

## Gianmario Cazzaniga, a life between bricks and carts

When, more than 35 years ago, the race to develop supermarkets and shopping centres began, he was there, between a building site and a distribution network to be acquired, while the world of commercial distribution was changing profoundly. Years of apprenticeship at the number One's court, Bernardo Caprotti, who made Esselunga a model for the whole of Europe. Then other years at the Standa of His Emittance, Silvio Berlusconi, which was the House of the Italians, but in need of so much renovation that in the end it was sold, a part to COIN and another to the Austrians of Billa. A paradox for the Milan that made the Cinque Giornate. But the mid-1990s were the time when the big foreign groups took Italian food distribution by storm. For many years, GMC worked alongside the most important of these, the French company Carrefour, a leader in Europe and second in the world only to the American giant Wal Mart in its development along the peninsula. He plan for a marriage between the transalpines and Standa foundered on Bermuda beach, where the Cavaliere used to spend his Christmas holidays at the time. The French consoled themselves by buying GS. However, some branches of Standa were acquired in the South, and it was not possible to build the House of the Europeans, but at least that of the Baresi, yes. With an eye to the no-longer-young shop assistants who moved from the shelves to the tills.

"Today, multinationals no longer use retraining, they go out on a limb and lay people off. Back then, however, the line dictated by the Cavaliere was to sell".

### - Has the World changed ?

"Even the big entrepreneurs. I don't see many people like Caprotti, Del Vecchio and Berlusconi around. The last few years have seen the rise of algorithms. The youngsters of my generation used to play on the playgrounds, which no longer exist today. The technological revolution changed everything. Then came COVID 19, which acted as an accelerator, changing consumers' needs and habits: what would have taken at least a decade to achieve, only took a few months of lockdown. People are buying online, not only the younger ones, to the detriment of traditional shops. Those who cannot keep up with the times will close their shutters."

### - In fact, in the United States, where things happen years earlier than in Europe, several shopping centres have closed down.

"Just think that the big investment funds have raised their rates of return. In other words, they want more profitable rates than in the past, because they want to be rewarded for the greater risks associated with the more critical sales made in traditional channels"

### - You have worked with the most established companies, from supermarkets to IKEA. Do you think that the Amazon model will lead to the disappearance of the big traditional brands, as happened with Nokia mobile phones, replaced by Apple and Samsung?

"In my opinion, food and luxury will have a competitive advantage that other sectors will not have. I'm thinking of those who sell low-cost clothing, electronics, do-it-yourself items which are not too bulky. I myself have bought the last two iPhones online and do my shopping online at Esselunga. The latter shows that by adapting to the times, i.e. by changing the distribution infrastructure, one can remain competitive. When I think of another large company I have worked with, IKEA, I don't think that leafing through a catalogue on

your PC can replace seeing the colours of the fabrics up close, touching the furniture and trying out the Swedish kitchen. It's an emotional journey that can't be replaced by a virtual tour”.

**- So nothing changes for you property developers ?**

“Not really, nothing will be the same as before. In banking, algorithms have replaced the experience and intuition of people. The traditional banker is no more. Like the traditional shop. Less and less. Social networks have replaced phone calls. Exchanging e-mails has replaced talking to each other. Everything is more impersonal. But until they invent the house in the cloud, there will be work for developers. Commercial real estate will come into its own when Generation Z reaches retirement age. By that time, I fear that buying in a traditional shop will be like driving an Isotta Fraschini today.