

Shopping centers: understanding the typological process to innovate

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Centri commerciali: interpretare il processo tipologico per l'innovazione

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Abstract

The rise of the automobile in the 1920s in the United States opened the door to a major upheaval in the organization of urban spaces as well as places dedicated to commerce. After an initial period of experimentation, the new commercial concentrations opened up the brings about the birth of the shopping center. It was in the 1950s that we can look a real crystallization of the American built type which was subsequently exported around the world. The paper, while exploring the rise of new forms in the United States, measures the impact and emergence of new configurations in Canada and France. In a second step, enlightened by the knowledge of the typological process and its variants, a project for a new shopping center is approached in order to introduce innovations as to the relationships of the built type to the surrounding urban forms.

Il commercio, come di attività di scambio, è sempre stato un elemento unificante e socializzante nella vita delle città. I mercati, i negozi, i bistrot sono luoghi per lo scambio di merci tanto quanto lo sono i luoghi di incontro in cui si formano e si rafforzano i legami sociali. Punto d'incontro tra la città e la campagna, tra il qui e l'altrove (attraverso merci esotiche), gli spazi commerciali sono veri e propri luoghi di incrocio e contaminazione, in continuo mutamento. Il passare del tempo, le successive trasformazioni di questi spazi hanno portato alla loro stratificazione storica e sociale, caratterizzandoli. Tuttavia, per diversi decenni, con la rivoluzione della mobilità e l'accelerazione dei flussi internazionali di merci, gli spazi commerciali hanno subito trasformazioni considerevoli. L'emergere della grande distribuzione ha trasformato il commercio in un'industria, con tutti gli attributi organizzativi specifici. Il passaggio dalla città "pedonale" alla città "motorizzata" (Weil (1999) analizza questo passaggio nel contesto francese. Secondo lui, si assiste attualmente alla creazione di una nuova forma urbana destinata a permanere; tutta questa dinamica di trasformazione segnerebbe dunque un cambio epocale per la storia della città) ha portato a una ridistribuzione delle attività urbane nell'area metropolitana. Pertanto, le

Trade, as an exchange activity, has always been a unifying and socializing element in the city. Markets, shops, bistros are as much sites for the exchange of goods as meeting places where social ties are formed and strengthened. Meeting point between the city and the countryside, between here and elsewhere (through exotic goods), commercial places are true places of miscegenation constantly changing. Over time, their successive transformations led to their historical and social stratification and thus characterized them. However, for several decades, with the mobility revolution and the acceleration of international flows of goods, commercial sites have undergone considerable transformations. The emergence of mass retail has transformed commerce into a real industry, with all the organizational attributes that are specific.

The transition from the "pedestrian" city to the "motorized" (Weil (1999) analyzes this passage exhaustively in the French context. According to him, we are currently witnessing the establishment of a new form of city that is here to stay; thus, all this transformation would constitute a change of era for the urban history) city has led to a redeployment of urban activities in the metropolitan area. Thus, the main roads entering the city, highways, metro lines have become as many reference axes for the location of new commercial centers. These new urban places are characterized by their position at the crossroads of urban and extra-urban flows. This geographical dimension of the new places for commerce is coupled with an urban dimension. Indeed, the relocation of commercial activities (and, in general, urban) on the territory has led to a radical transformation of urban forms, with the creation of specialized urban fabrics whose dimensions have constantly increased.

While, in general, the transformations brought about by the mobility revolution have been major in locating the various urban functions in the area, the disruption of commercial architecture has been just as important. The creation and transformation of new built types, such as the shopping center, have been the focus of formal research by some specialist architects for several decades. They have encountered the problems inherent in reconciling the vehicular flows of the motorized city with the local pedestrian movements. The shopping center would therefore be the result of an open typological process trial-error which varies from one cultural context to another while preserving common roots linked to the dialectic between territorial flows and local pedestrian spaces of shopping. Investigating the process of genesis of the built type, in all its nuances and variants, is an asset for the design of new commercial spaces. In this paper, we will first highlight the genesis of the formal characteristics of the shopping center in US and French contexts. Subsequently, the competition project for a shopping center in the north of Italy, will highlight how the project, while being part of the typological know-how, can innovate by bringing new considerations that allow to creatively pursue the process.

The emergence of car oriented commercial buildings in the US

In the first suburban developments, the location of businesses is determined by the proximity of public transport. However, the introduction of the car sig-