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# COMMODIFICATION OF PLACE

A COMPARATIVE CASE ANALYSIS OF  
THE LINK BETWEEN OVERTOURISM  
AND GENTRIFICATION IN FLORENCE,  
ITALY AND BOSTON, USA



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The information, analyses, and conclusions set forth are those of the author and do not necessarily indicate concurrence by Westfield State University, The American University of Florence, the city of Boston, and the Municipality of Florence.



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## **Abbreviations**

**CIN** – Codice Identificativo Nazionale [National Identification Code]

**EEA** – European Economic Area

**EU** – European Union

**HUL** – Historic Urban Landscape(s)

**SMI** – Social Media Influencer

**STR** – Short Term Rental(s)

**TAR** – Tribunale Amministrativo Regionale [Regional Administrative Court]

**UN** – United Nations

**UNESCO** – United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organisation

**UNWTO** – United Nations World Tourism Organisation

**WUF** – World Urban Forum

## Executive Summary

There is a strong connection between overtourism and gentrification. As cities have tried to attract more visitors to boost the economy, they have also had to contend with hordes of people pushing out locals and driving up rents. This project examines how overtourism and gentrification are linked in Florence, Italy and Boston, USA as well as their progenitors.

Both cities have experienced heavy levels of gentrification, albeit for different reasons. Florence has had to contend with travel numbers that match and even supersede pre-pandemic levels. In addition, the city has engaged in a back and forth with the regional courts and national government on one side and the municipality on the other trying to battle the increase in short-term rentals and their associated consequences. These include modern digital lockboxes on old building façades and increasing rental rates that are pushing locals and natives farther out from the city centre.

In Boston, decades of a thriving economy along with top tier higher education and healthcare and a rapidly growing technology sector have made living in the city unsustainably expensive. Due to the small size of Massachusetts, the housing crisis is rippling out across the entire Commonwealth. Through the years, more and more communities of colour have been displaced in neighbourhoods like Jamaica Plain and West Roxbury. City and state officials have attempted to counteract some of these forces with new affordable housing measures but have received pushback from landlords and corporations. Boston has been named numerous times as one of the most expensive American cities to reside in, outranking both New York City and Los Angeles.

One of the biggest drivers of touristic gentrification in the contemporary era has been the social media influencer. These individuals have appeared in dozens of cities around the world broadcasting live and attracting visitors at an astonishing rate. This project will do a deep dive into the link between these fascinating phenomena.

## Introduction

In a 2008 document published by UN-HABITAT entitled “Best Practices on Social Sustainability in Historic Districts,” it was stated that “Restoration and conservation has aimed at revitalizing a given geographical area for both residential housing and commercial activity... Ensuring that local residents, or business owners, or both benefit directly from [restoration and conservation] fosters social inclusion; as do measures set up to counter gentrification (Best Practices...5).” The purpose of the document was to publish case studies of superior examples of historical restoration and sustainability. Several years later during the 2012 WUF in Naples, then Director-General of UNESCO, Irina Bokova, had this to say about the importance of the preservation of HUL’s, “tangible and intangible heritage are sources of social cohesion, factors of diversity and drivers of creativity, innovation and urban regeneration – we must do more to harness this power (Haraguchi, 2).” The WUF was created in 2001 by the UN in an effort to address rapid urbanisation around the world and how to address it in a sustainable manner.

Ever since Rafat Ali first coined the term “overtourism” in an article in the online travel publication *Skift*, the descriptor has been embraced by academics, writers, activists, and municipalities around the world to describe the state of areas experiencing levels of tourism that place the region, its residents, its businesses, its monuments, and its governments under very heavy strain. Despite some calling it a buzzword, overtourism has caused municipalities, residents, and governments to rethink destination management philosophies due to challenges with sustainability, environmental degradation, tourist deaths, and sky-rocketing prices that significantly increase the cost-of-living to locals. Overtourism has gained attention all over the world as destinations struggle with it. For example, in Bali, the beaches are suffering from plastic pollution and rapid, unchecked development which is destroying the natural landscape. According to UNWTO, in 2018, Europe saw an increase in tourism by 6% (UNWTO, 2019). In Florence, Phelan (2018), writing for the online newsmagazine, *thelocal.it*, noted that more than 500 residents were removed from downtown apartments to make room for STR’s (e.g. Airbnb, VRBO) over

the course of less than a year.

Meanwhile, in Boston, USA, residents flatly rejected a privately backed bid to host the 2024 Summer Olympics due to the city's inability to handle the throngs of tourists that the event brings (Vaccaro, 2015). The UN's HUL approach, which seeks to increase urban sustainability involved various factions around a city, "the existing structures, the intangible heritage, cultural diversity as well as socio-economic and environmental factors along with local community values (Haraguchi, 5)" is just one such scheme in attempting to understand and address the increasingly dire issue of overtourism and the resulting gentrification that comes with it, largely due to the fact that tourists and locals tend to favour the same urban spaces.

At UNESCO's 1972 General Conference in Paris, during the Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage, the organisation adopted a resolution which included:

*Considering* that parts of the cultural or natural heritage are of outstanding interest and therefore need to be preserved as part of the world heritage of mankind as a whole [and]

*Considering* that, in view of the magnitude and gravity of the new dangers threatening them, it is incumbent on the international community...

to participate in the protection of the cultural and natural heritage...by the granting of collective assistance... (UNESCO, 1972).

One important outcome of this meeting was the resolution to begin the World Heritage Convention that worked with participating states to identify national sites of heritage but also sites that are in danger of decimation or damage due to a variety of mitigating factors. The World Heritage List now has nearly 1000 sites across 153 countries. This indicates that even five decades prior, nations were concerned with the preservation of world heritage sites in the wake of changing tourist patterns and the emergence of a wealthier middle class that had more disposable income to travel. As climate change and gentrification have worsened, along with the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, world



tourism has hit a crisis point for the most popular destinations around the globe<sup>1</sup>.

As the “travel floodgates” have re-opened now that the pandemic has eased, cities are experiencing a return to (and sometimes in excess of) pre-pandemic travel numbers. According to UNTourism, 2024 marked a return to normal tourist arrivals indicating,

Growth is expected to continue throughout 2025, driven by strong demand contributing to the socio-economic development of both mature and emerging destinations. This recalls our immense responsibility as a sector to accelerate transformation, placing people and planet at the center of the development of tourism. (UN Tourism)

The need to preserve spaces of the world cultural and natural heritage is not new, but the urgency has grown over the last several decades. If one includes the response to major world events that have occurred since the end of the pandemic like the 2024 Paris Olympic Games and Taylor Swift’s *The Eras Tour* 2023-2024 concert extravaganza<sup>2</sup>, historic urban centres are facing a potential catastrophic situation if plans aren’t put in place.

This mixed method interdisciplinary project, initiated as a response to a call for proposals from The American University of Florence in 2019, will utilize textual media analysis, stakeholder interviews, and visual and content analysis to examine the link between gentrification and tourism in two unique but similar cities - Florence, Italy and Boston, USA. This research study will examine how governmental and commercial entity’s attempts to remake central city locations, such as the Oltrarno district in Florence and the Seaport district in Boston, into tourist-friendly destinations have contributed to the creation of new forms of mass consumption and overtourism while exacerbating processes of residential and commercial gentrification. By so doing, this research, one of few comparative case studies on tourism gentrification, provides a unique opportunity

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<sup>1</sup> The definition of “cultural heritage” by the UN is more appropriate here than the definition of “natural heritage.” This full definition is in the endnotes.

<sup>2</sup> The Paris Olympics saw record attendance at 9.5 million tickets sold; *The Eras Tour* saw a global attendance figure at 10.6 million (**not** including those who watched the event from outside the venue)

to document different cities' attempts to manage the outcomes associated with the commodification of place and the resulting residential and commercial gentrification. This project will also discuss how each respective city has responded to these issues. As is the case with many social phenomena, there is a typical cycle of tourism-led gentrification:

- *Neighbourhood Appeal:* Unique districts will offer culturally rich experiences and lifestyles that attract tourists and new wealthy residents/investors; Piazza di Santa Croce in Florence or The North End in Boston would be examples; as will be discussed later, social media has been a large contributor to the increase in global touristic gentrification at this level;
- *Demand:* The influx of tourists boosts demand for lodging such as short-term rentals; housing costs balloon as a result;
- *Displacement:* Local residents cannot afford new rents after buildings are rehabilitated and are pushed out; higher end retailers come to the area that are unaffordable to locals; international brands degrade the local colour of the area; the high levels of gentrification in the downtown area of Detroit, Michigan would be an example of all of this;
- *Commodification:* A district becomes branded exclusively for the tourist; areas explode on social media drawing massive crowds; locals revolt;

The connection between Boston and Florence might not immediately seem obvious, however these two municipalities share quite a bit in common. Both are cities of history and antiquity within their respective nations. Boston is quite possibly the most important major city related to the Revolution and the development of early America which includes such landmarks as the site of the Boston Tea Party and Paul Revere's house. Florence is considered the birthplace of the Renaissance with some of the most salient histories in art, architecture, culture, and intellectualism throughout all of Europe. Both cities are known as centres of cultural heritage and education with museums and universities that set the standard for others around the country.

Boston and Florence are also both relatively compact cities known for their

walkability and safety. Boston has a very large Italian and Italian-American population and is also a port city dealing with a rapidly rising sea level and while Florence is 90 kilometers from the port of Livorno, the city has become a very popular excursion site for cruisers who usually only come into the city for the day, engage in patterns of heavy consumption in the city centre, and then leave in the evening. Boston serves as a port of call and origination port for lines such as Holland America and Norwegian, which is also fueling more tourist traffic towards a relatively small area. While both cities have had to deal with these effects, how each city has responded, both leading up to and after the pandemic, are quite different. This project aims to understand the forces that drive these phenomena, the social and economic implications for local communities, and potential solutions to mitigate the adverse effects of gentrification in tourist-heavy regions. The findings will contribute to a deeper understanding of the intricate dynamics at play, offering insights for policymakers, urban planners, educators, and community stakeholders seeking to balance economic growth with social equity.

## Literature Review

The field of travel and tourism studies is interdisciplinary and has been studied extensively across a variety of disciplines including sociology, communication, economics, geography, psychology, and marketing. Contemporary scholarship has especially focused on sustainable tourism and eco-tourism as both travelers become more conscious of their travel, but also as large-scale travel such as the cruise industry act as a drain on the environment. Most scholars agree that overtourism as a concept took hold after Rafat Ali's 2016 article on the travel industry site *Skift* entitled "The Genesis of Overtourism: Why We Came Up With the Term and What's Happened Since" in which the author ruminates on the effects of "over tourism" in Iceland. Of course, that article is almost a decade old at this point and overtourism has now been embraced by a multitude of sectors including academic, business, government, and hospitality.

Tourism, a critical economic facet of the global economy, has long been considered as the harbinger of success for numerous destinations seeking economic development and

long-term prosperity. Tourism, which is derived from the Greek word “Tornos,” meaning (wheel) and the circular movement of people, its interconnected system of government, host communities, operators, and visitors creates a symbiotic relationship essential to the achievement of economic and socio-economic outcomes. Significant research in the last century extol the virtues of the successful outcomes from tourism activities (Song et al., 2012). In tandem, the challenges that tourism poses on host populations have long been studied. Doxey’s irritation index (1975) or “Irridex” is renowned for tracing the life cycle of resident attitudes towards tourism, tourist and related development attitude change toward tourists and tourism development through euphoria (welcoming), apathy (visitors taken for granted), annoyance (saturation point approaching) to antagonism and harm (tourists are the cause of all problems, see the image on page 11). Dogan (1989), identified four commonly held socio-cultural strategies that destinations have primarily engaged in when faced with increasing tourist activities: Adoption (acceptance and promotion of tourist’s cultures), Boundary maintenance (well defined boundary kept between visitors and local culture), Retreatism (society closes off from tourists and revive old traditions and customs), *and* Resistance (aggression is focused against tourists).

Despite the attention to the sociocultural and economic dimensions of tourism and the impacts between tourists and locals, little research has examined the relationship between tourism and gentrification. Much of the gentrification literature focuses on the economic and cultural processes contributing to urban gentrification as well as the impacts of gentrification in tourist cities (Zukin, 1987, Lees, 2000; Ghaffari et al., 2018). Yet, it is only recently that studies have begun to examine tourism's impact on urban gentrification (Gravari-Barbas & Guinand, 2017; Cocola-Gant, 2018). Tourism and gentrification always have coexisted, however. Scholars have long shown how gentrification attracts tourists (Zukin, 1989; Schlichtman & Patch, 2014). Affluent tourists often share similar consumption habits and cultural tastes as gentrifiers which intensify and reinforce land uses and economic development strategies that increase residential and commercial property values. Others have noted that tourism drives gentrification by commodifying public spaces and eroding local commercial activities to attract global capital (Hamnett, 1991;

Judd & Fainstein, 1999). Rolnik (2013) examines the connection between governments creating enclaves of wealth and prosperity while those who cannot afford housing are pushed to the outskirts.

As a result of overtourism, public areas that long term residents utilize for noncommercial and social activities are privatized and remade into tourist-friendly spaces. These spaces are commodified and rebranded to offer authentic experiences, a sense of place, and venues that promote consumption opportunities for tourists. In line with these activities is the replacement of local shops and restaurants that long-term residents rely upon on a day-to-day basis by corporate retail, hospitality, and entertainment venues that cater to middle-class consumers and market to tourists (Gotham, 2005). Overall, the intensification of land uses to create new spaces of consumption for tourists drives up property values and converts existing housing stock into hospitality facilities leading to the displacement of local residents and retail establishments (Logan and Molotoch, 2007).

Lastly, scholars have noted that underpinning these processes of tourism gentrification is the production of narratives and imagery centered on the creation of authentic places and the commodification of local culture for the consumption of tourists and gentrifiers (Ley, 1996). There is a need for a better understanding of the mechanisms underpinning tourism gentrification as well as a need for empirical and comparative studies to evaluate how tourism is remaking the urban fabric of cities like Florence and Boston.

## Overtourism



*Figure 1. Graffito seen in Palma de Mallorca, Mallorca, España, May 2016; Courtesy of Reuters*

The use of culture and historic artefacts to attract visitors to a destination while simultaneously creating income for the host population seems like it should be a logical idea. Many locales rely on the revenue and popularity of tourism to attract visitors to their locations. In fact, having too many visitors might initially seem like a “good problem to have.” Tourism has, after all, long been considered a benign industry in which both tourists and locals win via the economic influx. Tourism can also represent wealth on the part of the participants; leisure travel typically involves disposable income, especially when considering international travel. These types of visitors can create a robust economic boon to certain areas, especially as “...extensive empirical analyses show how the current, dramatic reorganisation of socioeconomic structures is being marked by the emergence of a growing class of super-elites (New York Times 2005; Time 2006, qtd. in Thurlow and Jaworski, 2012).” This theory then points to the fact that this class should provide wealth for destinations.

The problem, however, is that this usage has been elevated to an absolute extreme resulting in a commodification of the goods and services offered whereby cultural heritage is reduced simply to the status of artefact traded at the whims of capitalism and neoliberal

policies. This has necessitated a better understanding of the value exchange that is created by such transactions and what effects this has on both the host population as well as the host locality itself (the cultural resources, nature, the urban environment, etc). Couple this with Italy's historically progressive rules surrounding foreign investment<sup>3</sup> in real estate which results in a city centre that becomes a cacophony of short-term rentals owned by landlords who may not even be Italian or reside in Italy.

While it can be initially tempting to shove most of the recent uptick in travel flows as simply a fault of the COVID-19 pandemic, overtourism was becoming an issue long before then. The photo in Figure 1 was featured in a 2016 Reuters article about tourism concerns as Iceland emerged from the 2008 financial crisis when tourist numbers ballooned to over 1.5 million visitors for a national population of 350,000. This illustrates the difficulty that municipalities have in balancing the issues of overtourism with the need for economic stimulus. According to a recent Bloomberg article, Iceland is expected to welcome 2.6 million visitors in 2026 (Sigurdardottir, 2025). The graffito in the image in Figure 1 was seen in Mallorca, Spain which also had been dealing with trying to welcome visitors without putting a strain on resources for residents. As stated in the article, "In some countries, [tourist flow mismanagement] can lead to a decline in tourism as a sustainable framework is never put into place for coping with the economic, environmental, and sociocultural effects of tourism. The impact on residents cannot be understated either... with tourism accounting for 12 percent of economic output and 16 percent of jobs, Spain can ill afford a backlash (White)." What is also interesting about this article is the fact that tourists were specifically traveling to Spain over other destinations that are perceived to be more "dangerous" or susceptible to civil strife like Egypt or Tunisia.

Data collection and analysis can and have been a useful way to study the link between gentrification and overtourism, but textual analysis and interviews can be an untapped resource for examining what is exactly happening "on the ground" and how residents are being affected by it. Florence's historic center has been described as a

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<sup>3</sup> Foreigners can typically buy real estate in Italy if their country has a reciprocal agreement (e.g. US, UK) and it's even easier for residents of other EU/EEA member states



gentrified urban island where low-income residents are replaced by short term rental owners and wealthy owners who can afford the high rent. Interviews with residents and the Mayor of Boston will appear later in this project.

As will be discussed later, gentrification is not always directly related to tourism, per se. Gentrification in Boston has taken alternately insidious form due to Boston's historically racist past, "After years of delay, school desegregation and court-ordered busing finally came to Boston in September, 1974. Even for those who had predicted a strong resistance, the violence and badly racist reaction that busing provoked was surprising (Massey, 37)." The Boston busing crisis was a period of heavy civil unrest during the 1970's as white residents in Boston suburbs violently reacted against the mandatory busing of Black students into their schools. Since then, many communities of colour have been completely displaced and further racist incidents have tarnished the city's reputation in an otherwise progressive state.

One notable incident occurred in 2017 when a fan at the Boston Red Sox's baseball game against the Baltimore Orioles used the "n-word" against centre-fielder Adam Jones and hurled a bag of peanuts at his person. This racist reputation has essentially led to segregation in Boston between wealthy areas like Back Bay and lower income areas like Roxbury, Hyde Park, or Everett. This has ultimately caused a wider crisis for residency placing it in the top five of the most expensive cities to live in. Due to Massachusetts' small size in area and population, this has a rippling effect throughout the entire state.

In Florence, touristic gentrification has driven out residential life and traditional urban activities resulting in a commodified experience for tourists. Long-term residents have left the historic city center for suburbs and satellite towns to take advantage of affordable housing and to avoid problems created by the significant influx of tourists in a relatively small area. These problems include lack of reliable public transportation or private car access within the city center, a high density of people in public spaces, and cultural clashes with tourists who are seen as disrespectful of Florence's cultural heritage when they leave their trash on church steps after a picnic.

In addition, the rapid appearance of digital keycode boxes on historic buildings

have indicated a clash of the old with the new. In many cases, these keycode boxes indicate the presence of *a* (or many) short term rental(s) in that building. With the keycode, the landlord or owner doesn't have to be physically present in Florence (or Italy or even Europe for that matter) and can send the instructions to the visitor via WhatsApp. This means that these buildings full of short-term rentals create a transient population in the city centre that makes the Centro Storico feel more like 'Disneyland' than a city of antiquity. The image shown in Figure 2 and in Appendix A are typical examples. Note that in the images in Appendix A, these digital boxes come in many shapes and sizes and the images suggest a strong variety of these rentals. What is even more troubling is that these digital keypads are seen throughout the entire metropolitan area.

As will be stated later in this report, it can be seen that much of the influence of tourist-related gentrification comes from social media apps like Airbnb, VRBO, and TikTok, much like Uber and Lyft have impacted urban mobility [Uber in Italy is used more like a private car service for pre-booking licensed taxis or luxury cars rather than the standard rideshare service with private drivers].

Residents also have had to contend with tour operators using large megaphones and speakers such as that seen in Figure 3 which are a nuisance.



*Figure 2. Example of a digital keycode box beneath the traditional doorbell; Photo courtesy of the author.*

In a November 2024 New York Times article on the concerns of tourism in Florence, it was reported that, “The data that we always remember is that 95 percent of the tourist presence in Florence is concentrated in five square kilometers, which are those that suffer the most from tourist pressure.” Jacopo Vicini, Florence’s councilor for economic development and tourism [Assessore Deleghe a Sviluppo economico, Turismo, Fiere e Congressi], said in a statement, “...Florence can be attractive, but above all [must be] livable for residents (McLanahan, Sect. C, Pg 7).” It should also be mentioned that for a city of less than 400,000 persons, Florence had to contend with tourist numbers in 2023 that reached almost nine million visitors with another 1.5-million-day visitors (e.g. cruise ships). In the first nine months of 2024, Florence saw 7.8 million visitors. While Florentines are certainly appreciative of the interest, this level of tourism without strong countermeasures or flow management is unsustainable and will eventually lead to revolt by locals. An interview with The American University of Florence Hospitality graduate student Emily Wrzos was indicative, “I was recently walking home, and I saw graffiti on a wall that said “Tourists go home!” in multiple areas. It made me feel a bit apprehensive to be an American here (Wrzos).”



*Figure 3. Tour Guide holding loudspeaker; courtesy of lookphotos.com*

Gentrification also has caused shifts in the commercial enterprises in and around the historical centers of Florence **and** Boston. Grocery stores and open-air markets face

soaring rents or are charged with being “incongruous and inconsistent” with the historic and artistic character of the city center and are forced out. Similarly, pharmacies, book shops, cinemas, and literary cafes are being replaced by luxury shops, retail chains, and franchise shops appealing to tourist shoppers. Figure 4 shows a Benetton shop in central Florence, highlighting how this Italian company, despite its global reach, has adopted the imported “Black Friday” or “Black Week” marketing tradition from the United States<sup>4</sup>. Appendix B located at the end of this document offers more evidence of the invasion of foreign brands which have swiftly crept into various parts of the city. Locals were particularly incensed to see Starbucks come to Florence in what is largely regarded as an important site of Italian coffee culture.



*Figure 4. A Benetton in Florence advertising a "Black Week" sale; Photo courtesy of the author.*

In Boston, gentrification has been seen as anti-local economic development but not necessarily related to mass tourism. Boston is part of what is known as a Metropolitan Statistical Area [MSA] that includes the downtown (comparable to a European “city

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<sup>4</sup> Black Friday is the day after the US Thanksgiving in which consumers have historically engaged in pre-holiday shopping; the term was coined by Philadelphia police to describe the throngs of shoppers that appear. It is also referred to this way as it is when shopkeepers come back into the “black” with profits.

centre”) and surrounding cities, the city of Cambridge, the “MetroWest” region which extends west to Framingham [central Massachusetts], into parts of southern New Hampshire, and down to (but not including) Cape Cod. The map in Appendix C shows the layout of Boston, as understanding its basic topography is useful in seeing how it has been gentrified. Although gentrification may result in reinvestment into blighted neighborhoods, local small businesses and microenterprises are displaced as wealthier residents seek out different goods and services than those historically associated with the neighborhood. Local small businesses typically provide the goods and services demanded by the low-income residents thus keeping the wealth they generate in circulation longer at the local level. With a strong commitment to the community, these business owners support employment of residents and partner with non-profit firms and community-based organisations to provide stability and vibrancy to the neighborhood. When gentrification results in significant changes to the demographic characteristics of the neighborhood, these businesses may decline and eventually close--replaced by large corporations and franchises without the same commitment to the welfare of the community.

In Boston, like Florence, as will be elucidated later, much of the gentrification is related to class. During an interview with Boston resident and Westfield State history professor Dr. John Dempsey, he stated, “Milton [a suburb directly to Boston’s south] used to be considered wealthy but was actually more middle class. It’s since become very wealthy. But the gentrification here and in cities like Jamaica Plain and West Roxbury wasn’t entirely due to just race – but also class. They also pushed out poor white people [as more industry came here] (Dempsey).”

In Florence, low-end retail shops offering cheap knockoffs draw sales away from artisans in areas such as the Oltrarno neighborhood. Inferior quality goods trivialize the traditional image and quality of local production. Florence’s artistic heritage is further challenged as artisan workshops close when craftsmen die with no one to take over the business. Figures 5 and 6 are the typical examples of cheap souvenirs that speak less to the historical heritage of the area than to tawdry stereotypes of Italian culture.





*Figure 5. A typical souvenir stand in Centro Storico; Photo courtesy of the author.*

An interesting side effect of touristic gentrification has been greater attention paid to not just preserving items of antiquity (at least in Italy) but respecting their inherent dignity as well. In a 2024 article in EuroNews, Accademia Gallery director Cecilie Hollberg expressed disdain at the types of souvenirs featured in Figures 5 and 6, as “she finds the more explicit magnets, aprons, t-shirts and figurines sold by street sellers to be ‘debasing’” which could impact how works of art are dealt with commercially (Morton).”



*Figure 6. A display of magnets including the hindquarters of Michelangelo's 'David;' Photo Courtesy of euronews.*

As the article continues, “[Hollberg] has launched a string of court cases invoking Italy’s landmark cultural heritage code, which protects artistic treasures against disparaging and unauthorised commercial use (Morton).” Considering how aggressively the EU enforces the protected designation of origin provision for food-related products, it stands to reason that same philosophy could apply to works of art.

This has significant implications beyond just the David but to other works of art as well which tend to be commodified and sold off (e.g. “La Gioconda” on condoms or “The Birth of Venus” on a mousepad). Hollberg’s philosophy is interestingly in line with Walter Benjamin’s seminal essay “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproducibility” in which he states, “Even the most perfect reproduction of a work of art is lacking in one element: its presence in time and space, its unique existence at the place where it happens to be (3).” This destruction of the original artwork’s ‘aura’<sup>5</sup> could be compared with the gentrifier’s destruction of the aura of a neighbourhood, whereas the production of art is given over to the praxis of politics, capitalism, and neoliberalism. Therefore, if one assumes that a unique work is an *objet d’art* independent of the mechanical facsimile, and therefore by taking the city centre as a unique artefact with its aura, the aesthetic value of the original is diminished. One could then argue that the aura of Florence (and other cities like it) has been diminished due to overtourism.

A report published in early 2019 from the Joint Center for Housing Studies at Harvard University pointed to how neighbourhoods have changed over the past twenty years in Boston. Amongst other factors, the report highlights that while there is growing racial and ethnic diversity in Boston, those groups are continually being segregated (Hermann, et al). There is historical precedent for this including the practice of redlining<sup>6</sup> and the aforementioned busing crisis. Those legacies are still at play when some of the areas with the heaviest commercial investment and highest affluence are also those with the highest percentage of white residents – including Seaport and Back Bay. A 2015 study from the Federal Reserve Bank of Boston cited that the median net worth for a black Boston household was **8\$ USD**, while a white household’s median was **248,000\$ USD** (Solis).

The above-mentioned report also discusses the emergence of two types of change

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<sup>5</sup> According to Benjamin, an artwork’s ‘aura’ refers to its authenticity or uniqueness. By replicating the artwork via commercial means, the aura is destroyed. For example, the aura of La Gioconda has been eviscerated many times.

<sup>6</sup> Redlining is a discriminatory practice in which financial services are denied to persons based on race or ethnicity, even if they are qualified for the services.



within low-income Boston neighbourhoods: gentrified areas were formerly low income but now have experienced heavy socioeconomic change and are now exorbitantly expensive (e.g. Jamaica Plain and Roxbury) and non-gentrified areas only become poorer leading to greater income inequality and higher crime in areas like Hyde Park and Dorchester. This has placed the entire Boston MSA under enormous financial and housing strain as locals struggle to afford rising rents (Hermann, et al., 2019). The issue has become so pressing in Massachusetts, that in her first State of the City address in 2024, Boston Mayor Michelle Wu proposed bringing back rent control policies to Boston which have been banned since 1994.

Edozi et al. note that “a cluster of core neighborhoods extending from Downtown through the South End and into Mission Hill and Jamaica Plain have seen a decline in people of colour. This very likely is a result of an influx of young white professionals that parallels the gentrification and displacement of communities of colour (2017).” Combine this with a massive influx of capital investment and high-end real estate development in various neighborhoods throughout the city and you have a distinct, and disturbing pattern of gentrification in the greater Boston area.

During the interview with Dr. Dempsey, he identified another issue that has been at the heart of the problem: the increasing number of biotech firms in the city. “Biotech has been a significant driver of gentrification in Boston, especially around Kendall Square. The high paying jobs and need for labs has driven up housing costs, displacing not only people of colour but poor whites as well like I said in other neighbourhoods like JP (Dempsey).” While Biotech would normally be considered an economic boon, the reality is that the benefits don’t serve lower and semi-skilled populations in the region which then excludes longtime residents from the benefits of biotech while emphasizing the drawbacks.

The fact that, like Florence, Boston is a historic city, the seventh oldest in the United States, with the tenth largest Metropolitan Statistical Area, that capitalises on both its place in the American experiment and cosmopolitanism to draw in tourists and new residents results in a coalescence of de facto segregation. One example of the historic

clashing with the contemporary would be the case of The Old Corner Bookstore on Washington Street. Built in 1718, the building has had several tenants since it was first used in the planning of the American Revolution but is currently occupied by a Chipotle Mexican Grill: a popular American burrito restaurant chain. The issue is that the only persons who are aware of its significance are visitors on the historic Freedom Trail (a 4.0 km walking path which showcases some of the most famous sites of the American Revolution) or a handful of residents. As the director of Historic Boston mentioned in a scathing remark, “If you say ‘Old Corner Bookstore,’ a younger group will look at you



*Figure 7. The Old Corner Bookstore in Boston, the oldest commercial building in the city, houses a Chipotle; Courtesy of Boston.com*

like, ‘Where’s that,’ [she] said. “But if you say ‘Chipotle,’ they know right away (Annear).”

Boston’s gentrification has been a result of the city being a victim of its own success with many of the issues stemming from a strong economy which attracts industry and residents, especially in the healthcare, research, higher education, and technology sectors. Much of the gentrification problems in Boston have plagued other American cities like Detroit as rapid capital investment has caused these cities to rethink their urban plans. The 2019 Harvard report referenced earlier reported the following, “Between 1990 and 2016, the region [Boston MSA] has become more affluent and more ethnically and racially diverse. However, during this same period, increases in house prices and rents outpaced the growth in many residents’ incomes. Moreover, while many of these changes have occurred throughout the region, the pace and nature of change has been uneven

across the region's cities, towns and neighbourhoods (Hermann, et. al).” The increase in tech giants like Facebook coming to Cambridge and the ubiquitous elite education presence with Harvard, MIT, Boston University, among many others that bring an influx of highly educated and high-earning professionals only cements the assertions made by Dr. Dempsey that Boston is essentially becoming a city exclusively for the elite and wealthy.

What is clear from the experiences of Florence and Boston is that increased tourism produces an impact on cities, especially in historic centers. Tourists and day-trippers engage in cultural activities that often overlap with the daily work and living of residents. The resulting gentrification of the historic centres and surroundings to serve the needs of visitors has led to a negative perception of tourism by the local community leading to graffiti that spells out in no certain terms how residents feel about what is happening to their city. Boston residents have lashed out similarly however via social media which will be addressed in the next section.



**Figure 8.** Graffito seen in Firenze, 2024; Photo by the author



**Figure 9.** Graffito seen in Firenze, 2024; Photo by the author

## Discussion

In 2007, Brian Chesky, Joe Gebbia, and Nathan Blecharczyk decided to rent out their San Francisco apartment to conference attendees to make some extra money. They called their new business “Air Bed and Breakfast.” Within about a year, they had inadvertently changed the future of how the world travels and consumes. Of course, Airbnb wasn’t the first platform to offer the idea of renting out one’s personal space to travelers; “Vacation Rental By Owner,” aka VRBO, was founded in 1995 as a niche offering to rent complete homes. On the Jersey Shore, for example, it has been a longstanding tradition for owners to rent out beach houses. What was different about Airbnb was a combination of timing, luck, and a missing element in other offerings as author Leigh Gallagher explains during an interview with *Fortune*. Gallagher wrote a well-received book, “The Airbnb Story: How Three Ordinary Guys Disrupted an Industry, Made Billions ... and Created Plenty of Controversy.”

It was that it was urban; it was also that it was home sharing — renting out space while the owner or the resident was there — that was the original idea...Also, I think they came along at the right time, because it was the Great Recession. People were looking for a cheap way to travel, and they just struck a chord with millennials, who were massive market that at the time was not really being spoken to by the traditional hotel industry (“The Airbnb Story...”)

When an STR in Piazza Santa Croce is 125 Euro per night for an entire flat, but a hotel is 250 Euro per night for a single room, it becomes a very complicated relationship for travelers, owners, and hoteliers. Even Brian Chesky himself, when asked about Airbnb’s relationship to the hotel industry, claimed that really, there wasn’t one and that they don’t, in fact, compete:

You know, this is overstated. Most people either wouldn’t travel, or they’d stay with friends and family [if they didn’t use Airbnb]. We’re not really replacing hotels...But the data shows [that Airbnb taking market share is] increasingly

starting to happen; this is a company that's doubled [in growth] every year ("The Airbnb Story...").

As has been discussed, this is clearly not the case as Airbnb have grown markedly since their beginning and have completely upended not just the travel industry but basic urban planning as well.



*Figure 10. The Eurostars Boutique Hotel (formerly Hotel Home Florence) which has been dealing with the effects of STR's; Photo courtesy of the author.*

The analysis of overtourism in Florence reveals significant patterns of overcrowding in key tourist locations, especially recently. Much of this can be attributed to tourist patterns returning to pre-pandemic levels but also realising that the pent-up desire for travel during the pandemic caused numbers to greatly expand. Italy was hit very hard during the COVID-19 pandemic, with the number of deaths by late 2020 placing it fourth in the world. Florence, and Tuscany as a whole, were also hit very hard with the pendulum swinging in the opposite direction as tourists avoided the area and businesses struggled to stay afloat. It was reported that "The Chamber of Commerce of Florence has calculated that in the most optimistic scenario, starting from a perspective of a GDP decline of 9.4% and a 6% drop in consumption, this year a loss in value of over 1.2 billion [Euros] will be reached for the almost eighteen thousand businesses in the commercial sector in the metropolitan city (RinascereFirenze, 2020)."





*Figure 11. The streets of Florence on 10th March 2020. Photo courtesy of NBC.*

In Boston, the pandemic exacerbated pre-existing levels of inequality. Unemployment, which had been at historic lows, skyrocketed to historic **highs**; low and medium-wage workers were hit the most powerfully, especially those who either worked in face-to-face industries or in sectors with lower pay resulting in the reduced chance of financial reserves. In 2021 alone, the Massachusetts Restaurant Association reported that 4000 outlets had closed permanently statewide (“COVID Indicators Report”).

As restrictions lifted in Italy, however, Florence realised that the city and region was facing a crisis due to the devastation of the tourist sector, but that also soon enough, tourists *would* return. In May 2020, then-Mayor Dario Nardella presented a post-pandemic plan that accounted for both tourism and for production and innovation, that was also inspired by the crowdfunding attempts of the past that helped the city (Zeffirelli’s 1966 documentary, *Florence Days of Destruction* is an example). The plan, called #RinascereFirenze [“Florence is Reborn”], outlines new economic models, transportation schemes, and planned events (such as participating in the first leg of the Tour de France which has never happened in Italy). The document also allowed for residents to comment directly on it which made it living and gave them a say in the future direction of their city as they anticipated the crowds’ return. The plan identified nine areas for the city to address: The Polycentric City, A New Historic Centre, Living in Urban Spaces, Green Mobility, Development of the city economy, Widespread Culture, Children and Families at the Centre, Personal Care: Welfare, Home, Work, and An Increasingly Intelligent City.

It would be worth noting the urgency with which Nardella discussed a re-envisioning of the Centro Storico,

Today the centre appears emptied of tourists, but also of residents who, in ever greater numbers in recent years, have given up enjoying its beauties, due to an increasingly inaccessible real estate market and a daily life that the large influx of tourists did not allow to live peacefully... It will therefore be necessary to operate on two main fronts: firstly by planning actions aimed at redesigning a centre through accessible residence and a remodelling of urban spaces, a strengthening of mobility and a rediscovery of small neighbourhood shops. Secondly by encouraging the creation of new places in the historic centre for innovation, research and high-level training, hi-tech laboratories, enhancing the advanced tertiary sector (RinascereFirenze, 9).

An interview with Assessora [City Councilor] Benedetta Albanese who addresses issues related to Education, Professional Training, Culture of Memory and Legality, revealed how Florence was trying to combat the issue more aggressively. She stated,

Allora noi abbiamo dal lungo tempo chiesto una misura al governo italiano con la quale si tutelassero le città d'arte con la quale si potesse garantire un equilibrio sostenibile tra il turismo che è una risorsa anche Fiorentina che non vogliamo demonizzare e le risposte abitative che comunque una città deve offrire alla cittadinanza.

[So for a long time we have been asking the Italian government for a measure with which the cities of art would be protected and with which we could guarantee a sustainable balance between tourism which is also a resource in Fiorentina which we do not want to demonize and the housing solutions that a city must offer to its citizens. *author trans.*]

Albanese is referring to a city ordinance enacted in October 2023 in Florence in which Nardella banned new STR units in the city centre. As an incentive to re-convert STR's into regular leases (longer term), Florence offered property tax breaks for three subsequent



years after a unit is reverted. Nardella stated at that time “In 2016, we had just under 6,000 apartments listed on Airbnb; today we have almost 14,378,” he said, noting that during that time the average cost of ordinary monthly residential rents had leapt 42% (Reuters in Florence).

As was stated earlier in this report, many of the neighbourhoods that have received the heaviest capital investment have been white, heavily gentrified, and very expensive. While it would stand to reason that the city would want to protect its small businesses, the bike lane issue, and a very heavy push to bring a second Amazon headquarters to Boston indicates the contrary. In 2017, Amazon was interested in building a second headquarters somewhere else in the US. Boston made an aggressive bid to entice the retailer to come to the region. Amazon ultimately did not choose Boston, but went with Arlington (VA), instead. Amazon cited many of the issues already addressed in this essay as the reason for not coming to the northeast including the fact that Boston’s incentives weren’t as strong as other cities and the company was very concerned about their effects on traffic and housing costs, essentially saying that they would put a strain on the already real estate market. It would appear that Amazon was more concerned about Bostonians than the city of Boston.

In a scathing article in the 11 December 2017 issue of *The Boston Globe*, the Spotlight team<sup>7</sup> took the city to task for its creation of the obnoxious new Seaport district. This area, seen in a before/after image in Figure 12, was seen as the urban equivalent of conspicuous consumption. Instead of turning the dilapidated wharf area into a neighbourhood for all Bostonians, the Seaport has become so homogeneous that “Lenders have issued only three residential mortgages to black buyers in the Seaport’s main census tracts, out of 660 in the past decade. The population is 3 percent black and 89 percent white, with a median household income of nearly \$133,000, the highest of any Boston ZIP code, according to recent US census estimates (Andrew, 2017).” The article

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<sup>7</sup> Spotlight is the special reporting unit for investigative journalism and was the same team that broke the Catholic church sex abuse scandal in Boston which yielded *The Globe* the 2003 Pulitzer Prize.

discusses the dismay of African Americans who feel excluded and unwelcome in the area. Andrew continues, “The Spotlight Team scrutinized the Seaport in its examination of whether Boston still deserves its reputation as an inhospitable place for people of colour. Despite the vision decades ago by the city's top development official as a place “for all Bostonians” to reconnect with the waterfront, the Seaport has become like an exclusive club created, frequented, and populated almost exclusively by the white and the wealthy (Andrew, 2017).”

Upon addressing this issue during the interview with Dr. Dempsey, a lifelong resident of the Boston area:

The reason why you’re not getting responses [to interview enquiries] from Seaport businesses is that they are too new. Seaport is a recent development. It’s all grown up in the last twenty years or so. It was docks and seagulls before the development. Everyone there has no idea what the hell you’re talking about when you ask about gentrification in the area because they haven’t been there long enough (Dempsey).



*Figure 12. A before and after image of the development of Seaport; photo courtesy of Urban International*

Compounding the issue is the fact that Seaport is located a considerable distance from most of the black neighbourhoods of Boston, has inconvenient public transit routes from those areas, and parking there is very expensive.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>8</sup> The average rent for a two bedroom apartment in Boston is in excess of 5,000\$ USD and will cost in excess of 2,000,000\$ USD to purchase.

In July 2024, the Tuscany TAR overturned Florence's Short Term Rental ban with ruling 858/2024. The magistrate in that case had ruled that Nardella's ordinance on banning STR's as a variant to Florence's planning had expired and rejected further appeals against his decision (Stevens). Airbnb released a statement and applauded the ruling, but Sara Funaro, the new mayor of Florence (Nardella's term expired at the end of June 2024) responded with, "The ruling of the Tuscany TAR does not cancel the variant of the Municipality of Florence to stop short-term rentals and does not go into the merits of the work done by the Municipality and the legitimacy of the resolution (Stevens)." She continued, "...in the first useful meeting of the council, I will bring the approval of the variant to reiterate the stop on short-term rentals. What remains is the inertia of a government that is indifferent to the problems of overtourism that afflict art cities like Florence (Stevens)." It is clear then that one of the clearest links between overtourism and gentrification is the politics of local and governing bodies. It doesn't help that Florence's municipal politics veer to the left while the national government in Italy tends toward the right. Without cooperation from national governments to combat gentrification, cities are left flailing without support to reinforce their policies to preserve sites of heritage. Venice has trialed and implemented a paid access scheme for day-trippers (tiered fees for advance and last-minute entries and QR-coded permits), introduced turnstile/entry-management systems and caps on group sizes, banned loudspeakers for tour guides, and has restricted large cruise ships from entering the historic lagoon to protect the city and its waterways. Rome has focused on demand-management and regulation: it has raised and revised its municipal tourist (overnight) tax, tightened rules and enforcement around short-term rentals and tour operations, and enforced measures to limit tourist coach access and unruly behaviour at key monuments (with targeted fines and spot checks). Florence, by contrast, has pursued a more aggressive local regulatory mix (including stricter short-term rental controls and limits on tour-guide behaviour) to protect its historic centre.

The Italian government did act, at least *somewhat*, with a law passed in early November 2024 that required in-person check-ins for STR's effectively enacting a national ban on what Florence was already trying to do: end the smart locks as shown

earlier and in [Appendix A](#) that were detrimental to buildings that were centuries old. The law also requires STR owners to display a national identification code or CIN on the front of the building- which could end up short circuiting Florence's intentions of reducing the number of STR's by providing a workaround as there still has to be a CIN displayed on the façade of the building.

Florence enacted local legislation with Assesore Jacopo Vicini and Mayor Funara completely banning electronic lockboxes on buildings as well (which went further than the national law) and enacting a ten-point plan to deal with overtourism, including using Artificial Intelligence or AI in their efforts. As will be discussed later in this report, social media and digital technology have played a large role in overtourism and its resulting gentrification. Florence seems to be using those same tools to its own advantage in utilising data mining to discover violations and illegal rentals (Walker, 2024). In 2023, the author visited an amministratore condominiale [apartment building manager] to enquire about renting in the city. Many of the flats that were shown were located on the outskirts of the city. The author enquired about finding something closer to the Centro Storico to use as a part time STR. The manager discouraged the author from doing this but said that many people do it quietly.

During a November 2023 interview with the operations manager of the Eurostars Florence Boutique Hotel, Giuseppe Scuderi, he pointed out that while Florence saw a massive uptick in short-term rentals after the pandemic, 14,600 was the "official" number, there was an additional element: "We're talking about the official ones, of course. Then we don't know about the unofficial...the illegal ones, we don't know the real number." This assertion as well as the author's experience at the real estate agency is supported by an article in *Corriere Fiorentino*, in which Giulio Gori writes,

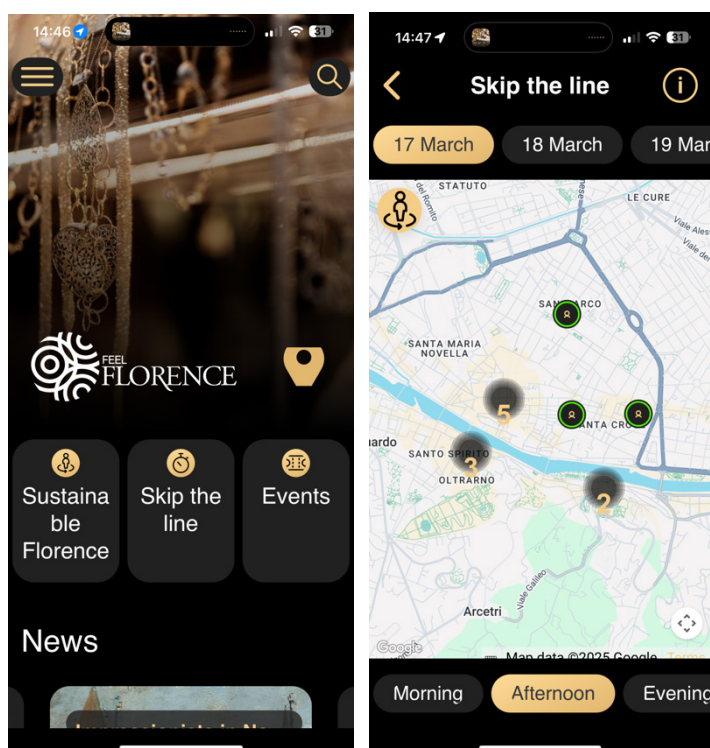
Il primo giugno [2023], il giorno in cui il sindaco  
Dario Nardella ha annunciato di voler bloccare la  
registrazione di nuovi Airbnb nell'area Unesco, quelli  
iscritti agli elenchi del Comune erano 9.500; oggi  
sono arrivati a 12.900. Non tutte però sono locazioni

turistiche attive: gli uffici comunali calcolano duemila appartamenti i cui proprietari hanno richiesto il codice identificativo, ma che non risultano nell'elenco comunale delle realtà effettivamente attive. Si tratta di chi ha deciso di registrare casa come Airbnb, pur non facendolo, per salvaguardare in prospettiva il valore dell'immobile. Conti alla mano, di tutti i neo registrati in questi due mesi scarsi, significa che in 1.400 facevano attività sommersa e hanno deciso di mettersi in regola.

[On June 1 [2023], the day Mayor Dario Nardella announced he wanted to block the registration of new Airbnbs in the UNESCO area, those registered in the municipal lists were 9,500; today they have reached 12,900. However, not all of them are active tourist rentals: the municipal offices calculate two thousand apartments whose owners have requested the identification code, but which are not in the municipal list of actually active properties. These are those who have decided to register their home as an Airbnb, even if they don't do it, to safeguard the value of the property in the long term. When you count, of all the new registrations in these two months, it means that 1,400 were doing underground activity and have decided to get in order, *author trans.*]

Following other cities that have done so, Florence released the *Feel Florence* application, which synergistically connects many of the initiatives discussed here. Launched in July 2020 after a two-month testing period on 200 users, the app was an anticipated response to post-pandemic crowds. In a case study brief released by Cultural Heritage in Action, a peer-learning scheme for regions on cultural heritage that is funded

by the Creative Europe Programme of the European Union, the app was described as follows, “FeelFlorence is an app suggesting unusual itineraries in the city centre, in neighbourhoods and in the metropolitan area, bringing tourists closer to local experiences and avoiding over-tourism in central areas of the city (Feel Florence...2022).” The application incorporates two interconnected systems – a content management platform in which the city suggests alternate routes and experiences to the most famous attractions, and the mobile app itself along with a corresponding website. One of the app’s main features is alerting visitors to congested areas in the city to avoid as shown in the screenshots from the app taken in March, 2024 in Figure 12. The use of drones and geolocation is just one example of how municipalities are working to combat touristic gentrification.



*Figure 13. Screenshots of the FeelFlorence app showing the congestion from March 2024; Courtesy of the author.*

Underground or illegal Short-Term Rentals have and will continue to plague overtouristed cities like Boston and Florence despite their best efforts. During the interview with the Eurostars Hotel manager, he indicated that short term rentals had not had a detrimental effect on their business due to heavy bookings. Conversely, customer sentiment wasn’t exactly enthusiastic as to the “value” of the accommodations with several travelers complaining about the cost with comments on the Tripadvisor platform



that included “For more than 500 euros for two nights (excluding taxes) I would have expected better (Let222)” and “The whole place needs a good 'bottoming' and a far more rigorous and regular cleaning regime putting in place (Gerald R).” These types of comments from visitors seem to indicate that hotels in Florence (and other gentrified cities) are experiencing strain when attempting to compete with short term rentals.

Florence is, of course, not the only municipality dealing with this issue and in other European cities, the crisis is also reaching epidemic proportions. In 2019, a coalition of several affected European cities, including Amsterdam (NL), Barcelona (ES), Florence (IT), and Kraków (PL), met in Brussels, the EU headquarters, to discuss and create a lobby for standardised rules from the European Commission when dealing with STR companies like Airbnb, Booking.com, and VRBO. Their requests included access to STR data to discover large rental companies who owned many units to understanding tourist flow data to discerning the evolution of the overtourist phenomenon.

The chart below visually indicates the concentration of these units in Florence along with the dramatic increase in rental price per night as well as monthly revenue which in just six months, increased by more than 100%. Of the sixty-nine million Euro that come into Florence from the tourist tax, one third, almost twenty-five million Euro come from short term rentals.

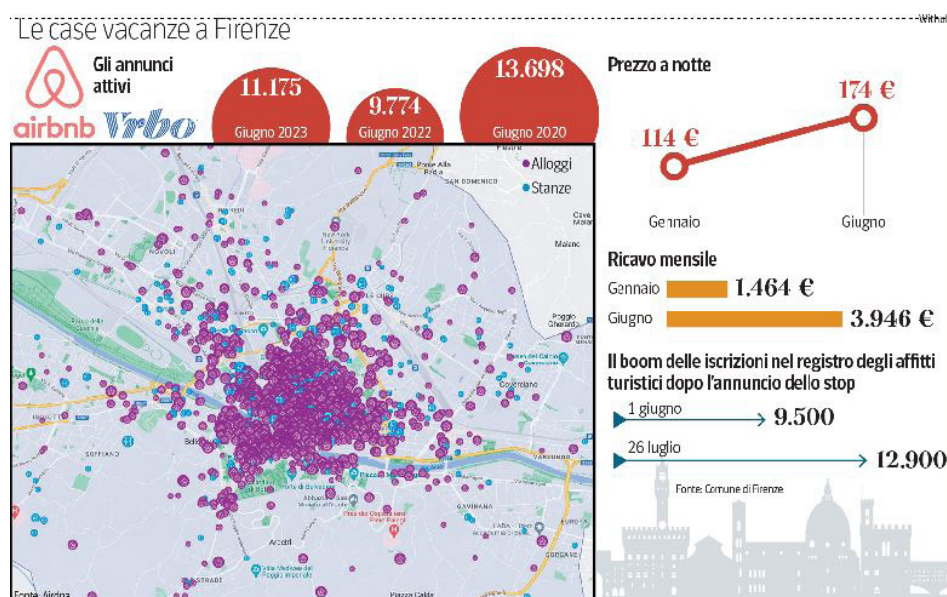


Figure 14. Increases in the number of STR units between Jan-Jun 2023; Courtesy Corriere Fiorentino



Studies of the impact of person-to-person rentals suggest that the economic gain is concentrated in a few individuals that control many units (Bettina in Florence listed 713 apartments for rent on AirBnB in 2018).

In Boston, STR profit map, an online investor guide for STR’s indicates positive growth in this market over the past several years.

BOSTON

Market Saturation Index ⓘ



Figure 15. STR Market Outlooks for Boston; courtesy of strprofitmap.com

BOSTON

Year-over-Year Monthly Revenue Change ⓘ

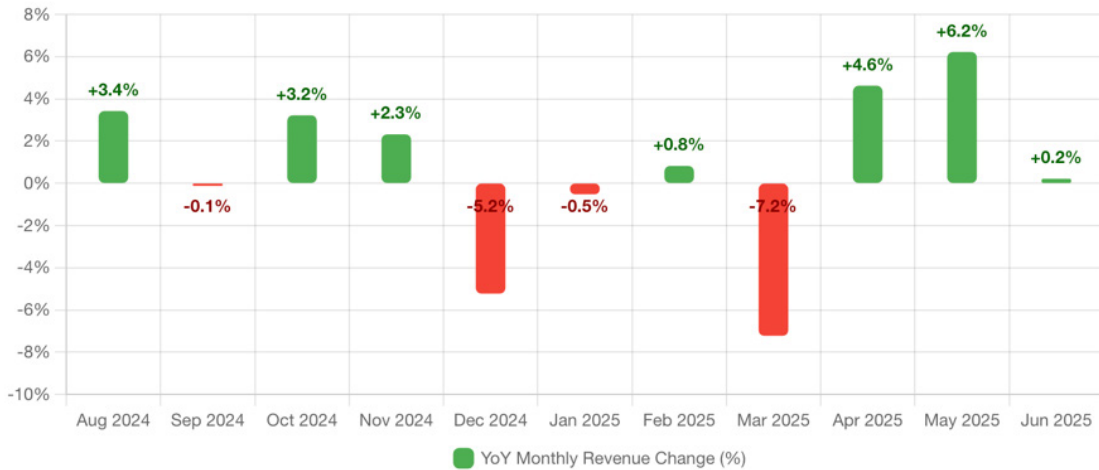
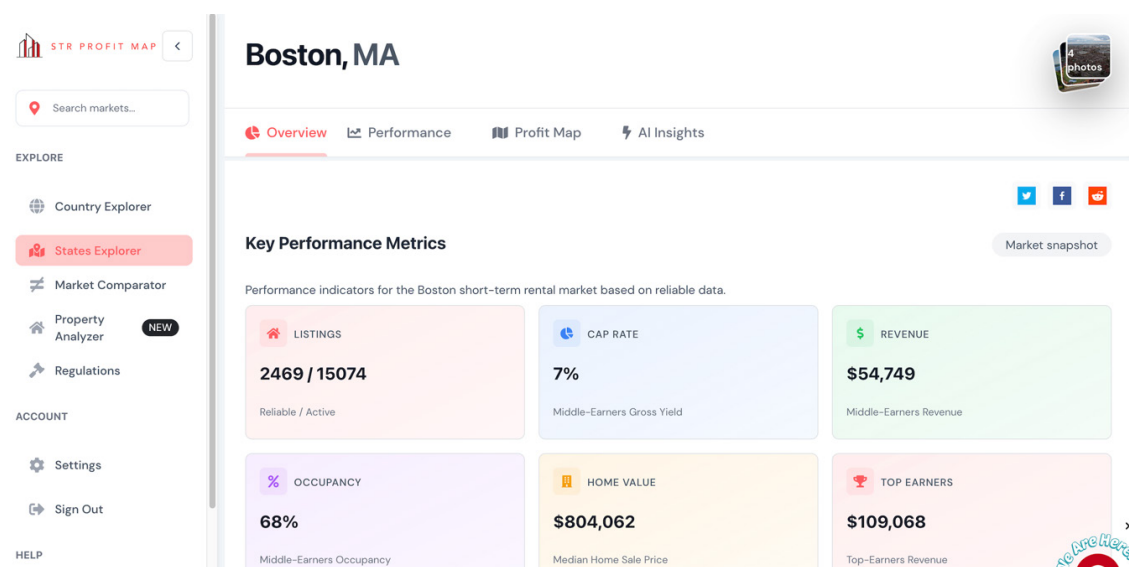


Figure 16. Year over year revenue change for STR, Aug. 2024 - Jul 2025; courtesy of strprofitmap.com

Figures 14 and 15 demonstrate that despite Boston's best efforts to curtail investment in and the use of STR's, they are still a viable option for capital investment which simply leads to more heavily gentrified neighbourhoods. Figure 16 shows that at the time the data was collected in July 2025, there were over 2400 reliable listings out of a pool of 15074 active properties. The **median** home sale price is in excess of 804,000\$ USD. This indicates that this region is only available to the ultra-wealthy



*Figure 17. KPI's for the Boston STR market; courtesy of strprofitmap.com*

## Solutions

In Boston, the issues of gentrification with respect to the cost of living and residential ownership have been top issues for both Mayor Michelle Wu and Governor Maura Healey, mainly as they have experienced pressure from constituents throughout Massachusetts. However, the issue has been a problem for decades. In a 1977 MIT Master's Thesis that examines the process of gentrification in two Boston neighbourhoods, the author writes: "Public agencies, citizens groups, and private individuals are devoting increasing attention to upgrading existing city neighborhoods...In most instances the renovation of such neighborhoods has been coupled with an influx of people more affluent than the existing population....These people, popularly labeled the "young professionals," are

supposedly driven by a desire to locate near their place of work...and within easy reach of selected social and cultural amenities (Pattison, 2). But these ‘young professionals’ are engaging in a scheme of displacement for residents who’ve been in these areas for decades.

A January 2025 report from Bostonpads.com, an online realty technology platform, illustrated how rental rates in Boston have fluctuated throughout the pandemic. Because Massachusetts is a relatively small state, this has ramifications throughout the region, even if you don’t live in Boston proper. “The current average rent price in Boston is \$3,282, which is up +2.15% year-over-year. Price growth did decelerate significantly, especially throughout the latter half of 2024... (Salpoglou, 2025).” But in the chart in Figure 17, the two-year change in rent prices is quite significant:

Apartment Size	2025 Avg. Rent Price	1-Year Change %	2-Year Change %
<a href="#">Boston Studios</a>	\$2,272	+3.00%	+13.81%
<a href="#">Boston 1BR Apartments</a>	\$2,667	+3.57%	+13.15%
<a href="#">Boston 2BR Apartments</a>	\$3,285	+2.51%	+13.33%
<a href="#">Boston 3BR Apartments</a>	\$3,898	+2.89%	+13.87%
<a href="#">Boston 4BR Apartments</a>	\$4,820	+6.23%	+16.64%
<a href="#">Boston 5BR Apartments</a>	\$6,082	+5.44%	+19.13%

*Figure 18. 2025 Average Rental Prices in Boston with 1- and 2-year changes; courtesy of BostonPads.com*

In Florence, rental rates are also high but also commensurate with the cost of living for the area:

Type of accommodation	Average rental price in Florence
Rooms	€630
Studios	€1,200
Apartments	€1,600

*Figure 19. August 2025 Average rental prices in Florence, Italy; courtesy of il Sole 24 Ore*

According to the news website *il Sole 24 Ore*, in the first half of 2025, rents rose by 5.5% nationwide and rose by 3% in Florence. Rents in Italy reached an average of 14.3 Euro per square metre and the increase in rent versus the tepid increase in sales prices (by 2.1%) has caused a reduction in the demand for rentals in Italy nationwide. In that recent study, Florence was identified as the second most expensive city in Italy to reside in (behind Milan) and ahead of Rome (Ceci). It should be noted as well that while the rental disparities between Florence and Boston might seem striking, this is not a true “apples to apples” comparison as the average salary for a Florentine is approximately 39,000 Euro, and the average salary for a Bostonian living in Seaport, for example, is nearly 134,000\$ USD.

Boston has also taken some actions to battle gentrification in the region, albeit differently than Florence. Governor Healey recently announced the end of broker fees<sup>9</sup> in Massachusetts, but by shoving the broker fee onto the landlord, they will simply raise the rent, contributing to the city’s already heavy unaffordability. The issue of rent control is a contentious one in a capitalistic system like the US, but in cities like Boston where the cost of living has outpaced salaries and Cost of Living Adjustments [COLA], it’s become a visceral reality for the residents. The Acquisition Opportunity Program has striven to identify properties at risk of conversion to high-rent residences and tries to acquire them to keep them affordable while offering low interest loans and housing assistance. Other schemes like the Anti-Displacement Action Plan and the Rent Stabilization Advisory Committee were only formed within the past few years under the leadership of Mayor Michelle Wu in response to an exodus out of the state due to unaffordable housing.

The author spent a significant amount of time attempting to contact officials and stakeholders in various affected neighbourhoods in Boston. Not a single individual or organization responded. To get some clarification from Boston leadership, the author connected with a session of the public radio station GBH’s call-in program *Boston*

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<sup>9</sup> Broker fees are renter-paid fees that can often equal one month’s rent and go to the cost of an apartment broker finding the property to rent. Typically, landlords pass these fees on to the renter in the form of higher rents.

*Public Radio* during a segment when Mayor Wu was a guest and accepting calls from the community. The author enquired about the issue of gentrification and affordability in Boston which led Wu to give the following response:

The way to make Boston more affordable is to roll back housing affordability requirements...I am not going to buy into the idea that the role of the public sector is to bail out developers and for-profit entities who...want to be the first to ensure that they are making a profit. We need market rate housing; we need public housing...we're also taking city owned buildings, libraries, that needed renovation, and putting affordable housing on top...redo the zoning code for the first time since 1965, and cutting red tape so that the conditions will be clear, predictable, and fast...In the meantime, we're focusing our resources on affordable housing. In many parts of downtown, people actually want to see more foot traffic and visitors to support the small businesses because of the changes with remote work. In some of the other neighbourhoods that you mentioned like Seaport...we know that flooding is a real issue, we're one megastorm away from disastrous consequences...and the residents of the North End wanted to ensure that a residential neighbourhood was still livable (Wu).

Wu assured the author that there would be the opportunity for follow up conversations, but despite the best efforts, none of those materialised. It is an interesting point that the author had a more positive response from Florentine officials to discuss the issue of gentrification, than those in Boston. There are some possible reasons for this. Italy has a long tradition in intellectual exchange and discourse and the chance to express the concern affecting Florence to an international academic audience provided a unique opportunity for Florentine officials. Both Wu and Healy are currently embroiled in respective political complexities; Wu is mounting would could become a contentious re-election campaign, and Healy is regularly engaging in battles with American President Donald Trump. It is possible that these issues may have led to a reticence to engage openly.

Boston did try to mitigate this issue with a 2019 ordinance that attempted to put

in some control on STR's which included: registration with the city; compliance housing laws, two-three family dwelling, and classification of residential use. What is interesting is that the fee for registering the STR with the city of Boston is only 25\$ USD per year for a room rented in a unit where the owner resides primarily, or 200\$ USD for a unit that is adjacent to the owner's residence ("Short Term Rentals"). This seems to be a contradiction in terms; for a city that is dealing with a massive (affordable) housing shortage that is also concerned about neighbourhood atmosphere and tourist transience, that seems like a significantly lower fee than what might be expected if the city is truly interested in dealing with urban livability.

In addition, like Florence, Boston is dealing with a significant number of illegal short-term rentals. According to the STR data website *Inside Airbnb*, 35.2% of listings, 1624 units, were listed illegally in Boston. What *is* encouraging however is that it seems Boston seems to be aggressively trying to enforce these unregistered units. Airbnb removed 1720 units platform due to their contract with the city (Insideairbnb.com). Like the distribution shown in Figure 13, Figure 19 gives a visual representation of the concentration of STR's in Boston

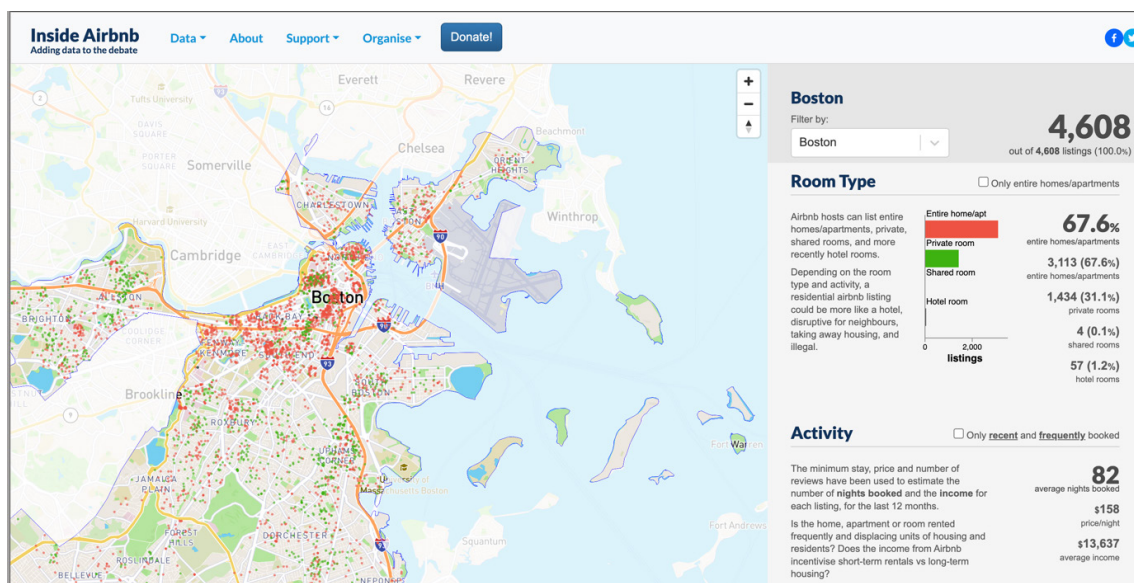


Figure 20. Screenshot showing Boston STR concentration; InsideAirbnb.com

Another potential solution that was put in place to help address the issue of gentrification in Boston is the Anti-Displacement Action Plan enacted in early 2025 by Michelle Wu. This plan, called *A Place to Thrive*, serves as a master scheme for combatting the displacement of residents, small businesses, and cultural institutions in Boston. The core goals include protecting homeowners and renters from displacement<sup>10</sup>. The plan acknowledges the complicated legacy of Boston and the displacement of its residents and highlights several dozen new tools to ensure that residents, small businesses, and neighbourhoods stay true and close to their cultural roots. While space prohibits listing out the entire plan, some of the most salient features are included below:

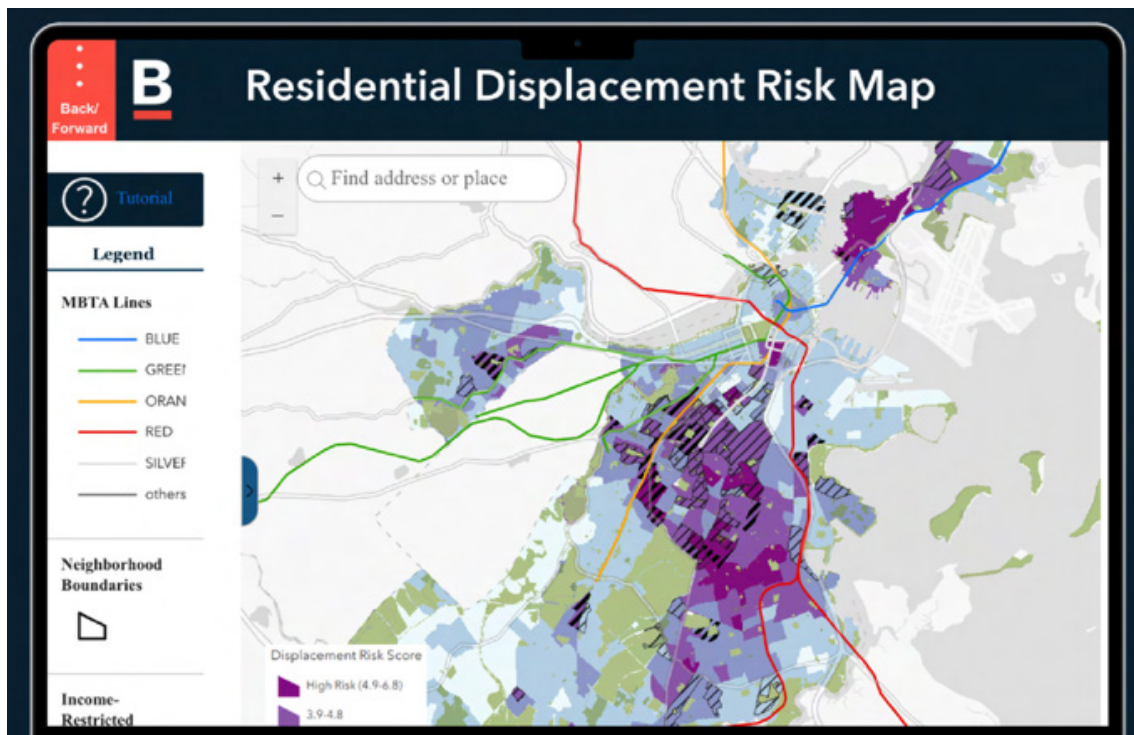
- Expanded measures to **improve access to income-restricted housing**, including new lottery preferences and a streamlined application portal to make the process easier for landlords and tenants alike
- A publicly available **Displacement Risk Map** that will enable the City and community to understand displacement risk citywide and take proactive steps to stabilize residents
- Significant steps to **identify and protect areas of cultural, historical, and community importance**, while also enabling the **production of more community-prioritized spaces**
- **New informational resources** to ensure renters and homeowners, older adults, and small businesses are aware of the full breadth of resources available to them (A Place to Thrive...)

The scheme is a way for the Wu administration to try and directly address the problematic living conditions for Bostonians. One of the most important pieces of the plan is the “Displacement Risk Map” which not only helps to identify areas of displacement risk but also works to validate resident concerns. Figure 20 gives a sample of the Risk Map.

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<sup>10</sup> The report defines ‘displacement’ as “when people are forced to leave their homes and neighbourhoods due to external pressures. There are different kinds of displacement: direct, economic, commercial/cultural, gentrification. Expanded definitions of these are in the end notes.





*Figure 21. Still of the Boston Displacement Risk Map; Courtesy of the City of Boston*

The STR issue is only a part of the problem in Boston. In fact, gentrification in Boston is primarily due to other concerns rather than overtourism, per se. While Boston's downtown area is technically smaller than the Centro Storico of Florence, 389 hectares versus 505 hectares, respectively, the ebb and flow of persons throughout the city admittedly *has* a bit of a balance. During the fall and winter seasons which roughly correspond to the American academic year, the city of Boston is inundated with students who attend its more than fifteen regional colleges and universities. While Autumn in New England is quite popular, much of that tourist flow is spread throughout the region by “leaf peepers” who are seeking out colourful foliage.

The exception to this is Salem, Massachusetts which is located north of the city by about 40 minutes. Salem attracts travelers who are interested in its strong Halloween theming as a historic site of the Salem Witch Trials [and its associated monument] in 1692. The 2024 season caused Salem to experience a record number of tourists with over one million visitors coming to the city. Salem has worked to battle this heavy tourist load by encouraging public transportation and ride share services (Uber and Lyft are both popular

in the Boston area). The image from TikTok in Figure 21 is a typical depiction of Salem during the month of October (note the date of 15 October – it gets ever busier closer to Halloween). During the spring and summer, the students tend to clear out leaving mainly residents and tourists in the city. The main period for intense crowding in Boston is during the university graduation season which takes place for about three weeks in May. During this period, lodgings can skyrocket prices necessitating families to either book one to two years in advance of a student's graduation ceremony or move further out of the city.

A municipality's dedication to public transit can do much to alleviate the impacts of gentrification, assuming everyone has access to it, and it works consistently, ensuring that transit hubs are prioritized to be near or adjacent to affordable housing. While Florence has made improving public transportation a priority in both *FeelFlorence* and *#RinascereFirenze*, Boston has had a problematic history with the Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority [MBTA, or commonly known as "the T"], which is the main public transit in the city.



*Figure 22. A typical October day in Salem, Massachusetts; Courtesy of TikTok.*

The T could be compared to a mix between a subway and a metro as portions of it are outside or elevated and other parts are underground. The T is the oldest public transit system in the United States which opened in 1897 and in recent years has been plagued by constant problems including derailments and constant breakdowns. In 2022, a fire broke out on one of the lines (the “orange” line) in Somerville, Massachusetts which necessitated passengers to evacuate through windows and one woman even plunged into the Mystic River to avoid the blaze (Goulston and O’Laughlin). As an op-ed in The Harvard Crimson quipped, it makes little sense that such an affluent, highly gentrified city would have such ramshackle transit, “The crisis seems illogical. Boston is one of the wealthiest metro areas in the United States — it should be able to build train tracks, which were invented over two centuries ago, the right distance apart (Quesada, 2024).” Quesada is referring to a very public scandal in which not only were the tracks of a new T line placed too close together, the MBTA actually knew about it and allowed the project to continue despite having knowledge that it was defective.

While New York, San Francisco, and Chicago all have fairly reliable public transit, the issue is not Boston’s alone but is more rooted in cultural and historical precedent thanks to Henry Ford. When Ford launched the Model T automobile, he not only changed how people would forever move around, but the auto industry heavily lobbied in city’s like Detroit leading to a dearth of public transit, especially when compared to Europe. This has left the national public transit system in tatters. In Boston, a 2024 report indicated that the MBTA has the highest number of derailments across any transit system in the US. A lack of interest in maintaining vehicles as well as the aging infrastructure, operator error - drivers in 2023 were issued 66 citations for excessive speed (Melendez, 2025), and, of course, mismanagement and corruption have all stymied progress on transit which has created a tangled mess of gridlock and confusing replacement bus schedules when T lines go down. This is all exacerbated by Boston’s circuitous road system which not only resembles a European city more than an American one but is notoriously confusing for visitors.

Another point of transportation contention that is related to this discussion is the

Boston bike lane controversy which has involved the city's efforts via Mayor Michelle Wu to reshape Boston's streets into a more bike-friendly environment. This comprised removing parking on certain streets and widening the bike lanes. A report from the Boston Planning and Development Agency explains, "While short-term customer and visitor parking was noted as a need, survey respondents also observed that more bicycle parking, safer bicycle infrastructure, and improved transit were needed (Keller, 2025)." Wu embraced that request which resulted in embroiling the mayor's office in one of the most heated and contentious debacles in the city's recent memory. The removal of parking spaces inconvenienced both residents who were trying to park at local businesses, and the businesses themselves which were losing traffic. In addition, many of the areas where Wu wanted to expand the lanes didn't feel like the city consulted with them so the initiative felt forced and not cooperative. Keller goes on, "Even cyclists agreed with the complaints. The bike lanes make it difficult to get around and take up parking spaces. For many, the salt in the wound is how the bike lanes (along with the bus lanes) are largely unused. This is a sore spot voters have with Wu (2025)." While some residents were unhappy, a group of cycling advocates were so passionate about the lanes, that they filed a lawsuit preventing their removal, causing further consternation in the affected areas. To further degrade the situation, "...depending on the neighborhood, bike lanes are being blamed for worsening the congestion they are supposed to help alleviate, driving away commercial investment and elderly residents...who can't use a bike to do their business (Keller, 2025)."

Another example of gentrification in Boston is how the state has handled gaming, especially in Eastern Massachusetts. Under the Expanded Gaming Act, which was passed in 2011, the state is allowed to have three "casino resorts" in an attempt to provide more transparency during the bidding process for gaming licenses and to capitalise on an international clientele (especially from Asia) who enjoy casino gaming. In Boston, the Wynn Resorts brand heavily campaigned to win the casino license, and in 2019, the Encore Boston Resort opened its doors. As part of the cycle highlighted at the beginning of this project, casino gaming can exacerbate gentrification as it exploits vulnerable, low

income communities (often of colour) leading to further economic inequalities.

A report created by National Opinion Research Centre [NORC] at the University of Chicago (IL), Institute for Community Health, was written in 2022 to assess the responses by community stakeholders to the casino's presence<sup>11</sup>. The results were overwhelmingly mixed as "participants shared specific concerns and perceptions about Encore's community impact on the economy, social and environmental factors, and health.



*Figure 23. Encore Boston Resort, Everett, Mass; Photo courtesy of Wynn Resorts*

Participants also highlighted concerns about 'Encore for whom?' noting casinos likely have disproportionate effects on their surrounding communities depending on socioeconomics and cultural background (NORC, 2022). "Encore for whom?" has become a catchphrase in the city to express concern about Encore's impact on the city of Everett (a small city near Boston where the casino is physically located). Interestingly, but not surprising, the cities where the Massachusetts casinos are located, Springfield and Everett, both are two of the heaviest cities to experience poverty with the former being the poorest city in the state. Both cities have significant populations of People of Colour. A press release from the University of Buffalo connects bankruptcy with the availability of gambling in poor areas, "In areas with the highest "neighborhood disadvantage" – determined by census factors such as the percentage of people who were unemployed, received public assistance, and/or live in poverty – more than 11 percent were problem gamblers... We

<sup>11</sup> NORC is a nonprofit organization based at U. Chicago that conducts rigorous research that is in the public's interest.



also controlled for the convenience of gambling opportunities in these neighborhoods, and our findings were unchanged (Wilde, 2014).” This suggests that Massachusetts’ actions are not only hindering the fight against gentrification and ignoring the plight of poor, problem gamblers, but it is actively placing commercial and economic interests ahead of those of its citizens.

As if increasing the physical availability of gambling wasn’t enough, in 2023, Massachusetts legalised online and mobile sports betting. This was a quixotic project that only served to negatively impact one of the states’ largest and salient populations: college students. Numerous studies and evidence have shown that mobile sports betting has created a whole new generation of pathological gamblers among young people. For Massachusetts, the state with the highest concentration of colleges per capita in the entire US, allowing sports betting in the state for college students (mobile betters must be at least 21 years old) can lead to a potential disaster in addiction and financial ruin.

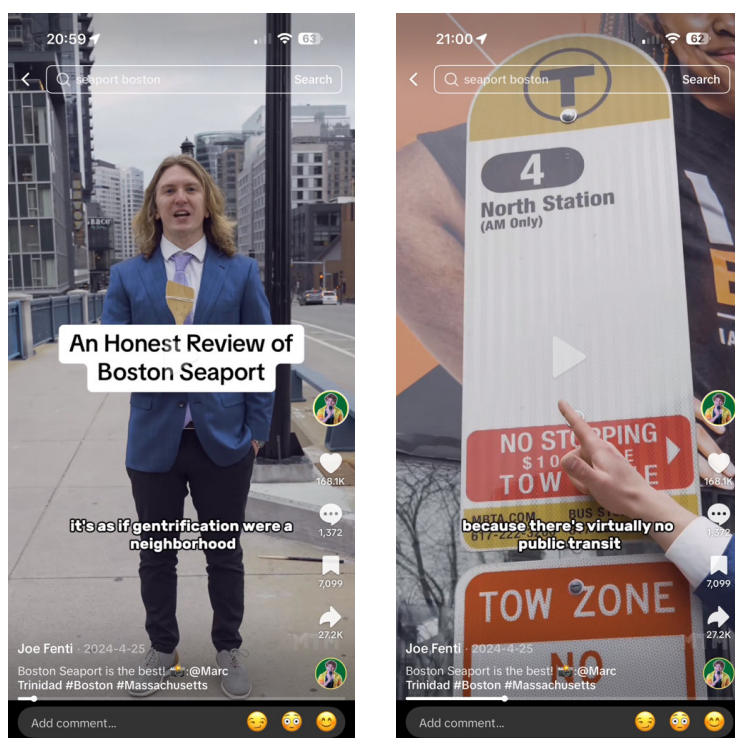
A PhD student at the University of Albany (NY) studying psychology discussed his findings with Time magazine, “Served up to students through ubiquitous ads that offer promises of “free” bets and easy wins, the [sports betting] apps sink their hooks deep into students, leading them to spend their financial aid money (loan delinquencies have increased by 5%), lie to their parents, and ignore their studies so they can keep playing, he says. Students from low-income families are particularly vulnerable, as they lack the financial safety net to bounce back from losses (Staley, 2023).” Given that many of the apps like DraftKings and FanDuel specifically and aggressively target college males, and the fact that this is, in fact, legal, the number of students getting into financial trouble is very alarming.

It's not just students who are susceptible, however. The ease with which mobile sports betting can be done avails it to anyone with addictive tendencies. In 2018, the US Supreme Court struck down a 1992 law that had prohibited online sports betting in most cases. After that, thirty-right US states adopted the measure. However, as this happened, academics started studying the effects of this form of wagering and found very disturbing results. In an article by Baylor University scholar Stephen Cranney, he discusses some of



the aftereffects: “three to four years after legalizing online sports gambling, the likelihood of declaring bankruptcy increases by as much as 25-30%; During this same time period, debt collection amounts also increase by 8%; Auto loan delinquencies increase by 5% (2024).” Cranney cites another study which says that people aren’t using their winnings to re-gamble, but rather, “people are not spending their lottery money on sports betting, but rather money from household and other investments. For example, legalization of sports gambling is associated with a 14% decrease in investments in the stock market (Cranney, 2024).” In a 2024 article from the University of Massachusetts, a survey was distributed to Massachusetts gamblers, who reported that since gambling became more accessible in the Commonwealth, they were reporting “an increase in gambling intensity and gambling harms. In addition, their attitudes toward gambling have grown more negative (Shillington, 2024).” It is clear from this evidence that the state has not done enough to protect its citizens from the harms of gentrification and income inequality, and could in fact, be actively injuring them.

Boston’s apparent obtuseness to the needs of its residents has led many to mock the city as seemingly not having learned from the mistakes of its past. The images from TikTok user “Joe Fenti” are representative from biting sarcasm posted in 2024.



*Figure 24. Stills from TikTok excoriating Seaport's gentrification; Courtesy of TikTok*

## The Impact of Social Media

It goes without saying that one of the largest contributing factors to overtourism in Florence, Boston, Venice, Amsterdam, and many other cities is the use of social media as a travel tool, both for planning an excursion, during the trip for content creation, and subsequent to the trip for influencing. Social media has been used for travel information for decades. Tripadvisor was founded in early 2000 in Needham, Massachusetts and has been one of the top websites for users seeking travel information and reviews. Other sites like *Lonely Planet* and American tour guide Rick Steves have parlayed travel into lucrative companies that now have companion apps and channels on the main social media sites. However, the increased popularity of streaming sites like TikTok and YouTube has resulted in a relatively new phenomenon in the intersection of travel and new media: the travel influencer. Social media influencers are third-party endorsers that attempt to shape and manipulate consumer attitudes via social media techniques.

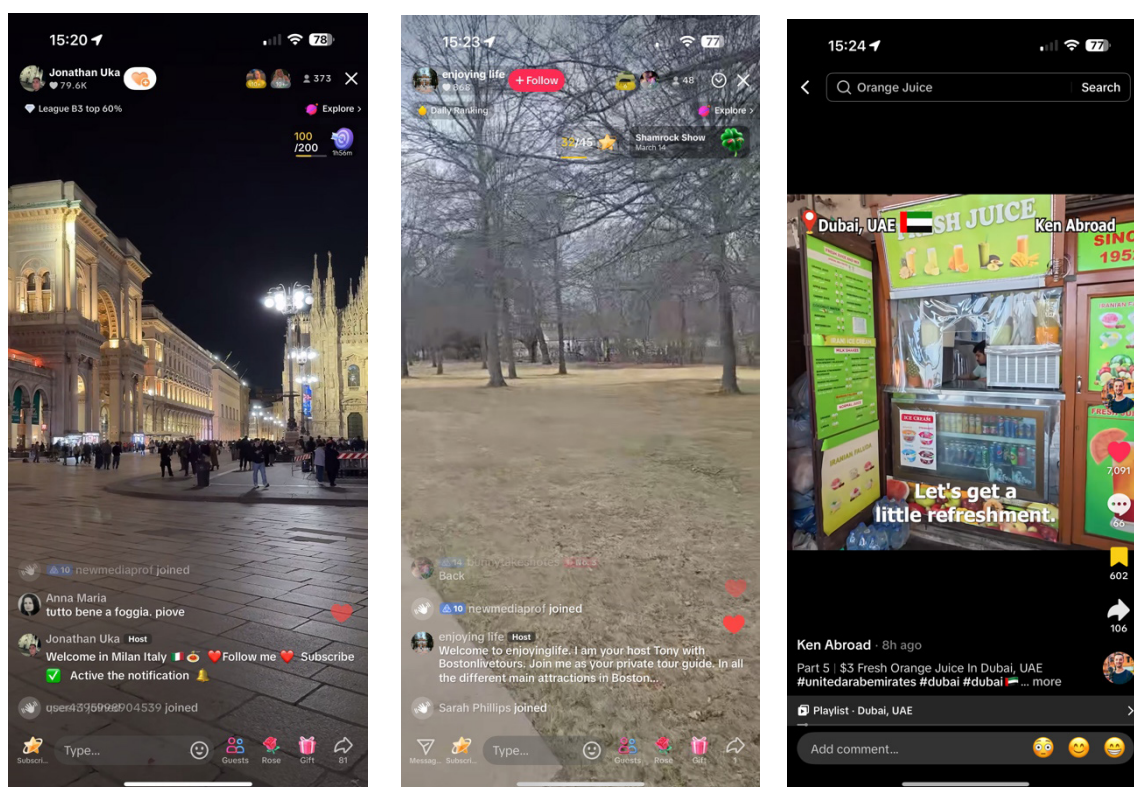


Figure 25-27. Examples of social media travel influencers in Rome, Boston, and Dubai; Courtesy of the author.

The images in Figures 25-27 are examples of what has become the modern social media tourist influencer. In some cases, these content creators are digital nomads<sup>12</sup> with other remote jobs to sustain themselves. Alternatively, the creators have built enough of a following that they have monetised the applications. These content creators will either go live or record videos that highlight certain aspects of a location such as tourist attractions or restaurants and then broadcast them to the world. This is a bifurcated situation that *can* be positive but usually has negative consequences. When an influencer finds a location and continually raves about it, they will often go viral, especially if they've built up a substantial following. While this can be a boon to the business in terms of what essentially amounts to free advertising, the response can often be so massive though that it overwhelms both the business and the neighbourhood.

An example of the connections between gentrification, tourism, and social media in Florence comes in the cases of All'Antico Vinaio and Salumeria Verdi [aka Pino's Sandwiches], two famous shops that sell Florentine panini. In 2014, All'Antico Vinaio, whose first outlet was located just adjacent to the Palazzo Vecchio, exploded on the social travel app Tripadvisor to such an extent that the shop was briefly the second most reviewed restaurant in the world on the site (the controversial owner of the chain, Tommaso Mazzanti had originally stated that it was the most reviewed outlet but later recanted with an apology in *La Nazione*<sup>13</sup>). The area surrounding the shop was already crowded due to its proximity to Palazzo Vecchio, but the immense popularity caused the crowds on Via dei Neri to balloon to an unsustainable level as seen in Figure 29. Additionally, with the increase in business in what had been a providential sandwich shop started by the family, Mazzanti raised prices, and they currently sit around ten Euro each on average.

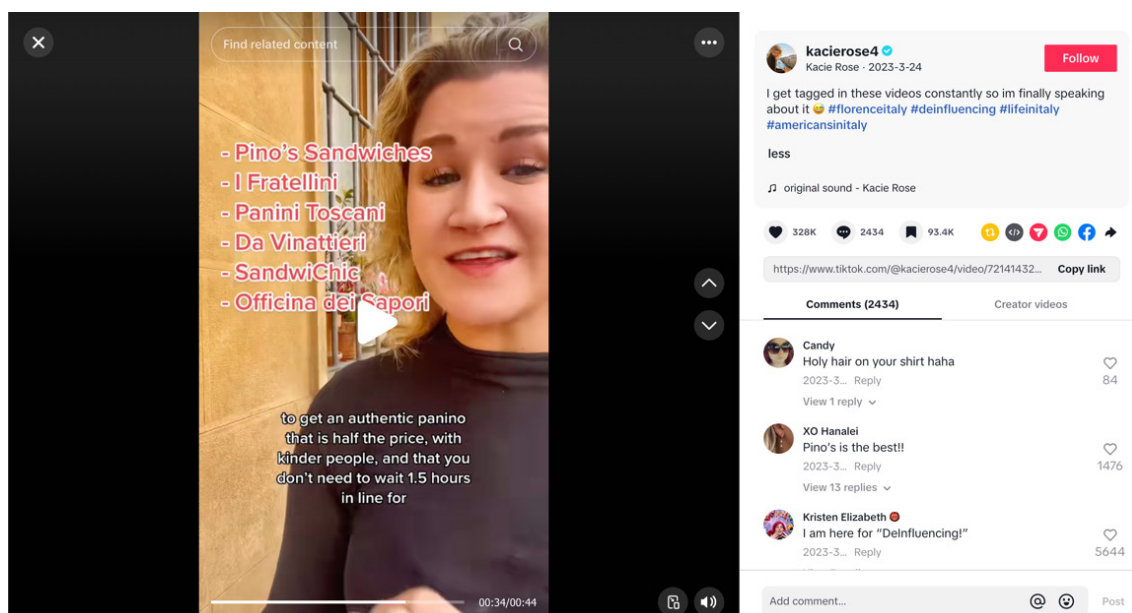
The interest in the shop grew beyond Tripadvisor with the explosion of travel influencers on applications like TikTok and YouTube. The influencer seen in Figure 28 is

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<sup>12</sup> A digital nomad is someone who works remotely in various locations of their choosing, oftentimes in other countries.

<sup>13</sup> The article is located at <https://www.lanazione.it/firenze/cronaca/antico-vinaio-tripadvisor-b9a5d218?live>.

one such example. The user @kacierose4, or Kacie Rose, is an American expat living in Florence with her Italian partner. She has been going live and creating videos for some time and has built up a very successful travel business catering to Americans visiting Italy. The post in the figure which discusses alternate outlets in Florence to get a panino that *aren't* All'Antico Vinaio is typical in the style of her content (cheerful and upbeat) as well as the amount of engagement - note that the post had 328,000 likes, over 2400 comments, and was saved by 93,000 users; Rose has an audience on TikTok alone of 1.1 million followers. These numbers are an indicator that more travelers, especially young people, are turning to social media to engage with the travel experience.



**Figure 28.** TikTok Influencer @kacierose4 explains where to get panino; Courtesy of the author

A letter to the editor of Journal of Travel Medicine in 2021 (during the pandemic) lamented about the lengths that influencers will go to in order to satiate their audiences, especially since “Tourists are increasingly choosing to consult social media influencers about travel destinations. One study reported that 88% of social media users would consider visiting a destination recommended to them by their favourite influencers (Mangan and Flaherty, 2021).” Jang and Park take an example of a Seoul residential neighbourhood in



which touristification<sup>14</sup> is a byproduct of urban revitalisation and comes from governmental interest, social media, and a stronger tourism demand (2020). Given the previous statistic that indicates the strong amount of faith that travellers put in influencers, Bašan, et. al. sought to create a model to study social media influencer (SMI) credibility by conducting statistical analysis. This was intended to determine the level of tourist destination product congruence with the trust established via the influencer. While there is other scholarship (2013 and earlier) on the intersection of social media and tourism, the advent and global popularity of the application TikTok (and its associated feature TikTok Live) which was created in 2016 makes contemporaneous research more robust. In addition, there is still a dearth of scholarship connecting these two fields.



*Figure 29. Crowds line up outside All'Antico Vinaio [Via dei Neri location] during November 2023  
Courtesy: the author*

It is worthy to note that the image in Figure 29 was taken during what is not considered the heavy season for Florence tourism (which is typically the summer), but in mid-November which has become much busier with the post-pandemic resumption of American families visiting college students who are studying abroad during the Thanksgiving holiday. The crowds have increased so significantly that in the last few years, the annual Florence Mercato Natale [Christmas Market] has moved up its opening

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<sup>14</sup> Touristification refers to the process of transformation of a place into a tourist space and its associated effects.

date from the first week of December to the last weekend in November, according to an employee at Finisterrae, a café in Piazza Santa Croce where the Market is staged. However, while social media helped Mazzanti build his empire (the chain now has more than sixteen outlets including Dubai and five locations in the United States), his usage of it hasn't necessarily endeared him to all audiences. Locals especially, have sneered at how his obnoxious self-promotion (in December 2022, he posted a video to Tiktok revealing his purchase of a 230M Euro Lamborghini) have only lined his coffers and made navigating the streets more treacherous.



**Figure 30.** *The Mercato Natale in Piazza Santa Croce (2024) opens a week earlier to account for Americans traveling for Thanksgiving; image courtesy of the author*

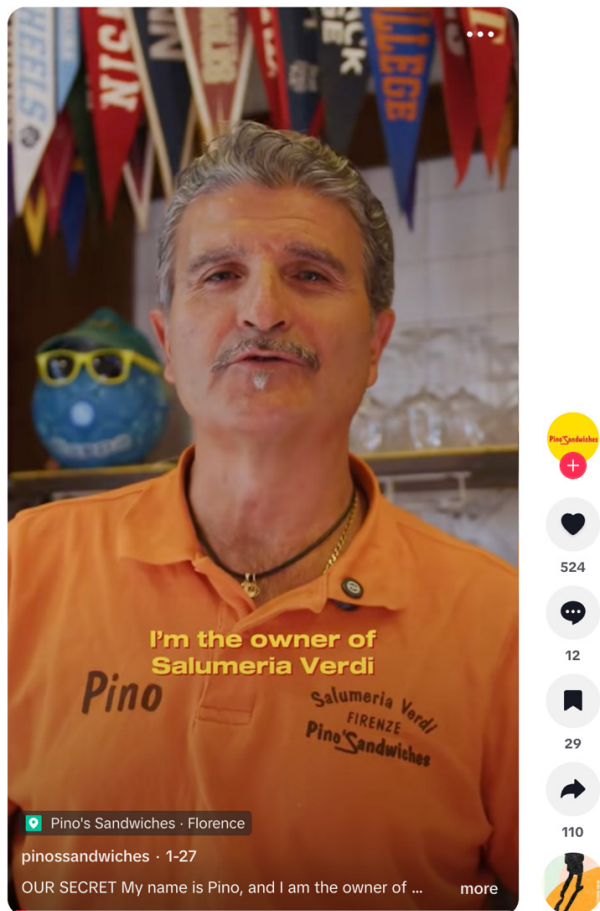
Additionally, All'Anitco Vinaio announced a partnership with Percassi (former owner of Atalanta BC) to expand the chain in Italy and throughout the world. This was received with derision as fans of the chain felt it would become too corporatised and lose quality, according to an article on the Italian food news website Scatti Di Gusto<sup>15</sup>.

Not all restaurants have responded to the popularity with such braggadocio. Pino [last name redacted], owner of Salumeria Verdi located along Via Giuseppe Verdi, has resisted the urge to raise the prices on his sandwiches. Pino has also embraced his collegiate

<sup>15</sup> That article can be accessed at <https://www.scattidigusto.it/allantico-vinaio-lamborghini-hater-polemiche-social>



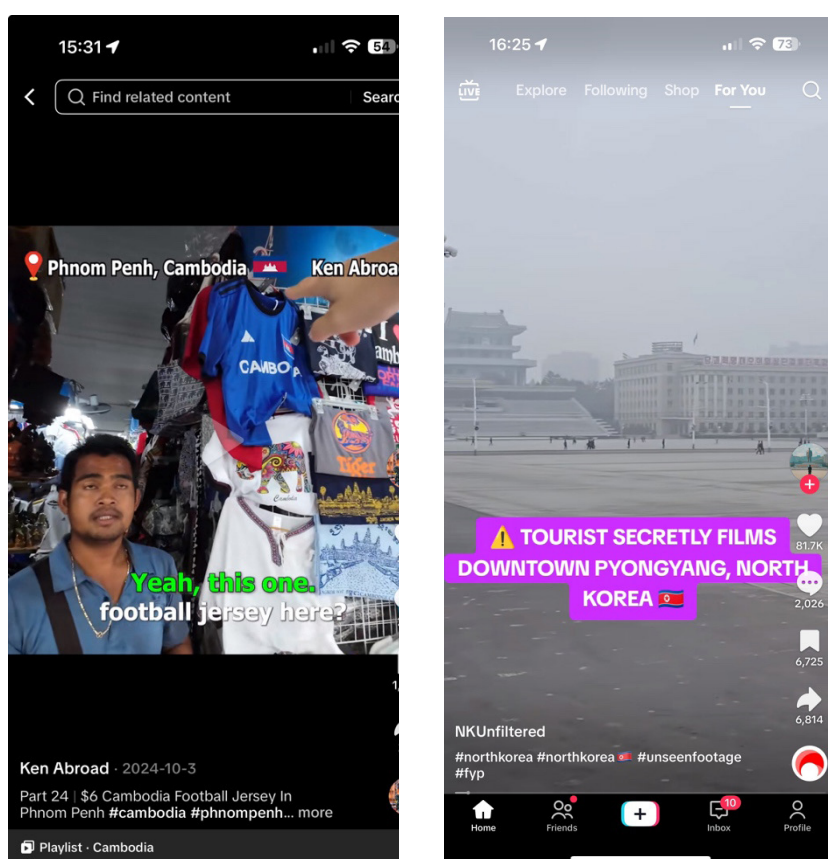
clientele by displaying pennants that students bring into the shop. He regularly posts content on TikTok and Instagram and is slowly building a following. A screenshot from his channel is in Figure 31. While travel influencers usually bring large crowds of their followers, their impact is not always completely negative. Some influencers have made a point of visiting areas that aren't traditional tourist hotspots like Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia, Baghdad, Iraq, or Karachi, Pakistan. These are cities that many users, especially those from the West, likely haven't visited and the "gonzo" nature of TikTok Live can give users a taste of what a locale is all about, especially one they've never thought about traveling to or might be advised against or barred from visiting.



*Figure 31. Owner Pino of Salumeria Verdi. Notice the collegiate pennants hanging from the wall in the background; Courtesy of the author.*

However, media portrayals (in television and film) of certain locations are leading to more distressing cases of overtourism and its negative side effects. Fans of the *Max* series *The White Lotus* have started flocking to Koh Samui, Thailand where the third

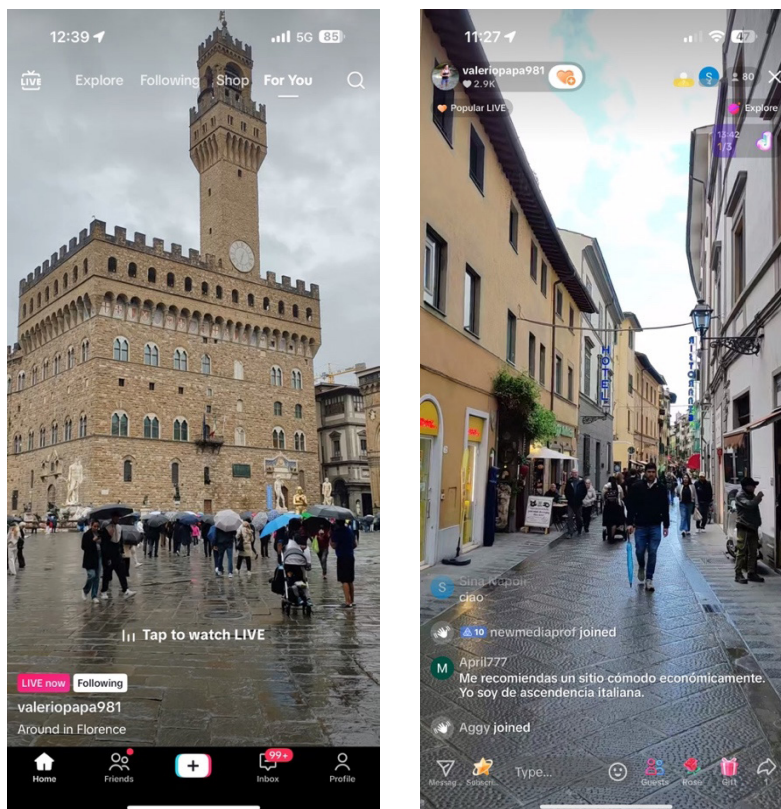
season of the show takes place. Auction house Sotheby's' chief marketing officer called it "The White Lotus Effect," a term which refers to affluent westerners traveling to or even buying real estate in the settings of their favourite television programs (previous seasons were set in Maui and Sicily which also saw a spike in travel interest beyond what is already present).



*Figure 32. Examples of tourist influencers from the author's TikTok account*

Writing for the activist travel outlet Cataylst Travel, Kleigh Carroll notes, "The Four Seasons in Taormina [Italy], where much of the [The White Lotus Season 2] was filmed, was completely booked for six months after production wrapped. Similarly, the set for Season 1, the Four Seasons Resort Maui at Wailea, Hawaii, reported a 425% uptick in website visits and a 386% increase in availability checks. When Thailand was announced as the setting for Season 3 in mid 2024, booking platforms reported increases in searches, and airlines added flights to cities like Phuket (2025)." Colin Nagy expressed annoyance that many travel outlets which have been critical of overtourism seem to be "behaving

like golden retrievers chasing a tennis ball, sprinting after the hype with little critical reflection (2025).” He notes that “The Four Seasons positioning itself with *The White Lotus* is one of the smartest marketing partnerships in travel. It is a masterclass in old-school, top-of-funnel marketing, achieving something few luxury brands manage; catapulting into mainstream awareness while maintaining exclusivity (2025).” However, Koh Samui [the location of the most recent season] is also facing significant infrastructure challenges like water scarcity, overcrowding, and littering. Figure 33 shows influencers even around in Florence.



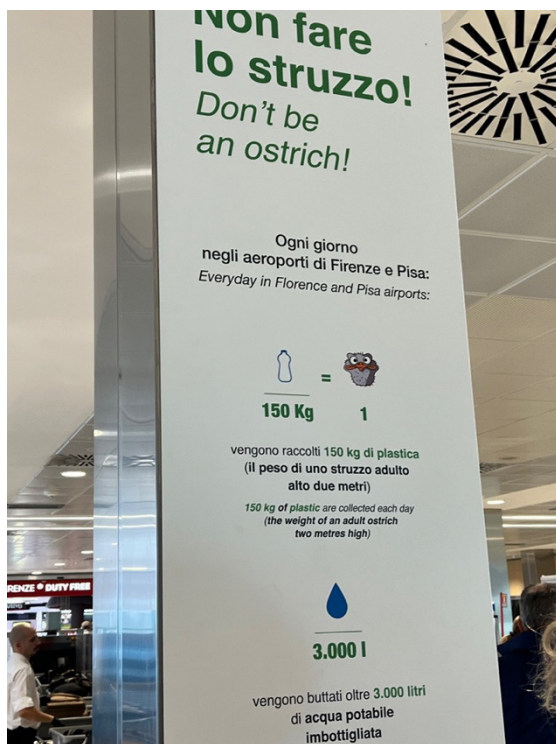
**Figure 33.** TikTok travel influencers broadcast from Florence; Courtesy of the author's TikTok account

## Conclusion and Further Research

As once local neighbourhoods become global destinations, curated online portrayals and live walking experiences fuel an influx of travelers and investment that accelerate overtourism and gentrification as has been extensively discussed in this report. More visitors are turning to social media for both travel influencing and information gathering and cities are seeing that the intertwined forces discussed here reveal how

digital visibility can fundamentally alter urban landscapes. Add in the rapid development of technology (the iPhone is less than twenty years old as of this writing) and the pent-up demand after the pandemic, and city planners are dealing with a crisis of epic proportions.

Earlier in this document, a quote mentioned the need for municipalities to take proactive measures and have a solid plan to address sustainable tourism. Regions that have not factored in these issues like Bali [dealing with plastic pollution and degrading natural resources] or Barcelona [locals are harassing visitors] have suffered so heavily that major travel publications like Fodors are actively discouraging people, mainly Americans, from visiting.



*Figure 34. Sign seen at Florence Airport imploring visitors to recycle; Courtesy of the author*

Addressing these challenges requires a multivalent approach but will also rely on creative thinking and tourist cooperation. The sign in Figure 34 was seen at the Florence Airport in late 2024 and reflects attempts by the region to address the environmental impact of overtourism, especially in terms of plastic waste and water usage.

Figure 35 shows a billboard image that appears all over the city and is a part of the



website [enjoyrespectfirenze.com](http://enjoyrespectfirenze.com) which is part of a huge campaign launched by Florence to *strongly* encourage visitors on just how to experience the city. As the website Destination Florence explains, “The campaign ‘Florence is Alive. Treat it with Care’ was created to raise tourists’ awareness about the importance of respectful and sustainable behaviour during their stay. Promoted by the ministerial project for major Italian destinations for sustainable tourism and implemented by the City of Florence in collaboration with the Destination Florence Foundation, this initiative aims to inform visitors on how to reduce their impact on the city (“Florence is alive.”).”



*Figure 35. Billboard for the Florence is Alive campaign; Courtesy of the author.*

The “Florence is Alive” campaign gives helpful but emphatic advice on how to conduct oneself in the city. Some of the suggestions include monitoring volume in the city, especially at night and wearing proper attire, “While flip flops and shorts are great for the beach, proper footwear and longer trousers are more suited to our city streets. These fashion tips become a rule when visiting churches, as most of them enforce covering the shoulders and knees (“I’ve got my eye on you!”).” The site also encourages shoppers to investigate local artisans, avoid jumping into fountains, and even has integrated social content on YouTube as shown in the screenshots in Figure 36. Strangely, the author noted that Florence doesn’t seem to have a strong TikTok presence. Given the number of young people that use TikTok especially for travel (many of the influencers are in their twenties and early thirties), building up a solid TikTok channel could be a big boon to Florence and dovetail nicely with the Feel Florence app.



**Figure 36.** Stills from the video content from *Destination Florence* advising what NOT to do; Courtesy of Destination Florence. The copy in the left still reads “Dance until late at night”

A 2013 report from UNESCO World Heritage Convention entitled *New Life for Historic Cities* details the urgency to preserve urban heritage in the face of a series of strengthening threats: climate change, urbanisation, mass tourism, market exploitation. The brochure details UNESCO’s approach to managing historic urban landscapes. This approach considers a variety of factors and creates a “layered city” scheme. Of course, there is the traditional notion of a “city centre” or “historic centre” in the main square of a city, but this plan needs to consider the wider urban situation and its geography. What is difficult however is when small concentrations end up contributing more than they “should,” for example, according to the report, “Salzburg (Austria) constitutes only 6 per cent of the country’s population but contributes 25 per cent of its net economic product” (Haraguchi, 14). Stakeholders however must put more pressure on community leaders to push back harder against the issue of overtourism and the imbalanced pressure that it can put on smaller locales.

One useful way that Florence could continue to use social media to its own advantage would be to start directly partnering with the influencers to help carry out the #RinasceFirenze scheme. Given that so many users put large amounts of trust in these influencers, a partnership could assist the city with a stronger enforcement of tourist



movement. As anyone in higher education knows, students will often listen to their peers before their professors.

In Boston, it is clear that greater attention and priority needs to be given to making the city more affordable. This will require strong dedication and cooperation on behalf of both the Mayor of Boston and Governor of Massachusetts along with stakeholders in local government, commerce, and education and the recent initiatives are an indicator of that interest. Boston has worked to also target certain neighbourhoods that specifically need assistance. Examples of this would include the “Dudley Street Neighbourhood Initiative” in Roxbury to control eminent domain privileges to prevent the city from claiming land unethically. In another targeted property rescue, the city of Mattapan saved a housing complex from market-rate prices and converted 250 residential units into permanently affordable housing.

This project makes several contributions to the existing literature. First, this is one of the only studies that directly looks at Florence and Boston in a comparative case study. Doing the project in this manner meant that the municipalities could potential learn from each other’s experiences. Second, this report is one of the first to connect live social influencing with tourism from a variety of angles, both positive and negative. Finally, it is the hope of the author that this report will assist other municipalities with handling their own issues with overtourism, for as has been displayed, Florence is certainly not the only city confronting this. In conclusion, it cannot be overstated how urgent addressing gentrification is in both Florence and Boston. As has been discussed, both cities have experienced levels of strain that are different but have affected their residents in equally negative ways. In the race for likes, follows, and five-star reviews, communities are being priced out, displaced, and reshaped beyond recognition. Until *everyone*, governments, businesses and residents address the digital dynamics fueling urban transformation, gentrification and overtourism will remain more than just buzzwords—they'll be symptoms of a deeper, systemic imbalance.

## Appendix A

These images represent digital keyboxes seen throughout the Centro Storico of Florence. All photos were taken in November 2023 and November 2024 and are courtesy of the author.



## Appendix B

These images represent examples of foreign commercial influence in Florence. All photos were taken in November 2023 and November 2024 and are courtesy of the author.



*Image 1 A Burger King Restaurant located near the Florence train station; Photo courtesy of the author.*



*Image 2 A Star Chicken Restaurant showing cuisine aimed at international (esp. student) tastes; Photo courtesy of the author*



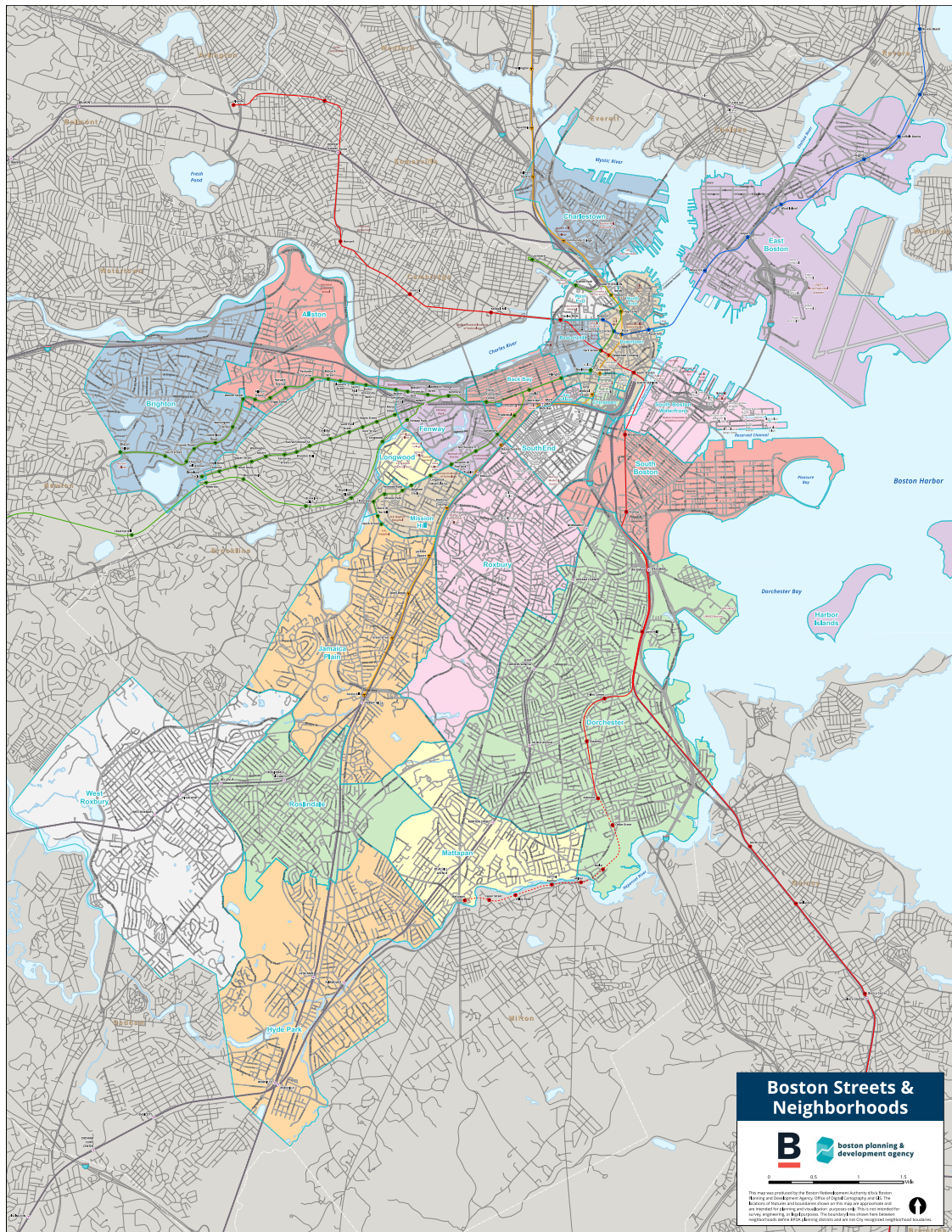


*Image 3 Another example of catering to more American palates with Tex-Mex styles; Photo courtesy of the author.*



*Image 4 Note the large Ferragamo advert in the Piazza della Repubblica with the 1871 Merry Go Round in the foreground; Photo courtesy of the author.*

## Appendix C



A clearer version of this map can be found [here](#); Courtesy of Boston Planning and Development Agency



## Notes

1. *Cultural heritage* includes artefacts, monuments, a group of buildings and sites, museums that have a diversity of values including symbolic, historic, artistic, aesthetic, ethnological or anthropological, scientific and social significance. It includes tangible heritage (movable, immobile and underwater), intangible cultural heritage (ICH) embedded into cultural, and natural heritage artefacts, sites or monuments. The definition excludes ICH related to other cultural domains such as festivals, celebration etc. It covers industrial heritage and cave paintings. *Natural heritage* refers to natural features, geological and physiographical formations and delineated areas that constitute the habitat of threatened species of animals and plants and natural sites of value from the point of view of science, conservation or natural beauty. It includes private and publicly protected natural areas, zoos, aquaria and botanical gardens, natural habitat, marine ecosystems, sanctuaries, reservoirs etc.
2. *Direct Displacement* refers to a situation where **households are forced to move from their homes**, due to non-renewal or lack of a lease, eviction, foreclosure, demolition/ redevelopment/ substantial renovation of their housing, or physical conditions that make a home uninhabitable, including climate disasters. Typically this results from actions taken - or not taken - by the property owner, though historically it has also resulted from government action through urban renewal and clearance.
3. *Economic displacement* refers to a situation where **current residents of an area can no longer afford to live there** due to rising housing costs. This can result from a range of actors and actions, including but not limited to private development, public investment, insufficient supply relative to demand, rising utility costs, and demographic change. This is also sometimes referred to as “indirect” displacement.
4. *Gentrification* is a **pattern of neighbourhood change** in which **a previously low-income neighbourhood experiences new investment, whether by private or public actors, accompanied by demographic changes**, increasing home values and/or rents, and other social and economic changes associated with



the physical, cultural, and/or political **displacement of existing lower-income residents**. Gentrification is acknowledged to also include the ways that climate change, and responses to it, may impact property markets and neighbourhood change patterns. Importantly, while the issues are related, not all displacement is linked to gentrification.

5. *Commercial/Cultural Displacement* is, similar to residents, **the closure or relocation of businesses and cultural enterprises that may be the result of direct or economic displacement**. They may be adversely impacted by non- renewal or absence of a lease, redevelopment or demolition of their existing premises, or rising rents. When the nature of services and goods sold in a given area shift, existing residents can feel a sense of dislocation or detachment from community.

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# Commodification of Place: An Analysis of the Link between Overtourism and Gentrification in Florence, Italy

## Teaching Notes

### 1. About the Author

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### 3. About the Case Study

- a. **Case Title:** Commodification of Place: An Analysis of the Link Between Overtourism and Gentrification in Florence, Italy
- b. **Disciplines:** Tourism Studies, Hospitality Studies, Media Studies, Sociology, Urban Studies, Public Policy
- c. **Keywords:** overtourism, Florence, social media, influencer, #RinasceFirenze
- d. **Abstract:** This teaching case explores the intertwined dynamics of gentrification and overtourism in Florence, a city renowned for its Renaissance heritage and cultural significance. While tourism has long been a cornerstone of Florence's economy, the exponential rise in short-term rentals, luxury developments, and tourist-centric services has reshaped the city's social and economic landscape pushing locals out of the Centro Storico [city centre] and into the outskirts. While Florence has put in place many measures to counteract this, which will be discussed in this case, one of the main causes of the problem more recently have been social media influencers. This case challenges students to examine how global tourism trends, local policy decisions, and economic incentives contribute to the displacement of long-term residents, the erosion of traditional neighbourhoods, and the commodification of culture. Through the lens of Florence, students will analyse the tensions between preservation and progress and evaluate policy alternatives aimed at balancing economic vitality with social equity and cultural sustainability. The case is designed for

courses in urban studies, public policy, tourism management, and sociology, and encourages critical thinking on sustainable urban development in historic cities under global pressure.

### 3. About the Course:

- d. Audience:** Undergraduates
- e. Level:** Upper division
- f. How does this case study fit in the course curriculum?** This case can be modified to fit in any of the above disciplines
- g. Special circumstance:** As some of the primary source materials are in Italian, a working knowledge will help but is not required. Verifying translations would be beneficial.

### A. LEARNING GOALS

Community Standard	Learning Goals
<b>A1. Tourism-related learning goals:</b> Cultural Awareness and Sensitivity	Students should be able to enunciate what cultural sensitivity is and why it matters, especially to cities of antiquity. Students should be able to articulate why Florence is a city of antiquity and its importance to cultural heritage.
<b>A1. Tourism-related learning goals:</b> Sustainability	One of the most critical issues facing contemporary tourism studies is sustainable tourism that minimizes the impact on the environment. Between massive cruise ships that port in historic cities only to have day trips to the carbon footprint of transatlantic flights, the idea of sustainable tourism must be understood by students and they should be able to suggest some strategies to mitigate the impact.
<b>A1. Tourism-related learning goals:</b> Carrying Capacity (Overtourism)	Carrying capacity is the maximum number of persons an area can handle before it becomes overwhelmed and degraded leading to overtourism. Students should also be able to cite other prominent cities where carrying capacity is stretched to its breaking point. Students should be able to point out areas in Florence where overtourism has been most problematic to the locals and the municipality.
<b>A2. Urban Studies-related learning goals:</b> Gentrification	Gentrification is the process of displacement of a neighbourhood due to the influx of affluent residents and tourists. Students need to understand not only that tourists often follow the same patterns and tastes similar to gentrifiers but that the issue is also related to short term rentals and their proliferation throughout the city, especially in Centro Storico. Students should understand the differences between hotels and short term rentals as well as the visual impacts of gentrification such as the digital lockboxes on buildings, loudspeakers from tour leaders, and skyrocketing rent.

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<b>A2. Urban Studies-related learning goals:</b> Public Spaces	Depending on the audience (American vs. EU students), this will take a slightly different approach. For American students, it's important to discuss the importance of public squares in Europe in the daily lives of the residents. The US doesn't have these in the same sense as in European cities (more of a "downtown."). Students will then have to understand how public spaces are managed and finally will study the #RinasceFirenze document which places one of its key factors as a reenvisioning of public spaces, especially Centro Storico.
<b>A2. Urban Studies-related learning goals:</b> Smart Cities	Florence has engaged in several initiatives to turn the Comune into a Smart City to battle overtourism including the Feel Florence app and real time crowd mapping for tourist flows. Students should be able to devise additional schemes to help the city become even more "smart." This segment will segue and connect to the next learning goal on media.
<b>A3. Communication-related learning goals:</b> The impact of media on tourism	Students should be able to clearly understand how exoticized media portrayals of certain locations can lead to overtourism as fans of films and programs flock to areas that are swiftly overwhelmed; recently, Sotheby's has dubbed this "The White Lotus Effect" after the popular Max program. Students should cite other examples in which portrayals of a location have led to an increase in tourism (e.g. The Lizzie McGuire Movie took place in Rome and many fans of the film have gone to visit spots).
<b>A3. Communication-related learning goals:</b> The impact of social media on tourism	Students will understand how social media has impacted tourist sites in both positive and negative ways; showing off unique parts of the world that aren't heavily touristed and have been portrayed negatively; or overwhelming a small shop because a review goes viral and then hurts the area (Al'antico vinaio would be a good example).
<b>A4. Public policy-related learning goals:</b> Municipal response	Students should be able to accurately and clearly explain how Firenze has responded including #RinsaceFirenze and the Florence is Alive PR campaign.
<b>A4. Public policy-related learning goals:</b> The UN	Students should understand the impact of the UN's pre-emptive actions and responses to sites of world heritage including the 1972 World Heritage Convention and the World Tourism Barometer.

## **B. SUGGESTED IMPLEMENTATION**

### **B1. Prerequisites**

- Tourism Studies basic understanding
- Quantitative and qualitative research methods
- Elementary Italian (optional)

### **B2. Suggested Instructor Preparation**

The following papers and documents will assist instructor preparation for the case:

- Ali, Rafat. “Exploring the Coming Perils of Overtourism.” Skift, 23 Aug. 2016, [Web link](#).
- Bašan, Lorena, et al. “Social Media Influencers as Co-Creators of The Tourist Destination Value.” *Tourism in Southern and Eastern Europe*, 7, 2023, [web link](#).
- Cocola-Gant, Agustín. (2018). “Tourism gentrification.” *Handbook of Gentrification Studies*, edited by Loretta Lees, & Martin Phillips, Elgar Publishing, 2008, pp. 281-293.
- Doxey, G.V. (1975). “A Causation Theory of Visitor-Resident Irritants: Methodology and Research Inferences.” *Travel and Tourism Research Association Sixth Annual Conference Proceedings*, September 1975, San Diego. Presentation.
- RinasceFirenze: Ripensiamo La Città. Comune di Firenze. Comune di Firenze. 2020. [Web link](#). (Note: document is in Italian)
- Haraguchi, Sachiko. “New Life for Historic Cities: The historic urban landscape approach explained.” *United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation. UNESCO World Heritage Center*, 2013. [Web link](#).

**B3. Suggested time for instructor preparation:** 5-7 hours (depending on background)

### **B4. Suggested Student Preparation:**

- Student Preparation Step 1: Media Literacy, students will need to familiarise themselves with google maps, tiktok, Feel Florence app, screening of the



program The White Lotus.

- Student Preparation Step 2: An introduction to the case would be helpful highlighting tourism in Florence before and after the pandemic. The contentious nature of the legal battles would also help to add some context, especially if the students are either primarily American or unfamiliar with the issues involved.

**B5. Suggested time for student preparation:** 2 hours

**B6. Duration:** This case study should ideally last 2-3 class periods given the breadth of the material addressed.

## C. RESOURCES & IMPLEMENTATION DETAILS

### Resources

- An interview with an AUF graduate student who discussed her experiences with gentrification in Florence from an American resident is on YouTube and can be found [here](#). This can be very helpful for students to hear about the issue from someone close to their own age.
- A companion video channel with footage and observations from the author is on YouTube and can be found [here](#).
- A public lecture given by the author at The American University of Florence in 2024 November discussing overtourism and gentrification in Florence and Boston can be found [here](#).

### Implementation Timeline Suggestions

- Time required for students to read/view the case related material prior to start of the overtourism case study: 2 hours
- Minimum in class time required: at least two 75-minute sessions
- Time outside of class needing to complete the case: 5-7 hours (students working in teams)
- If the case study needs to be implemented in multiple sessions, suggest in-class activities for each session
  - Session 1: Introduction to the case study and Florence (20 minutes)

- Session 2: Connecting overtourism, gentrification and the media (50-minute class period)
- Session 3: Opportunity for students to work on the case study in their teams (30 minutes)

### **Suggested Assignments and In-Class Activities**

I. Google Maps Exercise: Students will use the timeline feature on Google Maps to explore how Florence has changed, been gentrified, and to observe the crowds during high season

Ask them to:

- Identify signs of gentrification or tourist saturation (e.g., Airbnbs, boutique hotels, luxury shops, closed local stores).
- Mark areas that may be experiencing displacement of locals.
- Hypothesize what the neighborhood might look like in 10 years if current trends continue.

II. Role-playing: Students will be assigned roles of the following: Florentine resident, Airbnb property owner, City tourism official, small business owner, art student at local uni, tourist.

- Give students 5-10 min to review perspectives
- Stage a town hall debate on proposed limits to short-term rentals and tourist permits (encouraging students to stay in character and defend their interests).

III. Design a Policy Proposal

- **Prompt:** “You are a team of urban planners hired by the City of Florence. Propose a policy to mitigate overtourism and/or gentrification while protecting cultural heritage and resident wellbeing.”
- Problem definition (1-2 key issues)
- 2-3 actionable, realistic policies
- Intended outcomes and tradeoffs

## Commodification of Place: An Analysis of the Link between Overtourism and Gentrification in Boston, USA

### Teaching Notes

#### 1. About the Author

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#### 3. About the Case Study

- a. **Case Title:** Commodification of Place: An Analysis of the Link Between Overtourism and Gentrification in Boston, USA
- b. **Disciplines:** Tourism Studies, Hospitality Studies, American Studies, Media Studies, Sociology, Urban Studies, Public Policy
- c. **Keywords:** overtourism, Boston, social media, influencer, Massachusetts, gentrification, displacement, housing affordability
- d. **Abstract:** This teaching case examines how tourism and gentrification have had an impact in Boston, the state capitol of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts in the USA. Unlike Florence and other EU cities, where overtourism and a massive interest in antiquity have driven tourist numbers into the stratosphere, Boston's issues have been a slower, more insidious development of gentrification and residential displacement at the whims of capitalist and neoliberal policies. In Boston, decades of a thriving economy along with top tier higher education and healthcare and a rapidly growing technology sector have made living in the city unsustainably expensive. Due to the small size of Massachusetts, the housing crisis is rippling out across the entire Commonwealth. Through the years, more and more communities of colour have been displaced in neighbourhoods like Jamaica Plain and West Roxbury. City and state officials have attempted to counteract some of these forces with new affordable housing measures but have received pushback from landlords and corporations. Boston

has been named numerous times as one of the most expensive American cities to reside in, outranking both New York City and Los Angeles. While studying the case in Boston, students will be exposed to how capitalistic forces in affluent American cities have allowed gentrification to flourish and how residents, stakeholders, and localities can fight the influx. The case is designed for courses in urban studies, public policy, and sociology, and encourages critical thinking on sustainable urban development in American cities under new complicated, and often contradictory, regimes.

### 3. About the Course:

- d. Audience:** Undergraduates
- e. Level:** Upper division
- f. How does this case study fit in the course curriculum?** This case can be modified to fit in any of the above disciplines
- g. Special circumstance:** A primer on the geography and topography of metropolitan Boston area would be very helpful for students not familiar with the area; it's a unique layout for American cities. The author has included a map of the city in Appendix B and a link to a higher quality version of the map is [here](#).

### A. LEARNING GOALS

Community Standard	Learning Goals
<b>A1. Tourism-related learning goals:</b> Carrying Capacity (Overtourism)	Carrying capacity is the maximum number of persons an area can handle before it becomes overwhelmed and degraded leading to overtourism. Students should also be able to cite other prominent cities where carrying capacity is stretched to its breaking point. Students should understand the different times when Boston does experience overtourism issues (graduation season and the autumn season in Salem, MA). Students should be able to enunciate whether tourism in Boston is a critical issue.
<b>A2. Urban Studies-related learning goals:</b> Community Response	Students should have a clear understanding of how the community has responded to gentrification, rising costs, and the Boston's efforts to ease these problems. These stakeholders include residents, students, small business owners, universities. Students should be able to cite specific examples. This community response often can come in the form of social media posts, interviews, and community activism.

Community Standard	Learning Goals
<b>A2. Urban Studies-related learning goals:</b> Gentrification	Gentrification is the process of displacement of a neighbourhood due to the influx of affluent residents and tourists. Students should understand the historical factors that impacted gentrification in Boston, especially as it relates to the displacement of communities of colour and the conflicts between small businesses and the Boston municipality especially relating to things like bike lanes, failing public transit, and housing costs.
<b>A2. Urban Studies-related learning goals:</b> Boston Neighbourhoods	A report published in early 2019 from the Joint Center for Housing Studies at Harvard University pointed to how neighbourhoods have changed over the past twenty years in Boston. Amongst other factors, the report highlights that while there is growing racial and ethnic diversity in Boston, those groups are continually being isolated (Hermann, et al). The issue is also exacerbated by the fact that Boston is considered by people of colour as one of <a href="#">America's most racist cities</a> . These legacies are still at play when some of the areas with the highest commercial investment are also the whitest. While Boston has the reputation of being a bastion of liberalism, that is not necessarily the case. Students should be able to understand the legacy of racial profiling in Boston including the process of redlining which has led it to the situation it's in today. Students should also understand how gentrified areas in much of Boston have become very expensive and the nongentrified areas have become poorer with higher crime.
<b>A2. Urban Studies-related learning goals:</b> Casino and Online Gaming	In a 2024 paper published by scholars in management, there was new evidence to link the role of gaming, especially online gambling, with poverty and financial strife. Massachusetts not only expanded the gaming laws in 2011 to allow up to three casino resorts (in the west, central, and eastern regions) but also legalized online sports gambling in 2022 (the latter being quite problematic given the number of colleges in the state and the fact that collegiate gambling is becoming a growing problem. Students should especially pay attention to this section and understand not only the risks of gambling from a socioeconomic standpoint but what this also does to communities where casinos are located. Interestingly, the two cities where the Massachusetts Casinos are located, Springfield and Everett, are both two of the heaviest cities to experience poverty with the former being the poorest city in the state. Both cities have significant populations of People of Colour.
<b>A2. Urban-related learning goals:</b> Too much of a good thing...	Boston is a known hub for the best in healthcare (Mass General), higher education (Harvard, MIT, etc.), and is rapidly emerging in technology (TripAdvisor, Facebook, and Bose) attracting the talent popularly labeled “young professionals.” While these are features any city would love to have, the tradeoff is that the increase in affluent highly paid talent has caused housing costs to outpace salaries. Students should understand the balance that cities have to face when trying to attract new investment while also keeping it affordable. A good example on this for the instructor to use would be amazon's bid for their <a href="#">second headquarters</a> and how Boston and other cities were trying to lure the company.

Community Standard	Learning Goals
<b>A3. Communication-related learning goals:</b> Visual evidence of gentrification	Students should be able to understand visual examples of gentrification such as the Old Corner Bookstore in Government Centre or the Seaport district.
<b>A4. Public policy-related learning goals:</b> Municipal response	Students should be able to accurately and clearly explain how Boston and the Commonwealth have attempted to respond to the issue including implementing bike lanes and attempting to build more low cost housing.
<b>A4. Public policy-related learning goals:</b> Real estate market in Boston	It is also imperative for students to understand the racist concept of redlining in real estate finance and how it was enacted in Boston, Detroit, and many other cities.

## B. SUGGESTED IMPLEMENTATION

### B1. Prerequisites

- Urban Studies basic understanding
- Quantitative and qualitative research methods

### B2. Suggested Instructor Preparation

The following papers and documents will assist instructor preparation for the case:

- Pattison, Robert. “The Process of Neighborhood Upgrading and Gentrification: An Examination of Two Neighborhoods in the Boston Metropolitan Area.” 1977. Massachusetts Institute of Technology. Masters Thesis. [Web link](#).
- Edozie, Rita, et al. “Changing Faces of Greater Boston.” Boston Indicators, The Boston Foundation, UMass Boston, and The UMass Donahue Institute, 2019. [Web link](#).
- Ghaffari, Leila, et. al. “Toward a socially acceptable gentrification: A review of strategies and practices against displacement.” (2018). *Compass Geography*, 12, 2, 2018, 49 - 78. [Web link](#).
- Hermann, Alexander, Luberoff, David, and McCue Daniel. “Mapping Over Two Decades of Neighborhood Change in the Boston Metropolitan Area.” *Joint Center for Housing Studies of Harvard University*. January 2019. [Web link](#).



**B3. Suggested time for instructor preparation: 5-7 hours (depending on background)****B4. Suggested Student Preparation:**

- Student Preparation Step 1: Media Literacy, students will need to familiarise themselves google maps, Instagram, YouTube and TikTok. Basic cartographic skills would be useful in reading maps.
- Student Preparation Step 2: An introduction to the case would be helpful highlighting the history and issue of gentrification in Boston. The contentious nature of the battles between the city and residents should also be highlighted as they are quite nuanced.

**B5. Suggested time for student preparation: 2 hours**

**B6. Duration:** This case study should ideally last 2-3 class periods given the breadth of the material addressed.

**C. IMPLEMENTATION DETAILS****Implementation Timeline Suggestions**

- Time required for students to read/view the case related material prior to start of the overtourism case study: 2 hours
- Minimum in class time required: at least two 75-minute sessions
- Time outside of class needing to complete the case: 5-7 hours (students working in teams)
- If the case study needs to be implemented in multiple sessions, suggest in-class activities for each session
  - Session 1: Introduction to the case study and Boston (20 minutes)
  - Session 2: Connecting gentrification, urban policy, and media studies (50-minute class period)
  - Session 3: Opportunity for students to work on the case study in their teams (30 minutes)

**Suggested Assignments and In-Class Activities**

- I. Google Maps Exercise: Students will use the timeline feature on Google Maps to explore how Boston has changed, been gentrified, and to examine

visual evidence of historic buildings being repurposed for commercial outlets.

- Provide a handout on the historic areas and buildings in Boston (attached in Appendix A)
- Break students into groups and assign them a neighbourhood in Boston (e.g. Jamaica Plain, Back Bay, South End, North End, Allston-Brighton, etc). Students should also have access to the internet to examine Bostonpads.com, an online realty technology platform for historical rental data.
- Ask them to:
  - Study the given handout
  - Analyse gentrification indicators (rising rents, changing racial demographics, small business turnover).
  - Study the city of Boston now and look to certain neighbourhoods to see how they've changed.
  - Use the timeline feature in Google Maps
  - Mark areas that may be experiencing displacement of locals or where historic buildings have become gentrified
  - Identify catalysts (infrastructure, development, branding)
  - Present findings and have each group include one resident's or activist group's perspective as these

II. Role-playing: Students will be assigned roles of the individuals involved in a contested development project (e.g. new luxury hotel in Seaport or a Whole Foods in JP): Long-term Boston resident, City officials, real estate developer, local business owner, newcomer who works in technology, college student.

- Give students 5-10 min to review perspectives
- Stage a town hall debate on proposed limits to short-term rentals and tourist permits (encouraging students to stay in character and defend their interests).

### III. Zoning and Redlining in Boston: A History

- Provide zone maps, documents from the BostonPlanning and Development Agency (the zoning code website is located [here](#)), and sample affordable housing policies (samples are [here](#) and [here](#)).
- With the students, analyse how zoning laws facilitate or hinder gentrification.
- Explain the process of redlining. Using the maps, do an example of how banks would racially profile clients even if they were qualified for the services.
- Propose a policy change or zoning reform for at least two neighbourhoods
- **Optional add-on: Using historical redlining data located at the [Mapping Inequality](#) project from University of Richmond, trace a neighbourhood's transformation from policy roots to present-day market values.**

### IV. The Residents Speak Out

- Ask students to use social media for this exercise (especially TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube).
- Have students search social media for content related to Boston, especially, the high cost of living or current controversies (like the [bike lane controversy](#) or the [White Stadium Women's Football \(Soccer\) fiasco](#)).
- Have students study the content, the comments and lead a discussion of how residents and influencers are portraying city life and how congruent that is with media portrayals or governmental officials' comments. It would be helpful to discuss Goffman's [theory of presentation of self](#) when doing this exercise.
- Discuss how effective using social media is to put pressure on governmental officials to deal with the issue.

## Appendix A

### Handout: Exploring Historic Boston

#### Introduction

Boston, Massachusetts, is one of the oldest cities in the United States. Founded in 1630, it played a major role in American history, especially during the Revolutionary War. Today, Boston is home to numerous historic sites and buildings that tell the story of the country's founding.

#### Historic Areas of Boston

##### 1. The Freedom Trail

- A 2.5-mile red-brick path through downtown Boston.
- Connects 16 historically significant sites, including museums, churches, meeting houses, and burial grounds.
- Highlights: Boston Common, Paul Revere House, Old North Church.

##### 2. Beacon Hill

- Known for its narrow, gas-lit streets and brick row houses.
- One of Boston's most picturesque neighborhoods.
- The Massachusetts State House, with its iconic golden dome, is located here.

##### 3. Back Bay

- Features Victorian brownstone homes and 19th-century architecture.
- Known for the Boston Public Library and Trinity Church.
- Newbury Street offers a mix of historic charm and modern boutiques.

##### 4. North End

- Boston's oldest residential neighborhood.
- Strong Italian-American heritage.
- Home to the Paul Revere House and Old North Church.

#### Key Historic Buildings

##### Site of the Boston Massacre (1770)

- Cobblestone ring marking site of civilian massacre and precursor to

### Revolutionary War

- Was also the location where the Declaration of Independence was first read to Bostonians

### **Faneuil Hall (1742)**

- Public meeting hall and one site of the planning of the Revolution
- Currently a shopping centre with many stores, restaurants, promenade

### **Old Corner Bookstore (1718)**

- Located in historic core of Boston at the corner of Washington and School Sts.
- Used in the planning of the revolution

### **Old North Church (1723)**

- Famous for “One if by land, two if by sea.”
- Signaled Paul Revere’s midnight ride.

### **Paul Revere House (1680)**

- Oldest remaining structure in downtown Boston.
- Revere lived here during his famous ride in 1775.

### **Massachusetts State House (1798)**

- Designed by Charles Bulfinch.
- Golden dome overlooks Boston Common.

### **Trinity Church (1877)**

- Located in Copley Square.
- A masterpiece of Richardsonian Romanesque architecture.

### **Boston Public Library (est. 1848)**

- First large free municipal library in the U.S.
- Motto: “Free to All.”

Appendix B

