

YOUTH NIGHTLIFE IN ROME'S VIII MUNICIPALITY: RESULTS FROM SURVEY

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Abstract. In urban settings characterised by demographic ageing and shrinking youth populations, urban space is increasingly shaped by intergenerational asymmetries in visibility, needs, and political attention. However, the implications of these processes for younger cohorts remain underexplored. This study explores how young people engage with evening and night-time life in Rome's VIII sub-municipal subdivision - a territorially heterogeneous area characterised by both advanced population ageing and a strong youth presence linked to universities and cultural infrastructures. An online survey was administered to residents and regular users of the area, stratified by age groups (15-34, 34+), to analyse spatial practices, patterns of nightlife participation, and intergenerational perceptions. Results show that young people are highly present in the area's nightlife and tend to report more negative perceptions of safety and noise, while older respondents express more caution and concern. Although generational differences emerge in rhythms, behaviours, and expectations, the findings also highlight areas of coexistence and shared urban experience. The study offers preliminary insights into how age-based dynamics shape access to and perceptions of urban space during the evening hours.

1. Introduction

Demographic aging and the spatial reconfiguration of territories represent two of the most complex and strategically relevant challenges facing contemporary urban realities, both in Italy and in the European context (Paroli *et al.*, 2020). The process of population aging is reflected in both absolute and relative increase in the elderly population, especially in relation to the overall demographic structure and the shrinking of younger cohorts (Golini, 1999). At the same time, a progressive contraction of the population in younger age groups is occurring, both in absolute numbers and in relative terms (Golini & Rosina, 2011). In Italy, this trend has intensified over the past few decades due to persistently low fertility and the numerical reduction of female cohorts in childbearing age: a phenomenon already evident in earlier demographic cycles. The interaction of these factors has led to a structural decline in reproductive potential, resulting in a continued and steady drop in the annual number of births (Cifoni, Pirone, 2022).

As younger cohorts shrink and older age groups gain demographic and institutional weight, population ageing raises the risk of an imbalance in the distribution of public resources and attention across generations (Golini, Lo Prete, 2019). This becomes particularly visible in urban settings, where different age groups often have competing needs and priorities. Cities are increasingly characterised by intergenerational competition for resources, space, and political recognition (Rosina, 2022). In this context, urban policies often prioritise the needs of the majority age groups, which can lead to a relative under-consideration of younger populations in planning decisions, investments, and service design. One of the most visible consequences of this imbalance concerns the way urban space is used and regulated in the evening and night-time hours (Giordano, Gwiadzinski, 2018), when young people tend to express their social needs through forms of aggregation that are often marginal in policy agendas (Bonanomi, Rosina, 2022). Evening and night-time hours represent a crucial sphere of youth sociality, autonomy, and spatial appropriation; these dimensions are central to understanding how younger generations relate to the city and construct their everyday lives.

As of January 1st, 2019, the resident population of Rome peaked at 2,820,219; by January 1st, 2024, it had declined to 2,751,747, corresponding to an average annual growth rate of -4.9 per thousand. On that date, the city's population ageing was reflected in a 65+ population share of 23.7% (compared to 24.3% at the national level) and an ageing index - defined as the ratio between the population aged 65 and over and that aged 0-14 - of 195.5, slightly below the national level of 199.8. These data position Rome as a demographically aged city, where population dynamics overlap with the difficulties of sustaining social and spatial balance across an extensive metropolitan area (Caretta, Villante, 2006).

Starting from this demographic and policy background, this study aims to investigate whether, in a city like Rome, these conditions give rise to a situation of intergenerational competition in the use and perception of urban space. The analysis focuses in particular on evening and night-time hours, when differences in generational behaviours, needs, and expectations tend to become more visible, and potential tensions more pronounced. This study explores how these dynamics are reflected in young people's experiences, particularly in terms of access to public space, perceptions of safety, and patterns of social interaction, while also considering how these differ from adults and older residents. Investigating nightlife is not simply about mapping recreational habits, but about capturing broader processes of inclusion, visibility, and urban belonging.

In particular, this study focuses on Rome's VIII sub-municipal subdivision, which is one of the city's fifteen administrative districts and represents an emblematic case. Among the least populated (47.15 km²), it is also one of the oldest in terms of age structure. At the same time, it hosts Roma Tre University and several

cultural institutions, resulting in a spatial and demographic duality that brings intergenerational interaction - and potential tension - into sharp focus.

The study seeks to answer the following questions: Where do young people go in the evening and at night? What factors influence their behaviours and feelings of safety? What barriers - material or symbolic - shape their participation in urban life? And how do other age groups perceive their presence and practices?

2. Data and methods

The first step of the analysis aims to assess the demographic composition of the VIII Municipality, with particular focus on the relative size of the youth population. Drawing on municipal population registers, we analyse key indicators such as the age distribution, the share of residents aged 15–34, and the ageing index. These figures provide a necessary reference for understanding the numerical balance between generations and potential inequalities in access to and use of urban space.

To investigate the intersection of youth behaviours, spatial dynamics, and intergenerational relations, we designed an anonymous survey disseminated both online and in person. It was structured into two main versions: one targeting individuals aged 15–34 and one for respondents over 34. The survey explored six key thematic areas selected in line with the study's objectives: participation in nightlife, alcohol consumption and self-awareness (for the 15–34 group only), mobility and transportation choices, perceptions of safety, exposure to night-time noise, and personal spending. These dimensions allowed for the reconstruction of both the practices of urban nightlife and the potential barriers - material, normative, or perceived- that limit access to evening and night-time spaces. The survey was developed using the LimeSurvey platform and implemented with conditional branching logic to dynamically adapt the questionnaire based on previous responses, including gender-sensitive language. The survey relied on a non-probability sampling approach. Respondents were contacted through multiple channels, including social media dissemination, and in-person recruitment in university classrooms and selected secondary schools within the VIII subdivision. Data collection took place over a period between March and June 2024.

The analysis of the survey responses aimed to identify differences and similarities across age groups in terms of evening and night-time behaviours, perceptions, and use of space. The focus was primarily on the 15–34 age group, while responses from adults and older residents were used for comparison, in order to highlight potential generational asymmetries. A descriptive and exploratory approach was adopted to identify behavioural patterns and perceptions within the studied context.

3. Descriptive results

The VIII sub-municipal subdivision – hereafter, the VIII subdivision – is one of the smallest in Rome in both territorial and demographic terms. As of January 1st, 2024, it had 128,048 residents, accounting for 4.2% of the city's total population. It is one of the sub-municipal subdivisions with the highest levels of population ageing, with the share of residents aged 65 and over reaching 26.5% as of January 1st, 2024. By contrast, the youth population (aged 0–14) is relatively small, accounting for only 11.5% of the total. The target population of this study, those aged 15–34, numbered 23,594 as of January 1st, 2024, accounting for 18.4% of the total. The remaining adult population, aged over 34, amounted to 90,066 individuals, representing 70.3% of the total. Since the University of Roma Tre is located within the VIII subdivision and its students live in or regularly use the area, the survey was extended to include non-resident individuals, although no official reference population is available for this group.

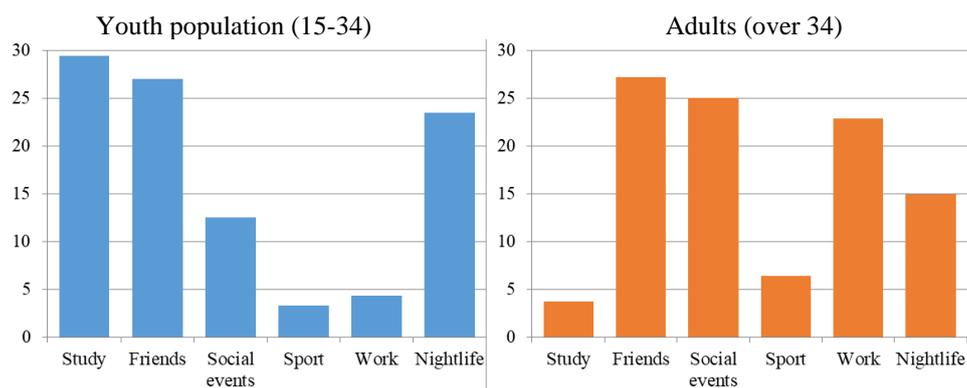
Results are based on 680 responses from individuals aged 15–34 and 331 responses from those aged 35 and above. In both age groups, women are overrepresented compared to men, with a stronger imbalance among older respondents: 54.2% of individuals aged 15–34 and 67.6% of those over 34 identify as women. This gender asymmetry stands in partial contrast to demographic data for the same age groups in the general population, where young men slightly outnumber women. The imbalance observed in the sample likely reflects a greater willingness among women to participate in social research. The results presented in this paper are to be considered preliminary, as the data collection process is still ongoing. The analyses provide an initial interpretation of the main trends emerging from the survey.

Among respondents aged 15–34, 42.5% are not residents of the VIII subdivision, compared to just 18.4% among those aged 35 and over. This marked generational difference highlights how the area attracts a considerable number of young people who actively use its spaces and services. The presence of Roma Tre University, cultural venues, nightlife activities, and accessible public spaces contributes to making the VIII subdivision a multifunctional urban hub for youth from across the city.

The reasons for spending time in the VIII subdivision differ substantially across generations. Among young respondents (15–34), not resident in the VIII subdivision, who are students in 58% of cases, the main motivations are study (29.4%) and nightlife (23.4%), followed by meeting friends (27.0%), reflecting the area's strong role as a social and educational hub. In contrast, adults aged 35 and over report significantly higher shares for work (22.9%) and attending social events (25.0%), while study and nightlife are marginal (3.7% and 14.9%, respectively) (Figure 1).

These patterns reinforce the idea that the subdivision plays a multifunctional role, but one that is experienced very differently depending on age.

Figure 1 – For what reasons do you spend time in the VIII subdivision?.



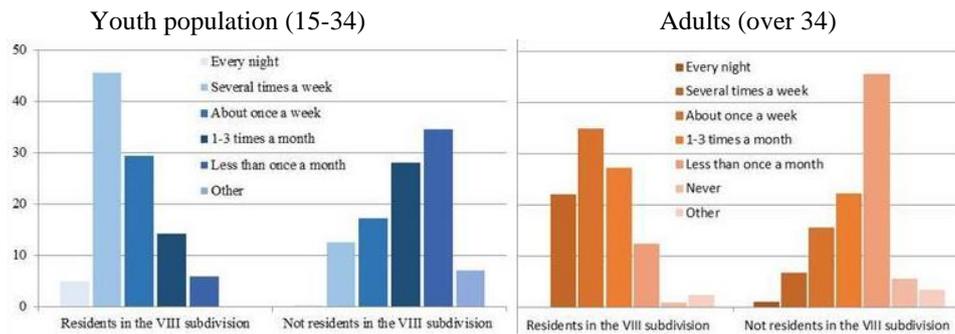
Source: our elaboration on surveys data.

When asked how often they go out in the evening within the VIII subdivision, clear differences emerge not only across generations but also between residents and non-residents (Figure 2). Among young respondents (15–34), those residing in the area show markedly higher levels of participation: nearly half (45.6%) report going out several times a week and 4.9% every night, compared to only 12.5% and 0.3%, respectively, among non-residents. Conversely, non-resident youth are concentrated in the lowest-frequency categories, with over 60% going out less than once a week. A similar pattern appears among adults. Residents go out more regularly than non-residents: about one in five (22.0%) go out several times a week and over one-third (34.9%) about once a week, while among non-residents the shares drop to 6.7% and 15.6%, respectively. Occasional outings (“less than once a month”) are much more common among non-resident adults (45.6%) than among residents (12.4%). Overall the residents—both young and adult— seem to be more deeply involved in the subdivision’s evening life, while non-residents tend to participate more sporadically. These results indicate that the area’s nightlife is not solely youth-driven and that adults also maintain a consistent presence in evening activities.

To investigate perceptions of noise disturbance, respondents were asked to evaluate how much certain sources of night-time noise - such as restaurants, bars, outdoor events, nightclubs, and people in the streets - had disturbed them at home during the past year. Night-time venues contribute to entertainment but also to the urban night-time economy; at the same time, they are among the main generators of

noise and urban disturbance (Crivello, 2019). The analysis aggregates responses across different noise sources to provide a general measure of disturbance.

Figure 2 – How often do you go out in the evening in the VIII subdivision.



Source: our elaboration on surveys data.

The results show a high level of tolerance in both age groups, though with a clear generational difference. Among young respondents (15–34), 74.3% reported being “not at all disturbed,” compared to 66.4% of adults aged 35 and over. While the share of those reporting “slightly disturbing” is almost identical (14.0% vs. 14.7%), the gap widens steadily at higher levels of disturbance: 5.8% of young people report being “moderately disturbed,” compared to 9.8% of adults; the shares increase to 3.7% vs. 4.1% for “very disturbing” and 2.3% vs. 5.0% for “extremely disturbing” (Table 1). When distinguishing between residents and non-residents, the same patterns remain: young people show generally high levels of tolerance, with only modest differences between residents and non-residents, while adults—especially residents—are more likely to report stronger disturbance. Among young respondents, residents appear even less disturbed than non-residents, with slightly higher shares reporting no disturbance at all, suggesting a stronger familiarity or habituation to the area’s evening soundscape.

These findings suggest that adults tend to be more sensitive to night-time urban activity, possibly reflecting different routines, expectations, or relationships with the neighbourhood. At the same time, the distributions indicate that negative perceptions are a minority in both groups, tempering common assumptions about widespread intergenerational conflict over noise.

The different ways in which young people and adults experience the VIII subdivision - through different rhythms, motivations, and spatial practices -highlight the presence of generational asymmetries that may influence perceptions, expectations, and forms of coexistence in the area.

Any study on evening and night-time urban life must necessarily engage with the issue of safety, not only as an objective condition but also as a matter of perception. Individuals' sense of personal security plays a crucial role in shaping their decisions about whether, how, and where to move through the city after dark.

Table 1 – *In the past year, after 8:00 p.m., how much have the following sources of noise bothered you while you were at home?*

Level of disturbance	Youth population (15-34)			Adults (over 34)		
	Residents	Not residents	Total	Residents	Not residents	Total
Extremely disturbing	1.6	2.8	2.3	6.8	0.6	5.0
Very disturbing	3.4	3.8	3.7	4.1	3.8	4.1
Moderately disturbing	5.1	6.1	5.8	9.1	12.4	9.8
Slightly disturbing	13.4	14.2	14.0	16.0	11.1	14.7
Not at all disturbing	76.4	73.1	74.3	64.0	72.1	66.4

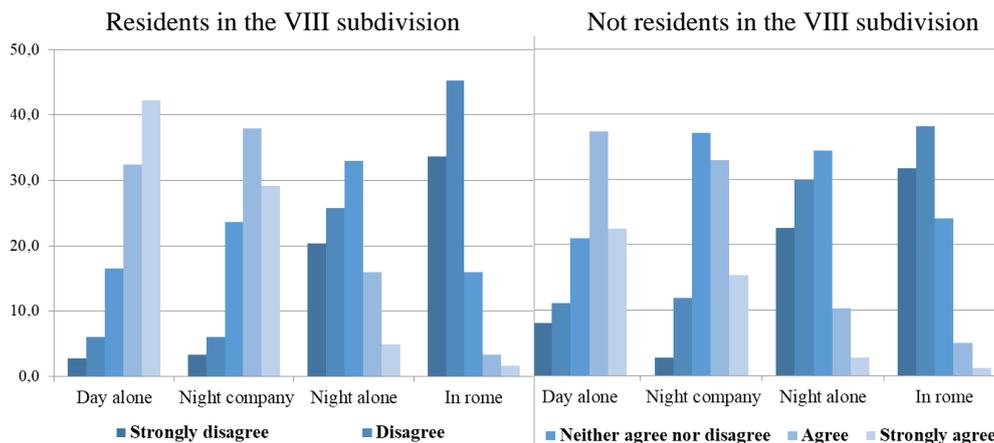
Source: our elaboration on surveys data.

Perceived safety can enable or constrain access to spaces, influence the frequency and nature of social participation, and condition the ways people - particularly young people - experience the urban environment. Safety is a central dimension in the governance of urban nightlife, often shaping both public discourse and local policy interventions. In many European cities, evening and night-time activities are frequently approached through a focus on regulation, surveillance, and the prevention of disorder. This perspective, while partially justified by concerns about public order, risks overshadowing the social, cultural, and relational value that nighttime spaces hold - especially for younger populations (Bichi, Pasqualini, 2018). The VIII subdivision stands out as a context where the presence of young people is particularly strong, and where local politics has shown a willingness - at least in principle - to prioritize youth-oriented initiatives and events, especially in the summer. Among young respondents, perceptions of safety vary significantly depending on time of day, company, and location. During the day, perceptions of safety are generally positive among young respondents, but with notable differences between residents and non-residents: 74.7% of young residents agree or strongly agree that the VIII subdivision is safe to move around alone, compared to 59.9% among non-residents. At night, however, feelings of safety become more fragile and strongly influenced by context. When accompanied, 67.0% of young residents report feeling safe in the VIII subdivision, while the share drops to 48.3% among non-residents. If moving around alone, the perception shifts dramatically for both groups, with only 20.8% of residents and 13.0% of non-residents agreeing that the area is safe, and disagreement becoming the majority position. Neutral responses increase

sharply, indicating hesitation or conditional confidence. Perceptions are even more negative when referring to other parts of Rome: 79.0% of young residents and 69.9% of non-residents disagree that it is safe to move alone at night elsewhere in the city (Figure 4).

These findings point to a clear contrast between day and night and between the VIII subdivision and the wider urban environment, but also underscore how being alone is the most decisive factor in shaping young people's sense of vulnerability after dark. Differences between residents and non-residents remain small when moving alone at night but residents show slightly lower disagreement levels, suggesting a marginally higher familiarity with the area.

Figure 4 – *To what extent do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements? During the day, the VIII subdivision is a safe area to move around alone; At night, the VIII subdivision is a safe area to move around when accompanied; At night, the VIII subdivision is a safe area to move around alone; At night, it is safe to move around alone in other parts of Rome. Youth population 15-34.*

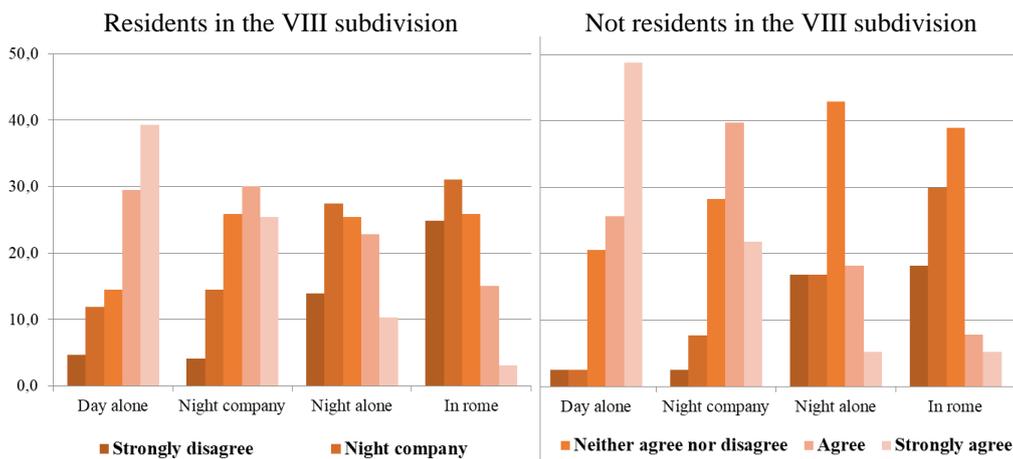


Source: our elaboration on surveys data.

Among adult respondents (35+), perceptions of safety show a similar structure to those of younger individuals, though with a more cautious tone overall. During the day, feelings of safety remain high for both residents and non-residents: 68.9% of adult residents and 74.3% of non-residents agree or strongly agree that the VIII subdivision is safe to move around alone. At night, however, perceptions become more fragile, with higher uncertainty among non-residents and greater polarization among residents. When accompanied, 55.5% of residents and 61.5% of non-residents report feeling safe, and neutrality becomes relatively common in both groups. The perception becomes significantly more critical when moving alone at

night: only 33.2% of adult residents and 23.4% of non-residents feel safe, and disagreement becomes widespread across both groups. These findings confirm the protective role of companionship in shaping safety perceptions: a recurring pattern across age groups that underscores the social dimension of spatial security. The most negative perceptions emerge when referring to moving alone at night in other parts of Rome, where 56.0% of adult residents and 48.1% of non-residents disagree that such movements are safe (Figure 5). Overall, adult non-residents tend to express slightly higher perceived safety than residents—except when moving alone at night within the VIII subdivision, where both groups display similarly low confidence.

Figure 5 – To what extent do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements?
During the day, the VIII subdivision is a safe area to move around alone; At night, the VIII subdivision is a safe area to move around when accompanied; At night, the VIII subdivision is a safe area to move around alone; At night, it is safe to move around alone in other parts of Rome. Adults (over 34).



Source: our elaboration on surveys data.

The comparison between age groups shows no uniform pattern: while adults tend to report higher perceived safety when alone—especially at night—young respondents express more confidence in some daytime and accompanied situations.. While both groups show a clear drop in perceived safety at night - especially when alone - youth report lower levels of agreement with positive safety statements and upper levels of uncertainty. These differences persist when distinguishing between residents and non-residents, with young residents generally reporting higher perceived safety than their adult counterparts, whereas non-residents in both age groups tend to express greater uncertainty. For example, when moving alone at night in the VIII subdivision, 20.8% of young residents and 13.0% of young non-residents

feel safe, compared to 33.2% of adult residents and 23.4% of adult non-residents. During the day, young respondents also show slightly higher levels of confidence.

Adults, by contrast, are more likely to respond neutrally, especially in contexts outside the subdivision. These patterns suggest that, although safety concerns are present across generations, adult people tend to engage with the urban space in a more cautious manner, although patterns vary by residential status., possibly because they are less conditioned by negative personal experiences or long-standing perceptions of urban insecurity.

4. Discussion and conclusion

In the face of growing population ageing and shrinking youth cohorts, many European cities face growing challenges in balancing the spatial and social needs of different generations. Rome is no exception. With a population of over 2.7 million residents and a steadily increasing ageing index, the city exemplifies the challenges of managing age-related imbalances across a large and socially heterogeneous urban territory. These dynamics raise important questions about the visibility, role, and integration of young people in the life of the city - particularly in relation to their presence in public spaces and their participation in urban rhythms that often diverge from those of older age groups.

This paper has addressed these questions by focusing on a particularly emblematic setting: the VIII sub-municipal subdivision of Rome. This area combines some of the highest levels of population ageing in the city with a strong presence of young people, due largely to the location of Roma Tre University and other cultural and recreational venues. It thus represents a meaningful case for examining how age-based asymmetries play out in the urban experience, especially during the evening and night-time hours, when differences in lifestyles, mobility, and spatial access tend to become more pronounced.

The findings of the survey, of which only a subset of the results have been presented here, underscore the importance of adopting a multidimensional perspective in the study of youth engagement with the urban night.

Patterns of use, perceptions, and behaviours are shaped by a complex interplay of age, residence, motivations, and social context. In Rome's VIII subdivision the analysis reveals a number of both contrasts and commonalities. Younger respondents appear to use the area primarily for study, socialising, and nightlife, confirming its role as a destination rather than a place of residence for many. They have a generally high tolerance for noise, combined with differentiated perceptions of safety depending on time, context, and whether they are alone or accompanied. Adults, on

the other hand, tend to engage with the area once a week and they are more likely to report higher sensitivity to noise..

Despite these differences, the analysis also reveals areas of convergence. In particular, the presence of others - friends, partners, or fellow residents - emerges as a shared factor that increases perceived safety at night across all age groups. This highlights the role of social ties in shaping the urban night as a lived and negotiated space. The coexistence of generational groups with different rhythms, expectations, and needs does not necessarily translate into open conflict, but may generate forms of tension or discomfort that remain unexpressed and should be acknowledged by urban policies.

The coexistence of different age groups in the same urban spaces - particularly in the evening and night-time - requires public policies that go beyond binary logics of regulation versus tolerance. Too often, institutional responses to nightlife are framed in terms of control, with safety and noise as dominant concerns. While these issues are not unfounded, focusing on containment risks overlooking the relational and experiential value of the night for young people. This study invite a shift in perspective: rather than viewing youth presence as a problem to be managed, urban policies should recognise it as a social resource to be supported. This includes investing in accessible spaces for safe and inclusive aggregation, ensuring night-time mobility. At the same time, policies must take into account the needs of older residents, preserving liveability, and quality of life. Balancing these needs requires an approach based on coexistence and mutual recognition rather than generational prioritisation. It also calls for the involvement of young people in shaping the city's night-time agenda—not only as users but as legitimate stakeholders in the urban environment.

This study represents an initial step in a broader research agenda aimed at understanding how young people experience urban space during the evening and night-time hours. The findings discussed here are based on a preliminary set of survey responses, and further data collection is ongoing. As such, the results should be interpreted as exploratory, offering a first set of insights into the spatial and perceptual dynamics that shape youth nightlife in Rome's VIII subdivision.

Future developments of the study will include spatial analyses of aggregation areas, cross-referencing self-reported destinations with territorial characteristics such as accessibility, residential density, and service availability to better understand the motivations and barriers experienced by youth in the urban nightscape. In addition, the analysis will be disaggregated by gender and age groups in order to capture internal diversity within the youth population and identify possible asymmetries in access, perceptions, and expectations. Particular attention will be paid to distinguishing between adults and older residents, in order to assess whether

the presence and practices of young people at night are perceived differently across generations—especially with regard to the tolerance of nightlife.

These further steps aim to refine our understanding of intergenerational relations in the night-time city and to support more inclusive urban policies.

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