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Milano Atlante di genere

Milan Gender Atlas

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**Verso
una urbanistica
di genere**

**Towards
a gender urban
planning**

“Our cities are patriarchy written in stone, brick, glass and concrete”.

Jane Darke, 1996

“When planners fail to account for gender, public spaces become male spaces by default”.

Caroline Criado-Perez, 2020

In several countries women have now taken on a crucial role within national economies, however, the discourse on how the shape of the city and the urban landscape take into account the female universe is hardly dealt with. In the public space, female bodies are still relegated to the imagery of domesticity or anchored to male sexual desire. On a symbolic level the city continues to be the space of men and, implicitly, the house the one of women. There is still a lot of work to be done across the board to transform this state of affairs: although they are undoubtedly a step in the desirable direction of equality, unfortunately, it will not be buildings designed by female architects alone that will make a difference.

Observing the urban context from the point of view of gender opens up horizons of interpretation that are certainly not unheard of, but that until now remain rather unexplored. The city, with its spaces, is the concrete representation of society that, over the years, has determined its characteristics: every urban choice, every political decision is the reflection of a dominant structure that supports the social order. “How urban planners have created gendered environments that are predominantly suited to the needs of men and the heteronormative family” (Beebeejaun, 2017: 323) is what feminist research on urban planning was claiming already in the Seventies. In the wake of later theories, particularly those from the Nineties, Leslie Kern resumes the discourse on urban space and the impact it has on women’s lives. Her conclusion is that “the city has been set up to support and facilitate the traditional gender roles of men and with men’s experiences as the ‘norm’, with little regard for how the city throws up roadblocks for women and ignores their day-to-day experience of city life” (Kern, 2020: 6).

It was precisely during the Nineties that the critique of the city according to the female gaze was consolidated, particularly in the Anglo-Saxon world, producing multiple publications resulting from investigations conducted from a different, unexplored point of view: the female one. This new way of looking at things draws from diverse sources and brings the attention back to people, to their daily life and to how it unfolds through the practical aspects of everyday life: “Feminist research produces ‘unalienated knowledge’ [...] the subject of enquiry, the conduct of research and the interpretation of results are all matters affected by personal experience and life events” (Yeandle, 1996: 11). Therefore, these are aspects that are excluded from planning, and that have never been the starting point for thinking and rethinking our cities.

The non-consideration of women when planning urban spaces is not accidental. It reiterates a paradigm on which society is founded, that is the exclusion of the feminine from the public space. Women are relegated to the domestic space, while the city and everything that happens outside belongs to the male domain. The pretended universality of planning hides the true subject of law, which has conformed the false neutrality to its needs; in other words, it is a way



Parco Trotter, Milano. Un esempio di spazio pubblico a dominio maschile
 Parco Trotter, Milan. An example of a male-dominated public space
 © Azzurra Muzzonigro

of disguising male power (Casanovas et al., 2012: 372). Despite the formal recognition of equality, several groups based on ethnicity, religion, gender or sexual orientation are discriminated against and subjected to forms of exclusion on a daily basis, making their full participation in public life impossible. “Patriarchy takes many forms and alters over time. It co-exists with most economic systems including capitalism, and in many settings: within the household, the workplace, the polity and so on” (Darke, 1996: 89). A crisis of this order of things has never occurred; on the contrary, for centuries the subordination of women has been perpetuated in all contexts, inside and outside domestic walls.

Therefore, even today, the need is to fit within the mechanisms of the system, together with its possibilities of transformation “to understand and to influence processes of social change, and for feminists, of course, this influence will be in the direction of eroding women’s subordination” (Yeandle, 1996: 11). In order to do this, we need to shift our gaze, transforming it into a political practice that puts people and their uniqueness at the center. Contemporary feminism teaches us to understand the intersection between diverse forms of discrimination, to join struggles and to channel our forces towards the common goal of equality and respect for differences. “Feminism is more than just a ‘perspective’ on the world; it is more than simply a way of ‘knowing about the world’; in the final analysis it is also ‘a way of being in the world’ (Stanley, 1990: 14)” (ibid.).

Since its inception, urbanisation has offered itself as a dynamic of develop-

16 ment and emancipation of society: urban space has become the representative of a *polis*, where, however, female presence has been excluded in more or less explicit ways. On the one hand, the city offers itself as a liberating experience, while it allows one to experience anonymity and to escape the standardised identities of patriarchy (Wilson, 1991). As early as 1961, Jane Jacobs described the great American cities as the favourite place where women would make themselves independent from the male figure in the house, as well as from the oppression of small communities where ‘everyone knows everything’: “Privacy is precious in cities. It is indispensable. Perhaps it is precious and indispensable everywhere, but in most places you cannot get it. In small settlements everyone knows your affairs. In the city everyone does not—only those you choose to tell will know much about you”. (Jacobs, 1969 [1961]: 58). And yet, the city has always been at the same time a place of expression of male ownership, where women are considered a property. This is also reflected in the danger, whether actual or perceived, of the public space: even today “women still experience the city through a set of barriers – physical, social, economic, and symbolic – that shape their daily lives in ways that are deeply (although not only) gendered” (Kern, 2020: 5).

Such differences are anchored in socially determined roles that see women as the main responsible for care works – hence, tightly bound to the domestic space – while men are stereotyped as breadwinners. Gender representations also imply different ways of using the city, so much so that, “because of their caring responsibilities, many are restricted to work which is close to home, with flexible hours and which does not require time away from home” (Walker, 1996: 37). From this point of view it is necessary to rethink our cities in light of two aspects. Firstly, care work implies a peculiar use of urban services and routes; in this respect “a greater engagement with everyday spatial practices provides critical insights into how claims to urban space and the exercise of rights are inherently gendered” (Beebeejaun, 2017: 323). Secondly, the city is still a place that entails troubles and discomfort for women, due to the potential dangers of the streets, but also for it remains a theatre of inequalities between genders that have never been bridged. Such disparities entail not just discrimination, insecurity and daily stress in managing workloads, but also poverty, “where socio-demographic transformations represent an increasing number of families led by women, who are solely responsible for the children they take care of” (Falú, 2016: 12).

Over the years, feminist struggles have turned in favour of autonomy: “Women’s work is an increasingly visible and essential part of the economy [...] and play a major and growing part in the most vibrant sectors of the economy”. In spite of this, “women continue to perform most of the unpaid work on which the comfort of the population depends”, and still today significant “divisions between women in terms of pay, benefits and occupational status, and important differences between women of different ethnic and cultural origins” remain (Yeandle, 1996: 29).

It is through the practice of observing urban dynamics through a feminist/female gaze that we can understand how “space is not neutral: it is inhabited by sexualized bodies which have different experiences of the city and the territories, with differences in the ways of living and of moving through the city. This difference is evident in all stages of life and according to the different abilities: childhood, adolescence, adults, older persons”. One cannot but agree that “cities should cherish all their inhabitants, however many times cities are often cruel and violent towards women. Urban spaces are, in fact, frequently places of women’s invisibility, designed and planned without thinking about women’s experiences and use during the day and night” (Boccia, 2016: 18).

Hence the need for this research, in order to understand how such dynamics actually manifest themselves, and which solutions can be put in place to smooth out the intrinsic discriminations of the city.

18 *Milan Gender Atlas* is part of the broader research of *Sex & the City*¹ commissioned by Milano Urban Center (Milan Municipality and Triennale Milano). It investigates the public and private spheres to better understand how women's lives develop outside and inside the home, and which specific needs such lives express. The urgency is to outline and explore a field of investigation that, by intertwining gender and urban studies, is able to generate tools for planning cities that are more attentive to the different targets that inhabit them. Thus, such research proposes to deconstruct the contemporary urban space through specific observation lenses, allowing a reading of the answers offered to the needs of women and gender-based minorities, particularly within the city of Milan. The result is a tool, both theoretical and practical, to design contexts that are more inclusive and attentive to the needs of the multiple subjects and the different bodies that inhabit urban space.

The feminist gaze that this research pursues, tends to raise questions and seek answers taking into account the needs of bodies that exceed the standards of the functional paradigm – i.e. men generally white, cisgender, wealthy and free from care work – placing 'women' at the center. Women not so much as a closed category within an exclusionary identity perimeter, but as an "open coalition" (Butler, 1999: 25), multiple and intersectional, developing visions embedded in a form of knowledge that is "embodied" and "situated" (Haraway, 1995 [1991]).

In line with such an approach, this research is in itself 'situated', as it makes choices, elaborates experiences, offers reflections and actively engages with public life, including through a series of interviews (conducted between October 2020 and July 2021). At its core is the construction of a *Gender Atlas* of the city of Milan: a critical mapping in which the cornerstones of the gender discourse – concerning the relationship between production and reproduction, the politics on female bodies, gender violence and the right to the city – become physical spaces that translate specific needs, as well as networks of subjects that animate and makes sense of the existence of such spaces. The *Atlas* is built through the superimposition of multiple layers of critical reading of the city.

Violence against women, both inside and outside the four walls, is a central issue: its observation engages with the facilities offered to fight against a phenomenon that is as brutal as unacceptable, for it's the result of a society founded on patriarchal values. The *Atlas* focuses on public space, recognising fear and perception of insecurity as a key issue of the difference between genders in our everyday life. In this respect, Milan is examined through its dynamics, the images and sensations it produces, as well as its statistical dimension.

The mapping aims to disclose the variations that the city offers to women's lives. By investigating their habits, it engages with those services that in diverse ways aim to respond to the needs related to their daily life: sites for safe breastfeeding, public toilets, lifts in the subway stations, playgrounds, nurseries and open squares. In fact, women's daily lives are dependent on the need to cope with most of the unpaid care work². However, dealing with mobility and other aspects of urban life as 'gender issues' does not mean endorsing the state of things: it is 'just' the state of things. On the contrary, the city of women – if there was one – would be the city of everyone, both female and male, and it would aim for a rupture of pre-established roles, with a consequent equitable

1 <https://sexandthecity.space/>.

2 According to the latest survey on *I tempi della vita quotidiana*, ISTAT, 2019, taking as an example an average day in 2014 "in Italy a lot of effort is put into unpaid work, about three and a half hours per day. If we consider the parents subset, while for fathers the dedicated time is 2h03', for mothers it is 6h24' until children are underage and 6h17' when they turn 18; in light of a decrease in care work (going from an average 1h39' for mothers with underage children to 19' for those with 18-plus children), domestic work increases, going from 4h45' to 5h58'. This is an evident sign of the reluctance of other family members to 'help out at home'", Elena Scanu Ballona, *Le equilibriste. La maternità in Italia*, Save the Children, 2020. <https://s3.savethechildren.it/public/files/uploads/pubblicazioni/le-equilibriste-la-maternita-italia-nel-2020.pdf>.

20 redistribution between genders of the burdens related to reproductive responsibilities. The city of women, to which this investigation aspires, places care at its center, regardless of the gender dealing with it.

Public space is also examined in its symbolic dimension: how many streets, squares, parks, gardens, statues and civic buildings are named after women or gender minorities? Although this may sound like a side issue, it is also in this way that public space bears symbolic meanings through which a society's cultural identity takes root and is passed on. The current framework is still behind in terms of a possible equitable representation of genders, therefore the mapping of female presence in Milanese toponymy aims to make such disparity manifest, in order to acknowledge it and take action to bridge the gap.

The research also investigates the dimension of sex work, its urban dynamics and what its presence implies from the point of view of public policies. The phenomenon of prostitution in Milan is mapped and analysed in its offer, in order to understand whether the physical aspects of public spaces disclose any relationship with such kind of activity.

As a last observation lens, women's healthcare services highlight a certain difficulty, despite the Milanese 'excellence', to recognise the actual needs, particularly if we look at lower classes that see their reference points being dismantled year after year. Counselling centers and facilities for termination of pregnancy are two extremes of a broader picture, disclosing also the virtuous attempts by local healthcare facilities for what concerns gender medicine.

The *Atlas* is conceived not so much as a complete and definitive mapping of spaces and subject, but as an open and in-progress organism, ready to embrace the multiplicity of visions that are embodied in the space. Its main goal is to display a gender-related geography, while offering itself as a platform for dialogue and the collective construction of an imaginary still to be realised.

In conducting the research *Sex & the City*, it was immediately evident how statistical data on mobility, habits, violence in public space, etc. organised by gender were not available. In light of this, during Spring 2021 the online survey *Il genere e l'uso della città* (Gender and the use of the city) has been produced and disseminated through social media, emails, radios and the press. The survey addressed women and men, girls and boys, as well as all non-binary identities that lived in or gravitated towards Milan, in order to understand if there are substantial differences between genders for what concerns the organisation of daily life, mobility patterns and the perception of insecurity. The data that have emerged integrate the *Atlas* in a significant way, enriching the mapping on the basis of information on which hypothetical scenarios can be developed, anchored to a reading of the current situation of the city of Milan as realistic as possible. This has been done by also taking into account the fluctuations due to the pandemic condition that has accompanied this research for almost its entire duration.

Milan Gender Atlas, and more broadly the project *Sex & the City*, aims to shed light on a theme that is little dealt with by academic research on a national level, as well as by public policies, which are mostly limited to specific interventions devoid of a broad-spectrum direction. If today 'gender issues' are at the center of public debates it is also because the great historical omission that has relegated women to the domestic walls has emerged, thus excluding them from public life. Nowadays it is impossible to keep conceiving such a state of affairs, and we must reach a vision of the city (and of the world) that is able to include everyone.

Consistently with a female gaze that aims to disclose the power relations behind the way space is conceived, the main aim of this research is not so much to provide answers, but to provide the tools to ask the right questions.

Atlante di genere di Milano

Milan Gender Atlas

● **Asili nido pubblici e privati**
Public and private nursery schools

— **Sex work**
Sex work

● **Associazioni e movimenti P.O.**
EO associations and movements

— **Toponomastica femminile**
Female toponymy

● **Aree gioco**
Play areas

♥ **Centri anti violenza**
Anti-violence centers

💧 **Happy popping**
Happy popping

💧 **Baby pit stop**
Baby pit stop

— **Ospedali IVG**
VTP hospitals

⊕ **Ospedali BollinoRosa**
BollinoRosa hospitals

🏠 **RSA BollinoRosaArgento**
BollinoRosaArgento nursing homes

🗨️ **Consultori pubblici**
Public family counselling centers

🗨️ **Consultori privati**
Private family counselling centers

🛋️ **Panchine rosse**
Red benches

🏠 **Centri Milano Donna**
Milan Women's Centers

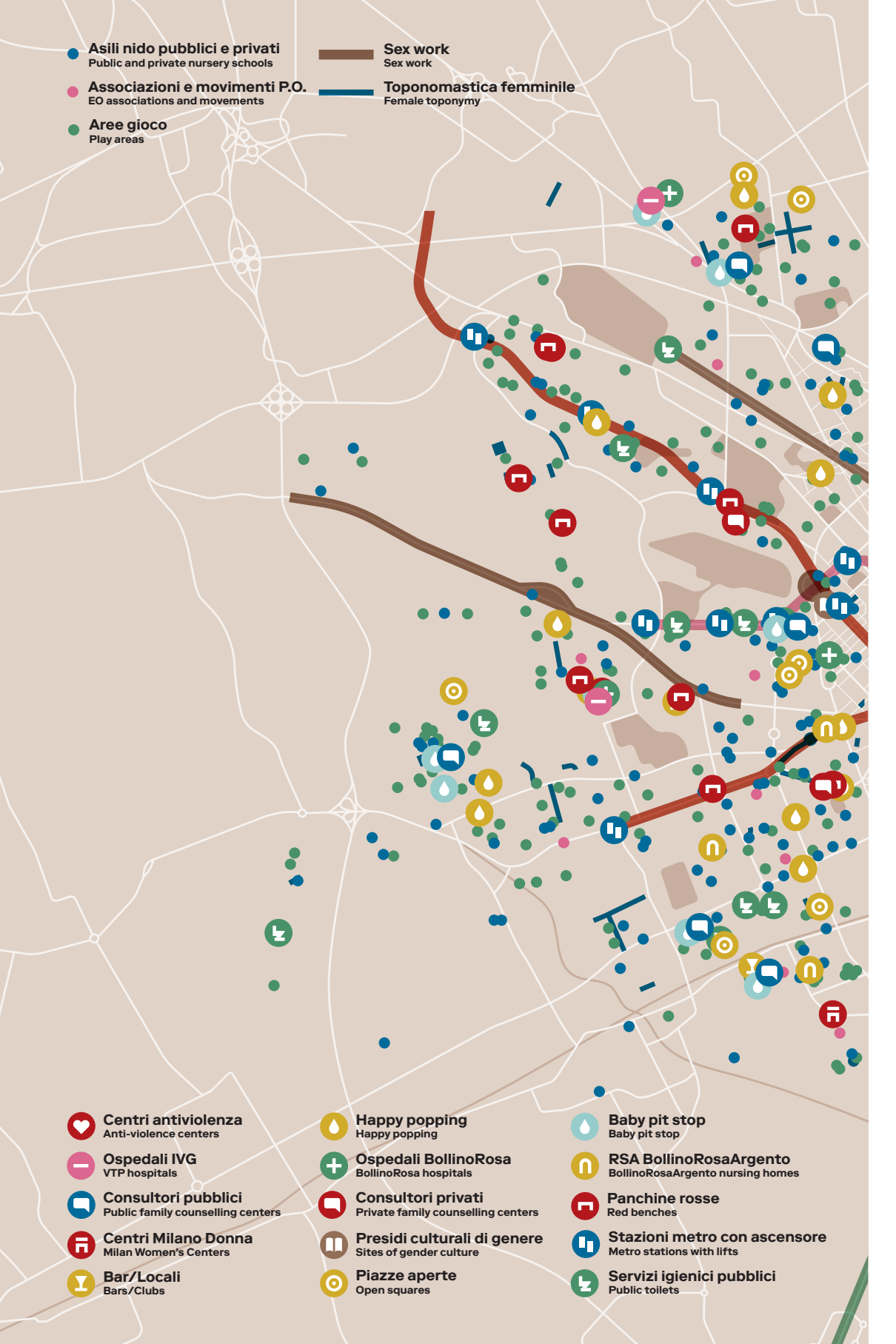
🏠 **Presidi culturali di genere**
Sites of gender culture

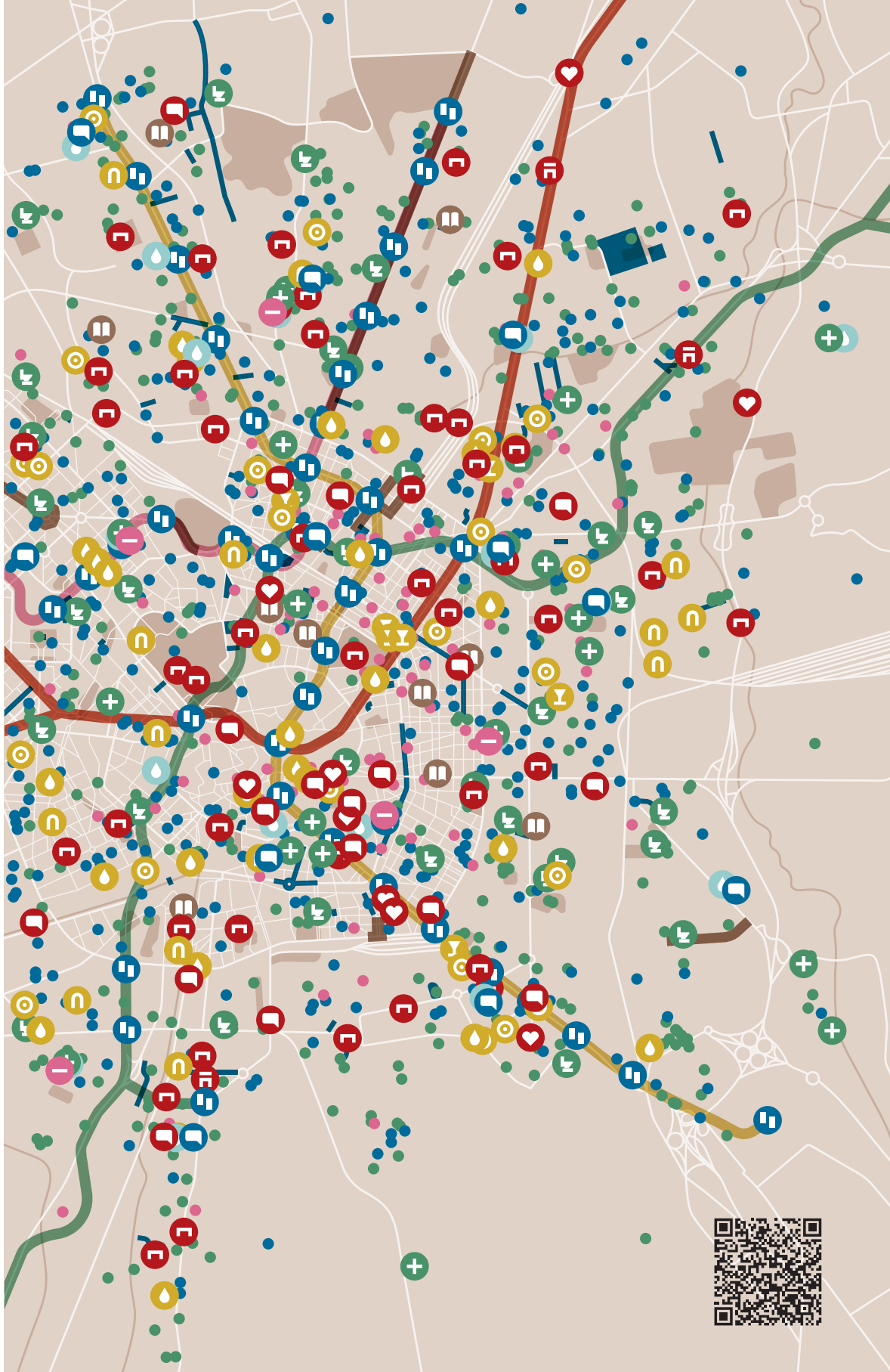
🚶 **Stazioni metro con ascensore**
Metro stations with lifts

🍷 **Bar/Locali**
Bars/Clubs

🕒 **Piazze aperte**
Open squares

🚽 **Servizi igienici pubblici**
Public toilets







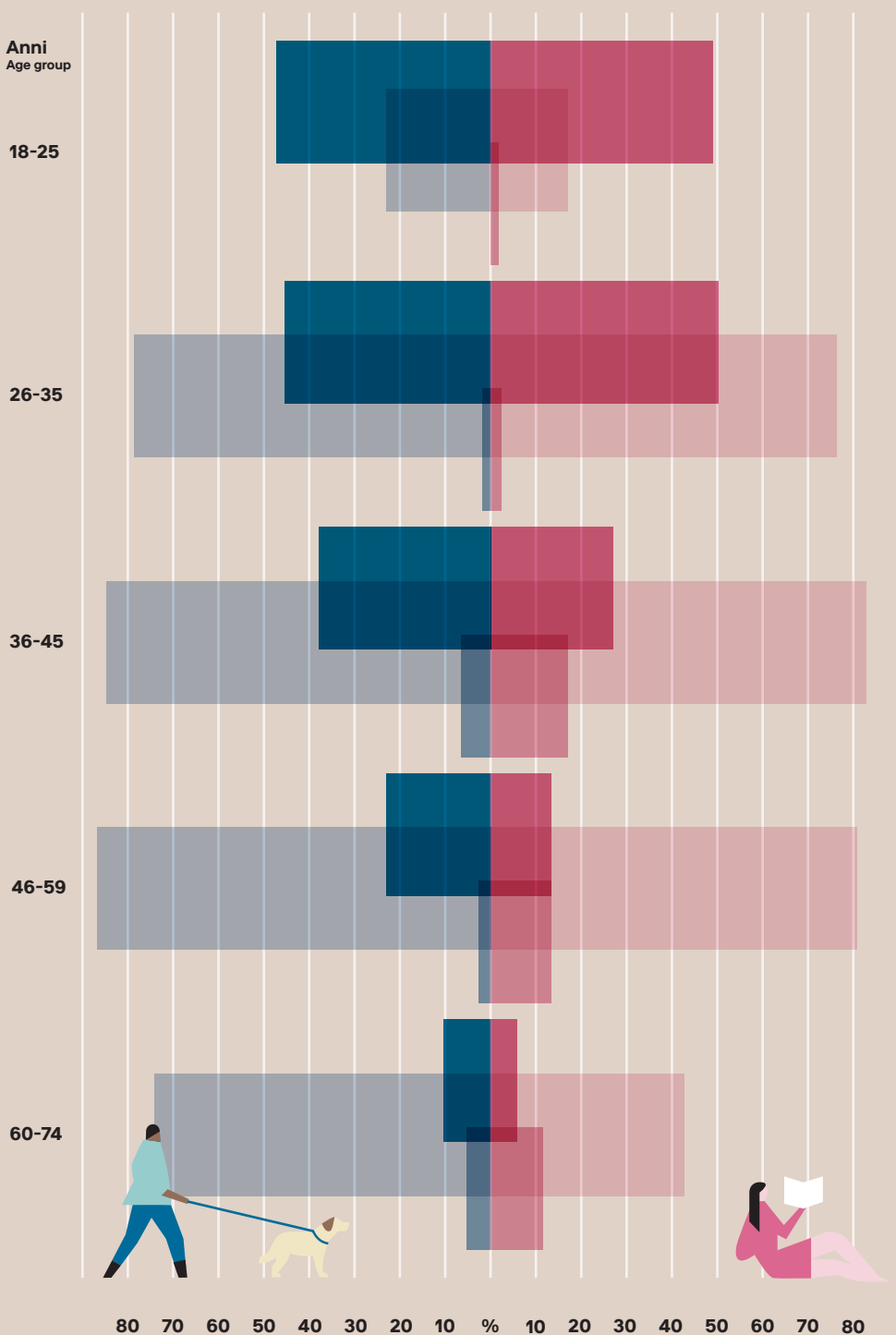
Statua di Cristina Trivulzio di Belgiojoso, inaugurata il 15 settembre 2021 a Milano
Statue of Cristina Trivulzio of Belgiojoso, inaugurated on September 15, 2021 in Milan
© Florencia Andreola

Mobilità a Milano

Mobility in Milan

● Uomo
Man

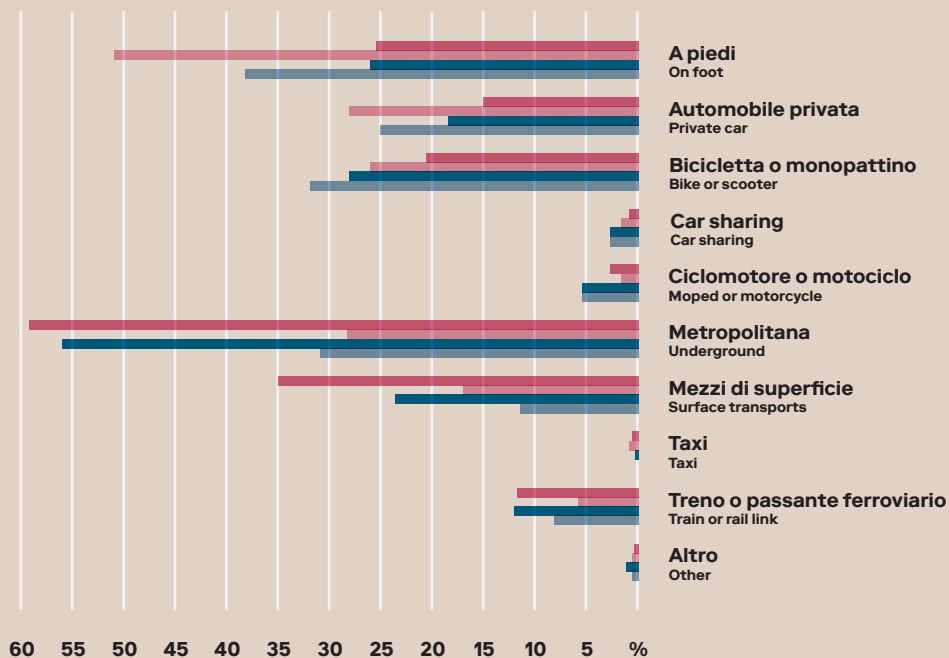
● Donna
Woman



- ● **Andare al bar o al ristorante o nei locali notturni**
Go to the cafe, restaurant or nightclub
- ● **Lavoro retribuito**
Paid work
- ● **Lavoro di cura**
Care work

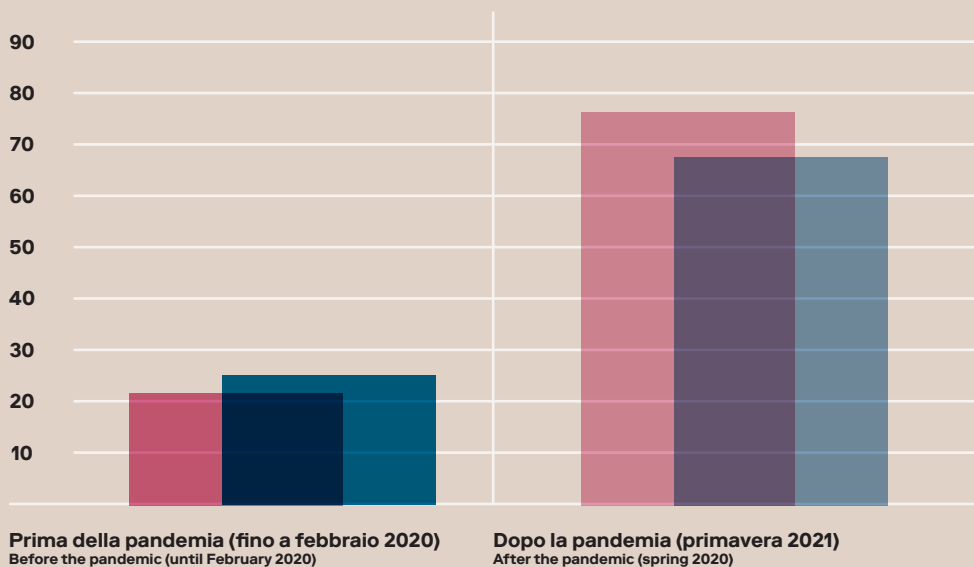
Mobilità a Milano prima e dopo la pandemia

Mobility in Milan before and after the pandemic



Da 0 a 2 spostamenti al giorno

Between 0 and 2 trips per day





La mappa riporta i consultori familiari pubblici e privati, gli ospedali e le RSA premiati da Fondazione Onda rispettivamente con Bollino Rosa e Bollino RosaArgento e le strutture ospedaliere in cui è possibile praticare l'interruzione volontaria di gravidanza. I consultori pubblici – in misura inferiore a quelli privati – coprono il territorio comunale in maniera omogenea ma rada. I 7 ospedali in cui si può praticare l'IVG corrispondono sempre a strutture premiate con Bollini Rosa.

The map shows public and private family counselling centers, hospitals and nursing homes awarded by Fondazione Onda with Bollino Rosa (Pink Stamps) and Bollino RosaArgento (Pink/Silver Stamps) respectively. It also shows hospitals where it is possible to carry out voluntary interruption of pregnancy (VTP). Public counselling centers – to a lesser extent than private ones – are homogeneously distributed in the municipal territory, but sparse. The 7 hospitals where it is possible to practice abortion always correspond to facilities awarded with Bollino Rosa.

 Ospedali IVG
VTP hospitals

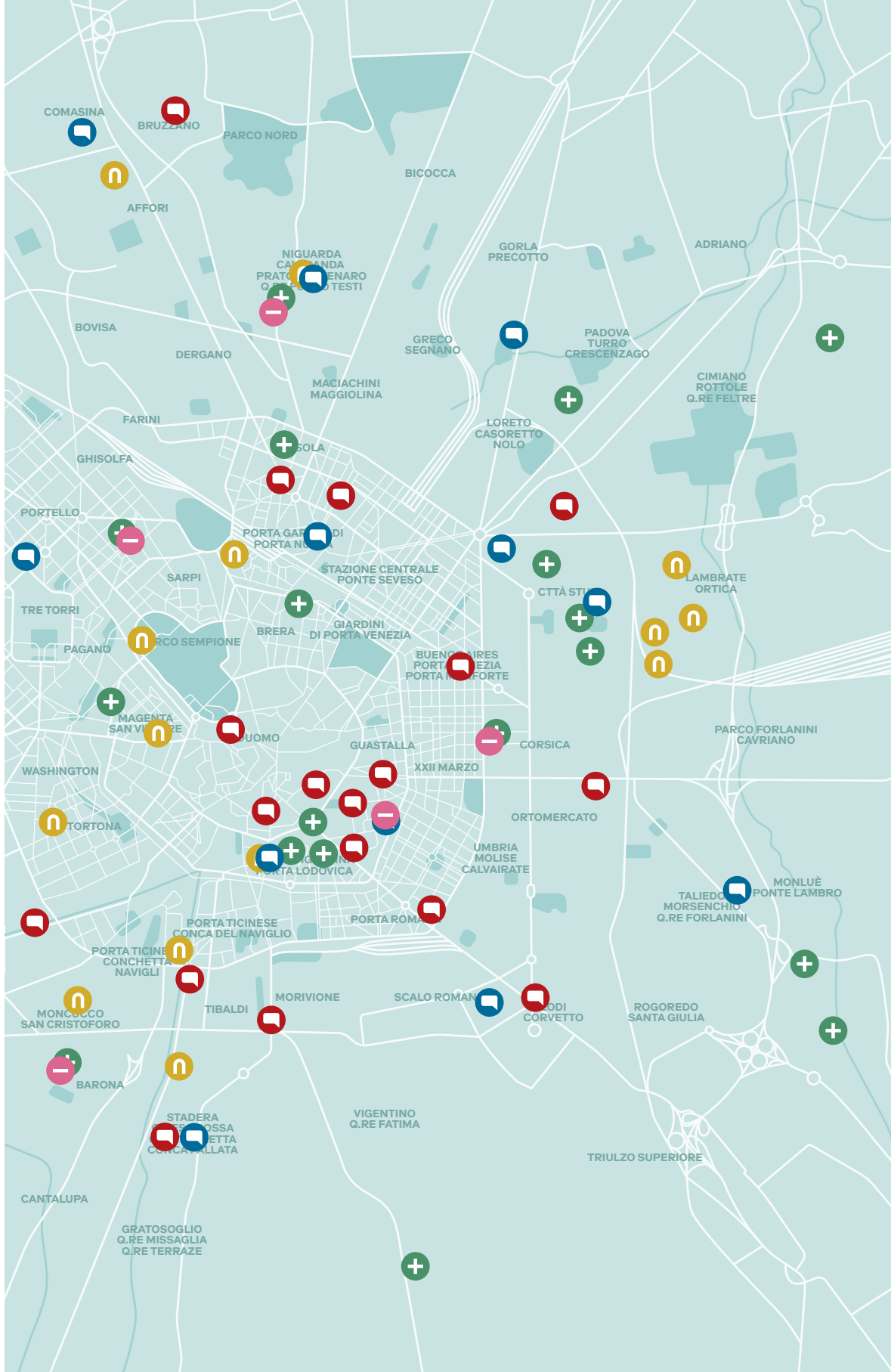
 RSA Bollino RosaArgento
Bollino RosaArgento nursing homes

 Consultori pubblici
Public family counselling centers

 Ospedali Bollino Rosa
Bollino Rosa hospitals

 Consultori privati
Private family counselling centers

Servizi sanitari
Gender health services



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MILANO ATLANTE DI GENERE / MILAN GENDER ATLAS

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La mappatura completa dei servizi dedicati alle donne e alle minoranze di genere a Milano è disponibile online al link (QRcode), dove viene mantenuta aggiornata dalle autrici.

The complete mapping of services dedicated to women and gender minorities in Milan is available online at the link (QRcode), where it is kept updated by the authors.

Nella stessa serie

In the same series

Milano Spazio Pubblico. Un atlante in divenire dello spazio di tutti
Milan Public Space. An in-progress atlas of everyone's space