



Citation: R. Sommella, L. D'Alessandro (2020). Consumption and Demand for Places: a Reading through the Neapolitan Case. *Bollettino della Società Geografica Italiana* serie 14, 3 Special Issue: 13-24. doi: 10.36253/bsgi-1007

Copyright: © 2020 R. Sommella, L. D'Alessandro. This is an open access, peer-reviewed article published by Firenze University Press (<http://www.fupress.com/bsgi>) and distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License, which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author and source are credited.

Data Availability Statement: All relevant data are within the paper and its Supporting Information files.

Competing Interests: The Author(s) declare(s) no conflict of interest.

For Italian evaluation purposes: While this work is fruit of shared reflections and research, paragraphs 3 and 4 are attributed to Rosario Sommella, and paragraphs 1 and 2 are attributed to Libera D'Alessandro.

Consumption and Demand for Places: a Reading through the Neapolitan Case

Consumo e domanda di luoghi: una lettura attraverso il caso napoletano

ROSARIO SOMMELLA, LIBERA D'ALESSANDRO

Dipartimento di Scienze Umane e Sociali, Università degli studi di Napoli "L'Orientale", Italy
E-mail: rsommella@unior.it; ldalessandro@unior.it

Abstract. The contribution starts from the historical importance of the commercial function in Naples in structuring the urban space, a function to which it is possible largely to trace the long-lasting relationship between consumption and demand for places, as well as many changes in the urban image. Retail organized the city not only on the main streets but also at the scale of non-minoritarian and widespread micro-spaces in the various neighborhoods, in a Naples that, especially in the twentieth century, was transformed according to macro logic very different from today's. Today the element that seems to most order the structure of places and the urban landscape is consumption, mixed with living and related activities, walking and cultural functions: elements mediated by local authorities, which in turn must deal with new phenomena. The question arises in territorial terms, as retail and consumption (so as their protagonists) claim places and public space. The case study will be that of the metropolitan territory in an extended sense and will be analyzed through four scales chosen as the most exemplary of the change: the upgraded/touristified city-centre; the historical centre in its marginal parts; the metropolitan interstices; the small and medium-sized centers at the metropolitan scale. Demands of products and places that become the expression of a new demand for city bring out the potential, contradictions and conflicts of a Mediterranean city in transition.

Keywords: consumption, demand for places, commercial function, urban image, retail.

Riassunto. Il contributo parte dall'importanza storica della funzione commerciale a Napoli nello strutturare lo spazio urbano, una funzione cui è possibile in gran parte ricondurre il rapporto di lunga durata tra consumo e domanda di luoghi, come pure molti cambiamenti dell'immagine urbana. Il commercio organizzava la città non solo nelle strade principali ma anche alla scala di micro-spazi non minoritari e diffusi nei vari quartieri, in una Napoli che soprattutto nel Novecento si trasformava secondo logiche molto diverse da quelle odierne. Oggi l'elemento che sembra maggiormente ordinare l'assetto dei luoghi e il paesaggio urbano è il consumo, misto con l'abitare e le attività connesse, il passeggio e le funzioni culturali: elementi mediati dagli enti locali, che a loro volta devono fare i conti con nuovi fenomeni. La questione si pone in termini territoriali, in quanto il commercio e il consumo (così come i loro protagonisti) rivendicano luoghi e spazi pubblici. Il caso di studio è quello del territorio metropolitano di Napoli in senso esteso e verrà analizzato attraverso quattro scale scel-

te come quelle maggiormente esemplificative del cambiamento: il centro-città riqualificato/turistificato; il centro storico nelle sue parti marginali; gli interstizi metropolitani; i piccoli e medi centri a scala metropolitana. Domande di prodotti e di luoghi che diventano espressione di una nuova domanda di città fanno emergere potenzialità, contraddizioni e conflitti di una città mediterranea in transizione.

Parole chiave: Consumo, domanda di luoghi, funzione commerciale, immagine urbana, commercio al dettaglio.

1. Introduction

In the book *Cities and consumption* (2006), Mark Jayne highlighted the contribution that, in the last twenty years, the literature aimed to establish a relationship between these two themes had offered to the understanding of the contemporary world. Our contribution is situated in the context of a *corpus* of studies designed, from the outset, to investigate the mutual and dynamic relations between urban development and consumption (Jayne 2006, 1) and then characterized by having continued to offer ideas in terms of geographical research. A contribution that, due to the nature of consumption itself, is necessarily partial and “situated” – to quote the words used by Juliana Mansvelt in one of the most innovative manuals on *Geographies of consumption* – because it is shaped by what we have studied, by the positions developed with respect to our object of study (Mansvelt 2005, XV) and, no less importantly, by the territorial context we have decided to investigate: the urban and metropolitan Neapolitan space. This space represents, in fact, not only the space of geographical analysis in which we are working up close¹, but also a *periphery* in the global and European context – although very different from that which emerges in the cases addressed by the geographer from New Zealand – from which development narratives that can be discussed with the so-called hegemonic geographies (*Idem*).

The relation between consumption and demand of places, both from a material and symbolic point of view, leads today to the consideration of different aspects, many of which are connected to the relevance of retail,

tourism and culture in processes of urban transformation and revolve, in our opinion, around the changed role of consumption itself (D'Alessandro 2015). The latter is considered, in most cases, the crucial variable to understand both transformations produced on the economic basis of the city, as well as those regarding its imaginaries. As Zukin sums up, “consumption is the key element”, and still: “consumer culture has helped many men and women to make their peace with the city, and it has pacified spaces in the city to prepare them for growth” (Zukin 2010, 230). A pacification that is “preparatory” for the growth of some parts of the urban spaces, in which a certain type of tastes and lifestyles prevails, signaling new forms of economic and cultural power. “Making peace” with the city, therefore, generates many contradictions, which then often produce conflicts in the representation – and consequent claiming – of the same spaces by different groups, characterized by opposing viewpoints, hiding what Zukin defines as a “universal rhetoric of upscale growth” (*Ibidem* 2).

With that in mind, some time ago we supported the need to build a new research agenda regarding cities and consumption, conferring upon the latter necessary centrality also with the aim to investigate its relationships with processes of urban regeneration (D'Alessandro 2015, 344). From the multiplicity of scale and forms that characterize these processes – both when they are carried out through small interventions or large renovation projects, as well as when they are created from phenomena of spontaneous development – comes the idea of this contribution (Sommella 2017, 136). Considering the transformation of a peripheral urban area like the Neapolitan one (and its relative imaginary) into a different space of consumption – which experiments a change in its distinctive elements but not for the same causes and with the same consequences that there have been elsewhere – opens up different insights for a discussion with the mainstream literature and with some of the conceptual instruments utilized by said literature.

In order to develop these insights, the contribution begins with a reconstruction of the unquestionable connection that consumption has had to the forms of commerce spatial organization, focusing on the role that retail has played in structuring various parts of the city, and also on the consequences that the transformation of Neapolitan space and its image have produced as to the geography of commercial activities; this in the belief that the reconstruction of the relevance that retail has taken on through time, shaping some of the functional and symbolic characteristics of the city and its surroundings, can contribute to highlight the specificity of the Neapolitan metropolitan territory. The new *demand for places*,

¹ This undertaking derives from a long-standing tradition of research carried out by the geographers of the “Orientale” University of Naples, recently in particular in the area of the PRIN 2015 on “Retail, Consumption, and the City: Practices, Planning, and Governance for Urban Inclusion, Resilience, and Sustainability”, coordinated at a national scale by Lida Viganoni from our University. The research group produced a series of volumes (see the website <https://luoghidelcommercio.wixsite.com/website-1>). Here, particular reference is to Viganoni 2017, 2019a.

connected today – apart from retail – to tourism and culture, will be the object of attention in the next part of the article, in which the scales through which it is possible to list the most relevant consumption landscapes will be identified. A brief concluding reflection, in light of the developed path, will be dedicated to the relationship between consumption and that which is expressed as a part of a new city demand².

2. Spatial organization of retail, forms of consumption and urban image

As known, in Naples – similarly to what occurred in other Mediterranean cities – retail has had a significant role in the organization of urban space³. It is just to this role that it is possible to bring back the relationship between consumption practices and places (neighborhoods, areas, streets, and squares). Some of the latter have gradually lost their identity connotations, which can be retraced, in their distinctive characteristics, in this paragraph. For different reasons from those that pushed, in different cities, for a homogenization and a new development of upscaled spaces (Zukin 2010, X), in Naples many of the changes at the local scale occurred in the context of a fragmentary and partial change, just a short distance from other micro-spaces whose distinctive elements are still quite evident, as we will see below.

In an interesting long-term reconstruction, Orefice (1986, 25) recalls that, after the fall of the Kingdom of Two Sicilies, one single retail street stood out for the retail activities of a superior level: via Toledo. While, in other parts of the city center, the retail presence was waning, this was certainly not the case for heart of the historic center of the city, characterized by much vitality and elevated levels of specialization, often connected to artisan crafts. Consistent with other Mediterranean urban spaces, was Piazza Mercato – the wholesale and retail area *par excellence* (Leone 1985, 5) – along with the surrounding areas that made up the most representative hub.

A fundamental divide was represented by the so-called *Risanamento Act* (1885) and by the many urban

planning operations that, after the cholera epidemic in 1884, had significant consequences as to the location of urban retail. Suffice it to mention some meaningful examples: the expansion along the western shore contributed to the birth of new shops and fashion houses, as did the opening of modern communication routes towards the station, which increased the retail appeal in that part of the city that connected some central areas to the railway terminal⁴, while the construction of two funicular railways established the expansion northward, towards the hills of the Vomero neighborhood (Orefice 1986, 26) (Fig. 1).

One element from the source cited, often neglected, is retail image, that in this phase changes as in “Europeanized” (Orefice 1993a, 160), contributing to the establishment of a new urban imaginary: “alongside the typically Mediterranean forms of sale, the main streets (via Toledo and via Chiaia⁵) take on the appearance of retail streets, following the example of the *rue corridor*” (*Idem*).

It is not possible here to retrace the steps that marked, from the first half of the 20th century and beyond, the changes that represent the result of different forms of interaction between urban development and the evolution of retail activities⁶. Suffice it to recall that, until the post-WWII era, shops of various types continued to be concentrated in the central neighborhoods, while the other parts of the city were characterized by a widespread presence of small grocery stores, within the context of a progressive upgrading of the retail system and of a patchwork layout in the forms of modernization. The relationship between retail and representation, a significant element for our purposes, was constrained by graphic advertising that made Naples a hub of absolute importance. Consider, for example, the billboards from the 1900s by Leopoldo Metlicovitz (and then by Marcello Dudovich), made for the advertising campaigns of warehouses of the Neapolitan apparel company owned by the Mele brothers: with the claim “Mode Novità Massimo buon mercato”, the image of Naples was associated with satisfying consumer needs that brought together elegance and price. In addition to retail dynamics, other phenomena arose, such as urban planning, building expansion, uncontrolled urban growth and, later, other population movements from the

² The term “city demand” was, not by chance, already used by Uberto Siola in one of the volumes that accompanied, in the second half of the Eighties, an entrepreneurial proposal (which caused heated debates and then remained only a proposal) for the transformation of the Historic Center of Naples denominated “Il regno del possibile” (Sommella 1997, 103).

³ On the other hand, (formal and informal) retail, with its places, represents a recurring element in the description of the mixité of land uses, in turn considered a characterizing factor of Mediterranean cities (Leontidou 2010).

⁴ The streets of Corso Umberto I and of via Duomo (that have resisted at length, the last one especially for wedding gowns) were the protagonists of a retail intended for extra-urban demand.

⁵ For a detailed reconstruction of the history and evolution of via Chiaia shopping district, see Discepolo, Lettieri 2019.

⁶ For this reason, we decided to highlight only the crucial passages necessary to understand the current dynamics, relying on sources elaborated in particular moments of the urban-retail transition.

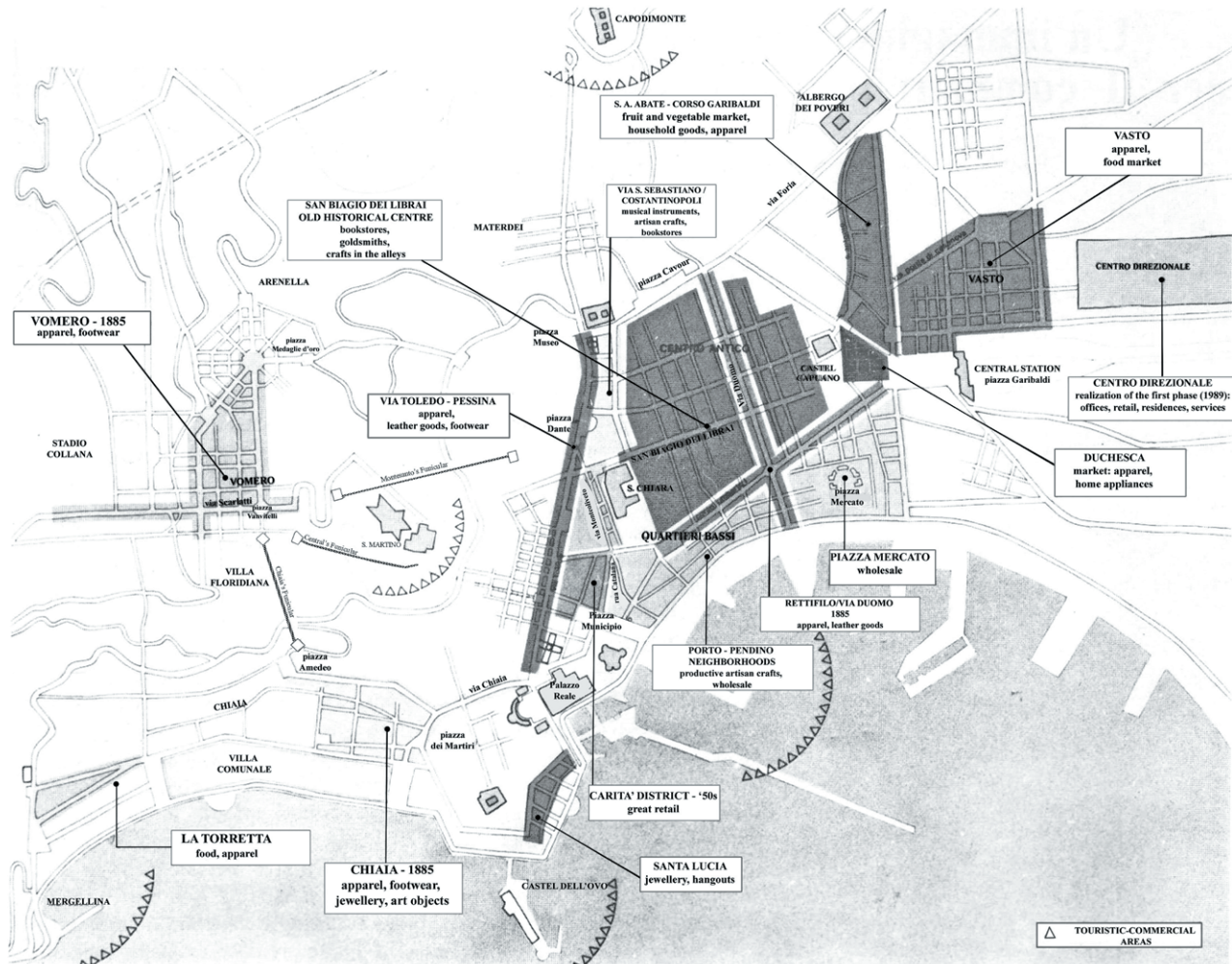


Figure 1. Main Neapolitan retail areas and relative merchandise characterization (1885-1985). Source: Ascom Forty Years Exhibition in Orefice 1993a, 160, modified by the authors.

central areas to those with new constructions and new planning instruments both for the city and for retail. These were phenomena that gave way to a more expansive distribution network, especially after WWII.

In order to convey the idea of the change that characterized the twenty-year period 1961-1981 (Orefice 1986, 31), it is enough to recall that, while the neighborhoods in the consolidated city center were decreasing in population and retail activities (San Giuseppe, Montecalvario, Porto), the neighborhoods that surrounded the central ones, along with those were even further away, registered an even more evident growth in terms of the amount of activities. Of the approximately 25,000 retail stores present in the city, more than 15,000 were located in a part of the center that, while losing inhabitants, had an increase in retail mixed with new service and professional activi-

ties (San Ferdinando, Chiaia). Other neighbourhoods (Pendino, San Lorenzo) had a certain vivacity because of a significant presence of specialized retail stores of various types, while others (Fuorigrotta, San Carlo all'Arena, Vomero/Arenella and, towards the northern outskirts of the city, Secondigliano⁷) had great increases in their population, and therefore, in their distribution network.

As Piana specifies (1986, 41), development varied significantly from area to area in the same neighbor-

⁷ It is sufficient to consider, at the scale of some of these neighborhood in the twenty-year period considered, the extremely significant increase in the distribution of stores (Vomero and Arenella +127.1%, Fuorigrotta +130.2%, Secondigliano +173.4) in relation to the population increase (Vomero and Arenella +20.1%, Fuorigrotta +24.7%, Secondigliano +32.1) or the spectacular diffusion, in the western periphery, of retail in a neighborhood like Soccavo (1,117.4).

hood: in some cases it was marked, above all, by the range of neighborhood retail shops that sold fast-moving consumer goods and goods of general consumption, while only in few circumstances it was characterized by goods sold by a number of specialized retail shops that were able to confer attractive capacity to their own neighborhoods. The features that differentiated the various areas of retail concentration (but also, within them, the main streets from the secondary ones) marked, therefore, the existence of various landscapes – some more traditional, others more innovative – but all of them indicated that the city leaned on retail as a structuring factor, so much so that the deserted areas were very few. The urban imaginary was strongly characterized by some retail areas, which made Naples a city of elegance, of fashion houses, of historical apparel shops, of specialized shops, so much so that it attracted consumers from a large area. Continuing to characterize some micro-spaces of a very distinctive type at a local scale, retail structured a new relationship between consumption and places, quickly adapting to the change in lifestyles, practices and forms of consumption that characterized the twenty-year period taken into consideration.

Although the retail function also organized the city in non-minority areas diffused at intra-urban scale, the dominant representation conveyed an image of Naples stimulated by macro-logic and urban-industrial policies⁸. It was a time in which retail was considered a banal sector or, in the best of cases, residual. However, with particular regard to services, at the beginning of the Seventies the city displayed a polarizing role with respect to its hinterland but also at a regional scale and, in more general terms, with respect to the Southern Italian urban system. In the 1961 census, Busca (1973, 7) calculated that the city of Naples alone, while representing the 6.4% of the population of the Italian Mezzogiorno, recorded values of 15-25% of the total in non-food wholesale shops and in those auxiliary to retail (considered along with communications, credit, and insurance). The competitiveness of the Southern Italian system – and that of Naples as its polarizing hub – reduced during the decade 1961-71, also in relation to commerce

(in the sectors mentioned), defined by Busca (1973, 58) as the most “rare” and decisive sector in terms of processes of urban agglomeration in the Mezzogiorno. With regard to retail activities, as to others of urban service, Naples suffered from phenomena of congestion, especially in its central areas, which themselves also reflected the territorial distribution of said activities (*Ibidem* 71).

Some time after, the emblematic example of these processes was that of Piazza Mercato, in which initially the typical Mediterranean commercial structure was developed (Amirante 1993) and then later one of the larger centers of wholesale products such as hardware, toys, and textiles (Leone 1985, 5). The evolution of the “commercial location *par excellence*” was profoundly influenced, in 1986, by the delocalization and consequent transfer of operators to the Centro Ingrosso Sud (CIS) in Nola, a phenomenon that gave life to the separation between wholesale, which was moved outside the city, and retail, which continued to structure its internal areas. Since the Eighties, moreover, Neapolitan retail underwent a commercial crisis so great that it increased the divide between the areas able to resist thanks to their specific connotation (or because they were protagonists of upgrading, such as Chiaia and Vomero or because they represented the old heart of retail trade) and those that, while characterized by the boom of activities in the sector, slipped towards a worsening of supply or towards other forms of congestion (in particular due to their inadequacy in hosting certain types of retail, often still mixed with artisan craft) or, finally, towards actual desertification (D’Alessandro 2006).

Despite the times of crisis, the activities located in central areas continued to have a relevant capacity of attraction. For the population that lived in the rest of the city and in neighboring municipalities, Naples still represented the central location of a superior level in which to exercise consumption practices for which it was worth moving with private and public transportation, attracted by the possibility of finding a certain type of goods in organized areas from a spatial point of view, relying on the specialization and on the qualification of the supply and of the forms of sales. The “significant retail emergencies” in the metropolitan area of Naples (Orefice 1993b, 331) – as Ascom, the retailers’ association source of the previous map, defined them – were only four. Next to the first of *Piazza Mercato area* and next to the second represented by the new *Naples Business District* (Centro Direzionale), other two different presences stood out: the *Euromercato*, inaugurated in 1978 for retail, and the aforementioned *CIS* for wholesale, which paved the way for new hubs, gravitating towards the Nola area (at the intersection of highways A30 and

⁸ Actually, before the industrial crisis in the Seventies, Naples – just like the hinterland characterized by industrial development and urban expansion so much so that it was called the North of the Mezzogiorno (Mazzetti 1966) – was an industrial city, due to the dimensions of the manufacturing it produced and due to the growth of the working class. These elements, however, co-existed with a chaotic urban structure that was often pre-industrial (Sommella 2010, 49), with respect to which retail contributed (also in close connection to artisan production, above all in some central areas of the city) in significantly characterizing the urban fabric.

A16), the Afragola-Casoria area, and the Marcianise area (close to the strategic hub of Caserta Sud on the A1 highway).

Returning to the capital city, only in the Nineties would there be a change, in the retail field, more as a result of the urban policies that successfully portrayed a new image of the city (marked by the season of the *Neapolitan Renaissance*) and as a result of phenomena of modernization rather than of specific actions or planning. In the city's both delayed and sudden transition towards the post-Fordist phase, the relationship between consumption and places lost most of the points of reference that it had relied upon for a long time, such as retail areas that were strongly characterized by the continuity of their merchandising. These areas – even with the changes that occurred over time – had continued to reflect distinctive identity features both for the inhabitants and for those who lived in other areas of the city, province, or region but in Naples found that dress (or even the fabric for that dress), those shoes (or even the shoestrings for those shoes), which were not possible to find elsewhere. Once the connection between retail and a productive artisan disappeared, made of know-how and an atmosphere that no longer responded to the changed consumptions, the divide between the different parts of the city was even more marked. The spatial organization of retail was, even more so than in the previous decades, characterized by an alternation of revitalized areas (that were able, thanks to combinations with leisure, to encounter the new demand of consumption of tourists and users in general) and marginalized areas (that resisted thanks to the demand of residents and that, while characterized by the arrival of new inhabitants, were quite fragmented). Amongst the latter, about fifteen years ago, we mentioned areas that were very close to those that were upgraded (D'Alessandro 2006, 90): the Quartieri Spagnoli, close to pedestrianized via Toledo; via Santa Chiara, close to via Benedetto Croce; Antignano, close to some retail areas in the Vomero neighborhood.

As of today these areas have changed, though differently, also due to pressure that has transformed them into areas of consumption⁹: after a long and complex period of slow transformations (Sommella 2010), the historic center of Naples is undergoing a new and extensive phase, that bears the signs of what occurred in the first years of this century when – once the intervention on the urban fabric decreased – the contradictions and the critical constraints

⁹ Many of these transformations have been recently analyzed thanks to other studies carried out about via Toledo and its surrounding areas, on via Croce and on via dei Tribunali, and on the market area of Antignano (in the Vomero neighborhood) (Viganoni 2019a).

appeared more evident (*Ibidem* 52). In a context in which the consumer crosses over, according to Fabris' significant phrase, from a demand born from need to a demand born from desire and advancing towards the path of the economy of experiences (Fabris 2009, 2), Naples – which had responded to the needs of consumers who come from a vast surrounding area with a peculiar combination between retail and places, and worked to respond to practices connected to desires – has seen itself thrown into a completely new context. It is a highly competitive context in which other urban spaces have equipped themselves in order to respond to a demand of experiences. In this context, the city seems to apply itself in order to participate in the competition, especially through bottom-up momentum, aiming towards a renewal of attractions starting with its past image, in order to reinvent new consumption purposes¹⁰. More in general, therefore, are the Neapolitan urban and metropolitan spaces in their totality that appear significantly transformed by new urban-retail and consumption dynamics, which have accelerated, especially in the last twenty years.

3. Landscapes of consumption at urban-metropolitan scale

The Naples of the new millennium has witnessed modifications and expansions in the retail landscapes well beyond the central part of the city: it has moved from a strong centralization (Market, Central Station, streets of qualified retail in the city center) – that, with an extensive gravitation area, for the sectors of greater specialization (the aforementioned non-food wholesale), reached part of the Mezzogiorno – to a commerce guided by new consumption practices both *in* and *of* the city. The latter, however, are not only encouraged by retail, but also by tourism and culture, since these are deeply integrated into purchasing and leisure activities, especially considering consumption as an explicative variable¹¹. Even examining *only* the transformations produced by the changing geography of retail activities in the relationship between consumption and place demand, the policies do not seem to pay specific attention to the

¹⁰ For the role played by media in the revitalization of the urban imaginary, see D'Alessandro, Sommella, Viganoni 2015.

¹¹ In the last months, security measures (closing retail activities, limiting mobility at all scales), carried out to combat the Covid-19 epidemic, have created problems for the retail and touristified landscapes. At the moment, it is not easy to reflect upon the effects of a crisis that may only be temporary or that could entail further changes, but here we refer to a study that ended right before the crisis itself and that can, therefore, represent a useful element of comparison with whatever occurs in the future.

role that said transformations produce on the territorial level¹². However, as an example, comparing the changes in the province of Naples with those that have occurred at the national scale, particular forms of coexistence between resistance on behalf of local retail and changes in innovative sectors do stand out.

In a report from 2013, aimed towards measuring fair and sustainable wellbeing, the Province of Naples witnessed the permanence of forms of concentration and resistance regarding the retail activities permanently established even in 2012, the year of the neighborhood retail crisis, registering a drop in the activities of 0.40%, as compared to 1.20% at the national scale (Comune di Napoli 2013). The endurance of the neighborhood retail did not impede, in the subsequent years, the development of e-commerce: with an increase, between 2009 and 2015, of 897 companies operating in the field of e-commerce, the Province of Naples placed third at the national scale after Rome and Milan, registering, in six years, an increase of more than 200% of companies that operate online (Unioncamere-InfoCamere, Movimprese 2016).

Against the backdrop of this peculiar coexistence of neighborhood retail and e-commerce boom, the many changes determined both by the logic of localization of new formats, as well as by the consumers' tastes in the urban and metropolitan way of life, stand out. These are changes that certainly do not find insurmountable borders in the provincial territory, nor in the Metropolitan City, but are articulated on urban-metropolitan scales that are increasingly fluid, where the administrative-functional limits prove to be less relevant, while the new connections that link different consumptions, as mobile as those who express them, prove to be more significant¹³. In said context with variable geometry (Sommella 2019), it is that same proximity that becomes plural, in both a spatial sense (residential proximity to workplaces and leisure areas, but also to transit hubs) and in a temporal sense, in the context of a non-stop and 24-hour city (D'Alessandro 2017). The new forms of proximity, which render "close that which is far, but also far that which is

close" (Gasnier 2007, 253), should be considered in the context of a space that is not absolute and continuous, but topological and dynamic. With this in mind, and in the context of the case study made up of an extensive metropolitan territory, we identified four scales in which it is possible to highlight the landscapes that distinguish our context of analysis in a more significant manner¹⁴.

The touristified city center, dominated by new retail presences, and the central areas *skipped over* by visitor flows and also by consumption-led activities are the two scales that, seen together, strikingly exemplify the contradictions produced by an urban development that is fruit of a singular mix of the need to respond to new forms of protagonism *from below*, forms of spontaneity and creativity put in place by new retailers, episodes of resistance on behalf of older retail entrepreneurs, discontinuous and fragmented urban policies.

The first scale is that which most efficiently summarizes the current capacity of consumption to affect places, even when it is not directed by macro-projects of urban development or by forms of city branding that, elsewhere, have provided significant changes in terms of urban regeneration, often accompanied by inevitable implications in terms of social segregation and socio-spatial polarization. The consumer demand, expressed above all by tourists – who arrived almost unexpectedly in a city that has not planned a program to revive attractiveness and in which it was invested for multiple reasons¹⁵ – by visitors, by users (students, but also new frequenters from areas that escaped the marginalization of the crisis that had besieged them some decades before) and, sometimes, by some residents led to a proliferation of activities carried out not really to satisfy purchasing needs, but rather new demands connected with hangout, eating out and having fun, especially in certain public places¹⁶. In this way, places that were previously deser-

¹² Consider, for example, the institution of the Metropolitan Cities (Città Metropolitane, l. 56/2014), which could have represented an interesting test bench in the case of Naples: at the moment it seems to have been a missed opportunity, not only because the Campania Region already had, during the implementation phase of the institutive law (in 2016), allocated the retail function to itself. The question regards, rather, the lack of consideration of retail and consumption as relevant factors of spatial change in the old Province of Naples, whose borders coincide with the Metropolitan City, which also identified socio-economic development of the territory as the first objective of its constituting strategic plan.

¹³ For a discussion about the concepts of center/periphery and inside/outside the city, with particular attention to the Neapolitan case, see Sommella 2019.

¹⁴ This is, evidently, a simplification and a choice that were also guided by the results of recent field research that we have conducted, to which we refer for more in-depth information (Sommella 2019, 53-72).

¹⁵ According to the Istat data referring to 2018, with 3.7 million tourists, Naples placed eleventh amongst the most visited Italian cities and was the first in Southern Italy for the movement of clients and the capacity of accommodation facilities (<https://www.istat.it/it/archivio/232137>). The Neapolitan performance, based on the most advantageous price-quality relationship as compared to other destinations in the country, should be framed in the context of a year that had a record number of tourist arrivals in Italy (429 million, with an increase of 2% as compared to the previous year), also due to the decrease in competitiveness of other destinations in the Mediterranean area.

¹⁶ Recalling a more recent encyclopedia entry on the Mediterranean city by Orum and Leontidou (2019), Carreras cites the "urban landscapes represented by the squares, which are also defining elements of the Mediterranean cities, no longer a political agora, but places for walking around and for contemporary performance, consumption hubs that are

tified, with no retail function or still connected to traditional neighborhood activities have been reconverted in night-life, entertainment and leisure areas. Even though they did not result in large-scale projects planned and realized for specific parts of the city or in actual branding strategies in order to generate new forms of appeal, the multiple operations aimed towards the historic center have transformed it in a sort of stage for that circus-like retail, tourism, and culture activities that have been diffused in more recent years, proving the city-center itself able to satisfy the new consumption demands, therefore producing further changes, both spontaneous and uncontrollable, as well as sudden (Sommella 2019).

At the same time, the policies of the municipal administration in power since 2011 tried to satisfy the strong demand of place *from below* coming from the segment of inhabitants and users, mainly young people, with a new type of protagonism coming from the squatting *centri sociali*. The policies, and not only those just mentioned, were guided by discursive practices aimed to overturn, under the umbrella of the resistance and uniqueness of the *rebel city*, both the revitalization of the urban image and the birth that had characterized the Nineties (already inspired by the *liberation* of the squares and the streets from cars and return of city and its monuments to the citizens), as well as the representation of Naples dominated by criminality and refuse that had characterized the first years of the twenty-first century. Both strategies privileged the central areas and were symbolized by new labels: the institution of greater limited traffic areas (*ZTL, Zona a Traffico Limitato*) in the historic center, the *liberation* of the waterfront area, strategically connected to the opening up of the city and the call for large-scale projects to carry out in the future. It is the case, for example, of the Unesco Historic Center program (2007) – then a large project (2010-11) and a new protocol – that, as has been noted (Laino, Lepore 2017, 140), was not marked by an actual urban agenda nor by a coherent set of provisions¹⁷.

The paradox is that this reconquest *from below* was accompanied by forms of *laissez faire* that, built on an urban *milieu* in which spontaneity has always had a significant role, encouraged, in some central areas, a multiplication of consumption places that was not less pervasive than that generated by other forms of urban governance. *Laissez faire*, combined with the revitalization of open spaces and a mix of environmentalism and “light liberalization” (Laino, Lepore 2017), did not impede but,

on the contrary, seems to have aided the creation of places destined more to those who consume the city than to those who live there. The urban administration had to contend with the new forms of the use of public space that if, on one hand, question the existence of private space itself, on the other they trigger forms of privatization of that is public. The outdoor cafés represent the most visible manifestation of these phenomena, even if they are expressed in many different way in a city that has, for example in terms of retail, always been characterized by the permeability between indoor and outdoor shops. At the margins of these dynamics, other demands from below – those expressed by inhabitants of nightlife areas reunited in committees and associations – have tried to counter a process that already occurred and that, before the Coronavirus emergency, seemed almost unstoppable: that of the transformation of some central areas in spaces dominated by B&B, outdoor cafés, shops and activities connected, above all, to food in its various versions (traditional, ethnic, gourmet, *cool*) and their users.

The areas in which the new activities are located are often found just a short distance from the parts of the center that seem barely touched by the new phenomena (and this is our second scale of analysis): the geography of the retail activities is, here, still marked by neighborhood retail, often grocery (sometimes traditional and sometimes reinvented, appealing to the new needs of the inhabitants) or by activities that find a key element in order to survive in the proximity of place of residence, with the heritage of trusting and lengthy relationships that this entails. With the advancement of new places of retail and consumption, though, these *insulae* retrogress or are more and more marginalized, highlighting a series of problems connected, in this case as well, to a public-private relationship of liminal spaces, and actually represent border areas that also express a certain *mixité*.

It is in highlighting the perimeter of the buffer zone of the Unesco Historic Center and, above all, of its “red zone” (Fig. 2a) that it is possible to identify urban landscapes in which there is an alternation, almost without a break in continuity, of spaces. Revitalized and marginalized retail squares and streets, nightlife areas that are characterized by different types, underlining the diversity of their users, and areas in which policies sometimes attempt to foresee and sometimes to pursue the phenomena (of the arrival tourists, of rediscovering the city and central places by users who are protagonists of a more and more liquid mobility), having an impact through pedestrianization or attempting to reconcile the regulations on public land use with forms of renewal, as it occurred in the policy areas identified in the Unesco Historic Center (Fig. 2b).

very diverse than the Central Business District” (Carreras 2018, 144).

¹⁷ In addition to this, there was the gradual completion of the underground system (started in the 1970s), factor that increased mobility within the city and with the northern periphery.

Further considering the role of proximity, but moving to the scale of peri-urban spaces and those of the outskirts, due to the increasing importance of accessibility and the consequent role of circulation hubs, the proximity itself can be associated with daily practices of a more and more mobile clientele (Gasnier 2007). If

“the spatial and temporal articulation of the paths travelled by the citizen and peri-citizens is multiple” (*Ibidem* 253), this multiplicity can be fully understood only by beginning with the changing lifestyles and consumption styles of citizens and “peri-citizens” (Naverau 2007).

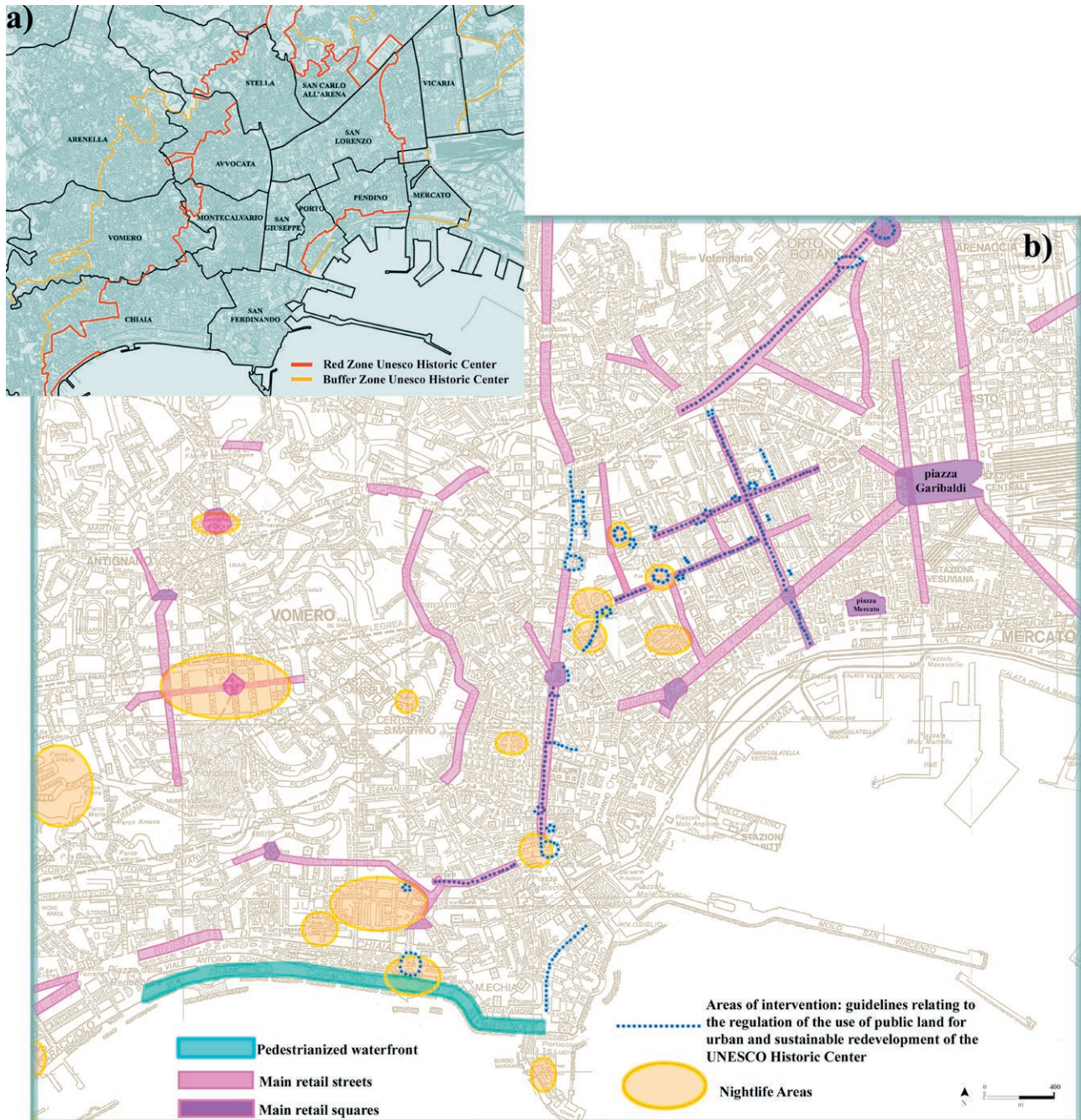


Figure 2a and 2b. 2a) The neighbourhoods in the Red and in the Buffer Zone of Unesco Historic Center; 2b) Landscapes of retail, consumption and nightlife. Source: 2a) authors' elaboration from Comune di Napoli, *Documento di Orientamento Strategico, Grande Programma per il Centro Storico Patrimonio Unesco*; 2b) authors' elaboration.

From a prevalently horizontal dimension of proximity, one moves towards a plural dimension, strongly connected to the change in urban rhythms, placing emphasis on its “economic, cultural, and social potential for interaction” (*Idem*). Not extraneous to this new dimension is the strong interconnection between metropolitan spaces, brought about by numerous east-west bypass roads that characterize the metropolitan territory. This dimension leads us to the third and fourth scales of analysis that we have identified: the scale prompted by suburbanization and flows, which identifies new gravitational hubs for retail and consumption in the interstitial spaces between municipalities, and the scale that produces a sort of return to urban centers of various size and characteristics.

The third scale arose from in-between spaces: in the context of a metropolitan territory in which it is sometimes difficult to identify the boundaries between urban centers, new retail formats have become embedded, related to large specialized and non-specialized distribution, but also to new consumption practices, connected for example to shopping centers of the latest generation or to outlets.

From this point of view, north of Naples and close to the strategic motorway junction of South Caserta, the area of Marcianise (together with the Nola area to the east and to the space between Casoria and Afragola) are confirmed as the three most significant hubs at the regional scale, although in a context of significant transformations. On one hand, above all where the metropolitan space still takes on the characteristics of the urban maze, there are continuities and marked fractures made by various presences, which sometimes adopt the form of actual retail enclaves, but always produce consumption “atmospheres” (Sommella 2019, 62). Also in this case, the retail structures aim to only partially satisfy the purchasing needs or in mixing these needs with the new demands for places for free time and entertainment, in order to offer consumers (citizens, peri-citizens, visitors, tourists) the possibility to experience practices that allow for evasion from the rhythms and spaces of daily life. These phenomena produce new use of spaces that are private, though characterized by processes that are imitative of public use and that are represented in various forms and with various results.

Finally, the fourth scale is the one that has characterized the recent evolution of small and medium-sized centers in the Campania region. The times, previously described, in which these centers suffered a shadow effect (Orefice 1993b) of a regional capital that was such an obstruction or, in the best case scenario, began to show limited ability as to appeal even from a retail point

of view, seem far away. While also in this case the timing, manner and results are different, the municipalities in metropolitan Campania have seen their distribution network strengthened but, above all, they have been characterized by processes of urban transformations (frequently triggered by local policies connected to programs and projects developed at the European level) combined with changes in retail and consumption. Mainly at the scale of city-centers, rhythms and spaces mark forms of organization of consumption that are satisfied by new combinations of retail, culture, and tourism. Not different from what was highlighted in the city of Naples, even in adjacent municipalities and medium-sized centers (for example Aversa¹⁸, Frattamaggiore, Pomigliano) the element that seems to principally organize the structure of places and urban landscape is a consumption mixed with living and related activities, hanging out, cultural and shopping functions.

4. The demand for products and places or demand for city

In these pages we have aimed, through the cases chosen, to highlight a part of the multiple changes that the central areas of Naples have undergone and, at the same time, to point out some of the ongoing transformations in the medium-sized centers and in the interstices of a metropolitan space (that of the Metropolitan City extended towards the Caserta area), strongly interconnected and in constant evolution. Above all, if viewed through the lens of retail and consumption, it is a space in which new hubs, which intercept flows thanks to their appeal, modify the dialectics between a center, whose essential element seems in part to be its embeddedness, and a more and more vast and complex periphery, characterized, time after time, by flows that are dynamic in nature. Alongside specific micro-spaces of retail and consumption, strongly characterized in a distinctive identity sense, there are dynamics similar to those that affect other urban spaces at, but not limited to, the Italian scale, which include both the city and its neighboring territories. Through the interpretative key utilized, a new geography of the metropolitan territory emerges, tending more and more towards reticulated forms in which, however, the hubs produced by a new and changing dialectic between center/periphery, proximity/distance, hierarchy/post-hierarchy stand out distinctively. This new geography, which renders the questions posed

¹⁸ The case of Aversa, particularly interesting for the policies of renewal that had various effects on retail and consumption, has been examined in depth in Viganoni 2019b.

in the introduction more evident, arises both in economic-business terms and in social and territorial ones, because retail and consumption reclaim on their own behalf – as do, on the other hand, their protagonists – places and public spaces. From this point of view, the demand for products becomes, more and more often, a demand for places, and both become, most of the time, the expression of what we indicated as a part of a “new demand for city”.

At the beginning of the Nineties, the attractive effect registered in the central areas of Naples and in its leisure spaces, in the daytime and night-time hours of holidays and in the day before each holiday, was considered an indicator of the demand for city (Orefice 1993b, 330) carried out by the external population. From then until today, this element has not changed, if not for the fact that the so-called external population is much more mobile and carries out consumption practices that are also mobile themselves. New places (in the areas surrounding the city center, in the interstitial spaces, in the medium-sized centers) aim to embody an appeal that, while not comparable to the effect made by the central areas of the capital city, catalyzes a new demand for consumption. If the latter has always transmitted a demand for places, this is even more true today, since the relationship between consumption and urban life has become a central component in our societies (Jayne 2006, 3). In cities that are “consuming spaces as well as consumer spaces” (*Idem*), as our interpretation has shown through the Neapolitan case, it is always evident the “rising social demand of a city able to respond to needs and desires” (Amendola 2010). It is not a question of uncritically establishing the reflection on “a city centered on demand” but of the fact that, as Amendola recalls, once the “centrality of the people who live, experience, dream, desire and realize the city” (*Idem*) has been restored, it is then necessary to identify the ways through which it is possible to come to terms with and interpret the contradictions that a process connected to the democratization of consumption (of needs, desires and experiences) and its places entails, starting with the changes in social geography and the new forms of residential segregation and territorial hierarchization.

In the same way the problem, in our opinion, does not lie in attributing excessive relevance to a consumption that, in reality, has already become the key element in the post-Fordist transition¹⁹, but in the rhetorical use

¹⁹ It is not only the role that consumption has taken on in the urban transition, but also that of not arrogantly ignoring – as Fabris (2010, 3-4) advised some years ago, recommending the importance of not indulging in demonization – that which consumption represents in our lives, as well as its symbolic and identity meanings.

that is made of it. This especially when consumption is used as a strategy for the transformation of the city or, still, as legitimation of discourses that convey certain specific urban policies and, in an even more perpetual manner, as an instrument of selecting forms of retail and purchasing practices, even while not instituted from above, which then become dominant, univocally identifying us as the places in which we consume. From this point of view, the peculiar relationship between consumption and places, highlighted by the Neapolitan case – with its way of not entirely fitting into mainstream theories that connect phenomena to univocal causes and that interpret the processes mainly through some conceptual instruments (*gentrification, city-marketing, city-branding*) – can be helpful in investigating, from a geographical perspective, this Mediterranean city. The potential, the contradictions and conflicts that emerge from the processes of production, construction and negotiation of places of retail, tourism, and culture are analysed as a significant part of a still wide range of living, working and not necessarily consuming places which characterise the metropolitan space.

References

- Amendola, G. (2010). *Tra Dedalo e Icaro. La nuova domanda di città*. Roma-Bari, Laterza.
- Amirante, R. (1993). Forma della città e struttura del commercio a Napoli. In Capasso, C. (Ed.). *Commercio e città. Lo spazio commerciale e lo scenario urbano. Cultura e progetto*. Napoli, Cuen, 165-174.
- Busca, A. (1973). *Caratteristiche funzionali dei centri urbani del Mezzogiorno*. Milano, Svimez-Giuffrè.
- Carreras, C. (2018). Città nel Mediterraneo, città del Mediterraneo? In Sommella, R., Viganoni, L. (Eds.). *Civiltà del Mediterraneo (special issue “Mediterraneo, frontiere, città, territori”)*, 29, 139-150.
- Comune di Napoli (2013). *Rapporto UrBes comunale di Napoli 2013*, <http://www.comune.napoli.it/flex/cm/pages/ServeBLOB.php/L/IT/IDPagina/27920>
- D’Alessandro, L. (2006). Commercio e dinamiche urbane: il centro storico di Napoli. *Storia Urbana*, 113, 77-97.
- D’Alessandro, L. (2015). Per una nuova agenda di ricerca su consumo e città. In D’Alessandro, L. (Ed.). *City, Retail and Consumption*. Napoli, Università degli studi di Napoli “L’Orientale”, 339-346.
- D’Alessandro, L. (2017). Premessa (Spazi del commercio e luoghi del consumo: Napoli e la sua area metropolitana).

- In Viganoni L. (Ed.). *Commercio, consumo e città. Quaderno di lavoro*. Milano, FrancoAngeli, 111-116.
- D'Alessandro, L., Sommella, R., Viganoni L. (2015). Film-Induced Tourism, City-Branding and Place-Based Image: the Cityscape of Naples between Authenticity and Conflicts. *Almatourism - Journal of Tourism, Culture and Territorial Development*, 6 (4), 180-194. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.6092/issn.2036-5195/4960>
- Discepolo, B., Lettieri, I. (2019). L'asse commerciale di via Chiaia: storia ed evoluzione. In Viganoni, L. (Ed.). *Commercio e consumo nelle città che cambiano. Napoli, città medie, spazi esterni*. Milano, FrancoAngeli, 243-269.
- Fabris, G. (2009). *Societing. Il marketing nella società post-moderna*. Milano, Egea.
- Fabris, G. (2010). *La società post-crescita. Consumi e stili di vita*. Milano, Egea.
- Gasnier, A. (2007). Les temps de mobilité des consommateurs au coeur des nouvelles logiques d'implantation de l'offre commerciale. *Espace, Populations, Sociétés*, 2-3. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4000/eps.2143>
- Jayne, M. (2006). *Cities and consumption*. London and New York, Routledge.
- Laino, G., Lepore, D. (2017). Napoli: una risposta alla crisi del governo urbano. In Pasqui, G., Briata, P., Fedeli V. (Ed.). *Le Agende urbane delle città italiane. Secondo Rapporto sulle città di Urban@it*. Bologna, il Mulino, 143-159.
- Leone, U. (1985). I luoghi del commercio a Napoli. Vecchia storia e nuova geografia. *Orizzonti economici*, 48, 5-8.
- Leontidou, L. (2010). Mediterranean cities. In Hutchison, R. (Ed.). *Encyclopedia of Urban Studies*. London, Sage, Vol. I, 493-498.
- Mansvelt, J. (2005). *Geographies of consumption*. London, Sage.
- Mazzetti, E. (1966). *Il Nord del Mezzogiorno*. Milano, Edizioni di Comunità.
- Naverau, B. (2007). El comercio de proximidad. Hacia una toma de conciencia por parte de los actores privados y públicos (Tolosa y Zaragoza). *Trace*, 51, 15-27. <http://journals.openedition.org/trace/625>
- Orefice, M. (1986). Sviluppo urbanistico ed evoluzione del commercio. *Orizzonti economici*, 52, 25-40.
- Orefice, M. (1993a). Sviluppo urbanistico ed evoluzione del commercio. In Capasso, C. (Ed.). *Commercio e città. Lo spazio commerciale e lo scenario urbano. Cultura e progetto*. Napoli, Cuen, 157-164.
- Orefice, M. (1993b). La funzione del settore commerciale nell'organizzazione dell'area metropolitana. In Capasso, C. (Ed.). *Commercio e città. Lo spazio commerciale e lo scenario urbano. Cultura e progetto*. Napoli, Cuen, 327-344.
- Orum, A.M., Leontidou, L. (2019). Mediterranean City. In Orum A.M. (Eds.). *The Wiley Blackwell Encyclopedia of Urban and Regional Studies*. London, John Wiley & Sons. DOI: 10.1002/9781118568446.eurs0519
- Piana, R. (1986). Considerazioni sul fenomeno commercio. *Orizzonti economici*, 52, 41-42.
- Sommella, R. (1997) Un vecchio nocciolo da reinventare. In Coppola, P (Ed.). *La forma e i desideri. Saggi geografici su Napoli e la sua area metropolitana*. Napoli, E.S.I., 95-104.
- Sommella, R. (2010). Las "lentas" transformaciones de los espacios centrales de Nápoles. In Martínez Rigol, S. (Ed.). *La cuestión del Centro, el Centro en cuestión*. Lleida, Editorial Milenio, 43-57.
- Sommella, R. (2017). Consumo e domanda di luoghi. In Viganoni, L. (Ed.). *Commercio, consumo e città. Quaderno di lavoro*. Milano, FrancoAngeli, 135-136.
- Sommella, R (2019). Il territorio della ricerca: fuori e dentro Napoli. In Viganoni, L. (Ed.). *Commercio e consumo nelle città che cambiano. Napoli, città medie, spazi esterni*. Milano, FrancoAngeli, 53-72.
- Unioncamere-InfoCamere, Movimprese (2016). *E-commerce: più che raddoppiate in 6 anni le aziende che vendono online*, file:///C:/Documents%20and%20Settings/Libre/Documenti/Downloads/Nota_impresa_e-commerce_2009-2015%20(1).pdf
- Viganoni, L. (Ed.). (2017). *Commercio, consumo e città. Quaderno di lavoro*. Milano, Franco Angeli. Open access: https://www.francoangeli.it/Ricerca/scheda_libro.aspx?Id=24923
- Viganoni, L. (Ed.). (2019a). *Commercio e consumo nelle città che cambiano. Napoli, città medie, spazi esterni*. Milano, FrancoAngeli. Open access: https://www.francoangeli.it/Ricerca/scheda_libro.aspx?id=26346
- Viganoni, L. (2019b). Commercio e città medie. Il caso di Aversa. In Viganoni, L. (Ed.). *Commercio e consumo nelle città che cambiano. Napoli, città medie, spazi esterni*. Milano, FrancoAngeli, 219-240.
- Zukin, S. (2010). *Naked City. The Death and Life of Authentic Urban Places*. Oxford, Oxford University Press.