

A COMMUNITY MUSEUM IN MILAN: PARTICIPATION AS A FORM OF COUNTER-POLITICS

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ABSTRACT

The article analyses citizen participation in MUBIG, a community museum project, in the Milan's Greco district, curated by a cooperative within a multigenerational residential project. The forms of participatory curatorship that animate the MUBIG project are read here as a counter-narrative against the hegemonic dynamics that focus on urban regeneration, which is used as a Trojan horse to legitimise exclusive housing policies, rising housing costs, and neoliberal culture in general. The article critically analyses participatory practices from a methodological perspective, placing them within the contemporary scientific debate, highlighting in particular the relationship with the neighbourhood through the urban garden, as well as the role of walks and discovery boxes as tools for connecting with the urban and social fabric. Through these three foci, the aim is to demonstrate the political potential of museum participation at the local level, highlighting its function in resistance and its role as an interlocutor with institutions.

KEYWORDS:

neighbourhood museum, participation, urban regeneration, co-curating, community

INTRODUCTION

Can a community museum be a safeguard against gentrification, which attacks cities by driving up housing prices, accentuating the class divide and generating social tensions? How can the active involvement of citizens in practices of co-curatorship, collaborative construction of narratives and participatory museography ensure the dissemination of culture as a barrier

against neoliberal extractivism? Is intergenerationality, as a relational and design practice, successful in fostering identification with a territory, in terms of affection and investment? All these questions lie at the basis of MUBIG, a community museum born in 2020 in the Greco district, in the northeast of Milan.¹

Participation as a form of political activation in the artistic sphere characterised the social turn of the 1990s, finding its “natural” theatre in the museum, art fairs and the *kunsthalle*. Since the 1970s, museology has also experimented with participation, partly under the impetus of community-based, or participatory art; partly within the framework of a museological reflection dissatisfied with the encyclopaedic and “vertical” paradigm, which the epochal processes such as decolonisation and globalisation have only superficially undermined.² More generally, the convergence of the humanities around the theme of representation and its interpretations in the fields of cultural and visual studies also contributed to the process.³

1) The article was submitted in August 2023. Although other essays are being published that place this experience against the background of its socio-cultural context, the bibliography refers to texts published by this date.

2) On the transformation of museums at the turn of the 20th and 21st centuries, in terms of the multiplication of interpretations, see in particular Hilde S. Hein, *The Museum in Transition. A Philosophical Perspective* (Washington/London: Smithsonian Institution Press, 2002); Stephen E. Weil, *Making Museums Matter* (Washington/London: Smithsonian Institution Press, 2002); Gail Anderson, ed., *Re-inventing the Museum. Historical and Contemporary Perspectives on the Paradigm Shift* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2004); Ivan Karp, Corinne A. Kratz, Lynn Szwaja and Tomàs Ybarra Frausto, eds., *Museum Frictions. Public Cultures/Global Transformations* (Durham/London: Duke University Press, 2006); Simon Knell, ed., *The Contemporary Museum. Shaping Museums for the Global Now* (London/New York: Routledge, 2019). For a critical reading of this process through the lens of social justice, see in particular Richard Sandell, ed., *Museums, Society, Inequality* (London/New York: Routledge, 2002); Richard Sandell, *Museums, Prejudice and the Reframing of Difference* (London/New York: Routledge, 2007); Richard Sandell and Eithne Nightingale, eds., *Museums, Equality and Social Justice* (London/New York: Routledge, 2012); Robert R. Janes and Richard Sandell, eds., *Museum Activism* (London/New York: Routledge, 2019).

3) See for example Charles Jenks, ed., *Visual Culture* (London/New York: Routledge, 1995); Nicholas Mirzoeff, *An Introduction to Visual Culture* (London/New

Creating room for the public's voice in the museum – the traditional stronghold of high and specialised knowledge – entails a Copernican palingenesis that not everyone is willing to face (and, it must be said, sometimes also a trivialisation of the concept of participation that settles for small isolated gestures, without taking into account the political component of listening).⁴ Over the last twenty years, however, more and more museums have been including citizen groups, associations, stakeholders, people with histories of marginality and exclusion, but also anyone with a story to tell in the project process.⁵ I emphasise, as a condition for a true cultural shift, the aspect of the involvement of stakeholders and more generally citizens whose life trajectories are relevant to the museum's collections from the very beginning of the curatorial process, and throughout its development, possibly not on a voluntary basis but rather for remuneration, as the Van Abbemuseum in Eindhoven does, for example, with its constituent groups.

Having worked with participatory methodology for more than twenty years, I am aware of all the limitations from which the instrument suffers, particularly in the Italian context in which I operate: as Simona Bodo writes, for example, the misunderstanding of the museum as a “Samaritan” that benevolently lands a hand to the most fragile out of sheer “goodness” or “goodwill” is a widespread *vulnus* and an ingrained system of thought.⁶ The experience described in this article

York: Routledge, 1999); James Elkins, *Visual studies. A Skeptical Introduction* (London/New York: Routledge, 2003).

4) See Markus Miessen, *The Nightmare of Participation (Crossbench Praxis as a Mode of Criticality)* (London: Sternberg Press, 2011).

5) See Adele Chynoweth, Bernadette Lynch, Klaus Petersen and Sarah Smed, eds., *Museums and Social Change. Challenging the Unhelpful Museum* (London/New York: Routledge, 2021).

6) See Simona Bodo, “Requiem per il museo samaritano? Una provocazione” [A Requiem for the Samaritan Museum? A Provocation], *AGCult*, January 3, 2022, accessed August 26, 2023, <https://www.agenziacult.it/notiziario/requiem-per-il-museo-samaritano-una-provocazione/>.

is intended to represent an attempt at radical participation, which develops only what the community has agreed upon in a collaborative curatorial practice. Because it is nomadic, without a fixed location, and low-cost, we hope that the case of MUBIG can be inspiring and replicable in terms of method in other contexts as well.⁷

MUBIG: A COMMUNITY MUSEUM AND ITS RELATIONSHIP WITH THE CITY

At a time when the occupation of land in Milan, like in many other European cities, is driven by private speculation, and when the administration's communication strategy aggressively sells the "Milan brand" as if it were not only for the very rich, the real cultural and political challenge is to ask how to protect the few remaining traditional residential areas from being sold at a low price in order to make high profits, following a mechanism of urban cannibalism that makes the city an increasingly exclusive place.

In the spring of 2023, a large number of students set up tents in front of the main Italian universities, starting with the Politecnico di Milano, to express their discontent with the exorbitant cost of housing. The protest, which received considerable media coverage, initiated a necessary and long overdue debate on the dynamics of exclusion and social segregation that characterise our society, which is presented by aggressive propaganda as a carefree reign of "diversity", "inclusion" and "creativity". As the urbanist Lucia Tozzi writes:

7) MUBIG, accessed August 25, 2023, www.mubig.it. For a general overview of the project from an urban planning point of view, see also Borgo Intergenerazionale Greco, accessed August 25, 2023, www.bigreco.it.

Thanks to the Expo and the post-Expo media campaign, [Milan] has gained a reputation as a welcoming, liveable and cool city. Queen of greenwashing, it has climbed the rankings of sustainable cities while consuming more land, more oxygen and more waste than any other place. In spite of forced privatisation of services, and the concentration of investment in prestigious areas and luxury developments, Milan has proclaimed itself the Italian capital of participatory democracy and progressivism, and the ideal place for young people despite the exorbitant prices of housing and dining. A few kilometres of bicycle paths scattered here and there without any coherent design, small-scale interventions of “tactical urbanism”, a massive influx of shared cars, motorbikes and scooters, and a handful of coworking spaces and fablabs have served to fuel the rhetoric of the smart city and innovation, while the proliferation of pseudo-cultural events, the continuous celebration of festivals and weeks dedicated to fashion, cinema, art, literature, architecture, design, but also to food, esoteric sports, emotions and feelings, and pets, has facilitated its hegemonic presence on the national cultural pages.⁸

The village of Greco, on the eastern side of the city (from which its name seems to have originated, evoking Greece, and therefore by extension the “East”), was incorporated into Milan in 1923, like many other small towns amalgamated into what was about to become the “rising city”, with the industrialisation so well represented by Futurist paintings:⁹ the first Italian metropolis. Until then, Greco was an autonomous

8) Lucia Tozzi, *L'invenzione di Milano. Culto della comunicazione e politiche urbane* [The Invention of Milan. Cult of Communication and Urban Policies] (Naples: Cronopio, 2023). All translations of the quotations are by the author.

9) *La città che sale* (The City Rises) is the title of a famous painting by Umberto Boccioni, 1910–1911, oil on canvas, Museum of Modern Art, New York.

municipality. This is testified by its layout, which starts from the central square with the 17th-century church of San Martino. A canteen for the disadvantaged and homeless, the *Refettorio Ambrosiano* (Ambrosian Refectory), managed by the city's diocese, overlooks the square. Frequented daily by hundreds of people, during the 2015 Expo, it was entrusted to a renowned chef and enriched with contemporary works of art. The rest of the neighbourhood has a few valuable historical traces (e.g. the Segnano Chapel, whose frescoes are preserved in the Louvre; fragments of rural farmsteads and ancient frescoes in the villas *de plaisance*, holiday homes of Milanese aristocratic families),¹⁰ that punctuate the 20th-century configuration, characterised on the one hand by the transformation of some old rural farmsteads, historically intended for a single extended family and its animals, into private single-family dwellings, and on the other by the construction of middle-class apartment blocks that sprang up mainly in the 1960s and 1970s.

The railway tracks leading north-east from the city centre delimit the district on its eastern side, while the southern side is marked by the Martesana canal, the main section of which was covered over during Fascism for hygienic reasons, according to a project that transformed Milan from a city of water into a city of asphalt, changing its connotations forever.¹¹ The presence of water is central to the history and memory of Greco: many women, in fact, worked as laundresses (with some farmsteads still preserving the stone washhouse); the

10) Gianni Banfi, *Greco ieri. Aspetti di vita e tradizioni di un antico borgo milanese* [Greco Yesterday. Aspects of Life and Traditions of an Ancient Milanese Village] (Milan: Longe Prospicio, 1997). By the same author see also *Greco. Aspetti di vita e tradizioni fra le due guerre* [Greco. Aspects of Life and Traditions Between the Two Wars] (Milan: Longe Prospicio, 1988), and *Quelli di Greco* [Those of Greco] (Milan: Longe Prospicio, 2023).

11) On Milan's recent urban planning policies, see also Jacopo Lareno Faccini and Alice Ranzini, *L'ultima Milano. Cronache dai margini di una città* [The Latest Milan. Chronicles from the Margins of a City] (Milan: Feltrinelli, 2021).

canal had sandy bends here and there used as beaches, while the bridges served as perfect springboards from which to dive. Water was fundamental to agriculture, one of the main pillars of the economy of this area until the 1930s, when it was gradually replaced by labour.¹² The presence of such marked boundaries has ensured the neighbourhood a relatively stable identity over time. Immigration in the 1980s and 1990s led to greater cultural diversity, with the opening of a number of businesses run by immigrants (especially restaurants and grocery stores), but it did not substantially change the neighbourhood, as it happened in the neighbouring Via Padova (Padua Street).

Greco presents itself as an altogether safe community with a lively social fabric: it has numerous citizens' associations, a "social street",¹³ a parish centre with multi-purpose halls, a seniors' university, numerous sports grounds – such as the basketball court financed by the NBA player Danilo Gallinari – and some important cultural spaces, including the Leoncavallo social centre, a historic site of left-wing dissident culture, and a rehearsal hall of the Teatro alla Scala (La Scala Theatre).

The cooperative behind the museum's design and curatorship, ABCittà (of which I have been a member for many years, first as an associate and since 2020 as a scientific collaborator for MUBIG), has been active in the field of participatory design for

12) The most important factories in Lombardy, such as Breda, Falk, Marelli and Pirelli, are located right next to the district. During the Second World War they were the scene of a very strong anti-fascist resistance and many workers were deported and killed in concentration camps. The memory of this resistance is preserved and disseminated by the ISEC – Institute for the History of Contemporary Age in Sesto San Giovanni (Milan).

13) "Social streets", an English expression also used in the Italian context, have become quite widespread, especially after the Covid-19 pandemic. They are an informal association of citizens living in the same street, or in the same neighbourhood, who organise themselves to share tools and resources, in the name of greater sociality and subsidiarity. Typical activities of a social street are dinners in courtyards, parties, vintage markets, free yoga or dance classes, etc.

more than twenty years.¹⁴ Composed of architects, sociologists, urban planners, and social workers, ABCittà has over time defined its “ecological” profile, aimed at the empowerment and valorisation of the existing resources therefore counterbalancing the rhetoric of “urban regeneration” as a panacea that, in our opinion, has often brought residents more harm than good.¹⁵ Starting from an awareness of our own shortcomings in this area, ABCittà’s assemblies have, over the years, focused on how to communicate, more effectively, the work that has been done. In an aggressive market, where funding is no longer guaranteed by the public sector but increasingly by banking foundations, or in any case by the private sector, we realised that strengthening the network of relations and knowledges already existing on the area would become our objective. In retrospect, when assessing the effects of cultural policies on the city over the last decade, fidelity to a certain understatement, also dictated by the urgency to focus more on people than on the “cult of communication” characterizing the field, proved to be a respectful and protective choice for the neighbourhood’s citizens (**Fig. 1**).

14) Based in Milan, the collective has worked mainly in the urban and regional territory, also participating in national and European projects focused above all on the protection of minors, on the fight against prejudices and stereotypes and on the negotiation of conflicts (in prison, in low-income neighbourhoods, in Roma camps etc.). See ABCittà, accessed August 25, 2023, www.abcitta.org.

15) Neil Smith, *The New Urban Frontier and the Revanchist City* (London/New York: Routledge, 1996); Neil Brenner and Nik Theodore, eds., *Spaces of Neoliberalism. Urban Restructuring in North America and Western Europe* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2002); Veronica Guerrieri, Daniel Hartley and Erik Hurst, “Endogenous Gentrification and Housing Price Dynamics,” *Journal of Public Economics*, no. 100 (2013), 45–60; Giovanni Semi, *Gentrification. Tutte le città come Disneyland?* [Gentrification. All Cities Like Disneyland?] (Bologna: il Mulino, 2015).



Fig. 1. A general view of the housing project called BiG, where MUBIG is located. © ABCittà.

THE MUSEUM ON THE DOORSTEP

The MUBIG museum was created within a project, developed by ABCittà since 2016, involving the renovation of an old farmhouse, which had been used until the 1970s and then converted into a complex of mini-apartments. Within the framework of a public-private project, based on the proposal and social design of the collective in agreement with the financiers, the flats have been allocated to three groups of residents: university students or young workers, self-sufficient elderly people, and single parents with children (only the latter sent by the Municipality's Social Services). ABCittà plays the role of a service provider, based on a 30-year agreement (**Fig. 2**).¹⁶

16) Anna Chiara Cimoli, *Un quartiere, una corte, un museo. Il modello BiG/MUBIG a Greco, Milano* [A Neighbourhood, a Court, a Museum. The BiG/MUBIG Model in Greco, Milan], in *Per una Nuova Casa Italiana. Prospettive di ricerca e di progetto per la post-pandemia*, eds. Michela Bassanelli, Imma Forino, Luca Lanini and Marco Lucchini (Pisa: Pisa University Press), 2023, 64–73. The paper was presented at the national conference *Per una Nuova Casa Italiana 2*, DESTEC – Università di Pisa and DASTU – Politecnico di Milano, June 15, 2022.



Fig. 2. The area prior to redevelopment. © ABCittà.

The project, whose first inhabitants arrived in 2019, envisages rent at reduced prices, decidedly advantageous compared to the average cost of housing, within a framework of skills and services exchange both within the complex and aimed at the neighbourhood. Intergenerationality is considered here a powerful tool in order to overcome the fragmentation that characterises life in large cities, constituting a very serious brittle point. Numerous common spaces and facilities are available (meeting room, laundry, bike workshop, climbing wall, condominium library that also serves as a coworking and study space, archive, children's play area). There are also activities encouraging residents to participate (book club, care of the urban vegetable garden, zero-mile market, food distribution for vulnerable families, cultural events, etc.). The pact is in fact based on the commitment to dedicate a certain number of hours, approximately ten per month, to social activities and participation in the life of the neighbourhood, on a voluntary basis and welcoming the proposals of each inhabitant. It happens, for example, that some of the elderly make themselves available for babysitting or help with children's homework, while

the young people, who are freer in the evenings or at weekends, take care of cultural events or ensure the distribution of food and medicine on cargo bikes.

The long and slow process of integrating into the neighbourhood, for those of us who had not lived there before, was a real challenge, and a discovery. The fact that we moved the cooperative's headquarters here, guaranteeing a presence during office hours, allowed us to get to know well both the new inhabitants, who gradually chose to settle in Greco, and the citizens of the neighbourhood, some of whom turned out to be very strong allies. We formed a partnership based on collaboration and friendship with the historian of Greco, Gianni Banfi, a tireless scholar of the neighbourhood as well as a cultural animator. Thanks to his own networks and empathy, Gianni opened the doors to places and relations that, in an exponential way, allowed us to encounter a rich, stratified memory, in which rural and working-class Milan intertwines with the new face of the city.

The neighbourhood museum project was born after a long phase of listening within the Museums and Society working group of the cooperative. From the start it was conceived as a fluid and "light" project, without a physical location but capable of collecting and reviving memory, while connecting old and new inhabitants. MUBIG, which received funding from a private foundation,¹⁷ was designed in collaboration with two partners: the Pinacoteca di Brera, the prestigious national museum directed by James Bradburne, and a local radio station called Stazione Radio. I have described the motivations and dynamics of these collaborations elsewhere.¹⁸ Here, I am particularly

17) MUBIG was financed by the Fondazione di Comunità Milano.

18) Anna Chiara Cimoli, "Il museo di quartiere: agopuntura culturale per 'modeste rivoluzioni'" [Neighbourhood Museum: Cultural Acupuncture for 'Modest

interested in specifying the meaning of the collaboration between a small *agit-prop* group and a large national museum, based on the common desire to explore the relationship between the museum and the neighbourhood. The Brera Art Gallery, located in the neighbourhood of the same name, once the lively cultural centre of popular and bohemian Milan, now home to luxury showrooms and representative offices, was in fact interested in the methods used by ABCittà in facilitating dialogue with citizens and weaving relationships on a local scale. Within the framework of the collaboration, through a number of workshops, the educational staff of the two museums exchanged skills and practices, following a peer education model that drew on the *savoir-faire* that each had in its toolbox (for Brera, expertise in caption writing, mediation aimed at children and families, digital communication tested and enhanced during the recent pandemic experience; for ABCittà, expertise in cognitive accessibility, easy-to-read writing, active listening techniques). An attempt was made never to resort to the “centre-periphery” polarisation (the centre going to the periphery with a “colonial” or “Samaritan” approach), nor to the concept of “culturally-based regeneration” (Greco does not need to be “regenerated”, let alone by external actors). Sharing this approach from the outset made it possible to establish a pact of clarity and “protection” with respect to the project.¹⁹

MUBIG aims to enhance the history of the neighbourhood not in a nostalgic but in a project-oriented way, with a focus on young

Revolutions’], *AES Arts+Economics*, April 2023, 150–163; Id., “‘A Sense of Place’. Musei e questione abitativa” [‘A Sense of Place’. Museums and the Housing Issue], in *Il museo necessario. Mappe per tempi complessi*, eds. Simona Bodo and Anna Chiara Cimoli (Busto Arsizio: Nomos edizioni, 2023), 179–196; Id., “‘Decolonising’ Museums Through Experimental Practices. The Case of MUBIG, a Neighbourhood Museum in Milan,” *Studia de Arte et Educatione*, no. 17 (2022), 61–72.

19) See the video made by the Pinacoteca di Brera and published on its YouTube channel, accessed August 26, 2023. <https://bit.ly/4imofnL>.

people. The activities it proposes – exhibitions, urban walks, discovery boxes, and other actions that will be described in the next paragraph – are designed with those inhabitants who have shown a desire to collaborate, within the “pact” I mentioned above.

PARTICIPATION IN PRACTICE: METHODS, ACTIONS AND PERSPECTIVES

The museum's project design largely overlapped with the Covid-19 lockdown (in Milan, two long periods between 2020 and 2021). The forced isolation and confinement at home prompted a reflection that has filtered into the process, which was forcedly transferred online. In collaboration with Greco Positiva (Positive Greco), an association of citizens active in the protection and enhancement of local tangible and intangible heritage, a call for documents was issued, starting with the question of which places in the neighbourhood were the richest in memory. The call was circulated via social networks and through postcards distributed in mailboxes and in the few shops that were open (pharmacies, grocery shops...). We received a huge amount of material (digital images, vintage photos and entire albums, scans of letters and documents of various kinds, books, pamphlets...) which we acquired digitally and which forms the core of MUBIG's digital archive.

Starting from this invaluable piece of public history, we worked with Stazione Radio to create a series of podcasts which, by referring to a map (both digital and paper), and using QR codes, allow a visit to the neighbourhood through the memory of its inhabitants.²⁰ The launch of the podcast (spring 2022)

20) Izi.Travel, accessed August 25, 2023, <https://izi.travel/it/felb-mubig-museo-di-comunita/it>.

was accompanied by a series of urban walks conducted by the inhabitants themselves, attended by a total of about 500 citizens. The word-of-mouth triggered by this process brought back to Greco families who had lived there in the past and who contributed to the reconstruction of pieces of history through a programme of interviews and the collection of documents for the museum collection (**Fig. 3, Fig. 4**).



Fig. 3. Gianni Banfi, a co-curator of MUBIG and neighbourhood resident, during the recording of the podcast. © ABCittà.



Fig. 4. One of the urban walks promoted by MUBIG, Spring 2022. © ABCittà.



Fig. 5. Detail of an exhibition on the transformation of the building and the neighbourhood, 2022. © ABCittà.



Fig. 6. The director of the Pinacoteca di Brera, James Bradburne, in dialogue with the inhabitants of the Greco district as part of the exhibition co-curated with MUBIG, May 2022. © ABCittà.

In May 2022, in collaboration with the Pinacoteca di Brera, we co-curated an exhibition of self-portraits by the 20th century Italian artists (Dino Buzzati, Fausto Melotti, Bruno Munari, and Mimmo Rotella) from the Cesare Zavattini Collection preserved in the museum. The exhibition *Inhabitants* started from the question of where to place the threshold between self and others, between individuality and collectivity, particularly in the light of the pandemic. Around the exhibition, a palimpsest of activities was built including a portrait workshop in collaboration with a neighbourhood art school, a talk with director James Bradburne, a visit to the parish, which, as we discovered on this very occasion, holds two ancient works from the Brera collection, and more (**Fig. 5, Fig. 6**).

The other activity co-designed with the Pinacoteca di Brera refers to two *discovery boxes* dedicated to the themes of physical and of perceived borders, based on a suggestion by the inhabitants, who have often highlighted the centrality of the border in the life of the neighbourhood, both in its tangible dimensions (the railway, the canal, etc.) and in immaterial ones (defined by class, gender, employment, age, etc.). The two series of discovery boxes, each produced in several copies, are designed to be lent, following the classic library mechanism, to schools, sports centres, families, and individuals. Each box, which is shaped like a suitcase, contains a series of materials and a *vademecum* that briefly explains the proposed activities, organising them by age group. The activities are above all conceived as “conversation starters”: the aim is not to obtain a result, but to share perceptions and experiences, within a framework of exchange on sensitive topics often perceived as taboo. The materials (maps, balls of wool, flashcards, reproductions of authentic photographs from the collection, measuring instruments, etc.) also serve as mediators, activating

reflections, thus overcoming the sense of embarrassment that can sometimes arise when one feels invited to express oneself in front of others (Fig. 7).



Fig. 7. Testing of discovery boxes with a high school, May 2022. © ABCittà.

The psychogeographic dimension of urban drift,²¹ which lies in the background of the activities to be done using the discovery boxes and which is a method that is often present in our planning, also informs the last strand of research that I am presenting in this article: the one linked to the shared care of the neighbourhood vegetable garden, entrusted to a group of citizens and associations of which ABCittà is a member. The vegetable garden, initially established autonomously by a small group of residents in a degraded area near the railway arches, was taken over in 2020 from a planning point of view by the

21) See for example Gert J.J. Biesta and Gillian Cowell, "How Is Community Done? Understanding Civic Learning through Psychogeographic Mapping," *International Journal of Lifelong Education*, no. 31/1 (2012): 47–61; and Francesco Careri, *Walkscapes: el andar como práctica estética* [Walking as an Aesthetic Practice] (Barcelona: Gili, 2002).

Milan City Council, which carried out the work of reclaiming the surrounding land, creating paths and installing benches, as well as an external gate.²² The care of the garden, which we are currently reflecting on in light of future projects, intertwines many themes that are becoming increasingly relevant to the future life of the museum and its agency: the connection with the neighbourhood through a permanent garrison for the collection of stories (public history), the reflection on environmental sustainability, the protection of a communal space, the potential to guarantee a minimum food support for those in need, and more.²³ The garden, with its dog area, walking spaces, vegetables plots and a climbing wall soon to be installed under the railway arches, effectively serves as an open-air extension of MUBIG. By renouncing the solidity of walls, the rhetoric of an urban regeneration that is as photogenic as it is aggressive, and the appropriation of resources, narratives and spaces, MUBIG aims above all to be a place for active citizenship.

CONCLUSIONS

The aggressive dynamics of tourism, real estate speculation and an increasingly “hit and run” idea of culture have put many urban ecosystems to the test in recent years; Milan’s is no exception. We started from the question of whether a small neighbourhood museum, lacking its own resources and therefore constrained to short-term planning, could become a space for cultural resistance, for nurturing relations and the

22) The garden, Bing, is managed by a group of associations coordinated by Legambiente Milano (ABCittà, the Ferrante Aporti Sammartini association, the Borgo Cascina Conti company and the Social street Greco Positiva). See Legambiente Lombardia, accessed August 26, 2023, <https://www.legambientelombardia.it/il-giardino-condiviso-di-greco-bing-rinasce/>.

23) See Helen V.S. Cole, Margarita Triguero-Mas, James J.T. Connolly and Isabelle Anguelovski, “Determining the Health Benefits of Green Space: Does Gentrification Matter?,” *Health & Place*, no. 57 (2019): 1–11.

expression of instances and desires.²⁴ To date, we can answer in the affirmative: in these first three years, MUBIG has hosted exhibitions, workshops, urban walks; it has attracted the attention of the Milan Triennale, which has “moved” some of the theatre season’s performances there,²⁵ and the Bicocca University, which has earmarked a PhD scholarship for its analysis (2023–2026). But the greatest achievement is seeing how the museum has become a permanent hub for the neighbourhood’s inhabitants, who regularly stop by the ABCittà headquarters to exchange information, make proposals or simply have a chat.

Based on the analysis of the existing data, the next three years will be marked not so much by the planning of events, manifestations and outputs, but by the consolidation of the dynamics of co-curatorship, with a consistent focus on the intergenerational dimension, on reflection on the costs of contemporary living and on caring as a form of political resistance.²⁶

24) We refer to the reflection of Andrea Staid, *Abitare illegale. Etnografia del vivere ai margini in Occidente* [Illegal Living. Ethnography of Living on the Margins in the West] (Milan: Edizioni Milieu, 2017).

25) Triennale Milano, accessed August 26, 2023, <https://triennale.org/memorie-future>.

26) On this last point, see Marie Moise, Chiara Organtini and Giulia Grechi, eds., *CURA: Care – Cure – Curate*, monographic number of *Roots\$Routes. Research on Visual Cultures*, no. 42 (May–August 2023), accessed August 26, 2023, <https://www.roots-routes.org/>.