
Shopping Behaviour of the Elderly as a Factor Influencing Supply Chain Solutions: The Case of Shopping Centres in Poland

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Abstract:

Purpose: The main objective of this article is to determine trends in the shopping behaviour of elderly people, with a particular focus on the rationale and determinants of their visits to shopping centres as a factor influencing the importance of these facilities in modern retail supply chains. Taking into account the demographic situation, living conditions and activity of elderly people in Poland, the specific objective is to identify circumstances and factors influencing the frequency and purpose of visits by senior citizens to these shopping facilities and to identify solutions that favour staying in these buildings by the elderly.

Design/Methodology/Approach: To achieve the main objective of the article, mainly secondary sources of information were used. Literature on the shopping behaviour of seniors, the problems of shopping centres and the issues of older people in these centres were analysed. In addition, statistical data and ministerial information on the situation of the elderly in Poland were used in the study to achieve the specific objective. An in-depth analysis of a number of reports and studies by consulting companies and real estate agencies on the development of the shopping centre market in Poland and on e-commerce and omnichannel was also conducted, while publications and reports by the Polish Council of Shopping Centres were utilised.

Findings: The results of the study indicate that in view of the current growing share of seniors in the population, which in Poland is 26.3% (and is projected to reach 38.65% in 2060), and the fact that a significant proportion of them live in cities, shopping centres are becoming an important place in the lives of older people. In Polish cities of different sizes there are around 600 such facilities, which effectively combine shopping and service functions with the function of a place for social integration. This is also confirmed by numerous international experiences. Shopping centres can play an important role in the shopping process of seniors, who value the advice of expert salespeople and also wish to complete certain stages of the purchase process in e-commerce. Research on different age groups indicates that shopping centres can successfully implement various omnichannel behaviours, effectively strengthening the role of these premises in supply chains and allowing customers to shape their own shopping experience. Older people, who often suffer from various illnesses or even disabilities, can be encouraged to visit shopping centres by special measures (infrastructure or information) to improve accessibility. As a result, shopping centres are becoming important places for older people to spend their time, enjoying the

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gastronomy, entertainment and even community activities on offer, preventing social exclusion. They are becoming a 'golden mean' for combining the business objectives of their owners, managers and tenants with the social activities that are also important in the context of ESG reporting.

Practical Implications: The analysis of secondary sources made it possible to identify practical implications concerning selected aspects of shopping behaviour of older people in Poland in the context of their visits to shopping centres, as places of social importance as well. Such an approach is important, among other things, for the various stakeholders in the shopping centre market, for the search for future solutions aimed at customers - seniors, bearing in mind that the proportion of these people in society will increase significantly with time.

Originality/Value: This paper attempts to identify the determinants of shopping behaviour of older people in Poland through the perspective of their visits to shopping centres, which are also places of social integration. Such an approach, which has the characteristics of a case study for Polish conditions, may contribute to enriching the literature on the subject, especially in view of the recent development of e-commerce and various omnichannel practices in retail supply chains.

Keywords: Shopping Centres, Elderly, Shopping Behaviour, Supply Chain Management.

JEL Classification: J11, J14, F19.

Paper type: Research paper.

1. Introduction

The conditions and way in which modern supply chains operate are determined by a number of external phenomena and trends. Due to the dynamic and turbulent nature of the environment, some of them appear suddenly, necessitating rapid corrective action or even leading to their reconfiguration. Such factors include various types of crises, armed conflicts or even epidemics. However, many phenomena are subject to long-term development, allowing stakeholders involved in the management of supply chains or a selected area of its functioning to observe them and introduce appropriate solutions.

Important areas of change are demographic trends, including one of the main ones, i.e. the ageing population and the associated development of the Silver economy. Many studies by recognised institutions point to its importance for logistics and the functioning of modern supply chains. In this context, it should be noted that an essential activity accompanying people is shopping, an necessary activity for the provision of various products needed for living. Hence, selected issues related to the shopping behaviour of seniors are given more attention in this article.

The ageing population and the shopping behaviour of senior citizens have an impact on the functioning of supply chains. This is multifaceted, just as there are many areas of influence and interconnection between the emerging Silver economy and different spheres of economic activity. From a logistics perspective, there are two main issues to consider - the type of products bought and how and where older people purchase them.

With reference to the first area, it should be noted that among the products purchased by senior citizens, a distinction can be made between those identical to those purchased by representatives of other age groups and those necessary for this group of consumers - e.g., those related to illness or disability, e.g., dietary supplements and food for seniors, orthopaedic equipment, special hygiene products. Nowadays, the range of products targeted at seniors is very wide, and various manufacturers are undoubtedly recognising this important consumer segment.

Directing attention to the second area of issues, it is important to emphasise that it concerns the choice of a specific solution within different sales channels. Nowadays, it is important to highlight the possibility of choosing within solutions such as physical shops or e-commerce or omnichannel and, in addition, the choice of a possible specific solution within the so-called last mile.

In this respect, it is important to emphasise that the shopping behaviour of people from different age and social groups entails changes in the structure of supply chains, in the way in which different logistics and retail facilities are used, determining more broadly whether their role is strengthened or lost.

The focus of this study is the changing role of shopping centres in supply chains today, in the context of their ability to meet the needs of senior citizens. The aim is to identify the conditions and factors that influence the frequency and purpose of visits by older people to these shopping centres, to identify solutions that favour visits by older people and, therefore, to strengthen the role of these facilities in the structure of supply chains, at such an important stage in the product flow where contact with the final consumer is made.

The subject is important both for shopping centre customers and the management of shopping centres, and more generally for all stakeholders involved in the operation of these facilities. For them, the social dimension of shopping centres, in the broadest sense of the term, should be of particular concern.

This is due to the fact that many actors include this type of activity in their CSR reports and others, who are obliged to do so, in their ESG (Environmental, Social, Governance) reports. For this reason, they must, when operating in supply chain structures, also ensure an appropriate social dimension to their activities.

The application of solutions aimed at the elderly and measures to ensure that their specific needs are met should be a guiding principle for many in the business sphere, including those managing commercial property. This is why the social dimension of shopping centres, as unique establishments that combine retail and service functions and at the same time provide a type of public space where people meet and spend time, is of particular importance.

Recently, greater interest in the elderly as a valued consumer group and also as an important research subject can be observed. This is undoubtedly due to the scale of the phenomenon - the growing share of seniors in the structure of societies, but also the change in the behaviour of this group and their peculiar economic emancipation (Zalega, 2016).

The actuality of the issue is confirmed by the forecasts concerning the share of seniors in Polish society in the coming decades. While this share is currently 26.3%, as mentioned, in the following years it will be 27.76% in 2030, 32.45% in 2040, 37.37% in 2050 and 38.65% in 2060 (GUS as cited in MSCP, 2024).

This situation calls for great interest and concern on the part of stakeholders representing various spheres of economic activity as well as authorities and organisations dealing with social issues. In view of the 600 shopping centres (GFK, Polish Council of Shopping Centres, 2023) operating in Poland, this issue will be analysed in depth.

2. Literature Review – Elderly Shopping Behaviours and Shopping Centres

2.1 Determinants of the Shopping Behaviour of Senior Citizens

As global demographic changes and the ageing of many societies continue, it is now difficult not to recognise how important and numerous seniors are and how specific their consumption and shopping needs and behaviours are. It is important to gather experiences and propose solutions concerning this social group, hence the first part of the article is devoted to an analysis of the factors influencing the purchasing behaviour of older people.

The ailments and inconveniences of the elderly are fairly well known, but the advances in modern medicine and the development of modern technology mean that many of today's senior citizens and their lifestyles are different from those of their contemporaries years ago. In addition, the view of and interest in this social group is also changing.

Until recently, seniors were perceived as a group characterised by lower activity, lower consumption needs and income. Currently, however, their life activity is

increasing in areas such as education, social activities or sport, among others (Rogala and Fojutowski, 2014).

In this context, the literature cites the concept of “active ageing” (Jarutach, Lerddamrongchai and Lertpradit, 2024; Guido, Ugolini and Sestino, 2022; Thalassinos, Cristea, and Noja, 2019), which, adopted by the WHO, means “the process of optimizing opportunities for health, participation, and security to enhance the quality of life as people age” (WHO 2002 as cited in Jarutach, Lerddamrongchai, and Lertpradit, 2024).

In addition, it should be pointed out that currently many representatives of this group “feel younger” than their metric would indicate and want to be perceived as such. For example, in Rahman and Yu's (2019) study, feel age is for those in the study group, in most cases, a few or several years lower than actual age (Rahman and Yu, 2019).

The literature also emphasises that Western societies have undergone a kind of cultural change, which has influenced the fact that currently the term “elder” is becoming acceptable to describe seniors, rather than “older”, as the latter term has rather offensive and discriminatory overtones (Guido, Ugolini, and Sestino, 2022).

Many contemporary seniors are changing their approach to life and are trying to shape reality in a more active way (Rogala and Fojutowski, 2014), which is clearly reflected in their purchasing behaviour. Numerous of them are also choosing to remain economically active despite reaching retirement age. This is becoming possible, thanks, among other things, to the proliferation of remote working and also to the favour of numerous employers who value experienced workers.

Thus, as mentioned, the resulting improvement in the material situation of seniors influences the level and structure of consumption (Zalega, 2016), while for retailers the segment of older consumers becomes a significant and valuable market (Rahman and Yu, 2019).

The willingness of senior citizens to remain younger than their date of birth would indicate and to remain active in many spheres of life does not undoubtedly mean that all adverse physical, psychological and social changes resulting from the passing of time disappear. Therefore, it should be clearly emphasised that the problems of the ageing society in terms of the need for solutions targeted at this group remain highly topical.

As highlighted in the literature, senior age is also a time of life changes. The literature points to two different types of these - those that are expected and planned, such as the transition to retirement, and those that are unexpected and sudden (Moschis *et al.*, 2011 as cited in Rahman and Yu, 2019), such as the death of a life

partner, resulting not only in pain and loneliness, but often also in a worsening of the material situation and a lack of support and assistance in everyday life matters.

The deterioration of the living and family situation of senior citizens often leads to social exclusion. Some of these people, who were once active and social relationships were important to them, undoubtedly want to seek and maintain these relations.

It is worth noting that the attitudes of seniors are also influenced by the conditions in which they have lived and developed at different stages of their lives. The literature highlights, for example, the differences between seniors coming from Central and Eastern Europe and Western Europe. In this context T. Zalega points out that Polish seniors are more traditionalists and show significant attachment to the family (Zalega, 2016), the differences of seniors from these parts of Europe are also highlighted by Najdený *et al.* (2019).

Hence, in the literature, the issue of seniors consumers' shopping behaviour is discussed with reference to the experiences of different countries from various corners of the world - outside Europe among others: Brazil (Pinto *et al.*, 2018), Thailand (Jarutach, Lerddamrongchai, and Lertpradit, 2024), Canada (Rahman and Yu, 2019) and Australia (White, Toohey, and Asquith, 2015) or from European countries such as Austria (Schwendtner *et al.*, 2024), Slovakia (Najdený *et al.*, 2019) and Poland (Lipowski and Angowski, 2017; Rogala and Fojutowski, 2014; Zalega, 2016; 2017; 2024).

Older people's shopping behaviour is a multidimensional issue and research into it is a significant challenge due to the heterogeneity and complexity of the ageing process itself and its impact on their lives and behaviour (Zalega, 2016). This is because seniors are also a heterogeneous group and usually (in the higher age brackets) older people struggle with a number of illnesses and disabilities, including motor as well as visual or auditory disabilities.

Due to a number of these factors as well as the constant changes taking place in the elderly group, making a clear characterisation of seniors as consumers is extremely difficult (Rogala and Fojutowski, 2014).

In summarising, following Olejniczak, it should be emphasised that the shopping behaviour of seniors is influenced by many factors, of which those of an economic, social, family, technological and marketing nature are the dominant ones (Olejniczak, 2018).

Improving the quality of life of seniors, as defined by the WHO, undoubtedly requires the implementation of a range of different solutions. When discussing this issue, it is pointed out that not only technological and scientific innovations serve this purpose, but the implementation of new business strategies that take into

account and support the behaviour of contemporary seniors and their role in society may also contribute to active ageing (Guido, Ugolini, and Sestino, 2022).

This issue is of particular relevance in the face of the consumption and purchasing behaviour in question, given the dynamic changes brought about by the development of e-commerce today in distribution channel structures as well as sales forms and last-mile solutions. In order for older people to find their feet in this reality, it is important to support them.

This social group therefore requires business and supply chain managers to carefully observe, analyse and respond to diverse and changing needs. At the same time, bearing in mind that shopping centres are quite special establishments, which not only cater for shopping needs, but can also become important places for senior citizens to spend time, the remainder of this article deals with this issue.

2.2 Seniors in Shopping Centres

Shopping centres as a kind of phenomenon combining retail and service functions and providing a space to spend time exist in different corners of the world. As one of the important types of retail facilities, shopping centres have attracted the interest of numerous researchers for many years (Miklinska, 2022).

In recent times, they have had to cope with periods of lockdown during the coronavirus pandemic or with the increasing share of online shopping in the consumer shopping habits. However, customers still visit these shopping complexes, while for many social groups they are an important meeting place - this is the case, for example, for young people - today's Generation Z (Borusiak *et al.*, 2018), but also for older people.

Referring to the existing literature on the determinants of shopping in shopping centres for seniors, there are a number of concepts and valuable insights into how shopping centres meet the needs of seniors through their attributes.

In analysing the role of shopping centres in the lives of senior citizens, reference should first be made to their social role, i.e. a secondary role behind their primary function as a shopping destination.

In this context, the literature emphasises that shopping centres are an important social gathering place, bringing together a wide range of users of different ages and who are there for different purposes - as consumers, sellers, or simply observing other people (White, Toohey and Asquith, 2015). Hence, a range of experiences beyond simple retail therapy are identified as purposes for being in a shopping centre (White, Toohey and Asquith, 2015). Pettersen *et al.* (2024) refer to "non-shopping motivations for visits".

Older people appreciate the shopping atmosphere in a shopping centre (Zalega, 2016) and the opportunity to hang around, which is facilitated by good conditions and usually a friendly and aesthetically pleasing design. Seniors are often lonely or even socially excluded people, so, as mentioned, they may be attracted to shopping centres by the opportunity to be in the company of other people.

In this context, the literature evokes the concept of “third places” as favourably located spaces (facilities) that are conducive to social gatherings and joint activities between different social groups, which are additionally not too crowded (Jarutach, Lerddamrongchai, and Lertpradit, 2024).

Also Pettersen *et al.* (2024) refer to this concept and consider shopping centres as valuable third places, playing a role as part of the social infrastructure or social arenas enabling sustainable social development especially locally and furthermore having an impact on health and wellbeing (Pettersen *et al.*, 2024). Bittencourt *et al.* (2012), on the other hand, provide an interesting study on the semi-public spaces of shopping centres, as a generator of attractiveness, in the context of older people staying in these facilities.

Due to the aforementioned factors, the literature links shopping by seniors in the shopping centre to the concept of shopping well-being (Pinto *et al.*, 2018). This is an issue of such importance that, according to research, shopping well-being translates into customer satisfaction in a number of important spheres, such as social life, consumer life and leisure life, among others, and therefore time spent in the shopping centre contributes to the overall quality of life (Hedhli, Chebat, and Sirgy, 2013).

Hedhli, Chebat and Sirgy (2013) indicate that customers' well-being in the shopping centre and their satisfaction with being there increases when shopping centres are characterised by the following factors: “high in functionality, convenience, safety, leisure, atmospherics, and self-identification” (Hedhli, Chebat, and Sirgy, 2013).

Pinto *et al.* (2018) address these factors in the context of a client group such as senior citizens in their study. As a result, they emphasise that for seniors, it is mainly functionality and self-identification factors that influence well-being in the shopping centre (Pinto *et al.*, 2018).

With regard to the basic function of shopping centres, i.e. their retail function, it should be noted that a characteristic feature of these facilities in various locations around the world is that customers are attracted to them by the presence of shops of well-known (often global) brands, but also of local operators. In addition, they are also places where different groups of services are concentrated, such as hairdressing, cosmetics and even medical services. Shopping centre managers try to enrich their offer by organising cultural or event activities.

The literature emphasises that modern seniors, follow a number of modern consumer trends and purchasing behaviours. These include, among others, smart shopping aiming to find the best offer on the market (Zalega, 2016).

As Zalega (2017) points out, smart shopping is linked to a solution referred to as showrooming, i.e. “visiting shops for the sole purpose of inspecting and testing products with the intention to buy them elsewhere and at a cheaper price, most commonly in online shops that offer discounts (e.g., discount codes, regular customer discounts, birthday discounts) or in less expensive shops” (Zalega, 2017).

It should be noted that shopping centres accumulating numerous shops from different operators are a place where a showrooming strategy can be implemented and, even if products are ultimately purchased by consumers online, this is often done in the online shops of operators with a brick-and-mortar store in the centre. Such a solution is an example of omnichannel behaviour.

In this concept, the customer uses a number of different touchpoints, paving the way for him or her to make a purchase (GFK, Polish Council of Shopping Centres. 2023), one of which may undoubtedly be the shopping centre and the shops situated there, or even the parcel machines located there, providing the opportunity to pick up or return goods purchased through e-commerce.

However, it is worth noting that today's dynamic development of e-commerce, on the one hand, may become competition for shopping centres and, in the absence of appropriate measures, may even mean an exodus of customers. On the other hand, if appropriate measures are taken and technological solutions are introduced, this situation may give these facilities a chance for a „second life“, a new dimension of their operation (Miklinska, 2022) and effective inclusion in the omnichannel model.

The literature emphasises that seniors value personal service (Lipowski and Angowski, 2017). This is a very characteristic feature of this age group. Rogala and Fojutowski (2014), on the basis of their research, indicate that for senior citizens, professional and patient advice from competent and appropriately prepared sales staff is an important advantage (Rogala and Fojutowski, 2014).

Seniors' mobility opportunities are important for their visits to shopping centres, so this topic is often linked to the issue of the spatial behaviour of this group of people (Rochmińska, 2015; Najdený *et al.*, 2019). Referring to the mobility of seniors in relation to visits to shopping centres, White, Toohey and Asquith (2015) point to two main dimensions of this: the first is how they travel, including their mode of transport, to that shopping facility and the second concerns how they move within that shopping centre.

For seniors without major health problems, both dimensions of mobility do not encounter significant problems. However, as they get older, seniors may be affected

by certain disabilities, such as musculoskeletal, hearing and visual impairments (Niemira-Jurek A. (ed.), 2020). A visit to a shopping centre can then be hindered by a number of barriers, and here the issue of accessibility of these shopping facilities is important to consider.

The issue of accessibility in the context of shopping centres is discussed in the literature under three dimensions: architectural accessibility (related to building regulations, resulting from legislation and taking into account the needs of people with reduced mobility); information accessibility (related to the use of means of presenting information adequate to the needs of people with various impairments, e.g. visual impairments, hearing impairments); communication accessibility (related to the possibility of accessing a shopping centre and cooperating with e.g. public institutions) (Niemira-Jurek A., (ed.), 2020).

3. Research Results

3.1 Seniors and Shopping Centres in Poland

As in many other European societies, senior citizens in Poland constitute a large social group, which grows with the years. At the end of 2023, in a Polish society of 37.6 million people, the number of seniors (persons over 60) was almost 9.9 million, i.e. 26.3% of the total population. It should also be added that the majority (58.1%) are women (GUS as cited in MSCP, 2024).

From the point of view of the subject of this article, it is important to indicate the age structure of this social group. The youngest seniors - aged 60-64 - account for 23.7% of this social group (GUS as cited in MSCP, 2024). A significant proportion of these people are still economically active. Men in particular are working, as the legal retirement age for them is 65 (60 for women). They are therefore economically well-off and represent an important consumer group.

The largest group of senior citizens (25.5%) is aged 65-69 (GUS as cited in MSCP, 2024). It can therefore be seen that almost 50 % of the senior citizens' community is made up of people under the age of 70. They are usually mobile, still in fairly good health and usually carry out daily activities, including shopping, independently.

The group of people aged 70-74 is the one growing in Poland in recent years. The share of these seniors in the elderly population is 21.3 %, while the share of the following groups, i.e. those aged 75-79, is 13.3 % and those aged 80 and over is 16.2 % (GUS as cited in MSCP, 2024). The oldest old are in many cases affected by multiple illnesses and often have mobility or hearing problems.

When analysing the issue of seniors' visits to shopping centres, it is important to consider which types of settlement units (urban or rural) are inhabited by representatives of this social group. In this context, it should be noted that at the end

of 2023, the proportion of seniors in urban areas was 28.2%, while in rural areas it was 23.4% (GUS as cited in MSCP, 2024). Therefore, taking into account the total population of Poland, it can be calculated that approximately 6.8 million senior citizens live in cities and approximately 3 million in rural areas.

In this context, it should be pointed out that the shopping centres discussed in this article have been a permanent feature of the retail landscape of many Polish cities for more than twenty years. Their development took place at a time when, due to numerous problems accompanying the process of economic transformation, the shopping streets located here had lost their character (Miklinska, 2016).

The high standard of modern retail space and the convenient location of these facilities attracted many well-known global brands, making them attractive to customers in Poland, especially those who, during the years of the reality of a centrally controlled economy, were cut off from many goods from Western Europe, for example, and it should be noted that this was the time of the youth of today's seniors. The public also viewed positively the fact that some shopping complexes were located in modernised buildings of former factories, industrial plants. This made them architecturally interesting, while the aspect of saving valuable post-industrial buildings from destruction should be seen as socially positive (Miklinska 2016).

In addition to traditional shopping centres, other retail formats are also developing in Poland, mainly retail parks and outlet centres. It is, however, shopping centres that have the largest share in the retail property space structure, amounting to as much as 80%, while the other main types of facilities account for 18% and 2% respectively (Okoń *et al.*, 2024). Basic information on modern retail space and shopping centres in Poland is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. *Basic information on modern retail space and shopping centres in Poland*

Information	Value
GLA In Stock of modern retail space (in June 2024)	13,5 million sqm GLA
Share of shopping centres in the structure of the main retail formats in the country	80%
Number of traditional shopping centres in the country	600
Share of shopping centres by size of space	5000 – 19 999 sqm GLA (24%) 20 000 – 39 999 sqm GLA (36%) 40 000 – 59 999 sqm GLA (24%) >60 000 sqm GLA (16%)
Space density in cities with shopping centres	698 sqm per 1000 inhabitants
Number of shops in shopping centres	about 40 000

Source: *Elaborated based on Okoń et al. 2024; GfK, Polish Council of Shopping Centres. 2023.*

In Poland, there are traditional shopping centres of various sizes (Table 1), including those with a surface area in excess of 60 000 sqm GLA, with facilities in the range of 20 000 - 39 999 sqm GLA predominating (Okoń *et al.*, 2024). Irrespective of the size of the facility and its location in relation to the city centre, the specific evolution of the function of these facilities under the influence of a number of market trends is important.

Influenced by a number of trends and technological developments, there are now both older and more modern shopping centres in Polish cities. In recent years, multifunctional facilities have been put into operation, a large part of which is made up of communal spaces as well as food halls and, in addition to traditional shops, show rooms, pop-ups (temporary shops) and concept stores, which are intended to provide a range of experiences for customers of all ages (Niemira-Jurek A. (ed.) 2020). Managers place great emphasis on the social dimension of shopping centres.

The basic trends that shopping centre managers in Poland are aiming to realise in terms of their social dimension are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. *Main trends and objectives to be pursued by shopping centre managers in Poland*

Trend	Interpretation
Accessibility - centres for everyone	The accessibility of shopping centres addresses the needs not only of people with disabilities, but also seniors or parents with children, etc. The solutions used in these facilities are intended to ease mobility and orientation in the complex (e.g. additional parking spaces, wide lifts).
Family-friendly	The facilities are designed to reduce the inconvenience of being in a building (air-conditioning, appropriate lighting, plants, landscaping)
Many channels - one objective	The centres use a number of channels to communicate with customers, including the Internet - for the presentation of advertising, information and image activities.
Modernity through technology	Modern technology with artificial intelligence supports the operation of the facility; screens, info kiosks, advertising mirrors etc. are used to communicate information to customers.
Catering has more than one name	Catering facilities are located in the centres, with a varied offer aimed at different audiences.
Leisure and entertainment	Centres offer a wide selection of entertainment tenants (e.g. cinemas, clubs, etc.) and establish cooperation with local authorities, NGOs, etc.
Tailor-made centres	In selecting tenants, centres make use of needs research in accordance with the profile of their customers, including seniors.
Local, which means ours	The centres' event calendars, their strategies and the collaborations undertaken are linked to the specifics of the property's location.
Many functions in one place	The centres are significant complexes with an offer that meets the needs of local communities while also providing jobs.
Design and order	The centres care about the functionality and aesthetic appearance of the facilities, ensuring good use of the space by different users.

Source: *Elaborated based on PRCH as cited in Niemira-Jurek (ed.), 2020.*

Experts dealing with the retail real estate market, indicating the trends currently important for the Polish market, emphasise that shopping centres are undergoing intensive changes through: remodelling, recommercialisation, rebranding and repositioning (CBRE Research, 2024). New brands, local products, events and activities targeting local communities, including the elderly, are appearing in the offer of shopping centres in Poland. The managers of these facilities attach great importance to communal spaces, leisure areas or even the existence of coworking spaces.

Also in Poland, experts point to an increased interest in ESG issues among various stakeholders in the operation of shopping centres - customers, facility managers, property owners, representatives of retail chains (CBRE Research, 2024), which results, among other things, in an intensification of pro-social activities, so important from the point of view of the subject of this article.

3.2 Determinants of Senior Citizens' Visits and Shopping Behaviour in Shopping centres in Poland

Research into the shopping behaviour of senior citizens in Poland indicates that they tend to purchase non-food products in shops located in shopping malls (Zalega, 2024). In these shopping facilities, given the choice of goods available here, clothing and cosmetics are most frequently purchased by them (Rogala and Fojutowski, 2014).

This is where the important role of salespeople for seniors, also mentioned in foreign literature, becomes apparent. In addition, in Poland, seniors value the convenient location of the facility, which is quite - close to their place of residence, and they also consider it important to be able to buy in safe and comfortable conditions in smaller shops (Szymańska and Płaziak, 2017). Older people avoid crowds and therefore often visit shopping centres on weekdays, in the forenoon, which is often allowed by the fact that they are already retired.

With regard to different age groups (16 - 54 years of age), it is indicated that Poles spend more than 60% of their shopping funds in shopping centres - depending on the type of product from 26% - 78%, while for e-commerce this expenditure ranges from 1% - 20% (GFK, Polish Council of Shopping Centres, 2023). This relationship undoubtedly reveals the still significant role of shopping centres, which at the same time confirms the relevance of addressing this topic, also in the context of one of the customer groups.

Currently, more than half of the shopping centre retail space (54%) is located in the eight largest cities in Poland (Upper Silesia Metropolis, Kraków, Łódź, Poznań, Tricity, Szczecin, Warsaw, Wrocław), i.e., those with a population of more than

400,000 inhabitants. Slightly smaller cities - those with a population of 200,000-400,000 inhabitants - have 12% of the retail space of shopping centres, while cities with a population of 100,000-200,000 people have 14% of the space of these centres respectively (Okoń et al, 2024).

Over the years, shopping centres in Poland have also been established in smaller towns (so-called secondary markets), so that currently 20% of the shopping centre floor area is located in those with a population below 100 000 inhabitants (Okoń *et al.*, 2024).

Thus, as noted, the large number of seniors (nearly 7 million) residing in Polish cities is a potentially important group of customers with good access to numerous shopping centres in their places of residence. Additionally, it should be emphasised that senior citizens residing in cities are usually in a better material situation than those in rural areas. According to statistical data, urban households with only those aged 60 and over had incomes 16.4 per cent higher than those in rural areas. A similar situation also applies to household expenditures - in this respect, for older people living in cities, they were higher (by 14.8%) than those in rural areas (GUS as cited in MSCP, 2024).

Visits to shopping centres by city-dwelling senior citizens are also facilitated by the public transport systems in place and the convenient conditions of use for people in this social group, as they have discounts, and in many cities they even use it for free (usually people aged 70 and over). Facilities for the elderly also exist in the rolling stock or urban infrastructure (Miklinska, 2023), making it easier to reach the shopping centre.

In this regard, it should be noted that the mobility of seniors is related, to a large extent, to their health status. More than half (54.9%) of people aged 60 and over (in 2023) indicate that there are no health-related limitations to their usual activities (EU-SILC, GUS as cited in MSCP, 2024). This is therefore undoubtedly the group of people who can visit shopping centres independently.

Another important issue identified in the literature review is the activity of seniors, referred to e.g. through the concept of active ageing. The report on the situation of older people in Poland (MSCP, 2024) discusses several areas to gain insights in this regard, such as education and the acquisition of knowledge, participation in cultural promotion activities or voluntary engagement.

With regard to the issue of activity in the framework of education in late life, it should be pointed out that 31.7% of people aged 60-69 in 2022 declared that they had acquired knowledge in various forms (for those aged 18-69, the percentage was 54%) (GUS as cited in MSCP, 2024)

In addition, it should be noted that senior citizens benefit from various forms of cultural and artistic activities organised by cultural institutions, non-governmental organisations and constitute about one third of the participants there, as well as willingly engage in voluntary activities, in 2022 they accounted for more than ¼ of all volunteers (GUS as cited in MSCP, 2024).

In the group of senior citizens visiting shopping centres in Poland, attention should be paid not only to those who are active and assess their health as good, but also to those who are affected by various illnesses, ailments or disabilities.

In this context, it should be noted that various forms of disability in Poland affect 4.5 million people of different ages. Among them are seniors affected by the above-mentioned problems. As life expectancy increases, the number of people with various disabilities increases - in Poland, among people aged 20, 2% have some form of disability; among people aged 75, the figure is already over 50% (Niemira-Jurek (ed.), 2020).

According to research carried out in Poland as part of the Accessibility Plus programme (initiated in 2018), at ministerial level, in cooperation with the Polish Council of Shopping Centres and the directors of some facilities, local shopping centres have facilities for selected groups (Niemira-Jurek (ed.), 2020):

- for seniors - 52% have numerous facilities, while 41% have only a small number,
- for persons with reduced mobility, who may also include seniors - 76% of facilities have numerous facilities for this group, while 23% have only a small number.

With regard to the mobility of shopping centre customers, according to the above-mentioned studies, 67% of people with a disability arrive at the shopping centre by car (Niemira-Jurek (ed.) 2020), so the issue of car parks in shopping centres, their appropriate signposting and their communication with the rest of the facility is becoming important.

In large cities, especially in very large cities (with a population of more than 500,000), up to approx. 40 per cent of customers with disabilities use public transport when travelling to the shopping centre, while the share of car transport decreases to 50 per cent (Niemira-Jurek (ed.), 2020). This is undoubtedly facilitated by the aforementioned low-floor rolling stock and the good accessibility of bus stops.

According to the survey results, facilities that are of high importance for people with disabilities include (starting from facilities with the highest number of indications): lifts, stairs and escalators, wide passageways (corridors), entrances with automatic

doors, disabled-accessible toilets, disabled-accessible parking spaces and others, such as reception desks with a lowered countertop (Niemira-Jurek (ed.), 2020).

Appropriate information on the centre's website should also be considered important. In this context, according to the directors of the centres, about 32% of the surveyed facilities have such information aimed at senior citizens (Niemira-Jurek (ed.), 2020). At the same time, it should be noted that not all facilities have appropriate solutions for people with sight and hearing problems, for example the lack of voice announcements in lifts or appropriate signage in Braille (Niemira-Jurek (ed.), 2020).

Selected examples of solutions and good practices in shopping centres to improve accessibility for, among others, senior citizens are shown in Table 3.

Table 3. *Examples of solutions and good practices in shopping centres in Poland to improve accessibility for seniors and others*

Shopping centre	Examples of solutions
Gemini Park (Tychy)	A wayfinding system has been developed for seniors and the visually impaired - information carriers of the appropriate size and height in the form of inscriptions and pictograms are located in sensitive areas
Forum Gdańsk	The facility has internal and external lifts, a flat and level surface provides access to toilets and parking spaces. A sign interpreter service is available in the shopping centre either from a web browser or on a tablet at reception
Platan Shopping Centre in Zabrze	All sanitary facilities are equipped with disabled toilets; the facility provides constant supervision by paramedics equipped with a defibrillator; a wheelchair and a wheelchair for seniors are available. Curbs have been eliminated on the outside of the facility.
VIVO! Lublin	The facility has bathrooms for people with disabilities, the centre's staff receive regular training in disability support, there are special wider spaces close to the entrances to the facility on each level of the car park, and there are also trawlers from two levels of the car park into the shopping centre.

Source: *Elaborated based on Niemira-Jurek A. (ed.) 2020.*

A convenient shopping path for the customer nowadays also takes on a dimension related to the omnichannel solution mentioned in the literature review. As experts point out, entities operating shops in shopping centres in Poland, including representatives of well-known brands, retail chains carrying out sales in the stationary and e-commerce channels, are actively pursuing an omnichannel strategy (CBRE Research, 2024).

When focusing on the shopping behaviour of seniors within e-commerce, it is first important to look at the online activity of Polish seniors. It should be pointed out that 27.9% of people in the 60-74 age group used the Internet several times a day, once a

day or almost every day - 19.7%, and at least once a week - 11.6%, while even less frequently - 2.6% of people (GUS as cited in MSCP, 2024).

Relating online activity to the likelihood of making purchases, following the results of a nationwide study, it should be indicated that 75% of respondents in the pre-senior and senior age group (i.e., the 50+ group) buy products and services on Polish websites (including, as one may assume, on the websites of shops having their branches in shopping centres). Furthermore, it should be noted that 19% do so on foreign websites (GEMIUS, Polskie Badania Internetu, iab Polska, 2024).

As is known, older people are more cautious about visiting foreign websites than younger ones. In addition, the reasons for not buying online should also be mentioned, and in this context people 50+ indicate that they prefer to see the products, talk to the seller and get advice (GEMIUS, Polskie Badania Internetu, iab Polska, 2024), which speaks in favour of shopping in shopping centres.

When analysing the shopping behaviour of senior citizens in Poland and referring to their e-commerce shopping activity, it should be emphasised that this situation may have two effects on the attendance of shopping centres by this social group. Firstly, purchases made online may be in competition with those made in a shopping centre, and this would be the case if seniors carried out the entire shopping process online. Secondly, if any stage of the shopping process is carried out in a shopping centre (a visit to a shop or a parcel machine located here), within the omnichannel model, these facilities remain relevant within the shopping behaviour of seniors.

With regard to the issue of omnichannel in shopping centres more broadly, to supplement the above comments, reference should be made to the results of a study conducted for 105 shopping centres in Poland and their customers comprising people aged 16 - 54 (GFK, Polish Council of Shopping Centres, 2023). Although the survey did not include senior citizens, the results also apply to mature and therefore future senior citizens.

In explaining the rationale for reaching for such findings, it should be pointed out, following Rochmińska (2015), that both from the scientific point of view and from the point of view of experience and conclusions for the business sphere, it is important to study the preferences and behaviours of people in the “pre-senior” age group, as they will soon be operating in the market as seniors (Rochmińska, 2015).

Furthermore, it is worth noting that in shopping centres in Poland, 61% of customers perform omnichannel behaviours. These behaviours account for 10% of visits where they are combined with traditional shopping and 1.5% of visits made solely for the purpose of performing omnichannel behaviours; visits where only traditional shopping is performed account for 88.5% of visits (GFK, Polish Council of Shopping Centres, 2023).

Referring more specifically to omnichannel behaviours (for customers 16 - 54 years old) in shopping centres in Poland, the following examples can be identified: viewing/checking a product in a shop in a shopping centre to later buy it online - 28% of customers; picking up in-store goods ordered and paid for online - 27% of customers; picking up in-store goods ordered online but paid for when picking them up - 21% of customers; goods picked up at a parcel machine in a shopping centre - 18% of customers; returning in-store goods ordered online and delivered by courier - 17% of customers; exchanging in-store goods bought online in a shopping centre - 16% of customers (GFK, Polish Council of Shopping Centres. 2023).

These data illustrate significant regularities in omnichannel behaviour in shopping centres in Poland and show the importance of these facilities in retail and omnichannel supply chains where such practices are used. They also allow us to gain an insight into the opportunities that older people face in this respect as part of their shopping behaviour.

4. Conclusions

In the annual Ministerial Report on the Situation of Older Persons in Poland for 2023, in the face of progressing demographic changes, it is indicated that the challenge for the coming years is, among other things, to create such conditions so that more and more seniors are included in social activities, especially such with the involvement of local potential. At the same time, it calls for the implementation of solutions aimed at reorganising infrastructure and public spaces, at the local level, to make them senior citizen-friendly (MSCP, 2024).

It is hard not to notice that shopping centres are an important response to such challenges. There are currently around 600 such facilities in Polish cities, which effectively combine shopping and service functions with the function of a place for social integration. This fact is also confirmed by numerous experiences from around the world.

On the one hand, shopping centres can play an important role in the shopping process for seniors who value the advice of expert salespeople, and on the other hand, they can be an important place in an omnichannel model for those who want to carry out certain stages of their purchase in e-commerce.

As part of the shopping process, senior citizens can choose the click and collect option and pick up the product ordered online at a stationary shop (in the shopping centre) or at a parcel machine located here or, in another case, return the product at a stationary shop (also in the shopping centre). The possibility of various such practices and, in addition, the developing social function of shopping centres, attracts such an important and growing customer group as senior citizens to these facilities, and this reinforces the role of shopping centres in supply chains, in their last mile.

Special infrastructural and informational measures to improve the accessibility of shopping centres for older people can encourage them to visit these facilities. As important places for older people to shop and use services, they prevent social exclusion. They are now becoming the optimal solution for combining the business objectives of owners, managers and tenants with the social measures that are also important in terms of ESG reporting.

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