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Research Title Artisans and Craftsmanship. The Florentine historical commercial activities

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Artisans and Craftsmanship. The Florentine Historical Commercial Activities

The research project concerns the documentation of historical commercial activities through an investigation of the social and cultural background of craftsmanship in Florence city centre. The historical identity of the city, which was included in 1982 in the World Heritage List, is closely related with these activities but it is increasingly being put to the test because of the changes occurred in recent years.

The city has faced the Flood of 1966, the crisis and globalization that have influenced its current urban fabric. Furthermore, under the great pressure of the era of mass tourism the main streets are slowly turning into stereotyped scenes where everything can be consumed. The disappearance of commercial activities and crafts related to the social and cultural structure of the city for the benefit of multinational business activities, are transforming the historic center into a Renaissance-themed mall. The city preserves its physical structure but it is losing its anthropic heritage that constitutes, with residents and artisans, a fundamental controller and catalyst of urban reality. The social dynamics and the relationships established between the seller and the client, between the artisan and the citizen are the same that define the neighborhood identity, which in turn represents a microcosm of the city.

In order to develop a plan of intervention and enhancement, the Municipality's Economic Activities and Tourism Department has stipulated in 2017 an agreement with the joint research laboratory "Heritage_CITYLab" of the Department of Architecture of the University of Florence (Scientific Director Prof. Stefano Bertocci) for the development of a documentation program for the historical commercial activities in Florence city centre.

The first phase, which led to the drafting of a new urban planning regulation, concerned the census of all activities (Fig. 1) through a structured census system taking into consideration the architectural and historical-artistic features and the relationship with the urban context (Fig. 2). Following a preliminary phase of study of archival documentation and previous research on the topic, the investigation on the spot has begun directly involving the shopkeepers and artisans, who pass down traditions and skills to date. The census has been matched by a photographic campaign aimed at representing the identity of these activities and by the realization of digital surveys (Fig. 3-4). The latter, implemented using the Structure from Motion methodology, are functional to the understanding and management of the system of relationships between the activities and the urban front and their influence on the image of the city. The research in the following phases envisages the development of virtual instruments for the enhancement and promotion of traditional craftsmanship as intangible heritage.

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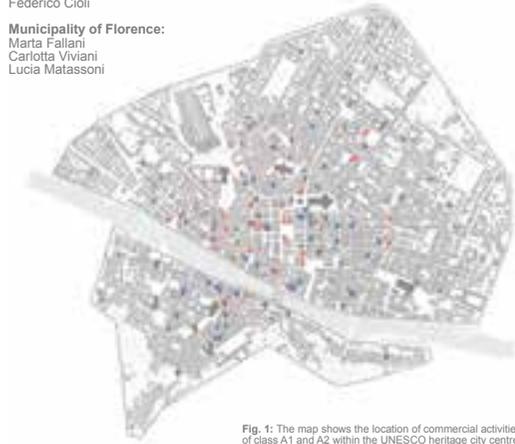


Fig. 1: The map shows the location of commercial activities of class A1 and A2 within the UNESCO heritage city centre.



Fig. 2: First and Last sheet of the form applied for the census of the commercial activities.



Fig. 3: Parts of frames made by the Leone laboratory, in via Palazzuolo.



Fig. 4: Decorative elements in bronze made by the bronzist Baldini in Via Palazzuolo.

The research project concerns the documentation of historical commercial activities through an investigation of the social and cultural background of craftsmanship in Florence city centre. The historical identity of the city, which was included in 1982 in the World Heritage List, is closely related with these activities but it is increasingly being put to the test because of the changes occurred in recent years. The city has faced the Flood of 1966, the crisis and globalization that have influenced its current urban fabric. Furthermore, under the great pressures of the era of mass tourism the main streets are slowly turning into stereotyped scenes where everything can be consumed. The city preserves its physical structure but it is losing its anthropic heritage that constitutes, with residents and artisans, a fundamental controller and catalyst of urban reality. In order to develop a plan of intervention and enhancement of historical commercial activities, the Department of Architecture DIDA of the University of Florence, in collaboration with the municipality and the UNESCO office of the city, carried out a research project to document the current situation. The first phase, which led to the drafting of a new urban planning regulation, concerned the census of all activities through a structured census system taking into consideration the architectural and historical-artistic features and the relationship with the urban context. Following a preliminary phase of study of archival documentation and previous research on the topic, the investigation on the spot has begun directly involving the shopkeepers and artisans, who pass down traditions and skills to date. The census has been matched by a photographic campaign aimed at representing the identity of these activities and by the realization of digital surveys. The latter, implemented using the Structure from Motion methodology, are functional to the understanding and management of the system of relationships between the activities and the urban front and their influence on the image of the city. The research in the following phases envisages the development of virtual instruments, such as Location-Based Apps and VR and AR technologies, for the enhancement and promotion of traditional craftsmanship as intangible heritage.