

Introduction

Retail is one of the most dynamic economic sectors in cities with important impacts on the habitability of urban areas. Traditionally, city centers have occupied a privileged position in the urban hierarchy of city functions. However, with the suburbanization of housing and jobs, soon, thereafter, retailing also relocated to the suburbs from the downtown's CBDs. Although this phenomenon has been occurring in the United States practically since the end of World War II, this trend was only experienced in Southern European countries much more recently. Furthermore, the scale of an agglomeration tends to dictate the number of subcenters and their relationships, usually via higher-density developments near expressway interchanges and railroad/subway stations.

This book is concerned with the revitalization of city centers in cities of various sizes across the Atlantic Ocean. The main research assumption is that the automobile has been greatly responsible for enabling the relocation of households and families to the suburbs. The building of highways and expressways facilitated regular movement between suburbs and central areas and among peripheral neighborhoods, in certain cases even without the need to drive through the center of town. An automobile-centric lifestyle has had devastating consequences for city centers. Directly and indirectly, city centers had to create space for the increasing number of vehicles passing through and, in most cases, demanding parking at relatively low costs. With the building of suburban shopping malls and commercial plazas, incrementally, city centers began losing their centrality as marketplaces. This cycle of decline has been discussed extensively in the literature.

This book explains how cities of various sizes mostly in the Iberian Peninsula (i.e., Braga, Guimarães, and Porto in Portugal; Burgos, Valladolid,

and Barcelona in Spain), Latin America (i.e., São Paulo in Brazil and Mexico City in Mexico), and relatively low and dense North American cities (i.e., Phoenix, Arizona, and New York City, respectively) have been conducting urban revitalization processes where walkability improvements contributed to strengthening downtown and midtown centralities and various other urban functions, including vibrancy, livability, partial eradication of homelessness, pedestrian and bicyclist safety, tourism, and sustainable consumption, among others.

This book is organized in three parts. Part 1 is about small, medium, and very large cities in the Ibero-America world. Part 2 is about two polar opposites: Phoenix in Arizona and Manhattan in New York. Finally, Part 3 is about one particular variant of commercial urbanism: tourism planning in the context of urban revitalization and consumption in Figueira da Foz, and how the implementation of commercial urbanism projects throughout Portugal in the 2000s has impacted consumption and solid waste generation.

The presentation of the case studies in the book follows a regional and scale-oriented criterion, from relatively small and medium-size towns and cities to the largest mega-cities in South and North America, all to a certain extent centered on privileged historic and cultural relationships across the Atlantic Ocean. The main case studies range from a little less than 100 thousand for the medium-size cities to about 10 million for the large American ones. Also, the case studies were selected based on my direct contact through either extended periods of residence or multiple study visits to the various cities during the last two decades.

Following this introduction, the book includes eight chapters and a conclusion. After reviewing some of the myths and best practice theoretical principles on the revitalization of urban centers in chapter 1, chapter 2 analyzes pedestrian precincts in four medium-size Iberian cities: Braga, Guimarães, Burgos, and Valladolid. This chapter also examines the impact of commercial urbanism improvements on the overall livability of the four city centers. The research was based on mostly qualitative methods that included multiple site visits to the four case studies at different times during the late 2000s and again in early 2014, extensive literature synthesis, and twelve approximately one-hour-long semi-structured interviews with employees and business owners in various economic sectors, residents, and administrators.

Chapter 2 identifies five major findings. First, major changes in the digital economy may have impacted walking levels for customary services in city centers. Second, the improvement of city centers has contributed to an increase in the leisure and night-time economy. Third, neighborhood special-

ization might have detrimental impacts to the overall city center livability. Fourth, local governments are relying on their expertise, creative funding strategies, and established collaborations to maintain existing programs and eventually start new ones. Fifth, cities' scales, proactive collaboration climate, and political leadership are found to influence the dynamics, complexities, and opportunities for the continued success of commercial urbanism projects in medium-size cities.

One of the chapter's takeaways is that to be fully effective, walkability improvements to public spaces in downtown areas need to be coordinated with other appropriate legislative and management programs. Furthermore, city scale (structure) and political leadership ability (agency) influence the dynamics, complexities, and opportunities for the continued success of the initial commercial urbanism improvements.

Chapter 3 analyzes four walk-only commercial precincts in the Ibero-American world. The research assumption is that the downtowns of global cities in Latin America have undergone transformative experiences relatively similar to those of the global north, with a slight time lag and with a higher presence of the informal sector. This chapter's argument is that the study of governance practices within contexts of urban revitalization is important to understand whether similar phenomena in distinct contexts have been dealt with differently and have produced relatively unique outcomes in terms of improved public spaces, a reinvigorated built environment, and more robust governance networks, especially at the neighborhood and city levels.

The pedestrianization of main streets seems to offer an important opportunity for this type of analysis. The key findings of chapter 3 include the realization that the promotion of a culture of walking is critical to the survival of livable cities and that walk-only commercial precincts play an important role in ensuring urban vibrancy. Public intervention is not only needed to create quality urban spaces but also to maintain adequate levels of urban vitality, free of crime and without the monopoly of strong interests that often tend to privatize and exclude citizens from the public realm.

City centers go through cycles of growth, decline, and revitalization, but not everybody benefits equally. Using Phoenix as a case study, Chapter 4 utilizes an eclectic array of data sources from personal interviews, focus groups, media sources, public reports, and technical studies to identify how institutional and civic leaders and citizens have traditionally responded to the presence of homeless individuals in the city prior to the 2008–2009 global financial crisis. The argument is that ending homelessness ought to be an integral part of the process of revitalizing urban areas. The chapter

advances seven recommendations for addressing homelessness in contexts of downtown revitalization.

Chapter 5 recognizes that commerce has always influenced the development and growth of cities. The relationship between urban development and trade has given rise to the emergence of different types of spontaneous and planned commercial formats, depending on people's needs, technologies of production and distribution, sale and storage techniques, and the technical innovation of firms. The Phoenix metropolitan area in Arizona is an interesting case study due to its multitude of recent commercial developments with a mix of modern and postmodern formats and the transformations and adaptations that resulted from the global financial crisis.

Therefore, Chapter 5 analyzes the innovative characteristics of four commercial formats in the Phoenix metropolitan area (i.e., the Phoenix public market, a "lifestyle center" in northern Phoenix on the border with Scottsdale, the Tempe Marketplace in Tempe, and the shopping area in terminal four of Phoenix's Sky Harbor International Airport). Finally, it also discusses a set of implications for the future of commercial developments in the Western world: local-global, material-sensorial, essential-dispensable, and authentic-illusory.

Chapter 6 examines the motivations, designs, and expectations behind the recent walkability improvements to New York City's Times Square district. This chapter emerged from the research assumption that the existence of safe, attractive, and comfortable walking environments is critical to the vibrancy of downtowns in global cities. Such a policy goal is a significant departure from the traditional transportation planning approach that has catered mostly to the needs of drivers.

The argument of Chapter 6 is that the creation of an almost exhilarating "theme park" setting in the core of Manhattan is as much an example of American neoliberalism as it is a demonstration of liberty, and a human desire made so by marketing campaigns, which increasingly broadcast Times Square and American-inspired globalization to the rest of the world. The impacts of the redesign works from both management's and users' perspectives are identified and discussed, including: first, a world-class status; second, localized street improvements as part of a comprehensive public spaces redesign; third, real vibrancy gains for the district; and fourth, demonstrative potential for the creation of walkable areas elsewhere.

Tourism, like other economic sectors, is also subjected to major market fluctuations. Established tourism destinations are impacted by internal socioeconomic changes and leadership options as well as by exogenous

forces and tendencies, events, and sectoral innovations. Chapter 7 answers the research question of whether cities can augment their endogenous tourism potential while reducing their volatility to outside forces by devising and implementing a tourism planning strategy as part of their community economic development programs. The chapter analyzes the case of a traditional “sun and sea” tourism city in central Portugal: Figueira da Foz. It is argued that over the last fifty years Figueira da Foz has had to reinvent its tourism branding and positioning multiple times through a myriad of city marketing and infrastructure development strategies to circumvent territorial and societal hurdles. The key finding is that tourism reinvention beyond consumption-oriented planning is necessary to withstand major socioeconomic and territorial transformations.

Chapter 8 analyzes the relationships among physical improvements to public spaces, increased levels of consumption, generation of solid waste, and associated environmental climate change pressures in the context of the Portuguese commercial urbanism projects of the 2000s decade. It ought to be clear by now that revitalizing city centers to become mostly privileged arenas of consumption has negative consequences from a triple-bottom line sustainability perspective. Commerce involves high levels of exchanges and consumption. Although commercial urbanism in contexts of urban revitalization has been used by decision-makers to improve the urban livability of cities, these revitalization interventions have increased the pressures on other more peripheral and fragile, but equally important, urban areas.

Therefore, Chapter 8 also discusses the relationship between merchants’ participation rates in Portuguese commercial urbanism projects and waste generation in four regional jurisdictions (i.e., *distritos*) of the north-central coastal region of Portugal. The chapter closes with a set of four implications for future policy actions. The first implication is the need for reduction, recycling, and reuse. The second, more emphasis on sustainable consumption. The third, the promotion of a circular economy. And the fourth, the implementation of a zero-waste city strategy.

Finally, the conclusion discusses the need to base urban revitalization interventions on more sustainable consumption practices that do not necessarily entail higher growth levels but instead aim at improving quality of life in cities.