Public Real Estate Assets and the Metropolitan Strategic Plan in Italy. The Two Cases of Milan and Cagliari

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Abstract. The process of economic transition from the old to the new economy produces significant effects also on cities and territories. The change in the production cycles has led to numerous and significant phenomena of delocalization and consequent abandonment of buildings and infrastructures, according to the markets. In Italy, starting from the 70 s, the divestment of industrial areas and the more recent Federalism Law have increased the interest on reuse of public properties as an act proper to municipal urban planning. However, the public real estate management (PREM) and the choice of new urban functions to be assigned represents a difficult challenge still today, at all levels of government, including that of the Metropolitan Cities (MCs), established by the Delrio Law.

MCs, which define development strategies in a medium-term period through the Metropolitan Strategic Plan (SP), represent a great opportunity to integrate PREM and public policies objectives. Within this framework, the aim of the present study is to evaluate meaning and roles recognized to the public assets in the SP drawn up by the Metropolitan City of Milan (MCM) - Lombardy Region - and in the ongoing SP of the Metropolitan City of Cagliari (MCC) - Sardinia Region. The qualitative and quantitative analysis of the two case studies allows authors to make considerations on the multiple roles that public real estate can play in the context of strategic planning to pursue sustainable development of territories.

Keywords: Public real estate management · Metropolitan strategic plan · Sustainable development

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1 Introduction

Public real estate management (PREM) is an important issue at the core of the political agendas of national and local governments [1, 2]. It has progressively acquired a significant role in implementing the theories of New Public Management (NPM) and Public Governance (PG), which have introduced important principles for a comprehensive restructuring of the public administration system, including those of efficiency, transparency, responsibility and decentralization [3, 4]. At the same time, a new awareness has grown about the environmental, economic and social benefits generated by an efficient management of public real estate assets (buildings and areas), capable of promoting the transition towards sustainable development models [5]. As a matter of fact, the reuse of this asset, which often represents a significant component of the existing city [6], both in quantitative and in qualitative terms, is a precondition for pursuing the ideal of "compact city" that grows mainly through the regeneration of derelict or abandoned sites [7], thus limiting soil consumption [8]. Furthermore, effective PREM allows a reduction in public expenditure, an increase in economic opportunities for the subjects directly or indirectly involved in the process (private investors or citizens) [9] and social benefits for the local community, especially in terms of public services and urban facilities [10, 11], two factors that improve the quality of life and the attractiveness of the urban context.

In Italy, the political debate on PREM has been characterized by different approaches [12]. Policies of economic-financial nature, aimed at reducing costs and consolidating the state budget, have alternated with more sustainable approaches aimed at recognizing the public asset as an extraordinary resource to support local community development. The Federalism Law (2013) which allows to transfer State-owned assets to all those Local Authorities that request them, as well as the various initiatives and projects launched by the State Property Agency to promote the knowledge, management and enhancement of the state properties are the first manifestation of this renewed approach [13].

However, several problems can be found at the local level, both in terms of knowledge and planning. Despite the Legislative Decree no. 33 of 14 March 2013, art. 30, which asks public administrations to publish information concerning the real estate owned and held and the related management policies adopted, not all the Italian municipalities have built up a comprehensive knowledge framework to support efficient long-term PREM. Significant delays are also found in the technological tools, which often does not allow to frame the real estate data within a more complex set of public policies and performance indicators of the city [14–16]. Furthermore, the specificity of the public asset has not always been recognized in the local plans for a long time and municipalities have rarely developed strategies to plan and manage the real estate assets within an urban vision for the future [17]. Only in recent decades the divestment phenomena that invest a significant number of buildings and sites in the city has required the introduction of new knowledge and planning tools also at the local level. Several municipalities have drawn up Charts, Masterplans and Strategic Projects to pursue a vision for the "city of tomorrow" based on the recognition of the values and potential of the "public city", understood as a complex system of buildings, open spaces and green areas belonging to different public bodies and institutions [18, 19].

Nowadays, PREM is an important issue at all levels of government, including that of the Metropolitan Cities (MCs), a new government body established by the Delrio Law (No. 56/2014). MCs, which define development strategies in a medium-term period through the Metropolitan Strategic Plan (SP), represent a great opportunity to integrate PREM and public policies objectives of environmental, economic and social nature [20]. Within this conceptual framework, the aim of the present research is to evaluate meaning and roles recognized to the public assets in the SP drawn up by the Metropolitan City of Milan (MCM) - Lombardy Region - and in the ongoing SP of the Metropolitan City of Cagliari (MCC) - Sardinia Region (see Fig. 1).

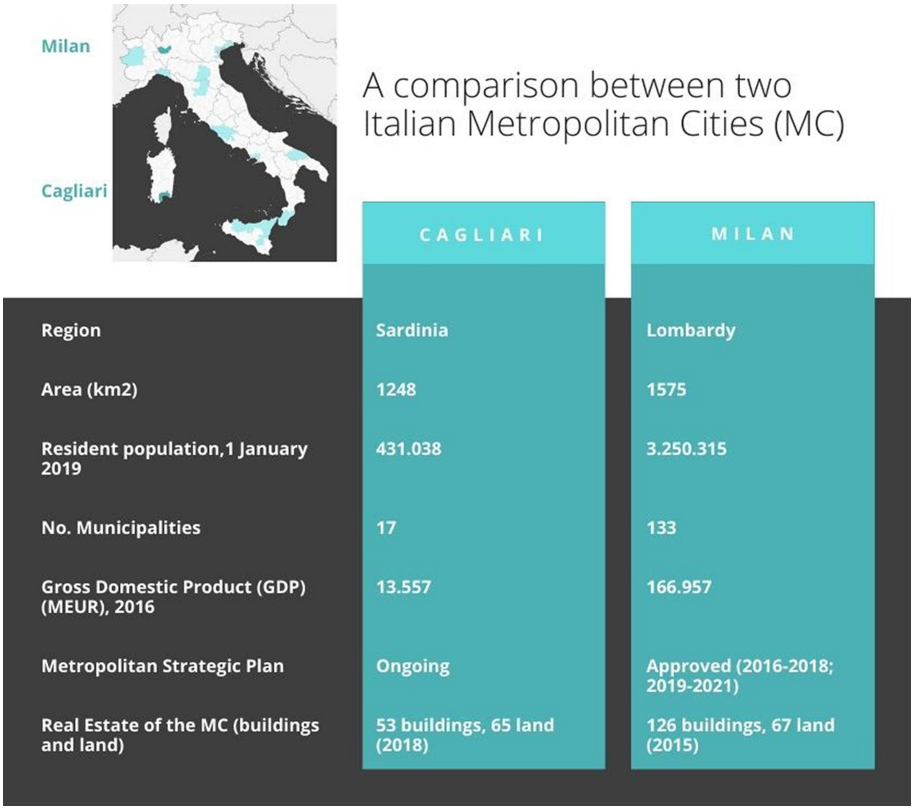

Fig. 1. A comparison between two Italian Metropolitan Cities: Milan (MCM) and Cagliari (MCC).

As a matter of fact, the two MCs, characterized by very different geographic, social [21] and economic [22] situations, adopt specific approaches in planning their public real estate assets [23, 24]. The comparison was carried out through a qualitative-quantitative analysis to evaluate projects and actions concerning public properties introduced by the SP of the MCM and the results obtained from the participatory strategic planning promoted by the MCC to collect weakness and opportunities of the "public city" to be considered in the ongoing SP.

After illustrating the objectives that Italian legislation assigns to the SP (paragraph 2), the contribution explores the two experiences of strategic planning carried out by the MCM (paragraph 3.1) and by the MCC (paragraph 3.2). The results of the comparison between the two case studies (paragraph 4) led the authors to make considerations on the multiple roles that public real estate can play in the context of strategic planning to pursue sustainable development of territories in the new political-administrative geography of the country (paragraph 5).

2 Material: The Objectives of the Metropolitan Strategic Plan

The Metropolitan level represents the scale which we must refer from 2014 to plan a large part of Italian territory in all of its variables including the public real estate asset. The institution of the MC, defined by Law No. 56/2014, represents an intermediate level of Governance of vast area Governance compared to the region level, elected not directly by the citizens, but by the representatives of the Municipalities that com-pose it. Except for the case of Cagliari, the borders of the other 13 metropolitan cities coincide with those of the former provinces. Its aims are to take care of the develoepement of the metropolitan area, to promote the integrated management of services, infrastructures and communication networks of interest of the metropolitan city.

In addition to the functions already attributed to the provinces, the metropolitan city is assigned new functions including that of having a three-year metropolitan strategic plan to be updated every year. It constitutes an act of direction for the Public Body and for the exercise of the functions of the municipalities and the unions of municipalities included within the aforementioned territory. (L. 56/2014, art.44). Strategic planning, born as a voluntary act, with the Law No. 54/2014 becomes a mandatory act for the Italian metropolitan cities, putting in the foreground a shared vision of the development of the territory.

The "three-years strategic plan of the metropolitan territory" represents, therefore, a programmatic document that outlines the "Metropolitan city vocation" (L. 54/2014 art. 1, c. 44, lett. e) and indicates the main lines of the development for a determinate territory, answering more effectively about an economic and social question, com-pared to the traditional territorial planning.

As established in all of the Metropolitan city Statute, the Strategic Plan "defines the programming guidelines general, sectoral and transversal objectives of development in the medium and long term for the metropolitan area, identifying the priorities of intervention, the resources needed to their pursuit, the timing and method of implementation, methods and tools for monitoring".

3 Method: A Comparison Between Experiences of Metropolitan Strategic Planning

As part of a broader research focused on new opportunities for the public real estate management and planning at the scale of the Italian metropolitan cities[1], the present paper aims to compare the two experiences of metropolitan strategic planning carried out by the metropolitan cities of Milan (MCM) and Cagliari (MCC). The MCM has been selected as a case study as one of the first in Italy to have adopted the Metropolitan Strategic Plan (SP). On the other hand, the MCC has been taken as a field of investigation as the authors of the present study, involved in the drafting of the SP, have completed important phases that allow to understand the future approach of the new public body toward the public real estate portfolio, which differs from that adopted by the MCM in some aspects.[2]

The research methodology adopted consists in a qualitative-quantitative analysis based on word cloud maps to evaluate the set of projects and actions on public properties introduced by the SP of the MCM, and the results of the participatory planning process carried out by MCC to highlight opportunities and weaknesses of the "public city" that the new government body will have to consider in the drafting of the SP. In more detail, the present study assigns a decreasing weight (W) to projects and actions adopted by the MCM and to opportunities and weaknesses emerged during the public consultation in the MCC based on their strategic value for the metropolitan territory: aspects concerning the territorial governance (W = 1), general public policies (W = 0.5) and more specific public measures (W = 0.25).

3.1 The Role of the Public Real Estate Assets in the SP of the MCM

The MCM, established by Law No. 54/2014, from 1 January 2015 has replaced the existing province of Milan, coinciding perfectly with its borders. It covers an area of approximately 1,575 sq km and includes 133 municipalities, with a population that exceeds 3 million inhabitants [25]. It was the first Italian Metropolitan City to draw-up a three-years strategic plan of the metropolitan area (2016–2018) [26], definitively approved with Council resolution of May 12, 2016.

The Plan is the result of an inclusive process that lasted about a year, which involved the main stakeholders of the territory with the aim of planning actions in the short term and defining long-term future scenarios for a "real metropolis, possible

[1] This paper is part of the research work carried out by Mara Ladu for the research scholarship entitled "The role of the public real estate for the governance of the Metropolitan City of Cagliari", under the supervision of prof. Ginevra Balletto.

[2] The Metropolitan City of Cagliari launched a call to draw up the Strategic Plan in 2018. It was won by the Temporary Business Association (ATI), constituted by Lattanzio Advisory and Lattanzio Communication in 2019. The authors of the present study are taking part in the activities of the interdisciplinary working group set up ad hoc by the aforementioned companies. Particularly, Professor Luigi Mundula as project leader, Professor Ginevra Balletto as head of the "City and territory" working group, Arch. Mara Ladu and Eng. Alessandra Milesi as collaborators of the research group.

metropolis". The Ideas Map [27] (September 2015), a document that guided the drafting of the SP, identified six development strategies for the area, which can be summarized as follows (see Fig. 2):

- Agile and high-performing (innovation and simplification of public administration);
- Creative and innovative (promotion of new economic activities and new employment);
- Attractive and open to the world (enhancement and attraction of resources and talents);
- Smart and sustainable (territorial and environmental transformations);
- Fast and integrated (integration of infrastructure and mobility services of people and data);
- Cohesive and collaborative (inter-municipal cooperation for proximity services).

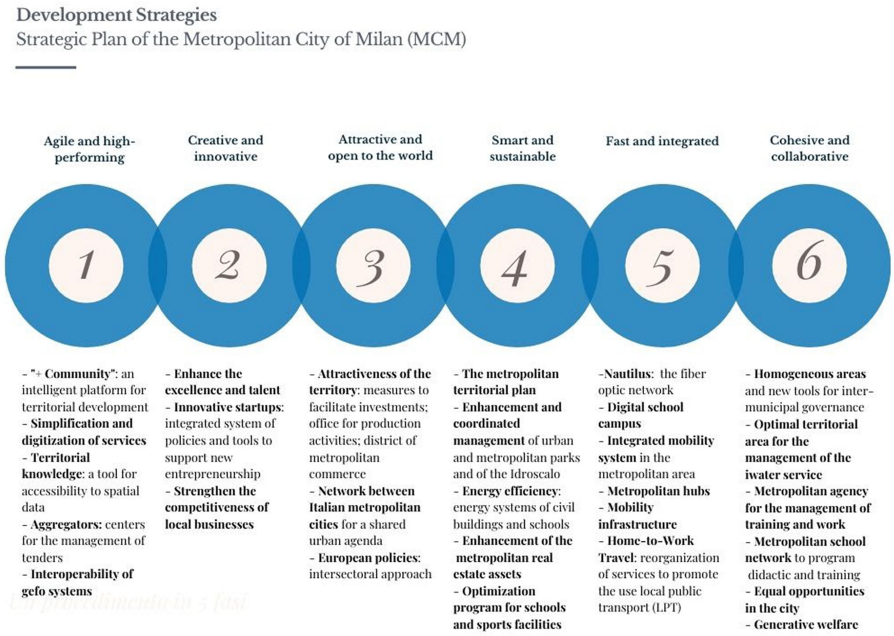

Fig. 2. The six development strategies identified by the SP of the MCM.

These strategies are configured as "design platforms" within which the Metropolitan city is called to develop policies, projects and partnerships by a dynamic and incremental process. At the same time, they are the starting point to develop territorial based projects and political agendas according to the vocations of the different contexts, involving local actors, primarily the Municipalities, in a cooperative form.

According to Law 56/2014, art. 47, the metropolitan city is responsible for the public properties, personnel and resources of the former Province. In the SP, the efficient PREM is a prerogative for a comprehensive reorganization of the public administration, which is at the core of the idea of an "agile and performing" city to be implemented by streamlining the authorization procedures, investing in the digitization processes, ensuring greater transparency. However, it is the strategy for an "intelligent and sustainable" city that introduces specific actions for the public asset (buildings and land) (see Fig. 3). The present study assigns a decreasing weight (W) to each project and action adopted by the SP according to their strategic value for the metropolitan territory.

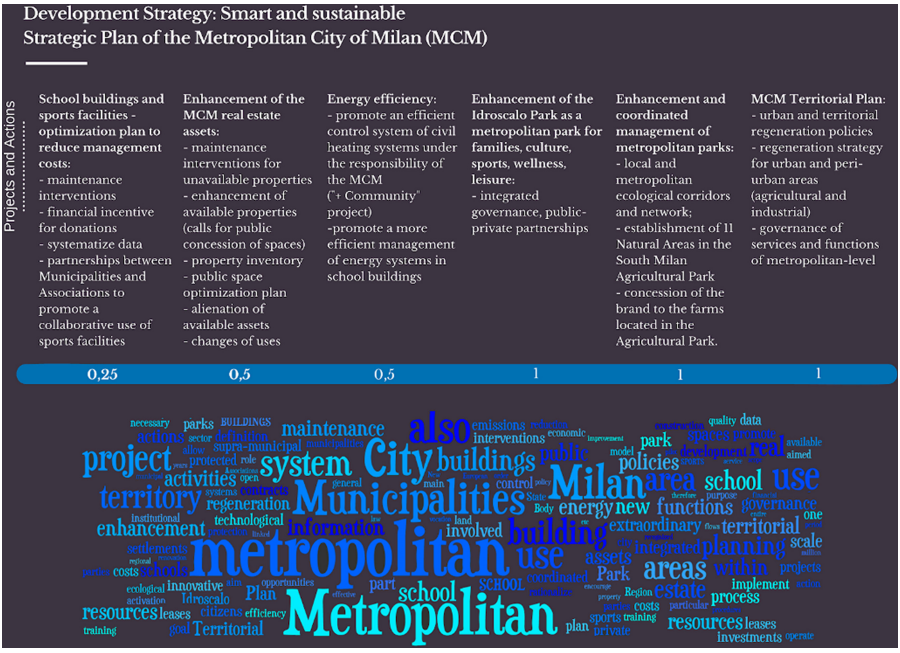

Fig. 3. Projects and actions adopted by the SP for the public asset (buildings and land) and the specific weight (W) assigned according to their strategic value for the metropolitan territory.

In this sense, urban and territorial regeneration policies and the governance of supra-local services and facilities that will be defined in the future Metropolitan Spatial Plan are considered decisive for the development of the entire metropolitan city (W = 1). The same level of importance has been recognized for actions relating to the enhancement and coordinated management of the parks in order to create a network of ecological corridors on a local and metropolitan scale, as well as to the valorization of the Idroscalo, to be understood as a new metropolitan centrality with cultural, sport, wellness and leisure activities. On the other hand, the present study attributes a minor weight (W = 0.5) to the set of measures aimed at improving the energy efficiency of

public and private buildings and to the enhancement policies of the real estate assets owned by MCM (unavailable and available assets). The enhancement policies consist in the promotion of calls for the concession or the alienation of the public asset, in the definition of different uses for spaces, in the policy of maximizing economic return from property leased to ensure adequate level of maintenance, in the rationalization and efficient space utilization. Considering that in the case of the MCM the real estate assets consist of about 190 buildings, 180 of which are school buildings, the SP introduces specific actions to optimize and contain public spending through a better use of school buildings and related sports facilities. The first aim is to update existing agreements, especially as regards school gyms, in order to propose new forms of management in collaboration with municipalities and local associations. Considering that the school buildings and the related sports facilities represent only a part of the total real estate portfolio of the MCM - although very consistent -, the research assigns a minor weight to these actions (W = 0,25).

The analysis highlights that the SP mainly focuses on the public real estate assets owned by the MCM which contributes significantly to pursuing the idea of "intelligent and sustainable city". In particular, the energy efficiency of public and private buildings contributes to reducing emissions and therefore to safeguarding the territory and the environment. More generally, the reuse of the underutilized buildings and the urban regeneration process are intended as priority actions to reduce land consumption and improve the quality of the urban environment.

These principles have been confirmed in the current SP for the three-year period 2019–2021 [28]. The update of the previous SP frames the metropolitan city development strategies into six policy fields (Simplification and digitization; Intermunicipal management, support for municipalities and European policies; Economic development, training and work; Territorial planning, metropolitan welfare and urban regeneration; Environmental sustainability and parks; Infrastructure and mobility system) according to the objectives and targets of the 2030 Agenda and to the Italian National Strategy for the Sustainable Development (SNSvS) [29]. Urban regeneration strategies are implemented through the enhancement of the public asset, especially that owned by MCM, as well as through redevelopment projects of underutilized spaces capable of promoting economic, cultural and social innovation, thus better responding to the community needs.

3.2 The Role of the "Public City" in the Ongoing SP of the MCC

The drafting phase of the SP of the MCC, established in 2016, has started in September 2019. To date, the construction of the knowledge framework has been completed through a desk analysis and a participatory diagnosis which involved both the mayors and stakeholders of the interested area during dedicated meetings, and the local community through the administration of questionnaires.

The participatory process "Towards a shared future" [30] aimed at drafting the SP consisted of three days of confrontation with the main stakeholders of the territory (February 19–21, 2020), at a time when still no cases of Covid-19 had been registered in Italy. The three days were organized into 6 Thematic Tables dedicated to key issues for the development of the metropolitan area: Resilience and environmental

vulnerability of the territory; Research, technology and business; Tourism, economic, productive and service activities; Transport and sustainable mobility; Health, social cohesion and quality of life; Urban fabric (see Fig. 4). Each Table included three sub-tables to which the guests took part according to their personal skills and interests.

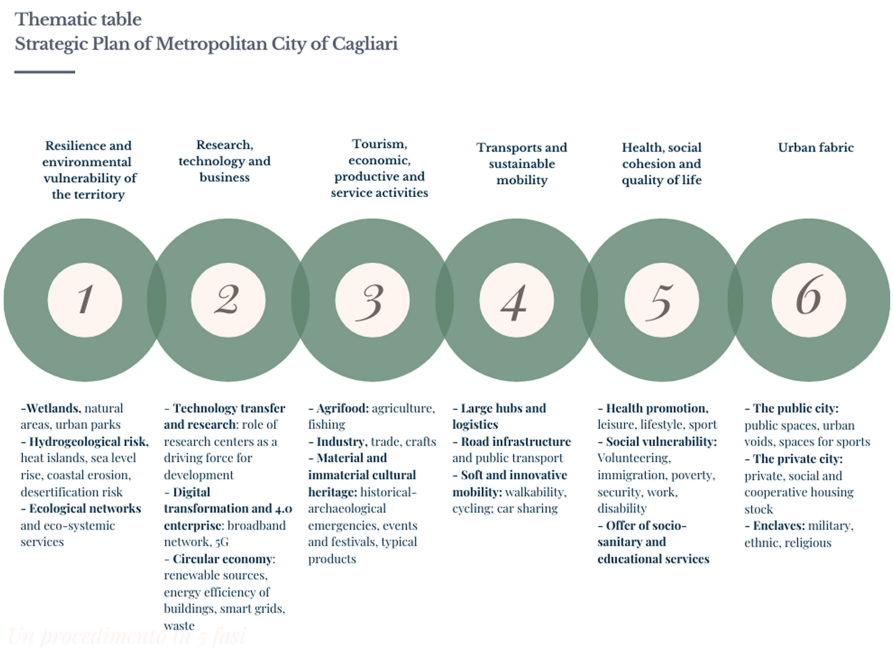

Fig. 4. The 6 Thematic Tables and the related sub-tables organized as part of the participatory process aimed at drafting the SP of the MCC. Elaboration by G. Balletto 2020.

The activity of the working groups was organized in two phases: in the first, participants were asked to evaluate opportunity and weakness of the proposed topic; in the second, after a collective discussion, each working group identified general and specific objectives up to develop some project proposals.

The public real estate theme was mainly analyzed by the Thematic Table dedicated to the "Urban Fabric", which focused on the concepts of "public city", private city and military enclaves. The stakeholders understood the public city as a system of public buildings, open spaces, green areas and mobility infrastructures (Ladu, 2018) which assumes a predominant role in contemporary lifestyles (pre-Covid-19) characterized by a reduction of the private sphere and a growing propensity towards the use of collective, public or semi-public spaces.

The list of opportunity and weakness emerged during the discussion led authors to develop a mixed assessment, where the qualitative aspects were highlighted through keyword maps and the attribution of a decreasing weight (W) according to their relevance and strategic value for the metropolitan territory (see Fig. 5).

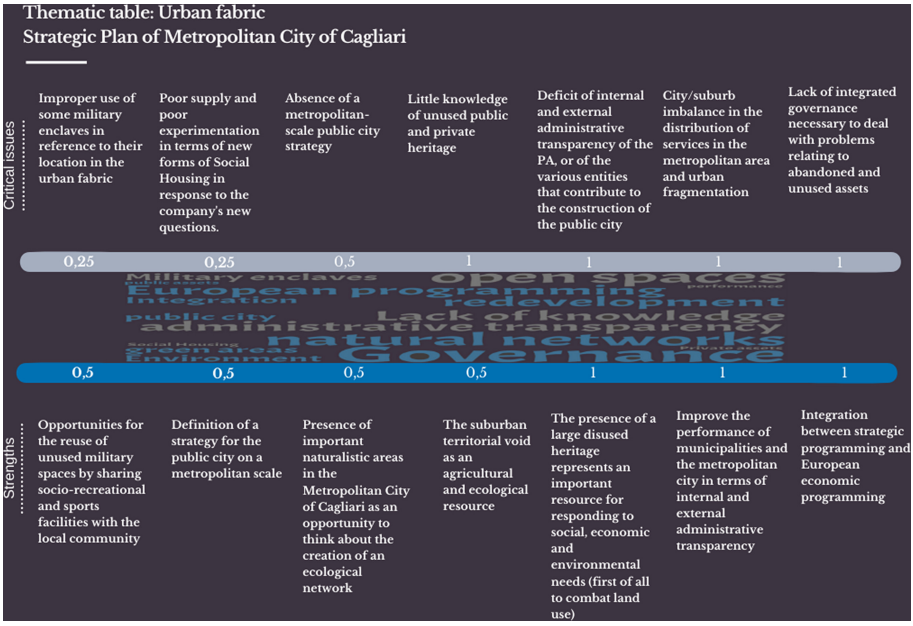

Fig. 5. The main outcomes produced by the thematic table dedicated to the urban fabric. elaborated by Balletto G., Milesi A. and Ladu M., 2020.

The main outcomes produced by the Thematic Table dedicated to the Urban Fabric show how the public assets can represent a significant resource to pursue the sustainable development objectives. The establishment of the new government body of the MCC is recognized as a great opportunity to:

- improve local and supra-local governance through an approach capable of integrating strategic planning and European economic policies;
- improve the administrative transparency on a local and supralocal scale;
- integrate the PREM issue within more general public policies objectives of social, economic and environmental nature;
- define a strategy for the public city on a metropolitan scale.

More specifically, the public asset (buildings and areas) represents an opportunity to improve the provision of socio-recreational and sports facilities, also through new forms of shared management between municipalities, institutions, private investors and citizens. At the same time, virgin land owned by public or private subjects represent an opportunity to increase the agricultural and ecological footprint, thus limiting soil consumption. This principle, recognized worldwide even before the current pandemic, nowadays assumes even greater weight because, as assessed by Murgante B. et al. (2020) [31, 32], the Covid 19 has spread mainly in urban contexts with higher land consumption.

In general, it is possible to say that in the case of the MCC, the public asset represents a cross-cutting theme. As a matter of fact, the Table dedicated to "Research,

Technology and Business", in discussing the circular economy issue, recognized specific objectives that the MCC should face to guarantee sustainable development of the territory, including: the drafting of a Metropolitan Spatial Plan to identify territories to be safeguarded, renewed, transformed; the adoption of monitoring tools to ensure constant assessment of the energy levels of existing buildings; the promotion of public policies to improve the energy efficiency of the building stock and to provide available public spaces to support start-up's activities.

Moreover, in light of the results produced by the other Thematic Tables, in the SP the public real estate assets will play an important role in pursuing the protection of the natural and built environment and its transformations, as well as in increasing efficiency and competitiveness in the sign of digital transformation.

Within this perspective, the ongoing Strategic Agenda defines the main objectives of the SP and the respective actions that the MCC should implement in the future.

These considerations are in line with the new challenges imposed by the contingent moment, which requires to adopt an interdisciplinary ecological qualitative-quantitative approach. Nowadays, even more than in the past, the strategic planning should be understood as an upgradeable and implementable process to govern effectively in ordinary and extraordinary conditions.

4 Results

The present study investigated the issue of public real estate management (PREM) in Italy, a topic that is gradually playing a central role in the civil, political and disciplinary debate. Following the establishment of the Metropolitan Cities (MCs) as a new government body, PREM need to be tackled on a metropolitan scale, going beyond municipal administrative boundaries. Indeed, the MC represents an opportunity to manage the public asset as a resource to pursue the territorial development objectives expressed by the Metropolitan Strategic Plan (SP).

Starting from these assumptions, the research set up a comparison between the two strategic planning experiences carried on by the Metropolitan cities of Milan (MCM) and Cagliari (MCC). A research methodology based on a qualitative-quantitative analysis has been developed to evaluate both the meaning attributed to the public real estate and the role assigned in pursuing the most complex government aims.

As regard the first aspect, the MCM intended the public asset mainly as the property owned by the new public body of the Metropolitan City, introducing different projects and actions depending on whether it is available or unavailable. Furthermore, considering that the majority of MCM's real estate portfolio mainly consists of school buildings, the SP introduces specific actions for this category. On the other hand, the MCC addressed the issue of public real estate assets from a broader perspective, as manifested during the participatory process for drafting the SP. Indeed, the main stakeholders called to the "Urban fabric" thematic table considered the public city as a system of built buildings and related services, open spaces, green areas and mobility infrastructures. Therefore, the working group did not focus only on the property owned by the Metropolitan City but, more generally, on the entire public asset present in the metropolitan area, owned by different public bodies and institutions. The military asset

has been recognized as a specific category of the public real estate, demonstrating its significant weight in the metropolitan context and, more generally, in the regional territory, in qualitative and quantitative terms.

The results obtained from the participatory process lead to define guidelines on the entire real estate portfolio present in the metropolitan area, also in order to support and coordinate the action of individual municipalities on their assets within a shared management and enhancement strategy.

As for the second aspect considered by the present research, it's possible to assert that both the cities assign a transversal role to the public real estate assets to pursue development strategies. Particularly, the MCM's SP recognizes:

- efficient management of the public asset among the actions necessary to pursue the idea of "Agile and performing" city;
- the energy efficiency of private and public buildings (in particular school buildings) and the enhancement of the real estate assets owned by the Metropolitan City as fundamental actions to pursue the strategy for a "Smart and sustainable" city;
- the enhancement and coordinated management of metropolitan parks as an opportunity to build ecological corridors on a local and metropolitan scale, thus pursuing the strategy for a "Smart and sustainable" city.

At the same time, the stakeholders involved in the participatory planning process of the MCC have recognized that:

- effective management of the public asset (buildings and areas) allows to improve the performance levels of the PA, to answer the demand for social housing, to increase and diversify the provision of socio-recreational and sports facilities through new collaborative management forms between institutions, private investors and citizens, but also to support start-up at an early stage, providing available public spaces;
- the energy efficiency of the public real estate assets is fundamental to reduce the emissions and to promote a circular economy model;
- effective management of the extra-urban territorial void, public or private, allows to strengthen the agricultural and ecological footprint, thus limiting the further consumption of virgin soils.

5 Conclusions

The comparison carried out by the present research work allows authors to make some considerations on the approaches adopted by the two metropolitan cities of Milan (MCM) and Cagliari (MCC).

First of all, even if the Law assigns the Metropolitan City (MC) the task of managing the real estate assets owned by the entity, the choice to consider the public asset as a whole, as the MCC is doing in drafting its metropolitan strategic plan (SP), can represent a great opportunity. As a matter of fact, a comprehensive knowledge of the public asset in qualitative and quantitative terms, of its intrinsic and extrinsic characteristics, is a precondition for guaranteeing efficient management and defining

future uses for spaces. In particular, the knowledge framework supports the MC not only in implementing rationalization, enhancement or alienation policies, but also in planning a balanced provision of public services and urban facilities throughout the metropolitan territory, especially as regards those of supra-local rank. Furthermore, a strategy for the entire real estate portfolio on a metropolitan scale stimulates and guides the process of knowledge and management of public properties also at the local level. For this reason, the MCC understand the entire "public city" as a set of buildings, open spaces, green areas and infrastructures for mobility.

The analyzes conducted also show that the SP can constitute a great opportunity to integrate the objectives of public real estate asset management and those of the more complex set of public policies. The two MCs examined have attributed to the public asset a strategic role in pursuing future development objectives, in line with the principles of the Urban Agenda for the EU (Pact of Amsterdam) [33] which recognize urban regeneration as a transversal action in guiding the transition towards sustainable development models. It is within this renewed cultural perspective that strategic planning in Italy should consider the public real estate assets, thus maximizing its potential to support the development of the territories.

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