

Written evidence submitted by Dr. Andres Coca-Stefaniak, University of Greenwich, London [HST 008]

1. I submit this evidence as a current member of the Future High Streets' Forum, a former Programme Manager for Thought Leadership, Research and International Partnerships at the organisation that managed and supported the Portas Pilots - Association of Town and City Management (www.atcm.org) - and an academic with over 16 years' experience researching town centres and high streets in the UK and elsewhere across Europe, particularly from a management perspective. For more information on my background, see <https://uk.linkedin.com/pub/andres-coca-stefaniak/12/94b/b14>
2. The current state of high streets and town centres in England and much of the UK can be probably best described as “being at a crossroads” in terms of central government’s policy making as well as the effectiveness of their management. Although online retail is progressively undermining the viability of many traditional high street retail formats, it could also be argued that there are a number of avenues that remain underdeveloped by town centres and high streets. These include the management of the visitor economy, the development of attractive evening and night-time economy formats, the innovative use of traditional markets (for instance, as platforms for innovation and local entrepreneurship) and the strategic positioning of town centres and high streets as competitive place brands that build on the local DNA of the area to offer a unique selling proposition that is not limited to retail.
3. Retail planning policy for town centres needs a re-think at national level. A recently published (2018) review of UK government policy related to urban sprawl, town centres and high streets in England and Wales rendered some useful insights on this front with implications for the management of town and city centres in England and Wales. The article can be accessed at Hallsworth, A.G. and Coca-Stefaniak, J.A. (2018), “National high street retail and town centre policy at a cross roads in England and Wales”, *Cities*, <http://gala.gre.ac.uk/19384/>
4. Similarly, there is some evidence (though further research is required) that many managers of town centres and high streets have a limited understanding of the concept of place branding and the possibilities this can offer for places that want to become

competitive on the basis of their DNA rather than copying other locations. A summary report on this issue (based partly on an article published in a high-ranking academic journal) can be found at: de Noronha, I., Coca-Stefaniak, J.A. and Morrison A.M. (2017), *Place branding practice in the UK and Ireland*, London: ATCM-University of Greenwich; ISBN: [978-1-901799-20-0](https://doi.org/10.1017/9781901799200), http://gala.gre.ac.uk/18011/13/18011%20COCA-STEFANIAK_Place_Branding_Practice_%28ATCM%20Report%29_2017.pdf

5. Research funded in 2013 by the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) led to a report and practical toolkit that gained traction with some of the Portas Pilots and Town Teams. This research showed that a wider level of engagement with local stakeholders is the first step towards the competitive strategic positioning of town centres and high streets based on their local 'DNA'. However, any successful strategic positioning inevitably leads to clear choices with regards to what markets or target groups should take priority. The dominant 'one-size fits all' or 'me too' approaches by many town centres and high streets lack focus and a clear market positioning strategy. This is an issue in town centre management that needs to be addressed. The following report funded by BIS in 2013 offers further insights: Coca-Stefaniak, J.A. (2013), *Successful town centres - developing effective strategies*, Gloucester: GFirst-ATCM, ISBN: 978-1-901799-10-1, <http://gala.gre.ac.uk/14927/>
6. Other European countries have been much more successful in supporting their small independent retailers in creating successful and effective place management schemes to run their town centres, high streets or districts in a way that has a distinctly local flavour and in ways that encourage the wellbeing, health and cultural life of local communities, thus achieving much better customer retention and loyalty rates in town centres. More information on this and practical examples are offered by the following journal articles: Coca-Stefaniak J.A., Parker C., Barbany A., Garrell X. and Segovia E. (2005), "Gran Centre Granollers – city, culture and commerce", *International Journal of Retail & Distribution Management*, 33 (9), pp. 685-696, <https://www.emeraldinsight.com/doi/abs/10.1108/09590550510611878>; Coca-Stefaniak, J.A., Rinaldi, R., Parker, C. and Quin, S. (2009), "Town centre and place management models: a European perspective", *Cities*, Vol. 26, Issue 2, pp. 74-80 <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0264275108001236>; Coca-

Stefaniak, J.A., Parker, C. and Rees, P. (2010), “Localisation as a marketing strategy for small retailers”, *International Journal of Retail & Distribution Management*, Vol. 38, no. 9, pp. 677-697, <http://gala.gre.ac.uk/13312/>

7. In addition to this, there is evidence (though further research is required) showing that current formats of funding town centre management, such as Business Improvement Districts, are failing to address growth opportunities in town centres, such as the visitor economy (see Chaperon, S., Coca-Stefaniak, J.A. and Kennell, J. (2016), *Business improvement districts and the visitor economy*, London: ATCM-University of Greenwich, <http://gala.gre.ac.uk/14772/>) and that the experience economy approach used by the leisure sector is not being adopted by town centres to its full potential (see Coca-Stefaniak, J.A. and Carroll, S. (2015), “Traditional or experiential places? – Exploring research needs and practitioner challenges in the management of town centres beyond the economic crisis”, *Journal of Urban Regeneration and Renewal*, Vol. 9, No. 1, pp. 38-45.<http://gala.gre.ac.uk/14772/>)

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