

(IN)TANGIBLE HERITAGE(S)

A conference on design, culture and technology
- past, present and future

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(IN)TANGIBLE HERITAGE(S): Design,
culture and technology – past, present, and
future

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INTRODUCTION

(IN)TANGIBLE HERITAGE(S): Design, culture and technology – past, present, and future

The buildings, towns and cities we inhabit are physical entities created in the past, experienced in the present, and projected to inform the future. The same can be said of the artefacts we use daily: designed furniture in the home, the mobile devices in our hands, the vehicles we see on our streets. However, each of these places, buildings and products had, at their inception, social and cultural roles beyond their 'object' status. They continue to have them today. What we understand a designed object to be then, is a complex question of material and social import, and an intricate play of the tangible and intangible identities. Increasingly, it is also a question of hybrid experiences and overlaid histories. This conference addresses the range of issues connected to this scenario.

The complexity described above is even more pronounced in the case of digital artefacts and experiences such as computational design, VR simulations of ancient buildings, mobile apps, digital photography or virtual exhibitions. Intangible at the very moment of their inception, such designed artifacts not only blur the difference between the object and the experience, but, increasingly, the past and the present. Computer generated imagery creates 'life like' reconstructions of historic sites. Laser scanning gives archeologists glimpses of pasts erased long ago. Computational design gives designers instant recordings of their work in progress. Coupled with digital cataloguing, it gives us the instant asynchronous design archive.

Considered in this context it is not surprising that recently questions about the nature of heritage and design have opened up to redefinitions of the tangible and the intangible. In responding to this scenario the work of the authors collected in this publication present a diverse range of perspectives from various fields including art, architecture, design and cultural studies, to name but a few. They present reconsiderations of 'heritage' as both a tangible and an intangible concept and overlay our notions of the digital, on ideas of heritage and concepts of physicality and the present.

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HISTORICAL AND TRADITIONAL TRADE: A FUNDAMENTAL ELEMENT OF THE CULTURAL IDENTITY OF CITIES. A REPORT ON THE SURVEY ON FLORENTINE HISTORIC SHOPS

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INTRODUCTION

The paper investigates the relationship between the city and historical and traditional trade, which testifies to the cultural evolution of cities while portraying behaviours and social habits reflected in the urban facades and the streets. Historical centres are particularly subject to a loss of identity, which follows the decline of artisanship and tradition, and jeopardises the integrity and authenticity of the entire site.

Historic and traditional shops have a fundamental role in preserving the urban heritage. In particular, the main commercial streets are necessary for social sustainability and cultural exchange.

Shops are the central place of human relations, representing an essential testament to their demo-ethno-anthropological heritage. The crucial role of the commercial landscape highlighted the need to record the intangible value in the urban documentation and survey campaign. These aspects represent the fragile part of cities' heritage that should be safeguarded to preserve the site's "authenticity".¹

In fact, «Retail history is a rich, cross-disciplinary field that demonstrates the centrality of retailing to many aspects of human experience, from the provisioning of everyday good to the shaping of urban environments; from earning a living to the construction of identity».²

The research aims at defining more homogeneous criteria and operational protocol for the documentation of historic shops, along with considering the material aspects of the architectural structure, the furniture, the shop windows, and their relations with the urban environment, history, social life, and economic and artistic culture.

The historical Centre of Florence is the case study for this in-depth analysis. A collaboration between the University of Florence and the Municipality of the city was set up in 2017, with the aim to define a new strategy for safeguarding and enhancing the cultural heritage of historic shops.³ Furthermore, the research investigates the relationship between historical and traditional shops and the city, underlining the mutual influence between the tangible elements of architecture and urbanism and the intangible heritage of tradition.



Figure 1. From left: Berlin's historic KaDeWe shopping centre during the Christmas season. Detail in decorated ceramic of a commercial front in Oporto. Leadenhall Market internal gallery in London (credit: Simone Bettoli)

CITY AND COMMERCIAL HERITAGE

Since ancient times, commercial architecture has been based on the principles of perception, with decorative devices being used to attract customers' attention.

Over time, the relationship between shops and public spaces has evolved, creating complex systems that increasingly transcended the physical reality of the streets, entering the “hyperuramic” world of telecommunications. The contemporary city has a double spatiality: the physical sphere of everyday life and social relations in the streets and squares; and the super-local, a virtual spatiality made of flows and networks.⁴

The fast evolution of commerce and trends constantly modified cities, weakening their historical identity over time.⁵ The architecture of urban spaces is dynamic: streets, squares and buildings are the constants that define a city's structure, while shops are inevitably subject to changes, which will also influence the social life.

The management of a city's commercial landscape involves many actors; First and foremost, the owners' interests must be balanced with those of the sellers, as well as the tastes of an increasingly globalised clientele. It must also consider the local community, who together with the shopkeepers constitute the social value of the city.⁶

All these aspects have a significant impact on the community: «When local shops change from one type to another, long-time residents and users experience a wrenching sense of loss. They have lost their “moral ownership” of the street, a sense of belonging that goes beyond legal property rights and is based on a deep identification with the culture of the space».⁷

In this context, the role that local shops play in structuring the identity of a neighbourhood or urban district is fundamental.⁸ These activities are often family-run and define the commercial character of a street, becoming reference points for the local community.⁹

The shops are not only the backdrop for shopping, but have substantial importance for social sustainability and cultural exchange within cities: local stores help build community, maintain a human scale, and contribute to local economic growth.



Figure 2. From left: Entrance to the historic Viena café in Barcelona. Detail of the historic Ginjinha Rubi restaurant in Lisbon (credits: Roberta Ferretti). Commercial front of the Tullio Bosio pharmacy in Turin (credits: Gian Marco Tramontano)

Historic and traditional shops

In the Seventies and Eighties, many European historical centres underwent a radical change with the development of suburbs, the diffusion of supermarkets and the increased use of private transportation. The widespread use of low-cost airlines and the development of mass tourism impacted the way we experience cities. Historical centres attract investments from large international companies eager to open luxury hotels and chain stores. This situation has a significant impact on the local economy: it contributes to increasing the real estate values and it encourages the exodus of residents to the suburbs. The departure of part of the residents and the closure of local shops lead to a loss of identity, impacting the remaining community that makes the city alive and functional.

In European cities such as Florence and Lisbon, these changes are mainly due to tourism (*touristification*), which continues to attract foreign companies that invest in the area without providing local economic improvements.

Today's commercial architecture is strictly influenced by e-commerce and modern technologies such as Augmented, Virtual and Mixed Reality, and it is evolving continuously, influenced by trends. In this context, the historic shop represents the permanence of the past in the present, handing down part of the history of cities and territories. Year after year, these substantial changes become less noticeable as they are part of everyday life. To protect the commercial and social heritage of the city, some local administrations have developed tools to identify and inventory those shops that in some way help to pass on local historical and cultural identity.

Generally, a “historic and traditional shop” is a commercial activity that has been operating in a static space for at least 50 years, that has maintained its original function and link with tradition over time, passing down the knowledge and practices through the generations. Several European cities have promoted documentation and safeguarding projects, such as *Lojas com Historia* of the Municipality of Lisbon and *Ruta dels Emblemàtics* of the Municipality of Barcelona.

In this problematic context, encountered throughout Europe and aggravated by the 2008 crisis and the COVID-19 pandemic, historic shops are surviving according to three main approaches.¹⁰ resistance (remaining authentic, hoping for an economic and political change); resilience (adapting to the new times through the proposal of more marketable products); modernisation (through a significant transformation of the image, product, and customers).

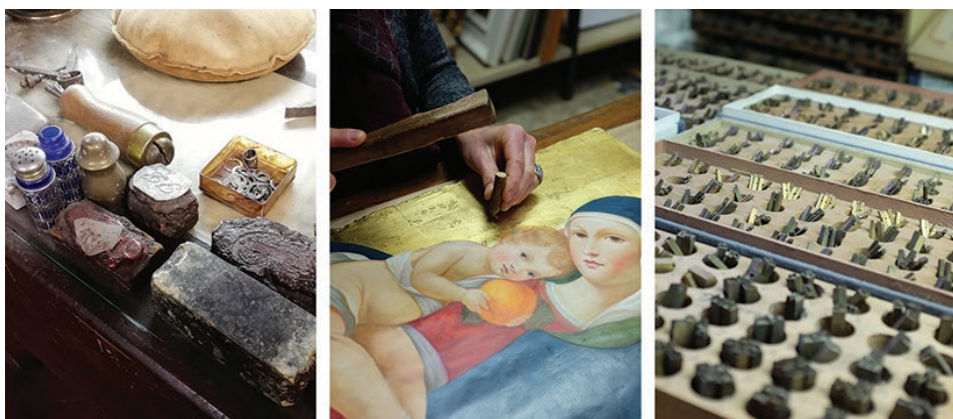


Figure 3. Artisans in Florence. From left: Work tools from the Nerdi Orafi laboratory. Decoration of a Madonna on wood, Dipinti Bianchi company. Work tools of the Balsimelli Bookbinding

HISTORIC SHOPS AS WITNESSES OF INTANGIBLE CULTURAL HERITAGE

To understand the research's goal, it is essential to consider the value that historic shops assume as demo-ethno-anthropological heritage and which can be the tools to analyse both their architectural and urban and socio-cultural value. Cultural heritage is not only made up of physical elements such as buildings and monuments but also of traditions that have been passed on through the generations. These traditions and their constant renewal are the engines that keep the cultural process of a city and a territory alive over time and constitute the critical element of irreproducibility. In fact, once the intangible heritage has disappeared, it cannot be recreated.

Artisans and their traditional manufacturing processes are an irreplaceable resource, which help preserving the know-how that was an integral part of the city, and continues to keep the image of the city intact. The profound interdependence between intangible and tangible cultural heritage has long been ignored, sometimes leading to the survival of architecture despite its social value. Some historical elements, such as signs and furnishings, remain silent witnesses of a commercial and productive past as a mere element of street furniture. By adopting the *Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage*¹¹ in 2003, UNESCO took an essential step towards recognising this cultural heritage, considered fundamental to maintain cultural diversity and promote of intercultural dialogue.

With the introduction of the term "Intangible Cultural Heritage" (ICH), UNESCO not only wants to shift from the material to the immaterial dimension, but it also recognises cultural expressions as cultural processes in their entirety and complexity, to be considered dynamic over time.¹² An important innovation introduced by the 2003 Convention was to replace the term "conservation" with that of "safeguard", recognising the intangible heritage as a living object. That means that cultural heritage must be considered free to evolve, overcoming the static criterion of preservation.

The 2003 Convention raises the question of what we want and must consider heritage to preserve those local cultural aspects to be handed down to future generations. However, the intangible heritage is more fragile than the material one, as it is closely linked to the people who make it exist. This entails the need to develop protection strategies that consider various aspects. As already mentioned, the difficulty of safeguarding intangible heritage is connected to habits and traditions that have been handed down spontaneously over time, and any forcing can compromise their authenticity. The UNESCO label and its strong attractiveness influences the tourism industry, which often intervenes negatively in the genuineness and survival of cultural events.¹³ In this context, the recognition of ICH remains a significant step forward in a historical period in which globalisation tends to level out and erase less intense cultural expressions and which are impossible to recover once they have disappeared.

In particular, the close correlation between tangible and intangible heritage, place, tradition, and culture is highlighted, as the one depends on the other in terms of maintaining the concept of “authenticity”.

Documentation and safeguarding strategies

To define a system of safeguarding and protecting commercial activities, it is necessary to consider their historical evolution over time, highlighting the dynamic nature of commercial architecture, excluding static documentation systems and conservative safeguard systems.

One of the things that mainly emerged from the history of contemporary commercial architecture is the dynamism of the forms, which must attract and be constantly innovative, modifying the “image” of cities at pace with the evolution of commerce. The 2003 Convention recognises “inventory” as the essential measure for the protection of ICH,¹⁴ and it identifies the three phases of the inventory methodology:

- a) Research and data collection in the field;
- b) Identification and multimedia documentation (paper, audio or visual);
- c) Interpretation of the acquired data.¹⁵

The act of documenting records an exact moment of the phenomenon under investigation and can slow down or even stop the possible development.¹⁶ The 2003 Convention highlights the dynamic nature of culture, recognising its evolution and the need for its vitality. The Convention insists on the essential social function of heritage and the importance of the participation of communities in all stages of the process of safeguarding the Intangible Cultural Heritage,¹⁷ preferring a bottom-up system, i.e., mainly promoted by the interested parties, over top-down, i.e., mostly based on administrative protection strategies.

These assumptions are an essential reference in research projects concerning historical and traditional shops, especially in those contexts where craftsmanship is an integral part of urban culture. The need to develop an intervention strategy to document, understand, manage, and promote the intangible elements of the commercial architectural heritage is an increasingly debated issue on the international scene, as it will help preserving the historical commercial identity of cities.

HISTORIC SHOPS IN THE UNESCO CITY CENTRE OF FLORENCE

Historical centres are suffering for the loss of “authenticity”, catalysing mass tourism and becoming fertile ground for investments by multinationals and large international brands aimed at exploiting the “shop window” factor of the city. The research aims to focus on the issues and develop a method of interpreting the phenomenon of historical and traditional shops through the case study of Historical Centre of Florence. In Florence, the constant loss of local and historic shops prompted the municipal administration to develop an intervention plan in 2018, which led to the draft and approval of the *Regulations for the protection and enhancement of historical and traditional Florentine economic activities*. The value of “authenticity” of the historic centre of Florence, included in the UNESCO World Heritage List in 1982, is strongly linked to the uniqueness of Florentine craftsmanship and traditional shops, which guarantees the continuity of an exceptional practice connected to the “image” of the city. Amongst the criteria for inclusion in the list, the importance of historic shops is highlighted, which testify to the past and constitute a factor of continuity with the present.

The development of an investigative methodology to document historic and traditional Florentine shops requires understanding the role played by commercial activities towards the city and the historic centre, highlighting their relationships and deep interdependence. The investigation into the historical evolution of the shops does not only mean studying the history of the city and the development of its political and economic aspects, but it is also useful highlight and analyse the social relationships and the role that craftsmanship and tradition play in the cultural and urban image of the city. The recent

improvement in digital survey technologies and Digital Humanities have resulted in increased opportunities in heritage documentation, facilitating a rapid updating of data and the development of increasingly intuitive and immediate user systems. These tools consent to a multilayer methodology that connects and integrates the aspects of the qualitative and quantitative survey with those of the architectural study.



Figure 4. The census was carried out within the municipal perimeter. The image shows the four pages of the data-sheet census form, the GIS with the location of the historic shops in the UNESCO centre of Florence and some characteristic historic shop windows

The digital survey campaigns

The starting point for this research lies in structuring the data-sheet census system that allows the rapid updating of data and the timely extrapolation of helpful information at various scales of intervention. Laser-scanner and photogrammetric *Structure from Motion* (SfM) digital surveys supported the census to document the shops as a physical element in constant evolution. The project database is therefore composed of a constantly updated side connected to a GIS (*Geographic Information System*) and a static one that documents some shop's crystallized images through drawings. The census form is divided into four main sections:

- (A) General classification data;
- (B) Description of the architectural structure;
- (C) Description of the history and products;
- (D) Relationship with the urban context.

The census involved over 400 commercial activities within the municipal area. The survey investigated links, history, product characteristics and processing techniques through interviews with shopkeepers, creating an archive rich in multimedia material: photographs, videos, and stories. These data have contributed substantially to understanding the fundamental problems of preserving this heritage. The digital survey activities considered three scales of intervention: the small shop, the monumental complex, and the commercial street.¹⁸ The case studies, chosen for their environmental and architectural value, were involved in digital laser-scanner and photogrammetric SfM surveys to represent the interiors and the relationship with the urban front.

The survey campaigns were carried out using a Faro Focus M70 and a Z+F 5016 laser-scanners, equipped with integrated cameras that acquire highly descriptive 3D data, supplemented by well-balanced high-resolution images in colour representation.

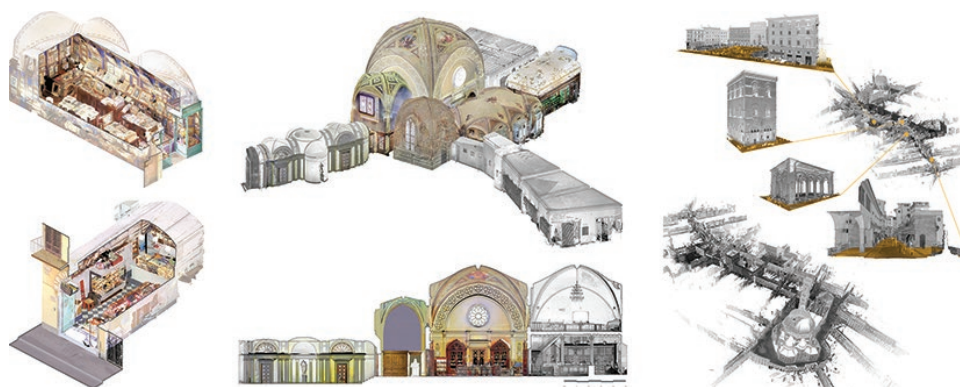


Figure 5. 3D point cloud models at the three scales of analysis: the small shop, the monumental complex, and the commercial street

The data acquisition involved planning many stations to obtain a complete 3D point cloud model, some of which overlapped at different heights, to avoid the formation shadow cones on the surfaces. Once registered, the point cloud required a post-production and data cleaning process to remove improperly generated parts due to the shiny, reflective, translucent, and transparent surfaces. The SfM photogrammetric survey concerned the external facade of the buildings, focused on shop windows and signs. The architectural drawing was performed at a detailed scale of 1:20, in addition to drawings on a scale of 1:10, 1:5, 1:2 and 1:1. Plants and sections represent the historical furnishing systems and decorative elements, drawn based on sketches and measurements taken by the direct survey. The digital survey campaign applied to the case study of the historic shops of the centre of Florence served to return the graphic drawings representing plans, elevations, and sections, helpful in setting up an abacus of the characterizing elements, to deepen further the historical activities in different cities of Italy and Europe, and to relate mutual influences and their evolution throughout history.



Figure 6. Images from within the 3D point cloud models. Top left: Molteni Pharmacy; top right: the Bizzarri shop. Bottom left: the Baccani Frames and Prints shop; bottom right: the Officina Profumo Farmaceutica of Santa Maria Novella

CONCLUSION

Coordinating the various parts of the documentation and information collected during the survey phases is essential to offer a reliable overall picture, which also considers the heritage's intangible aspects. The historic shops' value as a demo-ethno-anthropological testimony constitutes an asset that cannot be

separated from the city in a rational planning framework consistent with the identity of the place. The analysis aimed to develop a reference model for research, documentation, management, and protection of historic shops – applicable nationally and on the European and international scene – to define broader and more complete economic and cultural dynamics that bind historical commerce and cities.

The research highlights an essential issue for safeguarding historic shops: the dynamism of trade undermines a static protection system that would risk making the spontaneous aspects of culture, architecture, and the city disappear. However, it emerges that some fixed and essential points relating to conserving the historic image of shops can be identified under the principles of the UNESCO Convention on ICH.¹⁹

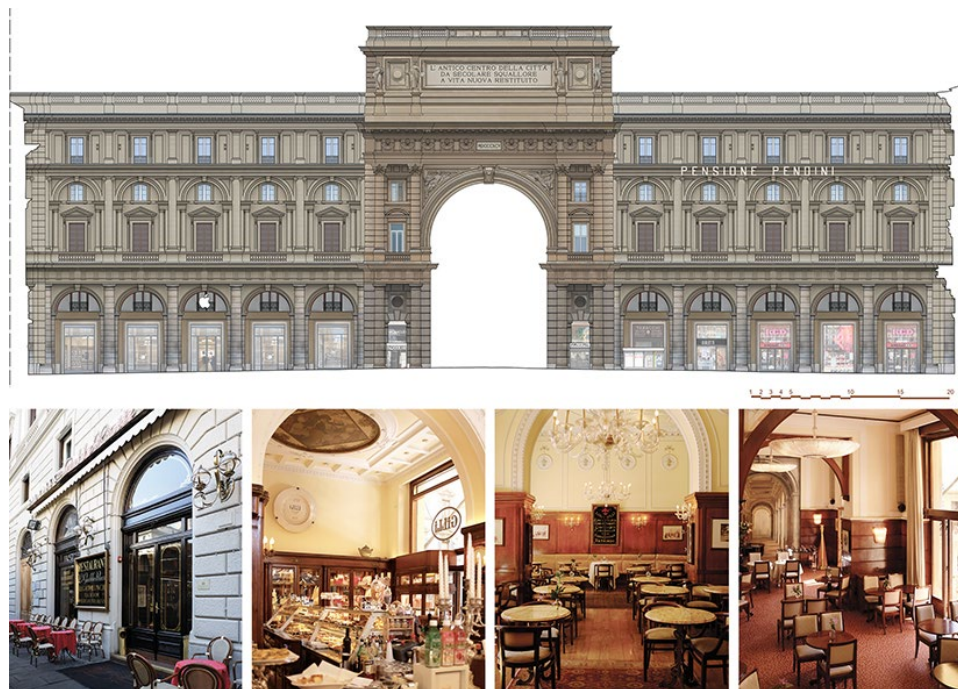


Figure 7. East architectural elevation of Piazza della Repubblica for the study of the relationship between historic cafes and urban space (credits: Chiara Fogato)

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The research is an integral part of my doctoral thesis entitled: *Urban identity and intangible cultural heritage. Digital survey and representation of historical and traditional Florentine commercial activities*. PhD Federico Cioli, Supervisor: Prof. Stefano Bertocci.

NOTES

¹ The term “authenticity” was discussed at the Nara Conference on Authenticity in 1994. In particular, the conference highlighted that the concept has a different meaning between East and West and should not be related to cultural heritage. Despite this, some declarations on historical centres, such as that of the historic centre of Florence, claim that their authenticity must be preserved, handing down traditions and cultural values.

² Howard Vicki and Jon Stobart, *The Routledge Companion to the History of Retailing* (London and New York: Routledge, 2019), 2.

³ Stefano Bertocci and Federico Cioli, “The documentation of the historical commercial activities in Florence city centre”, in *Drawing as (in) tangible*, ed. Rossella Salerno (Roma: Gangemi Editore, 2018), 941–948.

⁴ Eleonora Fiorani, *I panorami del contemporaneo* (Milano: Lupetti, 2005), 11.

⁵ Vanni Codeluppi and Mauro Ferraresi, *La moda e la città* (Roma: Carocci, 2007), 13.

⁶ Philip Kasinitz et al. “Local shops, Global Streets”, in *Global cities, local streets. Everyday diversity from New York to Shanghai*, ed. Sharon Zukin et al. (New York: Routledge, 2015), 195.

⁷ Sharon Zukin et al. “Spaces of Everyday Diversity. The Patchwork Ecosystem of Local Shopping Streets”, in *Global cities, local streets. Everyday diversity from New York to Shanghai*, ed. Sharon Zukin et al. (New York: Routledge, 2015), 24.

⁸ A local shop is a commercial activity not linked to major international brands, which operates mainly within a neighbourhood context, providing the inhabitants with specific services (e.g., hairdressers, florists, shoemakers, etc.), residence services and goods necessities (e.g., food, newspapers, butchers, etc.).

⁹ Jane Jacobs, *Vita e morte delle grandi città. Saggio sulle metropoli americane* (Torino: Einaudi, 2009).

¹⁰ Pedro Chamusca et al., “O comércio como património: o projeto “Lojas com História”” (paper presented at the XI Congresso da Geografia Portuguesa, Porto, Portugal, November 9–11, 2017).

¹¹ Federico Cioli, “The intangible cultural heritage: a dialogue between East and West”, *Firenze Architettura, Quaderni* (2020): 126–133.

¹² Chiara Bortolotto, “Introduzione”, in *Il patrimonio immateriale secondo l’UNESCO. Analisi e prospettive*, ed. Chiara Bortolotto (Roma: Istituto Poligrafico e Zecca dello Stato, 2008), 19.

¹³ Marco D’Eramo, “Unescocide”, *New Left Review*, 88 (2014): 47–53.

¹⁴ Luciana Mariotti, “Prospettive italiane della Convenzione per la salvaguardia del patrimonio culturale immateriale. Ipotesi di analisi tra antropologia e norme giuridiche”, in *Il patrimonio immateriale secondo l’UNESCO. Analisi e prospettive*, ed. Chiara Bortolotto (Roma: Istituto Poligrafico e Zecca dello Stato, 2008), 79.

¹⁵ These phases were identified during the Inventorying Intangible Cultural Heritage meeting, Paris, 2005.

¹⁶ Lorenzo Brutti, “Documentare l’intangibile: dai progetti di banche dati audiovisive ai sistemi di informazioni” in *Il patrimonio immateriale secondo l’UNESCO. Analisi e prospettive*, ed. Chiara Bortolotto (Roma: Istituto Poligrafico e Zecca dello Stato, 2008), 115.

¹⁷ Chiara Bortolotto and Marta Severo, “Inventari del patrimonio immateriale: top-down o bottom-up?”, *Antropologia museale*, anno 10, numero 28/29 (2011): 24–33.

¹⁸ These experiences were conducted within a thematic seminar entitled *The Historical Shops of Florence: integrated survey workshop of architecture* of the Laboratory of Survey of Prof. Bertocci for the Bachelor’s and Master’s degree in Architecture of the University of Florence. The selected commercial activities are the Molteni Pharmacy in via Calzaiuoli, the Anzuini and Massi Butcher in via dei Neri, the Baccani Frames and Prints shop in Borgo Ognissanti, the Bizzarri shop in via della Condotta and the Officina Profumo Farmaceutica di Santa Maria Novella. The commercial street taken into consideration is instead the one that from Cathedral square reaches Ponte Vecchio.

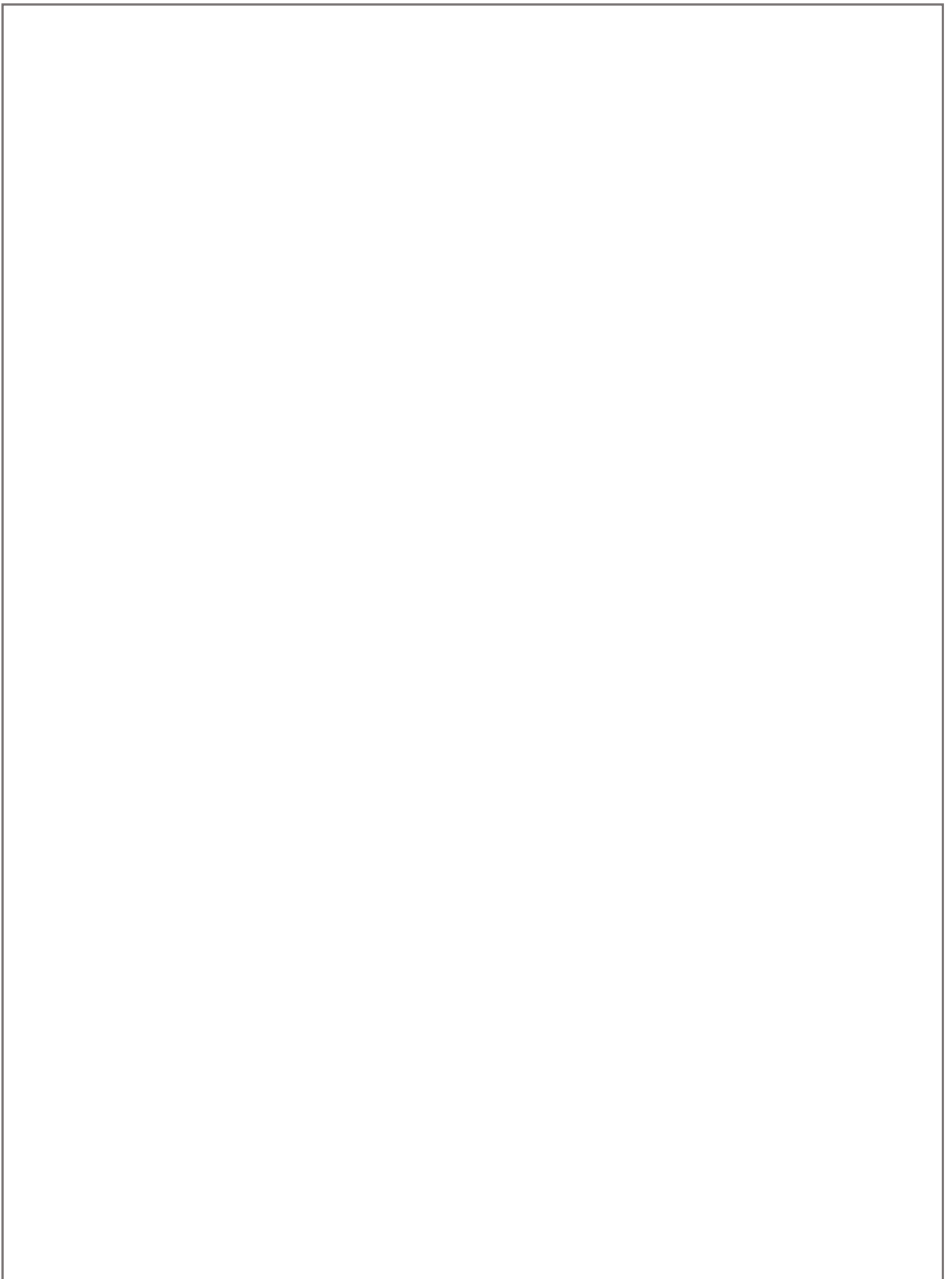
¹⁹ The Culture of the Vienna Coffee Shop (Wiener Kaffeehauskultur) - a classic example of a style and way of living in the city that spreads throughout Europe - was included in the list of Intangible Cultural Heritage by UNESCO in 2011, representing a prime example of recognition of this category in the UNESCO lists.

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