Governing Urban Diversity:

Creating Social Cohesion, Social Mobility and Economic Performance in Today’s Hyper-diversified Cities

Report 2i

Fieldwork inhabitants, Milan (Italy)

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The views expressed in this report are the sole responsibility of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of European Commission.
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1. Introduction

There is a growing conventional wisdom in writings on European cities that presents them as centres of ‘super-diversity’ (Vertovec, 2007). This refers specifically to their increasing ethnic diversity and to the demographic diversity between and within such ethnic groups. However, cities are becoming increasingly diverse, not only in socio-economic, social and ethnic terms, but also with respect to lifestyles, attitudes and activities. To indicate this enormous diversity, we proposed to use the term hyper-diversity (Tasan-Kok et al., 2013).

Within cities, groups can live segregated or rather mixed. Urban neighbourhoods may be fairly homogeneous residential areas in terms of housing and population, but they may also be heavily mixed with respect to types of housing (tenure, type, price) and population categories (income, ethnicity, household composition, age). In addition, individuals who belong to the same ‘official’ demographic category may possess quite different lifestyles and attitudes and involve themselves in a wide range of activities. Some may for example have a very neighbourhood-oriented life, with all their friends and activities in a very small area, while others may have their social activities stretched over the whole city or even beyond. Residents of mixed urban neighbourhoods may happily live together, live parallel lives, or be in open conflict with each other (Tasan-Kok et al., 2013).

This report is written as part of the EU-FP7 DIVERCITIES project. In this project, we aim to find out how urban hyper-diversity affects social cohesion and social mobility of residents of deprived and dynamic urban areas and the economic performance of entrepreneurs with their enterprise in such areas. In this report, we focus on the findings from our interviews with residents in which we explored their experiences of living with hyper-diversity and how it affects their lives.

This general aim can be broken down into more detailed and concrete research questions. They are central in the chapters of this report:

Why did people move to the diverse area they live in now? To what extent has the diversity of the area been a pull-factor? Or were other aspects (such as the availability of inexpensive dwellings) a much stronger motive to settle in the present area? (Chapter 3)

How do residents think about the area they live in? Do residents see their neighbourhood's diversity as a strength or a weakness? Which pros and cons do residents see in their neighbourhood's diversity? (Chapter 4)

How do residents make use of the diversified areas they live in? Do they actively engage in diversified relations and activities in their neighbourhood? To what extent is the area they live in more important than other areas in terms of activities? (Chapter 5)

To what extent is the diversity of the residential area important for social cohesion? Which elements foster social cohesion, which elements hinder the development of social cohesion in the area? (Chapter 6)

To what extent is the diversity of the neighbourhood important for social mobility? Which elements foster social mobility and which elements hinder social mobility? (Chapter 7)
How are diversity-related policies perceived by the inhabitants of the area? (Chapter 8)

The research in this report focuses on the city of Milan. This city currently has 3.2 million inhabitants in the metropolitan administrative area, and 1.3 million in the municipality. It is a highly diverse city in terms of population: 13.1 per cent of residents in the metropolitan area and 17.4 per cent in the municipality are non-Italian citizens, coming from many different countries: Philippines, Egypt, China, Peru, Sri Lanka, Ecuador, Ukraine and Morocco are the first eight countries of origin, totalling 70 per cent of all foreign residents in the municipality. This migration-related diversity is changing fast: in 2013, more than 2,200 foreigners became Italian citizens; 6 per cent (some 3,500) of new foreign residents were actually Italy-born children whose parents do not have Italian citizenship; 45 per cent of foreign residents in Milan have been living there for ten years or more.

Migration is not the only source of diversity in Milan. More than 45 per cent of households are single-person, while the “traditional” household made up by a married couple with at least a minor child sums up to just 12 per cent of the total, challenging the familistic boundaries of the Italian welfare state. Meanwhile, also the age structure of the city has changed, with – on the one hand – the increase of minors (from 12.7 per cent according to 2001 Census to 15.8 per cent in 2014) and of the elderly (from 21.4 to 23.4 per cent, among which the 80+ are growing faster, being now more than 100,000).

This means that intra- and intergenerational cohort relations are changing: the intersection of gender, ethnicity, family compositions and age produce new assemblages that may affect the way in which people group. Identification may become more nuanced than simple categories (e.g. Italian / non-Italian). While the total population grew by 15 per cent in the last decade, there has been a loss of Italian young adults, and the increase of children, elders and foreign nationals (see Table 1).

Finally, Milan is a city where also socio-economic conditions are diversifying, making the city more unequal: the unemployment rate is around 7.7 per cent in 2013 – much lower than the national average, but anyway grown strongly after the crisis (it was 3.9 per cent in 2007). The crisis has hit hard some groups, starting with migrants and youth: foreigners’ unemployment rate was just 6 per cent in 2007, while it grew to 20 per cent in 2012-2013 (Menonna & Blangiardo, 2014); youth unemployment rate skyrocketed to 34.5 per cent in 2013 (it was a good way under 20 per cent in the mid-2000s). At the same time, Milan is the area in Italy with the highest average income, due to a specific concentration of high-income groups compared to other Italian cities and to the role of Milan in the advanced tertiary economy: 40 per cent of wealth is owned by 10 per cent

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1 Source: demo.istat.it; 1st January 2014.
2 This share has to be increased respectively with a further 2,5 and 3,5%, if we include both undocumented stayers (some 27,000 in the municipality of Milan) and regular stayers not registered as residents (Menonna & Blangiardo 2014).
3 Source: demo.istat.it; 31st December 2013.
4 Source: http://dati.comune.milano.it/index.php?option=com_rd&view=item&id=136
of the population, making up the highest Gini index among the largest Italian cities (D’Ovidio, 2009).

Within Milan, the research takes place in the Northern area of the city, that administratively coincides with the zone di decentramento [decentralization areas] 2 and 9. This area has 335,000 residents (some 153,000 in district 2 and 182,000 in district 9) and can be considered as one of the most diversified areas in the city. First, it has one of the highest shares of foreign residents: they account for 26.2 per cent of the inhabitants (mainly Egyptian, Chinese, Bangladeshi and Filipino citizens), including some

Table 1. Population by age, sex and citizenship. Zone di decentramento 2, 9 (Milan North). Years 2003, 2013

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age group</th>
<th>Males</th>
<th>Females</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Italian</td>
<td>Non Italian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------</td>
<td>---------</td>
<td>-------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minors (0-17)</td>
<td>16,924</td>
<td>3,351</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(13.7)</td>
<td>(20.8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Young adults (18-35)</td>
<td>26,960</td>
<td>8,588</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(21.8)</td>
<td>(53.2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adults (36-64)</td>
<td>54,875</td>
<td>4,014</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(44.5)</td>
<td>(24.9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elderly (65+)</td>
<td>24,637</td>
<td>188</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(20.0)</td>
<td>(1.2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>123,396</td>
<td>16,141</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(100.0)</td>
<td>(100.0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minors (0-17)</td>
<td>17,384</td>
<td>8,969</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(14.6)</td>
<td>(18.9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Young adults (18-35)</td>
<td>20,113</td>
<td>18,373</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(16.9)</td>
<td>(38.7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adults (36-64)</td>
<td>53,666</td>
<td>19,481</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(45.1)</td>
<td>(41.0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elderly (65+)</td>
<td>27,792</td>
<td>674</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(23.4)</td>
<td>(1.4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>118,955</td>
<td>47,497</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(100.0)</td>
<td>(100.0)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: own elaboration on data from dati.comune.milano.it

Absolute numbers per age, sex and citizenship; column percentages (in brackets); % Non Italian is calculated as a share of total population (sum of Italian and Non Italian).
concentration areas. For example, among the 36,000 inhabitants of Via Padova neighbourhood – one of the focal points in our research – non Italian citizens are up to 34 per cent, and as many as 49 per cent among the minors of age.\(^8\)

This is not the only particular feature of the area: it is also mixed in terms of households, age and income. A generally young-to-adult immigrant population lives side by side with Italian elderly: 65+ make up 21 per cent of the population in the area, while minors are some 15 per cent.\(^9\) Also in this area, 45.7 per cent of households is single-person.\(^10\)

We conducted 52 interviews with residents of northern Milan. These interviews were held between September 2014 and February 2015. In the next chapter, we will first give some more information on the methodology that was adopted. This is then followed by six chapters in which we will answer the research questions mentioned above. In the conclusions we summarise the main results and address our main questions. We will also give some broader guidance for policy-making.

2. The interviewees

2.1 Selection procedure: how did we select our interviewees

The area we studied underwent meaningful changes in the last decades. Different flows of in-migrants layered in the last century coming from the surrounding countryside and Northern Italy, from Southern Italy (Foot, 1997) and, more recently, from abroad. The mix of new and old built environments and social mobility processes created mixed areas in terms of social class, origin, age, identification and categorisation processes, length of stay (Arrigoni, 2010; Ponti and Pozzi, 2012; Marzorati and Barberis, 2014).

This area was crossed by different populations, with the stratification and change of diverse social groups mentioned in the introduction. Internal labor migration (first from Northern Italy, later from the South) characterized the post-war period from the 1950s to 1970s. Migration from abroad started in the 1980s, and by the 2000s became more and more a family migration (due to reunifications with partners and children). Migration from Asia (China, Bangladesh, Philippines), South America (Peru, Ecuador), and North Africa (Egypt, Morocco, Tunisia) shared different spots in our research area. At the same time, native and long-term residents continued to live there, and new Italian households (especially new families, as we will see below) moved thanks to the availability of affordable housing and of good transports in the area.

For this reason, we looked for interviewees intersecting different forms of diversity, mainly related to the following characteristics:
- ethnicity and cultural background;
- social class;
- length of stay (newcomers/old inhabitants);
- origin (national and international migration flows);


In particular, we maintain that age and gender were focal features, affecting cohort experience. Their intersection with the other characteristics mentioned above has consequences on the experience of diversity and of the neighbourhood. As Barberis et al. (2014) and Angelucci et al. (2014) stress, the localized effects of specific configurations of interaction may affect the well-being of living together. Relevant researches held in the area (Pastore and Ponzo, 2012) show that a lively and peaceful neighbourhood environment depends also on how gender and age intersect with other diversities. For example:

- the interaction between natives and immigrants has also an age dimension. Native Italian citizens growing older and older are side by side with a much younger immigrant population (see Table 1). This also means that younger cohorts (natives or not) have more experience of diversity related to international immigration backgrounds;

- some meeting spaces (schools, parks, markets...) have a role for the sociability of different groups, also along gender lines (e.g. schools and parks work as spaces of encounter for immigrant and native females and their children).

Thus, given the relevance of meeting places, we started the selection of cases by identifying some foci, where we met gatekeepers and potential interviewees with the desired characteristics, and then went on snowballing from the first interviewees, into their loose social networks. Foci and gatekeepers were identified starting from personal networks of researchers, partly created during the previous steps of this research project (see Angelucci et al., 2014)

In particular, the foci we started from are:

- an intercultural association of parents and residents involved in the lively management of a school park (see Angelucci et al., 2014). This allowed us to access native Italians and immigrants active in inter-group relations;
- a community centre attended by different age groups;
- a yoga gym (with the gatekeeping role of the yoga teacher), to access middle-to-upper class interviewees, and their neighbours
- some well-known meeting places (pubs, shops), attended by different social groups, including "neighbourhood users";\footnote{We will focus on residents attending such places. Though, we maintained that places of consumption attended by a number of different social groups from inside and outside the neighbourhood have a role in defining the perception of and relation with diversity in the area.}
- a couple of apartments blocks in the area with different compositions (cohabitating youth; households) and housing histories in the neighbourhood, where we had gatekeepers.

2.2 Which groups did we miss?

Groups that are socially isolated are less accessible through snowball sampling and, consequently, are under-represented in our sample. This applies in particular to two very different groups: immigrant newcomers (especially those in a precarious legal status) and the Italian eldest residents. We have just 3 interviewees for the first category, and among the eldest interviewees only one is over 75.
Regarding immigrant newcomers, interviewers’ accessibility was limited by trust (especially for the undocumented ones) and language problems. We coped with these issues by using foci and gatekeepers close to this group, and by using polyglot interviewers.

Regarding Italian oldest residents, also foci and gatekeepers where a solution, in particular using kinship networks among neighbours and relatives.

On the other hand, we can state that young to middle-aged, middle class, integrated inhabitants are overrepresented in our sample and this may provide a picture of richer neighbourhood connections. We will take this issue in consideration when analysing our data.

2.3 Some general characteristics of the interviewees

In the above-mentioned foci, we selected interviewees that mirror the heterogeneity of the local population: men and women, belonging to different social classes and with different ages, both immigrants and natives or internal immigrants (typically from Southern Italy), both newcomers and older inhabitants.

Obviously, we could not construct a sample reflecting fully the complexity of intersecting all these variables, so we basically started from two main characteristics that were basic in relation with our research questions: gender and migration background. The control over the mix of other categories was less strict, leaving space to different intersections of hyper-diversity, anyway broadly balancing social class, age and length of stay in the neighbourhood.

Summarising, the principal characteristics of the 52 interviewees are the following:

- 30 of them are females and 22 are males
- 34 have Italian citizenship and among them 11 are internal migrants
- Among the 18 non-Italian citizens two are European citizens while the others are from non-European Countries (nationals from 13 Countries have been interviewed)
- 23 have a migratory background and we can classify them on the basis of the length of their stay: 3 of them have been living in Italy for less than 2 years, 4 have been living in Italy for 2/5 years, 7 for 6/10 years and 9 have been living in Italy for more than 10 years.
- 17 respondents belong to the age group 18-30, 22 to the age group 31-45, 6 to the age group 46-60, and 7 to the over 60 age group (5 of them are over 70)
- 23 of the interviewees live together with their partner (among them are married and unmarried partners as well), 12 live with their origin’s family (or some of its components), 8 share their apartment with one or more flatmates, 10 live alone.
- Half of the group is married or in a stable relationship, while the rest is single or divorced.
- 30 of the respondents live in Via Padova; 12 live in other areas of the zona di decentramento 2; 10 live in the zona di decentramento 9 (in particular Niguarda its surroundings.
3. Housing choice and residential mobility

3.1 Introduction

Housing choices are based on many variables, including personal characteristics, opportunities and aspirations, and the plural and multi-layered nature of these relevant variables is taken into account by most approaches on housing choice (Mulder, 1996). At the same time, housing choices have to be placed in the context of complex decision-making processes: the individual weight of pros and cons may be constrained, e.g. in terms of economic and social resources.

Hyper-diversity adds to this picture, accounting for a wide range of intersecting characteristics (gender, age, migration trajectories, cultural background, social class, lifestyles) having an impact on housing careers.

Thus, we will place a focus on housing decision-making processes and diversity. Doing this, we will also consider the role of neighbourhood diversity, so far taken in little if any consideration by literature as an element influencing housing choices.

So, in this chapter we will try to answer the questions (stated in Chapter 1): why did people move to the diverse area they live in now? To what extent has the diversity of the area been a pull-factor?

As a first step, to answer these questions we have to frame our case study in national and local patterns of the housing market: the availability and accessibility of a housing stock fitting different social, economic and housing needs is an important steering factor. So, social housing and other public or public-private housing policies may play an important role affecting individual decision-making processes.

This role may be an open issue in the housing market of Italian large cities that is characterized by a weak public support and a lack of affordable housing. Social housing is a marginal sector of public action, in the frame of a fragmented and under-protecting Mediterranean welfare regime. In our case study this is an issue especially for some groups, like migrants and youth (Ponzo, 2009; Agustoni & Alietti, 2010; Mencarini, 2008).

The groups occupying lower economic and social positions are disproportionately affected by such a weak housing policy. This is even more evident in the context of the economic crisis, that hit hard the most disadvantaged, but also some groups that started to achieve a sort of upward mobility (e.g. some long-term migrants: cfr. Ricucci, 2011). Also, discrimination processes add up to economic constraints in limiting housing choices for some groups – in particular immigrants.

There are wide place-based differences in the stock, quality and accessibility of social and affordable housing and generally migrants (especially newcomers) face worse housing conditions than natives. Such a situation is quite widespread throughout Europe (Bolt & Van Kempen, 2001), though, it may be particularly a disadvantage in the Italian case – exactly due to the low level of public intervention in the housing policy.
Other vulnerable groups in social transition (e.g. new, single parent and divorced households; young adults leaving the nest) face similar risks (Ranci et al., 2014; Balducci, 2004; Savini, 2014).

In our case study neighbourhood, these risk profiles accumulate and intersect. As we mentioned in previous chapters, the area’s population is characterised by diversity. The area is also very diversified in its structure, including buildings with different property values and functions: so, different populations living together in a neighbourhood with a very heterogeneous built environment can have very different housing careers.

Even members of the same group (by gender, age, ethnicity, migration history, social class) or members of different groups living side by side can experience quite different housing careers. Actually, notwithstanding a fine-grained mosaic of social groups and built environments, there can be micro-segregation processes (Benassi, 2002; Pratschke, 2007; Wood and Landry, 2008).

This means that neighbourhoods as a whole are quite mixed (Mingione et al., 2008), but some blocks are better off, renewed and gentrified, well connected with the public transport network: more expensive, they are inhabited by middle-to-upper classes (Scotti, 2010). Poorer social groups are located in more dilapidated, fragile and disadvantaged micro-areas, from a social and environmental point of view.

On the other hand, this also means that stigmatized areas may be actually more plural and lively than expected, and that there are chances for intergroup social relations – if some circumstances, that we will explore in the next chapters – are met.

### 3.2 Why did the residents come to live here?

Our interviewees mention a wide set of intersecting motivations for choosing their home in the present neighbourhood. We will report their different motivations (mainly: housing costs; accessibility; job opportunities; kinship networks, place attachment), and relate them to interviewees’ characteristics.

First, housing affordability is often mentioned by most of our interviewees. This area of the city has a housing stock cheaper than in many other areas. Lower prices are explained differently by different age cohorts: for older inhabitants, the area was affordable because it is located at the periphery of the city, while for the younger ones affordability is due to the deterioration of the area.

Obviously, this is not the only cheap neighbourhood in the metropolitan area. A competitive advantage is given by the fact that here low prices are matched with accessibility and mobility. The area is well connected, being crossed by important metro lines, railway and road routes bridging the city centre with the North-Eastern hinterland. Public transportation is well developed and heavily used.

“We came here in this area because rents were lower, we had some friends that were here and it was quite convenient with the metro line... so, it has been also a logistic choice.” (R06, F, 36, teacher, Italian)

Accessibility is important for many reasons, but the most important are job opportunities. Residential areas in the neighbourhood are in the catching area of a number of
businesses. Job opportunities changed in the years, attracting different kind of workers: large industries were common in the past decades, while small tertiary firms are now more usual.

So, job opportunities are more mentioned by older (internal) migrants: when they moved to the area, it was much more peripheral than now and close to big booming industries and service-sector businesses (Siemens and Pirelli had plants in the area).

“We focussed on my working place, first of all... I worked in Piazzale Loreto, so we searched for a flat in this zone.” (R15, F, 65, retired, Italian)

“When I came here [in Milan], I looked for a house with my sister, who was studying here. This neighbourhood has been chosen since it is near the headquarters of X [name of large multinational] and since it was an area with affordable prices, too. This is a reason. I didn’t know the surrounding social situation, since I lived here just as a worker: ultimately, for me it was just a house I found, and it was convenient since it was close to my workplace and a metro station – and was affordable.” (R12, F, 40, entrepreneur, Italian)

“We were back from Rome. The main point was that I was working close to Loreto square [a square in the Southern part of our case area, close to the city centre], so we were looking for an apartment in the area, to be close to my workplace... and then we were close to the metro, shops, different facilities. So, it was a sum of different reasons, but overall being close to my workplace in 10-15 minutes I was at work.” (R16, 74, M, retired, Italian)

Kinship networks form a second motivation for seeking a home in this neighbourhood. It is mentioned in particular by younger residents who have grown-up in the area and by international migrants and newcomers – especially those less endowed with economic resources.

It is well known that Italian young adults leave their parents’ nest less and later that many of their European peers. At the same time, many of those living alone, do anyway live at walking distance from close relatives.

“I started to look for a house to buy, and I found one at an affordable price, that was also very close to my sister’s place. We have also this [reason]: this long-lasting bond. I can go and do some chores for her if she need it, or the other way around.” (R07, M, 37, library security guard, Italian)

Family relations help to cut down the costs of living alone, in a context where labour and housing integration of the youth is problematic.

Kinship networks have a different role for international immigrant newcomers. For them, constraints in housing choices are particularly important: discrimination, limited resources and limited knowledge of housing chances in the city curb their chances to find an appropriate accommodation. Kinship networks help overcoming such

12Ambrosini and Bonizzoni (2012), studying migrant housing choices in Milan, found that the good housing conditions are not clearly related with income: the improved knowledge of the housing market, or (less extensively) the access to social housing are more important factors.
difficulties. They act as a buffer, providing basic support both for travelling to and staying in Italy. Ties with compatriots, albeit loose, provide a minimum set of information.

These strong or weak ties are often the main, if not the only, reason why they choose our case study neighbourhood to live.

“My parents have an Egyptian background […] the first time we moved here, they chose this area because there was an Egyptian community, a small Egyptian island so to say. Then, my parents opened a business (a restaurant), so when moving we had the need to be close to the restaurant […] When people move, they need always a reference point... so, if you have relatives there, you stay there. You start living with them, and then look around.” (R25, F, 24, student, Italian, Egyptian origin, 2G)

The situation is harder for those with very limited social ties. Their choice is based on limited information on the fact that the area is good for newcomers. However, since the neighbourhood is characterised by very different housing solutions, this also means that newcomers without good connections are trapped in the worst housing solutions in the area:

“[I found this house] on internet. I didn’t know anything at all. Otherwise I would never come here, because actually I don’t like this area so much.” R10, F, 27, Student, Chinese

Attachment to the place is a third motivation mentioned quite often. A share of our interviewees have been living in the area for decades, or have been grown there. In many cases, they moved elsewhere to study or work. Later on, when they decided to change home again, they preferred a new house in their old area.

This motivation is particularly strong for younger generations that appreciate the local atmosphere – including its diversity. Even stronger for those grown up in the area, with primary networks rooted there. The neighbourhood is the place where their social bonds developed.

“I’ve always lived here! I moved from time to time […]to attend the university in another city] but then I thought: ‘Sure, I miss my Milan, my neighbourhood!’. And I came back: when I was young, I moved to other neighbourhoods for one or two years, but I always came back... And when I bought my own house, I said: ‘Here! This is the area where I like to live, where I feel safe’.” R03, F, 35, unemployed, Italian (Somali origin)

“As the two quotations above suggest, for many young residents, diversity makes their neighbourhood special. Neighbourhood diversity allows more freedom, and it allows being both “unique” (personal diversity as positive) and “normal” (diversity as an accepted daily experience)."
Place attachment is not limited to “natives”, but is found also among migrants (both older internal and recent international migrants) – especially those that have been upward mobile. The neighbourhood has been the first destination for generations of labour migrants and their families: old internal migrants from surrounding areas and Southern Italy and (more recently) from all over the world.

Its affordable housing, connections, and succession of migrant group made the area a key place for newcomers, an ideal context were to start a housing career that later on may develop elsewhere. This grounded a sort of place attachment that mixes intra-group solidarity, kinship networks, and new socio-economic opportunities.

So, what is the place of diversity in housing choices? Looking back at the list of motivations above, it is rarely mentioned as a pull-factor in the housing choice. However, it comes to light as a “second-level element”, e.g. in pride and identification within the neighbourhood. Those showing place attachment, especially the younger ones born and grown up in the area, see diversity as a value and an asset, and they also try to convey this value to their children. As an interviewee says

“... then migratory flows began to arrive and shops re-opened, the zone came back to life. I think this is a positive effect. [...] I experienced positive aspects through the school and in terms of effects of diversity on my children's education.” (R17, F, 49, teacher, Italian, internal migr.)

The diversity of the neighbourhood can be considered an issue also for those that chose to move into this area thanks to their kinship networks. In this case, respondents do not refer to ‘diversity’: they may praise homogeneity of co-ethnic networks. Nonetheless, we can argue that the plurality of ethnic networks creates a welcoming environment for newcomers, allowing the development of services for them (e.g., cheap housing and shops, opportunities in the secondary segment of the labour market) and daily weak social relations that tolerate diversity. So, all in all, we may also argue that diversity can be – on the one side – a pull-factor for newcomers (thanks to network effects), but it is also an “anti-push-factor”, i.e. a factor that actively operates holding inhabitants in the neighbourhood once they have experienced it.

3.3 Moving to the present neighbourhood: improvement or not?

The perception of improvement experienced by interviewees is related to the motivation that grounds their housing choices, and the constraints they experienced. For example, for international migrant newcomers this area is often a buffer: their evaluations are suspended, because they do not expect improvements to come from a housing solution in this area. It is just a stopover.

“I: do you enjoy to live in this neighbourhood or would you prefer to live elsewhere?
R: to me it's the same.
I: Were you happier in your previous neighbourhood?
R: No, to me it's the same.” (M, 19, student, Philippine)

The characteristics of the neighbourhood (cheap housing and not highly reputed) make it a buffer also for other social groups, e.g. young adults and young families that (as we mentioned in the introduction) find it hard to access affordable quality housing: their
motivation to move is not so much to improve their position, but to avoid a deterioration of living conditions. Affordable, cheap housing in a connected area helps allows to cut living costs, and spare resources for future chances.

In this respect, we can define our neighbourhood, with the terms of the Chicago School, as a “zone of transition”: an aging built environment close to the centre with low property values, that attracts different waves of territorially and socially mobile populations.

These preliminary remarks are necessary to explain the difficulty of the interviewees to frame their housing choice in terms of “improvement” or not. It is more a “wait and see” situation.

Anyway, some of them can retrospectively analyse their experience, and assess pros and cons. In particular those that have been upward mobile in their housing and labour career after moving in the neighbourhood. Middle-class former internal migrants have often become homeowners: they have a clear perception of their improvement. To them, the move in the area has been part of this upward mobile process.

“I have been living in this house for 51 years. We moved in Milan to work, then we moved into this house because we had the chance to buy it; first we leased it, and then we bought it – little by little, since at that time it was possible.” (R51, F, 75, retired, Italian internal migr.)

On the other hand, immigrant newcomers, with limited resources and strongly relying on kinship networks, do rarely see their present accommodation as an improvement, as they experience tight circumstances.

Mostly, the area is a buffer for some households in transition, experiencing a turn in their life course: new households, separated or divorced persons with children, households with new-borns, and young persons at their first experience outside parents’ nest. These people are among those trapped in the weakness of Italian housing policy: not poor enough to access social housing, not rich enough to access homeownership or higher segments of an expensive rental market. They are lower-middle class that may risk falling into poverty, even when having qualified (but precarious) jobs (see also chapter 7). They can find a cheap housing solution in the area, often meant as temporary.

“We haven’t been here for 50 years. We moved in Milan to work, then we moved into this house because we had the chance to buy it; first we leased it, and then we bought it – little by little, since at that time it was possible.” (R51, F, 75, retired, Italian internal migr.)

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For most of the interviewees in the situation just mentioned above, the perception of improvements is not based on economic or housing improvements. It is more about intangible assets. They mention improvements in issues like neighbourhood social life; perceived personal safety; the access to appreciated public facilities (e.g. transports, parks, schools) that may be much scarcer in other areas. The atmosphere of freedom and neighbourhood liveliness is part of their perception of improvement. Diversity is part of this social environment.

“I lived with my parents. […] the choice of this house in this neighbourhood has been an act of rebellion, somehow. I was looking for a 'bohemian' place, I was looking for this kind of situation... and I'd say I found it!” (R09, F, 38, counsellor, Italian)

So, in some respects, diversity is part of the perception of improvement, since it is part of a welcoming context for people in a weak social (and housing) position.

3.4 Conclusions

In this section we have tried to answer the first set of questions mentioned in the introduction: Why did people move to the diverse area they live in now? To what extent has the diversity of the area been a pull-factor? Or were other aspects a much stronger motive to settle in the present area?

Diversity is not the most important motivation to move in the area. The availability of cheap housing in a well-connected neighbourhood – that makes mobility easy – stands clearly out as the most important reason mentioned by our interviewees. Diversity does not seem to affect negatively interviewees’ housing choice and perception of improvement or worsening of their life conditions.

For most interviewees diversity is not a pull-factor; though, for some of them (namely young adults and foreign-born middle-class) it contributes to enrich daily and social life of people who accept it. Diversity creates an enjoyable environment that becomes an asset able to overcome some hardship conditions.

Diversity is more of a pull-factor for recent international migrants: even if many factors cut the opportunity to reach a satisfying economic and housing condition, diversity plays a role in making the area a safe harbour for newcomers at least in the first steps of their migratory path. Indeed, the huge presence of in-migrants in that area creates the necessary conditions to the formation of kinship networks that in turn feed diversity of the area.

4. Perceptions of the diversity in the neighbourhood

4.1 Introduction

According to Eurobarometer, Italy ranks lower than average in the attitudes towards diversity (see Special Eurobarometers 296, 317, 393), that means that Italians are not very positive toward it. The situation is a bit better when referring to younger generations and to neighbours, who perceive diversity less negatively. Nevertheless, due to the Italian peculiar fragmentation, it is hard to infer something when scaling down to local level –
even harder when referring to one of Italian most international cities and to a fast evolving and hyper-diversifying situation (Ambrosini, 2012).

Some of the neighbourhoods within our research area have been subject to stigmatising media representations, associating diversity to urban decay, crime and dangerousness (Agustoni and Alietti, 2009). Targeted groups are usually stereotyped and stigmatized (like migrants or Roma). Squatters, unauthorized settlements, migrants’ concentration and their visibility (shops, gathering in squares and parks) receive negative media attention and negative politicization by those that Bigo (2002) calls “professional managers of unease” (politicians, administrators and professionals that gain power, legitimacy and resources by identifying threats and risks for the social order).

These representations may negatively affect the relations between a stigmatised neighbourhood (perceived from outside as “no-go areas”) and the rest of the city, and may also have mixed effects within the neighbourhood: negative discourses can prevent interaction between stigmatised groups and other residents; harsh and extreme representations of neighbourhood urban decay may contrast with everyday life experience – and also interests of the residents – in building positive neighbourhood relations (Van Eijk, 2012).

On the other hand, the diversity experienced in everyday interaction in public spaces may differ significantly from media representations, and it may cut through their oversimplifying categories (Pastore and Ponzo, 2013): in this sense, hyper-diversity as a daily experience of (and interaction with) diversity challenges large and acritical group categorizations by origin, ethnicity, age, gender. Contexts where intergroup interactions happens may be particularly important in the experience of diversity (Camina and Wood, 2009).

If the scientific literature suggests that stereotypes could reinforce notwithstanding interaction among diversities, at the same time it shows that this interaction may prevent the developments of some forms of stereotypes, and it may favour mutual trust (Schmid et al., 2014).

In the next pages, we will analyse these aspects of living in a diverse neighbourhood with reference to our researched area. In particular, we will try to answer the following questions: how do residents think about the area they live in? Do they see their neighbourhood’s diversity as a strength or a weakness? Which pros and cons do residents see in living in a hyper-diversified neighbourhood? We will see that, in the researched area, positive perceptions and discourses about diversity are generally prevailing.

4.2 Perceptions of neighbours

Perceptions of neighbours in the researched area are generally positive and instrumental in maintaining peaceful and “civilized” relations.

Nonetheless, if we focus on peculiar intersections of characteristics (such as origin, social class, age, and length of stay) we can find that some significant deviations from this general trend occur. Therefore, we are going to identify different groups among our respondents in order to examine the way they perceive their neighbours.
In particular, we can identify four main groups proceeding with two steps of differentiation:

a) the first differentiation is between *natives* and *international migrants*: at this step we include in the category of natives also internal migrants and new generations from an immigrant background (the so-called second generation)

b) the second step of differentiation refers to age, social class and length of stay within the two groups above:

1. among natives it is possible to distinguish between people belonging to *middle upper class, over 30* and people belonging to *lower-middle class under 30*
2. among international migrants it is possible to distinguish between *lower and middle class, long-term residents* and *working class newcomers*

The figure below provides a view on the grouping exercise we made.

This classification is not intended to cover all the possible intersections of categories, but it focuses on those most peculiar and interesting for our research purpose.

Therefore, the first evidence is that, among those who we categorised as *natives*, the most meaningful differences in perception of neighbours were observed along the two axes of social class and age group, while among the group of *international migrants* the main difference concerns the length of stay and, in the second place, social class.

Going into detail of each single group, we can see that the first group generally perceive neighbours in a just-formally polite way: they profess tolerance and good predisposition towards otherness, but rarely engage with neighbours and diversity in the neighbourhood. Their relationships with neighbours remain at the level of courtesy and aim to maintain a quiet and liveable environment.

“With some neighbours we have a sort of relationship but, unfortunately, they all are Italians… I mean… This block is a very good one, well maintained, especially if you compare it to the others in the neighbourhood… prevalently Italians live here. [...] I think that if I was a foreigner, with all the problems they have, the
better thing that could happen to me was that someone integrated as I am, would say 'Hi, good morning!' It would make me feel less isolated. [...] And I have forced myself to do so.” (R21, M, 41, webmaster, Italian)

A more nuanced perception is expressed by those involved in associations engaged with the neighbourhood and the promotion of its diversity. Even in that case, however, their actual attention toward diversity stays at the level of civility and courtesy.

The second group grew up and was schooled in the area. They are used to be engaged with diversity to such an extent that it becomes part of their personal identity and attitudes. Their perception of inhabitants is generally positive, but they also consider themselves pragmatic: i.e. able to appreciate (or not) people's background beyond populist intolerance and hypocrite tolerance. They maintain to avoid uncritical generalising positions on diversity, and describe themselves as opened to both accept and criticize the others. They are often involved in deeper and more stable daily relationships with their peers (from diverse backgrounds) in the neighbourhood, but their relationships with next-door neighbours is still mostly based on urban courtesy and kindness.

“If you've grown up in this neighbourhood [...] you know what you are talking about, I mean, you know them [migrants]. [...] While television speaks against Egyptian migrants, and says that they rape women and things like that... well, the Egyptian migrant on the TV is just like your 5 classmates or your neighbour and you know that they aren't as the media say. I mean it's really easier not to fall in with generalizations.” (R27, M, 24, student, Italian)

“I've had a Chinese classmate at primary school that then became my best friend. Today we consider each other as brothers.” (R27, M, 24, student, Italian)

”[With next-door neighbours] we have formal relationships based on kindness… but I don't have a neighbour that I visit, or on which I rely if I need something. [...] Probably because we've never asked them to help us.” (R25, F, 24, student, Italian, Egyptian origin, 2G)

The third group – long-term resident migrants – declare a generally very positive opinion about neighbours. Often they emphasise the sense of community and of being welcome into the neighbourhood.

“What I like is that Italian people that live here, at least those I know, that belong to the [name of neighbourhood association], or other people that I know... they are open minded, they say 'we want integration, we want multiculturalism to be part of our society'. They don't say, as other say outside this neighbourhood, 'you have to adapt to us'.” (R03, F, 35, unemployed, Italian, Somali origin)

This good impression, however, is not confirmed by any involvement into strong relationships with neighbours (if we exclude rare cases of migrants involved in associations).

Therefore, on the one hand, they stress the possibility to feel themselves at home among other diverse people; on the other hand, they complain about the detachment of Italian people and about the difficulties in creating stable relationships because of fast turnover of neighbouring inhabitants.
“I live in a block of flats where neighbours change continuously… In this moment I don’t even know the name of my closer neighbour.” (R03, F, 35, unemployed, Italian, Somali origin)

The last group has weaker social networks and poor socio-economic conditions. They generally have a negative, if any, idea of the neighbourhood. Often their ideas ensue from prevalent discourses outside the neighbourhood itself, or from the first – and tough – impact they had at their arrival. When they have any opinion about neighbours, it is usually negative.

“It’s difficult to live here. I don’t like it… I don’t know how my neighbours are but I don’t like them. They are… both foreigner and Italians… I don’t like them.” (R05, M, 19, unemployed, Tunisian)

Limited command of Italian language is a barrier to social relations. More isolated and vulnerable, they are less confident in neighbours. This condition is strengthened by the fact that they consider their stay in this neighbourhood as transitory. Consequently, they do not invest energy and time in creating relationships with neighbours (probably as much as neighbours don’t relate so much with them) and often they declare that they do not know anyone in the neighbourhood but their family unit or their flatmates.

“I live with my father and my sister. I don’t know how my neighbours are because I don’t go out very often. […] I don’t know how they are.” (R29, M, 19, student, Philippine)

4.3 Perceived boundaries of the neighbourhood

When we talk about boundaries of the neighbourhood, we have to distinguish at least two dimensions: the first one is the dimension of the perceived size of the neighbourhood (namely, how big the area is); and the second one is that of the perceived inhabitants of the neighbourhood (namely, who is perceived as a neighbour). In the case of Milan these two dimensions can be somehow not so consistent. This is explained if we consider the two Italian terms that respectively translate the words neighbourhood (quartiere) and neighbour (vicino). While the term quartiere can be translated back also as quarter, district, the term vicino includes the idea of proximity, thus referring more to the next-door neighbours, and not much further than this. Therefore, it was not surprising that, when we asked about the neighbours, respondents mainly referred to people who live in their same apartment block, or even on the same landing.

“I: What about your neighbours?
R: Well, in my apartment block there are a lot of foreigners. I couldn’t say a precise number… In this part of the building, by chance, they are less present, but in the other one I would say that they are half of inhabitants. […] On my same landing, just in front of my door, a Japanese woman lives, we are friends since ten years ago.” (R38, F, 40, psychologist, Italian)

Even if not so limited as the neighbours’ area, interviewees perceive also the neighbourhood as much more limited than it administratively is. The area they refer to as their “belonging area” spreads in a space at least three times smaller than the administrative neighbourhood does (generalizing: with some 10,000 inhabitants). To refer
to their daily environment and their neighbourhood, they generally use the previous denomination of the zones that in the past were tiny villages in the outskirts of Milan, and that were gradually absorbed into the city.

“It [my neighbourhood] is the internal part of Gorla\textsuperscript{13}, from the side of Via Padova.” (R14, F, 50, teacher, Italian)

Interviewees, except for rare cases of politically engaged respondents, have almost never mentioned the decentralization zones (that hosts some 300,000 inhabitants), i.e. the smallest municipal administrative units.

These perceptions are homogeneous among all respondents, despite of their differences in life styles, origins, age, gender.

4.4 Perceptions of the neighbourhood: positive and negative aspects

Inhabitants share very similar perceptions about positive and negative aspects of the neighbourhood. We can cluster positive aspects they mentioned in two groups: infrastructural and social features.

As for the infrastructural ones, most respondents mention effective public transport, a number of different businesses with long opening times, low housing costs, and, above all, the existence of parks and meeting places (see also Chapter 5). As for social factors, diversity plays a very central role in the construction of neighbourhood’s perception. It is generally perceived as a positive aspect, something that enriches inhabitants, even though with different nuances, that can be connected to a generational gap.

Some among older interviewees mention as a positive aspect the sociability that one develops living in that neighbourhood and facing diversity every day. Even if they consider also some problematic aspects of this issue, it is maintained to have a positive connotation:

“I mean… if you know people you are not frightened by them, if you meet [them]…so, my way to live the neighbourhood is different from the way of those not used to know diversity… so I am not that nervous as others are.” (R17, F, 49, teacher, Italian, internal migr.)

“When I am abroad, this way of interacting with my neighbourhood helps me a lot. I feel much more self-confident… It is as if the neighbourhood had strengthened me. In a positive way.” (R23, F, 28, showgirl, Italian, Eritrean Origin)

Interviewees in their 20s argue that the daily experience of diversity in all its aspects is always a positive factor: it helps to develop critical thinking; it gives the opportunity of meeting diverse cultures and lifestyles, and becoming familiar with otherness; it inspires creativity.

\textsuperscript{13}Gorla is one of the above-mentioned previous villages. Today some of these zones give their name to subway stations in the area.
“In my opinion, cultural diversity is just an asset for this neighbourhood. I mean, if you can meet in a short distance Indian, Chinese, African, Latinos communities, I think it can only be a positive factor.” (R34, M, 30, web marketing, Italian)

“First of all, I have the opportunity to meet diversity every day and I realized that, as for people who don’t live here, this thing is not that expected. As for me is just something normal, and I think that this is also a pull factor for people from other countries to come and work here. Most of people here are open-minded and they aren’t prejudiced.” (R25, F, 24, student, Italian, Egyptian origin, 2G)

Diversity plays a central role also in the construction of community narrative, and in the definition of personal identities strongly linked to the neighbourhood. Indeed, some of the interviewees mention the “sense of belonging” as an effect of being part of a diverse neighbourhood, where their own diversities can be accepted and valorised as a constitutive part of neighbourhood’s identity, and where everyone can find his or her own dimension and feel at home.

“This is the place where I belong… I feel this neighbourhood as my neighbourhood; I feel it close to me. [...] This is a working-class neighbourhood where one can find small shops, old-school vendors… it’s fascinating… and then, there is a diversity where I, with the colour of my skin, can be disguised.” (R23, F, 28, showgirl, Italian, Eritrean Origin)

“I: What’s your opinion about these “diverse neighbours”? R: Well, I’d say positive… because I immediately had the impression that it was like a small village, a little community.” (R15, F, 65, retired, Italian)

Another important element connected to diversity is the European character of the neighbourhood that inhabitants proudly perceive as much more intercultural and open-minded than the rest of the city.

“I see it [the neighbourhood] as… not the only one, but the zone that mostly classifies Milan as an European City. If one goes to Berlin or Paris, let alone US’ Cities… all of these cities have zones that are considered more dangerous than others, but… at the end of the day, these cities are the most well-advanced cities… So this [the dangerousness] is a necessary disadvantage that we have to face to become equal to other European cities. Only such important cities create cultural and development opportunities.” (R21, M, 41, webmaster, Italian)

Furthermore, the positive opinion of the neighbourhood has also strengthened thanks to some general improvements that took place while the population in the area diversified (perceived decrease of drug-related petty crime, stop to depopulation and deindustrialization processes).

“When I arrived here, 22 years ago, I had some problems, because there were drugs dealers just in front of this building… but then this problem became less and less important and now it’s substantially vanished.” (R15, F, 65, retired, Italian)

“…and then immigrants arrived and shops started again to open… [...] and this is a positive aspect, I think, because the zone started to live again.” (R17, F, 49, teacher, Italian, internal migr.)
As for the negative aspects, inhabitants mainly complain about aesthetic factors and especially about the negligence that both inhabitants and local administration show in maintaining a clean and beautiful environment. This state of neglect strengthens the impression to be in a deteriorated peripheral area, and keeps expectations low about the role and attention of the local government.

“Well, above all the streets… I mean, the sidewalk are really untidy… in this zone… here the local administration could do better… But as I said, the peripheral areas, here in Milan, are neglected!” (R51, F, 75, retired, Italian, internal migr.)

Nevertheless, even if they do not explicitly address migrants as a problem, often inhabitants complain about the lack of a shared culture about the management of public space: especially Italians attribute to foreigners a scarce respect for streets and environment.

“People get angry because they find that others pissed next to their door… [...] I think it is also a cultural problem.” (R14, F, 50, teacher, Italian)

4.5 Conclusions

Diversity influences very much the perceptions about neighbours and neighbourhood in the researched area, and generally it is seen as a positive aspect and as a strength of the neighbourhood: above all, inhabitants mention diversity as an essential element of neighbourhood identity, and as a constitutive factor of the sense of community they feel. It is important also in the construction of their personal identities that remain strongly linked to the neighbourhood even when far from it. Also, inhabitants proudly perceive neighbourhood diversity as an element of “Europeanness” and modernity.

Anyway, opinions and perceptions are not completely homogeneous. The most evident gap is a generational one: elderly and youngsters have very different attitudes toward diversity. The younger interviewees feel they can get the most from their neighbourhoods thanks to intercultural capabilities. However, it is not just a matter of age: among young people, there is a share of new generations from an immigrant background, and of people that intersect many other forms of diversity (in terms of gender, cultural and professional identities, as in terms of household types). They are more part of a hyper-diversifying environment, and in their daily experience they develop intercultural capabilities and positive predisposition toward diversity.

Despite this generational difference, however, a general positive perception of the neighbourhood is quite shared among interviewees. A neighbourhood particularly dynamic and lively emerges from their narratives, although relationships among neighbours remain on a courtesy level, keeping distance as a form of mutual respect and peaceful living together.
5. Activities in and outside the neighbourhood

5.1 Introduction

This section is meant to analyse how residents make use of the diversified areas they live in, and to what extent is the area they live in more important than other areas in terms of their activities. How do residents make use of the diversified areas they live in? Do they actively engage in diversified relations and activities in their neighbourhood? To what extent is the area they live in more important than other areas in terms of activities?

We have to adapt these questions to our target area. It is large enough to contain very diversified functions. The research area comprises many neighbourhoods: even if we scale down to that level, the urban fabric of the city is quite mixed. Many neighbourhoods have facilities like schools, shopping areas, and sport areas. Some old or new redevelopments within our target area (like Comasina, Bicocca or Bovisa) were meant to be independent neighbourhoods, with all the facilities at arm's length. Some landmarks – like the parks Trotter and Martesana – are important places for recreation, where a number of residents with diverse characteristics meet. This may apply to other public spaces like commercial streets and relevant institutions (e.g. schools), creating a sort of familiarity, attachment and feeling of safety even without direct social contact (Blokland and Nast, 2014; Curley, 2010).

To analyse these dimensions, we will first explore how inhabitants spend their time in and outside the neighbourhood. Then, we will focus on public space and associations as factors influencing activities in our case area.

5.2 Activities: where and with whom

Our interviewees show variable degrees of involvement in neighbourhood activities. The availability of a mix of functions and structures in the area eases the use of local spaces for a range of activities. We will distinguish interviewees according to their “use” of the neighbourhood for their daily activities. We will also try to disentangle how their activities are linked to neighbourhood diversity and to their social characteristics (by age, gender, ethnicity, social class, migration experience).

We can start with the group of heavy users of the neighbourhood. It is a share of interviewees that conducts most of their activities in the area. This group is made up first by young adults (in their 20s and 30s), both from native and migrant background, in particular those that grew up in the neighbourhood. We can add to them also a share of long-term older residents, and families with children.

Youngsters and young adults are those benefiting from the neighbourhood, conducting a number of activities in the area, enjoying and exploring a range of possibilities available there. These activities may be classified as institution-led, market-led and network-led:

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14 The two zone di decentramento we focus on include some 30 neighbourhoods. This may influence also what is considered activity in or outside the neighbourhood – an issue we are going to explore in this section. This has much to do with neighbourhood boundaries, and interviewees' use of the concept of “neighbourhood”, as we mentioned in Chapter 4.

15 This may be less true in some modernist housing projects, since in some cases the original project of multifunctional areas showed to be unsuccessful (planned commercial and leisure functions didn’t work). Though, in general the city has few large mono-functional, segregated areas.
as for institutions, they have used or still use education and training facilities in the area (for example: schools, language classes, training activities, libraries);

- as for market, they enjoy going out in the neighbourhood for leisure, consuming in local bars, pubs and restaurants, and having some other shops as important landmarks (e.g. music shops). It is also worth noting that a marketized space does not necessarily imply a privatized space. Many of these places overlook passage areas and use also public spaces as part of their activities. They are perceived as landmarks.

- as for networks, interviewees gather with friends and acquaintances in group-specific meeting places, according to interests and sometimes ethnicity (inter-ethnic groups do especially involve natives from migrant backgrounds or young long-stayers, while among adults and more recent arrivals there are spaces of intergroup contact, but leisure is often co-ethnic).

The number of public spaces and meeting places (squares, pedestrian streets, sidewalks, parks, gardens, pubs looking over the street...), especially in some neighbourhoods within our case study area, allows both separation and intergroup coexistence and contact (see also Ponti and Pozzo 2012).

Cultural consumers (those attending institution- or market-based cultural events) are over-represented among young adults with higher education and belonging to middle classes. Diversity is a part of their activities, since intercultural events are mentioned as part of the cosy things to do in the area.

Anyway, also less wealthy young interviewees can have quite a large use of the neighbourhood: there is a number are cheap or costless activities that can be done there, from using public spaces (see below) to consuming in some immigrant-led food shops.

“*We have a meeting place that is a pub very close [...] Usually we meet there, because we are lazy.*” (R25, F, 24, student, Italian, Egyptian origin, 2G)

“*[There’s a restaurant] with a Chinese menu and on a side there’s also a little South-American menu, it is a new thing for the South-Americans that go and eat there. That’s interesting!*” (R08, M, 24, student, Peruvian)

Young adults are also the ones that say more frequently that neighbourhood diversity is an asset for their activities: schools are one of the places where diversity is easier to meet; diversity in consumption is actively sought; diversity in kinship networks is part of their daily experience.

The other heavy users – families and older long-term residents – do have a different balance of activities: market-led leisure is less mentioned (even though a coffee with friends at the bar around the corner is usual), while the use of public spaces and institution-led places (parks, schools, associations) is more frequent. This allows diversity to enter into their life: the involvement in after-school activities and in associations – as users, volunteers and organizers – ease intergroup contacts, either spontaneously (e.g.: parks are used by a number of groups by age, gender, origin, length of stay, social class)

16 Local open-air markets have not been mentioned by our interviewees. Ponti and Pozzi (2012), studying a neighbourhood within our case area, show that markets are places of conflict and interaction among different social groups by age, gender, social class and ethnicity.
or as a goal of institutional activities, explicitly aimed to bridge social groups living in the neighbourhood.

“Before, my life was elsewhere, close to the city centre. I didn’t hang out much at this neighbourhood. Then, my daughters were born, and I started to hang out at the Park, since I took part in ‘Time for families’, a municipal service for children aged 0 to 3, that could stay with their parents and nannies in a place within the kindergarten.” (R17, F, 49, teacher, Italian, internal migr.)

“Now, I get lost as long as I leave the neighbourhood. I always worked here around, so children, home, work: every activities is here in the area.” (R03, F, 35, unemployed, Italian, Somali origin)

In this sense, within the set of heavy users of the neighbourhood, we can identify a smaller subgroup of activists that not only conduct a large part of their activities in the area, but also proactively promote local initiatives. Thus, they add a political dimension to their activities, not rarely promoting diversity as part of neighbourhood dynamism and regeneration.

“I write for a magazine funded by the area council (guided by the Democratic Party) […] I write about literature on the area, that is: I go and look for writers that wrote about this area.” (R25, F, 24, student, Italian, Egyptian origin, 2G)

Finally, heavy users do also mention some activities they conduct outside the neighbourhood. Cultural activities (e.g. going to a museum) or events, for example, often imply moving downtown. However, good transport connection does not imply that activities outside the neighbourhood disconnect people from it.

With less intense activities in the area, we can find a group of mild users. This group is made up mainly by middle-aged or elderly not using institutions so much, not so involved in associations, but anyway keeping a “light” sociability within the neighbourhoods. Their activities often take place outside the neighbourhood because their networks span further for different reasons: they attend workplaces or universities in other neighbourhoods for long hours; they moved into the neighbourhood in relatively recent times, so most of their social networks are located elsewhere.

“[Among my friends] I’m the only one living here, so I’m the one that moves outside the neighbourhood!” (R07, M, 37, library security guard, Italian)

“I haven’t this neighbourhood dimension. I mean: obviously, if I have to go out just for a coffee or having a little talk, I can stay here in the area, though I have not this inclination of living the neighbourhood.” (R06, F, 36, teacher, Italian)

In this group we can find especially those that chose to live here because of cheap housing and good connections in the city transport network. The good availability of

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17 For example, previous research led in Milan by Ambrosini and Bonizzoni (2012) shows that having children boosts social participation of immigrant families. Three immigrant families out of four are involved in extra-school activities, especially if children were born in Italy. Also, independently from their religion, immigrant families use Catholic playgrounds and youth centres, that are available in most neighbourhoods for free.
means of transport allow a fast mobility from/to the area – and thus also some use of the neighbourhood.

In particular, mild users use public spaces for leisure (especially in the weekends): walking, jogging, sometimes going to a pub or a restaurant, walking the dog, playing with children... These activities do not necessarily imply strong social contacts. However, interviewees mention also the social function these activities may have, consistent with that sentiment of urbanity we already mentioned in other chapters. Some interviewees, for example, report that walking the dog in a park can be quite a sociable activity, implying a recursive relation with other pet owners.

“When one has a dog, walks the dog at the park and knows people of different ages doing the same. So it is with children: you go with them to the park or to school and you know people. This brought me to interact with the surrounding community.” (R16, 74, M, retired, Italian)

In this case, chances for intergroup contact and experiencing neighbourhood diversity are more limited. Somehow, diversity can be also kept at a distance, relating just with those sharing similar interests (love for animals, playing football in the parks...).

Finally, we can identify a group of people with very limited activities in the area. In general, this orientation is related to the lack of area-based social networks, or to job commitments. Firstly, we can include recent international migrants, that not only conduct few activities in the neighbourhood, but often do conduct few activities in general. Leisure is strongly compressed, activities are limited to contacts with co-ethnics or with few institutions providing services for migrants.

Secondly, we can include people working at quite a distance from the neighbourhood (thus mainly using it as a dormitory), but also the few that work at home: they spend many hours at home with social contacts limited to food shopping.

So in general terms, those with limited activities in the area are also more isolated.

“I don’t really feel at home here. I leave home early and go back very late [to work outside the neighbourhood], and that’s all.” (R10, F, 27, Student, Chinese)

“I’m rather sedentary. Since I work at home, sometimes, some days I don’t even leave home.” (R21, M, 41, webmaster, Italian)

5.3 The use of public space

Our case study area is characterised by a specific set of public spaces that are widely mentioned by our interviewees. To start with, the area is endowed with a large number of parks and open-air facilities that are heavily used by inhabitants, especially in spring and summer.

No less than seven parks and gardens have been mentioned by our interviewees, with two especially used: Trotter Park and Martesana Park.

The first one is a park closed in the morning, since in school hours it is somehow the courtyard of a school. It is used for non-organized activities (walking, playing, partying...) but also for organized activities, since associations are active in the park: using facilities
available there (a teaching farm, an auditorium...), they set a large number of activities, especially targeting children and women.

“I run at the Trotter Park. I want to run there, but the schedule is tight: you cannot go there whenever you want, it is closed for long hours.” (R02, F, 28, homemaker, Romanian)

“Many schools here in Milan have an inner playground for the recreation time, and look on a street. So, they deliver the children at the gate, and go home. On the contrary, here we are inside a park. In the spring, when the weather is fine, we always stay here. I go and take my children at 4pm, then we stay here for a couple of hours. This allowed us to know some acquaintances better.” (R12, F, 40, entrepreneur, Italian)

Martesana Park is mainly used for non-organized and sport activities: jogging, playing football, cycling since it is crossed by a long bike lane.

“Martesana is a very long canal. There’s a cycling lane there, that starts from Milan and reaches the Adda river. So, one could ride for kilometres and kilometres without problems. In the urban areas there are bridges, lawns... it is very usable.” (R50, M, 55, audio-visual technician, Italian)

The number of large and small parks and gardens allow both bridging among diverse people, and bonding within age, ethnic or interest groups using specific gardens.

They are used by different persons (by age, gender, social class, origin, length of stay) as accessible, costless, multipurpose landmarks. They are places of coexistence and living together, where diversity of uses and users is well evident: a mild and kind intergroup contact that may support peaceful living together.

At the same time, in different hours and in different corners, the park can have different uses that clearly split social groups. As an interviewee puts it in an amused tone:

“That park is a place of eternal damnation, really. In the years, one comes to know every corner, something you cannot notice as a child. For example, you see migrants hanging around there. As a pre-teen, one just sees Peruvians partying. Then one grows up, and sees pot dealers; then grows up again, and see prostitutes.” (R27, M, 24, student, Italian)

Also, in some cases diversity is even sought: it is the case of organized initiatives targeting intergroup contact (see Angelucci et al., 2014 for details), that take place in the parks as well-known and proud reference points for the local community.

Open-air spaces are important in the relational economy of the neighbourhood. For example, it is important to consider the use of urban streets as places of daily life, especially in the areas with larger sidewalks, pedestrian streets and larger numbers of shops. In part this may be related to the quality of the built environment (especially for those living in smaller and overcrowded apartments).

The use of streets and squares can be limited elsewhere by a stronger policing of diversity: stop and search operations, formal and informal controls of public spaces can
be stronger in other areas of the city. Here diversity is much more visible than in many
other parts of the city with similar population mixes; at the same time, such a heavy use
of the streets is one of the reasons of a kind of use associated by some with urban
blight, e.g. littering and graffiti.

In this sense, streets as public space in the area have an ambiguous relation with diversity:
on the one hand, it is a place where diversity becomes normal. Inhabitants are more used
to daily interaction and visibility with different types of persons. Limited normative
views on what is allowed and what is not, widens spaces of freedom. On the other hand,
according to some interviewees it may be associated to a lack of social control and order.

“In summer some Italians have a walk with an ice-cream. Though, those keeping
the neighbourhood alive are migrants. And children, too, with their mothers.
Whatever the weather is, even in winter, they get out. They are really into this thing
of going out.” (R27, M, 24, student, Italian)

“In the city centre, if I leave home with a marker and write something on a wall,
police jails me... that's the showcase of Milan, no way you can smear it. Here it is
different.” (R27, M, 24, student, Italian)

Another important public space mentioned mostly by younger residents, students and ex-
students are public libraries, especially one in Crescenzago, considered very endowed and
rich in activities. Again, diversity is both in the users, in the uses (not only to study, but
also as a meeting point for peers), and in the activities that are promoted by the library
staff themselves, aimed to take the most from the location in a diverse neighbourhood.

“The library, basically. When I don’t work, I always come here and study.” (R08,
M, 24, student, Peruvian)

“Here the stronghold of public spaces is the library in Crescenzago. It is one of the
best libraries in Milan.” (R11, M, 37, entrepreneur, Italian)

“Every month our library has a cultural event, tied with cultures that are here. To
me it is a positive thing because you get to know very cool cultures [...]. My
grandma can’t get it, the generation of my father cannot understand it [...]: they
can’t care less if there’s a meeting on the translation of the Odyssey at the library.
Instead, for students studying here... I can’t say it changes your view of the world,
but it facilitates something [...] It's a kind of imprinting when you come into
contact with something nice from different cultures.” (R27, M, 24, student, Italian)

Some interviewees mention a number of other meeting places, mainly institution-led:
youth centres, senior centres, parishes, Catholic playgrounds (oratori). Their use is
differentiated by age, but quite mixed by gender, background and/or length of stay in the
area, allowing again intergroup contact.

However, it is worth noting that some interviewees mention as an important public space
a bus line: not unexpected in an area whose inhabitants stressed accessibility and means
of transport as an asset.
The line 56 crosses South-West to North-East a good part of our research area, starting from Piazzale Loreto, through Via Padova till Quartiere Adriano (a recent redevelopment not yet finished). This bus line is considered as a symbol of pros and cons of neighbourhood diversity, since it is used by different persons, with everyday tolerance and conflicts.

Lastly, it is worth mentioning the public spaces that interviewees would like to use but are not available enough in the area: gyms, swimming pools, cinemas. Much of the perception of being a (neglected) peripheral area is related to the limited attention to need for such spaces that may provide alternatives and new chances for sociability.

“You cannot tell that there’s a good number of public spaces. There’s no longer a cinema. This is a common problem of peripheral areas in Milan, anyway. There has been a will to strip them down of services.” (R11, M, 37, entrepreneur, Italian)

5.4 The importance of associations

Associations are mentioned by many interviewees. The area is endowed with a rich fabric of associations: ethnic and interethnic associations working on recognition; cultural associations; intercultural associations working on social contact; neighbourhood associations focussing on local social problems... Their large number and diverse activities are considered an important asset in having a lively neighbourhood, in promoting diversity, and in managing and overcoming negative aspects of diversity (e.g: risk of social isolation), hence in boosting social cohesion.

At the same time, associations seem not equally distributed in all the studied area, they are more concentrated (or more active, more visible and consequently more mentioned by our interviewees) in some hotspots, like Via Padova or Niguarda.

Their role is considered valuable due to the large number of initiatives organized, able to involve diverse and mixed target groups: among the others, there are initiatives targeting recent migrants (e.g. language courses), women (needle craft classes), youth (music projects), seniors – and also initiatives aimed at mixing people from different backgrounds and age groups. In this respect, they contribute to the intergroup contact and social cohesion of the neighbourhood.

“[Associations] have had a positive impact on my life: I attend the [name of grassroots association] since my brothers went to school (and the older is now 24!). This is the reason why I decided to stay here with my child, since I experienced this context as positive.” (R03, F, 35, unemployed, Italian, Somali origin)

“There are so many projects for children, women, integration, to help learning Italian, training for a job, doing theatre. There’s even a mixed acting company, and everyone can enter.” (R09, F, 38, counsellor, Italian)

Concerns are also to be mentioned: some interviewees maintain that some associations and initiatives do have more a bonding than a bridging effect. For example, some places, actions and associations do follow an intercultural approach, but limit their target to families with children. Given the population profile in the area we described in Chapter 2, this means excluding a range of social groups.
In addition, sometimes associations seem to have a paternalistic approach: actions are often thought and implemented by native, middle-aged, middle-class long-term residents. Also when an intercultural dimension is considered, diversity may be seen in an exotic way. Exoticism can praise diversity without challenging discrimination (Said, 1978; Santaolalla, 2000).

At the same time, considering also the strong stigmatizing discourse hitting some neighbourhoods in our case study, their role in setting the conditions for intergroup contacts should not be downplayed. Even when activities implemented by local associations are biased by a middle-class exoticist approach, they may anyway be a step forward towards the awareness of diversity in the neighbourhood. In the words of those involved as volunteers:

“It is a kind of mutual help. I make my time available to foreign youth, to teach Italian. On the other side, I get experience, satisfaction, something I feel involved in” (R06, F, 36, teacher, Italian)

“Living here I had the chance to know this situation. It is a way of life, finding a way to feel well. Volunteering, for example. This is nice. Perhaps you can find this elsewhere, too. Though, here I was able to get in touch with this world, perhaps because it is much more widespread.” (R12, F, 40, entrepreneur, Italian)

Also, some minority associations are mentioned. In particular, two native Italians referred to the Islamic Cultural Centre (also called “Mosque”: it is a worship place, even though not a real mosque) as an important landmark not only for Muslim migrants, since contributing to community cohesion and social dialogue.

“The Islamic cultural centre here plays a social role for all the Muslims, the Egyptians that may arrive without having any support.” (R11, M, 37, entrepreneur, Italian)

“My first contact with the Muslim culture has been the mosque in the neighbourhood, that is also an Islamic cultural centre […] They welcomed me, they offered me a coffee. A strong experience, because you go in something like a garage and inside there’s a real Mosque, with rugs, statues… An then you get out, see the bus 56 and ask ‘where the f**k am I?’.” (R27, M, 24, student, Italian)

5.5 Conclusions

This chapter was aimed at analysing how do residents make use of the diversified areas they live in; how (if) they engage in diversified relations and activities in their neighbourhood; to what extent is the area they live in more important than other areas in terms of their activities.

The plurality of functions available in our case study area may play a significant role in supporting a positive approach to diversity: schools and libraries; parks and pedestrian areas; associations; shops and leisure facilities are places where intra- and inter-group relations can take place. However, not every social group enjoys a similar, positive relation between diversity and activity in the neighbourhood.
Social groups that are more likely to achieve (and enjoy) intergroup contacts comprise youngsters and young adults, families with children and middle classes.

The first ones grew up in close contact with diversity, consider it a value and a normal, positive force in society. The second ones increase their intergroup contacts thanks to institution-led activities, be it schools, associations or other bodies targeting children from different backgrounds and their families. The last ones are endowed with resources to enjoy, “buy” – and thus select – the kind of diversity they like to experience.

At the same time, there are places where diversity is part of daily sociability in a less strong way – that contributes to peaceful living together anyway. Public places appreciated by inhabitants (like parks) and used by different social groups allow to see the normality of diversity, and to accept it as part of the neighbourhood.

In some respects, diversity is associated with mixed, ambiguous processes. Inhabitants tend to stress the existence of both bridging and bonding effects, and the creation of spaces of freedom together with spaces of decay.

6. Social cohesion

6.1 Introduction

The starting point of this chapter is the fuzzy, multilevel and multidimensional definition of social cohesion (Tasan-Kok et al., 2014), and the need to keep into consideration its drawbacks in terms of territorial and group boundaries that may ground segregation, intolerance and exclusionary practices.

Thus, here we will explore different meanings and perceptions of cohesion according to scale and belonging, with a special focus on the role that diversity may play at neighbourhood level. We will explore the contextual features that can make diversity positive for social cohesion, including support, types of social ties, groups and their interactions (Camina and Wood, 2009; Stolle et al., 2008; Laurence, 2011). In particular, we assume that inequality is the main predictor of limited social cohesion in heterogeneous areas (Tolsma et al., 2009).

In the Italian case, there is a recent and growing strand of literature dealing with issues of diversity and social cohesion, with a special focus on in-migrant related diversity. In the wake of international cases, this research strand is tied with a growing concern for concentration, segregation, and ghettoization of minorities from an immigrant background, that often causes law and order answers in the public and political discourse (see Barberis and Marzorati, 2014).

Some ethnographic researches just focus on the negative effects diversity may have on cohesion. For example, a research project on peripheries and immigration was commissioned by the Ministry of Interior (Cesareo and Bichi, 2010; Parra Saiani et al., 2010), and focus on crime and insecurity. Results show that it is necessary to address poverty on the structural side and overcome nativism on the cultural side to prevent mixophobia.
A step forward comes from the Italian spin-off project of the wider research programme Concordia Discors,18 that focusses on intergroup relations in immigration neighbourhoods in large cities in Northern Italy (including Milan and a street within our target area). This project maintains that the neighbourhood level itself is focal for social relations, and that conflicts and their management are an important part of diversified social life in urban environments. In this case there is not an *a priori* view of negative consequences of diversity, but an analysis of the factors that make everyday multiculturalism work or not. In both cases, research results show that neighbourhood public spaces play a relevant role for different groups with low social and economic capital, providing them a ground where they may ignore or clash each other. These people are those facing biggest challenges posed by diversity and at the same time are those with less tools to cope with them.

This risk (as underlined also by international literature, see Camina and Wood, 2009) can be increased or limited according to the design and quality of public spaces and the surrounding built environment: if both built and social environments are deprived, there is more risk for social cohesion to erode. In addition, the ability to build an alternative, consistent and inclusive public discourse on the neighbourhood may positively affect boundary-making processes and intergroup cohesion (see also Schaffer, 2014).

On the other hand, we have also to critically analyse the possible negative effects of the renewal of the built environment for social cohesion: it can open the road to gentrification outcomes or market-led social mixes. This process, indeed, may result in a displacement or stigmatization of poverty, to new mixes with limited social contact, to structures of power limiting space for minority groups (Bricoli and Cucca, 2014; Lees 2008; van Beckhoven and van Kempen, 2003; Bridge et al., 2014).

Indeed, some scholars, such us Elijah Anderson, underline the importance of particular city spaces in maintaining and creating social cohesion. Anderson argues that some spaces in the city may act as grounds where social differences are neutralised through a *civility practise* (Anderson, 2011). Under the *canopy* of these spaces, interaction characterised by weak ties and kind encounters foster the conservation of a peaceful milieu where social conflict is kept under control.

In the next pages, we will show that this is often the case of our researched area. Therefore, the question that we are going to answer in this section are the following: to what extent is the diversity of the residential area important for social cohesion? Which elements foster social cohesion, which elements hinder the development of social cohesion in the area?

### 6.2 Composition of interviewees’ egocentric networks

Interviewees create their own egocentric networks on the basis of common interests, common lifestyles and common life circumstances with other people. The actual proximity with neighbours is perceived as a secondary factor in establishing and managing social contacts and friendship, while other factors pertaining lifestyle are considered as the most important:

18 See the website [www.concordiadiscors.eu](http://www.concordiadiscors.eu) and Pastore and Ponzo (2012, 2013).
“There are people with whom we have some affinities… we associate with people that are not individualistic, they are open-minded and they want to give something to the others. This is becoming more and more important for me, because it gives me new energy!” (R12, F, 40, entrepreneur, Italian)

“[…] we are friends. It is a friendship based on the fact that we frequent the same places, our children are the same age.” (R22, F, 40, psychologist, Italian)

“I mostly spend time with people with whom I share civic commitment […] they don’t necessarily live in this neighbourhood, some of them live here, while some others live in in other places, but all of their children attended this school.” (R17, F, 49, teacher, Italian, internal migr.)

Even kinship networks are considered less important than the commonality of interests in creating and maintaining social relations. In this case, however, it has to be noticed that very often relatives do not live in the same neighbourhood and sometimes not even in the same country. For this reason, even if interviewees consider their relatives as important in their life, they do not always perceive them as part of their daily life and their actual networks.

“Yes, I have some relatives here, but we don’t see them so much. I think it’s because of our familiar model, very different from the Italian one.” (R25, F, 24, student, Italian, Egyptian origin, 2G)

“Just my mother is here, she is 90. My brother and my sister don’t live in Milan.” (R40, M, 70, retired, Italian)

Also ethnic communities seem to play a marginal role in the construction of egocentric networks: ethnic networks are usually relevant in the first steps of migration, when people face difficulties with the new language and the new society. Later, migrants usually create their networks outside close ethnic boundaries.

### 6.3 Living together with neighbours

Even if interviewees have their closer friends both inside and outside the neighbourhood, they generally use their neighbourhood as a place of encounter, and they display the construction and conservation of social relations into familiar public spaces. Even if not the whole neighbourhood, smaller parts of it assume a connective role, central to the management of inhabitants’ egocentric networks.

As it emerges from interviews, spaces such as parks, public libraries, and the street itself – as much as the rich public transport network – shape social relations providing people with places of encounter and sharing. These places are given group-specific meanings, creating identification and supporting social connection around them. Thus, they become focal points of social life within the neighbourhood. People feel a sense of belonging to certain places where they create separate communities based on interests and lifestyle commonalities. In these communities we can identify what Glick Schiller and Çaglar (forthcoming) call urban sociabilities, namely those social bonds emerging from sharing the same disempowered space in the city, where personal differences play a secondary role. In these places, people share a domain of commonalities that makes them feel as part of a community.
"I define the park as a little welcoming community, where I feel comfortable. I love staying here." (R03, F, 35, unemployed, Italian, Somali origin)

Again, we can try to group interviewees, this time according to meeting places and their link with different intergroup bonds.

Three main group result from this classification:
1. The first group includes people over-30, middle and upper-middle class, both Italian and long resident migrants, with children (or grandchildren) in their school age. The central point of this group is the child-caring practice, therefore henceforth it will be called child centred group
2. The second group is constituted by young people (teenagers, and people in their 20s) that do not have much more in common but their age. This group will be called for this reason youngsters group
3. The last group includes international migrants, with difficulties in interaction with indigenous people due to their unfamiliarity with the host society. They will be called immigrant newcomers group.

The child centred group has its focal points in school-related facilities – for example a park where a school is located, that has also a rich set of after-school activities managed by an association that was born as a parents' and teachers' association.

Having children at school seems to be the primary connective factor for cohesion and group identity: most of parents' and grandparents' spare time is dedicated to activities for their children. Being part of this community gives people a sense of belonging and creates strong bonds among them. Within this group, forms of mutual support are frequent and mainly related to childcare.

"Well, I think that it's not at the level of neighbourhood but at the level of the school and the park. Before I knew the school I was out, I didn't feel to have a support network: [...], but then when you enter the school and the park you feel that there is a network... yes there is it: we help each other." (R12, F, 40, entrepreneur, Italian)

"Those bonds derive from sharing the school. I mean, they are parents of my kids' schoolmates and we have important and strong bonds with them." (R03, F, 35, unemployed, Italian, Somali origin)

The connection with the most active associations in the neighbourhood, the tight link between having children and being part of the group, and the importance of schools and parks, are elements that clearly define their group identity. However, if these sharp community boundaries foster intragroup bonds, on the other hand they seem to constitute quite an entry barrier for others (i.e. people not having kids). This strong community character limits also association's activities frustrating its efforts to expand its range of action.

"This thing drives me mad! I can't stand that we can't use the park for the entire morning and part of the afternoon because it is all about kids! Here all the activities are implemented by the [name of association] and it is exclusively about school and kids. This is not a positive thing: there are other people besides the kids!"
And if people could feel integrate and involved even if they don’t have children, it would be such a good thing! […] I live this thing as a discrimination: I can’t live that place because I don’t have children. And I think it’s foolish because that place is so wonderful, and many initiatives could be implemented for everyone, not just for a part of the neighbourhood.” (R06, F, 36, teacher, Italian)

The *youngsters group* is constituted by people who do not share particular characteristics but their age, therefore a distinctive character of this group is exactly the heterogeneity and the familiarity with diversity in all its aspects and intersections. Group identity is based on the use of the same spaces in the neighbourhood even if their uses may differ from one person to another. In particular, schools and neighbourhood libraries, attended quite extensively by young people, are important reference points where relations are negotiated and maintained.

“I use public spaces here: the library and some parks. I like to use them: I try to take an advantage. Often, those friends that don’t live here come here and we meet there.” (R04, M, 24, student, Italian, internal migr.)

“I often attend the library; it’s a sort of familiar place for me.” (R23, F, 28, showgirl, Italian, Eritrean Origin)

“The library… you see it as a meeting point, the place where you create your social relations. I didn’t go there just to study.” (R27, M, 24, student, Italian)

These connections are less strong than those of the previous group are. There is a weaker sense of belonging and intragroup bonds are not so strong. This could be explained by two factors. The first one is that people share very few commonalities; very often, they have different backgrounds, interests, sexual orientations, and this diversity may hinder the sedimentation of a strong sense of belonging. The second one is the nature of the places involved: both schools and libraries are ambivalent places where social relations and isolation can easily coexist, and are both socially legitimate. However, contrary to the first group, these weaker ties constitute a more permeable entry barrier:

“Few deep friendships, but a lot of good acquaintances. I mean, if at night I don’t have nothing to do and I go to [name of the pub], I am sure to meet someone with whom I can spend a little time chatting…[…] There isn’t that closure and that consumption-oriented approach that you can find in a bar at Piazza Duomo.” (R34, M, 30, web marketing, Italian)

Nevertheless, this group often becomes the context where deeper interpersonal and multicultural friendships occur, and where forms of mutual support appear.

“I have two groups of friends, one from my neighbourhood, and one from the politic circle. Though, people from my neighbourhood are friends at a more personal level. They are people with whom I’ve grown up, we were classmates at school and we spent time together studying […] My best friend is a Chinese boy, he was my classmate at primary school, and […] through him I knew Chinese culture, it was fantastic.” (R27, M, 24, student, Italian)

The *immigrant newcomers group* is the one with the most evident difficulties in interaction with neighbourhood’s environment. These difficulties derive from limited language
proficiency, but also from other factors such as economic vulnerability that exclude them from a series of activities. The isolation these people experience is sometimes overcome through ethnic networks. This may become a double-edge sword on their own way to participation, because it can hinder the development of social skills necessary to inter-group interaction. In this sense, ethnic networks may be seen as a refuge that can become also a trap.

However, these networks ensure support that limits isolation. Actually, these people could not penetrate community boundaries of the first two groups, while they can find support into their ethnic networks.

“"Yes, I have friends [in the neighbourhood]. They are all from my Country.””
(R30, F, 33, babysitter, Ceylonese)

“In the park I knew some friends, they are Egyptians, mothers of schoolmates of my children. We help each other.” (R37, F, 23, homemaker, Egyptian)

While within these groups strong ties do exist, at neighbourhood level, social relations with neighbours are rather cold and characterized by weak, if any, ties. Very often people do not know their next-door neighbour nor those living in the same building.

“I know very little about people who live here. I best know people who work here.”
(R08, M, 24, student, Peruvian)

“Yes, I know them. I say ‘Hello!’ every day to the Chinese pizza man!” (R32, F, 70, retired, Italian)

Nonetheless, coexistence is characterized by a high level of courtesy and people generally maintain satisfying connections based on mutual tolerance and respect of others’ spaces. They feel this lack of bonds with neighbours as a space of freedom, not constraining their relational choices. At the same time, these kind of weak neighbour relations do not create a hostile environment: even if they do not consider neighbours as friends and do not rely on each other, there is a satisfying degree of confidence based on the shared belief in civility practice. This means that, through these kind of civil relations, people keep the level of conflict among different groups with different needs at a “reasonable” level.

“As for my neighbours, I don’t know them or I know them very little… There are a lot of situations… but… There is a peaceful coexistence. I mean, also in my building… it’s really ‘multicolour!’ There are people from all over the world, but we have a very normal relation. I think they are workers, and they are always very kind.” (R04, M, 24, student, Italian, internal migr.)

“We have… we are not friends, but our relations are good. […] I mean there are no frictions.” (R36, F, 45, teacher, Italian)

6.4 Conclusions

From the accounts above, we can infer that social cohesion is influenced by two opposite trends both taking place in our research area. On the one hand, the opportunity to meet every day diverse neighbours enables people to develop forms of sociability that maintain civil relations and low levels of conflict, even if these kinds of relations produce weak bonds and feeble support networks. On the other hand, both formal and
informal grassroots associations provide strong ties in close-knit bounded networks, where identity and belonging needs are satisfied and where often people find support. The balance between these two tendencies generally ensures the liveability of the neighbourhood and a satisfying level of social cohesion, as most interviewees refer to feel themselves in a friendly and safe environment.

Nonetheless, this is not the case for all people in the neighbourhood, and, in some cases, ethnic communities become places where the most vulnerable group (low-skilled international migrant newcomers) are trapped into a spiral of segregation. Indeed, emphasizing bonding in small communities or kinship networks, bonding social capital can accentuate distrust of other groups, hinder the development of inter-group social skills and generate a sense of insecurity.

Hence, the important role of hyper-diversity in affecting social cohesion in the neighbourhood comes to light. Being a complex and multi-layered concept, hyper-diversity has an ambiguous value: if the coexistence of diverse people in the same place may foster cohesion through the practice of everyday multiculturalism resulting in what Anderson calls civility practices, hyper-diversity may become a risky factor when particular forms of diversity intersect with disadvantages. In this sense, hyper-diversity poses challenges both to civil society and to public actors, which have to collaborate in order to fulfil all the positive potentialities of such a complex element of contemporary society.

7. Social mobility

7.1 Introduction

In this chapter we will focus on social mobility and its relation with localized social capital. We will analyse the role of area-based ties in enabling or constraining job and income opportunities; such neighbourhood-level bonds will be nested in the institutional context, and in the larger social networks individuals are part of.

To what extent is the diversity of the neighbourhood important for social mobility? Which elements foster social mobility and which elements hinder social mobility? We will operationalize these questions by looking at the link between group boundaries and (weak?) ties in bridging social capital and mobility chance.

The relevance (if any) of localized diversity in social mobility processes will be explored by analysing the difference between those in different positions in the labour market and – when possible – between those living in the area and working elsewhere, and those both living and working in the neighbourhood. In the last case, it is an issue to be explored if a strong reliance on neighbourhood resources may result into concentration in limited labour niches and poor opportunities (Elliott, 1999). Thus, we are going to examine whether this argument also apply in our case study.

Furthermore, we are going to examine whether neighbourhood diversity may counterbalance the limitations that stem from relying on neighbourhood resources in the search of job. Neighbourhood diversity, through weak ties, may provide access to varied social circles which can multiply job opportunities (Granovetter, 1973; Henning and Lieberg, 1996). Networks in the neighbourhood and representations of the neighbourhood may play a role in social mobility processes for both those working in
and outside our case area. They may be affected by neighbourhood reputation, and the gap between residents and non-residents representations.

### 7.2 Current and previous jobs

What is the current labour position of our interviewees? What kind of labour careers are they achieving? We will answer this question by distinguishing our interviewees according to their position in the labour market. Though, to do so we have to frame individual situations in a wider context – in particular, we have to mirror the strong segmentation of the Italian labour market.

So, we will at first separate between those in the primary labour market and those in the secondary labour market (non-standard job arrangements, underemployed). The first one have (or have had, in case they already retired) a smooth job career: entrance in the labour market with permanent positions and standard jobs. The latter have a much more fragmented career, with non-standard job arrangements (temporary jobs, casual works, long spells of unemployment).

As for the first group, among our interviewees civil servants and older workers are those better-off. This includes also those that already retired, and often enjoyed permanent jobs in their past.

> „Luckily, I have had a permanent position for many years, some 35, so I have no problems. I entered in the 1980s in the National Broadcasting Company.” (R50, M, 55, audio-visual technician, Italian)

> „I have been retired for a long time. Even more time than it would be fair to.” [he was in an early retirement scheme] (R16, 74, M, retired, Italian)

As stated in Chapter 3, many chose this neighbourhood because of the short distance to their workplace. This includes also civil servants (e.g. school teachers) who are either employed in the neighbourhood or in its close catching area. In this respect, moving to our case neighbourhood has been mostly a functional choice. Though, we can see that for some of the interviewees in this group also a sort of place attachment plays some role. In particular, some of the interviewed teachers have worked in other areas, but chose to move to schools in this area as a professional challenge and investment.

> „I worked also in other schools […] I was a tenured teacher in Sesto [a municipality north of Milan], and then I came here […] Three years ago I decided to move to work here. Since I’m a teacher, I asked to be transferred, and I obtained it […] I always chose schools in periphery, or anyway where there was something to do […] So I chose the school most interesting to me.” (R17, F, 49, teacher, Italian, internal migr.)

As the quote above shows, neighbourhood diversity may attract some persons interested to work with it: the case mentioned above, for example, is one example of some educational professionals that enjoy teaching in a multicultural environment.

In-between those better-off and those in the secondary labour market we can identify a subgroup employed in creative professions: web designers and illustrators are some examples we can find among our interviewees. They are not necessarily high-income
workers and may have less smooth careers (some are underemployed). They have in common the fact of both living and working in the neighbourhood, though in jobs that are weakly related to proximity.

In their cases, the choice of living (and working) in our case neighbourhood show a mix of reasons: affordability of housing and a multicultural environment are “assets” they look for. Neighbourhood diversity, its mix of different populations by origin, culture, social class is sought as part of an artsy and bohemian lifestyle.

In Italy – a country whose self-perception is still strongly mono-ethnic (Melotti 1997; Calavita 2005; Allevi 2010) – the kind of multicultural environment available in our case neighbourhood is still quite unusual. As a consequence, a multicultural neighbourhood is considered both “eccentric” compared to the Italian context, and “European” and modern in its plurality. So, the mix of affordability and multiculturalism becomes attractive for some creative professionals.

“I was moving from my parents' house. With them, I had lived in a big house with a garden and… My decision was: I want to go in a popular neighbourhood. Before I had lived in a rich residential area, with terraced houses… and then I moved into the chaos! It was a rebellion act, maybe… I was seeking a “bohemian” context… and I’d say that I found it!” (R09, F, 38, counsellor, Italian)

This group may also be seen as an avantgard of gentrification. This subgroup is made mainly by upper class natives or mobile foreigners from developed countries, that enter a neighbourhood mostly inhabited by economic migrants and less well-off social classes. In this respect, they may start a gentrifying process (Simon 2005): they are “users” of neighbourhood cultural diversity, though risking to displace it by gentrifying the area and commercialising diversity.

Passing to those in non-standard labour careers, we can start with young adults. Their position is consistent with the characteristics of the Italian labour market, that underprotecs young workers and have a difficult transition from education and training to work (Barbieri and Scherer 2009). Young adults we interviewed have often a weak job security. Even when inserted in market niches that may be quite profitable if/when a steady position is reached, they find it hard to make ends meet. For them the neighbourhood is rarely a labour market opportunity: thanks to housing affordability and good connections, it provides a good buffer to be independent from their parents.

“I'm in such a hardship! I have to run two businesses, otherwise I could hardly make it.” (R12, F, 40, entrepreneur, Italian)

“I worked for almost ten years in a kindergarten that has closed down in July. Now I'm applying for positions in the public administration. So, I've been unemployed for a long while, and now I'm babysitting.” (R03, F, 35, unemployed, Italian, Somali origin)

As for the migrants newcomers, their situation is much worse. Spells of unemployment and underemployment may be long. Skill waste is not rare. Some have a second (often moonlight) job to piece together an income enough to make their living:

“I worked as a medical representative for dermatological products, in and outside Egypt […] Now I work as janitor […] I also worked in a restaurant, but I
didn't like it. I did that job because there was nothing else I could do, and I needed money." (R01, M, 36, porter, Egyptian)

“Sometimes I work. Now and then.” (R04, M, 24, student, Italian, internal migr.)

“I haven't found a job yet, since I'm undocumented.” (R05, M, 19, unemployed, Tunisian)

“I did the most diverse jobs to survive. I've always had a night job as watchman in a library. Now I'm working in a customer service.” (R07, M, 37, library security guard, Italian)

“I work in a shop, but I'm looking for a job in set design. Certainly, I cannot make a living, since I work part-time.” (R10, F, 27, Student, Chinese)

For this group the neighbourhood does not provide so much job opportunities, too. Also in this case, when unemployed or underemployed both young adults and migrants can find informal buffers in the neighbourhood. That is: kinship networks (co-ethnic and family networks, for both in-migrants and the youth) and low housing and living costs, that help not to fall into poverty.

Actually, those in this group do rarely work in the neighbourhood, even though quite a number make the most of the connections and transport facilities available in the area: they work (rarely) in the centre or (more often) in the North-Western periphery surrounding our research area.

### 7.3 Using neighbours and others to find a job

Few interviewees mention neighbours as a source of job information or opportunity. In general, informal sources seem to play quite a limited role. Recent migrants are those mentioning more often kinship ties to find a job: relatives, fellow countrypersons and friends can provide information and guidance in the local labour market, and occasionally limited job opportunities.

“I found [a job] thanks to a friend. He has a restaurant, and I worked with him […] when you go and work with another Egyptian guy, he helps you.” (R01, M, 36, porter, Egyptian)

“I studied twice here [Italian course managed by a local association]. When I found it, [I came] to talk with them, to look for a job, but also just to hear from them […]. I worked for a while with my uncle – not so much, since he is now unemployed, too.” (R05, M, 19, unemployed, Tunisian)

The main problem seem to be the precarious economic condition of the neighbourhood: households have limited demands, because of their low income and firms have narrow profit margins. So, also when there is demand from neighbours, it doesn't provide enough economic stability.

“Offering private lessons here in the neighbourhood or in the city centre is totally different […] obviously it’s a matter of money. That is: you cannot charge too
much, they clearly tell it. In the city centre, if you offer private lessons in Latin for €10 per hour, nobody calls you, because they think you are good for nothing.” (R27, M, 24, student, Italian)

“[with clients from this neighbourhood] you have to do small jobs, even not paid so much.” (R21, M, 41, webmaster, Italian)

“I know there would be no economic return here […] My target is made up by a kind of person that doesn't live here.” (R09, F, 38, counsellor, Italian)

In this respect, neighbourhood diversity seems not to be very helpful for social mobility, but neither a barrier: it is not diversity but inequality and the concentration of poverty that hinders economic chances within the neighbourhood.

Among the few job opportunities in the area, some interviewees report intergroup job opportunities. Even though not explicitly declared, some immigrant entrepreneurs hire Italians for position that require specific skills (e.g., language skills for customer relations).

“An [Italian] boy that already worked there [in a bar bought by Chinese entrepreneurs] stayed there to work, but always complained that he was working for the Chinese. Now he has been working there for 5 or 6 years, still working there. Perhaps he learned to value all things together. At first, perhaps he was annoyed of having a Chinese boss. Though, he is working and has a regular wage!” (R03, F, 35, unemployed, Italian, Somali origin)

“My neighbours upstairs: one of them works in a restaurant, and sometimes asked me if I wanted to work with him, if I needed it. A couple of times I went there, since it was both a help he asked me, but also a helping hand to me.” (R04, M, 24, student, Italian, internal migr.)

7.4 Neighbourhood reputation as an asset in upward social mobility?

As we already mentioned above, some of the areas within our case neighbourhoods have been target of a strongly negative politicisation and stigmatisation, although most interviewees do not consider this as a negative issue in finding a job or pursuing a career. Living in the area is usually considered neither negative nor positive.

Quite a number of interviewees maintained that other neighbourhood features (that may positively or negatively affect social mobility) have stronger effects on social mobility than reputation.

Just one interviewee – a teacher – explicitly maintains that there could be a negative neighbourhood effect (not tied to diversity, but to inequality):

“it is a bit hindering to me, for the youth. They are still too frail, and this is a tough place […] I meet too many youngsters that want to earn a lot of money, but have no role model.” (R14, F, 50, teacher, Italian)

It is interesting to understand also the different points of view of those not considering the neighbourhood as an obstacle to social mobility. We identified two main features.
First, some immigrants or persons from an immigrant background maintain that discrimination is much more based on ethnicity:

“If I send my CV, the first thing they [the employers] see is a foreign surname... so, there’s much needed before they read about my skills, or decide to call me for a job interview... it is not about the neighbourhood where I live.” (R03, F, 35, unemployed, Italian, Somali origin)

Second, others stress that the neighbourhood is not isolated, has no clear-cut boundaries, and is well connected. This limits ghettoization and stigmatisation:

“This is a well-travelled area [...] This type of neighbourhood helps people, doesn't frustrate them. There are more peripheral areas that hold you back... in the end, this is a piece of the city.” (R50, M, 55, audio-visual technician, Italian)

“If I need to work in another part of Milan, I would have no problem to get there, since we are well endowed with means of transport. There’s no big obstacle in this respect, but the fact that this isn’t a very lively area from an economic point of view.” (R25, F, 24, student, Italian, Egyptian origin, 2G)

Those stressing positive aspects of the neighbourhood in supporting social mobility, often focus on the positive role of neighbourhood diversity. It does not strictly help in creating and finding jobs, but in producing an atmosphere providing specific and positive skills. In particular, “street smarts”, i.e. relational skills in coping with different kind of persons; in accepting diversity; in being able to deal with unexpected situations.

“If one lives here and knows some cultures, one can become so interested in them to study their languages and other features. This may also be an advantage in the labour market.” (R25, F, 24, student, Italian, Egyptian origin, 2G)

“This is a multicultural neighbourhood, so to say. This is not insignificant. It depends, so to say, on one's degree of openness, on one's will to engage with this issue. You can be scared and distance yourself, or you can let [diversity] to influence you, and get somehow in touch with it. When this happens, in my opinion, diversity enriches you. Both in terms of human relations and in terms of skills you acquire on how the world goes on.” (R17, F, 49, teacher, Italian, internal migr.)

7.5 Conclusions

In this chapter we analysed to what extent the diversity of the neighbourhood is important for social mobility, and which elements foster or hinder social mobility.

Actually, neighbourhood diversity seems to play only a minor role in social mobility, job and career opportunities for its residents. The main obstacle to social mobility is the frail economic condition of the neighbourhood and its inhabitants. Household incomes and business profits are quite limited, thus reducing opportunities at the local level.

However, the lack of opportunities in the neighbourhood is not a high obstacle for personal aspirations: the neighbourhood provides low living and housing costs; kinship networks; some (limited) job opportunities – enough to act as a buffer and limiting social risks of its frail inhabitants.
According to some interviewees, the most positive dimension in fostering social mobility is related to social skills: residents able to get along with diversity may be more able to cope with different kinds of persons and unexpected situations.

8. Perceptions of public policies and initiatives

8.1 Introduction

In this chapter, we primarily address the following research question: how are diversity-related policies perceived by inhabitants of the researched area?

To do so, we explore a) the perception and evaluation of existing policies and b) suggestions and needs expressed by interviewees.

In Italy, social and diversity-related policies are, indeed, a conflicting ground within a nativist approach on scarce resources, due to the limited legitimisation and blurred definition of a national discourse on immigrants’ incorporation and social participation (Barberis and Boccagni, 2014; Codini, 2010; Barberis et al., 2014).

Measures perceived as targeting stigmatized people may rise tensions, while policies may increase processes of conflict and division among and within specific groups, as in the case of Roma encampments, that reinforce stigmatization and isolation of this minority.

Furthermore, there is a number of public policies targeting the built environment, that can have differentiated effects on different groups.

Access to public or subsidized initiatives can be very variable by age, gender, background, length of stay: on the one hand, there are policies and actions targeting specific groups; on the other hand, even initiatives and policies whose access is granted on a universal basis may have a limited accessibility because of different kinds of barriers (Chaskin et al., 2012).

In Italy, some constraints come from the limits that the citizenship regulation poses to political participation, and by what Ambrosini (2012: 302) calls the “Italian anomaly”: that is, the fact that the role of minority associations is much weaker than in most Western European countries due to a limited socio-economic incorporation. As a functional substitute, advocacy groups (made up mostly by natives) tend to be more visible in supporting minority rights. In addition, the way in which diversity is addressed (implicitly or explicitly) or neglected in public policy, may have different consequences on the sense of acknowledgement and participation of different groups and individuals (Pastore and Ponzo, 2013).

Milan is not an exception in the Italian context and the role of little grassroots associations is prominent in addressing diversity-related issues. Nonetheless, the impact of their activities is threatened by the fragmentation of the interventions and the absence of coordination among actors involved into their implementation (Angelucci et al., 2014).

In the following pages, we will address all of these aspects, thus trying to underline weaknesses and strength points of the existing policy frame.
8.2 Perception and evaluation of existing policies and initiatives: what do residents know?

Generally, inhabitants of the researched area have little awareness about implemented policies. This outcome was quite expected, given the low level of involvement and participation in the neighbourhood life of a significant part of inhabitants. However, remarkable differences have to be noticed among groups of inhabitants and, above all, about the different perceptions these groups have on public policies and grassroots initiatives.

As for local administration, almost all the interviewees report its absence and its indifference toward neighbourhood’s needs. The most mentioned action was performed by the (former) local government two years ago: a huge investment on security forces in addressing criminality and in maintaining public order in the neighbourhood.

However, this policing practice was commonly seen by our interviewees as inappropriate, useless and counter-productive. They argue that crime in the neighbourhood was not such to justify a huge deployment of police officers, and they consider this measure as a blatant propaganda from “law and order” political parties. It fed the local agenda with a racist and populist discourse, mostly directed to constituency outside the area. Some interviewees consider policing actions especially negative as fostering the bad (and undeserved) reputation of the neighbourhood.

“I remember… when via Padova was militarized… I mean… an absurd farce… It was just a wind-up… […] It was just a media-security with clear political aims.” (R27, M, 24, student, Italian)

“You don’t need flying squads or assault rifles to maintain the serenity in this neighbourhood.” (R14, F, 50, teacher, Italian)

Even if some infrastructural initiatives, such as the project of a cycling lane, are positively evaluated by inhabitants, these are perceived much more as an empty promise than as an effective commitment from the local administration. They see implemented actions as limited in scope and fragmented.

As for the initiative implemented by grassroots associations, the degree of awareness among inhabitants varies considerably depending on their involvement in the associations themselves. Many middle-class natives are involved in different ways in activities implemented by most active associations in the researched area. For this reason, they obviously know their actions.

However, they also seem to acknowledge difficulties in reaching those people they aim to target, and thus problems in effectiveness and impact of their initiatives. Indeed, inhabitants who are not personally involved into the association generally know the associations themselves, but very little about their specific activities. Consequently, these activities may have a limited impact on the neighbourhood life, while they have a significant role in lives of people involved into the association.

“There are a lot of associations but…[…] they probably do something but I don’t know… they don’t promote very much their activities.” (R15, F, 65, retired, Italian)
“On my personal life [name of local association] initiatives had a real positive impact. [...] If there was more support from local administration maybe the initiatives could be brought also outside.” (R03, F, 35, unemployed, Italian, Somali origin)

Nevertheless, some of these initiatives, such as “via Padova is better than Milan”, are almost unanimously seen as incisive in reversing the stigma of the neighbourhood.

8.3 Policy priorities proposed by interviewees: what do residents want?

As mentioned in previous chapters of this report, one of inhabitants’ concern is about aesthetic features of the area. Many interviewees mention as a desirable public action the improvement of streets’ conditions, both in terms of infrastructural improvements and in terms of promotion of a culture of respect of public spaces.

“They often talk about a cycling lane… it could improve the liveability of the neighbourhood and could beautify the zone… I’d like it” (R25, F, 24, student, Italian, Egyptian origin, 2G)

Even if the perception of a liveable and safe neighbourhood is high, many people suggest actions in this field: while they complain about the policing actions led by the former local administration, they feel the need of a soft-control in order to ensure a quieter environment. This concern seems more related to worries about the reputation of the neighbourhood than to actual security problems.

“I think it’s important to control this territory, because it has some fragilities… [...] but not in the way they did some time ago, with the army in the park! The best control is made by people who live here, but anyway it’s important also a continuing presence of the institutions.” (R17, F, 49, teacher, Italian, internal migr.)

Finally, given the fact that people are aware of the rich fabric of small associations, interviewees suggest more dialogue among them, and more support from the public administration in order to create a structured and consistent grassroots-policy program. In particular, a main concern is about vacant and idle spaces and buildings: many interviewees suggest the public administration could foster a grassroots social reuse.

“The local administration could stimulate grassroots activities… could provide spaces. The municipality has a lot of vacant spaces. So give and promote them!” (R21, M, 41, webmaster, Italian)

“Let the spaces belong to those who need them! In Milan there are a lot of abandoned buildings and places!” (R07, M, 37, library security guard, Italian)

Neighbourhood’s diversity-related aspects such as the huge immigrants’ presence seems not to be a concern in our interviewees’ opinion, and their suggestions about policies do not directly address issues related to these topics.
8.4 Conclusions

The most evident and shared inhabitants’ perception about public policies is a sense of neglect by institutions. They feel a big distance between neighbourhood’s needs and public action. This lack of interest from the institutions is partially justified by inhabitants themselves, as the neighbourhood’s position is perceived as peripheral: it is somehow considered “normal” that areas at the periphery of the city are less cared. For this reason, they feel themselves and their neighbourhood as less legitimate to claim their rights to place as urban citizens.

However, someone of our politically committed interviewees argues that this is just a strategy of the local government to produce a sort of “cooling out” effect on the expectations of the dwellers, legitimating the decreasing investment in public policies. Nevertheless, whether this is a guided strategy or an unforced belief, this sense of neglect may be exploited by speculators: market-led renewal inducing gentrification can be seen as positive developments, while at the same time coming to detriment of the most vulnerable groups in the neighbourhood.

The second element emerging from the interviews is a big concern about the aesthetic factors linked to the use of the public space. What is interesting here is that, even if people complain about the conditions of the streets, streets themselves are extremely used, and are an important place where neighbourhood life occurs.

The need for a more structured and consistent program of policies involving the neighbourhood and addressing its diversity is quite spread among residents. They appreciate the activism of associations but they feel their initiatives are fragmented if not isolated and, as a consequence, less effective. Public support to and coordination of grassroots initiatives is considered as a potential strategy in facing challenges tied to hyper-diversification of the area. Such an interpretation is strongly consistent with outcomes of interviews and focus groups conducted with local stakeholders (see Angelucci et al. 2014)

9. Conclusion

“Have you seen how we are? We are a plurinational melting pot... This is our main feature, isn’t it? In my opinion, this helps us to belong to this area. In my opinion, no other area in Milan does the same. That is: this is our place, it is special. [...] not because we help and understand each other. To me, this doesn’t happen. Though, we are able to find and see what happen around us in a very realistic way [...] Everyone can find his/ her own way. There’s diversity, and will always be. Though, we can accept it. If a quarrel happens because of this diversity: don’t mind, it can happen. In a way or another, we fix it, patch things up. Anyway, everyone has his/ her own place. So, I don’t know how to put it: but it is a real world [...] here none compels you to accept his/ her standard just because you must.” R19, F, 43, cartoonist, Japanese
→ Summary of the key findings

Summarizing in short the key findings of this report, according to main research questions stated in Chapter 1, we can list the following bullet points:

- As regard housing choice (chapter 3) diversity seems not to be the primary pull-factor of the area, even if interviewees perceive it as a positive aspect of their housing conditions. Availability of less expensive dwellings and good public transport connection seem to play a more important role in interviewees’ housing choices. However, diversity is connected to place attachment, acting as an “anti-push factor” actively keeping people in the neighbourhood.
- Neighbourhood diversity is generally seen as a strength point of the area and it is held pivotal in the construction of neighbourhood community and individuals’ identities. Also, inhabitants proudly perceive neighbourhood diversity as an element of “Europeanness” and modernity (chapter 4).
- A number of enjoyable public spaces (such as parks and open-air facilities) enable inhabitants to use very much the neighbourhood (chapter 5). As a consequence, for most interviewees it is the place where spare time is spent. In some cases, even streets are used as places of daily social interaction, while public libraries are heavily used by younger people.
- Social cohesion (chapter 6) is influenced in two different ways by neighbourhood diversity: if the coexistence of diverse people in the same place may foster cohesion through the practice of everyday multiculturalism resulting in what Anderson calls civility practices, given the weakness of ties characterising this relations, hyper-diversity may become a risky factor when stronger forms of support and networks are needed, namely when particular forms of diversity intersect with disadvantages.
- Social mobility (chapter 7) is only marginally influenced by neighbourhood diversity; the widespread economic vulnerability of inhabitants seems to be the primary obstacle to their job and career opportunities. Thus, inequality and not diversity is the main problem.
- Diversity-related public policies (chapter 8) are perceived as distant from the actual needs of neighbourhood’s population, while grassroots initiatives are seen as fragmented and ineffective. Thus residents share a widespread demand for a more structured and consistent program of policies involving the neighbourhood and addressing its diversity.

In the next pages, some points will be addressed more systematically, and some guidelines of intervention will be inferred.

→ How do residents profit from a hyper-diverse area and how do they suffer from living in such an area? What do residents do with hyper-diversity and to what extent are they being affected by it?

Many interviewees do not consider diversity neither an asset nor a problem. To them it is simply a matter of fact, and it is important to get along with it in order to live together with serenity.
Nonetheless, some diversity related aspects influence inhabitants’ lives, their choices and their adaptive strategies, favouring or opposing their wellness.
First, diversity in the neighbourhood is perceived as one of the main factors that maintain housing costs lower than in other places. This is because diversity is often related to inequality, poverty, and discrimination, and these aspects work as a repulsive factor for most natives upper classes that prefer more affluent, socially homogeneous, and well-kept areas. The low appeal of the area on a wealthy target of buyers lowers housing costs even in case of housing stock of a certain quality. Most of the interviewees see this aspect as something to take advantage from, but also as a marginalising process, reproducing poverty and inequality concentration.

This concentration of poverty and inequality is the second diversity-related aspect that affects lives of inhabitants. It is perceived as something that reduces job and career opportunities, limiting social mobility chances.

Another important aspect influenced by neighbourhood diversity is inhabitants’ perception of security. Instead of create sense of danger, familiarity with diversity engenders trust and sense of safety among neighbours. Indeed, the bad reputation of the neighbourhood as unsafe is perceived by inhabitants as undeserved and they try to reverse the stigma promoting a different image of the neighbourhood, defining it as “better than Milan”, “European” and “liveable”. International immigrant newcomers are a partial exception to this general trend: they often feel out of place, and also insecure.

The hyper-diversity of the neighbourhood has a noticeable influence also on creation of social relations and social ties. Living in such a context, indeed, seems to hinder the creation of strong bonds and clear group identities. Instead, what seems to be fostered by hyper-diversity is the practice of “civility”, namely of polite and kind behaviour that always pays attention to not to invade the other's space. This kind of social attitude become a tool to both keeping contact with and distance from diversity. So, being a good neighbour, in the opinion of our respondents, means to be helpful for small daily needs without being too present in the others’ life (to be too present would be perceived as intrusive in private sphere).

Diversity affects also the sense of freedom that people experience in the neighbourhood. Indeed, the most widespread advantage explicitly or implicitly mentioned by our interviewees is that living together with diversity means living with more freedom. This is because you are not required to follow a strict normative standard, whether you are member of a minority or of the majority. However, it has to be noticed that this freedom is differently perceived by natives and immigrants or visible minorities. The latter are more object of policing and therefore experience lower levels of freedom than natives do.

Neighbourhood’s hyper-diversity particularly affects part of the middle class living in the neighbourhood, that is: diversity is the main reason why they chose to go and live there. These people are mainly employed in cultural and creative jobs, not rarely living in more well-off apartment buildings, that chose diversity as the background of their lifestyle, and that may be the vanguard of gentrification.

Finally, diversity affects differently people on the basis of a generational divide. As for older cohorts, made of people now retired that had quite a linear life course (a permanent job position, the passage from rent to homeownership, etc.) they do not experience diversity as an asset. They show a slightly prejudiced view, based on the difficulty to understand and accept social change in the area. On the opposite side, we
have younger cohorts of neighbourhood natives: they grew-up and were schooled in the area, building their peer group when the neighbourhood was already becoming very diverse. To them diversity is customary, but should also be promoted since it is a relational asset: if one is able to manage diversity in his/her kinship networks, he/she will be able to get along in any context.

➔ What can policy makers learn from the inhabitants perceptions and practices?

From interviewees’ perceptions and practices it is possible to infer some tendencies that should inform the policy making process at city and neighbourhood level.

In particular, the following suggestions and policy advices can be inferred by generalizing from interviewees' words. Policy-makers' awareness on these issues may be helpful in order to meet inhabitants' needs and priorities:

- **Invert the perception of marginality:** the perception of being a “peripheral neighbourhood” foments a widespread sense of abandon among the interviewees, cooling out expectations on public intervention in the area, and reducing trust in local institutions. Policies addressing the acknowledgment of the value of diversity and contrasting negative aspects of inequality could restore trust in institutions and increase democratic participation.

- **Soft-control actions:** while law and order policies are considered detrimental because they increase stigmatization and undermine social cohesion, on the other hand softer actions of control are solicited by inhabitants in order to ensure a quieter environment and, above all, to overturn stigmatization. Measures addressing public safety should take into account this aspect.

- **Upgrade urban environment:** requests for investment such as cycling lanes, pedestrian paths, repaving roads, improving street furniture and provide the neighbourhood with sports complexes are the most shared among interviewees.

- **Avoid actions that may foster gentrification processes:** an attention to the market effect of improvements is needed: those that favour private interests and/or contribute to rising housing and living costs have gentrifying effects that may negatively affect diversity, in particular unmixing class intergroup contacts.
References


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Van Beckhoven, E. and van Kempen, R. (2003), Social effects of urban restructuring: a case study in Amsterdam and Utrecht, the Netherlands. Housing Studies, 18 (6), pp. 853-875.


### Appendix

#### List of the interviewed persons

Since we promise anonymity to interviewees, the list of interviewees in the appendix includes only their basic characteristics (age, gender, position in household, occupation, ethnic group).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interviewee</th>
<th>Age group</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Position in household</th>
<th>Income group</th>
<th>Origin</th>
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