

Article

Social Dimension of Shopping Centers Operation: Managerial Perspectives

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Abstract: Shopping centers do not operate in a vacuum but in a society of diverse stakeholders who influence their profit and growth. Therefore, shopping centers management addresses the problem of incorporating social dimensions in their management. The paper aims to identify and evaluate managerial approaches and marketing strategies of shopping centers in the Czech Republic in the context of social dimensions leading to sustainable operation. The research builds methodologically on an online questionnaire survey with top management of shopping centers. It took place at the turn of the years 2019/2020. Out of 88 Czech existing shopping centers, 30 completed responses were received (response rate 34%). The managerial approaches and marketing activities of shopping centers aimed at customers, internal employees, and tenants of the shopping centers were assessed. In addition to profit, the main social aspect on which the management of shopping centers places an emphasis is also loyalty. A properly set working environment and working conditions are essential to achieve higher employee productivity and consequently higher profits. The shopping centers should increase their social roles to preserve the well-being of their employees and enhance customer satisfaction.



Citation: Kunc, J.; Křižan, F.;

Novotná, M.; Bilková, K. Social

Dimension of Shopping Centers

Operation: Managerial Perspectives.

Sustainability **2022**, *14*, 709. [https://](https://doi.org/10.3390/su14020709)

doi.org/10.3390/su14020709

Academic Editor: Pedro Guimarães

Received: 7 October 2021

Accepted: 4 January 2022

Published: 9 January 2022

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Keywords: shopping centers; marketing management; customers; internal stakeholders; social dimension; Czech Republic

1. Introduction

Shopping centers are a phenomenon in the whole world. They have become the places where people go not only to do their shopping but also to have new experiences, meet friends and spend their leisure time. They are popular public spaces with multifunctional use, full of stores, entertainment, and services. In consideration of the latest trends and consumer preferences, shopping centers are being constantly modernized and modified in line with new requirements. This need for continuous change stems from the retail sector being often referred to as the most dynamic economic sector. These changes also require them to incorporate sustainability principles in their management.

Many post-communist countries experienced significant changes in the retail sector and the shopping behavior of their citizens in the second half of the 1990s. The dynamic development of retail and adopting new consumer patterns in a relatively short period skipped over several decades of retail development in western European countries. Such accelerated development of retail had a strong impact not only on its spatial structure but also on consumer behavior, which had followed a completely different development model during the communist regime affected by a specific shortage of goods and lower quality of shopping opportunities [1–4]. The dynamics of shopping centers' development in the transition countries (post-socialist countries of Central and Eastern Europe) included the process of catching up with the developed world in terms of quantity, concentration

and, lately, also in terms of the quality aspects of retailing [5]. Shopping centers became a symbol of urban retail development and the most important trip generators in modern urban areas [6–10].

In the period affected by limited shopping possibilities, these localities of urban retail became cathedrals of consumption for consumers [11]. As consumers in these post-communist countries become more sustainability-conscious, urban retail should involve sustainable management and sustainability marketing techniques towards different stakeholder groups [3,4]. Moreover, sustainability is one of the megatrends reshaping the urban space, retail industry, and terms of competition [12,13].

Management and marketing are the main elements that determine the future success of the shopping centers and their competitive ability by choosing an appropriate tenant mix and creating an overall image [14–16]. Therefore, it is advisable to pay greater attention to the issues connected with the shopping centers' marketing strategies and the ways they communicate with different stakeholders [10]. However, other aspects cannot be omitted, such as shopping behavior, change in consumer preferences, and the needs influenced by external stimuli, including the emphasis on sustainability, responsibility, and social trends.

Since the shopping centers influence not only the spatiotemporal organization of the urban systems and the development of the region in which they are located [17,18] but also various groups of stakeholders, the paper focuses on their managerial approaches and communication with customers, employees, and tenants. The emphasis of the paper is placed on the shopping center's management's approach towards their activities focused on these three groups of stakeholders. Particular attention is paid to the social dimension of their operation. The issue of the social dimension in retail is often neglected, so no one has dealt with it even in the conditions of the Czech shopping centers. At the same time, the intertwining of social dimensions with the economic conditions and profitability can be observed [19].

This paper aims to evaluate managerial approaches and marketing strategies of Czech shopping centers in the context of social dimensions leading to sustainable operation. The following research questions will be answered to fulfil the aim:

RQ1: *What approaches to communicate with different groups of stakeholders (customers, employees, and tenants) have been used by the shopping centers managers?*

RQ2: *What social practices to enhance shopping centers employees' well-being and thus their productivity have been used by the shopping centers managers?*

RQ3: *What attitude have the shopping centers management had towards tenants within the marketing management strategies?*

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1. Shopping Center Management

Shopping center management is regarded to be a key element contributing to the actual success of the center. However, the shopping center's management is very specific in many aspects compared to other business entities. This is because the shopping center's managers must focus not only on their customers and employees' needs but also on the individual retailers or tenants [20]. The basic functions of management are, in general terms, planning, organization, administration, coordination, and monitoring [21]. All these management functions, together with appropriate marketing activities, are the main precondition for sustainable competitive advantages of the shopping center and making full use of its potential [22]. In the concept of management by Drucker (in [23]), management activities are strongly linked with marketing and innovations. This distinct approach to management linked two independent disciplines: marketing and management [24]. This marketing management system can be described as a philosophy of business administration that focuses on customer needs and reaching specific values for individuals, organization, and society. Marketing management is an area in which marketing is understood as a

whole-company effort. Thus, marketing management contributes to the overall concept of the shopping center and its strategic planning [25].

2.1.1. Management from the Perspective of Customers

Marketing management aims to create and maintain long-term relations with target customers, which allows businesses and other entities to achieve set goals. In this case, the management's task is to make decisions on key questions that include selecting target customers. Furthermore, they determine what customer needs will be satisfied, what products and services will be offered and what price level will be set. Moreover, this can include deciding what communication channels will be used in the shopping center [25]. In other words, marketing management can be explained as an effort to obtain, maintain, and develop relations with customers by creating, granting, and communicating a higher market value [26].

Consumer behavior is vital for marketing. It generates information on who the customers are, where they are, what they purchase, when and how [27]. Consumer shopping behavior and preferences are changing over time and are influenced by many factors that may be subjective or objective [28]. The economic and social relevance of sustainability are increasingly being enforced. Therefore, successful marketing management includes tasks such as getting in touch with customers, creating market value, and communicating it to the customer [25,29].

Customer relations management highlights the key role of customers for the sake of society since society can thrive and develop just through the customers [30]. Customers are the only reason why shopping centers emerge, as no business can exist without customers. Figure 1 compares the traditional concept of organization with this modern customer-oriented concept, where the customers receive the complete attention of the whole organization [25]. Although the focus on customers in marketing management is reinforced, quality management also requires identifying and satisfying the needs of employees and tenants [20]. These stakeholder groups can be recognized as internal customers [31]. The concept of internal customers impacts the human resources' function and may lead to greater satisfaction of both employees and customers.

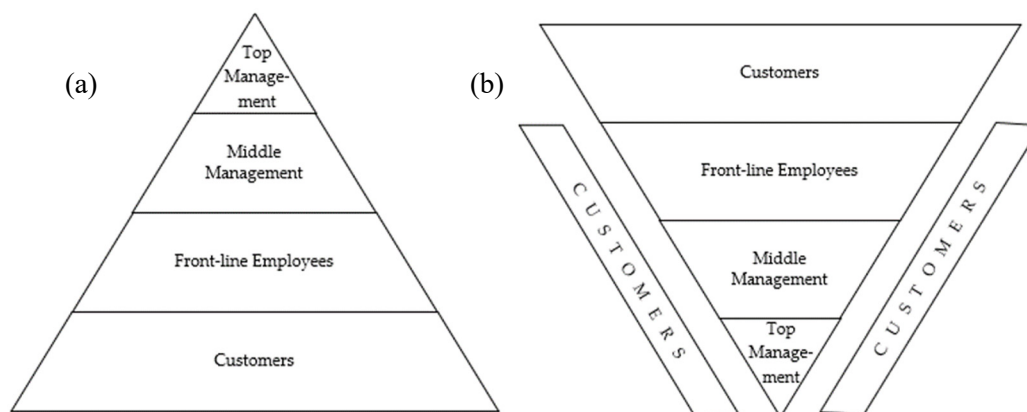


Figure 1. Concepts of organization [25]. (a) Traditional organization chart, (b) Modern customer-oriented organization chart.

2.1.2. Management from the Perspective of Tenants

An important element of the shopping center is its tenants forming the so-called tenant mix, which may be defined as a percentage representation of various types of stores (outlets) located within the shopping center [22,32]. Tenants operating in the shopping center represent a key entity for the shopping center, since the shopping center would not be able to exist without its tenants and their customers. Retail outlets are referred to as fillers of the shopping center with a specific form of management where the managers of individual outlets meet the requirements stipulated by the shopping center management [33].

From the perspective of a manager, the tenant mix is perceived as a whole range of outlets that cooperate to reach higher productivity of the center, and, at the same time, these units act as individual businesses. Nevertheless, communication between the tenants and the shopping center management is crucial. However, some studies noticed insufficient cooperation between these key elements because individual parties perceive themselves as independent units, which may jeopardize the success and competitiveness of the whole shopping center [20].

Similarly, the importance of managing individual tenants who directly experience the customer behavior and can hand over their knowledge to the shopping center management is emphasized [34]. In this respect, the feedback provided by customers is very useful [35]. This bound may relate to strengths and weaknesses of the shopping center, tenant mix composition, sustainable forms of functioning, shopping center ambience or effectiveness of the marketing notifications. The information may also concern the opening hours and services provided by the center, such as parking.

To fulfil the main objective of the shopping center, which is maximizing the profit, the renter (the owner or manager of the shopping center) must eliminate the number of empty spaces and, at the same time, maximize the rents received from each tenant [36]. The key thing is the placement of the tenants within the shopping center [16].

2.2. Shopping Centers Marketing

At a time of extensive competition among shopping centers, it is no longer enough to have a perfect tenant mix. Additionally, it is necessary to have an attractive and contemporary environment and adapt to current trends regarding social issues. Not only the professionals but also the consumers realize the importance of adopting social responsibility. Different marketing tools can be used by shopping centers to inform consumers of their initiatives [37]. Marketing also includes the factors that are clearly subjective and depend on the perception and requirements of each customer. One of the mentioned factors is attractiveness, which may be viewed from many perspectives, and there is no agreement on a definition of how to define attractiveness and what factors make it up. The attractiveness of the shopping centers builds a competitive strategy to attract more customers as well as to enhance their experiences and shopping enjoyment [38]. The attractiveness is also connected with an image that is regarded as the main element of shopping center attractiveness [39]. The shopping center's image primarily focuses on four key elements: merchandising, accessibility, services, and ambience [40]. All these elements influence the customer's perception and image of the shopping center [35].

Increasingly, entertainment is a part of the sustainability marketing strategies of the shopping centers, which allows them to differentiate themselves from other competitors. Thus, entertainment becomes, to a certain extent, an element of differentiation and opportunities on how to extend customer visit times and profit more [40]. On the other hand, sustainability marketing focuses not only on increasing sales revenue and profit but also on reaching sustainability goals [41].

Sustainability marketing decisions can be designed to enhance customer well-being and preserve the well-being of employees, tenants, the local community, and other groups of stakeholders. Similar social practices are likely to increase an employees' productivity and result in higher profits. From this point of view, various studies demonstrate a direct relationship between a considerate working environment, job satisfaction and customer experiences [42].

Communication Strategies

Opportunities for sustainability marketing, and thus shopping centers' competitiveness, are in communication with their customers, tenants, and employees. Shopping centers' managers should maintain an open dialogue to increase mutual trust and encourage sustainable relationships with all stakeholders [41]. For this purpose, they can use both internal and external communication strategies. Shopping centers communicate with their

customers continuously not only through the shopping center ambience, products and services offered to them but also through promotional materials and advertising. Retail promotion can be perceived as a descriptive term for a mix of communication means used by the shopping centers with the aim to influence the wide public on which the success of the center depends [43]. The main objective of the compiled communication mix of the shopping center is to influence the customer's perception, their attitudes and behavior, to enhance their loyalty to the center itself and to its individual outlets. However, the customers are not the only target group that needs to be influenced. Among other desired entities are, for example, business partners and, finally, the wide public.

The communication mix comprises five promotion tools, including advertising in the form of any paid impersonal presentation and promotion of ideas, goods, or services. Furthermore, it includes support of the sale, such as vouchers, discounts, or free samples, selling in-person, public relations, or direct marketing [29]. Public relations tools and activities can enhance positive attitudes towards shopping centers. These are tools used to communicate with target groups aimed at improving relations, promoting mutual trust, and understanding.

In addition to managing external communication between shopping centers and their customers and sharing information with the public via social media, public relations tools also focus on internal communication with employees and tenants [44]. Public relations could be an effective way to promote a special event [45]. Event marketing is an increasingly used means for sustainable communication, during which the organizers can have direct contact with all the target groups [46]. It is a tool of adventure marketing that enhances the interaction with customers and gets them involved [47]. The main types of event marketing in the shopping centers are, for example, exhibitions, fair trades, competitions, sport or gastronomy events, fashion shows, and charity events [48]. The idea of sustainable event marketing can lead to aligning with sustainability-oriented values, embedding sustainability in the planning process, and providing the opportunity for behavioral change [49]. Ideally, marketing and sustainability activities converge in the same context [50].

3. Materials and Methods

The main objective of the research was to analyze and evaluate marketing strategies and management of shopping centers in the Czech Republic. The emphasis was placed both on evaluating the shopping centers management approach towards their own marketing activities and on the approach towards internal employees, tenants, and customers themselves. The research was conducted by means of a questionnaire survey. The data were obtained through an e-questionnaire which was sent to all shopping centers in the Czech Republic. Either shopping centers managers or marketing department managers were contacted. The research included the shopping centers according to the internationally accepted definition ICSC [51]; in other words, the shopping centers occupying more than 5000 square meters, which implied that the questionnaire was distributed to 88 shopping centers in the Czech Republic (as of 2019).

The collection of responses was conducted in two rounds, whereas the first round of questionnaires was distributed in October and November 2019, and 24 responses were obtained—response rate 27%. The second round was realized in January and February 2020, and it involved the centers that did not respond to the request to complete the questionnaire in the first round. The shopping centers that refused to disclose their data were not approached again. Therefore, 60 shopping centers were approached in the second round, and six responses were obtained—response rate 10%. The final number of received responses was 30, which corresponds to 34% of all centers in the Czech Republic with GLA (gross leasable area) larger than 5000 square meters. Detailed information on the representation of individual shopping centers according to their size is depicted in the following Table 1. It is evident that nearly half of the shopping centers that submitted data were in the middle-size category with an area of 20,000 to 40,000 square meters; even

though small-size shopping centers with an area of 5000 to 20,000 square meters are most represented in the Czech Republic.

Table 1. GLA of the shopping centers in the Czech Republic.

GLA of the Shopping Centers (Number, %)			
5000–19,900 m ²	20,000–39,900 m ²	40,000–79,900 m ²	over 80,000 m ²
8 (27%)	14 (46%)	6 (20%)	2 (7%)

In terms of spatial localization, 12 out of 14 Czech Republic regions participated, whereas most questionnaires (7) returned from Prague Capital City, which is also the place where most of the shopping centers from all Czech Republic regions are concentrated. Five valid questionnaires were completed by the representatives from the shopping centers from the South Moravian Region and Moravian-Silesian Region, where the second and third largest cities of the Czech Republic, Brno, and Ostrava, are situated. Respondents answering the questions were most often occupying the position of a marketing manager or manager/director of the shopping center.

The sample can be regarded as sufficiently representative at the country level with a possibility of results generalization. Moreover, it was the last research, in terms of its extent, conducted in the Czech Republic before the COVID-19 pandemic. Thus, this research has become a unique milestone, and to some extent, the “final state” of the era of the uninfluenced approach of shopping center’s management to customers, employees, and tenants. It is also necessary to mention that the names of the shopping centers shall not be presented in the text, as some questions are rather sensitive, which might result in the disclosure of internal information. Figure 2 depicts the distribution of shopping centers involved in the research; the distribution of the remaining shopping centers meeting the internationally accepted definition is also included.

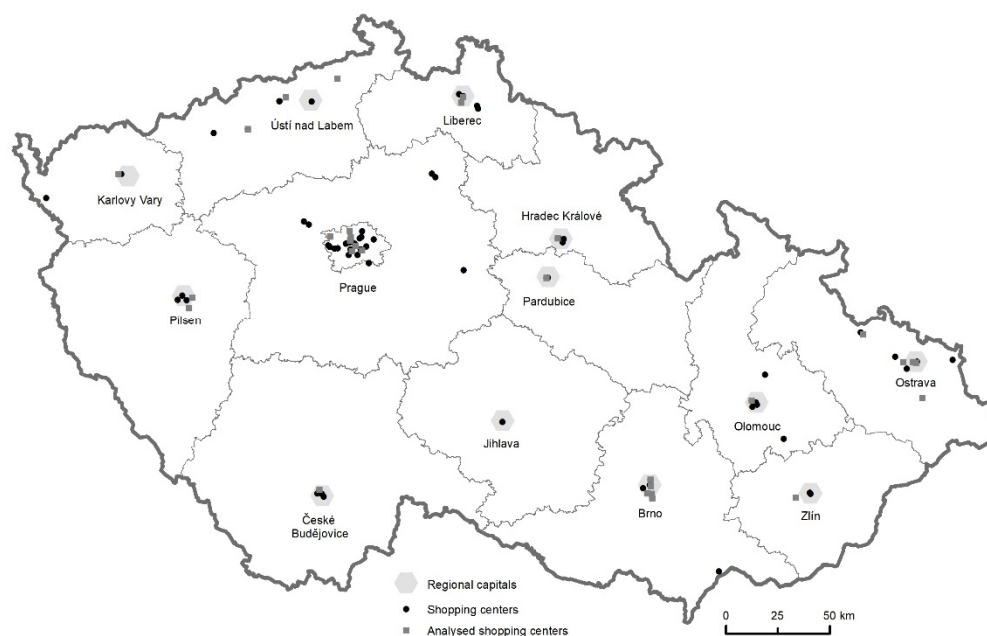


Figure 2. Distribution of shopping centers in the Czech Republic.

The questionnaire was based on recent studies and a comprehensive literature review. It consisted of two main parts, including 19 questions to be answered by respondents. The first part dealt with shopping centers management and sustainable operation; the second part included the questions focused on marketing activities and communication.

The questions were systematically related to the three groups of stakeholders that underpin the functioning and prosperity of shopping centers—consumers, employees, and tenants. The research results were also analyzed in a similar structure. The questionnaire included the questions that were evaluated on the Likert scale 1–5. Furthermore, there were open- or semi-open multiple-choice questions and closed questions with one possible answer. The questionnaire was finished with identification questions concentrating on the shopping center name, locality, and work position of the respondent. The results were evaluated and processed in the Microsoft Excel program and SPSS Statistics program. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and interpreted in the context of social dimensions of shopping centers and their future development.

4. Results

At first, the results related to the aim of the paper revealed the highest priority for the shopping centers management to the given aspects of their sustainable operation. Each of the pre-defined options could be evaluated by the respondents on a scale of 1–5 (1—unimportant, 2—less important, 3—neutral attitude, 4—important, 5—very important). The questionnaire survey revealed that more than 4/5 of the shopping centers (82%) that submitted information consider most important the growth of profit and turnover; this priority was rated by the respondents with an average value of 4.64. Another most frequently appearing priority was the enhancement of customer loyalty. Thus, these two priorities may be regarded as fundamental for shopping center’s managers, which was also evident in the consistency of the answers; in other words, a high average score and slight variance (distribution), as stated in Table 2.

Table 2. Priorities for the shopping centers management.

Aspect	Management’s Priority	Average Score	Variance/Distribution
Economic	Profit/turnover growth	4.64	0.80
	Customer loyalty enhancing	4.46	0.68
Social	Brand awareness enhancing	3.96	0.82
	Brand building	3.86	0.98

Furthermore, the questionnaire tried to find out what general factors had the most significant influence over the operation of the shopping centers in terms of social dimension and its economic context. Related factors were rated on a scale of 1–5. According to the assumptions, it was confirmed that the shopping centers were unequivocally most frequently influenced by economic conditions (average score 4.70), followed by customer demand (customer = a key element of the shopping center). A very high average score and very low variance proved an emphasis and concordance in these substantial factors of the economic aspects among all shopping center’s representatives. The factors representing the social dimension, such as security and unemployment, obtained an average score (Table 3).

Table 3. General factors influencing the operation of the shopping centers.

Aspect	Factors	Average Score	Variance/Distribution
Economic	Economic conditions	4.70	0.41
	Customer demand	4.23	0.45
Social	Security	3.57	0.78
	Unemployment	3.53	0.98

The next question aimed at finding out which of the following marketing tools the shopping center’s management used to communicate with stakeholders (Table 4). The same scale was used again. Most respondents (87%) indicated that advertising is the most frequently used tool to communicate with customers (average score of 4.87). The respondents only used the options 4–5 on the scale, which was reflected in a very low

variance of answers. Event marketing was another frequently used communication means, followed by the shopping center ambience and public relations, which were used for both external and internal communications [44]. Moreover, they were all completely fundamental tools for the maintenance of sustainable operation and competitiveness in the future times. Public relations had a very diverse scoring, and thus a high variance of answers (0.90); it was the most complicated tool used by the shopping center management towards customers. The questionnaire survey also revealed that sponsoring, as a tool for communication with shopping center customers, was not practically used. It might be so because it is very expensive, and there is insufficient feedback on how effective and successful this tool is.

Table 4. Shopping center marketing tools.

Marketing Tools	Strategy	Average Score	Variance/Distribution
Advertising	External	4.87	0.12
Event marketing	External/internal	4.20	0.49
Ambience	External/internal	3.80	0.56
Public relations	External/internal	3.37	0.90
Sponsoring	External	2.13	0.52

Spatial analysis of basic marketing communication tools showed that neither advertising, event marketing, nor the shopping center ambience had any statistical relation to the size of the shopping center or its location in a larger or smaller town/city. By contrast, in the case of the most complicated tool, which was public relations, a certain link to larger shopping centers in the largest cities (Prague, Brno, Ostrava) was proved.

As expected, the Internet was the most common form of advertising used by the shopping center management (Table 5). Specifically, 93% of respondents chose this option on a scale of 4–5 (average score 4.47); their very low variance proved homogeneity of answers. The form of advertising on the Internet could be very diverse; it could be an advertisement placed on social platforms, shopping center webpages, or a paid advertisement placed on various Internet platforms. Billboard ended up in second place as an advertising means used by shopping centers. The following two forms of promotion—the radio and newspapers/magazines—were rated very similarly by shopping centers representatives; the average score was 3.70.

Table 5. Advertising forms as a shopping center marketing tool.

Advertising Forms	Average Score	Variance/Distribution
Internet	4.47	0.38
Billboard	4.13	0.85
Radio	3.73	0.96
Newspapers/magazines	3.70	1.01
TV	1.60	0.64

Supplementary open questions indicated answers to how the event marketing and public relations tools were used. As for the event marketing, it was typically an event focusing on children or families (such as Easter or Advent workshops, children's days, concerts, birthday parties), followed by seasonal markets, handicraft fairs, meetings with YouTubers, sportsmen and writers' autograph sessions, and others. All such events brought more visitors to the shopping center. The questionnaire survey revealed that the shopping center's most frequently organized events aimed at families with children, which were a significant target group with both high perspectivity and economic and social sustainability. In terms of public relations, the shopping centers most often used press releases and PR articles placed on various communication platforms—the Internet, newspapers, magazines. Invitations to events, presentations or exhibitions organized by the given shopping center

were presented on social media and networks. Financial costs of advertising and event marketing usually accounted for 40–60% of the budget allocated for marketing. Other activities were cheaper.

To find out what social practices managers used to enhance shopping center employees' well-being and sustainable work performance, five incentives or aspects were rated by the respondents on a scale of 1–5 (1—never used, 2—less frequently used, 3—used, 4—frequently used, 5—the most frequently used). The results showed that the shopping centers most commonly concentrated on providing a good and pleasant work environment and conditions to keep or enhance their staff work performance. These two aspects were rated identically by the respondents (average score 3.95). A strong financial motivator was wage growth; career growth and training achieved median rating values. Low variance values proved a considerable consistency of answers by the shopping center representatives (Table 6).

Table 6. Factors used for motivation and sustainable work performance of the employees.

Factors	Average Score	Variance/Distribution
Work environment	3.95	0.65
Work conditions	3.95	0.55
Wage growth	3.45	0.65
Career growth	3.00	0.60
Trainings	2.85	0.53

The following question was finding out what benefits are offered to the shopping center employees. The respondents had one or more options. The questionnaire survey revealed that the shopping centers provided their employees with six benefits on average. Figure 3 depicts the benefits from which the respondents could choose and indicates the frequency of individual answers. The shopping centers most frequently provided their employees with the benefit of renting out work equipment (such as cell phones, laptops); this option appeared in two-thirds of cases. Furthermore, the respondents indicated that most frequently, they provided their employees with meal allowances, extra vacation/paid time off, and refreshments at the workplace. Transportation allowance was a rare benefit. Thus, the economic benefits prevailed over the social-related benefits (flexible working hours, contribution to education or leisure activities).

Tenant mix, often mentioned in the professional literature, has become a fundamental aspect of the operation, attractivity, and profitability of the shopping centers [32,35,52,53]. Therefore, the following question aimed at finding out which of the below-stated statements related to the tenant mix were supported by the shopping centers, and to what extent. The question contained sustainable operation-related statements, and for each of them, the respondent was to express his/her agreement on a scale of 1–5 (Table 7). It is necessary to mention that the scale was compiled the other way round; for the sake of better understanding: 1—agree, 2—rather agree; 3—neutral attitude, 4—rather disagree, 5—disagree. Overwhelmingly, the respondents agreed with the given statements and most frequently, they chose the options at the range from 1 to 3. The largest number of shopping center representatives (89%) expressed their agreement with the statement determining the relation between the success of individual tenants and the success of the entire shopping center (average score of 1.21); moreover, there was the lowest response variance here (0.58). Furthermore, the respondents strongly agreed with the statement claiming that the tenant mix generates a competitive advantage (average score of 1.32). The natural interconnection and long-term economic sustainability coming from the bounds between the shopping centers and their units (tenants) were the fundamental building stones of the shopping center's success.

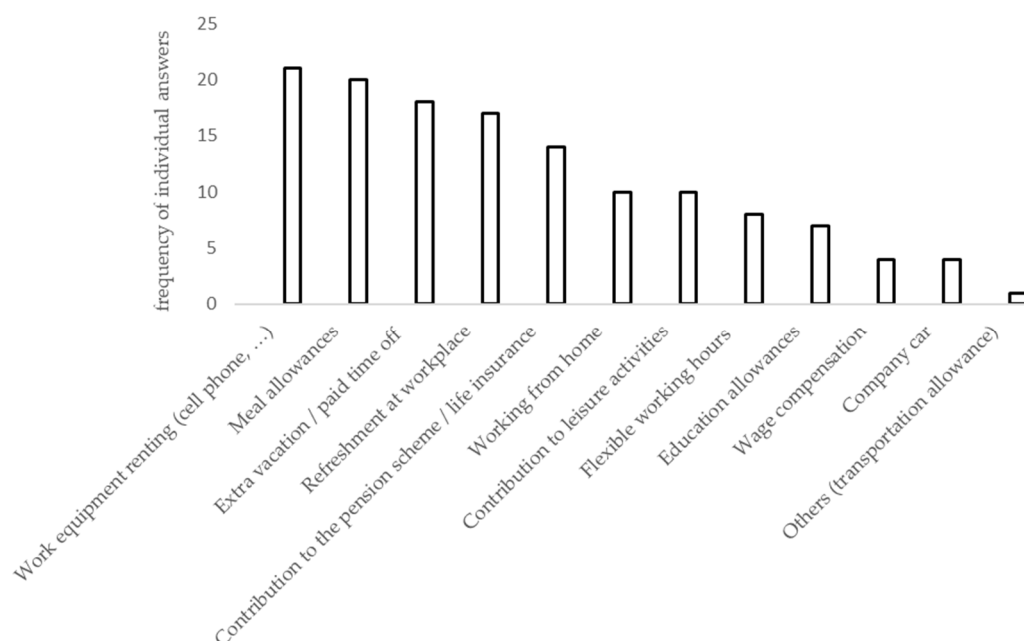


Figure 3. Benefits granted to the employees.

Table 7. Shopping centers' attitude towards the tenant mix.

Statement	Aspect	Average Score	Variance/Distribution
The success of individual tenants and the success of the shopping center are interdependent and influence each other.	Economic	1.21	0.58
Tenant mix generates a competitive advantage.	Economic	1.32	0.65
Tenant mix influences customer loyalty.	Economic	1.89	0.88
A wide range of tenants ensures a better shopping experience.	Social	1.36	0.73
Tenant mix creates image of the shopping center.	Social	1.57	0.67

5. Discussion

The paper focused on the managerial perspectives of the Czech shopping centers on their operation within the context of social dimension and related economic conditions. For maintaining the competitive advantage of the shopping centers, it is appropriate to provide a sustainable performance management framework that considers not only traditional economic measures but also a social dimension. The results revealed that the shopping centers, in general terms, place great emphasis on profit and turnover growth, which had been an expected aspect arising from the nature of the business entity and fully corresponding with the main goal of the shopping centers, which is the maximization of the profit [22,36]. Furthermore, it was found out that the shopping centers are most affected by economic conditions. The same result was also achieved in similar research conducted by The College of Estate Management in English and Irish shopping centers [54].

As for the other factors influencing the operation of the shopping center, the respondents most frequently opted for economic conditions and customer demand, which is fundamental for the shopping centers as it determines the customers' interest. At the same time, it reflected their financial capacity, which was influenced by economic conditions. A very high average score and very low variance proved an emphasis and concordance in these substantial factors of the economic aspects among all shopping center's representatives.

The research revealed some similar aspects in marketing approaches of individual shopping centers. As expected, the most frequently used marketing tool proved to be advertising, as it is a long-proven marketing tool with a broad impact and can be applied in many forms [25,29,55]. According to assumptions, the most frequently used form

of advertising was the Internet. The Internet is a valuable marketing tool, allowing a two-way dialogue between the shopping centers and their target groups [56]. Thus, the Internet's role in communication demonstrates its timelessness, flexibility, and effectivity (RQ1). Currently, the Internet is even more important for shopping centers, as the full-screen digitalization enables almost uninterrupted communication with customers, for example, through social networks (Facebook, Instagram), and so on. Another important and increasingly used communication tool, event marketing, allowed the shopping centers to directly contact customers and interact with them [46]. Based on the obtained responses, it may be concluded that the shopping centers concentrated, through marketing events, on families with children and focus on creating "family centers" [32]. Based on the synthesis of obtained results, it can be generalized that the main target group of the shopping centers (not only) in the Czech Republic are families with children.

To a certain extent, shopping centers have become a public space where people spend their leisure time and meet friends. The shopping center's managers are aware of this fact and, therefore, the shopping centers are being transformed into family and entertainment centers in which relaxing zones, fitness centers, or cinemas emerge. All of this creates a perfect place for all age categories where they can spend their leisure time. The shopping centers are successful in creating a perfect place for spending free time, and various marketing events support them; however, there is a flip side to it in the form of a negative influence on the young generation, who are called "mall junkies" as they spend their free time in the shopping centers [1,57–59].

To enhance employees' motivation, effectivity, and work attitude, the studied shopping centers used, in particular, non-financial means with long-term sustainability, such as a pleasant work environment and suitable work conditions (RQ2). In the research conducted by The College of Estate Management, however, the management of English and Irish shopping centers most frequently opted for training to enhance the employee's performance, which proved to be used the least in our research; career growth and responsibility delegation were in a second place, and the work conditions ended up in last place. Different perceptions of motivation tools may be caused by the national mentality and other set-up values, for example, preferring collectiveness to individualism. According to our results, the most common benefits granted by the shopping centers to their employees was work equipment renting (cell phones or laptops) or meal allowances. Here, the economic aspects outweighed socially relevant ones. Similar results were also obtained from the research conducted by a Czech company of Trexima [60], in which more than one thousand economic entities participated in the Czech Republic.

The importance of tenant mix (RQ3) was also proved in the responses to the question asking the management representatives to express the degree of their agreement with the given statements. The respondents almost unanimously selected the option stating that the success of individual tenants and the entire shopping center was closely related [61]. The further growth of the shopping centers in the Czech Republic depends on both a stable economic environment and, more importantly, correctly determined administration and employees of the shopping center, who react flexibly and adapt to changes and current trends.

6. Conclusions

The authors are aware of the existing limits of research, which, at the same time, can trigger future research directions. For our acquaintance with the opinions of the Czech managers on the social dimension of their operation, a questionnaire survey method was used. Using qualitative methods would offer a possibility to gain a deeper understanding of this issue. Moreover, only a one-sided perspective of managers was provided. From this point of view, a future research direction towards shopping centers' customers or tenants could be proposed. Similarly, the links between environmental innovations and the shopping center's competitiveness were not taken into account in this phase of research. Therefore, environmental issues might be addressed in future research.

Within the research, a representative sample has been obtained, representing 34% of all shopping centers with more than 5000 square meters in the Czech Republic. Some of the addressed shopping centers expressed their interest in the results of the research. The shopping centers management can use the obtained information as an inspiration for creating new marketing strategies and approaches towards the internal employees, as well as the shopping centers tenants and customers. Moreover, the results provide essential information on further future plans.

The research carried out at the turn of 2019 and 2020 provided a representative platform and a certain milestone in the management approaches of shopping centers in the period before the COVID-19 pandemic. It will be interesting to follow developments during and after the pandemic, as the operation of the centers has been hit by an unprecedented wave of restrictions, which will inevitably be reflected in the economic conditions and social dimensions of their existence and operation. Unique research from the Czech Republic can contribute to further comparative research and expand the discussion on the presented topic.

Author Contributions: J.K.: conceptualization, methodology, writing—original draft preparation; F.K.: supervision, validation, writing—review and editing; M.N.: formal analysis, data curation, visualization; K.B.: writing—review and editing. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

Funding: This research was funded by Masaryk University, grant number MUNI/A/1210/2020 and by the Slovak Research and Development Agency under Contract No. APVV-20-0302 and grant VEGA 2/0113/19. The funders had no role in the design of the study; in the collection, analyses, or interpretation of data; in the writing of the manuscript, or in the decision to publish the results.

Institutional Review Board Statement: The study was conducted in accordance with the Declaration of Helsinki. Approval for the study was not required by the Research Ethics Committee (REC) of Masaryk University in accordance with national legislation (Section 10, paragraph 1 of Act No. 111/1998 Coll., on Higher Education Institutions and on Modification and Amendment of Other Acts).

Informed Consent Statement: Informed consent was obtained from all subjects involved in the study.

Data Availability Statement: Not applicable.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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