

Airbnb and Overtourism - The Impact of Short-Term Rentals on Urban Tourism Pressure in Rome*

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Abstract

In recent years, the dynamic growth of short-term rental platforms, particularly Airbnb, has become one of the key factors intensifying the phenomenon of overtourism in European historic cities. The aim of this paper is to analyze the impact of short-term rentals on urban tourism pressure in Rome, one of the most visited cities in Europe. The study is based on secondary data analysis derived from Eurostat, ISTAT, Inside Airbnb, Roma Capitale open data sources, and industry reports related to tourism and housing markets. The paper examines changes in the number of Airbnb listings, tourism growth dynamics, the concentration of tourist activity in the historic city center, and the potential impact of short-term rentals on housing availability and residents' quality of life. Particular attention is given to the post-COVID-19 tourism recovery period. The findings indicate that the expansion of short-term rental platforms contributes to increasing tourism pressure, intensifies the touristification of urban space, and creates additional challenges for sustainable destination management. The paper contributes to the discussion on the role of short-term rental regulations and the application of smart tourism and governance tools in mitigating the negative effects of overtourism.

Keywords: overtourism; Airbnb; short-term rentals; touristification; destination management; sustainable tourism; Rome.

Introduction

Urban tourism has become one of the most dynamic yet increasingly contested dimensions of contemporary tourism development. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, many European historic cities were already facing mounting tensions between tourism growth, residents' quality of life, housing affordability, and the sustainable management of urban heritage. In the post-pandemic period, these tensions have re-emerged with renewed intensity, as tourist flows have rapidly recovered and, in many destinations, surpassed previous records. Rome represents a particularly relevant case in this context. In 2024, the city recorded approximately 51.4 million tourist presences and 22.2 million arrivals, reaching a historical tourism record and confirming its position as one of Europe's most visited urban destinations (Roma Capitale).

The concept of overtourism is commonly used to describe situations in which the scale, intensity, or spatial concentration of tourism generates excessive pressure on local communities, urban infrastructure, heritage sites, and everyday life. However, overtourism should not be understood merely as a problem of "too many tourists". Koenis, Postma, and Papp (2018) argue that overtourism is a multidimensional phenomenon embedded in broader processes

of urban transformation, including housing market changes, mobility patterns, platform economies, and conflicts over the use of public space. Similarly, the UNWTO report on managing tourism growth in urban destinations emphasizes that visitor pressure is both a tourism management issue and an urban governance challenge (UNWTO, 2018).

One of the most significant drivers reshaping urban tourism over the last decade has been the rapid expansion of short-term rental platforms, particularly Airbnb. Initially interpreted as part of the sharing economy and as a disruptive innovation in the accommodation sector, Airbnb enabled private dwellings to be transformed into tourist accommodation on a large scale (Guttentag, 2015). While such platforms have increased accommodation capacity, diversified tourist experiences, and created income opportunities for property owners, they have also intensified debates about housing affordability, displacement, touristification, and the commercialization of residential neighbourhoods. In this sense, Airbnb is no longer only an accommodation intermediary; it has become an actor influencing the spatial organization of tourism and the socio-economic structure of cities (Albuquerque, Quintela and Marques, 2024).

The relationship between short-term rentals and overtourism is especially visible in historic city centres, where tourist demand, cultural heritage, limited housing supply, and high real-estate values overlap. Celata and Romano (2022), analysing Italian cities, argue that online short-term rental platforms contribute not simply to generic touristification, but also to the conversion of residential housing into tourist accommodation, thereby increasing pressure on central urban areas. Their study is particularly important for the present article because it links overtourism directly with platform-mediated accommodation and shows that the spatial concentration of Airbnb listings may accelerate the transformation of city centres from places of residence into spaces of tourist consumption.

Rome offers a highly relevant empirical context for analysing this process. The city combines global tourist appeal, dense cultural heritage, strong post-pandemic tourism recovery, and increasing political and social concern about the effects of short-term rentals. Recent public debate has highlighted fears of the “Disneyfication” of the historic centre, the displacement of residents, and the growing dominance of tourist-oriented services in central districts. Reports also indicate that Rome’s historic centre has experienced significant demographic decline over the past decade, while short-term rentals have become one of the visible symbols of this transformation (Le Monde.fr).

At the European level, the issue has gained further policy relevance. In 2024, guests spent 854.1 million nights in short-term rental accommodation booked through major online platforms in the European Union, including Airbnb, Booking, Expedia Group and TripAdvisor, representing an 18.8% increase compared with 2023 (Eurostat, 2025). This rapid growth has encouraged cities and European institutions to seek better mechanisms for data transparency, registration systems, enforcement, and regulation. The European Parliament has also identified short-term rentals as a factor affecting housing availability and affordability, while noting the difficulty of regulating a fragmented and platform-mediated market (Colomb, 2025).

Against this background, the aim of this article is to examine the impact of Airbnb and short-term rentals on urban tourism pressure in Rome. The article focuses on the relationship between the growth and spatial concentration of short-term rental listings, the intensification of tourist flows, and the broader consequences for urban sustainability and destination management. The study is based on secondary data, including tourism statistics, municipal information, Eurostat data on platform-based accommodation, and open datasets such as Inside Airbnb, which provides downloadable data on Airbnb listings in Rome (insideairbnb.com).

The article contributes to the literature in a few ways. First, it situates Airbnb within the broader debate on overtourism and urban sustainability. Second, it applies this debate to Rome, a city where tourism growth, heritage protection, housing pressure, and platform-based accommodation intersect in a particularly visible way. Third, it highlights the relevance of secondary data analysis for understanding tourism pressure and for supporting evidence-based urban tourism governance.

Literature Reviews

The Concept of Overtourism

The concept of overtourism emerged in academic and policy debates as a response to the growing socio-spatial tensions generated by intensive tourism development in urban and heritage destinations. Although the phenomenon itself is not new, the term gained significant visibility after 2016, when several European cities, including Barcelona, Venice, Amsterdam, Dubrovnik and Prague, experienced increasing protests against excessive tourism pressure and its negative consequences for residents' quality of life.

According to the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), overtourism refers to situations in which “the impact of tourism on a destination, or parts thereof, excessively influences perceived quality of life of citizens and/or quality of visitors' experiences in a negative way” (UNWTO, 2018, p. 4). This definition emphasizes two important dimensions of the phenomenon. First, overtourism is not determined solely by the absolute number of visitors, but rather by the relationship between tourism intensity and the carrying capacity of urban systems. Second, the phenomenon affects both local communities and tourists themselves, influencing the sustainability and competitiveness of destinations.

The literature indicates that overtourism is a multidimensional and context-dependent phenomenon. Koens, Postma and Papp (2018) argue that overtourism should not be reduced to a simple issue of visitor overcrowding, because its causes and manifestations are closely linked with broader urban, economic and governance processes. In many cities, tourism pressure is intensified by factors such as low-cost airlines, digital booking platforms, cruise tourism, urban regeneration policies, and the globalization of city branding strategies. Consequently, overtourism reflects structural transformations within contemporary urban tourism systems rather than temporary fluctuations in visitor demand.

Another important aspect discussed in the literature concerns the relationship between overtourism and the concept of carrying capacity. Traditionally, carrying capacity referred to the maximum number of tourists that a destination could accommodate without causing unacceptable environmental, economic or socio-cultural impacts (Butler, 1980). However, contemporary researchers emphasize that urban carrying capacity is dynamic, socially constructed and difficult to quantify. As a result, the focus of tourism management has gradually shifted from static visitor limits toward adaptive governance models, stakeholder cooperation and data-driven monitoring systems (Milano, Cheer, & Novelli, 2019).

The academic debate also highlights the role of tourism growth in reshaping urban functions and public spaces. Overtourism often contributes to congestion, overcrowding of transport systems, pressure on cultural heritage sites, commercialization of public spaces, noise pollution, and the transformation of residential neighbourhoods into tourist-oriented consumption zones. These processes are especially visible in historic city centres, where limited spatial capacity coincides with concentrated tourist demand (Goodwin, 2017).

Several scholars argue that overtourism should be interpreted as a manifestation of unsustainable tourism development. Seraphin, Sheeran and Pilato (2018) note that destinations affected by excessive tourism pressure frequently experience a decline in residents' support for tourism, which may eventually undermine the social legitimacy of tourism development itself. Consequently, overtourism has become closely associated with debates on sustainable tourism, urban resilience and responsible destination management.

The COVID-19 pandemic temporarily interrupted the rapid expansion of global tourism and created expectations that urban tourism systems would become more sustainable and resilient. However, recent studies suggest that many destinations have returned to pre-pandemic growth patterns characterized by intensive tourist concentration and renewed pressure on local communities (UN Tourism, 2024). In this context, the overtourism debate remains highly relevant for both tourism researchers and policymakers.

Short-Term Rentals and the Sharing Economy

One of the most transformative developments in the tourism sector during the last decade has been the rapid expansion of digital accommodation platforms operating within the broader framework of the sharing economy. Among these platforms, Airbnb has become the dominant global actor, fundamentally reshaping urban accommodation markets and tourist consumption patterns.

The sharing economy is generally understood as an economic model based on digital platforms enabling peer-to-peer access to underutilized resources, including accommodation, transport and services (Botsman & Rogers, 2010). In tourism, Airbnb popularized a new form of short-term accommodation in which private individuals could rent rooms, apartments or entire homes to tourists through an online platform. Initially promoted as a more authentic, flexible and affordable alternative to hotels, Airbnb rapidly expanded from a niche platform into a major component of the global tourism economy.

Guttentag (2015) characterizes Airbnb as a form of disruptive innovation that challenged the traditional hospitality sector by introducing decentralized accommodation supply supported by digital technologies and platform-based trust mechanisms. The platform significantly lowered entry barriers into the accommodation market and enabled the rapid growth of tourism capacity without corresponding investments in traditional hotel infrastructure.

The literature identifies several positive effects associated with short-term rental platforms. Airbnb may contribute to local entrepreneurship, increase tourism accessibility, diversify accommodation supply, and distribute tourism revenues beyond traditional hotel districts (Dolnicar, 2019). In some destinations, short-term rentals also support tourism development in peripheral areas and create additional income opportunities for households.

However, the rapid expansion of Airbnb has also generated substantial criticism and regulatory concern. Scholars increasingly argue that short-term rentals have evolved from a form of collaborative consumption into a highly commercialized platform economy dominated by professional hosts and investment-oriented property owners (Cocola-Gant & Gago, 2021). This transformation has important implications for urban housing markets and the socio-spatial structure of cities.

One of the most frequently discussed issues concerns the impact of Airbnb on housing affordability and residential displacement. Studies conducted in cities such as Barcelona, Lisbon, Amsterdam and New York indicate that the conversion of long-term residential properties into tourist accommodation may reduce housing supply for residents and contribute to rising rental prices (Wachsmuth & Weisler, 2018). In this context, Airbnb is often associated with processes of gentrification and the commodification of housing.

The literature also highlights the increasing professionalization of short-term rentals. Although Airbnb originally promoted the idea of “home sharing,” many listings in major tourist cities are currently managed by commercial operators controlling multiple properties. This process contributes to the institutionalization of short-term rentals and intensifies tourism pressure in highly attractive urban districts (Adamiak, 2022).

At the European level, concerns regarding the growth of short-term rentals have led to intensified policy discussions on regulation and data transparency. The European Parliament and the European Commission have emphasized the need for registration systems, platform accountability and better access to data concerning online accommodation markets (European Parliament, 2025). Several cities have introduced restrictions related to licensing, zoning regulations, maximum rental days or taxation in order to reduce negative socio-economic impacts.

The relationship between Airbnb and overtourism is therefore increasingly interpreted not only through the lens of tourism demand but also through broader transformations associated with digital capitalism, platform urbanism and the financialization of housing markets.

Touristification and Urban Sustainability

The concept of touristification has become an important analytical framework for understanding the socio-spatial consequences of tourism growth in urban destinations. Touristification refers to processes through which urban spaces, neighbourhoods and local economies become increasingly reorganized around tourism consumption and visitor-oriented functions (Sequera & Nofre, 2020).

In the literature, touristification is closely associated with changes in the social, cultural and economic structure of cities. Tourism growth may stimulate urban regeneration, increase local revenues and enhance international visibility; however, excessive tourism concentration may also contribute to rising housing prices, commercialization of public spaces, transformation of local retail structures, and the displacement of residents from historic city centres.

Several scholars emphasize the relationship between touristification and gentrification. Gotham (2005) introduced the concept of “tourism gentrification” to describe situations in which neighbourhood transformation is driven by tourism-related investment and consumption rather than by traditional residential upgrading. In this context, tourism becomes a mechanism reshaping urban identities, land use patterns and social relations.

The rapid expansion of short-term rental platforms has intensified touristification processes in many European cities. Cocola-Gant (2016) argues that Airbnb contributes to the conversion of residential housing into tourist accommodation, thereby reducing the residential function of city centres and accelerating socio-spatial inequalities. Similar dynamics have been identified in Venice, Barcelona, Lisbon and Florence, where tourism-oriented economic activities increasingly dominate urban landscapes.

Urban sustainability has consequently become a central issue in contemporary tourism governance. Sustainable urban tourism requires balancing economic benefits generated by tourism with environmental protection, cultural heritage preservation and residents’ quality of life (UNEP & UNWTO, 2005). However, achieving this balance is increasingly difficult in destinations characterized by high tourism intensity and platform-mediated accommodation growth.

The literature highlights several dimensions of sustainability challenges associated with overtourism and touristification. Environmental impacts include increased waste generation, air pollution and pressure on transport infrastructure. Socio-cultural impacts involve the erosion of local identity, conflicts between tourists and residents, and the decline of community cohesion. Economic impacts may include the dependence of local economies on tourism-related services and the vulnerability of cities to tourism market fluctuations.

Recent studies also emphasize the importance of governance and data-driven destination management. Smart tourism and urban analytics are increasingly viewed as tools supporting sustainable tourism planning through real-time monitoring of tourist flows, accommodation patterns and mobility systems (Gretzel et al., 2015). Nevertheless, scholars note that technological solutions alone are insufficient without effective public policies and stakeholder cooperation.

Rome represents a particularly important case within this debate. The city combines intensive tourism demand, a globally recognized cultural heritage, strong dependence on tourism revenues and growing tensions related to housing affordability and touristification. The expansion of Airbnb and other short-term rental platforms in Rome’s historic districts has intensified discussions regarding the sustainability of current tourism development models and the future role of tourism within urban governance.

Research Methodology

This study adopts an exploratory case study approach to examine the relationship between Airbnb, short-term rentals and tourism pressure in Rome. The case study design is appropriate because overtourism is a complex urban phenomenon shaped by tourism flows, accommodation markets, digital platforms, housing dynamics and local governance. According to Yin (2018), case studies are particularly useful when the boundaries between the phenomenon and its environment are difficult to separate and when multiple contextual variables influence the observed processes.

Rome was selected as the research case due to several factors: its position as one of Europe’s leading urban tourism destinations, the exceptional concentration of cultural heritage resources, the rapid post-pandemic recovery of tourism demand, and the dynamic expansion of short-term rental accommodation. In 2024, Rome recorded approximately 22.2 million tourist arrivals and 51.4 million overnight stays, representing the highest tourism volume in the city’s history (Roma Capitale, 2025). Simultaneously, the city experienced substantial growth in short-term

rental accommodation and increasing public debate regarding touristification, housing affordability, and the sustainability of tourism development.

The primary objective of the study is to identify and analyse the relationships between:

- the growth of Airbnb and short-term rentals,
- the spatial concentration of tourism accommodation,
- the intensity of tourism pressure,
- and selected social and urban consequences associated with overtourism.

The article applies a mixed desk research approach combining: literature review, secondary statistical data analysis, institutional document analysis and spatial interpretation of tourism accommodation patterns. The methodological framework integrates both quantitative and qualitative analytical elements. Quantitative analysis focuses on tourism statistics, accommodation capacity, Airbnb market indicators and tourism intensity measures. Qualitative interpretation is used to contextualize empirical findings within broader debates on sustainable urban tourism, platform urbanism, and touristification.

The study is based on secondary data obtained from publicly accessible institutional databases, open datasets, and tourism market reports. The use of secondary data improves transparency, comparability and replicability of the research. The main sources include Roma Capitale statistical yearbooks, ISTAT tourism statistics (Italian National Institute of Statistics), Eurostat data on tourism and platform-based accommodation, Inside Airbnb datasets for Rome, and selected institutional reports from UN Tourism and the European Parliament. The analysed period covers 2016–2025, which enables comparison of pre-pandemic tourism growth, the COVID-19 collapse and the post-pandemic recovery phase.

The empirical analysis combines several methods. First, time-series trend analysis is used to examine changes in tourist arrivals, overnight stays and accommodation supply. Second, indicator-based analysis is applied to assess tourism pressure through measures such as arrivals per resident, overnight stays per resident, accommodation intensity, Airbnb listings per square kilometre and Airbnb listings per 1,000 residents. Third, spatial analysis is used to identify the concentration of Airbnb listings and tourism accommodation, particularly in Rome's historic centre and Municipio I.

This methodological approach allows the study to assess not only the scale of tourism growth in Rome, but also the spatial and social implications of short-term rental expansion. Its main limitation is reliance on secondary data, including Inside Airbnb datasets, which should be treated as estimates rather than complete official Airbnb records. Therefore, the study does not aim to prove direct causality, but to identify empirically grounded patterns linking Airbnb growth, tourism concentration and urban pressure.

Empirical Analysis

Tourism Growth in Rome in 2016–2025

Rome remains one of the most important urban tourism destinations in Europe and has experienced continuous tourism growth over the analysed period (Tab.1). Data from Roma Capitale indicate that between 2016 and 2019 the number of tourist arrivals increased from 14.26 million to 19.45 million, while overnight stays rose from 34.65 million to 46.54 million. The COVID-19 pandemic caused a dramatic collapse of tourism demand in 2020; however, from 2022 onward the city experienced a rapid tourism recovery. In 2024 Rome reached a historical tourism record with approximately 22.21 million tourist arrivals and 51.45 million overnight stays. According to Turismo Roma, these figures further increased in 2025 to approximately 22.9 million arrivals and 52.92 million overnight stays (Turismo Roma, 2025; Roma Capitale, 2025).

Table 1: Tourism flows in Rome in 2016–2025

Year	Tourist arrivals	YoY change	Overnight stays	YoY change
2016	14,261,436	-	34,651,136	-
2017	14,694,364	+3.0%	35,562,221	+2.6%
2018	18,973,379	+29.1%	45,449,980	+27.8%
2019	19,454,354	+2.5%	46,539,097	+2.4%
2020	4,096,347	-78.9%	9,894,400	-78.7%
2021	5,504,937	+34.4%	11,966,053	+20.9%
2022	15,218,735	+176.5%	34,737,389	+190.3%
2023	21,022,566	+38.1%	49,187,455	+41.6%
2024	22,205,163	+5.6%	51,445,879	+4.6%
2025	22,900,000	+3.1%	52,920,000	+2.9%

Source: Own research based on Roma Capitale, ISTAT, EBTL and Turismo Roma.

Compared with 2019, tourist arrivals in 2024 were approximately 14.1% higher, while overnight stays increased by approximately 10.5%. These figures indicate that Rome not only recovered from the pandemic crisis but entered a new phase of tourism expansion. The average length of stay remained relatively stable at approximately 2.3–2.4 days, suggesting that tourism pressure was primarily driven by increasing visitor numbers rather than longer stays. An important structural transformation can also be observed in the accommodation sector. Between 2016 and 2024, arrivals to hotel establishments increased from 11.54 million to 14.47 million, representing growth of approximately 25.4%, whereas arrivals to complementary accommodation establishments increased from 2.73 million to 7.74 million, corresponding to an increase of approximately 183.8%. A similar pattern can be observed in overnight stays: hotel overnight stays grew by approximately 21.5%, while overnight stays in complementary accommodation establishments increased by approximately 142.8% (Tab.2). This demonstrates the growing importance of non-hotel accommodation, including short-term rentals and Airbnb-type accommodation.

Table 2: Hotels and complementary accommodation in Rome

Year	Hotel arrivals	Complementary accommodation arrivals	Share of complementary accommodation	Hotel overnight stays	Complementary accommodation overnight stays	Share of complementary accommodation
2016	11,536,239	2,725,197	19.1%	26,935,666	7,715,470	22.3%
2019	13,036,638	6,417,716	33.0%	30,682,988	15,856,109	34.1%
2020	2,508,943	1,587,404	38.8%	5,741,989	4,152,411	42.0%
2021	2,800,044	2,704,893	49.1%	5,505,511	6,460,542	54.0%
2022	9,666,238	5,552,497	36.5%	21,552,631	13,184,758	38.0%
2023	13,767,073	7,255,493	34.5%	31,494,609	17,692,846	36.0%
2024	14,469,890	7,735,273	34.8%	32,715,854	18,730,025	36.4%

Source: Own research based on Roma Capitale.

Development of Airbnb and Short-Term Rentals in Rome

One of the most important drivers intensifying tourism pressure in Rome is the rapid growth of short-term rental accommodation. Roma Capitale statistics demonstrate substantial expansion of complementary accommodation establishments, including “alloggi per uso turistico” (tourist-use accommodation). Data from analytical platforms and Inside Airbnb indicate that Rome currently represents one of the largest Airbnb markets in Europe.

Between 2016 and 2024 the total number of complementary accommodation establishments increased from 10,352 to 32,430 units, representing growth of approximately 213%. Particularly dynamic growth was observed in tourist-use accommodation, which increased from 8,375 units in 2020 to 20,418 units in 2024, representing growth of approximately 144%.

Table 3: Growth of complementary accommodation in Rome

Year	Guesthouses	Holiday homes	B&Bs	Tourist-use accommodation	Total complementary accommodation
2016	2,618	5,455	1,892	n.a.	10,352
2017	2,900	5,688	1,830	n.a.	10,793
2018	3,066	5,867	1,783	n.a.	11,086
2019	3,218	6,014	1,678	n.a.	11,270
2020	3,132	5,532	1,538	8,375	18,943
2021	2,993	5,418	1,413	8,332	18,495
2022	3,408	5,429	1,615	2,007	12,737
2023	3,222	5,680	1,312	15,032	25,579
2024	3,682	6,687	1,364	20,418	32,430

Source: Own research based on Roma Capitale.

Data from Inside Airbnb and Banca del Fucino indicate that in 2023 Rome had approximately 34,000 Airbnb listings, around half of which (17,000) were concentrated in Municipio I, covering the historic city centre (Banca Fucino, 2025). This demonstrates both the large scale of the Airbnb market and its high spatial concentration. Market analyses also reveal strong professionalization of Airbnb activity in Rome. A substantial proportion of listings consist of entire apartments rather than shared accommodation, and many listings are managed by commercial operators with multiple properties. According to AirROI data, one of the largest operators managed more than 200 listings in the city (AirROI, 2026). This confirms observations by Cocola-Gant and Gago (2021) that short-term rental platforms increasingly function as commercialized platform economies rather than purely peer-to-peer sharing systems.

Airbnb and Tourism Pressure

One of the most important characteristics of overtourism is not only the number of tourists but also their spatial concentration. In Rome, Airbnb listings and tourism infrastructure are strongly concentrated in the historic centre, particularly in Municipio I, Trastevere and areas surrounding major cultural attractions such as the Colosseum and the Vatican.

In 2024 Municipio I contained approximately 50.8% of all accommodation establishments in Rome. The district alone included 8,945 tourist-use accommodation units and 4,000 holiday homes („case vacanza”) (tab. 4).

Table 4: Accommodation structures by municipi in Rome in 2024

Municipio	Hotels	Guesthouses	B&Bs	Holiday homes	Tourist-use accommodation	Total establishments	Share in Rome
I	715	2,712	532	4,000	8,945	17,067	50.8%
II	66	219	121	350	1,526	2,319	6.9%
VII	25	168	142	416	1,874	2,642	7.9%
XIII	35	177	117	542	1,473	2,388	7.1%
XII	16	86	69	296	1,273	1,764	5.3%
V	11	44	46	295	1,168	1,572	4.7%
Other municipi	—	—	—	—	—	5,672	17.3%
Total	994	3,682	1,364	6,687	20,418	33,424	100.0%

Source: Own research based on Roma Capitale.

It is worth noting that in 2024 Municipio I concentrated 43.8% of all “alloggi per uso turistico” and 59.8% of all “case vacanza” in Rome. This indicates that the short-term rental market is not evenly distributed across the urban

space, but instead is strongly concentrated in the area characterized by the highest tourism attractiveness and, at the same time, the greatest socio-spatial vulnerability.

Additionally, the study by Guarini et al. (2026) concerning Airbnb prices in Rome demonstrates that the city's central area accounts for 46.66% of the total short-term rental supply, corresponding to more than 12,000 apartments, while the density of tourist accommodation in the historic centre reaches approximately 613 units per km². For comparison, the same indicator amounts to 95 units/km² in Municipio II and 52 and 51 units/km² respectively in Municipi V and VII.

Tourism intensity indicators also demonstrate increasing tourism pressure. To assess the scale of tourism pressure, tourism flow data may be combined with information on population size, city area and the supply of short-term rentals. Roma Capitale covers an area of approximately 1,286.9 km², while the city's population amounts to approximately 2.75 million inhabitants.

The indicators show that in 2024 Rome recorded approximately 8 tourist arrivals per resident and nearly 19 tourist overnight stays per resident. These values should be interpreted with caution, as they refer to the entire administrative territory of the city, which is geographically extensive. The actual tourism pressure in the historic centre is significantly higher, since the main tourist attractions, accommodation facilities and Airbnb listings are concentrated there (Comune Roma, 2025).

The concentration of Airbnb in Municipio I is particularly significant. Approximately 17,000 Airbnb listings were located in this district, representing around 50% of all Airbnb listings in Rome (tab. 5). This means that the historic centre experiences exceptionally high tourism pressure relative to its residential population and spatial capacity.

Table 5: Airbnb concentration in Municipio I

Indicator	Value
Area of Municipio I	approx. 20.1 km ²
Population of Municipio I	approx. 163,420
Airbnb listings in Municipio I	approx. 17,000
Airbnb listings per km ²	approx. 846
Airbnb listings per 1,000 residents	approx. 104
Share of Rome's Airbnb listings	approx. 50%
Share of Rome's accommodation establishments	50.8%

Source: Own research based on Roma Capitale and Inside Airbnb.

The above comparison demonstrates a very strong spatial asymmetry. Although the entire city experiences high tourism pressure, its greatest intensity is concentrated primarily in the city centre. In Municipio I, the number of Airbnb listings exceeds 100 per 1,000 residents, indicating that the scale of tourist accommodation is exceptionally high relative to the local population. This represents a typical mechanism of touristification, in which apartments and premises in central districts are gradually transformed from residential functions into tourism-oriented uses.

Social and Urban Consequences

The expansion of Airbnb and short-term rentals has important social and urban implications, particularly regarding housing affordability, resident displacement and touristification. One of the most significant issues concerns the transformation of residential housing into tourist accommodation. High profitability of short-term rentals encourages property owners to shift apartments from long-term residential rental to tourist-oriented accommodation. As a result, housing availability for residents decreases and rental prices increase.

Reports and market analyses indicate that central Rome has experienced substantial rent increases in recent years, especially during preparations for the Jubilee Year 2025. Reuters (2024) reported that long-term rental prices in Rome increased by approximately one-third as property owners converted apartments into tourist accommodation.

Simultaneously, Rome's historic centre has experienced depopulation. According to Le Monde, the population of the historic centre decreased by approximately 38.5% between 2013 and 2023, while Trastevere lost approximately 45% of its residents over the decade.

Table 6. Selected social symptoms of touristification in central Rome

Phenomenon	Value / description
Population decline in the historic centre	-38.5% (2013–2023)
Population decline in Trastevere	approx. -45%
Airbnb listings in Municipio I	approx. 17,000
Share of Airbnb listings in Municipio I	approx. 50%
Share of accommodation establishments in Municipio I	50.8%
Growth of complementary accommodation in Rome	+187.8% (2019–2024)

Source: Own research based on Roma Capitale, Inside Airbnb and Le Monde.

Although these data do not independently prove direct causality between Airbnb and depopulation, the co-occurrence of rapid short-term rental expansion, tourism concentration and resident displacement is consistent with the literature on touristification and tourism gentrification. From the perspective of sustainable urban tourism, the findings suggest that the main challenge is not only the number of tourists but also the concentration of tourism accommodation and the transformation of urban functions in historic districts.

Discussion

The analysis indicates that contemporary tourism development in Rome demonstrates many characteristics typically associated with overtourism in European urban destinations. The rapid post-pandemic growth in tourist arrivals, the dynamic expansion of short-term rentals and the strong concentration of tourism activity in the historic city centre confirm that Rome is currently experiencing an intensive process of urban touristification. The findings are consistent with the conclusions of Koens, Postma and Papp (2018), who argue that overtourism should not be interpreted solely as a problem of excessive visitor numbers, but rather as the outcome of broader processes related to urban transformation, platform economies and the concentration of tourism functions.

In this context, an important question emerges: is Rome following the trajectory previously observed in cities such as Venice and Barcelona? The literature on overtourism identifies both cities as strong examples of conflict between tourism growth and residents' quality of life. In Venice, the problem became particularly visible through the depopulation of the historic centre and the dominance of tourism-oriented activities over residential and local functions (Seraphin, Sheeran, & Pilato, 2018). Barcelona, in turn, became an example of a city where Airbnb and short-term rental expansion contributed to rising housing prices, tourism gentrification and social protests against mass tourism (Cocola-Gant, 2016).

The empirical findings for Rome indicate similar processes. Particularly significant is the very high concentration of Airbnb listings in Municipio I, which includes the historic centre. The fact that approximately half of all Airbnb listings in Rome are located in this district suggests that short-term rental platforms do not primarily disperse tourism flows across the city but instead reinforce tourism concentration in already saturated areas. Simultaneously, the observed decline in the resident population of the historic centre and the increasing number of apartments dedicated to tourist accommodation correspond with the process of touristification described by Sequera and Nofre (2020). In this context, urban space gradually transforms from a place of everyday residential life into a space dominated by tourism consumption.

The analysis also demonstrates that Airbnb should be interpreted more broadly than simply as a change in accommodation supply. Digital platforms have become part of a wider platform economy shaping the functioning of contemporary cities. Guttentag (2015) originally described Airbnb as a form of disruptive innovation associated with the sharing economy; however, more recent studies suggest that the platform increasingly operates as a commercialized segment of the real estate market. Similar conclusions are presented by Cocola-Gant and Gago (2021), who argue that Airbnb contributes to the financialization of housing and increases the attractiveness of real estate as an investment asset. In the case of Rome, the high profitability of short-term rentals and the dominance of

entire-home listings indicate increasing professionalization of the market and a gradual reduction of residential functions in the city centre.

The findings further demonstrate that overtourism is a multidimensional phenomenon that cannot be reduced solely to visitor numbers. Tourism pressure in Rome results from the interaction of several processes: the globalization of urban tourism, the expansion of low-cost airlines, the platformization of accommodation markets, the concentration of tourism attractions and urban development strategies focused on tourism growth. In this sense, Rome reflects a broader urban tourism growth model in which tourism becomes one of the principal mechanisms of local economic development.

At the same time, the analysis highlights the limitations of a development model based primarily on continuous tourism growth. Literature concerning carrying capacity and sustainable tourism emphasizes that historic cities possess limited ability to absorb tourism flows without generating significant socio-spatial costs (Butler, 1980). In Rome, the problem concerns not only the number of visitors but also the strong concentration of tourism in the historic centre, increasing pressure on urban infrastructure and growing competition between residential and tourism functions. In the long term, these processes may weaken urban authenticity, reduce residents' quality of life and negatively affect tourists' experiences themselves, as also emphasized in the UNWTO report on overtourism management (UNWTO, 2018). Similar conclusions are presented by Albuquerque, Quintela and Marques (2024), who indicate that short-term tourist rentals are perceived differently by tourists and residents. While tourists primarily view Airbnb as a factor increasing the accessibility and attractiveness of destinations, residents more frequently emphasize rising living costs, pressure on the housing market and the deterioration of quality of life in heavily touristified areas.

In this context, governance and destination management become particularly important. The findings suggest that traditional tourism management approaches focused primarily on promotion and visitor growth are becoming increasingly insufficient. Greater importance should be assigned to smart governance tools enabling the monitoring of tourism flows, accommodation concentration and the impact of digital platforms on housing markets. Gretzel et al. (2015) argue that smart tourism can support more sustainable tourism planning through real-time data analysis, spatial monitoring and urban analytics. However, technological solutions alone are insufficient if they are not accompanied by effective public policies and regulatory frameworks.

The experiences of other European cities demonstrate that effective management of short-term rentals requires more proactive urban governance. Barcelona, Amsterdam and Lisbon have introduced registration systems, limits on rental days and spatial restrictions concerning new Airbnb licenses. The European Parliament has also emphasized the need for improved data transparency and stronger regulation of short-term rental markets (European Parliament, 2025). In the case of Rome, similar measures could help reduce tourism accommodation concentration in the most saturated districts and support the preservation of residential functions in the historic centre.

Conclusions

The analysis confirms that the growth of Airbnb and short-term rentals constitutes one of the key factors intensifying tourism pressure in Rome. Between 2016 and 2025 the city experienced a rapid increase in tourism demand, which after the COVID-19 pandemic exceeded pre-crisis levels. At the same time, non-hotel accommodation expanded significantly, particularly tourist-use accommodation and listings operating through digital platforms. The findings indicate that Airbnb growth is not merely a consequence of increasing tourism demand, but also an important factor shaping the contemporary model of urban tourism development.

One of the most significant findings concerns the strong spatial concentration of short-term rentals in Rome's historic centre. Municipio I contains approximately half of all Airbnb listings and more than half of the city's accommodation establishments despite representing only a relatively small part of Rome's territory. This suggests that Airbnb does not primarily function as a mechanism dispersing tourism flows across the city, but rather reinforces tourism concentration in already saturated areas. These findings are consistent with the overtourism and touristification literature, which emphasizes that the platform economy may intensify tourism pressure in the most attractive urban spaces (Koens et al., 2018; Cocola-Gant, 2016).

The study also confirms that the expansion of short-term rentals contributes to the touristification of the city. The growing number of apartments converted into tourist accommodation coexists with population decline in the historic centre, commercialization of local services and increasing competition between residential and tourism-related urban functions. In this sense, overtourism in Rome should not be interpreted solely as a problem of visitor numbers, but rather as a broader challenge related to urban sustainability and the long-term social and functional balance of the city.

From the perspective of sustainable urban development, the key challenge is therefore not maximizing visitor numbers, but achieving more balanced management of tourism flows and accommodation structures. The findings suggest the need for a more proactive urban policy toward short-term rentals. This particularly concerns:

- developing registration and monitoring systems for Airbnb listings,
- improving transparency of platform-based accommodation data,
- limiting further concentration of short-term rentals in the most saturated districts,
- and protecting the residential function of the historic city centre.

However, the study also has several methodological limitations. The analysis is based entirely on secondary data, which differ in methodology and level of aggregation. In particular, Inside Airbnb datasets should be interpreted as approximations of market structure rather than complete official Airbnb records. Consequently, they should be interpreted as estimates of market structure and spatial distribution rather than complete transaction records. Furthermore, the study focuses on a single urban case, which limits the possibility of broad generalization, although many identified patterns are consistent with broader European overtourism literature.

Therefore, future research should expand the analysis through comparative studies of European cities affected by overtourism, investigations of residents' attitudes toward tourism and short-term rentals, assessments of Airbnb regulations and their impact on housing markets, as well as the application of AI-based tourism monitoring tools for forecasting and managing tourism pressure.

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