

Are Britain's urban environment becoming clones

Research performed by NEF (the new economics Foundation) suggests that between 1997 and 2002, shops such as butchers, bakers and fishmongers are closing at a rate of fifty a week on high streets throughout the country. This devastating fact is down to many different reasons, however out of the numerous reasons the one that is making the greatest effect is the rapid increase of chain stores on our streets therefore taking money away from the locally owned shops. This process is taking place all over Britain transforming each of our high streets into indistinguishable points on the map, in addition it is vital that we find out the reasons for the closures of these independent stores and the opening of these chain stores, and be that the recession, stay-cations or inflation. Consequently during this report I will not only be looking at why and how Britain's urban environments are becoming clones of each other but also looking at the main reason in extreme depth.

One way Britain's urban environments are becoming identical to one another are the renovations taking place around the country. Towns and cities all around the country are having their high streets, parks and public areas transformed by removing their distinguishing features and replace them with cold hard steel and bare glass, the mark of a new artificial Britain. . . Therefore despite all the positive effects that developers talk about when opening these sites and there is a huge negative to these projects the way they demolish a towns character by imitating a facelift and remodelling its recognisable features into blocks out of a mould.

The internet revolution has opened opportunities for many independent stores all over the country making it easier for them to sell their goods to a wider audience, unfortunately huge global co operations have overwhelmed the internet shopping market over the last five years. By dominating the market they have made it so consumers just like in normal high streets head to the chain store's websites for the cheapest products leaving the the independent stores with no chance. In addition due to the internet constantly expanding it is possible for anyone in the uk to connect to the internet nowadays, as a consequence of this it means that even if towns or villages don't have chain stores they can still be accessed by the public through this new source taking money away from these stores and causing them to close.

▲ method of seeing whether towns in Britain are becoming indistinguishable is the a high street shop survey conducted by NEF which they got filled in for hundreds of towns around the UK, these surveys analyze the amount of chain stores and independent stores each high street has and then from these values they find out whether the high street in question is either 'home', the town has mostly independent shops, 'border', the shops are fairly evenly split between chain and independent shops, or 'clone', where most of the shops in the town are chain stores which are seen both nationally and globally. With this information we can find out a generalisation of what town centres around the country are like. The results that NEF found out conclude that out of every ten towns surveyed four turned out to be 'clone's these 'clone' towns were usually larger towns that chain stores had targeted due to their population threshold. ▲ further 26% of towns were on in the 'border' between 'clone' and 'home' towns, while just 33% were identified as being 'home' towns, therefore the majority of British towns can be classified as 'clones'. This means that the individuality of the vast majority of our high streets has been lost and replaced by a globally recognized monochrome strip of fast food restaurants; clothes shops and countless coffee stores that could be mistaken for hundreds like it around the UK, and no longer showing any relation to the town it belongs to.

Despite all the other causes that have led to Britain's towns and cities becoming so alike the most potent of these is the opening of chain stores like weeds among the independent stores starving them so once they die more chain stores can sprout up in their place. This unwanted cycle is taking place in every high street in the country, therefore there is more than one reason that it is happening on such a large scale the three causes I will discuss are the recession that has taken hold within the last year, inflation which in recent times has affected local businesses more than ever and finally the public's choice over where they choose to shop and live their lives.

The first reason we are going to look at for why there is such a rapid increase of chain stores is the recession. In the last year or so a recession has occurred due to banks lending out money to people who can't pay it back, this has led to banks doing the exact opposite and not lending any money to anyone. ▲ as a consequence the public have cut back on spending enormously and have then started shopping around for lower priced products leading them to shop at cheaper chain stores that sell mass manufactured products, this not only takes money away from the local economy but from independent stores causing them to close down. Due to the banks being unwilling to give out any money the empty shop fronts can't

be filled by new independent shops and therefore more chain stores fill the empty plots.

▲Another cause for the closure of independent stores and opening of chain stores is inflation which along with the recession is making it extremely difficult for small businesses to stay afloat as inflation is pushing prices of products further upwards the smaller retailers are forced into bumping their prices higher to make sure they can still make an income to live off. Consequently their customers look for cheaper products elsewhere and therefore chain stores get more money as they can sell their products the cheapest due to them being mass manufactured for low prices in third world countries such as India, therefore money is going away from local stores and economy and away across the world.

The final point I am going to look at for why there has been such a rapid increase in chain stores is because of people's choice. By people's choice I mean the general public's choice of living this involves choosing to go to supermarkets for groceries rather than buying locally from butcher's, farmers and green grocers. This obviously leads to closures of these kinds of independent stores but also gives money way to these supermarket businesses. Recently people have also chosen to participate in a new phenomenon called 'stay-cations', which as you may already know involve staying in the UK for holidays rather than going abroad. In this attempt to save money some might say by staying in the UK independent stores are benefitting, yet it is quite the contrary as most of the public end up spending even more at chain stores resulting in them earning more money to fund their never ending expansion.

In conclusion it is true that Britain's urban environments are becoming clones of one another we can see this most clearly from the surveys conducted by NEF as these show how the high streets are similar to each other. There are many reasons for this, cloning high street renovations, the internet, chain stores the list goes on. Fortunately people have awoken to these disturbing facts and are currently attempting to stop this relentless development by putting laws in place making it easier for independent stores to open and this is just one of the many strategies in place to combat the process.