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# Locally based retail policies as sustainable urbanity enhancers in Lausanne, Switzerland

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*ABSTRACT. The suburban sprawl of large malls, at the scale of Lausanne's conurbation, had an evident effect on spatial everyday practices of inhabitants and users of the central and peri-central districts while has increased the length and frequency of journeys. Mediation in the parameters that influence both the locally based services and the quality of public spaces could contribute to intensify urbanity. The main goal of this article is to explore how locally based retailing enhances urbanity, and takes part in urban intensity, and in the livability of public space. How can we integrate urban policies related to retail markets within a context of sustainable urban design? The new retail policies could become an extremely helpful planning tool, oriented towards true neighborhood proximity centralities both residentially and economically attractive.*

*KEYWORDS. Retailing, intensity, urbanity, sustainable urban planning, Switzerland, Lausanne*

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## **1. Introduction**

For many years now, and particularly during the last two decades, Lausanne's districts have registered a global change in their social and demographical structures as well as in their urban functions. The dawn of locally based functions such as retailing, is partially due to a decomposition and de-localization of commerce towards more suburban areas.

Retail commerce is one of the main agents in central places mutations at an urban scale. More than that, these mutations of market centers influence the inhabitants' environment and their way of living as well. Market location patterns had always accompanied major urban turnovers, and Lausanne could be considered as an archetypical case study of market mutations observed inside the Helvetic context.

This paper will be set in the multidisciplinary setting of urban retail planning, taking into account that urban policies regarding urban retailing are almost absent in Switzerland, and they require an effort of agreement between businesses, public power authorities and local communities. These policies and planning push forward with: firstly, the restructuring and sustainable generation of urban tissues and secondly, a greater and healthier economic development of retail commerce.

## **2. Aim and scope**

The main goal of our research is the enquiry of some hints that could help urban practitioners to take decisions in relation to the way retail activities can participate in strategies that improve the quality of the urban space and the organization of urban centralities. The quality of urban space, its morphology, its spatial planning and its ambiances as well as the way these centralities are integrated within the urban network and the hierarchy of centralities within the city are at the heart of the issues of making the contemporary city.

Retail planning is not only an urban structurizer, but also a modulator of urban intensity, mobility behaviors, social links, liveliness and identity of urban districts. Commercial offer has a role in creating urban spaces that are attractive, intense and livable in the inner city centers as well as in the most peripheral districts. However commercial offer is also at the basis of many urban problems such as: car-only mobility behaviors, urban sprawl, low quality urban landscapes and an artificialization of people's habitat.

What should be the role of retail centralities structures within a new urban programming in order to assure a redefined attire of urban spaces? And more exactly, how can we integrate all the decision takers of the retail system with the new policies of urban renewal in a perspective of a sustainable city planning? Those issues in the city of Lausanne will be illustrated through a description targeting on the bond between retail and the sustainable enhancement of urbanity through a recent urban project (Flon) and a future one (Vidy).

## **3. Conceptual background: Urban retail planning and the enhancement of urbanity**

This research is framed by the multidisciplinary concepts of urban retail planning and urbanity enhancement.

The notion of urban retail planning first appeared in the early 1960's in Paris when large malls started blooming in suburban areas where high-rise housing for the working classes had emerged in the post war period. Mérenne-Schumaker (1995), defined urban retail planning as the art or science of planning not only retail structures but also how to integrate them into the urban planning as a whole. For Choay and Merlin (2005) retail urban planning is the assembly of technical tools, governance, financial and spatial planning policies whose purpose is to generate retail facilities that are harmonious, efficient and coherent with the general scheme of urban planning (land usage, distribution of housing densities, transportation, public facilities, etc.).

In France, where the concept came forth, the Royer law (1973) reinforced by the Raffarin law (1996) succeeded to establish a clear regulation of retail in urban planning that finally led to an integration in the Urbanism Code (2010). On that account, commerce is highly regulated, mainly through the quantifiers of size and location. By contrast, in French-speaking Switzerland, urban retail planning is still today not explicitly an entity: ruling commerce on the territory is done indirectly through regulations and agreements that are sometimes vague and that finally empower each "commune" to decide over the location of retail, causing a lack of global planning of retail structures in larger metropolitan areas. However, in both countries decision takers problematize urban retail planning as matters of quantity (size and location) whereas commerce features that are harmful to the image, legibility and especially to the quality of the public realm are completely overlooked. Hence, in this paper, urban retail planning is referred to as a tool to conciliate commercial companies, public powers, and the community so as to foster an urban design that is both suitable for enforcing retail structures as well as for achieving a sustainable city.

As for an enhancement of urbanity, it is understood in this paper as defined by Palisse (2009), a process of reinforcement of the entire urban offer (habitat, activities, services, urban amenities elements and the quality of the public realm) in order to have a more diverse, lively and attractive city, not just as a rise of employment and human densities. Finally, both urban retail planning and the enhancement of urbanity come together at dealing with the qualities of the public realm.

#### **4. Getting the big picture: the framework of Lausanne's conurbation**

Swiss urban system is composed of middle-sized conurbations strongly interconnected through public transportation and Lausanne's conurbation could be considered as its archetype. The public power's will is to promote polycentric schemes linked through a highly efficient transport, so that compact urban tissues can grow from these centers and surround them.

Social construction (Hacking, 1999) and the political context in Switzerland have their singularity of being a federal system where cantons have had two centuries of conciliation (Mirimanoff, 2006). Conciliation between the main actors is also used in urban planning, thus the key fact that no overall directive strategy for retail development and growth has been set.

The lack of a global vision for retail structures lead to a differentiation in its structural distribution, polarizing all large surfaces retail activities (mainly car-based and detrimental to urban quality in many aspects) in the west (Fig. 1), while the eastern part keep sprawling with upper-classes residential suburbia. This polarization has been described as a typical case of spatial injustice (Bonard, Y. & Thomann, M. 2008).

Regarding the conurbation's west "communes", before 2000 there was, according to Bieler from the SDOL bureau (2012) a rush to cope with the attractiveness of having the first multiplex shopping center. There was a wave of car-driven retail centers, and from this period dated what was later called the "Arc-en-Ciel" sector surrounding by the A1 cross one of the black points of the Confederation highway system. The Canton decided to impose a moratorium to all western communes: all urban projects would be stopped until they came up with a mutualized vision regarding developments that were generating more car flux and thus, air pollutants. This led to a convention document, which was not under any regulation the SDOL (Developing Scheme of Western Lausanne). The SDOL is a product of a conciliation frame: the communes that subscribe it could withdraw at any time since it is not enforced by regulations but just a convention between neighboring communes. The vision proposed by the SDOL is generated around the main objective of stabilizing motorized traffic, thus controlling the location of potentially car-flux generators such as retail centers. The SDOL led later to the PALM (Project of conurbation Lausanne, Morges) that enlarged the convention of the SDOL to the north and east sectors of the conurbation. In short, the PALM project was a bottom up process, starting with agreements from the western communes and expanding to the entire conurbation.



Figure 1. Retail centers gathering around the highway junction in the Western communes at the conurbation scale.

##### 5. Lausanne's commune: intensified urban usages coming from retail developments

As was already pointed out at the end of the eighties by da Cunha (1988), even if Lausanne's inner centralities had lost a great part of its retailers in favor to the western communes' centralities; the inner-city was overspecializing in high value services to enterprises. In the current decade's urban planning literature, worries about the spread of large malls and the quantity of harvesting land that was wasted had turned into quality worries of the retail features in the cityscape and the environment. (Senelet, 2010). In Lausanne, the growth in retail is no longer directed to peripheral centers but to the inner city, that has to face the challenge of adapting these new retail centralities to meet the needs of usages, programs and forms of a sustainable city.

Lausanne's historic center is poorly adapted to motorized mobility because of its abrupt topography, and has also properly working retail centers in the peri-central districts that are structured surrounding its highly commercial driven hypercentre (see figure 2). Still, like many other European cities, car-based mobility has been boosted which along with the peri-urbanization have changed consumers' behaviors so that proximity and neighborhood based pedestrian shopping has strongly decreased. However, the political context of this middle size city (Agenda 21, Green Party in the City Council) makes sustainable urban planning a key issue and it is nowadays in the agenda of Lausanne's decision takers to encourage urban walkability (Metasanté, 2011) and to avoid as much as possible the conversion of farming and crop areas into built environment (LAT 1979, PdCv 2008).



Figure 2. Retail centralities at Lausanne's commune scale, polarized in the hypercenter

**FLON** In this urban *state of mind*, the urban project that was chosen for the underused brownfield site of the Flon, is an example of a public-private strategic partnership in retail that has led to an enhancement of usages in the recent time of the city. Historically, the group LO was the only owner of this brownfield of over 55'000 square meters. The municipality urban planning service had to come up with a formal and legal status for the project that took form under a PPA (Partial Plan of Land Use) accepted in 1999.

The intense urban usages are partly due to what the Swiss researcher Lavandinho called "free mobility" (Losa, 2010). This mobility form would be strictly linked to the "free" behaviors that are others than those related to work or study. The Flon district has a large entertaining offer of cinemas, restaurants and cafés as well an animated nightlife that could be a major attractor hub for free movers. But as seen in figure 3, the distribution of full-time employments in retail, the Flon district has attained the same rate of retailing as in the historical center, suggesting that the commercial driven hypercenter has assimilated the Flon district within.

These free movers, that make an intense usage of the Flon that peaks at some moments of the week, are deeply tightened to ambiances (see figure 4) of “funshopping” (Jansen, 1989). In fact, as Jacques Python (head of a retail-architecture firm in Lausanne) said, light shopping like clothes or high-valued articles could be easily placed in the inner city because it does not imply the use of vehicle to bring it home as it would be the case of bulk items (such as furniture or gardening shopping).

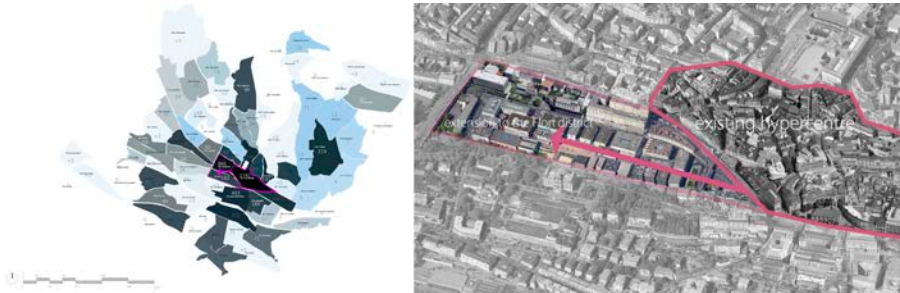


Figure 3. Expansion of the retail hypercenter to the Flon, as seen by the full-time employment numbers in retail by statistical sectors at Lausanne's commune scale, and an aerial view of the operation



Figure 4. The Flon's main promenade a week day, public benches and street art combined in this retail driven urban project

**VIDY** Since 2007, Lausanne's municipality is putting into practice the *Métamorphose* plan, to accompany the growth of the city (Français, 2007). This plan is made of multiple project areas that are strategic for the city's development. These targeted project areas are well defined: a north sector with an eco-neighborhood and a southern sector Près-de-Vidy where a stadium and a mixed used oriented development will be set. According to *Métamorphose*, the Vidy sector's vocation is to become an entrance to the city (see figure 1) and like the Flon was, it is a site where neighboring urban tissues are of great diversity (the social high rise housing *Bourdonette*, the lakeside walkabout, the highway and the EPFL and Unil universities) making it a project challenge to give a legible image for Vidy and to link it to surroundings.

Notwithstanding that the *Métamorphose* plan does not include directly urban retail planning measures, the south sector of Vidy proposes 20000 square meters of retail surface that take shape in a retail center that would be associated to the stadium.

According to the city council, there are two major approaches to this operation concerning retail: slow mobility issues and concurrency with surrounding retail centralities.

Both sides require deeper thoughts about what kind of commerce should be attracted in the new development.



Figure 5. The Vidy strategic sector for the *Métamorphose* plan

## 6. Conclusion: a necessary multi-scale approach for practitioners

Our main hypothesis was that urban quality was partially dependent of the retail centers system and its intensification. The question of the relation of urban quality with retail mutations, in its spatiality or when materialized in the architectural forms of commerce as well as its influence in urban spaces, has been applied to the different scales that can take an urban project. Retail offer is nowadays present everywhere in Lausanne. Retailing takes part in operations of urban renewal (such as the Flon district), micro-transformations of historical centers that have become pedestrianized (Rue du Bourg) and also in the making of secondary centralities in suburban and peri-urban spaces such as the new eco-district of Pleines du Loup.

The bond between urban quality and commerce structures has been approached by practitioners through a thematization that corresponds to various scale levels.

- At the large-scale level, the SDOL and the PALM have done mapping and redefining the localization and influence areas of retail centers at different levels of hierarchy following the methods of urban geography. These efforts of conciliation are needed to stabilize urban sprawl and car-mobility

driven behaviors that follow the chaotic blooming of large shopping centers.

- At the commune's level at this time, the Lausanne areas chosen for our study are of main interest for the municipality firstly because of the awareness of the lack of regulations in retail governance, secondly because of the role that retail plays in Lausanne's urban sprawl and mobility issues and thirdly because of the influence of retail in improving the quality of urban space.
- At the urban project level, the public space could be approached as a kinetic space, tightly bonded to its walkability, where retail functions could be inserted as a key factor to encourage pedestrians. As seen in the case of the Flon, but also in the intentions of the new project for Vidy, a retail-driven development is likely to intensify the usages of the public realm when its connectivity is highly dependent of slow mobility networks and pedestrianized. Most over, the public-private conciliation partnership has managed to insure a sustainable urban project: The emphasis of pedestrian itineraries and public transportation efficient connection make a more lively city while less car dependent (bearable project); the private partnership ensures the project is economically viable, and finally, the public partnership ensures that the project has a mixed used programs and time schedules for everyone, thus equitable.

To sum up, Lausanne's municipality, in contrast with the surrounding communes, is a case of commercial activities integration as a way to restructure, renewing and increasing the compactness of urban tissues in a sustainable perspective. The inner city center urbanity has been enhanced by good urban retail practices like the Flon and a similar result may be expected in the upcoming years by the Vidy stadium project.

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## **8. Biography**

Marta Alonso-Provencio, born in Madrid (Spain), graduated from Escuela Técnica Superior de Arquitectura de Madrid, ETSAM (DiplArch, 2009). She was a Research Student for two years at Kazuyo Sejima Lab, Department of System Design Engineering, Keio University, Japan. Currently, she is a PhD. candidate and a teaching assistant of professor Antonio da Cunha in Urban Studies at UNIL, Lausanne (Switzerland) where she is in charge of organizing the international workshop «Creating new urban spaces» and coordinating editor of the journal «URBIA». Her research interests focus on the urban design processes and how they influence the quality of the built environment.