

Stop the car park in Piazza Sant'Ambrogio in Milan

We - the citizens of Milan, of Italy and the World - turn to you, Mr. Mayor, in a renewed effort to stop the construction of the car park under *Piazza Sant'Ambrogio*.

It would be an irreversible change to this historic “piazza” if it was to become the roof of a five-storey underground silos. This historic square is the symbolic fulcrum of Milan, it is comparable in dignity and meaning, to the *Piazza del Duomo* in Milan or *Piazza San Pietro* in Rome. This place, in fact, holds in its ancient foundations, the memories of those martyrs in the honour of which Ambrose erected the first church, later dedicated to him. The sacredness of the religious rites that took place in the Basilica is still evoked here. This square was indeed experienced by the faithful of all times, as a sacred and public space, a natural continuation of their liturgy and devotion. For this reason, much more recently, the Memorial of the Fallen was built right here in this square and dedicated to the new martyrs, thus giving continuity to this sacred memory. The most profound civic identity issues stem from this place.

Let us recall that it is the Italian Constitution (Article 9) and the Law on Cultural Heritage (Art. 10 and 20) that simply prohibit the destruction of a historic square of such an importance.

Mr. Mayor, to stop this aberration, you could invoke very simple considerations of urban planning and viability: conceived back in 1985, this car park project today no longer makes sense, because it would be clashing with a historic city center that seeks more and more to be closed to private cars. In addition, this area is well served by public transport and there are available parking places nearby, including the parking lot recently put into operation (as requested for many years), in the street “via Olona”.

Of what public utility would then be the construction of another parking lot? This would be just another example of privatization of public space for the benefit of only a few. During your election campaign we welcomed your promise to suspend the works related to the car park projects at *Piazza Lavater* and *Piazza Sant'Ambrogio*.

We are aware that the hesitation of the new City government is due to economic reasons, due to the several million Euros of penalties which – as reported by the newspapers – the City would need to pay to the construction company concerned in case of cancellation of the works. The amount due by the City as reimbursement of expenses incurred to date by the company (actual damage) deserves, in our opinion, a serious public scrutiny and an examination of possible alternative forms of due compensation. We also plead that, on the other hand, full consideration and weight are given to the damage which would result from a profound and permanent change and trivialization of the “piazza”, following the construction of an underground car park: this would indeed result in a permanent damage to be endured by all those, throughout the world, who recognize that the square S. Ambrose is an asset of unparalleled historical and artistic richness.

Some people tried to demonstrate that the parking lot, far from distorting the square, would improve today's square which is considered as “formless”, distorted by wild parking and also profoundly altered and rebuilt over the centuries, especially after the devastating bombings that hit Milano in 1943. But if we would limit the protection of historic building only for those who have kept their original integrity, this would mean that we would exclude from protection many other testimonies of the past, the Cathedral of Milan (whose facade dates

from the nineteenth century) or even La Scala (also bombed in 1943), to cite only few examples. The square can certainly be improved, by freeing its surface from the cars. There is certainly no necessity to build a car park to achieve this result.

We insist that, even if the works have obtained the necessary permissions from the Superintendent, converting a historical piazza into the roof of a public garage is simply incompatible and contrary to the principles of heritage protection: the authorisation given by the Superintendent, which was granted on the basis of a political decision, cannot give legality to an action which is prohibited by the Italian Law on the protection of cultural heritage.

For all these reasons, Mr. Mayor, we appeal to your authority asking you to correct what was done wrong in the past, reaffirming the principles of heritage protection which needs to be vigorously respected. We urge you to reconsider this project and therefore to suspend the works in progress.

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