

SPECIAL ISSUE: Reflections and Learnings for a Post-War Urban Planning

Italian spatial plans for the post-WWII reconstruction. The case of Genoa

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Abstract

The article addresses a topic of international interest within urban planning, architecture and reconstruction history, with added timeliness given ongoing debates on reconstruction: the implementation challenges and consequences of post-WWII reconstruction plans in Italy, exemplified by Genoa's Reconstruction Plan (RP) and General Master Plan (GMP) from 1945 to 1960. The methods employed – primarily archival research, supplemented by literature review – helped to interpret the case study considering three scales of interventions (neighbourhood, individual buildings, and open spaces) resulting from the RP implementation amidst past planning trends and successive modifications. The research findings show delays, speculative practices, fragmented governance, and the limited effectiveness of public oversight, emphasising the dominance of private interests and the enduring legacies of RP and GMP for Genoa's urban development. By doing so, the research tries to situate the Genoa case in broader debates in the attempt to make a contribution not only to Italian planning history but also to comparative studies of post-war urban governance.

Keywords

Urban governance,
post-war
reconstruction,
planning history,
spatial planning,
heritage, Italy

Introduction

Post-WWII reconstruction represents a significant research domain on a global scale, encompassing diverse academic disciplines including architectural, planning and urban history, city planning, geography, heritage studies, and urban history design. In addition to the great deal of scholarly studies published over the decades, the 80th anniversary of the end of WWII and current conflicts (i.e. the Russo-Ukrainian and the Israeli-Palestinian wars) put reconstruction

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efforts at the centre of an international debate about the capacity of existing spatial planning tools to meet current and future development needs in areas heavily damaged by wars (Al Qeed, 2024; Carletti et al., 2024). These dramatic events have served to underscore the necessity to persist in the examination of this domain of research, employing a renewed emphasis from diverse planning viewpoints (Phillips, 2025). The lack of a comprehensive land-use policy – including spatial plans – and of good governance processes for the reconstruction process may even exacerbate the level of vulnerability of the territories affected by such disasters (Adams, 2011). Looking at past experiences in the realm of post-conflict reconstructions, especially those occurred after WWII, can be meaningful to extract lessons learned and derive valuable insights to inform the reconstruction of cities that have been recently damaged by war and the involved actors (e.g. city governors, public-private partnerships and different communities) (Rohwerder, 2024; Musiaka et al., 2025). Moreover, the reconstructed urban sectors and ordinary and brutalist buildings of the reconstruction period (1945 to 1960) are aging and therefore are becoming the subject of a widening interest. In fact, the already reconstructed city sectors are now being redeveloped or the reconstruction efforts have been even protracted over the course of several decades, and in many cases, they are still being continued (Larkham, 2019).

This article tries to stimulate scholarly discourse on the role played by the planning tools devoted to the post-WWII reconstruction in shaping the city-making by highlighting its main characteristics and its relationship with the comprehensive spatial plan. In particular, this research offers a contemplative examination of the Italian reconstruction doctrine and its implementation in the city of Genoa. The primary objective is to uncover the impact of the 1945-1950 Reconstruction Plan (*Piano di Ricostruzione*; RP), alongside the 1946-1959 General Master Plan (*Piano Regolatore Generale*; GMP), in shaping Genoa's development trajectory during the broader Reconstruction period (1945-1960) and beyond.

The reason for conducting this research is the need to provide a more robust understanding of the case of in Genoa for determining its position in the process of rebuilding Italian cities. Genoa has received insufficient scrutiny, primarily due to the paucity of archival materials from that era. In addition, various proposals elaborated during the Reconstruction period were implemented only in the following decades with substantial modifications, thereby establishing a fertile foundation for new investigative pathways. This case study is illustrative of the scarce analysis on the RP's contents and its implementation, as demonstrated by an initial effort provided by Gastaldi & Camerin (2024). The local debate on the post-WWII reconstruction commenced in Genoa even before the end the conflict (Ceschi, 1943). However, only a handful of scholars approached the RP at that time, claiming that war damage was often exacerbated by the private- and profit-oriented approach to city-making (Fuselli, 1954; Gabrielli, 1986). In

particular, Gabrielli (1963) characterised the RP and GMP as ‘the plans of missed opportunities.’ They were conceived amidst pressing housing demands but lacked clear direction and comprehensive preliminary studies, so they were disconnected from the genuine challenges faced by the city at that time. More recently, Baiardo (1999) and Giontoni (2017) stated that the RP mainly applied the ‘disencumbering’ approach (Ladd, 2014), i.e. the treatment of just few isolated historic buildings – even less than initially expected – as artefacts to preserve, rather than elements of a wider urban landscape.

These reflections, however, were not justified by any specific data, reviews or reflections on official documentations pertaining to the RP and its modifications, and without a deep exploration of the RP authors’ relationship with the City Council apart of the contributions of the local architect Mario Labò (Lantieri Minet, 2017: 258-360). This inaccuracy, as argued by Gastaldi & Camerin (2024) in their primordial attempt to explore the nature of the spatial plans approved during the Reconstruction period, generates a serious lack of foundations that need to be filled to comprehend the relationship between the RP and GMP. Although Italian scholars strongly confirmed the general private-oriented approach and the low-quality built environment resulting from the Reconstruction period across Italy (e.g. Astengo, 1949; Fantozzi Micali, 1998), the case of Genoa still lacks more detailed analysis on RP’s documentation. In fact, research released in the last decade (Bonfante & Pallini, 2015; Arcolao & Napoleone, 2023) recently proposed a reflection on a single-building basis in terms of architecture. They argued that the intention for building reconstruction, or at the very least their idealistic aspiration, was to safeguard the integrity of the urban fabric and the character of the old city. However, the results did not reflect the ideas of local architects (Ceschi, 1943; Labò, 1945). This recent approximation to Genoa’s Reconstruction did not provide a comprehensive study of the interventions, although it added to the existing literature.

The aforementioned research gaps call thus to verify the veracity of assumptions regarding Genoa’s RP drafting and implementation process (e.g. speculative approach to the built environment, lack of comprehensive vision, and expert-driven designs without a proper involvement of the local community) and its results. The inquiry on Genoa’s planning tools elaborated in the aftermath of WWII can contribute to advance the existing literature in four ways. Firstly, by creating knowledge on the tangible outcomes of Genoa’s RP, which have been highly influenced by the intertwined relationship of pre- and post-WWII urbanisation and planning trends. Secondly, by understanding how the proposal included in Genoa’s RP materialised – with delays – through an analysis that considers the results coming from different scales of interventions. Thirdly, the novelty of the research lies not only in its attempt to providing the relationship between post-WWII reconstruction and previous planning following an established

literature on urban processes in European cities after WWII (Diefendorf, 1990a), but also adding the dimension of post-1960 Genoa-making process. Eventually, the case study analysis offers fertile ground to highlight the key aspects which could come to inform future post-war responses. Underlining these points in relation to current and future reconstruction practices makes the article even more relevant for contemporary planning scholarship and practice.

The research is structured as follows: The first section is dedicated to the methodology and materials employed to perform the case study analysis. The two following sections offer a literature review of the extensive body of international and national inquiries pertaining to the Reconstruction period respectively, emphasising the originality of the post-war Italian urban planning debate. The article proceeds to the case study analysis and its results, followed by the discussion, which comprises the sections devoted to “Reconstructing Genoa as a spatial planning project of selective modernisation” and “The pre- and post-WWII urbanisation and planning trends in the wider Reconstruction in Genoa and beyond”. Finally, the conclusion synthesises the research findings and proposes the broader implications of the study.

Methods and Materials

This article draws upon Diefendorf’s observations (1989, p. 2), according to whom the “deeper insights into the process of rebuilding could only come with systematic archival research into newly available materials ... only the passage of time could make it possible to consider the era of reconstruction in the broader context of the history of European cities” in the 20th century and deal more objectively with its legacies. Also “research should cover a substantial period, from the crisis to the achievement of a post-crisis steady state, where planning is shaped by factors other than the crisis” (Larkham, 2018, p. 430). This is why the methodology adopted in this article is based on case-study research involving archival research aimed at reviewing of scientific literature, planning tools, graphic documentation, and RP authors’ correspondence with the City Council. These steps were taken as the case study analysis is conceived as an inquiry aimed at deeply understanding the dynamics of a specific context – the post-WWII reconstruction of Genoa – in a certain period – from 1945 to 1960 – (Flyvbjerg, 2006), with reflections that extended the research period until the early 1990s due to the necessity to comprehend the inherited issues of (un-)implemented RP proposals.

To achieve the article’s goals, the authors conducted archival research at the:

- Genoa City Council’s historical archive (section “*Settore pianificazione urbanistica del Comune di Genova, Spu*”)¹, along with its website (Comune di Genova, 2021 and 2025);

¹ The materials can be found in binders 113, 116, 64 (box 39), 67 (box 42), 75 (50), 76 (box 51), 77 (box 52), and 78 (box 53). In this archive, the City Council’s minutes from 1946 to 1959 were screened.

- Regione Liguria's archive (section "*Fondo Genio Civile, Piani di Ricostruzione*");
- local libraries (i.e., *Biblioteca Civica Berio* in which the 1959 GMP's documentation is archived); and
- *Fondazione Mario e Giorgio Labò* foundation to check the correspondence of the RP authors with Genoa City Council technician and politicians.

This work involved the consultation of an array of sources, including technical and planning documents, City Council deliberations and reports, and local press articles (from 1942 to 1960 in local newspapers such as "*Genova. Rivista mensile del Comune*", "*L'Unità*", "*Corriere del Popolo*", and "*Il Secolo XIX*") related to Genoa's RP – including its 33 modifications – and the 1959 GMP. This activity was conducted along with the review of traditional scholarly works in the realm of post-WWII reconstruction and spatial planning (by the systematic search in widely used academic search systems, including Google Scholar, Scopus, and Web of Science) and the regulations issued by the Italian government. This case-study-based research enabled the authors to present a specific standpoint on the subject, which was also informed by their personal experience in Genoa, as a result of numerous study visits conducted between 2022 and 2025.

Through a critical interpretation of these sources, the study elucidates the characters of both the RP and GMP, highlighting the significant changes and delays in their ratification, their limitations in providing public benefits, and their fraught dynamics amid post-bombing reconstruction efforts, urban development patterns, and the pre-existing built environment – especially within Genoa's historic centre.

Assessing Genoa's RP implementation is a challenging task in the absence of reliable municipal data, due to a very heterogeneous set of factors. Firstly, the numerous variations to the RP itself (totalling 33 until the 1959 GMP). Secondly, reconstruction works on buildings often involved parts (rather than the entire building) and the completely reconstructed buildings in their historical form and appearance occurred using materials and construction techniques from the 1950s. Thirdly, some buildings are now six or seven decades old and had been subjected to alteration, demolition and redevelopment as part of the urban change process. The time that has passed since the interventions makes it difficult to carry out an exhaustive mapping exercise from outside the buildings. This would require access to each building to verify certain features that are not apparent. For instance, the presence of a reinforced concrete stairwell would indicate that the building has been partially or completely rebuilt.

In addition to these methodological limitations, the material search failed to find the documentation elaborated by the 1945 commission entrusted with the task of drafting the first GMP – that included the reconstruction proposals – and the original drafts of the RP's early

versions. These documents could not be located in any of the archives responsible for preserving the documentation, whether public or private. Moreover, the inquiry faced the impossibility of conducting interviews to those who lived through the 1945-1960 period. As demonstrated by past research (Adams & Larkham, 2013), interviews can be revealing, but survivors are scarce and those who still live can be subject to problems of fading memory and potential bias.

Engaging Post-WWII Planning: Insights from Planning History in Europe and Italy

Post-WWII planning commenced in 1943, yet its beginning remains ambiguous, as it is characterised by a lack of clearly defined boundaries, both in terms of a fixed start or end date; even in the midst of ongoing hostilities, certain cities initiated the process of mapping damage and formulating reconstruction strategies (Cherry, 1990; Pane & Coccoli, 2023). However, implementing the reconstruction planning was in most of cases delayed, often spanning years or even decades, following the cessation of hostilities (Düwel & Gutschow, 2013). This is among the main reasons for the steady interest of academic studies on planning the design of cities in the post-WWII era to reflect on the successes and failures of 20th-century post-war planning and reconstruction, as well as the ways in which the legacy of war has shaped today's cities. A significant amount of the literature on urban and historical topics of reconstruction in the aftermath of WWII focuses on the urban experience in Europe, encompassing a wide range of activities, from planning to rebuilding, and the subsequent changes to the physical form (Grebler, 1962; Mamoli & Trebbi, 1988). In turn, post-WWII planning devoted to reconstruction is embedded within the wider replanning and rebuilding after a catastrophe, either natural (earthquake, flood and volcanic eruption) or human-caused (fire and economic crisis), being thus a still developing field, with continuous suggestions for proposing a post-catastrophe agenda for future research (Olshansky, 2016).

Over the decades, multiple attempts have resulted in novel perspectives on the contested nature of post-war reconstruction planning and its impact on cities, their urban form and liveability during the mid-20th century. The elaboration of a large number of reconstruction plans after the damages provoked by WWII, even while the conflict continued, stimulated a strong body of works that has shaped the field of planning history (Larkham, 2018), the contemporary approaches to planning (Larkham & Adams, 2023: 1144), and still resonates in contemporary debates (Musiaka, Sudra & Spórna, 2025). As recently demonstrated by Brook (2025, p. 1-3), much critical attention focused on the RP-proposed and -induced physical products and the reasons for their difficult implementation – e.g. land ownership, land assembly, shifting policy governing the environment, changing structures of government, and the rise of private mobility–, even when they had a comprehensive vision of the territory. This is accompanied by detailed

studies on developments in single cities or countries (Larkham, 2003), along with inquiries on international comparisons (Tiratsoo et al., 2002). Numerous edited books and special issues involving a wide range of cases have been released even recently (Alvanides & Ludwig, 2023; Ludwig, Alvanides & Laue, 2024), being the subject of academic networking held in the last 35 years (Diefendorf, 1989a; Diener et al., 2024).

The existing literature concerning post-WWII reconstruction in European countries demonstrates a plethora of approaches applied in post-war planning, depending on the confluence of multiple factors (e.g. local traditions, path dependencies in cultural engagement with historical heritage, the constrained economic resources to perform the planned actions) (Grebber, 1956). The complex and uneven implementation of such approaches was also influenced by government decisions on spatial planning – European countries generally enacted specific reconstruction plans, while Britain re-elaborated them as part of the formal “Development Plan” process, re-shaping their contents (Larkham & Adams, 2023) – and the conceptualisation of post-WWII as a continuation of earlier interwar plans, often spurred into action by the bombing of a city which acted as a catalyst for action (Berry, 1973).

The intertwine of these factors resulted in a myriad of reconstruction traditions, spanning from comprehensive and long-term visions of city development to the treatment of singular buildings with historic value as museum artefacts (Bonfantini, 2021), and from decision-making between the restoration/preservation and reconstruction/replication of damaged buildings (Sørensen & Viejo-Rose, 2015). Critic arose on the ways scholars conducted research in this field of study. For instance, Larkham (2018, p. 429) stressed that there is a paucity of literature on the subject of “planning systems and their contribution to, or performance in, disaster response” drawn mostly on official documentation. This could be helped through “the significance and influence of plan authors and their relationship with public authorities” (Larkham, 2018, p. 434). Doing such research can reveal surprising tensions between central and local authorities, and between local authorities and planners, sometimes resulting in explicit conflict (Lewis 2013).

For the specific case of Italy, the RPs were conceived as urgent planning instruments based on specialised regulations and restricted to smaller, precisely defined municipal sectors severely impacted by wartime devastation. Similar to initiatives like the INA-Casa neighbourhoods (Zeier Pilat, 2014, p. 5-9), the RPs were intended to expedite the transitional phase of rebuilding through streamlined approaches, thereby leaving an indelible influence on Italian spatial planning practices in the post-WWII period (Serafini, 2011). As predicted by Piccinato (1945), the RPs frequently fulfilled the immediate necessity of reorganising and extending damaged urban centres. However, they did not serve as a strategic framework for

guiding long-term urban growth and development with the risk of worsening the cities' conditions due to the excessive scope it gave local governments.

These plans responded independently from the GMP introduced by the 1942 Town Planning Act, and prioritised the urgency of providing new housing. As pointed out by Velo (2011: 160-173), RPs were criticised for their reactive focus on pre-existing urban issues, with some arguing that this approach ultimately exacerbated rather than alleviated urban challenges. Among the most critical issues, scholars like Cervellati (1976) and Campos Venuti (1993: 9-12) blamed the minimal publication, if any, of official documentation on the RPs' contents; the marked preference for private interests over public welfare, thus fostering rent-seeking behaviour and speculative land practices; and a general disregard for the existing urban morphology. As a result, planning the reconstruction represented an "obscure age" (Avarello, 1997, p. 320-321) in Italy's planning history due to the failed attempt to improve the quality of the damaged urban sectors (e.g. in terms of healthier environment due to congestion and pollution, greater accessibility, and provision of public equipment and facilities) (Bonfantini, 2021, p. 4). Bonfantini (2014, p. 380-381) ironically argued that the negative scholarly judgement on the post-WWII reconstruction plans has been repeated in a ritualistic manner over the decades based mostly on the debates occurred from the 1940s to the 1960s, but without in-depth studies on the spatial plans devoted to reconstruction and the lack of attention paid to their scarce technical documents. It is evident that, beyond even recent monographic studies on specific cases or locations (Melograni, 2021; Spina, 2022; Russo Krauss, 2024), these factors have resulted in the neglect of a significant history in the broader narrative of spatial planning in a period marked by the 'Italian miracle' that converted the country into one of the world's leading economic powers (Budzynski, 2020). This may have occurred also because the effective reconstruction of multiple sectors of damaged cities effectively materialised after the Reconstruction phase ended (i.e. after 1960), even in the decades of 1980s and early 1990s. This is why these transformations have been disconnected from the literature on the post-WWII reconstruction as the proposals coming from RPs merged into general master plans drafted according to the 1942 Town Planning Act, with substantial modifications.

Reconstruction Plans in Italy: Amid Prescriptions and Challenging Application

The Italian government launched the Legislative Decree no. 154/1945, titled "Standards for Reconstruction Plans in War-Damaged Settlements" (Gazzetta ufficiale, 1945), which was supplemented by two ministerial circulars (no. 49/1945 and no. 590/1945; Fantozzi Micali & Di Benedetto, 2000: 316-321) providing a detailed framework on the technical requisites for its implementation.

In terms of goals and scopes, Article 1 of Legislative Decree no. 154/1945 stated that the primary objective of RPs was “harmonising the urgent demands for new construction in war-damaged towns with the imperative to avoid hindering the rational growth of urban settlements.” Among the goals, especially the necessity “to address a range of essential elements, such as configuring the road and rail systems; designating zones for public services and equipment; and defining specific areas for demolition, restoration, renovation, and construction [...] and allocate sites for new developments, extending beyond the urbanised perimeter if needed to serve the areas impacted by reconstruction” stands out. Article 11 established also the validity of RPs (10 years of duration) and their legal status as Detailed Plans (*Piani particolareggiati*).

Ministerial Circular no. 49/1945 further elaborated on the scopes, clarifying that RPs were not intended as “a fully-fledged general master plan aimed at a comprehensive urban reorganisation”. Instead, this kind of spatial plan was “a strategic layout focused on restoring the pre-existing urban expanse as efficiently as possible, using minimal labour and resources”. In order to improve the pre-existing urban conditions and foster more balanced development, RPs were “allowed for flexibility regarding the reconstruction of buildings destroyed during the war”. Rather than strictly requiring the reconstruction in the same place, the RP permitted the “total or partial relocation to another site”, thus potentially triggering new waves of urban expansion in peripheral areas. Improvements in the quality of the damaged urban sectors were also the targets of the RPs, as “the destruction caused by the war should be seen as an opportunity to improve the quality of urban sectors. This could be achieved by improving the sanitary conditions of the urban fabric, expanding road networks, alleviating congestion in older districts, or relocating essential services and public offices to more suitable locations. The devastation brought by the war could be re-envisioned as a chance for the urban reconfiguration and restructuring, whether on a small scale or a broader one, offering significant potential for improvement across various facets of the city”.

Ministerial Circular no. 590/1945 delineated a precise distinction between the RP and the GMP, underscoring that “the Reconstruction Plan diverges technically from the General Master Plan in several fundamental ways: a) it does not cover the municipality as a whole but is restricted to zones impacted by wartime damage or designated for new development; b) it is primarily intended to oversee the construction projects necessary to accommodate the war-induced homeless; c) it is a provisional, situational plan, hence inherently temporary in nature.”

In the following years, two other regulations were enacted: Act no. 409/1949, “Provisions to Facilitate the Reconstruction of Housing Destroyed by War Events and the Implementation of Reconstruction Plans” (Gazzetta Ufficiale, 1949) and Act no. 1402/1951, “Amendments to Legislative Decree no. 154 of March 1, 1945, Regarding Reconstruction Plans for War-Damaged

Settlements” (Gazzetta Ufficiale, 1951). The main novelties were three: Firstly, Article 2 of Act no. 409/1949 established that the Ministry of Public Works (*Ministero dei Lavori Pubblici*) selects by list the municipalities to approve the RP (before June 30, 1952) and endorsed them as declaration of public utility to urgently implement the RP’s contents. Secondly, Article 1 of Act no. 1402/1951 supported the private initiative by the direct funding by means of the Ministry of Public Works. This funding covered 4-5% of the expenditure sustained by individual or consortium owners over a period of 30 years. If modifications to the RP were required, the approval process adhered strictly to the same protocol established for the original plan’s ratification. Thirdly, Article 15 of Act no. 1402/1951 established that within 4 years of the RP’s approval, the Minister of Public Works was required to issue a decree determining whether the municipality should retain the RP or draft a GMP according the 1942 Town Planning Act.

Based on the aforementioned legislative prescriptions and amendments and despite the absence of a comprehensive plan, municipalities across Italy proceeded with reconstruction measures. However, the latter were not embedded within a comprehensive scheme developed at a city-scale nor with a much-needed coordination at larger scale (e.g. inter-municipal plans) as pursued by the 1942 Town Planning Act.

This legislative framework had an impact on the RP implementation, which was affected by numerous factors.

Firstly, according to Astengo (1952b, p. 174), in that period the political activity was conducted on the basis of ideological considerations rather than practical ones, thus excluding urban planners. The absence of qualified professionals in the field of urban and regional planning in the post-WWII political domain, both at the municipal and national levels, along the lack of technical expertise among Italian politicians, contributed to the dearth of a comprehensive vision of urban development in terms of spatial planning among high-level officials and executives. Consequently, in a context of “difficult re-legitimisation” of spatial planning in the Republican era (Bernardini, 2024, p. 23-27), the potential role of planners was either overlooked, obfuscated, or regarded as inconsequential within the political discourse. The possible role of planners to conduct relevant urban interventions emerged at a time when the political arena offered a multitude of possibilities after the end of the dictatorship, yet urban planners were actually marginalised from the political process.

Secondly, each municipality developed its own reconstruction measures independently of one another, with no awareness of the other municipalities’ plans. This resulted in a fragmented approach to the reconstruction task driven by private actors with insufficient control by public authorities (Astengo, 1952b, p. 173). This is how a multitude of public works affecting urban and rural centres of varying sizes were carried out during the Reconstruction period, with a focus on

restoring or exploiting pre-existing urban environments characterised by poor urban quality. Due to the lack of local financial resources, many municipalities even engaged in property speculation, which resulted in a loss of public confidence. Only a small number of RPs were formulated in a timely manner – e.g. the RP of Brescia and Frosinone were approved in 1946, Pescara and Pisa in 1947, and Benevento, Macerata and Modena in 1948 (Bonfantini, 2021, p. 9-15)–, and conceived as a public task with the endeavour of farsighted urban planners to overcome the negative implications of speculative developments typical of post-WWII period (Falco, 2011, p. 17-19).

Thirdly, the RPs' validity as Detailed Plans (*Piano Particolareggiato*, DP) sought to balance urgent needs of reconstruction with the potential for future-oriented and comprehensive urban redevelopment through a dual approach (Micali, 1998). On the one hand, RPs merged urban design principles with broader urban planning strategies to facilitate prompt, practical, and pragmatic interventions aimed at addressing the immediate aftermath of destruction (Rosa, 1998). On the other hand, they also functioned as tools for urban planning that subtly alluded to more expansive ambitions, focusing on the long-term reconfiguration and spatial transformation of urban environments (Detti, 1953). These characteristics gave the RP the form of a tool specifically designed to elaborate upon and refine the contents of the GMP, resulting in the RP often taking the form of expansive architectural projects. RPs, in their quality of DPs, focused primarily on particular interventions, such as the development of residential and industrial areas, alongside urban renewal initiatives. As pinpointed by Vignozzi (1994: 134), DPs closely resembled large-scale architectural designs, aiming not just at broad urban development but at a meticulous, context-specific approach to reshaping urban spaces. This focus on specific, often localised interventions should have allowed RPs to provide more precise and efficient rebuilding in response to the immediate post-war needs of Italian cities. For this reason, RPs were inherently selective and project-specific, designed to address individual urban sectors rather than being a comprehensive or systematic blueprint. However, this stands in stark contrast to the GMP established by Act no. 1150/1942, which required a holistic and all-encompassing approach.

Eventually, this led to a challenging implementation of RPs (Serafini, 2011). The delay in the approval of RPs was due to the scarcity of financial resources, the unwieldy nature of the bureaucratic apparatus, the dearth of fundamental cartographic data, and the persistent disagreements, reconsiderations and intricate negotiations between state and local authorities. In addition, the execution of RPs was rarely, if ever, undertaken by their authors. This occurred notwithstanding the drafters were in multiple occasions experts recognised at national level, such as Cesare Chiodi (for the 1947 Fidenza's RP), Plinio Marconi (for the 1946 Verona's RP) and

Luigi Piccinato (for the 1945 Civitavecchia's and 1947 Pescara's RP). As a result, the responsibility for the RP implementation frequently fell upon the City Council's administrators due to the absence of a control body for the implementation phase. Furthermore, there was a tendency to apply countless modifications (*varianti*) signed by different technicians in derogation of what the national planning law stated regarding their contents (Piccinato, 2010: 238-242).

To sum up, in the post-WWII period, approximately 300 City Councils drafted a total of 325 RPs, 283 of which were approved and 42 were just drafted, with a total of 365 approved modifications and 62 only drafted (Serafini, 2011, p. 243). Upon expiration, the validity of RPs was commonly extended and hence they continued to serve as the primary municipal planning instrument across the country, albeit typically limited to specific, central areas, with no prescriptions related to the whole municipality. The technical simplifications, fiscal incentives, and expedited procedures linked to the RP enabled the real estate sector to exert significant influence, not only on municipal planning policies but more critically on escalating values of urban land rent (Oliva, 1993, p. 42).

Case Study Analysis and Results

The Genesis and Evolution of Genoa's RP

Genoa was as one of the most ravaged cities in Italy during WWII (Massobrio & Gioannini, 2007, p. 190-192) as it endured two naval bombardments and a staggering 85 air raids in the period 1940-1944. As a result, 11,183 buildings – corresponding to 23% of all buildings within the city – were obliterated, with 8,445 of these located in central districts (Comune di Genova, 1959, p. 122-123).

The demand for housing was made urgent by the wartime destruction and was further compounded by the rapid growth of the population, which increased by approximately 100,000 individuals between the 1951 and 1961, from 688,447 to 784,194. Additionally, a sociological inquiry conducted in the mid-1950s found 7,796 people living in 73 slums (Cavalli, 1957, p. 56-61). To face this situation, Genoa was the first major city in Italy, among those severely damaged by the war, “to recognise the urgent need to frame the reconstruction within a comprehensive, organic and up-to-date master plan, rather than a fragmented one, which took into account the damage caused by the war” (Labò, 1945, p. 12). The initial intention was to elaborate the reconstruction within the general planning schemes established by Town Planning Act no. 1150/1942. On June 5, 1945, the City Council's resolution no. 161 launched a commission devoted to the GMP drafting (Comune di Genova, 1945; for the entire chronology, see Annex 1). However, the GMP drafting was interrupted by the Ministerial Decree no. 1357 of May 28, 1946, which required Genoa's city centre and the districts of Rivarolo, Sampierdarena, Voltri and Teglia

to draft a RP. The boundaries of the areas affected by the RP were established by the Ministry of Public Works in agreement with the Public Works Authority (*Provveditorato alle Opere Pubbliche*). Genoa's RP affected 365.9 hectares of territory, comprising the historic centre (Figure 1) and Sampierdarena neighbourhood (Figure 2; Figure 3 provides the RP legend in English), representing 2.1% of the city's total municipal area and 8% of its pre-war built environment. Consequently, the City Council's resolution no. 1640 (August 8, 1946) entrusted the task to engineers Aldo Assareto and Eugenio Fuselli, along with the architects Mario Labò and Giovanni Romano. The RP was approved by the City Council's resolution no. 272 (May 14, 1948) and entered into a public consultation period between July 3 to 19, 1948. A total of 75 comments were recorded. Of these, 74 concerned the city centre area and were all submitted by property owners, including public bodies. The requests were generally aimed to modify the RP in order to increase their land values via growing building density, removal of heritage restrictions and changes to road layouts.

On October 8, 1948, the Public Works Authority advised the City Council to accept some of the objections and jointly draw up amendments. The City Council therefore asked the technicians in charge of the RP drafting to proceed with the changes requested by the Public Works Authority together with those appealed by private citizens, and then approved the RP amendments on April 14, 1949 (resolution no. 410; Comune di Genova, 1949). However, the Ministry of Public Works required more details and corrections about the amendments. Consequently, the RP was eventually approved by the City Council's resolution no. 935 of September 18, 1950 (Comune di Genova, 1950), with additional but insignificant modifications in July 1951 (Comune di Genova, 1951).

Although the RP drafting process began in 1945, it took more than five years for the definitive approval. Three important elements that can help to comprehend the drafting process were the following. Firstly, the RP's overreaching goal was to achieve a rapid reconstruction without entering into conflict with the existing seven spatial plans enacted between 1932 and 1940 (of which five were devoted to the city centre and two to Sampierdarena). Secondly, the City Council launched a new commission devoted to drafting the GMP on December 11, 1948, whose working tasks had no relation with the RP's contents. The GMP drafting proceeded slowly and accelerated just after the Ministry of Public Works mandated Genoa to formulate a GMP in 1954 (Ministero dei Lavori Pubblici, 1954a). Eventually, the Ministry of Public Works approved a total of 33 modifications to the RP between 1951 and 1958. Many of these amendments (13) occurred after the established deadline of the RP validity (January 24, 1955). This propelled the extension of the RP execution period until January 24, 1960 (Ministero dei Lavori Pubblici, 1954b), although the final approval of the GMP occurred in 1959.

Figure 1 – Map 1 of the RP covering Genoa's historic centre. Source: Comune di Genova (2021)

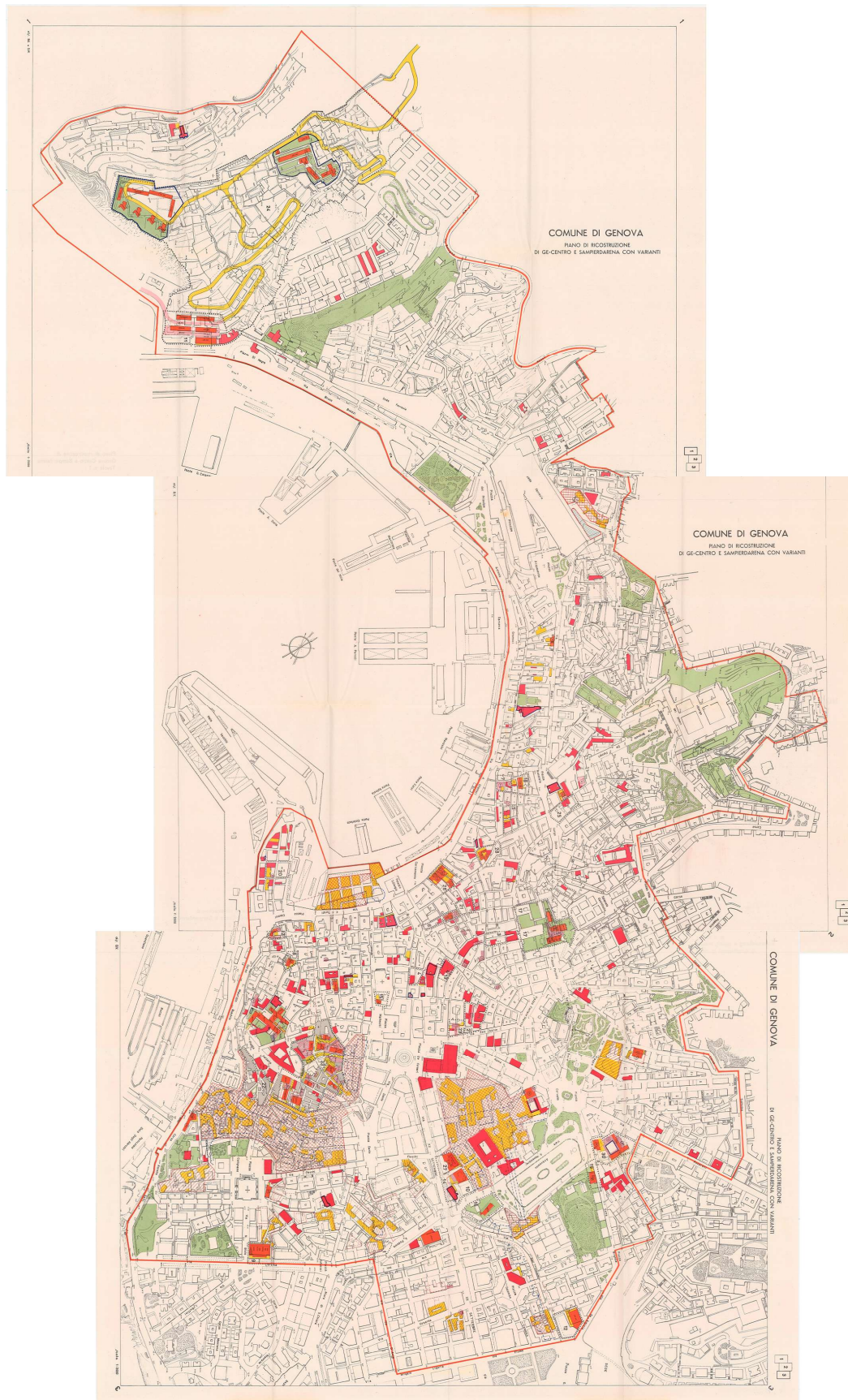


Figure 2 – Map 3 of the RP covering Genoa's Sampierdarena neighbourhood. Source: Comune di Genova (2021)

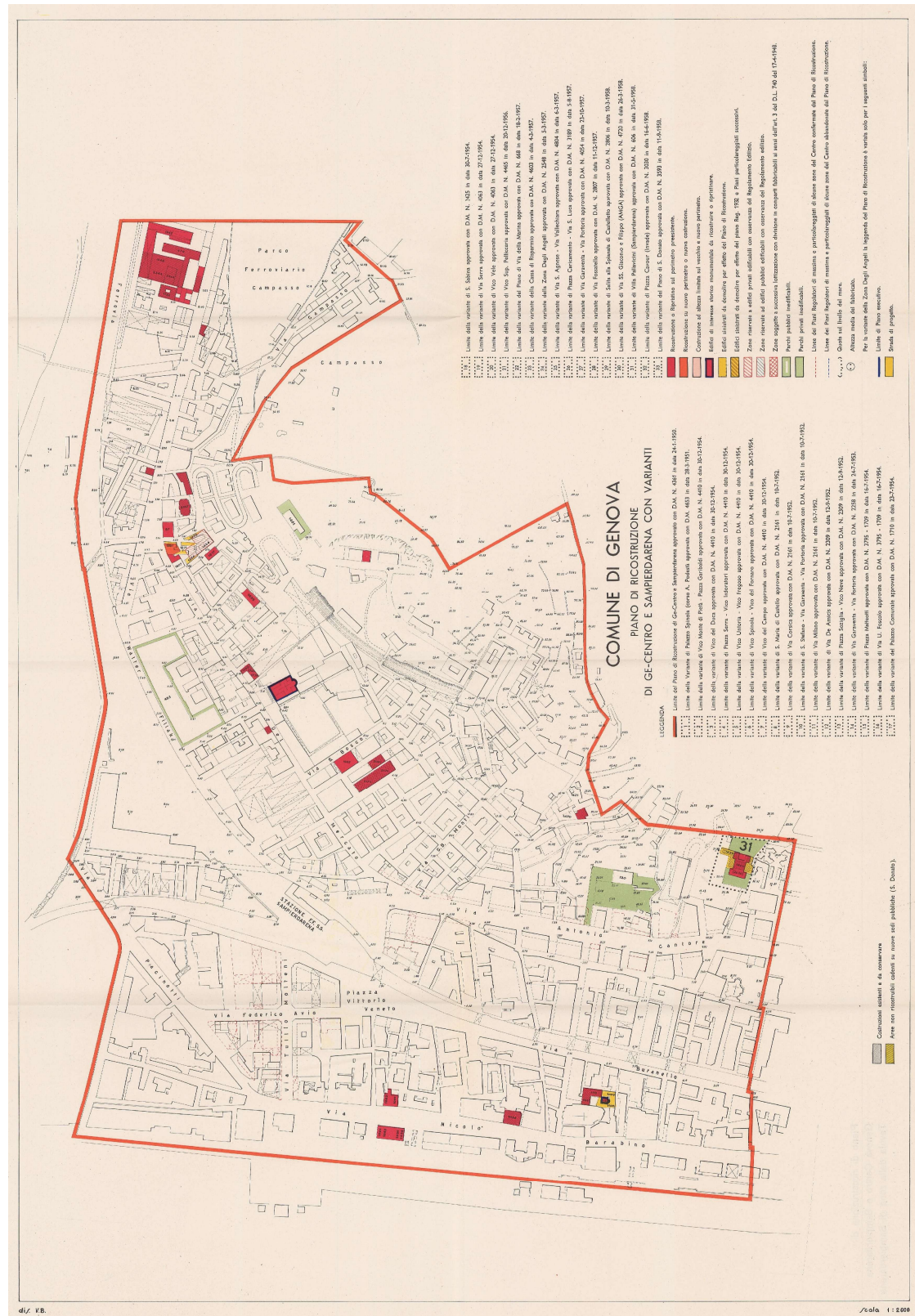
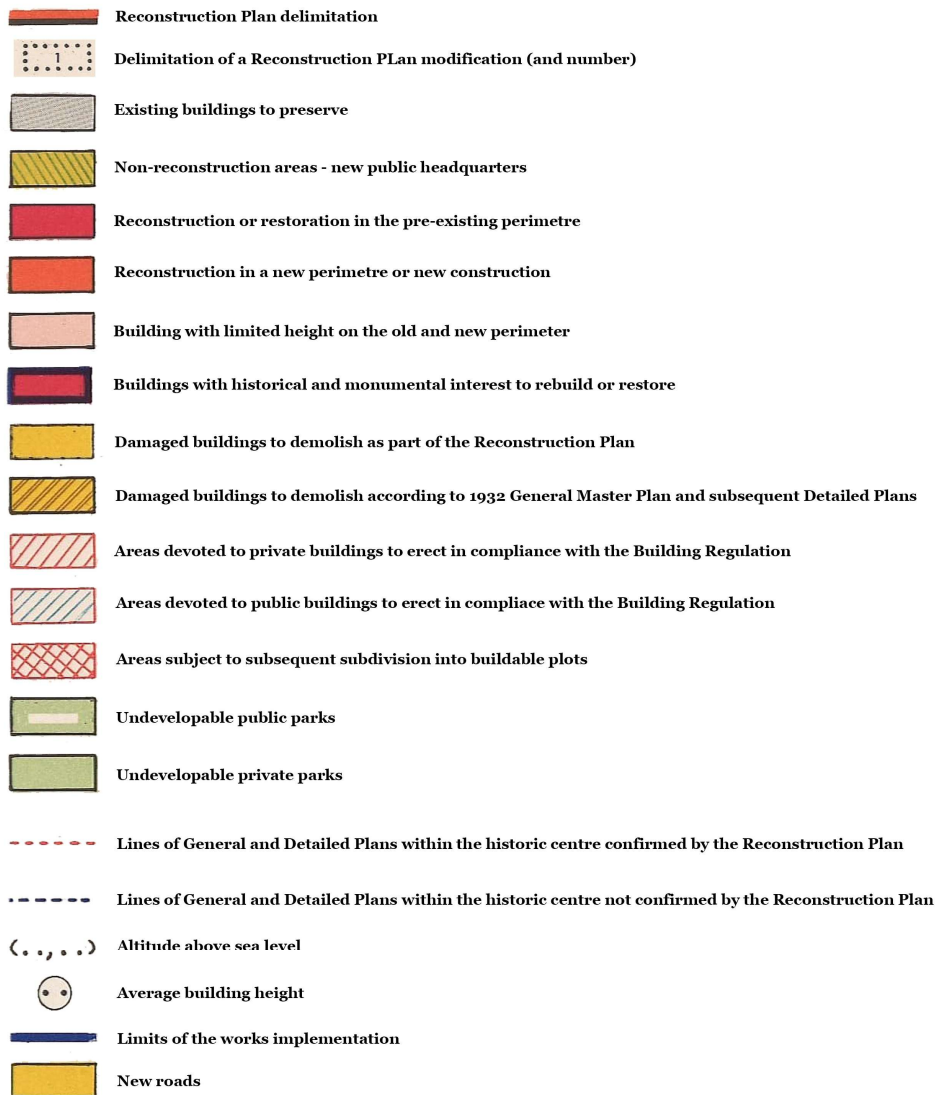


Figure 3: The RP legend (Figures 1 and 2) in English. Source: Federico Camerin based on Comune di Genova (2021).



The Implementation of Genoa's RP: Patterns and Proposed Outcomes

Despite the research limitations described in section “Methods and materials”, from a spatial planning point of view, the RP implementation can be screened by addressing three kinds of intervention scales: neighbourhood, individual buildings, and open spaces. Each of the three categories present two specific projects as example of the main dynamics occurring at the various scales. Although these cases cannot represent the total variety of the interventions carried out, they illustrate the general approach used to manage the damaged built environment, and their relationship with previous and successive époques.

At the neighbourhood scale, for some macro-areas with medieval configuration, such as Piccapietra and Via Madre di Dio sectors, the RP confirmed most of the recommendations of the 1932 *Piani Regolatori delle zone centrali della città* (Genoa's spatial plans for the central areas in English, Gspca) that had not yet been implemented (Figure 4; Figure 5 provides the legend in

English) (Barbieri, 1937). Gspca established the demolition of these areas (*sventramenti*), which had already been planned despite the absence of bombing damage, to carry out via Detailed Plans. The WWII damages provided a stronger motivation to implement these plans (Fuselli, 1949) and were performed after the Reconstruction period.

Figure 4 – The 1932 Genoa's spatial plan for the central areas. The black circle entails the area of Via Madre di Dio and the light-blue circle the area of Piccapietra. Source: Comune di Genova

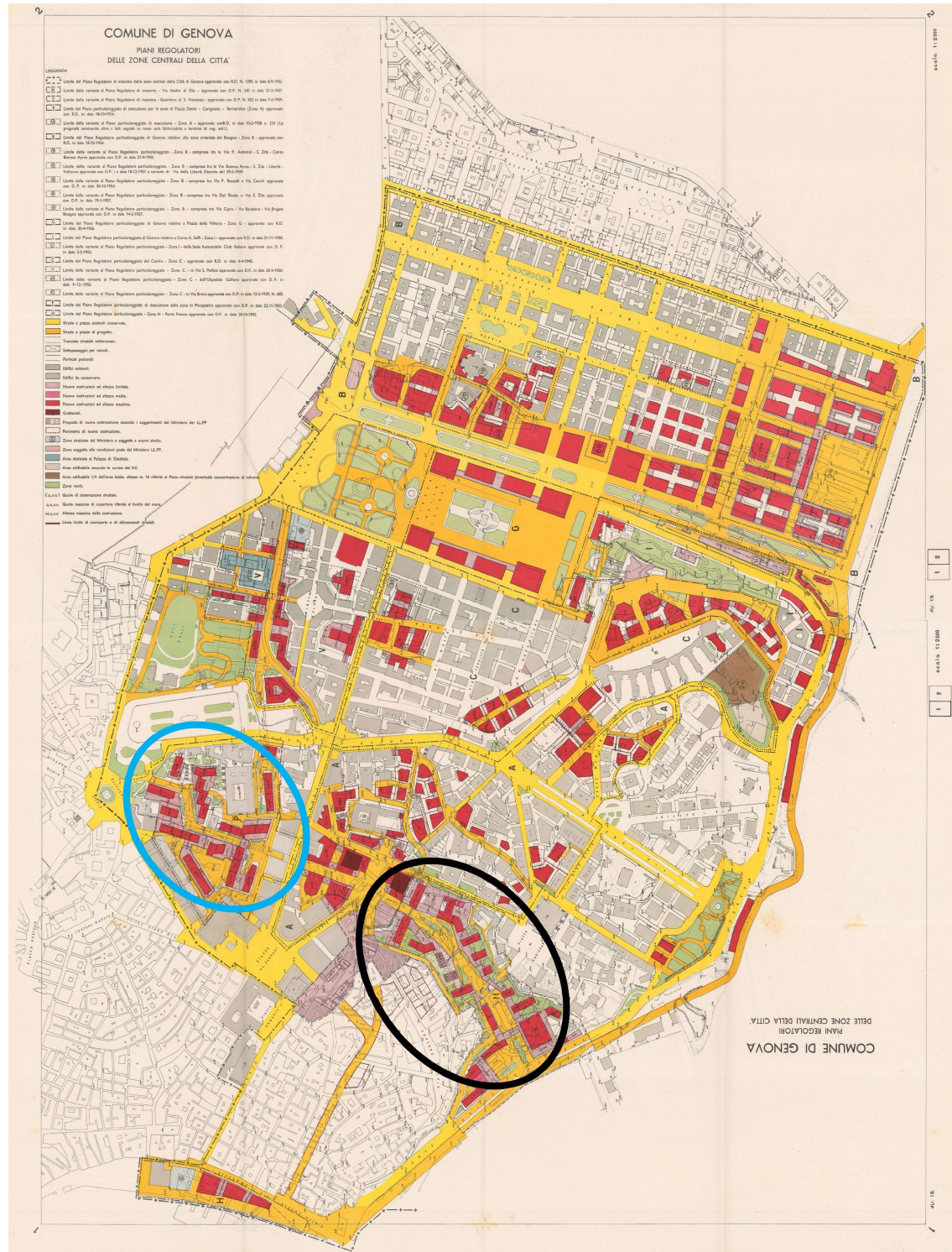
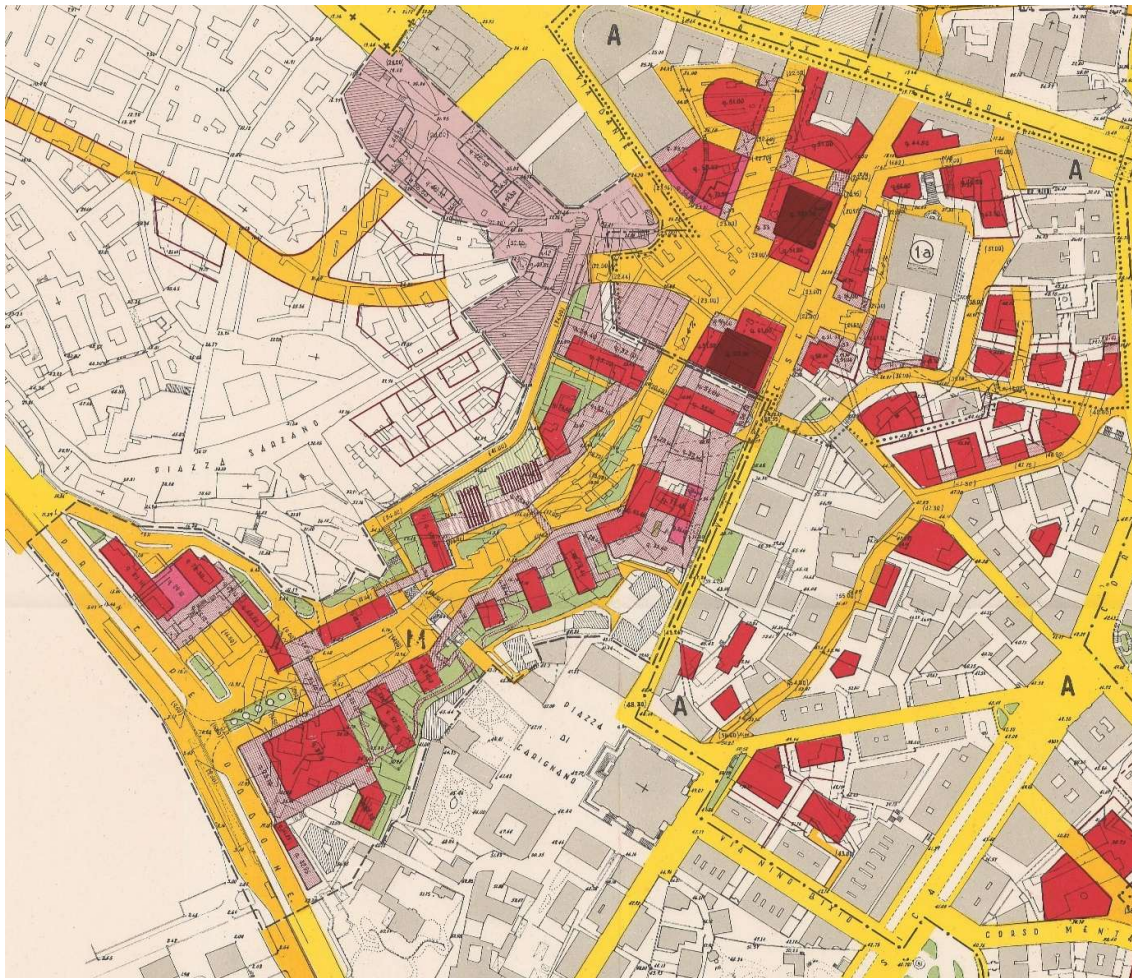


Figure 5 – The legend of the 1932 Genoa's spatial plan for the central areas in English. Source: Federico Camerin based on Comune di Genova

	Boundaries of the Gspca approved by Royal Decree no. 1,390 on September 8, 1932
	Boundaries of the modification to Gspca—Via Madre di Dio approved by Presidential Decree no. 340 on March 27, 1957
	Boundaries of the modification to Gspca—San Vincenzo neighbourhood approved by Presidential Decree no. 425 on April 7, 1959
	Boundaries of the Detailed Plan for the areas of Piazza Dante—Carignano—Bernardine (Zone A) approved by Royal Decree on October 18, 1934
	Boundaries of the Detailed Plan —Zone A approved by Royal Decree no. 253 on February 10, 1938
	Boundaries of the Detailed Plan for Bisagno's Eastern area—Zone B—approved by Royal Decree no. 253 on October 18, 1934
	Boundaries of the Detailed Plan's Modification —Zone B— between Streets P. Antonini-S. Zita-Corso Buenos Aires approved by Presidential Decree on September 21, 1950
	Boundaries of the Detailed Plan —Zone B— between Streets Corso Buenos Aires-S. Zita-Libertà-Volturno approved by Presidential Decree on December 18, 1951 and modification of Street della Libertà Decree of May 29, 1939
	Boundaries of the Detailed Plan's Modification —Zone B— between Streets P. Rossetti and Cecchi approved by Presidential Decree on October 30, 1954
	Boundaries of the Detailed Plan's Modification —Zone B— between Streets Del Rivale and S. Zita approved by Presidential Decree on January 19, 1957
	Boundaries of the Detailed Plan's Modification —Zone B— between Streets Cipro-Barbarino-Brigata Bisagno approved by Presidential Decree on February 14, 1957
	Boundaries of Genoa's Detailed Plan on Piazza della Vittoria square —Zone G— approved by Royal Decree on April 30, 1936
	Boundaries of Genoa's Detailed Plan's Modification regarding Corso A. Saffi —Zone I— approved by Royal Decree on November 21, 1938
	Boundaries of Detailed Plan's Modification — Zone I— of the Sede Automobile Club Italiano approved by Presidential Decree on February 2, 1952
	Boundaries of Detailed Plan of Genoa's centre — Zona C— approved by Royal Decree on January 2, 1940
	Boundaries of Detailed Plan's Modification — Zone C— on Street S. Pellico approved by Presidential Decree on March 20, 1950
	Boundaries of Detailed Plan's Modification — Zone C— of Ospedale Galliera approved by Presidential Decree on December 9, 1955
	Boundaries of Detailed Plan's Modification — Zone C— on Street Brera approved by Presidential Decree no. 685 on May 12, 1959
	Boundaries of Piccapietra Detailed Plan's Modification approved by Presidential Decree on November 22, 1953
	Boundaries of Detailed Plan — Zone H— Porto Franco approved by Presidential Decree on October 20, 1955
	Existing roads or squares to be preserved
	Planned roads or squares
	Underground road layout
	Underpass for vehicles
	Pedestrian arcades
	Existing buildings
	Buildings to be preserved
	New buildings with limited height
	New buildings of medium height
	New buildings of maximum height
	Skyscrapers
	Proposal for new layout according to suggestions from the Ministry of Public Works
	Perimeter of new construction
	Areas removed by the Ministry subject to further study
	Area subject to conditions set by the Ministry of Public Works
	Area designated for the Palace of Justice
	Building area according to Building Regulations
	Buildable area 1/4 of the total area, height 16 metres above street level (possible concentration of volume)
	Green areas
	(0,00) Road layout quotas
	40,00 Maximum coverage quotas relative to sea level
	14,0,00 Maximum building height
	Compartment and road alignment limits

Firstly, the Detailed Plan for Via Madre di Dio (approval process: 1957-1966) followed the RP guidelines (Figure 6) and established a high-density single-function business centre with a central green space eventually built in 1980. This plan underwent numerous revisions from 1932 onwards, but revealed major shortcomings in terms of integration with pedestrian flows and vehicular connections with the surrounding area, resulting in an out-of-reach, underused and marginal location (Salucci, 2017). In addition, local citizens and architects across the country protested in relation to the displacement of the 5,800 inhabitants, but the operation was launched due to the financial interests that gravitated around the new Madre di Dio sector (Repetti, 2025).

Figure 6 – Enlargement of the RP focused on Madre di Dio area. Source: Comune di Genova (2021)



Secondly, the Detailed Plan for Piccapietra (approval process: 1950-1953; ends of works: 1975) suffered postponements and amendments since the first proposal for its demolition elaborated in 1885 (Repetti, 2019). The RP was in line with this project (Figure 7) and regarded the demolition of the existing built environment, which comprised mostly public land. Only the Pammatone building, incorporated into the new courthouse, and the church of Santa Croce e San Camillo were spared. The intention was to build a new neighbourhood promoting private vehicular traffic on the basis of the criterion of self-financing of the necessary public works, so the approach of maximum use of the buildability prevailed to maximise economic benefits (Fazio 1959). The area was gradually privatised and the construction of the new buildings suffered from a number of architectural coordination problems (Repetti, 2025).

At the level of single buildings damaged during the war, the tendency to poorly respect the existing built environment and morphology took place in the form of new skyscrapers (Figure 8). This was done based on the fact that the RP established the full restoration of the pre-existing building volumes in cases of demolition and reconstruction, with an increase of buildability when

the intervention provided improvements for public benefits (e.g., enlargement of public roads and creation of new public squares).

Figure 7 – Enlargement of the RP focused on Piccapietra area. Source: Comune di Genova (2021)

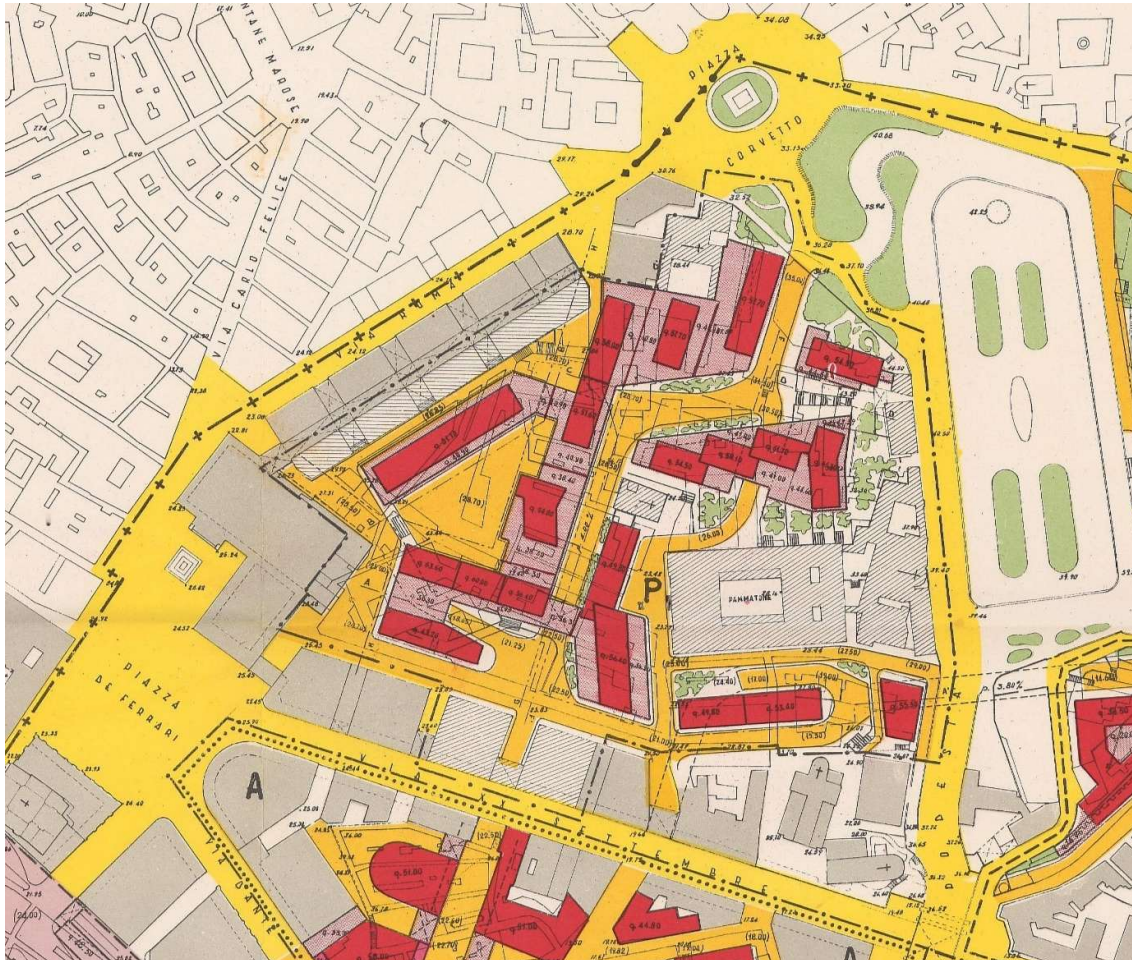
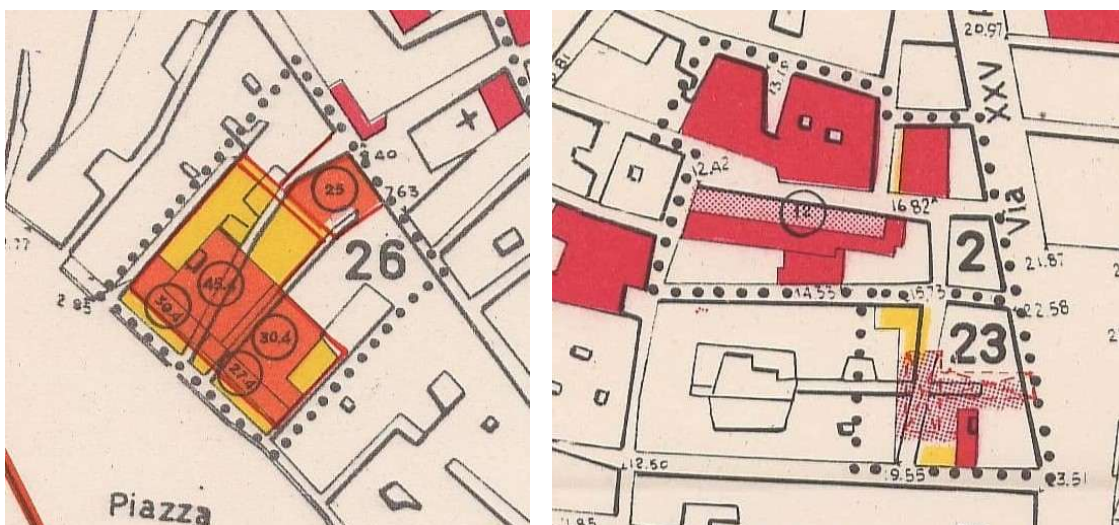


Figure 8 – On the left, the RP modification no. 26 Piazza Caricamento. On the right, the RP modification no. 23 Cassa di Risparmio. Source: Comune di Genova (2021)



One impactful project was realised between Piazza Caricamento and San Luca Street (Figure 9 and 10), a proposal devised by the City Council's Technical Office in derogation of the adopted RP (RP modification no. 26, approved on May 4, 1955), and subsequently ratified through a Ministerial Decree in August 1957 (Comune di Genova, 1957). The real estate developer involved, the General Real Estate Company (*Società Generale Immobiliare*), capitalised on the RP guidelines and negotiated a five-floor increase in exchange for the creation of a public square in the interior of the developed site. However, the intervention at Piazza Caricamento yielded a building whose scale and architectural character were incongruous with the surrounding urban fabric (No Author, 1951; Società di Letture e Conversazioni Scientifiche, 2024). The Caricamento Tower epitomised this volumetric restoration, reaching a height of 45.40 meters (Figure 10, right).

Another example is the reconstruction of the plot between Monte di Pietà alley and Piazza Garibaldi (Comune di Genova, 1954) (Figure 11). Initially, the RP limited the intervention to this specific area, but the municipal authorities elaborated a subsequent modification approved in 1957 (i.e. RP modification no. 23 "Cassa di Risparmio", approved on March 4, 1957; Ministero dei Lavori Pubblici, 1957). This was meant to expand the perimeter and permitted the construction of the *Cassa di Risparmio di Genova e Imperia* headquarters (Genoa and Imperia Savings Bank in English). The 1957 modification established the demolition of the existing buildings although the approved version of the RP acknowledged that they had sustained only minimal war damage. The approved modification highlighted the positive outcome of the increased volume of the new building, which would result in tangible improvements to ventilation, natural lighting, and vehicular traffic flows.

Figure 9 – Piazza Caricamento in 1890. Source: Comune di Genova



Figure 10 – Piazza Caricamento after the bombing on 22 October 1942 (on the left) and in 1954 (on the right). Source: Comune di Genova

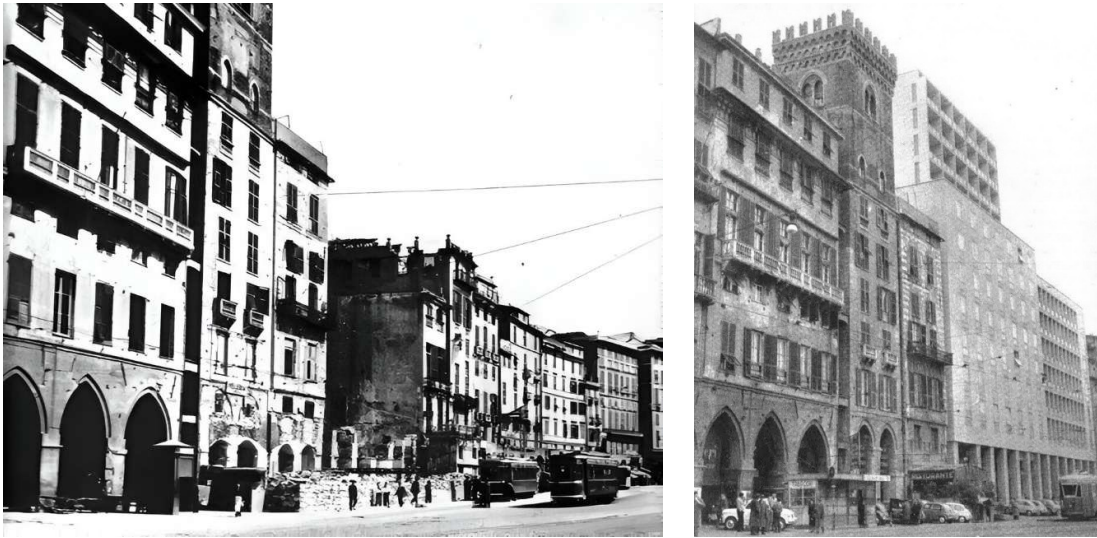


Figure 11 – The Genoa and Imperia Savings Bank's headquarters, 1960. Source: Comune di Genova



At the level of open spaces, the RP pushed for the densification of existing green areas located within the historic centre (Figure 12, left). This occurred in the Sarzano area to build an educational hub consisting of an elementary school, a middle school, and a nautical institute (Figure 12, right). The project, designed between 1948 and 1954 by the local modernist architect Luigi Carlo Daneri, was centred around the urban park of the San Silvestro former convent's bell tower. However, its realisation was blocked in the late 1950s by a municipal commission of experts tasked with the Plan for the enhancement, conservation and restoration of the Genoa's Historic Centre (*Piano di valorizzazione, conservazione e risanamento del centro storico di Genova* drafting; PecrGHC). This occurred because the project did not respect the layout of the existing buildings and topography (Gardella and Larini, 1974, p. 5-6). A new Detailed Plan was approved in 1974, being more respectful with the existing mobility system, stratifications and buildings relationships, and maintaining the green areas, but it was completed only in the early 1990s on the basis of the 1992 Expo's expenditure. The new project involved the restoration of San Silvestro former convent, including the installation of the new Faculty of Architecture headquarters, and the Bishop's Palace (Melai, 1995).

Figure 12 – On the left, the RP enlargement on Sarzano area. On the right, the Daneri-designed render. Source: Comune di Genova



Discussion

Reconstructing Genoa as a Spatial Planning Project of Selective Modernisation

The examination of Genoa's RP development through the lens of the triple-scale analysis (neighbourhood-, building-, and open space-scale) reveals delays, speculative practices, fragmented governance, and the limited effectiveness of public oversight during the Reconstruction period (1945-1960). The analysis of Genoa's RP implementation reveals that it functioned less as a technical response to wartime damage and more as a spatial planning project aimed at selective modernisation of the historic city. The RP became a strategic device

to accelerate long-standing redevelopment agendas, particularly in the medieval core, rather than an instrument of repair.

At the neighbourhood scale, the cases of Via Madre di Dio and Piccapietra demonstrate how reconstruction served as an opportunity to operationalise pre-war clearance paradigms (Balletti & Giontoni, 1990). The RP effectively reactivated the 1932 Gspca, which had already envisioned the *sventramenti* of central districts irrespective of war damage (Barbieri, 1937). Bombing destruction legitimised their implementation politically and culturally, transforming reconstruction into a form of delayed urban renewal. These interventions prioritised traffic circulation, land valorisation, and mono-functional business districts over social continuity, producing large-scale displacement (e.g. Madre di Dio's 5,800 residents) and fragmented urban fabrics. The planning logic was thus not restorative but transformational, privileging functional zoning, vehicular accessibility and real-estate profitability over neighbourhood resilience and social embeddedness.

At the building scale, the RP's volumetric restoration principle – allowing increases in building volume in exchange for public benefits – the insertion of high-rise and oversized structures into fragile historic tissues. The Caricamento Tower and the Cassa di Risparmio headquarters exemplify how negotiated derogations enabled developers to exploit reconstruction provisions to intensify land use beyond the morphological and typological capacities of the historic centre (Dillon, 1958). These operations were justified through technocratic arguments concerning light, ventilation, and traffic improvement, yet they produced sharp discontinuities in scale and architectural character. Reconstruction thus functioned as a lever for densification and capital accumulation, rather than as a mechanism for contextual repair.

At the open-space scale, the Sarzano case reveals an additional tension: the RP's inclination to densify residual green areas within the historic centre, in contrast with later conservation-oriented planning cultures. Daneri's modernist school complex embodied a planning vision grounded in functional rationalism and institutional monumentalism, but it conflicted with emerging heritage-based approaches that stressed topographical continuity, stratification, and relational urban morphology. Its eventual rejection and replacement by a more conservative Detailed Plan in the 1970s signals a paradigm shift in Genoese planning – from post-war modernisation to heritage-centred regeneration (Gardella & Larini, 1974).

Across these scales, reconstruction appears as a selectively modernising spatial project, privileging circulation efficiency, building volume maximisation and financial self-financing mechanisms. The RP institutionalised negotiated planning, where public authorities traded volumetric bonuses for limited public amenities, embedding speculative logics within the

apparatus of post-WWII reconstruction. Rather than reconstructing the pre-war city, Genoa's RP reshaped it into a new urban order that often undermined social continuity, morphological coherence and spatial accessibility. Methodologically, the research findings also underscore the limits of the retrospective reconstruction assessment attempted in this research: fragmented documentation, partial rebuilding, and decades of subsequent transformations complicate the identification of original post-war interventions. Yet, by reading reconstruction through neighbourhood, building and open-space scales, the research reconstructs not only physical outcomes but the planning rationalities that guided them.

The Pre- and Post-WWII Urbanisation and Planning Trends in the Wider Reconstruction in Genoa and Beyond

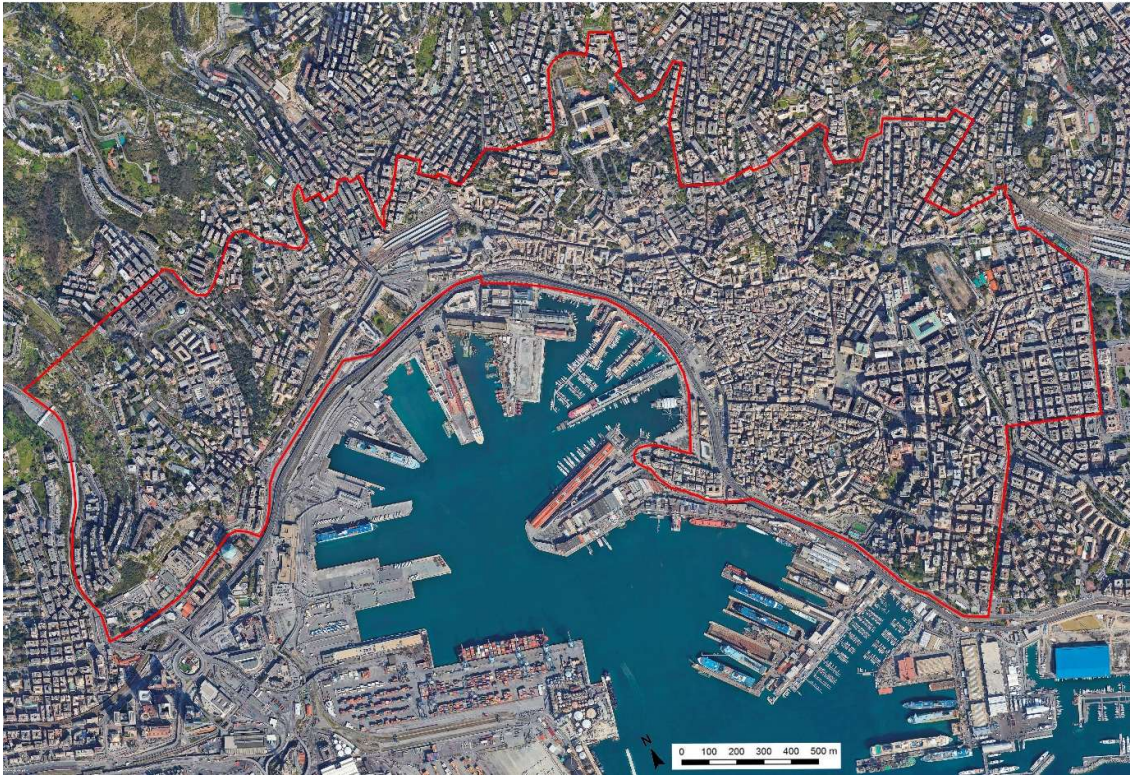
The case of Genoa constitutes one example of the facets that generally characterised the implementation of the RP in Italy. The case study analysis largely confirms the patterns observed by the existing literature at local level and in other industrial cities such as Bologna (Baldissara, 1994), Milan (Pertot & Ramella, 2016) and Turin (Vinardi, 1997), in which respectively 45% (125,000 rooms²), 24% (237,000 rooms) and 40% (52,000 rooms) of the housing stock was damaged/destroyed. The analysis presents also novel insights from the written communication of the RP authors to the City Council, the latter playing the part of an agent prone to urban speculation. This is in line with the claims of leading figures in architecture and urban planning who also drafted the RP in Genoa (Labò, 1950) and other cities (Renacco, 1950; Cederna, 1951). The political will was instrumental in shaping the post-war reconstruction, being in stark contrast to their prevailing ideas articulated through magazine articles (e.g. *Urbanistica*, Detti, 1950; and *Costruzioni-Casabella*, Gazzola, 1946), conferences (Cederna, 1961), during competitions (Piccinato, 1948) and even the RP drafting process (Marangoni, 1946). Yet their contributions frequently went unacknowledged by municipal authorities in Genoa and Italy.

One of the most notable aspects of the RP (Figure 13) was its disconnection from the genuine challenges faced by the city – and the same can be argued for the GMP –, with numerous delays and modifications. The causes of such an approach, however, were partially demonstrated. In fact, Baiardo (1999, p. 270) claimed that the electoral outcome of the Genoa City Council in June 26, 1951, played a major role in significant fluctuations in decision-making regarding the RP by the new centrist coalition spearheaded by the Christian Democracy, leading to 33 modifications with a more pronounced profit-driven approach to the interventions. However, the speculative approach also characterised the left-wing local government during the drafting period. This has

² In Italy, housing is quantified in terms of habitable rooms, which can mean living rooms, dining rooms, or bedrooms.

been clearly demonstrated by the letters send to the City Council by the RP authors (Labò et al., 1947 and 1949). Since its beginning, Genoa's RP primarily focused on urban densification, and served as a pretext for urban land speculation (Borselli, 1947; Ceschi, 1947).

Figure 13 – The satellite imagery of the historic centre of Genoa covered by the reconstruction programme (in red).
Source: Federico Camerin's elaboration (2026)



The incongruity between the vision of the RP authors and the City Council was clear already in 1947, when the City Council asked the plan authors to heavily modify the RP for the demolition of the historic centre to provide urban densification and new larger traffic roads (Labò et al., 1947). The designers thus questioned the necessity of the complete demolition and reconstruction of entire sectors within the historic urban fabric (Via Madre di Dio and Piccapietra) following Giovannoni's theories about *sventramento* (which can be translated as gutting or disembowelment in English). Instead, they argued whether it would be more appropriate to implement softer interventions (*risanamento*) to preserve the environmental characteristics of the historic centre as a whole. While the RP drafting group were in favour of preserving all neighbourhoods, the City Council was determined to uphold the decisions made by the 1932 Gspca.

In addition to *sventramento*, other measures implemented by Genoa's RP – such as the partial or complete repositioning of facades and increases in building height in spite of what standard planning regulations would allow – failed to align with the pre-existing urban morphology. Only a small number of buildings were deemed to possess historic or monumental

value to facilitate the reconstruction of specific buildings and the repositioning of façades to enhance hygiene conditions and improve urban mobility by enlarging existing streets or building new ones (Baiardo, 1999: 270-271). The RP did not provide the affected perimeter with a unified structural framework and a comprehensive planning scheme, as it favoured quantitative and not qualitative growth. As observed by the RP authors (Labò et al., 1947), even buildings intended for public use, such as those proposed for the Sarzano area, should have not being constructed to the detriment of existing green areas within the medieval fabric before the war damages. Instead, these spaces should have been safeguarded and expanded. The same RP authors (Labò et al., 1949) rejected the construction of skyscrapers such as those between Monte di Pietà alley and Piazza Garibaldi and Piazza Caricamento. They were considered inappropriate as they would result in disproportionately higher buildings in relation to the typical heights of the existing urban fabric. This praxis occurred without any form of ex-post assessment nor sufficient public control because what the RP was trying to achieve was a compound of measures “to alleviate the housing shortage and encourage the relaunch of the construction industry following the protracted period of stagnation caused by the war” (Fuselli, 1954, p. 6-7).

This issue was even acknowledged by the preliminary document of the PecrGHC, which was specifically commissioned by the City Council:

“The Reconstruction Plan was inadequate. Its inadequateness was demonstrated by how partial or total retreats of the fronts of buildings, modification of height or insufficiently studied modern reconstructions have resulted in a complete alteration of the existing built environment ... including the fact that buildings restoration involved in many cases the integration of the few surviving elements from demolished structures into new buildings, being totally decontextualised” (Comune di Genova, 1958, p. 5-6).

As stated by Fuselli (1954, p. 6), “the emergency of the reconstruction period was not always aligned with favourable conditions that would facilitate satisfactory results. In some instances, it has actually contributed to the excessive densification of the historic centre, while simultaneously distorting its characteristics”.

As a matter of fact, the PecrGHC objected projects such as Daneri-designed proposal for Sarzano area due to its unsuitability of this city sector for hosting the new school complexes due to possible traffic congestion, the high visual impact of the buildings in one of the Genoa’s oldest urban areas, and the formal-compositional solutions of a clearly rationalist nature (Borselli, 1947). The construction of new buildings adjacent to historic ones, where none have ever existed before, would cause an irreparable alteration of the existing dimensional and perceptual relationships in the historic centre. Gabrielli (1963, p. 265-266; 1986, p. 485) repeatedly highlighted that the RP’s approach to apparently preserving historical memory had often resulted in inappropriate architectural forms because this tool

“was drafted in a context of emergency, without a clear vision, without comprehensive preliminary studies, and without consideration of the city’s and its surrounding’s broader issues. Unfortunately, this plan perpetuates the longstanding trend of missed opportunities that began in 1900, namely the failure to provide the city with a more place-based planning”.

Furthermore, the RP encompassed merely a small fraction of the entire municipality (2.1%) and underwent 33 modifications without sufficient public oversight. This lack of vision for the city ultimately favoured the interests of private property developers (e.g., *Società Generale Immobiliare*) and financial capital (e.g., *Cassa di Risparmio di Genova e Imperia*). Regardless of whether the approval process had not been expedited, the efficacy of the RP would have been greatly enhanced with a more stringent oversight from the involved public administrations, namely the Ministry of Public Works.

The scarce attention paid to the real challenges suffered by Genoa at that time was also demonstrated by the GMP. While the RP approval process took five years and has been subjected to numerous modifications, Genoa’s GMP perpetuated this negative trend – experiencing a 14-year delay in approval – yet remained unutilised due to a shift in local administrative perspectives. Although the GMP purported to be influenced by the principles of the Athens Charter, the theories of Walter Gropius, and the Greater London Plan (Ufficio Studi Sociali e del Lavoro del Comune di Genova, 1962), it sparked numerous concerns due to the main objective of accommodating an additional 7,5 million inhabitants in 23,477 hectares of land within the municipal boundaries (Gabrielli, 1978). On the one hand, this future scenario was a stark contrast to the peaked population of 848,121 reached by Genoa in 1965: after that, the city experienced a slow decrease up to the current 564,919 inhabitants. On the other hand, the provision of new housing outpaced the demands associated with the migratory trends. Indeed, while 150,000 new inhabitants migrated to Genoa during the 1950s, 250,000 new housing units were built, leading to an oversupply (Cavalli, 1964, p. 88-95). The GMP neglected to address the genuine needs of the city and even did not dialogue with the RP in any sense, although it shares the same speculative philosophy resulting from the *laissez-faire* policies of the Reconstruction era. To address this situation, the City Council undertook a revision of the GMP starting from 1963 (Salveti, 2011).

Conclusion

This article has a clear focus on Genoa, as this city is a valuable proving-ground for investigating post-WWII reconstruction due to the heavy damages occurred here during this armed conflict. A scale of damage of up to 23% can be interpreted as significant on the magnitude of the Italian efforts for the reconstruction: Benevolo (1971) estimated that

approximately 17% of the residential stock was damaged during WWII across the country, of which 6% had been completely demolished. This is in line with British destruction, notwithstanding in countries such as Germany or Poland such percentage can be considerate small (Overy, 2013).

This study revealed a number of facets that can help to expand the existing knowledge about the reconstruction process in Italy by using Genoa as case study to illustrate the multitude of factors contributing to the difficulties related to the RP development. Firstly, the analysis of the national legislation – including various amendments – provides an understanding of the complexity of the reconstruction problem itself in a specific country under the lens of spatial planning. Secondly, the RP scale and variety of interventions indeed makes it necessary to adopt a novel approach to better understand the impact of the RP. This article adopted a triple vision for the case study analysis (based on a neighbourhood-, single-building-, and open-space-scaled interventions), which can be extended to other case studies across the country and abroad. Thirdly, the inquiry shows also the necessity to take into consideration the Reconstruction planning generated after WWII as a planning technique that followed wider urban development dynamics, ideas and practices already existing and under discussion between Genoa's RP authors and the City Council (*sventramento* versus *diradamento*). This testified the fact that the post-WWII reconstruction has been a trigger for implementing much of the already planned interventions, which stemmed from a cumulative process which already began between the late 19th century and in-between the two wars. Eventually, the drafting of Genoa's RP and GMP can be conceived as two separate tasks employing a large expenditure in terms of time and unnecessary urban renewal process disconnected to the public interest. In fact, the lack of sufficient control of the drafting and approval process in terms of preserving the existing urban fabric is today regretted as it implied a relevant loss of potentially listed heritage. This can definitely be blamed on the absence of sensitivity towards such aspects by state and local public authorities due to their prominent search for development and quantitative growth.

This research also signifies a preliminary step towards achieving a more nuanced comprehension of the role played by the RP for the post-WWII period in Italy. As demonstrated by the negative outcomes of the RP-induced projects fostered during the Reconstruction period and beyond it, the post-WWII planning tools had a strong impact in the later periods of urban development, decline, and regeneration that had characterised Genoa over the rest of the 20th and early 21st centuries. One may say that both the RP and GMP were not spatial planning tools for the common good of society as they improperly considered and addressed societal challenges. These issues were thus inherited in the successive decades, especially the disconnection between the historic centre and the port (Bobbio, 2005). The reconfiguration of the

relationship between the public sector, the private sector, and civil society by new modes of coordination of social-spatial behaviour in the 1980s resulted in regeneration schemes connected to a series of cultural events in the 1990s and 2000s that would instead fix this problem (Gastaldi, 2016). However, apart from a few isolated studies on contemporary planning history at a national level (e.g. Campos Venuti & Oliva, 1993), the existing literature still fails to provide a thorough reflection on the connection between the negative outcomes of Reconstruction period proposals and the problematic issues that Italian cities faced during the deindustrialisation process that occurred from the late 1970s.

The question arises whether, if the scale of wartime destruction of urban buildings and infrastructure in Genoa had been greater, the rebuilding of the city might have been commenced in a more favourable way. The proposed research has provided here a reasoned critique of the administrative procedures tied to the Reconstruction period and the motivations behind many of the post-war reconstruction measures taken in Genoa. The advancement provided by the case study analysis constitutes a starting point to understand that almost none of the analysed Reconstruction-related decisions or solutions have stood the test of time and passed the test of morphology and functionality of the urban areas.

As demonstrated by this research, most of the effects of the post-WWII reconstruction in Genoa are currently approached negatively due to the resulting transformations. Yet, there is still an insufficient assessment of how all the implemented transformations established by the RP, those modified over the decades, and those performed out of the RP scope during the Reconstruction époque – e.g. the creation of isolated social-housing neighbourhoods just outside the RP boundaries (Camerin & Gastaldi, 2025) – had an impact in the city-making of successive decades. This assessment can be especially revealing for the physical and governance disconnection between the historic centre and waterfront (Gastaldi & Camerin, 2015). This is a hypothesis to verify, the historic centre's districts that did not suffer any of the RP-induced transformations were then the target of specific actions undertaken within the 1992-to-2004 mega-events period. This occurred to face the urgent need to improve the decayed historic centre and reconnect it to its waterfront in order to reposition Genoa as a cultural and tourist destination following the deindustrialisation process and the consequent economic decline from the 1970s (Jones, 2022). What seems surprising can be the fact that the unimplemented RP-fostered interventions were those that have been resolved better in the late 20th century. The urban transformations of this later period marked an abrupt change in terms of city-making as they were based on shared strategic visions and plans as well as more inclusive participatory approaches that extended beyond the implementation of individual projects as it occurred instead during the Reconstruction period and beyond. Alongside such an approach, the

commitment of the local architect Renzo Piano for his own city had contributed to significantly improve the physical quality of Genoa's built environment since the early 1980s (Gastaldi & Camerin, 2017; 2020).

Starting from these reflections, it might be worthwhile to highlight the key aspects which can come to inform future post-war responses, bearing in mind the challenges of transferring urban policy or learnings from one context to another. The issue of proceeding with a reconstruction plan that lacks a broader vision or strategy for recovery and development which generates future challenges seems especially relevant. Equally relevant for drawing lessons from the case of Genoa are the reflections on how to manage the existing built environment, including heritage conservation/reconstruction, by reducing speculative-based practices. This aspect can be addressed by building a societal consensus around decisions with prioritisation of actions to take based on rationalisation mechanisms to reduce tensions between competing goals over time and place. In this sense, implementing mixed mechanisms for citizen participation in planning and decision-making regarding the future urban model can be critical. Nevertheless, weighing residents' interest with technical expertise is fundamental to avoid possible negative outcome in terms of resilience, as has been demonstrated in recent post-disaster reconstructions (Córdoba et al., 2025).

This article's initial endeavour may serve as a catalyst for a more extensive inventory of operations conducted within Genoa and on a city-by-city basis, thereby yielding a deeper understanding of the impacts of the RP at the national level via a broader comparative perspective on the scale of reconstruction of Italian cities. Another future research path could be a comparison with a diametrically opposed solution in terms of reconstruction planning adopted in Britain, i.e. embedding the reconstruction efforts within a new Town Planning reform. In Italy, the reformed planning system was eschewed, whereas in Britain, a new radical reform was implemented in 1947 (Larkham & Adams, 2023). This calls for a comparison of how these two approaches have shaped urban environments in these countries, going beyond current research (Ciccarelli & Melhuish, 2021).

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Conflict of interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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Appendices

Appendix 1. Chronology of the main steps taken in regard to the state legislation and documentation affecting GMP and RP with the specific information on the case of Genoa.

Source: elaboration by the Author/s (2026).

Years	State legislation and documents		Genoa	
	GMP	RP	GMP	RP
1942	1942 Town Planning Act			
1945		Legislative Decree No. 154/1945 Ministerial Circular No. 49/1945 Ministerial Circular No. 590/1945	05/06/1945 –City Council’s resolution no. 161: Commission to draft GMP including the RP	
1946				28/05/1946 – Ministerial Decree no. 1357: RP compulsory for Genoa
1948			11/12/1948: City Council resolution no. 1620, second Commission to GMP drafting	14/05/1948 – City Council resolution no. 272, first RP adoption
1949		Act No. 409/1949		05/03/1949 – City Council resolution no. 410, RP adoption with modifications
1950				18/09/1950 – City Council resolution no. 835, RP final approval
1951		Act No. 1402/1951		
1954			18/10/1954: Interministerial Decree no. 391, compulsory for City Council to approve GMP by 1960	From 28/03/1951 to 11/09/1958: RP suffered 22 modifications
1958				
1959			14/10/1959: President of the Republic Decree, GMP approved	