

CONSUMERSCAPES AND THE CULTURAL LOGIC OF SHOPPING PLACES

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ABSTRACT

This paper sketches a consumer-centric approach of urban retailing, broadening the conceptual framework of the Consumer Culture Theory (CCT) developed by Eric Arnould for stores to the shopping districts. We intend to show why *consumerscapes* matter for understanding the cultural dimension of urban *retailsapes* and the role they play in the consumers' daily-lives. In this context we briefly describe the CCT and its potential for the assessment of shopping places as fields of resources. The discussion will be conducted both in a theoretical and empirical way, supported by a case study analyzing consumers' perceptions of Colinas do Cruzeiro, a quarter situated in the outskirts of Lisbon.

KEYWORDS: Consumerscapes, Consumer Culture Theory, Consumer projects, Cultural resources; Retail strategy

CONSUMERSCAPES Y LA LÓGICA CULTURAL EN LUGARES DE CONSUMO

RESUMEN

En este artículo se presenta una aproximación al comercio urbano centrada en el consumidor, ampliando el marco conceptual de la Teoría de la Cultura del Consumo (TCC), desarrollada por Eric Arnould para las tiendas para las áreas comerciales de la ciudad. La intención es de demostrar por qué la percepción de los paisajes de los consumidores es importante en la comprensión de la dimensión cultural de los lugares de compras, así como su papel en la vida cotidiana. En este contexto, se describe brevemente la TCC y su potencial para la evaluación de los

espacios comerciales como fuentes de recursos. La discusión será tanto teórica como empírica, apoyándose para el efecto en las percepciones del barrio de las Colinas do Cruzeiro, ubicado en los suburbios de Lisboa.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Paisaje del consumidor, Teoría de la Cultura del Consumo, proyectos del consumidor, Recursos Culturales, Estrategia comercial

CONSUMERSCAPES E A LÓGICA DO CONSUMO EM LOCAIS DE COMPRA.

RESUMO

Neste artigo faz-se uma abordagem do comércio urbano centrada no consumidor, alargando o quadro conceptual da Teoria da Cultura do Consumo (TCC), concebido por Eric Arnould para as lojas, às áreas comerciais da cidade. O objetivo consiste em mostrar a importância das representações das áreas comerciais forjadas pelos consumidores na compreensão da dimensão cultural dos lugares de compra, bem como o seu papel na vida quotidiana. Neste contexto, começamos por fazer uma breve apresentação da TCC e do seu potencial na avaliação dos espaços comerciais como interfaces de recursos culturais. O problema é depois discutido tanto do ponto de vista teórico como empírico, apoiando-nos para o efeito nas percepções dos consumidores sobre o bairro das Colinas do Cruzeiro, localizado nos subúrbios da cidade de Lisboa.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Paisagens do consumidor, Teoria da Cultura do Consumo, projetos do consumidor, Recursos culturais, Estratégia comercial

INTRODUCTION

Change has always shaped urban *retailscales*, and supply and demand have been its main architects (BORCHERT, 1998). Consumers are constantly renewing their needs, wants and desires, changing their behaviors and lifestyles, with direct consequences on shopping activities. To face the consumers' challenge and survive in a highly competitive environment, shopkeepers have to renew their

strategies, introducing new retail concepts, innovative shopping environments and different types of goods and services (CACHINHO, 2014).

If we look closely at the changes of urban *retailscales*, we realize that shopping strategies have clearly taken a new direction, swerving away from the producers and heading to the consumers. With the development of the consumer society and the dissemination of its values, the most dynamic shopkeepers have realized that the key to their success lies in the consumers. They have therefore decided to stop merely being the producers' intermediaries to become the consumers' spokespeople, matching their shops' offer and atmosphere to the needs and desires of their customers (CACHINHO, 2002). As the consumers draw closer, retailers truly re-position themselves in the market. Besides carving out a new identity that is more in keeping with the role they play in society, they re-shape the retail-supply relations, including the manufacturers' production strategies. This is contrived through an interplay of personalization and emotions that strengthens the attractiveness of the shops, thereby transforming them into places of experiences (LIPOVETSKY, 2006; MILES, 2010). By doing so, shopkeepers raise the consumers' levels of satisfaction expressed through a set of emotional responses of varying intensity in relation to goods acquisition and shopping experiences (GIESE & COTE, 2002).

The strategic orientation of retail premises to the offer of life experiences has been explored by different authors namely looking at shoppers through the lens of consumer culture theory (ARNOULD, 2005; ARNOULD & THOMPSON, 2005) and the resource-based theory (VARGO & LUSCH, 2004). According to these approaches, consumption and shopping practices can be interpreted as socio-anthropological phenomena. People have a variety of projects that they tend to achieve through shopping, and shopkeepers offer the range of resources they need to accomplish such projects.

Bearing these ideas in mind, the purpose of this paper is to sketch a consumer-centric research approach of spaces for shopping and consumption in

the city, broadening the conceptual framework of the CCT developed by Arnould (2005) for stores to the shopping districts. In particular, we intend to show why *consumerscapes* matter when we seek to deeply understand the cultural dimension of contemporary urban *retailscales* and the role they play in the daily-life of consumers. Although answers to the questions raised by the perceptions of shopping districts as fields of resources still remain unclear, and further research in the field is needed, namely on the linkages between consumers' life projects and their achievement through shopping experiences provided by the retail venues and consumer environments, we hope to shed more light on the subject.

In order to reach these goals, we shall briefly describe the principles of the CCT and discuss its potential for the evaluation of shopping districts as fields of cultural resources for consumers. The discussion will be conducted both in a theoretical and empirical way, supporting our arguments in the analysis of consumers' perceptions of Colinas do Cruzeiro, a neighborhood located on the outskirts of Lisbon.

THE CONSUMER CULTURE THEORY: LOOKING AT STORES AS FIELDS OF RESOURCES

Many recent changes in urban retailing show a substantial shift in the strategies of retailers. At the heart of this change is the idea that in postmodernity consumption has become a social act by which the signs, codes and social relations are (re)produced (BAUDRILLARD, 1975; FIRAT & DHOLAKIA, 1998). Through consumption and consumer places people not only satisfy their needs but also forge images of themselves and define their identities.

This way of looking at consumption and individuals-consumers introduces major changes in the way the value of goods is created and the role of retailers in the production-distribution-consumption chain. Traditionally viewed as mere intermediaries linking production to consumption they now become strategic actors in the production cycle. The more proactive, committed to making stores

places of experiences, even relegate the manufacturers to a subordinate position in the process of value-creation.

The strategic orientation of retail premises to the offer of consumer experiences has been explored by marketing through the lens of consumer culture theory (ARNOULD & THOMPSON, 2005) and the resource-based theory (VARGO & LUSCH, 2004). Seeing consumption and consumer choices as socio-anthropological phenomena, research undertaken in this field has sought to explore the way in which consumers manipulate and transform symbolic meanings encoded in the offer (goods, services, brands, ...) and shopping venues in order to build their life projects (HOLT, 2002; DEBENEDETTI *et al.*, 2011). Making use of Arnould's (2005) terms, in market-driven societies, consumption becomes a means of producing one's self, one's self image in the community and one's tribal membership. Thus, individuals engage in shopping to accomplish a variety of projects for which they mobilize their own economic, social, and ideological resources. In turn, retail firms and shops compete for a role in the culturally constituted projects that individuals-consumers pursue by offering a mix of resources, which can be used by consumers. Arnould (2007) reports the deployment of these resources through the notion of *consumer agency* that reflects the way consumers, who base themselves on their own cultural resources, accept, reject and/or convert the resources provided by retailers.

From the marketing point of view, Arnould (2005, p. 91-93) identified four main categories of cultural resources: economic, utopian, ludic, and temporal. However, other types of resources can be found, depending on the features of the market and the socio-cultural environment. In short, retailers and shopping environments: offer economic resources when they help consumers' pursuit of identity projects organized around values focused on frugality, thriftiness, and value for money; symbolize utopian resources when they aid consumers' pursuit of a utopian world or selves; work as ludic resources when they facilitate consumers' pursuit of play, including activities, such as, transcendental

experiences, fan behaviors, imaginative role-playing; and finally operate as temporal resources when they enable the enactment of consumers' preferred time-styles, providing, for example, goods and ambiances that save time to be spent on leisure and socialization activities, strongly valued by individuals.

Seen through the lens of consumer culture theory (CCT) and the resource-based theory (RBT), retailers and shopping places are crucial in the daily lives of individual-consumers because they act as interfaces of the cultural resources they need to accomplish their life projects. Of course, given its inanimate condition, commodities (goods and services) and shopping places in themselves do not have the power to play such a role. In order to make this possible they need to be activated by the individual-consumers who draw upon their own cultural resources for the effect. This means that although shopkeepers provide the goods and the ambiances for shopping, it is only at the symbolic level and in the dialogue with individuals that commodities gain meaning and are able to perform the role of cultural resources. This is why authors such as Arnould (2005) and Vargo & Lusch (2004) feel the need to make a clear distinction between two categories of resources: the operant resources, intangible in their nature, linked to skills, knowledge, values and ideologies of individual-consumers, and the operand resources, usually tangibles, on which is felt the action of the first kind of resources. Breaking with the classic marketing view, Arnould (2005) argues that retailers, at least the most proactive, should be envisioned as operant and operand resources suppliers that compete for shares of consumer operand resources.

The idea that retailers and stores may be envisioned as interfaces of cultural resources that the consumers are able to call upon so as to follow up their personal and collective projects, has been witnessed by studies undertaken in different geographical settings. For instance, in the field of shopping mall patronage, Erkip (2003) reveals how the development of shopping malls in Ankara is shaping the identity of urban Turkish citizens who are searching for modernity; Haytko & Baker (2004), in an ethnographic examination of young American girls'

mall experiences show how the girls plan their trips and use the shopping mall to pursue their conventional social projects; and Varman & Belk (2011) in their post-colonial analysis of shopping malls as hybrid sites, reveal how young consumers in India, looking upon these spaces as Western spectacles, deploy them to transform their Third World identities.

However, studies that have tried to explain the cultural dimension of shopping environments are not entirely confined to shopping malls. Smith *et al.* (2001) explain the success of many health clubs and gyms as third places, above all in their aptitude to create a friendly inviting ambience which facilitates making social relationships among gym-goers. Kozinets *et al.* (2002) examine the themed flagship brandstores in terms of the mythological appeal of the narratives suggested by their physical and symbolic environment. In their study of Chicago's ESPN Zone conclude that consumers interact and "read" the megastore physical environment for the story it told them. Borghini *et al.* (2009) also explore the power of themed brandstores in the consumers' experiences. In their ethnographic study of the American Girl Place, they show how retailing in this brand-environment is an ideological affair. The brand ideology is overwhelmingly present in the different themed focal areas structuring the American Girl Place: the Museum, Theatre, Salon, Library, Café, and the Photo Studio.

The cultural dimension of retail and consumption also shapes the most banal shopping venues focused on the provision of low-order goods and services. In this field, Woodruffe-Burton & Wakenshaw (2011) carried out a research into the symbolic and experiential values of grocery shopping and consumer experiences, applying an existential phenomenological interview to ten women living in the UK. They reveal how consumers express and construct their selves and identities through their food shopping and consumer practices by appropriating the cultural and social meanings contained in the set of resources provided by retailers.

Finally, CCT was also used by Cachinho (2014) in the resilience assessment of urban retail systems by analyzing the consumers' perceptions of the shopping

districts and premises. The research concludes that reflecting consumers' satisfaction levels, *consumerscapes* can play an important role in the governance of the cities and in the management of shopping places committed to the resilience of retail systems. By incorporating the consumers' perceptions in the design and management of the shopping districts, planners and policymakers can adapt the amenities of places and environments to people's real needs, and retailers can redefine their strategies and adapt the offer in order to provide the cultural resources consumers need, helping them to accomplish their life projects.

COLINAS DO CRUZEIRO: DELIVERING THE CULTURAL RESOURCES FOR THE CONSUMER PROJECTS

The *Colinas do Cruzeiro* is quite a recent high-density neighborhood sited on the outskirts of Lisbon; it is composed of blocks of apartments specially aimed at people from the middle-class. The project dates back to 2001 and it has been estimated that after having been fully sold, 3,000 families will live there. However, in having been promoted for ten years, many apartments are still left for sale, while others have never got beyond the project stage, or they are currently being built. At the moment, the profile of the people living there falls predominantly into two kinds of households, both young and both at the first stages of the type of family life-cycle proposed in the 1960s by Wells & Gubar (1966, p. 362): the DINKYS (Double Income no Kids Yet) and the DIWKs (Double Income with Kids). Housing is the most important feature in the neighborhood, but most of the buildings were planned to receive a variety of retail uses and services especially geared to the local market, such as groceries, delicatessens, dry cleaners, beauty salons, restaurants and cafés. Figure 1 provides the location of Colinas do Cruzeiro neighborhood in relation to the cities of Odivelas and Lisbon. Figure 2 provides panoramic views of the Odivelas Town Square, Pulido Valente Street and Porto Pinheiro Boulevard, which are three of the most emblematic places in the neighborhood from the business and leisure point of view.

Despite its newness, *Colinas do Cruzeiro* is already relatively well-equipped in terms of retail offer. In 2011, 282 outlets covering various branches of activity were registered in the neighborhood where retailing and community-based services occupied a relevant position (Figure 3). Nevertheless, it should be noted that shopping opportunities for people living in the quarter are far from being limited to local offer. Residents have the possibility of choosing shopping facilities located 5 to 10 minutes away in the Odivelas city center or they may go to one of the four regional shopping malls located in the vicinity. Shopping opportunities are further opened up when considering the discount stores, supermarkets and large outlets specializing in the different branches of DIY furniture, and household and electrical goods that operate close to the neighborhood.



FIG. 1. Location of Colinas do Cruzeiro neighborhood in Greater Lisbon



Fig. 2 – Panoramic views of Odivelas Square, Pulido Valente Street and Porto Pinheiro Boulevard

A careful reading of *Colinas do Cruzeiro* through a CCT lens leaves no doubt whatsoever as to the cultural resources which the neighborhood places at its residents' disposal, as well as the role such resources might play in helping them

to fulfill their life projects. This offer is made possible by the diversity of the physical and material assets afforded by the built environment that shape housing, public space, retail facilities and the locality of the neighborhood. However, according to the perspective provided by the cultural resources, because they are inanimate, without any function or meaning, these tangible amenities are not enough in themselves to be perceived as meaningful resources by individual-consumers. In order to acquire this status and be appropriated as such, the individual-consumers need to activate their own cultural operant resources. This is so because in a consumer society, tangible assets tend to represent only the means by which people are able to detect the valued operant resources provided by the different kind of spaces and objects. Following Baudrillard's (1970) line of thought, it is essentially at symbolic level and in the dialogue going on with the consumers that the facilities supplied by firms, stores and shopping districts become meaningful and can be perceived as cultural resources. In turn, it is also at this level the latter are able to generate the goal-relevant experiences that nourish the consumers' life projects.

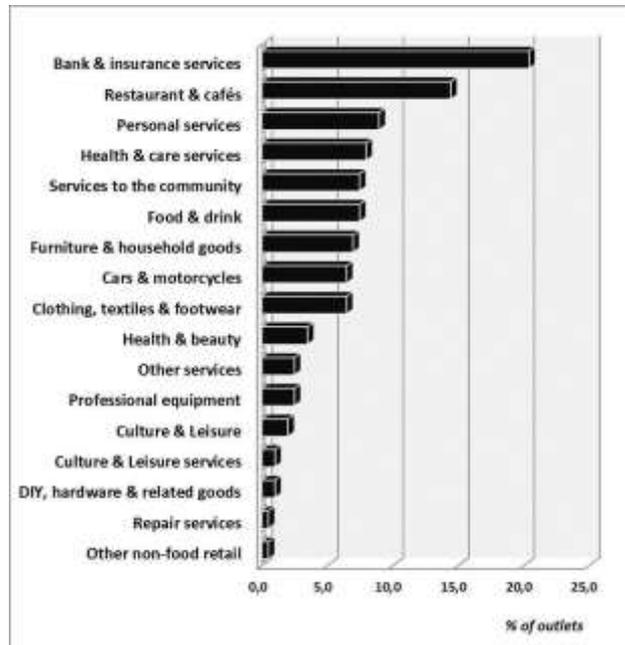


Fig. 3 – Retail and service mix of *Colinas do Cruzeiro* neighborhood

The commercial offer in *Colinas do Cruzeiro* cover the four macro categories of the cultural resources suggested by Arnould (2005): (1) economic, (2) utopian, (3) ludic, and (4) temporal. As a case study, we took Pulido Valente Street. Although Pulido Valente street was not planned to play a central role in the quarter, the truth is that in a few years it becomes the most important shopping axis of the neighborhood (Figure 4).

According to Arnould (2005), retail environments offer economic cultural resources when they enable the consumers to search for identity projects linked to frugality, value for money and inconspicuous consumption or, at the other extreme, related to luxury, extravagance and status consumption. Owing to the fact that *Colinas do Cruzeiro* is a neighborhood shopping district that is mainly geared to the middle class, the economic resources supplied by the retail firms are first and foremost associated with the values of thriftiness and frugality, inconspicuous consumption and utilitarian offer. In Pulido Valente Street, supplying these resources is therefore seen in its most explicit form in the discount stores with their low daily prices (*Minipreço*), the restaurants with their special-offer menus such as mini-portions at lunchtime (*Portugália, Canastro, Churrasqueira O Cruzeiro,...*), the take-away food places such as the *Rei dos Frangos* and *Zaika* with their daily promotions or even meals if coupons have been filled in, and the physical-fitness buffs going to the gym at the *Jazzy Life Club* thanks to fitness promotion campaigns and discounts on the monthly fees.

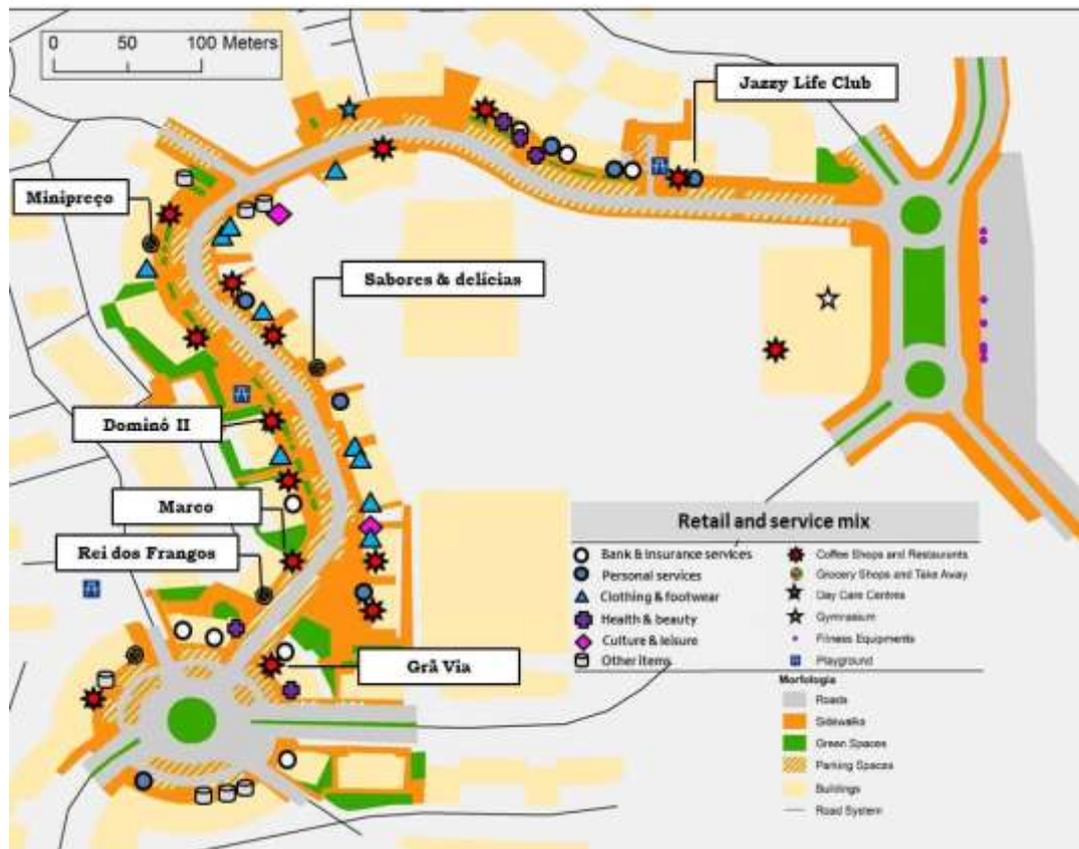


Fig. 4 – Retail and service mix of Pulido Valente Street

Retail environments are perceived as fields of utopian resources when they facilitate consumers' pursuits of the utopian world or selves (ARNOULD, 2005). Searching for the perfect world, filled with well-being, happiness and harmony all forms a part of, if not everyone's life-project, then almost everyone's. Through powerful marketing strategies, many firms outdo themselves in trying to convince people that this world may be reached through consumption and the spaces built on its behalf. The ability to carry individual-consumers into these fantasy worlds and enable them to find a perfect place for their life-projects has ceased to be confined to luxury goods so that now, it simply colonizes retailing in general, irrespective of the nature of the goods and services offered. The ultimate experience in this field is given us by means of the *concept*, *pop up* and *experience* stores, but the main philosophy underpinning this communication strategy and

consumer involvement, is already a common practice in the festival malls, the theme parks and some of the hypermarkets. In this context, it may be said that the shops geared to offering utopian resources are found in the vicinity of the *Colinas do Cruzeiro* neighborhood. The shopping malls called *Strada Fashion outlet*, *Dolce Vita Tejo* and *Loureshopping* have demonstrated their expertise when it comes to offering the consumers experiences that are anchored in these sorts of resources. Nevertheless, many of the shops situated in the neighborhood have also experimented offering the same resources. In referring only to Pulido Valente Street, it is mostly based on exploiting these kinds of resources in the sphere of personal services that we may explain the success of the Jazzy Fitness Center, and the grocer shop called *Sabores e Delicias* in the food and drinks branch. The first success story is explained by the benefits of well-being and image-building that lie in doing physical exercise and having the idea catch on. The latter case is due to the importance offered by quality products, personalized attendance, a familiar sociable environment and the shop-keeper's attention and consideration, all of which have become indispensable values for many consumers who have grown weary of the massification of the large stores.

The retail environments operate as ludic resources when they facilitate consumers' pursuit of play (ARNOULD, 2005). Ludic resources represent rewards for consumers and they are usually delivered by stores with the aim of exploiting the hedonistic dimension of shopping. The companies developing this segment of the market perceived early on that it was not enough to sell their products and services. In order to captivate the consumers and secure their loyalty, they needed to offer them *experiences*, unexpected and out-of-the-usual events able to give rise to emotions, relationships, feelings and sensations. The need for consumers to enjoy themselves replaced the acquisition of goods; now they had leisure-time activities and the performance/show, game, tourism and entertainment (Lipovetsky, 2006). The retail mix in *Colinas do Cruzeiro* is rather poor in its offer of these sorts of resources. Its condition as the neighborhood shopping center aimed

mainly at the satisfying the local residents, is not endowed with the critical mass to take advantage of such fantasies, wholly theatrical worlds that have been conceived to entertain and convince people that the imaginary has become reality. Nevertheless, even if they are not so fairytale-like in quality, the neighborhood has some spaces where consumers may enjoy themselves, spend their free time and socialize. In Pulido Valente Street, these resources are mostly available in the several pavement cafés such as *Dominó II*, *Grã Via* and the *7ª Arte*, or in restaurants such as *O Marco*. In these spaces, many of the consumers residing in the neighborhood may get together for a drink and a chat, spend a good part of their leisure time in them, meet friends and strengthen their social ties.

Finally, retail environments operate as temporal resources when they facilitate the enactment of consumers' preferred timestyles (ARNOULD, 2005). Time has always made a vital part of our daily lives. No one, regardless of their social condition or the place they live in, is able to live outside this regimen. Nevertheless, as paradoxical as it might seem, throughout the last few decades, despite the fact that time has never stopped extending itself and taking on new meanings, the truth is that never before have people felt so short of time as they do today. In the contemporary metropolis, more than any other branch of activity, shopping has known how to exploit time's potentiality. The most proactive firms in the innovative vanguard setting trends have simultaneously changed time into a multiple asset, a strategy and merchandise with a value in use, in exchange and in variable sign geometry. In conformity with marketing interests, and with the aid of technology and sophisticated marketing techniques, these stores have known how to stretch time, shorten it, speed it up, slow it down, do away with it or change it into pure showtime that delights the consumers.

In fact, in the retail-trade's exploitation of time, all sectors of daily life have been won over. When time is associated with space, another of life's raw materials to which time is intrinsically connected, it nearly always ends up by shaping spatial temporalities, generating consumer experiences, nurturing values

and life styles, conferring identities, dictating a place's rhythms or setting the rate of innovation. Indeed, the corporate exploitation of time in large cities is likely to undertake all these functions and many more besides, where almost always there is a deep impact on the nature and the rhythm of daily-life experiences. Such functions affect the routine activities in the individual's and the family's social life even if sporadically on a seasonal basis or in cycles situated far apart.

In the *Colinas do Cruzeiro* quarter various firms have efficiently exploited the different facets of this resource. In looking at Pulido Valent Street again, it may be said that the *Jazzy Life Club* offering personal services and the *Rei dos Frangos* in the take-away food branch both illustrate this kind of resource to perfection. Despite the marked differences in the level of goods and services they supply, both share a common factor in that they put buying time at the individual-consumers' disposal. When interpreted in the light of available resources, it may be said that these two kinds of shopping places allow the consumer to make an apparently paradoxical two-fold investment: on the one hand, an investment is made in oneself, in one's body, seeking to retard the passage of time and extend a healthy life through exercising; on the other hand, in buying goods that allow one to shorten the time spent on domestic tasks and housework, so that there is more free time to dedicate to other activities that give greater pleasure, mainly leisure-time activities and personal development.

CONSUMERSCAPES AND THE CULTURAL LOGIC OF SHOPPING PLACES

The representations that individual-consumers devise as regards the city's retail venues and shopping districts are called consumerscapes. When building them, a wide variety of variables are called into play where they are connected as much to the material and intangible qualities of the shops and the retail areas, as to the profile of the individual-consumers themselves. Included in this latter group, apart from the simple variables such as age, sex and educational levels, are other

much more complex variables that are difficult to measure such as values and life styles.

In order to evaluate the *consumerscapes*, a survey was carried out in the neighborhood during the months of April and May 2011. The research involved a questionnaire aimed at 125 consumers, stratified according to age and gender. This survey was further supplemented by a set of 25 in-depth interviews to consumers living in the quarter as well as a careful field observation of the built environment and the appropriation of public spaces by the residents.

The survey contained three sets of questions: (i) related to the targeted population's profile that could explain the images that were found. This group included variables such as age, gender, qualifications, household size, occupational status; (ii) regarding the different dimensions of the neighborhood's representations, meaning the characteristics of the physical environment, the shopping supply, the public space, perceptions of safety and parking conditions; (iii) connected to the consumer satisfaction as regards the retail facilities in terms of the quality of the assortment, the variety of the tenant mix and the neighborhood's weaknesses.

Three questions included in the set of considerations raised in the consumer survey, deserve particular attention when assessing the weaknesses of the neighborhood in terms of the resources supplied by the stores and other consumer spaces. The first issue has to do with the representations of the attributes that consumers tend to favor in their shopping experiences. Figure 5 shows the degree to which they most fully agree with the statements made in the survey that describe the neighborhood attributes. We are able to see that the best performances are found to be in the resources linked with the amenities of the built environment, the accessibility and the feeling of safety. In the opposite side, the most unfavorable aspects single out parking and circulation on the one hand, and the poor assortment of offer on the other. Actually, the last one only seems to fully satisfy 8% of the population surveyed. This deficit can be explained by the

fact that the quarter is perceived by most of the population as being a fairly uninteresting place in which to shop. This is the main reason why the most part of consumers go to other shopping districts, and are frequent costumers of the enclosed shopping centers implanted on the outskirts of the neighborhood.

Another dimension that is relevant to *consumerscapes* concerns the way people spontaneously describe the characteristics of the retail offer of the neighborhood. In being appropriated by the consumers as the fount of their resources, and called up so as to bring about their life projects, the images they build tend to emphasize their own potentialities and constraints and reflect their own levels of satisfaction as individuals-consumers. Figure 6 briefly illustrates these fields.

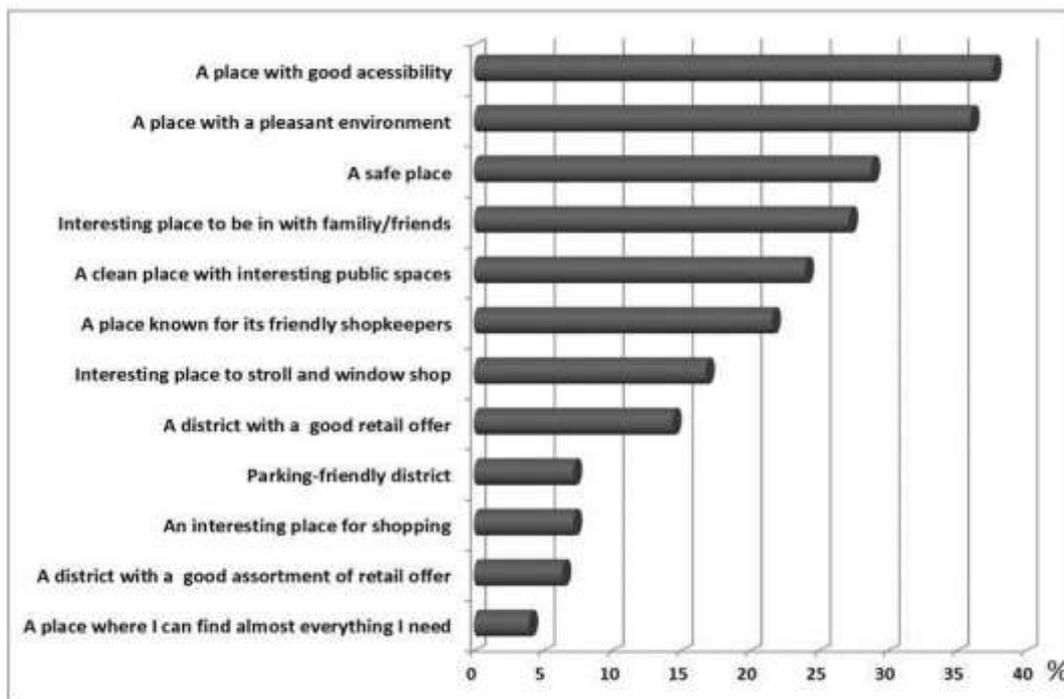


Fig. 5 – Consumers’ perceptions of neighborhood resources

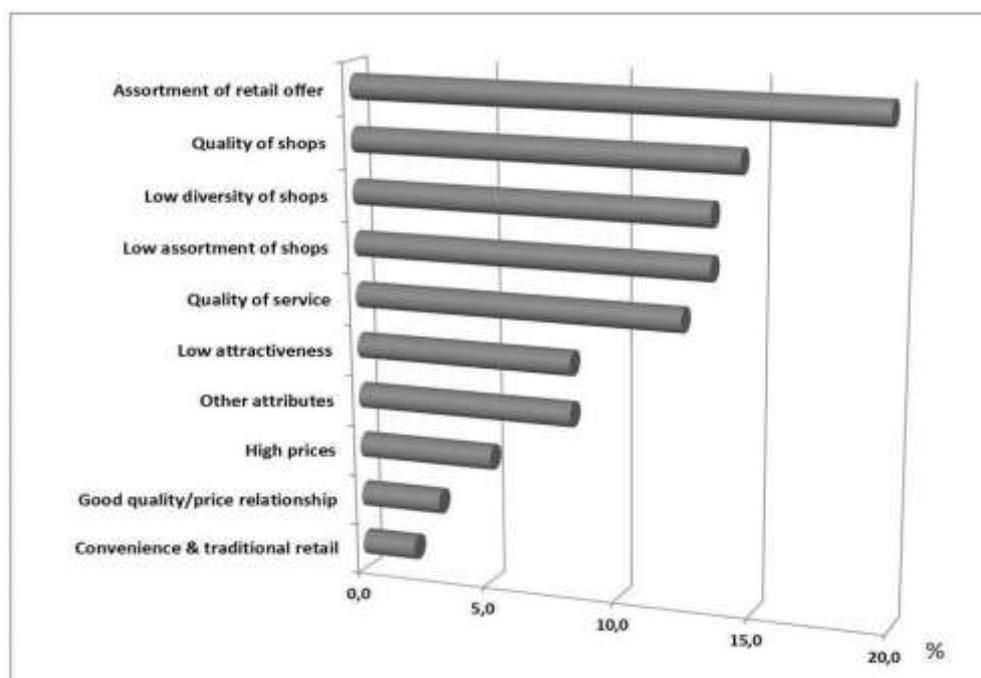


Fig. 6 – Consumers' perceptions of neighborhood shopping districts

Broadly speaking, it may be said that retail offer perceptions complement the image that people have about the general features of the neighborhood. The assortment and the quality of the retail offer indelibly marked the consumers' perceptions about the district. Other attributes are mentioned such as the high prices of goods, the modern attractive nature of the shops, or the friendliness of the shopkeepers, but these variables are only present in the minds of a very small number of respondents.

Taking into account the relationship between the positive and negative factors, we can say that the quarter is in a relatively weak position in terms of retail and services mix. To fulfill their life projects that are directly dependent on consumption, a significant part of consumers need to visit other shopping districts, even to buy certain convenience goods and services. This is the main reason why retail facilities and services do not become part of the consumers' mindset.

The third question has to do with the weaknesses of the neighborhood. Figure 7 shows the shortcomings point out by the respondents in the survey. In a brief analysis, it is relevant to start by saying that for a significant part of the people the neighborhood offer all the resources they need for carrying out their projects and they feel quite happy about the retail offer available to them and about the neighborhood' atmosphere. People did not single out any type of need. Nevertheless, the majority of the respondents said they were not satisfied about several things and pointed out shortcomings related not only to the retail offer but also to the amenities present in the public space. Parking facilities, the assortment of retailing, the scarcity of public gardens and parks and the spaces reserved for leisure-time activities come at the top of their demands.

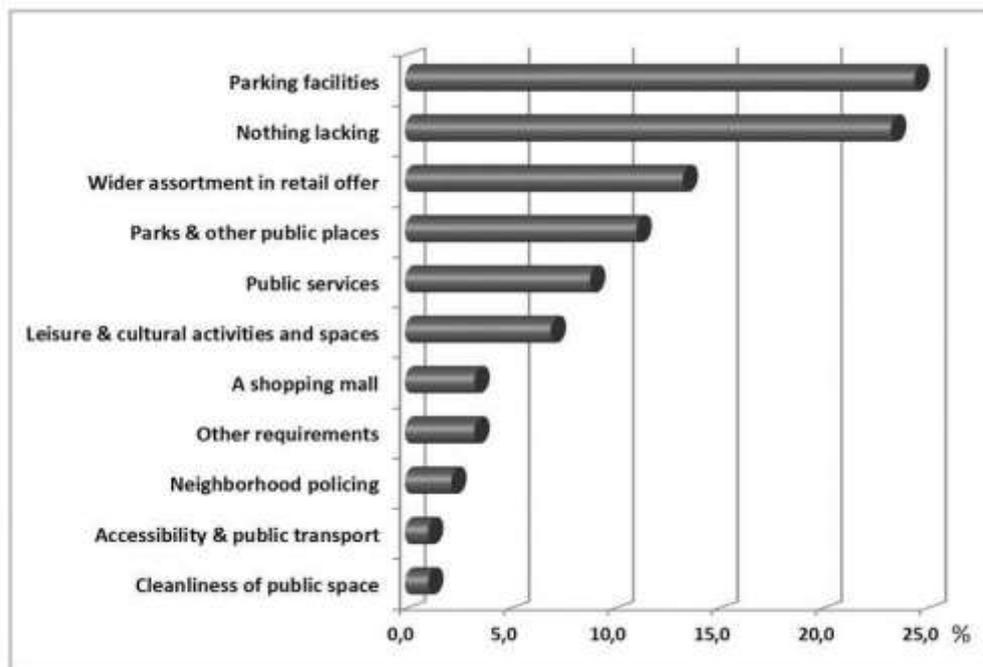


Fig. 7 – Consumers' perceptions of what is needed in the neighborhoods

In short, the *consumerscapes* of *Colinas do Cruzeiro* made it clear that the consumers tend to appropriate the neighborhood as a center of material and intangible resources through which they build their own personal and collective life projects. These resources are made available by a number of different

institutions and private and public spaces. Particularly relevant among such resources are the shopkeepers and shopping places through the offer and cultural environments they provide. However, the offer of cultural resources involve also the neighborhood environment (both physical and social), with special reference to public spaces and the diversity of activities undertaken in them. The resources provided by the neighborhood are interpreted by consumers, thereby activating their own operant resources. Actually, such resources only become valuable when individuals-consumers activate their own economic, social and ideological resources, and enlist them in their performances (ARNOULD & PRICE, 2000; ARNOULD, 2005).

The appropriation of the *Colinas do Cruzeiro* as an interface of cultural resources is achieved by individuals-consumers first on a tangible basis. Valorizing the material assets is foremost when both the quarter's potentialities and weaknesses are evaluated. It shapes the description that consumers make of the shopping facilities and environmental amenities offered by the neighborhood, as does the absence of resources demanded by consumers according to their needs. Included in such demands, for example, is the importance awarded questions about mobility or circulation (parking, accessibility), or the public space and, when concerned with the shopping areas, references about the lack of variety in shopping assortment, the offer of goods and services, and spaces conducive to leisure and socializing.

In the meantime, appropriation is also effected at the intangible level of symbols and signs which are interpreted by the consumers according to their cultural capital or operant resources, to use the terms of Vargo & Lusch (2004). This mode of appropriation, linked with the consumer's mindscapes also affects the evaluation of the built environment and the retail mix. When asked to give reasons for their representations or clarify the meaning of the words they had used to describe the neighborhood, for example, "*this place has a pleasant environment*", or "*this place is interesting to be in with my family and friends*", the

consumers tended to mention assets that are directly connected with values and life-styles. It is in this sense that we may interpret the references that are often made, for example, to social status, prestige and distinction of the neighborhood, the value they attach to local shops and convenience facilities, the friendliness of shopkeepers or the opportunities for socializing afforded by public space and pavement cafés, as well as the way these kinds of facilities and amenities help them to live significant experiences in the neighborhood, perform their social roles and feel good about their lives.

Interpreting the quarter as a supplier of resources and looking at their relationship with the residents' life projects, is particularly relevant when considering the demand for chances to consume. In calling for a greater diversity of supply, more leisure and culture spaces, bringing in some brand stores or even a shopping mall, the consumers are saying that the resources offered by the neighborhood are far from satisfying their consumer needs dictated by their life-styles. The content analysis of the in-depth interviews allowed us to conclude that a good part of the resources demanded by the consumers had a strong symbolic note to them, which says a lot about their users' life-styles and identities.

Empirical research shows that as providers of convenience resources for consumers' daily lives, the quarter of *Colinas do Cruzeiro* fail to fully satisfy the needs of most of the people taking part in the survey (CACHINHO, 2014). From the point of view of retailing, the weakness that is patent mainly as regards assortment and the quality of the offer, have led many consumers to look beyond the neighborhood for the experiences nourishing their personal and collective life projects based on consumption. In this context, retailers and service providers, individually or in partnership with the public authorities and other stakeholders, have a lot of room in which to maneuver and in doing so they can provide the neighborhood with the retail venues, environments and amenities that may respond to the daily needs of different kinds of consumers. By reducing these constraints, businesses will be doing a lot to substantially improve their clients'

loyalty; they will also raise the consumers' levels of satisfaction quite considerably and cause them to identify closer with the quarter and its shopping districts.

CONCLUDING NOTE

This paper has provided a sketch of a consumer-centric approach to urban retailing, broadening the conceptual framework of the Consumer Culture Theory (CCT) developed by Eric Arnould and ranging from stores to neighborhood shopping districts. The aim has been to demonstrate why *consumerscapes* matter in the understanding of the cultural dimension of shopping places and the role they can play in the consumers' daily-lives. We therefore began by briefly describing CCT and its potential value in assessing shopping places as fields of resources. Afterwards, we discussed this issue from a theoretical and empirical point of view, supported by an analysis of consumers' perceptions in *Colinas do Cruzeiro*, a neighborhood situated on the outskirts of Lisbon.

The analysis of *consumerscapes* and the myriad of motivating factors that they explain show that consumers tend to appropriate the shopping spaces and places as interfaces of tangible and intangible resources through which they build their own personal and collective life projects. The appropriation of the neighborhood as a fountainhead of cultural resources, linked with the consumer's mindscapes, affects both the evaluation of the built environment and the retail and services mix.

The change in scale when applying the CCT framework extending from shops to urban shopping districts raises some important challenges that require further research, and the answers to certain questions are far from clear. However, we hope that our research has shed some light on the subject and more in particular has shown the potentiality of CCT and *consumerscapes* so as to renew the perspectives of reading retailing and shopping environments in the city.

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Enviado em: 10/10/2014

Aceito em: 22/11/2014