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Aree protette, paesaggi culturali e trame urbane:  
tra riflessioni metodologiche,  
esperienze di valorizzazione territoriale  
e qualità della vita

*Edited by  
Sara Belotti*

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# Sesto San Giovanni Public Space Strategy to Unforeseen Emergencies after Covid-19 Experience

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## ABSTRACT

This paper explores the multifaceted impact of Covid-19 on Sesto San Giovanni, in the Milan metropolitan area. It analyzes the challenges faced by local businesses and how the city responded with extraordinary measures for public spaces, revitalizing commercial sectors, and adopting new coping mechanisms. The pandemic underscored the strategic importance of public spaces and commercial activities as vital infrastructures for societal well-being and resilience. Integrating outdoor amenities like dehors and parklets into urban redevelopment plans has boosted economic vitality and social cohesion, creating a vibrant and interconnected urban environment.

*Keywords:* preparedness; public space; tactical urbanism; commercial activities; Covid-19.

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## 1. PURPOSE OF THE PAPER

This paper aims to provide a comprehensive exploration of the transformative impact that the Covid-19 pandemic has had on the commercial activities and social dynamics of Sesto San Giovanni. In particular, the administration was forced to institute extraordinary measures for the utilization and public spaces governance, transcending traditional urban design and planning paradigms.

This essay will focus on urban vitality, as expressed through commercial activities, particularly those of bars, cafés and restaurants. It explores how Sesto San Giovanni managed the effects of the pandemic,

ensuring the provision of essential services and supporting the commercial sector activities. A crucial aspect has been the rapid proliferation of outdoor parklets and *dehors*, which have not only reflected the preparedness conditions but have also played a transformative role for bars, cafés and restaurants, enhancing their contribution to urban vitality. Then the paper examines the unforeseen urban challenges, with a specific focus on the crisis experienced by local commerce, leading to the drying up of neighborhood services.

A survey on the territory with semi-structured interviews with local traders and with a city councilor was used as methodology for this paper. The analysis was conducted during the period between October 2023 and March 2024. The article has been conceived as a critical reflection on the results of several fieldworks.

By examining preparedness measures, use of public spaces and local commerce dynamics, this research aims to offer valuable insights into the evolving socio-urban landscape of Sesto San Giovanni and its metropolitan counterparts.

## 2. ITALIAN URBAN SPACES AND THEIR ADAPTIVE RESPONSES TO EMERGENCIES

### 2.1. *Urban preparedness context*

In light of the Covid-19 pandemic, the discourse on urban planning has shifted towards a more nuanced understanding of preparedness. Traditional planning approaches are inadequate to deal with the uncertainties of our time and suggest the need to cultivate a responsiveness capable of handling unpredictable risks (Amin 2011). Preparedness, in this context, transcends the anticipation of specific risks and focuses instead on identifying and enhancing existing response capabilities (Galimberti 2023).

Preparedness involves a shift from a future-oriented perspective to an approach focused on the present. It involves recognizing and mobilizing present capacities for responding to generic risks, whether already expressed, latent, or potentially acquired. This reorientation acknowledges the reality of uncertainty as the new ordinary and underscores the importance of remaining adaptable in the face of evolving challenges (Balducci 2020).

Preparedness, often seen as a response mechanism to singular crises, can be seen as a sort of multifaceted ‘technology’ applicable to urban

planning and public policy. In an era marked by unpredictable events and pervasive radical uncertainty, the need to harness preparedness as a tool for broader urban resilience becomes evident. The Covid-19 pandemic, along with other interconnected crises, underscores the importance of proactive preparedness for enhancing urban resilience (Jonas *et al.* 2015). By reframing the versatility of preparedness, urban planners and policymakers can harness its capabilities to facilitate sustainable urban transitions and adapt to evolving socio-environmental dynamics. This paradigm shift recognizes preparedness as more than just a reactive measure, but as a proactive approach to foster resilient and adaptive cities capable of coping with uncertain futures (Armondi *et al.* 2023).

As pointed out in the literature (*ibid.*), a significant problem with urban preparedness revolves around the lack of agreement on how to define and implement it within existing governance frameworks. Instead of relying solely on post-disaster reactive measures, it is essential to recognize that the preparedness approach offers a perspective on complexity and uncertainty, underscoring the importance of dismantling existing political barriers, addressing fragmentation, and promoting collaborative relationships between different levels, sectors, and territories. Despite this acknowledgment, there remains a lack of consensus on how to integrate urban preparedness effectively into current governance systems (*ibid.*).

The discourse on spatial strategies in urban preparedness remains underdeveloped, with limited attention paid to the role of spatiality in shaping preparedness initiatives. Current approaches often tend to adopt a top-down, technocratic paradigm that oversimplifies the complexity of urban contexts and neglects the situated practices and socio-spatial dynamics that influence preparedness outcomes.

The evolving context on preparedness and emergencies highlights the need for a shift in urban planning towards a more adaptive and comprehensive approach. By prioritizing present capacities, breaking down policy barriers, and embracing the complexity of urban contexts, cities can better navigate uncertainty and build resilience in the face of new challenges.

## 2.2. *Public space usage during the emergency*

The landscape of public space use during emergencies reflects a shift away from traditional urban planning paradigms, which often prioritize rationalization and centralization of services (Governa e Memoli 2011). The rationalization approach, characterized by the closure of facilities accord-

ing to demand thresholds, has led to the decline of local commerce, neighborhood services, and schools, generating social and spatial inequalities.

The concept of the '15-minute city', first applied to a large metropolitan reality like Paris, challenges these principles of apparent rationality by emphasizing the importance of local accessibility and reducing the need for extensive travel, especially in times of crises such as pandemics (Florida *et al.* 2021).

The focus towards local accessibility has profound implications for urban life, transforming cities into experimental hubs where the effects of increased online activities and the re-evaluation of residential spaces become evident. Balconies, small gardens, and courtyards of apartment buildings, once sought after amenities, have now become essential during lockdowns, highlighting the need to reconsider the spatial dynamics of dwelling areas.

The emphasis on shopping within walking distance and the adoption of flexible delivery and opening times by local traders have reinforced the importance of neighborhood-based businesses. This shift towards localized commerce has been facilitated by measures to expand pedestrian and cycling spaces, as well as the allocation of public space for food and beverage services, challenging the dominance of cars in urban environments.

This reimagining of the use of public space not only enhances adaptability during emergencies but also promotes sustainable and inclusive urban development, where local accessibility and community engagement are essential.

### 2.3. *Commercial activities during Covid-19*

The Covid-19 pandemic profoundly reshaped the landscape of commercial activities, ushering in a profound transformation in consumption patterns and altering the dynamics of urban commerce. One significant shift observed during the pandemic is the transition from a model where people traveled to access goods and services to a model in which it is important that a significant share of basic services is available in the proximity (Perulli *et al.* 2023). This shift emphasizes the importance of adaptability in the face of uncertainties and emphasizes the need for local accessibility.

Neighborhood-level economic activities have faced unprecedented challenges during the pandemic, including compulsory distancing meas-

ures, supply chain disruptions, and fluctuations in consumer demand, demonstrating remarkable adaptability and resilience, pivoting their operations to meet changing customer needs and preferences.

Urban freight logistics, particularly last-mile activities, play a key role in the well-being and development of cities, ensuring the efficient delivery of goods to residents and businesses (*ibid.*).

However, the pandemic has also prompted cities to rethink their urban spaces, implementing a range of emergency policies and initiatives aimed at revitalizing urban economies (Cremaschi *et al.* 2021). Italian local authorities have therefore developed more agile procedures to grant and facilitate the occupation of public land, supporting the resumption of food and beverage services and retail activities<sup>1</sup>.

By exploiting public spaces for commercial use, cities have sought to create safe and welcoming environments for residents and visitors while stimulating economic activity and job opportunities. These tactical actions are implemented and achievable in the short term through experimental and often temporary light interventions<sup>2</sup> (Lanza and Pucci 2023).

The cities of Milan and Bologna have implemented street experiments, light interventions, and pop-up infrastructures with temporary alternative arrangements of the open spaces and streets such as parklets, dehors and terraces<sup>3</sup> (*ibid.*).

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<sup>1</sup> In Italy, the national law (article 63 of Legislative Decree no. 446, 15/12/1997) establishes that with their own regulation, local authorities can autonomously decide on which authorization procedures, in which urban areas, for how long, and at what rates private individuals are allowed to occupy public land.

<sup>2</sup> The Milan 2020 document depicts the guidelines and provides a framework for interventions to limit the effects of the pandemic on the daily life of the inhabitants and the functioning of economic and social activities.

<sup>3</sup> “[...] terraces as dynamic elements of urbanity: private domains in the public space where people eat collectively [...] parklets, i.e., converted kerbside parking spaces, many square meters of road space have been gained from cars. [...] when the pavement does not support a terrace – due to its width or an intense flow of people – or to extend an existing terrace. They are often placed using a platform that guarantees accessibility and a certain separation from cars. This typology, known as parklet space [...]. Dehors [...] [seasonal enclosed terraces and fixed structures]: enclosed structures are attached to the facade when the width of the sidewalk allows it, and this does not impede the passage of pedestrians. By regulation, they cannot exceed half the width of the sidewalk and must guarantee a clear passage space of more than 3 m. Therefore, they are usually placed on sidewalks wider than 5 m. In other cases, the structures are separated from the facade and placed either on the sidewalk or other pedestrian spaces, or on the roadway” (O’Connell *et al.* 2022, 1-13).

These authority resolutions allowed bars, restaurants, ice cream parlors, etc. to occupy more extended portions of the space with temporary and removable structures such as tables, chairs, umbrellas, and flower boxes, concerning public land both on the sidewalks and on the roadways.

The simplified authorization system and the suspension of the public land occupation rules and fees, started in May 2020, have been extended to December 2021.

The high number of interventions realized testifies to excellent reception of the measures by private operators as direct support to local economic revitalization.

Terraces, parklets, and dehors were realized taking various criteria into account. These included their temporary nature, ensuring they did not obstruct pedestrian pathways on sidewalks or vehicular traffic on roadways. Specifically, during Covid-19, these interventions aimed to ensure the minimum profitability of catering businesses, which have had to comply with the distancing rules, limit the maximum number of customers to reduce the risk of contagion.

#### *2.4. Commercial activities and urban space usage after Covid-19*

As municipalities emerge from the pandemic phase, questions arise regarding the sustainability of current public space arrangements for both retailers and administrations. Although the temporary expansion of public space for commercial purposes has been instrumental in supporting economic recovery, the transition to a post-pandemic reality requires a multifaceted approach to expanded use of public space.

Positive aspects of expanded use of public space are addressing the challenges associated with food and beverage services and retail activities. The notion of the ‘right to the city’, as articulated by Lefebvre, emphasizes the importance of ensuring that public spaces remain accessible and inclusive for all residents (Lefebvre 1968). This requires setting clear limits on the concessions granted to operators, ensuring that public spaces primarily serve the needs of the community rather than private interests.

The transition from emergency measures to long-term urban planning implies a shift from focusing on land occupation rules alone to comprehensive public space projects. This entails considering not only the spatial implications of commercial activities but also the architectural



quality of the artifacts introduced into the urban landscape. Although emergency measures may have prioritized speed over quality, it is essential to maintain high standards of urban design to preserve the overall aesthetic and functional integrity of public spaces.

The post-pandemic landscape offers a unique opportunity to institutionalize experimental approaches to public space management, using tactical urbanism tools to implement temporary transformations that pave the way for an enduring change. By incorporating guidelines for artifact quality and area projects into regulatory frameworks, local administrations can provide a roadmap for the long-lasting stewardship of public spaces that reflects the evolving needs and aspirations of urban dwellers (Bruzzese 2023).

The evolving discourse on commercial activities and public space use since Covid-19 underlines the importance of striking a delicate balance between economic imperatives and broader urban quality objectives.

### 3. OVERVIEW OF SESTO SAN GIOVANNI

Located six miles (8 km) from Milan's iconic Duomo, Sesto San Giovanni is a dynamic urban entity within the Lombardy region, with the distinction of being the eighth most populous city in the region with a population of 78.500 (ISTAT 2024).

Strategically located as a vital node of the Milan Metropolitan Area, Sesto San Giovanni serves as a crucial hub for regional and extra-regional communications. It acts as a crossroads for both highway and railway systems, playing a central role in connecting the broader network of transport infrastructure of the region (*Fig. 1*).

The urban planning of the city shows a polycentric structure, organized in its five sub-municipal districts (*Tab. 1*).

Sesto San Giovanni was an agricultural village until the early 20th century, housing approximately 6.000 inhabitants. The urban landscape began to undergo a radical transformation with the settlement of large-scale industry, marking a crucial moment that shaped the characteristics of subsequent urbanization forever.

The city starts to become polycentric, urbanistically modelled around three manufacturing conglomerates (Breda, Falck, and Ercole Marelli) as main poles, next to which urban areas emerged, serving as hubs for migration flows.

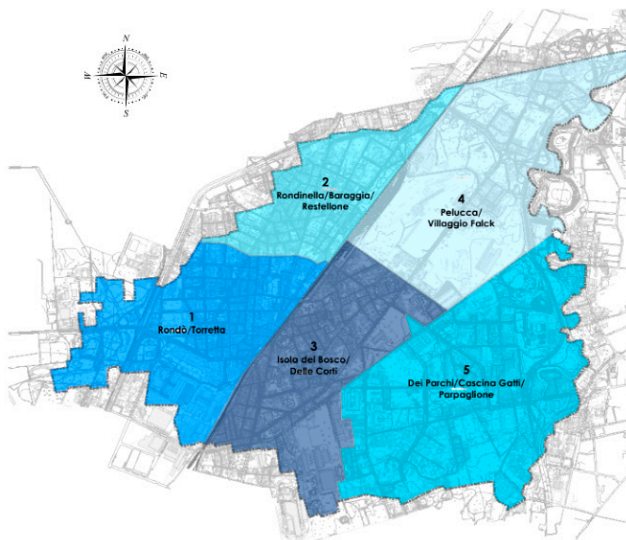


Figure 1. – Maps of Sesto San Giovanni and its neighborhoods.  
Source: based on Piano Governo del Territorio of the Municipality (2021).

Table 1. – Main characteristics of today's Sesto San Giovanni sub-municipal districts.  
Source: elaboration of the author based on collected data.

NAME	ORIENTATION	CHARACTERISTICS
1. Rondò / Torretta	SOUTH-WEST	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• One of the most dynamic areas with commercial activities</li> <li>• Connection to Milan downtown through the metro</li> <li>• Carroponte and Spazio Mil entertainment center coming from the ex-industrial area regeneration</li> </ul>
2. Rondinella / Baraggia / Restellone	NORTH-WEST	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sports Hall (PalaSesto), suitable for international ice-skating events</li> <li>• Campari Museum and Restaurant coming from the ex-industrial area regeneration</li> <li>• Main railway station and metro with connections from metropolitan area to the Lombardy Region and Switzerland</li> </ul>
3. Isola del Bosco / Delle Corti	SOUTH	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Municipality headquarters</li> <li>• Cathedral</li> <li>• Central library</li> <li>• Università degli Studi di Milano coming from the ex industrial area regeneration</li> </ul>
4. Pelucca / Villaggio Falck	NORTH-EAST	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Industrial areas undergoing disuse</li> <li>• Ecological reclamation</li> <li>• Ongoing urbanization</li> <li>• Città della Salute (planned project of metropolitan healthcare center)</li> </ul>
5. Dei Parchi / Cascina Gatti / Parpagliona	SOUTH-EAST	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• City's first inhabited area (possibly), the ancient nucleus is represented by Cascina de' Gatti, a rural village, which until 1869 was autonomous municipality</li> <li>• Active hubs of light industry</li> <li>• Hosts a high concentration of public buildings built especially in the 60s and 70s, still in use for residential purposes at social rent</li> </ul>

After World War II, the ‘city of factories’ became a land of immigration, especially from southern Italian regions. Companies restructured production processes, and Sesto San Giovanni participated in the country’s recovery with a first-class economy. These were the years of the ‘economic boom’ and its industrial supremacy, established on large factories that became global giants, guided the remarkable development of Italy during those years, where peace also brought real prosperity for the working class, gradually raising it to the middle class.

Within a few years, Sesto San Giovanni was recognized as the industrial hub for excellence, also known as the ‘Stalingrad of Italy’ due to the significant concentration of heavy industry and socio-political worker activism. Between the 1980s and 1990s, the city experienced an impressive deindustrialization, which led to the disposal of over 3 million square meters of urban areas. This transformative period resulted in a demographic decline of over 17.000 inhabitants, signifying the end of an industrial era (Gerosa 2000).

What many esteemed political and cultural figures in Sesto San Giovanni considered impossible as early as the mid-1980s, when the myth of the working-class citadel was still alive, has been accomplished in the following decades. The Sesto San Giovanni of the large factories now belongs to the past. However, the city remains capable of resilience. Since the late 1980s, initial efforts to redevelop disused industrial areas have commenced. In the decade from 1981 to 1991, despite the continuous closure of factories, the actual job losses in Sesto San Giovanni remained around 1.800 (Baron e Sinusia 2004). In fact, those expelled from large factories found employment in small and medium-sized enterprises. Moreover, the significant expansion of tertiary and service sectors managed to absorb the old workforce and provide employment for the new.

The destiny of Sesto San Giovanni was reshaped as the population settling in the city began to separate its destiny from that of the large industrial settlements and sought employment in services throughout the metropolitan area.

Recent years have seen an increase in the number of commercial establishments, both small and medium-sized retail shops as well as large shopping malls. Noteworthy is the growth of these activities managed by individuals of non-Italian origin, constituting approximately 20% of all businesses and reflecting a diverse and dynamic trade landscape in Sesto San Giovanni<sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>4</sup> Interview with the Municipal Councilor made by the author, 2024.

In the urban reality of Sesto San Giovanni today, new, and dynamic productive activities coexist with different national communities characterized by various lifestyles, being the 16.5% of resident population, especially from: Egypt, Romania, Philippines, Peru, and China.

In addition, needs and consumption of city users attracted by job opportunities, education, and the appeal of diverse services, infrastructure, and entertainment, also contributes to the city's vibrant tapestry of communities and lifestyles.

Despite all these transformations, Sesto San Giovanni seems to be moving towards differentiation from other municipalities of the metropolitan belt thanks to its strategic 'vocation' as a hub for regional and extra-regional communication systems centered around Milan.

#### 4. IMPACT OF COVID-19 AND PUBLIC SPACE USAGE ON COMMERCIAL ACTIVITIES IN SESTO SAN GIOVANNI

The impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on economic activities in Sesto San Giovanni has been multifaceted, encompassing environmental, economic, and social challenges that have further compounded the existing difficulties faced by the municipality.

Probable correlations between virus contagiousness, urban density, and air pollution underscore the importance of reclaiming usable surfaces within the city without further land consumption (Salone 2021). In Sesto San Giovanni, as in many urban areas, this involves discouraging private vehicular mobility and regenerating degraded spaces. Tactical urbanism emerges as a strategy that exploits neglected spaces within urban infrastructures for mobility, particularly roads, to reclaim new public spaces for people.

Tactical urbanism is focused more on top-down than bottom-up approach, but its expertise lies also in the ability to raise awareness and involve inhabitants. It represents an approach to urban regeneration that has been deemed effective as a tool for city adaptation during the pandemic period. Its ultimate goal is to foster civic engagement and activate spaces for citizenship, even in areas where such engagement was previously not envisioned, such as neglected, abandoned, underused, or restricted pedestrian or vehicular spaces (Armondi *et al.* 2023).

The broader context of the Milan Metropolitan Area, including Sesto San Giovanni, has been proactive in addressing public space concerns even

before the pandemic. Since 2018, the policies defined by *Piazze Aperte. A Public Space Program for Milan* (AMAT 2018) allow public spaces occupied by car parks to be returned to citizens, leveraging low-cost tactical urbanism strategies (Bruzzese 2023). The pandemic has further accelerated these efforts, particularly in reclaiming public spaces on streets, favoring pedestrians, and facilitating the construction of parklets for food and beverage services to support local businesses during the health crisis.

The local administration in Sesto San Giovanni has undergone a transformation, evolving beyond a coordinating role to actively implementing and realizing interventions, in line with the principles of tactical urbanism.

Key data for the study have been collected from the interview with the Deputy Mayor and Councilor in charge in the field of trade, neighborhood shop, associations, policies of the relaunch of the local production system, business support, cemetery services of Sesto San Giovanni. We can derive insightful observations regarding the impact of Covid-19 on economic activities, particularly focusing on public spaces used by traders and shops. Over the years, there has been a marginal decrease in the number of active commercial enterprises in Sesto San Giovanni from 2018 to 2022 (*Tab. 2*).

*Table 2. – Sesto San Giovanni commercial establishments variance (years 2018-2022). Source: DUP 2024/2026 Comune di Sesto San Giovanni (2024), elaborated by the author.*

YEAR	N° ACTIVE ESTABLISHMENTS	ANNUITY VARIANCE	ANNUITY VARIANCE %
2018	5.512	–	–
2019	5.509	-3	-0.55%
2020	5.481	-28	-0.51%
2021	5.357	-124	-2.26%
2022	5.410	+53	+0.99%

The negative economic impact of Covid-19 affected both activities and employees' wages, in particular leading less specialized businesses to cease operations. However, a noteworthy countertrend was observed, with a temporary 20-25% increase in the turnover of traditional shops during the holiday period of December 2020 and January 2021<sup>5</sup>. This

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<sup>5</sup> October 21: through Regional Ordinance no. 623, the Lombardy Region adopts further restrictive measures, imposing a curfew from 11.00 pm to 5.00 am the next

increase was attributed to the closure of the two major shopping centers in Sesto San Giovanni due to Covid-19 restrictions, resulting in an influx of new customers in the shops located in the city<sup>6</sup>.

During the Covid-19 emergency, there was a strategic emphasis on supporting activities by prioritizing the use of outdoor spaces. The municipality allocated an additional 2.000 square meters of public space to traders, free of charge, to supplement the existing spaces. The value of this gesture, in terms of the fee for the use public space (TOSAP)<sup>7</sup>, amounted to 87.000 euros<sup>8</sup>.

In 2020-2021 no fees were collected for both existing and additional public spaces dedicated to commerce, including those used for local markets. The central government intervened to support the municipality of Sesto San Giovanni, compensating for the loss of revenue.

The use of public spaces by traders, granted by the municipality, is subject to decorum and safety regulations, allowing traders the flexibility to choose the type of public space to occupy, be it parking lots, sidewalks, or squares. A regulation stipulates that commercial establishments may occupy a public space equal to half the internal surface of the store, with a length corresponding that of the store's windows.

According to this policy, traders ask the City Executive Board for the availability of the selected public space so that the municipal police can carry out checks to ensure compliance with the rules. In addition, the same merchants, thanks to this municipal authorization may require banks to grant a loan based on their turnover to furnish assigned public space. The municipality has left the choice of the type of public space to be occupied by traders, whether it be parking lots, sidewalks, or squares.

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morning. In fact, only motivated journeys, with self-declaration, for proven work needs, for situation of necessity or urgency, for health reasons are allowed. As for the trade sector, all commercial activities in shopping centers and large sales structures will be closed on weekends (Calcagno and Chiodi 2022).

<sup>6</sup> Interview conducted by the author (2024) with the Deputy Mayor and Councilor in charge in the field of trade, neighborhood shop, associations, policies of the relaunch of the local production system, business support, cemetery services.

<sup>7</sup> D.L. (Decreto Legge) n. 34 [National level], 19/05/2020, called "Rilancio" (Eng. Relaunch) which provided in article 181 measures to support public service companies-exemption from the payment of TOSAP and COSAP for public service companies holding concessions or authorizations for public land until October 31, 2020, and the simplification of the procedure for the issue of new concessions.

<sup>8</sup> Interview mentioned in note 6.

However, the rapid expansion of outdoor food and beverage services and retail activities has also presented challenges and trade-offs. Issues such as noise pollution, pedestrian congestion, and the loss of parking spaces have emerged as significant concerns for both businesses and residents. Additionally, the temporary nature of many emergency measures has raised questions about their long-term sustainability and effectiveness in promoting inclusive and equitable urban development.

To address these challenges, it is necessary to balance the needs of businesses with those of residents for peace and security, creating inclusive and vibrant urban environments through focused normative.

The revival of outdoor economic activities and the revitalization of the catering sector have contributed to the local economy's resilience and have played a crucial role in enhancing the quality of life, social connections, and community well-being, albeit with temporary reductions in municipal revenues due to fee cancellations.

The use of public spaces assigned by the Sesto San Giovanni municipality to retailers comprises two main types: 'parklet' and 'dehor'. The 'parklet' represents a tactical urbanism practice characterized by short-term and low-cost interventions. It consists of outdoor seating with tables and umbrellas placed on sidewalks or in free parking areas on the carriageway (O'Connell *et al.* 2022). On the other hand, 'dehor' is an external extension of a bar, café, or restaurant through removable structures that can be opened or closed based on weather conditions. These 'dehors' setups must comply with standards of decorum and safety regulations with specific characteristics, such as being elevated from the ground for easy removal, not obstructing pedestrian flow, allowing access to driveways, and not exceeding the height of the first floors of buildings.

According to the Municipal Councilor's interview, the overall costs of dehors were usually financed by banks on the business turnover of the traders. Notably, during the Covid-19 period, no taxation was applied to these setups.

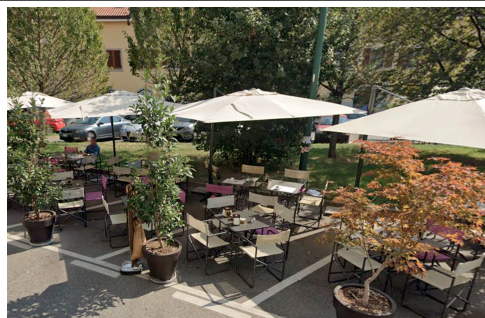
After the Covid-19 emergency, traders kept 1.000 square meters of the additional 2.000 square meters allocated outside. The released 1.000 square meters became public spaces for parking and pedestrian and vehicular use again, due to the future return to the usual taxation, demonstrating adaptability and shared use of urban spaces (*Fig. 2-3*)<sup>9</sup>.

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<sup>9</sup> Interview mentioned in note 6.



2019



2020

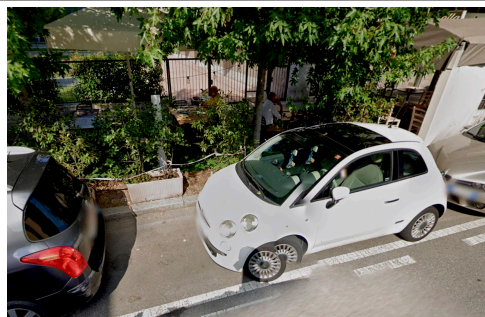


2023

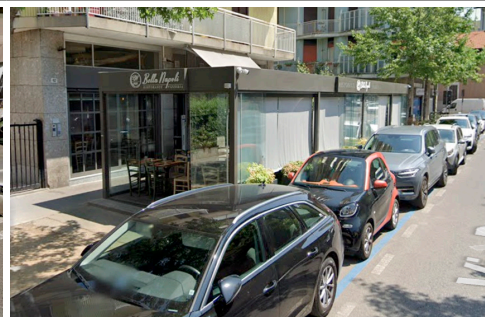
*Figure 2. – Public space transformation in the years 2019, 2020 and 2023 with parklets during Covid-19 period (Sesto San Giovanni, Via Stoppani).  
Source: Google Maps.*



2019



2020



2022

*Figure 3. – Public space transformation in the years 2019 (debor), 2020 (debor and parklet during Covid-19) and 2022, with renovated debor according to municipality rule (Sesto San Giovanni, Via Campari).  
Source: Google Maps.*



Currently, at Sesto San Giovanni is not yet available a unitary program for the design of public spaces but are in the planning phase and in some cases implementing individual specific interventions for the renovation and creation of outdoor areas.

Urban redevelopment is identified as an effective tool for enhancing the commercial attractiveness of the territory.

A significant aspect to be explored is whether there are distinct motivations driving the deployment of dehors and parklets among Italian and non-Italian retailers. According to the inputs from the interview with Municipal Councilor, it is plausible to hypothesize that non-Italian retailers may show a lower propensity to the use of dehors and parklets compared to their Italian counterparts. This could result from various factors, such as the potentially higher investment required. Additionally, the nature of non-Italian commercial activities, which may rely heavily on take-away services, could contribute to a preference for small terraces attached to the shop/facility. However, further research and analysis are needed to comprehensively understand the dynamics influencing the differential usage of public space among Italian and non-Italian traders<sup>10</sup>.

## 5. PREPAREDNESS AND PERSPECTIVES

The Covid-19 pandemic has prompted local authorities to rediscover the strategic value of public space in terms of preparedness, underscoring its significance as a crucial asset to support social functions and promote urban well-being.

This newfound recognition extends beyond economic considerations to encompass the socio-territorial importance of neighborhood services and social interactions. Indeed, commercial activities emerge not only as economic drivers, but also as critical components of community resilience and social cohesion, similar to critical infrastructures, which are indispensable for maintaining vital societal functions (Bruzzese 2023).

Outdoor facilities, such as dehors and parklets are crucial for supporting food and beverage service activities and fostering social interaction. It is imperative to recognize these spaces as critical infrastructures

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<sup>10</sup> Interview mentioned in note 6.

in the revitalization efforts of vast former industrial areas like Sesto San Giovanni.

Here tactical urbanism has emerged as a valuable strategy for adapting public spaces to changing needs during the pandemic. By reclaiming underused or neglected areas for pedestrian-friendly facilities such as parklets, cities have not only supported local businesses, but also enhanced the quality of urban life.

By integrating these facilities into urban redevelopment plans, local policymakers have promoted economic vitality, improved social cohesion, and strengthened community resilience in the post-pandemic era. The streets of Sesto San Giovanni adorned with dehors, terraces, and parklets have experienced increased economic and social attractiveness during and after the Covid-19 pandemic, fostering a sense of vibrancy and connectivity within the urban realm.

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