The resilience of shopping centres:
An analysis of retail resilience strategies in Lisbon, Portugal

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Abstract

Retail is a dynamic sector and for several decades shopping centres have been the most successful format. Although such shopping centres have been held responsible for the decline of other retail concepts, they are not without problems and some retail precincts are losing their viability, becoming dead malls. Some other shopping centres however are quite resilient. In this study we analyse the different retail resilience strategies used by older shopping centres to overcome their declining trend. For empirical evidence we adopt a case study methodology and fieldwork to investigate the evolution of all old shopping centres in Lisbon, confirming that a general trend of decline is affecting a large majority of those retail precincts. Refining our analysis, we interviewed managers from three shopping centres that remain viable. We conclude that a wide range of strategies can be implemented, all of which enhance the relevance of the shopping centre management structures.

Keywords: *Resilience strategies, shopping centres, retailing, dead malls, greyfields, Portugal*

1. Introduction

The retail sector has been characterised throughout history by its dynamism, contributing to a significant number of transformations in cities. Looking back, we can see the passage from a more itinerant retailing, held at fairs, markets and temporary venues, to newer landscapes dominated by permanent or long-standing locations. In terms of concepts, retail practised in fairs and open-air markets began to be connoted negatively, due to the modernity that new concepts progressively introduced into the sector. For example, the appearance and dissemination of hypermarkets in France provoked significant changes in the retail structure of that country (Colla, 2003; Metton, 1995). Other concepts such as 'hard-discount' or the *fachmarkt* (Pereira et al., 2002) were also relevant in modernising the retail sector, in this case in Germany. In a more comprehensive view, shopping centres have been the most successful concept because, generally, they were able to stay on top of consumer preferences since their inception to the present day. Although with world-wide presence, the shopping centre designation itself has covered very different retail precincts, from small ones located in the dense urban fabric, such as the shopping arcades in Paris, to the larger shopping centres located on the outskirts of medium and large-sized cities.

Over the last few decades, these retail precincts have been held responsible for the declining vitality and viability of town centres (Ozuduru et al., 2014; Teller, 2008), in a process that according to Guy (2007) begins with the opening of a new off-centre shopping centre, leading to an increase of vacant shop units and a worsening environment of the town centre. One of the major scientific concerns on this subject has addressed the relations between the large peripheral shopping centres and the traditional and consolidated town centres (Evers, 2006; Guimarães, 2014; Guy, 1998; Thomas and Bromley, 2002). Despite the success that has culminated in negative impacts on other retail concepts, shopping centres are by no means immune to failure and several retail premises have closed or are on the edge of such a fate. The use of the term "dead malls" reflects this evidence and has been particularly applied to describe the "closed or on the verge of closing" (Ferreira and Paiva, 2017, p. 5) suburban shopping centres in North America.

When compared to Europe, the phenomenon of dead malls is at a more advanced stage (Feronti, 2003) in the North American context, and since the dawn of the new millennium the number of dead malls has been reaching alarming levels there (Cavoto and Limonta, 2013). In Europe, because of delays in the dissemination of shopping centres, dead malls are starting to gain the attention of urban planners. In fact, their decline is significant regardless of locations closer to or farther away from consolidated urban and town centres. Still, after experiencing some sort of shock, some retail precincts can overcome the problems and remain viable.

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Appealing to resilience theory, currently widely used in several different contexts, in this article we aim to understand the strategies that contribute to the resilience of shopping centres so that they have managed to keep operating, thus contributing to the vitality of urban centres. As empirical evidence of such resilience strategies, we will use the city of Lisbon as a case study. Our research is guided by a set of research questions: What is the current situation of the shopping centres operating in Lisbon compared to the base-line year 1999? What have been the resilience features introduced for the ones still operating? We argue that despite sharing many similarities, it is the dynamism of the shopping centres' management structures (i.e. [and hereinafter] the managers themselves {sometimes referred to simply as 'management'} as much as their organisational aspects) that have fostered their resilience.

In the next section we will analyse resilience, the main concept used in our argument. In the third section we present the materials and methods used in this research, framing the following section, in which we analyse the evolution of the shopping centres in Lisbon that were already operating in 1999, subsequently deepening our focus to three shopping centres where we discuss their resilience strategies. Finally, some conclusions will be drawn.

2. Theoretical background

2.1 The dual role of shopping centres

The strong relationships between cities and their commercial fabrics result in webs of interactions, through which both are influenced by each other. Shopping centres are an example of such relations and can be better exemplified through two different roles: actor and victim, as described below.

The role of actor is characterised by their capacity to increase the vitality and viability of a certain area. Recent examples of such a role include several urban regeneration projects that used shopping centres as anchors to regenerate town centres (Jayne, 2006; Lowe, 2005, 2007). This protection of town centres is partially due to the local population's (not necessarily resident) and tourists' valuation of these areas (Guimarães, 2013). In this role, shopping centres are important when they are built in peripheral areas, by providing the local population with spaces where they can supply themselves. In fact, shopping centres are relevant facilities that contribute to the supply of population (especially in the period where there is a loss of importance of town centres and simultaneous suburbanisation).

Additionally, when located in deprived areas, shopping centres often provide social functions for local communities. As stated by Parlette and Cowen (2011, p. 795), "while privately owned and managed, enclosed malls in inner suburbs are at times the only indoor spaces that offer some degree of public access". This is in line with De Simone's (2018, p. 13) reflections about Parque Arauco, a large shopping centre that opened in Chile in 1982, seen as a place where people go to "chat, walk, play, and not necessarily buy" (author's translation). Furthermore, despite criticism about the privatisation of public space caused by shopping centres, Chiodelli and Moroni (2015, p. 40) concluded that "shopping malls do not necessarily privatise any public space" and that in most cases, the construction of shopping centres is made on private land that would rarely have some sort of public use.

Shopping centres were also relevant in the modernisation of the retail system and in increasing the retail fabric, usually with longer opening hours, which overall benefited a significant part of the population. Furthermore, by possessing management structure, they contributed to introduce this feature into the retail sector. According to Lewis (2014), there are four major roles of the shopping centre management structure: Operations, Marketing, Administration, and Executive & Other disciplines. The existence of a management structure is clearly one of the factors that, in general terms, differentiate shopping centres from traditional high street retail. Its influence on the resilience of shopping centres will be scrutinised in the section devoted to the empirical analysis, below.

The role of victim occurs when a certain urban area is deprived of their main elements of attractiveness and declines, weakening the viability of existing retail outlets. Paradoxically, this deprivation is provoked by urban changes which, occasionally, happen because private retail developers invest in different areas. The most iconic example is the implementation of shopping centres in peripheral areas and their impact on town centres. Nevertheless, as mentioned above, the evolution of retail also provokes impacts on already existing shopping centres. Concretely, urban sprawl in North America is provoking the constant opening of new shopping centres in increasingly remote locations. Such an evolution has been putting into question the viability of older shopping centres, resulting in their decline and eventually leading to the appearance of dead malls. According to Parlette and Cowen (2011, p. 795), this process derives from the "capitalist cycle of investment, disinvestment and re-investment". These authors show how the dissemination of big box stores and the revitalisation of central areas of cities contributed to the loss of importance of some suburban shopping centres.

In a similar way, focusing on the Greater Toronto Area, Hernandez (2003) and Jones and Doucet (2001) confirmed the negative impacts of some big box stores on the traditional retail structure of that region. According to these authors, their emergence as major retail destinations "left some shopping centres and many of their tenants in vulnerable positions" (2001, p. 507). The dynamism of shopping centres was also one of the main reasons that resulted in the decline of some retail premises, i.e. "competition from newer, bigger and brighter malls has resulted in declining sales and high store vacancy rates in first ring suburban shopping centres" (Feronti, 2003, p. x), representing the adaptive behaviour drawn from Darwin's natural selection concept as discussed by Lowry (1997). Other structural factors have been held responsible for dead malls, such as the dissemination of outlet malls, the rising importance of e-commerce (Schatzman, 2013), and more recently the "tightening of consumer spending and the de-valuation of commercial real estate in the United States as a result of the global financial crisis" (Scharoun, 2012, p. 110). The work of Lowry (1997) on the life cycle of shopping centres can also help to explain the evolution of those retail precincts. According to this author, four stages characterise this cycle: innovation, accelerated development, maturity and decline (see Tab. 1).

Due to several interconnected reasons, such as their location in relation to the main urban centres and size of the urbanised area where shopping centres are located, the retail precincts that have closed doors or are in full process of decline are now a pressing challenge for urban planning. This situation of a decline is not, however, inevitable. Some

Considerations	Stages			
	Innovation	Accelerated development	Maturity	Decline
Number of competing centres	very few	rapid growth	many of the same type of centre	many same and newer types
Vacancy rate	low	very low	moderate	high
Renovation of facilities	none	minor modifications	maintenance of existing facilities	neglect or extensive reformatting
Control exerted by developers	extensive	moderate	extensive	moderate

Tab. 1: Some considerations of Lowry's shopping centre life cycle stages
Source: After Lowry (1997)

of those retail precincts have managed to remain viable and continue with the doors open, thus continuing to be a valid asset of the retail structure in the urban area in which they are inserted. Lowry (1997) claims that survival strategies must be adopted by developers, which will be analysed further as resilience strategies in this article.

2.2 The concept of resilience and its importance for understanding changes in retailing

The concept of resilience has been used and adapted from different perspectives and research traditions. According to Pizzo (2015), it is possible to trace the first use of the word to the 1st century BC. The concept of resilience, however, was further developed with its incorporation in the analysis of ecological systems (Dolega and Celińska-Janowicz, 2015), and especially through the outstanding work of C. S. Holling. This author defined resilience as a "measure of the persistence of systems and of their ability to absorb change and disturbance and still maintain the same relationships between populations or state variables" (Holling, 1973, p. 14). In time, resilience has been incorporated into social science studies (Martin, 2012). Although it is a concept that has been used for some time, it has been gaining increasing relevance today. Its flexibility and the fuzzy ways to measure it partially explain its utility to understand and account for very different realities: for example, Adger's (2000) comparison of social and ecological resilience; Pisano's (2012) analysis of sustainable development through the lens of resilience; and Pizzo's (2015) discussion of the concept in planning theory and practice.

Some of the literature on regional development has also included the concept of resilience: for example, Hudson's (2010) work on the characteristics of resilient regions, and Hassink's (2010) research on the relations between regional resilience and regional economic adaptability. Resilience was also a key concept for Forino (2015) in his analysis of L'Aquila, a small town in southern Italy, following the earthquake that took place in 2009. Martin (2012) points out that a succession of major natural and environmental disasters and the subsequent reaction of local communities, fostered interest in the study of resilience as a concept able to explain different phenomena and events. The need for a certain system to adapt itself and be resilient implies the existence of a certain trigger. According to its temporal impact, Erkip (2015) distinguished two different kinds of trigger: "shocks" (pulse), which can be exemplified by events such as earthquakes; and "slow-burn changes", that fit the analysis of complex urban systems and their dynamism, because changes are continuously introduced into cities.

When considering the concept of resilience, three different interpretations can be distinguished and used for a study of retail resilience: the engineering, ecological and adaptive approaches (Martin, 2012). The first, engineering approach is one "in which resilience is regarded as a response to external disturbances and a move back to a steady state" (Boschma, 2015, p. 734), wherein the system will tend to equilibrium. To characterise this situation Wrigley and Dolega (2011) use the term "bounce back", which is to some extent related to the resistance to changes. The second interpretation follows an ecological approach and it "focuses on the scale of shock a system can absorb before it is destabilised and moved to a new configuration" (Dolega and Celińska-Janowicz, 2015, p. 12). Contrary to the engineering approach where the focus is on the ability of a certain system to resume to its pre-shock state, the ecological approach focuses on how much shock can the system support (Wrigley and Dolega, 2011). Finally, the third interpretation refers to the adaptive approach and follows an evolutionary stance. In this case, the system will be different when comparing the stage pre-disturbance to the stage when resilience is accomplished. For this matter, Wrigley and Brookes (2014) use the term "bounce forward" to describe the approach. It means the system will end up a step forward with respect to its starting point.

This adaptive capacity is particularly important in the study of urban systems. Earlier, Holling (2001) had already enhanced this feature, considering adaptive capacity as "the resilience of the system, a measure of its vulnerability to unexpected or unpredictable shocks". The changing nature of urban areas makes it virtually impossible to analyse them from a stability perspective. Simmie and Martin (2010) point this out when stating that "regional and local economic development is far from a smooth and incremental process but is subject to all sorts of interruptions and disruptions". Thus, resilience acquires relevance as a useful concept to uncover and understand the complex and continuous process of changes that characterise cities. From an urban planning standpoint, the use of resilience from an adaptive point of view is preferred, rather than the bounce back perspective. The use of the latter method could lead to the constant obsolescence of policies almost immediately after their implementation.

Because it can be an asset in understanding urban problems, the concept of resilience has been used to analyse how town centres and retail stores have managed to deal with the transformation of the retail sector. In this context, some research has been carried out (Barata-Salgueiro and Erkip, 2014; Cachinho, 2014; D'Alessandro, 2015; Erkip, 2015; Karrholm et al., 2014; Wrigley and Brookes, 2014; Wrigley

and Dolega, 2011). Moreover, a recent Urban-Net European funded project – REPLACIS, Retail Planning for Cities Sustainability – devoted to the resilience of town centres, defined urban retail resilience as "the ability of different types of retailing at different scales, to adapt to changes, crises or shock that challenge the system's equilibrium, without failing to perform its functions in a sustainable way" (Barata-Salgueiro, 2011, p. 30).

More attention has been given to the resilience of town centres, rather than on the resilience of retail stores and specific retail concepts, because a retailer's strategies, as studied by Erkip et al. (2014), can only partially explain the evolution of a certain centre (Teller et al., 2016). Thus, the scientific discussion revolved around the ability of town centres to remain an important retail destination within the respective urban region where they are located. For instance, the works of Wrigley and Brookes (2014) and Wrigley and Dolega (2011) are good examples of such research in British research on the subject. In the former, an edited collection contains several chapters that focus on the evolution of high streets, seen through the lens of resilience. Other researchers have focused on different geographical contexts: for example, the Cities special issue on retail planning and urban resilience (Barata-Salgueiro and Erkip, 2014) presented case studies from other countries, such as Portugal (Cachinho, 2014), Sweden (Karrholm et al., 2014), Turkey (Erkip et al., 2014; Ozuduru et al., 2014) and the United States (Balsas, 2014).

When dealing with the resilience of town centres, several factors have been introduced to explain why some areas have managed to be resilient while others failed. In this perspective, resilience is understood from the adaptive perspective as the ability of a certain system (here, the urban retail system) to comply and absorb changes and shocks and to restructure itself to still perform its functions in an improved way (here, to fulfil the provision of consumers). In the work of Wrigley and Brookes (2014), two major dimensions are analysed: public policies (Findlay and Sparks, 2014); and the governance of town centres (Coca-Stefaniak and Carroll, 2014). Besides these two factors, Cachinho and Barata-Salgueiro (2016) considered urban space attributes and the internal features of the urban retail system as crucial for its resilience.

Although increasing theoretical debates are found in the scientific literature, there is a lack of empirical evidence documenting the main features that contribute to the resilience of urban systems, in general, and especially urban retail systems. Although it was focused on the resilience of retail stores, the study of Erkip et al. (2014) is an exception. In this work, a survey of retailers in Ankara, Turkey, concluded that the relevance of strategies, such as the introduction of home delivery or private service buses, added services to the client, physical improvements and involvement in associations. With respect to the capacity of shopping centres to be resilient, the literature is even scarcer. Still, because of the size and location of most of these retail precincts, the inability of even just one shopping centre to be resilient and thus decline and close their operation, is a significant urban planning problem. Regarding the subject of dead malls, a study from the Congress for the New Urbanism (2001) found that shopping centre owners managed to requalify abandoned shopping centres into back offices or data centres. In several of these cases, although the former retail precinct lost its civic role, the building managed to maintain some value as a real estate asset. Focusing on the shopping centre Roma in Lisbon,

Ferreira (2015) concluded that the vitality of the shopping district, its accessibility and the management structure of the shopping centre was crucial in its revitalisation. In this case study, we intend to contribute to the scientific literature by analysing the strategies that contributed to the resilience of some shopping centres in Lisbon.

3. Material and methods

To respond our research questions and make inferences about our argument, we use Lisbon as an empirical case study. As a baseline, we consider shopping centres located in Lisbon that were operating in 1999, as the database that supported this study was collected in 1999 by Observatório do Comércio (2000). This database was updated through fieldwork developed by the author in 2017. This updating allowed us to document the evolution of shopping centres in Lisbon to answer the first research question. Elaborating on the work of Ferreira (2015), we classified shopping centres according to four major categories:

1. vital – referring to shopping centres with 9.9% or less vacancy rate;

2. struggling – for shopping centres with vacancy rates between 10.0 and 39.9%;

3. greyfields – for shopping centres with vacancy rates of 40.0% to 69.9%; and

4. dead malls – for the remaining shopping centres with vacancy rates of 70.0% or higher.

Subsequently, we focus the analysis on three shopping centres that are still in operation and which have considerable momentum. Using structured open-ended interviews, the manager of each of the shopping centres was interviewed. Under this category of interviewing, the same questions were asked to the three interviewees to "increase the comparability of responses" (Kitchin and Tate, 2000, p. 214). After proper ethical consent, all interviews involved audio recording and subsequent transcription. The questions that were asked can be summarised as the following general topics: a description of the shopping centre and its origins; the existence in the past of a decline phase, its causes and resilience strategies; the main current threats to existence; the current resilience strategies; the evolution of customer-target objectives; and other relevant (for the interviewee) information.

4. Results: Shopping centres in Lisbon

4.1 Background

Shopping centres emerged in Portugal in the 1970s, although it was in the following two decades that the concept witnessed its most significant dissemination (Guimarães, 2015). Nevertheless, in these earlier stages, shopping centres were characterised by their small size, their integration into the urban fabric, and the lack of a professional management structure: in fact, their organisational structure resembled a commercial condominium (Teixeira, 2014).

As in the Turkish case analysed by Erkip and Ozuduru (2015), the emergence of a new generation of shopping centres also contributed to the decline of the oldest retail precincts in Portugal. Ferreira (2015) identified three variables that may have contributed to the decline of shopping centres in the Lisbon region: the physical structure of the retail precincts, not adapted to newer requirements of consumption and leisure; the knowledge levels of their managers; and the

management structures of those retail premises. The latter variable is related to the fact that parts of the shopping centres were in fact commercial condominiums (Ferreira and Paiva, 2017), where each store was sold individually to different retailers, which transformed shopping centres into a mere real estate development.

Contrary to the North American context, where big box stores and power centres (in the European context – retail parks) contributed to the decline of some shopping centres (Jones and Doucet, 2001), in Portuguese retail structure there is not such a tradition of category killers. Ikea is the most well-known exception with five stores in the country (covering the two metropolitan areas of Lisbon and Oporto [each with two stores] and another one in Algarve). Besides, some international companies are established in big box stores such as Decathlon, Leroy Merlin, Staples or Media Markt. Additionally, some retail parks were constructed in several Portuguese cities in this millennium, but their relevance never reached a status that could put into the question the already consolidated retail system.

In 1999, 55 shopping centres (Fig. 1) were operating within the boundaries of Lisbon municipality (Observatório do Comércio, 2000), 10 of which were opened in the 1970s, 27 in the 1980s and 18 in the 1990s. Their characteristics reveal the fragility of the Lisbon shopping centres industry at the verge of the new millennium. This fragility was further put to the test after the mid-1990s with the emergence of new regional shopping centres. Although the majority of the old shopping centres had a management structure, in several cases it merely consisted of shopkeepers' commissions without professional management. They were mainly seen as real estate developments, rather than integrated commercial developments, evidenced by the fact that 40% of the retail precincts operated with a mix of rent and own store ownership (see Tab. 2). Other

indicators also point in this direction, such as the absence of a planned tenant mix, anchor stores and franchising stores. The small size of shopping centres is, to a certain extent, a consequence of their location in the densely urbanised town centres or in its surroundings, as well as their implementation in pre-existent buildings. Even when the building was built for that purpose, it had to face the obvious limitations of its location in very urbanised, densely populated areas. Consequently, the majority of shopping centres fit the Portuguese Association of Shopping Centres (APCC, 2011) definition of "very small" with 500 to 4,999 sq. metres of sales area (classification adapted from the International Council of Shopping Centres). Furthermore, the motorisation rate had escalated quickly in the last two decades of the 20th century, such that shopping centres that did not possess parking spaces (58.2% of the total shopping centres) quickly became outdated.

In these 55 shopping centres, three with regional catchment areas are included: Amoreiras, the first regional shopping centre in the Lisbon region, opened in 1985; Colombo, inaugurated in 1997 in a residential neighbourhood with good road connections; and Vasco da Gama, opened in 1999 following the urban renovation project in the eastern part of the city where the 1998 Lisbon World Exposition took place. Together with the opening of other shopping centres in the mid- and late-1990s with a sales area up to 15,000 sq. metres, such as Olivais, they represented a new generation of shopping centres that would put into question the viability of the pre-existent retail precincts, including those also opened in this period but without any kind of innovations when compared with those already existing. Based on these data and taking Lowry's life cycle thesis (Tab. 1) into consideration, one may argue that in the last three decades of the 20th century the Lisbon shopping centre industry went very quickly from the innovation stage to the accelerated
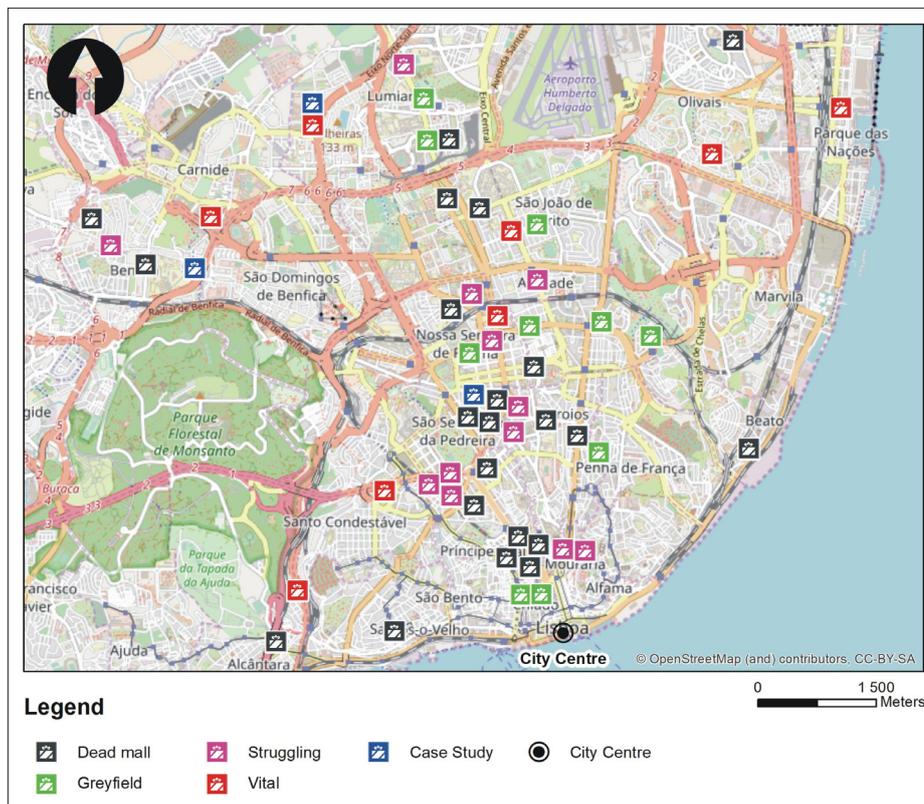

Fig. 1: Location and characteristics of Lisbon shopping centres
Source: author's fieldwork (2017)

Characteristics		Number	%
Management Structure	Yes	52	94.5
	No	3	5.5
Parking	Yes	18	32.7
	No	32	58.2
	No data available	5	9.1
Planned tenant mix	Yes	27	49.1
	No	27	49.1
	No data available	1	1.8
Anchor stores	Yes	21	38.2
	No	32	58.2
	No data available	2	3.6
Sale area	Very small (500 – 4,999 sq. metres)	46	83.6
	Small (5,000 – 19,999 sq. metres)	5	9.1
	Medium (20,000 – 39,999 sq. metres)	2	3.6
	Large (40,000 – 79,999 sq. metres)	1	1.8
	Very large (> 80,000 sq. metres)	1	1.8
Food and drinks	0 – 5 stores	41	74.5
	6 – 10 stores	6	10.9
	More than 10 stores	8	14.5
Stores ownership	Rent	27	49.1
	Purchase	1	1.8
	Mix system	22	40.0
	No data available	5	9.1
Form of management	Shopkeepers commission	12	21.8
	Management company	43	78.2
Building type	Adapted	15	27.3
	Built on purpose	37	67.3
	No data available	3	5.5
Number of stores	50 or less	37	67.3
	51 – 100	14	25.5
	100 or more	4	7.3
Opening year (by decade)	1970's	10	18.2
	1980's	27	49.1
	1990's	18	32.7
Vacant stores (%)	0 – 9.9	21	38.0
	10 – 39.9	24	44.0
	40 – 69.9	6	11.0
	70 and more	4	7.0
Location	City centre	8	14.5
	City centre expansion axis	27	49.1
	Residential neighbourhood	14	25.5
	Periphery	2	3.6
	New developments (periphery)	2	3.6
	No data available	2	3.6
Franchising	Yes	20	36.4
	No	33	60.0
	No data available	2	3.6

Tab. 2: Characteristics of shopping centres operating in Lisbon municipality in 1999
Source: Observatório do comércio (2000)

development and maturity stages, mostly because there was a significant growth in the number of shopping centres and the vacancy rates in 1999 were already substantial.

The data analysed below inform us how many of those shopping centres entered into the decline stage and were not able to reverse the situation, becoming dead malls, and how many of them did manage to circumvent that stage or, if reached, emerge from it, being resilient.

4.2 Evolution of shopping centres

In general terms, the shopping centres in Lisbon had already experienced some decline by 1999 (see Tab. 3). Still, this trend worsened further by 2017. The number of physical spaces for stores suffered a significant decrease, from 3,106 in 1999 to 2,382 in 2017. Two reasons can be used to explain this evolution. The first concerns readjustments in the physical layout of stores. Taking advantage of decreases in rental prices, some retailers grouped several stores into one (in this way, the overall retail floorspace remained equal). The second is related to the option of management to close several floors of the shopping centres due to the high or absolute vacancy rates that were being felt (in this case, there is an effective loss of available retail floorspace in the precinct). Following the same trend of decline, the number of occupied stores suffered a significant loss. In total, the 55 shopping centres lost almost one-third of the number of stores operating in 1999. Taking all things together, the vacancy rate increased from 15.7% to 24.9%, meaning that in 2017, one in four stores was closed.

These already worrying changes already take into consideration the two measures outlined above that diminished the available stores, which only serves to cover the real dimensions of the problem. Hence, if one considers the stores that were currently operating in 2017 and the physical spaces available for stores in 1999, we reach a vacancy rate of 42.5%. The data reveal that between 1999 and 2017 there was an inversion of the position of shopping centres. If, in 1999, 45 out 55 were still in the stages classified as "vital" and "struggling", in 2017 somewhat less than one half are in those two stages, and only 10 shopping centres had a vacancy rate of less than 10%. The number of shopping centres classified as dead malls increased dramatically from 4 in 1999 to 22 in 2017 (of which 15 were effectively closed and the remaining 7 had vacancy rates higher than 70%).

4.3 Resilience features

To uncover the resilience strategies developed by shopping centre management structures, interviews were conducted with managers of three shopping centres still operating and with considerable momentum, which constituted one of the

reasons why they were selected. Other reasons were also considered, namely the existence of a management structure and the respective manager, with whom we could conduct the interview. Besides, the three larger shopping centres of Colombo, Vasco da Gama and Amoreiras were not considered because they are still three of the larger shopping centres in the region and their position has not been threatened by the regional evolution of retail. Additionally, shopping centres that currently fit the category of dead mall were also not considered because, even if resilience strategies were implemented, apparently they were not successful. Thus, taking in consideration these parameters, interviews were conducted with managers of the following shopping centres: Dolce Vita Monumental (DVM), Fonte Nova (FN) and Pingo Doce de Telheiras (PDT) (see Tab. 4). According to the APCC shopping centres classification, the first two had a "very small" sales area, while the other had a "small" sales area.

4.3.1 Dolce Vita Monumental

This precinct is located closest to the city centre, in the new Lisbon CBD and in close proximity to other shopping centres. It is located in an historical building that was designed and built to host a theatre and a cinema. Named "Cine-Teatro Monumental", it was inaugurated in 1951. Due to the opening of other new cinemas in the city and the increased importance of television, this cultural space declined in the 1970s and eventually closed in the early 1980s. After some rehabilitation work that changed its facade significantly, the building was reopened as a shopping centre in 1993, retaining the name "Monumental" as a remnant of its previous function but presenting similar features to those of the most recent shopping centres (Tab. 4). Since then, major changes have occurred in 2005 and 2006 when the retail developers Amorim Imobiliária (first) and Chamartin Imobiliária (secondly) acquired this shopping centre. When the latter company took possession of the precinct, the first major change took place: "Dolce Vita", a brand that the company had already used in other shopping centres, was introduced into the Monumental, thus renamed as Dolce Vita Monumental. Recognising that this shopping centre was outdated, alongside the rebranding, major in-depth modifications were made in 2007 to its physical structure and layout, which required its closure for three months:

> "We took advantage of the three months in which the shopping centre was closed to expand the food court area and moved some stores that were on the lower floor to the top floor (strategic change to reformulate the tenant mix layout). We start from the premise that a centrally-located shopping centre such as Monumental would have to have a strong food court area". (Retrieved from the interview: author's translation).

		1999	2017	Change
Total of stores		3,106	2,382	− 23.3
Total of occupied stores		2,619	1,787	− 31.8
Vacant stores (total)		487	595	22.2
Vacancy rate (%)		15.7	24.9	9.3
Number of shopping centres according to the vacancy rate	Vital (< 10%)	21	10	− 11.0
	Struggling (10–39.9%)	24	13	− 11.0
	Greyfields (40–69.9%)	6	10	4.0
	Dead malls (> 70%)	4	7 + 15	18.0

Tab. 3: Evolution of analysed shopping centres in Lisbon
Sources: Observatório do comércio (1999); compiled from author's fieldwork (2017)

		Opening year	Dolce Vita Monumental	Fonte Nova	Pingo Doce Telheiras
Stores	Physical spaces	1999	33	78	25
		2017	33	65	17
	In use	1999	33	76	23
		2017	30	58	17
	Vacant	1999	0	2	2
		2017	3	7	0
	Vacancy rate	1999	0	2.6	8
		2017	9.1	10.8	0
Planned tenant mix (1999; 2017)			Yes; Yes	Yes; Yes	Yes; Yes
Food court (1999; 2017)			Yes; Yes	Yes; Yes	Yes; Yes
Stores ownership (1999; 2017)			Rent; Rent	Rent; Rent	Rent; Rent
Location (1999; 2017)			City centre expansion axis	Residential neighbourhood	Residential neighbourhood
Anchor stores (1999; 2017)			Yes; Yes	Yes; Yes	Yes; Yes
Parking (1999; 2017)			Yes; Yes	No; Yes	Yes; Yes
Management structure (1999; 2017)			Management company	Management company	Management company

Tab. 4: Main features of the three shopping centres analysed in depth
Sources: Adapted from Observatório do Comércio (2000); author's fieldwork (2017)

The cultural heritage associated with the location of DVM was seen as an advantage. Hence, the cinema was maintained, mainly attracting a specific audience. Furthermore, because this is a very small retail precinct, the management structure is aware that it cannot attract anchor stores – thus, the cinema itself is the anchor. The main change occurred in the food court. Before 2007 rehabilitation works, the ground floor possessed several non-food stores. These stores were then moved to the upper floor and, subsequently, the food court was enlarged on the ground floor. This change was carried out by management based on the principle that a central shopping centre must possess a strong offer of food stores in order to attract nearby workers. During the rehabilitation work, several stores that were underperforming were displaced from the DVM to give place to other stores that would attract more visitors, increasing the overall quality of the tenant mix. The DVM customer-type remained the same: the goal was to attract more people of the same type. After that period, the changes performed on DVM are shallower:

"Since 2007, investments are constant – now-a-days it is not viable to close a shopping centre for 3 months – the strategy is to improve progressively: in lighting, in the entrance, sofas. Clients like to see changes" (Retrieved from the interview: author's translation).

According to the manager this allows the costumer to continuously see some modernisation efforts, even if small, keeping the attractiveness of the shopping centre. Another relevant issue is the 6-years duration of the lease:

"Simply renewing contracts without this implying a renovation of the store's image is no solution. When the time for the contract renewal arrives, it is the ideal time to renew the store layout" (Retrieved from the interview: author's translation).

This duration of the lease is considered enough for stores to obtain profit after modernisation investments. It is expected that stores reach break-even in a period of 2 to 3 years, having about 3 years of profit, after which they must be prepared to make new investments. For the shopping centre management structure, this contract duration provides a significant margin of negotiation, forcing, when necessary, modernisation of the store under the risk of the lease not be renewed.

4.3.2 Fonte Nova

With some 4,481 sq. metres of sales area, this shopping centre is located in the dense residential area of Benfica, near the major green space of the city. It was built as a part of a larger project, which included the construction of residential buildings with a retail precinct on the ground floor. About one decade after the inauguration of Fonte Nova in 1985, this retail precinct began to suffer from the competition of Colombo, a very large shopping centre (122,000 sq. metres of sales area) opened in 1997 and located less than 1km away. Altogether, the opening of several shopping centres in the region and the economic crisis (around 2010 and following years) led to the bankruptcy of several businesses that were operating in Fonte Nova, partially funded with bank loans. The main difficulty in this period was to replace the closing stores with new ones of similar quality. One of the resilience strategies was the introduction of a risk-sharing management strategy:

"We began to be available to adopt risk sharing (variable rents, dependent on the sales value). If it goes well, it goes well for everyone and, if it goes wrong, it goes wrong for everyone. That is, the onus stopped being just on the side of the tenants" (Retrieved from the interview: author's translation).

According to this strategy, the value of leases became variable, i.e. the rental value became indexed to sales. Thus, the burden was shared between the retailer and the shopping centre administration. In this period, another management strategy was consistency in the selection of new stores for FN. When stores were closing, the option was to resist the pressure and not accept all stores just to keep low vacancy rate:

"It is better to have a vacant space than a bad store" (Retrieved from the interview: author's translation).

This decision was made to keep certain kinds of stores planned for a specific customer-type and not lowering the quality of the existing tenant mix. Moreover, other strategies were also adopted recently:

> "A shopping centre with 30 years like this has to change something structural. We began to reflect about what could be done to bring in more people and then changed the tenant mix" (Retrieved from the interview: author's translation).

A food court was created to gather the existing (and new) food stores that were dispersed throughout the shopping centre. A gymnasium was recently inaugurated in 2017 in order to increase overall vitality, replacing the former cinema that was operating but with no viability. Taking advantage of the supermarket already located in FN, an enlargement of this store was negotiated in order to increase its attractiveness. Consequently, because with this enlargement it was expected that clients would buy more products, a direct entrance to the car parking (already existent but with no use) was opened. Overall, in order to compete with the shopping centre Colombo and others in the region, the management structure chose to enhance what differentiates FN from others: its convenience, i.e. the possibility to quickly enter the shopping centre, shop and leave.

4.3.3 Pingo Doce de Telheiras

This is a considerably different shopping centre compared to the two discussed above and it is located further away from the city centre. Built in 1996, it is essentially a traditional retail precinct composed of an hypermarket and a small commercial gallery. It owes its name to the current hypermarket that is located here, Pingo Doce. Like several others in the country (Guimarães, 2014), the overall quality of the tenant mix evolved and it became more attractive. As a consequence, this shopping centre is currently less dependent on the hypermarket for attracting consumers. Although located in Telheiras, a densely urbanised neighbourhood, its proximity to several important road connections allows the PDT catchment area to extend well beyond Telheiras. When it was built in 1996, the hypermarket was Feira Nova. Because both Feira Nova and Pingo Doce belong to Jerónimo Martins, a major Portuguese company, a business decision made the conversion of the hypermarkets Feira Nova into Pingo Doce in 2008. In this period, the shopping centre was already experiencing a less vital stage that, roughly, lasted from 2005 to 2010. Despite the awareness of the decline stage, it was chosen to wait for the aforementioned change of brand before major changes were performed, which further enhanced its decline. Thus, in 2010 major rehabilitation works transformed the shopping centre significantly:

> "At the time, in 2010, many shopkeepers left the gallery, many shops were not occupied nor were many interested in renting" (Retrieved from the interview: author's translation).

In this period, several stores were displaced for the reconstruction and there was a lack of new ones to enter PDT. In order to diminish the vacancy rate, several services from the Jerónimo Martins company headquarters were relocated to the empty spaces. In 2015 even stronger rehabilitation works were performed, forcing the closure of the shopping centre between July and November, 2015. Some of the brands that belonged to the Jerónimo Martins company that were being sold inside the hypermarket, left these premises to occupy individual stores (mainly clothes, shoes and wellness). Because they demanded a significant amount of sales area, in some cases the physical space of more than one store was grouped into one, thus maintaining the overall sales areas but diminishing the number of stores and the vacancy rate (which was 0% at the time of the fieldwork in 2017):

> "What we try is that the tenant mix be convenient for the costumer" (Retrieved from the interview: author's translation).

Additionally, the tenant mix was rearranged to include convenience stores, such as a medical clinic and shoemakers. The hypermarket remained as the main anchor store of the shopping centre. With the rearrangement of the tenant mix, the shopping centre management structure clearly intended to place PDT not as a shopping centre with several anchor stores but as a retail precinct with a considerable number of convenience stores (not the retail concept but in what regards to the quick access to the stores). In this particular case, this feature is enhanced by the availability of a free large parking space.

4.4 Summary

Altogether, the adopted strategies in these three shopping centres share some similarities but include some specific elements for each one. As shown in Table 5, the analysis

Shopping centre		Dolce Vita Monumental	Fonte Nova	Feira Nova de Telheiras
Decline situation	Period	2007; 2011	2010–2014	2005–2010
	Causes	Outdated	Economic crisis; competition from new shopping centres	Outdated (coinciding with ownership change)
Resilience strategies	Introduced only occasionally	Physical rehabilitation; Food court enlargement; tenant mix reformulation	Food court enlargement; gymnasium; enlargement of the supermarket; parking lot	Physical rehabilitation; withdrawal of own brands from the hypermarket to the shopping centre stores; union of several stores in one; tenant mix
	Regular	Changes in the tenant mix	Changes in management (risk sharing); tenant mix maintained	Hypermarket constant modernisation features
Threats		Shopping centres nearby	Shopping centres in the Lisbon region	Other hypermarkets
Strengths		Cultural heritage; convenience	Convenience	Location; convenience

Tab. 5: Synthesis of the resilience features of the three analysed shopping centres
Source: author's interpretation

reveals a relevant variety of features. The period and causes of the decline situations are different or, at least, never fully coincide. The same happens with the strengths and threats as proclaimed by the interviewees, which reflect the strategic orientations of each of the shopping centres.

Regarding the resilience strategies, we have divided them in two: regular and occasional. In the first case, they refer to measures implemented with some regularity and are mainly interventions at a lower depth, aiming at maintaining the vitality and viability of the retail precinct. In the second case, they refer to in-depth measures with the aim of changing more significantly certain characteristics of the shopping centre. Because of this, these latter interventions were only implemented rarely.

5. Discussion and conclusions

Retailing is a very dynamic sector. Shopping centres have been dominant in this sector for several recent decades. Nevertheless, this does not mean that such shopping centres are not subject to threat (as to existence) and to become obsolete. The designation of dead malls fits such cases. Although evidenced first in the North-American context, this is not a process exclusive to this geographical region. In this article, we aimed to investigate this subject using Lisbon as a case study. The appearance and dissemination of shopping centres in the Lisbon region happened relatively quickly and threatened not only traditional retail located in high streets – but also the viability of older shopping centres.

With respect to our first research question, the base line for: "What is the current situation of the shopping centres operating in Lisbon compared to the base-line year 1999?" – with a few exceptions, the network of shopping centres in Lisbon in 1999 comprised very small retail precincts, the majority of which was mainly real estate developments with scarce or no professional management. Because of this, they were deeply affected by the appearance of new shopping centres, with professional management structures and regional catchment areas. Thus, between 1999 and 2017 the number of "vital" shopping centres diminished from 21 to 10. On the other hand, in 1999 four shopping centres were classified as "dead malls", whereas in 2017, 22 structures fit this category (15 of which were in fact closed). Considering these data, however, the overall vacancy rate did not increase as much as one might have expected (from 15.7% to 24.9%). This not so high increase (as might be expected) is masked by some remodelling, which reduced the number of stores and/or retail floorspace. Faced with the decreasing viability of their retail precincts, the management structures forced the closure of several floors and allowed the physical space of several stores to be assembled. With a decreasing real estate value, during the fieldwork it was possible to realise that the majority of stores that are still open in the less viable shopping centres are occupied with business with low added-value, such as sewing services, shoemakers, insurance companies, real estate agents and others.

Furthermore, these businesses are mostly located on the ground level and in the stores with a showcase for the street. The findings are in line with the conclusions of the Congress for the New Urbanism (2001) regarding the North American context, i.e. although, currently, the majority of shopping centres do not possess a commercial use, their physical space is still seen as a mere real estate product. Thus, spaces are leased as much as possible to all kinds of uses. Taking Lowry's life cycle in consideration, if in 1999 one could consider that the majority of shopping centres were in the maturity stage,

in 2017 they have clearly reached the decline stage. Because the aforementioned Lowry life cycle theory (1997) assumes that decline is not inevitable, this evolution means that the management structures of those shopping centres were not able to introduce resilience measures that would prevent the decline of those retail precincts.

To answer our second research question: "What have been the resilience features introduced for the ones still operating?", we have deepened our analysis and focused on three shopping centres. They have differed from the general trend and managed to remain viable in the analysed period. Although with several differences, they share some relevant characteristics: namely, the existence of a planned tenant mix, food court, anchor stores, a professional management structure and the stores ownership being concentrated in one company. It was these common characteristics that appear to be crucial for the resilience of these shopping centres. Parking was also a crucial feature for Dolce Vita Monumental and Pingo Doce Telheiras. The analysis of Fonte Nova also attested to this relevant factor because the construction of access to parking lots (previously not available) was one of the resilience strategies adopted by this shopping centre. Other resilience strategies were incorporated and they also enhance the relevance of a professional management structure. The synthetic information in Table 5 allows us to understand that different strategies can be put in place if the strengths of each shopping centre are taken in consideration. Physical rehabilitation seems to be crucial but just to some extent. If strong transformations were performed in two of the analysed shopping centres, they were carried out as an exceptional measure in order to deeply overcome the negative situations in which they found themselves. Once this stage was completed, it proved to be more effective to continuously develop shallow improvements. The enlargement and rearrangement of the food court was another major strategy, attesting to its current relevance, oriented at a two-fold audience: in the first case, oriented to consumers that work in the vicinities and use the food court for lunch: secondly, leisure-oriented for people that use the shopping centre to walk, shop or just to meet with friends.

The ability to rearrange the tenant mix is another relevant strategy. The chosen case studies show us how this strategy can be used differently. In Dolce Vita Monumental and Pingo Doce de Telheiras, this was a strategy to attract new and better stores for the shopping centre (from the same and different typologies) in order to increase their attractiveness. In Fonte Nova, this strategy was mainly used to control which stores entered into the shopping centre, denying the opening of stores that could lessen the quality of the tenant mix. Nevertheless, in this shopping centre this strategy was also used to incorporate a gymnasium (replacing an outdated and less attractive cinema) and to increase the retail floorspace of the already existing supermarket. Besides these strategies, two more can be demonstrated that are related to the shopping centre business management strategy. In Fonte Nova, following the economic crisis that put into question the viability of some of the existing stores and made it difficult to attract new stores, a sharing risk policy was put into practice, i.e. the rental price became dependent on the value of sales made by the respective store. In Pingo Doce de Telheiras, several own brands that belong to the same owner left the hypermarket and occupied the individual stores of the shopping centre. Overall, it was the relevance of the management structures and their ability to control these elements that dictated the resilience of the shopping centres

in this analysis. This control of the tenant mix is only possible if all stores of a given shopping centre belong to the same company, which can, thus, plan what type of store they want in the retail premise or even which ones do not contribute to its proper functioning. In the three case studies, any of the implemented resilience measures would be possible without the existence of a management structure.

Finally, another cross-cutting aspect of the three shopping centres is the intentional strategy of their management structures to make convenience one of its major strengths. Faced with the difficulty of competing with larger and newer retail precincts, the ease and speed with which purchases can be made is seen as an essential component for the viability of the analysed shopping centres. Connecting these findings with the theoretical discussions, it became evident that the adopted resilience strategies fit more than one perspective. The more in-depth measures are more connected with the engineering approach, i.e. the ones that were developed after the shopping centres experienced some decline and had to rearrange themselves to return to an equilibrium status. The adaptive resilience measures are the ones that have been implemented since the in-depth measures. In this case, it seems clear that the management structures are adopting an anticipatory approach, continuously adapting the retail precinct as a way to remain viable.

Now-a-days, the high number of shopping centres that are not vital, according to the classification adopted in this article, is significant. This may raise substantial challenges for urban planning in the near future. Because the problems affecting the majority of shopping centres have a structural nature (mostly due to their physical and management inadequacy), it is predictable that the number of dead malls will increase. Additionally, following the same rationale, one may expect that the majority (if not all) of shopping centres classified as struggling and greyfields will continue to decline, enlarging the number of dead malls, which will give the problem a further dimension. Indeed, because most of such shopping centres were conceived and maintained as mere real estate developments, they can hardly be considered simply a retail problem. Furthermore, because they occupy a vast area of the valued urban area of the city centre of Lisbon, they are at present an increasing urban planning problem.

Acknowledgements

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