thereby enriching its historical core with new layers of urban identity. The emergence of new mental, formal, functional, and commercial elements reveals multiple "Milans" within the city. This is evident both in architectural form and spatial organization. The role of green areas in Milan's newly developed urban centers notably diverges from that of traditionally conceived parks with geometric layouts.

3.2.1.1. Porta Nuova Garibaldi

The **Porta Nuova** project covers 290,000 square meters in the heart of Milan, and is today considered one of the most significant examples of contemporary architecture and urban planning in Italy. Initially conceived as a synthesis between the neighborhoods of Brera, Isola, and Repubblica, this space was designed through the collaboration of renowned architectural firms: Studio Pelli Clarke Pelli Architects, Kohn Pedersen Fox, and Boeri Studio. Through landscape design and architectural expression, these teams succeeded in establishing a strong identity for the area. The space is unified by a network of pedestrian passages leading toward *Piazza Gae Aulenti*, the central aesthetic and organizational element of the composition (*Figure 2*). The piazza is a circular elevated platform featuring three reflecting water surfaces. The square is partially covered with perimeter canopies, offering shade and defining its spatial character. The ground level accommodates various commercial functions, retail spaces, and hospitality venues, while the majority of the more attractive programs are located on the underground floor. The plaza is surrounded by three glass towers of varying heights, arranged in accordance with its circular geometry. The focal point of their composition is the spiral-shaped pinnacle of the tallest tower—*Torre Unicredit*¹¹. Adjacent to the complex is a low-rise building that underscores the regulation of the surrounding street, *Via Fratelli Castiglioni*. Continuing along this axis stands the *Unipol Tower*¹², a commercial building of distinctive geometry, completed in 2023. On the plaza, facing *Viale Luigi Sturzo*, two low-rise buildings have been constructed, one of which is the *Uni Credit Pavilion*, designed by Michele De Lucchi studio¹³. The structure, realized in timber construction, is a monovolume of free form. On one side, it comprises a ground floor and three upper levels, while on the opposite side, the height is reduced to a ground floor with a gallery. The form of the pavilion is inspired by the shape of a seed and, according to the architect, "symbolizes the unity of nature and the people who live and work here" [12].

The materialization and design of the pavilion completely diverge from the surrounding architectural context. It is intended for various social and cultural events, such as meetings, conferences, congresses, exhibitions, performances, and seminars. Immediately adjacent to the pavilion is the *East Office Building*¹⁴, designed by architect Mario Cucinella. The building is conceived as two geometrically pure volumes. The one with an ellipsoidal plan features a transparent laminated timber grid that acts as a membrane, detached from the building's main mass. The other volume is a solid cube made of exposed concrete. The contrast between the characteristics of the applied materials is dedicated to exploring potential

¹¹ <https://pcparch.com/work/porta-nuova-garibaldi-and-unicredit-headquarters>

¹² <https://www.mcarchitects.it/progetti/headquarters-gruppo-unipol>

¹³ <https://divisare.com/projects/367152-michele-de-lucchi-tom-vack-unicredit-pavilion>

¹⁴ <https://www.asingegneria.com/en/collaborazioni/e3-east>

syntheses between the natural and the artificial. The interior space is flexible and adaptable, suitable for office or commercial purposes. The transparency of the building emphasizes the connection between exterior and interior, forming a unified spatial environment. The building's position and form carry a strong urban and symbolic value, evoking the notion of a gateway: next to the basement level, a broad staircase leads up to the elevated plateau of *Piazza Gae Aulenti*.

The architecture of the entire complex is heterogeneous—formally, conceptually, and materially. There are pronounced vertical dissonances within the composition, while the horizontal regulation remains rigid and well-defined. The square has placed many of its essential functions underground, thereby largely losing the traditional role of the Italian *piazzetta*, which has been replaced by spectacular architectural gestures and corporate presence. Nevertheless, within the broader urban ensemble—which includes a pleasantly landscaped area extending toward the Isola district—a balanced atmosphere of contemporary Milan emerges. A particular contribution to the space is made by the residential complex *Bosco Verticale*¹⁵, a project by the Boeri Studio, internationally recognized as a paradigm of sustainable architecture. Its balconies host 480 medium-sized trees, 250 small trees, 14,000 ground-covering plants, and 5,000 shrubs. This part of Milan also accommodates the office towers of numerous corporations, collectively generating the impression of capital that relentlessly reshapes the city's identity, transforming it into a metropolis of power, design, and extravagance. Milan boldly promotes new traditions of urban form and urban life—traditions that are, at times, subject to debate.



Figure 2. Legend: 1. Piazza Gae Aulenti; 2. UniCredit; 3. Edificio di Piuarch 4. Unipol Tower; 5. UniCredit Pavilion; 6. East Office Building; 7. Piazza Alvar Alto; 8. Biblioteca degli Alberi; 9. Bosco Verticale. Photos from Private archive.

¹⁵ <https://www.stefano-boeri-architetti.net/en/project/vertical-forest/>

3.2.1.2. City Life

Another radically modern urban area has been realized in Milan: the *City Life* complex. This urban entity was constructed in the vicinity of the former Milan Fairgrounds, which remained active until 2005. The zone now occupied by CityLife, approximately two-thirds of the overall site, is bounded by the city's highways and has a shape close to a square. As one of the most ambitious urban and architectural interventions in Milan, CityLife can be regarded as a competitor to the *Porta Nuova* complex, with which it shares similar aspirations in terms of redefining contemporary urban identity. While *Porta Nuova* represents a high point in the architecture of the early 21st century, CityLife in certain aspects takes the concept a step further. The projects within this complex were designed by internationally acclaimed and influential architects—Zaha Hadid, Arata Isozaki, Daniel Libeskind and Bjarke Ingels. Their skyscrapers, grouped around *Piazza Tre Torri*, have become iconic symbols of contemporary Milan and a reference point within the global discourse of architectural production.

The complex CityLife is located relatively close to the historic city center and enjoys a more favorable position compared to *Porta Nuova*. It is open to its surroundings, not confined by dense urban fabric, and is characterized by a spacious, landscaped, and gently sloping green terrain. At its highest point lies *Piazza Tre Torri*, irregular in shape and distinct in character. The buildings that surround the square are arranged freely, without strict geometric alignment, emphasizing the openness of the space. The square transitions seamlessly into *Parco Tre Torri*, ensuring the continuity of the city's green belt. *Piazza Tre Torri* was designed by Oe Works Studio, while *Parco Tre Torri* was designed by Gustafson Porter. The entire area is free of vehicular traffic, which has been redirected to three large underground parking facilities. CityLife spatially and visually connects to the existing traditional Milanese blocks, which are clearly defined and geometrically structured. The main compositional axis extends from *Viale Ezio* toward *Piazza Tre Torri*, forming a broad promenade that leads across the *Fontana delle Quattro Stagioni* to *Piazza Elsa Morante*. To the left of this piazza is the residential complex designed by Daniel Libeskind¹⁶, while to the right stands the housing block by Zaha Hadid¹⁷. From this perspective, a view opens up to the elevated platform of *Piazza Tre Torri*, which rises approximately seven meters above the surrounding access level. The platform is perforated in three locations, allowing natural light and ventilation to reach the lower levels. This layered and carefully articulated spatial sequence reflects the ambition to reinterpret the classical principles of representative urban space through the lens of 21st-century urbanism and architecture (*Figure 3*).

The three aforementioned towers rise above the elevated plaza of the square. These are the *Torre Allianz*¹⁸, designed by Arata Isozaki in collaboration with Andrea Maffei Architects; the *Generali Tower*¹⁹, designed by Zaha Hadid; and *PWC Tower*²⁰ („Il Curvo“), authored by Daniel Libeskind. These office skyscrapers prominently represent the corporations that financed their construction—an unambiguous display of prestige. All three towers feature glass façades, yet differ significantly in form. *Torre Allianz* is characterized by restrained elegance, reflecting rational functionalism and the precision of Isozaki's approach. The *Generali Tower*, with its spiraling, sculptural form, expresses the dynamism and formal

¹⁶ <https://libeskind.com/work/citylife-residences-parcel-ii/>

¹⁷ <https://www.zaha-hadid.com/architecture/city-life-milano-residential-complex/>

¹⁸ https://isozaki.co.jp/archives/projects/allianz_tower/

<https://www.google.com/search?q=Andrea+Maffei+Architects+tore+Alliance+Milano>

¹⁹ <https://www.zaha-hadid.com/architecture/citylife-milano/>

²⁰ <https://libeskind.com/work/central-tower-c/>

freedom inherent to Zaha Hadid's architecture. Libeskind's tower is formally more complex, distinguished by pronounced curves and diagonals that defy the orthogonal logic of most contemporary office buildings. *Torre Allianz* was the first to be completed and was well received by both the professional community and the general public, being described as follows: "*The presence of the highly prominent Torre Allianz by Arata Isozaki—visible, yet never imposing, subtle and restrained, partially inspired by the Pirelli Tower—has undoubtedly played and will continue to play a leading role in shaping the city's skyline*"²¹[11].



Figure 3. Legend: P. Piazza Tre Torri; 1. Torre Allianz; 2. Torre Generali; 3. PwC Tower; 4. Zaha Hadid residential complex; 5. Libeskind residences.- Photos from Private archive.

CityWave, designed by *Bjarke Ingels Group (BIG)*, represents the final phase of Milan's *CityLife* redevelopment and is set to be completed in 2026. Envisioned as the northeastern gateway to the district, the project consists of two symmetrical posted office buildings connected by a 140-meter-long photovoltaic timber canopy, forming one of the largest urban rooftop solar installations in the world. According to the idea, the approach to the Piazza Tre Torri and the *CityLife* complex is wide open and clear. *CityWave* will be the first office building to achieve a 'beyond zero impact' standard, powered entirely by renewable energy sources. The system integrates sustainable technologies such as photovoltaic panels, rainwater harvesting, and thermal use of groundwater. These innovations are expected to reduce energy consumption by approximately 45% compared to standard office buildings.²²

Piazza Tre Torri is organized on two levels. Although the plaza incorporates openings that allow natural light to reach the underground spaces, the atmosphere gives the impression of enclosure and coldness. This feeling is further reinforced by the sparse greenery. The most attractive features are located underground, which is the inverse of a traditional urban setting. The interiors are designed in a uniform style, creating an atmosphere that more closely resembles an airport terminal than an urban public space. There is a lack of intimacy. The residential blocks by Zaha Hadid and Daniel Libeskind are innovative in form. Hadid's design subtly uses soft, curved lines to create a composition where the ensemble of buildings is perceived as a fleet of ships. This impression is enhanced by the white façade cladding, wooden details, and the geometry of the window openings. The block functions as

²¹ Maria Vittoria, **Milano viaggia verso il future** in *Milano Architettura La città e l' EXPO*, Milano (2015): 24

²² <https://www.dezeen.com/2025/04/11/citywave-big-milan-construction-photos/>

a continuous monovolume, with the height gradually increasing from *Piazza Elsa Morante* toward the perimeter of the complex. In contrast, Daniel Libeskind's urban layout for the residential buildings appears more fragmented and spatially dynamic. Instead of a compact whole, his buildings form two separate groupings, with a green space between them. The focal point of his composition is a freestanding tower. The architectural forms are characterized by sharp planes, which seem to have been cut with a scalpel and then rejoined to create complex volumes. The result is a strong visual expression of dynamism and movement, although compared to Hadid's architecture, there is less refinement and subtlety in the form.

4. CONCLUDING REMARKS

As researchers approaching Milan from an external perspective, we are aware of our limitations in fully perceiving all the layers of this city's urban phenomenon. Our understanding is primarily based on available documentation and direct experience with its most representative contemporary urban-architectural interventions. A series of critical questions arises: Has Milan, as a multi-coded and distinctly recognizable, and economically powerful metropolis, succeeded in realizing an urban revolution that opens avenues for reflection on needs, aesthetics, techniques, technologies, art, and 21st-century urban lifestyles (particularly those of *Generation Z*)? Has Milan responded to the vision outlined by the UIA in 2005? Can we trace future-oriented thinking, rooted in 20th-century conceptual frameworks, within the contemporary city? These questions invite both intimate and subjective answers, grounded in personal experience, yet they also demand confrontation with broader urban paradigms—specifically those of the postmodern and global-corporate eras. In this paper, we have examined several significant interventions in the physical and mental fabric of Milan. Within the CityLife and Porta Nuova developments, we observe the convergence of presumed values such as contemporary architectural fashion, engineering excellence, cultural vitality, and professional humanism. There is an undeniable sense of comfort and ease when resting on the gently contoured terrain of CityLife Park, safely removed from vehicular traffic and direct environmental pollution. However, the decision to place some of the most attractive programmatic content underground raises spatial and experiential concerns. Porta Nuova and Piazza Gae Aulenti reflect a similar design logic, though the latter suffers from high building density and a notable lack of green spaces. Nevertheless, the presence of *Biblioteca degli Alberi* and the area's strong pedestrian connectivity with its urban surroundings affirm Piazza Gae Aulenti as a necessary and impactful intervention.

Today, Milan presents itself as a rational and efficient metropolis. The municipality demonstrates strong financial capacity, with significant investments directed toward both profitable and non-profitable construction initiatives. The city administration, alongside its citizens, has clearly expressed a commitment to creating a contemporary urban environment and a readiness to support visionary projects that aim to shape the city's future. It is important to emphasize that art, creativity, innovation, ongoing education, and the creation of spaces for quality leisure time are all fully aligned with the spirit of the 2005 UIA Congress. Milan boasts a modern metro system and a compact urban structure, enabling strong connectivity between key urban nodes. Nonetheless, challenges remain in bridging the divide between central and peripheral parts of the city—an issue clearly reflected in the distribution of public

facilities and metro infrastructure. Although metro lines have been extended since 2005, the *Reuniting Milan* project, developed by award-winning Milanese architects, continues to hold significant symbolic and functional potential, serving as an example of the integration of collective spaces, green areas, and major transportation routes. Finally, we ask the question if the ideas of post-war architects and futurists have left a lasting impact on contemporary understandings of urban transformation. The visions that emerged from concrete spatial challenges and efforts to meaningfully reshape the existing city have materialized in the physical environment. The postmodern era particularly emphasized the idea of returning to the city, fostering context-driven architectural thinking, reaffirming the significance of traditional squares, and critically reassessing the typology of the urban block. In the case of Milan, the subject of this research, it is evident that postmodern principles remain present and relevant in contemporary transformations within the historical city center. A strong departure from traditional urban forms and the incorporation of futurist traditions can be seen in the shaping of new urban focal points. Yet, contemporary architects have taken a step further. These new urban centers are like a room filled with distorted mirrors. A new reality—or just “one more object”? In either case, they demand renewed intellectual, theoretical, technical, and practical engagement.

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