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Eugenio Arbizzani · Eliana Cangelli ·  
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# Technological Imagination in the Green and Digital Transition

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 Springer

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# Contents

<b>1</b>	<b>From a Liquid Society, Through Technological Imagination, to Beyond the Knowledge Society</b> .....	<b>1</b>
	Anna Maria Giovenale	
<b>2</b>	<b>Opening Lecture: Digital Spaces and the Material Culture</b> .....	<b>11</b>
	Pietro Montani	
<b>Part I Session   Innovation</b>		
<b>3</b>	<b>Innovation for the Digitization Process of the AECO Sector</b> .....	<b>21</b>
	Fabrizio Cumo	
<b>4</b>	<b>The Digital Revolution and the Art of Co-creation</b> .....	<b>27</b>
	Maurizio Talamo	
<b>5</b>	<b>Toward a New Humanism of Technological Innovation in Design of the Built Environment</b> .....	<b>37</b>
	Spartaco Paris	
<b>6</b>	<b>A BIM-Based Approach to Energy Analysis of Existing Buildings in the Italian Context</b> .....	<b>47</b>
	Marco Morini, Francesca Caffari, Nicolandrea Calabrese, and Giulia Centi	
<b>7</b>	<b>Short-Term Wind Speed Forecasting Model Using Hybrid Neural Networks and Wavelet Packet Decomposition</b> .....	<b>57</b>
	Adel Lakzadeh, Mohammad Hassani, Azim Heydari, Farshid Keynia, Daniele Groppi, and Davide Astiaso Garcia	
<b>8</b>	<b>COGNIBUILD: Cognitive Digital Twin Framework for Advanced Building Management and Predictive Maintenance</b> .....	<b>69</b>
	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 m<sup>2</sup> (800 m × 800 m).

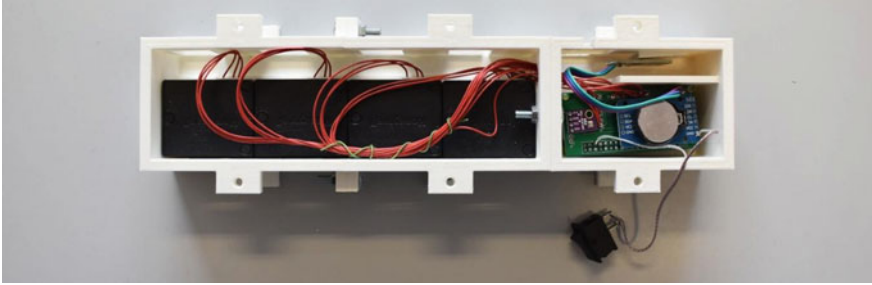
### 82.2.1 *A Citizen-Science Experience for Environmental Sensing*

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-met<sup>1</sup> 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 Piedmont<sup>2</sup> 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) ( $^{\circ}\text{C}$ ) 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,<sup>3</sup> number of passages throughout the day according to specific hour intervals<sup>4</sup> and real-time data on bus lines.<sup>5</sup>

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.

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<sup>1</sup> Developed by M. Bruse (ENVI-met GmbH, Essen, Germany).

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

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

<sup>4</sup> [https://www.gtt.to.it/cms/risorse/urbana/intervalli\\_sito.pdf](https://www.gtt.to.it/cms/risorse/urbana/intervalli_sito.pdf).

<sup>5</sup> <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 <sup>2</sup> )
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

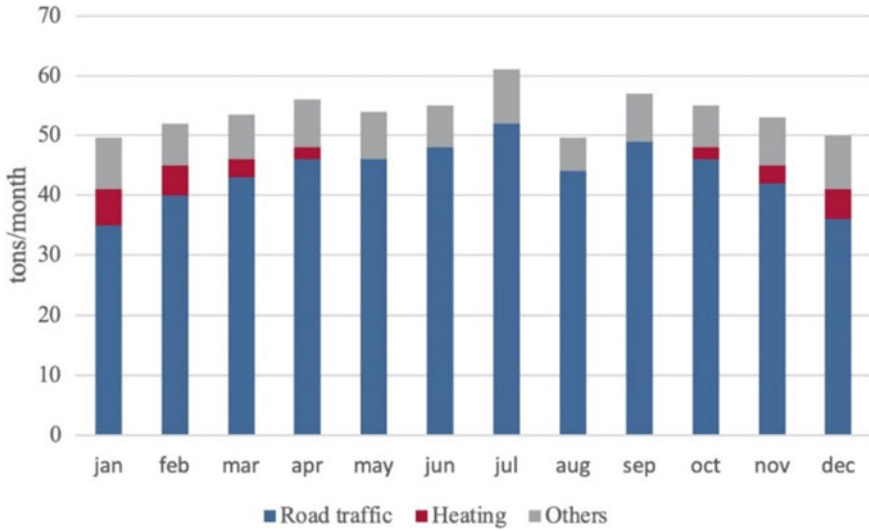


Fig. 82.3 PM 10 emission profile in Turin. Based on ARPA 2019

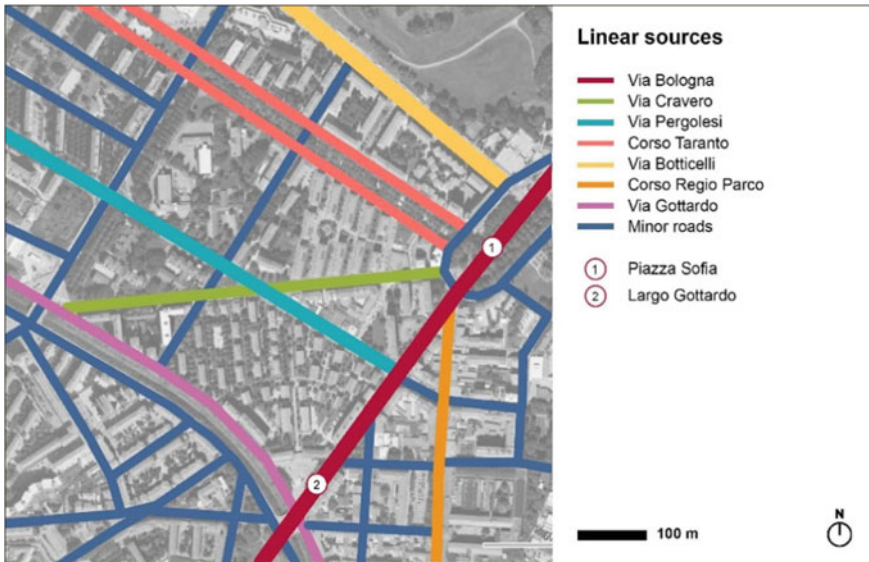


Fig. 82.4 Road linear sources



**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.

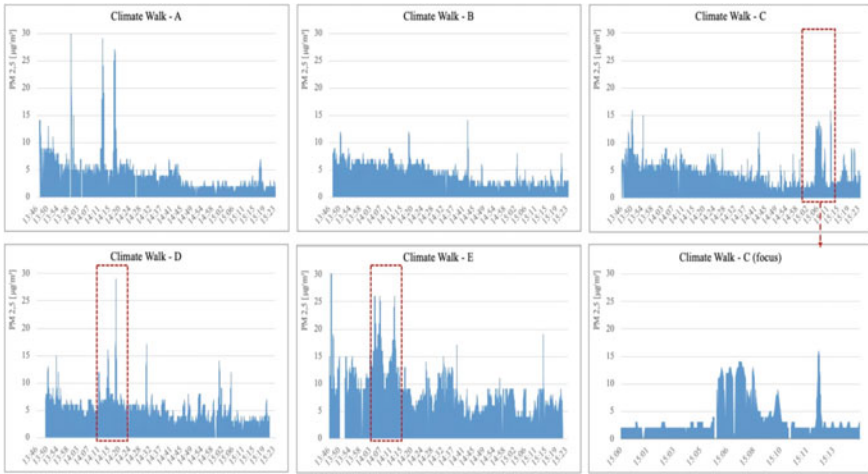


Fig. 82.5 PM2.5 values from different climate walks and a focus on path C. In the red boxes time-steps at crossroads with Via Bologna

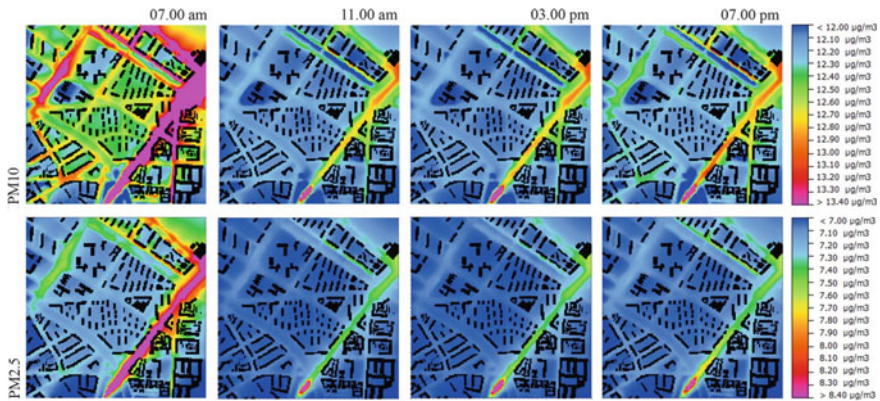


Fig. 82.6 PM10 and PM2.5 concentration at 7:00 A.M., 11:00 A.M., 3:00 P.M., and 7:00 P.M.

### 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

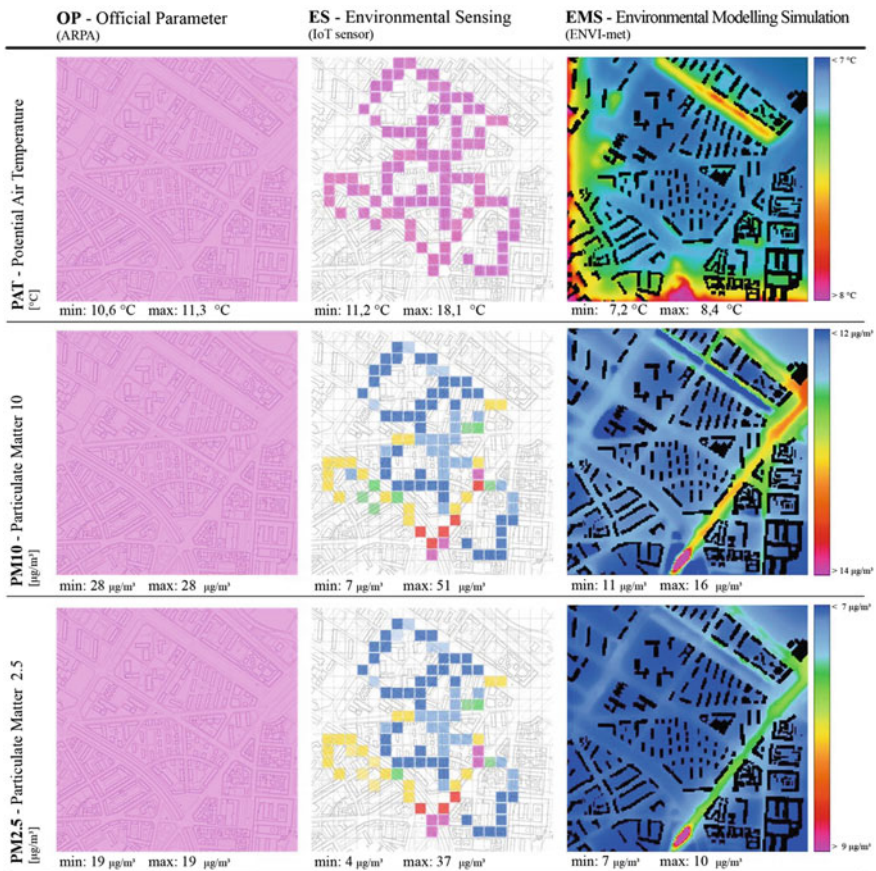


Fig. 82.7 Visualisation matrix at 3:00 P.M

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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