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Title: **The values and plus values of built heritage resources in the digital economy era. Methodological approaches and multi-perspective analysis on peer-to-peer accommodation systems in urban contexts.**

Abstract

Built heritage resources are firstly valued for their cultural significance, but it is now commonly acknowledged that they present economic values too. These economic values may be constituted by use values, non-use values but also by the externalities stemming from them. In fact, the existence, conservation and *mise en valeur* of these resources generate effects that interest a variety of stakeholders as well as the places they are located in.

A traditional industry affected by built heritage resources is tourism, with special regard to the sectors of communication, education, commerce, catering and hospitality. However, the recent rise and spread of digitally-mediated peer-to-peer accommodation systems - such as the leading platform *Airbnb*- have recently expanded the type and number of stakeholders providing accommodation and consequently gaining economic advantages from the presence of tourist flows appealed by local attractions: in the most favoured capital cities of urban tourism, the growth of offer and demand patterns related to short-term rentals has disrupted the hospitality domain and altered the balance required to combine economic development with cultural, environmental and social sustainability. The news and the pioneering literature on the topic seem to suggest that short-term rentals are actually fostering the competition with the hotel sector, the real estate market and long-term rentals, as well as causing an increased pressure on historic centres, with consequences not only at the economic but also at the social level.

In light of this framework, this dissertation aims to enrich the debate originally introducing the built heritage component in the discourse and specifically investigating the case of an urban context that has started to experience a significant tourism growth since the beginning of the last decade, i.e. the Italian city of Turin. The research firstly aims to study the development of the Airbnb phenomenon by a

diachronic and spatial perspective, identifying possible relationships between local built heritage resources and short-term rentals offer and demand patterns. Overall, the analyses carried out throughout the work capitalize on a set of geo-referenced data concerning Airbnb listings appeared on the Turin's market in the period 2009-2017, as well as on GIS-based information regarding the local built heritage and the socio-economic characteristics associated to the different sub-portions of the city. Given the supposed importance of the location factor and of possible spatial proximity patterns, the study integrates descriptive statistics and regression approaches with the methods of spatial statistics, with special regard to *ESDA- Exploratory Spatial Data Analysis* (including *LISA-Local Indicators of Spatial Association*) techniques.

The results stemming from the study provide evidence that spatial relationships and spatial correlation patterns between the density of built heritage resources and Airbnb listings exist, and that the areas most affected by the new short-term rental reality are the residential neighbourhoods located in the proximity of the historic centre of the city. Interestingly, results also highlight that the most frequent and profitable type of listings are small apartments situated not only in upscale central areas characterised by high environmental quality, transports, shops and services but also in neighbourhoods with challenging socio-economic characteristics that are conveniently located in the nearby of the city centre. Considering that some of the neighbourhoods that are currently mostly interested by the Airbnb phenomenon have experienced gentrification processes in a relatively recent past, this thesis proposes that the transformation of small residential units into short-term rental lodgings is an economic strategy related to the cycle of life of previously gentrified neighbourhoods and of their inhabitants. This process is originally defined through the term *accommodation*, a neologism that refers to the conversion of use of the residential units (*to accommodate = to host*) but also to short-term rentals as a new function satisfying the current needs of previous residents (*to accommodate = to fit, to adapt*) and transforming the private space into a place that can be easily rent out for profit, even on a need-basis (*commodification*).

Quantitative and comparative analyses underline that at this stage of development Airbnb may still represent an opportunity for Turin, especially considering that the city is trying to differentiate its hospitality offer and attractiveness using the experiential key. On the basis of available data, economic consequences on the real estate and long-term rental sectors seem not already clearly perceivable in this phase, but the evidence provided by the literature advises to make monitoring among the top priorities, since socio-economic consequences – such as excessive pressure on the historic centre, alteration of the social fabric, competition for the same residential units and unaffordable housing- may be severe and preventive analyses combined with mathematical forecasts would allow both to take countermeasures on time and to address local development toward the most sustainable direction.