

Retail Planning for the Resilient City

Consumption and Urban Regeneration

edited by

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Urban regeneration and commerce in Catania¹

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1. The new challenges of the twenty-first century city

The current social transformations of urban space commit the city to adjust its functions to the new needs of postmodern society. In their increasing competition with the European urban reality, many cities are committed to the revitalisation of city spaces and the enhancement of economic functions and services (Cirelli, 2001; Minca, 2001; Amendola, 2008). Consumption, in this view, plays an important role in public life and one that goes beyond the satisfaction of basic needs. It has become a vehicle for multiple messages and is one of the most important modes of behaviour that gives us the possibility of understanding social differences. The commercial functions performed by urban settlements and, more specifically, by commercial products, with their modern forms of distribution, have influenced the dynamics of cities and have marked their morphology. The widespread construction of shopping centres often becomes the engine of the economic development system. In some cases, it also drives the population development of urban centres. However, the

¹ Although the research has been developed jointly by all its authors, §§ 1 and 5 should be attributed to Caterina Cirelli, § 2 to Enrico Nicosia, § 3 to Leonardo Mercatanti and § 4 to Carmelo Maria Porto.

direct causal relationship between the two phenomena is not unidirectional.

The urban area has been transformed from a place of tradition. It now houses the signs of a widespread welfare society and a culture that tends to homogenise social classes and to trivialise traditionally important places in the name of a fundamental mechanism: consumption.

Urban expansion involves the contemporary city. Today, the city can no longer be treated as a well-defined spatial object. Rather, it is an entity in constant and unpredictable evolution that defies any attempt to delimit its borders and permanent character (Thrift, 2008). Over the past several decades, the capital invested in the improvement of infrastructure networks, synergies between public and private sectors in urban redevelopment and competition between cities have all fostered the progressive shift of activity, population and services to the suburban fringe. This shift has produced a new urban concept in which the city maintains a strategic role but abandons functional zoning and adopts new models of land use and new centres (Miani, 2001; Storchi and Armanni, 2010). The progressive growth of the suburbs is a complex phenomenon that involves every aspect of individual and social life and that requires constant adjustments of the territory and new economic and spatial models (Amendola, 2008). In fact, the growth of outlying settlements beyond existing or new construction from the urban centre is a process that requires a physical and functional reorganisation of the city (Finocchiaro, 2008).

Classical points of reference for the community have been replaced by new space, located mostly in the suburbs and the suburban rings, with a definable quality of aesthetic and functional innovation. New elements have begun shaping the postmodern city. These new elements have created an urban setting that is configured in the historic city and in the sprawling city, not seen in opposition but as different dimensions of a single territorial entity. The rapid and profound changes that have brought the spread of urban features throughout the area have weakened the meanings attached to the *polis* and have eliminated the traditional references to the city as a place that evokes a strong identity. This process has been facilitated by the spread of mobility, both collective and individual, and by the different value that increased mobility has assigned to accessibility. The spread of cities in space, connected with the transition to suburban residences and businesses, has led to the emergence of a new urban landscape. Because this new landscape lacks an identity of its own, symbols of urban modernism (shopping centres, cinemas, and the like) function as signs of local identification. They display characteristics that are different from those of the city, and they are often located outside the city.

These changes in the relationship centre/periphery have been induced by the fast process of modernization which has involved the Italian system of distribution with a few-decades delay compared to North America and other European countries. What is more, such changes have not always emerged with the same intensity and developing patterns in the different Italian regions. As a consequence, among the urban realities of Southern Italy, Catania has always represented an effective field of analysis, due also to the remarkable trade dynamism.

Indeed, while on the whole 80% of great retailing structures turns out to be highly concentrated in the central northern Italy, in comparison with the modest 20% of the southern area (Bullado, 2007), in Sicily the system of distribution has reached the highest level of modernization among the southern regions. Furthermore, the eastern part of the island, particularly the area situated between the provinces of Catania and Siracusa, shows such a well-developed trade system that it is ranked at an intermediate level among the other Italian regions, with regards to both the dealers' number and the occupied surface (Porto, 2008).

Compared to the province of Siracusa, in Catania the effects of such a retailing "revolution" turn out to be more evident, as it has been confirmed by a recent field work carried out by our research group (Cirelli et alii, 2007). By applying a worldwide well-established methodology on the trade urban area of Catania, the field work has highlighted in the system of distribution of the city a dualism between the urban trade and the suburban one: the first one has turned out to be less attractive than the second one, so that this concurs to impoverish increasingly the most central areas of the provincial capital.

2. The role of trade in the process of urban regeneration in the city of Catania

Catania is a city that reflects the principal characteristics of the urban South. However, we also find, indeed to an even greater extent, the kinds of changes and trends that also characterise the cities of more developed regions.

The identity of the city of Catania is now characterised not only by a historical and cultural heritage (material and immaterial) but also by commercial influence. These commercial resources and attitudes generate a definite incentive for the development of urban land. During the second half of the past century, the city experienced major changes that led to its functional reorganisation. Over the span of a few years, many historical entities of a commercial nature have been erased by new developments

(shopping centres, business franchises, and the like) that were able to steer consumer choices along a different path (Cirelli, 2007, 55-56; Di Blasi, 2007). Today, new insights give commerce a leading role. This role involves not only its economic functions but also its tendency to acquire more and more important values that extend the image and identity of the urban quality of life of city centres and neighbourhoods, the rehabilitation and regeneration of neighbourhoods and the safety of relevant parts of the city. Furthermore, trade, owing to its interdependence with urban planning, plays an important role in the upgrading of socio-economic and environmental trends and has a strong ability to attract tourism (Zinna *et alii*, 2003).

These themes are in line with the most recent studies of urban and commercial initiatives promoted by the European Union.

Also, national regulations, in particular the Decree n. 114 of 1998 (called the Bersani law) and those regulations in Sicily that govern trade, have a broad orientation. This orientation can involve programmes for choices of location, the problems related to accessibility, social and economic regeneration of residential and productive areas of population gravitation and usage, and spatial hierarchies in the urban and suburban streams. Furthermore, these activities proceed without neglecting the responsibility for organisational, functional, economic and trade promotion (Corna Pellegrini and Schmidt di Friedberg, 1993; Ottimo, 1996).

Since the 1970s, the commercial function has undergone radical changes. These changes are related to demographic changes. Between 1951 and 1971, Catania had a steady population growth rate because of high birth rates and significant flows of internal migration. However, the census taken in the following decade revealed a shift of population to other towns and the simultaneous arrival of commercial services.

Therefore, it is necessary to frame the reading of the phenomenon by extending the overall scope of consideration to the municipalities that make up the functional region comprising the so-called *Metropolitan Area of Catania*². This region is configured as a system of towns that extend south of Acireale and Paternò. It is also important to note the prominent role played within the province by the towns of Caltagirone (Calatino area – South Simeto) Giarre and Riposto (Jonica foothills area). During this period, the peri-urban region of Catania experienced a pressing need to develop new

² National Trade data for 01.01.2009 show, on a provincial basis, the presence of 25 655 units. Of these, 58% are retail enterprises occupying a fixed place, 21% are wholesale enterprises occupying a fixed place, and 21% are itinerant.

areas that were more accessible to users. This need was especially important for wholesale businesses. Driven by the need for development, the region has experienced a process that has resulted in new functions and in the birth of the first big commercial structures and of some large retail structures located at the commercial hub of Misterbianco (Cirelli et al., 2006).

Misterbianco has become an economic hub around which the entire surrounding area rotates. Moreover, the city has become the focus of the interests driven by the large influx from neighbouring provinces and from the neighbouring region (Cirelli, 1994; Zinna et al., 2003). From 1971 to the present, according to Istat, the population of Misterbianco has increased from 18 000 to over 45 000. The *Commercial Integrated Area* in Misterbianco, located in the western part of the urban area of Catania, has a real street market (Karl Marx Street). This area has established a clear principle of settlement. In its details, this pattern is both continuous with and discontinuous with other processes of settlement (e.g., residential settlement) (Cirelli, 2007, 71). The principle of settlement seen in this case is consistent with the growth of urban sprawl that extends along routes frequented by commuters and along the routes frequented by those who travel to the streets that provide major communication (Nigrelli, 2000).

This commercial area has further augmented its already-extensive product offer. In 1988, it added the new development of Città Mercato, now Auchan, the first settlement linked to the major retailers.

During the same historical period, Catania and its Old Town maintained a good level of cultural and executive functions despite a loss of commercial appeal. Thus, they continued as the main area of reference for intra-and extra-urban commuting. These events all occurred at the end of the eighties of the past century, a time at which significant measures for urban transformation were adopted. These changes were based on opportunities arising from the European Union and on the regeneration of certain areas.

During the following decade, these rehabilitation projects began to yield positive results in the Old Town and particularly in the area named "Pub District". The success of these projects has resulted from strong growth in the tertiary sector. Evening and nighttime recreation have repopulated this previously-marginalised area (Nicosia, 2007).

Today, the commercial activity of the city of Catania today is concentrated in three municipalities: Old Town, Ognina-Picanello and Borgo-Sanzio. These areas include more than 4 000 businesses, 77% of the total number of businesses in the city (Source: City of Catania, 2007).

However, many other municipalities remain undefended. Some of these municipalities have experienced a considerable and steady increase of their population over the past two decades, as is the case for IX (Librino-San Giorgio). However, a severe shortage of even the most basic services remains in these municipalities. Radical action would be required to restore these services and to rebalance the situation.

On 1/1/2008, Catania recorded a population of less than 300 000 inhabitants for the first time since 1951. This change is only slightly perceptible against the background of everyday urban life. However, it allows us to highlight aspects that have changed radically in the relationship between Catania and the towns of Etna. These towns have grown spontaneously through the establishment of new services and business functions. The town of Gravina di Catania, for example, has now exceeded a population density of 5400 inhabitants/km². The town also contains the largest hypermarket in the district. It should be noted that the process of modernisation of the distribution system of Catania has had many negative consequences. However, an impressive increase in the number of shopping malls has occurred. Indeed, the size of these malls and the presence of strategic groups of retail stores have produced an oversized supply in the Etna area, especially in the south, where new shopping centres, including Tenutella³, are being built.

The set of companies operating in the distribution sector in the province of Catania⁴ is broad and composite. The province includes almost all of the major forms of modern strategic distribution. These enterprises compete directly in an area that now has a high saturation level. The pace at which these modern places of consumption have developed depends further on the competition between the actors, especially international, who have invested huge amounts of capital and significant management skills in response to the potential of the Etna territory. However, this dynamic process was not held in check by appropriate policy choices by local governments, who could not put a stop to the development of new commercial space, saturating the request of the application.

³ The shopping centre will be developed on an area of 54 000 square meters and is inspired by the concept of "Shoppertainment" (entertainment and shopping). The Core Business Centre will be represented by catering, entertainment and gaming, and the commercial component will have a hypermarket of 10 000 square meters and a prestigious gallery with 300 stores at medium and high levels along with 6 000 square meters of sales areas in medium-sized specialized sections.

⁴ The province of Catania has over 30% of Sicily's total square meters of large-scale distribution facilities, over 40% of the area's largest facilities (over 1 600 square meters) and over 60% of the facilities with areas over 6 500 sq m.

In the Etna area, the trend towards concentration is a symptom of today's potential for economic development, but it is also characteristic of the strategies operating in the modern market. In fact, we can highlight the continuous formation and dissolution of alliances and agreements between firms. The process of concentration and the presence of international groups are two key features of the distribution sector. The trend towards concentration is also based on the competitive dynamics that characterise the economic life of the province of Catania. The initiatives related to the promotion of trade and retail activities focus on some major projects currently under construction. For example, these initiatives provide for the construction of a second commercial centre in addition to Misterbianco. This centre will include IKEA and will therefore establish IKEA as a protagonist in the economic life of the metropolitan area. Finally, the province of Catania is preparing to undertake the work needed to host Etnafiore, a new exhibition centre in Sicily. One of the largest and most important exhibition centres in the Mediterranean region, this property will occupy an area of 120 000 square meters.

3. What Future for the Old Town?

The historic centre of Catania may be briefly identified with the territory that marks the first of the ten municipalities of the city. However, the area is difficult to define because it is actually very heterogeneous in several respects. When we talk about Old Town, we cannot refer exclusively to the area that, before the 1693 earthquake, housed the old city whose core was today's Piazza Duomo. We must also include the urban expansion of the eighteenth century, easily identifiable from the widespread baroque architecture recognised by UNESCO in its World Heritage Site listing in 2002 and in less richly ornamented buildings that have since formed several working-class areas divided by the irregular plant and articulated morphology. We also include in the Old Town area the buildings built from the nineteenth century through the early twentieth century. The component architecture is therefore one of the criteria for identifying the historical centre. The palaces of this district are often characterised by significant architectural value. In one of them was born Vincenzo Bellini, the most authoritative exponent of Italian romantic melodrama. Other notable residents of the district include many authors, from Stesicoro to Giovanni Verga, from Federico De Roberto to Mario Rapisardi, who lived in these palaces and who wrote significant works. The historic centre of Catania is also recognised through the very presence of time itself. The buildings, monuments, and churches offer the viewer an interesting reading of the

evolution of the city. The observer can relive the time when the city of Catania was able to generate and export its talents through various forms of culture⁵.

The Old Town is thus an area where the cultural, taken as a whole, is especially strong to this day. Before the advent of the furious mass distribution activity that occurred in the nearby suburbs, the Old Town was also the marketing centre of the city. This role was underscored by the additional attractive force exerted by the two traditional markets (Fera o' Luni and Pescheria) and by the elegant historical shops (Di Blasi, 2007) which played a central role in the life of the city, especially in its heyday. These realities are now rapidly changing in response to two fundamental sources of disruption. The birth and development of ethnic marketing reflects strong migration in recent years and represents a response to competition from shopping malls. This marketing posture requires an ever more diverse and alternative outlook and has resulted in the spread of "strong" trademarks through franchising. As a result of these developments, shops that did not follow the new trends were forced to close by the historical changes underway and by the sharp increase in the value of land use. Some of these shops moved to other areas of the city. Meanwhile, strong franchise activities continued to emerge and spread. The business landscape of Old Town now resembles that of many other cities. The commerce-oriented Chinese have taken over the historic Fera o' Luni market and have perhaps allowed it to survive, whereas other traditional markets of the island, like the famous Vucciria of Palermo, survived until a few years ago but now no longer exist or are kept alive as unlikely tourist attractions (Rizzo, 2006; Mercatanti, 2010). However, beyond the prestigious buildings, the elegant streets, and the historical monuments, small areas with less-imposing buildings have, in some cases, experienced the same expressions of social problems and socio-economic paradoxes that concern not only the central area but also the entire city. We refer to the districts Cappuccini, Vecchio Corso, Civita, Angeli Custodi, San Cristoforo. These districts are considered to be dangerous areas. The collective imagination links the choice of a place of residence not only to the social status of an individual but also to his moral conduct. In the historical centre of Catania, the transition between different realities is often very

⁵ One of these cultural treasures is the city's music. In Sicily, Catania has always been the headquarters of music. See, for example, the classic historical treatment, *Secoli di musica catanese* (Pastura, 1968). Who knows how many times the young Vincenzo Bellini, until he was nearly eighteen years old, must have walked the path called Crociferi. This site is one of the most-frequently seen locations in the films of directors who have chosen to use Catania as a stage.

sharp. A luxurious bank is located only metres away from dilapidated houses with barred windows and other signs of deterioration. In part, these clashes have been caused by some questionable radical urban planning after World War II. An example is the nineteenth-century neighbourhood of San Berillo. This neighbourhood was almost entirely gutted to construct the Central Business District of the city. One area of this district remains. It has become the home to many African immigrants and a place of prostitution. However, it could recover if properly exploited. Despite its current condition, it could become a small jewel of the city, just as Ortigia has for Siracusa (Cirelli, Mercatanti, Nicosia, 2008).

We can say that, in the late 1980s, the historical centre of Catania began to play an important role in defining the overall structure of the modern town of Etna. This event happened to coincide with what has been recognised in other capitals (e.g., Palermo) as the “season of Mayors”, a period viewed as prosperous by the majority of society. The activities and actions taken during this period have led to the first long-term positive benefits for citizens and were facilitated by good use of the opportunities arising from the European Union (PIC Urban).

In fact, if we analyse the events of the past two decades, we can see more than slow growth and positive economic trends. The repositioning of the alternating economic and social development of Old Town has influenced very important aspects of the life of the district. The perceptual and psychological consequences of these changes are relevant and often contradictory. The use of urban space has changed greatly. The closure to traffic of the most central areas of the city has benefitted tourists, who can now admire the main squares of the historic centre (Piazza Duomo, Piazza Università, and Piazza Teatro Massimo) in their original splendour and without the presence of private vehicles. However, these changes also incited a hard-fought and lengthy protest by traders who complained that they had lost customers or “historic” clients because the approach to the sales area by car had become more difficult. A major deficiency of the area is its lack of parking. Despite the presence of important projects, the many economic difficulties that have emerged in recent years in the City and the seizure of some sites have created widespread chaos on the edge of the restricted-traffic areas. The development of the city’s subway system and the construction of an underground car park near the Villa Bellini will enable a better use of the Old Town and will also strongly influence the desirable expansion of the restricted traffic zone.

Part of the Old Town is experiencing a slow, decades-long stage of gentrification in response to citizens who have decided to settle in the city centre. In some cases, this process has involved resettlement. It has

occurred after experimenting in the decades before the suburbanisation to other municipalities of the Metropolitan Area.

The process began in the late 1980s, when the town council facilitated the widespread opening of new premises, mostly restaurants and pubs. These new urban resources and the progress of urban regeneration have led to the use of new spaces that were previously associated with situations of degradation and danger. In recent years, travel magazines have identified Catania as the birthplace of Italian *movida*⁶. The Port of Catania, which is fully part of the Old Town, has been upgraded. Simultaneously, some nearby buildings have been given new uses (as a university, a library, and so on) and have thus recovered their vitality. These changes form the basis for a new idea of a port. According to this concept, the port is no longer viewed as a specialised infrastructure located on the edge of the city and disconnected from the evolutionary processes of the social structure of the rest of the territory. This focus on the relationship between the sea and the ancient port city has fueled the phenomenon of *gentrification*. However, this process, as we know, has a double face. On the one hand, improving the social composition of residents of Old Town promotes an increase in services and increased attention to this area. On the other hand, we cannot fail to mention that the poorer segments of the population may have to move to areas where rents have not been soaring. This migration of the poor from gentrified areas has, in some cases, led to the formation of tiny ethnic neighbourhoods, to the presence of illegal construction or to the illegal occupation of dwellings (Mercatanti, 2007).

Cultural activity has experienced ups and downs. In general, however, cultural activity has helped to improve the condition of the Old Town. At the beginning of the new millennium, many permanent museums were founded in Catania. Some of these museums are of national importance – the Diocesan Museum, the historical museum devoted to the 1943 landing in Sicily, and the Film Museum, designed by François Confino and the second largest in Italy. In addition, there is much excitement about the future. The Municipality and the Province of Catania have initiated several projects related to the acquisition, recovery and reuse of containers and have undertaken plans to build prestigious new museums. The Bellini Museum has recently been expanded. The eighteenth-century Palazzo Gravina Cruyllas, home to the birthplace of Vincenzo Bellini, has been fully restored. Opportunities to enjoy the Old Town to the fullest possible extent have

⁶ Sadly, however, some new residents of Old Town have formed a committee to protest current conditions. They complain that the noise at night is lowering their quality of life.

increased as a result of all of these changes. This process is consistent with the greater flow of visitors to Sicily in the past twenty years. In the past two years, however, an alarming decline has occurred. This decline is not a result of the general economic crisis. These changes have also seen the development of luxury hotels in the Centre. Existing hotels have been renovated. An especially noteworthy development is that numerous other lodgings, basically B & B accommodations, have been added to the Centre's tourism infrastructure.

These events all occurred even as the malls in the suburbs and the large retail developments were attempting to capture consumers' attention and force visitors to use their facilities. The outcome sought by the malls and the large retailers was diametrically opposed to the changes taking place in the Centre. The historic centre of Catania, as mentioned above, is a reality that requires constant analysis because of the rapid changes to which it has been subjected. These changes have led to a revitalisation of the Centre's socio-economic life and to attempts to enhance the cultural resources of the city. The evolution of the historical centre of Catania certainly goes far beyond the conventional concept of a city in turmoil.

4. Commercial polarity: new functions for the suburbs of contemporary Catania as "the future" for the South?

The southern area of the city was developed by the middle of the past century. It includes two municipalities that were formed in large part by establishing new population settlements. Some of these municipalities are real ghettos. They arose as a result of public intervention and in accordance with a master plan that sought to build a self-equipped "satellite city". Other areas have grown spontaneously in an unplanned manner and are lacking in equipment and services, and they are often lacking even the most elementary resources (Cirelli, 2001). This area corresponds to the territory of the ninth and tenth Municipalities. It occupies an area of 14 000 hectares, about 2/3 of the total municipal area. Municipality IX, called Librino-San Giorgio⁷, from

⁷ The original plan, drawn up by architect K. Tange, was enforced in 1976. It was suited to the orography of the territory. The plan created a ring road system that consisted of two-lane roads surrounding the buildings. The first variant of the project was affected by the height limits on buildings that were located by the airport authority. The original project included a hospital, university facilities, service centres, cultural centres and gathering places, a shopping mall, etc. The final compromise reached regarding the project was the result of wild abuses in construction, and final approval of the project was pending for four years. The original Pharaonic plan vanished forever. These circumstances made it necessary to adopt a variant that sacrificed some public spaces as well as some healthy structures. This abusive variant brought the

the urban point of view is the most recent from an urban point of view. Its urbanisation was accomplished during the 1980s under the 1969 Piccinato plan. The area was to house about 60 000 inhabitants from the villages of Librino, Castagnola, Bummacaro, Sant'Agata and San Giorgio. The intention of the plan was to house the workers employed by enterprises in the nearby industrial area of Pantano d'Archi. The Piccinato plan had chosen this location to minimise commuting (Ruggiero and Cirelli, 1989).

Despite its strategic position near the airport, not far from the industrial area of Pantano d'Archi and major thoroughfares, and on the axis of the CT-PA motorway services CT-PA, the ninth Municipality has only recently been considered as the location for important functional structures that could serve to ease the commute to the more central areas of the city. The location of the most vulnerable and subordinate populations in the city, this municipality had 36 000 inhabitants by 1991 and reached approximately 42 300 in the 2001 census. It is therefore one of the most populous municipalities

From an economic perspective, the contrast is stark between the huge expanse of the Municipality, second only to the X Municipality, and the scale of a small business.

To date, the total number of small businesses in the Municipality is only slightly over a hundred. These establishments are primarily neighbourhood based. Large structures are absent. This breakdown indicates only a small presence of food-related and other such activities, relative to the extent of the Municipality. Thus, the area is still far from being independent of Catania, judging from the low profile of most activity and the clear and limited degree of satisfaction of even the most basic needs of the area.

The other municipality in the south of the city is the X Municipality. This area is formed by the St. Joseph La Rena neighbourhoods with the nearby public housing areas, Villaggio Sant'Agata, Santa Maria Goretti, Zia Lisa. Its origins are relatively recent and coincide with the urban sprawl of

population number to almost 70 000. To date, approximately 90% of the projected housing has been provided, and almost no functionally important public facilities (Nigrelli, 2001). Although some changes have occurred in some areas of the municipality over the past decade, for example the maintenance of essential services through the construction of roads, the provision of an adequate frequency and location of bus routes and the establishment of certain social services more or less related to public education, the character of the neighbourhood has remained linked to the structures typical of a metropolitan bedroom suburb.

the 1960s. Its population originated primarily from the migration from the rural hinterland that characterised those years⁸.

The municipality, however, is characterised by the presence of areas of high economic value and development potential. Some of these are designated for industrial and commercial purposes. The area possesses a major underground infrastructure (port, airport, railway stations, rail lines for freight). In addition the areas near the sandy beach have undergone major redevelopment and offer hotels, sports and entertainment venues. The absence of a real economic base, along with the marginalisation of the urban areas of the Municipality, with low levels of income per capita compared with the city and the entire metro system, will have negative effects on the attractiveness of these areas.

The X municipality is both the largest and the least populated, because the residential area is limited to Village Saint Agata, Zia Lisa I – II, and Village Santa Maria Goretti. All these areas are characterised by public housing and are concentrated in the north, whereas the southern area is occupied by Pantano d'Archi, with several large and medium-sized industrial estates. We also note here the prevalence with respect to size of neighbourhood businesses. At least until a few years ago, the presence of the only "mall integrated" urban area (Auchan) had triggered further development only slowly. However, partly owing to the attractiveness of this resource to people living in more central areas of the city, the area eventually triggered a gradual process of urban regeneration by encouraging the establishment of other businesses at the same location.

This functional economic marginalisation seems destined for change as soon as possible, thanks to recent locational choices made by both public and private actors.

The most significant public action in the area certainly the construction of the new hospital "San Marco" in the territory of the IX Municipality.

⁸ The oldest of the villages is S. Maria Goretti. This village was designed to accommodate 1 400 people left homeless after the floods of 1951 and has only primary structures: a primary school, a church and small businesses. Nearby, a few years later, the village Sant'Agata, also known as Aunt Lisa I, was constructed. This village is home to just under 10 000 inhabitants. It consists of row houses divided into three zones, A, B, and C. The settlement plan was completed in the 70s with the village of Zia Lisa II, which houses 3 200 residents. Further south, along Gelso Bianco, lies the village Pigno, a spontaneous settlement having peripheral and distinctly rural characteristics. The settlement, made up of immigrants who work as laborers, small traders and farmers or unemployed, had different origins and developments linked to its precarious economic and social conditions, environmental degradation and the municipality's lack of services.

This development is the most important element of functional change that can be seen in the short term.

The new hospital will replace at least part of the Vittorio Emanuele, the old regional hospital located in the city centre. It will include a total of 570 beds, services and those specialties most desired by potential users. The demand for assistance with health services is high in the area. A consequence of this high demand is the use of health facilities outside the region⁹.

We must also remember that, in Librino, propulsive action may arise from the public-private initiative known as "Zona Franca Urbana"¹⁰. Public fiscal incentives in the near future should ensure the creation of new businesses.

Recent private action has been more structured as well as impressive. The most important locations include a second shopping centre, also located at Auchan. This shopping centre, called the Port of Catania, is located in the area called "White Mulberry", along the terminus of the CT-PA. The structure occupies 12 500 square meters. With its 150 stores and approximately 5 000 parking spaces, it offers a complex and diverse range of products (food and otherwise) and ensures good accessibility. Moreover, the recent completion of the new "wholesale centre" in the area of Bicocca may represent a further breakthrough at the margin of these districts.

The structure is impressive. As shown by the statistics given for the project, it covers a total area of 897 500 square metres divided into 217 000 square metres of covered areas, 349 500 square metres of parking and almost 195 000 square metres of green space. The wholesale centre is in a particularly important location from a strategic point of view. It is within walking distance of major motorway junctions in eastern Sicily and within walking distance of the main infrastructure in Catania (port, railway station and airport) and the commercial centre of Misterbianco. This is a structure

⁹ The transfer of services from the old to the new hospital will be aimed primarily at the need to increase those offerings that involve a greater commitment to highly specialised care. The hospital will emphasise those sectors that are characterised by a particular intensity of care and by the use of sophisticated diagnostic techniques. The hospital will thus be able to respond in a more timely manner appropriate to the needs of the users. The new, modern hospital will be equipped to provide the highest standards of care.

¹⁰ These intra-municipal areas of minimum size will be granted tax exemptions to encourage the creation of small and micro enterprises. These areas, identified in 22 cities of the Peninsula, including Catania, were chosen because they are characterised by social disadvantage, economic growth, employment growth, and an untapped potential for development.

as the former is certainly the service throughout the metropolitan system of Etna. However, it still represents an important step in the process of regeneration of the entire area south of the city. Finally, the first IKEA store in Sicily is now open. This store offers 30 000 square meters of total area, 19 000 square meters dedicated to displays, a restaurant with 465 seats and 2 500 parking spaces. It is located in the "Buttaceto" district. It exemplifies the commercial attractiveness of the south.

5. Conclusions

The city of Catania is a region in transformation. Traditional trade is anchored in outdated patterns. However, it continues to play an important role, even as it is threatened by modern retail enterprises that are spread by force through the territory.

This region is characterised by diverse and efficient supply and demand and is lively, sensitive and receptive to innovation.

Revitalisation of trade should not be couched in terms of choices between the centre and periphery or between the store and the mall. Rather, it should be taken into consideration that people should have the pleasure of using these places. Businesses that are not cold and impersonal are more inviting to the customer. Accordingly, customers should be encouraged to rediscover the quality of human relationships that has for so long characterised the tradition and the commercial culture of our country.

The common goal of planning must be a concrete schedule for the establishment of commercial activities in both urban and neighbouring communities leading to a rational and balanced structure of the distribution network. It is necessary to support the competitiveness of local shops, especially in disadvantaged areas. The result should be a more widespread degree of user satisfaction both within the city and outside of it.

Optimising the efficiency of commercial services requires the elimination of deterioration and an end to the abandonment of the old town and the suburbs. These goals must be reached through the presence of competitive factors that influence the success of urban transformation that are increasingly oriented to the possible pursuit of a high level of quality of life. These goals should be pursued through the integration of public and private initiatives that take into consideration the needs of people through financial support. The goal of these initiatives is to adopt trade policies aimed at commercial and urban regeneration and development of the sector, and at the same time to aim for a revival of the identity and image of the city, its historic centre and its suburbs. A plan of this sort should be

combined with a careful policy on traffic and parking that convinces the merchants of the benefits of pedestrian areas. The plan will create new opportunities for attraction and entertainment with the support of local marketing and with the benefits generated by the incentives included in the plan's cultural and social implications for trade.

Nonetheless, this work has been oriented to understand which role the historical centre of Catania can still play, if we consider the increasingly less predominant role of its trade functions within the modern system of distribution of the metropolitan urban area. For this reason, we have followed the methodological approach proposed by Rolf Monheim (2008), according to whom "the perspectives of future relation between shopping centre and "natural" centre are considerably different, owing to the supply structure and the urban layouts, in addition to the capacity of the people responsible (retail dealers, propriety owners, politicians, public servants) to act together in the name of a shared interest, which has been a largely disregarded facet so far". As a consequence, this work has been also directed to catch the prospects of the course undertaken by the trade system of Catania, which can choose among different future trade patterns, like other Italian and European urban realities.

To end with, according to the results of this work, the different moving forces of this trade system seem to be directed towards a pattern based on the complementarity between the shopping centre and the historical centre, thanks to the projects of improvement destined to the traditional structures (such as the recent creation of the "Natural Trade centre" along the historical Etnea street), not to mention the re-funcionalization of new suburban districts, like in the case of Librino. These projects aimed at promoting the attractive role of the urban centre in order to avoid that the pattern of distribution is oriented towards less balanced layouts like those suggested by Krüger e Walther, 2007. According to their theory, among different urban patterns the polarization of the city implies a concentration of highly profitable functions in the 'autarkic' shopping centre, whilst the most ordinary supply, the restaurant industry and the public administration remain within the historical centre. On the contrary, another pattern conceived by the two authors implies that the very shopping centre becomes the "city", by including the highest-rate urban functions, so that it sparks off a process which Kruger calls of "re-urbanisation" of shopping centres.

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