ABSTRACT

Over the last three decades, Singapore has experienced profound changes in its retail developments. The two key factors contributing to the rapid developments and changes are the socio-economic factors and town planning policies.

The 1991 Revised Concept Plan has introduced the concept of "Regional Centres" to decentralize commercial activities from the Central Area to the suburban areas and HDB estates. These regional centres will provide substantial amount of retail space and offer a viable alternative to downtown shopping areas.

Using the Tampines Regional Centre as a case study, this study seeks to determine whether there is a change in the shopping behaviour and patterns of the HDB residents and also to ascertain the impact of the regional centre on retailing in both downtown shopping areas and HDB neighbourhood centres.

Based on the survey results, there are already sign of changes in the shopping behaviour and patterns of the residents. The retail establishments within the Tampines Regional Centre are able to cater to the residents' needs for both shopping goods and convenience goods. The findings also reveal that residents who shop at downtown frequently are not mutually exclusive from residents who shop frequently at the Tampines Regional Centre and HDB neighbourhood centres. This implies that frequent outshoppers may reduce their downtown shopping trips and satisfy their shopping needs at the Regional Centre.

On the other hand, residents who used to obtain convenience goods at the HDB neighbourhood centres can now obtain them through the Regional Centre.
With regard to business performance of the retailers, the survey results reveal that retail businesses at the HDB neighbourhood centres having similar trades as those found in the Regional Centre are badly affected. Generally, the neighbourhood centres lack variety and quality goods. They provide mainly convenience goods to residents in the vicinity. The survey findings indicate that the main concern of the residents, as shoppers, is the lack of variety and quality goods available at neighbourhood centres. This is an area of improvement which the shopkeepers within the neighbourhood centre should focus on. The future of the retailers at the HDB neighbourhood centres may not be bleak if they are willing to upgrade in terms of service and efficiency. They will be able to complement, rather than compete with the big retailers at the Regional Centre.

In planning the future neighbourhood centres, the HDB town planners will need to review the planning parameters and objectives of a neighbourhood centre. HDB may need to scale down the size of a neighbourhood centre to provide only essential goods and specialty goods to the residents. Furthermore, trade-mix control will ensure adequate market coverage for the survival of the various types of trade within a neighbourhood centre.

For the existing neighbourhood centre, it is important for each one to find its niche in the hierarchy of retail centres in order to be competitive.