

The forgotten youth of the old town

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In the center of the city of Palermo, under the surface of this rapidly evolving metropolis, a silent crisis lies in wait that is affecting the most vulnerable of its young people. Many adolescents and young adults find themselves trapped in a social limbo, without crucial support to be fully integrated into Palermo's society. This lack of assistance and opportunity has led, at times, to demonstrations of frustration that can boil over into acts of spontaneous violence. However, instead of confronting the roots of the problem, local and national media have chosen to focus on the sensationalized phenomenon of what they call "baby gangs" - portraying these youths as responsible for urban decay and the increase in crime.

This simplistic narrative not only stigmatizes an entire generation of young people, but also distracts attention away from the true causes of social unrest. The reality is much more complex and requires a deeper analysis of the dynamics at play.

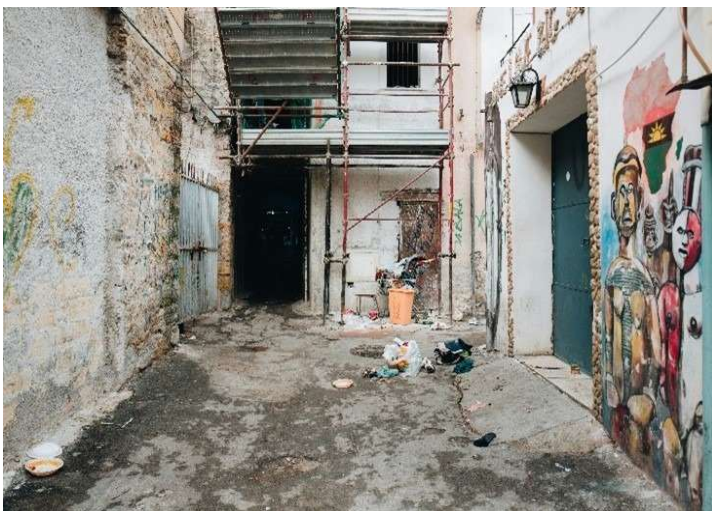


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The problem is rooted in the near-total lack of streetwork and effective integration measures. This deficiency is particularly evident in the case of Unaccompanied Foreign Minors (UAM). Once these young people leave the reception system upon reaching the age of maturity, they suddenly find themselves without many of the liberties and support they accessed as minors. The institutional abandonment they suffer is abrupt and total, often leaving them without any direction at a critical moment in their lives. The situation is further complicated by the recent wave of migration from Tunisia. In recent years, it is where most of the new arrivals have come from. However, the new immigration law

introduced by the Meloni government has made their regularization almost impossible, creating a vast population of young people in a situation of legal and social precarity.

One crucial factor, often overlooked in public debate, is the impact of overtourism on the social fabric of the city. Palermo's historic center is undergoing rapid transformation, with longtime residents gradually displaced from their original neighborhoods. This gentrification



Via Maqueda, Palermo

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process not only deprives young people of their traditional points of reference, but also exacerbates economic and social disparities.

As activists, we are witnessing on a regular base the devastating effects of these short-sighted policies. We see young people full of potential who, without the adequate support system, risk falling into the snares of marginalization and crack. It is essential to understand that these adolescents are not the problem, but rather the symptoms of a system that has failed to protect them and offer them real promise. A change of direction in the city's social policies is urgently needed.

It is necessary to invest in streetwork, create spaces for positive gatherings and develop training and job placement paths specifically designed for these young people. Furthermore, it is fundamental that we extend support of the UAMs beyond the age of maturity and find solutions for the regularization of young migrants, even if they have had complications in the renewal of their residence permits for foster care.

Only through an inclusive and multidimensional approach can we hope to break the vicious cycle of marginalization and violence and raise our voices for these young people left behind. Their story is the story of Palermo, a city that has always described itself as capable of welcoming and integrating different cultures. We can not allow this tradition of openness and inclusion to collapse now.

Übersetzung ins Englische: Olivia Taibi