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ID 1600 | IF NEOLIBERALISM IS EVERYTHING, MAYBE IS IT NOTHING? QUESTIONING NEOLIBERAL IDEOLOGY IN SPATIAL POLICIES AND PROJECTS

Simonetta Arondi¹

¹Politecnico di Milano

simonetta.arondi@polimi.it

1 INTRODUCTION

Neoliberalism is held to be the dominant and pervasive economic policy agenda of our times, a powerful and expansive political rationality of class domination and exploitation, the manifestation of 'capitalresurgent'. Anderson describes it as 'the most successful ideology in world history' (Anderson 2000, 17). This paper tries to demonstrate how the new development project MilanoSesto in the metropolitancy of Milan, Italy – an ongoing large-scale development project of housing, retail, offices, and public services, symbolically built on former Falck steelwork industrial areas – can't be understood as one of the embodiment of current pervasive neoliberal planning practice of the Western societies.

Using this example, it is argued that contemporary transformation projects – and in particular largescaleurban development projects – are the epitome of a set of contradictory processes, but cannot beunderstood as an example of ‘actually existing neoliberalism’.

North East Milan is a particularly complex spatial context, one of the former heartlands of westernEuropean Fordism which experienced a significant level of deindustrialization and a reconfiguration ofproduction at the local scale, with the crisis of the Fordist mass production system. In the ‘90s, North EastMilan was also subject to an intensive process of tertiarisation, triggered by decline in the manufacturingsector and exacerbating some of the structural change processes already initiated in previous years. With adensely populated and infrastructured territory, North East Milan is currently facing a second round ofeconomic restructuring following the economic shock caused by the global financial crisis in 2008.The paper reflects the change of an established sector of the urban region to grasp the socio-spatialrelation and dynamics that characterized the geography of North East Milan during three main, intertwined,phases of capitalist development:

- the long phase of growth and urban expansion;
- the season of the Fordist crisis and the subsequent economic restructuring;
- the current cycle of economic and spatial shrinkage after the 2008 global crisis.

The paper analyses the different construction processes and treatment of problems that define thespace of public policies and private transformation projects, questioning if it can be identified as neoliberalplanning project.

2 DEALING WITH THE CONTESTED AND UNSTABLE CARACTER OF NEOLIBERALISM

After a long period of constantly hostile critique of the pervasive neoliberalism paradigm incontemporary cities by critical neoliberalism literature(e.g. Peck, 2010; Springer et al., 2016, Rossi, 2017), inthe recent literature a number of authors have focused on the ambiguity and strong contradictions in whatdifferent approaches identify as neoliberal (Venugopal, Storper 2016), also in planning practices (Sager, 2015).Venugopal in particular recognizes that neoliberalism is almost everything, in fact a conceptualproliferation related to neoliberalism critique has led to the over-identification of different sets ofunconnected phenomena under a single misleading label (in which neo-liberalism is confused with classicalliberalism). Oddly there is no contemporary theories or body of knowledge that calls itself neoliberalism, norpolicy makers that implement it. Also in planning practices, advocates of market deregulation, private sectorledgrowth, real estate developers, and any of the components that radical urban theorists call ‘neoliberal’,define themselves neoliberal. Instead, paradoxically, “neoliberalism is defined, conceptualized and deployedexclusively by those who stand in evident opposition to it” (Venugopal, 2015, 170).

3 ENTANGLED ROUNDS OF SPATIAL RESTRUCTURING IN THE NORTH MILAN URBAN REGION

For much of the last century, North Milan in general, and Sesto San Giovanni in particular,represented a kind of incarnation – the purest – of the Fordist model of development in which the crisis ofthat industrial geography assumed dramatic proportions and visibility. North Milan as an historic region ofthe economic development of Milan and Lombardy, can be interpreted as an enlightening “litmus test”, emblematic of the current processes.

In the recent strategic plan of the Metropolitan City of Milan (2016), North Milan is identified withseven municipalities (Cinisello Balsamo, Cormano, Bresso, Cologno Monzese, Sesto San Giovanni, CusanoMilanino, and Paderno Dugnano), in an area of 5,788 hectares with important demographic weight –registering 315,494 inhabitants – and intense economic activities with 120,039 employees. However, the boundaries of North Milan do not exist from the administrative point of view. The geography of NorthMilan as a whole is a policy outcome and was structured in the early twentieth century through a variety ofinvestment decisions and policy agendas imposed from outside and other scales – industrial

decentralization— and by reason of local social processes, for instance the formation of a skilled labour force.

In addition, the northern urban strip of Milan municipality area has been home to the Pirelli industry from the early twentieth century. Industrial plants were abandoned in the 1980s, and after an international urban design competition, Bicocca Project was realized between 1983 and 2008. This is one of the largest urban transformation projects in Milan by size (700,000 square meters) with innovative urban functions in culture and knowledge economy such as: the new Milano-Bicocca university, the Pirelli Hangar Bicocca (Fig. 8) — one of the largest centers of contemporary art in Europe —, research centers, a residential neighborhood, and the great Arcimboldi theater (Fig. 6).

Looking at the spatial pattern side, two elements generated the North Milan geography:

- the territorial structure formed along the northern axis, governed by an investment of the ruling class between the 1800s and the 1900s since the industrial settlements between the northern part of Milan and the municipality of Sesto San Giovanni (in relation to the railway line) and the location of several housing developments for the working class, concerning the municipality of Cinisello in the 1950s and Cologno Monzese in the 1960s.
- The spontaneous process of metropolitan integration and the formation of large urban areas from east to west, from the Sempione area to the Vimercatese one, with a transverse link in the Milan urban region (Fig. 1.X).

The trajectories of three municipalities are essential for the understanding of the nexus between production and spatial patterns.

The historical spatial transformation of Cinisello Balsamo and Cologno Monzese is linked to the large-scale heavy industry development of Sesto San Giovanni. Their growth as medium-size urban centers —with the ability to attract not only dormitory suburbs of social housing in Cinisello and self-construction housing in Cologno, as well as productive activities — occurred after the Second World war, much later than nearby Sesto San Giovanni. From 1951 to 1971 the population of Cinisello, for instance, increased from around 15,000 to more than 77,000. Cologno redefined its urban economic base following the model of the Mediaset system suppliers' network in the audiovisual sector.

The process of urbanization is one of the key elements within this broader geography of capitalist socio-spatial organization (Brenner, 2004). Sesto San Giovanni became the social and productive model of Fordist industry and labour organization. Establishments such as Breda, the Falck steel industry, and the Ercole and Magneti Marelli industry have long characterized the country's industrial ethos, marking a material and symbolic dimension embodying values and social practices closely linked to factory work and working class subscriptions to the Italian Communist Party. The myth generated by these labour and industrial spatial patterns has labelled Sesto San Giovanni as, firstly, the Manchester and, then, the Stalingrad of Italy, but it has for years hidden deep changes throughout the local society. Consequently, the industrialist culture emphasized this leading role, neglecting and limiting important changes in the social and production configuration of Sesto.

The friction between the image of the autonomous city with a strong identity and that of a Milanese satellite city would linger and in some ways is still an open question. In fact, the urban and production renewal of Sesto San Giovanni and North Milan seems contradictory when compared with Milan.

Thus the crisis of the manufacturing industry in the steel and engineering sector (the last blast furnace was shut down in 1995) and the redefinition of the Fordist regulation system mainly hit Sesto San Giovanni — leaving many abandoned industrial buildings and areas — but it also ended up becoming the symbolic representation of the entire North Milan area, profoundly affecting the local social regulation mechanism. The demise of large industrial manufacturing plants was only one aspect of a more general process of transition of the overall production system, which involved both a deep-seated restructuring of the industrial manufacturing apparatus, and the emergence of new production patterns, also based on research and the application of new technologies related to the field of electronics, information technology and multimedia communication.

After the end of the Fordist/Keynesian cycle, North Milan exploited system-diversified production, with small and medium enterprises specialized in construction and trade and, on the manufacturing level, in engineering and in information and communication technologies.

Furthermore, North Milan's historically varied profile begins to take on a unique role as "policymaker" and its borders became increasingly recognizable in the metropolitan area during the 1900s. The main processes of rescaling (Brenner, 2009) that built this territory up as a recognizable area and that led to the pioneering role of the North Milan area in local development policies were as follows (BolocanGoldstein and Pasqui, 1999; Pasqui, 2002).

Firstly, on the national level, the recognition of the territory as a "crisis area" according to law 236/1993. Labelling North Milan as an industrial area in crisis within a national policy, not only had an influence on additional financial resources for the promotion of active employment policies and reindustrialization initiatives, but also a growing inter-relationship between the various municipalities in regards to redefining a development path for the area.

Secondly, on the local level, the establishment in 1996 of the North Milan Development Agency (ASNMI), limited company under private law whose shareholders are the main four municipalities (thus a very different structure from the Anglo-Saxon example of Urban Development Corporations); initially a company for the management of re-industrialization processes, the ASNMI has gradually taken on the role of accompanying actor and pioneering promoter of local development, also supporting the drafting of a North Milan Strategic Plan.

Thirdly, always on the local level, the practice of sharing policies between local governments and especially among pro-active mayors directly elected by citizens by the mid-1990s.

Fourthly, at that time on the national level, a different specific programming context – the so-called *programmazione negoziata* - started up in Italy. This type of negotiated programming had explicit contractual content which aimed to reconsider the tools and forms of public intervention in the economy, promoting endogenous economic development in weaker areas of the country (Governa & Salone, 2005).

Together, these processes and policies contributed to shaping North Milan; this territory is therefore the result of a plurality of processes, policies, framing and reframing activities in which a number of different actors have participated on various levels.

After the decline of the Fordist model and the consequent dramatic de-industrialization, following the closure of large scale industry in the steel and metallurgical sectors, the production system has been severely weakened by the global financial crisis of 2008, with a 33% decrease in employees in the manufacturing sector between 2001 and 2011 (see Table 1).

The economy of North Milan has undergone a troublesome period. The shifting hierarchies of international economic networks passed it by for the most part, and even multinational companies like Oracle, but also headquarters and large electromechanical manufacturers such as ABB or Alstom industry, which set up business in the area in the early 2000s, partly left Sesto San Giovanni. This shift is partly counterbalanced by a high share of employees in innovative sector (Table 1).

Even the ASNMI, after passing under the control of the province of Milan (its majority shareholder), which was subsequently renamed Milano Metropoli Spa, closed in 2013, leaving thirty employees out of work.

	1971. Population	2011. Population	Tot. workers 2001	Tot. workers 2011	Change 2001- 2011 workers (manufacturing)	Change 2001-2011 workers (commerce)	Change 2001-2011 workers (financial, insurance, real estate, professional)	2011. Share of employees in innovative sector
Milan	1,732,000	1,242,123	688,427	773,571	-23%	5%	5%	0.18
North Milan ²	324,977	304,601	102,015	106,064	-33%	8%	23%	0.91

Table 1 - North Milan before and during economic crisis: socio-economic data

4 THE UNCERTAIN FATE OF THE LARGE VACANT INDUSTRIAL AREA: THE MILANOSESTO URBAN DEVELOPMENT PROJECT

The project of the former Falck steel industrial area in Sesto San Giovanni is a paradigmatic case of a large scale development project – the most important example of urban transformation and functional renewal – undertaken in the Milan urban region, that traversed the three established periodization of capitalist development. There is a significant amount of vacant industrial areas in Sesto San Giovanni – around 235 hectares, about one fifth of its municipal area – suitable for potential transformation. The entire area subject to intervention – 1,430,000 square meters – is the largest in the Milan urban region and maybe the largest regeneration project of former industrial area in Europe.: larger even than that of Expo, which measures 1.1 million meters square.

- 1980s-1995. Falck industrial activities suspended.
- 1995. First development project by Kenzo Tange commissioned by the Falck company. The project is focused around the realization of theme parks.
- 1997. First land use change in the Sesto land use plan (from industry to services, housing and park).
- 1998. International competition organized by ASNM on “Falck areas urban park” (project winner by Paola Viganò).
- 2000. Falck areas are sold to a local developer (Pasini) for about 190 million euro.
- 2001. Master plan for a business center by a group directed by Mario Botta. The economic functions were strongly pushed forward by a private sector investment with a bank (Banca Intesa).
- 2001. Project proposal by Pasini for a residential project.
- 2004. New land use plan approved, reducing the volumes.
- 2005. Conflict between property owner and public administration. Pasini sells the areas to a national developer (Risanamento, owned by Zunino) for 218 million euro.
- 2006. First Master Plan proposal by Renzo Piano based on previous activities with working groups involving the citizens.
- 2007. Program Agreement between the Municipality and Lombardy region for the environment reclamation.
- 2008. PII (integrated initiative plan) proposal by Risanamento.
- 2009. New land use plan of the Sesto municipality.
- 2010. Risanamento files for bankruptcy.
- 2010. Risanamento sells the areas to a new developer (Sesto Immobiliare, poi MilanoSesto). Value: 405 million euro.
- February 2011. New PII proposal based on a revision of Renzo Piano’s Master Plan.
- July 2011. Inquiry into corruption, involving developers and the Municipality.
- September 2011. PII approved with 900,000 of park. Consequently Risanamento Spa is granted double the volumes given to the previous owner.
- 2012. Agreement Programming on the implementation of the City of Health and Research in the municipality of Sesto San Giovanni. The City gives the area to MilanoSesto, owner of Falck areas. Currently MilanoSesto holds the commission for the land reclamation (38 million euro). Following reclamation, the Municipality concedes the area for free to the Lombardy Region, to build the City of Health and Research.
- 2016. Agreement between the developer and Fawaz Alhokair, a Saudi Arabian group. MilanoSesto sells 130,000 (for 500 million euro) to Fawaz for the new development of a shopping center and a leisure park.

The analysis of the complex and yet incomplete progress of the project (Tab. 2) contests the existence of a pro-growth coalition. Following Storper (2016) it confirms that cities and regions are extensively regulated, especially land use and housing. Instead, we can find a deep-rooted left-wing municipality exhibiting a nostalgia for its industrial past and hesitant in defining a strong and shared trans-scalar policy agenda for urban renewal of the historical vacant industrial areas.

Tot. Gross Floor Area Project	1.012.134
Gross Floor Area residential	607.280
Housing	485.824
Affordable housing (20% del tot.)	121.456
Tot. GFA retail	max 100.000
Shopping mall	50.000
Medium commercial structures	36.563
Medium commercial structures	3.437
Small commercial structures < sqm. 500	10.000
Tertiary functions	147.853,5
Hotel	27.000
Productive activities	81.000
Other services	49.000,5
Public parking areas	215.488
Public and green spaces	200.098
Schools	43.397
Playgrounds	46.129
Social housing	11.907
Private parking lots	602.409

Table 2 – Former Falck Areas Building Program (MilanoSesto)

Early 2013 was a crucial time, because with a trans-scalar governance process, regional and local governments and the private foundation (Besta neurological hospital and Milanese Tumor institute) signed their intention to join this project and agreed to search for practical solutions to the implementation thereof by relocating the two hospitals in a new City of Health and Research (180,000 square meters). After twenty-one years of expectations, two competitions, the involvement of architects (Kenzo Tange, Mario Botta, Renzo Piano), and the recent new real estate investment by a Saudi Arabian global real estate investor-buyer, and the new manager of the MilanoSesto society Carlo Masseroli – former councilor of the past Milanese center-right urban government, identified with a laissez-faire approach in urban policies, labelled ‘neoliberal’ –, important issues like infrastructure and the high strategic trans-scalar potential of the advanced services localized in the activities City of Health and Research, but also to the development of the shopping center and leisure park, were not outlined in the local, metropolitan and regional settings of governance.

5 CONCLUSION. NEOLIBERALISM AS AN IDLE LABEL?

A number of authors emphasized the neoliberal character of the urban project transformation of former Falck areas, similar to other large – scale urban development projects (Baeten, 2012). Notwithstanding these interpretations, it is very hard to recognize a fixed neoliberal strategy in the extended, problematic, former area Falck transformation, such as the reworking of actors, policies institutions and regulatory framework in order to facilitate market driven land use changes.

The current global socio-economic crisis is related to multiple local events of preceding cycles under capitalism and is manifested in a series of socio-spatial effects. Is in the present conjuncture, as it was in the 1960s and in the late 1990s, North Milan a territory of urban change, experimentation of new relationships between spatial organization, settlement forms of the new economies and urban development that challenge both the traditional hierarchical urban image and the city/hinterland nexus? How do crisis and austerity mold urban regional geographies? This contribution has showed that in time of austerity North Milan is witnessing the emergence of a much greater unevenness in local systems that has

led to the development of a mosaic of differentiated productions of space, that does not support a claim of removal of the public sector from the urban policies and with the imposition of a market 'attitude'.

In North Milan a number of controversial, entrenched spatial strategies emerge.

Since the 2008 economic crisis, large scale development projects haven't captured the most interesting spatial transformations, in particular in Southern European territories (Knieling & Othengrafen, 2016). On the one hand, the effects of the global crisis and the negotiation over land use regulation, are making it difficult to carry out large urban transformation projects, such as in Falck areas. Some of those that are related to vast industrial vacant areas often stagnate due to the difficulties and bankruptcy of real estate investors and construction industry developers. There is little chance of investment, especially when compared to the demand of very large complex developments projects.

The singular large urban transformation project has trans-scalar effects not only redesigning and the local geography of governance (Büdenbender & Golubchikov, 2017), but also getting stuck in a trans-scalar territorial relations system which was profoundly changed as a result of the economic recession.

Nonetheless, large scale development projects are poorly integrated into the wider urban region processes and planning system. As a consequence, their impact on the urban area as a whole and on the areas where the projects are located remains ambiguous. Place branding in former Falck areas is a crucial example. The label "City of Health and Research" focuses on the representation of healthy space, considered as a permanent, singular, and sanitized image of place, which nonetheless inevitably means highlighting some elements and neglecting others.

Furthermore, the geopolitical domain of transregional policies and governance is remarkably absent. Although situated in the heart of the Lombardy region, former Falck areas do not serve as a "model" for border-crossing initiatives and new networks. Despite representing the broadest example of former industrial area redevelopment projects, the former Falck areas do not even have strategic priority in national, regional, and metropolitan policies.

To conclude neoliberalism as analytical framework is becoming inconsistent and useless, a sort of idle and – definitely – mainstream categorization to describe almost every contemporary urban transformations.

Instead of using (again) neoliberalism as a cover, we have to move toward a deep understanding of the fleeting, complex and nuanced geographical urban processes related to both the role of planning and policies (Armondi & Bruzzese, 2017) in contemporary societies.

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ID 1612 | WHEN ACTIVISM MEETS RADICAL POLITICS - LANDSCAPE PLANNING AS A CATALYST FOR TRANSFORMATIVE CHANGE

Louis Albrechts¹; Angela Barbanente²; Valeria Monno²
¹Catholic University of Leuven; ²Politecnico di Bari
angela.barbanente@poliba.it

1 INTRODUCTION

Planning for radical change has been conceptualized in different ways. A number of strong manifestos for change have been drawn up – for reconsidering the absolute faith in economic growth (Mishan, 1967; Hamilton, 2004), for living inter-culturally (Landry, 2000; Sandercock, 1998, 2003), for creating a more sustainable society (Sachs and Esteva, 2003), for social mobilization (Friedmann 1987), for an urban political ecology (Heynen et al., 2005), for recapturing democracy (Purcell, 2008) and for a more radical planning (Albrechts, 2013, 2015). In the vast literature that has been produced on approaches, forms and contents of radical planning, to our knowledge, there are no examples that discuss planning experiences developed by regional governments inspired by program guidelines explicitly aimed at countering neoliberalism (see also Purcell, 2009 on resisting neoliberalization).

This paper documents a planning/political process – the Territory-Landscape plan-making process developed in Apulia region¹, from 2007 to 2015-that counteracts the pervasive penetration of neoliberal thinking in the urban and regional planning practices. The relevance of this plan is that it parallels the coming into office of a new regional government elected in 2005 on the basis of a reaction against the excesses of a harsh neoliberal policy in Apulia a region that is characterized by a persistent social, economic, cultural and political issue of regional inequality.

The current competences of Apulia region essentially stem from the reform of 1999 that introduced the direct election of regional presidents and the constitutional reform of 2001. Both were approved by the centre-left government under pressure from the Northern League. These reforms furnished Italian regions with greater symbolic recognition, legislative autonomy and the scope for future implementation of fiscal autonomy (Masseti and Toubeau, 2013). As an ordinary-statute region, Apulia, gained "concurrent legislative powers" with the state, inter alia, in the issues of territorial government, management and enhancement of cultural and environmental heritage, infrastructures, protection of health². Even though, as

¹ Apulia, with about 4,1 million inhabitants in an area of 19,347 sq. km., is one of the fifteen ordinary-statute regions that together with five special-statute regions cover all the country and compose the "regional state" of Italy (Groppi and Scatone, 2012). It is located in the southern part of the peninsula, called Mezzogiorno and interested by the social, economic, cultural and political issue of regional inequality that since the late 1800s has been known as "Southern Question".

² Thus it is not possible to understand the Italian planning system and territorial transformations without linking it to regionalisation processes (Gelli 2001), and the consequent progressive differentiation of spatial planning models among regions (Lingua and Servillo, 2014). During all its existence as a unified state, Italy has seen a shifting tension between centralism and regionalism, centripetal and centrifugal forces of politics and administration (King 1987, 327), which have often resolved in failed attempts of institutional reforms (Bull and Pasquino 2007). However, in the recent years, similarly to other Western European countries, Italy faced a trend towards regionalism, i.e. the transfer of state power downwards towards the state's regional levels (Newman and Thornley 1996, 40).