Editorial

Silke Weidner

Professor, Department of Urban Planning, Chair of Urban Management,
Brandenburgische Technische Universität Cottbus-Senftenberg (BTU),
Cottbus, Germany

The idea for the themed issue on smart retail and future urban trade was raised long before the Covid-19 situation. An informal network of researchers and practitioners on city and retail (Wissensnetzwerk Stadt und Handel, 2020) meets in irregular intervals to discuss topics on retail and inner-city development. We decided that an issue on this research field is overdue in these dynamic times. The Covid-19 pandemic now makes this topic much more relevant, interesting and more broadly discussable. Perhaps even more authors would have submitted further articles – being in this extraordinary situation – also for retail & trading, the inner cities and corresponding urban places as well as real estate. But this themed issue already reports on the changing situations in retail chains, trading concepts, mixed use approaches, technological innovations and digitization as well as changing social demands and behavior patterns. So perhaps we'll need another special issue on the umbrella topic of 'post-pandemic inner city situations' in the coming years.

Trade has always been changing. Trade and retail are one of the basic and core functions of city-centers since their origin. Every change in this relationship raises questions as to whether existing functions and formats are still contemporary in the respective urban planning context. In the last decade there has been an enormous change from stationary trade to an increasing e-commerce. Digitisation is considered as a key transformation in urban development and retail, and based on the fast going transformation mixed concepts such as multi-channel trade, cross-channel purchasing as well as click-and-collect are just a few key points in the trade sector. Retail and the built spaces, mostly inner-city centers, are still looking for the right way to keep them attractive – even with an obviously decreasing stationary retail sector – but perhaps with more mixed use offers of leisure and culture, living, working and supply, social affairs, education and events. City-centers need to attract their citizens and guests. Thus experiments and trials – in some examples out of great necessity – are being carried out.

This ranges from dealing with special real estate of the retail trade, such as department stores to new store concepts or technological systems, and ideas to make these new things most comfortable. These questions and topics were also taken

up in the papers on our call for papers. They deal with the matter, both technically and non-technically, on different fields and scales: real estate, urban planning, smaller and bigger cities as well as special retail properties.

Stepper and Kurth (2020), from Kaiserslautern Technical University, address with their paper the transformation strategies for inner-city retail locations in the face of E-commerce, and discuss the entire city. It investigates if inner-city retail locations can find new attractive offers and functions, or if vacancies and trading down effects will threaten them. Six transformation strategies are recommended. This should help to increase the quality of the inner cities and thus their attractiveness.

Hangebruch (2020), from the Technical University Dortmund, takes a deeper look at one special business type. Over the last 25 years, Germany has had extensive experience regarding the conversion of former department store properties. These buildings are being less frequently re-used as pure shopping destinations. Instead, hybrid, multifunctional re-uses are increasing, especially since 2015. Analyzed examples show that redevelopment for new uses is time-consuming and technically complex, but generally feasible in the existing buildings.

Ribbeck-Lampel (2020), from the Brandenburg Technical University Cottbus-Senftenberg, presents a paper on the initial findings of an exploratory study into the spatial distribution patterns of selected developments in physical retail that are significantly influenced by digitisation. In short, the paper constated a lack of verified studies and results regarding the effects of digitisation on urban space but shows some hints as well.

Korzer *et al.* (2020), from Leipzig University, give a glimpse into their research on digital tools which they tested in an inter- and transdisciplinary setting in their paper on 'Rethinking retail digitisation in urban settings. The case of Leipzig, Germany'.

The authors all shed light on these current developments with their different potentials and risks for the sector of retail and our cities – the small and the big ones, and especially their

heart, the inner-city centers. They all work analytically, but also conceptually and competently. I hope you'll enjoy reading and that your research, projects and discussions will be inspired by it.

REFERENCES

- Hangebruch N (2020) The clue is the mix. Multifunctional re-uses in former retail real estate properties. *Urban Design and Planning* **173(5)**: 171–183, <https://doi.org/10.1680/jurdp.20.00041>.
- Korzer T, Hübscher M, Schade K and Ringel J (2020) Rethinking retail digitisation in urban settings. The case of Leipzig, Germany. *Urban Design and Planning* **173(5)**: 199–211, <https://doi.org/10.1680/jurdp.19.00019>.
- Ribbeck-Lampel J (2020) The digitalisation of stationery retail and its urban effects. *Urban Design and Planning* **173(5)**: 184–198, <https://doi.org/10.1680/jurdp.20.00050>.
- Stepper M and Kurth D (2020) Transformation strategies for inner-city retail locations in the face of E-commerce. *Urban Design and Planning* **173(5)**: 159–170, <https://doi.org/10.1680/jurdp.19.00017>.
- Wissensnetzwerk Stadt und Handel (2020) www.wissensnetzwerk-stadt-handel.de (accessed 06/11/2020).