

A study on Town Centre management for sustainability; A case study of Redditch in the United Kingdom

Mariko WADA Urban Renaissance Agency/ Waseda University*

1. Introduction

The town centre and retail sector are facing tremendous challenges from local, national and global consumer trends, including rapid changes in the fiscal situation affecting local authorities (Association of Town & City Management (ATCM), 2013). This situation has become more serious since the global economic recession of 2008, which was the start of a significant long term global restructuring of world's economy (Ibid).

Looking back into the past, with the rapid expansion of the motorized transport and the increase of urban population, the movement of public facilities to outside of town centres and the development of shopping centres out-of-town have occurred. In contrast, the hollowing-out of regional town centres represented a significant problem (Portas, 2011; Maskey *et al.*, 2013; Jones *et al.*, 2003). The shift from manufacturing to service caused the decrease of firms and employment's opportunities in the towns, which has spurred the decline of population and demand in the towns. Moreover, motorization made traffic congestion in urban area so that firms sought for the site in suburbs because of avoiding traffic congestion and preference of cheaper place (Shore, 2006). In addition, Development-led and market-led policy caused the development of shopping centres in suburbs and the decline of town centres become more serious (Jones *et al.*, 2003). Such phenomena have happened in many of the world's countries, such as in European countries and North America (Coca- Stefaniak *et al.*, 2009).

In response to this situation, in the 1990's, Town Centre Management (TCM) advanced in order to invite retailers into town centres and is being used in the developed counties (Guimarães, 2013). While TCM has been successful to some extent, high streets and town centres are still facing serious challenges from out-of town shopping centres and the growth of online and mobile retailing (Department for Communities and Local Government of UK (DCLG), 2012). Moreover, the lack of sustainability of TCM was criticized; that is to say, not only lack of the infrastructure but also weakness of involvement of some stakeholders and project duration (Guimarães, 2013; Coca-Stefaniak *et al.*, 2009). In addition, a sense of recognition of town centres as fundamental places for community caused the evolution of urban regeneration policies, running from 'reconstruction' to 'regeneration', such as success of the supermarkets, the development of parking and improvement of the planning system in the long term aspects (Portas, 2011; Maskey *et al.*, 2013; Jones *et al.*, 2003). For these reasons, the government has recognized that high streets have to offer something new that goes beyond retail, and with which neither shopping centres nor the internet can compete (DCLG, 2013).

In this research, it is considered that Town Centre Management is one of methods to realize

town centre regeneration and town centre regeneration effects on whole town beyond town centre to obtain long term benefits. Consequently, this research focused on TCM and explored the clues for solving the issues of town centre regeneration for sustainability and chose Redditch which is a town in the UK as a case study.

2. Challenges facing Town Centre Management (TCM)

2.1 What is Town Centre Management

Despite the concept of Town Centre Management (TCM) used to be one of key ways in which traditional urban retail areas have tried to resist the threat from increased retail in out-of-centre locations (Warnaby *et al.*, 2005; Coca-Stefaniak *et al.*, 2009), it has become more about sustainability (Otsuka & Reeve, 2007b; McAteer & Stephens, 2011). In terms of sustainability, it is not to be restricted to environmentalism but include issues of social justice, the way of living and quality of life (Grunwald, 2013).

According to ATCM (2014), Town Centre Management is defined that a coordinated initiative organized in order to ensure that town and city centres are desirable and attractive places, and the project uses it as the definition of TCM.

2.2 How have Town Centre management changed

In the early years of town centre management, initiatives were mainly established as partnerships between a local authority and a few key retailers, such as M&S and Boots (Yokomori, 2013, pp.70). Local authority had the leading role at infancy stage of TCM scheme (Coca-Stefaniak *et al.*, 2009). In addition, local authority also had funding role. Recently the most partnerships of structure have become wider (Ibid).

While retailing gave directly to the commercial viability of town centre, the recognition grew that the other activities need for attraction and viability of town centre (Portas, 2011). However, there are few evidence of TCM schemes that attempt to widen issues, such as improving quality of life and addressing environmental issues. In addition, TCM schemes face the growth of new retailing formats and changes in consumer behaviors (Coca-Stefaniak *et al.*, 2009). Therefore it is significant that TCM schemes prompt and develop the strategic assets which adopt not only competitive pressures from out-of-centre but also wider issues which include environmental, economical and social issues, such as lack of accessibility, loss of jobs, unattractive local markets and existing vacant spaces in town centres.

Therefore, the UK government established new plan and selected twenty-seven Portas Pilot towns in 2013 to overcome the challenges, such as lack of funding, high parking charge, lack of business improvement district, and existing empty sites, which means to create more jobs of British business and attract more people on high streets (DCLG, 2013). The plan has provided not only funding to ATCM and each town team but also parking measures, supporting local

markets and helping planning, such as adapting the existing buildings.

3. Methodology

3.1 Field setting

One of the most widely recognized roles of town centres is shopping (ATCM, 2013). The impact of the retail sector goes well beyond economic output and the retail sector can promote the social well-being of local communities. In addition, it is a fact that the retail has contributed to town centres regeneration. In contrast, there are opinions that not only key tenants but also new functions are needed for town centre generation to become sustainable (Portas, 2011). Therefore it is significant to comprehend actual condition of retailing and shopping in town centres and evaluate the plans.

As concerned with invitation of retailing into town centres, it is mentioned that the UK has high priorities and effects on town centre regeneration. As the literature review shows, much of both the academic and practical literature on TCM has focused on case studies (Nisco & Warnaby, 2014; ATCM, 2013). The case study approach has been used in many researches of TCM (i.e.: Coca-Stefaniak *et al.*, 2009; ATCM, 2013) and it has an advantage of capturing long-term achievement and trends, and find better town centre solutions. Therefore this project will choose Redditch which is one of the UK's middle sized Newtown as a case study.

Redditch is a town and local government district in north-east Worcestershire, England, approximately 15 miles (24 km) south of Birmingham. The town's population is approximately 80,000. The town was famous for needle industry in 19th century and flourished. However, with the change of the industry structure, The town was chosen for this case study because the high street has insufficient attractions, and most people commute to cities such as Birmingham and Stratford, so that the town has faced challenges of town centre and the town made Redditch Town Centre Strategy in 2009 with seeking sustainable development (Redditch Town Centre Partnership (RTCP), 2014; RBC, 2009). The town has good transport links within the Borough, including a strong network of dual carriageways and A-roads that connect Redditch to areas. In addition, the shopping centre (Kingfisher Shopping Centre) was built in Redditch town centre in 1976 (RBC, 2009) so that it is suitable for evaluating the impact of the shopping centre in Redditch town centre, identifying what kind of functions Redditch town centre lacks and evaluating the town's plans. It is an appropriate approach for evaluating theories in terms of the success of their practical application.

3.2 Collecting data and analysis

The research was undertaken in Redditch, comprising a combination of literature review and conducting interviews.

Data were collected via semi-structured face-to-face interviews for four days in June 2014, with Town Centre Management group (RTCP), RBC and public (shopkeepers, shoppers).

Interviewers were Mariko Wada and Kreshna Aisyah (Graduate students of Birmingham City University). Interviews was taped and transcribed. Semi-structured interviews are effective to collect qualitative data (Reed, 2013). Interviews with public lasted approximately 10 minutes, with RTCP and RBC approximately 45 minutes.

Redditch Borough Council developed Redditch Town Centre strategy to provide a co-ordinated framework for action and investment in Redditch town centre (Redditch Town Centre Partnership, 2014). RTCP is a non-political voluntary group, which represents the interests of local business including retailers, agencies and the other stakeholders related with Redditch town centre. It aims to support the private, public and voluntary sectors to work together to create a prosperous town centre (Ibid).

Interview with RTCP and RBC was conducted at Redditch Town Hall with Rosemary Sidaway; the director of RTCP and Alexa Williams ; in behalf of the Town Centre Coordinator in the Council, who are well acquainted with TCM.

Interviews with 21 shoppers were conducted on the main shopping street; around Church Green East, Church Green West, Market Place and Alcester Street (RBC, 2009) and interviews with 6 shopkeepers / managers in each tenant. Lists of questions will be prepared before conducting interviews. Interviews' contents are as following;

Table.1 The contents of the interviews

	RTCP and RBC	Tenants (Shops / Offices)	Shoppers
Questions	1. How did the Town Centre Management (TCM) start 2. Landscape 3. Transport 4. Other facilities /functions 5. Public and Community Involvement 6. Proposing tenants 7. Lack facilities / functions of Redditch town centre 8. Future of Redditch town centre	1. About the tenants 2. Landscape 3. Transport 4. Lack facilities / functions of Redditch town centre 5. Future of Redditch town centre	1. General Questions 2. Landscape 3. Transport 4. Lack facilities / functions of Redditch town centre 5. Future of Redditch town centre

Analysis was carried out using template analysis techniques. Template analysis is a structured technique for analyzing qualitative data that enables to place some order on data from the beginning of the analysis process (Thorpe & Holt, 2008). Therefore it has an advantage of giving scope for various approaches to create a structure for the analysis of data. The analysis is the process of organizing and analyzing textual data according to themes (The University of Sheffield, 2012). This can be text produced or used in the context of the evaluation irrespective of

the evaluation activity (Ibid). The method enables to reduce large amounts of unstructured text to that which is relevant and manageable in for the evaluation (Ibid). The analysis is useful to compare the perspectives of different groups within a specific context (King, 2004). The analysis will examine actual challenges and opportunities of Redditch town centre. Moreover, it will identify the customer's thought and behavior for shopping in Redditch town centre, each stakeholder's perception. In addition, it will be cleared how effective the key tenant (The Kingfisher shopping centre) and what is the local needs.

4. Findings

4.1. How did the Town Centre Management (TCM) start

In terms of key drivers to led to TCM in Redditch, RBC created strategies of TCM in 2009, RTCP was established at the same time which is a voluntary group, representing interest of shopkeepers and another stakeholders such as police, church and pubs. RBC and RTCP have different roles of TCM.

Regarding involvement of the stakeholders, the directors of RTCP hold meetings and anyone can listen to the regular meetings. In addition, local community can know the meetings by various media, such as RTCP's website, twitter, events, local meetings and the local newspaper.

However, most respondents do not have any experience to offer their opinions about the town centre to the council and they are not ignorant about RTCP. About the awereness of involvement of TCM, there is gap between the key drivers (RBC and RTCP) and publics.

4.2. Redditch town centre's landscape

Most respondents are satisfied with Redditch town centre's landscape. A few opinions are that the town is a little old and generic. The action plan of RBC includes minor changes of the town centre, such as street furniture. The total cost of improvement is large so that minor changes will be fulfilled every year.

4.3 Transport

In terms of car parks, there is no action plan of the council due to private sector. Most respondents of publics assess that the parking free parking is enough but some respondents of tenants point that the parking fee is expensive and it is hard for them to find cheaper parking. Moreover, Some respondents complained bus transport because buses are not reliable.

4.4 Lack facilities / functions of Redditch town centre

Main requests of publics are that they need the facilities for young and children. RBC recognize that Christmas events and Kingfisher shopping centre are successful in Redditch town centre. Most respondents also evaluate that Kingfisher shopping centre has positive impact on the town centre. However some respondants suggest that it needs something new such as

grothly shops. Old respondants requires more public toilet because there was public toilet outside before.

4.5 Future of Redditch town centre

The priorities of respondants in the future are that supermarket, modern shops, place for kids, improvement of bus and more tidy landscape. Some respondants point that vegetation is not enough.

RBC also regards supermarket and convenience store will be build in the town centre. However, needs of place for kids and improvement of bus were not suggested.

5. Conclusion

Overall, the research suggested how effective the key tenant and what functions are needed, and what policy plan / strategy can support inviting / creating facilities for town centre regeneration more. It was regarded that Kingfisher shopping centre has positive impact on the town centre. Furthermore, more attractive shops are needed, in particular place for young and kids. Therefore it is needed for the strategy to include the measures of the creating the attractive places.

In terms of transport, improvement of public transports should be supported by RBC. In order to realize them, it is better to involve more stakeholders in TCM to collect their voices.

Through the interviews, it was found that the stakeholders have the identity of the town centre. It will be needed to improve the strategy and to realize the sustainability of the town centre.

6. References

- Association of Town & City Centre Management (ATCM) (2013) *Successful town centres-developing effective strategies*. [online] Available at: https://www.atcm.org/tools_dir/tools/uploads/successful_town_centres_-_main_report [Accessed 5/Mar /2014]
- Association of Town & City Centre Management (ATCM) (2014) *What is Town Centre Management?* [online] Available at: https://www.atcm.org/about_atcm/what_is_tcm [Accessed 14/Feb/2014]
- Coca- Stefaniak, J. A., Parker, C., Quin, S., Rinaldi, R. and Byrom, J. (2009) Town centre management models: A European perspective. *Cities*, Vol.26, pp.74-80
- Department for Communities and Local Government of UK(DCL) (2012) *Improving high streets and town centres*. [online] Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/policies/improving-high-streets-and-town-centres> [Accessed 14/Feb/2014]
- Guimarães, P. P. (2013) The tools for city centre revitalization in Portugal. *Journal of Place Management and Development*, Vol.6 No.1, pp. 52-66.
- Jones, P., Hillier, D. and Comfort, D. (2003) Urban Regeneration Companies and City Centres. *Management Research News*, Vol.26, No.1 pp.54-63
- Kingfisher shopping centre (2014) *Floor plan*, [online] Available at: <http://www.kingfishershopping.co.uk/> [Accessed 21/Aug/2014]
- Maskey, V., Strager, M. P and Bernasconi, C., (2013) Managing a Sustainable Transportation System: Exploring a Community's Attitude, Perception, and Behavior of the Morgantown Public Rapid Transit (PRT). *Journal of Management and Sustainability*, Vol 3, No.2, pp. 56-67
- Nisco, A. D. and Warnaby, G., Urban design and tenant variety influences on consumers' emotions and approach behavior. *Journal of Business Research*, Vol. 67, pp211-217
- Portas, M. (2011) The Portas Review, [online] Available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/6292/2081646.pdf [Accessed 3/Mar /2014]
- Redditch Borough council (2009) *Town Centre Strategy Final Report* [online] Available at: <http://redditch.whub.org.uk/cms/pdf/Final%20Issue%20Redditch%20Town%20Centre%20Strategy%2007.09.09%20EM%20word1.pdf> [Accessed 22/Feb/2014]
- Shore, W. B. (2006) Land-use, transportation and sustainability. *Technology in Society*, Vol.28, pp. 27-43