From Market Place to the Market as a Place
by Professor Dr. Heliana Comin Vargas

Thinking about trends of market places in a process of sustainable development means to consider two main aspects. The first is related to the notion of mass society consumption that changed the meaning of market place -as the place for selling and buying daily goods- to a place where dreams are transformed in needs and consumption has become the main purpose. The second aspect is related to the characteristic of the retail spaces as real estate undertakings.

Considering that sustainable development includes concerns about economic progress, social equity and environmental preservation, the mass consumption society and the people behavior are strongly responsible for the pressure over environment in terms of the use and waste of natural resources; for air, water, soil and visual pollution; and for reinforcing social conflicts as only a few people can have access to many goods while many other people can not afford the basic goods.

In terms of architecture and built environment, this same mass consumption society promotes changes in the concept and meaning of market places. In its origin, market place was the area where people used to meet each other spontaneously for many reasons: for getting fresh water; for resting after a long trip; for attending public manifestation etc. The flow that all these activities were able to generate was the main source for the birth of market place as a place for supplying people with everyday consumer goods. From then on, the evolution of the mass consumption society has promoted an inversion in this statement.

Now, consumption is the main purpose in Market Places, Retailing Spaces or Shopping Malls, and social contacts and encounters are just an eventual side effect. Moreover, the consumption was extended beyond goods and services purchases. Consumption invades the world of leisure, culture, experiences and sensations using all kind of persuasion and induction tools for stimulating people to consume. Behind this situation, the retail spaces has been designed as a big scenery where people are involved for all their senses, giving birth to an ethical question concerning this sensorial architecture which helps to induce people for consumption. It is possible to extend this same discussion to other types of buildings as Leisure Centers, Hotels, Museums, and even Hospitals.
The second aspect is related to the essence of retail spaces like Shopping Malls, which is a real estate product. This specific situation can put the interest of the real estate entrepreneurs and builders apart of the investors (owners), retailers, consumers and citizens ones. Building with low cost to increase profits for the former does not mean low cost of operation and maintenance for the latter. Environmental impact (water and energy waste), economic impact to retailers and consumers (high space rents and price of products), and urban impact (urban economy and urban design) can interfere in the quality of urban life, mainly in developing countries where the urban development is not under control at all.

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