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# The Retail Evolution and Urban Transformation:

An analysis of challenges, social implications, and municipal adaptation in Malmö City

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## Abstract

In the last decade, news reports about an overall doomed brick-and-mortar retail landscape have grown. The field of commerce has experienced a digital boom, causing an increased shift of businesses from traditional brick-and-mortar retail to the internet. This structural transformation is changing the commercial landscape, putting serious pressure on city centre retail and urban development. Store closures have not received adequate attention from scholars, and research surrounding the retail evolution's connection to social interaction and urban planning remains limited. The aim of this thesis is to examine the transformational effects that the retail evolution has on urban development and social interactions in Malmö. By identifying challenges with these transformational effects, this study also investigates local stakeholders' views on what the municipality needs to integrate in order to adapt to these changes. Through a case study approach, this thesis employs semi-structured interviews with six stakeholders involved in urban development and secondary document analysis of municipal and organizational documents and reports. The results show that challenges of the retail evolution in Malmö include a loss of employment opportunities, a shift in retail formats, and a change in demand within the real-estate sector. These challenges have a negative impact on the urban development and social interactions in Malmö, affecting the city's attractiveness, social diversity, and safety. The data revealed key factors needed for municipal adaptation. These were categorized as collaboration and organization, behaviors and needs, and physical planning and identity. Despite legislative limitations, municipalities must work to bring actors and stakeholders together, and work towards common goals. As the theoretical framework helps show, this is not only important to meet demand, but to maintain and evolve the city centre as an arena of democracy, diversity, and social mixing.

**Key words:** *Retail, Structural Transformation, Urban Development, Social Interaction, Malmö City*

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# 1. Introduction

The retail sector is undergoing extensive structural changes on a local as well as a global scale (Glocker and Piribauer, 2021). The field of commerce has experienced a digital boom, causing an increased shift of businesses from traditional brick-and-mortar retail to the internet (Hasan, 2019; Spanke, 2020). E-commerce can be defined as searching and/or buying consumer goods and services via the internet (Mokhtarian, 2004), but it also represents several other processes such as creating appropriate promotions, selling various goods, and public relations. Whilst e-commerce creates benefits to vendors and customers (Hasan, 2019), digitization is leading to a comprehensive restructuring of the trading industry that is affecting social gatherings as well as important societal functions (Ekström and Jönsson, 2019). The transformation is putting serious pressure on city centre retail around the world (Källström, Persson and Westergren, 2019). In the last decade, news reports about an overall doomed brick-and-mortar retail landscape have grown, including most, if not all, of the physical retail formats (Helm, Kim and Van Riper, 2020). From a citizen perspective, the effects of e-commerce may be experienced as less time spent traveling to, and shopping in stores, resulting in a decrease in brick-and-mortar shopping, and a change in personal travel patterns (Sommar and Mellander, 2018). Particularly in the US, there has been substantial store closing as a result of the growth of online shopping. In 2015, the term “Retail Apocalypse” was coined and circulated by the media (Helm, Kim and Van Riper, 2020). This spread as retail chains like Sears, Toys R Us, Victoria’s Secret, and JC Penney filed for bankruptcy or significantly reduced their physical presence (Hortaçsu and Syverson, 2015). Though the retail apocalypse is widely used to describe this transformation, several authors are critical of the term. Since apocalypse conveys a sense of doom, people have argued that it is a flawed and misleading name (e.g Leake, 2020; Rämme, 2019; Spanke, 2020; Woods, 2019). An alternative term for this transformation is “Retail Evolution”, since retail in itself is not declining, but rather shifting between dominating platforms (Ciné and Epstein, 2018; TTEC, 2018; Dimov, 2019; CNN Business, n.d).

News sources have argued that the current crisis concerning the Covid-19 pandemic has led to the increase and acceleration of the effects of the retail evolution (Cityindex, n.d.; Mesrouj,

2020; P4, 2020; Rågsjö Thorell, 2020). The pandemic has been called out as a driver of changing shopping patterns, slowing foot traffic, and increased threats from online competitors (Fastighetsägarna, 2021). In January, economist and researcher Cecilia Hermansson stated that the decline of city centre retail and expanded interest in working from home can lead to less attractive urban environments (Lucas, 2021). Statistics also reveal that younger people generally are more inclined than older people to make online purchases (Sommar and Mellander, 2018), meaning we could see a further increase in e-commerce as the younger generation grows older. These factors point to a need for further research covering the retail evolution and municipal measures of adaptation.

The transformation of city centres will require active action to maintain its attractiveness and avert some of the possible repercussions of the upcoming societal changes (Helm, Kim and Van Riper, 2020). The city centre can be defined as an area, central to the city as a whole, in which the main land uses are commercial (Weltevreden, 2007). Public spaces allow people to meet on ostensibly neutral ground in planned and unplanned ways, creating social interactions within communities. By facilitating the mixing of interactions, public spaces can contribute to the cohesion of communities (Holland et al., 2007). The city centre is not only a commercial arena, but rather plays a crucial role as a venue for social interaction and encounters – be they planned or random rendezvous (Mehta, 2009). The social environment provides a place of engagement to fulfill emotional and social bonding (Ujang, Kozłowski and Maulan, 2018). The public space of the city centre is also crucial for social groups characterized by single households, loneliness, and alienation (Ekström and Jönsson, 2019). As retail creates patterns of movement within the city, it generates social values such as conviviality, interactions, and cross-cultural encounters (Førde, 2019). The urban street is also an open space shared among different groups of people regardless of gender, race, age, or socio-economic level (Lotfata and Ataöv, 2019). The dominating retail formats do not just shape a considerable share of economic activity of retail, but also sculpts the look and feel of our public spaces (Hortaçsu and Syverson, 2015). Thus, the retail evolution carries the possibility to affect social interactions within the urban sphere.

Sweden is one of the countries in Europe where e-commerce is most widespread (Statistiska Centralbyrån, 2017). In fact, Sweden has one of the highest rates of online shopping in the world,

and the growing e-commerce is creating an increasing interest in international brands amongst Swedish consumers (Handelns Utredningsinstitut, 2019). The loss of physical stores can be seen across the nation, and the media is warning about the “death of stores” (“butiksdöd”) (e.g. Brännström, 2019; Ekström and Jönsson, 2019; Olsson, 2019a, 2019b; Rågsjö Thorell, 2020; Staflin, 2021). In February 2020 it was reported that Scania (Skåne) is losing about thirteen physical stores every week. Out of these, only six are “replaced” by new ones, meaning Scania is losing about 700 stores yearly (Magnusson, 2020). The decrease of physical stores in Sweden is predicted to continue (Svensk Handel, 2019, cited in Källström, Persson and Westergren, 2019). The retail evolution can be seen as part of an urban transformation, which puts new pressure on urban strategies and adaptive measures (Pettersson, Winslott Hiselius and Koglin, 2018). The challenges of the structural transformation of retail have been brought to attention by Malmö city’s Department of Urban Planning. The municipality notes that the shift is occurring and that they are facing the challenge of creating favorable conditions for the development of the city center and retail districts. Their goal is to create a vibrant city centre with a rich urban life that offers commercial, cultural, social, and recreational activities (Malmö City, 2018). Measures to attain this goal are not presented on the municipality’s public platform, and formal social science research on the consequences of the current retail transformation is missing (Helm, Kim and Van Riper, 2020). I want to address this gap.

A common issue in evaluating different impacts of the internet arises from the fact that some of the effects are recent, little studied, and the subject of unsubstantiated hype (Knox and Pinch, 2010). The retail evolution is gaining interest among scholars; however, it has mainly been studied in relation to economics, marketing, and logistics (e.g. Childs et al, 2020; Mende, 2019; Källström, Persson and Westergren, 2019; Pettersson, Winslott Hiselius and Koglin, 2018). Despite this, store closures have not received adequate attention from scholars, and research surrounding the retail evolutions’ connection to urban development, social interaction, and urban planning remains limited (Berman, 2019; Kickert et al., 2020). Municipalities need to account for this change and find alternative pathways to create vibrant inner cities where people from different backgrounds can meet in their day-to-day life (Helm, Kim and Van Riper, 2020; Ujang, Kozlowski and Maulan, 2018). I believe this to be a crucial step to ensure and improve social

cohesion for future generations. This thesis contributes by exploring challenges and municipal measures of adaptation targeting the retail evolution, using Malmö as a case study.

## 1.1 Aim and research questions

The social functions of the urban streets have been stressed in geographic and sociological research for decades (e.g Jacobs, 1961; Jacobs, 1993; Carmona, Heath and Tiesdale, 2003; Metha, 2009). The decline of physical retail produces new patterns of movement within city centres, influencing urban sustainability and everyday social encounters. The retail evolution challenges the attractiveness and social functions of inner cities, posing a challenge for urban planners (Barata-Salgueiro and Erkip, 2014; Rydin, 2019). As the municipality is responsible for the strategic and physical planning in which physical retail operates, these issues present a need for municipal measures of adaptation, targeting city centres. The aim of this thesis is to examine the transformational effects that the retail evolution has on urban development and social interactions in Malmö. By identifying challenges with these transformational effects, this study also investigates local stakeholders' views on what the municipality needs to integrate in order to adapt to these changes. The aim is fulfilled through the following research questions:

1. *What challenges do stakeholders in Malmö identify with this transformation?*
2. *How do these challenges impact the urban development and social interactions in the city centre?*
3. *What key factors do the stakeholders identify as needed in order for the municipality to adapt to the retail evolution and why?*

## 2. Retail as a propeller of urban transformation

This chapter situates the study by introducing background information and previous research relating to the topic of the thesis. The chapter begins by introducing the transformation of retail and previous research surrounding retail resilience, policy approaches, and non-traditional retail. These research areas are interconnected and frame the existing knowledge and discussion on physical retail in cities. The chapter goes on to introduce research covering commerce in connection to social interactions within cities. Existing research has put much focus on the social functions of shopping malls, which is presented as a subchapter. The last section situates the study by introducing the retail evolution in Sweden. This is followed by an introduction to the current retail situation in the study area Malmö, ending with an overview of the municipality's legislative framework in relation to urban planning.

### 2.1 The transformation of retail

Retail can be defined as the activity of selling commodities or goods directly to the consumer. This thesis focuses on the retail evolution, i.e. the decline of brick-and-mortar stores. When discussing a decline in retail, this thesis zooms in on the presence of physical stores. In Sweden, retail is divided into grocery retail (“dagligvaruhandel”) and rare retail (“sällanköpshandel”). These categories are collectively called retail (“detaljhandel”) (Nationalencyklopedin, n.d, Detaljhandel entry). As retail as a whole is going through a structural transformation, the word is used without separation in this thesis.

The retail sector has undergone deep structural and spatial evolutions throughout the decades, leading to dramatic and radical consequences in terms of functional concentration, attractiveness, scale, and location of stores (Tamini, 2018). The decline in brick-and-mortar retail is often pointed out as a result of the growth of e-commerce (Bader, 2017). Other factors believed to play a part are shifts in demographics (Chopra, 2018), excessive debt (Rodriguez, 2019), and in some cases, the growth of shopping malls (Källström, Persson and Westergren, 2019). To remain competitive and stay afloat, retailers have been forced to cut costs through layoffs, inventory reductions, and store closings (Bader, 2017). In a case study in New Zealand, Taylor, McClintock, and Buckenham (2003) concluded that the viability and vitality of city centres can

be lost as retail activity shifts, physical stores close, and synergy is lost between retail activity, other commercial activity, social services, and community facilities. Today, 18 years after their research was published, similar findings can be seen across the world (e.g Barata-Salgueiro and Guimarães, 2020; Fernandes and Chamusca, 2014; Guimarães, 2019; Wrigley and Dolega, 2011).

Consumer behaviors and retail strategies have changed dramatically, and the evidence of this process has shown that inner-city areas have become less central to people's lives (Tamini, 2018). Cities and retail are intrinsically connected and in evolution (Guimarães, 2019). As commercial companies began to develop new strategies to strengthen their position on the market, new spatially-based problems emerged, mainly connected to a new pattern of the retail location, marked by a growing importance of suburban areas and a decline of city centres (Fernandes and Chamusca, 2014). Recent research has paid attention to the retail evolution, focused on issues relating to consumer behavior, retail strategies, and policy intervention (Barata-Salgueiro and Guimarães, 2020; Helm, Kim and Van Riper, 2020; Källström, Persson and Westergren, 2019; Kärholm, Nylund and Prieto de la Fuente, 2014). As highlighted by Helm, Kim and Van Riper (2020), there seems to be a tension between retailers and consumers; customers want physical retail formats, yet retailers struggle to survive. In the same study, a large number of consumers described physical retailers as often unable to deliver on basic retail functions, highlighting the need for approaches that secure brick-and-mortar stores.

### 2.1.1 Retail resilience and policy approaches

Although retail is a private-sector activity, planning and regulations have a significant effect on the activity (Fernandes and Chamusca, 2014). As described by Fernandes and Chamusca (2014), retail and territorial dynamics are affected by attitudes of consumers and retailers, alterations in the global socioeconomic milieu, diversity of time-space contexts, and the modifications in urban-regional spatial dynamics. National cultures and policies are also considered important to be able to understand what is happening with retail structures and concentration, as well as their resilience to spatial and socioeconomic change, economic crisis, and global competition (Ibid).

Urban consumption represents a complex system of overlying consumer spaces and rhythms (Muliček and Osman, 2018). Urban commerce has become more and more of an influential agent of urban everydayness, which affects the spatiotemporal organization of the city (Kärrholm, 2009; Muliček and Osman, 2018). Recently, the concepts of urban resilience and urban sustainability entered the discourse of urban policies (Barata-Salgueiro and Guimarães, 2020; Fernandes and Chamusca, 2014; Kärrholm, Nylund and Prieto de la Fuente, 2014; Ozuduru and Guldmann, 2013). Resilience refers to the degree to which a certain system can tolerate financial, ecological, social, and/or cultural change before reorganizing around a new set of structures and processes (Kärrholm, Nylund and Prieto de la Fuente, 2014). The liveability of a neighborhood is a dimension of urban sustainability (Knox and Mayer, 2009). Neighborhood shopping is considered to contribute to the sustainability of towns and cities, which raises the question of how such neighborhood shopping areas are treated within urban planning (Rydin, 2019). Barata-Salgueiro and Erkip (2014) stress that retail is an element of liveability, as a richer retail and service supply reinforces community ties and cohesion and increases the quality of life.

The transformation of city centres puts pressure on adaptive policy measures. As described by Ozuduru and Guldmann (2013), the overall goals of an effective retail policy should be to attain the economic, social, and environmental goals of urban sustainability, partly regarding the loss of trade in city centres. Following the urban and commercial transformation of the city of Lisbon, Barata-Salgueiro and Guimarães (2020) studied how cities cope with retail challenges to increase their resilience towards sustainability, focusing on the role of public policy. Reviewing policy approaches in relation to the three dimensions of sustainability - social, environmental, and economic, the authors discovered that improvements were made towards a more resilient and sustainable city centre. However, there was a lack of inclusion of the social dimension, and they saw a need for a greater concern with social and cultural dimensions of urban life, and extended collaboration between stakeholders. The authors therefore see a need for comprehensive paths of growth that respond to residents and visitors for a more resilient city centre and retail district (Ibid). The need for multiple active stakeholders has also been brought to attention by Rao and Summers (2016), who called for collaboration and prioritization of collective public goods, along with private interest. Research of 250 retail centres in the UK also suggested that the core of adaptive and resilient city centres is raised levels of quality and service, and new forms of cooperation between small independent stores and corporate retailers - which together suggest

the development of policy measures that promote innovation, creativity, and high-quality standards (Wrigley and Dolega, 2011).

Similarly, Kärholm, Nylund, and Prieto de la Fuente (2014) argued that retail resilience must be seen as one aspect of the planning of a resilient urban landscape. With the empirical focus of Malmö in Sweden, the authors analyzed the resilience of management and transformations of three different types of retail areas. In line with my thesis, the city centre of Malmö was analyzed, referred to as the “pedestrian precinct”. Through methods such as interviews with consumers and stakeholders, the authors revealed the need for a more inclusive approach in order to strengthen the resilience towards retail transformations. To make the region and retail increasingly resilient, they state that urban planners and retail planners need to go beyond “the stereotype” of the already established retail type, and instead open up to inviting a wider set of actors and integrate non-retail activities (Ibid). As Covid-19 has increased the effects of the retail evolution in this study area (Fastighetsägarna, 2020), this indicates a need for further policy intervention and research.

For city centres, the out-of-store experience constitutes a crucial complement to the in-store retail experience and makes shopping in city centres unique (Källström, Persson and Westergren, 2019). Urban planning can strengthen the city centres through place branding, which was researched by Källström, Persson and Westergren (2019). The study indicated that place can play an important role in the promotion of cities as retail destinations. The communication of promotion is dominated by the brand producer, in these cases being the municipality (Cleave et al., 2017). Municipalities need to understand that how they navigate and communicate in the virtual environment affects their attraction and outlook amongst external audiences. This perception is said to help formulate the image of a place, becoming an integral component of its brand (Ibid). Place-branding can also be seen in the case of Malmö, with marketing campaigns directed to attract Danish tourists (Kärholm, Nylund, and Prieto de la Fuente, 2014). The success of this marketing was not investigated. Thus, it remains unknown whether this type of place-branding has been successful in attracting people to the city centre of Malmö.

### 2.1.2 Non-traditional retail as adaptation

Many consumers have opposed the notion of physical retail being obsolete, indicating that there is an opportunity to segment the retail market accordingly. Brick-and-mortar retail is still valued by a large number of consumers, not only due to what they supply, but also because of the role they play in people's everyday lives (Helm, Kim and Van Riper, 2020). The concept of non-traditional retail has been brought to attention by Childs et al. (2020). Evaluating consumer behavior in "the retail apocalypse", the authors concluded that consumers seek dedicated in-store experiences, such as unique product offerings, services, and social interactions with other customers. Non-traditional retail formats such as pop-up stores, fashion trucks, fashion subscription services, and in-store interactive experience could therefore help maintain and attract new customers. This was also highlighted by Alexander (2019), who argued that whilst experts originally claimed that physical retail would be diminished or even displaced by online channels, it is now broadly accepted that the physical store plays a crucial role within the connected shopping experience. In similarity, Spankes's (2020) book "Retail isn't dead" is aimed at inspiring retailers to try new concepts to maintain and attract customers. The future of physical retail is partly dependent on factors such as retail management and consumer behavior. His suggestions not only include methods surrounding technology and omnichannel concepts - but also the encouragement of allowing customers to be part of in-store fun and interactive experiences. The need for experimental and interactive retail activities has also been brought to attention by Alexander and Cano (2020), whose study found that strong concepts encouraged discovery, exploration, play, diversity, convivial experience, quality, and the overall experience of "slowing-down".

As chapter two has shown this far, there is a large body of research focusing on the relationship between retail and urban planning policy. Though there is a wide focus in academia regarding the relations between consumer and retailer, there is less focus on how policies should strategize if the decrease of brick-and-mortar retail continues. If commerce is the glue that keeps the city centres thriving, current research should aid urban planners in finding measures for adaptation.

## 2.2 Commerce as a social platform

Physical retail is a necessary social and public process (Hortaçsu and Syverson, 2015). Previous studies have highlighted the social role of retail, categorizing it as a form of public space (Alexander, 2019; Latham and Layton, 2019; Sahito et al., 2020). Commercial spaces such as e.g., restaurants, cafés, and hairdressers can be seen as semi-public spaces despite being formally marketized and privately owned. The spaces can take on the form of public space through the ways in which they are used (Jones et al., 2015), meaning the commercial landscapes can add to the public social interactions. The presence and quality of local shops have been associated with a sense of community, working as meeting places that provide opportunities for proximity to others, passive social contact, and active interactions (Francis et al., 2012; Lund, 2002). This was also researched by Sahito et al. (2020), who concluded that commercial complexes act as quasi-public spaces with great social importance and the ability to promote social sustainability. These spaces play part in the socialization of inhabitants. The authors discovered that people seem to be attracted to quasi-public spaces as they “provide a modern and clean environment as an indication of civilized society”, which in turn foster the development of positive tolerance, social integration, a sense of community and unity, and public trust within the city.

The need for social infrastructure such as libraries, community centres, and parks has been stressed (Latham and Layton, 2019). As concluded by Latham and Layton (2019), even commercial entities facilitate shared use and collective experience, meaning they contribute to the social infrastructure of cities. As described by the authors, these spaces of social infrastructure highlight a range of often underappreciated and overlooked spaces, not often thought of as public, but which nonetheless have distinct public dimensions. Put in their own words: “*Studying these spaces as social infrastructure—as spaces that facilitate social connection—directs attention to the breadth, depth, and texture of social life that can be facilitated in the urban environment*” (p. 9) – further pinpointing the contribution of my thesis.

Similarly, Finlay et al. (2019) argued that “third places”, i.e. public and commercial sites that are neither home nor work, are constantly overlooked by scholars and policymakers. The authors claim that the public sphere and its relation to the quality of life are under-stated and under-researched, particularly among socioeconomically marginalized, vulnerable, and isolated

individuals. The research was motivated as third places “may be closing at an alarming rate”, which ties together their research with the retail evolution. Though the study focused on health care, their findings are relevant for research surrounding retail, policy, and social functions of cities. The authors promoted policymakers to take steps to protect and preserve third places, such as backing fledgling stores and services (Ibid). Encouraging researchers to afford third places greater attention, their work highlights the importance of research surrounding the social effects of the retail evolution and possible policy interventions.

### 2.2.1 The social sphere of shopping malls

In the research community, much focus has been put towards the studying of shopping malls as public spaces (Aceska and Heer, 2019; Beiró et al., 2018; Guimarães, 2019; Taylor, McClintock and Buckenham, 2003). There is evidence that the social atmosphere of the shopping mall contributes to its popularity and profitability (Feinberg et al., 1989). Social research has shown that commercial centres such as shopping malls make a significant and important contribution to social well-being (Taylor, McClintock and Buckenham, 2003).

Although shopping centres can be seen as places of exclusion due to their direct connection to consumption, studies have shown that marginalized urban dwellers use shopping malls as a social space (Aceska and Heer, 2019). The use of shopping malls has been identified as social spheres fostering the development of positive tolerance, social integration, a sense of community and unity, and public trust among people (Sahito et al., 2020). Studying shopping malls in Johannesburg and Mostar, Aceska and Heer (2019) discovered that the spaces are affected and reworked by the agency of urban dwellers, rather than being social and commercial spheres reproducing the exclusion of the marginalized. Similarly, a case study in Chile unveiled that social mixing in shopping malls occurs on a large scale (Beiró et al., 2018). The researchers concluded that less well-off people go to malls because they are free to enter and open to all, are quite safe, and provide comfortable places to spend time in. This indicates that though spaces of commerce are deeply connected to consumerism, the barriers are not unobtainable. Conducting a similar study in Turkey, Erkip (2003) noted that although many malls manage to attract all age and income groups, attitudes between different users indicate that the use is not all together democratic. Whilst the users can represent a heterogeneous group, hostility, and issues of

“otherness” is still an issue. This, the author concludes, may have implications for the urban policymakers. Relating to this view, Corroto and Richardson (2019) stated that “*Malls are not homogeneous entities, nor are they representative of the multicultural and social class diversity of America. They are somewhere in between.*” (p. 1083).

Though shopping malls have been widely successful since their growth after the 1950s, recent years have seen a decline in shopping centres. “Demalling” has become a major issue of discussion for academics and urban planners (Tamini, 2018). Whilst this transformation is most widespread in North America (Guimarães, 2019), it is occurring in Europe as well (Tamini, 2018). Since previous research has revealed that shopping centres possess a social and civic function, the declining retail premises means that the local population will lose a community place (Guimarães, 2019). News sources have signaled the need for alternative social spaces to take their place (Militaru, 2020; Waters, 2018). Although my study focuses on city centres, this connection between declining physical retail, social interactions, and municipal planning highlights the scope and contribution of this thesis.

### 2.3 The retail evolution in Sweden

In accordance with the characteristics of the retail evolution, sales through e-commerce and external shopping malls are growing at the expense of city centre retailing in Sweden (Svensk Handel, 2019, cited in Källström, Persson and Westergren, 2019). Handelsrådet (2020.b) has reported that the retail market is showing a decline in the number of physical stores alongside a growing share of store chains. The number of brick-and-mortar boutiques decreased by around 6 percent between 2017 and 2018. We can therefore see that the trend was evident even before the Covid-19 pandemic. Despite this decline, the number of chains increased their share of the number of stores from 56 to 61 percent, meaning it is mostly independent shops, such as small fashion retailers, that are closing down. This trend means that it is probable that future retail in Sweden will be characterized by a growing homogeneity concerning retail supply (Ibid).

In 2019.b, Svensk Handel predicted that Sweden will have lost 6000-11000 physical stores by 2030 – a number that might come to grow as this prediction was calculated before the Covid-19 outbreak in 2020. The fashion industry has taken the hardest hit since the pandemic. Last year

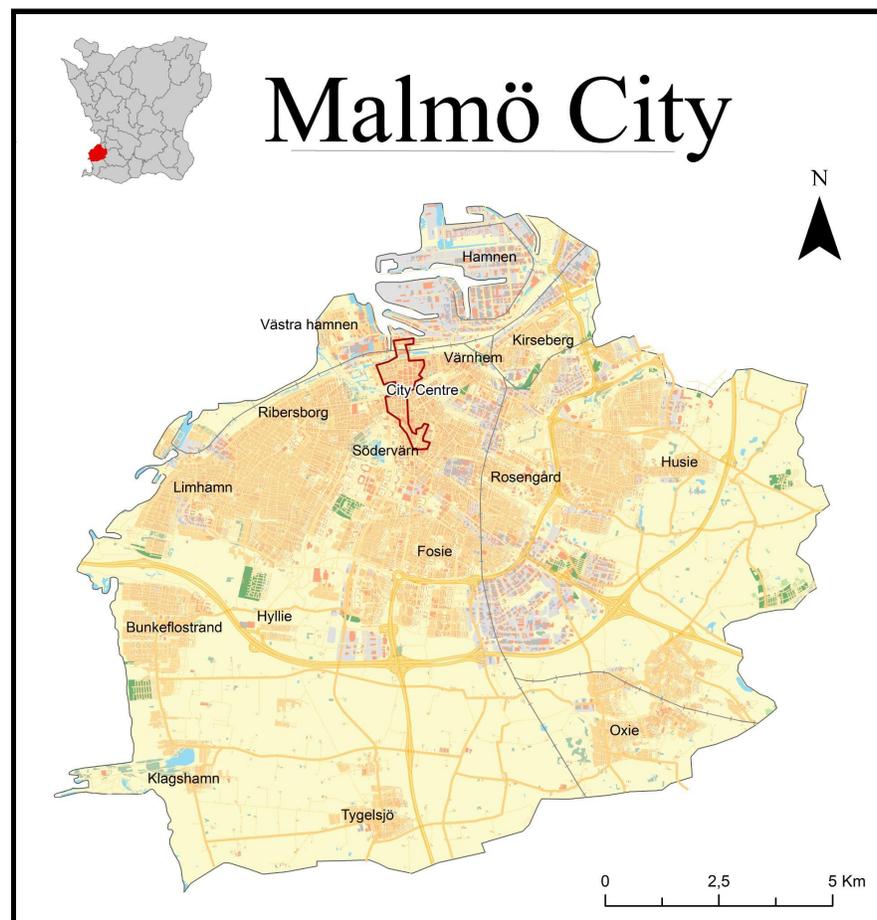
multiple Swedish companies' filed for bankruptcy, including retailers such as Joy, Polarn O, Pyret, Dea Axelssons, and Brothers (Handelsrådet, 2020.a). According to reports from May 2020, 41 percent of retailers had lost over 30 percent of their total sales in comparison to 2019 (Svensk Handel, 2020).

In a podcast by HUI Research, Helena Olsson describes the current characteristics of the retail evolution in Sweden. Working with urban development and property owners, she reports that larger cities have had more extensive negative effects than smaller cities as a result of the pandemic. This, she presents, could be the case as larger cities have more offices within the city centres, which means fewer people have utilized the centre as they work from home instead. According to Olsson, Sweden is seeing a transformation of city centres from a market space to a social meeting place. A survey investigating what the population in Stockholm desires from the city centre showed an increasing demand for restaurants, culture, nature, mixed functions, and a mix of people. As Olsson puts it, people want to *experience* things and *socialize* in the city (Detaljhandelspodden, 2020). Furthermore, she describes the importance of attractive city centres. City centres function as a display window for municipalities, and a thriving city centre works as an indicator of the entire well-being of a city, which in turn attracts new companies and tenants (Ibid). Whilst this argument provides insight into the importance of city centres, I want to highlight that this indicator hardly encompasses all parts of a city's health. A thriving city centre with functioning retail can indicate a good economy, but says less about the distribution of that economic health and the wellbeing of the population.

### 2.3.1 Local effects: Malmö

Home to about 348 000 people, Malmö is the third-largest city in Sweden (Malmö Stad, 2020). The transformation of Malmö has been relatively rapid and is similar to processes in other European cities (Kärrholm, Nylund and Prieto de la Fuente, 2014), making it suitable as a study area. In terms of retail, this includes the expansion of malls by the outskirts of the city, a decline of retail in the local squares of the city districts, and pedestrianization of the city centre (Ibid). Another factor playing part in the transformation in Malmö is the city tunnel, which came into use in 2010 (The Department of Urban Planning, 2018). The city tunnel, which connects the

central station with the train stations Triangeln and Hyllie, contributed to a greater concentration of retail in these areas (Ibid).



**Figure 1.** The figure shows the city centre of Malmö, marked in red. The boundaries are based on data from Statistics Sweden (2018), which became available during 2020. The graphic representation was presented in Cityindex 2020 (p. 12) and visualised by me. Source: Map layout; Michaela Brynhildsen 2021. Geodata; Lantmäteriet ©. The institution of Human Geography, Lund University.

The number of bankruptcies in Scania increased by 7 percent during 2020, compared to 2019 (Capuder, 2021). The results in Malmö are varied. As reported by Fastighetsägarna (2020), restaurants and hotels saw a positive development during 2018-2019, whilst the fashion industry struggled with a negative sales development of - 12 %. Several of the industries that have done well despite the structural transformation have had a difficult time since the Covid-19 outbreak, starting in the spring of 2020. This can be seen in the sales forecasts for Malmö's city center for the first half of 2020. Commercial services were estimated to have lost about 40 percent of sales. The restaurant and hotel industry which had previously been thriving showed a drop of 20

respectively 40 percent. Fashion retailers were estimated to have lost almost 30 percent of their sales. Altogether, Malmö was expected to have lost just over 20 percent of total sales in the city center (Ibid). A comparison between August 2019 and August 2020 further showed that Södra Förstadsgatan in Malmö's city centre had lost 60 percent of its human flow (Hellekant, 2020). Forecasts are predicting a continued loss of retail, especially in the restaurant industry (Capuder, 2021).

### 2.3.1.1 Urban planning in Malmö

Sweden has a municipal planning monopoly within the framework of national legislation. The state can only intervene in specific cases of planning and primarily through the county councils as the first control instance (Hedin et al., 2012). The department of urban planning in Malmö is responsible for master planning, detailed planning, property development, building permits, measurement, and mapping, as well as service for real-estate parties. Planning processes are regulated by the Planning and Building Act. It is only the municipality that has the authority to adopt plans and decide whether these should be implemented or not (Boverket, 2021). The master plan has to be approved by the city council, which is obliged to take a stand on the actuality of the plan at least once during a 4-year term of office (Kärrholm and Nylund, 2011). Sweden is one of few countries in Western Europe that has not yet developed a national retail policy regulating how retail should be developed (Ibid). Recent research and reports shows that many municipalities in Sweden are missing a retail policy and official policy statements concerning the retail system (Ekström and Jönsson, 2019; Fernandes and Chamusca, 2014; Svensk Handel, 2019a). This is the case in Malmö City, which highlights the contribution of this thesis. The municipality is currently developing a new establishment strategy. As this strategy is in the works and unpublished, it is not part of this thesis.

Apart from the municipal departments, the network Citysamverkan (City Cooperation) is active in questions of urban development within the city centre. Malmö Citysamverkan is a non-profit company owned by the municipality, 30 property owners, and 400 shops and restaurants (Malmö Business, n.d). The network works to carry out various projects and initiatives in collaboration with other parties. The goal of the network is to create and maintain an attractive and vibrant city center.

### 3. Conceptual framework

This chapter presents the conceptual framework that is used to frame the data. The chapter begins with an explanation of the terms of the current retail transformation, followed by urban social interactions and research connecting the geographic and sociological character of cities. This connects to the concept of third place, which is used to describe city centres as public spaces that facilitate urban social interaction. Finally, I introduce the work *Life between buildings* by Jan Gehl, further explaining the human activities that occur in the public urban realm. All together these concepts work to frame the analysis and discussion of the retail evolution in relation to urban development and social interactions.

#### 3.1 Retail transformation – apocalypse or evolution?

A common theme in the current conversation surrounding the decline of physical retail is what this phenomenon should be called. The term “retail apocalypse” reflects the dramatic changes of the retail industry, starting with the mass closure of a large number of North American brick-and-mortar retail stores (Peterson 2017, cited in Childs et al., 2020). This thesis instead uses the term “retail evolution”. Though these terms describe the same process, evolution is used to describe the phenomena as a transformation, rather than the definite end of physical retail. The transformation of retail can also be seen as an opportunity for retailers to adapt their business models, technologies, and supply chains (Business Wire, 2018).

The effects of the growing e-commerce differ between industries and locations. In Sweden, retail such as grocery stores and corner shops are stable. Retailers offering rare goods such as fashion, furniture, and book shops are on the other hand facing growing competition from online platforms (Arnberg et al., 2018). As physical retail is still valued and present (Helm, Kim and Van Riper, 2020; Hortaçsu and Syverson, 2015; Spanke, 2020), I deem apocalypse to be a too definite term. As the discussion surrounding the appropriate name of this phenomenon largely is taking place in the media, this thesis contributes to the discussion by investigating the traits and characteristics of this trend.

## 3.2 Urban social interactions

Social interaction has been linked to a variety of positive outcomes for physical and mental health throughout a person's lifespan (Holt-Lunstad, Smith and Layton, 2010). Alongside this, their opposites - social isolation, ostracism, and loneliness - have been linked to negative effects on health and well-being (Holt-Lunstad et al., 2015). The importance of social interactions in the urban milieu has been stressed by influential researchers such as Wirth (1938) and Jacobs (1961). Studies have shown that positive social interaction is an important element of social sustainability (Dempsey et al., 2011; Ghahramanpouri, Lamit and Sedaghatnia, 2013). According to Byers (1998), a city cannot be healthy if its built environment is constructed in a manner that prevents social interaction. Social interaction can entail anything from eye contact to direct contact with another person (Lotfata and Ataöv, 2019). As Dempsey (2006) put it: "*Without social interaction, people living in a given area can only be described as a group of individuals living separate lives, with little sense of community or sense of pride or place attachment*" (p. 62). Cities reflect a two-way process in which people modify urban spaces while at the same time they are conditioned by the spaces in which they live and work (Knox and Pinch, 2010). Scholars and researchers have stressed how physical characteristics make public spaces attractive for public life, emphasizing the role of social qualities of public spaces in place attachment and place-making (Mehta and Bosson, 2010). The public infrastructure of city centres is important to enhance and foster social and cultural life (Ujang, Kozlowski, and Maulan, 2018).

Previous studies have shown that an important characteristic that people desire in mixed-use neighborhoods is a lively and diverse core area - the neighborhood commercial streets (Brower, 1996, cited in Mehta, 2009). High-density mixed-use streets are claimed to facilitate social interactions as they encourage a range of people with different motivations to move through space. The city streets are therefore a key area of incidental social interactions since they promote public life outside the home and workplace (Jacobs, 1961; Talen, 1999). The streets are crucial for a community and a vital component of a city's image (Kutty and Furlan, 2019). Following this argument, Mehta (2009) claims commercial streets are not only used for shopping, but also other active and passive engagements. These include a wide variety of activities such as entertainment, leisure, people watching, spending time with friends, and relaxation. The findings showed that an appropriate combination of physical, land use, and social

dimension of space can make the urban streets desirable for stationary, lingering, and social activities (Ibid). As described by Ujang, Kozlowski and Maulan (2018), the social environments provide a place of engagement to fulfill emotional and social bonding. The public spaces of the cities are regarded as social spheres, providing a vital role in enriching the urban experience. Similarly, Kutty and Furlan (2019) revealed that social interactions create lively commercial streets where interaction can be strengthened through the presence of a variety of businesses. Studying the urban regeneration of Al Wakrah Old Souq in Qatar, their results showed that businesses on a commercial street can contribute to the urban regeneration of the built environment and enhance social interactions.

### 3.2.1 Third place

To better understand how the city centre can foster and facilitate social interactions, this thesis draws upon the work of Ray Oldenburg's concept of "Third place". Defined by Oldenburg (1999) as 'the great, good places', third places are a crucial element of an area's social infrastructure. The phrase "third places" derives from the notion of our homes as the "first" places in our lives, and our workplaces as the "second" (Oldenburg, 1997). Third places facilitate social connection by the ability to create social interaction, community building, and social support (Ibid). In that sense, it is a place that people can regularly visit and meet with friends, neighbors, co-workers, and even strangers (Mehta and Bosson, 2010). These places were identified as "heavens of sociability" since they provide opportunities for people to connect with others in communities and increase the quality of public life (Oldenburg, 1999). Typical public facilities and institutions, such as libraries and parks, constitute third place within the social infrastructures; but so do commercial businesses and certain privately-operated organizations such as cafes and restaurants, bars, barbershops, gyms, child day-care, community centres, sites of worship, and shopping malls (Finlay et al., 2019). Life without community produces a lifestyle consisting of a home-to-work-and-back-again pattern, which affects social well-being and psychological health. This two-stop model of the routines becomes fixed in our habits as the urban environment affords less opportunity for public relaxation (Oldenburg, 1999). A key dimension of a good city is its collective public character, and even commercial entities can facilitate shared use and collective experience (Latham and Layton, 2019). The benefits of being

part of a community are not only to have friends to interact with, but also to develop a sense of belonging (Hadi and Ellisa, 2019). Beyond individual-level social interaction, third places can serve to generate social surplus such as collective feelings of civic pride, acceptance of diversity, trust, civility, and overall sense of togetherness through sustained use and connection among residents (Latham and Layton, 2019). The connection between social interactions and health outcomes has been further brought to attention during the ongoing pandemic of Covid-19. Billions of people are or have been quarantined in their own homes as nations have locked down to implement social distancing as a measure to contain the spread of infection (Banerjee and Rai, 2020). As third places closed down, and social isolation became a collective responsibility, many reports of increased loneliness and mental health issues have risen (Banerjee and Rai, 2020; Galea, Merchant and Lurie, 2020; Hwang et al., 2020; Li and Wang, 2020). The loss of third places and their importance for mental wellbeing and social needs have not only been brought to attention by the research community, but also the mainstream media (DeVos, 2020; Ketcham, 2020; Low, 2020).

Writing in 1999, Oldenburg reported that there had been a decline of social gathering places in America. Familiar gathering centres, vital to informal public life, disappeared rapidly. As these effects spread throughout Western society, scholars have pointed to the importance of understanding and ultimately creating leisure spaces as third places constitute a welcomed approach to mediate this loss of community (Yuen and Johnson, 2017). Today, news sources around the world have pointed to the retail evolution as a diminisher of third places in society (Brown, 2017; Butler and Diaz, 2016; Dagens Industri, 2020; Waters, 2018), capturing the relevance of the term.

The traditional notion of physical retail is being disrupted by a consumer-centric, omnichannel environment, changing current servicescapes (Grewal, Roggeveen and Nordfält, 2017). Third place has been connected to commercial activities in retail before (Alexander, 2019; Crick, 2011; Mehta and Bosson, 2010). Unlike the traditional third place as described by Oldenburg, the commercial third place is designed specifically to get customers to increase the amount of time and money spent there (Crick, 2011). This thesis draws on third place to describe the city centre as a social arena. Rather than just focusing on commercial complexes as third place, I argue that

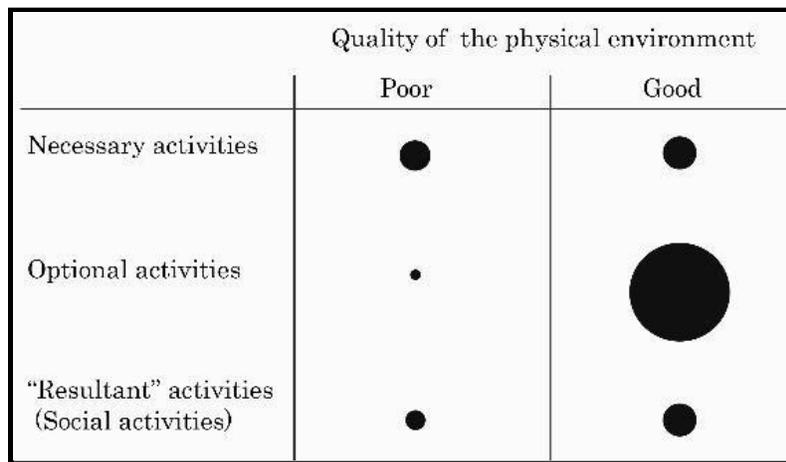
these together with the urban streets create a third place facilitating planned and unplanned interactions.

As Oldenburg's work was written more than two decades ago, limitations to his theory have been highlighted. Oldenburg (1999) argued that increasing technology contributes to the weakening of community and socially isolating experiences. With the growth of social platforms online, this argument has met its limitations. Scholars have instead recognized that information and communication technologies have the potential to be considered third places (Hadi and Ellisa, 2019; Memarovic et al., 2014; Yuen and Johnson, 2017). As this thesis solely focuses on physical third places within city centres, digital platforms will not be taken into consideration. Alongside this, several authors call for a more critical view of third places as public ones (Finlay et al., 2019; Glover and Parry, 2009; Yuen and Johnson, 2017). Though these spaces are often public in character, both visible and invisible barriers exist. As explained by Yuen and Johnson (2017), public places can be conducive to feelings of belonging and social cohesions, but they can also breed experiences of marginalization and exclusion. Concerning urban planning, it is also important to highlight that different people want and need different things from their third places (Crick, 2011; Finlay et al., 2019). This was considered throughout the discussion, and conclusion of this thesis.

### 3.2.2 Life between buildings

First published in 1971, Gehl's book "Life between buildings" has become widely influential within urban research and design (Matan and Newman, 2016). The book points out the shortcomings of functionalist architecture and city planning that dominated the period. Describing the social scene of urban streets, Gehl's work is highly relevant for research covering the social geography of urban society. Gehl (2011) emphasizes that life between buildings is a dimension of architecture that deserves more careful treatment. It is where social interaction and perception, urban recreation, and the sensory experience of city life take place. Gehl describes outdoor activities in public spaces as being divided into three categories with different demands on the physical environment: *necessary activities*, *optional activities*, and *social activities*. Necessary activities relate to the actions that are more or less compulsory. These are described as

often being related to walking, and including everything from going to school or work, running errands, waiting for a bus, or going shopping. Optional activities are in contrast the things we do outside that are closely related to our will to “do so”; sunbathing, eating lunch on a bench instead of at the office, or taking a walk to get fresh air. These activities are highly dependent on our wishes and needs, but they function or disfunction due to the built environment. They take place only when exterior conditions are favorable, and when weather and place invite them. The third category, social activities, combine the activities that hinge on the presence of others in public spaces. This includes activities such as children’s play, communal activities, social interactions, and even passive contact (seeing and hearing other people without engaging in direct interaction). This category also goes under the name of *resultant activities*. This name comes from the fact that these social happenings can be produced as a result of both necessary and optional activities. Going to work can result in conversations at the bus stop, and a walk in the park with your kids can result in children’s play at the local duck pond. Social activities occur in spontaneous ways as a consequence of people’s movement through public space. This, Gehl claims, implies that *the social activities are indirectly supported whenever necessary and optional activities are given better conditions in public space* (Ibid, p. 12). The life between buildings entails the entire spectrum of activities, which together make communal spaces in cities and residential areas meaningful and attractive (Ibid).



**Figure 2.** The figure shows the graphic representation of the relationship between the quality of outdoor spaces and the rate of occurrence of outdoor activities. When the quality of outdoor areas is good, optional activities occur with increasing frequency. As levels of optional activity rise, the number of social activities usually increases substantially. Source: Gehl, 2011, p. 11.

As described by Maxwell (2016), local pavements and streets are some of the most commonly used urban environments for pedestrian activity. Gehl (2011) asserted that the perceived complexity of built environments could have a psychological effect, making the walking distances between two points seem shorter than they actually were. Understanding the forces that influence this activity or “life” between buildings is a fundamental challenge in the field of urban design (Maxwell, 2016). Gehl’s (2011) view of social activities highlights the life of the urban city centre in an interesting way. As the mix of people who do not know each other and who have different interests is greater on the city streets and in city centres, the social activities are generally more superficial and passive. To be part of passive interactions is in itself a form of contact and social activity. This cannot only be appealing on its own but can also spark more comprehensive forms of social activities. As different forms of activities are dependent on and affected by the built environment, planners can directly and indirectly affect what is possible in public city life. Gehl therefore argues that this connection is important in relation to physical planning. Although there are limitations to the physical frameworks ability to create social activities, architects and planners can affect the possibilities for meeting, seeing, and hearing people – possibilities that both take on a quality of their own and become important as background and starting point for other forms of contact. Gehl’s work can be connected to the urban transformations that occur due to the retail evolution. The importance of necessary activities as a generator of social activities can be seen in his line of thought. This poses the question of how activities will change in the future, with growing digital services and perhaps, less necessary activities that engage us in the life between buildings.

## 4. Methodology

This chapter presents the methodology and methods used to collect and analyze data. The thesis approaches social science from a critical realist point of view. The ontological and epistemological standpoints are presented in the first section, followed by an introduction to the methods and ethical considerations. Primary and secondary data were collected using semi-structured interviews and secondary document analysis, presented under methods. This is followed by an introduction to the data analysis, and lastly, the limitations of the study.

### 4.1 Ontology and epistemology

When we talk about methodology, it is about the borderline between the philosophy of science and the critical methods or working procedures used in specific studies. This thesis employs critical realism as a theory of science in order to develop and clarify the ontological and epistemological standpoint. Critical realism argues for the necessity of ontology. The pursuit of ontology is the attempt to understand and say something about ‘the things themselves’ and not simply about our own beliefs, experiences, or knowledge and understanding of those things (van Ingen, Grohmann and Gunnarsson, 2020). Epistemology, or the theory of knowledge, instead investigates the origin, methods and limits of our knowledge about existence (Aitken and Valentine, 2014).

Critical realism has been largely influential in social sciences and is most closely associated with the work of Roy Bhaskar and Margaret Archer (Maxwell, 2012). Critical realism advocates a structural realist and causal powers approach to natural and social ontology, with a focus upon social relations and process of social transformation (van Ingen, Grohmann and Gunnarsson, 2020). Critical realism employs the integration of realist ontology, meaning there is a real world that exists independently of our perceptions, theories, and constructions. It further employs a constructivist epistemology, meaning understandings of the world are a construction from our own perspectives and standpoint, and that there is no possibility of attaining a “God’s eye point of view” that is independent of any particular viewpoint (Maxwell, 2012). This perception of the world means that although a real world exists, our knowledge of it is socially constructed and fallible. All theories about the world are grounded in a particular perspective and worldview, and

all knowledge is therefore partial and incomplete (Ibid). Critical realists seek to explain and critique social conditions, which makes it possible and desirable to produce concrete and practical policy recommendations and definitive claims for action on social problems (Fletcher, 2017).

When collecting data, it is important to reflect on how your own identity will shape the interactions that you have with participants and reviewed material. This is often described as recognizing your *positionality* and being *reflexive* (Valentine, 2013). Questions of gender, class, race, nationality, politics, history, and experience shape our research and our interpretations of the world (Schoenberger, 1992). It is important to note that I interviewed stakeholders with years of experience academically and professionally, all in fields in which my prior knowledge is limited. My perception of the world shaped the conduction of interview guides, and their perception built the results. Their knowledge and experiences are subjective, as are mine.

## 4.2 Methods

Critical realism is not a research method per se but a set of philosophical tenets that can inform a wide variety of methods and research designs, which seek to understand different phenomena. It is particularly useful for understanding how and why things happen, as well as unpacking the influence of context on these outcomes (Sturgiss and Clark, 2020). Whilst there are no specific set of tools to be applied within this methodological standpoint, critical realist work is often based on case-study research using methods such as interviews and ethnography (Vincent and O'Mahoney, 2018). According to Yeung (1997), qualitative methods such as interactive interviews are necessary to abstract the causal mechanisms of which quantitative and statistical methods are oblivious. This thesis is built on an intensive research approach. Intensive research prioritizes qualitative research designs, such as case studies or action research (Vincent and O'Mahoney, 2018). This is a qualitative study which means that the purpose is to comprehend processes, meanings, and qualities (Renstam and Wästerfors, 2015). The thesis is constructed through different qualitative methods, stemming from a case-study approach. Secondary data in the form of documents were collected in order to provide a background to the case, develop

interview guides, and triangulate data. Primary data was also collected through semi-structured interviews. The combination of two data sources facilitated overcoming issues such as biased selectivity (Bowen, 2009).

Approaching the research questions through a case study raises the question of generalizability. Generalizability refers to the prospect of applying the findings from research to other examples of the phenomenon, and the researcher must ask themselves how representative their cases are (Denscombe, 2010). This study is somewhat generalizable in that the effects of the retail evolution in Malmö are similar to other European cities (Kärrholm, Nylund and Prieto de la Fuente, 2014). Important to note is that the findings from the collected primary data are all influenced by the choice of respondents, their knowledge, and their worldview.

Research ethics are an overriding concern when it comes to strategy (Denscombe, 2010). All participants were therefore offered anonymity, informed about the nature of the research and their involvement, gave consent to being involved and recorded, and offered the transcriptions, voice recordings, and the final thesis. Participants expect researchers to act professionally and with integrity (Ibid), which was kept in mind to make respondents comfortable and to build trust. Issues of *reliability* and *validity* were taken into consideration when collecting data. The impact of the interviewer and the context means that consistency and objectivity are impossible to achieve. The collected data will be somewhat unique owing to the specific context and individuals involved (Ibid). A strength of interviews is however the direct contact, which means data can be checked for accuracy and relevance as they are collected, strengthening the validity (Ibid). To better ensure the reliability and validity of data both primary and secondary sources were used. The data was triangulated, which involves the practice of viewing things from more than one perspective (Ibid). My use of triangulation focused on the validation of the findings in terms of their accuracy and authenticity.

#### 4.2.1 Case study: Malmö

A case study as a research strategy allows the researcher to investigate a particular case in a thorough and detailed manner (Bryman, 2018). Flyvbjerg (2011) has stressed the benefits of case

studies, highlighting strengths such as its in-depth approach, high conceptual validity, understanding of context and process, understanding of what causes phenomenon as well as its ability to foster new hypotheses and research questions. Acknowledging the impossibility of studying society as a whole, the case study has been seen as one answer to this question, offering a vantage point from which to draw broader conclusions about societal trends and developments (May, 2011). The case study approach allowed me to study a global phenomenon in considerable depth. By limiting my study to a geographical area, specific local challenges and views of adaptive measures could be investigated and analyzed. Malmö City was chosen as the study area as it is affected by the retail evolution and shows a municipal concern towards this transformation. As explained by Swanborn (2010), a case study is particularly appropriate when we wish to gain insight into the worlds of several groups of stakeholders with contrasting visions and different views on solutions. It helps us discover the world as seen by participants in the system and identify and explain why they see it this way (Ibid).

#### 4.2.2 Interviews

Primary data was gathered through the use of semi-structured interviews. According to Smith and Elger (2014), a critical realist approach to interviewing involves the interviewer and respondent engaging in a fluid interactive process, which helps formulate perspectives, observations, experiences, and evaluations pertinent to the research agenda. Interviews provide an important basis for gaining access to the attitudes and emotions of informants as well as richly textured accounts of events, experiences and underlying conditions or processes, which represent different facets of the complex and multi-layered social reality (Ibid).

The semi-structured technique for interviewing was chosen to allow me to move freely between specified questions, elaborations, clarifications, and new subjects. This method enables the interviewer to have more latitude and to probe beyond given answers in a more dialogue-like manner (May, 2011). The interviews allowed me to gather new data not available in pre-existing documents or other secondary data sources. The respondents were chosen through purposive sampling and the contacting of gatekeepers such as receptionists and heads of businesses with knowledge about employees. Gaining access to the right people through gatekeepers is important since it affects what information and perspective you get (Valentine, 2013). As stated by Valentine (2013), it is important to make it clear to contacted gatekeepers exactly what sort of

information you want and who you would like to talk to. This was done carefully through emails between gatekeepers and later on, suggested respondents. The respondents were chosen to provide deeper knowledge regarding the retail evolution and possible adaptations in Malmö. A total of six interviews, of roughly 45 minutes each, were conducted. The following respondents were interviewed:

- A *strategist of urban development* from the department of strategic planning, Malmö City. This department is responsible for strategic and general planning issues. This includes the municipality-wide master plans and involvement in regional planning issues.
- A *landscape architect* from the unit of urban environment, Malmö City. This unit plans, develops, complements and rebuilds streets, parks, squares and green spaces in the city, based on a holistic perspective for the benefits of Malmö's residents.
- A *business developer* from the department of business policy, Malmö City. The role of the business policy department is to create good conditions for sustainable growth in the business community.
- A *business policy expert*, Svensk Handel, Malmö. Svensk Handel is an employers' organization that pursues trade issues for wholesale, retail and e-commerce.
- The *head of business policy* for Fastighetägarna Syd. Fastighetsägarna is a branch organization that works for a sustainable and functioning property market. Their mission is to improve the conditions for real estate in the country.
- A *researcher* active in the project "The store as a meeting place", docent at Lund University. The project is financed by Handelsrådet and investigates how stores can develop their role as a social meeting place.

The 5 first respondents were chosen as they are all important stakeholders in urban planning and questions of urban development, business, and the real-estate market in Malmö. As this thesis has a limited time frame, I chose to interview organizations working with retail and real-estate, rather than individual shop owners and property owners. The researcher from Lund University was chosen as there is limited research in this field, and his study is highly relevant to my topic. As the project has not yet been released, the interview gave valuable information which is not available publicly. As the respondents represent key actors in questions of urban development all will be referred to as *stakeholders*.

The disruption following Covid-19 leaves qualitative researchers with opportunities and challenges (Lobe, Morgan and Hoffman, 2020), limiting the possibility of face-to-face

interviews. All interviews were conducted virtually using the video-conferencing tool Microsoft Teams. Whilst there are benefits to conducting online video interviews, it requires a qualitative internet connection, a digital device that carries the necessary application, a microphone, speakers, a camera, and a disturbance-free location (Ibid). These requirements were met by all respondents. The choice to record the interviews was taken in order to provide the respondent with uninterrupted attention. Recordings also allow the researcher to go back and analyze factors such as emotions and linguistic nuances (Fägerborg, 1999).

#### 4.2.3 Secondary document analysis

Secondary data such as company reports and planning documents were gathered and analyzed as a complement to the primary data. Secondary data refers to information that has already been collected by someone else and which is available for the researcher to use (Clark, 2013). The strengths of including secondary data are manifold; It is relatively easy and quick to obtain, often great in amount, it provides the researcher with contextual material for the primary research, and it is usually of proven quality and reliability. Secondary data aid the researcher in sketching out issues or questions to pursue in the primary research, and help provide context for case studies (Ibid). This was the case in this thesis. Document analysis is a systematic procedure for reviewing or evaluating printed and electronic material to elicit meaning, gain understanding, and develop empirical knowledge (Bowen, 2009). They also help the researcher understand events and their developments, processes, and transformations in social relations (Bowen, 2009; May, 2013). Documentary sources should never be accepted at face value. As the data reflects the aims and attitudes of the people and organizations that collected that data, the validity is something that needs to be established rather than being taken for granted (Denscombe, 2010). To ensure the quality of the secondary sources the material was evaluated in relation to four basic criteria presented by Denscombe (2010); *authenticity*, *representativeness*, *meaning*, and *credibility*. Based on these categories, the validity of the documents has been treated and the material considered sufficient. The reviewed documents were chosen due to their valuable information regarding challenges of the retail evolution and municipal measures in relation to these issues. The documents that were collected and analyzed together with my primary data are:

- Master plan for Malmö, Malmö City 2018 - *The master plan is a strategic and visionary document with the purpose of guiding decisions on the use of land and water areas and how the existing urban environment to be developed. Malmö's current master plan was adopted in 2018.*
- Safe urban environment, Malmö City 2006 - *This document is an extension of the master plan and describes the municipality's work with safety in the urban environment.*
- Traffic and mobility plan, Malmö City 2016 - *This document is an extension of the master plan and describes how a progressive and holistic traffic planning can help to create an increased quality of life for residents, visitors and actors.*
- Program for active meeting places, Malmö City 2015 - *This document is an extension of the master plan and provides the strategy for development of places and structures for increased physical activity in public places in Malmö.*
- The plan for walk paths, Malmö City 2014 - *This document is an extension of the master plan with the purpose to point out which lanes are important for pedestrians in Malmö and to develop strategies for how pedestrians should be prioritized on these lanes. This helps to create attractive, safe, accessible and safe urban environments and traffic systems*
- Cityindex - Cityrapport Malmö, HUI Research and Fastighetsägarna 2020 - *Cityindex is a national report that describes the development of commercial activities in Swedish city centers with a focus on urban development. This document analyses Malmö City.*
- The physical market in a digital world, Svensk Handel 2019 - *This report aims to show how digitalisation is changing physical retail and trade, and to clarify the new conditions for municipalities and property owners.*

#### 4.2.4 Data analysis

The transcribed interviews were printed and hand-coded along with the selected documents. Coding is a process of analyzing qualitative text data by taking them apart to see what they yield before putting the data back together in a new, more meaningful way (Creswell, 2015). This method helped identify common expressions, concepts, and key factors. The process began with predefined themes developed from my three research questions. These themes were Challenges, Urban development and Social interaction, and Municipal adaptation. The codes and categories were developed through inductive coding. This means I did not start with a predefined set of codes, but instead developed and categorized them as they emerged from the transcripts. This

method was suitable as I wanted to identify the specific views of my respondents. An inductive process of coding can be beneficial to critical realist research as it allows the reality of others to be clearly represented in the data analysis (Roberts, Dowell and Nie, 2019). Within critical realism, coding focuses on reporting an assumed reality evident in the data and identifying tendencies rather than “laws” (Fletcher, 2017). Critical realists call these tendencies “demi-regularities”, and they can be effectively identified through qualitative data coding (Ibid).

Research question	Theme	Category	Codes
1. What challenges do stakeholders in Malmö identify with this transformation?	Challenges	Employment	Unemployment/Bankruptcy/Education/Economy/Demography/Labour market
		Retail	Non-commercial space/Mixed functions/Bankruptcy/Demand/Chains/Alternative concepts/E-commerce/Shopping center
		Real-estate	Rent/Property value/Ground floors/Tenants/Demand/Architecture
2. How do these challenges impact the urban development and social interactions in the city centre?	Urban development and Social interaction	Urban attractiveness	Economy/Attractiveness/Population/Labour market/Tax/Environment/Physical planning/Ground floors/Mixed function
		Social diversity	Interaction/Third place/Diversity/Cohesion/Public space/Segregation/Loneliness/Democracy/Urban dwelling/Demography/Human flow
		Safety	Safety/Environment/Ground floors/Human flow/Social interaction
3. What key factors do the stakeholders identify as needed in order for the municipality to adapt to the retail evolution and why?	Municipal adaptation	Collaboration and organisation	Internal collaboration/External/Collaboration/Network/Help/Time-horizon/Flexibility/Goals
		Behaviours and needs	Demand/Supply/Consumer behaviour/Non-commercial space/Green space/Meeting place/Mixed functions
		Physical planning and identity	Environment/Architecture/Uniqueness/Identity/Green space/Mixed function/Infrastructure/Accessibility

**Table 1.** The figure shows the coding table used to identify demi-regularities and common themes in the primary and secondary data. The codes emerged from the data and were then categorized and divided into the predefined themes. Source: Brynhildsen, 2021.

The analytic procedure of document analysis entails finding, selecting, appraising and synthesising data contained in the material (Bowen, 2009). The empirical findings were later mirrored against the conceptual framework. The analytical process of critical realist research involves several key steps: identification of demi-regularities, abduction, and retrodution. The abductive approach means we (1) have an empirical event/phenomenon (the result), which we (2) relate to a rule, which (3) leads us to a new supposition about the event/phenomenon (Danermark et al., 2019). The theories that help us get closer to reality, i.e. that help us identify causal mechanisms driving social events, activities, or phenomena, are selected and formed using rational judgment of these social events (Bhaskar, 1998). Retrodution is used to identify the necessary contextual conditions for a particular causal mechanism to take effect and to result in

the empirical trends observed (Eastwood, Jalaludin and Kemp, 2014; Fletcher, 2017). In this case, that meant going beyond simple identification of e.g. challenges, to further identify how and why they emerge, and what the final results mean. It is a spiral movement between theoretical and empirical work that moves in between observable phenomena and possible explanations to help us reach knowledge of complex reality (Belfrage and Hauf, 2017). The data analysis focuses on the stated research questions, meaning the causal mechanism that drives the phenomena ‘retail evolution’ will not be the focus of discussion. Instead, the retail evolution is viewed as a causal mechanism, and its outcomes studied through research question one and two.

#### 4.2.5 Limitations

The thesis is focused on the relation between the retail evolution, urban development and social interactions, as well as municipal adaptation targeting this issue. As this thesis focuses on municipal adaptation, measures by individual shop and property owners/developers were not investigated. Effects surrounding e.g economy and ecology are beyond the scope of this research. The research is geographically limited to the city of Malmö, focusing on the city centre. This scope was chosen in order to narrow down my research, which allowed for a more comprehensive and in-depth study. The timeframe of one semester posed limitations surrounding data collection. A longer period of time would have allowed for a comparison of multiple cases and/or further interviews. Despite this limitation, I managed to conduct multiple interviews with different stakeholders. The structure of these allowed for deep discussions and probing of questions. Because of this, the data is sufficient and provides answers to the research questions.

## 5. Results

This chapter presents the results from the primary and secondary data collection. This study examines the transformational effects that the retail evolution has on urban development and social interactions in Malmö, and further investigates local stakeholders' views on what key factors the municipality needs to integrate in order to adapt to these changes. The results answer the research questions (1) What challenges do stakeholders in Malmö identify with this transformation?, (2) How do these challenges impact the urban development and social interactions in the city centre?, and (3) What key factors do the stakeholders identify as needed in order for the municipality to adapt to the retail evolution and why?

### 5.1 Challenges

This section presents the challenges of the retail evolution as seen by documents and interviewed stakeholders. Although all respondents saw significant challenges with the retail evolution, two respondents noted that a structural transformation is nothing new and that retail has always been a business in change. The retail evolution is intertwined with issues following Covid-19, which made the pandemic a common theme within all interviews. As described by one respondent, the change that Covid-19 had on retail in 2020 had earlier been predicted to take 10 years, meaning the pandemic is accelerating the effects of the structural transformation.

#### 5.1.1 Employment opportunities

As reported in the municipality's master plan, the retail industry creates employment opportunities, important for the younger generation and groups without a university education in Malmö. Retail is the fourth largest employer in the city, encompassing 13,2 % of the working population between ages 20-64 in 2019 (Region Skåne, 2021). A majority of the respondents reported that the retail evolution can result in increasing bankruptcies, fewer store locations, and/or cutting of staff, meaning employment opportunities can be affected negatively. Job loss and unemployment due to the retail evolution were brought up by a minority of the respondents

as an issue. As the following quote describes, retail is a unique and crucial part of the labor market as it is one of few sectors that seldom demands a specific educational background.

*“It is one of very few sectors that does not demand a long education. You can go from high school and start your career on the floor, and then advance through internal education. (...) It is an entry-level job in Sweden. And those are few, very few.”* - Business developer, Malmö City (Interview 6, 2021-04-09).

*“Retail is among the five largest employers in 245 of the country's 290 municipalities, thus an important engine for creating both jobs and tax revenues.”* - Den fysiska handeln i en digital värld, Svensk Handel (2019a, p. 2).

One respondent explained that these employment opportunities are crucial for two reasons. Firstly, Malmö has a demography that depends on this employment sector. Due to the city's geographical location, it becomes the first home for many who migrate to Sweden. The retail sector is an important employer for this population as it can provide a gateway into the Swedish labor market. Secondly, a decrease in employment opportunities in such a large-scale sector could shake the economic stability of the municipality.

### 5.1.2 Shifts in retail formats

All respondents believed that the expansion of e-commerce will keep growing after the pandemic. The respondents confirmed that the pandemic has particularly increased the difficulties for the retail sectors in Malmö which were already struggling; fashion and footwear. It was also reported that city centre retail has struggled more than external shopping centers. Multiple respondents highlighted that alongside bankruptcies, a few retail sectors have grown stronger; e.g. home and leisure, construction, and pet stores. Their challenge has rather been to keep up with the demand and adapt to logistical needs. Important to note is that this growth is connected to the pandemic; it is therefore difficult to predict if it will be long-lasting. As the following quote shows, retail affects many different actors in the city, which makes the shifts vital to analyze and report.

*“We see radically different market conditions for retailers, property owners and not least the municipalities. Retail is one of few industries that affects all actors in a society.”* - Den fysiska handelsplatsen i en digital värld, Svensk Handel (2019, p.41).

All respondents and a majority of the documents report that retailers can survive the retail evolution if they find ways to adapt. As consumer behavior changes, new retail formats such as omnichannel retail, pop-up stores, showrooms, creative workshops, and mixed-use stores are being developed. E-commerce is accelerating, which forces shop owners to work fast. As the following quotes show, the interviews indicated that larger retailers have an advantage within rapid changes as they often have the financial backbone and manpower to make fast changes and try new concepts. This also means that smaller independent retailers are more sensitive to the challenge. The respondents explained that retailers will need to be flexible and work with less traditional forms of retail, which the following quote describes.

*“If you are a smaller store with a single owner and maybe two employees, then you have to administer staff, take care of the store, work with bookkeeping, marketing, social media - you name it! There is a lot more to do, which makes it difficult to keep up during transformations.”* - Business developer, Malmö City (Interview 6, 2021-04-09).

*“That is a trend that we are seeing; that you cannot survive if you are standing on one leg. The commercial services need multiple legs to stand on.”* - Strategist of urban development, Malmö City (Interview 1, 2021-03-17).

Multiple respondents noted that even large and successful companies might close down more stores in the future. Even if certain chains thrive, the need for multiple stores at multiple locations might diminish. A wide variety of stores was brought up by multiple respondents and documents as needed for an attractive city centre. A decline in both smaller, independent stores and chains could therefore challenge the urban attractiveness. This is highlighted in multiple documents, which stresses the need for a dense and mixed-use city centre. This is a challenge for the municipality, which needs to provide conditions that allow and aid changes in retail and creates an attractive urban development. Changes in retail formats further connect to challenges within the real-estate industry, which is presented in the following section.

### 5.1.3 Real-estate

A challenge within the retail evolution is its effect on the real-estate sector. The respondent from Fastighetsägarna Syd explained that the first challenge lies in the fact that not all property owners see the need of working with collaboration and urban development. A decline in brick-and-mortar stores can affect real-estate owners' ability to find tenants, which in turn can lead to empty premises. This was brought to attention by multiple participants and documents. City life is dependent on ground floor businesses as they attract us to the city centre. They play a crucial part not only for the safety within a city (see section 5.2.2), but also for the urban development in the municipality.

*“Instead of viewing e-commerce as the death of physical stores we must consider how we can complement and strengthen the relationship between service and e-commerce - and here, the real-estate premises become really important. (...) Of course, before this there might have been a demand for large scale premises, but now there might not be the same opportunities for this. It becomes too expensive, or a challenge of knowing how to fill the store.”* - Head of business policy, Fastighetsägarna Syd (Interview 5, 2021-04-08).

As described in the above quote, physical stores and e-commerce need to complement each other. This can entail concepts such as smaller showrooms in the city, with the purchasing of products being online. This challenges the real-estate sector since the need for premises shifts. Multiple respondents and documents noted an increasing demand for smaller, flexible rental premises. This is challenging for property owners and developers who need to find flexible solutions to match demand, which is difficult when working with fixed structures. The municipality is challenged as they need to keep up with this trend when conducting detailed plans and approving building permits. One respondent described the municipality's toolset as *“somewhat blunt”* in this area since much responsibility lies on individual actors and companies. As described in the following quote, the municipality's task is rather to follow developments, be flexible, and responsive.

*“Where we can and need to be responsive is on the building permit side. If you want to change a premise in your building you have to apply for a building permit from the urban planning department, and if we are not aware of the transformation that is going on our architects might*

*say 'no, it's inappropriate to have smaller premises' (...). We can help by being flexible and responsive in this process - but that's about it."* - Business developer, Malmö City (Interview 6, 2021-04-09).

The challenge of rent models and rising prices on the rental market was also raised. This topic was covered by a majority of the respondents and one document, with the challenge not only surrounding the need for lower rents, but the possibilities and limitations of such a response. Lowering rents affect the value of the property, which leaves few owners who want or dare to test it as a means of attracting new retail businesses. This is described in the following quotes;

*"From a perspective of urban development, it is crucial that we get vibrant ground floor tenants in new buildings. It is difficult to establish new retail or any kinds of activities in a ground floor property or a new building. Because of this, one could wish for some kind of lowered rent during the first period of establishment."* - Strategist of urban development, Malmö City (Interview 1, 2021-03-17).

*"Frankly, if you are a property owner and you have a premise and a rental price on that premise, that is part of the value of the property. If you lower the rent, you lower the value of that property."* - Head of business policy, Fastighetsägarna Syd (Interview 5, 2021-04-08).

As the quotes show, this challenge is highly complex. It is nationwide and involves the government's ability to financially back up those who lower the rent. Multiple respondents saw a need for a changed rental model to aid shop owners, but potential solutions are connected to the legal framework in which the real-estate industry operates. The respondents reported that neither of their organizations can change this. Their task is rather to report the needs of actors and be a voice and driver of change in political conversations.

## 5.2 Urban development and social implications

This section presents the results of the second research questions, which is connected to the identified challenges. As retail is a large part of the allure of the city centre today, it becomes relevant to ask how the retail evolution could affect its attractiveness and social functions.

## 5.2.1 Urban attractiveness

All respondents and documents showed that the retail evolution threatens the urban development as it affects the attractiveness of the city centre negatively. One respondent described this as part of a cyclical relationship within the city; An attractive city attracts visitors, which in turn results in greater demand and supply of stores and investments. If the city is inviting, more people are inclined to visit and make the city their home. This increases the population. As companies are drawn to cities with a large labour market, this may increase establishments. More companies lead to a greater labor market, which in turn may increase the population further. A large population generates greater tax revenues for the municipality, which can then be put towards improvements of the city centre. Together, this means that an attractive city centre creates ripple effects, which help finance new efforts within the municipality. As the structural transformation challenges the attractiveness of the city centre, this symbiotic relationship is at risk. The interviews and documents concluded that retail plays a crucial part in a city's attractiveness - not only for economic reasons, but as a creator of movement and social activities.

*“Many people today are unaware of how many the retail sector employs and its [the retail sector] significance for attractive places, residents, visitors and companies.” - Den fysiska handeln i en digital värld, Svensk Handel (2019a, 41).*

*“More residents can contribute to a richer city life with intensity, life and movement. In turn, this contributes to the city's attractiveness and safety.” - Master plan, Malmö City, p. 15.*

Multiple respondents and the master plan explained that this challenge puts further pressure on the flexibility of the municipality and stakeholders. As new types of retail evolve, with needs that are not known today, strategies and plans surrounding business operations need to be revised and readjusted continuously. New versions of business areas may need to develop to meet market needs. This challenges the long-term planning that characterizes municipal planning. A majority of the respondents also noted that this challenge connects to the real-estate and physical aspects of the city centre. Buildings “stand where they stand”, but life between buildings changes at a fast pace. Urban development and the attractiveness of the city centre were further connected to social values. As the following quote shows, the two are highly connected.

*“A good city space contributes to the creation of a sense of relation and identity, and humanistic values such as openness, tolerance and responsibility.”* - Master plan, Malmö City (2018, p. 47).

The connection between urban attractiveness and social aspects are presented further in the following section.

### 5.2.2 Social diversity

Many challenges reported by the respondents affect the social interactions and cohesion of the city centre. Multiple respondents and documents highlighted that the older, traditional market was a space of social gatherings, interaction, and networking - something that people still crave. They also pointed to the need of evaluating where different demographic groups can meet today, as e.g. work, school, and residential neighborhoods are highly segregated. This is highly relevant in Malmö, as the city is characterized by segregation (Malmö Stad, 2019). This issue was well formulated by one respondent, who said that many groups socialize with people with the same socio-economic background, cultural capital, or lack of cultural capital - which means the city centre is one of the few mixed spaces that exist. The respondents saw a need to evaluate who uses the city centre during the daytime, e.g. unemployed, senior citizens, parents on parental leave, or similar groups. As many people like to get out of the house, dwell and people watch, these third places are crucial. A minority of the respondents further connected this to loneliness - meaning the city centre is crucial as creators of social interactions amongst e.g. single households.

*“A society where people with different backgrounds, interests and preconditions do not meet is a society that encourages conflicts rather than understanding.”* - Researcher, Lund University (Interview 4, 2021-04-08).

*“In the larger cities this development [increase of single households] creates a strong demand for third places such as restaurants, cafés and culture.”* - Den fysiska handelsplatsen i en digital värld, Svensk Handel (2019, p. 8).

The municipal documents and multiple respondents also pointed to the city centre as an arena for democracy and participation. As the following quotes show, it is an important space as it is accessible, and has a public character.

*“Looked at from the outside, the centre in a city is the most democratic and open public space, because everyone can go there. (...) It is a social venue for the entire city, and in a well functioning city centre there is also a range of interesting things for a range of different groups of people.”* - Business developer, Malmö City (Interview 6, 2021-04-09).

*“By planning environments that support people's meetings and interaction, urban planning can support social and democratic participation.”* - Master Plan, Malmö City, p. 46.

The presented issue of rising property rents further connects to another trend in Malmö, affecting the social mix and cohesion of the community. This was brought up by multiple respondents and connects urban attractiveness to social interaction. Rental prices in exclusive locations are increasing, and exclusive locations attract exclusive tenants with exclusive products. As described by one respondent, Malmö's demography needs a wide span of goods and price ranges if the retail is to be interesting for the entire population. If the city centre is too exclusive, few will have the capital to become potential customers. If the city centre becomes elitist, it is no longer a place with public character.

Although the physical retail sector is shaking and many enjoy e-commerce, people still seem to enjoy the city centre. This was highlighted by a majority of the documents and respondents, who agreed that we are seeing a shift from the city centre being about retail and trade, to being about interactions and socialization. As the following quotes indicate, the city centre is highly social and an appreciated part of urban life.

*“Even if many of us appreciate the convenience of e-commerce, there is something human about wanting to go out and look at things, touch things and show yourself off. There is something human in this thing that we have always done: You go to the city centre, you dress nice and then you watch people, grab a coffee or whatever. It is nothing new.”* - Business developer, Malmö City (Interview 6, 2021-04-09).

*“We have that need somehow - of seeing others and being seen ourselves.”* - Business policy expert, Svensk Handel (Interview 3, 2021-04-06).

This transformation was described by both respondents and documents as a shift of the city centre from a traditional market space, to a social meeting place. If the city centre does not adapt, this can become a challenge for both the urban development and social life of the city.

Despite many people wanting the social aspects of the city centre, there is a challenge in getting people to locations and making them spend longer periods of time there. The issue was brought up by a majority of the respondents and connects issues of finance with the social aspects. Retail needs a flow of customers in order to sell their goods. In turn, retail and similar activities are crucial in creating the flow and interactions that many people crave. The challenge lies in finding out what people desire and what makes them spend more time in the city centre. Central playgrounds were brought up by two respondents as an example of how this can be achieved. They can maximize hours spent in the city as restless children can play, and their parents rest or run errands.

### 5.2.3 Safety

All interviews and a majority of the documents revealed that a large issue of social interactions connects to safety. A decrease in retail and social interactions can affect our perceived safety in the city centre. This does not only relate to the physical environment, but the movements on sidewalks and life between buildings. As the retail evolution can decrease our movements within the city centre, feelings of safety can be affected. As described in the following quotes, closeness to other people can increase the sense of security.

*“Places without people are perceived as empty, boring and desolate. Other people's closeness is an important quality because they create safety.”* - The plan for walk paths, Malmö City (2014, p. 7).

*“It is important for cities to create vibrant and safe city centers during both day and nighttime. A prerequisite for this is that there are people - residents, workers, visitors - in the city center during most of the day”.* - Cityindex, HUI Research and Fastighetsägarna (2020, p. 50).

The majority of respondents described that the challenge of filling ground floor premises not only affects property owners, but the population too. When attractive businesses fill these premises they create a flow of people between the buildings, which increases the feelings of safety. As described in the quotes, empty premises threaten the outlook and feeling of a city. Attractive retail can therefore be seen as something that can increase the public feeling of safety.

*“There is nothing worse than empty ground floors. It creates an immense feeling of unsafety!”* - Business policy expert, Svensk Handel (Interview 3, 2021-04-06).

*“Ground floors and their premises are incredibly important for a living city, and a living city is a safe city, and a safe city is attractive. It creates a cycle.”* - Head of business policy, Fastighetsägarna Syd (Interview 5, 2021-04-08).

If the retail in the city centre decreases, something else needs to fill the premises and attract people to the streets. Safety was also connected as an important factor of the urban attractiveness and the social mixing in a city.

## 5.3 Municipal adaptation

This section presents the results of the third research question. As it is clear that the challenges of the retail evolution affect the urban development and social interactions in city centres, the question of key factors for municipal adaptation becomes relevant.

### 5.3.1 Collaboration and organisation

From a standpoint of strategizing and adapting to the retail evolution, all respondents and documents agreed on a crucial need: collaboration. This is needed between stakeholders, organizations, municipalities, retailers, property owners, and visitors. There is also a need for extended collaboration within organizations, e.g. the different departments of the municipality. As the following quotes show, collaboration was called out as something that cities need more of, but also as something that is present in Malmö. This was supported by multiple documents.

*“What is missing is often a concrete collaboration between different stakeholders. This is seldom due to conflicting goals. I do not believe that anyone - municipal officials, property owners or politicians - do not want a vibrant and dynamic city centre retail space.”* - Researcher, Lund University (Interview 4, 2021-04-08).

*“Cross-border collaborations, initiative and broad participation are a prerequisite for a successful urban development.”* - Master plan, Malmö City 2018, p. 5.

The network Citysamverkan was brought up by a majority of the respondents as an important stakeholder concerning adaptation and collaboration. Multiple respondents pointed out that there is a need within collaborations to be aware of each other's incentives and evolve common visions and goals for the city centre. This could solve questions of who should finance and make reality of which need. Since the retail evolution raises many unanswered questions, a majority of the respondents and documents highlighted the need to explore new forms of collaborations and creative solutions.

It is important to note that different organizations have different legal and operational rights to support e.g retailers and property owners. All respondents representing municipal departments, business and trade, and real-estate organizations reported that they cannot go in and support individual retailers or property owners and developers for legal reasons. As described in the following quote, their task is rather to listen, be responsive, and report the voices of actors and the population within the city. This view was unanimous across respondents.

*“As a business developer we do this in many situations - we pick up signals from the outside and bring them into the city by saying ‘Now we are hearing this, it seems problematic’ or ‘This is not really functioning as it should’, and then we take this to our colleagues and tell them the reasons behind it.”* - Business developer, Malmö City (Interview 6, 2021-04-09).

A majority of the respondents reported that an overarching challenge within collaborations is the time horizons in which different stakeholders and actors work. The municipal departments often work in time spans of 30 years, which is a “lifetime” compared to retail businesses and property owners, who need to adapt rapidly to new consumer behaviors. As described in the following

quotes, a difference in time horizons can become an issue within urban planning, making well-functioning collaborations that go beyond this issue vital.

*“What I believe is missing is a mutual respect and understanding of the different cultures that we live in - that there are different time horizons in a municipal operation and a retailers operation. It is about creating some kind of mutual respect and adjusting as much as possible.”* - Researcher, Lund University (Interview 4, 2021-04-08).

*“In urban development, adaptation is quite tricky because urban development is long term. (...) We work within extremely long cycles, and the business sector works in completely different cycles, and the human - the common person - does not think about what they will do in 30 years.”* - Business developer, Malmö City (Interview 6, 2021-04-09).

A majority of the respondents and documents highlighted this as a key factor that needs to be overcome in order for the municipality to adapt to the structural transformation. Through common and comprehensive goals and creative collaborations, municipal adaptation is believed to work better.

### 5.3.2 Behaviour and needs

An identified key factor amongst the respondents and several documents was the need to include a wider view when planning for customers and visitors in the city centre. The typical visitors are often viewed as people with an earned income. A majority of the respondents highlighted a need to widen this scope and look at people using the city centre during day time. Actors need to think of the urban dweller and how to plan for this user. This connects to the challenge of exclusive locations and demography.

*“Naturally, the population with an earned income and good pay have a little bit more money to spend, but much of the consumption comes from groups who do not have this. It is often these groups who move around in the city centre, even during daytime. It is older people, immigrants, families with parents on parental leave and so on. These groups are quite large.”* - Researcher, Lund University (Interview 4, 2021-04-08).

*“A wide variety of activities in the city centre creates multiple reasons to visit and attracts different target groups, which makes the city centre a place for everyone.”* - Cityindex, HUI Research and Fastighetsägarna, (2020, p. 68).

Multiple respondents brought up that new strategies surrounding retail and urban development must put the human in focus and ask: what is our behavior, our needs, and our desires? This was identified as crucial in order to adapt to new demands and a wider set of users. The city centre is trying to survive within a model that is, in some ways, dissolving due to the retail evolution. As consumer behavior controls demand, the city centre must adapt accordingly.

*“Recently, to be crass, we have not had a supply that has matched the demand. It is a question of what people want. What do we want and what do we want to experience in the city centre? I believe that we should focus on this question rather than making e.g business reports. That is important too, but we believe even more in asking who this person in the city centre is (...).”* - Head of business policy, Fastighetsägarna Syd (Interview 5, 2021-04-08).

In connection to consumer behavior, several documents and a majority of the respondents reported a growing demand for non-commercial activities in the city centre. To adapt to this change, the respondents highlighted the need to create various reasons to visit the city centre. One respondent called this idealistic spot the “Dynamic multiplace”, where a variety of functions will attract a variety of people. This is explained in the first of the following quotes.

*“The future city centre is not just retail. We have to be honest and say this - it will not be just retail. It will be gyms, public service, work spaces - there must be multiple reasons to visit places.”* - Business policy expert, Svensk Handel (Interview 3, 2021-04-06).

*“The traditional retail has been about going to the city centre to run an errand or shop - to come home with a product. But now, the function of the city centre is much more relationship building and confirmatory. We want to be in the city centre to create identity (...).”* - Head of business policy, Fastighetsägarna Syd (Interview 5, 2021-04-08).

*“Malmö City will work for the establishment of informal, non-commercial and changing meeting places. A permissive attitude should be adopted to promote good initiatives for spontaneous and temporary places for social activity and meetings.”* - Master plan, Malmö City (2018, p. 47).

A majority of the respondents and documents reported that places which only offer retail will struggle. Instead, the city needs to combine retail with restaurants, entertainment, culture, sports, and commercial and public services. Growing demand for in-store activities and creative, interactive stores was also reported. This connects to the transformation of the city centre from a traditional market space to a social meeting place. It is therefore key that municipalities and collaborative networks investigate demand, plan for mixed functions and follow human behaviors.

### 5.3.3 Physical planning and identity

A majority of the respondents and documents reported that a key factor for adaptation and the strengthening of retail in the city centre lies in the physical structures between buildings. As external shopping centres compete with the city centre, infrastructure and accessibility become important factors for strengthening the inner city and populating its streets both day and night time. A majority of the documents and respondents also pointed to the appearance of the outside milieu as an important factor for attracting people to the city centre. Many strategies aimed at the city centre today are executed with Citysamverkan. These measures focus on connecting the outside milieu to the inside, involving everything from architecture to green passages. Functions such as lighting, benches and the quality of sidewalks can also aid the movement on the streets, and is often the focus of these collaborations. As people generally like populating the streets, the outside milieu is important. The following quote from the landscape architect refers to how Covid-19 has increased the demand for attractive city streets.

*“We will see an increased pressure between buildings. We sometimes refer to Gehls ‘Life between buildings’. It is so true and it has an enormous significance today. We see this.”* - Landscape architect, Malmö City (Interview 2, 2021-03-31).

*“A larger proportion of the area between buildings should be used for greenery, accommodation and meeting places. This, together with retail, can increase the amount and variety of destination points in the inner city.”* - Traffic and mobility plan, Malmö City (2016, p. 45).

Infrastructure and visual attractiveness were also called out as important for real-estate developers and property owners. As their structures are somewhat fixed, they must benefit from the life between buildings. As the following quote describes, properties are connected to a specific location, which affects the value and attractiveness of said property.

*“It’s going incredibly fast. The fast transformation does not show as much on physical properties, but a property’s value is incredibly connected to a location. And that location is connected to attractiveness.”* - Head of business policy, Fastighetsägarna Syd (Interview 5, 2021-04-08).

According to the master plan, the atmosphere between buildings in Malmö should be evolved, and the unique characteristics strengthened. This was also brought up by Cityindex and a majority of the respondents. Multiple respondents described this as being crucial, and in the works. The municipal strategy focuses on integrating historical characteristics with new influences, and conserving and evolving cultural environments. A majority of the respondents and documents brought up identity as an important factor for adapting to the retail evolution. There was a common understanding that efforts should focus on place-specific identity, and not old models of a “typical” city centre market area. Unique characteristics are believed to grow in importance, meaning the municipality, stakeholders and actors need to highlight what is special within specific locations.

*“We want to strengthen the identity of the inner city, I would say - and what this identity is is something that we are working with Citysamverkan to figure out right now. What should the city centre look like in the future? I cannot answer this today, but it is an ongoing task.”* - Landscape architect, Malmö City (Interview 2, 2021-03-31).

*“Malmö’s attractiveness will be further enhanced by the high quality of architecture and the urban environment, something that also promotes growth, creates urban and economic value and that conveys cultural, social, economic and environmental development.”* - Master plan, Malmö City (2018, p. 13).

Improvements of the outside milieu was further called out by all respondents and documents as a key factor for safety. Safe environments can lead to an increased use of the city, which affects retail and social interactions positively. Alongside this, a majority of the respondents and

documents called out the importance of mixed-use real-estate with activities in the ground-floor premises. As the first quote indicates, this connects to safety.

*“Today, (...) we should have the possibility to once again increase the mixed-function buildings. This is an important measure for improving and increasing the liveliness and, in turn, the safety of our public rooms.”* - Safe urban environment, Malmö City (2006, p. 4).

*“It is municipalities that choose to build cities instead of just housing that will be the winners in the future. To succeed, a holistic approach is needed that takes retail, housing and infrastructure into account.”* - Den fysiska handeln i en digital värld, Svensk Handel (2019, p. 41).

Although the municipality cannot decide what fills the real-estate owners' properties, they need to help by providing appropriate planning, collaborations, and information. As the quotes show, this can increase the safety and public character. These improvements can in turn strengthen the retail sector.

## 6. Discussion

This thesis aimed to examine the transformational effects that the retail evolution has on urban development and social interactions in Malmö. By identifying challenges with these transformational effects, this study also investigated local stakeholders' views on what the municipality needs to integrate to adapt to these changes. The presented results reveal that the retail evolution brings challenges of changing employment opportunities, a shift in retail formats, and pressures on the real-estate sector in Malmö. The structural transformation challenges retail, which affects the real-estate and its owners, which in turn affects the urban attractiveness, social diversity, and safety of the city centre. When attractiveness and safety are negatively affected, physical retail can take a further hit. This thesis contributes to the existing literature by investigating key factors for municipal adaptation to the retail evolution. These key factors were identified and categorized as collaboration and organization, behavior and needs, and physical planning and identity.

The results of the first research question show that the challenges of the retail evolution are highly intertwined. Being aware of the challenges of the transformation is a crucial step to know what adaptive measures are needed. The challenge concerning employment opportunities was not brought up unanimously, and there was a lack of focus on how this issue should be met. The results indicate that a possible reason for this is the belief that retail will adapt, and new employment opportunities with similar preconditions rise. Whilst this is possible, further problematization and integration of the issue would be beneficial. Like the result revealed, a loss of employment opportunities in retail could not only threaten the municipality's economy, but the social sustainability of the city. The challenge of unemployment as a result of the retail evolution did not emerge during the process of my literature review. This indicates a gap not only concerning municipal adaptation, but within the research community as well.

The shift in retail formats challenges stores' financial capabilities and puts pressure towards adaptation to new consumer behavior. As the structural transformation is an ongoing process, affected by Covid-19, it is difficult to say how resilient the retail in the city centre is. With this being said, Malmö carries strengths in its size - which can increase resilience. New concepts of retail, as described by Childs et al. (2020), Spanke (2020), and Alexander and Cano (2020),

proved to be an up-and-coming trend in Malmö. This study adds to this literature, showing that it is a growing trend in Malmö, and Sweden as well. The data revealed an increasing demand for creative and interactive stores, indicating an interest in physical retail as third place. The results add to Hortaçsu and Syversons' (2015) view of physical retail as a necessarily social and public process, and Methas' (2009) view of commercial streets as crucial for active and passive engagements. The wide variety of activities that he described as needed were also reported by the respondents, relating to the idea of the 'dynamic multiplace'. With sufficient organizational and collaborative frameworks, the shift of retail formats could transform successfully. The challenges of physical retail has a strong connection to issues of empty premises, urban attractiveness, and safety.

The real-estate sector is challenged by the retail evolution as it decreases the number of tenants. Property owners and developers are also challenged to keep up with new demands and find ways to attract tenants without affecting their properties values. A decrease in tenants can affect the social interactions and the safety of the city. The respondents' views of sidewalks and empty premises correlate with that of Jacobs (1961), who said that keeping the city safe is a fundamental task of a city's streets and its sidewalk. The relationship between activity level and degree of safety on streets has been reported before (Jacobs, 1961; Gehl, 2011) and is supported by the findings of this thesis. Lively streets with human flow expand mutual protection and increase the number of people who survey the street from their windows (Ibid). Real-estate depends on mixed-use and functions as a means of attraction, which has been highlighted by researchers such as Jacobs, and Talen (1999). The results indicate that this is a challenge that not only affects individual property owners and developers, but the urban attractiveness and social aspects of the city centre as well.

Results of the second research question revealed that the challenges put new pressure on the urban development and social interactions in Malmö. The findings add to the existing literature by showcasing how the challenges affect the attractiveness of the city centre and create issues concerning social diversity and safety. The respondents' views on the challenges' effects on urban development correlated with Olsson's view of the city centre as a display window for the municipality (Detaljhandelspodden, 2020). She describes a thriving city centre as an indicator of the wellbeing of a city, which corresponds with the view of urban attractiveness as a cyclical

relationship that is crucial for urban development. As commerce is at risk of declining and becoming more homogenous, the attractiveness is threatened. Urban attractiveness connects to the research of Latham and Layton (2019), who argue that a key dimension of a good city is its collective public character, of which commerce plays a part. Furthermore, the results advance what was previously covered in the literature review: city centres are highly social in their nature and play a crucial role in our social interactions. Previous studies showed that people value commercial streets and a lively and diverse core area (Brower, 1996, cited in Mehta, 2009), a desire that is evident in this case study. We can shop almost anything anywhere, yet we still want to go to “the market”, i.e. our local city centre. As highlighted by the respondents, people enjoy the social values of the city centre - to see others and be seen ourselves. This view connects to Gehl’s (2011), who claim that even the modest forms of contact of merely seeing, hearing, or being near others are a rewarding activity in high demand. The growing trend of the city centre as a social meeting place, suggests a desire for third places and social activities, and a growing demand for what Jones et al. (2015) defined as semi-public spaces. To generate social activities, people need the opportunity to do both necessary and optional activities in the city centre (Gehl, 2011). A decline in physical commerce can limit urban attractiveness and affect the resultant and social activities negatively. Urban attractiveness is closely connected with social diversity and safety, as attractiveness is what will draw or avert groups to the city centre.

As described by Oldenburg (1999), a lifestyle consisting of a home-to-work-and-back-again pattern can affect social well-being and psychological health. The pattern of moving between work and home is at risk of becoming increasingly narrow. A further expansion of e-commerce can mean that necessary activities, coined by Gehl (2011), move from the city centre to a digital platform. As necessary activities can lead to social or resultant activities, social interactions may diminish if the municipality and related actors do not adapt. Gehl’s “Life between buildings” was brought up by multiple respondents as influential in their view of the city centre's streets and safety. As the results indicate, there is an overarching challenge of getting people to the city centre and lengthening their stay. This need is also reported by Gehl, who claims that slow traffic and lengthy stays mean lively cities; *“If people are tempted to remain in the public spaces for a long time, a few people and a few events can grow to a considerable activity level”* (p. 79).

Finlay et al. (2019) argue that third places are constantly overlooked by policymakers. Although many respondents and documents included social implications as a result of the challenges of the retail evolution, there was a slight gap in how this should be met. In similarity with the findings of Barata-Salgueiro and Guimarães' (2020) case study of Lisbon, there is a lack of inclusion of the social dimension and a need for a greater concern with social and cultural dimensions of urban life. The data collected for this thesis covered social issues of safety, but said less about the necessity of third places and everyday social encounters. The results indicate that this could be due to the belief that new formats of retail and non-commercial activities will solve this. Finlay et al. (2019) conclude that policymakers need to take steps to protect and preserve third places, such as backing fledgling stores and services. This proved to be a complex issue in Malmö, as legal frameworks hinder financial aid to shop owners and changes in rent-models. The municipality does however need to preserve third places where possible and find and aid possible additions in the city centre. The data revealed that the municipality works actively with creating social meeting places, e.g. art installations and thematic playgrounds - but these efforts are centered outside the city centre. The need for these activities correlates with Gehl's (2011) view, who argues that even though most playgrounds have limited uses, and children mostly play in other places, the playground has an important function as a meeting place and a starting place for other activities. This showcases a need for similar thinking in the city centre. Further inclusion of the city centre in planning for social meeting places could increase the possibilities of interactions between residents from different neighborhoods and backgrounds.

Public places can be conducive to feelings of belonging and social cohesions (Yuen and Johnson, 2017), which connects to the respondents' view of the city centre as a democratic arena. As Yuen and Johnson (2017) explain, public spaces also breed experiences of marginalization and exclusion. This relates to the issues of segregation and exclusivity in Malmö's city centre. The identified challenge concerning segregation, single households, and loneliness correlates with the view of Oldenburg (1999) who connected segregation, isolation, compartmentalization, and sterilization as an issue within urban growth and urban renewal. Both respondents and previous research highlight the need for inclusivity in the city centre. As described by Gehl (2011), integration implies that various activities and 'categories' of people are permitted to function together, side by side. Gehl claims that a perfect architectural plan of a mixed-function

neighborhood is unimportant - what matters is rather that the people who work and live in the different buildings use the same public spaces and meet in connection with daily activities. As put by Oldenburg (1999): “*What does integration count for when little remains of a public and collective life? What does the right to associate mean in a land where people retreat to the privacy of their homes and where residential segregation remains solid?*” (pp. 212-213). For the city centre to be democratic, it needs to be a third place for the entire population. This does not have to entail retail, but activities that match demand and attract a wide demography with different socio-economic preconditions. This thesis advances the view of the growing demand for non-commercial activities, which was highlighted in the results. As the inclusion of non-commercial activities could open doors for people with varied capital, the democratic character of the city centre could be strengthened.

The results of the third research question revealed that key factors for municipal adaptation are increased collaboration, evaluations of behavior and needs, physical planning, and identity. The data showed that internal and external collaborations must extend, be creative, and find common goals and incentives that transcend traditional efforts and organizational issues. As described by March (2010), the core ‘work’ of planning is the process of informed decisions associated with plan-making and implementation, concerning social, economic, and environmental aspects of spatial arrangements. As the municipality’s legal framework can limit actions, their task is rather to listen, inform, facilitate collaborations, and make informed decisions that can favor individual and collective adaptation. As the literature review shows, previous research has highlighted the need for increased collaboration (Barata-Salgueiro and Guimarães, 2020; Rao and Summers, 2016). This research adds to this literature. The results further revealed that different time-horizons within collaborations is an obstacle that needs to be overcome through clear incentives and joint goals. This finding is an important contribution to the literature on adaptation to the retail evolution. Beyond the scope of this thesis is the question of how collaborations should be conducted. The municipality can encourage and facilitate collaborations, but the result will depend on the participation of outside stakeholders, organizations, and actors, meaning a willingness to cooperate will be key.

Furthermore, urban planners and collaborative partners must widen their view of who uses the city centre, follow human demand and desires, and work flexibly and adaptively to allow new demands to be met. Gehl (2011) highlights that the demand for easily accessible social opportunities outside the home is growing. This study adds to this view, as it is evident in the study area today. As the view and demand of the city centre as a social meeting place is growing, the municipality needs to adapt and make sure these needs are met. As the results indicate, this is a crucial part of the work towards a safe and attractive urban development that fosters third place and life between buildings. Mixed-used activities and functions were frequently brought up as a measure of adaptation. Crick (2011) and Finlay et al. (2019) highlight that different people want different things from third places. An increased mix of activities and functions could therefore have a positive effect on third places, as it can increase variation. A varied supply that speaks to a wide demography could also increase the urban sustainability and social infrastructure of the city centre (Knox and Mayer, 2009; Latham and Layton, 2019). As explained by Gehl (2011), integrating a mix of activities and functions to locations means more people will attend the same space at the same time. The finding concerning a growing demand for non-commercial activities contributes to Kärholm, Nylund and Prieto de la Fuentes (2014) view of the need to go beyond “the stereotype” of the established retail types, and instead include a wider set of actors with the integration of non-retail activities. This thesis contributes to this finding, as it shows a municipal and organizational awareness of this need.

Finally, the structure in between buildings must be functional, attractive, and planned in ways that highlight the identity and unique characteristics of locations. The findings indicate a tie to the belief of Gehl (2011); good architecture ensures good interaction between public space and public life. As reported by Källström, Persson and Westergren (2019), urban planning can strengthen city centres through place-branding, as place can play an important role in the promotion of cities as retail destinations. This view connects to the topic of identity. Urban strategies that focus on the unique and place-specific characteristics of space are often referred to as place-based approaches. These approaches are founded on the belief that the understanding of identity, meanings, and images of places help design management actions and predict the effects these have on management and people in that place (Kruger and Williams, 2007). Whilst urban attractiveness is key for the city centre, the results revealed a threat of locations becoming

increasingly exclusive. The municipality must increase attractiveness in ways that do not encourage, but rather works against, this transformation. This connects to the issue of rent-models, which can only be reworked by individual property owners, or national legislation. These factors indicate tension, further pointing to the need of collaboration.

The discussion shows that the results add to previous literature concerning the retail evolution and contribute by revealing and problematizing outcomes of this transformation. The retail evolution can be viewed as a causal mechanism driving these changes. The collected data supports the term 'Retail evolution' over 'Retail apocalypse'. As shown, retail is not diminishing to the point of disappearing, but rather shifting forms as part of a structural transformation and behavioral change. Important to note is that the effects of the retail evolution can differ, and the possibilities to adapt as well. Malmö has a favorable position as a retail district due to its size and population, which amounts to a larger customer base. If larger chains choose to close down stores around the country, this can mean that the locations in Malmö are attractive enough to be kept. Whilst the findings of this research can be generalized, it is important to note that they have been identified in relation to the specific study area. Although challenges are similar for many municipalities of varying sizes, they can differ. This means that specific needs for municipal adaptation should be evaluated at specific locations. The identified key factors apply to multiple municipalities, but adaptive measures and strategic planning are not a one-size-fits-all operation.

## 7. Conclusion

Social science research on the consequences of the retail evolution is missing. Whilst shifts in retail formats have been reported in previous literature, few researchers have asked how this affects urban life. The findings of this research adds to existing literature and thus contributes to filling this gap. This thesis has examined the transformational effects that the retail evolution has on the urban development and social interactions in Malmö's city centre. Through secondary document analysis and interviews with local stakeholders, this study has identified challenges of the transformation, as well as key factors for municipal adaptation. Common challenges were identified as a loss of employment opportunities, a shift in retail formats, and a change in demand within the real-estate sector. Furthermore, the results showed that the challenges of the retail evolution further impact the urban development and social interactions by threatening the attractiveness, social diversity, and safety of the city centre. As the municipality is responsible for the strategic and physical planning in which physical retail operates, the fate of the city centre cannot be left to individual private actors. The identification of key factors for municipal adaptation revealed that the municipality must increase collaborative networks, plan for a wide set of users and consumer demands, increase the attractiveness and accessibility of the physical environment, provide mixed functions and activities, and work with place-specific identity and unique characteristics. These factors were seen as crucial in order to move beyond organizational issues and find common goals that foster life between buildings and a diverse human flow.

By analyzing the empirical findings against the theoretical framework, this thesis highlights the social values of city centre retail - showing that it is an important facilitator of social meeting places of democracy, diversity, and social mixing. This shows that physical retail and alternative activities are something that researchers, urban planners and politicians should care about. The public space of the city centre plays a part in the socialization of inhabitants, which I argue to be crucial in a world that is both locally and globally characterized by social polarization, segregation, and socioeconomic inequalities. As commercial activities work as a form of public space that generates values of third place and social activities, it is crucial that new formats of retail and alternative activities evolve successfully. The findings indicate that the development of non-commercial activities is especially important. As Covid-19 accelerates the retail evolution,

adaptive measures must be implemented as soon as possible. Without sufficient adaptation, the social interactions of the city centre are in danger of declining. The city centre is home to social bonding, social diversity, and cross-cultural encounters. A successful city centre does not have to be a marketplace, but it must work to protect and facilitate these social values.

## 7.1 Future directions

This thesis does not reveal how actual strategies or collaborations are or should be executed. Strategies focusing on retail have been called out as lacking or completely missing in Swedish municipalities (see p. 15). As implementation of retail strategies has been recommended, future research could contribute by evaluating the outlook and outcomes of potential future strategies and collaborations targeting the retail evolution. This could allow for further recommendations for adaptive and strategic measures.

As it is beyond the scope of this thesis, the results do not involve views from individual shop owners or property owners and developers. To identify further recommendations for adaptation, research investigating these actors' challenges and needs would be beneficial. This research could study individual adaptation and strategies, as well as what these actors need from organizations and municipal departments to make their adaptation possible.

Questions solely related to Covid-19's effect on city centre retail are not within this scope. This poses an avenue for further research, important for continued adaptation. A trend, caused by Covid-19, is that more and more people in Sweden work from home. As this trend changes the life between buildings, consumption patterns, and demands within the real-estate sector, city centres would benefit from further research investigating this shift. This might also expand the demand for third place. Municipalities and actors could benefit from further research of this trend.

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# Appendix

## Interview guide 1

Date: 2021-03-17

Time: 15.00

Place: Online, Microsoft Teams

Interviewer: Michaela Brynhildsen

Respondent: Strategist of urban development, Malmö City.

### Introduction:

- Inform the respondent about anonymity and ask if allowed to record.
- Who am I and what is my background?
- What am I investigating and why?
- What will this interview focus on and what is its relevance?

### Personal:

1. What is your role at Malmö city?
2. What does your job consist of?
3. What are your responsibilities in this job?
4. How long have you had this role?
5. How long have you been working at Malmö city?
6. Do you work in a team of multiple people? What are the other people's disciplinary-professional backgrounds?
7. How does that collaboration work? Can you provide an example of a project and how your professional expertises comes together?

### Organizational structure:

8. Who is involved in planning strategies?
  - a. *Which departments?*
  - b. *Where do the directions come from? Planners, politicians or both?*
9. Who (or which department) is responsible for following and acting on the decided strategies?

### The structural transformation of retail:

10. The structural transformation of retail is mentioned as a challenge in the city's planning strategy. Could you describe this to a non expert? What is meant by that?
11. How do you work to strengthen retail in the inner city?
  - a. *What is the municipality's role?*
  - b. *What can and can't you do?*

- c. *What do you do?*
- 12. Have you seen any results from this?
- 13. What is your interpretation of the current retail situation in Malmö?
  - a. *In what ways is it a challenge?*
  - b. *For what or whom?*
  - c. *Follow up to make sure the respondent includes the time before the pandemic.*
- 14. Which types of retail are stronger, and which are more unsteady in the city centre today? How would you describe the situation? Is there a visible pattern?
- 15. How has Covid-19 affected the retail within the city centre?
  - b. *Do you believe that there will be any long-term effects?*
- 16. Media has called out the transformation of retail as a diminisher of public spaces and social interactions in the city centres. Is this something that you are working with? What role do you think that retail plays for the city centre as a social sphere?
  - a. *Could this be affected by the shifts in retail? In what ways?*

### **Malmö City's master plan:**

- 17. The need for public spaces is frequently highlighted as important by the municipality. What role does the city centre play in terms of public space? Is it an important space for social activities?
- 18. The current planning strategy mentions the creation of alternative places of social interaction in the city centre. Can you describe what these are and how you work with this area?
  - a. *What is being done?*
  - b. *What have the results been?*
  - c. *Are you working on anything else?*
- 19. In the strategy it is mentioned that “new concepts for the commercial service in the city center are under development, which combine sales of goods with experience-based consumption via, for example, cafés and creative workshops”. Can you tell me more about this? Provide an example of a possible outcome out of this new concept to a non expert in the area.
  - a. *What is your role in this?*
  - b. *What effects have you seen so far?*
- 20. In Malmö's current strategy it is mentioned that “Current retail districts and thoroughfares should be strengthened, focusing on developing the unique characteristics of each one”. Could you explain what this means in practice and how it is working so far?
- 21. One of the city's strategies is that more and better public meeting places should be created in Malmö. Could you tell me more about this?
  - a. *What do these public meeting places look like?*
  - b. *Are there any initiatives focused on the city centre?*
  - c. *What have the results been so far?*
- 22. Do you collaborate with any stakeholders outside of the municipality in relation to retail?
  - a. *If yes – who? What does that collaboration look like?*
  - b. *What is the purpose and what have the results been so far?*

23. Are there any other strategies focused on the retail and/or the social aspects of the city centre that you could tell me about?

### **Concluding questions**

24. Is there anything that we have not covered that you want to add?

25. Can I read about ongoing projects somewhere? Are there other documents that you think I should read?

26. Is there anyone you think that I should talk to?

27. Do you or your department wish to receive the recording, transcript and/or the final thesis?

### **Final remarks**

Connect to the beginning of the interview. Inform the respondent about the next steps of my research. Thank the respondent.

*End of the interview.*

## Interview guide 2

Date: 2021-03-31

Time: 13.00

Place: Online, Microsoft Teams

Interviewer: Michaela Brynhildsen

Respondent: Landscape architect, Malmö City.

### Introduction:

- Inform the respondent about anonymity and ask if allowed to record.
- Who am I and what is my background?
- What am I investigating and why?
- What will this interview focus on and what is its relevance?

### Personal:

1. What is your role at Malmö city?
2. What does your job consist of?
3. What are your responsibilities in this job?
4. How long have you had this role?
5. How long have you been working at Malmö city?
6. Do you work in a team of multiple people? What are the other people's disciplinary-professional backgrounds?
7. How does that collaboration work? Can you provide an example of a project and how your professional expertises comes together?
8. Can you tell me more about your work with Citysamverkan?
  - a. What is your role in this collaboration?
  - b. How do you work together? Can you give me an example?
9. I was told that you, together with Citysamverkan, work with the development of the inner city with a focus on the high-street. Could you tell me more about what this means and how you are doing this?

### The structural transformation of retail:

10. The structural transformation of retail is mentioned as a challenge in the city's planning strategy. Do these challenges affect your department?
  - a. In what ways?
  - b. How do you work with these issues?
  - c. Have you seen any results of this work?
11. How could this transformation affect your work in the future?
  - a. Which challenges do your department predict?
  - b. Do you see any opportunities with this transformation?
  - c. Does this affect the way you strategize for the future?
12. Do you work to strengthen the retail in the city centre?

- a. *How are you doing this?*
- b. *Which effects could this give?*
- 13. Have you seen any results from this?
- 14. How has Covid-19 affected the retail within the city centre?
  - a. *Do you believe that there will be any long-term effects?*
- 15. Media has called out the transformation of retail as a diminisher of public spaces and social interactions in the city centres. Is this something that you are working with? What role do you think that retail plays for the city centre as a social sphere?
  - a. *Could this be affected by the shifts in retail? In what ways?*
  - b. *Do you believe that retail is important as a social meeting place?*

### **Malmö City's master plan:**

- 16. The need for public spaces is frequently highlighted as important by the municipality. What role does the city centre play in terms of public space? Is it an important space for social activities?
- 17. The current planning strategy mentions the creation of alternative places of social interaction in the city centre. Can you describe what these are and how you work with this area?
  - a. *What is being done?*
  - b. *What have the results been?*
  - c. *Are you working on anything else?*
- 18. What do you and your department see as important when creating public meeting places?
  - a. *What is missing in Malmö?*
  - b. *Which qualities do people want?*
  - c. *Is there a public demand of this?*
- 19. One of the city's strategies is that more and better public meeting places should be created in Malmö. Could you tell me more about this and give me an example?
  - a. *What do these public meeting places look like?*
  - b. *Are there any initiatives focused on the city centre?*
  - c. *What have the results been so far?*
- 20. In Malmö's current strategy it is mentioned that "Current retail districts and thoroughfares should be strengthened, focusing on developing the unique characteristics of each one". Could you explain what this means in practice and how it is working so far?
- 21. Both academics and the media have claimed that we not only need city centres that attract people, but that make them spend longer periods of time there. Is this something you work with?
- 22. Are there any other strategies focused on the retail and/or the social aspects of the city centre that you could tell me about?

### **Concluding questions:**

23. Is there anything that we have not covered that you want to add?
24. Can I read about ongoing projects somewhere? Are there other documents that you think I should read?
25. Is there anyone you think that I should talk to?
26. Do you or your department wish to receive the recording, transcript and/or the final thesis?

### **Final remarks**

Connect to the beginning of the interview. Inform the respondent about the next steps of my research. Thank the respondent.

*End of the interview.*

## Interview guide 3

Date: 2021-04-06

Time: 14.00

Place: Online, Microsoft Teams

Interviewer: Michaela Brynhildsen

Respondent: Business policy expert, Svensk Handel

### Introduction:

- Inform the respondent about anonymity and ask if allowed to record.
- Who am I and what is my background?
- What am I investigating and why?
- What will this interview focus on and what is its relevance?

### Personal:

1. What is your role at Svensk Handel?
2. What does your job consist of?
3. What are your responsibilities in this job?
4. How long have you had this role?
5. How long have you been working at Svensk Handel?
6. Do you work in a team of multiple people? What are the other people's disciplinary-professional backgrounds?
7. How does that collaboration work? Can you provide an example of a project and how your professional expertises comes together?

### Svensk Handel:

8. Can you tell me more about Svensk Handels role in society and for retail? What is it you do?
  - a. *What is the role of the office in Malmö?*
9. Do you collaborate with any specific branch and organisations? E.g Citysamverkan, fastighetsägarna, Malmö City?
  - a. *How do these collaborations work?*
  - b. *What do the different stakeholders/organizations contribute?*
  - c. *What is the goal of this collaboration?*

### The structural transformation of retail :

10. The structural transformation of retail is often mentioned as a challenge amongst different stakeholders and organisations. Could you describe this to a non expert? What is meant by this?
11. Media has reported about the death of stores. What is your view of this term?
12. How do you work to strengthen retail in the inner city?
  - a. *What is Svensk Handels role?*
  - b. *What can and can't you do?*

- c. *What do you do?*
- 13. Have you seen any results from this?
- 14. What is your interpretation of the current retail situation in Malmö?
  - a. *In what ways is it a challenge?*
  - b. *For what or whom?*
  - c. *Follow up to make sure the respondent includes the time before the pandemic.*
- 15. Which types of retail are stronger, and which are more unsteady in the city centre today? How would you describe the situation? Is there a visible pattern?
- 16. How has Covid-19 affected the retail within the city centre?
  - b. *Do you believe that there will be any long-term effects?*
- 17. I read yours and Mats Hedenströms article from April 2020 which advocated for lowered rents for retailers as a support system. Could you tell me more about this?
  - a. *What effects did your article have?*
  - b. *Who is responsible for lowering rents? Property owners or others?*
- 18. Some claim that lowered rents during establishment periods could be a way of helping new retail owners survive. What is your view on this matter?
  - a. *Are rents a problem within the retail sector today?*
  - b. *Do you think a solution like this is realistic?*
- 19. In 2018 you och Mats Hedenström Svensk Handel wrote an article saying that Malmö (amongst other municipalities) needs to integrate a clearer retail perspective in their strategic work. Could you tell me more about this?
  - a. *What do you consider as missing and what is needed?*
  - b. *What could this inclusion lead to?*
  - c. *Who do you consider responsible for implementing such a perspective?*
- 20. Media has called out the transformation of retail as a diminisher of public spaces and social interactions in the city centres. Is this something that you are working with? What role do you think that retail plays for the city centre as a social sphere?
  - a. *Could this be affected by the shifts in retail? In what ways?*
  - b. *Do you see any social risks with this?*

### **The future of retail:**

- 21. Many claim (e.g. Detaljhandelspodden, Cityindex) that we are seeing a trend of the city centre going from a traditional market space to a social meeting place where people want to interact and experience things. Is this something that you have noticed?
  - a. *Is this visible in Malmö?*
  - b. *Do you see any opportunities and/or challenges with this shift?*
  - c. *What is your role in this transformation?*
- 22. Amazon was established in Sweden in 2020. Which effect do you think that this, and similar global internet companies, can have on the Swedish retail market?
- 23. Tillväxt malmö mentions a concept that you have explained as the dynamic multiplace. Could you explain to me what you mean by this?
- 24. In the strategy it is mentioned that “new concepts for the commercial service in the city

center are under development, which combine sales of goods with experience-based consumption via, for example, cafés and creative workshops”. Is this something that Svensk Handel is a part of?

*a. In what way?*

*b. Have any specific concepts been tested?*

*c. Have you seen any results from this?*

25. Some believe that the retail evolution is causing a growing demand of smaller rental premises. Is this something that you have noticed in Malmö?

*a. How can property owners/developers adapt to this demand?*

*b. What opportunities and/or challenges do you see with this?*

26. The need for vibrant ground floor premises with a mix of residential homes and offices is often mentioned as crucial for retail and the real-estate business. Is this something Svensk Handel works with?

*a. Why is it needed?*

### **Concluding questions**

27. Is there anything that we have not covered that you want to add?

28. Can I read about ongoing projects somewhere? Are there other documents that you think I should read?

29. Is there anyone you think that I should talk to?

30. Do you or your department wish to receive the recording, transcript and/or the final thesis?

### **Final remarks**

Connect to the beginning of the interview. Inform the respondent about the next steps of my research. Thank the respondent.

*End of the interview.*

## Interview guide 4

Date: 2021-04-08

Time: 10.00

Place: Online, Microsoft Teams

Interviewer: Michaela Brynhildsen

Respondent: Researcher within the project “The store as a meeting place”, Lund University

### Introduction:

- Inform the respondent about anonymity and ask if allowed to record.
- Who am I and what is my background?
- What am I investigating and why?
- What will this interview focus on and what is its relevance?

### Personal:

1. What is your role at Lund university?
2. What work do you do outside of the university?
3. How long have you had this/these jobs?
4. What is your academic and professional background?
5. Could you tell me more about Karin M. Ekström and how you came into contact with each other?
6. How does your collaboration work? Could you give me an example of how your academic disciplines complement each other?
7. How did you come in contact with this research topic and why do you find it interesting?
8. Can you tell me more about the project “The store as a meeting place”?
  - a. *When did you start working with it and when will you publish it?*
  - b. *What research questions have you been working with?*
  - c. *How did you conduct the research?*
  - d. *Which results have you seen?*
  - e. *How generalizable are these?*

### The structural transformation of retail:

9. Your research is focused on smaller cities, whilst mine focuses on a larger municipality. Do you think that the challenges are different between different types of cities? How do our cases differ?
10. The structural transformation of retail is often brought up as a challenge for urban development. What is your view of this? What challenges and opportunities do you see?
11. You use the term “death of stores”. What is your view of this term?
12. What is your interpretation of the current retail situation in Sweden?
  - a. *In what ways is it a challenge?*
  - b. *For what or whom?*

- c. *Follow up to make sure the respondent includes the time before the pandemic.*
- 13. What effects do you think that the pandemic has had on retail?
  - b. *Do you think that we will see any long-term effects?*
- 14. How can municipalities work to strengthen retail in city centres?
  - a. *Who is responsible?*
  - b. *What changes do you believe need to be made?*
  - c. *What could a potential result of this be?*
- 15. You and Ekström wrote an article in 2019 where you argued for a better dialog between property owners, municipalities and retail owners. What do you believe is missing in existing collaborations/dialogues?
- 16. Have you seen any examples where collaborations have worked well? Have you found any examples that you think other municipalities could learn from?

### **The store as a meeting place:**

- 17. In yours and Ekströms article in Sydsvenskan 2019 you warned that a decline of retail in city centres can decrease the amount of meeting places and possibilities of social interactions. What role do you think that retail place for the city centre in terms of social interactions?
  - a. *Could this be affected by the retail evolution? In what way?*
  - b. *Do you see any social risks with this?*
  - c. *Have covid-19 affected your view of this? How?*
- 18. You also wrote that physical retail plays an important role in the creation of socially sustainable societies. Could you tell me more about your view on this matter? How is it connected to social sustainability?
- 19. Do you believe that these social issues are evident in larger cities as well?
- 20. The need for public spaces is frequently highlighted as important by the municipalities. What role does the city centre play in terms of public space? Is it an important space for social activities?
- 21. Researchers and urban planners have argued for a need for alternative places of social interactions in the city centre. What is your view on this matter? What could an alternative place be?
- 22. Many claim (e.g. Detaljhandelspodden, Cityindex) that we are seeing a trend of the city centre going from a traditional market space to a social meeting place where people want to interact and experience things. Is this something that you have noticed?
  - a. *What opportunities and/or challenges do you see with this change?*
- 23. According to (Vingåkers) facts regarding your research you have researched new ways of thinking for developing physical retail and societies. Could you tell me more about this? Give an example of a possible result to a non-expert.
  - a. *How did you come to these conclusions?*
  - b. *Which results have you seen?*
- 24. In a podcast by Handelsrådets Ekström mentions that place and history is important for the development of cities. Could you explain why?

*a. Do you think that this applies to larger cities as well?*

### **Concluding questions**

25. Is there anything that we have not covered that you want to add?
26. Can I read about ongoing projects somewhere? Are there other documents that you think I should read?
27. Is there anyone you think that I should talk to?
28. Do you or your department wish to receive the recording, transcript and/or the final thesis?

### **Final remarks**

Connect to the beginning of the interview. Inform the respondent about the next steps of my research. Thank the respondent.

*End of the interview.*

## Interview guide 5

Date: 2021-04-08

Time: 14.00

Place: Online, Microsoft Teams

Interviewer: Michaela Brynhildsen

Respondent: Head of business policy, Fastighetsägarna Syd

### Introduction:

- Inform the respondent about anonymity and ask if allowed to record.
- Who am I and what is my background?
- What am I investigating and why?
- What will this interview focus on and what is its relevance?

### Personal:

1. What is your role at Fastighetsägarna Syd?
2. What does your job consist of?
3. What are your responsibilities in this job?
4. How long have you had this role?
5. Do you work in a team of multiple people? What are the other people's disciplinary-professional backgrounds? Can you provide an example of a project and how your professional expertises comes together?

### Fastighetsägarna:

6. Can you tell me more about Fastighetsägarnas role in society and for property owners/developers? What is it you do?
7. How does fastighetsägarna collaborate with property owners/developers?
  - a. *What is your role in this collaboration?*
  - b. *What does this collaboration add? Why is it needed?*
8. How do you collaborate with municipalities?
  - a. *How do you work with Malmö City?*
  - b. *How does this collaboration work?*
  - c. *Do you collaborate with other organisations and/or stakeholders?*
9. What does your collaboration with Citysamverkan in Malmö look like?
  - a. *What is yours and Fastighetsägarna Syds role in this network?*
  - b. *What does this collaboration add?*
10. On your website one can read that a vibrant city centre creates good preconditions for economic life, and is crucial for municipalities' attractiveness. Could you explain what this means to a non-expert?
  - a. *What is a vibrant city centre?*
  - b. *Why is this crucial?*

11. Many academics and urban planners claim that ground floor tenants are crucial from a perspective of urban development. Could you tell me more about why this is, and how you work with this issue?
  - a. *What are the challenges with such a goal?*
12. Do you work to aid property owners in finding tenants to their premises? How?
  - a. *What is your role in this?*
  - b. *Are there any other organisations who do this ? E.g municipal departments?*
13. I e.g. Cityindex one can read that there is a growing pressure of increase collaboration between stakeholders. What is your view of this?
  - a. *What is missing today?*
  - b. *What kind of collaboration needs to increase? Between who?*
  - c. *What result could this have?*

**The structural transformation of retail:**

14. What role do you think that the structural transformation of retail has on city centres attractiveness?
  - a. *How does this affect property owners/developers?*
  - b. *How does it affect city centres?*
  - c. *What opportunities and/or challenges do you see with this shift?*
15. Have you seen any effects of this already?
  - a. *How has that affected the real-estate business?*
  - b. *How do you and individual property owners/developers work with this?*
16. How has Covid-19 affected the real-estate business?
  - a. *What effects have you seen this far?*
  - b. *Do you believe that any of these effects will be long term?*
  - c. *How do you and/or property owners/developers work with this?*
17. Vasakronan in Malmö is one example of a property owner who reportedly struggled to find tenants for their ground floor premises during the pandemic. Is this something that you have noticed?
  - a. *Are there any similar examples?*
  - b. *Do you know how this or other property owners have worked to adapt to this?*
18. Do you believe that these changes (retail evolution and corona) affects Malmö's city centre? In what way?
19. Many mean that the structural transformation of retail is creating demands for new concepts of retail, e.g. creative workshops and experience-based shopping. How does this trend affect property owners and developers?
  - a. *Can the real-estate sector help aid this transformation? How?*
20. In the podcast "Detaljhandelspodden" Helena Olsson from Fastighetsägarna Stockholm explained that the retail evolution is causing a growing demand of smaller, more flexible rental premises. Is this something that you have noticed in Malmö?

- a. How can property owners adapt to this demand?*
  - b. Do you see any challenges with this change?*
- 21. Some claim that lowered rents during establishment periods could be a way of helping new retail owners survive. What is your view on this matter?
  - a. Are rents a problem within the retail sector today?*
  - b. Do you think a solution like this is realistic?*
- 22. In the video-presentation of Cityindex it is explained that the ways in which places contribute to visitors well being will play an important role for urban development in the future. What does this mean?
  - a. What part do property owners play in this?*
- 23. The same video mentioned that we need to find more reasons to visit the city centre which makes people want to come there and stay there. Is this something that you are working with?

### **Concluding questions**

- 24. Is there anything that we have not covered that you want to add?
- 25. Can I read about ongoing projects somewhere? Are there other documents that you think I should read?
- 26. Is there anyone you think that I should talk to?
- 27. Do you or your department wish to receive the recording, transcript and/or the final thesis?

### **Final remarks**

Connect to the beginning of the interview. Inform the respondent about the next steps of my research. Thank the respondent.

*End of the interview.*

## Interview guide 6

Date: 2021-04-09

Time: 13.00

Place: Online, Microsoft Teams

Interviewer: Michaela Brynhildsen

Respondent: Business developer, Malmö City

### Introduction:

- Inform the respondent about anonymity and ask if allowed to record.
- Who am I and what is my background?
- What am I investigating and why?
- What will this interview focus on and what is its relevance?

### Personal:

1. What is your role at Malmö city?
2. What does your job consist of?
3. What are your responsibilities in this job?
4. How long have you had this role?
5. How long have you been working at Malmö city?
6. Do you work in a team of multiple people? What are the other people's disciplinary-professional backgrounds?
7. How does that collaboration work? Can you provide an example of a project and how your professional expertises comes together?
8. Do you collaborate with any specific organisations or networks? E.g. Citysamverkan, Fastighetsägarna, Handelsrådet or similar?
  - a. *How does this/these collaboration work?*
  - b. *What do the different actors bring to the table?*
  - c. *What are the goals of these collaborations?*
  - d. *Have you seen any result of these collaborations that you can tell me about?*

### The structural transformation of retail:

9. The structural transformation of retail is mentioned as a challenge in the city's planning strategy. Could you describe this to a non expert? What is meant by that and which trends can be seen in Malmö?
10. Media has reported about the death of stores. What is your view of this term?
11. What is your interpretation of the current retail situation in Malmö?
  - a. *In what ways is it a challenge?*
  - b. *For what or whom?*
  - c. *Follow up to make sure the respondent includes the time before the pandemic.*
12. Which types of retail are stronger, and which are more unsteady in the city centre

- today? How would you describe the situation? Is there a visible pattern?
13. How has Covid-19 affected the retail within the city centre?
    - a. *Do you believe that there will be any long-term effects?*
  14. How do you work to strengthen retail in the inner city?
    - a. *What is the municipality's role?*
    - b. *What can and can't you do?*
    - c. *What do you do?*
  15. Have you seen any results from this?
  16. How do you integrate a retail perspective within municipal work? Do you have any specific strategic documents relating to retail?
  17. I e.g. Cityindex one can read that there is a growing pressure of increased collaboration between stakeholders. What is your view of this?
    - a. *What is missing today?*
    - b. *What kind of collaboration needs to increase? Between who?*
    - c. *What result could this have?*
  18. Some claim that lowered rents during establishment periods could be a way of helping new retail owners survive. What is your view on this matter?
    - a. *Are rents a problem within the retail sector today?*
    - b. *Do you think a solution like this is realistic?*
  19. Media has called out the transformation of retail as a diminisher of public spaces and social interactions in the city centres. Is this something that you are working with? What role do you think that retail plays for the city centre as a social sphere?
    - a. *Could this be affected by the shifts in retail? In what ways?*
    - b. *Do you see any social risks with this?*

### **The future of retail:**

20. Many claim (e.g. Detaljhandelspodden, Cityindex) that we are seeing a trend of the city centre going from a traditional market space to a social meeting place where people want to interact and experience things. Is this something that you have noticed?
  - a. *Is this visible in Malmö?*
  - b. *Do you see any opportunities and/or challenges with this shift?*
  - c. *What is your department's role in this transformation?*
21. In the strategy it is mentioned that “new concepts for the commercial service in the city center are under development, which combine sales of goods with experience-based consumption via, for example, cafés and creative workshops”. Can you tell me more about this? Provide an example of a possible outcome out of this new concept to a non expert in the area.
  - a. *What is your role in this?*
  - b. *What effects have you seen so far?*
22. In e.g. the podcast “Detaljhandelspodden” it was argued that the demand of smaller, more flexible rental premises is growing. Is this something that you have noticed in Malmö?

- a. How can property owners adapt to this change?*
  - b. Do you see any opportunities and/or challenges with this trend?*
- 23. Many academics and urban planners claim that ground floor tenants are crucial from a perspective of urban development. Could you tell me more about why this is, and how you work with this issue?
  - a. What can the municipality do to aid this?*
- 24. Are there any other strategies or collaborations focused on the retail and/or the social aspects of the city centre that you could tell me about?

### **Concluding questions**

- 25. Is there anything that we have not covered that you want to add?
- 26. Can I read about ongoing projects somewhere? Are there other documents that you think I should read?
- 27. Is there anyone you think that I should talk to?
- 28. Do you or your department wish to receive the recording, transcript and/or the final thesis?

### **Final remarks**

Connect to the beginning of the interview. Inform the respondent about the next steps of my research. Thank the respondent.

*End of the interview.*