



# Adaptive urbanism in ordinary cities: Gentrification and temporalities in Turin (1993–2021)

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## ARTICLE INFO

### Keywords:

Gentrification  
Austerity urbanism  
Turin  
Qualitative longitudinal analysis  
Adaptive urbanism

## ABSTRACT

The aim of this paper is to ground gentrification processes within a broader urban transformation pattern and within a deeper historical account, taking an ordinary city into consideration: Turin, in the North West of Italy. The paper elaborates on qualitative data collected along a twenty year span, allowing reflection on different phases and dynamics of capital extraction across time. We will show that, problematically, gentrification was considered as a positive model by local authorities and that it was adopted as a reference by both private and public actors to generate local growth and to react to economic crises.

## 1. Introduction

In gentrification studies, most of the empirical literature draws on in-depth analysis of single case studies or on multi-site and synchronic comparative analysis while diachronic and longitudinal analyses are relatively scarce.

One of the most relevant attempts at grounding local examples of urban transformation within a broader temporal scheme is Hackworth and Smith's gentrification waves model. When this model was first put forward in 2001, the purpose was “to understand (at a minimum) the context for changes to the process as a whole” (Hackworth & Smith, 2001, 466). The process as a whole was gentrification and specifically the changing role of the state as the key player within it. The model considered three waves (or phases) in gentrification, to which was added a fourth wave proposed by Lees, Slater and Wylie (2008, 173–187) and a fifth by Aalbers (2019).

The concept of waves is a controversial starting point for a dynamic comprehension of gentrification: many cities, for instance, experience these phases with different temporalities or with different sequences between them. The meaning of “market” and “state” is also problematic insofar as national and urban trajectories have often produced different ways of “being the market” and “being the state”. In this sense, the urge for a broader geographical and historical understanding of gentrification outside the main cities of the Anglophone world (Lees, 2000, 2012) appears even more meaningful.

The aim of this paper is twofold. On the one side, it elaborates on the relevance of adopting a longitudinal perspective in gentrification analyses, going beyond the waves model to support an analysis of the situated interactions between transformations occurring at different scales and urban hierarchies. On the other, it contends that gentrification has been increasingly considered, more or less explicitly, by local authorities as a positive, strategic tool to adopt in face of crises, namely as a tool of “adaptive urbanism” (Magnier et al., 2018), contributing to the debate on the controversial relationship between gentrification and crises.

In this attempt, the paper will draw on the trajectory that Turin, in North West of Italy, embraced after its deindustrialization process. Turin experienced a shift from a successful Fordist city to a would-be-successful post-Fordist one and then found itself hit hard by another urban crisis, largely connected to the financial crisis started in 2008 and continuing until the hit of Covid-19. The analysis of this case will highlight both contextual factors and structural, comparative elements offering further insights into the study of gentrification processes. This choice also allows to discuss the specific contribution that an analysis developed outside the main cities of the Anglophone world, in a context that is far from being an international hub or national capital, may bring to the debate.

The paper elaborates on empirical data collected along a twenty-year span in the city of Turin. Ethnographic fieldwork was undertaken in two neighborhoods (Quadrilatero Romano between 2000 and 2004; San Salvario between 2011 and 2014), employing media and archival

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research, participant observation, and in-depth semi-structured interviews with local authorities, residents, commercial entrepreneurs and associations' representatives.<sup>1</sup> Other areas of Turin (i.e.: Vanchiglia, Borgo Rossini, Aurora) have been investigated from 2014 onwards, with media and archival research, observation and semi-structured interviews.<sup>2</sup> The result is a body of diverse and diachronic sets of empirical data that, despite the methodological challenges, has allowed for a broad reflection on the characteristics, dynamics and actors of the transformations of the city in the last three decades.

The contribution will develop as follows: firstly, we will address theoretical and methodological issues that appear problematic in contemporary literature in considering gentrification as a process situated in specific spatial and historical arrangements. Then, we will develop a diachronic analysis of Turin's transformations, assessing the characteristics of gentrification processes affecting different areas of the city within a changing institutional frame across a time span of almost thirty years. More specifically, we will distinguish between three different gentrification phases: one under a growth agenda and defining a post-industrial city, a second under austerity urbanism and the third marked by digital platforms and tourism that we will call the short-term city. We conclude by summarizing the main findings and discussing the contribution that a longitudinal perspective on gentrification may offer to the debate of urban change, giving a special emphasis to crises and the role they have in creating the basis for change.

## 2. Time, space and crisis in gentrification research

As it is widely recognized in literature, understandings of gentrification are heavily indebted to Ruth Glass's (1964) definition. This has become a "conventional truth" (Clark, 2005, 264) which often hides the fact that the roots of inner city redevelopment, demographic turnover, displacements and evictions, selective downgrading and upgrading have been part of the fabric of the modern city at least from Haussmannian Paris onwards (Clerval, 2013; Smith, 1996). Since Glass seminal work, the literature on gentrification has been gathering together an extraordinary amount of in-depth descriptions and investigations of localized transformations fostering a debate on both its relevance and questionability (Schafran, 2014; Ghertner, 2015; Ley & Teo, 2020).

Here, we draw attention to two major issues in contemporary gentrification literature: 1) an over-representation of North-Atlantic global cities and 2) the issue of temporalities and crises.

To react to the first of them, there have been several attempts at building up a comparative outlook, widening the sample of cases available throughout the world (Carpenter & Lees, 1995; Van Criekingen & Decroly, 2003; Harris, 2008; Rousseau, 2009; Janoschka et al., 2014; Lees et al., 2015; Lees et al., 2016). This is a typical methodological reaction, implying the transferability of the concept and its applicability in different contexts, which also involved several criticisms (Ghertner, 2014; Ley and Teo, 2020). A second reaction was the reconsideration of the "geographies of gentrification" through a counterbalancing provided by perspectives outside of the wealthy cities of the Global North (Lees, 2000, 2012; Robinson, 2002). This has opened up to both innovations and criticisms: the quest for a "comparative urbanism" with the aim of bringing gentrification back into a general theory of urban transformations is as relevant now as it was in 2002, when Neil Smith (2002) published his controversial paper on gentrification "as a global strategy". Lees (2012) is therefore certainly right in asking for "a comparative imagination that can respond to the postcolonial challenge" (156), as well as Robinson (2002) who has rightly suggested that

we should closely consider the urban informal that won't fit within Global Cities theory. But still, the dichotomy between a Global North and a Global South will hardly help in such an endeavor, since both categories are inadequate to account for the complexity of intra and inter-urban dimensions (McFarlane, 2006). The reason also lies in the fact that within the label of "Western" lies a multiplicity of scales and spaces that do not match with the general label (Dines, 2022). Gentrification occurs in Naples (Dines, 2012), Athens (Alexandri, 2015), Amsterdam (Van Gent, 2013), Stockholm (Andersson & Turner, 2014), Dublin (Kelly, 2014) and Turin as well, even though some of these cities still appear under-represented in international publications (Kadi, 2019). Is it the same phenomenon, or rather, as suggested by Van Criekingen and Decroly (2003), should we enlarge our view towards multiple renewal processes across European cities (and elsewhere)?

There is a second major issue, one that has again been well captured by Loretta Lees (2012) who observed that "the temporal arguments in gentrification need to be rethought" (158). Gentrification, that we can broadly consider as "the production of urban space for increasingly more affluent users" (Hackworth, 2002, 815), always describes a process, in which portions of urban space are involved in demographic, material and socio-economic transformations that bring forward forms of social inequalities. Scholars have addressed differently the stages through which such a process takes form (Carpenter & Lees, 1995). The problem with stages is that they somehow convey the image of a hierarchy among them or, at least, a primacy. When discussing the temporality issue, however, our interest concerns the fact that gentrification processes are always grounded in a specific historical moment and relate to different layers of inequalities (Sutton, 2020). As mentioned in the previous paragraph, the "waves model", proposed by Hackworth and Smith (2001) and then further elaborated by Lees et al. (2008) and Aalbers (2019) reminds us to ground the analysis of processes of gentrification into a specific temporal frame, which is shaped by both local and global dynamics and trends (He, 2019). And yet, looking at Hackworth and Smith's (2001) "gentrification waves model", the choice of defining subsequent waves can lead to the assumption, not shared by the authors, that in order to experience the "third wave" a city must have passed through the "second" and even the "first". Also, the fact that some US cities, as well as cities like London, Toronto and Sydney, have shown to fit well within this temporal scheme doesn't make it necessarily universal or easily transferable across other spatio-temporal arrangements (Zhang et al., 2022).

Within the temporality issue, the role of recessions and crises in affecting gentrification processes has been developed differently (Alexandri, 2015; Hackworth, 2002; Hackworth & Smith, 2001; Lees, 2009; Verlaan & Hochstenbach, 2022). The 2008 financial crisis offered a test bench for the analysis: while taking different situated forms, the aftermath of the financial crisis has been widely characterized by austerity measures, reflected at the urban scale by what has been labeled as austerity urbanism (Peck, 2012). The local, situated implications of such "urbanization of neoliberal austerity", which we may consider as developing along the three dimensions of "destructive creativity", "deficit politics" and "devolved risk" (Peck, 2012, 631), are still a scarcely addressed matter, deserving further analysis.

To add a further dimension to the reflection, it is useful to frame the analysis within the discussions about the pervasiveness, including among local authorities, of the idea of urban entrepreneurialism (Harvey, 1989; Jessop, 2000), according to which the purpose and aim of cities has been first and foremost to grow, to attract flows of capital and investments - "higher wages, more businesses, higher house prices and more consumption means more economic activity and more happiness" (North & Nurse, 2014). The crucial issue for cities, therefore, would be to keep finding ways to promote growth, throughout periods of both recessions and development. As González (2011) highlighted, urban policies and urban regeneration "models", i.e. examples considered successful within a pro-growth agenda approach, travel and serve as inspiration for local policymakers in their quest for finding ways to

<sup>1</sup> For a detailed illustration of the two fieldworks and a broader analysis of the transformations of Quadrilatero and San Salvario, please also refer to Semi (2004) and Bolzoni (2016, 2019).

<sup>2</sup> In this stage, university master students were also involved in ongoing workshops and studios on urban transformations.

promote urban growth and compete globally to attract businesses and capital (Zhan, 2021). Gentrification, we argue in this paper, has come to be considered by local administration as a label of success, almost like a badge of honor, signaling that the city (or a portion of it) is running in the right race. As Magnier and her colleagues showed, promoting spatial planning through “involving the local society, including private enterprises, in integrated projects” (Magnier et al., 2018, 424) is one of the pillars of what they have called ‘adaptive urbanism’. In our paper we argue that such an adaptive strategy has been put forth through gentrification, creating local political consensus by co-opting different actors, corporate and non-corporate, through time. Crises have been interpreted as moments in time requiring intervention, therefore accelerating social change. Gentrification, as we will show, has come to be considered the means to develop this change.

We therefore situate our analysis of Turin's (on-going) urban transformations as follows: from an ordinary city perspective, we aim at bringing forward reflections on gentrification's temporalities and on the relevance of a contextual, grounded analysis that takes into consideration local, national and supranational concurring trends. We will refer to the “waves” terminology, in order to apply global comparison to the case of Turin, but we will also expand the range of gentrification-associated phenomena towards a wider set of urban renewals, as advocated by Van Criekingen and Decroly (2003) and Rousseau (2009). Both processes of residential and commercial gentrification will be considered (Ocejo, 2014; Shaw & Hagemans, 2015). Similarly, we will pay attention to phenomena of studentification (Smith, 2005; Chatterton, 2010; Munro & Livingston, 2012), as well as issues of platform urbanism (Barns, 2019; Van Doorn, 2020), and the making of a short-term city for tourists (Cocola-Gant et al., 2021).

### 3. Taking the ordinary seriously: crisis and Turin

In order to broaden the analysis of gentrification, our proposal is to go deeper into temporalities by looking to an Italian post-industrial city. Turin is Italy's fourth largest city in terms of population and it has long been considered the Italian one-company-town par-excellence, often compared to Detroit (Bagnasco, 1986; Castagnoli, 1998; Pizzolato, 2013). For almost a century, the city has been strongly tied in with industrial work and the main Italian automotive company founded in Turin in 1899, Fiat (Cardoza & Symcox, 2006).

In the late 1970s, the crisis of industrial society became a crisis of the whole city. Characterized by a scarcely differentiated economy and a rigid social structure, Turin found itself unprepared to face the repercussions of industrial decline (Bagnasco, 1990; Withford & Enrietti, 2005) in a moment also characterized by a crisis of legitimacy of Italian political parties, which requested a change in direction and ways of governing (Le Galès, 2002; Pinson, 2002).

The 1980s were years of turmoil, both at the political and social level: besides high unemployment rates and social problems such as a heroin epidemic, they were also marked by a critical political condition within the city, evident in its municipal instability, and fragmented civil society, insomuch as the local intellectual élite started to underline the need for politics to regain its position and tackle the current situation. Until the end of the 1980s nonetheless, the local authorities had a marginal role in leading the city's development. Fiat's predominance and pervasiveness obscured the status of the municipal authorities that seemed to have little influence and negotiation power over Fiat's decision-making that shaped the city (Pinson, 2002). However, reforms in national law during the 1990s strengthened the position of the City mayor and the local executive as a national law introduced, in 1993, the direct election by citizens of the City mayor, who was then in charge of appointing their own executive. This and other reforms, devolving significant powers to the local level, supported a stronger role of the City mayor in the local dynamics of power (Le Galès, 2002; Magnier et al., 2018).

It is exactly from this turning point that our analysis starts.

We can divide Turin's recent history into three phases. The new electoral system changed completely the system of government and therefore might be considered a turning point for local policy making. The first phase spans therefore from 1993 to 2006 (when the Winter Olympics took place), and it was characterized by the attempt to transition from an industrial to a post-industrial economy, with actions ranging from the hosting of mega-events to the development of a leisure and tourism landscape centered on historical heritage, the local food industry and cultural events.

The start of the second phase is placed right after the end of the Olympic Games of 2006 and ends in 2014 (the year witnessing the peak in eviction and unemployment rates): public debt, mostly due to the organizational costs of such event, and a stagnation resulting from the big push towards development, merged together with the world-wide financial crisis, which led to the rise of impoverishment, unemployment and economic contraction in both the second and third sectors. This time, the strategy was characterized by an urban austerity model, in the forms pointed out by Peck (2012) of destructive creativity, deficit politics and devolved risk in which local authorities frequently set the ground for private investors to operate, with subsequent and uneven effects on semi-central areas of the city.

This led to a third phase, which we see after 2014 and which is still ongoing, marked by platform urbanism where studentification and the creation of a short-term city for tourists and temporary city users have been more distinctly considered the main pillars of local development. For each of these phases we will first outline their main features, giving their temporal coordinates, and we then ground the analysis spatially with a specific case within the city that exemplifies most clearly the characteristic dynamics of the phase and that has been, more than others, an epicenter of urban transformations in that period of time.

#### 3.1. The first phase (1993–2006): gentrification as a post-industrial strategy

From 1993 onwards a ‘new’ generation of local politicians emerged and involved the civil society and the intellectual elite in imagining new lines of urban development (Le Galès, 2002; Belligni & Ravazzi, 2012; Heinelt et al., 2018). A new Master Plan was released in 1995 and in 1998 the work for setting up a Strategic Plan for the city's development, released in 2000, started. This process also created the basis for urban governance, building consensus around a shared vision and a network of urban actors linked together by a common cognitive frame, relations of cooperation and dynamics of trust (Logan & Molotch, 1987; Stone, 1989). The agenda of this political cycle was shaped along three guidelines: 1) the regeneration and redevelopment of the concrete urban fabric and its infrastructure, 2) the support of knowledge, technological innovation and research, and 3) the promotion of tourism, entertainment and consumption (Belligni & Ravazzi, 2012). While having a shared pro-growth approach, each of these guidelines moved along different possible paths of re-development. The current shape of the city is the result of the intertwining of these different lines and of the interactions between the forces promoting them. The last guideline, that has been probably the most visible one, is the one promoting Turin as a city of leisure, entertainment and consumption. Such an approach of cultural regeneration (Evans, 2005; Vicari Haddock & Moulart, 2009) draws inspiration from the model of the creative city (Florida, 2002) and from that of the city as an entertainment machine (Clark, 2004; Clark et al., 2002) that assumes that culture, amenities and the night-time economy may contribute to replacing the old industrial one (Rousseau, 2009).

The Winter Olympic Games of 2006 were the most spectacular example of this new trend, with a worldwide resonance that gave new visibility to the city, opening Turin to both a national and an international audience, marking and marketing Turin as an international spot for tourists but also fostering the local romance of a cosmopolitan and trendy life. The first case of gentrification in the city occurred within this

frame.

### 3.1.1. *Quadrilatero Romano: a classic tale of gentrification*

*I live by the Quadrilatero Romano, where I moved in 1993 buying an expensive flat from the well-known developer that, under a contract with the municipality of Turin, regenerated the hood, promising the newcomers that shops would have been rented to small craft activities. We are sick with the fairytale of nightlife providing only benefits, since it also implied a skyrocketing of real estate*

(Letter to the local newspaper La Stampa, 14.7.2012)

At the beginning of the 1990s Turin started a multifaceted restructuring of its historic center, which was still partly a poor, marginal inner-city district, undergoing a severe process of demographic change. In the 1980s, when Turin lost around 150,000 inhabitants, 13 % of its population, the Quadrilatero Romano area lost almost 30 % of its residents (Governata et al., 2009; Petsimeris, 1998, 2005).

In this context, during the 1990s the municipality of Turin put together a varied set of urban regeneration policies, ranging from the sale of public properties, to the organization of public calls for architectural and urban renovation projects, to the creation of an independent body funded by the European Union with the specific purpose of convincing the urban population to “live not leave”, to quote the slogan of ‘The Gate’ project<sup>3</sup> (Briata, 2011). The appearance of these policies is often mistakenly perceived as a spontaneous event, leading directly to their implementation “on the ground”, but the Quadrilatero Romano has an interesting story to tell about the temporalities of urban regeneration. If it is true that the interventions in the built environment that gave birth to the gentrification process started roughly during the mid-1990s, their elaboration may be traced back to the early 1980s when joint initiatives by the Municipality, local developers association and the Piedmont Region gave birth to public-private partnerships that couldn’t nonetheless find an appropriate business climate until the early 1990s. It was after 1993 that the newly elected mayor of Turin, Valentino Castellani, authorized the radical transformation of the neighborhood as part of a general restructuring of the city (Belligni & Ravazzi, 2012). One of the main developers of the previous partnership, the builder society called De.Ga, won the bid for the reconstruction of four blocks, while buying most of the empty shops of the Quadrilatero Romano as well. Refurbishing buildings and façades, this developer managed simultaneously to open some cafés and bars and to rent commercial spaces to selected boutiques and studios. In a very short time-span, this developer drove the transformation of the entire neighborhood, acting as a quasi-monopoly supported by the Municipality.

After this initial intervention in the built environment, in 1997 there was a second state-led intervention: the Municipality, with the declared aim to nurture the commercial revitalization of the neighborhood, made an exception to the commercial licenses quota and opened up several permissions within the borders of the Quadrilatero Romano. This boosted the commercial side of the neighborhood and was the structural force that provided its rebranding (Bolzoni & Semi, 2020).

<sup>3</sup> The Urban Pilot Scheme «The Gate», funded by the European Union, the Municipality and other bodies and foundations in 1996, which became a Local Development Agency of the Municipality in 2003.«The Gate» attempts to foster relations between actors in the neighborhood in order to reduce conflict, revitalize economic activities and social links, and provide sound reasons for a rational, “positive” use of space. Policies which were successfully implemented included forums with shopkeepers, grants for renovating the façades of buildings, and promoting a transition from the black economy to the formal economy.

All these initiatives boosted the entire neighborhood, exacerbating the difference with the adjacent ones. The values in real estate rose high<sup>4</sup> and the neighborhood began to be branded as the new hot spot in town and as a successful example of urban renewal. There were no questions raised whatsoever regarding social justice issues, namely those relating to the dramatic price inflation and the exclusionary effects this had on future residents and current inhabitants, mostly young males of immigrant background.

The mix of residential middle and upper-middle class apartments with fancy cafés, shops, museums (the MAO, museum of Oriental art, opened in 2008) and labs provide a secure environment for cosmopolitans, tourists and city-users. The “cosmopolitan urbanism” that resulted was imbued with façade multiculturalism, foodism and vintage clothes, a well known mix in European central neighborhoods (Binnie et al., 2006; Rath, 2007).

The main distinctive feature of this transformation emerges when examined within a longer timeline. The Quadrilatero Romano was the first central neighborhood confronted with gentrification in Turin after deindustrialization. The gentrification of Quadrilatero Romano acted as a collective marker, as a third-wave gentrification blueprint exemplum (Semi, 2004; Bolzoni & Semi, 2020).

### 3.2. *The second phase (2006–2014): gentrification as austerity urbanism*

The Winter Olympics Games of 2006 acted as a spectacular event reinforcing the local, national and international perception that Turin had successfully abandoned its industrial past for good and was ready for a future as the next Barcelona (Degen & García, 2012; González, 2011). It was simply a matter of spreading the mechanism that worked for the Quadrilatero Romano elsewhere in the city.

Things were nonetheless more complex than expected and marked by three distinct phenomena emerging from three different scales: the burden of the local public debt created to financially support the Winter Olympics of 2006, the neoliberal national policy liberalizing commercial activities in 2007, and the global financial crisis, starting in 2008. Such a combination changed the political-economic scenario entirely.

A double path marked the years that followed 2006: in the city center, commercial gentrification paired with tourism expansion and studentification altered the social, economic and spatial landscape, while outside the monumental, landmark and historical city, austerity urbanism developed and became widespread.

#### 3.2.1. *San Salvario shows the (new) way*

*On the side of public policies, there has not been in San Salvario a big planned, intervention. This does not mean that the city, the public authorities did not invest, do stuff, but... there was not a big project. I mean, the city of Turin has had other experiences, in other neighbourhoods, of integrated projects, with complex plans, but in San Salvario... well, the city has decided to invest in other areas [...]. There was, there have been public policies, policies that have worked in the ordinary, rather than in the extraordinary [...] So, public policies, yes, but outside, without a proper plan, therefore in a kind of fragmented, disunited, also anarchic way if you want, but at the end they met with the activation of local resources, associations, and so on.*

(Local association representative, interview, 29.09.2011)

The local pro-growth agenda considered the transformation of the Quadrilatero a successful one, a model to be replicated wherever and whenever possible, and the promotion of a vibrant nightlife, food

<sup>4</sup> From 2003 to 2013, and considering the broader area of “Garibaldi” or that of “Porta Palazzo” the rise of real estate prices is shifting from 56 %, when considering the non renovated residential stock, to 81 % for the renovated residential stock (source: <http://www.oict.polito.it/>).



culture and a dynamic cultural and artistic scene came to be an integral part of the urban redevelopment strategy (Vanolo, 2008; Crivello, 2011; Bourlessas et al., 2021).

However, the aftermath of the Olympic event was marked by its legacies and burdens: the public debt rose to 4 billion euros and fostered general budget cuts that reduced the room for local authority interventions, supporting a climate of neoliberal *laissez-faire* policy. While the transformation of Quadrilatero Romano saw strong leadership by the public, the transformation of the neighborhood of San Salvario, coming shortly after, emerged as the expression of a cumulative process.

San Salvario, bordering the city's historical center, is squeezed between the city's central railway station and the main city park running along the Po river. Built in the mid Nineteenth century, it has always been characterized by a mix of social and functional uses, and also became the first beachhead for subsequent waves of migration (Belluati, 2004; Todros, 2010). A declining area through the Eighties and Nineties, years marked by issues of public insecurity, high visibility of migrants in the public spaces and commercial closures, San Salvario had all the ingredients to emerge as the new hip and trendy place of consumption in the city after the Olympic event of 2006, in an eccentric continuity with the transformation of the Quadrilatero Romano.

As mentioned, no centrally planned project of neighborhood redevelopment nor specific zoning policies are evident. However, the direction the municipal authorities imagined for the city's new developments on the one hand, and the intertwining of national and local laws and policies of urban change on the other, have shaped such transformations even in the absence of a direct institutional intervention. A grounded account of timing and of the intertwining of different temporal and institutional dynamics is necessary once again.

Italian regulations of commerce, promulgated in 1971, gave the role of market regulator to local administrations. Municipalities and regions had the task of establishing limits to the rights of new operators to enter the market. Building on this role, the municipality in 1998 adopted a strategy of commercial revitalization as a means to foster urban redevelopment. The municipality selected some areas where they would abolish the fixed quota of commercial permits, allowing the opening of new commercial activities free from any restrictions. As mentioned, this strategy was implemented to promote the transformation of the Quadrilatero Romano and the city center.

A combination of neoliberal policies and rescaling processes took place right after that intervention: in 2007 a new national regulation erased the restrictions on new openings and the fixed quotas for types of commercial activities and areas and in 2012 a de-regulation of opening hours of commercial activities was implemented. In the meantime, however, the public administration set up new standards for commercial activities: in 2007 it decided to freeze new openings in the central area of the city until 2013. This zoning policy pertained to the areas of Quadrilatero Romano and the historical city center, the same districts that had previously benefited from new openings, making the areas in the immediate surroundings of the city center, such as San Salvario, particularly attractive. This can be considered as a reverse zoning policy: in a time of national liberalization, locking some districts (in)directly affects the surrounding ones. By blocking the change in areas already fully developed as consumption destinations in a phase of general liberalization, local authorities created the basis for a boost in the immediately surrounding areas. Local authorities could profit from this neoliberal policy by pretending to be only a free-market arbiter in the commercial revitalization of the area, not able to be held directly accountable for such processes and their social backlash, while at the same time profiting in terms of attracting capital and increasing tax revenues.

In this context, San Salvario experienced from the mid-2000s onwards processes of commercial gentrification and studentification (Bolzoni, 2016, 2022). While its demographic composition has changed at a very slow pace and residential gentrification has been rather soft and interstitial (Todros, 2010), the commercial fabric, more flexible and

permeable, has been showing relevant transformations. San Salvario came to be a preferred location for new openings, especially in the field of consumption and entertainment targeting university students and temporary city users, being one of the city's main hubs of nighttime entertainment. Over time, the commercial landscape has become increasingly homogeneous in social, cultural and economic terms.

Commercial regulations and, specifically, the interaction between national and local regulations, played a key role here. While the development of the central areas of the city (i.e. the Quadrilatero) was strongly managed by local authorities throughout the 1990s, there was no such intervention in the area of San Salvario. Only in late 2013, when the neighborhood's commercial fabric was already saturated, did the municipality decide to intervene by stopping the concession of further commercial licenses. The marginal role assumed by the municipal institutions can be considered a political choice itself: as the case of Quadrilatero underlines, the local authorities had the capability of understanding and shaping similar phenomena in the past, creating specific normative tools to manage the process of change. The positive evaluation of the Quadrilatero case, together with the construction of the new narrative of Turin as a city of culture, art, events and creativity, framed San Salvario's process. Therefore the case of San Salvario expresses a conscious public choice: to set the ground for private interventions in line with the urban pro-growth agenda in a context of public budget cuts and austerity urbanism.

### 3.3. Third phase (2014–2021): gentrification under platform urbanism and the short-term city

Aalbers (2019) describes the fifth-wave of gentrification as characterized by platform capitalism and touristification, corporate landlords, highly leveraged housing, transnational wealth elites and a further legitimization by and involvement of the local state in promoting and supporting private investments and transformations in line with gentrification processes. While transnational capital and the transnational elite are mostly absent from Turin, the on-going changes appear to fit well into such a frame, especially considering the role of the municipality in supporting private investments and the precedence given to short-term urban populations, such as university students and tourists. Alongside transformations concerning the housing market and the built environment, consumption (especially of food & drink), entertainment and cultural policies emerge as crucial levers of urban change.

While the overall residential population of Turin remains stable or slightly decreasing, figures on tourists show a clear increase, reaching a peak of 1.9 million arrivals in 2019 (Metropolitan City of Turin data). The transformation of Turin towards tertiary economic sectors is also witnessed by the sharp increase of Airbnb accommodation in town, which almost doubled between 2016 and 2019, reaching more than 4500 listings (Semi & Tonetta, 2021). University students have a relevant impact on the city's economy too: according to a recent report (Abburà et al., 2017), they number up to 100,000 and are growing, with 30 % coming from outside Turin, therefore requiring accommodation (the vast majority of which occurs within the private rental sector). At the same time, the metropolitan area remains heavily affected by the 2008 financial crisis, with high unemployment rates and job insecurity experienced especially by the younger generation (the youth unemployment rate has been near 40 % from 2008 onwards, according to Istat<sup>5</sup>). The connection with continuing deindustrialization is evident, as industrial production in the city dropped by 25 % between 2007 and 2010 (according to the data provided by Turin Chamber of Commerce). Also, in terms of urban living conditions, one might compare the rise of short-term accommodation for tourists with the astonishing rise of legal evictions in town that peaked in 2014 after a steady growth from 2007

<sup>5</sup> Istat is the Italian National Institute of Statistics. Data available at [www.istat.it](http://www.istat.it).

(data by City of Turin). The growing number of Turin citizens waiting for social housing support, combined with evictions and local real estate dynamics clearly show the widening of social inequalities.

### 3.3.1. Borgo Rossini and Aurora as new gentrification frontiers?

*[...] and then I see few police vans at the crossroad between Corso Giulio Cesare and Corso Emilia, flashing lights on. I cannot really understand what's going on (a sting?), none is around, but their position makes my mind go back to the militarization of this very street, last year, after the Asilo squat eviction. After spending the evening listening to politicians bragging about how wonderful this area will become by selling out yet another block to private investor for new high-end residences, this looks like a brutal reminder. How many evictions, protests and police interventions will this transformation led to? Hurry up, it's cold outside.*

(Fieldnotes, 21.01.2020)

*CORSO BRESCIA 42 (Near Nuvola Lavazza) In a building of late '800, renewed and refurbished by Torchio&Daghero developers, we offer a large studio with kitchen and restroom. Great view and bright*

(Real estate advertisement in the newly gentrified neighborhood of Aurora, online in Nov. 2021)

If we move away from a structural overview on winners and losers to look for the spatial dynamics within which these processes take place, we see a general trend towards expansion of processes of gentrification and studentification outside of Turin's central core, especially towards the Northern area of the city.

Borgo Rossini, Borgo Dora, Aurora, and, in general, the Northern areas of Turin are historically well-populated working-class neighborhoods, places where successive migratory waves of the twentieth century settled in industrial Turin, and are often associated with the phenomena of urban decay and segregation (Sacchi & Viazzo, 2003; Olagnero et al., 2005; Salone et al., 2017; Cingolani, 2018). They present real estate assets whose value per square meter in 2018 was 71–88 % lower (depending on the area) than the nearby city center, intensified due to the effects of the financial crisis. Indeed, the real estate values of the central areas have remained almost unchanged over time, while the Aurora and Barriera di Milano area between 2007 and 2017 recorded a decrease in values between 9 % and 29 % (Semi & Tonetta, 2021).<sup>6</sup> In the last decade, however, a number of public and private interventions have been starting to change this area, one block at a time. A new university campus, designed by Foster + Partners, was launched in 2013 and a few private tertiary institutions were established in the area in the following years (i.e. Scuola Holden and Institute of Applied Art and Design - Iaad). A few years later, the Lavazza coffee firm took over an industrial urban void to build a new general headquarters designed by Cino Zucchi and named 'la Nuvola' - the Cloud – inaugurated in 2018. In the following year, a Fuksas designed market building in the more central Piazza della Repubblica square was re-launched within the Mercato Centrale<sup>7</sup> national brand, shifting the commercial merchandise from dress and home objects to gourmet food, and the targeted consumers from working-class residents to middle and upper class residents and tourists (Bourlessas et al., 2021; Vanolo, 2021). Next to it, a former firehouse was transformed into a fancy hostel, café, restaurant and event space within the Combo<sup>8</sup> national brand and launched at the beginning

of 2020. An urban void nearby, publicly owned, was in the same period sold for 6.2 million euros to a property developer to be transformed into a high-end student hotel, for the international brand The Student Hotel. Other similar examples, on a smaller scale, have been emerging in these last few years, creating an urban area increasingly devoted to the needs, in terms of accommodation, leisure and consumption, of a temporary, well-off population of tourists, students, and “tourist-like” residents. In continuity with San Salvario and following the establishment of new university campuses, first Vanchiglia, secondly Borgo Rossini and then Aurora have emerged as new hip destinations, with a complete transformation of the commercial landscape, increasingly devoted to the food and entertainment economy and especially targeted towards university students. The growing population of short-term residents appears to share a cosmopolitan attitude towards cultural policies and an interest in vibrant neighborhoods, and hold generational, age and cultural values that are much more homogeneous than those of the vast residential population. As in the San Salvario case, the juxtaposition between populations has created the basis for temporal and spatial segregation not only in terms of accommodation but also in terms of uses.

These transformations, however, haven't gone by without contestations. Protests have emerged mostly around specific flagship interventions (e.g. the Mercato Centrale launch, The Student Hotel-Social Hub acquisition of a vacant lot, the clearing out the Asilo squatted community center just near the real estate intervention detailed at the beginning of this section), and the claims have often acquired a broader scope: the opponents often framed their contestations within a broader protest against the direction of the city change, increasingly focusing on gentrification and consumption – and increasing displacement of poverty, contestation, and the working class from the central and semi-central areas of the city.<sup>9</sup>

While the implications of the COVID-19 pandemic are out of the scope of this present paper, early observations show it has had a counterintuitive impact: even after the lockdown period, the establishment of new high-end accommodation for university students and temporary residents (i.e. student hotels) and the transformation of the commercial fabric to respond to the consumption needs of these groups are intensifying and becoming the most visible features characterizing this current frontier of gentrification in the city.

## 4. Discussion and final remarks

Turin since 2014 has become a higher education city, aiming at turning into a cultural hotspot, while recession and deficit politics are rampant. The translation of austerity urbanism into policy and the built environment has resulted in a mix of pro-market incentives, flagship projects, cultural amenities and facilities development as the main urban growth features, while in terms of urban life, public policies are devoted to protecting previous gentrification projects, sheltering investments and providing for new temporary users. But as new university campuses, museums and art districts rise, squats and poor households are evicted. While the whole north of Turin is culturally dignified by multiple interventions, local media, blogs and new residents hide its problematic, variegated present.

This portrays just the current phase, the last of a broader and longer process started when Turin, at the beginning of the 1990s, tried new approaches to local development after a long period of deindustrialization (Governa et al., 2009; Santangelo & Vanolo, 2010). While the first phase was marked by cohesive local political interventions, the second phase was shaped by turmoil at different scales as the effects of the Olympics effects faded. The third phase witnessed a continuation of the state of crisis, to which local authorities reacted by pushing forward neoliberal remedies even more. Across the time spanning from 1993 to

<sup>6</sup> For a broader analysis of real estate values at the city level, see also D'Acci (2019).

<sup>7</sup> Mercato Centrale (Central Market) format operates relaunching a previously closed/underused space, that often used to be a local market space, that becomes a container for upscale food shops and a food court. It is currently present in Florence, Rome, Milan and Turin.

<sup>8</sup> Combo format creates venues combining hostels with restaurants, cafés, radio and event facilities. It is currently present in Venice, Milan, Turin and Bologna.

<sup>9</sup> During the contestation several wall tags emerged with the caption “Rigenerazione = via i poveri” (Regeneration = poor out”).

2021, adaptive urbanism pushed forward a gentrification strategy.

With this paper we have tried to show how the same process, broadly called gentrification, happens through different phases, each one marked by specific policies and conditions. The continuity of gentrification is found in its effects: rising inequalities, rampant housing issues for poor households and the eviction of critical elements in the form of social movements.

What does a view from a city like Turin add to the broader study and understanding of gentrification as a global phenomenon? In which way can this work contribute to the ongoing debates?

First of all, analyzing gentrification in Turin underlines the relevance for a more localized, situated perspective, and therefore a higher sensitivity to local processes, situated temporalities, the connections among local events and the wider set of urban renewals. This appears even more relevant when investigating non-capital/non-global cities and looking outside the Anglo-Saxon, Northern European core (He, 2019; Zhang et al., 2022). If we are to decipher the geographies of gentrification (Lees, 2000,2012) we then have to reconsider the specific spatio-temporal arrangements that occur from the intersection of different scales in a given place. Turin, like any other city and urban area, is constantly synchronized with the global economic tune, and the de-industrialization crisis of the Seventies as well as the sub-prime crisis of 2008 both had a crucial local impact. Before and after them, local, regional and national scale dynamics influenced Turin in peculiar ways and were interpreted with an adaptive stance. If we look at gentrification solely: they shaped a third-wave intervention in the Quadrilatero Romano as a typical post-Fordist formula, a fourth-wave episode as a post-crisis neoliberal solution to fiscal turmoil and a fifth-wave process through platform capitalism and the making of a short-term city for temporary users. As such, the analysis has shown that the synchronization with global trends worked as an accelerator of local temporal arrangements, which were much slower.

Secondly, the analysis of temporal transformations involving different geographical scales that happened in Turin has shown the relevance of adopting a longitudinal approach in gentrification analysis (Verlaan & Hochstenbach, 2022). In this paper we have tried to highlight the necessity of a broader historical time-lapse within which local case studies are considered. Longitudinal approaches to gentrification analysis, be them quantitative or qualitative, are relatively few within the literature but crucial nonetheless, as they offer a more precise view on how scales and times interact constantly. San Salvator's transformation, for example, acquires meaning only if embedded within the broader local picture of urban regime and the path of transformations it envisioned across time through an adaptive urbanism. This shows also that different theoretical explanations may be combined within a given temporal framework.

With regards to temporalities, we conclude that they need further investigation, especially with a linkage that anchors timings (such as depicted by the gentrification waves literature), to transformations occurring at different scales and urban hierarchies.

Bringing forward these two points, finally, the analyses of the paper shows how gentrification has established itself as a positive model and crucial reference in the eyes of local authorities, a strategic tool to be adopted as a crisis response. Gentrification has been a means, not an end, just like Uitermark et al. (2007) have shown for Rotterdam or captured by Zhan (2021) with her work on "fluid gentrification" in Shenzhen, and as soon as it appeared to be a winning path, the sub-prime mortgage crisis came and again shattered the cityscape. The model remained, but the strategies needed to be changed.

If we accept the theoretical understanding of late modernity as marked by the acceleration of intragenerational time (Rosa, 2013), with social change occurring so fast that social actors are trapped in a "frenetic standstill", we can adapt this view to meta-actors like cities and show, through a detailed longitudinal analysis, when and how the multiple adaptations to change occurred at local scales. Crises are precisely the moments in which change appears as unavoidable and

reactions are needed: this is why several, different, even contradictory policies and interventions marked the gentrified landscape of Turin across time.

A comparative and global investigation of how and when gentrification becomes an adaptive tool for both local authorities and private investors, unpacking local specificities rooted within different (multi-scalar) temporalities is therefore urgent. It will provide both a detailed analysis of urban change through case studies and a more nuanced understanding of crises as recurrent moments of accelerated change. A question remains unanswered: how will the ongoing pandemic crisis affect the urban landscape, both in its structural aspects and lifestyle transformations? Is gentrification, as we have described it so far, about to change or simply spreading across pandemic lines? Our cautious preliminary answer is based on the longitudinal perspective adopted here: as far as the political and economic interests remain within the denser core of urbanized regions, there is no reason to foresee a decline in the uneven development shown in this paper.

### CRediT authorship contribution statement

**Magda Bolzoni:** Conceptualization; Methodology; Analysis; Investigation; Data curation; Writing - original draft; Writing - review & editing.

**Giovanni Semi:** Conceptualization; Methodology; Analysis; Investigation; Data curation; Writing - original draft; Writing - review & editing.

### Declaration of competing interest

No conflict of interest exists in the submission of this manuscript, and manuscript is approved by all authors for publication.

### Data availability

The authors do not have permission to share data.

### Acknowledgement

The authors would like to thank students and colleagues that have worked with them along the years investigating the transformations of the city of Turin and discussed their interpretation and analysis while they were both based at the Department of Cultures, Politics and Society of the University of Turin. The authors also extend their gratitude to the anonymous reviewers and editor for their helpful review and critical comments.

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