

BRESCIA'S OLD CARMINE DISTRICT: THE IMPACT OF PLANNING AND CONSERVATION DECISIONS ON THE AREA'S BUILT AND SOCIAL ENVIRONMENT IN THE 1970s AND 1980s

Carlotta Coccoli

Abstract

This chapter presents the preliminary results of a study of the interventions promoted by the Municipality of Brescia for the recovery of the Carmine district. This district, the old part of the historical centre, has traditionally experienced the most severe problems of physical and social dereliction, forcing economically disadvantaged social groups to reside in unhealthy conditions. Using the urban planning instrument of the “recovery plan”, since the mid-1970s the City Council has directly promoted and carried out a massive public intervention, combining the objective of preserving the district's heritage with that of improving the quality of life in the district. The interventions included the renovation of old, unhealthy dwellings on the verge of collapse, while the restoration of other buildings, including monuments, led to the creation of new services (offices and town halls, community and school centres, spaces for cultural associations, furnished green spaces, etc.).

Over time, the public initiatives for the area's rehabilitation generated a chain reaction, resulting in the emergence of several private projects that accelerated the recovery process. The decision of the University of Brescia to renovate a series of imposing monumental buildings and monastic complexes to house the university's law and economics centres and the rectorate gave Carmine's redevelopment process a decisive boost in the 1980s, while other buildings in the district were converted into student accommodation. Since the early 2000s, the Municipality of Brescia has promoted another redevelopment plan, the “Carmine Project”, which has completed the transformation of the once notorious district, not only physically and functionally, but also socially, turning it into the most culturally vibrant and multi-ethnic area of the city.

Approximately fifty years after the initial radical interventions in the district, this essay aims to reflect upon the motivations, strategies, and outcomes of this physical and social regeneration project, focusing on the initial phase of the 1970s and 1980s. The study begins with the observation that research conducted thus far on the Carmine district has predominantly focused on more contemporary projects and issues, such as the substantial influx of non-EU migrants that impacted the area from the 1990s onwards. Indeed, aside from a few brief accounts published in the 1980s by the very technicians and experts involved in the project (Lombardi, 1982; Ponzoni, Testi, 1985; Lombardi, 1989), a more comprehensive and in-depth analysis of the intervention and its outcomes is currently lacking.

Keywords

Brescia, Carmine District, urban redevelopment, building restoration, social housing



1 INTRODUCTION

This essay presents the preliminary findings of an ongoing research project that is exploring the urban regeneration schemes promoted by the public administration in the historic and popular Carmine district of Brescia, northern Italy. The research project is focused on the impact of urban planning and architectural interventions, with particular attention paid to the pivotal period of the 1970s and 1980s, which is considered to be crucial in the district's long-term regeneration process.

Over the past five decades, the area has undergone a significant transformation from a state of decline into a vibrant cultural hub. However, this transformation is not without its challenges. In recent years, the district has been experiencing a resurgence of chronic issues pertaining to low levels of security and petty crime, which have historically been associated with the area.

By consulting both published and unpublished materials, this study aims to gain a deeper understanding of the tools and methods employed in those pioneering physical and social regeneration projects in the district, with a view to evaluating their actual outcomes and long-term efficacy. Furthermore, the study aims to expand the existing bibliography on the subject, which is largely limited to works published in the 1980s, by providing insights into the events from both an urban and an architectural perspective.

The Carmine district makes up about a quarter of Brescia's historic centre, located in the north-western part of the northern Italian city. It represents the northern expansion of the Roman city, dating back to the early Middle Ages, which developed along the western slopes of the Cidneo hill. This compact medieval quarter has an urban fabric that developed around the current Via San Faustino and is characterised by the presence of imposing churches and convents, some noble residences, as well as more modest terraced dwellings typical of the working class (Lombardi, 1989, pp. 21–28). Possessing a rich history and unique social fabric, the district has served as a destination for migrants since the eighteenth century, solidifying its status as Brescia's working-class heart. However, perceived as declining, the district necessitated interventions focused on control and rehabilitation (Granata, Granata & Grandi, 2010, pp. 404–405).

2 HYGIENIC AND BUILDING CONDITIONS IN THE CARMINE: A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

The Carmine district has long had a reputation for dereliction and poor health conditions, both physically and socially. However, the situation deteriorated between the late 19th and mid-20th century. During this period, there was considerable debate about urban modernisation projects. The demolition of buildings, including the city walls, was considered an effective solution, as evidenced by the provisions of the 1887 Urban Recovery Plan and the Brescia Master Plan of 1929, which identified Carmine as an area in need of radical renovation (Robecchi, 1980, pp. 36–40). The 1929 plan, drawn up by the



FIGURE 1 General Master Plan of Brescia, Redevelopment of the Old City Centre (Piano Regolatore Generale di Brescia, Sistemazione vecchio nucleo cittadino) by Ufficio Tecnico Comunale, scale 1:1000, 1957. (From Archivio di Stato Brescia, Archivio RAPu, 9BSC3, CC BY-NC-SA)

architect Marcello Piacentini, echoed the strategy employed in the adjacent Pescherie district. There, the demolition of existing structures facilitated the construction of Piazza della Vittoria, a sprawling new central plaza envisaged as the linchpin of Piacentini's urban renewal programme (Coccoli, 2019). Subsequent urban development proposals continued to advocate a similar approach for the Carmine district, albeit ultimately unrealized (*Il popolo di Brescia*, 1941, December 21)

The general urban plan of 1954 placed a premium on the conservation of the city's historic and aesthetic assets. It stipulated that any demolitions should be confined to instances where they were deemed necessary for traffic or sanitation reasons (Municipality of Brescia, City Council, 1954). Nevertheless, the plan put forth radical proposals for the redevelopment of the Carmine district (Figure 1).

A socio-medical study conducted in the early 1960s by the municipal Office of Hygiene and Health provided further evidence to support the perception of the decline of the Carmine. The study revealed that over one-fifth of the impoverished population of Brescia resided within the district (Tarantini, 1963, p. 8). A noteworthy aspect of the investigation was the assessment of the hygiene and overall quality of residential buildings in the



FIGURE 2 The quadrilateral bounded by Via Borgondio (A), Via Fenarolo (B), Via Paitone (C), and Rua Sovera (D) in Brescia. (Carlotta Coccoli, aerial view retrieved from Google Maps, August 16, 2024; <https://maps.app.goo.gl/FLi7B3qQbTdxgW77A>, CC BY-SA)

district, with a particular focus on the four streets that were in the worst condition. Via (or Vicolo) Borgondio, Via Fenarolo, Via Paitone, and Rua Sovera were collectively identified as constituting the “notoriously unhygienic core of the Carmine district”¹ (Tarantini, 1963, p. 10) (Figure 2). Indeed, the same blocks had been identified by the Brescia Municipality as requiring demolition and reconstruction as early as 1932.

The 1960 evaluation employed a nine-point scale (ranging from “good” to “very bad”) to assess various parameters, including the age of the building, the standard of maintenance, the condition of the attic, the heating system, the water supply, and the presence of latrines and sewage systems. The results of the survey, conducted on a total of 48 buildings, were unambiguous: all exhibited deplorable hygienic conditions. The ancient buildings were in a state of disrepair, with terracotta floors in poor condition, wooden staircases showing wear and looseness, dark hallways, and living quarters of a limited height that were deficient in ventilation and sunlight. This was due to a combination of factors, including the height of the buildings and the narrowness of the streets. In essence, the study concluded that the most effective approach to addressing the situation would be “to demolish and rebuild rationally” (Tarantini, 1963, p. 18).

This socio-medical research was carried out at the same time as the drafting stage of the new Brescia Master Plan, which was entrusted to the renowned town planner Prof. Mario Morini, assisted by a committee of local experts, and approved in 1961 (Robecchi, 2006, pp. 273–277). In accordance with Italian legislation (Law 17 August 1942, No. 1150 on town planning, *Legge Urbanistica*), the responsibility for defining the specific details of intervention techniques was delegated to *Piani Particolareggiati* (Detailed Plans), an implementation tool intended to address the complexity of Carmine’s redevelopment.

¹ Unless otherwise stated, this and all subsequent translations from non-English-language sources are by the author.

of urban development was evolving away from the indiscriminate demolition of historic centres towards a new sensitivity, as evidenced by documents such as the 1960 Charter of Gubbio for the Safeguarding and Rehabilitation of Historic City Centres (Dainotto, 2003) and the 1964 Venice Charter for the Conservation and Restoration of Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS, 1964). Consequently, the planned intervention in the Carmine district was not implemented for over a decade.

3 THE HISTORIC CENTRE PLAN (1973–77)

The tendency towards extensive urban expansion beyond the city walls, a prominent feature of Brescia's post-war urban planning, underwent a significant transformation in the early 1970s (Lombardi, 1989, p. 47). The focus of the city's new urban plan, formulated by means of two amendments to the Master Plan in 1973 and 1977 (Pola, 2016, p. 21), shifted towards the objective of enhancing the existing urban fabric and promoting a higher quality of life within the city centre. This approach drew inspiration from cutting-edge critical reviews of land management methods promoted at the European level. Historic city centres, such as those of Leeds, Oldenburg, Vienna, Newcastle, and Amsterdam, emphasized the importance of integrating conservation in the existing built environment. This involved the restoration of buildings, with direct public intervention for those in the most dilapidated state, and the enhancement of public services (Benevolo & Bettinelli, 1981, p. 291).

This reorientation towards the historic centre gave rise to the necessity to develop a sophisticated intervention strategy. However, in many Italian cities during this period, the detailed plans that were put in place proved to be unwieldy and challenging to implement. Moreover, while urban studies of Italian historical centres in the early 1970s frequently employed the “urban block” as the primary unit of analysis, conceptualised as an *insula* defined by street boundaries and serving as the basic unit for collecting quantitative and qualitative data (Lombardi, 1989, p. 50), Brescia adopted a more granular approach, informed by the pioneering work of Saverio Muratori, Gianfranco Caniggia, and Leonardo Benevolo. Their studies had laid the methodological foundations for a systematic scientific approach to the investigation of the historical built environment (D'Amato Gurrieri & Strappa, 2003). Consequently, the “building unit” was adopted by the Brescia project as the fundamental unit of analysis, drawing inspiration from the urban plans of Bologna (1969), Ferrara (1975), and Como (1970–75) (Benevolo & Bettinelli, 1981, pp. 303–316).

Since the 1970s, this approach has resulted in the progressive establishment of a dedicated working group within the Urban Planning Department, whose remit was the historic urban core. In the course of preparing the Plan for the Historic Centre (the 1973 variant of the Master Plan), this team was charged with the task of cataloguing all buildings within the historic centre and classifying them according to their respective building types.

The “building unit”, while potentially taking each property separately, was in fact sized to function as a “minimum intervention unit”, addressing the shared needs of the residents within its structure (Lombardi, 1989, p. 50).

Furthermore, by aligning with a specific building typology, it facilitated the identification of broader issues applicable to other areas with similar historical housing stock. Consequently, regulations were enacted that established standards for each building type. As will be discussed in greater detail in the following section, this shift from the urban block to the typological unit facilitated informed design decisions regarding intended uses. In predominantly residential areas such as Carmine, regulations were introduced to preserve this character by maintaining the existing functions. These regulations prohibited the merging of adjacent building units of different types. Nevertheless, the construction of small commercial premises, residential dwellings, or service areas on the ground floor was permitted, as long as they remained within the designated unit's boundaries. In the case of large, unused historical buildings of an appropriate size and character, the priority was the installation of public services. This resulted in the establishment of new facilities for the University of Brescia within restored noble palaces and former monasteries in Carmine. In the majority of cases, these had already been taken into public ownership following the Napoleonic suppressions of the early nineteenth century (Lombardi, 1989, pp. 65–66; Granata, Granata & Grandi, 2010, pp. 413–414).

4 THE RECOVERY PLAN OF VICOLO BORGONDIO (1980)

A shift in policy regarding Brescia's historic centre emerged in 1978 with the establishment of "recovery zones" within its most deteriorated areas. This development coincided with the enactment of National Law No. 457 *"Norme per l'edilizia residenziale"* (Standards for Residential Construction) of 1978, which allocated public funds for the revitalization of existing dilapidated neighbourhoods (Caruso, 2017, p. 33). In response to this new legislative framework, the Municipality of Brescia launched a comprehensive public intervention programme. Rather than engaging in the complex and expensive expropriation processes outlined in the legislation, the municipality opted to acquire vacant building units for rehabilitation on the open market using state funds. In the period between 1977 and 1980, approximately 100 vacant dwellings were acquired within the historic centre, providing the impetus for the implementation of recovery plans (Lombardi, 1982, p. 86). The Councillor for Special Territorial Interventions in 1980 described the initiative as follows:

A substantial municipal programme for social and economic housing in the historic centre is currently underway. This intervention is based on a rigorous operational mechanism that involves the refurbishment of vacant dwellings and the permanent relocation into these of families who will thus vacate other dwellings, which will then be refurbished in turn. In essence, the aim is to maintain and expand a flywheel that enables the implementation of a large-scale refurbishment operation, an operation that cannot be achieved through one-off interventions but only through the effective continuity of a process of successive initiatives over time (Papetti & Savoldi, 1980, p. 89).

The primary objective of the programme was to preserve housing within the district, safeguarding existing residential units. The goal of social equity was attained by prioritizing the needs of vulnerable social groups, thereby expediting their return to their original homes. The strategy aimed to prevent social displacement and ensure access to affordable rental housing. Indeed, a fundamental tenet of municipal planning policy was the maintenance of a balanced social composition within the historic centre (Pola, 2016, p. 27).

In addition, the programme was devised with the objective of preserving the area's historic character, which is defined by a compact urban fabric typical of the medieval era. This is characterised by predominantly narrow, elongated plots upon which traditional terraced housing was constructed. Despite the deterioration that has occurred over time, the buildings have retained distinctive features that contribute to a unique urban landscape. These include stone doorways and windowsills, iron railings, wooden roof gutters, and fragments of wall decoration (Figure 4 & 5).

The recovery plan constituted the primary instrument for implementing interventions in designated areas, with Vicolo Borgondio and Contrada del Carmine identified as the initial focal points. The selection of these specific blocks for intervention was based on a comprehensive assessment undertaken by the municipality's newly formed Ufficio Centro Storico (Historic Centre Office), an expert unit comprising three operational units: urban planning, architectural design, and administration and organisation (Lombardi, 1982, p. 86). The office, headed by Professor Giorgio Lombardi, was formally inaugurated in 1980 as part of the recently established Assessorato agli Interventi speciali sul territorio (Department for Special Territorial Interventions). It represented the culmination of collective efforts initiated in the 1970s to study the historic centre (Pola, 2016, p. 21). The assessment had two principal components. Firstly, a combination of heritage assessment and market analysis provided key insights. The results of the market research indicated a willingness on the part of property owners to sell dilapidated properties at competitive prices. Secondly, a structural analysis of the blocks and individual buildings was conducted in order to assess their condition and potential (Lombardi, 1989, pp. 62–63).

The assessment facilitated the refinement of a micro-urban planning tool designed to define the objectives of a *restauro d'insieme* (overall restoration), with the objective of the residential and cultural regeneration of the historic fabric and the improvement of civic services. The plan comprised two types of restoration interventions: those targeting residences and those focusing on the neighbourhood or the city scale. The former, while respecting the specific existing typological characteristics, aimed to improve their organisation and functioning. In instances where buildings with the necessary characteristics to accommodate public services at the city scale were unavailable, it was possible to “consider modifications to the historic fabric in favour of a greater balance between residential and service uses” (Municipality of Brescia, 1986, July).

The case of Vicolo Borgondio provides an illustrative example of how intervention criteria were adapted to align with the specific characteristics of a particular building typology. It is important to note that terraced housing constitutes a significant proportion of the housing stock in the Carmine area. The original concept behind this typology was of a two-storey, single-family



FIGURE 4 Via Ventura Fenarolo, transformation through redevelopment. (Historical view, from Museo Nazionale della Fotografia Brescia, Archivio Borrani, id. 17, Fausto Borrani, 1970s–1980s, CC BY-NC-ND)

FIGURE 5 Via Ventura Fenarolo, transformation through redevelopment. (Current view. Photo: Carlotta Coccoli, 2024, CC BY-SA)



FIGURE 6 Via Federico Borgondio in 1975. This image serves as a testament to the state of the Carmine district before its urban renewal, providing an insight into the everyday lives of its inhabitants. (Photo: Pietro Manenti, 1975, Museo Nazionale della Fotografia Brescia, Archivio Manenti, CC BY-NC-ND)

dwelling for the artisan class, which typically accommodated commercial activities on the ground floor and residential functions above (Lombardi, 1989, p. 25). Over time, this building type exhibited remarkable adaptability, evolving into multi-storey rental units of up to six floors. Nevertheless, this transformation had been accompanied by a damaging loss of internal open spaces, which resulted in a decline in the overall quality of these terraced dwellings (Figure 6).

The uncontrolled expansion of urban areas, the increase in building heights, the growth in population densities, and the rapid social changes that have occurred in Carmine, especially since the late nineteenth century, have collectively resulted in the progressive deterioration of terraced housing districts in terms of both social and physical conditions. As previously outlined, the urban planning strategies implemented in Brescia from the late nineteenth century to the 1960s were consistently directed towards the eradication of areas such as Carmine. This approach was based on the assumption that terraced houses were associated with decline and substandard living conditions. By contrast, the analyses that informed the Recovery Plan developed by the Ufficio Centro Storico indicated the potential for building rehabilitation, provided that the restoration of courtyards and the provision of essential social services within the densely populated neighbourhood were undertaken (Lombardi, 1989, p. 94).



FIGURE 7 Recovery Plan for Vicolo Borgondio (Piano di Recupero di Vicolo Borgondio). Detail showing planimetric and façade restrictions. (Municipality of Brescia, Historic Centre Office, 1980. From *Brescia moderna* by Benevolo & Bettinelli, 1981, p. 417, CC BY-NC-ND)

The intervention criteria for these terraced buildings were devised according to a conservative approach, with the objective of restoring individual dwelling units. This primarily entailed the maintenance of two-room flats and essential services, without the forced merger of separate building units. This strategy was designed to meet the prevailing demand for housing among small families, single occupants, the elderly, and students. The only exception to this was the doubling up of apartments to create duplexes on the top floor, which was permitted for larger families. Furthermore, the regulations prohibited alterations that would have affected the building's overall form, such as modifications to floor levels or the repositioning of windows with the intention of achieving facade uniformity (Lombardi, 1989, p. 95) (Figure 7).

These initiatives have not only resulted in the restoration of the district's traditional buildings, but have also facilitated the rediscovery of architecturally significant elements, including stone staircases, capitals, and other stone details; traditional terracotta tile floors; wooden ceilings; and painted plasterwork. Moreover, the regeneration of public spaces attracted artisans and artists, who were drawn to the neighbourhood to pursue their creative endeavours.

The initial ten-year public intervention programme (1978–1988), which was undertaken in Vicolo Borgondio and the surrounding areas, was successful in achieving its objective of renovating approximately 800 houses (Pola, 2016, p. 21). This was accomplished without compromising the architectural and urban character of the district or displacing residents. This programme represents an exemplary case among Italian cities of a similar size.

Nevertheless, the initial plans did not automatically result in sufficient private investment to fully revitalise Carmine. The introduction of direct incentives, including financial contributions for the restoration of historic buildings, proved to be a crucial element in subsequent years, attracting private investment and facilitating the continuation of the district's regeneration.

A case in point is the restoration of Palazzo Calini, one of Brescia's most significant early Renaissance buildings (Lechi, 1974, p. 181), which is situated in the infamous Vicolo Borgondio and acquired by the Municipality of Brescia in 1980. It can be considered the most significant residential restoration project promoted by the Municipality of Brescia in the 1980s (Brescia Municipality, n.d.). Prior to the intervention in 1981, the building had deteriorated to such an extent, as a result of its subdivision into smaller dwellings, that its architectural significance was effectively obscured. Following the demolition of the partitions and the removal of the damaged plaster, the original halls, decorated with rich wooden ceilings and walls frescoed by Floriano Ferramola (1478–1528), were revealed on the principal floor (*piano nobile*). To conserve the courtyard and the spacious halls around it, the City Council resolved to refrain from using this area exclusively for residential purposes. Consequently, the most prestigious sections of the *piano nobile* were allocated for administrative and social services, while the ground floor was designated for public offices, artisan activities, and only the upper floors and the building's annexes were assigned to residential use (Brescia Municipality, n.d.). In this instance, a complex series of structural consolidation interventions was undertaken with the objective of achieving a philologically conservative restoration that respected the original construction system, the various structural typologies, and ensured the recovery of the original materials. Of particular note was the liberation and restoration of the portico columns on the ground floor, which had previously been walled up due to subsidence (Ponzoni & Testi, 1985, pp. 385–386) (Figure 8).



FIGURE 8 Palazzo Calini in Via Borgondio before and after ground floor portico restoration. (From Brescia Municipality, undated, CC BY-NC-ND)

From the mid-1990s onwards, the Carmine neighbourhood underwent a significant demographic transformation, evolving into a multi-ethnic area with a substantial population of newly arrived foreign immigrants. This demographic shift was driven by the availability of low-cost privately owned housing, which had become vacant due to its deteriorating condition. The neighbourhood has undergone a process of reappropriation by its new inhabitants, characterised by the emergence of low-investment foreign commercial activities. Such enterprises included international telephony services, retail (clothing), and grocery stores. The proliferation of these activities was facilitated by the physical structure of the medieval buildings, which offered ground floors characterised by small shops along the streets, and a lack of alternative commercial opportunities within the neighbourhood (Granata, Lainati & Novak, 2007, pp. 124–125).

In the early 2000s, following a nationwide debate focused on issues of security and the immigration/dereliction dichotomy and growing public demand for interventions aimed at re-establishing public order and safety in neighbourhoods with a strong ethnic character (Bino, 2000; Croset, 2000), a new *Progetto Carmine* (Carmine Project) was launched, marking the beginning of a second phase of public redevelopment in the neighbourhood (Richiedei & Frascarolo, 2018, pp. 104–105).

The Carmine Project was conceived in 2001 as a pioneering initiative focused on restoration, security, and social cohesion. It was developed based on an analysis of the neighbourhood's primary challenges, which included the persistence of dereliction in some buildings, the poor quality of public spaces, the underutilisation of existing public services, the transformation of traditional economic activities, and the gradual deterioration in the quality of housing (Ufficio Progetto Carmine, 2005). The project was financed by the municipal administration with the involvement of ALER (the regional public housing authority for Lombardy), property owners, parishes, cultural associations, and the University of Brescia. The university was a crucial component of the neighbourhood's redevelopment strategy, given its capacity to stimulate significant footfall in the area and generate demand for new commercial services and housing (Ottaviano, 2005, p. 315). The key objectives were to recover derelict private buildings and stimulate local economic activity through financial incentives, to regenerate public spaces and introduce new public services, and to enhance law enforcement in the area. However, in contrast to the municipal initiatives that were undertaken during the 1970s and 1980s, this new municipal recovery plan placed a significant emphasis on the physical restoration of buildings, particularly those that were privately owned. The funding channels that were employed were primarily focused on the renovation of common spaces and all elements – including entrances, facades, and fixtures – believed capable of restoring the perceived decorum of the public space (Figure 9). This unbalanced approach to tackling the physical decline of the area failed to recognise or address the underlying social problems prevalent in the Carmine district. In some cases, the project even exacerbated these social problems. In particular, the plan lacked a strategy to mitigate the

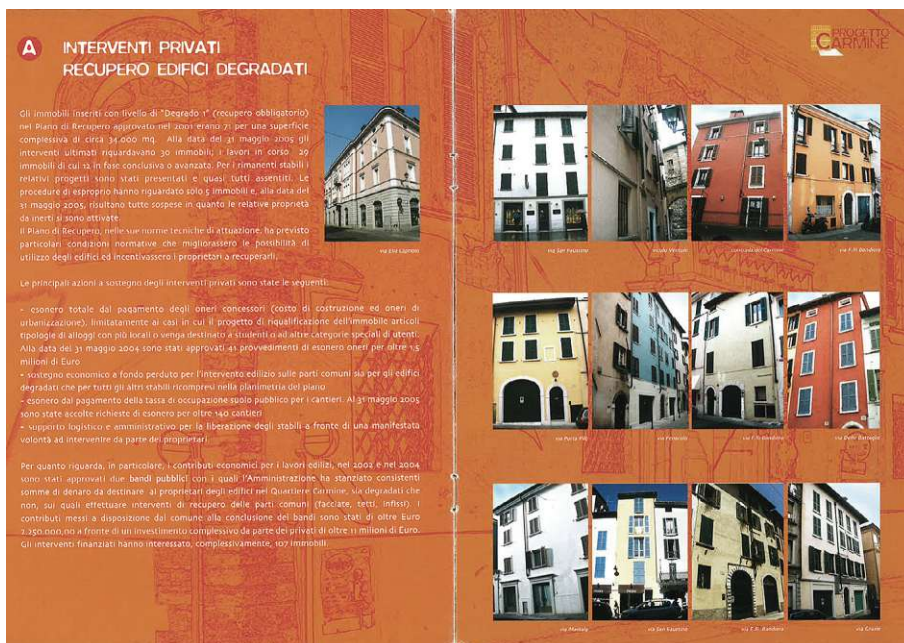


FIGURE 9 An excerpt from an leaflet produced by the Carmine Project Office. The leaflet illustrates the outcomes achieved between 2001 and 2005 in the restoration of run-down privately owned structures as part of the Carmine Project. (Graphic: Ufficio Progetto Carmine, 2005, CC BY-SA)

housing crisis created by the redevelopment, resulting in the displacement of low-income residents who could not afford the increased costs of the revitalised area (Granata, Lainati & Novak, 2007, p. 128). The influx of new middle-class residents resulted in a significant alteration of the social fabric of the area, which subsequently underwent transformation into a dynamic multicultural and yet socially upmarket neighbourhood. Characterised by artisanal workshops, alternative cultural spaces, and traditional bars and trattorias, the area acquired the sobriquet of “Brescian Montmartre”, a somewhat hyperbolic designation (Ufficio Progetto Carmine, 2005).

The current state of the Carmine district is shaped by a complex interplay of factors. While the area has become a thriving hub for nightlife, with a multitude of bars and clubs, this has come at a significant cost to the local community of residents. The art galleries and craft shops that experienced a renaissance in the early 2000s have been relocated, and the neighbourhood shops have gradually been forced to close. This latest transformation has given rise to a resurgence in social challenges reminiscent of the area’s past, including public altercations, vandalism, and noise disturbances, and most recently, extortion charges imposed on local businesses, perpetrated by out-of-town groups competing for drug dealing areas (Campesi, 2024; Barboglio, 2024).

In light of these developments, the local administration initiated a pilot project in 2023 with the objective of preventing and combating anti-social behaviour commonly associated with urban nightlife. The so-called *Piano*

di gestione della notte (Night-time Management Plan) seeks to address the issue of “*mala-movida*” (nightlife problems) through the implementation of a stewarding service in collaboration with local nightlife venue operators. The objective of this initiative is to provide a coordinated territorial presence in collaboration with law enforcement agencies, with a primary focus on ensuring that residents can get their rest at night without compromising the area’s success as an entertainment district (Municipality of Brescia, 2023, July 19). As the Mayor of Brescia stated at the inauguration of the pilot project: “The objective is to achieve a balance that enables the neighbourhood to retain its distinctive character while simultaneously safeguarding its residents, fostering the growth of local businesses, and taking action against those who engage in antisocial and disrespectful behaviour.” The city of Brescia, according to the councillor responsible for Social Safety, is establishing itself as a model for the rest of Italy in the management of nightlife (Orlando, 2023, November 3).

In a recent interview, a local resident observed that Carmine has effectively become primarily a location suited to nocturnal entertainment. During the daytime, with the exception of a few historic drinking establishments, the area is essentially uninhabited. “It has undergone a process of gentrification that has resulted in the loss of local amenities, as a consequence of the intensified exploitation of the night-time economy” (Radio Onda d’Urto, 2024).

The recent incorporation (July 2024) of the “urban DASPO” (a measure named after the original DASPO, the “*Divieto di Accedere alle manifestazioni SPORtive*” or “Ban on Access to Sporting Events”) into the revised Urban Police Regulations (an administrative measure that restricts access to specified areas of the municipality for a designated period) has augmented the Brescia municipal administration’s arsenal for managing disruptive conduct in the city’s most challenging localities, including the Carmine district (Goffi, 2024). The DASPO has been the subject of considerable criticism on the part of some politicians, citizens and associations engaged in social activities within the areas where it will be applied. It represents the latest in a series of instruments adopted by the public administration in an attempt to address the challenges of this ancient medieval quarter, which, in a cyclical pattern of rise and decline, is particularly affected by the complex issues facing contemporary cities and societies.

6 CONCLUSION

The preliminary findings of this concise retrospective analysis of public administration initiatives over the past century aimed at the redevelopment of the Carmine district indicate that, although further research is required through consultation of unpublished archival documentation, it is already possible to assert that the most complete and enduring results were achieved between the 1970s and the 1980s. In the context of a dynamic and engaged Italian debate on the reuse and redevelopment of historic centres (Belgiojoso et al., 1981), the municipal administration of Brescia exhibited remarkable political foresight by enlisting the services of some of the era’s most prominent experts in urban planning, economics, and legislation as consultants (Municipality

of Brescia, 1986). This enabled the municipal authorities to implement and manage a comprehensive programme to address the urban and social decay of the Carmine district directly in an integrated and coordinated manner. Guided by experts, municipal specialists developed a high level of practical knowledge, enabling them to oversee the entire redevelopment process through the establishment of a dedicated Historic Centre Office, which was responsible for implementing and managing each phase of the programme.

By adopting a forward-thinking approach and structuring the recovery process as a *cantiere continuo* (continuous worksite), the standard building rehabilitation period was reduced to eighteen months. This was achieved through the implementation of a methodology that optimised efficiency and streamlined the rehabilitation workflow. Properties procured from the private market at competitive prices were integrated into this cyclical system. The municipal administration's capacity to secure necessary funds by strategically exploiting regulatory provisions facilitated this approach. The eighteen-month timeframe served as a benchmark for all project stages, encompassing resident relocation, site surveys, design development, administrative approvals, and construction works tenders (Lombardi, 1989, pp. 86–87). This approach facilitated the Historic Centre Office's ability to also oversee the complex relationship with tenants of buildings undergoing renovation. This entailed joint assessment of relocation to optimal alternative accommodation, either in properties that had already undergone restoration or were undergoing restoration, taking into account the characteristics and needs of each household. The analysis, design, and tendering phases for the property that was still occupied by the inhabitants were initiated concurrently with this residential needs-assessment process.

The Municipality of Brescia employed a strategy that could be described as “holistic” in nature, backed up by a considerable organisational effort, to implement a large-scale restoration project in the Carmine district between the 1970s and the 1980s. As Lombardi observed (1989, pp. 86–87), this approach allowed the municipality to keep its financial commitments within acceptable parameters, thereby optimising both economic and social returns on investment.

As previously outlined, this strategy served as a catalyst for subsequent revitalisation initiatives within the neighbourhood, encompassing both those directly instigated by the public administration, such as the establishment of university campuses, and those fostering private sector involvement. More recent programmes, such as the “Carmine Project” of the 2000s, while not entirely unsuccessful, lacked the same breadth and ambition from the outset and were marred by a failure to adopt a multi-faceted approach, that is, they were unable to address both building problems and social dereliction, often resulting in superficial or short-term solutions.

In conclusion, we argue that the recovery plans implemented by the Municipality of Brescia in the Carmine district during the 1970s and 1980s represent a significant and noteworthy example of urban regeneration in Italy during that period. Consequently, they merit further detailed examination and comparison with analogous cases in Italy and abroad.

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BIOGRAPHY

Carlotta Coccoli, PhD, is an Associate Professor of Architectural Conservation at the University of Brescia, Italy. Her research interests lie in the protection of architectural heritage, with a particular focus on urban contexts and periods of armed conflict. Her book, *Monumenti violati. Danni bellici e riparazioni in Italia nel 1943–1945: il ruolo degli Alleati* (2017), provides a comprehensive analysis of the Allied role in the protection and repair of Italy's monuments during and after the war. Furthermore, she engages with the subject of urban history, focusing specifically on the urban reconstruction plans of Italian historic cities in the aftermath of the First and Second World Wars.