THE SHOPPING CENTRE
1943-2013

The Rise and Demise of a Ubiquitous Collective Architecture

Edited by Janina Gosseye & Tom Avermaete

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INTRODUCTION

The Shopping Centre 1943 -2013

The Rise and Demise of a Ubiquitous Collective Architecture

Janina Gosseye & Tom Avermaete

In his seminal essay 'Public Spaces, Collective Spaces,' which was published in 1992, Spanish architect and critic Manuel de Solà-Morales suggested that the civic, architectural, urban and morphological richness of contemporary cities resides in their collective spaces that are not strictly public or private, but both simultaneously.[1] De Solà-Morales described these places as 'the ambiguous spaces where the public form of our cities is played' and encouraged architects to resist ceding the battle over the design of shopping malls, vacation centres, parking lots and cinema complexes to commercial logic and developer standards. De Solà-Morales argued that these spaces warrant architects' attention, even if only for their ubiquity, volume and massive use, as he pleaded for a shift – both in terms of design and research – away from the standard, safe 'subsidized urbanity' to more slippery, less evident and (arguably) more interesting areas.

In the more than seventy years that have passed since Victor Gruen and Elsie Krummeck first introduced the concept in *Architectural Forum*, much has been written about the shopping centre. Curiously enough, the discipline of architectural history has made little contribution to this existing scholarship. In the canonical histories the perception has been shaped that the shopping centre is a 'second-class' citizen, an outcast, less valuable than its more 'high-brow' civic companions such as the museum, library or theatre. This historiographical discrimination seems at odds with the growing impact of mass production, mass distribution and mass consumption on our cities and territories since the end of the Second World War – of which the shopping centre is the spatial epitome. Moreover, architectural scholars have refrained from engaging profoundly with the shopping centres' original premise that it could 'expand beyond the goal of creating merely machines for selling, and could satisfy the demand for urban crystallization points and thus offer to the suburban population significant life experiences.'[2] Victor Gruen's claim that the shopping centre can act as a full-fledged 'urban centre' is generally accepted, but even so did conspicuously not make it into the pages of architectural historiography. The reasons for this radical exclusion of the shopping centre from the histories of architecture remain vague: Intentional distance from an architectural figure that is complicit with late-capitalist logics?; Difficulty to engage with the non-explicit authorship and the generic style of the shopping centre?; Or, a lack of a conceptual apparatus to qualify the public character of this privately-owned and collectively-practiced instance of the built environment?

The few occasions when the shopping centre has been admitted into the 'prestigious' realm of architectural history, the writings have commonly been biased towards the United States with surprisingly little attention for the numerous shopping centres in other national and cultural contexts.[3] This has led to the assumption that the North American dumbbell mall is *the* singular, immutable paradigm that has hovered over geographies and cultures since the mid twentieth century without losing its prime characteristics; an enclosed box surrounded by a large parking lot, which is characterized by comprehensive surveillance, engenders social segregation and encourages unchecked urban sprawl. Are these assumptions justified? Or, are the true capacities of the shopping centre – as a result of negative propaganda – obscured by our failure of vision? As more and more shopping centres are changed beyond recognition or die a slow death, this conference questions if we should all cheer and shout 'hooray,' or if there is more to shopping centres than meets the eye. By offering a fine-grained, region-specific reading, this conference aims to distil the shopping centre's key characteristics and reassess the contribution that it has made to post-war built environment and architectural culture.

The proceedings of this conference are divided into four parts, each of which corresponds with one of the thematic conference sessions. The first subsection, entitled **Acculturating the Shopping Centre** investigates if 'hybrids' developed as the paradigmatic shopping centre concept, the American dumbbell mall, encountered different socio-cultural climates, and what region-specific typologies can be identified. It also questions if, as societies changed over time, the shopping centre concept also – in a true Darwinistic fashion – evolved over time. Nicholas Jewell's contribution 'Eastern Promises' accordingly explores the hybridization of the shopping mall as its international spread mirrored the migration of global capital from the Western to Eastern hemisphere. Jewell recounts the transformations that occurred when the mall arrived in Singapore, where it became an object of quasi-metabolist experimentation, to its adoption in Hong Kong as an agent that manipulates the city section, to the synthesis of these propositions in mainland China where the shopping mall has become a keystone in the mixed-use expansion of its urban schema. By revisiting Jameson's analysis of the Bonaventure hotel in his seminal essay *Postmodernism or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*,[4] Esra Kahveci and Pelin Yoncaci Arslan conversely develop a comparative analysis, which presents the Cevahir shopping mall in Istanbul as a player in the global league of shopping centres, which signifies an architectural mutation; a constructed instance of postmodernity, similar to the one that Jameson observed in the Bonaventure hotel, albeit repeated in a remarkably different socio-cultural environment. Kahveci and Arslan thus argue that Cevahir is nothing more than another expression of the global post-modern 'shopping mall' phenomenon, making the users that dwell in the building, the only visible remainder of local context. Cynthia Susilo similarly identifies the Boulevard Commercial Project (BCP) in Manado (Indonesia) as a generic reproduction of foreign ideas, but attributes a greater role to the users in the process of 'acculturation.' Susilo claims that the BCP's spaces are socially reproduced through intense interactions between the mall and the Manadonese, thus creating spaces that are neither foreign nor completely local but both at once – a genuine indigenous modernity. Finally, Scott Colman recounts the evolution of Westfield. In the 1950s, this Australian company began with the importation of the American, suburban car-oriented mall typology to Sydney. Since then, in a true expression of the 'survival of the fittest,' the company has continuously evolved and redefined itself to meet current market demand and consumer logics. As a result, Westfield today constructs dense, vertical shopping typologies that occupy legacy sites of the industrial city and are 'hardwired' into the city's public transport system.

The second section, **Building Collectives and Communities,** focuses on the reformist underpinnings and socio-cultural ambitions of shopping centres. It explores the contribution that shopping centres have made towards moulding a 'common ground' and casting a 'space of appearance' within contemporary society. Leonardo Zuccaro Marchi investigates the transatlantic migration of ideas and references for a community 'core' in the period between 1950 and 1970. He illustrates how an osmotic relation existed between the concepts that were elaborated in the avant-garde theoretical debates of the late CIAM and the ones that were implemented by Victor Gruen in his initial designs for shopping centres. Sanja Matijević Barčot and Ana Grgić similarly investigate the shopping centre's 'core' potential, but shift the focus from West to East, as they probe into the social role that the shopping centre assumed in the construction of Croatia's socialist reality between 1960 and 1980. They claim that shopping centres in Croatia were often 'institutionalised' to a certain extent. Not only were they publicly financed and managed but, more importantly, they were regarded as indispensable and powerful components of a socialist urban planning. Finally, Jennifer Smit and Kirsty Máté's paper, in an attempt to redress the growing international criticism of the shopping centre as an undemocratic space that has a problematic relationship between private ownership and public participation, researches the malleability of the 'public character' of the shopping centre through the applied practice of 'guerrilla-picnicking.'

From Node to Stitch, the third subsection addresses the key role that the shopping centre has played as part and parcel of urban planning from 1943 to today. It connects the development of shopping centres to urban reconstruction and revitalisation efforts on the one hand and explores shopping centres' contribution to urban expansion projects and structured suburbanisation on the other. Il Lee, Joo hyun Park and Hyemin Park study the emergence of a new type of mall in South Korea in the early 1990s; the mega shopping mall. This typology is characterized by the augmentation of the shopping function with cultural and leisure facilities, such as multiplex theatres and various food and beverage stores, thereby giving the shopping centre the spatial and programmatic density to act as a new urban anchor. Thirty-three case studies illustrate the key role that these mega-shopping malls have played in South Korea's urban planning and design over the past last fifteen years. Travelling back in time, Joonwoo Kim takes us to 1960s South Korea, when one of the first 'shopping centres,' the Sewoon Complex, was built in Seoul. In his paper, Kim narrates how this megastructure, which is one kilometre long and fifty metres wide, which incorporates shopping, public functions and housing, and which was initially built as a 'stand alone' autonomous entity on an inner city clearing, has over the years forged strong connections with the surrounding tissue. Rana Habibi's paper discusses a similar 'superstructure' with shopping, built at the heart of a satellite neighbourhood in Western Tehran, called Ekbatan. Habibi deconstructs the development history of Ekbatan to explicate how in the shopping centre in mid-century Tehran became the object of forceful crossings between European, American, Asian and (last but not least) Persian models and influences. Viviana d'Auria finally takes us to West-Africa, where she iterates the development of the main city centre of the new town of Tema, which was planned by the Greek firm of Constantinos Doxiadis. According to Doxiadis' plan, the centre's civic and commercial activities were to be accumulated into a spine heading northwards, aligned with the 'Ekistic' growth of the city. D'Auria subsequently explains how the carefully planned figure of this civic and commercial 'spine' has since been 'recentred' by its everyday users through processes of selective appropriation, rejection and resistance. She thus illustrates the capacity of indigenous cultural practices to suspend models of development but also to intensify the infrastructure of the shopping centre beyond its projected intentions.

Papers in the final section, **The Afterlife of Post-war Shopping Centres,** seek to outline strategies for the redevelopment of shopping centres that have perished. By identifying 'best practices,' the papers in this part explore if for the increasing number of 'dead malls' there can be a new life after death. First, Gabriele Cavoto and Giorgio Limonta discuss the condition in Italy, where the transformation of vacant shopping centres and big box stores represents a new urban challenge that lacks precedents in terms of design strategies. Well aware of the specificities in terms of building size, urban planning legislation and contractual conditions, Cavato and Limonta propose to learn from the 'dead mall' experience of the United States to device a new set of design approaches for the European shopping centre. Vittoria Rossi similarly investigates numerous projects that have been realised in the US to re-interpret the growing number of dead malls, the so-called process of 'de-malling.' Her study illustrates how the failure or success of a project is determined not only by its capability to respond to short-term (often commercial) objectives, but also (and perhaps more importantly) by its ability to offer a long term vision that takes into account the project's potential to offer economic, social, political and natural resources for the local community. Rossi argues that the primary aim of de-malling is not (or should not be) to build, but to engage with specific contexts and intervene through the collaboration between public and private actors. Conrad Kickert's paper finally studies the reciprocal relationship between suburban shopping mall development and department store transformation in the urban core. In a comparative analysis of the Northland Mall by Victor Gruen in Detroit and the Vroom en Dreesmann department store in The Hague, Kickert explores the resilience of the shopping mall when conditions of shopping and urban development change. He claims that the 'heterotopia of the urban core' seems to offer a balance between permanence and flexibility, which can prevent the inertia between the envisioned and real futures of consumer environments.

Together, these papers present a first attempt to displace the discussions on the role, character and performance of the shopping centre from its canonical North-American matrix - without discarding it as an important point of reference.

They illustrate that the paradigm of the shopping centre should be looked upon as a typologically more complex and performatively more diverse paradigm than the dumbbell mall. In addition, the different contributions start to suggest the necessity for a more sophisticated theoretical framework to conceive the spaces of appearance that the shopping centre articulates in cities and territories, as well as for the continuous acculturations, transformations and re-articulations of this ubiquitous collective architecture.

This conference was funded by the Netherlands Organization for Scientific Research (NWO), as it is part of a research project, entitled 'The Post-war European Shopping Centre: A Place for Encounter between Avant-garde Discourse and Daily Building Practices, 1945-1973.' This research started in February 2013, and focuses on the cross-fertilization that occurred between the work of the avant-garde and commercial 'day-to-day' building practices in Western Europe in the early post-war decades. This study uses the shopping centre, a new urban figure of the post-war period, as the vantage point to research the interaction between these two ends of the architectural spectrum. The results of this research will culminate in a book, entitled *Shopping Towns Europe 1945-1975*, which will be published by Bloomsbury Academic in 2015.

Endnotes

1 Tom Avermaete, Fransje Hooimeijer & Lara Schrijver, Editorial 'Urban Formations and Collective Spaces', *Oase. Architectural Journal* 71 (2006): 2-6.

2 Victor Gruen, *Centres for the Urban Environment. Survival of the Cities* (New York: V.N.R. Company, 1973), IX.

3 See: Jeffrey Hardwick, *Mall Maker: Victor Gruen, Architect of an American Dream* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004); Richard Longstreth, *City Center to Regional Mall: Architecture, the Automobile, and Retailing in Los Angeles, 1920-1950* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1998); David Smiley, *Pedestrian Modern Shopping and American Architecture, 1925–1956* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2013); Alex Wall, *Victor Gruen: From Urban Shop to New City* (Barcelona: Actar, 2005).

4 Fredric Jameson, "The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism," in *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997). Originally published in *New Left Review* 146 (July-August 1984).

THEME 4

The Afterlife of Post-war Shopping Centres:
From Tumorous Growth to the Dawn of the Dead

In 1977, George A. Romero shot sequences of 'Dawn of the Dead,' a film that would soon become one of the great cult horror zombie movie, in a deserted mall. Shorn of life and light, the shopping centre's great echoing chambers of commerce took on a very eerie tone. Curiously, Romero's set design has much in common with the steadily growing number of photographs of abandoned malls strewn across the United States. As Americans return downtown and online shopping popularizes, they leave behind well over a hundred lifeless concrete and steel leviathans; relics of the post-war era, when Americans with cars and fat wallets fled to the suburbs. Thus far, this phenomenon oddly enough seems limited to the United States alone. The situation that many shopping centres (built in the 1960s and 1970s) appear to be facing elsewhere, is tumorous growth. The need to compete has led many shopping centres to expand beyond recognition, adding wings, floors, entries and exits without much consideration for the overall legibility of the complex. The result: an amorphous shopping maze. This theme seeks to set out strategies for (contemporary) shopping centre redevelopment, identify 'best practices' and explore if for the American shopping centres – like for the zombies in Romero's film – there is (a new) life after death?

Shopping Centres in Italy:
New Polarities and Deadmalls

Gabriele Cavoto & Giorgio Limonta

Abstract
The architecture and the urban form of European shopping centres represent an adaptation of the US settlement model with various temporal gaps. In Italy, the diffusion of shopping centres started in the 1970s with the evolution of the mass retail channel and the retail distribution groups. In the past two decades this development has witnessed a strong increase with the introduction of new typologies, such as 'commercial superstructures' and 'shopping polarities.'[1] In some urban areas, this has brought about strong territorial competition, with market saturation as a result. In the United States, where the competition among shopping centres is much stronger than in Europe, retail buildings suffering from demise or high vacancy rates, also known as 'deadmalls' and 'ghostboxes,' are common in every metropolitan area.[2] In Italy and Europe, however, the delay embedded in the modernization process of the retail system should allow public administrations to anticipate this phenomenon and accordingly adapt urban policies. Save for some differences in terms of localization strategy and urban planning regulation, the European and American retail distribution systems are after all quite similar. This became apparent when the first Italian deadmalls began to emerge. Once this problem has been registered, which solutions could be found? Can a shopping centre be given a second life? This paper analyses features and issues arising from the death and the conversion of commercial buildings. Focusing on Italy, the reasons for the demise of malls and its effects on the economic and urban systems will be studied.

Keywords: Italian scenario, shopping polarities, deadmall, demalling

Introduction

The analysis of the shopping centre phenomenon in the United States allows us to better understand the evolution of the Italian and European retail system. In the US, 'deadmalls' (abandoned shopping centres) and 'ghostboxes' (abandoned big box stores) began to appear in the mid 1990s and reached an alarming level by the beginning of the 2000s. The closure of shopping centres presents itself as an inevitable trend in the development of mass retail – as first perceived in the US, and later on in Europe. The phenomenon seems endemic to this type of facilities, as they are generally planned and managed to be successful in a limited period of time, which is sufficient to guarantee the amortization of the initial investment.

In Northern America, deadmalls and ghostboxes – or 'greyfields' as the Congress of New Urbanism,[3] which takes into consideration the whole urban context, defines them – are the testament of this short life span of the retail industry's physical structures. This collapse is caused by a variety of factors. The increasing number of commercial sites produces a strong competition between retailers and a market saturation, resulting in the crisis or failure of some properties. Moreover, every single mall or big box store must face specific problems, related to location, age, typology, accessibility, maintenance, catchment areas and changing consumers' behaviours. For example, in the US most customers favour the convenience of power centres, the pedestrian areas of the open-air malls or the 'urban style' of lifestyle centres over the enclosed mall. This results in the emergence of greyfields that pose a community-wide problem; not only in terms of the urban and social blight affecting surrounding areas, but also from an economical point of view; loss of tax revenue and the lack of job opportunities.

What happened overseas is useful to anticipate and perhaps even prevent the negative effects of the excessive expansion of retail structures in Italy, taking into account the main similarities and also differences between the two countries. In the US over 73% of all sales, both food and non-food, take place in stores of the mass retail channel, mainly represented by a few large commercial typologies (shopping malls, big box stores) and owned by powerful private companies, such as WalMart and HomeDepot. In Italy, in 2013, only 43,5% of all purchases took place in mass retail channel stores, with stark differences between food (65,5%) and non-food (24,1%).[4] More recent statistics however show that shopping centres and big/medium sized stores[5] in Italy are increasing their market-share, which is becoming much more akin to the of the US. Also the typologies of retail buildings in the US and Europe are quite similar, although the

N.	Region	Shopping centres*	Population**	Chief Town	% of Shopping centre per Region
1	Lombardy	192	10.001.496	Milan	
2	Emilia Romagna	134	4.450.541	Bologna	
3	Piedmont	118	4.425.194	Turin	
4	Veneto	98	4.928.503	Venice	
5	Lazio	87	5.889.649	Rome	
6	Tuscany	73	3.752.414	Florence	
7	Sicily	55	5.088.889	Palermo	
8	Campania	53	5.869.029	Naples	
9	Marche	37	1.549.507	Ancon	
10	Abruzzo	38	1.331.749	L'Aquila	
11	Apulia	33	4.082.840	Bari	
12	Calabria	35	1.977.148	Catanzaro	
13	Umbria	34	895.259	Perugia	
14	Sardinia	30	1.661.630	Cagliari	
15	Friuli-Venezia Giulia	26	1.227.625	Trieste	
16	Liguria	24	1.584.242	Genoa	
17	Trentino-South Tyrol	13	1.055.649	Trento	
18	Basilicata	10	575.993	Potenza	
19	Molise	10	313.278	Campobasso	
20	Aosta Valley	2	128.210	Aosta	* Our elaboration on data from Infocommercio[7]
	Total	1.102	60.788.845		** ISTAT[8], 2013

Figure 1: Map showing the distribution of shopping centres in Italy in 2014.

Figure 2: Deadmalls in Italy; (1) Le Acciaierie in Cortenuova; (2) Euromercato in Casoria; (3) Giardini del sole in Capodrise and (4) Polo della qualità in Marcianise.

average size of the US shopping mall and big box is much larger than that of its Italian counterparts. Analogies can also be detected in terms of location. Most of these large retails buildings are situated in suburban areas. As a result, they can often only be reached by private means of transportation. There are however also some profound differences between Italy and the US; particularly in terms of laws and regulations, which are much more strict in Italy. In the last twenty years, the Italian retail planning legislation has witnessed a progressive liberalization (Legislative Decrees 59/2010,[6] L. 248/2006, Legislative Decrees 114/98) and has adopted the principle of 'qualitative need' instead of the previous 'quantitative need.'[7] The liberalization of retail activities largely pertains to small and medium size stores, while activities on wider surfaces (with a gross leasable area of more than 2500 m^2) are still governed by a more complex retail authorization process that requires a prior evaluation by the regional committee.

The Italian Retail System

In Italy the phenomenon of land occupation and expansion of big retail stores presents an important challenge. Nonetheless, local policies do not (yet) seem to consider the signals coming from the US. Since the 1990s the Italian retail system has experienced a drastic evolution as new typologies have been created next to the traditional shopping centres. Even the location of retail stores have witnessed an evolution, as retail centres began to crop up in proximity of urban areas, often as a solution for the revitalization process of old industrial sites. The Italian commercial system has been further enriched by the introduction of new formats, such as factory outlet centres (FOC) or entertainment centres, and the mixture of different kinds of retail typologies and functions in specific urban areas called 'commercial polarities.'[8] When annexed to important buildings, such as train station or airports, these complexes are called 'superplaces.'[9] Next to this evolution, an important increase of new retail spaces has been registered, especially in the sector of medium sized big box stores. This increase is even occurring in saturated and congested areas.[10]

At the moment, the Italian retail scenario can be categorized into four different typologies of shopping places or 'Shopping Polarities.' First of all, the planned centre, which is an independent structure – or an open air set of retail buildings – planned and developed as a single entity or located in a complex formed by successive additions along the main road system. It comprises enclosed and open air shopping centres, retail parks, factory outlet centres, entertainment centres and aggregations, such as the 'Commercial strip.' A second type is the shopping district. This is a spontaneous aggregation of neighbourhood retail spaces along streets or urban squares. It is usually located in the central areas of cities and often organized in 'Urban commercial districts' (*Distretti Urbani del Commercio*) or 'Natural Shopping Centres' (*Centri Commerciali Naturali*).[11] The third type, is the stand alone store. Its is characterized by big and medium sized stores with formats similar to the big-box, and generally located in peri-urban and suburban areas. The fourth and final type, is the E-commerce place. This typology, that trades products and services over the Internet, is both competing with and complementary to traditional shopping places.

For years, the discussion has focused on the conflicts between planned centres and shopping districts. Nowadays, however, this dualism seems questionable. A recent Italian study[12] shows how the retail offer, activities, experiences and use of places related to planned centres and shopping districts are quite different and can sometimes be complementary or symbiotic. Strong competition is however emerging between similar shopping typologies, especially between planned centres, which often present the same layout and retail offer. The main companies of the retail industry constantly increase the commercial offer, especially in terms of local occupation and size, which in some areas has caused a growing competition between retailers and has led to market saturation. As a result, initial crises are emerging in some areas, where the tough competition has led to high vacancy rates and closure – ostensibly reproducing was has been happening in the US for the past twenty years. Even if the problem is only starting to emerge, it can (or should) be considered a sign of a new urban trend that needs to be controlled.

The Case of the Lombardy Region and the Milan Metropolitan Area

In Italy, the Lombardy region is the most dynamic in terms of economic growth and retail development. It was the first Italian region to reach a population of more than ten million – registering 10.001.496 inhabitants in 2013 – and has a commensurable GDP.[13] Lombardy has 192 shopping centres (see figure 1); a number that increases to 222 if the twenty-eight 'planned centres,' which have recently been authorized,[14] some of which are under construction, are also taken into account.

If we analyse the effects of the current competitive retail scenario in Lombardy,[15] considering the capacity of its 222 shopping polarities[16] and the force of their gravitational attraction in relation to their primary catchment areas,[17] certain areas are characterised by stark competition in the face of a low demographic density. Symptoms of the retail crisis have begun to emerge in these areas, including the increase of vacant spaces, the decrease of sales and the closure of the first food and non-food anchor stores. 'Le Acciaierie'[18] is the largest deadmall in the area. It opened in 2005 and was expected to host more than 150 shops on 57000 m^2 of gross leasable area. Milan's metropolitan region represents the most competitive retail area in Lombardy and Italy. It is characterized by many shopping polarities that were created in the last thirty years to 'accommodate' the metropolitan region's wide consumer catchment area. At the same time, the metropolitan area also incorporates a large number of medium and big box stores, especially grocery stores with a gross leasable area ranging from 400 up to 2500 m², called 'superstore' or 'supermarket.' The market is progressively saturated, inducing competition between the different structures. Nonetheless, many new shopping polarities are currently planned or under construction, four of which are large regional shopping centres. The regional shopping centre 'Westfield Milan,' which is located in Segrate, a town adjoining the municipality of Milan, is set to open in 2017. It will become one of Europe's largest shopping centres with over 300 shops and a 170000 m² of gross leasable area. Another one currently under construction is the regional shopping centre 'Arese Shopping Center,' which is located in Arese at a distance of ten kilometres from Milan. Arese will open in 2016 and offer over 75000 m² of gross leasable are. Also the 'Cascina Merlata' regional shopping centre, which is located in Milan next to the EXPO 2015 exhibition site is coming in 2017, offering over 35000 m² of gross leasable area. Finally, a new regional shopping centre located in the ex 'Falk' steel plant of Sesto San Giovanni, a town adjoining the municipality of Milan, is opening in 2018 and will offer another 74000 m² of gross leasable area.

As a result of this continuous growth, some older shopping centres are already investing in restyling and refurbishing in order to maintain or improve their appeal. Our recent analysis of this area[19] has resulted in a map showing the overlap between the catchment areas of every regional shopping polarity. The most competitive retail area in Lombardy according to our analysis is the northern portion of Milan's metropolitan region. In this area, due to market saturation, medium size stores, with a gross leasable area of less than 2500 m² in stand-alone layouts are the most affected by the crisis; particularly shops trading in home decoration, car dealership and grocery stores.

The Case of the Piedmont Region and Turin Metropolitan Area

The Piedmont region is ranked third for number of shopping centres per region, and presents dynamics similar to those of Lombardy. The Metropolitan area of Turin is the most interesting part of the region. Here the steady growth of the large-scale retail sector along with the approval of new projects for shopping sites have led to market saturation, fierce competition between shopping facilities and the presence of vacant buildings. A recent research that we have conducted[20] focused on the dynamics of the main shopping polarities (big box

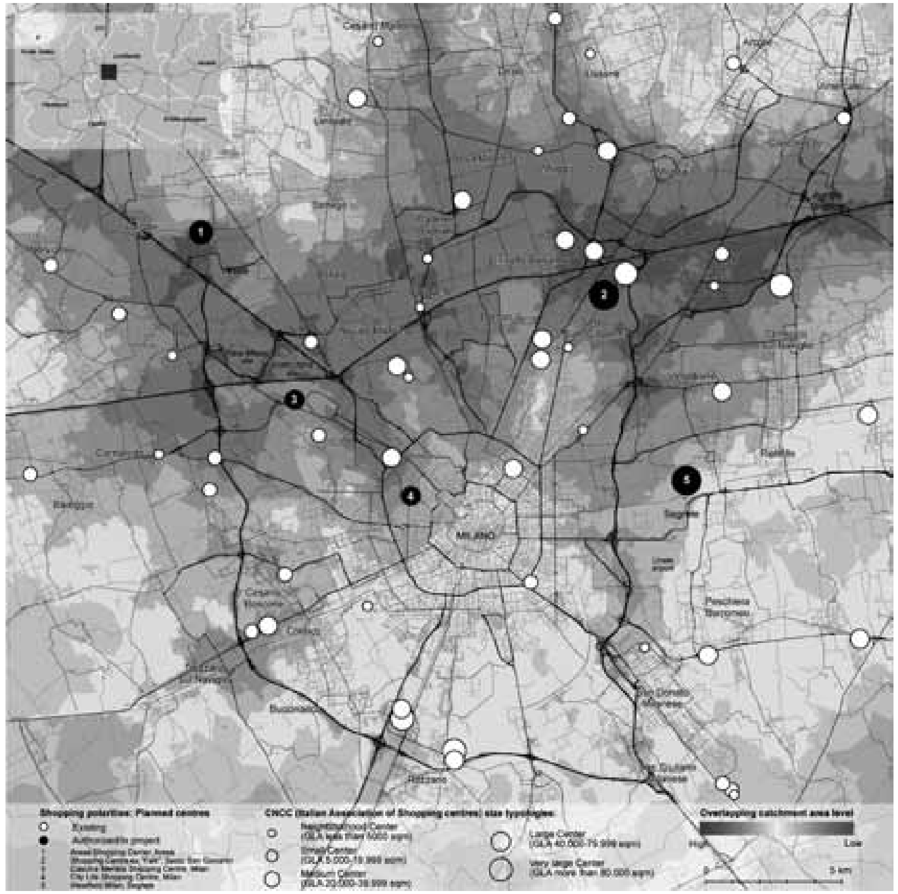

Figure 3: Map of Milan's metropolitan area, showing the overlapping catchment area and competitive landscape.

stores and shopping centres with a gross leasable area of more than 2500 m²). Analysing the current situation, two key trends can be observed in the evolution of the region's shopping polarities. There are those with a decisively suburban location, located in close proximity of highways that connect them to the city, and then there are those that have an urban location. These are more recent retail buildings, which are a part of larger urban transformations, commonly aimed at the redevelopment of industrial areas. Starting from the current situation the research provides a potential future scenario, considering new shopping polarities that are on their way. These include 'Caselle Designer Village,' which is a project by Praga Holding Real Estate, located next to Turin airport and offers more than 80000 m² of gross leasable area. Another project in the pipeline

is 'Fashion Mall Laguna Verde' in Settimo Torinese. This shopping mall is to be erected on the Pirelli industrial site, where it will insert 70000 m^2 gross leasable area. The 'Palazzo del Lavoro' project will, in turn, reuse the pavilion of Expo 1961 designed by Pier Luigi Nervi and offer more than 17000 m^2 of gross leasable area. The 'Galleria Auchan' may be realized in the Viberti area, an abandoned industrial site, on which Immochan presented a project for more than 90000 m^2 of gross leasable area, while the 'Mondo Juve' retail park and fashion centre is currently under construction in the southern part of the metropolitan area. It is set to open in 2016 and will offer more than 80000 m^2 of gross leasable area.
The future scenario assesses the risk of market saturation through a comparison with the existing situation. Scheduled projects could in the years to come modify the current state of Turin's retail context, as it creates new attractive shopping polarities that weaken the attraction of existing ones. At the moment, four different retail structures in this area have already been faced with the problem of demise. Of these, two have been redeveloped into new retail typologies,[21] another one is set to be demolished in the near future and will be replaced by three residential towers, while another one is still standing, albeit vacant and abandoned.

The Demalling Process: From US Experiences to the First Italian Cases

In the US, the emergence of greyfields encouraged communities and local administrations to devise shared solutions by defining regulations and guidelines that can prevent the phenomenon or by redeveloping abandoned areas. At the same time, a variety of public and private players, such as developers, politicians, communities, property owners and planners have been directly involved in the process of redevelopment and revitalization of greyfields. This 'demalling' process includes various strategies, which may differ in size, location, purpose, completion, strategy or ownership. Thanks to these kinds of projects, several demised shopping facilities have either been demolished and replaced with new urban areas or given a new use, such as museum, university, library, church, medical centre, offices, mixed-use or even novel retail typologies.
The transformation of vacant shopping centres and big box stores represents a completely new urban challenge. Given their short history, this type of buildings has not experienced relevant functional or architectural changes for decades. Moreover, their effective transformation is a complex issue, given the size of the buildings, the investment costs, urban planning rules, contractual conditions and also the necessary community support. By focusing on several case studies from the US, our recent research has identified four operating models: reuse, integration, redevelopment and replacement.

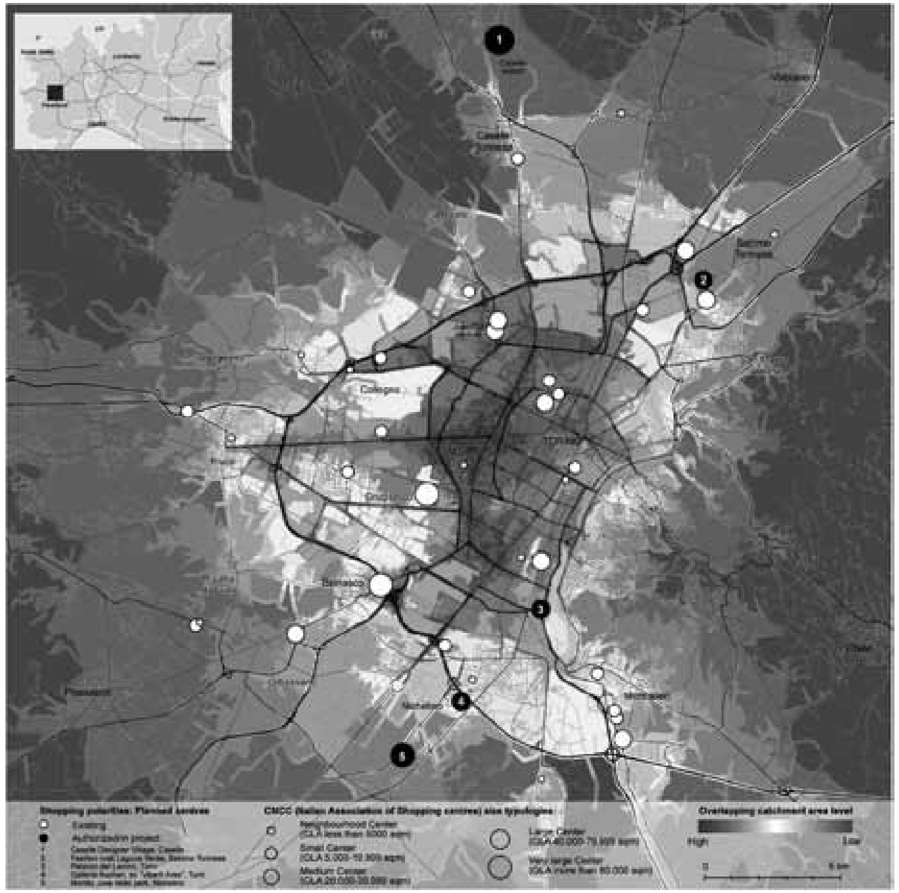

Figure 4: Map of Turin's metropolitan area, showing the overlapping catchment area and competitive landscape.

Figure 5: Demalling cases in Italy: (1) Health Centre in Pioltello, (2) 'New Pratilia' retail complex.

Reuse
This strategy involves the reuse of the abandoned building for a completely new function when retail is no longer a sustainable activity in the area. Changing the purpose of the building requires significant alterations but can solve social problems and counteract urban decay. The 'Denton Public Library' (Denton, Texas) was, for example, a large grocery store which has been transformed into a library. Another example is the 'Windsor Park Mall' (San Antonio, Texas). This was a regional mall, which is nowadays the Headquarters of Rackspace Hosting.

Integration
Integration refers to those interventions that provide the retail structures facing crisis with a new, complementary activity in order to revitalize the area and augment the flow of consumers. This kind of intervention was implemented at the 'Surrey Central City' (Vancouver, Canada), where a branch of the university campus is currently located on the last floors of the mall, next to a new office tower.

Redevelopment
Redevelopment implies that the retail function is maintained, while the structure and the typology of the building is strongly renovated through architectural and urban intervention, adding new volumes or demolishing parts of the complex. 'Santa Monica Place' (Santa Monica, California), an enclosed mall by the architect Frank Gehry (Gruen Associates), was for instance recently converted into an open-air complex. The 'Echelon Mall' (Voorhees, New Jersey) was, in turn, partly demolished to build residential and office buildings, and partly used to host the town centre.

Replacement
This strategy requires the demolition of the retail building and its substitution with a completely new urban area. The new complex could present an alternative retail typology, a mixed-use neighbourhood or a new activity such as office park or green area. Two examples are the 'City Center Mall' (Columbus, Ohio), which was replaced by a park surrounded with residential towers and offices, and the 'Cinderella Mall' (Englewood, Colorado), which was demolished to build a new mixed-use complex.

These methodological approaches require urban planning and architectural interventions, as they aim to generate new opportunities for greyfields and bring new life to deadmalls. From a legal point of view, however, the change of use can sometimes be problematic needs to be agreed with the public administration,

whose rules can influence, for the best or not, the proposal of transformation, sustaining, for example, the change of use classification. Besides the legislative aspect, the demalling process is strictly connected to the physical structure of the buildings to be transformed and adapted to a new purpose or just improved for a new commercial role. Demalling projects thus often have to overcome specific problems and deficiencies of these vast, single-story, single-use buildings, while at the same time defining new guidelines for their future development. The faults made in the United States, where commercial structures had a non-programmed and not regulated growth, offer an inevitable chance to reflect on these aspects, also considering the European and Italian areas.

In Italy some deadmalls and ghostboxes have already experienced transformations in terms of demalling.[22] One interesting project was realized for a ghostbox in Pioltello, a town close to Milan. In 2012, after several years of abandonment, the medium size grocery store was refurbished and transformed into a health centre. The renovation process started in 2008, six years after the retail store's demise. The municipality reached an agreement with all parties, both public and private, interested in this kind of renovation and signed a memorandum of understanding, which defined the architectural, economic and managerial detail of the project. In 2012, after two years of construction, the new health centre was opened and today hosts a public health association, different diagnostic devices, offices, private practices and small business activities related to the health industry. The new facility has 5000 m2 of surfaces and was realized with an investment of about twelve million euros. Another demalling case study in Italy, which follows the US' replacement strategy, is the case of Prato's deadmall. Here, the Pratilia shopping centre, which was originally built in the 1970s, was demolished in 2013, nine years after its closure. It was replaced with a new urban complex made up of complementary activities, such as a tower – hosting offices and a hotel – a public space and a larger big box store.

Conclusion
The Italian commercial system displays problems resulting from market saturation and retail sites' proliferation in distinct areas. Some shopping sites are already facing crisis, obsolescence and vacancy and if the development of this sector continues as expected, the failure and demise of malls will become inevitable trends.
The analysis of the Italian context has enabled us to study the process of demise of large and medium size stores in Italy in terms of public and private management and solutions. Different considerations emerge from this,

particularly with regards to how to develop urban and retail planning policies for large retail facilities, and how to face the problem of retail buildings' demise. The first aspect relates to the location of the new structures, based on the example of the UK's 'sequential approach,' which was already applied in interesting ways in some regional contexts in Italy; for instance the New Regional Retail Planning legislation of the Veneto Region.[23] This approach introduces a regulation for evaluating the quality of projects and areas, giving priority to central locations and guaranteeing specific requirements, such as: easy access through local public transportation, no land consumption, limited impact on environment and landscape, energy efficiency, the sustainability and reuse of materials, etc. These requirements become extremely important in the Italian context, where local policies of urban development still privilege the building of new big shopping centres in suburban agricultural contexts. It is furthermore necessary to consider the lifecycle of retail facilities during the planning and evaluation process of new settlements, preventing periods of crisis and planning interventions of reuse. The possibility of upgrading or conversion strategies might already be incorporated in project-phase of new retail infrastructures. For this reason public administrations in the US have introduced guidelines and rules to minimize the impact on the landscape of new constructions,[24] which would facilitate future reuse or demolition. The problem of the retail demise may thus turn into a great opportunity for the redevelopment of greyfields and, above all, for revitalizing urban spaces. It is therefore important to develop and promote guidelines, as is already happening in the United States, to reduce and prevent the negative effects in economic and environmental terms.

Overcoming mono-functionality, supporting alternative transit, reducing environmental impacts, or improving energy efficiency[25] of these buildings are just a few of the solutions that demalling strategies should provide. This foresees not only the use of equipment to minimize the energetic consumption of the structure, but also the use of material and sources that, at the end of the existence cycle of the structure, can be reused to reduce the cost of disposal, not only in economic but also in environmental terms. Future retail projects should take these considerations into account and should be developed much more coherently than they have been in the last decades. Local administrations have to define rules to guarantee quality standards and prevent unsuccessful dynamics, asking developers to provide a 'plan B' for their buildings, that facilitate reuse and redevelopment and promotes flexibility. Demalling strategies should be interpreted not only as a solution for the demise of buildings, but also as a set of instructions for future projects. Important themes, such as alternative transit, public facilities, mixed-use planning,

vertical growth, architectural sustainability, integration with urban context and soil protection, can influence the evolution of the retail sector and avoid the repetition of old mistakes.

Endnotes

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Design sketch for a shopping centre in Genk (Belgium)
by architect J. Plumier, ca. 1966.
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