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RETROSPECTIVE AND PERSPECTIVES

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ABSTRACT

The paper focuses on the commercial gentrification process and its impact on local businesses and neighborhoods in Sofia during the past 30 years. The research goes beyond the architectural representation of the mall and the hypermarket as a large scale development projects and grounds on qualitative approaches and spatial-temporal analysis focused on socio-cultural outcomes and impacts resulted by the competing functions and distribution and concentration of retail agents. Outlined and discussed are the trends at different time periods ranging from the benefits for the culturally sensitive visitors who enjoy the new consumption experience in the mall to the local/city disparities, to closing of local business and changing the identity of traditional shopping streets, open markets and wholesale markets.

The commercial centers are analyzed in retrospective in terms of location, potential to generate congestions, access to public transport, property ownership and previous functions, availability of land and buildings, length of operation, type of shops, level of multinationalism, target market segments and affordability of services/goods and right to access.

By summarizing the drivers and challenges of retail gentrification, the research findings suggest different sets of measures that might overcome or mitigate the impact of retail restructuring as part of integrated urban regeneration.

KEYWORDS: retail gentrification, urban regeneration, post socialist cities

1. INTRODUCTION

Retail districts in contemporary dynamic cities are especially fluid, responding to changing population patterns, consumer tastes, transportation patterns, and economic conditions. (Zukin 2009) Urban regeneration and development constantly re-introduces gentrification processes to a wide spectrum of city users. Re-use of buildings and places encourages processes of capital reinvestment (Smith) and successively creates spatially embedded places designed and serving social segments with distinctive cultural characteristics (Zukin, 1990). Lee, Slater and Waley (2008) qualify gentrification as a "global strategy connected into the circuits of the global capital and cultural circulation" and representative result of the neoliberal urbanism. Rooted in the urban regeneration and development, the retail gentrification is a highly political process (Betancur, 2002) that follows market-driven policies of urban development. The retail sector not only provides essential services and goods to the community but is also a 'frontier' of further gentrification (Gonzalez and Wiley 2013).

The positive effect of retail sector development is supported by different research findings on commercial environment as public spaces that generate new energy, on the opportunity to provide public space for social activities with the development of big shopping outlet, on rediscovering the traditional characteristics of a street after a revitalization and improved walkability, on private and quasi-private development projects that attach new identity grounded on strong place marketing. New retail establishments, however, do not bring only positive social effects and have diverse impact and footprint for different social groups. Retail gentrification is an expression of socio-spatial changes and consumers of the city. (Zukin 2009)

Retail developments as manifestation of new consumerism are related to four groups of parameters that affect urban life and distinguish specific characteristics of the "retail revolution" and its impact on CEE city structure: the effects of retail deconcentration on travel behavior, frequency of visits and the distance travelled; mode of transportation; energy efficiency of the buildings as a factor included in the calculation of CO2 emissions. Empirical studies of Warsaw and Prague find a close relationship between the decentralization of retail and increased motorization (Garb 2006).

At a strategic level Worzala and Bernasek (1996) consider that the value of most real estate is derived from local market conditions with local constraints determining the supply, the demand and the value of property. While investment in property is frequently based upon transactions involving the existing stock rather than new projects, the latter creates the image of a vibrant city equipped for the needs of modern business and market activities. However market choice can be limited due to institutional constraints including planning policy and procedures with a city's planning system capable of portraying positive or negative images to potential investors ranging from flexibility to bureaucratic inefficiency. Cities require planning systems, which are responsive to market conditions and capable of delivery under changing demand, and supply-side pressures reflected by market performance indicators and influenced by factors such as lease arrangements, liquidity, transparency and tenant demand. Within CEE countries the impetus arising from deregulation and privatization has stimulated the emergence of real estate markets, their rapid development and internationalization. The evolution and maturity of markets however, brought to increased disparities among consumers and saw the birth and decline of alternative exchange models that were spontaneously accommodated in the urban structure.

Mapping the changing context of retail and office property development requires a more qualitative approach to property research. The accuracy and availability of statistics and econometric data tell little about the shifting priorities of occupiers. Instead of focusing on the production and recycling of property market statistics, the contemporary trends in the researches concerning property markets are concentrated on possibilities to locate 'the cultural shifts characterizing changing perceptions of risk among the occupiers'. (Guy and Harris, 1997)

At the beginning of the transition period, after 1989, the restructuring of economy was mainly represented by property rights restructuring. These first transformations facilitated commercial property development, which in turn substantially contributed to the reorganization of land use within Bulgarian cities. Demand for property in particular retail space has generated developments at various city locations, thus significantly changing the retail geography of Sofia, and leading to considerable impact on land use patterns, travel behavior, consumers' choices, and lifestyles. Parallel and in retrospective, different strategies with different levels of intervention and impact were applied at various locations: from abandoned construction site to redesign and completed project; from decline to conversion and /or upgrading due to changed property ownership; from decline to regeneration and introducing new functions and increased walkability; from decline to demolition and high quality design; from greenfield to brownfield. The strategies applied for the analyzed projects and existing commercial centers, markets and streets are further assessed in terms of location, potential to generate congestions, access to public transport, property ownership and previous functions, availability of land and buildings, length of operation, type of shops, level of multinationalism, target market segments and affordability of services/goods and right to access.

2. RETROSPECTIVE: SOFIA'S RETAIL RESTRUCTURING, EVOLUTION AND GENTRIFICATION

2.1 The legacy: Retail and centralized planning (before 1989)

Grounded on strong ideology, centralized planning (1945 – 1989) in Bulgaria is characterized with large scale outstanding physical regeneration project, fundamental interventions but neglected social-economic and identity issue, lack of pluralism and no need to consider complex relationships between actors and interests, institutionalized planning process but lack of vision for long-term management of the built environment. (Tasheva - Petrova, 2010) The process of requalification, regeneration by demolition and gentrification started in 1956 with the design of the Largo complex with the government buildings, the Bulgarian socialist party main building, and the central Department store that substituted the "provincial" commercial streets of early 20th century Sofia and evicting the established retailers. Built on top of the very heart of the ancient city of Serdica, the complex was designed and constructed as the city's new representative center. The Central Department store stands opposite the already established alternative of the open-air markets - the built in 1911 Central Hali (The City Market Hall). Until 1978 the traditional shopping streets (lomsko shosse, Dondukov, Maria Louisa, Pirotska - pedestrian, Graf

Ignatiev as well thousands of sq. m. of market places and ground floors, especially planned as retail space in the new housing structures across the city.

During the period between 1978-1980 the idea for locating secondary service centers has been developed and implemented throughout the mass construction of supermarkets that substituted corner shops serving the neighborhoods thus providing higher quality and better proximity to retail services for the residents. At the same time, due to the intensification of urban structures and the newly constructed high-rise residential areas, the district department stores[1] were built in order to serve the administrative districts providing minimum population within a defined catchment area. Along with the construction of the National Palace of Culture and the provision of pedestrian space along Vitosha blvd., new commercial axes were formed along Cherni Vrah Street and the streets around the National Palace of Culture. (Angelov, 2015)

Likewise in western societies, the socialist regime created consumers and controlled the desire and the level of consumption. Ideologically, in order to hide disparities, the mass consumption during socialism was sustained by provision of low cost goods at equal prices for everyone and low quality, thus creating deficiency for luxurious goods. (Dichev, I., 2005)This situation created and nourished specific retail models as the urban tax-free shops[2] and the groceries for exotic fruit and vegetables. Those who were not able to participate in this formal model, the markets and the flea markets allowed informal interrelations and exchange of goods.

Between 1960 and 1989, the Woman's market was recognized as an alternative of the state food distribution system. The well-established system, controlled by the municipality, let the Cooperators from the villages near Sofia to support themselves in the direct provision of food (mainly fresh fruit and vegetables). Gradually the provided goods were diversified and the market survived the difficult years of the transition as a location recognized for its economic freedom and consumer alternative in times of political and financial crisis. (Mediapool, 2015)

In 1988, the Municipal authorities made the decision to relocate the existing at the time flea market from the city center periphery to the 100 dka re-cultivated coke ash hill to the northeast periphery. The main driving forces for the vitality of the market were the deficiency of goods and speculation. Everyone could sell, re-sell or buy goods with proved or suspicious origin and bypass the restricted distribution of "Western" brands as Levi's and Chico, electronic devices, cigarettes, chew gums "Turbo", records and cassettes of The Beatles and even the newly published bestsellers in Bulgarian language. Prices were non-fixed and negotiable according to the demand. (Antova-Konstantinova, 2015)

2.2 Informal economy, wholesale and small size neighborhood shops replaced by hypermarkets (1990-2005)

The process of globalization of Economy and especially the aspirations of all Central and East European (CEE) countries of the European Union membership imposed the challenges of 'hosting inward investment from transnational companies looking for low-cost production bases close to expanding local markets' and well-educated workforce which had to follow the path of peripheral nation of EU. (Hall, 1993) In the process of rapid economic restructuring Sofia as other CEE countries suffered serious shortages of commercial office and retail space, which needed to be remedied due to : a) the so called

[1] lozenetz, Mladost, Studentski grad, ljulin, etc.
[2] Originally created to serve the diplomatic mission

"transition economy" with its incomplete societies and emerging property markets, which would hardly follow any rule or relationship; and b) the increased uncertainty of post-modern times (e.g. the war conflicts in the 1990-s in The Balkan peninsula, which post-factum affected all sectors of economic life in Bulgaria.

The first 10 years (1990 – 2000) of the Transition in Bulgaria were characterized with a) the development of democratic political system and market economy; b) ongoing privatization, land restitution, economic restructuring; c) deindustrialization and increasing social differentiation; d) rapid change of the socio-economic conditions, cultural context and the physical appearance of cities; e) overall policy for territorial development and private sector-led urban regeneration. (Tasheva – Petrova, 2010)

Property market has been quickly established in Bulgaria at the very beginning of the transition. Liberalization of prices, selling of government property, the commencement of privatization and liberalization of international trade have still not produced tension with demand for retail space in Sofia city. But a disturbing decline of residential areas, low rate of availability of vacant plots and significant amount of buildings, including retail privatized buildings were subjected to or in need for refurbishment and renovation.

The open markets in the city of Sofia were the first that experienced transformations soon after 1989. Then in order to be re-used temporary as closed markets and Bazaars, in response to the new social needs and as an attempt to compensate for the missing archetypes, gradually followed the modernization of the City market hall, the transformations of out of date cinemas, the National Palace of Culture and sport halls. The well-functioning before 1990 Central department store and the system of equally distributed across the city territory district department stores lost importance and declined. At the beginning the limited space of the main shopping streets brought to high rents (after mid 1990-s) and retailers were ready to pay for the location/presence in the city. Demand was huge and some of the shops tried to occupy the second floor level, but even then the rent levels were going up. The only large scale urban renewal programme dating from this period and that directly influenced the image of the inherited shopping streets was the UNDP funded programme Beautiful Bulgaria. Although it has not been a fully integrated urban regeneration programme, it has helped to renovate a large number of significant public buildings and monuments in some of the biggest Bulgarian cities, including Sofia, thus supporting the new owners and enhancing the quality of the city centers.

In response of the retail system gaps, new socio-cultural phenomena emerged, were recognized and established on the map of Sofia: temporary stalls and markets along the main streets and their inner enclaves, the wholesale for industrial goods in Iliantci and those for food, the second hand malls for clothes, shoes, bags, toys, etc.. The second hand shops occupied central locations and promised two contradictory characteristics: high quality and low price.

The wholesale market Iliantci used to supply the state department stores and shops with industrial goods under centralized planning and functioned as a regional retail center during the first decade after 1990. The wholesale in Iliantci was the most popular and the largest market "on the edge" – between the cheaper direct sales and the black market. Neither quality of the built environment, nor functional organization was of importance. The most valuable factors for the existence of these spontaneous and transit locations were the accessibility, the crowd, and the possibilities for direct interactions between importers, manufacturers and end users in order to bypass tariffs, taxes and fees. (Hristova, S., 2005) At that time the Iliantci wholesale market could compete only the Woman's market and the Flea Market, though each one of them kept its identity and served different target groups.

At the beginning of the period the flea market continued to provide space for exchange of deficit goods, but after the 1999, with the arrival of the hypermarket chains in Bulgaria, it gradually declined and took the traditional function of a large scale carboot market. Along with the democratization and endless freedom of speech, the Slaveikov square accommodated another spontaneous market that had to satisfy the hunger and the deficiency of books.

After 1990 the Woman's market expands its territory and number of stalls. Cheap imported goods along with the traditional pottery, local food, spices, ironmongery, and clothes-imitation of famous brads clothes were sold there. The market keeps its reputation of being the right place for retail entrepreneurships and escape from poverty and unemployment. Due to the free movement of migrants across borders many emigrants from the Syria, Lebanon, Palestine and other Near East countries settled in the area and ran diverse shops there.

The flea market, the open-air book market at Slaveikov square and the Woman's market were recognized by professionals, communities and citizens as livable public space, functional retail places, and iconic phenomena of that period. After 2000 the arrival of the hypermarket chains as METRO, the supermarkets as Billa, Lidl, and Carrefour imposed challenges in front of the retailers at the wholesales, local shops and even the flea market. The traditional street shops for household items and the privatized wholesale shops for construction materials competed the new chains as Baumax and Bricolage.

2.3 The Malls and the city (2006-2015)

The large scale developments of commercial areas (malls) in Bulgaria since year 2000 no doubtfully re-introduced and re-discovered a well-established archetype of the Post-industrial societies that added value to the development of multifunctional space collecting shopping, services, attractions, entertainment and sports under common roof. Such new spaces are dominated by multinational companies, where economic phenomena cross over to society and culture and produce public space for consumption. (Sorkin, 1992) The crowded newly opened malls provided supply of high quality and new public space, which obviously was insufficient in terms of location, quality and diversity in the post socialist city of Sofia.

No matter that the new malls and new hypermarket chains satisfy socio-economic and psychological needs of residents, commuters and tourist thus offering multifunctionality 12 hours daily/7 days in a week, they form the big game of the multinationals and the profitable real estate business. Because of the size of the investments, most of the large scale commercial development projects still obey the rules of the localization theory in terms of positioning in the urban structure. As closed urban structures, they represent socio-spatial relations that impact the neighboring quarters and the existing transport communications. Being main factor in the formation and remodeling of the urban structure, at the same time they seek to seize the opportunities and maximize the profits and benefits of the economy of scale. As "mediators of the globalization" (Chamova, M. 2013), malls represent specific public space that simultaneously epitomize and generate new culture, lifestyles and generations. They arrived due to the FDI and the increased interest in investing in Bulgaria on the brink and after the EU accession.

Location, along with the mix of shops and management is an important success factor (T. B. Magazine 2007) that also affects mobility and access and segregates visitors into have and have nots in terms of car ownership. Location as factor couples with other important factors as: demographic characteristics of the population within the catchment area, social status, level of infrastructure provision, crime, etc.

The retail along the traditional shopping streets[3] were strongly affected by the operation of the shopping malls in terms of depopulation, loss of retail function, increased turnover of the tenants and loss of identity. Owners of shops along the main shopping streets were the first to be affected. Pedestrians, once crowded along the shopping streets, were spread in different locations across the city thus following the opening of the new shopping centers that offer diversity, high quality environment and design, sterile microclimate and clean and lighted secure public space. (Colliers, 2015)

During the first year of the first three malls' operation, tenants of retail space tended to value and to strive for both the mandatory presence on the shopping street and the presence in one of the malls. Some of the retailers' localization in the malls were driven by the willingness to expand their activity with new outlets. As the market was developing fast since 2006, the phenomena "paying to a tenant to move out" has been observed. The two factors "paying to a tenant to move out" and the paying for presence ranked Bulgaria 22-nd on the list of the World consultancy company Cushman & Wakefield by retail space rental rates in 2005 (T. B. Magazine 2006). Few of the malls provide direct connection with entrance of a metro station - Mega mall (Lylin), forthcoming – Paradise center, while The Mall of Sofia in in close proximity to the metro station. (Table 1)

The first effects observed in 2006 (summer) were the decreasing rent levels of retail space along Vitosha blvd and the surrounding area – with figures 10-15 % lower compared to the previous year. (Valchev. V) At that time the most expensive retail property for rent was located not far from the National Palace of Culture, on Partiarh Evtimii blvd., while the lowest rent levels were registered in the peripheral residential districts Lyulin and Ovcha Kupel. (T. B. Magazine 2007)

In 2010 the rent levels along the main shopping streets in Sofia (e.g. Vitoshka str.) did not change significantly, although decreased levels of sales were observed and the second generation of malls opened. The beginning of 2014 was marked as turning point because of the market maturity and new competitive requirements in mall management – changing the retail mix and transition to affordable brands. (Forton, 2014) (Table 1, 2.)

The prime retail space rentals in July 2014 rose by 3%-4% in Sofia, Varna and Plovdiv, compared to the previous six months. Compared to the first half of the year, in Sofia the rents of rental space on the main shopping streets increased by 3% over the half-year period. (Seenews, 2015)

Usually the leasing contracts are 5 or 10 years, planned at least 3[4] years in advance. Therefore only the occupancy rate is being monitored but not the tenants' turnover. The first three malls opened at good, although not 100 % occupancy in 2006. During the period 2013 – 2014 the vacancy rate of retail space in Sofia's malls grew by 6 %, compared to the 7 % along the Vitosha blvd. and 4% for Varna, 7% for Bourgas and 9% for Plovdiv.

At city level, the number of consumers stayed at comparatively stable levels, while the retail space doubled since 2010. This affected mainly the revenues and increased the competition, especially between malls located in nearby districts that share the catchment areas of served population. At the beginning of 2014 the average amount of retail space in the existing commercial centers in Sofia was 230 sq. m. per 1000 people (residents) compared to the EU average 268,3 sq. m. and the country's average – 96 sq. m. (Forton ,

[3] Vitoshka, Dondukov, Pirotska, Graf Ignatiev

[4] e.g. in 2015 the Management bodies are planning the leasing for 2017

2014) The total volume of retail space in Bulgaria was 783,260 sq. m at the end of 2014, while saturation rates grew from 101 to 108 sq. m per 1,000 residents. (Colliers) The opening of the new malls also brought to saturation of retail space and overlapping catchment areas (e.g. the potential visitors of Plaza West (Lyulin, not opened yet) and Mega Mall overlap by 80%). There are no evidences yet whether the overlapping catchment areas serve different areas and segments of the residential district. Professionals predicted that after 2014 the "war" will be for those consumers that are willing to cross the city. (Kosev, S., Forton, 2014)

Until 2006 the streets offered high rents of retail space and unsuitable premises. The Large scale projects brought famous brands that required unavailable space in Sofia at that time - from 1 500 to 2 000 sq. m retail space. Large space and one level space fitted tenants and shop owners as electronics retailers, the big supermarkets and the furniture shops that are usually located at the city's periphery and banned from downtown. (Valchev 2006) The shopping complexes designed as closed structures proved to be less dependent on the climate – rain, high temperatures, etc. and the third generation of malls are equipped with integrated and sophisticated facility management that provides controlled environment and safety due to security control and surveillance. These characteristics sometimes bring additional problems as: overcrowded space in case of unfavorable weather conditions, traffic jams due to the lack of free parking lots, not to mention the energy spent for the provision of the consumers' comfort.

The mix of tenants as an important factor for the success of the shopping centre may bring to two opposite effects: different shops of one kind but without competition between them attract more people but also may impose restrictions to diversity and reject consumers' interest. (E. i. Egozi 2006) The tenant mix in terms of provision of expensive and cheap brands is also comparable to the "budget option of main shopping streets". As for the retail mix – a tendency of homogenization has been observed, as well as need of promoting new and different competitive advantages as entertainment and sport facilities, events, cinemas, etc.

Malls have transformed and unified the commercial landscape of Sofia with the domination of the international retail giants and facilitated the social polarization by rejecting the low income citizens and closing the doors for local businesses. The ratio number of Bulgarian brands/international brands in the tenant mix of Sofia's malls gives clear evidence on the statement above. (Table) The min retail space occupied by Bulgarian tenants offer the following: a) goods as jewelry, children's shoes, Bulgarian cuisine at the food courts, Bulgarian confectionary, leather accessories, shoes and bags, optics, luxurious household linen, toys for children, books, cosmetics, bio food, men's suits, flowers, gifts; b) services as bank and insurance offices, mobile operator offices, easy pay counters; c) others as pet shops, multiplexes (Arena cinema), art galleries, car wash, clothes cleaning, pharmacies. Important note here is that the services as banking and mobile operators are partially owned by foreign banks and foreign mobile operators. As a result, the big number of bookshops in the malls[5] gradually competed and displaced some of the retailers of the open-air market on Slaveikov square.

Parallel to the evolutionary development of the malls as archetype, some of the existing markets tried to rebrand and name themselves "malls" – e.g. Ilientci Mall[6]. The tenants' community of the Bazaar is multicultural. The considerable share of the chinesse community has already started to settle in the nearby residential areas. (IPURD, 2013).

[5] At least 2 big bookshop chains per mall

[6] The former wholesale market

Other fascinating and livable markets in the past two decades declined and some mock names were coined as “the mall of Malashevci“[7] or the so called “the hypermarket of the poor”[8] .

Due to the segregation and need for affordable prices of goods, another phenomenon was observed in the recent 2 years - emergence of shops with big retail space called “Chinese malls” selling cheap to affordable products and goods made in China, Turkey and Bulgaria. They are with good location in non-prestigious parts of the city centre or within the peripheral housing areas as H. Dimitar, Suhata reka, Lylin, Krasna polyana, where the rent levels are low, the housing stock – worn out, and residents - low income. In the city center second hand shops were substituted by food hypermarkets, while the survived clustered at specific locations, utilizing the mix of pedestrian flows, low rent levels and short-term leasing contracts.

3. SPATIAL DIMENSIONS OF RETAIL RESTRUCTURING, EVOLUTION AND GENTRIFICATION: CHALLENGES AND PERSPECTIVES

The future challenges and perspectives could be summarized into four main groups as follows:

3.1. Retail development, urban development and impact on city structure and functions

- Agglomeration effects and economies of scale. Contribution to the formation of secondary and regional shopping centers. Sofia Ring Mall is a new regional retail development that together with the adjacent IKEA store, forms the biggest retail and leisure destination in Bulgaria located in a district with high-level income residents and high population growth. The first and so far the only ‘hot connection” between two retail complexes has been realized.
- High potential of malls to generate congestions due to the invasion into already built up urban tissue and infrastructure. Difficult pedestrian access nevertheless that the stops of the public transport were reorganized. People within the mall’s catchment area do not have pedestrian access to the Mall due to difficulties in crossing high class city boulevards.
- The recently finished (2014) renewal of the open air market “Jenski Pazar” which provides high quality design, increased share of the public space and second level for retailers. Majority of retailers were evicted and new monopolistic structures settled there.
- Development of shopping areas in the old low density wider catchment residential areas at the periphery (to the north-east, to the west and to the south-west) as well as provision of walkable connections.
- Due to the competition for retail space in the malls and recently completed renovation of the pedestrian part of Vitoshka street is being gradually transformed into a food street. The area between Graf Ignatiev street and Vitoshka str. has been recognized as a pleasant food district, where alternative restaurants and shops as well as emerging creative industries cluster.

3.2. Retail, infrastructure development and gentrification

[7] http://bitaka.tumblr.com
[8] http://www.temanews.com/index.php?p=tema&iid=197&aid=5008

- The construction of the metro diameters and the market forces driving towards the transit-oriented development. Urgent need for preparation of specific guidelines for the development along Lomsko shosse blvd.., where the construction has already been completed but retail development still kept at the level of the small plots with big number of owners.
- Changing modes of consumption/buying influenced by ICT development and e-commerce. New types of communications, forms of interaction (both interpersonal and mediated) will increasingly invade retail system. The transition from the industrial age towards the information age often seems to be a matter of polarities – it is either giving up the old or embracing the new, or adding the new to the old. However the concept of what is real and what is not is increasingly being redefined and blurred thus approaching a scenario in which Malls will be transformed into fitting-rooms visited by brand admirers and fans of indoor public space with food courts.

3.3. Retail property market, urban planning and urban governance

- Unequal spatial distribution but reached saturation of the market. Experts from real estate companies assert that the retail map is already occupied and no significant new projects are expected on the Bulgarian retail market in the next 5 years, rather existing projects that have been frozen will be relaunched and re-purposed. (Simeonova 2015) (Yordanova, 2015) A forthcoming renewal of the first generation of Malls is expected after the ownership change. (Genev, 2015) The increased competition requires future introduction of average to expensive price levels of the brands offered thus facilitating the processes of gentrification.
- Supporting groups of projects with public money, financed under the Plan for Intgrated urban regeneration and development. The groups of projects are expected to act as magnets and impulse drivers for the development of the west part of the city centre, and mainly the Pirotska street and the area between the boulevards framing the western axis of the city centre as well as one of the historic axis Maria Lousia street and the area to the west framing Hristo Botev blvd.
- Two different but complementing each other surveys conducted by the private and the public sector show the need of integrated approach in balancing the policies serving the global/international retail players and real estate intermediaries and defending the public interest (dialogue with society/consumers and communities: one conducted by Colliers and one conducted by the team developing the Integrated plan for Urban regeneration and Development (IPURD, 2013)

3.4. Grass root movements for a just city

- The festival “Sofia breathes” started as an initiative (until 2014) and worked in support of Sofia’s application for 2019 Cultural capital. Small family companies promote and sell bio products thus influencing the change in attitudes towards nature and revived production technologies and tools. Recently it has been added to the Cultural calendar of Sofia municipality and promotes and safeguards the identity of the streets in the city centre. (Actualno)
- The successfully functioning in the first 10 years of the Transition, the warehouse Zimnitza (not far from Stochna gara), has been gradually transformed by young activists into Zona Cultura.
- Farmers markets network Hrankop and open farmers markets once a week are regularly held at the municipal markets as follows: Ivan Vazov (on Wednesdays),

Mladost (on Fridays), Rimska stena (on Saturdays) as part of the initiative to organize and promote short food provision chains in big cities. (Hrancop, 2016)

4. CONCLUSIONS

The retrospective of the development of the major types of retail space in Sofia is between the narrative of decline and revival and on the edge of gentrification. Each retail model characterized by specific space and locations within the city, follows cyclical patterns of development and each stage corresponds to the attempt to adapt incrementally, compete, or provide alternative. The different retail models and locations analyzed exist autonomously and the gap between them is widening.

Urban dynamics and real estate markets are strongly influenced by economic structures. The relationship between the stage of urban development and the advancement of real estate markets is not simple and direct but also affected by all actors and possible beneficiaries. This is the reason for cities to require planning systems responsive to the market conditions and capable of delivery under changing demand. Having in mind the dynamics of property markets, one should agree that retail and commercial developments need much more qualitative research. Retail and commercial development shapes and reflects community formation and public space identity and therefore are sensitive to categories as classes, cultural capital, minorities and public policy. "The right to the city paces through the right to shop there. " (Zukin, 2009)

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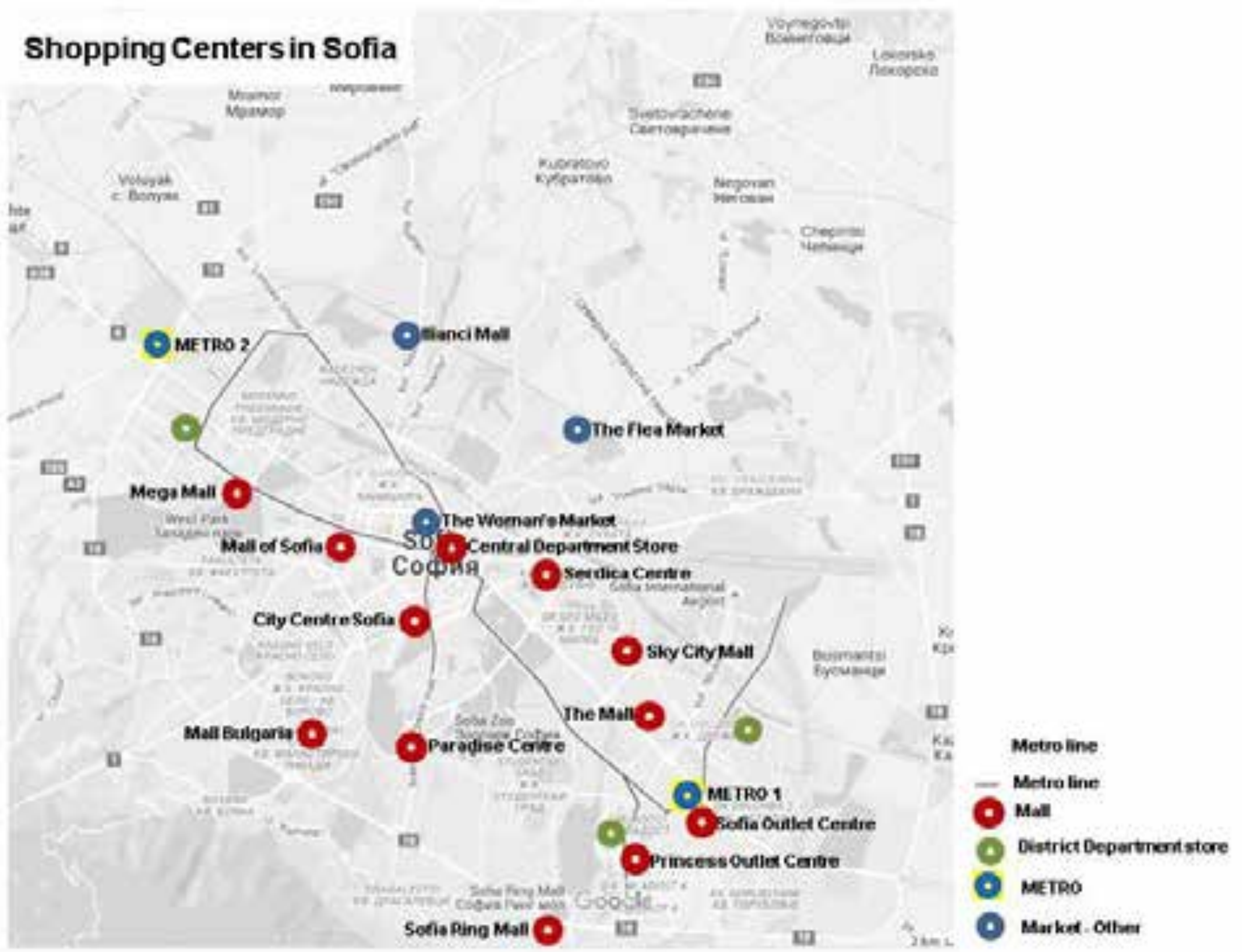

Figure 1: Major shopping centers in Sofia

Source: Google maps

Table 1: Major Shopping centers in Sofia. Characteristics

Source: Officiall web pages of the malls; http://www.sofia-guide.com/biz/shopping/shopping-centers/

SOPPING CENTRE	YEAR OPENED	PREVIOUS LAND USE OF THE PLOT	GROSS RETAIL AREA, SQ.M	GROSS FLOOR AREA OF DEVELOPMENT	ADDITIONAL ATTRACTION, MAIN MAGNETS	RETAIL UNITS/ BULGARIAN BRANDS AND SERVICES PROVIDERS
Central Department Store	2000 rennovated	Part of the Largo complex designed in 1956	19 000		11 000 office space	38
Mall of Sofia	2006	Abandoned construction site assigned for commercial development before 1989	35 000 700 parking lots	75 000 sq. m.	10 000 office 12 multiplex cinema halls (+ 3D cinema IMAX)	130 / 25
City Centre Sofia	2006	On the site of a district open air market	23 000 500 parking lots	45 000 sq. m.	6 cinema halls Food court, supermarket	100 / 20
Sky City Mall	2006	Former building of Electronica company	18 000 300 parking lots	26 000 sq. m. 320 parking lots	Entertainment center with a 16-lane bowling hall 3 400 sq. m "Fantastico" Hypermarket	120 /41
Princess Outlet Center	2007	on site allocated for secondary center before 1989, reconstruction of existing building	12 000	n/a	Entertainment center with a bowling hall	
Sofia Outlet Center	2010		15 000	n/a		64
The Mall (Carrefour)	2010	Empty plot within the city boundaries	66 000		10 screen Arena Cinema, entertainment venues, a fitness center, a food court Carrefour hypermarket 9000 sq. m	178 / 32
Serdica Centre	2010	Former military plot	51 000			210 / 34
Mall Bulgaria	2012	Empty plot within the city boundaries	34 000	80 000 sq. m. total	Carrefour 63 000 sq.m	
Paradise Centre	2013		80 000 2 000 parking	208,000 sq. m. total	multiplex - 14 halls, incl. 4DX cinema (100 seats); entertainment	350/ 20

			lots		center, Sky Park (7,460 sq. m) t ice synthetic rink (200 sq. m) food court Fitness and sports complex (4,032 sq. m.) incl a swimming-pool a multifunctional hall with 2000 seats and an outdoor panorama terrace.	
Sofia Ring Mall	2014	Greenfield (within the city boundaries)		69 000 sq. m. 3 500 parking lots	10 cinema halls	210/24
Mega Mall	2014	Empty plot within the city boundaries	24 000 sq. m. 600 parking lots		Billa	60(100planned)/20
Plaza West	forthcoming		26 000			

Table 2: Rent and sales level of retail space

Sources: 1 (T. B. Magazine 2006, issue 9 (34)); 2 (T. B. Magazine 2007); 3(T. B. Magazine 2007); 4 (T. B. Magazine, Expansion and Redistribution 2010); 5 FORTON, 2014; 6 (Seenews, 2015)

YEAR	RENT/SALES LEVELS	ITEMS/CONTRACTS	PRICES
2006[1]	Rent levels	warehouse space	from EUR 7 to EUR 12 per sq. m per month
	Rent levels	retail space in the shopping centers and malls	EUR 30 to EUR 60 per sq. m per month
	Rent levels	retail space along the high streets	from EUR 50 to EUR 120, per sq. m per month
		retail space along the streets in the residential neighborhoods	from EUR 4 to EUR 20 per month
2006[2]	Rent levels rented	Retail space of 60 sq. m. shop not far from the National Palace of Culture, on Partiarh Evtimii blvd.	EUR 117 per sq. m per month
2006[3]	Top asking rent levels	retail space in the centre of Sofia	From EUR 80 to EUR 130 per sq. m. per month
	asking levels Rent levels	64 sq. m . shop on Hristo Botev blvd	EUR 78 per sq. m per month

	asking levels Rent levels	32 sq. m . shop on St. Nedelya square	EUR 128 per sq. m. per month
2010[4]	Rent levels	retail space along high streets	EUR 70 per sq. m per month
2013[5]	Rent levels	retail space of 100-150 sq. m. shop with a first class location within the mall	EUR 22 per sq. m. per month
2014[6]	Sales prices	(City centre - Vitosha blvd.), P. Evtimii blvd and Madrid blvd Al. Malinov blvd (Mladost) –	From EUR 4 200 to EUR 21 000 per sq. m. From EUR 7 000 to EUR 8 000 per sq. m. From EUR 3 000 to EUR 4 000 per sq. m.

Photo 1: The largo complex, Central Department store (left)

Source: http://gradat.bg/forumgradat/2012/12/05/1961772_tursi_se_izpulnitel_na_vtoriia_etap_ot_sofiiskoto_largo/print/

Photo 2: The Ilianci Mall

Source: http://www.ilianci.com/bg

Photo 3: Slaveikov sq. open air book market

Source: http://www.viewsofia.com/article/1292/

Photo 3: Slaveikov sq. open air book marketThe winning Competition project

Source: http://www.viewsofia.com/article/1292/

 **Photo 4:** The frea market **Source:** http://izsofia.blogspot.bg/2015/05/blog-post.html	 **Photo 5:** The frea market **Source:** http://www.jivotatdnes.bg/news/jivot/izkustvo-za-smet-ili-edna-anonimna-poluistoriya-ot-bitaka

Photo 6: The opening of Serdica Mal

Source: http://магазини-в-софия.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/03/molove-v-sofia.jpg

Photo 7: Serdica Mall and the urban structure

Source: : Google Earth 2016

Photo 8: Woman's market before the reconstruction (in 2010, left) and after (2014, right)

Source: http://provocad.com/jenski-pazar-to-be-or-not-to-be/;