

Abstract

Retail has been one of the most severely affected sectors during the onset of the global Covid-19 pandemic. The national lockdowns and subsequent closure of the non-essential retail and leisure services have exacerbated the undergoing changes and fragility of the sector, already eroded by the rapidly increasing Internet shopping in the pre-pandemic period. Although there were clear winners such as large online retailers e.g. Amazon or the essential grocery retailers, most of high streets or shopping centres have experienced an immense economic shock and adverse impact that varied across space and time. Indeed, the extent to which this disruptive change has impacted the evolution, recovery and future growth of the traditional shopping and consumption spaces is little understood and as such warrants a rigorous academic investigation, which is central to the wider debate on vitality, economic performance and evolutionary change of these important urban spaces.

As such, this project aims to investigate the response of the traditional physical shopping and consumption spaces to the onset of the global Covid-19 pandemic at various spatial scales and draw international comparisons. This will be examined within the context of two countries: Poland - a fast growing and developing Central European economy and the UK – a mature Western European economy. The retail systems in Poland and Britain have very different historic and contextual backgrounds, which can impact significantly their resilience and response to the shock of the Covid-19 pandemic. In the UK, where there is systematic and granular data available, it is evident that the shock of the Covid-19 pandemic, has accelerated the pre-existing trends in retail and consumer behaviour with some commentators claiming that a decade worth of changes to the British retail sector have occurred within the past 12 months. Conversely, in Poland commercial research shows that the overall picture of retail landscape emerging from the Covid-19 pandemic is more positive. However, there is little **rigorous academic research to verify such findings** largely due the fact that in Poland **no systematic data for individual shopping and consumption spaces or their catchments is available** to the researchers.

To fulfil the research aim, the project will: **first**, develop analytical framework to examine the economic performance and evolutionary trajectories of shopping and consumption spaces. This will include computing boundaries for shopping and consumption spaces in Poland, estimating the areas customer are coming from and deriving key performance indicators. **Second**, examine the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on Polish and UK retail centres at a national scale. By using data driven approach, changes in their economic performance will be investigated across space and time. **Third**, compare the response of Polish and British shopping and consumption spaces to the pandemic by using a detailed analysis at intra-urban scale. The findings will be positioned within the relevant debates and resilience theories to better understand their adjustment to the so-called 'new era of retail'.