



Gabriele Cavoto - Giorgio Limonta  
URB&COM Urbanism and Retail Management Research Group  
DASTU Department of Architecture and Urban Studies  
Politecnico di Milano  
gabriele.cavoto@gmail.com - giorgio.limonta@yahoo.it

## The demalling process in Italy

### Abstract:

The demise of retail buildings is a rather recent phenomenon, very common in the United States. Hundreds of shopping malls and big box stores are falling into decay and their failure influences, to some degrees, the contemporary and future evolution of retail buildings. Europe and Italy are not immune to the overgrowth dynamics of the retail system that have been observed in the United States, and the first cases of decline and crisis have already appeared in several Italian areas. Demalling, a technical term that defines the response to the decline and demise of shopping centres, represents a totally new urban challenge to redevelop vacant malls and big box stores. Features and issues arising from the conversion of retail buildings have been analyzed focusing on the Italian context, through two case studies: the abandoned shopping mall Euromercato in Casoria (Naples) and the closed grocery store Esselunga in Pioltello (Milan), transformed in an Health Centre.

*Keywords: deadmalls, demalling, greyfield, retail planning, shopping centres.*

## 1 Introduction

The architecture and the urban form of European shopping centres represent an adaptation of U.S. settlement models with various temporal gaps. In Italy, the diffusion of shopping centres started in the 70s with the evolution of the Mass Retail Channel and the retail distribution groups and in the past two decades has experienced a strong increase with the introduction of new typologies, such as “*commercial superstructures*” and “*shopping polarities*” (Brunetta and Morandi 2009). In some urban areas, this large development has determined a strong territorial competition and a market saturation as a result. In the United States, where the competition among shopping centres is much stronger than in Europe, the commercial buildings suffering from demise or high vacancy rates, called *dead malls*, are common in every metropolitan area (Techentin 2003). In Italy, and Europe, the delay developed in the modernization process of the retail system should allow the Public Administration to manage the phenomenon in advance in terms of urban policies. In fact, the European retail distribution system is similar to the United States’ one with some differences in terms of localization strategy and urban planning regulation, and the appearance of the first Italian dead malls means that this phenomenon has already begun in this country. Once this problem has been registered, which solutions could we find? Can a shopping centre be given a second life? *Demalling*, a technical term that defines the response to the decline and demise of shopping centres, represents a possible answer (Dunham-Jones and Williamson 2011).

In this paper, features and issues arising from the conversion of commercial buildings have been analyzed focusing on the Italian context, through two case studies, analyzing the reasons of demise and its effects on the economic and urban system, and highlighting the similarities with the U.S. situation.

## 2 A comparison between U.S. and Italy

The analysis of the shopping centres phenomenon in the United States allows us to better understand the Italian and European retail system situations. What happened overseas, the effect on the urban systems, the ways and procedures followed to take care of them, is useful to foresee and, maybe to prevent the effects of the excessive expansion of the retail structures in Italy. Both areas have similarities and differences that should be highlighted. In the US over 73% of sales, food and not, take place in

stores of the Mass Retail Channel, that is mainly represented by few big economic typologies (Shopping Malls, Big Box, etc...) and private companies (such as WalMart, HomeDepot, etc...). In Italy, only 42,5% of the purchases take place in Mass Retail Channel stores<sup>1</sup>, with deep differences between food and non-food shopping, although, in the latest time, shopping malls and big/medium sized stores<sup>2</sup> cover wider quotas of market.

Although in these countries the retail buildings typologies show several similarities even if the average sizes of the US shopping malls and big boxes are much bigger than the Italian ones. Analogies can be observed in terms of location of these structures as malls and big boxes are mostly situated in the suburban areas, and, as a result, they can be reached mostly by private means of transportation. In the US, the successful shopping mall prototype, afterwards exported to Europe and Italy, was introduced by Victor David Gruen, architect of the first US shopping mall (South Dale Mall, opened in 1956 in Minneapolis) based on the sprawling principle of population as "civilian defence measurements" (Hardwich 2003). The development of this first prototype, generally built on the outskirts of cities at the intersection of main roads and with a wide customer base in the suburban areas, brought to the creating of wider, more modern and more complex structures, including entertainment and restaurant stores. Next to the development of the mall typology, a new kind of retail structure was planned, the big box, promoted by Walmart since 1962: these buildings revolutionized the habits of consumers, creating a strong competition with the shopping malls typology (Parlette and Cowen 2011). The big box surface can exceed 20.000 square meters of Gross Leasable Area (GLA) in a unique big building (only 12% of the surface is non-retail) and can host a wide assortment of products (specific or generic according to the commercial promoter, K-Mart, HomeDepot, Target) at very competitive prices, just above the loss threshold (Parlette and Cowen 2011, Burt and Sparks 2001).

However, in the specific Italian scenario, it's possible to pinpoint a main and deep difference from the US situation in terms of laws and regulations. In particular, the Italian Retail planning legislation went through a progressive liberalization in the last twenty years (Legislative Decrees n. 59/2010<sup>3</sup>, Act n. 248/2006, Legislative Decrees

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<sup>1</sup> Osservatorio Nazionale sul Commercio (National Retail Observatory), Sales composition in 2011.

<sup>2</sup> In 1998 the Legislative Decree no. 114 introduced the classification of retail stores. In cities with more than 10.000 inhabitants, stores with more than 2.500 square meters of GLA are classified as GSV (Grandi Strutture di Vendita - Big size stores), stores with GLA between 250 and 2.500 square meters are MSV (Medie Strutture di Vendita - Medium size stores), stores with GLA less than 250 square meters are EDV (Esercizi di vicinato - Small size stores).

<sup>3</sup> Italian transposition of the 2006 European Directive "Bolkestein" (ED 2006/123/CE).



n. 114/98) and led retail planning policies into a gradual transition from adopting a 'quantitative need' concept towards considering a 'qualitative need' one (Guy 2007). And also the regional administration took complete and exclusive competence on Retail planning policy (Act n. 3/2001). This liberalization of retail activities involves small and medium size stores, meanwhile activities on wider surfaces (GLA > 2.500 sqm) are still ruled by a more complex retail authorization process that requires a prior evaluation by the regional committee. This legal form limited or at least reduced, in comparison to the real estate market request, the development of the large retail facilities and promoted more the medium sized stores. These retail infrastructures, indeed, had a wider development in terms of new openings, offering store formats similar to the big-box one, but smaller in size, the so-called *medium box*. Right this kind of retail facilities is currently suffering, in some areas, from the market saturation and from the consumption's crisis.

### 3 Deadmalls and greyfields in the U.S.



FIG. 1 US Deadmall: Abandoned Value City near Randall Park Mall in North Randall, Ohio. source: <http://www.clevelandcentennial.blogspot.it>

In the US, the abandoned retail buildings (*deadmalls*), started to appear in the middle of 90's to reach an alarming level at the beginning of the 2000. A study carried out in 2005 by the Louisville University estimated that, despite of uncertainties due to the fast development of the phenomenon, 7% of all regional malls were already abandoned and that 20% would soon face the same crisis (Chilton 2005). Another analysis, led by the Costar group, foresees that at least 10% of 1500 regional malls

left will go bankrupt in a matter of a few years. The second biggest shopping mall managing company in the Country, General Growth Properties, with more than 200 real estates in 44 states, went bankrupt in April 2009, marking one of the biggest retail group collapse in the US history. Furthermore, since 2008 not one enclosed mall – term describing a shopping mall with a closed hallway – has been opened in the whole country (Ellen Dunham-Jones 2011): an unexpected decline in comparison to the first years of the 90s, when shopping malls were growing in numbers by 140 per year (Sharoff 2011).

The shopping centre closedown presents itself, anyway, as an inevitable trend in case of developments and mass retail expansions like the ones perceived in the US first, and in Europe later on. This phenomenon seems to be endemic to this kind of facilities, generally planned and managed to be successful in a very limited period of time – shorter than 2 years – sufficient to guarantee the amortization of the initial investment expenses. It is a complex problem that hits both big boxes and shopping malls with the due differences. The big box structure, most recently developed, is considered one of the causes of the decline of the shopping malls, but, at the same time, it suffers from the effects of the market competition (Hernandez and Simmons 2006).

In Northern America deadmalls and *greyfields* – as they are defined by the CNU Congress for the New Urbanism<sup>4</sup> considering the whole urban context – are the true witnesses of the short life span of the retailing industry physical structures. The effects of a greyfield on the surrounding areas can cover the economic level (loss in tax income in the public administration balances and loss of many jobs), as well as the social and urban ones with the decay that abandoned buildings of such size can create on the urban context: in fact, besides the environmental impact, the Public administrations have to face the proliferation of unproductive spaces with the net cut of the internal revenues (Inaba and Koolhaas 2001) and the dequalification of the closely area with a decrease in the value of the estate. The causes of failure are multiple and can be identified in the extreme proliferation of stores in the landscape, which ultimately fosters market saturation and in the obsolescence of these structures. These causes are strengthened by the specific features of every mall, such as location, accessibility, maintenance, customer base, etc... that can affect the crisis or the success of some structure. Furthermore, the fast evolution of the consumers' taste can influence the life cycle of some structures, as long as customers prefer the

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<sup>4</sup> Since 2000 the CNU Congress for the New urbanism analyses greyfield issues and solution, collected in several publications available at <http://www.cnu.org/malls>.

convenience of *Power centres*, the pedestrian areas of open air malls or the *urban style* of *Lifestyle centres*, in comparison to the classic kind of enclosed malls.

## 4 The demalling process

*Demalling* is the term defining strategies in response to the decay of retail facilities, through interventions of urban renovation and it stands for a new opportunity of recovering and urban development for deadmalls and greyfield (Chilton 2005). Abandoned shopping malls and big boxes become ground for new challenges to balance out social and urban layouts. The problem of closed commercial structures and the following reuse of abandoned spaces is a theme that, in the latest years, calls for a new scenario of possible solutions and innovative proposals. In the United States, greyfields were converted to places of worship, hospitals, libraries, museums, universities, offices, or multifunctional centres, becoming new urban centralities for the communities (Christensen, 2008). Demalling solutions are constantly increasing and can differ for the proposals, the aim of the intervention, the amount of investment, the extension of the transformation and the variety of the parties involved.

We highlighted four main kind of interventions: *refurbishment*, *integration*, *reuse* and *replacement*.



FIG. 2. Refurbishment and Integration: Huntington Beach (BellaTerra, California) and Surrey Central City (Vancouver, Canada). Sources: <http://www.rejournals.com/> and <http://www.topboxdesign.com>

- *Refurbishment* consists in renovating the structure of the building-keeping the retail function through architectural intervention or simple maintenance-on the faltering structure to improve the use of the retail areas. Two examples are the shopping malls



in Huntington Beach (BellaTerra, CA) and the Streets of Woodfield (Schamburg, IL) that were converted from *enclosed* to *open air* malls.

- *Integration* defines the interventions that add to the retail functions new complementary activities, creating new flow and opportunities to the retail areas in crisis. This kind of intervention happened at the Surrey Central City (Vancouver, Canada), where an university branch campus is currently on the last floors of the mall.

- *Reuse* requires the addition of new non-retail functions in the abandoned spaces to change the use transforming, sometimes drastically, the architecture of the building: two cases are the Denton Public Library (Denton, TE) and His Hands Church (Woodstock, GE), two large big boxes transformed into a library and a church.

- *Replacement* stands for the demolition of the retail infrastructure and its substitution with urban areas with a different urban function or with new retail facilities. Two examples are the Villa Italia Mall in (Lakewood, CO) transformed into a urban neighbourhood called Belmar and the City Center Mall (Columbus, Ohio) replaced by a park and surrounded by residential towers and offices.



FIG. 3 Reuse and Replacement - Denton Public Library (Denton, Texas) and City Center Mall (Columbus, Ohio). Sources: <http://aia-mn.org> and <http://www.greenroofs.com>

However, if the conversion of a greyfield seems perfectly logic, the practical reality is much more complex, depending on the variety of the several subjects involved, the high investments costs, the urban rules, the contract clauses, the structural limits, the site locations and the necessary agreement of the community. The goal of a demalling is to get over the demise and to guarantee a new social, economic and functional activity to the greyfield, bringing new energy to the specific context of each deadmall. The decline of retail spaces is becoming increasingly relevant in the US and forced, for the first time, all different public and private parties to face the challenge of transforming retail buildings. The flexibility of retails buildings, meant as

their capability to adapt to new uses and to respond to architectural modifications, represents one main issue for the demalling projects and it often influences considerably the strategies of transformation—in terms of typology and parties involved in the process (Bellintani 2010).

From the legal point of view, the changing of use can sometimes be problematic and it needs to be agreed with the public administration, whose rules can influence for the best or not proposal of transformation, sustaining, for example, the change of use classification. Besides the legislative aspect, the demalling process is strictly connected to the physical structure of the buildings to be transformed, adapted to a new purpose or just improved for a new commercial role. On the other hand, demalling projects reveal the problems and deficiencies of these vast, one-story, single-use buildings, defining, at the same times, new guidelines for their evolution in the future. The mistakes made in the United States, where commercial structures had a non-programmed and not regulated growth, offers an inevitable chance to reflect on these aspects, also considering the European and Italian areas.

## 5 The Italian retail system

Can we learn something from the dynamics observed in the US context? Is it possible that this trend could also appear in Europe and Italy?

The analysis of the American context suggests that the demise of malls and big box stores could be endemic to this kind of buildings, confirming the risk that this trend expands also to Europe, where the evolution of the retail system has accrued years of delay. Therefore, dynamics that can be observed in the United States should serve as a lesson, useful to manage the phenomenon in advance and to prevent its severe impact on the environment (Bottini 2005).

In Italy, for example, the phenomenon of land occupation and expansion of the big retail stores are far from reassuring and the control policies seem not to take into consideration the important signs coming from the USA. The Italian commercial system went through an evolution and it implied that, next to the traditional shopping centre, new typologies were created. Even the location of retail stores went through new explorations, creating retailing centres even in very close-up urban areas, often as main solution for the revitalization process of old industrial areas. New formats, like *Factory outlet centres (FOC)* or *Entertainment centres* and the mixed of many different kind of retail typologies and functions in specific urban areas called “*commercial polarities*” (Brunetta and Morandi, 2009), further enriched the Italian



commercial system, sometimes annexed to important building of train or air transportation, turning these areas into so called "*superplaces*" (Paris 2009). Next to this evolution an important increase of new retail spaces emerged, especially medium sized big boxes, even in saturated and congested areas (Tamini 2009). Today the main companies of the retail industry constantly increase the commercial offer, especially in terms of local occupation and size, causing, in some areas, increasing competition between retailers, which is leading to market saturation.

Indeed the first crisis cases of urban and suburban commercial systems start to appear in some Italian regions with multiple causes and effects, confirming the issues already experienced in the US territory.

This process, completely new in Italy, seems to involve especially medium size stores (GLA < 2.500 sqm) even if some shopping centres, especially in the South, had to start facing the close downs of food and non-food anchor stores, vacant spaces and decrease in sales.

## 6 Case studies

In order to analyze this subject two case studies were taken into consideration, one in the North and one in the South of Italy. The two cases are different for their size, for the demise reasons and for the public response to the problem. The Euromercato located in Casoria (Naples) is an abandoned shopping mall, whose future, after many and controversial events, is still uncertain. The former Esselunga located in Pioltello (Milan) is a medium size store that, after several years of abandonment, was refurbished and transformed into a health centre, becoming one of the first demalling cases on the Italian territory.

### 6.1 *Euromercato, Casoria (Naples)*

The first case study focuses on Euromercato, a shopping centre located in Casoria, a city in the metropolitan area of Naples. The area from Naples to Caserta went through large transformations which, in the last decades, completely changed the rural landscape of this area, especially along the main roads connecting the cities. Since the Seventies, this area witnessed the change from an agriculture based economy to an industrial one thanks to the subsidies to factories and to an important development of infrastructures. Between the two cities, connected by a railway and the A1 Highway more and more industrial settlements were built, transforming drastically the suburban landscape during the years.

Starting from the middle of the Eighties, the first commercial structures appeared in the area and, from the Nineties up to today, a strong increase was recorded, mainly developing in the suburbs along the main street intersections, both next to the industrial areas developed after the war and in rural areas bringing to an apparent saturation of the market.



FIG. 4 The shopping centre Euromercato: Bird's-eye view. Source: Microsoft Corporation (<http://bing.com/maps>)

In this retail system, made up of 22 shopping centres and new retail parks, some important retail facilities—stand out, such as the shopping centre Campania in Marcianise, 102.000 sqm of GLA with 172 stores, the shopping centre Vulcano Buono in Nola (projected by Renzo Piano), 68.600 sqm of GLA with 159 stores and the shopping centre Le Porte di Napoli in Afragola, 42.600 sqm of GLA with 70 stores. In the complexity of this scenario, that can be represented by an overlay analysis of the largest shopping centre<sup>5</sup> catchment areas<sup>6</sup>, the Euromercato centre in Casoria represents one of the first and most considerable case of decline and crisis appeared in Italy.

The shopping centre Euromercato opened in 1978 and it was the second shopping centre in Italy after the northern one in Paderno Dugnano (Milan). The centre, 21.500 sqm of GLA on one floor, hosted a big food anchor store and about 27 other commercial activities of different sizes. In thirty years of history this structure experienced times of great success and moments of deep crisis, mixed to

<sup>5</sup> For largest shopping centres and retail parks we consider the facilities with more than 10.000 sqm of GLA

<sup>6</sup> The catchment areas are generated by a specific GIS (Geographic Information System) FOSS (Free and Open Source Software), on a OpenStreetMap road data model (<http://www.openstreetmap.org>). The catchment area determination are based on the Dijkstra's algorithm for finding shortest paths (Shortest Path Theory). We consider a 0-20 minutes car drive catchment area for each shopping centre, solved in a free flow traffic condition (LOS - Level of service A - Highway Capacity Manual).

interchanging political and legal events. But at the end of the nineties the centre started its decline. In fact, in the surrounding areas a variety of competitive structures were built, like the big shopping centre Le Porte di Napoli in Afragola, which generated a loss for the appeal of the older mall.

A series of important changes in the managing companies followed one after another, for example the ownership of the building and the brands of the anchor stores, until 2010 when Carrefour decided to leave the centre. Since September 2011 the shopping centre has been officially closed for a refurbishment process promoted by the new owner, with the goal to drastically transform the centre under a new brand EuroCasoria. Today the shopping centre is abandoned and the 200 workers with unemployment agreement keep on fighting to reopen it, that might not happen anymore.

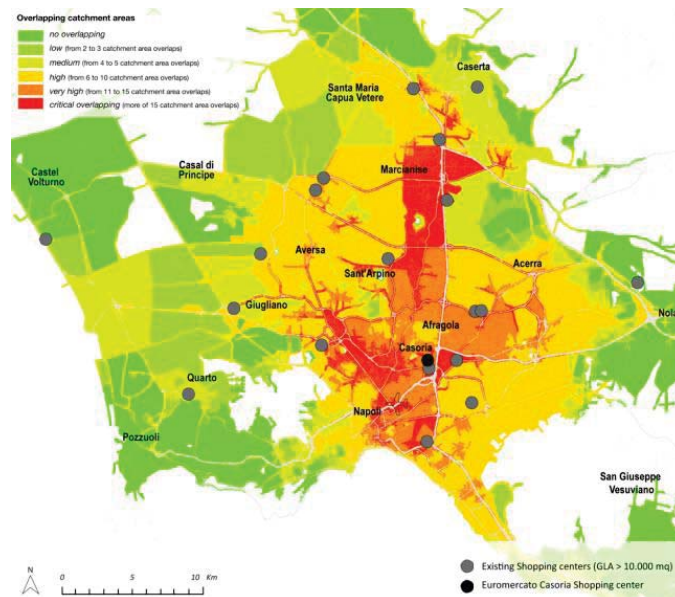


FIG. 5 Overlapping catchment areas of Naples largest shopping centres: the current scenario

The story of Euromercato confirms the US trend where the oldest structures, which are not able to renovate their image, suffer from the competition of most recent centres, giving way to a slow decline that eventually brings them to a final close down.

In the latest months, in addition, the news of a new shopping centre a few hundred meters away from the deadmall seems to have stopped any possible refurbishment process.



It is a project proposed in June 2012 by Eire (Expo Italian Real Estate) of Milan: Policentro Casoria a "multifunctional centre of latest generation" with above 42.000 sqm GLA, with a large grocery store, 9 non-food anchor stores, 127 stores, food including, 3000 parking spaces<sup>7</sup>. The structure will be built on the remaining agricultural area between the former Euromercato and the point of sales IKEA and Decathlon, becoming an additional commercial pole of the area. This scheduled projects could modify, in the coming years, the current state of the retail sector in the area, creating a new attractive polarity and weakening again the existing ones.



FIG. 6 The shopping centre Euromercato: The empty mall

This case study represents a typical example of the possible future scenario of some Italian metropolitan realities, defined by markets close to saturation and by the continuous addition of new projects, that often appear unjustified both in terms of urban location and in terms of economic and commercial feasibility. It seems necessary to come up with a policy that could promotes the improvement of the existing centres, giving priority to deprived areas, which lack access to a range of services and facilities, even as an opportunity to give new social and economic life. The risk, however, is that the close down of the shopping centre Euromercato represent a warning that goes unheard.

### 6.2 Esselunga, Pioltello (Milan)

The second case study concerns a grocery store with about 2500 sqm of GLA (22.800 cubic meters of built volume and a total occupied surface of 7.600 sqm), located in

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<sup>7</sup> <http://www.policentro.it/>

Pioltello a town in the Milan metropolitan area (6,5 km away from Milan city centre) with a population of about 37.000 inhabitants, defined by many neighbourhoods of social housing. The Milan's commercial system is characterized by many retail and entertainment centres (shopping centres, retail parks and entertainment centres) created in the last thirty years having a wide consumer's catchment areas. At the same time, there are additional medium and big size stores (big box), especially grocery stores, with a GLA included between 400 to 2.500 sqm, called *superstore* or *supermarket*, which complete and define the commercial offer of the metropolitan area. In this area where many new retail areas are projected and built, the market is progressively filling up with a consequent growth of competition between the different structures. As a result some retail centres invest in a restyling and refurbishment process to maintain or improve their appeal.

The Pioltello centre belonged to one of the most important Italian grocery corporation (Esselunga), built on an area destined for public services, located close to the City Hall along an important road connecting the city to Milan. This area belonged to the Local City Council which sold the rights to build and use it for 90 years to the corporation (called *right of surface*). The structure was therefore built on a ground belonging to the City in 1980 and was active as grocery store until 2003, when the corporation (Esselunga) transferred its point of sale (with a wider GLA) a few hundred meters away along a different road connecting to the city of Milan. By taking this decision, agreed with the public administration already in 1999, Esselunga corporation gave up its *right of surface* on the area and the existing building, which became exclusive public propriety, with the obligation, from the Local Council, to assign the area exclusively to the original function (public services) and not to allow any new grocery store.



FIG. 7 The grocery store Esselunga: Bird's-eye view of the demalling process. Source: Microsoft Corporation

(<http://bing.com/maps>)

In 2008, six years after Esselunga moved out and the area went through a renovating process from a commercial space to a health care centre. The municipality found the agreement of all parties, both public and private ones, interested to this kind of renovation and signed with them a so called *memorandum of understanding (MoU)* defining the architectural, economic and managing project. In 2012 after two years of work, the new health centre was opened and it is now hosting the Auxology Institute, Asl Milano 2 (public health association), Melegnano Hospital, and also different diagnostic equipment, offices, private practices and commercial activities in the health industry. The intervention of reuse allowed therefore to transform and revitalize a central area abandoned for many years and to reconvert it into a public service for the overall interest for a new total surface of about 5.000 sqm and with an investment cost of about 12 million euro, financed by Asl and the Auxology Institute.

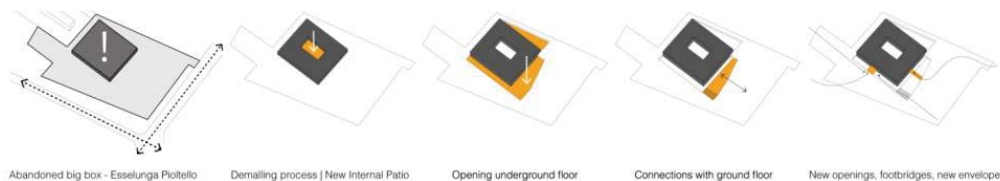


FIG. 8 Demalling strategies of reuse

The architectural project of demalling was made by Polis Engineering<sup>8</sup>. The former Esselunga of Pioltello was shaped as a big box with a rectangular base (60x70m) with a modular structure in concrete. The building developed on two levels: one floor, underground, hosting some parking lots and other technical areas dedicated to the staff, the other, on the ground floor and 8 meter high, including the retailing area and the warehouse space.

The change of use from retail to health centre required a series of adjustment of the structure, both technical and functional a challenge not so easy to face. Furthermore was important to show the new public use of the building also on the outside, creating a visual and physical connection with the context. The existing building was opened to the outside with the addition of new openings and entrances. Furthermore, the area around the building was dug in order to open the underground floor and connect it to the surrounding areas. This choice created the opportunity to recover a wide surface that was not usable in the past, making it available and

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.polisengineering.com/>



accessible from the outside. The volume of the building was emptied in the central part, creating an internal patio where all new activities face off. The project added a new envelope to the building that, besides its use for termo-isolation, changed completely the outside of the centre, and the external shape was improved also adding new entrances and footbridges to connect all entries. A part of the parking lot was transformed into a green area, which creates a sound and visual filter from the surrounding roads.

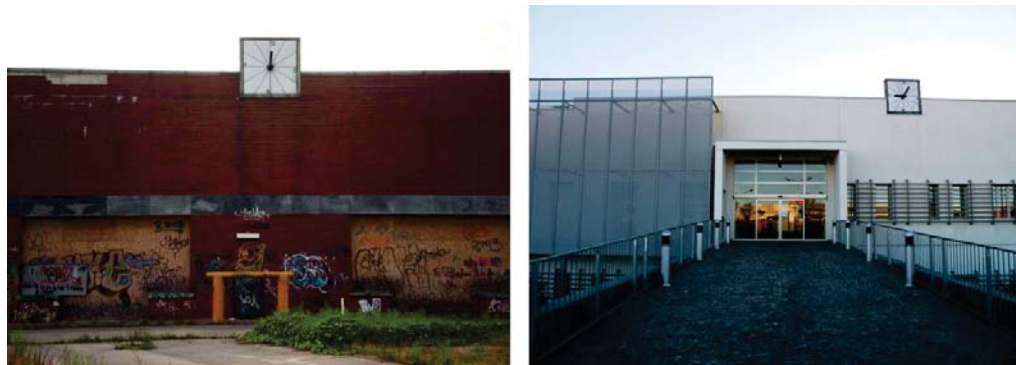


FIG. 9 Before and after the demalling process. Source: photo by R. Antoci and S. Carena

The intervention shows a strong political intention to find a solution to a degrading situation caused by the abandoned building. The result is an intervention where no more soil was used, able to offer a quality public service to the community and able to give to the city a new area with a high functioning and symbolic meaning. This reuse proves itself as a winning operation and shows how projects of this kind, sustained and promoted by clear strategies and by consistent architectural choices, can be considered sustainable and doable on an economic and decision making level.

## 7 Conclusion

Retail buildings' demise is a phenomenon, that has clearly emerged in the United States and, as we said, it may affect Europe and Italy in the next few years, even though with different features. The Italian commercial system, displays in some areas problems related to market saturation and retail sites' proliferation. As a result some shopping sites are already facing crisis, obsolescence and vacancies and if the development of this sector goes on as expected, malls' failure and demise will be

confirmed as an inevitable trends. Demalling seems to be the unique solution for shopping sites' decline but, as already stated, it would be appropriate to examine in the first place the causes of this phenomenon, in order to prevent it.

At the conclusion of this paper, thanks to the analysis of the Italian context and the in-dept look on the two case studies proposed, it possible to highlight the process of big and medium size stores demise in Italy, in terms of public and private management and solutions.

Different proposals and considerations emerge from these situations, in particular on how to develop the actual urban and retail planning policies for the large retail facilities and how to face the problem of retail buildings' demise. The first relates to the location of the new structure, based on the example of the UK *Sequential approach* (UK Communities and Local Government 2009)<sup>9</sup>, that was already applied in interesting ways in Italy in some regional contexts (New Regional Retail Planning legislation of Veneto Region<sup>10</sup>). The approach foresees the introduction of a mechanism regulating the evaluation of quality of requests and areas, giving priority to central locations or anyhow in contexts already developed, that can guarantee specific requirements: easy access through local public transportation, no land consumption, limited impact on environment and landscape, energetic efficiency and the sustainability and reuse of materials, etc.. These requirements become extremely important in the Italian context, where local policies of urban development still privilege building new big shopping centres in suburban agricultural context. For example in the Rome metropolitan area the main network of shopping centres and entertainment parks is made up of big suburban poles located along the external ring road system (Grande Raccordo Anulare), reachable exclusively by private means of transportation. Considering the 6 main shopping centres to be built in the next years, only two (urban regeneration of ex Mercati Generali and project development Forum Valle Aurelia) are foreseen to be in central areas as part of urban requalification projects of abandoned areas, while the other projects will be located in the agricultural outskirts and in market areas already overly occupied, creating the above mentioned difficulties.

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<sup>9</sup> The main policy objectives of the Sequential approach are:

“- *New development of main town centre uses to be focused in existing centres, with the aim of offering a wide range of services to the communities in an attractive and safe environment and remedying deficiencies and provision in areas with poor access to facilities.*

- *Competition between retailers and enhanced consumer choice through the provision of innovative and efficient shopping, leisure, tourism and local services in town centres, which allow genuine choice to meet the needs of the entire community (particularly socially excluded groups)."*

<sup>10</sup> Regional Lex n. 50, 28 december 2012 "Politiche per lo sviluppo del sistema commerciale nella Regione del Veneto".

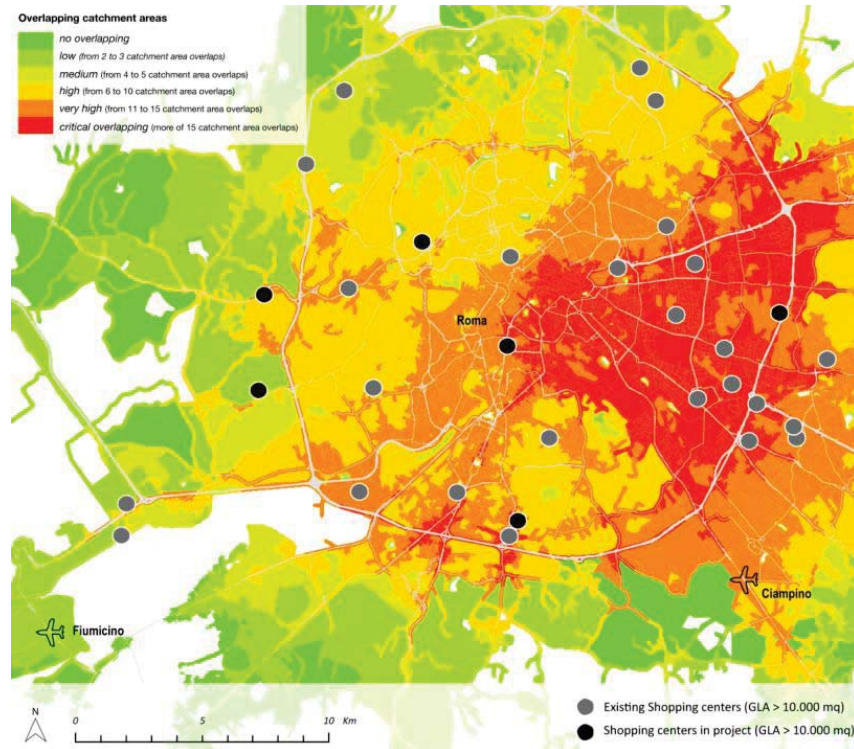


FIG. 10 Overlapping catchment areas of Rome largest shopping centres: the future scenario

This confirms the critical condition of some Italian scenarios, as emerged with the case study explained beforehand, whose evolution involves the weak planning system of some Italian regions: the case of Casoria is a visible demonstration of how the Public Administrations was unable to manage problems and opportunities arising from the demise of Euromercato and the approval of Policentro project. As a result public parties reveal their weakness in the decision-making process facing projects with apparent economic and social positive effects (job opportunities, new infrastructures, local taxes, etc...).

Furthermore it's necessary to consider the lifecycle of retail facilities during the planning and evaluation process of new settlements, preventing period of crisis and planning intervention of reuse: improving or converting strategies might be foreseen already during the projects of new retail infrastructures. For this reason in the U.S. public administrations introduced guidelines and rules to minimize the landscape



impact of the new constructions (Bottini 2005, Staricco 2007) and to facilitate a future process of reuse or demolition.

Malls and big boxes demise reveal problems and deficiencies of retail buildings, and it represents a new opportunity to rethink unsuccessful planning processes and wrong urban choices. Thus, deadmall cases and demalling projects will influence the future evolution of large-scale retail complexes, introducing a set of instructions and guidelines for future projects, based for example on the ecologic sustainability of buildings<sup>11</sup>; this foresees not only the use of equipment to minimize the energetic consumption of the structure, but also the use of material and sources that can be, at the end of the existence cycle of the structure, reused to reduce the expenses of disposal not only in economic but also in environmental terms.

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<sup>11</sup> Based on the example of US LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) certification, developed by the U.S. Green Building Council (USGBC).

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