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Foreword

LIDA VIGANONI

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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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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

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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 Aspicio. 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 Aspicio 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 Aspicio 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 are 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, Euronic, 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 supermarkets 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 “Citadella”.

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 hotspot, 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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