

Chapter 8

COMMERCE

SHOPPING

The importance of shopping in the social structure of a city can be readily appreciated when it is realised that apart from providing employment for a substantial proportion of people, it is the process by which every household obtains the food, clothing and other goods essential to living.

In the planning area of Melbourne approximately 80,000 people, or about 14% of the total work force, are directly employed in shopping. This is approximately half the total work force employed in all commerce or trade and equivalent to almost a third of all factory employment. Figures are not available to measure the total number of shoppers, but it is reasonable to assume that at least one member of every family unit is concerned for some period of each day with shopping. Shopping activities therefore, probably involve the average daily participation of more than a quarter of the total population of Melbourne. To emphasise the point still further, it is generally accepted that about 70% of the average total family income is spent on consumer goods, which means shopping in some form.

Such pattern of community life as exists in the urban area of Melbourne seems to be based primarily on the habits of shopping, that is, where people go for their daily and weekly needs, and there is probably no better way of visualising this community structure than by defining the sphere of influence of the various shopping centres.

For planning purposes the problem is firstly to try to define the existing pattern of shopping throughout Melbourne, secondly to analyse this structure with a view to establishing suitable standards for future development, and thirdly to determine the likely shopping needs of the city.

GENERAL PATTERN OF SHOPPING

In a large metropolis like Melbourne, spreading as it does in nearly all directions along radial lines from a large, attractive and readily accessible commercial centre, there is a considerable overlap of the spheres of influence of the central shopping area and of the various suburban shopping centres. For this reason there is no clearly defined pattern of community living in Melbourne as there might be in more isolated or rigidly planned communities. Because of this considerable overlap in shopping activities, an attempt has been made to define initially only the broader areas within

which the majority of people seem to be able to provide for the great bulk of their daily and weekly shopping needs. Such broad catchments or communities are generally located around large suburban shopping centres which attract people from a wide area extending beyond local neighbourhood or municipal boundaries. Within the spheres of influence of these large centres are subsidiary centres providing for more local needs, and these in turn, are generally supplemented by still smaller groups and isolated shops providing essentially for day-to-day needs. Over and above this is the main city shopping centre which constantly attracts a proportion of shoppers from all suburbs, principally for special needs such as clothing and the more expensive household requirements.

The overall pattern is complicated by the fact that the importance and function of many shopping centres are constantly changing, with the result that many areas now have more shops than they need while others have too few. As with most growing cities, the older inner suburbs tend to have too many shops because the sphere of influence of their shopping centres has been curtailed by the growth of large outer suburban shopping centres and by improved means of transport with the city centre with its attraction of larger and more comprehensive shopping facilities.

Most of the large metropolitan shopping centres are located near railway stations and are on or adjacent to main highways, and in some instances at important road junctions. As a result they are usually centres of traffic congestion and generally have inadequate facilities for car parking. However, despite this, the trend since World War II has been for an increasing proportion of metropolitan shopping to take place in the suburbs.

Types of Shopping Centres

From this pattern of shopping there appears to emerge five distinct types of shopping centres whose functions may be broadly defined as follows:

The Regional Shopping Centre: This is the central city shopping area which serves not only the metropolitan area but also the whole State. It offers a wider range of shopping, professional, business, administrative, recreational and cultural facilities than is possible in any suburban centre.

Major Suburban Centres: These are the larger suburban centres which, because of size, location and range of facilities offered, attract people from a wide surrounding district containing up to about 100,000 people and sometimes more. In addition to food shops, these centres usually provide a wide choice of shopping and include small department stores, drapers, furniture stores, chain stores and speciality shops of various types which normally are dependent on a large catchment or trade area. They also have a comprehensive range of banks, theatres, professional and commercial offices and some even have a retail market.

Secondary Shopping Centres: These possess some of the features of the major centres only on a more limited scale and are generally smaller in size and in their sphere of influence.

Minor Shopping Centres: This term is used for those smaller community centres that provide essentially for the weekly household needs of the surrounding neighbourhood within a radius of about half a mile.

Local Centres: These are still smaller groups of shops providing for the local day-to-day needs within a more limited radius.

The Regional Shopping Centre

The central city shopping area is the principal shopping centre in the metropolitan area and its influence in relation to suburban centres has grown steadily until recent years. It accounts for more than 40% of the total retail spending in Melbourne, and provides employment for about one-third of the people engaged in retail trade in the metropolitan area. A sample survey covering all municipalities in the metropolitan area showed that each week-day approximately 46,000 people come into the city to shop and about 88,000 on Saturday morning. In addition, about 70,000 city workers do their regular shopping in the city during the week, probably half of them on Fridays. It is estimated, therefore, that up to 100,000 people shop in the central city area on a peak day.

Most leading retailers believe that, despite the growth of large and attractive suburban shopping centres, the central shopping area will continue to grow with the population, and will always retain its dominating position as the main shopping centre for the whole metropolitan area and State. The reasons given are considered fundamental. No suburban centre can ever hope to provide the vast range of merchandise and special facilities that are possible in the city centre with its larger stores and strategic central location with regard to metropolitan transport which enables it to attract shoppers from a wider area than can any suburban centre. In addition, the central business area will always tend to be the location of the leading professional offices in most spheres. It will continue to remain the principal administrative, cultural and amusement centre, and therefore, continue to draw a large volume of people for other purposes besides shopping. Retailers consider it logical for shopping

facilities to develop in conjunction with these activities, thus providing more complete facilities for people coming into the central area.

There is also a powerful psychological factor. About 80% of shopping is done by women and most of them like to shop in the city centre because:

- (a) They prefer to select from what they believe to be a complete range of merchandise.
- (b) It is more convenient for many to shop in the city centre where their complete needs are centralised.
- (c) Many women are attracted by the glamour and atmosphere of the city centre where a day's shopping is looked on as a day's outing and an opportunity to meet friends from other suburbs.

The main central shopping area is at present bounded by Flinders, Elizabeth, Lonsdale and Russell Streets with Bourke Street the focus. Many retailers believe that the shopping centre will tend to grow northwards and that Lonsdale Street may become another Bourke Street. One of the dominating factors influencing this development is the future growth of the Myer Emporium Ltd., the largest department store in Australia. This one store has a very powerful influence on the shopping life of Melbourne, and, while it continues to expand, it will continue to have a strong influence on the growth of city shopping. If, on the other hand, this store opens branches in some of the larger suburban centres, it will unquestionably be a powerful influence towards decentralising shopping from the city centre. Important factors which will influence future development are the growing traffic congestion and the inadequate parking facilities in the central area, and the increasing distances of the new residential suburbs from the city centre.

Major Suburban Centres

In the absence of any official statistics covering the comparative volume of business done in individual shopping centres throughout Melbourne, a survey was conducted among leading retailers and wholesalers to obtain their opinions on the relative importance and growth of the larger suburban shopping centres. From this survey there seemed to be general agreement among important sections of the retail and wholesale trade on the present general trend of development.

To the west the position is fairly clearly defined. The Footscray district centre in Nicholson and Barkly Streets is the dominating shopping centre and has developed into one of the most active suburban shopping centres of Melbourne. It is located at the intersection of the principal railway lines and roads linking Melbourne with the western suburbs. Its sphere of influence extends throughout the municipalities of Footscray, Williamstown, Sunshine and a portion of Werribee. Because of the physical barriers caused by the West Melbourne swamp, which tends to isolate it from Melbourne, this shopping centre is rather different from most others in the metropolitan area. It is generally thought