

*Ola Thufvesson  
Cecilia Fredriksson  
Lena Eskilsson*

*Dep of Service Management and Service Studies  
Campus Helsingborg, Lund university*

## **From Consumer Behaviour to Urban Behaviour. On the role of retail in the development of cities.**

This contribution aims to shed light on how retail actors relate to consumption and urban development in a regional context. How do retailers and planners cater for the various consumption practices of cities? How are the needs of the increasingly unpredictable, demanding, and knowledgeable customer being engaged with? To what extent must urban planners and companies adapt to their customers' impulsivity, insufficient planning, and convenience? What opportunities and challenges will the development of e-commerce entail for regions, companies, and localities?

Cities today are, in many ways, a creative project for supporting a lifestyle-affirming, economically successful, and sustainable environment (Zukin 2011). Here, retail and its different actors have taken on an increasingly important role. The connection between retail development and urban development is an extensive research field containing different perspectives on retail's significance in cities. In the 1970s and 80s, from a national perspective, there was a focus on the countryside's loss of village shops and other services. At the same time, there were studies of how extensive demolitions were carried out in city centres with the aim of making space for modern retail environments such as department stores and solutions for taking care of increasing motor traffic (see, for example Johansson, B. 2011). Researchers like Jerker Söderlind (2011) are of the opinion that planners would have been able to prevent much of the weakening of the city centres had they been able to produce neighbourhoods suitable for large retail units reasonably adjacent to inner cities.

Since the early 1990s, however, research in the US, for instance, has increasingly been focusing on city centre depletion and the growth of out-of-town retail (see, for example Garreu, 1992; Cohen, 1996). In a considerable number of US cities, centres were emptied of both retail and their dynamic. Interestingly enough, the trend turned some years ago. Investment in classical out-of-town shopping centres is not as much as it was; every year, shopping centres are closing due to poor profitability. Instead, both capitalism and the new middle class, in many places, are once again looking in the direction of the

inner cities (see, for example Parlette & Cowen, 2011).

In Sweden, on the other hand, the trend towards larger shopping centres and more out-of-town retail has been accelerating over the last ten years. Major cities with good purchasing power and strong population growth are also experiencing a robust weakening of inner city retail. A driving force in this trend is the actors who see large premises and good accessibility, primarily for cars, as the route to profitability. Often, it is international actors who prefer the same types of premises and locations, regardless of where they are (see, for example, Kärrholm & Nylund, 2011; Kärrholm, 2012). Instead, the inner cities' countermeasures are now frequently becoming an investment in more touristic qualities. Examples of this include beautiful streets, experience-focused squares, flower arrangements, small specialised shops, showcase stores, handicrafts, beauty care, delicatessens, and cafés (see, for example, Öberg, 2008; Eskilsson & Fredriksson, 2010). These environments are very attractive to people who want to stroll, discover, socialize, and consume the city (see, for example Gehl, 2010). However, these environments find it difficult to reach the type of consumer who wants to be able, in a more target-oriented way, to choose between many different products in the same category.

There are many discernible parallel processes in this development of the city and retail. Since the 1990s, concepts such as the sustainability of urban planning have been forming strongly value-creating practices with holistic claims. Social sustainability spans across fields like integration, multiplicity, and the mixed city. Often, entrepreneurship, culture, and creativity are described as tools that are necessary for creating innovation, growth, and tolerance (Florida 2002, Landry 2008) Frequently, there are also descriptions of what kinds of people and environments a city needs in order to create the prerequisites for the mixed, tolerant, and economically flourishing commercial city. In order to develop successful planning strategies, inspiration is fetched from many different quarters. These strategies are a result of the increasingly stiff competition between cities and regions. It is a matter of being on the map of attractive places to inhabit and visit, of creating growth, or of counteracting segregation and criminality. Not infrequently, the role that retail plays in cities is perceived as an important driving force for development (see, for example Warnaby, G. 2006).

The process of initiating and organising retail in cities also entails elements of separation, thematization, and concept development. Our contribution aims to shed light on how a number of different actors in a regional retail context relate to consumption and various retail environments. Taking its departure point in an extensive empirical gathering exercise of various shopping practices, in relation to various shop formats, we have brought a group of Swedish planners and entrepreneurs in the Helsingborg region face-to-face with current research

findings. Through the careful documentation of both individual reflections and group discussions, we have created a voluminous and penetrating material in which the retailers' and planners' different conceptions of the regional retail trade's challenges and opportunities are made visible and analysed.

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