

The Shopping Centre of the Future

In all European countries where Covid-19 restrictions have been relaxed, there has been a restart of shopping centres which has increased enthusiasm and good results have been obtained. Here, Gaetano Graziano, Deputy Executive Chairman “ADCC-Italia” discusses the recovery of the shopping centre.



The percentage of admissions in shopping centres varies between 24 per cent and 29 per cent more than in the same period of 2020, a slightly lower share than in 2019. All operators are happy with this turnout, as we did not expect this return en masse, considering that shopping centres were among the first structures to undergo restrictions on free circulation, and were considered amongst the most dangerous places as a spreader of the virus.

As an act of civic sense and responsibility, we immediately adapted to Covid-19 by first reducing the opening hours, then completely closing the galleries with the exception of food shops and pharmacies/parapharmacies and we were, as an activity of sale, among the last to reopen.

Also, considering the negative economic effects on households and despite the exponential increase in online sales, this mass return means that people still have an interest in the mall and the stores within them.

They returned confidently because of the great work done by the directors of the centres and by the staff of the various essential services such as security, cleaning and maintenance to guarantee safety within the coronavirus emergency phase.

The management of parking lots and entrances, management of tunnel routes to avoid dangerous gatherings, management of spaces dedicated to any queues for entry to individual shops, management of health regulations (mask control, temperature reading, hand disinfectants etc), management of sanitization within structures and new cleaning procedures have all added up to make the shopping centre a safe and healthy place for shoppers of all ages.

Because of the change and disruption Covid-19 has brought about, this will certainly also lead to a change in figure of the manager of the traditional shopping centre, (looking at Italy as an example, today the average age of shopping centre managers in Italy are around 45-48 years old) and this is a very high average age. The reason behind this is simple; the director is no longer seen as a decisive figure for the management of the shopping centre and a young, new graduate with ambitions and a great desire to get involved. This will mean a new way of working and thinking about everything with a

curious mentality and innovative ideas to allow the shopping centre to transform moving forward.

After this bad experience for Covid which has been unlike anything anyone has ever seen before, which I hope will definitely end soon; we have to face the following challenges in what comes after:

- Will provisions for not frequenting crowded public places introduce new habits?
- Will a new lifestyle be created that will lead to less frequentation of physical stores?
- Was mass behaviour undermined by the coronavirus?
- What do shopping centers and outlets risk in the near future?

The results obtained give us hope that the world of retail trade and in particular that of shopping centres will not change radically and that shopping in a physical place will never end. That curiosity to go around, entering, touching, measuring and smelling will never be compensated by online; instead, the “photocopy” shopping centres will end up struggling, because they will be the places where you will always find the same brand and the same services and not moving forward with the now.

Shopping centres that will be able to re-affirm and strengthen their role as a place of purchase and social aggregation, those that still continue to play a central role in urban and suburban societies and keep alive the interest in the shopping centre as a place of attendance will flourish in the new normal.

The shopping centre has had to transform in a short time and develop into places that offer much more than the commercial offer of essential goods and services, from food shopping to hairdressers yesterday, but to also offer medical, dental offices, etc... to entertainment, to spaces for events, conferences or games and onto those more futuristic transformations where it is necessary to strengthen the idea of a shopping centre as a place for shopping but also as a meeting place.

In short, making the shopping centre a physical and virtual place to explore, to be surprised, conquered and finally purchased in is the way forward as we look towards a new future.

