

Expert group

Future Retail City Centre

Success factors for collective interventions
in town and city centres



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More information about the expert group:

www.shoppingtomorrow.nl/Future_Retail_City_Center_2017

To download the original Future Retail City Centre report:

www.cmihva.link/FutureRetailCityCentre

Preface

2018 has been another challenging year for many town and city centres in the UK. Footfall has fallen for the tenth consecutive year¹ and more big name high street retailers have disappeared. However, the challenges facing the UK High Street are not particularly recent phenomena, nor are they geographically unique. Therefore, the Institute of Place Management jumped at the chance to participate in the Future Retail City Centre project, an initiative from Shopping Tomorrow, a Dutch retail and e-commerce think tank. The combination of retail and place management practitioners from The Netherlands, Belgium and UK, and academics from the Amsterdam University of Applied Sciences and Manchester Metropolitan University has resulted in a comprehensive review of how partnership and collaboration among stakeholders can contribute to the development of strategies to counteract retail decline and reinvent or reinvigorate town and city centres.

The publication of this English translation of a selection of the case studies featured in the original project report comes at a particularly salient time for us in the UK. The Government has just opened a new £675m fund to help transform struggling centres, with an identification that one of elements of successful transformation is collaborative working “across public and private sector organisations including local businesses, driven by strong local leadership.”² This fund will also be supported by a High Streets Task Force that will help local places identify the best course of action and the interventions that are likely to have the most positive impact. The recommendations for the High Streets Task Force include “building a repository of success stories, describing how teams have turned their town centre around. There is of course no one-size-fits-all solution, but a variety stories and case studies can provide inspiration for town centre managers searching the best solution for their centre.”³

This document provides concrete evidence and a framework for the development of the type of partnerships that are now needed to transform town and city centres, as well as a helpful typology of interventions that locations can consider when they are deciding what to invest time, money and other resources into.

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1 SPRINGBOARD (2018) [HTTPS://WWW.SPRING-BOARD.INFO/REPORTS/](https://www.spring-board.info/reports/)

2 MHCLG (2018) [HTTPS://ASSETS.PUBLISHING.SERVICE.GOV.UK/GOVERNMENT/UPLOADS/SYSTEM/UPLOADS/ATTACHMENT_DATA/FILE/767749/FUTURE_HIGH_STREETS_FUND_PROSPECTUS.PDF](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/767749/future_high_streets_fund_prospectus.pdf) P. 8 FUTURE HIGH STREET FUND : CALL FOR PROPOSALS

3 (IBID, P. 10).

Introduction

Shopkeepers, local authorities, real estate owners and other urban stakeholders have realized in recent years that collective action is needed to try to 'future proof' town and city centres. In almost all the major UK town/city centres (and many smaller ones) there are Urban Management Partnerships that use marketing - and other - interventions to increase both consumer spending and the overall attractiveness of the shopping area. Also in neighbouring countries, including the Netherlands, Belgium and Germany, there is a similar awareness of this imperative, coupled with collective interventions to improve the attractiveness and vitality of city centres.

In many town and city centres, however, it is a challenge to create sufficient support for collective initiatives. In addition, the interventions being implemented do not always produce the desired effect. Many partnerships thus wonder which interventions offer the most 'added value' for their town/city centre, and which interventions have the most added value (in the long term) for all the stakeholders within the town/city centre? That is a question that many partnerships in the UK and abroad would like to have answered.

*ShoppingTomorrow's*⁴ expert group *Future Retail City Centre* wants to help Urban Management Partnerships (UMPs) to answer this question by researching international best practice relating to such interventions. This report is the English summary of the results of this research by the international expert group, considering a total of 21 case studies: 12 in the Netherlands, five in Belgium and four in the United Kingdom.

With this report, we want to help UMPs to make well-considered choices in relation to the wide range of possible town centre interventions. In the first part of the report, an action framework is developed consisting of a UMP development model and a typology of possible interventions. The second part of the report is a description of a range of case-studies, aimed at answering the question: 'What can we learn from interventions in the UK and other countries?' For this English translation of the original Dutch report, nine cases were selected, which describe a variety of different types of interventions aimed at 'future-proofing' town and city centres.

⁴ SHOPPINGTOMORROW IS A DUTCH RESEARCH AND NETWORK PLATFORM FOR (E-)COMMERCE PROFESSIONALS. THE PLATFORM EXPLORES, RESEARCHES AND CONTRIBUTES TO THE TRANSFORMATION OF (ONLINE) RETAIL. IT BRINGS TOGETHER VARIOUS EXPERT GROUPS, MADE UP OF RETAIL PROFESSIONALS. EACH YEAR NEW EXPERT GROUPS ARE FORMED AND EACH GROUP DELIVERS AN ANNUAL BLUE-PAPER ON THEIR RESEARCH FINDINGS. THESE BLUE PAPERS ARE COMBINED IN AN EXTENSIVE REPORT ON THE FUTURE OF THE DUTCH RETAIL INDUSTRY. THE RESEARCH PLATFORM WAS INITIATED IN 2013 BY THUISWINKEL.ORG AND IS NOW SUPPORTED BY OVER 20 DUTCH INDUSTRY AND INTEREST ASSOCIATIONS.

Part 1: Action Framework

The UK context: The development of Town Centre Management

Whilst many of the urban management activities that typically fall within the remit of town centre management (TCM) initiatives have long been undertaken by a variety of agencies (typically local public administrations), the first formal town centre manager in the UK was appointed in 1987⁵. Throughout the 1990s, the number of TCM schemes grew (catalysed by the establishment of the Association of Town Centre Management – the ATCM - in 1991), and by 1999 there were approximately 230 TCM schemes in existence⁶. By 2004, it was estimated that this figure had risen to up to 450 schemes⁷, typically organised as a partnership between public and private sector urban stakeholders⁸, and characterised by varying degrees of formality⁹.

However, the voluntary nature of participation in, and funding of, town centre management had resulted in concerns regarding the concept's sustainability in many locations. In response to this, legislation was passed to enable Business Improvement Districts (BIDs) to be introduced. BIDs incorporate a mechanism to impel mandatory participation of stakeholders (i.e. a ballot of eligible businesses to decide whether to set up a BID, and the introduction of a 'levy', comprising a small percentage - usually 1% of businesses rateable value – to be used to fund urban management initiatives¹⁰). The first such vote took place in October 2004 in Kingston on Thames, with the BID becoming operational on 1 January 2005. At the time of writing, there are now approximately 300 BIDs in the UK¹¹, and in addition, TCM schemes continue to exist in many urban centres without BID-type urban management structures.

The development stages of urban management partnerships

In spatial terms, in the research underpinning this report, which has a specific *retail* orientation, we focus on town/city centres and high streets, which we define as follows:

- A *town centre* is the largest shopping area in the urban locale, centrally located and often developed organically over time. In smaller village and town centres, there is a minimum of 50 shops. In larger city centres, there are more than 400 shops.
- A *high street* is located in an urban area and has at least 50 shops. These shopping streets are part of the urban fabric, and in larger towns and cities are often important main arterial roads. Again, they usually have developed organically over time.

5 WELLS, I. (1991) "TOWN CENTRE MANAGEMENT: A FUTURE FOR THE HIGH STREET", GEOGRAPHICAL PAPERS NO.109. READING, UNIVERSITY OF READING.

6 ATCM (1999) *THE DIRECTORY OF MANAGED TOWNS*, LONDON, ATCM.

7 HOLLINS, C. (2004) "W(H)ITHER THE HIGH STREET?" PAPER PRESENTED AT CONTEMPORARY ISSUES IN RETAIL MARKETING CONFERENCE, RETAILING IN TOWN AND CITY CENTRES: CURRENT ISSUES, FUTURE PROSPECTS, MANCHESTER, SEPTEMBER.

8 SEE ATCM, (1997) *DEVELOPING STRUCTURES TO DELIVER TOWN CENTRE MANAGEMENT*, LONDON, ATCM; AND URBED (1997) *TOWN CENTRE PARTNERSHIPS: A SURVEY OF GOOD PRACTICE AND REPORT OF AN ACTION RESEARCH PROJECT*, LONDON, THE STATIONERY OFFICE.

9 SEE WARNABY, G., ALEXANDER, A AND MEDWAY, D. (1998) "TOWN CENTRE MANAGEMENT IN THE UK: A REVIEW, SYNTHESIS AND RESEARCH AGENDA", *INTERNATIONAL REVIEW OF RETAIL, DISTRIBUTION AND CONSUMER RESEARCH*, VOL. 8, NO. 1, PP. 15-31.

10 [HTTP://BRITISHBIDS.INFO/ABOUT-BIDS/WHAT-IS-A-BID/](http://BRITISHBIDS.INFO/ABOUT-BIDS/WHAT-IS-A-BID/)

11 [HTTP://WWW.PLACEMANAGEMENT.ORG/SPECIAL-INTEREST-GROUPS/THE-BID-FOUNDATION-1/ABOUT-BIDS/#BIDS-MAP](http://WWW.PLACEMANAGEMENT.ORG/SPECIAL-INTEREST-GROUPS/THE-BID-FOUNDATION-1/ABOUT-BIDS/#BIDS-MAP)

In this report, we identify the defining characteristics of an Urban Management Partnership (UMP) as follows:

An Urban Management Partnership consists of two or more participants (e.g. retailers, hospitality providers and the municipality) who intend to work together for a protracted period to increase the attractiveness of the shopping area. The partnership focuses on one or more shopping districts in the town/city or on specific sub-centres or street(s) within these shopping areas. The partnership represents a common interest decided by the participants and organizes joint activities that aim to improve the performance of the (participating) stakeholders in the shopping area(s). These activities include marketing activities and services aimed at consumers, management of stakeholders, organization of the collective and representing its interests more widely.

Just like a business organization, a UMP has several stages of development. In total, the expert group of the *Future Retail City Centre* initiative distinguished five phases in the development of UMPs (see figure 1).

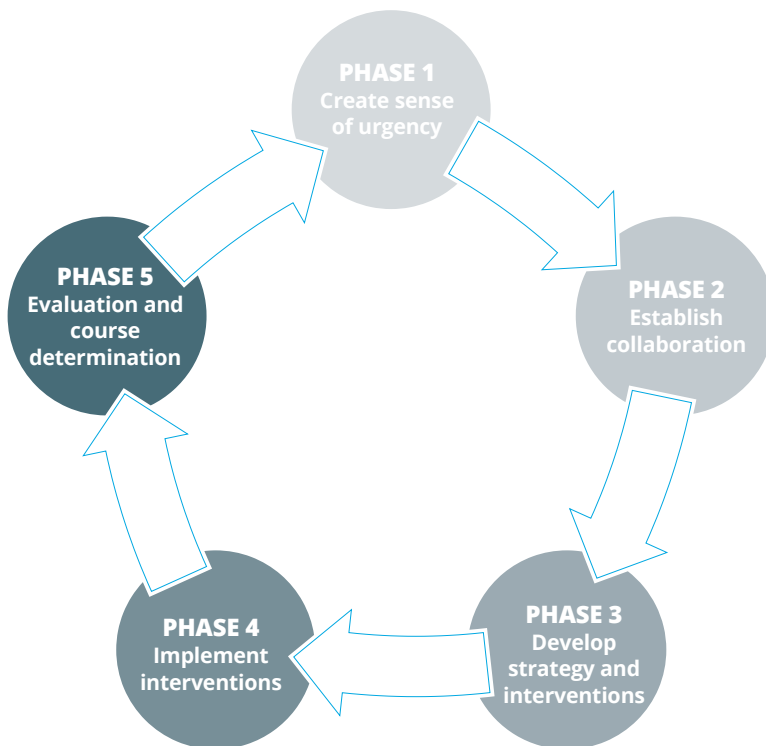


FIGURE 1: Development stages of Urban Management Partnerships

Phase 1 Create sense of urgency

In this phase, one or more retail stakeholders feel a sense of urgency and want to collectively take action to make their town centre more 'future-proof'. This is usually because of a specific reason; for example, a growing number of retail vacancies, increasing crime rates, declining profits. Alternatively, the action can be instigated by a proactive municipality, bank or property owner who wants to stimulate local cooperation. In this phase, the initiating party (or parties) seeks sufficient support from local traders and/or other stakeholders to start forming a partnership. A shared sense of urgency is crucial here. Sometimes it is not possible to create sufficient support and the initiative does not proceed.

Phase 2 Establish collaboration

In this phase, the actual partnership is formed. Often, but not always, a legal entity (for example a foundation, association or limited company) is established and a board is formed. Consideration is also given to how the partnership is financed. The most common forms of financing of UMPs in the UK are via the Business Improvement District (BID) and also TCM schemes (often constituted as public-private partnerships, with varying degrees of formality).

In this phase, the initiative may still fail. In the formation of a BID, for example, a ballot has to occur, and the result has to meet certain criteria. If the criteria are not achieved, the BID cannot start. However, once a successful ballot has occurred, the organizational structure and the financing of the partnership can be finalized, and staff can be recruited; for example, a BID manager, a communications officer, and other support staff etc.

Phase 3 Develop strategy and interventions

After the Urban Management Partnership has been established, the development of a joint (long-term) strategy/vision for the locale is the main focus. Often this process of strategy development has already started in Phase 2. For example, to establish a BID it is necessary to have a detailed business plan with an overview of the planned activities and costs.

On the basis of the strategy, the partnership formulates measurable objectives (targets) and specific interventions it wants to develop. In this phase, thought is also given to the marketing and communication channels to be used. Furthermore, the partnership must determine whether it needs support from external parties in the development and implementation of the planned interventions and whether or not this fits within the anticipated budget. Not every partnership pays sufficient attention to developing a clear and distinctive strategy for their town/city centre. Measurable objectives are not always formulated. This reduces the chance of success of the partnership in the medium term.

Phase 4 Implement interventions

At this stage, the partnership carries out the planned interventions and marketing activities. Some interventions are extensive and complex and weigh heavily on the available resources (for example, the development of a collective town centre loyalty card). An important challenge in this phase is maintaining the continuity of these activities. There are examples of partnerships that, for instance, have developed a WiFi network or an app, but had insufficient budget to (properly) sustain the activities (for example, maintenance costs etc.). For partnerships that use communication channels for visitors, it is important to have a continuous flow of relevant content. In addition to having sufficient resources, the involvement of the stakeholders and other partnership members is also important for the continuity of the activities. If traders and other participating parties no longer (actively) support and promote the activities, then success will most likely be elusive. The partnership must ensure that they keep the participants sufficiently involved during the implementation of the interventions.

Phase 5 Evaluation and course determination

After a certain period of time, usually varying from one to five years, the Urban Management Partnership enters the evaluation phase. In this phase, the board and the participants assess if the objectives of the UMP have been achieved, if interventions have worked well, and if the cooperation among stakeholders was successful. Some organizational forms, such as the BID, have a fixed term, after which a formal extension must be sought. This is usually the moment when the BID is evaluated. In addition, many UMPs account to the participants at least once a year for the activities carried out and the use of resources; for example in an annual General Assembly or Forum.

Partnerships are sometimes not very keen - or find it difficult - to formulate measurable objectives and measurements of effect. Therefore, it is often difficult to prove what the contribution of the various interventions are. How did the partnership increase the attractiveness of the town/city centre? It might be the case that during the evaluation phase, participants no longer see any benefit in continuing the UMP because they feel that too little has been achieved. After the evaluation, partnerships are faced with three choices: (1) continue on the same footing; (2) develop a new strategy and accompanying interventions; or (3) stopping the collaboration.

Improving town centre vitality and attractiveness through collective interventions

How can Urban Management Partnerships improve the attractiveness and vitality of their town centres? Many factors influence this attractiveness and vitality. A recent study¹² by the Institute of Place Management (IPM), based at Manchester Metropolitan University, has identified no less than 201 factors. The study identifies firstly how important a factor is for town centre vitality and viability, and secondly the extent to which a factor is controllable locally. This resulted in a figure with four quadrants (see figure 2). Each factor is placed in one of the four categories. The categories are:

"Forget it" – i.e. those factors with little importance and little control;

"Live with it" - i.e. those factors with importance but little or no control;

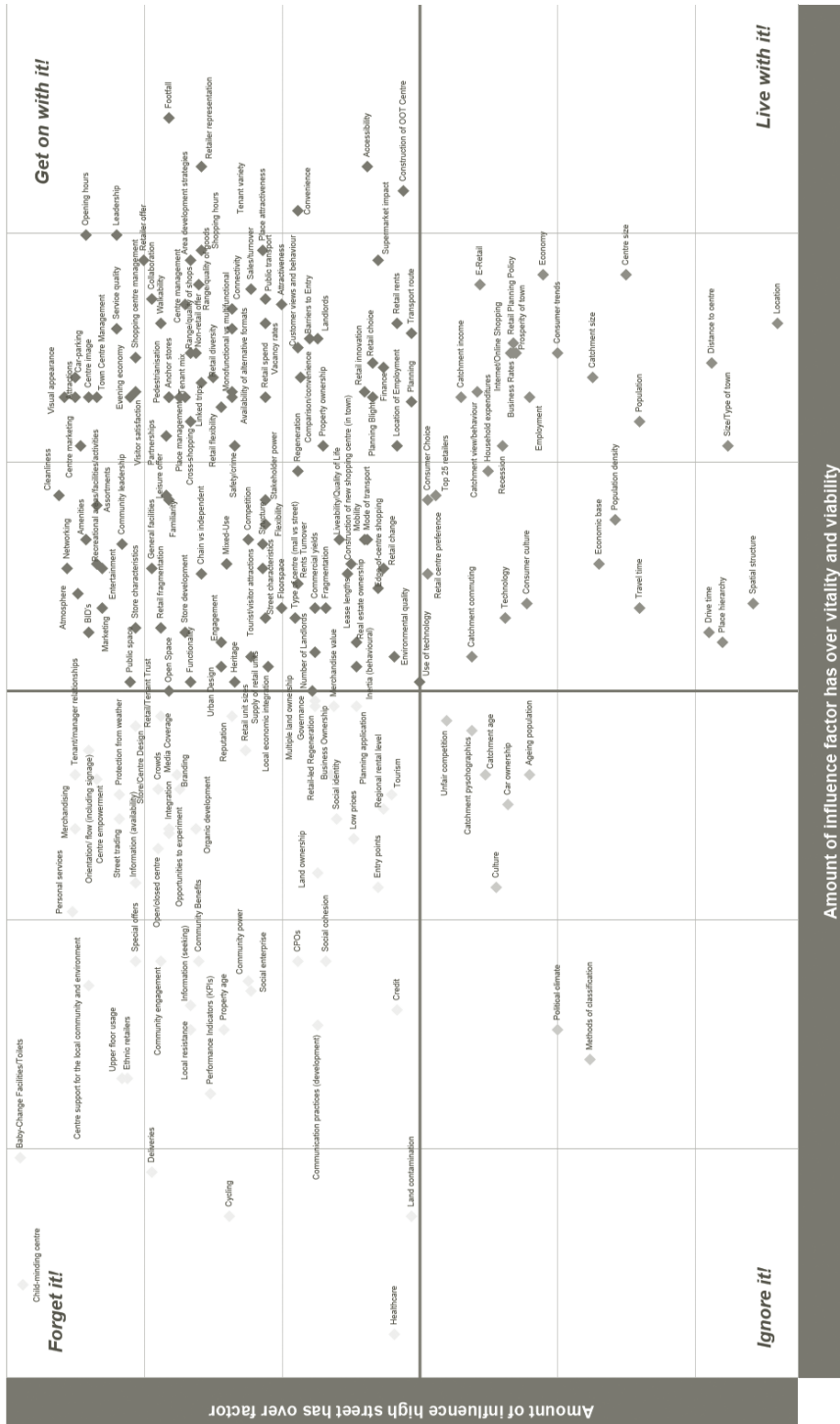
"Not worth it" – i.e. those factors with little importance but great control;

"Get on with it" – i.e. those factors with the greatest importance and control.

The *'Get on with it'* quadrant contains the micro-level factors that UMPs can influence and that have a major effect on the vitality and viability. In this quadrant could be interventions that are based on factors like opening hours (shop hours, evening economy), the appearance and cleanliness of the shopping area, the retail offer, the branch mix, leadership and cooperation and the quality of service (satisfaction of shoppers, image and reputation of the shopping area).

¹² PARKER, C., NTOUNIS, N., QUIN, S. & MILLINGTON, S. (2015). HIGH STREET UK 2020 PROJECT REPORT; IDENTIFYING FACTORS THAT INFLUENCE VITALITY AND VIABILITY. MANCHESTER: INSTITUTE OF PLACE MANAGEMENT, MANCHESTER METROPOLITAN UNIVERSITY.

FIGURE 2: 201 factors affecting vitality and viability



Source: Parker, C., Ntoumis, N., Quin, S. & Millington, S. (2015). High Street UK 2020 Project Report; Identifying factors that influence vitality and viability. Manchester: Institute of Place Management, Manchester Metropolitan University.

The majority of the factors in the 'Get on with it' quadrant relate to the retail structure, retail offer and the physical layout of the town centre. This conclusion is also confirmed by recent Dutch research.¹³ Physical changes, such as improvement of retail offer, atmosphere and friendliness and parking possibilities have the greatest positive effect on the visit frequency and length of stay of town centre visitors. Marketing activities, such as events and digital discount vouchers, can also have a positive influence on visits, although the expected effect is less significant than with physical adjustments in the shopping area. It is therefore important that partnerships that want to improve the attractiveness of their town centre give priority to physical adjustments, followed by marketing activities.

Based on the above research, the *ShoppingTomorrow* expert group has identified seven types of interventions that are applicable to town centres:

1. **Spatial:** e.g. improvement of accessibility, parking facilities, etc.
2. **Policy and legislation:** e.g. regulatory reform, zoning plans, etc.
3. **Branding:** including brand strategy, atmosphere areas, etc.
4. **Organization of the partnership:** e.g. promoting cooperation
5. **Marketing:** including events, loyalty card, smart parking, etc.
6. **Financial:** e.g. rent reduction, location premiums, etc.
7. **Training entrepreneurs:** including improving digital skills of entrepreneurs

Successful interventions based on 21 case studies

The expert group investigated successful interventions in 21 town centres: five Belgian cases, 12 cases in the Netherlands, and four cases based in the United Kingdom (see figure 3). The aim of this expert group was not to provide a complete overview of interventions, but to help partnerships to make well-considered choices in the wide range of possible interventions through inspiring practical examples. The case studies were chosen to cover all stages of the partnership development model (see figure 4) and the seven types of interventions (see table 1).

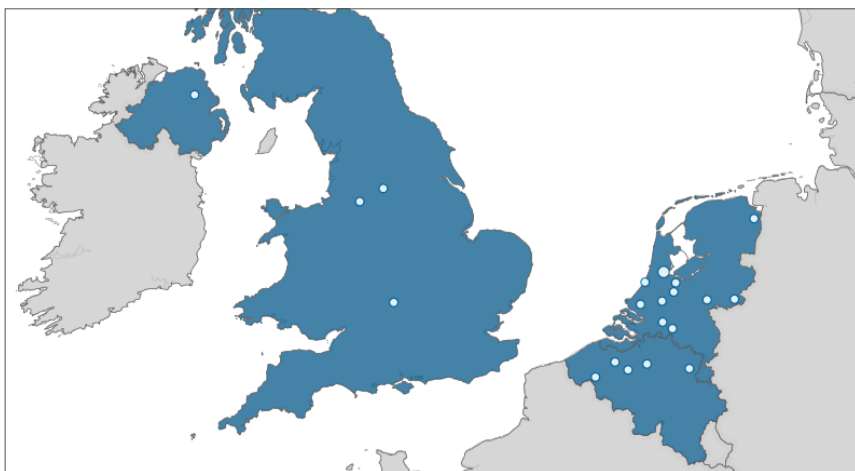


FIGURE 3: 21 case studies from Belgium, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom

13 RISSELADA, A.H., HAGEN, D., WELTEVREDEN, J.W.J., ATZEMA, O.A.L.C., SPIERINGS, B., JANSSEN J.-W.H. & GHAUS, F. (2018). HET VERBONDEN WINKELGEBIED. AMSTERDAM: HOGESCHOOL VAN AMSTERDAM.

Looking at the 21 case studies, many partnerships appear to be in several stages simultaneously (see figure 4). For example, there are UMPs that carry out interventions (phase 4) but are simultaneously developing other interventions (phase 3). These development stages should not be seen as a rigid model in which a partnership can only progress to the next phase once an earlier phase has been completed. The development of a UMP is a continuous process in which a number of milestones can be distinguished that are described in this development stage model. The model gives partnerships some structure and concrete tools by helping to answer questions such as: in what phase are we approximately, and what should we pay attention to at this stage?

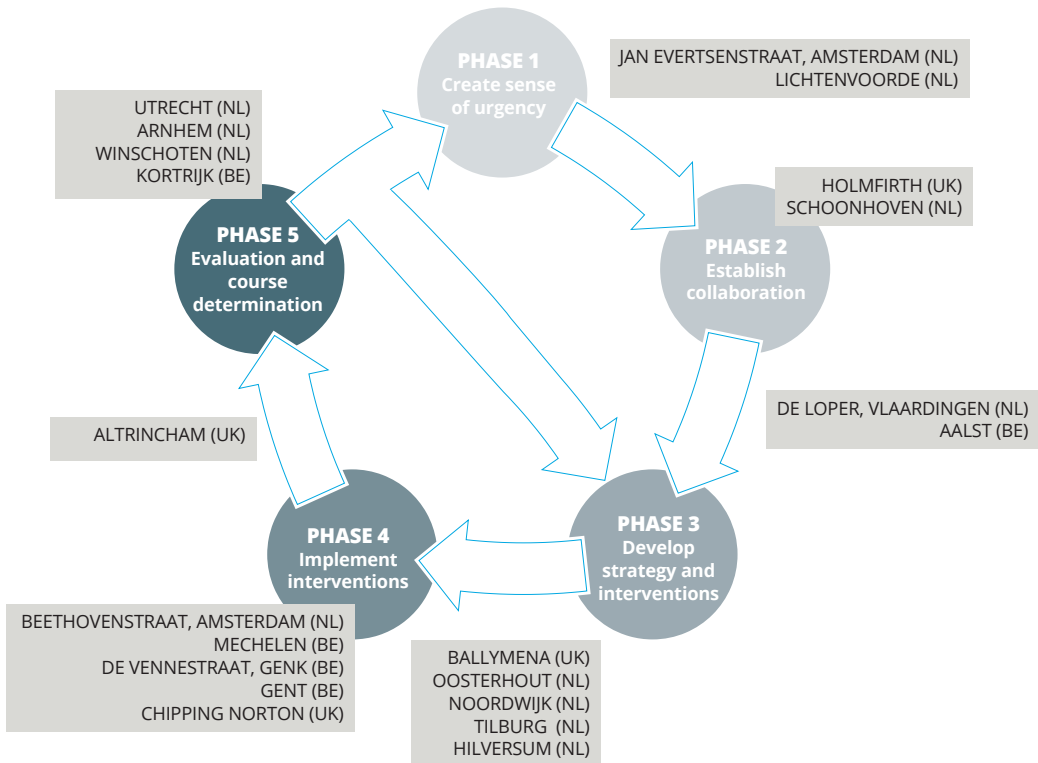


FIGURE 4: Development stages of Urban Management Partnerships in the 21 case studies

The 21 case studies describe a wide range of types of interventions. A large majority of the 21 UMPs undertake several types of interventions (table 1). The number of different interventions that a partnership undertakes depends on the development phase in which it finds itself.

TABLE 1: Overview of the types of interventions undertaken by the 21 UMPs from Belgium (BE), the Netherlands (NL) and the United Kingdom (UK)



Process, network and organization activities: this type of intervention is applied in 12 of the case studies. Jan Evertsenstraat, Amsterdam / Ballymena / Lichtenvoorde / Holmfirth / Schoonhoven / Winkelcentrum de Loper, Vlaardingen / Aalst / Oosterhout / Tilburg / Beethovenstraat, Amsterdam / Chipping Norton / Altrincham



Branding and brand positioning: this type of intervention is applied in 5 of the case studies.
Tilburg / Beethovenstraat, Amsterdam / Gent / Altrincham / Utrecht / Aalst



Financial incentives: this type of intervention is applied in 4 of the case studies.
Aalst / Kortrijk / Mechelen/ Winschoten



Legal and policy interventions: this type of intervention is applied in 5 of the case studies.
Oosterhout / Hilversum / Mechelen / Winschoten / Kortrijk



(Online) marketing: this type of intervention is applied in 12 of the case studies.
Schoonhoven / Aalst / Tilburg / Hilversum / Beethovenstraat / Mechelen / De Vennestraat, Genk / Utrecht / Arnhem / Winschoten / Gent / Chipping Norton



Spatial interventions: this type of intervention is applied in 7 of the case studies.
Mechelen / De Vennestraat, Genk / Gent / Altrincham / Utrecht / Arnhem / Winschoten



Stimulating innovative capacity of entrepreneurs: this type of intervention is applied in 4 of the case studies.
Noordwijk/ De Vennestraat, Genk / Gent / Chipping Norton

In the remainder of this report, nine of the 21 original cases are described in detail. A brief description of the town/city centre and the partnership is first given, followed by an explanation of the process and the results of a maximum of three specific interventions. Each case description ends with some concluding remarks.

Part 2: Case descriptions

HOLMFIRTH TOWN CENTRE (United Kingdom)

Experts: Margaret Dale and Gary Warnaby

THE PARTNERSHIP IS IN PHASE 2: ESTABLISH COLLABORATION

Holmfirth Town Centre

Holmfirth (part of the Metropolitan Borough of Kirklees, and administered by Kirklees Council) is a small town located roughly equidistant between the cities of Manchester, Leeds and Sheffield. With around 170 retailers and food & hospitality businesses, the town centre of Holmfirth is the most important shopping location for the 27,000 inhabitants of the Holme Valley, and also caters for visitors from North of England and further afield. The majority of the stores are independently owned, giving the town centre its characteristic, 'quirky' feel. Holmfirth town centre receives about 17,000 to 20,000 weekly visitors. The retail vacancy level is currently around 2%, which is far below the national average. Holmfirth is known as the location for the long-running and very popular BBC TV comedy series 'Last of the Summer Wine', making the town popular with fans, who visit in large numbers. The region is also known as a paradise for cycling fanatics. With its characteristic town centre, good cafés and independent shops and outdoor sports facilities, Holmfirth is in a good position to increase its appeal for tourists. In recent years, however, the local and regional authorities have paid little attention to strengthening the vitality and liveliness of the town.



Typical independent retail business in Holmfirth

Despite having no formal resource, HVVN maintains a newsletter, website and Facebook page. All communication is done via a mailing list; members receive an e-mail when matters of interest occur in the community. Meetings are also organized on an ad hoc basis.

Holme Valley Vision Network (HVVN)

A 'Keep Holmfirth Special' partnership started in 2009 in response to plans by the supermarket retailer Tesco to build a large superstore on the outskirts of the town. The partnership aimed to be more than just a protest group and in 2012, the initiators set up the 'Holme Valley Vision Network'. The focus of this network is to protect and promote the town. Its ambition is to make Holme Valley an attractive location for working, living and recreation, to stimulate the development of Holmfirth, and to ensure its vitality and viability.

With the exception of a contribution from a national 'Bringing Big Data to Small Users' (BDSU) project¹⁴ (i.e. funding of £4,683), the partnership does not have any structural finances. It is run on a voluntary basis by around 20 residents and entrepreneurs.

14 THE 'BRINGING BIG TO DATA SMALL USERS' PROJECT IS FUNDED BY INNOVATE UK, AND IS A COLLABORATIVE RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT PROJECT LED BY RETAIL INTELLIGENCE SPECIALISTS, SPRINGBOARD, AND INVOLVING THE INSTITUTE OF PLACE MANAGEMENT, MANCHESTER METROPOLITAN UNIVERSITY, CARDIFF UNIVERSITY, MYKNOWLEDGEMAP, AND OTHER KEY PARTNERS. SEE [HTTP://WWW.PLACEMANAGEMENT.ORG/SPECIAL-INTEREST-GROUPS/MANAGING-PLACES/TOWN-AND-CITY-CENTRES/DOWNTOWNS/TOWN-CENTRE-POLICY-AND-RESEARCH/BDSU/](http://www.placemanagement.org/special-interest-groups/managing-places/town-and-city-centres/downtowns/town-centre-policy-and-research/bdsu/)

Many 'spin-offs' have emerged from the partnership, including Holmfirth Events (www.holmfirthevents.co.uk), which focuses on the online promotion of the town. Since 1993, Holmfirth has had a business association (Holmfirth Enterprise and Development), which also focuses on promotion of the town. However, the number of members is decreasing, and at the start of 2018 the future of this association was in doubt. The Holme Valley Vision Network is the driving force behind various interventions and spin-offs in the town centre, but does not yet have a sustainable structure of collaboration, organizational form or structural funds.



INTERVENTION 1

Process, network and organization activities: establishing a voluntary community

The reason to establish a partnership in the first place was the Tesco plan to open a large superstore on the outskirts of Holmfirth. The organisers of the 'Keep Holmfirth Special' campaign were afraid that the arrival of Tesco would negatively affect the unique character of the town centre, with its relatively large number of independent shopkeepers. They were not against the arrival of a Tesco supermarket *per se*, but against the construction of a superstore on the edge of the town. The partnership was ultimately successful in stopping the Tesco superstore in 2013, after an initial successful protest in 2009.

How did an action group run by twenty volunteers accomplish this? First of all, through factual knowledge, by analyzing and responding to relevant documentation, including a 900-page traffic report into the impact of the proposed development on traffic in the town. In addition, the partnership carried out its own research, in which the claim by Tesco that the arrival of a large superstore would lead to a growth of employment was refuted. Furthermore, the action was supported by local professionals including a PR advisor, thereby allowing the partnership to conduct a successful media campaign that forced Tesco to respond to local concerns. However, the main success factor was faith in its own strength. People who oppose the establishment of local development by a large retail chain often feel that they cannot do anything against the plans of a large corporation. They therefore take no action and do not look critically at the information provided by the company. The initiators of Keep Holmfirth Special did take action and critically read all documentation. Eventually, traffic-based arguments were the decisive factor; the road network around Holmfirth was not equipped for the increased traffic that the new superstore would bring. The partnership made an important contribution to stop the construction of the superstore.

The Holme Valley Vision Network (HVVN), which has grown out of this action group, aims to bring together organizations and individuals concerned with the future of Holmfirth. In the period 2012-2013, the network held three surveys among local adults, adolescents and businesses to find out what they considered to be the most important issues for future of their town. The surveys were conducted by a professional market researcher and funded by local sponsors, including the Holmfirth Enterprise and Development business association. The results of these surveys provided input for local policy plans. The research by HVVN has, for example, led to a major initiative relating to cleaning up the river Holme. In order to structurally maintain and conserve the river, around 50 volunteers founded the River Holme Connections Charity in 2015. In 2016, the fund had a budget of more than £65,000, which funded projects to increase biodiversity in the river and to prevent erosion of the river banks.

In 2014 and 2015, HVVN participated in the national High Street UK 2020 project¹⁵. The aim of this project was to gain more insight into the factors that influence the development of retailing in town centres and high streets, and to develop concrete action plans for the participating urban locations. As part of the project, various workshops were organized for stakeholders in Holmfirth, from which specific plans for interventions were developed. This led to the establishment of the Holmfirth Conservation Group in 2015, which focuses on protecting Holmfirth's cultural heritage. However, various plans for marketing and branding interventions have not (yet) been implemented due to lack of resources.

The partnership also participates in the national BDSU (Bringing Data to Small Users) project, mentioned above, that aims to provide insights into the performance of the town centre based on data on footfall collected via Wi-Fi trackers. This has given insights into what happens at certain times in the town centre. Since the start in 2009, the partnership has grown into a forum that brings interest groups and individual stakeholders from Holmfirth together. The network functions as an important representative body on behalf of the community in its dealings with local government. In this way, it makes a major contribution to discussions about policy plans of the local administration of the area.

To conclude

This case is a good example of how a partnership with little financial resource can make an important contribution to improving the quality of its town centre. By examining the wishes and needs of the community and by acting as a connector between various local stakeholders, new initiatives have been developed to improve the attractiveness and reputation of Holmfirth. The most important lesson that HVVN wants to give to other partnerships is that you do not necessarily need the formal mechanisms of government to get things done in the locale. However, the success of such a partnership is vulnerable and is based to a large degree on the years of dedication (and available time) of an enthusiastic group of volunteers. For large-scale interventions such as town centre marketing campaigns or branding, however, informal partnerships like the HVVN generally do not have sufficient organizational capabilities and structural funding. Furthermore, in a situation where the key individuals have either less time to devote, or may pull out of the initiative entirely, there is a danger that the partnership will become non-operational, or that successful interventions will have little or no follow-up.

MORE INFORMATION

www.holmfirthevents.co.uk

www.facebook.com/HolmfirthEvents

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AALST CITY CENTRE (Belgium)

Experts: Pieter Van Houcke, Thomas Verdoodt, Sofie van Herreweghe and Ruth de Vreese

THE PARTNERSHIP IS IN PHASE 2 AND PHASE 3: ESTABLISH COLLABORATION AND DEVELOP STRATEGY AND INTERVENTIONS.

Aalst city centre

The Flemish municipality of Aalst has more than 84,000 inhabitants. The city centre has approximately 750 retail and hospitality outlets with a combined retail floor space of approximately 59,500 m² and serves a regional catchment area. Around 450 stores and 100 food & hospitality businesses are located in the core shopping area. Between 2008 and 2017, the number of vacant retail premises in the municipality of Aalst doubled to 182, and in 2017, the average vacancy rate in the centre was around 15%.

Urban Management Partnerships in Aalst City Centre

Various partnerships are active in Aalst city centre. Since 2014, cooperation between the municipality and the shopkeepers officially takes place via the Economic Council. This advisory body is the central axis between five thematic sub-councils. The purpose of this 'umbrella' body is to organize consultations, provide advice, represent interests, exchange information and develop actions and initiatives that ensure a healthy and economically viable city. Twenty entrepreneurs are involved in the Trade and Hospitality Sub-Committee, which also includes city centre management of the local government. In addition, since October 2017, entrepreneurs within the city centre have united in a business association called 'District A', enabling cooperation at city level between trade and hospitality businesses. District A has grown organically from the Trade and Hospitality Sub-Committee and in terms of legal form it is a non-profit association.



INTERVENTION 1

Process, network and organization activities: establishing partnership - District A

Until five years ago, there were several shopkeepers' associations within Aalst city centre. These associations functioned mainly at street level. Entrepreneurs could join without the need to pay a fee (usually around 300 euros per year). Consequently, entrepreneurs who were not members benefited from any successes (i.e. the 'free-rider' problem), and not every street had an association, which left some motivated entrepreneurs without any formal means of collaboration (even though they may be willing to get involved in some capacity). In 2014, the city of Aalst (because of the high vacancy rate) decided to bring stakeholders together to try to increase their involvement, for the sake of the future of Aalst city centre. In 2014, the Trade and Hospitality Sub-Committee was created, connecting urban policy makers and local entrepreneurs. Since then, the needs of local businesses are heard at quarterly meetings.

However, not every entrepreneur was aware of the existence of the Trade and Hospitality Sub-Committee. Moreover, a large-scale research project undertaken by the University College Ghent, in which more than 100 entrepreneurs were interviewed, showed that in order to increase the attractiveness of the city centre, cooperation between entrepreneurs should not only take place at neighborhood and street level, but also at a broader spatial scale. Seven traders from the city centre therefore joined forces and decided to set up an initiative for and by entrepreneurs, which functions at the city level: namely, District A. District A started in October 2017. The resulting positive media perceptions, along with the

trendy communication style of District A stimulated many entrepreneurs to be part of this partnership (at the time of writing the initiative has about 250 members). Moreover, the fact that this initiative has been led by seven inspiring local entrepreneurs, with flourishing shops and hospitality businesses, is a distinct advantage, as they act as ambassadors. In the past, the municipality organized events in the city centre, but shopkeepers were not sufficiently involved. Now, the municipality is trying to turn the tables and shopkeepers are being urged, through District A, to carry out activities themselves, while being supported by the city council.

District A focuses on creating experience in the core shopping area of Aalst by organizing events and by promoting Aalst as a shopping city for the region. District A does not have its own structural resources. For each project, District A seeks financing from partner organizations such as the city of Aalst, UNIZO¹⁶ and Horeca Vlaanderen.¹⁷ District A explicitly chose not to ask for extra monetary contributions from its members.

The first results of the collaboration are promising. Both the quality of cooperation between the entrepreneurs and the extent of connections with the local government is good, according to both parties. Alderman of Economics, Katrien Beulens, believes that District A has a lot of potential: "It is good that there are shopping street associations on a very local level, but also that there is now an overarching alliance. There are a lot of cool ideas that can attract people, and that benefit all city centre traders. As a city, for example, we organize Aalst Twinkelt, but we cannot do something like this every week. It is only to be welcomed that so much initiative comes from the merchants themselves."



INTERVENTION 2

Branding and brand positioning combined with financial incentives: Experience the city of Aalst: bAsta!

With the project 'bAsta!' (Experience Aalst) efforts have been made to strengthen the experience value of the city centre for visitors, and to increase its attractiveness for entrepreneurs. The municipality has taken the initiative for bAsta! and, by proactively responding to existing opportunities, aims to reverse negative trends in terms of how the city is perceived by stimulating a branding process for the city centre, encouraging child-friendly hospitality provision, tackling vacancies, and by listening to the concerns of the entrepreneurs within the city.

In February 2017, a process was started which, in consultation with the trade and hospitality industry, sought to identify and then promote the unique character of the shopping provision in the city centre of Aalst. The agency 'CityD' was commissioned to manage the whole process and organize participation sessions. These sessions revealed perceptions of Aalst as a creative shopping city, where satire and humor play an important role. It is important that creativity always originates in a bottom-up manner, and that it runs like a thread through the life of the inhabitants and the city of Aalst. Currently this unique character is translated into a communication strategy aimed at the region. The project coordinator of bAsta! is responsible for this communication strategy, in coordination with the City Marketing and Communication department.

¹⁶ UNIZO IS A BELGIAN NATIONAL BUSINESS ASSOCIATION FOR SMALL AND MEDIUM ENTERPRISES

¹⁷ HORECA VLAANDEREN IS THE FLEMISH SECTOR ASSOCIATION FOR CATERING AND HOSPITALITY BUSINESSES

In late 2017, the municipality also produced a brochure to promote the city to potential entrepreneurs and investors. In addition, the city of Aalst has created four financial incentives for the period 2018-2020 to stimulate living above shops in the city centre. Property owners and tenants can, thus, apply for grants to: make a building suitable as a dwelling above the store, make or renew a separate entrance to the dwelling, (store)front renovation, and to have the building meet the minimum requirements of the Flemish Housing Code. Applicants may combine these four aspects in grants up to a maximum of € 15,000 per property.

The city of Aalst is also strongly committed to making public space child-friendly. In December 2016, as part of the bAsta! project, a survey relating to child-friendly hospitality was held among visitors and employees in the city centre. In addition, children between the ages of 8 and 12 gave suggestions through a playful interactive session on how to make the city centre and its businesses more child-friendly. Based on this research, a catalogue was published with tips and tricks that hospitality operators can use to make their business child-friendly. In addition, ambassadors of child-friendly hospitality will be appointed. With bAsta!, the municipality uses various actions to create a more attractive city centre, together with the local entrepreneurs who try create a 'wow' feeling in their store. The municipality wants to extend this in its shopping streets.

bAsta!, and its linkage to the Trade and Hospitality Sub-Committee and the initiation of District A, was partly made possible by a European ERDF subsidy. These funds give both entrepreneurs and the local government more strength in the realization of the initiatives. It acts as a driving force and a positive spiral. The total budget of bAsta! is € 200,000, sourced from: ERDF subsidy (€ 80,000), Hermes fund (€ 40,000), East Flanders province (€ 50,000) and the city of Aalst (€ 30,000). Thanks to ERDF funding, it was possible to appoint a local project coordinator who could focus on actions to reduce vacancy levels. As a result, there is a central point of contact and there are effective resources to start specific actions and interventions. Linking to Intervention 1 above, since its establishment in 2017, District A has been working closely together with the City of Aalst as part of this initiative to make the city centre more attractive.



INTERVENTION 3

(Online) marketing: Foodmarkt

The first Aalst Food Market was organized in mid-September 2017 by a number of local entrepreneurs. Sixty-five local food establishments signed up to open a stand and about half of the shops in Aalst opened their doors. It was a great success and attracted thousands of visitors, which greatly exceeded the organizers' expectations. It was especially busy on some of the b-location, secondary streets that until three years ago had the highest vacancy rates.



Aalst Food Market

This intervention attracted thousands of visitors (estimated by the local police to be around 7,000) and although no formal evaluation took place, the contacts with participating businesses showed that perceptions were predominantly positive. There was also much favorable press coverage about the city, which was

positive for the place's image. Collaborations were established between different entrepreneurs. After the organization of the Food Market, the initiators decided to continue with this successful formula and encouraged other entrepreneurs to participate in a city centre-wide cooperation platform. This was the start of District A.

To conclude

With the establishment of the Trade and Hospitality Sub-Committee and District A, significant progress has been made to combine the various initiatives started by entrepreneurs and business associations in the city, and to cooperate more structurally with the local government. As a result, entrepreneurs became more connected and were given the opportunity to be heard by the local policy-makers. Local entrepreneurs received strong support from the city and this encouraged them to act proactively. They no longer expect that actions are organized solely by the local authority, but are now prepared to take matters into their own hands. If entrepreneurs have an idea, they can contact the city's economic department (with the City Centre Manager and bAsta! Coordinator). The city also made good use of European funding opportunities to finance interventions that help to improve the attractiveness of the city. Another unique aspect is that the city of Aalst is strongly committed to making public space and hospitality businesses child-friendly.

For the future, the Trade and Hospitality Sub-Committee and District A want to organize more events such as the Food Market. Work continues on the communication strategy and the efforts to boost the city's image. In time, the city also wants to show people that Aalst is bustling and full of innovative and local entrepreneurship.

MORE INFORMATION

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BALLYMENA TOWN CENTRE (United Kingdom)

Experts: Sean Trainor and Gary Warnaby

THE PARTNERSHIP IS IN PHASE 3 AND PHASE 4: DEVELOP STRATEGY AND INTERVENTIONS AND IMPLEMENT INTERVENTIONS

Ballymena Town Centre

Ballymena, in Northern Ireland, has a residential population of 26,000 inhabitants, and is situated 40 minutes to the North-west of the main city of Belfast. The surrounding area has a solid rural agricultural sector and the town has a strong retail and day-time economy. The centre of Ballymena has a historically well-established convenience and comparison shopping function, serving a regional catchment of about 100,000 inhabitants. The town centre has approximately 175 retail outlets, of which around 70% constitute comparison shopping provision, and 60 outlets in the food & hospitality industry. The retail vacancy rate is around 12%, which is lower than the national average of 14.5% in Northern Ireland.

Ballymena BID

The Ballymena BID was founded in 2015 and was the first Business Improvement District in Northern Ireland. The partnership's legal form is a company limited by guarantee (Ltd.) and the BID has been active for over two years in its current form. The annual budget is around £ 200,000, deriving from levy payments by some 440 businesses in the town centre. The BID has a maximum of 16 directors who meet every two months. There are three working groups (Marketing, Business Support and Clean/Safe), whose members meet when required. Budget requests, action plans and other proposals from the working groups must be approved by the overall BID board. The partnership focuses on marketing and promotion (including events), accessibility (including parking and signage), business support, safety and improving public space. The BID has developed its own brand that is used in all communications: 'Ballymena means More'. Recent actions include the organization of various events (including a town centre discount day), a safety training and information package for entrepreneurs, and member discount (including discounts on PIN transactions and energy costs). However, the establishment of the BID was the culmination of a protracted process, which is described below.



INTERVENTION 1

Process, network and organization activities: professionalizing the collaboration

Since 2003, Ballymena has employed a town centre manager to develop a partnership between the local statutory agencies and local businesses. This partnership was established as an *ad hoc* group, which met on a monthly basis. The local authority recognized the benefit of an established partnership, particularly as a consultative group, and supported some projects, such as small events in the city centre. While some success was achieved (for example, new parking legislation in the town centre and developing a voice advocating on behalf of local businesses), lack of funding was the main issue that restricted the partnership developing further.

The issue of funding came to the fore in 2007, when two traders approached the Council to fund new Christmas lights on their street. The Council had no statutory obligation to fund new lights, but recognized retail businesses take up to a third of their annual turnover at this Christmas trading season, and that any activities to help traders in this peak trading period would obviously be beneficial. However,

if the Council had said yes to this request, it would have felt obliged to fund similar activities in every shopping street; yet if it had said no, then credibility would have been lost, and its objectives to assist local business would be undermined.

The Council eventually agreed to double the amount of money raised by traders in the different shopping streets for this activity, up to a maximum of £ 60,000. Ultimately, as a result of such match-funding, £160,000 was available to renew the Christmas lights in the city centre. Local businesses felt empowered and felt that the atmosphere in the town centre was significantly improved, leading to higher turnover during the Christmas trading season. Subsequently, the Council worked with the partnership on a number of other activities, mainly based around marketing the town centre, and made funding available on a project-by-project basis. In 2007, having come to the realisation that funding was increasingly a barrier to achieving successful outcomes, the Council brought local businesses from Ballymena to the UK on a study tour to look at how town centres remain 'vital and viable'. This study tour was the first direct introduction to the concept of Business Improvement Districts (BIDs), and was well received.

In order to achieve structural funding for its activities, the partnership wanted to set up a BID. There was, however, a major problem: in 2007, Northern Ireland did not yet have the legislation to enable the setting up of BIDs, which was a new concept that few people in Northern Ireland had direct knowledge and experience of. The partnership realized that making new legislation would involve a lengthy process and that they had to maintain momentum. Initially, a 'voluntary BID' was proposed. When plans for this were drawn up, many businesses were enthusiastic and the number of members of the voluntary BID increased. This resulted in a budget to organize a 'Town Centre Discount Day', among other initiatives. It quickly became clear, however, that non-paying businesses also benefited from the actions of the partnership (i.e. the 'free-rider' problem), which reduced the support for the voluntary BID. However, the voluntary BID did lead to a greater recognition among local businesses of the need to formalize the BID structure, thereby requiring *all* businesses to make a financial contribution.

In the meantime, the Council lobbied the Northern Irish Government to introduce legislation to enable BIDs to get off the ground. Central Government was not very keen to develop new legislation because it was unclear which department should be responsible for this: was it legislation for businesses, financial legislation, or should it be covered by social affairs? Although not opposed to the BID concept, Central Government had other priorities. However, in 2010, further momentum was gained through a meeting between the Minister responsible and local representatives to discuss how to get the legislation through, dealing with some of the issues various officials had. The Minister welcomed the meeting and things began to move through the legislative process.

In the meantime, also in 2010, the Council had secured funding of £160,000, through the EU Interreg 1Va scheme to undertake a BID viability study and projects. This scoping study looked at location profile, BID viability assessment, and the Ballymena Partnership profile and action plan. This funding kept the BID concept and momentum alive during the legislative process.

In 2011, the Council agreed to fund £60,000 per annum for a three-year period for a business-led urban management company limited by guarantee, as a prerequisite to a BID that seemed now inevitable. This partnership was called Ballymena Town Centre Partners (BTCP) Ltd. Part of the Interreg subsidy was used to involve specialized BID advisers in the BTCP, in order to successfully prepare the transition to a formal BID. They helped, among other things, to draw up a business plan that businesses in the town centre could support in the ballot to establish a BID. In March 2015, 'Ballymena BID' became the first BID in Northern Ireland. The old BTCP partnership was integrated into the new BID in July 2015.



The Ballymena BID. Source: <http://nibidsacademy.co.uk/category/latest-news/>

To date, the Business Improvement District is still a young concept in Northern Ireland, and being the first had some initial teething problems. However, due to the success of the Ballymena BID, further BIDs were established in three other Northern Irish cities (Belfast, Newry and Strabane) in 2015-2016. Moreover, a Northern Ireland BID

Academy was established, where BID managers came together with professional BID advisors from UK to assist, train and network. Other towns in the region are now working towards establishing BIDs too.

To conclude

In order to professionalize the existing cooperation in the town centre, and to obtain the structural financial resources for interventions, the urban management partnership in Ballymena, together with the local Council, successfully lobbied for national BID legislation. In 2015, the Ballymena BID was the first BID within Northern Ireland. The successful impact on national legislation by a local partnership makes the Ballymena case unique; from the idea to establish a BID to the actual start of the BID took eight years. Over this period, the partnership has managed to maintain momentum, first through the establishment of a voluntary BID followed by a more formal limited company, financed with a European subsidy. The Ballymena case shows that a local partnership can achieve a lot with use of creativity, decisiveness and perseverance.

MORE INFORMATION:

www.ballymenameans.com
www.nibidsacademy.co.uk

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TILBURG CITY CENTRE (The Netherlands)

Expert: Stefan van Aarle

THE PARTNERSHIP IS IN PHASE 3 AND PHASE 4: DEVELOP STRATEGY AND INTERVENTIONS AND IMPLEMENT INTERVENTIONS

Tilburg City Centre

With 217,000 inhabitants, Tilburg is the sixth largest city in the Netherlands. The city centre has 360 retail units (85,000 m² of retail space), 55% of which constitutes comparison shopping. With a further 170 hospitality establishments and 3,800 parking spaces, the city centre caters to a regional catchment, and indeed beyond. Tilburg invests heavily in the city centre: for example, physical infrastructure has been improved by making a new connection between the Pieter Vreedeplein, the Heuvelstraat and the Emmapassage making the core shopping area more compact, functional and more easily recognizable; Primark, Hudson's Bay and Decathlon have recently opened up branches; and visitor numbers have risen. In addition to the core shopping area, the city centre also has a historic area with many independent businesses, hospitality and a nationally famous music venue 013.

Partnership Binnenstad Management Tilburg (BMT)

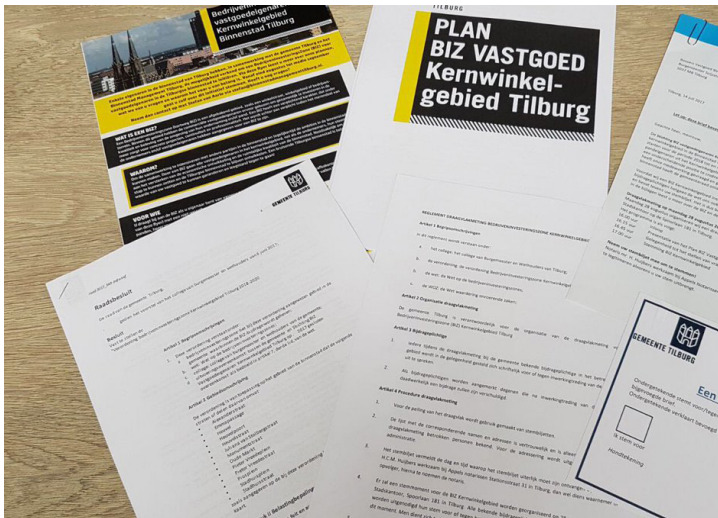
Tilburg's urban management initiative, Partnership Binnenstad Tilburg (BMT), has the task of promoting the attractiveness of the city centre and increasing quality of life in the area in the broadest sense. The BMT partnership was established in the late 1990s, based on a shared ambition of the stakeholders in the city centre to combine their interests and act together. In BMT, with a foundation as its legal form, the following stakeholder groups cooperate together: entrepreneurs, residents, property owners, the cultural sector and the municipality. Since 2014, the City Centre Tilburg Business Fund (Ondernemersfonds Binnenstad Tilburg) has been the executive organization while BMT is the 'consultation table' of the city centre, with the prime purpose of determining strategy and policy. The fund carries out projects on behalf of businesses located in the city centre and has an administrative delegation in the BMT. With money from more than 600 businesses (collected through the advertising tax), € 1,000,000 was invested from the business fund in the city centre in the period 2014-2017. Through additional income obtained, including project-related subsidies from the municipality and in cooperation with the City Marketing Organization, the actual investment was significantly more, at € 1,500,000. The City Centre Tilburg Business Fund is occupied with, among other things, the beautification and decoration of the city centre, addressing retail vacancy issues and the organization of events. In addition, more than 130 real estate owners have also set up a Business Improvement District (BID) as of 1 January 2018, which means they invest around € 130,000 annually to create an attractive city centre within their jurisdictional remit. Integral coordination between the stakeholders takes place via the BMT. Each year, approximately € 750,000 can be spent through input from all stakeholders. Due to the large number of traders, property owners and other stakeholders involved in the partnership and the substantive budget that comes with it, a professional, business-like approach to steering and programming activities is required: one which is customer-oriented, focused on profitability, and keeping stakeholders involved. The BMT has therefore been set up as a management organization with specific objectives. In addition to (pragmatic) ongoing policy and coordination, the BMT is mainly concerned with project-based work. Thus, the BMT team works on the action programs of the various funders, namely businesses, property owners and the municipality.



INTERVENTION 1

Process, network and organization activities: establishing a BID of property owners

The local business community took the initiative to open discussions with real estate owners about the formation of a BID. As a result, some property owners in the city centre, in collaboration with the municipality and BMT, have explored the possibility for a BID, specifically to unify local property owners. Through the BID, all real estate owners in the core shopping area will contribute financially to the economic development of - and the quality of the space within - the city centre. Of the 299 persons entitled to vote, 65% did indeed vote, of which 72% (141 property owners) voted in favour of establishing



Voting ballot for the property owners BID Tilburg

the BID. In addition, the aggregate property value of the voters was higher than that of the opposing voters. With this, according to the legislation enabling Dutch BIDs, there is sufficient support to actually set up the property BID.

A working group consisting of large institutional property investors and small local property owners has supervised the process, and at the beginning of 2018 the BID was established. Thanks

to the BID, real estate owners are united and resources are available to contribute to making the city centre more attractive. The BID was initially introduced for a period of 3 years, and each year the BID raises approximately € 130,000 in revenue. Moreover, as the real estate owners become fully-fledged partners of the BMT, this gives them a say in the future-proofing of the shopping area. Finally, another advantage lies in the fact that the municipality has one negotiating partner that acts on behalf of all the property owners.



INTERVENTION 2

Branding and brand positioning: Creating unique ambience areas

Tilburg city centre consists of a series of districts that all have their own unique separate qualities. BMT, the municipality and the local city marketing organization have taken the initiative to position the separate districts more clearly. This has resulted in nine districts, each with its own particular ambience - from a 'wandering' district with lots of independent shops, the core shopping area with the large chain stores, to the creative *Veemarktkwartier*. The branding of these different districts was determined in

'inspiration sessions' with a broad representation of stakeholders in the city centre. Although much has been invested in the public space in the city centre in recent years, the particular ambience and identity of the specific districts had to be further strengthened. Points for improvement of this intervention included: signposting, creating the recognizability of the various districts and emphasizing the typical



Launching the various atmospheric districts of Tilburg city centre

Tilburg elements in the public space that provide atmosphere (for example, references to the huge importance of the textile industry in the history of the city).

After establishing the unique character of these different districts together with the local stakeholders, and identifying the images and stories that gives particular identity to these specific locales, a process has started to spread this identity in the

public space. Thus, for example, different locales have selected a colour to promote the area. This has resulted in, among other things: colourful area signs, signage, new street signs and city maps and a bicycle sharing system in the colours of the different locales. BMT, the municipality and city marketing personnel coordinate the development of these districts. For each, a number of ambassadors have been appointed who are also the point of contact. The interventions are prepared and executed together with these ambassadors.



INTERVENTION 3

(Online) marketing: centralized content

Digital information about shops, events, accessibility, number of parking places and local news concerning the city centre is essential in today's digital age. Almost all cities have a website designed to inform visitors and residents, but many cities struggle with keeping the content on the website up to date. The City Centre Tilburg Business Fund has therefore taken the initiative to create a central database for the city where various parties in the city can supply and purchase content. The commercial company Tilburg.com is the central hub in this initiative, having signed an agreement with BMT, the city marketing and local tourist organizations to manage the individual websites of these organizations. In the case of the BMT, this is the website www.centrumtilburg.com. This legal structure has the advantage that in future BMT can easily switch to a different content supplier. There are specific editorial rules in place, so that the company that delivers and places the content (currently Tilburg.com) is aware when articles may or may not be transferred. An Application Programming Interface (API) has been built for this, enabling a system for exchanging information between different channels.

The website www.centrumtilburg.com is also the landing page when using the free Wi-Fi network in the city centre. Every day this leads to approximately 1,000 to 1,500 website visitors. Tilburg has been advised on this approach by various experts and by local initiatives in other Dutch city centres. This revealed, among other things, the importance of separating the ownership of the technology (website) from the content. For both elements, tendering processes have been completed with local parties within the city. The costs are approximately € 25,000 per year and are fully financed by the local business fund. The aim of the website and content supplier is better orientation of the visitor in the city centre, in preparation for - and during - their visit to Tilburg. Thus, the visitor will find all the necessary information relating to the city centre on one channel. The most important result of this approach is that shared reporting ensures uniform content about the city. In addition, the coverage of messaging increases as the same message appears on multiple channels.

To conclude

The case of Tilburg shows that major changes in urban design should go hand in hand with investments in organization, cooperation and (branding) projects that strengthen the identity of the city centre at the district and street level. A successful city centre not only has a strong retail offer, there is also local cooperation and investment in atmosphere and identity, often triggered by small-scale projects. From the start of the partnership in 2014, the strategy was to work extensively with stakeholders and ambassadors at the district/borough level. The support for the partnership and the individual projects has grown steadily, and has created sufficient support for the establishment of a property owner BID. In addition, it has proved to be a good strategy to use the district approach, where each locale is considered in its own right. Although entrepreneurs are part of a city centre with more than 600 shops, service and food establishments, they are most recognized in projects at the area and street level.

Nationally, the interventions in Tilburg have also received a lot of attention. In the coming years, the focus will be on embedding new projects in the urban structure and strengthening the routes within in the city centre that connect the various districts. Ultimately, the partnership hopes to earn the title 'Best City Centre of the Netherlands 2017-2019', which is a Dutch national competition comparable with The Great British High Street awards.

MORE INFORMATION:

www.ondernemersfonds.nu/

CHIPPING NORTON TOWN CENTRE (United Kingdom)

Experts: Shaun Fagan and Gary Warnaby

THE PARTNERSHIP IS IN PHASE 4: IMPLEMENT INTERVENTIONS

Chipping Norton Town Centre

Chipping Norton is a historic town with a population of approximately 6,500, located in West Oxfordshire, a 40-minute drive north of Oxford. The town centre is the main shopping area for the nearby villages (with about 15,000 inhabitants in the catchment area), and has around 120 stores (with a healthy mix of both local self-employed traders and national retail chains). The vacancy rate has recently reduced to practically 0%, which is far below the national average in the United Kingdom.

Experience Chipping Norton (ECN)

In 2012, Chipping Norton faced various challenges, including the absence of an urban management partnership, a marketing organization for the locality or any community forum that could bring residents and other stakeholders together. Local business did not know who their contact point was regarding matters that were affecting the town centre. Moreover, there was also no collective strategy / vision for the town centre; businesses had to arrange everything individually. The partnership Experience Chipping Norton (ECN) was established in 2012 to change this. With the establishment of ECN, the initiators aimed



Experience Chipping Norton (ECN) event

to create a central and streamlined organization for everything that has to do with the town. In terms of legal form, ECN is a Limited Company (Ltd.). The partnership is run by volunteers and has no structural sources of income, making it almost entirely dependent on donations, subsidies and sponsorship. Each initiative is, therefore, regarded as a separate project, and also financed as such, based on an individual project plan. The ECN steering committee and all project team members work on a voluntary basis. The number of businesses and stakeholders involved varies continuously. In the past five years, more than two hundred people have been involved in ECN projects. The steering committee does not have a fixed number of members, but usually there is a core of about six active members.

Local government is not involved in the partnership. On the contrary, according to the initiators, ECN has been set up as a reaction to the passive attitude of the local administration towards the local business community, and the town's lack of marketing and promotion. In addition, the regional district council seems more concerned with the larger towns in the region than with smaller towns like Chipping Norton. ECN aims to support and promote Chipping Norton to the following targets:

- Businesses: supporting local businesses, keeping the city centre alive, and ensuring a very low vacancy rate;
- Tourists: attracting regional consumers and tourists to visit the town;
- Community: providing a platform for all social groups and initiatives in the town, including religious communities, schools and other non-profit organizations.



INTERVENTION 1

Process, network and organization activities and Branding and brand positioning: the ECN approach and marketing strategy

In 2012, the ECN has taken the initiative to develop a digital platform aiming to activate, support and promote the local community. The platform therefore not only targets businesses, residents and visitors, but also local community organizations such as schools and churches, cultural institutions, local government, charity and interest groups. The online community, consisting of a comprehensive, up-to-date website and social media channels, aims to bring together all relevant information for local stakeholders and visitors in one central location. Through the digital platform, the ECN hopes to increase the involvement and cooperation between various stakeholders. The digital platform offers marketing and promotional activities in an inclusive, narrative manner, focusing on the entire town. The project is managed by a steering group, and created and maintained by experts with experience in the field of digital technology, marketing and PR.

The project got off to a bad start, when the funding from the Mary Portas program to rejuvenate British town centres proved to be problematic. Kicking off ECN afresh in 2013, in the beginning members had to work with a poorly designed website to bring together different elements in the town. Reaching an impasse in late 2013, help was needed. The ECN committee members staged a major event headed by former Prime Minister and local Member of Parliament, David Cameron. This call to arms united the town and kicked off a new phase of digital action. In 2015, the ECN acquired local cooperative financing for a new website, after which the platform could be developed further.

The intervention has resulted in:

- Partly due to the efforts of the partnership in terms of marketing and community education, an increased number of visitors, a growing number of businesses in the town, and the shop vacancy rate has dropped to virtually zero.
- Increased online involvement of local stakeholders and visitors via the website and social media channels. The website is currently visited about 12,000 times a month and through the social media activities, more than 10,000 people are reached every month. In addition, the collective has a mailing list with approximately 650 members.
- A more socially inclusive local community, and improved communication between the local stakeholders and the local government.
- Greater awareness within and outside the community for the unique traditions and heritage of the town.
- Higher national media profile for the town.
- The accolade of 'Runner-up' in the Great British High Street of the Year Awards in the category of Market Towns for two consecutive years. In addition, ECN chairman Shaun Fagan received a special accreditation award from the national government for his commitment to the town of Chipping Norton.



The Great British High Street Awards 2015



INTERVENTION 2

Stimulate innovative capacity: OX7

OX7 is an initiative of Experience Chipping Norton. It is a government-funded innovative youth project designed to engage 16-24 year-olds and provide bespoke training, support, skills and work experience to help them back into work, education or training. The goal is to get local youths who are threatening to fall outside society back on track. ECN has secured a two-year subsidy for the OX7 project from the Communities Fund administered by national government. This funding began in September 2017, and ultimately, the project must be financially self-sufficient in the future through involvement and sponsorship of local business. OX7 is run by a Board and administered by an ECN project manager and PR team, along with a qualified youth worker. These roles are funded by the Communities Fund project grant.

OX7 was a new kind of project for ECN, with a steep learning curve as a result. At first, the local authority was not fully committed and offered some resistance to this scheme. This was mainly because there was already a regional program to support underprivileged young people. However, the youth in Chipping Norton were insufficiently supported by this regional program. After a difficult start, there is now a lot of involvement and support for the initiative at a wide range of businesses and public organizations in and around Chipping Norton.

It remains early days for OX7, but initial results are promising. So far, about thirty young people have been helped in their trajectory into the labour market. Almost thirty local companies are also involved in the project and this number is expected to grow further. There is a lot of interest in the project from companies, which is a good omen for the future. With the help of local businesses providing OX7 with funding, internships and other resources and goods, ECN wants to ensure that the project is self-funded after the term of the grant ends.

To conclude

The Chipping Norton case is special because the partnership focuses on strengthening the whole community and not only on the town centre. This broader focus gives access to funding sources that are not available for partnerships that are primarily concerned with the viability of town centre and its businesses. To date, the results of the interventions are promising: greater social cohesion, increasing visitor numbers, more businesses and a sharp decline in shop vacancy. In all the activities that ECN undertakes, the passion and love of the members for their town resonates. This helps to increase solidarity and the willingness to cooperate within the community. The partnership is currently working on various project plans, including free Wi Fi in the city centre, heritage projects and the further development of OX7 into an independent company.

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MECHELEN CITY CENTRE (Belgium)

Experts: Stijn Anthoons, Sofie van Herreweghe and Ruth DeVreese

THE PARTNERSHIP IS IN PHASE 4: IMPLEMENT INTERVENTIONS

Mechelen City Centre

With a population of 86,000, Mechelen is the second largest city in the province of Antwerp. Mechelen is located near Antwerp and Brussels, the two largest cities in Belgium. It presents itself as a charming shopping city. There are numerous landmark buildings and a busy congress centre in the city centre. The core shopping area has 580 retail properties. The average vacancy rate in 2017 was 8.7% in the city centre overall, and 7.9% in the core shopping area in terms of m² retail floor space. These figures are testament to the efforts to reduce the vacancy rate in the core shopping area, which has fallen by 2.9 percentage points between 2009 and 2017. In order to strengthen Mechelen as a shopping destination, the 'Mechelen Shopping City' action plan was drawn up in early 2016. This action plan works around four pillars: accessibility, urban redevelopment, consumer experience and visitor communication. Thanks to the efforts to make the city centre more attractive, and also the presence of a conference centre in the city centre, Mechelen has seen the number of tourists and visitors increase every year over the past six years.

Partnerships MEST and Experience Mechelen (Mechelen Meemaken)

MEST (an abbreviation of *Testing Grounds for Start-ups from Mechelen*) is a non-profit association (Vereniging Zonder Winstoogmerk) founded in 2013 by the city of Mechelen, the Thomas More University of Applied Sciences and UNIZO (a Belgian interest group for the Self-Employed and SMEs). The idea for MEST arose after the observations that Mechelen had relatively high vacancy rates, and that whilst there were many start-up entrepreneurial businesses, their survival rate was relatively low. Mechelen did not seem a fertile ground for start-ups. In addition, the number of start-ups in the Mechelen region was low in relation to the number of graduates in higher education, and many start-ups had difficulty finding a temporary platform to offer their products and services in a safe and easily accessible environment. With MEST, the city of Mechelen sought to achieve two main objectives: to reduce the vacancy rate, and improve the business climate for start-up companies. In addition, the city is undertaking other interventions to make the centre more attractive to visitors, including the 'Shopping Shuttle' and 'Hands Free Shopping'. Mechelen is also committed to attracting and retaining creative talent (Talentenfabriek) and attracting investors and entrepreneurs.

However, despite these projects that were initiated with the participation of several stakeholders, Mechelen did not yet have a real partnership aimed at making the city centre future-proof. In 2016, the city received a grant from the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) to establish a Business Improvement District (BID). The BID, which has been operating under the name *Mechelen Meemaken* (Experience Mechelen) since the beginning of 2017, has an annual budget of approximately € 260,000. In order to provide structural funding for the BID, the city introduced a 'promoter tax' for businesses in the centre. The objective of the BID is to promote Mechelen as a vibrant city for both consumers and entrepreneurs through events, marketing activities and the establishment of partnerships between retailers, the hospitality industry, the city authorities, the tourism industry and other stakeholders. In addition, a new commercial strategic plan was drawn up to determine what spatial interventions are needed to strengthen Mechelen as a shopping city.



INTERVENTION 1

Legal and policy interventions combined with financial incentives: Fighting retail vacancy

MEST has specialised in making vacant retail premises available to start-ups at short notice. MEST assesses the ambitions of start-up companies, and talks to property owners to make their vacant properties available for these companies, where appropriate. In order to encourage property owners to participate, the Municipal Council has approved an amendment to the vacancy tax regulations, allowing exemption from the vacancy tax if they are part of the initiative. The period of the temporary use of the property depends on the possibilities of the specific premises and the wishes of the entrepreneur (with a minimum occupancy of one week), and with some properties, entrepreneurs can continue after the end of the MEST-lease period, by entering into a fixed lease with the property owner. Start-ups participating in MEST initially pay 50% of the market rent, gradually increasing to 100% of the market rent after one year. The property owner receives no revenue in the first year (all income goes to MEST), but does not have to pay any vacancy tax. MEST uses this revenue to cover the costs of its activities, such as the hiring of a permanent employee.

After the intensive support to enable a 'safe start', several start-ups have effectively entered into a fixed lease after the positive pop-up experience. The start-up support provided by MEST has clearly led to a change of direction in Mechelen with regard to the successful survival of start-up businesses, and this has given rise to the idea of policies focusing on inner-city entrepreneurship (see also intervention 4).

At the beginning of 2017, there was an opportunity to temporarily convert a formerly empty furniture store (3,000 m²) - the Artenova building - into a creative entrepreneurial hub: the Mechelen Talent Factory. Occupancy of the Artenova building, which is a collaboration between the municipal departments of Culture and Economy and MEST, is encouraging: dozens of artists and creative entrepreneurs have moved into the building, and are showing their creations to the public. A co-working space was set up on the ground floor to facilitate cooperation. The initiative creates extra momentum that attracts new target groups who, in turn, also get to know Mechelen. Since the end of 2017, Mechelen Talent Factory also has a pop-up store located in the city centre.



INTERVENTION 2

Spatial Intervention: Shopping Shuttle

To improve accessibility in the city centre, Mechelen launched the Shopping Shuttle in the summer of 2014. Visitors can park their car for free on two parking lots on the outskirts of the city, and then take a free shuttle bus to the city centre. The Shopping Shuttle service consists of five minibuses, which run on Saturdays and shopping Sundays (once a month) from 10 am to 7 pm. The waiting time is on average no more than five minutes. In 2017, approximately 650 people made use of this service on a Saturday. Evaluative research indicates that the Shopping Shuttle attracts a relatively large number of users from outside the city. In order to further increase accessibility, the scheme is being expanded, with another 3,000 new parking spaces introduced in 2018, nearly doubling the current capacity.



INTERVENTION 3

(Online) marketing: Handsfree Shopping

To improve the shopping experience, the city of Mechelen introduced the 'Handsfree Shopping' service in December 2015. City centre visitors can leave purchases in stores and receive them at home in the evening or at another chosen time. Consumers who have a smartphone can use this service via the 'Handsfree Shopping' app. But even without a smartphone, consumers can use this service. The deliveries in and around Mechelen take place the same evening with a cargo bike, the deliveries outside Mechelen are delivered via regular parcel delivery service. Visitors living in the Mechelen region pay € 6.00 for the delivery of all purchases, and consumers living outside Mechelen pay € 9.00. More than a hundred retailers in the city centre are taking part in the initiative. Participants can be recognized by



Brochure 'Mechelen Troef'

the 'Handfree Shopping' sticker. Approximately 500 parcels per month are collected from retailers via the service. The associated app does not seem very popular yet. In the Google Playstore, the app has been downloaded only 50-100 times since its introduction, but this may not be the best indicator of popularity, as consumers can also use the service without the App.



INTERVENTION 4

Marketing and spatial interventions: Redevelopment and 'Mechelen Troef'

The city of Mechelen strongly believes in the future of urban entrepreneurship; and young start-ups today like to settle in a vibrant city with nice shops and trendy food establishments in their vicinity. Attracting start-ups to the city centre leads to a win-win situation: employees start consuming in the city centre, generating more turnover for shopkeepers and restaurants, and thereby ultimately creating more employment. In order to attract more inner-city employment, in addition to the

MEST project described above, the city has implemented a number of actions, including the expansion of the activities of *Oh Mechelen*, a breeding ground for innovative and creative businesses in the city centre. In addition, a mixed living and working area is being developed near to the train station. The streets connecting the city centre and the station will be redeveloped in order to attract investors and other urban-oriented entrepreneurs.

In 2016, to attract investors and inner-city entrepreneurs, a brochure - 'Mechelen Troef' - was produced, which highlights the city's central location between Antwerp, Brussels and Leuven, and its other assets. In this way, Mechelen emphasizes its attraction to entrepreneurial businesses, the number of which have risen from 2,270 businesses in 2000 to 3,381 in 2016. The increasing number of visitors and tourists also indicates the increasing attraction of the city.



Handsfree Shopping initiative in Mechelen

To conclude

Mechelen is a good example of a proactive local government that uses a top-down approach to undertake various interventions in order to make the city centre more attractive. The combination of a legal/policy approach (i.e. limiting vacancy rates), a marketing approach (i.e. hands-free shopping) and a spatial approach (i.e. improving accessibility) makes this case special. Through various interventions, the city of Mechelen also wants to present itself as a breeding ground for creativity and entrepreneurship. By developing this identity, the city hopes to create more employment in the city centre. In addition, Mechelen was one of the first cities in Belgium to create a Business Improvement District. However, unlike examples from the United Kingdom and the Netherlands, the initiative for this BID came from the municipality and not the local business community. It is also interesting to note that the city has used funds from the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) to cover the costs of city centre interventions. Although such subsidies are not a structural source of income for collective interventions, they can help to initiate activities (such as the establishment of a BID).

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ALTRINCHAM CITY CENTRE (United Kingdom)

Experts: Penny Bell and Gary Warnaby

THE PARTNERSHIP IS IN PHASE 4 AND 5: IMPLEMENT INTERVENTIONS AND EVALUATION AND COURSE DETERMINATION

Altrincham Town Centre

Altrincham is a town with approximately 75,000 inhabitants and 20,000 workers in Trafford Metropolitan Borough area, which is part of the Greater Manchester conurbation. Altrincham is Trafford's largest town centre, but is the smallest sub-regional town centre in Greater Manchester. Altrincham has a primary catchment area of 109,000 residents, and a secondary catchment area of 402,000 residents. There are approximately 433 ground floor retail units in the town centre, which include a mix of high street multiple, independent and specialist shops and services, as well as two major supermarkets. It has two shopping centres, the Stamford Quarter, which underwent a major redevelopment in 2016, and The Graftons, which currently has redevelopment plans. The vacancy rate in the town centre was under 8% in May 2018, and footfall in February 2018 was up 5% on the previous year. Altrincham has excellent leisure and cultural facilities with Greater Manchester's only year-round ice rink, a six-screen cinema, leisure centre, library and two theatres close by. In addition, there are an increasing number of restaurants, bars and coffee shops. The town is also a key commercial office and creative industries hub within the South Manchester area. It has superb transport links by bus, tram and train to the rest of Greater Manchester and the North West via a new modern Interchange, has good access by car and is approximately four miles from Manchester Airport.

Central to the town's shared vision for a 'Modern Market Town', is Altrincham Market, which dates from 1290, and which underwent a major transformation in 2014 with local authority investment in improvement works and an enhanced public realm. Managed by Market Operations Ltd., Altrincham Market has swiftly become the place to go to relax, eat and shop and has received regional and national recognition.



Altrincham market (seen from outside)



Altrincham Market (inside)

Altrincham Forward

Altrincham Forward (AF) was founded in 2011 to revitalize the centre of Altrincham. At that time, more than 30% of the premises were vacant. In addition, the offer in the town centre did not sufficiently match the characteristics of the catchment area. There seemed little willingness by property owners to invest in the town centre and there was a spirit of apathy among many businesses. The existing partnership, Altrincham Town Centre Partnership, seemed unable to initiate the necessary transformation of the town centre.

Altrincham Forward was a joint public, private and community sector partnership. The Chair of the Board was the Leader of Trafford Council, and it included key representatives from the local Chamber of Commerce, the Retailers and Leisure Forum, the Landlords Forum, Transport for Greater Manchester (the local transport provider) and the local College. A comprehensive town centre assessment (by commercial real estate services firm DTZ) was commissioned by AF in 2011 and identified the key challenges and opportunities for Altrincham. A wide public consultation following this assessment resulted in the emergence of a shared vision and action plan for the town. In addition to the Landlords Forum and the Retailers and Leisure Forum, AF had three subgroups – People, Place and Economy – developing initiatives and projects to help achieve AF's action plan. In addition to Board members, these subgroups included a variety of stakeholders from local businesses, community groups (such as the local Civic Society, proactive environmental groups, and local creative organisations), residents, developers, community safety and local authority representatives.

The shared vision of AF is for Altrincham to be a unique, attractive and bustling modern market town:

- To make Altrincham one of the best market towns in the country – to make it 'The Modern Market Town'.
- To build it back into a town that is an integral part of residents' everyday lives, a town to be proud of and a town that people who are not local will want to come and visit.

The main three objectives were to increase footfall, user dwell time and spend in the town centre. Altrincham Forward's main funding sources were grant funds, local authority financial (including capital investment in the public realm) and in-kind support, business sponsorship of events and activities, developer contributions, and also by working in partnership with external agencies and organisations that could access funding to assist businesses and town centres.

By establishing a Business Improvement District (BID), AF wanted to realize a more sustainable form of financing, and in November 2015, a majority of the businesses voted in favour of the BID, Altrincham Unlimited, which has a budget of around £ 1.4 million over five years to 2020.



INTERVENTION 1

Process, network and organization activities: Landlords Forum

In 2012, as part of the Altrincham Forward action plan, property owners, developers, commercial agents and members of AF's Economy Group (including representatives from an architect's firm, a regeneration company, a local Councillor and senior Trafford Council officers) came together to discuss ways in which they could help to revitalize Altrincham, and in particular, to improve the shopping and trading environment and to reduce the number of vacant units.

The following key actions were agreed:

- To investigate the potential for an area-wide review and reduction in business rates due to development disruption, as well as lobbying to speed up the Appeals process (when business rates were contested by traders), to help existing and new businesses.
- To utilize a government High Street Innovation Fund allocation of £100,000, combined with some Council funding, to develop a Town Centres Business Growth Programme to encourage occupation of vacant units.
- To share information on business enquiries that cannot be met by one specific agent or property owner, so that the enquiry is not lost to the town.
- To develop an investment pack of information that property owners and agents can use to attract new businesses.

- To share good practice examples and solutions to improving properties, securing new tenants and bringing vacant units back into use.

The AF Landlords Forum was established and met quarterly, chaired by a senior representative from a national commercial agent (with units to let in Altrincham) and supported by a designated Council officer who facilitated the development of the key actions with the Chair and Forum members. The Forum also worked with a Rating Surveyors Association representative and the Valuation Office regarding business rates issues. There were regular communications with Forum members to update them on developments in the town, progress on projects and any opportunities for grant aid or support.

The establishment of the Forum has increased the knowledge and information exchange between real estate parties and made them more involved in the revitalization of Altrincham town centre. Property owners have started to invest in the quality of their retail premises: 90% of the buildings in the centre that were previously poorly maintained have been revitalized. There was also an arrangement for pop-up stores and the dressing up of the shop windows of empty retail premises. These measures also had a positive effect on the value of the retail premises. The desire to achieve a centre-wide reduction in local taxes was also realized, thereby increasing its attractiveness for new tenants. The subsidy scheme for filling vacant retail premises - the Town Centres Business Growth Programme - contributed to the start of 22 new businesses in the town centre, which together account for over 100 jobs and £ 600,000 in private investments. Partly as a result of the activities of the Landlords Forum, the vacancy rate in Altrincham town centre has dropped from 30% in 2010 to 8% in 2017. The innovative, collective approach of the AF Landlords Forum received national recognition, opening the doors for additional financing and support. For example, in 2013, the partnership received a 'High Street Renewal Award' from the national government for its successful interventions, with a sum of around £ 150,000.



INTERVENTION 2

Brand positioning combined with spatial intervention: Developing a 'Modern Market Town'

A key finding from the town centre assessment by DTZ commissioned in 2011, and the subsequent public consultation was the importance of Altrincham Market to the town and the need to reinvent it to create a focal point for the town centre to meet the aspirations of local people and visitors to the town. This resulted in a firm endorsement for creating 'the modern market town' positioning, and feedback as to what this actually meant. Factors included: (1) a celebration of the town's heritage; (2) a platform for quality local producers, suppliers, growers and makers of all kinds of things; and (3) a magnet for visitors who want to experience something different to the big brands and out-of-town centres, but in a way that reflects what we come to expect when we shop and eat or drink out. Since 2012, the partnership has organized the Twilight Market in the Christmas months (and sometimes on other days). During the event, the market is open in the evenings and all sorts of activities and performances take place.

The move from the existing hospital building next to the Market to a new site elsewhere in the town provided a unique opportunity to create a stunning new Market Quarter. Extensive consultation with Market stallholders was held. Between 2013 and 2014 there was significant investment of almost £1 million by the Council to refurbish the Market buildings, create a new, contemporary space in the lower market area, with lock-up market units and a canopy, as well as transforming the surrounding public areas to provide a pleasant shopping environment. At the same time, a new commercial operator for

the Market was sought who would help to develop 'the Modern Market Town', creating a cornerstone for the town centre to attract additional footfall and spend, address the lack of an independent high quality food offer, expand the specialist and themed markets, and nurture budding entrepreneurs.

Footfall has increased year-on-year since the opening of the refurbished Market, both in the Market itself and its permanent catering venue in the Market House, but also in the town as a whole. One of the key trading days for the Market is Sunday, and a number of town centre businesses have also started opening on Sundays to capitalize on the increased number of visitors, creating a whole day-out experience. The surrounding Market Quarter has seen all vacant units taken by quality niche independent businesses and the food and drink offer has expanded. The concept has gained national recognition, such as the national newspaper *The Observer* 2015 Observer Food Monthly Award for 'Best Local Market', as well as local approval as a leisure and tourism attraction. Altrincham Market Traders also won an Altrincham and Sale Chamber of Commerce award in 2016. Currently, work has started on the redevelopment of the former hospital site within the Market Quarter and will include a Health and Wellbeing Centre and Altrincham Library with enhanced community facilities and an improved public area to complement the Market surroundings.

To conclude

Altrincham serves as a good example of where research forms the basis for interventions and where the profiling of the town centre is based on a core element of the town (i.e. the Market). The unique bottom-up cooperation between real estate parties in the town has led to a wide range of measures, resulting in a sharp reduction in store vacancy levels. In Altrincham, the partnership has devoted a great deal of time and attention to consulting and involving stakeholders, with broad support for the planned interventions as a result. The municipality also played an important role in facilitating local cooperation, while also jointly investing in the redevelopment of the market area and other parts of the town centre. This does not mean that everything went easily. For example, the Landlords Forum has had to spend a lot of time convincing some property owners and real estate brokers not to focus solely on short-term profit, but also to look at the added value of tenants for the long-term quality of the city centre. In addition, it was a challenge to involve large, nationally operating real estate owners in the redevelopment of the centre.

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www.altrinchamunlimited.co.uk
www.altrinchammarket.co.uk

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ARNHEM CITY CENTRE (The Netherlands)

Experts: Nienke van Gerwen and Marian van Hooij

THE PARTNERSHIP IS IN PHASE 5: EVALUATION AND COURSE DETERMINATION

Arnhem City Centre

Arnhem is the capital of the province of Gelderland and has over 150,000 inhabitants. The city centre has a supra-regional shopping function consisting, in 2016, of 560 shops (120,000 m² of retail floor space) and 280 hospitality outlets. Recently, the Musis Concert Hall has been completed, and the redevelopment of the southern part of the city centre is underway. In June 2016, a new municipal retail vision was established which emphasised the importance of retail related development in the city centre. At 11.4%, the vacancy rate is slightly above the Dutch national average, but is decreasing. Apart from general economic recovery, Arnhem has taken initiatives to reduce vacancy rates. With the establishment of a 'Transformation Team', 105,000 m² of retail space has been transformed since 2013, mostly in the city centre. The transformation team is an initiative of the municipality, which, together with property owners, the local urban management partnership, project developers and shopkeepers, aims to create new uses for buildings. However, any possible transformation must fit in with the image that the municipality of Arnhem has in mind: a city centre with space for living, shopping and working and a balance between various population groups and social classes (diversity).

Platform City Centre Arnhem (*Platform Binnenstad Arnhem – PBA*)

In 2016, the Platform Binnenstad Arnhem (PBA) partnership was established with the participation of approximately one hundred people who were directly involved in Arnhem city centre. The idea was to give shape to plans for the city centre based on the direct involvement of local entrepreneurs. The Board of the PBA monitors the progress of the action plans, and the extent to which interests of the affiliated shopkeepers and business associations are represented. The board consists of representatives of seven collaborating local business organisations that regularly consults with the municipality.



Arnhem City Centre



In April 2016, the City Management Team was established. This team is the implementation body of the PBA and is accountable to the PBA board. The team is responsible for drawing up and implementing improvement agendas, set annually by the PBA, in close cooperation with the municipality. This implementation agenda is drawn up within the working groups of the PBA, where priorities are set each year. The City Management Team consists of a director, marketer, connector, caretaker/concierge and 'host'. Under the management team, six working groups are active on various themes, such as events, public space and accessibility. The annual budget of the PBA is € 450,000. In addition, many projects often have their own separate budgets with other sources of income such as contributions from business associations, funds, subsidies or private contributions.

The main objectives of the PBA are to:

- Increasing the appeal - and appreciation - of the city centre thereby attracting more visitors and increasing spending.
- Offering a digital infrastructure to all businesses in Arnhem's city centre.
- Providing services, specifically aimed at the needs of business in the city centre of Arnhem.
- Collaborating with regional training centres.
- Promoting the city centre and selling the city centre-wide gift card via the internet.
- Bringing and keeping the city centre of Arnhem in the 'top ten' of the most attractive city centres in the Netherlands.



INTERVENTION 1

(Online) marketing: local loyalty card 'Dit-is-Pas Arnhem'

In 2016, the PBA and the Arnhem based company CCV, which specializes in digital payment solutions, launched the plan for the 'Dit-is-Pas Arnhem' gift card, in collaboration with the municipality and other stakeholders. This initiative originated from the working group *Collective Innovation* to promote cooperation between entrepreneurs through a joint gift card with joint discounts. The idea was that shopper loyalty does not relate to one shop, cultural institution or food establishment, but to the city centre as a whole.

The current gift card, in the form of a 'credit card', can be used at more than seventy shops, restaurants, attractions and cultural institutions in Arnhem. Via online media (such as the website and Facebook), cardholders are kept informed of new acceptors and special offers. In the near future, the card will be linked to an online loyalty program. The aim of the 'Dit-is-Pas Arnhem' is to attract more visitors to the city and enrich the shopping experience.

'Dit-is-Pas Arnhem' is increasingly widely supported in the city centre of Arnhem, but has demanded a great deal of time, money and attention in the start-up phase (with annual costs of around € 65,000 for project execution and marketing, in particular). Merchants only wanted to join when enough gift cards were sold, but consumers did not buy the card until there were enough acceptors. However, after a year, the gift card initiative has reached a sufficient critical mass among both businesses and consumers, and the aim is for it to be completely self-sufficient both financially and organisationally by the end of 2018.



INTERVENTION 2

Spatial Intervention: Green plan

Being 'green' is a core value of the city of Arnhem. In 2017, the PBA, the Arnhem6811 residential platform and the municipality drew up the Inner City Arnhem Green Plan. The green project in the inner city serves several purposes: improving the atmosphere, making the time spent in the city centre more pleasant, reducing heat spots, tackling runoff water problems from rainfall, and increasing biodiversity. To improve the green quality of their street or square, entrepreneurs and residents choose from different types of green elements to be placed in their locale via green 'menu cards'. The collaborating parties reimburse 90% of the costs (50% by the municipality, 20% by the PBA and 20% by residents' organisations). Entrepreneurs and residents contribute the last 10% themselves. All local entrepreneurs and residents can make use of the green plan. However, there is a limit to the number of yearly applicants because of financial constraints.

An online evaluation survey was sent to the Phase 1 participants, measuring satisfaction, communication and willingness to participate, among other things. The initiative was very highly appreciated and more entrepreneurs and residents wanted to participate in the green project. In the meantime, the affiliated parties are working on the roll-out of phase 2. The agreements on the maintenance of the green areas were in the first instance made by the clients (entrepreneurs and/or residents partaking in the green plan). In practice, this did not always lead to the desired result. That is why the maintenance is now organised by the municipality.



INTERVENTION 3

Spatial Intervention: Town Centre Clean Up, The Big Bang

Since May 2017, the PBA, the municipality, residents and entrepreneurs have been working together to create a clean and tidy city centre. At this time, Arnhem started the 'Big Bang spring cleaning': Graffiti and chewing gum were removed, streets and street furniture polished up, new trash-cans were placed and so-called 'orphan bicycles' were cleaned up. The campaign made businesses, visitors and residents aware that a clean city contributes to a pleasant living environment and that it provides a warm welcome for visitors. Businesses and residents' associations were invited by the PBA and the municipality to sign a three-year maintenance contract. This contract stipulates that a professional company checks the public space in their locale every three weeks, cleans it and, if necessary, applies a (new) anti-graffiti coating. The entrepreneur and/or resident association pays 50% of the costs. The costs of this intervention in 2017 amounted to approximately € 60,000, of which € 12,500 was paid by the PBA and the remaining amount by the municipality.

Since various stakeholders are represented within the PBA, including residents, it was relatively easy to gain support for this intervention. The implementation was facilitated by the deployment of a management team, including a caretaker/concierge who focuses entirely on enhancing the public space and supervises these projects.

To conclude

The Arnhem case shows that a cooperation platform in which all local stakeholders are represented, and in which the qualities of the individual stakeholders are put to good use, can lead to effective interventions. Another unique aspect of Arnhem is the administrative organisation: it is not a centre manager who is responsible for carrying out the interventions, but a management team in which various areas of expertise come together. The downside of this multifaceted organisation is that there is a risk of fragmentation of implementation and initiatives. Resolute action of the board is therefore a prerequisite for a platform structure: for example, the joint gift card is an intensive project for all parties involved and requires a lot of time, money and attention during the start-up phase. In order to make a project such as this a success, insight into the support base among potential acceptors of the card is crucial. A proactive project manager with sales experience is also important. Since various stakeholders are represented within the PBA, including residents, it is also possible to gain sufficient support for initiatives such as the Green Plan and the Big Bang Cleaning Action. This is a good example of public-private investments to create a uniform and attractive image of the city centre. The deployment of a management team, including a 'caretaker' who focuses entirely on public space, are important success factors for these types of interventions.

MORE INFORMATION:

www.binnenstadarnhem.nl/over-ons

www.ditispasarnhem.nl

www.arnhem6811.nl/3826-2

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WINSCHOTEN TOWN CENTRE (The Netherlands)

Experts: Nienke van Gerwen and Gert Jan van 't Land

THE PARTNERSHIP IS IN PHASE 5: EVALUATION AND COURSE DETERMINATION

Winschoten town centre

With over 18,000 inhabitants, Winschoten is the largest town in the municipality of Oldambt (which has 38,000 inhabitants in total). Winschoten has a regional function for the Eastern part of the province of Groningen, which is located in the north-eastern periphery of the Netherlands, near to the German border. Winschoten has 259 shops with a combined retail floor space of 79,000 m² (of which 35,000 m² is located in the town centre). Of these 259 retail units, 41 are for convenience shopping, and 218 units constitute comparison shopping provision. Historically, Winschoten has always had a large number of fashion retailers, which helps to explain its broader regional attraction. Winschoten has approximately twice as much retail floor space as the average Dutch centre of a town with a similar number of inhabitants. However, space productivity (i.e. turnover per m²) is considerably lower than the national average. In the period from 2007 to 2013, there was a sharp increase in the vacancy rate in Winschoten and the surrounding region, and by 2017, the vacancy rate was approximately 18% in the town centre.

Town Centre Covenant Winschoten

Winschoten faced a major challenge in 2014. As the second largest shopping city in the province of Groningen, it has many town centre facilities in terms of shopping, hospitality, education, care and culture, and a catchment area of about 80,000 inhabitants. It also has an attractive historic downtown area with a variety of shops that are popular with German visitors. Nevertheless, problems manifested themselves more and more explicitly. For example, population declined by 4.5% in the period 2000-2015, with a further shrinkage of 6.1 % forecast for the period 2015-2025. Winschoten also had to deal with a decline in purchasing power due to an ageing population, increasing vacancy rates, a loss of quality public space and lagging investments in commercial premises. The combination of local and national trends (such as online shopping and the wider economic crisis), put pressure on the supply of amenities in Winschoten. Failure to act was not an option for the local stakeholders. What followed was an ambitious collaboration project between local traders, property owners and the municipality, with two important interventions: (1) an innovative financial cooperation; and (2) the Action Program for Strengthening Winschoten Town Centre.

The local partnership responsible for both initiatives has been given shape and direction in the *2015-2019 Winschoten Town Centre Covenant*. This covenant has been developed and signed by the municipality, the local Trade and Industry Association (*Handel en Nijverheid*) and the local authority of the Dutch hospitality industry (*Koninklijke Horeca Nederland*). The preparation and implementation of the Action Program was carried out in close cooperation with the covenant partners, the province and all stakeholders. The basic philosophy was: Developing a better future by doing it together. All stakeholders in the town centre were (and remain) actively and regularly involved in the preparation and implementation of the Action Program. In addition to advisory board meetings of property owners, residents and traders and project-related meetings, the quarterly 'market square meetings' that took place in the period 2015-2016 were an important means of consultation and coordination with all stakeholders in the town centre. The Action Program was managed by a specific organisational team responsible for this.

Currently, there is a project-based management approach, in which the municipality, business and *ad hoc* parties work together. Cooperation between stakeholders was - and is - good, and openness and trust are central to success. Nevertheless, the major changes in the town centre have demanded a

great deal from local businesses. This has contributed to the tensions and as a result, a new traders organisation was established in 2017 (Retail Club Winschoten) as an alternative to the existing Trade and Industry Association.



INTERVENTION 1

Financial incentives: Innovative financial cooperation

In 2014, the province of Groningen stated that, as a condition for its substantial financial contribution (€ 12.5 million) to the Action Program, all local stakeholders had to contribute to the strengthening of the town centre. In 2013, the municipality alone did not have enough money for large-scale investments: € 1 million could be made available, and in due course another € 1 million. This financial contribution of the province was welcomed, and therefore the local business community and the municipality decided to investigate whether a business case could be developed that could justify an investment of € 1 million by town centre traders. A working group of approximately five town centre entrepreneurs and a municipal project leader started developing this business case. The result was a financial plan based on the American model of Tax Increment Financing: i.e. a large investment in the town centre is repaid over a number of years through an additional tax on the local businesses. The idea behind Tax Increment Financing is that if entrepreneurs and the municipality invest together, eventually this will lead to increased sales, revenues and property values. This creates scope for entrepreneurs to make a financial contribution to urban regeneration (for more information on the financing model, see: www.cmihva.link/winschoten).

After much consultation, the town centre businesses considered abolishing the parking tax to be the most promising investment in terms of potential impact. The expectation was that free parking would have a clear positive effect on visitor numbers and retail turnover. The municipality calculated that its introduction would lead to a budget deficit of an average of € 425,000 per year and offered to underwrite € 150,000 per year of this amount, and the traders offered to pay € 150,000 through a local tax measure, and with a number of large-scale retailers an annual contribution of € 75,000 was agreed. These agreements were laid down in the Winschoten Covenant 2015-2019. After signing the covenant, the municipality abolished the parking tax as of 1 January 2015. After this, a working group of the local authorities and entrepreneurs set to work on the development of the tax measure and the elaboration of the contractual agreements with the local traders. The working group was soon confronted with an impossible task: a tax measure to cover the costs of abolishing the parking tax proved to be legally impossible. In addition, a contract for a financial contribution from traders to such an intervention had not yet been drawn up in the Netherlands, and it would require a great deal of legal expertise and commitment.

This setback did not prevent the municipality from introducing free parking, but the financing was organised differently. The municipality decided to finance the total intervention, which led to an annual deficit of € 150,000 in the municipal budget for urban renewal. The entrepreneurs indicated that they would contribute this € 150,000 to the implementation of the Action Programme in 2015 and 2016 and to the improvement of the city centre in the period 2017-19. In order to collect this amount, the local advertising tax was raised. This method was chosen because it is easy to implement, does not produce free-riders, and offers certainty over a longer period (2015-2019). An innovative aspect of the advertising tax structure is that it is levied partly on the basis of the value of the property in which the trader is established. The tax consists of a low fixed amount and a further part that depends on the value of the property. There are also two tariff areas: the core shopping district and the rest of the town centre. Both

principles lead to the broadest shoulders carrying the heaviest loads. The tax measures was discussed at a meeting with all traders at the beginning of 2015 and received broad support, partly because of its perceived fairness in the allocation of financial contributions.

The new advertising tax will bring in € 260,000 annually in the period 2015-19. This amount will be made available to the newly established town centre fund. Over this period, this fund will pay the municipality an annual sum of € 150,000. After consulting taxpayers, the fund annually advises the municipality on the use of this contribution. The remaining part of the proceeds of the advertising tax (€ 110,000) will be available for implementation and promotion of activities and events in the town centre. With the small group of large-scale retailers that annually contribute € 75,000 to free parking a contract was drawn up. No such agreement existed yet and the contract has been developed with a specialised legal advisor and the lawyers of the entrepreneurs, which precisely regulates the rights and obligations on both sides.



INTERVENTION 2

Spatial, legal and policy interventions, financial incentives and (online) marketing: Action Program for Strengthening Winschoten Town Centre

The Action Program was aimed at reducing the vacancy rate and increasing the attractiveness of the town centre. The implementation of the Action Program involved an investment of € 26 million over the period 2014 to 2016, of which € 22 million was accounted for by local authorities (province and municipality) and the remaining € 4 million by private real estate parties. Implementation took place under the direction of a program organisation team in which traders and the municipality worked together. Property owners, business and residents were involved in the program via advisory groups. The Action Program includes several interventions.

Area development and urban design

The area development within the Action Program consisted of the reconstruction of Oldambt Square, the restoration of the train station, the redevelopment of several brownfield sites and the construction of 'De Klinker', a Cultural facility. Furthermore, in 2014 and 2015 traders could apply for a subsidy for improving their premises or facade, for relocating their business to the core shopping area, or for creating dwelling space above the shop. A total of € 700,000 was invested in 45 such projects. This led to additional investments (on top of the subsidy) in retail properties of € 1.3 million in total.



Reconstruction of Oldambt Square

Reduction of retail vacancy

The aim of this intervention was to combat problematic vacancies in the town centre and to make the shopping area more compact by removing retail space (in terms of zoning) and moving shops from the peripheral parts of the town centre to the core shopping area. An ordinance on vacancy was introduced, and under this regulation, a property owner has a duty to report vacancies. The municipality checks town centre vacancies and can issue a fine if a vacancy has not been reported. After the notification has been made, the municipality will, on the basis of the by-laws, consult with the owner on how to proceed. Subject to certain conditions, the municipality has the possibility to nominate a user of the vacant property. In the period 2014-2016, 5,000 m² of retail space on the outskirts of the town centre was re-zoned and 4,000 m² of zoned retail space were taken out of the market. In addition, 10,000 m² that were in the development pipeline were cancelled. As a result of these measures, the total retail space in the town centre has decreased from 45,000 m² in 2013 to 35,000 m² in 2017 (excluding vacancy). The number of vacant retail properties in the city centre has halved from 91 in 2014 (35% vacant) to 47 in 2017 (18% vacant).

Free parking

As described above, free parking was introduced on 1 January 2015, which was (indirectly) financed by the municipality and local traders. Research has shown that, according to the retailers, free parking has led to an increase in the number of visitors and store sales, among other things. For example, 26% of shopkeepers and 29% of entrepreneurs in the hotel and catering industry indicated that free parking had increased turnover. In the core shopping area, as many as 45% of the entrepreneurs reported an increase in turnover. The same research shows that the impact of some anticipated problems, such as increased pressure on parking areas and increased long term parking, were not as bad as expected. The majority of entrepreneurs (68%) report that the advantages of free parking outweigh the disadvantages.

Monitoring

Monitoring and evaluating the interventions was also an important part of the Action Program. In the period from 2014 to 2017, data were collected on the vitality of businesses in the town centre, but also on how the changes effected the town centre catchment area, footfall, parking and accessibility.

To conclude

The Winschoten case is inspiring because of the major investment made by various stakeholders in the quality of urban space, parking, marketing and the retail offer in the town centre. Creating local support for the interventions is also central to success. From the outset, all stakeholders were heavily involved in the implementation of the interventions via feedback sessions, among other things. In addition, Winschoten has devised an innovative mechanism to allow local business to contribute financially to the improvement of the town centre. Finally, all the interventions were monitored and evaluated, which allowed the partnership to make clear what the effects of the interventions were. The Winschoten case proves that a coordinated approach, for which traders, property owners and local authorities are jointly responsible, can really work.

MORE INFORMATION

www.cmihva.link/winschoten

www.cmihva.link/case-winschoten

www.centrumfondswinschoten.nl/convenant-binnenstad-winschoten-2015-2019

www.gemeente-oldambt.nl/actieprogramma-versterking-binnenstad-winschoten

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Conclusion

In almost all the major UK town/city centres (and many smaller ones) there are Urban Management Partnerships (UMP) that work together to increase both consumer spending and the overall attractiveness of the locale. Also in neighbouring countries, including the Netherlands and Belgium, UMPs work to improve the attractiveness and vitality of city centres through collective interventions. However, this does not always happen without problems and obstacles. For example, in many town/city centres it is a challenge to create sufficient support for collective initiatives and the implemented interventions do not always produce the desired effect. Urban Management Partnerships therefore want to know which interventions offer the most added value for their town centre. The most important learning points from the case studies analysed by the expert group of *ShoppingTomorrow* are described below.

Critical success factors for collective interventions in town and city centres

Make sure there is a strong team that leads the way forward

The people organizing the partnership are crucial to its success. Many collective interventions require a large investment of time and specific expertise from those involved. To increase the success rate of interventions, partnerships should ask themselves whether they have the right people in the right place. Do they have the right expertise? Do they have sufficient time to set up and implement the intervention? Outsourcing certain activities to external parties can help. However, time and expertise are not the only ingredients for a strong team. It is just as important that a partnership is managed by people who are genuinely passionate about - and involved in - the town/city centre. It can also help if 'local heroes' and other successful entrepreneurs play an active role within the partnership. They can inspire other entrepreneurs to actively participate in the UMP and in the interventions that are carried out.

Much can be achieved with little or no budget, but structural financing is a foundation for a sustainable partnership

The majority of the interventions that UMPs carry out need financial resources. Finding (structural) financing is therefore one of the top priorities of a partnership. Without structural funding, it is impossible to develop a professional partnership and sustainable interventions. By persuading stakeholders to make a financial contribution or a contribution in kind (including time, expertise or a space/venue for getting together), partnerships with little or no budget can also get things done. This does require a large dose of creativity, persuasiveness and perseverance on the part of the UMP. A partnership without its own structural budget is vulnerable because it depends entirely on the efforts of volunteers and on voluntary (financial) contributions from stakeholders. In addition, a great deal of time and energy must be devoted to finding funding for each project. In short, UMPs should realize that available budget is not always a requirement for getting business done, but they should strive to become structurally funded in order to increase their chances of success in the medium and long term.

The importance of effective, committed and reliable (local) government

A key success factor for collective interventions is an effective, committed and reliable local government. If local government structurally supports the Urban Management Partnership, the success rate of the interventions increases. This support need not only be of a financial nature. Adapting local policy and legislation, providing personnel and expertise, improving public space and facilitating meetings are other examples of support that local authorities can offer. It also happens regularly that the local government itself is the initiator of interventions in the town centre, while seeking cooperation with the Urban Management Partnership.

Take your time to create and maintain the local support base

A strong local support base is the key to the success of Urban Management Partnerships; support is needed to start a partnership, to carry out interventions (successfully), and to continue and evolve as a UMP. If conflicting interests arise and the expectations of different stakeholder groups are not properly managed, the support base for the UMP and its interventions disappears. The following instruments can be used to boost the local support base:

- Ensure that stakeholders can actively think about the design of interventions and the spending of the budget;
- Ensure that all important stakeholders participate in the partnership and that they are involved in the implementation of the interventions;
- Take time for gaining support through 1-on-1 conversations, information and participation meetings, but also make it clear that there is a finite time for input of entrepreneurs who do not make their voices heard in the scheduled process time;
- Prevent 'free rider' behaviour, for example by making it compulsory for all local business to contribute to the partnership via a BID;
- Combine different objectives of the partnership in one intervention, for example reducing retail vacancy rates by offering new entrepreneurs a temporary low-cost shop space;
- For larger city centres: ensure that interventions are in line with the practice of traders in the various locales within the city centre and give each locale an autonomous budget to, for example, organise their own (promotional) activities;

Be innovative and proactively approach media outlets

Positive media attention for the town or city centres can lead to new opportunities for cooperation and financing. In addition, media attention can help to attract more visitors to the shopping area. For partnerships that have something interesting to report (for example a new action plan, the start of a BID, a unique intervention), it is advisable to proactively approach the press, instead of waiting for the news to be picked up by the media.

Invest in doing research

Research can help UMPs to achieve their objectives in five ways. Firstly, research can provide relevant insights for the development of specific interventions and it can provide better insight into the most important target groups of the town centre. Secondly, research can help to increase support for interventions that the partnership wants to carry out. Thirdly, research can help to increase the UMP's bargaining position vis-à-vis local government and other stakeholders. A partnership that can substantiate its arguments with facts and figures can hold its ground more easily. Fourthly, research can help to adapt or develop ongoing interventions to be more successful. Finally, in order to maintain support for the partnership and the interventions, it is crucial that research is used to determine whether the partnership and the interventions it implements have produced the desired result. It is striking, however, that very few partnerships properly evaluate the outcome of their interventions.

Seek cooperation with knowledge institutions

As described above, conducting research is important for the success rate of UMPs. Partnerships are often faced with questions regarding the development and results of interventions. The available budget to carry out (evaluation) research is often limited and partnerships usually do not have the money to hire research agencies to do this type of research for them. Colleges and universities can help in this respect since they are often looking for interesting thesis and research assignments for students. A number of the UMPs in this study have actively sought cooperation with knowledge institutions and this

has created a win-win situation. Knowledge institutions can not only help with research into the design and results of interventions, but can also help to obtain funding.

Closing remarks

In this research, the *ShoppingTomorrow* expert group 'Future Retail City Centre' has tried to answer the question, which interventions offer the most added value for town and city centres? It does so by providing two conceptual frameworks (a development model for UMPs, and a typology of possible interventions) and a description of 21 cases, of which nine are included in this English language version of the report. The interventions described by the expert group represent only part of the actions taken to make town centres future-proof. Nevertheless, valuable tips can be derived from the case descriptions, which can help to increase the effectiveness of UMPs and the effectiveness of their interventions. It is important to emphasize that the context in which interventions take place is an important determinant of success. This means that an intervention that has proved successful in one town centre will not (always) lead to the same results in another town.

So, in conclusion, the most important tip the expert group wants to give to UMPs from all over Europe is: learn from the experiences of other town and city centres. Go and see how other UMPs carried out a certain intervention and which factors (context) contributed to its success - or failure.

To download the original Dutch report with 21 case studies and for information about the expert group visit www.cmihva.link/FutureRetailCityCentre

