

“Post-Shopping Commerce”. Os Novos Modelos Urbanos das Actividades Comerciais

“Post-Shopping Commerce”. New Urban Models of Commercial Activities

“Post-Shopping Commerce”. Los Nuevos Modelos Urbanos de las Actividades Comerciales

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Resumo

O artigo introduz o projeto de investigação de pós-doc que se baseia no recente doutoramento. Aprofundando o tema, fornece uma análise exaustiva das áreas de "Post-Shopping Commerce": uma ampla gama de novos modelos comerciais que representam pólos alternativos de urbanidade e inovadores motores de interessantes dinâmicas sociais e económicas, que vão desde lugares de troca temporária de todos os tipos, "underground restaurants", "brand marketing", até a venda personalizada, e mesmo 'necessity retails' e 'obsolete factories'.

Dirigindo a atenção para a especificidade dos espaços comerciais Post-Shopping, este estudo visa ilustrar, questionar e reflectir sobre tais fenómenos e o seu lugar dentro da teoria e prática do planeamento, baseado na premissa de que os espaços comerciais têm um papel significativo a desempenhar na transformação e consolidação da atual cidade / território e na sua "cityness" (ou urbanidade).

Palavras-chave: Espaço comercial. Espaço Público. Urbanismo Comercial.

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Abstract

The paper introduces the post-doc research project builds on the recent PhD study. Deepening its inquiry, provides an exhaustive analysis of the areas of “Post-Shopping Commerce”: a wide range of new commercial models representing alternative poles of urbanity and innovative engines of interesting social and economic dynamics, ranging from temporary trading places of all kinds, to “underground restaurants”, “brand marketing”, personalized sale, and even ‘necessity retails’ and ‘obsolete factories’.

By directing the attention to the specificity of Post-Shopping commercial spaces, this paper aims to illustrate, enquire and reflect on such phenomena and its place within planning theory and practice, based on the premise that commercial spaces have a significant role to play in the transformation and consolidation of the current city/territory and his "cityness" (or urbanity).

Keywords: *Commercial space. Public space. Commercial urbanism.*

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Resumen

El artículo introduce el proyecto de investigación post-doc que se basa en el reciente estudio de doctorado. Al profundizar su tema, proporciona un análisis exhaustivo de las áreas de " Post-Shopping Commerce": un amplio conjunto de nuevos modelos comerciales que representan alternativos polos de urbanidad e innovadores motores de interesantes dinámicas sociales y económicas, que van desde los lugares de comercio informal de todo tipo hasta "underground restaurants", "brand marketing", venta personalizada, e incluso los 'necessity retails' y 'obsolete factories'.

Al dirigir la atención a la especificidad de los espacios comerciales Post-Shopping, este estudio tiene como objetivo ilustrar, cuestionar y reflexionar sobre estos fenómenos y su lugar dentro de la teoría y práctica de la planificación, basado en la premisa de que los espacios comerciales tienen un papel importante que desempeñar en la transformación y consolidación de la actual ciudad/territorio y su "cityness" (o urbanidad).

Palabras clave: *Espacio comercial. Espacio público. Urbanismo Comercial.*

"Post-Shopping Commerce".

New Urban Models of Commercial Activities

According to Henri Pirenne (1939) cities are "daughters of trade and their essence of being". More recently, the *Harvard Design School Guide to Shopping*, edited by Chuiha Chung, Jeffrey Inaba, Rem Koolhaas e Sze Tsung Leong, presents the rather striking idea that the making of architecture has always been dependent on an exclusion and masking of the centrality of retail (Smiley, 2003).

Taking as a starting point what seems to be a shared assumption amongst many theorists, even though they belong to very different epochs, this paper supports the idea of the close relationship between commerce and cities. Any project aimed at the defence and production of urban quality cannot avoid considering the issue of commerce, as well as the guiding forces underlying its development and ever changing nature.

In fact, there has always been an inseparable, congenital, and even constitutive relationship between urban centres and commerce. Throughout time, from the covered market of the eighteenth century to the large department stores and arcades of the nineteenth century, public commercial spaces have never lost the common

bond of being a mix of interaction, city expression, urban architecture and an extension of the space and public purposes of the urban centres.

However, at a certain moment of the twentieth century, the relationship between the urban centre and commerce changed considerably. With the consolidation of new market models and new distribution processes of products, services and information, consumption becomes the paradigm of the modern city (Chung et al. 2002, Smiley 2003) and commerce and its places take on the main driving role of such transformation. It is the era of the Shopping Malls that replacing the streets, parks and squares as the new collective space par excellence, recreate admirable worlds and optimized simulations of the traditional public spaces (Chung et al. 2002, Goss 1993, Ritzer 2000, Sorkin 2004).

Nevertheless, the changes do not end there; the transformation of the commercial spaces continued into the twenty first century. The causes of this ongoing process are probably different, not least the natural life cycle of the commercial spaces (that as any other kind of artifact linked to people, it changes according to its demand and its "volubility") and, overall, the current financial crisis.

The global financial crisis and its effects on the economy have caused a strong pressure on family budgets and debt, with inevitable repercussions on their purchasing and consuming power, along with a more general decline in their trust of the economic and financial systems. Market deregulation, considered to be the driving engine for economic growth and employment since the 1980s, has given rise to major problems that threaten to outweigh any achieved benefits, and have led to austerity-driven public policies that were until recently unimaginable.

In this environment of increasing complexity, marked by social divisions, instability, uncertainty and changes at variable rates, the actions of the economic agents, including consumers, are inevitably affected. The most evident sign that the crisis is affecting commercial spaces is the clear "deceleration" of the large shopping centres in countries affected by crisis and austerity. According to Cushman & Wakefield's latest European Shopping Centre Development report (November 2014), Western Europe's markets have seen an increasing number of refurbishments and extensions - characterized by a desire for high-quality schemes with increased cultural and social offerings and the introduction of complementary uses and convenience - and a very small number of new centres.

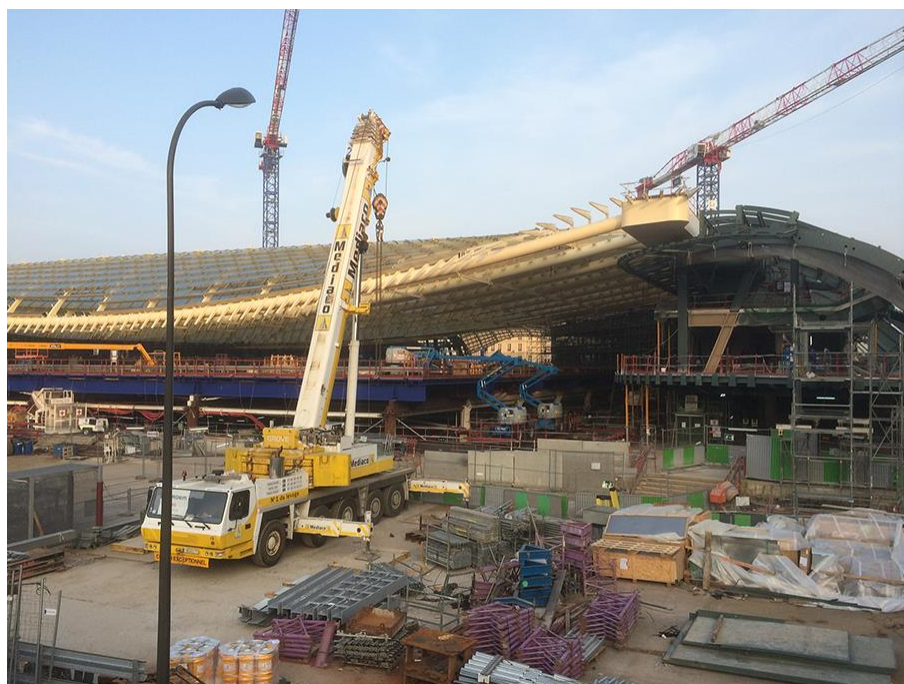
One of the most innovative recent proposals, and a good example of the current refurbishments and extensions trend, is the 15,000 m² extension of the Forum des Halles in Paris, where the four floors of stores extend down to the city's busiest metro hub. The ongoing massive renovation project (with a target completion date of 2016) - with an enormous golden-hued translucent canopy as centrepiece - will expand its library and conservatory to twice their original size, alongside the addition of a hip-hop centre and workshop space for aspiring artists (6,300 m² of retail shops; 2,600 m² of music conservatory; 1,400 m² of hip-hop centre; 1,050 m² of library; 1,000 m² of amateur workshops and a cultural centre for the deaf and hearing-impaired).

Figure 1: Forum des Halles, currently under reconstruction, Paris

Source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Les_Halles#/media/File:Forum_des_halles_03-2014.JPG
(28/09/15)

An evident sign of this continuing evolution also comes from the International Council of Shopping Centres. Robert Stoker, Senior Real Estate Manager of Wal-Mart Stores, said, "We have reached a stage where we can be flexible. We are no longer obliged to build flagship boxes blue-gray.", and quoted several examples of large commercial complexes that have changed the rigid and unavoidable formula of the Wal-Mart project (a single floor building along the main communication roads of metropolitan areas and surrounded by asphalt) to adapt them to existing neighbourhoods in new mixed-use settlements and structures erected vertically instead of horizontally.

So, if the age of the shopping malls is over, what comes next? And what kind of



relationship exists between city and commerce?

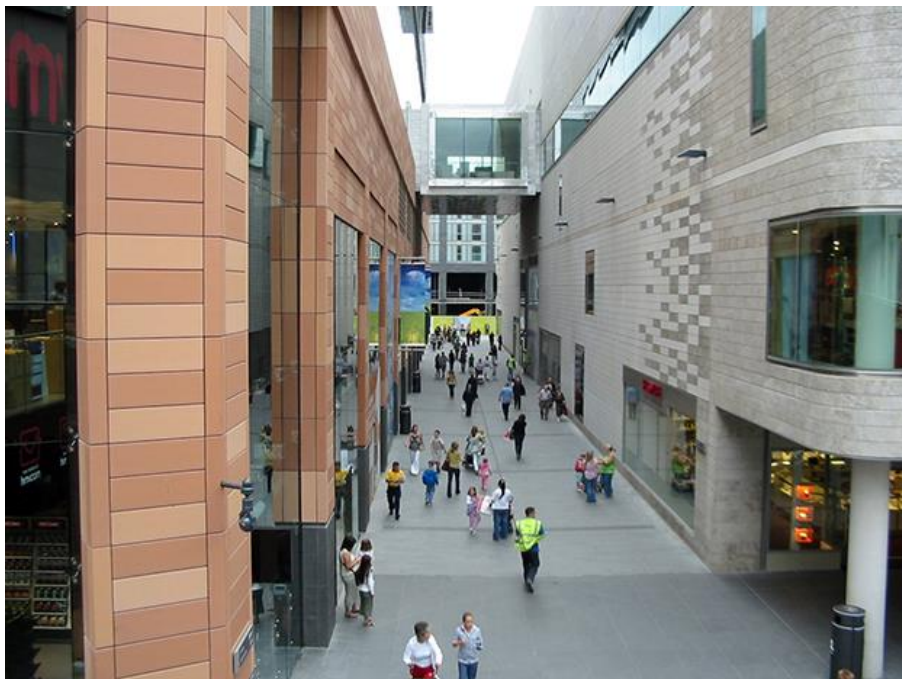
Wal-Mart is not alone in the wish to adapt to the new economic and social conditions. Many of the shopping centres are now envisaged to potentially transform themselves into new commercial structures, as it is hinted by the newest form of North American "hot" shopping: the *necessity retail*. Dragged by the commercial seduction of fruit and vegetable shops and other services for mass consumption, numerous *dead malls* - empty carcasses awaiting a new life – convert to the place where to find all kinds of basic supplies. The *necessity retail* represents the strange, although eternal return to an older form of consumption (Smiley, 2003).

If on the one hand, we clearly are witnessing the transformation of the large existing facilities for shopping, on the other hand, as a late response to the aggressive invasion of shopping centres, traditional public spaces of European cities are rethinking themselves. While shopping malls copied the urban centers, these are now copying the shopping malls. This reversal of the process has been witnessed by many projects of urban remodelling, which, in the end, are not much more than *urban restyling*, focused on marketing purposes, often including renovation, communication and promotion strategies aimed at highlighting the “consumable” features of a specific place. The old quarters of European cities increasingly look like shopping malls also in terms of the goods and services that are provided; the model of the shopping centre occupies all the available space and becomes the scene of any action in a public space. This trend often results in a phenomenon of gentrification, which does not differ much from those processes of social and space segregation typically produced by extra-urban commercial systems (Rabbiosi, 2013).

Figure 2: Wall Street, Liverpool One, Liverpool
Source: <http://www.flickr.com/photos/afanc/2821834098/> (1/09/15)

To the phenomenon of gentrification also work the progressive constitution of networks of commercial routes in urban centres, the renovation of the commercial street or the configuration of the so-called ‘market street’ and even the construction of *mixed-use* trading complexes of high quality integrated in the centre of the compact tissue.

Theorists have already reported on this change: “Conspicuous consumption is



dead, shopping centres are obsolete and shopping will be undertaken in ‘experience centres’ or in the city centre” (White 2009). Indeed, while city centres are learning lessons from shopping malls, large scale commercial developments are enhancing their offer with entertainment and cultural components.

A well-known case of urban regeneration encouraged by retail is Shoreditch, a vibrant district in London's East End. Its gentrification started with the construction of the Shoreditch High Street train station in 2010. However, that development has been completed with the opening of the first European *pop-up shopping*, located in a temporarily unused site close to the underground station. Boxpark Shoreditch is made completely from shipping containers. 60 containers total – 40 containers on the ground floor house shops for small exclusive brands, while the 20 containers of the upper are dedicated to entertainment in form of art galleries, restaurants and cafes. Adding another term to the shopping development lexicon, these *shipping malls* are neither a building, nor a stall – and despite their unusual construction material – they are mostly considered architecture as such. The shipping containers singular constructive qualities and the simple design produce a particular architectural outcome: the possibility to be placed on almost any urban lot for any amount of time.

Figure 3: Boxpark Shoreditch, London

Source: <http://www.boxpark.co.uk/#> (28/09/15)

Nearly all European capitals are also living a quite impressive change in its more classic centres of supplies, the wholesale food markets. Besides proposing an array of leisure activities and a wide choice of food and drink offerings, they have been becoming meeting places, tourist references, trendsetters spaces and stages



for events.

A good case study, Madrid has 46 municipal markets, some newly remodelled, which are reinventing their own space and their own offer.

In the two floors of the Mercado de Antón Martín, in the same street of the Filmateca and Reina Sofía Museum, the offer ranges from a sushi bar to a gluten-free eco-shop, through florists, butchers, poultry and fruit shops. The third floor has become a dance school. Sandwich Mixto - a publisher located on the first floor - sells poetry in cans, publishes fanzines and offers micro-residencies for artists.

The *sui generis* 50s market Espacio Platea, which has been the cinema Carlos III and nowadays preserves the stage with a lively agenda of dj's stunts and proposes five floors of gastronomic offer (in different stalls very famous *chefs* and culinary brands sell any kind of 'take away' dishes or food products) . You can taste the French cuisine or enjoy the exuberant cocktails while listening a free jazz concert.

Figure 4: Espacio Platea, Madrid

Source: <http://www.plateamadrid.com/> (18/09/15).

The attraction of potential consumers through entertainment is, truly, as old as the trade itself. But still, the formula that has transformed shopping in a significant leisure activity continues to work. The many and different regional fairs, temporary thematic markets or even the street hawkers, circus barker ancestors, clearly identify



the importance of the entertainment in the transformation of the commercial places in the premier destination for lengthy excursions that involved much more than taking care of urgent shopping errands.

Much more dramatically developed and integral to the continuous re-enchancement of shopping by entertainment is the American phenomenon of *Main Streeting*¹ which is committed to the historic preservation-based community through revitalization of historic downtowns and neighbourhood commercial districts. The older Mains Streets “are polished and ‘re-tenanted’ (not always by national chains) and the new “Mains Street Centers” provide gas lighting and horse-drawn carriages between huge department stores and “olde” shops” (Smiley, 2003).

In contrast with these new shopping realms, an alternative strategy is attempting to reach smaller and smaller markets, ultimately aiming at each individual. It is the personalization of commerce. Advertising imagery is replete with this rhetoric; the consumer is not just any consumer and its desires and needs are fulfilled by the promise of personalized attention. Some have framed internet shopping as the pinnacle of this market individuation. Others argue that shopping functions best in

¹ <http://www.preservationnation.org/main-street/>

proximity to others where differences can be displayed. The essence of shopping is the presence of the social realm, with all its pressures and delights.

However, within this major offensive of the large installations for shopping with entertainment or the “marketing” of the old cities centres, or the personalisation of commerce, in-between the large real estate investments, proliferates another notion of commerce and a new use of public space. Temporary, weak, and volatile, such a commerce sprouts in the cities to give new meaning to places, sometimes not expected to accommodate trade actions. These forms of commerce, these actions, appear and disappear, leave no trace, have no relevance to lasting change, are not cast in stone and do not interfere with public policy. To see those spaces, people have to, somehow, participate in their dynamics.

We refer to an infinite catalogue of informal commercial spaces, with innumerable articulations: temporary trading places of all kinds, from farmers’market, bio-eco neighborhood fairs, craft markets that exhibit the most original objects normally made with recyclable material, leftover-stock market stalls in some disused warehouse, sale of Panini stickers at subway exits, underground restaurants, car boot sales or the so called “food trucks”, sale of homemade products or “seasonal foods” such as chestnuts, cherries, strawberries and ice cream sold in some unusual itinerant stalls, even to poetry sold between the tables of a bar at dusk or *botellones* –street drinking.

Figure 5: Food Track, Lisbon

Source: A.Allegri

Often this type of commerce comes in forms of self-organization of the population (young people, elderly, and foreigners) adopting a space, identifying its potential, modifying it slightly and temporarily, and then leaving it to move to another



area. One of the most interesting features of this phenomenon is that, unlike in the recent past, it is not only related to a marginal population, even if they continue to have an important role in the construction of temporary and self-organized spaces. These spaces are envisioned by people of different cultures and histories, people

who do not reject, necessarily, the rest of the city and the rest of commercial spaces, but define their commercial exchange and their public life in-between each part: during the day in outlets and at night in the light of improvised stalls in a closed service station (La Varra, 2001).

These dynamics carry out a temporary rewriting of the urban space they fill. Literally occupying the urban public space, they transfigure its meaning and its value. Even the traditional spaces that connote the historical city, became provisional spaces and constitute a fragile and fragmentary network which filters into the tightly structures of urban public space. Although they are not flaunting spaces, this constellation of spots or scenes, which continually "light up" and "go dark," encourage the revitalization and redevelopment of many urban areas; there, the public life of the city seems to find a new energy for regeneration.

In summary, after the death of the shopping malls a range of phenomena have occurred that lead to an evident change in the configuration of the commercial spaces and consuming behaviour. If just few terms sufficed for most studies of shopping through the 1960s, today's retail pluralism demands a larger and more complex array of commerce definitions and terms, according to the oldest rule in retailing "everything is and must always be new".

This new commercial dictionary, identifying a diversified geography of commerce, shapes alternative and important hubs of urbanity and becomes the engine of interesting spatial, social and economic dynamics. The space is no longer moulded by decisions centred in a few and large operators and drivers of change, but rather by a polyarchic and ever-changing model where distinct uses and diverse situations legitimately overlap, in opposition to the growing pressure for homogenisation of the city understood as a place of consensus and consumption. As a matter of fact, because the new models of commercial activities are not easy to list and codify, urban and architectural reflection have a hard time translating the nature of all these phenomena into its own terms, in order to incorporate them into a project, eventually closed, limited in time, precisely shaped according to contingent needs.

Considering all the above, the research study, which the present paper introduces, aims to analyse such phenomena, and their evolutionary processes, based on the premise that commercial spaces have a significant role to play in the planning and, paradoxically, even the "non-planning" of places. At the same time, the new models of commercial activities alert on the necessity of seriously thinking about what changes in society, culture, technology and the economy are now driving the urban processes and, inevitably, is questioning about the emergence of a new approach in urban planning and design, maybe more dynamic or flexible, in the face of economic uncertainty and rapidly changing possibilities.

Therefore, it is essential for us to understand the origins, shape and meaning of current changes by directing the attention to the specificity of *post-shopping commercial spaces*.

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