

Sunrise for Some: Retail Access & Social Sustainability in Alfama, Lisbon

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Abstract

Departing from the premise that the mere existence of commercial enterprises is insufficient to determine whether the elderly population's supply needs are being met, this research aims to analyse whether the recent transformations in Lisbon's commercial fabric, driven by tourism, are affecting the ability of the elderly population of traditional neighbourhood of Alfama to access retail facilities. For this purpose, we draw on Levesque et al.'s (2013) conceptual framework on access, which encompasses the dimensions of affordability, appropriateness, approachability, acceptability, and availability and accommodation. Our findings show a detachment between the elderly population and the commercial fabric of the area. This is mostly due to the current orientation of retail towards tourism-related activities, neglecting the needs of the locals that continue to live in the area due to the gentrification pressure acknowledged to be affecting the neighbourhood. The results of our research highlight the need to consider the social sustainability of local communities living in areas with significant tourism activities. This research also underlines the relevance of recognising that access to retail needs to be evaluated from a multidimensional perspective to capture its complexity, especially when considering segments of the population affected by some sort of vulnerability.

Key words:
retail, tourism,
Lisbon, access,
commercial fabric

1 INTRODUCTION

Over the last twenty years, Lisbon has undergone profound urban transformation. As in many Western cities at the turn of the millennium, the shift to a post-industrial economy reshaped its traditional hierarchical structure (Barata-Salgueiro et al., 2017). The expansion of the city, especially with the consolidation of the metropolitan region of Lisbon and its different urban centres, meant that some traditional and historical centres of commerce were affected and declined. The main city centre of Lisbon is an example of such evolution, losing its position as the main centre of commerce and services of the region. This negative evolution was counteracted following the adjustments made after the global financial crisis (Barata-Salgueiro & Guimarães, 2020). Not only, but especially during the second decade of the new century, urban policies with neoliberal stances were put in place and, alongside a significant boost in tourism activities, led to a physical and functional rehabilitation of the city centre (Mendes, 2017). However, this revitalization was accompanied by gentrification (Cócola-Gant & Gago, 2021; Guimarães, 2025), and while the extent of gentrification's impact remains debated, vulnerable groups have been particularly affected.

Most studies on urban transformation and gentrification focus on housing, leaving a gap in retail research (Hubbard, 2018). Access to retail, particularly food, is well-explored in urban studies (Bayly et al., 2025; Chen et al., 2025; Janatabadi et al., 2024), yet most literature examines low-income peripheral areas and their links to food access and residents' health (Bayly et al., 2025; Cummins et al., 2008; Marshall et al., 2018; Raffo-Babici et al., 2025). Furthermore, access is often measured simply by the presence of retail outlets. This paper argues that commercial infrastructure alone does not guarantee access for all population groups. We, therefore, break down the concept of access into multiple dimensions, drawing from Levesque et al. (2013) and Doetsch et al. (2017), whose frameworks are widely applied in healthcare research.

Our study aims to determine if the recent upsurge in tourism is affecting the ability of the elderly population to access retail facilities. Our research focuses on the multidimensionality of retail access, excluding factors like dietary composition and quality (Bilal et al., 2018; González-Alejo et al., 2019; Needham et al., 2025). We contribute to knowledge on retail access by exploring this issue in Alfama, a historic

Lisbon neighbourhood affected by touristification. Retail changes impact different population groups unequally. Among vulnerable groups - such as immigrants, young adults, and the elderly (Garha & Azevedo, 2021) - challenges in shopping for essentials vary. This study examines whether Lisbon's ongoing transformation affects the elderly's ability to access basic supplies and how they adapt.

This segment of the population faces two conditions that make it more vulnerable in terms of accessing commerce, namely, economic and mobility issues. In the case of mobility, this condition has some specific characteristics in Alfama that make it particularly relevant to this study. We highlight the conditions of the buildings, which are old, lack elevators, and have difficult-to-navigate staircases, as well as part of the neighbourhood's urban layout, with its irregular grid and streets with streets with varying gradients. Obviously, not all elderly people experience these two conditions; however, economic and mobility issues particularly affect this population group. Our premise is that equitable food access for all groups is crucial for a neighbourhood's social sustainability.

2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

There is some research on access to retail by different fringes of the population (Bilal et al., 2018; González-Alejo et al., 2019). Existent research spans across different scientific fields, such as health and urban studies. From a health-studies perspective, much of the concern focuses on analysing the nutritional quality of food products (Pechey & Marteau, 2018; Swinburn et al., 2011), seeking to determine whether access and consumption of unhealthy food products is associated with health conditions (Love et al., 2019; Pouliot & Hamelin, 2009). From an urban-studies perspective, the focus is on analysing the existence of commerce in deprived areas, traditionally inhabited by populations with lower purchasing power, and how this relationship reinforces conditions of socio-economic inequality.

The term 'food desert' describes areas with limited access to adequate food retailing (Cummins et al., 2008), while 'disadvantaged consumer' refers to the least mobile and least well-off individuals (Opacic & Potter, 1996). This aligns with the deprivation amplification hypothesis, which posits that socially disadvantaged groups face additional structural deprivation due to their residential environment, further deepening inequalities (Schneider et al., 2019).

Some studies combine health and social science perspectives. Cummins et al. (2009) investigate whether access to fresh, high-quality food in marginal urban and rural areas is intrinsically linked to local dietary habits and health. Other research supports the deprivation amplification thesis, showing a correlation between marginalised areas and retail access. In Mexico City, where food retail is less dependent on large distribution chains than in North America and Europe, González-Alejo et al. (2019) identified food deserts and lower-quality food in some marginalised areas. However, despite its appeal, deprivation amplification may oversimplify the complexities of retail systems. Macintyre (2007) argues that there is no absolute link between poor neighbourhoods and resource deprivation, emphasizing that geographical context plays a crucial role. More than mere resource presence, quality, social relevance, and accessibility are key factors. In the case of Smith's et al. (2010), the authors found no evidence of limitations in access to trade in some of the most deprived areas of Scotland.

In a somewhat similar conclusion, Helbich et al. (2017) concluded that, despite the heterogeneous distribution of the commercial fabric (understood as the set of commercial spaces and shops in a given area) in Amsterdam, residing in deprived areas is not in itself a condition that restricts access to healthy and affordable food, which highlights the need to incorporate the characteristics of the urban spaces under study when analysing whether they fall into areas with limited access to retail.

These studies demonstrate the existing focus on the analysis of food retail. However, in the context of cities heavily pressured by tourism, the analysis should extend to other commercial typologies, as discussed in the following sub-chapter.

Access to retail stores in cities affected by touristification

The global rise of the tourism industry in the last decades contributed to the urban transformation of several tourist destinations (Gotham, 2005). Often, these changes in the urban environments are encouraged and facilitated by the local authorities, who look at tourism activities as a tool for economic revitalisation and urban regeneration (Barata-Salgueiro & Guimarães, 2020). This strategy is not exclusive to the Global North, as similar approaches can be found elsewhere. For instance, González-Pérez (2017) analysed how urban and strategic planning was put into effect in Santo Domingo, in the Dominican Republic, favouring tourism in order to achieve the economic regeneration of the area, which is in line with other studies focused on geographical contexts beyond the most studied Anglo-Saxon context (Boussaa & Madandola, 2024; Olivera, 2017; Delgadillo, 2018; Hiernaux, 2018; Sánchez, 2018).

However, excessive tourism in each destination provokes a set of negative socio-economic impacts, usually conceptualised as touristification (Barata-Salgueiro et al., 2017). It refers to the process in which the tourism carrying capacity (Mihalic, 2020; Tokarchuk et al., 2021; Wang et al., 2020) is exceeded and the functioning of some sectors is distorted. The housing sector is one of the sectors most affected by such developments, with the re-orientation of the housing sector towards tourism activities (Cocola-Gant & Gago, 2021; Garha & Azevedo, 2022), as well as the adaptation of the public space for leisure and consumption activities, such as the installation of terraces (Guimarães, 2021). Retail, the subject of our research, is deeply shaped by tourism activities, as it is one of the sectors most closely associated with tourism activities.

Despite the evolving nature of retail, the current transformation of the commercial fabric in cities affected by a rise in tourism activities differs from the traditional elements that characterise the evolution of the retail sector from the mid-1950s onwards (Davies, 2004). The new retail landscape is mainly composed of stores that offer products and services associated with leisure, neglecting typologies such as supermarkets and other food retail, as well as outlets from other typologies that are essential for the daily life of local inhabitants and a healthy urban retail system. Occasionally, this transformation is discussed under the retail gentrification framework, as the substitution of traditional stores for new retail spaces associated with leisure and consumption activities sometimes occurs through processes of direct or indirect displacement (Gonzalez & Waley, 2013; Zukin, 2008, 2009).

Incorporating access in retail geography

Drawing from Macintyre's conclusions (2007), access to basic supplies and other products cannot be apprehended by the simple existence of retail stores in each neighbourhood or district. That is, the mere presence of stores does not mean they're accessible to all or part of the population. In this regard, we must recall that current transformations of the commercial fabric of touristic areas are more than functional and, thus, the mere existence of outlets from a given retail typology does not mean they can be accessed by everyone in the population.

Unlike what happens in deprived neighbourhoods or peripheral locations (Van Burgel et al., 2024), in the case of cities pressured by tourism – especially in their historical centers and their surroundings – it is not that there is no commercial supply, but rather that it may not be available to a portion of the population that needs it, for various reasons. The dimensions analysed in the conceptual framework of Levesque et al. (2013) are relevant in framing these reasons. Furthermore, in addition to the characteristics of the territory – especially in terms of commercial offerings – there is also the fact that not all of the population has the same capacity for access; this is the case for the elderly population studied in this research, particularly due to recognized limitations in terms of mobility and their economic condition. This variety of elements combines with the recognized vulnerabilities of the elderly population and finds support in the five dimensions of access (Fig. 1) as defined by Levesque et al. (2013): (i) approachability; (ii) acceptability; (iii) affordability; (iv) availability and accommodation; (v) appropriateness - to discuss how the multidimensionality of this concept is key to apprehend the ability or inability of the elderly to acquire retail provisions.

Approachability relates to one's awareness of the existing commercial fabric in their area of residence. Acceptability is associated with the cultural and social factors that condition the willingness of the population to visit the existing commercial fabric. Affordability broadly concerns the prices at which the needed products are sold and, consequently, the population's financial capacity to purchase the products. Availability and accommodation concern the factual existence of a given commercial fabric,

within a physical distance that makes it reachable. Lastly, appropriateness further develops this latter dimension, as it aims to assess whether the existing commercial fabric possesses a tenant mix adequate to fit the needs of the analysed population. Each of these dimensions of access is geared towards an individual's ability to deal with the service: to perceive, to seek, to pay, to reach and to engage, respectively.

3 MATERIAL AND METHODS

This research is based on a case study focusing on Alfama, a neighbourhood in the city centre of Lisbon. Alfama is a traditional neighbourhood of the city with a privileged location close to the river Tagus, and the castle of São Jorge located on the northern edge of the neighbourhood. To the east is the area usually known as Baixa (downtown), where the main and traditional streets of commerce and services of the city are found. Due to this privileged geographical location, and due to the existence of a certain historical setting with elements relating to Fado – a well-known Portuguese musical genre – Alfama was one of the first areas where touristification impacts were felt in Lisbon. The proliferation of temporary housing available for tourists is likely to be the most recognised symptom of such a process, frequently associated with direct and indirect displacement of the local population (Cocola-Gant & Gago, 2021). In addition to the effects on the housing sector, the adaptation of the commercial fabric is also acknowledged as a significant outcome in areas subject to pressures from the tourism industry (Barata-Salgueiro, 2017). As previously mentioned, we will analyse the impacts of the transformation of the commercial fabric on the elderly, considering this population group particularly vulnerable to these changes, due to a combination of physical (mobility) and economic limitations. While we do not claim that all individuals within this age group have these limitations, we recognise that these characteristics are more likely to occur among them.

An interview script was created by the authors. The questions were developed to cover the five dimensions of access discussed in the theoretical section, as displayed in Fig. 1. The script consisted of closed-ended questions - allowing for the quantification of responses - and for each question, the interviewee was allowed to elaborate on their answer, thus obtaining qualitative information. In July 2022, we conducted 50 in-person interviews with local inhabitants of Alfama who were 65 years or older. The interviews were conducted in person on the streets of Alfama, with an average duration of 25 minutes. The responses were written down on paper. They were later transcribed into digital format and grouped into the tables presented in section four. The anonymity of interviewees was preserved in all stages of this research. In addition, in April 2023, fieldwork was conducted in person across fifty-seven streets of Alfama to collect information about existing commercial fabric, a key issue to analyse the 'Availability and accommodation', 'Appropriateness' and 'Approachability' dimensions. The collected information allowed us to categorise each retail store, which were further grouped and compared with existent information from the city council from 1995 and 2007.

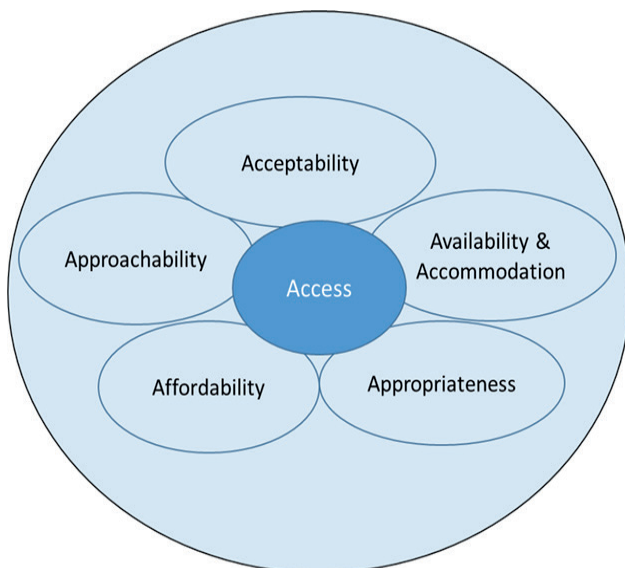


Fig. 1 – Dimensions of access
Source: Adapted from Levesque et al. (2013)

4 RESULTS

Elderly Residents' Perspectives on Retail Dynamics in Alfama: Insights from Interviews

Over the last few decades, Alfama has suffered some decline. However, this trend shifted in the post-2010s period. Alfama's recent evolution is marked by the growth of tourism in the city, which has most noticeably affected the more central neighbourhoods, including Alfama. Table 1 presents the household composition, living conditions, and mobility conditions of the interviewees for this research. Most of the interviewees live with one other person (44%). This can be either beneficial or challenging, depending on whether the other person can provide support for accessing retail services or if the interviewee is the primary care provider. A considerable number of interviewees live alone (40%), which can pose challenges for shopping among those with mobility difficulties, especially in Alfama's hilly terrain. Most interviewees have lived in their current accommodation for an extended period, with 34% living there for over 40 years and 42% since they were born, indicating strong ties to the neighbourhood, low residential mobility, and co-residence of two or more generations, as shown in previous studies on Lisbon (Alves et al., 2023). Regarding household management, almost three in every four interviewees (74%) report some degree of difficulty in managing their monthly budgets for routine expenses.

Overall mobility within Alfama and to areas outside the neighbourhood is mostly positive. Within the neighbourhood, 42% of interviewees rated mobility as good and 18% as very good. Similarly, mobility outside the neighbourhood was rated as good by 48% of interviewees and very good by 20%. While most elderly residents are physically able to shop for their basic needs, a notable portion (26%) requires assistance, primarily from family members (12%). A substantial number of interviewees need help to shop outside the neighbourhood, with all those needing help (22%) relying on family members. We should, however, highlight that, as the interviews

were conducted on the street, it is highly likely that the percentage of the population unable to physically access the shops is underestimated, as the interviews were conducted with people who already have some degree of mobility.

Approachability

The majority of interviewees (88%) reported being aware of the current commercial landscape in their area. Nearly half (46%) indicated that they are familiar with most of the existing retail stores. This response corresponds with previous feedback regarding mobility. Approximately one in four interviewees, including those who acknowledge being unfamiliar with the commercial landscape (10%) and some who only know a small portion (12%), attribute this lack of knowledge to the high turnover of stores and the focus on tourists by the current shops (table 2).

When asked if the changes in retail over the last ten years had affected their ability to shop, 54% of interviewees affirmed this was the case. This period coincides to the time when the impacts of touristification became more pronounced in Lisbon, thus highlights the commercial transformations in Lisbon's historic centre.

Regarding how they were affected, 26% of interviewees emphasized the loss of commercial diversity, particularly due to the closure of shoe stores, grocery stores, bakeries, post offices, and banks. Additionally, 12% mentioned that although some of these types of retail stores are still in operation, they must now longer distances to reach them. Another 8% noted that part of the commercial fabric is now owned by foreigners and oriented towards tourists. This response, which reflects a negative perception, can be understood in three ways. Firstly, there is occasional difficulty in communicating in Portuguese, especially in Asian establishments. Secondly, the new retail spaces are less likely to foster the social connections that traditional stores offered, as these connections require time to develop. This is significant since 76% of the interviewees have always lived in Alfama or have lived there for 40 years or more, implying a disconnect

Tab. 1. Household composition, living conditions and mobility among elderly residents in Alfama

Household					
Live alone (n=20, 40%)		Live with 1 family member (n=22, 44%)		Live with more than one family member (n=8, 16%)	
Length of time living in the current accommodation					
Less than 10 years (n=6, 12%)		10 to 24 years (n=2, 4%)		25 to 39 years (n=4, 8%)	
				40 + years (n=17, 34%)	
				Since always (n=21, 42%)	
How does the household manage to pay usual monthly expenses					
Large effort (n=3, 6%)		Some effort (n=12, 24%)		Small effort (n=22, 44%)	
				Relatively easy (n=9, 18%)	
				Some ease (n=3, 6%)	
				Great ease (n=1, 2%)	
Overall mobility within the neighbourhood					
Very bad (n=2, 4%)		Bad (n=8, 16%)		Reasonable (n=10, 20%)	
				Good (n=21, 42%)	
				Very good (n=9, 18%)	
Overall mobility to outside the neighbourhood					
Very bad (n=4, 8%)		Bad (n=3, 6%)		Reasonable (n=8, 16%)	
				Good (n=24, 48%)	
				Very good (n=10, 20%)	
				NA (n=1, 2%)	
Need help to shop in the neighbourhood					
Yes (n=13, 26%)		No (n=37, 74%)			
If yes, who helps?					
Family members (n=6, 12%)		Retailers (n=3, 6%)		Friends / neighbours (n=2, 4%)	
				Municipal parish (n=1, 2%)	
				No one (n=1, 2%)	
Need help to shop outside the neighbourhood					
Yes (n= 11, 22%)		No (n=39, 78%)			
If yes, who helps?					
Family members (n=11, 22%)					

Source: Interviews performed in July 2022

Tab. 2. Aspects related with the dimension of approachability.

Awareness of the commercial fabric in the neighbourhood					
Yes, in full (n=14, 28%)	Yes, most part (n=9, 18%)	Yes, a part (n=15, 30%)	Yes, but just a small part (n=6, 12%)	No (n=5, 10%)	NA (n=1, 2%)
Have the changes in the commercial fabric over the last 10 years affected your supply capacity?					
Yes (n=27, 54%)	No (n=22, 44%)	NA (n=1, 2%)			
If yes, why?					
Less diversity (retail and services (n=13,26%)	Need to walk longer distances (n=6, 12%)	Foreign retail (n=4, 8%)	Price (n=2, 4%)	NA (n=2, 4%)	
Was there a commercial establishment that closed recently that affected your ability to purchase a product?					
Yes (n=19, 38%)		No (n=31, 62%)			
If yes, from which retail typology?					
Coffee shops / Bakeries / Tavern (N=7, 14%)	Groceries (n=6, 12%)	Fishmonger / butchery (n=6, 12%)	Restaurants (n=3, 6%)	Banks (n=3, 6%)	
Haberdashery (n=3, 6%)	Pharmacy (n=2, 4%)	Convenience store (n=1, 2%)	Shoes (n=1, 2%)	Post office (n=1, 2%)	Public health centre (n=1, 2%)

Source: Interviews performed in July 2022

from long-term residents. Thirdly, the reorientation of retail space toward tourism has resulted in a tangible loss of retail diversity in the area. While not the majority, it is noteworthy that 38% of interviewees reported that their ability to access certain products has been impacted by the recent closure of specific establishments.

Acceptability

The topics discussed in section 4.1 address the gap between approachability and acceptability. Table 3 shows that most interviewees express dissatisfaction with the current commercial fabric. These answers deepen the content previously analysed (section 4.1) making it clear that the changes leading to the current tenant mix are seen by some residents as misaligned with their needs and consumer values. Reasons for dissatisfaction include the perception that stores are “oriented towards tourists” (14%), a “lack of quantity” (12%), stores that “do not serve local residents” (12%), and a “lack of diversity” (12%).

Regarding their opinion on whether the current commercial fabric meets their needs, interviewees responses differ when considering the effects on their own needs versus those of other elderly residents. On the one hand, 30% of interviewees stated that the commercial fabric does not meet their own needs. However, considering the broader needs of the elderly residents in the neighbourhood, this number increases to 52%. This indicates that the perceived negativity of the current characteristics of retail in Alfama is higher when considering the elderly population than the individual effects felt by interviewees. This suggests that, when the interviews took place, negative perceptions associated with commercial changes exceeded the actual impacts.

The size and composition of the tenant mix are frequently questioned. Concerns arise about the need for increased mobility if the quantity of stores is insufficient or if existing stores are not well-dispersed throughout the neighbourhood. This is confirmed by interviewees answers regarding the types of stores they still frequent in the area. Their answers reflect a range of retail typologies, with groceries, coffee shops, pharmacies, restaurants, and hairdresser/barber shops being among the most frequently used. It was also clear that, in recent years, the interviewees have stopped frequenting commercial establishments of these and other retail typologies (table 3). At first glance, interviewees appear to be adapting to the transformation of commerce in

Alfama, though not completely, as substituting some public and financial services proves difficult. However, upon deeper analysis, the data reveals that most interviewees do not frequent the newer commercial establishments. This suggests that their ability to adapt may diminish if the shift from old retail stores to new ones continues. In fact, 44 interviewees (88%) reported that they do not frequent retail spaces that have opened in recent years, highlighting the dependency of this population on the older establishments that still meet their needs. The fact that only six interviewees frequent retail stores that have opened in recent years seems to indicate that these are either not suited for their consumption needs and/or there exists a feeling of rejection towards the new retail stores. Indeed, several interviewees mention that within the neighbourhood they visit a variety of retail stores, such as grocery stores, coffee shops, and restaurants, among others, while other interviewees report having stopped attending retail stores of these same retail typologies. In some way, these seemingly contradictory data suggest that, as much as or even more than the presence or absence of certain establishments, their acceptance by the individuals is what drives their use.

Affordability

As shown above in table 1, about three in every four interviewees reported paying their usual monthly expenses with some effort. When all elderly residents were asked about their economic capacity to access consumer goods, 40% indicated that they must go outside the neighbourhood to acquire products at what they consider an affordable price. Although a majority (60%) stated otherwise, the 40% figure is still significant. Most of these interviewees highlighted that food retail is the primary type of retail they must seek outside Alfama. Other mentioned categories include home products and appliances, clothing, and broader responses like „everything.“ It is important to note that for an elderly population, the need to look outside the neighbourhood for basic necessities like food can create access barriers, impacting social sustainability for this vulnerable group in the medium and long term.

The evolution of these retail typologies must be interpreted in close connection with the broader change of the city over the past few decades. As suburbanization progressed in the Lisbon region throughout the second half of the last century, a reformulation of retail polarities occurred. This led to

Tab. 3. Aspects related with the dimension of acceptability.

Are you satisfied with existent commercial fabric in the neighbourhood?							
Yes (n=21, 42%)				No (n=29, 58%)			
If yes, why?							
Fulfil the needs (n=13, 26%)		Proximity (n=5, 10%)		Friendliness (n=3, 6%)			
If no, why?							
Oriented towards tourists (n=7, 14%)	Lack of diversity (n=5, 10%)	Lack of quantity (n=6, 12%)	Lack of services (n=2, 4%)	Do not serve local residents (n=6, 12%)	Lack of commercial spaces for conviviality (n=2, 4%)	Retail change a lot (n=1, 2%)	
Does current commercial fabric fulfil your needs?							
Yes, but just partially (n=12, 24%)		Yes, almost entirely (n=12, 24%)		Yes, totally (n=11, 22%)		No (n=15, 30%)	
Do you consider current commercial fabric of Alfama fulfils the needs of the elderly residents							
Yes (n=24, 48%)				No (n=26, 52%)			
If yes, why?							
Fulfil the needs (n=24, 48%)							
If no, why?							
Lack of quantity (n=12, 24%)		Help is needed to reach stores (n=10, 20%)		Lack of diversity (n=5, 10%)		Stores are oriented to tourism (n=2, 4%)	
What type of store you still attend in the neighbourhood?							
Grocery / Drugstore (n=23, 46%)	Coffee shop (n=22, 44%)	Pharmacy (n=17, 34%)	Restaurants (n=13, 26%)	Hairdresser/ Barber (n=12, 24%)	Butcher (n=11, 22%)	Fishmonger (n=9, 18%)	Bakery (n=5, 10%)
Have you stop using any store in the last years?							
Yes (n=28, 56%)				No (n=22, 44%)			
If yes, from which retail typology?							
Banks (n=10, 20%)	Grocery (n=8, 16%)	Personal items (n=6, 12%)	Coffee shops / Tavern (n=5, 10%)	Fishmonger (n=4, 8%)	Restaurants (n=3, 6%)	Bakery (n=3, 6%)	
Overall, do you use retail stores opened in the neighbourhood in the last years?							
Yes (n=6, 12%)				No (n=44, 88%)			

Source: Interviews performed in July 2022

a functional decline in the city centre, resulting in the reduction of certain retail typologies, such as those mentioned above.

If this evolution partially explains the initial answers gathered in table 4, interpreting the responses given to the following question requires deeper thought. Some interviewees (40%) reported they stopped attending certain stores and acquiring certain products due to economic constraints, primarily citing price increases as the reason. The three commercial typologies most frequently mentioned by interviewees as those who stopped attending include personal items, personal services, and cafes/restaurants. Although these types of stores still exist in the neighbourhood, economic barriers prevent some residents from accessing them. This aspect reinforces what was discussed in the theoretical component, namely the argument that the mere availability of certain stores selling specific products does not mean that consumers have a possibility of accessing the respective stores and products; in this case, because the prices are higher than the (some) consumers' ability to afford them.

Availability and accommodation

Almost half of the interviewees (48%) believe that the current tenant mix of the neighbourhood is insufficient in providing the population with an offer of retail and services that provides for their daily needs (table 5). Food retail is the retail typology identified as being the one that is most needed in the neighbourhood. Thirty percent of the interviewees highlighted this type of retail space, while 18%

specifically referred to bank branches. It is also worth noting that 10% of responses indicated a lack of establishments for household items. Other types of commerce and services were mentioned, albeit in smaller numbers, such as post offices, cafes and shoes stores.

When asked whether they recalled recent closures or relocations of any retail and service spaces to more remote locations, 54% of the interviewees said yes. This number is relatively low, especially considering the continuous process of retail change. This is likely due to the presence of some old retail spaces in the neighbourhood, which are most frequently used by the age group targeted in this research. In this regard, it is important to note that most interviewees emphasized they do not use the retail and services that have opened more recently (see table 3). This bias, regarding the partial use of the commercial fabric in the area under study, may explain some of the responses. It leads to a lack of awareness about the evolution of the commercial fabric that interviewees do not frequent or even know about (72% of interviewees admit not being fully aware of the composition of the commercial fabric of the area (see table 2). Given that consumption patterns are intricately linked to values, identities, and cultural practices, the elderly may be more prone to use the same services repeatedly. This makes it more challenging for them to adapt to new establishments, as it would require a change in their consumption routines, resulting in an incompatibility with their established habits. However, the new retail fabric may not necessarily suit elderly's needs. In

Tab. 4. Aspects related with the dimension of affordability

Do you need to move outside the neighbourhood to purchase products that, although existing in the neighbourhood, are more expensive than you can stand/considers a fair price?					
Yes (n=20, 40%)			No (n=30, 60%)		
Food retail (n=14, 28%)	Home products (n=7, 14%)	Everything (n=3, 6%)	Clothing (n=1, 2%)	Home appliances (n=1, 2%)	NA (n=1, 2%)
In the last 10 years, did you stop consuming/using any service/store because you were no longer able to pay?					
Yes (n=20, 40%)		No (28, 56%)		NA (n=2, 4%)	
If yes, from which retail typology?					
Personal items (clothing, shoes,...) (n=12, 24%)	Personal services (hairstresser/ barber shop) (n=12, 24%)	Cafes / restaurants (n=11, 22%)	Food retail (n=3, 6%)	Home products (n=2, 4%)	
Is this change mainly due to the loss of household income or an increase in the price of products?					
Increase in the price of products (n=16, 32%)		Loss of household income (n=1, 2%)		Both (n=3, 6%)	

Source: Interviews performed in July 2022

addition, changes in supply are often accompanied by a change in the retailer, shifting from someone who has been known for generations to someone who is new, often foreign, and may not speak the local language.

Despite the ongoing changes in retail, most interviewees (86%) reported that they did not stop using any specific product or services. This indicates that the current retail structure still adequately supplies the population and highlights the resilience measures developed by the population to access the products and services they need. Many interviewees mentioned that they need to travel outside the neighbourhood to access these services (see section Affordability). These responses are corroborated by data from the functional survey on the existing commercial fabric. Comparing data from 2023 with that from 1995 and 2007 reveals a significant reorganization of the neighbourhood's tenant mix. Despite this profound change, characterized by the proliferation of certain retail typologies and the decline of others, almost all retail categories, even if residual, remain present in the area. However, this evolution shows that even if some typologies are not completely nonexistent, the expansion of services linked to tourism is evident in Lisbon's historic neighbourhoods. The commercial fabric has adapted to the „fast“ needs of the city's visitors.

Appropriateness

It is unquestionable that the analysed area continues to possess a robust retail presence. As shown in table 6, although the total number of retail stores decreased between 1995 and 2007 - culminating in a declining trend affecting Lisbon's city centre the commercial fabric recovered with an increase of 29 stores by 2023. This means that the 2023 retail offer, with 258 stores, surpasses the number of stores present in 1995. However, it is important to interpret the data through the lens of appropriateness, in two key aspects. Firstly, it is important to highlight the proliferation of restaurants throughout the analysed area, with an increase of 79,4% between 2007 and 2023. As a result, by 2023, restaurants comprised almost half of the existing establishments in the area. Together with non-specialized retail, such as souvenir stores, these two retail typologies account for more than two thirds of all retail stores. Both retail typologies have a strong presence in tourist areas, a fact that aligns with Alfama's status as a popular

tourist destination. The recent evolution of commerce in the center of Lisbon should be seen as a result of the influence of tourism, but also of a broader restructuring of the city itself and the region in which it is located.

Secondly, the opposite process can be seen in other retail typologies. For instance, the decline in retail spaces for ‚Professional equipment and materials‘ and ‚Household goods‘ can be seen as part of the functional reorganization of the broader city centre. However, this also means that residents now have fewer local options to access these types of stores. Moreover, the decrease in the number of traditional coffee shops, pastries, and similar spaces, as well as drinking establishments affects the socialization of the local community. It is also significant to note the decreasing number of food retail establishments, either specialized like fishmongers, butchers and others, or non-specialized like grocery stores or mini-markets. This confirms the statements made by some of the interviewees about needing to leave the neighbourhood to access food retail (see section Affordability). On this matter, it must also be stressed that currently, all the existing non-specialized food retail spaces within Alfama are closer to what are usually referred to as convenience stores. Informal conversations during the fieldwork indicated that these establishments, due to their limited variety of choices, are only sought out occasionally. This is largely because there are no larger establishments nearby that residents can easily and quickly access. This observation is corroborated by the interview data, where 68% of the interviewees reported that they do their food shopping in supermarkets located at the neighbourhood boundaries.

This lack of appropriateness is further evidenced by the responses regarding recently closed establishments that have affected their supply capacity. Interviewees provided 38 answers, highlighting establishments with limited presence in the neighbourhood, such as specialized food shops - fishmongers (5 mentions), butchers (1 mention) - and household goods stores (4 mentions). Additionally, they pointed out closures of retail typologies with medium to strong presence in Alfama, such as cafeterias, pastry shops, and similar establishments (7 mentions), non-specialized food shops (6 mentions), and restaurants (2 mentions). This indicates that the mere presence of certain retail typologies does not guarantee they meet the needs of the population under analysis.

Tab. 5. Aspects related with the dimension of availability and accommodation

Do you consider that all the retail/services you need in your day-to-day life exist in the neighbourhood?					
Yes (n=25, 50%)	No (n=24, 48%)	NA (n=1, 2%)			
If no, what type of retail typology is missing?					
Supermarket / Grocery (n=15, 30%)	Banks (n=9, 18%)	Home appliances / haberdashery (diverse) (n=5, 10%)	Post office (n=3, 6%)	Cafes (n=2, 4%)	Shoes stores (n=1, 2%)
Do you remember if any retail store / service existed closer in terms of time/ distance and closed, in the meantime, or started to be located further away?					
Yes (n=27, 54%)		No (n=23, 46%)			
Did you stop using a product in your day-to-day because the service/retail store ceased to exist in the neighbourhood or became located further away and you are unable or have difficulty accessing it?					
Yes (n=5, 10%)	No (n=43, 86%)	NA (n=2, 4%)			

Source: Interviews performed in July 2022

Tab. 6. Composition of the commercial fabric of selected streets from Alfama (1995, 2007, 2023).

Retail typology	1995 n.º	2007 n.º	2023 n.º
Restaurants	55	68	122
Coffee shops, pastries, and similar	36	42	25
Food retail (specialized)	34	18	7
Food retail (non-specialized)	25	15	17
Drinking establishment	23	18	6
Professional equipment and materials	16	7	1
Personal items	14	2	10
Household goods	12	6	4
Culture and leisure	12	15	8
Non-specialized	12	33	56
Health, Hygiene & Wellness	6	4	2
Repairs (diverse)	3	1	0
TOTAL	248	229	258

Source: Authors fieldwork (2023)

5 CONCLUSION

The objective of this research was to analyse the ability of the elderly to access retail facilities in Alfama, a traditional Lisbon neighbourhood under pressure from tourism. For this purpose, we argue that access to commerce should be understood more broadly than the rationale that assumes the mere existence of commercial stores is the only sine qua non condition for the entire population to be able to frequent them. We used Levesque et al. (2013) multidimensional approach to access to argue that the mere existence of a certain commercial mix does not directly imply that the population has access to consumption and, consequently, that their needs are met. This is because access goes beyond leaving one point and arriving at another, encompassing the ability to perceive, seek out, reach, pay for, and engage the consumer. Thus, the transformation of the commercial fabric in Alfama was analysed in the light of the concept of access involving a vulnerable group, the elderly population (65 and over). For this group, barriers to access can be cumulative and intersectional, with a negative effect on medium and long-term social sustainability in Lisbon's central neighbourhoods, justifying the choice of this target group.

Regarding knowledge of the current commercial fabric, although most interviewees indicated awareness, some lacked familiarity due to the frequent turnover and opening of tourist-oriented businesses. However, knowledge of the commercial fabric does not necessarily imply use and/or satisfaction. Most of the interviewees who expressed dissatisfaction with the existing retail offer pointed out that it was

incompatible with their daily needs. This perceived incompatibility was even more pronounced when interviewees considered the needs of other elderly residents, rather than just their own. When analysing the dimensions of approachability and acceptability, an individual first needs to be aware that a service or product exists. However, even with this knowledge, they may choose not to seek it out if they do not find it acceptable. This relationship was verified as most people indicated they were aware of the new commercial fabric. However, more than half said they did not use the newly opened spaces, preferring to visit more traditional establishments instead such as grocery stores, coffee shops, pharmacies, hairdressers and barbershops. Acceptability is linked to the norms, values and culture of a population, conditioning the choice of individuals in the field of consumption, even if the individual fulfils all the other conditions to consume.

The changes that have taken place in the commercial fabric of Alfama, in general, stem from the more structural process of suburbanisation accompanied by commercial decentralisation, with the loss of retail typologies, and, on the other hand, from the more recent process of touristification in Lisbon. So, respectively, if one process has led to a reduction in the historically existing retail offer used by regular elderly residents, such as banks, electrical appliance shops, food retail, the other has implied an increase in commercial typologies aimed at tourism. In July 2023, restaurants and non-specialised retail shops geared towards tourism together accounted for two-thirds of the commercial establishments in the neighbourhood. Meanwhile,

the number of coffee shops, household goods shops, butchers, fishmongers and grocers, for example, has decreased. The functional reorganisation in Alfama suggests a disconnect between the expanding commercial supply and the needs of the resident elderly population. Almost half of the interviewees declared that the current mix does not meet their needs.

Although the effects of commercial transformations do not affect all interviewees in the same way, they have led to barriers in accessing goods and services for part of the elderly population in Alfama. The reduction or closure of certain types of retail has a direct effect on the availability and accommodation dimension, meaning that older people must travel longer distances to reach the goods or services they need. Although almost all of those interviewed said they had not stopped using any specific product or service, indicating that the current retail structure still caters to their needs, 27 out of 50 people indicated that they had followed the relocation of shops to more distant locations. In this regard, food retail was the most common type of retail establishment, followed by bank branches. The increase in travel by the elderly can be translated into a physical barrier, either because the product is no longer offered nearby or because it is cheaper to buy it outside the neighbourhood.

The economic capacity to obtain a good or service is also a factor that restrains access, implying that the individual will stop consuming or will travel greater distances to obtain a given good. Alfama reflects both situations. The elderly population stated that they had to look outside the neighbourhood for retail food, for example, but also that they had stopped attending certain establishments, such as restaurants. However, the catering industry has grown the most in the neighbourhood in recent years, but it has proved inaccessible to some of the elderly residents.

It is believed that the „emptying out“ of some retail typologies in the city centre because of suburbanisation has translated into barriers to access, for example in the dimensions of availability and accommodation. However, the intensification of the touristification, as part of what is known as commercial gentrification, has led to the emergence of multidimensional barriers of access to everyday goods and services for part of the elderly resident population. If, on the one hand, the barriers are not experienced by everyone in the same way, on the other hand, it cannot be ignored that for some elderly people the barriers are multiple.

In this way, the reflection on social sustainability, involving the elderly population and their healthy permanence in a historic Lisbon neighbourhood, must first acknowledge that the elderly people that live in Alfama are unfamiliar with the commercial fabric given the speed of its change; do not seek out new services because they do not recognise their needs in them or do not have the financial capacity to access them; travel longer distances to gain access, also resorting to the help of others. This research reinforces the literature on access and the relevance of its multidimensional understanding in the field of research into the changing commercial fabric.

This research demonstrates that residents possess a certain degree of resilience in the face of changes to the neighbourhood's commercial environment. However, it is also important to stress that the study reveals new challenges emerging in historic tourist districts with ageing populations. In this regard, Alfama appears to be a good example of how the adaptation of the commercial fabric is not driven by

changing consumption habits brought about by an ageing local population, but rather by adaptation to the new audience it now serves - tourists. Thus, residents' ability to adapt becomes particularly significant, given that on the supply side the greater potential for revenue from tourists encourages the commercial fabric to drift away from the local resident population. Thus, this study draws attention to how, in some areas, changes in the commercial landscape are moving in a direction contrary to the differentiated needs of a segment of the population, in this case, the elderly. Regarding its connection to existing research, this study adds to the knowledge about access to commerce. At this level, the study shows that in tourist neighbourhoods like Alfama, difficulties in accessing products and goods can still exist, even in areas where commercial activity is prevalent.

In terms of limitations, the number of interviews conducted was not statistically representative; the objective was rather for them to serve as illustrative examples of a process of retail change, adaptation, and access by a segment of the population, in this case the elderly. In addition, we are of the opinion that the results could portray a more worrying situation regarding access to commerce by the elderly population if the elderly who, due to mobility issues, rarely or never go out on the street had been interviewed. In this sense, in future investigations, an approach focused on this type of individual could contribute to building a more comprehensive overview of the subject. Furthermore, recognizing that there are geographical particularities that distinguish Alfama from other neighbourhoods in Lisbon and from other cities in Portugal and other countries, it would be relevant to replicate this study in other geographical contexts to obtain a broader overview of the multidimensionality of access to commerce in urban environments pressured by tourism.

In terms of policy recommendations, it is imperative that public decision-makers recognise commerce as an activity that, operating in the private sphere, performs functions of public interest, and, as such, should develop measures to stimulate commercial activities that serve the entire population.

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