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Pantano, Eleonora and Dennis, Charles ORCID logoORCID:
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Exploring the origin of retail stores in Europe: evidence from Southern Italy from the 6th century BCE to the 3rd century BCE

Abstract. Retail literature reports considerable research on the role that technology has played in retailing as an enabler of change, with emphasis on the shifting of power from retailers to consumers. While scholarly attention has been paid mainly to investigating the current scenario in order to predict future trends and preview retail settings for the coming years, the origins of the retail process, in terms of physical space for selling activities and history of retailing as discipline of business history, is less investigated. Using qualitative data gathered through historical documents and archaeological findings, the present study goes back beyond modern retail settings to explore the origins of points of sales as early as the Magna Graecia period (600 BCE – 300 BCE). Such historical analysis not only offers an insight into the origin of the modern retailing, but also cast broader questions about the degree to which historical interpretations of the growth of retailing have been evolved, by emphasising that after 2000 years, there are still similarities. To the authors' knowledge, this current study is the first to extend the baseline for such an understanding back a further millennium or so.

1. Introduction

When consumers enter a (modern) store they seldom reflect about the huge changes occurred in retail practice in the course of history, especially when considering the technology enhanced services and the new technology touchpoints. Similarly, they do not reflect that the modern stores might still keep some similarities with the first historical examples of points of sale in Europe.

Actual points of sale witness to constant changes prompted by continuous progress in technologies. These technological innovations can be viewed as enablers of change that dramatically modified the retail landscape (Hopping, 2000; Pantano et al., 2017), prompted by the need to provide new, entertaining experiences for consumers, while integrating leisure and retail (Jones, 1999), supported by a constant technology push to development of innovative consumer solutions based on the integration of advanced technology, which shows an increasing trend towards more technological-based retail settings (Pantano et al., 2017). Offering leisure facilities solicits consumers' interest and may encourage them to engage more purchases in the store (Jones, 1999). In particular, these technological innovations provide innovative, entertaining and interactive tools to search, compare, purchase and evaluate products (Pantano et al., 2017), through new services based on user-friendly interfaces and new modalities for interacting with products and physical sellers, while providing new multisensory shopping experiences able to attract more consumers and influence their buying decisions (Backstrom, 2011; Klein et al., 2016; Papagiannidis et al., 2017; Pantano and Gandini in press.).

For this reason, the role of technology and innovation management in the retail industry is increasing in importance among retail studies aiming to predict future trends and the evolution of the process (Johnson et al., 2015; Pantano et al., 2017). According to some authors, the focus on technology at the expense of knowledge of retail history might limit the understanding of the process of evolution (Poncin and Mimoun, 2014). At the same time, the attention to innovation of business historians and economists has focused more on the emergence of department stores and diffusion of points of sale, with emphasis on British regions during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (Hilton, 1998; Hodson, 1998; Fowler 1998; Stobart and Hann, 2004; Alexander, 2008; Mitchell, 2014). The origins of retail

processes, in terms of physical space for selling activities and history of retailing as discipline of business history, have been less investigated. To fill this gap, three main research questions are posed:

RQ1: Which is the historical period in European history witnessing the origin of a permanent and stable point of sale?

RQ2: What are the main characteristics of this “first” point of sale, and to what extent is this type of store similar/dissimilar to a modern one?

RQ3: What can modern retailers learn from the “first” point of sale?

Using qualitative data gathered through historical documents and archaeological findings, the present study explores retailing focusing on the origin of points of sale in the Magna Graecia period (600 BCE – 300 BCE), in order to advance understanding the relationships between modern and ancient stores and contribute to a fuller understanding of retail change.

The Magna Graecia period has been selected as it experienced some of the most important cultural and economic developments in European ancient history. In particular, the culture and politics of the period centred upon a geographical area in Southern Italy (approximating to the modern Calabria, Campania, Basilicata and Puglia region), which was colonized by Greeks from the 8th century BCE, and represents a peak of culture, economics, politics and arts in history (as William Smith described in the *Dictionary of Greek and Roman Geography* published in 1854). The area has been considered as one of the main commercial centres in the ancient world, and one of the regions where retail marketing was established, or at least, first recorded (as the Greek historian Polybius, 200-118 BC, described in *The Histories*, book II. Line 39, which covered the period of 264-146 BC). Similarly, the history of what is now Italy has been considered of wide importance for European history and growth to solicit the interest of many business historians (Di Martino and Vasta, 2011; Felice

and Vecchi, 2015; Nuvolari and Vasta, 2015). Despite these considerations, retail literature has almost ignored this period. Therefore, the reasons for choosing Southern Italy in this period are, first, that the economic and culture peaks make it a fundamental step in European history; and second, it shows an early example of forms of commerce moving from temporary locations within main squares in city centres to more permanent and stable places. However this area has attracted little research interest concerning commerce, retail and retail history. We propose that an understanding of the history of the Magna Graecia period supports managers in making more efficient predictions for investment and strategy (Batiz-Lazo et al., 2015; Pantano et al., 2017).

The remainder of this paper is structured as follows: in the next section the notion of point of sale is discussed through the lens of a brief review of modern points of sale characteristics. Following this, the paper addresses the points of sale format and growth in Magna Graecia. Finally, the paper compares the main features of ancient points of sale with the modern scenario, and draws tentative conclusions.

2. Theoretical background

Literature has largely investigated the attractiveness of a retail store and the subsequent influence on retail patronage (Yoo et al., 1998; Thang and Tan, 2003; Vrechopoulos et al., 2004; Oh et al., 2008; Pantano, 2016). The main drivers can be classified as (i) merchandise (Baker et al., 2002; Thang and Tan, 2003), (ii) store atmosphere (including design, lights, music, etc.) (Kotler, 1973; Roy et al., in press), (iii) service (Maglio and Spohrer, 2013; Demirkan and Spohrer, 2014; Papagiannidis et al., in press), (iv) accessibility (Goodman and

Coiacetto, 2012; Teller and Scnedilitz, 2012), and (v) layout and store format (Vrechopoulos et al., 2004; Gonzales-Benito, 2005).

Merchandise includes product quality, availability and assortment of products and brands (Yoo et al., 1998; Thang and Tan, 2003). A strong merchandise mix provides a wide range of products for consumers who are therefore more likely to find products to satisfy their needs (Thang and Teller, 2003). For this reason, larger stores offering a bigger surface for displaying products might have an advantage over smaller ones, which need to make additional effort to reduce this gap, such as by exploiting mobile and digital technologies able to virtually enlarge the physical offer (Dennis et al., 2012; Demirkan and Spohrer, 2014; Hagberg et al., 2016; Papagiannidis et al., 2017). Store atmosphere is related to the environment displaying the merchandise and the ease of mobility within the store (Thang and Tan, 2003; Papagiannidis et al., 2017). The environment includes design elements such as lights, music, scent, etc. (Kotler, 1973; Thang and Tan, 2003; Poncin and Mimoun, 2014), which enhances the desirability of merchandise for consumers. The environment has been found to solicit an emotional reaction in consumers able to lead them to favourable responses (i.e. positive shopping behaviour). For instance, during festivals such as the Christmas / Winterval period or Saint Valentine's day, stores usually introduce red lights and trimmings to solicit a degree of passion in consumers and help motivate them to buy present for significant others.

The modern retail scenario is further characterized by a shift from traditional manufacturing dominant logic to service dominant logic, which promotes the development of service solutions to create value for consumers (Vargo and Lusch, 2004; Ordanini and Parasuraman, 2011; Maglio and Spohrer, 2013). Due to this increasing attention towards service, modern retail practices reflect the significant shift from a traditional face-to-face service to a

technology-enriched one able to enhance shopping experience (Hagberg, 2015; Pantano et al., 2017; Bertacchini et al., in press.). As progress in technology accelerates and consumers become more conscious of their power, retailers try to differentiate their offer by providing smart consumer solutions based on technological innovation as opposed to stand-alone services or new products (Biggemann et al., 2013; Kang et al., 2015; Roy et al., in press). Therefore, the quality of service, with emphasis on in-store service, has become a fundamental part of retail management, which increasingly integrates with innovative technologies within the traditional service mix executed by traditional store retailers.

Concerning the accessibility, in terms of location, distance, etc., past studies in retail planning emphasize that it has a minor importance compared to store atmosphere (Oppewal et al., 1997; Teller and Reutterer, 2008; Teller and Elms, 2012). Similarly, important national and international retail chains clearly state their intention to be present in the most important commercial streets (pedestrian and otherwise), often by soliciting the opening of new franchised stores in the area where the prospective consumers footfall reaches a certain threshold (i.e. the US Starbucks for coffee, the Italian underwear brand Intimissimi, the Danish fine jewellery brand Pandora, etc.). Nevertheless, recent research emphasizes consumers' increasing interest in malls rather than shopping streets or other retail agglomerations (Goodman and Coiacetto, 2012), notwithstanding that the latter have beneficial effects on retail patronage (Teller and Scnedilitz, 2012). The development of efficient malls usually involves technologies to simulate the environment and virtually test it with consumers before the final design and build commences (Bruzzone and Longo, 2010). The accessibility of modern stores is further enhanced by new technologies that facilitate the creation of innovative stores based on digital and augmented technologies that can overcome the traditional boundaries of opening hours and fixed locations by offering virtual retail

environments that can be accessed 24/7, such as e-retail websites, mobile shopping apps, ubiquitous stores and so on (Demirkan and Spohrer, 2014; Hagberg et al., 2016; Pantano et al., 2017). As a consequence, the increasing diffusion of online stores requires new frameworks for the creation of virtual stores able to provide new virtual, efficient places for shopping (Vrechopoulos et al., 2004; Hagberg et al., 2016).

Moreover, studies devoted to the classification of store types underline the importance of this classification for understanding the evolution of store formats, market structures and consumer behaviour (Gonzales-Benito, 2005). Established theories suggest three main store layout typologies, each of one able to achieve different advantages (Vrechopoulos et al., 2004): (i) grid (a rectangular arrangement of displays and long aisles that generally run parallel to one another), (ii) freeform (an asymmetric arrangement of displays and aisles, employing a variety of different sizes, shapes, and styles of display), and (iii) racetrack/boutique (the sales floor is organized into individual, semi-separate areas, each built around a particular shopping theme in order to lead consumers to certain shopping routes or paths). Since the format is designed to address the needs of different consumers' segments (Tripathi and Dave, 2013), it is sensitive towards consumers' behaviour and preferences, and might evolve according to consumers' dynamics. The continuous evolution of formats and increasing trends of cross shopping behaviour among consumers (Carpenter and Moore, 2006; Pantano et al., 2017) further makes the actual scenario more complex.

3. Data sources

The present work is supported by a series of historical studies dating back to the 3rd century BCE and contemporaneous researches concerning citizens' lifestyles and the urban geography of the Magna Graecia historical period, based on archaeological findings. On one hand, these materials reflect the importance given to that period of history; on the other hand, they demonstrate the lack of knowledge of that period from a retailing perspective.

The data are qualitative in nature, reporting various aspects of ancient consumers' behaviours and commercial practices, collected from the archives of the University of Calabria (Italy), with emphasis on the data produced for the "Virtual Museum Net of Magna Graecia" project promoted by the Regional Operational Programme 2000-2006 (aimed at providing a unitary vision of archaeological heritage of the Magna Graecia period in Calabria), and the National Museum of Locri Epizefiri (Italy), which have been further triangulated with direct observations of the archaeological sites and interviews with archaeologists of the Magna Graecia period. Most of the documents consulted are available only in the Italian or Latin languages, *viz.*, archaeological reports and (original) historical documents dating back to this period. In particular, during the interview (lasting from 30 to 50 minutes), we asked an archaeologist, with expertise of Greek archaeology, to explain the forms of commerce during the Magna Graecia period, the main characteristics, the difference with the previous forms in the classical Greek period (before Magna Graecia), and the features of the ruins of the points of sales and commercial district in Calabria, with emphasis on Lokroi. Each interview has been conducted in Italian and transcribed.

4. Retailing in Magna Graecia from the 6th century BCE to the 3rd century BCE

Historians agree that the *Agora* represents the core of cities of the Hellenic world, including Magna Graecia. The *Agora* consisted of a central public space, a square where political and commercial activities took place, where local and imported products were sold (the term literally means “gathering place” or “assembly”) (Thompson, 1972; Bertacchini et al., 2006). The *Agora* was a fixed open space where products were sold in a sort of “fair” and where also other activities also took place, presumably varying in locations within the square from day to day. From recent archaeological findings, other places for commerce have emerged. In fact, some goods were sold in fixed spaces surrounded by walls and covered by a roof. This work focuses on such fixed locations as they may represent precursors of the modern concept of a retail store.

Several excavations showed a large presence of ceramics, terracotta and gesso and tools devoted to their manufacture in (and only in) tightly delineated zones adjacent to holy areas (Barra Bagnasco, 1997). This finding has led archaeologists to hypothesize the presence of places devoted to the manufacturing of statues to satisfy the demand of votive offerings (small statues in terracotta or gesso to be offered to the gods) (Barra Bagnasco, 1989). The simultaneous combination of these elements only in certain areas suggests that these manufacturing places were located in one specific district where also the selling activity took place (Barra Bagnasco, 1997), that is, a retail agglomeration. Therefore, these agglomerations were specialized, single commodity shops, usually ceramics, terracotta and gesso.

A meaningful example is the district of *Centocamere*, part of the archaeological park of Lokroi Epizefiri, in Calabria (Southern Italy). According to archaeologists, this retail agglomeration was specialized in ceramic manufacturing, and was located close to the city gates (Barra Bagnasco et al., 1981) (Figure 1). A justification of this location might lie in the easier transport of raw materials to the production facilities combined with dispersion of

smoke away from the city center to avoid the pollution generated during the crafting of ceramics.

The specific archaeological findings at the ruins of buildings in Centocamere indicate three different environments: private home, manufacturing, and selling (usually located on the central area). Thus, according to the archaeological findings, the stores were adjacent to both private homes and the artisans' manufacturing districts. In fact, excavations in this area have unearthed several elements of terracotta craft processing, and others devoted to the commercialization of the products. Thus, the further presence of particular furnaces and production equipment for clay craft leads archaeologists to conclude that the area was used for the production of ceramic goods.

Figure 2 shows an example of modern retail agglomeration, to graphically describe the extent to which the stores are similarly located on the main street devoted to the selling of goods. In particular, the Figure 1 relates to a section of Oxford Street in London, UK (0.4 km) where it is possible to identify 3 large department stores (Debenhams, House of Fraser, and John Lewis) and other stores from national and international retail chains like Disney Store, Boots (UK health and beauty store), Uniqlo (Japanese clothing store), Zara (Spanish clothing store) and so on.

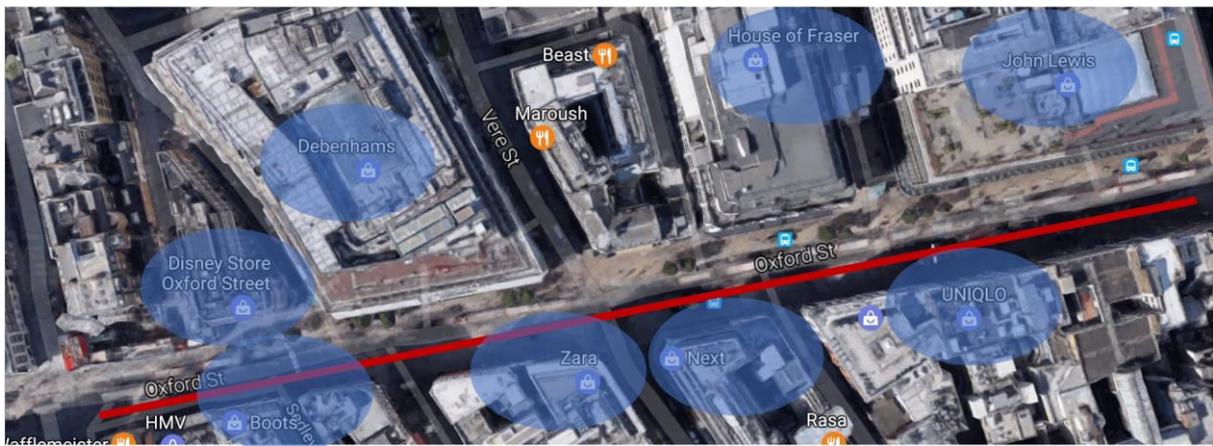


Figure 1: Example of modern retail agglomeration (Oxford Street, London, UK)

Figure 2 shows an aerial photograph of the actual scenario of Centocamere. The highlighted part of the picture focuses on a specific retail environment within the manufacturing district.



Figure 2: Aerial photograph of retail agglomeration of Centocamere in Lokroi (Calabria, Italy). Adapted from Squitieri (2012).

Figure 3 shows more in detail the portion of Centocamere highlighted in Figure 1 focusing on a single store, connected to a house and manufacturing facility. The excavations reveal the stones as they appear in the picture, delimiting the different environments, measuring 47.5 metres. x 27.7 metres overall.



Figure 3: The excavated ruins of a store in the retail agglomeration/artisan district of Centocamere in Lokroi (Calabria, Italy). Courtesy of ESG-University of Calabria.

Specifically, a central environment included a courtyard with a floor, devoted to selling, representing the store, while two peripheral areas were devoted to manufacturing (identified from the ruins of ancient furnaces) and the private home. Thus, the commercial space was on the ground floor, well connected to the both manufacturing environment and private home, with easy access to the store through ground-level doorways.

Members of Evolutionary System Group at University of Calabria (Italy) have prepared a virtual reconstruction this environment starting from the above mentioned elements in Figure

3 (Figure 4), as it looked in the Magna Graecia period, where the central block of the building consists of the ancient store. Since current excavations did not elicit any materials suggesting the presence of windows/storefront windows and no historians mentioned any texts, we can hypothesize that these ancient stores were without storefronts or other signs, and thus advertising would have been mostly based on word of mouth communication.



Figure 4: Virtual reconstruction of a store in the artisan district of Centocamere in Lokroi (Calabria, Italy). Courtesy of ESG-University of Calabria.

5. Discussion

The growing interest in retail evolution and innovation (Hilton, 1998; Stobart and Hann, 2004; Alexander, 2008; Teller and Reutterer, 2008; Goodman and Coiacetto, 2012; Hagberg et al., 2016; Pantano et al., 2017) is encouraging scholars and practitioners to develop new, more efficient frameworks to manage and predict retail change. This present study offers insights into a period of development and expanding commerce, which can aid understanding of retail processes, by extending the reach back beyond that of prior studies on retail history that mainly focus on the UK in the 18th and 19th centuries (Alexander and Akehurst, 1998;

Fowler, 1998; Hilton, 1998; Hodson, 1998; Stobart and Hann, 2004; Alexander, 2008; Mitchell, 2014). The Magna Graecia period was a rich period for culture, arts and commerce for the ancient world that warrants more investigations from a marketing perspective concerning the origin of retailing with emphasis on the point of sale. The current research demonstrates that the Magna Graecia period, more than 2,000 years ago in Southern Italy, offered a preliminary form of stores devoted to selling non-food products. Therefore, this historical period represents the starting point of the retail industry related to a fixed space, in other words stores, in Europe. These early environments provided the features of ancient specialist retailing, mainly based on a single specialist product type, with similar layouts and size, and limited to retail agglomerations at one specific district within the city. The antecedent forms of commerce, as known in ancient Greece, were related to a sort of fair, the Agora, thus not limited to a fixed space.

By the Magna Graecia period, society had made fundamental progress in retail practices, perhaps driven by evolution in response to market trends and technical progress. So it is particularly telling to note that, despite continuing change over millennia, it is still possible to observe important similarities between the ancient form of the point of retail sale and a modern equivalent. Hence, the outline of the early stores in Europe supports a more comprehensive view of the retail evolution in terms of (i) merchandise, (ii) store atmosphere, (iii) service, (iv) accessibility, and (v) layout and format.

In relation to the merchandise, it is clear that stores in the early stage of evolution were devoted to selling only one product category (usually ceramics), so typical product ranges have widened subsequently. In that period, producers retailed their own products, leading us to hypothesize that each store was based on a single product category produced by a single *firm/brand*. The modern scenario that aims to satisfy customers with optimum merchandise

mixes (Baker et al., Thang and Tan, 2003) is the result of an evolutionary process that started from the selling of only one non-food product category/brand and developed towards including a wider offer, while the role of retailer and producer have since become clearly separated in most cases.

Store atmosphere in terms of light, music, colors, design, aroma etc. is an essential ingredient of successful retail mixes in current research and practice (Kotler, 1973; Thang and Tan, 2003; Poncin and Mimoun, 2014), yet the current excavations are silent on this important aspect of retailing. Nevertheless, the excavations are still in progress (not only in Calabria but also within the other Italian regions included in the area), and it is therefore hoped that evidence on store atmospherics in the era may emerge in the future. Since the retailers of the particular product category were located within the same area and the available evidence indicates similar characteristics, it can be hypothesized that stores were differentiated by service. This means that the relationships between retailer and consumer could have been the element of the retail mix with the greatest impact on the success of the choice of the store and of the purchase process. Traditional human-based service is evidenced in response to the challenges of retail modernisation prompted by continuous progress in technology (Hopping, 2000; Dennis et al., 2012; Demirkan and Spohrer, 2014; Hagberg et al., 2016; Pantano et al., 2017; Savagiannidis et al., in press.). Although both scenarios largely employed a physical seller for the success of interactions, the modern one further adds technology to the traditionally-delivered service (Demirkan and Spohrer, 2014). Similarly, the modern retail scenario offers virtual stores that can be accessed 24/7 through the Internet and mobile devices overcoming the traditional opening hours, although data on the opening hours of the ancient scenario is absent. Since each store was connected both with the manufacturing place and private home, we can imagine that the opening times may have been related to the

timings of the craft processes or private habits of the owner/retailer. Recent studies demonstrate beneficial effects emerging from the development of retail agglomerations for both retailers and consumers (Teller and Elms, 2012; Teller and Scnedilitz, 2012), in line with the Magna Graecia scenario where retail stores devoted to a certain product category were located within the same district. The main similarities between the ancient and modern scenarios concern (i) the overarching importance of the consumer-vendor relationship, as a main driver of retailer success, and (ii) retail agglomeration. In fact, recent studies still find this form of retailing to be successful, as witnessed by the push to develop department stores, shopping malls, outlet villages, etc. (Gonzalez-Benito, 2005; Teller and Reutterer, 2012; Goodman, Coiacetto, 2012; Teller and Scnedilitz, 2012). On the other hand, modern points of sale differ in a number of ways, including retailer mix, merchandise mix, layout and format, all of which tend to be more varied in the modern store (Gonzalez-Benito, 2005; Carpenter and Moore, 2006; Tripathi and Dave 2013). In contrast, ancient ones usually had a regular, rectangular shape, presumably due to their specialization in only one product category that should be found easily even without the need to compare with other brands. Therefore, different store layouts have been developed after the 3rd century CE (after the end of Magna Graecia period), presumably when stores enlarged their offers with more products, categories and different brands/producers.

Findings further show a major difference between the modern and the ancient scenarios concerning the locations. While modern points of sale can be placed in several zones of cities (notwithstanding the preference for a zone with high pedestrians flow or within a shopping mall), during the Magna Graecia period all the stores devoted to the same product category were located in the same district (retail agglomeration). Since the points of sale were adjacent to the points of manufacture, usually these areas were outside or on the edge of the city due to

the pollution emerging from the crafting process, and the necessity of easy and fast access to the necessary water required for the manufacturing processes.

Features	Modern store	Magna Graecia store (VI cent. BCE - III cent. CE)
Merchandise	Most stores have a huge variety of products and brands	Limited to one product category, with some parallels with today's factory outlet stores (e.g. Poole Pottery in the UK specializes in ceramics and has an artisan production facility on site), or specialized manufacturing districts (e.g. Murano glass production in Murano-Venice in Italy, diamonds factories and retailers in Amsterdam).
Store atmosphere	Attention to light, music, color, design, aroma etc.	No data found
Service	Choice between human-based and technology based touchpoint	Human-based touchpoint
Accessibility	Most known retail brands presence on streets and shopping malls with the highest number of prospective consumers flow. Shifting from <i>ad hoc</i> retail agglomerations to shopping malls, with emphasis on tenant mix, service, experiential retail, and e-store 24/7 shopping	Retail agglomerations (specific districts), always on the ground floor, similar in concept to traditional unplanned retail areas that still survive into the present day
Layout and format	Regular or irregular/asymmetric, according to product categories and shopper flow goals	Rectangular in shape, no windows and connected to the private home and artisan production facility.

Table 1: Comparison between modern stores and historical ones dating back to the Magna Graecia period (6th century BCE to 3rd century CE).

6. Conclusions and future research

As would be expected in the light of the temporal difference, our research shows similarities and differences between the retail mixes of Magna Graecia stores and modern stores. It is

thus all the more striking that the consistent pattern of retail agglomerations (specific districts), always on the ground floor, is similar in concept to traditional unplanned retail areas that still survive into the present day. As retailing entered the modern age, retailers have been slow to embrace innovations (Mitchell, 2014; Pantano et al., 2017). To the authors' knowledge, this current study is the first to extend the baseline for such an understanding back a further millennium or so. After 2000 years, there are still similarities. It is therefore reasonable to hypothesize that future disruptive change to these consistent features is unlikely. This paper thus provides an important contribution to the retail literature for better understanding retail change and evolution.

Finally, our research contributes to the debate towards the Italian role in European history and growth (Di Martino and Vasta, 2011; Felice and Vecchi, 2015; Nuvolari and Vasta, 2015), by highlighting a still under-investigated topic, the role of Magna Graecia in Southern Italy in the growth of modern retailing.

The findings also have implications for practitioners, in providing an understanding of how retailing is evolving. Online and mobile channels are growing in popularity but are unlikely to fully replace physical/traditional retail stores, which have which still persist in particular districts (i.e. shopping malls, outlet villages, main pedestrian routes, etc.), in similar formats to those of more than 2,000 years ago, by still obliging retailers to find new strategies to differentiate the offer. We speculate that the differentiation in Magna Graecia was based on service, since the excavations indicate that the products were similar in terms of manufacturing, store size, raw materials, etc. For this reason, an efficient integration of technology would result in competitive advantage for modern retailers. Moreover, the specialization in a particular product typology, such as the ceramics has some parallels with today's factory outlet stores (e.g. Poole Pottery in the UK specializes in ceramics and has an

artisan production facility on site), or specialized manufacturing districts (e.g. Murano glass production in Murano-Venice in Italy, diamonds factories and retailers in Amsterdam, etc.), by representing a particular form of retailing still successful, characterized by the importance of service to differentiate the offer from the competitors.

In common with studies concerning more recent periods, this paper is subject to limitations, especially in respect of the availability of objective data at a temporal remove. Since the archaeological excavations are still in progress, archaeologists are not yet able to estimate the number of stores present in the district or the amount of products on sale. Similar districts have been found in others cities of Magna Graecia (e.g. in Herakleia, Basilicata, Italy). Findings lead archaeologists to speculate on the possible existence of bigger cities than the ones discovered to date, raising the intriguing possibility that further excavations might discover bigger, more varied stores or more extensive retail agglomerations.

This study is limited in that it is based on observations of archaeological findings and the data is therefore subject to interpretation by archaeologists and other experts such as museum curators. Future studies might provide more physical details of the store structure, such as the layout (e.g. number and position of shelves), advertising, store atmosphere, services and so on.

The present study is also limited in focusing on a specific historical period in Europe (6th century BCE to 3rd century CE). It is possible that in the same period in other parts of the world, such as ancient China and Persia, different forms of stores might have emerged or, indeed, the practice of retailing might date to earlier than 2,000 years ago. Further research is recommended to compare retail history and evolution in the same historical period or even earlier in different geographical locations.

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