

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

1.1 Shopping Change

Shopping is an essential part of our day-to-day existence and the organization of retailing has implications for every household. The Concise Oxford Dictionary defines 'shopping' as 'goods purchased in shops' and 'retail' as 'the sale of goods in small quantities direct to consumers' (Brown, 1992a). These definitions are suggestive of the interdependence between 'shopping' and 'retailing', where the former is 'consumer-based' and the latter 'producer-based'. Shopping is underpinned by connecting consumer demand to producer supply and the mechanism for this exchange is the shopping trip. This implies the importance of flows of consumers through a time-space fabric of shopping opportunities. Conversely, the nature of retailing is producer-focused, encompassing the ways in which firms interact with each other and sell goods to consumers. Whether the dynamics of this demand and supply interaction is driven by consumer or producer sovereignty is a hotly contested issue. Nevertheless, it is the thesis here that consumer trips to and within shopping centres are what maintain their viability, much like the analogy of blood-flows to different organs of the human body. If flows are stopped or reduced, precincts die. It is for this reason that it is important to study the dynamics of these consumer flows at different places, times and scales so that retail planning can be pro-active rather than reactive to sustain healthy shopping precincts.

The nature of shopping is not only an integral part of our society, but also an indicator of the rapid societal changes in the socio-economics of households and technological innovations. Consumers can access the Internet at home to shop globally, penetrating national borders or different time zones. The idea of the traditional neighbourhood shopping centre has been replaced, in part, by the one-stop shop at supermarkets, hypermarkets or planned shopping centres (Figure 1.1). The result has been substantial structural change in landuse patterns within retail hierarchies over a short time period.

Town centres that were once vibrant have been replaced by chains of vacant shops and urban obsolescence. The decline of town centres and neighbourhood stores have therefore been one of the major ramifications of this new global retail order where consumers have fundamentally changed 'when' and 'where' they undertake their shopping trips. The reasons for this retail 'shock wave' enveloping many centres are complex, but could involve an interplay of socio-economic change with household mobility and expenditure, technological change in the nature of flows and regulatory change in the ideology of public policy. Any one or combinations of these factors can fundamentally affect the nature of consumer flows and the health of precincts in retail hierarchies.

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The main function of retailing is to act as an intermediary between the consumer on one hand and the producer or wholesaler on the other, in the physical distribution of particular goods or services. Such a perspective requires some qualifications. Retailers are now not only fundamental to the buying, selling, storage and delivery of goods, but are increasingly becoming multi-range and multi-purpose in what they offer, and when and where they offer them. Consequently, there has been a fundamental change, from retailers originally selling specialised merchandise, to a multiplicity of goods and services. The supermarket is very much part of this transformation. It now offers a diversity of food and non-food merchandise within its floorspace. In other words, the supermarket has become a shopping centre within a shopping centre. Consumers can now conduct their banking, buy a book or flowers on the floorspace of a supermarket, twenty-four hours-a-day, seven-days-a-week. This structural change should have implications for the nature of the multi-purpose trip.

A particular dynamic model will be used extensively in this study (the so-called retail aggregate space-time trip or RASTT model) because it can be applied to a range of trip configurations, from local trips to a neighbourhood centre to global flows of Internet traffic. The model will provide a unifying structure to the analysis because it is process-based rather than subject-based and therefore it has the potential to look at retail change over different scales of space and time. The RASTT model was developed back in the mid-1980s and was a key component of the 'Storewars' debates on retail trading hours and location of floorspace in the 1990s within Australia. 'Storewars' is a term coined to describe the process of powerful retail corporations taking market share of smaller traders using various market strategies and public policy positions (Wrigley, 1994). Particular attention in this study will focus on changes in retail locations and shopping times. The RASTT model has therefore been intimately linked in public policy, by showing the predicted affects and accrued advantages to large retailers of changing the length and structure of the shopping week (Baker, 1994b) and by locating retail developments away from town centres (Baker, 1995). This process will be examined in this study, showing the link between a model and its policy implications.

Many of the issues that became globally significant in the 1990s (such as out-of-town retail developments) are not new. Indeed, such issues have been recorded within antiquity. For example, in ancient Rome, Claudius had asked consuls to license him to hold a market on his estates (Sherwin-White, 1966). Other cases sometimes led to protests. In Book V, *Letters of the Younger Pliny* (Radice, 1963, 137-138), in a letter written in 105AD to Julius Valarianus, Pliny records:

A praetorian senator named Sollers asked the Senate for permission to hold a weekly market on his property. This was opposed by representatives of the town of Vicetia, with Tuscilius Nominatus acting on their behalf, and the case was adjourned until a subsequent meeting of the Senate.

The issue was whether markets held weekly on private land could compete with the public daily markets in forums (Figure 1.2) and thus change the nature of consumer flows. Ancient Rome gave the Senate the ability to adjudicate on this issue because