

Article

Urban Commerce and Protected Cultural Landscape

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Abstract: From the analysis of the urban landscape, the investigation focuses on the role of commerce in historical urban areas and their relations at present with the landscape, in relation to the preservation of heritage values. Trade plays an essential role in historical urban areas, both in its past and in its present, since it is part of the urban landscape, creating it and modifying it but also preserving it. The historical protected urban areas contain diverse elements that reflect the impact of the commercial activity existing in the city throughout history. At present, the urban landscape of commercial activity is made up of a multiplicity of typologies and formats. Trade interacts with the historical landscape in which it is developed and the heritage values of that landscape, using them to strengthen its strategies of attraction, differentiation and sales. The shop owners contribute to the preservation of historic urban areas by maintaining the commercial function in them. Therefore, we affirm that the role of commercial activity in the preservation of urban protected areas is essential. However, further research is needed because the scientific community specializing in the management of cultural heritage has not deepened in this aspect.

Keywords: urban commerce; cultural landscape; historic city; cultural heritage; management

1. Introduction

The transformations brought about by the Industrial Revolution triggered the evolution of the conservative concern from the isolated monument to the historic areas, coinciding with what Françoise Choay called the conquest of the disciplinary status of the conservation of historical monuments [1]. A process that was configured during the first half of the 20th century until its consecration in the 1960s, as a consequence of the regeneration operations that followed the devastation caused by the two Great Wars in numerous urban areas.

From that moment on, the milestones that were going to mark the doctrine in relation to the city as a cultural heritage and the consequent task of preserving the values that make it worthy of that condition began to occur. The notion of a protected urban landscape was configured by the jump from the isolated monument to the historic area, although, it is already implicit in the concept of Monument as its Curtilage.

In relation to historical protected cities, the bibliography points out the importance of functional elements to guarantee the balance between preservation and habitability [2-9]. However, the analysis of the evolution of the supranational doctrine of cultural heritage published in the texts of UNESCO, ICOMOS and the Council of Europe- shows that functional issues have not been the subject of monographic development, although its importance for historic urban areas has been recognized.

Among the functional elements is the commercial activity [10], which appears implicit from the first international texts. They are only reflected as a negative element, through negative criticism related to the impacts of advertising [11-12]. Also the first time that it is mentioned explicitly [13] would again be in a negative sense, due to its impacts on the historical landscape. In 1976 UNESCO recognized for the first time the positive value of trade in the preservation of historic urban areas [2],

specifically for revitalization processes. Also in this text, revitalization is considered a part of the safeguarding of heritage and human activity as a value to be preserved, which would include commercial activity. Its recommendations also include the prioritization of joint projects between groups of owners and merchants. Commercial activity is not going to be treated extensively in the doctrinal texts of Cultural Heritage but its importance for urban vitality and as an indicator of degradation of an area has been confirmed in the daily management of cities.

The main objective of the work is to analyze the role of trade in historical urban areas and its current relationship with the countryside, in relation to the preservation of its heritage values.

2. Line of work and methodology

La investigación se sitúa en la relación entre la preservación de las áreas urbanas históricas y su adaptación to the needs that contemporary society demands of them in order to continue living within them.

In particular, we focus on urban commerce, as it is one of the elements that has received the least monographic attention from the priority focus of the preservation and scientific knowledge of Cultural Heritage.

There is a large bibliography devoted to the management of commercial activity in urban areas, which in some cases looks at areas with heritage protection, but generally concentrates on the analysis of economic and management aspects [14-21], lacking a deep Cultural Heritage-oriented approach.

The research method used is based on the empirical study of the object of attention, from the perspective of the analysis of the urban landscape as a perceptible result of the developed practices.

The choice to identify and evaluate the results of the initiatives developed or under development from the analysis of the urban landscape is motivated by the specific point of view of the art historian. This is always based on the vision, analysis and interpretation of the image, what it contains and how it is perceived. A reading that is integral, allowing to analyze at the same time the physical and the functional, the tangible and the intangible.

The research focuses on the United States and Western Europe.

3. Results

3.1. Trade as part of the urban essence from its origins.

The need for the supply and exchange of goods that occurs in every human agglomeration has motivated, throughout history and until now, the continued presence of commercial activity in the focus areas of urban social activity [22].

The routes generated by the flow of goods and services have been impacting upon the emergence, flourishing and decay of numerous urban centers throughout history [23-24], also allowing the contact between cultures, beliefs and different systems of organization [25-27].

Since antiquity, commercial facilities have been located in the vicinity of palaces and temples [28-30], next to the gates of cities and their ports, if they were maritime or fluvial. These thematic facilities, sometimes made up of temporary structures, have been complemented with shops installed on the ground floor of residential buildings, usually with direct access from the street. These facilities are present in urban growth processes and, sometimes, they are determinant in these processes, as happened during the XVI and XVII centuries or since the middle of the XX century [31-34].

The profound changes that have taken place since the 19th century, derived from the new economic model, technical development, the increase in urban population and the transformations that take place within cities, would give increasing importance to commercial activity.

This activity would experience a permeability to aesthetic fashions unknown until that moment thanks to the development of interior and exterior design, shop windows and advertising [35-36]. In parallel, the appearance of new architectural typologies for commercial use, such as passageways or

department stores, was occurring [37-38] (Figure 1). The functional hierarchy of commercial facilities that determines their location since the mid-nineteenth century would continue to develop to this day.



Figure 1. Galleries and passages of Brussels. The image is a brochure published in 2012 by the Direction des Monuments et des Sites / Directie Monumenten en Landschappen, an example of putting value on the Cultural Heritage of these spaces that are also protected.

Those tendencies that began in the 19th century would be accentuated in the 20th century and would determine urban transformations [39-40]. In them, the importance of commercial activity would increase. Placing it at the heart of the new models of urban growth that began to develop in the United States in the first half of the century [41]. These models pursue the perfect commercial city, materialized in the residential area in the suburbs whose center of community life is the shopping center [42].

This represents the pursued perfection in the context of which it arises because it offers optimal economic results, favored by a unitary management of space, while, thanks to its condition of controlled private space and equipped with parking, the user can park their vehicle and feel secure inside [42]. The appearance and development of the typology of the shopping center, symbol of the consumer society of the twentieth century, and the role granted by urbanism to this figure would set the rhythm between central urban trade and peripheral trade that would be a constant throughout the century [39, 41].

The commercial boom in the peripheries had a strong impact on urban commerce, which would increase due to population depletion in historic urban areas. Faced with the situation of urban commercial decay and the degradation of many central historical neighborhoods, movements began, both citizens in general and trade agents in particular, sought and demanded solutions that would reverse the situation.

In the last third of the twentieth century the processes of regeneration and revitalization of central urban areas would proliferate. As would the associative processes between commercial agents in these areas to defend their interests and encourage contributions to the processes.

From the point of view of urban commerce as a collective protagonist of these processes, broadly speaking we can speak of a predominant North American solution (USA and Canada) —Business Improvement Districts (BID)— and an European —Town Centre Management (TCM)—. Both models are based on the transfer of professionalized management of shopping centers to that of urban areas with a strong presence of commercial activity. The BIDs began in the 1960s [43] and the TCMs in the 1980s [44]. With them come the first quantitative successes, accompanied by qualitative effects that did not conform to many of the ideas and initial expectations, the phenomenon called gentrification [45-46] (applied both globally and for commercial activity in particular).

The twentieth century would end with a concept of the city where commercial leisure activities, along with recreational and cultural activities, played a leading role in urban life. Therefore, commercial activity became more important as an engine for recovery and revitalization of degraded urban areas.

The elapsed years of the 21st century have moved between the global expansion of the peripheral commercial area typology, especially in the Asian continent and the Middle East as well as in ex-communist European countries, and the realization that in the United States symptoms have been produced that have led to a post-shopping center stage understood as a center of community life and a relevant institution in society [47].

One of the most significant symptoms of this phenomenon is the conversion to new non-commercial uses of old shopping centers. New types of shopping center have also appeared, such as the strip shopping center, strip mall or affinity center and the villages. In parallel, the situation in the city centers is marked by what has been configured as a new urban commerce, with a mix of typologies where old coexist without variations, together with transformed derelict and new buildings.

An essential pillar of the turn of the century is the Internet or, more precisely, the generalization of Internet access. This means of communication represents a general and profound change both in the organization and in the perception of the world [48] and has involved a reorganization of space and time [49]. Commercial activity is being strongly affected by the possibilities of the internet, new communication channels, new forms of socialization and the interrelation between companies and customers, new services and instruments and new formulas of purchase and sale.

3.2. Historic urban protected areas contain various elements that reflect the impact of commercial activity in the city throughout history

The relationship of feedback between stores and markets and the influx of people is manifested throughout the history of the city and is reflected both in the names of many streets and squares and in the fact that commercial use is currently maintained in certain spaces that have been hosting this activity for decades even centuries.

It is common that among the elements of urban cultural heritage preserved in many cities today, a direct relationship with their commercial past can be established. In some cases because buildings or other architectural, sculptural or pictorial elements are preserved associated with the commercial bloom of the moment in which they appeared. In other cases, because the urban framework preserves developments or reforms that have occurred as a result of the impact of commercial activity.

There are also cases in which manifestations of intangible heritage are linked to commercial events or the production of certain goods and services that have supposed an economic boom associated with their trade.

3.3. The urban landscape of current commercial activity in central historical areas is made up of a multiplicity of typologies and commercial formats

The traditional commercial areas of urban centers are considered commercial laboratories, especially in large cities, where they try out and filter out tendencies that later expand into small cities and towns.

172 The analysis of the urban landscape shows that, at present, there is a convergent tendency of
173 commercial typologies that includes the adaptation to urban centers of formats typical of the
174 peripheries, such as the supermarkets of proximity or the urban stores of companies whose premises
175 were formally only installed in peripheral commercial areas (**Figure 2**). Due to this, companies have
176 developed formats in which the concept is adapted to the requirements or limitations of the urban
177 regulations in protected areas and the characteristics of existing commercial premises. This process
178 has contributed to the disappearance of local supermarkets, which can not compete on prices with
179 those belonging to large groups, which can now also operate as franchises.



(a)



(b)



Figure 2. (a,b) Proximity formats of the Carrefour supermarket chain (Carrefour Market and Carrefour Express). **(c,d)** Urban pilot stores of the Ikea chain. All images come from to the city of Madrid [50]. Author: Mónica López, 2018.

At present, for urban commerce we no longer only speak of a traditional supply trade, but also associate it with innovative business profiles that are going to develop their activity in permanent and non-permanent physical spaces, constituting themselves as essential actors in the current urban landscape of historical urban centers.

The rise of electronic commerce, or the simple possibility of purchasing from a computer has forced retail outlets to change their strategies in their stores. They must now make it an experience to visit their stores so that customers will want to go to them [51].

We speak of an attraction trade whose clientele transcends the residents in the neighborhood, extending more or less depending on the function that the city represents within the territory, the attraction capacity of the store owners and the character and state of conservation of the cultural heritage of the urban center.

The businesses that represent new urban commerce coexist with other older businesses, in many cases tending to disappear for different reasons: disappearance of shop owners without generational relief, exhaustion of the concept of the trade, changes in the commercial dynamics of the street or area where the store is located, regulatory changes, or the disappearance of its clientele. There are also cases in which historic stores are kept alive and accommodate the demands of the current consumer without changing their dedication. Another traditional method that is maintained is that of the craftsperson who has a shop-workshop where they make and sell their products.

A historical commercial typology that is maintained is that of the market, whether stable markets housed in a building (Figure 3, a) or an installation erected for that purpose (Figure 3, b) or in temporary formats (usually of a weekly nature) (Figure 3, c).



(a)



(b)



(c)

Figure 3. (a) Bolhao Market Porto, Portugal. (b) Norwich Market, UK. (c) Saturday market in Leiden, Netherlands. Author: Mónica López, (a) 2017, (b) 2011, (c) 2014.

A formula that is gaining presence is that of the shared space, where several business people share the expenses of a single place in which each one has an individualized store space. This is the version for commercial activity of the co-working premises, a concept associated with offices and professional activities, of providing services rather than selling products.

In the search for space optimization and cost reduction, multifunction spaces are located, which house different uses or services depending on hours or days. There are also spaces that house different functions simultaneously, usually selling clothing and decoration associated with cafeterias, to which can be added others such as hairdressing, massages or art works.

In the ephemeral urban landscape produced by commercial exchange activity, a new format has appeared: pop-up stores / retail / shops. These are installations that appear and disappear, directed not at sales but to the promotion and branding of the company and / or of certain products. They seek to convey that the goal is not simply to sell a product but to sell a concept and provide an exclusive experience. Thus attracting the customer to the brand by directing them to both its online store and its digital communication channels.

Another manifestation of creation or intervention on the landscape, of an ephemeral nature, is the punctual event format similar to a market but spread or developed over a specific urban area. These actions can occur from just the possibility of buying and selling products to complete cultural programs generated around commercial activity, this always being the main reason for the existence of these events. Sometimes only shops installed in physical stores in the area can participate, which display their products on the street, or they can be open to other companies to install pop-ups or have temporary displays.

3.4. Currently, urban commerce interacts with the historical landscape in which it is developed and the heritage values of it, using them to strengthen its strategies of attraction, differentiation and sales

Most of the new formats of urban commerce respond to the concept of a city that has been established since the end of the 20th century, where the festive, the immaterial, the ludic and the cultural and their combinations with commercial leisure take on greater prominence [52].

Added to this are the implications of the translation of business management techniques to urban management, from which city marketing has emerged [53]. The cities develop value creation strategies in which cultural heritage emerges as a differentiation resource that is going to be linked to its ability to attract visitors [54], strongly associated with cultural tourism, but also with the attraction of other economic activities, like the commercial one.

This power of attraction of visitors that heritage exerts, is linked with concepts that are going to become hegemonic in the 21st century. The emotional and the sensory [55], which are marking present and future trends of marketing and branding; and also experience, which guides the tourism and luxury industries, "two of the most powerful engines of the planetary economy" [56] (p. 193).

The clearest case of using the historic urban landscape as a scenario that strengthens and multiplies the brand values that companies want to transmit is found in the ephemeral formats we have discussed. For example, this is the case for the installation of a pop up of the company Custo Barcelona in one of the buildings that are part of the World Heritage Works of Antoni Gaudí [57-59].

Frequently these ephemeral formats are promoted and organized by groups of traders who are located in the same urban area (neighborhood, group of streets or individual street) with the aim of attracting potential customers of their businesses to that area. This is the case of the so-called Market of the Frogs (**Figure 4, a,b**), organized on the first Saturday of each month by the Association of Merchants of the Barrio de Las Letras of the city of Madrid (Spain).



(a)



(b)

Figure 4. (a, b) Market of the Frogs, Barrio de Las Letras in Madrid (Spain). Author Mónica López, 2016

These actions of the use of heritage value take place in the commercial premises. Mainly in the case of the exteriors, the maintenance of the defining elements of the premises' facades may be motivated by the requirements of the protection regulations. These usually contain guidelines regarding materials, designs, colors and decorative elements. But the maintenance can also occur, and is usual for the case of the interiors of the premises, because a new company recovers historical elements associated with the trade for the design of its premises, because it maintains the existing elements in it or because a company decides not to part with the elements associated with its own activity throughout its history.

These cases are also significant for the recognition of heritage values to the commercial activity, through the elements associated with it, by its direct protagonists. In addition to the provision of value, in this way the store owners contribute to the preservation process of the cultural heritage through the identification of the heritage elements, the realization of intervention projects and the diffusion of these and of the knowledge related to the commercial activity itself.

3.5. *Shop owners contribute to the preservation of historic urban areas by maintaining the commercial function in them*

Given its nature as a private economic activity, trade changes, evolves and transforms according to the needs of the market and society or it disappears. This makes it, therefore, difficult to approach from the point of view of protection as cultural heritage, of its elements of both a physical and immaterial nature.

From the point of view of the preservation of urban protected areas, it is necessary to unite to this the preservation of the commercial function itself, both for its intrinsic values and for its role in the balance of the urban ecosystem, especially in relation to the establishment of the resident population.

In this sense, it can be said that the substitution of one trade for another is good news because the premises retains the commercial function despite the closure of the previous business. These processes frequently make the detailed analysis of the urban landscape show periodic changes in terms of products and brands, but globally the use of the premises and the flow of people they generate are maintained.

The new formats of local supermarkets are also helping to recover the supply service of first necessity that had been badly damaged by the expansion of land use in the suburbs and the disappearance of food stores in the most central areas. These types of establishments also offer extra services such as home delivery, for which they have vehicles adapted to the historical layout of the city. It is a clear example of how trade is essential to maintain the residential character of these areas.

4. Discussion and conclusions

The analysis of the relationship between the urban phenomenon and commercial activity throughout history allows us to affirm that this is an essential element of the city. For this reason, the historical research on urban commercial activity provides essential information on the configuration of cities in general and the urban areas protected in particular. Also important points to understand, at present, the relationship between commercial activity and urban space.

The transcendence of commercial activity in the historical evolution of the city is reflected in the presence of elements linked to it in the cultural heritage currently existing in urban settlements. It is also a part of the heritage value of protected cities, as it is one of the defining functions of the urban entity itself.

Trade is a living activity, as are the people who give it meaning, who generate the flow of goods, ideas and of people who have to pass through the inherited urban fabric. The commercial urban landscape of historic urban areas is a mixture of formats, sizes and proposals where hundred-year-old establishments coexist with newly created ones, stores anchored in the past alongside the avant-garde, stable and ephemeral points of sale, local shops to supply residents from the neighborhood together with other attractions for clientele that proceed from the same city to the visitor from another country. All this in constant movement and susceptible to change.

Trade is part of the urban landscape, creating it and modifying it but also preserving it. At present, the predominant tendencies in promotion and sales strategies look to elements that are contained in cultural heritage in general and in historical urban landscapes in particular. This favors the fact that, in the difficult equation between preservation and destruction, urban commerce is an ally for preservation, despite the complex historical relationship between merchants and administrations in their management of protected areas.

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