ADAPTING AND RESHAPING RETAIL IN THE CITY

2/5

URBACT is a European exchange and learning programme promoting sustainable urban development.
The URBACT Programme enables cities to work together to develop solutions to major urban challenges, reaffirming the key role they play in facing increasingly complex societal changes. URBACT helps cites to develop pragmatic solutions that are new and sustainable, and that integrate economic, social and environmental dimensions. The URBACT method enables cities to share good practices and lessons learned with all professionals involved in urban policy throughout Europe.

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INTRODUCTION

The previous RetaiLink report **1/5 New Retail Trends and Consumer Behaviour**[1] , explained the need to know who the consumers are in our cities, being them local residents or foreign visitors. This will inform what retail offer will meet their needs and expectations and increase chances of success and viability of the local retail business sector.

The present report summarises the considerations, topics for analysis as well as policy measures that can be adopted to make this match. They were discussed at the second RetaiLink transnational meeting held in the Croatian city of Sibenik in autumn 2016. The thematic experts invited to participate offered guidance and advice for the ten medium-sized RetaiLink city partners on how to envision and shape a unique and attractive local retail proposition based on the local consumer as well as how to create the conditions that enable retail to fit into the city identity.

Key learning areas included:

a) The importance of analysing city centre vitality influence factors and footfall parameters;

b) How to create a clear and strong city retail identity that matches with the distinctiveness of the place;

c) The need to upgrade retailers' skills and build their capacities to keep up with the new retail trends, in particular the use of e-commerce and digitalisation strategies;

d) The benefits of enabling broad city centre digital infrastructure that supports the retailers and enhances the customer experience;

RetaiLink partners complemented the programme with their own practical knowledge: Hengelo and Hoogeveen introduced their respective experiences of envisioning a retail model for the city centre and retail DNA; the city of Romans showed how the Retail Observatory online tool is useful to gather and update information on local shops, and Basingstoke presented the support scheme of the Town Council for retail businesses through close individualised mentoring and a retail incubator.

1 At http://urbact.eu/retailink

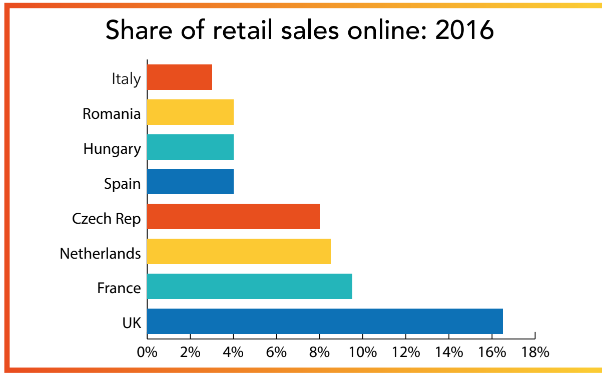
1.CITY CENTRE ANALYSIS AND TRENDS

CITY CENTRE VITALITY TO OFFSET RETAIL NEGATIVE TRENDS

The most successful city centres, down towns or high streets are associated with pleasant and leisure time, shopping, socialising and entertaining. City centres are poles of economic and cultural activity and urban life. However, in the last fifty years, medium-sized cities have been loosing retail, one of the key economic activities and an indicator of city centre health condition and performance.

Shopping habits and retail are both in continuous evolution. Around the 50s the spread of fridges and cars allowed spacing the frequency of shopping, since the 80s local authorities have allowed, and often facilitated, retail giants to emerge in the cities' outskirts. Out-of-town commercial centres have taken retail activity out of the inner city.

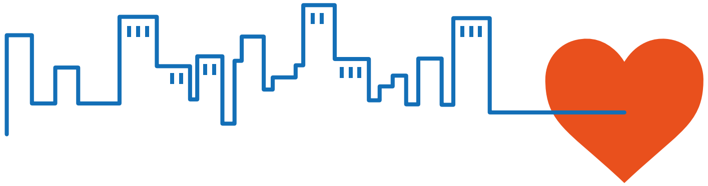
More recently, new consumer trends, in particular e-shopping, seem not to reach a limit in the mid-term. This has largely translated into a steady decline of retail units and jobs in city centres.



This combination of factors and trends has raised an alarm among the local authorities and the retail business sector[2]. They all complain that, with the loss of retail buzz, cities are also losing attractiveness, vitality, liveability and even safety[3].

Recent research undertaken in the UK though, suggests that the more satisfied people are with their city centre, the less they spend through online retail[4]. Retail sector studies indicate that offering the right retail mix, a strong leisure offer and good customer experience helps keeping the city centre alive. Retail, as the core business activity of high streets, can in turn contribute to this vitality. A multifunctional nature of today's city centres is a key factor for the area performance, this needs to be considered when planning for retail revitalisation[5].

2. The Town Centre Management partnerships have contributed to address it in many European cities (http://www.tocema-europe.com). Business Improvement Districts (BIDs) more recently, have become popular particularly in north and north-western European countries. The Future High Streets Forum, in the UK, is a government and retail leaders and experts cooperation scheme to develop new solutions for high streets.
3. *The Portas review: the future of our high streets* (2011) analyses these trends and challenges for medium-sized cities.
4. UK national consumer surveys undertaken between March and July 2016 on shoppers' preferences and habits. Retail Revolutions Report. Veredict, commissioned by Savilis Research (UK).
5. Millington, S., Ntounis, N., Parker, C. and Quin, S., (2015). *Multifunctional Centres: a sustainable role for town and city centres*. Manchester: Institute of Place Management http://www.placemanagement.org/media/56154/Multifunctional-Centres.zip



FACTORS INFLUENCING RETAIL VITALITY AND VIABILITY

In search of clues to know how to support the city centre vitality – measured as the number of businesses, their liveliness and the footfall - and viability – defined as place reliability for new business to invest-, the Institute of Place Management undertook a research study that helped determine factors that influence the two parameters[6].

The study was based on specialised literature review, interviews to retail experts, and also very importantly, on surveys to a very wide range of local agents from different fields. The outputs revealed a total of 201 retail and non-retail related factors with impact on high street performance. The two criteria below helped to filter out the list to a total of 25 factors:

- Level of influence that each factor was considered to have on the vitality and viability of the high street
- The extent to which a location has control over the factor

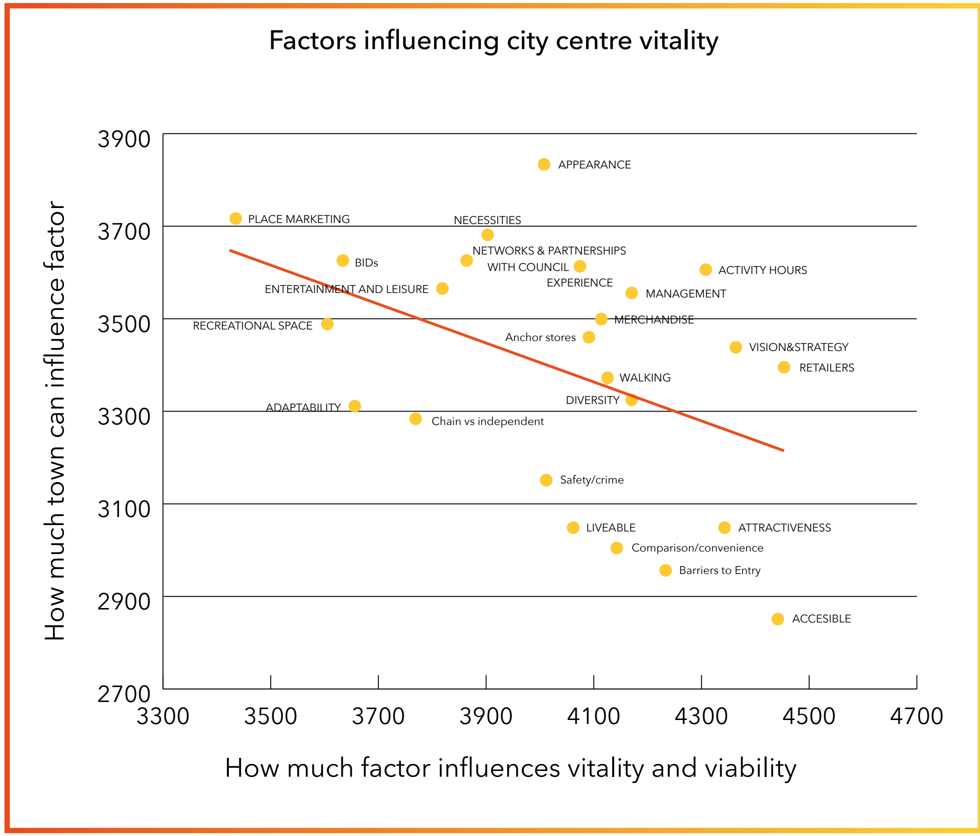
Examples of retail related an non-retail related city centre vitality and viability influence factors:

Retail retaled	Non-retail retaled
• Nature of retailers • Opening hours • Range and quality of shops and service • Merchandise they sell • The retail experience • Anchors to attract business to smaller retailers –usually, but not only retail stores	• Necessities, including car parking, toilets, benches, etc. • The city centre experience • Vision and strategy: leadership setting direction • Easy walking accessibility • Networks and partnerships • Good combination and choice of means of transport

One important conclusion of the entire study evidenced the inversly proportional relationship between influence and control: the more influential a factor is for the vitality of a retail area, the less controllable it is. In terms of action planning for the city centre revitalisation, this means that:

- Factors having low influence on the city centre vitality can automatically be discarded.
- Factors that have a real impact but the city cannot control, i.e. macro economic trends or the geographical location, are worthless caring about and the city can only live with them.
- Finally, city and retail managers should pay particular attention to those factors that have a high influence on the city centre vitality and that the city has an effective control over them. In the graphic below, this group is located on the upper right quadrant.

6. *Identifying factors that influence vitality and viability.* High Street UK 2020 Project Report. Cathy Parker, Nikos Ntounis, Simon Quin and Steve Millington, Institute of Place Management, Manchester Metropolitan University, Manchester, UK, 2015.
7. Local agents included major and independent retailers, town centre managers, market managers, supermarkets, retail property owners, shopping centre managers, town and district councillors, MPs, Mayors, council officers residents, volunteers, charities, head teachers, college heads, planning consultants, SMEs, youth workers, care workers, civic society, gallery owners, banks, restaurant and bar owners, fast-food outlets, police and leisure operators.


Factors influencing city centre vitality
How much town can influence factor
How much factor influences vitality and viability
3900
3700
3500
3300
3100
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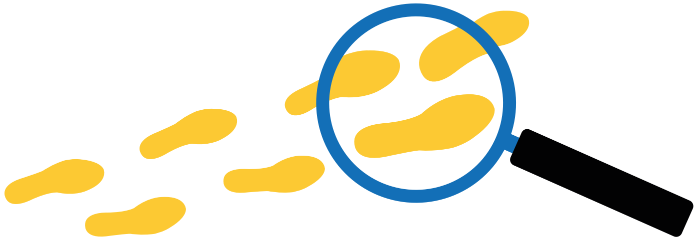
2700
3300
3500
3700
3900
4100
4300
4500
4700
APPEARANCE
PLACE MARKETING
NECESSITIES
BIDs
NETWORKS & PARTNERSHIPS
WITH COUNCIL
ACTIVITY HOURS
ENTERTAINMENT AND LEISURE
EXPERIENCE
MANAGEMENT
MERCHANDISE
RECREATIONAL SPACE
Anchor stores
VISION&STRATEGY
RETAILERS
WALKING
DIVERSITY
ADAPTABILITY
Chain vs independent
Safety/crime
LIVEABLE
ATTRACTIVENESS
Comparison/convenience
Barriers to Entry
ACCESIBLE



MODELS ACCORDING TO MONTHLY FOOTFALL ANALYSIS

In addition to influence and manageable factors, retailers, town centre mangers and local authorities should understand very well the way their city centre retail is used.

The performance of a city centre is, to a large extent, the reflection of its retail performance. Footfall is used to measure the location popularity and can also be an indicator of potential spending. The School of Computer Science & Informatics (Cardiff University) together with the Institute of place Management (University of Manchester) monitored monthly footfall analysis to show how different city centres are used for different shopping purposes[8].

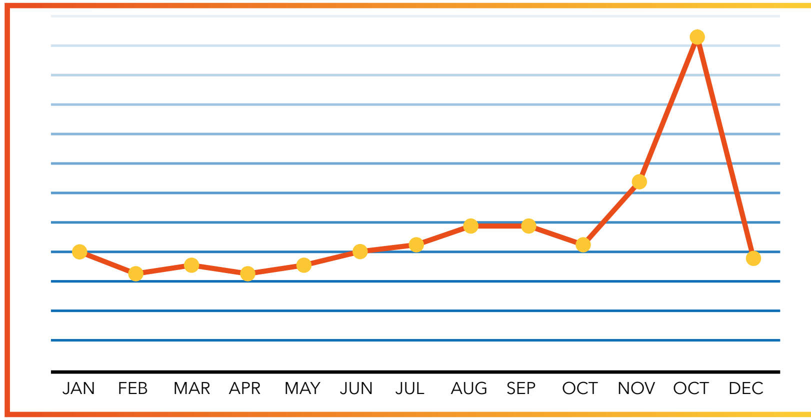
Based on a number of UK cities, the research concludes that four main town signatures exist. Local authorities and retailers can identify their city centre as one of the four signature types or as a combination of some of them. This analysis facilitates understanding consumers' habits and gives ideas on how to shape the retail offer in a way that best fits and brings higher visitors' flows.

8. *A clustering study to verify four distinct monthly footfall signatures: a classification for UK retail centres.* Christine L Mumford, Catherine R Parker, Nikolaos Ntounis and Ed Dargan. School of Computer Science & Informatics, Cardiff University, Institute of Place Management, Manchester Metropolitan University, February, 2017.

At the meeting in Sibenik, all ten RetaiLink partners took the chance to place themselves within one of the four signatures, or a mix of them:

1- COMPARISON SHOPPING TOWN

The Comparison type of town corresponds to larger towns and city centres. A footfall peak in December, coinciding with the Christmas preparation period, identifies their monthly signature.



Features

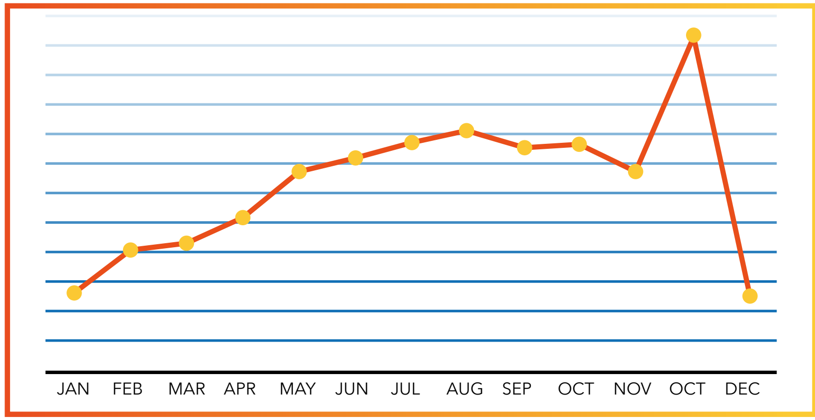
- Wide range of retail choice with multiple retailers
- Big and strong retail anchors
- Large catchment area
- Accessible by a choice of means of transport: junctions, railway stations
- Organised to compete with other comparison towns and shopping channels

RetaiLink partners

Liberec: In a first attempt to define the city centre signature, the city participants from Liberec stated that cold winters make the city centre footfall to decrease. There is some tourism in summer and shopping in the city centre experiences a clear peak in Christmas.

2 - SPECIALITY SHOPPING TOWN

Footfall in Speciality towns is higher and increasing into spring and summer, with a December peak and a sharp drop in January.



Features

- Offer something unique and special
- Anchor(s) are not retail but other assets, i.e. a historic centre
- Attract visitors but also serve local population
- Have longer customers' dwell time
- Management and marketing strategies are focussed to protect and promote identity and positioning

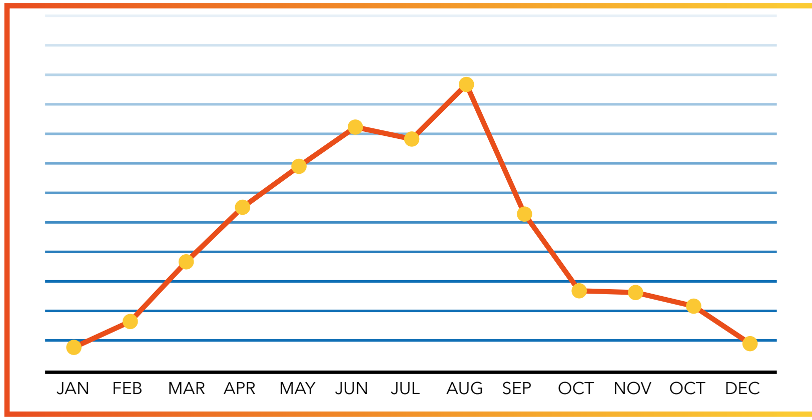
RetaiLink partners

Romans: Although the city does not undertake footfall analysis, Romans seems to be a mix of Comparison and Speciality. The city centre serves local population but there is a Christmas peak and some tourism in summer.

Basingstoke: The city is also a combination of Comparison and Speciality towns. There is a local market attracting people from other neighbouring towns, and experiences a Christmas peak.

3 - HOLIDAY TOWN

Holiday towns have very sharp footfall increases in summer and, in general, they do not serve very well their population.



Features

- Summer peak of visitors from potentially wide areas
- Anchors may be the beach or major attractions (usually not located in

the town centre)
- Retail may not serve the local community, particularly out of season
- Offers fun, entertainment and long hours in summer
- Retail may not serve well the local community, particularly out of season
- Offers fun, entertainment and long hours in summer

RetaLink partners

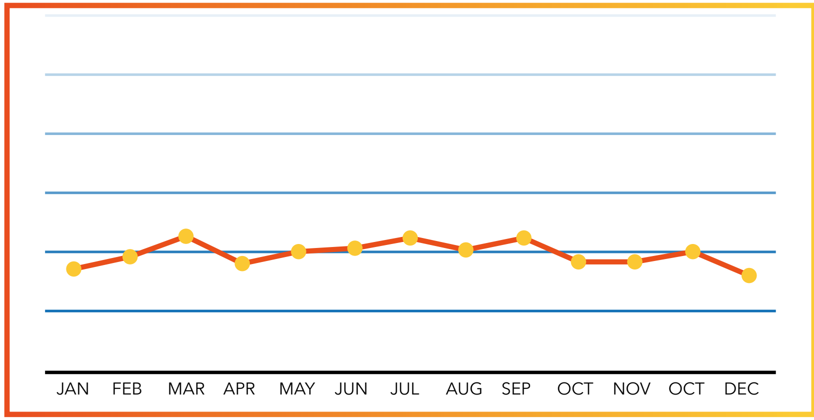
Pecs: The team from Pécs considered their city centre to be a hybrid model between Speciality town and Holiday town. Being the Capital of Culture in 2010 gave recognition of the historic heritage, which attracts visitors. However, tourism has been steadily decreasing in the last years, making the footfall look more as a Convenience town (see below).
Due to the existing population of University students, it is young people from abroad who use the city centre more often. One of the streets in the city centre has clear features of the Speciality town, where restaurants and bars are frequented during summer and Christmas periods, although not many retailers are located there.

Fermo: Fermo could be a mix of Holiday, Comparison and Convenience town. There are some tourists but there is no sharp tourist signature. Although some seasonally crowded beach resorts are not far from the city, the centre could attract higher levels of footfall. There is some Christmas shopping, however, there is no clear-cut December peak.

Sibenik: The city is the typical holiday town, with high and increasing summer footfall but empty shops and streets from October till May.

4 - CONVENIENCE TOWNS

Convenience or Community towns have a steady flow throughout the year. They serve well their resident population for food and basic products, although leisure shopping is more probably done elsewhere.



Features

- Focused on local community – retail offers, opening times, events, etc.
- Anchor is work, public transport, groceries
- Serves the local resident and catchment area
- Offers convenient mix of goods and services
- Accessible and locally connected

RetaiLink partners

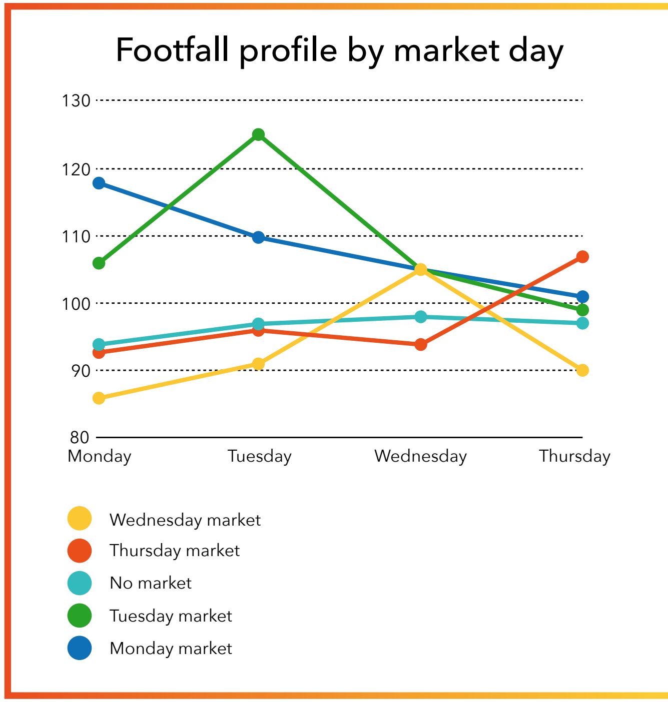
Hoogeveen and Hengelo: Both cities are typical Convenience towns, attracting consumers for daily products and services. As in other cities in The Netherlands, there is a turnover peak in May due to the national holidays, when people have holiday money to spend.

Igualada: The city centre is clearly a Convenience town but has a peak in December too. It seems that the economic crisis in the last years has made people stay in the city during the summer holiday period of August, thus keeping footfall at high rates. However, it is not perceived as Speciality town.

Bistrita: Bistrita's centre performs as a Convenience town, but the team mentioned a particular aspect, that is people working abroad do not spend in town.

One important finding of the above footfall signature study indicates that towns that have a sharper profile and are closer to one of the four types are performing better, while cities offering a mixed version of them see faster footfall decrease. Counting footfall and identifying each owns' model can help working towards sharpening it, getting their best version. Then, the messages for the local retailers can also be much clearer and helpful: when does the city expect them to be busy, how can they better adapt to customers looking for a speciality or for a convenient offer…

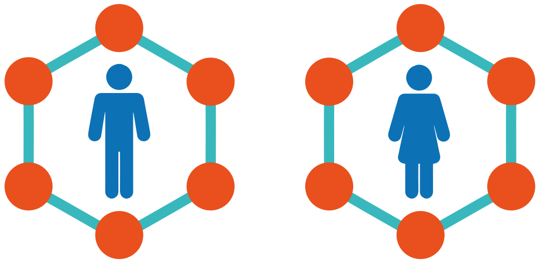
A relevant footfall increase in towns is the one caused by weekly street markets. It is well known that markets influence vitality and liveability of the urban area around and that they attract footfall. Cities with a street market might find it useful to analyse impact and consider which market days are more convenient for their residents and have positive effects on the surrounding retail activity. The graphic on the footfall performance by market day in a number of cities shows that some weekdays bring more footfall than others.



Multipurpose markets

Some bigger European cities have successful examples of neighbourhood revitalisation plans with fresh food markets as a central piece. Berlin, Rotterdam or Barcelona have managed to transform some local markets into places where people can do the grocery shopping but can also have a drink, eat at stalls which have been converted into small restaurants, where they cook market products, or even attend concerts and art performances. Markets can be used in many different ways and open longer hours for a variety of purposes.

2. CITY AND RETAIL IDENTITY AS THE BASIS FOR TRANSFORMATION



CONSUMER ANALYSIS TO HELP DEFINE THE CITY DNA AND RETAIL

Retail experts affirm that city managers from all disciplines can benefit from a new approach to their own city concept and identity, what they call the city DNA. It helps define a sharp distinct character to the place. Because retail is an integral part of the city identity, retailers can take advantage of the local DNA marketing by consistently fitting their shop and their offer.

With the support and guidance from retail advisors, the city conceptualises an effective strategy and shapes a retail proposition that *unconsciously* pleases the local consumer. The retail is shaped to offer what the profiled target customer expects. This process involves key elements and steps, as outlined below.

In the first place, three elements are an integral part of the new city and retail DNA identity approach:

The consumer:
It is the guiding north of the retail strategy. An initial research is required to identify consumers' needs and expectations as well as shopping preferences.

The consumer's unconscious decisions:
'Be' and 'feel' are key words in a retail strategy, as opposed to 'make' and 'have'. According to the neuromarketing approach and big brands' experience, consumers make decisions based on emotions and intuition and when they apply the reason, it is often to find arguments to confirm emotions and convince the brain on what has already been decided.

The aftertaste:
A comprehensive retail strategy needs to consider the whole process from the decision of choosing one destination for shopping through to the post-shopping experience. Then word of mouth will reinforce the prestige, the marketing campaign and the strategy itself.

With these concepts in mind, the process conducing to the definition of a city and retail DNA involves the following stages:

1. ASSESING THE CONTEXT:

Showcase values and assets of the location, non-retail related features such as the surrounding natural beauty, the historic legacy, an attractive cultural atmosphere, local products, etc[9]. Also profile the existing local retail, including size and composition.

2. DESCRIBING AND RECOGNISING THE CONSUMER:

Identify and understand the actual and the expected local consumers, whether they are transients or residents, and make them the retail GPS. The analysis of the local consumer should provide socioeconomic information, but also knowledge on preferences, values and aspirations[10].

9. It is useful to refer to the concept of Biorégion Urbaine, developed by Alberto Mangaghi.
10. See the previous RetaiLink report *1/5 New Retail Trends and Consumer Behaviour*, for Hoogeveen's exercise of local consumer identification as part of the city DNA development.

Consumer types in the RetaiLink network

Being a tourist place or having an important University can completely change the profile of the consumer that comes to town for shopping. RetaiLink partners offer examples of this diversity:

- Sibenik is an increasingly popular tourist destination. Most of the city centre shops are strongly oriented towards visitors during the summer season -many close from October to May, whilst residents tend to use shopping centres located out of town. As part of the retail revitalisation strategy, the local authorities aim at making the historic city centre retail also attractive for the resident population, thus regaining vitality throughout the year.

- In Igualada the main target consumer is the resident family, although, due to the innovative offer and retail-based events, the city has been able to broaden the catchment area and reaches out to shoppers from Barcelona, who come for the Rec.0 Pup up stores event, twice a year.

- In Pécs, local and foreign University students are the regular users of the city centre since a good number of faculties are not far from it. However, they tend to spend time and money in the hospitality sector, rather than in shops. The local authorities want to span the target consumer to attract the residents by enhancing the retail offer and other leisure activities.

- In Fermo, with a great tourist potential due to the historic legacy and the nearby beach resorts, the city might be able to put in place a strategy to meet expectations of both residents -all year round buyers, and tourists –seasonal shoppers in search of a genuine local product.

3. SETTING THE FLAG:

Once the consumer is identified and well known, cities need to categorise its retail offer with the support of retail focused analysis tools. For example, the RetaiLink partners used the three-dimension graphic developed by the retail advisory firm Martínez-Franch Consulting[11] that helps the city position itself according to 3 different categories of perceptions:

A. City retail evocations:

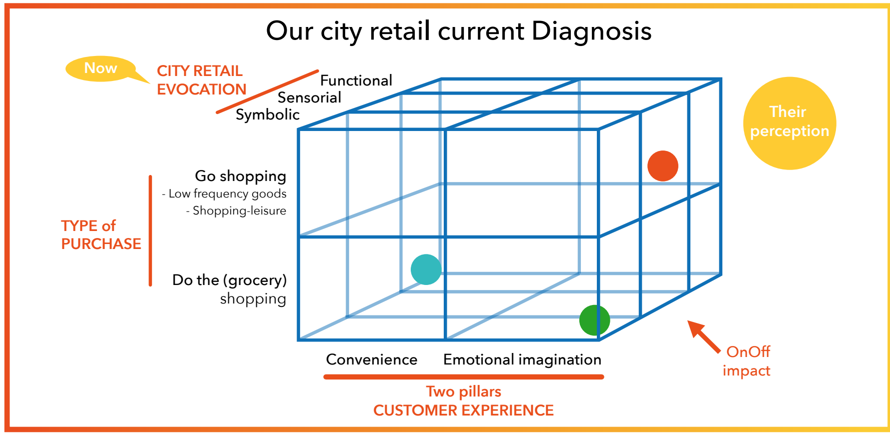
The consumer perceives the shopping activity in the city as being functional, symbolic, or sensorial.

B. Type of purchase:

The city is considered as a place to go for leisure shopping - purchasing low frequency goods (go shopping); or as a place to do the (grocery) shopping.

C. Consumer experience:

The consumer perceives retail as a convenience activity or as an emotional experience.



11. http://www.martinez-franch.com

Partner cities intuitively self-positioned in the three-dimension diagram, some examples can bee seen in the diagram.

- Igualada: Grocery shopping –Functional – Convenience
- Pécs: Go Shopping – Sensorial – Emotional
- Hengelo: Grocery shopping – Symbolic - Emotional

Different from, and complementing the footfall signatures seen in the previous section, this exercise reveals people's perceptions, that is, what the city means to the consumer. Ultimately value proposition will consist of a mix of 'feeling' and 'identity'.

City centre consultation in Pécs, 2016

The city of Pécs handed out a 32-question survey among city centre pedestrians and also distributed it as an online Google form. A total of 569 individuals answered the questionnaire, with a high proportion of young respondents, and mostly residents of the city centre.

The study conclusions show some clear expectations and also drawbacks of Pécs city centre that are going to be considered for planning purposes. For example, 90% of the respondents go to the city centre on a weekly basis, and 3/4 of them spend more than 2 hours there. The main motivation is walking, do some shopping and attending events and festivals downtown.

When it comes to spending priorities, retail does not rank first: there is a widespread opinion that there are no good stores and that the retail supply is weak. Thus bars and pubs are the main destination.

In general terms, consumers consider that the heart of the city has a friendly atmosphere and they would go there more often if they found better stores and cultural events. Other demands pointed to politeness of shop assistants as well as the need of parking areas and public toilets.

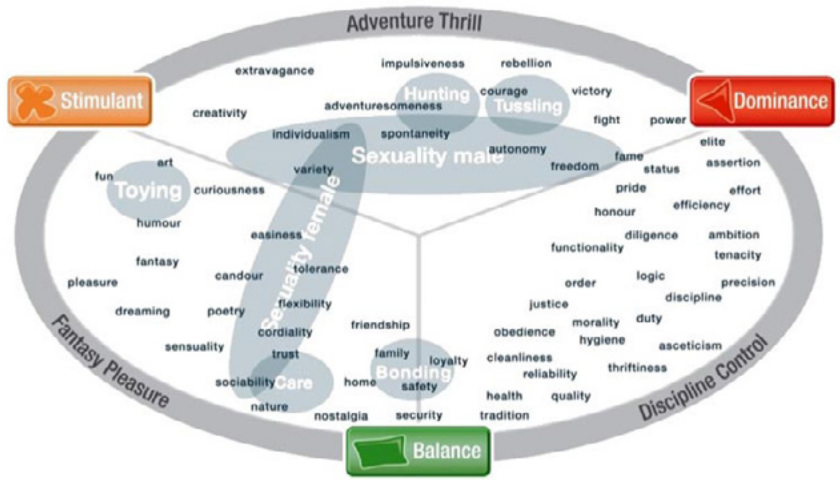
The research concludes that, although the city is initially perceived as a potential area for leisure shopping and experiential retail, the sector offer does not respond to the expectations of the regular city centre user.

Consequently, Pécs has shortlisted a group of priority issues to address in order to enhance the city centre experience:
- Capture retail anchors
- Increase opening hours: from 10:00 to 20:00
- Enable more car parking areas and ease traffic flows
- Install public toilets
- Enlarge green areas

By narrowing the potential consumers' universes to a single and distinct one, we are defining and setting the flag for a unique retail proposition. The city is different from the rest and has a specific offer. The flag facilitates visibility as well as marketing and positioning. Everything about the city and its retail should be consistent and according to that identity: the product, the shop display, the shop assistants, the shop window, the high street… they are all aligned, in the same way as the Matryoshka dolls fit within one another.

4. DEFINING THE CORE EMOTIONAL EXPERIENCE:

According to the neuromarketing approach,finding the core emotion will help in connecting with and attracting the potential consumer.
The Limbic Map of H.G. Häusel[12] is a comprehensive representation of emotions and values behind unconscious people's motivations. It is useful to identify values and emotions.



Using the mapping above and by combining passions and values, big retail brands connect with target customer emotions based on 4 basic types of persons' profiles:

A. The individual adventurous: Passionate people, who believe in themselves, look for progress and innovation. The entrepreneur type of person.

12. See: http://www.nymphenburg.de/limbic-map.html

B. The controllers: Those who like controlling themselves and others, what they are doing but also what others think about them. They look for luxury, respect, status, efficiency and calculated actions.

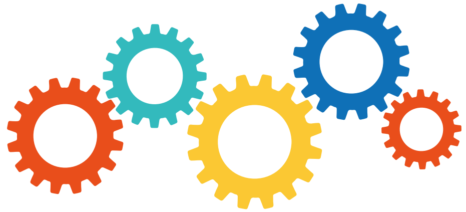
C. The collective adventurous: they gather people around for friendship and sharing. They like harmony, friendship and equality.

D. The collective controller: These people enjoy crafts, purity, responsibility, tradition, safety, modesty, and are balanced.

Based on this typology, retailers frame their messages and create marketing campaigns. By developing a sharp brand image, in line with one of these identities, they tell a story and make people strongly connect emotionally with that brand and its values; they make the consumer wanting to be part of the story.

The city DNA and retail conceptualisation works in a similar way. The whole city and retail marketing will tell the story that the target consumer wants to experience. The strategy should provoke a brain-friendly displacement, so the customer associates the city retail to a pleasant experience in line with the values and emotions that the person perceives as their owns. Eventually, instead of convincing with rational arguments, we are communicating through people's feelings, which is far more powerful and effective.

3. SUPPORT TO LOCAL RETAILERS



SKILLS TRAINING AND BUSINESS MENTORING

Reshaping the city retail, adapting it to the local consumer and doing so in coherence with the local DNA and retail proposition requires a multi-stakeholder strategy. Clearly, retailers are a key actor in developing and implementing the local plan, therefore, part of the city retail strategy should consider coaching them in a way that they effectively: **a)** take the right decisions to fit within the shared strategy; and **b)** participate and contribute to shape the local retail revitalisation project.

Retailers usually point to some skills they consider important to better manage their business:

- Visual merchandising
- Shop window arrangement
- Product range planning and inventory management
- Marketing

- Security issues, both in shop and from potential cyber-breach
- Legislation for the retail activity
- Monitoring of retail operations: metrics on footfall, factors influencing purchases, average ticket size, but also employment management.
- Customer service

Beyond, and in addition to these skills, what retail experts consider as important knowledge is how to enhance customer experience at the physical and virtual shop, that is, capacities and abilities that are critical to stay abreast with the ever-changing retail trends:

Customer personal treatment at the shop
Successful companies pay much attention to their employees. The way shop assistants are, behave and treat the client makes a big difference. Their image, character and values need to be consistent with the shop outfit and the product, since they are representing the brand. Experts say that 80% of the experience in a physical shop will come from the employees and only the other 20% is communication and marketing.

Shopping experience
Further than prices, sales and offers, the shop needs to emotionally connect with the target customer. This requires creating an environment that makes visitors strongly feel the shop identity. Retailers should consider what is displayed in the shop window and in the inner shop and recreate an attractive atmosphere that makes people want to be part of the story you tell[13].

Another current pressing issue of concern among the retailers is the increase of e-shoppers and the share of purchases that e-commerce represents. They understand how critical digital business skills are to keep track of daily and fast changes: new apps, new uses of social networks, Facebook and Twitter accounts… but for independent retailers, this is often perceived as overwhelming.
Experts on digital skills in the retail sector[14] advise conceiving a single digital and non-digital retail strategy. Consumers seem to be more rational when surfing the Internet, looking for best prices, while the physical store is more an emotional experience. Retailers will benefit from playing with the virtual and the physical retail proposition to enhance the shopping experience and make it more fun.

Below is a list of tips for retailers to better manage their online and offline presence:

- Make the business discoverable and visible online but at the same time offer a good shopping experience.
- Create a Unique Selling Point, special and distinct to others. Respond to the questions: Why will people come to my shop or my site? What makes my business different?
- Shape all marketing and visibility to target the identified customer, not "everybody".
- The website needs to be continuously evolving. Look at others' websites and identify what you like from them. Keep engaged with the connected customer. Outsource the online presence management if needed.
- The use of social media is mainly entertaining: 90% of the activity is about amusing. The number of followers will depend on your capacity to offer something appealing to them. Only the other 10% of the online customer experience should be sales information and promotion. If you manage to entertain and inform people, you have them engaged. They re-tweet, like, visit your website and, in the end, come to your physical store.

13. Hoogeveen's clothes shop The Boys portrays an image of friendship and sense of humour, so people buying a pair of jeans goes to The Boys not for the price but for the interaction with "friends". See RetaiLink 1/5 Output report, page 6.
14. Guy Douglas and Xav Anderson, *Digital High Street, a Digital and Practice Overview.* Clockwork City (UK)

- Put your small business into the overall picture of the town, you may participate in the collective digital marketing and platforms and engage in the collective tools (see Digital High Street: Platform and connectivity section below).
- Use the tools that really pay back the time and money invested.

Shoreditch Boxpark in London: Virtual retailers who became physical

Shoderitch Boxpark is a pop-up mall opened in 2011. It is an example of omnichannel pop-up shopping centre that enabled shipping containers at affordable and flexible lease to host young entrepreneurs who initiated their retail business online and came for the physical development of their shop. The Boxpark today mixes modern street food with local and global brands side by side to create a unique shopping and dining destination.

RETAILERS' ENGAGEMENT

Effective retailers' training and skills improvement only happens with their genuine engagement. Project partners who have initiated skills training programmes complain about low retailers' attendance: shop owners don't have the time or cannot leave their business unattended -bigger brands usually do their own internal training- and very often they consider that, after all, training will not change things.

To help retailers realise on the need to upgrade their business and professional capacities, and to facilitate their engagement, some individualised actions can be put in place:

- Training needs assessed by a mystery shopper
- Online training on a specific skill to allow learning own time and own pace, and certifying the training
- Mentoring business on one-to-one basis
- Finding the right Sheppard to lead the rest, showing positive impact on one business performance.

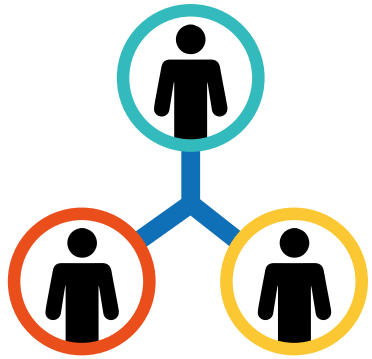
Besides offering individual mentoring, retailers' buy-in can come from their involvement in building direction of their own training and capacity building as part of a joint plan for retail sector improvement in the city. Also, sharing available information, such as dashboard results and surveys' conclusions can help create the sense of project ownership (they can even undertake data collection from their shops).

The city council can mediate to offer the training services by making available a pool of experts, as it is the case in the city of Basingstoke (see box below). In some cities the local college or the retail trade associations can be training providers. Finally mentors from larger retailers have also proved to raise interest among the local retailers.

Basingstoke's Top of the Town Grant Scheme

The City Council offers local shops, traders, restaurants and businesses at the Top of the Town –the city centre and retail zone- a helping hand to make improvements to their businesses.
Top of the Town Grant Scheme provides funding in the form of a grant for a day of expert support (worth £500) to help retailers respond better to changing consumer habits. The retail experts are part of an expert pool previously identified by the Council.

The scheme also includes grants for shop building face-lift or internal fit-out to help rejuvenate the historic heart of Basingstoke. The support to the retailers is part of the Basingstoke Town Centre Programme, which has helped to attract customers and increase sales and investments.



DIGITAL HIGH STREET: PLATFORM AND CONNECTIVITY

Digital has little by little completely changed the retailing business models and the whole high street landscape. Parallel to training local retailers on digital skills for their business enhancement, a comprehensive digital strategy including a digital platform and a well-thought plan could enable the city centre to improve the on/off retail experience.

A city centre digital strategy does not merely consist of installing free WiFi in an area. It is rather a coordinated intervention that offers a joint and custom-made selling proposition while at the same time activates digital tools for data collection on shopping preferences and behaviour. Digitalisation is one of the components of a place DNA and works by creating a digital oasis in the city centre to attract the consumers and guide them through the retail experience.

Similar to what we have learnt for individual retailers, place digitalisation allows the discoverability and visibility of the area and its businesses.
It provides a virtual space with contents to tell the city centre story.

The consumers appreciate the immediate information of the place where they are and, from the smallest business to the bigger operator, everybody has a story to tell through the digital channels. Again, as is the case with individual retailers, a city centre can become omnichannel for the best experience around shopping.

Clockwork City and Brent Council

The London Borough of Brent outlined an ambitious plan to become the first London Borough with a digitally integrated high street.

Clockwork City has recently completed Phase Two of a project for Wembley High Road and Brent Council to deliver digital infrastructure and skills support for twenty retailers, and to establish a commonplace brand and business association. The objective is to strengthen the high street appeal and accessibility, and to assist the area's SMEs.

The project actions have involved:

- Design and deliver a digitally integrated high street strategy
- Manage an accessible web presence for high street services, with a high quality online SME presence
- Provide selected high street SMEs with training to equip them with the skills necessary to capitalise on digital opportunities
- Establish momentum towards a business partnership for the High Road

- In total, 20 SMEs participated in a series of digital skills workshops, and benefitted from further one-to-one mentoring to ensure the skills and tools provided were suitable for their business, were integrated into their day to day operations, and could be used regularly and sustainably.

- This resulted in increased business confidence in using digital tools for their business, with 100% of participants saying they found training useful and would continue using these skills after the workshops.

- Wembley High Road as a destination benefitted from the creation of a bespoke website and social media accounts, with content specifically celebrating its diverse heritage, food, retail, and leisure offer.

- Each SME participant also had a microsite developed and the new branding created for the High Road will serve its purpose as destination branding as well as a logo for the emerging Business Association.

Many of the issues concerning SMEs on Wembley High Road were broader than the programme's initial focus on 'digital'. This meant that the programme effectively acted as a springboard to address these wider issues, simultaneously engaging and upskilling SMEs on the High Road while also discussing the future of the area as an economic hub and community destination.

According to experts on digitalisation and place management[15], ensuring a successful and sustainable city centre digitalisation strategy requires that the technology, skills, engagement and a well-designed plan go all together. Implementation is described in 4 stages:

1. Raising infrastructure and connectivity standards, including public WiFi access.
2. Improve basic digital skills of individuals, SMEs, and the third sector.
3. Develop a Digital High Street Health Index based on connectivity, infrastructure, device usage and skills.
4. Develop a high street digital toolbox to provide advice and guidance to local high street communities and stakeholders.

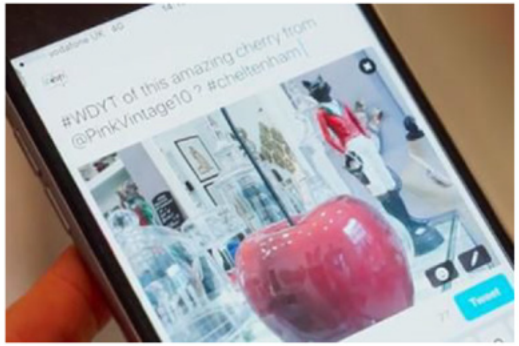
A digital strategy of this kind necessarily comes from a common agreement and a coordinated intervention, which will deliver better outcomes than unguided market forces alone. Experts affirm that small retailers can do more together in aggregate than alone and that big businesses do better when all businesses around them do better.

The #WDYT (What Do You Think) Campaign[16]

The #WDYT campaign was created to help UK towns and retailers connect with customers and reinvigorate local high streets. The #WDYT hashtag helps monitor shoppers' activity and opinions.

Shoppers are incentivised to share pictures of products they liked, in the social media. Those with a higher number of likes win the product photographed. Thus, consumers are attracted and engaged to a retail area and local shops increase their number of followers.

The objective is to put all participation in a single virtual place and offer an experience of B2B and B2C promotional effort that connects digital and physical conversations.



15. The Digital High Street 2020 Report, Digital High Street Advisory Board, 2015, UK
16. http://wdyt.org.uk