Driving through Europe is an experience full of diversity. This is what makes Europe so unique. Landscapes change constantly, languages and signage vary every so often, and traditional architecture reveals a complex and regional world. But there is one common feature to most city entrances from Greece to Scandinavia. Just before or after the sign marking the city limits, in the middle or at the back of parking lots, we find boxes which, although generally unattractive, are also very successful retail machines. These boxes are retail commodities adapted for serving both established and new ways of distributing goods. And distribution is their focus, regardless of other values such as sustainability, social attractiveness or esthetic contribution.

Driven by a highly individualized society and supported by exploding urban sprawl, these boxes have become the most convenient and attractive way of shopping. The arguments in their favor include minimal costs for construction and operation, easy asset management, and high flexibility for tenants. Free (with very few exceptions) from restrictions by public planning authorities, these buildings have developed into informal retail parks of stunning size. The sales area of these so-called "parasite facilities" often far exceeds even that of classic shopping centers.

Is this an irreversible development? Just like every other change in the retail business: probably not. Firstly, because these boxes will slowly but surely reach the end of their life cycles. This could create room for more coherent developments that share parking lots and other adjacent facilities. With the right legal framework, there would be excellent opportunities for concentrating volumes and functions at these locations. The most underestimated challenge is the redefinition of outdoor spaces from parking lots into lively environments that add value for both individual clients and the community as a whole. New concepts for retail parks in which extra space is produced by the compaction of volumes could be one answer to the improvement of city borders.

We will definitely see hybrid concepts, including some mega-structures, which will challenge traditional shopping centers, especially outside cities. I do not yet dare to dream about multifunctional premises which combine retail and entertainment with office space and even housing, but the early bird examples of this idea will prove how successful it might be, even if the real estate industry is still looking for easy products. The future is no longer about easy productivity but intelligent innovation. And the support of the booming IT industry will simplify even complicated real estate products for the benefit of a better world, even on the outskirts of cities.

It hasn't been long since food retailers paid no attention at all to the premises where they offered their merchandise, even though this merchandise should, because it is eaten, be the most emotional of all. For a couple of years now, it has been not only early birds in alpine niches, such as Mpreis, who have created attractive local meeting points that also sell food. Even discounters are demonstrating the positive influence of carefully treating their "homes." Why not trust in a larger scale of future retail parks that embody the same improvement in quality?