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Foreword

LIDA VIGANONI

Dipartimento di Scienze Umane e Sociali, Università degli studi di Napoli "L'Orientale", Italy
E-mail: lviganoni@unior.it

This special issue of the *Bollettino della Società Geografica Italiana* completes a research work funded in 2017 for a period of three years by the Ministry of Education, University and Research as part of the 2015 PRIN Program (Research Projects of Relevant National Interest) entitled: "Retail, Consumption, and the City: Practices, Planning and Governance for Urban Inclusion, Resilience, and Sustainability".

As the Principal Investigator, I would like to mention the main stages that marked the work of the research team and that represent a point of reference for this monographic issue. Seven Universities participated in our research. The national coordination was carried out by the University of Naples "L'Orientale". The Universities of Bologna, Trieste, Chieti-Pescara, Palermo, Macerata (later transferred to Messina), and the Milan Polytechnic participated in the project¹. Some members from the Universitat de Barcelona also participated with the Research Unit of Naples.

Traced in the field of urban geography, the project has placed its focus on the issues of retail and consumption, which have assumed strategic value over time in redesigning urban landscapes. A privileged observatory, therefore, not only to understand the meaning and scope of changes in contemporary urban spaces and to analyze new social and cultural phenomena that accompany them, but above all in order to identify new forms of management and planning of processes that are rapidly transforming the urban structure of the centers and suburbs of Italian cities. And this is also what is happening in urban spaces at the European scale. The ultimate goal of the research work was to provide guidelines in order to promote social inclusion, urban-commercial resilience and sustainability and, on the basis of previous collaborative and research experiences activated at both a national and international scale, new tools to grasp the recent transformations of the spaces and times of contemporary cities.

Already in 2017 the research group published a first volume, *Commercio, consumo e città. Quaderno di lavoro* (edited by Lida Viganoni, Milano, FrancoAngeli). The volume was the product of the first executive phase of this

¹ Principal Investigator and Responsible for the University of Naples "L'Orientale" Research Unit: Lida Viganoni; Responsible for the University of Bologna Research Unit: Alessandra Bonazzi (before Franco Farinelli); Marina Fuschi, University of Chieti-Pescara "Gabriele d'Annunzio"; Enrico Nicosia, University of Macerata (later transferred to Messina); Maria Antonietta Clerici, Polytechnic of Milan; Girolamo Cusimano, University of Palermo; Sergio Zilli, University of Trieste.

research and constituted an essential reference for the following work. In fact, the theoretical-methodological and empirical-operational tools have been defined to be considered common bases of reference, in line with the conceptual and analytical framework of the research, in order to harmonize the readings that each of the research units have then articulated on the problematic ideas emerging from the various urban-metropolitan contexts chosen as case studies.

The research has continued over the years, also through collective meetings for developing the updating and the debate within the research group. The final result saw the light at the end of 2019 with seven volumes published (one for each research unit). In general, the contributions present in the volumes unfold on very articulated scales of investigation, depending on the urban context of reference. In all cases, the work has met the specific objectives defined in the research project.

All publications are included in the *Scienze Geografiche* Series of the publisher FrancoAngeli in open access mode; a modality that allows knowledge sharing, dissemination and barrier-free access to research results. Therefore, the files regarding the entire work are freely downloadable from the FrancoAngeli Open Access platform (<http://bit.ly/francoangeli-oa>).

The published volumes

1. Bonazzi, A., Frixia, E. (Eds.). (2019). *Mercati storici, rigenerazione e consumo urbano. Il caso di Bologna*. Milano, FrancoAngeli, pp. 132. The Bologna Unit investigated the recent regeneration process that took place in the two Historical Markets of Bologna (Mercato di Mezzo, adjacent to Piazza Maggiore, and Mercato delle Erbe). This process first involved the careful translation of their original function – the neighborhood retail of local and non-local agri-food products – according to the usual terms of the branding and the so-called *aestheticization* of the daily, following the example of London and Madrid, and then activated its generative *hub* function. In fact, going beyond the geographical limits of the two markets, it has recomposed the economic spatiality of the entire historic center of Bologna in a shared strategic syntax that produces and tells the substantial identity between Bologna and food. What emerged from the analysis and research in the field was the engulfing process that, over four years, led to the construction of a real urban brandscape dedicated to food (è *Bologna City of Food*). The re-signification of the Bolognese urban space and the original unprecedented practices of trade and consumption were therefore investigated according to the theoretical lines of the brand logic and the practice of field research, so as to map the effects of commercial policies, between consensus production and practices of trade, economic/social exclusion and dissent, financial and informational investment. The result is the construction of Bologna as a privileged node in the geographical space of (tourist), national and international transport. What emerges in the research, between foodification, negotiation and tourists, is the phenomenon of a *market* of housing that, like that of food, has consumed what we believe is the normal way to live and live.
2. Clerici, M.A. (2019). *Competere nel commercio. Milano e le città medie tra deregulation e grande recessione*. Milano, FrancoAngeli, pp. 308. The volume investigates the case of the Milan area, where the process of transforming trade is particularly advanced. The divergent evolutionary trajectories of Milan and thirteen surrounding medium-sized cities, in the span of the period 1998-2018, are at the center of attention. Also in commerce, as in the economy as a whole, a repolarization is taking place in Milan that, strengthened by its role as a global city and by a greater resilience to the great recession, has strengthened itself to the detriment of the medium-sized cities. The volume demonstrates how the degree of effective liberalism on a local scale in the application of trade rules – more or less in line with the guidelines adopted at national and European level – has contributed to pushing Milan and the medium-sized cities in different directions. But, above all, the inclusion of trade in a more or less dynamic local economic system counts, which creates flows that can also be exploited by the points of sale. With this in mind, for decision makers, it is a priority to re-insert actions in support of trade in a broader policy for the development of medium-sized cities and the strengthening of their centrality in the vast area.
3. Cusimano, G. (Ed.). (2019). *Le strade del commercio in Sicilia. Analisi e ricerche sul campo*. Milano, FrancoAngeli, pp. 200. The book focuses on some representative roads of the metropolitan cities of Palermo, Catania and Messina, where for several years trade has undergone important evolutionary, transformation or decline phenomena. If the offer of organized large-scale distribution, often located in peripheral urban areas, is excluded, it is possible to say that in the collective imagination the maximum expression of the commercial offer of an urban center corre-

sponds to one or a few streets of a city. The choice to focus the study on some representative roads of the commercial situation of an urban center is therefore not accidental or peregrine. For Sicily this strong connection is completely evident in the three metropolitan cities of Palermo, Catania and Messina. Since the first reflections on the drafting of this volume, the idea of returning to the study of urban centers, subjected to several evolutionary phenomena in different sectors and threatened by the effects of the global crisis, has been shared. On the main city street where the phenomenon of trade is most recognized, evident, in transformation or in decline, common investigation tools have been used, such as the questionnaire administered to the various operators and/or consumers to directly understand the critical issues of the areas subject to analysis. Also, the cartography of the detected phenomena is an element that unites the essays proposed in this volume.

4. Fuschi, M., Ferrari, F. (Eds.). (2019). *Commercio e consumo nelle città d'Abruzzo. Casi studio*. Milano, FrancoAngeli, pp. 200. The new commercial geographies highlight a great variety of urban-commercial situations in the main cities of Abruzzo. The volume represents the second and final product of work carried out within the PRIN project and aims to represent the new commercial geographies of the main cities of Abruzzo. The contributions – built on the basis of a multiple methodological approach – although associable in the representation of the new experiential dimension, aim to restore a certain variety of urban situations: from the role that commerce can express in defining the resilience of an earthquake-stricken city like L'Aquila to that of the main economic-social driver for a city like Pescara, in search of a confirmation of centrality to be practiced through a renewed attraction; from the vulnerability of a sector which, despite innovation and metamorphosis, is still unable to contrast the attractiveness of large commercial distribution (Chieti and Teramo) to that of a sector that in small cities – even in the context of a generalized crisis – is able to express the potential associated with the economy of a wider territory (Castel di Sangro) or to demonstrate strengths in the trade in identity products (Sulmona).
5. Nicosia, E., Porto, C.M., Graziano, T. (2019). *Il commercio nelle aree urbane marchigiane tra vecchi e nuovi format*. Milano, FrancoAngeli, pp. 120. Focusing the analysis on the southern capitals of Macerata, Fermo and Ascoli Piceno, as well as on the coastal cities of Civitanova Marche, Porto San Giorgio and San Benedetto del Tronto, the research work reflects the evolution of the main dynamics that have occurred in the Marche distribution system over the last twenty years. From the historic shop to the extra-urban shopping center, from fast fashion to company outlets and outlet villages: the changing geographies of consumption spaces reflect deeper transformations, which affect local production fabrics but that, at the same time, are also triggered by global dynamics. Reading these changes through the interpretative and methodological grid of the geography of trade and consumption means digging deeply into the transformation processes of the territories, seizing the connections between economic development, urban policies and production structures, even more if the object of investigation is a *plural* region like the Marche. With the aim of investigating its current economic-territorial configuration, the volume focuses on the analysis of the Marche commercial system, historically influenced by urban polycentrism and the widespread diffusion of small and medium-sized enterprises, many of which organized in quality production districts.
6. Viganoni, L. (Ed.). (2019). *Commercio e consumo nelle città che cambiano. Napoli, città medie, spazi esterni*. Milano, FrancoAngeli, pp. 488. The most significant transformations that connote the relationship between retail activities, consumption and central and peripheral urban spaces are investigated through some case studies, inside and outside the city of Naples. Starting from a series of *Inquadramenti* (Frameworks), which represent the frame of reference for the subsequent parts, the paths follow the traces of the empirical research within the geographical field so as methods of other disciplinary fields. Outside the city of Naples, the commercial spaces of the suburban area of the Marcianise area and the urban-commercial transformations of one of the most important medium-sized cities, Aversa, are the object of attention. Within Naples, the itinerary instead involves the changes in the main commercial streets, some of the most popular non-food markets, the trade in products of foreign origin and those for personal well-being. The research also focuses on two parallel urban realities, Barcelona and Matera; thus the dynamics of the city of Naples are intertwined with those of the Catalan metropolis, while the City of the Sassi joins that of Aversa, proposing the analysis scale of two medium-sized cities.

7. Zilli, S. (Ed.) (2019). *Territorio e consumo in una regione composita. Il Friuli Venezia Giulia tra Grande Distribuzione Organizzata e Barcolana*. Milano, FrancoAngeli, pp. 168. During the entire Republican era, the Friuli Venezia Giulia Region maintained an internal division, marked by the two parts indicated in its name, invented in 1948. This constituted the main limit to the development of the territory, already bound in its opportunities for political and productive autonomy by the presence of the border with the Eastern countries. These limits could have been overcome, also by virtue of the regional specialty, with the fall of the iron curtain, the subsequent enlargement of the European Union to a large part of the eastern section of the continent, and the birth of new states that arose from the disintegration of the former neighbour, Yugoslavia. Instead, the reduced political will within the region has perpetuated the opposition between the parties, limiting the space for an organic discussion on the conditions of growth of the community. The renunciation of a different reasoning on a new internal cohesion stands out in the choices of territorial reorganization, linked to the possibility of adaptation to the national legislation and the need to update an old and inadequate organization of the administrative spaces. A similar attitude is also reflected in the political choices relating to Organized Large Distribution and in the ways in which the regional space has been invested by the introduction of centralized commercial structures, to an extent greater than the national average and not always consistent with the historical organization of the territory. This is despite the fact that Friuli Venezia Giulia maintains examples of possible different approaches towards the relationship between consumption, population and landscape, as suggested by the cases of the historical premises and the Barcolana.

Some of the issues addressed in the volumes gave rise to further reflections that led the working group to conceive, with the coordination of our colleague Rosario Sommella, a series of in-depth analyses and further summaries that find fulfillment in this special issue of the *Bollettino*.



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Consumption and Retail in Urban Spaces: Studies on Italy and Catalonia

Consumo e commercio negli spazi urbani: una ricerca in Italia e in Catalogna

ROSARIO SOMMELLA

Dipartimento di Scienze Umane e Sociali, Università degli studi di Napoli "L'Orientale", Italy
E-mail: rsommella@unior.it

1. Changing urban landscapes of retail and consumption

The choice of a shopping street in UK as the cover picture gives me the opportunity to introduce this special issue: in this country, the health of town centres and high streets has been under scrutiny for the past ten years, at a time when the effects of the global economic crisis were already becoming evident. As evidence of the interest in this topic, in 2011 the report *Revitalising High Street*¹ was published, as well as an article in which Wrigley and Dolega – using the concepts of resilience, fragility and adaptation – analysed the performance of more than 250 urban centres and high streets in four regions of the country, and their reconfigurations following the economic shock. A vivid debate followed, marked by different contributions. We have no way of accounting for the variety of opinions and positions expressed; suffice it to mention the works of scholars sometimes directly involved in the planning and management of retail areas, who focused their attention on specific issues: the challenges posed to the high street because of the impact of online retailing, of the rapid growth of the so-called convenience stores, of the consolidation of the night-time economy and of the new factors influencing consumer behaviour (Wrigley, Brookes 2014), or again the trends of commercial and social spaces characterised by an “adaptive flexibility” (Wrigley, Lambiri 2014, 919) that had kept them alive in the past and still constituted a creative presence.

Not only for high streets, these are phenomena and issues that, although articulated in different ways from a geographical point of view, also had several effects in Italy, over the last decade. On the occasion of an international seminar, I had the opportunity to focus on such dynamics: “half a century after the beginning of the transition to the post-Fordist city, we are observing transformations, not only in the central areas, which require us to integrate the interpretation of the changes of the urban economic base with new con-

¹ The report, commissioned by the British government, was entrusted to the retail expert Mary Portas (*The Portas Review. An independent review into the future of our high streets*).

cepts, suitable for grasping the deep change underway in terms of lifestyles, growth of cultural consumption, and responses to the crisis” (Sommella 2015, 233).

In connection with the work of the international research network on *City, Retail and Consumption* and with the research group of the Italian Association of Geographers *I luoghi del commercio fra tradizione e innovazione* (Retail places between tradition and innovation)², at the Orientale University in Naples for some years we have been dealing with urban-retail change and consumption practices in Naples and its metropolitan area. Recently we have investigated the topic within the framework of the Research Projects of Relevant National Interest (Italian acronym PRIN), mentioned in the Foreword (*Retail, Consumption, and the City: Practices, Planning and Governance for Urban Inclusion, Resilience, and Sustainability*), of which this special issue collects the latest products³. In all these works, analysing the urban landscapes of retail and consumption has been a way of studying an urban geography in rapid and sometimes fleeting change.

The aim of this special issue was to publish in English, in a prestigious journal, some further reflections than those that had marked the various stages of the work of the group⁴, made up of seven units operating in various parts of Italy, with the addition of the Barcelona team to the Neapolitan one. When we developed the idea of this publishing project, even brief summaries of the research seemed to be significant in offering a cross-section of the retail and consumption’s dynamics in some paradigmatic Italian and Catalan urban spaces. Notwithstanding, the ambition was also a different one: that of investigating – through specific in-depth studies (thematic or related to case studies) – aspects not adequately dealt with in the already published volumes, or even to take inspiration from themes and cases already dealt with to advance in a reflection that could contribute to building a further piece of a new research agenda on retail, consumption, and the city. Right from the early stages of the project, it seemed important to us to focus attention, in a perspective of international comparison, on Italian urban spaces and on the multi-dimensionality of the phenomena that have characterized them in recent times, using retail and consumption as interpretative keys of the changes in the centres and

suburbs of our cities. The aim was, therefore, to try to fill a knowledge gap not only regarding the consistency and characteristics of retail and entertainment activities, but also on the evolution of spaces and places in relation with consumption practices. In addition, we tried to focus on the relations between the different actors (entrepreneurs, workers, residents, users, and visitors) and the places, by noting the forms of conflict and trying to outline, in this case through a comparison with the Catalan context, innovative interpretations or future perspectives, without neglecting the role of the policies that guide the management of the sector.

By cross-referencing descriptive evidence and theoretical reflections, in this issue we attempted to trace evolutionary and, in some cases, analytical trajectories from different case studies, all aimed at reflecting on the relationship between consumption, retail and urban spaces in Italy and Catalonia at different scales: from the streets (Messina and Sabato) to the neighbourhoods (D’Alessandro and Autiero), from some paradigmatic spaces in urban centres (Albolino and Cappiello) to cities that have experienced recent transformations induced by retail and consumption (Bonazzi, Frixia, Sommella and D’Alessandro, Zilli and Modaffari) and again, in some regional contexts, from the focus on the intra-urban scale (Ferrari et al.) to inland areas (Cardinale et al.) and rural areas (Clerici) and, finally, from the metropolitan areas – as those of Catania and Messina (Barilaro et al.) and Barcelona (Carreras et al.) – to the Italian administrative Regions themselves, explored through the territorialisation processes of retail and tourism (Cusimano et al., Nicosia, Porto). Many of the reflections we have developed have, however, in some ways been overtaken by events: although the effects of the COVID-19 crisis on retail and consumption activities are not yet fully clear, and are still being produced at this stage, it is certainly a new challenge for those urban landscapes that have already been so profoundly altered by the dynamics that we analysed in this issue⁵.

Geography has begun to interrogate itself about the first spatial effects of the pandemic, as evidenced by several works devoted to the subject⁶. In relation to

² <https://www.ageiweb.it/gruppi-di-lavoro/i-luoghi-del-commercio-tradizione-e-innovazione-2/>

³ For a detailed review of the works of the international and national network, as well as of the publications we have produced on the Neapolitan case-study, see Carreras, D’Alessandro 2017.

⁴ These stages, with their respective results in terms of publications, are summarized in Lida Viganoni’s Foreword.

⁵ Although the focus of the last phase of the research and, therefore, of the contributions collected here was on case studies elaborated before the pandemic crisis, in some cases the field research was interrupted by the crisis itself, while in others the latter has represented an essential element for some brief concluding reflections by the authors on the future of the contexts investigated.

⁶ Among others, and dealing with various aspects of the pandemic, the monographic issues of the journals “Documenti Geografici” on *Geographies of the Covid-19* (Bozzato 2020) and “Dialogues in Human Geography” on *Geographies of the COVID-19 pandemic* (Rose-Redwood et al. 2020), as well as the Italian *Covid-19 Atlas project* (Casti, Adobati 2020).

retail and consumption too, during the pandemic, some scholars have developed reflections on the consequences induced by a health crisis that has had/is having a very significant impact on public spaces and then on the places of retail and consumption that mark the “daily geographies” of markets (Van Eck et al. 2020). This means commercial streets or squares, and all places of commerce in which the consumption of products is closely linked to that of the places and, therefore, of the public spaces themselves⁷. Again, in relation to the components of the urban commercial system, the consumption practices experienced during the most stringent lockdowns in commercial spaces such as supermarkets are cited as paradigmatic practices for retail shops as well: “in a longer timeframe, experiences gained in supermarkets will most probably turn out to be extremely important for all kinds of retail stores. As soon as legislation will step by step relax the regulations on social distancing, the network of practice will most likely expand from the realm of supermarket(s) (chains) to other retailers, for instance in fashion retail or bookstores” (Brinks, Ibert 2020). On the other hand, some of the effects of the crisis were immediately visible on the urban-commercial systems in Italy as well. In our country e-commerce, which was already growing rapidly, has experienced an unprecedented expansion: in one year (2020) – according to data from the eCommerce B2C Observatory of the Politecnico di Milano, reported by the economic-financial newspaper Sole24ore (Mancini 2020) – purchases of products on the web increased by 5.5 billion, marking a growth especially in the food sector. In addition to the natural prominence of the large players and specialised e-retailers, another interesting element was the involvement of small retailers and of the so-called traditional shops, especially in the grocery sector, as well as the growing role of large-scale organised distribution. Unsurprisingly, there has been an authentic rediscovery of neighbourhood commerce: although the phenomenon will have to be assessed over the long term, since it manifested its effects in Italy especially in the months of the strictest lockdown, data from Fida’s Observatory showed that during the pandemic almost one in two businesses (47.3%) active in the food retail sector recorded an increase in new customers⁸.

⁷ On the role of the crisis in rethinking these spaces at the Neapolitan scale, using the concepts of spatial vulnerability, adaptive resilience, and sustainability, we too have begun to reflect (Sommella, D’Alessandro forthcoming).

⁸ For an in-depth analysis of the research, carried out by the Italian Federation of Food Retailers (in Italian FIDA), member of *Confcommercio*, in collaboration with Format Research, see <https://formatresearch.com/2020/09/25/fida-confcommercio-negozi-di-vicinato-con-la-pandemia-piu-clienti-per-unimpresa-su-due-osservatorio-con-format-research/>, last accessed on 1/9/2021.

Beyond persistent prejudices – often changed in motivation or form but not in substance⁹ – regarding retail and consumption, both remain fundamental to understanding where the city is going. Studying consumption, on the other hand, does not mean assuming it uncritically as a way of managing the city, but understanding that it is a fundamental spring, even if it follows fashion – although, it is also redundant to specify, the city has never been and certainly is not now exempt from fashion – in order to understand some of the ways the city as it is lived. This is especially true in terms of attractiveness: the metropolis “attracts irresistibly because it presents itself as the place where you can buy everything you can afford and where what you buy makes what you can afford visible” (Amendola 2016, 17, *our translation*). However, it is equally clear that the urban future, and with it the wealth and the image of the city, are the outcome of processes and phenomena produced by “stakeholders, place marketing and the demand of a middle class”, the last one both protagonist and beneficiary of this philosophy (Amendola 2016, 17), which produces obvious contradictions. Recalling a previous work by Amendola (2010), as we pointed out in this special issue in relation to the Neapolitan case, these are “contradictions that a process connected to the democratization of consumption (of needs, desires, and experiences) and its places entails, starting with the changes in social geography and the new forms of residential segregation and territorial hierarchization” (Sommella, D’Alessandro in this issue).

The contemporary *flâneurie* spasmodically searches for attractive *scapes* and the urban tourism in progressive growth, although currently stagnant due to the pandemic crisis, involves profound changes. From this point of view, the sustainability of a city, which especially in the central spaces also for the effect of policies has found in spectacularization a fundamental driver (Sommella 2019), requires – as well as the construction of new spaces, artificial or not, in the suburbs and in the medium-size cities – new and further reflections. On the other hand, these themes offer other food for thought on the socio-spatial changes in cities, in the light of the phenomena with which the emergence of these *scapes* has to contend (including the pandemic crisis), and on the changes they have produced both in the urban fabric and

⁹ It is worth mentioning here the passage from the sociologist Fabris that we quoted (Sommella D’Alessandro, in this issue), recalling his invitation not to ignore “what consumption represents in our lives today, its symbolic and identity-related meanings, indulging in the oldest demonizations” (Fabris 2010, 3-4); and still not to persist in legitimizing new anathemas “on its hedonistic, expressive, semiotic and identity-related meanings” (Fabris 2010, 3-4).

the built environment of Italian cities and in our everyday experiences of these cities, which are increasingly linked to specific *atmospheres* of retail and consumption¹⁰, as highlighted in many of the articles in this issue.

Governance is crucial, even if, in the phase immediately preceding the one we are currently experiencing, it seems to have more than facilitated the trends underway: the revitalization of centres, the pedestrianisations, the expansion of areas allocated to public and private land occupation, with the related conflicts, are real elements and lead to gentrification or profound changes in entire parts of the city. Ultimately, it is a question of assessing the consequences of these dynamics and taking action to avoid the falsification of spaces. On the other hand, the commercial revolution, as well as changing the face of retail places aimed at satisfying simple needs, has produced new commercial spaces in which consumption and desires are sold, aimed at satisfying the demand for shopping and leisure experiences (Cachinho 2014). This does not concern, as we have highlighted in this issue for Naples, only high streets but also other commercial places because “in the postmodern metropolis of new retail spaces and consumer places, deliberately planned to seduce, intercept and create ‘consumactor’ expectations, the border between the stage and stalls disappears” (Cachinho 2014, 133). It is not a question of supporting consumption, but of looking at the city as a whole, understanding its transformations, including the economic ones, trying to understand the demands of stakeholders, residents, and users without ignoring – even more in the post-pandemic context – the need for social sustainability, resilience and, last but not least, the demands of social justice.

2. The last phase of the research project

Against the backdrop of the trends outlined above, the last phase of the research was marked by work of different angles, which sometimes even within the same research unit led to an analysis of the urban landscapes of retail and consumption by means of a wide variety of concepts, theoretical and methodological approaches. This gave rise to a wealth of perspectives on the selected case studies, contributing to progress in the reflections undertaken in the other phases of the project.

The case of the research unit “L’Orientale”, with its focus on Naples, Matera, and Barcelona, certainly exem-

plifies this variety. Starting from the historical importance of the commercial function in structuring the Neapolitan urban space and from the links of this function with the change of the urban image, D’Alessandro and I have briefly traced the long-term relationship between consumption and demand for places. More specifically, the *transcalar* analysis allowed us to focus on cases in which the demand for products and places is one possible evolution of a new demand for the city, highlighting the contradictions and conflicts of a Mediterranean city in transition. Even the changes that have recently taken place in the Neapolitan neighbourhood of Vomero appear more readable through the interpretative key of urban-retail changes and consumption practices. D’Alessandro and Autiero develop their reflections based on a field survey, outlining the characteristics of a micro-space, which – especially in the core area of its polarizing nodes – is disputed among various actors and, from an urban-commercial point of view, symbolizes the tension between forms of innovation and embeddedness. The main contemporary trends in retail and consumption are the subject of Carreras, Frago and Montesinos’ contribution, but at a different scale: that of metropolitan Barcelona, framed in the Catalan context. Based on almost thirty years of research on the subject, the Authors emphasize the need for a reconfiguration of the scales of analysis, then concentrating on the case of Barcelona. Focusing on changes in the traditional centrality of the Catalan capital, they lay the foundations for outlining some possible future directions. In the contribution by Albolino and Capiello, the changes in commerce and consumption are instead crossed with the effects of the tumultuous tourist development that has invested the city of Matera, in turn amplified by the event-process European Capital of Culture. The analysis is focused on the transformation of the historic district of the Sassi, in which the reconversion of commercial spaces, mainly for tourism purposes, has produced a marked expansion of the food & drink segment, which allows the Authors to emphasize both the specific characteristics of the Sassi and those of an urban development increasingly characterized by touristification.

These phenomena are similar to those recently faced by a greater city as Bologna, whose most recent trends have been outlined by the members of the research unit through two perspectives. Bonazzi analysed the standardised process of city branding that has led, since 2014, to a restructuring of urban public space, redefining the “emotional territory” of its citizens through an active remodeling or branding of urban policies. In the light of Baudrillard’s analytical categories relating to the “fourth, the fractal (or viral, or radiant) stage of value”, the Author exam-

¹⁰ On the importance of producing new urban atmospheres – real or artificially constructed for the purposes of retail and consumption – see our contribution (D’Alessandro et al. 2018).

ines the pandemic and the quarantine landscape, which has made even more evident the fragilities and the very crisis of the branding process symbolized by the generative *City of Food* logo. The practices and discourses of city promotion that have accompanied the recent transformations of Bologna's urban space are analysed by Frixia through the exploration of connections to changes in commerce and consumption and their meaning. The regeneration processes connected to food, which have redefined the socio-spatial fabric of some areas of the city, represent the track through which the Author deconstructs the optimistic readings of the city of Bologna, highlighting the phenomena of exclusion and displacement.

The multiplicity of the geographies of commerce in the heterogeneous territory of Abruzzo is the subject of the analysis of the Chieti-Pescara research unit, which focuses on a two-speed growth of the commercial sector between the coastal and inland areas of the region. Cardinale, Di Matteo, Pascetta and Zarrilli focus on several towns in the Apennine inland of Abruzzo, analysing urban commercial policies and, more generally, some public policies. The analysis of policies that have a different impact on the urban-commercial structure of different regional areas is conducted through the lens of retailers' and consumers' perceptions, which also allows the Authors to suggest some indications for future policies. The Pescara-Chieti area, which has played a polarising role within the urban structure of Abruzzo since the 1950s, is instead analysed by Ferrari, Iacuone, Scorrano and Fuschi with particular attention to the role of commerce as a vehicle for convergence and territorial cohesion, but also in relation to the marginalisation of certain forms of urban commerce. Going beyond the dichotomous opposition between peripheral commercial formats and commercial activities in central areas, the Authors propose an interpretation on an intra-urban scale, with the aim of promoting a balanced and sustainable reorganisation of the city.

The Messina research unit, previously based in Macerata, explores two reflections on the Marche region. Nicosia analyses the new elements of the regional tourist offer, focusing on leisure shopping and fashion tours. After framing the evolution of the region as a tourist destination over the last decade within the national and international context, the Author explores the construction of the Marche's territorial brand: by means of a field survey and some interviews, he outlines a number of itineraries for shopping tourism, trying to identify the relationships between the two sectors. Porto's contribution is instead centered on the Ancona case. Tracing the processes of commercial modernisation and the reconfiguration of the centre-periphery relationship, the

Author frames the urban landscape of Ancona, highlighting the new commercial hierarchies produced by the suburban territorialisation of the large commercial polarities. Based on this framework, the focus shifts to the complexity of Ancona's urban system and its commercial network, as well as to the need for policies aimed at reconciling the revitalization of local identity with forms of competitiveness at a global scale.

The article by Clerici, result of the work of the research unit of the Milan Polytechnic, analyses the processes of commercial restructuring in Lower Lombardy: the approach adopted is aimed at investigating a context considered marginal and peripheral, compared to those of the large urban areas on which most studies of commercial geography focus. Demographic size and position in the urban network are the variables taken into consideration to examine the commerce restructuring processes that characterised the municipalities of the chosen area in the period 2001-2019. The analysis restores the complexity of the evolutionary trajectories of the different municipalities and the relationships among them, but at the same time highlights worrying phenomena of rarefaction of the commercial supply of food, which elsewhere represented the prelude to the so-called *food deserts*.

The Palermo research unit examines, at different scales and from different perspectives, the most recent evolutionary trajectories of commercial spaces. Barilaro, Cirelli, Graziano and Mercatanti analyse, through the point of view of commercial geography, the territorial reconfiguration of the metropolitan areas of Catania and Messina. After a historical framework on the transformations of retail spaces and consumption practices that have marked the two main metropolitan areas of Eastern Sicily, these are explored with particular attention to the spread of new suburban formats, which have radically changed the centre-periphery relationships. The contribution by Cusimano, Cannizzaro, Giannone and Privitera, broadening the look at the Sicilian dynamics and comparing them with those of whole country, examines the structural changes (including the increase in large-scale distribution) and spatial changes (mainly due to the transfer of many activities to the suburbs and out-of-town areas) of commerce, as well as the impact of the 2008 crisis. Using data on the size and distribution of commercial enterprises, the Authors highlight a still widespread presence of small businesses on the territory, testifying to the flexibility of regional micro-enterprises. Messina and Sabato focus, instead, on four Palermo commercial axes, considered symbolic of the change in the urban landscape because of changing consumption habits. In order to analyse the origin and commercial evolution in these strategic areas of the historic centre, identifying the

permanence and changes of the four different evolutionary trajectories, the Authors adopt a synchronic and diachronic approach. The analysis is enriched by the results of a survey addressed to shopkeepers, aimed at investigating the perception of the sector's operators on urban-commercial and consumption changes.

The article by Zilli and Modaffari, result of the last phase of the research of the Trieste unit, analyses the case of Trieste by intersecting changes in trade and tourism. By framing the urban changes and their impact at various scales, the Authors examine the territorial indeterminacy, which is traced back to the narrowness of the administrative and political space. The most recent renewing of the city's image through new commercial and tourist activities is analysed by focusing not only on the phenomena of redevelopment and gentrification of the central areas but also on an event, the Barcolana, which symbolises a new relationship between the promotion of the urban image and the reshaping of the relationship between the city and the sea.

Finally, the afterword by Carreras, Martínez-Rigol and Morcuende shifts the focus to more general issues, offering an overview of contemporary phenomena in the global economy but also of the social, political, and cultural issues that have most affected the changes in consumer society at the global and urban scale. Retracing some processes (such as those of differential urbanisation) and new conceptions of the urban (among all, planetary urbanisation), the Authors examine the effects of the 2008 economic crisis and on the more recent effects of the health crisis to relaunch the need for new theoretical-methodological tools to develop new interpretative perspectives.

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Consumption and Demand for Places: a Reading through the Neapolitan Case

Consumo e domanda di luoghi: una lettura attraverso il caso napoletano

ROSARIO SOMMELLA, LIBERA D'ALESSANDRO

Dipartimento di Scienze Umane e Sociali, Università degli studi di Napoli "L'Orientale", Italy
E-mail: rsommella@unior.it; ldAlessandro@unior.it

Abstract. The contribution starts from the historical importance of the commercial function in Naples in structuring the urban space, a function to which it is possible largely to trace the long-lasting relationship between consumption and demand for places, as well as many changes in the urban image. Retail organized the city not only on the main streets but also at the scale of non-minoritarian and widespread micro-spaces in the various neighborhoods, in a Naples that, especially in the twentieth century, was transformed according to macro logic very different from today's. Today the element that seems to most order the structure of places and the urban landscape is consumption, mixed with living and related activities, walking and cultural functions: elements mediated by local authorities, which in turn must deal with new phenomena. The question arises in territorial terms, as retail and consumption (so as their protagonists) claim places and public space. The case study will be that of the metropolitan territory in an extended sense and will be analyzed through four scales chosen as the most exemplary of the change: the upgraded/touristified city-centre; the historical centre in its marginal parts; the metropolitan interstices; the small and medium-sized centers at the metropolitan scale. Demands of products and places that become the expression of a new demand for city bring out the potential, contradictions and conflicts of a Mediterranean city in transition.

Keywords: consumption, demand for places, commercial function, urban image, retail.

Riassunto. Il contributo parte dall'importanza storica della funzione commerciale a Napoli nello strutturare lo spazio urbano, una funzione cui è possibile in gran parte ricondurre il rapporto di lunga durata tra consumo e domanda di luoghi, come pure molti cambiamenti dell'immagine urbana. Il commercio organizzava la città non solo nelle strade principali ma anche alla scala di micro-spazi non minoritari e diffusi nei vari quartieri, in una Napoli che soprattutto nel Novecento si trasformava secondo logiche molto diverse da quelle odierne. Oggi l'elemento che sembra maggiormente ordinare l'assetto dei luoghi e il paesaggio urbano è il consumo, misto con l'abitare e le attività connesse, il passeggio e le funzioni culturali: elementi mediati dagli enti locali, che a loro volta devono fare i conti con nuovi fenomeni. La questione si pone in termini territoriali, in quanto il commercio e il consumo (così come i loro protagonisti) rivendicano luoghi e spazi pubblici. Il caso di studio è quello del territorio metropolitano di Napoli in senso esteso e verrà analizzato attraverso quattro scale scel-

te come quelle maggiormente esemplificative del cambiamento: il centro-città riqualificato/turistificato; il centro storico nelle sue parti marginali; gli interstizi metropolitani; i piccoli e medi centri a scala metropolitana. Domande di prodotti e di luoghi che diventano espressione di una nuova domanda di città fanno emergere potenzialità, contraddizioni e conflitti di una città mediterranea in transizione.

Parole chiave: Consumo, domanda di luoghi, funzione commerciale, immagine urbana, commercio al dettaglio.

1. Introduction

In the book *Cities and consumption* (2006), Mark Jayne highlighted the contribution that, in the last twenty years, the literature aimed to establish a relationship between these two themes had offered to the understanding of the contemporary world. Our contribution is situated in the context of a *corpus* of studies designed, from the outset, to investigate the mutual and dynamic relations between urban development and consumption (Jayne 2006, 1) and then characterized by having continued to offer ideas in terms of geographical research. A contribution that, due to the nature of consumption itself, is necessarily partial and “situated” – to quote the words used by Juliana Mansvelt in one of the most innovative manuals on *Geographies of consumption* – because it is shaped by what we have studied, by the positions developed with respect to our object of study (Mansvelt 2005, XV) and, no less importantly, by the territorial context we have decided to investigate: the urban and metropolitan Neapolitan space. This space represents, in fact, not only the space of geographical analysis in which we are working up close¹, but also a *periphery* in the global and European context – although very different from that which emerges in the cases addressed by the geographer from New Zealand – from which development narratives that can be discussed with the so-called hegemonic geographies (*Idem*).

The relation between consumption and demand of places, both from a material and symbolic point of view, leads today to the consideration of different aspects, many of which are connected to the relevance of retail,

tourism and culture in processes of urban transformation and revolve, in our opinion, around the changed role of consumption itself (D'Alessandro 2015). The latter is considered, in most cases, the crucial variable to understand both transformations produced on the economic basis of the city, as well as those regarding its imaginaries. As Zukin sums up, “consumption is the key element”, and still: “consumer culture has helped many men and women to make their peace with the city, and it has pacified spaces in the city to prepare them for growth” (Zukin 2010, 230). A pacification that is “preparatory” for the growth of some parts of the urban spaces, in which a certain type of tastes and lifestyles prevails, signaling new forms of economic and cultural power. “Making peace” with the city, therefore, generates many contradictions, which then often produce conflicts in the representation – and consequent claiming – of the same spaces by different groups, characterized by opposing viewpoints, hiding what Zukin defines as a “universal rhetoric of upscale growth” (*Ibidem* 2).

With that in mind, some time ago we supported the need to build a new research agenda regarding cities and consumption, conferring upon the latter necessary centrality also with the aim to investigate its relationships with processes of urban regeneration (D'Alessandro 2015, 344). From the multiplicity of scale and forms that characterize these processes – both when they are carried out through small interventions or large renovation projects, as well as when they are created from phenomena of spontaneous development – comes the idea of this contribution (Sommella 2017, 136). Considering the transformation of a peripheral urban area like the Neapolitan one (and its relative imaginary) into a different space of consumption – which experiments a change in its distinctive elements but not for the same causes and with the same consequences that there have been elsewhere – opens up different insights for a discussion with the mainstream literature and with some of the conceptual instruments utilized by said literature.

In order to develop these insights, the contribution begins with a reconstruction of the unquestionable connection that consumption has had to the forms of commerce spatial organization, focusing on the role that retail has played in structuring various parts of the city, and also on the consequences that the transformation of Neapolitan space and its image have produced as to the geography of commercial activities; this in the belief that the reconstruction of the relevance that retail has taken on through time, shaping some of the functional and symbolic characteristics of the city and its surroundings, can contribute to highlight the specificity of the Neapolitan metropolitan territory. The new *demand for places*,

¹ This undertaking derives from a long-standing tradition of research carried out by the geographers of the “Orientale” University of Naples, recently in particular in the area of the PRIN 2015 on “Retail, Consumption, and the City: Practices, Planning, and Governance for Urban Inclusion, Resilience, and Sustainability”, coordinated at a national scale by Lida Viganoni from our University. The research group produced a series of volumes (see the website <https://luoghidelcommercio.wixsite.com/website-1>). Here, particular reference is to Viganoni 2017, 2019a.

connected today – apart from retail – to tourism and culture, will be the object of attention in the next part of the article, in which the scales through which it is possible to list the most relevant consumption landscapes will be identified. A brief concluding reflection, in light of the developed path, will be dedicated to the relationship between consumption and that which is expressed as a part of a new city demand².

2. Spatial organization of retail, forms of consumption and urban image

As known, in Naples – similarly to what occurred in other Mediterranean cities – retail has had a significant role in the organization of urban space³. It is just to this role that it is possible to bring back the relationship between consumption practices and places (neighborhoods, areas, streets, and squares). Some of the latter have gradually lost their identity connotations, which can be retraced, in their distinctive characteristics, in this paragraph. For different reasons from those that pushed, in different cities, for a homogenization and a new development of upscaled spaces (Zukin 2010, X), in Naples many of the changes at the local scale occurred in the context of a fragmentary and partial change, just a short distance from other micro-spaces whose distinctive elements are still quite evident, as we will see below.

In an interesting long-term reconstruction, Orefice (1986, 25) recalls that, after the fall of the Kingdom of Two Sicilies, one single retail street stood out for the retail activities of a superior level: via Toledo. While, in other parts of the city center, the retail presence was waning, this was certainly not the case for heart of the historic center of the city, characterized by much vitality and elevated levels of specialization, often connected to artisan crafts. Consistent with other Mediterranean urban spaces, was Piazza Mercato – the wholesale and retail area *par excellence* (Leone 1985, 5) – along with the surrounding areas that made up the most representative hub.

A fundamental divide was represented by the so-called *Risanamento Act* (1885) and by the many urban

planning operations that, after the cholera epidemic in 1884, had significant consequences as to the location of urban retail. Suffice it to mention some meaningful examples: the expansion along the western shore contributed to the birth of new shops and fashion houses, as did the opening of modern communication routes towards the station, which increased the retail appeal in that part of the city that connected some central areas to the railway terminal⁴, while the construction of two funicular railways established the expansion northward, towards the hills of the Vomero neighborhood (Orefice 1986, 26) (Fig. 1).

One element from the source cited, often neglected, is retail image, that in this phase changes as in “Euro-peanized” (Orefice 1993a, 160), contributing to the establishment of a new urban imaginary: “alongside the typically Mediterranean forms of sale, the main streets (via Toledo and via Chiaia⁵) take on the appearance of retail streets, following the example of the *rue corridor*” (*Idem*).

It is not possible here to retrace the steps that marked, from the first half of the 20th century and beyond, the changes that represent the result of different forms of interaction between urban development and the evolution of retail activities⁶. Suffice it to recall that, until the post-WWII era, shops of various types continued to be concentrated in the central neighborhoods, while the other parts of the city were characterized by a widespread presence of small grocery stores, within the context of a progressive upgrading of the retail system and of a patchwork layout in the forms of modernization. The relationship between retail and representation, a significant element for our purposes, was constrained by graphic advertising that made Naples a hub of absolute importance. Consider, for example, the billboards from the 1900s by Leopoldo Metlicovitz (and then by Marcello Dudovich), made for the advertising campaigns of warehouses of the Neapolitan apparel company owned by the Mele brothers: with the claim “Mode Novità Massimo buon mercato”, the image of Naples was associated with satisfying consumer needs that brought together elegance and price. In addition to retail dynamics, other phenomena arose, such as urban planning, building expansion, uncontrolled urban growth and, later, other population movements from the

² The term “city demand” was, not by chance, already used by Uberto Siola in one of the volumes that accompanied, in the second half of the Eighties, an entrepreneurial proposal (which caused heated debates and then remained only a proposal) for the transformation of the Historic Center of Naples denominated “Il regno del possibile” (Sommella 1997, 103).

³ On the other hand, (formal and informal) retail, with its places, represents a recurring element in the description of the mixité of land uses, in turn considered a characterizing factor of Mediterranean cities (Leontidou 2010).

⁴ The streets of Corso Umberto I and of via Duomo (that have resisted at length, the last one especially for wedding gowns) were the protagonists of a retail intended for extra-urban demand.

⁵ For a detailed reconstruction of the history and evolution of via Chiaia shopping district, see Discepolo, Lettieri 2019.

⁶ For this reason, we decided to highlight only the crucial passages necessary to understand the current dynamics, relying on sources elaborated in particular moments of the urban-retail transition.

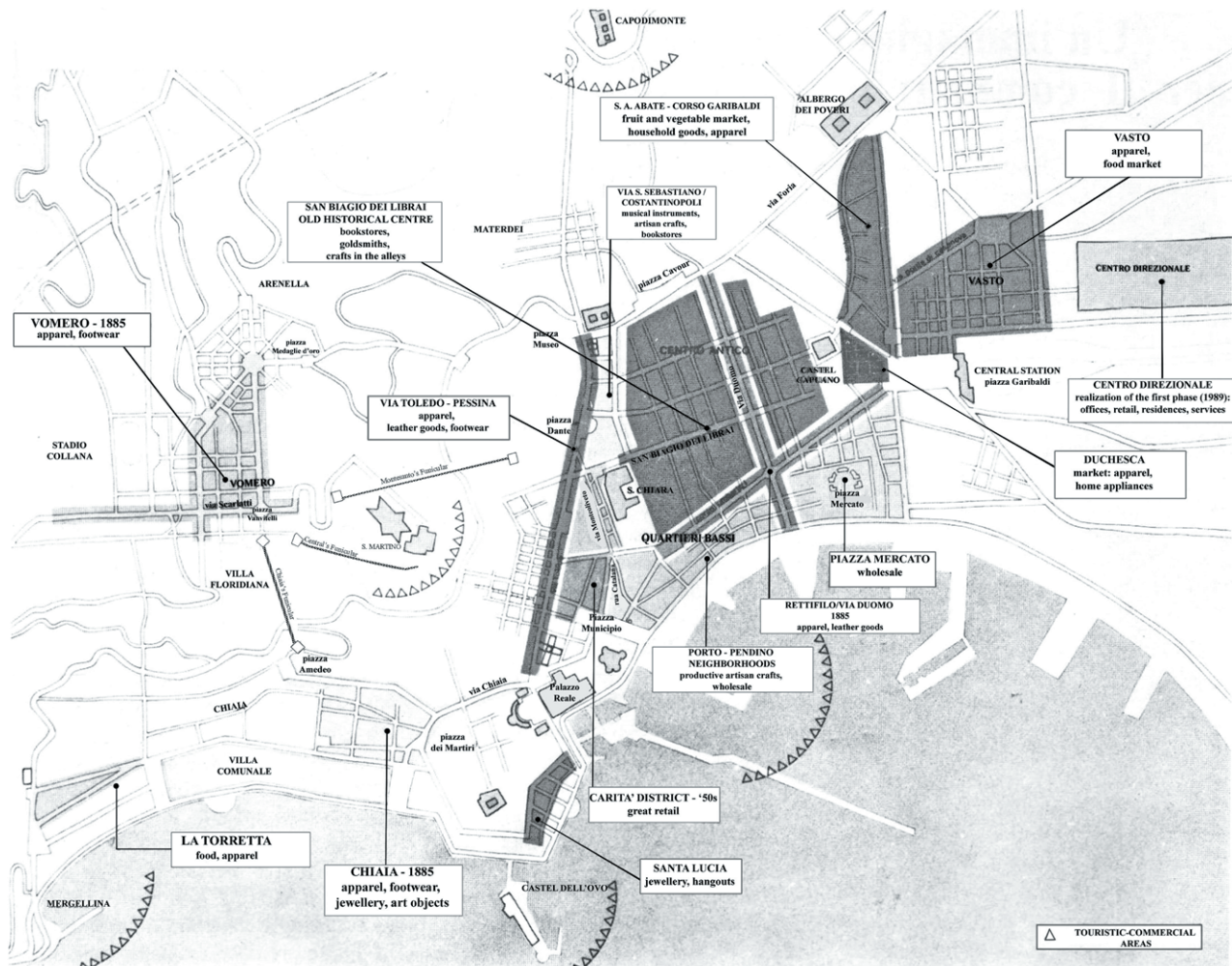


Figure 1. Main Neapolitan retail areas and relative merchandise characterization (1885-1985). Source: Ascom Forty Years Exhibition in Orefice 1993a, 160, modified by the authors.

central areas to those with new constructions and new planning instruments both for the city and for retail. These were phenomena that gave way to a more expansive distribution network, especially after WWII.

In order to convey the idea of the change that characterized the twenty-year period 1961-1981 (Orefice 1986, 31), it is enough to recall that, while the neighborhoods in the consolidated city center were decreasing in population and retail activities (San Giuseppe, Montecalvario, Porto), the neighborhoods that surrounded the central ones, along with those even further away, registered an even more evident growth in terms of the amount of activities. Of the approximately 25,000 retail stores present in the city, more than 15,000 were located in a part of the center that, while losing inhabitants, had an increase in retail mixed with new service and professional activi-

ties (San Ferdinando, Chiaia). Other neighbourhoods (Pendino, San Lorenzo) had a certain vivacity because of a significant presence of specialized retail stores of various types, while others (Fuorigrotta, San Carlo all'Arena, Vomero/Arenella and, towards the northern outskirts of the city, Secondigliano⁷) had great increases in their population, and therefore, in their distribution network.

As Piana specifies (1986, 41), development varied significantly from area to area in the same neighbor-

⁷ It is sufficient to consider, at the scale of some of these neighborhood in the twenty-year period considered, the extremely significant increase in the distribution of stores (Vomero and Arenella +127.1%, Fuorigrotta +130.2%, Secondigliano +173.4) in relation to the population increase (Vomero and Arenella +20.1%, Fuorigrotta +24.7%, Secondigliano +32.1) or the spectacular diffusion, in the western periphery, of retail in a neighborhood like Soccavo (1,117.4).

hood: in some cases it was marked, above all, by the range of neighborhood retail shops that sold fast-moving consumer goods and goods of general consumption, while only in few circumstances it was characterized by goods sold by a number of specialized retail shops that were able to confer attractive capacity to their own neighborhoods. The features that differentiated the various areas of retail concentration (but also, within them, the main streets from the secondary ones) marked, therefore, the existence of various landscapes – some more traditional, others more innovative – but all of them indicated that the city leaned on retail as a structuring factor, so much so that the deserted areas were very few. The urban imaginary was strongly characterized by some retail areas, which made Naples a city of elegance, of fashion houses, of historical apparel shops, of specialized shops, so much so that it attracted consumers from a large area. Continuing to characterize some micro-spaces of a very distinctive type at a local scale, retail structured a new relationship between consumption and places, quickly adapting to the change in lifestyles, practices and forms of consumption that characterized the twenty-year period taken into consideration.

Although the retail function also organized the city in non-minoritary areas diffused at intra-urban scale, the dominant representation conveyed an image of Naples stimulated by macro-logic and urban-industrial policies⁸. It was a time in which retail was considered a banal sector or, in the best of cases, residual. However, with particular regard to services, at the beginning of the Seventies the city displayed a polarizing role with respect to its hinterland but also at a regional scale and, in more general terms, with respect to the Southern Italian urban system. In the 1961 census, Busca (1973, 7) calculated that the city of Naples alone, while representing the 6.4% of the population of the Italian Mezzogiorno, recorded values of 15-25% of the total in non-food wholesale shops and in those auxiliary to retail (considered along with communications, credit, and insurance). The competitiveness of the Southern Italian system – and that of Naples as its polarizing hub – reduced during the decade 1961-71, also in relation to commerce

(in the sectors mentioned), defined by Busca (1973, 58) as the most “rare” and decisive sector in terms of processes of urban agglomeration in the Mezzogiorno. With regard to retail activities, as to others of urban service, Naples suffered from phenomena of congestion, especially in its central areas, which themselves also reflected the territorial distribution of said activities (*Ibidem* 71).

Some time after, the emblematic example of these processes was that of Piazza Mercato, in which initially the typical Mediterranean commercial structure was developed (Amirante 1993) and then later one of the larger centers of wholesale products such as hardware, toys, and textiles (Leone 1985, 5). The evolution of the “commercial location *par excellence*” was profoundly influenced, in 1986, by the delocalization and consequent transfer of operators to the Centro Ingrosso Sud (CIS) in Nola, a phenomenon that gave life to the separation between wholesale, which was moved outside the city, and retail, which continued to structure its internal areas. Since the Eighties, moreover, Neapolitan retail underwent a commercial crisis so great that it increased the divide between the areas able to resist thanks to their specific connotation (or because they were protagonists of upgrading, such as Chiaia and Vomero or because they represented the old heart of retail trade) and those that, while characterized by the boom of activities in the sector, slipped towards a worsening of supply or towards other forms of congestion (in particular due to their inadequacy in hosting certain types of retail, often still mixed with artisan craft) or, finally, towards actual desertification (D'Alessandro 2006).

Despite the times of crisis, the activities located in central areas continued to have a relevant capacity of attraction. For the population that lived in the rest of the city and in neighboring municipalities, Naples still represented the central location of a superior level in which to exercise consumption practices for which it was worth moving with private and public transportation, attracted by the possibility of finding a certain type of goods in organized areas from a spatial point of view, relying on the specialization and on the qualification of the supply and of the forms of sales. The “significant retail emergencies” in the metropolitan area of Naples (Orefice 1993b, 331) – as Ascom, the retailers’ association source of the previous map, defined them – were only four. Next to the first of *Piazza Mercato area* and next to the second represented by the new *Naples Business District* (Centro Direzionale), other two different presences stood out: the *Euromercato*, inaugurated in 1978 for retail, and the aforementioned *CIS* for wholesale, which paved the way for new hubs, gravitating towards the Nola area (at the intersection of highways A30 and

⁸ Actually, before the industrial crisis in the Seventies, Naples – just like the hinterland characterized by industrial development and urban expansion so much so that it was called the North of the Mezzogiorno (Mazzetti 1966) – was an industrial city, due to the dimensions of the manufacturing it produced and due to the growth of the working class. These elements, however, co-existed with a chaotic urban structure that was often pre-industrial (Sommella 2010, 49), with respect to which retail contributed (also in close connection to artisan production, above all in some central areas of the city) in significantly characterizing the urban fabric.

A16), the Afragola-Casoria area, and the Marcianise area (close to the strategic hub of Caserta Sud on the A1 highway).

Returning to the capital city, only in the Nineties would there be a change, in the retail field, more as a result of the urban policies that successfully portrayed a new image of the city (marked by the season of the *Neapolitan Renaissance*) and as a result of phenomena of modernization rather than of specific actions or planning. In the city's both delayed and sudden transition towards the post-Fordist phase, the relationship between consumption and places lost most of the points of reference that it had relied upon for a long time, such as retail areas that were strongly characterized by the continuity of their merchandising. These areas – even with the changes that occurred over time – had continued to reflect distinctive identity features both for the inhabitants and for those who lived in other areas of the city, province, or region but in Naples found that dress (or even the fabric for that dress), those shoes (or even the shoestrings for those shoes), which were not possible to find elsewhere. Once the connection between retail and a productive artisan disappeared, made of know-how and an atmosphere that no longer responded to the changed consumptions, the divide between the different parts of the city was even more marked. The spatial organization of retail was, even more so than in the previous decades, characterized by an alternation of revitalized areas (that were able, thanks to combinations with leisure, to encounter the new demand of consumption of tourists and users in general) and marginalized areas (that resisted thanks to the demand of residents and that, while characterized by the arrival of new inhabitants, were quite fragmented). Amongst the latter, about fifteen years ago, we mentioned areas that were very close to those that were upgraded (D'Alessandro 2006, 90): the Quartieri Spagnoli, close to pedestrianized via Toledo; via Santa Chiara, close to via Benedetto Croce; Antignano, close to some retail areas in the Vomero neighborhood.

As of today these areas have changed, though differently, also due to pressure that has transformed them into areas of consumption⁹: after a long and complex period of slow transformations (Sommella 2010), the historic center of Naples is undergoing a new and extensive phase, that bears the signs of what occurred in the first years of this century when – once the intervention on the urban fabric decreased – the contradictions and the critical constraints

appeared more evident (*Ibidem* 52). In a context in which the consumer crosses over, according to Fabris' significant phrase, from a demand born from need to a demand born from desire and advancing towards the path of the economy of experiences (Fabris 2009, 2), Naples – which had responded to the needs of consumers who come from a vast surrounding area with a peculiar combination between retail and places, and worked to respond to practices connected to desires – has seen itself thrown into a completely new context. It is a highly competitive context in which other urban spaces have equipped themselves in order to respond to a demand of experiences. In this context, the city seems to apply itself in order to participate in the competition, especially through bottom-up momentum, aiming towards a renewal of attractions starting with its past image, in order to reinvent new consumption purposes¹⁰. More in general, therefore, are the Neapolitan urban and metropolitan spaces in their totality that appear significantly transformed by new urban-retail and consumption dynamics, which have accelerated, especially in the last twenty years.

3. Landscapes of consumption at urban-metropolitan scale

The Naples of the new millennium has witnessed modifications and expansions in the retail landscapes well beyond the central part of the city: it has moved from a strong centralization (Market, Central Station, streets of qualified retail in the city center) – that, with an extensive gravitation area, for the sectors of greater specialization (the aforementioned non-food wholesale), reached part of the Mezzogiorno – to a commerce guided by new consumption practices both *in* and *of* the city. The latter, however, are not only encouraged by retail, but also by tourism and culture, since these are deeply integrated into purchasing and leisure activities, especially considering consumption as an explicative variable¹¹. Even examining *only* the transformations produced by the changing geography of retail activities in the relationship between consumption and place demand, the policies do not seem to pay specific attention to the

⁹ Many of these transformations have been recently analyzed thanks to other studies carried out about via Toledo and its surrounding areas, on via Croce and on via dei Tribunali, and on the market area of Antignano (in the Vomero neighborhood) (Viganoni 2019a).

¹⁰ For the role played by media in the revitalization of the urban imaginary, see D'Alessandro, Sommella, Viganoni 2015.

¹¹ In the last months, security measures (closing retail activities, limiting mobility at all scales), carried out to combat the Covid-19 epidemic, have created problems for the retail and touristified landscapes. At the moment, it is not easy to reflect upon the effects of a crisis that may only be temporary or that could entail further changes, but here we refer to a study that ended right before the crisis itself and that can, therefore, represent a useful element of comparison with whatever occurs in the future.

role that said transformations produce on the territorial level¹². However, as an example, comparing the changes in the province of Naples with those that have occurred at the national scale, particular forms of coexistence between resistance on behalf of local retail and changes in innovative sectors do stand out.

In a report from 2013, aimed towards measuring fair and sustainable wellbeing, the Province of Naples witnessed the permanence of forms of concentration and resistance regarding the retail activities permanently established even in 2012, the year of the neighborhood retail crisis, registering a drop in the activities of 0.40%, as compared to 1.20% at the national scale (Comune di Napoli 2013). The endurance of the neighborhood retail did not impede, in the subsequent years, the development of e-commerce: with an increase, between 2009 and 2015, of 897 companies operating in the field of e-commerce, the Province of Naples placed third at the national scale after Rome and Milan, registering, in six years, an increase of more than 200% of companies that operate online (Unioncamere-InfoCamere, Movimprese 2016).

Against the backdrop of this peculiar coexistence of neighborhood retail and e-commerce boom, the many changes determined both by the logic of localization of new formats, as well as by the consumers' tastes in the urban and metropolitan way of life, stand out. These are changes that certainly do not find insurmountable borders in the provincial territory, nor in the Metropolitan City, but are articulated on urban-metropolitan scales that are increasingly fluid, where the administrative-functional limits prove to be less relevant, while the new connections that link different consumptions, as mobile as those who express them, prove to be more significant¹³. In said context with variable geometry (Sommella 2019), it is that same proximity that becomes plural, in both a spatial sense (residential proximity to workplaces and leisure areas, but also to transit hubs) and in a temporal sense, in the context of a non-stop and 24-hour city (D'Alessandro 2017). The new forms of proximity, which render "close that which is far, but also far that which is

close" (Gasnier 2007, 253), should be considered in the context of a space that is not absolute and continuous, but topological and dynamic. With this in mind, and in the context of the case study made up of an extensive metropolitan territory, we identified four scales in which it is possible to highlight the landscapes that distinguish our context of analysis in a more significant manner¹⁴.

The touristified city center, dominated by new retail presences, and the central areas *skipped over* by visitor flows and also by consumption-led activities are the two scales that, seen together, strikingly exemplify the contradictions produced by an urban development that is fruit of a singular mix of the need to respond to new forms of protagonism *from below*, forms of spontaneity and creativity put in place by new retailers, episodes of resistance on behalf of older retail entrepreneurs, discontinuous and fragmented urban policies.

The first scale is that which most efficiently summarizes the current capacity of consumption to affect places, even when it is not directed by macro-projects of urban development or by forms of city branding that, elsewhere, have provided significant changes in terms of urban regeneration, often accompanied by inevitable implications in terms of social segregation and socio-spatial polarization. The consumer demand, expressed above all by tourists – who arrived almost unexpectedly in a city that has not planned a program to revive attractiveness and in which it was invested for multiple reasons¹⁵ – by visitors, by users (students, but also new frequenters from areas that escaped the marginalization of the crisis that had besieged them some decades before) and, sometimes, by some residents led to a proliferation of activities carried out not really to satisfy purchasing needs, but rather new demands connected with hangout, eating out and having fun, especially in certain public places¹⁶. In this way, places that were previously deser-

¹⁴ This is, evidently, a simplification and a choice that were also guided by the results of recent field research that we have conducted, to which we refer for more in-depth information (Sommella 2019, 53-72).

¹⁵ According to the Istat data referring to 2018, with 3.7 million tourists, Naples placed eleventh amongst the most visited Italian cities and was the first in Southern Italy for the movement of clients and the capacity of accommodation facilities (<https://www.istat.it/it/archivio/232137>). The Neapolitan performance, based on the most advantageous price-quality relationship as compared to other destinations in the country, should be framed in the context of a year that had a record number of tourist arrivals in Italy (429 million, with an increase of 2% as compared to the previous year), also due to the decrease in competitiveness of other destinations in the Mediterranean area.

¹⁶ Recalling a more recent encyclopedia entry on the Mediterranean city by Orum and Leontidou (2019), Carreras cites the "urban landscapes represented by the squares, which are also defining elements of the Mediterranean cities, no longer a political agora, but places for walking around and for contemporary performance, consumption hubs that are

¹² Consider, for example, the institution of the Metropolitan Cities (Città Metropolitane, l. 56/2014), which could have represented an interesting test bench in the case of Naples: at the moment it seems to have been a missed opportunity, not only because the Campania Region already had, during the implementation phase of the institutive law (in 2016), allocated the retail function to itself. The question regards, rather, the lack of consideration of retail and consumption as relevant factors of spatial change in the old Province of Naples, whose borders coincide with the Metropolitan City, which also identified socio-economic development of the territory as the first objective of its constituting strategic plan.

¹³ For a discussion about the concepts of center/periphery and inside/outside the city, with particular attention to the Neapolitan case, see Sommella 2019.

tified, with no retail function or still connected to traditional neighborhood activities have been reconverted in night-life, entertainment and leisure areas. Even though they did not result in large-scale projects planned and realized for specific parts of the city or in actual branding strategies in order to generate new forms of appeal, the multiple operations aimed towards the historic center have transformed it in a sort of stage for that circus-like retail, tourism, and culture activities that have been diffused in more recent years, proving the city-center itself able to satisfy the new consumption demands, therefore producing further changes, both spontaneous and uncontrollable, as well as sudden (Sommella 2019).

At the same time, the policies of the municipal administration in power since 2011 tried to satisfy the strong demand of place *from below* coming from the segment of inhabitants and users, mainly young people, with a new type of protagonism coming from the squatting *centri sociali*. The policies, and not only those just mentioned, were guided by discursive practices aimed to overturn, under the umbrella of the resistance and uniqueness of the *rebel city*, both the revitalization of the urban image and the birth that had characterized the Nineties (already inspired by the *liberation* of the squares and the streets from cars and return of city and its monuments to the citizens), as well as the representation of Naples dominated by criminality and refuse that had characterized the first years of the twenty-first century. Both strategies privileged the central areas and were symbolized by new labels: the institution of greater limited traffic areas (*ZTL*, *Zone a Traffico Limitato*) in the historic center, the *liberation* of the waterfront area, strategically connected to the opening up of the city and the call for large-scale projects to carry out in the future. It is the case, for example, of the Unesco Historic Center program (2007) – then a large project (2010-11) and a new protocol – that, as has been noted (Laino, Lepore 2017, 140), was not marked by an actual urban agenda nor by a coherent set of provisions¹⁷.

The paradox is that this reconquest *from below* was accompanied by forms of *laissez faire* that, built on an urban *milieu* in which spontaneity has always had a significant role, encouraged, in some central areas, a multiplication of consumption places that was not less pervasive than that generated by other forms of urban governance. *Laissez faire*, combined with the revitalization of open spaces and a mix of environmentalism and “light liberalization” (Laino, Lepore 2017), did not impede but,

on the contrary, seems to have aided the creation of places destined more to those who consume the city than to those who live there. The urban administration had to contend with the new forms of the use of public space that if, on one hand, question the existence of private space itself, on the other they trigger forms of privatization of that is public. The outdoor cafés represent the most visible manifestation of these phenomena, even if they are expressed in many different way in a city that has, for example in terms of retail, always been characterized by the permeability between indoor and outdoor shops. At the margins of these dynamics, other demands from below – those expressed by inhabitants of nightlife areas reunited in committees and associations – have tried to counter a process that already occurred and that, before the Coronavirus emergency, seemed almost unstoppable: that of the transformation of some central areas in spaces dominated by B&B, outdoor cafés, shops and activities connected, above all, to food in its various versions (traditional, ethnic, gourmet, *cool*) and their users.

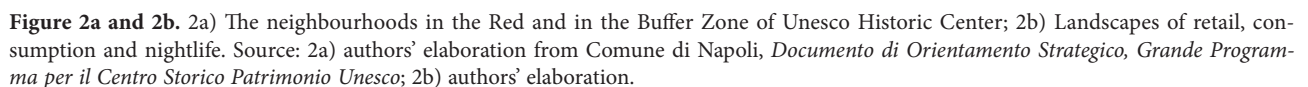
The areas in which the new activities are located are often found just a short distance from the parts of the center that seem barely touched by the new phenomena (and this is our second scale of analysis): the geography of the retail activities is, here, still marked by neighborhood retail, often grocery (sometimes traditional and sometimes reinvented, appealing to the new needs of the inhabitants) or by activities that find a key element in order to survive in the proximity of place of residence, with the heritage of trusting and lengthy relationships that this entails. With the advancement of new places of retail and consumption, though, these *insulae* retrogress or are more and more marginalized, highlighting a series of problems connected, in this case as well, to a public-private relationship of liminal spaces, and actually represent border areas that also express a certain *mixité*.

It is in highlighting the perimeter of the buffer zone of the Unesco Historic Center and, above all, of its “red zone” (Fig. 2a) that it is possible to identify urban landscapes in which there is an alternation, almost without a break in continuity, of spaces. Revitalized and marginalized retail squares and streets, nightlife areas that are characterized by different types, underlining the diversity of their users, and areas in which policies sometimes attempt to foresee and sometimes to pursue the phenomena (of the arrival tourists, of rediscovering the city and central places by users who are protagonists of a more and more liquid mobility), having an impact through pedestrianization or attempting to reconcile the regulations on public land use with forms of renewal, as it occurred in the policy areas identified in the Unesco Historic Center (Fig. 2b).

very diverse than the Central Business District” (Carreras 2018, 144).

¹⁷ In addition to this, there was the gradual completion of the underground system (started in the 1970s), factor that increased mobility within the city and with the northern periphery.

“the spatial and temporal articulation of the paths travelled by the citizen and peri-citizens is multiple” (*Ibidem* 253), this multiplicity can be fully understood only by beginning with the changing lifestyles and consumption styles of citizens and “peri-citizens” (Naverau 2007).



From a prevalently horizontal dimension of proximity, one moves towards a plural dimension, strongly connected to the change in urban rhythms, placing emphasis on its “economic, cultural, and social potential for interaction” (*Idem*). Not extraneous to this new dimension is the strong interconnection between metropolitan spaces, brought about by numerous east-west bypass roads that characterize the metropolitan territory. This dimension leads us to the third and fourth scales of analysis that we have identified: the scale prompted by suburbanization and flows, which identifies new gravitational hubs for retail and consumption in the interstitial spaces between municipalities, and the scale that produces a sort of return to urban centers of various size and characteristics.

The third scale arose from in-between spaces: in the context of a metropolitan territory in which it is sometimes difficult to identify the boundaries between urban centers, new retail formats have become embedded, related to large specialized and non-specialized distribution, but also to new consumption practices, connected for example to shopping centers of the latest generation or to outlets.

From this point of view, north of Naples and close to the strategic motorway junction of South Caserta, the area of Marcianise (together with the Nola area to the east and to the space between Casoria and Afragola) are confirmed as the three most significant hubs at the regional scale, although in a context of significant transformations. On one hand, above all where the metropolitan space still takes on the characteristics of the urban maze, there are continuities and marked fractures made by various presences, which sometimes adopt the form of actual retail enclaves, but always produce consumption “atmospheres” (Sommella 2019, 62). Also in this case, the retail structures aim to only partially satisfy the purchasing needs or in mixing these needs with the new demands for places for free time and entertainment, in order to offer consumers (citizens, peri-citizens, visitors, tourists) the possibility to experience practices that allow for evasion from the rhythms and spaces of daily life. These phenomena produce new use of spaces that are private, though characterized by processes that are imitative of public use and that are represented in various forms and with various results.

Finally, the fourth scale is the one that has characterized the recent evolution of small and medium-sized centers in the Campania region. The times, previously described, in which these centers suffered a shadow effect (Orefice 1993b) of a regional capital that was such an obstruction or, in the best case scenario, began to show limited ability as to appeal even from a retail point

of view, seem far away. While also in this case the timing, manner and results are different, the municipalities in metropolitan Campania have seen their distribution network strengthened but, above all, they have been characterized by processes of urban transformations (frequently triggered by local policies connected to programs and projects developed at the European level) combined with changes in retail and consumption. Mainly at the scale of city-centers, rhythms and spaces mark forms of organization of consumption that are satisfied by new combinations of retail, culture, and tourism. Not different from what was highlighted in the city of Naples, even in adjacent municipalities and medium-sized centers (for example Aversa¹⁸, Frattamaggiore, Pomigliano) the element that seems to principally organize the structure of places and urban landscape is a consumption mixed with living and related activities, hanging out, cultural and shopping functions.

4. The demand for products and places or demand for city

In these pages we have aimed, through the cases chosen, to highlight a part of the multiple changes that the central areas of Naples have undergone and, at the same time, to point out some of the ongoing transformations in the medium-sized centers and in the interstices of a metropolitan space (that of the Metropolitan City extended towards the Caserta area), strongly interconnected and in constant evolution. Above all, if viewed through the lens of retail and consumption, it is a space in which new hubs, which intercept flows thanks to their appeal, modify the dialectics between a center, whose essential element seems in part to be its embeddedness, and a more and more vast and complex periphery, characterized, time after time, by flows that are dynamic in nature. Alongside specific micro-spaces of retail and consumption, strongly characterized in a distinctive identity sense, there are dynamics similar to those that affect other urban spaces at, but not limited to, the Italian scale, which include both the city and its neighboring territories. Through the interpretative key utilized, a new geography of the metropolitan territory emerges, tending more and more towards reticulated forms in which, however, the hubs produced by a new and changing dialectic between center/periphery, proximity/distance, hierarchy/post-hierarchy stand out distinctively. This new geography, which renders the questions posed

¹⁸ The case of Aversa, particularly interesting for the policies of renewal that had various effects on retail and consumption, has been examined in depth in Viganoni 2019b.

in the introduction more evident, arises both in economic-business terms and in social and territorial ones, because retail and consumption reclaim on their own behalf – as do, on the other hand, their protagonists – places and public spaces. From this point of view, the demand for products becomes, more and more often, a demand for places, and both become, most of the time, the expression of what we indicated as a part of a “new demand for city”.

At the beginning of the Nineties, the attractive effect registered in the central areas of Naples and in its leisure spaces, in the daytime and night-time hours of holidays and in the day before each holiday, was considered an indicator of the demand for city (Orefice 1993b, 330) carried out by the external population. From then until today, this element has not changed, if not for the fact that the so-called external population is much more mobile and carries out consumption practices that are also mobile themselves. New places (in the areas surrounding the city center, in the interstitial spaces, in the medium-sized centers) aim to embody an appeal that, while not comparable to the effect made by the central areas of the capital city, catalyzes a new demand for consumption. If the latter has always transmitted a demand for places, this is even more true today, since the relationship between consumption and urban life has become a central component in our societies (Jayne 2006, 3). In cities that are “consuming spaces as well as consumer spaces” (*Idem*), as our interpretation has shown through the Neapolitan case, it is always evident the “rising social demand of a city able to respond to needs and desires” (Amendola 2010). It is not a question of uncritically establishing the reflection on “a city centered on demand” but of the fact that, as Amendola recalls, once the “centrality of the people who live, experience, dream, desire and realize the city” (*Idem*) has been restored, it is then necessary to identify the ways through which it is possible to come to terms with and interpret the contradictions that a process connected to the democratization of consumption (of needs, desires and experiences) and its places entails, starting with the changes in social geography and the new forms of residential segregation and territorial hierarchization.

In the same way the problem, in our opinion, does not lie in attributing excessive relevance to a consumption that, in reality, has already become the key element in the post-Fordist transition¹⁹, but in the rhetorical use

that is made of it. This especially when consumption is used as a strategy for the transformation of the city or, still, as legitimization of discourses that convey certain specific urban policies and, in an even more perpetual manner, as an instrument of selecting forms of retail and purchasing practices, even while not instituted from above, which then become dominant, univocally identifying us as the places in which we consume. From this point of view, the peculiar relationship between consumption and places, highlighted by the Neapolitan case – with its way of not entirely fitting into mainstream theories that connect phenomena to univocal causes and that interpret the processes mainly through some conceptual instruments (*gentrification, city-marketing, city-branding*) – can be helpful in investigating, from a geographical perspective, this Mediterranean city. The potential, the contradictions and conflicts that emerge from the processes of production, construction and negotiation of places of retail, tourism, and culture are analysed as a significant part of a still wide range of living, working and not necessarily consuming places which characterise the metropolitan space.

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¹⁹ It is not only the role that consumption has taken on in the urban transition, but also that of not arrogantly ignoring – as Fabris (2010, 3-4) advised some years ago, recommending the importance of not indulging in demonization – that which consumption represents in our lives, as well as its symbolic and identity meanings.

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Retail Changes and Consumption Practices in the Neighbourhood of Vomero, Naples

Mutamenti del commercio e pratiche di consumo nel quartiere Vomero a Napoli

LIBERA D'ALESSANDRO, ANNACHIARA AUTIERO

Dipartimento di Scienze Umane e Sociali, Università di Napoli "L'Orientale"

E-mail: ldAlessandro@unior.it; aautiero@unior.it

Abstract. The article focuses on the Neapolitan neighbourhood of Vomero, whose most recent transformations can be effectively read through the lenses of retail and consumption geography. In greater detail, the evolution of the neighbourhood will be briefly outlined through a long-lasting look on its retail change, from its urbanization to the current configuration of a fabric modified by new consumption practices, in turn generated by the different demands of (old and new) inhabitants and users. The fieldwork research, which took place on a selected core-area and was articulated into various moments – site visits, with the emotions and perceptions they aroused; mapping, to reconstruct the spatial organisation of retail and entertainment activities; in-depth interviews with privileged witnesses; analysis of local commercial policies – will allow to exemplify how the neighbourhood escapes the simplicity of some urban thesis on local-global dialectic. Even in a micro-space which has been the symbol of innovation and separation from the rest of Naples, the commercial core is disputed among various actors. At the scale of the polarizing nodes of the neighbourhood, the retail changes and the consumption practices – although not induced by top-down project or branding policies – highlight new tensions between forms of innovation and of embeddedness.

Keywords: innovations, embeddedness, retail changes, consumption practices, neighbourhood.

Riassunto. L'articolo è focalizzato sul quartiere napoletano del Vomero, le cui più recenti trasformazioni possono essere lette efficacemente attraverso la lente della geografia del commercio e del consumo. Più in dettaglio, l'evoluzione del quartiere sarà brevemente delineata attraverso uno sguardo di lunga durata sul suo mutamento commerciale, dall'urbanizzazione fino all'attuale configurazione di un tessuto modificato dalle nuove pratiche di consumo, a loro volta generate dalle diverse esigenze di (vecchi e nuovi) abitanti e utilizzatori. La ricerca sul campo, che si è concentrata su un'area centrale ed è stata articolata in vari momenti – sopralluoghi, con le emozioni e le percezioni che hanno suscitato; mappatura, per ricostruire l'organizzazione spaziale delle attività commerciali e di intrattenimento; interviste *in profondità* con testimoni privilegiati; analisi delle politiche commerciali locali – consentirà di esemplificare il modo in cui il quartiere sfugge alla semplicità di alcune tesi urbane sulla dialettica locale-globale. Anche in un micro-spazio che è stato il simbolo dell'innovazione e della separazione

dal resto di Napoli, il nucleo commerciale è oggetto di contese tra vari attori. Alla scala dei nodi polarizzanti del quartiere, i mutamenti del commercio e le pratiche di consumo – sebbene non indotti da progetti *top-down* o da politiche di *branding* – evidenziano nuove tensioni tra forme di innovazione e di radicamento.

Parole chiave: innovazioni, radicamento, cambiamenti del commercio, pratiche di consumo, quartiere.

1. Introduction

As a theoretical point of reference, this contribution lies on the branch of urban studies that considers retail and consumption as interpretative keys of changes within cities, and that has been developed in various manners, depending on the different analytical contexts¹. Recently, said branch of research has also constituted one of the starting points of a Research Project of Relevant National Interest (Italian acronym PRIN), in which we have participated, focused on the role that retail activities and dynamics of consumption have in redesigning Italian urban landscapes (Viganoni 2017, 2019).

In the context of the extensive debate that has developed thanks to the contribution of geographical studies in the English language, urban areas appear amongst the principle topics, to be considered as the context for new ways of interpreting the geographies of retail and consumption (Lowe, Wrigley 2000, 641). This renewed attention is fruit of the recognition of the close interdependence that exists between economic and cultural variables both in the area of retail and consumption geography, as well as in terms of surmounting the barriers between this discipline and the other social sciences (D'Alessandro 2012).

Since the mid-Nineties, studies on “micro-geographies” that modified the spatiality of retail and consumption have challenged the more simplistic theses regarding globalization (Crewe, Lowe 1995). The neighbourhood, in that respect, seemed the micro-space particularly suited to exemplify the urban-retail change that, in turn, often represented the result of consumption preferences and changes in the property dynamics, rather than the product of macro-visions of urban planners² (*Ibidem* 1887). This perspective seems to focus on

that which still occurs today in the Neapolitan neighbourhood of Vomero. The change in this micro-space, although not brought about by top-down projects or branding policies, has recently nonetheless generated controversial effects. These will be explored with the aid of fieldwork, in the belief that this case study can offer useful elements for the interpretation of several dynamics that characterize Naples³.

From symbol of modernization in the recent past, this neighbourhood continues to represent a sort of *avant-garde* in terms of retail and entertainment, as demonstrated by the diffusion of new formats and the spread of their corresponding consumption practices especially in the fields of fast fashion and food, that in Vomero evolve in different manners as compared to other areas of the city. The transformations caused by the proliferation of new activities, on one hand, contribute to bringing about new innovations in the urban fabric but, on the other hand, seem to challenge the urban holding capacity of the same fabric, so contributing to a progressive homogenization of the retail landscape. The fieldwork, together with references to the most significant policies, will allow for the exemplification as to how – even at the micro-space scale that has been the outpost of modernization initially, and then of innovations – Naples is difficult to situate in simplistic interpretations of the relationship between globalization and places. Retracing some of the most significant transitions that have marked the long-time relationship between retail activities and Vomero will contribute to making evident the characteristics of the neighbourhood as a “differentiated space of consumption” (Crewe, Lowe 1995, 1877). Though renewal and autonomy with respect to the rest of the city have always been distinctive features of the Vomero, the places on which we have decided to focus our attention have recently undergone further changes, which seem harbingers of certain types of renewal and, at the same time, of unprecedented consequences in terms of embeddedness: both are dimensions that can be interpreted in an even more effective manner through the magnifying glass of retail and consumption.

¹ For more information, reference should be made to the bibliographic repertory elaborated by Carreras, D'Alessandro 2017.

² As to the importance of the scale of the neighbourhood, see the multidisciplinary overview in Bell, Jayne 2004.

³ As to more general aspects of the relationship between retail, consumption and city at the Neapolitan urban and metropolitan scale, see the article by Sommella, D'Alessandro in this special issue.

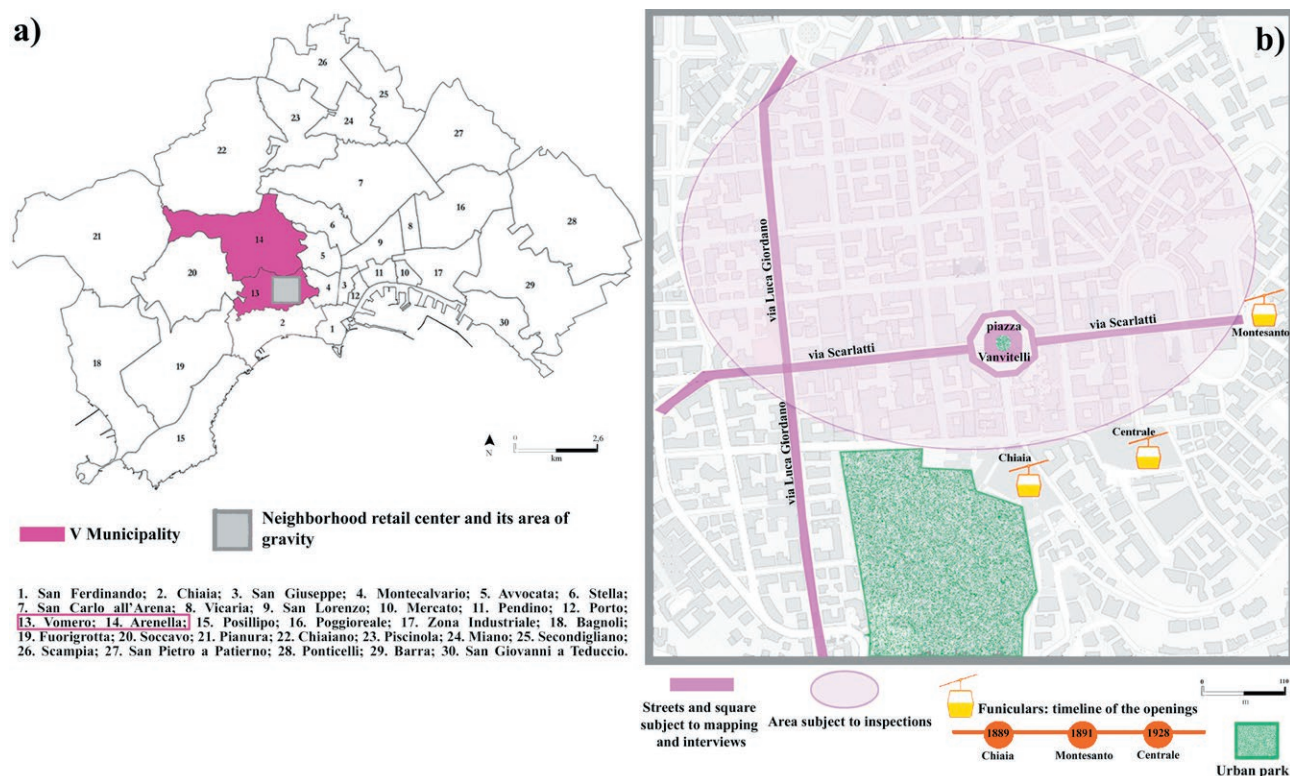


Figure 1. The Vomero neighborhood: a) position and administrative boundaries; b) the perimeter of the fieldwork. Source: authors' elaboration.

2. A micro-space as a symbol of commercial modernization

Vomero and Arenella⁴ – neighborhoods developed in the hills, northeast of the city center – make up the Fifth Municipality⁵. The former still revolves around its traditional commercial hub, which still today boasts a vast area of gravitation, considered overall as the perimeter of our research (Fig. 1).

This hub has its area of concentration in the retail street Alessandro Scarlatti: besides being defined as the

“main street” since the creation of the so-called “rione Vomero” (La Gala 2004, 94), it has been designated through the years as one of its cornerstones, together with piazza Vanvitelli (the square that crosses the aforementioned street) and the two Funicular Railways of Chiaia and Montesanto⁶, to which the Central Funicular Railway was added some decades later⁷. The other street object of the current mapping is via Luca Giordano: while its main stretch was also central in the past⁸, now

⁴ In a research on the residential localization of upper classes, the two hilltop neighborhoods were defined as elite spaces, expanding mainly in the Fifties and Sixties of the past century (Pfirsch 2011). Actually – if we consider a certain type of retail and consumption in addition to localization – it is above all the Vomero that, since its urbanization, has become “an integral part of the city as a new area of bourgeois settlement” (La Gala 2004, 91): the neighborhood has taken shape as an elite space, with its core in the area we have taken into consideration.

⁵ As of 2016 the Municipality, which spans an area of 7.4 square kilometers, had a resident population of about 112,000 inhabitants and a population density of 15,135 inhabitants/square kilometer. As to the Vomero neighborhood specifically, as of 31 December, 2016 (the last data available on the website of the Municipal Authority), the resident population totaled 44,422 inhabitants, highlighting a decrease of 4.8% compared to 2010 (<http://www.comune.napoli.it/flex/cm/pages/ServeBLOB.php/L/IT/IDPagina/34362>, last accessed on 7/5/2020).

⁶ As La Gala states, the Banca Tiberina – that had received the concession from the Municipality for the urbanization of the Vomero neighborhood (and for that of Arenella, realized later) – had considered those connections of fundamental importance in order to allow the pioneering inhabitants to “go up to the new neighborhood” when it was still practically deserted from a commercial standpoint (*Idem*).

⁷ The study, carried out by two Neapolitan engineers around 1880 to create mechanical transportation systems with a cableway installation, aimed to “connect the Vomero neighborhood to the lower western area (the Chiaia Funicular) and to the city center (the Montesanto Funicular)”; the installation of the Central Funicular occurred in the 1920s, when the need for a new form of connection between the neighborhood and the city center became pressing, also due to the insufficient service of the two installations constructed previously (http://www.anm.it/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=341&Itemid=100, last accessed on 7/5/2020).

⁸ Together with via Scarlatti, during the years following WWII, via Luca Giordano became – in the spaces left vacant between buildings – home

the street features new locations for retail activities and food, even in its extensions.

Between the end of the 1800s and the beginning of the 1900s, the neighborhood was characterized by numerous possibilities from the urban-commercial point of view: a regulated relationship between the height of buildings and the width of the streets, and an unprecedented attention, as compared to other parts of the city, to elements regarding pedestrian areas (Capasso 1997). Considering a long-term time frame, the neighbourhood took shape as an area specialized in apparel and footwear (Leone 1986). More specifically, between the 1950s and 1960s, in light of a pervasive building expansion and a consistent increase in population, the Vomero neighbourhood still did not have an adequate commercial presence, that was a distributional network able to satisfy the demand of the residents (Orefice 1986; D'Alessandro 2006). In the Seventies, construction became aggressive and there was another steady demographic increase: the two neighborhoods that are currently a single Municipality became the most emblematic examples of these phenomena throughout the entire city (Piana 1986).

In the short span of just a few years, the Vomero neighbourhood was characterized by the presence of areas specialized in the sales of goods of low purchase frequency, later holding out against the commercial crisis of the Eighties thanks to its specific profile. This profile was actually an alternative to the city center areas and, at the same time, different from that connected to the sale of ordinary goods and goods of mass consumption, typical of neighborhoods in which local shops proliferated (*Idem*; D'Alessandro 2006, 87). The birth of new shopping arcades contributed to highlighting this difference even more, in the field of retail, as compared to the other parts of urban space⁹ (Leone 1986).

The Nineties consolidated the image of a neighbourhood offering a distinct urban-retail structure, produced both by the specificities acquired in the previous decades, as well as by the progressive innovations, which ranged from the characteristics of the stores located on the most important streets to the shopping arcades and to the fairs that accompanied events. During this dec-

ade, interesting innovations in the architectonic elements of the commercial landscape were attempted, mixing with the forms of resistance of historic shops. For example, it is possible to cite some forms of coexistence: the so-called “anodized aluminum phenomenon” (Capasso 1993, 224) – generated by the emphasis of the use of this material, above all for the shop fronts of coffee bars – coexisted with shops that represented traditional elements of urban design¹⁰.

In this manner, at the beginning of the decade, via Scarlatti – considered a street of average-superior quality, on par with the much more well-known via Toledo – offered “both mass consumption and specialized retail” (*Ibidem* 235-236). Even then, it was considered a street that boasted a combination of retail and strolling about, thanks to its ideal urban position, to the historical and building fabric that was almost completely homogeneous and to the “discontinuous” encroachment of shop basements (Capasso, Pinto 1993). The most consolidated areas of the neighbourhood were described as being characterized by a complex spatial articulation from a functional point of view: they were residential areas adequately equipped with a variety and quantity of facilities and services so much so that they even attracted inhabitants from outlying neighborhoods thanks to their “high-performing” presentation, while the flow of commuters towards the city center, guaranteed by the funicular railways, was substantial for the so-called superior urban goods¹¹ (Apreda 1997).

The consequences of semi-pedestrianization in via Scarlatti that began in 1995 (*Ibidem* 364) and the public debate that followed between those (mainly architects/urban planners), who hoped for the total closing of this street – as well as other streets – to “automotive provincialism” (Capasso, Pinto 1993), and the shopkeepers, who rapidly changed from positions of ostracism to attitudes of consent as to total pedestrianization, contributed significantly to the modification of the commercial hub of the neighborhood, which has continued

to temporary shacks, later transformed into actual shops (La Gala 2004, 256): the commercial evolution of the two streets, although different, even today leads to group them together as the “elegant” streets of the Vomero neighborhood (Vinciguerra 2017, 27).

⁹ The symbol of the modern shopping arcade was considered the Galleria Vanvitelli, created in the Seventies: while it was a commercial hub due to its central position, it presented some weaknesses (Laureati 1997); these seem to be overcome at least in part, as the fieldwork has shown, thanks to the new types of activities that have recently characterized a sort of rebirth in this place of commerce.

¹⁰ This is the case of the flower stand located in piazza Vanvitelli since 1907 (*Ibidem* 231), one of the few businesses over one hundred years old that is included in the municipal register today.

¹¹ A further development was made by the opening, in several phases, of the subway line n.1, inaugurated in 1993 in piazza Vanvitelli: today the square is connected not only to the city center and to the neighborhoods in the northern part of the city but, due to the effect of the interchange with the other subway line and with the funicular railways, also to other areas of Naples and of the hinterland. The popular press often highlights the other side of the coin that this growing connection has led to, underlining the negative consequences produced by the easy access to a public place that appears, moreover, amongst the main areas of city nightlife.

to identify with the area we have investigated¹². Between the Nineties and the first decade of the new century, other measure were carried out – regarding mobility, creation of pedestrian walkways and restoration of individual stores – that showed the progressive urban-retail centrality of the Vomero neighbourhood, a micro-space that symbolized one of the most virtuous relationships between shopping and taking a walk or one of the ideal places to window shop. A practice, the latter, that seems to be further emphasized with the moving of the neighbourhood towards more pervasive forms of a combination of shopping and entertainment. Above all for some categories of users, as shown also in a research on the relationship between consumer and urban environments in a medium-sized city in Northern Italy (Qualizza 2017), window shopping is driven “by exploratory and recreational motivations, which do not necessarily lead to purchases” (*Ibidem* 74). The shopkeepers interviewed during our fieldwork made multiple references to practices of this kind, defining them as “entertainment commerce” to exemplify that, especially during the weekend or the holidays, at the neighbourhood scale the need for buying seems to be inseparable from that for leisure.

3. Fieldwork

The Vomero neighbourhood still today emerges as a particularly interesting object of study, due to the presence of a mix of characteristics that continue to differentiate it from the dynamics of other neighborhoods of the city that aim towards a high level of commerce. As we stated previously, fieldwork focused on the two streets that symbolize the vitality of retail – via Alessandro Scarlatti (including piazza Vanvitelli) and via Luca Giordano – but also on the adjacent streets that gravitate around these. Overall this historical, central part of the Vomero neighbourhood represents a point of reference for a significantly vast area. Accessibility and organization prove to be two key factors: the center of the neighbourhood, that is a broad area in which it is possible to satisfy all needs, is easily reached and quite vibrant.

In order to explore the characteristics considered less accessible through quantitative data and the media, the fieldwork was initially carried out through in-depth site visits, during various days of the week and at different times, in the belief that the direct observation of

this location – with the feelings, perceptions, and emotions that it provokes – represents a fundamental starting point of empirical research on retail and consumption¹³. Next, the mapping of the two main streets was carried out, with a survey of the spatial organization of the retail establishments and their typological classification, in order to verify the changes that occurred during the most recent years. Thanks to a dialogue with several actors in local politics, who showed great willingness and interest in this research, some in-depth and semi-structured interviews were carried out with a number of privileged witnesses. Through the intermediation of members of the Municipal Administration¹⁴, it was possible to interact with shopkeepers in the neighbourhood who were selected according to typological characteristics, years of activity and union or association commitments. The interview allowed for the support of the picture that emerged from the site visits and the mapping with thoughts on the role of retail and consumption in the complex dynamics of transformation occurring in the neighbourhood: this appeared even more necessary in light of the Covid-19 health crisis and the consequent lockdown, which began during the last phase of our study.

3.1 “The city within the city”

The origins of the commercial *diversity* of the Vomero, as previously stated, must be searched for in the history of urban development, in which the neighbourhood has been organized in an almost completely independent manner as compared with the rest of the city, mainly thanks to the variety and quality of the commercial and service activities located there. Its commercial success lies on this separateness, as we were able to deduce from the words of an interviewee who described the Vomero as a “city within the city”. This distinctive feature is also confirmed by visits to the neighbourhood that, according to the shopkeepers, are mainly carried out by its inhabitants because, as another interviewee underlined: “a resident of the Vomero neighbourhood doesn’t leave it, or does so rarely: besides the fact that you can find everything here, a resident tends to consider those who visit it almost like *invaders*”. This refers to the customary presence, during the weekend, of a significant number of users coming from other areas of the city or of

¹² Via Scarlatti, along with via Alvino and via Merliani, makes up a single Urban Pedestrian Area, instituted with the Deliberation of the City Council 3091/1995 and regulated, with regard to the road traffic, by the Mayoral Ordinance 1241/1999.

¹³ The fieldwork was carried out from December 2019 to the first week of March 2020.

¹⁴ Sincere thanks to the City Councillor for Labor, Commerce and Culture of the 5th Municipality, Luigi Sica, and to the City Councillor, Daniele Quatrano.

the province, so much so that the interviews have highlighted a certain reluctance on behalf of the residents, as well as on behalf of some shopkeepers, as to activities – Christmas fairs¹⁵, confectionary fairs, and food fairs that are periodically organized in the neighbourhood – and events (such as the White Night festival), all aimed towards increasing the number of participants¹⁶. The Vomero, on the other hand, remains principally detached from the dynamics of touristification that, in recent years, have started to involve other retail areas of the city: the neighbourhood, especially if compared to others in the city center, is not currently able to guarantee entertainment alongside a cultural program that would attract large-scale tourist traffic¹⁷. This, however, has not prevented the recent proliferation of B&Bs and vacation homes, prompted mainly by an excellent transportation network that connects the neighbourhood to the most attractive areas of the city: convenient transportation, together with atmosphere, order and urban decorum seem to make it an exceptional hub for short stays.

In this context, the retail network is in profound and rapid evolution, as the activities of the Centro Commerciale Naturale Vomero-Arenella¹⁸, founded in 2014 with the goals of the retail enhancement of the area and the struggle against (over)expensive rental prices and racketeering, show¹⁹. The inclination towards the construction of an avant-garde, sophisticated and high-quality commercial landscape – made up of apparel and footwear stores, as well as a significant variety of excellent local products – have given way to innovative projects and formats exported from European experiences, like concept stores or temporary shops or even activities more connected to leisure rather than to purchasing needs. Several shopkeepers did not hesitate to associate

some of the new commercial presences with the transformation of the neighbourhood into a space of consumption based on the combination of “nightlife and shopping sprees”. This combination, according to these interviewees, risks depriving the inhabitants of the commercial areas that satisfied their consumption needs, very often connected to historic activities that are disappearing.

The topic of closing historic stores and workshops, which is a common thread in the Vomero neighbourhood and in other parts of the city, is the subject of great debate regarding the transformation of said neighbourhood. In this regard, the owner of a historic shop that is over one hundred years old, referred to a sort of domino effect connected to the strategies of certain companies operating mainly in the fast-fashion field, which – either for commercial prestige or for marketing operations – are all located on the same retail streets because they are encouraged dynamic described as follows: “if there are large retail enterprises of this kind, ours cannot partake”. Other interviewees, however, expressed favorable judgements as to the new formats, considered as the only ones able to transmit forms of innovation, even hoping for a greater appeal of the retail areas of the neighborhood on behalf of consumers from other parts of the city or from the metropolitan area, or even for more significant tourist traffic. These differing opinions show, as it often occurs in these cases, that the ongoing phenomenon is quite complex: the dialogue with privileged witnesses leads to certain considerations in light of the new urban-retail structure of the neighbourhood.

3.2 The outpost of Neapolitan retail innovation

The hub of via Scarlatti is represented by the pedestrianized part, characterized by the concentration of a large number of apparel shops and bars: here the presence of big brands and two department stores transforms the landscape, as the shopkeepers interviewed noted, into a sort of open-air shopping center²⁰. Besides being quite visible and easily recognized thanks to the aesthetic quality of the structures, the logos and the indoor and outdoor furnishings, the stores take up large spaces which makes them even more imposing, compared to the stores of smaller dimension, in the overall retail landscape. At the same time, they contribute to significantly differentiating, in terms of the *experience*

¹⁵ One of the Christmas fairs enlivened via Luca Giordano precisely when we were doing this research: Sommella, Guadagno 2019 dedicated an in-depth study to it.

¹⁶ The White Night, after several disappointing experiments in other parts of the city, was organized for the first time in the Vomero neighborhood in 2012, and for three years it attracted numerous visitors. Not all of the interviewees were contrary to this type of events, rather some considered them fundamental for the development of the area.

¹⁷ The Vomero neighborhood is home to several cultural attractions (Sant'Elmo Castle, the Museum and Carthusian monastery of San Martino) and natural attractions (the Villa Floridiana urban park).

¹⁸ The Centro Commerciale Naturale – whose name comes from the desire to act as an alternative to artificial shopping centers – is the Italian variant of Town Centre Management: a network of shops (and sometimes also of craft and tourist services), organized in specific places of commerce in order to propose an integrated offer and often aimed at relaunching commercial areas especially in the city-centres.

¹⁹ It must be remembered that, in 1976, there was an initial form of associative activity amongst the shopkeepers called *Centro Commerciale Vomero*: at the end of the Eighties, the association included over 450 businesses (La Gala 2004, 306).

²⁰ Amongst others, the following stores are present in this section: COIN, Cisa, Benetton, Zara, Nike, Harcourt & Blain, D-mail, Kiko, Twinset, Foot Locker, Intimissimi, Timberland, Yamamay, Original Marines, Golden Point, Camomilla, Liu Jo.

Table 1. Via A. Scarlatti and via L. Giordano: total shops by type. Source: authors' elaboration.

Type	n.	%
Apparel	96	31.8
<i>Food&Drink</i>	72	23.8
Jewelry shops/Silverware shops	18	6
Perfume/cosmetics	11	3.6
Shoes/bags/leather goods	23	7.6
Bookstores	3	1
For rent/for sale	12	4
Other	67	22.2
Total	302	100

of consumption, this section of the street. Another section, though characterized by a frenetic atmosphere due to the traffic, still has *the feel of the neighbourhood*. One person who has worked for about thirty years in a popular bar, located on this street since the Seventies, highlighted that the clients are mainly locals, affirming: “if it were not for the shops, we probably wouldn't exist, because 80% of our clients are shopkeepers who, in most cases, are from the Vomero neighbourhood, so they come here outside of working hours”. The section closest to piazza Vanvitelli is completely different: the atmosphere here changes and is characterized by bars with outdoor seating – available space and well-maintained urban furnishings – where it is possible to stop before, during, or after shopping or where it is possible to stop and partake in nightlife.

Via Luca Giordano also shows sections that are commercially diversified. A section that was for many years mainly residential with few shops, even though it is not pedestrianized, is today characterized by new bars, typical restaurants and a few important apparel shops. Quite different is the section that, as part of the pedestrianized area, seems to mirror what was observed in via Scarlatti: large retail chain stores along with bars, quality apparel and footwear shops, but with more contained physical and economic dimension²¹. Even on this street, finally, there is also a section that is tailored to a neighbourhood dimension, fit for residents: this section still has some historic sartorial shops as well as those that are more utilitarian, such as upholstery shops, hardware stores, historic salted codfish shops and even a delicatessen, which make up a setting that would be unthinkable in some of the previously described sections.

²¹ Amongst others, the following stores are present in this section: Piazza Italia, Sephora, Carpisa, Tezenis, Zuiki, AW LAB, Lovable, Mondadori, Mara Carol, Intimissimi, Paola Riva, Calzedonia, Nara Camicie.

Table 2. Via A. Scarlatti and via L. Giordano: food shops by type. Source: authors' elaboration.

Type	n.	%
Restaurants, pizzerias, pubs	17	23.6
Bars/ pastry shops/ ice cream shops	33	45.8
Innovative/typical	11	15.3
Local shops	11	15.3
Total	72	100

Overall, the two retail streets appear as rather heterogeneous in terms of supply, with a marked concentration of apparel in the central pedestrianized sections (Tab. 1).

Closures were, in many cases, followed by new openings that seem to adhere to the new consumption habits: from the data collected, the unrented shops and those for sale on both streets represent just 4% of the overall retail landscape. From this point of view, many new businesses are part of the category *food & drink*: with almost 24% of the total businesses, food – according to almost all the interviewees – expresses the emblematic value of the transformation of consumption practices and retail innovation in the area.

Out of 72 food shops surveyed, almost half were part of the category bar/pastry shop/ice cream shop: these are businesses that, in many cases, have large outdoor seating areas (stationary or mobile) that take up considerable surface area (Tab. 2). The significant presence of these shops is more and more in line with the morphology that the area is adopting, especially in the section in which there is a close interdependence between retail and leisure.

The category that we defined as innovative/typical in order to indicate the presence of particular formats is very interesting, in that they are specialized in the sale of specific products or whose target is represented by clients looking for out of the ordinary experiences. Amongst the most emblematic we recall *l'Archivio Storico* (a cocktail bar with particular furnishings and the concept of Neapolitan history, specifically the Bourbon period) and the *Cafè Postal* (a coffee shop that is also a private mail service). Sometimes these are “pioneer” activities, born here and then spread to other parts of the city: this is the case of *Chipstar*, the first store specialized in the sale of Dutch fried potatoes, located for the last six years on the most important retail street in the neighbourhood and then expanded to other parts of the city²², and the restaurant *Panamar*, which opened

²² The *Chipstar* brand is a franchise created in Naples at the end of 2013, with its first store in via Scarlatti and others in via Chiaia and in via

two years ago and makes seafood sandwiches, proposing a format imitated in other areas of the city.

While the main streets of the neighbourhood seem to have modified their appearance over a rather long period of time, it is mainly on the side streets that the new businesses have multiplied in the most recent years, as evidence of a consolidated capacity of construction of the retail space that finds its roots in the history of the neighbourhood, which has always been oriented toward innovation and originality. The landscape of these streets has gradually been characterized by the presence of ethnic restaurants (mainly Japanese), sandwich shops, cocktail bars, organic food shops, herbalist shops and similar types of businesses²³.

Some of the new presences, however, do not always meet with the approval of the shopkeepers interviewed: more than one, while recognizing the particularly original features that the presence of food takes on in the Vomero neighbourhood as compared to the city center, consider the phenomenon the cause of the decline of the retail fabric and, above all, of the closure of many historic shops. In this regard, it must be highlighted that many of these shop owners decided not to join the register for the promotion of businesses instituted by the City of Naples in 2014²⁴. In some cases, the implementation of innovative businesses allowed for the recovery of commercial sites in decline: a striking example is the Galleria Vanvitelli, which we had cited as a case of desertification and which recently has been revitalized, due to its proximity to the side streets protagonists of the positioning of new types of stores²⁵. Growing attention to organic products, an expression of consumption practices different from the past, leads to a reflection on the role played by a certain type of aesthetics, of image,

of form and of space in a neighbourhood like Vomero, whose inhabitants show a particular awareness of projects that rely on shopkeepers who are attentive to the territoriality of merchandise.

The area studied, overall, from the point of view of the retail offering still shows some heterogeneous characteristics, though in a framework of progressive homogenization mainly produced by the ever-increasing combination of shopping and leisure (Fig. 2).

The heterogeneity, in some cases, represents the product of new shops, even in prevailing sectors (such as apparel and food, which are fairly diversified within their sectors). While some sections of the two main streets tend more and more to conform to those of other retail streets – characterized by a succession of large brand stores in the fashion and beauty sectors, outdoor seating, different types of fast-food, temporary shops, concept stores, restaurants and home decor shops – other sections are characterized by an articulated supply, even in shops that boast numerous years on those streets and are *on its inhabitants* that, in the Vomero neighbourhood, mostly correspond to a medium-upper social class with a high spending capacity.

4. Concluding thoughts: renewal and embeddedness

The recurring image of this neighborhood as a “(modern) city within the city” or “metropolis within the metropolis” (Vinciguerra 2017, 26-27) recalls an autonomy emphasized as a difference especially with regard to the areas of the city center: “the Vomero [neighbourhood] has a separate life, it is almost autonomous. In the neighbourhood, everything needed to study, have fun, eat, is present [...]” (*Ibidem* 27). The comparison between the two parts of the urban space, in the volume cited, is emblematically symbolized by the coffee shop that is most representative of the Neapolitan tradition (*Gambrinus*, located in piazza Trieste e Trento) in the touristic center of the city and the gritty American coffee shop (*Cup Cap's Coffee*, located near the Central Funicular) in the Vomero neighbourhood. It is not possible here to reflect on this comparison and on the interpretative instruments utilized to carry it out: it is enough to underline that, from the cited research, the Vomero emerges as a location in which “consumption is overshadowed by other things to do” (*Ibidem* 90). The latter is an element also mentioned by the interviewees during our fieldwork in relation to that which they indicate as “entertainment commerce”, which has as protagonists those who consume *in the neighbourhood* or *the neighbourhood itself*, not just as patrons.

Toledo (which, however, were later closed). The initial success of the format led to openings outside the Campania region, both nationally and internationally.

²³ It is possible to cite various examples: from *Healthy*, a health store (with a fitness area, cafe-bar, bookstore, cosmetic area, and homeopathic pharmacy) to *Poke*, a venue specialized in typical Japanese-Hawaiian salads (served in a specific bowl) and another of a large concept store, *Riot laundry*, that recreates the Anglo-Saxon model of reconvertng businesses with industrial furnishings and minimalist decoration (in the Vomero neighborhood it is the premises of the ex-bookstore Loffredo reconverted into a business that is, at the same time, a cafe, cocktail bar, clothing and record store) to *Sogni di latte* (a cheese shop with a space for tastings that presents a vast assortment of cheeses rarely available elsewhere).

²⁴ At the end of 2019, just five businesses from the Vomero neighborhood were registered (four in the category *historic shops* and one in the category *businesses active for over 100 years*), compared to a presence of this type of activity that is certainly more significant.

²⁵ In the Galleria Vanvitelli, there is a gym/beauty center that uses the latest equipment, a skater-style clothing store, and a very popular organic supermarket named *NaturaSi*.



Figure 2. I) Commercial street: shopping and walking; II) An over 100-year-old stand; III) Outdoor aperitif; IV) Food festival in front of the shops. Source: D'Alessandro, Autiero 2020.

According to the privileged witnesses, if the progressive autonomy acquired with respect to the rest of the city did not protect the Vomero neighbourhood from forms of homogenization of its urban-retail fabric, it is partially because these forms are expression of tastes and lifestyles not only of those who utilize the Vomero neigh-

borhood, but also of those who inhabit it²⁶. From this point of view, the “vomeresità”, that is to say the qual-

²⁶ While it seems excessive to speak of McDonaldization, it is true that in this neighborhood is localized a fast-food restaurant of this chain – like of the aforementioned *Chipstar* –, incidentally in the area we investigated.

ity of hailing from the Vomero neighbourhood (La Gala 2004, 8), is reflected in as many forms of belonging as there are consumers (residents or users) of the products sold in the neighbourhood, or how many of them still utilize the neighbourhood as a place of consumption.

At the scale of its polarizing hubs, retail and consumption create and recreate “place-specific identities” (Crewe, Lowe 1995, 1878), that more and more often come into conflict amongst themselves. As effectively underlined by some interviewees, the old pioneers have become staunch defenders of an embeddedness made up of resistance of historic shops, neighbourhood stores and of a retail offer connected to traditional cultural opportunities. A vision that clashes with that of the new pioneers (that sometimes are both new retailers and new inhabitants), who express requests in support of various forms of innovation, both in terms of the combination of shopping and leisure, as well as in new *hybrid* formats that combine economic and cultural elements, with food as the new protagonist in a myriad of forms.

In this tension between forms of renewal and embeddedness, the fieldwork highlighted an initial element of contention as to the commercial hub and the area we investigated: that between old and new inhabitants, which shows individual and groups that assert different and contrasting forms of territorialization of retail and consumption practices. In this case, it is a very different dynamic with respect to those of other neighborhoods of the city and that, only occasionally, reveals early stages of retail gentrification²⁷. Said retail gentrification, in a context that still reports elements of heterogeneity even in the *cooler* sections of the main streets, seems to reflect patchwork-like phenomena attributable to the predominance acquired from the tastes and lifestyles of those who have greater economic capital rather than cultural capital; however, it is not possible to exclude that, over time, this could be also associated with more pervasive forms of gentrification. From this point of view, according to several interviewees, the staunch defense of the “vomeresità” of the past may become a bastion of advancement for the more homogenized forms of the retail landscape. Said landscape, besides representing the advent of new shops and new actors, is also the fruit of a change in *atmosphere* generated by the adaption of the current shops into ways to attract new clientele through an upgrading up their merchandise and their ambiance, as Zukin revealed in her New York study (Zukin et al. 2009). Such dynamics produce nega-

tive effects that mainly affect the so-called “neighborhood shops” and that – even in an urban context completely different then the one just mentioned in terms of size, characteristics and range of the commercial function – can produce pervasive consequences in terms of abandonment on behalf of some consumers (mainly, but not limited to, residents), induced by the impossibility to satisfy demand that was guaranteed in the recent past by activities linked to the urban fabric. A second element of contention in our area of study is that which contrasts inhabitants and users, with the latter who assert their prerogatives at night, especially during the weekend²⁸. In this case, it is a dynamic more in line with what occurs in other parts of the city with a new centrality acquired by street food.

It is not to be underestimated that both contentions face a reality different from that which characterizes the globalization of consumption in other urban contexts: the Vomero neighbourhood is not a touristic-commercial area upgraded through top-down urban planning that have turned into outright forms of gentrification. Still, the neighbourhood experiments localization strategies regarding brands or chain stores in *cooler* sections and encounters fundamental leverage in new entrepreneurs, who often express their location preference for this micro-space because they consider it the outpost of progressive innovations.

Framed in these terms and associated with the statements obtained from the discussion with the local community, the *specific* interaction between global and local elements (Crewe, Lowe 1995, 1878) calls into question the need to anchor the current changes to policies, starting with the existing ones – which have often been implemented without considering processes that have already occurred – until those that have never been realized. It is not a question of deciding which element – renewal or embeddedness – should identify the neighbourhood, its inhabitants or its users, but rather of identifying a more virtuous relationship between changes in retail and consumption practices. This because, in a micro-space in which the continuous search for novelty and various forms of resistance to change oppose each other, our research shows several risks of disintegration of a fabric in which retail and consumption, understood as identity-related elements of territorial belonging²⁹, still represents fundamental components.

²⁷ Early stages both because they are not connected to complex questions of social class, ethnicity and cultural capital – which go far beyond the individual neighborhoods and urban spaces – and because they do not produce forms of displacement of the current residents or social inequality, which occurs in global cities (Zukin et al. 2009, 48).

²⁸ In many cases, the protagonists are young people: for an in-depth study of the role that they play in consumption spaces during nighttime, see D'Alessandro, Martinez-Rigol 2018.

²⁹ It is enough to consider that, during the mid-2000s, local newspapers defined the closure of some historic shops – that gave way to shopkeepers “without a track record” or to large chain stores – as “scars in the city’s commercial fabric” (Capua 2005).

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Rescaling Retail and Consumption in the Contemporary Barcelona Area

Il rescaling del commercio e del consumo nell'area della Barcellona contemporanea

CARLES CARRERAS I VERDAGUER, LLUÍS FRAGO CLOIS, EDUARD MONTESINOS CIURÓ

Geography Department, Universitat de Barcelona

E-mail: ccarreras@ub.edu; llfrago@ub.edu; edmontesinos1@gmail.com

Abstract. Consumption is one of the less known variable in urban studies. The article presents a general overview of Catalan and Barcelona study case, summarizing almost thirty years of research, with the goal to isolate the main contemporary trends of retail and consumption in the area. The recent economic processes in the Catalan context are analyzed in the first place. At the same scale, the level of analysis is again recentered on the changes into the metropolitan and regional Barcelona, focussing in the perspective of the old slogan of *Catalonia-city*. The necessity of the restructuration of the scale of the analysis is proposed. After, the lens is adjusted to the city of Barcelona case, focussing on the relevant change in his traditional centrality. Finally some future trends are advanced.

Keywords: Barcelona, Catalonia, centre, Metropolitan region, periphery, scale.

Riassunto. Il consumo è una delle variabili meno conosciute negli studi urbani. L'articolo presenta una panoramica generale sul caso di studio catalano e di Barcellona, sintetizzando quasi trent'anni di ricerca, al fine di individuare le principali tendenze contemporanee del commercio e del consumo nell'area. In primo luogo vengono analizzati i recenti processi economici nel contesto catalano. Alla stessa scala, il livello di analisi viene nuovamente centrato sui cambiamenti nella Barcellona metropolitana e regionale, concentrandosi sulla prospettiva del vecchio slogan della *Catalogna-città*. Si propone la necessità di ristrutturare la scala di analisi. Successivamente, l'obiettivo viene spostato sul caso della città di Barcellona, focalizzando l'attenzione sul rilevante cambiamento nella sua tradizionale centralità. Infine sono prospettate alcune tendenze future.

Parole chiave: Barcellona, Catalogna, Regione Metropolitana, periferia, scala.

1. Introduction

As members of a long tradition team on retail studies (Carreras 1989), the authors of this paper have set up their research focussing both in the city of Barcelona (Carreras et al. 1990; Carreras 2003a) and the region of Cata-

lonia (Frago 2011; Carreras, D'Alessandro 2017, 36-38 and 68-70), and their relations. These researches have encountered some difficulties, mainly related with the fact that since the last decades of the XX Century the increasing number of all kind of shops, stores and retail formats has been inversely proportional to the availability of their information sources. This fact has forced researchers to deal with methodological issues, as the use of indirect sources, especially some fiscal taxes until their total extinction in 2004, and the use of different qualitative techniques of research, as questionnaires and direct fieldwork. Due to this reason, studies absorbed large amounts of economic resources, needed wide teams of personnel, took long periods of elaboration, and were local scale focussed.

The development of the scientific research on retail studies under those difficult conditions contrast with the most common work of private consulting companies. They produced easily a huge number of reports oriented towards decision-making, both in public administration and in private companies. Those reports are based on distant observation, mainly with web mapping services. The results used to be referred to larger scales and although they were often achieved much faster, they were relatively simple and superficial.

It is in that frame that the main goal of this paper is to present a sort of a general overview summarizing almost thirty years of research on the Catalan study case, trying to isolate the main contemporary trends of retail and consumption and its territorial structure. A multi-scalar approach is used in order to achieve the goal, as well as in each scale a sort of state of the art is proposed. First, a brief analysis of the recent economic processes in the Catalan context is presented. Second, the level of analysis is recentered on the changes into the metropolitan and regional Barcelona, paying attention to the perspective of the old slogan of Catalonia-city. And third, the lens is adjusted to the Barcelona case, focusing on the relevant change in its traditional centrality. Finally, as research conclusions, some future trends are advanced.

2. The Catalan context

The nowadays retail structure and consumption spaces in Catalonia can be only understood in the frame of its history, in a sort of path dependency or historical process. Thus, the roots can be found in the strong commercial tradition at an international scale, mainly throughout the Mediterranean, that facilitated an earlier industrialization process in the XVIII and XIX Cen-

turies (Vilar 1962), when Catalonia developed a dense retail structure. Similar to the industrial pattern, the retail structure was based on small and familiar firms, on the long Mediterranean tradition. A very regular network of market centres with Barcelona on the top, and some forty secondary cities over a myriad of local places, in a sort of Walter Christaller's distribution, that allowed a later complete political and administrative organization designed in the 1930's but not applied until the end of the 1980's (Vila 1937; Lluch, Nello 1983, 1984).

During this long period of fifty years, everything changed; politically, from civil war (1936-39) to a late democracy through a long dictatorship (1939-1978); economically, with the increasing population mobility and the progressive social and economic process of modernization. The end of the dictatorship coincides in time with the beginning of the capitalist restructuration in the middle of 1970's. The changes brought about by this new stage have already been analysed¹.

Since then, there has been a double process of economic and territorial concentration. On the one hand, accumulation of capital has benefited the biggest firms, especially some international, mainly French distribution companies² (Arribas 2002). This fact, together with the proliferation of branches and franchises has weakened the traditional small and familiar businesses. On the other hand, Barcelona has concentrated the main part of population and activities, starting a strong and diffuse process of metropolitanization. Traditional commercial hierarchies have been altered (Beavon 1977) with the introduction of new retail forms, especially the modern shopping centres.³

These new retail forms have been encouraged by the social and cultural changes of the contemporary consumption habits that accompanied the progressive increasing of population's income. For instance, expenses per capita in the city of Barcelona doubled between 1991 and 2007; slowed by the consequences of the global financial crisis, and then recovered and increased only a 13% in 2018. Per capita expenses were always bigger in Barcelona than the average of Catalonia and even more than in the whole Spain⁴. This increasing consumption was constantly strengthening by international tourism. Numbers of foreign tourists in Catalonia were 15.2

¹ The reference is to the article by Carreras, Martínez-Rigol and Morcuende in this special issue.

² The internationalization of the Catalan economy was clearly reinforced after the integration of Spain into the European Union in 1986.

³ The first real shopping Centre in Barcelona was inaugurated very late, in December 1993, long after the positive impact of the summer Olympics.

⁴ Information from the series of the Statistical Yearbook of Barcelona.

million in 2007, and 27.7 in 2019, the majority of them (47.3%) visiting Barcelona⁵. In 2018, in a single city of 1.6 million inhabitants, 4.6 million people visited the temple of Sagrada Família, for instance. Together with the massive incoming tourism, even a relevant outgoing tourism was changing the consumption patterns⁶.

In front of all these changes, the autonomous government of Catalonia has been aground in a long and unsuccessful legal fight against the economic liberalization both at the level of Spanish and European rules. Instead, the Catalan policy has been the protection of local, familiar and urban⁷ retail. The deep changes that began in the 1970's, brought about the debate -with both theoretical and applied dimensions- of the substitution of the economic base of the city.

In the Western context, it was conceptualized that these changes implied a transformation from an old industrial economy to a knowledge economy (Florida 2002; Scott 2008). The key element to understand this process is the substitution of the mass production by the flexible: for the first time it was possible to solve the problem of overproduction, adapting the supply to the potential demand. The innovations in the means of communication and transport allowed the immediate global interconnection required to maintain such a system.

Regarding the case of Barcelona and Catalonia, some different aspects of this process deserve attention. From a merely economic point of view, there have been some attempts to measure the magnitude of the loss of industry because of the adoption of the flexible production. No robust conclusions were possible to extract from this analysis, since the comparison between two different types of organization is difficult. Traditionally, the industrial companies contracted all their employees regardless of the kind of job they had. The trend for big companies since the 1970's has been to *outsource*, that is, to transfer certain tasks needed to complete the productive process to external companies, specialized in the provision of goods and services. Therefore, having less industrial jobs in the present than in the past does not imply that the level of the industrial production of the country is lower now than fifty years ago.

Nevertheless, when we put the focus on the *new economy* that substituted the traditional industrial sectors, some experts of this issue have arrived to a con-

sensual diagnosis. For example, the regional economists headed by Joan Trullén, have emphasized the idea that what characterizes the economy of Barcelona since the first efforts to introduce the knowledge economy were the medium-low technology services in the central city and the low knowledge intensity industry in the periphery (Boix, Galletto, Trullén 2011). Other authors have conceded that in the past decades Barcelona configured more like an entertainment city that like an innovation region, where the creative workers are attracted by the quality of life of the city but struggle to find world-class job opportunities (Pareja-Eastaway et al. 2008).

This topic connects with the hegemonic discourses about the city. In the 1980's, when the strategic economic sectors were concentrating in the suburban areas (in the Mediterranean, but especially in North America) and it seemed that the cybernetic revolution would devastate all the traditional activities, the anti-urban discourses dominated (Hutton 2010). Since the 1990's, coinciding with the cultural turn in urban policies and the return of strategic economic activities to city centres (Harvey 1989), pro-urban discourses became dominant. In that context appeared the idea of the creative city. In Barcelona, the architect Oriol Bohigas, who had responsibilities in the urban planning area of the city council, fixed the official discourse. With that spirit, he wrote that the city itself was a *cultural event* (Bohigas 1986).

From a spatial point of view, the result of the substitution of the economic base of the city was clear. Factories almost completely disappeared in the central municipality; some industrial companies ceased to exist, while some others relocated their productive units to the industrial parks that were located in the periphery of the metropolitan area at the same time. Others transferred to other Spanish cities or elsewhere in the world (especially Eastern Europe and Asia). In the context of the resurgence of the city centres, already analysed, it is relevant to know what activities reused the most important factories that characterized the landscape of the city for most of the 20th century. In order to know whether the knowledge economy was the main driver of the process and if Barcelona became a creative city (Fig. 1).

This analysis has shown several on-topic facts (Montesinos 2019). In the central districts of the municipality, the prevailing uses in the former industrial plots are hotels, restaurants, housing, offices, and parking. All these projects have in common the private nature of their emergence, ruled by the real estate development of the past few decades. By contrast, in those neighbourhoods that were less pressured by the real estate market and had a stronger social organization (north and south-west of the city, notably), a different sort of uses stand

⁵ Information from the series of the Statistical Yearbook of Catalonia, published by IDESCAT.

⁶ The Barcelona Tourism Board calculated 10 million annual international travels in 2019, approximately the half of all the Spanish travels to the exterior.

⁷ Urban in the sense of centrally located shops, against the peripheral big commercial areas.

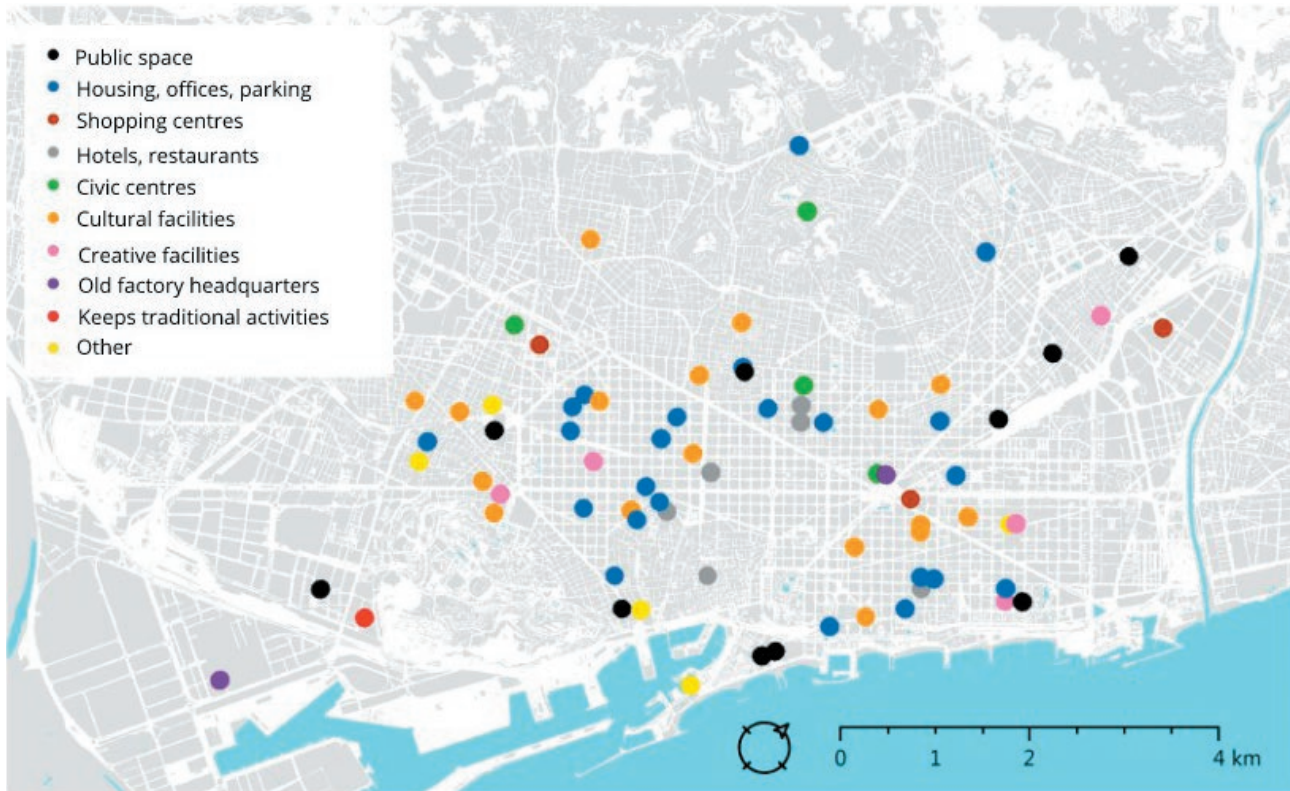


Figure 1. The new uses of former industrial factories in Barcelona. Source: Carreras et al. 2019, 128.

out, namely cultural facilities like schools and libraries and public spaces. There are cultural facilities in the central districts of the city too, but they are usually of a different kind; not of everyday utilization but of national or international reference, related to the tourism and leisure industry: museums, creative factories or cultural centres like La Bohemia factory. This last case is very illustrative because the former industrial company, a brewery, keeps its property in the city centre and contract creative workers to organize there cultural events on a regular basis (Carreras et al. 2019).

Thus, there exists a cultural sector with the strategic function in the urban economy of Barcelona to provide the values shared by the majority of consumers in the neoliberal era, epitomized by the young, cosmopolitan and well-educated creative workers. In this era, consumption has become a political action (García-Canclini 1995), and so the economic powers have had to construct a hegemonic way of consuming, functional to their interests. Notwithstanding the crucial importance of these symbolic aspects of the issue, from a materialist perspective these activities have not become an economic base for the city. Land rents and real estate specu-

lation are the real drivers of the economy of Barcelona since the global restructuring of the 1970's and nowadays tourism is the fuel that keeps the flame alive.

3. Catalonia-city, a periphery without center?

From the Catalan context, a more focused analysis on the Regional Barcelona is required, in order to understand the spatial structure of retail and consumption, which includes the relation of the city of Barcelona with the rest of the Catalan territory, that is the so called Catalonia-city. This analysis will reinforce three main axes of spatial restructuring: first, the loss of relevance of the local commercial system, mainly the county capitals; second, the integration of inner territories to new economic functions, related with the new corridors configuration, especially with logistics and tourism, which impacts on the retail and consumption spaces; third, the extension of the metropolitan area.

In this sense, the scalar restructuring of Barcelona in the context of the neoliberal economy has played a fundamental role in the articulation of urban consump-

tion spaces. Especially since the mid-1990, when Spain's integration in the EU was consolidated as well as the associated processes of neoliberalization of the economy. The new patterns of urban and regional development, variegated and contradictory, should be analyzed through the scalar changes.

These processes of scalar restructuring overlapped previous socio-spatial structures of consumption that dialectically give rise to new urban relations. Despite the speed and intensity of changes, this restructuring have metamorphosed at a local scale previous structures as a reaction to the new totality. The territorial rescaling, selective and fragmentary, started in the 1990's, and coexists with a diversity of urban realities at a local scale. These realities are product of slow times and have had relatively few changes during the 20th century. Because of this coexistence, multiple paths of modernization have been derived (Santos 1996) producing antagonistic situations between nearby territories as a product of the different dynamics of differentiation and equalization, and different resistances to creative destruction (Brenner 2014; Smith 1984)⁸.

3.1 Fragility of the local commercial system

The traditional analysis of consumption spaces in Catalonia is rooted in a contrast between Barcelona and the rest of the territory, articulated mainly by the unequal processes of capital centralization during the industrial period. Barcelona and its area were organized by a strong industrial economy, while the rest of the territory had an agricultural base. The industrial development that arose from the reinvestment of wine growers was restricted to the most fluid areas of the metropolis (Vilar 1962). The construction of Catalan nationalism in the late 19th century deepened this contrast, as it placed the cradle of Catalonia beyond the city of Barcelona (Nogué 1991; Vives 1962).

During the industrial period, this territorial contrast was based on two processes with different temporal and spatial scales logics. On the one hand, at a local scale, a system of pre-industrial city-markets; on the other hand, at a regional scale, the production of consumption spaces based on a Barcelona logic, that was materialized by the proliferation of secondary homes⁹. Those spaces

emerged as an outcome of the construction of a steam-powered railway infrastructure, which improved people's mobility in summers and weekends.

Moreover, the State played a key role in articulating the spaces of consumption on a regional scale, especially through the impetus given by the government to the four provincial capitals. These cities and their associated regions were the units with which the Spanish State organized its political power, until today. Those four cities were established as provincial capitals in 1833, and their function of capitals produced the demographic dominance of the city over its provincial territory that still occurs today: Barcelona concentrates 30% of the provincial population; Girona the 13%; Lleida the 32%; and Tarragona the 16%¹⁰. Despite the homogenizing role promoted by the State, the demographic dominance of Barcelona, and especially of its metropolitan area, as a result of the processes of capital centralization, enables to speak of relevant regional inequalities.

On the other hand, the thirty-eight pre-industrial market cities distributed between twenty or forty kilometers of distance have been the basis of the territorial organization in counties¹¹ (Vila 1937). Thus, with the territorial integration promoted by capitalism, those cities became the functional trunk of the urban system of Catalonia and at the same time had the possibility to correct the macrocephaly of Barcelona¹².

Since the 1970's, there have been different processes of economic and urban restructuring that allow to understand the role loss of local commercial systems (Lluch, Nel-lo 1984). Three general explanatory processes can be isolated: firstly, the maintenance of commercial power centralization around Barcelona despite the incipient role of the other three province capitals; secondly, the articulation of center-periphery dynamics at the scale of county and provincial capitals as a result of an increasing metropolitanization (Frago 2011); finally, the general commercial desertification that since 2008 affects the whole territory, and especially these county capital cities. This process of desertification means that the opening of new commercial shops is restricted only to shopping malls and tourist commercial axes, as an outcome of the growth of e-commerce.

The growing territorial integration around Barcelona has meant the dissolution of the capacity of terri-

⁸ By dynamics of equalization and differentiation we refer to what Neil Smith theorizes when treating unequal development (Smith 1984), and by creative destruction to the intrinsic dynamic of implosions-explosions theorized by Lefebvre (1970), later developed by Neil Brenner (2014) for dealing with planetary urbanization.

⁹ There are several artists who record this type of use of the territory, including Josep Maria de Segarra and Josep Pla (Carreras 2003b).

¹⁰ IDESCAT, 2019.

¹¹ The initial proposal of 1936 was 38 counties; in 1987, after the Franco regime, there were 41; and in 2015, Moianès was incorporated as the 42nd county.

¹² For a better understanding of the articulation of urban macrocephaly, see *O espaço dividido* (Santos 1979) and *Paris et le désert français en 1972* (Gravier 1972).

torial articulation by the county capitals. At the same time, the processes of urban agglomeration around the provincial capitals have been driven by the State, both from its political and administrative functions and from infrastructure investments. For instance, in Tarragona, there has been implemented an important specialization on the petrochemical sector. This process, however, has been unable to generate robust and autonomous metropolitan dynamics that at the same time were able to counteract the concentration of main tendencies around Barcelona. The modernization by the State of consumer spaces also has been boosted mainly through a Higher Education Policy that has looked for decentralization of Universities from Barcelona to the provincial capitals. However, the small number of students and the suburban location of the campuses have not helped to generate other dynamics of consumption's concentration.

In the Tarragona area, since the 1960's to the present day, the antagonistic coexistence between the petrochemical industry and tourism, both national and international, has been intensified. It has contributed to this fact the opening of the leisure complex of Port Aventura in 1995, with 5 million visitors (2018), the declaration of the city as UNESCO Heritage (in 2000) and the use of Reus airport by low-cost airlines, doubling the number of passengers over the last 5 years, reaching 1.3 million passengers in 2019. Although the process of territorial rescaling of the area of Tarragona has led to a significant increase in urban complexity, it should be underlined that no metropolitan political or administrative entity has been created¹³.

The urban agglomeration around Girona and its province is specialized in tourism, mainly because it is one of the gateways to Spain for millions of European tourists going to the Mediterranean. Tourism is also an important driver of the economy behind Tarragona and Reus, in contrast of the most strategic economic sector in Lleida around the agro-industries, specialized in fruit and derivatives' exports. A differentiating feature of the Lleida area is also its ability to organize the daily consumption of large territories, beyond the Catalan border. Although tourism is more exceptional than in the other provinces, the Aran and the Bohí valleys, both in the Pyrenees in Lleida, are areas linked to snow sports during winter and hiking on summer.

Territorial rescaling has meant a major restructuring of consumption spaces on a local scale. From the 1990's onwards, a new territorial order consolidates at the local level based on the restructuring and redevelopment of

urban spaces as an outcome of the impacts of metropolitan integration and global circuits of capital, commodification and labor. Responsibilities lie with both capitalist dynamics, especially the growing role of the urban land market, and the State, with its territorial and urban planning. The most important changes have been, firstly, the restructuring of the main areas of daily consumption as a result of the integration of regional capitals in the new global and metropolitan areas (Frago 2011) and, secondly, the refunctionalization of many agricultural areas towards international logistic activities because of the proximity to the main international corridors (Frago 2015).

The new territorial order of the regional capital's consumption spaces has been characterized by the articulation of urban totalities that endow these cities with center-periphery dynamics because of their metropolitan integration. The opening of new supermarkets and hypermarkets was synchronous and directly related to the building of new low-density neighborhoods, which emerged from the 1990's. At the same time, these new commercial areas also attracted consumers from other cities and the surroundings that had traditionally gone to the historical city center, the only space that had meant the city whole until then. On the other hand, dialectically, the traditional space of consumption corresponding to the historical center underwent significant changes, in most cases a slowdown.

The different paths followed by the historical city centers metamorphosis of the county capitals exemplify the restructuring of the consumption spaces as an adaptation to the new totalities. As a general process, three different paths of the urbanization can be identified: first, a general devaluation, second the maintenance of centrality or centrification¹⁴, and third as a mixed path, and even a more selective one, that materializes in devaluation or revaluation street by street. In the first case, the modernization has been characterized by a general housing disinvestment, accompanied at the same time by a dissolution of the centrality produced by massive closure of retail and service shops, especially significant when it has affected the main street, as is the cases of Valls, Tortosa, Balaguer, Cervera, and Berga. In the second case, when centrality is maintained or a process of centrification takes place, the business strategy is aimed at diversifying and expanding the catering offer. In addition, it is aimed, mainly in the early stages

¹³ The Camp de Tarragona Partial Territorial Plan, approved in 2010, was the first plan that considered a functional area.

¹⁴ Concept that was created to overcome the one of gentrification, so trivialized in recent years as a result of the growing weight of urban land value in all urban processes and consequently the loss of explanatory validity of the rent gap (Carreras 2010).

of the process, the opening of internationally renowned shops interested in catching the demand, but the concentration of consumption around online shopping has slowed down, as in the case of Reus, Vic, Vilafranca del Penedès, Mataró and Granollers. As it has been pointed out, in other cases, the process has been more selective, and as some streets have experienced a strong real estate and functional devaluation, other streets or squares have remained central or have been modernized to adapt to the new consumers' demand, as in the case of Tarragona, Igualada, Lleida or Manresa (Frago 2011).

To these three paths of the historical city centers as spaces of consumption at the Catalan level, it must be added a general phenomenon: the closure of retail activities that acted as an anchor for hundreds of other retail shops in those more dynamic historical city centers. The best example of this effect has been that of fast fashion brands with a high capacity to attract consumers, such as those of the INDITEX, Mango or H&M groups. The shops closure in the high streets of historical city centers has led to the dissolution of the concentration of consumption in these places and a step towards dispersion, affecting even the largest provincial capitals and county capitals.

The closure of such activities generates the crisis in the main commercial axis of the city centers, where many other shops took advantage of the attraction exerted by these commercial chains. The deconcentration of the historical center of the city is identified in important regional capitals such as Mataró, that in 2018 the two stores of INDITEX group closed, remaining open only those of the Mataró Parc shopping center, inaugurated in 2000 and located on the outskirts of the city and attached to a motorway. Further south of Catalonia, in Reus or Tarragona, the stores of these international brands have also closed over the last 5 years. These shops were concentrated in the shopping mall of the Central Park of Tarragona (inaugurated in 1997) and the Reus Trade Fair (opened in 2015), as well as in the Les Gavarres Commercial Park (opened in 1998), halfway between the two cities.

The process of historical city center deconcentration and the complementary dispersal to the suburban shopping malls and shopping parks have also occurred in dense metropolitan cities. In Badalona, in the metropolitan area of Barcelona, ZARA shop closed in 2013, resting only open the one located in the Màgic Badalona shopping center. While the business strategies of these brands detract dynamism of relatively large cities, in the smaller county capitals the slowdown is even deeper.

3.2 The global integration of inner territories: the role of the logistic activities

While the daily supply system has become more and more fragile, as it has been pointed out, there has been at the same time a global integration of the regional territory through the articulation of large logistic corridors aimed to connect the major metropolises of the world. Although the two main nodes that materially connect with global mobility, the seaport and the airport, are located very close to Barcelona, it is important to highlight the recent metamorphosis of the regional territory. This territory has changed its function, from the local supplying to an international scope. An example is the case of Valls: while its role in local structuring has been diminished, several logistic centers of international well-known brands, as IKEA, supply from there several countries in the south of Europe (Frago 2015).

The connection of metropolitan areas to great communications corridors has meant that some territories that were far away from the city direct influence, have now acquired a new relative position in the context of planetary urbanization (Brenner 2019). In this way, in Sallent, 80 kilometers away from the center of Barcelona, it was established the logistic center of Stradivarius, a branch of the group INDITEX, supplying whole Spain, southern France and northern Italy. The proximity to one expressway, that allows the French-Spanish connection avoiding Barcelona, is one of the main location factors, reaffirming the loss of role of the city's direct influence in the location of these activities.

Territorial rescaling has been the product of spatial strategies developed by the State for several decades. Nevertheless, it has been strengthened with its neoliberal management, and since then it has invested especially in infrastructure aimed to connect the big world metropolises. In this frame, the Spanish state invests in the construction of infrastructures of international scope, as motorways and expressways. Even transport nodes such as the airport (new terminal in 2009), the seaport (BEST terminal opened in 2012) and railway terminals (arrival of the high-speed train to the French border in 2013)¹⁵. Moreover, since 1992 the State invested directly in the construction of international logistic centers through CIMALSA¹⁶. Since the 19th century, the Spanish state

¹⁵ There is a progressive neoliberalization of the exploitation of state-owned infrastructure. Especially for the Spanish case is the private operation of *Puertos del Estado* and the railway lines of the public company ADIF (Frago 2016).

¹⁶ CIMALSA is a public company of Catalan Government, responsible for the promotion, development and management of distribution and logistics centres.

has invested in conditioning the space, especially aiming to a spatial integration at the level of the Spanish scale. Moreover, for shorter periods, when the regional government has been endowed with some political power, has integrated the space from a Catalan logic. Especially significant was the effort made by the Mancomunitat de Catalunya (1914-1923)¹⁷ which, despite its short existence, modernized communications on a Catalan scale, especially the telephone network.

The relative position of the territory with respect to the large corridors of international tourism has also meant a territorial rescaling from the opening of shopping and consumer centers aimed to catch the tourist incomes. As an example, it could be shown the opening of the Roca Village outlet shopping center in 1998. It currently has more than 120 luxury brands and concentrates almost 20% of tourist purchases in Spain using the VAT return system. This outlet attracts tourists from Barcelona and the Costa Brava, as well as those who are passing by the eastern Spain coasts and other European countries. Following the same logic in 2016 the Style Outlets was opened in Viladecans, five kilometers away from Barcelona airport¹⁸.

3.3 *The extension of metropolitan areas*

The logics of the restructuring and expansion processes of the new centralities, and of the metropolitan specializations are more explained for the rescaling of the territory of each municipality than by a dynamic of endogenous capital concentration, which is able to counteract the macrocephaly of Barcelona. This process has not been the same in closer areas to the metropolitan core than in the more remote territories. In the closest municipalities to Barcelona, the new centralities are directly related to a concentrated urbanization. This kind of urbanization is related to centrality functions, which should be located within the capital. Examples are the City of Justice or the Fira Barcelona Gran Via (International Exhibition Center), both located in the municipality of L'Hospitalet de Llobregat. In the most remote municipalities, but close to the main regional infrastructures, such as airports, motorways, expressways and business parks, there has been a territorial rescaling

based on extensive urbanization. Shopping malls that follow these location patterns are a good example.

The Llobregat Delta plain is a territory where many shopping malls have been built on old agricultural uses along the axis of the C-31 expressway and C-32 motorway, that connect the Garraf county with Barcelona. The pattern of dispersion of those shopping malls has come motivated by high municipal fragmentation. Nine shopping centers are located in this area of approximately eighty square kilometers. Each one is in a different municipality¹⁹ (Fig. 2).

4. **Barcelona, a commercial centre with no periphery?**

Into this changing Catalan urban system, Barcelona at large undoubtedly plays the central role in many different aspects: politically administrative, culturally, economically, even in the retail organization. At the same time, into the contemporary retail restructuring Barcelona has a clear central area. However, in a long metropolitanization process, based on the population and economic hypermobility at different scales, centrality is not a function of the quantity or quality of the goods and services offered (Beavon 1977). The reduction of times of transport and connection creates new spaces with variable geometries in a complex overlay of global and local trends. Urban planning has also promoted new centralities at municipal, metropolitan and regional scales. Barcelona designed in 1987 an ambitious plan with ten new central areas for its economic and urban redistribution and promotion (Busquets 1987), never completed.

In addition to that, it is necessary to integrate the complexity on the urban organization. The traditional dualistic theory of the dialectics between centre and periphery needs a reconsideration (Carreras 2017). The original geopolitical theory appeared in urban analysis on the sociology Chicago school at the beginning of 20th Century, and was developed later for the Tertiary activities in different directions by many Geographers like Walter Christaller, Raymond Murphy, Brian Berry or Neil Smith. Theory could remain explicative in the geopolitical domain, in spite of the difficulty to locate with accuracy the contemporary centre. However, the urban space organization is more complex than the Chauncy

¹⁷ The Mancomunitat de Catalunya was a deliberative assembly made up of the councilors of the four provinces of Catalonia created in 1914 and disbanded in 1923. It was responsible for the creation of many public institutions in health, culture and technical education and science.

¹⁸ In general tourists concentrate their commercial expenses in the last 3 days of its stay, so the location of this kind of shopping centers and outlets near the airports is very strategic.

¹⁹ Carrefour shopping park (former PRYCA, opened in 1974) in El Prat de Llobregat; Barnasud (1995) in Gavà; Sant Boi Shopping Center (1990s) in Sant Boi del Llobregat; Gran Via 2 (2002) in L'Hospitalet de Llobregat; the T1 Shopping Center at Barcelona Airport (2009) in el Prat de Llobregat; Vilamarina (2009) in Viladecans; Splau! (2010) in Cornellà de Llobregat; Ànec Blau (2010) in Castelldefels; Style Outlets (2016) in Viladecans and Finestrelles (2018) in Esplugues de Llobregat.

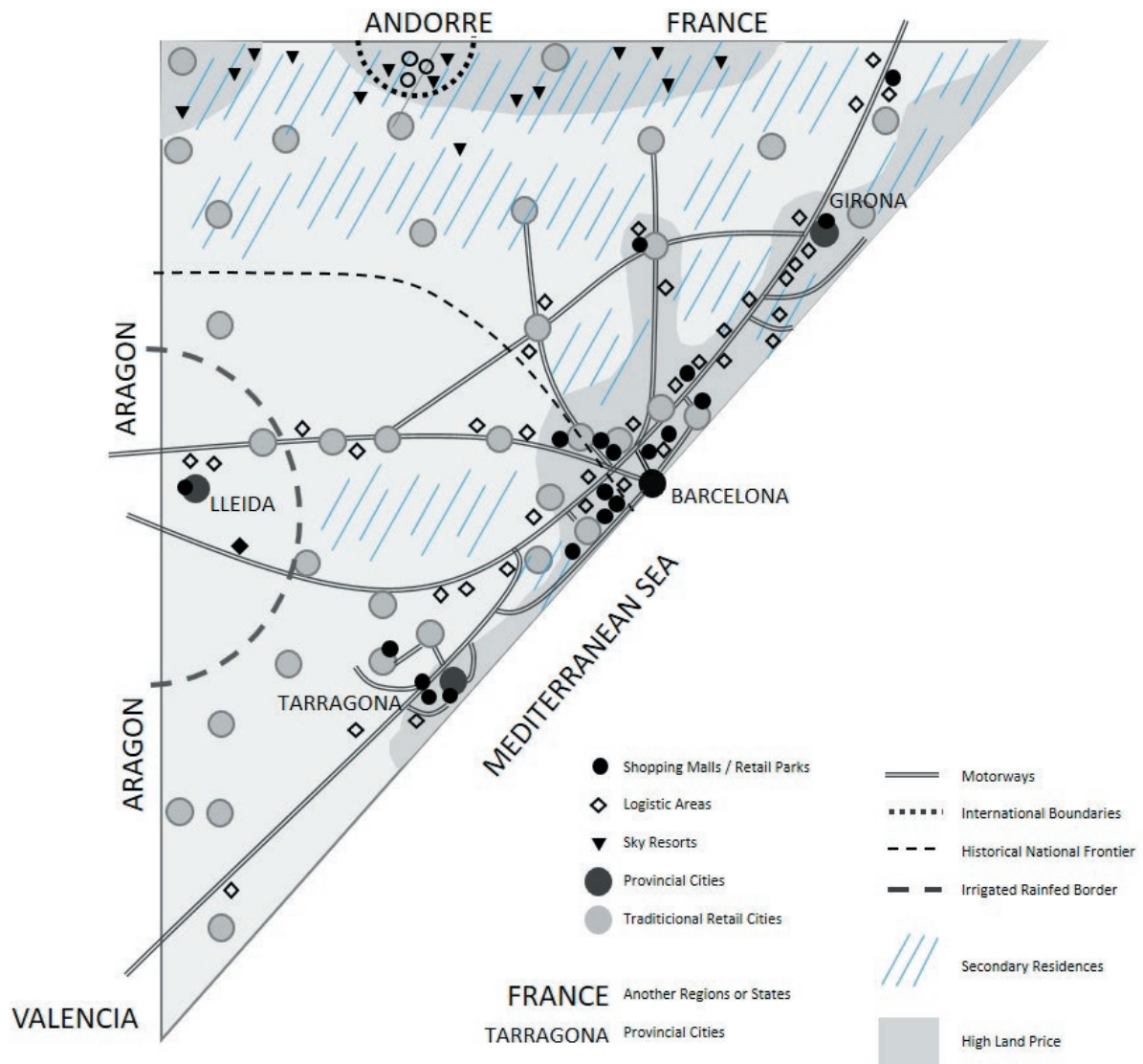


Figure 2. A schematic map of the main consumption spaces in Catalonia. Source: Bernardos et al. 2020.

Harris and Edward Ullman 1945 multiple nuclei model, because on a functional analysis there exists a changing overlapping of the influence areas of each nucleus, independent of their quantitative hierarchy.

The figure 3 tries to be a synthesis map of the commercial structure of the city, with the location of the main present retail points of Barcelona at the end of the second decade of the 21st Century. Nevertheless, the myriad of non-represented shops of the defined first level, organized around the municipal markets and other commercial centres, were dramatically decreasing. Many shops were vacant and many other changed their use,

mainly to residences. This real retail apocalypse affected also the department stores²⁰ and the shopping centres. The consequences of the pandemic lockdown of 2020 seems to predict an increase of this apocalypse.

However, the Shopping line, the real commercial centre first defined by the authors in 1990²¹, is always

²⁰ El Corte Inglés sold in 2019 one of its central building, temporary maintaining his commercial activity.

²¹ In this pioneer study, authors described a linear center of 5km length, but the Shopping line was reduced to the half. They also proposed alternatives to adapt some parts of this center as a living mall, in the way of BID's, but never implemented.

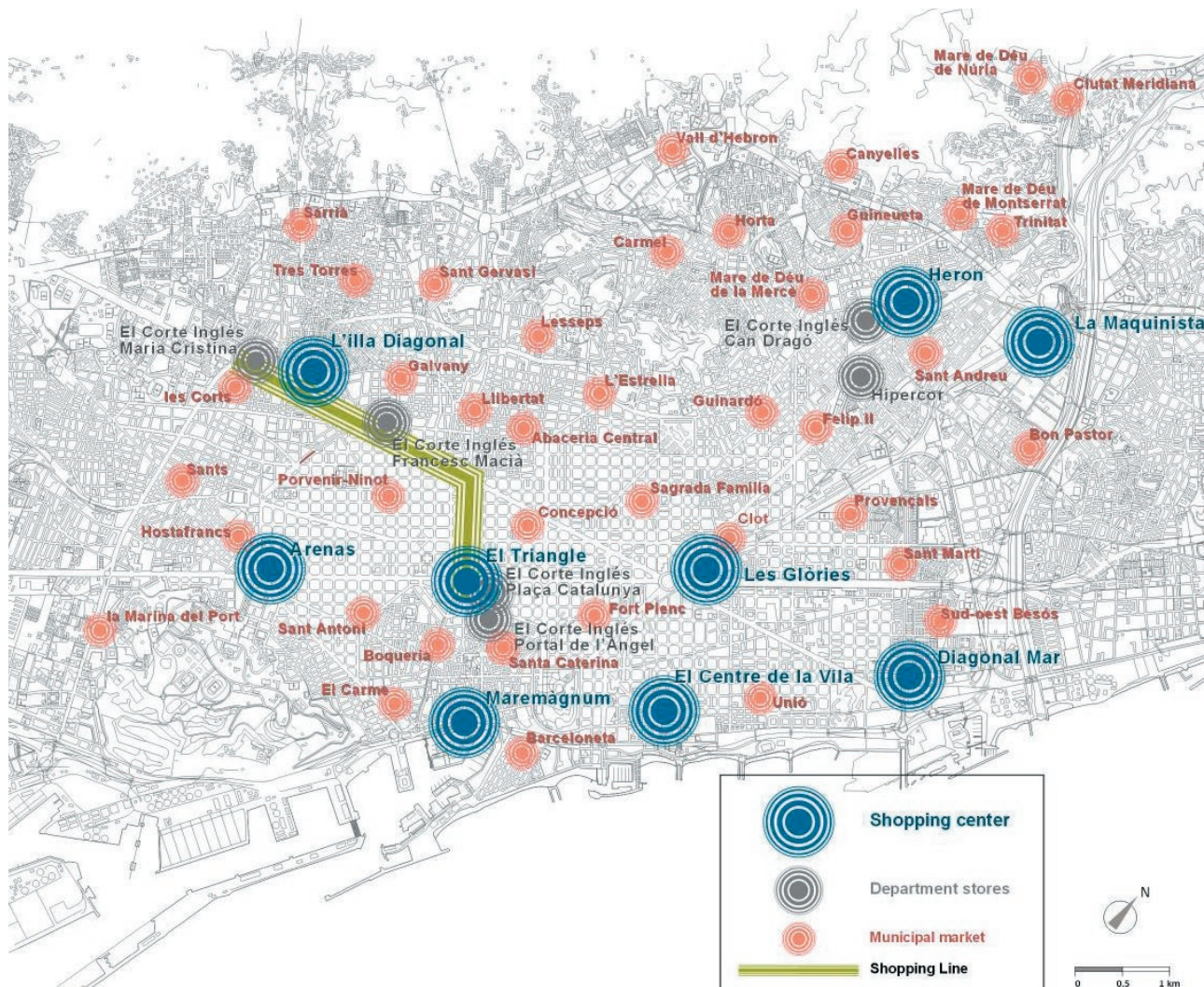


Figure 3. The commercial structure of Barcelona in 2017, according to the authors. Source: Carreras et al. 2019, 109.

alive, especially because the Barcelona's tourism board²² created its trademark on the wake of the summer Olympics of 1992, through the voluntary association of many of its different firms. The origin itself of this official initiative clearly manifests the leadership of the tourist sector, not of the retail. As usual, local big retailers maintained their traditional competitiveness more than cooperation (Carreras 2006). The old expensive fashion and jewellery shops were progressively replaced by flagship and franchised international companies; cinemas and high-class restaurants by the Mediterranean fast food of

*tapas*²³; the banks disappeared²⁴; bourgeois art nouveau residences were converted to museums²⁵.

The centre of the city is not anymore a commercial one; this new centre does not organize any influence area all around, and for this reason, it is possible to speak about a centre with no real periphery. In fact, it is the target area of national and international visitors,

²³ Appetizer or snack typical of the Spanish cuisine.

²⁴ The strong concentration of financial firms during the 2007 crisis, and the later closing of many branches and offices because the computerization of processes reinforced the effects of the apocalypse of commercial premises. In 2000 there were in the city 2.121 bank offices and in 2018 only 817, according to the Statistical Yearbook of Barcelona.

²⁵ One of the authors is doing a long and deep research on the historical evolution of the main avenue of the Shopping line.

²² Vid: <https://www.barcelonaturisme.com>

is a tourism centre of attraction. Relevance of tourism in Barcelona clearly appears in all kind of statistics. The majority of visitors use the international airport, giving the most spectacular proof of this relevance. Almost 20 million passengers in 2000 and more than 50 in 2018 were registered; in the same years, passengers of cruisers were 573.000 and more than 3 million. In addition to that is necessary to consider the proximity of many European countries that allows communication also by train, car and ferry.

Many visitors did the so-called commercial tourism, especially afforded people coming from farthest countries in other continents (mainly Americans, Japanese and Chinese) enlarging the market area of the local Shopping line to a global scale²⁶. In spite of the fact that the foreign visitors spend only few days in the city, the constant and massive²⁷ presence of different tourist groups almost all around the year²⁸ represents an important commercial demand²⁹.

On the way of the urban restructuring promoted by the organization of the 1992 summer Olympic Games, one commercial and tourist policy was implemented. Into the campaign *Barcelona posa't guapa*³⁰ looking the central façades renovation, municipality organized a sort of contest rewarding the best-preserved nicest shops with a century of tradition. The aesthetics was clearly prior to the dynamics of commercial activities, on the way of the landscape architecture. Municipality has a catalogue of iconic shops protecting retail and promoting their visit. It was a local policy subordinating economy to the monumentalization. Finally, the retail apocalypse has visibly closed many of these iconic shops (Carreras, Frago 2016)

The iconic streets and avenues of central Barcelona transformed the old commercial centre in a symbolic place. The Shopping line today is a tourist centre, with mainly international shops. The problem is that other well-located iconic parts of the city, like the Gothic quarter or the Sagrada Família, compete with the Shopping line with their images largely diffused everywhere on social media. These different attraction areas are not real centres with the capacity to organize and articulate larger territories of influence, but concentration zones.

Alternatively, simply it could be suggested that they are centres with no peripheries.

As already analysed, after the process of deindustrialization, the Barcelona municipality chose to encourage the tertiarization at large, planning an important decentralization of the business offices. However, into the wide range of activities included in the service sector the consumer services were the most privileged. The international success of the 92' Olympics balanced the hegemony to all activities connected to national and international tourism, as all kind of local statistics show. In conclusion an extremely biased tertiarization, with clear strengths and weaknesses: strengths were in the social and economic, even cultural enrichment and weaknesses in the fragility of the images³¹, in the serious conflict between residents and visitors³² and the high dependence of the communication infrastructures³³.

5. The future of Barcelona consumer's society: some final remarks

Future is always inscrutable, but the knowledge of the past and present allows suggesting some scenarios. In this regard, the evolution of the spatial structure of the retail and consumption in Catalonia and Barcelona is uncertain, but under the light of some trends some of these scenarios could be suggested or imagined, which is left to do. The dialectics between some selected dualities could be probably the best way to think the possible evolution of the Barcelona consumer society at its different scales. Even to choose a way to undertake some political interventions.

There are different important conflictive trends that make difficult any forecast. The opposition between small and big shops is irrelevant at a territorial level, because small shops and retail corners form the big shopping centres or the magazine stores. However, the real conflict is between small and big firms where the second will always win the competition, especially with the increasing process of capital accumulation. The conflict between urban and suburban retail, by the so-called proximity, depends on the evolution of private cars and

²⁶ In 2018, with more than 13 million tourists, the retail expenses per capita and day were of 17,72€.

²⁷ In 2000, there were more than 3 million tourist in the city, and in 2018 more than 13.

²⁸ January and December are the month with less tourist in the city, but with a reduction only of the 30%.

²⁹ The mobility collapse of 2020 is the best argument of the former touristification with the desertification of the city centre.

³⁰ *Barcelona make yourself beautiful*.

³¹ Pictures of riots and social and political protests counteract nice images. Especially critic was the diffusion of the terrorist attack on August the 17th, 2017 in the symbolic avenue of Ramblas.

³² Many demonstrations against tourists were organized in different neighborhoods; graffiti with slogans like *tourist you are a terrorist* or *tourist not welcome*. The popular idea was that tourism enlarges the urban land market generating difficulties for housing locals.

³³ Stop of flights during the pandemics of 2020 paralyzed all visits, with an uncertain future.

the future of agglomerations itself. Automotive industry is very powerful, with a capacity of adaptation to new energy sources, and it does not seem very realistic a noticeable reduction of car production or consumption; more after the pandemic that makes suspicious all kind of public transportation. In the Barcelona area, the bicycle could have already reached its maximum. The conflict local-global at the short term will reduce the different alternatives to globalization a very symbolic role. It is necessary to think that nationalist challenges to Globalization will remain only overacting of few mediocre leaders. Finally, the tension between commercial freedom and its legal regulation will with no doubt balance to the first.

Fragility and uncertainty could be the best conclusion. Fragility of everything after pandemics resolutions expressed for many people in the media and in the social networks. It looks very similar to the every New Year personal resolutions. As expressed by the French controversial novelist Michel Houellebecq on the Italian journal *Il Corriere della Sera* in May 2020: after all it will be the same, but a little bit worst.

Fragility especially of the economies, like the Barcelona and Mediterranean countries, excessively based on global tourism. The big tourist success of the last decades is in a strong divide. Continuity of global tourism needs possibilities; it is infrastructures, especially aerial connections, regulations allowing flights and passenger's mobility and tourists with money and feeling like spending it. All of that depends on a sum of multiple decisions, many of them outside the reach of the local, but the monopolistic tour operators, aerial companies or hotel chains are as affected as the universes of small and medium size local firms. In Barcelona, authorities and citizens must seriously consider their experience in the recent anti touristification movements in the wake of the total paralysation of all of that.

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research survey was interrupted at the
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related to the current sanitary emer-
gency.

Matera: the Sassi through Trade, Consumption and Tourism

Matera: i Sassi tra commercio, consumo e turismo

ORNELLA ALBOLINO¹, LUCIA CAPPIELLO²

¹ Dipartimento di Scienze Umane, Università degli Studi della Basilicata

² Dipartimento delle Culture Europee e del Mediterraneo, Università degli Studi della Basilicata

E-mail: ornella.albolino@unibas.it; lucia.cappiello@unibas.it

Abstract. The European Capital of Culture (ECoC) process-event has contributed to amplify the main transformations of the commercial structure in Matera. This paper proposes an analysis of the recent transformation of the historical Sassi neighborhood, aimed at pointing out the changes in trade and consumption practices, considering the effects that the development of tourism, one among the main drivers of the changes occurred, has produced in this area. Indeed, the Sassi neighborhood represents a definitely peculiar commercial and touristic landscape: from the year of designation of Matera as ECoC until today, the neighborhood – already a privileged destination for local tourism – has invested in a decisive reconversion of its commercial spaces, focused on the food & drink segment. These commercial activities are addressed mainly for tourists, therefore the first and most evident result is, actually, the exclusion of the residents. What are the characteristics of such a touristic change? What is the *position* of these places in the urban context? What are the functions that characterize them? Attempting to answer these questions will enable to highlight the specific characteristics of the Sassi and their development based on the most remarkable forms of *touristification*.

Keywords: historical neighborhood, trade, consumption, tourism development.

Riassunto. Il processo-evento Capitale Europea della Cultura (ECoC) ha contribuito ad amplificare le principali trasformazioni della struttura commerciale di Matera. Il contributo propone un approfondimento sull'evoluzione recente dello storico quartiere dei Sassi, volto a far emergere i cambiamenti nelle pratiche di commercio e consumo, alla luce degli effetti che lo sviluppo turistico, tra i principali motori dei mutamenti avvenuti, ha prodotto in questi luoghi. I Sassi presentano infatti un paesaggio commerciale e turistico decisamente peculiare: dall'anno della designazione di Matera ad ECoC ad oggi, l'area – già meta privilegiata del turismo di prossimità – ha investito in una decisa riconversione dei suoi spazi commerciali, concentrandoli nella tipologia del *food & drink*. Rivolgendo simili attività quasi esclusivamente ai turisti, il primo e più evidente risultato è l'*esclusione*, di fatto, dei residenti. Quali le caratteristiche di una tale trasformazione in chiave principalmente turistica? Quale la *collocazione* di questi luoghi nella realtà urbana? Quali le funzioni che li connotano? Tentare di rispondere a tali quesiti consentirà di far emergere le specificità dei Sassi e del loro sviluppo improntato alle più spiccate forme di *turistificazione*.

Parole chiave: quartiere storico, commercio, consumo, sviluppo turistico.

1. Premise: memory and souvenirs

The case study focuses on the Sassi of Matera and aims, as main objective, at highlighting the most significant and recent transformations that have characterized the area examined, from the point of view of trade and, in part, of consumption. From this point of view, the theoretical assumptions concern the relationship between urban spaces, commerce and consumption: analyzing these issues permits to understand the extent and rapidity of the changes occurring, in order to “build knowledge that results in appropriate policies, in connection with the social body involved” (Viganoni 2019b, 10)¹.

Particular attention is paid to the impact of tourism development on urban spaces and, specifically, on the historical centres with their valuable cultural heritage. Especially in order to promote more suitable policies, starting from a deep knowledge of local context, trying to outline conditions of economic, social, as well as environmental sustainability, thus ensuring the well-being of communities, avoiding conflictual situations. More generally, the paper contributes to the analysis of the new relationship between cities and tourism (Adamo 2012), a perspective that is also developed through European programmes that enhance the urban-cultural, material and immaterial heritage, with the asset of the big events (Richards, Palmer 2010).

The event-process Matera European Capital of Culture (ECoC) 2019 (D'Alessandro, Stanzone 2018) has, in fact, strengthened the role of the city as tourist destination (Stanzone, Viganoni 2012), accelerating a number of changes, in part already underway within the urban fabric. This has happened exponentially within the Rioni Sassi, a UNESCO heritage site and main tourist attraction of Matera. Often, however, the changes that have occurred do not represent the product of a shared vision and, therefore, negative externalities are emerging, affecting mainly the residents (García 2004). In Matera, tourism has modified

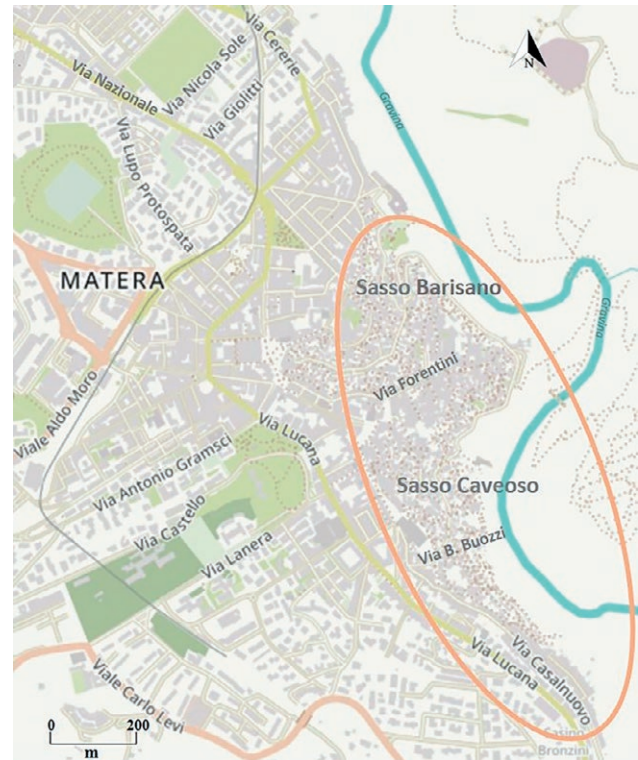


Figure 1. Matera and the Rioni Sassi. Source: authors' elaboration from OpenStreetMap 2019.

the structure and characteristics of the city and, above all, those of a neighbourhood such as the Sassi, where one of the most evident aspects is the proliferation of accommodation and food & drink activities, mostly conceived for tourists (Finkelstein 1999).

In detail, after a description of the main elements that define the origin and evolution of the Rioni, the contribution underlines the Sassi as an example of de-territorialization of the living function and re-territorialization of the commercial spaces in a tourist-oriented key (Kärrholm 2012). Mainly starting from 2015 until today, there has been a deep metamorphosis of the commercial landscape in the Sassi as a direct consequence of tourism development. This phenomenon has accentuated the dichotomy between the rest of the city and the district, which has consolidated its tourist function, while facing the risk of triggering processes of so-called “trullizzazione”² (Stanzone 2009, 8; Semi 2015).

¹ The changes result in the “food and tourism-led transformation marked by rapidity and volatility” (Viganoni 2019b, 24). See the research activity related to PRIN 2015 *Commercio, consumo e città: pratiche, pianificazione e governance per l'inclusione, la resilienza e la sostenibilità urbana*, coordinated by L. Viganoni, who defined the basic theoretical and methodological framework (Viganoni 2017, 2019a). See also the works of Cirelli 2007 and D'Alessandro 2015.

² These aspects have also emerged from the numerous interviews carried out. For further details on the methodology adopted in the field survey see also the following paragraph.



Figure 2. The Rioni Sassi. Source: authors' image, 2019.

1.1 From the Dante's inferno to tourism paradise

The historical centre of Matera comprises three main areas: the Civita, the Sassi (Caveoso and Barisano)³ and the Piano. Although from an administrative point of view the first two are considered as an unicum, the article specifically refers to the Rioni Sassi.

The district of the Sassi is delimited by the ravine, on whose side it is possible to notice the numerous rocky settlements that characterize the Matera site (Fig.1).

The well-known metaphor, portrayed by “Cristo si è fermato ad Eboli”, which compares the shape of the Sassi to the image aroused by the Dante's inferno, really gives

the idea of the intricate labyrinth of this neighborhood; on the contrary, the living conditions that have shocked Italy no longer reflect the current reality (Fig.2). The unhealthy and overcrowded troglodytic dwellings have been transformed, mostly, into luxury accommodation or restaurants, more or less renowned; the cisterns for collecting water have been converted, in some cases, into elegant SPAs; the humble caves have reached real estate values that far exceed the average of the rest of the city⁴. The traces of rural civilization are now only present in the exposed objects used to embellish trattorias, bed & breakfasts and house-museums.

In the Fifties, after the enactment of the law 619 of 17 May 1952 for the rehabilitation of the Sassi, the population was relocated to the newly built suburbs, subsequently, the Rioni remained uninhabited for a long time. Only in the Eighties, through two biennial programs (Law 771/86), the Municipality of Matera gave in sub-

³ The Civita and the Sassi have a considerably different history: the Civita, which houses the Cathedral and the residence of the Archbishop, was originally surrounded by walls and represents the first nucleus of the medieval city, although the first settlements in Matera date back to the Neolithic period (Laureano 1993). The Sassi have developed beyond the limits of the walls, initially with isolated rural buildings, then with clusters of houses and excavated caves inhabited by the humblest part of the Matera population (Giura Longo 1966). Further considerations concerning the commercial organization of the Civita and the Piano are available in Albolino et al. 2019.

⁴ For further details consult Agenzia delle Entrate, <https://www.agenziaentrate.gov.it/servizi/Consultazione/ricerca.htm>, last accessed on 20/02/2020.

Table 1. Trend of the population of Matera and residents of the Sassi in the period 1950-2019. Source: authors' elaboration from Open-data Matera, various years.

	1950	1988	1994	2001	2011	2019
Population of Matera	30.109	53.765	56.387	57.785	59.796	60.411
Living in the Sassi	15.990	1.888	1.887	1.850	1.803	1.446

concession the houses belonging to the State, allowing the repopulation of the area (Tab.1). This is the moment in which the Sassi loose the connotation of marginality, regaining *centrality* in the urban fabric. Over the years, the neighborhood has been almost completely requalified, with the exception of a limited part still awaiting restoration, especially in Sasso Caveoso. However, also because of the re-functionalisation in a tourist way, part of the population has left the districts again: 1.446 inhabitants live here in 2019, with a decrease of 20% compared to the previous decade (1.803 in 2011)⁵.

The particular conformation of the neighborhoods also presents problems of accessibility, which is now guaranteed by a city bus line that mainly transports visitors, service claimed for years by the inhabitants to the local administration; moreover, a system of elevators connecting the Sassi and the Piano has been projected. It involved the construction of seven elevators of which only two have been built so far, the first one connecting piazza V. Veneto-Vico Commercio and Sasso Barisano (completed in 2013); and the other one via Casalnuovo and Sasso Caveoso, completed in February 2019, though both not operative yet⁶.

2. Tourists and commercial activities

The study of the commercial changes cannot ignore the analysis of the main effects of the tourism, which, in recent times and in different areas, has represented the driver of the urban transformation of Matera.

In the Nineties, except from some destinations, the Basilicata Region was not well known in national and international tourism circuits; however, in recent time, the presence of a not so well-known environmental and cultural heritage (D'Alessandro 2009) and the incisive action of the Region and the Territorial Promotion Agency (TPA) produced interesting results. Despite the UNESCO World Heritage recognition has been a very important event, tourism in Matera still had not had an important role until ten years ago.

Certainly, the media *battage* linked to some important cinematographic performances (such as, in 2004, *The Passion* by Mel Gibson) has had a great effect; then, in 2015, a *Financial Times*' article brought the image of Basilicata close to Tuscany (Stanzione, Viganoni 2012)⁷; some successful films and television series, set mainly in the streets of Rioni Caveoso and Barisano, have caused a significant acceleration of tourist development⁸. Therefore, this has amplified the attention on the Sassi, which have always been the main element of attraction on urban scale.

It should be pointed out that our study mainly focuses on the city of Matera, but the Sassi are undoubtedly the first attractor reached by tourists. Moreover, it is possible to say that the tourist flows directly involve the two Rioni⁹.

In the period 2000-2009, the city of Matera registered an increment in arrivals of more than 120% (from about 37.000 to more than 81.000), while overnight stays increased by 50% (Stanzione, Viganoni 2012, 558). Since then, the positive trend continued to grow: overall, after ten years, there is an ongoing increase in arrivals of almost 380% and touristic presences of around 450%. Nevertheless, here has been analysed the period 2015-2019, because the designation of the city as European Capital of Culture represented a turning point. This is confirmed by the arrivals and presences trend, exclusive-

⁵ The data reported are the ones elaborated by the municipal bureaus as census data for the Sassi district are not available. The selected years describe a significant trend of the period examined. In 1994, after UNESCO World Heritage recognition, 1.887 people lived in the Sassi (out of a total population of 56.387 in Matera). The population remains substantially stable until 2011 (1.803); then there is a progressive reduction until 2015 (1.647), where, one year after the designation of Matera ECoC, the area shows a clear transformation in touristic direction (see Open-data Matera, various years).

⁶ In February 2019 the local administration cancelled the operations due to the fragility of the architectural context.

⁷ In these years, the implementation of a specific Integrated Tourist Offer Package and the tourism Plans were examples of quite incisive strategies, policies and actions.

⁸ About the tourist enhancement of urban film sets see Nicosia 2012.

⁹ The data commented here are based on different survey methods, made available by the TPA database, Matera Open-data, the Municipality data catalogue (please refer to <http://dati.comune.matera.it/>, last accessed on 10/04/2020) and Matera Infocamere, that is the Registro delle imprese created by Camera di Commercio. Useful has been the survey of Datacontact, an important private company based in Matera, that carries out communication and market research activities. Recently it presented an interesting elaboration of the results of over 4.500 interviews about Matera2019, proposed to residents and tourists, face to face and online. We would like to thank Dr. R. Tosto. In order to study the commercial structure of Matera, starting from the overall list of the enterprises registered on urban scale, the data of those located in the streets of the Sassi have been then extracted.

Table 2. The main dynamics related to tourist flows reported in Matera in the period 2015-2019. Source: authors' elaboration from TPA data, various years.

	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	% 2015-2019
Customers movement						
ARRIVALS						
Italians	153.572	186.028	204.997	250.916	275.377	79%
Foreigners	61.352	64.065	76.517	93.897	112.781	83%
<i>Total</i>	<i>214.924</i>	<i>250.093</i>	<i>281.514</i>	<i>344.813</i>	<i>388.158</i>	<i>81%</i>
OVERNIGHT STAYS						
Italians	248.515	297.993	323.086	394.267	524.850	111%
Foreigners	105.130	111.428	124.635	153.265	205.584	96%
<i>Total</i>	<i>353.645</i>	<i>409.421</i>	<i>447.721</i>	<i>547.532</i>	<i>730.434</i>	<i>107%</i>
Accommodation capacity						
Hotels	27	26	29	31	36	33%
Extra-hotels	274	456	556	608	682	149%
<i>Total</i>	<i>301</i>	<i>482</i>	<i>585</i>	<i>639</i>	<i>718</i>	<i>139%</i>
<i>Total bed-places</i>	<i>3.593</i>	<i>4.527</i>	<i>5.283</i>	<i>5.847</i>	<i>6.566</i>	<i>83%</i>

ly highlighting positive values, registering an increase of more than 80% in terms of arrivals and 107% of presences (Tab.2)¹⁰.

Significant changes have also affected the typology and the origin of tourists: in recent years the number of foreigners has multiplied (+83% of arrivals and +96% of presences), along with national and local tourism that, until ten years ago, represented the almost exclusive category¹¹.

According to our work, which focuses on the evolution of commercial activities in the Sassi, the most interesting data concern the accommodation, since the commercial landscape of the Rioni – and in part also of

the Piano (Albolino et al. 2019) – has radically changed in this direction: hospitality activities and food & drink enterprises represent nearly all the retail businesses located here¹². In particular, these last aspects concern the Sassi, an area of about 27 hectares, where the development of the total area appears larger, considering that in every little street there are *recinti*, climbs and stairs and that several houses hide caves and cisterns still unexplored (Fig.3). Here, there is a significant concentration: analysing in detail the streets of the neighbourhoods there are about 300 accommodation facilities, principally extra-hotel activities (there are only 15 luxury hotels)¹³. Moreover, there are 100 accommodations available on the Airbnb website, a third of the overall Airbnb hospitality activities in the city¹⁴. A similar growth may depend on

¹⁰ In 2015 the number of arrivals has reached 214.924 units, whereas the number of overnight stays 353.645; during the following four-year period, there has been an average annual increase of around 16% (in terms of arrivals, with a peak of 22% between 2017-18) and 22% (presences), reaching the 13% and 33% respectively in 2019. The ECOC year has recorded significant values: about 400.000 people visited Matera (more than 730 overnight stays), preferring the summer months. Additionally, it should be taken into account that the data presented here may probably be underestimated: for some years now, extra-hotel accommodation, especially in the Sassi, seems not to have been systematically acknowledged. As a consequence, even guests of these accommodation facilities might not be included in the census.

¹¹ If the Apulians are still the prevailing percentage, the Italians who visit the Sassi come mostly from Campania, Lazio and Lombardia (regions that compete for the primacy of this ranking).

Increasingly tourist flows are also recorded from abroad: since 2015 there has been an increase in arrivals (from over 60.000 to just under 113.000) and presences (from 105.130 to 205.584). US, France, UK and Germany are the most represented countries, followed by the Netherlands, Switzerland, China and Japan.

¹² In 2015 the city of Matera there were 27 hotels (with a total of 1.645 beds) which became 36 (with 2.071 beds) in 2019; more significant is the data relating to the non-hotel establishments: they showed a total increase of almost 150% (from 274 to 682, while the number of beds exceeds 130%: from 1.498 to 4.495). It also emerges that while in the previous years tourists preferred hotels, in 2019 presences were equally distributed.

¹³ In fact, there are mainly holiday homes (30% of those present in Matera are located in the Sassi: 171 out of a total of 546), rooms to rent (56), b&b (48), one hostel and one holiday home, the first one in the Sasso Caveoso and the other in the Barisano.

¹⁴ In Matera there is a total of 300 Airbnb accommodation facilities. Moreover, Airbnb (<https://www.airbnb.it/>), created in 2007 and spread in Italy about ten years ago, is an alternative to traditional accommodation. This is a community where the homeowners rent out their houses to tourists. In order to obtain data on the Airbnb accommodation located in the Sassi, it has been identified the precise location of each activity by analysing the website (<https://www.airbnb.it/s/Matera--Italy>, last accessed on



Figure 3. The dense network of narrow streets, *recinti* and stairs. Source: authors' image, 2019.

the constant improvement in the quality of this type of accommodation offer (as also demonstrated by the Booking.com evaluations), thus presenting an original and more territorialized character, as well as on the flexibility of the offer – which is often characterized by a strong *experiential vocation* – and by more accessible costs¹⁵.

Equally significant are the numbers relating to food & drink activities: due to the specific features they denote, they appear to be a direct consequence of tourism development. The study on the urban area called Piano already showed surprising data, but the analysis of the Sassi reveals the phenomenon extent¹⁶.

10/01/2020). We also thank Dr. F. Marra for the advices and data provided. The work also revealed a peculiarity: some bed & breakfasts – this is a fairly limited number – are also proposed on the Airbnb platform. But in these cases they work mainly as b&b or *viceversa*. At least so say the hosts contacted.

¹⁵ However, it is clear that the change of these accommodation segments is a direct consequence of ECoC, because only a few hotels were born in 2015 (Sarti 2019).

¹⁶ The Opendata Matera website highlights (September 2018) the presence of 76 shops: about 90% of them are restaurants (43, with a good presence of pizzerias, bracerias, trattorias, with degustation of typical

The data examination of the period 2015-2018 confirms the transformation taking place. During the period under consideration 62 businesses were launched in the Sassi¹⁷: excluding accommodation facilities, there are restaurants and delicatessens (34, many of which are also bars)¹⁸, grocery shops (5, including a bakery and a wine shop, with two of them also selling souvenirs); bars (3, including an ice cream shop and a winebar which is also a rotisserie), a bookshop that also sells gift items. Another 11 shops appear to be linked to the tourist vocation of the districts: specifically, there is a workshop that develops and sells innovative products and services for the enhancement of cultural heritage, a bicycle rental, as well as different activities aimed at storytelling of the *modus vivendi* of Sassi rural culture, as well as the promotion of events and the organization of exhibitions,

products) and bars (25, including two winebars and a non-alcoholic bar). There are also 8 other grocery shops (activities also carried out by many bars) and an herbalist shop.

¹⁷ See data from Infocamere, March 2019.

¹⁸ And there is also a home cooking business.

moreover there are artistic handicraft restoration and conservation atelier, and museums¹⁹. Besides these, there are also the activities of street vendors, recently regulated by the Municipality, who mainly sell typical products and souvenirs, generally of poor quality, in via Madonna delle Virtù.

3. The Sassi trade

The main road of the neighborhood starts from via dei Fiorentini and continues with via Madonna delle Virtù up to piazza San Pietro Caveoso, proceeding with via B. Buoizzi which leads out of the Rioni²⁰. The road, which borders, in the part of via Madonna delle Virtù, the natural limit of the district formed by the ravine, connects the two main accesses to the Sassi, the first one in piazza V. Veneto, and the second one in via Casalnovo. This street (about 2,000 metres), which interrupts the Escherian perspective of the dense overlapping of caves, houses, narrow paths, steps and squares, follows the bed of the two *grabiglioni*, watercourses that used to run through the Sassi, interred in 1924 (Giura Longo 1966).

The first phase of repopulation, at the beginning of the Nineties, was not followed – as also confirmed by the above mentioned data – by an adequate articulation of the commercial offer, in particular of neighbouring shops such as bakeries, supermarkets, newsstands, tabacchi, which are indispensable especially because of the peculiar structure and the resulting hard accessibility, in particular for the aged population.

Today, the Rioni are connoted by an evolving commercial landscape: there are increasing numbers of new food & drink localizations, both on the main roads and in the small squares and secondary streets, alternating local food and more standardized products. Compared to the Piano area, there is a prevalence of restaurants and trattorias with local cuisine, rather than businesses providing street food or take-away. As it was habitual for the inhabitants of the Sassi to use the space in front of the house as an extension of their home, so the restaurant activities also occupy the streets or public squares. Indoor spaces, sometimes insufficient to meet a constantly growing demand, are increased by the tables placed outside, especially during the summer season. As in the Piano area, which has recently seen a crescendo

of food-related activities, the alternation of dehors often disturbs the perception of the peculiar Unesco site, obscured by umbrellas or more elaborate structures, as well as by groups of tourists waiting for their turn.

A disorderly group of umbrellas also characterizes piazza San Pietro Caveoso, the largest of the Sassi, which hosts several attractions such as the homonymous church, the rocky spur of Madonna delle Virtù and the belvedere from which it is possible to admire a long part of the Gravina torrent and the rocky settlements. In the square there is also the terminus of the urban transport service of the Sassi line. The place, therefore, where via Madonna delle Virtù is followed by via B. Buoizzi, gathers a significant flow of visitors and here are present most of the stands selling handicrafts and souvenirs. These are unauthorized traders for this area and in order to rectify this situation the administration has provided a call for fifteen stalls, for the sale of non-food products, in via Madonna delle Virtù²¹, this position, however, is not considered satisfactory by retailers due to the low tourist flow.

The high concentration of tourist and cultural attractions, accommodation activities and restaurants, draws many visitors especially during the day, leaving the Sassi almost desolated in the evening, except on summer weekends. The movida privileges the Piano, in particular the axis that starts from piazza V. Veneto and continues along via del Corso and via Ridola, but at the same time it also gains prestige via delle Beccherie and piazza del Sedile (Albolino et al. 2019). This phenomenon contributes to emphasize the break between the Piano and the Sassi, giving the impression of an entertaining park that can be found in many historical centres intended almost exclusively for tourist use. The standardization of retailscape, moreover, also demotivates the use of the Rioni by the citizens of Matera, for reasons of leisure, who often avoid the restaurants located here due to the rise of prices and who prefer the Piano area for shopping, which although it is increasingly oriented to the tourist demand, is still able to respond satisfactorily to the needs of the residents.

The progressive invasion of the Rioni by commercial activities, mainly destined to the so-called temporary inhabitants, as already mentioned, was followed by the further recent abandonment of the residents who settled here in the Nineties, also due to the lack of basic services.

Currently, the significant flow of visitors has raised the necessity for a medical service and a local police sta-

¹⁹ They concern, in particular, the setting up of exhibition spaces, aimed at telling Matera and Murgia story, and the bookshop of the exhibition dedicated to Salvador Dali. There are also 1 shop selling ceramics and various furnishings, 2 film production and filming with drones services.

²⁰ Via Buoizzi and via Madonna delle Virtù are limited traffic areas, while via dei Fiorentini is more accessible by car.

²¹ Comune di Matera, Ufficio commercio (04/04/2019) "Assegnazione stagionale posteggi Rione Sassi prodotti non alimentari", <http://www.comune.matera.it/avvisi/item/3501>, last accessed on 10/05/2020.

tion in the districts, but these, are measures put in place to meet the necessities of tourists, that are the main users of the Rioni nowadays, rather than those of the inhabitants²². Following the same approach, it seems to have been issued the last public call for tenders that allows the assignment of buildings in the Sassi²³: the Municipality makes available “17 state property buildings for non-residential use located in the Rioni Sassi meant for neighbouring shops”²⁴. Always expected, the presence of retailers of basic products, seems to arrive when *the neighborhoods* have disappeared, replaced by activities for tourists²⁵. The concession of these properties could represent, today, a good opportunity to satisfy the primary needs of the last residents, but the commercial categories mentioned in the public call allow the inclusion of several typologies of products that may not be very useful for the inhabitants but more oriented to the needs of tourists²⁶. Considering the high cost for the renovation of the property, which will be covered by the sub-concessionaire, it is conceivable that the investor wishes to take advantage of the echo of the process triggered by Matera2019 to intercept customers that can guarantee greater profits than the sale of *bread and milk*.

These properties might alternatively have been intended for residential use by singles or young couples (the latter measure provided for by Law 771/86), attempting to balance the phenomenon of tourism tertiarisation and gentrification which has occurred in recent years.

²² Comune di Matera, Settore Opere Pubbliche (29/04/2019) “Verbale di presa d’atto: realizzazione di un presidio sanitario e sede distaccata della polizia locale nella ex scuola materna di Piazzetta Garibaldi”, <http://www.comune.matera.it/avvisi/item/3572>, last accessed on 09/05/2020.

²³ Following the population displacement from the Rioni, nearly all the houses have been acquired as public property and given in concession to the Municipality of Matera. The two biennial programs for the rehabilitation of the Sassi (provided for by Law 771/1986) have allowed the assignment of the properties with agreed rent for a duration of thirty years. Most of the houses was sub-concessed in the 1990s. The rent, agreed and paid in advance, was intended, among other things, for the renovation and extraordinary maintenance works to be carried out by the Municipality of Matera (Pontrandolfi 2002).

²⁴ Comune di Matera, Settore Gestione del Territorio-Servizio Sassi (07/05/2019) “Bando pubblico per l’assegnazione in sub-concessione, per anni 30, di immobili demaniali, ubicati nei Rioni Sassi di Matera da destinare ad esercizi commerciali di vicinato”, <http://www.comune.matera.it/avvisi/item/3569>, last accessed on 09/05/2020.

²⁵ The neighbourhood in the Sassi represented both an architectural and social unit: the contiguity of the houses, opened around the small square or a courtyard, allowed the natural relationship between the inhabitants, that strengthen their social relations outside the door of the house.

²⁶ Such as the sale of travel items and souvenirs, antiquities, modelling items, art galleries, paintings, sculptures and graphics with historical and artistic value, furniture and objects with historical or artistic value, philatelic items, numismatic items and other collection items.

It should be remembered that the State property, conceded in the Nineties at an agreed rent, envisaged an amortisation plan for restructuring costs. At present, the sub-concessions do not determine appropriate revenues for the administration, which in the meantime has to face the expenses for the ordinary maintenance in the Sassi, significantly increased, also because of the commercial activities established here and the high number of tourists²⁷.

In the Sassi there is a considerable part of the public building heritage of Matera and to this must be commensurate the financial resources for the maintenance that cannot be covered by the property rents which are highly inadequate both at current costs and at market prices. Moreover, the significant presence of accommodation, restaurant and commercial activities turn out to be a source of conflict, not only with the residents, whose quiet is disturbed, but also among the operators themselves, whose needs are often divergent (noise coming from pubs and restaurants close to bed & breakfasts).

4. Opinions and perceptions from the interviews with the people who live the Sassi: some conclusive considerations

It is clear that as a direct consequence of the tourist flows described, the Sassi district, especially in recent years, has strongly invested in conversion of its commercial spaces, concentrating them on all types of accommodation and food & drink activities. The research points out that, except for rare exceptions, the businesses aroused as a result of the designation, today belong to these two categories, aimed almost exclusively at tourists, while there are no essential shops needed in a residential area.

It should be noted here that the proposed study is the result of a detailed series of interviews (supporting the desk analysis), addressed to the witnesses of the dynamics in progress, that we consider privileged mainly because they are historical residents of the Rioni, because of their work (they are owners of entrepreneurial activities) or because they are representatives of the institutions.

This has been done in order to replace the planned field survey: it was opted for interviewing people who have a good knowledge of the places, so as to obtain

²⁷ This is also what emerges from the interview with M. Morelli. The collection of waste, for example, implies high costs due to the peculiar morphology of the districts that does not allow simple operation of motorized vehicles and therefore requires a number of people that carry out the work manually.

adequate descriptions of the actual situation. The inhabitants were asked about the living conditions in the Sassi²⁸; to the others, especially entrepreneurs, we asked about the main changes occurred in terms of tourism and the critical issues identified, from the designation to the end of 2019, also inviting them to provide an overall assessment of the year of the event and possible future perspectives²⁹.

The economic motivation of the ongoing transformation is clear but it seems to be paradoxical and source of numerous problems³⁰. A further complication is represented by the difficulties – aggravated by the problems of accessibility – to inhabit an environment that is already considered complex from an architectural point of view.

Tourism in the Sassi has *de facto* altered the functional structure of this residential area which is being transformed into a cultural asset, mainly available to tourists rather than its inhabitants. Moreover, it appears evident that the declared residences would may hide the high density of b&b, holiday homes and apartments of the Airbnb network. It is no coincidence that in via Casalnuovo, which is one of the streets with the highest concentration of residential properties, there is also a huge number of extra-hotel accommodation activities³¹.

The application dossier for ECoC also defined the

tourists as “temporary citizens”: active participants in a long-term “civic project” based on mutual learning, creativity and shared values. Well, it does not seem that the “civic project” mentioned above, the strategy that becomes action by involving citizens, has been fully implemented.

Throughout the year of events Matera 2019 the volunteers were so many, but often the inhabitants of the Sassi, rather than being protagonists of a kind of “greeter destination” (Holmes, Smith 2009)³², were relegated to the background, as it has been happening for years: the neighborhood has strengthened its role as cultural attractor but according to many viewpoints the ECoC event has excluded residents from the decision-making processes³³. This is the opinion expressed by the majority of those who are engaged in hospitality and food & drink activities, but who often do not live there³⁴.

Beyond the importance of the event, in the Sassi it seems to be the awareness that a process based on cultural heritage, on its fruition associated with innovation, has produced intervention of urban regeneration but has failed to ensure in general a better quality of life for residents. Probably – with the exception of neighbourhood relations and the sense of pride for the realized events – the sense of belonging and participation has not been strengthened³⁵.

The commercial landscape, lacking essential services, seems to confirm this, although it is aimed at so-called “temporary citizens”. But if the tourist becomes the only actual resident, this process will probably lead the place to turn into an entertaining park at worst, or

²⁸ Due to the architectural difficulties, problems of accessibility and the lack of primary services (commercial and non-commercial).

²⁹ The analysis was based, therefore, on the results of the forty qualitative interviews with residents and, more generally, with city users, carried out *in loco* (which turned into telephone interviews during the lockdown), as well as on the results of Datacontact's research (see note 9) and on the direct knowledge of the places: the authors have been working in Matera for several years. We would like to thank all those who have shown great availability and attention to our research in a difficult time. Among others A. Antodaro, G. Armando, A. Bonora, V. Corleto, D. Coscia, A. Esposto, L. Paolicelli, T. Mariani, R. Montinaro, M. Morelli, F. Ponte, A. Pontrandolfi. For convenience reasons here are present only some notes on the opinions expressed by the many people interviewed.

³⁰ For many, after the initial enthusiasm, the turning point expected with the ECoC has betrayed expectations: “the real change” has stopped at the edge of the Sassi. Some have even spoken of a substantial deterioration in the quality of life for the inhabitants: *invasion* of tourists; noisy nightlife; maintenance and cleaning concentrated in the main streets; lack of parking; a shuttle bus, set up by the Municipality, which follows a route considered not useful for residents; many restaurants with high costs (“it is not possible to buy a sandwich or simply some bread”, “a greengrocer's shop would also be important for tourists, not only for residents”). And there is a sort of marked break point with the rest of the city (it is used to say “go up to the Piano, go up to the city”).

³¹ And the same happens in via Buozzi, via Fiorentini and San Pietro Caveoso. According to the interviewees, especially residents, this happened with the more or less explicit approval of the institutions that in the Sassi have favoured the establishment of the accommodation activities and privileged the needs of restaurateurs over those of the inhabitants, punctually expressed also by the Committee of Rioni Sassi Neighborhoods.

³² For this particular type of tourist hospitality and participation of local communities please also refer to <https://globalgreeternetwork.info/>, last accessed on 14/05/2020.

³³ This is what has been said several times by the inhabitants involved; however, even entrepreneurs report such difficulties, although they are less critical about engagement issue, charging it to individuals rather than to the administration, and sometimes complain about the need for greater autonomy. On Matera2019, however, the opinions of economic operators are decidedly positive, although some point out that “it could have been done better and earlier”; there are also those who note the absence of programming aimed at “after 2019”.

³⁴ One of the historical residents said: “they are not real Sassi inhabitants”. It should be underlined, however, that this is not always the case: some entrepreneurs have launched accommodation activities inspired by the so-called responsible tourism and consider them not only an economic activity by itself but also the possibility of meeting people, sharing experiences, opening up to the outside world a reality as rich in history as the Sassi. And actually the “tourism of emotions” is the real future prospect.

³⁵ It emerges, in fact, the enthusiasm of the people of Matera for the goal achieved, but at the same time more than 80% defined themselves as spectators rather than protagonists of the multiplicity of projects put in place; moreover, the 40% asked for a greater involvement of citizens in the upstream organization of cultural initiatives (Datacontact 2020). The same happens in our interviews.

rather into a commercial showcase, resulting in the expulsion of its inhabitants, as Magnaghi (2017) argues about Alberobello³⁶.

This also refers to the typical products, so much requested by tourists. In the Sassi there was the bread making tradition: after the *sfollamento* no trace remained (Fadini 2012). The absence of commercial activities aimed at local consumption also risks erasing what could be a closer link between the tradition of the places and the tourism development.

There is no doubt that many criticalities are also to be attributed to the peculiar topography and historical evolution of the Sassi, but it seems to emerge the need to intervene concretely and in a more focused way.

Also because, in the meantime, the pandemic has opened totally unpredictable scenarios that will have to be tackled through shared strategies and multiscale policies.

In order to better manage the processes of tourism and gentrification of the Sassi area, it seems advisable to have a significant commitment of the institutions in different directions. It emerges mainly the need to promote more participation and communication campaigns, probably also through a greater connection with the Rioni Sassi Committee: the good aggregation capacity of local associations in the Sassi is really important; this should be combined with the need to coordinate more effectively the influx of tourists, especially those who do not stay overnight and that sometimes turns into the most deleterious *bite and run* tourism. From this point of view, it might also be necessary to update the framework of regional tourism planning, also considering the most recent events, so as to be able to respond to the changing needs of the territories and populations, with particular attention to the new role – which must be recognized and consolidated – of the internal areas³⁷. This may prevent further conflict situations in the future.

These are only some of the aspects to consider, but, more generally, in a climate of strong uncertainty (although positive attitudes are not absent) there is the need to define as soon as possible a strategic programme, intended as an organized and coherent response is required, that involves all the actors present

in the area and promotes the key actions to tackle the situation being experienced.

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³⁶ It is no coincidence that in the survey of Datacontact, in response to the question of how Matera became after the candidacy, the adjectives "international" and "famous" are highlighted, but 80% also adopt the expression "more commodified".

³⁷ One of the objectives, in extreme synthesis, is to promote forms of diversification of tourist flows. This would allow to encourage a rebalancing of the provincial and regional tourism development in favor of contexts that can be transformed into privileged destinations of a more sustainable tourism; at the same time, it could be envisaged the visit to the Sassi in a more suitable way adapted to the specificity of the place (thus also ensuring the coexistence of residential and tourist functions).

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Bologna City Branding

ALESSANDRA BONAZZI

Dipartimento di Filosofia e Comunicazione (FILCOM), Università degli Studi di Bologna, Italy

E-mail: alessandra.bonazzi@unibo.it

Abstract. The purpose of the article was to analyze the standardized city branding process that since 2014 has restructured the public space of Bologna and redefined the emotional territory of its citizens through the active remodeling or branding of urban policies. As is known, Bologna's global brand is based on the generative logo *City of Food is Bologna* (Bonazzi, Frixia 2019), which has re-generated the spaces of consumption by translating them according to the terms of contemporary documedial capital (Ferraris 2020; Semi 2015). However, the writing of this article has coincided with the latest stages of the Quarantine imposed by Covid-19 and the imminent start of so-called Phase 2. The unprecedented event of the pandemic has temporarily suspended the functioning of the current *City of Food* by placing the atmosphere of euphoric consumption in quarantine. In other words, a *Landscape of Quarantine* has critically overlapped that of the *City of Food* and revealed its fragility and crisis – which, however, was already made evident by the voracity with which branding had consumed its ethical potential (Arvidsson 2007). On the threshold of the quarantine, and waiting to understand the fate of the Bologna branding, the whole process has therefore been analyzed in the light of Jean Baudrillard's analytical categories relating to the "fourth, the fractal (or viral, or radiant) stage of value" (Baudrillard 2001a) and within the temporal torsion that is typical of the unexpected interference of any crisis.

Keywords: Landscape of Quarantine, urban space, city branding, food.

Riassunto. Lo scopo dell'articolo era analizzare il processo standardizzato di city branding che dal 2014 ha ristrutturato lo spazio pubblico di Bologna e ridefinito il *territorio emotivo* dei suoi cittadini mediante l'attiva rimodulazione o *brandizzazione* delle politiche urbane. Com'è noto il marchio globale di Bologna dipende dal logo generativo *City of Food is Bologna* (Bonazzi, Frixia 2019) che ha ri-generato gli spazi del consumo traducendoli secondo i termini del contemporaneo capitale documediale (Ferraris 2020; Semi 2015). Tuttavia, la stesura del presente articolo ha coinciso con le ultime fasi della Quarantena imposta dal Covid-19 e l'imminente avvio della cosiddetta Fase 2. L'inedito evento della pandemia ha temporaneamente sospeso il funzionamento dell'attuale *City of Food* mettendone in quarantena l'atmosfera di consumo euforico. In altre parole, un *Landscape of Quarantine* si è criticamente sovrapposto a quello della *City of Food* e ne ha rilevato la fragilità e la crisi – già comunque evidenziata dalla voracità con la quale il branding aveva consumato il suo potenziale *etico* (Arvidsson 2007). Sulla soglia della quarantena, e in attesa di capire il destino del branding bolognese, l'intero processo è stato perciò analizzato alla luce delle categorie analitiche di Jean Baudrillard relative al "fourth, the fractal (or viral, or radiant) stage of value" (Baudrillard 2001a) e dentro la torsione temporale che è propria dell'imprevista interferenza di ogni crisi.

Parole chiave: Paesaggio della quarantena, spazio urbano, city branding, cibo.

The fourth stage is the phase of viruses.
At that stage, we are in a fourth, viral
dimension where resistance is no longer
possible. What can you do then?
Jean Baudrillard, *Fragments*

The secret is:
“come over here and make it up,
since it’s the tourist himself
who takes part in the narration”.
Roberto Grandi

1. Landscape of Quarantine and “Viral Ontology”: a necessary premise

In 2010 Nicola Twilley and Geoff Manaugh curated an exhibition entitled “Landscapes of Quarantine”. According to the two curators, spatial separation is presented as a strategic response to the suspicion. More precisely: “quarantine is a strategy of separation and containment – the creation of a hygienic boundary between two or more things, for the purpose of protecting one from exposure to the other. It is a spatial response to suspicion, threat, and uncertainty”¹. Now, ten years later in 2020, Covid-19 is suddenly staging an intense global Landscape of Quarantine, necessitating a worldwide crisis lockdown and torsion in a global “future-in-past”² timeframe of quarantine, as it proceeds towards the viral restructuring of capital flows, consumption and narratives – including that of our social/individual bodies, simultaneously dangerous and endangered.

Covid-19, with the inevitable result of physical and moral quarantine, has presented itself as a truly global line of *crisis* capable of unhinging the last residue of apparent technical/immunological security – the dream of being able to control the infection – representing “the archetypal conflict that confronts public health: the tension between society’s dual interests in safeguarding individual liberty while protecting and promoting the health of its citizens” (Ries 2004, 3).

Translated into the outcome of our research, this accelerated line of torsion or crisis has quarantined the dissonant geography of the Bologna *City of Food* genera-

¹ <https://dprbcn.wordpress.com/2010/03/04/landscapes-of-quarantine-curated-by-geoff-manaugh-and-nicola-twilley/>

² The presentiment of a future of crises that comes from the past and from the margins is the form of thought proper to the crisis. See Derida 1999.



MAP 002: *Quarantine* by David Garcia



City of Food is Bologna

tive logo and the euphoric communication capital that animated its *Brandscape* (Vanolo 2017). Indeed, “the spatial response to suspicion, threat, and uncertainty” is clearly irreducible to the scenes of consumption in which, to paraphrase Peter Sloterdijk, the principle of availability for consumption is given in the form of *signs*

and opportunities for contact. On the eve of the imminent reopening of the places of consumption and commerce (the so-called Phase 2), it is the imperative of the “security mechanism” (Lakoff 2017, 99-100) that dictates the geometry of social distancing: the renegotiation of quantitative terms in the relationship between space, sociality and consumption. This is what is happening in Bologna:

“The Mayor gathers the appeal by the handfulls, [...] promising for Phase 2 tables in place of the blue stripes. Will the Bolognese hosts be forced to reduce their seats due to social distancing? And will the City widen the spaces for the dehors, regardless of the size of the premises, even at the cost of sacrificing parking. “If a club has to reduce its seating by half – says the mayor – we’ll ensure that throughout the summer season instead of the blue stripes there will be tables.” As well as ensuring “all possible efforts to reduce city taxes”.

The Councilor for Commerce Alberto Aitini points out: “We’re currently working on the dehors in order to help out the merchants: we’ll cater to the needs of everyone, those of the residents who have to go home, as well as those of pedestrians or cyclists who have to pass through” (“Repubblica Bologna” 04/30/2020).

But the geometry that increases the urban space assigned to the re/production of value doesn’t take into account the emotional needs of Bologna’s immaterial global *City of Food* branding and its typical scenes. So the obvious question that circulates among the tables is:

What will the City of Food be like next Monday, May 18th, [...] Next Monday won’t be the same as before. Forget the casual chatter at the Osteria del Sole, along with that Vico-lo Ranocchi stunned by the evening crowd, where not even a pin could pass. Who knows if you can still meet people “by chance”, if there will be “love at first sight”, because it will be a scene “by reservation only”. [...] Will you still be able to chat with the host, who in many cases has been a rare confidant? And all those yummy things in the form of canapes and finger food in residence at the counter, at aperitif time, along with a glass of wine, a chat and then off to the next stage of an endless evening? [...] In the meantime, while awaiting better times, the Bolognese restaurant world is being forced to reinvent itself. Reducing the place settings by half, annulling spontaneity, with the aggregation that turns inexorably into a gathering, the aperitif is transfigured into an Afternoon Tea, the defense of the tureen with tortellini, to be brought steaming hot to the table, is the daily exercise in this new social order where the possible arrival of plexiglass is announced as the end of the world, when taverns will become non-places like highway restaurants. The kitchens start up again, the dining service becomes more formal, hope lingers on and it is hoped, as all the restaurateurs in the shadow of the Two Towers say

in chorus, “that the customers won’t be afraid and will come back to grace our tables, because this state of affairs can’t last forever”. (“Repubblica Bologna”, 14/05/2020, italics mine)

In other words, the calculation of urban social distancing activates in the *City of Food* the suspicion of viral and intangible contamination as an *atmospheric* principle (Sloterdijk 2013) which fatally contaminates, by sanitizing it, that euphoric atmosphere of consumption assigned to *Foodtainment*’s own themes: the crowded sharing of experience and the hypersocialization/aestheticization of consumption (Finkelstein 1999). It’s the formal, salutary strictness of social distancing on reservation and the insistence on physical boundaries – signs that deny any chance of contact – that makes manifest and upsetting the potential contagion process that “requires contact”, but more subtly “it always implies more than this: it implies absorption, invasion, vulnerability, the breaking of a boundary imagined as secure, in which the other becomes part of the self” (Bashford, Hooker 2001, 4).

For now this is exactly where we are: on the cultural threshold of an impending crisis, in the expectation of a future-in-past that afflicts the political space of the Urban *Landscape of Quarantine* and infects the scenes of profit of the Bolognese *Foodscape* that oscillate between desire, circulation and “cognitive dissonances”³. And this torsion, this polysemic line of tension between control and profit – between biopolitics and bio-informational capitalism – is an interference that unites the multiple planes in which the two landscapes unfold. It can be called contagion, brand equity or, which is the same, “viral ontology”⁴. However, the principle of that “total metonymy”, by nature viral, which, according to Jean Baudrillard, is the proper figure of the “fourth, the fractal (or viral, or radiant) stage of value”, in which “there is no point of reference at all, and value radiates in all directions, occupying all interstices [...] Properly speaking there is no law of value, merely a sort of epidemic of value”, the fourth phase of a capitalism based precisely on the circulation and active production and

³ The expression belongs to the Director-General of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) Yves Daccord, who claims that “The great danger of the present situation is the (cognitive) dissonance the virus creates – between personal risk, which is very low, and community risk, which is very high”. The danger naturally lies in the fact that the natural tendency is to ignore the community risk line. Cit. in Klimburg, Faesen, Verhagen, Mirtl 2020, 5.

⁴ On the viral form of the contemporary theoretical thought treated here, I refer the reader essentially to: Jameson 1997; Bardini 2011; Deleuze, Guattari 2011: in particular see chapter “1730: Becoming-Intense, becoming-Animal, Becoming-Imperceptible”; Baudrillard 2001a; Braidotti 2002.

sharing of a viral communication of value (Baudrillard 1993, 5). In some ways, this critical torsion is also the immediate biological translation of the digital metaphor of the experience of our time: “going viral has come to refer to an infectious idea that replicates itself, like a real virus, spreading rapidly through online networks” (Fisher 2016, 117), touching bodies, affections and narratives. Just as “contagion” is also the sign of the repeated overcoming of vulnerable bodily boundaries which bears the name of *biocapitalism* (Bardini 2011).

It is on this threshold – between biology and technology, affections and experiences, bodies and value, containment and contagion – that research on the places of consumption in Bologna should recommence. The choice is whether to do this by starting from the idea of “Landscape of Quarantine”, orienting oneself with David Garcia’s MAP 002 – to wit *Quarantine* – or from the prismatic Foodscape, illuminated by the irresistible viral phase indicated by Jean Baudrillard. Whatever the position, it is nonetheless the current unfolding viral order, of capital or life touched by ghostly physical or moral quarantines, that with which the future geography will have to critically reckon. And it doesn’t matter which version of the topic you choose.

2. On the threshold: branding, “ethical capital” and food

For now the version is Bologna *City of Food*’s, and the reckoning will be made with the standardized order of value extraction in the form of emotion and available atmospheres, by way of the food theme – an ideal commodity because by its nature it’s boundless. Such an order, which doesn’t differ from the one Baudrillard theorized, requires the implementation of a standard procedure capable of crystallizing the aesthetic and cultural values of any city⁵.

The procedure doesn’t reserve any surprises and always achieves the expected result. The standard rests on the projective lines of imagination and desire, causing the design of a precise, convincing image of the city. The image is based on the shared, participatory narrative of what makes it truly unique, by selecting and re-signifying denotative and connotative traits that seduce consumers

and investors. The result is the production of a desire that the urban image externalizes and circulates, whose aesthetic, symbolic, experiential value is computed in relation to the stocks of current information capitalism.

The calculation of value obviously depends on the euphoric consumer atmosphere that the image suggests and on their coinciding with the expectations and desires disseminated online⁶. Hence, the calm that welcomes the progressive commercialization of the public space, the active symbolic construction of rigid codes of access to the practice and social use of this space isn’t surprising, nor is the domestication of the antagonistic dimension of politics within the regeneration plan devised by the brand (Atkinson 2003; Eshuis, Klijn, Braun 2014). In other words, to extract value from the immaterial, symbolic dimension of the material consumption of cities, it is necessary to make urban policies “ghostly” (Vanolo 2017) and to push on the “phantasmagoric” dimension of the mediated sharing of emotions related to consumption (Andreotti, Lahiji 2017). Therefore urban branding prescribes three moves: the gentrification of crystallized spaces, the exploitation for profit of informational (Dyer-Withford 1999) or documedial capital (Ferraris 2018, 2020) to extract the so-called *brand equity*, the recourse to more advanced neoliberal governance and consultancy policy.

This global order of city branding has also engulfed Bologna since 2014, which, as is known, has been restructured as an “à la carte city” at the back and call of tourists, who choose according to their desire of the moment and are free to freely draw up their own menu. The principle of “total metonymy” is in action, and it is illusory to believe that it only affects urban forms, since citizens are the interface for creating brand value and part of what must be sold as lifestyle (Bookman 2014, 86). So it isn’t out of place to resort to the suggestion of branding as a viral prismatic crystal, whose “value radiates in all directions, occupying all interstices”, interweaving even our bodies. It’s no coincidence that this is exactly what the *City of Food - Eataly World* (www.youtube.com/watch?v=ycKP9AKP72o) video delineates. Here, in fact, the logo reverberates and radiates onto every corner, surface, facade, floor and square of a nocturnal Bologna, poetically engaging the rare passersby. Needless to say, the values evoked by this contact take the form of food, immediately transformed into potential brand equity.

The reverberation of that sort of contact realizes what Peter Sloterdijk calls the contemporary psycho-

⁵ The topic of urban regeneration through the global branding strategy usually has a strategic strong point in food (Semi 2015). In Bologna, food has become the exclusive object of potentially unlimited cultural consumption, the sign that has spatialized, recreated and absorbed all the urban social functions, lending itself to immediate consumption that falls within the cultural logics of contemporary communicative capitalism. The Bologna case is a good example of what Esperdy calls “Edible Urbanism” (Esperdy 2002).

⁶ For an exhaustive critical interpretation of the logic and practice of Branding, I refer the reader to Arvidsson 2006.

geography of emotions redesigned by urban branding, whose content hinges on the idea of a “public interior” that absorbs and translates the space of merchandise into a mass total and comprehensive staging – internalized in the minds of consumers (Sloterdijk 2013). In a more pragmatic way and in the words of Adam Arvidsson:

Brand equity thus consists of a set of proprietary social relations. In this sense, brands are examples of social interaction made into capital, they are a form of “ethical capital”. Consequently brand management is primarily about organizing such relations between the brand and its customers (and, increasingly, between customers by means of the brand). It is about managing the affective dimension of social interaction, making sure that a desired modality of interacting and relating arises. This way brand management is about [...] “affect modulation”. Because brands work mainly to turn affect into value, they can give us a key insight into the growing economic importance of affect and “experiences” in the information economy (Arvidsson 2007, 10-11).

The emotional territory unfolds among the tables and the mediated social relationships, making possible the unfolding of ethical capital between shared narratives and the circulation of affects, placing Bologna at the top of the aestheticizing global food gentrification, according to the intentions of an economic order that regulates the “Immaterial productivity” that “tends to be increasingly socialized” (Arvidsson 2007, 7). What however was unpredictable has been the accelerated exhaustion of the equity brand, as a sign of the voracity with which symbolic capital has devoured the secret of the “à la carte city” (2014-2018) and engulfed the city. The fatal de-generation of the logo is one of the risks of the impact of routine contagion.

3. The fourth stage of capitalism: “Documediality” and City of Food

The report of the implementation of the Bolognese brand is edited by Roberto Grandi, scientific manager of the process, and Alice Prospero (Grandi, Prospero 2015). It’s a narrative that makes clear the routine practice of urban branding, planned at each stage and characterized by the usual keywords – imagination, creativity, participation and belonging. The climate of public and private investment is the usual atmosphere that supports the political banner of strategic urban regeneration. Therefore the opening is assigned to Matteo Lepore (Councilor for the City’s Economy and Promotion, Tourism,

International Relations and Digital Agenda from 2011 to 2016)⁷:

So, first and foremost, the is Bologna project is an invitation to ourselves to reflect on what we are and what we would like to be; an invitation to be creative and to take a leading role, to look forward and not back, but without eradicating our roots (Grandi, Prospero 2015, 7).

In short, the promotion of Bologna’s identity moves from the individual dimension and collective rewriting – the auto(bio)graphy of contemporary cities – of those terrains of the imagination that ensure the maximum value of the brand: to wit, equity. The whole question plays on the definition and communication of tangible and intangible identity attributes. Hence the invitation is to participate enthusiastically in the writing of a shared storytelling and an equally shared self-reflection. The outcome of

the process of construction of a brand is given by the image that the various reference publics have of the brand. If place marketing privileged the targets external to the city, to whose demands for places it tried to give adequate answers, place branding also keeps in mind the internal targets of the city” (Grandi, Prospero 2015, 11).

Perfectly in keeping with the principle of interiority identified by Sloterdijk, since each place branding depends on the construction of a perceived positive image, which produces and reinforces in the citizens a high sense of civic pride and belonging (political technique) and, externally, which is able to attract investors and tourists. The slide is towards the use of place branding as a subtly political protocol for governing, without conflict and in the desired direction, by participating in a project for the common good (Brenner 2002). We know what the objective is. In Roberto Grandi’s words:

The overall proposal of the city, at the level of both tangible and intangible identity features, can be represented by the sentence “Bologna city à la carte”, describing a city that does not offer fixed menus or combinations already predefined to choose between, but a plurality of proposals that the different types of public can freely choose in relation to their desires (Grandi, Prospero 2015, 37).

A concept that belongs to the gastronomic dimension – fixed menu and/or creative invention of the meal – where the choice between different offerings is best achieved in restaurants. Food extends itself to intangible

⁷ The city’s current Councilor of Culture, Tourism, Promotion and Civic Imagination.

traits, the only ones that play on experience and arouse emotion – transfuse urban manufacture, produce life-style, become the expected identity of Bologna – and the urban form extends itself instead to the metonymy of branding. This too is an expected and foreseen result. The last act is dedicated to the choice of the logo which can only be *generative*, since:

What emerged is a Bologna that does not put forward pre-conceived and inflexible itineraries, but a city that offers opportunities for choice and experimentation, both for those who are visiting for either short or long periods or for those who live here or come to the city every day. The Bologna that emerges is a city made up of many stories and a variety of ways of experiencing it which, in terms of visual representation, cannot be enclosed in the inflexible logos that traditionally characterise cities. This consideration led to an international competition being held to choose a new logo. As you browse the pages of this book you will see that this logo is presented as an alphabet which, based on symbols of the historical memory of our area, gives local institutions, businesses, associations and individuals the opportunity to describe their Bologna and to contribute to communicating its identity, which is at the same time plural, unique and distinctive. Thus the city is the product of what we think, what we experiment and of our way of life and the idea of opening ourselves up to this dimension using a new common alphabet is, in my opinion, fascinating (Grandi, Prospero 2015, 7).

The logo subtly prescribes restitution in the form of a personal narrative – a rhetorical appeal that stands for a creative and playful generative participation of equity to be introduced into euphoric ethical, informational capital⁸. The public presentation of the City of Food project took place on March 24, 2014; on April 11th the Mercato di Mezzo space opened to the public, and a few months later it was the *Other* space (Altro) of the Mercato delle Erbe (December 2014). Thus the city entered the stage of the fourth phase of capitalism – ethical, informational or viral – discovering the charm of an unlimited symbolic and material production of a commodity that lends itself to a practically unlimited consumption, that invades the body, touches the senses, activates the cultural imagination and the forms of sociality/convivality. The atmosphere is inclusive and the homogeneity of gastronomic consumption is supported by the

repetition of the concept of experiential montage typical of Bologna's urban branding, publicly repeated as a mantra. A good example of how intangible productivity and brand equity extraction are truly, and increasingly, actively socialized and mediatized, "going viral". And the *prismatic phantasmagoria* of city branding begins its dance with *Ghostly politics*.

4. City of Foodscape and brand (dis)equity

The City of Food Manifesto (March 24, 2014) is the official and institutionalized acknowledgment of the project "devoted to metropolitan Bologna and the history of its love for food"⁹. To this *object of desire* is entrusted the "reputation of Bologna on a global level, a value to be protected and enhanced". The double meaning of this dedication, midway between *values* and *value*, which alludes to consumption and the public dimension of promotion (Gibson 2005, 260), is aimed at investors (public and private) who intend to participate in brand equity, including the entire urban community to which it proposes "to adopt the City of Food is Bologna brand and to work together". Having declared the theme of the *composition* of the "à la carte city", a clear, effective, and, should be added, predictable urban image is obtained. On the other hand, each brand works on the unambiguous clarity of its image, which doesn't preclude the multiplicity and variety of experiences that each of us can share by consuming the product, nor the heterogeneity of the experiential communities that are built around hypersocialization of the product's storytelling (Sepe, Pitt 2017, 3-4).

The first act of the generative logo acts on the toponym: City of Food *stands for* Bologna – it's what connotes the city – its meaning and monographic theme. Bologna, on the other hand, stands for the signifier that evokes in the imaginary the extension of all the food that can be found in the city, deploying and developing the urban space according to the prescriptions of the logo (Medway 2014, 155-156), up to internalizing the urban community – an active subject in reproducing and enhancing the love story with food as a decisive lifestyle. Incidentally, *Bologna* is also the global name of *mortadella*: a truly total metonymy that allows "same place and same time every emotional zoning experience" (Allingham 2008, 166). However, the crystallization generated by such a metonymy has accelerated the exhaustion of its brand value (2014-2018) and intensified the

⁸ Matteo Bartoli and Michele Pastore won the competition by designing an alphabet of signs starting from some elements of Bologna's urban architecture. The letters make it possible to write any concept that generates a precise logo. Each word is accompanied by the *is Bologna* payoff. The web platform on which to write and share what Bologna is is naturally accessible to everyone. The detailed description can be found in Roberto Grandi's text.

⁹ www.comune.bologna.it/news/city-food-il-progetto-di-marketing-territoriale-sul-cibo-che-guarda-allexpo-2015

consumption of public space in a single direction. The voracity of branding, the prismatic touch of ethical capital, envelops the city in the order of the unfolding fourth phase. Sharon Zukin coined the term *urbanoid* as an attempt to say that the buying and selling of urban space doesn't principally concern portions of physical space but segments of the social one, by privatizing the traditional heterogeneous aspect of the streets, sociability and commerce (Jackson 2010). And it's here that the immaterial line of critical torsion that the promise of brand equity maintains becomes visible. It's all played on the line of desire for food – in the dual form of displayed merchandise and of circulating value in the hypersociality mediatized and mediated by commerce. The architectural installation is left intact, intensifying the emotional experience of the gastronomic spectacle and removes the presence of those who, in some way, interrupt the internal atmosphere of euphoric moral relief. The values of the spiritual market of brand equity, exchanged on the table of the security and aestheticization of consumption, require the inevitable social (dis)equity of exclusion or quarantine (Low, Smith 2005). It also affects those who don't participate in the storytelling or share the symbolic code in operation.

The order of branding stages forms of hospitality and welcome that support and enhance that image of conviviality expected by the tourist and conveyed by the brand theme (Graziano 2013). Of course, the street, the market are public spaces par excellence, and some intrusion or dissonance is always possible, but *in the interior world of ethical capital*, the very hard contemporary symbolic economy is at work. Therefore, the *urbanoid* belongs by rights to a particular sector of public. Because it is no longer simply a matter of places where you can eat or socialize, but *landscapes* of the "City of Food" populated by members of the emerging creative class and those of a more traditional middle class, which however have an extraordinary appetite (Bookman 2014). Two steps into the urban phantasmagoria and you learn what happens to the values of hospitality, welcoming and sociability when they are touched by value (brand equity) and internalized in the ethical capital of the emotional heritage of each successful brand (Bell 2007; Williams 2000; Neal 2006; Atkinson 2003). Here is where documedia capital plays its hand. While money informs about the purchasing power of subjects within the landscape – decidedly limited information – it is the narratives on social media that provide information on what you are, want, hopefully, intend to try – definitely unlimited amount of available information capital. Hence, the homogeneity of the expected image is built a priori by (and for) an exclusive public community that

exclusively colonizes the urban space in an imaginary emotional territory of signs to be accumulated and put into circulation, made up of affections, views and experiences. The viral *fractal* ontology of urban regeneration carries out and replicates imaginaries, whose style changes to occupy every interstice and fold. For their part, the Bolognese are seduced by the symbolic system of the Foodscape, and few evade the media-based hypersocialization of breakfasts or aperitifs. The new middle class, creative or presumed such, takes its place at the tables, participating in the euphoric public conviviality. In short, everyone takes very seriously their routine work as re-producers of documedia capital, intensifying attractivity and desire within the urbanoid (Semi 2015, 101). At least until 2018.

5. Implosion

According to Jean Baudrillard the fractal stage is characterized by the retreat of the entire substance of the symbolic order of the third phase onto the current network of social value – or on the social network of value. This retreat, or the return of what was believed to be past, haunts the current economy of value, which therefore becomes pure simulation, in which codes and objects are ordered by the principle of contiguity without any reference to reality. The "City of Food" place branding is part of this hauntology, which presents itself as the return of the sign (indeed, the logo) now transformed into an object, but an object that isn't real, "an object much further removed from the real than the sign itself" (Baudrillard 2001b, 129). For Baudrillard, such an object outside of representation is "a fetish". For us here it's an *urbanoid*. An *urbanoid* filled with value. The last torsion is obvious: "when the passion for value becomes embodied, beyond value ... this becomes the object of a higher fetishism" (Baudrillard 2001b, 129). Marx's definition of fetishism as "the religion of sensuous appetites" (Raines 2002, 33) fits the City of Food like a glove. The degree of this *higher fetishism* or *sensuous appetites* is quantified by the numbers of the Chamber of Commerce: at the end of September 2017, there were 411 restaurants in the historic center in Bologna, 214 food take-aways, and 70 pastry and ice cream shops. The figure reached 1,420, by adding the bars. Added to this total were 552 activities related to the food trade. The calculation is quickly made: for every 37 residents there was a space devoted to food. On an economic level, the yield stopped for all 12 months of 2018 – even if only by 0.9%. City of Food closed 187 retail businesses and opened 247 food companies. The intense acceleration of the brand-

ing process (in five years + 31.9% of restaurants, mini-markets + 48%, cafeterias + 233%) collides with the function and limits of the urban space, whose every fold and crevice has been fatally touched by it. On these limits, the euphoric narrative consumes value in the emotional market of experience: the creative “à la carte” city, in four years retreated into being a fixed price folding menu, whose presence on the net was reduced to 4%. The urbanoid imploded. In *the interior world of ethical capital*, the atmosphere was oppressed by a negative semantic drift, and the emotional re-territorialisation, in order to retain brand equity – now decisively declining – became a matter of internal consensus. “Thus the system is better seen as a kind of virus [...], and its development is something like an epidemic (better still, a rash of epidemics, an epidemic of epidemic)” (Jameson 1999, 249). If we adopt Fredric Jameson’s standpoint, we see from there that Bologna City of Food has fulfilled the premises of the system and played in its logic.

“What can you do then?”

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Food Regeneration, Substitution and Urban Consumption in Bologna

Food regeneration, sostituzione e consumo urbano a Bologna

EMANUELE FRIXA

Dipartimento di Filosofia e Comunicazione (FILCOM), Alma Mater Studiorum, Università di Bologna, Italy

E-mail: emanuele.frixia2@unibo.it

Abstract. This paper traces the recent transformations that have taken place in the city of Bologna to critically redefine the meaning and scope of the changes related to commerce and consumption, and including the city's more general practices and promotional rhetoric. It will show how, starting from the increase in tourism and the strategic planning and policies to render the city more attractive, the city has undergone a reconfiguration through important regeneration processes linked to food. It will highlight the limited range of political and economic values which, through new ways of regulating public space and access to consumption, have redefined the socio-spatial fabric of certain areas of the city. The processes described will trace a path for deconstructing the reductively optimistic way in which Bologna is being portrayed, which ends up producing forms of displacement and exclusion.

Keywords: urban consumption, city branding, regeneration, foodification, Bologna.

Riassunto. Il contributo ripercorre le recenti trasformazioni avvenute all'interno dello spazio urbano bolognese per ridefinire criticamente il significato e la portata dei mutamenti legati al commercio e al consumo, fino alle più generali pratiche e ai discorsi di promozione della città. Si mostrerà come a partire dall'aumento della domanda turistica e dalla strategica pianificazione delle politiche di attrattività, la città sia stata riconfigurata attraverso importanti processi di rigenerazione legati al *food*. Verranno evidenziati i limiti della gerarchia di valori politici ed economici che, attraverso nuove modalità di regolamentazione dello spazio pubblico e di accesso al consumo, hanno ridefinito il tessuto socio-spaziale di alcune aree della città. I processi descritti saranno la traccia su cui decostruire le rappresentazioni dell'urbano che ridotte a visioni ottimistiche finiscono con il produrre forme di sostituzione ed esclusione.

Parole chiave: consumo urbano, city branding, rigenerazione, foodification, Bologna.

1. Introduction

In the last ten years the city of Bologna has undergone significant transformations that have affected its urban fabric, commercial activities and, more generally, modes of consumption. This has involved, over a short period of time, the redefinition of strategies aimed at positioning the city within a European and international context. The transformation of certain commercially related structures, such as historic markets, has been accompanied by a certain rhetoric about the city and specific city branding policies (Dinnie 2011) (Kavaratzis 2004) (Vanolo 2017). At least two main factors have determined this complex mechanism of representations and interventions concerning the urban space: first, the consequences of the crisis of some important economic assets¹ and more traditional forms of consumption and commerce; and second, the steadily increasing tourist influx. While the former has seen, since the Great Recession of 2008, a progressive redistribution in the patterns of labor and employment², the latter, linked above all to the increase in tourism, has called for new infrastructure strategies and planning to redefine and resignify the urban space. The increased tourist influx has been fundamental in guiding intervention and revitalization policies through a series of the city's geographical plans and imaginaries (Papotti 2020). This renewal has involved closely related urban policy operations; I will focus on at least two fundamental ones: the first concerns the upgrading of infrastructure; the second the way in which the city narrates itself through defining new discursive frames and storytelling (Mager, Matthey 2015; Sandercock 2003). The first has brought about an aesthetic enhancement thanks to the high-speed railway, begun in 2008 and completed in 2013 with the inauguration of the new station designed by Arata Isozaki and Andrea Maffei. Also, in 2008 the low-cost carrier Ryanair began using Marconi Airport, paving the way for the renewal of the Terminal – between 2011 and 2013 – and a constant increase in passenger traffic³. This visible, material aspect has been followed by an equally important one which has not directly concerned infra-

structure but has strongly oriented its regeneration processes.

The aim of this paper is to show how, starting with the increase in tourism and the strategic planning of beautification policies, the recent transformations of Bologna's urban space can be re-examined from a privileged perspective in order to reach a critical understanding of the significance and extent of changes related to commerce and consumption, and to include the city's more general practices and rhetoric of promotion and representation. The rapid changes in Bologna's economic and socio-spatial context over a few years redefine the city as "consumption machine" (Rossi 2017) by intervening on organizing policies linked to attractiveness and supply to new categories of visitors. For this reason, the case study presented here offers the specific features of an urban context with recognizable functions traditionally associated with Bologna as the capital of the region of Emilia-Romagna (study, commerce, hospitality), which are redefined in a short period of time (about fifteen years). Consequently, the example of Bologna becomes emblematic and ultimately shows how the commercial regeneration of large areas of the historic center and some peripheral areas has contributed to transforming the socio-spatial fabric of the city, progressively redefining the hierarchy of political and economic values that govern it.

2. Policies, new arrivals, new rhetoric and regeneration

The need and the opportunity for the regenerating some of its spaces and consumption processes starts from a fundamental fact: the increase in visitors. To get an idea of the impact on Bologna of the increased tourist influxes it suffices to make a quick comparison between the years 2009, 2014 and 2019. According to the data of the *2009 Report on the tourist movement and the composition of the reception infrastructure of the Emilia-Romagna Region* (Regione Emilia-Romagna 2010), "tourist presences in the Municipality of Bologna were approximately 1,700,000 (with approximately 800,555 arrivals)". The comparison with the 2014-2019 period accounts for the significant increase recorded under the peaks: it went from 2,180,000 presences in 2014 to 3,188,000 in 2019⁴. The almost doubling of figures in the span of a decade is at the same time the cause and effect of certain government policies and the way Bologna has been

¹ Including the exhibition sector and part of the manufacturing sector.

² As described by the studies of the Metropolitan Government on the Province of Bologna, in 2009 there were 67.8% of the total employed in the service sector, 30.7% in industry and 1.5 in agriculture. In 2018 the percentages were redistributed, respectively, with 71.5% in the service sector, 26% in industry and 2.5% in agriculture (Comune di Bologna 2010 and Comune di Bologna 2019).

³ A constant increase from 2004 to 2019, as documented by Assaeroporti's annual reports, and with the prospect of further expansion of the airport sanctioned by the go-ahead of the conference of services to the new masterplan (<https://assaeroporti.com/statistiche/>).

⁴ See the progression from the charts published on the website *The numbers of metropolitan Bologna*, <http://inumeridibolognametropolitana.it/dati-statistici/turisti-nel-comune-e-nella-citta-metropolitana-di-bologna-serie-storica>

represented (Rossi, Vanolo 2012). These data indicate the important role played by tourism – and consequently by commerce – and indicate the powerful connection between policies of aesthetic enhancement and economic investments in the food and restaurant sector, along with the transformation of Bologna into a new tourist destination. It is precisely these factors that have placed Bologna on the list of cities affected in recent years by touristification and tourism gentrification processes (Cocola-Gant 2018; Sequera, Nofre 2018; Gravari-Barbas, Guinand 2017; D'Eramo 2018), whose effects will be explained below.

Weaving the fabric of this connection took a powerful and effective city branding operation that provided the framework within which to refurbish plans⁵ and strategies aimed at reconfiguring commercial areas. The original investment came about from the need to revalue the city's resources by building an effective mechanism through which to "narrate the city to the world" (Comune di Bologna. Iperbole 13/12/2013). The Bologna City Branding⁶ project, won by *è Bologna*, refurbished a discursive and value strategy capable of re-signifying its various representations: a true generative logo that could encompass and personalize the entire range of urban experiences⁷. Among these experiences, what dominated and engulfed the storytelling of the city was food: the territorial marketing project *City of Food*, born as a (re) generative logo connected to *è Bologna*, fulfilled this function. As the blurb reads on the city's website:

One of Bologna's internationally recognized elements of identification is food, not only for its gastronomic aspects, but also for the profound attention paid by various local operators and institutions to food in its various contexts: social, environmental, scientific, economic, didactic, cultural and recreational.

City of Food is a project that was created to coordinate all food initiatives by both promoting some of them directly and proposing itself as a clearing house of all the research, spaces, experiences, and scientific-cultural-commercial events related to food that take place in the metropolitan area of Bologna. Public and private partners who choose to join the initiative can contribute to promoting Bologna as a city of food at an international level (Comune di Bologna. Iperbole 24/03/2014).

What clearly emerges is that the response to the economic crisis had already identified, in 2012, future development vectors in food and tourism, building a specific "narrative of place" (Papotti 2020, 151) and reproducing the conditions for a new economy based on "foodtainment" (Finkelstein 1999) and more generally a new "recreational turn" (Stock 2007). Hence, with the formalization in 2014 of Bologna City of Food and the creation of the Bologna Welcome agency, the structural conditions were set up to continue investing in promoting the city and making it attractive: new visitors, new tourists, new consumers. The revenue from the tourist tax made it possible to invest in cost-free cultural activities, giving the city the perception of an inclusive spirit and shared participation⁸.

Together with the first goal of promoting the city as a new tourist destination, the next phase involved managing the destination and hospitality, as well as promoting authenticity through the socio-economic wealth being offered. In line with this was the commercial regeneration of some areas of the historic center, traditionally destined for market activities, such as the Mercato di Mezzo and the Mercato delle Erbe⁹. This new reconfiguration, by favoring the replacement of the fruit and vegetable stalls with new refreshment stands, has turned out to be a rational and successful way to make the urban space profitable by exploiting the influxes, and so guaranteeing the city's economic recovery and new strategic positioning¹⁰.

The regeneration of spaces associated with commercial replacement has been one of the most significant tools and effects for setting in motion the *consumption of the city* policy by placing Bologna within those processes of economic and cultural regeneration (Vicari Haddock 2009, 26-35), characterized by interventions on infrastructures, "which will serve to economically develop the area", and "by interventions of a cultural nature" (Semi 2015, 74), functional to promoting it and making it aesthetically attractive. In this respect the many possible itineraries promoted by Bologna Welcome¹¹ are a prepackaged idea of the city, resulting from the close link between both narratives and rhetoric about the city,

⁵ The reference is to the *Piano Strutturale Comunale* (Municipal Structural Plan), which entered into force in 2008 with the aim of providing "the general guidelines that will guide the city's urban development over the next twenty years" (<http://www.comune.bologna.it/psc/articoli/1797>).

⁶ <http://www.fondazioneinnovazionebologna.it/progetto/bolognacity-branding>

⁷ For a critical reconstruction of the genesis of the generative logo of Bologna, see Bonazzi 2019, 17-45.

⁸ Consider, for example, important traditional initiatives such as the Cinema Ritrovato, in Piazza Maggiore, all the musical and entertainment activities related to the Biografilm Festival, or to the busy calendar of Bologna Estate.

⁹ For a precise reconstruction of the regeneration processes applied to the two markets, see Zinzani 2019; Frixa 2019a.

¹⁰ I refer in this regard to the "Mercati" section of Progetto 19: City of Food (Comune di Bologna. Iperbole (12/06/2019). In reference to the regeneration and requalification of the Mercato delle Erbe see Comune di Bologna. Iperbole 4/03/2015).

¹¹ <https://www.bolognawelcome.com/it/informazioni/inspirati>

and the increase in influxes associated with regeneration processes¹². These are strategies that blatantly reveal a political-economic planning that actually does not allow deviations from a translation of urban life into commodified forms of consumption. The critical interpretation of the overlap between the material transformations of the space and the policies concerning how the city is portrayed and promoted, has made it possible to identify a series of effects and consequences specifically attributable to the Bologna context.

3. The consequences. Representations, effects, values: the *price of replacement*

The effects of the overlap among city branding policies, an increase in visitors and regeneration processes linked to consumption have transformed the commercial fabric of the city and the use of space, especially as regards specific activities located in the historic center. According to tourism and trade data, for the past several years Bologna has undergone a *food mania* that, according to the Chamber of Commerce, has seen catering grow by 27% from 2009 to 2018, leading to as much as a 72% increase in takeaways¹³. This result on the material space of commerce, linked to a remodulation of the offering in the retail and administration sectors, has clearly encouraged certain redefinitions of the city by changing its perception in recent years. It is no coincidence that the attention of the international press has often focused precisely on the new *city of food*, hastily skipping over what had been its most traditional geographical imaginary. Despite the fact that Bologna has been known in Italy and abroad through the label “the learned, the red and the fat”, the *Guardian* in its *Bologna city guide*, had proclaimed: “but it is *la grassa* (the fat) that’s perhaps the most fitting¹⁴”. What aroused the interest of the international press, together with the result of the policies adopted and the consequent repositioning of the city as a tourist destination, had been – at the end of 2017 – the inauguration of Fico Eataly World, the largest agri-food park in the world, located in the northeast district of the city, just beyond the Pilastro district. The big operation carried out within the CAAB (Centro Agroalimentare di Bologna) by the City, Eataly, Coop Alleanza 3.0 and Prelios Sgr, was the most significant consequence of the consolidation of a pub-

lic-private partnership in which the public sector creates the basis for the private sector to be able to operate, favoring the conditions for realizing new profits¹⁵. Thus Bologna has become the Italian and European capital of food, using the commercial regeneration of large areas of the historic center and some outlying areas as a means for significantly transforming the city’s socio-spatial fabric. A Bolognese *food regeneration* that has temporarily obscured some of its historic attractions, as the article in the *Guardian* notes, paving the way for a new large “widespread space for catering and consumption” (Dansero, Nicolarea 2016, 22). A city historically linked to an imaginary and an urban activity based on university study, industrial excellences, a well-defined political tradition and a marked cultural, musical and cinematographic identity has, in the space of just a few years, been flattened into the City of Food.

The direct consequences of these policies and processes is found in another article published by the *New York Times* that just inside the “regenerated” Mercato delle Erbe rediscovers the new and more authentic “rebel” spirit of the city of Bologna:

“The students who congregated nightly in piazzas have been forced to move outside the city wall, replaced with temporary visitors like me, heading to Airbnb with their roller suitcases click-clacking on cobblestone streets. That rebel spirit, though, still persists. We found it at Mercato delle Erbe, a food market by day that fills with mostly crowds of residents at drink stands by night”¹⁶.

The consequences of these promotional policies, seemingly inclusive and shared, give us an insight into a number of direct effects, as well as a specific, renewed value dimension, capable of producing dystopias through its vaunted urban images: it is in this scenario that the replacement effect exhibits its full force. In Bologna the important urban community of students seems to be marginalized in the context of redefining the hierarchies of a strongly consumer-oriented policy. Added to this is an increasingly widespread phenomenon of short-term rental platforms – for tourists and transient visitors, concentrated mainly in the historic center – as further evidence of the displacement of city users, redesigning living spaces and values in precisely the same way as it has recently done to commercial activities that no longer fit into the new rules for spatial utilization.

In line with this trend is the new “Regulation for the exercise of commerce in urban areas of cultural

¹² For a critical view of the urban regeneration processes in Bologna, see Zinzani, Proto 2020.

¹³ The number of bars and restaurants in the historic center are 1 for every 37 inhabitants. By the way, please note the article by Lillo 2019.

¹⁴ Hubbel 2017.

¹⁵ See Mosconi 2019.

¹⁶ Yuan 2018.

value” approved by the City Council on July 8, 2019, which extends to the “nucleus of ancient formation” a set of measures aimed at limiting the presence of “commercial activities incompatible with the need to protect and enhance our cultural heritage”. The Municipality website lists the activities whose activation, in the wake of the “UNESCO Decree” (Legislative Decree no. 222, 25 November 2016) and the Code of Cultural Heritage and Landscape (Legislative Decree no. 42, January 22, 2004), will be banned for a three-year period (Comune di Bologna. Iperbole 12/06/2019). What clearly emerges from this decree is a will to progressively exclude certain commercial activities from much of the historic center. The intent is to impose yet another reconfiguration of the urban space in the direction of its future patrimonialization, made explicit by the presentation of the candidacy of the Portici di Bologna as a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Hence substitutions as the main effect of a “food gentrification” (Cohen 2018; Sbicca 2018), elsewhere defined as “foodification” (Frixia 2019b, 109-129; Loda et al., 2020), extended to large areas of the city, and directed towards a now consolidated “new frontier of gentrification” (González, Waley 2012; González 2018; Sequera, Nofre 2018), starting from the regeneration of historical markets and certain food-related forms and practices of consumption. In this rapid redefinition of the values that guide the city’s policies, the example of Bologna therefore seems exemplary, due to the speed of the substitution processes applied to the consumer areas, as well as the premature exhaustion of the portrayals that encouraged and produced them.

4. Conclusions. Space consumption and *market* risk

But the candidacy of the Portici di Bologna as a UNESCO World Heritage Site is indeed a tangible sign of the exhaustion of the *city of food*¹⁷ brand and the need to refashion the city’s offering and positioning on aspects mainly related to its cultural and architectural heritage. Once again, the processes described above become the engine of substantial transformations that redefine the methods of use and regulation of public space and, in some instances, of social conflict. This is the direction taken by the new *Dehors regulation* (regulation of the occupation of public land for outdoor spaces annexed to public administration premises), which outlines a special regulation for some areas where it is possible to adopt “guidelines and projects for managing

outdoor spaces based on motivated needs for functionality, decorum and protection of the urban context”¹⁸. Once again the city is reconfigured to prepare for a new scenario, through new keywords and new rhetoric. The limits set for the historic center area and for some activities related to commerce, reproduce, through displacement procedures, new forms of exclusion (Cocola-Gant 2019): the activities that no longer fall within the new discursive and regulatory framework, along with the persons who cannot participate in those forms of consumption, are excluded from the representation of the city.

The quest for a personalization of the urban experience and for forms of authenticity to be delineated within the tourist influxes have ultimately contributed to shedding light on *market* limits that nurture a “gentrified authenticity” (Gonzalez, Waley 2012) and reproduce, in the guise of hospitality, the consumption of authenticity as a means of exclusion (Zukin 2008). Hence the most glaring result of certain territorial marketing policies did not prefigure just a rapid consumption of the effectiveness of the brand applied to the complex urban geography, but ended up reproducing, in what boasts itself as a hospitable and welcoming city (Bell 2007), the emergence of new forms of enclosure (Harvey 2012; Hodgkinson 2012; Sevilla-Buitrago 2015). This, in the case of Bologna, becomes one of the major risks in sacrificing the city for market reasons and favors the emergence of new, more or less visible borders that involve not just the opening hours of public establishments or the conflict between customers and residents in some areas devoted to consumption, but justify in the name of urban decorum the very methods for exploiting public space (Loda et al. 2011)¹⁹.

The processes described, which have affected and transformed urban consumption in Bologna, show how access to consumption has ultimately become an access or exclusion from the city and how they are the contributing cause of a sudden emptying of the urban space. In the final analysis, access to consumption becomes an access or exclusion from the city, and paradoxically the risk of emptying the urban space becomes more and more concrete. As recently indicated, “the apartments where tourists stay, which are in effect subtracted from the availability pool of residents, leave an ‘empty’ social fabric, a ‘city made of air’, causing the progressive emptying out of the historic center, turning it into

¹⁸ Art. 20, Area projects (Comune di Bologna 2018).

¹⁹ These aspects have been treated in a talk entitled “I confini al mercato” (Market Borders), presented at the conference “Confin(at)i/ Bound(aries), IX Giornata di Studio *Oltre la globalizzazione*”, held in Trieste on December 13th, 2019.

¹⁷ Today the one on food is just one of the itineraries suggested by Bologna Welcome.

a showcase (Codeluppi 2014), or, to say it another way, it is sacrificed in order to create a place of transit and consumption” (Frixia 2019b, 125). The emptying out process already determined by the food brand and the apartments reserved for short-term tourist rentals, seems prophetic today, if we consider the weeks of lockdown during the Covid-19 pandemic²⁰, and the measures currently being implemented in the second wave of the pandemic. A city set up over the last decade to attract floods of tourists finds itself alone with its residents, and before it will be able to reactivate the receptivity and tourism machine, it will have to deal with the limits of the model that promoted and governed it. For this reason, the rapid transformations described provide, in the Bologna context, a privileged perspective for understanding the reasons and limits of the changes linked to trade and consumption. This is a great opportunity to intervene on the now cyclical consumption of the urban space and its representations, and to find a middle way between market needs and the rights of residents to their city.

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²⁰ For an initial critique on how short-term rental cities will change after the pandemic, see Celata 2020.

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Urban Retail in Inland Abruzzo: Between Decline and New Polarities

Il commercio urbano nell'Abruzzo interno: tra declino e nuove polarità

BERNARDO CARDINALE¹, DANTE DI MATTEO², CONCETTINA PASCETTA³, LUCA ZARRILLI⁴

¹ *Facoltà di Scienze Politiche, Università di Teramo, Italy*

² *Dipartimento di Architettura e Studi Urbani (DASU), Politecnico di Milano, Italy*

³ *CRESA - Centro Studi Agenzia per lo Sviluppo della Camera di Commercio del Gran Sasso d'Italia, L'Aquila, Italy*

⁴ *Dipartimento di Economia (DEc), Università degli Studi "G. d'Annunzio" di Chieti-Pescara, Italy*

E-mail: bcardinale@unite.it; dante.dimatteo@polimi.it; concettina.pascetta@libero.it; luca.zarrilli@unich.it

Abstract. The multiple geographies of trade in Abruzzo reflect the heterogeneities of regional fabric itself: different constituents like orography, business demography, population density and infrastructure endowment have led to a two-speed growth of the retail sector, where coastal areas have developed faster than inland areas. Through retailers' and consumers' prism, this paper offers a focus on the urban retail in some cities of the inland Abruzzo, providing some policy implications. Availing of descriptive and semi-parametric approaches, we found that some public policies, like subsidies and pedestrianisation, had an impact on retailers' perception based in inland areas even higher than those localised in coastal areas, while other features still remain lacking, such as accessibility; besides, compared with coastal areas, consumers' perceptions in inland areas show an higher social function, where buying behavior is less hedonic and more functional to the needs of local communities.

Keywords: Inland Abruzzo, urban trade, retailers' perceptions, consumers buying behavior.

Riassunto. Le molteplici geografie del commercio in Abruzzo riflettono l'eterogeneità dello stesso tessuto regionale: varie costituenti come l'orografia, la demografia d'impresa, la densità di popolazione e la dotazione infrastrutturale hanno causato una crescita del settore del commercio a due velocità, in cui le aree costiere hanno conosciuto uno sviluppo più rapido rispetto alle aree interne. Attraverso la lente dei commercianti e dei consumatori, questo articolo offre uno sguardo alle politiche urbane del commercio in varie città dell'Abruzzo interno, fornendo alcune implicazioni politiche. Mediante approcci descrittivi e semi-parametrici, troviamo che alcune politiche pubbliche, come le agevolazioni e la pedonalizzazione, hanno avuto un impatto maggiore sulle percezioni dei commercianti situati nelle aree interne rispetto a quelli localizzati nelle aree costiere, mentre altri aspetti rimangono carenti, come l'accessibilità; inoltre, rispetto

alle aree costiere, le percezioni dei consumatori nelle aree interne sembrano mostrare una funzione sociale più consistente, laddove il comportamento d'acquisto è meno edonico e più funzionale alle esigenze delle comunità locali.

Parole chiave: Abruzzo interno, commercio urbano, percezioni dei commercianti, comportamento d'acquisto dei consumatori.

1. Introduction

In the early post-war decades, retail in Abruzzo experienced high levels of *pulverisation* due to its role as a *refuge* sector. With particular reference to the inland areas, sparsely populated and difficult to reach, local retail played a key social function, just satisfying the demand for essential goods of many mountain centres. The trade law reform (426/1971), which was supposed to ensure a productivity recovery in the trade sector encouraging the spread of large-scale distribution throughout the country, in Abruzzo region led to a *leopard spot* modernisation process (Landini 1981). In the coastal area – first in Pescara's provincial capital, then in neighboring municipalities – the establishment of large retailers faster occurred (i.e., supermarkets and large warehouses), while in inland areas, frequently characterized by a long-term population decline, only few urban trade polarities arose (L'Aquila, Sulmona, Teramo) where the large distribution remained weak. It is only in the decades straddling the new millennium that further suburban shopping centres were built in the proximity of motorway exits (Pratola Peligna) or along dual carriageways (San Nicolò a Tordino), thus succeeding in capturing the consumption demand of additional smaller communities (Scorrano 1997).

Such *mall*ing phenomenon was particularly visible in the city of L'Aquila, where the 2009 earthquake caused the relocation of many retailers in out-of-town shopping centres and galleries, which played a pivotal aggregating role for the suffering local community immediately after the health emergency. It has emerged a gap between the major urban cities of inland Abruzzo, where several suburban shopping centres has opened and the modernisation of the retail network finally occurred, and the other smaller municipalities of inland Abruzzo, where small retailers are called upon to meet only a neighborhood demand, which is even thinner in the case of the seismic crater area.

On such bases, this research explores the trade growth dynamics of inland Abruzzo always in comparison with the trend of coastal area. Broadly, this contribution is composed of six-parts: the introduction is fol-

lowed by a reconstruction of trade-evolutionary dynamics in Abruzzo region from the early 1950s to nowadays, explaining the weight of the trade firms' demography over the resident population in the selected cities of the case study; instead, Sections three and four explore the perceptions of retailers in relation to some of the main trade policies: firstly, a correlation analysis was performed to individuate the main linkages between trade policies and retailers' degree of satisfaction; secondly, a linear model was used to evaluate to what extent the most relevant public policies have impacted on the degree of trade evolution of the four interested areas and through a semi-parametric predictive model the features of retailers that primarily would need further targeted public interventions are identified; Section five exploits descriptive statistics to deepen the consumers buying behavior and data are retrieved from the early questionnaire used in Fuschi and Ferrari (2019); the last Section discusses the main findings in the view of the existing literature and provides conclusions and policy recommendations.

2. Trade in inland areas, a diachronic reading

Many studies have investigated the spatial patterns of retail distribution and have identified three consolidated trends in retail development: dichotomy between (i) coastal and inland areas, (ii) urban and rural ones, (iii) bigger and smaller urban centres. These trends have been recognized at different geographical scale: at national scale according to the studies regarding, for instance, Netherlands (Borchert 1988), Britain (Hallsworth 1994), India (Sinha, Kar 2007), Czech Republic (Szczyrba 2010), Brazil (Giraldo Lozano 2015), at regional scale regarding some Italian regions such as Marche (Porto, 2019), Piedmont (Brunetta 2007, 2011) or Sicily (Cannizzaro 2019) and at subregional scale, where examples come from Amiata area (Preite 2005), Assago area (Morandi, Paris 2013), Milan metropolitan area (Clerici 2019), Pesaro-Urbino province (Musso 2007, 2010) and Trentino (Brunetta, Caldarice 2016).

Keeping in mind the three mentioned trends, the analysis of commercial system in Abruzzo has been carried out using firstly baseline statistical indicators which have been already proposed, for instance, in some retail studies by Istat (Cozzi 2006). The retail system of four cities of inland Abruzzo has been analysed (L'Aquila, Teramo, Sulmona and Castel di Sangro), using the data made available by the Istat industry censuses since the second post-war period (1951–).

The current retail structure of inland areas is the result of the sedimentation of specific events to which

local repercussions of global and national phenomena, as well as policies carried out by public bodies, have overlapped. The evolution of their retail system is different not only from that of coastal areas, because of specific demographic and economic trends, but also from that of the other settlements of inland Abruzzo, because the four analysed cities play important administrative or gravitational roles.

In 1951, the commercial structure of Abruzzo was dominated by Pescara, with regard to retail and to wholesale trade, although the demographic size of the latter was only slightly higher than that of L'Aquila, the regional capital, which was the second main distribution centre in Abruzzo and the main one in inland areas, due to its rising administrative functions. The number of residents served by each shop in inland areas was relatively limited and lower than the regional average, because of the small size of the population and the difficulties in mobility and transportation. This situation therefore necessitated a very scattered commercial distribution. The typical retail firm was predominantly family-run and had a low average number of employees. In inland areas, they were larger than in other parts of Abruzzo because they were able to draw customers from the neighbouring small towns. During the 1950s, the growth of the commercial structure of the four cities under investigation was considerable, both in retail shops – supported by the population growth – and in wholesale shops, thanks to the role of trade as a safe-haven sector for agriculture and craft workforce not yet absorbed by the industry. Thus, a further *pulverisation* of the retail distribution structure occurred, along with the drop of the average number of inhabitants served by each firm.

In 1961, itinerant commerce in inland Abruzzo was still an important retail distribution sector, much more than the regional average, which is a proof of the rooted purchasing habits of the inland population. During the 1960s, the growth of inland Abruzzo distribution system slowed down: the lack of barriers to entry, which favored the access of entrepreneurs not keen on innovation, perpetuated a certain inefficiency.

Then, in 1971, L'Aquila kept on being the second main distribution centre after Pescara, with a number of inhabitants served by each retail shop that was still higher than the regional average: in Abruzzo region as a whole, indeed, retail shops were widespread due to the diffusion of small towns, where small shops guaranteed the minimum level of quality of life and the satisfaction of the primary needs of the inhabitants. During the 1970s, while the trade law reform (Law 426/1971) promoted the spread of modern distribution with department stores and supermarkets, the regional retail struc-

ture was still fragmented and provided a traditional and backward supply. During this decade the population increased in our four cities and *extra moenia* development started close to the historical city centres through the creation of new peripheral neighborhoods along the main roads and near the industrial areas. The demographic increase encouraged the growth of the distribution sector, both wholesale and retail, along with a further decrease of the number of inhabitants served by each firm. Meanwhile, as nationally, food retail decreased due to the competition of large retailers, different eating habits and fewer restrictions on access to non-food retail markets.

In the 1980s, the population increase was still increasing thanks to the establishment of planned industrial areas (L'Aquila, Sulmona, Teramo), which attracted residential settlements and commercial activities along the connection roads. While wholesale stores kept on growing, retail stores decreased for the first time, while their average size increased. These are the first signs of the crisis of traditional retail that continued in the 1990s, in line with the national trend and the contemporary growth of specialised retail.

At the beginning of the new millennium, the retail structure of inland areas had a lower level of modernisation compared to the Pescara's area, as proven by the absence of shopping centres, even in larger cities like L'Aquila and Teramo, and by the presence of just few department stores.

The 2009 earthquake dramatically hit L'Aquila's economy, which was mainly based on public administration, commercial firms and building companies. The physical destruction of the historic city centre forced the population, as well as the administrative, productive and commercial activities to leave. The resident population moved to the suburbs or to nearby towns, several firms had to close, and many other businesses moved to peripheral locations or in shopping centres and galleries. This phenomenon was a real push to *mall*ing, in contrast to the national and international trends, since the shopping centres played a renewed social role as aggregation poles and reference points for the community (Pascetta 2019, 43).

The current situation in inland cities, analysed by means of ASIA archive (the business register of local units by Istat), in 2017 shown a lower presence of trade firms compared to the urban area of Pescara and to the Abruzzo region as a whole, as a result of a drop in both retail and wholesale shops if compared to the previous two decades. As highlighted by the increase in the average size of trade firms, the role of large retailers has strengthened thanks to the opening of important shop-

Table 1. Trade firms and inhabitants per trade firm in the selected cities and Abruzzo. Years 1951-2017. Source: author's elaboration on data from ISTAT Censuses and ISTAT ASIA Archive.

	L'Aquila		Sulmona		Castel di Sangro		Teramo		Abruzzo	
	Firms	Inhab.	Firms	Inhab.	Firms	Inhab.	Firms	Inhab.	Firms	Inhab.
1951	653	83,7	314	72,6	80	67,9	424	91,1	12.656	100,9
1961	985	56,9	556	38,5	127	40,2	844	49,6	20.040	60,2
1971	1.169	51,4	547	37,7	163	31,0	1.008	47,4	26.668	43,7
1981	1.419	44,9	665	35,7	243	21,4	1.199	42,6	32.356	37,6
1991	1.408	47,5	715	35,6	232	23,6	1.241	41,7	32.365	38,6
2001	1.424	48,1	745	34,0	219	25,7	1.189	42,9	30.847	40,9
2011	1.297	52,0	664	36,8	195	30,5	1.193	45,4	30.053	43,5
2017	1.259	55,2	601	40,2	196	34,2	1.117	48,6	28.039	46,9

ping centres in the four cities concerned, which testifies an ongoing process of modernisation, although lagging behind if compared to the coastal areas.

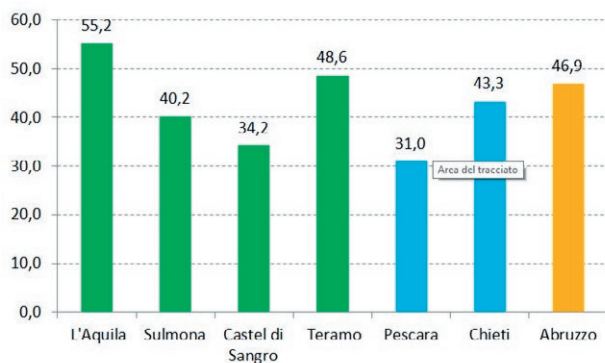
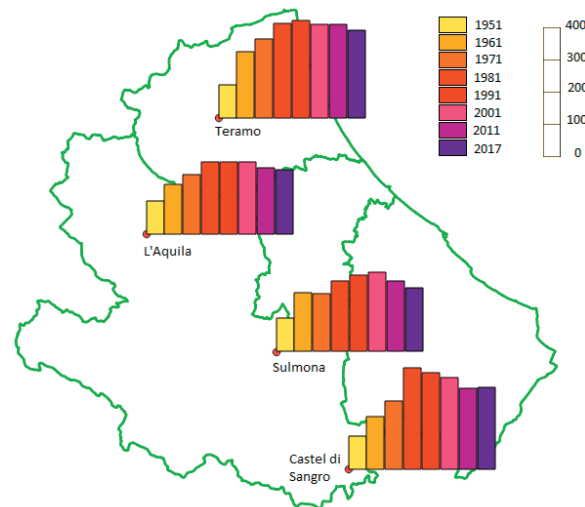
Ten years after the earthquake, reconstruction in L'Aquila is still in progress. The municipality has carried out economic support initiatives, but still few firms – mostly restaurants and bars – have returned to the historic city centre. As against the pre-earthquake period there has been a decline in groceries and shops for personal items, as well as a loss of customers because people mainly prefer the shops located in the suburbs. Also in Teramo the urban trade has to face deep problems following the earthquakes of 2016 and 2017 (Cardinale, Matani 2019, 123).

At present, there is a big gap between the main inland cities, where modern retailing has spread, and the remaining part of inland Abruzzo, where small independent retailing is still present and has to cope with great difficulties due to low accessibility, loss of custom-

ers following the population decrease and limited retail supply, so that a real risk of rarefaction of trade firms reasonably exists. In this respect, the consequences of the Covid-19 pandemic may be lethal for the retail structure of such smaller communities, if not supported by adequate place-sensitive policies (Di Matteo 2021).

3. Retailers' perception and local policies: inland vs. coastal cities

The need to explore and update the knowledge about the spatial distribution of the shops, the behaviour of trade operators and, broadly, the urban retail

**Figure 1.** Inhabitants per trade firm in the selected cities and Abruzzo. Year 2017. Source: author's elaboration on data from ISTAT Censuses and ISTAT ASIA Archive.**Figure 2.** Trade firms in the selected cities. Years 1951-2017 (1951=100). Source: author's elaboration on data from ISTAT Censuses and ISTAT ASIA Archive.

dynamics is a longstanding objective for geographers (Warnes, Daniel 1980). The retail geography is an articulation of processes involving various material and immaterial dimensions, resulting in a combination of “places, spaces and practices [that] are never purely economic” (Lowe, Wrigley 2000, 641-642), thus implying the need for a specific deepening from the point of view of the operators and their perception. The retailers operate in a competitive space that fosters the establishment of a series of regulatory domains, such as land-use and environmental planning, food law and safety, crime and social order (Marsden et al. 1998, 482), and at the aim to regulate these issues suitable policies from governmental bodies are required. The *mutual* relation between local governments and retailers’ supply lies in the reason that the “retailers [constantly deal] with consumers [so far as to] become sensitive barometers for government in the testing of what is seen to be legitimate policy” (*ivi*, p. 489).

For such purposes, it is therefore necessary to explore the perception of local operators about some of the most common policies carried out by governmental bodies, and this will help understand which are the policies that enhance the retailers’ overall perception and which, otherwise, still represent weaknesses in the retail processes of the inland cities of Abruzzo region. Data coming from a survey conducted among some inland and coastal cities in Abruzzo provided us some information related to the degree of improvement of retail activities and a series of observations regarding the evaluation of some main policies undertaken by local institutions, in the opinion of the retailers. These data have been put in correlation through the principle individuated by Charles Spearman (1904, p. 77), which is summarised in the following formula:

$$r = \frac{S_{xy}}{\sqrt{Sx^2 \times Sy^2}} \quad (1)$$

where r is the required correlation, x and y are the deviation of any pair of characteristics from their mean and S_{xy} is their sum, Sx^2 and Sy^2 are the sum of the squares of all the values of x and y . The choice of the Spearman correlation instead of the Pearson one is due to the (ordinal) rank feature of the collected variables, and for this reason a non-parametric and non-linear approach like the Spearman’s rank correlation has been regarded as preferable, in particular because its use is recognised in geographical studies who consider different administrative territories as part of the correlation analysis (Hauke, Kossowski 2011, 89). The results are presented in the table 2.

On the whole, both separately and as a unique proxy of the inland areas, the majority of the policies adopted by the inland municipalities seem to be positively correlated with the general perception of the retailers. In particular, the policy related to the trade valorisation carried out through direct initiatives of the public institutions is significantly correlated with the perception of the retailers of L’Aquila (0.473, $p < 0.05$) and Teramo (0.558, $p < 0.05$), while the correlation is less significant in the case of Castel di Sangro (0.394, $p < 0.10$) but still positive; the urban policies related to the improvement of accessibility and pedestrianisation appear to be positively and significantly correlated only with the perception of the retailers of Teramo (0.436, $p < 0.05$; 0.390, $p < 0.05$) and Castel di Sangro (0.478, $p < 0.05$; 0.447, $p < 0.05$); the policy concerning the urban furniture seems to be an element which positively influences the perception of the retailers, boosting the degree of improvement of the commercial activities in the case of Teramo (0.537, $p < 0.05$), Castel di Sangro (0.458, $p < 0.05$) and L’Aquila (0.289, $p < 0.05$); the advertising valorisation of commercial activities generates positive and highly significant correlation with the perception of Teramo’s (0.574, $p < 0.05$) and L’Aquila’s (0.427, $p < 0.05$) retailers, while the significance is lower in Castel di Sangro (0.442, $p < 0.10$); similarly, the policy con-

Table 2. Correlation between local trade perception and types of policies. Source: author’s elaboration on survey data; Spearman correlation is reported, **indicates significance at $p < 0.05$, *indicates significance at $p < 0.10$

city/type of policy	L’Aquila	Sulmona	Teramo	Castel di Sangro	Inland Cities	Coastal Cities
Trade valorisation by public institutions	0.473**	-0.240	0.558**	0.394*	0.434**	0.414**
Accessibility	0.143	0.163	0.436**	0.478**	0.241**	0.354**
Pedestrianisation	0.165	0.033	0.390**	0.447**	0.236**	0.107
Urban furniture	0.289**	0.225	0.537**	0.458**	0.351**	0.310**
Advertising valorisation	0.420**	-0.110	0.574**	0.442*	0.352**	0.333**
Public subsidies	0.427**	-0.083	0.557**	0.420*	0.429**	0.367**
observations	50	24	52	20	146	155

cerning public incentives to the retailers' activities shows a good and highly significant correlation in the case of Teramo (0.557, $p < 0.05$) and L'Aquila (0.427, $p < 0.05$), while it is positive but less significant for the retailers of Castel di Sangro (0.420, $p < 0.10$).

It is immediately clear that the perception of Sulmona's retailers shows correlations with none of the abovementioned public policies. This could lead to a diachronic understanding of the data: on the one hand, it is possible that trade and commercial activities of the retailers of Sulmona are so good that they do not require any type of intervention; on the other, it may suggest that the trade activities in Sulmona are close to the stagnation phase of its logistic life-cycle curve, which makes any kind of policy irrelevant.

If we consider the four municipalities as a whole proxy of the inland cities of Abruzzo region, we observe analogies and differences with the other proxy regarding the coastal cities (proxied by the cities of Pescara and Chieti). Policies like trade (0.434 vs 0.414) and advertise (0.352 vs 0.333) valorisation by institutions and urban furniture (0.351 vs 0.310) show very similar coefficients both for inland and for coastal cities; accessibility policy towards urban areas seems to be more successful in coastal cities (0.354 vs 0.241), probably thanks to the better conditions of the arterial roads; conversely, public subsidies programs seem to generate higher and positive correlation with the retailers of inland cities (0.429 vs 0.367), presumably because the retailers located in peripheral areas have benefited from greater public incentives for their activity; lastly, policies related to the pedestrianisation show significant coefficients only in the case of inland cities, probably because of the higher degree of urbanisation of retail shops located near the coastal cities, which do not require adjustments to pedestrianisation.

4. Planning for a retail resilience: who needs more?

A good retail planning system may influence the resilience of a community, where retail areas may "be part of a structure enabling resilient everyday life" (Rao, Summers 2016, 98). Despite the private nature of the retail sector, planning and public policies for retail development have always been a guidance and a regulator whenever the fluid scenario of the retailing system has altered its spatial *equilibrium*, thus moving from city centres to suburbs and shopping centres and then evolving again in other types of retail spaces (Fernandes, Chamusca 2014). It is a mutual cooperation between retailers and local governments: specific location decisions of private individuals may help public authorities to regenerate and make resilient a certain area in the urban space; vice-versa, public policies, such as incentives towards certain categories of products, may encourage the flourishing of a diversified and targeted commercial portfolio for the city, as well as the possibility to start up new businesses for private individuals.

On the basis of the available data, we propose regression models in which we post-estimate the predictive margins regarding four specific characteristics of the interviewed retailers in Abruzzo inland areas. The baseline model takes the following formula:

$$y = \beta_0 + \sum \beta_n X_n + R_i + \varepsilon_i \quad (2)$$

where y is the outcome variable expressed by retailers' perception about the commercial evolution of the area, $\sum \beta_n X_n$ is a set of control covariates shaped on the same types of public policies used in (1), R_i is the (ordinal) rank variable used as main predictor of retailers' perception and consisting in certain features measured in the survey, ε_i is an error term. Afterwards, follow-

Table 3. Adjusted predictive margins of retailers' main features. Source: author's elaboration on survey data; delta-method standard errors are in parentheses; ***indicates significance at $p < 0.01$; all predictors are at their mean value; the numerosness (146) encompasses the observations collected for the four inland cities as a whole territorial system

<i>Years in business</i>	Margin	<i>Type of business</i>	Margin	<i>Trust and loyalty relevance</i>	Margin	<i>Shop size (sqm)</i>	Margin
<10	1.773*** (0.0754)	<i>self-employed</i>	1.834*** (0.0559)	<i>for nothing</i>	1.610*** (0.5653)	<50	1.829*** (0.0712)
11-20	1.856*** (0.0949)	<i>head office of a chain</i>	1.596*** (0.2322)	<i>somewhat low</i>	1.693*** (0.1467)	51-100	1.882*** (0.0750)
21-30	1.885*** (0.1222)	<i>branch of a chain</i>	1.921*** (0.1425)	<i>somewhat high</i>	1.746*** (0.0895)	101-200	1.974*** (0.1757)
>30	2.035*** (0.1102)	<i>franchise</i>	2.042*** (0.1292)	<i>totally</i>	1.951*** (0.0609)	>200	1.769*** (0.2949)

ing the interpretation of Honoré (2008, p. 6) about the potentiality of β to calculate interesting marginal effects “even when the errors in the model and the explanatory variables are not independent”, we compute the adjusted predictive margins for four observed characteristics (R_i): a) number of years in business; b) type of business; c) trust and loyalty relevance with the consumers; d) shop size.

The results of the postestimations provided in Tab. 3 show the coefficients of the predictive margins for each rank of the involved ordinal variables. This procedure helps us to individuate, although summarily, which classes of retailers need priority interventions by local governments of inland areas of Abruzzo and which, on the contrary, already have satisfactory performances. The results may be useful for addressing retail development policies in such places. An easier display of the coefficients is provided in the following figure.

When the number of years in business is considered, we observe a regular confidence interval for all the four typologies; anyway, retail shops with 21-30 years and – in particular – those with more of 30 years in business seem to be more positive towards the degree of retail development of their city, while retailers with less years of business show lower values. As concerns the type of business, more positive perception is observed for shops in franchise or for branches of a chain; probably this value reflects lesser responsibilities of these two types of businesses compared to the obligations, deadlines and management implications of self-employed shops and head shops/offices of a chain.

As far as the parameter of trust and loyalty relevance between retailers and consumers is concerned, shops that consider it highly relevant or relevant are generally more positive towards the retail development of their area, while shops that give low or zero relevance to

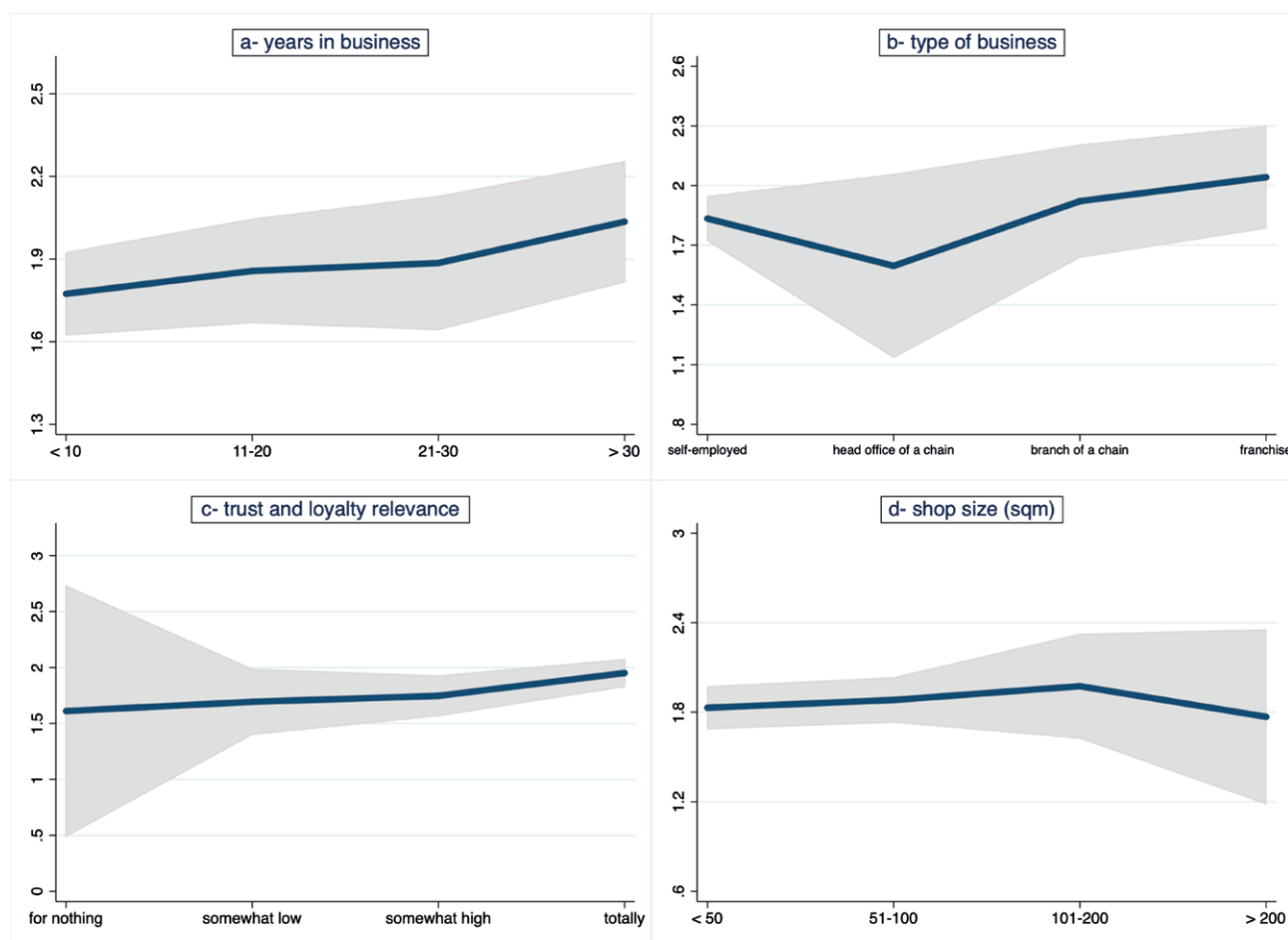


Figure 3 (a-b-c-d). Graphical adjusted predictive margins of retailers' main features. Source: author's elaboration; the grey shadows represent the confidence interval areas at 95% of confidence level.

trust and loyalty seem to have poorer perception about the *retail health status* of their area. Lastly, small (<50 sqm) and medium-small (51-100 sqm) shops seem to be the ones with the best perception, while bigger shops show a not suitable confidence interval: it probably means that they perceive less positively the retail environment of their area. This probably reflects the long-term change in the commercial structure of Abruzzo, where wholesale shops have progressively given way to smaller retailers.

These results may suggest some early indications for addressing future policies: from the retailers' perspective, they need to give more emphasis on their relationship with the consumers in terms of trust and loyalty because high relevance in this mutual cooperation generates a better retail development; local governments, instead, should primarily focus on the newer shops (less than 20 years in business), with targeted interventions towards self-employed shops and head shops of a chain, taking into account those shops that need a wide space to carry on their activities.

5. Buying behaviour and perception: a survey

In recent decades many authors have faced a new sociological category: the “post-modern” consumer, that is, a new type of consumer who expresses his/her identity through purchase decisions (Featherstone 1991). According to Fabris (2003), the post-modern consumer is syncretic, since he/she embodies different lifestyles, and eclectic, because he/she combines heterogeneous cultural features. For Gilles (2007) he/she is well informed and seeking for quality. His/her purchase decisions are also a way of asserting political ideas (Graziano, Forno 2012). Essentially, buying behaviour has nowadays social and cultural functions that go beyond the needs of everyday life (Paltrinieri 2004; Hamouda 2012) and can give relevant information from a geographical point of view as well (Berry 2013; Montello 2018).

Keeping these assumptions in mind, in the spring of 2018 a survey has been conducted via face-to-face interviews to a sample of 625 individuals visiting historic city centres and shopping malls in three coastal cities (Pescara, 200 units; Chieti, 100 units; Lanciano, 50 units) and four inland cities (L'Aquila, 100 units; Teramo, 100 units; Sulmona, 50 units; Castel di Sangro, 25 units). In this Section, the main findings of the survey will be discussed. In particular, the divergences between the two groups (coastal cities and inland cities) in the buying behaviour and perception of the interviewees will be

reported, in order to get some indication if, and to what extent, different purchase patterns can be related to different geographical situations.

The first thing to underline is that there are no significant differences between the two groups as to the main reason for reaching the place where the interviews occurred (Tab. 4). For most of the respondents of both groups it is one of the following: “shopping”, “workplace”, “stroll”, “restaurants/bars”. The only noteworthy divergences refer to “attractiveness of brands” and “environment/atmosphere”, which are relatively more important for visitors of inland cities.

“Clothing/footwear” and “foodstuffs” are by far the main items of interest for both groups, but in inverted proportions: the interviewees of coastal cities favor clothing and footwear, while those of inland cities mostly buy foodstuffs (Tab. 5).

The visitors of inland cities show a very positive perception of the area where the interview took place, since 85% of them judge its atmosphere pleasant or very pleasant, which is consistent with the results of table 4. Not as enthusiastic, but still favourable, is the assessment of the visitors of coastal cities (67,9%). On the contrary, the latter give greater importance to the relationship of trust and loyalty with the shopkeeper (83,5%, against 64% of the former), showing some kind of “nostalgic” attitude as well, since 45,2% of them think that the importance of this relationship has decreased during the past 10 years.

There are no major differences on the mobility side either (Tab. 6). About half of the interviewees of both groups reached the place of the interview by car. To get there on foot is slightly more common among visitors of inland cities, while those of coastal cities are relatively more inclined to use urban transportation. The acces-

Table 4. What is the main reason to come to this place? (%). Source: author's elaboration on survey data.

	total sample	coastal cities	inland cities
shopping	29,4	30	28,7
workplace	18,1	20,8	14,5
stroll	16,3	16,3	16,4
restaurants/bars	13,6	15,7	10,9
private matters	7,8	6,8	9,2
education/training	4,0	4,6	3,3
crossing to reach other places	3,7	2,9	4,7
attractiveness of brands	2,6	0,6	5,1
cinemas/theatres/exhibits/sport	2,2	1,7	2,9
environment/atmosphere	1,6	0	3,6
others	0,6	0,6	0,7

Table 5. What kind of goods are you interested in when you come to this place? (%). (Only to those who answered “shopping” to the first question). Source: author’s elaboration on survey data.

	total sample	coastal cities	inland cities
clothing, footwear	43,1	53,5	28,7
foodstuffs	34,8	26,7	46,1
sportswear	4,3	3,1	6,1
books, stationery	3,6	4,3	2,6
electronics	3,3	3,1	3,5
perfumery items	2,5	1,9	3,5
jewelry, watches	1,8	2,5	0,9
telephony items	1,4	1,2	1,7
furniture	1,4	1,9	0,9
household products	1,4	1,2	1,7
others	2,2	0,6	4,3

sibility of the place of the interview, on the other hand, is perceived in more positive terms by the visitors of the inland cities: 82,7% of them judge it good or very good, against 63,2% of the other group.

Pedestrianisation is a quite interesting issue: it is definitely more common in coastal cities (63,5% of occurrences against 35%); but it is intriguing to note that, while almost all the respondents of the cities with no pedestrian area would not be in favour of creating one, very few respondents of the cities where a pedestrian area exists (that is, the three coastal cities plus Teramo) would support its elimination.

Finally, 68% of visitors of coastal cities believe that malls are causing the closure of shops in historic city centres, against the 36% of the other group, where this trend is less present or less perceived (Tab. 7).

In conclusion, according to the findings of the survey it seems that the buying behaviour and the perception of the interviewees do not change very much from

Table 6. How did you get here? (%). Source: author’s elaboration on survey data.

	total sample	coastal cities	inland cities
car	49,6	49,7	49,4
on foot	26,4	24,3	29,1
city bus	7,5	9,4	5,1
bicycle	7,4	8,3	6,2
motorcycle	5,4	6	4,7
suburban bus	3,2	2,3	4,4
train	0,5	0	1,1

Table 7. How much do you agree with the following statement? “Malls are causing the shops in the historic city centres to close” (%). Source: author’s elaboration on survey data.

	total sample	coastal cities	inland cities
strongly agree	23,2	27,7	17,5
agree	30,7	40,3	18,5
neither agree nor disagree	28,5	24	34,2
disagree	13,0	7,4	20,0
strongly disagree	4,6	0,6	9,8

coastal to inland cities, despite gaps in terms of functions, demographic size and accessibility. The divergences, where present, are not substantial, being limited to the intensity with which some features and trends are perceived, or to secondary issues. The phenomenon of homogenisation of lifestyles and buying behaviour, due to the rapid development of communication systems and the convergence towards consumption standards, is well known since a long time: “the world’s needs and desires have been irrevocably homogenized” (Levitt 1983, 93). The findings of the survey seem to be in line with this assertion.

6. Conclusions

The social and economic evolution of Abruzzo has often traveled along a double track, which reflects the identity ambivalence of this region: coastal and inland, Adriatic and Apennine, urban and rural. A dichotomy was also observed in the evolution of urban trade: the decline of the last decade was felt slightly in the major urban areas, while smaller settlements, especially those of the inland, were more affected due to demographic weakness and scarce infrastructure (Fuschi, Ferrari 2019). In this paper we have focused on the inland part of the region, in its comparison with the coastal area. In particular, we referred to an aggregate consisting of four inland cities: L’Aquila, Teramo, Sulmona and Castel di Sangro. They are at the same time heterogeneous in terms of size, accessibility and functions, and comparable in their retail dynamics, so as to be considered representative of the sub-regional unit under investigation.

In the first decades of the second post-war period, the retail trade in Abruzzo was rather *pulverised* due to its role of a safe-haven sector for unoccupied workforce, not yet absorbed by industry. In inland areas, this phenomenon was even stronger: the highly scattered localisation of the retail firms was required by the scarce

mobility of the population, due in turn to deficiencies in transportation and accessibility. It must also be said that, despite the small size and the poor propensity to innovation, the traditional and family-run retail firms used to play a fundamental role in protecting the minimum level of quality of life and the satisfaction of the basic needs of the inhabitants.

The trade reform introduced in 1971, which fostered modern distribution with department stores and supermarkets, gave rise to a two-speed growth of the trade: while in coastal areas, thanks to greater economic and demographic vitality, modernisation started earlier, continued quickly and had significant effects, in inland areas it showed up later and developed more slowly; furthermore, its effects were limited and concentrated in the main cities (L'Aquila, Sulmona, Teramo), which were emerging as demographic and industrial poles.

Currently there is a deep gap between the main inland cities, whose retail network has finally modernised, as evidenced by the opening of important shopping centres, and the rest of inland Abruzzo, where a prevailing fabric of small independent retailers faces great difficulties due to poor accessibility, loss of customers as a result of population decline, and limited supply, so that there is a real risk of rarefaction of retail firms. To all this must be added the general difficulties of traditional retail due to the economic crisis and the competition from modern specialised shops and online commerce, together with the unexpected health emergency caused by the Covid-19 pandemic. The case of L'Aquila is noteworthy: the 2009 earthquake and the consequent relocation of many retail firms to shopping centers and galleries produced a real push to *mall*ing, given the role that the latter have ended up taking as poles of social aggregation.

The spatial distribution of the shops and the urban retail dynamics can be usefully related to the perception that local operators have about the policies implemented by governmental bodies, in order to understand which are the policies that enhance the retailers' overall perception and which, otherwise, still represent weaknesses in the retail processes. For these purposes, we have used data coming from a survey conducted in 2018 among some inland and coastal cities of Abruzzo that provided us information about the improvement of retail activities and the opinion of the retailers regarding the evaluation of the policies undertaken by local institutions.

According to the findings of the non-parametric modeling, it seems that the retail sector of inland Abruzzo does not travel at a very different speed than that of coastal areas. What can be inferred, instead, is that the former has more utilitarian and resilient features, with

a stronger view to serving the community, compared to the more hedonistic and consumerist ways that can be observed in the major coastal cities. The survey also showed that newer stores, as well as those run by the owner himself, appear to be more vulnerable to trade fluctuations than the long-lasting ones, making it necessary to have consequent and specific public policies and plans, which are supposed to be more place-sensitive (Di Matteo 2021).

On the demand side, buying behaviour and perception of the consumers can give relevant information as well. Therefore, a parallel survey has been conducted in the same inland and coastal cities via face-to-face interviews to visitors and customers, in order to get some indication if, and to what extent, different purchase patterns can be related to different geographical situations. The findings show that there are no major differences between the two groups (inland and coastal) of interviewees in most of the aspects considered by the survey. The divergences, where present, are not substantial, being limited to the intensity with which some features and trends are perceived, or to secondary issues.

Therefore, it seems that both on the supply and the demand sides behaviour and perception of the individuals do not change very much from coast to inland, despite gaps in terms of functions, demographic size, accessibility, spatial distribution of shops and structural organisation of retail. To quote Levitt (1983), we can conclude that the findings of the surveys seem to be in line with his assertion that the "needs and desires of the people underwent in the last decades a process of homogenisation worldwide".

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The Role of Commerce in the Main Urban Area of Abruzzo: an Intra-Urban Reading

Il ruolo del commercio nella principale area urbana d'Abruzzo: una lettura a scala intra-urbana

FABRIZIO FERRARI¹, SILVIA IACUONE¹, SILVIA SCORRANO², MARINA FUSCHI¹

¹ *Dipartimento di Economia (DEc), Università degli Studi "G. d'Annunzio" di Chieti-Pescara, Pescara, Italy*

² *Dipartimento di Lettere, Arti e Scienze Sociali (DiLASS), Università degli Studi "G. d'Annunzio" di Chieti-Pescara, Italy*

E-mail: fabrizio.ferrari@unich.it; silvia.iacuone@unich.it; silvia.scorrano@unich.it; marina.fuschi@unich.it

Abstract. Since the 1950s, the urban structure of Abruzzo has gradually polarized on the area of Pescara-Chieti, as the expression of a series of location and settlement advantages. There, the trade sector, favoured by a period of expansion of large-scale commercial distribution, represented a powerful vehicle for territorial convergence and cohesion, contributing to the progressive process of marginalization of urban proximity trade. The aim of this work is to go beyond the opposition between suburban shopping center/central urban trade and to propose an interpretation at intra-urban scale that starts from peripheral neighbourhoods and peculiar spaces: They are able, in some cases, to better represent urban identity, but, above all, to provide a favourable observation point from which to promote a balanced and sustainable reorganization of the city.

Keywords: commerce, Pescara-Chieti area, urban neighborhoods, vulnerability, city project.

Riassunto. La struttura urbana abruzzese si è progressivamente polarizzata, a partire dagli anni Cinquanta, sull'area Pescara-Chieti, espressione di una serie di vantaggi localizzativi e insediativi. Qui, il comparto del commercio, grazie alla stagione della grande distribuzione commerciale, ha rappresentato un potente veicolo di convergenza e coesione territoriale, contribuendo al progressivo processo di marginalizzazione del commercio di prossimità cittadino. Obiettivo del presente lavoro è quello di andare oltre l'approccio contrappositivo centro commerciale suburbano/commercio centrale urbano per proporre una lettura a scala intra-urbana muovendo dai quartieri periferici e dagli spazi peculiari capaci, in alcuni casi, di raccontare meglio l'identità urbana, ma soprattutto di fornire un osservatorio privilegiato da cui partire per promuovere una riorganizzazione equilibrata e sostenibile della città.

Parole chiave: Commercio, area Pescara-Chieti, quartieri urbani, vulnerabilità, città progetto.

1. Introduction

The urban structure of Abruzzo reflects the features of a diversified and dualistic territorial dynamic, witnessed by the presence of a single large urban area gravitating in the coastal and valley belt, more widely coalescent with the coastal town sprawl and with a system of “isle cities” (Fuschi 2006) spreading along the inner mountain areas (Landini 1976; Salvatori 1993). The “isle cities” are poorly integrated, weak in their socio-demographic and functional features as well as vulnerable in their geomorphological structure, which is characterized by seismicity (Landini, Massimi 2010).

The crucial point of this system is the urban area of Pescara-Chieti, centered on the two cities which are just 16 kilometers away. Their proximity has generated a conurbation (Massimi 1989) that is particularly evident in the valley area corresponding to the ribbon-like configuration of Chieti Scalo, perfectly welded with the western expansion of Pescara, while the hilly historical core – Chieti Alta – keeps an *isolated* feature from the geomorphological¹ and socio-cultural points of view.

The trade sector has been a powerful way to create territorial convergence and cohesion since the 1980's (Landini 1981), when the period of the growing of the large-scale retail sector (Bullado, Buzzetti 2001; Bottini 2005; Cirelli 2007; D'Alessandro 2015) fostered a further suburbanization driven by remarkable economic benefits, such as accessibility, scale and land advantages (that are typical of Fordist and capitalist systems). All these aspects contributed to the growth of the main urban area of Abruzzo, triggering, by means of substantial increases in size, rhythm and frequency of relationships, the urban strengthening and the rehabilitation of suburbs.

The analyzed area is, therefore, an urban agglomeration surrounded by shopping malls that operate as focal points around which new forms of *territorial coagulation*, following the phase of settlement dispersion, have emerged. According to the “new retail geography” (Wrigley, Lowe 1996), their role has gone beyond the mere retail activity and has reached a more intricate situation characterized by the change in lifestyle and in purchase habits of individuals, which foreshadows new spaces for recreational tertiary and signs a paradigmatic association between economic factors and cultural reasonings (Jackson 2002; Wrigley, Lowe 2002; Jackson, Thrift 1995; Wiedenhoft, Murphy 2017).

The vitality and commercial density of the urban area of Pescara-Chieti (which was very important for the whole region and for adjacent subregions) also produced a progressive marginalization of urban proximity trade (Cirelli 2009, 2016), amplified by the economic crisis and the advent of e-commerce. Thus, in this way, Pescara and Chieti have taken on the features of the typical post-modern cities, transformed and partially emptied in their central commercial landscapes and weakened in their size and demographic composition.

The aim of this paper is to go beyond the opposition between suburban commercial area and central urban commercial area², by analyzing the role of the commerce in the most peculiar and representative intra-urban areas and to contribute to a redefinition of the resilience of the contemporary city able to show the factors of vulnerability and to reveal the limits of urban planning. All these aspects are in full compliance with the most recent related scientific production, that has emphasized the plurality of the commercial landscapes – such as those of the *main streets*, the ethnic and the suburban ones – and has proposed a careful narrative of the dynamics that feed the different urban mosaic tiles (Carreras i Verdager, D'Alessandro 2017; D'Alessandro, Viganoni, 2013; Loda, Mancini 2003; Clerici, Faravelli 2006).

This paper specifically deals with peculiarities and vulnerabilities: in the first case study – the retail sector in Chieti Scalo – we analyze the situation of a typical street center located on the highway S.S. *Tiburtina*, where there is a ribbon-like commercial model polarized on specific aggregation areas (railway station, university). The second case study – the urban suburbs of Pescara – deals with the specific structure of the retail sector that hovers between settlement proposals and commercial desertification. The last case study is about the ethnic trade in Pescara and analyzes the relationship between space and ethnicity by means of a field research aimed at assessing the level of integration and, possibly, at observing areas of segregation and urban rifts.

2. The commerce in the urban area of Pescara-Chieti: a multiple and progressive reading. Adaptations, peculiarities and vulnerabilities

After the Second World War, the geographical proximity played a role of opposition between the two cities

¹ It should be noted that the hilly slopes of Chieti, characterized by a marl-clayey structure, vulnerable to landslides, have heavily prevented the development of the edification and the connection between the upper and the lower parts of the city (Ferrari 2019).

² This key has been the subject of critical analysis conducted by the PRIN Abruzzo working group. The conclusion to which reference should be made for specific in-depth analysis can be found in Fuschi, Ferrari 2019.

of Pescara and Chieti, when the strong demographic and functional growth of Pescara (mainly due to internal migratory flows from mountain areas attracted by the increasing opportunities in the city) began to overshadow Chieti, where the effects of the economic boom were limited, notwithstanding its role as the industrial pivot for the Val Pescara area as well as the capital of a particularly vast and mountainous province.

During the 1970's and the 1980's Pescara (the only city in Abruzzo with a population of over one hundred thousand inhabitants) developed a first and second process of belt suburbanization (Fuschi 2001), in accordance with the typical dynamics of urban model, with settlement, industrial redistribution and tertiary centralization.

The suburbanization process of Pescara, thanks to the administrative and physical features³ of the area, affected other towns of the province of Chieti such as Francavilla al Mare and San Giovanni Teatino⁴. In this way the suburbanization process created a continuous and urbanized system; it also produced a link between the two cities, supported by suitable roadways and by the trade sector which represented a powerful way to create territorial convergence and cohesion.

Here the season of shopping centers has found a powerful demand basin, which has defined a dense urban area (Fig. 1)⁵ whose vitality has ended up producing a process of emptying or, at least, of marginalizing proximity urban trade.

More specifically, Chieti (Ferrari 2019) dissipated the process of commercial accumulation because of the crisis in the secondary sector, the contraction of the public sector (offices and barracks), and an increased

situation of downsizing and ageing population. This contraction was due to its limitations, lying in the poor accessibility and the geomorphological vulnerability, which sharpened the gap with the valley part of the settlement (Chieti Scalo). The contraction in commercial activities was undeniable, as well as significant: regarding the food sector from 1961 to 2016 there was a decrease from 571 employees and 336 activities to 223 employees and 117 activities, according to ISTAT data. While the retail located in the historical center underwent a progressive reduction of activities, in Chieti Scalo there was an increase in the trade sector due to the better accessibility, which acted as a glue and added value to its development. It was supported, in turn, by factors such as a greater concentration of young people and the larger size of the families than in the historical center, as well as the presence of a university campus. Actually the city is still struggling to find ways to bridge this gap (despite the approval in 2019 of a Municipal Business Plan that has not been applied yet), although its considerable artistic and cultural heritage – which has remained on the sidelines of the tourist offer for too long – could represent a driving force for improving the historic center following new trade and consumption patterns, in a context where a rethinking of the urban plan, in its unitary function, is still necessary.

In the second half of 1980's (Fuschi, Scorrano 2019), after gaining a historically leading position in the trade sector, Pescara coped with the crisis of the urban retail caused by the prominence of suburban shopping centers. Observing the ISTAT data, grocery stores decreased by 35% in the decade 1981-1991 and by 16% in the following one, alongside the decline of the shops (-11% in the decade 1981-1991 and -16% in the decade 1991-2001). The city reacted to this scenario with a mixed public/private commercial plan. After a long preparatory phase, it led to the establishment of the first *Centro Commerciale Naturale* (i.e. CCN, *Natural Shopping Center*) which involves the central streets of the city and whose aim is to enhance tourist, cultural and social sectors. At the same time, Pescara completed its transformation by gradually and partially replacing traditional trade activities with restaurants, making food a specific landmark associated with new habits of purchase and use of space. In doing so, *foodscape* ended up typifying the old town, located around the Bourbon fortress, and the CCN streets, with a significant growth in the sector over the last ten years. There were favorable responses able to fuel processes of urban rehabilitation, to support the tourist offer and to add new values and power of aggregation to the urban space. At the same time, it is also important to notice the limits of a sectorial plan which is poorly

³ The city of Pescara borders the province of Chieti to the south and west.

⁴ Francavilla al Mare, historically the favourite seaside resort for the city of Chieti, borders Pescara and San Giovanni Teatino to the north, and represents a connection between the two chief towns. Initially, Francavilla al Mare and San Giovanni Teatino have gradually absorbed the suburbanization process of Pescara. Later they have absorbed the functional suburbanization process too.

⁵ This structure has begun in the 1990's supported by the first instances for the opening of shopping malls on regional and provincial scale. The first has been *Mall* (currently renamed *Borgo d'Abruzzo*) in Villanova di Cepagatti, followed by *Auchan* and *Ipercoop* in the municipal area of San Giovanni Teatino and *Iper Pescara Nord* in Città Sant'Angelo (towns of the first urban belt of Pescara, with San Giovanni Teatino belonging to the Chieti province). These shopping malls have been followed by several others (*Centro Universo* in Silvi Marina, *Iper* in Ortona, *Meg-alò* in Chieti Scalo and the *Outlet Village* in Città Sant'Angelo), giving reason for a high density value (70.26 m²/1000 inhab.) which, since the beginning, has placed Abruzzo at the top of the southern regions and in the seventh place on the national scale (a higher value than the national average, 65.38 m²/1000 inhab., and than the *Mezzogiorno*, 46.02 m²/1000 inhab.) (our elaboration based on MISE data, 2017).

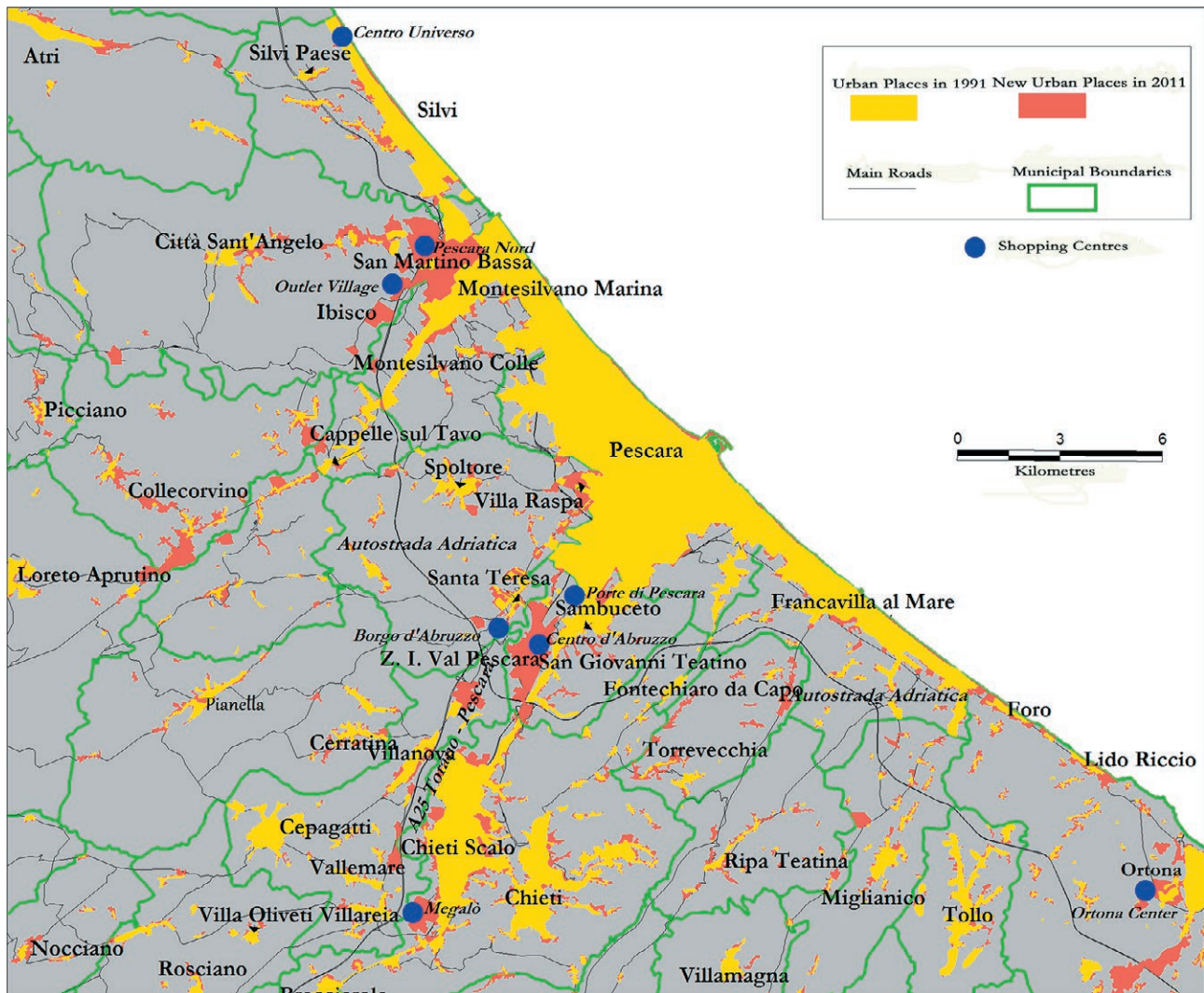


Figure 1. Location of Shopping Centers in the urban area of Pescara-Chieti. Source: elaborated by Fabrizio Ferrari.

integrated within a wider urban planning, and partial if compared to the dynamics of the interstitial and peripheral areas.

3. The development of trade in a transit area in Chieti Scalo

Chieti Scalo, as its own toponym reveals, is the valley part of the historical hilly core of Chieti. The term *Scalo*, in fact, refers to the railway line which has exploited the flat part of the site and around which has been built the first nucleus of the lower city. This case study, therefore, concerns a peculiar area of Chieti which, also from a supra-municipal perspective, is quite

extended and relevant for trade and transportation. This area has developed a high agglomeration of heterogeneous commercial activities whose main localization factor is the accessibility. The observed area is represented by the urban section of S.S. 5 *Tiburtina*, the ancient junction between Rome and Pescara, fundamental for the Chieti transport system and for the connections between the Upper and the Lower Val Pescara (Fig. 2). Because of its importance, in 1975 the local authorities built the *Asse Attrezzato* (RA12) in order to solve congestion problems in the urban section, and to quickly connect Chieti with Pescara and the A25 with A14 motorways, avoiding the city center. The heavy traffic has improved the localization of commercial activities thanks to good accessibility and easy parking and, at the same time, has

been a deterrent to the development of a certain sense of place, in which users can enjoy walking and shopping. The stretch of *Tiburtina* within the municipality of Chieti is divided in four segments, the central ones of which will be analyzed: *Viale Abruzzo* and *Viale B. Croce*. Regarding the urban landscape, in these streets there are a lot of one or two-storey houses, with the ground floors often dedicated to small businesses and the second floor often unused and in lousy conditions. Next to these edifices, there are other buildings with numerous floors, which were built for housing needs during the urban expansion of Chieti until 1990s, now mostly rented to university students. The fragmentation in small shops has determined two simultaneous phases. The first one is a phase of “release” (Dolega, Celińska-Janowicz 2015) of many activities, especially some of the traditional and historical ones that in many cases have not been affected by a generational renewal. The second phase is represented by an increase in non-commercial activities, that has determined the diversification of the offer but, on the other hand, it has induced negative effects on the dispositions of potential consumers, occupying “dead” spaces of shopping and dispersing commercial activities in ever larger spaces (Reimers, Clulow 2004).

On *Viale Croce* the commercial activities are organized into three segments: from the station to the intersection with *Via Pietrocola* and *Via Penne* there is a stretch with the oldest buildings in which there are small shops, especially clothing stores; up to the intersection in *Via Campobasso*, there is the most modern stretch with heterogeneous activities including restaurants; along the last section there are tenement buildings and medium-sized commercial areas with medium-low range products.

About the configuration of *Viale Abruzzo*, the first part up to *Via Mattei* is like the first segment of *Viale Croce*, but the buildings are newer and the shops more heterogeneous. In the second section, up to the intersection with *Via Vibrata*, there is a concentration of commercial and recent areas used as food supermarkets, household goods, linen and clothing garments stores. Regarding the last stretch of this street, there is a low intensity of commercial activities and semi-rural residences; in this area we can also detect a large *urban void* around the Municipal Stadium.

Thanks to a field research carried out jointly with an analysis on the Chambers of Commerce, it is possible to notice some characteristics of the road sections outlined: on *Viale Abruzzo* out of 337 locations 175 are for civic use (buildings, gates, etc.), 24 are empty (most of them are for sale or for rent), 58 are dedicated to activities that are not strictly commercial (real estate

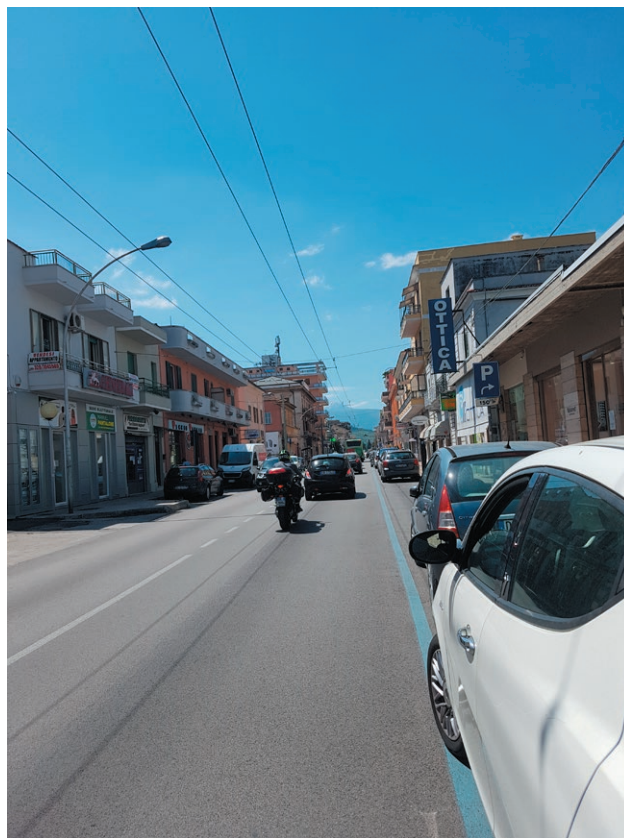


Figure 2. Chieti Scalo: a typical ribbon-like commercial model. Source: photo by Marina Fuschi.

agencies, hairdressers, car repair activities), 80 are dedicated to commerce and consume. Among these, 17 refer to clothing stores located in the initial part of the street and inside the small shopping center. It is important to notice that in this section there is a fairly large number of shops despite this area is near to the shopping mall *Megalò* where there are a lot of clothing stores. There are also 11 restaurants and 5 cafés, built up recently, and specialized in fast food and take-away (emphasizing the role of the street more as a transit space than as a resting place). The study on *Viale Croce* has demonstrated that, out of 402 locations, 198 are for civic uses, 31 are empty, 71 are for other uses (also in this case real estate agencies, hairdressers, but also some residual wholesale activities) and 102 are commercial activities. Of the latter, 13 are clothing activities, located in the first section in continuity with the stores of *Viale Abruzzo*, while 18 are related to the restaurant business which are recently enlivening the street's nightlife. In addition, there are support activities and others such as hardware stores and jewelry stores.

At a glance, the lack of attractions, including architectural ones, gives an image of a street where there are mostly service activities particularly relevant to the local community, but which are only worth the time of a brief stop. Most of restaurants and cafés, which are increasing in recent years, do not have external dehors, even if they have had an increase in clientele, especially the students, who tend to decrease during the summer. However, it is possible to outline a *nightscape* initial phase (Chatterton, Hollands 2003), especially on *Viale Croce*, but it is necessary to requalify these streets, which should take a central role within the urban fabric of Chieti Scalo. In February 2020, a vote was held on a motion to name one of the streets of Chieti Scalo as *Corso*, formally recognizing the need of a central place in the lower part of the city. At the same time, it is also necessary to implement concrete actions, including rehabilitation and gentrification policies (Bridge, Dowling 2001), and to establish spaces for social and commercial life. In this sense, it is important to point out some annual initiatives such as the *Notte Bianca dello Scalo*; during this event, which lasts only a few nights, the interruption of large road traffic occurs in a perimeter around the station, an element of strength and at the same time of weakness, involving also the initial section of the *Via Colonna* and some contiguous crossroads. A hypothesis of pedestrian area, however, is not practicable for long time, because of the pivotal role of these streets even in the metropolitan area; therefore, it will be necessary to study new projects to increase the attractiveness of this area (Teller, Reutterer 2008). Some factors such as the potential degree of urban interaction and accessibility, the number of sociable activities such as catering ones, can transform this area into a place of exchange rather than a place of competition against various local actors, for instance the nearby *Megalò* shopping mall or other services as the University, creating a hybrid and fluid area, capable of transforming itself and potentially attracting new visitors and users. (Kärholm et al. 2014). On the other hand, the high rate of empty or abandoned facilities must induce incentives to occupy spaces in order to give a global image of an alive area (Dolega, Lord 2020), considering that public incentives for localization, like the reduction in local taxes, have been successful in other districts of Chieti. These dynamics are part of a larger and systemic vision through which the city must reconnect the relationship between the upper part and the lower part, through planning processes favored by the recent approval of the municipal commercial planning. This is a significant perspective to counterbalance the actual Scalo role, as connection area between neighboring municipalities, therefore tending to marginalize the hilly historic center.

4. The role of commerce/consumption in the urban suburbs of Pescara

The establishment of the city of Pescara is the result of the aggregation of some municipalities whose centralizing element could be identified in the parishes (*Madonna del Fuoco*, *Madonna dei Sette Dolori*) surrounded by a rural neighborhood. This process has induced a functional and social differentiation of urban spaces through the progressive evolution of the urbanization process and the consequent building growth of the city. According to the typology of the social and building fabric, the area (even if it is an urban space of about thirty-four square kilometers) allows to outline at least three different *suburbs*. During the immediate post-war period in the central area⁶ the urban development took place in compliance with a social balance in which public housing coexisted with conventional and luxury residential buildings. About twenty years later in the northern suburbs of Pescara (*Zanni*) and along the southern inner section of Pescara river (*Villa del Fuoco and Rancitelli*; *Fontanelle and San Donato*) there was a significant concentration of houses built in the framework of the public residential building planning (Cavuta, Ferrari 2019); over the years this situation led to a gradual expulsion of the middle-class, with related damages in terms of economic depreciation of real estate and commercial activities, which in turn caused a spiral of degradation, fertile ground for the underworld⁷. The building development in Pescara – partly planned, partly subject to the free action of real estate market – produced a spatial and social fragmentation (Scorrano 2011); in this situation, the places of commerce, intended as spaces for social aggregation and free time, also reproduced and reinforced the spatial rifts. Three different types of urban suburbs – each with peculiar commercial features – came into conflict with the central city (which identified a *Natural Shopping Center* in *Piazza della Rinascita*, also known as *Piazza Salotto*) and the neighboring commercial galleries.

The first one, the *Città Giardino*, characterized by a high-quality residential demand, was planned during the fascist period along the coastal strip to the South of Pescara (bordering the municipality of Francavilla al Mare) and also extends along the hilly section of San Silvestro.

The second type of urban suburb, characterized by social housing, is represented by degraded social and

⁶ The expression “central” refers to the northern part of the Pescara river corresponding to the central section of the historic municipality of Castellammare Adriatico (Fuschi, Scorrano 2019).

⁷ The residential complex known as *Ferro di Cavallo* in the *Rancitelli* district can be considered as an example.

economic areas (*Zanni*; *Villa del Fuoco* and *Rancitelli*; *Fontanelle* and *San Donato*).

The third one is *Pescara dei Colli Madonna* (divided into *Santuario* and *Colli Nord* districts), so named, according to the writer, because of its identity mark represented by the eighteenth-century *Basilica della Madonna dei Sette Dolori*. This urban suburb can be considered almost as a second town thanks to its urban functions (also including a branch of the Municipal Offices). The various urban and social aspects outlined lead to a series of questions about the role currently played by the retail sector. Furthermore, current trends involving commercial and leisure services, with aggregative purposes, could represent a tool to recover the degraded suburbs (Howard 2007). But are there central commercial areas in the above outlined suburbs, and what role do they play for the residents? Starting from the northern suburbs of Pescara, the *Via Nazionale Adriatica Nord* represents the main road and commercial artery which, by cutting the coastal strip into two portions, constitutes a boundary line between the area of urban decay to the west and the area of the building recovery and of the villas revalued by the opening of the *Strada Parco* – a cycle and pedestrian street originating from the displacement of the urban section of the railway line – to the east.

Along the *Via Nazionale Adriatica*, near *Zanni* district, the opening of the urban shopping mall *Delfino* has represented a meeting and stopping point for the elderly even if there are only 16 shops there, housed inside a rather small area. The neglected courtyard of the social housing and the sense of insecurity are counterbalanced by the possibility to enjoy a protected place like *Delfino*, that performs a social more than a commercial function for the economically weak population of the area. In the studied area there are three food discount stores, two of which are located on the *Via Nazionale Adriatica*: coming from the south, the first one is a few hundred meters before *Zanni*, in a connection section with the hilly zone; the second one is in the center of *Zanni*; the third one, recently opened, is at the end of the social housing area. Therefore, there is an important commercial area near *Zanni* district, which, thanks to the presence of supermarkets, food discounts and specialized large-scale distribution, also attracts residents from the hilly area and the coastal strip north of the central town. The movement of consumers heading towards the area tends to reduce the segregation effect that characterizes the popular district; in addition, the existence of a shopping center, which already performs an aggregative function, implies an enhancement and a diversification in the use of commercial spaces that can also be used for cultural events. In the inner peripheral

area at the south of the Pescara river (*Villa del Fuoco* and *Rancitelli*), – more affected by degradation than the northern suburbs – large-scale commercial activities are located on the edge of the area, leaving the inner suburb served by scarcely profitable retail stores. Thus, *Villa del Fuoco*, *Rancitelli*, *Fontanelle* and *San Donato* districts represent an economic and social periphery just crossed to reach the places of large-scale distribution and the shopping centers of *San Giovanni Teatino*; that is due to a lack of private aggregative spaces with commercial and recreational functions and to the poor conditions of public infrastructures.

Contrasting commercial desertification, enhancing commercial and recreational spaces structured as shopping centers, privatizing public spaces to guarantee safety for traders and consumers are necessities and strategies to fight the social and economic hardship of the popular suburbs. On the other hand, in the residential suburbs of the *Città Giardino*, thanks to the propensity to mobility of the residents, places of aggregation are not necessary as demonstrated by the downgrading of a shopping mall into a supermarket.

As already pointed out, in the northern hilly area, the intense building development process (started in the 1990's) led to the creation of an urban *continuum* consisting of terraced houses and buildings. Around *Largo Madonna dei Sette Dolori*, a suburb with marked rural features and a small center with tertiary functions was replaced by social housing, and the purchase needs of the residents have been for a long time satisfied by neighboring sales points located along the historical urban section linked to the coastal strip.

However, the urban expansion led to the planning of a second commercial hub at the beginning of *Via di Sotto*, where some large-scale retail businesses and services for citizens – such as gym, laundry, café, Carabinieri barracks and a municipal offices branch – have settled. This area is served by a large parking lot and it is also facilitated by its position along one of the main road arteries.

Furthermore, the opening of the *Arca*, a shopping mall with leisure facilities in the neighboring municipality of *Spoltore*, which is also located in an area historically linked to the *Pescara dei Colli Madonna*, represents a meeting and cultural place and a space where community identity elements are consolidated.

Now, Pescara, although requalified in its central spaces, must recover its peripheries degraded by social and economic problems. This regeneration has to concern the renewal of the building structure (e.g. the proposal to break down the *Ferro di Cavallo*), but it also has to act on the social fabric, operating on the spaces of aggregation and on everyday life, on the commercial

and craft neighborhood activities, and especially on the sense of belonging to a territory. In a renewed context of social security, all these elements can find a strength in structures capable of mixing the commercial offer with leisure activities.

5. Ethnic trade in Pescara: an enclave in the central urban fabric

In the *glocalized* context of large urban areas widely crossed by global flows, talking about trade without analyzing the type of ethnic supply would give a distorted view of the local economic reality. Ethnic trade is characterized by a double interesting aspect; if on the one hand it recalls the characteristics of what we could define premodern commercial space, characterized by the destructuring of sale activities, the spaces informality, “the interpenetration between street life and shops’ commercial activities”; on the other hand it follows the postmodern typical “space-time compression”, as well as the proximity to stations, ports and other infrastructural nodes, enhancing flexible urban fabrics. (Lanzani 2003). In one of the areas that are considered central there is an enclave, a sort of small city within the city and an agglomeration of different ethnic groups, which is the case study of this analysis. This area includes one of the main urban arteries, *Corso Vittorio Emanuele II*, connected with some perpendicular streets and with the coastal strip⁸. The present field research aims at detecting the number and the trend of ethnic trade in one of the most significant areas of the Adriatic city, not so much from the quantitative point of view of the phenomenon – which is widespread in Pescara – but rather for its centrality in the urban fabric. This perspective is very important, being this area exactly halfway between the railway station and the streets which represent the fulcrum of the city commerce, including the luxury one, and the promenade⁹. Indeed, the ethnic enclave has occupied the central spaces left empty by the residents – both in housing and commercial terms – producing an unsafe commercial landscape, in some cases quite degraded, characterized by a general atmosphere of insecurity with shops and shop windows uncared-for. In this context of closure and distrust, the various ethnic groups tend to produce forms of mutual support, while, on other side, there is little openness to integra-

tion by the local population. Through the field survey it has been possible to detail the quantity and the type of ethnic shops currently present, noting a high concentration of activities although they are in a really small area: out of the total 29 stores, about 31% is represented by grocery stores (mainly Chinese and African, and then Romanian), followed by a 21% of ethnic restaurants, and by around 14% of phone, technology and repair shops (mainly Chinese and Indian). Greengrocers, costume jewelry shops and international couriers – who deal with the movement of goods and people between Italy and Romania – account for about a 7% each. Lastly, general store, tailoring, clothing and internet point are all present with a single unit (each accounting for 3.4%).

Comparing the data collected through the field research with those provided by the Chambers of Commerce (February 2019), a very interesting historical profile comes out, as about 55% of the commercial spaces currently run as ethnic have hosted over the years at least another ethnic shop, which indicates a sort of loyalty towards the place by foreign communities.

Since the 1970’s, in fact, the ethnic phenomenon begun to develop in Pescara, particularly with African communities in the form of itinerant trade, which was also due to the seaside that characterizes the city; only since the 1980s ethnic groups have taken root downright in this area, becoming part of the local economy and have witnessed the arrival of other groups such as the Chinese, the Iranians and others from Eastern Europe. In this context it’s important to highlight “the relationship between space and ethnicity”, as the foreign population settled in spaces left empty by the local population, which moved to peripheral hilly and flat areas after the building development of the late 1980s (Fuschi, Scorrano 2009). This phenomenon has generated a process of urban substitution, limiting the areas of abandonment, in some cases reaching a sort of new enhancement of the urban space (Lanzani 2003). Today we are still far from talking about a real socio-cultural integration. Indeed, recent analyzes have shown that the *differential incorporation theory* has much more evidence than the *spatial assimilation theory*, so that the settlement and the integration of foreign communities do not depend exclusively on the socio-economic aspects relating to the origin, but rather on the reception capacity and the openness of the local population (Cristaldi 2012). Exemplifying, in this sense, is another situation related to ethnic Senegalese peddlers, who have occupied for years, mostly illegally, the area in front of the station, with rows of stalls used during the day for commercial activity and transformed into bedding at night, with a result far from satisfactory. About four years ago this place has been

⁸ These streets are *Via Piave*, *Via Mazzini*, *Via Quarto dei Mille*, which, together with *Via de Amicis*, circumscribe *Piazza Santa Caterina da Siena*, delimiting the study area with *Piazza dei Martiri Pennesi*.

⁹ Starting from 2014 there has been the establishment of the *Natural Shopping Center* along these streets.



Figure 3. Area intended for *ethnic market* in the railway underpass in Pescara. Source: photo by Silvia Iacune.

dismantled with the promise of creating a space where those traders could have worked legally and safely; a promise that seemed could be fulfilled last year with the *ethnic market*, located in a dedicated space in the railway underpass of the central station (Fig. 3).

This project raised controversies from several parties such as Confcommercio, the political opposition and the foreigners themselves, who considered this idea as discriminatory and ghettoizing. Also this case, as indeed the widest phenomenon of emerging degradation in the analyzed area, prefigures an enclave and confirms the idea of a structurally rifted and poorly integrated city. Pescara would need political strategies aimed at building a systemic vision of the city able to support a real and combined integration of this new aspect of the economy (Panzarella 2010). These issues represent a mirror of the concept of glocality that characterizes today's society, favoring interrelations that are necessary both for the economic development and for the connection of the social fabric in order to achieve a cultural expansion.

6. Conclusions

The case studies analyzed in this paper have tried to look beyond the contrast, widely debated in the literature, between the favorable period of the large commercial *format* and the trade crisis in the central and historical areas of the city. This means to overcome a homologating description of the city, by adopting a multiple and complex view which moves from suburbs, interstitial areas and peculiar spaces, in order to better narrate urban identity. This type of study offers a privileged position from which to foster a balanced and sustainable reorganization of the city. Indeed, this seems to be the most urgent aspect highlighted by the studies about Chieti Scalo and the suburbs and the ethnic trade of Pescara. The retail sector, in its private dimension but mainly in public planning, does not seem to be able to reconfigure the urban shape in its unitary dimension, thus confirming internal rifts, large residual spaces and even segregation areas. It is necessary to start to follow a cooperative logic

aimed at promoting “functional integration processes of different offers and complementarity formats with other types of functions located in a large territorial system” (Brunetta 2012, 75). In this way, on the basis of proven mutual benefits for the urban system, it is possible to produce virtuous effects of reactivation and/or consolidation of urban commerce in peripheral and/or peculiar areas.

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Leisure Shopping and Fashion Tour, New Elements of the Marche Tourist Offer

Leisure Shopping e Fashion Tour, nuovi elementi dell'offerta turistica marchigiana

ENRICO NICOSIA

Dipartimento di Scienze Cognitive, Psicologiche, Pedagogiche e degli Studi Culturali, Università degli Studi di Messina, Italy

E-mail: enicosia@unime.it

Abstract. In the last decade, the Italian region Marche has consolidated a respectable position in the national and international panorama of tourist destinations. A region, that in building its territorial brand, has used its peculiar mix of past traditions and modern innovations to offer tourists a complex territorial product. This blend of natural, cultural and historical resources succeeds in appealing and attracting even the most demanding visitor. Purchasing goods during a holiday has always been a significant activity of the tourism macro-industry, both from the economical and experiential point of view. Within the variable framework of the tourism market, where destinations and operators have to adapt and enhance their offer to better attract their targets, analyzing how shopping could be a primary, secondary or ancillary reason for traveling, is a matter of crucial interest. Such travels can require short movements, typically one-day or week-end trips, but can also be characterized by a longer duration where other experiences, besides shopping, are combined. This phenomenon and its demand have historically involved Italy, a country that can rely on a diversified and high-quality offer that valorizes and combines traditions, expertise and local products along with the offer of big international brands. Among the various itineraries offered, the ones that connect places of tradition, industriousness and local craftsmanship to areas designated to prestigious fashion brands and clothing outlets, are of particular interest. The incorporation of shopping activities within a vivid framework of traditional entrepreneurial businesses is both a pleasant and advantageous experience. It represents the opportunity for a renewed exploration of the area and the rediscovery of the best local production companies. The objective of this work, through a field survey and interviews with tourists, entrepreneurs and workers of these sectors, is to investigate the phenomenon in its territorial consistency in order to understand if there is a substantial cause and effect relationship between the two sectors.

Keywords: leisure shopping, shopping tourism, tourist offer, Marche.

Riassunto. Le Marche nell'ultimo decennio hanno consolidato, nel panorama nazionale ed internazionale delle destinazioni turistiche, una posizione di tutto rispetto. Una regione che nel costruire il suo *brand* territoriale ha utilizzato quell'atmosfera mista di tradizioni e innovazioni, per offrire al turista un prodotto territoriale complesso, che integrando insieme risorse naturali, culturali e paesaggistiche riesce a stupire e affasci-

nare anche il visitatore più esigente. L'attività di acquisto di beni durante il viaggio è da sempre una componente rilevante, sia dal punto di vista economico che esperienziale. Quanto appare interessante, nel quadro mutevole del mercato turistico, in cui destinazioni ed operatori si ritrovano ad adattare e potenziare la propria offerta per attrarre al meglio i propri target di domanda, è analizzare in dettaglio quanto lo shopping sia oggi motivazione (primaria, secondaria o accessoria) dello spostamento. Si tratta di viaggi che possono tradursi in spostamenti brevi (week-end), oppure estendersi ad un più ampio arco temporale durante il quale altre esperienze si combinano a quella dello shopping. Questo fenomeno e la relativa domanda oggi coinvolgono le Marche, regione che può contare su un'offerta differenziata e di qualità che valorizza e combina tradizione, competenze e prodotti locali con l'offerta di grandi marchi internazionali. Tra i vari itinerari offerti, piuttosto interessante è quello che lega i luoghi della tradizione dell'operosità e dell'artigianato tipico ai rinomati outlet della moda e dell'abbigliamento. La tipicità s'incontra con lo *shopping*, in un'esperienza piacevole e vantaggiosa: un modo nuovo per esplorare il territorio e riscoprire le eccellenze delle migliori realtà produttive locali. Obiettivo del presente lavoro, attraverso un'indagine di campo e l'effettuazione di interviste, è investigare il fenomeno nella sua consistenza territoriale al fine di comprendere se esiste una sostanziale relazione di causa ed effetto tra i due settori.

Parole chiave: shopping ricreazionale, shopping tourism, offerta turistica, Marche.

1. Introduction

Purchasing goods during a holiday has always been a significant activity of the tourism macro-industry, both from the economical and experiential point of view. It is thus a matter of interest analyzing in depth how shopping, within the variable framework of the latest tourism market, has become nowadays a primary, secondary or accessory reason for traveling. As highlighted by Sciarelli and Rossi (2007), clarifying the role played by the shopping industry in a tourist destination is a complex operation even though it is evident that the commercial facilities of the territory can affect tourists' decision-making in choosing a destination. "In terms of economic effect, tourism can diversify the local economic structure and reduce imbalances and gaps by creating opportunities for income and employment in the region. Foreign exchange serves a key function in overcoming difficulties, such as deficits in foreign trade, as its ultimate contribution to local and national economic growth is significant. The development of travel packages for shopping tourism can become important and economical because of the substantial earnings from

foreign trade and exchange of currencies from tourism" (Choi, Heo, Law 2015, 2). Such travels can require short movements – typically one-day or week-end trips – but can also be characterized by a longer duration where other experiences, besides shopping, are combined. This phenomenon traces its roots back in the US of the early 30's but starts spreading in Italy soon after the opening of the first shopping centers and the rise of a diversified and high-quality offer that valorizes and combines traditions, expertise and local products along with the offer of big international brands. As Rabbiosi says (2016, 415) "During the late 1990s, into the first decade of this millennium, several cities began advertising shopping experiences to tourists, alongside with more traditional themes, such as heritage and cultural tours (Evans 2003; Gotham 2002; Law 2002). Promoting leisure shopping sites, events and itineraries characterizes late consumer capitalism signifying the importance of a city's brand image (Rabbiosi 2015b)".

The increase of leisure shopping, no longer subordinate to the fulfillment of basic needs, together with the rise of mass tourism, has strengthened the relationship between shopping and tourism, thus fostering new opportunities for tourist destinations and increasing the number of visitors and tourist shoppers. Moreover, it has provided an excellent way of diversifying local tourist offer by taking advantage of the top-notch territorial productions. Nowadays shopping is more and more linked to leisure time activities and is often a strong motivational push for choosing a certain holiday. Thanks to the progress of modern technology in many fields, transport and payment sectors for instance, people have acquired a wider range of mobility and buying options so a side activity like shopping can really become the main reason for picking a precise tourist destination (Alunno et al. 2012; Moscardo 2004, McIntyre 2012, Rabbiosi 2013, 2015a). Indeed, the need and desire to indulge in shopping activities has become a main stimulus for setting out on a journey and is the result of people's need to rest, their wish to escape their daily routine and the acceptance of challenges implied by shopping (Jackson 1991; Rojek 2005; Kim, Timothy, Hwang 2011; Rabbiosi 2011). Tourists seek both pleasurable and practical shopping experiences. Although tourists may not actually purchase products, the activity can still provide them with pleasure (Jansen-Verbeke 1991; Choi, Heo, Law 2015).

This phenomenon and its relative demand strongly affects Italy, especially if we consider cities like Milan and Rome which have become top luxury shopping destinations. Via Montenapoleone and Via della Spiga mark the famous fashion quadrilateral in Milan, where as

Piazza di Spagna with its historic Caffè Greco in vogue since 1760 and via Condotti, where Bulgari opened its first store in 1905, represent the crucial shopping hub of the city of Rome. Milan is the third European city in terms of number of luxury brand stores strategically located on streets with high pedestrian flow. This urban area, historically dedicated to shopping, is one of the most sought-after European destination not just by luxury retail businesses but by international clothing brands who also attract numerous tourists. Millennials in particular, choose to buy luxury goods in the most important European shopping streets but also like shopping in extra-urban locations that play a significant role in the geography of commerce, hence turning shopping malls, outlet villages and factory outlet stores in true and proper tourist destinations (Jackson, Thrift 1995; Graziano, Nicosia, 2013; Nicosia 2016).

Similarly, the Marche region which counts a diversified and high-quality offer that valorizes and combines traditions, expertise and local products along with the offer of big international brands, has lately seen the rise of tourism connected to leisure shopping. Among the various itineraries offered, the ones that connect places of tradition, industriousness and the popular craftsmanship of the Fermo and Macerata area, to the luxury clothing stores, are of particular interest. The incorporation of shopping activities within a vivid framework of traditional entrepreneurial businesses is both a pleasant and advantageous experience. It represents the opportunity for a renewed exploration of the area and the rediscovery of the best local production companies.

In this context, the relationship between shopping and tourism takes on a complex meaning. Tourism is an important industry which has an impact on each country's GDP and represents one of the most important cultural activities of contemporary society (Urry, Larsen, 2011). Clearly, the present pandemic situation caused by the spread of the COVID-19 which is devastating economies on a global scale, has had serious repercussions in the tourist sector, marking severely the present season and inflicting a tremendous blow at the direct and induced occupation. Tourists' behaviors and their way of traveling in the aftermath COVID-19, especially in the short run, will undergo a drastic change and it is a common belief that this can further slow down the process of economic recovery in reference to the entire tourist sector with serious consequences for the all the workers involved in the tourism business (lay-off schemes, unemployment, shutting down of business activities). This present work's attempt to analyze the phenomenon of shopping tourism in the Marche area is the result of a field survey and interviews with tourists carried out

between June and September 2019 with the objective of understanding the present relationship of these two sectors – within the territorial context subject of study – trying to identify the current trends and mapping new directions for future researches. Moreover, this article aims to contribute, by bringing a social and cultural perspective, in examining the nexus between tourism and consumption as it is performed in space through leisure shopping.

2. The role played by shopping in the tourist offer of a territory

The urge to embark for a shopping travel is either due to the need to purchase goods that are available only in particular places or to the need to reach production areas that are well-known for specific products. Going around stores, looking at shop windows, visiting markets and fairs, buying typical food and wine products, whether it is for personal use, making a gift or taking a souvenir home, represent for the tourist fundamental activities required for the fulfillment of those needs that make each travel unique. The moment the purchase takes place, the tourist literally gets in touch with the objects, the people and the culture of a particular place. Going shopping also implies a set of interrelated practices rooted in contemporary consumer society and deeply connected to particular economic, social and cultural dynamics that have helped shaping the identity of this phenomenon in its modern sense (Zukin 2004; Zukin, Smith Maguire 2004). Leisure shopping is a popular activity, particularly during holiday trips and vacations; it is one that not only modifies the structure of the shopping space in tourism places (Snepenger et al. 2003) but also has a pervasive impact on places that were not originally intended as leisure shopping spaces in the strictest sense (Bærenholdt et al. 2004; Tosun 2007; Rabbiosi 2011). Shopping becomes therefore an intrinsic part of the touristic and traveling experience. Nowadays shopping is no longer perceived as a marginal activity but as the main drive for setting out for a trip. In analyzing the relationship between shopping and tourism, two categories can be outlined. The first is where shopping is regarded as a collateral traveling activity and takes place for other reasons. The second, refers to specific touristic mobility where shopping is the trip's main purpose (Timothy, Butler 1995). Setting off for a journey has an impact on a tourist's buying habits. With this in mind it can thus be stated that *shopping tourism* is a form of contemporary tourism in which the purchasing of goods that do not belong to a person's daily environment is the

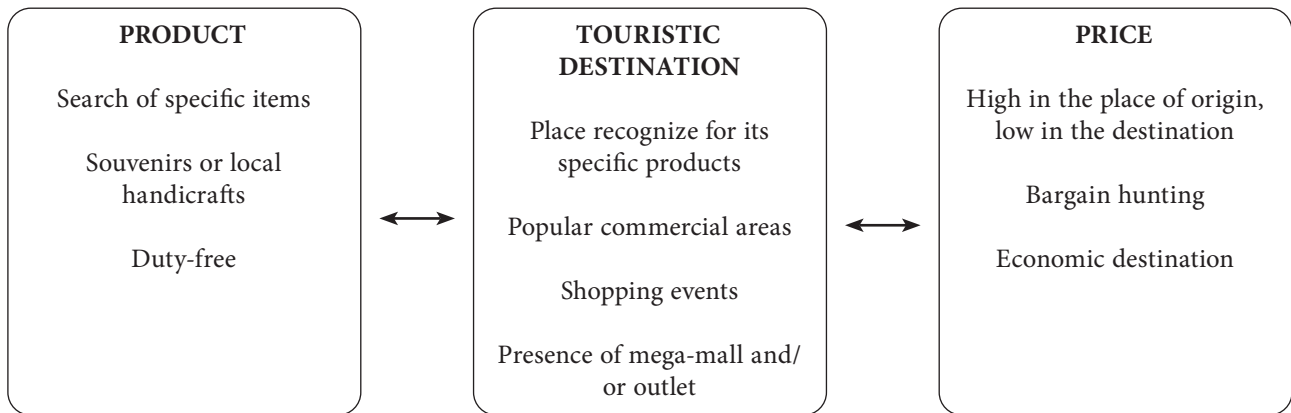


Figure 1. Factors influencing shopping as a motivation for travel. Source: author's elaboration from Timothy 2004.

key factor in choosing to travel. In regards to travelers' reasons for reaching specific tourist destinations, Timothy (2004) has identified three main factors that contribute in making shopping the primary traveling reason (Fig. 1): the product to purchase, the tourist destination and the convenient price.

Many tourists seek special brands being well aware of the product's high-quality and iconic design. Others prefer duty-free shops where they can purchase goods without paying taxes.

These shopping destinations have become famous tourist sites because they were specifically planned to meet this intention and thanks to their well valued and appreciated offer, the association of these sites to their typical territorial production is very common.

A last factor that affects tourists' decision-making in choosing a destination is the convenient price. If the tourist had no economic advantage, reaching a specific site would not be of any particular interest. The fact that tourists seek offers that are good value for money is further shown by the increasing popularity gained by outlet and company stores in recent years.

With respect to the economic advantage that is linked to the phenomenon of shopping tourism, a particular mention to the practice known as cross-border shopping is necessary. The latter can be considered a touristic phenomenon as it involves the movement of visitors from their hometown, the access to touristic infrastructures, the various on-site expenditures and whatever is ascribable to tourism. Economic, legal and social differences encountered on the other side of each frontier create attracting conditions for all sorts of tourists who are thus encouraged to go cross-border shopping for the sake of convenience. Some of these reasons include: favorable currency exchange, high tax gap between the two countries, wider range of goods and

facilities compared to the home-country, wider range of brands, luxury brands and top-quality products, more flexible opening times and days. Cross-border shopping is pleasurable since the traveling is perceived not only in functional terms but also and especially as a leisure and entertainment activity.

Today more than ever, locations that allow a more articulate shopping experience whilst meeting consumers' needs are preferred. The experience of a tourist shopper is thus linked to the destination chosen for his/her vacation.

3. Methodology

The survey was held between July and September 2019 and was carried out in the Marche region among the factory outlet stores located in the districts between Fermo and Macerata. This is a well known shopping area outside the city boundaries with a strong pull that attracts and moves tourist shopper flows in and out of the city.

The data provided by the Chamber of Commerce of Macerata in regards to the distributional format of the factory outlet stores located in the Macerata district, shows that the vast majority of shops are linked to the clothing and footwear industry.

Most of the factory outlet stores are situated near the industrial area and often inside it. In other cases, factory outlet stores are located in the shopping areas or in the city center but always at a short-distance from the production sites. Only a very few outlet stores are positioned outside the Marche region.

The empirical part of the survey was constituted by face-to-face questionnaires conducted in the shopping areas of Casette d'Ete (FM), Montegranaro (FM), Porto

S. Elpidio (FM), Piediripa (urban fraction of Macerata) and Civitanova Marche (MC). These questionnaires were held over different days within a certain time-period in order to cover a wider representativeness of the sample that was randomly chosen.

Italian and foreign tourists were asked questions concerning their personal characteristics, traveling behaviors when visiting the chosen destination, information connected to the purpose of their travel and the incidence or presence of shopping among their motives.

Finally information was collected specifically concerning their shopping expenditure during their travel, not counting expenses for traveling, accommodation, food and tourist attractions (for example museum or park entrance fees).

Tourists were asked to breakdown their shopping expenditures in ten macro-categories including products like accessories (jewelry and leather goods) and design objects (furniture).

For each area, 50 valid questionnaires were collected. In case of tourists found on-site before the stores' opening times and therefore without having had the chance to perform any type of shopping activity, the choice was made to interrupt the interview in order to use only significant answers that are truly useful for data-collection and data-analysis processes.

Local residents, commute workers, as well as newly arrived tourists who had not yet started their shopping activities, were excluded from the survey. Information concerning tourists in their final stage of their visit was privileged over information regarding newly arrived tourists who were generally not included in the sample. The answers of tourists who had not performed any type of purchase were also taken into consideration when making calculations.

4. The fashion tour in the Marche: the investigation field

The Marche Region has been the protagonist of an economic miracle. It presents itself to visitors and tourists with its highly-productive environment and the vivid economy of its territory marked by a widespread distribution of medium and small sized businesses and highly-specialized production districts.

The peculiar structure of the region's economy was also analyzed by the economist Giorgio Fuà who even coined the term "The Marche Model". The latter was based on the strong bond that linked the industrial network to its urban tissue. This region has been capable of hosting some of Italy's biggest factory districts by adopt-

ing a modern productive system based on innovation and high-quality exports whilst preserving the typical family dimension that was deeply rooted in this territory's social structure.

The manufacturing and white goods factories, the naval and musical instrument businesses together with the fishing and wine industries are but some of the economic activities that mark this region. It is in close proximity to the main production areas of top manufactured goods, scattered across the extra-urban and peri-urban land, that factory stores and outlet malls have proliferated before being incorporated in the complex network of relationships (territory-inhabitants-users) and characterizing the area's outlook and functions (Nicosia, Porto 2015).

Top-quality products combined with the expertise of local artisans are the secrets behind the success of many small businesses that have managed to become world-leading brands. These local productions, whichever sector they are connected to – food and wine, footwear or manufactured goods – are the epitome of quality, reliability and convenience. The proximity of many tourist attractions to popular factory outlet stores set the grounds for a locally-customized tourist offer (for example the tour operator Esitour). The holiday package offered to tourists and visitors includes accommodation and a guided shopping tour with a personal shopper.

On this matter it is worthwhile taking notice of an initiative promoted by Regione Marche (www.destinazionemarche.com) aimed at offering tour packages designed around the shopping offer of local factory outlet stores.

This initiative involves the making of a multimedia guide (static and interactive) with content related to local company and factory stores according to previously made agreements. The guide is uploaded on the website www.in-outlet.it (where other regions like Abruzzo, Umbria and Emilia Romagna are also featured) and further access to the link is also found on the region's tourism portal within the section named *made in Marche*. The latter is specifically reserved to thematic routes which are considered a main asset in the development of a sustainable form of regional tourism. This thematic route network includes itineraries connected to top-notch food and wine products as well as shopping tours that take place either within the urban center along the streets where local artisan shops are based or outside the city walls, where the destinations are factory stores and famous company shops. The In-Outlet network also includes the creation of a special discount card for tourists and an exclusive app designed to enhance the shopping experience. The know-how gained in the In-Outlet

project was also used for two spin-offs called Shoptour and In-Outlet Online Village. The first aims at promoting short tours (mainly weekend trips) which combine shopping activities in outlet stores. The second has the purpose of creating a virtual village where local businesses can open their customized online shops, thus encouraging virtual visitors to purchase goods during their digital tour.

A travel to the Marche can therefore be an opportunity for combining the classic cultural tour or beach holiday with a shopping tour by taking advantage of the numerous top-quality goods offered by the several factory stores spread across the region.

The main factory districts worthwhile visiting during the fashion tour are two. The textile one located near Ancona and Italy's biggest footwear district situated between the provinces of Ascoli, Fermo and Macerata. Montegranaro and Casette, for instance, two towns in the province of Fermo where Tod's luxury head quarter of the Della Valle family is based, have a secular history in the manufacturing of quality shoes. The manufacturing of leather is a very old tradition in the Marche. Montegranaro in fact, also hosts luxury outlet stores of the Rossi shoe company as well as the brand Zeis Excelsa which manufactures and distributes for companies like Cult, Merrell, Harley Davidson and Bikkembergs. Another famous production/selling site is that of the Nero Giardini brand based in Monte San Pietrangeli. As far as menswear is concerned, a hot shopping spot is Filottrano a small town in the Ancona province where back in the 70's many tailoring boutiques like Lardini, Tamantini and Luca Paolorossi started their businesses. Montappone instead, is the heart of the hat manufacturing production and it is known as the International Hat Centre. The pretty village of San Biagio Osimo, always within the jurisdiction of Ancona, hosts another important outlet store that sells a wide range of top Italian brands for youth clothing like Malizia, La Perla and Naj Oleari.

The world of factory outlet stores in the Marche appears very heterogeneous and often hyper-specialized. It ranges from fashion stores, to shops specialized in designer kitchen accessories, to emporiums dedicated to lamps and home furnishings. An attractive target for kids can also be found close to Recanati where there is a district entirely dedicated to the toy industry. Here too there is the opportunity of spending time shopping along the lovely streets of the Marche's city centers. In Urbino the shoe brand Piero Guidi boasts an exclusive boutique located in the historic Raffaello Gallery right in the town's heart. In Fano, instead there is the chance of purchasing shabby-chic footwear directly in the laboratory Folets of the artisan-philosopher Andrea Traina

who aims at a zero-impact production by choosing to manufacture only hand-made products using exclusively Italian and naturally-tanned leathers. The famous beachwear brand Emamò has an exclusive outlet in Fabriano which is also worth visiting.

Moving towards Matelica, in the province of Macerata, we find one of Italy's most famous fashion designer's store, the Armani Factory Outlet. In Tolentino, a small village in the heart of the Macerata province, there is also the company store of the fashion designer Nazareno Gabrielli.

Finally, in Pesaro, you can find the Outlet Freeport, – owned by the company licensed in Europe for the brands Ralph Lauren, Timberland and Husky – and the Union Moda Factory Outlet which covers a surface of roughly 2000 squared meters and sells a vast variety of Replay designer clothes and accessories.

According to the 2017 Report of the Symbola-Unioncamere Foundation which annually analyses the contribution of culture and creativity to the economy of Italian regions, the Marche, especially the provinces of Ancona and Macerata, record a strong impact on Italy's cultural-creative production thanks to the quality of the manufacturing tradition of its factory-selling districts.

The widespread distribution of small and medium sized businesses combined to the presence of important and highly-specialized production districts of clothing, accessories and manufacturing goods have helped shaping the lively economic and commercial scenario that is peculiar to the Marche region (Graziano 2019; Sfodera 2013).

This territorial configuration of highly-specialized micro-systems which form a clustering of the finest production districts constitutes the distinctive brand of the Marche region and represents the heart of the globally known trademark *made in Italy*.

The rise of company stores, factory stores and stock clearance shops has taken place right next to the main manufacturing and production areas that mark the extra-urban and peri-urban landscapes of the region. This phenomenon has re-shaped the land's functional asset and visual appearance influencing the complex network that governs the relations between people, territory and users (Betti et al. 2011; Perna 2012; Nicosia, Porto 2015).

Most of the single-brand factory outlet stores and stock clearance shops are mainly based in the provinces Macerata (22) and Fermo (47) (Tab. 1). The number drops in Ancona (25) and Ascoli Piceno (3) where the production mainly involves the manufacturing and design industry (Fondazione Symbola-Unioncamere, 2017).

Table 1. Outlet list of the Macerata-Fermo district.

Municipality and province	Outlet	Address/location
Corridonia (MC)	Santoni Factory Outlet	Via delle arti, 79
Monte San Giusto (MC)	2 GI CI srl (MgMagica)	VIA PAPA GIOVANNI XXIII, 75/79
Monte San Giusto (MC)	BVM Shoes (Bellini)	Via Martin Luther King, 5
Civitanova Marche (MC)	Falc (Naturino-Voile Blanche)	Contrada San Domenico, 24 (Civitanova Alta)
Monte San Giusto (MC)	Fornarina	Largo Minnucci 35-39 Villa San Filippo di Monte San Giusto (MC)
Corridonia (MC)	Antonio Maurizi	Via Enrico Mattei, 133
Civitanova Marche (MC) e Porto San Giorgio (FM)	Andrea Morelli	Via Luigi Einaudi, 428 (Civitanova) e Borgo Fratelli Rosselli (Porto San Giorgio)
Civitanova Marche (MC)	Barleycorn	Via Lauro Rossi, 16
Monte San Giusto (MC)	Baby Ketty	Via San Giacomo, 12
Monte San Giusto (MC)	CRM (Camerlengo)	Via Madonna Concezione, 70
Morrovalle (MC)	Moma	Via Martin Luther King, 9
Monte San Giusto (MC)	Lepi	Via del Lavoro, 27
Civitanova Marche (MC)	Bamboletta	Via Sonnino, 47
Montecosaro (MC)	Giorgio Zamponi	Via Crivelli, 22
Monte San Giusto (MC)	Zecchino d'Oro	Via Purità, 128
Monte San Giusto (MC)	Cherie (AFG srl)	Via Macerata, 326
Civitanova Marche (MC)	King	Contrada San Domenico, 20
Monte San Giusto (MC)	Fabi	Via Bore Chienti, 5
Morrovalle (MC)	Il Gergo	Via Gentile da Fabriano, 66
Corridonia (MC)	Novarese	Via della Tecnologia, 15
Montecosaro (MC)	Manas	Via Piceno, 2, Montecosaro Scalo
Civitanova Marche (MC)	Strategia	Via Enzo Ferrari, 17
Civitanova Marche (MC)	Cesare Paciotti	Via Pirelli, 6
Monte Urano (FM)	Gallucci	Viale I maggio
Sant'Elpidio a Mare (FM)	Roberto Botticelli	Strada Provinciale Brancadoro -Località Casette d'Ete
Falerone (FM)	Fiorangelo	Via Molino Vecchio 1/C
Fermo	Andrea Montelpare	Via Carlo Concetti, 21
Porto Sant'Elpidio (FM)	L'autre chose	Via Mare Egeo 9/13
Sant'Elpidio a Mare (FM)	Cappelletti	Contrada Brancadoro, Casette d'Ete
Sant'Elpidio a Mare (FM)	Bimbi belli	Via Leonardo Da Vinci, 10 Casette d'Ete
Montegranaro (FM)	Fausto Ripani	Via del Castello
Porto Sant'Elpidio (FM)	Malloni	Via dell'Industria, 18
Monte Urano (FM)	Iacovelli (Linea bimbi)	Via Papa Giovanni XXIII, 51
Porto Sant'Elpidio (FM)	Le Silla	Via San Crispino, 37
Sant'Elpidio a Mare (FM)	Premiata, Lanciotti De Verzi, Prada, Sergio Amaranti, Il Gergo	Il Castagno Brand Village, Strada Brancadoro-Casette d'Ete
Sant'Elpidio a Mare (FM)	Tod's, Roger Vivier e Hogan	Via Filippo Della Valle, Casette D'Ete
Sant'Elpidio a Mare (FM)	Vittorio Virgili	Strada Provinciale Faleriense, 3261
Porto Sant'Elpidio (FM)	Loriblu	Via dell'Economia, 9
Montegranaro (FM)	VRL Lattanzi	Via Alpi, 143
Municipality and province	Outlet	Address/location
Porto Sant'Elpidio (FM)	Icone	Quartiere Corva
Monte Urano (FM)	Florens	Via dell'Artigianato, 1
Montegranaro (FM)	Damiano Chiappini	Via Adone Zoli
Montegranaro (FM)	Rodolfo Zengarini	Via Dei Monti, 210
Sant'Elpidio a Mare (FM)	Formentini	Via Leonardo Da Vinci, 24
Montegranaro (FM)	Marilungo	Via Alessandro Manzoni, 51

Municipality and province	Outlet	Address/location
Porto Sant'Elpidio (FM)	Dario Ciotti	Via Del Progresso, 6
Montegranaro (FM)	Rossi	Via Dolomiti
Montegranaro (FM)	Franco Gentili	Via Alpi, 16
Porto Sant'Elpidio (FM)	Ripa Shoes	Via Mare Jonio, 9
Montegranaro (FM)	Lilly Fortuna	Via Alpi, 134
Monte San Pietrangeli (FM)	NeroGiardini	Via dell'Artigianato, 6
Montegranaro (FM)	Zeis Excelsa, Oxs, Docksteps	Via Alpi 135/137
Montegranaro (FM)	Alberto Guardiani	Via Alpi
Monte San Pietrangeli (FM)	Aldo Bruè	Via Alcide De Gasperi, 9
Montegranaro (FM)	Franceschetti	Via Fermana Nord, 95
Montegranaro (FM)	Carlo Ventura	Via Alpi, 12
Montegranaro (FM)	Fessura	Via Cavallotti, 78
Montegranaro (FM)	Blue Star/Luca Guerrini	Via Pola
Montegranaro (FM)	GNV	Via Fiume angolo Via Pola
Sant'Elpidio a Mare (FM)	Nando Muzi	Via Faleriense, 2103
Monte Urano (FM)	Carim	Via Carpazi, 15
Monte Urano (FM)	Kelton	Via Urali
Monte Urano (FM)	Fabix	Via Italia, 15
Montegranaro (FM)	Mario Bruni	Via Turati, 4
Grottazzolina (FM)	Ocra	Strada Provinciale Girola 3/F
Fermo	Giorgio Fabiani	Via Dell'Industria 20
Porto Sant'Elpidio (FM)	Miss Noise	Via dei Consorzi Artigiani, 8
Porto Sant'Elpidio (FM)	Norma J.Baker	SS16 Adriatica, 28
Montegranaro (FM)	Petrocchi	Strada dei Monti, 1
Magliano di Tenna (FM)	Melania	Via Enrico Fermi, 1

5. Results

The results obtained from face-to-face interviews are very heterogeneous. In order to place the data collected into its proper context, it is important to report some figures connected to tourist flows concerning the provinces of Macerata and Fermo which represent the investigation field of this study. In 2018 the province of Macerata (336.572 tourist arrivals and 1.560.159 tourist presences) and Fermo (178.582 tourist arrivals and 1.134.546 tourist presences) registered a total amount of 515.154 tourist arrivals and 2.694.705 tourist presences. The data recorded by the Regional Observatory on Tourism until October 2019 counts 320.015 tourist arrivals and 1.525.882 tourist presences in the province of Macerata thus registering an increase of over 5 % whereas the numbers concerning the Province of Fermo are of 180.706 tourist arrivals and 1.171.870 tourist presences marking a strong increase compared to the figures reported in 2018 (www.statistica.regionemarche.it).

The sample of interviewed tourists is mainly European (82%) and their nationalities are Italian, Dutch, German, Belgian, French and British. The remaining

percentage comes from Asia (9%), North America (5%), South America (2%) and Australia (2%). The data shows a substantial heterogeneity between the three different age groups (18-35, 35-55 and over 55) used to classify the sample. As far as data concerning tourists overnight stays (3-5 days, 7 days and over 7 days) the results share similar percentages. Only 5% of tourists were one-day visitors and arrived to Macerata and Fermo from another holiday destination. Interviewees were also asked who they were traveling with. Over 40% were traveling in couple while roughly 25% were traveling with family and friends. Only a very limited number of visitors were solo travelers, group travelers or on business trip.

All interviewees were asked if it was their first time in Italy or in the Marche. Other two crucial matters for the purpose of this investigation, was understanding whether the visitors had chosen, at least once, a holiday with shopping as its main purpose (regardless of the time and destination of their travel) and if, before choosing their holiday destination, they had made previous researches concerning the presence of shopping facilities (outlets, markets and so on). Data shows that only 7% of the sample taken into investigation was on

a shopping trip or had already experienced this type of holiday and that in most cases the top destination had been Paris (18%) followed by Milan, Rome and London (17%). The number of interviewees who declared were on a shopping-based trip represents less than 1% of the entire sample.

A higher percentage of positive answers is recorded in relation to the second question concerning the gathering of information on shopping facilities prior to choosing the holiday destination. Among the tourists that had never undertaken a holiday with shopping as its main purpose, 19% affirmed they had collected information concerning shopping facilities even though they admitted it was not the main reason for their travel.

Each tourist was also asked information concerning their shopping expenditures. Data was collected concerning the type of goods that had been purchased, prices, number of people intended per expenditure (as a single good can have a multiple number of users), factors in buying and the place of purchase. Most interviewees (85%) reported purchasing at least one good in the area of study and the average per-capita daily expenditure amounts to 225 Euros. When classifying the average per-capita daily expenditure according to tourists' nationalities, it can be observed that Italians on average spend less (roughly 100 Euros) where as non-European tourists spend almost 30% more than the general average expenditure. Figures related to European tourists generally show that the average expenditure is slightly below the general average.

Compared to other fellow travelers, people who travel with a partner usually spend more than average (245 Euros). Slightly lower is the average expenditure per-capita of group travelers (230 Euros) where as expenditure concerning family travelers is approximately 100 Euros.

When analyzing the purchased goods, more than half of them (64%) are clothing and footwear items, 14% are accessories, jewels and leather items, 18% are food and wine products and the remaining 4% are articles belonging to other categories.

To better understand the shopping geography and map out places linked to tourists' purchases, questions were asked on where each good had been bought according to a list of various options (market, city center, shopping streets, shopping center, factory outlet and so on). In Macerata and Fermo data shows that most of shopping activities took place in factory outlet stores specialized in fashion and footwear items. Purchases made in the city center and at local markets, on the other hand, were mainly linked to typical products and souvenirs. Interviewees were also asked questions connected to traveling and shopping in general and in particular, if

they considered the Marche as an ideal destination for shopping and if it would be worthwhile returning there for this reason. Less than 60% of the sample interviewed declared to have found an item they wanted to buy but chose not to mainly due to difficulties concerning its transportation back to the visitors' hometown (approximately 50%) or because the price was considered too expensive. Another interesting result worth noticing, is the fact that over 50% of the interviewees decided to purchase a specific item (in their current travel or in previous ones) on behalf of third parties and it was bought in places like the Marche due to the presence of specific brand productions or unique artisan goods that are hard to find elsewhere or because of favorable purchasing conditions (currency exchange rate or sales).

Despite the fact that shopping was or was not the main purpose of their holiday, seven tourists out of ten recommended the Marche as a shopping destination although 83% would not return there for shopping-based reasons (83%). By extrapolating the answers of the interviewees who affirmed they had – at least once – chosen a travel mainly for shopping purposes, the percentage of those who recommended the place are higher (92%) as well as percentages of those who would return to the same area for purchasing reasons (60%).

6. Final Considerations

The results of this investigation have highlighted the persistent trend of factory outlet stores clustered together in the Marche region, mainly in the area around the towns of Fermo and Macerata where the economical and cultural identity of the place is deeply rooted. This identity finds its further expression in the specialized productive systems of the territory and appeals to national and international tourists more than in the past. The presence of clustered outlet stores adds value to the tourism setting of the region and helps refining the tourist offer.

Contemporary travelers are more informed than before and thus more demanding. Their constant wish for an authentic traveling experience inevitably generates the need to refine the tourist destination with a more specialized and customized offer that meets a wider range of personal needs.

Shopping tourism is becoming an increasing phenomenon which however strongly depends on how the goods sought-after are closely connected to the place in which they are found. The stronger this link, the higher the attractiveness of the destination. In the case of the Marche, the uniqueness of the territory and of its pur-

chasable goods are fundamental assets in enhancing the pleasantness of tourists' experience.

One of the main challenges for governance bodies today is building a territorial strategy that can further align and interrelate the various segments of the tourism supply/offer so as to foster a communication that promotes a common brand concept for the Marche and is well aware of which are the commercial formats that require most focus. Within this regional destination where different tourist segments converge, it is necessary to further enhance all those real business areas where tourists go seeking an all-round tourist experience.

The times prior the pandemic outbreak seemed ready for the Marche to gear towards a bolder strategic approach by choosing to focus on shopping tourism – following the example of other famous international destinations – as a means of further diversifying the local tourist offer.

Although defining the exact scope of this phenomenon as well as clearly identifying all its related stakeholders may not be an easy task, it is nevertheless evident that shopping tourism does represent a segment of the tourist offer on which future tourism planning of the Marche region should focus on.

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Processes of Commercial Territorialization in the Polycentric Region of the Marche. New Commercial Hierarchies in the *Doric Capital*

Processi di territorializzazione commerciale nelle Marche policentriche. Nuove gerarchie commerciali a partire dal capoluogo dorico

CARMELO MARIA PORTO

Dipartimento di Scienze cognitive, psicologiche, pedagogiche e degli studi culturali, Università di Messina, Italy

E-mail: cporto@unime.it

Abstract. The gradual modernization of commercial activities during the past 20 years has had a deep impact on the urban landscape of Ancona and has strongly affected the stable relationship that for decades had marked the city center and its suburbs. The traditional hierarchy of commercial areas has undergone a new configuration due to suburban territorialization processes brought by a large-scale polarization of the city's suburbs. Understanding these new commercial hierarchies represents a valid tool for planning proper territorial policies and boosting more resilient-based processes which aim at restoring the primary role of a city center that has slowly lost its social appeal and its functional *status-quo* within the city's metropolitan area and in the urban network of the Marche.

Keywords: territorialization, distribution system, polycentrism.

Riassunto. La progressiva modernizzazione commerciale, che ha investito il territorio marchigiano nell'ultimo ventennio, ha profondamente mutato il paesaggio urbano anconetano ed ha influito in maniera significativa sul mantenimento dell'equilibrato rapporto centro-periferia che aveva caratterizzato per decenni il sistema urbano gravitante sul Capoluogo. La configurazione di nuove gerarchie commerciali, come conseguenza dei processi di territorializzazione suburbana innescati dalle grandi polarizzazioni extra-urbane, può rappresentare una valida chiave di lettura utile a suggerire politiche territoriali appropriate e in grado di innescare processi resilienti utili a restituire un ruolo di primo piano al centro storico della città che nello stesso periodo a visto via via diminuire la sua capacità attrattiva e di conseguenza la sua supremazia funzionale verso l'area metropolitana e i più in generale nei confronti della complessa e fitta maglia urbana marchigiana.

Parole chiave: Territorializzazione, sistema distributivo, policentrismo.

1. Consumer Models and Polycentric Relationships in Ancona

Consumer areas are a main factor in determining contemporary re-structuring of urban and suburban territories thus replacing the past urban model of the factory town and the post-Fordist city. These processes are especially evident when looking at the increasing space occupied by activities linked to the traditional and non-traditional tertiary and commercial sector. Although these changes have helped in shaping new urban layouts of several territorial systems, they have also strongly contributed to the commercial desertification of many city centers which, ever since the early 90's, has invested many Italian and European cities. This spatial shift towards the outer area of the city and its suburbs has redefined past territorial balances and shaped new multicentric and/or polycentric urban areas depending on what was the city's structure prior to the diffusion of the phenomenon (Bullado 2007a; Porto 2019).

Modern cities have responded to changes brought by deindustrialization processes of urban economies by progressively allowing consumer activities to permeate their structures up to the point of ousting production ones (Meini, Monheim 2002; Carreras, García Ballastreros 2006; Bullado 2007b, 2009; D'Alessandro 2015; Cirelli et al. 2016). As a consequence of these transformations, contemporary cities are *special* and sometimes even *surreal* or *fantasy* places “[...] where shows are associated to art, museums but also to shopping venues: new places are born in substitution of past squares and streets where people can meet and socialize like shopping malls, airport lounges, theme parks and all those – more or less – artificial places designed by an ever-changing society” (Miani 2001, 48).

Consumer habits in their most advanced form can deeply alter the territory and its community creating new socialization venues that meet the fast-paced metamorphosis of modern consumer behaviors which are, by these same places, further influenced and affected in the unfolding of these activities. The result of this paradigm is that places originally meant for commercial or socialization activities (including political and religious buildings) that have contributed in forging Italian cities' layout for the past centuries have been abandoned in favor of new surroundings like suburban areas and their main transit routes (Porto 2016). These new areas are artificially designed for socializing activities and are today's substitute of the lively atmosphere which used to be a prerogative of city centers only. The city – which in its oldest sense was meant as a public space – has been re-placed by a consumer-designed city. The performance

of consumer activities has become in Ilardi's words “[...] the organizational principle in relationships among individuals and among individuals and goods” (Ilardi 2004, 21).

This evolutionary framework of city-trade-consumer relations seems to prefer vaster and artificially planned suburban areas where entertainment represents the most effective drive-in promotional policies thought for contemporary consumers. In view of such political strategies which generate “[...] temporary convergences of social interactions that are independent from the background in which they take place and, to a certain extent, are typically traceable in non-places, [...] city centers are called to answer using tools that can remove inbuilt limitations and restore their leading convergence role, not only commercially but also socially, civically and culturally” (Musso 2012, 161).

It must however be noticed that especially in the Anglo-Saxon world but also in France, Spain and even more in Germany, there has been a partial turnaround in the past twenty years, regarding GDO location choices and moreover in respect to the mega shopping venues which have started to relocate in the city centers thanks to the re-functionalization of old spaces like historic buildings, dismissed urban industrial areas and interstitial voids left over by the turbulent expansion of cities begun in the mid-20th century (Cavoto, Limonta 2015). Such phenomenon, often stigmatized in current literature with the expression “back to downtown” mainly concerns big industrial and manufacturing towns as well as the big financial cities (Zanderighi, Tamini 2018).

It is within this corollary that the present work inserts itself without wanting to be in any way exhaustive. This paper rather aims at adding a piece to the mosaic of a more complex research topic that has already been addressed in the PRIN 2015 “Retail, Consumption, and the City: Practices, Planning and Governance for Urban Inclusion, Resilience, and Sustainability”. The latter offered an empirical way of testing if an urban polycentric system (like that of the Marche) – compared to a polarized one – is more apt to implement policies which aim at granting a “complementary” approach among “traditional” distribution models using more modern formats. The above-mentioned test took into consideration the areas included in the provinces of Macerata, Fermo and Ascoli and left out (due to lack of time and resources) the metropolitan area of Ancona (Nicosia, Graziano, Porto 2019). It was thus natural to further continue the investigation, without granting the same level of detail, in the attempt of offering a better over-view on the topic.

In order to understand the role of Ancona, the Region's capital, in the economic and commercial dynamics of the Marche, it is important to refer to the concept of *plural* region. This idea does not have a straightforward meaning as it is linked to the complex identity of the Marche. The historian Sergio Anselmi, in the 1980's described his region in the following terms.

"A marginal rectangle, sleepy and full of tenant farmers, situated between the north and south of the Adriatic coast: this was until the late 50's the general way of picturing the Marche, a place from which to escape as many had already done back in the 1800's [...] the leap forward that marked the 1950's up to the 70's significantly changed the Marche and yet its past tenant-farming background, with its hundreds of small towns, villages¹, fractions of land well framed in the territory, together with the widespread presence of the tenancy-based cultural system which has become more refined due to contacts with the urban environment (today the Marche counts four Universities offering all kinds of courses, Art Academies and Musical Institutions), contribute to forging the region's exclusive and gentle imprinting" (Anselmi 1985, 9-11).

From a functional point of view, the urban network of the Marche, is marked by a complementary-based relation (especially for more important services) between the eleven Urban Functional Areas (*Aree Funzionali Urbane*) identified on the territory. These areas basically involve slightly more than 30 towns/villages out of the over 200 present in the region. This urban model is strongly characterized by a natural form of urbanization which is widespread across the land and is further confirmed by population data. Although there are more than 200 small towns scattered across the region, just 16 count more than 20.000 inhabitants and Ancona is the only town with a population slightly above 100.000 (Nicosia, Porto 2015).

The polycentric urban nature of the Marche is the result of its morphological layout – a coastline connected to its inland by a variety of plains, hills, valleys and mountains – and the organization of agricultural activities of tenant farmers (Nicosia, Porto 2015). The development of industries during the second half of the 1900's produced a crisis in the traditional organization of rural land and caused farmers to shift, first to Rome and the industrial towns of northern Italy and then to the coastal towns, so that the settlements in the hills, in the absence of manufacturing activities, turned into empty shells, while the valley villages and the towns of

the plains and along the coast kept on growing chaotically. During the last thirty years, changes in the production structures have had a strong impact on population distribution as well as on local economy. The pre-existing gap between the coast, rich in various types of settlements, and the hills-mountains, mainly scattered with nuclei and centers, has grown deeper. (Betti 2002, 186). This has broken the geographical distribution of the entire and rather homogeneous Region, which had lasted for centuries; the Province of Ancona has nowadays a population density twice that of Macerata and Pesaro-Urbino. Although its polycentric organization, the territory of the Marche is characterized by a growing dualism between the coast (33% of the territory) and the hill (36%) and mountain (31%) areas (Betti, Nicosia, Porto 2011).

This territorial re-arrangement brought about by infra-regional migration flows towards the coast land, has contributed in shaping a linear urbanization of the region that runs along the entire seacoast and is physically interrupted by the Conero Mountain. Ancona is the most populated town (slightly above 100.000) of this urban *continuum* followed by Pesaro, Fano, Senigallia, Civitanova Marche and San Benedetto del Tronto. A point of further interest is that among these towns, only Ancona and Pesaro-Urbino are two district capitals.

Ancona, regional and district capital, is the hierarchically superior town within the complex urban network of this *plural* region. This superiority however is not ascribable only to its historical and institutional importance but also to its strategic position that ever since its foundation has turned it into one of the main commercial harbors of the Adriatic Sea. Ancona is the most important harbor of the region also due the level of its infrastructures which make it the most accessible city of the Marche and strengthens its competitiveness in terms of geographical location along the Adriatic coastline.

2. Commerce, consumer habits and modernization processes in Ancona

The commercial modernization process which has affected Italy and the Marche's sales system, especially in the last two decades, has had a strong influence in re-shaping the urban planning of Ancona – more than other regional capitals – thus powering the rise of the suburbs which have acquired a new centrality outside the traditional city center.

The present work follows the traditional model based on the opposition *center-suburbs* as the starting

¹ The population of the Marche is of 1.525.271. This figure represents slightly more than 2,5% of Italy's national population in 01.01.2019. The population of the Marche is distributed in 246 different municipalities 50% of which has a population of less than 3.000 (ISTAT 2018).

point for the analysis. This “weak” transcalar methodological approach allows to investigate and describe spatial areas using the opposition scheme center *versus* suburb. It is defined as “weak” because it is applicable at different spatial scales and sizes (economic and territorial development, hierarchy, political influence). It is in contrast with a “strong” transcalar methodology which is based on the joint study of different spatial scales linked together by an ensemble of physical connections (Bonaverò 2005).

This opposition between the traditional commercial offer of the city center in contrast to the modern shopping system strategically positioned along the main transit routes, can be a useful tool in identifying strong points and weak points of both models in order to build policies that foster integration and complementarity to better suit recent consumer trends and leisure activities in general.

This study offers an analysis based on the municipal scale although administrative borders have not always been strictly respected in order to reach a wider comprehension of the suburban shopping agglomerations (Southern Suburb) that contribute in creating an urban concentration that stretches out for several kilometers and incorporates neighboring towns. The south industrial/commercial area, more specifically, runs for more than 10 kilometers unfolding along the main transit routes of minor towns like Candia, Vara and Angeli as well as the towns of Camerano and Osimo.

This work's focus is the territory between the city center and the Industrial area Baraccola (Southern Suburb). The latter has a very heterogeneous urban structure not always easy to interpret. It presents many past urban layers. It is a mix of buildings of different styles and periods and the morphological structure itself is the result of an often chaotic urban planning.

Data used for the investigation concerning the shopping dynamics of the past two decades has been mainly provided by local institutions, in particular the Office for the Economic Affairs of the municipality of Ancona and the Chamber of Commerce. Other information was also gathered via other institutions, local companies of the area of interest, specific case studies and local newspaper articles.

The *Doric Capital* is the only urban system of the Marche that has a more metropolitan – however weak – type of configuration. This is not only because of its demographic superiority compared to the other towns of the region and its territorial extension but also because of its core role as a provider of administrative services (locally and regionally), resources and facilities.

The modernization of the local distribution system

starts at the end of the 90's and becomes more intense the following decade also thanks to the Bersani reform and the Legislative Decree 114/98.

Changes are particularly evident in the Southern Zone. In a time span of ten years this area has experienced a strong boost in the commercial building sector which has consequently led to the expansion of the main transit roads of this peripheral territory. The area of highest commercial/industrial density includes the Baraccola Zone and the districts of Osimo and Camerano².

The presence of many manufacturing/logistics companies and pre-existing infra-structures together with the territorial configuration of the valley that grants fast connections between the Southern Industrial districts (Osimo-Camerano and Castelfidardo-Recanati) and Ancona, have been crucial elements in recent urban planning decisions.

The very first large-scale retailer to open at the beginning of the 90's was the shopping center Joyland (acquired in 2002 by Auchan). In the early year 2000's other large retailers followed this trend like Ikea (in the area of Camerano) and the shopping park Cargopier (in Osimo Scalo). Nowadays the province of Ancona has the highest concentration of shopping centers (nine in total) on a regional basis. The Auchan shopping gallery covers 7.320 square meters, counts 42 stores and provides 1600 roofed parking spaces. It represents the most established shopping space of the area and has increased its commercial power over the years becoming also an important socializing spot for younger generations.

Other important retail stores are located nearby. Megastore Expert is a chain of electronic retailers and occupies a surface of 2.500 square meters whereas Globo Cosmo with a surface of 5.300 square meters is the biggest retailer of the fashion and footwear industry. The modern Extasy Busco is a mega sports center with pools, gyms and beauty centers which also offers shopping facilities and has even a post-office. Another impor-

² This area runs along the valley of the river Aspio. It is crossed in its entire length by the Adriatic route and includes the districts of Ancona, Camerano and Osimo. This territory also reaches the area of Castelfidardo, however most of the urbanization process here is mainly linked to the industrial sector and only marginally counts some exclusively commercially designed areas. The territory subject of this study is situated along the flat stripe of land of the Aspio valley and is delimited by two hillsides. It includes the Industrial Zone Baraccola (Ancona) on the north, Osimo Stazione on the south (part of Osimo) and Aspio Terme (district of Camerano) in the middle. The shopping/industrial spaces are positioned along the main transit route SS16 which connects Southern Ancona to the motorway A14. There also two important train stations and the so called Asse Nord-Sud which is an important national road that grants rapid access to the Sirolo-Senigallia main transit route (SP2) and links southern districts to the inner parts of Ancona.



Figure 1. Retail Area Historic Center.

tant center specialized in the entertainment sector with 9 movie theaters, game rooms, restaurants and other related activities, is the Uci Cinema or former Multiplex Girometti which is also close to a Mc Donald's chain. The Baraccola zone surely marks the starting point of this modernization process which has also invested the areas of Camerano and Osimo. Nevertheless, the arrival of other mega industries of the sales industry like Mediaworld (2.600 sqm) and Pittarello Calzature (1000 sqm) has further strengthened the commercial attractiveness of Baraccola (figures provided by the Chamber of Commerce).

Special attention deserves the Ikea store situated in Aspio in the Camerano district. The Swedish mega furniture company opened its first shop in the Marche in 2006 after heated debates concerning land and viability issues. It counts almost 25.000 square meters of exhibition area and is thus the biggest furniture store of the region (www.ikea.com).

The opening of the Ikea store with its infra-regional catchment area has undoubtedly contributed in enrich-

ing the overall economic flow of the Marche but has also had the counter effect of damaging local small and medium sized businesses. The increase of car flow consequent to the store's activities has also made upgrades (financed by Ikea and public institutions) to pre-existing infrastructures necessary. These include roundabouts, double-track roads and the small train station of Aspio situated in the store's car park. Always in Camerano, the Carrefour shopping center and the Conbipel store also deserve a quick mention.

Cargopier is another important shopping center located in Osimo Stazione and built in 2004. It covers 23.000 square meters and provides 1.200 car park spaces. There are 32 shops in total and the biggest building hosts famous retail chains like Oviessie, Euronics, Brico Io, Risparmio Casa and the food discount shop Dico. The second building is a more recent construction and is occupied by smaller franchise dealers.

In terms of consumer goods, the commercial offer of the city is mainly specialized in long term items rather than food products. Most stores belong to the electron-



Figure 2. Retail Area Ancona Sud.

ic, fashion, household/furniture and hobby sector. Taking advantage of the vast exhibition spaces available, the Southern Zone is more into electronic and furniture products whereas small retailing businesses are more popular in the central zone.

Large-scale food retailers are also more present in the Southern Zone where there are several hypermarkets of famous food chain distributors. Supermarkets leave room to local groceries and smaller shops selling traditional or ethnic food in the central zone.

Data collected from a quantitative analysis of the commercial businesses active in Ancona confirm the long-term crisis that has invested this sector. In less than 10 years time, Ancona has lost more than 400 businesses (from 3000 registered activities in 2009 to 2.638 in 2018). Two facts are immediately observable. The first is that during the years taken into account, all annual tendential variations are negative. The second is that since 2009 there has been a business decline of over 13% which is a significant figure. (Chamber of Commerce 2018).

The city center of Ancona stretches towards north-east along the Guasco hill – with its beautiful San Ciriaco cathedral – and the Astagno hill characterized by the renaissance military construction named “Cit-tadella”.

The center of the town is crossed from east to west by a transit route that splits the city in two and connects the harbor to the rocky beaches of Passetto thus linking the *two seas* of Ancona. This axis route is made in its first part by three parallel roads (Corso Stamira, Corso Garibalidi and Corso Mazzini) which join in Piazza Cavour (main square) and continue as one main boulevard (Viale della Vittoria) until the Passetto monument which conventionally marks the boundaries of the town's center.

The city center is technically marked by the area surrounded by the town's 19th century walls and delimited by the harbor on one side and Piazza Cavour on the other. The overall heterogeneous architecture of the buildings however does not always guide the viewer's

sight towards this perception. The area is in fact the result of centuries of urban stratification and juxtaposition of past Doric architecture, world war remaining constructions and modern buildings of recent times.

The city's center is thus characterized by the three parallel roads previously mentioned and four main squares. Piazza del Plebiscito (also known as the Pope's Square) near the oldest part of the city, Piazza della Repubblica with its Teatro delle Muse (theatre) close to the harbor, Piazza Roma which is also the shopping heart of the town and finally Piazza Cavour with its typical 19th century style. There is also the modern Piazza Pertini near Corso Stamira.

Most of the administrative offices and municipal buildings are placed in this town area whereas shops and general retailing activities are traditionally found along the three main roads. Back until the 19th century the so called Pope's Square used to be the commercial heart of the town but it lost its *urban pole-position* after the building of the theatre (Teatro delle Muse) near Piazza della Repubblica and the construction of Piazza Roma. In recent years however, Pope's Square seems to have regained its past liveliness thanks to the opening of new pubs and the full pedestrianization of the area. The beauty of its buildings is also an extra incentive for open-air forms of socialization.

The contemporary layout of the city center is therefore marked by this clustering of services, facilities and leisure time areas within the space enclosed by these three squares. This is why we can consider Ancona a polycentric type of town.

The older parts of the city, situated near the Guasco hill, seem cut-off from this urban cluster. This is probably ascribable to its morphological asset. The ancient little streets which unfold up and down along the hill, hinder viability and accessibility which are essential requirements for commercial activities and public services. Nevertheless, thanks to the cultural and architectural heritage of this area, important projects have been developed to further enhance this part of town and promote its attractiveness also to non-local residents.

Many important institutions are situated in this area like the National Archeological Museum of the Marche, The Civic Art Gallery "Podesti", the Modern Art Gallery, the City's Museum, The Faculty of Economy of the Polytechnic of the Marche, Italy's Military Training School and other financial/administrative buildings.

Like many old Italian towns, viability and accessibility are big issues due to their urban network which is usually marked by small central streets (only suitable one-way car traffic) and due to a massive convergence

of administrative facilities and local governance offices in the city center. Another problem is connected to a natural lack of car-parking spaces. Although roofed or underground car parks – for instance in Piazza Pertini – have been built in recent years, car flows coming in and out of town are still an open issue in terms of traffic efficiency.

This mismanaged traffic congestion negatively affects the city's appeal and its livability which are two essential conditions for fostering the growth and development of commercial activities inside the city center. This consequently influences people's preference towards more accessible extra-urban shopping areas.

This slow process of commercial desertification, which seems affecting especially medium sized cities in Italy, has of course weakened the polarizing pull of the city center. In the case of Ancona, traffic has shifted in both directions of the Adriatic route (north towards Pesaro and south towards San Benedetto del Tronto) thus generating a more polycentric re-arrangement of the Marche's urban system.

Traditional shops situated in the town's center which offered typical local goods, have been replaced by the standardized offer of franchise companies whose windows not only have strongly changed the shopping landscape of the old Ancona, but have also weakened its past identity.

Although the city center counts four main squares, it is the area in Corso Garibaldi and Piazza Roma that constitutes the true hub of commercial activities and weekend strolling. Most of the shops here are specialized in clothing and accessories. There are still some traditional old shops that, for the time being, survive the occupation of franchising chain-stores whose low-cost offer is especially appealing to younger targets of consumers. Most of these clothing brands (Terranova, Benetton or Zara) sell fast fashion goods and are a typical example of global-shopping consumer culture. The old tailoring boutique Belvederesi (open for over 50 years) and the clothing shop Rinaldi have both been replaced in Corso Garibaldi by other retailing businesses of the global industry.

Quite often, shops seem to prefer locations on the side streets of Corso Garibaldi like via Lata, via degli Orefici and at the beginning of Corso Mazzini where rents are higher. This increase of property values has also allowed an upgrade in terms of attractiveness of the area near Pope's Square as confirmed by localization tools provided by the Apple Center.

It is therefore questionable whether the city center of Ancona – already under pressure to satisfy modern needs and embrace a more or less drastic change

– has what it takes to integrate the expansionist and functionalist approach of modern businesses, mainly focused in the suburbs, without damaging the typical *shopping landscape* of the city, thus setting an example for a sustainable economic and urban development (Porto 2007).

Furthermore, if Ancona's urban regeneration has fostered an economic recovery, it is also true that the commercial growth of recent years, with all its imperfections, has strongly contributed in speeding-up processes concerning urban improvements.

Some of these upgrading measures are worth mentioning and include the stone paving in Corso Garibaldi (2009), the introduction of car-free areas in central streets and the introduction of LED technology for streetlights (exquisite mix of design and energetic efficiency). The latter is the result of a joint project which involved Ancona's Municipality, the company Enel Sole, the institution Anconambiente and a group of local business retailers.

3. Final Considerations

The gradual modernization of commercial activities during the past 20 years has had a deep impact on the urban landscape of Ancona and has brought to the rise of *suburban centers*. Although this slow process of urbanization involves the city's peripheral area, it is not easy to mark clear boundaries as it invests the municipality of Ancona as well as some of its neighboring districts.

A balanced set of policies that promote territorial enhancement, efficient urban planning and foster the economic growth of the city, in particular its center, is highly recommended, especially after the devastating economic effects of the COVID19 pandemic lock-down. The confining measures imposed by governments have temporarily stopped the competition between the retailing activities of the city-center and its suburbs. This economic setback can however be an opportunity to plan *new spaces* and re-think best practices more fit for latest social distancing requirements.

With this in mind, a more complementary/cooperative-based commercial urban system would be desirable, rather than focusing on territorial competition, so as to integrate modern consumer needs with traditional commercial activities. Such co-existence can pave the road to a more sustainable and functional urban reality.

The ghettoization of the city center during the last decade seems slowly diminishing as a consequence of a growing awareness of local communities towards this

phenomenon. Policies of urban regeneration and the recovery of public spaces have led to a rise of visitors and have gradually boosted economic growth and cultural activities which proves how the commercial sector can be a strong shareholder for urban regeneration processes.

It is therefore important to adopt policies that are well aware of the complexity of Ancona's urban system and its commercial network. Urban planning should focus on improving the level of the town's accessibility and its attractiveness without however, compromising the city's identity and livability.

It would also be desirable a governance capable of cooperating with all the stakeholders of the private and public sector that share the common interest towards the development of Ancona's city center. The ultimate aim should be to preserve the town's historical and social heritage whilst promoting a mindful economic and commercial growth.

As far as the Southern Zone, is concerned it is evident that it has reached a spatial market saturation. The opening of new shopping areas in fact often causes the shutting down of other pre-existing businesses or end up in an economic failure due to their unsustainability within that given marketplace.

Although this area is important for economic and occupational reasons, it also presents many critical factors, for instance the loss of economic and functional power of the minor towns located nearby. In fact, where as Ancona's center still – at least partially – manages to attract visitors re-claiming its role as the region's hot-spot, the survival – from a functional point of view – of minor towns is at risk due to this process of desertification. The only municipality, besides Ancona, that appears to be strong enough to compete with modern shopping areas by re-affirming the traditional commercial power of the urban center, is Riviera del Conero which is a very popular tourist destination and offers a range of high-quality local goods.

Problems and future solutions concerning Ancona, overall may result not straightforward to understand due to the complex relationship between the city and its network of commercial activities. Although the changes affecting this territory are the result of mechanisms ascribable to globalization, they nevertheless determine a regional and local impact in the medium and long run. This is why, future municipal governance should foster development and improvement policies capable of granting the competitiveness on a global-scale network of this commercial hub whilst enhancing and promoting the territory's local identity.

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Retail Trade Restructuring Paths on the Fringes of a Strong Region: the Case of Lower Lombardy, Italy (2001-2019)

Percorsi di ristrutturazione del commercio al dettaglio ai margini di una regione forte: il caso della Bassa Lombardia, Italia (2001-2019)

MARIA ANTONIETTA CLERICI

Dipartimento di Architettura e Studi Urbani (DASU), Politecnico di Milano, Italy
E-mail: maria.clerici@polimi.it

Abstract. The “commercial revolution” driven by the spread of large-scale retail is always spatially differentiated. Even within an economically developed region, such as Lombardy, significant differences can be seen between territories with regard to the structure and evolution of the distribution network. The paper considers the case of Lower Lombardy, a vast rural area which includes 424 municipalities split into 4 provinces (Pavia, Lodi, Cremona and Mantua). An eccentric outlook is adopted compared to trade geography studies, which are usually focused on large urban areas, overlooking what occurs in *peripheral* contexts. The restructuring of the distribution network between 2001 and 2019 is investigated, highlighting how the municipalities of the southern part of Lombardy witnessed different evolutionary trajectories in relation to their demographic size and their position in the urban network. The image of trade decline, often associated with rural areas, is too simplistic and conceals different processes, which restructure the relationships internal to those areas. The paper also highlights a concerning process of weakening of the proximity commercial supply: are we moving towards the formation of food deserts?

Keywords: retail trade, liberalisation, rural areas, urban hierarchy, food deserts.

Riassunto. La “rivoluzione commerciale” indotta dalla diffusione della grande distribuzione è sempre spazialmente differenziata. Anche all'interno di una regione economicamente sviluppata, come la Lombardia, sono visibili significative differenze fra territori per quanto riguarda l'assetto e l'evoluzione della rete distributiva. Il *paper* considera il caso della Bassa Lombardia, una vasta area rurale comprendente 424 comuni suddivisi in 4 province (Pavia, Lodi, Cremona e Mantova). Si adotta uno sguardo eccentrico rispetto agli studi sulla geografia del commercio, che usualmente si focalizzano sulle grandi aree urbane, trascurando quanto accade nei contesti *periferici*. Viene indagata la ristrutturazione della rete distributiva fra 2001 e 2019, evidenziando come i comuni della fascia meridionale della Lombardia abbiano vissuto differenti traiettorie evolutive in relazione alla loro taglia demografica e alla loro posizione nella rete urbana. L'immagine del declino del commercio, spesso associata alle aree rurali, è troppo semplicistica e nasconde processi differenti, che riarticolano i rapporti interni a tali aree. Il *paper*

evidenza inoltre un preoccupante processo di indebolimento dell'offerta commerciale di prossimità: si va verso la formazione di *food deserts*?

Parole chiave: commercio al dettaglio, liberalizzazione, aree rurali, gerarchia urbana, *food deserts*.

"There was a time when the idealised image of a rural community almost existed. Every small town would have its bank, its post office and its store. Every village would have its church, its shop and its pub. No more. The rationalisation and closure of both private and public services in rural communities has been one of the most visible manifestations of contemporary countryside change" (Woods 2005, 96).

1. Introduction

When looking at the transformation dynamics of retail trade, large urban areas catalyse our attention. Here, the "creative destruction" generated by the spread of large retail complexes is more shocking. Competition between businesses is fierce and a multipolar supply network has now formed, on the geographical level, which makes the ordered centre/periphery hierarchy of the past, long protected by territorial planning, unrecognisable (Borchert 1998). The historical cores of the larger cities are emblematic of a strong capacity of reinvention of trade, in reaction to the altered competitive context (Wrigley, Lowe 2002). However, a view too focused on urban areas risks relegating to the background what occurs elsewhere. This work shifts attention to the rural areas, connoted by a specific trade environment, with pressures and challenges to be addressed which differ greatly from those that affect large cities. Investigating the evolution of trade in these places means considering a small aspect – at first sight, marginal – within the broader issue of territorial gaps and the socio-economic development of peripheral contexts, which continues to concern the decision-makers at different levels of government.

In Italy, after the "Bersani Decree" (Italian Legislative Decree 114/1998), there was some public commitment to supporting the distribution network in rural areas, but, unlike other countries, there is no solid thread of studies on trade issues in these areas: there have been few works and they mostly relate to mountain areas (Preite 2003; Morandi 2005; Pilotti, Giovanelli 2010). An unforgiveable oversight. In rural economies,

the trade sector generates many jobs, gives visibility to handicrafts and typical local products, and is a precious source of revenue for public bodies (Vias 2004; Adkisson, Pallares 2016). Without shops, the quality of life reduces irreparably, particularly in more isolated regions (Fertner et al. 2015). In many countries, efforts have been made to guarantee an albeit minimal commercial presence in rural areas, also with a view to stabilising the resident population. The most successful measures include the opening of multifunctional emporiums offering a broad range of services (Amcoff et al. 2011; Karlsson 2012). In rural areas, in addition, trade has even more marked social value than in the large cities. Cabras and Lau (2019) compare shops and other essential services to fully-fledged "third spaces" and to community hubs, demonstrating how their closure reduces social cohesion. In these places, trade is an icon of identity, a signaller of vivacious communities and of the "rural idyll" (Scarpello et al. 2009).

Low population density, settlement dispersion and often considerable distances from town centres which provide essential services for community life are the main factors that affect the structure and the system of relationships within rural areas. It is not easy, here, to guarantee an adequate supply of public and private services, therein including those of trade (OECD 2010). Looking at the long-term dynamics of trade geography in developed countries, rural regions stand out for their fragility. They are affected by a reduction in shops that is more pronounced than that experienced by other territories, a process linked in a *two-way* relationship to the depopulation that has struck many areas, particularly those in remote locations (the process is, however, also active in more dynamic areas). This image of inexorable trade decline is too simplistic and should be re-discussed. Besides, even on the front of development policies, it is now clear that rural areas make up an articulated universe (ESPON 2013). The evolutionary trajectories of trade in rural areas, in comparison with those of other *central* territories, must therefore be investigated more carefully. But attention must also be paid to the dynamics internal to each area, following the restructuring of the system of relationships at local scale generated by the development trajectories of the individual municipalities. Even concerning the involvement of mass retail chains, rural communities do not find themselves in the same situation (Bahn, Abebe 2017; Chaze 2017).

The contribution deals with all this, taking as its field of investigation the quadrant to the south of Lombardy, including the provinces of Pavia, Lodi, Cremona and Mantua: 7,880 square km, 424 municipalities, 1.6 million inhabitants in 2019.

The aim of the work is twofold. Firstly, the transformation of the distribution network over the space of twenty years after the entry into force of the “Bersani Decree” is recognised. By liberalising trade, this measure altered the market balances: the effects were strong in densely urbanised areas – where a significant increase in large retail complexes was recorded – but also extended to the peripheral contexts. The 2008 economic crisis was a further shock that challenged trade resilience. We will attempt to understand how, in Lower Lombardy, transformation forces affected the municipalities in relation to their demographic size and their position in the settlement system. The second aim of the work is to assess the extent to which the contraction of the distribution network in the period in question (2001-2019) led to situations of excessive rarefaction of the food supply. We will touch upon a crucial issue. In many developed countries, in rural areas, phenomena of food deserts are present which, although difficult to measure, pose serious problems of spatial justice. Guaranteeing an adequate proximity service – to which the elderly and those who are less mobile are more sensitive – is an objective found in the “Bersani Decree”. The issue is also important in Lombardy, a region that, in the national panorama, boasts the lowest density of shops compared to the population¹, by virtue of the intense development of large-scale retail.

The work is split into two parts. The first (section 2) contextualises the problem of trade in rural areas, focusing on the interweaving of factors that threaten the stability of the distribution network, until generating phenomena of food deserts. The second part of the work concerns the case of Lower Lombardy. After having outlined its settlement features (section 3), we investigate the transformation of the distribution network between 2001 and 2019 (sections 4-5), noting that there are still very clear traditional connotations and how the overcoming of the centre/periphery hierarchy is less advanced compared to other parts of the region. Finally, we focus on the rarefaction of the commercial supply of food which may be a prelude to the formation of food deserts (section 6).

2. The decline of trade in rural areas: a trodden path?

The statement of the geographer Michael Woods, at the start of this essay, captures a situation now common to many countries, including Italy: the gradual rarefaction of public and private services in rural communi-

ties. The process does not spare commercial businesses, having negative repercussions on the habitability of the places. It is a problem that has been known for some time, but that continues to concern policymakers and to fuel studies and debates (Massal 2018; Twardzik, Hefner 2019). Even international cooperation networks are having to contend with this issue: the Save Rural Retail project, activated in 2018, is emblematic, federating public bodies of seven European countries, in the search for effective solutions to encourage the survival of small commercial enterprises in rural areas². Demographic decline, which affects many of these places, is a key factor that compromises local commercial supply, particularly where there are no compensatory tourist flows, which guarantee adequate profits to traders.

The development of large-scale retail is a further serious threat to the maintenance of trade in rural places. Although preferably located close to large town centres, large retail complexes extend their influence to a broader extent over the territory, leading to the closure of many small shops providing a service close to residences. Therefore, even for foodstuffs, the distances to be travelled to access supply locations have significantly increased. Many rural areas have become food deserts (Amcoff 2017; Behjat et al. 2017; Blanchard, Lyson 2002; Furey et al. 2001; Marshall et al. 2018; Scarpello et al. 2009; Smith, Morton 2009; Wrigley 2002).

The practice of out-shopping, favoured by the increasing mobility of the population, is another important factor influencing retail trade patterns in rural areas. Local shops are no longer the main destinations for purchases, but merely satisfy supplementary requirements; the majority of spending flows elsewhere, depressing local entrepreneurial vitality and reducing tax revenues for public bodies. Out-shopping mainly involves the younger, educated and mobile population. The elderly and low-income individuals, hindered in their mobility, are more dependent upon local shops, even if the offer is less varied and the prices higher, due to the greater logistical and supply costs that weigh on rural retailers (Broadbridge, Calderwood 2002; Mullis, Kim 2011; Shannon 2016). Overall, the cited factors interweave to create a hostile environment for businesses, particularly in more isolated locations (Byrom et al. 2003).

In reality, the image of the relentless decline of retail trade in rural areas is too simplistic and unifying. Rath-

¹8.9 shops/1,000 inhabitants in 2017, against a national value of 11.2.

² The project forms part of the INTERREG 2014-2020 Programme and has a budget of 1.7 million Euros. The lead partner is the Chamber of Commerce, Industry and Services of Teruel (Spain); another eight public bodies of Finland, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Poland, Spain and Sweden participate.

er, there are different evolutionary processes, affected by geographical and local socio-economic conditions (Vias 2004; Paddison, Calderwood 2007). The foresight of policymakers and the capacity to attract investments also make a difference (Ayres et al. 1992).

The problems and dynamics of trade in remote areas are different from those that can be seen close to urban agglomerates. In the latter case, for example, competition between businesses is higher and out-shopping practices more frequent. To describe this diversity, McEachern and Warnaby (2006) introduced the concept of “relative rurality”. Urban and rural do not contrast sharply; there is, rather, a continuum of situations, graduated by the changing combination of certain factors, such as population density, the services present, the structure of the settlement system and the distance between inhabited centres.

Specific attention has been paid to the role of medium and small towns (market towns) in rural contexts. Often, they *lose out* due to the attraction of metropolitan areas and demographic and productive decentralisation which strengthens even smaller inhabited centres, fuelling phenomena of settlement dispersion. However, compared to commercial services, there is no shortage of places that keep unaltered their role of polarity compared to the surrounding territories. Much depends on the geographical position of the individual cities, on the level of openness to large-scale retail and, last but not least, on the capacity to polarise jobs (in the public and private economy) which generate flows usable by the commercial businesses themselves (Marjanen 2000; Powe et al. 2007; van Leeuwen, Rietveld 2011; Chaze 2017).

3. The case of Lower Lombardy

For the geographer Turri (2000) the territorial area to the south of Lombardy, coinciding with the provinces of Pavia, Lodi, Cremona and Mantua, constitutes the “green heart” of the Po Valley megalopolis: an area mainly consisting of plains, fragmented into 424 municipalities (in 2019) and located on the left bank of the river Po, with the exception of two appendices (Oltrepò Pavese and Oltrepò Mantovano).

Lombardy, despite hosting a city (Milan) which exceeds a million inhabitants, is the land of small towns, a trait that connotes even more clearly the southern belt of the region. Here, in 2019, 82.5% of municipalities have fewer than 5,000 inhabitants, against a regional value of 68.7% (Tab. 1). However, the incidence of small towns is not homogeneous in the study area: it reaches the mini-

mum in the province of Mantua (54.7%), which, also for other aspects, is different from the rest of the territory (often starkly).

In Lower Lombardy demographic density is about half that of the region (197.3 against 421.6 inhab./km²) and a non-negligible share of the population (8.2%) lives in nuclei and scattered houses, a legacy of historic forms of widespread coverage of the countryside which still remain today. Overall, it is not a remote rural area, given its vicinity to Milan and to the *central urban backbone* of the region extending between the foothills and the line of *risorgive*. Some areas, located close to the large infrastructural corridors, are classified by the regional territorial plan (2017) as “emerging polarities”³. There are also more isolated places, where the LEADER programmes are active, aimed at promoting socio-economic development through Local action groups (LAG)⁴.

Lower Lombardy’s economic system is strongly linked to agriculture and to intensive farming. In terms of added value, the primary sector has a significant incidence with respect to the regional picture (4.5% against 1.1% in 2017). The secondary sector is also over-represented, which revolves around agri-food and other specialisations, sometimes assuming typical configurations of industrial districts (particularly in Mantua).

As noted several times, in rural areas, population mobility is high. This is also confirmed in the case in question, with the sole exception of the municipalities of the province of Mantua, connoted by lower commuting rates than those of the region.

As early as in the Nineties of the last century, Lower Lombardy had recorded a good demographic increase (+2.4% between 1991 and 2001). This also manifested in the 2001-2010 period: as previously, the population growth rate was higher than the regional rate (+8.1% against +6.3%: fig. 1). The municipalities close to Milan grew at a more intense rate. This geography highlights how large portions of the low plain have been affected by the wide-ranging decentralisation, around Milan, of the population and of economic activities. Equally intense, but less linked to Milanese affairs, is the increase in the province of Mantua. On the other hand, both the capitals of the province and the small more isolated municipalities lose population, particularly in Oltrepò Pavese: overall, few places. The picture changes significantly in the subsequent period (2010-2019) when the population growth rate stands at a value less than the regional rate

³ Lodi-Crema-Cremona triangle, Mantua-Brescia-Verona triangle, Lomellina-Novara area.

⁴ For the period 2014-2020, this was the LAG Oltrepò Pavese, Risorsa Lomellina, Oglio-Po and Terre del Po.

(+1.8% against +4.8%). Large portions of Lower Lombardy, now, are witnessing a demographic decline, with high points in the more isolated areas (Oltrepò Pavese, Lomellina, Oltrepò Mantovano, Oglio-Po area). Phenomena of growth are very concentrated, involving the capitals, their surrounding belts, and, once again, the territorial area close to Milan.

4. Different trajectories of transformation of trade

To what extent does Lower Lombardy share this process of weakening of the distribution network that connotes many rural areas? The question is dealt with in this paragraph, investigating the transformation of retail trade between 2001 and 2017.

In general, in Italy, the liberalist change in trade governance, impressed by the “Bersani Decree” (1998), has had two effects, only partly counteracted by the 2008 economic crisis (Clerici 2019): 1) jobs in the industry increased, driven by the development of large-scale retail, with an inversion of the cycle of decrease recorded in the Nineties; 2) local units reduced, but at significantly lower rates than in the past.

These two trends can also be seen in Lower Lombardy. Here, however, the performances are not good (Tab. 2). Between 2001 and 2011, the reduction of local units (-12.6%) was higher than that recorded at regional level (-8.2%). The same occurred in the subsequent period (2012-2017) when the rate of change stood at a value double that of Lombardy (-8.7% against -4.3%). There are differences between the four provinces of the study area, and their positions, as to intensity of changes, have changed over time. However, they all performed worse than the region as a whole. In terms of employment, between 2001 and 2011, the expansive regional dynamic was followed, but with a more timid recovery (+6.5% against +14.2%). In the subsequent phase (2012-2017), the trajectories diverge: while, at regional level, workers further increased (+2.3%), in the study area, the opposite happened (-1.9%). This was the case in all provinces, except for Mantua. Overall, compared to the Nineties the differentials with respect to the regional figures increased: in Lombardy, the liberalisation of the retail sector seems to have accentuated the gaps between territories.

Employment dynamics should be followed closely as they involve a crucial problem. In many countries, liberalist attitudes in the governance of trade are justified both by the intention to improve efficiency in the sector and by the will to support employment, relying on large-scale retail, which allegedly generates more jobs than it

destroys (Viviano 2008). In the southern part of Lombardy, a particular situation has been produced. In all provinces, between 2001 and 2011, precisely as occurred at regional level, employment in trade increased. The trend of decline recorded in the previous decade was therefore inverted. A good result. But while, at regional scale, employment increased until surpassing, in 2011, the threshold of 1991, this did not happen in the study area. In 2011, the gap compared to twenty years earlier is approximately 3,000 workers. Given the declining dynamics of the 2012-2017 period, the gap further expanded (-3,500 workers in 2017 compared to 1991). Only the province of Lodi, over the course of the 2000s, regained the employment levels of 1991.

To analyse in more detail the evolution of trade, the municipalities of Lower Lombardy were split into four categories: 1) provincial capitals; 2) centres, or non-capital municipalities with over 10,000 inhabitants in 2019; 3) municipalities in the belts surrounding the two previous situations, located within a radius of 10 km; 4) other municipalities. In that way, the existence or otherwise of a centre/periphery hierarchy in the transformation of the distribution network can be ascertained.

Centres and belts – particularly the former – boast the best performances: in both periods in question, they record smaller reductions of local units compared to the other types of municipalities and the area as a whole (but not compared to Lombardy: tab. 2). In terms of employment, the same situation arises again. It should be noted that centres and belts see an increase in workers between 2012 and 2017, albeit modest, but opposed to the general dynamic. These places, in addition, have a positive balance of employment in the long-term (1991-2011), which is further consolidated in 2017.

Centres and belts, as we will see below, have focused strongly on large-scale retail. The municipalities close to the larger cities have obtained benefits from the decentralisation of trade: an excellent example of the capacity to exploit the so-called mechanism of “borrowed size” (Meijers, Burger 2017). But, in addition, many centres, coinciding with municipalities with a certain demographic size, have not been less successful in attracting large sales structures within their administrative borders. At local scale, the vitality of historic centres has been jeopardised, but the long-term balance – in terms of local units and workers – is in any case better than that recorded by the capitals and by the more peripheral municipalities, which suffered the most negative effects of the development of large-scale retail.

This is important as it highlights how, in the Lombardy low plain, a centre/periphery hierarchy tends to be retained in the organisation of the territory which

follows “christallerian” principles (Emanuel 1990; Dematteis, Emanuel 1990; Mainardi 1997; Turri 2000). This does not mean that the hierarchy established by Christaller is unchanged. It has eased, but the process is not as disruptive as the one visible in the Milan area, where, over the 2000s, trade decentralisation has continued at an intense pace (Clerici 2019). This has interwoven with the redistribution of the population and economic activities, originating a “post-metropolitan” urban form in which the centre/periphery gradient has flattened (Balducci et al. 2017). In Lower Lombardy, on the other hand, trade decentralisation is of short-range and *spreads* around the main centres. It should be noted that the centres include municipalities (not capitals) with more than 10,000 inhabitants, medium-small cities, generally identified as polarities of the respective provinces in territorial plans; cities that, often, are classified as poles of local labour systems. Therefore, they are key points in the organisation of the territory. Trade contributes to strengthening their centrality, similarly to when it occurs for many market towns of other countries, at the *centre* of rural regions.

The breakdown of municipalities by demographic classes is a further key of interpretation which highlights the major difficulties of the smaller centres (<5,000 inhab.) in safeguarding their distribution network (Tab. 2). The demographic decline that has broadly affected these places has certainly not encouraged the survival of trade.

5. The network of medium and large food sales structures

In the liberalist climate of the 2000s, also in Lower Lombardy, large-scale retail earned new market spaces at the expense of small businesses. Assuming the classification of the “Bersani Decree”, we follow the evolution of medium and large sales structures over the timeframe 2003–2019, focusing in particular on the food sector.

It is clear that medium sales structures (MSS) have an important role to play in Lower Lombardy: in 2019, a good 40.3% of the area’s total sales surface was linked to this type of structure, with an appreciable difference from the regional figure (34.5%). Food surface areas account for about a quarter of the total and in the period in question they increased at higher rates than the non-food areas, as also occurred at regional scale (Tab. 3). However, there are differences between the prices of the area as to evolutionary trajectories (Fig. 2). Mantua and Cremona have driven the development of MSS. For a long phase, after 2003, their growth rates were higher than the regional ones; they then reduced, until con-

verging on the latter. Pavia and Lodi, on the other hand, display a more constant trend of growth in line with the regional rate.

The significant presence of small inhabited centres and the low demographic density, which connote the study area, push up the amount of MSS with respect to the population. As early as in 2003 all provinces, except for Cremona, had a density index higher than the regional one. However, the spatial distribution of MSS does not follow the same model. In the province of Mantua, the share of municipalities with these structures is very high (68.8% in 2019). In the rest of the territory, on the other hand, the presences are sparse and involve only a small part of the municipalities, included between 26.5% (Cremona) and 31.1% (Pavia). Overall, in the period in question, the share of municipalities with food MSS increased from 27.6% to 34.0% of the total (from 117 to 144 municipalities). The increase recorded close to Milan was significant, where there was some demographic effervescence which opened new market spaces for enterprises.

Food MSS have made their entrance into many small municipalities (<5,000 inhab.), even though the share of surface area attracted is small (Tab. 4). These structures prefer larger centres; in particular, the municipalities with between 5,000 and 10,000 inhabitants significantly increased their incidence in terms of surface areas. Considering the position of the municipalities in the urban network, the attraction exercised by the capitals and the centres, where over half of the total surface areas are concentrated, is clear. But the value has reduced over time. There has been an outward push: the belt municipalities and above all the other municipalities, even more peripheral, have concentrated increasing shares of the overall surface area.

As regards large sales structures (LSS), the study area followed the regional trend: in the food sector, the growth was more intense between 2003 and 2011 (+14.4%), but then, between 2011 and 2019, it reduced (+2.2%). In both periods, however, the variation rates were lower than the regional ones. Considering the entire timeframe, the growth rate in the study area is 9 pp. lower than the Lombardy rate (+17% against +28%: tab. 3). The limited demographic load in the plain to the south of Lombardy has definitely hindered the advancement of LSS. But it is also important that those structures appeared well before the “Bersani Decree”. In the mid-Seventies of the last century, one of the first Lombardy shopping centres was opened in Montebello della Battaglia (close to Voghera)⁵; other structures were built

⁵ It is currently one of the largest shopping centres of Lower Lombardy with a GLA (Gross leasable area) of 33,400 sqm.

over the course of the Nineties and saturated the local markets.

As already occurred for MSS, the aggregate data mask the different behaviours of the provinces (Fig. 2). Mantua is a case apart: strong rates of development higher than the regional ones, it contrasts with the other provinces, which were much more static (Cremona even sees a drop in surface areas). The localisation of food LSS is very concentrated. In 2019, they were present only in 39 municipalities (32 in 2003). Once again, the province of Mantua is detached from the others: the share of municipalities with structures of this type increases to 21.9% (in 2019), well above what is recorded elsewhere, particularly in the provinces of Pavia and Cremona (where the value is 5%). Considering these data together with those on MSS, one aspect is clear: the majority of municipalities have a distribution network linked to small stores. However, despite being distributed in a punctiform way, the larger structures have restructured the relationships between territories, even at a great distance: the sharp decline of local units highlighted in tab. 2 confirms this.

When looking at the location of food LSS, the siege of the larger town centres is a clear image. There is no intricate network of polarity that connotes the Milan area. The design is much more *orderly*. Around Lodi and Mantua there is stringent coverage: LSS are present in a good part of the municipalities of the belt, along the main roads that lead out to the territory. Elsewhere, the presences are punctual, although the surface areas involved are substantial, as in the cases of San Martino Siccomario (south of Pavia), Montebello della Battaglia (east of Voghera) and San Rocco al Porto (close to the regional border, north of Piacenza).

In this general context, the group of smaller municipalities (<5,000 inhab.) plays an important role, polarising about a third of the total surface areas (Tab. 4). Compared to 2003, the share has reduced by 4.8 pp., but remains significant, above all when compared with the modest concentration level of MSS. The municipalities in the bracket of 1,000-3,000 inhabitants are strongly attractive. However, even the capitals and the centres have a non-negligible incidence in the geography of LSS. The latter even increased their incidence (from 33.2% to 37.3% between 2003 and 2019). These figures highlight how the drive to decentralise trade is strong but is contrasted by the larger town centres, which have also opened up to large-scale retail. Note the dynamism of the municipalities in the bracket of 5,000-10,000 inhabitants and above all that of the centres between 10,000 and 20,000 inhabitants: the intermediate layer of the urban armour is very vivacious in challenging both the

historical supremacy of the capitals and the increased competition of many small municipalities.

6. The rarefaction of food supply

In the context outlined thus far, it is unclear how the level of commercial service to the population has changed. The distribution network of Lower Lombardy has weakened in the last two decades, but to what extent has this determined situations of criticality in supply, particularly food? The question is burning in the political sphere. Of course, competition between businesses must be encouraged, but an adequate proximity service must always be guaranteed, particularly in the smaller centres and in the areas with low settlement density. The aim is cited in the “Bersani Decree” and also inspires the governance of trade in Lombardy. Furthermore, the problem of the formation of food deserts, which involves many rural areas, is also intercepted.

The Lombardy region has introduced an index for assessing the level of commercial desertification, based upon which it is clear that the phenomenon is more pronounced in the small municipalities of the mountains and the plains (therein including the study area)⁶. Rather than use that index, we chose the Retail Capacity Index (RCI) developed by Bilková et al. (2018). It assesses the (positive or negative) difference with respect to the theoretical level of supply that each municipality should have based upon its population, taking account of the regional context and its evolution over time:

$$RCI = [(Si - Pi * S/P)/Si] * 100$$

where Si = supply in the municipality i ; S = total supply of the region;

Pi = population resident in the municipality i ; P = total resident population of the region.

The index was calculated twice: for shops and for their surface areas. As we will see, this determines a different geography of situations of deficit and surplus of food supply in the period 2003-2019. Consideration was given to all types of sales structure identified by the “Bersani Decree”: small shops, MSS and LSS: for this reason, in calculating the RCI, it is necessary to consider

⁶The index appears for the first time in the *Three-year programme for the development of the trade sector 2006-2008*; it considers the entire distribution network with the calculation of “theoretical shops” and identifies six criticality thresholds. The index does not establish a ranking for access to funding.

the surface areas and not just the number of shops⁷. We do not put forward an accurate measure of food deserts, but we identify at least the most problematic situations (with even significant deficits), which may conceal these phenomena. Besides, the identification of food deserts is affected by many methodological issues and would require a direct comparison with the locations and people's perceptions (Hubley 2011; McEntee, Agyeman 2010; Shaw 2006; Skarkey 2009; Ver Ploeg et al. 2015; Yeager, Gatrell 2014). The application of the RCI to the administrative grid of the municipalities could arouse perplexities, given their different extension and the more or less dispersed structure of settlements. However, in Italy, municipalities are the basic unit of territorial governance and they have important duties also in the policies for the distribution network.

The data highlight a difference between the food sector and trade as a whole, as regards consistency and evolution of situations of deficit and surplus of supply (Tab. 5). It is reasonable to assume that many municipalities have a surplus in food, all the more so in a place dominated by small inhabited centres. Food stores *follow* the population and are widespread in the territory, while the supply of other goods is rarer and is polarised in the larger urban centres. The data confirm this. Looking at food shops, a significant decline in cases of surplus can be seen: in 2003 they involved 53.5% of the municipalities of Lower Lombardy, but then the share dropped, becoming a minority (34.4% in 2019). The demographic figure should not be overlooked: in 2019, just over half of the population lived in municipalities in surplus, but the value had reduced compared to 2003 when it was 60.3%. The differential between the population in situations of surplus and deficit, at the start of the period in question equal to 20 pp. reduced to just 4 pp. This is a picture that makes you think: in Lower Lombardy, the transformation of trade was intense even before the “Bersani Decree”, but only in the liberalist season opened by the latter did the relationships of strength overturn. The municipalities in deficit grew, until becoming prevalent, and even those not having any supply increased (food deserts in the literal sense).

While, for the food sector, there was a profound change, for trade as a whole the variations were less drastic. As early as in 2003 the majority of municipalities displayed a deficit of supply and, over time, the values increased slightly. Looking at the demographic figures, there is greater balance between situations of deficit and of surplus, but the former became prevalent. The general picture does not change – other than a different scale of values – applying the RCI to sales surface areas.

as. In this case, the influence of a distribution network connoted by the significant presence (compared to the region) of shops with small surface areas is strongly felt.

Deepening the analysis on the coverage of food shops, some differences emerge at provincial scale (Tab. 6). In 2003, the cases of surplus were prevalent in all provinces except Lodi, reaching a maximum share in Mantua. Only in this latter place did the situations of surplus, albeit reducing, remain the majority. Mantua, in addition, is the only province in which all municipalities have a food supply. Those particular aspects are attributable to the higher demographic size of the inhabited centres and the greater distances that separate them.

In 2003, the municipalities with a deficit of supply increased in the territorial bracket close to Milan. Here, intense demographic growth was recorded, but the daily mobility outside the municipalities for work reasons is also much higher. This may have strengthened out-shopping practices for foodstuffs, depressing the development of supply locally. There are many cases of deficit also around the capitals and centre municipalities. This is not surprising: these centres have a rather substantial surplus – which reflects their historical territorial centrality – and they exercise an “agglomerations shadow” effect on the surrounding areas. In the belts, as early as in 2003, the municipalities in surplus were less than half of the total (48.3%) and they halved over the next 16 years (24.6% in 2019). This is due also to the establishment, in the belts, of large commercial structures that compressed (cannibalised) the local shops. In 2019, the situations of deficit – having become prevalent – are arranged in the territory to design broad and compact fields. The cases of surplus are thinning out: they coincide with the capitals, with almost all centre-municipalities, as well as with some small and peripheral centres, where isolation and tourism have sustained local supply.

Considering the sales surfaces, the picture changes significantly due to the large presence of small shops and a development model focused on large-scale retail (Tab. 7). In 2003, only a small part of the municipalities boasted a surplus of supply (19.3%) and the share remained stable over time. However, a good part of the population of Lower Lombardy is concentrated here. For the higher presence of cases of surplus, places that can rely upon a network of structures with larger surface areas stand out. So, the province of Lodi, which, in the ranking relating to shops was in the last position, is placed immediately after Mantua. The latter confirms its singular position: in the long-term, it retains the highest share of municipalities in surplus (approximately 40% of the total), with a significant detachment from Pavia and above all from Cremona.

⁷ Bilkova et al. (2018) consider, on the other hand, only shops.

From the aggregated data at provincial scale, no significant changes over time emerge. However, the positions of the municipalities have changed. The relationships internal to the area have been redefined. An initial clear aspect concerns the gap between large and small municipalities, strengthening between 2003 and 2019. In the larger centres (>5,000 inhab.) there was an increase in situations of surplus, already preponderant in the higher demographic classes (municipalities with over 10,000 inhab.). This is linked to the number of their stores, but it is above all thanks to the location of MSS and LSS that these municipalities find themselves in an advantageous position (surplus) compared to the smaller centres (<5,000 inhab.), where situations of deficit prevail and tend to increase. A further clear aspect concerns the centre/periphery hierarchy. It is rare to find capitals and centres in deficit. In fact, these cases have reduced until almost disappearing. Conversely, in the belts and in the even more external areas, situations of deficit have an overwhelming incidence and there are even places devoid of trade. Overall, a geography is outlined with broad areas in deficit. The exception is Mantua, some small isolated centres (in Oltrepò Pavese, in Lomellina), the capitals, centres and municipalities which have invested more than others in large-scale retail (particularly in the belts surrounding Lodi and Mantua).

From the data discussed thus far, it is clear that cases of deficit have increased until involving a good part of the population and municipalities of Lower Lombardy. But what is the level of under-supply of food? In tab. 8 the cases of deficit are ranked so that their severity can be assessed. In particular, the value 100% indicates an offer equal to half of the theoretical level that the municipality should have based upon its population. In addition to heterogeneity in the levels of under-supply, the increase in situations of most criticality stands out: in the higher classes of tab. 8 there are increasing shares of municipalities and of population. It remains to be seen to what extent this is a problem. People, even for purchases of foodstuffs, are more mobile than in the past, less interested in shops *near to home*. However, the figures show a significant rarefaction of supply. The upheaval of old principles which guided the localisation of small grocery shops has been strong, even after the liberalisation of trade.

The presence of double deficit situations is significant (for shops and surface areas). Together with municipalities devoid of trade, these are the places closest to food deserts. They increased between 2003 and 2019, until involving 52.6% of municipalities and 34.6% of the population.

7. Conclusions

Lower Lombardy is also affected by this process of reduction of the distribution network which in developed countries is striking many rural areas, *weak links* in the geography of trade compared to other more resilient territories. Despite the change incited by the “Bersani Decree”, the variation of local units and workers continues to mark worse performances than the regional ones, with growing divides over time. In the space of about twenty years, a significant erosion of proximity services has been recorded. Cases of deficit in the food supply have increased, until involving, in 2019, over half of the municipalities and a significant portion of the population. Municipalities devoid of trade have also increased, together with those having a double deficit (under-supply of shops and of surface areas), places that are close to food deserts. All this raises a question on the level of policies: in Lower Lombardy 41 trade districts have been established, but the capacity to protect shops, as a whole, has been modest. The demographic decline of many municipalities, along with the vicinity to Milan – which encourages out-shopping – compress the local distribution networks. However, the trajectories of trade transformation, south of Lombardy, are not homogeneous. At provincial scale, Mantua is a case apart, bolstered by better performances. There are also clear differences between municipalities based upon their demographic size and their position in the urban network. The smaller and peripheral municipalities have a distribution network with more traditional traits and they suffer greater difficulties. In the capitals and in the centres, and their respective belts, on the other hand, the performances are better. These places have attracted large-scale retail, with a play of centrifugal and centripetal forces that has determined a particular situation in the regional context: the centre/periphery hierarchy has not completely dissolved. A comparison with other rural areas – not just Lombardy – would be very useful to build a comprehensive picture of the different trade development models. The impact of e-commerce is another topic to consider in future research although it is currently stronger in the non-food sector. Even considering the *small* distribution sector, the presence, within a strong region such as Lombardy, of significant differences between areas is confirmed: a challenge for the policymakers beset by the problem of territorial cohesion. The restrictions on the movement of people, introduced by the Italian government following the Covid-19 health emergency, have highlighted how important it is to ensure an adequate local supply of food in each municipality. These drastic measures will also condition the slow return to normality that awaits us.

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Table 1. Lower Lombardy: general data, 2019. Source: author's elaboration on ISTAT and OECD.

Variables	Provinces					Lombardy
	Pavia	Lodi ¹	Cremona	Mantua	Total	
Municipalities, N°	186	61	113	64	424	1,507
Inhabitants, N°	545,888	237,628	358,955	412,292	1,554,763	10,060,574
Inhab./Km ²	183.9	297.2	202.7	176.1	197.3	421.6
Municipalities <5,000 inhab., %	87.1	85.2	89.4	54.7	82.5	68.7
Resident population in municipalities <5,000 inhab., %	39.1	47.5	46.8	21.0	37.4	20.5
Resident population in nuclei and scattered houses ² , %	7.9	4.7	5.2	13.2	8.2	3.7
Value added ³ , mln. Euro	12,070.3	5,463.5	10,234.7	11,725.2	39,493.7	348,097.6
Primary sector, %	2.6	3.6	5.2	6.2	4.5	1.1
Secondary sector, %	27.1	28.0	33.0	34.8	31.0	26.8
Tertiary sector, %	70.3	68.4	61.8	59.0	64.5	72.1
Mobility outside the municipalities ² , median, %	46.8	50.7	47.0	36.1	45.0	46.3
Regional typology (Oecd)	Intermediate	Intermediate	Intermediate	Intermediate	-	-

¹ Including San Colombano al Lambro (province of Milan), with the exception of data on value added. ² In 2011. ³ In 2017, current prices.

Table 2. Retail trade in Lower Lombardy, 2001-2017. Source: author's elaboration on ISTAT.

Areas	Local units		Workers		Δ% Local units		Δ% Workers	
	N° 2001	N° 2017	N° 2001	N° 2017 ³	2001-2011	2012-2017	2001-2011	2012-2017 ³
Provinces								
Pavia	6,323	4,918	14,972	14,585	-14.2	-9.4	2.7	-3.6
Lodi ¹	2,222	1,889	6,115	6,547	-8.6	-8.7	8.7	-5.9
Cremona	3,866	3,272	9,240	9,582	-8.7	-8.1	7.8	-3.4
Mantua	4,887	4,126	11,224	12,921	-15.5	-8.2	9.3	3.7
Categories of municipalities								
Provincial capital	3,395	2,811	9,192	9,136	-13.5	-7.4	8.9	-9.9
Centre	4,682	4,052	11,882	13,608	-8.7	-7.1	13.9	1.6
Belt	3,272	2,746	8,953	9,750	-11.2	-8.3	7.5	0.1
Other	5,949	4,596	11,524	11,141	-16.0	-11.0	-3.8	-0.4
Demographic classes of municipalities ²								
<1,000 inhab.	611	398	841	660	-21.8	-15.9	-1.8	-20.5
1,000-3,000	3,019	2,373	7,297	6,924	-13.2	-10.6	-1.3	-5.1
3,000-5,000	1,693	1,321	3,871	3,726	-12.8	-10.7	-1.3	-3.2
5,000-10,000	3,898	3,250	8,468	9,580	-14.6	-8.5	4.6	7.0
10,000-20,000	2,076	1,820	5,270	6,057	-6.9	-6.7	15.6	-1.0
>20,000	6,001	5,043	15,804	16,688	-12.0	-7.4	10.4	-4.2
<5,000	5,323	4,092	12,009	11,310	-14.1	-11.6	-1.3	-5.6
>5,000	11,975	10,113	29,542	32,325	-12.0	-7.6	9.7	-0.5
Total area	17,298	14,205	41,551	43,635	-12.6	-8.7	6.5	-1.9
Total Lombardy	98,805	88,692	273,778	317,738	-8.2	-4.3	14.2	2.3

¹ Included San Colombano al Lambro (province of Milan). ² In 2019. ³ Calculated on average annual data.

Table 3. Medium and large sales structures in the provinces of Lower Lombardy, 2003-2019¹. Source: author's elaboration on ISTAT and Trade Observatory for the Lombardy region.

Areas	Food sector				Total			
	sqm 2019	Balance sqm 2003-2019	Δ% sqm 2003-2019	sqm/1,000 inhab., 2019	sqm 2019	Balance sqm 2003-2019	Δ% sqm 2003-2019	sqm/1,000 inhab., 2019
Medium sales structures								
Pavia	87,963	34,375	64.1	161.1	328,740	89,107	37.2	602.2
Lodi ²	36,518	13,397	57.9	153.7	137,594	36,018	35.5	579.0
Cremona	53,019	20,362	62.4	147.7	225,404	81,398	56.5	627.9
Mantua	87,641	28,337	47.8	212.6	325,894	61,284	23.2	790.4
Total area	265,141	96,471	57.2	170.5	1,017,632	267,807	35.7	654.5
Lombardy	1,503,508	530,474	54.5	149.4	5,672,291	1,259,005	28.5	563.8
Large sales structures								
Pavia	47,667	3,832	8.7	87.3	160,485	1,103	0.7	294.0
Lodi ²	26,110	4,730	22.1	109.9	107,409	12,153	12.8	452.0
Cremona	21,696	-1,808	-7.7	60.4	92,138	-131	-0.1	256.7
Mantua	46,778	13,897	42.3	113.5	155,353	22,225	16.7	376.8
Total area	142,251	20,651	17.0	91.5	515,385	35,350	7.4	331.5
Lombardy	888,946	194,211	28.0	88.4	4,011,907	1,205,547	43.0	398.8

¹ Medium sales structures: 150-1,500 sqm in the municipalites up to 10,000 inhabitants and 250-2,500 sqm in the other municipalities. Large sales structures: over 1,500 sqm in the municipalities up to 10,000 inhabitants and over 2,500 sqm in the other municipalities. ² Included San Colombano al Lambro (province of Milan).

Table 4. Medium and large food sales structures in Lower Lombardy, 2003-2019. Source: author's elaboration on Trade Observatory for the Lombardy region.

Municipalities ¹	Medium sales structures ²				Large sales structures ²			
	sqm 2019	Balance sqm 2003-2019	% sqm 2003	% sqm 2019	sqm 2019	Balance sqm 2003-2019	% sqm 2003	% sqm 2019
Categories of municipalities								
Provincial capital	57,335	20,529	21.8	21.6	22,170	1,955	16.6	15.6
Centre	87,360	23,895	37.6	32.9	53,012	12,672	33.2	37.3
Belt	42,968	15,799	16.1	16.2	48,208	2,677	37.4	33.9
Other	77,478	36,248	24.4	29.2	18,861	3,347	12.8	13.3
Demographic classes of municipalities ³								
<1,000 inhab.	1,233	811	0.3	0.5	-	-	-	-
1,000-3,000	14,677	5,356	5.5	5.5	39,563	1,117	31.6	27.8
3,000-5,000	19,576	8,132	6.8	7.4	8,019	-	6.6	5.6
5,000-10,000	84,960	37,748	28.0	32.0	19,487	4,907	12.0	13.7
10,000-20,000	47,521	19,115	16.8	17.9	26,480	10,557	13.1	18.6
>20,000	97,174	25,309	42.6	36.6	48,702	4,070	36.7	34.2
<5,000	35,486	14,299	12.6	13.4	47,582	1,117	38.2	33.4
>5,000	229,655	82,172	87.4	86.6	94,669	19,534	61.8	66.6
Total area	265,141	96,471	100.0	100.0	142,251	20,651	100.0	100.0

¹ Included San Colombano al Lambro (province of Milan). ² For dimensional limits, see table 3. ³ In 2019.

Table 5. Retail Capacity Index in Lower Lombardy: general picture, 2003-2019. Source: author's elaboration on ISTAT and Trade Observatory for the Lombardy region.

Cases	% Municipalities (100% = 424) ¹			% Resident population		
	2003	2011	2019	2003	2011	2019
Food: stores						
Without offer	4.5	3.3	6.1	0.5	0.2	0.6
Deficit	42.0	52.4	59.4	39.2	38.6	47.6
Surplus	53.5	44.3	34.4	60.3	61.1	51.8
Total: stores						
Without offer	4.0	3.1	5.4	0.4	0.2	0.5
Deficit	76.9	78.8	77.6	47.8	51.6	53.3
Surplus	19.1	18.2	17.0	51.8	48.2	46.3
Food: surface areas						
Without offer	4.5	3.3	6.1	0.5	0.2	0.6
Deficit	76.2	75.2	74.3	53.9	46.0	44.0
Surplus	19.3	21.5	19.6	45.6	53.8	55.4
Total: surface areas						
Without offer	4.0	3.1	5.4	0.4	0.2	0.5
Deficit	79.0	80.0	79.0	49.3	51.4	55.8
Surplus	17.0	17.0	15.6	50.3	48.4	43.8

¹ Administrative boundaries in 2019; included San Colombano al Lambro (province of Milan).

Table 6. Retail Capacity Index in the municipalities of Lower Lombardy: food stores, 2003-2019, val. %. Source: author's elaboration on ISTAT and Trade Observatory for the Lombardy region.

Areas	Without offer		Deficit		Surplus	
	2003	2019	2003	2019	2003	2019
Provinces (row=100%)						
Pavia	7.5	9.7	33.9	54.3	58.6	36.0
Lodi ¹	4.9	3.3	68.9	82.0	26.2	14.8
Cremona	1.8	5.3	46.9	62.8	51.3	31.9
Mantua	-	-	31.3	46.9	68.7	53.1
Categories of municipalities (row=100%)						
Provincial capital	-	-	25.0	-	75.0	100.0
Centre	-	-	42.1	36.8	57.9	63.2
Belt	2.5	3.4	49.2	72.0	48.3	24.6
Other	5.7	7.8	39.2	56.5	55.1	35.7
Demographic classes of municipalities ² (row=100%)						
<1,000 inhab.	14.0	20.7	29.8	43.8	56.2	35.5
1,000-3,000	1.1	0.6	47.5	67.4	51.4	32.0
3,000-5,000	-	-	52.1	79.2	47.9	20.8
5,000-10,000	-	-	43.1	60.8	56.9	39.2
10,000-20,000	-	-	46.2	53.8	53.8	46.2
>20,000	-	-	30.0	10.0	70.0	90.0
<5,000	5.4	7.4	42.0	60.9	52.6	31.7
>5,000	-	-	41.9	52.7	58.1	47.3
Total area	4.5	6.1	42.0	59.4	53.5	34.4

¹ Included San Colombano al Lambro (province of Milan). ² Administrative boundaries in 2019.

Table 7. Retail Capacity Index in the municipalities of Lower Lombardy: food sales surface areas, 2003-2019, val. %. Source: author's elaboration on ISTAT and Trade Observatory for the Lombardy region.

Areas	Without offer		Deficit		Surplus	
	2003	2019	2003	2019	2003	2019
Provinces (row=100%)						
Pavia	7.5	9.7	75.3	73.1	17.2	17.2
Lodi ¹	4.9	3.3	73.8	75.4	21.3	21.3
Cremona	1.8	5.3	87.6	84.1	10.6	10.6
Mantua	-	-	60.9	59.4	39.1	40.6
Categories of municipalities (row=100%)						
Provincial capital	-	-	25.0	-	75.0	100.0
Centre	-	-	15.8	5.3	84.2	94.7
Belt	2.5	3.4	76.3	78.0	21.2	18.6
Other	5.7	7.8	80.9	78.4	13.4	13.8
Demographic classes of municipalities ² (row=100%)						
<1,000 inhab.	14.0	20.7	73.6	72.7	12.4	6.6
1,000-3,000	1.1	0.6	85.6	88.4	13.3	11.0
3,000-5,000	-	-	79.2	81.2	20.8	18.8
5,000-10,000	-	-	72.5	52.9	27.5	47.1
10,000-20,000	-	-	23.1	7.7	76.9	92.3
>20,000	-	-	10.0	-	90.0	100.0
<5,000	5.4	7.4	80.6	82.0	14.0	10.6
>5,000	-	-	55.4	37.8	44.6	62.2
Total area	4.5	6.1	76.2	74.3	19.3	19.6

¹ Included San Colombano al Lambro (province of Milan). ² Administrative boundaries in 2019.

Table 8. Levels of food trade deficit in Lower Lombardy, 2003-2019. Source: author's elaboration on ISTAT and Trade Observatory for the Lombardy region.

Deficit/levels	% Municipalities ¹			% Resident population		
	2003	2011	2019	2003	2011	2019
Deficit in stores						
<25%	33.1	28.4	24.6	49.9	31.3	34.1
25-50%	30.3	24.3	19.4	25.9	23.2	18.8
50-75%	12.4	14.0	15.9	8.9	16.9	15.6
75-100%	8.4	9.0	10.7	4.6	6.1	7.4
>100%	15.7	24.3	29.4	10.7	22.5	24.2
Total	100,0	100,0	100,0	100,0	100,0	100,0
Deficit in surface areas						
<25%	13.0	8.2	9.5	27.0	15.9	14.3
25-50%	13.3	12.2	10.2	13.4	13.3	15.8
50-75%	13.9	11.3	6.7	12.2	11.8	8.4
75-100%	9.6	7.5	7.3	10.7	7.7	8.8
>100%	50.2	60.8	66.3	36.8	51.3	52.7
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Cases of double deficit ²						
Pavia	32.8	44.1	50.0	23.8	32.5	34.8
Lodi	57.4	59.0	67.2	39.5	41.6	43.6
Cremona	45.1	55.8	58.4	30.6	36.6	41.2
Mantua	20.3	26.6	35.9	16.2	19.6	23.3
Total area	37.7	46.7	52.6	25.7	31.4	34.6

¹ Administrative boundaries in 2019; included San Colombano al Lambro (province of Milan). ² Excluding municipalities without offer.

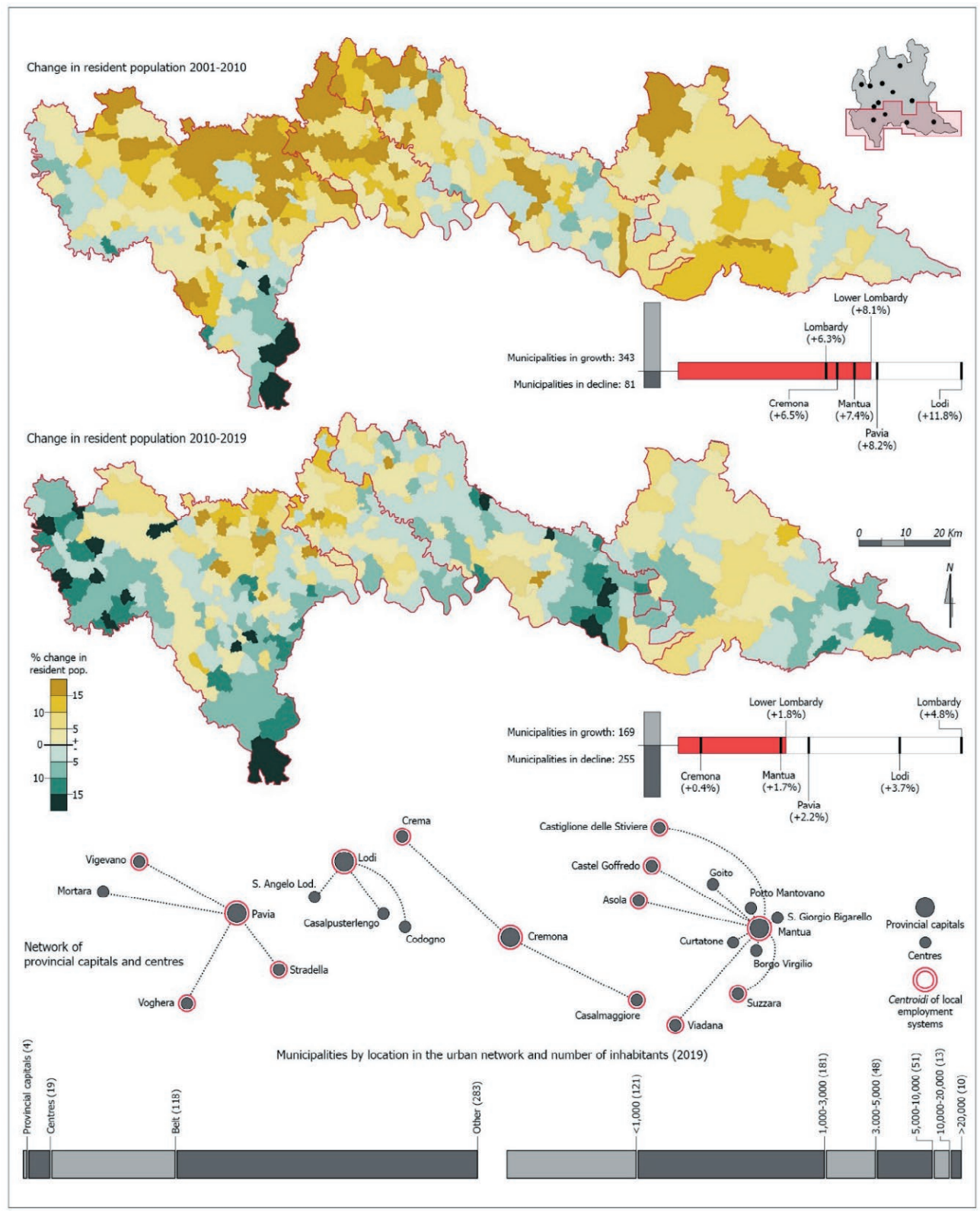


Figure 1. Variation of the resident population and type of municipalities in Lower Lombardy, 2001-2019. Source: author's elaboration on ISTAT data.

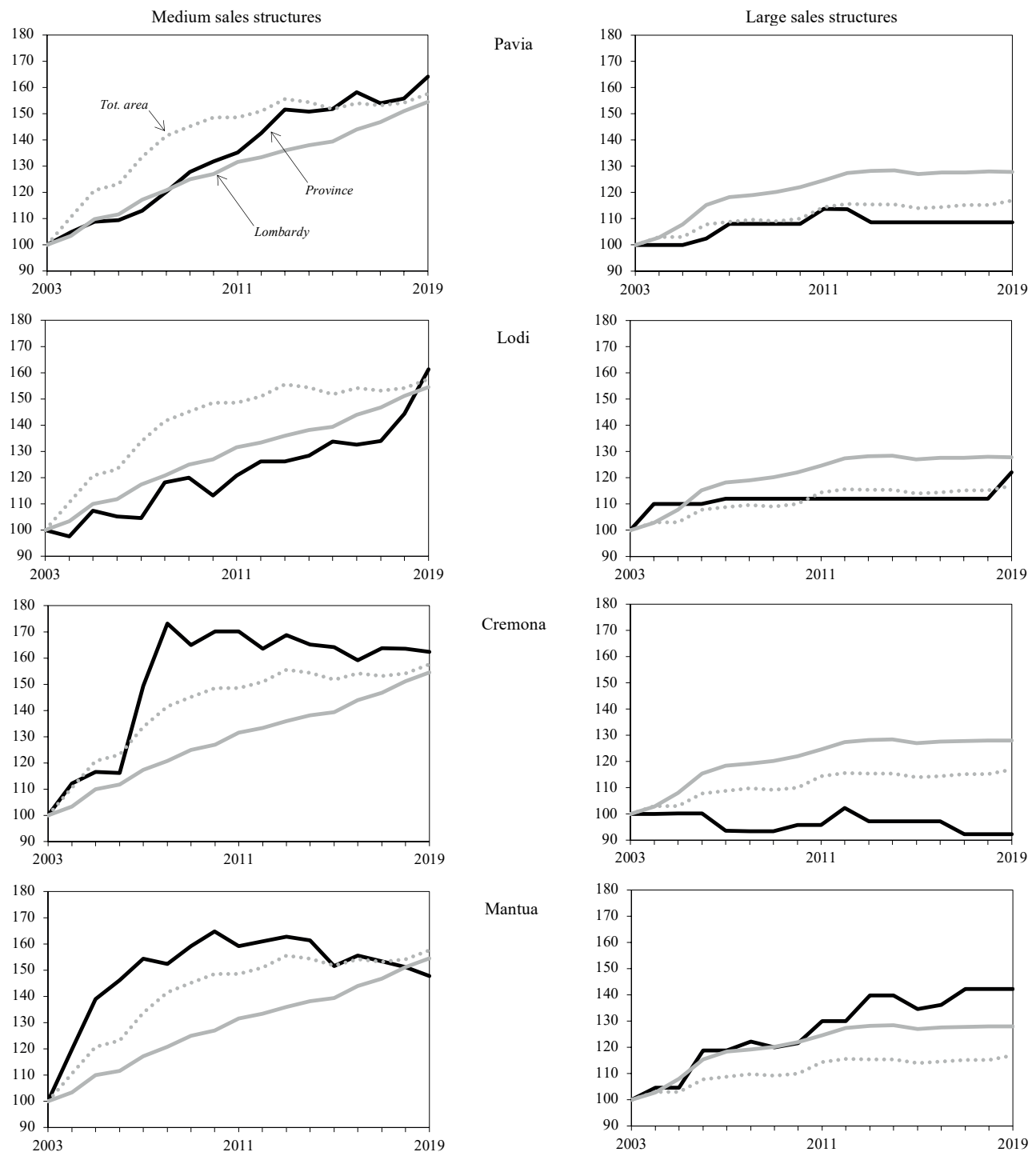


Figure 2. Trend of surface areas of medium and large food sales structures in the provinces of Lower Lombardy, 2003-2019 (indexes 2003=100). Source: Trade Observatory for the Lombardy region.



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The Centre-Periphery Dialectics in Eastern Sicily Retail System. An Exploratory Research

La dialettica centro-periferia nel sistema commerciale della Sicilia orientale. Una ricerca esplorativa

CATERINA BARILARO¹, CATERINA CIRELLI², TERESA GRAZIANO³, LEONARDO MERCATANTI⁴

¹ Dipartimento di Scienze Cognitive, Psicologiche, Pedagogiche e degli Studi Culturali, Università di Messina, Italy

² Dipartimento di Economia e Impresa, Università di Catania, Italy

³ Dipartimento di Agricoltura, Alimentazione e Ambiente, Università di Catania, Italy

⁴ Dipartimento di Culture e Società, Università di Palermo, Italy

E-mail: caterina.barilaro@unime.it; cirelca@unict.it; tgraziano@unict.it; leonardo.mercatanti@unipa.it

Abstract. This paper aims at scrutinizing from an historical perspective the deep transformations shaped by retail spaces and new consumption patterns challenging long-entrenched dichotomies, such as the centre-periphery one. In particular, the exploratory research explores the territorial reconfiguration of the main Eastern Sicily metropolitan areas, Catania and Messina, from the lens of the retail geography, namely after the diffusion of new suburban retail formats which have completely upset deeply-rooted relations between urban core and suburban rings.

Keywords: centre-periphery dialectics, urban sprawl, suburban retail format, historical centre, Sicily.

Riassunto. Questo lavoro mira a esaminare, da una prospettiva storica, le profonde trasformazioni prodotte dagli spazi di vendita al dettaglio e i nuovi modelli di consumo che sfidano dicotomie a lungo trincerate, come quella centro-periferia. In particolare la ricerca esamina la riconfigurazione territoriale delle principali aree metropolitane della Sicilia orientale, Catania e Messina, dalla prospettiva della geografia commerciale, ponendo attenzione al periodo successivo alla diffusione di nuovi format commerciali della periferia che hanno sconvolto le relazioni profondamente radicate tra il nucleo urbano e gli stessi anelli suburbani.

Parole chiave: dialettica centro-periferia, espansione urbana, format commerciali suburbani, centro storico, Sicilia.

1. Introduction

Over the last decades, shopping has become one of the major driving forces which have been reshaping city morphology, functions and hierarchy, by fostering unprecedented relations between the urban core and suburban rings (Barata-Salgueiro, Cachinho 2011). As Crewe puts it (2000, 275) “retail geography has come to occupy a central position within social-scientific research” insofar as places, spaces and practices of consumption are embedded within new theoretical and methodological frameworks of economic geography (Crang 1996). This is principally due to the fact that “not only is shopping melting into everything, but everything is melting into shopping [...] Shopping is the medium by which the market has solidified its grip on our spaces, buildings, cities, activities, and lives. It is the material outcome of the degree to which the market economy has shaped our surroundings, and ultimately ourselves” (Leong 2001, 129).

As a matter of fact, the huge increase in the number of suburban retailing formats out of the USA, where they firstly emerged in the 1950's, has been recently concurring in transforming traditional urban dichotomies, such as those between urban centres and peripheries, inserted in the wider chancing landscapes fostered both by urban sprawl and urban shrinkage.

The impressive transformation of consumption practices, retail spaces and related territories also concerns *peripheral* economies, where new *shopping experiences* have been recently affecting old-established territorial structures and relations. This is the case of Sicily, where over the last decades consumptionscapes have been increasingly altered by the emergency of new retail formats, which have completely reshaped local territorial hierarchies, particularly in the eastern part of the island. In this context, the two main metropolitan areas, Catania and Messina, have underwent on the one hand an evolution towards the growing commodification of historic centres, increasingly swallowed up by fast fashion formats and commercial desertification; on the other hand, their peripheral areas have experienced a socio-economic and even territorial transformation due to new suburban retail formats. The remaining Sicilian eastern provinces have shown a growing functional autonomy in terms of retail services: Siracusa historic centre has been recently classified as one of the most commercially *resilient* in Italy, with low rates of shop closures (Cirelli, Graziano 2019), while its consumptionscapes have been increasingly catered to a cosmopolitan tourism target, as it also happened in Ragusa. According to the data retrieved from Confcommercio database, in Siracusa the

decrease in retail business in 2018 was of 7%, the lowest of the whole island, while food and tourism businesses registered the highest increase, equal to 56%; in Ragusa the decrease in retail businesses was of 10%, while the food and tourism businesses increased of 51%.

In Catania and Messina metropolitan areas new centre-periphery processes have emerged both in terms of new urban centralities and its relations with surrounding areas. Urban sprawl does not only entail the hyper-growth beyond urban administrative boundaries, but also the decentralization of activities, population and services in the urban fringe, to the point that suburbs traditionally regarded as peripheral have become the new centres of retail and services, often substituting the old historic ones. Thus, centrality is no longer a matter of physical localization, but it has become the outcome of a multilayered process where traditional spatial parameters have been replaced by new social and economic patterns (Cirelli et al. 2015).

This paper aims at evaluating the impact of new retailing spaces and patterns in the two metropolitan areas of Eastern Sicily, Catania and Messina, in order to scrutinize to what extent they have reshaped local territorial hierarchies. The paper is based on an exploratory secondary research approach, drawing both on the review of existing literature on the specific place-based case studies and the analysis of recent data, retrieved from institutional sources. In so doing, the paper can provide significant insights into past and current dynamics shaping centre-periphery relationship, apart from fresh reflections about the post-Covid potential evolution.

2. Catania

As the traditionally most vibrant commercial centre of Eastern Sicily, Catania has historically boasted a rich and variegated retail offer. The city maintains still today its commercial vocation and continues to play a relevant role as an attractive pole not only in the surrounding area, but for a wider territory involving the whole eastern Sicily, although Siracusa and Ragusa/Modica have recently gained a growing functional autonomy in terms of retail services and functions.

Over the last years, the transformation of centre-periphery socio-economic relations in the metropolitan area of Catania is a relevant example of how new retail spaces can challenge old-established territorial hierarchies, particularly in a geographical area marked by sharp contradictions (Cirelli 2007; Cirelli 2008).

From the seventies onwards, the city experienced the evolution of the relationship with the neighbor-

ing municipalities, where a demographic increase was registered owing to the population flows coming from the city centre. In a first phase, this involved the simple redistribution of the population, whilst the main administrative and service functions remained concentrated in the main urban core. Catania, in fact, remained a highly attractive pole and services centre for a broad catchment area, whereas the neighboring municipalities were confined to the function of *dormitories*. The main consequence was the increase in commuting rates and, therefore, congestion and saturation. Although some municipalities already had a relative functional autonomy, at least as far as lower rank commercial services were concerned, it was Catania the main attractive pole of the local urban hierarchy, due to the huge amount of higher-level services (Cirelli et al. 2016).

Classified as a metropolitan centre in the eighties, due to its demographic weight (about 500,000 inhabitants, except the hinterland), the city went on in following the main trends of centrifugal counter-urbanisation, although this demographic decentralization was not followed by a contemporary production delocalisation, economic diversification or decentralization of governance functions. In spite of the ever-lasting demographic decay, the centre of Catania remained for many years the main pole of retail, services and economic activities. From the 1980's onwards, public-private partnerships, the improvement in infrastructural networks as well as the europeization of territorial governance have triggered out the shift of the commercial function towards suburban areas, particularly in Misterbianco, a nearby municipality where a dense integrated retail areas emerged since the late 1980's.

Throughout the 1990's, suburban areas were punctuated with large retail chains ranging from Cash and Carry Metro (18,000 sqm), located in Misterbianco, and Auchan (73,000 sqm) located in a peripheral by highly accessible neighborhood of Catania.

It was in the late 2000's that new suburban retail formats began spreading in Catania metropolitan area, with a variegated set of multifunctional shopping centres and large-scale monobrand retail spaces (i.e. Conforama, Ikea).

Meanwhile, the consumptionscapes of the historical centre have underwent an increasing process of retail desertification, fostered by the growing number of closures of family-run businesses and the parallel "invasion" of fast fashion and franchising format (Cirelli et al. 2016).

Over the last two decades, the controversial relationship centre-periphery has been undergoing a process of reconfiguration, principally due to a peripheral retail

overgrowth with the emergence of new consumption spaces, such as shopping malls, articulate around large supermarkets chains, and big-scale monobrand retail shops.

As a consequence, the territorial hierarchy has been reshaped by a reticular system of interaction between Catania and the municipalities situated along the first suburban ring. Overlapping exchange flows among the several urban centers punctuating peri-urban and suburban areas have fostered the growing tertiarization of territories previously dependent on the centripetal attractiveness of the main urban centre, which now have been experiencing increasing rates of retail functional autonomy.

For decades the historical centre lost its residential attractiveness, while maintaining the functional-commercial one. It was with the emergence of suburban retail formats that the long-lasting relations among territories, consumption practices, local communities and retail spaces were completely upset, by shaping a completely new geography of consumption.

The development trajectory of these new commercial spaces mainly followed the North-South direction. Directed in a first phase towards the foothills, in a second stage the trajectory was oriented to the South and South-West of the city, within or in the proximity of two districts, the fifth and the sixth, in which there was a greater population density as well as strong territorial imbalances due to social and economic disadvantages (Cirelli et al. 2014).

The retail system of Catania, therefore, has recently developed towards reticular and polycentric consumption models and practices, aligning itself with other experiences in Italian and European cities. The strengthening of entertainment in shopping experiences as well as the new retailscapes catered to multifunctional consumers have fostered the proliferation of large-scale commercial and entertainment "parks", often accused not only of "killing" central retail areas, but also of concurring in eroding public space by a growing privatization (see Chiodelli, Moroni 2015 for an original reflection about it).

Even without ascribing the crisis of the city center retail exclusively to the emergence of suburban "gigantic size" retail, it is unquestionable that in recent years the economic structure of urban retail in central areas has weakened considerably (Cirelli et al. 2014). In the last decade, in fact, the commercial offer of the historic centre and the central area has aligned itself with the dictat of fast fashion, registering a proliferation of franchise stores and major low-cost clothing brands, levelling down the whole commercial offer. Furthermore, the dif-



Figure 1. Piazza Cairolì in the 1940s with the De Dominicis store and the XIX century Chiosco. Source: private collection.

difficulty of accessing bank credit, the growing competition with e-commerce, rising levels of urban unsustainability in central areas, due to congestion and traffic, have accelerated the fate of the neighbor's shop, forced to succumb to the big chains or to tourism-oriented services.

Data retrieved from *Confcommercio* (Association of tourism, services and retail businesses) database highlights the constant decrease in the number of new retail businesses opened over the last 15 years in Catania, together with the increase in shutdowns. Apart from the number of activity cessations, in the last 15 years several retail spaces have been transformed in food and tourism-oriented businesses (restaurants, bars and accommodation) to the point to increase of +43% in 2018, while the number of retail businesses decreased of -14% (Cirelli, Graziano 2019).

Nowadays the commercial crisis has reached a global scale, due to the Covid-19 pandemics which has further increased an already existing tendency to decline in the historical centre and the hyper-growth of suburban retail formats, whose supply is not sufficiently supported by an adequate demand. The phantom of demalling is at stake, insofar as numerous retail spaces inside many shopping centers remain empty for long periods after activity cessations.

3. Identity crisis and new retail dynamics in the City of the Strait

In the aftermath of the 1908 earthquake, the Messina reconstruction project completely redesigned the urban pattern. Retail, which until then had been the foundation of the productive system, moved to the southern edges of the historical area, where the new city was growing. The concentration of shacks in this area led to the development of economic and commercial activities triggered by the reconstruction itself. *Piazza Cairolì* (Fig. 1) and *Viale San Martino* became the main urban axis, acquiring a new centrality not only from the commercial point of view, but also from a social, cultural and recreational perspective (Ioli Gigante 1986, 145-146).

This configuration remained until the second war conflict, after which Messina was not able to highlight its economic specificity and the administrative function became the main source of income (D'Angelo 1999, 8). The retail distribution system moved towards increasingly large and highly specialized areas. This allowed Messina to express its economic and cultural supremacy towards Calabria. *Piazza Cairolì*, architectural square, soon became the *living room* of the city and together with the road axes that branch off from it, will be

enriched with numerous and elegant shops; *viale San Martino* was punctuated with shop windows hosting varied and elegant retail facilities.

At the end of the last century, the decline in commercial functions in the central area of the city and the increasingly significant presence of the Chinese community in the economic and social fabric redesigned its commercial landscape, while the birth of new urban polarizations along the Tyrrhenian coast of the Peloritani Mountains¹, able to express commercial liveliness, strongly compromised the attractiveness of Messina.

The economic and cultural changes occurred in Messina in recent decades have resulted in a spontaneous reorganization of the retail offer, marked by the advancement of large retail chains or the phenomenon of franchising and the emergence of online shopping: a weak and incomplete innovation process.

The southern urban suburbs of the city are dotted with new small and medium-sized retail centres, also Chinese, due to the increase in housing density following the low value of real estate income property, which was followed by an expansion of commercial activities. In particular, the Tremestieri area became a multifunctional hub, an important link between the motorway and the port. The namesake shopping center built in the area - the first in Messina - represents the only experience of medium-sized extra-urban polarization². Its commercial offer and attractiveness, however, is intended to serve only the most immediate needs of local users³.

In this process of economic standardization, the urban image of Messina was modified: the new low-profile architectural geometries⁴ transformed *Piazza Cairolì*, hiding its elegance and weakening the fragile territorial identity. The historic shops of the city and the iconic places - where before there were privileged places of commerce and strolling - closed⁵; some old-established territorial structures move to streets near the centre to save on rent; others change their intended use⁶. On the

other hand, as witnesses of a recent past, some important shops remain⁷ together with the nineteenth-century liberty style *Chiosco*, famous for the *salt lemonade*.

The disappearance of traditional stores is offset by the spread of the franchise retail stores, in particular in the sectors of fashion and food (i.e. McDonald's in *Piazza Cairolì*). *Piazza Cairolì*, *viale San Martino* and *via Dei Mille* are full of franchise stores. In order to counter this phenomenon, some *retailers* tried to adapt to the new distribution logic of online sales, developing new strategies to emphasize the consumer shopping experience in the 'real' store.

The proposal to transform a street into a Natural Shopping Centre by the *Millevetrine Association* has recently taken place in *via Dei Mille*⁸, a parallel street to *viale San Martino*, which during the Christmas period becomes a very popular pedestrian area. This project is the first and only of its kind in Messina. It aims to revive quality trade, considering that the pedestrian precinct must involve the main city stakeholders applying the basic principles of *visual merchandising* and *experiential and relational marketing*, also aiming to promote tourism in this area⁹. The debate on this issue is still open (Barilaro 2019, 152-153).

Therefore, the history of Messina highlights the economic, social and cultural limits of this city, which has failed to propose multifunctional shopping centres and new areas of entertainment to contrast the economic desertification of its urban centre, as happened, for example, to Catania (Cirelli, Graziano 2019, 95). The City of the Strait, which with the 1908 earthquake lost its historic centre, is now also losing its urban centre, subject to continuous changes that distance it from its identity. The urgency of systemic commercial policies in order to revitalize the beating heart of the city is evident, maintaining however the residual historical features that are still at least partially visible and interpretable. Messina needs a new visibility, new economic and functional prospects, capable of restoring the economic vitality. Messina needs to build a model that recognises signs of the past to redesign the city of the future.

¹ Especially Milazzo, Barcellona and Spadafora.

² The *Maregrossa Shopping Centre*, recently built in the neighborhood close to the city center, rather than a shopping centre, falls into the category "shopping gallery" (Porto 2019, 181-185).

³ Favorite destinations are Catania (in particular the *Centro Sicilia* in Misterbianco and *Etnapolis* in Belpasso) and Enna (*Sicily Outlet Village* in Agira).

⁴ Poorly harmonious and malfunctioning urban furnishings and ugly metal structures for the tram service, reintroduced after fifty years.

⁵ From 2008 to 2018, 122 historic stores in the central area closed (Confcommercio Imprese per l'Italia 2019). Among these, the *Magazzini Piccolo* exerted an attraction on the municipalities of Aspromonte (Calabria) and the province of Messina, while *De Dominici*, *Siracusano*, *Rinciari* or *Rotino* had a significant position in the clothing sector.

⁶ Perhaps the most emblematic case is the *Odeon Cinema* transformed into a *Zara* franchise.

⁷ High profile stores such as *Iannello* clothing since 1865; the *Casaramona* pastry shops since 1884, *Irrera* since 1910 and *Santoro* since 1912; the *La Motta* jewelers since 1929 and *Gullo* since 1948; the *Bisazza* gift shop since 1888, the *Prinzi* stationery since 1909 (Barilaro 2019, 149).

⁸ In *via dei Mille* there are 86 retail activities with 32 different product categories.

⁹ This would be important, especially in relation to cruise tourism, since shipping traffic within the port is very dynamic, with high growth prospects. In fact, in 2018, about 400 thousand cruise passengers arrived in Messina.

4. Conclusions

The exploratory research has shown to what extent retail spaces, commercial functions and consumption practices are able to completely transform urban hierarchies at the sub-regional level. Although with several differences in terms of urban heritage and commercial vocation, the place-based case studies of Catania and Messina have highlighted the crucial role played by new consumptionscapes in re-shaping long-entrenched dichotomies (core/ring, centre/periphery). The territories of both metropolitan areas have undergone a significant evolution from a first stage of centripetal attractiveness of the historical centre and central areas, followed by a reconfiguration of territorial balances due to a new retail functional autonomy of neighboring municipalities after the diffusion of suburban retail formats. Furthermore, the recent Covid-19 pandemics has been completely reshaping forms, functions and hierarchies of consumption practices and models. During the lockdown, generally e-commerce has increased its territorial diffusion, together with the (temporary?) rediscovery of family-run proximity businesses, often reorganized with home-delivery services. The post-lockdown current phase is more complex to interpret from the lens of retail geography, since consumption practices significantly will depend on several factors, such as the households purchasing power, the reopening of several retail/food businesses, the risk of new restrictions.

As a matter of fact, it is more crucial than ever to scrutinize the relations among territorial development, urban hierarchies, economic structures and consumption practices and spaces at the local level.

In so doing, the paper provides useful insights which could be useful for other researchers, policy makers and institutional actors in order to reconceptualize territorial governance at the local scale, by underlining the even more relevant role played by retail spaces and consumption patterns in moulding new relations and functions.

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Retail in Sicily: an Overall View

Il commercio in Sicilia: uno sguardo d'insieme

GIROLAMO CUSIMANO¹, SALVATORE CANNIZZARO², MAURIZIO GIANNONE³, DONATELLA PRIVITERA⁴

¹ Dipartimento di Culture e Società, Università di Palermo, Italy

² Dipartimento di Scienze Umanistiche, Università di Catania, Italy

³ Dipartimento di Scienze Economiche, Aziendali e Statistiche, Università di Palermo, Italy

⁴ Dipartimento di Scienze della Formazione, Università di Catania, Italy

E-mail: girolamo.cusimano@unipa.it; scanniz@unict.it; maurizio.giannone@unipa.it; donatella.privitera@unict.it

Abstract. In Sicily, the retail sector shows changes both from a structural point of view, with an increase in large-scale distribution at the expense of small businesses, and spatially, through the transfer of many commercial activities to the suburbs of cities or to extra-urban areas. This is a phenomenon that can also be observed in the rest of the country. The analysis of the most recent statistics in the sector, however, seems to highlight a significant flexibility of a part of the fabric of Sicilian commercial enterprises due to the widespread presence of small commercial businesses on the regional territory.

Keywords: large-scale organized distribution, suburbs, localization, micro-enterprises, flexibility.

Riassunto. In Sicilia il settore del commercio mostra cambiamenti sia dal punto di vista strutturale, con un incremento della grande distribuzione a scapito dei piccoli esercizi, che spaziale, attraverso il trasferimento di molte attività commerciali nelle periferie delle città o in aree extraurbane. Si tratta di un fenomeno che è possibile osservare anche nel resto del Paese. L'analisi delle più recenti statistiche del settore sembra tuttavia evidenziare una significativa flessibilità di una parte del tessuto di imprese commerciali siciliane dovuta alla presenza diffusa sul territorio regionale di piccoli esercizi commerciali.

Parole chiave: Grande distribuzione organizzata, periferie, localizzazione, microimprese, flessibilità.

1. Introduction

The retail sector in Sicily has suffered the negative impact caused by the economic crisis of 2008. The effects of that crisis have contributed to further weaken the local business commercial community, which is already in a state

of difficulty due to a structural condition of organizational and economical deficit.

In Sicily, as in many other parts of Southern Italy, the organizational downsizing of the retail sector is also associated with a change in the spatial distribution of the points of sale. The phenomenon affects historic centres and the downtowns, where a progressive reduction of little shops can be observed, as well as the peripheral areas of urban centres, spaces preferred by the large-scale distribution.

To describe the current trend and to try to analyse some effects caused on the regional and local commercial system by the current organizational changes, this paper has managed the most up-to-date sector statistics. The data, drawn from research institutes and national administrations as well as from the Sicilian Region, are read trying to bring out some emerging dynamics and to interpret the macro-trends through an overview of the most recent information regarding the actual consistency and the spatial distribution of some retail business categories. The quantitative approach is therefore intertwined with a qualitative analysis of the information collected, proposing an interpretation of phenomena still in progress which, for this reason, here are focused outlining possible trend lines that can be further explored when consolidated statistical data will be available.

2. The trend of retail in Sicily: an economic and territorial framework

The commerce sector has certainly played a relevant role in the Sicilian economy. According to the Bank of Italy, in 2016 – year which the latest available territorial accounting data refer to – the retail sector affected the formation of added value in Sicily for a significant 12.3%, a percentage however in line with the national average (Banca d'Italia 2019). The economies of Sicily and, more generally, of the South (Mezzogiorno), as it is known, their structural bases rest largely on the traditional tertiary sector. In 2018, the added value of the services sector, within which retail falls, accounted for almost 83% of the total in Sicily, more than 79% in the South and 74% in Italy (Studi e Ricerche per il Mezzogiorno 2020). It should therefore come as no surprise that the fabric of small commercial enterprises has been able to hold up on the island and in the south of the country, albeit with great difficulties, to the effects of the post-2008 economic shock. This is demonstrated by the gradual increase in employment in the service sector in the decade following the 2008 crisis, unlike in other sectors (ISTAT 2018), and by the fact that in 2018 the bal-

ance between registrations and business closures was positive precisely in the south, with a performance, that alone was worth 60% of the increase recorded in that year at national level (Ministero dello Sviluppo Economico 2018).

However, it can be assumed that even in Sicily there is a tendency to downsize the consistency of the sales networks. The signs of a structural weakening are also registered in terms of economic productivity, as shown by a survey carried out in Sicily by Cerved Group for the period 2004-2017, on a sample of about 3.500 stock companies active in the retail, which shows a progressive decrease in the operating profitability of the companies in the sector (Banca d'Italia 2019).

But, although in a context of general setback, some indicators suggest that part of the fabric of Sicilian commercial enterprises has suffered less from the long wave of the crisis. The dynamics of the consistency of fixed retail sales in the period 2017-2019, for example, show a negative balance on a national basis of -2.8% as a consequence of the cessation in Italy of 20,647 businesses, whereas in Sicily the negative balance stood at -1.3%, a percentage which corresponds to the cessation of 7,307 businesses in the three-year period (Source: authors' elaboration of data from the Ministry of Economic Development). It is as if the very small commercial reality had been able to, thanks to its microstructure and its elastic organizational model, adapt better than others, to external negative impacts. There is no doubt that, overall, also the trend of commerce in Sicily, similarly to what is recorded at a national level, reveals a depressive trend in the medium-long term. But the negative impact caused by the economic crisis could have caused some critical issues in the island's commercial network, that the flexibility – if not the fragility – of its structure has paradoxically managed to absorb, at least in part. In this sense, the clear prevalence in the South, and especially Sicily, of businesses with the legal nature of sole proprietorship lends itself to several readings, a certainly a simpler and less burdensome business form which, however, can help better manage market turbulence thanks to a better ability to adapt small and very small enterprises to situations of difficult of endogenous and exogenous origin.

This adaptability could be interpreted as a resilient capacity recognizable in local retail systems based on small and very small businesses, which, although they may appear less competitive, are probably able to better withstand the impact of the crisis by operating in an informal and less regulated economic context.

The term resilience is a concept widely used today in the social sciences as well as in the technological, health

and ecological fields. From a strictly ecological point of view, resilience can be considered as a condition that determines the persistence of relationships within a system and the measure of the system's ability to absorb any changes in state induced by internal and external variables (Holling 1973).

Urban studies increasingly cite resilience with reference to the spatial organization and commercial dynamics of cities. The scientific literature links the urban retail resilience to the ability of the local business system to adapt to changes or shocks that undermine the internal balance without failing to perform its functions in a sustainable and profitable way (Cachinho 2014; Rio Fernandes, Chamusca 2014). In any case, the urban retail resilience is an endogenous quality that should be analysed in the broader framework of spatial planning, since commerce in cities expresses adaptive capacities if it is part of a sustainable and resilient urban system (Kärholm, Nylund, Prieto de la Fuente 2014).

The resilience of small commercial enterprises may appear abnormal considering their shortcomings from a financial, technological and managerial point of view. But, although many studies argue that small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in the commercial sector in periods of prolonged crisis may suffer most from the effects of economic downturns, it is also true that empirical results of studies concerning businesses should be appropriately contextualized, as each territory expresses cultural and social values that influence – often in a very different way – community responses to crises (Bourletidis, Triantafyllopoulos 2014).

The organisational models of the commercial networks, however, are also changing in Sicily to adapt to transformations of the global market, with the result that the sales microstructures also give way here to large-scale organized distribution (in Italian *Grande Distribuzione Organizzata* [GDO]). Small businesses continue to represent the backbone of the Sicilian commercial system even if, as better described below, urban peripheries and even inner areas of the regional territory are increasingly occupied by large-scale retail stores. Even if in 2016 on the island the share of retail appanage of the GDO was still lower than the national average of about four percentage points (Banca d'Italia 2019).

Furthermore, the GDO is characterized by dynamics that favour commercial megastructures rather than minimarkets and supermarkets. In 2012 in Sicily, minimarkets, retail establishments with a sales area between 200 and 399 square meters, represented 34.3% of the total retail outlets of the GDO, while supermarkets, structures that have an equal or greater sales surface at 400 square meters, they represented 52.6%. The department

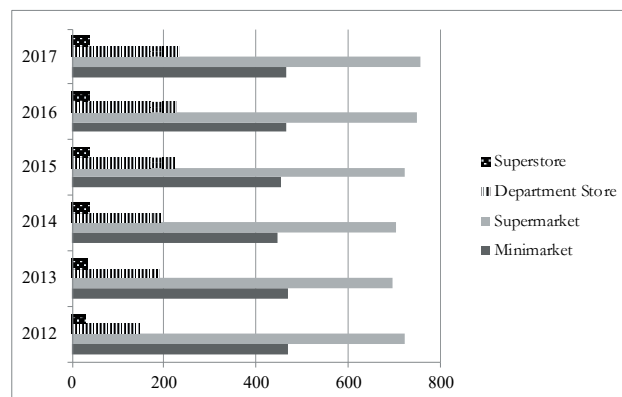


Figure 1. Consistency of large-scale retail outlets in Sicily from 2012 to 2017. Source: authors' elaboration on ISTAT data, Sicilian Region.

stores, also with an area equal to or greater than 400 square meters but equipped with a wider assortment of products belonging to different types of goods, occupied 10.2% of the market and superstores, retail businesses with surfaces of sales over 2,500 square meters, 2.3%. After five years, that is in 2017, the share of minimarkets had fallen to 31.1%, and that of supermarkets to 50.6%, while department stores and hypermarkets increased up to reaching 15.7% and 2.6% respectively.

Also in Sicily there is therefore the slow but progressive phenomenon of the decreasing in small commercial realities and above all of the so-called “neighbourhood shops”, points of sale that letter e) of paragraph 1 of art. 2 of the Regional Law no. 28 of 22 December 1999, defines as “small businesses with a sales area of up to 100 square meters in municipalities with a resident population of less than 10,000 inhabitants; up to 150 square meters in municipalities with the resident population of no more than 100,000 inhabitants; up to 200 square meters in municipalities with a population of over 100,000 inhabitants”, and, at the same time, the gradual growth of medium-large size structures. It is the small shop, the proximity shop, which gives way to department stores and superstores, icons of a multisector and standardizing consumer space: “Superstores are sometimes called ‘category killer’, because their enormous variety and low price tends to drive an earlier means of consumption, the small specialty shop, out of business” (Ritzer 1999, 18).

The development of retail in Sicily is certainly hampered by the obsolescence of the regional rules governing the sector and their consequent inadequacy to effectively manage the changes underway. It should be considered, among other things, that the Sicilian Statute

Table 1. Trend of the Consistency of commercial enterprises in Sicily, years 2012-2018. Source: Unioncamere, Sisprint

Cod. Ateco	Types	Sicily			South and Islands			Italy		
		Absolute values	Inc. %	Var. % 2012/2018	Absolute values	Inc. %	Var. % 2012/2018	Absolute values	Inc. %	Var. % 2012/2018
G 45	Wholesale and retail repair of motor vehicles and motorcycles	14,657	8.3	-0.9	63,919	7.7	3.5	171,665	7.5	5.5
G 46	Wholesale retail (except of motor vehicles and motorcycles)	33,952	19.1	-1.2	163,593	19.8	3.0	509,577	22.3	-0.8
G 47	Retail retail (except of motor vehicles and motorcycles)	81,217	45.8	-6.4	371,154	45.0	-1.7	850,360	37.1	-2.6

reserves to the Region an exclusive competence in the field of industry and commerce (art. 14, letter d). In any case, the need to modernize laws and regulations concerning the commerce sector in Sicily is a need today felt by all policymakers, as evidenced by the attention paid by regional institutions on various public occasions (most recently during the VI Regional Conference on retail held in Palermo on 3 October 2019) on the topic of updating the sector regulations.

The framework law governing the sector of commerce in Sicily, namely Regional Law no. 28 of 22 December 1999, dates back to over 20 years ago. The regional Administration then intervened with regulatory measures that tried to make the rule adherent, as far as possible, to a dynamic and constantly evolving scenario. But the application of the law has remained substantially unchanged, in the sense that the administrative measures issued over time have not been able to update the approach and therefore to achieve a new strategic vision for the development of the sector.

The regional rules relating to extraordinary sales and liquidations (Regional Law no. 9 of 25 March 1996) as well as retail in public areas (Regional Law no. 12 of March 1, 1995) date back to an earlier period.

2.1 Commercial enterprises in Sicily: a diachronic analysis

Although the individual commercial enterprises show a moderate resilience, the sector as a whole shows clear signs of suffering. This is demonstrated by the negative trend recorded in recent years in Sicily with reference to the size of the commercial companies grouped under the Ateco G 45, G 46, and G 47 macro categories.

In fact, the stock of Sicilian commercial enterprises in category G 45 lost, in the period 2012-2018 almost a percentage point of its consistency, while the same enterprises increased by 3.5% in the South-Islands area and in Italy by 7.5%. A negative sign also for companies marked with the G 46 code, which in Sicily decreased by 1.2% but which in the South and Islands increased by 3%. Finally, the figure of the classified companies G 47: here at the decrease is even more marked because in Sicily the stock diminished by 6.4% compared to the drop of 1.7% in the area of South and islands and, 2.6% in Italy; with the aggravating circumstance that in Sicily, the total of enterprises in this category accounts for 45.8% of the total of commercial enterprises.

3. Some dynamics of retail stores with a fixed location in Sicily

The categories that make up the articulated system of commerce are different and each of them is an expression of a specific composite and changeable production cross-section, continuously conditioned by geo-economic variables, distribution strategies and consumption trends. The wide range of Ateco codes identifying commercial activities testifies, in some way, the complexity of the economic and social universe connected to the commerce sector.

Retail stores, street vending, wholesale and intermediaries are the main typological categories according to which the sales networks are organised. However, the focus of this paragraph is centred on the retail system, and in particular on fixed establishments, considering

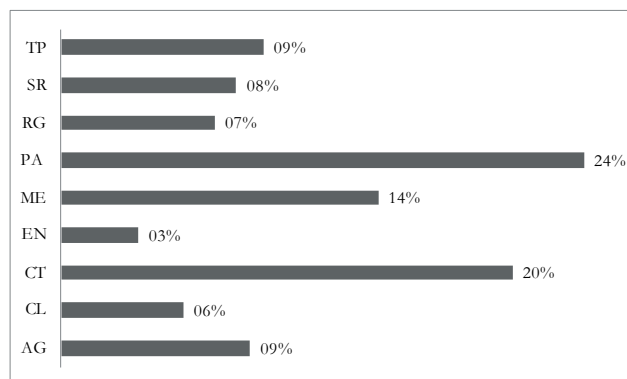


Figure 2. Distribution in the Sicilian provinces of fixed-point businesses, year 2019. Source: authors' elaboration on data from the Ministry of Economic Development.

this sector particularly representative of the evolutionary dynamics that cross and shape the world of retail in Sicily.

As of December 31, 2019 in Sicily the number of fixed establishments registered by the Ministry of Economic Development was 66,637 units, equal to 9.2% of the national total and 21.9% of the establishments surveyed in the South-Islands area. In Southern Italy only Campania had a greater number of commercial units (96,231). The number of shops in Sicily is still relevant if considered in absolute terms since the island is ranked fourth among the Italian regions for the number of shops behind Campania, Lombardy and Lazio.

In Sicily, the distribution of commercial activities on a provincial basis has a significant presence of establishments with a fixed location in the provinces of Palermo (23.7% of the total), Catania (20.4%) and Messina (14.3%), where the three metropolitan areas exert clear polarizing effects. The provinces of Trapani follows

(9.2%), Agrigento (8.5%), Syracuse (7.9%), Ragusa (6.9%), Caltanissetta (5.5%) and Enna (3.5%) follow.

The ratio between businesses and resident population highlights in the island a widespread distribution of the commercial networks in the area and therefore an accentuated proximity of the sales service to residents. In Sicily, in fact, we find a shop for every seventy-five inhabitants, whereas in Italy the ratio is one for every eighty-four. The presence in Sicily of a network of neighbourhood businesses distributed throughout the territory is a circumstance also underlined by the Bank of Italy (2019).

The territorial distribution index of the shops allows to observe the distribution on an area basis of the stores in relation to the number of consumers.

In Sicily, the ratio between commercial establishments and resident population calculated on a provincial basis shows a rather articulated geographical location of the activities, with distribution point of sale indices ranging from 0.0152 in the province of Messina and 0.0123 in the province of Catania, territories representing the geographical extremities of the distribution range of the consumer services.

The legal nature of the businesses contributes to defining the profile of the company structure, its competitive skills, the economic basis, the relationships with distribution networks and territory. For this reason, it is interesting to note that in Sicily 64% of Sicilian commercial enterprises in a fixed location prefer the legal form of sole ownership, whereas the figure drops to 62% in the South-Islands area and even to 54.9% in the national territory. The share of businesses owned by joint stock companies and even more that of commercial activities managed in the form of partnerships is decidedly less substantial. In fact, on the island, fixed-point retail companies set up as joint stock companies represent 23.8%

Table 2. Consistency and distribution of the businesses with a fixed location in the Sicilian provinces¹, year 2019. Source: authors' elaboration on data from the Ministry of Economic Development and ISTAT.

	AG	CL	CT	EN	ME	PA	RG	SR	TP	Sicilia	Italia
No. of businesses	5,697	3,679	13,613	2,318	9,556	15,766	4,626	5,283	6,099	66,637	722,234
Population	434,870	262,458	1,107,702	164,788	626,876	1,252,588	320,893	399,224	430,492	4,999,891	60,359,546
No. of shops for every inhabitant	76	71	81	71	66	79	69	76	71	75	84
Distribution index	0.0131	0.0140	0.0123	0.0141	0.0152	0.0126	0.0144	0.0132	0.0142	0.0133	0.0120

¹ Today, due to the Regional Law no. 15 of 4 August 2015, in Sicily the regional provinces have been replaced by the metropolitan cities of Palermo, Catania e Messina and by the free consortia of Agrigento, Caltanissetta, Enna, Ragusa, Syracuse and Trapani.

Table 3. Established commercial businesses separated by legal nature, year 2019. Source: authors' elaboration on data from the Ministry of Economic Development.

	Non classified	% on the total	Other forms	% on the total	Individual company	% on the total	Limited company	% on the total	Partnership companies	% on the total	Total
Sicily	2	0.0%	687	1.0%	42,661	64.0%	15,875	23.8%	7,412	11.1%	66,637
South- Islands	7	0.0%	2,447	0.8%	190,737	62.8%	71,112	23.4%	39,495	13.0%	303,798
Italy	24	0.0%	8,629	1.2%	396,312	54.9%	192,076	26.6%	125,193	17.3%	722,234

of the total, a percentage slightly higher than the average of the companies in the South-islands area (23.4%) but lower by almost three percentage points to the national average (26.6%). The differences are even more marked in the case of partnerships, because in this case the difference is more than six percentage points (11.1% in Sicily and 17.3% in Italy).

As highlighted above, in Sicily the numerically significant presence of individual commercial firms in face of a reduced stock of joint stock companies or of persons would lead to think of a condition of structural weakness. But overall, the Sicilian retail business sector seems to suffer the impact of the crisis less than it does at national level.

Further elements of assessment regarding the competitive and resilient capacities of Sicilian small commercial enterprises could emerge from a comparative verification of the sales surfaces of the businesses. The higher percentage incidence in Sicily of the sales areas of individual company – mostly corresponding to small enterprises – compared to that of limited and partnership companies – certainly larger – could mean a better resilience and adaptability to the crisis by small businesses. The percentage of surfaces of small businesses, among other things, is higher in Sicily than in Southern Italy and in the whole country. However, a direct comparison with other national or regional realities presents objective limitations since the size of the surfaces of the Sicilian businesses is not specified in the statistics of the Ministry of Economic Development for 53% of the total, while at a national level the percentage of unspecified sales areas is 36%. Excluding this distortion, in any case, it is observed that the very small (from 1 to 50 square meters) and small size (from 51 to 150 square meters) surfaces in Sicily represent respectively 23.6% and 18% of the total extension of the surfaces of the establishments in the fixed location, while the incidence of the other commercial areas is much lower (2.2% for areas from 151 to 250 square meters; 1.1% from 251 to 400 square meters 1.8% from 401 to 1,500 sq m; 0.1% for 1,500 sq m and above).

4. Diffusion and new functions of modern distribution systems in Sicily

The change in the economic structure of Sicily that occurred from the second half of the twentieth century, had proposed a new model of the wider territorial system.

The increased productivity of the agricultural sector, due to the modernization of agricultural structures, and the consequent increase in the processing and marketing of agri-food products has meant that the medium and large urban centres, and in particular the main coastal cities with a sufficient infrastructure and financial system, developed a remarkable economic system. In addition, the cities themselves began a process of transformation process, strengthening the secondary sector, especially the petrochemical industry and tertiary, especially the commercial one. In fact, in addition to the metropolitan cities (Palermo, Catania, Messina), the urban centres that showed a substantial urbanization process were precisely those linked to industrial production activities (Gela, Syracuse, Augusta, Priolo, Melilli, Milazzo) and to agricultural and commercial ones (Marsala, Mazara del Vallo, Agrigento, Vittoria, Paternò, Bagheria, Misterbianco etc.)

Moreover, “[...] the commercial potential of coastal areas drew further impulses following the modernization of the already existing and deficient road structures and the construction of new road and railway network infrastructures” (Cannizzaro, Corinto 2013, 45).

The result was “a new urban landscape, in which the concentration of commercial services, entertainment activities and leisure tourist attractions are flanked by large peripheral spaces where medium-large commercial structures were created and are being created that integrate with the multifunctional spaces” (Cirelli 2007, 21).

The changing demographic and economic conditions of these cities have certainly produced new social needs and in recent decades they have imposed new patterns of consumption and organization of the spaces of commerce. Cities increasingly welcome within them the

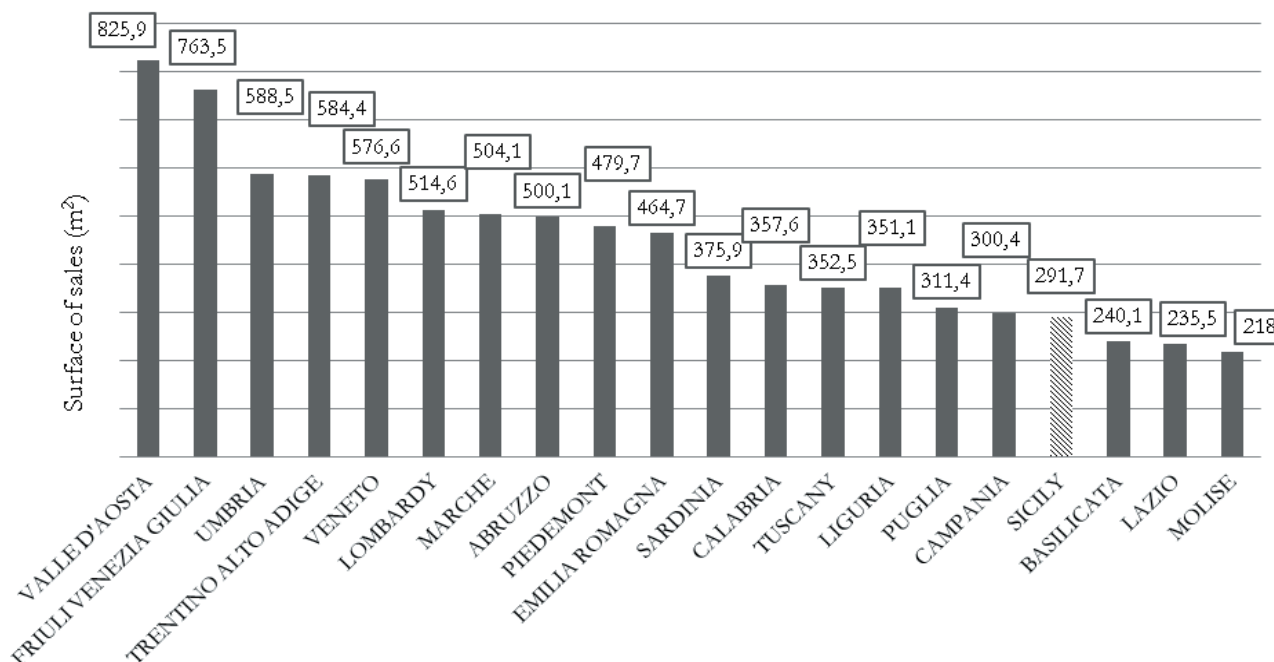


Figure 3. Territorial distribution GDO: ratio of sales area by number of inhabitants ($\text{m}^2/1.000$ inhabitant). Source: authors' elaboration on data from the National Commerce Observatory, Report Archive.

signs of widespread well-being and a culture that tends to standardize social classes and trivialize places of consumption (Cirelli et al. 2011). The distribution system has not escaped this modernization process, which has had to adapt to the new social functions carried out by occupying ever larger areas.

In the early 1960s, department stores, supermarkets and other types of distribution establishments settled almost exclusively in historic centres. But as early as the 1980s, due to the growing need for space to occupy for the complex functions they were beginning to perform, the modern commercial centres of the GDO have preferred to settle in peripheral areas, or outside the urban context and sometimes in places far from the cities, where land costs are lower, the spaces available much wider, and the accessibility more efficient, since the choice often falls in places close to the main axes. This also happened in Sicily (Cusimano 2017, 214).

The choice to locate commercial centres in suburban areas represented an advantageous solution both for companies and for public institutions that found a convenient solution for use of large areas without causing the city to suffer the impact of the settlement of huge and invasive distribution structures (Zanderighi 2008).

The Sicily region has not escaped this process of location transformation, so much so that the large com-

mercial centres today insist exclusively in the peripheral areas of large cities with greater concentration in the suburban areas of metropolitan cities.

Although the region ranks at the bottom in terms of the presence of large-scale retail outlets (GDO) with a sales area of 291.7 m^2 per 1000 inhabitants (Fig. 3), from 2010 to 2018 the percentage of growth, although it is lower than that of the macro-region of the South/Islands, it is however in line with that of the country (Tab.4).

It is however in the five-year period 2005-2010 that on the island there is a significant settlement phase of

Table 4. Territorial distribution GDO: ratio of sales by number of inhabitants ($\text{m}^2/1.000$ inhabitants). Source: authors' elaboration on data from the National Commerce Observatory, Report Archive.

Geographic area	31/12/2010	31/12/2018	Δ 2010-2018	Δ % 2010-2018
Italy	345.0 m^2	413.9 m^2	68.9 m^2	20.0
Northwest	422.3 m^2	491.8 m^2	69.5 m^2	16.4
Northeast	444.5 m^2	554.0 m^2	109.5 m^2	24.6
Centre	306.7 m^2	331.8 m^2	25.1 m^2	8.2
South and Islands	251.8 m^2	321.7 m^2	69.9 m^2	27.7
Sicily	240.9 m^2	291.7 m^2	50.8 m^2	21.1

Table 5. Large-scale retail businesses and sales area in Sicily. Source: authors' elaboration on data from the National Commerce Observatory, Report Archive.

Type	Year 2005		Year 2010		Δ 2005-2010	Year 2018		Δ 2010-2018
	N°	m ²	N°	m ²	N°/ m ² (%)	N°	m ²	N°/ m ² (%)
Minimarkets	158	47,925	456	138,488	+298 / +90,563 (+189)	420	126,171	-36 / -12,317 (-8,9)
Supermarkets	519	423,434	736	571,252	+217 / +147,818 (34,9)	763	632,339	+27 / +61,087 (+10,7)
Department Stores	122	144,211	127	141,450	+5 / -2,761 (-1,9)	213	218,800	+86 / +77,350 (+54,7)
Superstores	10	53,156	27	184,524	+17 / +131,368 (+247,1)	39	224,672	+12 / +40,148 (+21,7)
GSS	33	113,378	64	181,173	+31 / +67,795 (+59,8)	68	256,544	+4 / +75,371 (+41,6)
TOTAL	842	782,104	1,410	1,216,887	+568 / +434,783 (+55,6)	1,503	1,458,526	+93 / +241,639 (+19,8)

¹ Grandi Superfici Specializzate (Large Specialized Surfaces)

these distribution formats with an increase in the sales area equal to 55.6%, while in the subsequent period considered, 2010-2018, except for Department Stores and Specialized Large Surfaces, which recorded an increase of 54.7% and 41.6% respectively, showed a slowdown or stall phase with a little significant growth both in numerical terms of structures and in terms of occupied surface (Tab.5). In the case of the Minimarkets, there has even been a setback. Evidently this turnaround denounces a certain level of saturation of the regional territory, especially in the provinces most equipped with large commercial centres.

In fact, although the large-scale retail outlets in Sicily are ubiquitous, the unequal location between the ex-provinces of the island is evident.

Moreover, the largest distribution types, hypermarkets and large specialized areas, mostly insist in the metropolitan cities of Catania¹, Palermo and Messina. Even the former provinces of Ragusa and Syracuse show a commercial vitality, characterised by a significant presence of commercial poles of considerable extension. While the GDO structures of the former provinces of Agrigento, Trapani, Caltanissetta, and Enna are still somewhat backward, as evidenced by the greater presence of commercial distribution formats more similar to traditional structures such as minimarkets and supermarkets (Cirelli et al. 2011, 186; Cannizzaro 2019, 211).

¹ Catania boasts a long commercial history, the first commercial center in Sicily was formed since the 1970s in Misterbianco, the hinterland city of the Etna capital.

In recent years, however, large shopping malls have also been established in the former *minor provinces*, as in the case of Sicilia Outlet Village, a real commercial village in the territory of Agira in the province of Enna.

The establishment of large-scale retail outlets has expanded to the functions of different cities and consequently redetermined the island's urban hierarchy. Furthermore, the modern malling process, in addition to the evident territorial transformations, has expressed some positives such as the decongestion of traffic in historic centres, the creation of new safer socialization places, greater control of hygiene conditions, full compliance with tax regulations, the greater vitality of peripheral areas otherwise destined for degradation (Cannizzaro 2019, 218).

5. Conclusions

Some summary considerations can be useful to try to provide an overview of the commercial sector in Sicily. The sector is in crisis, as on the other hand is observed in the rest of the country. There is a transformation of the sales networks, with department stores and hypermarkets taking the place of small commercial realities and neighbourhood shops, although this process occurs more slowly than in other parts of Italy. This change is likely to affect the density and distribution of the sales networks, which are now very close to the residents. For some years already, in fact, there has been a strong concentration of

hypermarkets and larger distribution chains in metropolitan areas and their slow but progressive diffusion in less urbanised territories. The obsolescence of the regional legislative and regulatory system does not help the sector to face the challenges imposed by changes in the global market. However, the extreme flexibility of the micro organizational model, certainly the most widespread in Sicily and usually indicative of a condition of structural weakness, could have helped part of the sector to cope better with the impact of the crisis. However, this is a situation which in the long term can only lead to negative effects that can no longer be resolved. For this reason, it is necessary to strategically rethink the development trajectories of the sector.

Looking at the effects produced by the 2008 crisis on the Sicilian trading system, at the changes and contradictions of its organizational model, characterized by the advancement of large-scale distribution and, at the same time, by the survival of a fragmented and micro-company sales network, it seems that in Sicily, the current configuration of the commercial system is functional to the reorganization strategies of contemporary cities.

Edward W. Soja (1989), among the main trends that identify the modern processes of restructuring of urban space, indicates the centralization and concentration of the ownership of capital, whose materialization takes place through the formation in the cities of large corporations; together with this centralizing trend, however, another is developing which instead delegates part of the functions to decentralized operating units, which are therefore less controlled and more flexible. In this way, the range of action of capital is widened, so that it can reach parts of the market that would otherwise escape its ownership. The coexistence in Sicily, apparently contradictory, of two very different types of commerce, the large-scale retail trade and the small or very small commercial enterprise, could therefore be explained as a need to optimize the sales space and maximize profits in an area where the advanced consumption models of Western societies coexist with a widespread informal economy. This shows how important it is to address the issue of the consumption of goods and services taking into account the more general changes affecting the space and organization of cities.

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The Four Axes of Palermo's Commerce: a Geographical Perspective

I quattro assi del commercio a Palermo: una prospettiva geografica

GIOVANNI MESSINA¹, GAETANO SABATO²

¹ Dipartimento di Culture e Società, Università di Palermo, Italy

² Dipartimento di Scienze Psicologiche, Pedagogiche, dell'Esercizio Fisico e della Formazione, Università di Palermo, Italy

E-mail: giovanni.messina01@unipa.it; gaetano.sabato@unipa.it

Abstract. Commercial dynamics within a city represent an excellent observatory desk to study urban transformation processes. These dynamics reflect the verticality and horizontality relational system, but also the exchanges and reciprocation of the cultural and socio-economic relations. From a geographical perspective it is interesting to detect cultural, social and economic changes both permanent and in evolution which constitute the urban pattern and shape its viability. This work originates in 2015 within the PRIN project (Relevant Interest National Project) "Commerce, consumption and the city: practices, planning and governance for urban inclusion, resilience and sustainability" which has studied some relevant commerce dynamics in Italian main cities. Here we focus on the case of Palermo, by analysing four important streets in the city center: via Maqueda, via Ruggero Settimo, viale della Libertà and via Lincoln. They represent significant cut outs of how consumers' habits have developed in Palermo and have strongly characterized the present urban landscape by establishing a complex network of relations which shape the pattern of the city. By employing both a diachronical and synchronical approach, on one hand we analyse the evolution of the four axes. On the other hand, we illustrate the results of the research carried out by using questionnaires aimed to reveal the present conditions of the shops taking place through the business owners' perception.

Keywords: urban transformation, commercial dynamics, Palermo, city center, permanence and change.

Riassunto. Le dinamiche commerciali all'interno della città rappresentano un ottimo punto di osservazione per studiare i processi di trasformazione urbana. Queste dinamiche riflettono verticalità e orizzontalità dei sistemi di relazione, nonché scambi e reciprocità dei rapporti socio-economici e culturali. Da una prospettiva geografica è di grande interesse individuare permanenze e mutazioni culturali, sociali, economiche che costituiscono il tessuto cittadino e danno forma all'attualità. Questo contributo nasce nell'ambito del Progetto di Rilevante Interesse Nazionale (PRIN) 2015 "Commercio, consumo e città: pratiche, pianificazione e governance per l'inclusione, la resilienza e la sostenibilità urbane" che ha studiato alcune dinamiche fondamentali del commercio nelle principali città italiane. Qui ci concentriamo sul caso di Palermo, analizzan-

done quattro importanti assi viari: via Maqueda, via Ruggero Settimo, viale della Libertà e via Lincoln. Essi rappresentano ritagli significativi di come le abitudini di consumo si siano evolute caratterizzando l'attuale paesaggio urbano e determinando reti di relazioni complesse che informano il tessuto cittadino di Palermo. Si è scelto un approccio insieme diacronico e sincronico: da un lato viene analizzata l'evoluzione degli assi viari, dalle origini alla situazione attuale; dall'altro lato vengono discussi alcuni risultati della recente ricerca effettuata attraverso questionari volti a registrare la percezione che i commercianti hanno dei loro esercizi.

Parole chiave: Trasformazione urbana, Dinamiche del commercio, Palermo, Centro storico, Permanenza e cambiamento.

1. Introduction

Urban changes, observed from a diachronically and synchronically geographical perspective, constitutes a privileged object of analysis. As a matter of fact, when studying the transformation process of a city, it allows us to identify cultural, social and economic changes both permanent and in evolution which constitute the urban pattern and shape its viability. Commerce dynamics are linked to those transformation processes (Cirelli 2007, 2009; D'Alessandro 2015; Dobbs et al. 2012; Glennie, Thrift 1992; Jayne 2006; Porto, Nicosia 2018): they represent an interesting observatory desk where we can observe the ongoing changes within a city, as they not only reflect the verticality and horizontality relational system but also the exchanges and reciprocation of the cultural and socio-economic relations (De Certeau 1990; Lynch 1990). The city, as Ricoeur observed, being a "concentrated organization", is most evident outcome of a community and of an economy based on the division and differentiation of labor: "La 'metropolis', c'est la 'technopolis'. [...] [La ville est] l'appareil logistique des rôles sociaux" (Ricoeur 2003, 115).

The present work originates in 2015 within the PRIN project (Relevant Interest National Project, Progetto di Rilevante Interesse Nazionale) "Retail, Consumption, and the City: Practices, Planning and Governance for Urban Inclusion, Resilience, and Sustainability" ("Commercio, consumo e città: pratiche, pianificazione e governance per l'inclusione, la resilienza e la sostenibilità urbane") which has studied some relevant commerce dynamics in Italian main cities. In particular, this contribution focuses on the case of Palermo, by taking into account four important streets in the city center: via Maqueda, via Ruggero Settimo, viale della Libertà and via Lincoln. They represent, with their peculiarity,

significant cut outs of how consumers' habits have developed in the Sicilian city and have strongly characterized the present urban landscape by establishing a complex network of relations which shape the pattern of Palermo. Here, the trade dynamics will be addressed from two complementary perspectives: diachronic and synchronic. The second paragraph will briefly explain the evolution of the four roads, from its origin until the present status, with particular attention to the commercial dynamics. The third paragraph will illustrate the results of the research recently carried out by using structured questionnaires with closed and open answers, aimed to reveal the present conditions of the shops now existing on those streets, taking place through the business owners' perception.

2. Origin and development of the four trade axes of Palermo

Today, via Maqueda, via Ruggero Settimo and via della Libertà is an uninterrupted road which begins in Piazza Giulio Cesare, with the train station overlooking the square and reaches up to piazza Vittorio Veneto, crossing the city on the flat terrain from Southeast to Northwest (about 4,4 km). A large part of the street remains within the historical center of Palermo, one of the largest in Europe. The last two roads form a number of extensions of the older via Maqueda (originally *New Road*), opened in the sixteenth century during the Spanish domination and meeting orthogonally the old via Toledo (at present Corso Vittorio Emanuele II) in piazza Vigliena (known mainly as the *Quattro Canti*). Via Ruggero Settimo (originally *Stradone fuori porta Maqueda*, Out gate avenue), created in 1778, follows via Maqueda from the present piazza Verdi (the area dominated by the 17th century Gate Maqueda). The opening of viale della Libertà, extending to via Ruggero Settimo, dates back to the second half of the nineteenth century (and finished in 1915). Already the cut of via Maqueda itself in the seventeenth century, met the needs arising from the city élite who were asking for more residential areas and roads. In the following centuries, via Ruggero Settimo and viale della Libertà completed the planned expanding project out of the old historic center intra moenia under the impulse of and ever dynamic bourgeoisie. In particular, viale della Libertà was thought as the continuation of via Ruggero Settimo and was in total 2.5 km long. It was meant to facilitate the connection between the center of Palermo to the Colli area, where resort areas for the city nobility were developing since the eighteenth century. It was realized between 1846 and

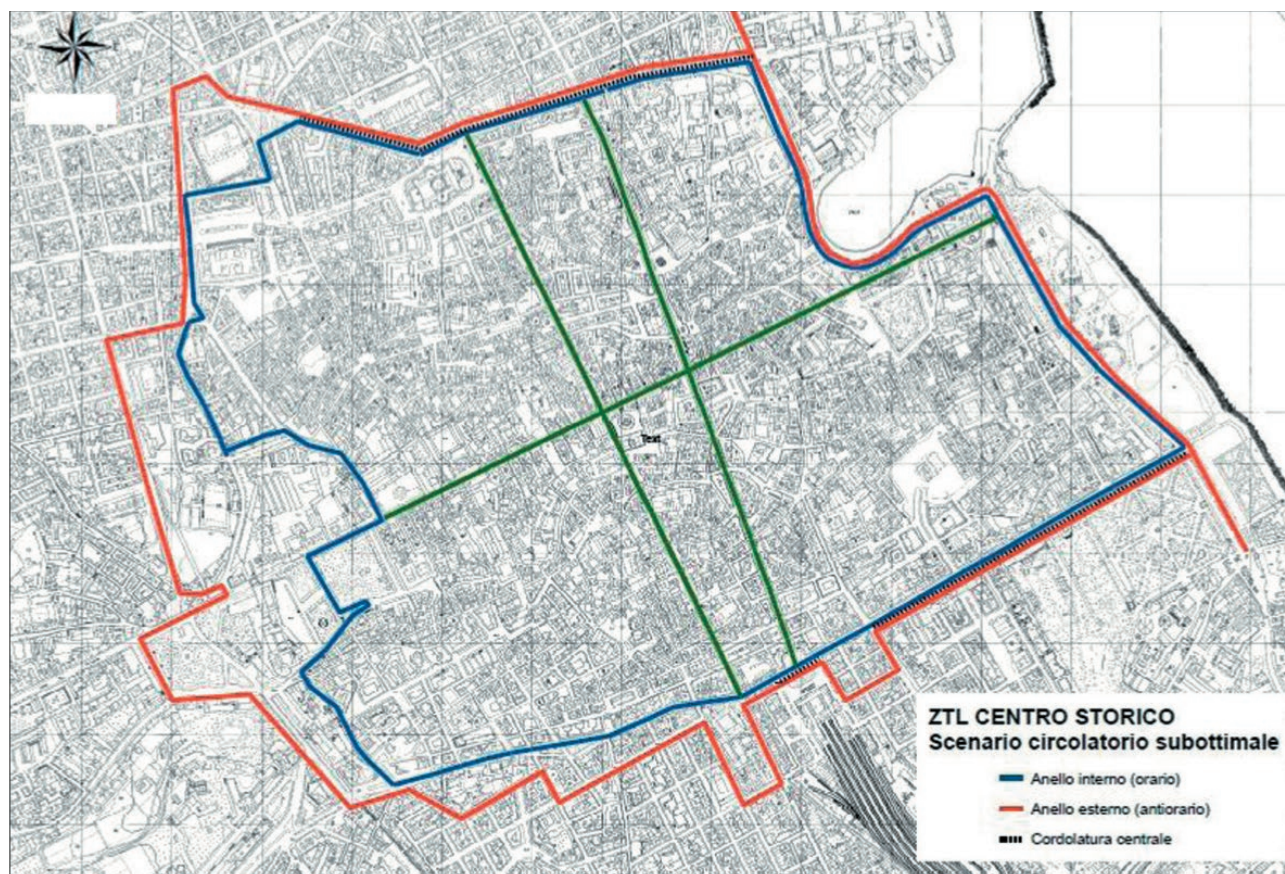


Figure 1. The Limited Traffic Zone (ZTL) in the City Center of Palermo and the perimeter paths. Source: Comune di Palermo 2013.

1851, raised following the model of a boulevard, was cutting farm fields and gardens including pre-existing green spaces in its path together with others realized ad hoc (such as the park defined as “Giardino Inglese” – English Garden, completed in 1853): an element trail similar to those found in contemporary European cities, inspired by the English model of city gardens (Chirco, Di Liberto 2004, 26). The fourth road axis object of the study is via Lincoln (the old *Stradone di S. Antonino*, avenue S. Antonino), realised between 1632 and 1637 in order to connect S. Antonino convent to Piano S. Erasmo, outside the city walls towards East. During the eighteenth century the road became one of the expansion routes for the middle class of Palermo by hosting a number of residences (Chirco 2006) and marking the green area developed around the Botanical Garden (Orto Botanico) and the city park of Villa Giulia. At present, the road, which is 1 km long, begins in piazza Giulio Cesare and ends at the Foro Italico Umberto I, running along the entrances to the public gardens and defining the wide Southeast perimeter stretch of the limited traffic zone (ZTL – Fig.

1) launched in 2017 aimed to contrast the pollution in the historic center.

The road axes so far examined are the result of the early expansions intra (as in the case of via Maqueda) and mainly extra moenia realised by the city middle class between the 17th and 18th century. This *imprint* will stay for long and indicating in many cases the designated use that still remain today. The opening of via Maqueda in the seventeenth century, meant a new form of urban rationalization in respect to the medieval plant. The buildings, built on the two sides of the street since the opening of the road, confirm the typical grace and theatricality of the Baroque. This ideal route culminates at the threshold of the 20th century with the building of the Teatro Massimo (1875-1897), the first, in terms of dimension, among the Italian theatres and third among the European theatres built in the 19th century. The destructions following the Second World War, the 1956 town planning scheme, as well as the notorious

'sacco di Palermo'¹ (the bag of Palermo) saved nearly all via Maqueda, that preserved a great deal of its original aspect until the present day. During the second post war, mainly in the stretch between piazza Verdi and the Quattro Canti many businesses related to clothing and shoes. An intense oversized road traffic in respect to the capacity of the road and the lack of parking lots in the area opened considerable controversies concerning the neighborhood accessibility and in general the center. Already back in the mid 80s, Cusimano (1986, 25-26) had reported on how the shop keepers considered private street traffic necessary to attract clients. In recent years, the ZTLs, which established the ultimate pedestrianization of via Maqueda from piazza Verdi (already experienced episodically), entailed a new set up of business activities (to note also the tourist flows, which today are more substantial), with the opening of many *ethnic* shops run by immigrants (some of them have been there for long) and with a proliferation of the food and restaurant sector at the expense of the older and more traditional ones. This development should be put in relation with the proximity of one of the most historically popular areas of the night movida, nearby Teatro Massimo (Mercatanti, Messina 2019).

Via Ruggero Settimo and the initial segment of via Libertà (between piazza Ruggero Settimo-Castelnuovo and piazza Crispi-Mordini) continues north and can be dealt with as one only axis, stretching for just over 1 km (the first road is 350 m long, the second 700 m long). Today it defined as "the lounge of Palermo" (with an emblematic image), both for the refined residential neighborhoods rising around it and for the quality and quantity of business activities present there. During the 1700s and 1800s the axis followed and marked the establishment of the middle class, which was claiming new spaces out of the historic walls, and soon became the reference point for this rising class, and thus in turn, a new important city center. Suffice it to say that today, the Teatro Politeama (1867-1875) is considered a symbol of the modern urban center, by connecting via della Libertà (incorporating it) to via Ruggero Settimo.

In the last two centuries, the look of via Ruggero Settimo has changed a lot. Already in the nineteenth century the roadway was lowered, and new shops were

obtained on the ground level of stately buildings (Chirco 2006, 197) In the 30s of the twentieth century, many estates were renovated or built to meet the growing demand for new stores. Part of the present look of the street is due to this phase, but its final asset dates back to the second post-war, when the business center was built in the neighboring piazzale Ungheria along with new estates addressed to banks, offices and shops. Between the 50s and the 70s the axis became the center of a number of successful business activities, hosting historic shop windows (still active today or until recently) which had become identity references for the entire city: two cinemas (among which *Cinorkestron* from 1914), several cafeterias, bookshops and perfume shops².

The first part of via della Libertà was planned and realized in the middle of the 19th century as an elegant boulevard, while the homonymous residential district which rises on the two fronts, has a plant that dates back to the late nineteenth century. It was developed following the IV National Exhibition (1891-92): the fair was hosted in an area of 130.000 square meters big, whose lotting launched the construction of private buildings commissioned by traders and entrepreneurs. The two main types of housing, the *villino* (a small villa inspired by the eighteenth century manor houses) and the *palazzetto* (a small palace inspired by the Renaissance buildings) were often realized in Liberty or Art Nouveau style. Some scholars prefer defining it as *modernist style*, *stile modernista* (Pirrone 1990; Chirco, Di Liberto 2004). Among the most prestigious authors of these projects appears the architect Ernesto Basile from Palermo who realized and implemented some of the most representative buildings in town (the Villino Florio, the enlargement of the Grand Hotel et des Palmes and the interiors of the Teatro Massimo), maximizing the Liberty style to its highest expression. Between the end of the nineteenth century and the early twentieth century the fashionable villini contributed to spread the image of the city as an important site of the Italian Liberty style at a national level. The current look of the road has been affected by the sad events linked to the "sacco di Palermo" (the bag of Palermo): because of some obscure concessions, many estates have been knocked down indiscriminately, often in disregard of existing legal restrictions (as the case of villa Deliella), in favour of new apartment buildings. Nevertheless, the first part of the road has undergone less changes and many of the small

¹ The building speculation during the period of time from the '50s to the 80s distorted the building scheme of Palermo, the collusion between the local institutions (city and region) and the mafia organizations delivered a number of building permits and public tenders which the city criminal organization managed by covering entire urban areas with concrete; this way destroying part of the historic-architectural heritage of the city (Barbera 2012; Butera 2010; Bascietto, Camarca 2018; Violante 2012).

² Among the historic shop windows: The Pasticceria del Massimo and the Extrabar Olimpia by Dagnino, the Bar Mazzara, the Bar Caflish, the Bar Al Pinguino, Flaccovio Bookshop and Hugony perfume shop (Messina, Sabato 2019, 60-62).

palaces, which had been saved from the building speculation, were renovated in order to host business activities and banks. The prevalence of clothes and jewelry shops and along with Italian and foreign luxury labels, confirm the centrality of these businesses in attracting Italian and international high spending demanding clients in this area of the city (Messina, Sabato 2019). In addition, the current commercial network is proposed to the tourists visiting Palermo as the most refined “shopping road” and “made in Italy”, intercepting the flows heading the historic center.

The axis in via Lincoln has had a different development, it was opened in the seventeenth century with the intention to direct the middle-class expansion out of the historic walls toward East and the sea. The residences of neoclassical inspiration and the most important green area of the time broke with the Baroque, defining the road as a conjunction between the fortified city and the new expansion area. At present, the axis currently connects two different urban areas, the Kalsa quarter, which in recent years has undergone a gentrification process and the Oreto-Station (Oreto-Stazione) quarter, with a quite heterogeneous urban landscape (including some venues of the University of Palermo, public gardens and public housing). In the 80s the business activities present on the street, for some time now, belonged mainly to the textile and furniture sectors. In addition, via Lincoln was the first contact with the city that those who came from municipalities located around the main town had with the commercial area. In the same years, an unprecedented migration flow from China addressed Palermo: a community, coming from the town of Whenzhou settled in the first half of via Lincoln, that differently from other older Chinese groups living in Italy, opened immediately a series of stable business activities (mostly small family run shops), this way consolidating the image of a little Chinatown (Cusimano, Giannone 2019). Such a concentration of shops (clothing, accessories) on the axis would be decreasing in parallel with the increasing of manufacturing plants and service as well as the expansion of the commercial space. In recent years, Chinese activities have spread around the Central Station (small supermarkets, household items) and then throughout the city (restaurants): in 2018, only 60 Chinese businesses out of 411 were located in via Lincoln (*Idem*). Besides, from 2014 the number of migrants has decreased, probably because of our country's lesser economic attraction, against a rapid productive growth of the Chinese system. Few Italian businesses enterprises have survived along the road, perceived as historic brands by now.

3. The fieldwork

The four road axes represent, as explained earlier, the ideal spaces and hubs where the historical events linked to the urbanization of Palermo have development and crossed, along with the commercial perspectives – thus socio-economical – of the city and its urban policies, with particular reference to those concerning traffic management.

Taking into account that trade is one of the complex functions that deeply operate within the relation between human community and urban area, we wanted to investigate, through a fieldwork, the system of perceptions that the operators have developed in *reading* the city in its complex dimension of overlapped urban space and commercial space.

In order to detect the operators' perceptions (Corbetta 2003; Phillimore, Goodson 2004; Hay 2005; Delyser et al. 2010), the business owners (on sample universe model) operating along via della Libertà-Ruggero Settimo (Messina, Sabato 2019), via Maqueda (Mercatanti, Messina 2019) and via Lincoln (Cusimano, Giannone 2019) were asked to fill in a structured questionnaire integrating open and closed ended (multiple choice answer questions), in respect to the dynamics, perspective and criticality involved in the location of their shops within the urban spaces.

The data and thoughts that followed are however based on the analysis of the questionnaires actually filled in, which are considered to be fully representative of the variety of the issue analysed.

It should be pointed out that some of single brands shop owners in the luxury sector, and most of those within the Chinese community expressed unwillingness to cooperate, the ones because of their company's obligation to secrecy and the others because of a general disregard to the research. The greatest criticality rises right in the data collected in via Lincoln (where the Chinese enterprises are hegemonic), the data is too limited to have a statistical value. Therefore, via Lincoln will be dealt with separately.

The summary of the data extrapolated from the analyses of the questionnaires are illustrated in Table 1.

With respect to the product category, the data analysed show plastically three different types of supply (and demand) between the axis of via della Libertà and the one in via Maqueda. If in the first one there is a concentration of luxury shops (boutiques and monobrand stores) and valuables (jewellery and antiques), in the second one it is food, ethnic and local shops.

Independent enterprises are the most commonly type found in the urban spaces analysed, but a num-

Table 1. The questionnaires of the data of the perceptions of shop keepers on trade roads in Palermo. Overall framework. The data on via Lincoln are crucial for the reason explained in the text. Source: Survey on location, 2019.

	Via Libertà/Ruggero Settimo	Via Maqueda
Product Category	Jewellery 15%	
	Clothing 34%	Clothing 24%
	Food 32%	Food 56%
	Other 19%	Other 30%
Kind of enterprise	Independent 61%	Independent 80%
	Branch 32%	Branch 17%
	Franchising 7%	Franchising 3%
Size	<50sm 3%	
	50-99sm 17%	50-99sm 29%
	100-200sm 46%	100-200sm 64%
	>200sm 34%	>200sm 7%
Propriety	Owned 15%	Owned 7%
	Rented 85%	Rented 93%
Number of employees(average value)	Full Time 3.9	Full Time 2.9
	Part Time 1.3	Part Time 1.2
Owner's activity	Employed in the shop 49%	Employed in the shop 73%
	Not employed in the shop 51%	Not employed in the shop 27%
Reason of localization	Clientele	Centrality 27%
	Big spenders/Centrality 72%	Ztl (limited traffic zone) 37%
	Commercial area 27%	Historical roots 7%
	Other 1%	Touristic area 17%
		Ethnic quarter 7%
		Other 5%
Number of visitors(average value)	Week 334,5	Week 393
	Week-end 240	Week-end 305,6
Client's origin	Any 32%	Any 46%
	Mostly national/International 2%	Mostly national/International 8%
	Exclusively locals 66%	Exclusively locals 46%
Importance of trust in business	Important 76%	Important 37%
	Neutral 10%	Neutral 29%
	Not important 14%	Not important 34%
Perception of the traffic in the city center	Balanced 36%	Balanced 49%
	Increase private mobility 10%	Increase private mobility 12%
	Limit private mobility 49%	Limit private mobility 27%
	Don't know 5%	Don't know 12%
Accessibility to the center with private car	Very good 0%	Very Good 0%
	Good 50%	Good 16%
	Neutral 2%	Neutral 2%
	Bad 46%	Bad 66%
	Very bad 2%	Very Bad 16%
Accessibility to the center with public transport	Very Good 0%	Very Good 0%
	Good 83%	Good 51%
	Neutral 2%	Neutral 6%
	Bad 15%	Bad 41%
	Very Bad 0%	Very Bad 2%

	Via Libertà/Ruggero Settimo	Via Maqueda
Accessibility to the shop with private car	Very good 0% Good 24% Neutral 12% Bad 59% Very Bad 5%	Very good 0% Good 29% Neutral 12% Bad 49% Very Bad 10%
Accessibility to the shop with public transport	Very good 0% Good 2% Neutral 19% Bad 64% Very bad 15%	Very good 0% Good 17% Neutral 34% Bad 41% Very bad 7%
ZTL Extension	Correct 63% Too much 0% Too little 35% Don't know 2%	Correct 75% Too much 2% Too little 11% Don't know 12%
All day Opening	In favour 76% Against 24%	In favour 73% Against 27%
Sundays Opening	In favour 76% Against 24%	In favour 71% Against 29%
Assessment on the changes in the neighborhood	Better 98% Don't know 2% Worse 0%	Better 73% Don't know 12% Worse 15%
Assessment on the appeal of the neighborhood	Attractive 98% Neutral 2% Deterioration 0%	Attractive 80% Neutral 8% Deterioration 12%

ber of national and international branches were found along the axis Libertà-Ruggero Settimo. The franchising formula instead is less popular. The variation in respect to the overall extension of the commercial spaces is strongly marked. Most of the shops can count on a surface area between 100 and 200 square meters, while the spaces offered along the luxury axis are more extended (above 200 sm), prerogative of those shops which, because of the amount of goods, they need larger exhibition spaces and shop windows, thus they are located along the stretch of the higher offers. In relation to the ownership of the spaces, rentals are mostly prevalent although along the axis Libertà-Ruggero Settimo ownership of the estates coincide with the ownerships of the company.

As far as workforce is concerned, in via Libertà-Ruggero Settimo, which usually includes the owner, it stands on an average of 3.9 full time workers (minimum 1, maximum 10) and of 1.3 part time (minimum 1, maximum 8). In via Maqueda, where surfaces are usually smaller, enterprises are individual, the type and quality of the offer is very different from the luxury shopping roads; the average full-time workers decrease to 2.9 and the average part time workers recorded is 1.2.

Except for few exceptions, the shops standing along the axis via della Libertà-Ruggero Settimo have a reasonable commercial tradition, dating even back to 1947, 1962, 1983 and 1986. Most of the stores were founded between the 90s and 2000. In via Maqueda, next to some long-standing activities (the oldest reported dates back to 1993), rise more recent shops, opened from 2008 on. There are relevant differences concerning the present locations: most of the shops in via Maqueda control that market only since recent years (2008-2017), marking a renovated commercial dynamism in that axis. In via della Libertà-Ruggero Settimo locations are spread in terms of time, with only one exception in 1971, that is resulting from 1990 and 2018. In regard to the motivation of the location (or re-location) in the current place, it clearly emerges how much the commercial systems in via della Libertà-Ruggero Settimo and in via Maqueda are completely different for the offer provided and demands, although belonging to one single ideal axis. Viale della Libertà-Ruggero Settimo is considered the big and iconic shopping road, often defined as the "Lounge of Palermo", the offer expressed is addressed to a big spender clientele; whereas via Maqueda, thanks to the ZTLs, was able to develop a more accessible commercial

offer with a great number of ethnic stores and catering addressed to the tourist demand. This data is comforted by the origin of the clientele surveyed: via Maqueda evenly attracts local, national and international clients; viale Libertà-Ruggero Settimo, which thanks to the big mono brand stores attract likewise international clients (Messina, Sabato 2019), it has, nevertheless a rooted offer addressed exclusively to local big spender clients. It is no coincidence that in viale della Libertà-Ruggero Settimo trust within the relationship between the shop keeper and the customer is perceived as an important value; the same indicator, in via Maqueda is often perceived as irrelevant.

The data related to shops previously present in the location is flawed due to a number of refusals to answer the question. However, what emerges is that in both axes, pre-existing enterprises were linked to clothes and shoes. The average weekly flow of visitors in viale della Libertà-Ruggero Settimo results to be of 334.5 clients (minimum 100, maximum 1.500); during weekends the average is 240, (minimum 30, maximum 1.000). Via Maqueda, instead reports this data between weekly and weekends: 393 (minimum 100, maximum 2.000) and 306.5 (minimum 50, maximum 1.200).

As far as the opinion on traffic in the urban center is concerned, in viale della Libertà-Ruggero Set-

timo, the widespread perception of a balanced situation between public and private traffic stands out, accompanied with a strong request to limit still more firmly the circulation of private cars. Conversely, although in perceived as a balanced trend, some shops keepers in via Maqueda are in favour of the circulation of private cars. Accessibility, in fact is a crucial factor: if access to viale della Libertà-Ruggero Settimo with private cars is not widely considered, access with public transport is considered very easy. Access to via Maqueda with private cars is considered hard, and with public transport it often results difficult. Instead, users' perception mediated by the shop keepers appears differently. Access to the commercial area is critical in both axes, in fact, due to the limitations of private cars (traffic, jams, limited parking spaces, ZTL) and the poor public transport. In apparent contradiction with what affirmed earlier, ZTLs are perceived by the merchants of both axes as a useful tool to the businesses, considered suitable to the surface and even too limited. This marks a strong change in the dealers' perception compared to the past. There are many requests for new pedestrian areas all over the city aiming at boosting trade: viale della Libertà, via Roma and Mondello stand out for intensity.

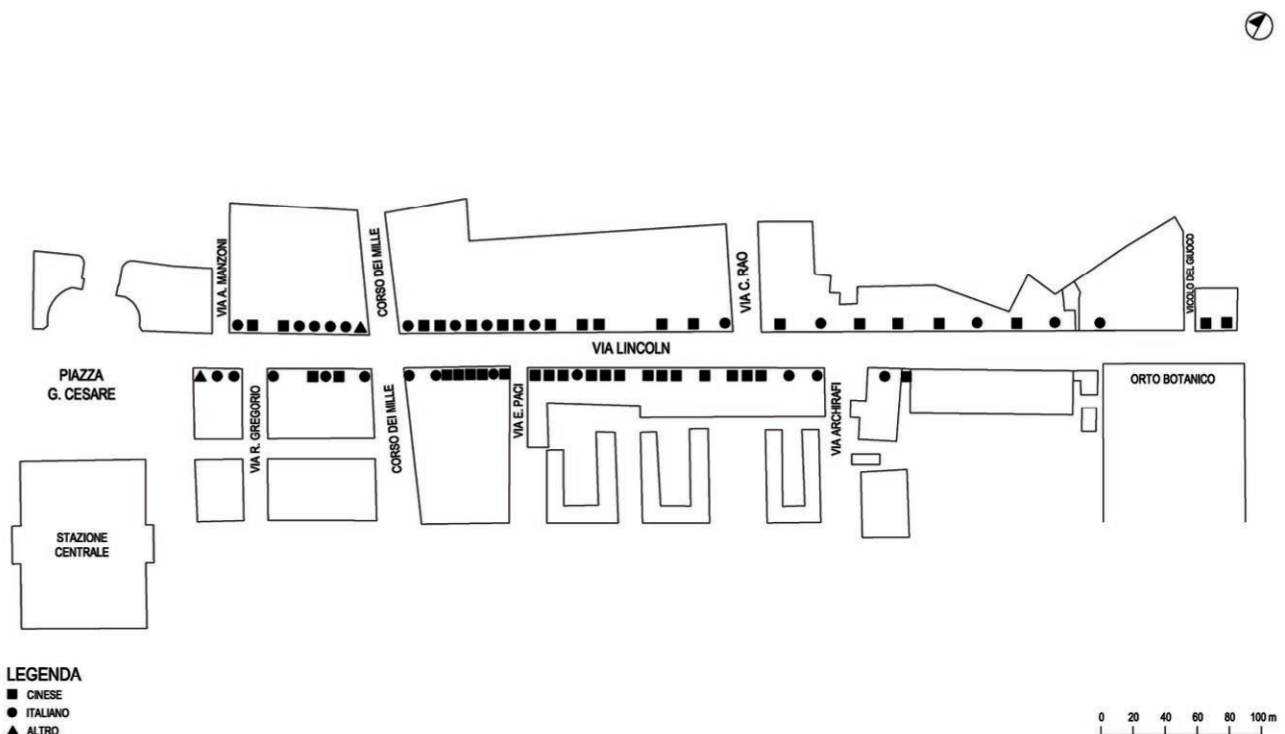


Figure 2. Distribution of Chinese and Italian shops in via Lincoln, Palermo. Source: Technical drawing by Federica Placenti on surveys by Giovanni Messina.

In respect to opening hours, the shop keepers in viale della Libertà-Ruggero Settimo and via Maqueda are basically in favour of the all-day opening and Sunday opening too.

As far as the perception of the neighbourhood context is concerned, both quarters are considered attractive and believed to be gradually improving. If on the one hand, the data related to viale della Libertà-Ruggero Settimo is not surprising, on the other hand, it results remarkable for via Maqueda, which evidently benefits from the pedestrianisation, the tourist attractiveness and from the new enterprises mainly related to food business.

When analysing the organisation of the Chinese enterprises in via Lincoln (Cusimano, Giannone, 2019) a diachronic process of business expansion was observed which saw the Chinese shops first occupy, mainly the entire, commercial space of the road, then spread to nearby areas and finally settle, here and there, also in other areas in town. Giving a closer look at the shop profiles, a limited specialised merchandise is observed, with a tendency to favour general merchandise typical of general stores, and a trend to lower the competition related to price reduction over differentiation and specialization. The sequence of spaces of the Chinese and Italian shops (surveyed with a fieldwork in June 2019) is observable on the previous map (Fig. 2). With regard to the commercial profile of the Chinese shops in via Lincoln, it was difficult to define exactly the kind of merchandise of products stocked and sold (the same could be said for the other shops present throughout the city). As a matter of fact, the multitude and promiscuity of types of the items sold in these shops makes the clear identification of the product sector reference frequently difficult (items such as clothes, households, toys and electronics are displayed together).

The organization asset related to the Chinese in via Lincoln entrepreneurial system remains unclear; it appears little open to a commercial integration (even if recently a number of Italian Chinese companies have been founded) and closed to any debate external to the community membership. This idea is supported by the fact that none of the Chinese shop keepers currently in via Lincoln, was willing to fill in the questionnaire prepared for this research.

4. Conclusions

By using a geographical perspective and combining a diachronal and synchronal approach, here we took into account the Palermo's commerce dynamics. Indeed, studying them allow us to better understand the trans-

formation process of a city that imply cultural, social and economic changes. Summarizing, via Maqueda, via Ruggero Settimo and viale della Libertà confirm their centrality for the commercial dynamics of the Sicilian city. Their bourgeois origins, between eighteenth century and the early twentieth century, have bestowed on these axes a strong commercial vocation, influencing their history and their evolution in the modern city. Nowadays, via Ruggero Settimo and viale della Libertà, with their luxury shops, represent the heart of the most refined activities, able to attract Italian and international high spending demanding clients. In the last decade, the major transformations concerned via Maqueda, where it can be reported a proliferation of the food and restaurant sector at the expense of the more traditional ones (such as clothing and shoes). The pedestrianization of the street and its proximity to the popular areas of the night movida, nearby Teatro Massimo, contributed to this transformation, also determining a greater tourist presence in this axe. Finally, a different evolution had via Lincoln, opened during the middle-class expansion out of the historic walls toward East. For a long time, this axe was the first contact with the commercial area of the city for those who came from municipalities located around Palermo. However, in the 80s the Chinese community that has settled in via Lincoln, strongly marked the street with many business activities, changing its commercial landscape (mostly small supermarkets instead the older textile and furniture sectors). In the last years, while Chinese enterprises have spread in all the city, few Italian shops have survived in via Lincoln, perceived as historic brands by now.

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A City without Territory. Trade, Tourism and the Use of the Sea: the Case of Trieste

Una città senza territorio. Commercio, turismo e uso del mare a Trieste

SERGIO ZILLI, GIOVANNI MODAFFARI

Università di Trieste, Dipartimento di Studi Umanistici, Italy

E-mail: zillis@units.it; giovanni.modaffari@live.it

Abstract. This contribution offers a glimpse into recent developments in the administrative, economic and political history of Trieste, within the framework of the local, regional and – because of the town's unique circumstances – international communities. In the first parts of this work, the identification of the city with Italy's eastern border is retraced, following the historical events of the second post-war period, a phase in which Trieste was one of the sites of the confrontation, also from a commercial point of view, between Western democracies and the socialist countries of the Eastern Bloc. From the nineteen-sixties onwards, the city had to re-establish its position both within the autonomous region of which it is now the capital – Friuli Venezia Giulia – and in terms of its relationships with the neighbouring countries of Slovenia and Croatia, which are now members of the European Union alongside Italy. This new situation has highlighted the uncertain nature of Trieste's hinterland by reason of its limited administrative and political power. As is described in the second part of this work, the city had to redefine an economic system in which critical issues such as the absence of major manufacturing industry, the reduced activity of its port, and a trading network stuck in the local dimension have led to the image of Trieste being reconsidered from the point of view of an outside observer, and to a focus on tourism, also through, and as a consequence of, a new and different use of the sea. In this way, we will see how the redevelopment and gentrification of central areas such as the Cavana district or the triangle of via Torino has progressed at the same pace as the private sporting initiative known as the Barcolana, whose economic success and its promotion of the image of Trieste have contributed to remodelling the relationship between the city and the sea, that is, between its inhabitants and the resource upon which Trieste built its fortune.

Keywords: Trieste, trade, tourism, Adriatic Sea, Italian Eastern Border.

Riassunto. Nel presente contributo si intende ragionare sull'evoluzione recente della storia amministrativa, politica ed economica di Trieste, analizzandone le condizioni e discutendone gli effetti sulla comunità locale, regionale e, considerate le peculiarità del caso, internazionale. Nelle prime parti di questo lavoro, si ricostruisce l'identificazione della città con il confine orientale dell'Italia, in seguito alle note vicende storiche del secondo dopoguerra, fase in cui Trieste è uno dei luoghi della contrapposizione, anche commerciale, fra democrazie occidentali e paesi socialisti. Dagli anni Sessanta del secolo scorso, la città ha dovuto reinventarsi un ruolo sia all'interno della Regione

autonoma di cui è divenuta capoluogo – il Friuli Venezia Giulia – sia nelle relazioni con le aree vicine di Slovenia e Croazia, con le quali oggi condivide la appartenenza alla Unione Europea. Questo nuovo stato delle cose ha evidenziato l'incertezza del suo territorio di riferimento, in ragione della limitatezza dello spazio amministrativo e politico. Come si vedrà nelle parti successive del contributo, la città ha dovuto ridefinire un sistema economico in cui criticità come la mancanza di un apparato manifatturiero di rilievo, la ridimensionata attività del porto, una rete di commercio rinchiusa nella dimensione locale hanno condotto alla rielaborazione dell'immagine della città in funzione dell'esterno, del turismo, anche attraverso e in conseguenza di un nuovo e diverso rapporto con il mare. In questo percorso, si vedrà come alla riqualificazione e la gentrificazione di aree centrali come il quartiere di Cavana o il triangolo di via Torino si affianchi la crescita di un'iniziativa privata a carattere sportivo, la Barcolana, il cui successo economico e di promozione dell'immagine di Trieste contribuisce a rimodulare il rapporto tra la città e il mare, cioè tra gli abitanti e la risorsa sulla quale Trieste ha costruito la propria fortuna.

Parole chiave: Trieste, commercio, turismo, mare Adriatico, confine orientale italiano.

1. Introduction

The analysis of the case of Trieste in the relationship between city, territory and consumption must necessarily take into account the administrative development of an urban reality with unique features which are difficult to compare with other cases in Italy. The beginning of its new life as an Italian city – which dates back to 1954 – will be the starting point of a complex story of relationships with the national territory but also in the context of international dynamics. This work examines the various phases and moments of transitions through which Trieste's age-old central role in Mediterranean sea-traffic and trade routes was replaced by a new status as a border town which turned itself into the shop-window of the West for consumers from behind the Iron Curtain, as well as the administrative centre of the new Friuli-Venezia Giulia region (from 1964). Upon the subsequent end of this economic phase, those critical issues identified in the absence of a respectable manufacturing system and in a reduced port activity were accompanied by the stagnation in the trading network, in which the prospects for growth were mainly local. In the recent decades, Trieste has thus reworked its image to please the visitor's eye, focusing on tourism and concentrating its efforts towards the redevelopment of degraded areas – such as the Cavana district, through the URBAN Community Initiative – the invention of new spaces for the leisure activities (as is the case

of the commercial conversion of the triangle of via Torino), and a wider range of hotel accommodation. The revival of the waterfront, though reduced, being limited by the road system that separates the city from the water, has been led by a private sporting initiative (Barcolana) whose media, and consequently promotional, success has brought about a change in attitudes towards the use of the sea.

2. Return to homeland

When it returned to Italy permanently, Trieste did not have a well-defined role to play; after being the major port of the Austrian Empire it was now the last port at the top end of the Adriatic Sea and had lost its strategic position for the hinterland. After the end of the regional centrality attributed by the Italian and fascist administration, after the war and the risk of becoming part of the German Reich or the Yugoslav Socialist State, the city had to submit to occupation by the Allies (Anglo-American for the city; Yugoslav for its hinterland in north-western Istria) (Apih 1988; Verrocchio 2004; Caturuzza 2007; Zilli 2013). The choice of Trieste as the tail end of Europe, together with Berlin, yet worthy of a continued occupation, brought the considerable advantage of keeping it at the center of international political attention. This paved the way for funding from the ERP (the European Recovery Program, better known as the Marshall Plan) thanks to which the local manufacturing industry was rebuilt, the shipyards were reopened and the maritime business resumed, addressing the issue of mass unemployment (Mellinato 2005; Verrocchio 2006). At the same time, the economic flows from Italy continued, preserving the national cultural primacy, and the local university became the only one in the Italian system which received funding beyond its borders.

Nationalism in the new Yugoslavia had forced tens of thousands of Italian citizens to abandon their homes and take refuge in Italy, mostly by way of Trieste (Colummi et al. 1980; Volk 2004; Altin Badurina 2018). Their presence served as a tool to exert political pressure locally, nationally and internationally. The strengthening of an Italian identity in the city, which was made up by thousands of refugees who had become Italian citizens in 1920, provided solid support to oppose the Yugoslav designs for annexation in the Northern Adriatic (D'Amelio 2015; Capano 2016; Maggi 2019). The resources, however, were unable to sustain a demographic increase of almost a quarter of the urban population and those arrivals translated into a parallel hemorrhage of the native Triestines, many of whom emigrated. (Apih 1988; Sapelli 1990; Fait 1999).

After 1954, with the loss of that central position that had guaranteed its economic fortunes, Trieste was pushed to the sidelines of the West, at the southern edge of the “Iron Curtain” (as Winston Churchill called it) and was left seeking new points of reference, both external and internal. The novelty came with the closure of the connections with the surrounding territories, in particular with Istria which, in the previous phase and especially during the Fascist era, had been the ideal region for fostering relationships, and where the new administrators – the Yugoslavs – were the same who had driven the *new* Tries-
tines away from their lands. A prohibition of any *political* contact was linked to an *emotional* refusal, which isolated the city in the Cold War era. The only open direction was towards the west and the provinces of Gorizia and Udine, together with which Trieste was supposed to make up the Autonomous Region of Friuli-Venezia Giulia, the only region among those with a special status yet to come into being, which did not happen until 1964 (Zilli 2019).

3. The loss of the sea

The new condition finally saw the birth of the Region, whose creation took ten years nevertheless, and the recognition of its peculiarity as the only real city led Trieste to become the administrative capital of the new region nineteen years after the end of the second world war. However, its relations with the other part of the region did not take off and the city withdrew into itself, also because of the continuing availability of internal funding, which enabled it not to depend on resources from outside, except for State funding for the border areas. In the decades that followed, the separation between Friuli and Venezia Giulia – the latter commonly identified with Trieste only – remains constant and the two sides undertook independent and distinct development paths (Degrassi 2002; Zilli 2012 and 2019).

The city by the sea lived a phase of strong deindustrialisation, partially offset by the development of the tertiary sector following the new regional centrality, and saw a high rate of employment in both insurance companies, such as Assicurazioni Generali and the Riunione Adriatica di Sicurtà, and in the remaining companies (Sapelli 1990; Andreozzi Panariti 2002; Verrocchio 2006). In this period, Trieste was seen from the eastern side of the Iron Curtain as the showcase of the West, where jeans and coffee were the best-selling goods, distributed every day in huge quantities to the various parts of the Balkans. Thousands of Yugoslavs crossed the border every week to buy products that could not be found in socialist countries, and also to see that *other world*

beyond the barrier¹. It was a trade that filled the streets of the city, the pockets of traders, the coffers of banks and of exchange offices, activating an economy, mostly underground, which gave Trieste the status of one of the fifteen richest cities in Italy (Battisti 1979).

At the end of the twentieth century, the disintegration of Yugoslavia and the significant development of Friuli – two concurrent events – changed the previous system of relations. The birth of the republics of Slovenia and Croatia drove away consumers from Trieste’s market and the sales of jeans disappeared with no alternative presenting itself. The other part of the region – from which Trieste and its economy had stayed away, having neither interest nor the will to invest in the poorest province of Northern Italy – was completely transformed after the two devastating earthquakes of 1976, thanks to a careful use of the funding made available for reconstruction. From an out-migration area it has become a production center for small and medium-sized enterprises aimed at the European market, attracting workers from the rest of the country and from abroad (Grandinetti 2016). Within its borders, it has set up a structured system of relationships and its provincial capital has grown from a small town into a city. Udine is the political, but also economic, social and cultural reference point for the entire Friulan territory. Where it was once Trieste which avoided relations with Friuli, it is now the latter which shows no interest in the city by the sea.

4. The dawn of the new millennium

At the beginning of the new millennium, the city found itself without an area to be a reference point for, without a manufacturing system, with a port with reduced activities (80% of the tonnage of goods is represented by the oil discharged by ships and placed in the pipeline that connects the Northern Adriatic with Munich) and with the entire area of the Old Port – as extensive as the flat urban part (about 600 thousand square meters) – completely unused and abandoned (Porceddu 2009). Without the Balkan customers, with a manufacturing sector that sees the local health care company at the top in terms of the number of employees, followed by the public administration (regional, municipal and provincial) and by the high educational network (the two universities and the international research centres), and with the national primacy (in percentage) of resident pensioners, Trieste

¹ As it is admirably shown in the documentary film *Trieste, Yugoslavia. Quando Ponterosso era il più grande centro commerciale dei Balcani*, directed by Alessio Bozzer (2017).

shows no sign of opening up towards the outside and is *used* only by its population.

The trading network has not seen any development and has maintained the features of an internal service structure, with neighbourhood shops or supermarkets. With regard to the food industry, there was a local distribution chain founded in 1903 – the Cooperative Operai di Trieste, Istria e Friuli (Workers' Cooperatives of Trieste, Istria and Friuli) – which in fact played a dominant and controlling role in the commercial policy. It maintained it until 2015, when bankruptcy, linked to management problems, opened the doors to the entry of national operators who, however, did not change the situation. The development of an organized large-scale distribution is also hampered by the urban structure. The spaces available between the sea and the surrounding hills (which reach 300 meters above sea level a short distance from the coast) are small and the road network is not adequate for external connections. The urban layout is recent, developed in the twentieth century, although the area of the old town dates back to the period between the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, except for some new buildings erected in the Fascist era. On this basis, the commercial network was unable to expand, and the only two examples of a shopping center – of modest size, inaugurated in 1991 and 2003 respectively – cater only for the needs of the residents. A medium-sized commercial center is located a few kilometers from the city borders, with over 32,000 square meters of sales area, but its position, approximately one kilometer from Slovenia, well suggests the target audience. Overall, the sales area of large-scale distribution in Trieste is 25% lower than the regional average (Umek 2019, 101). New commercial centers are springing up in the Friuli area, particularly near the motorway toll booths (Selva 2019), or in the coastal areas of Slovenia, in a median position in the flows between Italy and Croatia (Umek 2019). These also attract buyers from Trieste due to the competitive prices and a varied offer compared to the local market.

The hinterland of Trieste is in fact smaller than the already limited territorial extension of its province (just over 200 square km) and the international border closes it in a restricted and peripheral area. Under these conditions, the attachment to the previous operating methods of the local economy works against the idea of making use of the territory for tourism, despite the town's history and specific features of the landscape, including the sea (Valussi, Minca 1989). Starting from the end of the Habsburg era, the sea, the great historical resource of Trieste, has gradually lost its importance in the local economy. As a matter of fact, by the beginning of the new millennium, it has slowly become, both in fact and

in geography, the last port at the far right of the Adriatic, surpassed in activities by the adjacent but Slovenian structure of Koper (Catalan, Zilli 2008). The resumption of traffic and the full reactivation of port activities took place after the first fifteen years of the century. The reduced availability of spaces equipped for bathing use is absorbed by the local population, on the basis of a relationship with the sea transversal to the social classes and to the eras. This is testified by the continued existence of a bathing establishment in which sunbathers are separated according to sex, the only example in Europe, a legacy of the early twentieth century². In addition, the city suffered from a reduced attractiveness, as evidenced by a limited hotel availability – 10 hotels in 2008 (Umek 2019, 99) – which discouraged the arrival of tourists.

5. A new look

In such a stasis, hopes and requests for a different attitude were not answered within the local political establishment, who were more interested in maintaining the status quo (D'Amelio 2009; Pagliaro 2013). However, the end of the Cold War and the birth of new states that gradually joined the European Union paved the way for a new central role of Trieste, based on the memory of the role it had played in the past (Andreozzi et al. 2004). The city slowly became aware of both having an exploitable heritage in terms of attractiveness and of the new favourable international conditions.

The beginning of this change coincides with the election as mayor of a person external to the *classic* environment of local power, an entrepreneur – Riccardo Illy – who set the management of the administration on different tracks. The choice adopted was to create a new image for Trieste, shifting its attention from a peripheral and decayed center to that of a privileged witness of the past eras overlooking the sea. The starting point was the restoration of an area close to the historic centre (1996), also using specific European Union funding to restore the neighbourhoods in an advanced state of decay. This triggered an important process of gentrification involving the whole area, also encouraging new initiatives such as the competition in the year 2000 for the city's candidacy for Expo 2008 (Colombino, Minca 2005).

Beyond the lack of services, which are gradually recovered, the relationship between the parts of the city must be reviewed (Minca 2009; Bialasiewicz, Minca

² The story of this establishment is reconstructed in the documentary film *The Last Beach* (2016) by Thanos Anastopoulos and Davide Del Degan, presented at the Cannes Film Festival in the year of its release.



Figure 1. The *Rive*, the main urban sliding axis during the Barcolana of 2016. Source: Photo Studio Borlenghi.

2010). From an economic point of view, the issue of the Porto Vecchio (the Old Port) emerged very clearly, the continuous abandonment of which has kept away new economic actors and represented a visual testimony of the lack of commitment to finding a solution. There was a growing need to expand the new port, undersized as a result of years of minimal commercial choices, although its position reduces connection times with the markets of Central Europe by at least four days. Only in the last five years has the structure managed to re-enter the international trade network, becoming one of the first eleven European ports by tonnage (Port of Trieste 2018), and a candidate as the final stop for one of the branches of the *Belt and Road Initiative* promoted by the Chinese government. There is still no regulation on the contact between the residential area and the access to the sea, interrupted by the main urban sliding axis and by a series of parking lots that follow along one after the other on the sea-front (Fig. 1). The local primacy of the car does not allow adopting solutions which may foster a direct relationship with the sea, but the new policy identifies a path going from the central railway station to the recovered area

of Cavana that is both suitable for a different use of the center and favourable for tourists. The pedestrianization of areas, the relocation of parking lots, the widening of sidewalks, new regulations for the open air sections of bars and restaurants, incentives for new commercial initiatives and an improved accommodation capacity³ have all helped to restart the local commercial initiative, also thanks to the internal financial availability.

6. A re-invented city centre

In the centre of the city, the vast redevelopment plan taking place in recent years which principally involved the area of Cittavecchia (the Old Town) has radically transformed commercial activities and consequently, the ways in which the city is used, producing a new balance between districts and neighbourhoods. Three segments

³ In 2019 the number of hotels had risen to 24 and the number of beds available in the provincial territory, also including those in B&Bs, exceed 6,300 units (Source: authors' elaboration on data from the Bilateral Regional Tertiary and Tourism Authority of Friuli Venezia Giulia).

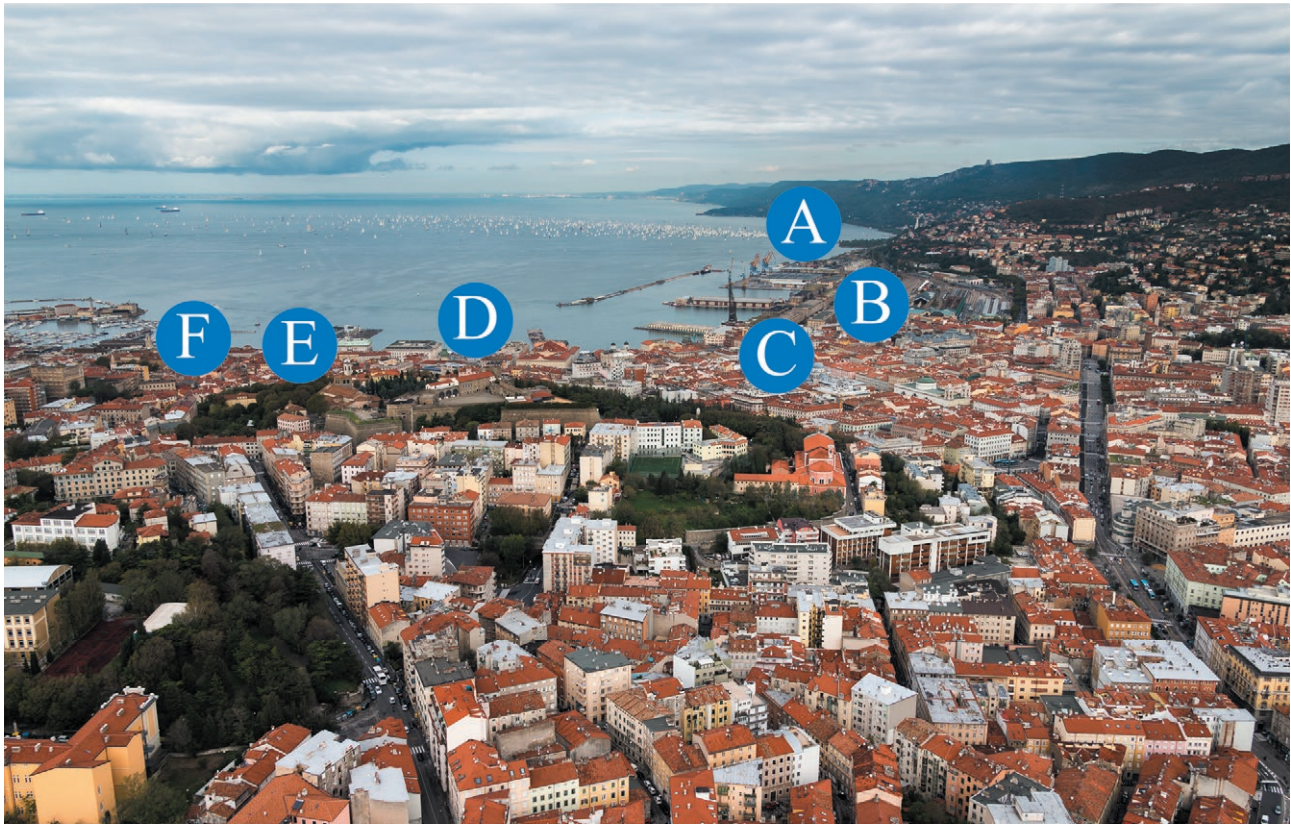


Figure 2. Trieste City Centre: (A) the Old Port, (B) Trieste Railway Station, (C) Piazza del Ponterosso and via Genova, (D) Piazza della Borsa and Piazza Unità, (E) Cavana and Cittavecchia, and (F) via Torino and Piazza Venezia. Source: Photo Studio Borlenghi, Milan, 2012.

of the centre in particular have shown the most evident signs of these changes. Starting from the railway station (therefore from the north) these are: the Grand Canal (Piazza del Ponterosso), the district of Cavana, and the triangle of via Torino⁴. The most evident aspect has been the reshaping of the dynamics of retail commerce with a view to increasing the number of premises for restaurants, shopping and tourism in general. The latter has been the main beneficiary of both public and private investment in recent years, with results that can be considered generally successful. This is particularly true of the Barcolana, especially if we take into account the expansion in the hotel network observed following the increased number of visitors, with a doubling in the number of beds. Furthermore, the total number of tourists who visited the city in 2018 was more than 513,000 (for almost 1.2 million presences), almost half of whom came from abroad (Regione Autonoma Friuli Venezia Giulia 2019, 173).

⁴ The triangle between via Torino, via Cadorna and via San Giorgio, including Piazza Venezia, in the south-western area of the city centre and within walking distance of the Riva Nazario Sauro.

The three segments all fall within the part of urban space most directly exposed to the sea and which perhaps best represents the historical development of the city, which owes its fortune to its past ability to position itself as a port hub for the fundamental dynamics of trade. The area of Piazza del Ponterosso, with its shifts in the type of goods sold there, is truly a piece of commercial archaeology, having been, as we have seen, an important market and at the center of the most varied traffic, including those of *jeansinari* and coffee retailers; it is now an organic fruit and vegetables market. The object of various architectural and road interventions that have harmonized its appearance in recent years, the area now has two streets (via Rossini and the quieter via Genova) that are perpendicular to the axes that run parallel to the sea line and along which the last decade has witnessed the openings of several restaurants and bars, favoured by a gradual process of pedestrianization⁵. A development still uncertain and subsequent to the more intense one which involved the triangle of via Torino,

⁵ Il Piccolo August 23, 2018.

which had started a few years earlier. Observing the city road network (Fig. 2), Piazza del Ponterosso, Cavana and Via Torino are connected by a pedestrian walkway less than 2 kilometres long which runs parallel to the road axis of the Rive, starting at the station and ending in Piazza Venezia. This route also passes through two focal points of the urban design of Trieste: Piazza Unità d'Italia and Piazza della Borsa.

7. Old Town/New Town

Descending from the hills of San Vito and San Giusto towards the sea, between the seafront and the Theresian part of the city, Cittavecchia is an area that – according to the famous boxer Nino Benvenuti, who grew up there – found its essence in the relationship “for the sea, with the sea, of the sea. That was its life” (Benvenuti 2002, 133-134). To better understand the role of the Cittavecchia, however, it is appropriate to highlight its functional connections with those areas that are notable for their level of commercial activity: Cavana and via Torino.

Cavana⁶ is the geographical and historical *heart* of Trieste but since the second post-war years it has witnessed a long phase of depopulation: from around 12,000 inhabitants in the 1950s to 450 registered at the end of the 1990s, most of whom fell into at-risk social categories (Campagna, Speranza 2002, 135; Campagna, Sampaolo 1999, 18-19; Palermo, Savoldi 2002, 185).

The condemned buildings had led to road closures and de-population. It also brought about a progressive environmental and socio-economic degradation. This process resulted in a fragmented city center whose functional part remained limited to the area in front of the port, full of commercial, professional and service activities (Campagna, Ricci 2000, 37). Since the 1990s, Cavana has undergone social and environmental redevelopment interventions made possible within the framework of the European initiative called the URBAN I Community Plan (European Commission, 2003). In the case of Trieste, it was decided that European, national, regional and local measures would be adopted under the *Progetto Tergeste* (Tergeste Project)⁷, designed for completion in

the two-year period 1997-1999, with the redevelopment of the Cittavecchia, identified as a *target area* (Zubini 2006, 219).

The goal of the Project was to start a process in order to promote the recovery of the housing market in the area through the “creation of positive expectations on the part of the population” (Campagna, Speranza 2002, 131). Some critical issues made the start particularly difficult: the small population of the target area and the resulting difficulty in identifying internal resources; the extreme state of decay of the buildings and the structures. The Project was also aimed at the residential and commercial revitalization as well as inverting the depopulation process (Palermo, Savoldi 2002, 185-186). In this way, the redevelopment of both the road system and the buildings was carried out, fostering the renewal of the population through economic activities – with particular attention to local craftsmanship – residence halls and meeting spaces. Furthermore, the original purposes of the URBAN Plan included a *social gentrification*, namely an integration of heterogeneous social groups by social and economic profile (Colombino, Minca 2005, 47-48). For this reason, additional tools were envisaged: student houses, multipurpose social centers, such as anti-violence centers for women and minors or other intercultural and multiethnic centers, a reception community for drug addicts, and a House of Music to integrate the new inhabitants of the neighborhood (Progetto Tergeste 2001, 12). However, only a few of these ideas were actually implemented. The most apparent consequence over the years has been the foreseeable increase in the value of the properties recovered in the hamlet and finally brought back to life. Cavana, even in the pre-2008 crisis period, stood as one of the most valuable areas of the city⁸, where the increase in prices had created exclusivity and transformed many spaces into restaurants or tourist accommodation activities.

8. Once upon a time in via Torino

The commercial *reconversion* of Via Torino can be considered as a strategy which resulted from the wider redevelopment of Cavana. Analysing in detail the triangle, some more general gentrification features (Semi 2015, 7) could be considered as the result of the redevelopment of Cavana, which has generated advantages also for the economic activities located in this part of the center. The gradual replacement of the traditional shops of the streets with more recent ones, mainly dedicated to busi-

⁶ Lying at the centre of Cittavecchia, Cavana is part of the district “Città Nuova – Barriera Nuova - San Vito – Città Vecchia”. In the early 2000s, 16.5% of the population (37,000 inhabitants) lived in this district (Campagna, Ricci 2000, 38).

⁷ In this project, economic resources were allocated for initiatives of financial support and social services; smaller amounts were allocated for the redevelopment of buildings and education (Campagna, Speranza 2002, 131).

⁸ Il Piccolo, May 7, 2008.

ness of eating and drinking, was favoured – as with Via Genova – by the pedestrianization of via Torino (where the Museum of the Civilization of Istria, Fiume and Dalmatia is located) and via Diaz (where the Revoltella Museum can be found). The radical change of the entire area led to a change in the consumer audiences. The new businesses, almost homogeneous in terms of the type of activity, all appeared around the same time. In the wider area, including Piazza Venezia, the oldest activity dates back to 1920s (Buffet Siora Rosa); out of a list of 23 establishments, 14 were opened after 2014; of these, 8 started their activity between 2017 and 2018⁹.

This upheaval in the economy and commerce had the effects of transforming the area into one of the centers of the city's nightlife, thus inaugurating an unprecedented use of this space. Important consequences can also be observed from an aesthetic point of view, since those areas of the public property used for outdoor activities are subject to the council rules contained in the regulation for the installation of open-air furniture and fittings (Comune di Trieste 2016).

The traditional shops or those belonging to types that are similar to the previous ones, have vanished. The final point of this route can be considered the Ancient Wine Warehouse which, standing on the Riva Tommaso Gulli, is another important symbol of the commercial history of Trieste; converted into Eataly restaurant and market in 2017, it is the first stop for an ideal entrance to the city centre from the south.

The gentrification of the triangle around via Torino is characterized by its predominantly commercial nature, with the increase in activities designed for greater volumes of consumption compared to the traditional ones and aimed at much larger audiences, such as the various segments of the student population and the expulsion of activities not related to leisure. In addition to the presence of the museums mentioned above, the upper floors of the stately buildings that surround the streets are partly occupied by offices and, as has already happened in similar situations, the new identity of the streets has met the resistance of the residents due to the contrasts deriving from the scarce compatibility of needs.

9. The sea reconquered

The central part of the waterfront of Trieste is mainly occupied – on the city side – with restaurants and bars which are, however, lacking on the most exposed

strip, which acts as a limit to the sea – except for isolated exceptions such as Eataly – and where they were replaced by structures geared to supporting pleasure boating and tourism. This strip of seafront hosts the event with the highest economic as well as symbolic value held today in the city: the Barcolana. The seafront (the Rive) is the natural theater of the largest regatta in the world (by number of participants)¹⁰. From the waterfront evolution model described by Vallega (1993, 23), Trieste is now going through its *post-industrial stage*, with an attempt to recover a large part of Porto Vecchio, which is the most important opportunity for investment; nevertheless, its gradual removal from state control has not yet led to true redevelopment (Comune di Trieste 2019). With the Barcolana and other side events, the city manages the sea as a resource that “helps to implement its development, to redevelop itself, to obtain otherwise unimaginable visibility” (Guala 2015, 170). The birth of the organizing body of the Barcolana, the Società Velica di Barcola e Grignano (Sailing Company of Barcola and Grignano), dates back to 1969 and represented a decisive step in the transition of a previously elite sport from *yachting* to *sailing*¹¹.

Taking visibility as the first parameter to measure the Barcolana's contribution to the city system, according to a SWG study conducted for the 51st edition of the Barcolana, the percentage of Italians who knew about the event jumped from 21 to 53% between 2001 and 2019¹². Barcolana, an event now spread over two weeks preceding the Sunday of the main regatta (in the month of October) has set itself over time as an event *larger than the city* thanks to the size of the economic impact that has managed to grow steadily over 50 years (Modaffari 2019).

In 2018, 300,000 tourist arrivals were counted (corresponding to the days visitors spent in the city), corresponding to 234,000 people. Half of the diverse range of visitors was made up by spectators from other Italian regions; 44% was the share of residents within the former province of Trieste, while 6% came from abroad (especially from Slovenia and Croatia); 73% of visitors declared they had attended at least one previous edition of the Barcolana, confirming a high level of loyalty to the event. The broader economic impact for 2018,

¹⁰ In the 2018 edition, there were 2,689 boats on the starting line, corresponding to over 16,000 crew members (Guinness World Records 2018; B2G Consulting 2019a).

¹¹ In the early 2000s, 40% of the boats registered in the Region were sailing boats, 80% in the province of Trieste compared to the national average of 20% (Tracogna 2010, 151); the widespread nature of this practice is connected to the presence within the territory of boatyards specialized in the construction of sailing dinghies and related components. In this regard, see also Karlsen 2018, 15.

¹² Il Piccolo October 16, 2019.

⁹ Source: our processing on data from the Chamber of Commerce, Industry, Agriculture and Artisanry of Venezia Giulia (Trieste).

calculated in terms of public, organization and sponsor spending, amounted to over 70 million euros, with an overall multiplier of 33 compared to the investment (B2G Consulting 2019a). Considering that the share of public funding for the event stands at 15%, a minimum percentage if compared to the average of Italian events (40%), the tax impact is estimated at € 6,2 million in revenue against a public investment of 340,000, producing a *return on investment* (ROI) of around 18,4 (B2G Consulting 2019a; 2019b). The occupational impact, however, was estimated as 572 full-time equivalents¹³.

The media coverage for the fiftieth anniversary edition (2018) reached an estimated value of over 26 million euros, with direct coverage by RAI and by networks in those countries where sailing plays a major role in the popular culture (Australia, New Zealand, etc.). This element was also amplified through the use of new social media, with around 100.000 spectators at the competition's Facebook Live (B2G Consulting 2019a).

10. Conclusions

Trieste has based its development and fortunes on its external relations, in particular with non-neighboring areas. The post-WWII conditions interrupted this process, first with the secession of Italian territories to Yugoslavia, then with the creation of the Iron Curtain and the continuation of military occupation until 1954.

While, on the one hand, Trieste's return to Italy paved the way for the birth of the Friuli Venezia Giulia Region, of which it became the capital city, it also presented the opportunity to establish a new system of relationships with Friuli, which Trieste decided not to take advantage of. The city survived thanks to the primacy of the services sector and the exploitation of its image as a western outpost for citizens coming from behind the Curtain. The collapse of the socialist systems of the east and the economic revival of Friuli forced the city to review its internal organization. Faced with the impossibility – due to historical, demographic and urban planning reasons (Columi, Ferrari 1980; Ara, Magris 1982; Apih 1988; Sapelli 1990; Andreozzi, Panariti 2002; Melinato 2005; Cattaruzza 2007; Zilli 2019) – of becoming a point of reference in the organized distribution or marketing of high consumption products – a role that was taken on by other cities – the solution adopted was to give Trieste the image of a tourist hub.

This process took place through a redevelopment of

the town centre, with the identification of urban spaces intended for restaurants and leisure activities, and by rebuilding its relationship with the sea.

This process took place through the reorganization of the waterfront, with a renewed vitality of port exchanges, and above all with the consequences of the success of a sailing regatta that publicizes the image of Trieste as a city on the sea around the world. Since 2016 Trieste is also by Regional law a “tourist city” and this gives it a series of prerogatives that make it easier to provide services for tourists. In a few years, the number of beds available doubled (between hotels and B&Bs) and the city is now part of the international tourism circuits.

In light of the events linked to the global health emergency of 2020, Trieste too finds itself facing numerous unknowns that call into question the continuation of the path undertaken so far. The organization in the city of the EuroScience Open Forum 2020, the main European event for scientific research, at the time of writing, has been postponed and is likely to suffer the consequences of global events in terms of attendance and downsizing of the promotion of city. The Barcolana finds itself suffering repercussion with regard to the number of participants and public, and must now reinvent itself to comply with COVID-19 regulations.

The tourist sector on the one hand and the entry into the *Belt and Road Initiative* on the other are now the important elements that Trieste needs to develop new territorial relationships, with both the rest of the Region and, above all, Europe. Whether or not these favourable conditions can be maintained will depend on how things proceed in light of the effects of the COVID-19 crisis, and also on the ability of the local ruling class.

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Afterword The Consumer's Society in the Era of the Postglobalization

Postfazione

La società dei consumatori nell'era della post-globalizzazione

CARLES CARRERAS I VERDAGUER¹, SERGI MARTÍNEZ-RIGOL¹, ALEJANDRO MORCUENDE GONZÁLEZ²

¹ Geography Department, Universitat de Barcelona

² Universidade Estadual Paulista, UNESP, Brasil

E-mail: ccarreras@ub.edu; smartinezrigol@ub.edu; alejandro.morcuende@gmail.com

Abstract. The article tries a general overview of the contemporary changes in the global economy. First proposes a characterization of the present period of history, advancing some of his main explanatory elements. Next, summarizes the great economic, social, political and cultural changes, discussed on the long way of more than twenty years of research at an international level. Third, it remarks some concrete changes at an urban scale. Finally, suggests the possibilities of some differential urbanization processes, on the way of the planetary urbanization.

Keywords: change, crisis, planetary urbanization, postglobalization.

Riassunto. L'articolo tenta di offrire una panoramica generale sui cambiamenti contemporanei dell'economia globale. In primo luogo, propone una caratterizzazione dell'attuale periodo storico, delineando alcuni dei suoi principali elementi esplicativi. Successivamente, riassume i grandi cambiamenti economici, sociali, politici e culturali, discussi attraverso il lungo percorso di oltre vent'anni di ricerca a livello internazionale. In terzo luogo, rileva alcuni cambiamenti concreti a scala urbana. Infine, suggerisce le possibilità di alcuni processi di urbanizzazione differenziale, seguendo il percorso dell'urbanizzazione planetaria.

Parole chiave: cambiamento, crisi, urbanizzazione planetaria, post-globalizzazione.

1. Introduction

Changes acceleration in these first decades of the XXI Century require a permanent updating of all kind of socioeconomic analysis. The last restructuring of the capitalist system since the 70's has encouraged the technical,

scientific and informational globalization (Dicken 1986; Santos 1996¹). The capital accumulation at this global scale seems paradoxically collapse its own increasing possibilities (Smith 1984), disclosing the implosion of the financial crisis of 2007 and allowing the explosions of climate change and new pandemic and of political populisms and new nationalisms.

Independently of the all-possible different points of view about these relevant questions, it appears an urgent claim for new methods and concepts in order to be able to explain theoretically the reality at different scales. A complex analysis is needed from a renewed discipline of Political Economy both for a scientific explanation and for the advancement of new political proposals.

On the way of almost twenty years of international research on City, Consumption and Retail, this article tries to propose first a characterization of the present period of history, advancing some of his main explanatory elements. Next, summarizes the great economic, social, political and cultural changes, extracted from the reflections of the PRIN team (Carreras, Martínez-Rigol 2019). Thirdly, it remarks some concrete changes at an urban scale. Finally, suggests the possibilities of some differential urbanization processes, on the way of the planetary urbanization (Brenner 2014).

2. Reaching a Postglobalization era?

The main question to answer today is if it is already possible to speak about Postglobalization, Postcapitalism or Postcrisis. Here the prefix post is used only as a sort of an acknowledgement² of the possibility of the end of Capitalism and of his more than forty years cycle of Globalization, at least as they were known until today (Wallerstein et al. 2013; Streck 2016). In the same sense, Postcapitalism could be an easy way initially to refer to a yet unknown economic system foreshadowed by an increasing inequality among people and territories (Piketty 2013) and by the monopolization of the big informational new corporations. Since the mythical date of 1973³, different crisis affected the global economic system: oil prices growth, manufacturing delocalization,

financial crisis. All these economic crises were framed in a changing geopolitical order further analyzed on this paper. So today is possible to think that crisis could be the new restructured organization of the Capitalism as a whole. The XXI Century world could also be entering into a postcrisis or perhaps into a perpetual crisis scenario.

By the use of the post, we assume that the world is attending a new transition from Capitalism to some other system not yet well defined, as occurred before in some other secular transitions (Anderson 1974; Hilton 1976). The use of transition's analysis force to distinguish clearly which elements from the old system that is disappearing prefigure the new one. The dialectics among past, present and future is at the base of any transition.

Apparently external to the Human society there are two different big challenges that aggravate and accelerate the processes of change. The first has been the climate change with all his controversial evidences, especially the acceleration of the so-called natural disasters, and the international political debate about it⁴. Above all the different and irreconcilable opinions, everyday increase the popular awareness of the negative impacts of socio-economic activities on the Planet, especially among the young people. The second challenge is the recurring pandemic⁵ every time more frequent and deepest that defy the scientific progress of the health and medical disciplines and infrastructures everywhere in the World.

In front of the explosion of these two challenges, the increasing spread of the way of life of the consumer's society that accompanied the globalization and in greater extend exploded into the planetary urbanization, is progressively questioned. After three decades of neoliberalism⁶ seriously eroding the welfare state, especially in Western Europe, the means of collective consumption (health, education or social services) have been dramatically reduced. This fact is the base of the heavy consequences in the diffusion of the 2020 pandemic, at least in countries like Italy or Spain.

The recent increase of environmentalist attitudes and mass confinements against pandemic necessarily affects the general way of life of the consumer's society. We assist to the disclosing of different attitudes aiming for a most austere and responsible consumption. Two different and apparently contradictory trends are

¹ In his last book, the Brazilian geographer Milton Santos (1926-2001) even suggested a popular alternative to his contemporary Globalization (Santos 2000).

² Authors are against the use of the post prefix as a qualification of a new period defined only by the contradiction of the characteristics of the past ones, like occurs with the abused terms of postmodernism postfordism, postindustrial, and many others.

³ This year with the first big oil crisis is conventionally considered as the starting point of the last capitalist restructuration.

⁴ In 1988, United Nations create the Intergovernmental Panel of Climate Change in order to advise governments with periodical reports.

⁵ The most diffused were Ebola in 1976, Aids in 1981, SARS in 2002 and the covid-19 in 2020.

⁶ The main icon could be the British government from 1979 to 1990 of Margaret Thatcher (1925-2013) that take the slogan of TINA (There Is No Alternative).

in action. For one hand, it appear more and more frequently an increasing consumer's cooperativism, recycling habits, second hand goods reuse and local productions promotion⁷. Even some forms of the so-called circular economy, based on a new way of bartering, are often analyzed and promoted. On the other hand, different forms of e-commerce are increasing, both by the big commercial corporations (like Amazon, Alibaba, Google and Youtube) and by multitude of fragmented and individual initiatives at a global scale. These trends have deep consequences on the urban life and on the organization of cities.

Another important element is the progressive and evident weakening of democracy all around the world, even among the most developed countries. This so important political process appears on the frame of the strong economic competition for the first place between USA and the P.R. of China. The comforting three worlds of the Cold War decades do not exist anymore and there is today a clear lack of leadership with the discomfort of uncertainty.

Two main elements should be underlined, also in this geopolitical restructuring. For one hand, there is the rise of different kind of populisms. Many social movements of extreme right are developing fundamentalism, racism and essentialism everywhere in the world, side by side of different forms of left populism generating new social movements, especially on cities (Mouffe 2018). On the other hand, an increasing nationalism affects all the spheres of the political life, at the scale of the Nation state, with protectionist and anti-immigration policies. However, nationalism also appears at the intra state scales (Soudan, Scotland or Catalonia) and at international scale (EU, Mercosur, UNO or OMS crisis).

The combination of these different elements could clearly been interpreted as a transition from one system to another (Wallerstein et al. 2013; Streck 2016). All the changes associated with this transition need a lot of more detailed analysis in order to understand the present configuration and dynamics of the consumer's society.

3. Some recent changes on the Consumer's society at a global scale

As has been pointed out (Carreras, Martínez-Rigol 2019, 2020), the emergence and consolidation of the consumer society since the mid-20th century are analyzed

in the light of a series of general and global changes at the political, social, economic and cultural levels.

It should be pointed out that it is in light of this set of changes on a global scale that consumption has consolidated as, if not the main, one of the main generating activities of society, displacing production and work as fundamental variables (Dicken 1986), or, at most, being on par with them. Consumption has become a central and relevant topic (Carreras, D'Alessandro 2017), mainly because it has connections with social life from its triple conceptualization as acquisition (provision through the market or any other mechanism), appropriation (use to which objects are destined) and symbolization (processes that give meaning to supply and use) (García-Canclini 1995; Warde 2017).

3.1 *A system that mutates appearance, but not its logic*

The logic of capital has become the engine of society. The processes of circulation and accumulation of capital, as the geographer David Harvey affirms, are today hegemonic when it comes to providing the material, social and intellectual bases of our life in common, and therefore, of our social system, called capitalism (Harvey 2014, 22).

From this statement, one could adopt the perspective that the main processes of transformation of the economic system throughout these last two centuries have been an incessant struggle of capital to escape from the straits to which time and space subject it, in his search for continuous growth, accumulation and profit, for imposing his logic all around the world. And in this process, consumption has been essential, since it is a key function to maintain the process of circulation and accumulation of capital.

The processes of circulation and accumulation, and the imposition of the logic of accumulation and profit, require, even as part of the temporary remedy for their cyclical and intrinsic crises, territorial expansion and the reduction of capital turnover time. The system mutates, adapting to the new conditions created from its growth and crisis cycles and the various technological innovations, but without losing its space predatory and time accelerating nature.

One of its latest mutations has been the much-discussed globalization, which has also been one of the main elements that has allowed the consolidation of the consumer society. Globalization, which in economic terms refers to the integration of markets, finances, technologies and States, has allowed nation-states, transnational corporations and people to extend their reach to the entire

⁷ In Spain, the promotion of consumption at local markets is symbolically called as 0 km and 15 minutes cities are promoted.

world in a faster and deeper way, and at a lower cost than ever (Daniels, Jones 2012), giving a new twist to territorial expansion and time acceleration. The effects of this technology-based process on production have been extensively analyzed, as the production and exchange of goods and services have increased exponentially. But at the same time it has meant important changes in consumption. Needs have had to be stimulated and consumption facilitated, in order to offer a way to an unprecedented increase in productive capacity. The consumption model prevailing since the second half of the twentieth century is characterized by widespread access to a wide range of goods and services that go much beyond the cover of the needs considered for survival.

In this consumer capitalism, credit, and access to it by a large part of the population, has become one of the key elements that has allowed the maintenance of capital circulation and the reduction of its time turnover. The nation-states and corporation's economies need also to go to credit in order to finance investments in the space-time fixes that underlie the geographic expansions of capital. However, without a doubt, the access of domestic economies to credit and its socialization, as shown by Raquel Rolnik in the case of housing, has meant the inclusion of low and middle-income consumers in financial circuits (Rolnik 2013). This is one of the characteristics of the so-called financiarization of the economy. Or as it has also been described, the emergence of financial capitalism, a type of capitalism identified by the production of the financial universe in which capital can be realized from banking activity or in the financial markets themselves, regardless of the production of goods and services, and with much higher profit rates (Méndez 2018). There has been a radical change in the relationship between productive capital and financial capital (Lapavistas 2013).

The technological revolution that globalization has brought about has therefore favored an internationalization of consumption. The new communication tools have revolutionized the ways of sale, the means of payment, and even logistics, and at the same time have promoted a series of important changes in the consumption habits of individuals and households. Electronic commerce has meant opening digital communication to traditional business relationships. There is an unstoppable increase in the use of electronic commerce as a way of acquiring goods and services by growing population groups. As a continuation of this, collaborative consumption practices are a prominent axis. Together with the modification of payment methods, it has led to a restructuring of spaces and consumption times, making consumption ubiquitous in everyday life.

3.2 The increasing concentration of power in a few

A second aspect to be highlighted is the change in the establishment of a certain world hegemony, understood as control and direction at the economic, political, military and ideological level of the world (Taylor, Flint 2002). The hegemony of the United States of America, which, starting from the cyclical interpretation of hegemony in the world-society of the North American sociologist Immanuel Wallerstein, begins in the middle of the XX Century (Wallerstein 1984), seems to be currently in crisis, or at least, in question, as the Italian economist and sociologist Giovanni Arrighi also pointed out (Arrighi 2005).

This interpretation highlights that despite the fact that the dominance of the hegemonic State continues to exist in various spheres, it is in the economic sphere that it acquires its maximum relevance. Especially from three processes that follow one another in chains: supremacy in productive efficiency, commercial supremacy and financial supremacy. The new emergence of China from the last quarter of the XX Century has led to the questioning of North American hegemony in particular, and in general of the Triad, which includes the European Union and Japan, clearly in the productive field, and in the commercial and financial ones.

A second aspect to be considered in the power relations among different agents is that the nation-state hegemony may be somewhat threatened by a new economic agent. The process of globalization was led by the multinational corporation, considered as the hegemonic agent. Since its emergence in the late 1960, its institutional and territorial organization has become more complex (Dicken 2003; Morelli 2010; Coe, Kelly, Yeung 2007). Today is configured as that type of company that maintains the power to coordinate and control operations in more than one State, although do not possess them (Dicken 2003). In addition, within the framework of competition that is inherent to the capitalist economic system, there has been an intense process of concentration of power and capital in them, to the point that many of these companies have a volume of sales or profits much higher than Gross Domestic Product of many States of the world.

The emergence of these multinational corporations can be seen as a counter power to the nation-states, which at times have been unable to control the corporations' actions, which freely move their investments and capital, seeking maximum revaluation. It is not even strange that those corporations are the object of a differential and beneficial treatment by the governments, to which they grant fiscal advantages, reduction of taxes or

other benefits, trying to attract their investments since it is considered that they generate work and wealth. Perhaps within this framework it is possible to read the numerous local and regional policies that have arisen everywhere, trying to relaunch territorial competitiveness, positioning these territories as the focus of attraction for the mass of capital that, in its free movement, seeks maximum revaluation.

While some particular readings of globalization announced the disappearance of the nation-state in the face of this loss of sovereignty, it has not yet occurred. The relationship between the two agents is symbiotic rather than contradictory. The Fordist and Keynesian welfare state has undoubtedly mutated. For example in the last financial crisis of 2007, its alignment with capital prioritizing the rescue of banks and financial entities, questioned on the one hand its public and redistributive nature. Nevertheless, on the other hand it showed its strength as a fundamental institutional element to maintain the principles of capitalism, and among them, the existence of the market as a regulatory element of the system. As Karl Polanyi showed in the 1940s, overthrowing the myth of *laissez-faire*, the market's institutionalization and operation requires the State (Polanyi 1944).

3.3 An increasingly unequal social system

Globalization and its technical foundation have generated a new international division of labor, through which there has been a new territorial articulation of what was configured as the center, the semi-periphery and the periphery (Lluch 1981). The value-chain of products expresses these connections of diverse spaces and agents oriented to production, distribution and consumption, to the accumulation of capital and to the extraction and appropriation of profit. In those value-chains, each territory is destined to fulfill a specific function assigned by the logic imposed by hegemonic actors (Santos 1993, 1996). This territorial specialization in specific functions is in relation to the initial comparative advantage, but it is also due to the intensification of unequal exchange flows (commercial, financial, technological and migratory) depending on the competitive capacity of each area.

At the same time, there is also a growing technical division of labor, associated with a growing specialization of activities and tasks, leading to a decrease in production costs and an increase in productivity. This same specialization and simplification means that many of the tasks can be automated, and this process highlights another of the contradictions of the system,

since the effect it can have on the relationship between constant capital and variable capital leads to a reduction in the rate of profit. A trend that Karl Marx already pointed out and that today some other economists have reaffirmed (Carchedi 2017). Adding these territorial and technical divisions to the social division of labor, a growing socio-labor and territorial segmentation is favored, in which capital finds an adequate means for the extraction of profit.

There is an increasing polarization of wealth within the capitalist system, also a polarization in the distribution of income. More than this, nowadays income do not increase despite the fact that the productivity, occupation or corporations' profits do. This has questioned the meaning of the middle class, when some part of this group of population, despite the fact that they have an income, they fail to survive. As the British economist Guy Standing explains, we have attended to the appearance of what he has called the precariat (Standing 2013). A new social class with job insecurity, unstable and temporary jobs, which contrasts with a high educational level; they depends exclusively upon a monetary wage, since those non-monetary benefits of the welfare state have been cut off; and furthermore, they cannot find a political answer to his situation.

At the same time, access to certain goods and services has constituted as an element of social differentiation and affirmation of status. This access is given, especially through the market that constitutes itself as the main mediating agent. The processes of privatization and commodification are thus necessary. Taking up the topic of the middle class, today under pressure (OECD 2019), its definition is based in their income, but also it is defined by certain patterns of consumption and access to certain goods, such as housing or education. The French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu identified certain class practices through consumption, that is, how consumer practices are an expression of a social position (Bourdieu 1988), as well as the processes of distinction and equalization between the various groups or social classes. The consumer thus becomes at the center of research and debate, while his practices, his subjectivity and his experiences in relation to consumption are also ways of transforming individuality, community and social relations (Mansvelt 2009).

The processes of social segregation are related to the possibilities of access to consumption or the use of certain spaces for consumption. So consumption becomes a variable from which the city, urban space and social processes that occur in it can be interpreted (Zukin et al. 2009; Martínez-Rigol 2019; D'Alessandro, Martínez-Rigol 2018).

3.4 A cultural logic functional to the system

Our cultural system is based on objects' consumption. The French sociologist Jean Baudrillard showed how modern social life, especially throughout the 20th century, had been focusing on consumption, understood as an ordered system of codes and signs, in which objects play a fundamental role (Baudrillard 1970). There is the necessity of these signs consumption, so that individuals can show their identity, their inclusion and belonging or, on the contrary, their exclusion. This logic is a fundamental part of our system, and makes cultural logic constitutive of accumulation processes of capital.

Thus, the North American hegemony that does not seem at all clear in political and economic terms seems to remain at the cultural and ideological level. This cultural variable in hegemony is related to consumption. The creation of consumption patterns, especially in urban areas and the great world metropolises, is a clear example of how cultural processes have tended to a clear uniformity of the world, also related to the social level with the appearance of a broad middle class, as pointed out previously, today in question. The predominance of the North American way of life today has a global reach, and despite the crisis of neoliberalism, it continues as the most accepted social project worldwide and still without an alternative by the political and economic rivals of the United States. It could be argued, perhaps, that it is through consumption patterns that North American hegemony would continue today (Ornelas 2010; Carreras, Martínez-Rigol 2020).

Mobility, an aspect that for some would be the most outstanding characteristic of globalization, logically does not affect all citizens equally. Some acquire the status of potentially mobile; others remain anchored to the territory. But, even so, the increase in mobility (from migratory flows to tourism) and the use of electronic media have had an impact on social interaction and the increase in cultural trafficking. Within this frame, identities must be renegotiated under a double process of cultural homogenization and heterogeneization, as García Canclini has already shown (García-Canclini 1989). In this process, consumption has become a main element, essential in the construction of identities and lifestyles.

The contradictions presented by the development of this social project, especially in relation to the environment or social inequalities, and which could be placed within the framework of the capital-nature and capital-labor contradictions, do not seem, up to now, to be sufficiently solid as to propose a substantial change in said project. Rather, they seem to be contradictions that the

system is slowly integrating or phagocytizing, as David Harvey has pointed out in the case of the capital-nature contradiction (Harvey 2014).

4. Some recent changes on the Consumer's society at an urban scale

As has already been pointed out, one of the most important elements of the Globalization period was the so-called financiarization of the whole economic system (Méndez 2018). At an urban scale, this element has a clear and strong consequence on the weight of enormous price's inflation in the land market. The real state has been the real manager of the urban economies and societies. Formally, urban land does not constitute a real free market⁸, because of its evident physical limitation and rigidity. Nevertheless, the role of the State as regulator with his powerful weapon of urban planning succeeds to mobilize the buildings and land market, not local anymore, but international (Bernardos et al. 2014). His main instrument is the constant renovation of the urban fabric, even in many historical environments through big punctual interventions. Catalyst has been the euphemistic denomination of this new form of planning⁹.

For understanding urban land prices distribution there is always useful the classical Alonso's argument in his location theory, on the frame of the traditional center periphery dialectics, based on the simple distance (Alonso 1964). However, his logic radio concentric model has become more and more complex, with a similar evolution of the former Chicago school urban models. Thus, even in this case it is possible to think about a multiple nuclei of high urban land prices everywhere in the world, generated by the development of two different actions. For one hand, the urban renovation with catalyst interventions in big projects, sometimes designed by famous starchitects¹⁰ (La Cecla 2004), that creates new centralities in many ancient urban areas (old factories and obsolete infrastructures). On the other hand, there is a process of urban expansion in new edge peripheral cities. In a very similar direction, many tourist resorts, in their most large sense¹¹, concentrate big investments that increase the value of the real state at a regional, national or international level.

⁸ If free market has existed at any time as discussed many years ago by the Hungarian social scientist Karl Polanyi (1886-1964) (Polanyi 1944).

⁹ Chemical mythology is thus added to the Mathematical and Physical tradition in urban planning and in Social Sciences in general.

¹⁰ Name that indicates a reduced group of celebrated architects working at the international level in punctual projects.

¹¹ Including a large range of typologies, as harbor marinas, beach developments, thematic parks, golf courses or ski stations.



Figure 1. One of the traditional and emblematic Barcelona's shop closed because the recent retail changes. Source: Moreno 2020.

A second remarkable element is the hierarchical change in the organization of the chain value into the commercialization networks. The continuous increase of the number, diversity and quantity of goods and services in the consumer's society and the implementation of the just in time new form of service has altered the traditional channels of distribution. The increasing high speed of the transportation means also has highly contributed to this process of change. Thus, logistics become the strategic activity with the subordination both of the production and the retail networks. Accumulation of capital has mainly profited few big distribution and logistics corporations, creating powerful monopolies at a continental scale. One of the best examples could be the USA firm Walmart¹², the top 2019 company by revenues in the *Fortune* rankings, when in 2000 was the oil com-

pany Exxon, and years before the automobile General Motors.

A third element is the recent evolution of the retail and consumption structures at the urban scale. Since the end of the Second World War started a strong competition between the traditional urban shopping structures and the big commercial shops connected to the highways networks. It has been the era of malls and shopping centers, initiated in USA and France and rapidly diffused everywhere. The biggest shopping areas were concentrating capital in front of the small business of urban retail. There was one of the most visible economic dimensions of the traditional center periphery urban dynamics. Many cities of any size in the majority of countries experienced a real decay of their commercial centers in front of the new expansive peripheries, due to the suburbia growth with its particular form of civilization, based on the mass use of the private cars and his consequent daily mobility.

¹² Company created by Sam M. Walton (1918-1992) in 1962.

However, in the last decades of XX Century a movement back to the center of cities begins, both of afforded population and of their consumption patterns. The center periphery dynamics was maintained but changing its preferential direction. The movement generates a certain gentrification era, first analyzed in London and in other Anglo-Saxon cities, and later in the majority of cities all around the world (Smith 1996; Martínez-Rigol 2000; Lees, Slater, Wyly 2008).

Recently, with the hegemony of the financial capital in urban areas, this center periphery dialectics was disorganized in many ways (Carreras 2017). The intense mobility of population overruled the strict christallerian hierarchies, first in the metropolitan areas (Beavon 1977) and after at the rest of urban scales, because the planning of new centralities and the strong specialization processes in the offer of goods and services. A new theory of diffuse cities and their variable geometries has been developed by some Italian economists¹³ in order to explain new urbanization patterns. The center of the city of course exists always but his role is not anymore that of the top of the commercial structure, but the symbolic one, often monopolized by the increasing international tourism. In this period, the commercial and consumption renaissance of city centers generate a process of demalling (D'Alessandro, Sommella, Viganoni 2016).

Finally, it is necessary to take account of the advent and increase of the e-commerce extended by the diffusion of internet uses that has relevant consequences on all forms of urban retail, changing also many of the consumption patterns. In USA at the end of the second decade of the XXI Century a great number of shops, both in malls and in the city center were closed; 9,300 in 2019¹⁴. This new phenomenon has been denominated as the Retail Apocalypse (Philipose 2019). The recent dramatic lockdown of million people in front of the covid-19 pandemic could reinforce this hegemony of the e-commerce, especially from the biggest companies. The stock exchange itinerary of firms like Amazon, Tesla or Procter & Gamble seems to announce the continuity of a new Globalization era more technologic and more cartelized, according to the analysis of the French journal *Le Monde*¹⁵.

5. The planetary urbanization and a social justice and welfare future

An attentive analysis of the strongest lines of thought among the different disciplines of the urban studies indicates the planetary trends of Capitalism and its geographies, since at least the last fifty years. Henri Lefébvre first announced this hypothesis of the total urbanization of society (Lefébvre 1970). A little later, Neil Smith introduced the geography of capitalism as an essential part of the production mode. A capitalism geography that reflects the trends to equating and to differentiating with the typical spatial capitalist contradictions through the unequal development. Smith criticizes Ernest Mandel asserting that the unequal development is a function of the contemporary universality of capitalism (Smith 1984). Milton Santos, for his part, explaining the state of the world at the end of the XX Century, remarks the analogy between the state of politics and the state of techniques He asseverated the unicity of technics. (Santos 2000, 23). We should not forget that all these ideas were already implicit in the book of 1845, *The German Ideology* (Marx, Engels 1845 [1970]).

In order to understand the process of the capitalist urbanization evolution and transformation until the planetary stage, it is important to remark three constitutive moments. Firstly, the period of the concentrated urbanization, during the industrial capitalism, with the reinforcement of the concentration of capital and people in one settlement, at the same time that new agglomeration appears. It is the moment of the exclusive urbanization processes of cities and metropolis. Secondly, the extended urbanization indicated all the territories and landscapes transformations beyond the agglomeration, which maintain its role of driving force of the urbanization. Extended urbanization¹⁶ explains the processes of the operationalization by cities of places and territories beyond the concentrations. The implementation of this process occurs in the influence areas of metropolis and cities, in the medium cities, in the large infrastructures crossing the territory, even in the operationalization of wild areas. Finally, appears the differential urbanization processe that implies a real rupture with the inherited social and spatial order. They are different in each socio-spatial formation, because they are acting over very different spaces. They also produce new potential urban spaces that appropriate the already existing urban con-

¹³ As Giacomo Becattini and Roberto Camagni.

¹⁴ According to the magazine *Forbes*, on January, 25, 2020.

¹⁵ Edition of May, the 2nd, 2020.

¹⁶ This moment of extended urbanization finds a clear relationship with the counter-urbanization process defined by Brian Berry in 1976, and the debates on the compact and diffuse city.

figurations and create new forms of urban space (Brenner, Schmid 2015).

Today the urban phenomenon appears in a more variegated, polymorphic, diverse and multiscalar nature, from these three moments. Its concrete processes are densification of the intrametropolitan networks that demand big infrastructures, restructuring of the great agglomeration's hinterlands, expansion of the industrialized agriculture and destruction of the rural forms of life, as well as the operationalization of the areas before considered *saltus*¹⁷ (Brenner, Schmid 2015).

As seen, the recent processes of urban restructuration originated by the social, political, economic and cultural transformations in the 1970's force to question the traditional way of the urban phenomenon and his present hegemony known as the New Urban Era [NUA] (Brenner, Schmid 2014). The hegemony of NUA is based on the consensus that the urban problems are materialized on the cities, as a settlement typology defined by its dimension, density and diversity that allow the distinction between the city and its outside (Brenner, Schmid 2015).

Because all of this, it is necessary to conclude to discard the theoretic and methodologic tools used until today in the study of agglomeration. Analyze the urban phenomenon today demand to go far beyond, but do not leaving attention to the cities transformations, as well as recreate the useful concepts of the classical urban studies in order to explain our present and open our future (Schmid 2014, 70).

Planetary urbanization is the paradigm that consent these fundamental theoretic reorientations and new methodological proposals. Is the concept that allows the explanation of the present difference, heterogeneity and complexity of urbanization processes. Planetary urbanization, in spite of the fact that the current transformations and changes have a global range because the existence of capitalism all around our world, which surface –and even beyond– is completely urbanized at certain degree, do not implies any kind of homogenization of urbanization. On the contrary, urbanization today is not a unique global process but a complex interplay of related but contradictory processes marked by uneven development of capitalism (Schmid 2018, 2).

Differential urbanization, still in theoretical and interpretative elaboration, together with the other two moments of urbanization summarize the dynamism of today capitalist urban forms in his dialectics between

innovation and obsolescence. It comprises also all the rest of urban processes, concentrated and extended, today fastest and more dynamics, and accelerated at the same rhythm than the contradictions of the capitalism in crisis. The contradictory processes of acceleration and stagnation are territorialized into the relation between space and society, contradicting the everyday life that become more difficult, more unjust, more dangerous and less livable.

This differential urbanization is therefore a moment in the historical evolution of socio-spatial transformations. A moment when could be suspected the systemic and chronic crisis of the capitalist mode of production as known until today. And it is possible to connect it to the dynamics of implosions and explosions summarized by Lefébvre. These are constant and continuous processes of socio-spatial restructuration into and outside of the agglomeration (every day far beyond) that take place in our historical time, the present stage of the capitalist mode of production inaugurated in the 1970's. Lefébvre defined this as a great concentration (of people, activities, capital, goods and objects, tools, means, thoughts) on the urban reality and a biggest crash with the projection of multiple and scattered fragments of peripheries, secondary residences, satellites, etc. (Lefébvre 1970).

With no doubt, the main contradiction is the putting together absolute space and differential space. The first could be defined as the planning space that tends to total homogenization and seize the second, the lived space. This contradiction leads to the question of difference and inequality. It is into the everyday life where the inequality is materialized, and where the difference is expresses and mute. Demonstrate the difference, against the homogenizer pushing, could lead us to the conscience (Santos 2000).

Thus if the urbanization is differential it is also because is fostered and shadowed at the same times by the different forms of urban fight. Here is necessary to put also the conflicts and the competition at all the scales, the war of places in Santos words. Into the denial, there appears also the contestation. The differential space generated by the contradictions of the abstract space (mainly the conceived space of planning) offers also a new horizon of all that is possible. This is at the same time a theoretical and political task¹⁸ (Lefébvre 1970; 1974). In this sense Brenner and Schmid affirm that urbanization is just the mean and the expression of this collision/transformation (Brenner, Schmid 2015).

¹⁷ Along with the *saltus*, the unknown and wild where it can be assaulted, are the *ager* and the *polis*, as types of artificialization of the earth, in their Latin denominations.

¹⁸ Lefébvre placed alongside induction and deduction, transduction, the reflection of the possible virtual object.

It is possible to conclude that some social change trends are consolidating. Mainly, the overcoming of the country-city contradiction and the permanent crisis of capitalism modify the vectors of the counter hegemonic movement. The triumphant postmaterialist values of the 1960's are recovered today with the subsistence as the vertebrating axis of the political combat at all the scales. The processes of differential urbanization, in their multiple forms as the logistic urbanization, contribute this recomposition. It is the case, for instance, of the mining sector in Chile which reorganization generate new political subjects from the decline of the peasantry (Arboleda 2017). New political subjects that could produce the constitution of a class for itself. It announces a necessary debate around the emancipatory possibilities that planetary urbanization consents to envisage in our horizon.

The present sanitary emergence and the forwarding economic and social cataclysm are a consolidating part of the general trend invigorated in 2008. We are confronting the sixth decade of a permanent capitalist crisis period that could become chronic for other decades. The end of capitalism seems to be more possible than ever, in spite of the unknown way of his reconfiguration and of which new system will produce (Wallerstein 2013; Streeck 2016). However, we are certain that we are very far from the pompous discourses announcing the triumph of the liberalism, and the social history is open again, if sometimes was really closed. If nothing will be the same than before, we urgently need new theoretical and methodological tools, and normative Social Sciences that could help to develop the perspectives that are today potential in the social history itself.

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e-mail: segreteria@societageografica.it – sito web: www.societageografica.it

conto corrente postale 33087008

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