

Whitepaper

The role of tourism

In the monoculturalization of local retail in European city centers



Dit beeld is gegenereerd met Gemini

Foreword

When travelling through European cities, the pattern becomes increasingly familiar. Street after street begins to look the same. The same shops, the same concepts, the same promises. What once expressed local identity and urban distinctiveness is gradually replaced by a predictable urban landscape. We often label this as success: busy streets, growing visitor numbers, economic vitality. But what if that very success is quietly undermining the foundations of our cities?

This white paper is a summary of the study we carried out on behalf of the European Alliance on Balanced Urban Tourism in close collaboration with the EU Urban Agenda Partnership on Sustainable Tourism. The paper starts from a simple yet uncomfortable question: what happens to the city when diversity slowly disappears? Based on a comparative study of 37 European cities and indepth interviews with policymakers, researchers and practitioners, this research shows that monoculture is not an exception, but a structural urban trend. From highly touristic destinations to emerging city centres, functional and retail diversity is declining almost everywhere.

Monoculture rarely appears overnight. It seeps into the city gradually, driven by rising rents, the scale advantages of chains, shifting consumer behaviour and a market logic that rewards efficiency above everything else. Tourism often acts as an accelerator, but it is seldom the sole cause. It is precisely this accumulation of forces that makes monoculturalisation so persistent — and so difficult to reverse.

This white paper does not argue for nostalgia or for freezing cities in time. Diversity is not a romantic ideal; it is a precondition for resilient, liveable and future-proof cities. The question is not whether change is needed, but how we can actively steer towards an urban mix that balances economic vitality with social and cultural value. This research aims to contribute to that conversation — by offering insight, exposing tensions and opening up a necessary debate on the future of European cities.



European cities are becoming more alike which is a threat to their success. This paper explores how monoculture quietly takes hold, why tourism is only part of the story, why urban diversity is not a luxury but a necessity and most important which measures can be taken to ensure a successful future of Europe's city centres.

- Ingrid Ploegmakers, Leading Expert Retail & Leisure at Sweco

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EUR 2,3 trillion
& 30 million jobs
in 2035 (WTTC)



Darya Tryfanava (via Unsplash)

Introduction

Tourism is one of the major economic drivers in Europe. It provides economic growth, employment and social development. European cities, as top tourist destinations in the world, benefit particularly strongly from the sector. However how does the increasing number of visitors impact retail in these cities?

In Europe alone, we have more than 2,9 billion overnight stays in 2024. With the number of tourists continuing to grow, destinations are increasingly experiencing the impacts of (mass) tourism. The fragmented nature of the touristic product causes threats posed by the increase of tourists to have harmful and far-reaching effects, including derivative effects on sectors like local retail.

Tourists cause a monoculture

In European city centers, particularly those with historical significance, there is a growing concern that the influx of visitors affects the local retail environment. Local retail is facing the threat of monoculturalization, where the local environment is moving towards a homogenization of shops and services that cater predominantly to tourists. This phenomenon of monoculturalization is often at the expense of local, artisanal, and iconic businesses. This shift can lead to a loss of cultural identity, diminished quality of life for residents, and harm to the local economy.

EUR 1,8 trillion & 24,5 million jobs the total contribution of travel and tourism to Europe's GDP in 2024 (World Trade & Tourism Council (WTTC))

Importance of local shop diversity

Protecting and supporting local retail is crucial for preserving the cultural identity and unique character of city centers. These businesses often reflect the history, traditions, and craftsmanship of the area, fostering a strong sense of place and community. Moreover, supporting local retail contributes to a more diverse and resilient economy, reducing dependence on mass tourism and promoting sustainable growth. By strengthening shop diversity, cities can create vibrant destinations that attract visitors as well as strengthen social bonds, and provide stable employment opportunities for residents.

Focus and methodology of the survey

This paper identifies challenges and potential solutions related to monoculturalization caused by tourism and establishes a shared approach preventing monoculturalization across all participating EuroCities' members. The study is based on the following research methodology:

- Online questionnaire under the Eurocities network and beyond. 37 cities from 18 different countries completed the survey.
- Online interviews with 11 selected cities to learn more in detail about monoculturalization. Besides 9 cities that are dealing with a monoculturalization, 2 shadow cities were spoken.
- Analyses of general data and reports and information on the selected 9 cities that cope with monoculturalization.
- Personal interviews and two brainstorm sessions with monoculturalization experts.
- Several sessions with a project group comprised of representatives of the EU Alliance on Balanced Urban Tourism and the EU Urban Agenda Partnership on Sustainable Tourism and Eurocities.

Monoculturalization as a phenomenon

The phenomenon of monoculturalization has remained a largely underexposed research area. Upon analyzing this multi-layered, interconnected phenomenon, the following considerations are in place:

- Abstraction of monoculturalization: the characteristics or extent to which monoculturalization as a phenomenon is prevalent in city centers is not unambiguous. As the concept is relative, the way monoculturalization works, will always depend on the context of the city center. Therefore, finding a common theme throughout the context of various European cities requires a certain level of abstraction of the phenomenon of monoculturalization.
- Non-absolute view on monoculturalization: in line with the above, the study offers insight into expert and policy perspectives within time and budget constraints. The study draws on expert interviews to provide a broad overview of mono-culturalization in each city. Its findings mainly reflect expert opinions rather than a fully objective assessment. Because information is not always centrally available, some local nuances may be missing.
- Non-generalizable results: the results are based on participant perspectives and lack objective metrics. Therefore, they cannot be directly generalized to other cities. Each city's findings should be interpreted within its specific context. However, together, the results reveal a broader pattern showing monoculturalization as a threat to local retail in European city centers.
- Touristification versus monoculturalization of city centers: touristification and monoculturalization are related but distinct concepts. Touristification focuses on catering to tourists and can occur at the level of individual places. Monoculturalization refers to dominance by one cultural group and depends on the wider context. Unlike touristification, monoculturalization is more absolute and less scalable in nature.



Tourism monoculturalization

First benchmark

This research provides a first benchmark on the role of tourism on the monoculturalization of local retail in European city centers. Tourist influx can lead to a homogenization of shops and services catering predominantly to tourists, resulting in adverse effects on local, artisanal, and iconic businesses. This shift can lead to a loss of cultural identity, diminished quality of life for residents, and harm to the local economy.

The growing concern in European city centers for these effects on local retail is not without foundation. The survey shows that a clear pattern in a decline of shop diversity in the last 5 to 10 years is seen throughout cities in Europe. This decline does not necessarily have to be linked to tourism, as even non or less touristic cities deal with decline in shop diversity. It emphasizes the fact that more drivers are at play (see p. 11) and that the role of tourism in influencing shop diversity is more nuanced.

Nevertheless, tourism can act as a catalyst amplifying the effects in some cities more than in others. Many cities who participated in the study see how a continuous flow of tourists has a strong impact on local retail and directly influence the shop diversity negatively. In some cases, this results in touristification or monoculturalization of their retail environment. The form and severity of monoculturalization varies but is generally limited to a few streets within city centers. Certain shared aspects of monoculturalization are more prominent than others (see p. 13) whereas differentiating factors also influence this.

Lastly, cities are facing serious challenges (see p. 17) preventing monoculturalization and protecting local retail. Current EU legislation, especially the EU Services Directive, is focused on free-market system and limits the opportunities for cities to intervene. Cities are therefore implementing a wide variety of measures (see p. 19) within their capabilities to prevent or push back the effects of monoculturalization. Measures to address this phenomenon are critical, as the retail offering for locals will further diminish if these trends continue.



Key takeaways:

- All cities experience decline in shop diversity, regardless of their touristic profile
- Tourism can strongly accelerate these effects, and in some cases lead to monoculturalization
- Spatially monoculturalization tends to be limited to a few streets in the city center
- Extent and form of monoculturalization differs per city, although common patterns appear
- EU Services Directive forms serious obstacle
- Cities attend to resourceful measures to intervene

What is a tourist shop?

Almost all cities struggle with the identification of tourist shops as hard metrics to define tourist-shops are usually not at hand. A relatively intuitive approach is often adopted in the identification process, using certain indicators to help distinguish them. Therefore, between the cities there is little precise commonalities in set definitions, although some general features are often mentioned:

- Types of products
- Language used
- Location & proximity to high foot traffic
- Appearance of the shop
- Type of brands
- Type of customers & numbers of visitors
- Higher pricing & revenue
- Seasonality of opening time

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Partially due to the missing identification metrics, barely any city is measuring or keeping track of tourist shops in a regulatory way. Without a common framework, measuring is not possible. An exception is Venice, which tracks the number of stores as the result of imposed regulations on limiting the opening and transfer of both food and non-food businesses (No. 26/2022) in protected areas.

The largest issue with measuring tourist shops lays within the demarcation: when is a shop primarily catering to tourists or locals. Usually this distinction is a grey area, that can not be easily grasped in a formal definition or measurement. This is exemplified by the notion of touristification shops and services originally aimed at locals. The city of Visby illustrates this particular difficulty:

Many shops are a hybrid between tourist and local "needs and wants" – as local people can also enjoy crafts shops and vintage shops

Louise Hoffman Borgö, World Heritage co-ordinator for Hanseatic town of Visby

Measuring and demarcation

The various cities use the following definition regarding touristification of shops and services:

- Amsterdam: "Forms of retail that, according to their advertising, presentation, assortment, and/or operations, are exclusively geared towards daytrippers and/or tourists."
- Bruges: "Businesses that, through a combination of one or more of the following characteristics, target daytrippers and/or tourists, specifically their advertising, presentation, assortment, operations, design, striking colors, and/or low pricing."
- Split: "Tourist shops are primarily selling souvenirs, postcards, magnets, T-shirts, and locally branded items (e.g., olive oil, lavender products, or wine), usually having signage in multiple languages."
- Šibenik: "By the range of goods such as souvenirs and by operating only in season."
- Ghent: "A shop catering in the need of tourist demand, located in touristic zones, but we did not define it yet specifically for policy purposes."
- Genoa: "The proximity to high foot traffic from tourists is a key indicator. For example, the narrow alleys of the historical center, often host shops targeting visitors with souvenirs, regional products, and crafts."
- Izmir: "does not have a specific regulatory framework to differentiate tourist-oriented shops from other retailers."



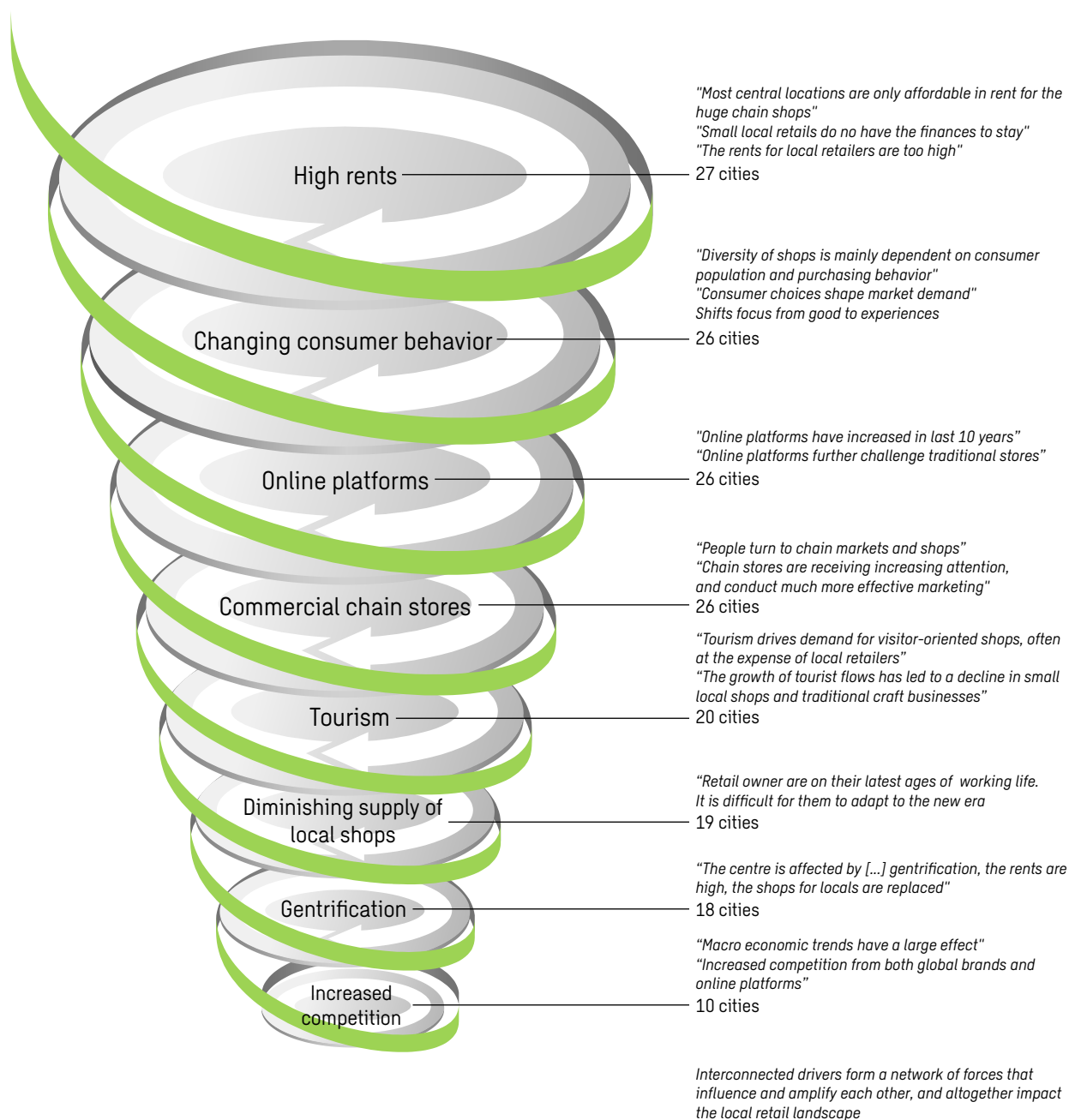
Drivers and trends influencing retail

Retail diversity in European city centers

Retail diversity in Europe is under pressure. Over the past five to ten years on a wide scale European cities have witnessed a decline in shop diversity. This trend is detrimental to the local retail landscape, diminishing the access to a wide variety of goods and services available to consumers, influencing livability and eroding the unique cultural identity of each city. Although the access varies per city, measuring the retail diversity is common practice among European cities for which they use similar definitions. In fostering a diverse retail landscape, most cities consider the role of local retailers to be extremely important.

As shown below, the cities have indicated several drivers (non-exhaustive) to influence retail diversity. Among high rents, consumer behaviour, and online platforms, tourism is named as one of the most influential drivers. Commercial chain stores, diminishing supply of local shops and gentrification are also indicated as influential drivers. To a lesser degree, increased competition, regulations & policies and local investments are mentioned. As the retail environment is very volatile and interconnected, the drivers cannot be isolated. Drivers rather form an interconnected web in which they influence and amplify each other.

Subsequently, tourism cannot be seen as a standalone cause for loss in shop diversity and understanding the other drivers allows it to be placed in a broader context. Tourism however still is a threat for retail diversity. The large influx of tourists as entering the retail environment of a city center as potential consumers inevitably has an impact on the local retail landscape and its diversity. The (very) touristic cities in Europe all have one or more areas characterized by shops and services primarily catering to tourists. Tourism can therefore be seen as an undermining factor for shop diversity.



Similarities in monoculturalization

Whereas the (very) touristic cities in Europe all have one or more areas characterized by shops and services primarily catering to tourists, there is great variation in the degree of monoculturalization; between cities, but also within cities. Being a relative concept, the context of each city shapes the phenomenon differently. Five determiners have been identified which give insight in how monoculturalization may take a different form or be perceived differently from city to city: 1) geographical, 2) definition, 3) cultural, 4) quality, 5) seasonality (see p. 14 and 15).

Nevertheless, general patterns across the European cities in the study emerge (see below). In an attempt to scale the extent of monoculturalization, participants with a high to extreme degree of monoculturalization include Barcelona, Bruges, Dubrovnik, Firenze, Prague, Sibenik, Split and Venice. Generally, monoculturalization is mostly limited to a few streets in the city center. Still, in particular streets or areas, the dominance of tourist-oriented shops can rise to 70% of all retail establishments. In line with that almost all cities indicate that the local tourist economy changes the retail offering. They feel that the continuity of retailers is under threat.

The effect of monoculturalization shows how local retailers either are displaced due to high rents, changing clientele, reduced demand of locals, or need to adjust their offering to the touristic demand. In return, the retail offering generally becomes more oriented on tourists which often goes hand in hand with lower quality retail and higher prices. As a result, rents may continue to rise, but also locals start to avoid (certain parts of) the city center as the offering no longer meets their needs. Cities sometimes see how these interconnected developments power a vicious cycle, in which the effects of monoculturalization fosters the conditions to worsen the effects to problematic proportions. Solutions become a top priority as measures are put in place by cities to intervene.

Aspects most cities share

A. Local retailers are displaced:

Reduced demand from locals and high rents in the city center form difficult circumstances for local stores to survive in the city center, causing local retailers to forcefully quit, move or change their concept.

- In Dubrovnik locals shop outside the city center, which has led to new retail areas outside the Old Town to sprout up to meet this local demand.
- In Florence, as rents in the city center are very high, local retailers A) have to adjust their offerings, tailoring to the touristic demand, or B) have to relocate outside of the city center, where rents are lower.

B. Quality goes down:

Tourists, usually being non-returning customers, generally have lower quality expectations than locals and seek out easy, fast and convenient options such as low quality products, fast food and takeaway.

- Bruges is facing significant challenges due to the increasing number of fast-food outlets, takeaway shops and tourist shops selling low-quality souvenirs, as retailers are responding to the demands of visitors.
- Addressing low-quality shops is more important than fostering a diverse retail landscape in Venice.

C. Prices go up:

As a result of growing visitor demand, shops are able to charge higher prices for their products. In particular for lower-quality goods, the value-for-money ratio and prices are rising more quickly than it would without the increased demand.

- In Dubrovnik there are only two supermarkets left in the city center, which also serve tourists. Due to high demand, these supermarkets drive up their prices.

D. Political agenda:

The public debate about the lack of local offering and the tourist-centric retail landscape has often led to political action, policies or programs. These cities have often already taken measures in an attempt to intervene with monoculturalization, usually part of a larger tourism strategic plan.

- In Ghent, local retailers are expectant for more strategic direction in terms of policy in regard to tourism developments from the city.
- The 'Living city' is a prevalent theme in Visby and the public debate about the effects of tourism on the livability of the city center grows.



8 shared characteristics of monoculturalization

Loss of shop diversity

One of the main characteristics of mono-culturalization is a more one-sided retail offering, causing a decline shop diversity.

33
cities

25
cities

A substantial part of retail is tourist-oriented

Another main principle of touristic monoculture is that the one-sided retail offering is tourist-oriented meaning it caters predominately to tourists and visitors.

Inadequate offering for locals

In most cities the one-sided tourist-oriented retail offering goes hand in hand with a diminishing offering (retail, services, work opportunities) in the city center for local inhabitants.

25
cities

24
cities

Copy cat behavior

As products and concepts succeed in the tourist market, businesses start to copy each other's merchandise and services, fueling the homo-genization of the retail landscape even more.

Locals avoid the center

As the offering starts to cater mainly to tourists and the offering for locals is diminishing, locals tend to avoid the city center.

23
cities

23
cities

Catering only to visitors

As a substantial part of the retail landscape starts to be tourist-oriented. Businesses start to cater their products and services to visitors only (especially in particular streets).

Touristic reputation

Shops and their one-sided offering leads local inhabitants to perceive particular streets to be touristic in a negative way.

23
cities

21
cities

Economic functioning under pressure

With a heavy reliance and pressure from tourism, one of the aspects of monoculturalization elicits is that the general economic functioning is under pressure due to tourism.

Dissimilarities in monoculturalization

Although (dis)similarities can be derived in the research, it is important to note that monoculturalization is largely a relative concept. Meaning that monoculturalization is shaped to a great extent through the eye of the beholder and the context of each city center. Therefore, the concept is not unambiguous: it is not always clearcut and consistent.

Nevertheless, among the participating cities, certain determining factors can be identified which largely influence how a touristic monoculture is perceived. These five determiners, explained below, illustrate how monoculturalization might take different forms and differ in severity. This may portray differences between cities as well as dissimilarities in monoculturalization within the same city.

1

Geographical determiner

The geographical scale on which monoculturalization is examined is highly determinant for the manner in which the issues are perceived. This scale can be a single street, a zone or particular areas in the city center, or even the whole city center. This has several implications:

1. Monoculturalization may be concentrated in specific areas or streets (like Bruges) or be an issue for the whole historic city center (like Dubrovnik).
2. The one-sided tourist-oriented retail offering may seem like an enormous issue on a local street level, whereas there are no issues for a city center as a whole.
3. Two similar situations of monoculturalization in city centers may be experienced completely different due to the scale of the city(center). Consider for example the same amount of tourist shops in both large metropolis Paris or in small historic city center of Visby.

2

Definition determiner

Not every city defines (tourist-oriented) retail the same way. There may be significant differences in the legal or juristic definition between countries. This may lead to the same cheese-shop being considered part of the touristic monoculture in Amsterdam, whereas it may not be an issue in Oostende. Another example could be Bruges which classifies takeaway as retail, whereas national law in Italy only distinguishes retail in food and non-food.

3

Cultural determiner

The cultural differences between countries play a determining factor in the perception which shops are considered to be tourist-oriented. For example, whether a city attracts a lot of domestic visitors or international tourists makes large difference. Usually retail in domestic destinations is perceived to be less touristic, as the original offerings for locals can also cater to domestic tourists. Think of the retailers that sell products native to the country such as typical food or books in the domestic language.

While destinations receiving a lot of international visitors will lead to some retailers making (necessary) changes to meet the demand of foreign customers. People generally enjoy familiar products and services they are used to. Changes could involve therefore introducing culturally exotic products or adding foreign languages. Typically, these retailers would be perceived more touristic than retail catering to domestic tourists, even when certain culturally exotic retailers are more often visited by locals.

4

Quality determiner

Within the same city it is not always clear which shop is perceived to be catering to tourists, and which is not. In this, the (perceived) quality of the store and price of the products can play a determining role. Although largely subjective, it is often that when the quality of the products and store are (perceived) low, it is more frequently labelled as an undesired tourist shop. When the tourist shop offers high quality products, it is often thought of as a non-harmful addition to the retail landscape. This always includes a personal, subjective factor in which someone's perception is shaped. Moreover, this inability to use quality as an instrument and evaluate shops objectively has been mentioned as a challenge by several cities (e.g. Ghent, Bruges, Firenze).

5

Seasonality determiner

Whether a city is known to have strong touristic seasonality patterns can also be a determining factor in how monoculturalization takes form. This has mainly to do the fact that, in year-round destinations, tourists alone can form a steady and reliable source of customers for retailers, making local residents subordinate clientele. In contrary, retailers in seasonal destinations depend to a greater extent on local customers as tourists number dry up in the off-season. Hence, retailers will be focused more on also catering to local inhabitants to ensure a steady income. Evidently this works two ways, as the influx of tourists can also help to sustain certain level of retail and services in the city.



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Challenges cities face with monoculturalization

1 Economic and short-term interests at the destination conflict with the long-term visions of governments:

"Local businesses have no motivation to continue fighting to guarantee their presence in the major tourist spots and that they find a faster economic benefit in tourist shops."

"Landlords of retail properties do not cooperate."

"Retailers do not want to organize and adapt to new ways of doing business, space owners rent space exclusively based on the criterion of a better price."

2 The principle of free trade is not always desirable; some governments would prefer to exert more control:

"While market liberalization encourages supply, it has transformed historic centers into tourist traps filled with visitor-oriented shops."

"It is not possible to prohibit certain kinds of undesirable shops due to freedom of trade or to intervene with the high rents private owners ask for their units."

3 Difficulty in operationalizing and evaluating shop quality:

"Quality cannot be used as an instrument for assessment, as no typologies or frameworks exist to measure this."

4 Misalignment between EU, national, regional legislation and the municipality's priorities:

"There is a desire to differentiate between the historic center and the rest of the city, balancing free market dynamics with the need to avoid monoculture in retail, but this is restricted by EU service directive."

"Policy can not be enforced due to EU Services Directive."

5 Governments struggle with limited resources:

"The cost of the resources needed to combat monoculturization is a challenge."

"Regulatory enforcement tends to lag behind actual developments"

"The legislative process is slow."

6 Traditional shops are closing down with no successor interested in taking over the store:

"Despite municipal financial support, it's challenging to attract local entrepreneurs to occupy vacant shops."

"It is difficult to motivate new entrepreneurs for running local shops as it has become less profitable and desirable jobs to have in a changing retail landscape."

7 Ever-rising number of tourists:

"Balancing the needs of residents, tourists, and businesses requires a thoughtful, multi-faceted approach that prioritizes local culture while also acknowledging the economic importance of tourism."

"There is a lack of alternative markets besides tourism where local people can build businesses."





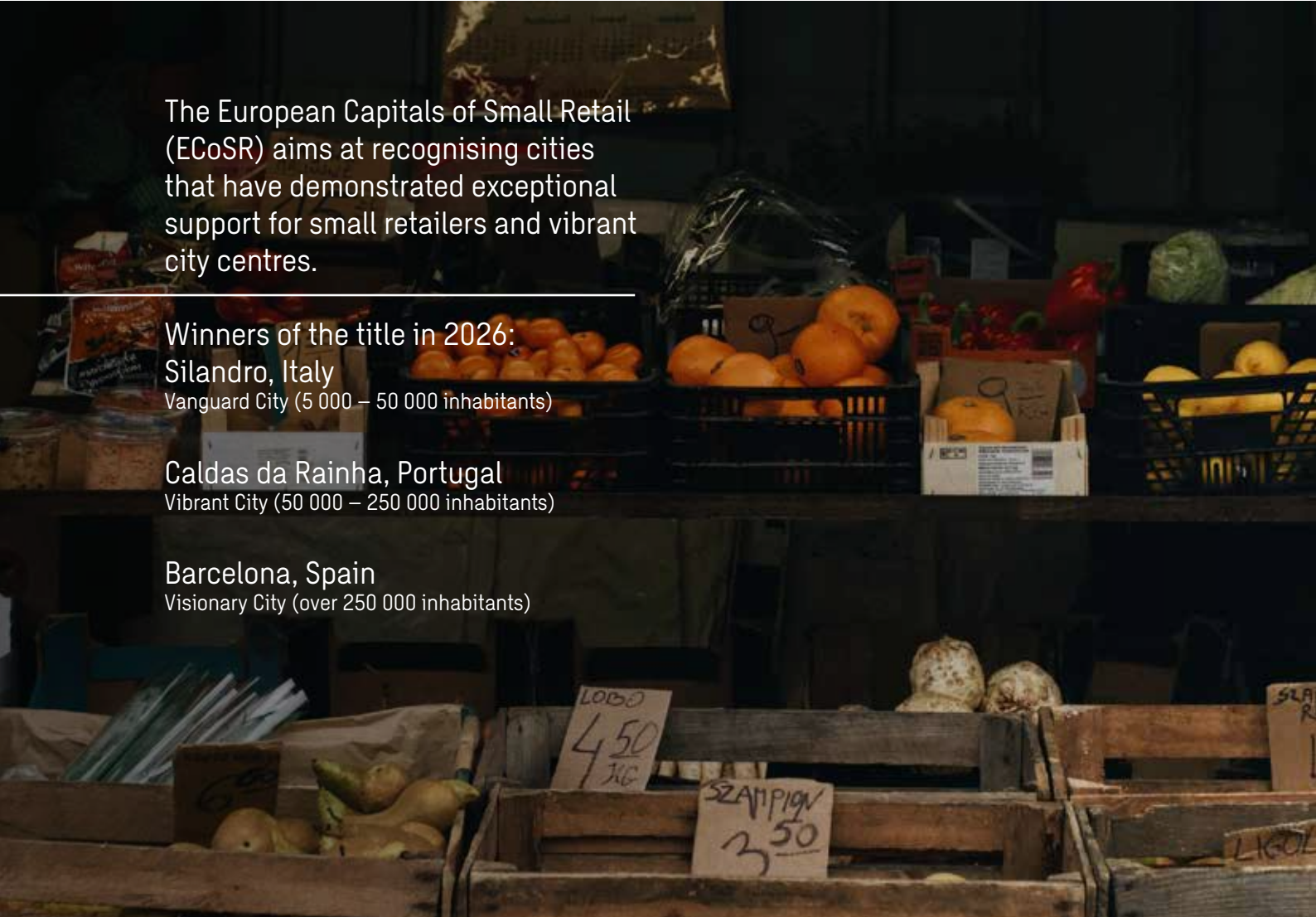
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Measures to combat monoculturalization

In the process of implementing measures to intervene with monoculturalization, cities run into common challenges that prevent successful mitigation of the impact of tourism on local retail. Apart of the everrising number of tourists, these include the conflict of interests in the city, limited resources, transitional rights, online shopping, quality assessment, and the end of the line for local businesses. However, the most cities feel that the biggest challenge is presented by current EU legislation, specifically the EU Service Directive. It subjects local governments to the vagaries of the free-market system without adequate instruments to intervene, therefore misaligning with the municipality's priorities to govern the retail landscape.

In essence, local governments have very little room to act effectively. Within their capabilities a wide variety of measures is therefore applied, with varying degrees of success. Displayed on the right, the measures used depend heavily on the context of the city and vary strongly in frequency, form and effectiveness. The quadrant model provides structure and insights on commonalities within measures along two delimitators, 1) stimulatory vs. regulatory measures, and 2) 'prior to the shop's establishment' vs. 'while the shop is established'. With these delimitators measures are categorized in encouragement, incentive, determining and control measures.

In general, the regulatory measures are more effective than stimulatory measures. However, they also require more manpower or financial resources to enforce, which makes stimulatory measures more efficient in terms of resource use. A selection of effective (less efficient) measures include B2B collaborations, peer approvals, sustainable tourist strategies (including managing day visitors), university collaboration and refurbishing facades, ingrowth entrée rents, annual financial support and regulations based on the UNESCO framework.

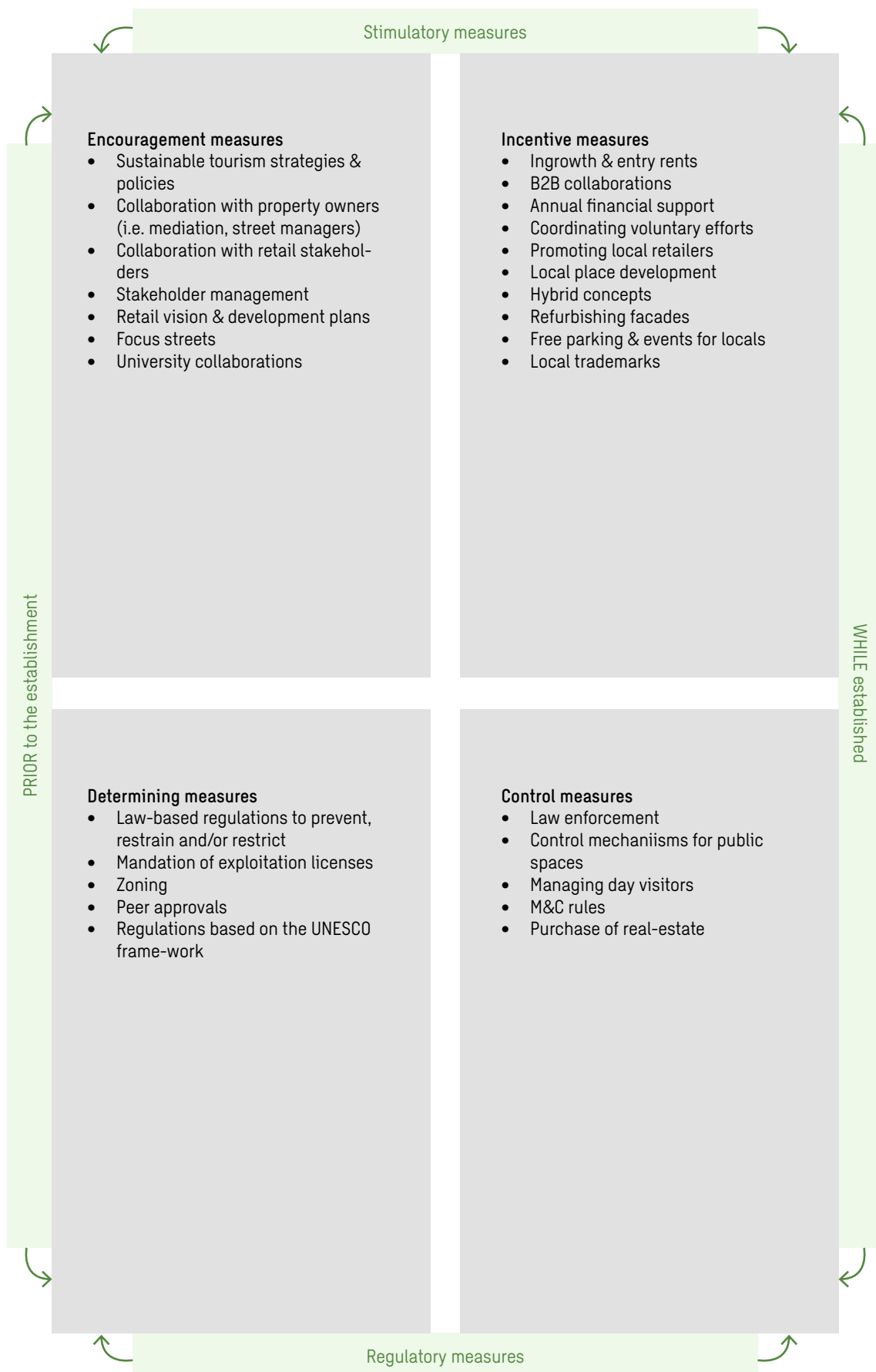


The European Capitals of Small Retail (ECoSr) aims at recognising cities that have demonstrated exceptional support for small retailers and vibrant city centres.

Winners of the title in 2026:
Silandro, Italy
Vanguard City (5 000 – 50 000 inhabitants)

Caldas da Rainha, Portugal
Vibrant City (50 000 – 250 000 inhabitants)

Barcelona, Spain
Visionary City (over 250 000 inhabitants)



Case studies from Europe

Monoculturalization comes in multiple forms and severity, and each city has their own approach in preventing or tackling the impacts.

In the following pages we present the best practices in that we have seen in the case study cities. These demonstrate how effective measures can be taken to tackle the challenges posed by monoculturalization as well as to stimulate local retail diversity. These measures are often combined together and include policies, strategic collaborations, city planning, zoning, legal and UNESCO frameworks, regulations and visitor management.

Encouragement measures

- 1 Multi-disciplinary stakeholder approach to keep close ties, Ghent (BE)
- 2 Tourism strategy and strategic action plan to encourage local retail continuation, Gijón (ES)
- 3 City-management principles to strengthen the urban environment in Kiel (DE)

Incentive measures

- 4 Subsidizing, mediation platform and pop-up displays in Bruges (BE)
- 5 Public education campaigns and free language courses, Gaziantep (TK)
- 6 Livability and local identity through local place development in Visby (SE)

Determining measures

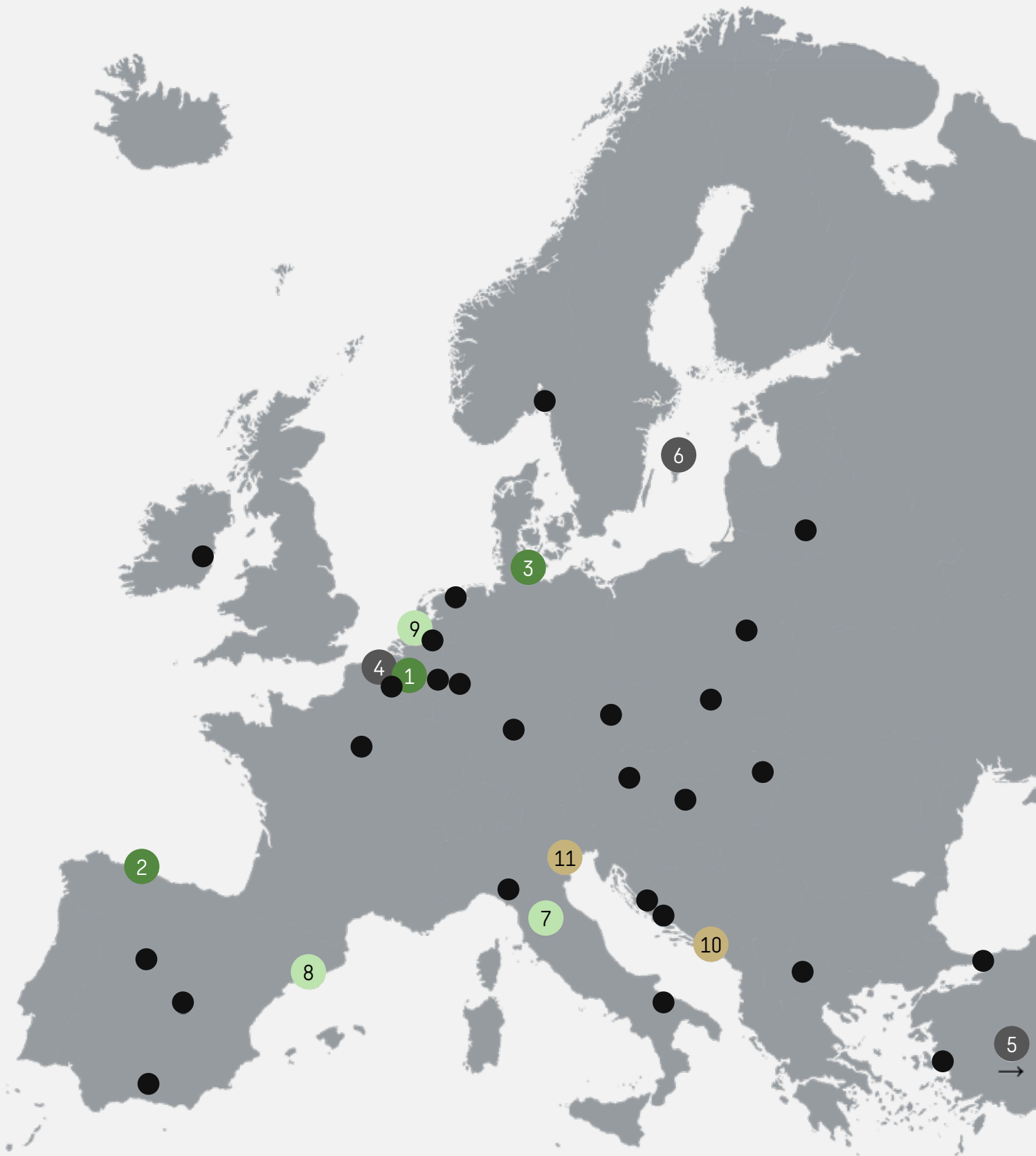
- 7 UNESCO World Heritage Framework to block new F&B establishments, Firenze (IT)
- 8 Urban planning tools and action plans in highflow areas, Barcelona (ES)
- 9 Regulatory measures & exploitation licences preventing new tourist shops, Amsterdam (NL)

Control measures

- 10 Repopulating the Old Town and control mechanisms in the public space, Dubrovnik (HR)
- 11 Access fee, zoning and shop regulations & aesthetics in Venice (IT)

Other Cities

- Cities that only participated in the online questionnaire.



1 Multi-disciplinary stakeholder approach to keep close ties, Ghent (BE)

Ghent's approach is rooted in cross-sector coordination rather than hard restrictions. Its retail, nightlife, culinary and tourism stakeholders form a dense collaborative ecosystem that monitors trends, shares information and strengthens local retail resilience. While EU law prevents Ghent from enforcing some retail visions, its policy work guides decisions and helps align local actors around protecting shop diversity. The city channels funding through its local DMO to support projects, promotion and direct assistance to local retailers. Ghent is highly active in European networks, particularly the European Capital of Local Retail initiative, advocating for a shift in EU policy that would give cities stronger tools against monoculturalization. This multilevel advocacy is itself a strategic measure, aimed at eventually securing the regulatory authority needed to protect local commerce.

At street level, Ghent uses its close-knit networks to anticipate retail displacement, intervene early through communication and support, and encourage shops to adopt visitor-oriented strategies without abandoning their local base. While its measures cannot restrict tourist shops outright, they work to slow down homogenization by keeping local businesses competitive and well-connected.



2 Tourism strategy and strategic action plan for local retail continuation, Gijón (ES)

Gijón focuses on retail continuity and resilience to prevent monoculturalization indirectly. The city operates a succession-mediation program connecting retiring shop owners with younger entrepreneurs, protecting longstanding local businesses from disappearing and being replaced by chains. It offers digitalisation support to help shops compete with online retail, strengthening their long-term viability. Gijón's tourism strategy maintains a strong local DNA, resisting mass-tourism branding that could attract visitor flows large enough to reshape retail. Regulations limit Airbnb growth, helping to maintain stable residential populations that sustain everyday retail offerings. The municipality also profiles standout local shops as attractions in themselves, drawing domestic tourists to businesses that reinforce, rather than distort, the city's authentic identity. While the city does little in the way of restricting tourist shops (because they are few), its measures prevent market forces from pushing the urban core toward tourist-dominated retail in the future. Environmental performance by reconnecting blue-green systems and creating ecological corridors.



3

City-management principles to strengthen the urban environment in Kiel (DE)

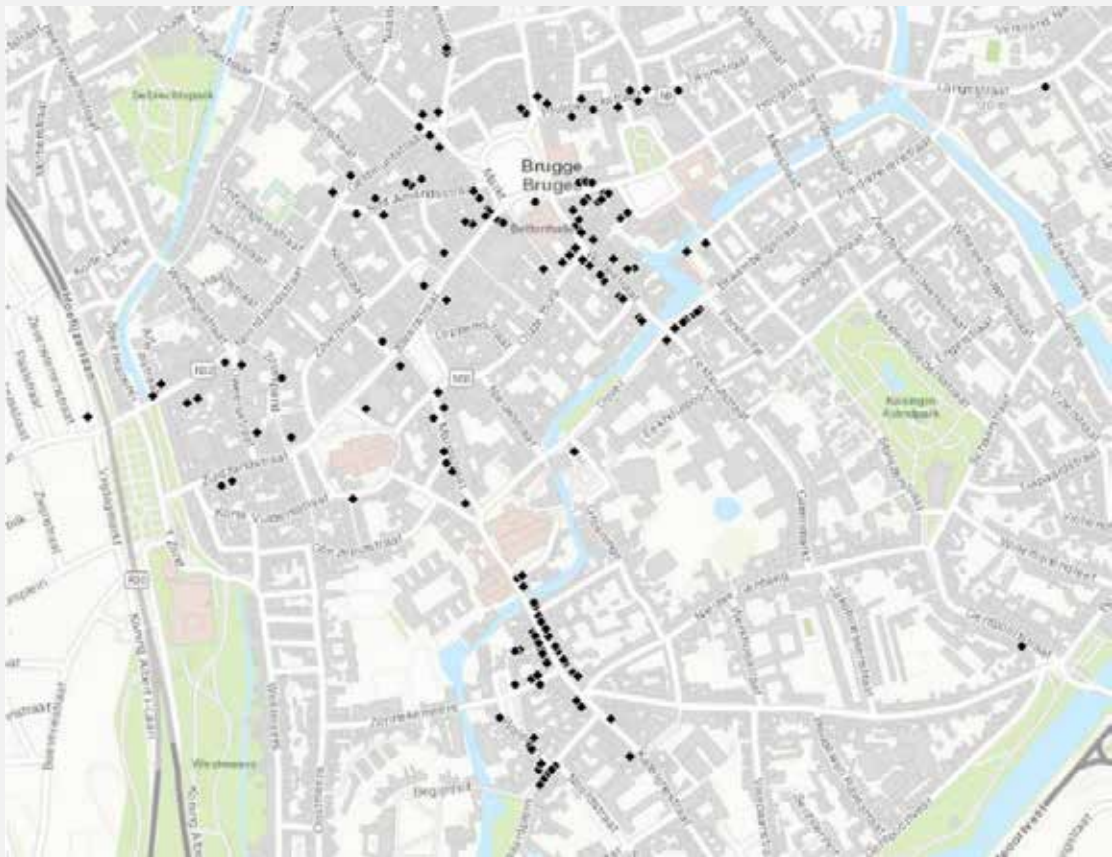
Kiel's strategy focuses on revitalising a centre weakened by structural retail trends. The city applies city-management principles to strengthen the urban environment: redesigning public spaces, reducing car dominance and making the centre more attractive to local shoppers. The redevelopment of the Holstenfleet canal area is a prime example, where better-quality public space generated new local investment. Kiel supports local entrepreneurship through funding competitions that offer temporary rent exemptions, making central locations more accessible to new businesses. To address vacancy and homogenisation risks, Kiel uses strategic rental management, involving outreach to property owners, temporary uses for empty spaces, and curated zone profiling. Placemaking assigns each of six central zones a distinct identity, "urban," "chic," etc., creating structured diversity and attracting shops that complement each area's profile.



4

Subsidizing, mediation platform and pop-up displays in Bruges (BE)

Bruges takes a softer but highly structured approach, relying on guided commercial curation rather than heavy restrictions. The city uses an ambitious City Centre Policy designed to keep the historic core attractive not only to tourists but to residents. Shop diversity is supported through marketing initiatives that elevate authentic producers, exemplified by the Handmade in Bruges label, which boosts visibility and desirability for local artisans competing with low-quality souvenir vendors. The municipality offers subsidies tied to sustainability, accessibility and long-term value creation, prioritising entrepreneurs who strengthen the shopping area rather than dilute it. Vacancies are tackled through additional funding for neighbourhood shops and by repurposing empty spaces. Bruges employs centre managers positioned directly in the retail streets, bridging the municipality and the business community, providing guidance, spotting trends early and intervening when clusters of undesired shops appear. A unique tool is the mediation platform (formerly “Space Tinder”), which links property owners to entrepreneurs looking for suitable premises. Thus steering occupancy toward desirable businesses. Pop-up displays give experimental entrepreneurs a low-risk entry point, preventing homogenisation by allowing new concepts to test viability. The city also uses zoning rules to restrict hospitality in shopping streets while focusing it on particular squares. Because unrestricted tourism leads to fast-food proliferation, Bruges even discourages day-trippers, a bold economic positioning, by making short visits more expensive, aiming to reduce low-value rapid consumption. However, legislation limits Bruges’ ability to prohibit certain shop types, making carefully curated incentives the backbone of its strategy.



5

Public education campaigns and free language courses, Gaziantep (TK)

Gaziantep, though not facing tourist-driven monoculturalization, actively protects its traditional bazaars and market ecosystems through strict heritage regulations that prevent any alteration to building structure, function or appearance in protected areas. Tenants in heritage properties receive rent reductions and discounted water fees, providing economic incentives to maintain long-standing crafts, textiles and gastronomy-oriented retail.



The city is developing a tourism masterplan with Cappadocia University, targeting sustainable commercial evolution rather than touristification. Gaziantep enhances retail quality through public education campaigns, training artisans in communicating about local products and expanding traditional knowledge. It also addresses linguistic barriers by offering free language courses to shopkeepers, ensuring that local shops can serve tourists without shifting their product focus.

6

Livability and local identity through local place development in Visby (SE)

Visby pursues a nuanced strategy focused on livability and local identity. Its newest tourism strategy emphasizes local place development, ensuring that measures serve residents first. The city is exploring the purchase of retail real estate to gain direct control over which businesses occupy key locations, a long-term structural tool.

Visby maintains strong cooperation with real estate owners, heritage councils and citizen initiatives like Eye on Visby, ensuring early detection of negative trends and shared stewardship of the centre. To counteract seasonal closures, Visby implements hybrid concepts such as winter pop-ups, galleries and farm-shop annexes, sustaining vibrancy during low-season months and preserving a balanced offering for locals.

Retail linked to local products, as textiles, crafts, farm goods, is actively encouraged, reinforcing an identity less vulnerable to tourist-only homogenisation. While national law limits tourist taxes and other regulatory measures, Visby compensates through stakeholder-driven governance and continuous monitoring of islanders' perceptions of tourism's impact.



7

UNESCO World Heritage Framework to block new F&B establishments, Firenze (IT)

Firenze relies more heavily than most European cities on heritage-based regulatory power. The UNESCO World Heritage framework is used to block new food & beverage establishments within the core zone, halting the expansion of tourist-facing eateries that saturate the historic streets. Firenze also designates specific streets with protected commercial identities, such as Ponte Vecchio's jeweller tradition, where only certain legacy retail types may operate.

To preserve its cultural fabric, Firenze supports shops with more than 50 years of history, offering exclusive promotion and tax benefits that help them survive in an environment otherwise dominated by tourist consumption. The city attempts to reset the retail-resident balance by repopulating the historic centre, using stricter regulations on short-term rentals to bring locals back and increase everyday retail demand.

Recognising that UNESCO protections alone are insufficient, Firenze has recently extended heritage-inspired restrictions to streets outside the UNESCO zone, giving it more territory where tourist-oriented retail can be limited.

Nevertheless, national law restricts retail classification to “food” vs “non-food,” preventing Firenze from blocking tourist-focused non-food shops, a major regulatory constraint, but within these limits, the city applies every available tool to maintain authenticity.



8

Urban planning tools and action plans in high flow areas, Barcelona (ES)

Barcelona deploys one of the most comprehensive regulatory systems in Europe to counteract the explosive growth of tourist-oriented retail. The city uses a strict land-use plan that outright bans new tourist shops in designated areas of the historic centre. When a retail space becomes vacant, only non-tourist-related functions are allowed to replace it, effectively shrinking the tourist-shop niche over time. Enforcement is active: inspectors monitor compliance, ensuring that shops do not circumvent regulations through façade-based disguises. The city maintains strong aesthetic rules, rejecting neon lighting and intrusive signage to push retail streets back toward a more dignified, neighbourhood-friendly appearance. Barcelona also tackles disruptive “dark kitchens” by forcing them out of central residential areas and into industrial zones, shielding the street-level commercial mix from distortive effects.

In high-pressure zones, such as the Sagrada Família district, the city implements multi-sector action plans combining mobility management, social cohesion initiatives and retail rebalancing. These plans aim to “cool hot zones” by widening sidewalks, adjusting bus flows, and supporting anchors of local commerce. To reinforce authentic retail, Barcelona invests in financial support for long-standing traditional shops, offering training, event funding and targeted budgets for “high flow areas.” The city also uses temporary mobility redirections during construction to keep local shops accessible — a subtle but important strategy to prevent local businesses from failing and being replaced by tourist shops.



9

Regulatory measures & exploitation licences preventing new tourists shops in Amsterdam (NL)

Amsterdam is working actively to counter the growing mono-culturalization of its city centre, where rising tourism, high property prices and the dominance of tourist-oriented shops increasingly push out local, authentic retailers. To preserve a diverse and livable urban core, the city combines stricter spatial regulation with more direct market interventions. Through targeted zoning plans and licensing requirements, Amsterdam restricts the establishment of new tourist shops and introduces additional screening to prevent low-quality or purely tourist-driven businesses from establishing. At the same time, the municipality takes a more proactive role in the real estate market by purchasing strategic properties, offering subsidised entry rents to give local entrepreneurs a fair starting position, and collaborating closely with area managers and property owners to maintain a balanced mix of shops.

This regulatory framework is supported by focused street-level approaches, where selected areas receive intensified monitoring and enforcement to keep the retail environment varied and accessible to residents. These efforts, however, are challenged by limited legal room under European regulations, transitional rights that allow un-desirable businesses to persist after ownership changes, and the rapid churn of retail concepts that constantly tests policy boundaries. Despite these hurdles, Amsterdam continues to strengthen its grip on the market and nurture voluntary cooperation among local businesses, aiming to safeguard a city centre that remains both economically vibrant and rooted in its local identity.



10

Repopulating the Old Town and control mechanisms in the public space, Dubrovnik (HR)

Dubrovnik confronts one of the most extreme concentrations of tourist shops in Europe, and countermeasures are correspondingly strong. The municipality uses its significant property ownership, around 50% of central properties, to repopulate the Old Town with residents, creating demand for everyday shops and reducing reliance on tourist-only retail. Through these repopulation efforts, the city nurtures a more balanced commercial ecosystem.

Short-term rentals are tightly regulated: neighbour approval is required for rentals in apartment buildings, limiting housing conversion into tourist accommodation and indirectly protecting local-serving retail. The municipality tightly controls public space, especially terraces, under its cultural heritage authority, using these levers to limit expansion of tourist-oriented F&B and commercial spill-outs.

The city offers annual financial support to traditional crafts and local shops, reinforcing non-tourist retail and heritage-based commerce. To reduce overcrowding and the associated demand for fast tourist consumption, Dubrovnik has introduced mandatory time-slot booking for day visitors, which flattens visitor peaks and stabilizes the customer base for diverse shops. Authentic retail is actively encouraged through official marking of genuine shops and crafts, giving locals and visitors a clear alternative to mass-market offerings. The city also collaborates with DURA, an NGO that buys properties specifically to prevent tourist shops from taking over, a rare and powerful anti-monoculturalization instrument.



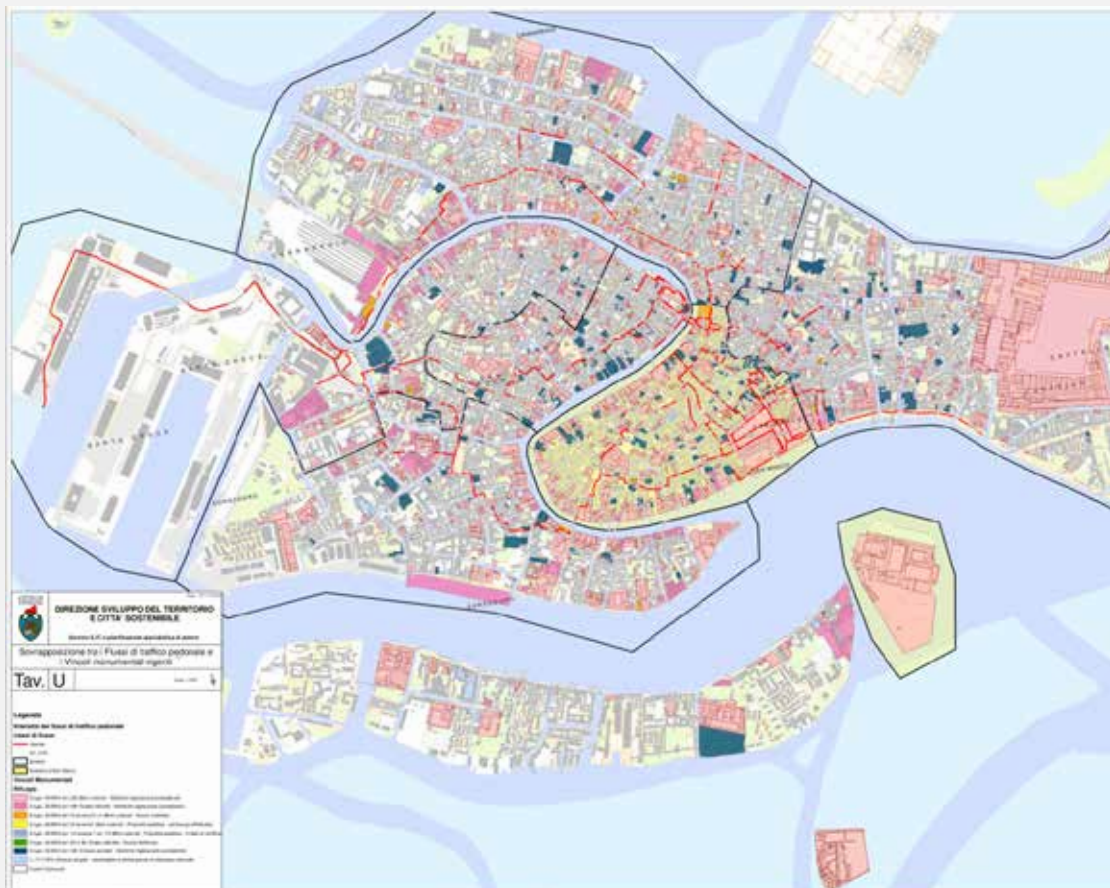
11

Access fee, zoning and shop regulations and aesthetics in Venice (IT)

Venice uses some of the most interventionist tools in Europe. The city establishes protected retail zones via multiple resolutions (34/2018, 26/2022, 13/2025) where new bars, restaurants, takeaways and low-quality souvenir shops are prohibited. Only specific types of businesses, often linked to local production or crafts, may open in these areas. Venice pairs this with an overarching zoning system that restricts the movement and expansion of certain retail functions, preventing tourist shops from relocating into higher-profile areas.

Aesthetic regulation plays a major role: storefronts must adhere to strict design rules that prioritise harmony with heritage architecture, raising the quality threshold and limiting the viability of low-end tourism retailers. To reduce visitor pressure, Venice introduced an access fee for day visitors, adjusting pricing to influence arrival patterns. The city also bans new hotels in the historic centre and explores regulations for private rentals, attempting to rebalance residential presence.

Because free-market principles limit local regulatory autonomy, Venice strategically uses its UNESCO status to justify stronger interventions, often with measurable success: while the number of new shops remains constant, their quality has increased due to the restrictive filter. Collaboration with the University of Venice helps refine storefront improvements and uplift the city's commercial environment.



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As a junior project manager, she works on a major urban transformation project in the city center of Eindhoven, focusing on sustainable development and community engagement. Daphne has conducted extensive research on the touristification of shopping streets in Amsterdam, which was the subject of her thesis. Additionally, contributions to writing the strategic tourism plan for the Alkmaar region with one of her colleagues demonstrate her commitment to enhancing local tourism strategies.



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