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Emotion, Energy, Experience*

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ERRATICISM AND MULTICULTURAL PERMEABILITY OF URBAN FABRIC IN PALERMO

Giulia Bonafede

Grazia Napoli

Department of Architecture, University of Palermo (Italy)

***Abstract.** Interactions between physical and social space draw different urban dimensions, or cultural landscape mosaics, which constantly change and evolve. The shape of the city promotes or discourages multiculturalism and social relations. The latter, in turn, reverberate in the way in which urban space is used, not only to meet basic needs - dictated by reason of survival (housing, employment, and services for education, care, leisure, etc.), but also because the inhabitants are driven by the desire for happiness and the simultaneous meeting that Lefebvre described as the “individualization in socialization”. Migrants groups have historically inhabited the central areas of cities, initially appropriating marginal and degraded areas and progressively permeating the urban fabric with their residential and small-scale commercial activities. This erratic process has led them to the conquering of public spaces and of better-qualified localities for commercial activities, replacing those who were no longer competitive in the economic conditions of the time. In the city of Palermo, new dynamics could compromise the intercultural values of relational use.*

***Keywords:** erraticism, multicultural relational value, historical areas, commercial companies, public space.*

Introduction

Urban regeneration policies can give rise to different erratic behaviours. The activation of processes of gentrification, for example, pushes migrants towards peripheral areas, depriving central places of the mosaic of the value of intercultural relational use and supporting, instead, the commodification of the space. Analysing these phenomena in the city of Palermo, used here as a case study, illustrates that the new flows of migrants tend to be distributed in the suburbs, where the low costs of housing increase the permeability to localisation, although significant concentrations of foreigners persist in the central places of the city. However the crisis in the housing market (Napoli, 2007a), related to the more general economic stagnation, has slowed the gentrification process of migrants, creating new opportunities to reflect on urban conditions/transformations with more careful attention to the safeguarding of the values of socio-cultural mixing (Bonafede & Napoli, 2015).

These considerations have led to the concept of erraticism being reconsidered in evolutionary ecological (but also economic and social) terms: a dynamic system reacts to perturbations or shocks of an exogenous (or endogenous) nature,

finding a new (dynamic) balance appropriated to the new environmental conditions. New phenomena (the economic crisis in the building sector and real estate market, new migratory flows and their erratic behaviour within neighbourhoods or throughout the city) lead to a new urban situation that should be governed by defining political paths, identifying systems of social values, and evaluating operational choices. Promoting the process of change poses different questions linked to the power relations among the social groups that preside over political decisions. What are the social aims of the changing process? Who benefits from the change? Who is excluded/included?

The paper investigates, through case study maps, how multiculturalism is manifested between erraticism and permanence, in reference to:

- The erraticism of the residential localisation of migrants in the neighbourhoods (dynamics, distribution, trend);
- The way in which migrants use public spaces (purpose, period, time slots) in terms of sharing, rivalry, or complementarity with other social groups;
- The permeability of the historical market and of central areas for the localisation of migrants' commercial activities (mapping of the mosaic of activity).

The study is aimed at the identification of critical issues, discrepancies, and also potentialities to be taken into account in the definition of new urban policies (housing and economic) for supporting multiculturalism.

Demographic dynamic and urban policies in the city of Palermo

The city of Palermo, in the 2004-2011 period, registered a slow population decline of -3%, while the number of foreign residents increased by 37% (Bonafede & Napoli, 2015). Since 2011 the resident population of Palermo has again started to increase, whilst the foreign population has continued to rise, albeit at a lower rate, equalling 10.1% in the period 2009-2015 (Table 1a and 1b).

Table 1a.

Residents of Palermo in 2009-2015							
	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Foreigners	24,205	26,269	28,227	29,696	30,652	25,997	26,647
Population	656,081	655,875	657,166	654,987	678,492	678,492	674,435
Incidence	3.7%	4.0%	4.3%	4.5%	4.5%	3.8%	4.0%

Table 1b.

Variation 2009-2015 of residents of Palermo		
	Absolute	Percentage
Foreigners	2,442	10.1%
Population	18,354	2.8%

This unpredicted rate of growth of the migrant population has also been

registered by other southern Italian cities, which, like Palermo, are now considered as urban places of permanence and social rooting rather than as points of transition towards northern regions. This phenomenon is confirmed in Palermo by the increasing numbers of second-generation foreign residents (D'Anneo, 2016), and is supported by widespread employment opportunities for foreign residents, in contrast to the high rate of unemployment that characterises Sicily as a whole (Nerozzi, 2010). Historically, the majority of foreign residents of Palermo have been concentrated in the historical areas of the city, particularly in the following neighbourhoods: no. 1 and no. 2 (in the first district), no. 3 (third district) and in no.10 (in the eighth district), as illustrated in Figure 1.

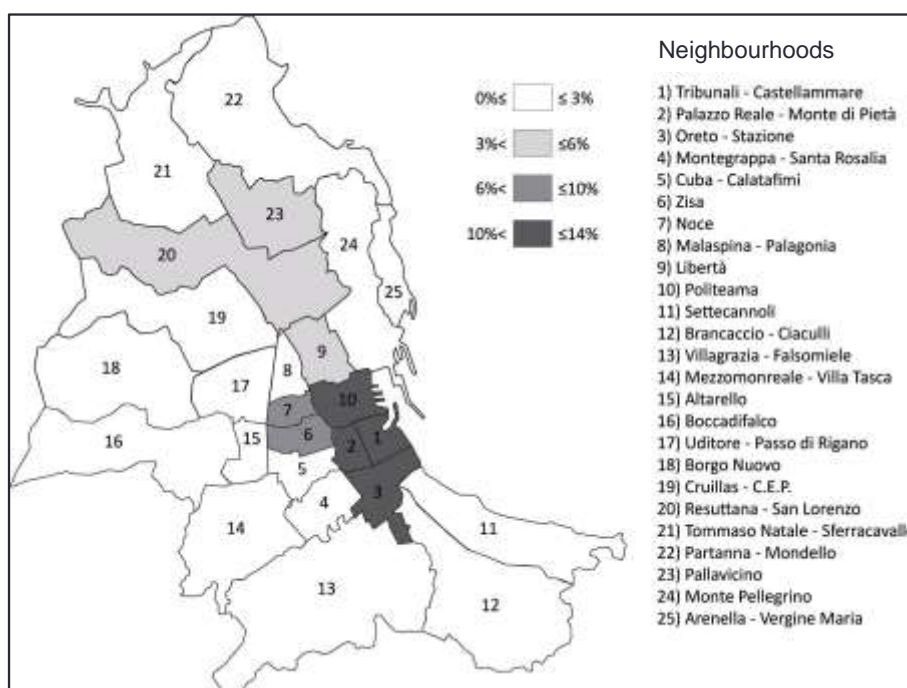


Figure 1. Distribution % of foreign residents in Palermo by neighbourhood, 2011

Table 2 shows that the highest incidence of foreign residents in the first district persists in 2015, although the total population is the lowest compared to the other districts such as, for instance, the eighth, where in particular both the number of foreign residents and the total population is the highest in absolute terms (D'Anneo, 2016).

Table 2.

Residents of Palermo in 2015 by district (author's elaboration on data from D'Anneo)

	I	II	III	IV	V	VI	VII	VIII
Foreigners	5,809	1,439	3,358	1,785	5,569	1,066	1,732	5,889
Population	26,770	75,734	76,307	105,021	116,025	76,134	78,730	122,687
Incidence	21.7%	1.9%	4.4%	1.7%	4.8%	1.4%	2.2%	4.8%

In the historical centre (first district), the socio-cultural groups are also highly heterogeneous. With reference to the year 2009, the foreign residents originated

from no less than eighty-seven different countries, predominantly Bangladesh (34%), Tunisia (11.6%), and Sri Lanka (10.3%). Foreign residents with lower incidences follow, originating in order from Romania, Mauritius, Ghana, China, Morocco, and the Ivory Coast. The other foreign groups have incidences lower than 2% (Bonafede & Napoli, 2015). In aggregate terms, in the whole city, the Asiatic population represents the major incidence among foreign residents; African and European incidences follow, while the presence of foreign residents coming from other continents is negligible, as shown in Figure 2.

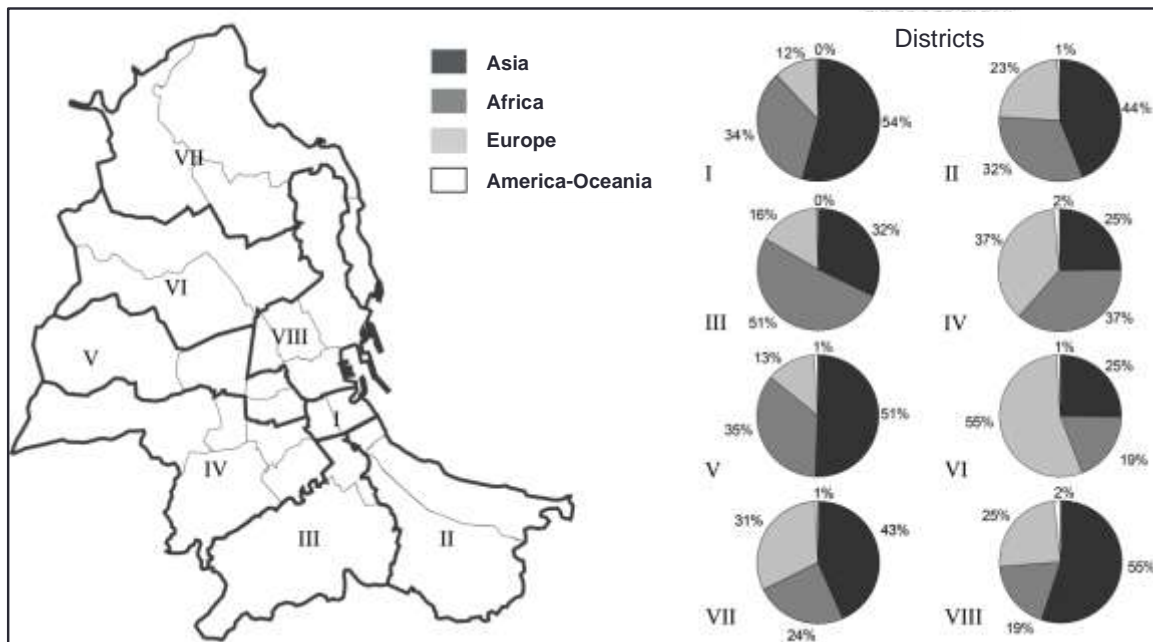


Figure 2. Foreign residents in Palermo by continent of origin and district, 2011

In particular, in the historical centre (first district), the slow decline of buildings, which was registered until 1995, favoured processes of substitution involving the arrival of foreign residents, among other low-income inhabitants, to replace the medium-high income residents who were moving to more modern areas of the city. Besides the convenience of finding low-priced accommodation, the factor that drove migrants to this location was also related to the opportunity to start small commercial activities close to the historical markets such as *Ballarò*, *Capo*, and *Vucciria*, which are generally more inexpensive.

The historical centre continues to register the highest incidence of foreign residents on the local population and on the rest of the foreign population residing in other urban areas of Palermo, although from 2006 these indicators have begun to decrease (Bonafede & Napoli, 2015). Since 2006, in fact, there has been a sustained increase of foreign residents moving to other urban areas of Palermo, as shown in Figure 3, although this phenomenon is quite contained, and seems to be related to urban policies and plans focusing on the recovery of the historical centre. In fact, from 1995 until 2006, following the approval of the recovery plan for the historical centre (in 1993), the municipal and regional

governments financed the recovery and restoration of private buildings without being able to intercept low-income owners, benefiting instead the real estate developers, who have seen high returns (Napoli, 2007b).

Within the general economic crisis that began in 2007, this aspect has to be correlated both to the difficulty of middle-low income families to access the real estate market and to the preference of private investors to focus on demand from middle-high income families (Bonafede & Napoli, 2015), whilst public housing projects have been almost completely non-existent (Pinzello, 2012).

Although a certain number of buildings were recovered as a positive outcome, this kind of urban policy also results in a process of “sporadic gentrification” (Bonafede & Napoli, 2015; Diappi, 2009) and consequently of “erratic behaviour” of migrants (among other weak categories), who move from areas with elevated levels of value in use (Lefebvre, 1970), like the central area, towards peripheral and deprived zones, or remain within the historical centre, but in areas that are tangibly more degraded. These dynamics, in turn, can exacerbate the residential hardship of migrants (Bonafede & Picone, 2013), and can affect their capacity to resist or react to change through the transformation and appropriation of public spaces, as we will discuss in the following paragraph.

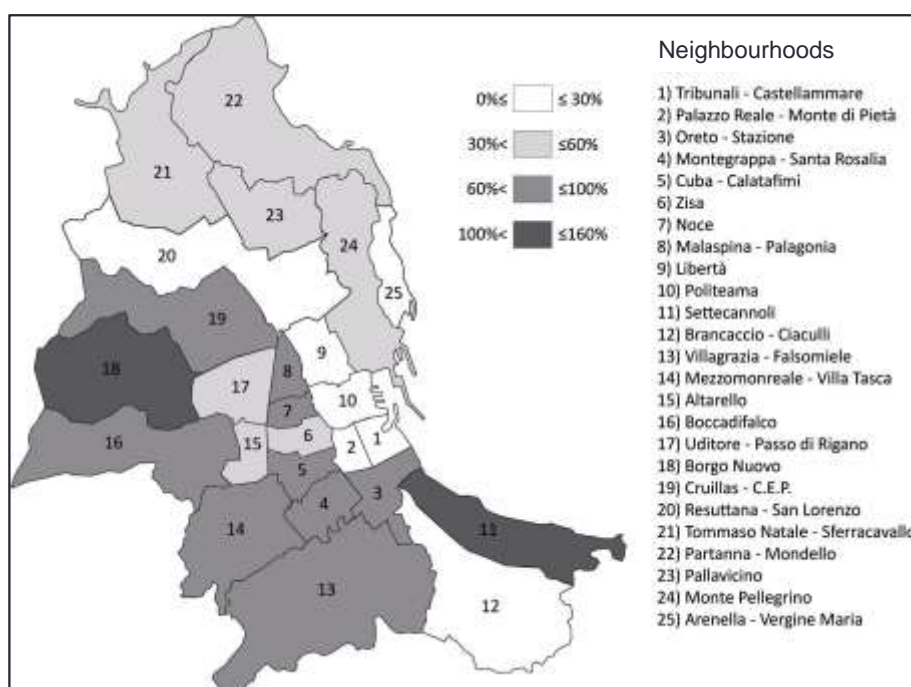


Figure 3. Variation % of foreign residents in Palermo by neighbourhood, 2004-2011

Inclusive or exclusive/transitional public spaces in a central area of Palermo

Within this framework of economic crisis and of urban policy, we have tried to explore how social groups react in the open public spaces. If gentrification produces exclusive enclaves, and also struggles for the appropriation and erosion of public space (Holston, 1998), we observed the interactions between

Italian and migrant groups within a study area in order to evaluate the level of socio-cultural mix and of multicultural relational value.

The study area corresponds to the *Mandamento Palazzo Reale*, a portion of the neighbourhood no. 1 within the first district, where, in addition to the public financing for the recovery of private buildings, the restoration of some important public institutions (like the municipal library and religious monuments) has played a significant role of economic regeneration, while the diffuse presence of associations (such as, e.g., the S. Chiara Centre) that offer various services to migrants groups has contributed to support their social rooting in the area.

During the period of observations (January-June 2012), we monitored the level of population turnout (high, medium, low) during four time intervals of the day. We then synthetically classified the public spaces as either “inclusive”, where interactions between socio-cultural groups are stable through time, and as “exclusive/transitional” in those spaces where interactions principally involve groups of Italians excluding groups of migrants, and vice versa. These latter spaces, whilst not entirely excluding certain groups, are nevertheless characterised by occasional and provisional interactions.

The comparative analysis of the different time slots, even if not returning in detail the wide range of relations existing between the various socio-cultural groups, reveal that during the day the most inclusive spaces are the historical market and the areas near to the schools and the university, with different levels of turnout. In particular, the *Ballarò* market registers a high turnout during the day, and is frequented sporadically during the early hours of the morning when the sellers, also of foreign origin, are setting up their displays of food products.

Groups of young people (Italians and migrants) are generally more disposed to interact during the school break in areas characterised by catering activities, and in the afternoon by playing football in improvised spaces. Conversely, in the evening/night near bars and bistros, public spaces develop primarily exclusive/transitional characteristics. In addition, groups of migrants primarily interact with each other within exclusive public spaces, such as the *Piazza Santa Chiara* (no. 3 in Fig. 4), where the homonymous Centre only occasionally organises intercultural events that are open to other inhabitants, or in other open spaces such as no. 4 (Fig. 4) where, in any case, the music and songs of the Ghanaian community widely resonates through the rest of the neighbourhood, affirming original ways of appropriating the public space. Figure 4 below shows the analyses during the four time slots. Overall, the entire area presents an elevated value of intercultural relations and high permeability to change in regards to the multicultural use of external public spaces, which varies also in function of the erratic localisation of the housing and commercial activities of the migrants. Urban policies and plans should carefully take into account this complementarity between public spaces, housing, and commercial activities in order to safeguard and improve the current social *mixité*, or *diversity*, in this historical area of Palermo, as well as really involving the inhabitants, especially

heterogeneous groups of migrants, in the democratic processes of decision making in relation to choices that affect them (Bonafede & Lo Piccolo, 2010).

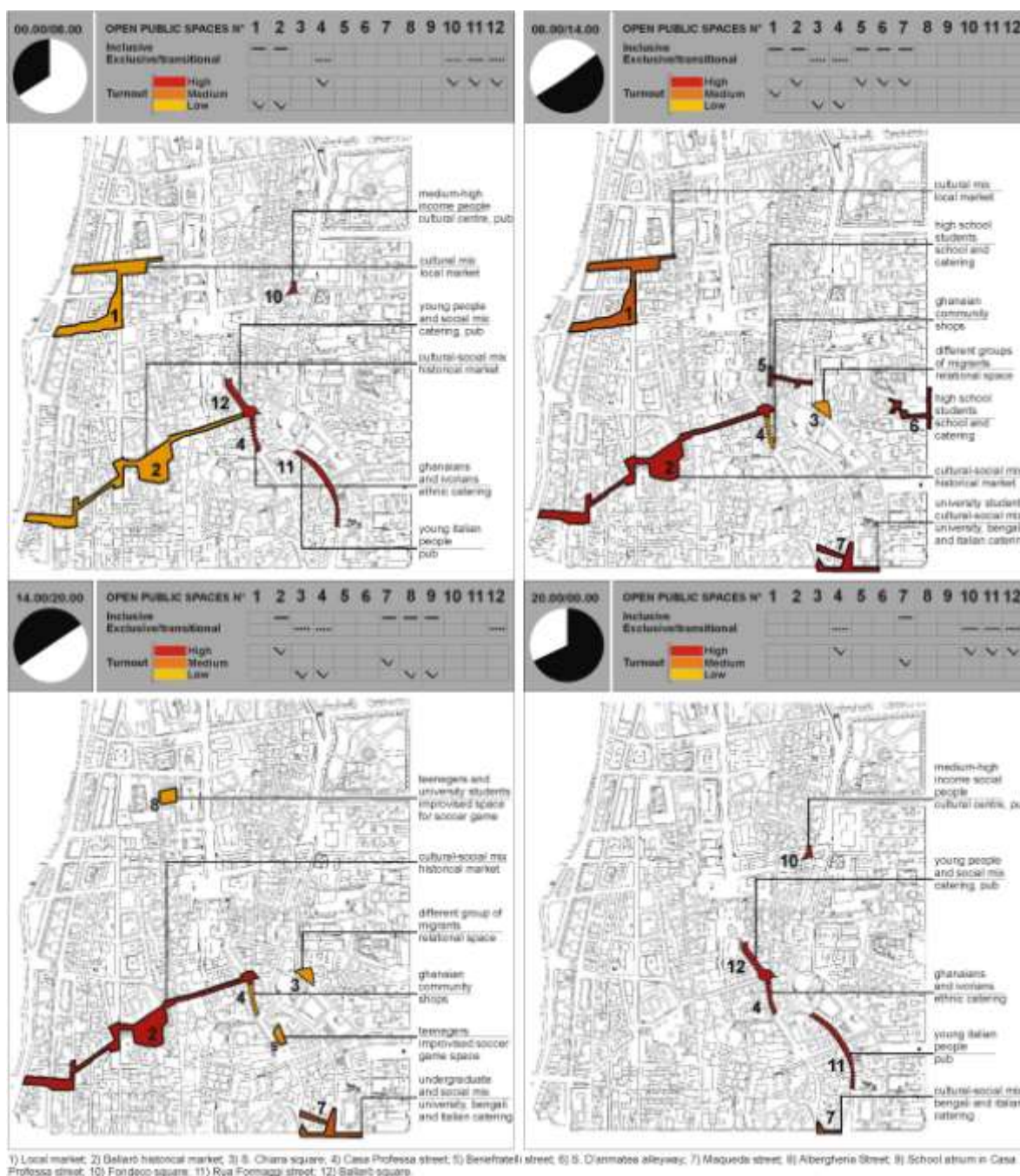


Figure 4. Use of the open public space in Mandamento Palazzo Reale by time slot

Permeability and resistance, densification and dispersion in the historical centre of Palermo

The urban fabric of the historical centre of Palermo has been analysed to observe the presence and the spatial distribution between permeability and resistance, densification and dispersion, of the commercial activities managed

by migrants.

The presence of such economic enterprises is indicative of the propensity to a settled life and the interruption of the erratic movement of migration that implies the decision to stop in a place and invest in it, not only in terms of financial but also of human capital. All these elements also require interaction with the local social intercultural system, even if such a decision doesn't exclude future erraticism, either within the same city or to other cities or countries.

The permeability of the historical centre to migrant people is investigated, in particular, in relation to the economic activities located in the main axes of *Via Vittorio Emanuele* and *Via Maqueda*, and in the surrounding streets. *Via Vittorio Emanuele* was the main street of the city until the 16th century, when *Via Maqueda* was laid that, crossing the former, formed the so-called “*Baroque cross*” that divided the historical centre into four *Mandamenti* (ancient districts): *Palazzo Reale*, *Monte di Pietà*, *Tribunali*, and *Castellammare*. In the 17th century, numerous noble and ecclesiastical buildings were built on *Maqueda St.* that became the main axis for the cities’ urban expansion to the north. Indeed, its prolongation in *Via Ruggero Settimo* and *Via Libertà* constitutes the centre of the city, and holds the highest symbolic and representative values of the contemporary city.

The case study is comprised by six areas, including: the two high streets; a system of streets that lead from *Via Maqueda* and spread into the ancient districts; and the historical market of *Ballarò* (Fig. 5).

Area	Data	Area	Data	Area	Data
1-High Streets	198	2-Mandamento Palazzo Reale	186	3-Mandamento Monte di Pietà	174
Via Vittorio Emanuele Via Maqueda		(Side streets near Via Maqueda) Via Tukory Via Chiappara al Carmine Via delle Pergole Via Giosafat Via Case Nuove Via del Bosco Via Ponticello Via dell'Università		(Side streets near Via Maqueda) Via del Celso Via Candelai Via S. Agostino	
4-Mandamento Tribunali	141	5-Mandamento Castellammare	55	6-Ballarò Market	114
(Side streets near Via Maqueda) Via Giovanni da Procida St. Via Discesa dei Giudici Via Calderai Vicolo Meschita Via Arco Meschita Via Giardinaccio St. Via Divisi Via Fiume Via S. Rosalia Via Torino St. Via Trieste St.		(Side streets near Via Maqueda) Via Bari Via Napoli Via Venezia Via Bandiera		Piazza Ballarò Piazza del Carmine Via Giovanni Naso Via Collegio di Maria al Carmine Via Porta di Castro Via Albergheria	

Figure 5. Areas of the case study

The database comprises 868 small commercial enterprises, affiliated to the Chamber of Commerce of Palermo and selected on the basis of the owners’ country of birth (rather than current nationality), and refers, therefore, to first

generation migrants located in Palermo. For the most part these are “individual enterprises” (97%) and non-food retailers (95%); 58% of the enterprises are street vendors and 20% are stands on public areas.

In the six areas, the largest community of migrants originates from Bangladesh (altogether 66%) whose presence varies from 48% in the area 6 (market of *Ballarò*) to 86% in the area 3 (*Mandamento Monte di Pietà*), where *Via S. Agostino* is a pedestrian street traditionally dedicated to market stands operating on public land.

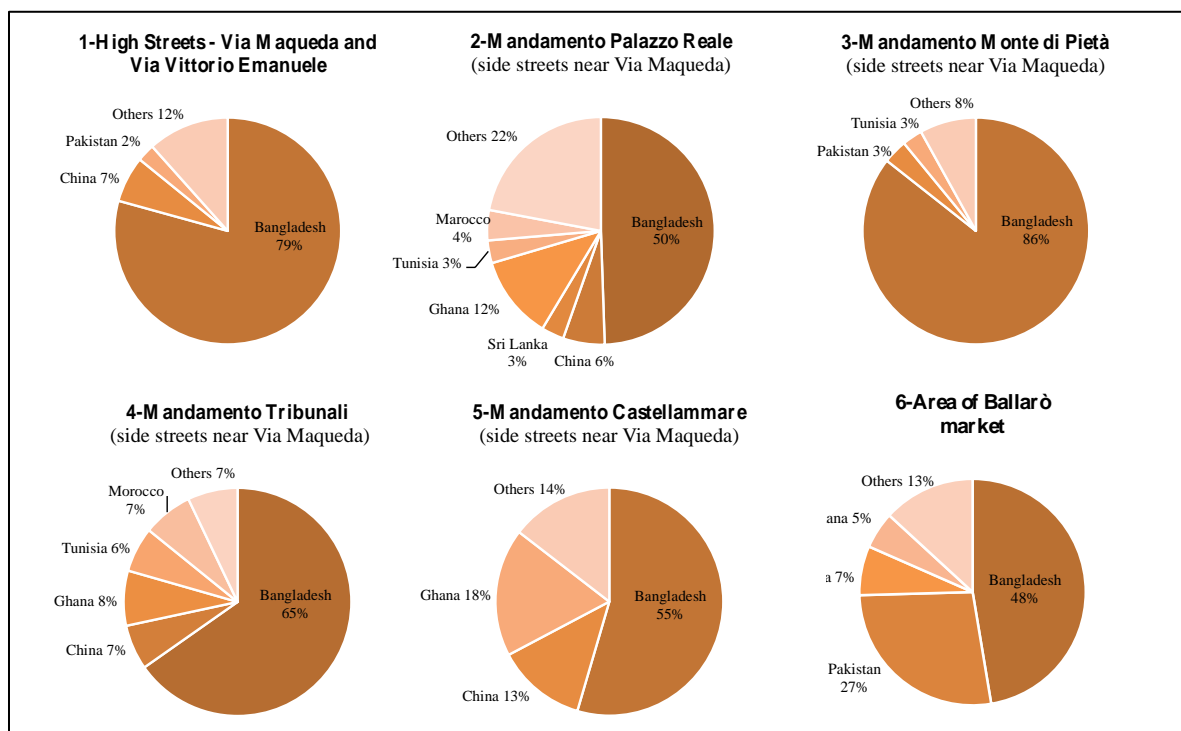


Figure 6. Migrant’s commercial enterprises by area and country of birth (author’s elaboration on data from the Chamber of Commerce of Palermo, 2016)

The graphs in Figure 6 show that in the areas of the case study other communities of migrants are present, although in very small numbers, originating from Asia (e.g. China, Pakistan, Sri Lanka), Africa (Ghana) and, particularly, Maghreb (Morocco and Tunisia). In the areas 2 and 4 (respectively *Mandamento Palazzo Reale* and *Tribunali*), Bangladeshis are balanced by other groups of migrants, and the mosaic of commercial activities of foreigners expresses the multiculturalism of the local socio-economic fabric very well.

In addition, it is significant that there is the presence of migrants in areas traditionally designated as historical markets, such as the market of *Ballarò* (area 6), where the permeability to the entry of foreigners confirms that “*the market*” has always had the peculiarity of being the quintessential place of exchange and comparison, as well as of meeting. It is also the place of “translation” in monetary terms, which evokes other levels (social and symbolic) of translations, representative of a multicultural city.

A deepening of the study focussed on *Via Maqueda*, in which the shops managed by Italians or migrants were identified (through direct survey). The street has been divided into four stretches (Fig. 7):

- A (from *Via Tukory*-*Piazza Giulio Cesare* to *Via del Bosco*-*Via Divisi*);
- B (from *Via del Bosco*-*Via Divisi* to *Piazza Vigliena*-*Via Vittorio Emanuele*);
- C (from *Piazza Vigliena*-*Via Vittorio Emanuele* to *Via Bandiera*-*Via S. Agostino*);
- D (from *Via Bandiera*-*Via S. Agostino* to *Piazza Verdi*-*Via Cavour*).

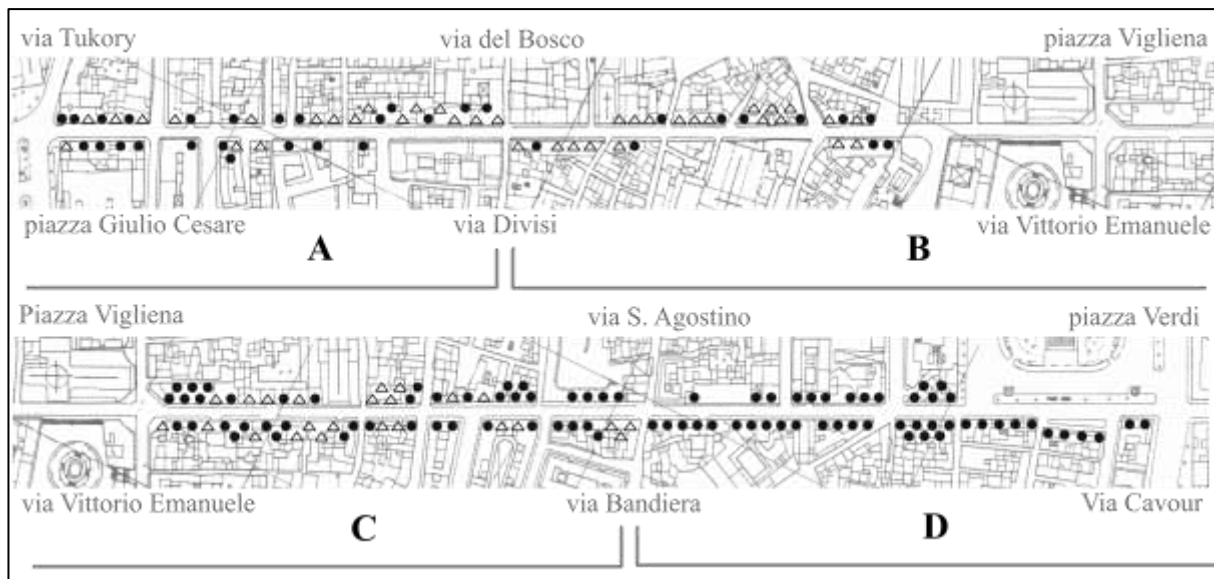


Figure 7. Localisation of migrant's (white triangle) and Italian's shops (black circle) in *Via Maqueda* (data collected directly, June 2016)

The graph in figure 8 shows that in the stretches A and B, the activities managed by migrants equals or exceeds those managed by Italians; in the stretch C those of migrants are fewer, while they are totally absent in the stretch D that is the closest to the centre of the city (*Piazza Verdi* and *Via Ruggero Settimo*), where the high-end shops and stores are located.

Corresponding with the final stretch of *Via Maqueda* (D), it seems that there is an impermeable demarcation line that has stopped, probably only momentarily, the erratic and pervasive flow of the commercial activities of the migrants that tend to spread towards the city centre. The existence of this boundary could be due either to the resilience of the “indigenous” economic system, or to the multinational chains, which have maintained or acquired the central locations, changing the type of products they sell in order to confront the economic crisis, as well as to the principles of economic efficiency, under which the payment of high rents sets the entry criterion for economic activities, excluding those that can't ensure such levels of profitability as to make a central location economical.

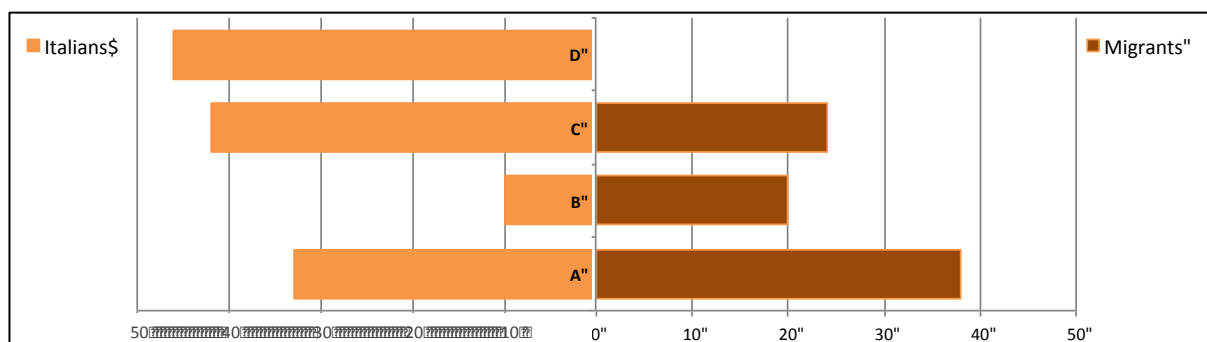


Figure 8. Numbers of Italian's and migrant's shops in the stretches A, B, C and D of Via Maqueda (data collected directly, June 2016)

This analysis reveals a historical centre in which the mosaic of cultural diversity is in a state of continuous dynamic equilibrium between resistance and change, and in which each piece of the mosaic can be subject to an erraticism of both place and content, regarding the subjects or the objects of trade. It forms, in this way, both sporadic presences and densifications of migrants originating from the same country that tend to congregate to reconstitute a community based on their own habits and customs. These densifications are not static but are flows that permeate the urban fabric and construct branching systems that proceed from the inner areas of the districts towards the principal axes (or vice versa from the main streets towards the inner areas). The elevated degree of permeability of the historical centre to the establishment of commercial activities managed by migrants is, however, complementary to the residence of migrants in the same areas and to their ways of using the external public spaces (as previously described).

Summary

We have explored the demographic dynamics of Palermo, through a temporal series of data in the context of districts and neighbourhoods, in order to understand the trends of migrant flows compared with the rest of population. We have highlighted that migrants are concentrated principally in central areas, although a new trend of distribution towards the fringes of the city is occurring. Urban policies focused on the recovery of the historical centre together with the economic crisis in the real estate market have contributed to cause a sporadic process of gentrification, pushing migrants towards deprived and more degraded areas, both peripheral and inner, that has brought about new erratic behaviours also in regards to the appropriation and use of public spaces. To better analyse this erraticism, we have mapped the public spaces and their use during four intervals of time in a significant portion of the historical centre of Palermo. In addition, we have analysed the presence and spatial distribution, between permeability and resistance, densification and dispersion, of small shops managed by migrants in six areas of the historical centre, elaborating 868 data regarding commercial enterprises and directly collecting other data. The results demonstrate that migrants are part of the multicultural socio-economic system and that, moreover, there is an invisible and impermeable border that has, until now, stopped the flow of migrant shops moving towards the centre of the city.

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Giulia Bonafede	Department of Architecture University of Palermo, Italy E-mail: giulia.bonafede@unipa.it
Grazia Napoli	Department of Architecture University of Palermo, Italy E-mail: grazia.napoli@unipa.it