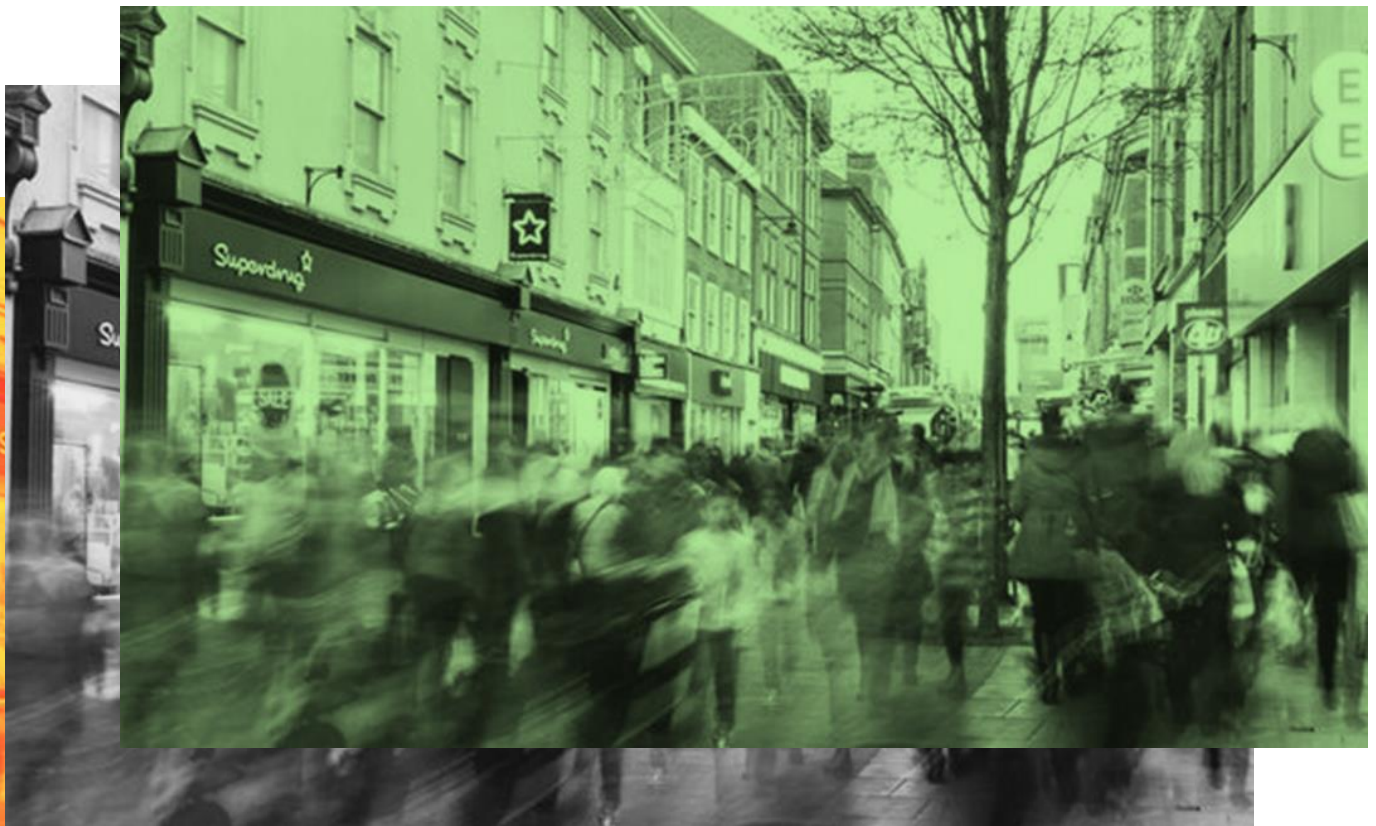


Dissertation Research

Moving the needle in the revitalization of High Streets: Commercial Landowners and Urban Vitality



Master thesis of the Spatial Planning program
Specialization in Planning, Land and Real Estate development
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Radboud University

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Thesis Research

Moving the needle in the revitalization of High Streets: Commercial Landowners and Urban Vitality

By

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R E D E V C O

Abstract

The traditional concept of the High Street, often revered as the heart of local communities, has faced significant challenges in maintaining its economic and social vitality. Historically, it served as more than just a commercial space, embodying a hub of community interaction and local identity. However, urban transformation and technological advancements have shifted consumer behaviors towards online shopping and global chain stores, leading to the decline of small-scale enterprises and neighbourhood interdependence. The Covid-19 pandemic further accelerated this trend, prompting a surge in e-commerce and exacerbating the vulnerability of brick-and-mortar retail establishments, particularly department stores and traditional retail properties located at High Streets.

This research investigates the role of the private sector, specifically commercial landowners, in revitalizing High Streets through the adoption of Commercial Landowner Responsibility (CLR) principles. Commercial landowner responsibility refers to the ethical, genuine and strategic commitment of real estate corporations, beyond their legal obligations, to ensure a vital and socially sustainable High Street by posing positive influence to environment, community and stakeholders.

The study addresses a gap in urban theory by introducing the concept of CLR and demonstrating its relevance in empowering commercial landowners as key stakeholders in urban revitalization efforts. Through a comprehensive analysis of stakeholder needs and strategic interventions, the research highlights the transformative potential of commercial landowners in shaping the vitality of urban centers and High Streets.

The study employs a qualitative approach, combining qualitative stakeholder analysis with case study methodology to explore the effectiveness of CLR initiatives in enhancing the vibrancy of High Streets. The case study of OX, a 'department store sized building' located in the heart of Lijnbaan, serves as a focal point for examining the practical implications of CLR principles in action. By closely examining community needs, fostering community-centric services, and utilizing flexible leasing structures to benefit local entrepreneurs, the research demonstrates how commercial landowners can play a proactive and pivotal role in revitalizing the High Street.

The research contributes to ongoing discussions in urban theory by challenging traditional narratives that place the burden of urban revitalization solely on the public sector. Instead, it argues for the agency of private entities in driving positive change in urban environments. By showcasing real-world examples of CLR principles in action, the study underscores the importance of recognizing commercial landowners as active decision-makers and stakeholders in shaping the future of urban centers.

Keywords: *Urban vitality, Commercial Landowner Responsibility, High Street, Stakeholder Cooperation*

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1. Introduction

1.1 Research Problem Statement

The High Street has long been idealized as the focus of community life (Hubbard, 2017). The key function of a High Street is, of course, an economic space where goods and services are bought and sold, a place where consumers can browse before deciding to purchase. But the High Street has been more than merely a shopping street. It is a community space where people routinely go to meet friends, to wander, or just hang out (Hubbard, 2017). While the concept of the High Street preserves its image as a symbol of local community support and small businesses, the actual condition and existence of the High Street often fall short of this ideal (Talen & Jeong, 2018).

The downturn of the High Street can be linked to the widespread urban transformation centered around cars that emerged in the early 20th century. This shift weakened localized economic interdependence, and reduced the necessity for neighborhood-based services (Fogelson, 2003). Additionally, technological innovations have diminished the significance of a local urban lifestyle to the extent that, in many areas, daily life is no longer closely connected to walking, and the corner store is no longer the focal point where local identity and social interaction thrive (Griffiths et al., 2008). Furthermore, the reduced variety in uses and the prevalence of global chain stores contributed to a decline in local resilience, but also led to significant disinvestment of the High Street (Carmona, 2015).

A century of retail innovations, encompassing shopping malls, big box department stores, strip malls, and online shopping, has led to the erosion of small-scale enterprise and place-based interdependence (Talen & Jeong, 2019). In an era dominated by international chain stores and e-commerce, the landscape of High Streets has changed. There now appears to be a considerable gap between the community inclusive High Street model of the past, and today's urban commercial corridors consisting of global chain stores and boutiques.

Online shopping and the homogenization of the High Street caused by the lack of undiversified commercial activities, led to significant dysfunctions of retail properties (Zhang et al., 2016; McGowan, 2019), and consequently to the High Street. Zhang et al. (2016) argue that the decreases in the growth rates of store numbers, business floor areas, and retail sales of department stores (see Figure 1.) indicate that the demand for these types of properties also fell. This downward trend caused a turbulent economic environment for the High Street, but also to commercial investors leveraged in High Street real estate, hereinafter referred to as commercial landowners.

This decrease of property demand had an immediate effect not only on the economic viability of High Streets to attract further investment but it also affected the greater local economy, as real estate performance and economic development are closely related

(Shen, 2021). There seems to be a disconnect between what society is being offered and what it actually desires from its High Streets, as traditional shopping needs are increasingly being met through digital services (see Figure 2.). This trend not only exacerbates the challenges faced by brick-and-mortar stores but also impacts the vibrancy of urban cores.

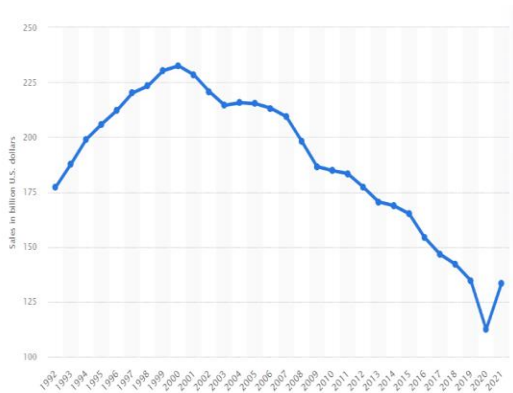


Figure 1. Department store sales in the United States from 1992 to 2021 (Source: Statista, 2023)

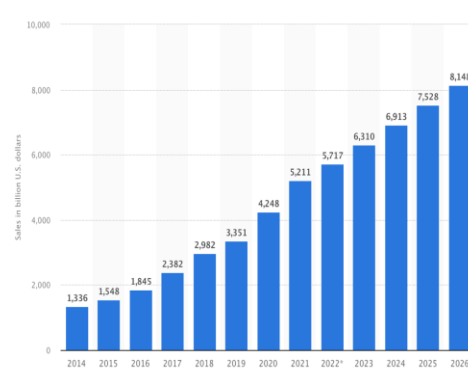


Figure 2. Projected e-commerce sales worldwide from 2014 to 2026. (Source: Statista, 2022)

Hart et al. (2013) argues that down town visitors are experience seeking, looking for more than just traditional retail offerings. They desire a holistic experience that encompasses tangible elements such as stores and products, as well as intangible aspects like social events that strengthen community ties.

People prefer to travel to city centers for experiences, social gatherings, food facilities, leisure activities and services, which fundamentally ask for a different supply from the urban center (Beek, 2015).

To reinvent the High Street and deal with the changing retail landscape, urban researchers recommended cooperation between stakeholders of the city center (Theodoridis et al., 2017; Stijnenbosch, 2015; Voss, 2016).

At a time where consumers are experience seeking, the otherwise monofunctional retail spaces located in the city's heart have the potential to offer opportunities to engage, and establish a sense of place and community. This could be achieved through landowner-occupier cooperation in understanding and facilitating community needs and desires.

On that account, this offers an opportunity to shape a new kind of High Street, that moves from a model of pure economic extraction towards a more resilient model that combines economic goals, with community and inclusivity goals. The argument is that if this human-centric environment was to be established, it would also lead to an economically stable and resilient climate for the High Street, the community, but also for its shareholding stakeholders.

An example would be the Weaver Street Market in Carrboro, North Carolina. The market is a hub for the community where people go to meet up with others or to immerse themselves in the company of others, while enjoying food and drinks (Urban Land Institute, 2022). Local businesses such as the Weaver Street Market that are invested in supporting and improving the communities in which they operate, can directly affect the health and well-being of area residents, as well as maintain an 'experience sustained' commercial success.

Similarly, dysfunctional High Street properties might bear the opportunity to become major experiential community hubs of today's urban centers, hence, bringing back the historic social value of the High Street and its sense of community (McMillan & Chavis, 1986), instead of satisfying mere shopping needs. If this is the case, commercial landowners, as beneficiaries of a functional High Street environment could be viewed as accountable for enabling these opportunities to society and establishing a fit-for-purpose downtown destination.

1.2 Research Gap

To gain a fuller understanding of the revitalizing opportunities of the urban realm that lie ahead of us, it is essential to first establish the current state of knowledge in the area. This research uses the concept of urban vitality (see [Section 2.7](#)) as theoretical foundation to High Street revitalization efforts.

While there have been studies exploring various aspects connecting sustainable urban development and urban vitality, there is a significant gap in comprehending the specific role that stakeholders and in particular commercial landowners of High Street real estate can play in this context.

Urban vitality is a key concept of the research. According to Liu et al. (2022), urban vitality is a driving force of urban sustainable development and influences the well-being of residents. Urban vitality has the potential to attract capital and talent, enhance competitiveness and creativity, and maintain resilience. Urban vitality is regarded as the power and energy within a city (Landry, 2000; Xiao et al., 2021).

The New Urban Agenda and the 11th Sustainable Development Goal proposed by the United Nations, both emphasize that a sustainable city needs to embrace resilience, security, vitality, and inclusion (Caprotti, et al., 2017). It is therefore more relevant than ever to consider and engage urban vitality as a key element to urban practices.

Smith et al., (1997) formulated the notion of urban vitality and connect it abstractively to urban development by using six qualities, namely: livability, character, connection, mobility, personal freedom, and diversity. In a different study, Huan et al. (2019) proposed a conceptual framework in which urban vitality is based on social activity intensity, economic activity intensity, and pedestrian density. Jacobs (1961), who also

introduced the concept, discuss mixed land uses, small blocks, diverse architecture, and urban density as essential elements for urban vitality.

Different forms of urban development have different effects on urban vitality (He, et al., 2018). Because the density, mobility and diversity of the population could intuitively represent the vitality of a place (Gómez-Varo et al., 2022). High land-use mixing and intensification can promote multidimensional interaction between residents and place, which is believed to improve urban vitality (Chen et al., 2019)

As seen, most studies discuss a particular aspect of urban vitality from the dimensions of built environment, human mobility and land use. These studies focus on the responsibility of public regulators and policy makers for applying the right urban development strategies to address the concept of urban vitality in their development practices. Whilst it is true that the most remarkable changes can be driven from the public sector, there are significant literature gaps in regards to what role the private sector could have in efforts that address urban vitality.

Questioning the role of the commercial landowner and associating it with the vitality of the High Street has the potential to bring a fresh perspective on a new operational business-model for commercial real estate entities, which will actively focus on the purpose and functionality of urban centers.

An early hypothesis of this paper encompasses the narrative that landowners have the capabilities to actively contribute to the urban vitality of the High Street, benefiting stakeholders, and satisfying their commercial returns. Commercial landowners, with their own initiative, can play a pivotal role in empowering the vitality of urban centers and High Streets, without the need of new policy implementation. As Montgomery (1998) discussed, proactive interventions into the built environment can create and enhance community and urban vibrancy.

Since the topic to be researched hasn't been studied before, and in order to prove whether the hypothesis formulated holds true, a case for exploratory research, qualitative in nature is made. This research will focus on the role of commercial landowners of High Street real estate, who are perceived as one of three major stakeholders.

1.3 Research Aim

The study positions commercial landowners of High Street property at its core, behind the narrative that they too can play an active role in empowering the urban vitality of High Streets. This challenges the baseline, in which landowners of such properties are seen as 'passives', responsible only for providing the 'shell' of the building, and for the input of minimum financial contributions in structural maintenance and cleaning fees of public spaces.

As part of this process, Commercial Landowner Responsibility (CLR) is introduced as the collection of principles that corporate landowners voluntarily adopt when acquiring, (re)developing, managing, and investing in real estate. These principles involve taking responsibility and strategically and actively promote a positive influence on the environment, communities, and stakeholders through their actions.

The argument that commercial landowners can empower urban vitality is built on CLR and what stakeholder theory entrenches (see [Section 2.1](#)). Stakeholder theorists like Jones (1995), Donald and Preston (1995), and Jones and Wicks (1999) argued that trying to create value for non-shareholder stakeholders actually creates the most value for the shareholders. This indicates that commercial landowners, as shareholders who have leverage in High Street property can benefit from adopting CLR principles and strategically invest in their business model to increase the urban vitality of the High Street. Therefore:

The research aims to study whether and how commercial landowners can contribute to the urban revitalization at High Street locations, by adopting CLR principles.

Urban vitality refers to how busy or 'alive' an urban center is at different times through the various activities that are offered. In simple terms, urban vitality at High Streets is the vibrant and attractive mix of diverse businesses and experiential possibilities in densely populated and socially diverse pedestrian areas.

On the other hand, urban viability relates to the continuing ability of that urban area to attract investment (Ravenscroft, 2000). Human flow, activity and revenue in commercial zones are correlated. The measures of vitality and viability are therefore interrelated.

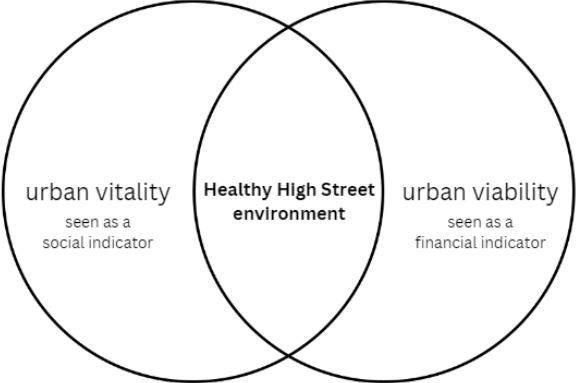


Figure 1. Correlation of urban vitality and viability (Source: Author)

It must be noted that as this paper aims to approach the topic from a societal standpoint the concept of urban viability will not be further elaborated. Nevertheless, it is important to be mindful of its existence and symbiotic relation with urban vitality.

1.4 Research Objectives

The study identifies three main stakeholders whose role is essential in the voluntary revitalization of the High Street. The '*human individual*' which will often be referred to as the end-users, citizens or visitors. The '*real estate operator*', often referred to as the occupier or tenant, and the '*commercial landowner*'. Public administrative bodies such as government agencies will be left out of the study. The goal is to research a way for private stakeholders to contribute willingly and benefit from it as an external effect to their actions. How High Streets and urban centers could benefit from policy drafting and implementation, and what the role of policy makers could be are important issues, but are out of the scope for this study.

The research due to its exploratory nature is strategically divided in three layers. First, the reasoning of people visiting a High Street location will be studied. This is to develop an empirical understanding of what people truly seek by visiting the High Street. This part of the research is essential to provide insights into the interests of the '*human individual*' seen as one of the three major stakeholders. Furthermore, the challenges of today's High Street will be explored and identified in order to shed light on the source of these dysfunctions.

The data analyzed in the first layer are mostly secondary from research conducted in Copenhagen, London, and Rotterdam by an external research consultancy. This secondary research will be complemented with semi-structured interviews done by the researcher. The research results of the consultancy were shared with the author through the internship hosting organization and permission to publicly present them was given.

However, the research will interpret the data based on its own theoretical background and research methodology. Furthermore, High Street experts that will participate as interviewees in this study will be asked to give their opinion on the topic. Consequently, the study of the data set, the interview results, and relevant literature review, will lead to new insights and conclusions that are specific to this research.

The second step will study the overall changing retail landscape, being the predominant sector occupying High Street real estate, and will focus on how these changes affect the sector's demands regarding its physical presence. Retail and High Street experts will be asked how technological advancements are influencing the demand and operation of retail properties. The interviews and relevant literature review will support the development of a theory on the interests of '*real estate operators*', seen as the second major stakeholder of the High Street.

Subsequently, the working relations of real estate operators and commercial landowners will be questioned by interviewing High Street experts and retail, as well as landowner representatives. The goal is to understand what these working relations are based on, whether they could pose a threat to urban vitality and whether something has to change in order for urban vitality to flourish. This will allow the research to

elaborate further on the relevance and applicability of CLR, and establish a theory on the working relations of commercial landowners and real estate operators.

The final layer consist of a case study in which CLR principles are adopted by a commercial landowner during a single building redevelopment. The goal of the commercial landowner is to add value on his own investment by being engaging the community through diverse, experience-oriented offerings, and provision of actively managed space to local entrepreneurs.

The project will be put under study for its influence on urban vitality, by evaluating its engagement with citizens, impact on pedestrian flows and diversity of uses. The theoretical framework of urban vitality that will be used as a foundation is 'The vital triangle of life' that is part of Liu et al. (2022) work (see [Section 2.7](#)). The data collection process will be done through the analysis of location intelligence data, a survey, and unstructured observations.

In summary, there are four objectives in this research.

1. To understand what citizens/visitors seek when visiting the High Street, and what are the High Street's present-day challenges that cause dysfunctions.
2. To understand how the retail sector is changing in regards to its physical presence, in response to the changing market demands.
3. To understand the current working relationships between commercial landowners and operators, and whether these relations affect urban vitality.
4. To understand whether CLR applied during a single building redevelopment can positively influence the High Street's urban vitality.

1.5 Research Questions

Main question

How can Commercial Landowner Responsibility (CLR) at High Street locations influence urban vitality and contribute to its future social sustainability?

Sub-questions

Question one aims to qualitatively expand the theoretical foundation laid by Talen and Jeong (2019), who argued that High Street offers benefits that reach far beyond consumption. Namely, street activity, economic development, diversity, and social connection. The second part of the question will further elaborate the present-day challenges of the High Street focusing on the private sector, providing a different perspective to the work of Hubbard (2017), who mainly focus on the role of the public sector.

Understanding the reasons and expectations of citizens visiting the High Street, as well as its contemporary challenges, will serve to inform how commercial landowners can effectively contribute to the High Streets revitalization efforts by adopting CLR principles.

1. Why do people visit the High Street, and what are the present-day challenges of the High Street?

The second question will help for an understanding towards where the retail sector is heading, and therefore, uncover the interests of High Street operators in regard to how they will optimize physical commercial space. By delving in these topics, the research aims to bring the interests and needs of operators to light, and hence, provide insights to commercial landowners how to actively assist them through CLR.

2. How is the retail sector changing, and what will be required from its physical presence in response to the changing market demands?

With the third question the study delves into the 'business-as-usual' relations amongst commercial landowners and real estate operators. Understanding this will help the research build a theory on the current working relations between landowners and operators, and whether those negatively influence the vitality of the High Street. This step will further help to build the theory on how commercial landowners can adapt their processes in order to help operators succeed and flourish.

3. Do the working relations between landowners and operators pose a threat to urban vitality?

In the last phase of the research, the relevance and effectiveness of CLR adopted during a single building redevelopment will be tested in practice in order to understand whether it can influence the vitality of the High Street. The theoretical framework that will serve as a foundation to discuss urban vitality in comprehensible terms is that presented by Liu et al. (2022), which will be further elaborated in Section 2.7

4. Can CLR applied during a single building redevelopment positively influence the urban vitality of the High Street?

1.6 Societal Relevance

In their work Theodoridis et al., (2017) highlight that there is an urge to consider how High Streets and town centers can transform to redefine their purpose and cater once again to the needs of their local communities, ensuring they remain relevant and sustainable. It is often the case that over-commercialized High Streets (see Picture 1) do not reflect those needs and offer a homogenized landscape that serves to numb people's sense of place (O'Donovan, 1989). Sense of place in the urban context is a theory that broadly describes human connection to places (Stedman, 2003).

O'Donovan (1989) argues that when the lack of sense of place settles within the urban core, locals experience alienation from it, based on the suspicion that there is nothing interesting apart from the general run of places. In an era of globalization, O'Donovan (1989) argues that the relentless thrust of the technological society towards cultural homogeneity must be mitigated. It is therefore a pressing issue to find efficient and effective ways to reinvent High Streets and reignite the street's ties with the locale.



Picture 1. The Lijnbaan, Rotterdam. A homogenized High Street (Source: Author)

Theodoridis et al. (2017) discuss that learning how to reinvent the High Street fundamentally involves stakeholder cooperation, emphasizing that the revitalization of the High Street is solely within the control of local decision-makers. This revitalization process involves creating a mix of stores and services focused on a central point of interest. High Streets should be easily accessible and offer various and diversified services to intrigue and keep the community engaged (Theodoridis et al., 2017).

Hart et al. (2013) highlights the impact of human behavior on High Streets and argue that visitors look for a complete experience, involving both tangible elements like stores and products, and intangible aspects like social gatherings and events, that bring excitement and novelty to the community.

For an effective revitalization process leadership is crucial, in which stakeholders are seen as active agents of change (Theodoridis, et al., 2017). The study societally contributes by introducing for the first-time commercial landowners as active stakeholders and local decision-makers of the High Street. Viewing commercial landowners as "agents of change" allows the research to critically analyze their potential role as active stakeholders, as well as their contributions towards efforts to revitalize and reconnect the High Street with the community.

This paper argues that commercial landowners operating under CLR principles, which fundamentally consider broader stakeholder needs, have the capabilities to lead the revitalization the High Street's, while also achieving sustainable commercial returns. Stakeholder theorists (Jones, 1995; Donald & Preston, 1995; Jones & Wicks, 1999) suggest that by becoming "agents of change" and creating value for non-shareholding stakeholders, such as commercial landowners, have the potential to exceed their commercial targets, achieving a win-win scenario in which both business and society flourishes.

The assertion that commercial landowners can serve as pivotal agents of change in urban revitalization projects is crucial. By adopting roles beyond mere profit generation and actively engaging in the sustainable development of their locales, these landowners can enhance urban vitality and reestablish the High Street's ties with the community. This involves not only enhancing the physical and economic landscape of High Streets but also fostering a community-centric decision-making that aligns with broader stakeholder needs.

The paper posits that such an approach not only contributes to the vitality and sustainability of the High Street, but also aligns with achieving superior commercial outcomes for commercial landowners, illustrating a symbiotic relationship between the flourishing of business and the welfare of society at High Street locations.

1.7 Scientific Relevance

In their paper White et al. (2023) argue that urban retail centers are undergoing significant transformations marked by unprecedented changes. The impact of increased online retailing since the early 2000s, coupled with rising occupying costs for operators are evident in the growing number of business closures, vacant spaces, and overall uncertainty in the High Street (Hubbard, 2017).

These structural changes, accelerated by the Covid-19 pandemic (See Figure 3), are causing policymakers responsible for managing urban centers to shift their focus towards promoting a more diverse use of properties in areas that were once predominantly retail-focused (White et al., 2023).

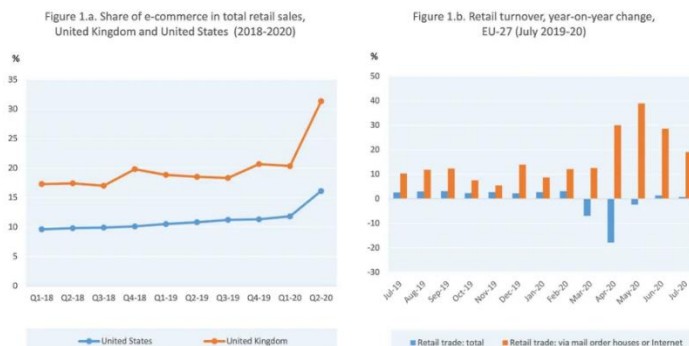


Figure 3. Increases in the share of e-commerce in total retail due to Covid-19 (Source: OECD, 2020)

However, this study does not explore the response of the government to these changes, neither supports the repurposing of retail properties to residential as an efficient solution to urban revitalization. The study embraces stakeholder theory and researches how shareholding market players, specifically commercial landowners, can innovate in their business framework, cooperate, and take the lead in revitalizing the High Street in a way that brings positive outcomes for all stakeholders. That's also the foundation of what this paper introduces as Commercial Landowner Responsibility.

As presented in [Section 1.2](#) (Research Gap), while studies have delved into various aspects linking sustainable urban development with urban vitality, there remains a notable gap in understanding the particular role that stakeholders can play within this context.

White et al. (2023) examine the High Street as a complex ecosystem involving various stakeholders, including evolving community behavioral patterns. These stakeholders have diverse interests and aspirations, which often shape the physical layout of urban spaces, resulting in a lack of diversity in city centers (White et al., 2023). Consequently, this poses a potential risk to the vitality and sustainability of the High Street.

By delving into the interests of three primary stakeholders, the human individuals, real estate operators, and commercial landowners, the study aims to scientifically analyze how and whose interests contribute to the observed lack of diversity, and therefore, impediment of urban vitality in urban centers.

Allen et al. (2011) emphasized the potential for cooperation among stakeholders to foster innovation, leading to the development of new retailing formats and alternative uses for existing buildings that would benefit stakeholders and communities. The study's scientific significance lies in its investigation into how commercial landowners of such buildings can initiate cooperation and repurpose traditionally operated structures in ways that are both socially and commercially valuable, while considering the concept of urban vitality as a primary indicator.

Celińska-Janowicz and Dolega (2015) discuss that new ways of organizing space emerge as a result of internal changes and urban renewal, forming new connections between elements and reshaping social structures. These innovations benefit communities and hence attract more visitors, increasing human activity and gradually opening up additional opportunities for growth, enhancing the urban vitality of the High Street.

The scientific relevance of this research derives from the ongoing investigation into whether and how commercial landowners of High Street properties, guided by CLR principles, can instigate and facilitate these innovations. Additionally, it aims to delineate the most efficient methods in enhancing the High Street's urban vitality. This approach challenges the status-quo, which views commercial landowners as passive shareholders solely focused on short-term financial gains and risk mitigation, often disregarding social indicators like urban vitality in their operational processes.

2. Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

2.1 Stakeholder Theory

The term “stakeholder” can be described in various ways. To begin with, a more specific definition can be given by focusing on the concept that every business, regardless of its size, aims to generate value for “those groups without whose support, the business would cease to be viable” (Freeman et al., 2010)

In its simplest form, stakeholder theory implies that the interests of specific groups are joint and that to create value, one must focus on how value gets created for each and every stakeholder. Following Freeman and Reed (1983), stakeholders include any person, group, or organization that affects and/or is impacted by an organization's decisions.

An opposing view comes from Friedman (1970), who supports that stakeholder interests is not about social responsibility, but about capitalism. According to Friedman the purpose of business is to “use its resources and engage in activities designed to increase its profits so long as it stays within the rules of the game”

The difference between Friedman's view and the one this research is willing to undertake is what makes business successful. While Friedman et al. believe that success is delivered by maximizing profits, this study uses Freeman's et al. (2010) argument, that to achieve maximum profits, companies must offer products and services that align with human desires. They should maintain strong partnerships with suppliers to ensure quality in their operations and lastly, operate within supportive communities that would play a vital role in fostering an environment where businesses can thrive.

Friedman may hold the view that striving for profit maximization leads to success. However, as Freeman et al. (2010) put it, the pursuit of profit maximization can be counterproductive, as it diverts focus from the underlying factors that create value, particularly stakeholder relationships.

In spite of these distinctions, Friedman's perspective on maximizing shareholder value can coexist harmoniously with stakeholder theory. Ultimately, the most sustainable path to value maximization is by meeting the interests of stakeholders.

As already presented, Jones (1995), Donaldson and Preston (1995), and Jones and Wicks (1999) support the research's argument, that creating value for non-shareholder stakeholders actually creates the most value for shareholders. In addition to that, the works of Collins and Porras (1997), and Graves and Waddock (1994) highlighted that profitable firms have a purpose and values beyond profit maximization. Profit maximization may be better thought of as a result or outcome.

As George (2003) puts it “*Serving all your stakeholders is the best way to produce long-term results and create a growing, prosperous company. Balancing the interests of all*

stakeholders and delivering strong returns to shareholders is not contradictory. In the long run, they go hand in hand"

Linking the theory to the research, there are three High Street stakeholders in the scope of this study. The commercial landowner, the real estate operator and the human individual. An early hypothesis is that the interest of the commercial landowner is an Internal Rate of Return (IRR), the operator's is revenue, and the human individual is looking for a fit-for-purpose destination where they can engage in social interaction, experience, and satisfy their needs.

The interests of stakeholders might look dissimilar. However, viewing it from a different perspective it is reasonable to assume that if the operator is offering something that the human individual desires, this will lead to, one, customer satisfaction, and two, increased revenue for the operator. This increase in the operator's revenue will lead to lesser vacancy risks for the commercial property, and a stable IRR for the commercial landowner. A chain-effect, that stakeholder theory thoroughly explains.

Putting stakeholder theory at the center of thinking about business, the pursuit of gains for shareholders at the expense of other stakeholders can be avoided. A pursuit which ultimately destroys both shareholder and stakeholder value (Freeman, Harrison, Wicks, Parmar, & Colle, 2010)

2.2 Stakeholder Identification and Analysis

Failure to attend to the information and concerns of stakeholders clearly is a kind of flaw in thinking or action that too often and too predictably leads to poor performance, outright failure or even disaster (Bryson J. M., 2004). Stakeholder analyses are now arguably more important than ever because of the increasingly interconnected nature of the world.

It is clear that any problem, encompasses or affects numerous people, groups and organizations. In this shared-power world, no one is fully in charge, hence, no organization 'contains' the problem (Kettl, 2002).

The need to manage relationships has become such a part and parcel of the need to govern that Feldman and Khademian (2002) assert that 'to manage is to govern'. And it is hard to imagine effectively managing relationships without making use of stakeholder identification and analysis.

Bryson (2004) presented fifteen stakeholder identification and analysis techniques, which were grouped into four categories. These four categories are: Organizing participation, creating ideas for strategic interventions, building a winning coalition around proposal development, review and adoption and implementing, monitoring and evaluating strategic interventions.

All of the techniques are simple in concept, yet, due to time and resource limitations of this study the researcher will make use of a technique developed by Bryson (1995) called 'The basic stakeholder analysis technique'.

The technique involves several steps, starting with brainstorming a list of potential stakeholders. Next, a flip chart sheet is prepared for each stakeholder. Subsequently, for each stakeholder, a list of criteria the stakeholder would use to judge the organization's performance is established. This step could be replaced with a list of stakeholder's expectations of the organization.

Then the researcher, decides based on theory and data how well the stakeholder thinks the organization is doing. Always from the individual stakeholder's point of view. Colored dots indicate the stakeholder judgement, good (green), fair (yellow), poor (red). The final step is identification and recording of what can be done to satisfy each stakeholder.

Contextualizing Bryson's technique to the relevance of this research, the High Street is viewed as the 'organization', and the stakeholders are the landowner, the operator and the human individual.

A visualization of the second and third step of the 'basic stakeholder analysis technique' is illustrated below in Figure 4.

Stakeholder list of expectations	Organization	Stakeholder list of expectations	Organization	Stakeholder list of expectations	Organization
Commercial Landowner	High Street	Operator	High Street	Human Individual	High Street
Significant Pedestrian Flow	● ●	Significant Pedestrian Flow	● ●	Diversity of uses	●
Positive IRR	●	Positive IRR	●	Opportunities to experience and socialize	●
Secure property valuation	●	Sales Increment	●	Connectivity	●
Connectivity	●	Connectivity	●	Accessibility	●
Accessibility	●	Accessibility	●	Safe & Secure Environment	●
Safe & Secure Environment	●	Safe & Secure Environment	●		

Figure 4. The High Street's stakeholder expectations. Analysis system based on Bryson (1995)

The human individual

In the right-most table, the interests of the human individual at High Streets are illustrated. The analysis was done with Bryson's basic stakeholder analysis technique, and was based on literature review and the paper's narrative. Pine and Gilmore (2013) discuss how the world entered an experience economy. The experiential value of products and services is a significant factor attracting and engaging the human individual. In the urban context, Lorentzen and Hansen (2013) discuss that cities and

urban environments are not an exception to, as experiences are place-bound, and can enhance the quality of a place, and visitor attraction.

However, as presented from the literature so far in this paper, there is a clear lack of diverse, non-transactional, experiential opportunities at High Street locations to serve civil society, the human individual. This lack of essential elements in the postmodern society causes the human individual to seek opportunities to experience and socialize elsewhere, decreasing human activity in High Streets.

Connectivity, Accessibility and a Safe Environment are prerequisites for all three stakeholders analyzed. However, these interests will not be considered further, as the involvement of public authorities is viewed as necessary in order to influence those indicators.

The Operator

In the middle table, the interests of the High Street's operators are depicted. The operator takes on the high occupancy cost at High Street locations due to the expected pedestrian flow, and expected revenue. The declining sales due to the e-commerce and changing consumer behavior cause a negative IRR and eventually drive the operators to establish their business elsewhere. In the same way, this translates into negative influences on the vitality of the High Street.

The Commercial Landowner

In the left-most table, the landowner is identified as key stakeholder, as well as his interest and expectations from the organization, the High Street. The operation of the commercial landowner at High Street locations is based on the expected increasing rental values and pedestrian flow, which as described is endangered due to risks on occupational vacancy. This creates a chain-effect, that causes an uncertain internal rate of return (IRR), and decreasing property yields.

To address the interconnected challenges faced by stakeholders, the theory suggests that cooperation is an essential component for effective resolution. By fostering a spirit of unity and shared objectives, stakeholders can collectively navigate, and overcome issues, promoting synergy, and achieving mutually beneficial outcomes.

2.3 Stakeholder Cooperation

Savage et al. (2010) discuss interorganizational collaborations and the nature of stakeholder relationships. They address them as social partnerships. These partnerships are collectives that aim to solve problems that otherwise could not be solved by an organization acting alone. Such partnerships, as Waddock (1989) addresses, represent

social problem-solving mechanisms among organizations from more than one economic sector.

Interorganizational cooperation has been desirable, even necessary for achieving competitive advance among business organizations (Powell et al., 1996). The cooperation among different industries enables the organizations to pool resources, and capitalize on complementary capabilities, and enhance innovativeness (Savage, et al., 2010).

Very related to this study is that networks with high closure (Burt R. S., 2004), because of their extensive interconnections can facilitate the exchange of information and the development of common norms among partners, which as Soda et al. (2004), describe it, has a positive effect on overall performance. The study considers commercial landowners as such networks, with the resources to cooperate with organizations across sectors in order to achieve their goals, financial, social and environmental.

For Gray (1989) there are three factors that can motivate organizations to seek cross-sectoral partnerships, or cross-sectoral cooperation. First, the cooperation should allow the organization to achieve something that could not be accomplished in any other way. That could simply be exchange of cross-sectoral information that would depend on industry expertise. Secondly, cooperation can help organizations to tackle social or macro-environmental issues, that otherwise could not be solved by a single entity. Finally, through cooperation, organizations can respond to environmental complexities, uncertainty or turbulence (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978).

The vacancy rates and unstable investment environment could be viewed as turbulence for commercial landowners, while the changes in consumer behavior create a challenging environment for the operator. Even though individual organizations have different goals the focus is on collectivity, not on any individual organization.

But cooperation doesn't necessarily have to be extensive, but rather strategic. Some relationships, integral to social partnerships are what Lambe et al. (2012) call interimistic. That is a type of relational exchange that is defined as close, collaborative, fast-developing, short-lived, in which companies pool their skills and resources to address opportunities or threats. Hence, the landowner and the operator could build an interimistic relationship to offer an excellent and unique 'product' to the community.

But building on cooperation is not that easy. As Trist (1983) noted, an appreciative component to build cooperation is necessary. In order to develop a commitment to cooperation, stakeholders need to perceive that they are interdependent and hold the belief that it is to their advantage to join forces and develop a common definition of the problem they are tackling together (Gray B. , 1985).

The next step would be to develop a sort of structure that can support this cooperation (Trist, 1983) and pool the necessary resources to tackle the problems the cooperation is trying to address. As an example, due to changes in retail that originate from consumer

behavior, lead retailers to growingly operate more through digital channels and therefore, the demand of traditionally operated retail properties is decreasing leading to a gradual increase in High Steet property vacancy. To adapt to this change stakeholders, have to develop an efficient and structured way of cooperation in order to be successful in keeping the High Street relevant and connected with the community.

To summarize, three set of factors are expected in order to make a stakeholder cooperation effective. One, the extend of shared goals, secondly, the structural features of the cooperation and lastly, processual issues, such as the degree of trust among partners and the quality of leadership (Savage, et al., 2010).

Figure 5 illustrates the hypothesized outcomes resulting from the cooperation of the study's three major stakeholders. By focusing on urban vitality as the core indicator in revitalization efforts of the High Street, increased footfall, increased revenue, lesser vacancy and increased overall economic viability is expected. Nevertheless, the strategy and structure for initiating such cooperation remain uncertain and will be explored in the subsequent chapters of the paper.

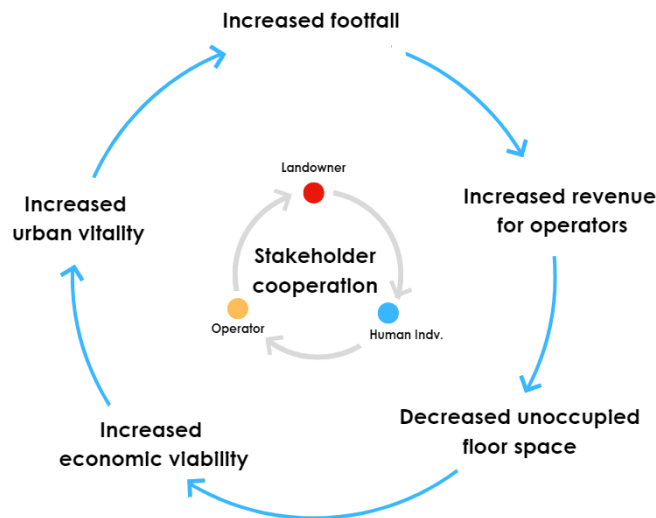


Figure 5. Stakeholder cooperation in the High Street
(Source: Author)

2.4 The Commercial Landowner

The term landowner refers to a property owner who has the legal ability to rent or lease that property to another party in exchange for rent payments. Landowners may be individuals, businesses, or other entities such as public housing associations.

The key concept relevant to this study are commercial landowners, that come also under the name of company landowners or corporate landowners. The definition seems to vary across regions, and is often directly connected with the number of properties, and financial or human resources a landowner holds. For example, Herbert et al. (2013), as well as Dan Immergluck and Jonathan Law (2013), define commercial landowner as those owning and managing more than 10 properties. Another study chose 15 properties as the cutoff number of owned properties defining a commercial landowner (Raymond et al., 2016), and exclude banks, public entities, and non-profit organization from the definition of the commercial landowner.

What differentiates commercial landownership from individual or small-scale landlords is the scale and resources in their property management operations and their financial backing from institutional and private investors. Commercial landowner prime objective is to acquire properties, optimize them, and generate a monthly return on investment by leasing properties to tenants and managing them efficiently, satisfying investors.

For this study the term 'commercial landowner' is defined as an organization that owns and manages over 15 properties, and that is not a bank, public entity or a non-profit organization, and whose main purpose is to achieve a return on the initial investment. These organizations are funded by private and public investors, such as pension funds and insurance companies, but also by banks and high net worth individuals.

The above-mentioned definition narrows the term of commercial landowner to organizations which take the form of companies such as Real Estate Investment Trusts (REITs), Asset Management Organizations, Funds, Private Equity Firms, Family Offices, or Real Estate Partnerships among individuals or entities.

The research strategically refers to the above-mentioned commercial entities as commercial landowners to highlight the human nature of the decision-making that drives these types of organizations.

2.5 Corporate Social Responsibility

Under the notion that enterprises should not only be profitable tools, but also responsible citizenships, and that social responsibility is a responsibility and obligation to protect, foster, increase and enhance the benefit of stakeholders and social people, CSR is:

“A process with the aim to embrace responsibility for the company's actions and encourage a positive impact through its activities on the environment, consumers, employees, communities, stakeholders and all other members of the public sphere who may also be considered stakeholders” (Tai & Chuang, 2014).

An additional interesting aspect is that of Jones (1980), who described CSR as the notion that corporations have an obligation to society groups other than the

stakeholders and beyond what is prescribed by law. In CSR, the obligation must be therefore, voluntarily. The obligation of a corporation that wants to institutionalize its social responsibility, goes beyond the traditional duty to shareholders and reaches other societal groups such as customers, employees and neighboring communities.

According to Bird and Smucker (2007) three principles must be considered in processing the social responsibilities of corporations. The first is an awareness of the historical and institutional dynamics of local communities. The second is the necessity of good communication with local communities and third is the degree to which the firm's operations safeguard and improve the social and economic assets of the local communities.

However, it is often that corporate social responsibility was looked at as an "addon" to "business as usual," and the observation often heard from executives was that "corporate social responsibility is fine, if you can afford it (Freeman et al., 2010).

Freedman et al. (2010), divide CSR into two categories, namely the residual CSR and the integrated view of CSR. The residual view of CSR is secondary, non-strategic activity, characterized by the notion of "giving back to society". It emphasizes the moral obligation and practical benefits of corporations sharing some of the value they've generated with society. From this standpoint, CSR is not fully integrated and doesn't challenge the traditional notion that profit maximization is the primary.

On the other hand, the integrated perspective of CSR is the integration of social, ethical, and environmental considerations into the corporate strategy. In simpler terms, the integrated approach acknowledges that managing business involves managing relationships with its stakeholders. In this way, integrative CSR underlines the necessity for redefining the role and purpose of corporations (Post et al., 2002). Here, the primary focus is on creating stakeholder value proactively rather than focusing on the distribution of profit.

As Ackerman (1975) stated, *"In the long run, the more successful corporations will be those that can achieve both social responsiveness and good economic performance."* Waddock and Graves (1997) support Ackerman's argument with the hypothesis that better financial performance leads to better social performance, and that better social performance increases financial performance.

This statement confirms the study's argument, since social performance is secured through stakeholder cooperation, and hence, stakeholder cooperation can lead to increases in financial performance.

2.6 Commercial Landowner Responsibility

Using CSR as the theoretical understructure, the study develops the concept of Commercial Landowner Responsibility (CLR) and defines it as the collection of principles that corporate landowners voluntarily adopt when acquiring, (re)developing,

managing, and investing in real estate. These principles involve taking responsibility and actively promoting a strategic and positive influence on the environment, communities, and stakeholders through their actions.

In the interest of this research, commercial landowner responsibility refers to the ethical, genuine and strategic commitment of real estate corporations, beyond their legal obligations, to ensure a vital and socially sustainable High Street.

Despite the broad framing of the concept, CLR, alike CSR, is closely related to stakeholder theory. Through CLR, the commercial landowner should be viewed more as a partner and key decision-maker, that has the extensive resources to initiate cooperation amongst stakeholders and tackle common environmental, social, and financial issues.

In further support of the applicability of CLR and its connectedness to the landowner's interest, comes Bouwman's (1973) argument. Bouwman (1973) argues that the market responds to the social behavior of corporations in terms of market price and investment prospects. According to Bowman, many institutional investors view firms that are not socially responsible as riskier investments. It is therefore in the commercial landowner's interest, to institutionalize the fundamental beliefs of CLR in order to increase his market capitalization and investor appeal.

2.7 Urban Vitality

Successful urban places combine opportunities for people to meet, to conduct transactions, and experience diversity and variety (Montgomery J. , 1995). The research explores the High Street from this particular perspective and explore what responsibility commercial landowners can have in contributing to its success, having as starting point the needs of civil society.

In his paper John Montgomery (1995), connects the notion of urban vitality with what he calls the 'evening economy', a concept that is about opening possibilities for transactions to take place in extended periods of time. In his view, a landscape that provides diversity is expressed by layers of activities and transactions. *"People meet, they trade, buy and sell, they are also stimulated by the possibilities of meeting others, of seeing friends, of enjoying the company of strangers."* (Montgomery J. , 1995)

In connection to the research's problem statement, Montgomery (1995) points out that technological sophistication, the Internet, teleworking and the flexible working patterns give people more choices in how to organize their time, but consequently, there are not enough choices in what to do with that time, and therefore limiting what is considered as urban vitality.

John Montgomery (1995) further defines urban vitality by 'borrowing' the term of vitalism from the Fontana Dictionary of Modern Thought (1977). "Vitalism is a theory or

collection of beliefs which contend that living processes are not to be explained in terms of solely material compositions but that living things are animated by a principle such as a vital force" (Bullock et al., 1977). Hence, urban vitality is the vital force of a place, the state of being alive, people on the streets at different times, human variety. In other words, activity, transaction and diversity (Montgomery J. , 1995).

Zhang et al. (2020), appreciate the complexity and abstract definition of urban vitality in their attempt to quantify the factors that influence it. In a more practical approach, they took vitality as a variable directly depended on spatial-temporal gatherings of human flows, considering that city vitality refers to the ability of the city to attract lively businesses and human activities.

Their definition of urban vitality aligns with that of many other scholars as "the abundance of urban activities, or the intensity of residential activities". (Jin, Long, & Sun, 2017; Wu, Ren, & Du, 2018; Ye, Li, & Liu, 2017)

This research will adopt a definition of urban vitality that includes all above and is best explained by Paul R. Maas (1984) as:

"The synergism of sizeable number of varied and unique commercial and experiential opportunities, in a relatively dense and socially heterogeneous pedestrian population, which animates certain areas, throughout each day and evening."

In order to be able to practically measure urban vitality, the researcher will rely on indicators developed by URBED (1994) and the paper of Liu et al. (2022) and that are aligned with the given definition. Three indicators are of particular importance in analyzing the vitality of the High Street.

In particular, Liu et al. (2022) compare the city to a living organism. They discuss a city's vitality as evident externally through the ongoing expansion of all urban elements, while its internal dynamics are principally represented by diversity and mobility. With that in mind they drew an analogy of biological vitality and urban vitality (see Figure 6.)

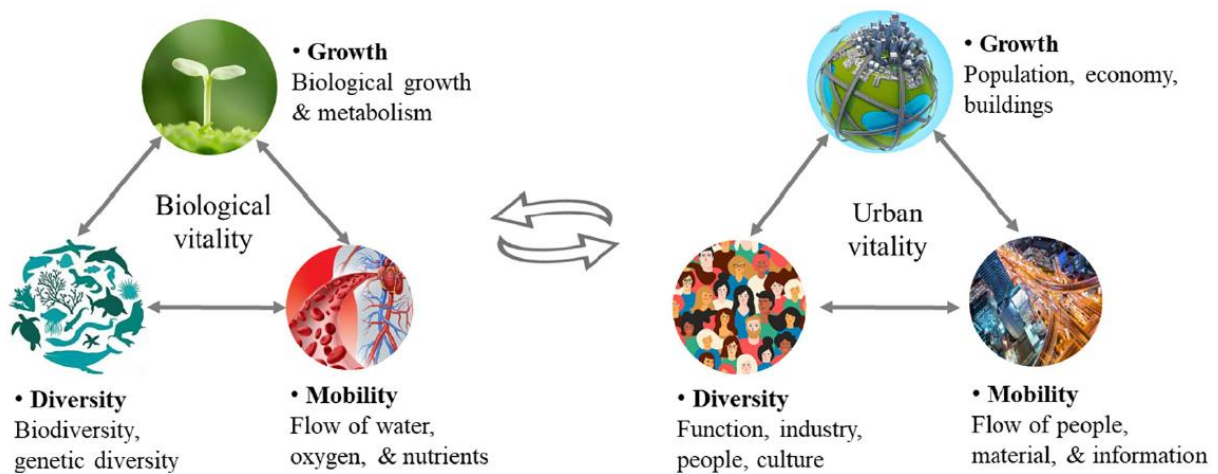


Figure 6. The vital triangle of life. Source: Liu et al. (2022)

Conke and Ferreira (2015) argue that the vibrancy of a city becomes apparent through its continual economic, demographic, and structural growth and renewal. A faster urban metabolism, driven by increased people and resource flow, contributes to enhanced living conditions and socio-economic improvements.

Nowak (2006) discusses that parallel to biodiversity's crucial role in natural selection and ecosystem resilience, urban diversity stands as a vital prerequisite for a city's viability. Studies have highlighted that diverse urban composition, structure, and function enhance urban vitality, with innovation closely tied to diversity (Kang, Fan, & Jiao, 2021).

Additionally, mobility serves as a constant source of energy in life. The flow of material, energy, and information propels interactions within the organism and its external environment (Liu, Gou, & Xiong, 2022). This ability to continually draw energy from the environment, sustaining entropy loss, distinguishes life from non-life, a concept referred to as the "secret of life." (Schrödinger, 2012)

The mobility of people, materials, and information, both within and outside the city system, holds the key to the urban organism's vitality. Similar to biology, the "vital triangle" (See Figure 8) comprising growth, diversity, and mobility is applicable to cities.

Therefore, the below listed indicators will be measured in order to study urban vitality.

1. Pedestrian flows: The number of human mobility on the High Street
2. Diversity of uses: The changing balance of space usage and service offerings.
3. Building growth: The number of new buildings developed or activated.

2.8 Social Sustainability

Over the past 25 years sustainability gained a prominent role in political agendas and society. The discourse of sustainability is balanced among three pillars, economic, environmental and social (see Figure 7.), with the latter being the least examined one (Davidson, 2010).

The discourse of social sustainability offers a multi-varied definition that many scholars and academics held debates upon. This sub-chapter will introduce these definitions and clarify the way this term will be used in the study.



Figure 7. Three Pillars of Sustainability, Source: (Hafizyar & Dheyaaldin, 2019)

Thomas Maloutas (2003) gives stage to a thought-provoking argument. He states that social sustainability cannot be informed without environmental thinking. He further introduces the processes of 'de-socialization', as the pursuit of equality that is replaced as the central force by the need to make peace with nature, and 're-socialization' as the argument that social inclusion is a necessary condition for making peace with nature.

"The legitimacy of sustainability is heavily dependent on the prominence of relations to nature in the widely accepted form of the need to preserve natural resources" (Maloutas, 2003).

In his view, the division of social and environmental sustainability goals are politically necessary under neoliberalism and are otherwise a withdrawal from really meaningful objectives such as social equality and justice, in favor of less ambitious targets such as social cohesion, solidarity and inclusion. In this context Maloutas (2003) sees it possible to 're-socialize' sustainability only where social objectives are reintroduced, but only as minor to the prime target of sustainability. However, discussions on social sustainability, especially within the urban literature, have largely separated social from the environmental debate.

As an example, Stren and Polese (2000) describe social sustainability as "The development that is compatible with the harmonious evolution of civil society, fostering an environment conducive to the compatible cohabitation of culturally and socially diverse groups while at the same time encouraging social integration, with improvement in the quality of life for all segments of the population".

Their definition builds on Yftachel's and Hedhecock (1993) earlier definition "The continuing ability of a city to function as a long-term viable setting for human interaction, communication and cultural development", and that urban social sustainability is a concept that looks at cities as arenas for meaningful social relations that meet the needs of present and future generations.

Consequently, *"the socially sustainable city is marked by vitality, solidarity and a common sense of place among its residents"* (Yiftachel & Hedgecock, 1993)

Although Thomas Maloutas (2003) made a well-thought point on the division of social and environmental sustainability, this research will keep these key concepts distinct, as this offers an effective approach for establishing practical and achievable targets in the urban setting, and simplifying the intricate discourse on sustainability. Hence, highlighting the equal importance of prioritizing social sustainability where society has institutionalized and flourished over nature, such as urban centers.

This study will combine Stern and Polese's (2000) definition of social sustainability with Yftachel and Hedhecock's (1993), as following:

"Social sustainability is the compatible development of the harmonious evolution of civil society, which facilitates the ability of a city to function as a long-term viable setting for human interaction, communication and cultural development."

2.9 Connecting Urban Vitality to Social Sustainability

Urban vitality, as defined, captures the essence of a thriving urban environment, characterized by vividness, varied commercial and experiential opportunities and dense social interaction. On the other hand, social sustainability signifies the long-term viability of a city as a nurturing space for human interaction, communication, and social development.

These definitions reveal a deep connection between the two concepts. The presence of varied and unique experiential opportunities in an urban setting not only revitalize physical space, but also foster social interaction. A heterogeneous and dynamic pedestrian environment can lead to cultural exchange amongst visitors and thus, personal growth.

Hence, urban vitality, by vivifying the High Street, plays an essential role in facilitating social sustainability. Vice versa, a social sustainable environment where individuals feel connected, contributes to the vitality of the urban core. It is clear that these concepts are interconnected, each strengthen the other's aspiration.

2.10 Social Conflict Theory

As the study considers stakeholder theory significant, the conceptual relationship amongst stakeholders is equally important to be assessed. The High Street, according to the study is defined by three stakeholders whose quality of working relationships is hypothesized to be a variable directly affecting urban vitality. Social conflict theory will be used as a tool to reflect on these relations and impact to the High Streets vitality.

According to Oberschall (1987) conflict arises when two or more parties intentionally engage in competitive interactions. Boulding (1963) elaborated the concept of conflict further as "the situation of competition in which the parties are aware of the incompatibility of potential future positions, and in which each party wishes to occupy a position that is incompatible with the wishes of other". The term "social conflict" according to Oberschall (1987) refers to conflict in which parties are groups, organizations, communities, rather than individuals that take part of the conflict.

Applying social conflict theory within the framework of this study, commercial landowners lease out commercial real estate with the primary goal of generating income. Conversely, retailers, entrepreneurs, and SMEs serve as the real estate operators, leasing the property from these commercial landowners to provide and sell their services or products to individuals, groups, and/or other businesses.

At its core, the relationship between the landowner and the operator is characterized by conflict. The landowner aims to maximize profit by minimizing expenses and extracting the highest possible rent from the operator. Conversely, the operator seeks to

minimize financial outlay by negotiating lower lease payments while maximizing the landowner's responsibilities for operational costs like maintenance. This conflict arises from differing priorities and objectives between the two parties.

Contrary to the initial negative connotation to social conflict theory, Coser (1957) presents it as something necessary to society in order to prevent the staleness of systems, and an impoverished creativity. He sees the clash of values and interests as a fundamental ingredient to the production of vitality, comparing the function of conflict with that of an earthquake. The theory will be used to reflect whether the conflictual relationship amongst landowners and operators is fruitful towards urban vitality or whether it impedes it.

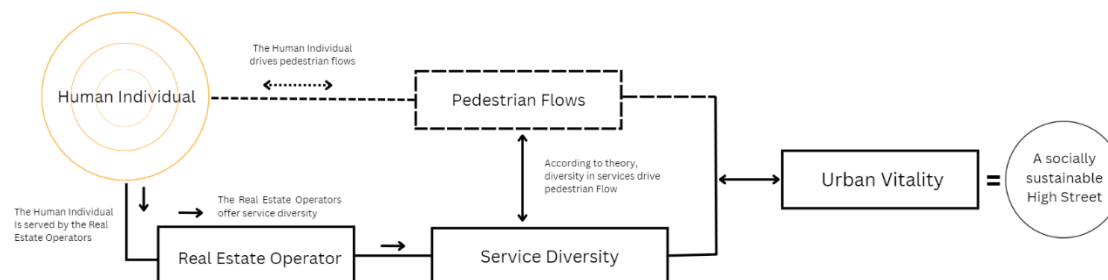
“There is nothing abnormal about an earthquake. An unshakeable earth would be a dead earth. A quake is the earth's way of maintaining its equilibrium, a form of adjustment that enables the crust to yield to stresses that tend to reorganize and redistribute the material of which it is composed. The larger the shift, the more violent the quake” (Coser, 1957).

2.11 Conceptual Framework and Operationalization

Based on the discussed concepts and theories, a framework is made, which conceptualizes the main theory of this research. The conceptual framework depicts the process of reaching a vital and socially sustainable High Street based on the theory presented, and questions whether the commercial landowner could have a role in enhancing this. The conceptual framework is titled as 'The High Street Battery'.

For the 'High Street Battery' to function, High Street real estate operators provide sought-after and diverse products or services to the community, that are not limited to transactional retailing. These diverse offerings, according to theory, attract new visitors and thus, lead to an increment in pedestrian flow. Diversity of uses, and pedestrian flows are the essential indicators of urban vitality, as discussed in the paper of Liu et al. (2022).

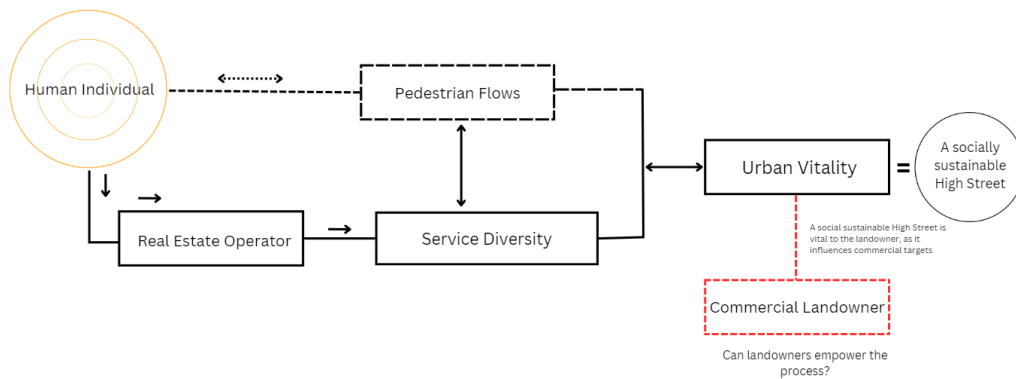
Therefore, a positive contribution towards those indicators leads to a more vital, viable High Street. The remaining question is that of the role of the commercial landowner to the whole process, seen as one of the major stakeholders of the paper. By the end of this research, it is aimed to have developed a clear indication as of how the third stakeholder can contribute to vital High Street.



Graphic 2. The High Street Battery excluding the Commercial Landowner (Source: Author)

In Graphic 2, the theory of urban vitality based on the paper of Liu et al. (2022), Montgomery (1995) and Paul R. Maas (1995) is illustrated and contextualized to the High Street. Civil society is served by real estate operators at High Street locations. If these operators offer diverse and varied services that continuously intrigue the community, pedestrian flow will increase and the vitality of the High Street will be restored.

In Graph 2, commercial landowners are depicted as the third major stakeholder of the High Street within the conceptual framework. However, their specific role has not been clearly defined at this stage of the research. The conclusion chapter aims to assign a clear role to commercial landowners, with the objective of enhancing or assisting in the vitality of the High Street. This clarification will provide valuable insights into how commercial landowners can contribute to the overall vibrancy and success of the High Street environment.



Graphic 3. The High Street Battery questioning the role of the Commercial Landowner (Source: Author)

3. Methodology

In this section the reader will be instructed to the methodology of the research, as the roadmap of the research is explained.

The philosophical basis behind the qualitative approach will be explained by using Saunders et al. (2019) and Creswell's book on research design (2014) in order to give grounds for the chosen research perspective. But first, the research strategy will be outlined, including how data will be collected and analyzed to answer the research questions. In order to outline the methodology of this research, the research onion of Saunders et al. (2019) is used.

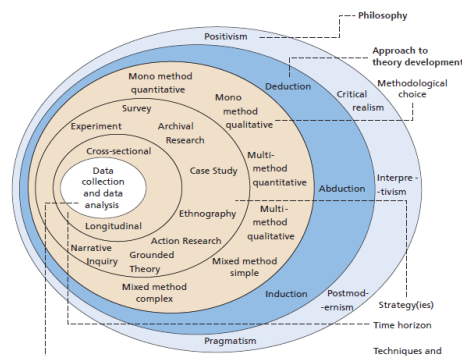


Figure 8. Research Onion (Saunders et al., 2019)

3.1 Research Philosophy

The primary layer within the research framework (see Figure 10) revolves around the concept of research philosophy. Research philosophy embodies a set of fundamental beliefs and underlying presumptions concerning the cultivation of knowledge (Saunders et al., 2019). Throughout the various phases of the research, both conscious and subconscious assumptions come into play. These include assumptions related to the nature of reality (ontological viewpoints), perspectives on human knowledge, the criteria for defining acceptable and robust knowledge (epistemological viewpoints), and the extent to which the researcher's personal values influence the research process (axiological considerations).

These underlying assumptions inevitably shape the researcher's understanding of their research question, the methodologies employed, and the manner in which findings can be interpreted (Crotty, 1998). A well-thought-out and consistent set of assumptions will constitute a credible research philosophy, which will underpin the methodological choice, research strategy and data collection techniques and analysis procedures (Saunders et al., 2019)

Following the work of Saunders et al. (2019) there are five major philosophies, positivism, critical realism, interpretivism, postmodernism and pragmatism. Positivism is associated with the philosophical perspective of a natural scientist and involves engaging with a tangible social environment in order to formulate generalizations that resemble scientific laws. This highlights the positivist inclination towards empirical method designs aimed at generating objective data and facts, free from human interpretations or bias (Saunders et al., 2019). The researcher is detached, neutral and independent of what is researched and maintain an objective stance in order to generalize the outcomes as one true reality.

Secondly, critical realism which according to Saunders et al. (2019) focuses on explaining what we see and experience, in terms of the underlying structures of reality that shape the observable events. This research philosophy claims that there are two steps to understanding the phenomena under research. First, there are the sensations and events we experience. Second, there is the mental processing that goes on sometime after the experience, when we 'reason backwards' from our experiences to the underlying reality that might have caused them. Research using 'critical realism' aims to explain real-world organizational events by identifying their underlying causes and mechanisms. Therefore, critical realists frequently adopt in-depth historical analyses of social and organizational structures, delving into how they have evolved over time (Reed, 2005).

The third research philosophy explained is interpretivism. In summary, Interpretivism emphasizes that humans are different from physical phenomena because they create meanings. It argues that humans and their social worlds cannot be studied in the same way as physical phenomena, because people of different cultural backgrounds, under different circumstances and at different times make different meanings, and therefore

social science research needs to be different from natural science research. The purpose of interpretivist research is to create new, richer understanding and interpretations of social worlds and context (Saunders et al., 2016).

Following, comes postmodernism. Postmodernism highlights the role of language and power dynamics, aiming to question established ways of thinking and give voice to less heard viewpoints. Postmodernists argue that any sense of order is not fixed and relies on language and its categories. The goal of postmodern research is to challenge radically the established way of thinking and knowing (Kilduff & Mehra, 1997).

Lastly, a pragmatist perspective suggests that concepts matter only when they assist in taking action (Kelemen & Rumens, 2008). It evaluates concepts, theories, hypotheses, and results not in a theoretical context but in relation to how they guide thinking and actions (Saunders et al., 2016). Pragmatic research starts with a real-world issue and strives to provide practical solutions that can inform future practices. Furthermore, pragmatic research starts with a problem, and aims to contribute to practical solutions that inform future practice (Saunders et al., 2019).

As discussed, the research aims to study whether and how commercial landowners can contribute, also to their benefit, to the revitalization of High Street locations through CLR principles. Having described the five major research philosophies, a pragmatic research approach is best suited for the study, as it focuses on making an actual difference to organizational practice.

The research aims to achieve this goal by examining theories developed throughout the study, not merely as abstract concepts, but as practical tools guiding both thought and action. Specifically, the theory regarding potential ulterior motives for individuals visiting the High Street, insights into contemporary dysfunctions within the High Street resulted from data collected in sub-question 1, theories pertaining to retail evolution and the utilization of commercial spaces explored in sub-question 2, and the theory derived from analyzing the relationship between landowners and occupants in sub-question 3, will serve as integral components structuring the exploration of the fourth sub-question. Finally, these theories will collectively provide clear direction towards addressing the main research question.

3.2 Theory Development

Given the theoretical nature of this research, a critical question arises concerning whether the focus is on constructing new theories or testing existing ones, which significantly impacts the research's design. Saunders et al. (2019) discuss deductive, inductive or abductive as the main approaches to theory development.

In a deductive study, the goal is to find an explanation for the research problem by leveraging existing theories. This involves establishing a theoretical framework based on the available theory related to the research topic, offering a broad explanation or

description of the research problem. The objective is to determine if the explanation proposed by the theory is valid (Thiel S. V., 2007). This is done by collecting data, analyzing it, and determine whether the findings support or reject the explanation that is suggested by the theory in the theoretical framework. Testing this theoretical framework will help the research clarify to what extent the current knowledge is deficient, and whether the theory applied provides an explanation for the research question.

An opposing way to deductive theory development is the inductive approach, in which empirical observations lead to new theoretical insights. Observations made in inductive research are subsequently transformed into generalizations, forming the foundation for constructing a theory or model. In this approach, a researcher starts with a particular viewpoint or expectation, derived from logical reasoning, prior research, the findings of other researchers in related fields, or insights obtained from those involved in the study. They then proceed to observe and collect data to complete the dataset. Inductive research leads to the development of a new theoretical framework (Thiel S. V., 2007).

Unlike the linear movement from theory to data (deduction) or data to theory (induction), an abductive approach combines elements of both and moves back and forth. This approach seeks to integrate various explanations into an overarching conceptual framework, essentially constructing a final theory (Suddaby, 2006).

In the context of this study, an inductive approach is employed, requiring the development of a new and intricate conceptual framework. The research argues that High Streets are presently inadequate in meeting the needs of the community, a situation exacerbated by shifts in the retail industry and consumer behavior, leading to a decreasing urban vitality.

Consequently, commercial landowners who own High Street properties face financial distress by having invested in buildings that remain vacant and do not generate income. Therefore, the study suggests that these landowners could take on an active stakeholder role, and contribute to the revitalization of the area, securing that way their assets' occupation and income.

By actively positioning themselves as stakeholders, commercial landowners can lead or support, and participate in the identification of specific community needs and characteristics, and in cooperation with the real estate operator offer a 'product' that was established through stakeholder-centric decision making.

The inhabitants' and visitors' needs could be identified by the landowner and the operator, and through their cooperation satisfy them. The study argues that satisfying human needs will increase human activity and increasing revenues for the operator, and stabilizing property yields. Therefore, all three stakeholders simultaneously benefit by commercial landowners participating as active stakeholders.

Since there is little information on all the above-mentioned parts of the research, the study is open to new insights that are gained through the collection of empirical evidence on the subject. Therefore, an inductive approach to theory development will be deployed.

A research approach based on inductive reasoning tends to prioritize the context in which events occur. As a result, it may be more suitable to study a small group of subjects rather than a large one, as is the case with deductive reasoning. Inductive research inclines to employ qualitative data and utilize various methods to gather these data, aiming to present diverse perspectives on phenomena (Saunders et al., 2019).

3.3 Research Approach

The third layer of the research framework relates to the methodological choices that need to be considered. One of the central methodological decisions is whether the research will adopt a quantitative, qualitative, or mixed-method research design.

Quantitative research involves examining relationships between variables. These variables are being measured in numerical terms and analyzed using a range of statistical and graphical techniques (Saunders et al., 2019). This approach often incorporates controls to ensure the data's validity, similar to experimental designs. Quantitative research is typically associated with a deductive approach to theory development because it collects and analyzes data to test existing theories.

In contrast, qualitative research focuses on exploring the meanings ascribed by participants and understanding the relationships between them. Qualitative research utilizes a variety of data collection techniques and analytical procedures to develop or refine a conceptual framework and contribute to theory development (Saunders et al., 2019). This approach is particularly valuable when the aim is to gain deeper insights and explore the nuances of a subject.

This research will be conducted using qualitative methodology. The study questions the role of the landowner in association with the vitality and social sustainability of the High Street. In order to achieve that, and because the previously unexplored nature of the research questions, the study will adopt an explorative character (Thiel S. v., 2014). Saunders et al. (2019), define explorative studies as research that aims to seek new insights, ask new questions and assess topics in a new light. More about the explorative approach will follow on chapter 3.4 Research Strategy.

In a broad sense, qualitative research is an approach that allows someone to examine people's experiences in detail. This is done by using a specific set of tools, such as in-depth interviews, focus group discussion, observation, content analysis and more (Hennink et al., 2010).

The need for an in-depth understanding of the complex research issues, which embrace perspectives of study population, their beliefs and behavior make qualitative research methods applicable to the study. Moreover, the plethora of 'why' and 'how' questions linked to the research makes qualitative research most suitable for. 'Why' questions aim to explain and understand issues and 'How' questions describe processes or behavior (Hennink et al., 2010).

The qualitative method is generally framed in terms of using words rather than numbers and is characterized by the exploring and understanding of a social or human problem. Data about people and places is collected in a participant's setting (Creswell J. W., 2014). Qualitative research is useful to get a holistic detailed understanding of the problem and, therefore, can complement the answer on the research question in this study. It is important to hear the opinion of the empowered individuals and to place this in a context (Creswell J. W., 2014).

Furthermore, qualitative research is expressed by an inductive style where theory is the outcome of research and involves the drawing of generalizable assumptions out of observations, as explained in section 3.2. The inductive qualitative research is a 'bottom up' approach of using empirical data to describe, explain or understand a phenomenon (Hennink et al., 2010). Theories or patterns will be established after which someone can distinguish relationships, their context and deeper thoughts and behaviors.

3.4 Research Strategy

In the research onion model, the fourth layer involves selecting a research strategy. Various research traditions offer several potential research strategies. Some of these strategies are primarily associated with quantitative research designs and are therefore not considered in this research. However, research strategies suitable for qualitative research include grounded theory, case study, ethnography, action research, narrative inquiry and more.

The 'built-up' nature of the study doesn't allow for the adoption of a single strategy but gives room for a mixture of various qualitative approaches in order to collect empirical data that will answer the research questions. Different strategies can be useful at different points in a study, depending on whether they are suitable for answering the research questions and objectives.

The research will be explorative in nature. Exploratory research is about discovering information about a topic that is not understood clearly by the researcher. This lends itself particularly well to new phenomena where you may not be prepared to launch into a piece of full-scale research but want to gain some insights that will inform your research design (Saunders, et al., 2018).

An exploratory study can offer preliminary answers to initial questions, but further in-depth research is required to provide more reliable and conclusive answers. The methods for conducting this exploratory research include:

- Reviewing relevant academic literature
- Conducting semi-structured interviews with industry experts
- Employing unstructured observations.
- Analyzing secondary qualitative data deriving from various data collection streams (see Section 3.6.1)
- Collecting and analyzing location intelligence data on demographics and pedestrian foot fall
- Visitor and partner survey as part of the case study
- Presentation and analysis of the Net Promoter Score (NPS) as research metric
- Counting the number of different building-uses and service offerings within the Lijnbaan

It is important to note that the research strategy is guided by the research questions, research objectives, as well as the extent of the existing knowledge, the amount of time and other resources that are available to the researcher.

As discussed, the thesis is laid out in three layers. The first one (sub-question 1) starts with building a theory on the reasons people visit the High Street. The data for the initial step are pre-collected by an external consultancy, and validated through semi-structured interviews conducted by the researcher. The research takes the form of ethnography, which is a research strategy that focuses on describing and interpreting the social world through first-hand field study.

The data was collected from 5 different qualitative streams. Citizen interviews, intercept surveys, Public Space & Public Life (PSPL) survey, and place desk research. Ethnography is very time-consuming, since it takes place over an extended period of time. Therefore, the author of the thesis will rely on the secondary data, but will do his own analysis and interpretation.

In the second layer (sub-question 2 & 3), the research aims to establish a theoretical framework on the transforming retail landscape and how this affects the demand of how retail properties are sought to be utilized by operators. Furthermore, the research uses social conflict theory as a foundation to develop a theoretical understanding on the relations amongst landowners and operators and how it affects urban vitality.

To gather data on both topics the researcher will deploy a strategy based on grounded theory (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). In grounded theory, theory is developed from data generated by a series of observations, discussions or interviews involving an inductive approach.

Lastly, the third layer (sub-question 4) will be covered by an in-depth case study. This phase of the research is aimed to discover whether and how commercial landowners

can positively influence the vitality of a High Street, through the adoption of CLR principles in the redevelopment of a single building.

This will be done through:

1. Analysis of foot fall data
2. Analysis of the Net Promoter Score (see Section [3.6.3.3](#))
3. Analysis of community feedback
4. Analysis of the actions taken by the commercial landowner.

Lastly, the way CLR manifested through the commercial landowner's actions will be assessed by the feedback received from the community through the survey.

The results will showcase in practice whether landowners have the power to positively influence a High Street through CLR, by being impactful on the metric of urban vitality.

3.5 Time

There are certain time-constraints in the completion of the research project. This causes the research to be a cross-sectional study. Cross-sectional is research that studies a particular topic at a specific time. Saunders et al. (2018) call it a 'snapshot'. They call it this way because the data collected from participants are from one period in time, whereas if a research design has the capacity to study change and development overtime, it is referred as longitudinal.

In longitudinal research a particular topic is studied over an extended period of time. This type of study is however impractical for a student researcher, given the time and resource constrains.

3.6 Data Collection

Due to the 'built-up' nature of this research, meaning that theory is established during the process of the study, it is necessary for data to be collected through various streams. The primary data collection method is through semi-structured and a survey. However, not all sub-questions of the research can be answered solely through interviews and surveys. Therefore, literature review and observational research will also significantly contribute to the process.

To simplify the research process, the study takes stage in three layers. Each of these layers contain one or more of the sub-questions necessary to answer the main question, and each of these layers and sub-questions have a different data-collection strategy.

It is important to note that due to the nature of the research, there will be possibly an 'knowledge overlap'. That means that the participants' expertise will probably be broader than the context of a single sub-question. The selection of interviewees will be

therefore strategic in their ability and knowledge provide information linked to more than one sub-question. Most of the participants that will be asked to be interviewed are familiar with the problem statement, and have expertise in the retail sector, the High Street as well as the commercial real estate industry.

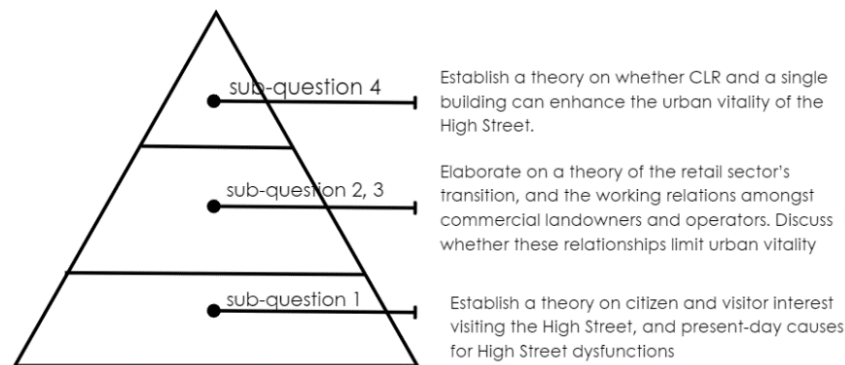


Figure 9. Visualization of the study's research layers

3.6.1 Layer One

The first layer of the researcher is constituted by the first sub-question, and the data that need to be analyzed derive from semi-structured interviews and secondary data analysis. The interviews and analysis of the secondary data will help the research build a theory on the reasons people visit a High Street location. The second segment of the initial sub-question delves into the contemporary challenges faced by today's High Streets. The data for this aspect are gathered through interviews with High Street experts, considering perspectives from both occupiers and landlords.

Why do people visit the High Street, and what are its present-day challenges?

To assess the suitability of secondary data for the study, the methods that were used to collect it must be understood. Without this knowledge, thorough evaluation is not possible and hence, it reduces the ability of the researcher to assess the quality of the data, but also the quality of the findings and conclusions (Saunders et al., 2019)

The data analyzed for sub-question one, derive from four streams of data in three different cities, London, Copenhagen and Rotterdam. The significance of collecting data in three different metropolitan areas lies behind the concept of Data Triangulation (Denzin, 1970), which refers to the use of different sources of data as distinct from using methods in the production of data. Mathison (1988) discussed that a good research practice obligates the researcher to use multiple methods, data sources in order to enhance validity of research findings.

The methods used are in-depth citizen interviews, Intercept surveys, a Public Space & Public Life (PSPL) Survey, Observation Research, Site Visiting and Place Desk Research.

The following table shows the methods, quantity and location of the data collection process.

London	Copenhagen	Rotterdam
4 Citizen Interviews	4 Citizen Interviews	9 Citizen interviews
66 Street Intercept Surveys	66 Street Intercept Surveys	68 Street Intercept Surveys
6 Site Visits	8 Site Visits	6 Site Visits
-	-	1 PSPL Survey
-	-	2 Observation Days

Table 1. Data collection streams by external research consultancy

3.6.1.1 Public Space & Public Life (PSPL) Survey

Public Space & Public Life (PSPL) Survey is the main method for research of the relationship between public space and public life, as well as usage. The goal is to identify and comprehend public activities and behavior patterns. The findings are then analyzed both quantitatively and qualitatively. This analysis supports the development and renovation of urban public spaces, ultimately leading to the creation of high-quality spaces for citizens to enjoy. (Zhao, 2012).

There is an interactive relationship between urban public space and citizens in which "people make space and space shapes people" (Zhao, 2012). Urban public space not only provides a necessary place for social life and various activities, but also becomes a "catalyst" and "generator" for activities, and plays a positive role in enriching citizens' life and improving the image of the city. Therefore, studying and evaluating the quality of urban public space is an important premise and way to enhance the quality of urban public space and improve the public life of citizens.

Unlike the Post-Occupancy Evaluation method (Preiser, 2022) which focuses on buildings and human use, the PSPL survey method (Public space & Public Life Survey) is an evaluation method for the quality of urban public space and the condition of citizens' public life. PSPL is a method to assess the quality of urban public space and the public life condition of citizens.

The object of PSPL is to study public space of various types and scales in the city, and the core of the study is the people and their activities in the space. The goal is to investigate the relationship between the spatial environment and public life through the study of citizens' activities in public space.

PSPL research can help planners and designers to better understand people's public life, how people use existing public space, and explore the relationship between public space and public life, so as to better guide the design of public space. The content of the PSPL research involves data and information about people's public life in public spaces, such as "where people move around", "how many people move around", "what

activities are carried out", the status of public life in public space, and the factors that influence people's use of public space (Zhao, 2012).

As Gehl and Svarre (2013) put it, "The quality of a city is not judged by how many people walk its streets, but by whether they invest time in the city, what they do there, what they see there, or where they sit and enjoy the urban environment with other people they may not know".

"People will only engage in selective activities if the venue and environmental conditions are right and if it is pleasurable to enter the venue and stay there for a long time. In addition, recreational activities are always welcome. A high-quality city needs to provide visitors with a wide range of recreational activities to participate in, urban life to enjoy and opportunities for self-enjoyment" (Gehl & Svarre, 2013)

Therefore, the PSPL survey conducted in Rotterdam will help this study grasp the social position of the High Street. By combining this with other data sources like citizen interviews and intercept surveys, the external consultancy gathered information on shifts in citizen behavior when they visit the High Street.

3.6.1.2 Intercept Survey

Intercept surveys provide a useful data gathering method for assessing locally salient topics (Flint et al., 2016). Intercept surveys are a tool that researchers can use to capture local data quickly and with minimal cost.

Researchers can turn local community events into research venues to collect data that improve programs, to explore specific client needs, and to capture perceptions about situations, products, or services (Dillman et al., 2014). The Intercept Survey in the case of this study, found place in High Streets of London, Copenhagen, and Rotterdam.

The results of the intercept surveys, together with the PSPL survey, the citizen interviews and the observation sessions will give this study reliable data to analyze in order to answer the first sub-question of the paper.

3.6.1.3 Observation Research

If a research question and objectives revolve around observing human behavior, an apparent approach to uncovering this information is to observe individuals in action.

Observation involves the systematic observation, recording, description, analysis and interpretation of people's behavior (Saunders et al., 2007). There are two types of observation, participant observation, which is specified for qualitative research, and structured observation, specified for quantitative. The first puts its emphasis on

discovering meanings that people attach to their actions, whereas the latter is more concerned with the frequency of those actions.

In the context of the research performed by the consultancy, the aim was to understand why people are visiting the High Street. The secondary data collected, relied predominately in structured observation, however some assumptions made derived from the participant approach.

3.6.1.3.1 Structured Observation

Structured observation is systematic and has a high level of predetermined structure. This method adopts a detached stance from the researcher, whose concern is quantifying behavior. Structured observation informs someone how often things happen rather than why they happen. A brief overview of what was observed in the structured observation research will be briefly presented in the table below.

Indicators
Stationary Count (Gender)
Stationary Count (Age)
Stationary Flow
Movement Count
Stationary Posture
Stationary Activity
Movement Counts

Table 2. Key points of observation research conducted by the external consultancy

3.6.1.3.2 Participant observation

Participant observation involves the researcher actively seeking full involvement in the lives and activities of subjects, hence, becoming a member of their group, organization, or community.

This approach allows researchers not only to observe events but also to experience and share them, as noted by Gill and Johnson (2002). It has been widely employed in various disciplines as a means to delve into the underlying dynamics of social settings and understand "what is going on."

Gill and Johnson (2002) propose a fourfold categorization, explaining the roles that a participant observer can have. These roles include:

- Complete Participant: In this role, the researcher fully engages in the activities without disclosing their identity. This approach prevents the researcher from influencing the behavior of the subjects being studied.

- Complete Observer: Here, the researcher remains an external observer without revealing their identity. This method also aims to minimize any potential influence on the subjects' behavior.
- Observer as Participant: In this role, the researcher discloses their purpose to those involved in the research setting while still maintaining an observational stance.
- Participant as Observer: This role involves the researcher actively participating in the setting but with an acknowledgment of their research purpose, sharing a dual role as both participant and observer.

The role that the external researchers took was that of a complete observer. The aim here was to understand how the space is used throughout the day in different weathers and in different hours. The following table depicts the selected observation spots in the three prementioned countries, the time and the day.

	Rotterdam
Location	Lijnbaan, Binnenwegplein
Day	Thursday, Friday, Saturday
Time	9:00 am to 9:00 pm (Thursdays) 10:30 pm (Friday) 11 am to 5 pm (Saturday)

Table 3. Location, Day and Time of Observation Research

3.6.2 Layer Two

The second layer of the research is constituted by sub-question 2 & 3. The data collection method for these questions are semi-structured interviews and reviewing relevant academic literature. The interview participants will be asked to put their input on 'why, in their opinion, people visit High Street locations'. This will help the researcher validate his conclusions derived from the first layer of the study.

In regards to sub-question 3, the data collected on the relations amongst landowners and operators will be reflected upon using social conflict theory as a foundation in order to assess their impact on urban vitality.

- How is the retail sector changing, and what will be required from its physical presence in response to the changing market demands?
- Do the current working relations of landowners and retail operators pose a threat to urban vitality?

3.6.2.1 Semi-structured interviews

Semi-structured interviews, also referred to as qualitative interviews, involve a participant that is answering the semi-structured interview questions. In such interviews, the researcher has a list of topics that have to be covered, and questions to be asked. The order of the questions can vary depending on the responses from the participant.

Semi-structured interviews are collecting data that are qualitatively analyzed. The data is used to either explore what is happening and gain new insights or describe what is happening and identify patterns (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2019)

Semi-structured interviews will serve a data collection method to investigate and collect data on sub-question two: "How is the retail sector changing, and how does it affect its physical presence?"

Semi-structured interviews are used to discover a shared understanding of a particular group. The sample of respondents should be fairly homogenous and share critical similarities relating to the research question (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). The particular group that shares critical similarities relating to the research question that will be interviewed are professionals whose expertise cover both the High Street environment, but also the real estate domain.

Due to the knowledge overlap that the respondents might bring in it is important to note that the answers of the interviewees will be contextualized to more than one sub-question.

Contact person	Industry	Function	Reason of contact
P1	Retail, Architecture, Place-making	Managing Director, High Street Task Force board member	Multi-year experience in the retail sector. Placemaking strategist, Author, and board of London's High Street task force
P2	Real Estate Investment Management	Chief Innovation & Strategy Officer	Multi-year experience within retail and retail real estate.
P3	Real Estate Investment Management	Head of Innovation	Multi-year experience in commercial real estate
P4	Real Estate Investment Management	Head of Research & Strategy	Multi-year experience in the retail sector, leasing procedures, negotiations and retail real estate.
P5	Retail Entrepreneur	Managing Director	Successful retail entrepreneur, director of innovative retail & experience concept.
P6	Retail Investment Management	Co-Founder, Chair at High Street Task Force	Multi-year experience in retail real estate sector. Chair at UK's High Street Task Force

Table 4. List of interviewees

3.6.2.2 Desk research

In the context of the second and third sub-question an in-depth desk research will also be conducted and used in the development of the study. Desk research is a data collection method that relies on books and literature review, in order to gather additional information about the topics under study. Reviewing existing literature and relevant books, serve the research as a way to underpin empirical data that were found by the semi- and unstructured interviews.

A well-documented process of identifying potential sources of publications and the specification of inclusionary and exclusionary criteria is needed in order to guarantee a valid and reliable research (Sowers et al., 2010). Therefore, the literature review is not limited to academic literature, but will also include reports, and publications with content relevant to the topic of interest. In order to identify suitable sources for this research, three electronic databases and are used:

- Web of science (to identify academic publications)
- Google Scholar (to identify academic publications)
- Google search (to identify reports and publications within the domain of interest)

Furthermore, to justify an in-depth desk research, the 'snowballing' method will be used in which relevant and intriguing citations on academic literature will be further explored, leading to a chain-effect in reviewing literature.

3.6.3 Layer Three – The OX Case Study

The third and final layer consist of the final sub-question. At this stage, the researcher will use the building located in Lijnbaan 150, Rotterdam, as his field lab. The building in Lijnbaan 150, now on referred to as OX, is being redeveloped with CLR principles in place, and operated as a multi-purpose setting, a space for community events, retail, food & beverage. The research will take the form of an in-depth, explorative case study, and together with the theory developed over the research process the final objective of the research is aimed to be met. Through the case-study the last sub-question will be answered.

Can CLR applied during a single building redevelopment influence the vitality of the High Street?

Case studies serve as a research method applicable across various domains, shedding light on individual, group, organizational, social, political, and related phenomena. Its distinctiveness lies in addressing the complexities of social phenomena. Essentially, this method allows researchers to capture the comprehensive and meaningful aspects of actual events (Yin, 2009).

All research methods serve the purposes of exploration, description, and explanation. Hence, there are exploratory, descriptive, and explanatory case studies. A case study constitutes an empirical investigation delving deeply into a contemporary phenomenon within its authentic setting, particularly when distinguishing between the phenomenon and its context isn't straightforward (Yin, 2009).

The nature of a case study engages with situations where the variables of interest outnumber available data points. Consequently, it relies on multiple sources of evidence, converging data in a triangulated manner. Moreover, it benefits from established theoretical propositions to guide data collection and analysis (Yin, 2009).

In simpler terms, the case study method is employed when an in-depth comprehension of a real-life phenomenon is needed, considering its contextual factors especially relevant to the specific phenomenon under study (Yin & Davis, 2007).

When conducting a case study, a crucial differentiation lies in the choice between single-case and multiple-case designs. This decision needs to be made before any data collection commences to determine whether one case or several cases will be employed to tackle the research inquiries. Utilizing a single-case study design is suitable under various conditions, and below are five rationales for its appropriateness.

One rationale for a single case is when it represents the critical case in testing a well-formulated theory. The theory has specified a clear set of propositions as well as the circumstances within which the propositions are believed to be true. A single case, meeting all the conditions for testing the theory, can confirm, challenge, or extend the theory. The single case can then be used to determine whether a theory's propositions are correct or whether some alternative set of explanations might be more relevant (Yin, 2009)

The second rationale for a single case is where the case represents an extreme case or a unique case, worth documenting and analyzing. A third reason for choosing a single case is centered on the representative or typical instance (Yin, 2009). In this scenario, the objective is to capture the circumstances and conditions of an everyday or commonplace situation. The case study might exemplify a standard project among various projects, and the knowledge gained from these cases is presumed to shed light on the experiences of the average person or institution.

A fourth rationale for a single-case study is the revelatory case. This situation exists when an investigator has an opportunity to observe and analyze a phenomenon previously inaccessible to social science inquiry (Yin, 2009). Lastly, the fifth reason for undertaking a single-case study is the longitudinal approach, in which a study is examining the same single case at two or more distinct time points. Due to the time constraints, a longitudinal approach would not be feasible in the case of this study.

The selected case study to answer sub-question 4, is considered to be a unique case worth document and analyzing in order to underpin and expand relevant theory developed during the research process. As described, the unique case is a multi-

purpose setting in which the landowner, through innovation, participates also as the operator in order to create value for public and private stakeholders.

3.6.3.1 Case Introduction

The story begins on the 15th of October 1953, Rotterdam, when the home furnishing company De Klerk opened their doors in their newly constructed building at the corner connecting the Binnenwegplein square and the Lijnbaan. In 1986, the company De Klerk decided to close their Rotterdam branch, and in 1987 the Donner bookstore decided to establish itself there.



Figure 10. Lijnbaan 150, Rotterdam. De Klerk Building 1956 (Source: wederopbouwrotterdam.nl)

Bookstore Donner was officially opened on October 31, 1988, and after a renovation in 2000 became the largest bookstore in the Netherlands. By then, the DeKlerk building was better known as the Donner building.

In 2014, the Donner bookstore moved to the former Rotterdamsche Bank, leaving the historic building vacant. The former De Klerk/Donner building, by now a listed municipal monument, has since been used by various clothing brands that have struggled and failed to sustain themselves.

In 2016 the building was bought by a commercial landowner, who then faced depreciation of the property due to the lack of occupier demand. As the commercial landowner is heavily leveraged in High Street properties of significant size across Europe, Lijnbaan 150 was thought to be the perfect testing ground to come up with an innovative strategy in which citizen and entrepreneurs' needs are explored, identified, and then facilitated in the building through continuous research, feedback and active management.

As presented in the previous theoretical chapters, the argument is that if you succeed in attracting people into a building or a certain area, and then sustain and re-attract them through the offering of diverse services and experiences, urban vitality, and eventually property yields will increase.

What is aimed to be achieved is to create a sociocultural connection with the city and residents/visitors by lowering the barriers for local entrepreneurs and by emphasizing on Rotterdam's community needs. With this tactic, the building is aimed to sustainably and organically regain its value.

3.6.3.2 Objectives of the Case Study

The objective of the case study is to test the hypothesis that by adopting CLR principles, a commercial landowner can enhance urban vitality of the Lijnbaan with a single building redevelopment. CLR manifests through the adoption and application of certain initiatives that will lead to beneficial outcomes for all major stakeholders of the paper.

The retrieving of information will begin with three semi-structured interviews involving the initiators of the project. The questioning of the three interviewees will be based on the principles of Sinek's Golden Circle (2009), illustrated in Figure 11.

Following the Golden Circle will allow the research to gain an in-depth understanding on the following essential information. The interviews will start by questioning the 'why' or the purpose of the project's initiation. What was the motivation for initiating the concept? Which issues are aimed to be addressed and solved through the project's realization?

Questioning the 'how' and the 'what' aims to uncover the actions or indicators taken in consideration by the initiating organization in order to address those issues and fulfill their purpose. These are ranging from success factors, leasing tactics, space provision and more.

The data received from these interviews will serve us an understructure to the case study. Documentation of the interview guides will be made available in the Appendix of the paper.

The case study has three units of analysis to assess the effectiveness of CLR in revitalization efforts of the High Street. The first one is **partner satisfaction**, where partner is someone selling a service, product or activity within the building. The second is **visitor satisfaction**. Both will be tracked by feedback analysis received through conducted survey, observation of visitor engagement, and NPS analysis (see section [3.6.3.3](#)).

The third is **urban vitality**, which as Liu et al. (2022) discussed is constituted by three measurements. Pedestrian flow, diversity of uses, and buildings developed. As this study researches the redevelopment of a single building (n=1), the third indicator will not be taken further in consideration.

Each of these units of analysis have a different set of questions. Therefore, the data for these three units of analysis will be gathered through various methods.

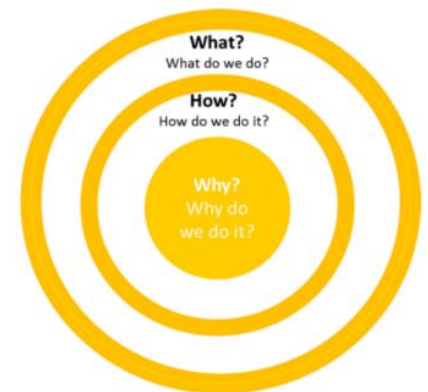


Figure 11. The Golden Circle (Simon Sinek, 2009)

Unit of analysis	Data collection Method
Partner satisfaction	Feedback analysis (survey)
Visitor satisfaction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feedback & NPS analysis (survey) • Unstructured observations

Table 5. Methods to analyze CLR effectiveness

The study will start having as participants visitors and partners that offer products and services on-site. The data collection method for partner and visitor satisfaction will be through surveying, and unstructured observations. What is the community feedback, how likely is the community to positively promote the project through word of mouth (NPS), and how do people react and engage with the space when visiting?

The aim for this step is to receive qualitative data that can be contextualized on whether the particular setting is bringing value to the community. Through this procedure it will become evident whether CLR manifested in ways that benefited the discussed stakeholders.

Lastly, urban vitality will be measured and analyzed. In order to measure urban vitality, two indicators are of particular importance.

1. Pedestrian flows
2. Diversity of uses

Indicator	Measurement Tool	Method
Pedestrian Flow	Location Intelligence, NPS analysis	Comparison of pedestrian flow before, and after the project's activation. Future footfall prediction using the NPS method
Diversity of uses	Counting number of diverse services and building uses in the Lijnbaan, Rotterdam	Comparison of number of different use opportunities before, and after the building's activation

Table 6. Indicators/Methods to measure urban vitality

3.6.3.3 Net Promoter Score

The Net Promote Score is introduced in the research as a survey method and a way to further assess the project's impact on visitor satisfaction and pedestrian footfall. Frederick Reichheld (2003) introduced the NPS concept as a straightforward survey metric that allows an organization to track its relationship with the end-user, and has been used by extremely prominent companies (Creamer, 2006; Keiningham et al., 2007)

The survey method asks a single question, “On a zero to ten scale, how likely is it that you would recommend (organization X) to a friend, colleague or family member”. The assumption of NPS is that people who engaged with your service, are likely to discuss it with others. Anyone rating 0 to 6 is labeled a “detractor”, someone who will talk about the provided service negatively. Anyone rated 6 to 8 is considered a “passive”, and 8 to 10 is considered a “promoter”, someone that discuss positively about the service.

The Net Promoter Score (NPS), is the percent of “promoters” minus the percent of “detractors”. According to Reichheld (2003) this single number has a very strong relationship with the organization’s financial performance, and hence, the commercial success of the landowner. Earning positive word of mouth communication from customers can be a powerful force especially in today’s “connected customer” contexts (Kirby & Marsden, 2005)

In interest to this study, the NPS method will be used to assess the following:

1. OX’s relationship with the community of visitors (visitor satisfaction).
2. OX’s impact on future footfall, under the assumption that a high NPS will lead to more visitors.

3.7 Data Analysis

In the core of the research onion, lies the selection of techniques and procedures to analyze the data. The data analysis is aimed at investigating whether the theoretical framework holds true, positioning the landowner as an active stakeholder on revitalization efforts, or whether it is not valid. The process of data analysis is conducted according to the data analysis spiral of Creswell and Poth (2018).

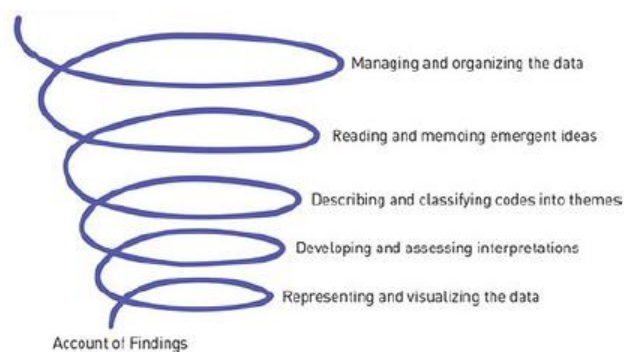


Figure 12. Data analysis spiral; Source (Creswell & Poth, 2018)

Managing and organizing the data: Data management, the first loop in the spiral, begins the process (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The data, with exception data from the literature review, are collected in the form of video- and audio-recordings. These files will be stored offline in hardware, as well as, on the researcher’s personal laptop. Each set of data will be stored in different files, under proper titles. The audio-recordings will

be deleted after the transcript process. The documents used for the literature review will be stored in a similar way.

Reading and memoing emergent ideas: Following the organization of the data, researchers continue analysis by getting a sense of the whole database (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Agar (1980) suggests that researchers should read the transcript several times, immerse themselves in the details, trying to get a sense of the interview as a whole, before breaking it into parts. Data deriving from text will be contextualized through memos, notes and codes by the use of software.

Describing and classifying codes into themes: The next step consists of moving from the reading and memoing to describing, classifying, and interpreting the data (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In the software (Atlas.ti), codes and categories will be formed. Detailed descriptions, codes and themes will be developed, which aim to provide an interpretation of the view of the researcher. Coding plays a pivotal role in qualitative research, encompassing the interpretation of text derived from interviews, observations, and documents. In the coding phase, text or visual data is divided in categories of information, seeking evidence for the code, from different databases that are used in the study, and then assigning a label to the code. The coding approach that will be employed is lean coding. Lean coding begins with 5 to 6 categories and then expands as review and re-review of the database continues.

Developing and assessing interpretations: Interpretation involves making sense of the data, the "lessons learned," as described by Lincoln and Guba (1985). It is a process that begins with the development of the codes, the formation of themes from the codes, and then the organization of themes into larger units of abstraction to make sense of the data (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Here, the researcher will critically reflect upon descriptions, classifications, and interpretations of the data.

Representing and visualizing the data: In the final phase of the spiral, researchers represent the data, a packaging of what was found in text, tabular, or figure form (Creswell & Poth, 2018). During this phase, the study will explore and present whether and how commercial landowners can contribute to a positive vitality shift. This will involve constructing a cohesive narrative and establishing a conclusive theoretical framework built upon the subsequent stages of data analysis.

3.8 Validity and Reliability

Researchers need to convey the steps they will take in their studies to check for the accuracy and credibility of their findings. It is important to note that validity and reliability are different in regard to the method selected by the researcher, qualitative or quantitative (Creswell J. W., 2014).

In regard to this study, qualitative validity means that the researcher checks for the accuracy of the findings by employing certain procedures, whereas qualitative

reliability indicates that the researcher's approach is consistent across different researchers and among different projects (Gibbs, 2007).

3.8.1 Qualitative Validity

Cresswell and Poth (2018) elaborate on validity in qualitative research, emphasizing its focus on ensuring the accuracy of findings as described by the researcher, participants, and readers. Internal validity relate to how well empirical data accurately represents a particular reality. In qualitative research, which is reliant on narrative data, maintaining internal validity involves demonstrating that the data collection was conducted in a manner ensuring the accurate identification and description of the subject under study (Franklin et al., 2010).

Several steps are taken to ensure internal validity. After transcribing the interviews, the technique of 'participant validation' is applied (Saunders et al., 2016). This involves sending the interview transcript to the participant, asking for their validation of the interpretations, thereby enhancing internal validity. Another method employed for internal validity is 'triangulation,' which involves combining different methods and sources to strengthen the credibility of findings. In this research, all three presented layers incorporate triangulation.

The first layer utilizes secondary data analysis, and participant responses from the interviews. The second layer includes a relevant literature review, semi-structured interviews. Finally, the third layer incorporates diverse data collection methods, such as surveys, feedback analysis, observations, participant observations, and locational data analysis such as pedestrian footfall.

External validity, also known as 'transferability,' is concerned with the extent to which findings can be applied to a broader context (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Relevant to this study is Ecological Validity, defined by Schmuckler (2001) as the ability to generalize behavior observed in a lab setting to natural behavior in the real world. In other words, ecological validity explores the relationship between real-world phenomena and the investigation of these phenomena in experimental contexts.

Ecological validity is relevant to this research, as the paper's findings aim to transcend locational barriers. High Streets worldwide share a common issue, and the case study aims to determine if a specific set of actions and processes can address the problem. Although measuring ecological validity is complex, the researcher's 'laboratory' being a real-world setting supports its postulation.

3.8.2 Qualitative Reliability

Reliability, or dependability in qualitative research, is essential for the replicability and consistency of the study and is considered a prerequisite for validity (Franklin et al.,

2010). Attaining a specific level of reliability requires accuracy and consistency in the research process. However, the use of diverse data collection methods in this paper introduces challenges to reliability. For instance, in semi-structured interviews, the flexibility may lead to biases from both the researcher and the respondent. Subject bias may occur when respondents withhold information during interviews to avoid potential harm to their surroundings. Additionally, observer bias refers to the possibility of the researcher analyzing interview data differently from others (Franklin et al., 2010).

Cross-checking, as recommended by Franklin et al. (2010), was not feasible due to the academic nature of the paper. Typically, qualitative researchers involve multiple team members and research participants to confirm their field observations, interpretations, and transcriptions. However, working independently and facing time limitations, the researcher couldn't engage in cross-checking for this study.

However, to still be able to assure accuracy and consistency, transparency and correct documentation are important. This enables other researchers to conduct the same research similarly, producing closely related outcomes. Therefore, interview-guides, transcripts, the coding document, survey questions and data sets are used to include standardization in the data collection process, and will be provided by the researcher in his final submission to the educational institution.

The pre-described three layers of the study give the researcher guidelines on how to analyze the data in a deductive way, enabling triangulation and improving reliability. In the data analysis phase, a coding scheme is employed to ensure consistency in interpreting the interviews, and the coding scheme is provided for reference.

It is important to note that qualitative research approaches can produce results influenced by the researcher's abilities and experiences (Johannesson & Perjons, 2014). As a result, the researcher may introduce a degree of subjectivity into the study.

4. Results

This chapter presents the findings derived from the data collection process and the secondary data analysis. The results will be presented accordingly to the three layers of the study. Section 4.1 presents the connection that humans have with High Streets and the contemporary issues that make High Streets socially dysfunctional. The data of the first layer were obtained by semi-structured interviews and are further supported by the analysis of secondary data as described in section 3.6.1.

Section 4.2 consist of the second layer and data obtained through literature review and semi-structured interviews, regarding the future direction of the retail industry, the utilization of retail real estate and how the working relationship amongst occupiers and landowners affect urban vitality.

Section 4.3 presents the data derived from the in-depth case study, which tested in practice whether CLR principles applied by a commercial landowner during a single building redevelopment can actually enhance the vitality of the High Street. The last layer will also explore the role of the commercial landowner as presented in the conceptual framework, 'the High Street battery', depicted in section 2.10.

4.1 Layer One - Results

In the first layer of the study, the connections of humans with High Streets, and current dysfunctions that may obstruct these relations are explored. The first key theme that emerged from the participants' responses is the notion of High Streets as a space for community and social interaction. Through interviews and secondary data analysis it becomes evident that those who frequent High Streets find significant social fulfillment, actively participating in the rich social components these areas should offer.

Participant 1: *"High Streets are about community, about gathering. With the growth of online shopping people may be unmotivated to go to physical shops to shop. But what I think stops people from not going is the community piece. Someone can buy something much more conveniently and possibly cheaper online. But the reason they go to the shop is because of the collisions they will have, the serendipity, the kind of impromptu moments it will create for them in terms of gathering, in terms of community and interaction with people."*

Participant 2: *"There are a few needs that should be catered for in the High Street. Of course, it's a place where people come together, there is a need to connect. I think that always in human behavior, we are signaling right towards each other. That's also what we are there for to do in the High Street, to see and to be seen. There is also a more convenience angle to it, but that's becoming less and less. There is also something around being inspired, learning, seeing new things, and being entertained as well. There is just the human need to want to see new things and being inspired."*

Participant 4: *"I think there are two reasons people visit the High Street. It's definitely the social components, people really like people, so we always like to meet others, and we are looking for places that are busy and vibrant. We do that thousands of years, so that's something really in our DNA. But it is also about the convenience of the known, and the excitement of the unknown. You know what to expect there, you know where to park your car, your bike, you know how to walk the streets. But you are also getting excited because you are always supposed to find something new. Like a treasure hunt, you find new experiences, and that's something people like to do. You may not specifically look for something, and then you find something beautiful and you want to tell others about it. Those experiences are what makes it nice to visit the High Streets."*

Participant 5: *"Loneliness, one person households, Covid, increasing need for human interaction with the growth of social and digital media. All these factors drive the future*

of High Streets far beyond channels of distribution or track channels of transaction. They are places for community, and therefore, we need to kick the addiction of retail”

The participants highlight various needs that High Streets cater to, beyond mere transactional convenience. These needs include the desire for connection, the human inclination to signal and be seen, the importance of inspiration and learning, and the entertainment factor. High Streets are essential places for community, particularly in response to challenges such as loneliness and single-person households. The reference to kicking the "addiction of retail" suggests a shift in perspective towards recognizing High Streets primarily as community spaces rather than just commercial hubs. While the High Streets of the present may not replicate the local character of the past, they continue to serve as urban channels for interaction, providing people with a means to experience a sense of community.

To further support the interview results and the argument that High Streets serve as an essential social component of urban life, the secondary data analysis is presented below. Figure 13 depicts the number of High Street locations (n=12) and number of intercept surveys (n=200) conducted by the external research consultancy.

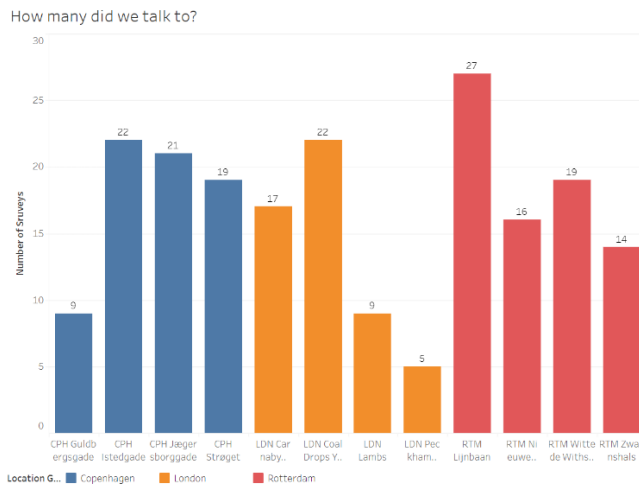


Figure 13. Total number and High Street locations of the conducted Intercept Surveys (Source: Redevco Netherlands)

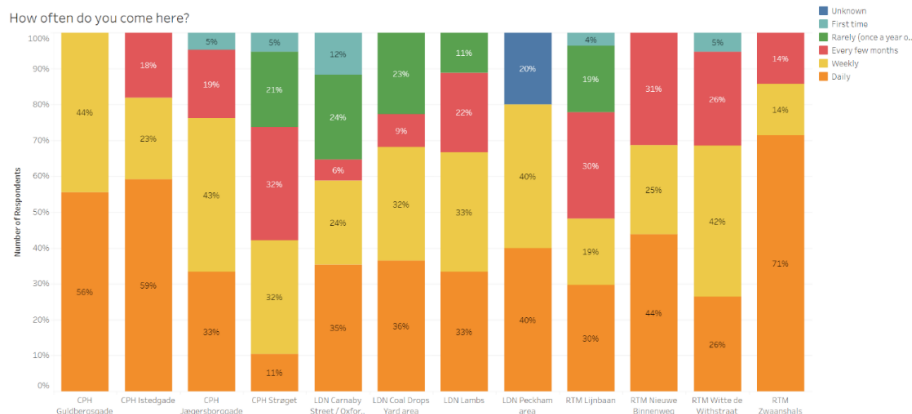
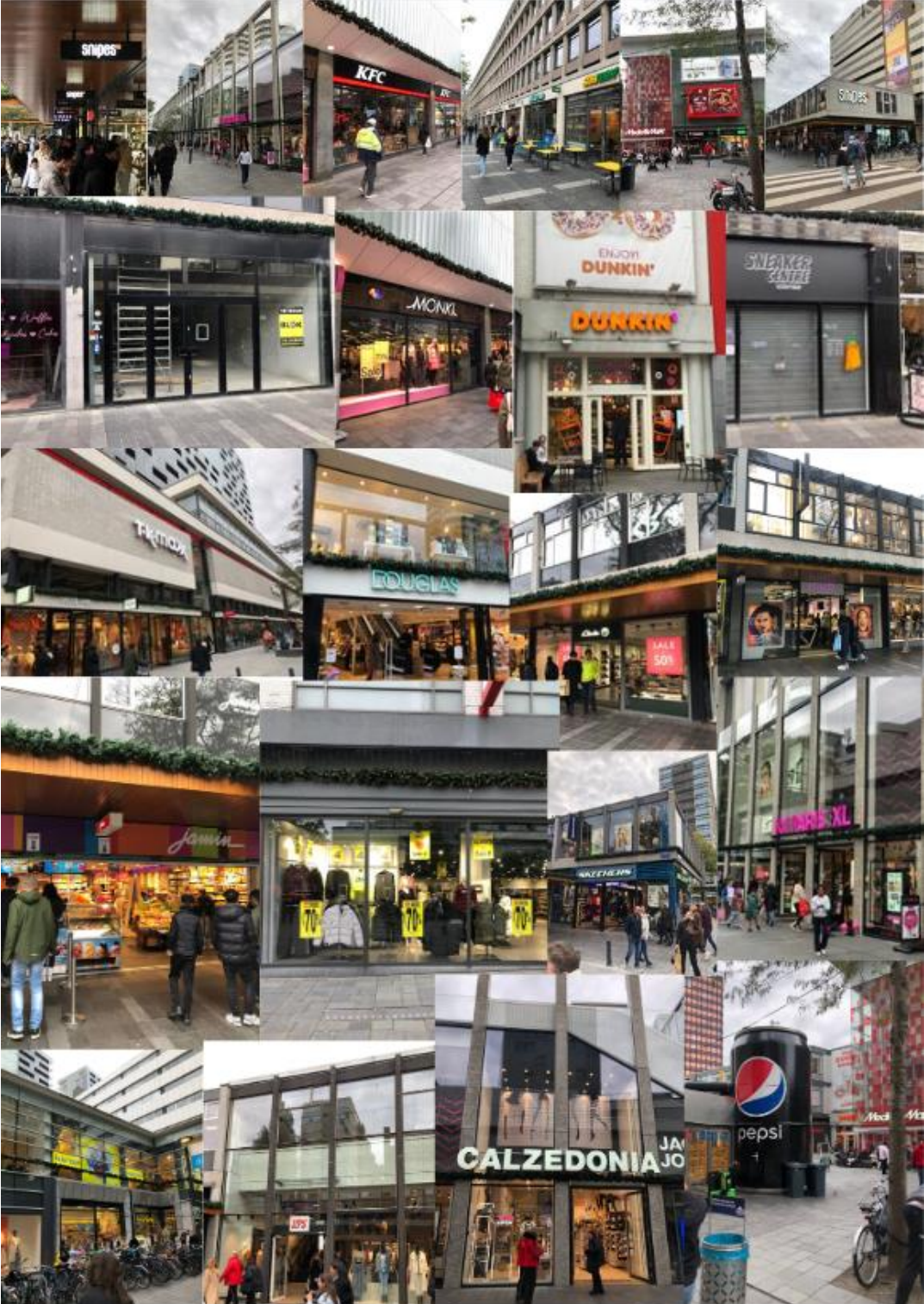


Figure 14. Percentage of responses to the question 'How often do you come here?' (Source: Redevco Netherlands)

As illustrated in Figure 14, the majority of respondents visit High Streets on a daily or weekly basis. This data is presented to emphasize the significance of High Streets as hubs for interaction and daily commutes, challenging the perception of these spaces as overly commercialized outdoor shopping malls, as portrayed in Graphic 4.



Graphic 4. Lijnbaan, Rotterdam. (Source: Author)

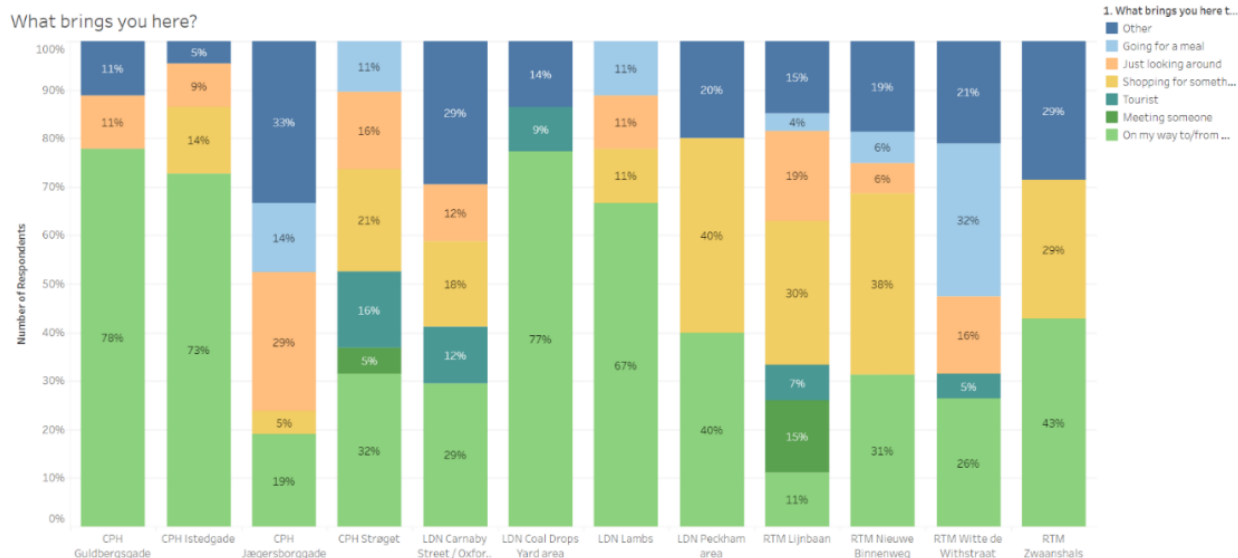


Figure 15. Responses on the question 'What brings you here' (Source: Redevco Netherlands)

As Figure 15 illustrates, the motivations behind individuals visiting a High Street varies. A significant proportion of respondents either fall into the category of passersby or are driven by the intention to 'Shop for something specific.' However, the responses categorized as 'Just looking around' and 'Other' constitute a segment of particular interest to this study. Unfortunately, further information on the response 'Other' was not given by the research consultancy and therefore, it was not possible to elaborate in-depth on that response.

Nevertheless, it is crucial to highlight that the combined responses of 'Just looking around' and 'Other' encompass a significant portion, ranging from 10% to 60% of the responses. This observation contributes to the argument that individuals visiting the High Street are not solely motivated by transactions but seek a space for presence and experiential engagement.

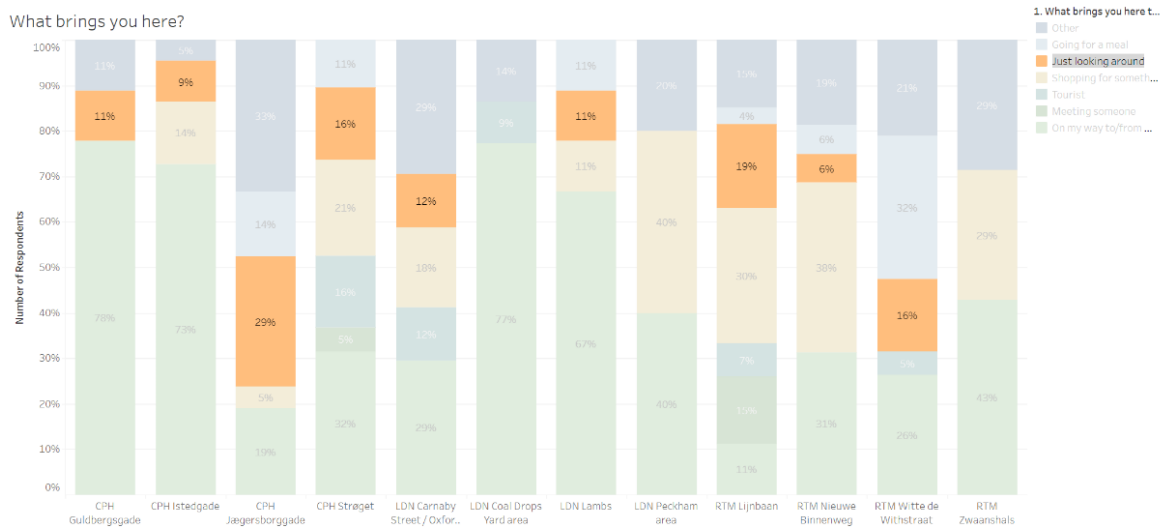


Figure 16. Percentage of participants that answered 'Just looking around'

The following data provided is extracted from the PSPL survey conducted by the research consultancy, encompassing observation sessions (see Figure 20 & 21). This information contributes to the assertion that the Lijnbaan serves as a gathering spot for young adults, aligning with the viewpoint expressed by Participant 4 in the interviews.

P4: *“When you look at people visiting high streets, are also a lot of young girls and boys, they don't have much money. They go there from a social perspective, spend all the day in in fitting rooms and trying things out, and then they only spend the money on one cup of coffee and they had a lovely day. So, it it's also inclusive for people without money. It's a meeting place. But in the end, it can be boring and you can easily imagine that something new should be added”*

As shown in Figure 20, the largest age group, comprising 51%, falls within the broad range of 25-64. However, due to the breadth of this range and the lack of specific insights, it is disregarded for the analysis. Notably, the second most prominent age group, ranging from 15-24, is of particular interest and aligns with the viewpoint expressed by Participant 4. Consequently, the Lijnbaan appears to function as a meeting place and a space of significance for teenagers and young adults, who may lack the spending capacity to consider the Lijnbaan a fit-for-purpose destination.

Movement Count - Age

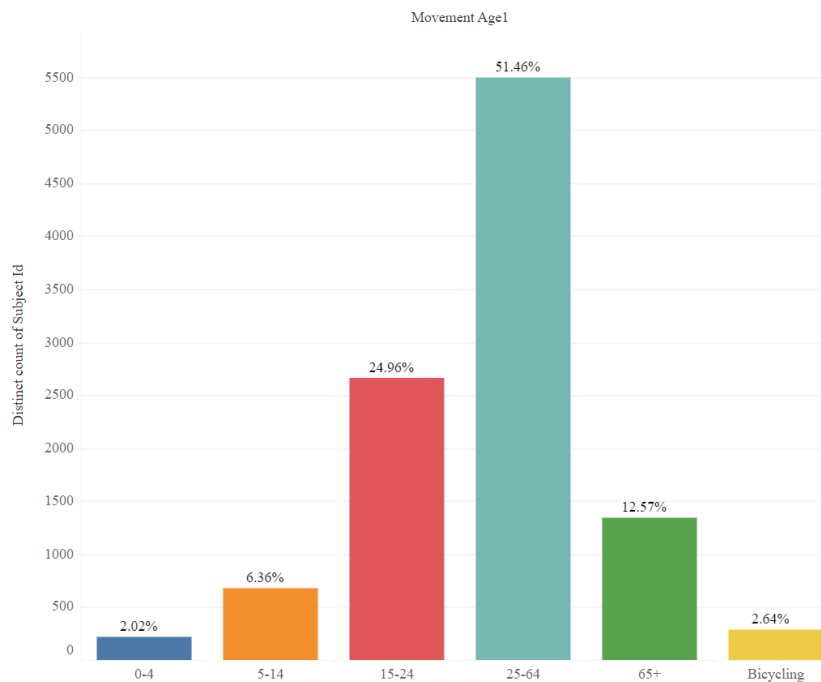


Figure 20. Movement count by Age in Lijnbaan, Rotterdam

Finally, an activity map of individuals in the Lijnbaan square (Binnenwegplein) is presented (see Figure 21). The data map illustrates that the Rotterdam High Street serves as a space for interaction and presence. Only a small portion of the visitors, accounting for 12%, is actively engaged in shopping activities in the Binnenwegplein.

This trend could be attributed to the availability of public seating areas at Binnenwegplein, turning the space into a resting spot during shopping excursions. Nevertheless, the noteworthy data point is that 43% of individuals are engaged in conversations, while 16% are simply observing others. This highlights the strong social aspect of the High Street in people's lives, emphasizing its role beyond a mere shopping destination.

Activity Map



Activity Stationary

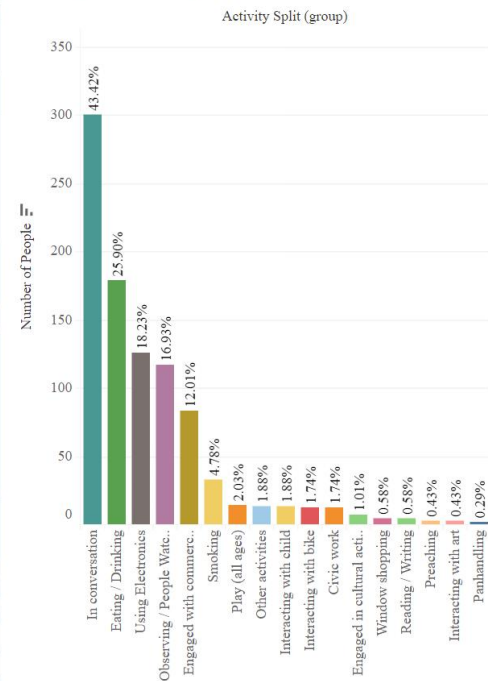


Figure 21. Activity map. Lijnbaan, Rotterdam

Dysfunctions of the present-day High Street

The second facet of the first sub-question addresses the current challenges impeding urban vitality at High Street locations. To gather insights into these obstacles, High Street experts were interviewed, with a focus on perspectives from both occupiers and landlords. From the interviews, a prominent challenge to urban vitality emerged, specifically the fragmented ownership of commercial real estate that constitutes the High Street.

P4: "When you have every asset has a different owner, then all owners go for their best profit only for them, and then it's not by definition the best for the High Street. So, for the High Street, you would like to have this mix and you would like a bit more food and beverage or other functions to make it a vibrant place, not only during opening hours but also after opening hours. But for the landowner, he just wants the highest rent for his own building and that's definitely not the best solution for that part of the city"

P1: "One of the things that we must always have a caveat in speaking about High Streets is the fractured ownership, and the fractured ownership makes everything very, very challenging. And that is particularly the case in what I believe is the nub of the issue, and is the key to solutions."

P6: "...and even if you even if you wanted to buy a High Street to make a massive change happen, you could spend 10 years just finding each landlord and trying to negotiate with them individually... Fragmented ownership is a huge problem, so, but it's not just fragmented ownership. In the UK, we've got a massive problem of even being able to identify who the owners are. You know, everybody is supposed to be registered by the Land Registry, but the information is fragmented, at best."

While **fragmented ownership** stands out as a key challenge to urban vitality, it's crucial to acknowledge that it's not the sole issue. **Occupancy costs**, encompassing not only monthly rent, but also the broader expense structure of the contemporary retail model, proved to be a significant factor affecting the High Street and who has the financial capacity to be located there.

P6: "If there's a vacant shop you go, you know you find the owner. You say I like to rent this place and there you go. Here's a rental agreement, it's probably 10 pages and you sign it; you get on with it. Happy days. You do that in the UK. It's 120 pages and that's the least. Then you've got the license for alteration to paint the shop, then there's the guarantee, you probably need a legal. I mean, you're probably looking at like, that, thick pages and you'll probably need a lawyer, and the lawyer is 10 Grand, 10 grand before you even did anything. And that's a massive impediment for SMEs and smaller entrepreneurs."

P4: "If we are able to have also these smaller entrepreneurs, local entrepreneurs, local heroes and these very special shops in a shopping center, in a shopping street that will be perfect. And for them, most of the time it's much too expensive to be on that location and they need to be flexible because they have to try out. Is it working or not? So, if we can find a way to add these local heroes to these vibrant places, that would really make it very attractive for the people who come there. So, for those smaller entrepreneurs, we need to find new solutions."

P2: "What is different in retail too, for instance offices or parts of real estate, is that the retail spaces are usually offered like a shell, so nothing is in there. So as a tenant, you need to invest and you need to put a fit out in which means that the really high barrier to entry because the tenant needs to go for long list, they need to be invested. So, you really need to be like an established business to be able to enter this market."

However, the research brought to light more significant issues related to High Streets, particularly originating from the private sector.

P2: "So, we (commercial landowners) have a clear issue in the House Street where there has been a trend that we've tried to optimize the earning capacity of the High Street. So, the buildings that are there are clearly been used to drive rental growth. So,

this means that always the retailer that was able to create the highest turnover would get a store, and the stores have grown bigger and bigger and bigger. But in essence, when online started the ability to create turnover got hampered. So, then we got back into a vicious circle. A negative trend. Basically, when the earnings capacity reduced, we saw the big rental houses struggled and vacancy occurring, but the rent levels are still so high that the local entrepreneurs can never afford this."

The interview with Participant 2 (P2) revealed a consensus that today's High Street is perceived not as a community space but rather as an economic instrument for investors. The following interview passage further supports this perspective.

P1: *"Fundamentally everything is driven by the funds (commercial landowners), is driven by investors. The problem with we have at the moment and it's an existential problem, and that is funds rely on two things. They rely on revenue, rent, and they rely on valuation. Valuation is dependent on what they call covenant. So, a covenant of a shop or a physical space increase as the brand presence increases. If you have Zara, Zara has a very big covenant. If you have a big Albert Heijn, it's got very big covenant. It's a big brand in other words the covenant is reflective of the risk. the covenant impacts the valuation because the fund sees it as a low-risk tenant."*

When a location is viewed primarily as an economic tool for investors rather than a space for people, the decision-making process becomes financially oriented and risk management strategies become institutionalized rather than place-making strategies. This is precisely what has transpired with today's High Streets, resulting in a monofunctional, over-commercialized landscape that lacks vitality.

Nevertheless, interviewees offered solutions that could bring about a transformation in this flawed High Street business model. While not part of the initial research scope, the author deemed it essential to incorporate their insights into this study. In particular, two solutions were proposed that could be implemented by the private sector without requiring government intervention.

P1: *"The solution is the structure of the business case. You shouldn't structure your business case whereby your covenant is coming from your ground level. Reduce the covenant from your ground level, and indeed reduce the amount of revenue you're targeting from your ground level, which gives you freedom as a developer, as a curator, as a as an asset manager, gives you freedom to do very, very interesting things on the ground level. Because you're not going after the dollar. You're making a massively beautiful, vibrant community space and if you do that, the valuation above ground will increase. Your rent it easier, you'll get better revenue and create a truly authentic place. If you go down the cookie cutter route where every shop is the same as shop as the same as the next high street. People won't want to live there, people don't want to work there, and you won't rent the upper levels. That's fundamentally the dynamic, that is fundamentally the solution.*

Now that solution opens up a whole load of questions, what is the ground level? How do we get the mix right? What can we capture the data of our audience to make sure

we have relevant offers? How much space is supportable? What is the projected audience in the future? So how do you imbue the master plan with flexibility to in order to change it as time goes on? Because a lot of the problems of high street is that they're not flexible, they can't change so they lose relevance."

The second solution, named "**Space as a Service (SpaaS)**" was introduced as a less radical approach that could be facilitated by commercial landowners. In the current retail model, as briefly outlined by Participant 2, only the 'shell' of the property is made available for rent. This entails no installations, no HVAC systems, and no insulation. Beyond the sustainability concerns associated with this model, where each tenant brings their own fit-out and discards it upon moving out, substantial costs are incurred, as highlighted by the data gathered from interviews. The proposed alternative involves the landowner offering space as a service by handling the fit-out of the property themselves, and making the space available under more flexible and accessible leases. This also allows the landowner to charge a higher rent, as the occupier saves significant costs in the initial procedures.

P2: *"Space as a service. So basically, we let the space but with services, all with the idea to help them to concentrate on their own business. So usually as a tenant, if you need to go and you want to rent a space, you also need to have the know how to create a space. You need to know how to fit it out. You need to know well the construction activity. All of those kinds of things, but with the space, the way that we are offering, we are helping the entrepreneurs to just to be busy with the things that they want to be busy with, and not all of those other things that are just, actually quite annoying and difficult."*

P2: *"We want to offer those tenants a space that is fitted out so we make sure that all of the basic infrastructure is there. That means that they will need to pay a higher rent than if they would not have to, but because we are offering them flexibility. Basically, if they want to leave, they can leave. Uh, so we don't offer the long contracts that otherwise you would do so short-term contracts flexibility and a space that is ready fitted out that a tenant can just use. So, it means that they can rent smaller square meters they don't need to take a big space and this can go with a small investment. So actually, if you want to promote your product, you can rent a couple of square meters for a week or two, or maybe for only a couple of days, and then you can try and test and see if you can able to connect with your community. So, in that sense, it's very flexible. It should be very user friendly and it should be very transparent."*

P4: *"Space as a service, I really believe in that. So, if you can, uh, find a way to make a building with the right fit out that you can easily change and offer a space to entrepreneurs to try out. And if it's not working, then decide together that it's better to stop, and not saying, well now you've signed the lease contract for five years. So, you are forced to keeping paying and keep the space. That's not something that's future proof in the end."*

4.2 Layer Two - Results

In the second layer, the study examines the dynamic between landowners and occupiers, evaluating its impact on the vitality of High Streets, using social conflict theory as a theoretical understructure to test whether the 'business-as-usual' relationship of the two parties is a hindering factor to the health of the High Street. Subsequently, the trajectory of the retail sector is explored to understand how these shifts will influence the utilization of commercial properties by operators.

Two distinct data collection streams were employed for this layer: semi-structured interviews to uncover insights into the working relationships of these two stakeholders. And literature review, complemented by the semi-structured interviews to understand the trajectory of the retail sector and how operators will optimize physical commercial space in the future.

Landowner–Operator Relations & Urban vitality

Prior to unveiling the results, it is essential to provide a brief overview of the social conflict theory for the convenience of readers. Following this, an evaluation will be conducted to determine its applicability to the relationship dynamics between occupiers and landowners.

Conflict, as discussed by Oberschall (1987), emerges when two or more parties actively engage in competitive interactions. Boulding (1963) further delineates conflict as a scenario of competition where parties recognize the incompatibility of potential future positions, each striving to occupy a position conflicting with the desires of others. Oberschall (1987) defines "social conflict" as conflict involving groups, organizations, or communities, rather than individuals.

Coser (1957) portrays social conflict theory as vital for society, preventing stagnation and fostering creativity. He views the clash of values and interests as essential for generating vitality, likening conflict to an earthquake that maintains equilibrium and facilitates adaptation. Conflict, according to Coser, generates new norms and institutions, aligning with John Dewey's (1988) argument that unchallenged systems stagnate, lacking the capacity for renewal.

It is acknowledged that the relationships between landlords and tenants have historically been prone to conflicts, however, without any substantial shifts in the course of history. The interview results presented affirm this narrative.

Retailer operators seek central locations with high footfall to effectively showcase and sell their products. On the contrary, landowners aim to maximize their earnings by leasing their property to retailers they perceive as a 'safe' choice, and they prefer the income to be as passive as possible. Even when the two parties reach a consensus, the

external impact of such agreements often reflects in urban landscapes, pushing smaller, local retail operators to less busy locations.

This trend of rents continually rising and spaces being allocated to the highest bidder, favoring the business model that produces the highest turnover rather than a business model that creates shared value in a broader sense than only financially. This contributes to the dominance of global franchises in city centers, creating monotonous urban environments that lack vitality. Consequently, conflicts tend to be resolved when a financially stronger occupier, often in the form of a global franchise, is willing to meet the demanded terms or negotiate prices with landowners that are unattainable for SMEs. Ultimately, these dynamics harm the vitality of the area, eventually resulting in challenges for the landowner, occupier and the community.

The interview findings suggested that the landlord frequently emerged as the source of the problem, with a behavior that impedes urban vitality. The following interviewee perspectives can inform what CLR aims to address, and will be used again in the third layer of the research, where certain CLR principles will be tested in their practicality to enhance urban vitality of the High Street.

P5: *"In a way the goal of a landlord is to have as little work for a space as possible. They want to have a long lease contract with a retailer or tenant who preferably never calls them again and just pays their rent on time. That's my experience with landlords. I think high return low risk. They will always look for a tenant who has a track record who has a stable form of income. Who will not change their concept every week or month and who will not be calling on the phone every week with complaints or changes"*

P2: *"...this is also because of the relationship between the landlord and the tenants. The landlord was there to drive value on behalf of their investors or whatever, and they would never really, intrinsically, go for a win, win situation, or work towards the situation that the tenant would also be successful. So, I think the landlord proved to be pretty inflexible. They wanted to reduce their risk, so to have long leases with tenants at a rental level that would be as high as possible. Rather than seeing how together they could create an experience that would be interesting for people to visit. So, this led to a very monofunctional area."*

P6: *"I think landlords often tend to forget that they are selling a service. So, they are receiving often large sums of money in return for a service, they are letting out their building. I think in the past, my experience with landlords they tend to forget that they are offering a service and they don't treat tenants as clients, as customers. And if you go to any hotel or restaurant the way you are treated as a customer reflects on the service and experience of that restaurant. I think in the real estate realm, it is often overseen or forgotten that people that are renting your building or space, are clients or customers and you need to treat them in a way that they would leave a 5-star review."*

As explained, social conflict revolves around the notion that two or more parties engage in a struggle to obtain resources at the expense of the other. In the context of the landlord-tenant relationship, the landlord seeks to maximize financial gains with

minimal input in the long run, while the tenant aims to occupy the space with the lowest possible rent and extract the maximum input from the landlord.

Typically, an agreement is reached that only the few can afford at High Street locations. Unarguably, this has an immediate impact on urban vitality, a metric that as explained, is highly driven by the diversity of uses and experiences in the urban realm.

P6: *"If the fundamental relationship is between an owner of an asset and the occupier of an asset, and they're in friction, you kind of forget, there's another thing here. There's another interested party in there called the consumer, they're called the resident. There is what is good for the tenant, what is good for the landlord, then there is conflict between those. But what's good for the place? And that gets forgotten, whereas when they working together like this, you're kind of thinking, well, if we make the place better, we all get better together. So absolutely, conflict is a bad thing for the wider environment in the sort of immediate sense."*

P2: *"The landlord will look at the balance sheet of the tenant and they will favor a big company with a big balance sheet over a small entrepreneur that would perhaps bring more uncertainty. Basically, you want to lead an easy life with the tenant that pays as much rent as they can and do not generate work for them. That's has always been the business model, and landlords have been able to get away with it for a long time. And I think that situation is changing now."*

The challenge hindering the potential for fruitful conflict-induced change in this scenario, as outlined by Coser (1957), is the considerable disparities among retailers and the private sector as a group. The retailing industry is predominantly controlled by large enterprises capable of affording high rents, and they are not inclined to pursue radical changes in the commercial property sector and landowner relations. Conversely, SMEs lack organization, collective strength, and currently lack the influence to make substantial changes. However, the diminishing vitality and economic viability at High Street locations and the huge economic shock resulted by the global pandemic, have driven some commercial landowners to think of innovative and creative solutions, but also made them reconsider their position as stakeholders that have to cooperate with others.

P2: *"The fact that we had to close down all of our stores was a huge shock, something like that never happened before, but also there is more of a general trend within real estate with more awareness, more focus on ESG. So, we now starting to realize that actually we (commercial landowners) are part of the society and we need to play our role in it too. So that's why you're seeing that investors are also thinking more about the health of the High Street. So, I think this creating bit more awareness, at the same time also people are starting to realize that if we don't change the High Street, it will only get worse. And of course, in some areas, because there has been so much vacancy, the rent levels have dropped."*

P6: *"The relationship amongst retailers and landlords has been very, very conflict driven and, I think interestingly, with COVID it became slightly better. I think there was definitely a move towards the, we're all in this together, which was a good thing."*

Through the coding and analysis of the interviews, it became apparent that the landowner needs to reassess their role and become a cooperative stakeholder in the urban center. The 'business-as-usual' behavior of landowners is undeniably obstructing urban vitality, as individualistic interests prioritize short-term profitability over sustainable long-term returns.

P1: *"I can rent a shop easily tomorrow, but am I sure that after three years' time the tenant will still be there? That's the difference. It is much more complex and complicated to think of a way to create sustainable commercial return opposed to immediate commercial return."*

In order to revitalize the High Street and in order to secure sustainable, long-term returns landowners have to become more flexible and most importantly take an active and hands on approach in their business model. As a participant noted, the landowners have to change from the role of the "librarian to that of an editor".

P1: *"A librarian just has a room full of books and they dust the shelves, they take the tickets and they may make sure the lights are on, make sure it's warm, so people can come and read books. The editor determines what books should be in there, and edits the whole assortment. And so, there's a difference between a librarian, someone who guards over the shops and make sure no one makes a mess, or no one steals the books, to an editor who designs the content. Very different. I think that's why landlords have to shift from being librarians to being editors."*

P6: *"Fundamentally the landlord class has to realize that we've had it too good for too long and that there needs to be far more equity in the relationship. The difference is that now being a landlord is not passive income, it's an operational income. Owning retail property is more like running a hotel than being a real estate person, so you need to understand marketing. You need to understand customer service. You need to understand the business models of your occupiers. So that's massively different. You're engaging with your occupier so much more and you know it's, there's a lot more friction. There's a lot harder work, you know with increasing movement towards turnover, rents as much more alignment of interest between the owner and between the landlord and the tenant, the owner and the occupier. So, it's in everybody's interest to make this place as best they can be because the rents are higher and so it's how it should be"*

Stakeholder cooperation is essential for the High Street. Facilitating the right mix of services is fundamental in revitalizing an area, and the curation has to begin with the landowners' active involvement and acknowledgment of his role as a stakeholder of the urban fabric. Focusing on having your property simply occupied, even by a financially healthy organization, isn't enough for risk mitigation, as vitality drops, foot fall

decreases, and the disappointing revenues of 'big tenants' will eventually drive them elsewhere, leaving the property vacant again.

An external consequence of the short-term decision-making by landowners, as reported in Dutch (Laumans & Vugts, 2024) and British (France, 2023) news outlets, and one that needs deeper investigation by urban researchers, is the occurrence of money laundering schemes at High Streets, often camouflaged as candy and souvenir shops. In a bid to keep their property occupied and maintain income, landowners accept tenants who can meet the requested rent without thorough due diligence of the legitimacy of the occupier. So often the behavior of landowners and lack of policies not only impede urban vitality but directly inflict damage to the urban fabric, but also put citizens in risk of harm.

P2: *"In London on Oxford Street, you see that there's been so much vacancy. And what happened is that we got a lot sweet stores, in which criminal activity was driven from the store. Money laundering. So, there's also this realization that we need to be careful because as a landlord you don't want to have those kinds of activities in your store, but it's also not good for the High Street. So, we need to be careful with what kind of tenants we put into the High Street to also make sure that it is more attractive for people to go to."*

Retail real estate, and the future of retail.

In regard to sustainable growth in cities and the effort to enhance the attractiveness of urban areas, the lasting success of commercial property becomes crucial. Retail properties play a vital role in building city centers and are commonly situated in the heart of cities. As a result, these properties significantly influence the overall look and attractiveness of city landscapes and the inner cores (Zimmermann & Burkholz, 2019).

In the retail industry, digital transformation is causing shifts in consumer preferences. The strong connection between property functions, such as facilitating in-person purchases, and physical locations is gradually diminishing with the growth of online shopping. This transformation results in some traditional retail and, consequently, retail real estate becoming outdated.

Zimmermann and Burkholz (2019) argue that the ongoing changes in these markets challenge the retail real estate sector to create new and sustainable operational formats. Nevertheless, the limited space for new developments in urban centers and the high costs associated with demolitions pose challenges for the creation of new formats. Therefore, an alternative solution must be sought in terms of utilizing existing properties.

As discussed, due to demographic shifts, shifts in consumer habits, technological advancements, and digitization, traditional retail including city shopping venues face growing threats as part of a broader structural change. These alterations not only impact the perception of inner cities but also present fresh challenges for urban development.

In the context of retail real estate, the user is the occupier or retailer who requires the property as a resource. The landowner receives income through rental payments. Therefore, the property must effectively facilitate the retailer's business concept and enhance its functional operation. Nevertheless, the ultimate factor determining the success or failure of a landowner and a retailer is the consumer, the citizen, the human individual (Zimmermann & Burkholz, 2019).

Schaule (2014) argued that a property is financially sustainable only when its characteristics fulfill the needs of both current and future users, and if there is a consistent, long-term demand for a specific purpose. The retail sector has continually experienced changes and advancements, influenced by various external and internal factors that are interconnected. Currently, the primary catalyst for this structural transformation is the evolution of e-commerce, bringing changes in traditional brick-and-mortar retail properties.

The emergence of online platforms and new digital channels like mobile and social media has transformed retail business models, and consumer behavior (Piotrowicz & Cuthbertson, 2014). While the previous decade favored multi-channel approaches in retail, there is now a shift towards what is known as omni-channel retailing.

The omnichannel idea is seen as a progression from the multichannel approach. Unlike multichannel, which involves a separation between physical and online stores, omnichannel allows customers to transition seamlessly between online platforms, mobile devices, and physical stores all within one transaction process. The customer journey is intended to be fluid, offering a unified and seamless experience, regardless of the channels employed (Rigby, 2011). Since the channels are integrated, the perceived interaction is not with a specific channel but with the brand as a whole. That of course, changes the role of the physical store.

Piotrowicz and Cuthbertson (2014) see a possibility that the traditional store might transform into a "hub," serving as a central point that integrates all sales channels. This presents an opportunity to utilize the store as a space for delivering a personalized experience, attracting customers to engage with the brand.

For further elaboration on the future of retail and retail real estate, Ibrahim Ibrahim, a London based place-strategist, member of the High Street Task Force, and author of the book *"Future Ready Retail: How to Reimagine the Customer Experience, Rebuild Retail Spaces and Reignite our Shopping Malls and Streets"*, was invited for an interview.

Ibrahim Ibrahim: *"Retail will always be and has always been about four things. Recruitment, transaction, fulfillment, and retention. Recruitment means finding a customer, transaction means selling them something. Fulfillment means getting it to them, and retention means encouraging them to come back. The middle two things transaction and fulfillment are moving away from the physical space. They're moving online. So, what we're left with is recruitment and retention. So, if you are a brand, and you take a physical space to recruit and retain customers, that means you're behaving like a media platform. You're using that space, like a media platform."*

If you think about a physical space as a media platform, it changes everything. It changes the design of the shop, it changes the service proposition, it changes the type of people you employ. It moves from shelves to stages, it's a place for activation. It's a place for events. It's a place for community.

The future of retail is not about real estate. It's about content, and it needs new skills. That is not leasing boxes. That's curating experiences. That's, program management. That's editing. That's storytelling. You know, that's a very different skill set. And it's no longer about designing boxes with glass fronts. We've got to move on from products on shelves to sell, to stories on stage to share. The two key things are media platform and community center. That is what the physical future physical store is going to be about."

Based on the findings, retail properties remain important for occupiers, the human individual, and the urban core. The envisioned future of omnichannel and experiential commercial spaces underscores the importance of reintroducing a community element to the High Street, using space as a platform to attract and retain customers.

However, a challenge arises as the future appears somewhat exclusive. Omnichannel engagement demands significant capital due to high occupancy costs and extensive management capabilities. This poses a risk for SMEs, potentially hindering their ability to rent a 'stage' for the recruitment and retention of new customers. This gives large chains a significant competitive advantage over small businesses, as they can afford commercial floor in prime locations, resulting in actively driving SMEs out of the High Street.

P2: *"Retailers report a lot about the 'Halo' effect, that if they have a store in a certain location then they can see that their online turnover is going up a lot, so there is a clear interconnection between the physical presence and online sales, and the other way around. So, if they're visible also online, their physical sales will go up. So, it's really important for retailers to have multiple outlets, to use multiple channels, and it is clear that the physical channel will continue to be really important."*

The increasing demand for agility and flexibility can be addressed by introducing more flexible lease terms and letting strategies within the framework of commercial leasing, so that smaller entrepreneurs and retailers can access High Streets.

One potential solution to give a broad range of retailers and service providers access to physical platforms is embracing Space as a Service. By offering modular in-store space provision, flexible contracts and improved accessibility for SMEs to showcase their story, a diverse range of retailers and service providers can create engaging experiences at High Street locations.

This approach may be particularly beneficial for driving occupancy in big-sized properties, allowing them to accommodate multiple retailers, entrepreneurs and service providers under one roof through modular space provision. While this has the potential to benefit citizens and smaller operators, there is a need for further exploration of the value proposition of Space as a Service for commercial landowners.

O'Roarty (2000) discussed that the need for flexibility in commercial leases requires the development of new spatial products with risk-reward profiles that differ from traditional space offerings, benefiting both occupiers and commercial landowners. Consequently, this should result in a range of pricing options. She argued that a majority of occupiers are willing to pay high rents in exchange for shorter leases and/or break clauses, thereby enhancing their flexibility in occupying the space. This indicates occupiers' readiness to financially compensate commercial landowners for the heightened uncertainty of returns associated with more flexible lease terms.

O'Roarty (2000) argued that the crucial question is how much extra rental premium is needed to offset the additional risk. Valuation-wise, the challenge lies in figuring out the right discount rate risk premium. The findings from her research highlight the increasing importance of incorporating flexible lease terms into occupancy strategies.

Traditionally, as discussed, negotiations between commercial landowners and occupiers were often perceived as conflicting, where gains for one party were considered losses for the other. However, introducing flexible lease terms can reshape this relationship, recognizing that the objectives of commercial landowners and occupiers differ, but are also to a certain extent intertwined, creating a win-win opportunity.

O'Roarty (2000) study analysis shows that, when priced accurately, flexible lease terms open up new opportunities for commercial property decisions. Occupiers can meet their needs without diminishing the value of the commercial landowner's asset, they may even enhance it.

Therefore, cooperation between landowners and occupiers, and experimentation with flexible leasing strategies inform how CLR can effectively manifest in an impactful way on the High Street's urban vitality.

4.3 Layer Three – Detailed Case Description and Results

Before the study delves deeper in the case, it is asked from the reader to revisit Section [3.6.3](#) in which information of the history and storyline of the case is given. In the third layer of the research, the research aims to answer the following question:

Can CLR applied during a single building redevelopment influence the vitality of the High Street?

Chapter 4.3 is divided in two sub-sections. In 4.3.1, the case of OX will be thoroughly presented in order for the reader to understand how CLR is applied in practice. The results from the interviews with the initiators of OX will serve as an understructure to give the reader an 'insider' understanding of what is happening in the building located in Lijnbaan 150, Rotterdam. The interviews were coded and summaries of the findings are presented.

Name of Interviewee	Function
Marrit Laning	Chief Innovation & Strategy Officer
Elsbeth Quispel	Head of Innovation
Nick Van Aalst	Managing Director of OX OpCo

Table 7. Interviewee list for the OX case

The goal of this sub-section is to make the reader fully comprehend the case before the research results are presented. In Sub-section 4.3.2 the data collected from the various streams will be laid out and the argument that aims to answer the last sub-question will be built.

4.3.1 Lijnbaan 150, Rotterdam - OX

In this section the results from interviewing three initiators of the project are categorized and summarized in the text below. During the interview Marrit, Elsbeth and Nick were asked questions regarding the execution of the project, the issues that are being addressed, success factors, the strategy, and the challenges that lie ahead.

What is OX?

Marrit: *“OX stands for oxygen, for trying to breathe air into the High Street, and we're trying to reinvent the next 100 years of High Street. And what it really is, it's a testing ground for us to try and find ways to make cities more livable and sustainable.”*

Elsbeth: *“OX is a concept to future proof the High Street, with that, we're moving away from a purely transaction driven retail space on the High Street to a more experiential ecosystem approach for the High Street.”*

Nick: *“The intention of OX is to be a place for people. So, it's a place where entrepreneurs, were visitors, city inhabitants, tourists, where everybody feels welcome and that they can find what they're looking for at any time of the day, any season, any mood they're in, and we have an offer or service or something to shift their mood. So, it's a place that serves the many and that offers multiple modes where we focus on the relationship with our visitors and partners, and not so much on transactions.”*

During the interviews several key issues with the High Street were highlighted, including its lack of diversity and appeal due to the dominance of fast fashion and fast-food establishments. This homogeneity has led to a decline in earnings capacity and property values, a statement in line with the theory presented so far in the paper.

OX was proposed as a solution involving an innovative business model focused on offering flexibility and lower barriers to entry for smaller businesses, leading to a diversified experiential landscape. By investing in fit-outs and fostering a collaborative relationship with diverse partners, the goal of OX is to revitalize the area and create a win-win-win situation where the commercial landowner, occupiers, and community thrives.

Marrit: *“We saw a couple of issues (in the High Street). One, the High Street is no longer interesting, has become like a monoculture with all kinds of fast fashion and fast food. Not really*

interesting for people to visit. As a consequence, earnings capacity is going down and the value of our buildings are going down... So, then I really thought, well, is there something we can do? Can't we think of a different type of business model that would help us to overcome this?... it would also allow us, as a landlord, to take much more control, to become much more of an operational partner and have a real relationship with our tenants in a sense that it could be a win-win situation where we try to collaborate to make sure that they have the right space to operate and that they are successful. Because if they're successful in the end, we would be successful too"

The OX project aims to address issues and provide solutions for two main target audiences: partners/companies and inhabitants/visitors of the cities. For partners and companies, OX seeks to create an accessible and flexible modular space with low threshold, where entrepreneurs, service providers and brands can lease out floor space and freely change and adapt their concepts. The project offers services and tools to help partners excel in the retail landscape, including digital and physical experiences to engage with end users and build relationships be. The goal is to integrate citizens into the ecosystem and foster a sense of community and engagement.

From an end user/visitor perspective, OX aims to provide a better alternative to existing urban spaces, focusing on health, consciousness, sustainability, and engagement. This includes addressing basic needs such as accessible toilets while also offering spaces and co-created experiences for refreshment and relaxation. The current key pillars are food & beverage, goods & apparel, creativity & entertainment, and wellbeing. OX envisions itself as a space accessible by everyone, while prolongating the opening hours of the Lijnbaan, offering experiences co-created with the community to suit various interests.

Nick: "If you look at programming and ticketing, we host about 12 events per week. Our goal is to have 50 events per week in the future, but we are already asking the users of the space what kind of programming they want. So, we asked our community what kind of events or workshops would you like to see within OX and we chose the one that had the most requests and we organize it. And it was interesting to see that the event that sold out the quickest was the one that was sort of created by the community. So, it was drinking and drawing, it was a painting lesson with wine tasting. It was a strange combination, so having a drink and draw, but apparently that's what people wanted. So, we did it and it sold out within an hour."

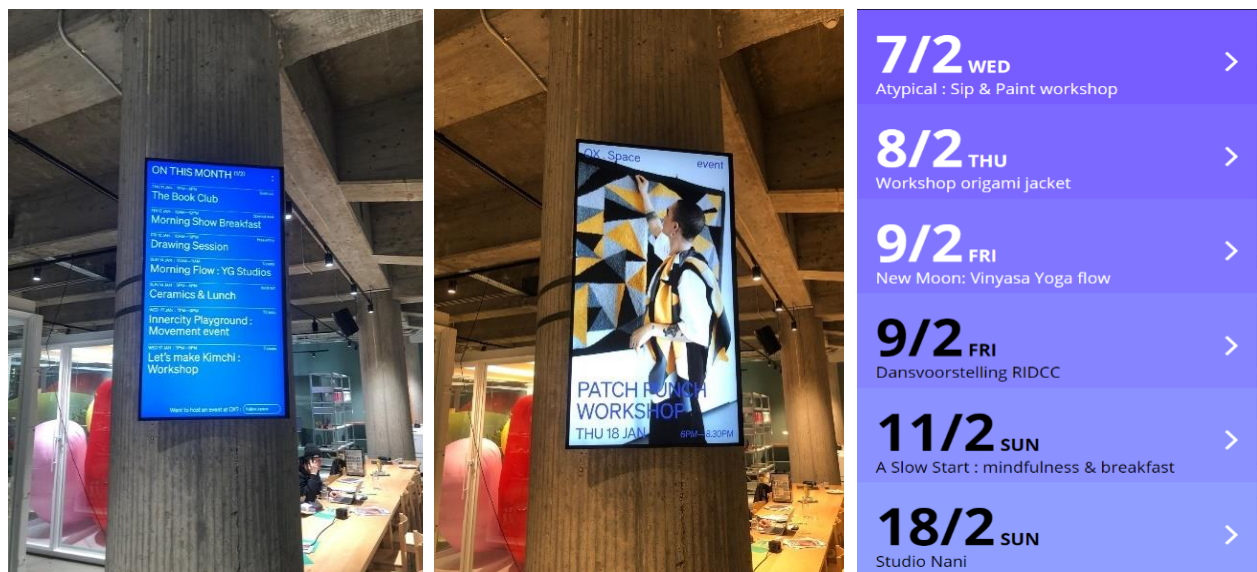


Figure 23. February Event & Workshop Agenda in OX (Source: Author)

The interviewees emphasized the importance of testing and experimenting with engaging end users in the curation of experiences at OX. Furthermore, the importance of relevance to the local community and creating value for partners was also highlighted. Critical success factors identified included community involvement, partnership with tenants and entrepreneurs, and a willingness to experiment and learn. The ultimate goal is to develop a viable business model that can be replicated in other cities, thereby impacting broader urban revitalization efforts.

A lot of effort is put to engage visitors and partners in providing feedback in the physical space. Visitors and partners can provide feedback and express their needs via QR codes that can be found in the building (see Figure 24). However, most of the feedback given is through digital media such as Instagram, as QR codes proved to have a high threshold for participation. Over the period of January to March, visitors had the option to enjoy a free cup of coffee if they would share their needs and provide feedback via the QR codes. The goal is to co-create experiences, products, and services with end users. This way of co-creation is aimed to grow and sustain a community organically, and attract new people and services in the High Street, increasing the urban vitality of Lijnbaan.



Figure 24. OX feedback forms (Source: Author)

Community Research (Partners & Citizens)

The interviewees discussed the central role of extensive research in driving community-centric urban development initiatives. They emphasized in the importance of understanding and facilitating local community needs, particularly in the face of challenges like urbanization and space constraints in city centers. Through thorough research and an iterative process, the commercial landowner leverages the insights gained to experiment with new business models and cooperate with local partners in order to successfully transform the malfunctioning building into a more valuable space for the community. Some processes of the research are shown in Figure 25.

Marrit: "...the city center is under pressure because of urbanization. We have a lack of space and we just need to make sure that we utilize the space in such a way that it offers value for its users...Of course, It was easier said than done. So, we spent a couple of years going back and forth and doing lots of research. Because I was a fund director at the time, I was able to find a building that was not functioning, was malfunctioning really. Basically, has been a bit of a bad acquisition at the time because we thought it could be a flagship. But of course, because of all the trends and I already told you it had been empty for like 6 years. And I thought, OK, well, why don't we just try and experiment here and try and see if we can make this a better place."

Elsbeth: "We did another research where we discovered what would OX actually should be. How that's going to function? How that can tap into all the needs that are at the Lijnbaan. I have to say it was not one research phase, but there were multiples ones leading to the same conclusion. And why are we now in the phase we are today is also another research phase where we decided we should not work out the concept and then launch it in full, but we should start an iterative learning process, because it's so important to get that end user perspective, the visitor perspective and other user perspectives into the mix of the of the concept."

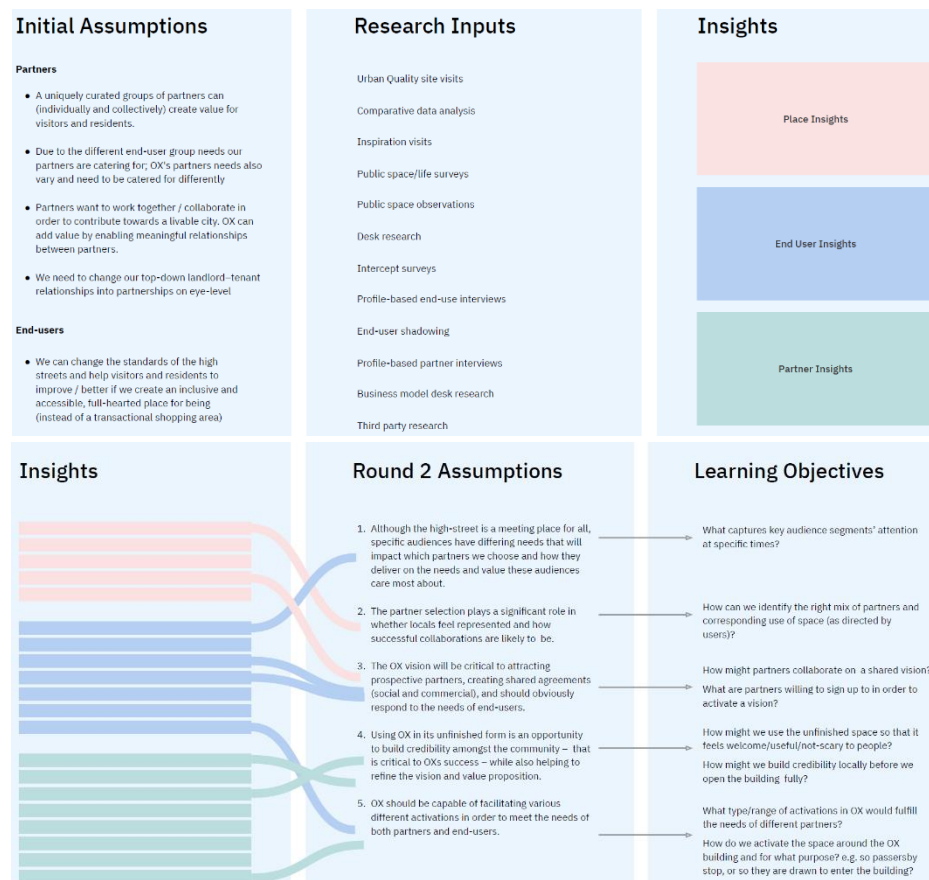


Figure 25. Research Procedure (Source: Redevco Netherlands)

The division of OpCo from the PropCo

In order for the commercial landowner to realize a transition from a passive to active stakeholder, a different company structure had to be employed. This initiative also informs how CLR principles were manifested during the project.

The organizational structure was separated in the Property Company, now on named as PropCo, and the operational company, now on named as OpCo. The OpCo leases from PropCo, and tenants and partners that want to be located and sell products and services in the building lease from the OpCo. The PropCo is responsible for providing their space as a service.

The OpCo assumes the role of the 'active stakeholder' with a focus on citizens' interests, tenant/partner attraction, and the development of an engaged agenda. It's important to note that while the commercial landowner holds sole ownership of both the PropCo and the OpCo, the latter operates with its own managing director and team to enable agility and overcome rigid corporate decision-making structures.

Under a fixed rent contract, the OpCo leases the building from the PropCo. Subsequently, occupiers, regarded as 'partners', rent floor space from the OpCo in a modular fashion. Additionally, the OpCo actively participates in building operations and explores opportunities to maximize revenue, extending beyond conventional real estate models that rely solely on rental income (see Figure 26.)

The research emphasizes this particular topic, underscoring the initiative of dividing the company structure into its passive and active departments, the PropCo and the OpCo respectively. This division, in alignment to CLR, facilitates the transition of the commercial landowner from a passive to an active stakeholder and 'agent of change'.

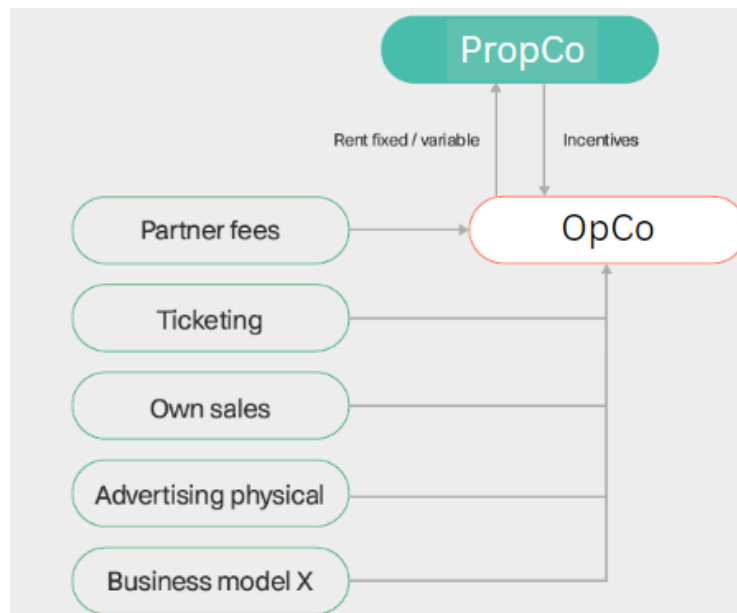


Figure 26. Structure & income streams (Redevco Netherlands)

The phased approach

In order to ensure an alignment and relevance with community needs for both partners and citizens, a phased approach is strategically adopted over a period of 2 years. In September 2023 and for the next 6 months, OX opened its doors to the public, and in March 2024, the building will close down for further redevelopment and concept calibration based on the feedback collected.

Elsbeth: “We decided not to open up with a Big Bang, and say to the community hello, here is a store, or here is a space, it is called OX, and this is what you can do here. No. From an innovation and iterative learning perspective we decided to take three phases, OX, OX M and OX L. OX is where you are today, it is fitted out in a fairly minimalistic way and there are no installations, it’s quite cold. But it is really to test and to pilot components of the business model we have in mind for OX. Now we have six months of testing, then we will close the building to do the refurbishment as well as the fit out for the majority of the building, and then open only half of it. Right now, the accessible space is about 1000 square meters. OX M will be 2500 and then the full building, OX L, will be about 5500 square meters.”

Nick: “So the phased approach is not only to spread risk, but also to understand what you need to do for the future. So, you’re not just doing anything, but doing the right thing. So, it’s in a way de-risking, but it’s also engaging your community, your end visitors that become part of the process and I think it’s it can be very simple as, you know, having people in an early stage join in in the journey and, have given them not only the feeling but the actual sort of ownership and creative control of what you’re doing. I think it will create a better experience for a longer lasting relationship with your end user. People want to be involved.”

In a follow-up question, the interviewer asked how is the assessment is being made of what is working, and some of the early findings. The interview response highlighted findings from a financial model focused on event operations, particularly examining traction and demand during evening programming. Initially, there was skepticism about evening programming’s potential, but it was discovered that there is significant demand, which is a beneficial finding for the vitality of the High Street.

Elsbeth: “we’re saying in our financial model, we’ve accounted for, I think in the full-blown OX, I think it’s about 55 events per week. So now we’re seeing how many events can we operate? How much traction do we get? Which sell? But also, is there more traction during the night or during the day? And initially we thought that we won’t have traction to evening programming, it will be really difficult. But it turns out that’s not the case at all. So, the evening programming, actually, there’s a lot of demand for that. Which is obviously great for the High Street”

To create a space and program that truly adds value to the local community, OX will initiate and evolve in 3 distinct phases:

OX S <small>1129 m²</small>	OX M <small>2822 m²</small>	OX L <small>5,342 m²</small>
Small Footprint ‘pop-up’ One Space with Agenda Program	Medium Footprint (3+ floors) Hybrid Floors Program	Big Footprint (All floors) Dedicated Program
A mixture of open to the public and invite only events with a program-agenda that integrates all the different pillars and contents.	Fully open to the public. All sub-concepts of the programmatic pillars have a dedicated space within Hybrid Floors. Final fixtures and design elements.	Fully open, and full force program with dedicated floor for pillars. Full final spatial experience.

Figure 27. The phased approach (Source: Redevco Netherlands)

Space provision and charges

The leasing model for providing space to local entrepreneurs makes use of Space as a Service. That is offering fitted-out spaces with basic infrastructure in place, allowing for flexibility in lease terms and cutting occupying costs. Tenants will have to eventually pay a higher rent for this convenience but benefit from short-term contracts and the ability to rent smaller square footage, requiring only a minimal investment for the finishing touches of the interior according to their liking.

This flexibility enables local businesses to rent space for short durations, such as a week or a few days, to test their products and connect with the community. The leasing process is designed to be user-friendly and transparent, with clear pricing structures and transparent earnings reports. The aim is to support tenants by removing the need for them to handle space creation and fit-outs, allowing them to focus on their core business activities and ease accessibility.

Marrit: "Basically, we let the space but with services, all with the idea to help the entrepreneurs to concentrate on their own business. So usually as a tenant, if you want to rent a space, you also need to have the know how to create a space. You need to know how to fit it out. You need to know well the construction activity. But with the space, the way that we are offering, we are helping the entrepreneurs to just to be busy with the things that they want to be busy with."

In the current phase, the focus is on a pop-up pre-construction model where deals are based on commission, with a low threshold and a full-service approach that includes, the fit-out, point-of-sale systems, and staff provision. Content creation is also offered as a service, providing partners with quality photography for their own channels. Looking ahead, three partner archetypes have been defined: testers, scalers, and stayers. The physical space of the building is aimed to be divided accordingly, with 50% dedicated to stayers, 30% to scalers, and 20% to testers.

A tester stays for less than three months, aiming to excite and create experiences. Scalers stay for a shorter period than stayers but longer than testers, potentially transitioning into stayers. Stayers commit to a longer-term presence, ideally 5 to 10 years.

The goal is to offer space as a service, providing fit-out and installations while allowing tenants to bring their own finishing touches and products. This approach aims for sustainability and modularity, reducing the need for extensive fit-out changes between tenants, decreasing significantly waste production.

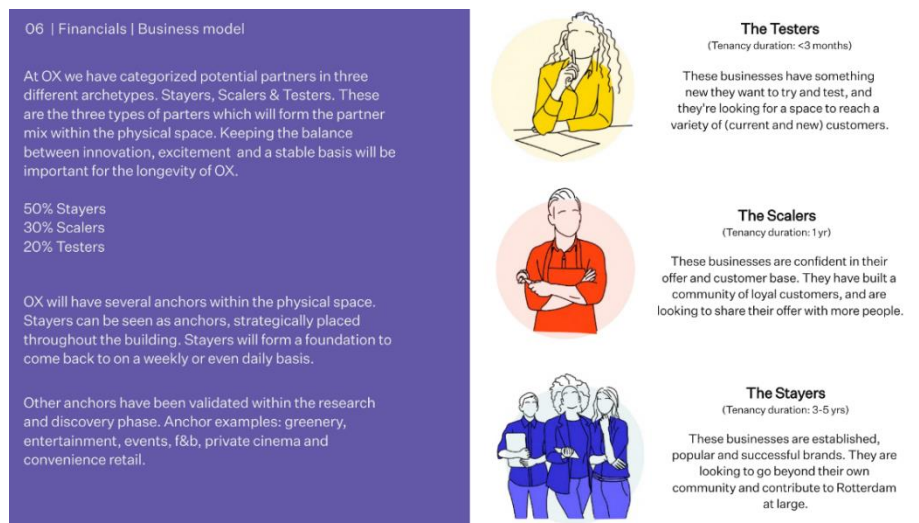


Figure 28. OX Partner Archetypes (Source: Redevco Netherlands)

The revenue strategy for the commercial landowner

Throughout the paper it was explained that CLR attempts to benefit the three major stakeholders of the study. The tenant, the citizen/visitor, and the landowner himself. Through OX, the prospective occupier/partner/entrepreneur benefits from an easily accessible space at a central location that would otherwise would be unattainable due to extremely high rents and occupational costs. The citizen on the other hand, benefits from a multi-purpose space co-created with him, which seeks to facilitate his need to experience and connect with others at a central location. What is left to explore is how the commercial landowner plans to create commercial returns from his community-centric actions.

Marrit: "...then we create a viable business model that we can then also expand into other countries and other cities, because if this is really viable and that's why the commercial angle is of importance, then we can really change and have impact. But if it's not viable, then we will also not be able to convince other landlords perhaps to do the same, or for ourselves to do this. We are not philanthropy. So, if it's not commercially viable then I'm afraid that it can't be rolled out and we cannot have the impact."

Throughout the research process, the author put a lot of effort understanding the strategy adopted by the commercial landowner, and how a community-centric approach can eventually lead to sustainable commercial returns. It was explained that the commercial landowner moves from the role of the asset manager to that of an operator, by the corporate division of the PropCo and the OpCo, in which the PropCo is preoccupied with traditional asset management practices, including the sustainability measures of the asset.

The function of the OpCo, however, was not as straightforward. In his exploration, the researcher discovered that the OpCo's role encompassed the following tasks:

1. Identifying community groups within the city of Rotterdam that shares similar values and needs.
2. Providing services and experiential offerings to facilitate the communities in line with their requirements.
3. Engaging the community by involving them in the co-creation and curation process of the offerings.
4. Fostering the sustainability of the community by seamlessly integrating them into the OX ecosystem and fostering a sense of ownership belonging among its members.

Identify
Facilitate
Engage
Sustain



Community

Figure 29. The OpCo strategy for sustainable growth (Source: Author)

Figure 30 is a visual representation of how the commercial landowner aims to increase building revenue through initiatives that fall under CLR principles, and impact urban vitality. The following visualization was presented and validated by the commercial landowner, but also by the theory presented on urban vitality (see Section 2.7).

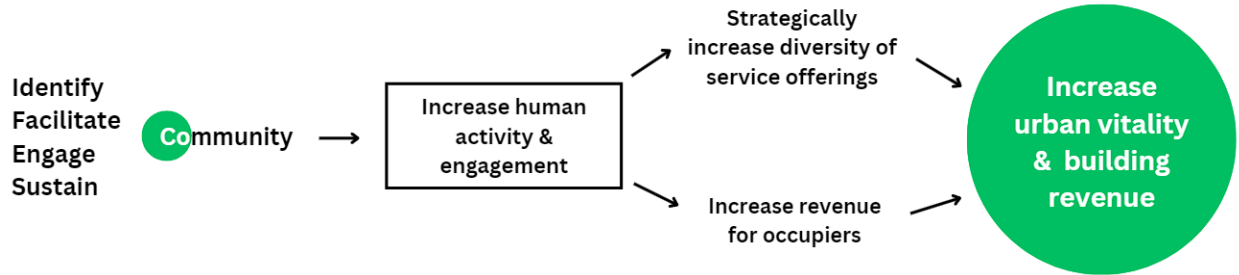


Figure 30. A strategy for sustainable commercial returns (Source: Author)

The aim is to balance attractive returns for shareholders with maintaining a vibrant and diverse community space. Transitioning from asset management to operations gives access to additional revenue streams of that of an operator, such as marketing, event hosting, F&B sales, fostering a mix of business models (see Figure 32). Ultimately, the goal is to grow the community by inviting participation and fostering curiosity and engagement among stakeholders.

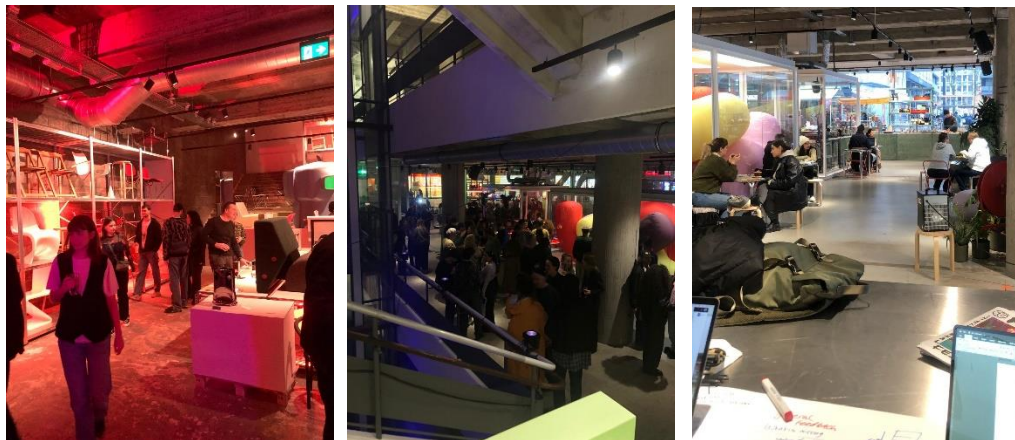


Figure 31. Evening and morning hours in OX (Source: Author)

Business model	Explanation
Partner income fixed fee / turnover	A fixed fee or a commissioned based rent or a combination of both. The height of fee or % is determined on the archetype of the partner and the positioning within the building. <small>*See IDEO blueprint for more information regarding the partner archetypes</small>
Branded Spaces	Spaces in both digital and physical OX which can be branded by suitable partners. Example: the roof terrace by Staatbosbeheer or the toilets by YONI.
Digital platform	Annual income generated from digital partner fee's. Based on comparison with social media platform costs for companies. Price per view/engagement.
Events & Programming	OX will be heavily programmed. An inspiration for OX was discovered during the research phase. Folkhuset Absalon, organizing over 100+ events a week. There are two types of events. Private functions & ticketing. A private function could be corporate or a wedding.
Founding partners	Founding partners are corporations that will support us on our mission to breath Oxygen back into our city centers. Partners that are proud to be a part of the journey and are willing to chip in as founding partners. For instance Microsoft as a digital partner.
Building partners	OX is high-street innovation, our building partners will be able to use OX to showcase their newest and most innovative technologies. In return we ask them for a discount on the CAPEX.
"Buddy system"	The buddy system will support young and upcoming brands to be able to take part in a concept like OX. For instance: ABN AMRO with Mondriaan fonds will support OX by funding the rent of the artist space.

Figure 32. Potential revenue streams (Source: Redevco Netherlands)

Past and Future challenges



Figure 33. Conceptualization of OX L
(Source: Redevco Netherlands)

The interviewees acknowledged the uncertainty regarding how to maintain affordability for small entrepreneurs while sustaining building revenue. The proposal is to experiment with intensification of space use to increase relevance and revenue. By stacking various uses throughout the day, such as breakfast gatherings, afternoon and evening events, they aim to compensate for potentially lower individual income from each use. Flexibility in organizing and timing space usage, possibly operating for extended hours, is considered important.

In regards to obstacles, OX faced and continues to face several significant challenges. Firstly, there's the hurdle of convincing shareholders, including colleagues trained in traditional real estate models to embrace a new approach that involves taking on risks and experimenting with unconventional business models. This cultural shift within the company towards prioritizing community care and experimentation over solely economic metrics has been particularly difficult.

Elsbeth: *"The initial challenge is trying to do something, well, let's say quite out of the box exploring a new business model and trying to achieve approval from a traditional real estate company. That has been quite challenging. As well as setting it up, setting OX as separate company with their own governance and responsibilities. Obviously, we're now learning what it takes to run OX as a company and what it takes to scale."*

Marrit: *"The biggest challenge probably is making people believe there is a place on the High Street for this and that we as a landlord, a traditional real estate business should be doing this. We're used to get rid of all of the risks in our business models. My colleagues and I, we've been trained to do so, trying to go for a long lease with credible tenants that have a bit of a balance sheet and know they are not going to fail, and they are going to be able to pay the rent. So convincing colleagues, who have been trained to think in financial metrics and to only think about the economic value of our buildings, to make them realize that this is not the way to go, but that we really need to care for our inner cities, and that we as a landlord need to experiment."*

The second biggest challenge is the uncertainty that surrounds the acceptance and viability of OX within the local community. While research suggests positive outcomes, the true reception and success will only be determined through implementation. Additionally, the scale of the building presents a challenge, requiring substantial investment and ongoing stakeholder management to maintain support for the project. Ensuring continued commitment and conviction from the team amidst uncertainties and stakeholder inquiries is crucial.

Elsbeth: *"I think challenges ahead will be how can we ensure that we can truly stick to the concepts and evolve the concept over time based on needs from consumers, visitors, partners, etcetera. But how can we make sure that that we can truly roll that out in the way we envision. I think that's where the strength of the concept fits, that we really do with in response of and with*

the users of the concept, whether that's partners or end users. I think that's the power for OX, but I think that's also the challenge"

Overcoming internal cultural shifts within the company towards embracing unconventional business models, alongside the challenge of convincing stakeholders of the relevance of this new approach, underscores the need for perseverance and strategic communication. As OX continues to evolve and respond to the needs of its community, the ongoing commitment for experimentation, flexibility, and user-centric adaptation will be pivotal in realizing its vision and ensuring long-term success.

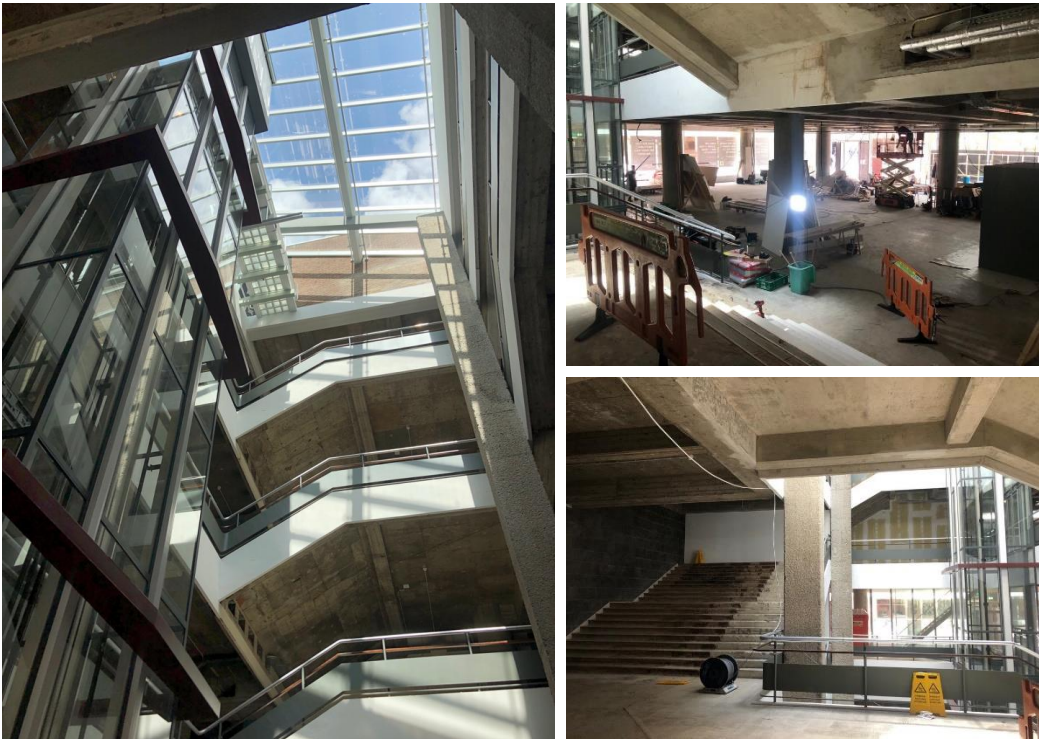


Figure 34. OX during the initial redevelopment phase (Source: Author)

4.3.2 The impact of OX on the urban vitality of the Lijnbaan

In order to evaluate the potential impact of OX on the vitality of the High Street, it is essential to examine the prior and present condition of the Lijnbaan. The study by Liu et al. (2022) will serve as a foundational reference for understanding urban vitality in clear and comprehensible terms.

Drawing from Section [2.7](#) and building on Liu et al. (2022) framework of the 'vital triangle of life', three key indicators of urban vitality will be analyzed.

1. Pedestrian flows: The number of people on the street at different times.
2. Diversity of uses: The changing balance of space usage, between offices, shopping, cultural, entertainment, restaurants, education and housing.
3. Building growth: The number of new buildings developed or activated.

For convenience to the reader, the results and arguments will be divided into two subsections. Sub-section 4.3.2.1 will provide data and discuss pedestrian flow before and after the project's execution, as well as some additional indicators thought of necessary to be presented. Sub-section 4.3.2.2 will discuss and present data on the diversity of uses in the Lijnbaan. It's worth noting, as presented in section 3.6.3.2, that the third indicator, building growth, will not be further considered as the case study focuses on the activation of a single building.

4.3.2.1 Pedestrian footfall

Overall, the Lijnbaan emerges as a robust High Street based on foot traffic statistics, with a quick after-covid recovery (see Figure 35). A comparison of visitor numbers to other major High Streets is depicted in Figure 38. Notably, the Lijnbaan experiences its peak footfall at 3 pm on Saturdays, with 4750 visitors. This figure is particularly noteworthy considering Rotterdam's total population of 1.2 million residents, showcasing the Lijnbaan's ability to compete with High Streets in cities like New York, London, and Melbourne.

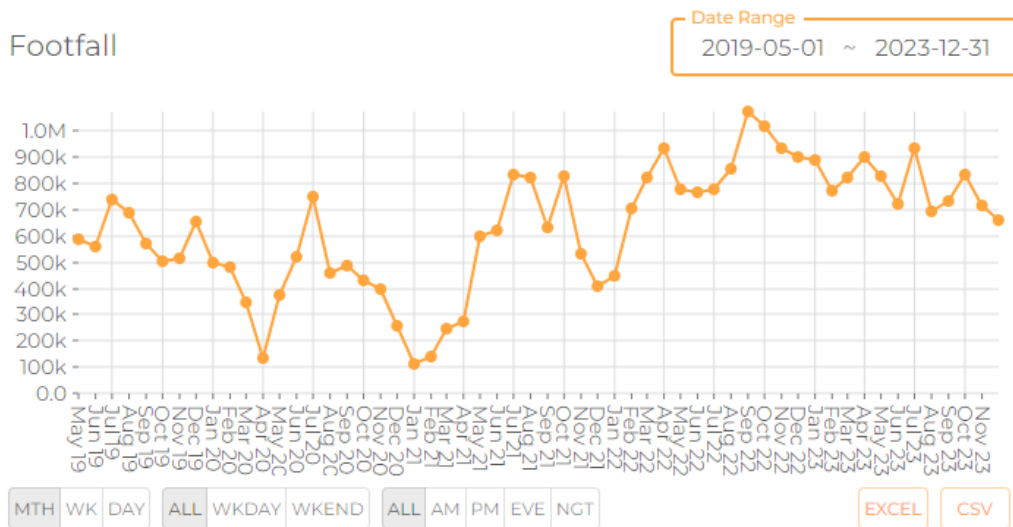


Figure 35. Monthly Footfall statistics in the Lijnbaan (Source: Location Intelligence Service Data Base)

Lijnbaan is on par with high streets worldwide

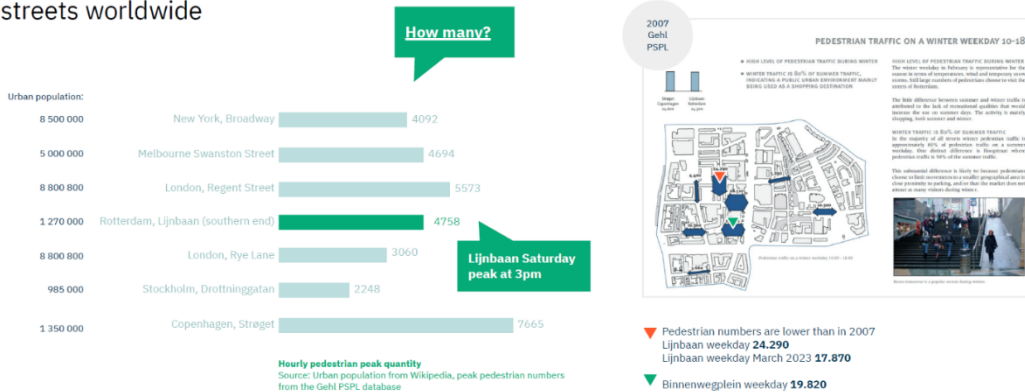


Figure 36. Lijnbaan Pedestrian Foot Fall (Source: Redevco Netherlands)

Figure 36 displays the monthly footfall across the entire Lijnbaan. However, it is assumed that due to the already high footfall numbers in the Lijnbaan, the single building activation, the limited time of the project's initiation, and due to the cross-sectional nature of the research, the impact on pedestrian flow may not be visibly reflected across the entirety of Lijnbaan. Therefore, since the case focuses on the activation of a single building, it is necessary to narrow the scope to increase the accuracy of the findings. Consequently, the footfall data specifically for the two streets connecting to Lijnbaan 150, Rotterdam, will be analyzed.

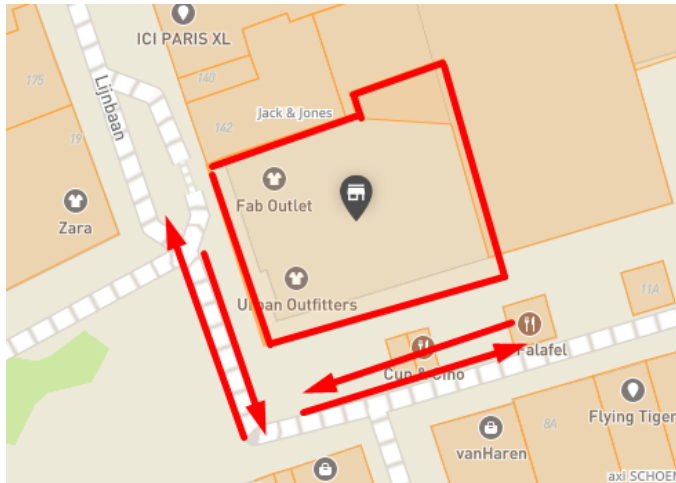


Figure 37. Perimeter of Lijnbaan 150 (Source: Location Intelligence Service Data Base)

The red arrows in Figure 37 indicate the area in which the pedestrian flow is measured using location intelligence specifically for Lijnbaan 150. Figure 38 illustrates the monthly footfall changes in Lijnbaan 150 from September 2022 to December 2023. Initially in September 2022 a negative footfall trend is evident, beginning at -55.7% and reaching its peak in August 2023 at -88% as the building remained vacant. However, following the opening of OX in September 2023, a slight upward trend is observed in the footfall change percentages. Specifically, from September 2023 to December 2023, footfall changes improved from -70% to -53%, indicating a positive impact of OX on footfall statistics. Nevertheless, due to lack of comprehension of how the location intelligence platform generates this data, the study cannot solely rely on it.

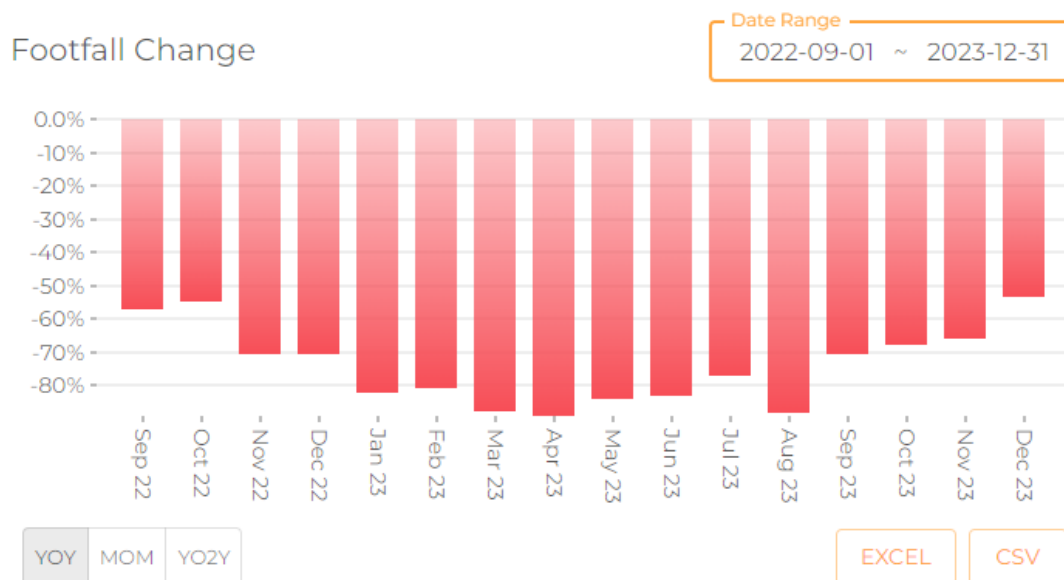


Figure 38. Lijnbaan 150 Footfall change (Source: Location Intelligence Service Data Base)

A meeting was arranged with the Intelligence Location provider to evaluate the reliability and quality of the data. However, due to the inability to access the back-end functions of their service, it was not feasible to validate the accuracy of the data.

As presented in section 3.6.3.2 to further evaluate the impact of OX on the vitality of the Lijnbaan, a Net Promoter Score and community feedback will be incorporated to forecast the impact on pedestrian footfall. The rationale is that if a notable Net Promoter Score and positive feedback are obtained, it provides an indication of potential increasing flow of visitors over time. Furthermore, community feedback (visitor feedback & partner feedback), and NPS will serve as indicators to assess whether the actions taken by the commercial landowner under CLR principles benefited stakeholders.

Further Indicators	Data collection stream
Net Promoter Score (NPS)	Survey
Visitor Feedback	Survey
Partner Feedback	Survey

Table 8. Indicators for future footfall prediction and CLR assessment

Net Promoter Score

The Net Promoter Score, as discussed in section is a metric measuring end-user experience and how likely is that the customer will recommend OX to friends and family as a place to visit. The respondents are group as following:

- Promoters (score 9-10) are loyal and will promote the project
- Passives (score 7-8) are satisfied but unenthusiastic customers who will not push the status quo.
- Detractors (score 0-6) are unhappy customers who can damage OX reputation by negative word-of-mouth.

The survey and the question to determine the NPS was survey accessible through the QR positioned on-site. The question was: **'How likely are you to recommend OX to a friend?'**. Due to change of feedback platforms during the research period, it is important to analyze and combine the NPS scores of both platforms. A total number of 335 responses were received in the period of September to February.

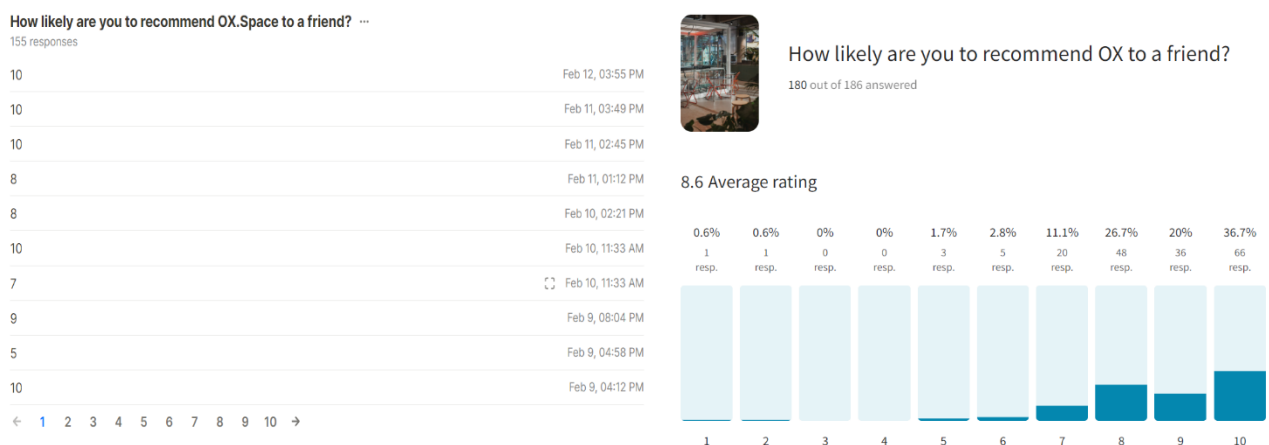


Figure 39. NPS responses (Source: Feedback Data Bases)

The results obtained from 335 responses to the question “**How likely are you to recommend OX to a friend?**” are categorized as follows:

Score	5(subtractors)	6(subtractors)	7(passives)	8(passives)	9(promoters)	10(promoters)
Frequency	1+3 (4)	6+5 (11)	27+20 (47)	46+48 (94)	29+36 (65)	46+66 (112)
Percentage	1.19	3.28	14.03	28.06	19.40	33.43

Table 9. NPS calculation based on data received

Subtracting the sum percentage of Detractors (scores 5 and 6) from the sum percentage of Promoters (scores 9 and 10) yields the Net Promoter Score, which can range from a low of -100 (if every customer is a Detractor) to a high of 100 (if every customer is a Promoter).

Therefore, the total NPS score of Ox is: $(19.40+33.43) - (1.19+3.28) = 48.36$

Scores	Meaning
- 100 - 0	The majority of people interacting with your product or brand are having a bad experience. They are not happy with your company and are spreading the word that your goods or services should be avoided.
1 - 30	This an acceptable range to be in as you have slightly more promoters than passives and detractors. However, most companies in this range have a lot of opportunities to improve.
31 - 50	This is where most companies tend to live. A company in this range places value on a quality customer experience and is generally delivering it with a solid group of promoters ready to refer others to your brand.
50 - 70	A company in this range is doubling down on customer experience — and it shows. Some of the most beloved brands have an NPS in this range, and it means that they have a larger than average group of promoters sharing their positive perception with their personal networks.
71 - 100	This is NPS score is rarely attainable. A company with a score in this range is considered to be among the absolute best in their industry.

Table 10. NPS score table categories (Source: delighted.com)

The feedback analysis revealed a positive Net Promoter Score (NPS) for OX, suggesting a favorable perception among respondents regarding the likelihood of recommending the space to others. This positive sentiment indicates promising potential for OX to attract more visitors over time. A high NPS is indicative of satisfied customers who are likely to become advocates for the platform, thus contributing to organic growth through word-of-mouth recommendations.

Visitor Feedback

When considering visitor feedback, it's essential to contextualize its implications for urban vitality. Two specific questions delve into this aspect. Referring to Figure 40, it's evident that 33% of respondents have visited OX multiple times, with an additional 11% identifying themselves as frequent visitors. These responses, in conjunction with the Net Promoter Score (NPS) outlined earlier, underscore a significant potential for growth in human activity over time. Finally, among the 56% of respondents who visited OX for the first time, 60.5% reported having a 'Very Good' first impression, while 35% described their impression of OX as 'Good' (see Figure 41). This data suggests a positive trend in visitor engagement and satisfaction, which indicates a positive outlook on the overall vibrancy and attractiveness of the urban environment surrounding OX.

Moreover, it's important to note that everyone surveyed agreed that OX has a positive impact on the Lijnbaan. This clear consensus, shown in Figure 42, indicates that people see OX as a good addition to the area. This widespread agreement emphasizes that OX is valued by the community and contributes towards the attractiveness of the High Street.

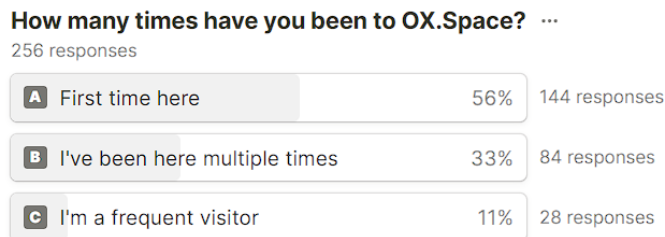


Figure 40. "How many times have you been to OX?" (Source: Feedback Data Base)

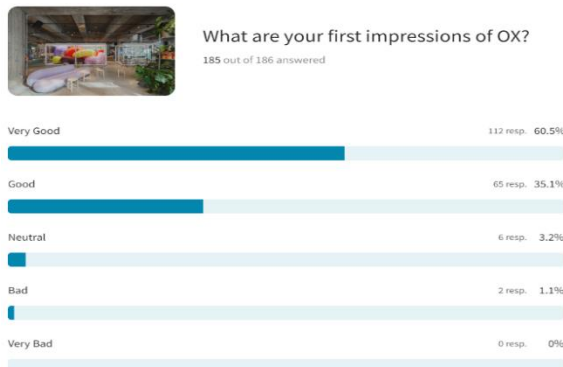


Figure 41. "What are your first impressions of OX" (Source: Feedback Data Base)



Figure 42. "Do you think OX has a positive impact on the area?" (Source: Feedback Data Base)

Partner Feedback

Based on the survey conducted to assess the value of OX and Space as a Service for entrepreneurs and service providers, the feedback was predominantly positive. Partners expressed satisfaction with the space and provided constructive input for future improvements. Among the factors that attracted partners to choose OX to showcase their services, location and accessibility emerged as the most common considerations. The low threshold, central location, and ready-to-use space offered by OX presented an appealing opportunity for entrepreneurs to test their services. The survey indicated a positive perception of OX and Space as a Service among partners, highlighting its potential as a valuable resource of urban vitality.

No.	Partner Responses on "Why did you choose OX for your event"
1	For its location and ambiance
2	Friend recommended and also location-wise is great!
3	It's the perfect place to attract the right kind of people for your event.
4	It's a big space and also very welcoming. The location is perfect.
5	Because it's a very fresh new space with a lot of potential for Rotterdam
6	I had yet to host a book club in Rotterdam, and through conversations with the event manager, I realized that OX is actually a pretty great place to start.
7	As we had another cultural institute in the city being very hard to work with and lacking on many different levels, we needed a space that could provide all productional needs , but that was also in some way connected to our idea of progressive communal events.
8	Because it's accessible
9	We were curious about what OX can become, I was there in the first week and liked the foundations idea behind the concept.
10	Entourage and accessibility
11	Nice space and location , focused on community, forthcoming personnel
12	I liked how ox proclaimed to be a place for community and connections so I got drowned towards this location. And I think because it is such a centered place yet has a very cozy feeling it was a nice opportunity to do a kimchi try out over here :)
13	It seemed like a great opportunity to share our vision in collaboration with a new space and new people
14	The unique space and modern feel

Table 11. Detailed partner responses on the question "Why did you choose OX for your event" (Source: Feedback Data Base)

Lastly, partners were asked to provide their opinion on the value of OX in the transformation of the Lijnbaan. Nine partners participated, all of whom shared the same opinion that a concept offering easily accessible space is crucial in the transformation of the High Street into a more vibrant and vital place.

Do you see value in OX.Space to transform the high street into a more lively place?

9 out of 14 answered

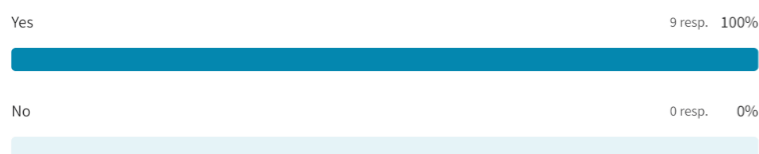


Figure 43. 'Do you see value in OX to transform the High Street?' (Source: Feedback Data Base)

4.3.2.2 Diversity of uses

Sub-section 4.3.2.1 presented the data regarding past and present footfall statistics, and a forecast on pedestrian footfall increase that was outlined by the NPS scoring system and community feedback. In this section the study will explore the second indicator of the paper of Liu et al. (2022), which discusses the diversity of uses in a High Street.

Two types of diversity are identified. The first pertains to land use, which encompasses the mix of residential, office, retail, and leisure spaces within an area. The second type of diversity focuses specifically on the variety of services offered within a High Street. Regarding the first type of diversity, the Lijnbaan demonstrates a healthy mix of land uses, encompassing sufficient residential, office, and retail properties. However, it is evident that it significantly lacks leisure and community spaces.

In Figure 44, different types of land uses are delineated by color groups. Residential properties are represented by buildings outlined in yellow, the office property is outlined in red, and ground floor retail properties are outlined in blue.

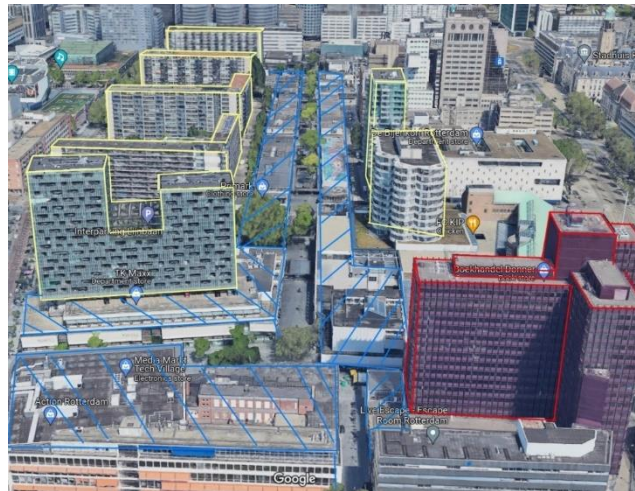


Figure 44. The Lijnbaan divided in land uses (Source: Author)

Figure 45 illustrates the specific types of services and amenities that were available in a 500-meter radius of the Lijnbaan before the initiation of OX. The 'General Retail' category primarily comprises fast fashion outlets, while the 'Food and Beverage' category is predominantly occupied by fast food franchises.

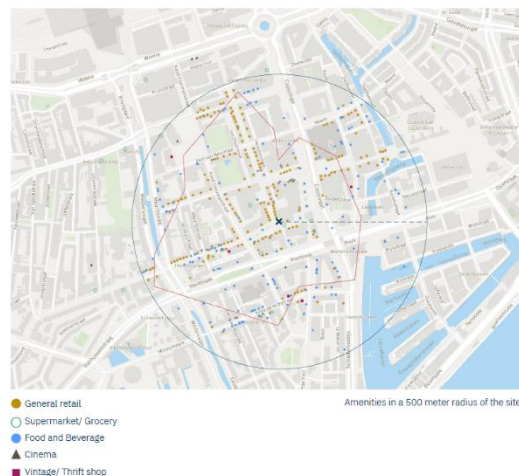


Figure 45. Lijnbaan Amenities and Services (Source: Redevco Netherlands)

In total, five categories were identified within the 500-meter radius (see Figure 45.), while only three categories were located within the High Street: General Retail, Supermarket, and Food and Beverage. However, these categories lack functionality to promote community engagement among citizens and visitors as their services are primarily transactional, making the Lijnbaan an unfit-for-purpose destination based on the results of the study's first layer.

Since the establishment of OX, an event/workshop agenda has been curated and actively managed by the OX team. This agenda offers more than 10 different types of events and workshops per week within a single building. Over time, the agenda has been intensified with the aim of reaching an optimal number of 55 events and varied workshops per week. Figure 46 depicts the intensification of the agenda from November to February, highlighting significant interest from the community and partners for their services to be facilitated in the building.

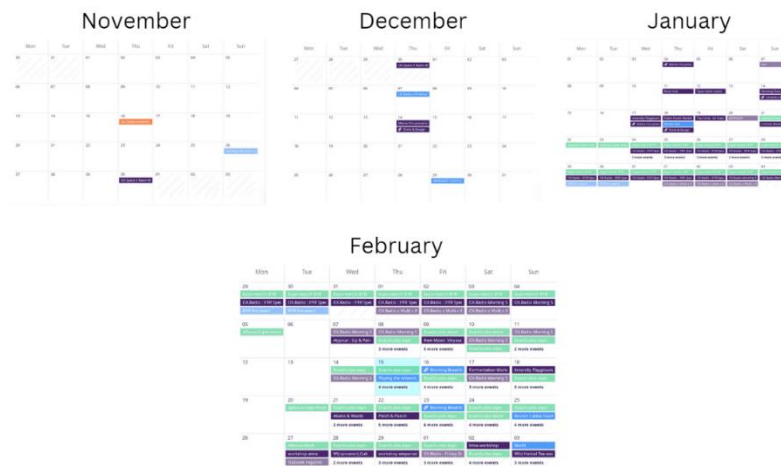


Figure 46. OX experience Agenda growth from November 2023 to February 2024 (Source: Event Data Base)

During the presentation of the theoretical chapter and the first layer, the argument was made that High Streets hold a significant social role, as people do not visit solely to shop but also to engage and feel part of a wider community.

As part of the survey conducted among event and workshop participants, they were asked whether they found events and workshops valuable to the community, and whether hosting such events contributed positively to their experience of the High Street (see Figure 47.) These questions served the purpose of understanding whether the initiatives take by the commercial landowner under CLR benefit the human individual and enhance the social position of the High Street.

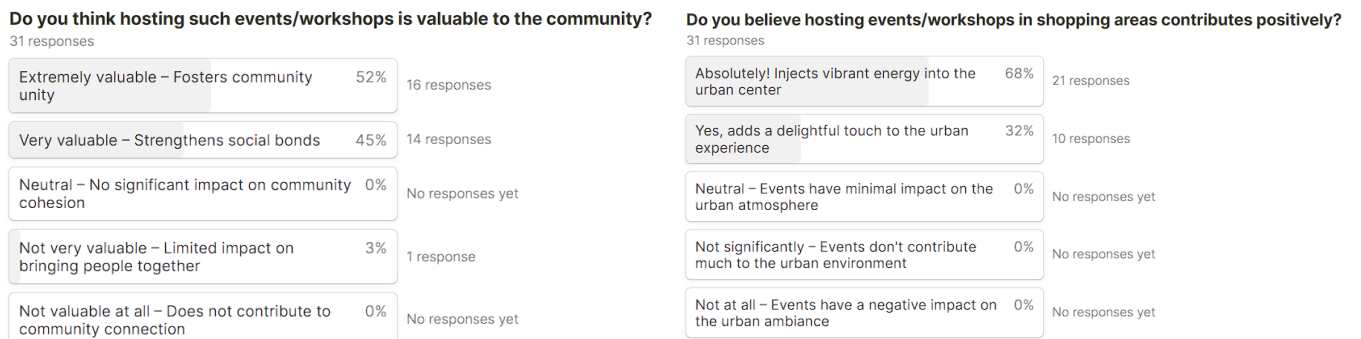


Figure 47. Community Feedback on CLR initiatives (Source: Feedback Data Base)

Observations

As part of the study, the researcher held various observation sessions within the building and participated in events in the role of a participant observer to personally experience whether Lijnbaan 150, operated as OX, genuinely benefits the human individual.

Three notes of the researcher are presented below. The first one is written as a visitor in OX, the second as a participant to one of the events, and the third is about two unusual occurrences while observing.

Visitor/Observer

"People entering the space for the first time are intrigued by the art display and various products that are being offered. They are amusingly surprised by the unknown and video record and take pictures of the space.

Many of them stroll and explore the space, and then continue their walk. Others sit down to have a coffee or something to eat, but without really comprehending what the project is about. There is a clear communication gap that has to be filled. This also shows that people visit the High Street, in this case, the Lijnbaan, to explore and experience, embracing the unknown. They are willing to enter a space they haven't before and see what it is about.

Other people use the space for co-working. It is important to note here that most of the people using the space as co-working are students that otherwise would not visit the Lijnbaan. That means that OX is attracting a new audience in the Lijnbaan, which in itself unarguably positively adds to the vitality of the street as a new demographic is facilitated.

What is also interesting is that people might enter the building just to use the bathroom that was made publicly available. Kids also find the space very playful. They are immediately intrigued and bring out their inquisitive and playful character"

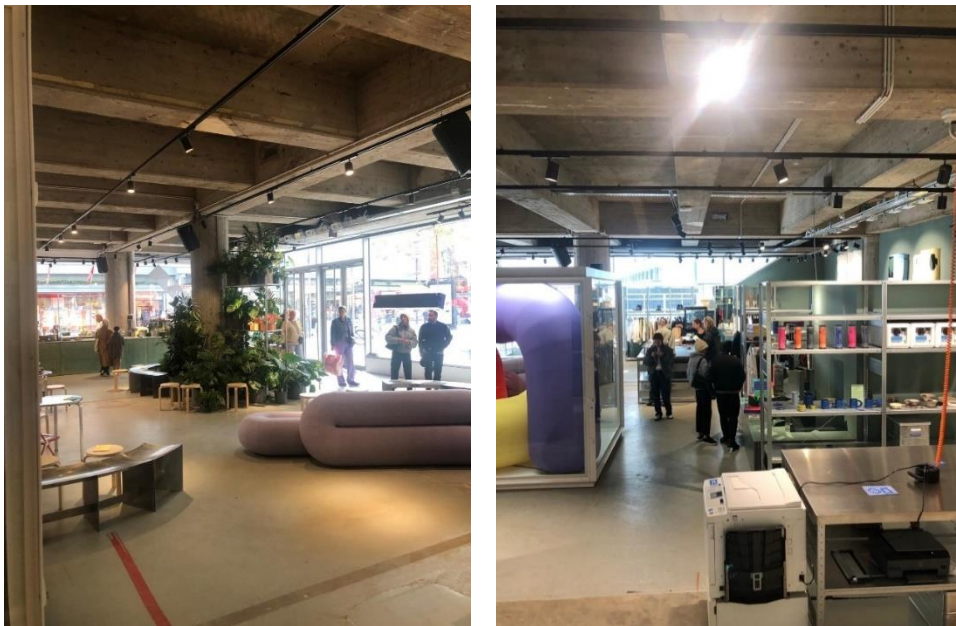


Figure 48. Observing (Source: Author)

Participant Observer

"In preparation to my participation in the 'Book club' event, I created a structured table that would guide my observations and help me assess whether people enjoy themselves, engage and befriend each other. I wanted to see if there is true social value in the experience.

When the event started, I quickly realized that my process of assessment would be completely irrelevant as people didn't only engage with the service and with each other, but opened up to personal conversations and connected on a deep personal level. I realized that what was truly happening could not be filled in, in text boxes of a Word document.

During the Book Club, the host handed out cards that had different quotes which he collected from various books, and invited us to self-reflect upon them, and then openly discuss the topic. The Book Club, hosted by my now friend Kritikos, was a therapy session. The ease and seamlessness of how 15 very different individuals became a unit and openly discussed very personal topics was a unique experience. Everyone participated, and everyone had a great time.

By the end of the session everyone was looking forward to the next session. I really wish I had taken a picture with all of us together. After the event I approached Kritikos and discussed the community value of his service, which strangely wasn't clear to him. I expressed that this was one of the most beautiful experiences I had since my immigration to the Netherlands three years ago.

It is important to note that the event started at 7pm. During that time, every other retail establishment had their doors shut and the Lijnbaan didn't look at all like the vivid and busy street it was during the day. If we discuss the set of CLR initiatives brought life to the High Street, and think of urban vitality as the liveliness of a place during day and night, we would have been right in the middle of the case."



Figure 49. The Book Club facilitated in OX (Source: Author)

Occurrences during Observation

The young entrepreneurs

"I spent a lot of time in OX writing this paper, constantly observing. One afternoon, a group of 5, mustn't have been more than 18 years old, came and explored the building. They decided to sit down, somewhat close to me, and without ordering anything to eat or drink, and started discussing about how they will build their own clothing brand.

There was the leader of the group guiding the conversation, and they seemed all pretty knowledgeable on their argumentation. There was a lot of energy and engagement, and definitely some oppositions among the group. This lasted about 40 minutes, and they decided to leave.

This occurrence really stuck with me, as I reflected on the fact that if this building was occupied by a clothing brand or any other retail service, these kids wouldn't have the space available to discuss their idea at that exact moment in time. I witnessed how a space can inspire entrepreneurship, and that space was located in a High Street."

The gentleman from the carnival

"One afternoon, around 5, while I was working on my paper in OX, a gentleman around his mid-50s walked into the building. I saw that he was curiously looking around and I decided to engage with him. After we made eye contact, he came and sat opposite of me on the long table in the F&B section. He shook my hand, introduced himself, and asked whether I was speaking Dutch or Spanish.

As I speak neither, we kept the conversation on a functional English level. The gentleman was giving dance lessons and is one of the people organizing the carnival that takes place every year in Rotterdam. He told me that he was giving dance classes in a building close by that recently shut down, and was now looking for new space that can facilitate his classes. This guy was, literally, in need of Space as a Service.

I got up and explained the situation to Hannah, who curates and organizes the agenda, and communicates with the partners. I pulled myself from their conversation as they continued in Dutch.

After their discussion ended, the gentleman came over to me, shook my hand, told me that I looked like an incredible dancer, thanked me, and left. I never figured out whether he will actually become a partner with OX, but my guess is that the next phase of OX would suit him better as the lack of installations in the current phase of the building hinders functionality."

It was incredible, and definitely fortunate, to have experienced in such a way the importance of publicly available and actively managed space, for both citizens and service providers. The final phase of OX, the 5500sqm of available floorspace, if curated properly has the potential to create a community forest. Different people, different experiences, different things to do, different settings, at different times of the day. However, as the cross-sectional nature of the study takes place during the pilot phase of the project, we can only assume and speculate about the end result. However, if theory holds true, and the OX team continues to grow engagement with the community, urban vitality will certainly increase in the Lijnbaan.

5. Discussion

The Discussion chapter will start from the third layer (sub-question 4) of the study, considering that the newly presented information is fresh in the reader's memory. Sub-section 5.2 and 5.3, will discuss the results of the second and first layer of the study respectively. Finally, sub-section 5.4 will present recommendation for future research and discuss limitations.

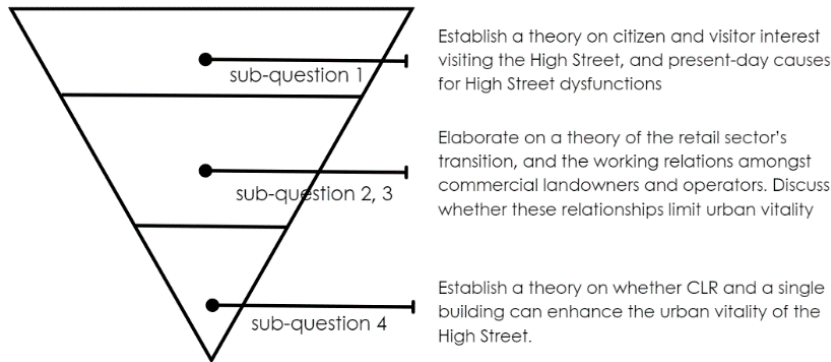


Figure 50. Discussion Chapter layout

5.1 Layer Three - Discussion

The aim for the OX case study was to answer whether **CLR applied during a single building redevelopment positively influence the urban vitality of the High Street**. During the theoretical chapters of the paper, the work of Liu et al. (2022) on urban vitality was discussed, and the 'vital triangle of life' was presented as the theoretical understructure for the impact assessment of OX on urban vitality.

CLR was defined as the collection of principles that corporate landowners voluntarily adopt when acquiring, (re)developing, managing, and investing in real estate. These principles involve taking responsibility and actively promoting a positive influence on the environment, communities, and stakeholders through their actions. At this point of the research, the concept of CLR can be narrowed and reviewed how it manifested in the OX case. The commercial landowner took an operative approach, repositioned themselves from traditional asset managers to active stakeholders, and base their decision making on data-based community feedback and continuous research.

The strategy of the commercial landowner to increase building revenue through initiatives that fall under what CLR entrenches and impact urban vitality, are again presented below:

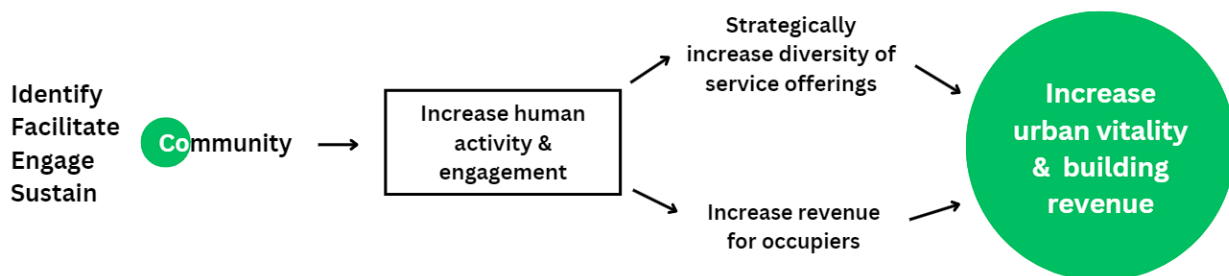
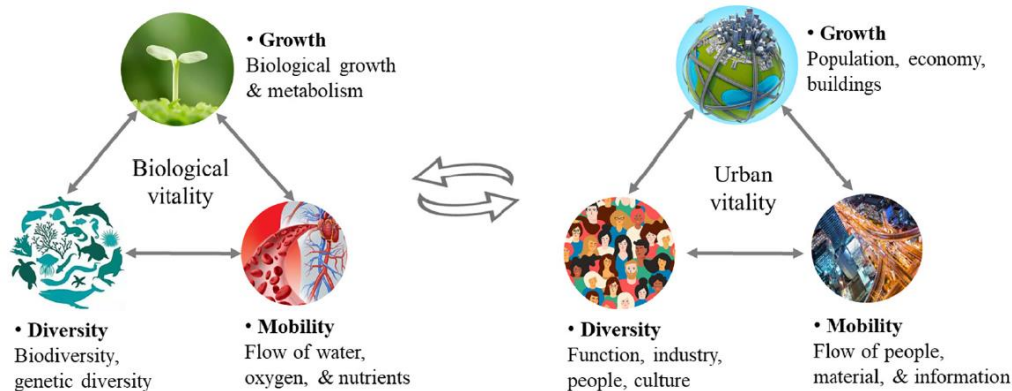


Figure 51. A strategy for sustainable commercial returns (Source: Author)

For the impact analysis on urban vitality, the study used the work of Liu et al., (2022) "The vital triangle of life".



The vital triangle of life. (Source: Liu et al., 2017)

The triangle discusses three key elements: Mobility, Diversity, Growth. The study of OX's impact on urban vitality is done by the project's impact assessment on these three key elements and their sub-categories as seen in the visualization of "the vital triangle of life"

The influence on Mobility, specifically the flow of people, is depicted by OX's effect on pedestrian footfall. Likewise, the impact on Diversity, encompassing functions, people, and culture, is portrayed by OX's influence on the diversity of uses in the Lijnbaan. Lastly, the impact on Growth, involving population and buildings, is exemplified by the activation of the otherwise empty building sitting at Lijnbaan 150, Rotterdam. An increase to these three elements, indicates a positive impact on urban vitality without the need to quantify and perplex the concept of vitality.

Mobility/Pedestrian Footfall

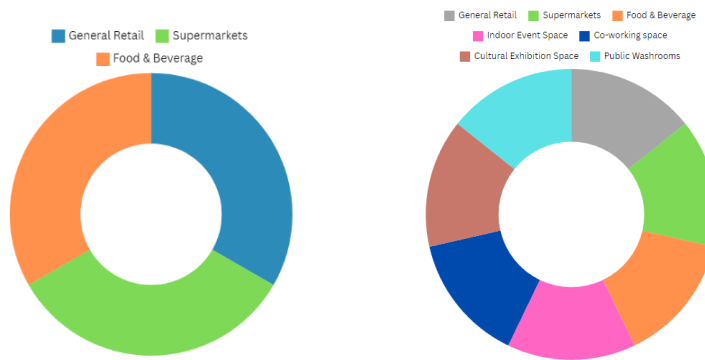
Location intelligence data showcased a positive impact on pedestrian footfall, specifically in the area surrounding Lijnbaan 150, with an increase of 23% in a period of 3 months. However, as the source of the data could not be first-hand validated, it could not be considered fully reliable. Thus, a net promoter score and community feedback was incorporated and presented as a source to forecast a probable increase of visitors. A Net Promoter Score of 48% and significantly positive feedback resulted from a survey of over 350 people suggests a gradual increase of people that are willing to visit OX. Hence, despite the short time-period of the project's initiation, it can be argued that a slight, yet positive increase on flow of people in the Lijnbaan was achieved.

Diversity of Uses

The Lijnbaan suffers in terms of service diversity. There is a repetitive model of general retail that mostly consist of fast fashion and cosmetic shops, and food and beverage spaces that are mostly global fast-food chains. A total of three different services could be identified within the High Street.

1. General Retail
2. Supermarkets
3. Food & Beverage

To this category OX, in its current phase, contributes a multi-purpose destination that facilitates a diversified agenda of events and workshops each week, a co-working space, public washrooms, and a space for cultural exhibitions and engagement. In addition to that, OX prolongates the opening hours of the Lijnbaan from 3 to 6 hours depending on the evening events and activities hosted, and provides space to student groups that would otherwise visit the Lijnbaan rarely. Lastly, OX allows diverse engagement opportunities to the underrepresent age group of 15 – 24 that amounts to 24% of Lijnbaan's population flow



*Comparison of service diversity in the Lijnbaan before and after OX
(Source: Author)*

Growth/Building Activation

The current phase of OX uses one fifth of the total floorspace available (1100 sqm), and will unfold to its fullest form (5500 sqm) through a gradual strategic process that will last approximately 2 years. During the months of September and March, the team collected data and feedback from the community, but also experimented with various events and workshops, and thus, tested what intrigues, attracts, and engages the community.

In March 2024, the building will close its doors in order to prepare and open 2800 sqm of leasable floor space. During the redevelopment process the team will analyze all the data and feedback collected over the 7-month period, and will calibrate their next steps based on the results received. Subsequently, the building will close down one last time, for its last development phase, where the full-scale building will be made available to the public and services.

The Lijnbaan unarguably grew by the activation of a single building that was vacant for 6 years. However, the High Street will truly benefit in forms of vitality from an organically grown, and community centered concept that offers diverse services and has the potential to attract, and bring together new visitors, and facilitate new community groups that would otherwise rarely visit the solely retail focused destination.

Contextualizing the discussion to the third layer with the 4th research question

"Can CLR applied during a single building redevelopment influence the urban vitality of the High Street?"

OX certainly had an unquantifiable, yet undoubtedly positive impact on the urban vitality of the Lijnbaan, especially in consideration to the work of Paul Maas (1984), who defined urban vitality as *"The synergism of a sizable number of varied and unique commercial and experiential opportunities, in a relatively dense and socially heterogeneous pedestrian population, which animates certain areas throughout each day and evening."*

The strategic activation of Lijnbaan 150, Rotterdam introduced a new range of community-centric services to an otherwise typical shopping street, by giving space to various service providers and entrepreneurs. This initiative provided engagement opportunities for the community, including the underrepresented age group of 16-24, which accounts for 24% of the total pedestrian flow on Lijnbaan.

Furthermore, extending the operating hours of a street, particularly one that is lively for only a third of the day, is a significant initiative that greatly contributes to the High Street's urban vitality. As presented in the theoretical chapters of the paper, John Montgomery (1995) connected the notion of urban vitality with the 'evening economy', a concept that is about opening possibilities for transactions to take place in extended periods of time.

The extended opening hours encourage more and different people to visit the street during different times of the day, and this type of increase in foot traffic contributes to a more vital and safer environment as more people are present. This argument is in line with the work of Montgomery (1995), who discussed vitality as the vital force of a place, the state of being alive, people on the streets at different times, human variety. In other words, activity, transaction and diversity.

However, the question of whether a single building is effectively enough to revitalize an entire High Street remains uncertain. Urban vitality is a complex and multifaceted concept that is challenging to quantify. The OX initiative, while promising, is still in its early stages and limited to a single building currently being operated on a fifth of its capacity. Therefore, assessing its potential impact on the urban vitality of the entirety of Lijnbaan is difficult at this point in time.

Given the high amount of footfall in the Lijnbaan, directly measuring the number of new visitors attracted by OX is challenging, especially with current technology limitations. Nevertheless, indicators such as the Net Promoter Score (NPS) and community feedback suggest a positive forecast for an increase in urban vitality in the Lijnbaan.

The size of OX, being a department store, presents both opportunities and challenges. While its spacious layout allows for creative utilization of floor space, it also comes with significant expenses and management complexities that traditional real estate practices may find challenging to handle. The division between the Property Company and the Operational Company, delineating ownership from management responsibilities, was crucial in making OX a viable venture. This division of roles needs to be taken into account when discussing CLR, and being sincere with a community-centric decision making.

If multiple commercial landowners adopt CLR and focus on activating vacant buildings by catering to community needs and embracing urban vitality in revitalization efforts, it is

reasonable to anticipate increased human activity and appreciation from the general public. By prioritizing interests of the stakeholders, particularly the human individual as highlighted in this thesis, both operators and landowners stand to benefit from these efforts in the long-term, as urban vitality will slowly but surely increase.

5.2 Layer Two - Discussion

In the second layer of the study, two topics were researched. The first one was regarding the relationship amongst real estate operators and landowners, and the second, the trajectory and changes within the retail sector and retail real estate.

5.2.1 Landowner – Occupier Relations

The aim of this section was to answer **whether the current working relations of landowners and operators pose a threat to urban vitality**. The value of cooperation amongst landowners and operators was elaborated through the presentation of stakeholder theory and the works of Freeman et al. (2010), who argue that commercial success is delivered by profit maximalization, but to achieve maximum results, the commercial entity has to align its services with customer desires. Furthermore, the work of Savage et al. (2010) on the nature of stakeholder relationships and interorganizational collaboration was heavily considered, as the dysfunctions of the High Street proved hard to be solved by a single organization.

The results of 6 interviews were contextualized on whether the relationship and individual behavior of the two High Street stakeholders limit in any way the vitality of urban centers. The relationship of the two stakeholders, landowners and operators, was acknowledged as being historically prone to conflicts. The findings suggested that the landlord frequently emerged as the source of the problem, with an inflexible, risk averse behavior that prioritize financial profit and impedes urban vitality. The interview results indicated that landowners have to reposition themselves from passive shareholders to active stakeholders, a role that Theodoridis et al. (2017) presented as “agents of change”. Through proactive and hands-on involvement commercial landowners have the opportunity to secure the health of the High Street and focus on sustainable long-term returns rather than short-term profitability.

To provide further depth to the relationship of the two stakeholders, the research made use of social conflict theory, and the works of Oberschall (1987) and Coser (1957). When examining the conflict between landowners and operators, a different dynamic emerged. Both parties operate within the market sphere, with the more financially secure occupiers often finding common ground with landowners. This diminishes the potential for disruptive conflict, revealing that the true contention lies in the competition between SMEs and large corporations, particularly regarding their ability to afford high rents in desirable locations.

This situation underscores the crucial role of the commercial landowner in strategically cooperating with operators who will enhance the urban vitality of their property's location. This involves considering urban factors beyond mere financial metrics, such as the variety of community driven activities and social engagement opportunities.

Certainly, while offerings in general retail are important, an excessive and repetitive model of this type of services in the High Street will lead to a gradual decline in urban vitality. The behavior of landowners to prioritize 'safe' operators can eventually render the area less attractive for further economic investment, resulting in commercial losses for landowners, operators and citizens over time. A solution to this challenge lies in adopting a long-term vision for the High Street. This entails landowners collaborating with stakeholders and possibly with public authorities, in order to develop a master plan which facilitates the needs of the community.

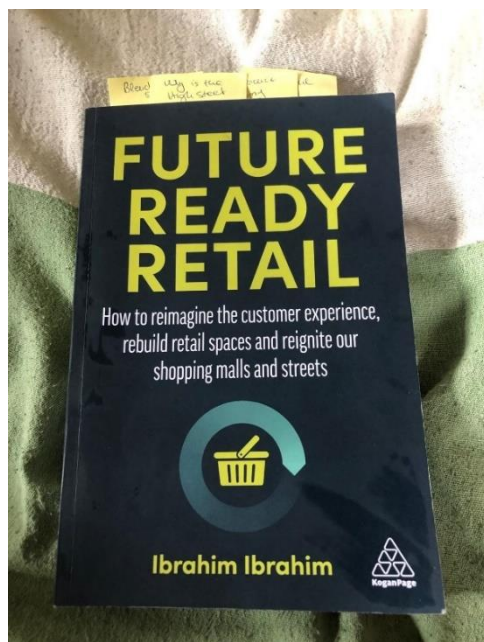
By striving to achieve a strategic balance of service offerings on-site, based on community needs, the High Street can better meet the evolving demands of its residents and visitors while ensuring its long-term sustainability and attractiveness for investment.

5.2.2 The future of retail and retail real estate

The aim of this section was to **study the current trajectory of the retail sector** after the impact and institutionalization of the internet technology, **what will be required from its physical presence in response to the changing market demands.**

The works of Verhoef et al., (2015), and Rigby (2011) presented the omni-channel future of retail, in which successful service providers will offer unified and seamless online and brick-and-mortar experiences. Omni-channeling was presented as the approach to integrating channels, erasing the distinction between online and physical channels, making the product and service offering easily engaging and accessible to the consumer through online channels and brick-and-mortar stores.

Ibrahim Ibrahim, place strategist and author of the book *“Future Ready Retail: How to Reimagine the Customer Experience, Rebuild Retail Spaces and Reignite our Shopping Malls and Streets”*, was invited for an interview. Prior to the interview, his publication was studied by the researcher in order to prepare the semi-structured conversation (see Picture 2.)



Picture 2. *Future Ready Retail*, Ibrahim Ibrahim (2022)

Ibrahim contended that retail properties will continue to be essential for occupants, customers, and the urban core itself. This aligns with Zimmerman & Burkholz (2019), who emphasized the significant influence of retail properties on the overall appearance and appeal of cityscapes and the urban core. The future of retail, sees retail spaces as recruitment platforms and as a way to retain customers. In the future, Ibrahim argues, down town commercial spaces will be operated as platforms where people have the opportunity to engage with the service but also with each other. These spaces will be used to engage with customers, foster relationships and create communities rather than focusing on achieving transactions.

However, the omni-channel future seems somewhat exclusive. Implementing omnichannel engagement requires substantial capital investment due to high occupancy costs and the need for extensive

management capabilities. This presents a risk for small and medium-sized enterprises, potentially limiting their ability to rent space for creating engaging customer experiences. As a result, large corporate chains with greater financial resources have a significant competitive advantage over small businesses. They can afford prime commercial floor space in desirable locations, effectively squeezing out SMEs from the High Street and reducing their presence in the retail landscape.

This displacement, unarguably presents itself as a further hinderance to urban vitality at High Streets, based on the work of Jin, Long, & Sun (2017), Wu, Ren, & Du (2018), and Ye, Li, and Liu (2017) who define urban vitality through the abundance of urban activities, or the intensity of residential activities. Global chains are actively searching to occupy attractive locations in order to lay out their omni-channel strategy, limiting the space availability for SMEs, and leading to a repetitive, monotonous High Street landscape with limited variety of services in place.

In the theoretical chapters of the paper, it was presented that urban vitality and urban viability have a symbiotic relationship, based on the report of URBED (1994). Urban vitality was further elaborated as the vibrant mix of diverse business and experiential possibilities in densely populated and socially diverse pedestrian areas, vivifying an urban area throughout both the day and night. On the other hand, urban viability related to the continuing ability of that urban area to attract investment. As human flow and revenue in commercial zones are correlated, the measures of vitality and viability were presented as interrelated.

This relationship of urban vitality and urban viability underscores the significance of transitioning the role of the landowner, as Ibrahim referred to *“from being a mere librarian to becoming an editor”*. The ongoing displacement of SMEs on High Streets by large enterprises due to their substantial financial resources, not only undermines the vitality of the street but also constrains urban viability, and consequently negatively impacts the economic development of the urban center.

Space as a Service can be a creative solution to these hindrances of urban vitality and dominance of retail franchises. O’Roarty (2000) discussed that the need for flexibility in commercial leases requires the development of new spatial products with risk-reward profiles that differ from traditional space offerings. The strategic and modular space provision of actively managed floorspace in the High Street can prove invaluable to SMEs and entrepreneurs, and massively impact the vitality of the urban core.

The challenge however lies within the landowner, as there are no concrete results yet on whether Space as a Service will allow them to achieve their financial targets. As presented, O’Roarty (2000) argued that the crucial question is how much extra rental premium is needed to be charged on operators for the flexible and modular space provision, to offset the additional risk associated with flexible leasing.

5.3 Layer One – Discussion

The first layer of the thesis laid ground to the rest of the paper by answering the first sub-question **“Why do people visit the High Street, and what are its present-day challenges?”**. The answer to the question was elaborated through data generated by comprehensive research done by an external research consultancy, literature review and through 6 semi-structured interviews with experts in the field.

Why do people visit the High Street?

Further expanding on Hubbard's (2017) work, the research presented High Streets more as than just outdoor shopping malls, they are essential spaces for social interaction and community engagement. Beyond serving as mere commercial hubs, High Streets cater to a variety of human needs, including the desire for connection, the need to signal and be seen, the importance of inspiration and learning, and the entertainment factor.

While some individuals visit High Streets for specific purposes, a significant portion is motivated by the desire to simply explore or engage socially and experientially, highlighting the importance of these spaces beyond mere shopping. High Streets serve as inclusive meeting places where people, including those with limited financial resources, can gather, socialize, and spend time without making significant purchases.

Interviewees emphasize the community aspect of High Streets, highlighting the unique experiences and interactions that occur in these spaces. Despite the convenience and possibly cheaper options available online, people are drawn to physical shops due to the sense of community, serendipity, and impromptu moments that arise from interacting with others in these environments. Therefore, High Streets play a vital role in fostering social cohesion and facilitating meaningful interactions, making them indispensable components of the urban core and people's lives.

The present-day challenges of the High Street

While Hubbard's (2017) work focused on the mismanagement of High Streets during recessionary periods by the public sector, this study argued that the challenges on High Streets proved to be multifaceted, with fragmented ownership of commercial real estate emerging as a prominent obstacle. This fragmentation leads to a focus on maximizing individual profits for landowners, rather than fostering a vital community space by targeting on the right mix of services. This situation enables landowners to prioritize short-term profitability by ensuring their properties remain produce rental income by simply being occupied, often without a clear long-term plan. This behavior creates a vicious cycle where brokers focus solely on maintaining occupancy levels in order for the building to produce income and keep its book valuation. Consequently, the community's perception of the services or products offered in High Street is completely disregarded.

Interviewees underscored this shift in perception where High Streets are viewed primarily as economic tools for investors rather than spaces for community engagement. Hence, there is a conflicting view of how society and the market view these locations. As explained, this approach continually prioritizes financial short-term gains and risk management over place-making strategies, resulting in a monofunctional, over-commercialized landscape.

Talen and Joeng (2019) discuss that new retail formats, such as out-of-town retail, and online shopping were the primary reasons for the erosion of SMEs and place-based interdependence. However, the interview results showed that a high accessibility threshold and high occupancy costs further exacerbate the issue, limiting the presence of local entrepreneurs and SMEs at High Street locations. Currently, retail real estate is typically offered as bare shells, necessitating significant investment from operators/occupiers to make them operational. This renders prime locations with high rents unfeasible for smaller local businesses and entrepreneurs. As a result, the diversity and range of services in city centers are limited, hindering urban vitality.

6. Conclusion

The Conclusion chapter of the paper will begin by addressing the main research question, supported by the interpretation of data presented in the Discussion chapter for the four sub-questions. Sub-section 6.2 will involve the author's reflection on the research process. Sub-section 6.3 will present recommendations and address limitations, while 6.4 will discuss recommendations for praxis. Finally, 6.5 will outline the contributions made by this research to the field of Spatial Planning.

6.1 Answering the main research question

The research aimed to investigate the potential contribution of commercial landowners to the revitalization of High Street locations through the adoption of Commercial Landowner Responsibility (CLR) principles. The primary research question driving this inquiry was: **“How can Commercial Landowner Responsibility (CLR) at High Street locations influence urban vitality and contribute to its future social sustainability?”**

To be able to address the main research question, four research objectives were formulated. As CLR fundamentally encompasses broader stakeholder needs, these had to be first identified. Therefore, the first three objectives centered around the identification of stakeholder interests within High Street locations and the impact assessment of their interactions. Finally, the last objective was explored through a case study analysis, which was conducted to examine the practical implications of CLR implementation on a High Street's vitality.

In the initial phase of the study, the social significance and communal role of High Streets were underscored, highlighting issues such as fragmented ownership and high occupier costs that contribute to a homogenized, monocultured and repetitive landscape. Consequently, commercial landowners under CLR principles are tasked with integrating stakeholder needs into their decision-making processes. This involves fostering community engagement and opt to diversifying the range of services and products offered to promote urban vitality in High Streets.

The second layer of the research delved into the interests of High Street operators and the requirements from the retail sector's physical presence in response to the changing market demands.

Through interviews with retail and High Street experts, coupled with a literature review, it was discovered that operators are increasingly viewing downtown brick-and-mortar stores as platforms for recruitment and customer retention, aiming to engage the community with their services. This emphasizes a shift from simple transactions to fostering community engagement in physical locations, as operators leverage both physical and digital channels to connect with customers. These findings resonate with Piotrowicz and Cuthbertson's (2014) theory, which acknowledges the transformative impact of digitization on the retail sector, while emphasizing the continued relevance of physical spaces to the retail industry.

Retail real estate plays a crucial role in drawing and involving customers, providing an opportunity to build a community and ultimately ensuring the success of operators in the ever-changing retail environment. Hence, the accessibility of High Street locations is essential for SMEs and entrepreneurs to expand and compete with global franchises. Furthermore, the presence of

SMEs and a variety of diverse businesses is fundamental for promoting urban vitality in urban centers. However, high occupancy costs and rental rates pose significant barriers for small and medium-sized enterprises, rendering High Streets inaccessible and undermining urban vitality.

The interviews confirmed the work of O'Roarty (2000), which revealed the need of flexible leasing structures and Space as a Service (SpaaS) options for operators of commercial real estate. Therefore, CLR principles suggest Space as a Service to be widely considered as a High Street leasing strategy by commercial landowners. In this way they can enhance the vitality of High Streets by reducing barriers to entry for a diverse range of operators, and by exploring innovative business models tailored to the needs of stakeholders, commercial landowners can contribute to the success of their tenant and effectively contribute to the vitality and sustainability of High Streets.

Diving in the working relationship of landowners and occupiers by interviewing retail and commercial landowner representatives, revealed that the latter party must reassess their role and adopt a collaborative stance within the urban landscape. The interview findings revealed that landowners often emerge as the source of the problem.

Traditional landowner approaches that favor financially strong companies prioritize short-term profitability over sustainable, long-term benefits for themselves and the High Streets. The traditional 'balance-sheet approach' and chasing individualistic interest contribute towards the establishment of a monocultured landscape, that eventually hinders urban vitality. By embracing a proactive role as "agents of change" and active stakeholders, commercial landowners can transition from passive overseers to active stakeholders, facilitating the provision of socially enriching and community engaging services, and accommodate the diversity of offerings within their location and properties in line with community needs.

In the concluding phase of the research, the effectiveness of a commercial landowner's initiatives in increasing the vitality of a High Street was evaluated. By closely examining community needs and actively fostering the development of community-centric services, a visible, albeit modest improvement in the urban vitality of Lijnbaan was observed. The direct engagement of the commercial landowner in the capacity of both curator and operator, coupled with the strategic phased activation of a building and the embracement of SpaaS as a leasing strategy, resulted in a more diverse range of services tailored to the community's needs.

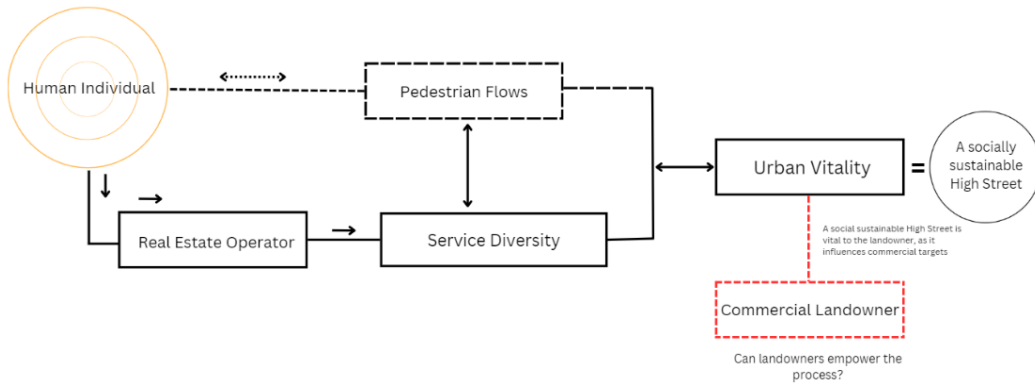
This approach heightened the diversity and range of services available on the High Street by improving access for local SMEs and entrepreneurs to a prime location. Consequently, urban vitality experienced a positive impact, evidenced by the increased diversity of activities observed in the Lijnbaan.

An NPS of 48 points and remarkably positive feedback from the community, indicates the successful manifestation of CLR principles, as OX was well-received by its audience, with promising predictions for future increase on human activity. Hence, the strategy of the commercial landowner to initiate the redevelopment of a building by adopting CLR and considering broader stakeholder needs, benefited both stakeholders and urban vitality. However, the commercial success of the strategy has not been visible yet, due to the cross-sectional nature of the study.

Despite this uncertainty, the inherent value of these initiatives to the broader community, encompassing entrepreneurs, SMEs, and citizens alike, is undeniable. The initiatives contribute positively to the overall socio-economic fabric of the community, fostering a more inclusive and

vital High Street environment. While financial viability remains a legitimate question, the tangible benefits derived by various stakeholders underscore the significance of such community-centric approaches in urban revitalization efforts. Further exploration and evaluation are necessary to ensure the long-term sustainability and financial viability of these initiatives according to CLR principles. Nevertheless, their intrinsic value to urban vitality and community well-being remains evident.

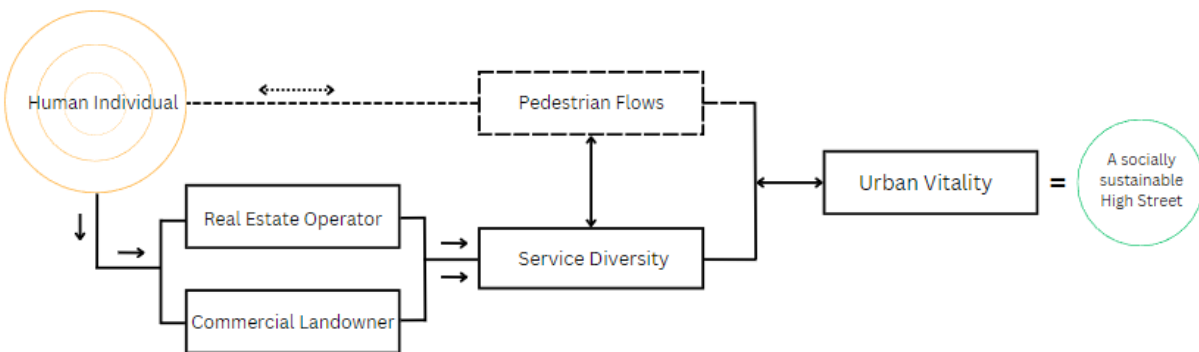
In Section 2.11 of the study, an initial conceptual framework was presented and the role of the commercial landowner was questioned in the procedure of establishing a vital and socially sustainable High Street.



Graphic 5. The High Street Battery questioning the role of the Commercial Landowner (Source: Author)

After the conduction of the research and the three-layered results produced, a validated conceptual framework can be established which visualizes the new results and improved theory of this research (see Graphic 6). It was found that the commercial landowner has the capabilities to positively influence the vitality of the Highstreet, benefiting all major stakeholders of the research.

With the adoption of CLR principles, certain initiatives such as community research, flexible leasing options, modular space provision (SpaaS), and citizen engagement have indeed benefited stakeholders and positively influenced the vitality of the High Street leading to a more socially sustainable environment. The most essential initiative taken by the commercial landowner was the transition from a passive to an active stakeholder and collaborator, by the division of the PropCo and the OpCo. The embracement of this novel mentality allowed the commercial landowner to explore avenues and business models that were previously hidden to traditional real estate practices.



Graphic 6. The final version of the High Street Battery, depicting commercial landowners as active stakeholders to a vital & socially sustainable High Street. (Source: Author)

The refined conceptual framework (see Graphic 4.) portrays the commercial landowner as a dynamic and essential component within the ecosystem of the High Street. Unlike the traditional depiction where real estate operators solely bear the responsibility, the updated framework positions the commercial landowner as an active and contributing stakeholder, directly serving the needs of individual citizens.

The sudden impact of the pandemic on commercial real estate was a shock that forced commercial landowners to reassess their position. However, the interviews uncovered that the inflexible and risk-averse corporate culture within which commercial landowners operate poses challenges for establishing this cooperative approach as the standard practice. These findings align with the assertion made by Dolega and Celinska-Janowicz (2015), who argued that organizations' reluctance to adapt their processes increases as they become more hesitant to incur the escalating costs associated with change.

Unless being an active stakeholder can be empirically shown to contribute to the commercial objectives of the landowner, the substantial risks and capital investments required to enact change cannot be readily justified within a corporate environment driven by financial KPIs.

For CLR to influence urban vitality and ensure a socially sustainable High Street, commercial landowners will have to adopt an assertive role of a leader, and a cooperative role of an active stakeholder, being involved in strategically curating and facilitating the right mix of products and services available to the community. Cooperation amongst landowners and operators is paramount, ensuring that the evolving needs of the third stakeholder, the human individual, are effectively addressed and facilitated in today's High Streets.

6.2 Reflections

The execution of this research presented several challenges, particularly due to its grassroots approach, which began with an analysis of stakeholders' needs as defined within the study. Limited experience in research methodology may have affected the coherence of the paper to some extent. However, despite these challenges, the research successfully demonstrated that commercial landowners operating under CLR principles possess the capacity to positively influence the vitality of a High Street. This highlights the necessity for a repositioning of the commercial landowner's role within the urban environment.

Furthermore, the research prompted reflection on the transformative potential of private entities, raising questions about the efficacy and feasibility of such initiatives in the absence of public sector intervention or mediation.

The case study of OX provided valuable insights on the impact of CLR on High Street urban vitality. Although the specific context of OX as a department store may limit the generalizability of the findings to smaller High Street buildings, it nonetheless underscored the value of community research, flexible leasing structures and strategic redevelopment of a building in benefiting both the community and shareholders.

A lot of thought was given to the fact that the immersion of the researcher to the OX case, while also being employed under the initiating organization would lead to biased results that would favor a positive outcome. These concerns regarding researcher bias were addressed through extensive research, active participation in events and observation of community engagement

with the OX concept. Despite undeniable value to the community, the question remains whether this approach will ultimately prove financially beneficial for the commercial landowner. Effective communication, ongoing engagement, and trial and error will be essential in ensuring community understanding and support, a goal that is still in progress and perhaps not addressed enough.

6.3 Recommendations & Limitations

The research concentrated on the role commercial landowners can play in revitalizing High Streets by embracing a set of principles defined by CLR, and primarily leveraging stakeholder theory. The research was structured into three layers, each accompanied by recommendations and limitations.

Layer One

The first part of the study focused on highlighting the social significance of High Streets within urban areas and their importance for the community. This involved identifying the interests of the human individual, key stakeholder of the research. Additionally, the study explored the dysfunctions of High Streets to understand the underlying issues that allow a repetitive landscape, which may conflict with the interests of these stakeholders.

The research specifically excluded the role of public agencies and focused instead on examining the influence of the market sphere on contemporary issues facing High Streets. While this decision helped narrow down the study's broad scope, it also created a blind spot that warrants further exploration. The study identified fragmented ownership and high occupancy costs as significant factors contributing to the repetitive nature of High Street landscapes. However, it's important to note that the impact of national and supranational policies of urban planning and free competition were not examined in their impact on the vitality of High Streets, as governmental agencies with regulatory power have been excluded from the study.

National and European regulations regarding free competition were established with the aim of fostering an inclusive entrepreneurial environment. However, a question arose during the conduction of this paper, that certain regulations might inadvertently lead to exclusivity within High Streets, as global franchises are free to dominate attractive urban locations. This exclusivity could result in a limited range of services being offered to civil society, ultimately affecting the accessibility and diversity of services within these urban spaces, hence, limiting urban vitality.

Further investigation into the impact of urban policies on High Street dynamics is needed to better understand how regulatory frameworks influence the socio-economic landscape of urban areas. This would provide valuable insights into potential policy adjustments needed to ensure that High Streets remain vibrant and inclusive spaces that cater to the diverse needs of communities.

Layer Two

The second phase of the study delved into the complex relationship between landowners and occupiers/operators within High Streets. This relationship was identified as a key factor directly influencing urban vitality. It was argued that the risk-averse behavior of landowners tends to

favor tenant businesses with predictable and stable revenues, creating an environment that is often exclusive for SMEs and individual entrepreneurs who want to operate in central locations such as High Streets.

The findings regarding this relationship were based on six semi-structured interviews involving representatives from both landowners and occupiers/operators. Due to time constraints and the multilayered nature of the research process, a more comprehensive exploration was not feasible.

It's noteworthy that the study did not examine the legal aspects of the landowner-tenant relationship. National regulations governing landlord-tenant relationships can significantly impact the dynamics between these two parties and consequently influence the vitality of urban areas.

Mark Robinson, co-founder of Ellandi, a UK-based real estate investment management company specializing in retail properties, highlighted in the interview that the Landlord and Tenant Act 1985 in the UK is observed to have a counterproductive effect on cooperation between parties involved. Instead of facilitating collaboration for mutual benefit, the Act often becomes a battleground for resolving conflicts. Parties tend to prioritize their own interests within the framework of the Act rather than seeking opportunities for mutually advantageous outcomes.

This Act, intended to regulate and balance the landlord-tenant relationship, inadvertently becomes a barrier to constructive engagement. Rather than fostering an environment where parties work together to achieve common goals, it creates a dynamic where each party navigates within the confines of the Act to protect their individual interests. Therefore, a thorough examination of the legal framework governing this relationship and its consequences on the urban environment is needed.

The research into the legal dimensions of the landowner-occupier/operator relationship would provide valuable insights into how regulatory frameworks shape the dynamics of High Streets and could inform potential policy interventions aimed at promoting a more diverse and vital urban landscape that positively influences vitality.

The second layer of the study also focused on analyzing the evolving landscape of the retail sector towards omni-channel strategies. It examined how commercial floor space is increasingly being utilized not just as transactional channels but also as platforms for attracting and retaining customers. By exploring this, the research aimed to study the future relevance of brick-and-mortar stores and understand the perspectives and interests of another key stakeholder in High Street properties, the occupiers.

The study highlighted the growing demand for Space as a Service and flexible leasing structures, particularly for SMEs. This aligns with the argument put forth by O'Roarty (2000) regarding the importance of adaptable leasing arrangements to accommodate changing business needs. However, the impact of flexible leasing structures on real estate evaluations remains uncertain and requires further investigation. The implications of these leasing models on property valuations are not yet well-defined, indicating a need for more in-depth exploration in this area to better understand their potential effects on the real estate market and investment decisions.

Layer Three

The OX case study provided insights into how CLR and certain actions behind the activation of a single building can influence, albeit to a small extent, the vitality of an entire High Street. It was demonstrated that CLR prompts commercial landowners to consider stakeholder needs when making decisions about how to utilize a building and what services to introduce to the community and the High Street.

However, a significant limitation of the study, as previously emphasized, was its cross-sectional nature and the limited timeframe since the initiation of the OX project. Therefore, the assessment of whether the project enhanced the urban vitality of the Lijnbaan area was based on community feedback and footfall forecasts. It is important to note that evaluating the impact of the OX project on Lijnbaan's vitality will require ongoing research, as community establishment is a gradual process and OX is scheduled to be fully operational in a year from now. Continued monitoring and analysis will provide valuable insights into its effectiveness as a catalyst for urban revitalization efforts.

Beyond its implications for urban vitality, the OX case offers an intriguing avenue for exploring the practical implications of "Space as a Service" and flexible leasing structures on building valuations, a challenge brought up by O'Roarty (2000). By delving into this topic, researchers can contribute innovative perspectives to the real estate industry, guiding practitioners on how to accurately assess the valuation processes of properties that adopt these contemporary leasing models. This deeper exploration has the potential to inform future urban development strategies and enhance the sustainability and livability of urban spaces.

Lastly, one of the hypotheses formulated posited that commercial landowners could achieve and even surpass their commercial targets through the adoption of CLR, aligning with the principles of stakeholder theory and the work of Freeman et al. (2010). However, since OX represents an ex-ante case of business model innovation, this hypothesis cannot be definitively confirmed at this point. Despite the uncertainty surrounding this hypothesis, the examination of OX's impact on urban vitality suggests that the interests of the third stakeholder, namely the commercial landowners, may indeed be served. This is in line with the argument put forward by George (2003) who argued *"Serving all your stakeholders is the best way to produce long-term results and create a growing, prosperous company. Balancing the interests of all stakeholders and delivering strong returns to shareholders is not contradictory. In the long run, they go hand in hand"*. This indication is promising, as it suggests that CLR initiatives have the potential to positively influence both the commercial success of landowners and bring significant value to the community.

Nevertheless, drawing a conclusion regarding the hypothesis will require further time and observation. The evolution of OX and its impact on the commercial performance of the involved landowner will need to be monitored over an extended period to provide a more definitive answer. This underscores the importance of longitudinal studies in assessing the efficacy of innovative business models and their implications for stakeholders in the urban environment.

6.4 Recommendations for praxis

Based on the findings of this research, several recommendations for practical application emerged. Future studies should delve into the longitudinal and descriptive impacts of the OX case on the vitality of Lijnbaan, as well as the influence of the commercial landowner's strategy on the commercial valuation of the building. This in-depth analysis would provide valuable insights into the sustained effectiveness and financial implications of community-centric initiatives and CLR.

Successful implementation of bespoke community research and flexible leasing structures, as demonstrated by the OX case, can serve as a viable strategy for commercial landowners to revitalize dysfunctional real estate assets in urban centers. By understanding and actively addressing the specific needs of local communities, and offering flexible leasing options to local SMEs and entrepreneurs, commercial landowners can attract diverse operators and foster a vibrant High Street environment.

If the OX case proves to be a viable business model, further examination of Space as a Service and its implications on valuation for buildings like Lijnbaan 150 should be considered. This exploration would provide insights into the feasibility, challenges and benefits of adopting SpaaS as a leasing model at prime locations.

Moving on from the OX case, further research can inform public agencies with regulatory authority about the challenges facing today's High Streets, which have transitioned into outdoor shopping malls rather than thriving community centers. Initially, the study has excluded government intervention in order to explore the effectiveness of market initiatives through CLR. Nevertheless, the results derived from interviews acknowledged the importance of government intervention in order to allow a healthy relationship amongst stakeholders. For example, in Section 5.4 it was presented that the 1985 Tenant Act in the UK was perceived having a counterproductive effect on landowner – occupier cooperation. Therefore, research on the legal frameworks that define landowner – tenant relations is highly recommended.

The research discussed that the risk-averse, inflexible, and purely financially motivated approach of commercial landowners is unlikely to shift in the near future. However, it also suggests that altering this behavior could yield benefits for commercial targets. Should this rigidity persist and continue to undermine the urban core, governmental intervention may become necessary. Government incentives have the potential to incentivize actions that foster enhanced vitality in urban areas, benefiting all parties involved.

Therefore, there is a need to research regulatory frameworks and policies that can allow and incentivize cooperation amongst landowners and operators while prioritizing community needs. By aligning regulatory policies with the principles of Commercial Landowner Responsibility (CLR) and community-centric development, policymakers involved in the urban realm can create an enabling environment for sustainable urban revitalization.

6.5 Contributions to the science of Spatial Planning

The traditional concept of the High Street, often revered as the heart of local communities, has faced significant challenges in maintaining its economic and social vitality. Historically, it served as more than just a commercial space, embodying a hub of community interaction and local

identity. However, urban transformations, technological advancements, and increasingly growing occupying costs; have shifted consumer behaviors towards online shopping and allowed for the dominance of global chain stores, leading to the decline of small-scale enterprises and neighborhood interdependence. In response to these challenges, there is a growing recognition of the need for High Street revitalization efforts that prioritize placemaking, community-centric design, community engagement and diversity of services and uses.

The research has shown that the market sphere, in particular commercial landowners can take the lead in collaborative initiatives involving stakeholders such as local businesses, entrepreneurs, SMEs and civil society in order to reinvigorate High Streets as vibrant community hubs. By embracing flexible leasing models, exploring new business models, understanding evolving consumer preferences, and leveraging data-driven insights, High Street properties under the right management have the potential to foster social cohesion, support local businesses, and enhance urban vitality. By prioritizing urban vitality and social sustainability in decision-making processes, landowners can not only achieve commercial success, but also contribute to the overall economic and social resilience, and well-being of the communities they serve.

While Montgomery (1998) highlighted the importance of proactive interventions in the built environment by the public sector to foster community and urban vibrancy, this research fills a significant gap by considering the role of the market players, such as commercial landowners, as immediate beneficiaries of urban revitalization efforts. Unlike the perspectives presented by Hubbard (2017) and the work of Talen and Joeng (2019), which primarily focus on the public sector's responsibility in addressing the decline of the High Street, this paper argues that private and resourceful entities can also act proactively as "agents of change." Drawing on the concept described by Theodoridis et al. (2017), private entities have the potential to lead the transformation of the urban core and play a crucial role in revitalizing High Streets.

In conclusion, this paper makes a notable contribution to Spatial Planning by introducing the concept of Commercial Landowner Responsibility (CLR) and demonstrating its significance in High Street revitalization endeavors. By positioning commercial landowners as active stakeholders and decision-makers rather than passive shareholders, the paper emphasizes their pivotal role in shaping the vitality of urban centers and High Streets.

The initial hypothesis of the research, asserting that commercial landowners have the agency to drive positive change in urban vitality without necessitating new policy implementation, is validated through the findings of this study. By showcasing real-world examples of CLR principles in action, the paper underscores the potential of commercial landowners to proactively contribute to the revitalization of High Streets, thereby empowering urban centers to thrive.

However, to institutionalize a market behavior where commercial landowners prioritize urban vitality and community needs over financial metrics, government intervention may be essential. The rigid corporate environment often acts as a barrier to innovation and tends to uphold inefficient operational procedures, making governmental intervention a potential catalyst for change in this regard.

7.References

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Informed Consent Form

Dear participant,

First of all, I would like to thank you for your interest and participation in this study. Below I will briefly explain the content of the research.

The research being conducted is part of the master's specialization Planning, Land and Real Estate at the Faculty of Management at Radboud University, Nijmegen. This specialization focuses on urban development from the perspective of area and real estate development.

The primary focus of this study revolves around the revitalization of High Street Locations, with a particular emphasis on an essential metric known as urban vitality. At its core, Urban Vitality embodies "The vibrant mix of diverse business and experiential possibilities in densely populated and socially diverse pedestrian areas, bringing energy throughout the day and night."

Central to the research is the acknowledgment of commercial landowners of high street retail properties, positioning them as key contributors to the creation of a vibrant urban center. In light of this perspective, I introduce the concept of Commercial Landowner Responsibility (CLR), defined as "the collection of principles that commercial landowners voluntarily adopt when acquiring, (re)developing, managing, and investing in real estate. These principles involve taking responsibility and actively promoting a positive influence on the environment, communities, and stakeholders through their actions."

My hypothesis posits that CLR can indeed play a pivotal influence in the revitalization of our urban centers. The research unfolds in three distinct stages. Firstly, we delve into the motivations of individuals visiting the High Street. Subsequently, we scrutinize emerging retail trends, examining the physical presence of the sector and exploring the dynamics between landowners and retailers. Finally, a detailed case study implementing CLR undergoes analysis, aiming to discern whether an enhancement of urban vitality is achievable through CLR.

The final product of this study is a research report in the form of a Master's thesis. The master thesis can potentially be published on the Thesis Repository of Radboud University. The data collected during this study are available only for research purposes and will be treated in a highly confidential manner. The interview will be recorded, with your approval, using an audio recorder. However, recording the interview is essential for further elaboration. The audio fragment will be transcribed, and will be deleted immediately after.

You are fully within your rights to withdraw from the study at any time without having to give any reason. Furthermore, you are not obliged to answer questions to which you cannot answer.

If you have any further questions, I will be happy to answer them by email at savvastopal@gmail.com. I would like to ask you to fill in the declaration data collection and data processing below

Data Collection and Data Processing Statement
Please indicate your preferences in the boxes below

	Yes	No
1. Study Participation		
I have read the informed consent form and have been fully informed about the study by this.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I hereby voluntarily consent to participate in this study and am fully aware that I may refuse questions, withdraw from the study at any time, without any motive.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I understand that recording the interview is essential for a correct elaboration of the results and hereby consent to the recording of the interview using an audio recorder and transcribing this audio recording	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. Data collection		
I understand that the data collected will be used purely for research purposes and that all or part of the research report may possibly be published.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I understand that I can have data from the transcript removed/modified by the researcher.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. Anonymity		
I consent to the use of my name in the research report. If you do not consent to this, you will be anonymized as respondent P.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I give permission for my position to be named in the report.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I understand that the personal information collected that is traceable to me, such as email, name, etc. is available only to the researcher, who will delete this data after the completion of the research report	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Name of participant

Date

Signature

Appendix 2: Codebook

- Code Groups (4)
 - !High Street - Layer One (10)
 - !High Street - Convenience (4-0)
 - !High Street - Experience (4-0)
 - !High Street - Fit for purpose (2-0)
 - !High Street - Fragmented ownership (3-0)
 - !High Street - Issues (13-0)
 - !High Street - Need for change (4-0)
 - !High Street - Occupying Costs (8-0)-
 - !High Street - Social need (7-0)
 - !High Street - Solution (2-0)
 - !Landowner - Need for shift (10-0)
 - !Landowner/Occupier - Layer Two (6)
 - !Landowner - Need for shift (10-0)
 - !Landowner Interests (6-0)
 - !Occupier/Landowner - Communication Gap (1-0)
 - !Occupier/Landowner - Cooperation (8-0)
 - !Occupier/Landowner - Issues (6-0)
 - !Occupier/Landowner - Relations (20-0)
 - !OX case study - Layer Three (12)
 - !OX - As solution (2-0)
 - !OX - Business strategy (13-0)
 - !OX - Challenges (5-0)
 - !OX - Citizens and partners (2-0)
 - !OX - Future (3-0)
 - !OX - Research (2-0)
 - !OX - Space as a service (3-0)
 - !OX - Space provision (2-0)
 - !OX - Steps (4-0)
 - !OX - Success factors (6-0)
 - !OX - What is it (5-0)
 - !OX - Which problems does it adress (6-0)
 - !Retail & Retail Real Estate - Layer Two (8)
 - !Retail - Business case & e-commerce (4-0)
 - !Retail - Experience (1-0)
 - !Retail - Future Function (3-0)
 - !Retail - High costs for SMEs (3-0)
 - !Retail - Issues (2-0)
 - !Retail - Real Estate - Function (10-0)
 - !Retail - Real Estate - Future optimization (11-0)
 - !Retail - Space as a Service (1-0)

Interview Transcript Coding

Code Group Manager

Code Groups

New Group New Smart Group Duplicate Create Snapshot Rename Delete Edit Comment Edit Smart Group Search & Code Show in Network Excel Export

Search Code Groups

Name	Size	Created by	Created	Modified by	Modified
!High Street - Layer One	10	Savvas Topalidis	3/29/2024 12:44 PM	Savvas Topalidis	3/29/2024 12:50 PM
!Landowner/Occupier - Layer Two	6	Savvas Topalidis	3/29/2024 12:50 PM	Savvas Topalidis	3/29/2024 12:50 PM
!OX case study - Layer Three	12	Savvas Topalidis	3/29/2024 12:51 PM	Savvas Topalidis	3/29/2024 12:51 PM
!Retail & Retail Real Estate - Layer Two	8	Savvas Topalidis	3/29/2024 12:50 PM	Savvas Topalidis	3/29/2024 12:50 PM

Comment:

Select a code group to show its comment

4 code groups

Appendix 3: The High Street Batter (Conceptual Framework)

