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Doctoral Program in *Urban and Regional Development* (36<sup>th</sup> Cycle)

# How Food Logistics Is Changing Our Cities

## Large-Scale Retail Trade Distribution Centers in Italy

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# *Summary*

Over the past decade, Large-Scale Retail companies have significantly redefined the structure of food distribution logistics due to changes in consumer demand and calls for increased performance, food safety, and sustainability. The primary spaces where this transformation has taken place have been food Distribution Centers (DCs), which are large warehouses used to serve a network of shops and stores. Today, there are more than 450 DCs in Italy.

The literature that has so far dealt with these spaces has highlighted, on the one hand, their functionalist character, describing forms of codification and standardization, as well as the fact that they are pieces of a more extensive extra-territorial logistical network; on the other hand, it emphasizes that they are permeated by labour-related practices that create specific workspaces characterized by negotiations, tensions, and conflicts. Despite their widespread presence and increasing relevance in contemporary Italian and European urban landscapes, the impacts on the surroundings of DCs have been observed less, not only in social and environmental terms but also, and especially, in relation to the emerging new urbanizations they generate.

This research describes the increase and spread of DCs, highlighting how the operation of these spaces determines new logistics-led urbanizations characterized by an extreme diversity of spaces in terms of scale, morphology, quality, operations, and practices. Observing, describing, and interpreting them can help develop an awareness of the need to treat these new urbanizations as more ordinary spaces. This requires identifying sensitive spaces and integrating them with the demand for emerging spaces needed, including housing, mobility, energy and environmental infrastructure, spaces for well-being, and auxiliary economies, which can provide the most effective means to imagine and guide the future of this evolving city.

To do so, the research will draw on fieldwork conducted in Italian national territory since 2020, focusing in more detail on three selected areas: Santa Palomba (Roma), Aversa Nord (Caserta), and Liscate and Casirate d'Adda (Regione Logistica Milanese).

**Keywords:** food logistics; workspaces; economic and urban transformations; processes of urbanization; distribution centers.