
Almatourism

Journal of Tourism, Culture and Territorial Development

When Music Invades the Urban Spaces: the Piano City Festival in Milan, a New Paradigm of Sociability?

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ABSTRACT

In 2010 the pianist and composer Andreas Kern organized Piano City, a metropolitan piano festival with original and innovative elements: the locations for the concerts are living rooms; the profile of the executors and interpreters include professional musicians, but also piano students, teachers, amateurs and piano-lovers; the heterogeneity of the musical genres (classic music, rock, jazz etc.); last but not least, the use of the Internet as a medium to publicize the event. Inspired by Kern's idea, Ludovico Einaudi first organized a Milanese edition of Piano City in 2011. Since then, the piano-festival has represented a significant episode in the recent revamping of the city image after a period in which it had become dull and weak.

Milan has interpreted at its best the philosophy of this event: the promotion of typical places, the use of the web and of social media, the urban hospitality and the free exhibitions, the inhabitants' involvement, the incentive to explore the city in order to rediscover and reappropriate the public spaces; these are just some of the strengths of Piano City Milan: these elements make this piano festival an opportunity for the construction of a collective sense of place and a new paradigm of urban sociability that offers the city the chance to redeem itself, its own identity and to activate new forms of self-narrative.

Keywords: Piano; Festival; Milan; Territorialisation; Music; Community; Urban Style

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1. Tourism as a heterocentered process of territorialisation?

We usually refer to the word tourism as a singular noun, but it would be more appropriate to use it in its plural form, “tourisms”: the list of the different experiences we can access to becomes longer every year, and today it includes such activities as dental tourism, shark tourism, LGBT tourism, slum tourism, stag party tourism, bankruptcy tourism, wedding tourism... Along with this proliferation of new forms of tourism, the existing ones constantly change owing to the role of old and new factors such as entrepreneurial culture and management, social theories, Information Technologies, heritage, climatic change, public policy, cultural conflicts, sexual identity, imaginary, sustainability, planning, religion, hospitality. Everything seems to agree with Gui Lohmann and Alexandre Panosso Netto when they observe that: “Tourism means much more than can be expressed by a simple word” (Lohmann, Panosso Netto, 2017, p. 26); or, as Claudio Minca e Tim Oakes claim, tourism is “a constitutive force in the social world”, “capable of reassembling our understanding of contemporary life” (Minca, Oakes, 2014, pp. 298 and 301). As a global phenomenon, tourism appears to be limitless and to absorb heterogeneous and endless perspectives, perceptions and interpretations, activities and relations, so that we can really say that *nothing human is alien to it* (Cunha, 2014, p. 100).

Within this context, the definitions and implications of tourism discussed here share a common and recurring element. We can express it in the simplest possible way by saying that *nobody is a tourist at home, for example in their own city* – it would be a contradiction. Above everything else, the touristic experience has one distinguishing feature: its undeniable nucleus lies in relocation, that is to say in momentarily putting a distance, a physical and mental detachment from the world of everyday life. Therefore, a journey is not “tourism” in itself (simply because it is so), even though there is no tourism without a journey, a departure, a separation from ordinary activities and places: the escapist moments need specific escapist spaces, far from home. Any examples? It would be enough to browse through a seminal work on this topic, the book that John Urry devoted, some decades ago, to *the tourist gaze* (first edition 1990). In its more recent edition, co-authored with Jonas Larsen, Urry further emphasizes one of the key tenets of his analysis: tourism is a “separate sphere” of our life, something that always implies an inversion of the ordinary, a breaking with the everyday that «necessarily involves some movement through space, that is, the journeys and periods of stay in a new place or places» (Urry, Larsen, 2011, p. 4). Separation, breaking, inversion... there is always a difference between the places where one lives and works and the places of touristic experience, so that the touristic use ends, or is interrupted, once someone returns to their everyday life and their usual place of residence.

To be precise, the distinction between “everyday life in usual places” and “extraordinary life in new places” at the basis of Urry’s argument might be compared to the pair of host and guest, which, as we read in Jafar Jafari and Hongen Xiao’s *Encyclopedia of Tourism*, “lies at the heart of tourism” (Jafari, Xiao, 2016, p. 436). A

binary logic dominates even in this opposition, since you cannot be one and the other at the same time. If the one who welcomes (*host*) is necessary to establish that special human relationship which is called hospitality (as Camargo, 2015, observes, for example), the one who is received, the guest – as we see in the guidelines of the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) – is a *visitor*, that is to say, any person travelling to a place other than that of his/her usual environment (from this point of view, the tourist is a visitor who stays at least one night in the place/country visited) (United Nations, 1994). This definition challenges customary notions of “visitor”, “other place”, “usual”, “environment” and “place or country visited”; if we turn it upside down in order to focus on other side of the coin, the host becomes any person who does not leave their usual environments/places/countries.

Urry’s argument that the touristic experience requires moving away from the “usual places” is also central to a recent volume edited by the Italian journalist Marco D’Eramo, who insists on the opposition between full and empty spaces. In D’Eramo’s view, tourism is a constant in and outbound flux: during the summer, cities become empty as their inhabitants go to the seaside, but at the same time they are filled with tourists coming from outside (Interestingly D’Eramo, who is Italian, overlooks the numerous cities that are located along the Italian coasts and islands, where there is no need to go much further away to take a dip). D’Eramo discusses tourism even as a “separation tool between residents and visitors” and an “invisible wall between the group of the temporary residents (“visitors”) and the actual residents (“natives”)” (D’Eramo, 2017, pp. 141 and 142). There is no other possibility, *tertium non datur*: the visited territory (city or country) is either a residential place or a place for visiting and discovering; accordingly, one may be a host or a guest, a resident or a visitor, a tourist or a native, but is never both at the same time.

The double rule of breaking with everyday practices and spatial relocation is so strong that even when such authors as Cecilia Pasquinelli scrutinize the complex urban forms of city tourism, they can only say that “cities are becoming places for visitors and guests rather than place for inhabitants” (Pasquinelli, 2017, p. 37); Pasquinelli hopes that in a “hospitable city” the admixture of inhabitants and visitors might fill “the gap between hosts and guests (“meaning between tourists and residents”, thus laying the foundations for overcoming tensions and conflicts over the use, appropriation, and control of the urban space. At the same time, she also admits that «This does not seem to happen, however, and quite the opposite emerges in many capital cities where an anti-tourism sentiment is apparent» (ivi, pp. 37-38). The distinction-separation between tourist and resident is thus implicitly confirmed. Indirectly, it is also present in the theorization of the figures of the *urban tourist* and the *urban traveller*. The former is a traditional type of (cultural) tourist that visits museums and monuments; the latter implies a passive reception of culture, a mere admiration of standardized images of the place. However, urban travellers looks for first-hand genuine experiences of the city and wants to delve into the “urban ordinary” and live “like a local” – thus they do not simply admire a urban culture from an external perspective (e.g. the tango in Buenos Aires), but they interact with the urban environment and the local instructors (“experiential learning”), and when they return home they have learnt how to dance.

Neither the *urban tourist* nor the *urban traveller*, however, is a true inhabitant of the city, they are external and temporary users.

All these aspects may be summarized by saying that *tourism is a form of heterocentred territorialisation*. With this expression I am referring to the “geographical theory of complexity” outlined by the Italian geographer Angelo Turco (Turco, 1988, 2010, 2012; see also Minca, 2009 and 2012, for the fundamental influence of Raffestin's thought). According to Turco, territorialisation, – that is to say, the process of anthropization of the Earth, – coincides with the ability of a single culture to transform and organize the physical space, and thus to produce the *territory*, a dynamic field that is at once the prerequisite and the outcome of social action. It is a *prerequisite* because the territory is pre-existent, and thus it defines the conditions of present and future existence; and it is an *outcome* because the community (that produces it) is mirrored on it and finds its values, its abilities, its aims, and its own identity in it. From this point of view, territorialisation needs to be self-centered: it projects on terrestrial spaces endogenous needs, aspirations and aims which are intrinsic to the community that inhabits a certain portion of Earth surface. This self-referential and self-organized character enables inhabitants to reach their aims; In other cases, however, the logic governing the territory might be *heterocentred*, based on (or responding to) a cultural and spatial context that is different from the one of the societies that inhabits it. In this case we have the intrusion and conflation of forms and practices of territorialisation that are “alien”, and thus “a geography which is conceived, promoted, directed from the outside” (Turco, 1988, p. 147). Seen from a traditional perspective based on “separation and dislocation”, tourism should definitely be included in this definition: it is a way of organizing the territory through an external focus point, which is not based on the residents but on the visitors’ expectations (and this is exactly where most of its conflicting traits come from). In tourism marketing, landscapes and events, the promotion of local customs and cultures, and the very image of a place etc. are constructed with the primary aim of attracting the attention of external subjects, and to convince them that they need to visit a specific country (which is different from their own) to feel good (“you can find here something that the places of your everyday life do not have”). At a first glance, the definition of tourism as *a form of heterocentred territorialisation* foregrounds what is essential and emphasises, without any frills, a key feature of the touristic experience. One may wonder whether this is always the case. Is tourism always a form of heterocentred territorialisation based on the separation of usual and unusual environments, and the neat distinction between guest and resident, or are there any touristic experiences that overcome such binary distinctions?

One may reasonably doubt this. For instance, the clear-cut distinction between “practices of everyday life” and “tourism” seems to be based on an ideological view of the world in which people are seen as mostly immovable. As if people lived in the places of their lives continuously and hardly moving. This is a world where moving represented a temporary transgression from routine (as in Maurice Le Lannou’s definition of the *homme habitant* or “inhabitant man”; see Le Lannou, 1949; Tanca, 2014). From this perspective, the distinction host/guest was still relevant in that it enabled a prompt identification of roles and practices that were clearly different and

could not be confused. The necessity of a physical and mind detachment engendered by the touristic experience was perfectly compatible with this mind frame. However, Minca and Oakes observe that such stiff binaries are no longer meaningful in the world we live in, whose chief values are not strong territorial roots and immobility. Rather, mobility and dislocation stand out as life rules. In the so-called post-industrial and late capitalistic societies, we witness a process of interpenetration and indistinction between everyday life and tourism, here and elsewhere, self-centered and heterocentred practices: “Doesn’t it seem more the case that we travel to introduce a bit of disorder to our regulated and routinized daily lives? Doesn’t travel refresh and revive us because our narrow views of the world become disrupted as we expand our horizons? Such views, we feel, constitute more an ideology of travel than actual traveling practice. [...] travel never really escapes places” (Minca, Oakes, 2006, pp. 14-15). In order to illustrate this change, in the next section I will deal with a musical festival that has been organized in Milan for several years, *Piano City*. Thanks to its peculiarities, this festival seems to provide a positive answer to the question – indeed, it is a case in which there is no relocation, the distinction between the “separate spheres” is suppressed and the places where these events take place are also the ones of the everyday life usually experienced by the inhabitants of the city.

In order to highlight these features, I will first examine the history of this piano festival, open to everyone and involving urban spaces that are usually not associated with music. To this end, I will briefly focus on the Berlin, Naples, and Palermo editions (paragraph 2). Subsequently, I will investigate the rationale for the Milan edition. As the result of a process I have labelled “musicalization of the city,” *Piano City Milan* is distinguished by a few specific features that are closely connected with the topical qualities and multiple scenarios that the capital of Lombardy offers (paragraphs 3-4). I will then discuss this event against the backdrop of the recent history of Milan in order to ascertain whether it contributed to that process of identity re-writing that has transformed Milan into a “creative” and “shared” city (paragraph 5). As a last point, I will examine the ways in which *Piano City Milan* overcomes the customary distinction between “places of everyday life” and “tourist places” and builds forms of urban sociability based on inclusive practices in people’s everyday places (paragraph 6).

2. Piano City in Berlin, Naples, Palermo

The history of *Piano City* began in 2010, when the pianist and composer Andreas Kern organized a metropolitan piano festival in Berlin that presented, right from the start, a series of original and innovative elements: (i) the locations of the concerts; (ii) the profile of the executors and interpreters; (iii) the variety of musical genres; (iv) the use of the Internet. *Piano City Berlin* is a “widespread event” that took concerts out of canonical places such as music halls and theatres, for two days (23-24 October) in order to territorialize them around the city. The chosen locations – from private salons to living rooms – paid homage to the 19th century German tradition of the *Hausmusik* (“domestic music”), the custom of gathering in a house, among the domestic walls, in

order to *musizieren*, to play music together, in a non-public context. The executors involved in the Berlin festival are not only professional musicians, but also piano students, teachers, amateurs and piano-lovers that decide to open their homes to the public and host people for a concert (the landlord might either be playing, or simply hosting a pianist). The pieces that are played cover a wide range of musical genres, from classical music, to pop and jazz (see the poster of the event in **fig. 1**: *Free Jazz in Friedrichshain? Debussy in Mitte? Bach in Moabit?*, where Friedrichshain, Mitte and Moabit are the names of three neighbourhoods in Berlin). Moreover, *Piano City Berlin* was the first piano festival entirely organized via the Internet: the executors were able to post their candidacy using their smartphone and uploading clips directly onto the website of the event; the participants could post their availability to host in their own living room a pianist and some guests; tickets could be purchased at the price of 5 euros while browsing the concert list online; the audience could create their own “musical tour” through the various events scattered across the city by using Google Maps. This allowed every Berliner to create their personal playlist, by choosing the locations and programmes they liked best, and thus plan their own route through the German capital¹. In other words, *Piano City* laid the foundations for a “musicalization of the city”; where the locations, the protagonists, the Internet and the community approach enable to experience various forms of cultural tourism. As the creator of the festival put it:

One of my ideas has always been to dip a whole city into music. When all the windows would open, and piano music could be heard on the streets and reach all people: That would be just wonderful! Everyone was able to apply with a cell phone video: One minute play and one minute declaration of intention. And there are all nationalities represented. That provides the festival with a very good and colourful mixture. I hope, Piano City will have different effects. First of all, I want to take out the pianists from their lonely practicing. Secondly, I wish to attract more attention to this instrument. Many synergies will take place. Perhaps, neighbours will have more attention to the pianist's rehearsing next door, because they are invited to the concert. Finally, I hope that there will be a get-together in the city that intensifies a city-feeling. We almost had all living room concerts sold out. Piano City is starting shot in Berlin. That is a great point of origin. But we hope that Piano City will take place in other cities, too. And that is actually possible in any city (Kern, 2012).



Figure 1: Free Jazz in Friedrichshain? Debussy in Mitte? Bach in Moabit? The poster of Piano City Berlin (2010)

One of the strong points of the Berlin kermesse is its exportability: *Piano City* is a type of event which, due to its inherent characteristics, can be repeated, remodelled and reterritorialized successfully in other locations. What is important is that the original spirit of the manifestation is preserved. This is what has happened in Milan (since 2012), Naples (since 2013) and Palermo (since 2017), all cities where this short-distance piano festivals has taken roots. Before I focus on my in-depth examination of the Milanese festival, I shall briefly illustrate the Neapolitan and Palermitan editions.

The Naples festival was launched in 2013 with the collaboration of Andres Kern and was presented – as the official website of the manifestation shows – as a “festival made by Neapolitans for everyone who loves Naples and the piano: off the grid, with no discrimination for musical genres, places and ages, with love, energy and the joy of music at the heart” (PianoCityNapoli, 2013). *Piano City Naples* proposes the core elements of the Berlin and Milan editions: house concerts and exhibitions in the most beautiful historical places of the city, a variety of musical genres and interpreters (professionals, piano-lovers and students), the importance of the web and live updates (and free entry). Naples exploits the heritage of its piano school, first established in the shadow of Vesuvius in the mid- XIX century by the Austrian virtuoso Sigismund Thalberg, who lived the last thirteen years of his life in the city.

More recently, *Piano City Palermo* made its debut in 2017. The festival, which lasted for three days (29 September – 1 October) hosted on the whole 70 hours of music distributed in over 20 places across the city (Zisa, historical trams, Mondello seafront, the Garibaldi Theatre, etc.), which was turned into one big stage. The choice of hosting this event is in line with the so-called “Palermo Renaissance”, the recent scenario of

economic growth and cultural development that made the city the Italian Capital for Culture in 2018. Thanks to piano music events organized throughout the urban space, the inhabitants could discover (or re-discover) the most unusual venues and the extraordinary settings of their city.

3. Piano City goes to Milano

As I have mentioned in the previous pages, Kern hoped that *Piano City* would also take place in other cities. By lucky circumstances, Milan, which has hosted the festival since 2012, seems to be the city that has better interpreted (and adapted) the philosophy of the event: the use of the web and social media, the hospitality of the city and the involvement of its inhabitants, as well as – and these are points of novelty – the incentive to explore the city in order to rediscover and re-appropriate public spaces, the promotion of the typical characteristics and the free performances. These are just some of the strengths of *Piano City Milan* and somehow make this festival a new paradigm of urban sociability² that offers the city the chance to reclaim its own identity and build or re-activate new forms of self-narrative.

Piano City was officially launched in Milan in May 2012, but a similar event had been organized the previous year: debuting on December 16, 2011 “Piano City Prelude” was a completely free 4-hour musical marathon created with the support of public and private players (the Milan municipality, Edison and Intesa Sanpaolo bank). It involved 30 pianists (professionals and amateurs) with Ludovico Einaudi as the leading musician, performing variations on the themes of Mozart’s *Don Giovanni* (which opened La Scala Theatre’s season that year). One of the most interesting elements was the location of “Piano City Prelude”: The Magenta Barracks, a historical headquarters of the *Carabinieri* (part of the Italian gendarmerie) that had been waiting for requalification since (it was dismissed in) 2007. Before becoming a new cultural pole in Milan, intended to host the new centre of the Brera Fine Arts Academy, the Magenta Barracks were a forgotten and closed off place in the city that was, rediscovered and promoted thanks to music.

The first edition of *Piano City* was organized some months later, in May 2012, thanks to Ludovico Einaudi’s idea and the support of Stefano Boeri (at the time Councillor for Culture). Einaudi stated that he first thought of bringing *Piano City* to Milan when he attended the Berlinese event. He was impressed by the positive experience of, putting musicians in direct contact with the audience, in a way that could never have happened during a usual concert: “This initiative stems from below, from the love for music [...]: in Italy, too, apart from the already well-known people, there is a network of top quality artists that needs to be presented to people”. Then the musician – who has, held concerts in his own house during the various editions, thus hosting the audience – adds: “*Piano City* is a gift to the city and to its musicians”, a festival for all tastes and ages. “We offer something for everybody” (Einaudi, 2012, p. 25). Boeri, who is also among the authors of the “Vertical Forest”, – which in a short span of time has become

a urban landmark and one of the symbols of the new Milan – echoed Einaudi by highlighting in several interviews the civic value and the collaborative nature of the event: *Piano City*, as he explains, is a “new concept of metropolitan music: an entire city crossed for three days by the notes of hundreds of pianos spread out everywhere [...] a new format for promoting the musical creativity widespread in Milan” (Boeri, 2012a, p. 2) and “a new way to do culture for such an alive and open city as Milan should be” (Boeri, 2012b, p. 6).

Year by year, edition by edition, the musical offer of *Piano City* has grown both in quality and quantity, becoming one of the cultural initiatives that best represent the city: since 2012, the type and number of events has increased, the locations have multiplied, the age groups involved and the hours of music played have expanded, allowing this metropolitan festival to be experienced live thanks to social media (see **Table 1**, with the summary of the various editions).

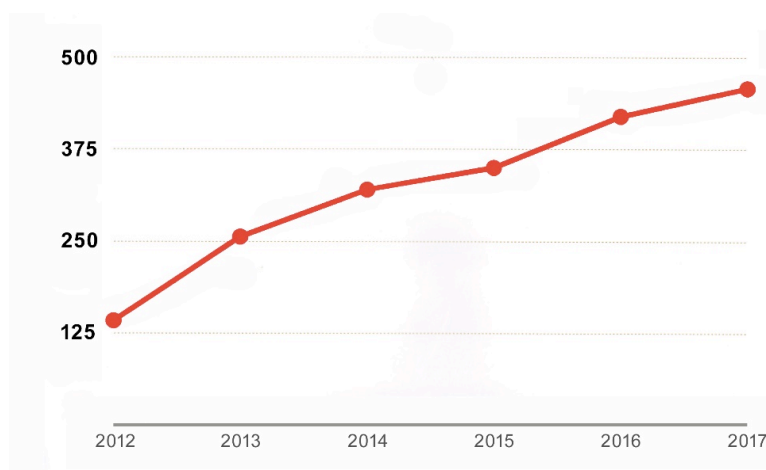
Table 1: schematic summary of Piano City Milan history (2011-2018)

<p>2011 16 December</p>	<p><i>Piano City Preludio</i>: Ludovico Einaudi and 30 pianists, 4 hours of concert, free admission in the Magenta barracks (account twitter). Twitter and Facebook account</p>
<p>2012 11-12-13 May</p>	<p>“Culture calls culture”. The events of this edition (200 concerts) are divided into 5 categories: House Concerts, Main Concerts, Kids, City Concerts, Guest Concerts Official website and YouTube page</p>
<p>2013 10-11-12 May</p>	<p>“Soundtrack of your city” New categories: Piano World, Special Concerts, Educational Concerts, Tram Plan 264 events + connection with EXPO</p>
<p>2014 16-17-18 May</p>	<p>200 pianists, over 300 events New categories: Piano Boat, and Piano Bici + workshops and lessons. The event has its own Instagram account</p>
<p>2015 22-23-24 May</p>	<p>Piano City becomes an Expo 2015 event Among the events, a concert for the inmates at the San Vittore District House</p>

2016 20-21-22 May	Over 400 concerts Among the flagship events, two-night marathons, Pianonight and Pianorave, which end with two evocative concerts at dawn
2017 19-20-21 May	50 hours of music with over 450 events including concerts, piano lessons, tributes to great masters and new executions. For the first time the festival leaves the city borders with concerts in the province and in the region: appointments with pianists and always different genres in the provinces of Milan, Como, Monza and Brianza, Bergamo.
2018 18-19-20 May	50 hours of music with over 470 events. Among the special initiatives, two concerts on the water: on a floating platform on May 19th at the <i>Bagni misteriosi</i> , (a former seaside resort of the '30s in the city); May 20 at <i>Idroscalo</i> , at 5 am.

Let's have a look, for example, at the data concerning the concerts. **Table 2** shows that their number has more than tripled, increasing from 125 in 2012 to 458 in the 2017 edition; the number of the locations, too, has increased from the 35 of 2012 to more than 150 in 2017:

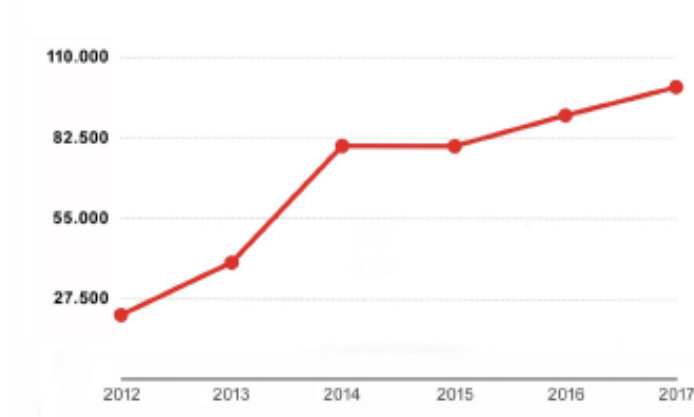
Table 2: number of concerts in the years 2012-2017



Source: Piano City Milano, 2017b

It has been estimated that over 5 years the number of participants rose from more than 27,000 to beyond 100,000 (Table 3), an evident sign of the concrete appreciation of the audience:

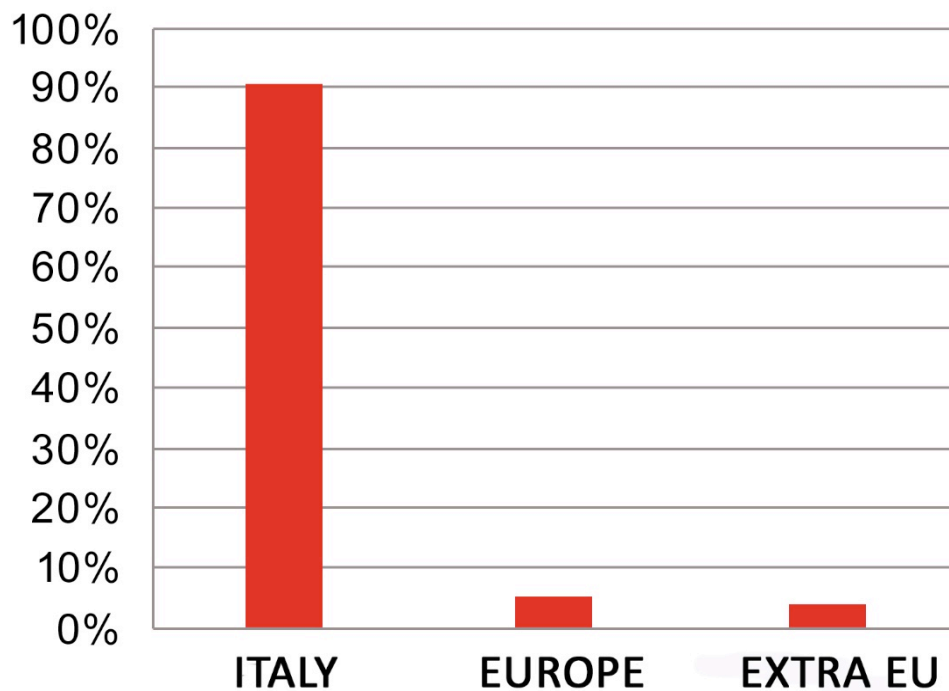
Table 3: number of participants in the years 2012-2017

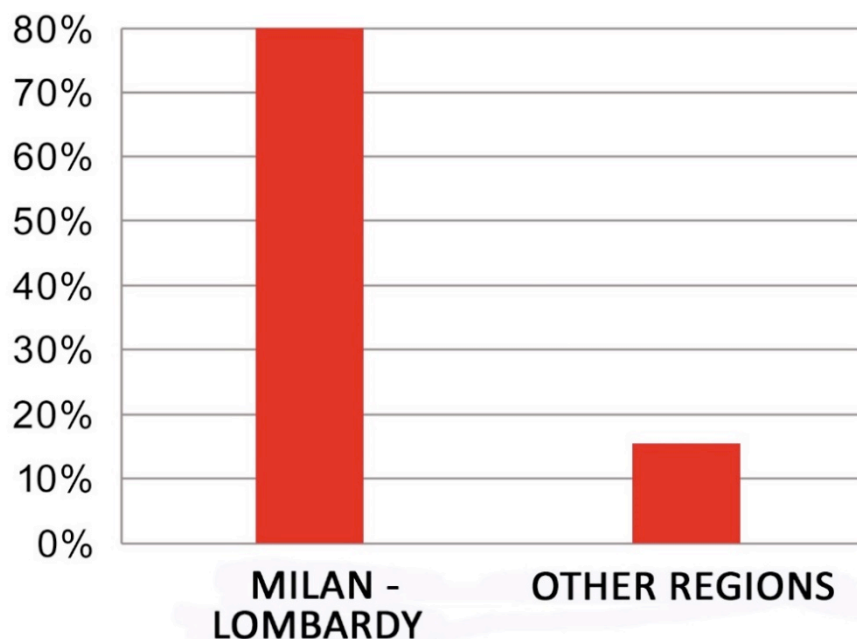


Source: Piano City Milano, 2017b

Participants consist for the most part of Italians (90%) (**Table 4**); regional audience shows a very strong territorial and urban acknowledgement that the festival has in Milan and in Lombardy (**Table 5**).

Tables 4-5: geographical origins of the public





The web provides clear evidence of the success of this event: the monthly visitors of the website were 270,000 during the 2017 edition, which was held between 19-21 May, with almost 18,000 views on Twitter and, 1,400 likes on Instagram (Piano City Milan, 2017b).

4. What is Piano City Milan?

As the result of a conjoined effort of public and private players – a constant trend in the organization of cultural events – with the crucial role of the Milan Municipality, Edison and Intesa Sanpaolo Bank, *Piano City Milan* relies on the collaboration and co-optation of institutions, citizens, and companies. Each side of this triangulation represents one key to the success of this kermesse. This metropolitan festival is firstly based on gratuitousness and volunteering: everyone, from the creators to the musicians involved (professionals and non-professionals alike), take part without being paid, just for the pleasure to be there; this is one of the strengths of the events, the gratuitousness of the concerts. In addition, most exhibitions are free-access (some of them, such as the house concerts, only need to be booked online). The instruments are provided by a Milanese network consisting of producers, importers, shops, tuners and carriers willing to promote the piano culture among the young audience, and to make people re-discover the pleasure of listening to live music. As already mentioned, some musicians, like the artistic director of Piano City Ludovico Einaudi, show an inversion of hospitality because the musician who performs also hosts the audience by welcoming them to his or her home (Capitoni, 2012, p. 30). Moreover, house concerts dispel the stereotype of the “closeness” usually associated to Milan and its inhabitants. Their availability to open their private houses grows yearly, thus emphasizing, as Einaudi suggests, the original communicative tension of music:

Music is very often experienced in a detached and cold way: you buy the ticket, you go to the theatre, you get back home and that's it; the concert turns into an event without communication. In the house concerts it is the other way around. There is a strong human relationship, a direct exchange between the artist and the audience and among the musicians themselves, too, that can thus meet, confront each other and make projects. (Einaudi, 2013, p. 15)

Another aspect which deserves attention is the double territorialisation, at the same time temporal and spatial, of *Piano City Milan*. The 2016 edition proposed 50 uninterrupted hours of music, from dawn till dusk; the 2017 and 2018 editions were "non-stop" events, an uninterrupted musical flow with such important concerts as *Piano Sunrise* and *Piano Night*; among the nocturnal marathons we should remember *Silent Wi-Fi Concert*: a concert played in the silence of the night, which the audience listened to using hi-fidelity, Wi-Fi headphones. The extension of the festival schedule points to a personalization of the experience which is among its key strengths. In spatial terms, the territorialisation operated by *Piano City Milan* is widespread: the events are not confined to a specific venue in order to support a capillary, scattered and de-centralized covering of the town. The stage for the event is not a particular place in Milan but *the city itself, in its own entirety*, in its most significant locations but also in the most hidden or ordinary ones.

Debunking the (nineteenth century and exclusive) idea that music should be confined and "caged" to specific places means challenging our visual and oral perspective in order to transform the urban space – considered in an integral and integrated way – into a huge musical machine. This aspect is highlighted by newspaper headlines where puns with the word "piano" (which in Italian is both the abbreviation of "pianoforte" and an adjective, meaning "slow") occur: "*Piano City overflows everywhere*", "the city is filled with notes", "the whole city is listening", "Milan capital of the pianoforte", "the sound of the city", "everywhere is piano", "the city resonates", "a piano everywhere", etc., where the reiteration of adverbs such as "everywhere", "all" etc is meant to highlight the ubiquity of the events scheduled. Indeed, when one considers the variety of locations it is hard to argue with this view. In this regard, *Piano City Milan* might be described as a route to explore, re-discover and re-appropriate multiple urban sceneries for the amusement of the inhabitants of the city: "Our aim – Einaudi explains – is also to make citizens discover unknown areas, zones they do not normally go to or which they do not associate with cultural events" (*Ibidem*). We can divide these scenarios into 4 categories:

(i) First of all, the old and new urban landmarks, typical locations of the identity of Milan: Sempione Park, Sforza Castle, Villa Reale Gardens, the Civic Aquarium, Vittorio Emanuele II Gallery, the Scala Museum, Pirelli Palace, City Life, Rotonda della Besana, Museum Centre GAM PAC;

(ii) Then we have the "coincidence place" (to use Pierantoni's words; see Pierantoni, 1998), that is to say the ordinary places you pass by for a more or less short time: railway stations, libraries, schools, garages, but also prisons (music needs to be relocated where it is not present);

(iii) Then there are the *private houses*: the closed spaces of intimacy, the private which opens up in order to host domestic recitals, in an oxymoronic frame of “home worldliness”;

(iv) *Last but not least*, the courtyards of block of flats, shared spaces halfway between the public and the private.

This list does not follow a particular priority order; its points all have the same dignity. The elements mentioned so far are part of the graphic and cartographic components of the event programme. One of the main *iconemi*³ of the city – Duomo Cathedral, Sforza Castle, the Arch of Peace, Velasca Tower, the Scala Theatre – are hinted at right from the cover of the programme of the first edition (**Figure 2**); in order to suggest the deep link between the event and the venue hosting it, the official logo evidently traces, in an abstract way, the historical map of Milan which is shaped into a grand piano (**Figure 3**). The mapping of the events suggests a subdivision of the city in 9 parts corresponding to 9 municipalities (the current administrative divisions of the city), and at the same time it highlights the so-called centrifugal character of the festival: by comparing the maps in the programmes of 2012 and 2013, we notice that from the second edition the concerts are not concentrated in the centre (zone 1), but tend to “spread” throughout the urban space; see, for example, the 2013 edition map (**Figure 4**). In the case of the most recent editions, even the space offered by the city is not enough: the concerts go beyond the city borders, they overflow, they go “out of the city” and take place also in the provinces of Milan, Como, Monza and Brianza and Bergamo.

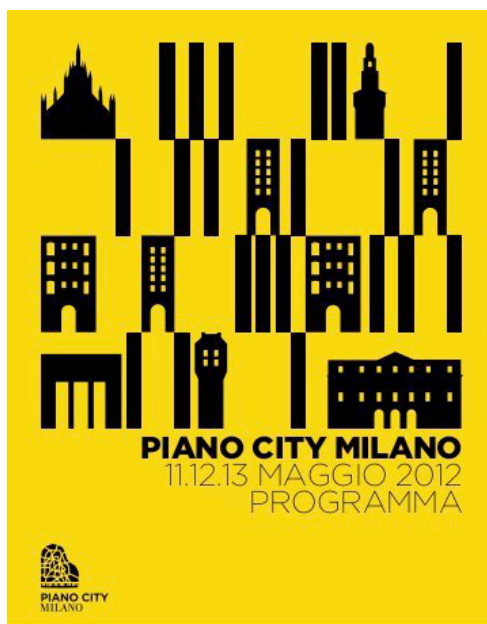


Figure 2-3: Some of main icons of Milan (*Duomo, Castello Sforzesco, Torre Velasca*) on the cover of the 2012 edition of the program (on the left); and the official logo of Festival and Milan historical map (on the right).

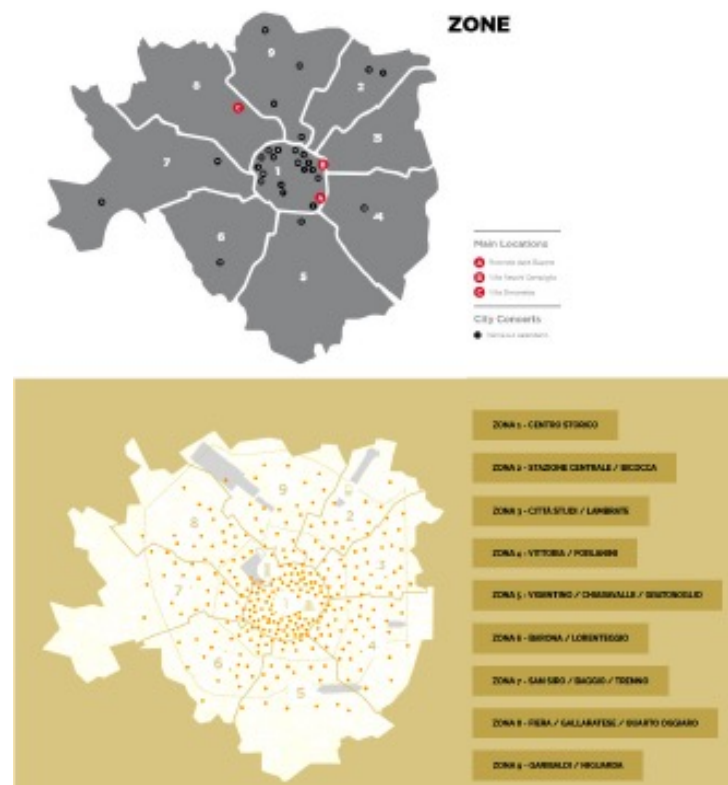


Figure 4: dissemination of concerts in urban space in the 2012 (above) and 2013 edition (below)

In any case *Piano City Milan* does not only consist of fixed locations: the nature of this metropolitan festival is dynamic, not static, and its ultimate meaning is in supporting crossing-practices of urban space. *Piano City* draws an ever-moving city where music is literally brought to every corner of Milan. Let's consider, for example, such initiatives as *Piano Tram*, *Piano Boat* and *Piano City on the Road*. These are itinerant and outdoor ways of exhibition that are only partially organized in a fixed location. With *Piano Tram*, two historical tram wagons provided with a vertical piano travel across the old town centre; in *Piano Boat* pianos travel on the Navigli, the system of navigable canals around and inside Milan; *Piano City on the road* involves the use of vehicles specifically designed and realized in order to create a mobile musical experience: in *Piano à porter* an upright piano is placed on an "Ape Piaggio" car, a light commercial vehicle, and is played every 50 minutes in a different location. *Piano Bici* is a hybrid instrument between a vertical piano and a bicycle: the piano replaces the handlebar of the vehicle, with two wheels on the front and one at the back; finally, *Piano Tandem* is a hybrid between a piano and a tandem bike ridden by a pilot and a musician.

The 2018 edition confirmed this trend: as a real festival of the Milan community, *Piano City* offers "a city to be explored left and right across many districts and centres" (as this year's Programme says) as its stage, and its keywords are "choose and discover". As a Widespread event that allows for social practices in everyday places, it is at the same time a map and a score; or, even better, a map and a score that every person builds according to their schedules, needs and musical tastes (**Figures 5-7**).

5. A chance to re-write the urban identity?

One further element should be considered to discuss the peculiarity of this event: *Piano City Milan* is part of a larger plan of urban regeneration, and thus a significant event in the recent relaunch of Milan after a period in which its image had become dull and weak. The deindustrialization of the last decades of the XX century had actively contributed to the loss of its identity:

The most important, traumatic and dramatic change to Milan – its landscape, its identity, its rhythms – has been the rapid and complete deindustrialization and industrial decentralization. The latter process began in the 1960s, the former in the 1970s. By the 1980s all the historic factories in the city and its hinterland had closed or employed tiny fractions of their former workforce. (Foot, 2001, p. 174)

Even though the city's recovery had been under construction since the 1980s, its post-industrial conversion was neither easy nor painless: for many years a new identity was difficult to pin down.

To simplify, it can be stated that the trauma of the end of the “old world” shattered the single identity of the city, which contained and summarised everything, that identified and reassured everyone, and that it fragmented, or rather became a kaleidoscope of many details and changing identities: of localized identities assumed and internalised by individual portions of the city. (Granata, 2015, p. XI)

It is obviously a generalisation, which involved not only Milan, but also a lot of other Italian and non-Italian cities, in the same years; unique for their history, morphology and assets, they all had to rely on themselves, and on their own latent and endogenous energies, in order to re-invent themselves and overcome their crisis (of the settlement model, of environmental, social and economic sustainability, of the urban density with the progressive average ageing of the population, etc.), thus slowly defining their new image. Milan was able to take advantage, in its individual path towards a “cultural”, “creative”, “smart” or “sharing” city (Pratt, 2011a and 2011b; Santangelo, Aru, Pollio, 2013; Grésillon 2014; Lodigiani, 2014; McLaren, Agyeman, 2018), of its own position as Italy's financial hub, a global fashion capital and a cosmopolitan and multicultural city; Expo 2015 brought here not only about 21 million visitors but also significant investments in transport infrastructure (e.g. a new Metro line).

Milan has seen its skyline changing and it has progressively become a “vertical city” (Verdelli, 2014; see also Roditi, 2006): with its new skyscrapers in the *Isola* and *Porta Nuova* neighbourhoods (among which the Award-winning “Vertical Forest” by Boeri); with *City Life* (a requalification project of the area of the former Exposition); with the re-opening of the *Darsena* (an artificial water basin used in the late 1970s to moor the boats sailing the Navigli), etc.

All these elements make Milan the only Italian city that can compete in the entertainment market with such global cities as London, Paris and Berlin (and recently, after Brexit, with Amsterdam, which will host the new European Medicines Agency headquarters). Its own specificity – contrary to its competitors, this city is not a political capital – reflects a peculiarity of the Italian urban history. Rome, the capital city, does not need to compete with the other cities in order to be attractive; It has been attractive for centuries as the centre of Christianity and because of its historical and artistic heritage, which is unique in the whole world. The history of Rome is enough to make it special and draw millions of tourists every year. In order to attract investments and visitors, Milan needs to reinvent itself continuously, by proposing new urban styles based on innovation and the participation of the greatest number of people⁴.

Piano City is part of this transition, which implies re-discovering and re-writing the identity of Milan as an Italian metropolitan city with good potential for development and strong European and global ambitions (ACRE, 2007; Ponzini et alii, 2014); for this reason the city especially needs cross-the-board events involving the citizens and engaging them in the life and the thousands of spaces of the city. It needs to develop more place-focused forms of urban and territorial governance. Through Piano City, Milan tests itself: its ability to territorialize itself and “be a team”, to involve, to support its own skills and internal resources, thus creating an endogenous and self-centred attractiveness based on the will to participate and share spaces and experiences, places and music.

These intentions lie under the programmes of the different festival editions, which reveal a city self-narrative where pride and projects, strong traditions and ambitious expectations overlap within a single discourse. Let’s consider, for example, the following passage centred on the idea of a city as a source of hidden and collective abilities which can be brought to light and enhanced by music: “By supporting the myth of *Milan as a city that hides away its beauty*, our intent is to *lift, for three days, the veil that often covers the city’s charm*, knocking on its doors through piano music” (Piano City Milano, 2012; my italics here and from now on).





Figures 5-7: some moments of the past editions of the festival

This “unveiling” also implies revealing the urban “vocations” and the topical qualities that make the city unique. We should notice the performative efficacy of these statements: they are not only describing a given reality, but somehow, they also wish the reality they are describing – so that it is practically impossible to tell the two levels of discourse apart:

Concerts, laboratories and lessons will turn music and the piano into the protagonists of a manifestation that confirms *the international vocation of our city*. (Piano City Milano, 2014; my italics)

Piano City Milan turns five. Five years of *an open city, just like the houses that have hosted our pianists* [...] five years of *a city that never stops and is ever-changing*. (Piano City Milano, 2016; my italics)

Milan has got the overflowing rhythm of a big European metropolis, a city with a lot of hearts and a lot of hands, the crucial centre of all the changes, a cultural capital that never forgets about its vocations of open-mindedness and integration. The challenge of Piano City Milan 2017

is to *look like the city hosting us more and more*, to keep up with the same rhythm, to reinvent ourselves together with her through new ideas and proposals. Just like Milan, Piano City wants to be *an open, participatory and engaging festival, a chance to meet new people for everyone* [...]. Because we find it all in the name: “Piano”, since it is a homage to the instrument and to its music, “City”, since it has got the energy, the exciting climate of the city, and “Milan” since its incomparable human measure of neighbourhoods, houses, courtyards, gardens, its many loved and unexpected places, make it the ideal theatre for meeting and participating. *Piano City Milan 2017* is a small independent festival aiming to become bigger, but *the true protagonists are you*, it is your spark that can light up the impossible and turn the incredible into something real. (Piano City Milano, 2017a; my italics)

The last passage introduces a new element for reflection: the influence and interchangeability of the “all” and the “part”, the “map” and the “score”, what is big and what is small, the city and its festival. If *Piano City* is an event that aims to be bigger, the city itself provides it its topical qualities – its energy, the open-mindedness and the physical elements necessary to make its ambitions come true: a unique human landscape made of (old and new) “neighbourhoods, houses, courtyards and gardens”. In this way, one is reflected into the other and the rhythms of the urban life become – or, better, they are – the rhythms of music and vice versa.

Conclusions: being a tourist in one’s own city?

The positive qualities of *Piano City Milan* are many; let’s try to summarize the most important elements to make their hidden links explicit.

Let’s start with the last one, the planification it requires: every representation of the territory always contains a “implicit project” (Dematteis, 1995): it is never only the neutral description of what the territory is, but it is also the formulation (the wish) of what the territory might be. *Piano City* is not only a great piano festival which lasts several days; it is a key episode in an urban narrative which reveals the ability of the city to make new projects. After the end of his industrial history, Milan wonders about its own identity as an Italo-European metropolis, a cultural, dynamic, open, integrated, engaging, participatory capital (see Rolando, 2017). *Piano city* can thus be seen as simultaneously a “celebration of” and a “test on” a certain idea of the city – an idea that has a specific political nature: as is well known, the etymology of the word “politics” derives from the Greek *polis* and is linked to a cluster of concepts that have overlapped in time, such as good governance, common good, citizenship, the ability to manage the *res publica*. These ideals are clearly empty without the active and widespread participation of people: The *Piano City* event does not have a mere passive-conventional character, but this is participatory and interactive. In other words, there is not a clear separation between making/listening to music and everyone can choose where to stand, if on the user’s or on the executor’s side (this is mostly because these are not traditional concerts, but a revival of the experience of “domestic music”). This element is closely linked to its transversal nature, that is to say its attempt at acknowledging the right of all the members of the community to express their own abilities by putting them and themselves at the others’ disposal (the so-called

“inversion of hospitality”). As the data show, this principle holds a political quality in that it can be the starting point for the construction of a new paradigm of urban sociality. As a matter of fact, *the engaged and produced territoriality* is set up here as a network of mutual, free and active services, both a factor and the context for meeting, learning and having symbolic exchanges. *Piano City* aims at being far more than a simple piano festival (and this is where its strength lies): it aims to be a point of convergence for people and build a collective sense of place. Everything that this event stimulates, engages and communicates would not be possible without the engagement of the inhabitants and the peculiarity of the urban spaces (for a similar reflection, see Rabbiosi, 2016): an open territory, made up of houses and courtyards, museums and rural houses, libraries and stations, trams and historical palaces, *Navigli* and prisons. The slow and shared re-appropriation of the city by those who live it implies acknowledging its topical qualities: these allow it to be a unique and different place, making it, as Angelo Turco says, “a place [...] where things that can only take place there happen” (Turco, 2014, p. 22). We might have different editions of *Piano City* in different cities; but even though the format remains the same, it is the different urban context that, time after time, makes the difference (landscape, culture, social actors involved) and makes each of them unique and non-repeatable elsewhere.

We can return to the question we started with. *Nobody is a tourist in their own home?* It should by now be clear to the reader that *Piano City Milan* overcomes traditional binaries such as internal/external geographies (Massey, 1993 and 2006), personal/consensual geographies (Lowenthal, 1961) and urban strategy/tactics (De Certeau, 1984). Its geography is not conceived, promoted, directed from the outside *but from the inside*. This event produces a special deviation from the norm: for the first time, you can be a tourist in your own city. Therefore, this fact supports Minca and Oakes’s claim that “The presumed boundaries between everyday life and the tourist experience can no longer be sustained. What is normally defined as the ‘tourist experience’ has become a fundamental part of how people learn about and travel through the world on a daily basis” (Minca, Oakes, 2014, p. 301). The general conflation of experiences we are currently witnessing – everyday life is increasingly experienced in touristic terms, while what we define as tourism tends to discard dislocated and delayed practices – suggests an essential and paradoxical truth: in the late capitalist era it becomes hard to distinguish the tourist practices (and the actors enacting those practices) from every other aspect of our social life, but also from the places of everyday life.

Acknowledgment

The author would like to thank *Piano City Milan* Press Office for their help and in particular D. Manuela Rosignoli.

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<https://www.pianocitynapoli2018.it/>

¹ See the website: <http://pianocity-berlin.com>.

² In this text when I use the term *sociability*, I mean generally the quality of liking to meet and spend time with other people. More precisely, from Nigel Thrift I take up the idea that the sociability is a particular organizations of social institutions that allow, promote or inhibit understanding of the conditions of own existence from social groups; from this point of view, sociability is the result of the encounter between “sense of community” and “sense of place” (Thrift, 1996, pp. 89-90). From the French historian Maurice Agulhon (1977), I take up the idea that sociability to indicate the “social quality” of a system of relationships that take shape in everyday life. Therefore, sociability designates the ways in which social actors divide and share spaces, practices, speeches and ideas; and the concrete methods of construction and diffusion in specific places (squares, salons, coffee houses and other places for the practical conduct of public life) of social relations.

³ That is to say “images representing the whole, which express its peculiarity, they represent the most characteristic elements, the most significant ones” (Turri, 1998, p. 170).

⁴ Therefore, while the current mayor of Rome can afford to withdraw the candidacy of the city for the 2024 Olympic Games, Milan is going to compete with Turin to host the 2026 Winter Olympics (Giannattasio, 2018).