

EU recovery fund to help restore Milan's inner canal ring?

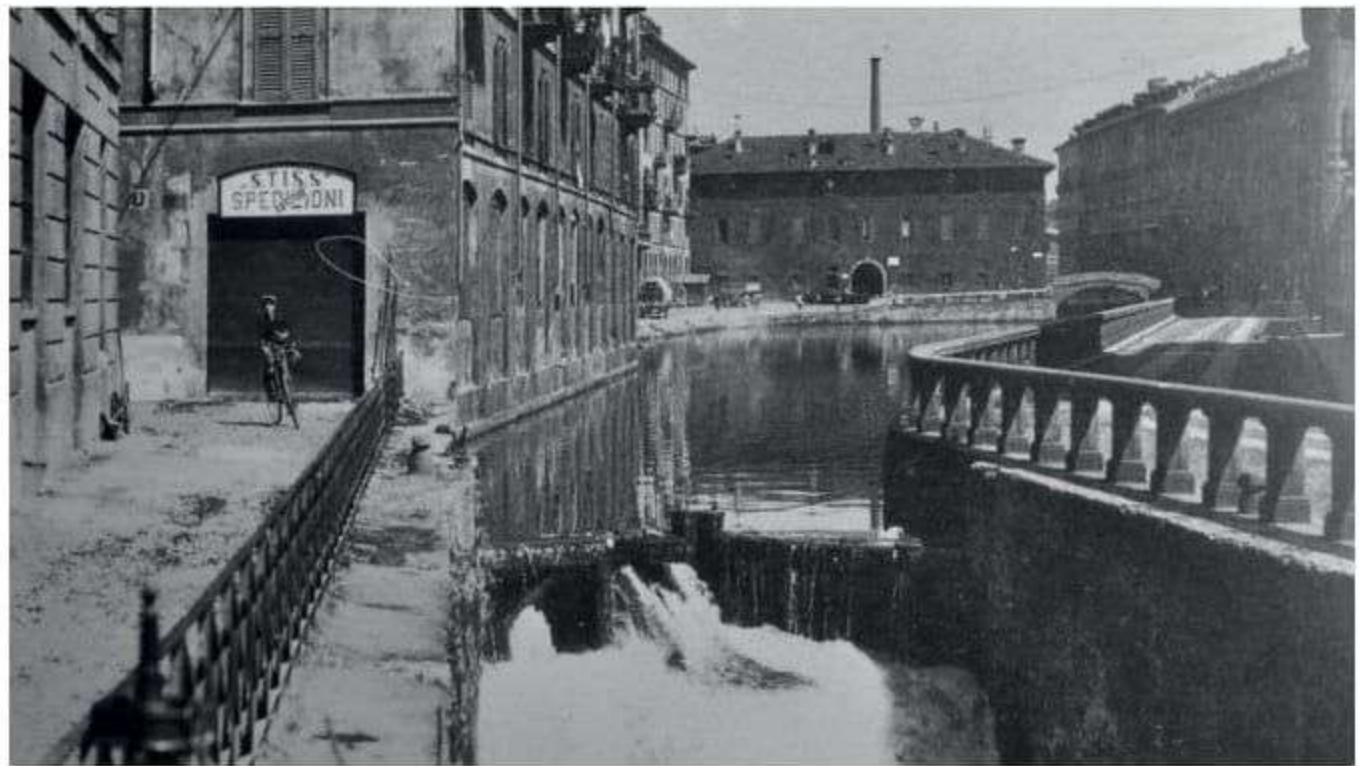
SPEAKING AT AN 'ITALIAN FESTIVAL' on December 4, 2020, Milan's mayor Beppe Sala addressed the 40-year-old project to reopen the city's canal connections and inner ring. As if to justify the slow progress, he recalled that the cost of the overall project, with a fully navigable connection 8 km in length through the city itself, is €500 million (see map). He confirmed that the city had put in a request for support via the Government's Recovery fund and from the European Union, with a decision by the European Commission expected in June 2021. It is obviously hoped that the project will be approved at the national and European level, but no work can be undertaken on the project until then, the mayor observed.

An IWA International Committee tour in 1983 visited Milan and met architect Empio Malara who was already then campaigning for at least one symbolic restoration, the connection from the large basin at Porta Ticinese to the Viarenna lock. The main focus of his association Amici dei Navigli has otherwise been the Locarno-Venice route, using Milan's already navigable canals.

The association Riaprire i Navigli was founded with the broader ambition of full restoration of the complete canal network in Lombardy, including the Leonardo-designed Naviglio Paderno, which president Roberto Biscardini claims is 'the most beautiful canal in Europe'. Hence the push for the complete 8-km connection to be implemented by the time Milan hosts the Winter Olympic Games in 2026.

No less than 9 of the 54 locks on the Lombardy canals are located within the city of Milan, as shown in the remarkable book *Le Conche: per la navigabilità dei Navigli Lombardi*, published by Biblion Edizioni. Seven of these need to be rebuilt, although one technical presentation at the World Canals Conference in Milan in 2014

San Marco lock on the Naviglio Martesana, where it joined the cerchio or inner canal ring in Milan



suggested that there could be additional locks with smaller differences in level round the ring.

54 locks in Lombardy

The 270-page book, by Roberto Biscardini and IWI Council member and expert Edo Bricchetti, wonderfully captures the atmosphere of Lombardy's canals, including the late 19th century Canale Industriale, with a stunning collection of historic and contemporary images of the locks. The 2020 photographs were taken by Stefano Topuntoli. The book is a *cri de cœur* by the authors for the canal reopening through Milan to be implemented at last, after 30 years of debate. It answers many questions, even for those who do not read Italian: a millennium of hydraulic engineering achievements in a single tome! The book is available in our online shop for £26 plus £12 postage. The authors' intention in exploring the hydraulic and engineering details of all the locks in Lombardy was to highlight their importance throughout the history of Italy's most industrial province, but also to support today's genuinely European ambition

to reopen the navigable routes from Locarno (Lago Maggiore) and Colico (the northern end of Lago di Como) to Venice, passing through Milan's *Fossa interna* or defensive moat, also known since Leonardo da Vinci's time as the *Cerchia interna dei Navigli milanesi*. ■

The canals through Milan and location of all nine locks; at present only those on the Naviglio Pavese are in working order. All the others are buried with the exception of Leonardo da Vinci's Conca dell'Incoronata.



Cover of the new book by Roberto Biscardini and Edo Bricchetti.

Miorina Lock, the first on the Ticino downstream from Lago Maggiore, fully restored and ready to welcome boats for the mythical voyage from Locarno to Venice.

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