

Do they want to be consumers or do they want to be citizens?

Alan Bruton, Architect

Shopping has become more than ever pervasive in our lives and society, but we find ourselves also in the middle of a big change in its spatial configuration. Through history shopping spaces have changed their face in function of newly developed technologies. Now with an ever-increasing evolution of the virtual world, also consumerism has become part of it. This shift has a direct impact on our actual structures of retail, town centres, department stores and even shopping centres are becoming useless and deserted, while the number of online consumers is growing steadily. At the same time the sphere of shopping has been branching out to infiltrate other programs, such as airports, train stations, museums, schools and even churches, to render these more profitable. From this spread we can see what an important position shopping holds in our contemporary culture, nevertheless most architects remained ignorant of this fact from the middle until the end of the 20th century. Consumerism does not play exactly a noble part in our society, and therefore is not part of the high culture that architects usually work with, such as schools, theatres, libraries, museums, housing and even offices. Nevertheless, since the turn of the century architects have started to slowly interest themselves again in the matter of retail, and with that have arisen many questions of what role architecture plays in the world of shopping. This thesis will propose ideas for the repurposing of today's abandoned shopping centres, drawing inspiration from Victor Gruen's vision of the shopping centre as a kind of suburban city centre – not just a commercial space, but a civic and social hub. With the rise of online shopping and the consequent decline of shopping malls, the time is right for an architectural reimagination of the shopping environment and its role as a public space and think critically about its future direction.

Third Place in the shopping centre

Karoline Endres | EPFL

**The future of the shopping
mall is the future of the city.**

Jon Jerde

Master Thesis
EPFL Architecture

**Third Place
in the Shopping Centre**

Third Place in the Shopping Centre

École polytechnique fédérale de Lausanne | EPFL ENAC

Architecture Enoncé Théorique de Master

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1. Introduction

Preface

Shopping centres as we know them were originally conceived as city centres out of the city – in the American suburb. They became a huge success for many retail investors and a fatal blow to existing inner cities. Meanwhile, they developed into important public spaces for many suburbanites and the concept enjoyed huge support, so much so that later the suburban shopping centre concept was used to revive the city centres themselves. Europe readily imported the shopping centre idea not long after its takeoff in the US and adapted it to its own needs. This in turn had similar impacts on its regional and urban development, as in its country of origin. As with all of its preceding shopping environments, it has been through many modifications since its creation. Today, however, it probably finds itself in the middle of its most significant transformation so far. The number of dead and sick shopping malls is steadily growing in both the US and Europe. Many go through massive redevelopments or changes of programme to save themselves, and some are simply left to decay. On the other hand, it is exactly this metamorphosis that gives the shopping centre the opportunity to refind its initial purpose as a diverse centre of the community – a *third place* for the people who visit it.

Third place - In community building, the third place is the social surroundings separate from the two usual social environments of home («first place») and the workplace («second place»).

Thesis Research

Questions:

How has architecture had an impact on the shopping centre's public identity?

Can it enable a more durable evolution of the shopping centre?

Has public space of the shopping centre changed over time, or did it remain as it was, as with the established public space of a city?

Aims + Objectives:

Historical exploration of the rise to prominence of the shopping centre, and how that can inform future developments, within the geographic bounds of Europe and North America.

Hypothesis:

The shopping centre can, through its architectural design, adapt to become a durable communal public space based on its geographical, technological and cultural situation.

Outlined Info:

From the example of Gruen's work and ideal of the shopping centre

- to the history and evolution of shopping places
- the contemporary situation of shopping centres and future possibilities
- finishing with an analytic study of examples of shopping centres from history and today.

Method:

Analysis of historic resources leading up today's version to in turn inform future directions to take in the shopping environment as an enabler of public space as not only a commercial aim but also to create a third place.

2. Victor Gruen, an ideology

a. The definition of the shopping centre

At the time of the construction of the first shopping centre in the United States, there had not been much like it before. Shopping was usually done on shopping strips - long, traffic-heavy roads lined by shops - or in department stores in the by then already derelict town centres. The opening of the first enclosed shopping mall - Southdale Center in Edina, Minnesota - didn't just mean a revolution in interior large-scale architecture but had also a at the time unknown impact on the urban form. Victor Gruen, one of the founding architects of these first large scale projects that treated shopping in the suburbs, saw the shopping centre not only as a place to consume, but wanted it to be a veritable place of culture. He imagined it as a town centre for the suburb that would create identity and be a meeting point and gathering place. This meant that the centre had to go beyond commerce and include a varied programme that would also attract clients at times when the shops were not open. These different functions were connected by a network of multiple public spaces that exemplified the main idea of the shopping centre. To Gruen the centre was not purely about consumerism: this was only used as the trigger to make the project profitable. It had to work similarly to a small city centre, with a combination of retail, social and cultural activities. The other functions next to commerce ensured greater durability, so the building was not totally dependent on people consuming goods. Gruen often referred his projects to historical marketplace examples in Europe and even to the Greek *Agora*. A claim that attracted criticism, but to use the earliest well known place of sale and exchange of humankind lent him a nice inspiration for a shopping centre that would not only be used for consumption but also for human exchange in general. (Wall, 2005)

"A group of retail and other commercial establishments that is planned, developed, owned and managed as a single property. On-site parking is provided. The center's size and orientation are generally determined by the market characteristics of the trade area served by the center. The two main configurations of shopping centers are malls and open-air strip centers."

(Definition of Shopping Center, International Council of Shopping Centers, 1999)



1. Bruce Dayton and Victor Gruen in front of their model for Northland Center

b. Modern agora as suburban centre

Gruen was one of the few architects in the 20th century who shaped the development of commercial architecture in a substantial manner, both positively and negatively. His achievements were forgotten for many years, and he was often only remembered as the "Father of the Shopping Malls" - a title he never liked himself. Only in recent years have architects begun to interest themselves more in the architecture of commerce and, consequently, in his work.

As an immigrant from Vienna to New York, Gruen, (born Viktor David Grünbaum) being of Jewish descent, was forced to flee his home town and country and make a new home in the US in 1938 after Austria's annexation by the Nazis. Fortunate to have already acquired an image as the architect who had renewed shopfronts in Vienna in a very new and successful style, he was quickly hired by fellow Austrian immigrants to renew their shopfronts on New York's famous 5th Avenue. Together with coworker Elsie Krummeck he founded the business *Gruenbaum and Krummeck Designers*. Their design of open and inviting shop fronts hit a nerve in New York, and their work was quickly published in various design and architectural magazines. Throughout his life Gruen was also involved in the theatre. This hobby certainly had great impacts on his designs and he worked frequently with the theatrical display of goods, using light and shadow to attract consumers but also to create comfortable atmospheres. Their success brought them together with Grayson's - a chain store company - for which they designed many facades all over the US.

In 1942 Gruen and Krummeck married and moved to the West Coast, where they were confronted with the daily use and dependence of the automobile and many hours spent in congested traffic. Around this time they were among the few first who began to imagine projects that integrated the car as main means of transport and experimented with the relationship between the shopping pedestrian and their car. One of the first projects carried out that actually included some of these ideas was Milliron's department store, which in a way synthesized the many concepts they had thought of in the past but at the same time integrated the automobile use of the Californian suburb. The facade of the building acted like the shop fronts in the city that Gruen had designed before, only that now it was oriented towards a more automobile focused clientele. The front entrance was formed by four display pavilions that were oriented towards oncoming traffic, acting like theatrical stages attracting potential consumers. Parking was not only around the store but also on the roof, as a consequence of lack of space at ground level due to the choice of a one



2. Car access to Milliron's roof parking

storey building. For Gruen it was like an incorporation of the road into the building itself. To grab further attention from drivers, Gruen added a tower-like structure on top of the roof bearing the logo of the store, which became in itself a landmark. Further development problems of the regional planning of the project and its context showed though that building along and on both sides of a busy boulevard did not work well in the long run, since growing traffic prevented any communication from one side to the other. Gruen continued searching for better solutions for the suburban market and soon decided that the car had to be separated more from the shopping area, leaving the pedestrian free to move by foot. This is when he came to the realisation that a shopping centre could not only be a collection of stores but also had to become a public space. The ideal of a modern Agora as a suburban centre was born, in a time when city centre quality was deteriorating, and the city outskirts lacked community spaces. (Gruen and Baldauf, 2014 ; Wall, 2005)

"It is the aim of our scheme to impress the center's facilities deeply into the minds of the people living in a wide surrounding area. The center shall become to them more than just a place where one may shop - it shall be related in their minds with all the activities of cultural enrichment and relaxation: theatre, outdoor music shell, exhibition hall."

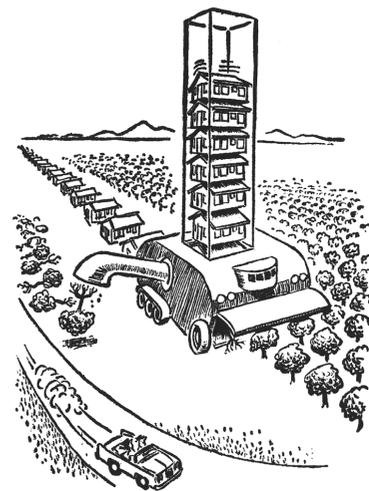
(Gruen and Ketchum in Wall, 2005: 71)

c. Urban impact

The scale of Gruen's projects had been significantly enlarged when he started to work in California, but not until Milliron's had he worked with the environmental aspects of the context, touching more than just the architecture. "Milliron's was designed to serve flows of vehicles, people and merchandise" (Wall, 2005: 53). In undertaking a project of a larger scale where the architect had to take other factors into consideration which went beyond the building itself, it became a territorial planning project, involving the whole region around it. As we know today, the impacts were felt across the whole country, traffic increased immensely, and urban sprawl was further driven by the newly-constructed shopping centres, having in return a huge effect on existing city centres, that would lose even more visitors.

Through his life Gruen had also always worked on publishing his ideas in magazine articles and books, which he in turn promoted further by giving public lectures. Consequently, he became a known personality for retail architecture, but also a consultant for suburban and urban projects. Through the spread of his texts his work was copied all over America and, eventually, the rest of the world. (Wall, 2005)

Later in his life, having realised the damage that urban sprawl and regional shopping centres had done to inner cities, he committed the rest of his life to working on city centre improvements. Here, he made significant contributions to many pedestrian city projects, ridding centres of cars, especially in Europe where he returned after resigning from his old firm, the Gruen Associates. (Gruen and Baldauf, 2014)



3. "The masked builder strikes again"
by Virgil Parth

d. Architectural features

For Victor Gruen architecture was the tool that allowed him to answer the demands of merchandising. He and Krummeck had published a brochure in which they explained that merchandising controlled the design of stores, the design had to be a "synthesis of merchandising, cost control and design flexibility" (Wall, 2005: 52). For them this did not exclude architectural aesthetics, on the contrary, they had to be found through the following points as a foundation of the design:

Visibility and Access

With the design of a shopping centre it was particularly important to think of the access and visibility of the place, since Gruen's first major projects were all regional and therefore situated near highways, confronted with vast distances and clients arriving mostly by car. Northland Center, near Detroit Michigan was his first big scale project. Already with this design the road access system was one of the main issues developed in the process. After his project for Milliron's, Gruen would often suggest parking all around the perimeter of the centre, leaving the centre free of any traffic. For Northland he designed a convenient access for a public transport service by bus, where people could directly enter the centre from an upper level. As for visibility, he used simple signs, such as the name of the mall on a water tower. Before he started to only focus on the interior of buildings, visibility was also created through transparency: glazed shop windows and lit up displays such as those he had created in Vienna were deployed within the stores. This effect of transparency was further achieved through open arcades bringing the visitors in from the parking, where they could have a glimpse of the interior waiting for them. Naturally, pedestrian access between the different spaces had to be ensured and made as easy as possible. While the arcades did function as passages at Northland they also protected the consumer from inclement weather. Ramps, escalators and lifts would result in a faster, simpler flow of people between different levels. (Gruen and Baldauf, 2014)

Orientation and Structure

Once inside the shopping centre Gruen was aware that the comfort of a visitor was dependent on them not feeling lost. He created a sense of orientation through clear spatial organisation with straight lines and central points that took on the role of landmarks. These could be simply stores, but equally deliberately positioned objects, like artistic sculptures or fountains. For a simple spatial organisation the architectural structure, had to be simple as well and allow for as much flexibility as possible, so shop owners could change their spaces over time, and it left open the possibility of incorporating different functions. This naturally called for the use of a structure based on pillars with vast open spaces and non-structural separation walls. (Gruen and Baldauf, 2014)

Material and Colour

The materials that Gruen used borrowed from the modern and international styles, with a choice of simple but high quality materials like brick and stainless steel with sleek but fancy colours that would entice the consumers to linger longer and therefore buy more. Just as was the case in Gruen's small-shop renovations, the shopping centres also maintained an air of luxury and comfort. (Weiss, n.d.)

Goods Display

As previously mentioned, Gruen had a strong interest in theatre and he used this knowledge of stage design in his commercial projects. Artificial lighting was one of the most crucial elements he used in his interior designs. Gruen was convinced that its impact on the consumer could extract emotions that would trigger memories of positive moments, such as sunsets, and therefore increase the possibility of higher consumption. The tactic of using the visitor's emotions is a system that is today pushed to its extremes, using all the tools at the retailer's disposal, not just lighting. (Wall, 2005; Gruen, 2014)



4. Sculpture and Arcade at Northland, USA



5. Interior courtyard with lights, fountains, plants and public furniture at Southdale Center, Edina USA

Extras

What other developers would have called architectural frills, Gruen saw as an important support to "create a successful strolling atmosphere", a place with new, interesting experiences (Gruen in Wall, 2005: 85). These experiences he created through commissioned artworks and the implantation of natural elements such as water fountains or flowers and plants, but also through the addition of mixed use with programmes such as cafes and playgrounds or public furniture in general. Such elements formed the public space of the shopping centre and gave it a certain identity that other centres would not have. It was with these elements that Gruen brought the city centre identity to the suburb and made people feel like it was their public place where they could come and not only consume but also meet others and participate in social and civic activities. The acclaimed urban activist and author Jane Jacobs, who advocated for the city of New York as a city that is formed by its citizens - having significant impacts on inner-city developments - praised Gruen's project for Northland as a useful study object for inner-city planning especially for its flexible use of open public spaces and the introduction of artistic elements. These were exactly the elements that Gruen would further use in his later career as city planner. (Jacobs, 1954)



6. Crossed concrete ramp for cars at Milliron's, LA

3. A brief history of the shopping centre and how it became to be

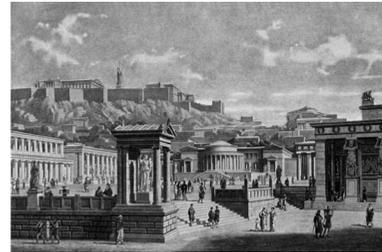
The ability to exchange goods in a dedicated place most probably exists since humans started to settle down, and specialise themselves in certain crafts, but one of the very first historically documented marketplaces is the Greek *Agora*. This was a public, open square that was most of the time placed between the ruling palace and the other principal buildings of the town. It was an area where traders met and sold multiple times a week, but it also functioned as a meeting space for the townspeople and was used for voting, debates, public displays, sports and parades. It functioned much as city centres do today and made shopping an already-indispensable part of town centres.

Similar to the Greeks, the Romans used open spaces as centres of civic life, but they began moving trading, among with other functions, into closed spaces that were called the *Forum*. These were probably among the first defined sheltered shopping spaces in Europe.

Through medieval times trading, as with most other human developments, went through a slower evolution in Europe. Nevertheless, many of the market and town halls constructed during this time continue to exist today. They were mostly large wooden structures with an open space on the ground floor and a closed one above. The shops were often placed in between columns on the ground floor, facing outward towards the streets, while the upper floors were used by the Guilds (associations of artisans or merchants who oversee the practice of their craft in a particular area). Another type owing its development to this time could be found on central streets, where small shops would open up towards the street on ground floors, while the shopkeeper would have his home above the shop. By the 14th century, the Italians had already started to move different market types into different buildings, a trend taken up by the rest of Europe by the 16th century. New market halls were formed by large linear structures covering long stretched spaces.

In the meantime, cities in the Middle East and North Africa had already developed planned retail areas such as the Bazaar of Isfahan, where shop stalls were placed under a long vaulted arcade, facing covered interior streets in between buildings.

Through the expansion of world trade and an evolution in banking, credit and limited liability companies in the late 16th century, Europe evolved from town and market hall to court hall exchanges. These buildings were arranged over two floors, with the market placed on the ground floor and stands on the first floor. The upper floors also became the preferred space to sell luxury goods in covered spaces - a change that largely influenced the later spatial organisation of arcades and department stores.



7. Ancient Greek Agora



8. Herefordshire Medieval Market, GB



9. The original Royal Exchange in London before it burned down



10. The Grand Bazaar, Istanbul



11. The Crystal Palace, London



12. Passage Choiseul, Paris

With the first appearance of glass in shop fronts, access to stores changed, and the client could from then on enter the shop him- or herself and be served at an interior counter. This and the overcrowding of London and Paris streets brought traders to enclosed pedestrian arcades, lit with glazed lanterns and transparent glass shop fronts presenting attractive goods.

From the 18th to 19th century there were other shopping models generated by an ever-growing population in major cities: new market buildings that were larger in size and offered all kinds of goods, and fair buildings that did not only offer products, but also involved leisure events and provided entertainment, for example the Foire St. Germain market, just out of the city walls of Paris.

The arcades were further developed through the 19th century and began to make use of a system of continuous vaulted glass roofs, a feature which quickly expanded all throughout Europe (for example, Galerie d'Orleans, previously Galerie de Bois). With the Great Exhibition of 1851, London constructed a building entirely of glass and steel, similar to a greenhouse: the *Crystal Palace*. This project that became known to the whole world had an even greater impact on further glass arcade developments, which became grander and more complex in time. They eventually even took up whole city blocks.

By the end of the 19th century, the first department store had opened. This new shopping environment adopted all the advantages that had been created thus far, such as accumulating a mass of shops with a variety of goods within one enclosed space, letting natural light come in through vaulted glass roofs and making use of glass fronts to attract shoppers. Soon it also had an opportunity to grow vertically, since the invention of elevators and, not long after, the arrival of the escalators enabled swifter, easier access to the upper floors. Another novelty was that anyone with money was allowed to enter department stores, there was less class discrimination within the store, and it was one of the first places a woman could go to by herself in the city, without fear of being discriminated against. Goods started to be displayed more openly and could be touched, and there were less over-the-counter sales, making shopping a new kind of experience. One could simply go and have a look - or window shop. (Coleman, 2006)



13. Aerial View of Northland Center

It was not until the 1950s that the shopping centre, as Gruen promoted it, began to multiply first all over America and then Europe and the rest of the world. There were a number of factors that influenced its success, not all related to Gruen. One of the main impacts was made by a new mobility, more accessible for the masses than ever before.

After the Second World War, the US quickly found itself with a growing economy, a much stronger housing market and an explosive growth in population. Americans desired to have the goods that were unavailable during the war and were longing for a life of stability and comfort. The established cities were unable to satisfy these needs and did not have the capacity to meet the enormous increase in the number of automobiles. Due to these facts, and the lower building cost in undeveloped areas, building in the periphery of the city became more attractive. People moved their homes to the suburbs and worked in the city, but given the frenetic development of many suburban regions in the US, planning could not keep up. The evident result was the lack of any kind of central identity of these new suburbs. There was a stronger focus on idyllic family homes with their own recreational spaces in the form of the front and back yard and expansive interior living spaces. The car became the most important object in people's lives: the only way they would move around outside of their homes (still the case today for most people living in suburbs), though there has been a slow decline of this trend in recent years.

With the growing development of city sprawl and ever larger distances, previous best practices in city planning could no longer be applied and new methods had to be developed to define new spaces for private and public living that were also adapted to the car use. The shopping centre was about creating a community centre similar to the urban centre, only out of the urban space, adapted to the new normal of suburban life and personal motor transportation. (Wall, 2005)

As for the Swiss context:

Europe took up the idea of the shopping centre quite quickly after it had regained economic strength in the postwar years. Switzerland, on the other hand, required some more time to import the American suburban idea. As in America, the driving force for the establishment of the shopping centre was an increase in car mobility and therefore a growing number of people who made the decision to live outside the cities, thus creating the first Swiss agglomerations. This development called for shopping centres out of town, which was responded to with a wave of construction during the 1970s. The Spreitenbach shopping centre, built in 1970 and Switzerland's largest still today, described its project as the "Construction of a Paradise" to advertise to future clients in the newspaper.

(Furter & Schoeck-Ritschard, 2014)

4. The contemporary shopping centre survival of the fittest

a. Why the ideal of Gruen did not work

Gruen envisioned a new concept of living in the suburbs with the same qualities available as in a town centre, and his main aim was to separate the human from his automobile. This he saw as possible within his shopping centre. Together with Larry Smith (a coworker) he published the book *Shopping Towns USA, The Planning of Shopping Centers* to distribute the knowledge they had gained through the work with Southdale Shopping Center to the rest of America. The goal was to produce and share a list of tested principles for improving suburban regions. Little did Gruen realise at the time that he was about to change most of America's urban landscape. The book was especially popular with developers who were looking for a way to make a profit with commercial investments. Most investors were evidently not interested in cultural functions as Gruen had promoted them. They left the social aspects aside, focusing mainly on the development of commercial space. The architect was no longer needed as the key figure in the whole project process, and only - if involved at all - could respond to the developers demands. The shopping centre became, as a renowned shopping centre developer once claimed, "a machine for selling, not an architectural problem." (Taubman in Wall, 2005: 104)

The construction of shopping centres became so popular due to its high success rate that they sprouted like mushrooms all over America, pulling purchasing power out of the city centres that were still intact. This meant that entire town centres were further abandoned, and many smaller, local shops were forced to close down. It also promoted an even greater urban sprawl and changed the landscape of consumerism across the United States. Unfortunately, many of the cheap shopping centres that were built drew their inspiration from the inward-oriented architecture of Southdale Center, creating a growing landscape of blind boxes with no attractive features to the environment. Gruen had decided to make Southdale an introverted building that focused on a perfect interior, where the customer was protected from the noisy and unattractive streets and parkings of the suburb, with the key focus of leaving the car behind upon entry. In comparison to Northland, he made all the shops open only to the inside, which was of course also a question of energy efficiency. He avoided too much signage on the outside because he thought that signs were the worst thing about the suburban strips. Sadly, as Alex Wall states in his work, the decision in favour of an introverted architecture reduced Gruen's work to that of a "traffic engineer and an interior designer".

(Wall, 2005: 101)

But there is another reason why Gruen's idea of centre in an enclosed building could not succeed and it is visible through one of the projects that he had realised himself. The Cherry Hill Shopping Center in New Jersey became an actual town centre to the nearby suburban Delaware Township that even changed its name to Cherry Hill. The centre was held by single private property firm, though it was used as the main public place in town. Within this conflict lies the problem for a closed centre wishing to become a true public centre. Where people's rights can be restricted by rules and regulations of private centres, for example of freedom of speech, as a result the place cannot be truly public. For Gruen it was supposed to be "*the community's living room*", but it became a living room of restrictions. Nonetheless Wall adds that the shopping centre has become "a select stage for collective display and individual representation of new consumer products and styles" for its clients and merchandisers, something that high streets always had been, but that the difference lies in the street as an "unlimited space of the city".

(Wall, 2005: 109)



14. Aerial View of Milliron's

b. Constant expansion or death

“the urgency with which a type is embraced is directly proportional to the inevitability of its obsolescence.”

(Herman 2001: 527)

Ever since the activity of shopping became one of entertainment instead of need, it has had to renew itself – as we have seen from its history. Arcades were replaced by department stores, which were in turn replaced by shopping centres. The consumer spaces were pushed to ever growing size thanks to the invention of artificial ventilation, air-conditioning and escalators. Now even the classical shopping centre is being replaced by shopping villages, or it is growing to the size of the latter. Shopping developers have always found new ways to renew the shopping experience, though where does it end, or does it ever end? While some regional malls grow to a larger size, others aren't able to compete and lose their clients to the bigger versions. In the same way that the shopping centre has killed the inner cities, the bigger malls ruin the smaller versions, leaving behind desolate empty dead shells. Shopping centres like the Mall of America have such a sheer size that one can quickly get tired or lost in its setting, which demonstrates an existing limit to its size in function of creating a comfortable shopping environment. Furthermore, the physical expansion has already reached its limits in terms of technical possibilities with air conditioning and escalators. In consequence of those limits shopping has again begun to search new ways to survive. (Leong, 2001)



15. Aerial View of Mall of America, USA



16. Empty Food Court in dead Owing Mills Mall, USA

Side Note on Switzerland's position:

Even in Switzerland growing in size has been the number one solution to attract consumers to return. When a centre started to lose clients, new expansions would be added horizontally as well as vertically. As Peter O. Wintsch, the longstanding managing director of the Regensdorf shopping centre near Zürich, stated in his letter to the authors of *Zwischen Konsumtempel und Dorfplatz*, “Expansion had always been the strategy of the Zentrum Regensdorf AG.” (Wintsch in Furter & Schoeck-Ritschard, 2014) This method of survival is still common practice, but naturally in a place like Switzerland, space is much more limited than in an American suburb and so even expansion is limited to a certain extent. In their book Furter and Schoeck-Ritschard ask themselves if the shopping centre was a discontinued model but wrote that the economic figures were stating clearly differently. Although acknowledging that the American situation of dying malls may be a warning for Switzerland's retail centres, they could not imagine shopping centres actually closing, due to the much higher value of land in Switzerland. Nevertheless, only a year after their publication, the Swiss shopping centre Centro Ovale in Chiasso, Ticino, had to close its doors to its remaining clients. All but one shop had to shut down due to a too low turnover rate, most likely because of lost clientele to other competitors and a too generic retail offer as its then active president Arnoldo Coduri had postulated for the Swiss newspaper, the *Tagesanzeiger*. (TA, 09.12.2015) The sales figures in shopping centres in Switzerland have been stagnating and even falling through the last few years. Regardless of the negative prospects, probably the last big shopping centre in Switzerland opened only in 2017. The Mall of Switzerland – confidently referring to to the superregional Mall of America – had had the aim to become the largest entertainment and shopping centre in the region of Lucerne, but according to recent news its operators are already considering a change of program to save the project from its ruin. Other shopping centres in the country have already undertaken functional conversion steps and have moved back to programs that attract more visitors and create stabler economic conditions. (Meier, TA, 2018)



17. Abandoned Landover Mall in Maryland, USA

c. Invasion of shopping into other domains

“Shopping is the medium by which the market has solidified its grip on our spaces, buildings, cities, activities, and lives. It is the material outcome of the degree to which the market economy has shaped our surroundings, and ultimately ourselves.”

(Leong 2001: 129)

In order to survive shopping, has had to resort to alternative solutions to expanding only in size. As previously discussed, shopping places have been constantly replaced by new types, and these changes have always occurred within smaller time frames, creating a system with the capacity to react increasingly flexibly. Today, it is hard to distinguish shopping from other public functions, which often work in symbiosis. The program of retail has become the tool to prevent long-existing institutions from disappearing and to ensure they keep their status. Institutions such as museums, churches, schools and even the city were once supported by civic and social structures, but with a growing shift from public to private responsibility, such places have been forced to come up with their own resources and have thus begun to use retail to their own financial advantage. Shopping presents itself as the most immediate solution, but it also shapes the institutions in return, not only in program but also through its visual aspects. As a consequence, many such institutions are beginning to look more and more alike.

Another form of institution that has been formed through shopping is the one of the place where we pass through or wait, railway stations and airports but also the places from which we can't easily escape for a fixed period, including large means of transport such as airplanes or ocean cruisers. This form of retail influences the way we use our public space, because it means that wherever we go within a social built structure, such as a city, we are being confronted with consumerism. The city itself has become suburban, by saving itself from desertion it has adopted suburban shopping principles of reviving its own high streets. However, this has had great impacts on many today's cities such as ridding its centres from heavy car traffic, introducing pedestrian friendly zones including public furniture and making it visually more attractive, but it has also given rise to an inner city development that is mostly focused on consumption. Places in the city are risking to become purely consumerist and therefore turning



18. Fondation Beyeler Museum Shop



19. Mariahilferstrasse Vienna, lined by typical European shops

into superficial spaces. In *The Gruen Effect* (2012), a biographical film about Gruen, Gudrun Hausegger and Alex Wall talk about what he would have thought of the main pedestrian shopping district in Vienna today, reaching the conclusion that he probably would be disappointed after observing the streets for a while, since fashion and other high end stores have created just another global city centre that could be confused to any other European shopping street. The regional shopping mall's principal problem now exists in the city centre as well.

These problems do not just stop in our public space. Shopping has been invading our private spaces for a while, starting with catalogues, television shopping and in recent times with the constant online connection to any product we want to buy. Therefore, the commercialisation of once-civic spaces is merely the continuation of this trend.

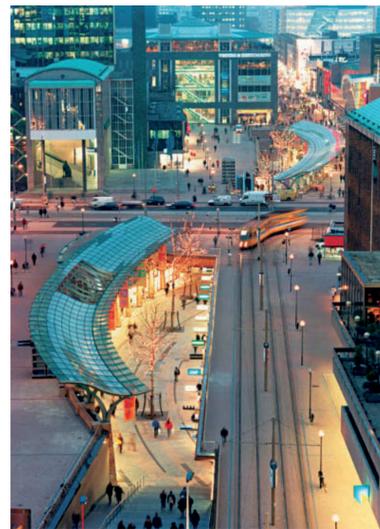
In his article in the *Harvard Design School Guide to Shopping, ... And Then There Was Shopping*. Leong (2001: 134) fears that “In the end, there will be little else for us to do but shop”. On the other hand, one could argue that when shopping becomes mainly an activity done from home, it might lose some of its more pleasurable and social aspects, accordingly the public space will have to respond with other programmes than retail that can still offer those moments of social experience.



20. Shop Ville in Zürich railway main station

d. Other new forms of shopping centres

After the department store, the shopping centre became the new important place to shop, but for some time now the “classic” enclosed shopping centre has also been overtaken by new forms of shopping concepts. By the 1980s consumers had already started to dislike the artificial feel of the centres that had been inspired by the Southdale project, desiring a stronger connection to the natural environment. While many malls began integrating skylights in courtyards with natural light access, others went even further and opened themselves up to the outside, as had been the case with Northland, Gruen’s first shopping centre. A number of economically stagnating malls in the US have been reconverted into shopping streets again, some even allowing vehicle access in order to reattract lost customers. New, larger schemes to make centres seem less artificial have emerged in the form of *shopping and outlet villages*, which, even though in reality very fake, give the visitor the feel of shopping town streets in the open, while at the same time providing a much bigger selection in a more convenient manner with amenities such as enough free parking, a semi-public protected area and easy orientation. Merchandisers have also realised that focusing on specific groups of customers can be more lucrative and have come up with *speciality centres* that attract more often high paying customers such as tourists and people looking for leisure time only. Another form with that goal are *focused retail centres*, that will sell goods and services of a similar type, like for example IKEA. Another way of attracting more customers has become more popular since the 1980s with shopping centres like the Canadian West Edmonton Mall that provide entertainment as much as shopping, including roller coaster rides, adventure parks, cinemas and events, not so dissimilar to the concept of Disneyland, itself much inspired by the works of Gruen. (Coleman, 2006 ; Chung, 2001)



21. Beursplein in Rotterdam



22. West Edmonton Mall pool area



23. Snoopy Camp Amusement Park in Mall of America, Bloomington

e. Experience instead of shopping

Another architectural pioneer who mixed shopping with entertainment is American architect Jon Jerde. As with Gruen, shopping is used only as the bait to attract visitors to a place of community – what is more important is the “experience”. While Gruen’s architecture was influenced by the modern and international style, where a building was set up by a clear structural system and orientation was easy, Jerde completely ignores Mies’ concept of *less is more* and goes with a more postmodern idea of overwhelming people. His projects often swallow up their visitors and force them to acknowledge the architecture that surrounds them in order to keep their sense of orientation. At the same time, he adds entertainment programs to the consumer’s visit, who find themselves completely engulfed by the shopping and consuming experience. Like Gruen, Jerde is fascinated by the theatre, and wants to integrate it in his architecture, although he uses it in a way that the consumer becomes part of the play instead of watching it through the shop window. Daniel Herman (2001) draws an analogy between Jerde’s architecture and the fun house: a fun house where scale, orientation and clear organisation become unclear, with the aim that the visitor will stay longer.

The idea of using entertainment and experience to attract customers into shopping centres is nowadays a common appliance and comes in various forms. Every new form of shopping centre uses the effect of selling experience, because it offers yet another attraction for people to return and alongside spend money in the many available shops around the entertainment taking place. They remind the customer of what he still thinks he needs or wants. Experience can be achieved through events taking place or entertainment provided through cinemas or other amusement installations, but merchandisers have started to advertise also with more subtle experiences using new technologies to their advantage, with the aim of making the consumer feel like a part of the shopping process, in similar ways to Jerde. In the end the experience becomes more important to the visitor than the shopped product itself and will infest itself much stronger in her or his memory, so they are more likely to return to the shopping centre.

5. Rebirth after death

a. The death of the mall

Re-urbanisation, wealth inequality and the internet but also the millennial generation – being more interested in experiences than goods – all influence the decreasing economic numbers of malls in America. It is estimated that already more than one third of the malls in the US are dead or dying. Even though the US is showing a particular bad scenario, shopping centres in Europe are stagnating and dying as well. (Voien, 2017)

The dead mall inspires a kind of fascination for the once so alive places that have now turned into obsolete and deserted graveyards. They appeal to an interest in a place that has become the complete opposite of what it once was. Since modernism architects have not shown much interest in shopping environment buildings, since shopping centres had become the antithesis of well-developed institutional architecture. But now that malls are experiencing abandonment of capital investors, or that the same investors are desperately looking for ways to save them, the architect's interest has returned. Empty structures have to be filled with new programs, giving many architects the opportunity to develop new, exciting projects, with programs other than retail.

“Killing the mall, paradoxically, has allowed it to become what Gruen once intended it to be - a city center. Death has allowed the mall to fulfill its original promise.”

(Herman, 2001: 470)



24. Dead Rolling Acres Mall



25. Interior of dead mall

b. Back to Gruen's ideal mixed-use centre or the third place revival

From the 50s to the 80s the shopping centre functioned on commercial use only, but it is clear today that shopping on its own will not exist any longer in a durable way. Shopping for necessities can be conveniently done online and people are drawn to buy their products in a physical place only for the experience, or out of time convenience if shopping areas are close by or part of a commute. Most new commercial projects aim for mixed-use programs and focus on the entertainment aspect. They are returning to the initial ideas of Victor Gruen, trying to make the public space more inviting by adopting principles of pedestrian city centres. The need for public space in the built environment has existed through all human history, but it has started to lose its most important features, a phenomenon in which the increasing invasion of shopping has played a role.

In the *Harvard Design School Guide to Shopping* (2001), Chuihua Judy Chung argues that public space as a physical place no longer exists, and that today the true place of public communication has moved to our screens. We share and communicate our information on television and social media, where “public space has been thinned to a series of surfaces” – screens – while the physical public space is no longer a platform of real communication, but more a surface of visual perceptions of a proposed ideal life. “Shopping has flattened public space”. (Chung, 2001: 524)

In spite of this strong perception, that is in many ways true, an opposing movement can be already perceived, and it is now that this change is gaining momentum. As American sociologist Ray Oldenburg describes in his book *The Great Good Place*, there are places in a city, and even smaller communities, that allow people to gather informally – what he calls *the third place*, a social environment where people lead their community lives, next to their home (*first place*) and workplace (*second place*). He defines them as very important to functional civil societies, democracies and civic engagement. These third places exist within churches, cafes, clubs, libraries and parks, and can also include shopping centres. (Oldenburg, 1999) Undoubtedly as long people will desire to have a third place in their lives, public space as a space of encounter and communication will not disappear. Especially with recent communication and social media developments – everyone being constantly connected – people have rediscovered an interest in returning to their roots, with wildlife camps and other events involving “real life” (without technology) booming for some years now. This trend has also changed their shopping activity and created a whole new generation of consumers, requiring significant adaptation from retail. In *Retail Design International* this new client is called *Customer 3.0*:

“He is individualistic by nature, attaches importance to values and has a critical stance towards consumption: that is Customer 3.0. As a new customer type, he poses a huge challenge for retailing and sales because he does not belong to any of the existing categories. He cannot be classified by age, income or education, is not necessarily a digital native. But he is self-assured, wants to make an active contribution and is not satisfied with bog-standard solutions. He wants to be courted and rarely gives brands a second chance.

(Brück-Seynstahl, 2016: 14)

c. Alternative and future shopping spaces

Online and offline

Today, online retail has already become a common part of our daily lives. Whenever we do not have the time to go to town or the next shopping centre, we buy what is needed on the internet. For some, all shopping now takes place online, with even fresh produce able to be easily delivered directly to our front door. This trend is growing, and shopping centres and food markets have already begun adapting accordingly, branching out into online sales, with home delivery or specified collection points at their physical premises. On the other hand, online merchants are realising that virtual shopping also has its limits, and traditional brick-and-mortar traders are beginning to play to their advantages. As Gruen understood, the appeal to the senses can be a very powerful tool to attract customers, but online stores can so far only use the visual one, while brick-and-mortar places can manipulate their customers in many other ways. While sound and smells of products and environments can play an important role, the tactile feeling of materials can also have a significant impact on customers. These impacts rely greatly on the architecture that enables them, which goes to show that architecture of analogue retail can help to individualise certain spaces and leave a more lasting impression on its visitors. As a consequence, online retail is also branching out to physical platforms that can be experienced in reality while working alongside their main online platforms, so consumers can also test things before deciding to buy a product online. This creates a whole new world of shopping experiences and, therefore, spaces to provide these experiences. Shopping environments are becoming more interactive, a development which is even more exciting through the growing quality of virtual reality, and the spaces becoming more diverse in their functions, which also implies a demand for higher flexibility in the architecture. (Messedat, 2015)

Mixed-use

To assimilate shopping centres more to city centres, developers and architects have realised once more that variety in functions can help to make a centre more attractive but also create greater economic stability, making them less dependent on retail, a sector that is by nature subject to immense seasonal and cyclical fluctuations. The concept of *mixed-use* merges different programs with residential, commercial and cultural functions together, either under one roof or in a whole neighbourhood complex, and it should allow pedestrians easy access and connection between the different zones. Gruen had already planned his projects, such as Northland, with a mixed-use development, but, as has become apparent, investors were for a long time uninterested in programs that made them less money than commercial use. Only now that shopping centres are dying because of decreasing clientele have they rediscovered the importance of mixed-use programmes.

A more extreme version of mixed-use could be the concept of *trading spaces*, the idea of mixing retail enterprise with social projects, so that both parties, the merchant and the community, can benefit, each one supporting the other. Tessy Britton, an educator and community practitioner, has worked on various projects to improve high streets in English town centres, and is an advocate for the *trading spaces* development. With her work she promotes projects that include a kind of trade of goods or services combined with an experience of learning or fixing things that are related to the specific trade. (Dobson, 2015) Even though Britton argues for the high street locales only, this concept can very easily be translated to other sort of centres that have been abandoned because of overly superficial use and shortsighted development.



26. Rose Biketown interactive display

Interactive shopping and pop-up stores

In the future successful traders can no longer only rely on display advertisement and simple interaction with the customers during their visit, they have to turn the relation between the buyer, the product and the seller into something more meaningful than just a simple money transaction. Already today certain retailers are making use of new technologies available to them. With most people having smartphones on them, it has become much easier to access visitors' opinions and make them feel like their personality is valued in a specific place. US Starbucks for example has started to share its Spotify music list with its customers, so they can add their own songs, taking part in something like a modern jukebox. These kinds of interactions can enrich relationships between customers and shops and their brands. (Blocher, 2016)

The new type of customer is a more spontaneous buyer but also easier to activate. This has the consequence that temporary spaces will become more attractive for retailers, because mobile and mini-formats are more likely to encourage experimentation, surprises and unique shopping experiences. They also involve less investment and economic risk and therefore give smaller businesses greater chances to establish themselves. Projects like the pop-up stores in the container collection in Shoreditch London have taken off with so much success already that they have multiplied in numbers in high demographically diverse cities such as London. (Brück-Seynstaahl, 2016)



27. Boxpark Shoreditch Containers

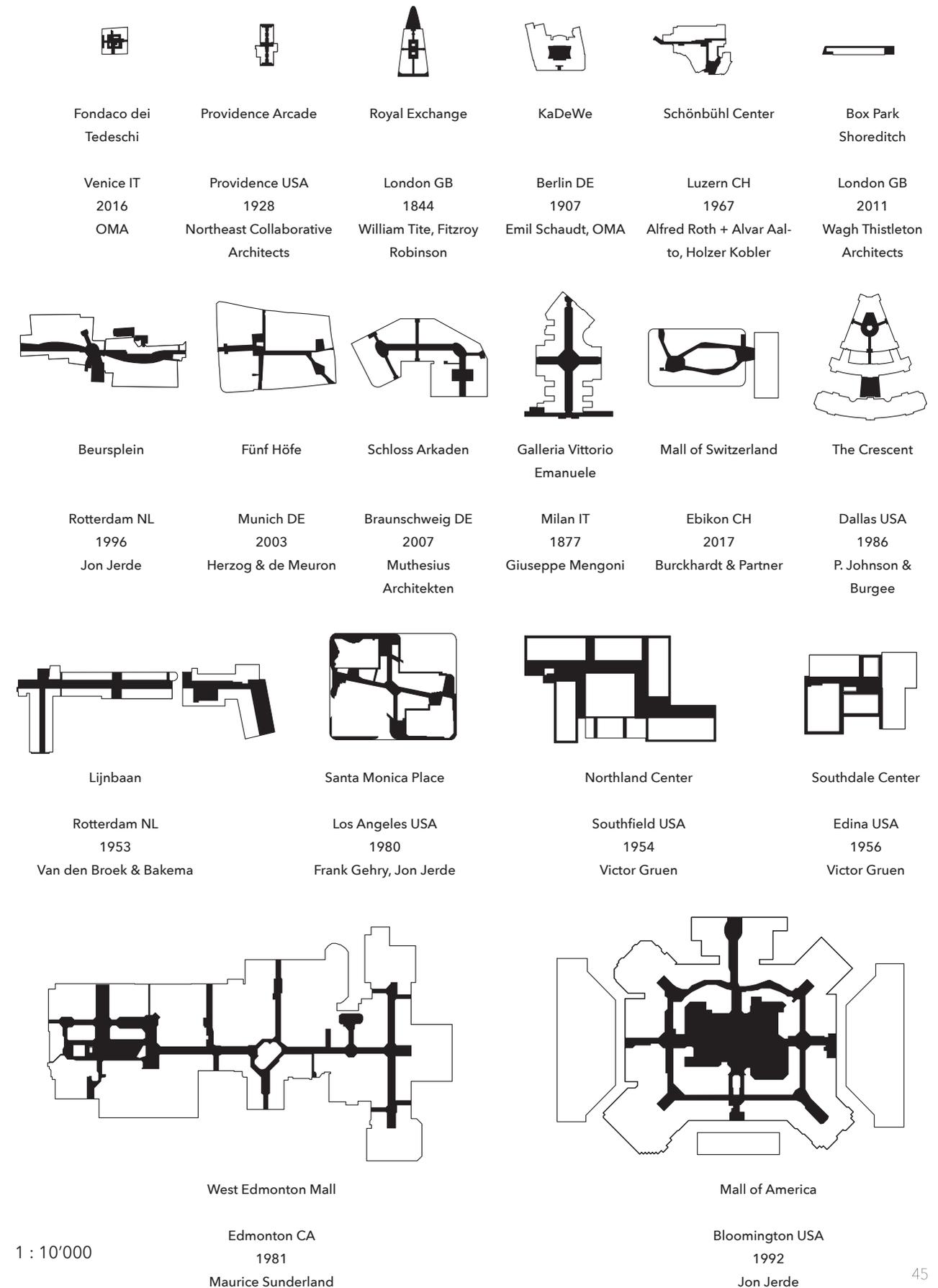
6. Shopping centres documentation and analysis

For a practical analysis of the discussion above I have made a selection of shopping centres that reflect the same geographical and historical context that is considered by the previous part of this thesis. Notably, they have been chosen for the following reasons:

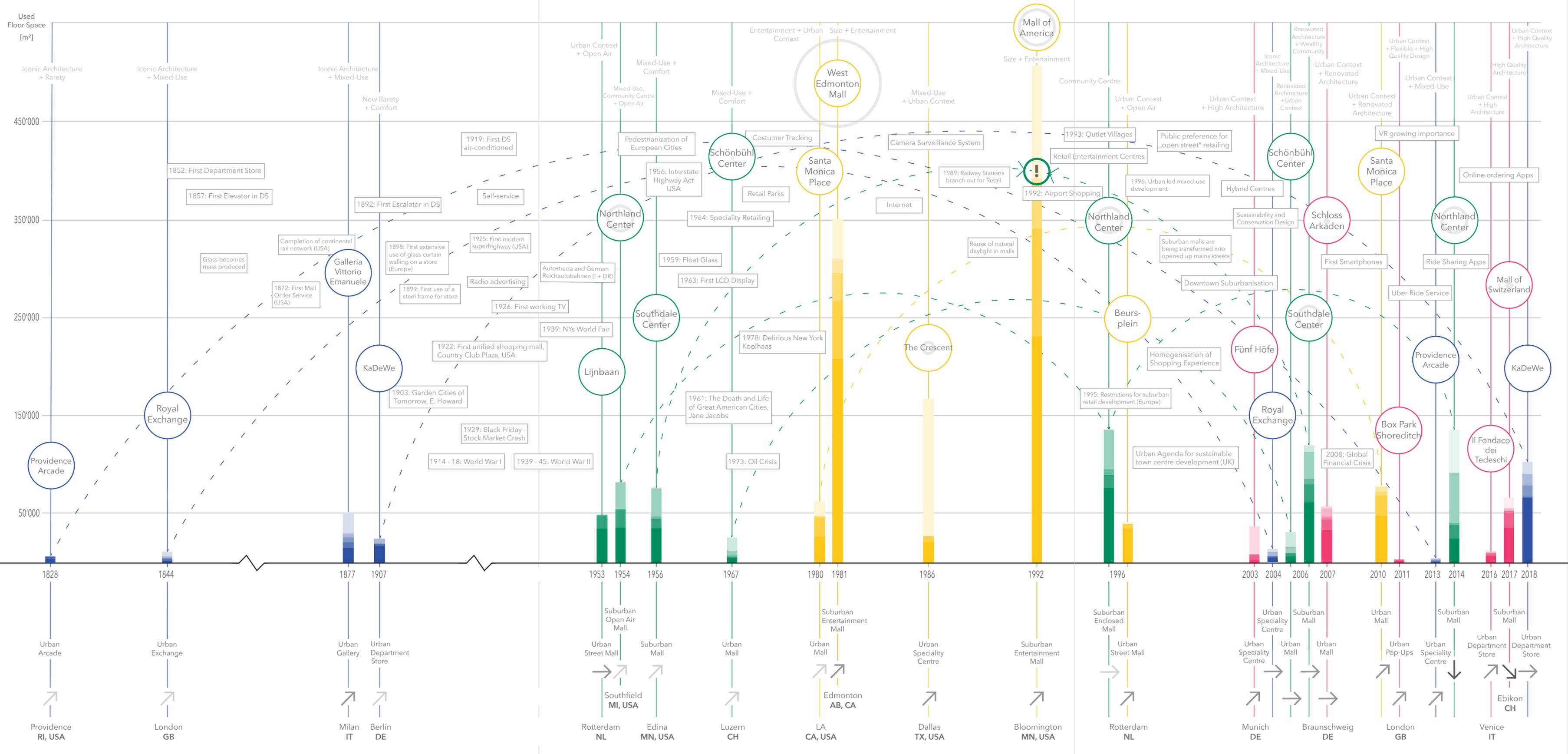
- Geographically, they are limited to North America and Europe, and therefore represent the development of shopping centres across the western world.
- All have been designed by architects and should therefore reflect conventions of architectural practice.
- They have been designed at different points of history (starting with the spread of department stores and exchanges), describing the evolution of the shopping centre as we perceive it today.
- Being of different historical and geographical origins, they also reflect different types of shopping centres
- They represent various sizes, reflecting the range of the currently existing and recently abandoned shopping centres in the analytical context.

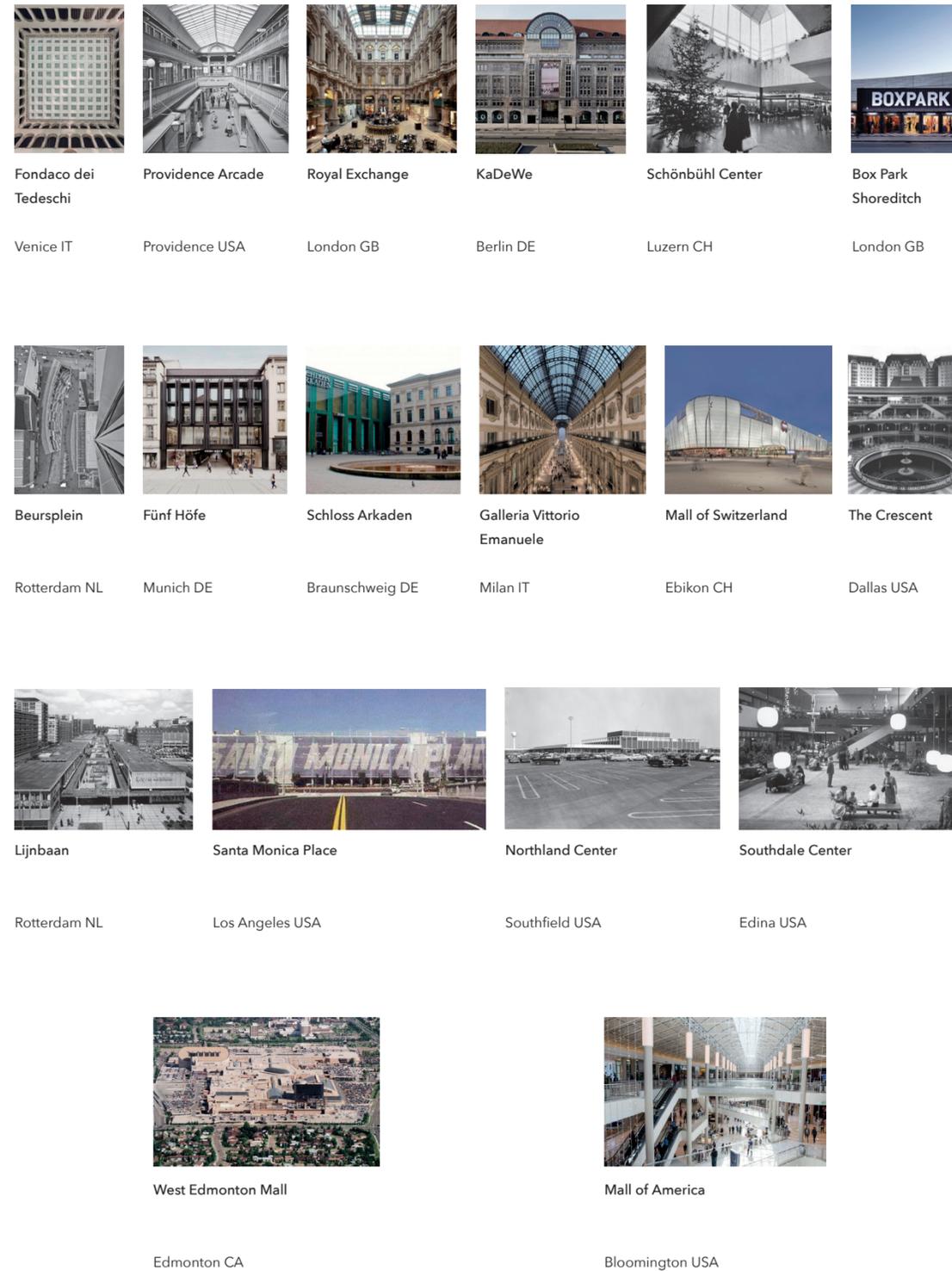
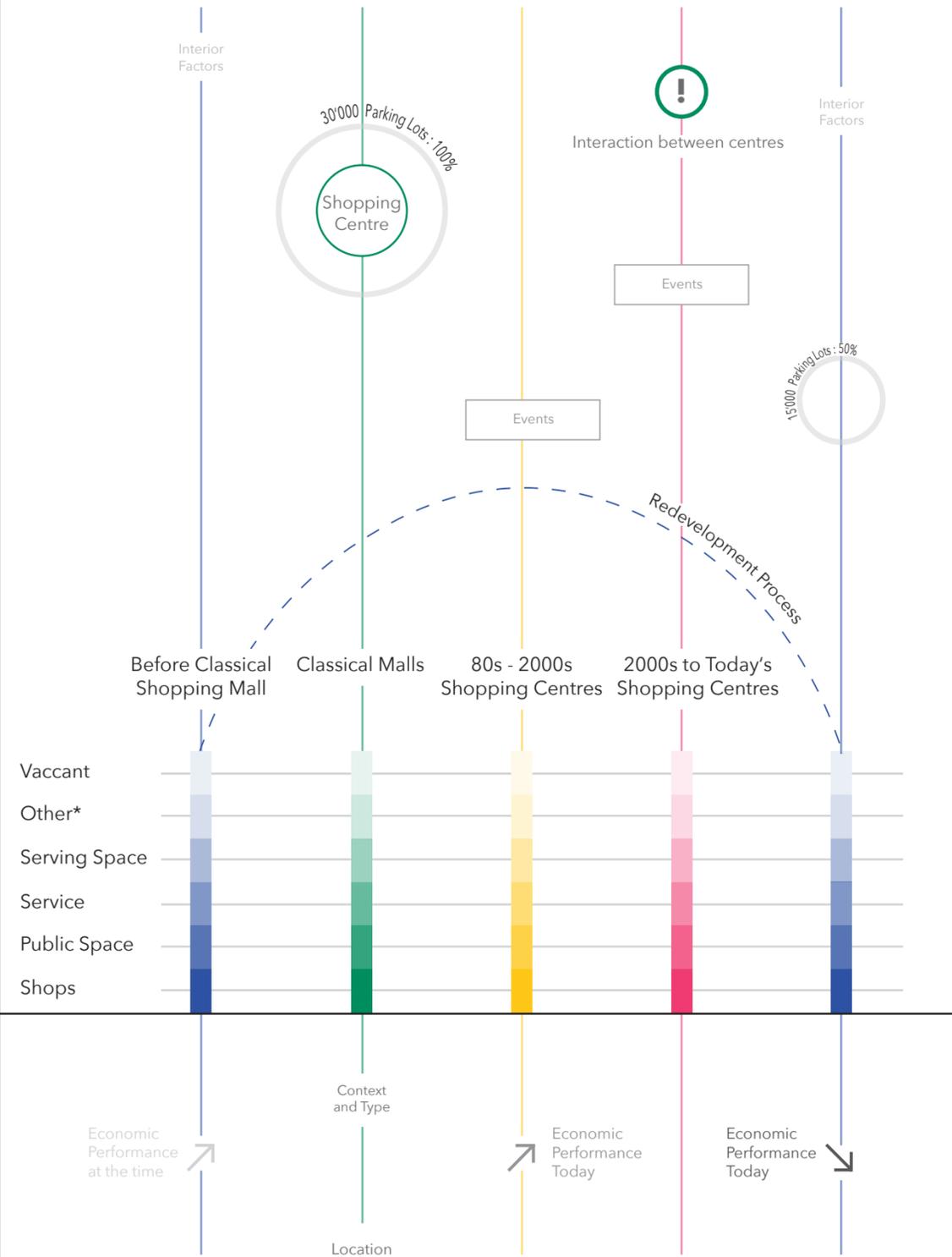
The following 18 examples are divided into four time periods, the first representing shopping centres before the classical shopping centre, up to the mid-1950s. The next group is formed by the classical type of shopping centre, followed by a group of successful new types of centres that emerged after the classical centre up until the 2000s. The last group reflects typical cases of shopping centres that have been constructed within the last 20 years.

Each bar in time represents a specific shopping centre at its point of creation or reopening after redevelopment. The bar represents the corresponding floor area divided into different functions. The arrows represent economic performance of the specific centre - either growing, stagnating or declining - based on the most recent, publicly available data regarding various factors such as retail turnover, profits and number of visitors.



28. Shopping centres' ground floor plans at same scale, showing public distribution





Analysis

The diagram allows us to uncover several trends and constants in shopping centre development. First, in most cases the amount of public space did not change much in the centres that were redeveloped, even though in some cases a redevelopment resulted in an expansion of shopping space (Southdale, Northland, Santa Monica Place). This net decrease of the proportion of public space seems to go along with a decline in the economic prospects of a centre, at least initially – in the case of Southdale, a further redevelopment currently underway seeks to add further mixed-use space to reverse this trend and allow it to better compete with the nearby Mall of America, while in the case of Northland, the centre was ultimately closed down and demolished. Prevailing economic conditions clearly have a role to play: the 2008 Recession hit Detroit suburbs particularly hard, resulting in lingering high unemployment, low incomes and a population decline, none of which are helpful to a centre relying mostly on retail revenues for its survival. Santa Monica Place ultimately survived and is again on an upward trend, but only after significant investment in entertainment architecture, overseen by architect Jon Jerde.

Mixed-use can be perceived as a growing trend in the last 20 years while the shop ratio has decreased at the same time, even though the two early projects of Gruen (Northland and Southdale) were initiated as mixed-use centres and were mostly reduced to retail through their further life, most likely having had an impact on the downfall of Northland in 2015. Any centre in the analysis that had been underperforming is currently under redevelopment to have a more varied programme added to it.

Naturally, extended periods of enduring vacant space are also an indicator for poor economic performance. While regional centres struggle to perform well today, shopping centres in the city have more success and profit from a wider and higher income group of customers. This is also a reason why new shopping centres are in general only opened within higher density regions, but this has also been reinforced partly because of more restrictive laws passed by many European countries by the mid 1990s to protect the hinterland from further sprawl. The Mall of Switzerland – being therefore a bit of an exception since being the newest mall within the range of examples and still located out of the city – is still struggling to fill its vacant space and is also already going through changes of programme. Another tendency that seems to stick out is that new shopping centres are mostly renovations and redevelopments of existing historic fabric within cities.

7. Conclusion

How has architecture had an impact on shopping centres public identity?

As we have learnt from the discussion of the history, evolution and architectural contribution to the shopping centre, we can confidently say that the use of certain architectural elements within shopping centres has an impact on their public identity. As Gruen understood early on in his work on these spaces, a sufficient amount of public space both allows the customer to access the shops but has at the same time an importance in and of itself. Equipped with public furniture and other leisure possibilities such as cafes, restaurants and meeting places, it allows the visitor to take breaks between shopping activities. The space adorned by artistic and entertainment installations gives a feel of holiday. Well developed architecture can also provide efficient and easy access and orientation, while the connection to a shopping centre in the city is particularly important, since many visitors will arrive by foot or bike, especially in city centres. When a project manages to be well embedded in its context it can also create sense of public identity for the people who live around it. This can be seen to be the case in regional centres when they have been well planned surrounded by residential zones and including other functions than retail.

Architectural design can have also a direct impact on creating identity for specific stores and is used as a tactic against the online market. Salesmen are using for example, high quality materials for the interior design to give customers the feeling of authenticity that they could not get on the internet. This strategy can also be applied for the public space of a shopping centre to transform the space of distribution and circulation with a certain materiality into a place where the visitor can linger and meet friends, so that he will associate the shopping centre with a certain character he likes and will be more likely to return.

Can it enable a more durable evolution of the shopping centre?

This thesis has argued that architecture can influence the public identity of a shopping centre, which in turn will allow it to attract more people. Through a longer time period this can of course only be assured through constant upkeep and renewal of a place, but in a way that does not diminish its architectural quality. This of course depends highly on future decisions made in the management of a centre but also on the economy of its environment.

A further important factor is the application of mixed-use. The concept of mixed-use enables a centre to become more like a city centre, including many different functions in one place and therefore creating an environment that is dense and rich in variety. In the long term such a shopping centre will react better to retail fluctuations and become more flexible in the face of functional changes.

Has public space of the shopping centre changed over time, or did it remain as it was, as with the established public space of a city?

In most of the successful cases analysed, the proportion of public space has at least remained the same, while in the shopping centres where its ratio had been reduced, we see negative trends in economic developments. We could therefore assume that the balance between shops and the space connecting them should not tip too far in the direction of commercial space, to provide a shopping centre with points of attraction beyond consumerism. As we have learned, however, if the public space is not equipped with the right proportions or the necessary elements to attract the specific community of the place it might as well not be there. The same problem exists within the city, when urban planners create big public spaces that no one will use due to lack of interest, missing amenities, poor aesthetics in the eyes of the local community or poor placement. The difference of the shopping centre to the city, as discussed earlier, exists within the question of the ownership of the public space. Ownership, and therefore control, of shopping centres is very often private, implying that the rules and regulations governing its use may also be set in private and without consultation of its users. However, it should not be forgotten that no space in our modern society is without some form of control. The difference between privately owned and publicly held spaces is that rules in the latter are usually legitimised through democratic processes. Applying

some modified form of these processes in private spaces meant to be used as public venues, such as through public consultations or community oversight meetings, maybe one way of ensuring such spaces can be used to their full potential. In some cases, shopping centres are already firmly within the public domain, such as the Lijnbaan Centre in Rotterdam. Introducing mixed-use functions such as housing often means that residents can have a greater say in the use of the public space of the centre, although this may give them undue privilege over other users. Therefore, it can be concluded that it is not necessarily the amount of space that matters but rather its use, and how this use is governed.

All in all, the retail industry is promising a colourful future in the shopping world. It is aiming to respond more efficiently to individual needs of customers with help of new technologies and direct interaction, but also to create a richer shopping environment that includes other offers than retail – mixing art, culture, hospitality and retailing. (Messedat, 2016) But can this evolution really improve our public space in a durable way or will it remain superficial, as Judy Chung predicts?

Ultimately, there is still a great amount of hope for the future of our retail spaces, when looking at the many examples that engage in experiences that bring back the spirit of public space not only in the form of trading but also in cultural exchange. The transforming shopping centre can be a great opportunity to reinterpret retail and public space together. This allows new possibilities for experimentation in architecture. At the same time, we have to understand that any project of the size of a shopping centre becomes a regional project and will never only include the architect but involve many other players from different disciplines. It is also a project that never ends, since over time the shopping centre has to always react to its customers' desires, which will change over time based on economic, societal and technological conditions. There are signs that this is already better understood by architects working on those kinds of projects, but it should always be kept at the forefront of one's mind when working with commercial architecture. By accepting the shopping centre's dynamic nature and its environment we will go a long way to creating successful vibrant community hubs into the future.

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