TITOLO TESI
TOWN CENTRE MANAGEMENT: DEVELOPING NEW STRATEGIES BASED ON THE E-TECHNOLOGY CHALLENGE

Settore scientifico disciplinare di afferenza
SECS-P/08

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Esame finale anno accademico 2012 – 2013
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Academic Year 2012 – 2013
Dedicated to my Family
1. Foreword

This thesis is the result of a research project carried out at the Faculty of Economics, University of Cagliari and at the Stockholm Programme of Place Branding (STOPP) at the Stockholm University School of Business. I am grateful for the financial support provided by the Consorzio Uno and Italienska Kulturinstitutet "C.M. Lerici", which has made it possible to fulfil the project.

2. Acknowledgements

First of all, I would like to thank my supervisor Ernestina Giudici that gave me the opportunity to start a PhD programme and who has patiently guided me through it, as without her help, this thesis would not have been possible. I know it is not enough to say only “thank you” to my supervisor and, honestly, I am incredibly grateful for everything she has done for me, and for giving me the strength and courage to continue with my studies during these three long years.

I wish to thank also Per Olof Berg that gave me the possibility to take part in the STOPP group, to stay at the Stockholm University School of Business for several months, and to improve my background knowledge.

My profound gratitude and thanks go also to my family for supporting me during all my studies and, of course, my life. I would like to thank my friends and colleagues of the Department of Business Economics for their unconditional support, every members of the Stockholm Programme of Place Branding for their kindness and guidance, and all my loved ones. Last but not least, a personal thank you to Fabio, Silvia, Giorgio e Nicoletta for being there for me always, these have been the most important moments of my life. A special ‘Thank you’ to Rai for giving me the courage to face my fears.
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3. Abstract

Over time, the Town Centre has always had an important role in the development of local economies (McAteer and Stephens, 2011), experiencing periods of growth and decline that influenced its physiognomy. The Town Centre’s decline was caused by several different factors, such as the decentralization of retail activities away from, and on the edge of, the Town Centre (Schiller, 1986; 1988), and the development of new forms of selling over the Internet (Bhatti, 2007; Ickler, et al., 2011). All in all, this has led to a crisis for Town Centre’s retailers, prejudicing their development and enhancement (Alzubaidi et al., 1997; Thomas and Bromley, 2003).

In order to contrast the pauperization of the Town Centre and to improve its growth, during the last decades in several European Cities was created the Town Centre Management (TCM) schemes, to find practical responses to the emerging complexities of urban revitalisation (Coca-Stefaniak et al., 2009). Taking into consideration this scenario, the aim of this work is to further the understanding of the role-played by TCM’s over time in revitalizing the commercial activities in the Town Centre. Studying TCM programs and activities carried out in different European cities will work towards that better understanding of their effectiveness. By investigating the TCM programs in some Swedish and Italian cities, this study aims at identifying the core elements in the TCM strategies related to improving and developing the Town Centre.

This thesis is organized in three autonomous papers, where each of them constitutes a specification of one general topic. The first paper aims to analyse the existing literature to highlight scholars’ point of view and, to verify whether the retail activity maintains the central role in the perspective of the Town Centre revitalization, or if the attention has shifted to other activities. One question of this analysis is: What are the research lines that emerge as attracting interest for future development regarding the Town Centre revitalization? This paper built the review of the literature (Roley and Slack, 2004) by using a retrieval procedure based on the combination of several keywords in order to identify the journals where the considered topic assumes relevance.

The purpose of the second paper is to understand the way in which the TCM, through the adoption of practical strategies, tackles problems related to the decentralization of retail activities away from the Town Centre. More precisely, the research questions are: what are the answers that Cities gave to the development of Town Centre problems? In the European context what kind of organizations has been created to pursue the goal to revitalize the Town Centre? Does an accord exist between scholars to the most effective initiatives that Cities have to adopt? To answer these questions a qualitative method based on multiple case study methodology was adopted (Eisenhardt, 1989; 1991; Yin, 1994; 2009). The multiple, case study permitted to make a comparison between different realities, providing a stronger base to clarify the several multifaceted aspects of the same
From the analysis of the literature and empirical cases, studied in the first two papers, it emerged that the use of Internet and ways to sell through it (Bhatti, 2007; Ickler et al., 2009; Curty, and Zhang, 2011) are rarely adopted as tools able to revitalize the Town Centre. Inasmuch, the third paper aims to highlight what kind of e-technologies - after a specific analysis of each of e-commerce, s-commerce and m-commerce - are more suitable than others to help Town Centres retail activities to regain their past glory.

The research questions are: What are the reasons for the development of new forms of selling? What are the new forms of sale over the Internet developed in the last decades? And, in what way is it possible to connect old and new forms of selling in order to improve the retail attractiveness of Town Centres? To find a way by which it is possible to connect old and new forms of selling that could improve the retail experience in Town Centres, a model has been proposed.

The implications of this thesis are both theoretical, since it contributes to a better understanding of the relationship between TCM and the renaissance of the retailing activities (in order to support the urban revitalization), and practical, as it emphasizes the role of the internet and new forms of selling over it that could be integrated within traditional forms of selling within fixed location stores in the Town Centre.
4. Introduction

The Town Centre has had for a long time a central role in the development of local economy (McAteer and Stephens, 2011). For this reason the preservation of the Town Centre is fundamental for the development and maintenance of the vitality and viability of Cities (Schiller, 1986; 1988; 1994; URBED, 1994; 1997; Paddison, 2003).

The Town Centre is considered as a force that attracts people to work, to visit and to live (ATCM, 1994; 1996a; 1996b; 1996c). But, in the course of time, this area had to face several challenges that modified its characteristics and physiognomy. Some of these challenges can be referred to the decentralizations of retail activities (Schiller, 1986; 1988, 1994) out and to the edge of Town Centre, and to the development of forms of selling over the Internet such as electronic commerce, social commerce and mobile commerce (Bhatti, 2007; Ickler, et al., 2009; Curty and Zhang, 2011) that bring into crisis Town Centre retailers. Consequently, Town Centre has to adapt over time to these problems to tackle changes and to face challenges.

Regarding the retail problems, several cities in Europe have experienced the phenomenon of out-of-town shopping centres and, in general, new types of shopping facilities (Thomas and Bromley, 2003) that have directed the attention of citizens, tourists and investors from the Town Centre to these new types of artificial Towns. However, Town Centre had to compete and survive the movement of people to the outer edges of town and to survive the development of out-of-town shopping centres that damaged the traditional shopping streets in the Cities (Schiller, 1994).

The phenomenon of decentralization, and the correlated development of new types of shopping facilities usually in the decentralized locations (Thomas and Bromley, 2003) determined the reduction of shops in the Town Centres with a decrease in the attractiveness to people, and a reduction in economic welfare (Caboni and Giudici, 2013).

In addition to this problem, in the last decades Town Centre had to face also other important challenge related to the development of forms of selling over the Internet that have influenced the retailers within the Town Centre. In particular, the Electronic Commerce is a new form of selling products and services over the Internet that retailers have to take into consideration inasmuch it offers a new channel for interaction between buyer and seller (Janson and Cecez-Kecmanovic, 2005; Jascanu et al., 2007). What is more, the Social Commerce considered as a combination between social media and electronic commerce (Wang, 2009; 2011; Curty and Zhang, 2011) cannot be ignored by Town Centre retailers because through it each person can interact with one or many other people.

The rapid development of people’s like for Social Commerce (Schen, 2012) is related to the new opportunities offered: sharing information and contents, exploring people’s behaviour, sharing
experiences and opinions about what, where and from whom to buy (Jascanu et al., 2007). The challenge for Town Centre retailers is to acquire the skills to be able to facilitate collaborative shopping experiences and relationships between buyers and sellers (Baird and Parasnis, 2011), taking into consideration also the opportunities offered by the diffusion of the mobile commerce that permits to sell and buy products and services without restrictions of time and space (Bhatti, 2007).

Taking this scenario into consideration, to face these challenges, the Town Centre Management (TCM) can be considered one possible correct answer to manage Town Centre in order to emphasize its strengths and to face its weakness, and to define strategies and specific plans enables to tackle the several problems that Town Centre has to face. From the 80s, when for the first time was introduced the term of TCM (Spriddell, 1980), scholars focused their attention to further the understanding of the phenomenon related to the retail decentralization in order to comprehend if and in what way TCM can help Town Centre revitalization. Several contributions, in fact, highlighted (Alzubaidi et al., 1997; Evans, 1997; Oc and Tiesdell, 1998; Wolley et al., 1999; Wolley, 2000; Thomas and Bromley, 2003) that one of the most important goals of TCM is related to the preservation and development of Town Centre.

Based on three separate papers each with specific purposes, this thesis aims to further the understanding of the role played by TCM’s over time in revitalizing the commercial activities in the Town Centre and to propose a model that offers a possible way to revitalize the Town Centre. The study of TCM programs and activities carried out in different European cities constitutes a relevant point of this work. By investigating the TCM programs in Swedish and Italian cities, this study aims at identifying the core elements in the TCM strategies related to improving and developing the Town Centre. First of all, this thesis seeks to clarify what is the Town Centre Management literature state of the art (Roley and Slack, 2004), in order to highlight what are the differences or similarities in the scholars’ point of view and try to verify if the retail activity maintains the central role in the perspective of the Town Centre revitalization. To do this will be collected data through a retrieval procedure that combines several keywords from a major online database, in a specific arc of time, in order to identify the journals where the considered topic assumes relevance.

Secondly, the literature analysis was a basic support to understand if and in what way Town Centre can find useful answers to stop the retail decentralization phenomenon, and verify with what types of organizations Cities have equipped themselves to revitalize the Town Centre. To have a practical knowledge of the TCM activities, a qualitative method based on multiple case study methodology (Eisenhardt, 1989; 1991; Eisenhardt and Graebner, 2007; Yin, 1994; 2009) that permits to make a comparison between different realities has been adopted: Swedish and Italian contexts were
analysed to provide a stronger base to clarify the several multifaceted aspects of the same phenomenon (Eisenhardt, 1991; Eisenhardt and Graebner, 2007), and to focus the attention on empirical experiences in order to compare four realities: Stockholm, Västerås, Milan and Cagliari.

From the analysis of the literature presented in the first article and from the investigation of empirical cases shown in the second one, it emerged that the use of Internet and ways to sell through it (Bhatti, 2007; Ickler et al., 2009; Curty, and Zhang, 2011) are rarely used as tools able to revitalize Town Centre retailing. Inasmuch, the third paper aims to highlights what new ways of virtual commerce can help retailers placed in the Town Centre and particularly what new ways are more appropriate than others to engage people in the Town Centre shopping process. After a specific analysis of each of these new ways, a model, combining several e-technologies, is proposed.
References


Association of Town Centre Management (ATCM) (1994). Research Study: The Effectiveness of Town Centre Management (London: ATCM).


5. Essay 1: Town Centre past and present in the literature analysis

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Abstract

Town Centres are suffering a big challenge due to the out-of-town shift of most of the retailers that traditionally worked there. In what way scholars analysed the recalled phenomenon? The answer to this question is the core of the current paper. More specifically, starting from the basic Spriddell (1980) contribution, 62 papers from academic journals; 8 organization reports and 7 chapters in edit books, have been analysed. In addition, also reports of some public and private organizations directly involved in the Town Centre problems’ solution are been taken into consideration. To do the described analysis, a bibliometric methodology has been adopted. As a result of the literature analysis clearly emerged, on one hand, the central role played by the TCM in the perspective of the Town Centre revitalization, and, on the other hand, the no doubt essentiality of the retailers’ engagement in the revitalization of the Town Centre also in cases of the adoption of new solutions to better interact with their customers.

Keywords – Town Centre Management, Retailing, Public and private collaboration
Introduction

Over time, Town Centre has always had an important role in the development of local economies (McAteer and Stephens, 2011), suffering periods of growth and decline (Lang et al., 2008; Martin, 2011; Balsas, 2014) that influenced Town Centre’s physiognomy. The decline period of Town Centre was caused by several threats, such as decentralization of commercial activities out and at the edge of Town Centre (Schiller, 1986; 1988; 1994), the development of a new form of selling over the Internet (Bhatti, 2007; Ickler et al., 2009; Curty, and Zhang, 2011). It led to crisis the retailers in Town Centre, with a consequence of depopulation and isolation in the cities’ heart (Oc and Tiesdell, 1998) that are going to prejudice the development and improvement of traditional Town Centre (Alzubaidi et al., 1997; Thomas and Bromley, 2003; Fillion and Hammond, 2008). To face the pauperization of this area, the creation of TCM (Town Centre Management) has played an important role.

As shown by several scholars (Alzubaidi et al., 1997; Evans, 1997; Oc and Tiesdell, 1998; Wolley et al., 1999; Wolley, 2000; Thomas and Bromley, 2003) the preservation and development of Town Centre has always been considered one of the most important goals of TCM, in order to maintain the core town’s vitality and viability (Schiller, 1986; 1988; 1994; URBED, 1994; Paddison, 2003). TCM can be considered one possible, correct answer to manage Town Centre in order to emphasize its strengths and to face its weakness.

At the same time, the role carried through TCM is fundamental for cities that want to compete with each other and gain an advantage (Whyatt, 2004), inasmuch Towns Centres are recognized as places which offer a multifaceted range of functions and services (Page and Hardyman, 1996; Ashworth and Voogd, 1988; 1990; DoE, 1993) capable to attract citizens, tourists, investors and many other categories of people that have a relationship with these places (Wells, 1991).

TCM can perform an essential role in defining the best practices to develop the Town Centre in the best possible way, and, more specifically, to reduce or stop the flow of people to the outer edges of Town. Adopting the above cited role, the TCM can help the Town Centre to compete with out-of-town shopping centres (Schiller, 1986; 1988; 1994), and to develop strategies that have taken into consideration the several challenges Town Centre (Codato, 2010) were faced with, as well as to prepare revitalization projects (Warnaby and Davies, 1997; Whyatt, 2004; DeNisco and Warnaby, 2014) to manage such issues.

Thanks to TCM, it is possible to find viable perspectives for the renaissance of abandoned Town Centres and it can be a helpful tool to revitalize such areas (Hutchinson, 2001; Whyatt, 2004).
Due to several problems that affected Town Centre, the purposes of this paper are several: first of all, to analyse the existing literature to highlight scholars’ points of view and, particularly, to identify if there are broad differences or close similarities; secondly, to verify if the retail activity maintains the central role in the perspective of the Town Centre revitalization, or if the attention shifts to other activities; finally, to examine what is the research line that emerges as interest attracting for future development regarding the Town Centre revitalization?

In summary, the purposes can be synthesised as follow: what is the contemporary Town Centre Management literature state of the art?

This paper is organized as follows. The subsequent point is devoted to introducing the adopted research methodology. Next, the theoretical background regarding Town Centre Management from the 80s to the present will be analysed. For a better appreciation of the many facets of the analysed phenomenon, the theoretical background will be divided in several sub points, each of them able to show the contribution of scholars that share the same specific points of view with reference to the TCM general topic. To synthetically summarize, the several contributions proposed by scholars are shown in a graphic representation. Finally, conclusion and findings are presented.

**Research Methodology**

This study is based on data collected from May to November 2013 and it includes 62 papers published from 1980, when the concept of TCM by Spriddell was firstly introduced, to 2013. Some articles at disposal come from online sources from 2012, and were scheduled for printing in 2014.

The procedure applied for the review of the literature (Rowley and Slack, 2004) started with developing a combination of keywords through major online databases (Google Scholar, Elsevier, Proquest, Springer, Web of Science). In particular, has been used the retrieval procedure based on the combination of the sequent keywords: Town Centre Management; City Centre Management; TCM and Town Centre; and each of them was combined with keywords like: Decentralization problems; Out-of-Town development; Out-of-Town shopping; Retail activities; Retail decentralization; Retailing; Town Centre revitalization. Through the combinations of these keywords have been identified the journals where the considered topic assumes relevance. These journals are shown in the table 1, jointly with the number of papers found in each of them. In addition to the articles published in academic journals, into consideration were taken 7 chapters in edit books and other non-academic documents directly (8 organization reports) connected with the topic analysed, such as ATCM (Associations of Town Centre Management), Planning Policy
Guidance of DOE (Department of Environment), in order to contribute to in refining the literature review.

Table 1 - Academic Journals

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ACADEMIC JOURNALS</th>
<th>NUMBERS OF ARTICLES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>International Journal of Retail and Distribution Management</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cities</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Journal of Town and City Management</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The International Journal Review of Retail, Distribution and Consumers Research</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Journal of Urban Design</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local Economy</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Geographical Journal</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International Journal of Public Sector Management</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Journal of Place Management and Development</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Town Planning Review</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urban Studies</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Applied Geography</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consumption Markets and Culture</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International Journal of non profit and Voluntary Sector Marketing</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Journal of Business Research</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Journal of Economic Geography</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Journal of Urbanism: international research on Place making and urban sustainability</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Landscape Research</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Management Research News</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Planning Theory and Practice</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Planner</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Urban Design International</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Urban Design Quarterly</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urban Research and Practice</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Author data collected through online database

**Theoretical background**

The analysed papers give us the possibility to trace the full range of publications on Town Centre Management, from the TCM birth to nowadays. The sub-topics highlighted are the following:

- *To improve the quality of shopping*
- *Retail decentralization*
- *The commitment of TCM*
- *Cooperation between private and public sector*

- *Retail’s role in Town Centre*

Each of the points listed is going to be analysed below.

*To improve the quality of shopping*

The literature regarding the Town Centre Management has developed since the eighties taking into consideration management practices, generally adopted within firms, in order to develop and improve the Town Centre environment (Reeve and Otsuka, 2004; Otsuka and Reeve, 2007).

In the 80s Spriddell (1980) used for the first time the term TCM to emphasize that the purpose of Town Centre Management was to improve the quality of shopping in the Town Centre.

The latter observation asks to be considered with attention: in fact, the TCM were born with the aim to imitate the best practices that enabled the Town Centre to become successful in the past. Another situation that contributed to the search for finding ways to manage and maintain the rate of development of Town Centre has been the specific big retail chains’ interests – *Marks and Spencer* and *Boots* – owners of some buildings placed in the commercial streets of the Town Centre (Wells, 1991; Guy, 1994; Reeve and Otsuka, 2004; Otsuka and Reeve, 2007). For this reason, these chains had a consistent interest in preserving the level of their retailing activities (Otsuka and Reeve, 2007; Elizagarate, 2011) in order to increase the value of their property, and consequently act for the development of TCM in relation to this need.

After Spriddell, problems related to the quality of shopping within Town Centre and the consequence survival and health of commercial streets (considered the core of shopping in Town Centre) was analysed also by Gransby (1988) who stated that the “*future of the high street depended on professional planning*” (Gransby, 1988: 13), in order to guarantee the subsistence of commercial areas in the Town Centre. In his study, Granby highlighted that the planning of specific activities was capable of taking into consideration customers’ changing needs and was the starting point to achieve the goal of the subsistence of the commercial area. This means that the retail organizations working in the Town Centre have to continuously consider with attention “*the changing aspirations of society*” (Gransby, 1988: 13) to be able to satisfy the emerging needs.

It is interesting to note that the needs of town customers assumed considerable importance in reference to the planning strategy for improving and maintaining the high street’s vitality (Schiller, 1986; 1988; 1994). Gransby (1988) emphasized also the necessity to create a work-team of planners, retailers and developers playing a central role in the development of Town Centre.

*Retail Decentralization*

The shift to out-of-town is also named decentralization – it constitutes the main reason of
the Town Centre pauperization. This phenomenon has been attentively studied by Schiller (1986) that identified benefits for both consumers (car access, parking, cheaper goods, wider choice) and retailers (free from congestion, lower costs, more space layout, more offer of goods and services). Surely, of interest to us is the attention devoted by Schiller (1986; 1988) on three retail decentralization waves (figure 1).

Subsequently Fernie (1995; 1998) recognized a forth wave (figure 1) that posed another threat to the traditional Town Centre of high street retailers (Fernandes, 2011; Fillon and Hammond, 2008; Fernandes and Camusa, 2014), related to the development of new retail formats of warehouse clubs, factory outlets and airport retailing (Schmidt et al., 1993; Jones, 1995; Fernie, 1996). As Schiller (1994) noted, this was not simply a shift from one place to another, but the retail decentralization contributed to modifying the Town geographical physiognomy.

Warnaby et al. (2005), pointed out that “the concept of TCM has become one of the main ways in which traditional urban retail areas have attempted to counter the threat from increased retail provision in off-centre locations […]” (Warnaby et al., 2005: 183).

In fact, the retail decentralization that has caused the commercial activities to move out of town (Schiller, 1986; 1988; 1994; Hallsworth, 1994; Thomas et al., 2006) is connected to the necessity to offer services away from the increasing congestion that progressively characterized
many Town Centres, and this problem was just noted by Marks & Spencer in 1984 in their annual report, which asserted that: “The use of family cars for shopping has increasing importance to our customers. Where local authorities have recognized this need and worked with retailers to improve parking facilities and good access roads, the public continue to prefer to shop in the high street [..]” (Schiller, 1994: 47).

At the same time the retail decentralization and the correlated development of new types of shopping facilities (Thomas and Bromley, 2003; Thomas et al., 2006) determined several problems for the Town Centre’s economy as shown in the figure 2.

![Figure 2 - Damages of Retail Decentralization](image)

Due to this broad awareness on the strengths and weaknesses of the decentralization phenomenon, Schiller (1994) highlighting the specific United Kingdom situation “where the Government was very worried about the out-of-town impact”(Schiller, 1994: 46) pointed out that the Town Centre was the right place to locate most forms of offices, commercial and retail activities. The advent of the retail decentralization also determined several damages connected with the safety of Town Centres. In fact, the reduction of continuous flows of people, determined an increasing isolation of
this area with a consequent increasing of vandalism and criminality (Brearley et al., 1993; Beck and Willis, 1995; Oc and Tiesdell, 1998).

Taking into consideration that one of the consequences that the phenomenon of retail decentralization caused in the Town Centre was related to the subsequent pauperization of the trade in the historic streets, with a decrease in the economic welfare of traditional Town Centres (Fillon and Hammond, 2008; Fernandes, 2011; Caboni and Giudici, 2013; Fernandes and Camusa, 2014), TCM assumed a central role in competing with out-of-town shopping centres.

The commitment of TCM

Page and Hardyman (1996) taking into consideration the commitment of TCM as one of the most important opportunities to revitalize the Town Centre and the Department of Environment (DoE, 1993) emphasised that Town Centres have grown as central places where people come together to buy and sell, close to where they live or where the main central streets converge (Page and Hardyman, 1996).

The perspective of these authors is based on the retailing central role within the Town recognising how retail is essential to improve commercial viability (Schiller, 1994; Page and Hardyman, 1996; Elizagarate, 2011).

Other scholars (Evans, 1997; Oc and Tiesdell, 1998; Blackwell and Rahman, 2010), after analysing specific cases in the U.K. (Coventry and Nottingham, recognised as being at the forefront of Town Centre Management in the U.K.), pointed out that TCM’s activities were considered “a response to the rise of out-of-town shopping centres” (Oc and Tiesdell, 1998: 86) and stressed also the importance of the activities proposed by TCM (entertainment and leisure facilities, loyalty cards, pedestrianization, festivals and activities related to the hospitality sector in order to attract people to the Town Centre) capable of enhancing the traditional Town Centre value (Schiller, 1994; Page and Hardyman, 1996; ATCM, 1996a; 1996b; 1996c; Worthington, 1998).

Taking into consideration the Worthington’s perspective (1998), it clearly emerged that the commitment of TCM is related to stressing the contribution of a cooperative behaviour (Guy, 1993) among retailers in order to overcome their individualism and “[...to work in a co-operative manner, in order to present their town centre as a viable, vital and vibrant alternative to the out-of-town superstore” (Worthington, 1998: 69). Forsberg (1995) recognized the basic contribution of the issue related to cooperation between stakeholders of the Town Centre. It is for this reason that TCM have to stress the cooperation as a useful tool to overcome problems connected to the Town Centre revitalization (Forsberg et al., 1999: 316).

One of the attempts by TCM to preserve and develop Town Centre is related to the retailing
perspective as recognized by Baldock (1989), who stressed the central role of TCM in order to enhance the Town Centre environment “that was suffering by comparison with enclosed malls” (Otsuka and Reeve, 2007: 436), and the importance of the commitment by TCM to guarantee the success of Town Centre that is strictly related to the vitality and the viability (figure 3) of the Town Centre (Schiller, 1994; URBED, 1994; Reeve, 1996; Paddison, 2003).

![Figure 3 - Vitality and Viability of Town Centre](image)

Source: Author data collected

**Cooperation between Public and Private sector**

The TCM’s function can be expressed as “*a comprehensive response to competitive pressures*” (Wells, 1991: 24). In this role, both public and private sectors of the Town Centre could be involved in the development, management and promotion of the Town Centre. With this point of view, Wells wanted to highlight the status of residents, tourists, investors involved in the Town Centre’s life and leisure. In other words, in Wells’s contribution, the importance of the role played by people in relation to the Town Centre is visibly expressed.

A strong relationship between public and private sectors that constitute the board of TCM is one of the most important requirements to manage the Town Centre in the best possible way: the implication is that the efforts of the board of TCM contribute to the creation of an environment oriented to preserve the Town Centre vitality and viability (Schiller, 1994, URBED, 1994; Paddison, 2003).

Based on Well’s contribution, it is clear that the possibility that TCM can be successful in the revitalization of Town Centres is in the nature of TCM: a combined partnership between the public and the private sector (Pal and Sanders, 1997; Diamond, 2002; Hogg *et al.*, 2004) where, as Whyatt (2004) noted, and McAteer and Stephens (2011) highlighted: “*all parties who have an interest in improving the experience within a town for all of its users must act in partnership to*
achieve their objectives” (Diamond, 2002; Whyatt, 2004: 346; McAteer and Stephens, 2011: 265).

The previous statements were accepted and shared also by several scholars (Page and Hardyman, 1996; Reeve, 1996); moreover Hylton (1990) and Stansbury (1993) who concentrated their attention on describing the activities connected with the development of the Town Centre, taking into consideration the roles of individuals involved in these development activities (Warnaby et al. 1998).

Warnaby (1998) pointed out the importance of the commitment of TCM to find a practical response and a proactive way to solve the problems related to out-of-town decentralization. In relation to this issue, the author stressed the importance of several kinds of stakeholders as shown in figure 4., related to the Town Centre vitality. More precisely, he noted that only applying the marketing principles (Ashworth and Voogd, 1988; 1994) and realising a strong cooperation with all the stakeholders, a strategic approach can be identified and developed to manage the urban retail system (Warnaby, 1998): this is possible because the activities related to shopping appear as the specific motivation behind the visits of Town Centres (ATCM, 1994).

The most relevant implication resulting from the relationship with the private sector is related to a stronger orientation of TCM to strategic perspectives in order to pursue a competitive advantage Warnaby (1998). To reach the latter purpose, as Stubbs et al. (2002) noted, it has been necessary to insert another category of people in the TCM board: the voluntary sector. More specifically, the Town Centre, to develop itself, cannot be left aside from the citizens’ involvement

![Figure 4 - TCM’s Partnership](image)

The partnership of the public and private sector has also been highlighted by the Association of Town Centre Managers (ATCM), which emphasized the effective coordination of the private and public sectors including local authority professionals, to create a successful Town Centre in broad
consultation with the interested parties (ATCM, 1994; 1996a; 1996b; 1996c). Based on Wells’
contribution, in the early nineties several contributions (ATCM, 1994; 1996a; 1996b; 1996c,
URBED, 1994, 1997; British Retail Consortium, Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors, Royal
Town Planning Institute, in ATCM (1994) were developed on the role that TCM played in the
coordination of private and public sectors in order to develop a successful Town Centre (URBED,
1997), as shown in the figure 5.

Figure 5 - TCM’s role in the public – private sectors coordination

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ROYAL TOWN PLANNING INSTITUTE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• TCM manager could perform a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>number of tasks of direct relevance to the town centre environment. These include the co-ordination of basic local authority services, the stimulation of publicity and promotions the promotion of environmental improvements and development within the Town Centre.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>BRITISH RETAIL CONSORTIUM</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• TCM is about developing a partnership between private and public sectors in order to assess the competitive strengths and weaknesses of a particular town.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ROYAL INSTITUTE OF CHARTERED SURVEYORS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• TCM is a comprehensive programme by public authorities, private sector interests and voluntary organizations, which aim to improve the standard of facilities, environment, convenience and safety in Town Centre.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Author data collected through organization reports

Retail’s role in Town Centre

The centrality of the retailers’ role and their involvement in Town Centre Management clearly emerged from the Medway et al. (2000) contribution.

More specifically, Medways’s analysis (Medway et al., 1999) stated that 85% of TCM schemes in the United Kingdom received some kind of financial support from retailers (Medway et al., 2000) and also for this reason there is no doubt that the retail issue was, is and will be fundamental to the management of Town Centres.

Retailing is the major activity within the Town Centre (Getz, 1993; Page and Hardyman, 1996) that contributes to its vitality and viability (Page and Hardyman, 1996; Reeve, 1996). It is for this reason that the TCM has the purpose to attract people in the Town Centre in order to improve retail attractiveness in the downtown streets (Teller, 2008; Teller and Reutterer, 2008). To face this aim, great attention must be devoted to the creation and realization of effective promotional activities to interact with the biggest number of people that contribute to the Town Centre revitalization (Warnaby, 2013).

Wolley identifies local people as the essential key to urban vitality focusing his attention “on
young people because this category is very sensitive to the call of shopping and eating out as a way to meet their friends in the Town Centre’” (Wolley, 2000: 453). From an analysis conducted by Wolley et al. (1999) it becomes clear that “young people have a sense of civic pride and know what they like and dislike about their town centre” (Wolley et al., 1999). Taking into consideration the fact that young people can have many interests in the Town Centre, especially in relation to retail activities, it clearly emerged that TCM has to consider the young people opinions (Wolley et al., 1999; Wolley, 2000) in order to create and realize promotional activities (Wells, 1991).

Ravenscroft (2000) too takes into consideration the central role of people in the Town Centres’ life, highlighting the fact that this area assumes a relevant role insofar as it is considered “an appropriate location for residential, retail, cultural and leisure development” (Ravenscroft, 2000: 2533). In particular, the author emphasises the concept of vitality and viability proposed by Schiller (1994), identifying the indicators of vitality and viability for the health (DoE, 1996) of the Town Centre as shown in the figure 6. From the analysis of these indicators, it evidently appeared that the retail issue has a significant role in the health (Ravenscroft, 2000) of Town Centres and it could be a dangerous behaviour to underestimate this aspect in the development and management of the traditional Town Centre.

In the wake of Ravenscroft, Balsas (2000; 2007; 2014) emphasises the problems of revitalization of Town Centres related to new forms of commercial activities such as shopping centres and hypermarkets that have “important impacts on traditional forms of retail in the town centre area”.

Moreover, Balsas points out that the Town Centre’s revitalisation and its historic preservation is an issue directly related to urban retail, taking into consideration the strategies implemented by “The main street Program and the Business Improvement Districts” in the United
States (Balsas, 2000: 20). In fact, these programs have the purpose to stimulate the economic development in the Town Centre, with a specific approach capable of improving the shopping experience in the urban district.

The importance of managing the Town Centre with a specific and strategic plan closely, directly related to the retail issue, has grown so much that initiatives similar to those adopted in the USA and the UK have been developed in several European countries such as Spain, Italy, Sweden, Austria, France, Norway, Belgium and Germany (Coca-Stefaniak et al., 2005; Coca-Stefaniak et al., 2009; Donaghy et al., 2013). This new attention to Town Centre can be connected with the urgency to find practical responses to the emerging complexities of urban revitalisation (Coca-Stefaniak et al., 2009; DeNisco and Warnaby, 2014) in order to emphasize the role of TCM towards Town Centre retail revitalization.

The awareness that the Town Centre revitalization cannot be separated by the retail activity revitalization is shared by almost of scholars where some specifics are possible to highlight:

- Thomas and Bromley (2003) in their work emphasised the relevance of retail revitalization, taking into account the situation in small Town Centres.

- Whaytt (2004) noted the role played by retailers in the Town Centre, pointing to the fact that they have the necessary customer knowledge and skills in order to contribute to Town Centre schemes and support Town Centre activities.

- De Nisco et al. (2008) considered the retail activities as having an essential role in increasing the vitality and viability in the traditional Town Centre, and a fundamental tool in the development and regeneration of the urban economy;

- Paddison (2003) clearly stated that a good retail development makes it possible to have a “Prosperous and vibrant Town Centre” (Paddison, 2003: 619);

- Several scholars (Oc and Tiesdell, 1998; Wolley, 2000; Stubbs et al., 2002; Peel, 2003) highlighted that this regeneration involved the retail offer of the central shopping district;

- Otsuka and Reeve (2007) noted that Town Centres have become much more than a retail outlet and this is the way for a real revitalization: discovering what functions are able to attract the dynamic change (Coca-Stefaniak, 2011) of present customers.

To pull the strings

The scholars’ contribution analysis presented above had the purpose to highlight, on one hand, whether the revitalization of Town Centre problem has reached the scholars attention, and on the other hand, to identify what multiplicity of view points have emerged.

The annexed graphic (a “tree”) (figure 7) has the aim to clarify if and in what way the
several contributions are connected or not. The “tree” has been built considering each big point as the basic contribution and the related small points as the connected works. The lines mean that between two points a connection exists.

By analysing the “tree”, it clearly emerges that the Spriddell (1980) work not only constituted the beginning of the attention to the shopping problems, but it was also the work taken as a point of reference for many other scholars. At the same time other contributions (like that of Fernie, 1995; Wolley, 2000) did not attract the attention of others. Moreover, analysing the “tree” it is easy to see how many scholars faced the problems directly or indirectly in connection to the public and private collaboration.

Figure 7 – The “Tree”
Conclusion

The analysis of the literature presented above shows clearly that the attention of scholars in the course of time was devoted to the understanding of Town Centre problems.

It clearly emerged that scholars’ attention could be represented as a wave: from 1980 to 1990 there was a continuous increasing of interest and a significant number of contributions. The top of the wave is represented by the 90’ number of publications with the maximum of attention; after that, the decline began and, at present, the interest it is really low.

Moreover, the scholars’ contribution helps us also to understand the role played by retailers to the revitalization of Town Centre and to verify if the scholars’ highlighted alternatives suggest reasonable ways to reach the same goal. It emerged that Town Centre can plan its survival, on one hand, giving centrality to retailers but, on the other hand, innovating the way in which they interact with their consumers. Some scholars suggest organizing specific events, activities and similar attractions, able to provoke customers’ retention.

Specific attention has been devoted to the public and private collaboration, but low attention has been focused to the retailers’ collaboration. In the same stream it is possible to insert the consideration that inadequate attention has been given to the role that young people can play in the perspective of the Town Centre revitalization.

The implication, as it emerges when summarising the information presented above, is that Town Centre could have positive perspectives in reacquiring a significant role if they are able to create a strong but contemporary, flexible network of collaboration giving the correct attention to the adoption of the social network potentiality to develop their activity.
References
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6. Essay 2: Town Centre Development strategies – a comparison between cities in Sweden and Italy

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Abstract

Starting with the awareness that the Town Centre is suffering due to problems caused by the retailers’ shift to the out-of-town places, the aim of this paper is to understand if and in what way Cities find useful answers to stop the stated phenomenon. The questions to which we are trying to find answers are: What types of organizations Cities equip themselves with to revitalize the Town Centre? Do cities of different countries and different sizes exhibit the same set of activities? Adopting a qualitative method based on multiple case study methodology (Eisenhardt, 1989; 1991; Eisenhardt and Graebner, 2007; Yin, 1994; 2009) this paper explores the Swedish and Italian context, by focusing the attention on empirical experiences in order to compare four realities: Stockholm, Västerås, Milan and Cagliari

Keywords: Town Centre development strategies, Town Centre Management, Stockholm, Västerås, Milan, Cagliari
Introduction

In many European Countries social, demographic and lifestyle changes have had a major impact on the retailing activities within Town Centre (Forsberg, et al., 1999), because over the centuries retailing [...] has been associated with the Town Centre where people can meet, exchange products [...] and it enables a wide range of needs to be met in one trip (Forsberg, 1995: 185). For this reasons Town Centre Management (TCM) has to take into consideration these changes in order to adapt and to face new challenges because TCM schemes as Pal and Sanders (1997) noted, are being considered both from public and private sectors “as a means of maintaining and improving Town Centre” (Pal and Sanders 1997: 70).

The Town Centre has been considered until the end of the previous century the core of attraction for people, the central part of town that in general is connected with shopping and retailing that Peel (2003) pointed out as one of multiple uses (retailing, housing, entertainment and a mixture of civic, administrative and professional services). Consequently TCM have to create several strategies, (e.g. economic development and urban regeneration, retail development, marketing and promotion, safe prevention, transport and local services, tourism and hospitality management, environmental improvement) related to the improvement of Town Centre. Town Centres have grown as central places where people come together to buy and sell, close to where they live (DoE, 1993; Page and Hardyman, 1996), having a central role in the development of local economies.

Nowadays, many Town Centres in Europe are affected by problems related to retail decentralization (Schiller, 1986, 1988, 1994; Fernie, 1995; Forsberg, 1995; Alzubaidi et al., 1997) that undermines fixed location shops within the Town Centre.

More precisely, in the last decades, as a consequence of the shift of the retail activities out of town, a lot of shops located in the Town Centre moved to decentralized locations to have better chances to attract more people and to increase their revenue. Among the problems that have prompted retailers to go out of Town, a significant role played the necessity to offer services away from the increasing congestion that progressively characterized many Town Centres.

The decentralization phenomenon has had several impacts (economic, social and environmental) on traditional forms of retail established in Town Centre (Balsas, 2000; Warnaby et al., 2005) that came to create problems on the vitality and viability of Town Centre (Schiller, 1986, 1988, 1994; Balsas, 2004) as shown in the figure 1.

The economic impacts are related to the trade in the Town Centre. The development of new form of retailing, in fact, determined the reduction of people in Town Centre and a consequent
decrease in the trade of this area because consumers prefer to go away where it is possible to find a broad and more attractive range of shopping (Guy, 1994; 1998; Warnaby et al., 2005).

The social impacts are related to the efficiency because people have greater possibility to choose services and goods nearest to their needs, while the equity impacts were related with the loss of shops in traditional Town Centre and consequently less opportunities to shop for the category of people that have their mobility impaired (Bromley and Thomas, 1993) and therefore they cannot benefit from the new form of retail in the decentralized locations out of town.

The environmental impacts are connected with the development of new retailing that were came to modify the physical environment out of town, determining an increasing traffic that caused local road development.

Figure 1- Impacts of Retail Decentralization

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Economic Trade Impact</th>
<th>Social Efficiency and Equity Impact</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Environmental Development of new retailing</td>
<td>Deterioration of Town Centre</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Author data collected

If, on one hand, the retail decentralization determined numerous benefits both for retailers (e.g. free from congestion, lower costs, more space layout, more offer of goods and services) and consumers (e.g. car access, parking, cheaper goods, wider choice), on the other hand, this phenomenon caused a reduction of shops in the Town Centre with a consequent decrease in the attractiveness to people and therefore a depopulation and reduction in economic wealth.

The problem related to the retail decentralization is only one of the reasons connected to the fact that an increasing number of Towns is engaged in the re-generation of their Town Centres, with specific initiatives of revitalization. Town Centre Management has assumed an important role in the development and improvement of this urban area. As Warnaby et al., (2005) noted, the TCM represents one of the most important ways to give correct answer to the threat from increased retail development out of Town Centre in order to create strategies able to determine the re-birth of the
Town Centre (Balsas 2000; 2007). The TCM activities have the goal to account for the problems mentioned above by promoting the redevelopment of traditional Town Centre (Thomas and Bromley, 2003).

In reality, is this the answer that Cities gave to the development of Town Centre problems? In the European context what kind of organizations has been created to pursue the goal to revitalize the Town Centre? Is there a consensus between scholars to the most effective initiatives that Cities have to adopt? With reference to the latter questions, around Europe (Coca-Stefaniak et al., 2009) have been developed projects, analysed by several scholars with the aim to contribute to increasing the knowledge and awareness regarding the traditional Town Centre. A significant example of the scholars’ contribution is shown in the table 1.

The establishment of the Town Centre Management is considered in this paper the correct answer for the renaissance of the Town Centres, and in particular the right way to promote retailing in the downtown streets.

To find answers to the other two research questions, two really different contexts have been analysed: Sweden and Italy. More precisely, the attention has been focused on two Cities in Sweden, Stockholm and Västerås, and two Cities in Italy, Milan and Cagliari.

The development of this paper is as follows: after the introduction the attention is devoted to understanding, firstly, the Swedish context and the decisions adopted in Stockholm and Västerås to solve the Town Centre problems, secondly, the Italian context and the behaviours adopted in Milan and Cagliari. Finally, a discussion and conclusion will be presented.

Table 1 - Example of TCM strategy for Town Centre revitalization

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Years</th>
<th>Authors</th>
<th>City/Country</th>
<th>TCM Strategy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1998</td>
<td>Oc, Tiesdell</td>
<td>Coventry, Nottingham UK</td>
<td>Safety for Town Centre</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1998</td>
<td>Guy</td>
<td>Western Europe: UK, France, Germany</td>
<td>Planning Policies for retail decentralization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1998</td>
<td>Worthington</td>
<td>Leominster UK</td>
<td>Loyalty Cards and events initiatives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1999</td>
<td>Forsberg, Medway, Warnaby</td>
<td>Falun, Karlskoga, Kalmar SWEDEN</td>
<td>Cooperative behaviours of retailers and property owners</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>Balsas</td>
<td>Coimbra and Aveiro PORTUGAL</td>
<td>Open air shopping centres</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>Thomas, Bromley</td>
<td>Lianelli UK</td>
<td>Improve the shopping attractions in Town Centre</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>Paddison</td>
<td>Achmore UK</td>
<td>Supports and contributes to the commercial performance of Town Centre</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>Weltevreden, Atzema</td>
<td>Utrecht</td>
<td>To remain vital shopping</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Research Design

This paper is based on the case study methodology (Eisenhardt, 1989; Yin, 1994; 2009), more specifically have been analysed four case studies by combining data collection based on a variety of data sources such as archives, interviews and observations (Yin, 1994; 2009; Eisenhardt and Graebner, 2007). The multiple cases permitted to make a comparison between different realities, providing a stronger foundation to clarify the several multifaceted aspects of the same phenomenon (Eisenhardt, 1991; Eisenhardt and Graebner, 2007). The realities analysed, took into consideration different schemes of TCM developed in Sweden and Italy. These case studies focus on Stockholm and Västerås; Milan and Cagliari (figure 2). To achieve the purpose of this work, due to the necessity to analyse several Cities with different characters in the way to obtain more useful results, the selection of Countries and Cities to assume as objects of the analysis was done by applying the below listed three criteria:

a) The selection of Sweden and Italy was based on the fact that they are characterized by really different political, cultural and commercial contexts.

b) The selection of the Cities was based on their role and dimension: two large (national) and two small (regional) cities, in order to understand if size matters.

c) Stockholm, Västerås, Milan and Cagliari were selected because they come in line with the previous criteria.

To understand in depth the situation of retail in these cities, have been studied general planning and policy documents like the Vision for Västerås 2026, the Comprehensive Plan, the Trade Policy, Document of Stockholm City I Samverkan, and the guide of DUC (Distretti Urbani...
del Commercio) and CCN (Centri Commerciali Naturali) in Italy. These documents reflect the above stated objectives, policies and visions that constitute an important part of the context for this work. Empirical data was collected through direct observation in the Town Centre of Stockholm, Västerås; Milan and Cagliari. Direct observation is a general expression that included short interviews with local retailers, customers and citizens but also informal discussions with people who were in the store. In addition, have been conducted interviews with TCM managers, strategic advisor, and local retailers, both in Sweden and in Italy, in order to investigate the actual situation of the Town Centre and identify the principal strategies elaborated by TCM. Finally the collected data were processed.

Figure 2 – Sweden and Italian Maps

Source: Author data collected through Internet

The approach of Sweden to Town Centre regeneration

Sweden is one of the countries in Europe that is affected by the problems related to the retail decentralization caused by the development of out and edge of town shopping centres (Forsberg, 1995; 1998) that determined the deterioration of traditional Town Centres (Forsberg et al., 1999).

The first scheme of TCM in this country was established in the middle of 1980, and in the course of time to carry out a cohesive TCM strategy, stakeholders (public sector as well as local government and private sector as retailers and property owners) have been involved in the Town Centre Management in order to work together in a cooperative way (Healey, 1996; Forsberg et al.,
1999). In fact, the cooperation represented in Swedish TCM demonstrates the successful way through which to overcome problems that affected Town Centre.

Forsberg et al. (1999) noted how retailers and property owners and local government of Town Centre, through cooperation can overtake problems related to retail decentralization of Town Centre (Schiller, 1986; 1988; 1994; Pal and Sanders, 1997; Diamond, 2002; Thomas and Bromley, 2003; Whyatt, 2004; Hogg et al., 2004; McAteer and Stephens, 2011) and depopulation (Oc and Tiesdell, 1998).

The development and improvement of Town Centre has always been an important issue that TCM (Alzubaidi et al., 1997; Evans, 1997; Oc and Tiesdell, 1998; Wolley, 2000; Thomas and Bromley, 2003) had to face and the mainly retail development in Sweden has been considered fundamental to maintain the Town Centre as the first area of commercial activities (Forsberg, 1995), in relation to the decrease of stores in Town Centre since 1960s and as Forsberg (1998: 185) highlighted “this decrease does not seem to have bottomed out”.

In particular, in the 1993 in Sweden (Malmö) was established the Swedish Association of Town Centre Management (the Svenska Stadskärnor logo is placed below) as a public organization that incorporates 200 member organizations such as local communities, government agencies, Town Centre Management organizations (e.g. City I Samverkan¹), property owners, retailers, and other commercial interests and private individuals. The aim of this organization is to exchange experiences of TCM and Town Centre development around Sweden and today are present in “Sweden approximately 100 town and city centres that have developed TCM schemes with public and private partnerships” (Björn Bergman, CEO of Svenska Stadskärnor).

Over time, in several Swedish Town Centres the TCM has focused its employment to improve the attractiveness of Town Centre by involving “[...] the maintenance and marketing programme carried out in a cooperative way by the community, property owners and retailers” (Sandahl and Lindh, 1995: 52).

Stockholm “The Capital of Scandinavia”

¹ CitySamverkan is a non-profit organization that aims to initiate and implement projects in cooperation with firms and
Stockholm is the capital of Sweden and it is also considered the “Capital of Scandinavia” as highlighted by Monica Ewert (Director of Communication, Stockholm Business Region Development). More precisely Stockholm - The Capital of Scandinavia (see the logo placed below) is the brand name (Keller, 1993; Aaker, 2009) for the Stockholm region; it is used by all who work together in order to promote the development of Stockholm as a region for new businesses and tourism. Stockholm is the largest city in the Scandinavian countries and it is considered the economic center with the largest gross regional product, also, the principal multinational companies have their headquarters in this city. Furthermore, Stockholm is recognized as one of the world’s leading ICT clusters and the TCM managers and retailers are trying to implement the use of technology within the Town Centre.

The Stockholm Town Centre is articulated in several islands and the management of this area depends on the organization named Stockholm City I Samverkan (CiS) (logo is placed below) that can be translated “interaction” or “work together”. CiS is a member of Swedish ATCM (Association of Town Centre Management) established in 2007 with the goal of facing the development of Town Centre. The focus on Town Centre retailing, as Jerker Soderlind (Strategic Advisor of Stockholm City I Samverkan) points out, is one of the most important aims that this organization has to face in order to improve the competitiveness of small shops in Town Centre and to compete with big shopping centres out of the Town Centre. The retail within Town Centre is concentrated in six important shopping streets that delimit the main shopping areas2 (figure 3) in Stockholm Town Centre:

1) **Bibliotekstan** recognized as an exclusive and sophisticated shopping area famous for its high quality products (*border in orange*).

2) **Hötorgscity** that includes modern streets around the Hötorget skyscrapers and the Hötorget square (*border in green*).

3) **Hamngatan, Regeringsgatan** that is the intersection of two important retail streets (*border in purple*).

4) **Drottninggatan** and surroundings - area appreciated as the oldest shopping street in Sweden, a pedestrian area that stretches from the northern to the southern part of the city (*border in pink*).

5) **Kungsgatan** regarded as the vibrant city street stretching from the western to the eastern part of the city (*border in yellow*).

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2 Stockholm City I Samverkan recognizes these shopping areas in the annual report that define the Stockholm shopping map.
6) Vasagatan recognized as a busy street dominated by big hotels and the Central Station, the hub for communication and transportation (*border in red*).

Figure 3 - Stockholm shopping map

The Stockholm CiS recognized 15 reasons which entrepreneurs have to take into consideration to establish their business in the Town Centre. Among these reasons, the most important are related to the fact that the Town Centre possess competitive characters that suburban retails are not able to express: it is considered as a force that drives Swedish retail as well as a great deal of Swedish citizens to spent their income on retail. In particular, Stockholm Town Centre as Jerker Sorderlind stated: “offers an attractive environment for shopping with pleasant compact shopping area”. The importance to invest in the retail is also recognize by the *Stockholm Business Region*\(^3\) that emphasizes investments in the Stockholm City in several business sectors and, in particular, in the

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\(^3\) Stockholm Business Region is a company wholly owned by the City of Stockholm, and is part of the Stockholm’s Stadshus AB Corporation. Stockholm Business Region has two subsidiaries: Stockholm Visitors’ Board and Stockholm Business Region Development, which work together to promote, develop and market Stockholm as a business and tourist destination.
retail as highlighted in the documents of Stockholm’s business guide that certified that a large proportion of Swedes' income and wealth are being spent on fashion, furniture and other retail goods. In particular, it clearly emerged that in the last 15 years the retail sector has enjoyed strong annual growth, averaging 3.5 percent per year. During the last years, the Swedish retail sector emerged as one of the strongest in Western Europe, and retail sales totaled at 73 billion euro in 2012. Retail accounts for 40 percent of total household consumption.

Moreover, to facilitate the movement of people from suburban area to Town Centre, in order to increase the retail and the possibility of shopping within Town Centre, Stockholm CiS contributed to creating an efficient public transport system.

From the Stockholm’s Vision 2014 emerged clearly that the commitment of the Stockholm CiS is related to the development of public and private partnerships in order to improve the growth of the Town Centre, through strategies capable to ensure quiet, clean, safe and attractive streetscapes, in order to contribute: to the city attractiveness’ increase and to the emotional charge and passion for Town Centre. The core value on which Stockholm CiS based its strategies can be summed up in “Inspiration, Collaboration and Value creation” and “the mission of CiS is to increase the number of visits to Stockholm City, by creating a more attractive urban environment with better experiences, increasing market share for city trade and consequently the occupancy for hotels and restaurants, moreover increasing the perceived security and strive for good returns on properties in Stockholm Town Centre” as stated by Jerker Sorderlind.

Per Eriksson (CEO of CiS) highlighted that:

“CiS have several goals to address such as the creation of a map of Stockholm City with all property owners, boutiques, cafés and restaurants, and a booklet with tips and information on the regulatory framework regarding trade signage, in order to have a pleasant and vibrant street environment with orderliness”.

Moreover, another strategy, able to facilitate the orientation of people within Town Centre that CiS would create for 2014, are 28 informal panels (as shown below) to improve the orientation in the Town Centre. From the documentation related to the improvement and development of Stockholm clearly emerged that the commitment of Stockholm CiS is, first of all, related to the development and improvement of the attractiveness of the Town Centre, in order to increase incomes of trade and attract a

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4 Document in which are explained the goals of Stockholm City i Samverkan for the 2014.
greater number of people who can visit the city and consequently increase revenues associated with the consumption of goods and services in the Town Centre. The strategies elaborated by CiS are only offline and not online in fact, with reference to the use of Internet as a tool of interaction between people (as residents, tourists or investors), and analyzing the CiS website clearly emerged that there are no links between fixed location stores and the websites of CiS. In this website it is not possible to find practical information related to shopping in Town Centre; and people cannot discover the potentiality of shops in this area and consequently their possibility to purchase goods and services.

Retailers in specific parts of the Town Centre developed autonomous activities, such as in Regeringsgatan, where property owners are currently collaborating on several projects along the street, enabling additional spaces for flagship stores on multiple floors. In So-Fo\(^5\) (see map on the side) online initiatives that have been developed by an association of retailers that through the Internet website of So-Fo, recreated a virtual world in which people can find practical information regarding fashion, food, trade, culture, nightlife, services and business innovation of this neighbourhoods, even before their journey in this area.

With reference to the information regarding the retailers, people can find practical information data of shops placed in this area such as location, opening hours, and kind of business and contacts. On this website it is not possible for consumers to buy over the Internet items of preference, it is a virtual world where people can gather only practical information.

*Västerås: the City without Limit*

Västerås is located in the center of the Sweden Country, approximately 100 km from Stockholm. With 136 000 inhabitants, it is the sixth largest city in Sweden. The Town Centre is closed in a specific space (as shown below) and is characterized by a total retail surface area of 110,000 squared meters. Visitors have been attracted to Västerås due to the diversity of its retail offer, which was boosted in

\(^5\) The area SoFo that means "South of Folkungagatan" is located in Södermalm, a district of Stockholm, and bounded by Folkungagatan street to the north, Ringvägen to the south. The name SoFo is a pun on Soho, the districts in London and Manhattan, and is an invention of local entrepreneurs, who since 2003 have attempted to re-brand the area as a centre of creative and innovative fashion and retailing. In particular, many Swedish fashion designers are located in SoFo.
the 1990s by the development of large out-of-town shopping malls. Despite the competitive advantage achieved by Västerås through the rapid development of out-of-town shopping malls that attracted shoppers from Town Centre to the suburban areas, this phenomenon caused a potential threat to the diversity of retail and services offered by the Town Centre itself when these malls increasingly became an alternative for visitors coming to the city centre itself. It was as a result of this progressive change in customer habits that the creation of Town Centre Management (TCM) scheme began in 1995, and in 1997 was created the Västerås Citysamverkan, (logo is placed below). The ambition of the Västerås Citysamverkan, reaching far beyond a reactive approach, aimed at revitalising the city and bringing residents back to the Town Centre.

Västerås Citysamverkan was founded as a not-for-profit limited company owned by its members: each member not only contributes by paying a membership fee proportional to their retail/business surface, but is directly involved in the creation of a strategic plan that integrates areas as urban planning, street and house lighting, management of public spaces such as parks and gardens, crime and waste management, etc. Local planning and policy documents from the early 2000s emphasize the importance of trade and shopping for the further development the Town Centre. The Vision of Västerås, entitled ‘The City with no Limits’, stressing the means that in this city “everything is possible”. From this document clearly emerged that the goal of Västerås Citysamverkan was to establish Västerås as a regional shopping city and, as Maria Fors (CEO of Västerås City Samverkan) stated: “Through many years of creative thinking, it has found a unique way to combine out-of-town shopping with a dynamic inner city’. We saw the opportunities and we wove together our history and our future in order to have a city where people feel that everything is possible: “a city to be proud of, in which human beings and technology combine in a thriving symbiosis”.

“The cooperation is one of the most important values that constitute the vision of Västerås CiS, in order to address the goal, in which citizens of Vasteras feel that they are participating, and they have a strong desire to take part and contribute. As a regional trading city, Vasteras has developed increasingly strong roots and has, through many years of creative new thinking, found
unique ways of combining external shopping centres close to residential districts with a pulsing Town Centre.”

Västerås CS, adopted strategies capable to develop and improve the retail within Town Centre, created an Internet website in which are inserted all fixed location stores of the Town Centre and in this way people can have the possibility to find practical information for shops, as well as for every kind of activity and events within Town Centre.

In the Town Centre website there is a specific session (figure 4) in which are classified the retail activities of Västerås (such as: flowers, books, electronics, hairdressers, malls, health and beauty, decorating, iron, construction, color, clothing, food, furniture, shoes and bags, sports and leisure, optics, gold, and other).

Figure 4 - Västerås City Samverkam website, shopping session.

For each of the business categories people can find all the shops located within the Town Centre, and clicking on the name of the store, will appear the store’s website, and thus people have the possibility to buy directly from home. As Maria Fors stated:

“Not every, but many of the shops in Town Centre have their own website in which people can buy goods, but we want to create the possibility, through the Västerås website, in which if you click on the name of the shop you can interact, buy and stay active”.

...
The Italian answer to the Town Centre attraction decrease

The development of new form of shopping such as the out-of-town shopping Centre that caused the pauperization of Italian Town Centres and the economic decrease of retail in the urban area, was one of the reasons that led to the development of “Centri Commerciali Naturali” (CCN), that literally means “Natural Shopping Centre”. The development of CCN in Italy dates back to 1998 when was issued a national law in order to address in an appropriate way the modernizing of economy by attempting to encourage different types of commercial activities and regulate the growth, out of Town Centre, of artificial shopping centres, not forgetting to support traditional independent retail activities within the Town Centre (Codato, 2010). Consequently, in enacting this law, several regions in Italy (table 2) issued regional laws in which were explained the characteristics of CCN.

In the Sardinian regional law CCN are defined as “natural shopping centre characterized by a formal partnership of local independent businesses that work together on coordinated and proactive initiatives, according to a strategic development programmed to ensure that Town Centres are desirable and attractive places”.

As Codato (2010) highlighted, the CCN can be considered as places where retailers of Town Centre work together to enhance the quality and services of the area. The development of CCN in Italy was related to the revitalization of Town Centre and its retail businesses in order to regenerate traditional shopping area of Town Centre and attracting shoppers back (Coca-Stefaniak et al., 2008).

CCN in Italy was related to the improvement of the economic, social, and cultural aspects of the Town Centre as aggregation of shops, businesses, tourist services that are located in the same area or in the same street and establish a network operating as an integrated shopping area.

Nowadays, does not exist an Italian official guide that certifies the number of CCN per region; therefore, the association of retailers such as Confesercenti and Confcommercio with Chamber of

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6 Legislative decree from 31 March 1998, n. 114 (Reform of the rules related to the commercial sector, in accordance with Article 4, paragraph 4, of Law 15 March 1997 n. 599)

7 Art.1 L.R. 5/2005 defined CCN as “the common effort of mainly already existing small commercial activities, crafts and services, distinct and established only for the purpose of enhancing the value of urban zones, which develop their integrated, individual activities under the legal form of the consortium or association”.

Article 1 L.R. 5/2006: a set of commercial activities, crafts and services, referred to in Article 36, which carry out integrated activities according to a common direction and are legally identified in the forms of the consortium or association; they can be joined together under the formation of common commercial areas, public and private category associations; the natural commercial center aims to enhance the value and quality of the trade in urban areas in harmony with the cultural, social, architectural contexts, with particular reference to the economic and social revitalization of historic centers;
Commerce tried to work together by creating partnership in order to improve the number of CCN in every regions of Italy.

Table 2 - Italian regional law about CCN

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>REGION</th>
<th>REGIONAL LAW</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Abruzzo</td>
<td>N° 62, 09-08-1999</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Campania</td>
<td>N° 1, 07-01-2000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emilia Romagna</td>
<td>N° 14, 05-07-1999; N° 20, 22-12-2005</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lazio</td>
<td>N° 4, 28-04-2006</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Piedmont</td>
<td>Resolution of Regional Council 29-10-1999, N° 563-13414</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sardinia</td>
<td>N° 5, 18-05-2006</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sicily</td>
<td>Decree 12 luglio 2000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Province of Trento</td>
<td>Provincial Law N° 4 DEL 08/05/2000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tuscany</td>
<td>N° 28, 07-02-2005</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Author data collected

Another way to raise the urban retail is related to the Distretti del Commercio (Retail District) developed in Italy in the last decade. The Retail District can assume two different forms: Distretti Urbani del Commercio (DUC) that means “Urban Retail District” and that was established in municipal territory, and Distretto Intercomunale Diffuso (DID) that means “Intermunicipal District” and established on the territory of most municipalities. This kind of organizations get inspiration for their objectives and structure on the experience of CCN and TCM, and in the 2011 a national law⁸ “Statuto delle Imprese” that literally means “Firms’ Statute” has recognized and defined these Retail District. These Retail Districts are financed by the Region, Municipality, retailers and the Chamber of commerce, which cooperate together to improve the quality of attractiveness of the Town Centre area, basing their strategy mainly on the development of the retailing activities.

In the official guide of Lombardy Confcommercio are described the characteristics of Retail District and the objectives of these kinds of organizations that can be summed up in the following elements:

- To promote an urban space through retail activities
- To recognize the retailing strategic role
- To highlight the advantage that comes from the cooperative management of the city

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⁸ National law n°180-2011
retailing
- To enhance and promote the cooperation between actors involved in the development of urban retail
- To support the development of a skilled occupation

Some of the most significant strategies elaborated by the Retail District are the following: to manage the communication and corporate image by creating a logo of the District and several tools in order to enhance the importance of the initiatives developed by the District; to create a website in which it is possible to disseminate information on the district initiatives and create the possibility for customers to buy good and services through an electronic commerce sections; to develop thematic tours, activities and events elaborated in order to promote the attractiveness of the district; to define strategies capable to develop customer loyalty in order to analyse customers behaviours and to supervise performances of retailers; to create enterprises network in order to manage retail activities, marketing, promotion, communication in a coordinative way; to restore, rehabilitate, renovate the heritage buildings for trade; to create video surveillance and vigilance systems in order to improve the security for people, goods and building; to define strategies able to enhance the vitality and viability of the district.

Milan: the first Italian City engaged in the Town Centre evaluation

Milan is the second-most populated city in Italy, after Rome, and the capital of Lombardy. The city has a population of about 1.3 million of inhabitants, while its urban area, which comprehends the neighbourhoods, is the 5th largest in the EU with an estimated population of about 5,248,000.

Basing on the model of TCM developed in several European Cities (Coca-Stefaniak et al., 2009), also in Milan in 2009 was created a similar scheme named “Distretti Urbani del Commercio” (DUC).

To develop the described scheme model, several actors have been involved: Department for Production activities Employment Policy and Labour, with the collaboration of retailers associations, Department of Tourism and Services of the Province of Milan and the Chamber of Commerce of Milan. The above-mentioned collaboration determined an investment of more than 10 million euros; more precisely 3,187,485.6 were funded by Milan Council, 2,647,548 by the Region of Lombardy and finally 4,467,862.40 by private partners.

The goal of this operation was, first of all, to regenerate the urban retailing through a renaissance of the city context, in order to enhance artistic and cultural heritage, and to improve the livability and safety.
Taking into consideration the big dimension of Milan, it was possible to identify several areas in which were created five different DUC (figure 5).

**Figure 5 - DUC’s Milan**

Each one of these *Urban Retail Districts* has a specific logo as shown below, with specific characteristics capable to address the regeneration of retailing in these areas. DUC “*Brera*”, is characterized by the presence of trendy shops, art and design that aim to protect their excellence where art and design give this area the epithet of *Design District*.

DUC “*Isola*”, in the course of the last five years had led to a big transformation of this area that is going to join culture and innovation in order to create a smart city model, in which retailers of this area drive the combination between tradition and innovation through several initiatives (e.g. *Fuori salone dall’Isola* thank to which the stores of this area exhibited the design products just shown in the *Furniture Milan Exhibition* with the objective to encourage the visitors to walk the shopping streets of the area).

DUC “*Navigli*”, aims to enhance Milan waterways. DUC “*Sarpi*”, with the goal to promote this area as a commercial part of the city with a project of pedestrianization; DUC “*Giambellino*” addresses the enhancement of territorial peripheral tissue in a strong post-industrial transformation.

The five listed DUC can be considered as a first step of a big project that aims to involve also other commercial areas of the City. The characteristics of these areas are similar to CCN, but bigger in relation of the geographical area involved; in fact, DUC aims to increase the turnout of citizens.
interested in the neighborhood, some of which will be handled directly by the neighborhood associations.

Due to the satisfying result of the first five DUC, at the end of 2012 were established four other DUCs named: *Galleria, 25 Aprile, Buenos Aires e Pratocentenaro*. In these areas, public and private actors offer integrated management interventions, in order to drive the promotion of the territory. In particular, these DUCs have played an important role in the definition of strategies and policies to support and facilitate the establishment of new pedestrian areas and limited traffic zones.

Another strategy elaborated by Milan City Council in order to preserve the value of the Town Centre traditional store, is named “*Botteghe Storiche*” (logo placed on the side).

In the 2004, the Milan City Council approved the guidelines for the establishment of the Register of Historical shops, with the aim of protecting and defending those commercial activities and crafts of strong urban roots able to give value to cultural heritage that can be at risk of extinction. Among the actions required for the establishment of the Register of firms and commercial craft it is necessary to be operating in the city for over 50 years, undertaking the same activity. The recognition for "Historical Shop" is highlighted by the commencement, with honour, of a plaque stating the value and status of cultural property.

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*Cagliari: experiences in progress*

Cagliari is the capital of the Sardinia Island, an autonomous Region of Italy; it has nearly 150,000 inhabitants and its metropolitan area has more than 480,000 inhabitants.

In the 2013 the Sardinia Region developed, through the resolution of Regional Council n. 44/36 of 23/10/2013, the register of Sardinia’s CCN. This register certified that in Cagliari are located five CCN, but only two (figure 6) of these are active in the development of strategies able to revitalize Town Centre retailing.

These two CCN are: *Consorzio Centro Storico* in the Marina neighbourhood and the *Consorzio Insieme* in the Villanova neighbourhood that is considered the principal area of shopping in Cagliari Town Centre, and bring together 350 retail activities.
CCN “Consorzio Insieme” was founded in the 1999 through the commitment of retailers that had their fixed location store in the main shopping streets within Town Centre. This CCN aims to create collaboration between members of the consortium, in order to revitalize the retail in the urban area. In the subsequent years, some associates of this CCN decided to create a trade association in order to preserve and protect the interests of firms that operate in the retail, tourism and craft sector. One of the most important strategies elaborated by this association is “Sardegna Multi Card” (see logo placed on the side). The president Franco Fozzi of the consortium stated: “this kind of innovative tool was born in order to promote the purchasing on the Town Centre area. Through this card retailers can improve their customers’ number and maintain the loyalty of old customers with sale and discount”.

The Sardegna Multi Card is at disposal to all customers who wish to use it, valid in all stores affiliated to the circuit. The holder of this card has the benefit to collect points on the card according to his/her purchases: points, which are automatically recorded and accumulated on the card will vary according to two parameters: amount spent and type of store where customers purchased food or services, and when reaching 100 points (or multiples of 100), customers can claim a prize of € 4.00 (or multiples). The holder of this card has also the possibility, through the website, to know every kind of information related to the stores in which they can use it. Via the website, customers have the possibility to check their card’s points, to find the shop they are interested in, to find promotions and products, and to have all the possible details related to the Town Centre activities.

In the summer of 2013 was promoted the second edition of “Notti Colorate” that literally means Colored Nights (see the poster placed below). This is an initiatives created by the
municipality of Cagliari with Confesercenti and Confcommercio in collaboration with Coldiretti, Confindustria, Civic Museum and other consortia and trade associations of the shopping streets of Cagliari.

This initiative involved over two hundred retailers with the goal to face the crisis by attracting citizens and tourists that spent their holidays on the coast near Cagliari, by creating a service bus shuttle that stopped in the heart of Town Centre.

The name “Notti Colorate” was chosen because different colours involving culture, social policy, food and wine characterized each event. Shops were open until late at night and tourists and inhabitants could have the possibility to do shopping, but they also had the possibility to visit the principal monuments in the Town Centre. Furthermore, on these occasions the shopping streets were animated by special events such as musical entertainment touring, wine tastings, exhibitions and performances, and numerous initiatives for children cared for by the Department for Social Policies, which permitted children to colour the city and have fun with road games.

CCN “Cagliari Centro Storico” was developed in the 2007 through the involvement of several kinds of actors such as retailers and craft businesses that decided to create a consortium in order to enhance the traditional Town Centre and to revitalize the economic activities. This CCN aims to work together to make the area more liveable and enjoyable. To address this goal, were developed several socio-cultural initiatives dedicated to local people and tourists, by promoting the natural beauty and enhancing the quality of life of those who live and work there. To improve the numbers of citizens and tourists in this area the CCN created a pedestrian zone, area without traffic, organized events to promote the possibility of people socialization within Town Centre. Other strategies elaborated by CCN for the future took into consideration the implementation of new retail and craft activities.

Learning from the studied experiences

As it clearly emerged from the table 3, the experiences regarding the Town Centre revitalization assumed a really specific feature in each of the analysed Cities. It is from the diversity
that characterizes each set of activities adopted in the studied Cities with the aim to revitalize Town Centre that we can acquire precious knowledge to suggest to other City Municipalities or private organizations that have the purpose to work in the direction of the creation a new Town Centre’s life. Particularly, from table 3 emerged the different strategies elaborated by Italian and Swedish TCM. By analysing the reasons that have led to the emergence of TCM in these contexts, it is clear that there are two different forces that managed the TCM development.

In the Swedish context the development of TCM aimed to increase the attractiveness of the Town Centre and the revitalization of its retailing (e.g. Stockholm) with the intent to promote the urban area as a new place where people can meet, buy something and interact with each others (e.g. Västerås).

In the Italian context emerged that the reason of the creation of TCM was promoted in order to protect the heritage of the Traditional Town Centre and respond to the current, changing situation related to the depopulation and isolation, and to preserve the patrimony of these areas.

| Stockhol m | Increasing the attractiveness | Collaboration between private and public sector. Retail Partnership based on collaboration | Information Panel No web appearance | Polycentric with 6 areas and sub-alliances (SoFo) | Mutual collaboration, between Business region and CS |
| Västerås | Developing City as a Regional Shopping Centre | Not for profit P&P company | Strong virtual city /website | Monocentric | Mutual collaboration, between Business region and CS, and citizens |
| Milan | Promote Urban space and protect City Heritage | Many different organizations | Labelling (Bottega Storiche) | Polycentric with 9 areas | Autonomous Management for each DUC |
| Cagliari | Increase Customer Loyalty | Many different organizations | Cards & Events | 2 Natural shopping Centre | Chamber of Commerce with CCN |

Table 3 – City’s TCM behaviours in comparison

Source: Author data collected

The different features of TCM’s organization show that in the Swedish context are achieved the most collaborative situations between public and private, while in Italy several kinds of private organizations work for the revitalization of Town Centre but not in a collaborative way with the public sector. Also, the strategies used to revitalize the retail within Town Centre are completely different: in Stockholm CitySamverkan creates several strategies in order to improve the attractiveness of Town centre with information panels, while in Västerås the attention was focused on the virtual world in order to improve the possibility for retailers to be noted by visitors prior to their visit within Town Centre. In Italy, efforts of TCM are focused on the definition of the label, customers’ loyalty card and events promoted in the several DUC or CCN developed in the Town
Centre. The different features of these cities shown how in Sweden the focus is concentrated on the development of a unique Town Centre even if it is divided in several zones, instead, in Cagliari and Milan several zones stay independent from each other, with different strategies and projects. The collaboration is the file rouge that drives the development of TCM in Sweden, both in big and small cities; moreover, in the case of Västerås, the collaboration with citizens, mentioned in the definition of strategies and projects, constituted an interesting specific feature. In summary, the most relevant lesson that we can obtain by considering the studied cities behaviour, is that only with a strong and involving collaboration – regardless of manner and participants – the Town Centres can work for their re-birth.

**Conclusion**

The analysed case studies are full of suggestions for both academics and practitioners. In fact, academics can draw new stimuli for researches where by comparing several cities’ experiences, different organizations’ answers and people behaviours, can contribute to specify existing theories or build new ones in relation to big changes that are possible to comprehend from the analysed cases.

With reference to practitioners, the four Cities’ experiences studied can constitute a relevant base, both for a model that can be adopted in the perspective of Town Centre revitalization, and to avoid steps identified later as errors in the considered experiences.

Moreover, what emerges from this study is that the Town Centre problems involve an increasing numbers of Cities, particularly in Europe. Similar studies and reflections on current interventions are in progress and it is certain that they will be susceptible of really interesting, future research works.
References


Abstract

This paper is an attempt to develop a new way to selling products or services for retailers within Town Centres. From the analysis of the literature emerged that the use of Internet and ways to sell through it (Bhatti, 2007; Ickler et al., 2009; Curty and Zhang, 2011) are rarely used as tools able to revitalize urban retail. Inasmuch, this paper aims to highlight what new ways of online commerce – e-commerce, s-commerce and m-commerce – are more suitable than others to help Town Centres retailers revitalize the place where they work. The research questions are: What are the reasons of the development of new forms of selling? What are the new forms of sale over the Internet developed in the last decades? And, in what way is it possible to connect old and new forms of selling in order to improve the retail attractiveness of Town Centres?

The answer to the previously stated questions given in this paper is a proposed model which, by combining the physical and the virtual way to sell products and services, is supposed to provide the specific strength to revitalize the Town Centres.

Keywords: Town Centre revitalization model, electronic commerce, social commerce, mobile commerce
Introduction

The economic crisis that for some decades has been affecting the economies all over the world assumed an additional negative impact in the Town centre that suffered because many retail activities shifted out of town (Schiller, 1986; 1988, 1994; Oc and Tiesdell, 1998; Thomas and Bromley, 2003).

To assess the Town Centre economic difficulties it is necessary to take into consideration also the advent of new forms of commerce such as electronic commerce, social commerce and mobile commerce (Bhatti, 2007; Ickler et al., 2009; Curty, and Zhang, 2011; Yadav et al., 2013).

The intensified use of the World Wide Web in the last decades (Foley and Sutton, 1998; Singh et al., 2001; Ickler et al. 2009) led to the development of purchasing products and services online (Yadav, 2013). The direct implication has been that retailers, on one hand, suffered the reduction of their affairs and on the other, had to adopt new ways to do commerce positioning themselves on the Net (Hart et al., 2000). In particular, retailers within Town Centre, in addition to the above mentioned problems, have also to compete with this new way of commerce (Palmer, 2000): and this appeared at first glance a threat, but if well managed can become an opportunity able to revitalize the Town Centre (Burt and Sparks, 2003).

In fact, Internet and the penetration of technologies in the life of people have already evoked changes in their daily lives: from work to holiday time; from home activities to shopping; and so on (Barnes, 2002). Also, in the retail sector nowadays, consumers more often seek information through Internet relating to purchases that normally are concluded over traditional channels of retail (Bakos, 1997; 2001). Nowadays millions of people worldwide use Internet to search information about products and consequently to purchase them online (Terzi, 2011). This is one of the reasons whereby recently more retailers are increasingly focusing their attention on electronic, social and mobile commerce in order to find a new way to sell their products or services.

By means of the use of Internet, customers become more efficient in the buying process, because the cost of information, as well as the cost and time required for acquiring information, is low while the options are increasing in quantity more and more (Bakos 1997; 2001; Terzi, 2011).

As information is easy to access, consumers have the capability of becoming fully informed regarding their options and in this way they have the possibility to adopt better decisions with less required effort (Bakos 1997; 2001, Brynjolfsson and Smith, 1999).

By considering the Town Centre as a community that changes over time, also the retailers within Town Centre have to modify their selling strategies taking into consideration the development of Internet through which they can sell products in order to exploit new technologies for future survival. Specifically, retailers have to acquire the awareness that the technological
innovation developed over the Internet (Porter, 2001) is changing the way through which people communicate and socialize (Roblek et al., 2013), buy goods and services, and in relation to this the greatest threat for traditional retail in the Town Centre is the trend for using the Internet to search for the best deals (Singh et al., 2001; Kim et al., 2013; Roblek et al., 2013).

This technological era imposed, to the Town Centre retailers who want to overcome the crisis, the adoption of digital strategies in order to continue to keep customers in the traditional downtown streets: in particular, the innovation and intuition can be considered as the key success factors for retailers (Roblek, 2013). If retailers exploit the potentiality of Internet and new forms of commerce over it, they could create a situation through which customers can have the possibility to interact with retailers in the Town Centre, both before their journey in the urban area and after.

In this scenario, the electronic, social and mobile commerce offer to consumers more choices than ever before, and they can be a solution that helps retailers to maximize their online presence, drive sales, reduce customer service costs and increase the traffic on the web.

This paper aims to analyse the potentiality of some new forms of selling in order to understand in which way retailers within Town Centre can exploit these and reacquire a central role. Particularly, this paper tries to find answers to the following research questions: What are the reasons that stimulated the adoption of new forms of selling in the retailers placed in the Town centre? In what way is it possible to connect old and new forms of selling in order to improve the retail attractiveness of Town Centres?

To find responses to the previous questions this paper is organized as follow: the subsequent point is devoted to the analysis of the literature adopting a bibliometric methodology. The third paragraphs reaches the aim to highlight the main characters of the e-commerce, s-commerce, and m-commerce with the perspective to understand if and in what way these technologies can help the town centre in their engagement of revitalization. A proposal of a model will be presented. Finally, some conclusions are presented.

**Literature review methodology**

To achieve the purpose of this paper a literature review is made on the adoption of new technologies to help town Centre to regain the glories of the past.

The review was made by collecting papers published in peer reviewed academic journals from the following database: IEEEXplore, Proquest Central, Science direct. The keywords used for searching the papers were: electronic commerce, e-commerce, social commerce, s-commerce, mobile commerce, m-commerce. Each of the cited words was combined on its turn with keywords like: Town Centre, Town Centre retailers, retailers, Town Centre Management.
The papers, discussing new technology only in terms of technicalities have been excluded. More precisely, were selected papers discussing the development of new forms of selling over the Internet, and focusing the attention on the analysis of electronic commerce and the further development, such as social commerce and mobile commerce in order to identify new ways of commerce through which retailers within Town Centre can obtain benefits.

In particular, these form of commerce being developed recently, it is just lately that the academic research is focusing the attention on the e-commerce, s-commerce and m-commerce (Varshney and Vetetr, 2002; Nagai and Gunasekaran, 2007); articles related to these fields are scattered across various journals (31) in several disciplines such as business, management, marketing, information technology.

The multidisciplinarity covered by the highlighted journals, clearly emphasizes that there are not yet shared points of view between scholars, nor standard accepted definitions (Kang and Park, 2009) related to e-commerce, s-commerce and m-commerce. The implications is that also applications can assume many facets with a multiplicity of opportunities for firms – and thus work for retailers - but they have to acquire, on one hand, the knowledge of the potentialities of this new technologies and on another, the awareness of the usefulness that they can reach with the adoption of these technologies.

To better understand the dynamism that characterized the e-commerce, s-commerce and m-commerce, it can be useful to observe the content of table 1, 2, and 3 that show the most significant definition elaborated by scholars in the last decades. These definitions are also useful to draw valuable guidance for practical application in regard to the perspective to regenerate the Town Centre.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Authors</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>E-commerce Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Harrington</td>
<td>1995</td>
<td>Is the exchange of information, goods and services, and payment by electronic means</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aaron et al.</td>
<td>1999</td>
<td>Is about building better relationships among customers, producers and suppliers. Its implementation harnesses networked resources to foster the exchange of business transactions in a more efficient and cost effective manner.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Palmer</td>
<td>2000</td>
<td>Is a form of commerce used to connect key suppliers and retailers along the retail pipeline to support existing distribution schemes, customer interactions and product displays.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Singh et al.</td>
<td>2001</td>
<td>Is the online exchange of value, without geographical or time restrictions, between companies and their partners, employees or customers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wilson and Abel</td>
<td>2002</td>
<td>Is the use of electronic media such as the Internet to transact business.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burt and Sparks</td>
<td>2003</td>
<td>Is a process innovation that provides the capability to transform traditional tasks and activities and associated costs, within the retail channel.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jason and Cecez-Kecmanovic</td>
<td>2005</td>
<td>Is a commercial transaction between buyers and sellers over the Internet.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jascanu et al.</td>
<td>2007</td>
<td>Is a form of commerce that imitates the process of negotiation that takes place between human beings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turban et al.</td>
<td>2008</td>
<td>Is a process of distributing, marketing, buying, selling, or exchanging products, services and/or information including the Internet, doing business transactions electronically.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yang. Et al.</td>
<td>2009</td>
<td>Is one of the most important Internet applications that change the way people shop, and shopping online gives people more flexibility in time and place.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Khoshnampour and Nosrati 2011 Means buying and selling products or services on Internet or other networks.

Terzi 2011 Is the use of Internet to conduct business transactions nationally or internationally.

Zaker and Ansari 2013 The use of electronic information technology to conduct business transactions among buyers, sellers, and other trading partners.

Huang and Benyoucef 2013 Is undergoing an evolution through the adoption of Web 2.0 capabilities to enhance customer participation and achieve greater economic value.

Sun et al. 2014 A special type of web applications designed for online shopping, plays an important role in the modern world.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Authors</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>S-Commerce Definition</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jascanu et al.</td>
<td>2007</td>
<td>Is a combination between social networking and e-commerce.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dennison et al.</td>
<td>2009</td>
<td>Is the concept of word of mouth applied to e-commerce, and it is the marriage of a retailer’s products and the interaction of shoppers with content.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ickler et al.</td>
<td>2009</td>
<td>Social commerce focuses on interpersonal relations (recommendations, feedbacks, information, etc.) that are influencing a business transaction before, while or after it happens.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wang</td>
<td>2009, 2011</td>
<td>“Social shopping” (or social commerce), combining shopping and social networking, is an application of Web 2.0 in electronic commerce to benefit from users’ social networks.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stephen and Toubia</td>
<td>2010</td>
<td>Is a form of Internet-based social media that allows people to actively participate in the marketing and selling of products and services in online marketplaces and communities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curty and Zhang</td>
<td>2011</td>
<td>Social commerce can be briefly described as commerce activities mediated by social media.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liang and Turban</td>
<td>2011</td>
<td>Is a place where people can collaborate online, get advice from trusted individuals, find goods and services, and then purchase them. To summarize, SC has three major attributes: social media technologies, community interactions, and commercial activities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shen</td>
<td>2012</td>
<td>Social commerce is defined as a technology-enabled shopping experience, where online consumer interactions while shopping provide the main mechanism for conducting social shopping activities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wang and Zhang</td>
<td>2012</td>
<td>Social commerce is a form of commerce mediated by social media and is converging both online and offline environments.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yadav et al.</td>
<td>2013</td>
<td>Social commerce refers to exchange-related activities that occur in, or are influenced by, an individual’s social network in computer-mediated social environments, where the activities correspond to the need of recognition, pre-purchase, purchase, and post-purchase stages of a focal exchange.</td>
</tr>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Authors</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>M-Commerce Definition</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Clarke</td>
<td>2001</td>
<td>Refers to any transaction with monetary value that is conducted via mobile network.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barnes</td>
<td>2002</td>
<td>The new range of mobile technologies offers the Internet ‘in your pocket’, for which the consumer possibilities are endless, including banking, booking or buying tickets, shopping and real-time news.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Balasubramanian et al.</td>
<td>2002</td>
<td>m-commerce is the use of mobile (handheld) devices to communicate and conduct transactions through public and private networks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kalakota and Robinson</td>
<td>2002</td>
<td>Typically designates the use of wireless devices (particularly mobile phones) to conduct electronic business transactions, such as product ordering, fund transfer, and stock trading.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bigné et al.</td>
<td>2007</td>
<td>Is the buying and selling of goods and services using wireless hand-held devices such as mobile telephones or personal data assistants (PDAs)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ngai and Gunasekaran</td>
<td>2007</td>
<td>m-commerce refers to the conduct of commerce via wireless devices.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chang et al.</td>
<td>2009</td>
<td>Includes a vast variety of activities comprised of transactions with monetary value conducted via a mobile phone.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cyr et al.</td>
<td>2009</td>
<td>Mobile commerce (m-commerce) has the potential of serving customers in wireless environments for both business and pleasure.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Khalifa et al.</td>
<td>2012</td>
<td>M-commerce refers to conducting any transaction, involving the transfer of</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
ownership or rights to use goods and services, which is initiated and/or completed by using mobile access to computer-mediated networks with the help of an electronic device.

| Zhang et al. | 2012 | Refers to the business activities conducted via wireless telecommunication network. |

Source: Author data collected

From the literature analysis one point can be underlined: even if some applications are taken into consideration there are really few the papers that discuss the advantages that can result from the usage of the new technologies to give a new life to Town Centre. This paper has the aim to contribute to reduce this gap.

**New Technologies overview**

This point is devoted to outline the main characteristics of e-commerce, s-commerce, and m-commerce, and in this way, create the basic analysis that makes it possible to compare them with the aim to suggest some applications on the retail activities placed inside the Town Centre.

**Electronic Commerce**

The electronic commerce or e-commerce (Aaron et al., 1999; Singh et al. 2001) can be considered as an innovation process and as one of the main Internet applications that offers attractive opportunities for retail growth (Palmer, 2000; Wilson and Abel, 2002; Yang et al., 2009). As highlighted by Wilson and Abel (2002), e-commerce is related to the use of electronic media like Internet to transact retail activities that changed the people shopping by involving commercial transactions between buyers and sellers over the Internet (Janson and Cecez-Kecmanovic, 2005; Yang et al., 2009). The e-commerce has the final goal to imitate the process of negotiation that takes place between human beings (Jascanu et al., 2007) by offering the possibility for retailers to transform in an innovative way the traditional activities within the retail channel (Burt and Sparks, 2003). Through e-commerce, people have the opportunity to find, both products and information relating to products and retailers, and after that to complete the shopping process.

As defined by Harrington (1995), the e-commerce can be considered as the exchange of information, goods, services and payments through Internet (Singh et al., 2001; Terzi, 2011) that offers a wide choice in relation of content, products and services (Bakos, 1997; 2001; Wilson and Abel, 2002), and which affected the perception and attitudes of traditional market retail (Rosen and Howard, 2000; Jascanu et al., 2007). The range of choices creates important benefits for both retailers and buyers (Terzi, 2011) offering available information and online services at lower costs and allowing high-speed transactions. In fact, buyers benefit from the convenient access to information without intermediate services (Khoshnampour and Nosrati, 2011), and they can acquire
information about product characteristics before purchase and compare prices (Janssen and Van der Noll, 2002). On the other hand, sellers benefit from selling to consumers anytime and anywhere with low costs and in real time (Janson and Cecez-Kecmanovic, 2005; Khoshnampour and Nosrati, 2011).

E-commerce also provides new opportunities for retailers (Palmer, 2000) that have the possibility to reproduce in the virtual store (figure 1) the shopping experience: in fact, the virtual store is able to evoke the physical analogy of buying products or services with a bricks-and-mortar store (Khoshnampour and Nosrati, 2011).

Figure 1: From Physical to Virtual Store

One of the winning features of e-commerce is related to the fact that transactions no longer require physical coordination between buyers and sellers, but participants find each other through their personal computer, and through this kind of online commerce consumers have the possibility to conduct a transaction directly with a sellers also in another part of the world without travelling to the country where the seller has the fixed location store (Terzi, 2011).

The use of e-commerce by Town Centre retailers can permit them to address one of the main goals of their business activity related “not simply to bringing the customers in the door but also to retain these customers for future purchases” (Reibstein, 2002: 465) and without doubts, thanks to the potentialities that e-commerce offers. The possibility to reach this goal is becoming more and more a reality. Potentialities embedded in the e-commerce offer to the Town Centre retailers the possibility to build customer loyalty and acquire new customers (Reibstein, 2002).

Social Commerce

Social commerce can be recognized as a commerce activity developed through social media such as Facebook, Twitter or Linkedin (Ickler et al., 2009; Liang and Turban, 2011; Liang et al., 2011) and where people are able to explore the opportunities of this kind of e-commerce being engaged in a collaborative online environment (Curty and Zhang, 2011). Social commerce as
acknowledged by several scholars (Ickler et al., 2009; Wang 2009; 2011; Wang and Zhang, 2012; Curty and Zhang, 2011) is a new form of selling through Internet developed in the last ten years by stimulation of the web 2.0 wave (Curty and Zhang, 2011; Roblek et al., 2013). The term “social commerce” was introduced for the first time, by Yahoo! in the 2005 (Jascanu et al., 2007; Ickler, 2009; Wang, 2009; Curty and Zhang, 2011; Wang and Zhang, 2012). Despite the phenomenon of social commerce emerging rapidly (Shen, 2012) academic studies are at its early stage (Curty and Zhang, 2011; Shen, 2012) and just recently scholars have been trying to find a definition of social commerce which is going to be accepted, but at the moment “there is no standard definition of this phenomenon” (Liang and Turban, 2011: 6).

Social commerce is a combination of social media and e-commerce: the first encouraged people to share product information, experiences and opinions related to shopping experiences with their friends (Liang et al., 2011; Jascanu et al., 2007), the second permits to sell products or services. More specifically, s-commerce is an extension of e-commerce (Liang and Turban, 2011) through which both consumers and retailers can obtain several benefits. In fact, if e-commerce can be considered as a static form of selling where people (as consumers and sellers) can buy and sell without interaction with each other, through social commerce, instead, it is possible to create a relationship between consumers (C2C) and between consumers and retailers (B2C).

The social process differs from e-commerce because in this case there are three stages of shopping. The first one, as in e-commerce, is related to searching products or information about products or also about sellers; the second stage is sharing information, contents or recommendations through social media (Roblek et al., 2013) in order to interact not only with sellers (B2C) but also with other consumers (C2C); and finally, the third stage is related to the purchase.

It is interesting to note that the social commerce process can start also from the cited second stage: in fact, consumers often do not have in mind clearly a specific product or service and ask for help the friends of the social commerce community. Benefits that consumers can obtain are related to the fact that before purchasing they can get information not only from retailers but also from other online consumers. At the same time, retailers can improve their profit by attracting and maintaining customers’ loyalty through recommendations by exiting customers (Curthy and Zhang, 2011).

Differently from the e-commerce, s-commerce websites are not simple places where something can be bought: they are places where each person can interact with one or many people and the shopping process becomes social (Leitner and Grechening, 2007; Kim and Srivastava, 2007; Kang and Park, 2009; Shen, 2012). Social commerce websites can be considered a virtual square, similar to the small village squares where customers communicate and share information.
about products, prices and deals, write comments on goods and services or can have the possibility to create customer shopping list in order to share it with friends or other customers in general or have a relationship with retailers (Leitner and Grechening, 2007). Social commerce making use of social media (Roblek et al., 2013) that permits people to share contents, has changed the way through which they shop “people have the power to share and make the world more open and connected” (Roblek et al., 2013: 3) and for this reason Town Centre retailers have to redesign their commerce strategy in a social way by using e-commerce with the interaction of social media tools enabling the creation of new forms of connections (figure 2).

Figure 2: From Physical to Social Store

Through social commerce, consumers have the possibility to interact (Kim and Srivastana, 2007) while shopping (Shen, 2012) and to take a compatibility test and find his or her “shopping soul mate” with similar shopping tastes (Schen, 2012). Nowadays, consumers as buyers become active producer of content over the Internet (Ickler et al., 2009) and are no longer passive as in the past. Social interaction (Kim and Srivastana, 2007) became the predominant element in the social commerce process and the creation of the relationship between consumers is now what drives the conversation: consumers are signalling the way businesses have to follow. Customers are increasingly familiarizing themselves with social media and retailers cannot ignore the phenomenon: the challenge of the future for retailers within Town Centre is to acquire the skills to be able to facilitate collaborative experiences and relationships between customers (Baird and Parasnis, 2011).

**Mobile Commerce and Quick Response Technology**

The development of mobile commerce (m-commerce) is very recent and it is related to the conjunction between wireless telecommunications and the Internet application (Balasubramanian, et al., 2002; Khalifa and Shen, 2008; Khalifa et al., 2012; Lu et al., 2012; Zhang et al. 2012) that have
increased the rapid growth of the mobile variant of e-commerce (van de Kar, 2000; Siau et al., 2004; Zhang et al., 2012).

The emergence of this new way of commerce is particularly related to the growing number of consumers with smart phones or other mobile devices, Internet-capable (Siau et al., 2004). In fact, by 2015 mobile commerce will grow to around $119 billion of the global industry (Khalifa et al., 2012).

Consumers in the last years acquired another way to access worldwide information about products or services from anywhere and anytime (Chang et al., 2009; Bhatti, 2007; Lu et al., 2012) and consequently to conduct electronic business transactions from their mobile devices (Kalakota and Robinson, 2002; Mahatanankoon, 2007; Li et al, 2011). Mobile commerce can be considered as an extension of e-commerce (van de Kar, 2000; Siau et al., 2004; Zhang et al., 2012) that retailers within Town Centre have to face and then become able to integrate this kind of selling with the traditional form.

The main characteristics that m-commerce offer to consumers are the mobility and broad reach; in particular, the mobility implies that people have the possibility to purchase something through their mobile devices and also that they can be reached at any time via a mobile device (Ngai and Gunasekaran, 2007).

Mobile commerce could become increasingly important for consumers and retailers within Town centre. More precisely, consumers through m-commerce have the opportunities to research product information, run price comparisons and even make online purchases by using their mobile devices (Siau et al., 2001; Siau et al., 2004). Therefore, consumers have the possibility to connect the online and offline worlds as shown in figure 3.

Also retailers, on the other hand, by implementing the use of mobile technologies in their business strategy can obtain the opportunity to connect their online and physical store in order to combine the strengths of e-commerce and traditional shopping (Siau et al., 2004). Town Centre retailers have to exploit, in the best possible way, the potentialities offered by m-commerce and to connect their online window and fixed store enabling the connection of the two by the use the new technologies. These could help retailers to combine the strengths of e-commerce and traditional shopping in order to interact with clients or, more precisely, to connect the virtual and physical world. One of the technologies that retailers can use to achieve their goal is Quick Response Technology (QRT) that enables to help retailers in the connection between their physical shop and mobile devices (Okazaki et al., 2012; Okazaki and Mendez, 2013). More specifically, Quick response is a technology that permits the implementation of technologies such as bar-coding, scanner, and so on and through QR code retailers can obtain profits in return for delivering
satisfaction through improved store attributes (Ko, 1993; Ko and Kinkade, 1997; Cyr et al., 2006; Meydanoglu, 2013).

Figure 3: Qr Technology and Mobile commerce

To achieve the goal of having better operational efficiency and retaining effectiveness, Quick response (QR) could be an element of a retail strategy in the Town Centre shops. The shops placed in the Town Centre that possesses QR Technology, have the possibilities to connect the physical shop to the virtual world via mobile devices. In other words, QRT technology can be considered a tool that helps retailers to connect their physical store to the electronic commerce world.

The digital footprint within Town Centre Retail

As shown by the discussion regarding the e-technologies, each of them possesses special characteristics which, appropriately applied, can help Town Centre to overcome the negative trend in which they have found themselves. More precisely, considering that e-commerce, s-commerce and m-commerce possess relevant specifics, retailers working in the Town Centre can adopt a combination of them to create an offer that possesses strong competitive advantage compared to the out of town malls.

To better understand in what way Town Centre can combine the three e-technologies, it is useful to consider the following schemes (figure 4) that synthesize the essential phases of the flow, starting from a personal computer or a mobile device to arrive at the final point that is “purchase”.

Figure 4 - E-commerce, S-commerce and M-commerce Process
Analysing the three elements of the scheme, it emerged that one phase is common to all: “searching products and information over the Net”, and that only social commerce is characterized by the phase of sharing through social media between B2C and C2C”

Due to the fact that nowadays clients are more and more interested into being emotionally involved also by sharing their own experience – independently on the products or services they have the aim to buy – the s-commerce must be considered with broad attention. (Hsiao et al., 2010; Lee and Ma, 2012).

The implication is that Town Centre retailers can find the way to its revolution embracing the potentiality of s-commerce. For example, to become the promoter of a community (on Facebook, or similar) sharing with “friends” members of the community, not only information regarding products or services but specifically sharing the historical, cultural, social, environmental heritage that is embedded in the Town Centre and that obviously, adequately communicated constitutes an inimitable competitive advantage.

Starting from the previous reflections, a virtuous circle can be highlighted as shown in the figure 5:
1 – in the past the strength of the Town Centre has been the physical shop that nowadays, while maintaining the physical dimension, is shifting to the e-commerce dimensions;
2 – the subsequent evolution saw the sellers shifting from e-commerce to s-commerce, reducing the strength of the physical shop but increasing the relationship with their clients;
3 – the increasing diffusion of mobile devices put sellers in front of another challenge: how to communicate information on products and services via mobile? The technology - with the QR code, for example – gives, a useful answer. Via this code it is possible to create a link between physical and virtual shop where, for instance, the client can get in touch with the code when the physical shop is closed but since the virtual one is always open he/she can satisfy their goal to purchase.
In summary, the proposed model exhibits that physical shops and e-technologies are part of the same virtuous circle and that together, they can give potentiality able to, on one hand, increase the sales in shops in the Town centre, and on the other hand, stimulate the knowledge. In this way, there is a good perspective that visiting and experimenting the emotion that the Town Centre heritage can offer leaves an interesting experience.

Figure 5 – Virtuous circle

Conclusion

The analysis presented in this paper, clearly underlines that Town Centre retailers need to understand that the traditional way of selling now must be revitalized with the implementation of the use of Internet and new technologies in order to enhance the possibility to sell products and services, to create a strong customer loyalty with old customers but also to increase the possibility to attract new customers. Virtual and physical worlds must be joined in order to create a place where people can go physically but they can stay connected also virtually, for example, when they are in another part of the world or simply at home. Only the potentialities offered by the web allow reaching people anytime and anywhere. Retailers have to involve customers in a great manner in the experience of shopping by using every kind of innovative tools at their disposal. For this reason, it is not sufficient to create websites to sell products or services. It is important to offer instruments to support real life commerce activities. Inasmuch today the act of commerce has become a social one and so it must be on the Internet, consequently people choose and buy following their emotions, impressions or feelings.
If in the traditional form of selling, retailers have only one way to sell products, which is from their physical shop in downtown street, nowadays thanks to the implementation of the new form of selling, retailers have a lot of possibilities to sell their products. From this point of view, Town Centre retailers have the possibility to revitalize the urban trade by discovering the technological way to attract consumers creating strong relationships through the opportunities offered by Social Commerce and driving the customers attention to the Town Centre activities, events, special offers, and similar attractions. Retailers have to look in particular at the combination of mobile and contactless technologies such as (QR) that are able to engage consumers in and out of the store and create an interactive store experience.

Therefore, the main challenge for Town Centre retailers is to give consumers a richer shopping experience, encourage them to stay longer in a retailer’s physical store also when the store is closed and create the possibility to engage customers in the store life. With an interactive role between the physical and virtual, it is possible to create events that stimulate people to buy on-line and at the same time meet the community physically.
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8. Conclusion

The dissertation provides a broad vision on the Town Centre Management research field, focusing the attention to the understanding of the Town Centre problems and to the strategies adopted by TCM in order to preserve the traditional Town Centre. In this work we set to answer several research questions that help us to find some practical and empirical implications. More precisely: in the first paper, the analysis of the literature showed the point of view of scholars by identifying the differences and similarities and verifying the role of retail activities in the perspective of the Town Centre revitalization. Clearly emerged that the attention of scholars in the 80s when the concept of TCM appeared for the first time, it was focused on the enhancement of quality of shopping in downtown shopping streets. Subsequently, a consistent numbers of contributions attested that scholars and practitioners concentrated their efforts to identify what kind of strategies can be useful to adopt by TCM to improve and maintain the vitality and viability of the Town Centre. In the 90s, the attention of scholars was principally concentrated on the problems that derived from the phenomenon of decentralization of retail activities out of Town Centre, in order to identify principal causes that determined this phenomenon and identify what strategies can be useful to stop it. The role of retailing in the Town Centre emerged as one of the most basic factors in the development of local economy and several scholars’ contribution helps us to understand the role played by retailers to the revitalization of Town Centre. Inasmuch, the Town Centre survival depends, on one hand, on the centrality of retailers but, on the other, also on the creation and application of innovative ways by which they can interact with their consumers in order to create customer retention and loyalty. Several scholars highlighted the collaboration between public and private sector as one of the major factors that drive the revitalization of Town Centre. From that joint commitment it is possible to create strategies that have the potential to preserve the Town Centre. In particular, TCM have a central role in the inspiration of the collaboration between retailers that work together to achieve the same goal: the Town Centre revitalization. The implications that derived from the first paper is that Town Centre can reacquire a central role if it manages to create a strong but contemporary flexible network of collaboration between human beings involved in the process of Town Centre revitalization, and via this network gives the correct attention to the adoption of the social network potentiality to develop their activities.

To corroborate these implications, the second paper offers a broad range of tips and suggestions for both academics and practitioners. In fact, academics can draw stimuli for researches which, by comparing several cities’ experiences, different organizations’ answers and people’s behaviours, can contribute to specify existing theories or build new ones in relation to the big changes that are possible to identify from the analysed cases. The specific cases studied in the
second paper show that the problem regarding the Town Centre revitalization assumed a really specific feature in each of the analysed Cities. In particular, the multiple case study methodology adopted permitted to make a comparison between different realities in order to have a base useful to clarify the several multifaceted aspects of the same phenomenon.

Through the experiences analysed, it is possible to highlight how the efforts of different kinds of organizations that work for the Town Centre renaissance, are all directed to the creation of a new Town Centre life. The different elements that characterised the Swedish and Italian context, have been useful to analyse in order to understand how different schemes of TCM like “Stockholm CitySamverkan”, “Västerås Samverkan”, “DUC” and “CCN”, developed in different Countries, working in the same direction: drive the re-birth of Town Centre. In the Swedish context, this goal is achieved through the development of TCM aimed to increase the attractiveness of the Town Centre and the revitalization of its retailing (e.g. Stockholm) with the intent to promote the urban area as a new place where people can meet, buy something and interact with each others (e.g. Västerås). In the Italian context, the creation of TCM was promoted in order to protect the heritage of the traditional Town Centre and contrast the consequent situation related to the depopulation and isolation, and to preserve the heritage of this area.

Furthermore the implications that derive from this second paper can be suitable also for practitioners that collaborate for the Town Centre revitalization. In fact, the four Cities’ experiences studied, can constitute a relevant base, both for the individuation of new strategies that can be adopted in the perspective of Town Centre revitalization, and to avoid errors identified in the development of the considered experiences; in particular, it emerged from this study that the Town Centre problems are involving an increasing number of cities in Europe. So, such studies and interventions are in progress and certainly will lead to really interesting future researches.

Strictly connected with the second paper are the results that emerged in the third paper: a model that TCM or other organizations inside the Town Centre can experiment to create a competitive advantage able to evaluate the Town Centre. The core of the model is the proposal of a strong combination between physical store and the adoption of e-technologies in the creation of a virtuous circle: the combination that emerges from this thesis is, on one hand, able to clarify what is the state of the art with reference to the analysed topic, and on other, to give a practical suggestion to the way by which retailers in the Town Centre can reacquire their role.