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Commerce and the large scale: common themes from three different experiences

Corinna Morandi

The subject of commerce in relation to the urban space and the territory has not to date been the object of many in-depth studies in urban planning, within the framework of a relative indifference on the part of Italian planners for a series of activities considered as worthy of greater attention on the part of economists or sociologists. The intense development of surfaces for large distribution, now increasingly often spaces associated with other large facilities such as multiplex cinemas or theme parks, produce certain effects on the territory which are highly conspicuous and disturbing: consumption of land, jeopardising of the landscape, induced traffic, distortions in the model of employment and practices of consumption and of life. What has been described as the 'commercial revolution' began, as is well known, in Europe in the sixties with different rates of progress and it spread in Italy with a significant delay compared with other European countries, above all the United States. In Italy specific regulations for the sector date from law 426/71, principally used to set quantitative objectives of development of commercial activities for different product typologies.

Recent years have been crucial in determining the need for a new approach to understanding the dynamics, not only economic but also locational, of businesses and in emphasizing the role of territorial planning together with commercial planning. The turning point was marked on the national level by the approval in 1998 of the so-called 'reform of commerce', which introduced strong principles of liberalization in a sector widely dominated by conservative logics and a defence of the rents of position of the operators already present on the market.

The element of great impact which prompted the need to reform the instruments of governance of the phenomenon, including territorial instruments, was the rapid and intense evolution of the process of modernization of the commercial sector, with the massive entrance to the market of major operators, including international companies, and the restructuring of the presence of the principal brands in the various territorial ambits. These factors taken together determined in a relatively short period a marked expansion above all of large surfaces of organized distribution and the appearance of wholly or partly new commercial formats.

In the urban centres, a traditional area for the installation of commerce, situations emerged which saw at the extremes 'commercial desertification' on the one hand and on the other the gentrification and standardization of supply with the same national and international brands. In the outer urban areas there was a marked impoverishment and even decay of structures with commercial consolidation of aggregations in the presence of good conditions of access; in the suburban territory the large surfaces garrisoned the major axes and road junctions,

often with structures with a high impact and morphologically questionable as in the case of factory outlet villages; but they respond to a commercial demand for service which can no longer be met in different ways, like that expressed by the diffuse city.

Commerce mobilizes extremely important economic resources and of this municipal governments are well aware, to the point of encouraging in many cases the location of medium-sized and large facilities in their territory. The location of commercial surfaces or leisure facilities, which are often integrated in them, like multiplex cinemas, have been seen by the real estate operators and operators in the sector as a highly profitable field of investment and, by municipal administrators as economic resources.

As can be seen, the substantial change in the organization of the sector and its reflections in the territorial organization call for an analytic commitment which is far from banal. Naturally the commercial phenomenon, even restricting the field of interest to its spatial and territorial aspects, can be studied with various keys to its interpretation and on different scales.

In this contribution we present three cases, two Italian and one Spanish, in which the reading of the phenomenon and the development of instruments of governance is conducted on the large scale. I use this deliberately generic definition because the issue is not so much the reference to an administrative territory (though in the case of Bologna it is precisely the provincial Plan of commerce), but to an ambit that is neither local nor regional. The issue is placed on this territorial level in a very interesting way: an obvious reason is that the gravitational fields of large surfaces and specialized surfaces, above all if present in complex aggregates and supplemented by other functions besides commerce, have a largely supra-local dimension. Besides, it makes little sense to appraise the impact of the individual facility, while it is far more significant to consider aggregations of commercial and para-commercial activities, which often give rise to supra-local continuities.

New spaces of production, commerce and production in the Barcelona metropolitan region

Antonio Font, Lorena Vecslir

The most recent transformations of the spaces of production and consumption have extensively affected the existing spatial, functional and landscape structures of the Barcelona metropolitan region (Rmb).

The places of commerce and consumption are influenced by the spatial integration of buildings devoted to distribution and entertainment and by the evolution of sales formats, the reduction of commercial spaces of a traditional kind and by the intensive development of large specialist facilities.

The result of these economic processes is a new locational geography: a grid configuration that tends to be organized on principles of complementarity and synergy and a network composed of elements that are distinct in their forms and functions: specific nodes or poles, areas of centrality, linear densifications, etc...

To outline the field of inquiry a preliminary distinction was made between:

- spaces of 'production', which include all industrial activities (from the single factory, whether isolated or inserted in a precinct or industrial park, to major industry) and tertiary activities, logistics, services to business and offices;
- spaces 'of commerce and consumption', which comprises commercial activities and personal services, accommodation facilities, catering and leisure (entertainments, culture and sport).

At the same time a 'trans-scalar' approach was chosen to analyze the complexity of these spaces on different scales:

- the regional scale, on the level of the whole metropolitan region with its administrative divisions (comarcas) (1:50,000) to study trends in the location of these activities and their relationship to the evolution of the occupation and the use of land;
- the scale of the 'urban corridors' (1:25,000), to identify and characterize the main road axes on which the activities are clustered and identify the 'systems' or 'fragments' constituted by the new developed forms of production and consumption;
- the scale of the fragments or 'significant elements' (1:10,000, 1:5,000), with the objective of analyzing the links with the existing infrastructures and the principal functional and morpho-typological features.

Spaces of production and consumption in the metropolitan region

Location and spatial structure. The 1977 Rmb map represents a territory recently industrialized (between the mid-1950s and the mid-1970s, when the international energy crisis intervened), and a process of construction

of the principal infrastructures which had just begun. Industry was largely concentrated in the central area and in some development zones like Sant Andreu de la Barca and Martorell, the cities of Sabadell and Terrassa, the Baix Vallès, etc. Two large hypermarkets (one of which no longer exists) and the headquarters of a large company (Catalan West) were the first tertiary activities located in the metropolitan region: they were to progressively replace traditional production functions.

In the period 1977-2004, with the network of motorways and expressways now laid out, new industrial areas developed in the vicinity of the established production zones or partly urbanized areas, forming linear corridors or clusters where many of the processes of relocation and productive decentralization were concentrated. The principal criteria for the location of businesses were a high level of access, links with technological and telecommunications infrastructures, public services and proximity to research and development centres, the cost of land and, to a lesser degree, environmental quality and landscaping as factors of image-building, closeness to markets and synergy with other businesses.

One of the most important factors in this period was the appearance of large new complexes for tertiary activities and the creation of important facilities on a metropolitan scale, both urban and suburban, in part a legacy of the 1992 Olympics.

Evolution of activities in relation to the infrastructural network. For industrial activities, the following tendencies are recorded:

- the logics of location during the process of industrialization (between the mid-1950s and the 1970s) rested on a multi-nuclear urban structure, supported by the rail system and the network of national and metropolitan roads;
- the major infrastructures constructed in the period 1972-77 did not generate new industrial locations of functions, but contributed to a widespread and homogeneous consolidation of the industrial corridors already formed in the previous period;
- the network formed by the major traffic arteries stimulated the creation of new activities in the metropolitan area, with parallel processes of growth in new industries and the conversion of existing areas of the urban fabric. The process of tertiary expansion moved into a subsequent phase (starting in the mid-1980s). The connection between the location of tertiary activities and the principal road infrastructures of the region is evident and not just as a question of accessibility, but also in quest of visibility and the possibility to attract a customers from a supra-local catchment area.

Evolution of consumption of land between 1977 and 2004. In the metropolitan region, for the consumption of land during the period in question a particularly prominent role was played by the comarca of the Vallès occidental, followed by the Baix Llobregat and the Vallès oriental. These were followed at a distance by that of the Maresme and of Alt Penedès. It is necessary to empha-

size that in the case of Barcelonès there were changes in the use of certain zones that were previously industrial (Puerto-Zona Franca, SantsHostafrancs, Poble Nou, Sant Andreu, etc.).

In the case of the surface areas occupied by industrial activities, their variation between the beginning and the end of the period in question was 57%, that is to say it passed from 4,870 hectares of net surface area in 1977 to 7,659 hectares in 2004 in the whole of the metropolitan region. In the case of surface areas occupied by tertiary activities and of large dimensions, it passed from 711 hectares of surface area in 1977 to 1966 in 2004, with a development equal to 177%. In the case of surface areas devoted to 'major installations', the variation is about 39% between the beginning and the end of the period considered, passing from 2,699 hectares in 1977 to 3,746 in 2004.

Principal axes or urban corridors

Change of scale and delimitation of fragments. Starting from the associated analysis on the scale of the metropolitan region, we have identified twelve corridors, or principal axes, of location of the economic activities related to the infrastructures for mobility. The change of scale and a more detailed analysis of the corridors we had identified made it possible to identify certain 'systems' or fragments corresponding to the new spaces of production (business centres, logistics areas, science or technology parks, R and D centres, complexes or circumscribed elements that are the headquarters of offices or services to businesses) and new spaces for distribution and consumption (commercial parks, leisure parks, aggregations of commercial or specialized surface areas, isolated buildings with commercial functions, for personal services and leisure).

Territorial situations. We identified four groups of 'territorial situations', starting from the type of relationship that the new spaces of production and consumption have with the road and railway infrastructures and with the existing installations, their degree of urbanization, their functional features and the catchment areas of their users.

The first group comprises corridors where no conurbation has developed and individual elements of new innovative functions can be distinguished and the presence of production activities is accompanied by a limited presence of tertiary activities and services to businesses.

The second group of corridors is defined, in contrast, by the continuity of urbanization and the presence of buildings lining the road axes of a tertiary-productive type, housing activities with a high degree of innovation and with a metropolitan scale in the user catchment areas.

The third group of corridors comprises those that traverse cities with a solid industrial tradition, in which there have been gradual processes of conversion of old factories located along the historical roads, transformed into buildings for commerce and logistics, and at the same time small tertiary developments have been installed at the points of access to the cities.

Finally, we identified a series of corridors where spaces of consumption clearly predominate over production spaces. They are located at the nodes in the roads and near the points of access to the compact inner cities, neglecting the intermediate parts of the road axes and they have a catchment area that is both local and metropolitan.

Interpretation of the territorial role of the corridors. The overall vision of the new fragments of the system of production and consumption within the Rmb reveals some constant or recurrent elements in the logic of location of the different activities:

- the new productive spaces (business parks, technology parks, logistics areas) tend to constitute continuous fronts or clusters related to the principal road axes;
- the new spaces of consumption, particularly the shopping centres, are located in zones of greatest accessibility near the principal nodes of the road system;
- the public facilities and services appear with different forms and locations, though there is a large concentration near the B-30. In general they are activities on a metropolitan scale of large dimensions, which entail a heavy consumption of land, distant from infrastructures, but with a high level of accessibility;
- in operations of functional replacement, central locations are favoured, many of them in Barcelona, near the Rondas, as in the principal medium-sized cities of the metropolitan region (Sabadell, Mollet, Vilanova i la Geltrú, Mataró, etc.).

Some conclusions

Location and development model in relation to infrastructures and the environment. Very briefly and without attempting a detailed evaluation of the locational strategy and modes of transformation of every type of fragment of production and consumption in the Rmb, the analysis reveals the close connections present between these factors and the infrastructures for mobility, in particular the network of the principal road arteries.

Locations related to the principal networks have been reinforced, above all with in the case of new spaces of consumption and production, with greater added value.

The analysis records a spatial structure dependent on a model of accessibility and certain typologies of mobility that should be reconsidered in future, in part as a function of the new system of high capacity transport, which ought to prompt new choices in territorial planning, with greater coherence between the location of the innovative activities and the public transport network and collective and service facilities, and with forecasts for new systems of intermodal travel, less dependent on the congested road system of the metropolitan area.

A change in the regional model of open spaces could also have an effect on the revision of locations, existing and expected, of spaces for production and consumption.

Forms of the new places of production and consumption. In a way similar to the models of the British 'business

park' or French 'parcs de bureaux', the old brownfield sites are being replaced by new developments in which the presence of natural elements and improved infrastructures are decisive. It is also important to reconsider the previous regulations in relation to current tendencies, reducing the minimum size of the lots, providing for the introduction of tertiary functions and improving the quality of the design of the buildings.

The relation of these developments with their immediate surroundings, with the existing urban fabric and with the objective of integration in the landscape is one of the principal strategies in seeking to supersede the models of development that saw them as autonomous or decontextualized elements.

As for the spaces of commerce, from the early 1980s there was a generalized replacement of small and medium-sized sales surfaces, above all those in the food sector and non-everyday consumer goods, first with the replacement of department stores and then with other formats: hypermarkets, outlets, hard discounts, traditional commercial centres, with large surface areas (in general selling groceries) as 'anchors' to garrison the territorial catchment area and a gallery of sales points, besides fast-food restaurants, garden centres, petrol stations, gyms, bowling alleys, etc.

Parallel with this development, there has been a transfer of leisure activities which once took place in the streets and squares to specialized 'precincts', separated from the traditional public space: shopping malls, zones for public or private sport, theme parks, etc.

What strategies for planning in the metropolitan region? In conclusion, and in relation the drafting of the metropolitan territorial Plan for Barcelona, we indicate some open issues and some possible suggestions derived from the experience of this study:

- the possibility of defining, in the territorial Plan, some supra-municipal territorial environments (metropolitan corridors or axes in which the activities described are clustered), starting from in-depth analysis of the economic structure;
- the difficulties inherent in the technical and administrative practice of acting on a municipal scale when dealing with processes that are supra-local or territorial in nature;
- the importance, on an intermediate scale between the metropolitan region and the individual 'fragments', to adopt instruments for planning economic activities that will be capable of dealing with the opportunities, necessities and specific features of each territory, while bringing out the local aspects of identity and enhancing variety in territories;
- evaluation of the existing spaces of production and consumption and of the conditions of location, with the objective of proposing policies of development, restriction or transformation;
- fostering mixité between production, consumption and leisure activities so as to supersede the spatial segregation in the territory of functions that are perfectly compatible with each other;

- the promotion of clusters for research and innovation as a specific strategy of the metropolitan region, where there already exist embryos of advanced activities, in which sectors of the business and scientific community work together with local government and which were identified through our study (technology parks, R and D centres);

- the study also observed, besides the limited effectiveness of planning on the local scale for the governance of the new processes of development of production and consumption activities, the absence of regulatory mechanisms for distributing costs and benefits at the inter-municipal level, which would optimize the distribution of externalities in the territory. In this sense the possibility of creating new forms of partnerships and governance on the territorial level would be of particular importance in the Rmb as a way of dealing with problems common to many local administrations, as a way to devise shared strategies, launch policies on the supra-local scale and establish mechanisms of collaboration between public and private subjects.

A territorial project for Bologna's commercial system

Marco Guerzoni

In spring 2004 the Province of Bologna adopted the territorial provincial coordination Plan (Ptcp). This was an instrument for the governance of an immense area, which regulates and coordinates the various functions and activities which have been or may be established in the provincial territory. It consists of a set of policies and instruments necessary for the accomplishment and on-going maintenance of the 'territorial project'. Noteworthy among them, for their importance and complexity, are the Territorial agreements, the structural Plans drafted in associated form between the municipalities, the Plan of provincial mobility and the commerce Plan, without forgetting the transversal activities linked to Territorial adjustment.

The provincial commerce Plan aims principally to plan and program the distribution network with regard to the commercial facilities which by dimensions and impact generate supra-municipal effects. One of the principal innovations of the regional planning law is also valid for commercial functions, with the identification of two components in the governance of the territory: the planning (or structural) function and the programming function.

In complete harmony with the Ptcp, the commerce Plan lays down a set of 'rules of the game' and structural guidelines: the polycentric pattern constituted by the layout of the Functional poles and the supra-municipal production Ambits above all. But it also proposes, appropriately, through the 'range of variation', a dimensioning which represents the operative component of the Plan, which is submitted to verification and revision cyclically every three or five years.

Principal strategic choices

The studies and the inquiries preliminary to the drafting of the commerce Plan made it possible to develop a clear diagnosis of the state of Bologna in relation to the presence and spread of commercial facilities, the system of consumption, the economic and territorial impact generated. The Bolognese territory dominates the regional panorama (and even the national in some cases), in terms of both the presence of major distribution facilities (the provincial average today is about 280 mq for every thousand residents), and in relation to growth over the last fifteen years: from the beginning of the nineties to the present, the provincial stock of facilities for large-scale distribution per capita grew eight times over, becoming almost exclusively polarized in the city of Bologna and in the municipalities of the inner metropolitan belt.

The commerce Plan seeks therefore mainly to contain the development of large-scale distribution facilities after what has happened in the recent past, and establishes a principle for the territorial enhancement of the facilities which can be carried out in the future. In this sense

the Plan does not respond to the general 'demand' for large distribution facilities (which is difficult to estimate) but proposes a system of rules of development that the market can if necessary adopt, on the basis of opportunities that will be appraised and analysed in the temporal horizon of programming, by means of the Territorial agreements, planning instruments laid down under Regional law (Lr 20/2000) to implement the Ptcp, and in compliance with the range of variation.

The developmental criteria for the location of commerce facilities of supra-municipal importance are fixed by the Plan on the basis of a territorial project that seeks to create an effective polycentric framework based on a high-quality, strong and at the same time highly articulated polarization of facilities which attract large numbers of people, with the objective of improving standards of living and purchasing opportunities for the population within its own territorial ambits while creating vital and pleasant urban spaces.

The decongestion of the Bolognese conurbation by preventing excessive recourse to mobility across a wide radius entails the development and consolidation of two strategic alternative destinations to the major magnet represented by the metropolitan core: on the one hand the functional poles and production ambits for mixed functions already envisaged under the Ptcp; on the other the principal urban centres of the metropolitan system, where there is already present an articulated and qualified range of services for the population.

On the basis of these guidelines, a brake has been put on hypotheses for development which envisage the transformation for commercial purposes of zones outside the functional poles and the areas already urbanized or possibly open to urbanization. This excludes the possibility of installing commercial structures of supra-municipal importance that gravitate on the major road network not financed and not yet inserted in the provincial administration's implementation programs. Instead, locations were favoured which were closely related to the stations of the Metropolitan railway service or at any rate calculated to boost the more sustainable forms of mobility.

This hypothesis of territorial reorganization of the commercial facilities plans to consolidate a 'second circle of filters' along the routes that currently see much of the population gravitating from the mountains and the plain towards the city of Bologna and its conurbation, places characterized by a dense presence of high-attraction commercial activities. The new polarities of this 'second circle of filters' have, however, to be conceived in a radically different way from the shopping centres of the 1980s and 90s.

Planning policy should aim, in the first place, at the creation of developments that guarantee a certain mix of functions, by studying comprehensive solutions which bring together built-up areas and existing historic town centres on the one hand and new poles of services on the other, taking care to contribute to the comprehensi-

ve enhancement of the existing urban fabric. The Plan then encourages the use of different forms of mobility in the service of the commercial system, by identifying interchanges between road-rail, along the home-work routes, as the foundations for a project to be privileged and boosted. The structural pattern that derives from this approach envisages nine 'potential reservoirs': seven functional poles and two production areas, for the possible construction of major distribution facilities in the coming years, on the basis of public necessities and market trends.

Relative to operative programming (the Range of variation), the provincial Council of Bologna has established that these 'potential reservoirs', can host a total (for the whole metropolitan territory) of up to 86,000 mq of Sales surface, in the arc of the next six years (with a commitment to verify how much has been built in three years' time).

This layout could not, however, be fully implemented, if it were not supported by three policies that the same commerce Plan has adopted, and which only superficially seem to be unrelated to the question of commerce: territorial adjustment; support of the Metropolitan rail service; the quest for quality and sustainability in commercial developments.

Redistributing rent to compensate for impacts

Following the philosophy of the Regional law 20/2000, the commerce Plan appears as the most suitable instrument to reassert the principle of adjustment for commercial developments, and for defining the common regulations for its application.

The 'supra-municipal' nature of the commercial activities regulated by the commerce Plan presents it as a privileged object in territorial adjustment: they are rare functions, with effects that are reflected beyond the boundaries of the municipalities where they are located, and which at the same time generate considerable financial resources (private and in part public) and substantial costs (public) on different territorial scales.

The territorial impacts induced by commercial facilities which by nature and dimensions cause spillover effects, can be classed as of two types:

- a negative impact on small-scale commerce, due to proximity to the historic city centres and established urban ambits;
- a negative impact on the metropolitan road network.

The commerce Plan envisages a specific 'contribution to sustainability', which is applied to commercial projects with the greatest potential impact and is defined in the territorial agreement.

In these contexts the Plan envisages that the new developments should be connected to a contribution earmarked for the adoption of compensatory measures (in terms of policies and works), through the payment of a specific 'additional' and 'contractual' contribution above the contributions for construction under Lr 31/02, to be specified within the implemental instruments, starting

from the Territorial agreement.

The contribution will be used to fund:

- projects for the enhancement of the historic city centres and traditional commercial areas, in compliance with and integration of the objectives of the Lr 41/97 (Intervention on behalf of the small and medium-sized businesses in the commerce sector);
- projects for mobility given priority in the provincial mobility Plan.

Support for the Metropolitan rail service

The Plan's policy of privileging the nodes of exchange for mobility, specifically the areas of the stations of the Metropolitan rail service (Sfm), in the location of new commercial facilities, endowed with suitable accessibility, articulated on two principal levels of action, referring to Bologna centrale and the remaining stations which possess a strategic service potential.

By its drawing power and service potential, Bologna centrale railway station possesses the qualities to be a functional pole, as indicated in the Ptcp. The role of commerce, in the future organization of the station, should therefore represent yet another opportunity for travellers; the specific methods of implementation, and the contents of the commercial format are defined by an appropriate Territorial agreement, which also forms the basis of the organizing elements of the recent International design competition, for the new integrated complex of the Bologna centrale station, held by the Rfi and won by the Japanese architect Arata Isozaki.

Besides Bologna centrale railway station, 16 stations of the Metropolitan rail service (out of a total of 80) have been identified on the basis of their location, potential traffic, and favourable conditions of modal interchange: this will entail conceiving the ambit of the 'minor stations' as a 'new place', a catalyst for commuter flows and an organizer of local spaces. In this way it will meet the needs of commuters (with numbers growing steadily), so as to restore vitality to often peripheral spaces at risk of decay.

Reducing the environmental impact of commercial developments

The emergency dictated by environmental pollution, the effects of climate change, the general and growing lack of resources, particularly water and energy, has also led the commerce Plan to identify policies and concrete choices to help reduce the environmental impact generated by the commercial system as a whole and by the individual commercial facilities in particular. A large commercial structure is an enormous consumer of energy, a very powerful attractor of traffic, and a constant producer of waste. The objective of the commerce Plan, in this respect, is to supply guidelines and principles aimed at the reduction of the principal causes of environmental impact in the system of large-scale distribution, by regulating both urban-building-architectural design and the constructional and administrative methods adopted in

these facilities, with a three-pronged policy:

- by defining the ‘performance objectives’ to be pursued in the planning and construction of new shopping centres inserted in the Plan;
- by asking for all shopping centres to adopt ‘environmental management’ of their facilities and activities;
- by introducing mechanisms of incentives which reward virtuous developments and behaviours.

The methodological approach adopted introduces, as the element of reference, the instrument of ‘indicators’: besides defining for each theme the objectives that should be pursued, as well as associating each objective with a list of useful project actions to enable the objective to be reached, the commerce Plan experimentally introduces a list of unambiguous quantitative and qualitative parameters. With each objective is associated one or more indicators, through which it will be possible to ‘measure the environmental sustainability’ of the commercial development. This articulated system is regulated by the Plan in both the body of rules and in a single thematic enclosure: the Guidelines for the construction of ecologically endowed commercial areas.

Commerce in the milanese territory: the geography of supply and main lines of governance and enhancement

Corinna Morandi

Between 2007 and 2008 the Urb and Com laboratory produced a study to reconstruct the geography of the commercial activities present in the territory of the province of Milan, as a backdrop against which to place some proposals for the governance of these activities.

Lombardy and the Province of Milan: the framework of regulations for commerce

The Milanese urban region, one of the most dynamic areas of the country in terms of economic development and territorial transformation, has been affected with great intensity in recent decades by the location of medium to large commercial surfaces, some of them integrated into multifunctional poles. The historical road axes connecting Milan with the metropolitan territory and beyond are today underscored by almost continuous rows of commercial facilities of various dimensions and typologies, but large surface areas are also recurrent along the network of smaller roads and in sparsely populated areas. The network of neighbourhood commerce has in many cases been completely overhauled, but the historic city centres of medium-sized towns have maintained their character as urban commercial poles.

These dynamics of reorganization of the commercial supply system have found significant support in Lombardy over the last decade in the adaptation of the regional planning regulations to the ‘reform of commerce’ of 1998 and the three-year Program for the development of the commercial sector in 2006-08, which at least on the level of principles introduced some clear and significant guidelines, such as:

- rigorously restricting the consumption of non-urbanized land, orientating operators who intend to build commercial surfaces of large dimensions towards locations in outer-urban areas already endowed with infrastructure and brownfield or blighted sites ripe for redevelopment;
- upgrading and specializing the network of medium-sized surfaces for sale, as highly critical;
- defining projects that increase the level of service to consumers;
- using economic resources generated by the construction of commercial surfaces for significant projects of public enhancement of the territory, local development, and environmental reclamation;
- fostering new construction projects, extensions, and redevelopment of commercial surfaces with the objectives of environmental sustainability, architectural quality and insertion in the landscape.

Moreover, in 2005 the Lombardy Region approved the new regional planning law which identified the roles and

areas of competence for the different territorial authorities, also in reference to the sector of commerce.

The cognitive picture of supply

This study made it possible to identify in the Milanese urban region, a territory with uncertain boundaries, undefined in relation to an administrative unity, some of the developmental environments of commerce with specific features in terms of locational logics, extent, dynamics and sometimes the criticality of commercial activity. This approach led to the recognition that the Milanese urban region, but not the province of Milan, comprises an developmental ambit of commerce located north of the provincial area and identified in the belt of extensive urbanization at the foothills of the Alps, within which the commercial presence produces the emergence of a linear supply system running east-west and articulated in two segments of the infrastructural corridor or Varese-Lecco and Bergamo-Brescia, with different typological and gravitational features. Another developmental area dilated beyond the ambit of the province to that of the urban region was recognized in the Lodigiano, whose supply system, historically generated by the commercial clusters positioned at the intersections of the Milanese communes with the belt of the via Emilia, is today characterized by the presence of extensive commercial surfaces concentrated in a territory with a low demographic concentration.

In relation to the objectives of the project, the cartographic and interpretive study of the geography of supply is itself however concentrated on the Province of Milan, because of the need to relate the analytic part of the study to its strategic and orientative implications, within the framework of the revision of the administrative authority's instruments for large-scale planning. The reconstruction of the picture of commercial supply in the provincial ambit was achieved through a complex work of creating databases for medium-sized and large sales surfaces and their geo-referencing.

The integration of retail in large scale policies

The description of the geography of commerce by separate ambits enabled us to appraise the specifics of the different areas in relation to the types of commercial activities that characterize them and the way they relate to the territory.

The comprehensive extent of the commercial supply of retail activities in the province of Milan is of over 5.3 million mq, about half of which is distributed in neighbourhood businesses and the other half in over 150 large surface areas and over 2,500 medium-sized surface areas. A few essential data will give us an immediate idea of the relation between the urban system of Milan and the rest of the province: Milan, with about one-third of the population, has about half of the surface areas and sales points of neighbourhood public businesses; but it has only one-third of the surface area of the medium-sized structures and only one-seventh of the surface areas of

large sales facilities.

In synthesis, the developmental layout presents a central system, which the new plan for the governance of the city's territory seeks to strengthen further, both through operations of reuse of the still available areas, and by resorting extensively to the regional policies of support to commerce, particularly through the recent financing of the 'urban districts of commerce'.

The territorial axes and commercial aggregates placed on the nodes at the intersections between radial and tangential roads are consolidated with the insertion of new formats and the reinforcement of product specialization. Some cases appear to constitute real multi-functional poles, even on the interregional scale when certain conditions of location, accessibility, complexity of aggregation and its commercial and extra-commercial formats create particularly extensive catchment areas. Some large surfaces are linked to the expectation of new infrastructures: and their construction could present some criticalities because of the uncertainties and the long times taken for such projects.

The communes with the largest populations and commercial traditions have created projects for the development of commerce coordinated with programs of urban city redevelopment which are often effective in the curbing the processes tending to weaken the commercial fabric, while the lack of commercial supply in proximity to smaller communes and in public housing estates is highly problematic. Problems, new to Italy but already evident in other countries, are bound up with urban decay and sometimes the decommissioning of large commercial facilities which fail to be attractive and competitive and represent elements of decay in the territory and the landscape.

The major suburban polarities represent, potential or real, criticalities for the urban territory, at least in two ways: by their impact on the infrastructural networks and their impact on the supply networks in the proximity. The road network, existing or related to reliable projects for new infrastructures, should be taken as a precondition for the location of big new facilities with large catchment areas, but the conditions are beginning to be mature for accessibility from the rail network to be seen as an important resource of the milanese region, to be considered as a significant factor in location, not only for commerce of proximity but also for medium and large surfaces.

A further element of reflection that emerges from the study of the locations of the commercial facilities is bound up with the relationship between the dimensions of the interventions and the size of the population of the communes. It would be advisable to introduce certain criteria, in the logic of what is expected from regional planning for 'zero impact growth', so as to activate mechanisms of supra-municipal coordination and orientate the locations of major facilities, so avoiding further consumption of non-urbanized land, which has reached an extremely critical threshold, and the major commercial

surfaces have without doubt contributed to this process. In this there is obviously a significant role for the subject responsible for large area planning, the province or in the future the metropolitan city, to promote some pilot projects, for example to test a process of coordination in the modes of planning governance of commercial locations, to develop projects that respond to the demand for integrated commercial activities related to the nodes of mobility, particularly of public transport, as a response to the evident growth of travel in the provincial ambit and access to the area also by populations in transit and not only by residents, so developing the theme of commerce as a service of general interest starting from situations which require both physical and socioeconomic redevelopment programs, as in the major public housing estates.

Retail development ambits

Corinna Morandi

The Sempione and Magentino axis. This developmental ambit has as its principal reference the radial axis of in the process of formation of the conurbation of this metropolitan sector, the construction of the new trade fair pole in the communes of Rho and Pero and the scheduled completion of the Expo district have already activated a series of expectations and processes of transformation of the areas. Here, as in other zones of the inner belt of Milan, in recent years there has already been a strong development of large commercial surfaces, as in the case of the Metropoli shopping mall in the commune of Novate Milanese or the commercial aggregate of Baranzate (Esselunga-Decathlon-Castorama), both on the margins of the communal boundary of the city. Despite these presences, the supply in the vicinity of the historic city centre of Rho has been maintained on high levels, both in quantity and in its typological articulation. To the south of the Sempione axis, other concentrations of medium-sized and some-times large surfaces have developed, often in communes of small and medium-small dimensions.

Milanese Brianza and the major market road of Valassina.

In the multicentric conurbation of Milanese Brianza a prevalently linear system of commercial supply is recognizable, abutting onto the axis of the Viale Nuova Valassina, between Monza and Giussano, and characterized by a sequence, often uniform, of commercial buildings of medium-sized and large dimensions. The linear system, unique by the density of presences in the whole regional ambit, the axis of Zara-Fulvio Testi-Cinisello Balsamo-Sesto San Giovanni, is one of the strongest and most attractive clusters by the modernization of its formats and the integration of strictly commercial supply with catering and leisure activities.

This axis is also the theatre of a new phase of consolidation, with the numerous redevelopments of brownfield sites, both in commune of Milan (Bicocca, the former Marelli works) and in the metropolitan communes. In the northernmost part, the system is characterized by the widespread presence of average and large sales facilities, with a specialization above all in the area of furnishings, related to the furniture production district of Brianza, as in the communes of Lissone and Seregno. The important urban pole of the city of Monza (with over 120,000 inhabitants), the capital of the new Province of Monza-Brianza, constitutes the interchange between Milanese Brianza and the Vimercatense.

The reticular system of the vimercatense.

Special in-depth study was devoted to the vimercatense, because of the importance of the programs for new

infrastructures (the Pedemontana and the Tangenziale est express roads, the extension of the subway line and intervention in the rail system). These interventions, mainly during the '90s and in particular the second half of the decade, shaped the new major commercial developments in the territory of the vimercatese, whose principal results were the development of the new aggregates of Carugate (with over 54,000 mq of surface area for sales), Cornate d'Adda-Busnago and Villasanta, which emphasise the reticular and polycentric character of this territory.

In fact, alongside these developments there exist 'weaker' situations of supply characterized by the pulverization of the supply system and the presence of small operators in the smaller historic city centres and in communes with low demographic density. To the south there developed a further system of supply, with the presence of large shopping malls, including some in situations of a weak developmental grid, or specialist structures, such as the Multiplex in Melzo, which by its geographic location draws on an important catchment area.

The axis of the via Emilia.

In the southeast sector, medium and large surface areas form a linear system characterized towards Milan by its continuity with the strong commercial axis of corso Lodi and south towards the supply system of the lodigiano: large shopping malls and clusters of medium to large specialized surfaces, above all in the sectors of furnishings and Diy facilities.

The western axes: Lorenteggio-Vigevanese.

The linear Lorenteggio-Vigevanese supply system is characterized by a strong spatial continuity between one of the major historical axes of the urban commerce in Milan and the recent development of the suburban market road with Metro and Ikea, Decathlon and Castorama, the sequence of fashion outlets, and themed markets on Sunday mornings at Cesano Boscone and Corsico.

This developmental situation can be compared to the south with the large shopping malls in Assago and Rozzano: in the latter case, the presence of a facility with a broad catchment area, both urban and metropolitan, was recently strengthened by the construction of a multiplex cinema. Assago clearly reveals the result of the process of consolidation of extra-urban poles, in which commerce and activities integrated with it constitute an essential component of its power of attraction.

The new interventions are inserted in the deteriorated situation of the extra-urban territory of south Milan, which began with the tertiary centre of Milano Fiori and the Forum of Assago, where it produces an effect of increased density and functional complexity, which will benefit from access to road and rail transport with a new subway line.

The central urban system: Milan.

The first fact to emphasize is the large quantitative presence of retailers, which continues to confirm the histori-

cal role of the city as a large node of flows and therefore of commercial exchanges. In total, sales points of different formats numbered over 23,000, for a surface area of over 2 million mq, a very significant quota of the over 5.3 million mq of commercial surfaces in the Province, while there are 7,830 public businesses (bars, cafés, pubs, restaurants), amounting to over 850,000 mq of surface area. For many years the development of medium-sized and above all large distribution was relatively restricted in the urban area, for both planning reasons and because of the commercial policies of the municipal administration. This situation changed radically because of the sharp boost given in the late eighties with the reuse of derelict and underused sites with programs in which the construction of new large commercial surfaces, mainly food stores, promoted by a small number of operators in a near-monopoly system, played a considerable part in terms of dimensions and as a significant element of efficacy in the economical feasibility of programs. The historical axes are supplemented by large new surfaces, over 30 in the municipal area and new aggregations which strengthen the principal inter-urban axes, as has happened on the northwest axis with the Portello project. This is a multipurpose commercial aggregate, opened in 2005, inserted in a broad urban project located on the former Alfa Romeo site, with a residential zone and a park covering 80,000 mq, promoted by the Gruppo Finiper and designed by the Studio Valle architetti associati.

The new Piano di governo del territorio (Pgt) tends to enhance the presence of commerce, including formats of medium-sized and large dimensions, both in the central and semi-central zones still awaiting transformation as well as in the residential districts.