

The importance of well planned stores and physical meeting places

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Black Friday and Christmas are approaching—it's the time of year when

many people gather in stores and other physical meeting places. To be able to handle this, it's important to understand why people are attracted to these places and to plan and prepare for this, says researcher Pernille K Andersson at CTF, Service Research Center at Karlstad University. A pandemic doesn't change people's needs or behaviors.

Since the start of the pandemic, people have been urged to use [social distancing](#). Many people have lived completely isolated from their surroundings when working at home, shopping online and avoiding going to the gym. An increasing number of people are feeling lonely and isolated.

Important for people's well-being

"Physical [meeting](#) places such as stores, restaurants and gyms are places where people can shop, eat and exercise. But they're also places where people can meet and socialize—make new contacts, find new friends or love—and are of great importance to people's well-being," says Pernille K Andersson, researcher and senior lecturer in psychology at CTF.

"In general, people are social and look for different ways to socialize with other people. This may be an explanation to why it's so difficult to reduce the spread of infection, People are drawn to physical places, despite restrictions, as the need for human contact is stronger than the fear of being infected or infecting others."

Plan for safe physical meeting places

She means that it's important for retailers, service providers and other actors connected to physical meeting places to have an understanding of this, and to plan and prepare for this.

"The need for human contact will not decrease due to a pandemic, on the contrary. Therefore, it's important to be able to handle physical distancing and increased demands on hygiene and safety so that visitors don't risk being infected or infecting others when visiting stores and other physical meeting places," says Andersson.

Focus on other values

She urges retailers and other actors to consider offering other values to their customers this year, instead of, for example, focusing on attracting customers to stores with reduced prices.

"Give the customers an opportunity to feel that they participating in a [social context](#), even if they aren't in the physical [place](#). Retailers could, for example, let customers see, interact and shop together in a virtual [store](#). In these times, [digital tools](#) are important, it's just a matter of being creative and understanding the customer's needs and trying to adapt services based on them," says Andersson.

Provided by Karlstad University

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