

The invisible roads of contemporary businesses

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Abstract

At what time of mercantile history to the idea of a product packaged to meet human needs has replaced the encompassing concept of a man educated to comply with a particular status symbol? It is in the idea of globalization that you can frame this radical change, fruit of a process more than of a particular event. The reflections presented in this article, which are the summary of a larger work which involved more scholars and two PRIN, try to highlight a truth intuitively understood by most people: globalization has forever changed the practice of the trade. The demonstration of the thesis goes through the comparison between the two systems of trade, apart in time and antithetical in the culture, and, for this, particularly illustrative. The two different realities will be compared with respect to three levels of analysis. Starting from the shops for retail sale, then through the issue of commercial buildings and their relationships with urban settings, you finally come to the networks of regional trade relations. On the side of the tradition we place the shopping streets of the North African territories, on that of globalization we put the architectures of the Italian shopping centers. Both represent two clearly definable contexts respect to the exposed thesis. This clear evidence has determined both the choice and the juxtaposition.

Keywords: Market, trader, trade, shopping center

Introduction

At what time of mercantile history to the idea of a product packaged to meet human needs has replaced the encompassing concept of a man educated to comply with a particular status symbol? It is in the idea of globalization that you can frame this radical change, fruit of a process more than of a particular event. Transformation that has influenced the modern dynamics of trade to the extreme limit consisting of the dematerialization of the exchange spaces in the specific agora of virtual worlds. This demarcation highlights how the recorded change release completely the organization of commercial structures from models of human settlement of the area related to the localization of goods, whether food, manufactured goods or technology products. We will try to prove this thesis through the contraposition of two systems that differ greatly. On the one hand some traditional commercial roads of the North African territories, on the other the modern system of Italian shopping centers. The comparative analysis shows a clear transformation from an optimized system on issues of production and logistics (the merchants roads) to another in which the dynamics of settlement of commercial activities, organized on the concept of catchment area can be represented as an invisible network of graphs (the international ways of finance).

The reflections presented in this article are the summary of a larger work which involved more scholars and two PRIN, try to highlight a truth intuitively understood by most people: globalization has forever changed the practice of the trade. If on one hand the impetus for the exchange remains one of the most important keys to understanding the contemporary social dynamics, globalization has transformed a system of exchanges between individuals or social groups in an "impersonal" system of trade flows regulated by centralized and codified procedures whose main purpose is that to optimize profits through, for example, reducing business costs.

The demonstration of the thesis goes through the comparison between the two systems of trade, apart in time and antithetical in the culture, and, for this, particularly illustrative. The two different realities will be compared with respect to three levels of analysis. Starting from the shops for retail sale, then through the issue of commercial buildings and their relationships with urban settings, you finally come to the networks of regional trade relations. On the side of the tradition we place the shopping streets, on that of globalization we put the architectures of shopping centers. Both represent two clearly definable contexts respect to the exposed thesis. This clear evidence has determined both the choice and the juxtaposition.

The system of the shops in the three study cases of Rabat, Kairouan and Nefta

The area of the sale, in traditional markets, is the point at which, physically, supply and demand meet. This is the place where the merchandise becomes the protagonist. Every possible strategy is put in place to present in the best way the product: the stalls expose the goods, and, leaning toward the street, attract wayfarers. The shop windows, where present, usually exhibit the most precious goods. Shades and umbrellas, finally, identify and define the spaces of negotiation. The goods is the engine of all. Whether it is inside the shop windows or on market stalls, the product is exposed according to practical criteria (the distribution on the counter) but also in order to glorify sight, touch and smell. The architecture - the front of the buildings, moldings, balconies, cornices - disappears during the day to regain the prominence of the commercial space at night, once folded shades, disassembled mobile equipment, closed the shutters of the shops. The examined examples are Rabat: Rue des Consuls; Kairouan: avenue Ali Belhouane; Nefta: rue Chaffai Cheriff (being all three the result of a long campaign of surveys by Francesca Fatta, Sebastiano Nucifora, Anna Petino e Agostino Urso). The comparison of the three study cases makes possible the generalization of the mechanisms of sale on which commercial activities are organized separately or considered as a global phenomenon. The market recognizes the goods as the only reliable protagonist.

Rabat: Rue des Consuls, part of the Rabat medina. Rue des Consuls looks like an almost straight road axis, oriented in a direction south-north, separated into two parts by the rue Souika. The southern part of the road, which is accessed past the Bab el Mellah, is mainly used for the sale of spices, food and handicrafts organized with precarious and mobile stalls, according to the logic of maximum flexibility. As you head north commercial space is more structured. Makeshift installations are replaced by architecturally defined spaces characterized by sequences of doors and portals in richly decorated wood. The shops, placed on causeways axis road, sometimes occupy part of the public space using removable structures, some other times predispose their windows obtaining places on which to present and preserve the best goods. Places are sometimes enriched by moving wings of the fixtures on which is exposed a further quantity of goods. Across the street you notice the absence of advertising signs of great visual impact, such as illuminated signs, emphasizing the concept that good merchandise is the best among the possible advertising.

Kairouan: avenue Ali Belhouane. Located in the heart of the city, the avenue Ali Belhouane maintains, as in the other study cases, a fixed pattern: the extension of the area of trade, although limited to working hours, goes beyond the physical limit of the shop through the use of stands. Once again, to the mobile structures are added, for the exposition of the goods, the inner doors of the frames which, properly removed and hung up, serve both as exhibitors of products and as filters between the store and the space in front of it. Also in this case, for the sale of products of greater value, the commercial strategy prefers a pattern of greater guarantee to the seller. As in Rabat, the important goods is placed inside the shop windows, which are often finely decorated to draw attention and even to act as a filter between the object and its potential buyer. In discrepancy with the study case of Rabat we are in the presence of commercial architecture characterized by a greater typological homogeneity. As a general rule, each store is composed of a fixed part, a system composed of an entrance and a window, and a mobile part, the external stand. The latter, according to the commercial activities, specializes in forms at the same time ingenious, functional and beautifully presented. Once again little or insufficient attention is given to the advertising signs. The ability to attract the customer is entrusted both to a sophisticated product presentation and to the proverbial friendliness of the local merchants. Once again, during the night and when the businesses stop, architecture regains its urban stratified and complex space.

Nefta: rue Chaffai Cheriff. Among the three, the shopping street of Nefta is certainly the most humble. Placed on the northwest edge of the Place de la Liberté, it appears to the customer slowly, as you approach to its shops. The market space is quite moderate and it is composed of two orthogonal paths, the first of which, the one tangent to the square, is about fifty meters long. The intersection of the two main shopping streets is underlined by an old hotel, which is the building of major interest among all. The entire complex, excluding hotel, consists of a floor above ground level. All shops, directly connected to the road, have quite regular modules. Their compositional rhythm is further emphasized by an equal number of accesses among them homogenous in shape and color. If possible, a greater visual unity is achieved through the exclusive use of the brick as exterior facing. The almost total absence of advertising signs and shop windows makes the exercise of trade even more direct. The only object that stands between seller and buyer is the stall on which you expose the few available goods.

The streets of the market between Morocco and Tunisia

Usually placed in the medinas of their cities, the shopping streets, together with the places of worship, are the main engines of development. Representing these architectures in relation to the respective cities can often determine whether the logic of foundation but also to suggest the subsequent dynamics of transformation. Finally, size and complexity of commercial space often implies an equivalent level of welfare, of social development and cultural progress, present or past.

Rabat: Rue des Consuls. Integrated to the medina of Rabat, Rue des Consuls looks like a nearly straight road axis, oriented in a direction north-south, parallel to the river Bouregreg. The road, positively characterized by the quality of its architecture, qualifies as one of the key points of the entire medina. At the urban level, are evident the relationships between the Rue des Consuls, the ancient city walls, the access doors and the main places of worship. Examining the details, the way is orthogonally crossed and divided into two parts by the rue Souika which represents a significant and invisible border of demarcation. The latter, in fact, separates the southern area from the northern one that is, between the two, the most important and structured one. Going in a northerly direction, the functional integration of the road to the surrounding urban context is compositionally underlined by the alternation of small shops in places specialized in handicraft production, the Kaisarie, once great fondouk used as shelters and warehouses for merchants.

Kairouan: avenue Ali Belhouane. Even in this study case there is a clear relationship between the urban medina, the shopping street and the main places of worship. Once again we are in the presence of a linear urban axis which, in this example, implies a serial and commercially specialized tissue. The ordered sequence of small cells, at the urban level, identifies the homogeneous tissue at Al Assouek. The shopping area, though compact and perfectly integrated in the medina, contrasts sharply with the residential typology with which it relates. Though in a globally homogeneous tissue, the change of structural space of commercial buildings stands out for differences compared to traditional Islamic residences. Aspect that stands out most in the northern area than in the southern one that, between the two, is the most fragmentary. The level of complexity and quality of the exchanges in the medina of Kairouan, trade center of absolute importance in the Tunisians territories, is emphasized in the middle portion of the commercial axis by the presence of a wooden roof painted in blue. This superstructure, useful shades from the summer heat, underlines and highlights the most relevant part of the entire trading system.

Nefta: rue Chaffai Cheriff. The shopping street, in this study case, is located in the ancient district of Ouled Chrif, the more structured and compact one in Nefta. The rest of the city, in fact, is marked by numerous voids that, in the tradition of the town, suggests the presence of numerous families of tribal origin. Ouled Chrif is physically separate from the modern city by two mutually perpendicular axes. The first is the avenue Bourguiba, oriented along the west-east direction, which represents the main pole of urban aggregation. It is around this road which concentrates most of the public buildings. The second, characterized by green palm trees and by the blue of the irrigation canals, connecting the corbeille (source water) with the oasis. Circumnavigate the neighborhood is an experience that allows you to frame the medina as a compact housing, almost introverted, which turns his back systematically to the palmerie. Its permeability is however guaranteed by numerous roads, sometimes hedged sometimes not, which follow one another being meandering and seemingly devoid of prevailing direction. The real barycentre of the neighborhood, place de la Liberté, it is the only urban void noteworthy, the result of a renovation of the historic center operated by the French at the time of the Protectorate. To the north-west of the square, preceded by a small place, is the entrance to the first part of the market. At the other end is positioned an abandoned hotel. Finally, from the latter begins the second part, perpendicular to the first, which ends heading west crossing the margin of the same district at a small square in front of the mosque of Sidi Zmourine. Finally, looking at the planimetry of the entire district, you immediately notice the obvious contrast between the court houses and the street market. In the first you experience the city's traditional Arabic characters defined as islands surrounded by roads on which overlook the blind passages that lead to the heart of housing. In the second, the street market, the reasoning is reversed. In most cases, the system of the shops, without any mediation, interfaces directly with the road.



Fig. 1: Maps of Rabat (Anna Petino); Kairouan (Sebastiano Nucifora); Nefta (Agostino Urso)

The ways of the trade in the Western Sahara

The gold road, the salt route, the route of the slaves: it is worth crossing a hostile, inaccessible and desolate place - the Sahara desert - only in exceptional circumstances, where the dangers of an improbable journey are consistently rewarded by great gains. How to cross, however, this sea of stone and sand? Were necessary some support bases, the oases, man-made for this purpose. Vital centers but also metaphorical harbors of ancient routes that cross the sea of the Sahara. They are at the same time the primary source of supply in the desert and precious nodes of a commercial network that for centuries has linked the shores of the Mediterranean sea to sub-Saharan Africa. If the Sahara is considered as the sea, the caravans are its ships. And there are ships built for large distances but also ships of "coasting". We take for example, in the case of Tunisia, the caravans that starting from the sub-Saharan territories headed towards the Mediterranean Sea and then in the direction of Tunis. The track crossing the desert contemplated some necessary stops such as Douz, Gabes and Kairouan. Douz, formerly known as the navel (Douz as sorra), is configured as barycentre of a secondary clearing network. Products of lower quality like food or craft items replace slaves and gold, caravans reduce their size and, thus, the distances traveled. Douz commercial network covers an average radius of about 600 km which, it will be a case, corresponds to the distances between Douz and the cities of Tunis, Tripoli, Ghadames, Ain Salah. We can definitely say that on the examined territories are structured hierarchically organized commercial networks and mutual functional relationship. The dynamics that determine them are ultimately derived from factors such as the importance of the goods, their production area, the dynamics of the exchange, the orography of the area and the location of the oasis.

Rabat: Rue des Consuls. Rabat, Morocco's capital, is a city that faces the sea, the Atlantic Ocean, and that rests on the bend of a river, the Bouregreg. Founded by the Phoenicians around the third century BC, it very quickly becomes a focal point for trade so much for the Mediterranean routes and for the trans-Saharan ones. Passed the Phoenicians, then the Romans, then the Muslims, even the pirates and even the French. The city undergoes many domains but it maintains consistently a vocation to trade. From the city passed gold, slaves, food and even fine fabrics and handicrafts. Depending on the domination and on historical periods prevailed one or the other merchandise and with time they built a network of increasingly branched paths. By land are important those tracks whose caravans, going towards the South, cross the Atlas Mountains in order to trade in salt and slaves. A legend says that the Moroccans crossed the desert to get to Timbuktu, the walls of which, it was said, were built in massive gold. The story instead tells us that these trades related to the "white gold", the salt extracted from the salt pans of Taoudenit. About the slaves, the strong commercial link between Rabat and Sudan is testified by the Souk el Ghezal (located in the far north of Rue des Consuls) - Today the wool market - once a place used for the sale of slaves.

Kairouan: avenue Ali Belhouane. The importance of Kairouan, in the Tunisian territorial context, is highlighted by two fundamental aspects: geographic location, cultural and spiritual importance. Kairouan is the fourth holiest city of the entire Islamic culture. From a geographical point of view, the centrality of the city is emphasized by its position as a crossroads between two major caravan routes. The first directrix, the east-west one, within the limits of the state, connecting the Mediterranean Sea with the massif of the Aurès. Then placed in a broader context it connects the outer fringe of the Muslim world. The second directrix, the northern-south one, starting from the city of Tunis, passes through its territory, crossing Kairouan, Gabes, Douz, and the Grand Oriental Erg before going into the territories of the Niger. Gold and slaves are the most valuable goods, those that before any other move the caravans along this trans-Saharan path. Kairouan has always had a strong commercial vocation and for this, in its history, it has played a dual role: as crossroads of the major trans-Saharan paths and as barycentre of a portion of the territory included roughly in the triangle whose vertices are positioned in Sousse, Sfax and Kasserine. This second network of businesses has been traditionally fueled by a prosperous manufacturing sector (textiles, carpets, ceramics, leather and pottery) which joins the commercialization of a wide variety of agricultural products and foodstuffs.

Nefta: rue Chaffai Cheriff. The city, which as some others has remote and uncertain origin, was established as a rest and restoration point where the caravan routes met the natural water spring. As Erodoto tells us, the logic of settlements followed based schemes of displacements, from encampment to encampment, lasting a maximum of ten days of walking, travelling by camel or dromedary. Once again the development of the city center has been favored by two factors that recur cyclically in these territories: movements and exchanges both commercial and religious ones. In spiritual terms Nefta boasts the presence of 24 mosques and 100 marabout. In terms of trade the urban center is organically connected to the network of cities that

gravitate around the Chott el Djerid, the great salt sea of Tunisia. Yet, Nefta like many other towns in the region, was a Phoenician, Roman, Byzantine, Arab, Ottoman colony, and was finally under French control before conquering the independence together with its own nation. In terms of the settlement, the city is perfectly in relation to the desert with which it coexists. Nefta, like all cities of the Chott, adopt an urban plant characterized by parallel streets oriented in function of the prevailing winds and then in causal relationship with the palmerie. The city, being the last outpost of the Chott el Djérid on the Algerian side, is divided into two parts by the avenue Habib Bourguiba. The road collects many interesting aspects: it separates the new town from the old one; it appears as the main axis of aggregation of public functions; it belongs to the track that, tangent to the salt desert, connects proceeding from the Algerian border, the city of Herzouan, Nefta, Tozeur, Kebili, Douz. This, finally, stands as intermediary node between the commercial circuit just described and one of the most important track of the trans-Saharan Tunisia.



Fig. 2: Planimetric schemes of Rabat (Anna Petino); Kairouan (Sebastiano Nucifora); Nefta (Agostino Urso)

Marketing: the new science of trade

Reggio Calabria, the town. An international brand, Auchan City. Two commercial structures comparable in size. Two different owners. The first architecture is located in the northern part of the city, close to the historic center. The second, set in a more peripheral area (the populous district of Sbarre), is located along its main driveway, the avenue Calabria Avenue. The first, yet, is a restored building obtained by reconfiguring an old FIAT automobile plant. The second building is a new project built on a vacant lot. Comparing the two structures, in light of the presence of a single tenant, allows to draw some interesting conclusions. The first concerns the formal relationship between the definition of the architectural envelope and design of interior spaces. In both cases you can see that the outer case looks like a simple, basic, hermetically shielded structure. It appears as a continuous wall surface where the only relevant openings are the main entrances and the emergency exits. The second observation concerns the fact that the sales areas of the two plants have distribution patterns virtually identical, although both cases are affected by the presence of different design constraints. The last observation concerns the parking arrangement. In the first case, the one of the restored building, parking lots, although separated from the commercial activities, occupy a part of the building complex. In the second case, that of the project, the parking arrangement has a classic solution: they are allocated in the entire underground floor. The lesson that we can draw is quite clear: the presentation of goods in the retail space has priority over any possible compositional logic. Within a unified space for the shape, the spaces of trade are organized as an aggregation of micro perspectives each of which aimed at the capture of a specific social target. Multiplying the micro scenes exponentially increases the ability to capture the customer as well as any possible increase of the same retail spaces. In spite of touch and smell, the packaging prevails on the product, on its real look, on its natural color, on its texture. Gone are the days of bargaining, of fumes and perfumes sometimes intense, sometimes sweet and delicate. In perfect order and in absolute silence each individual package defends its formal perfection, perched on always ordered, organized and rigorous shelves. From the care of the product we passed to the care of the customer. This is the key to understanding such a radical change. Be realized means wearing simultaneously the clothes of the manager, of the intellectual and of the sportsman, activating a whirlwind of experiences that lead to an emotional hypertrophy that anesthetizes the mind. The result of this media

bombardment produces a new figure, the consumer, that is by definition a compulsive individual who does not buy any more what he needs, but what guarantees to him the apparent acquisition and preservation of a status symbol. The final slogan is: to buy, buy, buy.

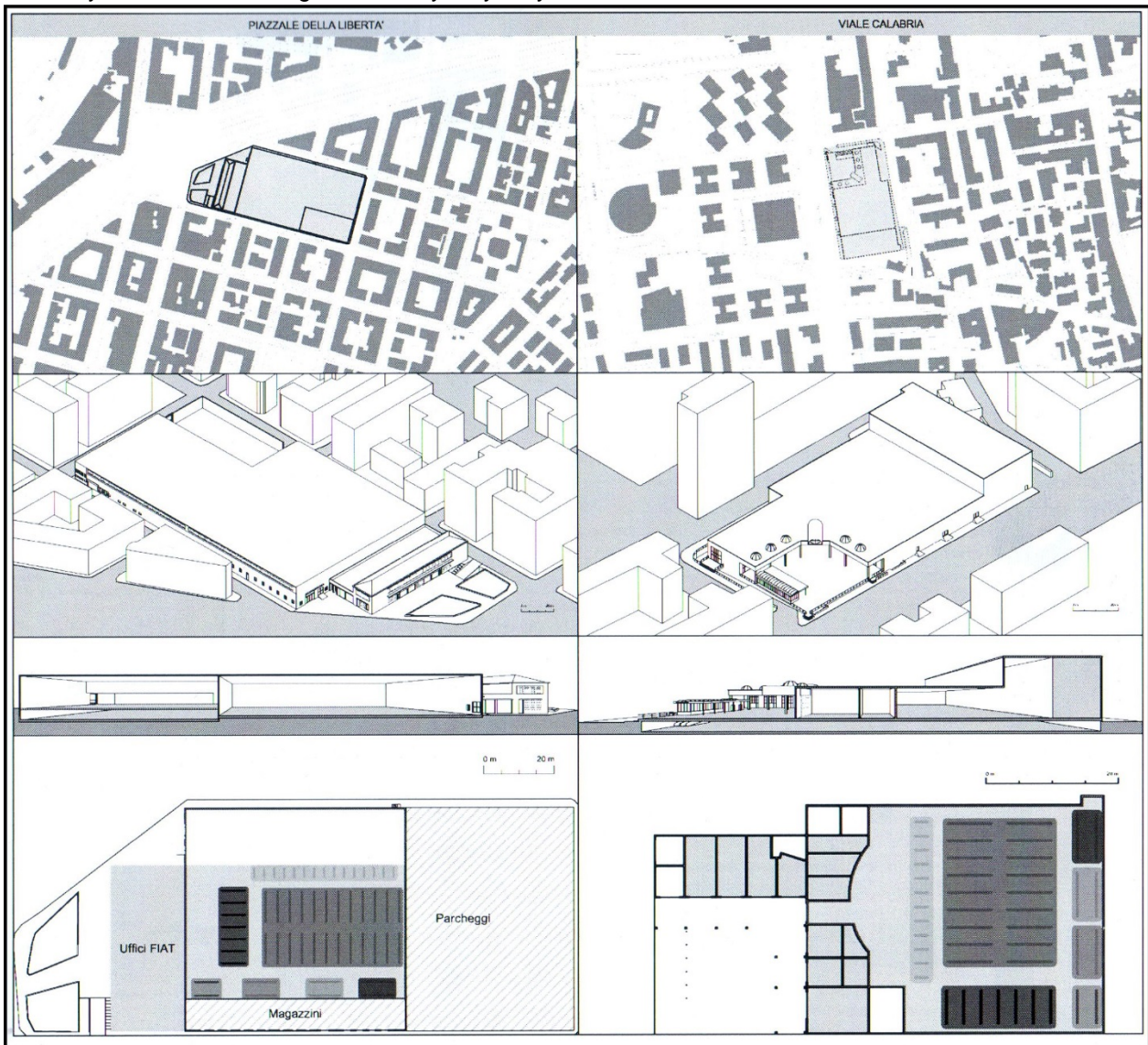


Fig. 3: Plan comparison between two Auchan city

The city and the shopping center

The image is by its nature, still, complete and perfect. It is the result of an act that in the present, orphan of the past and unable to look to the future, does not evolve or involve. It can only be used and replaced. In this context, the need to produce architectures characterized by a deep figurative value, but also manifest symbol of a trade group, subvert so much the way of conceiving the project as a way of understanding and interpreting the figure of the designer. Indeed, the need to assemble a three-dimensional system of signs, of which the immediate recognition is guaranteed presupposes a transience, if not a contradiction of the decorative, functional, spatial and figurative elements, having these to be quickly updated or replaced to maintain unchanged the affection to the brand or the product. The architectural design, in spite of the building type, turns into an overlapping of functions in constant becoming, without the beginning or the end, tenaciously oriented to the control of a permanent state of design and construction. How far from the "spontaneous" architectural stratification of the streets of the market! The shopping centers, regardless of the location or the urban context in which they are located, are essentially artifacts as impeccable on the technological level as approved and standardized on the formal one. They are autonomous and

decontextualized islands , indifferent to any form of dialogue with its context, apart from the logistics-infrastructural point of view. The approach is always the same: to a simplification of the architectural envelope and a separation from the external environment usually contrasts a multiplication of the interior spaces and their qualitative connotation that is extremely varied and rich. Rather than integrate with the urban context, it appears as its representation in a reduced scale. On the one hand the contemporary city has produced a fragmented and incoherent universe in which the urban space becomes a fluid, variable, unstable and mobile mass. On the other hand it has produced the philosophy of the shopping center which fits perfectly the figurative description of the contemporary city. A dynamic space in which the perception of reality is experienced in terms of a dual relationship: a constant physical transformation of the urban environment and its equivalent intangible images, increasingly complex, increasingly stratified. Powerful appears the image of the hypertext as a possible system for arranging activities. The project, in fact, beyond the architectural qualities of its compositional system, is organized according to a topological structure of graphs whose nodes are all accessible through endless paths, each of which is at the same time point of arrival and of departure for new activities. The shopping center, looks like a labyrinth, but its strong tendency to the ordered use of images, at the same time powerful and clear, produces interest and curiosity while avoiding the unpleasant feeling of disorientation.

Brief history of shopping centers

The modern history of shopping centers originated in the United States, the prime mover of Western culture after World War II. From the first Mall designed by Victor David Gruen, in Minnesota in 1957, much time has passed. If on one hand it is clear the paternity of the American type, on the other its next graft in Europe has produced a wide range of original solutions. It is at the beginning of the 60 buildings that we are witnessing to the first building result of a synthesis between the US model and European trade architectures : the department stores and shopping arcades. Are the problems of congestion and accessibility of urban areas to suggest a rethinking of the entire retail commercial distribution network. The intent is to encourage the use of the car and at the same time a more balanced and rich concentration of goods and services for leisure. Thus, in later times, develop two design strategies. The first assumes the design of the suburban shopping center. Therefore, once consolidated the first model, concurrent to the evolution of an ecological thinking on the issues of recovery and reuse of architectural, states a trend to the conversion of crumbling structures in the heart of the city producing important examples of urban requalification. All models of the main European countries, it can be demonstrated, have comparable dynamics of development. Choose the Italian case, therefore, allows once again to exemplify the dynamics about a wider context. In Italy the phenomenon of globalization began with clear delay as regards most Western countries, probably because of the Municipal Commercial Plan (planning instrument regulated by Law 426 of 1971). Only some time later, in the period between 1988 and 1992, following the French and German models, they began to plan and regulate the opening of shopping centers. We remember, for importance, the center Bonola, in the Gallaratese neighborhood in Milan and Cinecittà 2, located in the hinterland of Rome. In 1991, then, opens Curno with the first Media World Store at that time an unknown brand, today a market leader. It is only between 1993 and 1997 that consolidates a real urban integration policy of the shopping center to the development policies of the territory. Among the many structures designed in this context include the Centro Leonardo in Imola and the Grande Mela in Sana (in triveneto) that proposes the first experiment of integration between the shopping center, the multiplex cinema and the games room. But it is with the construction of the shopping center Gigli di Campi, in Prato, which, for the first time in Italy, the commissioning is addressing to regional customers. These are also the years in which the design of the first shopping centers in Southern Italy began. A little later, between 1998 and 2002, the social debate, from long time focusing on the issues of recovery and reuse of architectural heritage, induces the government to intervene in the dynamics of localization of trade architecture, through the provision of economic incentives or town planning facilities. The aim is to recover the particularly degraded urban areas. A striking example is that of Casalbertone, in Rome, that provides a boost to the reactivation of the regional economy through restructuring and conversion of an entire industrial area. Among the new proposals by the big brands of particular interest is the construction of the first Factory Outlet centers among which, at a European scale, we point out that of Serravalle. The final turning point, a law reorganization, coincides with the enactment of Decree Law No. 114 of 1998 (the so-called Bersani law), which simplifies the acquisition of new business licenses. Noteworthy is the project of Orio Center, directly connected to the Bergamo airport. It was the first shopping center to get to open on Sundays in Italy. The next innovation is the testing of the commercial type of Liesure Centre, yet another invention designed to enlarge the number of customers. It is in the period between 2003 and 2008, that investors yet dissatisfied raise further the target. Proliferate, thus, new shopping centers of regional dimension among which the Parco Leonardo in Fiumicino, the shopping center Vulcano Buono (Renzo Piano) and Etnapolis (designed by Massimiliano Fuksas). A lot time has passed from the design of the first

shopping centers. The tastes have evolved and cultural patterns of outdated architectures have become obsolete. The time of their renewal arrived. The examples of Curno shopping centers and of Carousel in Carugate, in addition to the Giulia one in Trieste are paradigmatic. Recent experiments noteworthy are the business parks and Factory Outlet centers, shopping centers models that emphasize a greater extent, a strategy aimed to dimensional gigantism. From these realizations derives an observation: the design of commercial structures of greater size, which corresponds to an ever wider catchment area, pursues the strategy for exponentially increasing the volume of trade carried out. And so we come to the present day in which the global crisis interrupted this policy of expansion. The trend that follows seems to direct the work of the experts towards production of quality projects related to issues of environmental sustainability and urban regeneration.

The foregoing reasoning allows us some concluding reflections. The Italian network of shopping centers is developed according to a model in which appear first architectures of medium or small size. Only at a later time we proceed to the design of commercial exercises of greater size. The system, in this stage, reaches its maximum level of development which corresponds to a complex hierarchical structure of the commercial network: there is an interregional one, a regional one and finally, the local one. Then when we shift the focus from the dynamic of location of shopping centers to the forms of organization of the respective properties, the ultimate mystery is revealed : the entire management of the now globalized businesses appears indifferent as to the size of the commercial network that its distribution on the territory. Looking at the whole system from the right perspective allows to notice two important aspects. The first is the realization that the entire global market is managed by an ever smaller number of actors. The second relates to the speed with which was transformed the structure of trade. Little more than fifty years have been enough to impose a single model of trade, whose organization is perfectly suited to every place, culture or social model.

The invisible network: the Retail Real Estate

We described how, in the architecture of shopping centers, is felt the presence of images obsessively homogenizing whose reading leads immediately to the stereotype of "total consumer". This result is pursued with conviction by a commercial network whose purpose is to optimize all the strategies needed to maximize profits. The financialization of the management of shopping centers, therefore, appears as an integrated system of skills, among which that of the architect is not even the most incisive. On top of the pyramid lays the investment companies and individual owners. Next, there are the developers, divided into traditional and professional ones. It is then the turn of the specialized companies, classified in Retail Companies, in Management Companies and in Companies providing services. Further down, in this hierarchy pyramid, are at the Tenants / Renters. Finally, at the bottom, you can identify the Consortia or Associations of the Operators. Let's proceed with order. The first two categories are those who have the responsibility to define the nature, the placement and amount of investment. In them are normally present players of international level such as "institutional investors", typically made up of sovereign wealth funds, insurance companies, investment funds, financial companies and pension funds. Among the actors playing is anyway the category of Developers, whether traditional or professional, the one that establishes the investment strategies. Other key players in the financial structure, are the companies that are involved in various ways in the process of implementation and management of the architectural work. This is for us the most interesting level to which belong the architectural and engineering professionals. Usually, these companies are divided into three categories: the marketing companies, management companies and utility companies. Each of them is related to the merchandising mix. The circle is completed by the two categories which can be defined, consumers apart, as the final users of the shopping center: the Tenants / Renters and the Consortium or Association of operators. The opening of a new shopping center, in a nutshell, is reduced to a very complex analysis which occurs step by the step. The first consists in the determination of the area of influence (isochronous) of the structure, usually assessed in a distance equal to about forty-five minutes travel time by car. This is the portion of territory which assess the quantity and quality of potential consumers. In the same area, then it is important to evaluate the extent of possible competitors. Both estimates are determined by evaluating at the same time the number of municipalities involved and the disposable income of the resident population. Being this first phase completed it is then necessary to go on for further investigation. You must assess the level of market saturation. This is the data which determines the degree of crowding and competition ongoing on the territory. Then, the effect of overlap (the overlapping), becomes a business risk far more appreciable than competition between different brands. This observation suggests further statistics evaluation necessary to estimate the strength of the single competitor. The importance of the individual competitors is measured with respect to the totality of the centers included in the catchment area, broken down until the smaller unit reference (the size of the district). Increasingly sophisticated analysis, based on the discipline of geomarketing, inevitably open the market to operators of high capacity and experience, able to impose their own structures. Autonomous organizations whose work focuses on statistical analysis necessary to meet the demands previously made. Retail Real Estate is the name that describes the set of these companies. International operators which are configured as the protagonists of the commercial scene.

In Italy, for example, we can cite the case of Cogest Italia that manages a total of 36 structures, some of which are located in the provinces of Turin, Trieste, Macerata, Padua, Perugia, Cagliari, Verona, Pisa, Siena, Agrigento, Caltanissetta, Reggio Calabria and Catanzaro. We can also mention the case of the Italian Shopping Centers (ICC) which in addition to Etnapolis, one of the largest shopping centers in Italy, manages a total of ten of them including VeronaUno (Verona), Palladio (Vicenza) and Grand'A (Cuneo).

A study case: Calabria

Going further down the scale, we try finally to represent, through three synthetic maps, a model of development of shopping centers at a regional level. The case of Calabria. Starting from a study carried out by the Department of Economics of the University of Calabria (the PIT 22 - Area of the Straits) the first map identifies and defines the catchment areas in which are the 14 centers included in the census in the region in 2011. The second map, then, tells the size and distribution on the territory of the shopping centers. The understanding of the data that will be exposed necessity, however, of a brief introduction related to the classification of the types of commercial buildings. Distinction made by the National Council of Shopping Centers which proposes a possible organization with respect to the categories of size, of location and of type of use. The three categories are:

1 *Size* • Neighborhood shopping center: GLA lower than 5.000 sq.m.; • Shopping Center of small size: GLA 5.000 – 19.999 sq.m.; • Shopping Center of medium size: GLA 20.000 – 39.999 sq.m.; • Large shopping center: 40.000 – 79.999 sq.m.; • Regional shopping center in an extensive area: GLA over 80.000 sq.m .

2 *Location* • Urban location: represented by the central areas with high commercial density; • Peripheral location: or in semi-central areas or the edge of the urban area with a limited commercial density; • Suburban location: it has generally a provincial attraction, in areas with low commercial attraction, but well linked by roads.

3 *Type of use* • Single type of use: when it is inserted into a building intended only to be used as shopping Centre;

Multiple type of use: when it is added to a multifunctional building such as a residential one, a directional office, a public office, an hotel etc.

Returning to our investigations, then, the data indicate the presence of the main type of medium shopping center with suburban location and type of single use. Fifty percent of the shopping centers included in the census fall into the category just described. Of the other fifty percent, three have a gross leasable area (Gross Leasable Area) ranging from 10,000 sqm and 20,000 sqm, the last four, mainly urban, have a GLA of less than 10,000 square meters. Of the fourteen activities included in the census, The Fountains is the only retail park built to date in Calabria. The final map, the historical one, tells the temporal development of the regional system of shopping centers. From this it appears that, once the phase of colonization of the market has passed, the new projects aim to expand its catchment area through specialization of commercial formats to maintain high levels of profitability in the territories in which keeping faithful the customers. Thus it is arranged a supply of goods and facilities increasingly rich and specialized. It reproduces, in a smaller scale, what we previously described as a model of Italian commercial development. We try to draw, at this point, some final remarks. The first concerns the regional system of infrastructure. It is immediately apparent that the two main traffic routes - the A3 and the SS 280 - form the backbone of the regional distribution system of the shopping centers. The first connects Calabria with the rest of Italy and links, at the same time, the city of Cosenza, Lamezia Terme and Reggio Calabria. The second joins Catanzaro with Lamezia Terme and its airport, the most important of the region. We come, then, to the location of three of the most important regional structures, the Commercial Park Le Fontane and the shopping centers I Due Mari and Vibo Center. They are positioned on the axis determined by the city of Vibo Valentia, the airport of Lamezia Terme and the district town of Catanzaro. Action, this, which shows quite clearly a mainly economic logic of placement. In fact, although the synthesis historical map tell us that the positioning of the first shopping centers occurs in the province of Cosenza, the potential money flows direct elsewhere the development of architectures of greater size. The transformation of the airport of Lamezia to an International airport does not seem extraneous to this phenomenon. All shopping centers, finally, in their positioning are always subordinate to the presence of at least one of two key factors: the proximity to large urban agglomerations and a quick connection to the main roads.

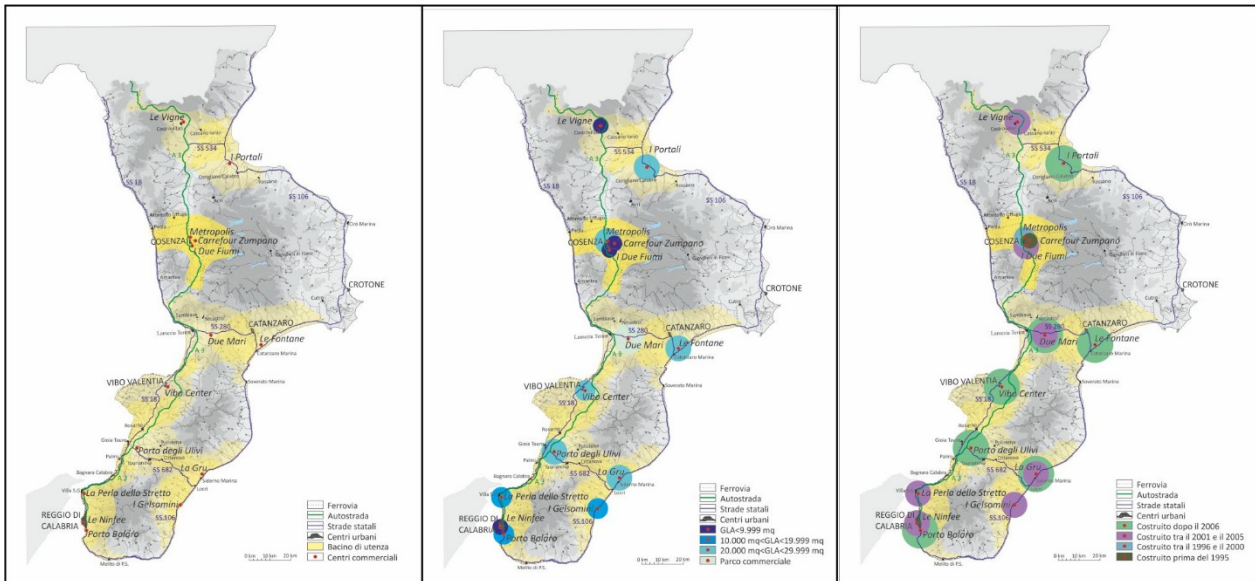


Fig. 4: Calabria. Shopping centers: 1 – Chatchment area; 2 – Gross Leasable Area; 3 – Historical map

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