

CONSTRAINTS AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR LOCAL ACTORS ENACTING TERRITORIAL STRATEGIES IN METROPOLITAN MILAN<sup>\*</sup>

Matteo Del Fabbro<sup>1</sup>

**SOMMARIO**

The contribution analyzes territorial strategies of socio-economic actors that operate at a metropolitan scale in the Milan urban region. It highlights first the important initiatives enacted by urban elites of the core Municipality, which have been increasingly acknowledging the local dimension as an autonomous setting of representation of collective interests. It also shows that socio-economic actors operating in “peripheral” metropolitan territories (i.e. not including the functional core or the core Municipality) display a remarkable deployment of territorial strategies in relation with ongoing supra-local trends, of territorial disarticulation and political disintermediation. A comparative analysis of socio-economic actors in three metropolitan territories external to the functional core (*Monza and Brianza*, *Alto Milanese*, *Provincia di Pavia*) allows for highlighting similarities and differences in the attitude declared and the strategies enacted. The contribution argues that the “exceptionality” of the Alto Milanese with regard to the other two territories can be explained by the emerging configuration of political-economic constraints and opportunities, expressed through the spatial interpolation of geography of Labour Market Areas (LMAs), based on the to 2011 census, and implementation of Local Government Reform (LGR), imposed by the Italian Government in 2014. This hypothesis is corroborated by the comparative analysis of political strategies in four metropolitan jurisdictions external to the core Municipality (*Alto Milanese*, *Nord Milano*, *Nord Ovest*, *Sud Ovest*).

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<sup>1</sup> Gran Sasso Science Institute (GSSI), viale Crispi 7, 67100, L'Aquila, e-mail: [matteo.delfabbro@gssi.infn.it](mailto:matteo.delfabbro@gssi.infn.it).

## 1. Introduction

In a phase characterized by shortage of resources, political recentralization, and austerity economic policy, local and urban societal actors in Southern Europe are expected to endure hard consequences of the crisis (Eckardt & Ruiz Sánchez, 2015). Nevertheless, the exploration of societal phenomena in relation with macro-structural trends reveals meaningful cases of counter-intuitive evidence (Bianchetti, Cogato Lanza, Kërçuku, Sampieri, & Voghera, 2015).

Some unexpected evidence quickly emerges also when considering the territorial scale of the metropolis (Armondi, 2017) in relation with the implementation of the local government reform (Di Giulio & Profeti, 2016). For instance, when proactive Mayors in the Milan metropolitan hinterland used this occasion to reinforce pre-existing networks and, united, were able to successfully challenge the proposal put forward by the regional Government of Lombardy (Del Fabbro, 2018). I define such episodes, which valorize existing forms of socio-spatial proximity, cases of *societal transformations at local level*.

In this paper, I will address more systematically cases in which local societal actors in the Milan metropolitan region are increasingly adopting a *strategic approach* based on the *transformation of socio-spatial proximity* to address the current shortage of public and private resources – which translates as difficulty of the local State to distribute benefits, and diminished capacity of single actors to invest. The paper contributes therefore to current debates on development trends of European urban societies (Andreotti, Le Galès, & Moreno-Fuentes, 2015; Cucca & Ranci, 2017), through a detailed case study of the Milan metropolitan region.

## 2. Theoretical framework and hypothesis

Metropolitan spaces are much studied today by scholars with a neo-Marxist approach (Brenner, 2014), which has been applied also to the Italian case (Balducci, Fedeli, & Curci, 2017). Urban forms are regarded there as the spatial manifestation of structural economic trends and the research object consists in the ‘spatial organization of society’. This conceptualization might overlook the hypothesis that a space *is* also a structuring form of society, not only a container of society. The *civitas* of cities (Calafati, 2009) – their socio-political nature – is often sacrificed by neo-Marxist approaches in the name of macro-structural trends, which in the long-term are supposed to flatten the spatial distribution of society.

On the other hand, the first formulation of the urban sociological model of ‘European city’, which constitutes an intellectual alternative to neo-Marxist approaches, assumed that urban socio-political powers were attributable mostly to core Cities or ‘Greater cities’ (Le Galès, 2002, Chapter 3). It did not take up the question whether, and how, ‘atypical’ territorial morphologies may also *be* local political societies; whether and how they may be *made of* networks of local elites. Therefore, the conceptualization and empirical verification of the passage *from the city to the metropolis* (Lefèvre, Roseau, & Vitale, 2013), in terms of socio-political constructs, still constitute open research questions.

In other words, my hypothesis is that the geography of metropolitan development can be explained also by the capacity of a local society to design and pursue collective strategies. This hypothesis is not implausible in theoretical terms, as long as one considers that metropolitan territories in western Lombardy have been following an original development trajectory, partly independent from the influence of Milan, and connected instead with collective initiatives of local elites.

Monza, the Brianza region, Pavia, Vigevano, Legnano, Busto Arsizio, Saronno, Lodi: all these localities developed thanks to a local bourgeoisie, a local working class, local forms of political power, local forms of civil society. I have illustrated quantitatively elsewhere the dynamics of these territories (Del Fabbro, resubmitted), finding that these localities are still endowed with a certain degree of autonomy from the main urban centrality: Vigevano is the central locality of a manufacturing district which is enduring some difficulties; Busto Arsizio is the largest locality of a robust local system, which includes Legnano and Gallarate; the Brianza region has been absorbed in the metropolitan functional core but enjoys political

autonomy thanks to the Province of Monza and Brianza; Lodi and Pavia are the central localities of the respective local systems, characterized by rural landscapes. Now I will focus qualitatively on these territories, to try and understand whether and how the local elites are responding to the challenges engendered by supra-local trends.

### 3. Methodology

The fieldwork aimed at gathering empirical evidence of the actions, strategies and visions of public and private actors playing a relevant role in the daily processes of ‘metropolitan construction’. The fieldwork took place between April and May 2016. A total of 46 interviews was conducted, with an average duration of 45 minutes, representing 45 actors (discrepancy between number of interviews and number of actors is due to the fact that some respondents represented more than one actor and other respondents were interviewed twice). The technique used was that of open, semi-directive interview to a person occupying a top management role in the organizational hierarchy of local actors. Interviews were conducted following a loose model based on some constant elements, that were however adapted to the peculiarities of each respondent. The common framework featured three parts and six broad questions.

The first part was the shortest one and was simply aimed at “breaking the ice” with the person representing the local actor. Actual gathering of information in this phase was as much important as establishing a good environment for the interaction. The assessment of the lexical fields mobilized by the interviewee was important as it could facilitate understanding in subsequent exchanges (respondents had different backgrounds therefore they tended to use different terms to address the issues of metropolisation).

The second part was maybe the most difficult one, because it drew directly on my academic formulation and understanding of the problem. If the respondent did not share the same conceptual references, which was very often the case, this part may be completed in a short time; however, it was important not to skip it, exactly because being open to the interpretation of the respondent, it may trigger spontaneous and unexpected replies. This part aimed also at exploring how local actors apprehended the metropolitan question by testing hypotheses tailored on each local actor and based on historical events, ongoing reforms, socio-economic interests.

The third part aimed at assessing how the most relevant ongoing processes of metropolitan restructuring (institution building, local political agenda, big events) were affecting – or not – the existing system of local actors. This part drew on specific hypotheses that I developed through desk research but that I had not assessed empirically.

#### 3.1 Sampling and data

The scope of potentially relevant actors was extremely wide in terms of policy field and sector of activity, and relatively limited in geographical terms, as the study focused on only one territory, the metropolitan region of Milan. The type of actors ranged therefore across all the different components of local society: organized civil society, elected officials and politicians, technical and scientific experts, private market players, public policy-makers. I privileged actors involved in more specifically ‘urban’ activities, such as urban development and collective services delivery, but I also approached other societal sectors.

As far as the territorial extent is concerned, I drew on previous analyses to select which territorial references to take into account. I started from the legal boundaries of the Metropolitan city, as they were defined by Law 56 of 2014. I referred then to the functional extension of the metropolitan area, defined by ISTAT, the National statistical Institute, in the latest update of Local Labor Systems released in 2014. The comparison between metropolis *de jure* and metropolis *de facto* reveals three major discrepancies (Figure 1): (i) the territory of Monza and Brianza is included in the functional metropolis but not in the legal one, as it corresponds to the Province with the same name; (ii) the territory of Legnano is included in the legal metropolis but not in the functional one, as it is functionally related with Busto Arsizio; (iii) the territory of

Abbiategrosso is included in the legal metropolis but not in the functional one, as it is functionally related with Vigevano.

Therefore, I selected three main territorial references: Milan and its metropolitan area (mostly corresponding to the Metropolitan city and the Province of Monza), the conurbation of Busto Arsizio-Legnano (split between the Metropolitan city and the Province of Varese), and the urban agglomeration of Vigevano-Abbiategrosso (split between the Metropolitan city and the Province of Pavia).

The population of respondents is therefore composed by the combination of the type of actors and the selected territorial scales and territorial systems. Many forms of organized civil society and public administrations are structured on a provincial basis. Therefore, in order to study the functional territory of Vigevano it was necessary to refer to the provincial organizations based in Pavia. This is not disturbing, as long as the functional territory of Pavia is also integrated in the city-region and therefore affected by the dynamics of metropolisation and challenges of metropolitan governance. On the other hand, the Province and the functional territory of Lodi, which are also integrated in the city-region, do not host many seats of organized civil society, because of its historical dependence from Milan (the Province of Lodi was created only in 1992). However, the metropolitan area of Milan features also the opposite exception, that of territories without a Province of their own but hosting local seats of organized civil society. This is the case for Monza and Brianza (which became a Province only in 2009) and for the southern part of the Busto Arsizio-Legnano conurbation, included in the administrative territory of the Metropolitan city of Milan, and known as 'Alto Milanese'.

## 4. Findings

I will first review the strategic approach practiced by some local societal actors, based in the core city but with a metropolitan scope of action, which in the last 4 to 5 years have been developing major initiatives independently, or despite, the 'big event' of Milan, the Universal Exposition.

### 4.1 *Strategies of urban elites*

*Assolombarda* is the Milan's association of manufacturing entrepreneurs: in a city with an industrial past like Milan, this association gathered once many important groups of Italian industrial capitalism. The association has been promoting since 2013 its own strategic plan, named *Far volare Milano* ('Let Milan fly'). The strategic plan was in fact the flagship project of the mandate as president of Gianfelice Rocca, one of the most important contemporary Italian industrialists. At the head of Techint, a multi-national group with Argentinian-Italian capitals, Rocca decided to run for the presidency of *Assolombarda* (in 2013), and not for the presidency of *Confindustria* (in 2016), the national association of industrialists, of which *Assolombarda* is a member.

One of the 50 projects, carried out in the framework of the strategic plan 'Let Milan fly', regarded the ongoing elaboration of the reform of local government. In 2013-2014, *Assolombarda* took on a leading role among Italian urban industrial elites, to promote the importance of the institutional reform of metropolitan areas. However, in *Assolombarda*, there existed an engagement on the potential opportunities linked to the effects of socio-spatial proximity, even before the legislative debate started, and before Rocca became president:

The engagement of the association on the subject of the metropolitan area precedes the strategic plan ... in 2012 we held local assemblies at territorial level, during the mandate of the previous President ... in the absence of institutional inputs of any kind. We considered it as a bet to be played. We started taking positions, publicly and not only publicly, to promote this vision, not just to support the institution of a new administrative entity, but to support all that should go with it. In spring 2012 we organized, like every year, meetings at the territorial level, which were devoted to the subject of the Metropolitan city, in order to promote the idea that *many of the themes which we worry about must be addressed at a metropolitan scale*.

*Vittorio Biondi, director, territorial competitiveness department – Assolombarda, 19 May 2016*

From the point of view of *Assolombarda*, the beginning of the debate on the ‘Del Rio’ law in 2013 was a ‘window of opportunity’ to bring forward an institutional innovation that, in Milan, represented a vexed question, which offered important opportunities for the competitiveness of the local industrial system.

Another important actor of the Milanese organized civil society is the local *Confcommercio*. Originally linked to shopkeepers, this association gathers today entrepreneurs from all branches of the tertiary sector. Since my fieldwork took place around one month before the elections of the Mayor and the Municipal council of Milan (scheduled for 5 June 2016), I was there at the right time to observe how the relationship between local civil society and local politics gets structured. The association adopted a strategic approach to the forthcoming challenges of the city and the metropolis, through the initiative *Benvenuto il luogo*<sup>2</sup> (‘Welcome to the place’).

The association started the initiative ‘Welcome be the place’ several months before the electoral deadline of 2016. A few weeks before the vote, it convened all the 9 mayoral candidates in the conference hall of its headquarters for a public debate. The ‘strategic document’ previously put forward, through its guidelines, themes, and proposals, structured the debate. Also in this case the impulse to this initiative is not an ordinary one. The president of the local *Confcommercio* has been since 1995 Carlo Sangalli, a former member of the Parliament, who since 1997 has also been president of the Chamber of Commerce of Milan, and since 2006 has been president of the national *Confcommercio*.

Conceptualizing the role of the association in this way, the *Confcommercio* leadership is also implicitly incentivizing its social basis – made of social categories more or less constantly in search of ‘protection’ – to overcome an excessive closure towards ongoing dynamics of socio-economic transition, including metropolisation. The association decidedly engaged in the new opportunities of *regulation of socio-spatial proximity* during the phase of institutional construction of the Metropolitan city of Milan:

We believe very much in the Metropolitan city, so much so that as organization of defense of collective interests we preceded it. Lodi has been substantially incorporated since 2011, Monza has never detached. We strictly collaborated to the drafting of the strategic plan, we introduced two proposals: “The advantageous Milan” [*La Milano che conviene*] in the Alto Milanese, in which our associate hotel managers collaborated among them and with eight Municipalities to reduce some management costs and use those resources for territorial promotion; and the “metropolitan shopping area” [*DUC metropolitano*] – there are 13 of these “urban shopping areas” [*Distretti Urbani del Commercio – DUC*] in Milan and 30 in the Province, they are a form of public-private collaboration aimed at reviving an area through commercial activities – we proposed a coordination at metropolitan level of the guidelines for all these “shopping districts”.

Marco Barbieri, head of institutional relations, *Confcommercio Milano Lodi Monza Brianza*, 6 May 2016

An initiative in the same vein of that organized by the *Confcommercio* of Milan was promoted by *Assimpredil – Ance Milano, Lodi, Monza e Brianza*, the local association representing the entrepreneurial interests of another important sector of urban economy, that of construction. *Assimpredil* took up an innovative approach for the formulation of its relationship with local politics. The association gathered several other local actors of urban development and invited them to elaborate together a common ‘platform’ on different issues (urban regeneration, territorial planning, etc).

Also in this case, the origin of this initiative is a relevant one. *C’è Milano da fare* (“We have to build Milan”) – this is the name of the initiative – was an idea of the current president of *Assimpredil*, Marco Dettori. However, it drew on previous mobilizations of the association at local and national level promoted in particular by Claudio De Albertis, an engineer and building entrepreneur himself, who was president, in different periods of time from 1990 to 2016, of *Assimpredil* and of *Ance* (the national association of which *Assimpredil* is a member)<sup>3</sup>. The exceptionality of *C’è Milano da fare* lies therefore in the effort to include diverging interests.

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<sup>2</sup> From the song with the same title by the Italian songwriter Giorgio Gaber.

<sup>3</sup> De Albertis, who had been president of *La Triennale di Milano* since 2012, passed away on 2 December 2016.

It emerges therefore that local actors of urban development mobilized their *socio-spatial proximity* to elaborate a common vision and influence collectively the local political agenda:

Each [interest group] has some relationship with the [city] administration – so the positive aspect, that the new President of *Assimpredil Ance* must be credited with, is to speak with one voice – we will see if this type of work continue after the [city] elections.

*Valeria Bottelli, president, Ordine of architects and planners of the province of Milan, 10 May 2016*

[There are] different points of view: we are very concentrated on the local dimension, *Assoimmobiliare* that is at the opposite side of the value chain, [represents] the big [real estate] investor. [...] Some relationships [among interest groups] were already there and were very positive, but very desultory; the President of *Assimpredil Ance* said that this [work on a common document] must be a starting point.

*Alessandro Maggioni, president, Federabitazione Lombardia, 11 May 2016*

The idea is that this working group is not limited to an situation related with the [city] elections, but that it acquires a continuity. [...] The aim is to work for the city interest, to give a value added to the city administration, and also to create synergies within this working group, [this situation] has a double meaning.

*Vincenzo Albanese, president, FIMAA<sup>4</sup> Milano-Monza, 18 May 2016*

In this sub-section I presented a case of *societal transformation at urban level*: the socio-political investment on the city level of members of the national elites who have a strong link with Milan. The three organizations of defense of collective interests (*Assolombarda*, *Confcommercio*, *Assimpredil*) have a metropolitan dimension; nevertheless, the initiatives are strongly linked to the main urban centrality. And not so much in administrative terms (Municipality of Milan), but in socio-historical terms: the leaders of these organizations are members of the Milan urban bourgeoisie, who is physically and culturally rooted in the historical center, the area delimited by the *navigli* (artificial canals built in the Middle age).

However, in the Milan urban region the traditional metropolitan model of the dominant core city with its hinterland has started to interact with other territorial development patterns, rooted in different periods and dynamics of European socio-economic development. For this reason, I suppose that metropolitan territories, other than the core city, may attempt to develop forms of socio-political aggregation.

## 4.2 Strategies in metropolitan territories

In the current phase of austerity and recentralization, metropolitan territories are pulled in two different directions: in a vertical sense, because of political dependence with centers of decision, and in a horizontal sense, because of functional dependence with the metropolitan core. I will now analyze the attitude towards supra-local trends of some societal and State actors which operate at the scale of the selected metropolitan territories (see *supra*).

### 4.2.1 Local administrators

Empirical evidence shows that the Mayors representing the metropolitan administrative territories of Nord Milano, Nord Ovest, and Sud Ovest consider the new intra-metropolitan jurisdiction (*Zona Omogenea*) as an opportunity to manage jointly urban collective services and share urban externalities:

We also have to see how the intra-municipal jurisdictions will evolve: if they will manage some functions delegated by the Metropolitan city; or if they will become the place where Municipalities can create the conditions for joint management of services. I tend to lean towards the latter option.

*Lorenzo Gaiani, Mayor of Cusano Milanino, 26 April 2016*

I believe in it [the Metropolitan city of Milan], it has some institutional and budgetary problems that have to be solved, but if we think of territorial planning, of urban services networks, of transportation and mobility, of fare systems integration: it was born for all of these. Now it is still under construction, apart

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<sup>4</sup> FIMAA: *Federazione Italiana Mediatori Agenti d’Affari*.

from some small things you can't see the results yet. In the future, I think we will have to reach strong forms of intervention of the Metropolitan city on the competences of the Municipalities such as territorial planning, which means sharing planning fees [*oneri di urbanizzazione*] among several Municipalities, so that it becomes more equitable for Municipalities that decide to preserve green areas instead of developing land.

*Pietro Romano, Mayor of Rho, and president, Patto dei Sindaci del Nord Ovest, 6 May 2016*

[The intra-metropolitan jurisdictions proposed by Lombardy Region] are really large. A functional area of 300-400 thousand inhabitants. It is clear that it gets a bit out of our range, to manage functions on such level, and so with unavoidable subsequent difficulties

*Barbara Agogliati, Mayor of Rozzano, and president, Metropolitan city department – ANCI Lombardia, 22 May 2016*

On the contrary, the Mayor representing the metropolitan administrative territory of Alto Milanese hold an opposite conception of the *Zona omogenea*, as she underscores the importance of the new framework of metropolitan governance to defend the cultural-historical autonomy of that territory:

I'm in favor of the gradual reinforcement of inter-municipal coordination. On the one hand, it has to consolidate on specific administrative issues, to relieve the work of Municipal offices; on the other hand, it has to become more structured so that the Alto Milanese can become a counter-part of the Metropolitan city of Milan, because this is a need of the territory. We are at the "periphery" of the Metropolitan city and the risk that we see is that whoever leads the Metropolitan city concentrates all the positive improvements in the center, and brings all the negative disturbances in the periphery. For us, the consolidation of the [inter-municipal] coordination is a necessity, to count more towards [the Metropolitan city of Milan].

*Sara Bettinelli, Mayor of Inveruno, and president, Conferenza dei Sindaci dell'Alto Milanese, 5 May 2016*

#### 4.2.2 Regional economic interests

Empirical evidence shows that the leadership of the CGIL trade union of the Province of Monza and Brianza precisely acknowledge both the ongoing territorial dynamics of metropolisation and the ongoing dynamics of political and administrative restructuring; moreover there is evidence that this territorial organization has elaborated a response aimed at safeguarding the micro-local peculiarities of the different portions of territory:

We have just held our general assembly [*Conferenza di organizzazione*], which structured the territory in five areas: Monza, Vimercate, Desio, Carate, Cesano; important investments are being made in the respective CGIL operational centers [*Camere del Lavoro*]. We carried out a specific reflection on this aspect. We enacted 22 projects of various nature. The project called "Resettlement" [territorial structuration in 5 areas] is an important one, it involves structural investments [...]. Our executive body [*segreteria confederale*] is composed by 6 people, each one is competent for one territorial area, plus the sixth who is the secretary general. We are doing exactly the opposite of the general trend of institutional consolidation. We try to accompany the ongoing process of restructuring of local autonomies [i.e. local governments] through a settlement in small homogeneous zones, regardless of where these zones will be ending up in the new restructuring ... Instead of trying to consolidate our provincial organization with that of Lecco, we carry out an operation of territorial sub-division within our organization, and we try to manage these zones, if not autonomously, at least instating a specific local presence and thus preparing ourselves for an hypothesis of institutional territorial restructuring which might even break up the Province of Monza into separate parts.

*Maurizio Laini, segretario generale, CGIL Monza e Brianza, 21 aprile 2016*

In another metropolitan territory, the leadership of the *Camera del Lavoro*/CGIL trade union of Legnano stressed the consequences of the new institutional framework on the pre-existing forms of inter-municipal governance. However, a complex puzzle of territorial configurations is seemingly bringing to a stalemate in the elaboration of a response to supra-local trends:

For us, [the Metropolitan city] should be not only an organized system but it should also be the true scale of territorial competition. But I don't see the instruments that would allow the Metropolitan city to take up such a role. Maybe the new territorial working group that I mentioned before ... some initiative for some portions of the territory can take up such a role, but as of today, this doesn't exist. [...] [Restructuring of intermediate territorial institutions] will involve us, I am sure, but then how will we be able to make choices, I don't know. We are late, as trade unions: on the one hand, politics has not provided us with the necessary tools to articulate a discussion, but on the other hand, [...] there are questions of power for us too. So in some cases it looks better to stay put and see [what to do] later.

*Maurizio Stampini, secretary general, CGIL Ticino-Olona, 10 May 2016*

The comparison between the CGIL trade union organizations of two different metropolitan territories shows that the respective leaderships are well aware of both metropolisation and recentralization dynamics; however, in one case (Monza-Brianza) the organization has elaborated a strategic response and is implementing it, while in the other case (Legnano) there seems to be a deadlock in the elaboration of a strategic approach.

Empirical evidence also shows that, in the metropolitan territories of the Province of Pavia, the territorial influence of the functional metropolitan core is well acknowledged by the management of the *Confindustria* entrepreneurial association. Moreover, the historically weak cohesion of the provincial territory, combined with the national administrative reform (Law 56/2014), provoked the re-activation of internal territorial cleavages, as the Municipal council of Vigevano approved a formal request for the inclusion in the Metropolitan city of Milan. Starting from this awareness of ongoing trends of territorial and institutional transformation, this entrepreneurial association elaborated an articulated response:

We worked on a project, "Pavia 2020", together with the University [of Pavia] aimed at highlighting the characteristics and the development potential of the local economic system, through the analysis of integrated industrial sectors. So, the aim was to understand what were the effects of the [global economic] crisis on the territory and what levers are available to revive economic development. [...] We identified 9 main integrated industrial sectors which characterize the territory – these are the industrial productions which connect the territory in terms of technologies and markets. The agribusiness has a very long value chain for instance: from food farming to catering with all the intermediate phases, including packaging which is very strong in the Province. We identified local firms, the available research competences at the University of Pavia, the technological and market trends, and we conceived some projects, around 80 projects that we have been trying to implement.

*Francesco Caracciolo, director, Confindustria Pavia, 9 May 2016*

The metropolitan territory of Alto Milanese represents a relevant piece of the industrial history and the entrepreneurial class of Lombardy. The leadership of *Confindustria Alto Milanese* stressed in fact the autonomy from the much larger peer association of Milan, *Assolombarda*. The ongoing process of institutional restructuring is mostly regarded by the entrepreneurial association leadership as a continuation of previous forms of territorial governance and is not triggering specific new initiatives:

In the Metropolitan city, we are part of one of the intra-metropolitan jurisdictions [*Zone omogenee*]; it is practically tailored. [...] It is not excluded that Municipalities from other Provinces join the Metropolitan city of Milan. See the case of Vigevano [see *supra*]. There had been a debate, two years ago, on the accession of Busto Arsizio to the Metropolitan city of Milan but I believe this debate is interrupted now. Also because, actually, this Metropolitan city endures a big problem of funds, of resources, and moreover it inherited previous budgetary problems from the Provincial administration. It is remaining just on paper.

*Giuseppe Scarpa, president, and Andrea Pontani, director, Confindustria Alto Milanese, 22 April 2016*

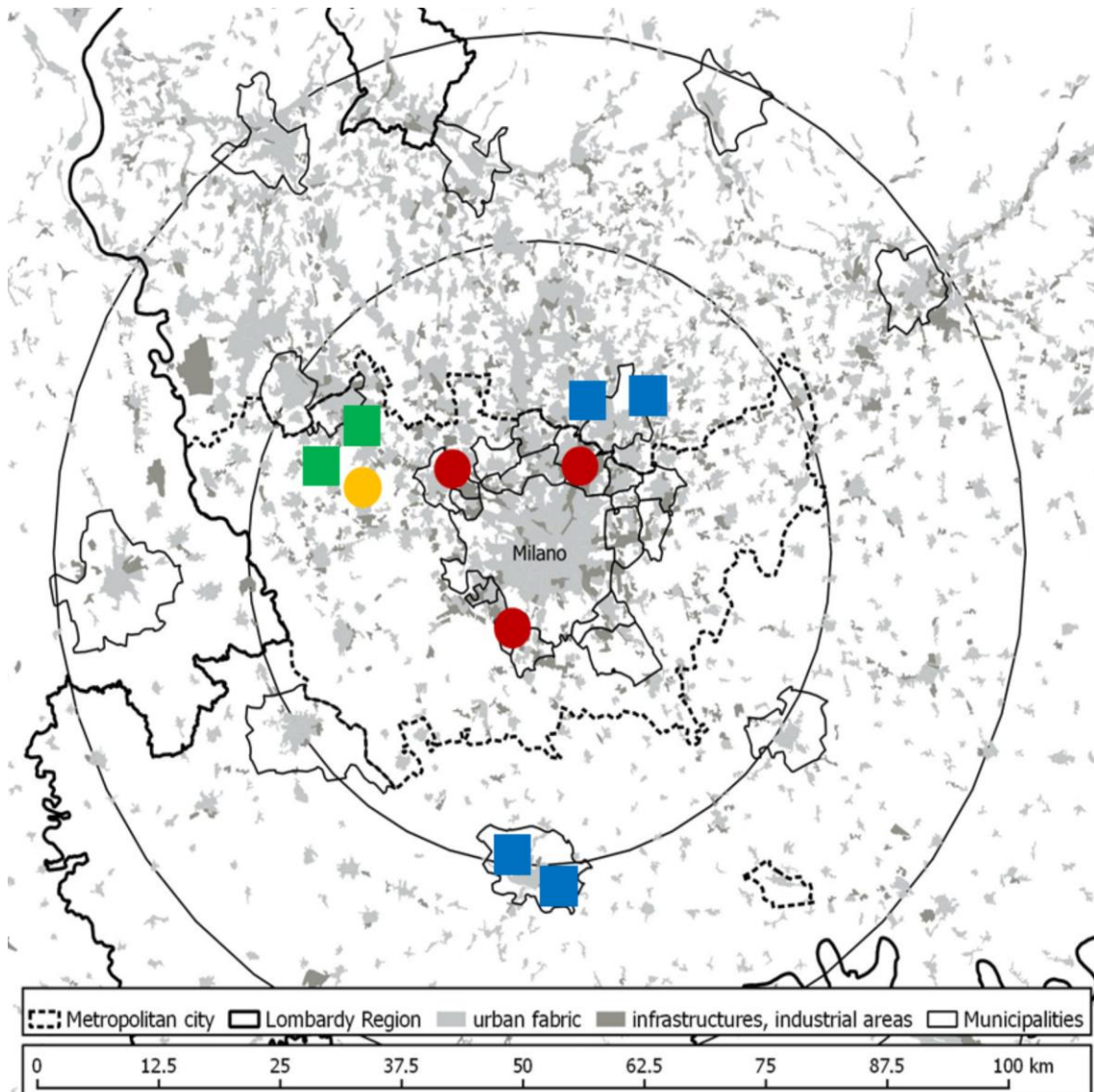
The differences of approach to the challenges of metropolisation and recentralization on the part of the entrepreneurial associations of two different metropolitan territories are striking. On the one hand, a heterogeneous and economically weaker territory (Province of Pavia) has been developing a vivid awareness of the consequence of these trends on its territory, and it put forward a remarkable strategic approach. On the other hand, a more dynamic territory with a glorious industrial past (Alto Milanese), which is already



equipped with some form of territorial and institutional project, displays a lack of strategic elaboration on the most recent supra-local trends.

The evidence presented allows one to sketch out a relatively clear trend: metropolitan societal elites can strategically counter-act to macro-structural or supra-local trends, of political disintermediation and territorial disarticulation. The complexity of the transformation of socio-spatial proximity at metropolitan scale is that one of the external constraints for the exploitation of locally available resources is acknowledging the socio-territorial influence of metropolisation dynamics. The fieldwork has found that the leadership of some relevant metropolitan societal actors are being able to address this complexity.

*Figure 1 – Localization of the territorial strategies analyzed in the Milan urban area*



**Key:**

Blue square: Regional economic interests – presence of territorial strategies; Green square: Regional economic interests – absence of territorial strategies  
 Red circle: Local administrators – management of urban externalities; Yellow circle: Local administrators – representation of urban identity

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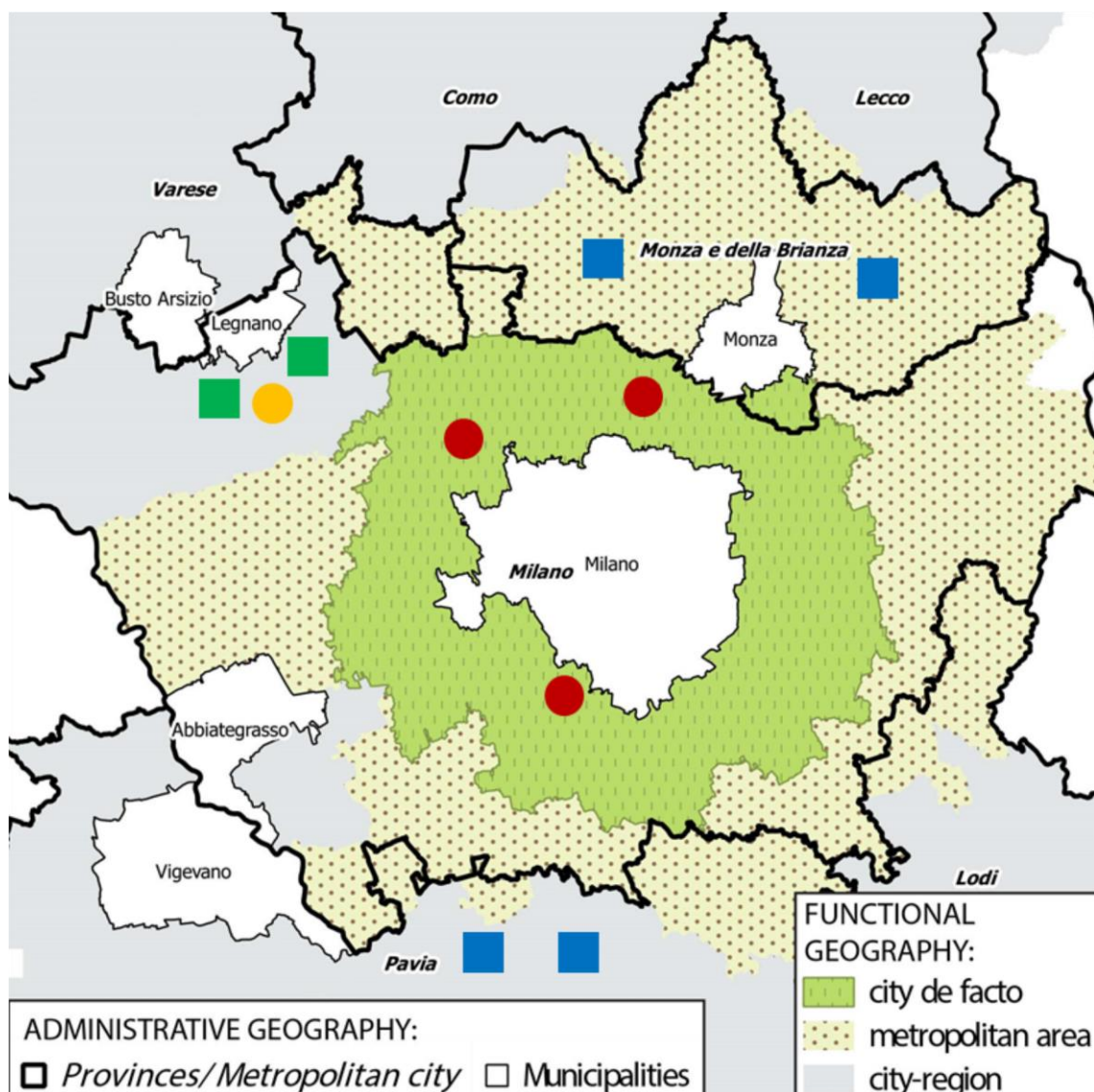
The fieldwork has found however one major exception: metropolitan societal actors in the metropolitan territory of Legnano, known as ‘Alto Milanese’, display a different set of conceptions and initiatives relative to strategic counter-action to macro-structural and supra-local trends. As I have already highlighted, the difference does not lie in the capacity of conceptualizing these trends, but really in the lack of (regional

economic interests), or a diverging (local administrators) strategic response, in comparison with actors located in other metropolitan territories (Figure 1).

## 5. Discussion

My hypothesis is that this exception can be explained with the effects of the national reform of local government (Law 56/2014 ‘Del Rio’) on different metropolitan territories. In other words, I suppose that an undifferentiated legislative act has created unexpected ‘structural contexts of opportunities’ (Vitale, 2015) for differentiated metropolitan territories. To demonstrate this hypothesis, I will use two variables: degrees of territorial interdependence as a variable of differentiation of metropolitan territories; legal frameworks introduced by the Law as a variable of intermediate territorial institutions. The two variables structure the context of opportunities for local and regional actors in metropolitan territories (Figure 2).

Figure 2 – Local structural elements of territorial strategies enacted in metropolitan Milan



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The three metropolitan territories of Monza e Brianza, Province of Pavia and Alto Milanese have comparable degrees of territorial interdependence with the functional metropolitan core: Monza-Brianza is more integrated in the metropolitan area (i.e. commuting area), while Province of Pavia and Alto Milanese enjoy a higher functional autonomy. However, all three territories share a comparable challenge: to find a balance between the influence of the metropolitan core and the peculiarity of local dynamics. In other words, these three territories have to face similar territorial challenges. However, they were endowed by the State with different *territorial institutions*: Alto Milanese was part of a Metropolitan city, while the other two disposed of an *Area vasta*.

The Metropolitan city disposed of some innovative instruments of territorial governance, such as the 'Strategic plan' and the intra-metropolitan jurisdictions. The territories outside the Metropolitan city – Monza-Brianza and Province of Pavia – remained instead under the direct 'supervision' of the Regional government. The lack of new instruments of territorial governance, and the loss of pre-existing forms of policy coordination and democratic representation, deprived the members of local elites of many of the necessary tools to orient the development of their 'places'. As a reaction to this, they had to elaborate and develop a spatially-sensitive socio-political project, or a 'territorial strategy'. On the other hand, the territory of Alto Milanese was not directly involved in the downgrading of Provinces, because the Province to which it belonged was bound to become a Metropolitan city. This territory had the possibility to continue using the instruments of territorial governance which it had been using before. Therefore, local elites did not have apparently urgent reasons to mobilize and devise a 'strategic approach', since the instruments to shape a territorial and institutional project were safeguarded.

Not only the governance of Alto Milanese is characterized by a different territorial institution than other territories with a similar territorial interdependence, the contrary is also true: the governance of Alto Milanese is characterized by a different territorial interdependence than other territories with the same territorial institutions.

The territory of Legnano enjoyed a peculiar administrative status in the former Province of Milan; also, it experimented original forms of inter-municipal governance. But the possibility to keep on using them after the reform of local government – differently from other territories of the city-region with similar economic characteristics – was not due to a recognition of its importance and peculiarity. It was rather a random effect, due to the fact that the Alto Milanese, although having a functional territorial autonomy, was included in the administrative boundaries of the Metropolitan city of Milan. In other words, the innovative instruments of territorial governance were not attributed by the State to Legnano and its territory, but to Milan and its territory; in fact the new institution is the Metropolitan city of *Milan* not the Metropolitan city of *Legnano*.

The *formal* consequence of Law 56/2014 on the governance of this territory was to transform the status of the Municipality of Legnano from a 'local government of a small provincial city' (see Tosi & Vitale, 2011) into a 'local government of a big metropolitan neighborhood'. If a locality holds the status of 'small provincial *city*', then inter-municipal governance is an instrument to share with the surrounding territory some strategic orientations; if a locality has the status of 'big metropolitan *neighborhood*', then inter-municipal governance is an instrument to manage more efficiently services and functions.

## 6. Conclusion

In this paper, I have found that the objectives and attitudes of local actors can be explained by the configuration of territorial interdependence and territorial institutions in two ways.

First, the engagement of societal actors into the elaboration of a 'territorial strategy' can be explained by the lack of appropriate instruments of territorial governance – seemingly induced by Law 56/2014 – for the metropolitan territories that are outside the administrative boundaries of the metropolitan institution (Monza-Brianza, Province of Pavia). It emerges from this an implicit demand to regulate socio-spatial proximity *beyond* the boundaries of the Metropolitan city of Milan.

Second, the different meaning attributed by political actors to innovative instruments of metropolitan governance – introduced by Law 56/2014 – can be explained by the differentiated territorial interdependence of metropolitan territories with the main centrality, and therefore by differentiated territorial interests represented by actors included in the metropolitan institution (Alto Milanese, Nord Milano, etc.). It emerges from this an implicit demand to regulate socio-spatial proximity *within* the boundaries of the Metropolitan city of Milan.

The unexpected evidence emerging from the fieldwork may be read thus as a form of resistance of local organizations to the risk of becoming just a useless transmission chain of decisions taken in the national capital. In other words, the tentative conclusion is that transformation of socio-spatial proximity is taking place not only at urban scale (like the urban elites of the city of Milan are doing) but also at the metropolitan scale.

## 7. References

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