



Journal of Urbanism: International Research on Placemaking and Urban Sustainability

ISSN: 1754-9175 (Print) 1754-9183 (Online) Journal homepage: www.tandfonline.com/journals/rjou20

Learning from the past to support everyday well-being: rediscovering hidden landscape patterns for proximity planning in Monza (Italy)

Mario Paris

To cite this article: Mario Paris (21 Oct 2026): Learning from the past to support everyday well-being: rediscovering hidden landscape patterns for proximity planning in Monza (Italy), Journal of Urbanism: International Research on Placemaking and Urban Sustainability, DOI: [10.1080/17549175.2026.2747731](https://doi.org/10.1080/17549175.2026.2747731)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/17549175.2026.2747731>



© 2026 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group.



Published online: 21 Oct 2026.



[Submit your article to this journal](#)



[View related articles](#)



[View Crossmark data](#)

Learning from the past to support everyday well-being: rediscovering hidden landscape patterns for proximity planning in Monza (Italy)

Mario Paris 

DISA - Dipartimento di Ingegneria e Scienze Applicate, Università degli Studi di Bergamo, Dalmine, Italy

ABSTRACT

Contemporary debates on the 15-minute city highlight the need to rethink accessibility, proximity, and quality of life through integrated spatial, social, and environmental perspectives. This paper contributes to this discussion by proposing a landscape-oriented and historically grounded approach to proximity planning, based on a long-term analysis of urban planning instruments in Monza (Italy), a medium-sized city within the Milan urban region. Through a critical reconstruction of the succession of general town plans from 1925 to 2022, the study examines how past planning decisions have shaped current conditions of accessibility, public space provision, and everyday well-being. Rather than interpreting proximity as a purely time-based metric, the paper argues that quality of life is shaped by the interaction between the distribution of services, the continuity of green and open spaces, and the capacity of urban environments to support diverse daily practices. The analysis reveals that fragmented yet persistent landscape structures, including residual green spaces, waterways, tree-lined boulevards, and urban–rural interfaces, constitute a dispersed fabric with significant potential to enhance well-being and everyday accessibility. By “possible landscape pattern,” the paper refers to an interpretive and project-oriented framework that reconnects inherited, residual, and under-recognised spatial resources rather than prescribing a fixed masterplan.

ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 7 January 2026

Accepted 7 October 2026

KEYWORDS

Proximity planning; quality of life; urban landscape; 15-minute city; urban well-being; Monza

Introduction

Urban regions are increasingly shaped by changing patterns of living, production and mobility, which challenge conventional planning approaches and call for renewed ways of interpreting existing spatial resources. Within this context, the study investigates how urban planning strategies can build on inherited territorial assets while addressing sustainability, ecological transition and social inclusion. Monza, located within the Milan urban region (Lanzani 1991), provides a relevant case through which to examine the historical processes that have shaped contemporary urban and landscape conditions.

CONTACT Mario Paris  mario.paris@unibg.it

© 2026 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group.

This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited. The terms on which this article has been published allow the posting of the Accepted Manuscript in a repository by the author(s) or with their consent.

By revisiting the “continuities and contradictions” (Venturi 1966) of urban form, the study interprets inherited spatial structures not simply as constraints, but as potential resources for future transformation. Particular attention is given to green networks, water systems, residual and interstitial spaces, and “minimal landscapes” (Ferlinghetti 2009) that persist within the contemporary urban fabric. In this sense, landscape is approached as a territorial palimpsest (Corboz 1983; Corner 1999) in which past spatial logics and traces remain legible and can be critically reinterpreted in relation to present planning challenges.

Based on archival planning documents and relevant scholarship, the study examines the succession of Monza’s general town plans from 1925 to 2022 through comparative redrawing and a standardised graphic representation. This approach makes it possible to identify continuities and contradictions between planning intentions and subsequent urban development (Secchi 2000), and to recognise spatial structures that have persisted, fragmented or remained partially unrealised over time.

The paper therefore examines how inherited green, blue and open-space systems may contribute to contemporary proximity planning. Rather than proposing a new master-plan, it explores the potential to reconstruct a coherent territorial framework from existing and often dispersed resources. The paper first outlines the methodological approach, then compares four main planning phases and discusses their cumulative contribution to the definition of a “possible landscape pattern.”

Materials and methods: why analyse Monza’s urban plans in succession?

The reconstruction of Monza’s planning history builds on and updates the research conducted between 1999 and 2000 by the RAPU+ Archive of the Politecnico di Milano. Commissioned to support the study and dissemination of the city’s planning documents, the earlier research examined eleven major planning instruments developed between 1913 and 1997 and was subsequently published in a volume edited by Fabrizio Bottini (2003).

The present study extends this earlier work by examining the main plans through a comparative and interpretive approach and by incorporating the Territorial Government Plans (PGT) of 2007, 2017 and 2022. The analysis draws on the technical documentation associated with each plan, relevant scientific literature (Canesi and Rocca 1985; Legnani 1994; Senes et al. 2021), and, where appropriate, non-academic contributions produced by local associations, activists and stakeholders commenting on planning decisions (Majoli 1997, 2021).

The research originated from a request by the Municipality of Monza to reassess the city’s planning legacy. As Michele Faglia (2003) argued, rereading planning instruments as part of a network of relationships can help identify spatial continuities and cultural identities that have been progressively obscured by fragmented urban development. From this perspective, planning documents are treated not only as regulatory instruments, but also as records of spatial intentions whose persistent traces may inform contemporary conservation, regeneration and design.

Methodological approach

The analysis was designed to move beyond a purely descriptive reconstruction of planning history. Building on the earlier RAPU+ study, it interprets the sequence of plans as expressions of changing and sometimes contradictory planning intentions (Secchi 2000, 48) rather than as a linear progression. It also relates these intentions to their material outcomes, including the spatial traces left by partially implemented or unrealised proposals.

This perspective makes it possible to assess how successive planning strategies contributed to Monza's present landscape structure and to distinguish short-term responses from broader territorial visions. The study therefore combines historical interpretation with a forward-looking reading of inherited spatial resources. Its principal analytical device is the comparative redrawing of the plans, described in the following subsection, which provides a common basis for identifying continuities, ruptures and unresolved legacies across the planning sequence.

Redrawing as an analytical method

Comparative redrawing was used as an analytical rather than as a purely graphic exercise. For each plan, the study examined statutory maps, technical reports, planning regulations, archival documents and relevant literature. Since these sources differed considerably in scale, terminology and graphic representation, the plans were redrawn using a common municipal boundary, scale, orientation, graphic hierarchy and legend.

The shared legend identified recurring spatial categories: existing and planned urban expansion; agricultural and open land; public green spaces; public facilities and services; natural and artificial water systems; transport infrastructure; urban edges and containment devices; unrealised interventions; and inherited spatial resources. These categories enabled comparison not only of land-use allocations, but also of the relationships between open spaces, public facilities, infrastructure and urban–rural interfaces. Where documentation allowed, planning forecasts were also compared with subsequent development in order to distinguish implemented, partially implemented and unrealised elements.

Although standardisation inevitably reduces some of the historical and technical specificity of the original documents, it makes their spatial intentions comparable. Redrawing therefore functions as a form of critical mapping, revealing continuities, ruptures, contradictions and persistent traces across the planning sequence. These findings provide the analytical basis for the possible landscape pattern developed in the following sections.

Why Monza?

Monza was selected as a case study because it combines characteristics typical of contemporary metropolitan urbanisation with a distinctive concentration of historical and landscape assets. With more than 120,000 inhabitants in 2025, it is one of Lombardy's largest cities and occupies a prominent position within the Milan urban region. This wider

metropolitan system is characterised by high population density, strong economic activity and intense functional relationships between municipalities.

Monza is the provincial capital closest to Milan (see [Figure 1](#)) and is closely connected to it through road, rail and commuting flows. These relationships are expected to be further strengthened by planned extensions of the metropolitan transport network. At the same time, Monza cannot be understood simply as a satellite of Milan. Its territorial structure reflects a long agricultural history, shaped by large estates, water-management systems and a network of canals and irrigation channels, among which the Canale Villoresi plays a particularly important role.

This landscape structure is also defined by major historical assets, including the eighteenth-century Villa Reale and its Park, as well as a wider system of historic villas, tree-lined boulevards and residential areas with gardens. Over time, agricultural landownership was progressively associated with investment in industry, real estate and, more recently, advanced services, contributing to a complex and highly stratified urban fabric (Ferlinghetti 2026).

Monza is therefore both representative of broader metropolitan dynamics and distinctive in its local spatial structure. Its planning history reflects processes of industrialisation, suburbanisation, infrastructural expansion and functional decentralisation that are common to many European urban regions, while retaining landscape elements that provide significant opportunities for contemporary planning.

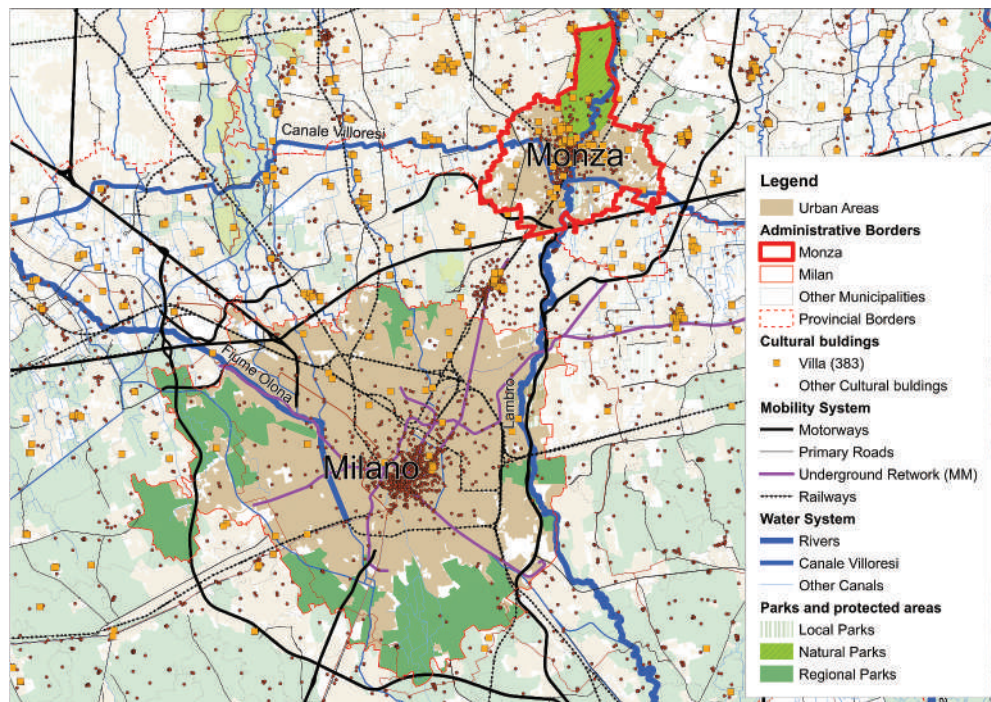


Figure 1. Monza in the Milan urban region: territorial structure and main landscape assets (source: Mario Paris 2026).

Monza's planning history reveals dynamics of urban expansion and restructuring driven by real-estate pressures and changing patterns of living, production and mobility, processes (Brenner 2014) that recur across contemporary metropolitan regions while taking locally specific forms (Walker 1994).

In Monza, these contradictory traces are evident in several phenomena:

- The gradual consolidation of highly specialised and competitive industrial areas in the eastern part of the city, contrasted with the widespread presence of disused industrial sites interspersed within the large-scale twentieth-century expansion in the south-western sector.
- The juxtaposition of public housing estates and areas of detached and semi-detached housing developed for the private market and predominantly higher-income households.
- The location of major urban functions—including offices, shopping centres, and cultural and recreational facilities—outside consolidated central areas, in some cases contributing to new clusters of peri-urban centralities (Paris and Balducci 2019).

At the same time, Monza retains distinctive landscape characteristics within the Lombardy and Italian context. The settlement system maintains high landscape quality, with historical assets such as *ville di delizia* from both the historic and twentieth-century expansions, historically significant tree-lined boulevards, networks of upper-income residential areas with gardens, and residual “resistant” spaces such as small groves and utility buildings. Yet, these landscape systems remain only partially integrated with the urban fabric. The Lambro River, running north–south, and the Canale Villoresi, a major west–east artificial waterway structuring the secondary water network, offer significant opportunities to rethink the city's open-space system.

Within the fractal urban fabric of the modern expansion of the city, numerous under-utilised or degraded areas emerge that call for redevelopment and enhancement. Some transformations will be facilitated by the planned public transport investments, including the metro network and renewed connections with Milan, which will reconnect various hubs around the historic centre and private transport nodes, fostering a polycentric urban structure.

Taken together, these conditions make Monza's open spaces an important potential resource for contemporary planning. Their protection, reconnection and enhancement could contribute to the regeneration of peripheral areas and help the urban system respond to challenges including climate adaptation, urban heat, water management and spatial justice.

Results: a comparative reading of Monza's planning sequence

Rather than considering the twelve planning instruments as autonomous episodes, the analysis compares them through five recurring dimensions: the dominant planning intention; the treatment of agricultural, green and open land; the distribution of public spaces, services and major urban functions; the role of mobility and water systems; and the spatial legacy left by each plan. This comparative framework makes it possible to

identify continuities, discontinuities and contradictions between planning intentions and the material transformation of the city.

The plans have been grouped into four broad periods, corresponding to [Figures 2–5](#). These periods do not represent homogeneous phases, but highlight significant shifts in the relationship between urban expansion, public facilities, infrastructure and landscape structure.

From controlled expansion to the fragmentation of green wedges, 1925–1949

The first three plans reveal a progressive shift from a landscape-based model of controlled expansion to a more fragmented and infrastructure-led urban structure. The 1925 PRG organised development along the radial routes extending from the historical centre, while green wedges, the agricultural belt and the Canale Villoresi were intended to separate expansion sectors and establish recognisable limits to urban growth. In the 1938 plan, industrial development and increasing residential demand, particularly south of the railway station, began to weaken this spatial figure. New residential areas and public facilities reduced the continuity of the green belt and created conditions for further urbanisation. By 1949, road and railway connections with Milan had become the principal vectors of expansion. The green wedges survived only as fragmented urban green and public spaces, although the boulevard system, the Canale Villoresi and the decision not to cover the Lambro River preserved elements that would remain significant for the future landscape structure.

Infrastructure-led growth and the construction of the public city, 1959–1971

Between 1959 and 1971, the dominant planning rationale was based on large-scale expansion supported by road infrastructure, public facilities and urban standards. The 1959 and 1964 plans projected a substantially enlarged city, first for 500,000 and subsequently for 300,000 inhabitants. Their oversized road networks and distributed public facilities enabled urban development, but also contributed to the reduction of agricultural land and inner-city open spaces. The 1971 PRG introduced a partial reassessment through national planning standards, the protection of the historical centre and the strategic location of schools, sports facilities and other public amenities.

From the well-served city to the urban belt park, 1980–1993

During the 1980s and early 1990s, the containment of urban growth and the reconstruction of a broader green structure returned to the centre of planning debate. The 1980 Service Plan further consolidated the idea of a distributed public city by increasing the provision of services and redefining Monza's role within a wider regional system. Nevertheless, the location of tertiary functions along the Rho–Monza highway and the outer ring road reinforced corridor-based development and emerging forms of functional decentralisation. The sequence also includes the 1985 Draft PRG Variant and Leonardo Benevolo's 1993 Urban Belt Park proposal. Taken together, these plans highlight the transition from a distributed network of public services and tertiary functions towards renewed containment strategies, based on the new role of the historical tree-lined

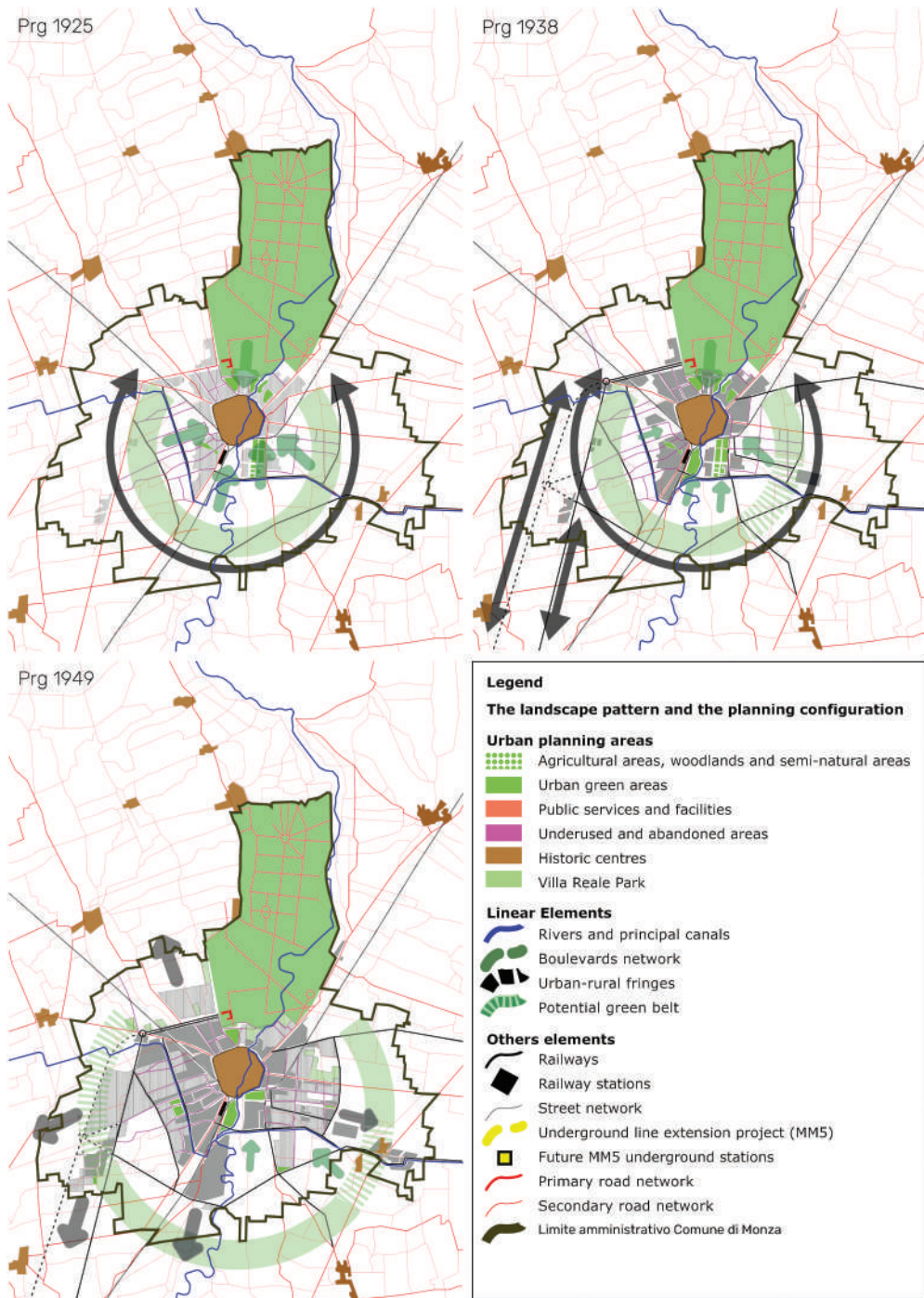


Figure 2. From controlled expansion to the fragmentation of green wedges: the 1925, 1938 and 1949 general town plans (source: Mario Paris, 2025). Caption: The comparative redrawing highlights the progressive reduction of the green wedges, the persistence of the radial and boulevard systems, and the increasing role of road and railway infrastructure in directing urban expansion.

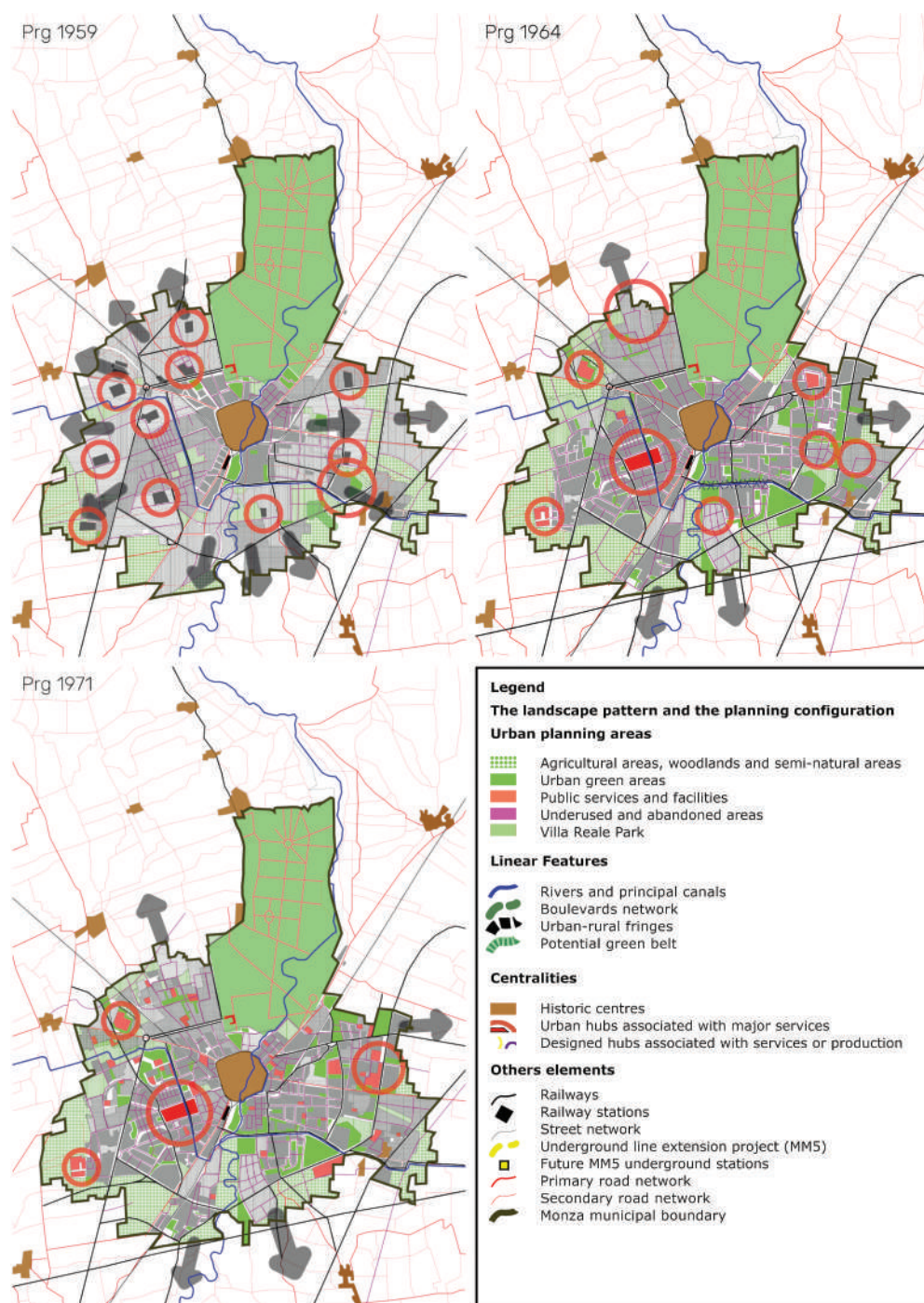


Figure 3. Infrastructure-led growth and the construction of the public city: the 1959, 1964 and 1971 general town plans (source: Mario Paris, 2025). Caption: The sequence shows the relationship between oversized expansion, the reduction of agricultural and open land, the distribution of public facilities and the emergence of corridor-based development.

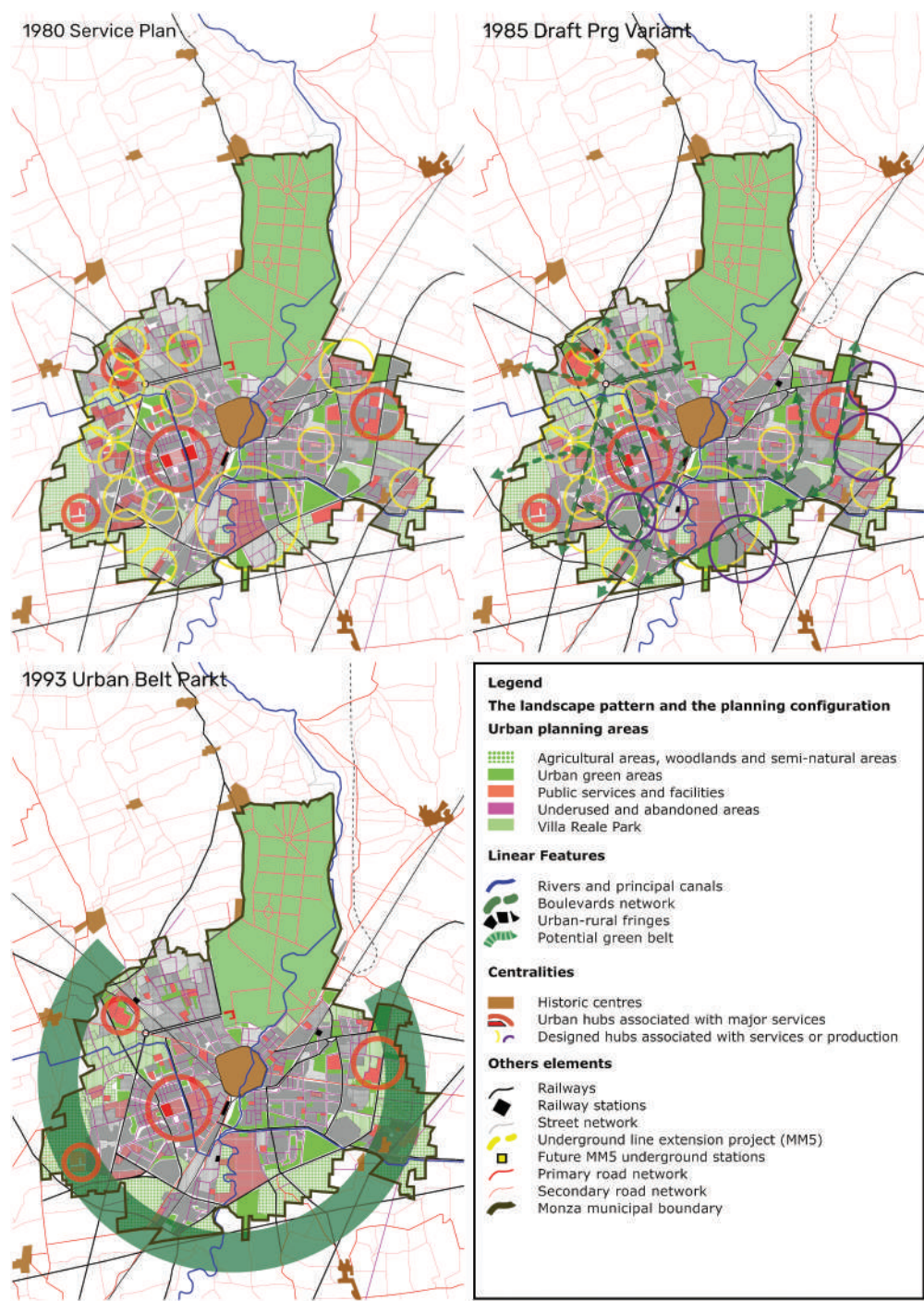


Figure 4. From the well-served city to the urban belt park (source: Mario Paris, 2025).

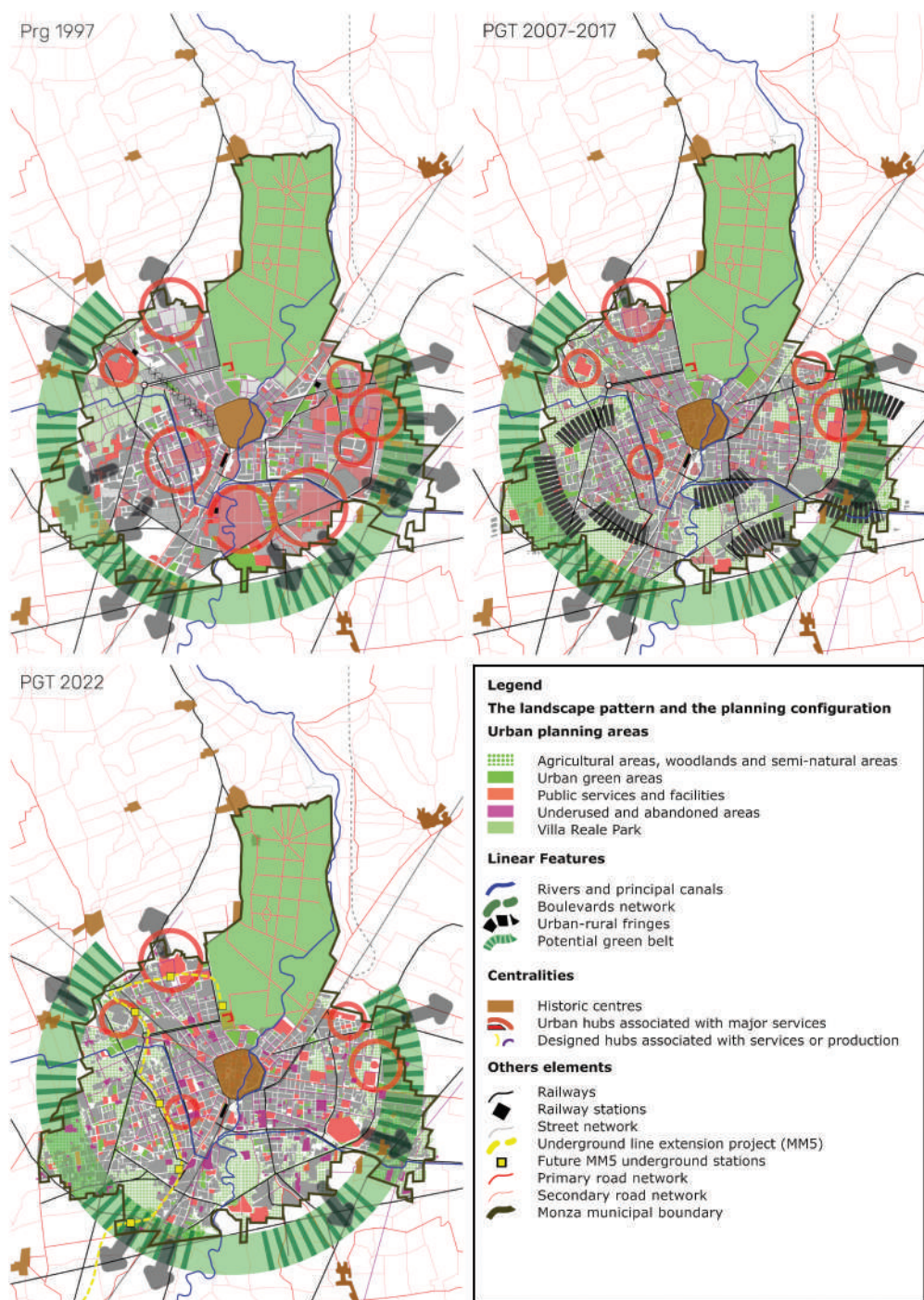


Figure 5. From polycentric development to residual landscape strategies (source: Mario Paris, 2025). Caption: The sequence illustrates the return of containment strategies, the development of a polycentric system of functions and the progressive recognition of urban margins, residual spaces and inherited landscape structures as potential connective resources.

boulevards, large green areas and an inter-municipal agricultural and environmental belt intended to reconnect urban development, public facilities and open spaces.

The 1985 Draft PRG Variant recognised tree-lined boulevards as components of a green network, revived the idea of an urban belt park and proposed new railway stations. The 1993 Urban Belt Park developed this approach at an inter-municipal scale, defining an extensive agricultural and environmental protection zone and associating landscape protection with peripheral regeneration and the reuse of underutilised spaces.

From polycentric development to residual landscape strategies, 1997–2022

The 1997 PRG introduced a more explicitly polycentric structure based on major public functions, tertiary hubs, transport infrastructure and the redevelopment of former industrial sites. This strategy generated new centralities and some physical reconnections, but also contributed to the occupation and fragmentation of the remaining rural belt. The 2007–2017 PGTs shifted attention towards urban margins, containment and the interface between the built fabric and open land. The 2022 PGT further developed this perspective by recognising unused, underused and non-vegetated areas as potential resources and by relating their transformation to local public transport and the proposed extension of the MM5 metro line. In this final phase, inherited and residual spaces are no longer interpreted only as areas awaiting development, but as potential components of a connected landscape and proximity-based urban structure.

Beyond the sequence: recurring ambitions and spatial legacies

Taken together, the four phases reveal neither a linear evolution nor a simple succession of planning models. Rather, they show the recurrent reformulation of similar ambitions under changing demographic, economic and infrastructural conditions. The comparative synthesis presented in [Table 1](#) considers each phase according to its main planning intentions, the treatment of green and open spaces, the distribution of public services and urban functions, the role of mobility and connections, and the legacy left for the possible landscape pattern. This diachronic reading makes it possible to identify both persistent objectives—particularly the containment of urban expansion and the provision of green spaces and public facilities—and the contradictions through which these objectives were progressively fragmented, reinterpreted or partially implemented. The table therefore provides the analytical transition from the reconstruction of the plans to the discussion of their cumulative effects on Monza's contemporary landscape structure.

Discussion: what can we learn from Monza? Two recurring ambitions across Monza's planning history

The comparative analysis and redrawing of Monza's general town plans reveal enduring continuities as well as significant contradictions in the formation of the contemporary urban landscape. Drawing on [Portas et al.](#), Monza's settlement structure can be interpreted as the combination of a radial pattern, rooted in historical routes and settlements, and subsequent configurations generated by urban expansion and infrastructure. Development initially occupied the spaces between existing urban areas and radial axes

Table 1. Diachronic reading of Monza's planning phases: public space, green systems and connections (source: Mario Paris 2026).

Planning phase	Main planning intention	Green and open-space structure	Public spaces, services and urban functions	Mobility and connections	Material outcomes and legacy for the possible landscape pattern
1925–1949 Controlled expansion of the historical core	Controlled radial expansion Definition of urban boundaries Progressive response to industrial and residential growth	Green wedges Agricultural belt / green crown Canale Villoresi as boundary Progressive fragmentation of open spaces	Boulevards and public spaces New facilities supporting expansion Public facilities, including the cemetery, as catalysts for urbanisation	Radial street network Ring-road system Railway and road links to Milan Lambro River preserved	First integrated green–water–mobility structure Persistent boulevards and waterways Residual fragments of green wedges
1959–1971 Oversized expansion based on infrastructure and services	Large-scale urban expansion Residential, industrial and tertiary growth Adaptation to national planning standards	Reduction of agricultural land Loss of inner-city open spaces Fragmented green areas Quantitative green standards	Distributed public facilities New hospital location Schools and sports facilities Protection of the historical centre	Oversized road network Infrastructure-led expansion Proposed culverting of the Canale Villoresi Decentralisation of functions	Distributed “public city” Services as growth catalysts Fragmented open-space system Unrealised projects as residual opportunities
1980–1993 From the well-served city to the urban belt park	Consolidation as a regional service hub Return to containment strategies Inter-municipal landscape vision	Boulevards as a green network Large western green area Urban belt park Agricultural and environmental protection	Increased service standards Tertiary functions along major corridors Recreational and sports facilities Reuse of underused areas	Milan inter-municipal framework Proposed railway stations Regional road corridors Inter-municipal open-space connections	Main precedent for the possible pattern Integration of services and open spaces Green belt as a territorial framework Peripheral regeneration opportunities
1997–2022 Polycentric development and residual landscape strategies	Polycentric urban structure Regeneration of former industrial sites Containment of further expansion Enhancement of existing resources	Fragmentation of the rural belt Protection of urban margins Urban–rural interfaces Residual and underused green spaces	Major urban hubs Institutional, health and tertiary functions Regenerated industrial areas New centralities	Partial undergrounding of the railway Public transport network Active-mobility connections Proposed MM5 metro extension	Connection of hubs, services and green areas Residual spaces as assets Mobility nodes as catalysts Basis for a proximity-oriented strategy

and later extended into the surrounding rural landscape, particularly along major transport corridors and through the progressive merging of urbanised areas (Portas, Domingues, and Cabral 2003).

This increasingly fragmented urban fabric can be read in relation to Viard's notion of an “archipelago society” (Viard 1994). In Monza, this fragmentation is expressed spatially through differentiated residential environments, decentralised functions, infrastructure corridors and uneven relationships between built-up areas, services and open spaces. Against this background, two recurring planning ambitions emerge particularly clearly.

Limiting the conversion of peri-urban agricultural land

The first is the recurrent attempt to contain urban expansion and limit the conversion of peri-urban agricultural land. Since 1925, although with varying degrees of continuity and effectiveness, Monza's plans have repeatedly proposed green belts, open-space systems and physical boundaries as means of controlling urban growth. These strategies were not merely regulatory devices; they sought to frame urban explosion (Font et al. 2007) within a broader territorial structure articulated by boulevards, railway infrastructure, waterways and land-use discontinuities.

Their implementation, however, was often partial. Successive development pressures progressively fragmented many of the spatial structures intended to contain expansion, leaving residual agricultural areas, discontinuous green spaces and unresolved urban edges.

Equipping urban growth with public spaces, services and green structures

The second recurring ambition, particularly evident after the Second World War, was to support urban expansion through public spaces, green areas and distributed services. Schools, sports facilities, major public functions and open spaces were progressively conceived as components of a wider "public city" extending beyond the historic centre.

These two ambitions—containing urban expansion and equipping the growing city—have shaped Monza's planning history, but their simultaneous and uneven implementation often produced fragmented outcomes. Broad territorial visions, including those associated with Leonardo Benevolo's urban belt park, were frequently modified by piecemeal interventions and changing development pressures. The resulting peri-urban landscape is therefore heterogeneous, combining areas of environmental, architectural and social value with spaces shaped by incremental development.

Some of these contradictions are particularly visible in areas where planned transformations remained incomplete or were redirected over time. Agricultural areas such as Cascinazza were subject to prolonged development pressures, while spaces along major infrastructure corridors gradually accommodated commercial, sports and leisure functions. In several cases, these processes favoured incremental development over the consolidation of a coherent spatial structure.

This condition also affected the potential role of boulevards, waterways and open-space systems as connective elements. Infrastructure is particularly significant in this respect: roads and railways that were sometimes conceived as boundaries to urban expansion also became vectors of further development. Together with the Canale Villoresi, these infrastructures contributed to physical and functional fragmentation and may have reduced spatial continuity between neighbourhoods and open spaces.

At a supra-local scale, similar processes are visible in the progressive merging of Monza's urban fabric with neighbouring municipalities, particularly towards the north-west. This condition, common to the wider northern Milan and Brianza urban region, reinforces the need to interpret Monza's landscape beyond municipal boundaries. The unresolved spatial legacies generated by these processes constitute important resources and challenges for contemporary planning.

A subtle yet dense pattern

Beyond the Villa Reale Park, Monza's landscape consists of discontinuous green, blue and open-space systems. Read together, waterways, agricultural remnants, parks, tree-lined boulevards, greenways and semi-public spaces reveal a latent network with the potential to support social interaction and everyday practices. This reading provides the basis for the possible landscape pattern developed below and is further articulated through three elements.

The first concerns the urban–rural interface, which is interpreted not simply as a boundary to urban expansion but as a potential connective space between built-up areas and open land. In this perspective, residual and undeveloped spaces can be recognised as active components of the landscape structure rather than as vacant land awaiting transformation.

The second concerns new transport infrastructures, whose effects may extend beyond mobility provision. If integrated with landscape and environmental strategies, planned rail, metro and road interventions could help reconnect fragmented open spaces, mitigate existing barriers and strengthen ecological and recreational continuity.

The third concerns inter-municipal cooperation. Since Monza's open-space systems extend beyond administrative boundaries, a broader territorial perspective is required to connect local and regional protected areas, reinforce ecological corridors and limit the further merging of neighbouring urbanised areas.

Defining the possible landscape pattern

The possible landscape pattern is not a masterplan, a completed green network or a prescriptive spatial model. It is an interpretive and project-oriented framework that brings together spatial resources already present in Monza but currently fragmented, weakly connected or insufficiently recognised by planning. These resources include waterways, tree-lined boulevards, residual agricultural land, public and semi-public open spaces, underused areas, urban–rural interfaces, slow-mobility routes and local centralities. The term “possible” therefore refers both to the partial material existence of these elements and to the relationships that could be established among them.

The pattern emerges from the diachronic comparison of Monza's planning instruments and from the distinction between planning intentions, their material outcomes and the spatial traces left by partially implemented or unrealised projects. Comparative redrawing reveals green wedges progressively reduced to isolated fragments, infrastructures operating at different times as boundaries and vectors of expansion, public facilities contributing to a dispersed “public city,” and unrealised interventions leaving residual spaces and unresolved urban edges. These continuities and contradictions do not constitute a single inherited structure; rather, they form a set of persistent spatial resources that can be reinterpreted within a contemporary landscape framework.

For proximity planning, the possible landscape pattern shifts attention from the distribution of services or fixed travel-time thresholds towards the spatial and environmental quality of the relationships between everyday destinations. In this sense, the

approach complements time-based interpretations of the 15-minute city (Moreno et al. 2021) by foregrounding differences in environmental quality and connectivity between neighbourhoods (Cremaschi et al. 2024).

Its relevance lies in its capacity to relate public facilities, green and blue spaces, pedestrian and cycling routes, residual areas, urban–rural interfaces and neighbourhood centralities across different scales. The pattern does not demonstrate that proximity or well-being has already been achieved. Rather, it identifies spatial conditions and locations in which landscape-based interventions could strengthen continuity, accessibility, legibility and the everyday usability of the urban fabric. It thus provides a bridge between the historical interpretation of planning legacies and the formulation of future urban projects.

Perspectives: from the possible pattern to city projects

The possible landscape pattern can guide projects operating at intermediate scales, from minimal landscapes and urban–rural interfaces to water systems, public spaces and mobility corridors. Possible interventions may include reconnecting fragmented open spaces, improving relationships between the city and its waterways, reusing unresolved urban edges and recognising underused or overlooked spaces as components of a wider landscape structure.

Rather than treating Monza's landscape as a collection of isolated problems, this approach interprets inherited spatial structures as adaptable resources for contemporary planning. Their reconnection may help strengthen environmental continuity while addressing climate resilience, energy transition and spatial justice (see Figure 6).

In this study, everyday well-being therefore extends beyond physical proximity to services (Mouratidis 2018). It also depends on the environmental quality, accessibility and usability of the spaces connecting everyday destinations (Mouratidis 2021). Green and blue spaces, walkable routes and public spaces may support physical activity, social interaction, environmental comfort and a sense of place. The possible landscape pattern does not measure well-being directly; rather, it identifies spatial resources (Paris 2026) and potential connections through which planning may support the quality of everyday urban experience (Barton and Grant 2006; Gehl 2006; Markevych et al. 2017).

Conclusions: from historical landscape patterns to everyday well-being

This paper has shown how Monza's present spatial conditions result from the cumulative effects of planning decisions made over almost a century. The comparative reading of the plans reveals two recurring ambitions: containing urban expansion and equipping the growing city with public spaces, services and green areas. Although only partially implemented, these intentions have left persistent traces in the contemporary urban landscape.

The concept of the "possible landscape pattern" brings these traces together within an interpretive and project-oriented framework. Waterways, tree-lined boulevards, residual green spaces, urban–rural interfaces, public facilities and slow-mobility routes are considered not as isolated elements, but as resources whose connections may be strengthened through future urban projects. The pattern therefore does not constitute a fixed masterplan, but a means of recognising and reactivating inherited spatial opportunities.

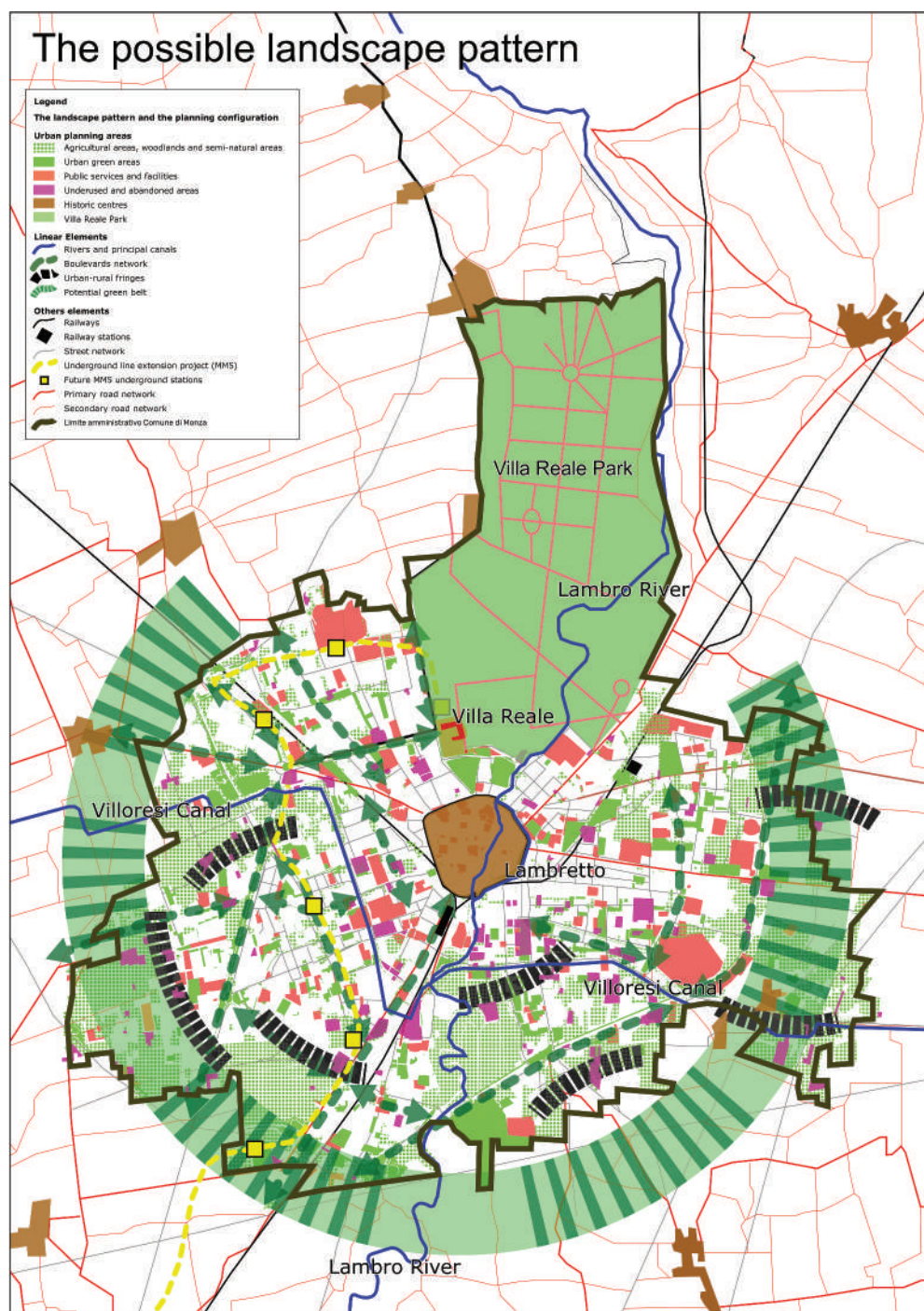


Figure 6. The possible landscape pattern: inherited resources and potential connections for proximity planning (source: Mario Paris 2026). Caption: The diagram does not represent a fixed masterplan. It identifies existing and residual landscape resources—including waterways, green and open spaces, public facilities, local centralities, urban–rural interfaces, and slow-mobility corridors—and the potential relationships through which they could form a more continuous and accessible everyday landscape.

From this perspective, proximity cannot be reduced to distance or travel-time thresholds. Everyday well-being also depends on the accessibility, environmental quality and usability of the spaces connecting services and daily destinations. The study does not directly measure well-being; rather, it identifies spatial conditions that may support walking, social interaction, environmental comfort and a stronger sense of place.

Although Monza's spatial configuration is context-specific, the study is not intended to propose a universally replicable model. Its transferability lies in the method: the diachronic comparison and standardised redrawing of planning instruments, the recognition of persistent and unresolved spatial resources, and their reinterpretation through a possible landscape pattern. This approach may be relevant to other medium-sized cities within metropolitan regions characterised by historical stratification, fragmented open spaces, water infrastructures and twentieth-century urban expansion, provided that it is adapted to their specific spatial and institutional conditions. Further research should assess these opportunities through accessibility analysis, field observation and participatory research on inhabitants' experiences.

Acknowledgments

This study is part of a broader research programme entitled *“Una pluralità di letture disciplinari volte a identificare e a descrivere le relazioni territoriali e gli scenari sottesi a costituire le componenti della carta comunale del paesaggio”*, commissioned by the Municipality of Monza—Servizio tutela e valorizzazione del paesaggio—and carried out by the Centro Studi Territoriali “Lelio Pagani” of the University of Bergamo. The research supported the preparation of a dossier for the development of the Carta condivisa del paesaggio for the future Territorial Government Plan (PGT).

The author thanks the colleagues who were members of the research team: Fulvio Adobati (coordinator), Arturo Arzuffi, Andrea Azzini, Elettra Barbieri, Renato Ferlinghetti, Elio Moschini, and Monica Resmini.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

The author used ChatGPT (GPT-5.6 Sol, OpenAI) to assist with English-language editing and stylistic refinement of the manuscript. All substantive content, analyses, interpretations, and final editorial decisions were reviewed and approved by the author, who takes full responsibility for the published text.

Funding

This research was supported by a research agreement commissioned and funded by the Municipality of Monza – Landscape Protection and Enhancement Service, and carried out by the Centro Studi Territoriali “Lelio Pagani” of the University of Bergamo.

ORCID

Mario Paris  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-1129-3609>

References

- Barton, H., and M. Grant. 2006. "A Health Map for the Local Human Habitat." *The Journal of the Royal Society for the Promotion of Health* 126 (6): 252–253. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1466424006070466>.
- Bottini, F. 2003. "a cura di." In *Monza. Piani 1913–1997*, Milan: Libreria CLUP.
- Brenner, N., eds. 2014. *Implosions/Explosions: Towards a Study of Planetary Urbanization*. Berlin: Jovis Verlag.
- Canesi, M., and B. Rocca. 1985. *Monza: sviluppo, identità culturale, ambiente*. Milan: Giessea.
- Corboz, A. 1983. "Le territoire comme palimpseste." *Diogenè* 121: 14–35. janvier-mars.
- Corner, J. 1999. "The Agency of Mapping: Speculation, Critique and Invention." In *Mappings*, edited by D. Cosgrove, 213–252. London: Reaktion Books.
- Cremaschi, M. 2024. "Grandeur et misère de la proximité urbaine Parisienne." In *Pour en finir avec le petit Paris*, edited by D. Behar, et al. 311–323. Paris: Archicity.
- Faglia, M. 2003. "Presentazione." In *(a cura di), Monza. Piani 1913–1997*, edited by F. Bottini, 7. Milan: Libreria CLUP.
- Ferlinghetti, R. 2009. "Paesaggi minimi e spazi urbani." In *Gli spazi urbani tra immaginario e realtà. Dintorni: Rivista di letteratura e culture dell'Università degli Studi di Bergamo*, edited by P. Cesaretti and R. Ferlinghetti, 273–296. Vol. 6 (Bergamo: Università degli studi di Bergamo).
- Ferlinghetti, R. 2026. "Per una rinnovata centralità del margine." In *(a cura di), Da Parco-città a Città-parco. Trame, interpretazioni, suggestioni*, edited by F. Adobati, R. Ferlinghetti, and M. Magni, 49–65. Monza: Comune di Monza.
- Font, A., eds. et al. 2007. *La explosión de la ciudad*. Madrid: Ministerio de Vivienda.
- Gehl, J. 2006. *Life Between Buildings*. 6th ed. Washington: Island Press.
- Iana Markevych, Julia Schoierer, Terry Hartig, Alexandra Chudnovsky, Perry Hystad, Angel M. Dzhambov, Sjerp de Vries, Margarita Triguero-Mas, Michael Brauer, Mark J. Nieuwenhuijsen, Gerd Lupp, Elizabeth A. Richardson, Thomas Astell-Burt, Donka Dimitrova, Xiaoqi Feng, Maya Sadeh, Marie Standl, Joachim Heinrich, Elaine Fuertes. 2017. "Exploring Pathways Linking Greenspace to Health: Theoretical and Methodological Guidance." In *Environmental Research*, 301–317. Vol. 158.
- Lanzani, A. 1991. *Il territorio al plurale*. Franco Angeli (Ed.), Milan.
- Legnani, F. 1994. "Monza. La lunga attesa per il piano." In *Urbanistica*, 100–103. Vol. 102.
- Majoli, G. E. 1997. Cronologia degli strumenti urbanistici a Monza. Unpublished Report.
- Majoli, G. E. 2021. Breve storia degli strumenti urbanistici a Monza, Online report, available at Accessed October, 2025, <https://www.vorrei.org/ambiente/13032-breve-storia-degli-strumenti-urbanistici-a-monza.html>.
- Moreno, C., Z. Allam, D. Chabaud, C. Gall, and F. Pratlong. 2021. "Introducing the '15-Minute City': Sustainability, Resilience and Place Identity in Future Post-Pandemic Cities." *Smart Cities* 4 (1): 93–111. <https://doi.org/10.3390/smartcities4010006>.
- Mouratidis, K. 2018. "Rethinking How Built Environments Influence Subjective Well-Being: A New Conceptual Framework." *Journal of Urbanism: International Research on Placemaking and Urban Sustainability* 11 (1): 24–40. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17549175.2017.1310749>.
- Mouratidis, K. 2021. "Urban Planning and Quality of Life: A Review of Pathways Linking the Built Environment to Subjective Well-Being." *Cities* 115: 103229. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cities.2021.103229>.
- Paris, M. 2026. "Monza e i suoi piani urbanistici. Continuità, contraddizioni e prospettive per progetti di città diversi, plurali ed inclusivi." In *Da parco-città a città-parco. Trame, interpretazioni, suggestioni*, edited by F. Adobati, R. Ferlinghetti, and M. Magni, 73–82. Monza: Comune di Monza.
- Paris, M., and A. Balducci. 2019. *Practicing a Polycentric (Post) Metropolis. A Dialogue About the Milan Urban Region*. Groningen NL: AESOP - InPlanning Ed.
- Portas, N., Á. Domingues, and J. Cabral. 2003. *Políticas Urbanas. Tendencias, estrategias e oportunidades*. Lisbon: Fundacao Calouste Gulbenkian.
- Secchi, B. 2000. *Prima lezione di urbanistica*. Rome: Editori Laterza.
- Senes, G., P. S. Ferrario, G. Cirone, N. Fumagalli, P. Frattini, G. Sacchi, and G. Valè. 2021. "Nature-Based Solutions for Storm Water Management—Creation of a Green Infrastructure Suitability Map as

a Tool for Land-Use Planning at the Municipal Level in the Province of Monza-Brianza (Italy).” *Sustainability* 13 (11): 1–18. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su13116124>.

Venturi, R. 1966. *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture*. New York: The Museum of Modern Art.

Viard, J. 1994. *La société d’archipel*. Avignon: Éditions de l’Aube.

Walker, R. 1994. *Edgy Cities, Technoblurbs and Simulcrumbs: Depthless Utopias and Dystopias on the Sub-Urban Fringe*. Los Angeles: University of California Press.