

(SUMMARY RELEASE)

Does supermarket retailing need regulating?

The big, high-street supermarket retail chains' proliferation and continuing rivalry has become an issue for governments' policy makers and communities alike, and could result in regulations being tightened on them using competition legislation and land-use planning.

This conclusion was arrived at in research carried out by four university researchers on 'Regulating UK Supermarkets: an oral history perspective', published online by History & Policy.

The growth in supermarket retailing over the last five years has been the subject of an investigation, in 2000, by the Competition Commission, which listed a major concern being 'that large out-of-town supermarkets were contributing to the decay of the high street in many towns'. The New Economics Foundation report – 'The Clone Town Britain Survey' (2005) – argued that consumer choice has been reduced by the domination of 'faceless chains' [of supermarkets] on Britain's high streets. The House of Commons select committee 'High Street Britain 2015' report, in 2006, also backed that view: that consumers would lose out if government bodies did not take action, as by then the small shop would probably be extinct.

Opposing those views was the British Retail Consortium who concluded that such reports wanted to 'turn back the clock' and that consumers, by 'voting with their feet', clearly demonstrated their preference for large supermarkets.

The researchers concluded that consideration of the history of the coming of self-service and the supermarket to post-war Britain would benefit policy makers and interested groups when considering the issue of supermarket regulation.

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