

STORE LOCATION AND STORE ASSESSMENT RESEARCH edited by R. L. Davies and D. S. Rogers. John Wiley and Sons, 1984, pp. x, 375. Cloth, \$34.95.

As R. L. Davies notes in the introduction to this volume, the two topics of the title are well-defined and important areas of retailing practice, but have accumulated remarkably little literature. The book is a collection of invited pieces from both academics and practitioners, and manages to marry a variety of themes in its 18 papers. The result is a very original and useful volume which will be welcomed by regional scientists and geographers for several reasons.

Store location, or retail site selection, is the problem of picking optimal sites for retail activities, given the assumption that location is a primary determinant of success. Store assessment is the intimately related problem of modeling sales or economic return from a store of specified design in a specified location, usually in order to estimate the effects of changes either to the store itself or to its competitive environment. To many field practitioners, both problems are matters of highly tuned professional judgment unsuited to scientific analysis, and that message comes through clearly in several chapters in the book, both in the ways in which important variables are defined and in the ways in which they are combined into overall evaluations. For example, the major methodological chapter on store location concludes with a list of fourteen "major topics that must be addressed in a location strategy for any type of retailer," such as "Operating policies" and "Retail environment," but precise details of definition, measurement and application are missing. Instead "it becomes the challenge of each strategist to apply creatively these concepts to his particular retail chain" (p. 252). In contrast, some of the more analytic chapters adopt a scientific approach, applying standard multivariate techniques to the isolation and calibration of factors affecting store sales, and discussing the associated difficulties of small samples, causality and collinearity.

This dichotomy of subjective versus objective, field practitioner versus academic, runs very deeply through the book, and gives what one suspects is an accurate view of the major problem faced by the small group of researchers in this subdiscipline. Regional scientists led by the title to anticipate reviews of the findings of recent research will likely be disappointed: on the subjective side it is difficult to see how one can report, let alone measure, the improvement of professional judgment (if indeed that has occurred in recent years), and on the objective side it is perhaps significant that not a single validation experiment or evaluation of a prior decision is reported.

In fact very little of the recent literature in spatial interaction modeling and location allocation has made its way into applied site selection, despite the obvious potential. Part of the problem here is the commercial nature of the field, since "the veil of secrecy that surrounds the research undertaken by individual firms means that it is difficult to determine the extent to which...models are being employed within the industry" (p. 331). Unfortunately such commercial secrecy conflicts directly with the need for publication as an adjunct to scientific progress. The chapter on gravity models by D. S. Rogers, one of two on "Modern Methods of Sales Forecasting," carries the literature on spatial interaction modeling through to Wilson's entropy models of the early 1970s, but no further, ending with a necessarily incomplete account of two commercial packages, SLASH and MODEL, instead of a review of the very prolific research of recent years into shopping (MCI) models and competitive location-allocation, much of which has appeared in the site selection context in such periodicals as the Journal of Retailing.

The book is organized into a logical sequence of three sections. The first six papers establish the retail setting, describing the various trends in marketing, development controls and urban structure which have affected retailing in the past few decades and the ways in which retail form is affected by economic and social processes operating on the physical landscape. The next collection of six papers discusses the statistical data available from conventional sources such as the census as well as less conventional licence plate spotting and direct market research. The final third of the book contains discussions of methods and techniques.

As a collection of essays the book works well in creating a useful impression of current practice across the full width of the spectrum from academic to commercial. It cannot fill all of the gaps in the current literature, but it fills a very important one. At the same time it emphasizes the weaknesses of the present field, particularly in the absence of a single conceptual framework. The chapter by K. Fairbairn on the urban pattern of retailing relies heavily on the Central Place framework of Berry's papers of the early 1960s, but is exceptional in this respect. A particularly clear illustration is the concept of trade area, which is used repeatedly throughout the book. It is clearly defined in Central Place Theory, but only in deterministic form, whereas practice requires a probabilistic definition. The scientifically oriented papers provide a number of suggested methods for trade area delimitation, but the results, and the implied definition of the concept, vary widely depending on the method. Typical of the trade area definitions in the papers by practitioners is "that geographically contiguous zone from which they derive 75 to 80 percent of their total sales" (p. 259), although clearly an infinite number of closed curves can be drawn in the plane to include a specified proportion of a given point set. The closest approach to an objective algorithm for trade area delimitation is contained in the final paper by K. G. Jones and D. R. Mook, but this is based on dollar purchases being known in addition to locations for each customer. Also, substantial sampling errors persist in their approach.

In addition to contrasting practitioner and scientist, the book also makes a very interesting comparison between recent experience in the UK and North America by juxtaposing treatments of the same topic from both sides of the Atlantic. There are five of these pairs of papers, all within the first two sections on the retail setting and statistical data sources. The effect is striking, in the impression conveyed of a merging of issues as the UK becomes more oriented to marketplace competition and North America to planning and environmental quality, and at the same time in the role that everyday familiarity plays in a field such as this. The North American reader understandably immediately when reference is made to specific chains such as K-Mart, but often misses the significance of the marketing strategies of Sainsbury, and vice versa. To a regional scientist, the overall impression conveyed by the book may be one of disappointment that the gap between the cutting edge of scientific research and site selection practice is so large. Academic research can gain from greater practical exposure, and the last decade of scientific literature still has much to offer to the objective practitioner. But perhaps it is precisely this conflict between science and judgment which makes the field such a fascinating combination of anecdote and applied principle.

Michael F. Goodchild
University of Western Ontario, Canada