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What is the Place of Retail in Contemporary Small Towns?

Many researchers indicate that retail is increasingly important for the development of the city. It still creates a large resource on the labour market, organizing and impacting urban public space and even creates a new type of social and cultural relations as well as often it becomes a market and marketing symbol of the city and town. Currently, towns and cities spatial organisation became a subject of dynamic structural changes, touch its functional, social and economic base, parallel processes of modernization and revitalization further complicated the situation and development of many cities. Many of these changes enhance to modern commerce.

In the past decades, intensive development of modern shopping malls, which invested increasingly in the urban central districts are slowly became a "cities under the roof" and offer a diverse set of deals. These objects usually take larger plot, has a large, free parking, convenient access and spacious one-storey buildings. Both the downtown and peripheral shopping centres represent a huge competition for traditional forms of retailing and its intensive development will not only quantitative changes in retail chains, but also a change of a spatial, social and economic. Traditional downtown loses their function in favour of commercial, multi-functional and comprehensive gallery and suburban residential districts are monofunctional (i.e. Ptaček, Szczyrba 2007, Leeuwen, Rietveld, 2011, Heffner, Twardzik 2013).

As in other parts of Europe, small towns and other local centres in the rural areas so far fulfilling housing functions (commuting) but local trade and services are systematically losing importance for commercial service of residents. Their demand potential is largely taken over by shopping centres located in the outer metropolitan zone. "Outflow" of central functions results in increasing peripherality of small towns. Urban centres, located in the outer area, are becoming mono-functional – they're dominated by housing and locally served by one or two discount stores usually located in accessible nearby road network nodes and convenient "greenfield" location (large parking lot). The changes take place both in the spatial structure (architecture, communications, spatial development) as well as in social and economic (labour market, economy). The main change is connected to disappearance of traditional economic bases of small towns, including the former trade-services functions carried out towards rural areas in the surroundings zones. Changes in small towns and rural retail go along with evolution in consumer behavior and consumer mobility for services including retail (i.e. Halás, Zuskáčová 2013). In this respect, shopping centers and discount stores became the favored retail format in the rural and peripheral outskirts of big urban centers. During the transformation processes, retail and services and more generally, services of general interest (SGI), could be placed unfairly and with a deeper impact on territorial cohesion, particularly

for peripheral localities. Regional and local peripheries are usually represented by rural areas where the local centers are losing their position in the service processes (mostly shopping function, see Maryáš et al. 2014 or Križan et al. 2017); however, such development is typical for other countries as well (e.g. Cebollada 2009; Wang and Tang 2013)

Interesting are the components of retail change in the cities as well as in medium and small towns, in particular possible explanation of changing patterns of retailing. Important for urban structural change – in every type of the urban centre - is the locational change in retailing. The processes of retail institutional change are also important for location, existence and functioning of retailers and stores in the cities space as well as in small urban centers. Other aspects of store location seen as being of most importance are that of accessibility. In many towns and cities, both larger and smaller, retail and commerce was shifted outward. Consequently, in the city centers conditions for retailers and services have changed completely, especially in the cities and towns of Central Europe, where the availability of parking and public transport is limited.

The interactions between trade and retail activities and urban economic resilience with a primary focus on the former socialist countries in Central and Eastern Europe and particularly in Poland.

Quick and intensive increase of large-scale retail outlets and its impact to the social and economic aspects of existing retail in local, regional and national urban systems have been extensively discussed in the urban economic and planning literature. The answer to the question: What is the future of the traditional trade and retail in the cities and small towns? Is it very actual because the question of survival of retail facilities in a competitive and dynamic urban structure has been discussed less. The problem of functioning of retail and trade in small and medium-sized towns as well as in outer zones of urban agglomerations became extremely important. Especially important is the adjustment of traditional city-center retail function, disappears and depreciates at a fast pace resulting in numerous deserted main streets and pedestrian areas in many even in the cities and small towns. Many authors believe that this phenomenon is connected to uncontrolled influx of new forms of shopping venues in outer (hypermarkets) and inner (shopping malls) zones of traditional cities and towns. It is a lot of examples, from the practical disappearance of retail in the high streets to the successful revitalization of city centres and their increased role in economic resilience.

Retailing has always been crucial and important to the function, urban form and identity of the city. The success of the city commerce is seen as sign of urban vitality and good urban policy provided by the key city institutions. The status of retail and commerce show the position of a city or town in the hierarchy of settlement system and to give each place of the city its own special character, in particular the physical appearance of the high streets and types of retailing (e.g. corner shops, market halls, department stores, supermarkets, hypermarkets, shopping malls). Important is the answer to the question why exactly such a set of retail stores and services get together in some cities and towns and how it is change over the longue duree.

Among the main principles of the functioning of commerce in the cities are usually mentioned:

- Ensuring appropriate conditions for historic downtowns and new urban communities to compete with modern malls and suburban shopping centres.
- Promote development of sustainable communities which can give more profits for retail and shopping investment in downtowns and historic cities (Gibbs 2012).
- Guarantee a good level of permanent accessibility to the city centre retail and shopping areas, in particular by pedestrian, bicycle and public transportation network.
- Reinforce retail services and commerce in city centres by locating parking for support walking on downtown public spaces such as a town square (Brunette and Caldarice 2016).

On the other hand, neighbourhood centres and local shopping streets are giving economic, social and cultural identity to many towns and cities, especially in Western and Southern Europe. Their quality lies in a mix of retail, restaurant, services, leisure and cultural offerings. The location of retail shops close to residential areas allows the citizens to make their everyday shopping on foot, by bicycle or using public transport. In Poland widely developed the movement protecting local shops and services and many local activists and politicians considers that tailored and resource-efficient development of local retailers networks as well as social, cultural and transport infrastructure are matched to the demands of urban users and population.

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