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# SUM MAR IES!

## THE PARADOXES OF URBAN REGENERATION BETWEEN ECO-GENTRIFICATION AND GREEN SACRIFICE ZONES

### CASE STUDY FROM THE CITY OF ROME

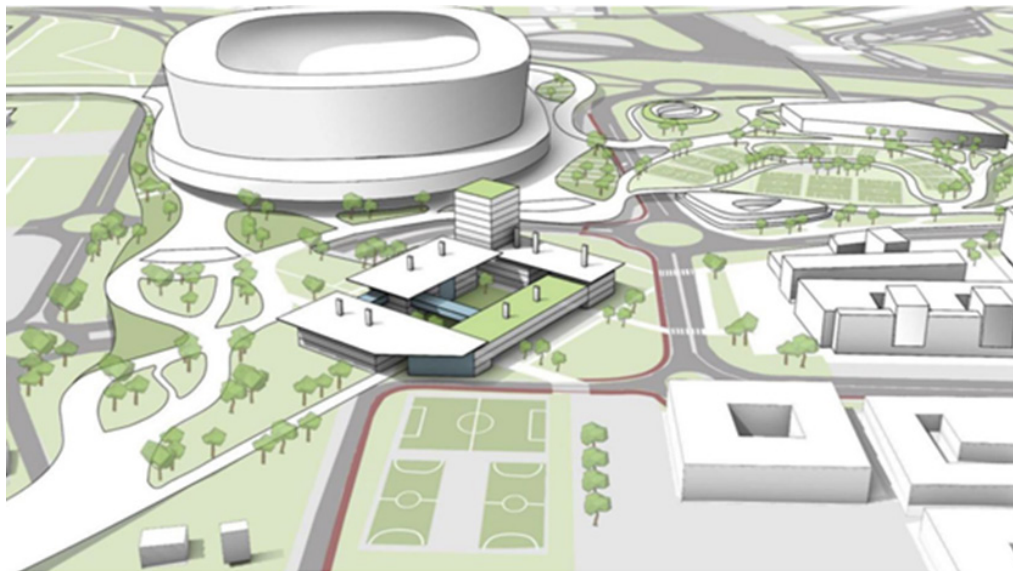
Lucrezia Morgante

## Urbaria Summary 2025/2

### The paradoxes of Urban Regeneration between Eco-Gentrification and Green Sacrifice Zones

#### A case study from the City of Rome

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*Image: Rome Technopole Headquarters. Technical-economic feasibility project*

- This article explores two potential scenarios for the urban transformation of the Pietralata neighbourhood in Rome, reflecting on the extreme consequences of the impacts associated with such change. The findings reveal that, although green sacrifice zones and gentrification may seem like antithetical outcomes, both can have their roots in underregulated urban regeneration.
- Large-scale works and the concentration of multiple projects within a single area are two factors that can hinder the sustainability of regeneration efforts, limiting their long-term environmental, economic, social, and spatial benefits.
- Context-sensitive policy measures are needed to prevent paradoxical outcomes that undermine the original goals of regeneration processes.

## Introduction

Urban regeneration is considered a main tool for sustainable urban development. It is an integrated and multidimensional process that aims to transform abandoned areas by giving them a new identity and thus new social, cultural and economic meanings. However, the scientific debate highlights that regeneration can threaten the political and economic balance of urban agglomerations unless it is mitigated by public policies aimed at balancing socio-spatial inequalities (Couch et al., 2008; Roberts & Sykes; 1999). Social injustices are exacerbated where the needs of vulnerable groups are neglected to prioritise the implementation of green interventions (Anguelovski et al., 2019). Instead, social cohesion, innovation and sustainability must move hand in hand if urban regeneration interventions are to yield widespread, long-term benefits (Roberts & Sykes, 1999).

In this context, this article examines the consequences of unregulated urban regeneration processes through a case study of the Pietralata neighborhood in Rome. This geographical area represents a particularly significant case, because it is the focal point for several development projects, ranging from cultural and research institutions to a healthcare hub and a major project for the construction of a multifunctional stadium for the AS Roma Football Team. Through a discourse analysis, the study identifies the risks and opportunities associated with the urban transformation plan and proposes policy recommendations to address emerging challenges.

## The paradoxes of urban regeneration

Among the contradictory effects of regeneration are gentrification, green sacrifice zones and Locally Unwanted Land Uses (LULUs).

In 1964, Ruth Glass coined the term “**gentrification**” in her book *London: Aspects of Change*. Gentrification is a neighbourhood-scale class transition occurring in cities transitioning into a post-industrial economy. In the process, working-class residents are displaced and replaced by the middle class (gentry).

The concept of gentrification has evolved significantly since its original formulation by Ruth Glass in 1964. Over time, various interpretations have emerged to capture the shifting dynamics of the phenomenon. Among these, terms such as green gentrification (Gould & Lewis, 2012; Newman, 2011), environmental gentrification (Sieg et al., 2004), eco-gentrification, and ecological gentrification (Dooling, 2009) have been used. While these terms all refer to the socio-spatial impacts of implementing green and blue infrastructure, each emphasises distinct aspects of the process (Quinton & Nesbitt, 2024).

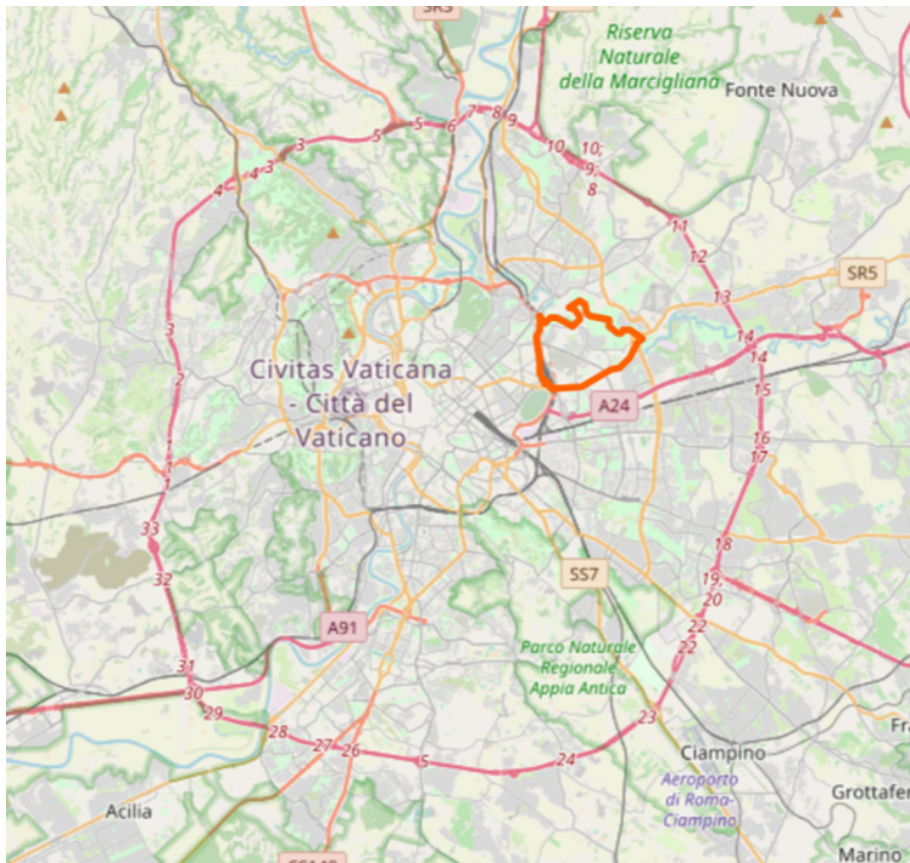
Although scientific literature has long focused on the effects of the sustainable development model in areas affected by gentrification processes, it has devoted few resources to the analysis of socio-spatial contexts that remain excluded from the phenomenon (Dooling, 2009).

In this regard, Anguelovski and Connolly (2024) talk about green sacrifice zones.

**Green sacrifice zones** are produced by the concentration of environmental hazards in areas where vulnerable groups (low-income or ethnic minorities) live. Residents of green sacrifice zones are subject to environmental injustice, which denies them the right to enjoy a healthy environment, also referred to as the «right to landscape» (Scott & Smith, 2017).

Particular attention must be paid to large-scale projects, as they can be considered Locally Unwanted Land Use (LULU) and, consequently, be rejected by residents (Popper, 1983; Popper, 1985). These projects can trigger gentrification processes, such as stadium-led gentrification (Lauermann, 2023), that have similar features to those associated with the implementation of green and blue infrastructure.

## The context of Pietralata



Pietralata is a neighbourhood that has undergone profound changes in the course of history: initially a large farmstead in the Agro Romano, then a *Borgata* (Roman suburb) and finally a working-class district of the city of Rome (Camarda, 2007).

The first significant urban transformation of the neighbourhood occurred under Mussolini, who was responsible for large-scale interventions and the forced relocation of entire families from the historic centre of Rome to Pietralata. During this period, the area took on the characteristics of a *Borgata*, marked by the absence of basic hygienic, transport, and educational

services, and frequently affected by flooding from the nearby Aniene River. Although living conditions have gradually improved due to infrastructural developments, residents' needs have been overlooked by public administrations and the neighbourhood has suffered from a chronic lack of funding, resulting in long-term marginalisation.

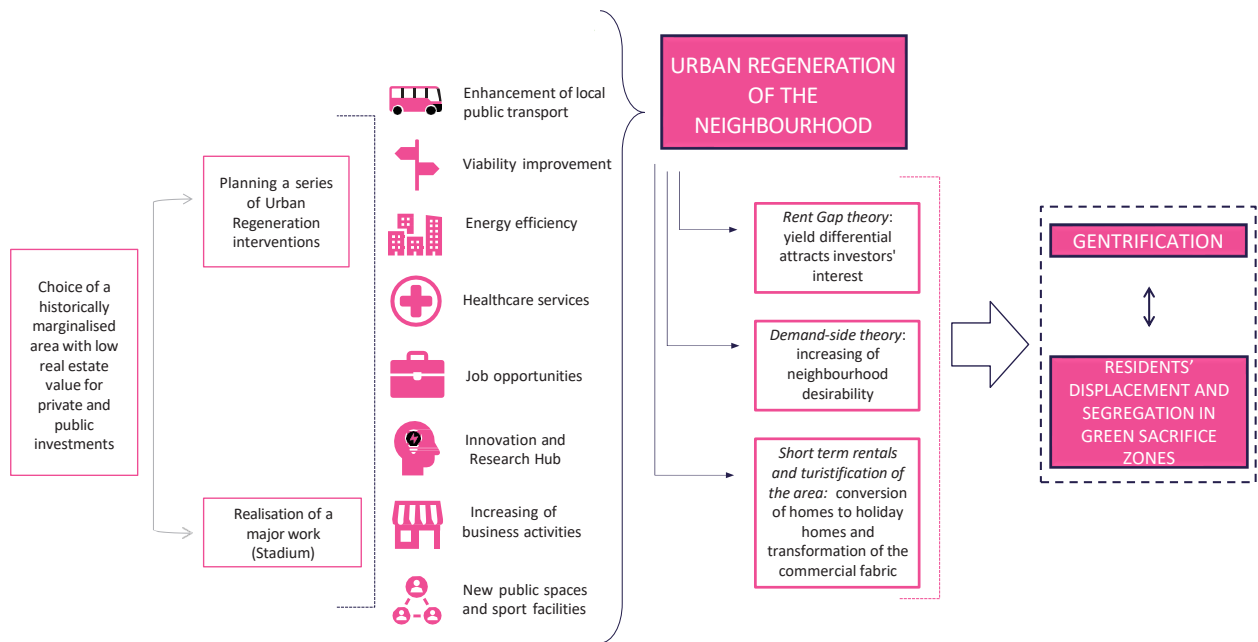
The area is currently at the centre of a long-awaited regeneration plan, which could reintegrate Pietralata into the urban fabric of Rome. Thanks to the National Recovery and Resilience Plan 2021–2026 (NRRP), part of the Next Generation EU programme, the area has benefited from public investment aimed at urban regeneration. These funds have also attracted private investors and fostered the development of public-private partnerships. The following projects are the result of these investments:

- *Rome Technopole*: a regional ecosystem aimed at connecting knowledge and business institutions to establish a research hub in Lazio Region. The Technopole will host a dense network of universities, research organisations, companies, public administrations and industrial groups.
- *Istat Headquarters*: a “city of statistics”, including offices, library, training rooms, press room and conference centre.
- *Umberto I Polyclinic*: the relocation of the Umberto I healthcare hub to the Pietralata district.
- *Biotechnology Centre, Student Residence and Sapienza Campus*: new spaces for Sapienza University will be created in Pietralata neighbourhood.
- *Defense RFI/FS (Tiburtina Directional Centre)*: Tiburtina station, a fundamental traffic junction for the Pietralata district, is at the centre of a Masterplan that aims to give life to the “Roman Défense”, a district of skyscrapers with offices, shopping centres, hotels and apartment blocks.
- *Centre of Excellence Services for Disabled and Family House*: the Centre is currently under construction and will consist of four buildings.
- *AS Roma Stadium*: A multifunctional facility that will host up to 60.000 people.

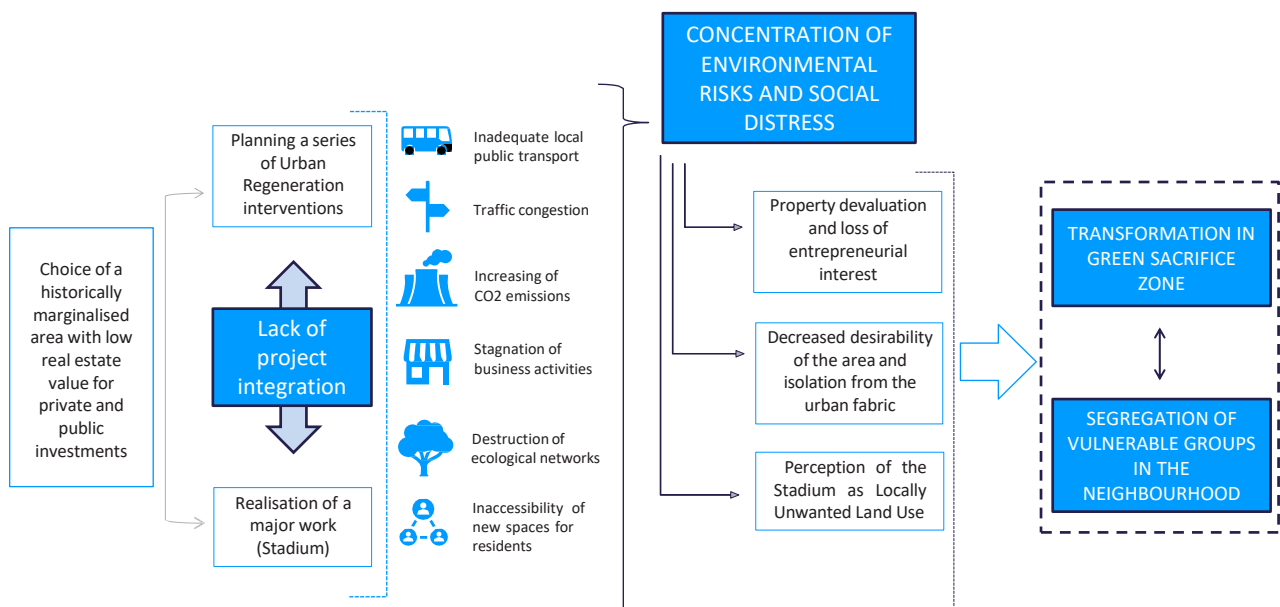
## Results: two scenarios

Two antithetical scenarios have been developed to show risks and opportunities related to the Pietralata regeneration plan.

In the first scenario, the Stadium proves to be environmentally sustainable and, together with the other works, contributes to the enhancement of the district and its integration into the urban context of Rome. In the first phase, it is assumed that residents are the main beneficiaries of the neighbourhood transformation, but the latent criticalities of this urban transformation gradually start to emerge. As historical residents move to other areas, homes are purchased by more affluent dwellers, attracted by a vibrant district representing a new status symbol. The coexistence of the multifunctional stadium with the other projects results in the combination of stadium-led gentrification effects with those of green gentrification.



In the second scenario, the Stadium generates a series of negative impacts that have a knock-on effect on the entire area, causing issues for residents, workers and patients at the hospital, without guaranteeing any compensatory measures for them. Negative externalities are mainly caused by the lack of integration among the projects, the absence of housing regulation policies and the exclusion of residents from the planning process.





These scenarios represent the extreme points between which the future of Pietralata may fluctuate, depending on the policy choices that will follow the urban regeneration process.

Given the administrative, social, spatial and economic context of the neighbourhood and based on literature insights, my research identifies policy strategies to counteract the negative effects of urban regeneration. The policy measures have the following objectives: decommodification of housing; detouristification; increasing social housing options; improving the road system; enhancing social inclusion; fostering citizens' participation.

### **Relevance for the Finnish Context: Sustainable Urban Development and the Welfare State**

Nordic countries have resisted the spread of gentrification processes thanks to their social-democratic welfare model that includes housing policies (e.g. social mixing strategies), residents' inclusion in the planning (*genius loci*) and a general attention to social sustainability issues (Camerata, 2009; Leino et al, 2024; Sepe, 2010). However, these countries are shifting towards a development model based on the sustainability paradigm, which brings with it new challenges. Leino, Wallin and Laine (2024) warn that this is causing eco-segregation in Finnish cities such as Tampere, undermining social equity principles and causing the displacement of historical residents.

Cities are replacing national regulation with market-oriented policy strategies, which bring with them the risks of paradoxical outcomes, as mentioned in the case of Rome. The sustainable development consequences are overlooked in the Nordic context and are not included in the political debate (Leino et al, 2022), increasing the risk of unintended counter effects connected to regeneration processes. Therefore, it is essential to follow up on this research by developing monitoring plans to detect early signs of ecogentrification risk. Policy strategies should be informed by geographically spread experiences, while being continuously adapted to the peculiarity of each context.

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