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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Lo Sardo Square district is located in the heart of Messina’s historical downtown. Its central location makes the area a vital node in the city traffic flows, but at the same time has a marginal role in the commercial structure of the city. It is surrounded by highly populated neighborhoods, several offices, and multiple institutions. Together these attractions represent a significant potential market that Lo Sardo Square merchants could capture. The area also hosts one of the most remarkable scenes of the whole downtown. The square with its elegant building and its arcades is an architectural asset on which the district needs to capitalize.

Despite these assets, Lo Sardo Square faces many challenges; in particular, the surrounding, competing corridors offering goods and entertainment options the district doesn’t, and its general perception as the beginning of the Messina periphery. Additionally, the area does not possess cohesive design elements, it’s a chaotic traffic node (a sort of gateway between the downtown and the southwest residential neighborhoods), it hosts polluting and noisy commercial activities, and, despite the fact that the square is actually closed to automobile circulation, it is not a pedestrian friendly environment, including a poor illumination system and street furniture. Finally, the area is not commercially structured and lacks a merchants association; the first weakness of a district that needs cohesion and a shared development plan.

Nevertheless, the district has several opportunities upon which it can build. This includes the enormous potential to capture different market segments that are already in place, including; the student population living in the nearby dorm, the University located a few feet away, and the employees of several offices (banks, professional services, insurance companies, etc…) and the Court. Another important element is the square’s spatial patterns, which are perfect for a natural commercial district. It is imperative that Lo Sardo Square merchants combine these two elements, attracting new customers within a pleasant scenario, transmitting a warm sense of enclosure, typical of a convenient neighborhood.

A qualitative market analysis for the district, together with an examination of stakeholders’ views, revealed that the district could host other commercial activities to complement current offerings. These new uses include sit-down restaurants, bars and coffee shops, music stores, bookshops, gift shops, women’s and girl’s apparel, specialty groceries, and food and handcrafts open markets. An examination of existing conditions data, stakeholders’ views and the market analysis also provides the framework for the following recommendations:

I. Organization
   • Establish a Local Merchants Association as a managing body of the Lo Sardo Square Natural Commercial Center
   • Create public participation around plan approval and its implementation

II. Economic
   • Recruit new businesses that complement the local, independent character of the area and that offer new services that appeal to a larger number of customers
   • Strengthen existing businesses through an active retention and enhancement program
   • Relocate incompatible commercial activities and services to a more suitable area

III. Design
   • Create two clusters of food-related activities to support a rational design in the square
• Create a pedestrian area throughout the district
• Establish a continuous, cohesive and unique design for the whole district

IV. Promotion
• Use promotional strategies to identify Lo Sardo Square as a commercial destination
• Develop a retail promotion strategy to attract new shoppers and reward long-time customers
• Organize special and unique events that will change the general perception of Lo Sardo Square and attract more customers
INTRODUCTION

The Lo Sardo Square Revitalization Plan is an economic and design tool to promote future development along a district that, in recent decades, experienced tremendous competition from the surrounding commercial corridors. The area is perceived today as the beginning of the Messina periphery and needs to reinvent itself. Together with the City of Messina’s “Programmi Complessi” Office, this plan focuses on the different strategies to make Lo Sardo Square district a renovated and vibrant commercial district, serving its local residents, as well as other market segments (mainly students and employees working in the area). Indeed, Lo Sardo Square has exceptional assets at its disposal, especially regarding its location and its beautiful architectural style. The key to this plan is defining the specific ways the district can organize these strengths in a fresh, modern way.

Defined in this plan is the creation of a Natural Commercial Center, a conceptual place where history, culture and services, which only an historic downtown can offer, will face the growing interest in shopping malls and big box retail. This plan is a response to the anonymous modern commercial centers. It introduces a model of harmonious life, based on social relations and exchanges between people. This plan aggregates all of the elements in modern life that are missing; a small-town comfort and a sense of community that Lo Sardo Square can fulfill.

In order to obtain qualitative data on the project area and shape solutions that will meet the citizens’ approval, this plan employs an element of public participation. Several different instruments were used to encourage public participation: 45 local residents, randomly chosen through the telephone book, were surveyed in order to gauge their perceptions about the commercial district. A focus group with young professionals, mostly working in law firms located in Messina’s downtown and patronizing the court daily. Their opinion was considered important since they spend much of their days around the planning area and could represent a potential market for the district’s commercial activities. In addition, three different interviews with local stakeholders (a representative from a neighborhood association, one from the Borough institutions and a one from the SIU “Il Tirone”) were conducted in order to obtain other viewpoints about the area, relating to their specific activity. Finally, a blog describing the project was created in order to stimulate citizen participation while experimenting with new communication technologies. The blog, promoted through an informal network and local online newspapers, collected ideas, suggestions, and critiques, proving to be an effective tool to stimulate debate and participation.

The American Main Street Four-Point Approach was used in order to formulate a set of revitalization strategies that could shape Lo Sardo Square’s future commercial development. The first section of this document contains an analysis of Messina and Lo Sardo Square’s history and conditions that will influence its potential for revitalization. The remaining portions of the plan include a series of recommendations based on the Four-Point approach. These include:

I. Organization: Create the Lo Sardo Square association to establish the Natural Commercial Center and to target key objectives allowing the district to compete with other downtown shopping and dining destinations.

II. Economic Restructuring: Ways to sharpen the corridor’s relevance in today’s competitive marketplace through business recruitment and retention strategies that capture both local and regional markets.

III. Design: Techniques to capitalize on the district’s authentic characteristics and to create a unique and identifying design which will lead to a general change in perceptions of the whole area.

IV. Promotion: Specifically-tailored strategies designed to promote a new image of Lo Sardo Square and to attract new customers through high-quality communication tools.
STUDY AREA DEFINITION

The study area consists of Lo Sardo Square and the first block of its nine side streets, which run adjacent to the square that is the main focus of this plan. The nine side streets include: Via S. Marta, Via A. Martino, Via Cemaia, Via E.L Pellegrino, Via M. Giurba, Via P. Imperiale, Via G. Conti and Via Rifugio dei Poveri, which leads to the Spirito Santo Church. On the right of Via E.L Pellegrino is a tiny park, Largo Seggiola, which hosts a statue of Queen Elena, dedicated to her because of her efforts to relieve Messina’s population during the tragic days after the earthquake.

The area is located in the heart of Messina’s historical downtown. Its central location makes the area a vital node in the city and its traffic flow. Via S. Marta connects the square to several highly populated residential neighborhoods in the Southwest side of Messina and to the A20 interstate. Via Porta Imperiale, which merges with Corso Cavour north of Via T. Cannizzaro, connects it to the directional services district (where Province and City Council are located). Its East border is adjacent to Messina’s main commercial district (Viale San Martino and its side streets).

The actual Lo Sardo Square was planned by Emesto Basile\(^1\) around 1909 (and included in the new Land Use Plan, the Borzì plan adopted in 1911), according to a style that tries to compound a formal elegance with functionality. The two-story buildings, with a wide arcade on the first floor, create a pleasant effect making the square an attractive and welcoming place. Despite being one of the most homogeneous and relevant architectural spaces of the entire city, the square is in a state of abandonment. Its current state is derived mainly from the lack of a well-defined function, which would naturally be residential and commercial.

Originally, Borzì intended the square to serve as a landmark denoting the gateway between the old and new

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1. Emesto Basile was a famous liberty style architect who planned also the Massimo Theatre in Palermo, and Motecitorio, the Italian House of Parliament.
Lo Sardo Square Revitalization Plan

This has caused an undetermined socio-economic role, within its modern context. A similar square, Piazza Castronovo, with a similar role, was created along the old city borders in the north end. The square is named after the politician and lawyer Francesco Lo Sardo, the first Messina communist to become Member of the Parliament in 1924. As a survivor of the 1908 earthquake (which killed his only child at the age of twelve), he led the socialist movement in town and in 1921 joined the new Communist Party. Because of his political ideas he was arrested by the fascist government in 1926 and transferred to several prisons across Italy (he also spent some time in prison with Antonio Gramsci, one of the founders of the Italian Communist Party). He always refused to ask for pardon (when asked to sign for the pardon he said: “they wanted my flesh, they will get also my bones: I don’t sign!”) and died in Prison in 1931.

Francesco Lo Sardo during his days in Prison
Part I: Assessment of Existing Conditions and Revitalization Potential

HISTORY

A brief historical overview of the City of Messina

Founded by Greek colonists in the 8th century BC, Messina was originally called Zancle (a native word for “sickle”—but in legend the name is attributed to King Zanclus) because of the shape of its natural harbor. Since its foundation, the City was considered one of the most powerful in the Mediterranean and had the privilege to issue its own money (till the XVII century). In the early 5th century BC, the city was renamed Messene in honor of the Greek city Messene. The name eventually turned into Messana and then Messina.

As mentioned, Messina has played a decisive political role due to its highly strategic position and harbor, which was already outstanding as far back as the 5th century BC. It was subject to many foreign rulers, under which it saw periods of alternating fortunes. The Romans, ruling since 263 BC, developed the city’s urban plan. The Byzantines (who ruled till the barbarian invasion) notably fostered the harbor that soon became a major stop along Mediterranean routes.

The Saracens, the Arabs and the Normans (which, like the Romans, placed a great value on urban development) conquered the city in different periods until the beginning of the XII century AC. After the Normans, Messina witnessed the domination of the Castilians, the Spanish and the Austrians (around 1516 AC). In the middle ages the European continent had to deal with the Black Death, and Messina most likely was the entry port for that plague around 1350 AC. Also during the Spanish and Austrian domination, the City of Messina became an important art and cultural center of the Renaissance (the painter Antonello da Messina is one important example).

This earthquake happened during the Borbons, which from the beginning of the XVIII century dominate and oppress Messina, till 1860 AC when Garibaldi comes in the effort to unify Italy. The city was again almost entirely destroyed by another earthquake and associated tsunami on the morning of December 28, 1908, killing about 70,000 people (over a total population of around 170,000) and destroying most of the ancient architecture. The city was largely rebuilt in the following years, according to a more modern and rational plan. Between January, 9th 1941 and August, 17th 1943, Messina witnessed four naval and 2,805 aerial bombings. The city, and part of the province, were destroyed again. But most importantly, the combination of the earthquake and the bombings cancelled Messina historical memory.

A view of Messina port, around 1760

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Today Messina is a city of approximately 260,000 people living in more than 50 villages and fractions. The territorial extension consists of a strip of land that stretches along the coast of the Tyrhenian and Ionian Sea (with its 58 km of coasts, Messina is the “longest” and “most maritime” city of Italy and it is the only city of the Country that abuts two different seas). Its inland part includes a vast portion of the Peloritani Mountains.

The Earthquake

On December 28, 1908 at 5:21 am an earthquake hit Messina with an estimated magnitude between 6.9 and 7.1, according to today’s Richter scale. It lasted approximately 30 to 40 seconds and the destruction was felt within a 300 km radius. Moments after the earthquake hit a tsunami struck many of the coastal cities with forty foot waves causing even more destruction. Coming with no warning, and killing over 70,000 people in Messina alone, the earthquake and tsunami left the town completely destroyed. 91% of its buildings were downed and searching for the missing lasted for weeks. Considering the population of Messina was only 170,000 the death toll was devastating.

Poor and unstable construction practices at the time was a major reason that so many buildings collapsed. The buildings were massive with heavy roofs and floors that could not withstand the shaking and rumbling of the ground. In the years following 1908, precautions were taken when reconstruction began, building architecture that would be able to withstand earthquakes of variable magnitude, if one should strike again. In the midst of reconstruction, many of the Italian residents were relocated to various parts of Italy. It should be added that the first project of reconstruction considered the possibility of rebuilding Messina in another area, leaving the old city as an immense cemetery. But the few families who survived strongly opposed this solution, and the city was eventually rebuilt covering the rubble.

The cause of the earthquake was due to normal faulting between

2. The disaster made it to the headlines of the newspapers and initiated world-wide relief efforts. With the help of the Red Cross, Russian and British sailors, and even the King and Queen of Italy, the search and cleanup were expedited. Treatment centers were located north of Sicily in Naples.

3. In the following years, many families coming from other villages of the Province repopulated Messina, creating a mix of “natives and foreigners” which contributed to the lack of interest of the Messina population in its history.
plates. Italy sits along the boundary zone of the African Continental plate and this plate is pushing against the seafloor underneath Europe at a rate of 1 inch per year. This causes vertical displacement which in turn can cause earthquakes.

The bombings during WWII
Due to its geographic position and the importance of its port, Messina was the most bombed town in the region during World War II. As mentioned previously, four naval and 2,805 aerial bombings destroyed the newly rebuilt city.
Pilots of the allied forces were reporting pictures of a “ghost town”, with its buildings apparently intact, ignoring that the new building practices along with the new street system were absorbing the exploding wave, maintaining intact the external walls of the buildings, which were collapsing inside.

After the last air mission, in August 1943, a Royal Air Force pilot said: “that sad town appeared reduced almost in the same conditions than it was after the 1908 earthquake”.
It’s still unclear if all this destruction was necessary and in which measure it contributed to the final victory of the allied forces in the Mediterranean. But the population, as in previous invasions that characterized its history, suffered with great dignity during those terrible months. Showing great moral strength was not resignation but a sense of responsibility in the face of what was considered inevitable.

The land use plan
Over the centuries, the city of Messina has often changed (even radically) its cartographic aspect, partially because of the natural disasters and partially because of the different war events it witnessed. In that regard, maps of Messina have changed significantly over the years.
The actual land use plan (Piano Regolatore)\(^4\) basically developed after the earthquake and through the Second World War. As stated earlier, after the 1908 natural disaster the project of relocating the entire town elsewhere was abandoned and a new planning process started to rebuild Messina in a safer way.

4. On the significance and use of the Piano Regolatore refer to the ‘previous plan’ section.
than before. The new Piano Regolatore was commissioned to the City planning director, engineer Borzi, whose final project was approved at the end of 1911. The first concern of the new plan was to strictly respect the new anti-seismic regulations, trying (with alternate results) to preserve part of the urban tissue of the pre-earthquake period. The most evident innovation was the expansion of the city, whose area was almost doubled both towards the north and south, along the streams that characterize the hilly territory. The ancient walls, which also separated Messina from the Peloritani Mountains, were partially replaced by a ring road that surrounds the actual downtown. The aspect of the city changed drastically, with wide streets, small buildings and regular grids that were now characterizing Messina (the former width/length ratio of 3/15 – expressed in meters - was replaced by a much safer 13.5/10).

Along with the mediaeval walls, many ancient and valuable buildings, damaged by the earthquake, were demolished to provide space for new construction more functional to the uses needed at that time (in particular affordable houses to relocate families who survived the disaster). In this way, Messina lost a great part of its historical and architectural assets. After WWII, a new building phase began beyond the borders of Borzi’s plan (and in particular above the ring road), which became too old for a fast-growing city. This construction was not included in a new Piano Regolatore, which was approved only in 1973 (the so-called Piano Tekne, from the name of the firm that developed it), but instead in different variations of the existing one. The new plan stayed in place till 1986 when a partial variation (Piano Urbani) was approved to address the pressing need for affordable housing. A final general variation was then approved in 2003.

The Study Area
Piazza Lo Sardo (formerly known as Piazza del Popolo), with its actual configuration, didn’t exist before the earthquake. The space containing the square was, in fact, a large circular area, whose name is not shown in any map, with some scattered houses. This small farming village was located just outside the ancient walls (a small portion of which was also included in the square) that delimited the city border for many centuries. In particular the area was adjacent to one of the gates, Porta Imperiale, which was named after Emperor Charles V who passed through Messina after he won the battle of Tunisi and who ordered the construction\(^5\) of the walls (among the most important fortification

\(^5\) The walls were actually in place since 1200 AC, but Charles V ordered a radical restructuring in order to better protect the city.
in the Mediterranean), in 1536, in order to defend the city from the Turkish attacks. During this period Messina witnessed a significant commercial expansion, and this old farmer borough progressively grew, reaching a total population of 10,000. Its houses reached the walls, while the small square in front of the church probably served as Churchyard and as a customs office for goods control before entering the city by the Port Imperial. The Old Walls stayed in place and were used at least until the middle of the XIX century. After this period, some of the walls (including two major access gates to the city) were demolished to allow the city to grow. But the majority of the so-called “Cinta Muraria” was destroyed after the 1908 earthquake, when the reconstruction process, as mentioned, wasn’t able to preserve Messina’s entire historical heritage. However, an estimated 20% of the walls still exist. The walls help resist the city’s (often irrational) expansion, but unfortunately these ruins don’t constitute a real tourist attraction or even a recognized historic site for Messina citizens.

Some remains of the old walls near the Spirito Santo Church

Some of the remains of the walls can be found in the Piazza Lo Sardo area, and in particular near the Spirito Santo Church. The Church was built in 1452, near a convent that was established in 1291. Both buildings were just outside the walls of the city with the Church sharing a wall with the ancient Cinta Muraria. During the 1908 earthquake the monastery was completely destroyed and the Church severely damaged. Thanks to the strong commitment of Father Annibale di Francia, who in these parts reached holiness, the Church was rebuilt in order to preserve the ancient ruins and to respect the baroque elements that make this Church one of the most valuable baroque building in all Sicily. The reconstruction also involved the foundation of a convent and a female orphanage. Today, an elementary and a middle school are hosted in adjacent buildings related with the Church and the convent. Moreover, Sisters Daughters of the Divine Zeal, after a careful search in the old monastery, found the old stone walls of the monastery dating from the XIV (perhaps XVI) century. Their vision stirs deep emotion and an inside tour guided by the sisters is particularly worthy of attention.

The square is also adjacent to an historical neighborhood, the Tirone, which was included inside the walls since its last restructuring in 1536. The importance of this area relies on its location, on a small hill in the hearth of Messina, on several ruins (part of the Old Walls and some houses from the XVIII century), and on an important restoration and industrial plan that the City commissioned to the STU (Urban Transformation Company) “il Tirone”, a public private partnership that, according to a national development program, was established with the purpose of returning to Messina citizens to one of the most valuable areas of the city.

The neighborhood relates to this plan in at least two aspects: first of all, its industrial plan (that will be discussed in the following section) can be, in many ways, complementary to a commercial revitalization effort for Piazza Lo Sardo. Moreover the area of Tirone was characterized by the presence of several monasteries and religious institutes (along with ancient buildings reachable through small stairs) so that the whole area was also called the Monasteries neighborhood. Most likely, this characteristic also extended to Piazza Lo Sardo, where different signs of churches and even a Synagogue (whose ruins were just few feet from the square) were found. The presence of all these religious buildings of different denominations (not far from the study area, where the University is today, was also the Jewish Ghetto, called La Giudecca) makes historical function
of this area really interesting. It was a place where different cultures and different religions met and lived together, showing a degree of integration largely unknown today, but natural for a city used to continuous invasions during its centennial history.

**RELATED PLANS**

**Piano Regolatore (the land use/zoning plan)**

**Comparing the two systems** - The American comprehensive plan corresponds to the Piano Territoriale Regionale (PTR - at a regional level) and the Piano Territoriale Provinciale (at a provincial level called PTC). In particular, the PTR identifies and regulates the main socio-economic, territorial, and landscape features of a region, and defines the strategies to transform and improve them. The PTC (which is often missing as in the case of Messina) addresses the territorial development, according to criteria inspired by sustainability and coherency (with the regional guidelines and the socioeconomic context in which it operates). It should also contain a set of guidelines for the municipalities in order to create local plans coherent with those adopted at higher levels of government (regional and provincial).

At the local level, in the Italian system, it is the Piano Regolatore Generale, surely the most important planning document for a locality. It roughly corresponds to the American Zoning Plan, since it is the instrument through which the building and infrastructural activities are regulated, parcel by parcel. The PRG has two different sections: the implementing regulations, corresponding to the American subdivision regulations, and the building regulations which establish the general requirements (both physical and bureaucratic) that should be fulfilled in order to start a building process and to obtain a building permit.

6 As concerns the comprehensive and the zoning plans, the Italian and the American systems differ especially on the planning process: for both plans in Italy public participation is rare, while the whole process is often driven by politics or just by few technicians; moreover the comprehensive plan doesn’t require a periodic update process, which means that most of the Italian cities have plans more than 40 years old!

The PRG and the Study Area - Currently, two different zoning classifications exist for the parcels included in the study area. These are: A1 zone (buildings with an historical, monumental or environmental value) and A2 zone (urban areas of environmental interest). These current zoning classifications reflect the importance of an area located in the historical downtown of Messina and whose buildings represent a valuable post-earthquake architectural example. At the same time, the restrictions included in the two categories, if helpful in preserving Messina’s historical assets, may limit future attempts to renovate the area; especially if the interventions require more than a routine maintenance.

The following list provides an overview of the two zoning classifications in Piazza Lo Sardo area.

A category - A zones comprise those portions of territory whose urban agglomerates or buildings have a valuable historical- artistic character. They can include also adjacent areas that can be considered fully integrated with their landscape.

**A1 zone** - For the buildings included in this zoning classification, only few typologies of interventions are allowed: restoration, maintenance, consolidation, restructuring and changes in domestic uses. Volume increases are forbidden. Exceptionally, new constructions of public interest can be added after a long procedure, which involves the Cultural Heritage Superintendence, the Building Commission and the City Council.

**A2 zone** - This zoning classification includes those areas representing the old urban district, which has an important historical significance. It contains the majority of Messina historical and artistic buildings, and still maintains the original patterns defined in the Borzio plan. In this case preservation is referred to the whole urban agglomerate, including some buildings’ characteristics, as their heights and their facades. Also for this zoning classification the only interventions allowed are restoration, maintenance, consolidation, restructuring and changes in domestic uses, but only after the building permit has been issued.
Lo Sardo Square Revitalization Plan

DESCRIPTION OF THE PLANNING AREA

Tirone Industrial Plan

A brief plan overview - According to a national legislation (L. 15.5.1997 n.127), in 2002 Messina City Council created the Urban Transformation Company “Il Tirone” (a public-private partnership) in order to develop and implement a rehabilitation plan for the Tirone neighborhood.

The plan’s main purpose is to restore and make available one of the most valuable areas in downtown Messina, the only district in town where it’s possible to appreciate so many pre-earthquake buildings. This neighborhood was severely destroyed by the 1908 earthquake, but it still preserves its original urban patterns, a large portion of the “Old Walls” and many ruins of ancient buildings, which represents an important historical document for a city which desperately needs to preserve its memory.

The strategy is to combine its central location with new social functions in the downtown context, where spaces are scarce.

From this point of view, the interventions in the actual Tirone area are considered together with some other in the adjacent streets (including Piazza Lo Sardo), in order to implement an integrated and complementary approach for the whole district. This will establish a focus on the development of the service sector (offices and commercial activities in particular), the rehabilitation of the seediest areas and the construction of new residential and office buildings.

The Plan and the Study Area - Two different recommendations, out of ten included in the plan, are directly related with Piazza Lo Sardo.

The first one is recommendation number 9, which foresees the transformation of Lo Sardo Square and some of its side streets (along with some other areas in the Tirone neighborhood) into a pedestrian area. Even though any detail is provided, the project will include a new pavement and a new lighting system, and some major changes in the district viability organization. About this last point in particular, in order to create the pedestrian area, the plan recommend (as only possibility) the re-opening of the S. Marta tunnel, located East of Lo Sardo square, in order to define a new major arterial in an area crossed daily by heavy traffic (in the direction hill-downtown and vice versa).

The other recommendation is the number 2, which proposes the construction of a handicraft center in the Tirone area and an underground parking lot to service it. This project, intended as an effective solution to rehabilitate the area and reduce its vehicular traffic, relates to the study area because it foresees the agglomeration in a single five story building of all those polluting service activities (mechanic, electrician, car washing) currently scattered throughout the district, mostly in Piazza Lo Sardo area. If implemented, intervention number two would
Lo Sardo Square Revitalization Plan

DESCRIPTION OF THE PLANNING AREA

make several first floor shops available under the arcades surrounding the square. Moreover, since the plan includes also the construction of one new school complex (with a kindergarten, an elementary and a middle school), three residential and office buildings and another residential building, if implemented it could provide a new market for the study area commercial activities. Finally, since the plan also focuses on the rehabilitation of historical sites as the old Tirone village and the S. Barbara steps, if implemented it could create a tourist district adjacent to Lo Sardo square, which could serve as its commercial area.

SURROUNDING INFLUENCES

Located in the heart of Messina Downtown, Piazza Lo Sardo is adjacent to important institutional and economic activities. Nearby are located most of Messina’s directional activities, important commercial corridors, schools, the University of Messina, and several churches, banks and offices. Moreover, the study area is also adjacent to several highly populated neighborhoods, some of them easily connected through collector streets starting from Piazza Lo Sardo.

Main influences

The University’s main building is located less than 1,200 feet from the study area. Here are located three important schools, economics, statistics and law, where more than 13,000 students are enrolled. Moreover, the complex includes more than 2,000 employees and also hosts the University’s directional offices and the President’s...
schools. These schools enroll more than 7,000 students and employ around 300 people. One of these schools, the religious institute Spirito Santo, is located in the study area, occupying three large buildings in Piazza Lo Sardo and Via S. Marta. It counts more than 520 students (between kindergarten, elementary, middle and high school) and 50 teachers.

More than ten churches are located within a quarter mile radius, including Messina Cathedral. Two of them are included in the study area, the Church of Santa Rita and the Church of Spirito Santo. The Spirito Santo Church, in particular, also a feminine orphanage and is one of the most valuable religious buildings in downtown Messina.

In addition, after Sisters Daughters of the Divine Zeal revealed the old stone-walls of the adjacent monastery dating from sec. XVI, it represents one of the few touristic attractions in the area.

Finally, the Study Area is surrounded or easily accessible by some highly populated residential neighborhoods, including the villages of Camaro, Cataratti, Montepiselli, Messina 2 and a new residential neighborhood called the Mito. Together they account for around 30,000 people. The residents of most of these neighborhoods need to get through Piazza Lo Sardo, or its side streets, to reach the downtown area. At least three different collector streets start from these neighborhoods and end in the square, which becomes the gateway to the commercial downtown (Viale San Martino district, Via Garibaldi and the Cathedral area).

PUBLIC SAFETY

Since no official data is available at the study area level, the public safety issue has been investigated through the perception of crime by local residents and merchants. All stated that, due mainly to its central location; crime is not a real concern for the area. Local residents don’t consider personal safety a problem for the area. Some issues arise when talking about the arcades: especially those not hosting any evening or night activity. They are poorly illuminated and give a dangerous perception (even though nobody recalls any crime under the arcades). Another problematic aspect, although not particularly relevant, is related to the Via S. Marta, especially in its last section just after Piazza Trombetta, which is commonly considered unsafe. In this case the insights obtained from local residents rely on its proximity to high crime rate neighborhoods as Camaro and Bisconte.

Finally, it should be noted that Messina City Council, using some European funds and in partnership with many institutions and organizations, is implementing a program to assist those merchants who decide to denounce the extortion they may experience. It is an important initiative for at least two reasons: this crime is the most important obstacle to develop any economic activity in large parts of Southern Italy and, most importantly, it creates the conditions for a new, and more effective, relationship between merchants and public institutions.

7. This last information is drawn from a telephone survey, administered to 45 local residents, whose findings will be discussed later in this section.
CIRCULATION AND PARKING

Lo Sardo Square was created as a gateway, from the new city extension, to the old historical downtown. For this reason, the square has developed as a vital node in Messina traffic flows. This traffic pattern produced a rather critical situation, with daily traffic jams at peak hours and no space for parking (which represents the most serious issue related to circulation). Also for this reason, the square intersection was recently closed and substituted by a roundabout encircling the square, which didn’t prove to be an effective solution since most of the traffic problems are still in place.

Road Network Overview
Two collector streets end in Piazza Lo Sardo, connecting peripheral neighborhoods and the commercial downtown located just east of the Square. In particular, Via Porta Imperiale (one-way direction North-South from residential neighborhoods towards Lo Sardo square), north of Via T. Cannizzaro, is Corso Cavour, a major arterial crossing the directional services (City Council and Province) district and stretching till the north residential portion of Messina; Via S. Marta (one-way South-West direction from Piazza Lo Sardo till Piazza Trombetta, and two-way after that) connect some southern neighborhoods (Camaro, Bisonte and Cataratti) and the A20 interstate exit with the downtown. A new roundabout was intended to simplify traffic flows crossing the square, but with scarce results. The whole study area is provided with on street, free parking (it is actually situated on the border with the parking fee area, which starts east of Via Cesare Battisti).

Traffic Analysis

Today, the square is still a busy node especially during peak hours: in the morning, adjacent neighborhood residents and interstate drivers enter downtown to reach their workplace (essentially offices, shops, schools, the University and the Court), while in the evening they exit downtown to go back home. Looking at the traffic flows during peak hours (7.30 – 10.30 am and 17.00 – 20.00 pm), Via S. Marta counts around 400 vehicles per hour in the direction South-West – North East (towards downtown), and between 400 and 800 in the opposite direction. Via Porta imperiale counts between 800 and 1200 vehicles per hour, while its prolongation south of the square, Via A. Martino, between 400 and 800 per hour. Part of the traffic flow from and to South West residential neighborhoods is also concentrated in Via S. Cecilia, which merge with Via S. Marta in Piazza Trombetta: here the traffic flow is between 400 and 800 vehicles per hour. According to these flows it is possible to evaluate the degree of saturation of the different nodes included in the study area or located nearby: Piazza Lo Sardo is the most critical one with a value higher than 0.75. On the contrary, Piazza Trombetta has a degree of saturation between 0.25 and 0.50. Finally, Piazza Regina Elena (located between Piazza Lo Sardo and the commercial district) has a value comprised between 0.50 and 0.75. Notwithstanding these important traffic flows, mainly because of parking shortage, it can be inappropriate to look at these drivers as potential customers for...
Piazza Lo Sardo commercial activities.

Parking inventory and analysis
Parking is the most critical circulation issue in the area, for several reasons. First of all, the study area is just outside the borders of the parking fee area, which means that every driver looks first for a parking space here even if its destination is not close. Secondly, the on street parking regulations are rarely respected, and it’s not uncommon to find second lines of parked cars in these narrow streets. This creates severe traffic problems and sometime hinders pedestrian access to the square. Finally, because of the presence of several car related services (also in the actual square), often parking spaces in front of them are reserved for their operations, at least during work hours. Parking stops being an issue a few feet from the study area, and especially in the commercial district, East of Via C. Battisti, where the parking fee area begins and where parking spaces are usually available.

Pedestrian Circulation
The “wild” parking patterns in the study area can often create a pedestrian unfriendly atmosphere in a quarter that should have been intended mainly for pedestrian access. Cars often occupy sidewalks making it difficult to stroll and browse in different shops, both in the square in front of the arcades and in the side streets. Also entering in the actual square can be difficult because of parked cars blocking the crosswalks or even the physical access to the square. Finally, the arcades, rather than offering a pleasant environment, are seedy and dirty, hosting also polluting commercial activities conflicting with a shopping activity. When accessible, the square represents the only real pedestrian friendly portion of the study area, with some shady trees, some benches, a newsstand and a small kiosk selling beverages.

STREETSCAPE AND DESIGN
Design plays a vital role in determining the success of a commercial district. People who feel comfortable in their physical surroundings are more likely to spend greater amounts of time in the area, which can translate into greater sales for a retail corridor. The study area has a lot of design problems, which transmits a sense of disconnect, making it impossible for the district, in the actual condition, to embody a unique sense of place. In particular, there are several differences in the general appearance (design and streetscape, street furniture and infrastructures) between the square and its side streets.

Streetscape and Design
The buildings that face the square have a consistent style, which melds a formal elegance with functionality. They are all two storey buildings with a wide arcade on the first floor, an architectural
choice that makes the square an attracting and welcoming place. But this pleasant general appearance deteriorated progressively and today both the facades and the arcades present signs of abandonment. The inside of the arcades have neither a unique design nor a consistent illumination. Even though the arcades are privately owned (as part of the buildings) they are still considered public space, and for this reason merchants cannot make any change or decoration. Obviously, this leads to significant differences in the appearance between those parts that host a restaurant or a shop and those where polluting activities are located. Some businesses, however, provide pedestrian lighting for their patrons, since no public illumination system is in place. Moreover one of the buildings, hosting a religious institute, is in bad conditions and with unpainted facades.

The illumination system in the square consists of two different streetlights; a taller (almost the buildings size) one on the square borders, and some smaller ones (with a double bulb) on the sidewalks in the center of the square. On the side streets, the lighting system is pretty anonymous, since it was adopted an old streetlight model used all across town. The difference in the street lighting, within the square and between the square and its side streets, contributes in creating a sense of disconnection.

Finally, few trees and some neglected bushes adorn the square, while the side streets don’t host any green element. The other area of the district with some green is Largo Seggiola (on the left), both in its tiny park (where some trees hide the disregarded monument) and in the street off the sidewalks.

Street Furniture
There is very little street furniture in Lo Sardo square (it is totally absent in the side streets, with the exception of few trash disposals). A few old and deteriorated benches are located in the four corners,
news and the weather conditions.

**Sidewalks**
The sidewalks also differ greatly between the actual square, its edges and its side streets. But between the square and the sidewalks off the arcades the only difference is about the design. The side streets sidewalks are made with a different (less elegant) material, larger tiles boarded with lava stones. Those on the square, instead, are made with tiny lava stone tiles boarded with marble.

The three different sidewalks’ styles of the district: on the left it’s the square, in the center is a sidewalk outside the arcade and on the right one in a side street.

**BUILDING CONDITIONS AND USES**

Building conditions in the study area were evaluated using criteria developed by Peter Dunbar & Associates. Essentially all buildings have a consistent condition that could be defined as sound. But there are a few exceptions: the elegant arcades along the square, the most valuable part of the study area, are all in a deteriorated condition, showing a state of abandonment (see picture), occurring because of the polluting commercial activities that they host. Another building in deteriorated condition is the religious institute that faces Piazza Lo Sardo and extending in Via S. Marta and Via Rifugio dei Poveri (see picture).

**Building uses**
The study area presents a unique buildings use pattern, all mixed uses. Each building, in fact, has some residential units together with commercial activities on the first floors and offices spaces in the upper floors. This is a typical European downtown pattern, where different uses easily coexist. However, as mentioned in the existing activities section, some of the commercial uses are incompatible with a commercial and pedestrian district located in the heart of the downtown area (in particular car related services would need larger spaces in an area more easily accessible with cars).

**Real Estate Market**
The historic downtown, which includes the study area, shows an average value for residential units between $240 and $350 per square foot (sf), while the renting value is between $0.9 and $1 per sf. In the same area property value for a commercial unit is between $435 and $650 per sf, while the renting value for the same destination is between $1.7 and $2.6 per sf. Finally, according to STU “Il Tirone” report, the demand for office spaces is declining and so are their prices, which are slightly lower than those for residential units. Both residential and office are among the highest property values in town, mainly because of the location and the architectural style of the buildings, usually dating in the period between the two wars or right after WWII. Property
owner investors usually buy in this area in order to rent apartments to students, which represent a significant part (together with young families) of downtown inhabitants.

**THE COMMUNITY VIEW**

Different instruments were used to promote public participation in the planning process. These include focus groups, telephone survey, interviews, and a blog. Citizens were asked about different aspects related with the plan, including their perception of the area, their opinion on the square physical aspects, commercial activities and identity. A list of positive and negative aspects was also demanded, along with their general vision and some suggestion on what they would have recommended for improving the district. The first significant result that can be outlined is the high degree of loyalty shown by local residents. Statistics show that 84% shop in the district daily or weekly. But while they buy in the area, at the same time they defined shopping in the district negatively for an 80% (average 60%, fair 13%, and poor 7%). Local residents patronize the district mostly for their groceries (84%) and for hair and beauty salon (80%).

- **Positive and negative aspects**
  
  Among the most negative aspects of the district, participants indicated the general appearance of buildings, the perception of the square, the lack of entertainment and cultural events, etc. 

11. Full reports on stakeholders’ attitudes are provided in the appendix

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>Rated Excellent</th>
<th>Rated Fair</th>
<th>Rated Poor</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Personal Safety</td>
<td>73%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prices</td>
<td>87%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pedestrian Atmosphere</td>
<td>76%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Places to Eat</td>
<td>66%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Signage</td>
<td>63%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Selection of Stores &amp; Goods</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parking</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Store Hours</td>
<td>57%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special Sales Events</td>
<td></td>
<td>80%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General Appearance of Buildings</td>
<td></td>
<td>50%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Entertainment Options</td>
<td></td>
<td>43%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
its proximity to some neighborhood with a high crime rate, and the presence of polluting and noisy commercial activities. Other negative elements that were pointed out include: the poor physical conditions of the arcades and of some of the side streets (due also to the presence of polluting activities), the heavy and chaotic traffic (including also the parking situation) and the lack of the basic street furniture elements (especially in the actual square, where part of the pavement is asphalt). On the other side, there was a general consensus in considering personal safety in Piazza Lo Sardo as excellent. Participants agreed on considering the square’s architectural style as the most important asset on which the district could capitalize; in particular its proximity to important economic and institutional activities. Most of them also mentioned the sense of enclosure that the square transmits, the architectural style and in particular the arcades, the pedestrian environment and the tranquility and relaxing feeling, even if it is located nearby chaotic streets (some residents expressly pointed out how they wouldn’t like a remake of more chaotic commercial areas as the Cathedral district).

- Things to be changed
Among the aspects they would like to change, several mentioned the need to illuminate the arcades after office hours. Other suggestions include the removal of the two kiosks selling shoes and beverages, the relocation of noisy activities, the creation of a pedestrian area which should include a new pavement (maybe with lava stone, which was the original Messina pavement), and a fountain in the center of the square. Some other design improvements were also suggested. In particular, in order to reduce most of the noises and pollution, it was highly recommended to address traffic and parking problems, which should include the elimination of the roundabout and the asphalt. A new lighting system was also proposed, both for the square and its side street in order to create a more pleasant and safe environment, especially after the sunset. Other suggestions included the introduction of new street furniture, the presence of new trees and other green elements, and the setting of some general guidelines for building restoration and to prevent inconsistent stores’ signage.

- Identity, vision and new commercial activities
Most of the citizens involved in the planning process outlined how sense of enclosure that the square has should be preserved (due also to its circular shape). They imagine the square as a self-contained neighborhood mainly serving local residents needs. On the other hand, they recognize that for its central location it could have a broader function: a gathering point in the heart of historical downtown where employees of nearby offices and university students could enjoy the pedestrian area, the beautiful architectural style, and shopping (including bars and restaurants). When prompted about a commercial area that they would indicate as good examples, some participants mention the Cathedral area in Messina and the so-called Ancient Borgo in Milazzo. Both districts after a thorough renovation have tried and succeed in attracting new customers, especially young people. The Ancient Borgo has the significant limitation of missing out on daytime activity, since it’s focused exclusively on bars, restaurants and similar commercial activities. The vision that comes out is, therefore, two-fold: a lively
Lo Sardo Square Revitalization Plan

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commercial district during the day, with retail activities serving local residents, students and downtown employees, and a nightlife area where citizens could enjoy local restaurants and bars, or just relax and walk in a renovated square (with new and comfortable benches, trees, etc...). It should be pointed out how blog users compared to local residents were less concerned about avoiding noises in what is also a residential area.

According to this view, the general concept regarding the new uses was to attract small, “mom and pop” stores, in order to preserve the convenience area atmosphere. The new uses proposed include: coffee shops, sit-down restaurants, deli and take away, bars, bookshops, music stores, independent clothing and accessories shops, gift and handcraft retails, and some small groceries (maybe selling also ethnic or local food). Moreover, the importance was stressed of the arcade for the commercial activities (underlying again how some polluting activities should be relocated elsewhere). They could host tables and chairs for bars and restaurants or small, thematic open markets (vintage clothes, antiques, local handcrafts, etc...). Finally, some users focused on the potential relations between the square and art or outdoor activities: some of them suggested using the open spaces for street theatre plays, art exhibitions, concerts or for small sport events, like street-ball, imaging part of the square as an American playground.

Finally, some stakeholders proposed a different vision, which focuses on the integration between Lo Sardo Square area and the Tirone borough. According to this view, the Tirone would be the natural commercial center (for its historic value and its street configuration), while Lo Sardo Square would serve it, especially with outdoor events organized by the merchants’ association.

MARKET ANALYSIS

Existing activities in the Study Area

More than 70 commercial activities and approximately 15 different professional offices are included in the fourteen building composing the study area. These figures are doubled if the study area borders are extended for another block in each direction. This high concentration of shops and services, however, doesn’t respond to any particular commercial strategy, since the offer includes extremely diversified and often conflicting activities.

The Square - The buildings facing the square (including its corner intersections) host a significant variety of shops, while presenting the only vacancies (four) of the study area. This last point is extremely important, since these blocks represent maybe the most valuable commercial locations of the whole study area. Commercial activities in the square include clothing and accessories shops, a tobacco shop, two groceries (one selling ethnic food), two mechanics, an electrician, a car rental, a religious institute (which include a school), two sit-down restaurants, two pizzeria (but only one sit-down), a bar, a tattoo parlor, a pet shop, three internet points (one also offering long-distance call service for immigrants), a beauty salon, a printing center and some professional offices. Finally, the actual square hosts a newsstand, a little booth selling shoes, and a small beverage kiosk.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Business Type</th>
<th>% of Respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Entertainment Options</td>
<td>96%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Restaurant/Bar/Deli</td>
<td>73%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clothing Store</td>
<td>73%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grocery Store</td>
<td>70%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2: Recommended New Businesses - Telephone interviews

An example of conflicting activities within the square
The side streets - The nine side streets included in the study area offer a significant variety of shops and services. These include: shoe shops (Via Antonio Martino is a sort of shoe district, also in its section beyond the study area limit), sporting goods, clothing and apparel shops, medical instruments, a printing center, several hardware and housing products stores, a betting center, call centers for immigrants, professional services, beauty salons, a laundry, an ethnic sit-down restaurant, a movie theatre and a night club (they share the same building), a bar, a grocery store and several mechanics and other car related services (electricians and car washing).

Trade Area Definition
The study area is ideally located within a larger district that in this plan is considered the trade area. Since it is really difficult to draw boundaries in an urban environment, those should be considered as potentially variable limits. The trade area was defined according to two different criteria: 1. a proximity to Lo Sardo Square suitable to preserve the convenience character (within a walking distance) of a commercial district which serves first of all the neighborhood in which is located and 2. the presence of institutions (like the court), activities (like professionals’ offices) and residential quarters that could represent a natural market for the square commercial activities. As shown in the map (the green area) the trade area extends, on its East side, till the intersection between Via S. Marta and Viale Europa including some residential units directly
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Viale San Martino is the most important commercial corridor of the whole City of Messina and is located a few feet from the planning area (whose borders are represented by Via La Farina, Via C. Battisti, Via T. Cannizzaro and Viale Europa), hosts 70 grocery stores or supermarket, around 500 commercial activities and 55 among bars, restaurants and trattorie, while the resident population is only 4,781. These numbers reflect the importance of what can be considered the economic and social heart of Messina downtown. In particular Viale San Martino (in the section comprised between Piazza Cairoli and Viale Europa and together with its side streets) represents the main commercial corridor, especially for clothing and apparel. But the area is also characterized by the presence of several bars and many offices of different professional services.

Another commercial corridor is Viale Garibaldi, and especially the tract starting at Piazza Cairoli and stretching till Viale Boccetta. It essentially developed as continuation of Viale San Martino. Different stores of clothing, apparel, accessories, together with bars, cocktail lounges, supermarkets and several banks are located here. It represents also a major arterial, crossing a huge part of Messina downtown and connecting the north residential area with Viale San Martino corridor.

Finally, the Cathedral area is considered a commercial corridor of significant competition. In the last five years, it developed as a main tourist quarter (the cruise ships dock few hundreds feet...
Lo Sardo Square Revitalization Plan

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from here) and as a nightlife district. This revitalization process was mainly due to the creation of a pedestrian area, which includes the Cathedral Square and some of its side streets, where several bars and restaurants opened afterward. Located a few feet behind the University and North of Via Garibaldi (which benefits from its lively environment), this portion of downtown represents Messina’s primary location for nightlife activities, which include cocktail bars, small clubs and restaurants of all sorts (pizzeria, trattorie, ethnic restaurants, deli, take away, etc...). It also hosts other commercial activities such as groceries, gift shops, coffee shops and travel agencies. Moreover, major institutions, such as the City Council and the Province, along with several offices and banks, which clearly represent a significant market for local commercial activities are located here. Finally, because of the presence of the Cathedral, the Catalani Church and some other historic and artistic landmarks, the area can be considered as the main touristic district in the whole City of Messina. According to these considerations, the Cathedral quarter can count on a huge and diversified market for its day and night activities. It includes tourists, employees of the two major institutions located in the area, University students, and young professionals, who animate weekend nights.13

A last aspect involving the three areas should be pointed out. All of them can benefit (directly or nearby) from the presence of the light-rail system that was created around six years ago. It proved to be a fast transportation mode, connecting the two ends of Messina center, and crossing right in the middle of these three commercial centers.

Finally, it must be noticed how the trade area and the competing corridors overlap in the section between Via C. Battisti and Viale S. Martino. This portion is actually an integral part of Viale San Martino district, but it has been included in the trade area to capture a potential market for commercial activities as restaurants and delis that could compete with those located in Viale San Martino corridor, by offering a more pleasant environment.

13. On the South side any area was identified since south of Viale Europa (a sort of natural barrier) downtown ends and totally new socioeconomic relations patterns (with different commercial nodes and residential areas) start.

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### Table 3: Lo Sardo Square Potential Market

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Type</th>
<th>Size</th>
<th>Current Capture rate*</th>
<th>Potential Capture rate*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Local Residents</td>
<td>4,946</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>742</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employees</td>
<td>6,879</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students</td>
<td>15,000</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>150</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>SubTotal (actual market)</strong></td>
<td><strong>26,825</strong></td>
<td>-</td>
<td><strong>961</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Surrounding neighborhoods</td>
<td>29,887</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>299</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>SubTotal</strong></td>
<td>56,692</td>
<td></td>
<td>1,260</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Residents (STU Plan)*</td>
<td>275</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Employees (STU Plan)*</td>
<td>150</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>57,117</td>
<td></td>
<td>1,260</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Estimation based on stakeholders’ views analysis

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**Trade Area Demographic profile (demand side)**

The trade area, as identified, extends roughly for a 500 feet radius from the square. The population in the area is around 5,000 people, which doesn’t take into account the presence of several students renting a house in the district. These 5,000 local residents represent Lo Sardo Square’s primary and stable market. Besides local residents, the commercial district could count as other important market segments. Around 7,000 employees work each day in the trade area. These are one-third University staff, and for the remaining Court, banks, schools and office workers. These people spend at least eight hours a day in their office and may find extremely convenient, especially in terms of time, shopping and eating in Lo Sardo Square area.

Moreover, the proximity to the University complex offers another possibility, represented by the more than 13,000 students enrolled in the three schools located there. Even though only a small part of them use the university facilities every day, they still represent a significant and easily marketable demand for local retails. The 220 students hosted in the nearby University dorm should be added to these figures, along with other 1,750 students that use the dining
center located behind the dorm complex. Total student population to be considered is therefore 15,000.

Finally, in the long run, the district, if effectively revitalized, could attract customers from the surrounding neighborhoods and those located West and North West from the Square (Camaro, Cataratti, Bisonte, Montepiselli, and Messina 2). Total population of these quarters is around 30,000 people, who are scarcely intercepted by Lo Sardo Square retails (due also to a considerable distance with some portions of them). This effort, though, could have side effects related with the high crime rate of these areas and therefore it should be carefully considered.

It should also be considered the new residential and office units that would be added in the trade area if the STU plan will be implemented. The plan doesn’t offer too many details on the number of units that would be developed, but the four buildings will include around 180,000 sf in new residential and office space. Considering an average of 1,000 sf per unit would imply the construction of around 180 residential units. Roughly 60% (110) of these new units would be residential, adding something like 275 new local residents in the area. The other 50 units would be office space, with roughly new 150 employees.\textsuperscript{14}

Obviously, this market of around 57,000 people is only potential and, most importantly, available for the surrounding commercial corridors, which in this moment capture most of it. Trying to estimate an actual and a project capture rate for each category, with a successful revitalization process the district could try to attract five times the customers (especially among students and local employees) it is currently experiencing.

\textsuperscript{14} An average of 2.5 person per housing unit and 3 per office unit was considered.
market requirements for some of these uses. According to the figures shown in Table 4, the actual market can clearly support the existing commercial activities and also call for new ones, especially if the uses are well-marketed. The market composition (a mix of students, local residents, and employees) should support such a variety of stores and retail; and a greater diversification in the offer, together with the district convenience character and the arcades and the square potential new usage, should allow to face the surrounding districts competition.

Moreover, the perspective of an additional market represented by the surrounding neighborhoods and by the new housing and office units included in the STU plan can further sustain a revitalization effort for the whole district. Overall, the square should strengthen its daytime vocation becoming a primary location in the trade area for shopping (because of its proximity to Viale San Martino Corridor, it would relate essentially on groceries and other small goods such as book, music and handcrafts) and eating, attracting new customers, especially students and employees, which could enjoy small cafés, nice restaurants and deli where to eat during their lunch break, local small shops where to look for an old book or a CD, or where to buy ethnic food.

At the same time, even though the Cathedral area (which is progressively consolidating with Via Garibaldi corridor) is the primary nightlife location, Lo Sardo Square could play an important role becoming a secondary scene for restaurants and bars, trying to preserve, however, its residential character and its tranquility: the arcades and the square could represent the perfect scenario where to eat a traditional cuisine meal or where to drink a cocktail or where to walk and enjoy Messina mild climate.

<table>
<thead>
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SWOT ANALYSIS

Strengths
Location is one of the Piazza Lo Sardo business district’s greatest strengths. It is located in the heart of Messina’s historic downtown, and easily accessible from the interstate and from the north residential city area with two different street collectors. Another important asset is represented by its architectural style (with its elegant arcades) which transmits a pleasant sense of enclosure. The area is also perceived as essentially safe and as a convenient commercial district by local residents, which proved to be loyal customers for the neighborhood retail. Other strengths include the high commercial density of an area that is a natural candidate to become a pleasing commercial district, the pedestrian area that can serve for multiple purposes.

Weaknesses
Piazza Lo Sardo is surrounded by important commercial nodes, giving potential customers many alternative choices. Local merchants, around seventy different retail and activities are located here, but don’t seem to have any relationship or try to undertake any common effort to improve the business climate or to promote the area. The district does not possess a well-defined image both for the poor condition of its arcades (which don’t have a public illumination system) and for the general perception of a peripheral area, playing a marginal role in the city’s socio-economic relations. The district also lacks consistent urban design elements (especially between the square and its side streets), including the illumination system, the street furniture and the sidewalks. While the area lacks entertainment activities, it currently hosts many polluting activities conflicting with the other commercial uses and with the idea of a pedestrian commercial district.

Opportunities
Together with local residents, Lo Sardo Square district has the potential to capture different market segments:
- The student population living in the nearby dorm, in the area or frequenting the University located a few feet afar
- The employees of the several offices (banks, professional services, insurance companies, etc...) located in the surrounding districts
- The Court and University employees
- The residents of the highly populated neighborhood located outside the study area and easily connected to it

Other opportunities on which the district could capitalize include: the Tirone industrial plan that if implemented could provide an additional market to the square’s commercial activities and a tourist district (the historical Tirone borough) located just outside the study area; the ruins of the old Cinta Muraria (some located near the beautiful Church of the Spirito Santo), which could represent an additional tourist attraction; the spatial patterns perfect for a natural commercial district; the presence of four vacant units that could be used to attract new business to complement the actual offer; the growing citizens’ interest in rediscovering their territory and their memory; and the trust relationship between merchants and customers due to the convenience character of the area.

Threats
The greatest threat to Lo Sardo Square district is the ongoing increase in urban degradation of its buildings and streets. The area is more and more perceived as a periphery, also for its proximity to some fringe neighborhoods that suffer a high crime rate. This situation is leading to a progressive loss of economic importance of the whole district, while other commercial corridors are growing and consolidating (like Viale San Martino and Via Garibaldi or the Cathedral area and Corso Cavour and Via Garibaldi, now considered as two unique districts). A last element that should be addressed is the increasing commercial role of the artificial shopping centers or of the big boxes, which are capturing every day a larger number of customers.

15 An explanation of the natural commercial district is provided in the organization recommendations section.
Part II: PLAN FOR THE REVITALIZATION OF LO SARDO SQUARE

VISION: LO SARDO SQUARE IN THE FUTURE

The Lo Sardo Square area is a quiet neighborhood with unexpressed potentials. Its commercial activities serve a local market, focused essentially on the convenience needs (groceries and few other small services) of nearby residents, within a suggestive and elegant scenario located in Messina’s historic downtown. In recent decades, the commercial nodes surrounding the district had experienced significant development, marginalizing the area. As a result, the square is progressively perceived as the beginning of the periphery, despite its central location. A revitalization effort is therefore needed in order to assume a new role in downtown socio-economic context and to develop the possibilities of an area that could be a natural commercial center in the earth of Messina.

Imagine the square as an oasis in a bustling and chaotic downtown, where university students, employees and local residents can enjoy a pleasant atmosphere in an impressive architectural context, experiencing a warm sense of community.

Envision a district where local merchants welcome customers with the familiarity of home; where attracting small coffee shops offer the perfect break in a tiring day; where restaurants serving local food represent the perfect spot for a business meeting; where students can browse their cultural experience in independent bookstores and music shops; where employees can enjoy an excellent take out and deli for their lunch during a quick break from the office; and where local residents can walk and shop in their courtyard, whether it's for their groceries or for a local handcraft to decorate their house.

Picture the Piazza and its side streets at night; a safe place where people of all ages can find their ideal restaurant or bar, or just take pleasure in experiencing the square; newly renovated with trees, benches and illumination. Imagine the arcades as the perfect retreat on a rainy day, a perfect spot to sit and enjoy a cocktail or a coffee while reading a book or conversing with a friend.

Finally, visualize the district during the weekend, when the chaotic traffic gives way to a peaceful quiet. It becomes the perfect location for young, old, parents, children and pets alike. A small organic food market offers them the possibility to escape from fast and tasteless food, the ideal scene to enjoy an ice cream in the summer, or to host a concert of a local band or theatre production.

It's all already there; it just needs to be discovered!
ORGANIZATION RECOMMENDATIONS

The organization recommendations are designed to specify who will oversee the economic, design and promotion recommendations that will be outlined later in this section. In an area where merchants didn’t experience any connection, the creation of a Local Merchants Association is the prerequisite for any effective revitalization measure. Together with the City of Messina “Programmi Complessi” Office and the Development Department, the association should supervise the implementation of goals and objectives of this plan.

Goal 1 – Establish a Local Merchants Association as managing body of the Lo Sardo Square Natural Commercial Center.

Objective 1.1: Creation of the Lo Sardo Square Local Merchants Association

Why: Lo Sardo Square faces a problem of disorganized merchant presence, partially due to rather diversified and in some case conflicting commercial structure.

16. A natural commercial center (NCC) is an outdoor shopping mall that has all those assets (history, culture and services) that only an historic downtown can offer to customers, and in particular to local residents. The main difference with a traditional mall is that shoppers little or rarely interact with the operators, while in a natural commercial center enjoy of a relationship of trust with the neighborhood shop, creating a “commercial loyalty” whose benefits are both for the consumer and the retailer. It is essentially a response to the “fast shop” of modern commercial centers, by introducing a model of harmonious life, based on social relations, exchanges between people, aggregation and all those elements in modern life have gone missing.

From a procedural point of view a NCC is usually proposed by a local merchants’ association to the City and consists in a comprehensive plan (to be developed with local institutions) to reorganize the mix of commercial activities of an area, as well as its public spaces. In other terms, it’s a set of design recommendation and promotion initiatives to be implemented within an institutional context, and whose aims include: a greater competitiveness of local retail and services, a unique communication strategy, an increase in the number of visitors, an increase in the activities’ value, a rediscover of social life in public spaces and an improvement of the urban environment.

A more detailed document on the nature of Natural Commercial Centers, along with the formal proposal for creating one and some of their initiatives are available in the appendix.

Who: A representative from the City of Messina “Programmi Complessi” Office and the Development Department, which together need to start a cooperative process among local merchants.

What: First step will be to survey local merchants in order to gauge their opinions on creating a stable partnership. Then a working group should be established with those merchants that showed more interested in the project with the scope to set the association. This should include the formulation of a statute, the creation of a logo, and the establishment of an organizational structure scheme. The Association can start with just a core group of merchants, while the others will have the possibility to join later.

Objective 1.2: Creation of the Lo Sardo Square Natural Commercial Center.

Why: An “urban marketing” activity, whose aim is to promote the commercial district by combining the commercial and economic variables with the natural assets that determine the attractiveness of an urban environment, is necessary to start an effective retail revitalization effort.

Who: Lo Sardo Square Merchants Association will propose to the City of Messina the establishment of the Natural Commercial Center.

What: The formal institution of a designed area as the “Lo Sardo Square Natural Commercial Center”, where the City of Messina, with the support of the Lo Sardo Square Merchants Association, will implement the recommendations (especially the design and promotion ones) provided in this plan. Once established the NCC will also serve as an institutional framework where the merchants’ association together with the City
Goal 2 - Create a public participation around the plan approval and its implementation.

Objective 2.1: Start a new participation process with local residents and other stakeholders

Why: It would be the first time in a city like Messina, to produce public participation for a small neighborhood plan. It would create enthusiasm around the plan, its goals and objectives, making its implementation easier.

Who: The City of Messina “Programmi Complessi” Office.

What: During the plan editing and before its approval, a public meeting should be held to illustrate the main concepts. Further analysis and interviews with property owners, merchants, local residents and other relevant stakeholders should also be conducted.

ECONOMIC RECOMMENDATIONS

To become a vibrant business district, Lo Sardo Square needs to combine the existing business with new complementing commercial activities in order to keep serving a local daily market and to attract new customers from the trade area and beyond. The economic development plan recommends that the City of Messina Development Department and the Lo Sardo Square merchant association concentrate their efforts in retaining the existing retails compatible with the new image of the area, while attracting new ones.

Goal 1 - Recruit new businesses that complement the local, independent character of the area and that offer new services that appeal to a larger number of customers.

Objective 1.1: Target businesses that meet the trade area potential demand, such as a sit-down restaurants, cocktail bars, coffee shops, deli/take outs, specialty food stores, bookshops, music stores, gift shops and women’s and girl’s apparel. Attract vendors of organic and local food in order to establish a weekly or week-end open market. Attract vendors of ethnic and local handcrafts in order to establish a weekly or week-end open market.

Why: Market analysis and stakeholders’ attitude indicate an untapped demand able to support these new businesses. Moreover the study area has vacancies in strategic locations that could be filled in a short-medium period.

Who: The newborn “Lo Sardo Square Merchants Association” will create a Business Recruitment Committee to work with a representative from the City of Messina Development Department and the City of Messina “Programmi Complessi” Office.

What: The committee will use the market analysis and the demographic data included in this plan (both to be expanded and updated with other data collected on the field) to identify and recruit new businesses to invest in the district. Moreover partnerships with farmers and ethnic and local artisan associations will be established in order to set food and handcrafts open markets.

Objective 1.2: Create a Business Recruitment Packet that includes
an up-to-date list of available properties (including a corresponding datasheet for each) and a Messina downtown fact sheet, which will highlight what sets Lo Sardo Square apart from surrounding competing corridors.

**Why:** A publication with the most important facts on investing in Lo Sardo Square will provide prospect businesses with detailed information to assist with a decision to locate in this specific area.

**Who:** City of Messina Development Department, which will represent the primary point of contact for new business, working jointly with the Lo Sardo Square Merchants Association.

**What:** An annual brochure including:
- A list of available properties
- A Messina downtown fact sheet which will include the most recent economic and demographic statistics
- The study area zoning regulations
- Possible target markets
- A list of available local, national and European business incentives

**Goal 2 - Strengthen existing businesses through an active retention and enhancement program.**

Objective 2.1: Create a Business Enhancement and Retention Strategy.

**Why:** Maintaining the existing businesses (which also employ more than 100 people) is the pre-condition to attract new commercial activities and to revitalize a retail district. Moreover, Lo Sardo Square can count on many long standing businesses (as the shoe corridor shops and the restaurants and pizzeria) with established clientele, and on new commercial activities (as the ethnic grocery and the internet points) that have improved and diversified the actual offer.

**Who:** The City of Messina Development Department should establish a Business Enhancement and Retention Committee to create, together with two Merchants Association members and a representative from Messina Chamber of Commerce, a Business Enhancement and Retention Plan.

**What:** The Committee should undertake actions including:
- Offering business assistance on website development and advertising
- Increasing awareness of available local, national and European grants or incentives for commercial activities
- Promoting events in the district
- Creating, with a key role played by Messina Chamber of Commerce, a volunteer training program to assist local retails in creating strategic and business expansion plans and in accessing public incentives

**Goal 3 - Relocate incompatible commercial activities and services in a better equipped area.**

Objective 3.1: Create a relocation plan in order to assist incompatible commercial activities to relocate in a new area of Messina.

**Why:** The implementation of the revitalization plan and in particular the introduction of a pedestrian area will make some of Lo Sardo Square existing activities unable to coexist with the commercial patterns that will be introduced. These activities need an operation area where they continue to serve their clientele without diminishing their business volume.

**Who:** The City of Messina Development Department should study a relocation plan in order to offer valid alternatives to the actual locations. The department should partner with the STU “Il Tirone” which has developed a similar plan in an area adjacent to the district.

**What:** A relocation plan listing the potential sites (existing or to be built) for relocating these commercial activities.

Objective 3.2: Provide, directly or indirectly, financial incentives to the commercial activities that need to be relocated.

**Why:** In relocating incompatible commercial activities will experience additional costs that should be mitigated by public funds, considering the public interest of the project.

**Who:** The City of Messina should allocate a sum for this purpose.
Moreover, The City of Messina Development Department should provide assistance in obtaining national and European grants. **What:** A new local fund to help these commercial activities to relocate, and an assistance program for accessing national and European incentives.

**DESIGN RECOMMENDATIONS**

Design plays a vital role in achieving vitality in a commercial district. The strategic placement of new retail uses combined with streetscape enhancements can attract new customers to shop and enjoy the district. The key is introducing design elements that are unique and consistent for the whole district, and that can value the architectural assets of Lo Sardo Square.

**Goal 1 – Create two clusters of eat-out commercial activities to support a rational design in the square.**

**Objective 1.1:** Place newly-recruited restaurants, bars, cocktail lounges and deli/take out on two opposite ends of the square, where other similar commercial activities already exist.

**Why:** Even though the area is pretty small and can be considered a unique commercial cluster, creating a cluster of eat-out activities will shape the square as an appealing location both during the day, to employees and students, and at night, to all kinds of customers. Moreover, concentrating in two different and symmetric places inside the square will help in designing this new asset.

**Who:** The Business Enhancement and Retention Committee created by the City of Messina Development Department.

**What:** Clusters of bars, deli and restaurants at two opposite sides of the square, and in particular in the two buildings facing the square and sharing Via G. Conti and in the opposite block between Largo Seggiola and Via Cernaia. These three buildings hosts the four vacancies identified in the study area. The cluster could play a role similar (even if with smaller dimensions) to the Cathedral area, where several bars and restaurants are concentrated in few sf.

**Goal 2 – Create a pedestrian area throughout the district.**

**Objective 2.1:** Traffic closure of the square and its side streets.

**Why:** Create a pedestrian area will change drastically the district aspect, eliminating the actual chaotic traffic and allowing customers and local residents to enjoy of one of the most valuable area of Messina downtown. The square will finally become a real square, an Agora’ where people can gather and different initiatives and events can be organized. Offering a pedestrian-friendly natural commercial center to shoppers will also increase local retail’s sales.

**Who:** The City of Messina Department of Urban Circulation

**What:** The creation of a traffic free area, where only pedestrians and bikers can access. Once the area will be closed to car and motorbike circulation, the City of Messina should provide strict enforcement through regular patrols by the Messina Police Corp.
Objective 2.2: Change in traffic flows around the study area.

**Why:** Since Lo Sardo Square today is a vital circulation node in Messina traffic patterns, it is important to identify valid alternatives. Traffic flows between downtown and residential neighborhoods must be addressed through alternative routes.

**Who:** The City of Messina Department of Urban Circulation, in partnership with the STU “Il Tirone” which already presented the same recommendation in its plan for the Tirone neighborhood.

**What:** Closing the entire study area to traffic; the traffic flow from downtown to the west neighborhoods and the A20 entry will be diverted into the Santa Marta tunnel (that needs to be restored and re-opened) and from there to the Via S. Marta direction west, bypassing the square node. Other routes (to be added to the tunnel route, whose re-opening is an essential condition) are already in place and are represented by Via S. Cecilia and Via Noviziato that are used as collector streets from and to downtown.

Objective 2.3: Change in the parking configuration around the study area.

**Why:** The pedestrian area will eliminate hundreds of on street parking (most of them not included in any regulation but still tolerate). The parking issue, therefore, needs to be addressed, especially for local residents.

**Who:** The City of Messina Department of Urban Circulation, in partnership with the STU “Il Tirone” which already presented some related recommendations in its plan for the Tirone neighborhood.

**What:** The parking fee area, which has its limit in the Via C. Battisti, needs to be extended north in order to include the study area adjacent blocks.

This will allow more availability of parking spots, which today is hindered by the fact that Lo Sardo Square district is the closest free parking area to the historic downtown and to the several institutions and public offices located here. Local residents will be provided with free parking passes. After this measure, parking will still be an issue. Therefore it is necessary to study long-term and stable solutions, which could involve the parking projects presented by the STU “Il Tirone” in the Tirone neighborhood or a new configuration of part of the large military base located just a few feet from the study area.

**Goal 3 - Establish continuous, cohesive and unique design for the whole district.**

Objective 3.1: Visually define Lo Sardo Square borders through gateway cross-walks and street banners.

**Why:** It is important to make the transition from the city to the pedestrian area throughout the district will change drastically Lo Sardo Square’s appearance.

An example of raised and artistic crosswalk
new business district visibly and, most importantly, to a renovated pedestrian area, free of traffic and noise, and the scenario for a relaxing shopping experience, coffee break, or a walk.

**Who:** The City of Messina Department of Urban Circulation and Lo Sardo Square Merchants Association  
**What:** At each intersection on the planning area border the department of Urban Circulation will install a visual raised crosswalk, in marble stone, which will mark the entry in the Lo Sardo Square district. The merchants’ association will display street banners (appropriately designed with a new logo) to welcome visitors and shoppers. Merchants will also provide the district, at least in two strategic locations, with marble or stone store directory maps, which will include the location of the Spirito Santo Church and the ancient borough of Tirone.

Objective 3.2: Create a new paving for the square and its side streets  
**Why:** The commercial district needs a consistent paving that will radically transform the square appearance. Moreover, the pedestrian area allows for the removal of the asphalt both in the square and in its side streets.  
**Who:** The City of Messina Department of Urban Circulation  
**What:** The actual paving will be removed, along with the sidewalks both in the square and in the side streets. The entire area will be aligned at the same level. The square will be paved, creating a system of three concentric circles in lava stones, and each area will be delimited by a circle of marble stones. The material is the same already in place in the square’s sidewalks, but it will be distributed differently. In the square, the new paving will help rearrange its spaces and functions: the circles will guide the allocation of street furniture and green elements, as well as the space available for the commercial activities. Only in the external circle, closest to the restaurant and bars cluster, will it be allowed to place tables and chairs. Regarding the side streets, they will be paved using the same materials (lava and marble stones) but with a different design.

A stylised example of how should be organized the square with a new paving. The dark areas will be paved with lava stones while the white circles with marble. This will allow also a different and more rational spaces’ arrangement.

Objective 3.3: Enhance the visual identity of Lo Sardo Square through specific design elements.
**Why:** This design change will create a uniform vision of the district, defining its boundaries.
**Who:** The City of Messina Department of Urban Decoration  
**What:** The City will provide new street furniture, including comfortable...
benches (that will be distributed in the second circle facing the center of the square), trash disposal, planter boxes, placed on the border between first and second ring, where they are needed to delimitate the restaurant and bar clusters. Bike racks will also be provided to encourage cycling. Finally, a new, consistent street signage will be introduced to help identify the district.

Objective 3.4: Improve the public illumination system in the whole district

**Why:** From the stakeholders' opinion analysis, illumination proved to be an important issue, especially at night when the square, and the arcades in particular, are dark.

**Who:** The City of Messina Department of Urban Decoration

**What:** Even though there is a pleasant public illumination system already in place, it needs to be improved and to be extended into the square’s side streets. While the double luminary streetlight within the square seems to respond perfectly to the architectural style, pedestrian scaled lighting needs to be added
to the taller streetlights on the square’s borders. This last system should also be extended to the planning area side streets. Regarding the arcades, an illumination system needs to be implemented, maybe adopting the same style that is already in place in front of the “Trattoria del Popolo” (see picture in the previous page).

**Objective 3.5: Renovate the arcades**

**Why:** it is the most valuable asset of the entire planning area, and most of them are in poor conditions.  
**Who:** The City of Messina and the property owners.  
**What:** Since the arcades are privately owned but are of public use, a renovation system must be found that can represent this two-fold situation. Two different options are proposed:  
1. The city should allocate a small grant for each property owner to stimulate them to renovate the arcades, according to a set of guidelines created by the City of Messina Department of Urban decoration.  
2. The property owners should give the arcades to the city, free of charge, and the city will take care of renovating and keeping them clean.

**Objective 3.6: Develop a color plan for the whole district**

**Why:** The general appearance of the area, and of the building in particular, is not adequate to the potentials of the district. A new color plan, if well implemented, will change the perception of the area and attract more customers.  
**Who:** The City of Messina and the property owners.  
**What:** different strategies can be implemented to reach this objective:  
- The City of Messina will create a color general plan for the whole district, which has to serve as a set of guidelines for future renovations of buildings and facades, and also as a regulation for the shops’ signage.  
- The City of Messina will allocate a “façade grant” to stimulate property owners to renovate them. In particular the buildings in the square need a consistent color.  
- The inside panels of the arcades will be painted with a darker color (yellow or brown) to emphasize the shops located there.  
- The buildings’ front doors, along the planning area, should be painted in different colors in order to reproduce a “Dublin effect” and to characterize the whole district.

**Objective 3.7: Install a statue or a fountain, or another type of sculpture in the square**

**Why:** The Square needs an element that can represent it, and that can become an attracting landmark.
The City of Messina will start a process of public participation to let local residents decide which kind of sculpture they would like to see in the square. The City should propose some alternative, which should include a statue of Lo Sardo (since the square has his name) and a fountain or other sculpture representing multiculturalism and integration (since this was originally an area where different religions and people coexisted). The statue should be installed in front of the square’s main side street, Via S. Marta, facing east, towards the square.

The marketing and promotions recommendations are intended to promote an image of Lo Sardo Square emphasizing the area’s strengths as a commercial corridor in order to appeal to existing and potential customers. They should be implemented within the institutional framework of the newly created Natural Commercial Center.

**Goal 1 - Use promotional strategies to identify Lo Sardo Square as a commercial destination.**

**Objective 1.1:** Develop a slogan that will guide all future promotional efforts.

**Why:** A sentence striking the attention of potential customers can help identify the commercial district and will tell people why it is worth visiting.

**Who:** Lo Sardo Square Merchants Association.

**What:** The slogan should describe what sets Lo Sardo Square apart from surrounding competing corridors, its convenience character and pleasant atmosphere.

**Objective 1.2:** Develop, print and distribute a Lo Sardo Square Retail Map/Brochure, which should include information on discounts and events in the district.

**Why:** To market the different segment of potential customers (local residents, employees, students).

**Who:** Lo Sardo Square Merchants Association.

**What:** an informational brochure/flyer showing the location of each shop, and informing potential customers on sales events and discounts. A discount coupon redeemable at participating retail could also be included. The Brochure should be distributed in the local residents’ and offices’ mail boxes and in front of the University and the dorm.

**Objective 1.3:** Create a web site for the Lo Sardo Square Natural Commercial Center

**Why:** The importance of new communication technology offer an opportunity to market a larger number of customers.

**Who:** Professional web designer, hired by the Lo Sardo Square Merchants Association.
Lo Sardo Square Revitalization Plan

GOALS, OBJECTIVES AND STRATEGIES

**What:** A web site, using the slogan and logo of the district, containing all the relevant information on the district, including retail locations and telephone numbers, and information on sales events and special initiatives. The web site should also be promoted through links with other Messina related web sites (online newspapers, local forums, etc...).

**Goal 2 - Develop a retail promotion strategy to attract new shoppers and reward long-time customers.**

Objective 2.1: Develop cross-promotional strategies to encourage multiple-destination shopping within the district.

*Why:* Lo Sardo Square could easily become a shopping area where shoppers can stroll and browse different shops, or have lunch or a coffee in one of its restaurants, bars or coffee shops. This should lead to an increase in merchants’ sales.


*What:* One type of cross promotion is cross-product placement. For example, ethnic food from the oriental market could be displayed in the internet point/call center.

A second type of cross promotion is cross-couponing, where one business offers discount coupons as incentives for shoppers to visit a related business within the area. For example, the hair beauty and a restaurant could offer coupons to their customers to encourage patronage to both businesses.

Objective 2.2: Develop a specific retail marketing for special segments of the market.

*Why:* Lo Sardo Square district can count on a diversified market which includes local residents, employees and students.


*What:* For the student population to gravitate towards the area, an agreement between the merchants’ association and the University of Messina should be established to include a list of local commercial activities where university students can have discounts. For employees of nearby offices and institutions, local merchants should create special offers, especially during their lunch break. Examples are: promoting a lunch menu at a reduced price, a monthly lunch subscription at a convenient cost, a delivery service, or a telephone service that allows employees to place the order from their office in order to minimize the time spent at the restaurant. Moreover, coffee shops and restaurants should create a fidelity card to reward students and employees after a certain number of coffees or meals (with a free one).

Objective 2.3: Develop retail promotions to reward customers loyal to the area.

*Why:* Local residents proved to be a significant asset for Lo Sardo Square commercial activities. They represent their market base, and therefore need to be retained.


*What:* Two different options can be implemented, both experienced in other

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Christmas illumination, together with other related events, could attract more customers in the district.

An example of EurOmaggio
GOALS, OBJECTIVES AND STRATEGIES

Natural Commercial Centers across Italy.
1. Lo Sardo Square Merchants Association should issue a “discount-money” (called for example EurOmaggio) that each retailer can buy (1 Euro = 1 EurOmaggio). Each merchant can give these discount notes (they can be issued in different values from 1 euro to 50 euro) to their customers as they shop. It is an actual discount, but the customers can spend it only within the district and among those commercial activities that are participating the initiative (it won’t be convertible into real money). This promotion could start with the usual customers (through the issue of a fidelity card to be showed when shopping) and, in the long run, could be extended to all customers. This program will increase merchants’ sales since customers will be attracted to shop and spend their discount notes in the district, instead of buying elsewhere.

2. Lo Sardo Square Merchants Association will introduce a fidelity card through which the customer, instead of receiving the traditional discount, will receive a similar amount of money to be deposited in a retirement program. This incentive, which requires the involvement of a bank or other financial institution, is particularly suited for housewives and students, which usually don’t have a stable income. Obviously the owner of each retirement fund can also increment their account with voluntary payments.

Goal 3 - Organize special and unique events that will change the general perception of Lo Sardo square and will attract more customers.

Objective 3.1: Develop a successful retail event at the beginning of the Christmas holidays, capitalizing on Lo Sardo Square’s architectural and design assets.

Why: This kind of event, at the beginning of winter break, is important because it establishes a positive image in the minds of shoppers and generates future sales in the area by introducing new consumers to the district in a period in which private expenditure usually increases.

Who: Lo Sardo Square Merchants Association together with the Borough institutions.

What: It has to be perceived as a special event for the entire borough and, in a sense, for the whole city. An example event could be the introduction of a Christmas special illumination (in the square, under the arcades, in the store fronts and in the side streets) to be lighted during a public ceremony followed by a concert or a show. During the event stores should stay open.

Objective 3.2: Organize a series of summer events, from end of May till September, in order to offer Messina downtown citizens a pleasant place to spend their summer nights.

Why: More and more, people are spending their vacation in town, looking for some entertainment activities at night. Organizing periodic events throughout the summer will improve Lo Sardo Square’s perception and increase the potential customer base.

Who: Lo Sardo Square Merchants Association together with the Borough institutions.

What: Initiatives to be organized can include: a music festival to
be held weekly with local artists, theatre plays, art exhibitions and small sports events. These activities can all be hosted in the square. Another example could be a series of “open sky” movie nights to be hosted in the T. Cannizzaro Elementary School courtyard located one block outside the district, in Via M. Giurba. During the events stores should stay open.

Objective 3.3: Establish a periodic (once a month on Sundays) antiques open market, using the impressive architectural scenario represented by the arcades.

**Why:** The arcades offer a natural site for this type of activity, and a monthly event, if well promoted, can introduce new consumers to the district.

**Who:** Lo Sardo Square Merchants Association together with the category artisans association.

**What:** The open market should be held under the arcades, in those sections that don’t host a store or an activity that need front space. It should be promoted through flyers to be distributed throughout the city.
### Implementation Matrix

This schedule is a suggested timeline for how the Lo Sardo Square plan should be realized. Each objective has been prioritized as an immediate (third quarter of 2008), short-term (last quarter of 2008), mid-term (2009), or long-term need (2010 and over). These needs can be reworked and shifted depending on funding, political will, or unforeseen needs that require immediate attention.

#### Organization

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<tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.1 Creation of the Lo Sardo Square Local Merchants Association</td>
<td>The City of Messina “Programmi Complessi” Office and the Development Department</td>
<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td>1.2 Creation of the Lo Sardo Square Natural Commercial Center</td>
<td>Lo Sardo Square Merchants Association and The City of Messina</td>
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<tr>
<td>2.1 Start a new participation process with local residents and other stakeholders</td>
<td>The City of Messina “Programmi Complessi” Office</td>
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<td>ongoing</td>
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#### Economic

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<tr>
<td>1.1 Target business that meet the trade area potential demand</td>
<td>Business Recruitment Committee, City of Messina Development Department and “Programmi Complessi” Office</td>
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<td>ongoing</td>
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<tr>
<td>1.2 Create a Business Recruitment Packet</td>
<td>City of Messina Development Department</td>
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<tr>
<td>2.1 Create a Business Enhancement and Retention Strategy</td>
<td>City of Messina Development Department, Merchants Association and Messina Chamber of Commerce</td>
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## Lo Sardo Square Revitalization Plan

### 3.1 Create a relocation plan to relocate incompatible commercial activities in a new area

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<tr>
<td>The City of Messina Development Department</td>
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### 3.2 Provide, directly or indirectly, financial incentives to the commercial activities that need to be relocated.

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<td>The City of Messina Development Department</td>
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### Design

#### Object

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<tr>
<td>1.1 Creation of two restaurant clusters</td>
<td>The City of Messina Development Department</td>
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<tr>
<td>2.1 Traffic closure of the square and its side streets</td>
<td>The City of Messina Department of Urban Circulation</td>
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<tr>
<td>2.2 Change in traffic flows around the study area (restoration of S.Maria Tunnel)</td>
<td>The City of Messina Department of Urban Circulation</td>
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<tr>
<td>2.3 Change in the parking configuration around the study area (and search of new parking solutions)</td>
<td>The City of Messina Department of Urban Circulation</td>
<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td>3.1 Visually define Lo Sardo Square borders through gateway cross-walks and street banners</td>
<td>The City of Messina Department of Urban Circulation and Lo Sardo Square Merchants Association</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td>3.2 Create a new paving for the square and its side streets</td>
<td>The City of Messina Department of Urban Circulation</td>
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<tr>
<td>3.3 Enhance the visual identity of Lo Sardo Square through specific design elements</td>
<td>The City of Messina Department of Urban Decoration</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>3.4 Improve the public illumination system in the whole district</td>
<td>The City of Messina Department of Urban Decoration</td>
<td>X</td>
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<td>3.5 Renovate the arcades</td>
<td>The City of Messina and the property owners</td>
<td>X</td>
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<td>3.6 Develop a color plan for the whole district</td>
<td>The City of Messina and the property owners</td>
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<td>3.7 Install a statue or a fountain, or another type of sculpture in the square</td>
<td>The City of Messina</td>
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### Promotion

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.1 Develop a slogan that will guide all future promotional efforts.</td>
<td>Lo Sardo Square Merchants Association</td>
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<td>1.2 Develop, print and distribute a Lo Sardo Square Retail Map/Brochure</td>
<td>Lo Sardo Square Merchants Association</td>
<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td>1.3 Create a website for the Lo Sardo Square Natural Commercial Center</td>
<td>Professional web designer, hired by the Lo Sardo Square Merchants Association</td>
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<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td>2.1 Develop cross-promotional strategies to encourage multiple-destination shopping within the district</td>
<td>Lo Sardo Square Merchants Association</td>
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<tr>
<td>2.2 Develop a specific retail marketing plan for special segments of the market</td>
<td>Lo Sardo Square Merchants Association</td>
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<td>2.3 Develop retail promotions to reward customers loyal to the area</td>
<td>Lo Sardo Square Merchants Association</td>
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<td></td>
<td>3.1 Develop a successful retail event at the beginning of the Christmas holidays</td>
<td>Lo Sardo Square Merchants Association together with the Borough institutions</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3.2 Organize a series of summer events, from end of May till September</td>
<td>Lo Sardo Square Merchants Association together with the Borough institutions</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3.3 Establish a periodic (once a month on Sundays) antiques open market</td>
<td>Lo Sardo Square Merchants Association together with the category artisans association</td>
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CONCLUSION

The Lo Sardo Square area has enormous potential to become an important commercial district in Messina’s historic downtown. The presence of a large and diversified market, together with an impressive architectural context, makes the area one the most valuable in the entire City of Messina.

The Lo Sardo Square revitalization plan is designed to help local merchants capitalize on the district’s strengths, minimize weaknesses, seize opportunities and respond to threats. Following the plan’s organization, economic, design and promotion recommendations will help Lo Sardo Square become an attracting Natural Commercial Center, where patrons will enjoy shopping and walking.
SOURCES


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