

Caring about carrying: Retailers' role in assisting their customers to perform consumer logistics

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In the last few years there has been an increased attention towards questions of mobility, which has led researchers to explore various aspects of mobility in consumption (Brembeck, Cochoy & Moisander, 2014). This attention has also included a renewed interest in what Granzin and his colleagues termed “consumer logistics” (Granzin & Bahn 1989; Granzin 1990; Granzin, Painter & Valentin 1997; Granzin, Painter & Bahn, 2005), which refers to the logistics between point of purchase (e.g. a grocery store) and the point of consumption (e.g. the dinner table) and where the activities are performed by the consumers (see e.g. Holmberg & Hagberg 2013; Hansson 2014; Hansson & Brembeck 2012; Cochoy et al. 2013; Hagberg & Normark, 2011; Holmberg 2013). This growing body of work has among other things explored how consumers carry things in the city (e.g. Cochoy et al., 2013), how different consumer groups such as elderly (e.g. Hansson & Brembeck, 2012), families with children (e.g. Hansson, 2014) and students (e.g. Holmberg, 2013) go about to perform consumer logistics as well as a national survey of what modes of transport and which means of carrying consumers use when shopping groceries (Holmberg & Hagberg, 2013). Some of this work has also attended to interrelationships between retailing and consumption in the evolution of consumer logistics historically (Hagberg & Normark, 2011). However, so far there is a paucity of studies that investigate consumer logistics in terms of what contemporary retailers provide the customers with in assisting them (or hindering them) in their endeavors to carry out consumer logistics.

The purpose of this paper is to describe and analyze the retailer side of consumer logistics. The aim is to map out what stores in inner cities provide their consumers with to transport the goods from the store to the point of consumption. Thus, it is the consumers who perform the logistics of interest in our paper, but they are not alone in this work. Consumers use various modes of transport (car, bike, public transport, on foot) and means of carrying (shopping bags, baskets) in their logistics. Retailers have an important role in how consumer logistics is carried out by providing means of carrying, facilities and equipment such as elevators, parking lots and bike stands and being located close to housing areas and stops for busses and trams. Together with store design, urban environment and other people involved in the task of purchasing, these aspects have a significant impact on the way in which consumer logistics is carried out.

The paper draws on a survey of retailers in the city centre of Gothenburg. 173 stores completed the questionnaire. All retailers in the most central shopping streets (e.g. Kungsgatan and Östra Hamngatan) and shopping centres (e.g. Nordstan, NK, and Kompassen) were invited to respond to the survey. Questionnaires directed to store managers were handed over to a shop assistant and picked up later on. The participants represent stores of different size and different forms of

ownership, independent as well as chain stores. They cover several sectors; e.g. clothing, groceries, home electronics, sports, and newsagents. The paper analyses various aspects of the retailers' offerings concerning consumer logistics aspects, such as transport facilities within 100 m from the store (parking, bike stand, stop for public transp.), the means offered for carrying goods from the store (type of bags and boxes), accessibility inside the store, the possibilities to place orders at the premises and the offering of home deliveries, as well as recycling of goods. The paper accounts for how retailers in general provide consumers with various aids in carrying out consumer logistics, but also identifies differences between different types of stores and in different retail sectors.

The results of the Gothenburg retailer survey are discussed in relation to findings from other studies on consumer logistics, thereby highlighting: *The spatial dimension* – by comparing the results to a similar survey of retailers in Toulouse city centre (Daniau, 2012) similarities and differences between places are analyzed; *The temporal dimension* – the findings of the retailer survey are analyzed with regard to the historical development of consumer logistics in retailing (Hagberg & Normark, 2011); *The actors dimension* – the retailer-survey results are discussed in relation to studies of contemporary consumers conducting consumer logistics, which includes in-depth studies of specific consumer groups as well as a nationwide study of how consumer logistics is performed by consumers (Holmberg & Hagberg, 2013). Relating consumers' experiences of practicing logistics to the accessibility of facilities, equipment and aids in and close to the stores, the paper concludes with a set of central logistical aspects for retailers to work with in order to aid consumers to perform consumer logistics. Finally, the paper identifies issues for further research.

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