



Looking at retail planning policy through a sustainability lens: Evidence from policy discourse in Finland

Laura Yrjänä, Anahita Rashidfarokhi*, Saija Toivonen, Kauko Viitanen

Department of Built Environment, School of Engineering, Aalto University, Espoo, Finland



ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:

Retail planning
Retail planning policy
Retail location
Sustainability
Policy discourse

ABSTRACT

This study aims to identify and categorise the sustainability concerns raised in retail planning policy discourse, using empirical data from Finland. In order to identify the concerns, we conducted a critical discourse analysis of the policy discourse presented in media from 1990 to 2015. The analysis was conducted chronologically in order to understand the evolution of the sustainability concerns and the changes in the policy debate. To categorise the concerns identified from the discourse, we developed a holistic sustainability framework based on previous literature. Our findings show that during 1990's the concerns were mostly socio-economic, however, due to enforcement of sustainable development policies, the share of environmental concerns raised significantly in 2000s. The findings of our study reveal the problematics of the retail planning policy making and call for a more holistic understanding of the multidimensionality of the sustainability impacts of retail planning.

1. Introduction

Retail planning policies have been in the midst of a major change all over Europe in the last decades, due to concern over the negative impacts of out-of-town centres, such as increased car dependency and the decline of small town centres (Bell et al., 1997; Cliquet, 2000; Doak, 2009; Erkip et al., 2013; Evers, 2001; Garside et al., 2003; Goncalves and Ferreira, 2015; Guy, 2007; Henderson, 2011; Wiese et al., 2015; Yrjänä, 2012; Zetter and Watson, 2006). Although there has been quite a clear consensus on the certain impacts of out-of-town centres, there seem to be difficulties in finding a holistic planning policy approach that would reduce these impacts. Therefore, planning policies are constantly changing from being restrictive to being relaxed and back again, depending on which retail policy objectives are being politically prioritised (Schmidt and Radaelli, 2004).

For example, in the UK the negative effects of out-of-town retailing were addressed by providing planning policy guidance in 1996, with the objective of protecting the existing town centres (Guy, 2007; Hallsworth et al., 1997; Sadun, 2015). This was in contrast to the 1980s policy in which retail developers were encouraged by the central government to expand out of town (Guy, 2007). In the Netherlands, planning policy for retail spaces has always been strongly focused on protecting the existing retail structures and, for a long period, retail location policy was strictly controlled on the national level (Van der

Krabben, 2009). However, since 2004, the Dutch national government allowed a decentralised planning model that was believed to be able to address the negative impacts of out-of-town retailing more efficiently (Janssen-Jansen, 2016; Van der Krabben, 2009). Also in Finland, the motivation for new retail planning regulations in 1999 was the protection of small local stores and town centres and more power was given to municipalities to control new retail development. These regulations were made even more restrictive in 2011 in order to tackle the negative environmental impacts of out-of-town retailing as part of climate change mitigation policies (Yrjänä, 2012). However, since 2016, the regulations have been relaxed to some extent. Similar concerns over growing, large out-of-town retailing have been observed in France and Denmark (Tuohimaa, 1996).

As seen in the previous examples, there seem to be similarities in the motivations to guide retail planning. However, due to the differences in the cultural framework, governance and planning systems of these European countries, the chosen policy approaches to retail planning differ (see for example, Fernandes and Chamusca, 2014). Extra pressure comes from the requirement of the European Union that all the member states should integrate sustainability into all their policies and activities as well as the rising importance of corporate social responsibility. However, integrating sustainability in retail planning policies is a complex and multidimensional task for policymakers as they have to address the needs of the retail industry and encourage competition;

* Corresponding author at: Real Estate Research Group, Department of Built Environment, School of Engineering, Aalto University, P.O. Box 14100, 00076, AALTO, Espoo, Finland.

E-mail address: anahita.rashidfarokhi@aalto.fi (A. Rashidfarokhi).

provide an equitable system of shopping opportunities for all groups; preserve the old traditions and legacies; and reduce the negative environmental impacts of the retail location (Bell et al., 1997; Campbell, 2016; Jackson and Watkins, 2005; Jones, 2014). Although the literature recognises the importance of planning regulations, still relatively little is known about how these regulations actually affect retailing (Nishida, 2014) and how the stakeholders of the retail planning process react to these changes. Various stakeholders are involved in the retail planning process and have diverse and often contradictory concerns about the sustainability of retail planning policies. A better understanding of the reasoning for the raised concerns is imperative in capturing the complexity of the issue.

Therefore, the aim of this paper is to identify and categorise the sustainability concerns raised in retail planning policy discourse, using empirical data from Finland. In order to identify the concerns, we conduct a critical discourse analysis of the policy discourse presented in the media, especially in newspaper articles. The discourse was analysed chronologically between 1990 and 2015 in order to understand the evolution of the sustainability concerns and the changes in the policy debate. We used public discourse as a source because it has a role in forming the interpretation of political dilemma and affects the perceptions of what is at stake in a policy debate (Radaelli, 2003). By highlighting certain opinions and concerns, public discourse also has the ability to transform the interests and preferences upon which negotiations are structured (Radaelli, 2003; Phillips et al., 2004). From public discourse, we can analyse the ongoing policy debate and see how the objectives are discursively formulated and communicated to stakeholders (Schmidt and Radaelli, 2004). Media has a prime role in communicating information and simultaneously acts as a platform for pushing different agendas in the policy debate (Saraisky, 2016). Media frames the issues, ideas and themes that serve as key elements in the ongoing policy discourse among citizens, policymakers and journalists (Saraisky, 2016). By increasing the knowledge of the concerns under debate in the policy discourse we can help policy makers to understand the multidimensionality of sustainability concerns related to retail planning. Addressing these concerns could, in turn, improve the legitimacy of new retail planning policies.

The originality of this study lies in the application of a framework which helps us break down the raised concerns into different dimensions of sustainability, understand their interconnections and see what concerns are prioritised in the policy discourse. The framework is developed based on a comprehensive review of the extant retail literature and increases the holistic understanding of the multidimensionality of the sustainability of retail planning, which to the authors' knowledge was missing from the field.

The rest of this paper is structured as follows. Section 2 reviews existing literature on the economic, environmental and social impacts of retail planning. Section 3 describes the development of retailing and the legislation for retail planning in Finland and explains the methodology for collecting and categorising the policy discourse in Finland. Section 4 presents the categorised sustainability concerns identified from the policy discourse and discusses the evolution of the policy debate. Section 5 provides the concluding remarks.

2. The sustainability impacts of retail planning policy

The decentralisation of retailing has been a continuous trend over several decades (Jones, 2014). The reason to locate out of town came from the increased need for space, firstly from grocery retailers, secondly from bulk retailers, and the development of large shopping centres caused the third wave of out-of-town retailing (Ratcliffe et al., 2009). Consumers also preferred out-of-town centres due to the lower prices and a wider selection of goods that these centres could provide (Guy, 2007). The negative impact of out-of-town centres on the viability of the existing town centres, equal accessibility, urban sprawl and increased emissions have prompted a substantial debate among

academics and policy makers regarding if more control over the growth of out-of-town centres reduces the negative impacts of retailing from a sustainability point of view (Breheny, 1995).

The definition of *sustainable development* has become the core of policy debates all over the world since the Earth Summit conference in Rio in 1992, where the attention was focused on the potential of policy action to achieve sustainable development (Mazza and Rydin, 1997). This has led to the emergence of a large body of literature. The terms *sustainable development* and *sustainability* have now come into mutual parlance, referring to development that 'meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of the future generations to meet their own needs' (Brundtland Commission, 1987). The concept of *needs* deals with the economic growth that is necessary for the fulfilment of the needs. It also has a social aspect as the matter is not only about changing the present consumption of resources for the sake of future generations, but it is also about recognising that the definition of needs is dependent on a range of cultural norms and values (Mazza and Rydin, 1997). Simultaneously, meeting the needs of the present involves debate on the limited environmental resources, our extensive GHG emissions and the destruction of natural habitats. Finding a balanced policy solution to these contradictory dimensions is often a challenge and retail planning is an area in which this is not an exception.

The majority of the extant studies on retail planning and policies have focused on specific sustainability problematics. However, in order to understand the linkages between sustainable development and retail planning policies we need a holistic picture that shows the interconnections and contradictions between the different sustainability impacts of retail planning. Thus, in the following paragraphs, we present the impacts identified from the literature under the three dimensions of sustainability. The identified impacts will work as the base for developing a holistic retail planning sustainability framework. The framework is presented in Section 3 and is used to categorise the sustainability impacts identified from the policy discourse on retail planning in Section 4.

2.1. Economic impacts

Retail planning affects the economy in several ways. Retail location affects the number of customers, the retail sales and, therefore, the profitability (Chhetri et al., 2017; Yrjänä and Uotinen, 2010). Retail planning also contributes to economic viability (evening economy), cost efficiency and economic regeneration (Ghadge et al., 2016; Hallsworth et al., 1997; Jones et al., 2007; Lowe, 2005). Retail also plays a role in providing employment opportunities for the local population and generates tax money for municipalities (De Sousa, 2000; Padilla et al., 2017; Yrjänä and Uotinen, 2010). With retail planning we can promote the competitive environment (Guy and Bennison, 2002; Padilla et al., 2017), and support the viability and vitality of town centres by offering a mix of shops and services that address the daily needs of citizens (Jones et al., 2007; Padilla et al., 2017; Yrjänä and Uotinen, 2010).

2.2. Environmental impacts

Retail planning plays a major role in urban environmental sustainability. The location of retail affects the mode of transportation (private or public) that consumers can choose (Arranz-Lopez et al., 2017; Björklund et al., 2016; Guy, 2007; Hallsworth et al., 1997; Jiao et al., 2016; Soltani and Allan, 2006; Wiese et al., 2015; Yrjänä and Uotinen, 2010). The contribution of retail location to urban freight, trip length, GHG emissions and air/noise pollution mitigation could be achieved by focusing on accessibility (Carley et al., 2001; Cherrett et al., 2012; Chhetri et al., 2017; Ghadge et al., 2016; Guy and Bennison, 2002; Jiao et al., 2016; Määttä-Juntunen et al., 2011; Wiese et al., 2015). Out-of-town retailing causes urban sprawl, which can have a negative impact on greenfield sites. Locating retail to brownfield sites could contribute to the protection of biodiversity and green areas (Erkip et al., 2013; De

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/6545993>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/6545993>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)