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PRACTICE ARTICLE

Ten years of the new tramline 4: reconnecting northern and southern neighbourhoods of Turin by public transport

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Ten years after extension and renovation works were conducted on the line as part of the urban transformation process for the 2006 Winter Olympics, tramline 4 is the most widely used in Turin and has played a significant role in the evolution of public transport. Featuring a length of 15.8 km, 45 stops, approximately 60 min from one end of the route to the other and a frequency of 5 min in peak hours, tramline 4 is the most important infrastructure in the north–south axis of the city. It has also played a crucial role in reconnecting distant neighbourhoods to the rest of the city. Indeed, it crosses the city from one end to the other, revealing the complexity of the former Italian *one-company town*. Thus, not only is tramline 4 a simple means of transport but also a mobile social and physical cross section of Turin.

Keywords: Turin; public transport; neighbourhoods; urban transformations; social analysis

In his book ‘*Städtebilder*’ (1963), the German philosopher Walter Benjamin emphasises the idea of getting to know cities by strolling through them to capture a wide range of impressions and images. This kind of *flânerie* can be enjoyed in Turin by taking tramline 4 which, since its extension and renovation in 2006, crosses the city from north to south (Figure 1), revealing the complexity of the former Italian *one-company town* (Bagnasco 1986).

In the twentieth century, Turin revolved around FIAT (*Fabbrica Italiana Automobili Torino*), and entire parts of the city were built to provide homes to the thousands of immigrants from southern Italy who sought work in the city between the 1950s and the early 1970s. The frailness of the corporate town model was observed in the 1980s, and the global deindustrialisation process had a strong impact on the city. However, a forward-looking municipality and some important projects, like the new Master Plan (PRG) in 1995, the selection as host for the twentieth Olympic Winter Games in 1999 and the first strategic plan of the city in 2000 marked a turning point for the future of the city (Caruso, Pede, and Rossignolo 2017; Winkler 2007). Nowadays, not only is Turin an industrial city but it has also become a touristic, university, cultural and food capital. It has undergone a new strong migratory flow – especially from Eastern Europe – that has reshaped entire areas of the city (Prat and Mangili 2016). All these transformation processes have left a trace in the city both in physical and social terms.

Tramline 4 passes through some of the most significant locations in the history of Turin and connects various neighbourhoods of the city that have recently been involved in huge urban transformations and urban regeneration processes. It is an example of good practice in public transport. Indeed, the renovation works of the line have affected urban areas that were built too far away from the rest of the city, such as the neighbourhood of Falchera and Mirafiori Sud, which are at the opposite ends of the tramline. The line was

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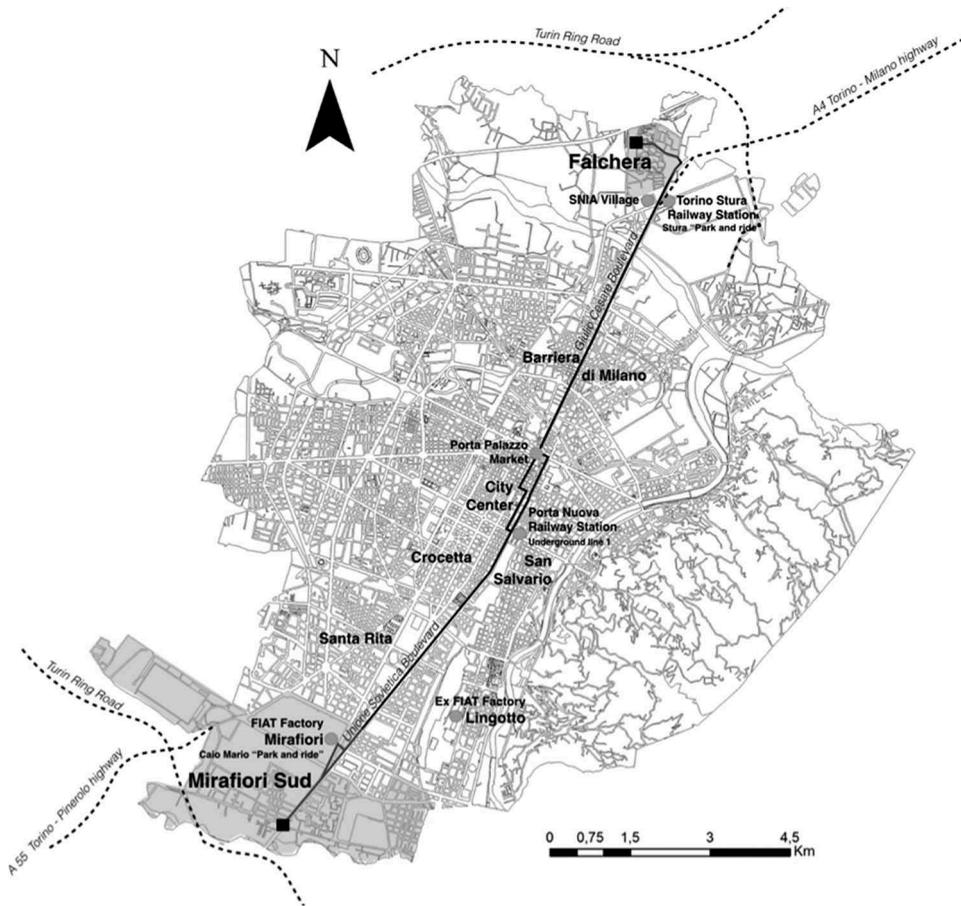


Figure 1. Map of tramline 4 (Copyright Francesca Bragaglia).

specifically lengthened to connect the inhabitants of the public-housing neighbourhood of Falchera (Figure 2) situated at the extreme edge of the northern side with the rest of the city. As a matter of fact, Falchera was quite isolated prior to 2006 but it has finally begun to be a part of Turin since the terminus of tramline 4 was installed in the neighbourhood. Nowadays, the inhabitants of Falchera can reach the city centre in around 20 min by tram – this signifies serious competition for private transport – instead of the 50 min that were once required by bus. Hence, the real estate market of the area, which suffered a crisis before the extension of the tramline, has been revived and new young residents and students have arrived, also as the result of a project launched by the City of Turin to improve the social mix in the area. This would have been impossible without tramline 4. The installation of the tramline terminus in Falchera was decisive for the neighbourhood and involved a considerable amount of money. This huge renovation and extension of the line cost 45 million euro, 17.9 of which were allocated for the 2 km needed to connect Falchera to the rest of the route. Moreover, the neighbourhood is now involved in a remarkable requalification process of a huge green space enhanced by little artificial lakes in Falchera. The project aims at transforming this area into one of the most important and



Figure 2. ‘The trip continues ... Next stop Falchera!’ The campaign of information about the extension of the line to Falchera neighbourhood in 2006 (Copyright Francesca Bragaglia).

largest urban parks of the city and, as such, its connection to the rest of the city by tramline 4 will be crucial.

Speedier public cross-town transport

The trains of tramline 4 are 34 m long, have a capacity of 200 passengers and are the newest trains in Turin. They travel for the majority of the route in tracks separated from car traffic in order to guarantee a commercial speed of about 17 km/h in off-peak hours and 14.1 km/h in peak hours. This makes them a very competitive means of transport, the fastest surface transit in the public transport of Turin and also the one with the highest frequency (12 passages/h for each direction in peak hours). Hence, it only takes 72 min to cross the city from Falchera to Mirafiori Sud in the rush hour, and 67 min in the opposite direction, with an average duration of 68 min in peak hours and 56 min in off-peak ones.

Moreover, the line is an essential element in Turin metropolitan area’s ambition to encourage change from car-based to other modes of transport. Two *park and ride* facilities were, therefore, created in strategic places – near the Turin Ring Road and the highways – along with improvements at tramline stops ‘Caio Mario’ in Mirafiori Sud (415 parking stalls) and ‘Stura’ at the edge of Falchera (617 parking stalls). This encourages people living in other municipalities but working in Turin to leave the car and use public transport. In addition, in order to promote the train interchange as well, tramline 4 is connected with the railway station ‘Torino Stura’ situated at the edge of Falchera from which the majority of the lines of the metropolitan railway system (SFM) departs. It also reaches the Porta Nuova station, from which long-distance trains and the subway depart. Therefore, during the past 10 years, the performance of tramline 4 has made it the main route of the north–south axis of the city’s public transport system. Indeed, compared to Italian standards for public transport, its cross-town travel time and commercial speed are considered pretty fast, also considering that the average speed of the other tramlines in Turin is about 10–14 km/h. Compared to another cross-town tramline, such as number 15, the length of the journey from one end of the route to the other is pretty much the same, but tramline 15 is only 11.5 km long, instead of the 15.8 km of tramline 4. Nevertheless, the speed of number

4 is below European standards. In Munich, the commercial average tramline speed is around 20 km/h and in Lyon 23 km/h. To overcome this issue, in September 2016, a proposal for a modification of the line – which in the future could be applied to Turin’s entire public transport system – was discussed. This could involve the elimination of some of the stops that are close to each other, in order to align its speed to European standards. This proposal has already generated a big debate between two opposing sides: on the one hand, the need to cut down costs and give a better service, and on the other hand, to safeguard the *right to mobility* for everybody.

Tramline 4 tells the city’s social and industrial history

Telling the history of tramline 4 also means telling the history of the city. It is actually much more than a simple means of transport, it is a physical and social cross section of Turin.

The public-housing neighbourhoods of Falchera and Mirafiori Sud, located at the opposite ends of the tramline, are two representative examples of neighbourhoods of the economic boom of the 1960s. Located 9 km from the city centre of Turin, these two neighbourhoods have long constituted emblematic cases of being far from the centre, both in geographical and social terms.

Mirafiori Sud (Figure 3), whose estimated population is currently around 39,000 inhabitants, was a rural area outside the city in the late nineteenth century. The construction of the FIAT Mirafiori factory in 1939 – it was named after the neighbourhood and clearly represented the strong identity between the factory and the Mirafiori neighbourhood – changed the area profoundly. Turin and the Mirafiori area, in particular, faced a strong migratory flux after the end of World War II. The population rose from 3000 inhabitants in the early 1970s to more than 40,000 in slightly more than 20 years, the



Figure 3. Tramline 4 in front of the Fiat Mirafiori Factory (Copyright Francesca Bragaglia).

majority of them being workers. Mirafiori Sud, together with Mirafiori Nord on the opposite side of the Fiat factory, became the image of the ‘one-company town’. To respond to the housing emergency of those years, a huge public housing unit was built using prefabrication and intensive building techniques. In particular, the public-housing blocks in Artom Street, Roveda Street and Negarville Street were well known as the dormitory neighbourhood and implied an idea of ‘distance’ from public services and transport, and from the city centre.

This ‘distance’ is felt more clearly in Falchera, which is situated at the extreme northern edge of the city, and which features public housing inhabited by 8000 people. Falchera (Figure 4) has two core locations, namely ‘Falchera Vecchia’ and ‘Falchera Nuova’. Falchera Vecchia was built between 1952 and 1954 as an independent village by well-known urban planner Giovanni Astengo, who was inspired by the English garden cities. Falchera Nuova was completed in the early 1970s and made extensive use of prefabrication and building typologies that radically differed from those of Falchera Vecchia. These two parts of Falchera present many differences in terms of quality of the buildings and public spaces, which are better in the old part created by Astengo, but both are characterised by the huge distance not only from Turin city centre but also from other parts of the city. Therefore, the decentralised geographical position determined both physical and social marginalisation from the rest of the city. This was further emphasised by the difficult transport connection prior to the ambitious extension of tramline 4 in 2006.

Tramline 4 has 43 stops between Falchera and Mirafiori Sud. Travelling from north to south, tramline 4 revisits some of the major turning points in Turin’s urban history (see the map in Figure 1), precisely from the SNIA village, a workers’ village in the 1920s, now property of the IACP (the local authority of public housing), to the long axis of Giulio Cesare Boulevard that penetrates another deprived neighbourhood currently involved in an urban regeneration process, Barriera di Milano, a historical suburb near the city centre where a huge Apulian community settled during the economic boom (Mela, 2014). Now the neighbourhood is also inhabited by a big community of immigrants, constituting 29% of the area’s population. The route of tramline 4 continues to the end of Giulio Cesare



Figure 4. Inside tramline 4 in Falchera (Copyright Francesca Bragaglia).



Figure 5. Tramline 4 crosses Porta Palazzo and enters the monumental city centre (Copyright Francesca Bragaglia).

Boulevard, dividing one of Europe's biggest multi-ethnic markets into two parts, namely Porta Palazzo (Figure 5) – an area that was affected, in the late 1990s, by an urban regeneration process mainly financed by the European Union (Governata et al., 2009)– and then reaches the area referred to by tourist maps as the city centre. The tram covers some of the most upper-class streets of Turin and then proceeds along the abstract demarcation line between one of the richest neighbourhoods in the city (Crocetta), and San Salvario, a multi-ethnic neighbourhood near the railway station of Porta Nuova, recently the focus of a transformation process designed to make it a night-life district for young people. The area is thus experiencing a phenomenon of gentrification in some of its parts.

Then, tramline 4 covers almost the entire royal historical axis that, now called *Unione Sovietica Boulevard*, was built in the eighteenth century to connect the Savoia Residence of Stupinigi with the Royal Palace in the city centre, which divides the middle-class neighbourhoods of Santa Rita and Lingotto, where the first huge FIAT factory building opened in 1923 and has now become a cultural and commercial centre. A few stops before the Mirafiori Sud terminus, tramline 4 passes just in front of the FIAT Mirafiori Factory, now FCA (Fiat Chrysler Automobiles), with legal head office in the Netherlands and financial headquarters in London, the symbol of a past era in which Turin was one with FIAT.

Hence, tramline 4 affects both social and physical abstract lines of demarcation. It crosses the dichotomies of Turin, between rich and poor people, historical upper-class and new multi-ethnic neighbourhoods, the old industrial identity and the new multi-faceted images of the city (Santangelo and Vanolo, 2010). In this tramline, which is the most widely used in the city, *one really encounters* the Turin of today. Tramline 4 is an example of excellent public transport and also a way to retrace the social and industrial history of Turin.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

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