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The Four Axes of Palermo's Commerce: a Geographical Perspective

I quattro assi del commercio a Palermo: una prospettiva geografica

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Abstract. Commercial dynamics within a city represent an excellent observatory desk to study urban transformation processes. These dynamics reflect the verticality and horizontality relational system, but also the exchanges and reciprocation of the cultural and socio-economic relations. From a geographical perspective it is interesting to detect cultural, social and economic changes both permanent and in evolution which constitute the urban pattern and shape its viability. This work originates in 2015 within the PRIN project (Relevant Interest National Project) "Commerce, consumption and the city: practices, planning and governance for urban inclusion, resilience and sustainability" which has studied some relevant commerce dynamics in Italian main cities. Here we focus on the case of Palermo, by analysing four important streets in the city center: via Maqueda, via Ruggero Settimo, viale della Libertà and via Lincoln. They represent significant cut outs of how consumers' habits have developed in Palermo and have strongly characterized the present urban landscape by establishing a complex network of relations which shape the pattern of the city. By employing both a diachronical and synchronical approach, on one hand we analyse the evolution of the four axes. On the other hand, we illustrate the results of the research carried out by using questionnaires aimed to reveal the present conditions of the shops taking place through the business owners' perception.

Keywords: urban transformation, commercial dynamics, Palermo, city center, permanence and change.

Riassunto. Le dinamiche commerciali all'interno della città rappresentano un ottimo punto di osservazione per studiare i processi di trasformazione urbana. Queste dinamiche riflettono verticalità e orizzontalità dei sistemi di relazione, nonché scambi e reciprocità dei rapporti socio-economici e culturali. Da una prospettiva geografica è di grande interesse individuare permanenze e mutazioni culturali, sociali, economiche che costituiscono il tessuto cittadino e danno forma all'attualità. Questo contributo nasce nell'ambito del Progetto di Rilevante Interesse Nazionale (PRIN) 2015 "Commercio, consumo e città: pratiche, pianificazione e governance per l'inclusione, la resilienza e la sostenibilità urbane" che ha studiato alcune dinamiche fondamentali del commercio nelle principali città italiane. Qui ci concentriamo sul caso di Palermo, analizzan-

done quattro importanti assi viari: via Maqueda, via Ruggero Settimo, viale della Libertà e via Lincoln. Essi rappresentano ritagli significativi di come le abitudini di consumo si siano evolute caratterizzando l'attuale paesaggio urbano e determinando reti di relazioni complesse che informano il tessuto cittadino di Palermo. Si è scelto un approccio insieme diacronico e sincronico: da un lato viene analizzata l'evoluzione degli assi viari, dalle origini alla situazione attuale; dall'altro lato vengono discussi alcuni risultati della recente ricerca effettuata attraverso questionari volti a registrare la percezione che i commercianti hanno dei loro esercizi.

Parole chiave: Trasformazione urbana, Dinamiche del commercio, Palermo, Centro storico, Permanenza e cambiamento.

1. Introduction

Urban changes, observed from a diachronically and synchronically geographical perspective, constitutes a privileged object of analysis. As a matter of fact, when studying the transformation process of a city, it allows us to identify cultural, social and economic changes both permanent and in evolution which constitute the urban pattern and shape its viability. Commerce dynamics are linked to those transformation processes (Cirelli 2007, 2009; D'Alessandro 2015; Dobbs et al. 2012; Glennie, Thrift 1992; Jayne 2006; Porto, Nicosia 2018): they represent an interesting observatory desk where we can observe the ongoing changes within a city, as they not only reflect the verticality and horizontality relational system but also the exchanges and reciprocation of the cultural and socio-economic relations (De Certeau 1990; Lynch 1990). The city, as Ricoeur observed, being a "concentrated organization", is most evident outcome of a community and of an economy based on the division and differentiation of labor: "La 'metropolis', c'est la 'technopolis'. [...] [La ville est] l'appareil logistique des rôles sociaux" (Ricoeur 2003, 115).

The present work originates in 2015 within the PRIN project (Relevant Interest National Project, Progetto di Rilevante Interesse Nazionale) "Retail, Consumption, and the City: Practices, Planning and Governance for Urban Inclusion, Resilience, and Sustainability" ("Commercio, consumo e città: pratiche, pianificazione e governance per l'inclusione, la resilienza e la sostenibilità urbane") which has studied some relevant commerce dynamics in Italian main cities. In particular, this contribution focuses on the case of Palermo, by taking into account four important streets in the city center: via Maqueda, via Ruggero Settimo, viale della Libertà and via Lincoln. They represent, with their peculiarity,

significant cut outs of how consumers' habits have developed in the Sicilian city and have strongly characterized the present urban landscape by establishing a complex network of relations which shape the pattern of Palermo. Here, the trade dynamics will be addressed from two complementary perspectives: diachronic and synchronic. The second paragraph will briefly explain the evolution of the four roads, from its origin until the present status, with particular attention to the commercial dynamics. The third paragraph will illustrate the results of the research recently carried out by using structured questionnaires with closed and open answers, aimed to reveal the present conditions of the shops now existing on those streets, taking place through the business owners' perception.

2. Origin and development of the four trade axes of Palermo

Today, via Maqueda, via Ruggero Settimo and via della Libertà is an uninterrupted road which begins in Piazza Giulio Cesare, with the train station overlooking the square and reaches up to piazza Vittorio Veneto, crossing the city on the flat terrain from Southeast to Northwest (about 4,4 km). A large part of the street remains within the historical center of Palermo, one of the largest in Europe. The last two roads form a number of extensions of the older via Maqueda (originally *New Road*), opened in the sixteenth century during the Spanish domination and meeting orthogonally the old via Toledo (at present Corso Vittorio Emanuele II) in piazza Vigliena (known mainly as the *Quattro Canti*). Via Ruggero Settimo (originally *Stradone fuori porta Maqueda*, Out gate avenue), created in 1778, follows via Maqueda from the present piazza Verdi (the area dominated by the 17th century Gate Maqueda). The opening of viale della Libertà, extending to via Ruggero Settimo, dates back to the second half of the nineteenth century (and finished in 1915). Already the cut of via Maqueda itself in the seventeenth century, met the needs arising from the city élite who were asking for more residential areas and roads. In the following centuries, via Ruggero Settimo and viale della Libertà completed the planned expanding project out of the old historic center intra moenia under the impulse of and ever dynamic bourgeoisie. In particular, viale della Libertà was thought as the continuation of via Ruggero Settimo and was in total 2.5 km long. It was meant to facilitate the connection between the center of Palermo to the Colli area, where resort areas for the city nobility were developing since the eighteenth century. It was realized between 1846 and

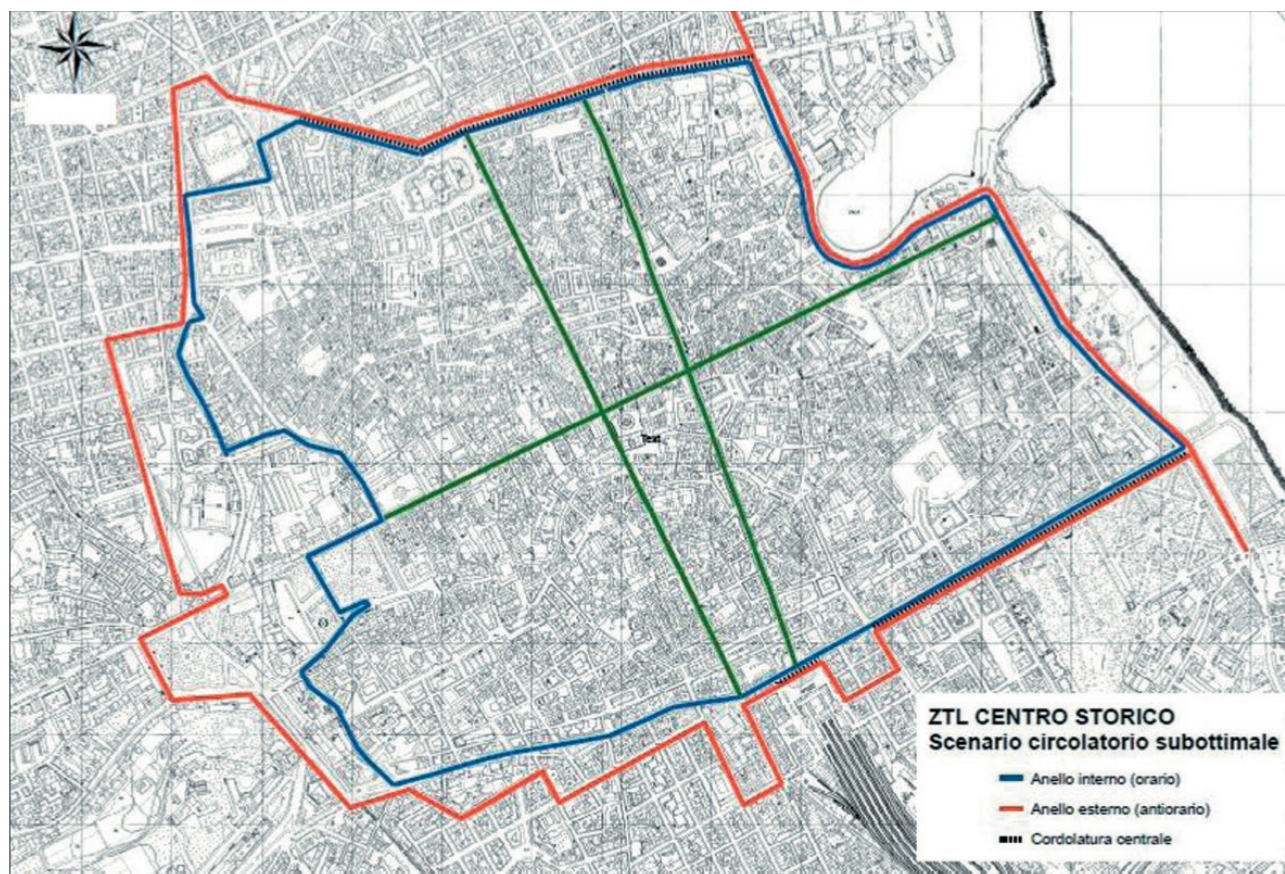


Figure 1. The Limited Traffic Zone (ZTL) in the City Center of Palermo and the perimeter paths. Source: Comune di Palermo 2013.

1851, raised following the model of a boulevard, was cutting farm fields and gardens including pre-existing green spaces in its path together with others realized ad hoc (such as the park defined as “Giardino Inglese” – English Garden, completed in 1853): an element trail similar to those found in contemporary European cities, inspired by the English model of city gardens (Chirco, Di Liberto 2004, 26). The fourth road axis object of the study is via Lincoln (the old *Stradone di S. Antonino*, avenue S. Antonino), realised between 1632 and 1637 in order to connect S. Antonino convent to Piano S. Erasmo, outside the city walls towards East. During the eighteenth century the road became one of the expansion routes for the middle class of Palermo by hosting a number of residences (Chirco 2006) and marking the green area developed around the Botanical Garden (Orto Botanico) and the city park of Villa Giulia. At present, the road, which is 1 km long, begins in piazza Giulio Cesare and ends at the Foro Italico Umberto I, running along the entrances to the public gardens and defining the wide Southeast perimeter stretch of the limited traffic zone (ZTL – Fig.

1) launched in 2017 aimed to contrast the pollution in the historic center.

The road axes so far examined are the result of the early expansions intra (as in the case of via Maqueda) and mainly extra moenia realised by the city middle class between the 17th and 18th century. This *imprint* will stay for long and indicating in many cases the designated use that still remain today. The opening of via Maqueda in the seventeenth century, meant a new form of urban rationalization in respect to the medieval plant. The buildings, built on the two sides of the street since the opening of the road, confirm the typical grace and theatricality of the Baroque. This ideal route culminates at the threshold of the 20th century with the building of the Teatro Massimo (1875-1897), the first, in terms of dimension, among the Italian theatres and third among the European theatres built in the 19th century. The destructions following the Second World War, the 1956 town planning scheme, as well as the notorious

'sacco di Palermo'¹ (the bag of Palermo) saved nearly all via Maqueda, that preserved a great deal of its original aspect until the present day. During the second post war, mainly in the stretch between piazza Verdi and the Quattro Canti many businesses related to clothing and shoes. An intense oversized road traffic in respect to the capacity of the road and the lack of parking lots in the area opened considerable controversies concerning the neighborhood accessibility and in general the center. Already back in the mid 80s, Cusimano (1986, 25-26) had reported on how the shop keepers considered private street traffic necessary to attract clients. In recent years, the ZTLs, which established the ultimate pedestrianization of via Maqueda from piazza Verdi (already experienced episodically), entailed a new set up of business activities (to note also the tourist flows, which today are more substantial), with the opening of many *ethnic* shops run by immigrants (some of them have been there for long) and with a proliferation of the food and restaurant sector at the expense of the older and more traditional ones. This development should be put in relation with the proximity of one of the most historically popular areas of the night movida, nearby Teatro Massimo (Mercatanti, Messina 2019).

Via Ruggero Settimo and the initial segment of via Libertà (between piazza Ruggero Settimo-Castelnuovo and piazza Crispi-Mordini) continues north and can be dealt with as one only axis, stretching for just over 1 km (the first road is 350 m long, the second 700 m long). Today it defined as "the lounge of Palermo" (with an emblematic image), both for the refined residential neighborhoods rising around it and for the quality and quantity of business activities present there. During the 1700s and 1800s the axis followed and marked the establishment of the middle class, which was claiming new spaces out of the historic walls, and soon became the reference point for this rising class, and thus in turn, a new important city center. Suffice it to say that today, the Teatro Politeama (1867-1875) is considered a symbol of the modern urban center, by connecting via della Libertà (incorporating it) to via Ruggero Settimo.

In the last two centuries, the look of via Ruggero Settimo has changed a lot. Already in the nineteenth century the roadway was lowered, and new shops were

obtained on the ground level of stately buildings (Chirco 2006, 197) In the 30s of the twentieth century, many estates were renovated or built to meet the growing demand for new stores. Part of the present look of the street is due to this phase, but its final asset dates back to the second post-war, when the business center was built in the neighboring piazzale Ungheria along with new estates addressed to banks, offices and shops. Between the 50s and the 70s the axis became the center of a number of successful business activities, hosting historic shop windows (still active today or until recently) which had become identity references for the entire city: two cinemas (among which *Cinorkestron* from 1914), several cafeterias, bookshops and perfume shops².

The first part of via della Libertà was planned and realized in the middle of the 19th century as an elegant boulevard, while the homonymous residential district which rises on the two fronts, has a plant that dates back to the late nineteenth century. It was developed following the IV National Exhibition (1891-92): the fair was hosted in an area of 130.000 square meters big, whose lotting launched the construction of private buildings commissioned by traders and entrepreneurs. The two main types of housing, the *villino* (a small villa inspired by the eighteenth century manor houses) and the *palazzetto* (a small palace inspired by the Renaissance buildings) were often realized in Liberty or Art Nouveau style. Some scholars prefer defining it as *modernist style*, *stile modernista* (Pirrone 1990; Chirco, Di Liberto 2004). Among the most prestigious authors of these projects appears the architect Ernesto Basile from Palermo who realized and implemented some of the most representative buildings in town (the Villino Florio, the enlargement of the Grand Hotel et des Palmes and the interiors of the Teatro Massimo), maximizing the Liberty style to its highest expression. Between the end of the nineteenth century and the early twentieth century the fashionable villini contributed to spread the image of the city as an important site of the Italian Liberty style at a national level. The current look of the road has been affected by the sad events linked to the "sacco di Palermo" (the bag of Palermo): because of some obscure concessions, many estates have been knocked down indiscriminately, often in disregard of existing legal restrictions (as the case of villa Deliella), in favour of new apartment buildings. Nevertheless, the first part of the road has undergone less changes and many of the small

¹ The building speculation during the period of time from the '50s to the 80s distorted the building scheme of Palermo, the collusion between the local institutions (city and region) and the mafia organizations delivered a number of building permits and public tenders which the city criminal organization managed by covering entire urban areas with concrete; this way destroying part of the historic-architectural heritage of the city (Barbera 2012; Butera 2010; Bascietto, Camarca 2018; Violante 2012).

² Among the historic shop windows: The Pasticceria del Massimo and the Extrabar Olimpia by Dagnino, the Bar Mazzara, the Bar Caflish, the Bar Al Pinguino, Flaccovio Bookshop and Hugony perfume shop (Messina, Sabato 2019, 60-62).

palaces, which had been saved from the building speculation, were renovated in order to host business activities and banks. The prevalence of clothes and jewelry shops and along with Italian and foreign luxury labels, confirm the centrality of these businesses in attracting Italian and international high spending demanding clients in this area of the city (Messina, Sabato 2019). In addition, the current commercial network is proposed to the tourists visiting Palermo as the most refined “shopping road” and “made in Italy”, intercepting the flows heading the historic center.

The axis in via Lincoln has had a different development, it was opened in the seventeenth century with the intention to direct the middle-class expansion out of the historic walls toward East and the sea. The residences of neoclassical inspiration and the most important green area of the time broke with the Baroque, defining the road as a conjunction between the fortified city and the new expansion area. At present, the axis currently connects two different urban areas, the Kalsa quarter, which in recent years has undergone a gentrification process and the Oreto-Station (Oreto-Stazione) quarter, with a quite heterogeneous urban landscape (including some venues of the University of Palermo, public gardens and public housing). In the 80s the business activities present on the street, for some time now, belonged mainly to the textile and furniture sectors. In addition, via Lincoln was the first contact with the city that those who came from municipalities located around the main town had with the commercial area. In the same years, an unprecedented migration flow from China addressed Palermo: a community, coming from the town of Whenzhou settled in the first half of via Lincoln, that differently from other older Chinese groups living in Italy, opened immediately a series of stable business activities (mostly small family run shops), this way consolidating the image of a little Chinatown (Cusimano, Giannone 2019). Such a concentration of shops (clothing, accessories) on the axis would be decreasing in parallel with the increasing of manufacturing plants and service as well as the expansion of the commercial space. In recent years, Chinese activities have spread around the Central Station (small supermarkets, household items) and then throughout the city (restaurants): in 2018, only 60 Chinese businesses out of 411 were located in via Lincoln (*Idem*). Besides, from 2014 the number of migrants has decreased, probably because of our country's lesser economic attraction, against a rapid productive growth of the Chinese system. Few Italian businesses enterprises have survived along the road, perceived as historic brands by now.

3. The fieldwork

The four road axes represent, as explained earlier, the ideal spaces and hubs where the historical events linked to the urbanization of Palermo have development and crossed, along with the commercial perspectives – thus socio-economical – of the city and its urban policies, with particular reference to those concerning traffic management.

Taking into account that trade is one of the complex functions that deeply operate within the relation between human community and urban area, we wanted to investigate, through a fieldwork, the system of perceptions that the operators have developed in *reading* the city in its complex dimension of overlapped urban space and commercial space.

In order to detect the operators' perceptions (Corbetta 2003; Phillimore, Goodson 2004; Hay 2005; Delyser et al. 2010), the business owners (on sample universe model) operating along via della Libertà-Ruggero Settimo (Messina, Sabato 2019), via Maqueda (Mercatanti, Messina 2019) and via Lincoln (Cusimano, Giannone 2019) were asked to fill in a structured questionnaire integrating open and closed ended (multiple choice answer questions), in respect to the dynamics, perspective and criticality involved in the location of their shops within the urban spaces.

The data and thoughts that followed are however based on the analysis of the questionnaires actually filled in, which are considered to be fully representative of the variety of the issue analysed.

It should be pointed out that some of single brands shop owners in the luxury sector, and most of those within the Chinese community expressed unwillingness to cooperate, the ones because of their company's obligation to secrecy and the others because of a general disregard to the research. The greatest criticality rises right in the data collected in via Lincoln (where the Chinese enterprises are hegemonic), the data is too limited to have a statistical value. Therefore, via Lincoln will be dealt with separately.

The summary of the data extrapolated from the analyses of the questionnaires are illustrated in Table 1.

With respect to the product category, the data analysed show plastically three different types of supply (and demand) between the axis of via della Libertà and the one in via Maqueda. If in the first one there is a concentration of luxury shops (boutiques and monobrand stores) and valuables (jewellery and antiques), in the second one it is food, ethnic and local shops.

Independent enterprises are the most commonly type found in the urban spaces analysed, but a num-

Table 1. The questionnaires of the data of the perceptions of shop keepers on trade roads in Palermo. Overall framework. The data on via Lincoln are crucial for the reason explained in the text. Source: Survey on location, 2019.

	Via Libertà/Ruggero Settimo	Via Maqueda
Product Category	Jewellery 15%	
	Clothing 34%	Clothing 24%
	Food 32%	Food 56%
	Other 19%	Other 30%
Kind of enterprise	Independent 61%	Independent 80%
	Branch 32%	Branch 17%
	Franchising 7%	Franchising 3%
Size	<50sm 3%	
	50-99sm 17%	50-99sm 29%
	100-200sm 46%	100-200sm 64%
	>200sm 34%	>200sm 7%
Propriety	Owned 15%	Owned 7%
	Rented 85%	Rented 93%
Number of employees(average value)	Full Time 3.9	Full Time 2.9
	Part Time 1.3	Part Time 1.2
Owner's activity	Employed in the shop 49%	Employed in the shop 73%
	Not employed in the shop 51%	Not employed in the shop 27%
Reason of localization	Cientele	Centrality 27%
	Big spenders/Centrality 72%	Ztl (limited traffic zone) 37%
	Commercial area 27%	Historical roots 7%
	Other 1%	Touristic area 17%
		Ethnic quarter 7%
		Other 5%
Number of visitors(average value)	Week 334,5	Week 393
	Week-end 240	Week-end 305,6
Client's origin	Any 32%	Any 46%
	Mostly national/International 2%	Mostly national/International 8%
	Exclusively locals 66%	Exclusively locals 46%
Importance of trust in business	Important 76%	Important 37%
	Neutral 10%	Neutral 29%
	Not important 14%	Not important 34%
Perception of the traffic in the city center	Balanced 36%	Balanced 49%
	Increase private mobility 10%	Increase private mobility 12%
	Limit private mobility 49%	Limit private mobility 27%
	Don't know 5%	Don't know 12%
Accessibility to the center with private car	Very good 0%	Very Good 0%
	Good 50%	Good 16%
	Neutral 2%	Neutral 2%
	Bad 46%	Bad 66%
	Very bad 2%	Very Bad 16%
Accessibility to the center with public transport	Very Good 0%	Very Good 0%
	Good 83%	Good 51%
	Neutral 2%	Neutral 6%
	Bad 15%	Bad 41%
	Very Bad 0%	Very Bad 2%

	Via Libertà/Ruggero Settimo	Via Maqueda
Accessibility to the shop with private car	Very good 0% Good 24% Neutral 12% Bad 59% Very Bad 5%	Very good 0% Good 29% Neutral 12% Bad 49% Very Bad 10%
Accessibility to the shop with public transport	Very good 0% Good 2% Neutral 19% Bad 64% Very bad 15%	Very good 0% Good 17% Neutral 34% Bad 41% Very bad 7%
ZTL Extension	Correct 63% Too much 0% Too little 35% Don't know 2%	Correct 75% Too much 2% Too little 11% Don't know 12%
All day Opening	In favour 76% Against 24%	In favour 73% Against 27%
Sundays Opening	In favour 76% Against 24%	In favour 71% Against 29%
Assessment on the changes in the neighborhood	Better 98% Don't know 2% Worse 0%	Better 73% Don't know 12% Worse 15%
Assessment on the appeal of the neighborhood	Attractive 98% Neutral 2% Deterioration 0%	Attractive 80% Neutral 8% Deterioration 12%

ber of national and international branches were found along the axis Libertà-Ruggero Settimo. The franchising formula instead is less popular. The variation in respect to the overall extension of the commercial spaces is strongly marked. Most of the shops can count on a surface area between 100 and 200 square meters, while the spaces offered along the luxury axis are more extended (above 200 sm), prerogative of those shops which, because of the amount of goods, they need larger exhibition spaces and shop windows, thus they are located along the stretch of the higher offers. In relation to the ownership of the spaces, rentals are mostly prevalent although along the axis Libertà-Ruggero Settimo ownership of the estates coincide with the ownerships of the company.

As far as workforce is concerned, in via Libertà-Ruggero Settimo, which usually includes the owner, it stands on an average of 3.9 full time workers (minimum 1, maximum 10) and of 1.3 part time (minimum 1, maximum 8). In via Maqueda, where surfaces are usually smaller, enterprises are individual, the type and quality of the offer is very different from the luxury shopping roads; the average full-time workers decrease to 2.9 and the average part time workers recorded is 1.2.

Except for few exceptions, the shops standing along the axis via della Libertà-Ruggero Settimo have a reasonable commercial tradition, dating even back to 1947, 1962, 1983 and 1986. Most of the stores were founded between the 90s and 2000. In via Maqueda, next to some long-standing activities (the oldest reported dates back to 1993), rise more recent shops, opened from 2008 on. There are relevant differences concerning the present locations: most of the shops in via Maqueda control that market only since recent years (2008-2017), marking a renovated commercial dynamism in that axis. In via della Libertà-Ruggero Settimo locations are spread in terms of time, with only one exception in 1971, that is resulting from 1990 and 2018. In regard to the motivation of the location (or re-location) in the current place, it clearly emerges how much the commercial systems in via della Libertà-Ruggero Settimo and in via Maqueda are completely different for the offer provided and demands, although belonging to one single ideal axis. Viale della Libertà-Ruggero Settimo is considered the big and iconic shopping road, often defined as the "Lounge of Palermo", the offer expressed is addressed to a big spender clientele; whereas via Maqueda, thanks to the ZTLs, was able to develop a more accessible commercial

offer with a great number of ethnic stores and catering addressed to the tourist demand. This data is comforted by the origin of the clientele surveyed: via Maqueda evenly attracts local, national and international clients; viale Libertà-Ruggero Settimo, which thanks to the big mono brand stores attract likewise international clients (Messina, Sabato 2019), it has, nevertheless a rooted offer addressed exclusively to local big spender clients. It is no coincidence that in viale della Libertà-Ruggero Settimo trust within the relationship between the shop keeper and the customer is perceived as an important value; the same indicator, in via Maqueda is often perceived as irrelevant.

The data related to shops previously present in the location is flawed due to a number of refusals to answer the question. However, what emerges is that in both axes, pre-existing enterprises were linked to clothes and shoes. The average weekly flow of visitors in viale della Libertà-Ruggero Settimo results to be of 334.5 clients (minimum 100, maximum 1.500); during weekends the average is 240, (minimum 30, maximum 1.000). Via Maqueda, instead reports this data between weekly and weekends: 393 (minimum 100, maximum 2.000) and 306.5 (minimum 50, maximum 1.200).

As far as the opinion on traffic in the urban center is concerned, in viale della Libertà-Ruggero Set-

timo, the widespread perception of a balanced situation between public and private traffic stands out, accompanied with a strong request to limit still more firmly the circulation of private cars. Conversely, although in perceived as a balanced trend, some shops keepers in via Maqueda are in favour of the circulation of private cars. Accessibility, in fact is a crucial factor: if access to viale della Libertà-Ruggero Settimo with private cars is not widely considered, access with public transport is considered very easy. Access to via Maqueda with private cars is considered hard, and with public transport it often results difficult. Instead, users' perception mediated by the shop keepers appears differently. Access to the commercial area is critical in both axes, in fact, due to the limitations of private cars (traffic, jams, limited parking spaces, ZTL) and the poor public transport. In apparent contradiction with what affirmed earlier, ZTLs are perceived by the merchants of both axes as a useful tool to the businesses, considered suitable to the surface and even too limited. This marks a strong change in the dealers' perception compared to the past. There are many requests for new pedestrian areas all over the city aiming at boosting trade: viale della Libertà, via Roma and Mondello stand out for intensity.

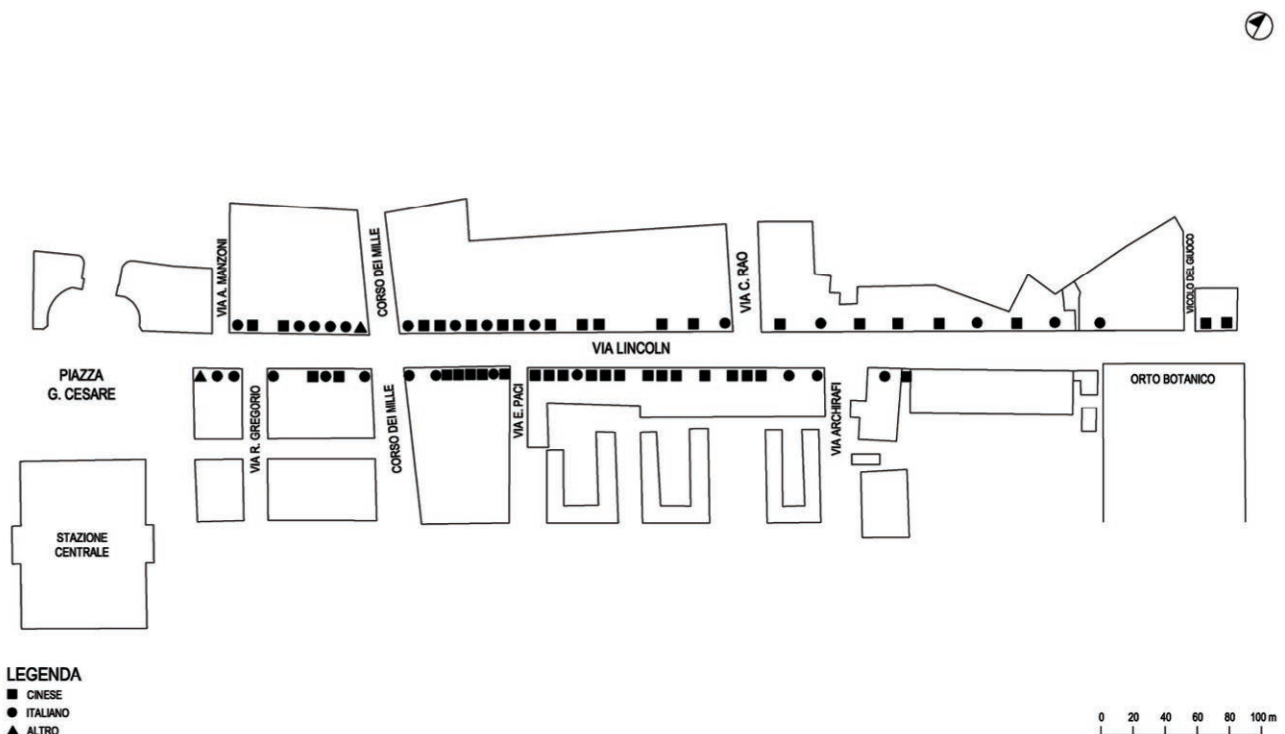


Figure 2. Distribution of Chinese and Italian shops in via Lincoln, Palermo. Source: Technical drawing by Federica Placenti on surveys by Giovanni Messina.

In respect to opening hours, the shop keepers in viale della Libertà-Ruggero Settimo and via Maqueda are basically in favour of the all-day opening and Sunday opening too.

As far as the perception of the neighbourhood context is concerned, both quarters are considered attractive and believed to be gradually improving. If on the one hand, the data related to viale della Libertà-Ruggero Settimo is not surprising, on the other hand, it results remarkable for via Maqueda, which evidently benefits from the pedestrianisation, the tourist attractiveness and from the new enterprises mainly related to food business.

When analysing the organisation of the Chinese enterprises in via Lincoln (Cusimano, Giannone, 2019) a diachronic process of business expansion was observed which saw the Chinese shops first occupy, mainly the entire, commercial space of the road, then spread to nearby areas and finally settle, here and there, also in other areas in town. Giving a closer look at the shop profiles, a limited specialised merchandise is observed, with a tendency to favour general merchandise typical of general stores, and a trend to lower the competition related to price reduction over differentiation and specialization. The sequence of spaces of the Chinese and Italian shops (surveyed with a fieldwork in June 2019) is observable on the previous map (Fig. 2). With regard to the commercial profile of the Chinese shops in via Lincoln, it was difficult to define exactly the kind of merchandise of products stocked and sold (the same could be said for the other shops present throughout the city). As a matter of fact, the multitude and promiscuity of types of the items sold in these shops makes the clear identification of the product sector reference frequently difficult (items such as clothes, households, toys and electronics are displayed together).

The organization asset related to the Chinese in via Lincoln entrepreneurial system remains unclear; it appears little open to a commercial integration (even if recently a number of Italian Chinese companies have been founded) and closed to any debate external to the community membership. This idea is supported by the fact that none of the Chinese shop keepers currently in via Lincoln, was willing to fill in the questionnaire prepared for this research.

4. Conclusions

By using a geographical perspective and combining a diachronal and synchronal approach, here we took into account the Palermo's commerce dynamics. Indeed, studying them allow us to better understand the trans-

formation process of a city that imply cultural, social and economic changes. Summarizing, via Maqueda, via Ruggero Settimo and viale della Libertà confirm their centrality for the commercial dynamics of the Sicilian city. Their bourgeois origins, between eighteenth century and the early twentieth century, have bestowed on these axes a strong commercial vocation, influencing their history and their evolution in the modern city. Nowadays, via Ruggero Settimo and viale della Libertà, with their luxury shops, represent the heart of the most refined activities, able to attract Italian and international high spending demanding clients. In the last decade, the major transformations concerned via Maqueda, where it can be reported a proliferation of the food and restaurant sector at the expense of the more traditional ones (such as clothing and shoes). The pedestrianization of the street and its proximity to the popular areas of the night movida, nearby Teatro Massimo, contributed to this transformation, also determining a greater tourist presence in this axe. Finally, a different evolution had via Lincoln, opened during the middle-class expansion out of the historic walls toward East. For a long time, this axe was the first contact with the commercial area of the city for those who came from municipalities located around Palermo. However, in the 80s the Chinese community that has settled in via Lincoln, strongly marked the street with many business activities, changing its commercial landscape (mostly small supermarkets instead the older textile and furniture sectors). In the last years, while Chinese enterprises have spread in all the city, few Italian shops have survived in via Lincoln, perceived as historic brands by now.

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