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Foreword

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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The published volumes

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

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

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

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

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