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Opportunities for slow fashion retail in temporary stores

Opportunities
for slow
fashion retail

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to further theorize the concept of the “sustainable temporary store” and explore benefits and challenges for slow fashion retailers using temporary stores to promote a new value proposition and develop a business model.

Design/methodology/approach – The theoretical part combines the findings from marketing and human geography literature to theorize pop-up retailing from the slow fashion SME perspective. The empirical part uses a critical case study and a qualitative method approach (primary sources, half standardized interviews, ethnographic observation).

Findings – The study provides theoretical insights into five success criteria for the “sustainable temporary store” across geographies. Empirical findings allow for further conclusions about challenges in regards to spatial requirements and business modeling for slow fashion retail entrepreneurs in the Netherlands.

Research limitations/implications – Limitations of the study are the geographical scope of exiting literature on the global north and the restricted sample size. However, by selecting a critical case, careful geographically restricted generalizations can be made.

Practical implications – The study provides useful information for slow fashion entrepreneurs who want to use cheap temporary space to develop their retail business model.

Social implications – The results show that there is placemaking value (social value creation) in temporary slow fashion retailing.

Originality/value – The study provides a relevant contribution to the theory of pop-up retailing and more precisely to the concept of the “sustainable temporary store.” It also delivers a replicable empirical research design for other geographies.

Keywords Pop-up retailing, Slow fashion, SME retail, Sustainable temporary store, Vintage

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

One effect of the economic crisis and changing consumer behavior in the Global North during the last nine years has been the huge availability of retail space. In high streets, shopping centers and derelict industrial spaces, this has led to opportunities for creative and cultural start-ups to experiment with new retail concepts. Real estate owners let their property for low price to pop-up initiatives, to guarantee (or raise) real estate value as well as local public liveliness and safety. With the western economies recovering, this situation is changing. Predominantly in global cities such as London, Paris and Amsterdam, real estate prices and rents are rising quickly and small businesses are crowded out (Hubbard, 2017). However, this does not apply to smaller towns. Whereas the Amsterdam city center knew a 3.6 percent vacant retail space in 2016, the national average was still 10 percent (Teulings *et al.*, 2017). Due to the ongoing online disruption, retail real estate acts more and more volatile with huge spaces in luxury main streets of New York and Düsseldorf currently unused (Kapalschinski and Kolf, 2017). There is and will be a lot of temporary vacant space and city councils ready to experiment with new forms of value creation in urban retailing.

This situation creates opportunities for micro entrepreneurs and a lot of independent designers and starting retailers of slow fashion have grabbed these, often experimenting with local concept or vintage stores to create new value propositions and develop their retail business models (Alexander and Bain, 2016; Cataldi *et al.*, 2010; Clark, 2008; Fletcher, 2010; Pomodoro, 2013; Ziehl and Osswald, 2015). Rather than closely defined, slow fashion retailing is understood here as the retailing of designed clothing and lifestyle products being



locally produced or re-used. This links to aspects of transparency about working conditions, fair wages and a reduced carbon footprint (Henninger *et al.*, 2016; Pookulangara and Shephard, 2013). As part of a broader “slow movement,” slow fashion retailing does not refer to time so much as to a mindful consumption and disposal of products (Kant Hvass, 2014) and to a philosophy of attentiveness which includes sustainable and sensorial fashion products (Clark, 2008). Vintage, because of its longevity and individual garment’s story, is thus an important part of slow fashion.

In many cities, slow fashion retailing has developed as a form of alternative retailing, valuing local resources and creating new retailer-producer-consumer networks (Clark, 2008; Ferreri, 2015; Leslie *et al.*, 2015). Mostly, starting micro retailers have very limited financial resources and are experimenting with their business model. Pomodoro (2013) showed that in Italy they often start with a “sustainable temporary store,” a finding which meets with evidence in other countries (Alexander and Bain, 2016; Ferreri, 2015). This type of pop-up store houses “emerging brands with a product offering dedicated to environmentally sustainable fashion (use of natural materials, use of traditional production methods of particular areas, social projects, etc.)” (Pomodoro, 2013, p. 349). However, many of these stores disappear after the pop-up experience[1] and do not grow into businesses elsewhere. This raises the question if and how slow fashion retail start-ups with the objective of developing innovative and sustainable business models can really take advantage of “low budget urbanity” (Ferreri, 2015, p. 181).

The literature on temporary retail space currently revolves around the concept of pop-up retailing. Warnaby *et al.* (2015, p. 303) defined pop-up retailing as “an experientially orientated consumer-brand interaction, taking place within a particular, albeit temporary, ‘territory.’” They identify three distinguishing characteristics of pop-up retailing from the existing literature: a highly experiential in-store environment; a focus on promoting a brand or product line; and availability for a limited period, with this essential ephemerality aiming to create a sense of urgency, to stimulate purchase or other actions. However, he, similar to most other marketing scholars (Gursch and Gursch, 2014; Haas and Schmidt, 2016; Kastner, 2015; Klein *et al.*, 2016; De Lassus and Freire, 2014; Russo Spena *et al.*, 2012; Surchi, 2011), focuses on the objectives of global brands: to promote brand/product lines, to test new markets and to sell seasonal or limited editions of product (Warnaby *et al.*, 2015). Only Pomodoro (2013) with the entrepreneurial type of a “sustainable temporary store” and Alexander and Bain (2016) who researched Canadian SME’s include the perspective of small retailers. They both stress the network enhancing effect of “collaborative pop-up shops” (a temporary joint venture of several entrepreneurs offering complementary merchandise).

Interestingly, opportunities and challenges for small business start-ups in temporary spaces have been much more discussed by human geography scholars (Andres, 2013; Colomb, 2012; Ferreri, 2015, 2016; Finan, 2015; Harris, 2015; Stevens and Ambler, 2010). These authors mostly describe the pop-up store as a community shop catering to alternative lifestyles (Ferreri, 2015; Ziehl and Osswald, 2015). Whereas for topics like the flagship store, findings of marketing and human geography were combined (Crewe, 2000, 2017; Yeung and Ang, 2016), this is not the case for the literature on temporary retail space. This paper will close the gap. It thus contributes to the theory of temporary retailing and more precisely to the concept of the “sustainable temporary store” (Pomodoro, 2013) from the perspective of SME. It will first look at the literature in vintage and slow fashion retailing to determine opportunities for new value propositions. Further on, it will analyze marketing and human geography literature. The goal is to formulate a set of “inherent properties[2]” of successful pop-up retailing for slow fashion micro retailers:

RQ1. What are the relevant properties of pop-up retailing for the objectives of retail entrepreneurs in slow fashion?

After that, the findings of an empirical study in the Netherlands will be discussed to test these properties and further explore benefits and challenges of pop-up stores for starting slow fashion entrepreneurs. Due to the ephemeral character of pop-up retailing, the empirical study uses the critical case of one pop-up vintage retailer in the city of The Hague. Two research questions will be at the heart of this exploration:

- RQ2. Can a creative entrepreneur successfully use the pop-up retailing properties to promote and test a new value proposition in slow fashion retail?
- RQ3. Can a creative entrepreneur develop a sustainable retail business model and source of income during this pop-up retailing experience?

The collected material and used methodology not only allows to answer the first two questions generally and the third regionally, but it also leads to formulate practical implications for slow fashion retail start-ups and municipalities in the Netherlands.

From vintage to slow fashion retailing

The recent literature on vintage fashion agrees that it is a trend that has shifted from subculture to mass culture during the last ten years (Tungate, 2008; Cassidy and Bennett, 2012; Cervellon *et al.*, 2012; McColl *et al.*, 2013). Cicolini (2005) traced the history of vintage retail back to the early 1970s but talks of a revival in the new millennium, busted not at least by popular film series like *Sex and the City* and *Mad Men* (Cassidy and Bennett, 2012). There is a general acceptance that clothing is identified as vintage when it is produced in the period between the 1920s and the 1980s. Vintage pieces are not necessarily pieces which have been used, but can be second-hand. The retailing of vintage fashion is done by concessions in luxury and mid-market multiples, e-tailers and specialized markets and stores (Bardhi and Arnould, 2005). However, McColl *et al.* (2013) claimed that the highest proportion of vintage is sold by specialist stores, “typically small, independently owned businesses[3].”

The vintage fashion consumer in general not only buys for uniqueness, frugality and nostalgia, but also has a distinct fashion involvement (Cervellon *et al.*, 2012; Meraviglia, 2014). Cassidy and Bennett (2012) specified style, quality and uniqueness of the garment as main drivers for vintage consumption with women aged 25-39 years who form the largest demographic group buying vintage clothing. Cervellon *et al.* (2012) found that a higher level of education and higher income were related to the purchase of vintage. Understanding the story of a garment (Cervellon *et al.*, 2012; Cristache, 2013) seems to be of particular value to this customer group. As vintage pieces are unique, only one size, albeit scarce and not readily accessible, the feeling of a “treasure hunt” enriches the shopping experience. Guiot and Roux (2010), studying French second-hand shoppers across channel, first published about the critical buying motive: consumers buying second-hand for ethical and ecological reasons and wanting to bypass mainstream retailing.

The growing vintage fashion retail in the new millennium has increasingly been associated with the slow fashion movement. This movement came up to speed in 2013 after the collapse of the Rana Plaza building that housed multiple garment manufacturers in Bangladesh (McColl *et al.*, 2013; Buckle, 2014; Meraviglia, 2014). Perceived very much as opposition to the fast fashion business model practiced by international fashion brands and vertically integrated retailers such as Zara and H&M, this movement “is observed in cities around the world and is characterized by the growth of small, independent boutiques” (Leslie *et al.*, 2015, p. 89). Leslie *et al.* (2015) who based their study on boutiques in Toronto (Canada), stress the importance of the role of small, independent retailers in alternative shopping areas. Focusing on the curation of slow fashion apparel and lifestyle products, those retailers often provide customized service and have deep supplier and client relationships.

The current literature suggests a new value proposition that these alternative boutiques are developing. It revolves around the curation of slow fashion in regards to sustainability and in regards to style. Small retailers play a central role in educating their customers about the ethical and aesthetic values associated with these products (Cervellon *et al.*, 2012; Pookulangara and Shephard, 2013; Leslie *et al.*, 2015). In the particular case of a vintage boutique, the customer learns how to mix old with new and “appropriate them [vintage clothes] in a symbolic way by learning how to wear them without being distasteful” (Cristache, 2013, p. 167). Customers are helped with their aesthetic evaluations and buy for a smaller, more quirky and original closet of items than typical fast fashion customers do.

It is in connection with this new value proposition of slow fashion curation that urban space not only as a site for staging consumer experiences, but also as a site of networked negotiation in the assessment of quality, enters the research discussion. Experience economy theorists place slow fashion retailing in alternative “bohemian” neighborhoods where an integrated cluster of boutiques curate alternative fashion values and experiences. Narratives about place are thus adding value to product and service (Leslie *et al.*, 2015, p. 99). This relatively recent literature around the concept of “territorial stage setting” offers a changed perspective on the older literature on space in vintage/slow fashion retailing which predominantly focused on individual store atmosphere, layout and location (see McColl *et al.*, 2013 for an overview).

Finally, Buckle (2014) contributed interesting findings to the discussion. In her study on recycled fashion shopping in inner-city Sydney (Australia), she was able to relate certain geographical clusters of boutiques with fashion-focused urban demographics such as millennial professionals with more than average income. The literature thus indicates opportunities for new value propositions in regards to slow fashion retailing by small boutiques in alternative “bohemian” neighborhoods. As SMEs typically start their business with low financial investment, they are increasingly grabbing the opportunity of low-cost temporary retail space to develop and test new business models (Alexander and Bain, 2016; Ferreri, 2015; Pomodoro, 2013).

Properties of a successful “temporary sustainable store”

The temporary use of vacant or derelict spaces by a pop-up store is not brand new. Temporary shops, galleries and restaurants emerged in the USA since the turn to the new millennium. In Europe, pop-up stores “officially” appeared some 13 years ago, when in 2004 the high fashion label Comme des Garçons opened a temporary guerilla store furnished in an abandoned bookshop in Berlin, Germany (Alexander and Bain, 2016). Since then, unusual and unique locations have been associated with pop-up retailing. Temporary stores predominantly pop-up in upcoming urban environments all over the world, albeit in highest frequency in the global cities of the Global North[4].

In all research about pop-up retailing, there is strong consensus about the demographic group which feels most attracted to temporary spaces: millennials with hedonic and experiential motivations (see for an overview Taube and Warnaby, 2017, p. 389). This divers group of people born between 1980 and 2000 is more extravert and leisure-values oriented than earlier generations (Twenge and Campbell, 2012). Raised in a time of accelerated technology use and globalization, they are well-informed consumers using online information, blogs and peer reviews for product orientation. Offline and embodied, they are predominantly looking for experiences and the identification with products and their producers (Niehm *et al.*, 2006; Gursch and Gursch, 2014; De Lassus and Freire, 2014). They are “always on the move, are driven by the wish to freely live temporary and exciting experiences” (Pomodoro, 2013, p. 342). The pop-up which typically lasts several days to one year and often has a restricted or exclusive product range plays to this wish (Alexander and Bain, 2016; Haas and Schmidt, 2016; Warnaby *et al.*, 2015).

Pop-up retailing has a growing importance in the retail of international luxury and high street fashion brands. According to marketing research, international brands use pop-up stores successfully as part of their overall marketing strategy (Klein *et al.*, 2016; De Lassus and Freire, 2014; Taube and Warnaby, 2017). The staging of their offer in temporary concept stores/“brand pantheons” (Pomodoro, 2013; Warnaby *et al.*, 2015) or in temporary community/tribal stores strengthens the consumers’ brand experience and can increase brand value. Furthermore, the use of temporary test stores is a cost-effective way to explore new regional and generational markets (Pomodoro, 2013; Surchi, 2011).

Next to international brands with physical retail, more and more established online retailers understand pop-up retailing as an opportunity to add a physical and sensory experience to their online customer touchpoints and to experiment with new products and services (Hogeschool van Amsterdam, 2016). There is little known about the successful use of pop-up retailing by small enterprises with “sustainable temporary stores.” What are the relevant properties of pop-up retailing for the objectives of slow fashion retail entrepreneurs? (RQ1) This question will be answered in the following.

Scarcity of time vs post-fordist placemaking

Scarcity of time and merchandise can be marked as the first property of the pop-up format. They create a sense of urgency with the consumer. However, from the point of view of starting entrepreneurs who want to promote a new value proposition and develop their retailing business model, this ephemerality is ambivalent. Human geography authors, being more interested in the creation of place than in marketing, have vitally discussed this (Harris, 2015; Ferreri, 2015, 2016; Hietanen *et al.*, 2016). According to their analysis, the flexibility with which pop-up stores can be installed and deployed plays to the volatility of post-fordist economies[5] and is not always in the interest of the starting entrepreneur.

A Dutch study on the supply side of pop-up retail (Loggers and Kooijman, 2014) shows that the immediate financial benefits of most pop-up spaces are small. However, the social value creation has been assessed as very high. Municipalities and real estate owners are satisfied with the quality of life and safety-enhancing effects in regions with successful pop-up projects. It is the so-called placemaking as a result of a successful pop-up spacing which revalues vacant retail space. This is very successful when cultural or commercial initiatives work closely together with local residents. The result is a reevaluation of the space after the temporary experience, a new recalled identity of place (Finan, 2015; Moore-Cherry, 2017).

Whereas municipalities and real estate owners often profit from pop-up retailing, the scarcity/flexibility property of the pop-up store is not something SMEs can easily embrace. Colomb (2012) and Stevens and Ambler (2010) show in the case of Berlin how a global city is exploiting small cultural and creative entrepreneurship related to pop-up spacing in order to build a “creative city” narrative, whereas the micro entrepreneurs are attracted by cheap space, their stories are instrumental for marketing and they are gradually pushed into accelerated commercial growth, or out. These entrepreneurs experienced an “exploitation of their creativity for the economic benefit of others” (Colomb, 2012, p. 143).

Marketing scholars also underline that pop-up retailing works much less transactional than promotional. To reach his objectives, a micro entrepreneur consequently has to carefully balance the benefits of scarcity against the cost of deploying a pop-up operation. A moderate pop-up period of 6-12 months will probably allow him better to profit from the low-cost space and its consumer attractiveness whilst having more time to benefit from customer feedback and develop a business model. This also allows for more time to create customer loyalty for the emerging slow fashion retail brand.

Immersive store environment

Both marketing and human geography authors describe the pop-up store environment as discovery driven and designed to facilitate consumer engagement. Creating a memorable experience is an important aspect of pop-up activity. While the first studies into the experience economy (Pine and Gilmore, 1999) stressed the involvement of consumers in a theatrical and memorable environment, more recent research points to the immersive power of retail spaces engaging active consumers with makers and product experts (Caru and Cova, 2007). Immersion, the experience of entering a multi-sensory space which immediately identifies itself as “a different world,” has thus been described as an important pop-up property.

Warnaby *et al.* (2015) suggested to distinguish between design, ambient and social “experiential cues.” Next to tangible element like flooring and furnishing, ambient cues like music, lighting and scent and social cues like positive and increased staff interaction create emotional and behavioral effects in terms of customer engagement (Taube and Warnaby, 2017). Alexander and Bain (2016) who examined the pop-up from the perspective of SME, also stress the importance of the temporary retail environment being multi-sensory and interactive. Smell, sound, sight, taste, touch and movement (floorplan) all must be addressed. According to their findings, SME retailers often fail to embrace this property when using the pop-up format. As a lot of consumers still need to discover slow fashion, the immersive store environment property is of particular importance for the “sustainable temporary store” creating experiential engagement and making sustainable fashion more accessible.

Aesthetic and evental interstitiality

Human geography authors also describe pop-ups as in-between spaces existing in the cracks of dominant orders or “residual spaces” left out of time and place (Harris, 2015, p. 596). As such they work like an “interruption” (Ferreri, 2016) or “festival” (Ferreri, 2015; Hietanen *et al.*, 2016) disrupting urban aesthetics and movement routines with unusual locations and exterior store designs. The visual interruption creates a “surprise effect” (Taube and Warnaby., 2017, p. 388) and openness for exploration on the side of the consumer. Some marketing scholars also stress the event character of pop-up retailing (Pomodoro, 2013; Warnaby *et al.*, 2015). This phenomenon is referred to as the aesthetic and evental interstitiality (Harris, 2015) of pop-up spaces by human geographers.

Applying aesthetic interstitiality by finding and designing unique spaces and augmenting evental interstitiality by festival-like programming, slow fashion retail entrepreneurs can enhance their opportunities in temporary spaces. The chance lies in the re-interpretation of retail concepts and the creation of customer engagement for slow fashion in general and the retailer’s value proposition in particular.

Social media marketing

The name pop-up for the temporary store refers to the namesake internet application, small screens with information requested or by surprise appearing on a website. This name association from the digital world is accompanied by a high level of online integration of physical pop-up spaces: activity on branded websites, social networking sites and text messaging belong inseparably to pop-up retailing (Gursch and Gursch, 2014; Pomodoro, 2013; Alexander and Bain, 2016). The online and social media integration bypassing traditional channels of marketing is an important additional property of pop-up retailing. Given the need to maximize interest in a pop-up activity over a short period of time, social media assumes great importance in three temporal stages: the pre-experience stage, the pop-up experience itself and the post-experience stage (Warnaby *et al.*, 2015). This applies not only for international brands, but also for starting slow fashion retailers who want to take maximum advantage from the temporary retail space.

Theoretical findings

Combining marketing and human geography literature (see also Overdiek, 2017), the theory of the “sustainable temporary store” can be enriched by the following relevant properties of pop-up retailing for slow fashion entrepreneurs:

- (1) moderate scarcity, restriction in terms of time (six months to one year);
- (2) immersive, multi-sensory and interactive store environment;
- (3) aesthetic interstitiality (unusual location and/or exterior store design);
- (4) evental interstitiality (festival-like programming); and
- (5) social media marketing in pre-experience, experience and post-experience phases.

According to both marketing and human geography literature, the challenges for slow fashion start-ups in temporary stores lie predominantly with the revenue model of the start-up, as the literature clearly states that pop-up retailing is not a vessel for sales, but for marketing and placemaking where social and real estate value can be created.

Methodology

This study champions a performative approach: collaborative practices are created and recreated on a daily base within distinctive spatial contexts. The entrepreneur, her customers and other network partners as human actors together with the pop-up itself as a “nonhuman actor” (Latour, 1994) unfold an entrepreneurial presence[6]. From this “grounded-in-action” perspective, reality is the outcome of a joint mediation between the “built-in properties” (Fairhurst and Putnam, 2004, p. 18) of objects and the objectives of human subjects.

After the conclusive literature research into the opportunities of value creation in slow fashion micro retailing and the analysis of relevant properties of pop-up retailing for this objective, the research questions (*RQ2* and *RQ3*) were reformulated into the proposition:

- P1.* A creative entrepreneur, who uses all pop-up retailing properties, can take advantage from the low-cost space to (a) promote and test a new value proposition in slow fashion retailing and (b) develop a sustainable retail business model and source of income during this pop-up retailing experience.

In the following, the above proposition will be tested against a single case study. The case study is known as a method that produces concrete, context-dependent knowledge which is particularly valuable for the learning of the professional (George and Bennett, 2005). According to Flyvbjerg (2006), generalization on the basis of a single case is possible if the formulated proposition applies to it and if the case is well chosen. A well-chosen case in regards to the above formulated proposition is an extreme case: a slow fashion entrepreneur who uses all found success properties of the “sustainable temporary store.” Consequently, the actual situation of pop-up stores in the city of The Hague, The Netherlands was mapped. In total, 15 “sustainable temporary stores” were visited and scrutinized for the use of the above described pop-up properties.

There was only one store which gave the impression of using all built-in properties of pop-up retailing well: “Heet Strijken,” a boutique for vintage and local designer fashion. The case of “Heet Strijken” will serve as a critical case which can be generalized in the following aspect: “If it [the above proposition] is valid for this case, it is valid for all (or many) cases. In its negative form the generalization would be: If it is not valid for this case, then it is not valid for any (or only a few) cases” (Flyvbjerg, 2006, p. 14). “Heet Strijken” was followed for three months (weekly visits of two hours) and primary sources such as statistical data from the municipality, promotion material, photos of the space and tax declarations were collected. Additionally, 6 in-depth semi-structured interviews of 90 minutes with the entrepreneur and customers were conducted and two evening store events were attended, talking to suppliers and customers, applying ethnographic observation[7].

Case study findings

With 520.000 inhabitants, the city of The Hague is the third largest city of the Netherlands, after Amsterdam and Rotterdam. At the time of this study, 10 percent of the retail real estate in The Hague was vacant, some of it used by temporary stores (Dynamis, 2016). The “Heet Strijken” (Dutch for label instruction: Iron with high heat) vintage store owned by Lisanne Ackermann used a retail space in Boekhorststraat, a smaller shopping street connecting the inner-city pedestrian area with a residential canal. The pop-up had to leave the space after 16 months, right before the finishing of this research, in October 2016.

Boekhorststraat had a 19.4 percent vacancy rate in 2013. The Haags Retailpunt[8], a municipal organization dedicated to the development of The Hague as a shopping city, ranked the Boekhorststraat on place 55 on the attraction list among 64 retail areas in the city. The area homes lower income groups and students, but municipal and neighborhood initiatives, together with real estate investors, were pushing for the area redevelopment and many houses have already been renovated. However, from a retail point of view, it can be ranked as a C location, close to the city center, but with a very low shopping footfall.

Using the properties of a successful “temporary sustainable store”

Lisanne Ackermann is 33 years old, from German origin and a graduate of the Royal Academy of Art, The Hague. In 2014, she decided to start a creative business to combine her creativity with her love of vintage fashion and her natural extroversion. Her enterprise orientation (Mills, 2011) can be clearly marked as that of creative business. Her goal of having a pop-up store was to ultimately run a successful slow fashion boutique which would also provide a decent income for herself. However, ethical and ecological motives also played a role in her choice for selling vintage fashion and products from local designers.

Starting with its festive opening, “Heet Strijken” played with the scarcity and restriction property of a pop-up. First of all, the space was claimed as pop-up with a “Heet Strijken” storefront flag which would only be put up when the store was open. The time limitation of the shop was clearly communicated on its website, regularly stressed on its Facebook site and enhanced by a bi-annual, one-day kilo sales (property 1).

Lisanne used a ground-floor run-down retail space of 16 meters long and 4 meters wide with two shop windows at the front. She gave this space an industrial and urban look by keeping basis colors and rough materials and adding industrial lighting and DIY shelves. An artist friend of hers painted huge monochrome faces on the walls so that the whole space gave the impression of being a metro tunnel. As Lisanne wanted to distinguish her store from the traditional vintage shop, she kept it very spacious and presented the clothing on color and pattern (as opposed to item category). The most important goal for her was that the aesthetics were right and that the space was inspiring for customers:

I want to stimulate my customers to wear old clothing in a contemporary way. That is why I try to present it in a space which looks very cool and “now” (interview owner).

Next to this visual immersion of her customers in a cool space, she also took care of other sensory aspects of the retail environment. She treated all vintage clothes with a special cleaning and scenting tool. The result was that the typical mossy smell of vintage was layered with a clean sensation. Enhanced by the spacious floorplan, customers had a lot of room to move freely and use the several mirrors to test their looks. Moreover, Lisanne played cool, urban music, often from singer-songwriters. All in all, “Heet Strijken” had a very immersive and multi-sensory store environment (property 2).

As for aesthetic interstitiality, it must be said that the type of retail space described above was unique on Boekhorststraat. So the perception when seeing the shop windows and entering the space was that characteristic of an “in-between space.” Lisanne augmented this by asking artists from her academy network to style her store windows. They picked

a theme with every redecoration, i.e. “Manga” or “Twin Peaks” creating a very visible disruption in the street aesthetics (property 3).

The store window artwork was released together with the seasonal Friday evening event Hoogtij. This is a local initiative of art galleries in The Hague. Four times a year, they organize and promote a local art walk with events in shops and galleries. “Heet Strijken” also hosted live performances of singer-songwriters in the store. Like this, “Heet Strijken” kept evental interstitiality alive, certainly for a pop-up store with the long stay of 16 months (property 4).

Finally, “Heet Strijken” was very busy in keeping the network of clients engaged on social media, foremost via a Facebook site. Lisanne posted photos of her restyling of old clothes almost everyday. She used original photography to advertise events and encouraged sharing. Twice a year, she organized a professional photoshoot, again helped by a photographer from her network, to produce her own visual storytelling. The images represented a cool group of diverse people in their mid-twenties wearing re-styled vintage in retro spaces, i.e. using old telephones or 1970s furniture (property 5).

Conclusively, it can be said that the entrepreneur used all five properties of the “sustainable temporary store” very well.

Promoting a slow fashion value proposition

“Heet Strijken” specialized on vintage clothing from the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s. Some authors call this retro fashion (Cassidy and Bennett, 2012, p. 257). Twice a year, for spring/summer and for autumn/winter, Lisanne bought 350 kilos of second-hand-clothes per category from a wholesaler. She then selected approximately 35 percent from these clothes for her store. Another 30 percent were second choice and used to fill in for sold items. Finally, the last 35 percent went into a kilo sales’ event which the store held bi-annually:

What I want is that you buy something unique, but also with a unique experience and from a great person. That’s it! (interview Ackermann).

Lisanne’s criteria for choosing were very fashion and trend-focused. She watched videos of the big fashion shows and traced how these trends were translated by fast fashion retailers. Then she made a buying list. After that she used a group of four art school friends (male and female) as a sounding-board. When the delivery was in, she selected on items, size and material. In this process, she paid extra attention to the wishes of two customer groups: those buying natural and fine textiles and those buying for print and color (and not caring about the textile). Further one, she added a selection of clothing and lifestyle products from starting independent slow fashion designers to her retail mix. Products that matched with her chosen style could be brought in on the basis of consignment (25 percent on sales for “Heet Strijken”). The entrepreneur consciously handled a very low percentage as she wanted to support independent local designers. Lisanne’s curating approach can thus be interpreted as a very fashion focused and customer-oriented one.

As the below customers quotes reveal, her value proposition was very well promoted to the customers of the pop-up store. It consists in the styling she applied, in the selection and display of the vintage clothing and in her customer service approach. She created a very open-minded atmosphere in the store, shared her enthusiasm for particular items and co-created style and “how to mix old with new” with the customer. She also served coffee and tea to the faithful visitor and developed social ties, by i.e. selecting certain items for individuals during the buying process:

Then I look into the mirror and ask myself “is this nice?” [...]. In such a moment I ask Lisanne “Can I wear it with this or that?” and she answers “Yes, do that. That is awesome, man!”. That is how she talks. “Really cool, man!” [...] and then I think “yes!” (interview customer1).

She helps you with honesty, telling you if something fits well or not, or when she has a styling idea. Really a refreshing vision on things! I think this is why I always come back. [...] She sells very different vintage clothing than the other vintage shops where I bought before. I have, a little, [...] not really changed, but [...] I take her advice. I go with it and try something new (interview customer2).

Customers found the pop-up store via the Facebook site, the website or, mostly, word of mouth. “Heet Strijken” successfully established its brand using a logo, storefront flag, website and original photography on posters, postcards and online. The logo is inspired on clothing labels for washing instructions. It conveys very well and recognizable the fresh, stylish and pure DNA of the brand. The space, its immersive and clean interior, the founder herself: all align to a clear and authentic identity. For all customers interviewed, buying a unique piece of clothing in a very personalized and experiential environment was the primary motive for purchase. They all experienced the shopping at “Heet Strijken” as recreational. So it can be concluded that “Heet Strijken” successfully grabbed the opportunity the pop-up retailing offered for branding a new vintage retail concept and developing an attractive value proposition. Next to the pop-up properties, this is mostly thanks to the extravert personality and strong fashion styling skills of the founder and to the huge creative investment of her art school network.

Building a sustainable business model

The “Heet Strijken” business model was incomplete, even at the end of the time as a pop-up store. Quality of clothing was more important for the interviewed customers than slow fashion motivations. They all admitted that was more of an extra bonus to the product, revealing that the customer segmentation could have been better. Also, the entrepreneur did not put much thought into pricing/margins and alternative revenue streams to product sales. Moreover, an online store or styling blog was not affordable due to the lack of time and financial resources. It can be summarized that knowledge and skills derived from business modeling and financial supports were not available to the entrepreneur.

And there were more challenges. Lisanne struggled with the low footfall of the location, whereas the events were crowded, everyday customers came only for “Heet Strijken” to the Boekhorststraat and did not shop at any other store in this street. As enriched by the quotes below, it can be concluded that customers temporarily visit a stand-alone pop-up store, but usually prefer areas of the city where more quirky and authentic boutiques and cafes are clustered:

When I go shopping, I have my itinerary. Then I go from this boutique through to the next and to the next (interview customer1).

I think the shop would have more customers [...] in a street] with a more “Amsterdam” flair. [...] those are places where people also come to spent a “day off”. The Boekhorststraat is more of a street where you only go because you found this special shop on the internet (interview customer4).

The footfall in the street, it’s a pity [...] you don’t have nice restaurants or little terraces, you know. There is no relaxed shopping in that neighborhood (interview customer2).

Another challenge was the poor provision of the retail space. The real estate company owning the space contracted a third party to handle all vacancy. During the whole time the entrepreneur used the space, she did not have a central heating and the toilet was not connected to the street canalization. However, she paid 1,450 euro rent in 2015. In the 16 months of her stay, she had two weeks’ notice and worked with uncertainty of place:

The provision of space is bad. We had a leaking roof, but the real estate owner would not mend it because it is a temporary renting situation. They [the real estate owners] also want the Boekhorststraat to develop. But they don’t want to do anything for that. That is a pity (interview other pop-up entrepreneur Boekhorststraat).

At the same time, dump stores with no appeal to her customer group opened and closed in the street. This situation resulted in a revenue stream challenge for Lisanne. With minimal financial investment and a low running cost due to the strong support from her creative network, she realized an 8,000 euro profit in 2015. Even if this is not bad for a small start-up, it put herself in a financially precarious situation.

Conclusion and discussion

Combining marketing and human geography literature, the concept of the “sustainable temporary store” (Pomodoro, 2013) could be enriched. From the perspective of slow fashion retailing start-ups, five relevant properties of pop-up retailing could be identified: moderate scarcity in terms of the time of the pop-up retailing (six months to one year), an immersive, multi-sensory and interactive store environment, aesthetic interstitiality (unusual location or exterior store design), evental interstitiality (festival-like programming) and the need for social media marketing in the pre-experience, experience and post-experience phases.

The empirical case of one “sustainable temporary store” in the Netherlands shows that a starting retailer can use these properties to successfully build and promote a retail brand and a unique value proposition in slow fashion retailing. In how far is the “Het Strijken” pop-up retail experience generalizable? On the grounds of the methodological choices, the case can be qualified as critical. It could be shown that “Heet Strijken” used all relevant properties of the “sustainable temporary store.” However, the entrepreneur could not sufficiently develop a retail concept into a sustainable business model due to the lack of knowledge and skills in business modeling and the lack of financial resources.

Also, aesthetic interstitiality eventually turned into a challenge as customers on the long run preferred to shop in a territory with a matching cluster of small boutiques and hospitality offerings.

The proposition (*PI*) can thus be confirmed for the A part and rejected on the B part. Consequently, whereas A is probable for most slow fashion retailers who use the pop-up properties well, B can be expected to apply even less to entrepreneurs who poorly use the pop-up properties.

For the Netherlands, it is interesting to note that in the present critical case the branding/marketing part of starting up a business seems to match well with the skills set of a creative and her network. The creative entrepreneur intuitively knew and used the relevant properties of pop-up retailing. Financial and business model thinking appears to fit less with her and her networks’ motivation and skills. Yet, business collaboration very much stays in that network. This is a situation literature also identified in the case of independent fashion designers and their business partners in the Netherlands (Overdiek, 2016).

This study was grounded in recent literature on the pop-up format and slow fashion retailing in the Global North. The situation in the Global South might be very different. Also, local characteristics play a role which could not be captured by using the current literature. Both slow fashion retail studies and pop-up retailing literature quoted are from France, the UK, Sweden, Romania, Germany, Italy, Australia, Canada and the USA, but comparative research is missing. However, the theoretical findings can be generalized and the design of the empirical study could be replicated for research about the “sustainable temporary store” across geographies.

Practical implications and further research

In a lot of urban geographies, creative micro entrepreneurs with alternative retail concepts are the temporary solution to empty retail space. This situation is presented as a win-win by municipalities and governments. However, whereas place marketing and real estate owners profit from a successful placemaking, the entrepreneur very often does not have enough of an opportunity to build a source of sustainable income. In general, there is a need of a more

horizontal relationship in the exchange between the city, the real estate provider and the entrepreneur who is about to create social value in placemaking.

However, the opportunities for slow fashion SMEs in temporary stores lie in the full use of all five built-in properties of the “sustainable temporary store.” As it could be shown for the Netherlands, slow fashion SMEs can thus develop a value proposition, a successful branding and a solid customer base. In return for the social value they create, they should be encouraged to ask municipalities and real estate owners for a decent provision of space and temporary contracts respecting their retailing objectives. They should also be aware of the challenges. If they have the goal of building a sustainable business in slow fashion retailing, they should try to get access to business modeling knowledge and skills. Also, better access to matching financial support (like peer-to-peer financing) should be explored.

For further research, international comparative studies into the integration of the “sustainable temporary store” with online fashion communities (see Yeung and Ang, 2016, for the example of Singapore) and into the collective organization of collaborative pop-up retailing are needed to investigate the opportunities for slow fashion retailers in developing new value propositions and business models in temporary stores.

Notes

1. There is a lot of empirical evidence for the short life of entrepreneurial efforts in temporary stores, albeit no quantitative study to this date. See Wanders (2016) for the situation in the Netherlands.
2. For methodological reasons, the concept of “built-in properties of objects” (Fairhurst and Putnam, 2004) is preferred to that of characteristics as the former refers to practices and the status of things in process. See further the methodology chapter of this paper.
3. This situation might be under threat by online vintage retailing platforms like Vestiaire Collective, ThreadUp and “Rent a Runway.” Currently, only the first operates in Europe, the others are still USA only. Small, local slow fashion retailers will have to develop complementary business models.
4. It is hard to give a quantitative estimation of pop-up retailing in different countries. The British Centre for Economics and Business Research (2014) stated in July 2014 that the country’s pop-up retail sector generated a 2.3 bn pounds (then around 3.1 bn euros) per year and thus represented 0.6 percent of total retail sales in Britain. Farmer markets and local food providers contributed for more than 50 percent to this turnover.
5. For the multi-faceted concept of post-fordism please refer to the summary Amin (1994) gives in the introduction to his reader. Information technology, globalization, postmodern consumerism, flexible workforces and global corporate control are the most prominent developments captured.
6. This concept is associated with the Communicative Constitution of Organizing (CCO) ontology approach and highlights the continuous performance of reality. See for a discussion Putnam and Nicotera (2009).
7. Conceptually, the nine building blocks of a business model as described by Osterwalder and Pigneur (2010) and the five built-in properties of the pop-up as theorized in this article, served as grid for interview themes and the coding of the material. Results of logbook observations, interviews and secondary sources (bookkeeping, website publications, Facebook activity, etc.) were triangulated.
8. See www.haagsretailpunt.nl (accessed November 10, 2016).

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