

Stirlingretail

Comments on retail issues from Leigh Sparks, the Institute for Retail Studies, University of Stirling

Retailing, Shopping and Covid-19

Posted on May 19, 2020 by Leigh Sparks



Over the last couple of months I have produced on this blog a range of pieces around retailing, shopping and the coronavirus pandemic. There will no doubt be more to be said as the situation develops.

One of these pieces – [What should we value about retailing and towns and what should we do about them](#) – attracted a fair degree of attention in a variety of places. The piece was a call for more radical thinking around the future for towns and high streets: essentially a plea not to go back to how we were, but instead to carve out the economy and society that we want (and need) and to be inclusive and community focused rather than distant transactional and extractive as so many of our places have become. The original post has been re-blogged and altered for use in various sources and outlets.

At the University of Stirling, we are proud that much of our research has a public policy focus. We have created [a public policy blog](#) to present, from across the University, this research and thought leadership on policy. As part of our reaction to the pandemic, we are now producing podcasts from various of our academics on their specialist area and the implications of COVID-19, raising questions and policy implications.

I was asked to contribute to the series, and my podcast is available via [as part of the lecture series](#) and directly [here](#). I have taken this opportunity to expand on and repurpose much of the recent material in this blog and build on a presentation I gave at [an Institute of Place Management](#) Webinar a few weeks ago (for the delegates, I promised to post the presentation and this podcast is that). [A full transcript of the podcast can be downloaded here \(Transcript of Podcast May 2020\)](#).

Some of this work was also the subject of a podcast discussion I did with David Jamieson for [Source.scot](#), a couple of weeks ago. This interview was a part of a feature entitled [“Retail behemoth: are we witnessing the birth of a savage new business age”](#). My interview (“Beyond the noise: how the crisis is transforming the retail sector”) ranges widely over retail change, the impact of the virus on the sector and what we want to come out of this period for towns and retailing and can be listened to [here](#).

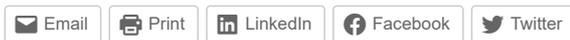


For now, according to Leigh Sparks, Professor of Retail Studies at Stirling University, the big divide is between food retailers and the non-food sector: "You see real variations in the way the pandemic has impacted retailing. The food sector has seen a massive increase in most cases. It was deemed an essential sector – it was kept open."

[Interview between David Jamieson and Leigh Sparks](#)

There will be much more to be said about the longer term impact of the pandemic on retailing and shopping. I doubt we can yet begin to really see what the potential disruption will be like. We can though start to anticipate the type of future we want and try to work out the steps to get there. This is ever more important if we are not to simply go back to the (failed) ways of doing things.

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About Leigh Sparks

I am Professor of Retail Studies at the Institute for Retail Studies, University of Stirling, where I research and teach aspects of retailing and retail supply chains, alongside various colleagues. I am Chair of Scotland's Towns Partnership. I am also a Deputy Principal of the University, with responsibility for Education and Students.

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