

From Heritage to Territorial Governance: Integrating Housing, Tourism and Greening in Historical Cities

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Abstract

Historic cities are increasingly expected to combine tourism-led economic development, environmental transition and housing affordability. However, these objectives are generally pursued through sectoral policies and planning instruments operating at different institutional and territorial scales, producing fragmented governance and reinforcing socio-spatial inequalities. In contexts affected by overtourism, urban greening and heritage enhancement contribute to increasing urban attractiveness and real estate values, while the expansion of short-term rentals accelerates residential displacement and gentrification, undermining affordable and social housing policies.

This paper argues that these dynamics should be understood not merely as market failures but as the outcome of a mismatch between the spatial scale of contemporary urban processes and the governance scale of existing planning instruments. Drawing on the case of Florence, the paper discusses different planning instruments and governance paradigms within the frame of local urban policies and plans: the UNESCO Management Plan represents an integrated framework for coordinating heritage conservation, tourism management and urban quality within the World Heritage Site, yet its action remains constrained by the boundaries of the historic UNESCO Centre, while housing and real estate dynamics increasingly unfold at the metropolitan scale. The Green Management Plan is a purely operational instrument toward green transition and conversely, the proposed Arno River Contract is explored as a territorial governance framework capable of integrating environmental transition, housing and tourism policies through a multi level and multi-stakeholder approach extending beyond the UNESCO perimeter.

Achieving socially just and environmentally sustainable historic cities requires a shift from heritage-centered management towards integrated territorial governance capable of addressing tourism, greening and housing as interdependent dimensions of urban development.

Keywords

Historic cities; overtourism; housing affordability; social housing; urban greening; UNESCO Management Plan; River Contract; territorial governance.