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Building for consumption: an institutional analysis of peripheral shopping center development in northwest Europe

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.0 Introduction

One of the most significant urban developments of the late twentieth century has been the dispersal of population from the great cities to the surrounding regions. Beginning in the early decades in the United States, this push outwards mainly became an issue in the postwar era when swelling incomes, demographic growth, and the ubiquitous car enabled a considerable proportion of the population to relocate themselves and their families outside the traditional city.

In the early years of American suburbanization, many conventional urban functions — retail, cultural, entertainment — remained in the cities well. However this began to change over time, and even these functions began to migrate outwards as well (Jackson, 1985; Fishman, 1987; Garreau, 1987; Kunstler, 1994; Longstreth, 1997; Rusk, 1999). The most conspicuous were retail functions whose presence had long defined the vitality and character of city and town centers. In the US, the movement of shops to the periphery and their consolidation is epitomized by the enclosed mall (Kowinski, 1985; Sorking, 1992; Borking, 1998). This “building for consumption” catered to the specific demands of the new suburbanite; it was car-friendly, protected from the elements, safe and clean. During the height of the shopping mall building period (1960-1980), almost 30,000 malls were constructed in the US (Lowe and Wrigley, 2000: 646). Other formulas such as superstores, retail warehouse parks and factory outlet centers continued this trend. As construction boomed in peripheral areas, retail sales plummeted downtown (Frieden and Sagalyn, 1989: 13). Especially during the 1970s, core cities of metropolitan areas gained the unwanted reputation as centers of decay, filth, lasciviousness and crime, and some even faced fiscal ruin. Since about the 1980s, American public officials have retaliated with projects to revitalize the old centers: urban renewal, civic monuments and public amenities, and a deluge of cultural activities and events. Perhaps the most visible of these projects was the building of “downtown malls” — stylish retail centers designed to compete with their suburban counterparts. The alliances forged and methods employed in this endeavor signaled for many a new era in planning.

Although similar demographic, economic and social pressures exerted themselves in Europe, albeit less intensively than the United States, the response has been much more differentiated and belated. The first real out-of-town shopping center (Parly-2 outside of Paris) only opened its doors in 1969, decades after this had become an established phenomenon in the US. Europe has always been much more heterogeneous than the US in terms of its administrative and corporate cultures, economic systems, legislation and planning systems. In fact, many European nations have enacted legislation and imposed planning restrictions specifically designed to prevent, halt or slow the growth of out-of-town retail developments (Davies, 1995; Pilat, 1997; Guy, 1998a). There is a palpable difference between Anglo-Saxon and Continental cities in their urban morphology (Berry, 1973; Fishman, 1987). Today, however, the opening up of markets and liberalization processes related to European Union regulations and continuing globalization are offering private development interests increasing opportunities for crossing borders. Indeed, some parts of Europe seem now to be experiencing the outflow of retail functions that typified the US half a century ago, particularly Eastern Europe (ICSC-SCT, 1998; Volkmann, 1998; Blotvogel, 2000; Kolen and Bell, 2000). At the same time, countries with similar economic profiles still have vastly different retail structures. Understanding this variation is key for understanding the

mechanisms driving retail development. Ultimately, the course that spatial developments will take — i.e. whether the retail structure will increasingly resemble the US model, or whether traditional or other retail forms will prevail — depends largely on the innovative and/or preemptive measures taken by Europe's public and private sector actors. Thus, powerful global trends notwithstanding, the course of retail development is, I argue, not a foregone conclusion but dependent on local contextual factors.

Before commencing with my account on how Europe is building for consumption, I want to take a step back and consider the subject of retail development at a more abstract level. This is the topic of the next section, which provides an analysis of the term, and reflects on the buildings for consumption themselves (supply side: physical manifestation) as well as motivation behind building for consumption (demand side: consumer preferences) and how the two are intertwined. Once this is complete, this introductory chapter will turn to how to study this phenomenon using a comparative institutional approach, and how this research can contribute to the current body of literature in the area of planning and retail. This will entail a presentation of a main research question and theoretical framework as well as a justification for the choice of narrowing the focus to large-scale peripheral shopping centers in Germany, the United Kingdom and the Netherlands.

1.1 Retail development as an object of study

When we talk of retail development we essentially are talking about the spread and location of shops in a particular area. Research in this area takes on manifold forms, such as studies on the disappearance of greengrocers in French village centers or the Scottish countryside to the growth of commercial strips in the American Midwest, the political furor surrounding the construction of Factory Outlet Centers on the outskirts of Berlin, the future of suburban megamalls in California and the advent of slick themed consumerist temples like Niketown in Portland, Oregon. Not only is the subject matter diverse, so too are the disciplines involved in studying it, ranging from diverse subdisciplines within economics to policy analysis, urban planning, geography, sociology, and marketing (Marshall and Wood, 1995). The methods used also reflect a degree of conceptual polarization. On one side, quantitative methods are employed to design sophisticated models of distributional logistics or inform locational decision-making (e.g. Jones and Simmons, 1990; Hernández et al, 1998; Clarke, 1998; Müller-Hagedorn, 1998). At the other extreme, retail studies also seems to include a *mélange* of sociological-cultural explorations, indictments, critiques or celebrations of consumerism which are usually couched in postmodernist terminology and which link shopping to identity (see e.g. Sorkin, 1992; Urry, 1995; Zukin, 1995, 1998; Miller and Jackson, 1998; Clarke et al, 1998; Miles et al, 1998; Featherstone, 1998; Crewe, 2001; Clarke, 2003). Somewhere in the middle lie the concerns of town and country planners, the ones who are confronted on a day-to-day basis by the physical problems posed by new retail formats such as traffic congestion, shifting levels of provision, urban revitalization and disappearance of open space (e.g. Dawson, 1983; Thomas, 1990; Guy, 1994a; Davies, 1995; Boekema et al, 2000). Definitions on what constitutes “retail” or “development” will vary eclectically from context to context, depending on what the researcher has studied. As mentioned, there is no agreement or consistency on key terms such as shopping center, peripheral or out-of-town, retail park or superstore, and this is exacerbated by language problems in international comparisons (Guy, 1994a, 1998b; Helfferich et al, 1997; Reynolds, 1998).

In order to negotiate the conceptual quagmire that typifies the literature on retail development, it is essential to gain a better understanding about what we actually mean when we use the term. If the aim is to understand and explain the phenomenon on its own terms, it

is not sufficient for the researcher to simply impose a definition, but to arrive at a definition after reflecting on the object of study and the way it is studied. As Julie Lawson recently remarked, “Rather than begin with theory imposition, the explanatory process can *begin with the object of study*, by abstracting its complex, interacting dimensions and developing a practically adequate theory of explanation” (Lawson, 2001: 1403, emphasis in original). This having been said, the purpose of this section is to consider the term retail development, unpack its intrinsic characteristics and their implications and then observe its manifestations.

1.1.1 Definition/deconstruction of retail

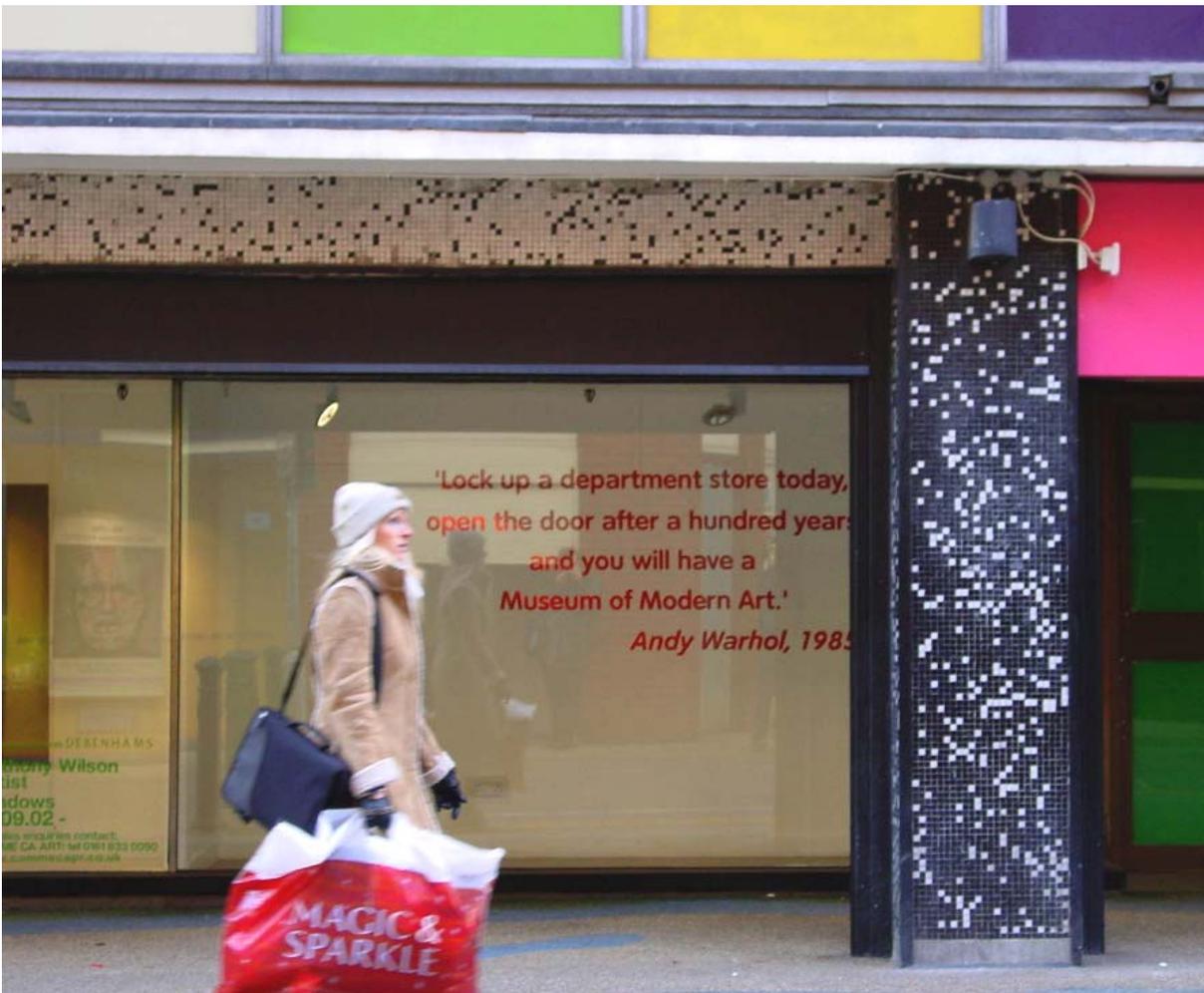
Retail, as an economic practice, is usually subsumed under the more general heading of services, a classification that unfortunately obscures some of its specific qualities (Davies, 1984: 7; Marshall and Wood, 1995; Sayer, 2000: 19). Granted, retail is a service, but it should also be remembered that retail is a particular kind of service far removed in many respects from those activities performed by auditors, security guards or legal consultants because it deals with trade in tangible consumer goods. Due to its different nature, one can therefore also expect that it will differ in the way in which it manifests itself over time and across space. A casual reflection would seem to confirm this: settlement patterns of, for instance, designer shoe shops in a metropolitan area are for the most part quite different from those of law offices or call centers.

In order to explore this further, a logical starting point would be to consider some formal definitions of “retail” in order to uncover the roots of this difference of outcome. According to the Oxford English Dictionary, retail is defined as “the practice of selling goods in small quantities to the general public.” Already from this definition, and the modifications made to it by those in the field, some important distinctions can be made which will be useful for explanations of retail development. First, there is an indication of a relationship between a single seller and a larger public, thus excluding pure business-to-business transactions (e.g. wholesale). This has significant spatial implications in that “the general public” has much different accessibility requirements and demands of (and impacts on) the surroundings than do other businesses, something that will be returned to in more detail later.

This dictionary definition has been given greater specificity in the retail marketing literature. Many authors include an additional restriction in the definition that excludes the sale of goods by producers, such that merchandise sold directly to consumers by a manufacturer is not considered retail. This, usually done to emphasize the traditional position of the retailer as a middle link in the supply chain, is becoming increasingly untenable in the wake of e-tail and factory outlet center formulas. Other definitions of retail include a provision that the goods may not be consumed at the premises at which they were purchased, in an attempt to distinguish between, for example, buying food in a shop (retail) and in a restaurant (non-retail). However, as with the above, novelties such as take-out food establishments have blurred this distinction as well (PW 3 April, 1998: 13; Boekema et al, 2000). Finally, as the physical setting at which retail trade takes place can vary greatly, from makeshift kiosks in open air markets to ostentatious theme-park malls, further problems of definition can arise *vis-à-vis* leisure and entertainment functions (Crawford, 1992; Newby, 1993; Terhorst and Van de Ven, 1999; Kooijman, 1999a, 2000; Romeiß-Stracke, 2001; Loeng, 2002).

While the above may appear to some as overzealous hairsplitting, understanding exactly what we mean by the object of study can have major implications for the way it is researched and, ultimately, in the explanations generated. The degree of austerity of definition of retail can and has produced, for example, variation in the time at which the phenomenon is said to have

originated, and the times at which (if any) so-called “retail revolutions” have taken place (Gayler, 1989; Bromley and Thomas, 1993; Fernie, 1998; Dawson, 2000). Moreover, the definition will affect research on the forces that are said to cause shops to diffuse, cluster or concentrate under certain circumstances, the type of data collected to understand this, and on policy that seeks to control it. The intention is however not to produce a new definition or description of retail, but more to show a conscious appreciation for the issues involved in its study. Thus, for the purposes here, it is sufficient to utilize the dictionary definition above coupled with an appreciation of the different limits — retail *versus* wholesale, retail *versus* catering and retail *versus* entertainment — suggested by the literature, bearing in mind that these are useful, but inherently fuzzy distinctions. Thus, a definition such as “the practice of selling goods to the general public to be consumed elsewhere” would be a tolerable starting point.



As with retail, the term “development” should be briefly touched upon. Again, the relevant OED definition can be considered: “to build or change property on an area of land, esp. for profit” (p. 318). This notion, as dealing with the status of land, is therefore inextricably linked to the notion of property rights, and more specifically to the urbanization process because it usually involves a conversion of land to new uses. A great deal has been written on the politics of property development, and this will receive more attention in Chapter 2. However, for our purposes here, it is better to confine the discussion to the topic at hand. When applied to the concept of retail, what is specifically interesting is the spread of shops — as fixed point-of-sales for retail merchandise within a permanent structure — over space, rather than

other types of retail trade such as e-tail (unless, of course this directly leads to atrophy in the current retail structure). Together, retail development then refers to the physical construction or modification of such sales space, which can range from closings, openings or expansions of inner-city shops to the construction of freestanding hypermarkets.

This conceptualization of retail development is inherently political as much as it is economic. When a parcel of agricultural or derelict industrial land is designated as retail, its value can increase significantly, and landowners often actively lobby for rezoning. The public sector may also welcome the extra tax income generated by the higher value. In Western Europe, where public authorities generally wield comparatively high levels of power in land use decision-making, rezoning involves an appeal to the government and preparedness to make concessions if so demanded. On the other hand, the increases in land value at one site also impacts the surrounding area, such as spin-off investment in the form of new buildings or refurbishment that may engender a positive cycle of investment, bringing new funds into the public treasury and improving the image of the locality. Sometimes these spin-off effects are deemed significant enough to demand concessions from the public sector. When land use is altered to support retail, not only does it produce changes in land value but it also alters the structure of retail provision and the field of competition. As discussed in the definition of retail above, profits in this sector are closely tied to the local consumer market and the nature of the competition. Competition is fiercest in zero-sum branches where there is little room for organic growth, and where there are only limited gains available. Taking the example of the freestanding hypermarket, this format has been blamed not only for its environmental externalities but primarily for its capacity to shift sales from other localities — ultimately compromising their land value — due to the product range offered.¹ Therefore, retail development can be seen as highly politicized, but politicized in a different way than other aspects of urban development. Generally the politics is played out within a small circle of vested interests — developers, retailers, real estate investors, planners and local politicians — rather than within society at large. Rarely do political parties hold consistent stances on retail development issues. Conservative parties are generally torn between promoting free-market competition and supporting vested businesses interests, while the left has both promoted large-scale development as a boon to consumers and condemned it for its adverse environmental impacts (Arribas and Evers, 2001).

1.1.2 Retail manifestations (supply)

This section seeks to familiarize the reader with the most common ways that retailing manifests itself. Taking into account the variation in conceptions and terminology and the work on definition above, this will provide a few basic distinctions in outlet type and format according to several dimensions. This will become more important in the case studies in later chapters. For the sake of convenience, non-store retailing such as Internet shopping and post order companies will be excluded from consideration as this does not concern a physical structure; this is, after all, a study about *buildings* for consumption. An adequate starting point for a classification of retail building types is given in Guy (1994a: 12), depicted in an adapted form below. The first criterion noted by Guy is whether the point-of-sale involves a single or multiple structure, and the second deals with size and ownership.

¹ Namely a wide and deep assortment of merchandise that is generally only bought only once by consumers such as milk, bread and toothpaste. It is highly unlikely that more provision of such products will result in increased levels of purchase. Other ranges such as designer brand clothes, compact discs and electronic equipment can produce higher cumulative consumption overall.

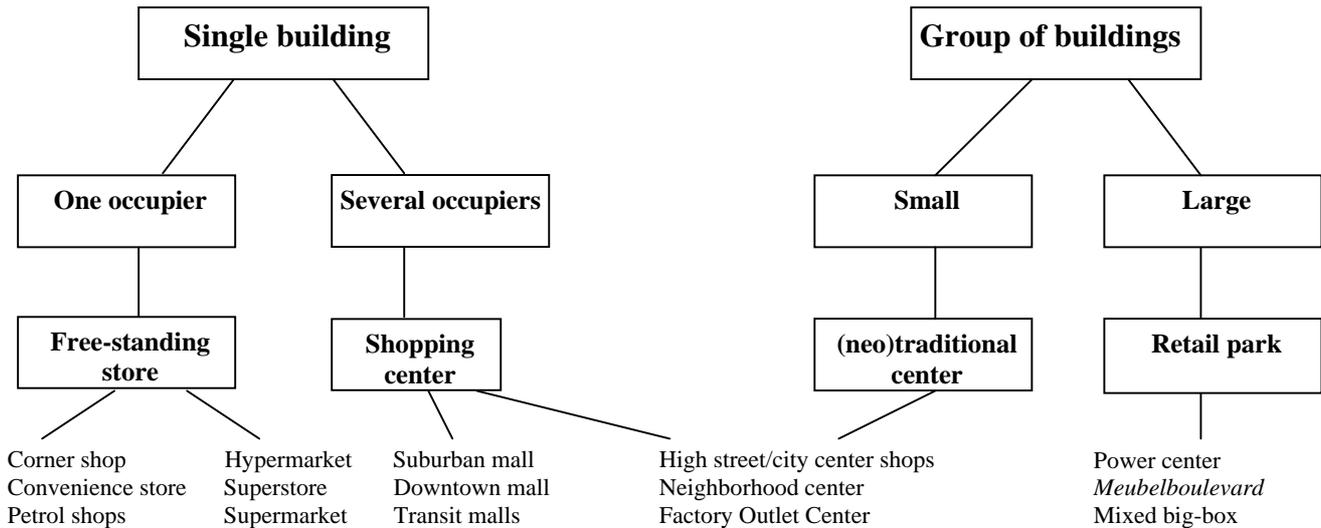


Figure 1: A typology of retail supply types

Although this figure may seem quite simplistic to those within the field, its value is in showing a sorting-out of retail types commonly encountered in the metropolitan area. It should be added that there are many hybrid forms imaginable, and various distinctions to be made within categories according to certain additional criteria. Product range, for example, is an important distinguishing characteristic when referring to retail concepts. An even more important distinction regards the location. The first category, for example, of a free-standing store can take on many forms depending on its size and location; this changes its meaning significantly for the various actors involved in the development process. A proposal for a new grocery store in a residential neighborhood is quite different than one for a 10,000m² hypermarket at an out-of-town location. More central to the purposes of this thesis, depending on the location, shopping centers may be seen by planners as blights on the metropolitan landscape, or enthusiastically welcomed as opportunities for urban regeneration. Because the position of a proposed outlet or center in relation to other established centers is so important for urban development, a wide range of concepts have been used in the trade literature and policy to denote location, sometimes having formal definitions established in law. Developments outside of existing centers have been referred to as peripheral, fringe, greenfield, edge-of-town or out-of-town depending on the author, context or attitude towards the development.² Although this is a very important concept, I have chosen to use all these terms interchangeably, depending on the connotation and the context, rather than confine myself to a single term. One reason is that this enhances readability, because terms can be employed purposefully to stress the negative or positive connotations of the development. Another reason is that each national context has a slightly different conceptualization of the center/periphery problem, and using English equivalents of the terms used may preserve this richness. This may, however, at times give the impression of a bias against peripheral development.

Finally, something must be said of the large-scale hybrid forms at the center of the chart, the malls and urban entertainment centers. In terms of sheer mass, these are perhaps the most

² Clifford Guy, who has continually called for a single terminology in retail studies (1994, 1998b, 2000), introduced a new concept, that of “off-center” to refer to these locations in a non-pejorative manner (however, even here, one could argue that “off-center” also has a negative connotation).

interesting retail forms for those interested in urbanization patterns because they usually exceed 30,000m² of sales space and can be highly controversial. Due to their massive size, they are usually realized in out-of-town or suburban locations. Shopping malls are collections of shops within a single structure, traditionally in the form of a galleria flanked by two department stores (Gruen and Smith, 1960; Borking, 1998; Kooijman, 1999a). This formula was developed in the United States before the Second World War, but only started appearing in Europe much later. Despite signs that American consumers may be beginning to tire of this concept (Duan, 1995; Labich and Hadjian, 1995; Berry, 1996; Lucas, 1996; PW 27 Nov, 1998: 14), this tried-and-true method continues to be applied today across the world. These forms of retail, which can have potentially enormous impacts on the existing retail structure, will comprise the basis for the detailed case studies.

1.1.3 Consumer behavior (demand)

Although the focus thus far has been primarily on retail development as the provision of new shops, and will continue to be so, one of the driving forces is ostensibly the perception of market demand. The qualifier “ostensibly” is used in light of recent evidence that shows that, “changes in retail structure ... are more attributable to changes in the cost structures of firms than to changes in the preferences of consumers” (Munroe, 2001: 357). This point will be revisited when discussing the selection of actors for the conceptual framework in Chapter 3.

In spite of the dubious influence of the consumer, a great deal of attention has been devoted to the study of consumer behavior in retail studies, and a high level of causal importance has been attributed to this. The bulk of this research is aimed at identifying (niche) markets, and often operates on the basis of hypothetical consumer typologies or modes of consumption. Detailed studies are regularly commissioned by retailers, municipalities and developers as to the characteristics of a particular area in terms of levels of car use, affluence and population in order to forecast potential turnover levels, or impacts on existing centers. Although the techniques used are becoming increasingly sophisticated, making full use of advancements in information technology, it remains notoriously difficult to pinpoint the causality between supply and demand. This is partly because a dynamic relationship exists between retailers responding to new demands in society (and hence shaping new expectations for the sector) on the one hand, and retailers actively creating new demand via marketing strategies on the other.

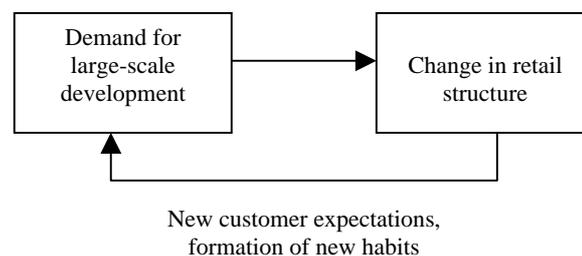


Figure 2: Cycle of supply and demand

In other words, patterns of expectation among consumers do have an indirect causal impact on the retail structure. For example, a shift has occurred in some segments of the industry (particularly food retailing) from small neighborhood boutiques to large cash-and-carry formats. Here, the convenience of selection and value-for-money has won out against proximity. After consumers become accustomed to driving to a supermarket instead of walking to a neighborhood shop, demand for traditional forms of retailing may decline

further. Hence we can see that, rather than being an autonomous linear process, specific retail development outcomes can impact the retail development environment.

Over time, the evolution in the patterns of expectation of consumers in Europe and North America seems to have become increasingly crystallized in two distinct kinds of shopping behavior. Not only are there different kinds of consumers, but the same consumers can act quite differently when in different shopping modes or “moments” (Jones, 1999). For certain kinds of shopping, more demands are placed on price and car accessibility, while other kinds of shopping are marked by an emphasis on less tangible factors such as aesthetics, service and a pleasant atmosphere. Dion Kooijman analyzed this divergence using the terms “machine” and “theater” in his PhD dissertation, and the Dutch trade literature has adopted the curiously Anglicized terms *runshoppen* and *funshoppen* to denote the same. Although there has been some attempts by retailers traditionally associated with errand shopping (such as supermarkets) to dabble in providing leisure-oriented amenities — what Kooijman calls “hybrid shops” — the two categories remain astonishingly stable for the vast majority of retail formats. The table below summarizes the two shopping modes, using a more neutral intentional/recreational distinction (Sources for table: IMK, 1993; Borchert, 1995b; Lehtonen and Mäenpää, 1997; Kooijman, 1999a, 1999b; Bak, 2000).

Intentional shopping (serves needs, run)	Recreational shopping (serves wants, fun)
Rational, routine	Hedonistic, experience
All-under-one-roof	Atmosphere
Wide and deep assortment	Identity/branding
Accessibility	Differentiation
Convenient opening times	Entertainment and leisure
Discount/bargain prices	Retail mix (targeted selection)

Figure 3: Intentional versus recreational shopping

Much of the development process for intentional shopping formats is fairly straightforward for retailers and investors: success is usually a function of location, competition and demographics within the catchment area. This is comparably unproblematic to model in quantitative terms, although the phenomenon of combination trips (usually work/shopping) has made this more problematic (Timmermans et al, 1982). Even more difficult to model are motivations within the experiential sphere. Recreational shopping formats, especially large-scale projects like shopping malls and urban entertainment centers are so complex because the goods they offer are less linked to survival and more to intangible qualities such as identity and taste. Often an implicit assumption is made that a link exists between leisure quality and sales. The argument is that providing a pleasant atmosphere and auxiliary activities and amenities will have a synergy effect and increase the attraction of a center, drawing more people and inducing them to stay within the sales environment for a longer period of time, hence increasing the potential for sales. Thus, shopping centers as consumption-generating machines are supplemented with cinemas, libraries, restaurants and cafes, post offices, ice-skating rinks, carnival rides and so forth. In the United States, shopping malls already attract more tourists than traditional attractions (Die Zeit, 13 Dec., 1996), and one Florida mall even considered charging admission (ICSC-SCT 9 June, 1999). After the incorporation of theme parks into megamalls like the West Edmonton Mall in Canada, theme parks like Euro-Disney are building supplementary malls (FD 30 Dec, 1997). The extent to which such factors actually translate themselves into profit is the subject of an intense but unresolved debate within the retail development literature (leisure proponents include Duan, 1995; Frehn, 1997; Van Papendrecht, 1997; Clement, 1998; Kooijman 1999a, 2000; Jones, 1999; VGM Sept, 2000: 6-8; dissenting opinions include Newby, 1993; VGM

June, 1999: 29; Ackermann et al, 1999; VGM Sept, 2000: 12-14). Nevertheless, it is clear that the ambition to produce synergy between shopping and leisure has left a clear imprint on both industries.

An additional difficulty faced by large-scale retail projects is that an “attractive environment” is difficult to define, let alone quantify. Indeed, the differentiation of society has necessitated that difficult decisions be made as regards the production of a shopping environment and selection of appropriate motifs. An environment that, for example, exudes “family values and safety” will be embraced by some, but not all consumers.³ Indeed,

...the range of responses can include everything from no response at all (that is a failure of the symbolic content to stimulate), to a variety of reactions dependent on individual associations invoked by the environment, to a negative response, and even displeasure (Gottdiener, 1997: 5).

The result is, more than is the case with intentional shopping, increased market segmentation (Hajer and Reijndorp, 2001). In some cases the realization of major retail projects that focus on a particular target group can bring about a social-sorting process between those who value and use the new facilities and those who prefer the traditional urban environment. If these projects are located out-of-town, the social sorting becomes a spatial one as well. All three case studies will grapple with this issue.

Finally, it should be noted that retail structures tend to have a limited life cycle. The department store and shopping arcade define the state-of-the-art in ninetieth century retailing, but have largely given way to the self-service supermarket and shopping mall in the twentieth. At present, the life-cycle turnover for new retail formats seems to be accelerating as traditional centers undergo continual facelifts in an effort to keep up with the introduction of new formats (Tordjman, 1994; Hajer and Reijndorp, 2001: 53; Chung et al, 2002). Whether or not this dynamic is driven by the desires of consumers for something new and exciting or by the retail and development industry in their attempt to distinguish themselves in a competitive arena is open to debate. However, one thing is clear: the structures that house retail functions have an increasingly fleeting, impermanent character, that is, they are buildings for consumption.

1.2 Literature/contribution

A great deal has been written on the development of regional shopping centers in the United States within the context of urban and regional planning. This literature chronicles the exodus of retail functions from the traditional cities to new, rapidly developing suburban regions in the 1960s and 1970s, and their subsequent, cautious, return to the cities in the 1980s and 1990s. In addition to conventional economic-geographic studies of the “retail impact” kind, marketing research, and ethnographic or postmodernist research on consumerism, this phenomenon has also been examined from an institutional perspective, which analyzes how the relevant stakeholders operate within a specific policy environment. The most comprehensive study was undertaken by Frieden and Sagalyn (1989) in their account of public/private deal-making in the development of downtown malls in the United States.

When one turns to the literature on Western Europe, the picture is more fragmented. Here, similar developments have been observed with regard to the diffusion of retail activities and

³ Although far from common, modernization, theming and renovation can even create opposition from those worried that the area would lose its integrity and authenticity, as was the case with Seattle’s Pike Place Market (Frieden and Sagalyn, 1989).

the rise of public-private partnerships in retail center development, but there has yet to be a comprehensive and comparative study that ties this to the institutional context. For example, much of the literature on planning (public-sector point of view) generally focuses upon policy within a single country or region, while much of the literature on retailing (private-sector point of view) stresses internationalization. As the literature is still in formation, much of it is of the descriptive or survey kind. Texts on retailing in Europe from a private-sector perspective, for example, generally focus on the experiences firms have when crossing borders (e.g. Dupuis and Dawson, 1999). For the public-sector side, descriptive accounts of retail policies in various European countries have been published as chapters in Davies (1995) *Retail Planning Policies in Western Europe* and the European Union has facilitated the comparison of planning systems with their Compendiums on Spatial Planning, also descriptive and oriented towards formal systems and rules. While such research is certainly useful in describing the playing field upon which retail development occurs, it says little about the actual forces at play and provide causal explanations. Hallsworth (1995b: 257) argues for a more institutional approach:

Textbooks on retail regulations and related law-making are usually rather bland and 'factual' in nature rather than critical and penetrating ... we should certainly never be naïve as to why laws are enacted and we should be alert to which power-brokers are being benefited by the process.

In one of the few authoritative institutional works on retail development that seeks to bring the private and public realms together in an explanatory rather than descriptive study (but unfortunately confined in its analysis to the UK), Clifford Guy (1994a: 4) noted that:

The academic study of property development and its relationships with institutional factors, particularly development finance and land use planning, seems still to be in its infancy ... It is to be hoped that some of these ideas will be taken up elsewhere and subjected to more rigorous analysis. One way in which this might be done would be through international comparisons of retail development and its institutional influences.

This research seeks to address this gap in the literature by taking an institutional approach to retail development in Germany (CentrO Oberhausen, Ruhrgebiet), the United Kingdom (Trafford Centre, Manchester conurbation) and the Netherlands (ArenA Boulevard, Amsterdam region). The research aims to gain insight into the mechanisms responsible for large-scale retail development in these three northwestern European countries. It will examine what factors influence the strategies and orientation of the various actors involved in the supply of retail facilities, and how this interaction produces a certain retail structure. This study therefore fits in well with the suggestions made by Cliff Guy and Alan Hallsworth above.

Research in this area is all the more needed because retail development has not received the attention it is due within the spatial planning literature. In urban studies and planning textbooks, retail is usually mentioned only in passing and rarely is a chapter or even a section devoted to the subject. This is odd considering that its impact on the vitality of a city is so visible. When retail functions depart they can leave behind a space that is bleak, lifeless, and potentially dangerous: a city devoid of retail is experienced as a "dead" city. By extension, the diffusion of shops from traditional urban centers to the outskirts has serious implications not just in terms of economic vitality for shopkeepers but also the very livability and well-being of urban areas. At the same time, as new and increasingly sophisticated retail facilities are springing up at dynamic peripheral locations such as highway interchanges this can create a new kind of urbanism. Arguably, the most important development of this sort is the out-of-town shopping mall, or megamall, because it attempts to replicate (a sanitized version of) the urban environment, and offers quality merchandise otherwise only found in city center

locations (Judd, 1995; Borking, 1998; Kooijman, 1999a; Evers, 2001). If we wish to understand what is happening to our metropolitan areas, it is essential to gain more understanding about how these retail structures get built, and what (f)actors influence the process.

In addition to this substantive contribution to the retail/planning literature, this research can also have relevance in the theoretical realm as an empirical application of a new institutionalist approach. When one views retail development through an institutional lens, the conclusions do not only have implications for the subject matter under investigation, but also reflect on the method employed to arrive at them. As will be discussed in Chapter 3, the new institutionalism is growing in influence but remains splintered in terms of disciplinary origin and its perspective on the relative influence of actors and structures on social phenomena. It is hoped that this thesis may serve as an example of one way in which some of the ideas expressed by new institutionalist theoreticians have found their way into empirical case study research.

1.3 Main research question

Having stated the justification for the project in terms of its practical and theoretical importance, and the contribution it can make to the existing literature, the main research question can be presented:

How do institutional factors influence the decision-making process on large-scale retail developments in the Netherlands, Germany and the UK?

In order to answer this, a number of operational subquestions can be posed for each country under investigation:

1. What institutional conditions (economic, administrative, spatial) exist that impact the retail development sector?
 - a. What *retail policy* is enacted, and how do these kinds of rules affect retail developments?
 - b. What *dynamics* can be observed in the retail sector, and how do these influence urbanization patterns?
2. Who are the relevant *actors* and what are their *interests*?
 - a. What *actors and interests* can be discerned in the *private sector* (e.g. developers, financiers, retail stores and organizations), and how is the retail market organized?
 - b. What *actors and interests* can be discerned in the *public sector* (e.g. municipalities, regional administrations, sector agencies), and how is it organized?
3. Finally, how do these forces (actors and environment) combine to result in certain decisions on large-scale retail projects?

There is an inherent dialectic to these subquestions. The first two require observation and inventory of retail development to be carried out within their political/policy settings. The next subquestion addresses the players in the process, their interests and institutional positioning. The final subquestion completes the circle by asking how the interactions between these forces result in actual retail developments. The specific nature of this interaction will be explored in the next section.

1.4 Theoretical framework

Since spatial developments can be examined in an almost infinite number of ways (geographically, culturally, economically, politically, socially, etc.), it is essential to clarify what criteria and concepts will be used to first isolate and then analyze the object of study. As stated, this research endeavors to view the spatial development of retail functions from an institutional perspective, one that is interested in how actors operate within a perceived environment. Here, “institutional” is not merely taken to mean its dictionary definition of formally established bodies such as government agencies, universities and churches, but rather encompasses a wider meaning of the “rules of the game” in society (North, 1990; Ostrom, 1991). These include the written and codified rules such as laws, but also the norms and values (some of which have evolved organically, others cultivated over time) that have become embedded into the fabric of social relations (Giddens, 1984; Healey, 1997; Scharpf, 1997; Salet, 2002). Institutions, thus seen, become expressed in a profusion of organizations, alliances and antagonisms with varying degrees of explicitness, durability and formality. These then constitute part of actors’ parameters for action, the decisions those actors make and any activities (outcomes) performed on this basis, which, in turn, feeds back into the system of institutionalization. This dynamic conceptualization of institutional relations has been called “the new institutionalism” in the social scientific literature (Peters, 1999). What is at issue here, of course, is how such institutional parameters frame the decision-making context for actors involved in retail development. Unlike most institutional approaches that focus exclusively on rulemaking in organizational terms, this conceptualization of institutionalism encompasses economic and spatial dimensions as well. As an inherently economic activity (see §1.1.1) the inclusion of this aspect is understandable. But space is also increasingly becoming acknowledged as a structuring force:

Conceptions of space — which are central to any ontology — are part and parcel to notions of reality. Much more than simply a world view, this sense of space, one’s ‘spatiality’, is a fundamental component of one’s relationship to the world (Shields, 1992 quoted in Richardson and Jensen, 2000).

This fairly abstract formulation can be clarified schematically. The figure below provides a graphic representation of how strategies and actions of actors can be framed by institutions. It is proposed that the final pattern of retail development arises from the interaction between the institutional dimensions and the mediating structures in practice. The issues discussed here then provide concrete focal points for the empirical case study research.

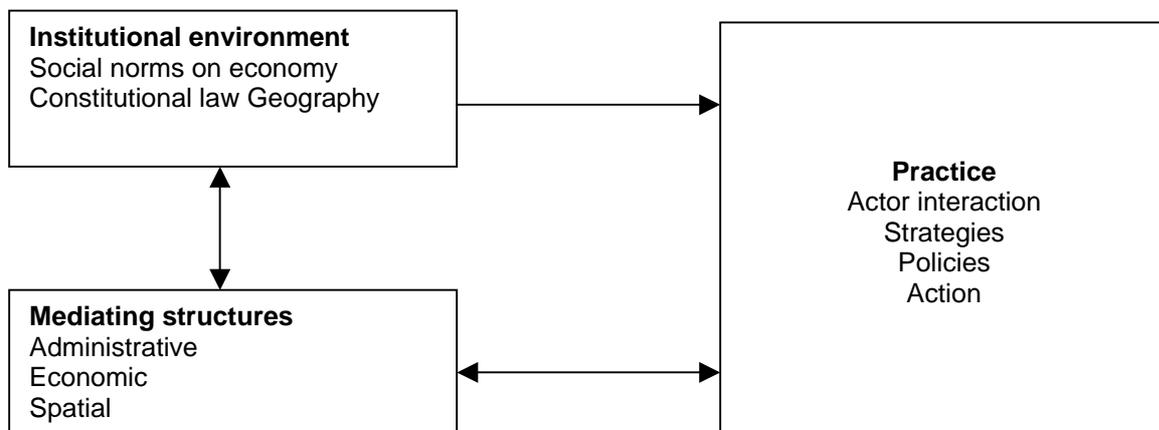


Figure 4: Hypothetical illustration of institutional interaction

The highest level of abstraction I have chosen to call the **institutional environment**. This concerns the often-latent value judgments regarding social interaction that comprise one's lifeworld or ontology. On a collective scale, when *conventions* or *norms* become so embedded in social interaction that they assume a taken-for-granted character, they will influence the way in which agendas are set (what situations are problematized, and what are not). In terms of retail development policy, this will include deeply ingrained beliefs about the sanctity or imperfection of the free market and private property, the role of the government, and beliefs regarding consumer choice and protection in a particular country. It also relates to whether problems are commonly resolved via consensus, compromise or conflict. This level also concerns the rules that govern what kinds of rules can be made, often established in *constitutions* or *framework laws*. Finally, basic aspects of a country's geography can affect retail development such as its level of urbanization or topography, can also be placed in this category.

Stepping down a level are the **structures** that mediate between the institutional environment and the operational level of strategy and policy. These are often the everyday manifestations of what already exists at the institutional environment level. The first of these, the *administrative structure*, has two main components: coercive authority and fiscal discretion. The first regards the formal rules and practices that have been established regarding the relationship between governmental level — specifically plan coordination, legal powers of appeal, and whether the system displays top-down, bottom-up features, or a combination of these. This is because “formal elements of a system ... have significant structuring power, acting as a form of ‘hard infrastructure’ of a system” (Vigar et al, 2000: 7). With respect to retail planning, this often regards the kind of retail policy in place to deal with out-of-town or large-scale development (size-based, location-based criteria) and the degree of restrictiveness. The second, fiscal discretion, acknowledges that much intergovernmental power is determined by the disbursing or withholding of funds.⁴

The *economic structure* is also of paramount importance to retail planning and development. Here, we can make a distinction between supply and demand. On the supply side one may consider economies of scale, behavior of lenders that determine the availability of capital, retailer disposition regarding suitable sites, locus of investments, experience and competition. On the demand side, one can look to policies like the relaxation of opening hour restrictions, but also trends in consumer behavior. Equally important is the role of the state in regulating the retail economy, either through competition legislation, opening hours, protective measures for small shopkeepers, or (again) via planning restrictions on out-of-town development.

Finally, the *spatial structure* needs to be considered. This can also be divided into two main parts: morphological and functional. Morphological factors relate to the physical topography of an area, including impediments to retail development such as large bodies of water, mountains and poor land which restricts building size as well as locational factors such as proximity to harbors, airports, and residential settlements exhibiting interesting socioeconomic attributes. Other aspects of the morphological structure include the degree of (sub)urbanization, monocentricity or polycentricity of metropolitan regions, and the country as a whole since this will affect business decisions on outlet siting. The functional category concentrates on the land-use characteristics of the area such as the jurisdiction and binding

⁴ Thus, it is important to know if most local revenue is received from central or local sources, what conditions might be attached to these funds, and what possibilities exist for obtaining other sources of income.

nature of zoning plans, whether regional plans exist as well as the movement of population and capital over space.

At the most concrete level of the scheme one encounters the **operational** strategies (right-hand side of the figure), agreements, and missions of private organizations and policies of public agencies as they interact with rules established at the structural and institutional level. This behavior, naturally, is perceived by other actors in the field, who adapt their actions accordingly, thus forming situations of conflict and cooperation in the process. Studied in isolation, this interaction forms the basis of game theory and rational choice theory. However, in this institutionalist conceptualization, actor interaction is influenced by and also feeds back into the structuring parameters described above.

As a result of this dynamic actor/environment model, certain themes will reoccur in the analysis, such as how the positions, interests and behavior of some actors will influence those of others in producing retail development. Sometimes this can be described in terms of collective action problems. Another theme is how some actors are able to work within a given system to come up with creative results. An example of this is how certain local authorities have adopted an entrepreneurial planning style in order to promote developments they feel are desirable, rather than simply forbidding unwanted developments.

1.5 Methodology

The purpose of methodology is to provide a conceptual link between the theoretical and the empirical parts of a particular piece of research. This section aims to show how a comparative case study method using the theoretical ideas expressed above is appropriate for addressing the main research question. A justification for choosing the Netherlands, Germany and the UK will also be given in this section, as well as the rationale behind focusing on large-scale out-of-town projects.

At this point it is helpful to recall the main research question: *how do institutional factors influence the decision-making process on large-scale retail developments in the Netherlands, Germany and the UK?* From the very wording of this question, a few things can be mentioned. The first is the nature of the question; it is a “how” question rather than a “why”, “where”, “who” or a “how much” question. This already suggests that the answer will be in the form of an identification and analysis of mechanisms (i.e. institutional factors) and their effects on behavior and outcome. This study can therefore be seen as a strategic exploration into a particular phenomenon with the intent to explain. There is no ambition to advance or refute a general theory of urban development, but instead the goal is to understand a particular (type of) development in full. This disposition is also reflected in the fact that the contexts are listed by name in the research question: only three Northwest European cases are considered in the analysis, and thus only these three will receive attention in the conclusions. Although this research may very well have relevance for other regions, and it is certainly hoped that others may build upon the work presented here, the scope of the substantive conclusions is not intended to exceed the scope of analysis. Naturally, any theoretical insights produced by this thesis can be more broadly applied to other cases.

Now we can turn to why a comparative case study method was employed to study retail development. Besides the fact that naming three countries in the main research question already necessitates such an approach, there are some other advantages worth mentioning. First, as will be argued in more detail below, case study research allows for the kind of depth demanded by institutional approaches. Case study research also provides the flexibility to

account for many different kinds of institutional variables over time, and to examine the effect these have on actors. Multiple cases involving different institutional contexts allow comparisons to be made, thus enabling the generation of insight into the role of particular contextual factors in producing a particular outcome. Finally, one can consider that this is a well-established method and that much research in the field of urban and regional planning is now taking the form of cross-national comparative case studies (Masser and Williams, 1986). This method is less developed within the retail literature, but after some clear calls for more cross-national comparative research (Guy, 1994a, 1998a), there has been a promising growth of work in this area as well (e.g. Davies, 1995; Dupois and Dawson, 1999; Howe, 2003).

1.5.1 Methodological justification

Although a few reasons were provided above for the decision to approach the issue of retail development using a case study approach, more can be said on this issue. The purpose of this section is to explain in more detail why this method was selected above other kinds of methods. Addressing this, Sayer (2000) distinguishes between “intensive” and “extensive” methods in explanatory research, and the kinds of phenomena they are best suited to explain. Extensive methodologies cover a large number of cases and attempt to draw conclusions from an analysis of the variations and regularities observed between them. The methods usually involve survey data and statistical analyses of databanks. This approach is common in the natural sciences, and is from time to time advocated in the social sciences by those wishing to attain a similar claim to “scientific” legitimacy. Concerning retail development, taking an extensive approach could tell us about the extent to which certain phenomena are observable (e.g. number of hypermarkets), which could then be correlated with other variables (e.g. consumer spending levels, car ownership rates). If one wishes to gain a more thorough understanding of the causal processes at play, however, there are significant drawbacks to such an approach. First, if one is interested about, for instance, why northwest European countries differ in their retail structure, the number of cases is simply too small to produce interesting conclusions at the national level. Subdividing these into regions will not help much as some variables — opening hours, planning restrictions — are set at the national level, and complete data sets are often difficult to obtain at lower levels of scale. Another problem regards the comparability of data across countries, as different criteria are often used in collection.⁵ Steps towards the development of a more comprehensive databank has been made by Eurostat (European Commission, 1997), and this holds promise for quantitative-minded researchers in the future. At the moment, however, EU-level data remains rather limited and general, and for the time being it is more practical to search for explanations by examining fewer cases in more detail, the mission of “intensive” research. Comparative intensive research is also, I would like to argue, better suited to address the concerns raised in the main research question and the ideas expressed in the theoretical framework on the institutional approach. This is because intensive research seeks to study individual agents in their causal contexts in order to understand why change happens (Sayer, 2000). Taking a comparative intensive approach would help to explain why certain types of decisions are made in one context and not in another, and as such, intensive research “is strong on causal explanation and interpreting meanings in context, but tends to be very time-consuming, so that one can normally only deal with a small number of cases” (Sayer, 2000: 21).⁶ This

⁵ Some countries’ data include, for example, car sales as retail, while others do not. In addition, the distinctions made earlier in the paper regarding retail versus food and entertainment carry on though into the quantitative data collected.

⁶ The limited scope this implies is not necessarily a weakness, nor does it make the study any less scientific — the relationships uncovered which are found to produce the difference between the cases can then be applied to other cases. All in all, for matters as complex as retail development, in which a market/policy dialectic is clearly

limitation should not be an issue for this thesis because only three case studies are being considered.

In this institutional intensive research project, each case will be analyzed on its own terms, so that answers to the research questions will be allowed to arise from a general investigation into the case. A conceptual framework, drawn up in Chapter 3, will guide the process. The result will read like a case history of a development project, with the emphasis on how the most important actors have responded to institutional conditions and various contingencies. This kind of institutional approach

...provides a halfway position between a theoretical system that, like neoclassical economics, substitutes universal and standardized assumptions for empirical information on the one hand and purely descriptive studies of individual cases on the other (Scharpf, 1997: 41).

Considering these points, the research is qualitative in nature, relying heavily on interviews and the interpretation of written source material such as plans, contracts, newspaper clippings and professional journal articles (in fact, over 3,200 sources were collected). This was felt to be the best method by which to uncover the institutional factors that influence retail development as embedded within a specific context. A quantitative “extensive” approach would have been unfeasible anyway because there is a lack of reliable quantitative data on retail development across countries (here, the problem of definition becomes magnified and contaminates data) and for the length of time envisioned. There has yet to be a comprehensive spatial inventory of retail developments in Northwest Europe, and undertaking one within the framework of this research is certainly beyond its scope.

1.5.2 Rationale behind country selection

Northwest Europe was selected for several reasons. Since the differences in retail structures and policy between North and South Europe on a number of counts are considerable, and Eastern Europe presents a unique problem, an analysis spanning Europe as a whole would soon become prohibitively complex or purely descriptive. In addition, the decision to confine the research to the Netherlands, Britain and Germany was motivated by reasons both conceptual and practical. Pragmatism aside, these are arguably three of the most important markets of Northwest Europe in terms of population density and purchasing power. According to a number of relevant retail indicators (e.g. turnover per capita, workforce, floorspace per capita, consolidation), these countries also exhibit striking similarities in their basic retail structure (European Commission, 1993, 1997; Davies, 1995: 10; Péron, 2001).⁷ On the demand side, GDP per capita in these three countries is also similar, and the share of retail sales in that GDP is around 20% for each of these countries (Dobson and Waterson, 1999: 140). There are also some overall similarities in some aspects of shopping behavior within these countries (Eurostat, 1999). More importantly, all three of the selected countries, like many other European nations, had introduced some form of controls on shop location in the postwar period. However, unlike most Southern European countries and Belgium, retail planning in Germany, the Netherlands and the UK was introduced not for reasons of economics (i.e. using maximum size criteria for applications for new stores to protect small shopkeepers from superstore development) but for reasons of planning and spatial

observable (Davies, 1995; Guy, 1998a), such an approach is warranted if one wishes to remain sensitive to the subtleties of the relationships involved. It should come as no surprise, therefore, that “virtually all cross-national comparative research [in planning] takes the form of case studies” (Masser and Williams, 1986: 16).

⁷ Belgium, in contrast, tends to exhibit some southern European characteristics and it is partly for this reason that it has been excluded from the study.

development (i.e. using location-based criteria to evaluate retail applications) (Guy, 1998a: 967; Arribas and Evers, 2001). Thus, this thesis can be placed within the tradition of those following the comparative-studies logic of studying the differences within a group of seemingly similar objects (Eckstein, 1975; Masser and Williams, 1986; Blaikie, 1993). This is also reflected in the choice of case study regions within the countries — all are large metropolitan areas dealing with growing polycentrism and economic restructuring.

The difference is in the geographic distribution of retail: while all countries may have similar amounts of retail space per capita, the nature of this space and its spatial distribution is rather different. At present, in both Germany and the UK a considerable part of food shopping is done at out-of-town hypermarkets, while this is virtually negligible in the Netherlands (EIM, 1999). Similarly, unlike the other two countries, the Netherlands has no out-of-town shopping center. Even more astounding is the development of retail over time. This is illustrated by the figure below that depicts the growth of hypermarkets (large and usually in out-of-town locations) in the selected countries. Please keep in mind when reading this chart that the UK and Germany are much larger markets than the Netherlands, and these are absolute and not relative figures. Even so, the proportional difference is striking: in the 1975-1995 period, Germany nearly doubled its number of hypermarkets, the UK trebled while the Netherlands remained relatively stable.⁸ Obviously there is more at hand driving retail development than macroeconomic factors alone.

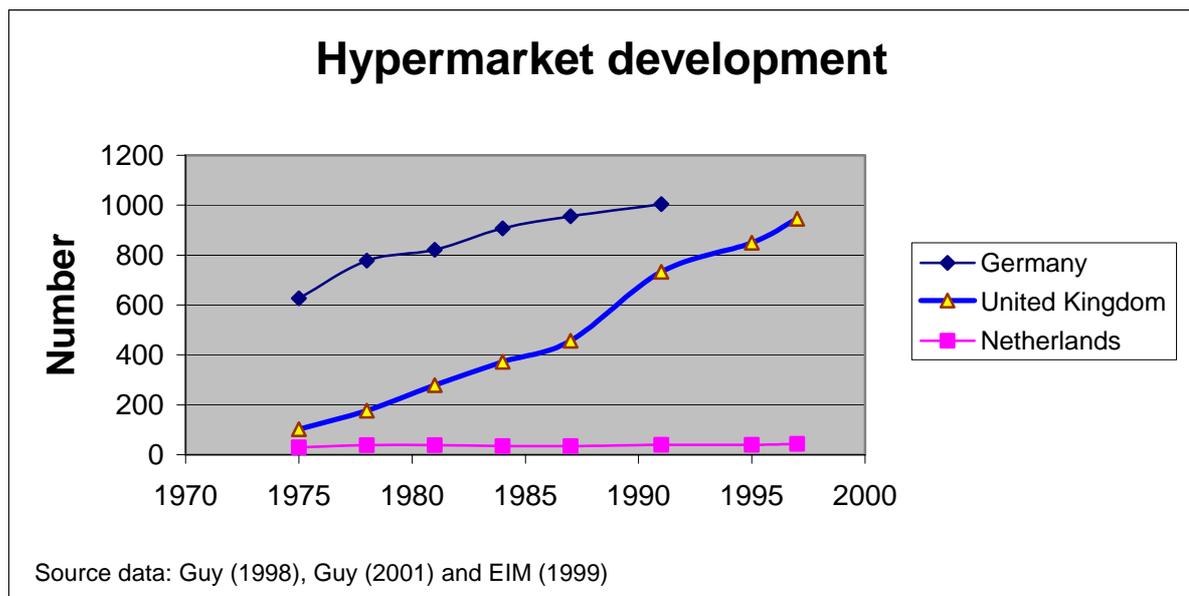


Figure 5: Hypermarket development in case study areas

Finally, in addition to these formal reasons for case selection, some pragmatic ones should be mentioned as well.⁹ As mentioned above, the research was funded and carried out in the

⁸ The difficulties in obtaining reliable data for this figure also illustrates the difficulty in performing cross-cultural research on retail development. Figures for Germany, for example, become confused due to the addition of the new states (which, incidentally had initially explosive levels of hypermarket development in the early 1990s). On the other hand, while the Dutch generally do not collect data on the number of hypermarkets (certain outlet size) but count aggregate floorspace at “peripheral sites”, other countries keep records on the number of large stores (e.g. hypermarket), regardless of location.

⁹ Matters of pragmatism are commonly and unjustly viewed as inherently inferior to formal scientific justifications. I would like to argue that they are of a different nature, but no less important to the writing of a thesis. Usually purely scientific explanations belie important practical motivations, such as language. Indeed,

Netherlands at the University of Amsterdam, which made a Dutch focus reasonable as a starting point. Another important consideration is language. Because an institutional approach entails an in-depth analysis of documents and interviews, this demands a reasonable command of the language in question. This explains the restriction of cases to English, German and Dutch speaking regions. As a final consideration, France and Southern Europe were also excluded because they comprised the research territory of a colleague (Luis Arribas) at the same institute.

For each country, after a description and analysis of the institutional factors, a case will be examined in detail. The cases all concern large-scale shopping center projects (sometimes called Urban Entertainment Centers) on the urban periphery that represent the new frontier of retail development. These projects are born out of and also stretch the limits of the rules of the formal system and thus provide a good indication of how planning clashes with economic and political practice. The reactions in each country to these projects will also serve to highlight the structural and institutional differences between them.

1.6 Plan of book

In this introduction, the central themes and problem areas were introduced and, where applicable, defined. This included a discussion and deconstruction of retail development, and a brief examination of supply and demand issues in the retail sector. The chapter included the statement of the main research question and some discussion of methodology and theory. It was stated that the research object will be analyzed in terms of the interplay between actors and their environment, here identified along three main dimensions: spatial, economic, and administrative.

The next chapter elaborates on §1.1 by examining the forces driving retail development. It argues that retail development cannot be interpreted in simplistic terms of convergence towards a single (US-style) structure, but that the spread, kind and scale of shops depends on myriad other factors such as economic conditions, (planning) policy and politics. In so doing, the three dimensions identified in the first chapter are analyzed according to their impact on retail development. In general, the (classical) economic approach views retail development as a natural process governed by quantifiable factors such as distance, catchment population attributes and manifested as trends such as consolidation. In contrast, the spatial planning approach sees retail development as partly the output of specific policies, usually to restrict the spread of out-of-town shops. The last approach acknowledges that retail development is also politically motivated, specifically with respect to retail-based city center regeneration schemes. The chapter closes with a few theoretical statements about the environmental factors that shape the decision-making process of those involved.

Chapter 3 seeks to ground the substantive insights of the previous chapter within the theoretical literature. First, the institutional approach taken in the thesis is positioned within the growing body of (new) institutionalist literature. Then, a conceptual framework is presented to illustrate the interplay between actors and structures in retail development. The various constituent parts of this conceptual framework (decision-making environment, actors, outcome) are then discussed to show how this can act as a working model to understand retail development in the case studies. Finally, a few hypothetical questions arising from the

Williams notes that, “language is a major issue to be faced in comparative research... [but] there is surprisingly little discussion of this in the literature on comparative methodology” (Masser and Williams, 1986: 35).

conceptual framework and the insights gained in Chapter 2 will be posed for further investigation in the case studies.

Chapter 4 is the first case study, and focuses on the struggle of Oberhausen in the German Ruhrgebiet to develop its geographical center following the closure of a large factory. The catalyst for development was the shopping mall CentrO, and was hotly contested by surrounding communities, who had been successful in blocking a larger scheme a few years before. The tale is one of municipal rivalry and distrust within a context of a decentralized and inflexible planning system.

Chapter 5, the second case study, focuses on the Trafford Centre in the Manchester conurbation. In this case, an administrative change (the abolition of the Greater Manchester Council), coupled with an enticing market for out-of-town shopping center development unleashed a deluge of planning applications in the region. Almost a decade of legal battles would ensue before the developers of the Trafford Centre finally emerged victorious. The UK case illustrates how even (and perhaps especially) in centralized systems, planning can be derailed by political shifts.

Chapter 6, the last case study, turns to Amsterdam in the Netherlands. In this case, a restrictive national policy on peripheral retail development prevented localities from realizing out-of-town malls like CentrO and the Trafford Centre. A relaxation of policy in the early 1990s enabled a few cities to build (within a series of strict parameters) large-scale retail schemes at the edge of town. The ArenA Boulevard in Amsterdam Zuidoost is such a project. The Dutch case illustrates a different kind of dynamic than that found in Germany and Britain. Here, a culture of compromise, inclusion, and mutual adjustment had resulted in the creation of a center without internal cohesion and little commercial flair. The desired outcome (that it not damage existing centers) may have been achieved, but the costs to the ArenA Boulevard within a context of further liberalization of retail policy might be too high.

The last chapter sums up the lessons learned in the case studies and projects them against the theoretical backdrop of the institutional approach. It reiterates the interrelationship between the institutional context (administrative, spatial, economic), content (actual development, design), and practice (strategies and standpoints of actors). In addition, the main research question posed in this chapter and the hypotheses posed in Chapter 3 are revisited and reflected upon.