

## **Shopping Mall Parking Lot as/is a Meeting Place: Typologies and Strategies for a New Polarity in Architectural and Landscape Design**

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*This article presents the results of a study developed around the general theme of the future of large shopping centers in relation to the current transformations of territory and city in Italy. Specifically, the research deals with outdoor spaces, those enormous technical and service spaces strictly connected to the commercial "big-boxes". The focus of the research is therefore on the large parking areas, the roads, the manoeuvring and service areas for sales: the large asphalt slabs that surround the commercial volumes. The research starts from the specific case study of the large shopping center "Tiare" in Villesse, Gorizia (one of the largest in the Friuli Venezia Giulia Region) and then extends to the development of a more general and scientifically articulated modelling. The objective was to translate the initial retrospective study (origins and development of shopping centers) and the design explorations developed in the academic sphere and through workshops on the potential of the case study into strategies, exportable to other contexts. The spaces involved are considerable, amounting to 2-3 times the sales area, i.e., parking lots of 30-40-60 hectares, the same extension of an entire town. From this it is easy to understand the importance of the architectural design on other disciplines, and the need to question "if and how" these spaces can also become something else, if they can also have a social role due the dimensional-territorial entity, and specifically, recovering the American tradition from Gruen onwards, if they can assume the role and function of a meeting place. The research allowed the identification of methodologies for the transformation of car parks into meeting points: the creation of a landmark, densification and screening. In addition, the results obtained offer possible new developments for these places that can be identified in the following macro-strategies: the re-urbanisation of peripheral commercial nodes, neural development between city and shopping centre, parallel and autonomous development of shopping malls and cities, commercial development and urban erosion.*

### **Introduction - From Mall to Shopping Center Mall ... by Car**

The research focuses on shopping centers and in particular the large open spaces around them, technical places resulting from a planning characterized by a manual approach and mainly used as parking lots.

Huge areas often used only to leave the car parked but with great architectural, landscape, environmental and even social potential.

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If in the beginning the places dedicated to the creation of social relations resided in the open and vital spaces of the city, such as squares and markets, with the passage from the pre-industrial to the modern phase of capitalist society, other types of places begin to appear, expressions of the need to create an indoor, large dimensioned, air-conditioned and safe space.

At first the *passages* and the *grands magasins*, but also the hyper-interiors of the universal exhibitions, define the genealogy that leads to the creation of the shopping center as a specific manifestation of the society of mass consumption according to two main models of reference: on the one hand the mall, emblem of the American sprawl, which transforms the outdoor commercial space into an air-conditioned commercial strip, easily accessible by car and with a large availability of parking spaces; on the other, an approach that comes from the ashes of Europe undergoing reconstruction, where the commercial facilities concretize the effort to rebuild the torn cities through multifunctional, experimental interventions and, in some cases, expression of the desire to build a new modern citizenship.

The logic of late capitalism led to an exasperation of the proliferation and hybridization of these models within urban systems and especially in peripheral territories. Today these realities seem to be put in crisis by the virtualization of the forms of distribution and sale of goods and, as in any crisis situation, the outcome of the possible evolutions is not obvious and will involve very different scenarios: from the re-urbanization of major commercial systems to the exploitation of gaps that the virtual currently presents, probably passing through a range of hybridizations in continuous evolution.

Today it is very clear that shopping is an indispensable phenomenon to understand the urban<sup>1</sup> and that, beyond good intentions and trivializations, it is a vital and recurring question in the architectural discourse.

What role does architecture play in shaping those spaces, neither strictly public nor generically private, but enjoyed collectively? And how does the architectural project actually shape the multiple faces of the community? And more specifically, is it possible to transform the external areas of a large shopping center into a collective meeting place?

If perhaps it is easier for buildings and structures, what could be the fate of the huge open areas dedicated to traffic and parking of thousands of cars? Today, they are still predominantly technical and service areas, but research has made it possible to investigate case studies and design tools to convert them or to associate these spaces with new social, ecological and even new functional values.

The study was developed by a group of researchers from the University of Trieste and had a dual purpose: a theoretical-methodological and an operational practice, applied to the specific case study of "Tiare" shopping center in Villesse, in the province of Gorizia, owned by Ingka Centers. A large commercial platform with a catchment area that covers the entire Friuli Venezia Giulia region, the Veneto region, Slovenia and Austria. Study and project workshops were organized with

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1. C. J. Chung, J. Inaba, R. Koolhaas, and S. T. Leong, *The Harvard Guide to shopping* (Köln: Taschen, 2001).

students, as well as conferences and in-depth seminar days and part of the results were collected in scientific publications.

The analysis of the historical evolution of these places, the in-depth analysis of the case studies and the design experimentation conducted have made it possible to build a theoretical-operational methodology that outlines the design approaches to transform the large technical spaces around the shopping centers into real meeting places, in such a way as to define the strategies for a greater integration of commercial platforms with the territories and with the problems connected to them, both in a contemporary and future perspective.



**Figure 1.** Location of the Case Study

Source: EagleFVG 2021.



**Figure 2.** The Case Study: The Shopping Center and the Parking Lot of the "Tiare Shopping Mall" in Villesse - Gorizia (Italy)

Source: EagleFVG 2021.

## Literature Review - Origins and Development

In order to stimulate investment, the United States Congress in 1954 issued a series of measures that artificially accelerate the aging of industrial and commercial buildings by increasing the depreciation allowances that can be deducted from taxes.

Before this act, in 1953, there was only one regional mall in the whole of the United States.<sup>2</sup> Three years after the issue of this scrapping incentive there were twenty-five. If we then consider all types of shopping centers, open, closed, linear (along the roads), etc. the increase was 500%.<sup>3</sup>

At the same time as this accelerated depreciation of real estate, the United States focused on the growth of the large infrastructure network with the "Interstate Highway Act", and within 10 years the "world's largest highways" would be built, facilitating the fast automobile connection of an entire continent.<sup>4</sup>

These two laws, like the ingredients of a magic potion, triggered and favored the suburban growth of American cities, transforming them into metropolis or rather territorial cities. In this context, new forms of commerce were born and developed, all to be experienced and consumed by car: first the shopping malls and later the Edge Cities were almost naturally located in the interchange infrastructures of the great road arteries.<sup>5</sup>

In this context of infrastructural development and commercial growth, especially with the birth of large-scale distribution, the theories and projects of Victor Gruen find great success. One of the first case studies of this new architectural typology was the project for the Southdale mall in 1954. And it is precisely the *Architectural Record* magazine that in the mid-1950s begins to deal with this new phenomenon of commercial cities, giving space to Victor Gruen's projects. Bruno Zevi, albeit in a very concise way in his "History of modern architecture" of those years, is one of the first in Italy and Europe to dedicate space to Gruen's professional experiences, highlighting the novelties of urban and infrastructural layouts, and above all of inclusion of recreational aspects in these commercial mini-cities.<sup>6</sup> Richard Longstreth,<sup>7</sup> some years after Zevi, analyzes the "Gruen case", with a focus on Southdale's mall as a paradigmatic project. The book is completed in chapter IX by a comparison of the design experiences of Victor Gruen with those of Clarence Stein, another important protagonist among the pioneers of shopping center designers. As we said previously, it is a crucial moment for the United States, but also for the architectural culture which sees the birth of real new typologies: Southdale is the first enclosed mall, an introverted shopping center, which contains complexity and functional articulation to build an

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2. F. Bottini, *I nuovi Territori del Commercio. Società locale, grande distribuzione, urbanistica* (Firenze: Alinea, 2005), 43.

3. M. Gladwell, *The terrazzo jungle. Fifty years ago the mall was born. America would never be the same* (The New Yorker, 15 March 2004).

4. Ibid.

5. Ibid, 162-175.

6. B. Zevi, *Storia dell'Architettura moderna* (Torino: Edizioni di Comunità, 1975), 302.

7. R. Longstreth, *City center to regional mall. Architecture, the automobile, and retailing Los Angeles* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1997).

artificial urban world and which responds to the logic of the market and the strategies of large retailers and which, at the same time, is totally indifferent to what is outside, to the context: these are the prodromes of Wall-Mart's big boxes.

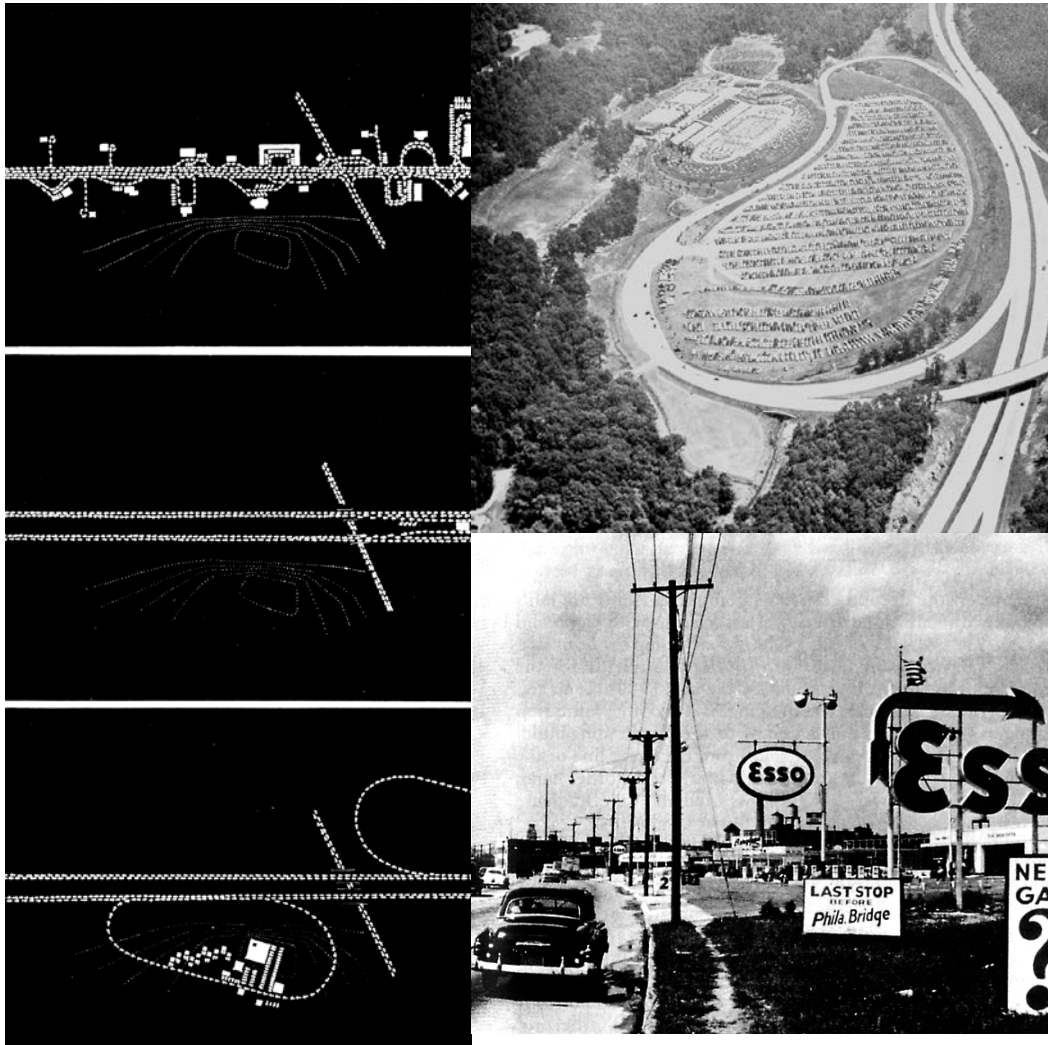
This type was born in the United States in the mid-50s and then developed until the early 90s, from here it evolved into big-boxes as a response to a general decline and the crisis of large-scale distribution, which began precisely at the beginning of the 90s. This collapse was considered by scholars as physiological:<sup>8</sup> omnivorous commercial plates, ever larger and more and more introverted, but above all for single use. "People are moving towards the greatest and easiest-to-reach concentration."<sup>9</sup> The corpses of a lost battle remain on the field: huge malls with stretches of asphalt around them, parking spaces and roads that occupy 2-3 times the covered surface of the mall.

This also represents the end of a society idea based on the brutal live-work-shop triad. Accomplice of this decline in the evolution of shopping malls on the street was the birth, as a reaction to the first signs of decline, of new types and forms of large-scale retail trade. And so, in the late 1980s and mid-1990s, discount department stores, category killers, outlet stores and warehouse clubs appeared. The surfaces are in dizzying growth, enormous volumes and surfaces for trade: from 10,000 sqm super-centers arrive in a short time (late 90s) to 30,000 sqm, which means outdoor spaces for parking and service roads equal to more than double, that is, surfaces of asphalt around 60-90,000mq. The category killers, shops that offer sector-specific products at very low prices, reducing profit to almost zero but focusing on quantity, start at 2,000 sqm and after a few years, in the mid-90s, soon reach sales surfaces around 20,000 square meters together with the outdoor spaces that grow accordingly. The growth of these malls outside the cities, which is recorded in less than 10 years, especially for the sales surfaces and consequently for the outdoor spaces, is in some cases of an exponential type. The impact is huge. In about 40 years, the forms of trade redesign territories and landscapes and extend the city, contributing to making them, first in the United States and then in Europe, metropolises, territorial cities. Infrastructures play a decisive role in this race towards gigantism and, in fact, the Freeway business centers were born in the early 90s. Malls that cater exclusively to traveling motorists, with diversified services that range from fuel, to parking and annexes (bathrooms and bars), to catering, to various trade (food, spare parts, cosmetics, clothing, household goods, appliances, etc.) up to the large-scale distribution trade that affects all product categories in a global way. A common feature of this new typology, the Freeway business centers, is the total extraneousness to the context and, on the other hand, the complete integration with the infrastructure: they are in fact conceived as real extensions of the street space.

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8. R. L. Nelson, and F. Aschman, *Conservation and rehabilitation of major shopping districts* (Washington: Urban Land Institute, Inc., 1954), 8-9.

9. W. J. Reilly, *Manuale per la progettazione dei Centri Commerciali* (New York: Urban Land Institute, 1950).



**Figure 3.** *Infrastructure, Cars, New City-Territory (Sprawl Town). Early Commercial Street Car Diagrams in USA (Man Made America, C. Tunnard, B. Puskarev); One of the First Suburban Shopping Centers Accessible Only by Car (Man Made America, C. Tunnard, B. Puskarev); Las Vegas' Strip (R. Venturi, D.S. Brown, S. Izenour, Learning from Las Vegas)*

The great typological invention of the twentieth century and - as Kevin Lynch<sup>10</sup> argues - the only major American contribution to the development of the city is the strip, that is, the street market.

This new typology, the result of spontaneous dynamics and self-organizing processes celebrated in the famous text "Learning from Las Vegas"<sup>11</sup> by Venturi, Scott Brown and Izenour, probably expresses the first true character of the street

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10. K. Lynch, D. Appleyard, and J. R. Myer, *The view from the road* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1964).

11. R. Venturi, D. S. Brown, and S. Izenour, *Learning from Las Vegas* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1972).

market for automobiles. The strip is a market on the scale of the city or the territory, designed to be lived, used and consumed with the car.

It is a sort of natural evolution of the historic urban mall of American cities of the early 1950s which has then evolved into the big-box which since the end of the '80 begin to populate the edges of the city and then gradually in areas often completely to be urbanized, but close to motorways and infrastructural interchanges.<sup>12</sup> Thus were born the American regional malls, large slabs in the middle of nowhere, huge commercial boxes with nothing around them but huge surfaces of asphalt for parking lots.

Shopping, thanks to the car, acquires a new dimension linked to simplicity and freedom of movement.<sup>13</sup> These new forms of commerce, suburban retail, which soon became the trend of large-scale distribution, are made exclusively for cars:<sup>14</sup> organized by large specialized plates along the main interstates, the large boxes of Wall-Mart draw the new imaginary of the American consumerism that after twenty years will also arrive in Europe. This second phase marks the leap of species, the genetic variation: we are at the beginning of the 90s and the commercial space takes on the dimension of the territorial scale,<sup>15</sup> the reference is no longer the architecture, the building in the city, nor the isolated but it is the big box. The big-boxes speak the language of infrastructures, deal with the extension of the highway and measure the extent of the desert territory. Hence, the famous Oregon Trail Syndrome.<sup>16</sup>

Shopping follows a syncopated rhythm, entering and exiting the various malls by car along streets lined with large sign-buildings, goods on display, large parking lots, in which "[...] there are no benches, protected spaces, public toilets, trees. It is difficult to recognize objects and orient yourself, everything is very large, huge, colorful and above all shouted to catch the driver's attention".<sup>17</sup> Both in the American strip and in the European street-market, the most evident fact is the lack of a continuity of the collective space, the one on a human scale, to which we are ordinarily used since the streets belonged to people<sup>18</sup>. This absence is the result of a new relationship of direct permeability between the traffic lanes of the road, cars and shopping centers.

Everything is thought in automotive terms, including open space (only parking lots and maneuvering areas), and in this new world the car becomes the necessary extension of the body, of man himself. The scale, size and texture of the public

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12. F. Bottini, *I nuovi Territori del Commercio. Società locale, grande distribuzione, urbanistica* (Firenze: Alinea, 2005), 43.

13. R. Banham, *Los Angeles l'architettura delle quattro ecologie* (Genova: Costa e Nolan Editions, 1983).

14. F. K. Benfield, M. D. Raimi, and D. D.T. Chen, *Once there were greenfields. How suburban sprawl is undercoming America's environment, economy and social fabric* (New York: National Resource Defence Council, 1999).

15. "Big Box Retail", Planning Memo, December 1995, Office of State Planning – Department of treasury, New Jersey.

16. C. Dardi, *La sindrome dell'Oregon Trail* (Spaziosport n.3, 1985).

17. K. Lynch, M. Southworth, *Design and Managing the strip* (London: The MIT Press, 1990), 582

18. B. Rudofsky, *Strade per la gente, architettura e ambiente umano* (Roma-Bari: Laterza, 1981).

collective space are determined by speed, radii of curvature, visibility and dynamic perception. This type of commercial-associated automobile infrastructure has resulted in a specific degree of permeability between the road, the urban context and the landscape that has produced a new type of public open space, exclusively linked to movement: modern shopping centers.

The forms of permeability that characterize the strips, and in general all the street-markets, have produced the loss of the idea of urban space as a continuous experience, as a sense of belonging since spatial perception is characterized by two speeds: the one about a landscape seen as a set of heterogeneous objects, the contrast of which restores uniformity, and the other about a precise knowledge, characterized by thrusts, with specific and targeted objectives inside the car parks and commercial boxes. Permeability - vector of belonging - is built up of interface elements: fences and signs, asphalt surfaces of car parks, envelopes, shape, architectural skin of malls, often transfigured into real icons or commercial brands.

The space of movement is a public space with uncertain boundaries, in which road edges, maneuvering areas, car parking areas and showcase facades take on the role of a new threshold space.

They replace the function that once, in the historic city, the arcades and continuous fronts of shops, bazaars and cafes performed.

The bibliography and case studies collected in this research tell an interesting story ranging from Victor Gruen to Bob Venturi, from urban malls to regional malls, from street markets to Freeway business centers. But the protagonist is always the automobile. In this way a historical-urban route and an architectural and landscape evolution of shopping centers can be reconstructed.

Shopping malls were born in the city, moved to the suburbs and then further and further out, into the territory, along the great arterial roads and near infrastructural nodes, to then today, after 70 years, show the first signs of a process of re-entry into urban centres, but with new forms, new typologies, and above all leaving empty giants (big-boxes) and huge expanses of asphalt, hectares of parking and roadways in the territory.

The proposed research has attempted to reconstruct this path, an evolution or involution, which first in the United States and then in Europe, has taken place and is still taking place. Perhaps in the United States it is already at an end, but in Europe and Italy it is still going on.

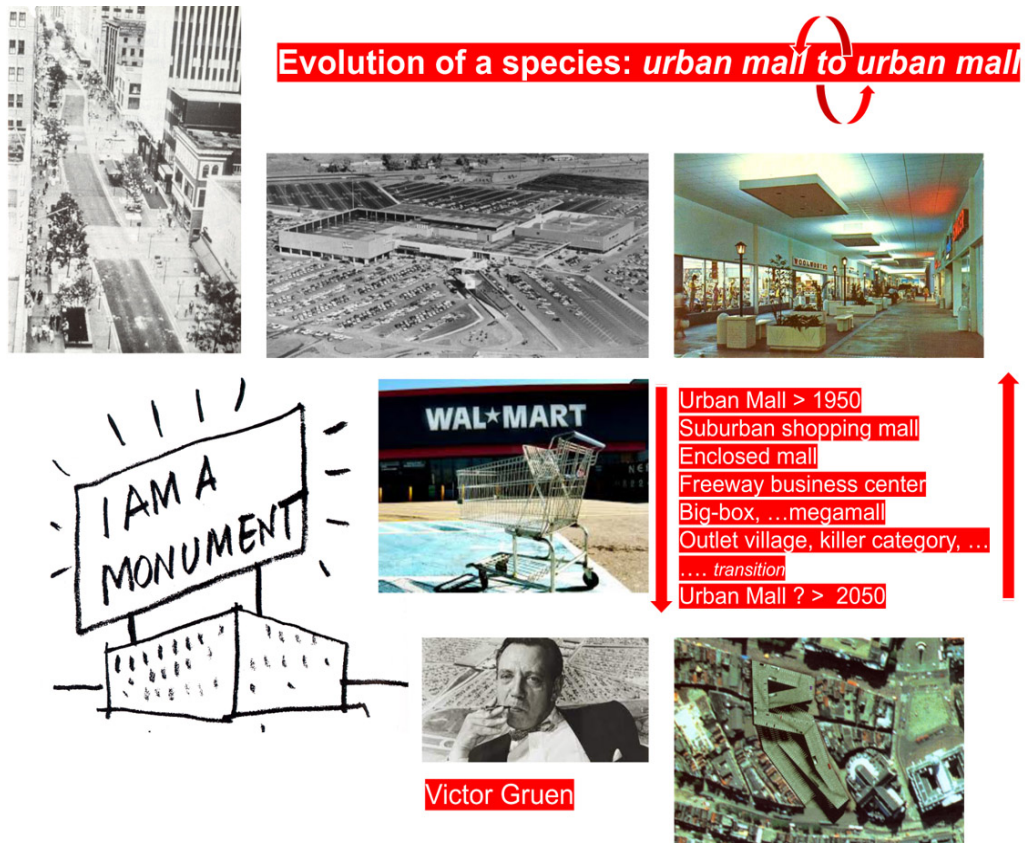
What to do with these large commercial areas, how to make them attractive and re-functionalise them?

How and what to transform them into once the mall is back in town?

How to convert asphalt areas of 80,000-100,000sqm, always located outside cities and close to motorways and junctions? How to manage the transition period?

The shopping center car park is a newly formed space, yet to be explored and investigated. Especially considering the profound changes in the forms of large-scale retail trade that have occurred in the last 70 years and in relation to the new dynamics that are emerging for large malls outside the cities.





**Figure 4.** Evolution of the Shopping Center, Case Studies and Reference Figures

Source: research team.

"Forecourt or part of an urban street where cars can be parked, within special spaces delimited by strips", this is the dictionary definition of parking. At first reading, the car park is definitely described only as a space serving the car. It was born as a technical space that spreads and develops in parallel and necessarily with the expansion of infrastructures, in particular roads, as a service space for mobility and pedestrian-motorist modal exchange.<sup>19</sup> The main feature of these places, unlike the other urban materials that make up the open space of the city (street, square, park, etc.), is the rigidly monofunctional nature: by definition, the car park was born exclusively as a space dedicated to parking the automobile, it is almost impossible to think of reconciling other activities and functions, so that its technical nature has often compromised the presence of aesthetic contents, limiting and discouraging design and compositional explorations.

However, from a certain historical moment onwards thanks to some conscious American design experiments of the 70s, first of all those of the SITE, and some initial attempts related to the development of the large-scale distribution sector

19. L. Ponticelli, and C. Micheletti, *Nuove infrastrutture per nuovi paesaggi* (Milano: Skira, 2003).

starting from the 50s with Victor Gruen,<sup>20</sup> work began, both on a theoretical and a design level, on the intrinsic aesthetic potential of the car park, as an open space, interface of buildings and architecture of the city, to then develop on a wider dimension and in relation to the city and with the systems that make it up, and therefore as a new theme for the urban design.

The revolutionary text by Bob Venturi,<sup>21</sup> who taught us to look at Las Vegas and, more generally, the spaces of the city, the street and the new urban landscape, as ephemeral as it is structural for the new forms of sprawl, is only a few years earlier. These are the years in which the American vocation to open spaces "leaps overwhelmingly in the work of the SITE in the form of reaffirmation of the organic nature of man's home".<sup>22</sup> In the book on SITE edited by Cristiano Toraldo di Francia we find the synthesis of the cultural approach and the experimental and visionary legacy of this innovative research that focuses on the spatiality of infrastructures. But it is also the narration of an effervescent climate in which the new paradigms of public space were born, that of the "place that is no longer a place", of the "super-place", of "hyperplaces", up to the *terrain vague*.

These experiences in Italy have found a theoretical metabolization about twenty years later than in the United States, as Mirko Zardini or Aldo Aymonino and Valerio Paolo Mosco tells us in "Asphalt"<sup>23</sup> in the innovative theming "Contemporary Public Spaces. Zero volume architecture"<sup>24</sup> or Serena Mafioletti and Stefano Rocchetto in the systematic collection "Infrastructures and contemporary landscapes".<sup>25</sup> Just to mention some of the most significant texts that through design experiences build a sort of *a posteriori* theory of the new public spaces of the city: the spaces of mobility, of infrastructures, of roads, of parking lots.

Over the past 20 years, an extensive bibliography has proliferated on parking as a theme and place of urban, architectural and landscape design. This is the indicator of a fertile line of research that has also found in Italy, especially in the University of Pescara, Rome and Venice,<sup>26</sup> a sort of beginning with three texts, all published in 1996: the first two, "Crossings. The new territories of public space",<sup>27</sup> curated by Paolo Desideri and Massimo Ilardi, and "Hybrid landscapes. A journey into the contemporary city" by various authors including Mirko Zardini, more focused on building a theory of infrastructure spaces as public spaces and on the

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20. V. Gruen, and L. Smith, *Shopping town USA. The planning of shopping centers* (New York: Reinhold Publishing Corporation, 1960).

21. R. Venturi, D. Brown, and S. Izenour, *Learning from Las Vegas* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1972).

22. C. Toraldo di Francia (Ed.), *SITE architetture 1971-1988* (Roma: Officina Edizioni, 1989), 10.

23. M. Zardini (Ed.), *Asfalto: il carattere della città* (Milano: Electa, 2003).

24. A. Aymonino, and V. P. Mosco, *Spazi contemporanei. Architettura a volume zero* (Milano: Skira, 2006).

25. S. Mafioletti, and S. Rocchetto, *Infrastrutture e paesaggi contemporanei* (Padova: Il Poligrafo, 2002).

26. A line of research developed in Italy between the Universities of Architecture of Pescara, Rome and Venice, by Pippo Ciorra, Aldo Aymonino, Peppe Barbieri, Carlo Gasparini, Rosario Pavia, Alberto Clementi, Antonino Terranova.

27. P. Desideri, and M. Ilardi, *Attraversamenti. I nuovi territori dello spazio pubblico* (Genova – Milano: Costa & Nolan, 1997).

analysis of urban phenomena and of the anthropological and social dynamics connected to these spaces, and finally another book, always coeval, "The space of motion. Design and project"<sup>28</sup> by Nico Ventura, more focused on the research of case studies and on the construction of an idea of spatiality of infrastructures connected to the design-architectural experiences and to the artistic-visual experiences born between Europe and America between the 60s and 90s.

The car park, which evolved in these dimensional terms during the last century thanks and because of the shopping centers, has acquired numerous and diversified functional roles and architectural meanings over time from being a road service device, reaching in some situations to play a symbolic value. Not only in commercial areas, but in general for the design of the urban scene, for the construction of the image of the city up to the very structure of the public space.

After this founding nucleus, the research continued following various experiments that focus the parking lot as the fifth elevation of the architecture, until it assumed the role of the main subject in treatises on the urban project and the landscape project. Connected to this more project-based bibliography on the new role of parking there is also that of an anthropological and social nature, including "Non-places"<sup>29</sup> by Marc Augé.

In the empty spaces of the metropolis"<sup>30</sup> and "The individual in revolt. A reflection on the misery of citizenship"<sup>31</sup> both by Massimo Ilardi.

The car park was therefore born as a technical space and soon assumed an architectural and urban role. The evolution has not ended and even today, in an increasingly conscious way, projects and experiments are being carried out around the architecture of the parking that oscillates between two and three dimensions, in a continuous (creative) imbalance between structure and infrastructure and in constant search for architectural identity and technical form, always within the dialectic between the paradigm of path, sign on the ground, and the paradigm of artifact, volumetric object.<sup>32</sup>

Among the case studies identified in this research, the SITE group and in particular the work of James Wines are among the most emblematic, for the design explorations and for the ideas that are developed between the 80s and 90s of the twentieth century. Their projects have profoundly contributed to changing the image of these huge commercial plates, transforming the big boxes into architecture and the asphalt deserts (parking lots of shopping centers) into landscapes, sometimes into gardens (in the classical sense).

Even today, their experiences are still very useful keys to thinking and rethinking the mall in a different way and that, years later, it is important to study and recover - with a historical perspective of the evolution of the city and the

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28. N. Ventura, *Lo spazio del moto. Disegno e progetto* (Roma – Bari: Laterza, 1996).

29. M. Augé, *Nonluoghi. Introduzione a una antropologia della surmodernità* (Milano: Eleuthera, 1993).

30. M. Ilardi, *Negli spazi vuoti della metropoli. Distruzione, disordine, tradimento dell'ultimo uomo* (Torino: Bollati Boringhieri, 1999).

31. M. Ilardi, *L'individuo in rivolta. Una riflessione sulla miseria della cittadinanza* (Genova – Milano: Costa & Nolan, 1995).

32. V. Gregotti, "La strada: tracciato e manufatto," *Casabella* no. 553-554 (1989): 2-5.

territory and a critical distance from urban phenomena and architectural fashions - their projects and theoretical work for at least three reasons:

1. Jame Wine was the first to glimpse the narrative potential of shopping center car parks (whether it is ironic or alienating, provocative and denouncing), both as an interface-filter and as real architecture, able to speak its own language and referring to environmental art, he leaves the purely technical and service space dimension;
2. "The Rest Stop Platte River", "Best parking lot building" and "Ghost parking lot" projects by SITE for the first time show that a parking lot cannot be just a banal single-purpose space dedicated only to parking cars, thus introducing the dimension of flexibility, multifunctionality and temporality of use. A line of research and experimentation that today is successfully practiced by many European and American studios (Topotek, Big, Tom Matton, West8, Adrian Geuze, MVRDV, Smaq Architectes) that propose hybrid architectural solutions and mixed functional structures, transforming the parking lot into parks, market areas, spaces for events, play areas, sports areas, squares, museums, meeting places;
3. SITE's work made it possible to understand, perhaps for the first time, that the shopping centre car park is one of the spaces of contemporaneity, like a park, a square or an avenue, and that it must therefore be thought of as an urban or landscape fact, with its own characteristics and architectural significance. This is why, after the SITE experiments, it is no longer possible to think of the car park merely as a technical fact to be concealed, a service space to be mitigated, an asphalt esplanade to be contextualised, but it is itself the protagonist of the landscape scene.

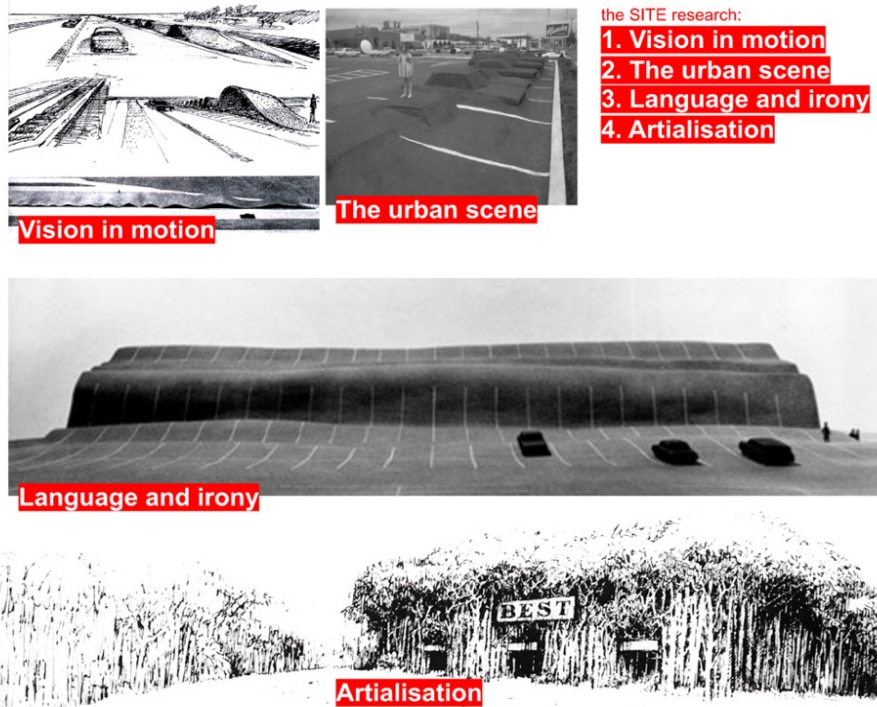
In the SITE projects, but above all in the theoretical writings of James Wines, words such as Indetermination, Inversion, Ritual, Irony, Humor, Entropy, Disorder frequently recur, which are the key to interpreting a new approach to the architecture of the city, an important contribution that between the mid-1970s and the mid-1980s, allowed the overcoming of traditional thinking that saw the form as an extension of function (dogma of modern architecture that the SITE helped to unhinge), towards a new vision into which the content of the form is an extension of the context and architecture is no longer just a question of form and space, but of information and thought, narration of the landscape, of the habitat of man, which is why after the SITE ... it was no longer alone a parking: "NOT SEEN and / or LESS SEEN of ..."<sup>33</sup>

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33. M. Duchamp, *NOT SEEN and/or LESS SEEN of ...* (The New Yorker, 6 February 1965), 37.



**Figure 5.** SITE and James Wines, Ghost Parking Lot, Hamden Plaza Shopping Center, Connecticut (USA), 1977  
Source: Web of SITE Architects.



**Figure 6.** SITE and James Wines Research  
Source: Research Team.

### **The Case Study: The Tiare Shopping Center in Villesse**

Giving new life to these mono-functional areas in order to transform them into multipurpose and attractive places for urban areas located in the vicinity of shopping malls, areas that are usually already characterised by a polycentric structure. The objective is to bring back value and architectural character to a space such as the car parking lot developed from a purely technical and regulatory point of view. The methodology adopted is that of the educational workshop/competition with the involvement of the area's stakeholders during the design process and a subsequent phase of critical analysis of the design results functional to outlining the recurring invariances and lines of strategic development.

The case study from which this operational research started is a large commercial infrastructure located in the Friuli Venezia Giulia Region, in Villesse, in the province of Gorizia. It is a large shopping center called Tiare. The study was promoted in collaboration with INKGA Centers<sup>34</sup> precisely to redesign all the outdoor spaces, parking lots and roads in order to make them a place of greater attraction and a more integrated technical space in the landscape. The large shopping center is located near two major highways, the A4 (Trieste-Venice-Milan) with the A37 (Villesse-Gorizia-Lubiana) which are part of two European corridors (Baltic-Adriatic and Mediterranean).

The location is strategic. However, there is nothing around, only the countryside, it is a sort of cathedral in the desert and access, today, is only possible by car. The shopping center is almost equivalent in size to the urban center of the nearby village of Villesse or that of Romans d'Isonzo. It is therefore perfectly in line in terms of location, size and layout with the type of large American malls mentioned above. In addition to seeking solutions for the conversion of large uncovered areas, the research also questions the future of these large commercial infrastructures present in supernumerary within the Friuli Venezia Giulia Region, also in consideration of the fact that one of the medium-long term strategies of IKEA is guided by the intention to implement a return to major urban centers and abandon these extra-urban sites.<sup>35</sup>

This phenomenon is very similar to what already happened in the United States 20-25 years ago and which Mirko Zardini talks about in "Hybrid Landscapes. A journey into the contemporary city and Hayden Dolores in "Building suburbia fields and urban growth".<sup>36</sup>

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34. INGKA Centers is part of the IKEA universe and owns the shopping centers where the IKEA blue-box is connected.

35. IKEA's pilot project was recently inaugurated in Vienna for the so-called return to the urban heart of cities. "Starting from a study that records a radical change in purchasing behavior, the maxistore will be a seven-storey building, each of 3,000 square meters, in the center of Vienna just a few meters from the Westbahnhof station. The store will not have parking spaces, but logistics that promises home delivery" radically changing the business model underlying the architectural concept. From A. Giorgi, *La nuova Ikea di Vienna, in centro e senza auto* (Domusweb, February 2020).

36. H. Dolores, *Building Suburbia. Green fields and urban growth: 1820-2000* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2003).

This shopping center, like many others in Italy and Europe, as well as the American ones of 30-40 years ago, represents the hub of a territory dominated by the automobile. Shops surrounded by parking lots rather than by neighborhoods which together have strongly contributed to the spread of sprawltown<sup>37</sup> and to the consolidation of the suburban territory, between globalization and localism.<sup>38</sup>

The relevant bibliography (see the bibliographical apparatus of Fabrizio Bottini's book "The New Territories of Commerce") suggests numerous solutions for these problems, ranging from infill development to mixed use, from smart growth strategies to total abandonment and consequent renaturalisation or agri-urbanisation.



**Figure 7.** *Tiare Shopping Center in Relationship to the Nearby Town of Villesse. Dimensional Comparison: Research Team*

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37. R. Ingersoll, *Sprawltown* (Milano: Meltemi, 2004).

38. C. Gasparini, *Passeggeri e Viaggiatori* (Milano: Meltemi, 2003), 63.

## Methodology - Operative Research

The introduction to Costantino Dardi's book "Simple, Linear, Complex",<sup>39</sup> although far removed in time from today, encapsulates the attitude that accompanies us in much of our operational research. In this case too, the research did not start from a pre-established theoretical assumption to be verified within a given field of investigation, but used the project itself as a tool for understanding the context and also as an element for prefiguring possible futures.

The project, from the Latin *pro* (forward) and *jacere* (to throw), represents what is thrown forward, projected into the future and subjected to verification.

It is with this in mind that the research conducted on the subject, first of all, saw the organization of an intensive workshop with the participation of the students of the Integrated Design Laboratory of the academic year 2018/19 of the Degree Course in Architecture of the University of Trieste together with professors and researchers of the Department of Engineering and Architecture of the same university.

After analyzing the physical and socio-economic context, eleven projects were developed where the students freely interpreted the conditions and proposed a series of solutions that aim to prefigure solutions - to the expectations deriving from both the shopping center and the reference territories - and to anticipate visions, suggest portions of the future, letting us glimpse how people will be able to experience these places in the next few years.

Subsequently, the first laboratory phase of the workshop began, which led to the definition of the design concepts, an expression of the work of the design groups formed by the students.

The eleven projects presented proposed as many solutions for transforming the external areas of the business park into a place dedicated to meeting, entertainment and experimentation. The result is a variegated picture of ideas from which to draw

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39. "At the end of the journey backwards, through the fifteen years of my work as an architect, I realize that the relationship between theoretical elaboration and design research can, in my case, be paradoxically reversed.

The area of theory, in fact, appears much more appropriately covered by drawings, projects and the underlying system of references: the idea of architecture that you face, the methodology I have used, the unchanged ones that are highlighted.

This probably derives from the fact that, upstream of my experimental activity, an accurately performed theoretical design cannot be traced, but rather some trend lines emerge from it, correlated with each other by an internal dialectic and intertwined with the contributions that architectural culture has developed over the years.

The area of the project, on the other hand, by explicitly assuming the positions of the field, by the deliberately oriented approach to the foundation of a base of references, of a critical apparatus, of a historical background, of a cultural location, it seems to me that is more correctly filled by written contributions. Critical projects, therefore, whose legitimacy is always the daughter of time and passions: which inevitably appear to me all the theoretical propositions of the architects, always deeply imbued with programmatic contents, conditioned by the objectives pursued in design research, inevitably derived from the choices that (with greater historical truth and with less cumbersome ideological apparatus) descend from the sheet of drawing paper, always disputed between wanting to be the subterranean conscience of the project and not being able to be anything other than tools of operational criticism." - C. Dardi, *Semplice, lineare, complesso, l'acquedotto di Spoleto* (Roma: Kappa Edizioni, 1987), 15-16.



in order to transform the outdoor area of the shopping center under consideration into a large meeting place. The construction of the resulting imagery is a rich and heterogeneous picture that originates from a series of programmatic approaches of both a temporary and permanent nature. Here are the projects and their brief description:

- The "2x2" project (group 1 - Angela Bertoni, Lorenzo Kratter, Giada Lesizza) proposes the construction of a landscape through the punctual insertion of only three scenographic elements: the tower, the arena and a double connecting strip. By overlapping the existing infrastructural layer of fast mobility with a new one with a distinctly public and cycle-pedestrian vocation, the project conquers the large scale by shifting from the second dimension of the vast surface to the third dimension, rising in height.
- "Park (ing) bridge" (group 2 - Virginia Fabbro, Silvia Musini, Arianna Santarsiero) instead focuses on the transformation of residual green spaces into a continuous, changeable and adaptable connective park: an internal green ring, partly raised, connects the entrances to the Tiare and IKEA generating opportunities for singularity such as the green hill and a large multifunctional arena. Here the landscape dimension and that of an extra-urban enclave merge and exasperate each other, using greenery as a material for spectacle.
- The third project (group 3 - Giorgio Conforto, Eleonora Di Stefano, Debora Paulin) changes the paradigm and reads the vast parking lot of the shopping center as a game board: the creation of a playscape or artificial landscape is entrusted to the little boxes, microarchitectures protagonists in this new commercial interior. The physical and virtual boundary between the internal and external space of the commercial box is pulverized by redefining the figure-ground relationships, in fact these colored boxes, in addition to representing the temporary extension of the commercial surface outside, become a perspective device that captures the gaze of the subjects-consumers.
- "Diagram Park" (group 4 - Sofia Artico, Federica Ferrigno, Lara Slavec) determines an instability designed through an effective design in which program and diagram tend to coincide. By directing the existing functions and those that can be simply implemented along a band connecting the main entrances with variable section that rejoins the incoming cycle and pedestrian flow, the project constitutes a linear park or strip which, in addition to recognizing the logic of the context in which it is inserted, empowers them and makes them visible.
- A landscape generating flow is the constitutive principle of "The Flood project" (group 5 - Stela Guni, Giulia Piacente, Vittoria Umani). The landscape narrative recognizes water and its motion as a force capable of destabilizing the entire soil design and overturns the technical-functional data linked to four-wheeled mobility in favor of the experiential dimension

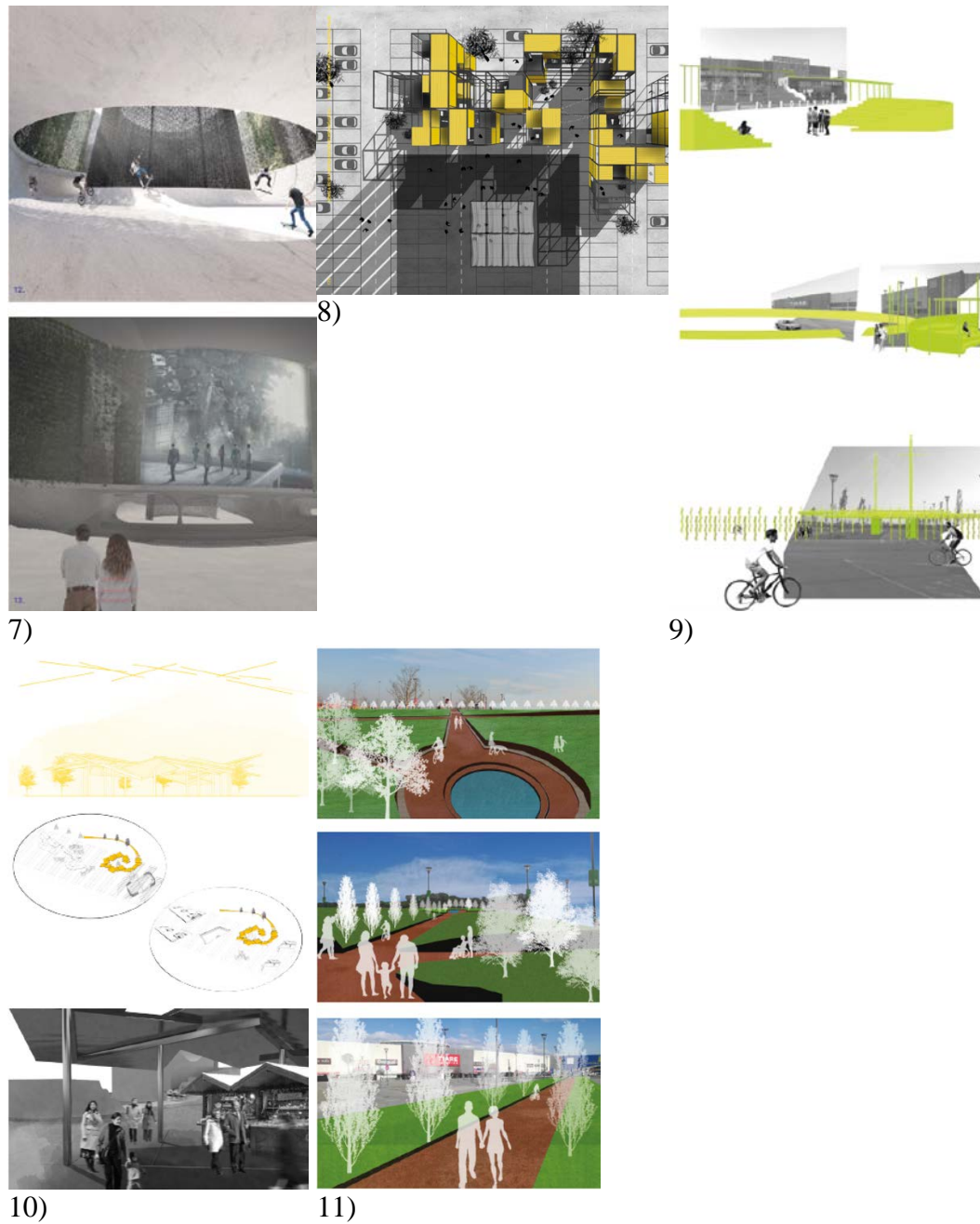
of the project, in which the automobile becomes one of the many materials, at least as much as the green of this highly experimental linear park.

- On an even larger scale, the "Global blue box" project (group 6 - Vlad Maricel Martinas, Semir Skenderovic) is aimed, which, reading the infrastructural advantage in which the project area is inserted, exasperates the paradigm of the program beyond its borders physical and exploits the virtual context. The logistic vocation of the project does not translate exclusively into an intangible infrastructure - in the software - but also in the actual hardware, in which the Venturian lesson is shrewdly evoked.
- On site (group 7 - Ivan Bello, Jesku Franklind) recognizes the boundary between the commercial enclave and the context in which it is inserted a threshold to be designed. By redefining the zero project altitude below the parking level, a semi-underground path is created, delimited by a metal interface which, in addition to circumscribing the public cycle-pedestrian area, wraps around itself, creating towers. The medieval and defensive metaphor is translated here into a project that invokes Edoardo Tresoldi's ephemeral cathedrals of light.
- Complexity is the protagonist of the "Yellow Boxes" project (group 8 - Matteo Savron, Elwira Wòjcicka, Monica Bidoli), with an openly metropolitan breath. Extreme and paradoxical in order to bring the living dimension - however ephemeral and in fact translated into consumption - inside the business park, the project reinterprets the logic of the internal space and rewrites them in the external areas. The stratification of flows, activities and events is ordered by an infrastructural grid that rigorously declines each element of the project, in a multiple dialogue between homogeneity of image and specific variations.
- The "Bölle" project (group 9 - Michela Contin, Valentina Devescovi) conquers the outdoor areas by playing on the autonomy of the parts and the strong pop iconicity of the overall image. The spaces for relations, parking and the actual park are fenced and juxtaposed. In this project, too, the tendency to make the functional program coincide with the design of the commercial park translates the operational needs into a potentially exportable model.
- Returning to the logic of the linear park, the "Zig Zag" project (group 10 - Matteo Ros, Milisav Stankovic, Enrico Vidulich) introduces the technological and energy theme in the project of a roofing system developed along a broken line, that is a path that can be used at different altitudes and which connects the entrances and the arena for the shows.
- The "Blue Islands" project (group 11 - Giacomo Caporale) is part of another trajectory working on the perspective gaze and on a vision of the world that derives from the tradition that sees the garden as a place of criticism of the city, and in this case of the shopping center itself. The experimentation of a new relationship between man and nature is here entrusted to water, already a protagonist on the landscape scale, and here declined in water squares, canals and swimming pools capable of hosting

the playful and entertainment parts of the functional program. These water figures are immersed in a vast green background that represents a waterscape.<sup>40</sup>



<sup>40</sup> V. Rodani, "Confronto all'americana," in *The shopping center as/is a meeting place* (Eds.) C. Meninno, and V. Rodani (Trieste, Edizioni Università di Trieste, 2020), 205-211.



**Figure 8.** *Visions. Photosimulations of the 11 Parking Projects of the Shopping Center Transformed into a Meeting Place*

*Source:* 1. Angela Bertoni, Lorenzo Kratter, Giada Lesizza; 2. Virginia Fabbro, Silvia Musini, Arianna Santarsiero; 3. Giorgio Conforto, Eleonora Di Stefano, Debora Paulin; 4. Sofia Artico, Federica Ferrigno, Lara Slavec; 5. Stela Guni, Giulia Piacente, Vittoria Umani; 6. Vlad Maricel Martinas, Semir Skenderovic; 7. Ivan Bello, Jesku Franklind; 8. Matteo Savron, Elwira Wójcinka, Monica Bidoli; 9. Michela Contin, Valentina Devescovi; 10. Matteo Ros, Milisav Stankovic, Enrico Vidulich; 11. Giacomo Caporale.

From this variety of projects, an attempt was then made to identify common traits that could represent trends in approaching this type of place.

From the analysis carried out, the projects were grouped into three macro-categories through the identification of as many recurring design invariants. The result is a typological case study which can represent a useful tool for interventions in similar contexts.

Parallel to this work concentrated on the external part of shopping centers, some members of the teaching and research staff have dedicated themselves to a critical research on historical case studies relating to architectural envelopes dedicated to the large-scale distribution trade.

An in-depth study that has allowed to bring out architectural approaches that have marked the history of architecture and cities, constituting real stages in the design evolution of this type of artefact and which can represent a cognitive background of a certain importance, complementary compared to the outcomes of the project research described above.



**Figure 9.** Schematic Synthesis of the 11 Projects Developed During the Workshops to Transform the Parking Lot of the Shopping Center into a Meeting Place

Source: 1. Angela Bertoni, Lorenzo Kratter, Giada Lesizza; 2. Virginia Fabbro, Silvia Musini, Arianna Santarsiero; 3. Giorgio Conforto, Eleonora Di Stefano, Debora Paulin; 4. Sofia Artico, Federica Ferrigno, Lara Slavec; 5. Stela Guni, Giulia Piacente, Vittoria Umani; 6. Vlad Maricel Martinas, Semir Skenderovic; 7. Ivan Bello, Jesku Franklind; 8. Matteo Savron, Elwira Wójcinka, Monica Bidoli; 9. Michela Contin, Valentina Devescovi; 10. Matteo Ros, Milisav Stankovic, Enrico Vidulich; 11. Giacomo Caporale.

## **Results - Strategies and Models for the Architecture of the Shopping Center Parking Lot**

The expressive richness found in the projects produced - which in turn draws on other design references - both theoretical and practical has been analyzed in order to trace invariants within the different design syntaxes adopted.

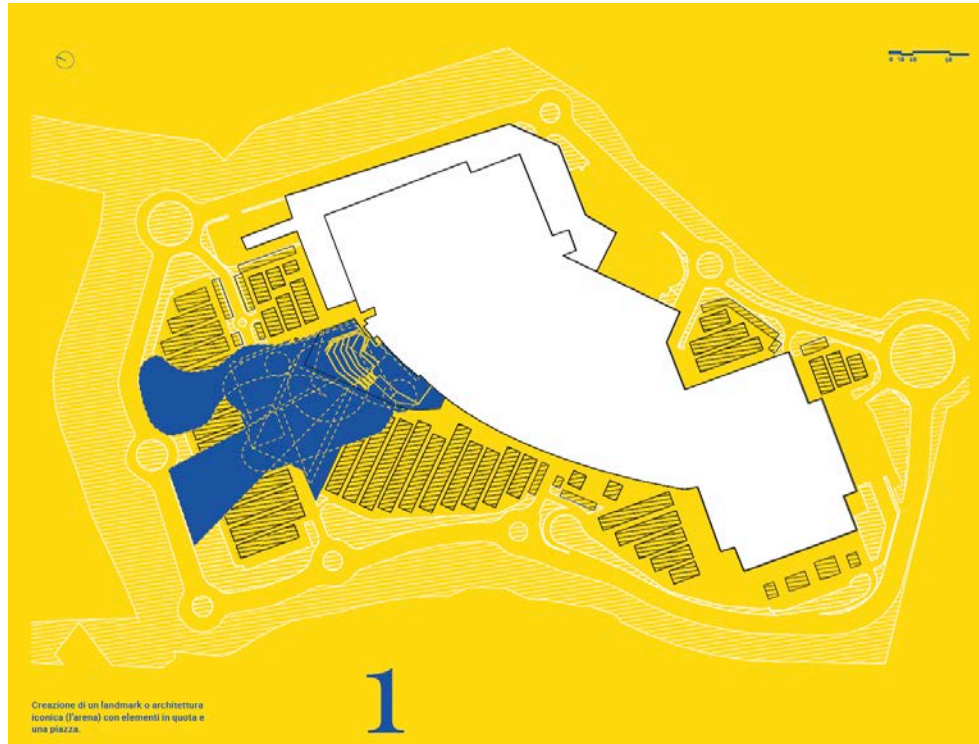
The criteria adopted for the evaluation of the projects concern economic aspects, aspects related to functionality at both local and large scale, the level of territorial connectivity and, finally, issues related to the composition and character of the architecture.

Macro families have been recognized that become real design geographies, able to place the design of the shopping center park within a territorial system, rich in relationships and positive effects, such as to lead to a rewriting of the relationship that it has with urban realities, with road infrastructures and pieces of agricultural and natural territory that can be found nearby. These project geographies are:

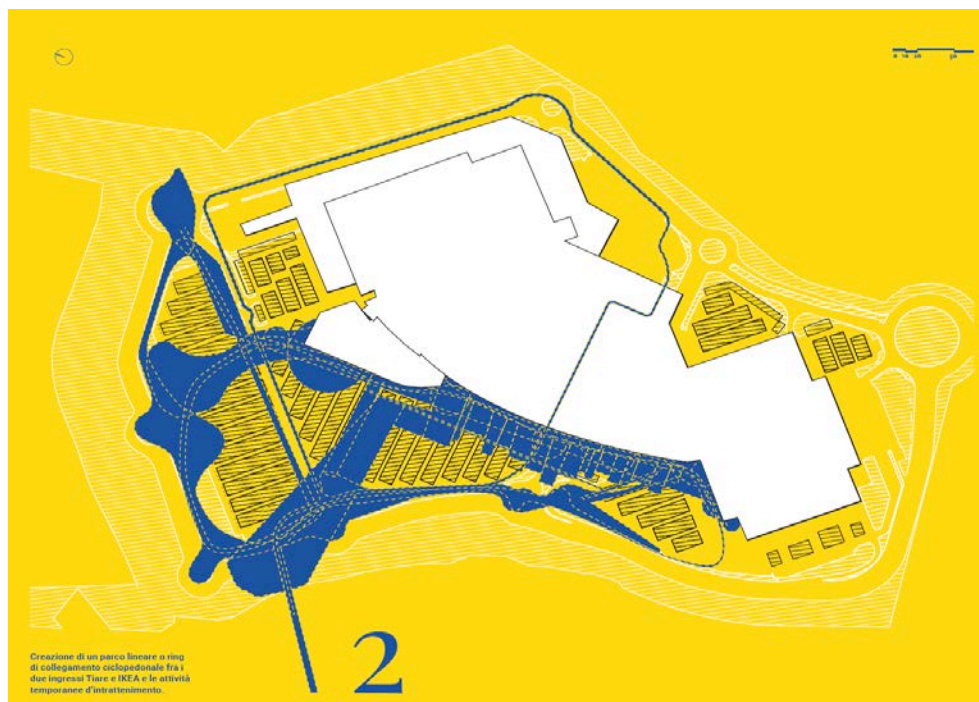
1. Landmark - From the search for a relationship with the context of reference, it is possible to note how some projects seek the creation of a landmark or at least an iconic architecture capable of standing up to the territorial scale. Generally speaking, the element that most defines this type of approach is the tendency towards elevation in order to establish a new visual relationship from and to the context. Through this type of operation, a new design element is proposed with respect to the current visual panorama of the built, starting an additive landscape that could have further future developments.
2. Densification - The creation of a park capable of rewriting the relationship between the two main entrances and the surrounding area instead starts from a desire to densify the use of outdoor spaces. Like the places inside the shopping center, there is a tendency here to massively increase the presence of a series of new functions in a space initially dedicated only to vehicular use. The increase in the complexity rate also brings with it situations of conflict between the different functions, here read as design opportunities on which to graft detailed designs.
3. Shielding - The need, imposed by the legislation, to create a shield towards the motorway infrastructure, has led to a third series of projects where the visual mitigation of the shopping center becomes the fundamental theme of the project. Through this approach, a buffer space is created between the shopping center and the outside, which thus acquires innovative and unusual spatial characteristics, offering the possibility of proposing design landscapes that are radically different from what we are used to. The shielding, in turn, in some cases becomes itself as a landmark, redefining the spatial and perceptive relationships with the surroundings.<sup>41</sup>

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41. C. Meninno, A. Venudo, and T. Bisiani, "Geografie progettuali: lettura e riscrittura di un' infrastruttura," in *The Shopping Center as/is a Meeting Place* (Eds.) C. Meninno, and V. Rodani (Trieste: Edizioni Università di Trieste, 2020), 219-220.



**Figure 10.** Synthesis of the Design Morphologies. Concept for New Functions and Activities for the Shopping Center Parking Lot. Macro Families 1: Landmark  
Source: Research Team.



**Figure 11.** Synthesis of the Design Morphologies. Concept for New Functions and Activities for the Shopping Center Parking Lot. Macro Families 3: Densification  
Source: Research Team.



**Figure 12.** *Synthesis of the Design Morphologies. Concept for New Functions and Activities for the Shopping Center Parking Lot. Macro Families 3: Shielding*  
Source: Research Team.

The diversity and richness that can be found in the details of individual projects offer the opportunity for further readings, capable of grafting additional categories of reasoning.

In any case, it is evident how the reasoning on the transformation of an urban and territorial space of this magnitude can lead to the redefinition of relationships between the constituent elements of the infrastructured landscape, proposing new design research to understand the evolution of these places also in view of a probable future mutation of the ways in which the inhabitants of the city and the peripheral contexts acquire goods.

In fact, all the projects propose an architectural and landscape reconfiguration of the large system of uncovered parking lots, of the roads and of all those appurtenant areas that relate to the large commercial box constituted by IKEA-Tiare, to the road-infrastructural node of Villesse and to the huge void of the surrounding countryside. A perfect context for the contemporary widespread city, a non-place, towards which none of the projects arises with a trivializing or stereotyped attitude.

The urbanized voids around the big boxes are often much larger than the building to which they refer and are designed with a banal approach, where the mere application of current legislation applies without realizing that their bigness deserves more, it is however an important opportunity to offer something more to people, to the territories.

From the eleven projects emerges a search for a contextual relationship capable of rewriting the meaning of these spaces. There is no search for a new independent



identity but a sort of extremization of the ordinary that expresses the desire to search for a new image, always in relation to the object that acts as a primary catalyst. Some with dry composure, some with irony, some through a provocative approach, all have managed to transfigure the technical banality of the parking lot into an evocative narrative, each with its own characters and stories.

All this proves the initial intuition: the parking space of a shopping center cannot only be understood as a regulatory, secondary, service space but has the potential to become a new polarity in the large commercial project and as such it should be understood and exploited, for the benefit of everyone. Furthermore, the re-use of these spaces both when the shopping center is still alive, and when it is dying or dead, can trigger very important urban re-use dynamics. Depending on the urban location they have, they can become elements of urban transformation within the city or territory on a large scale. As happened over the centuries for the open spaces inside cities, where squares and markets were supplanted by built blocks, parks, large public buildings, they too could be elements of the transformation: undergone by the places if not adequately studied and designed or favorably triggered if the object of appropriate and intelligent studies such as to define an architectural and landscape added value.

If considered in their entirety, the parking areas of a given region represent a significant dimension, with a huge impact on the territory that hosts them. For this reason, the issue should be further explored and the transformation actions should be carefully evaluated.

### **Discussion – Shopping Mall Parking Lot between Landscape and Architecture**

The case study of this research, the Tiare shopping center, with its huge parking lot is one of the largest commercial parks in Friuli Venezia Giulia. In addition to accommodating around 150 shops of all kinds, the complex boasts a varied offer of bars and restaurants, a multiplex cinema, a gym, meeting rooms, workshops and play areas for families and their pets. It hosts local trade shows, sporting events and shows for a total of 1.3 million users per year. It is also the only shopping center in the region and the first in Italy to host an IKEA store inside it.

In 2018, the province of Udine won the Italian record for the ratio of large-scale distribution to the number of inhabitants, which is dizzyingly close to 1 (938 square meters per 1000 inhabitants), followed by the province of Gorizia (825 square meters per 1000 inhabitants),<sup>42</sup> where is located the Tiare. The pulverized and multipolar settlement structure of Friuli Venezia Giulia lends itself well to the

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42. According to the Quarterly Observatory of the Tertiary edited by Ires FVG and Format Research and published by the Bilateral Tertiary Body of Friuli Venezia Giulia, between 2007 and 2018 the retail space of the large-scale distribution in the region increased by over 60%. From: <<https://www.ebinter.it/>>; site accessed on 05/11/2020.

analogies with the American model,<sup>43</sup> in which the way of life is conditioned by the car and leisure time by the shopping center.

The evolution of the American paradigm of the enclosed mall surrounded by huge parking areas has now seen numerous evolutions: from the theories of Victor Gruen to the Ciam debate on the heart of the city,<sup>44</sup> from the experiments on the shopping center as an engine of urban development,<sup>45</sup> up to the variegated hybridizations typological, functional and settlement.

In the United States, the phenomenon of deadmall, ghostboxes and related greyfields, or shopping centers in a state of abandonment, emerged in the mid-nineties to reach its peak around the early 2000s. In Europe and in Italy the scenario presents some differences. In Italy, for the moment, there is a strong growth and development of commercial formats. This is also true in the case of Friuli Venezia Giulia. But the trend is already marked, the American dynamics precede those of Europe by 20 years.

In summary, the scenario that lies ahead is that of the retail apocalypse. And all this, more than producing urbanity, has produced the trivialization of the city, with a design aesthetic that is generally of little value, which alternately and trivially draws on vernacular forms, from an impoverished version of the contemporary and which gives birth to reproductions of itself.

On the one hand, the autochthonous megamall becomes the ideal complement to suburban life.

On the other hand, the intrinsic instability of the global market makes it a dangerous prototype of urbanity in perpetual risk of obsolescence. It is from these local/global results and comparisons that the research could continue. In fact, the Los Angeles Forum for Architecture and Urban Design has promoted the "Dead Mall" competition to investigate theoretical issues and design practices capable of experimenting with the potential for reconversion of abandoned big boxes.<sup>46</sup> Among the results, many of the remedies proposed to shopping centers affected by illness or death proposed a greater integration of the mall with its context, offering not only economic and commercial resources, but also social, cultural and landscape resources.

The paradoxical and perhaps open aspect of this research lies precisely in the question of whether it is possible for the business park to become a place for socializing and meeting beyond the mere mercantile relationship between supply and demand.

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43. T. Crosby, *Il monumento necessario* (Bari: Dedalo Libri, 1980), 16; F. Tentori, *Abitare nella pianura friulana. L'Insediamento, il sedime, la casa* (Venezia: I.U.A.V. Dipartimento Progettazione Architettonica, 1987), 45.

44. "The heart of the city" was the theme of the eighth International Congress of Modern Architecture, held in Hoddesdon in 1951.

45. V. Gruen, *The heart of our cities. The urban crisis: diagnosis and cure* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1964).

46. W. Techentin, *Dead Mall* (Los Angeles: Los Angeles Forum for Architecture and Urban Design, 2004).

In the twenty-first century it is clear that shopping has now become an inevitable and in some ways indispensable practice of the city experience.<sup>47</sup>

So on the one hand the images of abandoned and demolished malls can be read as the process of continuous market expansion, but on the other they loom as a warning to remind us of the lesson of Las Vegas. The invention of one world always starts with the exclusion of another.

This research has made it possible to identify, study and make general the trends described above, more closely linked to the open spaces around shopping centers, but also involved disciplinary investigations that led to the definition of possible evolutionary strategies relating to the dialectic between shopping center and city, evolutionary scenarios which can be summarized as follows:

#### 1. Re-urbanization of peripheral commercial hubs.

The reintegration of the large shopping center within the city can be an interesting option, it is necessary to meet the needs that have determined its success: ease of reaching and parking, a large range of goods in a single, easily accessible space. Understanding how to combine the needs of the shopping center with the dimensional and organizational limitations of the urban space is not an easy challenge, but one with implications full of potential. The issue of infrastructures and mobility as a whole will have to be addressed seriously, to propose alternative solutions and accommodate the significant flows generated by such a presence within the urban fabric of the city without this distorting the very essence of the project sites.

#### 2. Neural development between city and commercial center.

The further development of the shopping centers and the city could be configured as polarity capable of creating connective filaments at the territorial level, real clusters of functions and buildings. This type of scenario could be the prelude to a polycentric metropolitan city capable of exercising an attractive power towards the most marginal suburbs.

#### 3. Parallel and autonomous development of shopping centers and cities.

In this configuration, both the city and the shopping centers develop, increasing their importance and size but maintain independent characteristics between them, without giving rise to further connective developments and becoming independent attraction poles towards the periphery and the territory according to their respective specificities. In this case, the intermediate space does not provide for the establishment of an organized planning and remains characterized by the exclusive presence of sprawl and by the connective infrastructures.

#### 4. Commercial development and urban erosion.

This last scenario represents the worst case scenario for the city as it is known today. The initial commercial depopulation contributes to the erosion of the

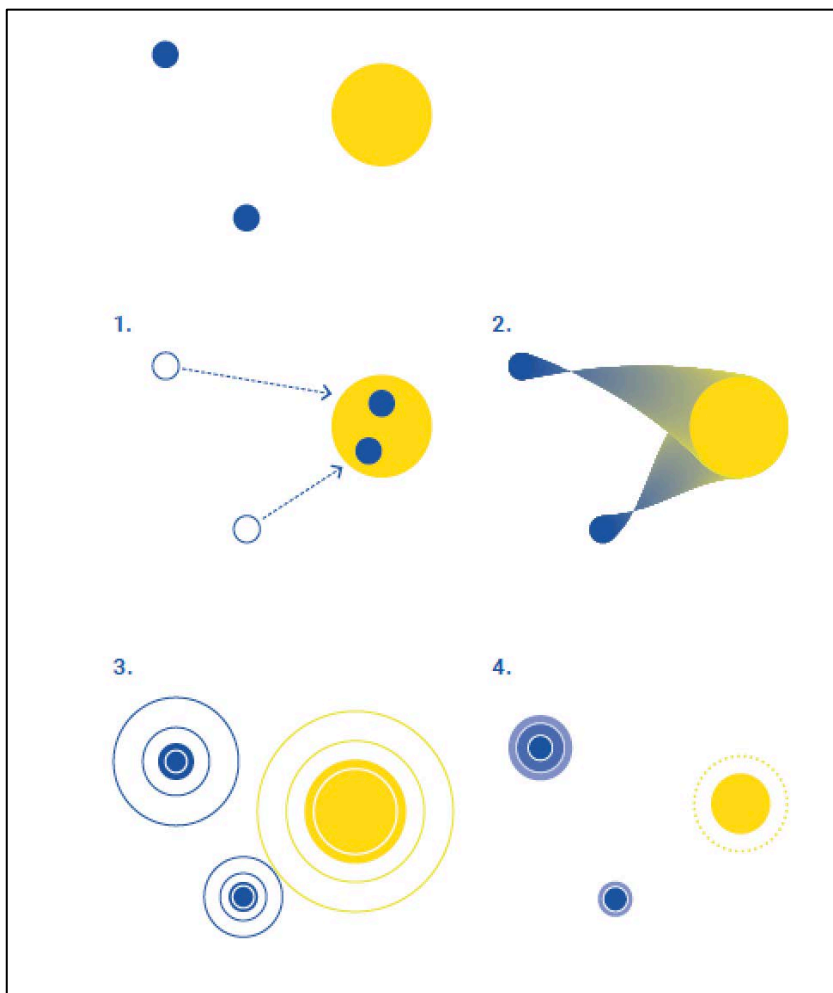
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47. C. J. Chung, J. Inaba, R. Koolhaas, and S. T. Leong, *The Harvard Guide to shopping* (Köln: Taschen, 2001).

inhabited center by encouraging depopulation and weakening the city as a catalyst. In turn, the commercial nucleus is enriched with other experiential elements to the point of assuming characteristics of attraction typical of the urban condition. This scenario raises profound questions regarding the urban destiny of some territories.

- Will living and the other aspects of collective life still have catalytic polarities or will involution push towards an acentric diffusion?
- What developments can be seen in the coming decades?
- What will be the prevailing relationship between city and commercial center?

The in-depth study of the reference contexts and of the dynamics in progress could offer prefiguration's capable of anticipating and guiding the evolutionary directions of this dialectic, helping us to better understand a piece of our near future.



**Figure 13.** *Diagrams of Dynamics "Shopping Center - Territory – City": 1. Re-urbanization of Peripheral Commercial Hubs; 2. Neural Development between City and Shopping Center; 3. Parallel and Autonomous Development of Shopping Centers and Cities; 4. Commercial Development and Urban Erosion*  
Source: Meninno 2020.

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