

The Retail Planning Knowledge Base Briefing Paper 3

Clone Towns

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CLONE TOWNS



The New Economics Foundation coined the term clone towns to describe a process by which towns were becoming populated by a predominance of the same multiple retailers and in the process losing identity as smaller independent retailers were squeezed out. Andrew Simms of the New Economics Foundation has been at the forefront of this concept.



Clone Town Britain

The survey results on the bland state of the nation

The Concept

‘The death of diversity undermines democracy, attacks our sense of place and belonging and therefore well-being. It hands power to the corporate elite ultimately pulling apart the rich weave of natural systems upon which our livelihoods and the economy depend’ writes Simms (p.5).

‘...there is also a strong parallel between genetic diversity in the natural world and retail diversity on our high streets. Where loss of genetic diversity threatens the survival of species..... clone towns imperil economic livelihoods, communities and our culture, by decreasing the resilience of high streets to economic downturns and diminishing consumer choice’ (Simms, p.6).

Keith Vaz commented, ‘We have to ask whether we want to see the UK retail landscape completely redrawn and the high streets dominated by the supermarket convenience stores. No more butcher, baker and candlestickmaker, just Metros, Metros and more Metros. The character and integrity of our town and city centres are being disfigured for ever’ (House of Commons, December 2005).

Key Findings

- The term was coined by the New Economics Foundation and is in danger of becoming a factoid
- It caught the public imagination but in terms of an understanding of retailing it is not very useful
- The results of the New Economics Foundation reflect their philosophy rather than an independent investigation. The data was collected by those committed to this philosophy.
- The methodology is a self fulfilling prophecy. Only the first 50 high street shops are used in the analysis.
- Academics and professionals concerned with the welfare of retailing recognise that secondary retailing is a crucial part of retail structure and that it is where smaller shops and independents are often located.
- There are legitimate concerns about town and district diversity and these are issues taken up by town centre management experts.
- Secondary shopping has been neglected by retail planning policy guidance

Web Sites

www.neweconomics.org/gen/uploads/t3zly355dpog3w55ctaiuu4506062005082504.pdf
www.neweconomics.org/gen/uploads/mrrefr55lroqjwrefpvg525528082004130744.pdf
news.bbc.co.uk/1/shared/bsp/hi/pdfs/15_02_06_highstreet.pdf
www.business-strategies.co.uk

References

Baldock, J.,
Secondary shopping – the antidote to ‘clones’,
National Retail Planning Forum Newsletter, September 2005, 3.

Baldock dismisses the clone town report as a partial analysis applying only to the prime retail areas. He underlines the importance of secondary shopping areas.

Clone towns, Neighbourhood retailing

Boyle, D.
Not another clone town campaign,
Town and Country Planning, 74(7/8), 2005, 247.

Boyle states that the key finding of the research on clone towns was the trends which were being observed. The participation of local people in local places was very important in collecting this data in the same way as it is important for local places to remain distinctive.

Clone towns

Cavannagh, E.
Attack of the clones?
In **Centre Retailing 2006**, London; Estates Gazette, 2005, 32-36.

A shopping industry response to the new Economics Foundation report on clone towns. This response stresses what is being done by the industry to promote a mix of multiple and independent retail development in shopping centres and town centres whilst at the same time underlining the importance of multiples in ensuring town centre vitality. It considers schemes to assign units for independent retailers in shopping centres and discusses ways in which new developments create new secondary areas in town centres which are well suited to independent retailers.

Clone towns, Town centre

House of Commons, All-Party Parliamentary Small Shops Group
High Street Britain: 2015,
London:APPSSG, 2006, 91p.

The All Party Small Shops Group was set up to address issues relating to the competitive position of the small shop sector in UK retailing. The report includes comments on clone towns as part of the argument for greater attention to the competitive position of small shops..

Competition, Food retailing, Small shops

National Retail Planning Forum

The role and vitality of secondary shopping – a new direction,

London: NRPF, 2004, 59p.

The National Retail Planning Forum commissioned research on secondary shopping with a view to considering how planning legislation as proposed in Draft PPS6 and in the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act would impact on secondary shopping. It seeks ways to make the planning framework positive for secondary shopping. Town centre fringe, district centres and small town centres all come under the grouping secondary shopping. Case study data from each type of secondary data was used with examples from Exeter, Seaton, Reigate, Birmingham, Doncaster, Bolton, Sutton and Cheam. The relative significance of national and local aspects of change are discussed. A number of recommendations for planning policy specific to secondary centres are made. A key publication on the role and nature of secondary shopping.

PPS6, Neighbourhood retailing, Secondary shopping

New Economics Foundation

Clone town Britain: the loss of identity on the nation's high streets,

London: New Economics Foundation, 2004, 25p. (see also: Blackman, D.

Shopkeepers pay a high price for high street cloning, **Planning**, 3/09/04, p.4)

This report is concerned with the sameness of high streets blaming the lack of differentiation on the spread of multiple retailing. The report broadens the argument to a range of other sectors where diversity has been reduced by corporate culture. From a retail perspective the impact on the character of town centres is addressed. The argument is made that the existence of clone towns increases vulnerability to company fortunes and changing economic conditions as well as too much concentration in a few hands. The commentary in **Planning** on this report makes a number of criticisms mentioning consumer preferences and ways in which small retailers can cooperate to offer more distinctive shopping spaces.

High street, Town centre

Salisbury District Council

Salisbury: home town or clone town?

Salisbury District Council, 2005. (www.visitsalisbury.com/membersarea/factsandfigures/Clone%20Towns%20Final%20Report.pdf)

A District Council application of the methodology. The results highlight the importance of secondary shopping areas for independent and smaller retailers. Retail structure is mapped in Salisbury by street.

Clone town, Salisbury

Simms, A., Kjell, P. and Potts, R.

Clone town Britain: the survey results on the bland state of the nation,
London: New Economics Foundation, 2005, 40p. ISBN 1-899407 98 7

This is the full report of the New Economics Foundation on clone towns in the UK (See also earlier introductory report: New Economics Foundation **Clone town Britain: the loss of identity on the nation's high streets**, London: New Economics Foundation, 2004, 25p.) The report pursues the argument high streets are becoming too similar with too many of the same multiples in every high street. Three types of towns were identified from the survey of 103 towns outside the London area – clone towns, border towns and home towns. A table of results, key examples and ways to combat clone town development are included in the report.

The methodology used and the survey material are included in Taylor, J., Oram, J. and Kjell, P. **Clone Town Britain**, London: New Economics Foundation, 2004, 4p.

Clone town, Market towns

Warnaby, G., Bennison, D. and Davies, B.

Marketing town centres: retailing and town centre management,
Local Economy, 20(2), 2005, 183-204.

Given the increasing homogeneity of retailing in town centres place marketing faces an increasing challenge in promoting the attractions of places. The role of marketing and the lack of marketing experience amongst town centre managers are the main foci of the article.

Town centre management

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