

# **The commercial transformation of Bolognina and its implications in the neighborhood gentrification process**

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## ABSTRACT

In this paper I tie in with the argument that the changes in the commercial landscape taking place in many cities of economically advanced countries may play a role of primary importance in gentrification processes. Unlike several studies on gentrification mainly focused on the demographic and residential aspects of the process, I claim that commercial supply may actively affect practices of consumption, identification and socioeconomic transformation of a neighbourhood. Indeed, the effect of changes in commerce takes on particular importance in the redefinition of the daily practices of inhabitants, the aesthetics of certain areas and the overall representation of the neighbourhood. Also, it contributes to reshaping the neighbourhood even before an effective demographic composition change. At the same time, changes in commerce seem to have significant impact on the attraction of new residents and on the exclusion of specific social groups. This research is based on the findings of a study carried out on the Bolognina neighbourhood in the Italian city of Bologna. It was executed through observations of commercial supply and physical space, the analysis of data related to population structure and income concentration, a series of interviews to local key informants, and a further set of interviews to long-term residents and new ones. This work starts with a theoretical introduction of the problem, considering gentrification as a process that may be related to the ongoing changes in the context of globalization. Agreeing with Butler (2005), I argue that the conceptual strength of gentrification lies in its ability to shed light on how transformations of the external economy have affected the relationships between people and the places where they live. Therefore, the role played by commerce in gentrification processes is analysed within the wider transformation process of the economic base of globalised cities. The second part is focused on the empirical study of Bolognina, highlighting the connection between commercial landscape and gentrification. In particular, the transformations of the commercial fabric, the aesthetic features of new businesses and their target customers are analysed. At the same time, the consumption practices of residents are taken into account, in order to identify the commercial enterprises and *loisir* places that are most attended by long-term residents and gentrifiers. Furthermore, particular attention is paid to the role of institutions in fostering the regeneration of the neighbourhood. Urban

policies intended to enhance the commercial fabric and to build a new institutional representation of the neighbourhood are examined on the basis of their objectives, the categories of involved subjects and the results produced. In conclusion, the implications between residential and commercial transformation are considered, pointing out that the concentration of certain enterprises, the presence of high-value dwellings and the localization of higher income might be interconnected in outlining the neighbourhood areas most affected by changes. Moreover, focus is placed on the possible influence of the commercial supply on the social exclusion of weaker social categories.

## **INTRODUCTION**

Gentrification is a process of socio-spatial change that has long been accepted as a phenomenon of global nature (Atkinson & Bridge 2005). Its manifestations no longer appear to be limited to Europe, USA and Oceania, but have gained a global mark that is closely related to capital flows and cultural circulation (Smith 2002). The spread of gentrification seems to be connected to the deep changes in the economic system brought about by globalization (Hamnett 2003). The crisis of the Fordian production model in economically advanced countries came about alongside the proliferation and modification of consumption spheres. In particular, the commercial activity has experienced a sharp expansion in terms of economy and employment, thus generating significant impact on the localization and specialization of businesses. Over the past few decades, this process has significantly impacted on the transformation of the commercial landscape in several cities and affected the remodelling of the commercial supply in neighbourhoods. Nevertheless, most scholars have focused their research on residential aspects of changes in neighbourhoods, disregarding, or marginally dealing with, the commercial dimension of the change. This particular form of gentrification, hereinafter referred to as commercial gentrification, has been the subject of increasing attention over the past few years (Lees et al. 2008).

Research has analysed these changes through the lens of consumption, by relating the preferences expressed by gentrifiers with the identity formation of the new middle class (Bridge & Dowling 2001; Ilkukan & Sandikci 2005; Zukin 2008). The establishment of

specialized stores and ethnic restaurants, for example, has been connected to the consumption patterns of gentrifiers. More recently, on the contrary, some scholars have highlighted the mechanisms underlying the production of new spaces of consumption. Thus, commercial gentrification has been analysed within the wider process of neoliberal restructuring of the city, by stressing the role played by the State in fostering the regeneration of the commercial fabric (Gonzales & Waley 2013). Other research has instead taken into account the transformation of the commercial supply as part of the broader process of residential gentrification (Davidson & Lees 2010:406) or tourism gentrification (Cook 2004). The diversity of research approaches and findings shows how these changes could produce multiple implications in neighbourhood development. Commercial gentrification can indeed improve the representation of the neighbourhood, increase the number and type of specialized stores and boost the quality of the residential environment. However, these transformations can also have negative repercussions on residents regarding the development of a sense of exclusion from their own neighbourhood (Slater 2006). Although several scholars have examined the implications between gentrification and social exclusion, only in a few cases has commercial gentrification been considered as a process capable of creating potential inequalities between gentrifiers and long-term residents (Verwaaijen 2013; Zukin 2009). Slater (2006), for example, has found that weaker social classes may be affected by various problems, such as increased costs or a supply of products that does not meet their taste, which may lead to their exclusion. Conversely, according to Verwaaijen (2013) the establishment of new stores can intensify the diversification of businesses and improve the quality of the life of all inhabitants.

The variety of research approaches adopted and results obtained shows that the debate about commercial gentrification is still going on and several issues are still unanswered: what are the effects produced by commercial transformations on the consumption practices of long-term residents? How do these changes contribute towards the aesthetic redefinition and the representation of the neighbourhood? Is there a relationship between the geographical distribution of the new businesses and the areas affected by the most evident residential gentrification features? Can commercial gentrification have an impact on the exclusion of the weaker social categories?

Most of the research on commercial gentrification has been made on the main cities of

economically advanced countries. Only in a few cases have commercial changes been studied outside Western countries (Ilkukan & Sandikci 2005) or within cities that play a secondary role in the national urban hierarchy (Cook 2004). Now that the process tends to be manifest in medium-sized cities as well, it can be seen that the production of new consumption environments affects these urban contexts.

In this work, the transformation of the commercial landscape that is affecting the Bolognina neighbourhood in the Italian city of Bologna is investigated by means of a study case. The aim is to shed light on the connections between commercial gentrification and the socioeconomic transformation of the neighbourhood. I intend to argue that commercial gentrification is encouraging reinvestment mechanisms, producing a differentiation of the commercial fabric capable of reflecting the transition process that is involving several parts of the neighbourhood. The establishment of new retail businesses seems, indeed, to have significant effects on the daily life of inhabitants, on the representation of the neighbourhood and on the attraction of new residents. At the same time, I intend to correlate the commercial transformation of the neighbourhood to the areas where a higher income concentration is recorded, thus illustrating how the geography of the new commercial landscape may be related to the areas affected by the most evident manifestations of residential gentrification.

This article is divided into four parts. The first part provides an overview of the literature on the role played by commerce within gentrification processes, including commercial gentrification in the wider context of socioeconomic changes triggered by globalization. The second part introduces the research carried out and shows the connections between the transformation of the commercial landscape and gentrification in Bolognina. In particular, it analyses the changes in the commercial fabric, the aesthetics of the new businesses and the type of customers for whom they are intended, pointing out the differences existing between the consumption practices of gentrifiers and those of long-term residents. At the same time, particular attention is paid to the role played by institutions in the promotion of urban regeneration and the policies adopted to foster the development of new businesses and the construction of a new image of the neighbourhood. Then, the third part investigates the links between commercial and residential transformation by identifying the areas of the neighbourhood that are most affected by the gentrification process. The final part brings

forward a few considerations, focusing on the fundamental importance of the changes in the commercial base and the interactions with the residential change in interpreting gentrification.

## **1. COMMERCE AND GENTRIFICATION IN THE POST-INDUSTRIAL CITY**

Today, most scholars agree that the crisis of the Fordist model has brought about a substantial break in economic development processes, thus ushering the advent of a new social and manufacturing model. According to Castells (1996), in this new phase of capitalist development the activities related to the processing and exchange of information take on growing importance and significantly impact on the social organization system. The globalization of economy has deeply altered the social, economic and political reality of entire transnational areas, states and cities (Sassen 1994). Starting from the 70s, these changes have fuelled the overcoming of the Fordism-based industrial model and started a large-scale reorganization of the economic and employment base of many urban realities (Harvey 1989).

With the decline in manufacturing output and the growing importance of the service sector, there is a quantitative reduction in the working class and a progressive increase in the number of highly professionalised workers in economically advanced countries: the so-called “new middle class” (Butler & Savage 1995). This process of change, which emerged starting from the second half of the last century, coincided with the gradual formation of the post-industrial society, characterized by its own class structure and new cultural and residential preferences. According to Hamnett (2000), the rise of the new middle class is closely related to the emergence of gentrification processes in the old working-class neighbourhoods of cities. Therefore, gentrification can be regarded as a phenomenon that appeared from the late twentieth century and is associated with the development of the post-industrial society and the progressive decline of the socioeconomic model based on manufacturing. From this point of view, the pioneering study of London neighbourhoods undertaken by Glass (1963) is an example of how significant changes in local relations can be produced by changes in the economy. Since its appearance, gentrification has indeed made it possible to connect the

dimension of macro-scale changes (e.g. deindustrialization) with the micro-scale effects that they produce (e.g. transformations of neighbourhoods) (Hamnett 2003).

According to Butler (2005), the conceptual strength of gentrification lies exactly in its capacity to shed light on how the transformations in the external economy have affected the relationships between people and the place where they live. The changes in the globalised world are indeed inextricably related to the formation of new social groups, to the residential choices made by them and to the formation mechanisms of their identities. Although it has been a long time since the term was coined, the definition provided by Glass (1963:xviii) still seems to be able to adequately describe the social change trends in the neighbourhoods of post-industrial cities. The concept of gentrification tries to explain what Slater, Curran and Lees (2004:1144-5) defined as “the class dimension of neighbourhood change”, in the post-industrial city. However, in the current phase of capitalist development, the formation of social identities is subject to significant redefinitions and to a fragmentation that complicates the overall framework. The concept of social class based on employment status, while still being valid in the context of globalised economy, seems to be integrated in new social groups partly centred on consumption preferences (Butler 2005). In fact, the post-industrial era coincided in economically advanced countries with some expansion of trading and with a redefinition of the role of consumers. In particular, the commercial function seems to have acquired new strength in the economic articulation of the city and, at the same time, to have taken on a central role in the formation of identities. For example, buying a certain brand of clothes or frequenting a trendy club is not only a form of consumption that is an end to itself, but can also constitute a means of social distinction. In this sense, the consumption of products and services has become increasingly important in the formation of identities (Jackson & Thrift 1995). These forms of identification seem to be absolutely marked within gentrification processes, in which the flow of a new social group is often accompanied by social differentiation systems based on these new memberships. In support of this thesis, Bridge and Dowling (2001) found that the visibility of the consumption practices of the new middle class is a key element in gentrification processes, as it appears to be able to establish distances between the various social components that are mixed up in the neighbourhood.

Most of the studies on gentrification have shown that consumption practices are related

to the cultural capital, the economic availability and the preferences expressed by social groups. However, if consumption practices take place in neighbourhoods, they have to confront with a spatially delimited commercial supply, which tends to follow forms of adaptation based on the changes in the external economy, on the potential of the local market and on the guidelines of urban policies. Crewe and Lowe (1995) proved that the localization strategies of certain highly specialized businesses are based both on economic criteria and on cultural considerations about the identity of the place. Consequently, the creation of a certain commercial landscape tends to have significant effects on the representation of the neighbourhood and on the attraction of similar forms of investment. At the same time, the presence of a certain mix of businesses may considerably impact on the attraction of new residents as well.

The transformations of the commercial landscape thus play a central role in gentrification processes for at least three reasons. Firstly, they play a key role in the formation of identities, creating spaces of differentiation and possible inequalities between social groups. Secondly, they contribute to create a representation of the neighbourhood that can attract new residents and new investment, even before an effective change in demographics. Finally, they interact with the residential gentrification process and reshape the physical and social composition of the neighbourhood.

In recent years, the consideration of these implications has been increasingly important in studies on gentrification (Lees et al. 2008; Luckins 2009; Zukin 2008). For example, Bridge & Dowling (2001) pointed out that the commercial differentiation tends to produce real consumption microgeographies, which can be related to the social identities in the neighbourhood. Doucet (2009) pointed out that the establishment of new businesses is perceived positively by local residents, as it appears to be able to enhance the image of the neighbourhood and the diversity of the existing businesses. Other scholars have instead focused their attention on the production of new consumption spaces and their effects on neighbourhood development dynamics. Gonzales and Waley (2013), for example, analysed the urban policies behind the transformation of the main retail market in Leeds, identifying the commercial regeneration of markets as a new gentrification penetration frontier in English cities (Smith 1996). The interrelations between post-industrial city, news consumption spaces



and gentrification seem to be the centre of a series of studies that try to connect the changes in the global economy to the spatial and social changes experienced by neighbourhoods. The establishment of new businesses can indeed have significant repercussions on the spatial reconfiguration of places and on the attraction of new residents (Jutgla et al. 2010). Obviously, local-scale effects vary depending on the social and political context where the businesses are established. Gentrification may as well take many forms and characteristics, according to the context where it develops (Maloutas 2011), and generate multiple and differentiated effects both within the same city (Butler 2007) and between different cities and countries (Lees et al. 2008).

Despite the variety of forms that it can take, commercial gentrification has been recognised over the past few years as a particular kind of gentrification (Bridge & Dowling 2001; Doucet 2009; Zukin 2008). Most studies have related the establishment of new stores to the consumption preferences of gentrifiers and the formation of their identities. Only in some cases has the creation of new consumption spaces been interpreted as a phenomenon linked to the ampler residential gentrification process (Davidson & Lees 2010). Consequently, the interconnections between commercial transformation and residential transformation occupy a marginal position in most studies. This work aims to shed light on these connections, by analysing retail as a differentiation factor, in the production of spaces and identities, within the neighbourhood transformation process. At the same time, it looks into the possible relationships between commercial gentrification and the exclusion of certain social categories, trying to study the consumption patterns of gentrifiers and long-term residents. For this purpose, I intend to make use of an integrated research approach in order to consider gentrification as a process in which consumption and production interact with each other (Clark 1995; Lees et al. 2008; Ley 2003; Smith & DeFilippis 1999; Smith 2002). This theoretical perspective is useful as it allows relating the production mechanisms of the urban environment (e.g. capital circulation, role of institutions) to the growing role played by individual choices (e.g. consumptions) within gentrification processes. Consumption and production have long appeared as elements that are more and more complementary with each other in providing a thorough explanation of gentrification (Hamnett 1991). The decision to live in a certain residential environment may, for example, be perceived as both a form of investment

and a life choice determined by specific preferences (Bridge & Dowling 2001). Similarly, the production of new commercial environments can be considered as a phenomenon in which consumption patterns and creation of identities interact with movement of capital and urban government choices.

The commercial transformation that is being experienced by some areas of Bologna seems particularly related to the residential gentrification process that is affecting the Bolognina neighbourhood. In this part of the city, the urban regeneration projects and the transformation of the commercial landscape are encouraging the introduction of reinvestment mechanisms, following a long period of commercial and residential disinvestment. The recent development of the new businesses coincided with the gradual arrival of new residents and contributed to create a commercial space differentiated in terms of type of customers and localization of concerns. The new businesses also seem to follow a direction of development that can be related to the advance of gentrification and the residential location of gentrifiers.

## **2. COMMERCIAL TRANSFORMATION OF THE BOLOGNINA NEIGHBOURHOOD**

### **2.1 Research methods and location**

The research carried out is an exploratory study of the commercial transformation of a former working-class neighbourhood. First, it aims to examine the extent to which this change is affecting the differentiation of the consumption practices of the neighbourhood residents. Second, it intends to stress the role played by institutions in the promotion of new concerns and analyse the policies adopted to foster the development of business and a new representation of the neighbourhood. Finally, this work is intended to explore the geography of the change in the neighbourhood and shed light on the interrelations between the commercial and residential dimension of the change. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and informal interviews, direct observations and analyses of secondary data. More specifically, the semi-structured interviews were submitted to 4 new residents of the neighbourhood and

4 long-term residents, 3 public administrators, 2 university scholars, the president of Bologna FIAIP<sup>1</sup>, a trade unionist and two members of political organizations dealing with the issue of evictions in the neighbourhood. Informal interviews were held with 4 owners of newly established stores, 3 real estate agents working in the neighbourhood and 3 residents. Direct observations concerned the physical space and were made in 10 places where aesthetic features have undergone changes in the last eight years. The field research was carried out in Bolognina, a Bologna neighbourhood where I lived between 2005 and 2006 during my university studies. This urban context has been experiencing important territorial change processes for some years. The case study is an example of the geographical spread of gentrification processes and of their emergence in cities that occupy a secondary position in the global urban hierarchy (Lees 2000).

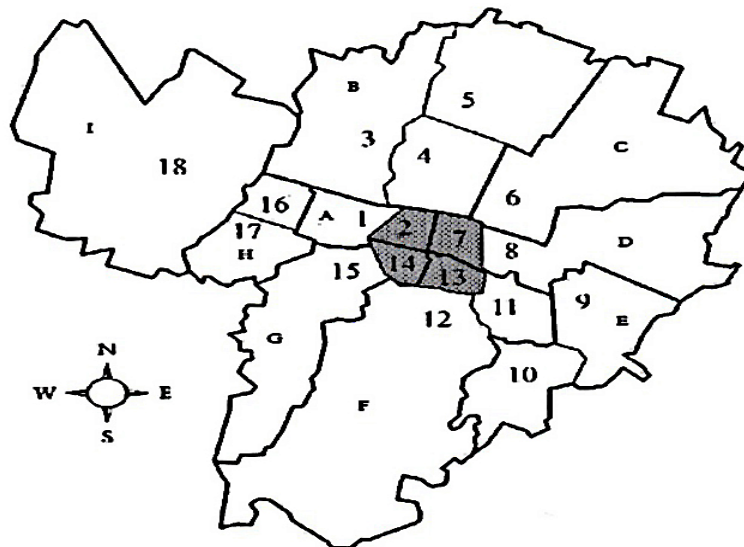
Data were collected in a field research period between October 2014 and April 2015. The various groups interviewed were asked to answer a set of various questions formulated on the basis of the information to be collected and by leaving ample room for further issues arising. For example, residents were asked questions about their consumption patterns, the living environment and their perception of the changes in the neighbourhood. The interviews to university scholars and public administrators helped to frame the urban transformations within the development of the city and the political choices. The president of FIAIP was asked to answer about the trend of real estate values in the city and in the research context. Finally, the trade unionist and the activists of political organizations answered questions about housing problems and their connection with urban transformation processes. In order to collect specific information, most of the people interviewed were selected on the basis of their knowledge of the issues to be analysed, then identified as key informers and contacted directly. On the other hand, the residents interviewed were selected through the “snowball sampling” method, whereby I took advantage of a pre-existing network of personal contacts. I tried to get in touch with two categories of residents: those who have lived in the neighbourhood for at least 20 years and those who arrived there in the last 7 years. 4 interlocutors considered representative of long-term residents and gentrifiers were selected for each category, on the basis of their professional position, the location and

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<sup>1</sup> Federazione Italiana Agenti Immobiliari Professionali (Italian Federation of Professional Real Estate Agents). It is the main Italian association of real estate professionals, with 10,106 real estate agents across Italy. It has 20 regional headquarters and 105 provincial districts. Every year it publishes provincial reports divided by cities and neighbourhoods, based on the trend of real estate prices.

the type of their residence. Informal interviews with retailers were centred on certain newly-opened concerns, while those with real estate agents tried to figure out the trend of the residential choices of the various social groups. The new commercial concerns, including delis with typical products, furniture shops and organic shops, were selected on the basis of opening year and store specialization. The analysis of the role played by institutions in the regeneration of the neighbourhood was carried out by studying the urban policies and through semi-structured interviews to local administrators. Also, the distribution of the commercial concerns that have opened in the past few years was mapped to support the research results, by using direct observations, informal interviews with residents and secondary data provided by Bologna government authorities. This mapping was finally related to the areas of the neighbourhood having the greatest concentration of income and real estate values, by using secondary data provided by Bologna government authorities and the information obtained from the informal interviews to real estate agents. The map was considered useful to identify the connections between commercial and residential gentrification.

The research focused on the Bolognina neighbourhood (4,943 km<sup>2</sup>, 35,158 inhabitants), located north of the historic centre of the city of Bologna (Figure 1).



Administrative districts: A-Porto, B-Navile, C-San Donato, D-San Vitale, E-Savena, F-Santo Stefano, G-Saragozza, H-Reno, I-Borgo Panigale

Neighbourhoods: 1-Saffi, 2-Marconi, 3-Lame, 4-Bolognina, 5-Corticella, 6-San Donato, 7-Irnerio, 8-San Vitale, 9-Mazzini, 10-San Ruffillo, 11-Murri, 12-Colli, 13-Galvani, 14-Malpighi, 15-Costa Saragozza, 16-Santa Viola, 17-Barca, 18-Borgo Panigale

**Figure 1.** Administrative districts and neighbourhoods in the Municipality of Bologna. Historical core marked in grey (Buzar et al. 2007:67)

The territorial structure of Bolognina is the result of the 1889 Urban Plan, which was aimed at redesigning the area outside the historic centre, through two different town planning forms: the garden city and the council house (Collettivo Piano B 2007). The Bolognina neighbourhood lies north of the railway station and is characterised by the strong prevalence of a densely populated orthogonal grid pattern (7112.6 inhabitants per km<sup>2</sup>).

Council houses, still largely existing in the neighbourhood, were originally designed to serve the housing needs of the working class. Starting from the early twentieth century, several industries were built in this area, which actively contributed to define Bolognina as a working-class neighbourhood. This connotation inherited from the past, however, seems to have been redefined over time, following the gradual closing of factories and the end of the manufacturing and social world revolving around them. The decline of Bolognina, started in the Eighties and continued during most of the Nineties, led to the gradual abandonment of the neighbourhood by the working class and most of the commercial concerns that were structured on the balance between factory and neighbourhood. The consequent loss of population was part of the wider economic, urban and demographic trends that were affecting some cities of Northern Italy at that time, such as: industrial deconcentration, suburbanisation and second demographic transition (Mingione 1996). The demographic decline only underwent a turnaround between the two millenniums, thanks to the progressive arrival of Italian and foreign migrants. Today the neighbourhood has taken on a new aspect and thanks to its strategic localisation it has acquired a central position in town planning choices and in the housing preferences of certain social groups.

“Bolognina is now a vibrant inner-city district, with numerous cultural, commercial, and environmental amenities, and thriving communities of both international immigrants and migrants from other parts of Italy” (Buzar et al. 2007:66)

The demographic transformation that has affected Bolognina can be read from within the gentrification processes that have been going on for several years in the Mediterranean context and have produced substantial changes in the social, spatial and economic configuration of many neighbourhoods (Petsimeris 2005). Despite the

increasing number of studies on gentrification in these contexts, the commercial dimension of the change does not appear to be adequately investigated. The commercial transformation thus seems to be a fertile ground for analysis, in order to highlight the implications between the production of new consumption environments and the volatility of a neighbourhood during gentrification.

## **2.2 Consumption practices, spaces and identities**

The consideration of consumption practices has long had a key role in the study of gentrification processes. Mills (1988), for example, pointed out that gentrifiers seem to express consumption preferences related to the aesthetic and architectural values of homes. May (1996) examined the consumption of ethnic food by gentrifiers as a means to indicate their belonging to a cosmopolitan social identity. More recently, other types of consumption expressed by gentrifiers seem to have attracted the attention of researchers. Among them, those which involve consumption practices within the transformation processes of the commercial landscape have become particularly important. One of the main studies on these aspects was carried out by Ley (1996), who analysed the interactions between the change in the commercial supply and the formation of identities in Kitsilano neighbourhood in Vancouver. Consumption preferences seem indeed to be related to the formation of urban subcultures capable of standing out from the other social groups present in the city (Ilkucan & Sandikci 2005). Despite the growing number of these types of research, most scholars have focused their attention on the consumption practices expressed by gentrifiers (Slater 2006). As a result, the implications of commercial changes have been analysed mainly from the point of view of the new residents. The consumption practices of long-term residents, which have been taken into account only recently, have shown that commercial transformations can have different effects for the various social groups. Sullivan (2014) pointed out that the opening of an organic supermarket can be perceived positively only by those who can afford to buy and give value to the products sold in that place. On the other hand, those who do not have adequate financial resources are likely to be afflicted with a feeling of exclusion, which is directly linked to their economic access ability. Thus, the investigation of the consumption practices of both gentrifiers and long-term

residents takes on a central role in the understanding of the different effects that commercial gentrification may have on the various social components of a neighbourhood.

This study has been carried out on the Bolognina neighbourhood, in the city of Bologna. Starting from the mid-90s, demographic and economic changes, related to the post-industrial transition of the city, began exerting considerable effects on the remodelling of certain urban sections. Gentrification processes appeared in the historic centre and then gradually spread to the north of the city, in neighbourhoods like San Donato and Bolognina (Buzar et al. 2007). Although it is difficult to say exactly when gentrification took off in Bolognina, the process has led to a gradual overcoming of its image as a working-class neighbourhood. In fact, over the past 10 years the residential and commercial structure of the neighbourhood has changed considerably and is still undergoing significant modifications. As confirmed by thorough interviews to residents (old and new) and observations, the establishment of new businesses in several areas of the neighbourhood is giving a new image to some of its parts. The number of vintage stores, wine bars, ethnic restaurants, organic and local product shops is growing every year and seems to be related to the gradual arrival of new residents with a fairly good economic and cultural capital. One of the gentrifiers interviewed said: “since I arrived in 2007, new shops selling typical products and organic food have opened, as well as vintage clothes shops that I really love to visit”<sup>2</sup>, while another pointed out that “several bars and clubs where you can enjoy happy hours or spend the night are opening, and they have a different attendance from the usual bars of the neighbourhood”. The establishment of new commercial concerns has not only concerned stores and clubs, but also restaurants and body care shops. Over the past few years, the number of highly qualified gyms, chemist’s shops, surgeries, wellness centres and hairdresser’s shops has multiplied. The localisation of these concerns is far from being accidental and seems to reflect the needs expressed by the new residents of Bolognina. McDowell (1997) pointed out that the location of these concerns can be related to the residential choices of those who work in the sector of services, thus expressing the need for personal care of the new middle class. At the same time, the establishment of new ethnic and organic restaurants can be identified a further signal of the arrival of gentrifiers in the

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2 February 19, 2015. V.'s interview, new resident.

neighbourhood. In fact, this social group is characterised by a high propensity to eat out and by the appreciation of particular restaurants (May 1996).

The type of change that is affecting Bolognina seems to be in line with the findings of Bridge & Dowling (2001) and Zukin (2009), who observed a growth in the number of similar concerns in Sydney and New York, within neighbourhoods experiencing gentrification. The new businesses differ from the previous ones both in terms of the type of customers that they try to attract and of their aesthetic features. As emerged from informal interviews with traders, their target customers are mainly new families, students and office workers that have lived in the neighbourhood or frequented it for some years. The owner of a deli shop specializing in typical Tuscan products stated that “we have decided to open our shop here because the neighbourhood has been populated in a different way lately; it has become a place of transit with the opening of the high speed train station, filled with people who, after their university studies, settle here. It would have been pointless to open here a few years ago, when there were only workers and foreigners”<sup>3</sup>. This statement shows that the customers of the new commercial concerns belong to social groups that have gained some weight in the neighbourhood only over the past few years. In fact, the demographic structure of Bolognina, which underwent important changes between 1991 and 2014, recorded an overall growth of the population and a greater incidence of single people, immigrants and divorced people compared to the past. Although these changes may reflect trends typical of the second demographic transition, what is interesting to note is the recent type of immigration in the neighbourhood. Over the past five years, immigration from other countries has decreased in quantity, while migration trends from other parts of Italy and from the Province of Bologna have become consolidated (Figure 2). These flows mainly consist of well-educated people who work within the city and decide to live in Bolognina because of its proximity to the historic centre and to roads. These people are members of what Butler and Savage (1995) defined as the new middle class, namely highly professionalized workers with a certain cultural and economic capital. In some cases, these people settle in the city as a result of a job offer, while in other cases they decide to stay in Bologna after completing their university studies in the city.

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3 March 15, 2015, informal interview. Chatting with S., owner of a deli store opened in 2014.



**Figure 2.** Resident immigrants by place and years of immigration (Bolognina neighbourhood)

	1991 - 1995	1996 - 2000	2001 - 2005	2006 - 2010	Dal 2011
1. Province of Bologna	371	542	657	1.162	1.270
2. Other Provinces of Emilia-Romagna Region	108	145	195	335	426
3. North-West Italy	52	65	100	164	240
4. North-East Italy	29	65	90	125	180
5. Middle Italy	71	121	172	290	304
6. South Italy and islands	327	508	844	1.043	1.104
7. Foreign countries	146	391	1.061	2.078	1.864
<b>Total</b>	<b>1.104</b>	<b>1.837</b>	<b>3.119</b>	<b>5.197</b>	<b>5.388</b>

**Source.** Municipality of Bologna, Population movements from 1991 to 2014, <http://goo.gl/3wm46z>

The arrival of these new residents has come alongside the establishment of new commercial concerns targeted to them. The interviews revealed that gentrifiers tend to articulate their consumption around these spaces, which they prefer compared to the other businesses of the neighbourhood. On the other hand, long-term residents do not seem to particularly appreciate these new concerns and choose modes of consumption based on established habits. This category prefers classic grocer's shops, cheap supermarkets and the historic concerns of the neighbourhood. Moreover, this group seems poorly inclined to consume food in restaurants or to rely on home delivery services. A boy, born and grown up in Bolognina, expressed the consumption preferences of his family as follows: "we who have grown up here go shopping where we have always been used to. Sometimes we go to a foreign greengrocer's, others to the supermarket, but we would never dream of going to a macrobiotic restaurant or to the shop selling typical Puglia products, because they are too expensive and we do not like them"<sup>4</sup>. Thus, there is a problem of identification in the products sold and diversity in price ranges between new and old businesses, tending to limit access by long-term residents. Although the cultural capital may be related to the preferences of the various social groups, the economic factor has the greatest impact on residents' consumption choices. In fact, commercial gentrification seems to produce consumption spaces in Bolognina that are differentiated on the basis of the cost and type of products sold. Despite the access problem for long-term residents, the persistence of cheap and poorly specialized shops prevents this problem from turning into the social exclusion of this

4 February 12, 2015. E.'s interview, long-term resident.

category from the neighbourhood. Instead, what is going on seems to be a gradual displacement pressure, namely a physical, social and economic change that binds the consumption possibilities of the least affluent and affects their degree of identification in the neighbourhood where they live (Slater 2009).

Also poorly appreciated by long-term residents is the aesthetics of the new concerns, which is characterised by minimalist décor and post-modern architecture. Many businesses have renovated their premises, while others have been established within new commercial spaces built on former industrial sites (Figure 3). The juxtaposition between old and new expresses a mix of past and present architectural forms, an eclectic fusion of modern and contemporary characters in both internal and external environments. The spread of these new aesthetic elements has brought about a feeling of rejection by historic inhabitants who have always witnessed the development of the modernist architecture of the neighbourhood. The spaces in which the transformation of the physical landscape is more evident are indeed indicated by long-term residents as the least appreciated places in the area, precisely because of the discrepancy between their aesthetics and the building types that have historically characterised Bolognina. Conversely, gentrifiers see the new commercial spaces as nice places to frequent, where to shop and spend free time. It is no coincidence that most of the new concerns attract the latter group, also thanks to the quality and the order of internal environments.



**Figure 3.** The commercial space of Officine Minganti, a former industrial area in the eastern part of Bolognina.

Furthermore, gentrifiers seem to recognise themselves as a social group inside the new spaces of consumption. An office worker who has recently moved with her family to Bolognina claims that “the places that we most like to go to are the new Minganti gym and some ethnic restaurants, because here we find other office workers like my husband and me and other families like ours”<sup>5</sup>. Therefore, these places are also aggregation spaces for gentrifiers, where they can socialize with people who are similar to them in terms of economic, cultural and social features. Hairdresser’s shops, gyms, restaurants and beauty centres thus become new spaces of relationship that are mediated by the economic relationship. By frequenting these environments, new residents get the chance to meet and socialize, avoiding mingling with the social heterogeneity that characterizes other aggregation spaces of the neighbourhood, such as parks and social centres. Although several people interviewed stated that one of the main reasons for appreciating Bolognina is precisely its “jazz” character, namely its high diversity, gentrifiers prefer to build relationships within their own social circle and rarely come into contact with other ethnic and social groups. The relationship with the social heterogeneity of Bolognina seems instead mediated by consumption habits related to food and the purchase of typical products, limiting the interactions with the various components of the neighbourhood to these aspects. Butler (2007) pointed out that the search for “similar” contacts is actually a characteristic common to many gentrifiers, and tends to produce relational systems based on the homogeneity of its components. The new commercial concerns play a key role in the creation of these networks and in the formation of gentrifiers’ identity: they ensure an exclusive environment where to build relationships, allow gentrifiers to anchor their belonging to consumption places and shape social identities on the basis of the products sold. The effects exerted by commercial gentrification thus tend to affect identity formation systems. The relationship between consumption, new residents and identification systems seems to confirm the findings of the research that has identified an interpretation of commercial gentrification in these connections (Bridge & Dowling 2001; Ley 1996; Zukin 2009). While carrying out this research, however, the spread of the new spaces of consumption proved to be producing identification and relationship environments only for new inhabitants, whereas the production and aggregation structures that have contributed to

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5 February 19, 2015. B.'s interview, new resident.

shape the historic identity of the neighbourhood and its inhabitants are gradually disappearing. Factories, aggregation centres and contacts in public spaces are replaced by new commercial environments, which filter relational possibilities and set up economic barriers. Commercial spaces thus appear to be the (non-) place (Augé 2009) in which social relationships are disconnected from the history of Bolognina and the production system that shaped it, and get anchored to new identities that find their *raison d'être* in the division of work, but are integrated by the client relationship between trader and consumer. The lack of recognition in a changing neighbourhood thus seems to affect only the part of residents who would identify themselves in the relationship between industrial production, neighbourhood and working-class mutualism (Collettivo PianoB 2007).

### **2.3 Urban policies and urban regeneration**

The transformation of the commercial landscape is a process that can be strongly connected to urban policies. For example, in the gentrification process in Park Slope, New York, public subsidies played a key role during the commercial and residential renovation of the area (Lees et al. 2008). Although the study of consumption preferences may reflect the commercial consumption patterns of gentrifiers and long-term residents, it also appears necessary to investigate the economic and political framework in which the new spaces of consumption are established. The aim of this section is to analyse the political choices underlying the commercial transformation of Bolognina, focusing on the policies for the urban regeneration of the neighbourhood, on the modes of building a new representation of the place and on its effects. The consideration of these elements is spreading among the studies on commercial gentrification, since it is related to the changes in the production base of the post-industrial city and to the guidelines of urban policies associated therewith (Jutgla et al. 2010). Moreover, following the proposals of Smith (2002), the analysis of the political level allows studying and highlighting the role played by the neoliberal state in the production and valorisation of urban spaces. Over the past thirty years, urban regeneration and territorial marketing policies have become a development strategy common to many cities in the Western world (Rossi & Vanolo 2010).

The redevelopment of the built environment is a process that has started quite spontaneously in the Italian context, even though public interventions can create enough externalities for its takeoff (Diappi 2009:10). In the case of Bolognina, the relationship with urban policies and projects is rather stringent, and it is connected to both the choices made by the municipality and the investment mechanisms adopted by privates. In fact, the regeneration of the neighbourhood took place when the area was identified as strategic for the development of the entire city, because of its central location, its proximity to communication routes and the presence of several urban voids created by deindustrialization. Since the late 90s, public authorities have considerably committed to the creation of an attractive residential environment in the city (Buzar et al. 2007), which has turned into a series of functional development projects carried out through both public funding and the involvement of private investors. Although these initiatives also concern the historic centre of Bologna, the largest number of interventions has been or is being completed within the urban fabric of Bolognina (Figure 4).

The presence of new infrastructure, buildings and public services has enriched the neighbourhood and has come alongside the building redevelopment and reconversion of some of its parts.

**Figure 4.** Main public or public-private interventions for the redevelopment of Bolognina from 2004 to date.

	<b>Implemented</b>	<b>Being implemented</b>	<b>Planned</b>
<b>Infrastructure</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Bus depot</li> <li>- High speed train station</li> <li>- Salesiani car park</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Navile University Centre</li> <li>- Redevelopment of central station</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- New trolleybus lines</li> <li>- CNR Centre</li> <li>- Industrial research hub</li> <li>- Airport connection</li> </ul>
<b>Public building</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- 1 subsidized housing block MercatoNavile</li> <li>- Renovation of 7 ERP buildings</li> <li>- University college</li> <li>- 59 new ERP homes</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- 2 subsidized housing blocks</li> <li>- Demolition and reconstruction of 124 ERP homes in 3 sites</li> </ul>	
<b>Non-residential building</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Building for commercial use MercatoNavile</li> <li>- Commercial complex PortaEuropa</li> <li>- Commercial spaces former Officine Minganti</li> <li>- New Town Hall and commercial spaces via Fioravanti</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Demolition and reconstruction of commercial spaces and offices Casaralta</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Commercial spaces Corte Matteotti</li> </ul>

<b>Private residential building</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Residential complex via Parri 210 houses</li> <li>- Residential complex CorteMatteotti 36 houses</li> <li>- Subsidies for private renovations</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- 282 houses MercatoNavile</li> <li>- 94 houses for reconversion of former Cevaloni industrial area</li> <li>- Subsidies for private renovations</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Subsidies for private renovations</li> </ul>
<b>Mobility and street furniture</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Redevelopment of via Carracci, new cycle track and public square</li> <li>- Cycle tracks eastern Bolognina</li> <li>- Improvement of local public transport</li> <li>- via Fioravanti car park</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Pedestrian and cycle route CanaleNavile</li> <li>- Urbanisation works MercatoNavile</li> <li>- Burial in via Gobetti</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Station underground road axis</li> </ul>
<b>Social, healthcare and school services</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Safety interventions on school buildings</li> <li>- Extension of high school in via Matteotti</li> <li>- Extraordinary maintenance of school buildings</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Extraordinary maintenance of high schools</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- New school centre MercatoNavile</li> <li>- New outpatients clinic MercatoNavile</li> </ul>
<b>Other services</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Public Administration computer network</li> <li>- Railway noise barriers</li> <li>- Road noise barriers</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Trigeneration plant MercatoNavile</li> <li>- Safety cameras</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Green and street furniture MercatoNavile</li> <li>- Cultural centre and new neighbourhood market MercatoNavile</li> </ul>

**Source.** Processing of data from Bologna Municipality, Atlas of Territorial Transformations 2014, <http://goo.gl/7KL8xS>

Furthermore, the long series of interventions on physical components has been supplemented by further projects designed to establish a new feeling of community and a new identity of the neighbourhood. Among them, the most interesting one is the project Convivere Bolognina, a participatory process which, by involving the organizations and the citizens of the territory, aims to overcome the problems affecting certain specific areas and to improve the quality of the life of residents (Bologna Municipality 2014). Following deindustrialization, Bolognina was affected by a series of demographic, economic and social changes that impacted on the expansion of certain critical aspects and generated interstices of physical social degradation. The loss of employment in the industrial sector, the arrival of several waves of migration from abroad and the breakdown of the social ties revolving around the factory led to the creation of urban sections afflicted with petty crime and a low degree of maintenance in the physical environment. This situation influenced the private investment mechanisms and generated a vortex of residential and commercial disinvestment that suffered a

setback only in recent years. Convivere Bolognina aims to overcome the problems related to the economic, physical and social degradation, through the identification of four areas of intervention: social cohesion and policies, civic safety and education, commercial and cultural development. Basically, it is a participatory urban regeneration project with the goal of making the neighbourhood more liveable for inhabitants and more attractive to new investments. The consideration of the measures for commercial development is of particular importance for this research. Convivere Bolognina intends to promote partnerships between traders and encourage the establishment of new specialised businesses through economic incentives and tax reliefs. Shop owners are networked to design initiatives in the neighbourhood and, at the same time, subsidies are granted for entrepreneurial initiatives of young people. Long-term effects are yet to be verified, but some positive signals can already be seen regarding the attraction of new concerns. An informal interview with a young owner of a furniture store revealed that the recent establishment of her business is “surely related to the fact that the municipality is doing something for this neighbourhood, it is changing it, and this is something that encouraged us to open here and not somewhere else”<sup>6</sup>.

The establishment of a network of new specialised concerns seems to follow a cascade effect, as it has made the neighbourhood attractive for the localization of other commercial concerns. Over the past seven years, 105 new businesses with a high specialization degree have been started up. Beauty centres, hotels, ethnic restaurants and various shops have been established in a fabric made up of 773 commercial concerns (Bologna Municipality 2014). At the basis of the localisation of these concerns in the neighbourhood there are a number of factors related to both political choices and real estate market trends. The various public interventions on built property and the urban regeneration policies have affected the physical and social components of Bolognina, while real estate market trends have allowed a reduction in the cost of residential and commercial leases starting from 2006 (FIAIP 2014). The combination of urban policies and reduction in real estate values has opened new opportunities for profit in this part of the city and the commercial sector has started to invest thereon in a considerable manner. According to Smith (1987), similar trends create room for private investments and are at the base of the explanation of gentrification processes. Although Smith’s rent

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6 January 30, 2015, informal interview. Chatting with M., owner of an interior design shop opened in 2013.

gap theory is based on the land rent value and has been experimented with on real estate development mechanisms, it seems appropriate to assume that the business investment system will follow the same trend as the residential one. From this point of view, the disinvestment and reinvestment cycle supported by urban government measures has already been described by Gonzales and Waley (2013) regarding the commercial transformation of Leeds market. The investment on business in Bologna mainly comes from young entrepreneurs, who have seen driving forces for the economic revitalisation of the area in the physical redevelopment projects and in the commercial development policies. The observations of the new spaces of consumption confirm the prevalence of young people establishing new concerns; 66.7% of the new traders seem to be aged below 40 years.

It should be noted that Convivere Bologna, as well as the Municipal Structural Plan<sup>7</sup>, are aimed to develop a specialised commercial cluster within the city and thus foster the establishment of new businesses capable of attracting non-resident consumers as well. This goal appears to be related to the creation of a consumption-attractive commercial fabric capable of standing out in terms of quality of goods and services offered. Most of this strategy seems to revolve around food and the demand for services expressed by “city users” (Martinotti 1993), who work in the new municipal offices located in the western part of the neighbourhood or travel when going out of the new high speed train station. At the same time, food consumption is identified as a means to attract flows of tourists and residents from other parts of the city. The emphasis attached to the specialisation of businesses also seems to fulfil the task of diversifying a commercial landscape that is largely characterised by poor quality. Since the late 90s, in fact, we have witnessed the closure of many historic concerns and their replacement with grocer’s and greengrocer’s shops mainly managed by foreigners (Collettivo PianoB 2007). Given the considerable spread of these concerns in the neighbourhood and the need to compete on the reduction of prices, the traders of the sector tried to increase their income by selling alcoholic drinks and extending working hours to the night, thus undermining the competitiveness of those who tend to respect the typical Italian working hours and days. The municipal ordinance issued in November 2014<sup>8</sup>, which

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7 PSC Bologna identifies Bologna as a real estate development area for over 70% of its territory, <http://goo.gl/YF8Dpk>

8 Mayor’s ordinance 11.11.2014, <http://goo.gl/Ghov5e>



prohibited the sale and the consumption of alcoholic drinks on public spaces of the neighbourhood after 9 p.m., considered the consumption of alcohol as one of the main problems for the safety of Bolognina and regulated its sale. However, it could be argued that this regulation is also intended to discourage the opening of further foreign greengrocer's shops, considered by many of the interviewed people as degrading for the image of the neighbourhood. This hypothesis seems to be confirmed by an interview with a resident of Bolognina: "the ordinance against alcohol has nothing to do with safety; our neighbourhood has the same level of petty crime as other parts of Bologna and the fact that it has been only applied to this area has other reasons"; it does seem to be connected to the will to limit earnings of foreign greengrocers, who "are deeply affected and, with the high rise in rents or utilities, struggle to keep their little shop going"<sup>9</sup>. From this point of view, the ordinance is a further element implemented by the public administration to promote the commercial development of the neighbourhood, since it sets restrictions on the spread of concerns with low specialisation. This measure, however, tends to hit a fraction of commerce that is closely associated with the migrant component of the population and its effects might lead to a gradual displacement of these concerns in the near future.

Moreover, at the centre of institutional measures is the will to support the commercial and residential development of Bolognina with urban marketing operations. A considerable part of Bolognina regards the remodelling of the negative image that the neighbourhood obtained following deindustrialization and the proposal of a new representation of the place. The aim stated in the policy document is to eradicate the negative background, by changing the perception of the neighbourhood in order to attract new businesses and promote the development of local enterprises (Bologna Municipality 2014). One of the main activities undertaken in this regard was the establishment of a new logo of the neighbourhood capable of highlighting its importance in the urban development processes of Bologna (Figure5). The choice of such an attractive and innovative image is intended to oppose the cumbersome legacy of the past and to free Bolognina from the image as a working-class and degraded neighbourhood that characterized it for a long time. What is revealed by this representation is new bond with the remaining part of the city. The image seems to

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<sup>9</sup> February 12, 2015. E.'s interview, long-term resident.

recall the spatial features of the neighbourhood, highlighting the geometric regularity of its urban layout with squared shapes and the focal points of the city with circular shapes. In this representation, Bolognina appears to be the connecting space between the flows and the junctions of future Bologna: the new high speed train station (below), the motorway junction (above), the trade fair and office centre (right), the residential project MercatoNavile and the new university research centres (left). This promotion mechanism seems to follow the territorial marketing choices to which post-Fordian cities are called to respond nowadays, producing attractive representations of the places and of the new urban economy that characterises them (Rossi & Vanolo 2010).



**Figure 5.** The new logo of the Bolognina neighbourhood (Bolognina is Bologna).

The new image of the neighbourhood is intended to guide this territorial area out of the margins where it has been confined by physical barriers (railway that separates it from the city centre) and social issues over time (Bazzoli 2014). As emerged from the interview to the president of the Navile, the administrative area of which Bolognina is part, “these promotion and regeneration interventions are aimed at creating a new economic and social context for Bolognina, which may produce new conditions for coexistence and deconcentrate problems, also thanks to the arrival of new residents and businesses”<sup>10</sup>.

The regeneration policies adopted can be seen as an instrument whereby the city council is trying to transform the neighbourhood economically and socially. From this point of view, the commercial gentrification of Bolognina appears to be a process that is connected to the economic changes induced by globalisation but finds a driving force in

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<sup>10</sup> December 9, 2014. D.'s interview, President of the administrative district of Navile.

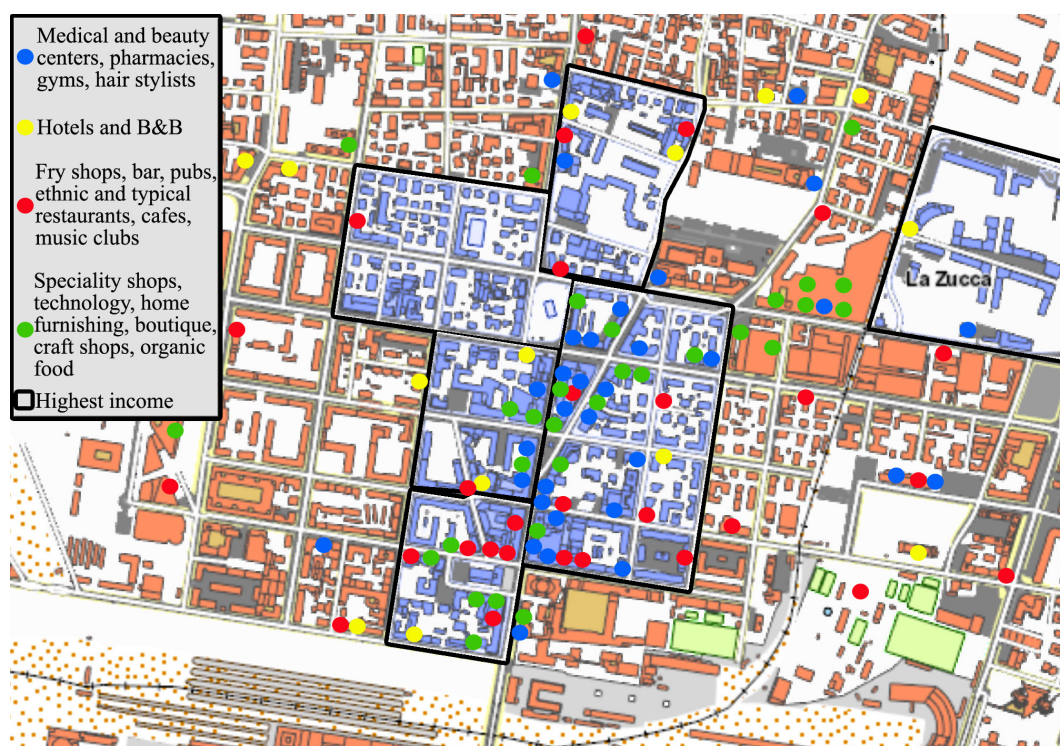
the role played by the public player. Institutions increasingly tend to support the gentrification process in its initial phase, creating a context of attraction for investments in the private sector (Lees et al. 2008). This mechanism seems to demonstrate that the promotion of gentrification through urban policies has become an instrument of great importance for the attraction of investors, residents and tourists, at a time when cities compete with each other for the allocation of resources and population (Sassen 1994). According to Smith (2002), the global spread of these instruments and their adoption by the public player should be read as part of a systemic change in the ways the state relates to capital and urbanisation. Gentrification is indeed no longer perceived as a process in which the public player must adjust the negative externalities produced by the market (e.g. displacement, housing unaffordability), but rather as a policy instrument to reshape the physical and social components of a neighbourhood according to the market itself.

### **3. THE INTERACTION BETWEEN COMMERCIAL AND RESIDENTIAL GENTRIFICATION**

The transformations induced by commercial gentrification have been mainly analysed through consumption preferences, identity constitution and the mechanism for the production of new retail spaces. Although several research projects have attempted to shed light on the impacts that these changes may produce on the social and spatial elements of neighbourhoods, the possible interactions between commercial and residential gentrification seem marginalised to a residual position. Davidson and Lees (2010) are among the few scholars who have tried to correlate the residential aspect with the commercial one, interpreting the reshaping of the commercial supply of Wandsworth in London as part of the new-build gentrification process that started in the district in the late 90s. Therefore, they have considered the replacement of pubs and corner stores with boutiques and restaurants as the result of residential gentrification, taking into account the connection between residential changes and new spaces of consumption. Although the arrival of gentrifiers can certainly exert a driving role in the attraction of commercial concerns intended for them, the findings of the Bolognina case

study foster the idea that residential gentrification and commercial gentrification can be understood as separated processes, albeit closely related to each other. Indeed, the interviews conducted show the lack of a clear causal nexus between the two processes. Instead, the establishment of new commercial concerns seems to be tied to a series of economic, political and cultural factors that are only partially related to the arrival of gentrifiers in the neighbourhood. Therefore, the commercial and residential transformations appear as two distinct typologies of change that may contribute to the physical, social and relational modification of the neighbourhood through their interaction. In particular, the two processes may find strong levels of connection within the relationship between the location of new businesses and the areas of Bolognina where the highest incomes are concentrated (Figure 6). The central area of the neighbourhood is the best-stocked one in terms of retail stores and services. Since 2007, several restaurants, specialized businesses, gyms, wellness centres, hairstylist's shops, accommodation facilities, professional offices and several services have been established in this place and have considerably implemented its commercial supply.

**Figure 6.** The distribution of specialized businesses (established between 2007 and 2015) and highest income areas.



**Source.** Processing of data collected and Registry and income data relating to the polling station, Municipality of Bologna 2013, <http://goo.gl/LVxbL6>

The opening of new consumption spaces has influenced the development of the area and

the residential preferences of the population, allowing increasing attractiveness of the place. According to several real estate agents, new residents are moving into this part of Bolognina. These impressions are confirmed by data about people living within the areas shown in Figure 6. In fact, there was a general increase in the number of residents in these areas between 2007 and 2014, due to the growth in the number of singles and households (Figure 7). The growth in the number of one-person households is mainly related to the settlement of young singles and only minimally to the death of a spouse.

**Figure 7.** Households living within the areas highlighted in Figure 6 divided by number of components.

Components	1	2	3	4	5	6	Tot.
2007	1.902	880	466	255	45	18	3.566
2014	2.303	856	477	261	45	28	3.970

**Source.** Processing of data about households for census sections, Municipality of Bologna, <http://goo.gl/vb3Blo>

The increase in households with dependent children is connected to the residential preferences of those who wish to bring their home location closer to their workplace, usually located within the inner city. Singles, students and fixed-term workers seem to prefer renting a home while households and consolidated couples are more oriented towards purchasing. The expansion of resident households has fostered the occupation of vacant buildings and the adaptation of the real estate supply to the growing housing demands from people who increasingly tend to live alone and wish to reside within the urban context. According to a real estate agent from the neighbourhood, “the areas around Via Matteotti are the most attractive for both business owners and households and in recent years we have sold several houses in this part of the neighbourhood to Italian households”<sup>11</sup>. The interest around the central area of the neighbourhood, evidenced by the increase in the number of residents, has allowed a gradual upgrading of the private real estate and the development of high value housing typologies through the conversion and subdivision of former large flats. Lofts are the main building typologies that have characterised renovations in recent years. According to the President of FIAIP Bologna “several buildings have been recovered and the local real

<sup>11</sup> December 10, 2014, informal interview. Chatting with S., owner of a real estate agency based in Bolognina.

estate market has followed the Milanese loft fashion”<sup>12</sup>. The spread of this type of housing and the presence of refurbished buildings appear quite obvious when looking at real estate advertising. Furthermore, the most prestigious houses are placed around the central part of the district and are characterised by far higher real estate values than other parts of Bolognina. Indeed, the average selling value of the renovated flats in the neighbourhood is about 3,200 Euros per square meter (FIAP 2014) while in the areas highlighted in Figure 6 values are between 3,700 and 5,300 Euros per square meter. This price difference is mainly due to a housing differentiation that seems to have fostered the establishment of new social groups with decent disposable income in the past few years.

The central areas of Bolognina house the largest number of refurbished buildings and new commercial concerns, as well as peak incomes. Indeed, a significant number of individual incomes between 20,000 and 30,000 Euros per year are recorded in the areas marked in the picture, compared to average 19,177 Euros per year in the neighbourhood<sup>13</sup>. The incidence of this figure confirms the presence of different social groups compared to the other components of the population. The group with the highest disposable income mainly consists of service employees who usually intend to bring their residence closer to their workplace. These are people who seem to enjoy the urban life environment and to whom the central location of Bolognina, the supply of services and the presence of a renewed commercial fabric are key elements in making their settlement choices. From this point of view, new spaces of consumption and the presence of a good quality housing supply seem to have encouraged the arrival of new kinds of residents.

Moreover, the urban sections highlighted in Figure 6 are the areas that show the most obvious signs of gentrification of the physical environment. The architectural elements, the high quality finishes and the outstanding maintenance of the buildings that persists in these areas appear to testify the presence of social groups who wish to distinguish themselves through the aesthetic connotations of their residential space. Mills (1988), in fact, pointed out that a lot of gentrifiers prefer certain housing aesthetics capable of reflecting the specificity of their social belonging in the built space. This distinction is

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12 January 15, 2015. G.'s interview, President of FIAIP Bologna.

13 Registry and income data relating to the polling station, Municipality of Bologna 2013, <http://goo.gl/LVxbL6>

not only clear in the preferences of residential consumption but also in commercial ones. From this point of view, the opening of new businesses seems to respond to this need and to generate in turn further impact on the physical environment. In particular, specialised stores and restaurants contribute to the aesthetic improvement of the area either through the maintenance of the outer space or through the inclusion of new street furniture elements (Figure 8). Sidewalks and squares where specialised businesses are located display floral furnishings, tables and outdoor seats arranged by traders as well as a higher level of cleanliness in the surrounding area. Therefore, commercial gentrification appears to actively contribute to the enhancement of the built space.



**Figure 8.** Bottom: street furniture outside an organic restaurant and recently opened bar. Top: renovated residential building.

The interactions between residential and commercial change tend to involve a plurality of aspects. On the one hand, the establishment of new businesses seems to attract new residents and foster the process of residential gentrification. On the other hand, residential gentrification introduces new social groups in the area, reinforcing the demand for high quality goods and services. Moreover, both processes appear to contribute to the reshaping of the built space through the restructuring of the housing stock, the introduction of new elements of street furniture and the maintenance of outdoor spaces. The joint action of the two gentrification processes then reshapes the social and spatial morphology of the neighbourhood, creating different places of

consumption and residential areas for different social classes. Whereas the combination of low business specialisation, competitive prices and low profit margins allows wide purchase access to marginalised groups as well, there is a high degree of social diversity of customers (Figure 9). This social diversity mainly flows into the streets characterised by a low commercial specialisation level and into the local market in via Albani, where interactions develop between people who can live in largely differentiated ways (Hiebert et al. 2015). Conversely, in places where the economic barriers of prices do not allow a heterogeneous social presence, the diversity tends to give way to cultural homogeneity and to foster exclusion mechanisms.



**Figure 9.** Local street market in via Albani, lower income place of consumption.

The resulting image of the neighbourhood is a series of territorial areas characterised by the presence and consumption patterns of specific social categories. Where signs of commercial gentrification are more obvious there is a high-quality urban environment in which the commercial supply seems to meet the needs and preferences expressed by gentrifiers and city users. On the other hand, the consumption patterns of pensioners, immigrants and low income people are concentrated where the commercial fabric is less qualified. From this point of view, it appears that the interaction between commercial and residential gentrification is producing a kind of "micro-geography of consumption" (Bridge & Dowling 2001), in which cultural capital and economic capital orient specific groups to live and buy in specific areas of the neighbourhood. This geography of



consumption creates a level of exclusion that mainly involves long-term residents and, more precisely, the poorest part of this social group. Moreover, this gap in consumption accessibility among social groups tends to occur spatially in the physical components of the district, showing that gentrification processes can create economic and cultural barriers able to separate the social components of the population.

#### **4. CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSION**

The analysis conducted in this work addresses the transformation of the commercial landscape as an interesting interpretation key of gentrification processes. In fact, the establishment of new businesses seems to have a considerable effect on the differentiation of consumption practices, the attraction of new residents and the socio-spatial transformation of the neighbourhood. While the production of the new spaces of consumption seems to fit the changes caused by the transition of the post-industrial city, the role played by public players in promoting the commercial transformation of neighbourhoods appears to be a common element to many urban policies. In this sense, the neoliberal State creates the conditions for a structural transformation which is then developed by market players. Gentrification, in fact, seems to be a widespread policy across the globe (Smith 2002), at a time when the pervasiveness of the market has become quite influential in urban policies. The costs and benefits of these changes do not appear evenly distributed within the local population and bring about a diversification in consumption access that may contribute to the exclusion of disadvantaged social groups.

This work about commercial gentrification analyses the effects produced on a local scale by the post-Fordist transition, showing that the study of consumption practices, identity formation mechanisms, urban policies and economic investments is essential when investigating gentrification processes. In fact, urban changes can be explained thoroughly only by assessing the many elements that contribute to their introduction in the urban context. In this sense, the attention paid to the local level shows that the joint action of economic, cultural and political factors plays a central role in the commercial transformation of Bolognina.

The analysis carried out can also appear instructive in the manner in which it stresses the interaction between the commercial and residential dimensions of the change. In fact, the location of commercial concerns mapped during the research highlights the close relationship between the distribution of commercial supply, the residential preferences of gentrifiers and the transformation of the physical and social environment of the neighbourhood. In this sense, the interaction between commercial and residential gentrification seems to contribute to both the remodelling of the aesthetic connotations of certain urban sections and the formation of different consumption structures between social classes. Consequently, the inequalities in the consumption of goods and services outline a geography of social differentiation that finds material evidence in the built space: high-quality residences and places of consumption for the most affluent people and low-level living spaces and commercial areas for the poor. Although this differentiation appears to follow the high degree of fragmentation existing within the post-Fordian society, what is interesting to observe within a neighbourhood that is undergoing a gentrification process is how consumption accessibility affects social relationships, creating cultural and economic barriers among social groups who, while living close to each other, experience strongly divergent environmental and cultural contexts.

Further studies on the effects that commercial gentrification can produce locally may shed light on the different types of inequalities that this process can generate between gentrifiers and long-term residents. An interesting aspect to be investigated is the displacement suffered not only by certain categories of residents but also by the owners of businesses that are being replaced. Moreover, similar research carried out on other medium-sized cities could be useful to compare the forms of development and the potential effects of the process in different urban settings in Europe and other parts of the world.

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