

Gardner's Attitude to Development of High-Tech Shopping Centres

Gardner's Counterarguments for Opponents of High-Tech Boom

In his article, Carl Gardner refutes the opinion that development of high-tech shopping centres is a bad thing (1991). However, he acknowledges that this may become a source of new problems, though these can be tolerated by the consuming public.

First of all, Gardner believes that a big number of critical arguments against upmarket retail centres are idealistic in nature. In other words, opponents of the retail industry usually hold somewhat unrealistic point of view that fails to adequately explain why this phenomenon is so "evil". For instance, the socialist philosophic school presents consumption, and particularly, so-called "consumerism", as a negative tendency and argues that the society must rather strive for growth of production. For those who support this point of view, high-end retail stores are the symbol of the evil created by capitalism and spread throughout the world. The main shortcoming of this view is that it fails to acknowledge any benefits that can be derived from consumption. Not accidentally, this theory has been criticised by Gardner (p. 40).

Furthermore, the analyst believes that other opponents of the retail boom also fail to provide satisfactory explanations on why high-tech shopping is a dangerous tendency. For instance, he criticises left-centred thinkers' view of the matter, as this group has failed to consider some of the new tendencies that influence decisions of British shoppers. These people claim that retail centres have been designed to manipulate shoppers making them buy new commodities and thus enrich them. Gardner strongly objects to this shallow idea because it is based on the assumption that

shoppers are not able to make independent rational decisions and can be easily manipulated by means of specific marketing tricks (ibid.). As marked by the author, this view is biased and groundless: buyers have both the right and power to reject or accept popular novelties. Refutation of these ideas by Gardner further indicates why he does not think that high-tech retail growth is a dangerous tendency.

Some express concerns that the growth of shopping centres leads to dilapidation of social life by aggravating the gap between the rich and the poor (ibid.). This causes increases in crime rates since crimes are a form of have-nots' rebellion against their inability to participate in enjoying the benefits of the retail industry. However, there are certain counterarguments that should be considered: first of all, many retail boom critics have asserted that high-tech shopping centres will lead to the demise of civilian life, but as we know, none of their predictions have come true. Besides, this perspective is extremely pessimistic, as it initially considers the worst case scenario only, which seems to be somewhat shallow.

Gardner focuses on the detailed description of modern high-tech shopping centres. For instance, when describing one of the malls opened in London, he says that "it is done in angular, "raw tech", neo-constructivist style developed by Crighton Design, with a giant "drawbridge" spanning the central space" (ibid.). He provides this description in order to depict the welcoming nature of the shopping malls that makes them suitable locations for interactions and meetings. This is especially important in light of certain dryness that may be noticed in the British outdoors environment. In this regard, the author believes that the function of the retail boom satisfies a real need of

the society, i.e. provision of a meeting venue for people who have difficulties with finding communication in other places.

Apart from the latter, the author also believes that this retail boom is a natural response to the current urban standard of living. Most urban citizens cannot afford living in well-designed buildings, and the only form of the luxury that corresponds to their income status is purchasing goods at high-tech shopping centres. While the income level growth is a very long process, the retail satisfies people's need for short-term gratification. Gardner, therefore, asserts that there are no grounds for considering shopping centres as a negative issue since they offer the British population what other public institutions cannot give (p. 41).

Gardner (p. 41) further believes that the retail boom was not a creation of the British masses per se; it was caused by economic forces that stay beyond their control. This implies that it is incorrect to demonise the trend since no single group of individuals actually caused it. Developing this idea, he gives examples, such as the inflation that occurred in the past decade: citizens learned that saving their money did not protect them. The rising unemployment level led to the unrestricted spending "bug" since individuals wanted to rebel against the system that imposed this heavy burden on them. Therefore, this example makes Gardner's statements seem more realistic.

My Response to Gardner's Ideas

Though Gardner seems to decline and disprove anti-capitalist ideas, some of them can be noticed in his explanations. For instance, the author affirms that most middle class or low class British citizens participate in shopping in order to rebel against their everyday life miseries. He further claims that consumers prefer to ignore these

negative forces focusing on their consumption opportunities rather than their production duties. This statement is consonant with ideas provided by the socialist school of thought: its adherents believe that production is progressive while consumption is not. Socialists described that the proletariat often apply unconventional means to oppose domination of capital owners. In the retail boom era, the rebellion against the external pressure is conducted through excessive spending. As Gardner's argument reflects the same socialist ideas that he firmly opposed before, I find it impossible to completely agree with him due to the vagueness contained in his reasoning.

On the other hand, I agree with some of Gardner's ideas about helplessness of the public with regard to social pressure and bad living conditions. The author believes that the retail boom is provoked by the external factors beyond the control of the masses, such as poor housing infrastructure.

Gardner's position is supported by the basic rules of demand and supply. For example, the retail industry offered products and services in 80s, but there was no high demand for goods. Consequently, suppliers responded to the low demand by offering fewer shopping options. As a result, the country was stuck at the point of low equilibrium. However, introduction of a new component into the range of equilibrium determinants made demand for shopping centres products go up. This new component was poor housing infrastructure: inadequate service in one sector led to increasing demand in another area, and that is why the retail sector grew tremendously. Apart from the controversy on sociological theories, the rest of Gardner's arguments seem to be quite weighty, as they are supported by knowledge that refers to economics.

Reference

Gardner, C. (1991). Spend, Spend, Spend. *New Statesman and Society*, 1, pp. 40-41.