

Lost in Transition: Turns and Twists of  
Turin's Post-Fordist Governance

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A spotlight on Italian cities: urban change, governance and planning

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Italy's territorial organization is historically marked by the density of town and cities spread across the country. Italian cities were the places where new institutions and forms of government have been shaped over the centuries, and where main innovations in the social and cultural domains continue to take place. The country's economy, itself, is rooted in a multitude of medium – and even small – urban areas, a factor that has helped Italy to limit the impact of the polarization process affecting other European countries (e.g. rural depopulation).

Despite that leading role, it is only since the end of last century that urban areas started to be highly regarded within the national political agenda. Drivers of this process have been legal reforms to further empower local government, State initiatives to stimulate urban regeneration and, not least, the European Union, that especially in the Southern regions still plays a key role in supporting local projects and planning innovation.

In the nineties, reforms have brought to municipalities a greater autonomy in a wide spectrum of relevant policies for local development, including new approaches to urban planning. New principles were embedded in the planning practices – for instance, civic participation – while the spreading of public-private partnerships have accelerated urban renewal in a number of Italian cities. More recently (2014), metropolitan government have been established in 14 city-regions, likely the territorial scale where the most urgent urban issues of contemporary Italy should be addressed, from social housing to climate change adaptation (Vinci, 2019).

While institutional innovation is a good key to explain the progress in local governance and planning capacities within most Italian cities, their material transformation must also be related to the external investments that national and European policies have moved to urban areas in these years. Among the main target of these investments have been (and continue to be) public housing estates, districts where urban decay and economic distress have often led to serious problems of social marginality. The recovery of brownfields, also, is a typical focus of this generation of public initiatives,

in the attempt to combine environmental restoration with the creation of public space and facilities of vital importance for the community.

After the downturn of the 2010s, when austerity have slowed down public intervention in all sectors and regeneration projects in most Italian cities, in recent years a new momentum for urban policy is taking place in different directions. The EU Cohesion policy is bringing fresh resources to a strategy started in the previous programming cycle (2014-2021), promoting sustainable urban development through projects in sectors such as green transport, energy retrofit of the built environment and social inclusion.

Even greater expectations are generated by the implementation of the National Recovery and Resilience Plan (NRRP), the 191 billion package the country has agreed with the EU in response to the pandemic crisis (Viesti, 2022). Here, several billion euros will be spent for the climate change adaptation of urban areas and city-regions, beside wide-spread interventions on basic infrastructure – from schools to sport facilities – to bridge the gaps created with the shrinkage of welfare policy.

The desire of national government with these policies is also reducing the striking differences that still exist, in terms of urban development, between the northern and southern regions of the country. Cities in the south of Italy, in fact, are the mirror of deep-rooted territorial inequalities, with a development potential often trapped by inefficiency in the public sector, fragile local economies and widespread social distress (Eurostat, 2016; Fina et al., 2021). These weaknesses end up affecting not only the 'performance' of cities and the quality of life they can offer, but also the ability of public policy to promote effective transformative processes. In the end, it is worth considering this diversity when the question of urban change in the Italian cities is approached.

With this scenario in the backdrop, the papers of this special issue reflect different ways urban questions can arise in the Italian cities and the many directions can be

given to urban policy under the impulse of municipalities and local stakeholders.

In the first article, Francesca Governa and Carlo Salone examine Turin's urban policies during the last thirty years. By highlighting the present weakness of the socio-economic urban fabric, the article talks about Turin's recent urban events, and gives discussions on urban policies that have marked the last thirty years of Turin, and the current difficulties for confronting a post-industrial transition.

The second article comes from Milan. Laura Montedoro questions the replicability of the processes that have redesigned the Lombard capital and the (modest) role of urban planning in the city's revival. She further discusses the role of urban planning in the alleged 'Milan model'. The article further touches upon on the balance between public benefit-private profit by also talking about the urban planning policies that the government should apply.

In the third article, Valentina Orioli draws our attention to the challenges of Bologna's metropolitan identity. The article starts with giving a brief information about the metropolitan reform in Italy and the choices of Bologna by also talking about the metropolitan challenges in the current administrative mandate. Then, the article illustrates the fundamental aspects of the flagship projects of Bologna, namely "Green Handprint" and "City of Knowledge".

The fourth article examines the environmental issues and their integration into urban planning in Naples. In their article, Gilda Berruti and Maria Federica Palestino first discuss the role of environmental education in response to climate change; then; they focus on the strategies of the Metropolitan City of Naples. In the end, they conclude the article with by talking about the 'Oxygen Common Good' resolution of Naples and institutional agreement between the Department of Architecture of Federico II University and the Metropolitan Council.

Last by not least, in the fifth article, Ignazio Vinci provides a deep understanding of the process that is

reshaping large waterfront areas in the city of Palermo, and talks about the modern urban development of Palermo. Vinci first talks about the events and economic factors that have negatively impacted on the city-port spatial relations; then, he gives a discussion of the threats and opportunities the current regeneration process can provide on the city's future development. This article has a critical importance for better understanding the regeneration of the waterfront area of Palermo.

In this last and concluding issue of IGLUS Quarterly, we had chance to visit Italy thanks to the great efforts of well-known urban scholars from Italian Cities. We sincerely believe that you will enjoy the articles in this issue. We also invite you to join the discussion at [iglus.org](http://iglus.org). If you any questions related to this issue, you may contact the editors of this issue through [ignazio.vinci@unipa.it](mailto:ignazio.vinci@unipa.it) and [numanyanar@hotmail.com](mailto:numanyanar@hotmail.com).

*Ignazio Vinci and Numan Yanar*

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## IGLUS Quarterly – The End of An Era

I am proud, yet also very sad, to present to you this last and final issue of our IGLUS Quarterly publication series. IGLUS Quarterly started under the leadership of Mohamad Razaghi in 2015, one year after the official launch of the IGLUS Executive Master, and was subsequently managed by Maxime Audouin (volumes 2 and 3), Diego Giron (volume 4) and ever since (volumes 5 to 8) by Numan Yanar with the help of IGLUS manager Umut Tuncer. I would like to thank them all for all their excellent work which has made IGLUS Quarterly one of the rare free global online quality publications on urban infrastructure governance. During these 8 years we have featured 124 articles covering each time a particular urban infrastructure governance topic. Today, IGLUS Quarterly is freely distributed to 50'000 readers worldwide.

My sincere thanks also go all the authors of the articles who have shared their expertise and insights with the larger IGLUS family. Thanks to IGLUS Quarterly we have managed to build a global network and community of IGLUS friends with whom we not only want to continue to interact in the future, but actually engage in the next phase. Indeed, the IGLUS journey does not stop with this last issue of IGLUS Quarterly. Quite to the contrary, and so let me share with you the IGLUS phase, so-to-speak IGLUS 2.0 as of January 2023.

To recall, IGLUS was officially started by myself in 2014 while being a professor of management of network industries (infrastructures) at Ecole Polytechnique Fédérale Lausanne (EPFL), Switzerland, and was built around a global executive master program with 2-week action-learning modules in Asia, Europe, Africa, the Middle East and the Americas. During the past 9 years we have met extraordinary people all around the world, all sharing a passion for understanding and collectively addressing urban infrastructure governance challenges in innovative ways. Unfortunately, COVID-19 put an end to our itinerant action learning modules and so, regrettably, the last modules had to be taught online. Thanks to the IGLUS Quarterly and our three MOOCs – the most successful one being

the Smart City MOOC with over 40'000 learners – we have reached a global visibility that we could never have dreamt of.

I have now retired from EPFL and we have now engaged in a two-year transition phase (2023-2024). While I will stay in charge during this transition phase, IGLUS headquarters have moved to the University Cristobal Colon (UCC) in Veracruz, Mexico. Dr. Julio Torres has taken over the management of the IGLUS project from Umut Tuncer, whom I sincerely thank for all his efforts and great accomplishments during the past 5 years.

There will be a new IGLUS Newsletter to be published four times a year with more but shorter contributions on similar topics as in the past, yet involving the global IGLUS network of which you as readers are part much more actively than before. The discontinued IGLUS Executive Master will be replaced, on the one hand, by short certificate online courses and, on the other hand, by shorter, 4-day long, action-learning field visits in the major cities around the world. Furthermore, the metropolitan area of Veracruz, Mexico, will become first IGLUS action-research laboratory, whereby UCC will play an active role in the emergence of a metropolitan governance for all the relevant infrastructure. At the same time UCC will use this urban action-research laboratory in order to transform itself into a new type of transdisciplinary action-learning University at the service of a metropolitan area, its citizens as well as its economic, social, and ecological actors.

I truly look forward to IGLUS 2.0 and hope that you will all be part of this new step in our global and local collective learning journey. Thanks to this, we should all become better equipped to “*learn our way out*”<sup>1</sup> of the challenges faced by an urbanized planet with problems so big that they appear, at times, overwhelming.

*Matthias Finger*

<sup>1</sup> *Learning Our Way Out* is the title of a book published in 2001 by myself and my friend Dr. José Manuel Asun, who, today, is the rector of Universidad Cristobal Colon (UCC). Finger, M. & J. Asun (2001). *Learning Our Way Out. Adult Education at a Crossroads*. London: Zed Books.

# Lost in Transition: Turns and Twists of Turin's Post-Fordist Governance

Francesca Governa<sup>1</sup> and Carlo Salone<sup>2</sup>

**Abstract:** *The article aims to present and critically discuss Turin's urban policies during the last thirty years. Starting from the '90, Turin, the Italian "one company town", has passed through various moments of a never ending urban transition. By focusing on the Turin's attempt to go beyond the so-called "Fordist urban model" and face the deindustrialisation process, and highlighting the present weakness of the socio-economic urban fabric, we advance two main arguments. The first one is that the never ending search for a new urban development model is marked by shortcuts and illusions, that led to the disapper of a fresh view on the city and its possible future and the gradual tarnishing of the leading role of the political and economic elites; the second one is that today Turin urban policies are mainly introverted and closed, while the possible links between Turin and the evolving urban geography of the Northern Italy are completely missed. This situation leads to the weak structuring of today urban public debate and to an endurance urban crisis.*

**Keywords:** *Turin, urban policies, post-industrial transition, post-fordist urban governance, urban elite*

## Authors' Profile

Francesca Governa, PhD, is an urban geographer and professor of economic and political geography at DIST, Politecnico di Torino. She is currently the principal investigator of a three-year research program on urbanization processes related to the Belt and Road Initiative and the scientific supervisor of a research funded under the Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions.

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## Introduction

In 1990, the Italian sociologist Arnaldo Bagnasco edited a book titled "The city after Ford". The city was Turin. The title is nothing but a formula. However, the story told to describe Turin follows a well-known plot that remains still today more or less the same: the strong industrialization process during the so-called "gold period" started to crack during the second half of the seventy and in the following decade the deindustrialisation took place, Turin entered the "after Ford" era and the quest for a new model of urban development began. Even now, however, it is not clear which could be the direc-

tions to follow. What does "after Ford" mean and entail? The anxious search for a new model of urban development capable of replacing, or at least completing, the city's traditional industrial specialisation is now complemented by the search for a mode of representation (and power) suited to the new era in which the city must weave relations with the 'outside', be it the 'near' outside of regional relations or the 'far' outside of transnational networks and flows. Notwithstanding, the current public debate in Turin is introverted, focused on 'decline', and prone to self-pity or even rancour. By questioning this stance, this article suggests the need to overcome the entanglement of local dynamics and open Turin to the web of complex and multi-scalar relations that connect it with the city-region of the Italian North and the broad spatiality of international connections.

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**Fig. 1:** *Spina Centrale*, the Mario Merz's Igloo (Source: Carlo Salone)

The article aims to propose a critical reading of Turin's recent urban events, not only through a necessarily synthetic interpretation of the urban policies that have marked the last thirty years, but also by highlighting some 'missed acts' that explain, at least in part, the current difficulties to face an arduous and never ending post-industrial transition. The discussion starts from the 2006 Winter Olympics, and then describes the difficulties of the urban transition towards the so-called knowledge economy. By focusing on the Turin's attempt to go beyond the so-called "Fordist urban model", and highlighting the present weakness of the socio-economic urban fabric, we advance two main arguments. The first one is that the never ending search for a new urban development model is marked by shortcuts and illusions, that led to the disapper of a fresh

view on the city and its possible future and the gradual tarnishing of the leading role of the political and economic elites; the second one is that today Turin urban policies are mainly introverted and closed, while the possible links between Turin and the evolving urban geography of the Northern Italy are completely missed.

### **Rise and Decline of the Olympic city**

At the beginning of the 1990s, the electoral reform that allowed the direct election of mayors, and the more general change in the Italian institutional organisation, reverberated in a change of the city's government, from both the point of view of the actors involved (with a general - though not as radical as it seemed at first sight - change



of local political leaders and the redefinition of the forms of representation and participation of the civil society), and of the urban agenda, the decision-making processes practised, and the policies implemented.

In 1995, after a long period of false starts and attempts to define new plans that are never being implemented, a new masterplan (Piano Regolatore Generale - General Regulatory Plan-GPR) was approved and a general urban transformation of Turin started. This transformation is mainly a transformation of the built environment. Enthusiastically, a study by the Chamber of Commerce pointed to Turin's new GPR as a key instrument to remedy "the disappointments of urban planning by projects in the 1980s, which had in fact brought the city's transformation processes to a standstill" (De Santis and Russo 1997, p. 132, auth. transl.). Approved during the first term of the council led by Valentino Castellani (1993-1997), the new GPR searches for a new urban centrality and its guiding image can be summarised as a 'return to the (city) centre'. The central axis (*Spina Centrale*) that links along the central railway (*Passante ferroviario*) (Fig. 1) the many 'industrial voids' left in Turin's urban fabric by the economic transition of the 1980s, with strong concentrations especially north of the river Dora (i.e. in the first industrial suburbs), is the "flagship project" of the new masterplan.

At this stage, Turin seemed to have left its dark periods behind it: the transition of the Italian one-company town was underway, not without trouble, but everything seemed possible. In 1999, during Castellani mayor's second term in office, the city was indicated as the venue for the 2006 Winter Olympics. This event will become the catalyst for the administration's action around which many of the choices made and strategies implemented revolved. The administration led by Chiamparino, Mayor in his turn for two terms (2001-2006 and 2006-2011), managed both the design and the implementation of strategies and actions devoted to making Turin the 'Olympic city' (Dansero and Puttilli, 2010).

Generally speaking, and also thanks to the undoubted communication capacity of the local government and especially the mayor, the event was a success. However, to

fully appreciate the Turin Olympic story, it is necessary to distinguish various layers. The first layer is the urban marketing strategy and the promotion of the urban image: thanks to the network of actors already active in the strategic planning process that began in the second half of the 1990s, this strategy was successful in terms of the enhancement of the tourism offer (Vanolo, 2008). The second layer is the extraordinary 'material' impact of the Olympic programme, particularly on certain parts of the city: 7.5 billion euros in public works, with 65 Olympic works and more than a thousand interventions, in the municipality of Turin alone, on the road infrastructure; 4.5 million square metres of usable floor space of new buildings, 70% of which residential (Mancini and Papini, 2021).

Many of these square metres are concentrated along the *Spina centrale*: 342 dwellings converted into subsidised housing in the northern part of the city and 204 dwellings converted into social housing in the southern part. The implementation of both the masterplan and the Olympic Programme has thus engendered an extraordinary physical, social, and functional urban change, which has also led to the acceleration of spatial transformations that had long been under discussion (from the underground railway to the expansion of Caselle airport, from the reuse of some large derelict lands, such as the former General Markets and Italgas area, to the modernisation of some sports facilities). Yet the urban transformation of Turin appears in many ways detached from an overall idea of the city, so much to be configured solely as a set of interventions that seize the opportunities offered by the industrial vacancies to be filled.

The third layer is the most problematic: urban politics and policies, especially in a city in which basic statistical indicators - such as the number of inhabitants, ageing of the population, unemployment, and so on - show difficult underlying trends, seem lacking a clear vision of the city's future after the collapse of the industrial fabric, in order to manage the post-industrial transition (Bagnasco et al., 2020).

The evolution of Turin over the last forty years seems

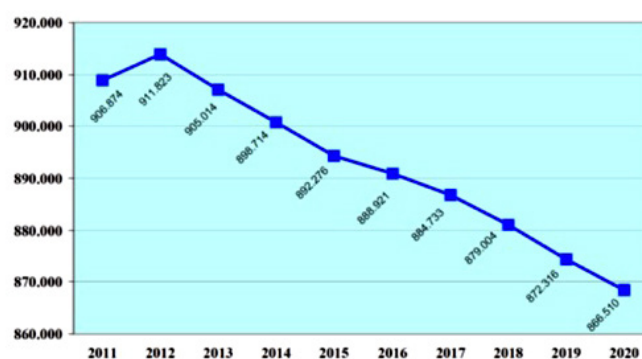
relatively simple to summarise: from the ‘one company town’, dominated by the automotive sector, to the “always on the move” city; from the city in crisis of the 1980s to the ‘creative’, vibrant, funny city (Vanolo, 2015); from the ‘grey’ city of the past industrial monoculture to the ‘increasingly beautiful’ city where ‘passion lives’. These expressions, which echo the slogans used by the municipality to present the Olympic Programme and the 2006 Winter Olympics (“Turin always on the move”) and to accompany the city during the period of the event (“Passion lives here”), describe a transformation that conveys simple and somewhat stereotypical contents. The transformation of the built environment has contributed to building consensus and legitimacy around an idea of the city that has forgotten ‘other’ visions, erased differences, and eluded conflict, partly as a result of the progressive impoverishment of public debate on the city and the rise of a strong leader and personalist conception of political representation.

Today Turin is presenting the bill for these cancellations and elusions. In the aftermath of the 2006 Olympics, the construction sector started to slow down (Rapporto Rota, 2016) and the 2008 crisis further complicated the situation. At the same time, the Olympics have left a heavy legacy from a financial point of view: against costs of more than 3.3 billion, the benefits have been generously estimated at 2.5 billion, with heavy consequences on municipal budgets. The pacified and ‘happy’ urban transformation is progressively being flanked by the grey areas of a fragmented and hidden unease, of unheard demands and denied needs, in which the segregated spaces of the new immigrant ethnic groups mingle with those of consumption and the leisure activities of the impoverished middle classes, the places of innovative tertiarization with those of poverty and abandonment.

This unease - and intolerance - has gradually found a way to manifest itself, at least politically, in the change of municipal administration. In this sense, post-Olympic Turin seems to be an example of those “places that don’t matter” described at a European level by Rodriguez-Pose (2017), who points out how much and how the resentment and difficulties of places and people who feel - and in part really are - excluded from the processes of globalisation

are expressed above all from a political point of view with support for sovereigntist and populist parties and movements.

The political-administrative change in 2016, with the win of the *Movimento 5 Stelle* (a sort of vehicle of anti-political protest, used to voice popular discontent with traditional parties and professional politicians: Diamanti, 2014) and Chiara Appendino as mayor, closes the political cycle started in 1993 and the long period of center-left political-institutional continuity whose action had, however, begun to show signs of tarnishing at the moment of its greatest success. The 2006 Olympic Games probably constituted the apex and at the same time the breaking point of Turin’s transition. It was certainly impossible to continue on the same level, also for financial reasons. But that is not all. While at the beginning of the 2000s everything seemed within reach, once the party and the aftermath of the Olympic triumph were over, Turin slowed down. Data show a city progressively smaller (today 866,510 inhabitants, with a 4.4 % reduction in the resident population between 2011 and 2020 (Fig. 2), older (with an old-age index in 2016 of 207.7, while the North-West regions stood at 169.8) and poorer (Piedmont Region, CEP, 2018).



**Fig. 2:** The decrease of the Turin population (Source: Città di Torino, 2022)

This situation is added by the void of ideas and (any) vision for the future: Turin seems no longer capable to think and rethink itself. While in 2022 the municipal elections were again won by the center-left parties, and the Turin

leadership of the *Movimento Cinque Stelle* can be considered as a sort of parenthesis, the political and strategical “void” does not change. It is not only a matter of (weak) local government but of more general weakness, if not lack, of governance and the absence of a new urban élite. A narrow intellectual and professional elite, an expression of universities, entrepreneurial and professional worlds, with a major role of the banking foundations and the Chamber of Commerce, governed Turin for more than 20 years without real opposition (Belligni and Ravazzi, 2013). The turnover of elites did not take place. What it is trivially a problem of generational turnover, clashes in Turin with a blocked system, not able of defining even the slightest economic, cultural, and political pluralism and of overcoming a pyramidal vision of power and urban government. Turin’s networks were and remain simple networks, tending to be closed, with few actors and a strong circularity of decision-making processes.

### **From Factory to Skyscraper: The Unfinished Transition to A Service Economy and The Dark Side of The Knowledge Economy**

On the closing night of the Olympic Games, the fireworks illuminated an economy and a society undergoing a profound transformation: after a long and fluctuating restructuring, Turin’s production apparatus and the entire economy underwent a metamorphosis that saw the progressive loss of centrality of the automobile industry. During recurring crises - from the late 1990s to 2004 and finally to 2008 - the urban decision-making system tried to counter the difficulties in the automotive sector by devising strategies to reverse the decline of the “city-factory”. The first attempt to overcome the Fordist economic organisation and its social legacy was made through the First Strategic Plan (1997). Ten years later, a Second Strategic Plan (2006) tried to apply the paradigm of the knowledge economy as a “key recipe” to plan the 21<sup>st</sup> century Turin. Finally, the Third Strategic Plan (2016) focused on a ‘new manufacturing economy’ connected to a neo-industrial paradigm that aims to translate the traditional industrial legacy into innovative forms (DASTu and Irs, 2014), promoting new consumption patterns especially

on food and technological urban smartness, changing the model of consumption and focusing the new functions on food and technological urban smartness.

In the meantime, FIAT tightened and then dissolved its engagement with General Motors, proceeding with the contraction of production activities in the Turin plants. At the same time, it articulated the process of delocalisation and presence on foreign markets with the merger with Chrysler in 2009 and the creation of the Italian-American group FCA, and with the recent ‘hot merger’ between the latter and the French Peugeot (Ginori, 2019; Sodano, 2019). FIAT is thus moving away from Turin and at the same time reducing its connections with the more dynamic productive system of the rest of Piedmont and Northern Italy. This last aspect is fundamental in influencing the role played - and suffered - by the Turin area in the relations between flows and places within the northern macro-region and in the broader relations with Europe and the world (Berta, 2009).

The need to govern the transition from secondary to the advanced tertiary sector within the metropolitan system and, at the same time, to direct relations with the contiguous systems - Milan above all, but also the non-metropolitan systems of Piedmont - had been consciously taken by Turin’s élites since Castellani governments (1993-2001). In that period, the perspective adopted was strongly centred on the city of Turin. The transition towards an economy of business services, hoped for above all during the second Castellani administration and pursued by the Chiamparino one (2001-2011), contributed to modernise Turin’s industrial base, but did not develop according to the expectations of the decision-makers. The unequivocal change in the quality of urban spaces, indeed, was mainly oriented towards cultural and tourist functions, perhaps the only innovation that has asserted itself in the city’s tertiary profile, conveyed by the image success of the 2006 Winter Olympics and the massive, albeit not always successful, urban renewal conducted in those years.

Notwithstanding, the laborious transition of the Turin economy towards the tertiary sector has shown significant signs of acceleration in recent years: based on the latest





**Fig. 3:** *Spina Centrale*: the restored OGR and the Renzo Piano's Intesa San Paolo Bank skyscraper (Source: Carlo Salone)

available ISTAT survey (2018), there are 222.577 businesses within the territory of the Metropolitan City of Turin, of which about 1/3 are tertiary (Camera di Commercio di Torino, 2022). Among the latter, however, only a minority can be counted under the category of the innovative enterprise (Caviggioli, Neirotti and Scellato, 2018; Rota Report, 2018).

The late and never-ending tertiarization mobilised expectations and attempts of a Turin's variant of "creative class" strengthened during the effervescent onset of the 2000s, made up of more or less large-scale events (the 2006 Winter Olympics and the entire framework of periodic events linked to contemporary art), highly successful cultural experiences (the Book Fair, *Artissima*) and institutions consolidated over time (the municipal museums'

system and the related Fondazione) (Fig. 3).

A complementary but increasingly important aspect in the local economy and public policy is also the food sector, especially in its cultural and experiential implications. An articulated system of supply has been built on food, based on events of great international appeal (*Terra Madre* and the *Salone del Gusto*, promoted by Slow Food) and on a widespread presence of venues, restaurants and bistros focusing on regional (and other) food and wine.

The city's image has thus been radically re-branded, focusing on some aspects (culture, creativity, food, leisure) mainly oriented towards an integrated offer for national and international tourism (Vanolo, 2015). By hinging on the richness of regional food and wine traditions and the

innovation brought by digital platforms in the temporary accommodation market (Semi & Tonetta, 2021), Turin has then become a tourist destination. Since technological innovation activities and start-ups do not take off, tourism represents one of the few truly significant items in the urban post-industrial tertiary sector. Moreover, the consolidation of platform economies in the short terms rentals market collides with the other major axis of local urban policies, i.e. Turin's as a 'university city'. The effort of both the University and Polytechnic of Turin to attract students from other regions and abroad, opened up the issue of so-called "studentification" in a real estate market that, while traditionally lower than in other Italian cities, is already cracked by the higher rate of evictions in Italy (Bolzoni and Semi, 2022).

Intimately connected to the late and never-ending story of the tertiarization of the metropolitan area, the knowledge economy has been a powerful factor in Turin's last twenty years. Declined in its many specifications - culture, technology, and industrial design - it includes professional figures and companies operating in sectors with a high intensity of intellectual capital. The two Turin universities are undoubtedly a dynamic component in this area, with a traditionally strong presence of the Polytechnic in the industrial field, but also a growing capacity of the University to assert itself as a vector of innovation and an actor of technology transfer. The multi-year research agreements entered into by the two universities with the Compagnia di San Paolo, a leading bank foundation in the regional and national panorama, represent a successful attempt to lend unity to the efforts to achieve the economies of scale required to make investments in basic research effective.

In quantitative terms, already at the turn of the new century, the metropolitan area boasted a presence of skilled workers, half of whom were specialised technicians and the other half divided between entrepreneurs, managers and professionals, representing 40% of the total workforce. This relevant dimension of highly qualified professions placed the Turin area in third place in absolute values after Rome and Milan in the early years of the century, but in a less apex position in percentage terms, surpassed on this level by medium-sized cities such as Flor-

ence and Bologna due to the still strong presence of those employed in the manufacturing sector.

If the 2000s saw an increase in the share of skilled workers, in the same period there were signs of a presence of low-skilled workers that was higher in percentage terms than the other urban areas in the Centre-North, prefiguring an increasingly dualistic labour market that, in 2018, presents eloquent numbers and equally worrying social and political effects.

The 2008 crisis and its aftermath have dramatically accentuated these characteristics, leading to a generalised rise in unemployment until 2014, which is much higher in Piedmont than in the rest of the North. In this context, Turin's situation is even more worrying, as can be seen from the 2018 Piedmont Region-CEP Joint Report, which also highlights the particular severity of youth unemployment (40.8% of young people up to 24 years of age) compared to other regions in the North.

### **Questioning Turin's Urban geography in the Northern City-Region**

The urban crisis of Turin comes from afar: it is rooted in the post-industrial late and contested transition; it is suspended in the illusion of the Olympics period; it is embedded in the after-Olympics difficulties, both financial and otherwise; it is enmeshed in the fiscal crisis of 2008; it is part of the present covid, post-covid and climate change emergency.

The rise of the global economy, and its today evolution, opens the issue of governing the variegated territorial structure of the macro-region of Northern Italy, affected by the concentration of production clusters and tertiary activities of the leading sectors, creation of logistical platforms operating on a continental and so on. Where is Turin in this bargaining space? What are the current conditions of the relationship between Turin and what is outside? Where does Turin fit within the macro-regional and global transformations?

Looking at long-range spatial relations, the Turin area

suffers from a condition of isolation that the high-speed train connection with Milan and the rest of Italy have only partly alleviated. It is not only a matter of 'physical' connections. Turin's weakness and difficulty probably lie above all in its inability to look beyond itself, to promote generous and open images and visions, to think (and think of itself) in relation to the regional and macro-regional territory, enhancing the potential of the city-region such as, for example, those that emerge in the field of innovation and digital development linked to old and new production traditions and the role of universities and research.

On these major issues, local politics seems to remain in a worrying state of aphasia. Not even the *Movimento 5 Stelle*, with its claim of the need for change, has led to the turnover of key players, the emergence of new actors and new models of action. The election of Stefano Lo Russo as Mayor in 2021, with a centre-left coalition, sounds as a back to the past in a city that was sorted out through the Covid-19 emergency with a mix of despair and violence. Turin appears to lack a ruling class capable of expressing an idea of the city and a strategic vision of urban government, of proposing ideas and overcoming old imaginaries (and new-old myths), of looking beyond institutional boundaries (be they those of the Municipality or those of the Metropolitan City), to build alliances and coalitions to innovate the treatment of unresolved problems: among the others, poverty and growing inequalities, the worsening environmental quality and sustainability of development processes, the governance of mobility flows. No tangible signs of a new urban policy agenda, no evident attempts to think at Turin differently and to redefine the role of the city in the enlarged geographies of flows and relations against the backdrop of the changing Northern Italy.

During the 2021 elections, the city's debate tended to reproduce themes and slogans that have accompanied the history of Turin over the past twenty years: Turin's Mayor is called to lead the transition and emerging from the crisis (which one?), in an eternal (and frustrating) confrontation with Milan now in a quite evident urban boom. No thoughtful reflection on an idea of a future for the

city that takes into account its structural constraints, its links with the rest of the administrative region, and its interdependencies within an 'implicit' global urban region of which Milan and Turin could be the key metropolitan nodes.

The current role of Turin within the evolving urban geography of the Northern Italy is increasingly weak, so as the area seems to be 'off the map', as other recent research about the economic performance of the Northern Italian regions show (Buzzacchi et al., 2022).

The reasons for this progressive marginalisation are partly due to structural problems in Turin's economy and society that have emerged starkly over the last two decades, and partly to the tarnish role of urban elites and local politics to focus on the future and promote new ideas and strategies



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