

# Chapter 7

## SUBURBAN SHOPPING

THE importance of the shopkeeper in the modern community lies in the fact that he acts as an intermediary between the producer or manufacturer and the consumer, and is responsible for distributing to the people all the necessities which modern life demands, including not only the primary needs of food and clothing, but also a wide range of goods required in the home, the office, the workshop, and in the field. In this task about one-seventh of the total work force of the community is engaged, and in carrying it out they make daily contact with about one-quarter of the whole population. In the residential areas of a city it is natural that the great bulk of purchases are those necessary for maintaining home life, particularly food and, to a lesser degree, clothing and household necessities. Food must be bought regularly at short intervals, and it is not surprising, therefore, to find that 97 per cent. of food purchases are made in suburban shopping centres and that 45 per cent. of all shops in the suburbs are engaged in the sale of food. The suburban centres also share almost equally with the central business area in the distribution of the longer-term needs of clothing and furniture.

The fabric of our community is woven about the home, the care of which falls mainly on the mother. On her also devolves much of the responsibility for bringing up the family. Therefore, in the residential area of our cities the needs of the mother and the children should receive first consideration. It is the housewife on whom falls most of the burden of shopping, which takes up much of her time and energy. To her any saving in time and any added comfort and convenience in carrying out this constant task will make her lot easier, but all too frequently, poorly placed and badly planned centres have made her shopping wearisome and difficult. Planning, therefore, places considerable importance on the convenient location of shops in relation to the home and on the proper design of shopping centres.

At the outset of our consideration of this aspect of our community life, it will be helpful to summarise the broad characteristics of shopping throughout the suburbs of Melbourne.

In the survey, 380 separate shopping centres, of varying sizes as shown in Table 4, and containing over 16,500 shops, were identified.

In addition to these 380 centres, there were, at the time of the survey, approximately 3,600 shops which occur in scattered groups of less than five shops or as single units.

The suburban shopping centres vary in character and in the nature of the services they offer. They may be classified as follows:

*Major Shopping Centres* such as Prahran, Footscray and Camberwell, which contain upwards of 250 shops, serve a large area and offer facilities for the purchase of a wide range of foodstuffs and a limited choice of furniture, clothing and personal services.

*Secondary Shopping Centres* such as Kew, Malvern, Bentleigh and Moonee Ponds, with about 100 shops or more, which serve a more limited area than the major centres and where the principal business transacted is in food, household necessities and personal services.

*Minor Shopping Centres* of varying size providing a service mainly to the neighbourhood within walking distance, and in which the principal business is the sale of food.

*Local Shops*, ranging from small groups to individual shops, whose primary function is to cater for the day-to-day and emergency household needs.

One of the concepts of modern planning, which arises from consideration of the needs of the mother and the child, is a community structure consisting of a series of *Neighbourhood Units* based on the primary school and the local shopping and community centre. While this conception can

Table 4  
SIZE OF SUBURBAN SHOPPING CENTRE

<i>Number of shops</i>	<i>Number of centres</i>
Over 300	4
200 to 299	7
100 to 199	36
50 to 99	45
20 to 49	97
5 to 19	191
Total	380



be successfully applied in planning new communities, its application to existing communities can seldom result in more than a compromise. A detailed study of the community structure of Melbourne discloses that no true neighbourhood structure exists, but it is possible to distinguish a pattern of living based on shopping centres. These centres are usually in the minor category, and correspond to the shopping component of a neighbourhood centre. Their spheres of influence can be approximately defined, and form suitable units on which to base planning proposals. To these we have given the term *Living Units*. Not infrequently a living unit is found with two or three small shopping centres within its bounds or with a centre which has developed beyond the minor category, and now serves a wider area as well as providing for immediate local needs.

A study of this question reveals that the shopping pattern overseas, and to some extent here also, is undergoing changes and it will be profitable to consider the factors which are causing this.

The increasing use of the motor car has given the housewife in particular and the shopper in general a greater degree of mobility and independence, thus enabling advantage to be taken of shopping facilities over a wider area and permitting a more discriminating choice of shopping venue. Overseas this is resulting in the establishment of centres designed to cater particularly for the car shopper, in association with which there must necessarily be ample provision for car parking.

It is becoming more generally recognised, that no matter how attractive a shop or a shopping centre may be, it will not attract the customer who uses a motor car for shopping unless adequate parking facilities are provided. With the growing use of cars, this problem is becoming increasingly acute, and in future must have a great influence on the prosperity of shopping centres and, as a consequence, on their planning. Parking spaces should not only be adequate in number, but if they are to properly fulfil their purpose must also be located convenient to the shops, because shoppers do not want to carry their purchases a long way to their cars.

Increasing discrimination by shoppers and recognition by shopkeepers of the possibilities of stimulating trade are resulting in the application of new ideas in the design and layout of individual shops and of shopping centres. Accompanying this is a trend towards larger individual suburban shops, enabling them to offer improved amenities and facilities and a wider range of goods for the choice of customers. The growing congestion of the central business area is making conditions there less and less attractive, particularly in comparison with a well-designed suburban shopping centre which provides facilities for more convenient and less tiring shopping.

The restriction in recent years of trading hours in Victoria has freed many shopkeepers from the need to live on their business premises, and has enabled them to make their

homes in more attractive and congenial surroundings. This is greatly reducing the need for the combined shop and dwelling, and is having considerable effect on the planning of shopping centres. Among other things it results in a reduction in the depth needed for shopping allotments, and enables the few dwellings required to be built as attractive flats above the shops. It also permits what is an attractive feature of some American shopping centres—namely, the shop with entrances and display windows both front and rear and the whole ground floor area of the site devoted to the display of goods.

This trend is having another effect. Many of the dwellings attached to shops are not occupied now by the shopkeeper but by tenants, and the shopkeepers travel to and from work by motor cars, which have to be parked somewhere during business hours. In many suburban shopping centres, it is now common to see much of the curb space occupied by non-commercial vehicles before trading hours. In all but the smallest shopping centres, this adds to the already formidable problem of finding accommodation for parked cars.

In the Melbourne metropolitan area most suburban shopping centres, and particularly the larger ones, do not provide modern shopping amenities. The principal defects are:

- (a) Location on main traffic routes, frequently at important road junctions, resulting in interference both to shoppers and traffic. The presence of shopping centres on busy traffic routes is one of the main factors which interfere with the free movement of traffic. On the other hand, fast-moving road traffic is a menace to shoppers and impairs the amenities of a shopping centre. Shoppers have frequently to keep alert to keep alive.
- (b) Ribbon development with the consequent loss of convenience to shoppers. Extreme cases of this are found in roads such as Sydney Road, Brunswick, and High Street, Northcote, which will be discussed later.
- (c) Lack of amenities within shopping centres, particularly inadequate car parking facilities. This problem of parking transcends all others in these centres, and its solution will do more than anything else to make them more efficient and more attractive to customers. Some municipalities are already requiring new shops to be set back from the street alignment to provide some parking accommodation clear of moving traffic.
- (d) Intrusion of industrial and other non-commercial uses and vacant lots into shopping centres, resulting in discontinuity of shopping frontage. This has been due partly to weaknesses in zoning by-laws of many municipalities, which permit shops and industry to intermingle freely, and which zone, either directly or indirectly, for too much land for this mixed use. In times of economic well-being more shops have been built than the needs of the locality justified, with the result that in times of recession, and even under normal conditions, shops have been used for other purposes.