

POLITECNICO DI TORINO
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The demise of commercial buildings – *Demalling* strategies for Turin

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Shopping center near Moncalieri

Places, non-places, super-places are just some of the terms that define the big commercial buildings that have begun to appear from the 1970's on the Italian landscape. The commercial buildings have been built repeating faithfully the USA's models, but with at least a decade of delay. Starting from the North of Italy, shopping malls have been settled in the extra-urban areas, in the towns' suburbs and, finally, in the denser urban areas. They traced a tight net of commercial structures and every new point in this net modifies fluxes and habits of millions of people. However, every new opening increases the risk of market saturation: the continuous overlapping between the catchment area of different shopping centers threatens this delicate system governed only by the competition among large retail companies.

In order to understand the real effects of market saturation, we just need to look overseas, in the US, where, during the past 20 years, the territory and the local communities have witnessed the battle among the leading retail actors. In this battlefield, dead malls appear everywhere reminding us how the demise of commercial buildings is such an inevitable phenomenon in this kind of development dynamics. Nearly every city hosts a *dead mall* or an abandoned *big box*. In Italy the delay in the modernization process of the retail system should allow us to manage this phenomenon in advance thanks to policy and urban planning's tools. But the European retail system doesn't look so different from the United States' one and the first *dead malls* appeared in Europe and in Italy validate the risk that commercial demise could be replicated in our country too. *Demalling*, a design workshop held in Caserta in June 2011, dealt exactly with this risk: in the area between Naples and Caserta new shopping sites are still being realized even if some malls in this region are almost dead. *Demalling*, a technical term that defines the response to the decline of shopping centres, is the topic of this thesis. Here, features and issues arising from the conversion of commercial spaces to new functions have been analysed through the U.S. and the Italian reality.



Shopping center Auchan, Venaria

The Metropolitan area of Turin is chosen as a case study on which, through a detailed analysis, existing and planned retail spaces have been mapped in order to evaluate the risk of commercial demise in a future scenario of expansion. Just in response to the continuous growth of new commercial places in this area, a number of architectural strategies have been proposed to reuse these huge retail buildings, starting from a number of already realized projects of reuse in the U.S. These strategies, classified into five major categories (function, wide open space, roof, building envelope, interior space), define a sort of manual for the reuse of commercial spaces, dead or in crisis. Some of these strategies (many combinations are possible) have been then tested on four case studies selected in the metropolitan area of Turin: four retail buildings different by type, context and activity. For each case study a general project of reuse has been proposed, showing the architectural potential of these places and offering a further insight into the dynamics of reuse, through the choice of some strategies suggested by the specific urban situation.



Shopping center Carrefour, Corso Montecucco, Torino

This research process is not supposed to be definitive, but, as well as the dynamics in the retail evolution, is considered to be flexible to future scenarios. Therefore, this thesis aims to provide on the one hand an analysis tool for existing commercial areas and, on the other, a system of project strategies to guide the reuse of this kind of spaces. It also highlights how the issue of the demise of retail buildings can become, in the future, a central topic in the dynamics and in the politics of development and governance of our cities.

Presentation thesis on-line:

http://issuu.com/gabriele_cavoto/docs/tesi_demalling_gabriele_cavoto

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