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Setting up a University City. Geographies of Exclusion in North Turin

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(Article begins on next page)

**Setting up a university city. Geographies of exclusion in
North Turin**

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INTRODUCTION

In a context of broad massification of university education, combined with the growth in importance of universities within the logic of global competition between cities as knowledge nodes (Olds 2007; Foote 2017; Moos et al. 2019), Higher Education (HE) institutions have progressively seen a change in their role as actors/anchors in the economic, physical, cultural, and social transformation of cities (Goddard et al. 2014). In literature, the relationship has been investigated both in terms of positive role of universities for their weight on regional and urban economies (Goddard & Chatterton, 1999), and in terms of negative externalities generated by the frictions between uses and users in space at local level. Universities' role in urban changes has gone hand in hand with the growth of student populations, whose presence and practices can have important 'material and symbolic effects on the urban landscape' (Collins 2010, p. 940). Under the label 'studentification' (Smith 2005), scholars have highlighted the impact exerted by increasing students' concentration on cities all over the globe, eventually leading to conflicts (Sage et al. 2012, for a broader perspective, but also insights in specific contexts as in Prada, 2019, Gu & Smith, 2020, Miessner, 2021, Franz & Gruber, 2022).

However, looking only at students' agency as driver of transformations and negative externalities risks underestimating the complex array of interests and agencies that lay behind the production of geographies of (more or less latent) exclusion and conflicts. Heterogeneous urban dynamics can be located within broader conflict-ridden trends in urban transformation, in which the simplified causal relation between students and exclusion appears misleading. A growing body of literature has moved beyond the first understandings of studentification, investigating how the increased reliance of urban development strategies on HE has supported a new form of capitalist urbanization (Heslop et al., 2022). The forms of socio-spatial exclusion usually associated to increased students' concentrations are traced back to the actions of public institutions, investors, and entrepreneurs, who variously try to take advantage of the growing relevance of universities for urban economies.

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3 The case of Turin, located in the North-West of Italy, shows that a dominant narrative on the
4 role of HE institutions has triggered various stakeholders' strategic orientation. During the last
5 twenty years, this former industrial town has tried to leverage on local universities as a crucial
6 asset for the local economic system in a knowledge economy framework. On their part, local
7 universities have shown their relevance both in terms of their capacity to attract new, mobile,
8 young populations, and as assets for a broader process of urban socio-economic restructuring
9 (Zasina et al. 2021).

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19 The aim of the article is to explore the production of geographies of exclusion that cannot be
20 simply linked to the negative impacts directly exerted by the increased pressure of students'
21 concentrations on specific neighbourhoods. They should also be related to the specific form that
22 urban development strategies driven by HE takes in post-industrial cities. We advocate an
23 alternative understanding of the production of socio-spatial exclusion, framing the process of
24 studentification within broader dynamics of capitalist urbanisation and knowledge 'assetisation'
25 (Ward and Swyngedouw, 2018) in a post-industrial city. The article provides evidence on how
26 multiple actions of both institutional actors and players in student-related economic sectors are
27 framed by a broader narrative that identifies HE as a key growth strategy for the city. Therefore,
28 many variegated transformations can be interpreted as the effects of capital investments that
29 materialise in university-related 'fixes' (Harvey, 2001; Jessop, 2016), whether they take the form
30 of student housing premises, changes in the commercial and leisure landscapes, or profound
31 impacts on the housing market.

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49 To this purpose, the next section frames the theoretical debate to which the paper provides its
50 contribution, followed by the case study and the methodology adopted to conduct the empirical
51 research. The investigated area is Aurora, a neighbourhood in North Turin that has been recently
52 undergoing relevant urban changes mostly, but not completely, related to the transformation of
53 Turin into a university city. The fourth section explores three sites of urban change in the
54 neighbourhood,

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3 characterised by the emergence of different forms of socio-spatial exclusion related not
4 simply to the increased concentration of students, but also to different ‘expression(s) of
5 capitalism in urban space’ (Revington 2021, p. 4). The last part synthesises the first insights and
6 highlights possible directions for further research.
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10 11 12 13 14 **STUDENT GEOGRAPHIES AND URBAN DYNAMICS**

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16 Academic literature has borrowed the expression ‘town-and-gown’ to identify the negative
17 externalities produced by HE institutions on cities. Since the beginning of the 2000s, the
18 introduction of the concept of ‘studentification’ (Smith, 2005) has drawn attention to the role
19 played by students as specific inhabitants of the city, stressing how increasing student
20 concentrations in urban areas may engender conflictual and exclusionary dynamics between
21 students and local populations. The first works on studentification explored the UK context and
22 shed light on the economic, physical, cultural, and social changes in neighbourhoods. These
23 studies paid particular attention to two types of transformation. On the one hand, they look at the
24 impact of students’ residential patterns on local housing markets (Hubbard 2008; Smith 2008),
25 highlighting the production of multiple geographies of segregation (Fincher & Shaw 2009;
26 Munro et al. 2009; Sage et al. 2012). On the other, studentification as a conflictual dynamic
27 between students and residents¹ over the use of urban space has been also understood as the
28 creation of consumption geographies and playscapes explicitly catering to students and young
29 population (Chatterton 1999; Chatterton & Hollands 2002; Malet-Calvo et al. 2017).
30 Exclusionary dynamics associated to processes of studentification are described in terms of
31 multiple negative effects that the rise of student populations brings to residents, both directly
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¹ It is important to acknowledge that non-local students live in the city, even if for a relatively limited period and with limited rights as non-permanent residents. To this extent and for the sake of simplification, in this contribution we will refer to ‘residents’ when dealing with long-term inhabitants of the city and use the term ‘non-local students’ for those whose motivation to stay is mainly related to being enrolled to a HEI in general. Finally, students will be considered as one population except when a separation between local and non-local students is needed.

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3 (i.e., noise, dirt, disturbance) and indirectly (i.e., displacement, change in local housing market,
4 place transformation).
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8 However, this approach to studentification risks overestimating the role of students while
9 focussing on the immediate effects that growing students' concentrations bring to a
10 neighbourhood. It tends to overlook other agencies, public and private actors, as well as the
11 broader policy and planning context that favours the studentification of a neighbourhood.
12 Specific local and supralocal factors pave the way to the production of socio-spatial exclusion
13 generally associated to studentification, factors which cannot be limited to the effects of students'
14 agency on residents.
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24 Recently, research on the role of HE in urban development, inspired by a political economy
25 approach, has widen the scope of the factors that produce forms of socio-spatial exclusions
26 related to the role of universities in the development of cities and neighbourhoods. Rather than
27 focussing on the typical social and cultural transformations associated to increased students'
28 concentrations, this perspective shifts the attention towards the complex array of drivers that lead
29 to the production of space for university students, thus including multiple actors – not only
30 students – in the production of socio-spatial exclusion. This approach allows to broad the scope
31 of the investigation, accounting for the heterogeneous tensions that may arise between strategies
32 of urban development revolving on HE and local needs. Indeed, 'the process of studentification
33 links with new ways in which capital is circulating through the urban environment, seeking new
34 markets or lifestyles for commodification' (Gregory & Rogerson 2019, p. 178).
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49 The relationship between HE institutions, the massification of post-secondary studies, and
50 processes of capitalist urbanization manifests in multiple ways. A prolific strand of research has
51 drawn attention to the rapid diffusion of PBSAs as an example of how vertical expansion
52 (through high-rise buildings) has become a new spatial fix (Nethercote 2019) and to the role of
53 real-estate investors in transforming local housing markets. The negative impacts of PBSAs is
54 associated to the dynamics of housing financialization, highlighting how 'studentification does
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3 not simply arise from growing post-secondary enrolment in a restructuring knowledge-economy
4 city [but] emerges from intentional efforts by firms to create products for investors' (Revington
5 & August 2020, p. 870). The realization of PBSAs in Waterloo (Canada), for instance, shows
6 how processes of studentification serve the interests and dynamics of urban capital accumulation,
7 laying at the core of a form of spatial segregation constituted by the construction of generational
8 housing submarkets (Revington, 2021). In a different context, PBSA are expected to become the
9 most probable market solution for the lack of student housing attending Chinese universities,
10 promoting exclusionary dynamics (Gu and Smith, 2020).

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21 The exclusionary effects associated to the dynamics in student rental market is often the result
22 of the profit-oriented agency of actors other than students. The emergence of a buy-to-let market
23 in the student accommodation sector (Gibb & Nygaard 2005) and the spreading of private
24 landlordism catering to students (Hochstenbach et al. 2020; Miessner 2021) generate
25 affordability issues, wealth inequality, urban segregation, and uneven spatial trends. On the one
26 hand, financialisation and commodification of the student housing market leave often aside those
27 students that cannot afford a PBSA or privately rented accommodation (Sotomayor et al., 2022).
28 On the other hand, the increased demand of student housing drives speculative transformations
29 at both the neighbourhood and the city level, distorting the local housing market. Looking to the
30 construction of university-town in China, Li et al. (2014) identify dynamics of land-centred
31 speculative urbanism associated to state-driven initiatives aiming to produce space for students.
32 Here, 'local residents such as displaced villagers are largely marginalized, whilst the profit and
33 livelihood of landless farmers is not fully guaranteed' (Li et al. 2014, p. 431). Investments in
34 PBSA are potentially seen as drivers of exclusionary processes, also in relation to their capacity
35 to attract mainly international and high-income students (Collins 2010; Fincher & Costello 2005;
36 Fincher & Shaw 2009).

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The relationship between studentification and capitalist urbanization is a useful lens to explore
the introduction of leisure venues and retail spaces catering to students too. Students both produce

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3 and consume specific urban playscapes that are part of the nightlife economy, in areas that are
4 characterised by ‘new forms of segmented nightlife activity based around more ‘exclusive’ and
5 ‘up-market’ identities amongst young adults’ (Chatterton & Hollands 2002, p. 96). Drawing a
6 parallel between research on retail gentrification and non-residential studentification processes,
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Zasina (2021) suggests looking at ‘retail studentification’ in the frame of urban leisure economy
changes, in which the purchasing power and consumption patterns of students are part of the
potential boosters of urban economies.

These processes assume a specific form in ‘provincial’ or ‘secondary’ cities. While global
cities present peculiar dynamics also in the case of university-driven growth, having often
stronger property markets, cities which are not in the first tier find in HE institutions and the
provision of student services effective means to deal with many unsolved urban issues (Smith &
Holton 2007). Post-industrial, secondary cities look at university-driven urban development
strategies to overcome multiple crises affecting their social and economic fabrics. In cities
struggling to govern their development trajectories, the identification of HE institutions and the
knowledge economy as key elements for economic and urban development drives planning
decisions in urban contexts which are deeply affected by austerity politics (Heslop et al. 2022).
Recent investigations have shown how the PBSA business too presents specific features in
secondary cities, where the financialization of student housing provides new opportunities for
capital investment in otherwise stagnant housing markets (Revington & August 2020).

Drawing on this literature, the present contribution links socio-spatial exclusion in a
studentifying neighbourhood with different aspects of capitalist urbanisation, avoiding both a too
narrow focus on rising student concentrations and the ‘students vs. residents’ trap. A broader
perspective of social and economic entanglements between increasing HE students and processes
of urban change points at the heterogeneous tensions arising between HE-related urban
development strategies and local needs. As stressed by Foote (2017, p. 1342), ‘there is a need to
expand the spatial and temporal understanding of neighbourhood change in the knowledge nodes

beyond studentification', looking also to wider urban development dynamics that clash with the needs of other local communities. A secondary city still struggling with the constraints imposed by a post-industrial scenario helps in detecting the changes in narrative and the associated processes.

Through the investigation of processes of urban transformation in an area which has become increasingly characterised by a patchworked presence of university students, we aim at including the multiple geographies of exclusion produced as the result of both urban capitalist dynamics, sparked by local coalitions of interests as well as global investments, and the rising of students' enrolment connected to the global imperatives of the knowledge economy (Heslop et al. 2022). Notably, the article will show how the construction of a PBSA, the proposed conversion of a former hospital into a student residence, and the nightlife economy revolving around a commodified student lifestyle exemplify how the combination of policy decisions and capital investments shape the urban space, entailing the production of heterogeneous geographies of exclusion affecting both residents and students.

THE REVOLVING DESTINY OF NORTHERN TURIN

Turin, which was mostly known as a typical one factory town (due to the former automotive manufacturing company FIAT, now Stellantis), has gone through a redefinition of its urban economy since the beginning of the 1980s, leveraging on culture, creativity, 'smartness', and the service sector (Rossi 2015; Vanolo 2015; Gonzàles et al. 2018; Ponzini & Santangelo 2018). Besides the 2006 Winter Olympics enthusiasm, Turin has not yet found a way to overcome its economic decline, which has become dramatic after the 2008 financial crisis. The economic downturn is reflected in the decrease in Turin's population: : more than 40.000 residents lost in the 1998-2018 timespan, with 858.205 inhabitants in 2020 (<https://www.istat.it/en/>).

The attempt to identify a new path to relaunch Turin's post-industrial economy has seen both the University of Turin and the Polytechnic of Turin acquiring progressively a major role in local

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3 urban growth strategies². In the span of two decades, the two universities have shifted from being
4 important assets of the city to crucial partners in implementing urban strategic plans and
5 programmes of urban regeneration (Zasina et al. 2021). While at first the relevance of universities
6 within urban growth strategies was mainly attributed to their role as knowledge factories, during
7 the last ten years the focus has shifted on their capacity to become an element of Turin's urban
8 branding strategy and to attract students and investments from other regions and countries
9 (Anonymous 2021). In line with this shift, in 2012 the Municipality launched the *Turin*
10 *University City* plan (Mangione 2019) with the scope of leveraging on universities' capacity to
11 introduce physical, social, and economic changes as partners of urban regeneration initiatives.
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24 A flourishing student housing market and the national and international investors' entrance in
25 the sector accompanied this change of paradigm in the urban strategy, sometimes favoured by
26 specific measures adopted by the local government (Anonymous 2020). During the last ten years,
27 the total number of students enrolled at both major universities reached 115.000, with almost
28 40.000 people coming to Turin from either other Italian regions or from abroad. Spatial
29 transformations came along, differently impacting parts of the city. Both universities have been
30 active in opening new locations, in some cases with flagship sites to become sort of landmarks
31 for a neighbourhood. Contextually, the increased need to accommodate non-local students has
32 fuelled the dedicated housing supply, either by deflecting the rental market of those areas close
33 to a university site or boosting the construction of public³ and – increasingly – private student
34 residences. These processes have led to the emerging of specific 'studentscapes' made of
35 students' educational, residential, and leisure activities (Zasina et al. 2021), through which
36 students co-produce urban space and contribute to the transformation of Turin.
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57 ² The University of Turin and the Polytechnic of Turin are the biggest HE institutions in the city but not the only
58 ones. Among others, there are the design institute IAAD and the Fine Arts Academy.
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60 ³ In Italy, Regional agencies for the right to study provide and regulate the access to public student residences, by means of a scholarship system.

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3 The area located close to one of those flagship sites, the Campus Luigi Einaudi (CLE), has
4 been undergoing a particularly intensive process of university-related transformation. CLE is a
5 45.000 sqm-campus opened in 2012 on the Dora River, in the Vanchiglia neighbourhood, to the
6 immediate North of the city centre and South of the Aurora neighbourhood, a formerly working-
7 class neighbourhood which is nowadays a patchwork of variegated areas populated by ageing
8 working-class residents, migrants, and a newer middle-creative class (Fig. 1).
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23 The whole area surrounding CLE has gradually become characterised by the higher presence
24 of students – around 8.000 of which are enrolled in courses that take place at CLE, with an effect
25 on the housing market, the retailscape, and the public transport system (Anonymous 2020). A
26 quantitative analysis conducted on a sample of 11.763 non-local students (more than 1/3 of the
27 non-local student population), shows a relevant increase in student population (Anonymous
28 2021). Within this sample, from 2010/11 (before CLE was built) and 2017/18, Vanchiglia
29 increased its student population by 67%, and Aurora increased it by 77%, while showing a
30 decrease in resident population (Fig. 2).
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48 In Aurora, changes brought by these shifts in students and residents' populations have become
49 particularly evident. Notably, the part of the neighbourhood adjacent to the CLE – Borgo Rossini
50 – is now extremely popular among students as both a place to live and a nightlife venue. At the
51 same time, relevant real-estate investments in the student accommodation sector have been either
52 made or planned in the whole neighbourhood. These transformations however do not happen in
53 a vacuum. Although at a different pace, the whole of Aurora and the Borgo Rossini area
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3 specifically show clear but contrasting signs of urban renewal dynamics. Borgo Rossini, once
4 known for its small workshops and other businesses connected to the close historic graveyard,
5 has been rapidly gentrifying since the beginning of 2000s. Now, it is a fashionable area,
6 populated by fancy cafés and eateries, small art galleries and boutiques, a place where well-
7 educated, cosmopolitan, middle-class people in their 30s and 40s crave to live. The area has also
8 experienced an increase in short-term rentals, which represents another sign of incipient
9 upgrading and real-estate transformation (Semi & Tonetta 2021).

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19 However, the western part of the Aurora neighbourhood witnesses quite a different situation.
20 During the last years, both policymakers and media have depicted Aurora as one of the most
21 problematic areas of Turin. The neighbourhood is characterised by a population living in
22 vulnerable conditions, made in large part by poor migrants, unemployed, and elderly (AuroraLab
23 2017), with enduring public disinvestment and a suffering retail sector⁴.

32 33 **METHODS**

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35 The investigation combines previous analyses of the area (Anonymous 2021) with qualitative
36 methods to explore the heterogeneous geographies of exclusion associated with the unfolding of
37 the processes of student-university related urban changes. We identified three sites, in which a
38 combination of political choices, fine-grain local and international investments, and connected
39 urban changes takes the shape of a university-related fix. Here, forms of exclusion emerge as the
40 performative effects of the entanglement between the materialisation of the knowledge economy,
41 universities, and forms of capitalist urbanisation, universities and students' increased presence,
42 and context-specific features (Fig.3). The first site is the former Maria Adelaide Hospital, on
43 which plans have been made to convert the building into a student residence. The second site is
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59 ⁴ Because of the stigmatisation of the whole area, a recent EU Urban Innovative Action has been launched with the
60 aim of addressing the issue of night safety along the Dora River.

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3 the square known as “Le Panche” located in Borgo Rossini and neighbouring streets, for their
4 increasing relevance in the geography of students’ nightlife. The third site is in the Mosca Bridge
5 area, in which Turin's location of the international PBSA company *The Social Hub* (formerly *The*
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10 *Student Hotel*) is going to open.

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We conducted 35 semi-structured interviews to: 1) associations of residents working in the area; 2) association of residents negatively affected by the analysed transformations; 3) residents in Borgo Rossini; 4) public institutions in the HE field (both local public universities, the Regional agency for the right to study (EDISU) and the local branch of the centre for university sport); 5) local policymakers whose work is either directly or indirectly connected to the *Turin University City* strategy; 6) organizations working on the student rental market, such as the representatives of a union of small landlords and a local platform for student rentals. To shed light on the conflicting interests and visions behind the two student residence projects and the divisive nightlife in Borgo Rossini, we also conducted observation in three ad-hoc meetings of Turin City Council commissions participated by both council members and representatives of the associations of persons living or working on the affected areas and monitored five social media pages of the associations involved in resisting these transformations from May 2020 to May 2022.

EXCLUSIONARY GEOGRAPHIES, CONFLICTS, AND RESISTANCE

The presence of the university has strongly affected the Dora’s North riverbank. While various projects of PBSAs construction are already open or on their way, Borgo Rossini, near the CLE, is now extremely popular among students either looking for a place to live or in search for a cool nightlife venue. Notably, the Italian company *Camplus* opened a new location in Borgo Rossini,

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3 which may accommodate up to 300 students, while another Italian company, *CX*, has renovated
4 a former office building to host 92 students in the proximity of the CLE. Other two PBSA, close
5 to each of the previous are expected with the renovation of former office buildings.
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10 All these transformations have raised concerns not only among residents but in some cases
11 among students too. Indeed, the progressive dynamics of urban change leading to the
12 construction of a neighbourhood appealing to students involved the usually uncoordinated
13 agency of heterogeneous actors, whose interests and goals coalesce only in a second moment. At
14 the same time, as will be shown, each transformation entails the reproduction of a different form
15 of capitalist urbanisation, which results into socio-spatial exclusion affecting multiple subjects
16 in different, non-exclusive ways.
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26 In what follows, the production of exclusion is presented as an emergent, contingent socio-
27 spatial effect produced by the entanglement of site-specific transformation linked to university-
28 related changes brought by a knowledge-oriented economy, contextual dimension, and affected
29 subjects. Each subsection explores the form of university-related urban change involved, the
30 affected subjects, and the conflicts and forms of resistance arising from these processes.
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40 **The Maria Adelaide hospital** - The former Maria Adelaide Hospital in the Borgo Rossini area
41 has been for a long period one of two public hospitals serving about 90.000 inhabitants. Both
42 hospitals were shut down by the Region in 2016 in the framework of austerity policies⁵, leaving
43 only two private hospitals, albeit affiliated with the national health system (Interview with a
44 member of the grassroots association *Riapriamo il Maria Adelaide*, Let's Reopen the Maria
45 Adelaide, RMA). After that moment, the Maria Adelaide has been mainly used as a location for
46 temporary cultural events.
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60 ⁵ In Italy, public health facilities and services are constitutionally competence of the regional governments.

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3 The hospital closure provoked an important backlash. On the one hand, residents complained
4 about the fact that they had to go further to get medical examinations and about the general
5 availability of medical services in the area (Resident, female). The hospital was considered one
6 of the most important points of reference for the residents, since they used to go there for x-rays
7 and orthopaedic examinations (Resident, male). But the closure had negative consequences for
8 some local retailers too. For example, the owner of a bakery that has been open for fifty years
9 right in front of the hospital complains about the fact that she lost a great part of her clientele too,
10 made of people going to the hospital and then stopping by to buy some bread (Retailer, female).

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21 During 2020, the Covid-19 pandemic made the reopening of the hospital no longer just an
22 urgent matter, but for a moment an actual possibility too. However, the local administration
23 rejected this option. The RMA, created by some of the former staff members of the hospital right
24 after its closure, was relaunched with the support of other citizens during the pandemic. The
25 association worked on an awareness campaign and tried to persuade the regional administration
26 to maintain the sanitary destination of the building. They disseminated information on the various
27 projects that have been proposed by the local administration on the building, both using their
28 social media pages and organising public meetings. When plans to change the destination of the
29 area in the ongoing revision of the City Plan started circulating, the group launched a petition to
30 prevent the destination of the former hospital to be modified into 'service area', reaching a
31 considerable level of support (Members of RMA).

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47 In 2021, the designation of the international university sports competition *Winter Universiade*
48 *2025* put a definitive end to the hope of a reopening. The bet was won thanks to the collaboration
49 of the local administration, the two main universities, the EDISU, and the University Sports
50 Centre. The sports competition is considered a unique occasion to brand Turin as an international
51 university destination and to attract students from abroad. A relevant element of the plan for
52 organising the event is represented by the realisation of various residences for the athletes, which
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3 are going to be converted into student residences after the competition. The Maria Adelaide is
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5 one of the identified locations.
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8 The appointment of the *Universiadi* thus made even more concrete the risk of losing forever
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10 the possibility to reopen the hospital and pushed the association to intensify its efforts. The
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12 RMA's protest obtained the support of a major union of Medical Doctors and the State medical
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14 board, which helped them to draft an alternative plan to open a so-called "Casa della Salute" (i.e.,
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16 a local health centre), thus maintaining the sanitary destination of the building. At the time of the
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18 article, this effort seems to have succeeded for a small part of the existing building, which may
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20 be left for the new health facility. Plans to build a residence are still enduring and the most
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22 problematic issue is represented by the project financing model planned to finance the
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24 transformation. The RMA association and local politicians of the opposition lament that the
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26 *Universiade* will be used as a further instrument to privatize the student housing sector, on the
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28 one hand, without providing an answer to the actual need of public student accommodation
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30 facilities and, on the other, contributing to transform the sector into a financial asset.
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37 **Le Panche** - The 'Esedra di Borgo Rossini', a cosy, small square on the river, nearby the Maria
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39 Adelaide, has become one of the youngsters' nightlife epicentres, gaining the nickname "Le
40
41 Panche" (i.e., the benches). The nickname has been given by the younger crowd because of the
42
43 increasing relevance acquired by the homonymous bar on the square. The bar, which opened in
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45 2014 (two years after the opening of the CLE), is blamed for bringing new practices of
46
47 consumption that triggered an uncontrolled nightlife economy. But it was only a couple of years
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49 ago that the situation became untenable, due to the progressive attractiveness of the bar's low-price
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51 policy for drinks, very soon emulated by nearby shops, which changed their opening hours,
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53 targeting their offer to young consumers.
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58 Albeit the eateries that have opened in the area during the last ten years clearly address a
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60 clientele made of young, cosmopolitan people, with high cultural capital, the interviewees did

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3 not identify these businesses as drivers of exclusion. The arrival of these new businesses is
4
5 generally considered in line with a retailscape that was already characterized by the presence of
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7 activities addressing a clientele in search for high quality, “authenticity”, and good care (Owner
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9 of a tearoom, female). However, the nightlife popularity of the square and the adjacent streets
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11 full of small night shops became an issue.
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15 The opening of these bars was made possible by a national law that deregulated the business
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17 and some local policy interventions, such as the stop imposed to the opening of new bars in other
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19 neighbourhoods already saturated and, more recently, the post-Covid ordinance issued by the
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21 City that allows retail activities to occupy with terraces the public space near their premises for
22
23 free. This situation led the area to be labelled in public discourse as one of the neighbourhoods
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25 affected by the *movida* problem, that is, to an uncontrolled and disturbing nightlife⁶, associated
26
27 with the concentration of young people in small outdoor places, alcohol abuse, loud voices and
28
29 music, and general antisocial behaviour (Resident, male).
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33 However, the blaming of this situation is mainly on young people’s behaviour. Many
34
35 interviewed residents and retailers complained about the noise, garbage, and occupation of the
36
37 square and surroundings from the evening until late at night. Changes in the houses (e.g., new
38
39 windows, air conditioning, etc.) or even transfer in other areas were some of the forced outcomes
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41 for the residents. Some of them, decided to rent their former flats to students rather than trying
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43 to sell them (Resident, male). Others who tried to sell the flat had to face many difficulties: ‘*We*
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45 *decided with the real estate agent to schedule the visits to the flat during the morning, because*
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47 *from the late afternoon you cannot even get to open the front door*’ (Resident living on the square,
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49 female).
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59 ⁶ The term *movida* originated in post-Francoist Spain, during the 1980s, to represent all the joyous expressions of
60 freedom and fun of the youth in the squares, streets and parties of Madrid and other big cities. It has kept this meaning in Italy, standing for mostly uncontrolled or spontaneous forms of nightlife of the younger part of the population.

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3 A vicious circle is exacerbating the negative externalities. Anti-social behaviour (Owner of a
4 bookshop, male), arrival of drug dealers (Resident living on the square, female), dirt left during
5 the night by young, drunk people and other retailers' clientele pushed away are some of the
6 detected problems.
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12 To resist this process and claim their rights, some residents tried to act through the main
13 grassroots association working in the area, the *Comitato Borgo Rossini* (CBR). To cope with the
14 problems caused by the kind of student lifestyle that is promoted by the new bars, some members
15 of the CBR have first unsuccessfully tried to reach an agreement with the bars' owners. Recently,
16 they engaged in the identification of potential locations where to open youth aggregation centres,
17 as an alternative strategy (President of CBR, male). At the same time, the CBR has tried to
18 directly face the problem by submitting interpellations to the City Council and by grouping with
19 other similar associations in other neighbourhoods.
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33 **The Social Hub** - The last urban intervention related to the provision of student accommodation
34 and the exclusionary effects so produced is linked to the transformations happening in a formerly
35 public area sold to the international PBSA company *The Social Hub* (TSH), located on one
36 corner of the Mosca Bridge. The bridge connects Aurora to Porta Palazzo, a heterogeneous and
37 vulnerable area closer to the city centre, populated by migrants and low-income groups and
38 hosting the largest food market in the city. In public discourse, the bridge area is usually portrayed
39 as one of the most deprived and dangerous of the city, due to the high presence of drug dealers,
40 homeless, drunk people, drug addicts, and a general state of abandonment.
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51 The area where the PBSA is going to open was formerly a factory. In the recent past, the land
52 was publicly owned (Provincia di Torino), with a public school on it. Since the demolition, the
53 area (which was supposed to remain public, according to the City Plan) was left empty, due to
54 the high costs for reclaiming the area from the polluting residues of industrial processes. All the
55 attempts to put it up for auction failed, and the area was temporarily given (1 year) to a local
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3 religious organisation, which converted it into a cricket field for the local Pakistani community.
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5 Eventually, in 2020, TSH company bought the area to a much lower price than its land value,
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7 due to the pressing need of the City to alienate some of their properties to cover its debt. The
8
9 company planned to build there a 525-bed accommodation facility which provides rooms for
10
11 students, a co-working space, hotel rooms, a gym, and other extra services for students and a
12
13 broader clientele. Each room will cost more than 500 euros per month, which is almost double
14
15 the average price paid by students for a room on Turin's rental market (Anonymous 2022).
16
17 Moreover, the high costs stand in sharp contrast with the real-estate values of Aurora, the lowest
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19 in the city. The strong difference between the PBSA prices and Aurora's average selling price
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21 marks a situation of potential residential gentrification driven by a classic rent-gap mechanism
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23 (Smith 1979).
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28 Due to the kind of offer and the location chosen for the project, the announced arrival of TSH
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30 became soon a very divisive issue. On the one hand, residents who have lived in the area for a
31
32 long time see it as a good requalification project and eventually even an opportunity for
33
34 employment (President of a local association of retailers, female). This opinion is shared also by
35
36 the District's President, who stresses the fact that, according to the current project, TSH will
37
38 provide the area with a 6,000 sqm public garden and that they officially asked TSH to contract
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40 neighbourhood residents to work there.
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44 However, some grassroots associations aiding local people in need labelled the project as the
45
46 'luxury student residence' and saw another step in the gentrification process of an area in which
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48 people need houses, jobs, education, and welfare support, instead. Instead, to make room for
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50 TSH, the building located on one of the corners of the lot had to be demolished and three local
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52 associations were evicted: a dojo gym, whose mission was to leverage on martial arts to prevent
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54 youth problems and an instrument for social inclusion; the cultural association *FuoriLuogo*; and
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56 the *Comitato di Zona Aurora* (Aurora Zone Committee, CZA). The CZA was particularly
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58 affected by the project, since their members used to organise afterschool activities for children
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3 mainly coming from low-income, migrant families. To resist the project, besides launching an
4 information campaign through its social media accounts, the group organised public meetings in
5 the neighbourhood and submitted formal amendments during the consultation process for the
6 new City plan (Members of CZA, males and females).
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14 **DISCUSSION**

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16 The empirical research has shown how various forms of socio-spatial exclusion may be
17 associated to the configuration of new student geographies connected either to public
18 interventions or to private actors' agency and interests. Rather than focusing exclusively on the
19 conflicts between residents and students generated by the increasing concentration of the latter
20 and the change they bring in the urban structure, the investigation of the transformations in and
21 around Aurora shows the heterogeneous and contingent ways in which socio-spatial exclusion
22 emerges as unintended effect of these transformations.
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33 Socio-spatial exclusion results as the heterogenous and contingent outcome of a set of urban
34 transformations, which can be considered as university-related fixes for capitalism urbanisation.
35 Land-rent mechanisms, local business investments, large financial groups' interests and the way
36 needs that are represented – or get overshadowed – take different shapes in the three areas. At
37 the same time, they are all framed by an overarching policy narrative through which a post-
38 industrial city investing in its HE assets advocates a shift for its urban economy. It is such a frame
39 that orients decisions about whose specific interests need to prevail for the broader interest, either
40 explicitly or – most of the time – through implicit non-coordinated decision-making processes.
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51 In the case of *The Social Hub*, the decision to allow for a PBSA to be built on a formerly
52 public, although abandoned, site in one of the most problematic and vulnerable area of the city
53 configures a case of privatization that affects both students and residents. Low-income students
54 indirectly experience housing exclusion, both because rooms prices are not in line with Turin's
55 housing market and because the city's much needed student accommodation offer is mostly
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3 increased through private rather than public investments. At the same time, the privatization of
4 the area prevents alternative uses potentially in line with the needs of a highly vulnerable
5 neighbourhood. Finally, the displacement of those associations working on the area affects
6 particularly 'deprived communities' (cf. Sage et al. 2012), thus configuring a specific form of
7 student-related geography of exclusion which sees students not as direct cause of the negative
8 impacts produced but as medium used both symbolically and materially by public and private
9 investors to promote a specific intervention of urban regeneration which does not respond to the
10 needs of the most vulnerable segment of the local population.
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21 The conversion of the former Maria Adelaide hospital into a student residence financed
22 through a project-financing model is another example of privatization through which private
23 investments get favoured by local administration within the framework of a competitive urban
24 agenda. In an area which has been already suffering from the rising concentration of students,
25 and where there have been recent investments in the PBSA sector, the risk is to progressively
26 produce a student enclave, potentially displacing former residents (Sage et al. 2013). On a more
27 general level, the Region's decision to pursue austerity politics in the health sector that provoked
28 the hospital closure and, on the contrary, to promote urban development projects having at the
29 core the provision of a PBSA results in the exclusion of residents' interests and needs from the
30 local political agenda.
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44 The transformation of the main square of Borgo Rossini into a student/young nightlife venue
45 is at odds with the daily life of both residents and retailers of an already gentrified neighbourhood.
46 However, rather than being (only) the students' high concentration and behaviour to cause the
47 place transformation and the exclusion from public space of residents, the entrepreneurial choices
48 made by bars' owners and the supportive attitude of the local administration concurred to the
49 production of a night-entertainment-dominated area, where the needs and daily rhythms of
50 residents and retailers seems to not fit.
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3 These examples of socio-spatial exclusion are neither univocally affecting a homogeneous
4 category of residents nor are directly provoked by the rising student concentrations. The evidence
5 shows how exclusion raises from the new role played by universities within the global knowledge
6 economy and the consequent growth in enrolment numbers, both part of processes of capitalist
7 urbanisation of a shrinking post-industrial city.
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14 Unpacking the exclusionary dynamics that unfold in Aurora, in relation to public and private
15 interventions aiming at attracting students, allowed to shed light on how complex is the array of
16 heterogeneous agencies and interests that leads to socio-spatial exclusion. Although the area of
17 “Le Panche” and the spatial practices of students crowding there at night seem to configure a
18 typical studentification process in which residents are negatively affected by high concentrations
19 of students, the causes behind it are more complex. Processes of socio-spatial exclusion
20 constituted by the disruption of daily life, place transformation, and the exclusion from the use
21 of public space have their primary origin in the concurrent agency of some business owners and
22 local authorities, whose interests eventually coalesced in transforming areas of the city in places
23 for commodified leisure. The same is true for the foreseen PBSAs, which see the convergence of
24 private interests to invest in a city where land value is low, a growing real-estate sector, and of
25 the need of local governments to both find ways to boost the urban economy and to promote
26 regeneration of some areas.
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47 CONCLUSION

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49 The article shows that the production of geographies of exclusion that may go under the label
50 of ‘studentification’ is not associated only to increasing concentrations of students and their
51 agency. Rather, a broader process of urban change participated by different actors is deemed to
52 cause the mismatch between the university-driven urban development strategies pursued in a
53 post-industrial, secondary cities and the needs of the local population. The negative effects
54 experienced by the broader local community seem to be mainly due to how these strategies and
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3 plans are pursued, often out of lack of public resources, without considering the needs of
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5 residents, who may feel ‘a loss of local control’ (Heslop et al. 2022, p. 15).
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8 Considering both transformations in the retail sectors and in the housing market of a specific
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10 area, the study has shown the multiple ways through which urbanisation processes led in the
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12 framework of the knowledge economy and commodification of once public resources may
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14 leverage on the needs of the student population, and how it triggers specific urban
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16 transformations. At the same time, the rising importance of universities within urban
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18 development projects, of post-industrial cities in specific.
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21 In Turin’s case, initiatives targeting university students and the realization of PBSAs represent
22
23 different albeit integrative forms through which the transformation of the city into a university
24
25 one becomes a further path for capitalist urbanisation to proceed. Nightlife economy responds to
26
27 the idea that cities are sites where consumption and leisure can be boosted and highly
28
29 commodified. At the same time, the introduction of private funds in the conversion of former
30
31 public areas and buildings shows not only how student housing has become a major urban
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33 financial asset but also how the fortunes of formerly disinvested areas are mostly left in the hands
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35 of market forces and institutions which do not necessarily can be held accountable for the impact
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37 of their initiatives on cities and societies.
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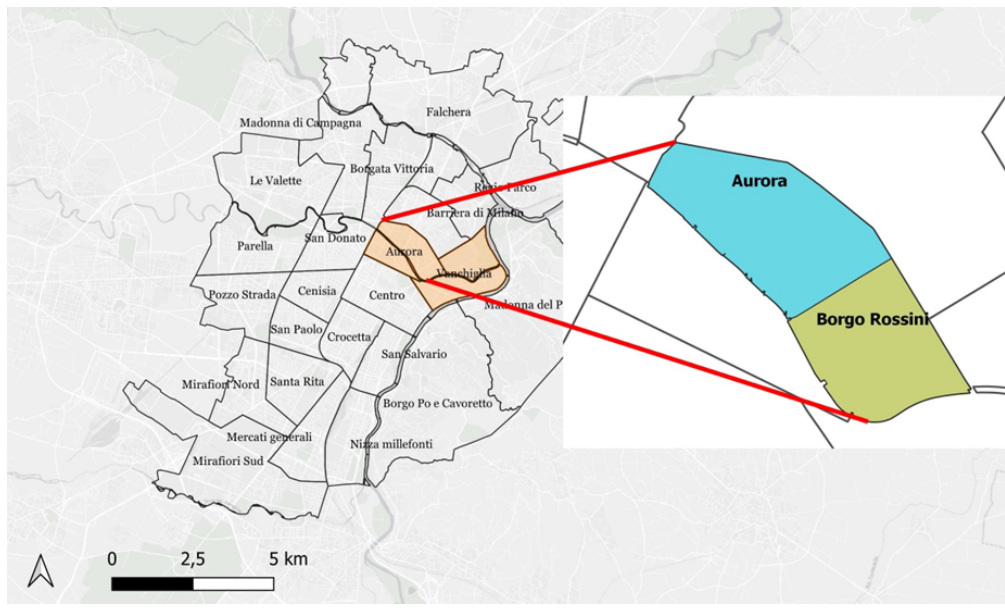


Figure 1 Neighbourhoods Aurora and Vanchiglia, with a focus on the two studied areas (known as Aurora and Borgo Rossini)

410x244mm (57 x 57 DPI)

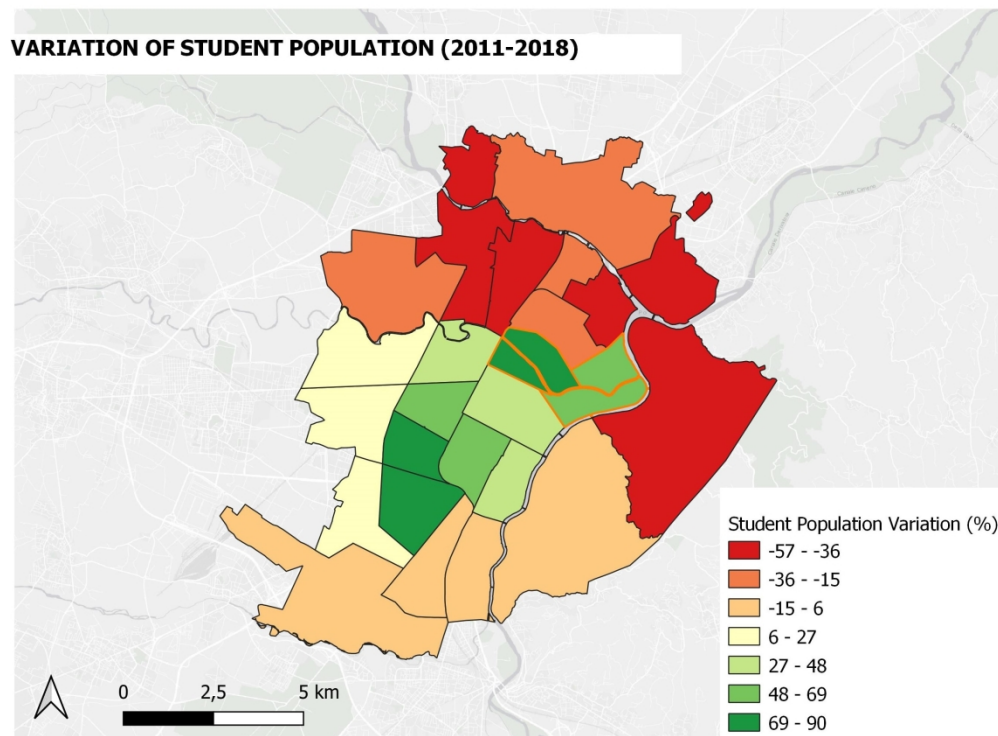


Figure 2 Variation of students concentration between 2010/11 and 2017/18

226x169mm (300 x 300 DPI)

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Figure 3 Studied area with the three sites of interest

216x165mm (144 x 144 DPI)