Evaluation of two stores centered on the user’s activities and environmental perception

**Introduction:** The store environment is a determinant aspect in the period of time possible buyers stay, which increases the probability of purchasing and spending more than was previously planned (BAKER; LEVY; GREWAL, 1992; AUGUSTIN, 2009; UNDERHILL, 2009). Given its importance, the store has been the study object in many different fields such as Environmental Psychology, Visual Merchandising and Marketing. Most of these researches are centered on the environmental needs of possible buyers. There is a smaller number of works available which highlight the seller’s needs. They remain on site for long periods of time and in labor activity, strengthening a more consistent bound with the environment.

We seek to contribute to the theme through the course of two case studies in stores that commercialize gifts and are located in shopping malls. This study aims to identify which would be the main constraints related to the environment, and differences between the needs and environmental perceptions of sellers and clients.

**Method:** The research has an interdisciplinary, explorative and qualitative approach. It is based on the application of the following methods: Behavioral Mapping, Wish Poems and Interviews. Behavioral Mapping was adopted for recording the direct and systematic observations of the the environment, being undertaken during an entire day in both stores. The results were treated qualitatively, and they allowed the understanding of the users’ profile, their activities, and the constraints.

The Wish Poems was applied to understand what would be desirable in a store environment through the users’ perception. It was applied on 11 sellers and 38 clients, and the obtained data were treated with Content Analysis.

The Structured Interviews allowed going deeper into specific aspects highlighted in previous methods. They were applied on 52 buyers and 11 sellers, and they received basic statistical treatment.

**Results:** Among the Behavioral Mapping results, the following are included: the absence of seats for sellers; products exposed outside of physical reach; and insufficient dimensions of the cashier furniture. Although, in the studied stores, sellers were oriented to stand during opening hours, they sit on the displays and on the stairs. Products can also be seen exposed on heights physically unreachable. Eventhought these situations are sporadic, sellers were observed climbing on displays to take products on higher shelves, increasing chances of falling. Finally, it was verified that the cashier desk allows for two employees to perform different activities, such as charging and packing, but it does not give support to do the same activity simultaneously. In these circumstances, employees were seen packing in improvised locations.

In the Wish Poems, the three most cited categories desirable for future projects were: appropriate relations between the layout and environment dimensions; playful ambience; and comfort. Although the categories coincided for clients and sellers, the weights and arguments associated to them differ. For instance, when referring to the layout and store dimensions, the clients highlighted the importance of insuring wide areas of circulation meanwhile sellers gave more emphasis on scaling the cashier in order to fit two employees performing simultaneously.

In the Interviews, among the negatively evaluated aspects by users, it was highlighted again the relation between the layout and the environment dimensions. Both groups think it is desirable to dispose of a wide and obstacles free circulation. Clients also evaluated negatively the visual pollution due to the great variety of products exposed, and the difficulty to reach some of them. Employees highlighted aspects related to furniture such as the need for maintenance of some of them and the danger of the shelves sharp edges.

**Discussion:** Some of the problems observed derive from the stores restricted dimensions which limited the environment planning. Therefore, in future projects, it is possible to reduce the amount of furniture and products exposed or provide the sensation of more amplitude through resources such as color, finishing materials, lighting, or compact furniture.

In the obtained results, we observed many affinities, but also some differences between the needs and perceptions of the two main user groups. Generally speaking, the sellers have a wider understanding of their demands as well as the ones from possible buyers. For their longer
stay and knowledge of the location, this user group should always be considered in the stores evaluations, which has not always occurred.

**Keywords**: store, constraints, environmental attributes, activities, perceptions.

**References**:
