

Environmental sensing and simulation for healthy districts: a comparison between field measurements and CFD model

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Eugenio Arbizzani · Eliana Cangelli ·
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Contents

1	From a Liquid Society, Through Technological Imagination, to Beyond the Knowledge Society	1
	Anna Maria Giovenale	
2	Opening Lecture: Digital Spaces and the Material Culture	11
	Pietro Montani	
Part I Session Innovation		
3	Innovation for the Digitization Process of the AECO Sector	21
	Fabrizio Cumo	
4	The Digital Revolution and the Art of Co-creation	27
	Maurizio Talamo	
5	Toward a New Humanism of Technological Innovation in Design of the Built Environment	37
	Spartaco Paris	
6	A BIM-Based Approach to Energy Analysis of Existing Buildings in the Italian Context	47
	Marco Morini, Francesca Caffari, Nicolandrea Calabrese, and Giulia Centi	
7	Short-Term Wind Speed Forecasting Model Using Hybrid Neural Networks and Wavelet Packet Decomposition	57
	Adel Lakzadeh, Mohammad Hassani, Azim Heydari, Farshid Keynia, Daniele Groppi, and Davide Astiaso Garcia	
8	COGNIBUILD: Cognitive Digital Twin Framework for Advanced Building Management and Predictive Maintenance	69
	Sofia Agostinelli	

9	Design of CCHP System with the Help of Combined Chiller System, Solar Energy, and Gas Microturbine	79
	Samaneh Safaei, Farshid Keynia, Sam Haghdaday, Azim Heydari, and Mario Lamagna	
10	Digital Construction and Management the Public’s Infrastructures	93
	Giuseppe Orsini and Giuseppe Piras	
11	An Innovative Multi-objective Optimization Digital Workflow for Social Housing Deep Energy Renovation Design Process	111
	Adriana Ciardiello, Jacopo Dell’Olmo, Federica Rosso, Lorenzo Mario Pastore, Marco Ferrero, and Ferdinando Salata	
12	Digital Information Management in the Built Environment: Data-Driven Approaches for Building Process Optimization	123
	Francesco Muzi, Riccardo Marzo, and Francesco Nardi	
13	Immersive Facility Management—A Methodological Approach Based on BIM and Mixed Reality for Training and Maintenance Operations	133
	Sofia Agostinelli and Benedetto Nastasi	
14	A Digital Information Model for Coastal Maintenance and Waterfront Recovery	145
	Francesca Ciampa	
15	Sustainable Workplace: Space Planning Model to Optimize Environmental Impact	157
	Alice Paola Pomè, Chiara Tagliaro, and Andrea Ciaramella	
16	Digital Twin Models Supporting Cognitive Buildings for Ambient Assisted Living	167
	Alessandra Corneli, Leonardo Binni, Berardo Naticchia, and Massimo Vaccarini	
17	Less Automation More Information: A Learning Tool for a Post-occupancy Operation and Evaluation	179
	Chiara Tonelli, Barbara Cardone, Roberto D’Autilia, and Giuliana Nardi	
18	A Prosumer Approach for Feeding the Digital Twin. Testing the MUST Application in the Old Harbour Waterfront of Genoa	193
	Serena Viola, Antonio Novellino, Alberto Zinno, and Marco Di Ludovico	

19 Untapping the Potential of the Digital Towards the Green Imperative: The Interdisciplinary BeXLab Experience 203
 Gisella Calcagno, Antonella Trombadore, Giacomo Pierucci, and Lucia Montoni

20 Digital—Twin for an Innovative Waterfront Management Strategy. Pilot Project DSH2030 217
 Maria Giovanna Pacifico, Maria Rita Pinto, and Antonio Novellino

21 BIM and BPMN 2.0 Integration for Interoperability Challenge in Construction Industry 227
 Hosam Al-Siah and Antonio Fioravanti

22 Digital Twin Approach for Maintenance Management 237
 Massimo Lauria and Maria Azzalin

23 Digital Infrastructure for Student Accommodation in European University Cities: The “HOME” Project 247
 Oscar Eugenio Bellini, Matteo Gambaro, Maria Teresa Gullace, Marianna Arcieri, Carla Álvarez Benito, Sabri Ben Rommane, Steven Boon, and Maria F. Figueira

Part II Session | Technology

24 Technologies for the Construction of Buildings and Cities of the Near Future 263
 Eugenio Arbizzani

25 The Living Lab for Autonomous Driving as Applied Research of MaaS Models in the Smart City: The Case Study of MASA—Modena Automotive Smart Area 273
 Francesco Leali and Francesco Pasquale

26 Expanding the Wave of Smartness: Smart Buildings, Another Frontier of the Digital Revolution 285
 Valentina Frighi

27 Sharing Innovation. The Acceptability of Off-site Industrialized Systems for Housing 295
 Gianluca Pozzi, Giulia Vignati, and Elisabetta Ginelli

28 3D Printing for Housing. Recurring Architectural Themes 309
 Giulio Paparella and Maura Percoco

29 Photovoltaic Breakthrough in Architecture: Integration and Innovation Best Practice 321
 Guido Callegari, Eleonora Merolla, and Paolo Simeone

30	Reworking Studio Design Education Driven by 3D Printing Technologies	335
	Jelena Milošević, Aleksandra Nenadović, Maša Žujović, Marko Gavrilović, and Milijana Živković	
31	The New Technological Paradigm in the Post-digital Era. Three Convergent Paths Between Creative Action and Computational Tools	345
	Roberto Bianchi	
32	Technological Innovation for Circularity and Sustainability Throughout Building Life Cycle: Policy, Initiatives, and Stakeholders' Perspective	357
	Serena Giorgi	
33	Fair Play: Why Reliable Data for Low-Tech Construction and Non-conventional Materials Are Needed	367
	Redina Mazelli, Martina Bocci, Arthur Bohn, Edwin Zea Escamilla, Guillaume Habert, and Andrea Bocco	
 Part III Session Environment		
34	Technological Innovation for the Next Ecosystem Transition: From a High-Tech to Low-Tech Intensity—High Efficiency Environment	383
	Carola Clemente	
35	Technological Imagination to Stay Within Planetary Boundaries	391
	Massimo Palme	
36	Quality-Based Design for Environmentally Conscious Architecture	399
	Helena Coch Roura and Pablo Garrido Torres	
37	Digital Transformation Projects for the Future Digicircular Society	403
	Irene Fiesoli	
38	The Regulatory Apparatus at the Service of Sustainable Planning of the Built Environment: The Case of Law 338/2000 ...	417
	Claudio Piferi	
39	From Nature to Architecture for Low Tech Solutions: Biomimetic Principles for Climate-Adaptive Building Envelope ...	429
	Francesco Sommese and Gigliola Ausiello	
40	Soft Technologies for the Circular Transition: Practical Experimentation of the Product “Material Passport”	439
	Tecla Caroli	

41 Imagining a Carbon Neutral University 449
Antonella Violano and Monica Cannaviello

42 Life Cycle Assessment at the Early Stage of Building Design 461
Anna Dalla Valle

**43 Design Scenarios for a Circular Vision of Post-disaster
Temporary Settlements** 471
Maria Vittoria Arnetoli and Roberto Bologna

**44 Towards Climate Neutrality: Progressing Key Actions
for Positive Energy Districts Implementation** 483
Rosa Romano, Maria Beatrice Andreucci,
and Emanuela Giancola

**45 Remanufacturing Towards Circularity in the Construction
Sector: The Role of Digital Technologies** 493
Nazly Atta

**46 Territorial Energy Potential for Energy Community
and Climate Mitigation Actions: Experimentation on Pilot
Cases in Rome** 505
Paola Marrone and Ilaria Montella

**47 Integrated Design Approach to Build a Safe and Sustainable
Dual Intended Use Center in Praslin Island, Seychelles** 523
Vincenzo Gattulli, Elisabetta Palumbo, and Carlo Vannini

Part IV Session | Climate Changes

48 Climate Change: New Ways to Inhabit the Earth 537
Eliana Cangelli

**49 The Climate Report Informing the Response to Climate
Change in Urban Development** 547
Anna Pirani

**50 The Urban Riverfront Greenway: A Linear Attractor
for Sustainable Urban Development** 557
Luciana Mastrodonardo

**51 The Buildings Reuse for a Music District Aimed
at a Sustainable Urban Development** 567
Donatella Radogna

**52 Environmental Design for a Sustainable District and Civic
Hub** 577
Elena Mussinelli, Andrea Tartaglia, and Giovanni Castaldo

53 Earth Observation Technologies for Mitigating Urban Climate Changes 589
 Federico Cinquepalmi and Giuseppe Piras

54 A Systematic Catalogue of Design Solutions for the Regeneration of Urban Environment Contrasting the Climate Change Impact 601
 Roberto Bologna and Giulio Hasanaj

55 Digital Twins for Climate-Neutral and Resilient Cities. State of the Art and Future Development as Tools to Support Urban Decision-Making 617
 Guglielmo Ricciardi and Guido Callegari

56 The Urban Potential of Multifamily Housing Renovation 627
 Laura Daglio

57 A “Stepping Stone” Approach to Exploiting Urban Density 639
 Raffaella De Martino, Rossella Franchino, and Caterina Frettoloso

58 Metropolitan Farms: Long Term Agri-Food Systems for Sustainable Urban Landscapes 649
 Giancarlo Paganin, Filippo Orsini, Marco Migliore, Konstantinos Venis, and Matteo Poli

59 Resilient Design for Outdoor Sports Infrastructure 659
 Silvia Battaglia, Marta Cognigni, and Maria Pilar Vettori

60 Sustainable Reuse Indicators for Ecclesiastic Built Heritage Regeneration 669
 Maria Rita Pinto, Martina Bosone, and Francesca Ciampa

61 A Green Technological Rehabilitation of the Built Environment. From Public Residential Estates to Eco-Districts ... 683
 Lidia Errante

62 Adaptive Building Technologies for Building Envelopes Under Climate Change Conditions 695
 Martino Milardi

63 The Importance of Testing Activities for a “New” Generation of Building Envelope 703
 Martino Milardi, Evelyn Grillo, and Mariateresa Mandaglio

64 Data Visualization and Web-Based Mapping for SGDs and Adaptation to Climate Change in the Urban Environment ... 715
 Maria Canepa, Adriano Magliocco, and Nicola Pisani

65 Fog Water Harvesting Through Smart Façade for a Climate Resilient Built Environment 725
 Maria Giovanna Di Bitonto, Alara Kutlu, and Alessandra Zanelli

66 Building Façade Retrofit: A Comparison Between Current Methodologies and Innovative Membranes Strategies for Overcoming the Existing Retrofit Constraints 735
 Giulia Procaccini and Carol Monticelli

67 Technologies and Solutions for Collaborative Processes in Mutating Cities 745
 Daniele Fanzini, Irina Rotaru, and Nour Zreika

68 New Perspectives for the Building Heritage in Depopulated Areas: A Methodological Approach for Evaluating Sustainable Reuse and Upcycling Strategies 757
 Antonello Monsù Scolaro, Stefania De Medici, Salvatore Giuffrida, Maria Rosa Trovato, Cheren Cappello, Ludovica Nasca, and Fuat Emre Kaya

69 Climate Adaptation in Urban Regeneration: A Cross-Scale Digital Design Workflow 769
 Michele Morganti and Diletta Ricci

70 Adaptive “Velari” 783
 Alberto Raimondi and Laura Rosini

71 Temporary Climate Change Adaptation: 5 Measures for Outdoor Spaces of the Mid-Adriatic City 801
 Timothy Daniel Brownlee

72 A Serious Game Proposal for Exploring and Designing Urban Sustainability 811
 Manuela Romano and Alessandro Rogora

73 Energy Efficiency Improvement in Industrial Brownfield Heritage Buildings: Case Study of “Beko” 821
 Jelena Pavlović, Ana Šabanović, and Nataša Ćuković-Ignjatović

74 Industrial Heritage of Belgrade: Brownfield Sites Revitalization Status, Potentials and Opportunities Missed 831
 Jelena Pavlović, Ana Šabanović, and Nataša Ćuković-Ignjatović

75 Challenges and Potentials of Green Roof Retrofit: A Case Study 843
 Nikola Miletić, Bojana Zeković, Nataša Ćuković Ignjatović, and Dušan Ignjatović

76 Designing with Nature Climate-Resilient Cities: A Lesson from Copenhagen 853
 Maicol Negrello

77 New Urban Centralities: Universities as a Paradigm for a Sustainable City 863
Camilla Maitan and Emilio Faroldi

Part V Session | Health

78 Environment for Healthy Living 875
Francesca Giofrè

79 New Paradigms for Indoor Healthy Living 883
Alberto De Capua

80 Healthy and Empowering Life in Schoolyards. The Case of Dante Alighieri School in Milan 893
Valentina Dessì, Maria Fianchini, Franca Zuccoli, Raffaella Colombo, and Noemi Morrone

81 Design for Emergency: Inclusive Housing Solution 907
Francesca Giglio and Sara Sansotta

82 Environmental Sensing and Simulation for Healthy Districts: A Comparison Between Field Measurements and CFD Model 921
Matteo Giovanardi, Matteo Trane, and Riccardo Pollo

83 A Synthesis Paradigm as a Way of Bringing Back to Life the Artistic Monuments Inspired by the Motives of the People’s Liberation Struggle and Revolution of Yugoslavia 935
Meri Batakoja and Tihana Hrastar

84 Social Sustainability and Inclusive Environments in Neighbourhood Sustainability Assessment Tools 947
Rosaria Revellini

85 Inclusive Neighborhoods in a Healthy City: Walkability Assessment and Guidance in Rome 959
Mohamed Eledeisy

86 Tools and Strategies for Health Promotion in Urban Context: Technology and Innovation for Enhancing Parish Ecclesiastical Heritage Through Sport and Inclusion 969
Francesca Daprà, Davide Allegri, and Erica Isa Mosca

87 Nursing Homes During COVID-19 Pandemic—A Systematic Literature Review for COVID-19 Proof Architecture Design Strategies 981
Silvia Mangili, Tianzhi Sun, and Alexander Achille Johnson

88	A New Generation of Territorial Healthcare Infrastructures After COVID-19. The Transition to Community Homes and Community Hospitals into the Framework of the Italian Recovery Plan	991
	Andrea Brambilla, Erica Brusamolín, Stefano Arruzzoli, and Stefano Capolongo	
89	Wood Snoezelen. Multisensory Wooden Environments for the Care and Rehabilitation of People with Severe and Very Severe Cognitive Disabilities	1003
	Agata Tonetti and Massimo Rossetti	
90	The Proximity of Urban Green Spaces as Urban Health Strategy to Promote Active, Inclusive and Salutogenic Cities	1017
	Maddalena Buffoli and Andrea Rebecchi	
91	Environmental Attributes for Healthcare Professional's Well-Being	1029
	Zakia Hammouni and Walter Wittich	

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Chapter 82

Environmental Sensing and Simulation for Healthy Districts: A Comparison Between Field Measurements and CFD Model



Matteo Giovanardi, Matteo Trane, and Riccardo Pollo

Abstract Atmospheric Particulate Matter (PM) is considered among the main risk factors for cardiovascular, respiratory, and carcinogenic diseases. Besides, heat waves accounted for 68% of natural hazard-related deaths in Europe between 1980 and 2017 and many climate models project a global rise in climate hazards. Environmental Monitoring (EM) is a key resource to control health determinants, addressing threats arising from unhealthy external conditions. Forecasting models may need data coming from pervasive distributed sensor networks and computational simulations. Moreover, district-scale Environmental Sensing (ES) and Environmental Modelling Simulation (EMS) may identify criticalities and specific strategies to mitigate climate risk affecting physical health. This paper compares the output from ES, by field measurements during a “climate walk” joined by more than 60 people, with EMS, by a Computational Fluid Dynamic software (CFD). The assessment has been performed on a real urban district. For on-site measurements, data were acquired by low-cost IoT-based sensors developed by the authors. For simulations, we used ENVI-met, a prognostic non-hydrostatic CFD. Potential Air Temperature and PM 10-2.5 concentration parameters have been measured and simulated on a specific winter day. Results are presented and discussed through a visualisation matrix making the comparison direct. The analysis of the results pointed out the role of ES and EMS for high-resolution scenarios assessment. Although real-time monitoring needs extensive infrastructure at the urban scale, the use of low-cost sensors and a citizen science approach could provide precise input data to support even more accurate models, towards a healthy district site-specific design perspective. This may finally contribute to achieving the Sustainable Development Goal 11.6, aiming at reducing the adverse environmental impact of cities, thus paying particular attention to air quality.

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Keywords Environmental sensing · Environmental modelling and simulation · Healthy district · ENVI-met · IoT

82.1 Introduction

By aiming at making cities and human settlements inclusive, safe and resilient, the Sustainable Development Goal 11 points out to reduce the adverse per capita environmental impact of cities, including by paying special attention to air quality (target 11.6). Despite some progress achieved in reducing exposure in certain countries, the global health burden of ambient fine Particulate Matter (PM) is still increasing annually (Southerland et al. 2022). Air pollution causes a wide range of adverse health effects, even at the lowest observable concentrations (Strak et al. 2021). Alongside this, heat waves accounted for 68% of natural hazard-related deaths in Europe between 1980 and 2017 and many climate models project a global rise in climate hazards (Woetzel et al. 2020). Emissions by anthropogenic sources are the main factors in the processes causing air pollution and heat waves in cities. Even though some of these processes regard planetary-scale climatic phenomena, planning at regional and local scale has to respond to imminent challenges due to global warming and threats arising for human health. For instance, the role of greenery has been largely discussed as a pollution mitigating element (Rui et al. 2019). The urban fabric can allow natural ventilation or obstruct the wind flows, influencing PM concentrations and temperature cool down.

Urban surface materials are determinant in lowering the air temperatures, thus improving comfort for people in public spaces.

Given the complexity of these multi-scale issues, Environmental Monitoring (EM) is a key resource for health determinant control. EM asks for data that may come from Environmental Sensing (ES), by a distributed pervasive sensor network monitoring several Environmental Parameters (EPs), and Environmental Modelling and Simulation (EMS), by advanced computational tools forecasting patterns based on given boundary conditions and site-specific features. This research combines both approaches, supported by a Citizen-Science (CS) experience, for EM purposes. The second section of this paper describes the Materials and Methods applied and introduces the case study.

The third section illustrates the Results obtained both from the on-field measurement and a Computational Fluid Dynamics (CFD) simulation, while the fourth one discusses them by a visualisation matrix. Finally, the Conclusions present the advantages coming from the combination of ES and EMS for scenarios assessment, towards a healthy district site-specific design perspective.

82.2 Materials and Methods

The research was carried out in Turin, a city in north-western Italy, surrounded by the western Alpine (Cfa climate according to Köppen–Geiger classification). The case study is within Regio Parco district (45°04' N 7°42' E), a peripheral area in the north-eastern part of the city, located near the Po River and some main green infrastructures.

The area of analysis extends for approximately 640,000 m² (800 m × 800 m).

82.2.1 *A Citizen-Science Experience for Environmental Sensing*

ES can be defined as the process by which acquiring real-time data on several EPs through a distributed pervasive sensor network. ES systems can range from dynamic (mobile) to purely static deployments and can monitor different built environment parameters, to improve process efficiency, ensure optimal environmental conditions, highlight patterns, detect anomalies, or avoid stress conditions. ES allows for major knowledge on dynamic phenomena as it is enabled by an Internet of Things (IoT) virtual infrastructure, consisting of a network of interconnected objects based on standard communication protocols (Giovanardi et al. 2021).

In the context of an innovative teaching experience, 62 students were part of the on-field measurement campaign. This CS approach led us to acquire real-time data on several EPs at the same time: air temperature (AT), relative humidity (RH), PM 2.5-10 concentration, and air pressure. The on-field measurement campaign was carried out by using IoT-based devices (Fig. 82.1). Although in a prototypal status, these devices were successfully used in previous research, after its calibration and validation (Montrucchio et al. 2020). The device consists of four PM sensors using laser scattering technology, a DHT22 sensor for air temperature and relative humidity, a barometric sensor for air pressure, and real-time clock for temporal data synchronisation. It also incorporates a Raspberry Pi simple-board computer, and its micro-SD card stores data by a Python script. The external case was 3D printed and it measures 44 mm × 36 mm × 12 mm.

The low-cost device (total cost around 40 euros) is powered by portable batteries.

The campaign was organised in five different paths, namely Climate Walks (CWs) *A-B-C-D-E* (Fig. 82.2), and took place on 29 November 2021 from 1.45 to 3.45 P.M. approximately. Each CW consisted of some stop points, where students were given pre-printed surveys too, to fill in with the time of arrival at and departure from each stop (approximately 15 min per stop), data about traffic (number of cars passing by per road lane), and personal feelings about environmental quality. At the end of the walks, surveys were collected and data on road traffic was used as input to model the pollutant sources with reliable site-specific values. The paths were also recorded and geo-referenced by using the application Open GPX tracker, to match the data

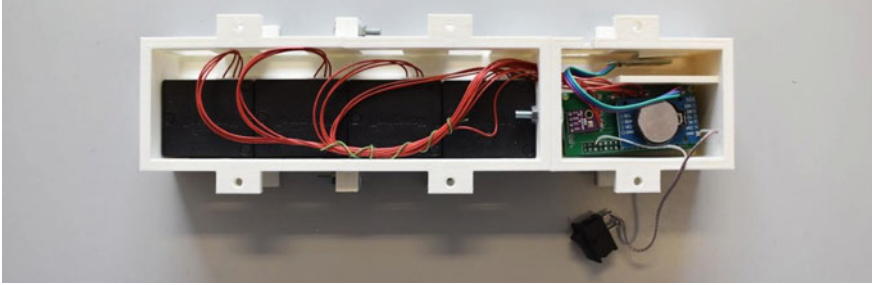


Fig. 82.1 IoT-based device for monitoring air quality, temperature, humidity, and pressure

acquired from the devices with the time interval spent in each stop and the traffic data coming from surveys.



Fig. 82.2 Climate walks

82.2.2 CFD for Environmental Modelling and Simulation

For EMS purposes, we used the software ENVI-met¹ version 5.0.2, a holistic three-dimensional non-hydrostatic CFD for the simulation of surface-plant-air interactions in urban environments. The district area was modelled with a $5 \times 5 \times 2$ m grid cell resolution (xyz), where buildings, horizontal and vertical greenery, roads and pavements, natural surfaces, and pollutant sources were digitised. As for the meteorological input data, we used the ones provided by ARPA Piedmont² on 29 November 2021 (Table 82.1). Data were acquired from the nearest urban meteorological station, 4 km far as the crow flies from our campaign's start meeting point (Torino Grassi station). The simulation time was set to run for 48 h. We considered the second 24 h results, which are more accurate as ENVI-met requires some spin-up time. Although doubling the simulation timing, this could turn out into more accurate results, especially in the afternoon and evening hours (Middel et al. 2014). For the purposes of this research, we mainly focused on Potential Air Temperature (PAT) (°C) and PM 2.5-10 concentration ($\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$). PAT and PM were evaluated at 2 m height from the soil.

As for the pollution sources modelling, in absence of detailed data, punctual emissions due to heating from buildings were not considered. However, this approximation does not invalidate the results: as reported by ARPA Piemonte (2019), the main source of PM in Turin is actually linked to the traffic (Fig. 82.3). Thus, linear traffic sources were sized by combining on-site traffic measurements, carried out during the CWs, and the Traffic Tool in the Database Manager.

Specifically, it calculates the emission profiles per linear source type by providing an equivalent hourly flow rate profile after injecting a type-day total car volume (Veh/h). Its calculations are based on standard emission rate (HBEFA 2022). PM 2.5 was calculated as a fraction of PM 10 according to Schafer et al. (2021) (36% out of PM 10 in inner roads, 53% in roads at urban fringe and suburban roads) (Fig. 82.4). For roads with no traffic measures, we used data provided by a regional report, providing traffic volumes per hour on a standard day in November (Regione Piemonte 2017). In total, we created 11 linear emission profiles (Table 82.2). The estimation of the urban bus rate over the total traffic volume was carried out by considering the number of bus lanes crossing the roads,³ number of passages throughout the day according to specific hour intervals⁴ and real-time data on bus lines.⁵

Background levels were set ($6 \mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$ for PM 2.5, $10 \mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$ for PM 10) according to the lowest most recurrent values acquired by the sensors.

¹ Developed by M. Bruse (ENVI-met GmbH, Essen, Germany).

² Regional Agency for the Environmental Protection: <http://www.arpa.piemonte.it/>.

³ <https://www.gtt.to.it/cms/risorse/urbana/mappa/mapparete.pdf>.

⁴ https://www.gtt.to.it/cms/risorse/urbana/intervalli_sito.pdf.

⁵ <https://www.gtt.to.it/cms/percorari/urbano?view=linee&bacino=U>.

Table 82.1 Meteorological data on 29 November, 2021 by Torino Grassi ARPA station

Hour	Air temperature (°C)	Relative humidity (%)	Wind speed (m/s)	Wind direction (deg.)	Global radiation (W/m ²)
00:00	1.6	80	0.6	227	–
01:00	1.4	82	0.7	161	–
02:00	0.3	87	0.6	316	–
03:00	– 0.1	88	1.1	89	–
04:00	– 0.2	81	0.4	326	–
05:00	– 0.1	80	1.5	276	–
06:00	0.4	74	1.3	242	–
07:00	0.8	71	1.2	224	–
08:00	1.6	68	1	221	43
09:00	3.1	73	0.5	94	253
10:00	7.1	62	0.9	163	372
11:00	9.5	38	1.4	126	427
12:00	11	22	0.6	120	411
13:00	10.9	17	0.9	106	351
14:00	11.3	18	1.4	88	275
15:00	10.6	17	3.4	317	208
16:00	9.3	15	4.4	328	–
17:00	7.9	17	2.8	323	–
18:00	7.4	21	2.4	247	–
19:00	6.9	23	3.4	290	–
20:00	6.6	24	2.9	263	–
21:00	5.3	25	1.4	100	–
22:00	5	30	1.2	174	–
23:00	4.4	39	1.4	150	–

82.3 Results

82.3.1 Results from ES Campaign

About 120'000 PM data were collected during the CWs. Data coming from four sensors within the devices were averaged to obtain a single PM 2.5 and PM10 data, and the results refer to a time period of ~ 90 min grouped in 10-min steps. The PM 10 average data varies between 6 and 13 $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$, while PM 2.5 ranges between 4 and 9 $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$, accounting for about 60% of the PM 10 share. As shown in Fig. 82.5, the variance of the average data is minimal, with the exception of CW E. A more in-depth analysis for each walk was carried out to deepen the correlation with endogenous factors. For example, in CW C, a higher level of PM is recorded at the road junction

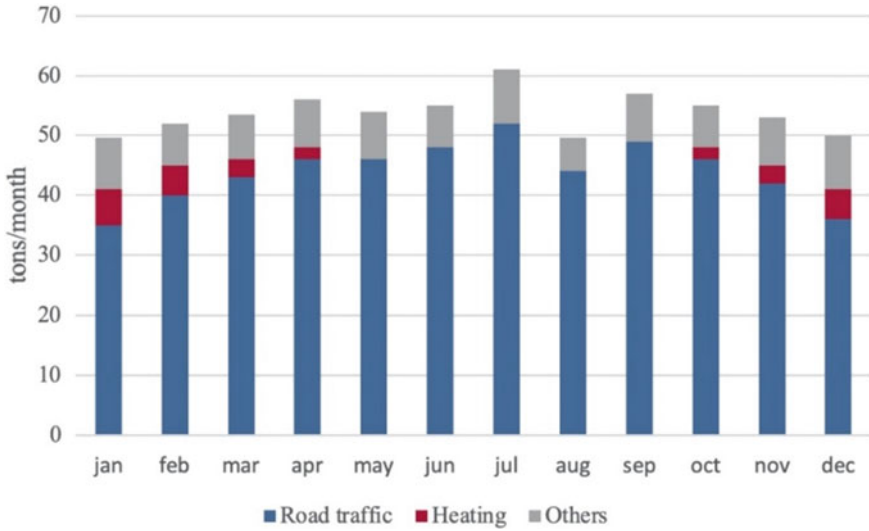


Fig. 82.3 PM 10 emission profile in Turin. Based on ARPA 2019

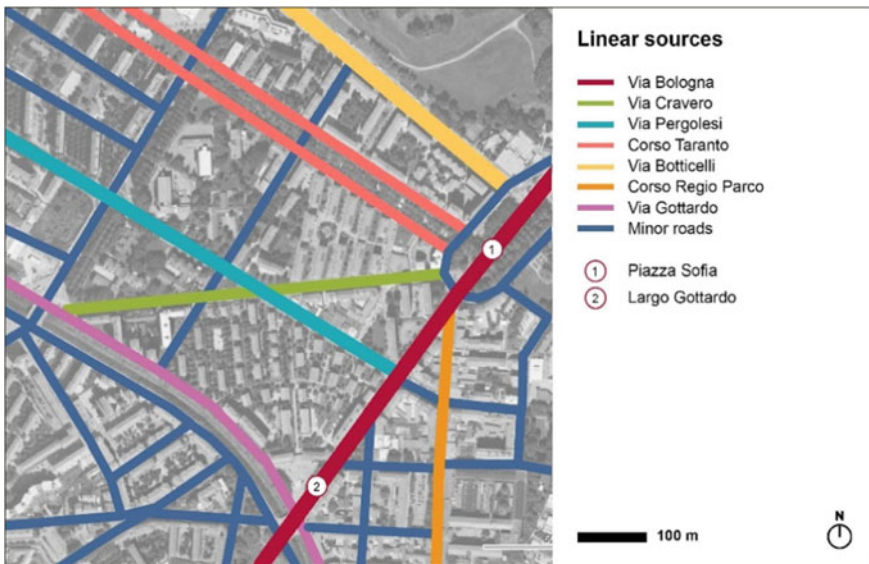


Fig. 82.4 Road linear sources

Table 82.2 Traffic volumes/road/day

Road	Road type on ENVI-met	Traffic volume (Veh/d)	Public transport (Veh/d)
1a. Via Bologna—P.zza Sofia	Road at urban fringe	23,200	620
1b. Via Bologna—L. Gottardo	Road at urban fringe	21,000	400
1c. Via Bologna	Road at urban fringe	21,000	540
2. Via Cravero	Inner road	5000	100
3. Via Pergolesi	Inner road	5000	100
4. Corso Taranto	Sub-urban road	14,000	115
5. Via Botticelli	Road at urban fringe	21,000	170
6. Corso Regio Parco	Sub-urban road	17,000	–
7. Via Gottardo	Inner road	5000	140
8a. Minor roads (1 lane)	Inner road	2100	–
8b. Minor roads (2 lanes)	Inner road	2100	–

between Via Bologna and Via Pergolesi, while in CW *E*, higher pollution levels are monitored at the intersection of via Maddalene, via Sempione, and via Bologna. The PM values were usually higher at main street intersections. As for AT and RH, the values recorded are partially higher than those officially monitored. More precisely, between 2 and 3 P.M., 11 °C (AT) and 17% (RH) was recorded by ARPA, compared to 15 °C and 20% respectively acquired by the devices on average.

82.3.2 Results from EMS

PM 2.5 and PM 10 concentration peaks were present at 7:00 A.M., while at 2:00 pm and 3:00 P.M., slightly lower values resulted from EMS compared to the ones acquired from the devices (Fig. 82.6). However, the major criticalities were present in correspondence with the main traffic sources, namely Corso Taranto, Via Botticelli, and Via Bologna. In the first, pollutants were prevented from removal by the building curtain in the north direction (considering the prevalent direction of the wind on that day), while in the second and the third, the traffic volume was much higher than in all other roads. One can still highlight how pollutants are generally lower in inner areas, where the traffic is generally lower or absent and the amount of greenery is higher.

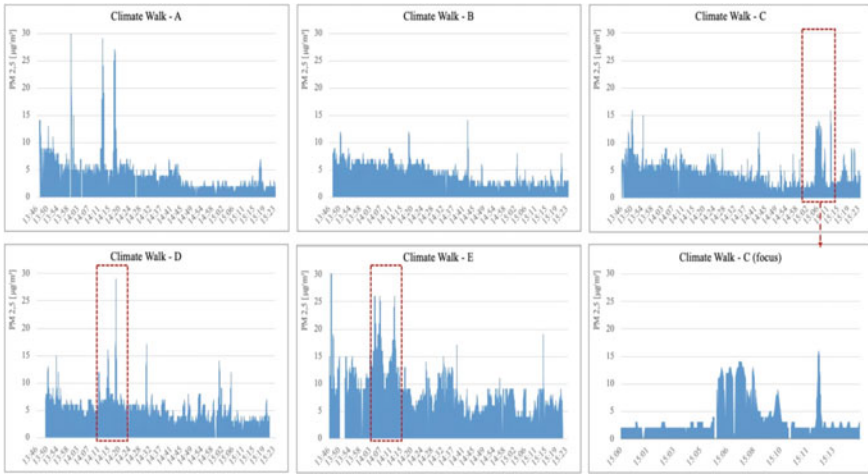


Fig. 82.5 PM2.5 values from different climate walks and a focus on path C. In the red boxes time-steps at crossroads with Via Bologna

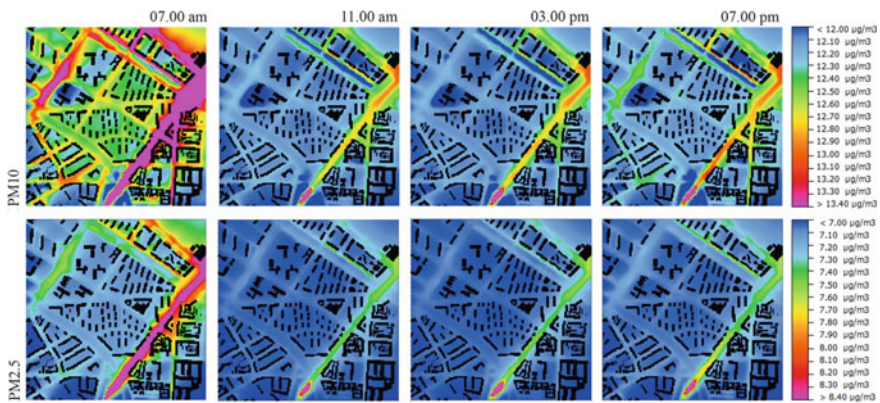


Fig. 82.6 PM10 and PM2.5 concentration at 7:00 A.M., 11:00 A.M., 3:00 P.M., and 7:00 P.M.

82.4 Discussion

Constant development in computational abilities has been allowing more advanced approaches for microclimate analysis and modelling, emphasising its high capacity of solving complex phenomena and nonlinearity of urban climate systems (Liu et al. 2020). Indeed, EMS makes it possible to analyse EPs over a relatively wide area, also predicting the microclimate conditions under different planning scenarios (Bartese-saghi Koc et al. 2018). While data coming from sensors point out values that are

valid for a certain path (if they are dynamic sensors, as in our case) or a single point in the space (if they are static ones), relative to a specific narrow time, EMS offers a more comprehensive overview on several EPs, describing trend and pattern throughout a type-day with a higher space resolution.

The results coming from ES and EMS are compared in a visualisation matrix including the data coming from the official meteorological urban station (Fig. 82.7).

Average PM 2.5 and 10 values by ES were very similar to the EMS outputs, although in certain areas, the values acquired by ES were slightly higher. However, in both cases, we can still assume a certain correspondence between peak values and traffic, especially at the intersections between Via Bologna and minor roads. Daily urban average values provided by the ARPA station were actually higher (28 $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$ for PM 10 and 19 $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$ for PM 2.5), but they do not allow for any high-resolution information and further in-depth considerations. Specifically, acquisition by the devices could be considered more accurate as they capture traffic-related

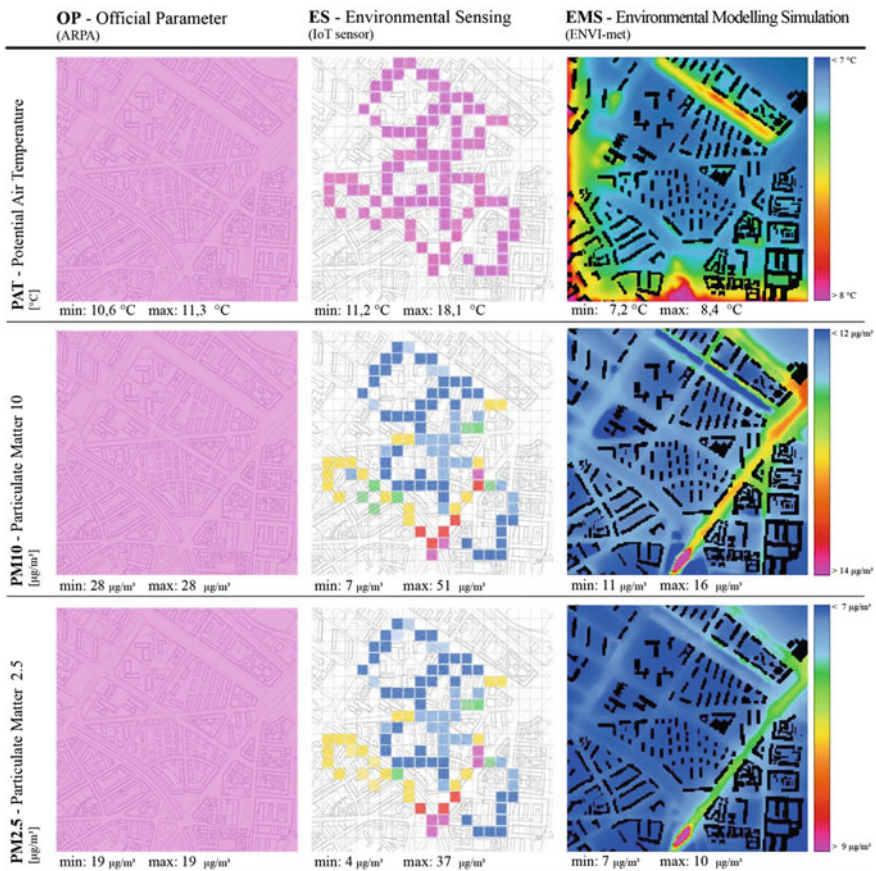


Fig. 82.7 Visualisation matrix at 3:00 P.M

instant conditions, while the simulation outputs rather highlight a certain trend, as they are based on traffic volume approximations. In these terms, sensors highlighted a higher PM concentration in some crossroads.

The research is burdened by several constraints. The simulation timing didn't allow us to model the area with a greater resolution. Although the main pollution sources are related to traffic, modelling other sources could have affected the total PM concentrations and the distribution pattern, as they finally account for ~ 15% of the total PM in November (Fig. 82.2). Besides, we could not force the wind speed and direction (apart from injecting initial values), as this would have required 30-min interval data. This may have affected the PM distribution and concentration, especially if we consider that the simulation day was characterised by highly variable wind speed and direction. As for the ES, we had to clean data, as some outliers were present. Finally, although necessary for data sampling and processing information, data acquired were overabundant, thus hard to manage.

82.5 Conclusions

The aim of the paper was to compare the results of an on-field measurement campaign with modelling and simulating, towards a site-specific assessment of the environmental quality in a real district. The originality of this research lays on performing an environmental assessment by combining ES and EMS, in mutual support for a comprehensive overview on several EPs. Both approaches “fed” from a CS experience, which is also meant to have a major role in sensibilising people towards more pro-environmental consciousness. The findings may encourage the extension of a network of sensors for a more accurate analysis of the urban environment conditions over time and space. This is especially true if we imagined a distributed sensor network for EPs and traffic monitoring, to be spread all over the city in parallel with respect to the official meteorological stations, supported by a proper IoT infrastructure. Indeed, these only provide hour data on a few EPs and a daily average values on PM concentration, which may actually strongly vary from one point of the city to another and cannot highlight any site-specific distribution pattern.

On the other hand, the on-site survey and acquired data were crucial for EMS. In this perspective, EMS could count on real-world high-resolution data, which may turn into a robust environmental time-series and “labelled” environmental conditions (i.e. hot summer day, rainy autumn day, dry spring day, etc.) for scenario assessment, design, and validation. This may finally lead to more and more accurate models, depending on-site-specific boundary conditions forcing. The finding may encourage expanding EMS to the whole city too, by discretizing the urban area to optimise the computational timing but still providing a space-time resolution allowing micro-urban scale analysis. Apart from the limitations described, EMS, supported by ES, plays a major role in knowing, thus representing input data to manage urban environmental conditions that may threaten health. Combining the approaches would finally lead to setting digital worlds for real cities, with a deeply site-specific perspective at

the district scale, where the effects of policies, personal choices and habits, projects, anthropogenic processes, patterns of use are much more immediately visible and correlatable to human health and well-being.

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