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Urban Challenges and Sustainable Technological Revolution



Special Session Proposal

Sustainable retail trade and changes in urban space

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Abstract

Retail is undergoing an unprecedented transition. The internet has led to new sales channels and new opportunities to reach out to customers, and globalization has opened markets and introduced new competitors. Then COVID-19 happened, rocking the industry to its core, as stores around the world closed and consumers had no choice but to order online. Sustainability has moved up the agenda for retail players. Still, questions remain on the path forward. Will the 2030s be the decade when sustainability (finally) breaks through? How should retailers combine operational excellence with social and environmental responsibility? Across the world, retail players are pressured to reduce their impact on the environment, with a special focus on climate change, biodiversity, and scarce resources. All companies in the retail sector and the business world in general, are changing their philosophy and way of doing business to be more sustainable. Because for consumers it not only matters that brands do well, they want them to give the best of themselves and not only worry about economic aspects, but also monitor their social and environmental impact. However, is sustainability possible in the retail sector?

Sustainable utilisation of urban retail space can be achieved by balancing environmental, societal, and economic needs. As the challenges facing the retail property sector (e.g., the demise of high streets, increasing store closures, vacancy rates, and void periods) continue to grow, the global mission towards sustainability and resilience remains an uphill task. In this sense, sustainability was considered through a focus : the efficient use of retail property assets for economic purposes and the impact of these physical retail assets on the local environment in terms of carbon footprint. Within a location, retail spaces can be optimally set out to minimise travelling distance of consumers, thereby reducing the carbon footprint of consumers and maximising the potential footfall and dwell time in retail locations. The decision regarding where to shop is highly connected to accessibility which, if impeded, can discourage shopping and have an adverse effect on the sustainable performance of retail locations. It is becoming increasingly important for local planners, town centre managers, property developers, investors, landlords and retailers to have a thorough understanding of how consumer movement influences shopping behaviour and, by extension, retail location performance and viability. A clear understanding of the nexus of accessibility and retail location performance will also enable strategic planning, asset management, and the optimum utilisation of urban retail spaces.