

# FIRENZE EXPERIENCE & IMPRESSION

SFU ITALIA DESIGN 2007 HEATHER CHIANG

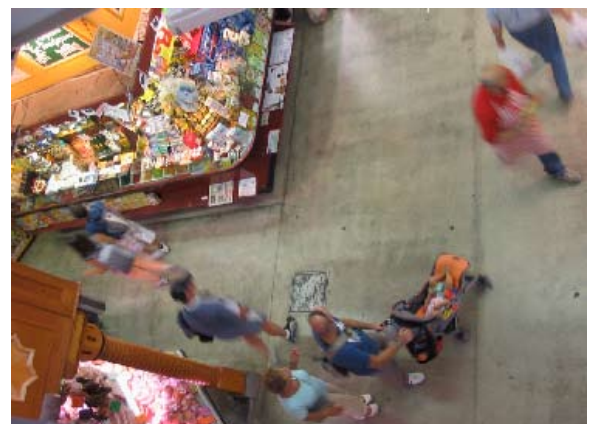
## Dynamics of Delight Application

Peter F. Smith's Dynamics of Delight analyzes how people interpret aesthetics in an attempt to understand the creation of delightful spaces and interactions, with respect to architectures, piazzas, streets, cities. This second part of the assignment is to apply the terminologies and concepts from Dynamics of Delight to analyze the social spaces and human interactions of streets and piazzas.

When I considered where to focus this part on, I searched for a street that is more interesting than the rest and a piazza that is different from the others.

I came upon a street block that opens during the passeggiata and has very interesting items on display. As well, I found Mercato Centrale to be a very fascinating place bustling with daily activities and social interactions, with locals and tourists wondering around aisles of vendors and eateries, each of which found a way to display its own identity.

I decided to focus on these two spots as well as the space surrounding the market.



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## Street - Borgo la Croce Experimental Night Market

Italian streets and square are where people flow through and go about their daily activities while socializing with friends, family, and total strangers. It is where the little dramas of life play themselves out, where people go and stop, where they can observe others and in return, be observed themselves.

Strolling through the streets, or passeggiata, is a ritual, a social momentum partly through which the culture continues and sustains itself. Bars along the streets offer a drink to those who prefer to sit and chat instead and gelaterias make sure delicious ice creams always complement the stroll. Local Italians take back the streets while avoiding the heat of the day and most of the tourists. With the assurance of the crowd, people comfortably enjoy themselves and each other's company. Passeggiata takes place during the evening when the air is cool and fresh, through major streets and squares, during which the whole street scape becomes a sidewalk.

However, most stores are closed at this time of the day; only bars, restaurants, gelaterias, clubs and such are open, with street vendors scurrying about the major squares and attractions.

Amongst this there is one block on Borgo la Croce, located right before the street enters Piazza Beccaria, that decided to try out something different. For one week each year several stores on that block reopen at about 9 PM and close at 11PM to midnight. The Italians bring out the chairs and tables by the sidewalk, display their products, chat and enjoy the evening air. This little market attracted arts and craft makers from other parts of Italy to come and sell their handmade work in little booths out on the sidewalk in front the stores that are closed. At this off-city-center location, the passeggiata crew stops to check out the quality handwork or just to shop for other products.

The lights in an otherwise dark street, the booths and crowds of people act as social attractors for the passersby, although this place is not well known, those who bumped into it will be pleasantly surprised by the craftsmanship, rewarded with reaching an interesting destination and



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seeking out different arts.

Old books, ceramics plates, cloths, handmade wooden and bead necklace and bracelets, lamps with large semi-transparent pedals and leaves covering the light bulbs, designed color painted t-shirts and shorts, handcrafted jewelries, furnitures, household and kitchen accessories, hand woven table mats, as well as bedroom and washroom accessories spread onto the street, distinguished by the aesthetic design of the individual stores and booths.

A young lady pulls out her paint board, on top of which lays a t-shirt she's painting on. Around her are tops, skirts, jackets, and shorts that she's already done with, each with a different pattern. On the booth beside it, a guy from a town close to San Gimignano comes to Florence for the week to sell necklaces, earrings, small bowls, and other accessories; he works with different kinds of wood as well as silver and bronze. Across the street an old Italian lady is weaving a thin white thread into all kinds of small teacup mats and table mats. In sophisticated details she creates different flower patterns. And apparently, she is there just because, for her works are for display and not for sale.

Also, in the store behind the weaving lady, I happily found some neat Alessi household products.

Most of those who came by are Italians, with the exception of a few tourists who have wondered in at this time of the night. Friends and families come and children learn from the weaving lady, chatting and enjoying their time. Women and men come and check out the clothes, household supplies, books, and accessories, while others throw curious glances as they bike or walk on by.

The creativity of the individuals and that of the society created this convergence of talents, pushing the possibility of new interactions at night, building on passeggiata and the Italian culture as a whole. My wish is that this little market would continue and grow, big enough to showcase even more personally designed works, but small enough to not become a tourist attraction, as many other street markets now seem to only target tourists.



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## Market - Mercato Centrale

Mercato Centrale, the central food market in Florence, is fascinating and complex on many levels, from its historical significance and the surrounding street scape to sustaining day to day activities and little human interactions. Born out of urban changes, it embodies an accumulated experience of space reorganization through time.

When the capital of the newly united Italy moved from Turin to Florence in 1860, the old historic center of Florence was reconstructed. The growth of population urged for three new markets, the largest of which was Mercato Centrale, located in San Lorenzo.

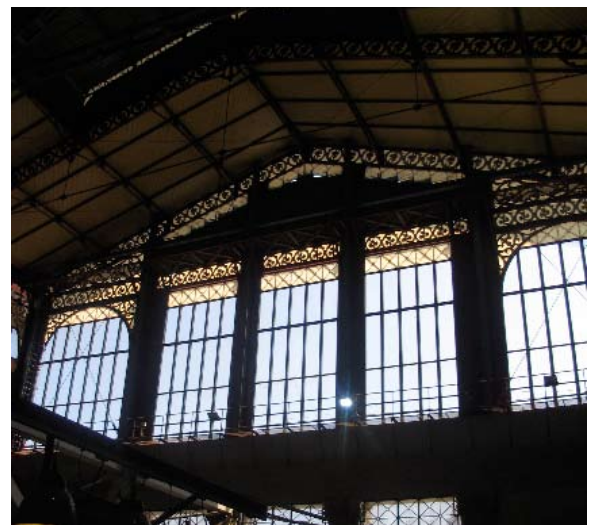
To open up a vast area for the market, an old neighborhood named Camaldoli was torn down and in 1874 Mercato Centrale was constructed by Giuseppe Mengoni using mainly glass and cast iron, the most innovative materials of the era.

The old elements were integrated with the new. Placed on a large square stone base composed of an arcade with 10 classical Renaissance arches on both the front and the back facade, the cast iron and glass structure on top act as large high windows, allowing abundant light to filter into the market. The underlying structure is layered with the combination of materials, forms and styles of different eras, creating a delightful structure that is sensitive to its time and place.

The bright colors of green and red stand out in the neighborhood, while matching the color of the windows from across the street, and yet the grey and beige stones blend in with its neighboring structures and the rusticated style echos the Palazzo Medici nearby.

When other markets were demolished, Mercato Centrale stood the test of time and continues to serve Italians supplies of fresh food. It is where life was enhanced and thus symbolic of that part of the history.

Inside the market, aisles of stalls group together in clusters to allow people plenty of space to move through and walk around the clusters to check out the products.



# FIRENZE EXPERIENCE & IMPRESSION

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The ground floor sells meats, fish, salami, cheeses, and a variety of oils, a few flower and wine stalls, and eateries and cafes which are often located on a corner or near the entrance for people to grab a quick lunch and coffee.

Each stall is decorated with their own identity or just beautified with flowers, puppets, animal graphics, creating diversity among the otherwise grid-like market stalls and aisles. This is consistent with the chaos theory in Dynamics of Delight which states that harmony comes from coherent diversity. It was also stated that aesthetics come from the alliance between practical and symbolic, here the symbolic operates on many levels, including the poetic identities.

Along the side of the market a section with tables and chairs is dedicated for sitting-down customers, decorated by the eateries beside it, with old pictures of the local and store people, flowers and wallpapers.

Going to the top floor the vendors sell fresh fruits and vegetables, and dried fruits. Here the structure of Mercato Centrale is better revealed, with white supporting beams spanning across the middle and further structure that goes up to the ceiling. This is a floor high enough for those upstairs to be unnoticeable to those underneath and thus makes for a great people watching spot.

Many of the products still directly come from farms, resulting in high quality items, and the unbeatable prices create a constant flow of people consists of local Italian families, moms, couples and elders, as well as tourists. The market becomes not only a place that support day to day living, but also a social attractor for locals, especially for the elders. People can spend time enjoy wondering about the different stalls, compare the products and chat with the stall owners, who sometimes offer small food and wine tastings.

Outside, a different kind of market continues, covering the streets with vendors who for the most part target tourists. The space surrounding Mercato Centrale is mainly used for parking of cars and bikes, while allowing the traffic to pass through. After the market closes at 2 PM, the outdoor space is instead used for social activities.

