

STRATEGIES OF COMPLEMENTARITY BETWEEN RETAIL ACTIVITIES AND TOURISM IN HERITAGE CITIES: THE CASE-STUDY OF VENICE

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Shopping is an important activity for the consumers' goods provision, but it may also be considered as a significant element in the city's service offer and an excellent complement for the tourist offer. In heritage cities, this importance may be even higher due to the monospecialisation of these cities on tourism and tertiary activities (Yuksel, 2007, a.b). As a matter of fact, shops become part of the city image and participate in the creation of the own urban image, like other tertiary activities as restaurants, leisure or clearly, culture activities.

Even though some kind of shops have trivialized the importance of shopping activities in the city image, as souvenir shops with low quality products, it is commonly accepted that shops have helped in the maintenance of a solid urban image.

In many occasions, artisan shops sell goods produced in the neighbourhood, helping local businessmen to participate in the urban economy. In this way, the number of activities that can survive due to the tourism impact rises, giving a wider market for these artisan products (De la Calle, 2002).

Sometimes, the presence of tourist-oriented shopping activities has created controversy about the territory use among different urban agents. Retailers are interested in the urban central areas because of the shopping potential, whereas residents prefer to maintain the local atmosphere.

The incompatibility of opinions regarding the use of space has been expressed by the term «tourist shopping habitat» (Yuksel, 2007 b) and it is an important point of discussion for local agents, who do not find the perfect solution for living and selling their products in the same place.

However, in the last decades, foreign investors have entered into these local markets because of their potential as purchasing centres. They use the local infrastructures for selling global products, irrespective of the origin of the product and the shopper's provenance.

Furthermore, these shops have taken advantage of the unique urban scene and the stream of tourists that come to the city because of the cultural heritage patrimony. Usually, these shops belong to big corporations which are able to invest in the most expensive areas of the city, ousting local shoppers and artisans who have not the same economical conditions.

This situation can be illustrated with the case-study of Venice, a city-museum which is visited every year by more than 16 million tourists due to its spectacular appearance, cultural richness and social tradition.

In this city, conflicts between retailers and residents have grown since the bulk of shops are oriented to tourists, who are the most important group in terms of demographic volume. Moreover, among these shops focused on tourists, luxury shops have occupied the most representative *calli* (streets) of the heritage city centre and residents are not able to buy staple goods in their own city anymore.

In this sense, whereas those shops offering goods for local residents are disappearing because of the demographic crisis and their low profitability, a large amount of souvenir shops are spread all over the city centre.

Moreover, the most representative area of the city, the surroundings of the *Piazza San Marco*, has been absolutely occupied by luxury shops which are selling global products in one of the most beautiful urban scenes of the world. Local manufacturers and businessmen are unable to pay such high rents and they occupy cheaper locations in other *sestieri* (districts) of the historic centre.

This article aims to analyse the current situation of the retail structure in Venice by using in-depth interviews held in luxury shops. Retailers were asked about the relationship that they have with other retailers and, obviously, with the city of Venice.

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