

## HISTORIC CITY CENTRES AND COMMERCIAL GENTRIFICATION

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### ABSTRACT

Regenerating the historic centres of cities has long been an important and widely used intervention for local authorities to fight urban decay and obsolescence. It also has helped administrations to increase their competitive power in attracting new businesses, increasing visitors' footfall, and to promote rising property values. To plan for regeneration it is vital to adopt an area-based approach which requires a joint organizational management perspective to deal with social, economic, spatial and environmental issues under a single umbrella. Otherwise, various unexpected consequences might arise. To illustrate this, physical improvements in such areas usually end up with increased property values which are both enjoyed and/or endured by the stakeholders, including local residents, tradesmen and others. Therefore, any intervention with reference to the regeneration and rehabilitation of historic city centres should be monitored by the planning departments of the municipalities to deal with the possibility of unexpected consequences.

Pedestrianization is one of these intervention tools used to regenerate historic city centres, providing benefits in such areas as health, environment, transportation and accessibility, and also economic and social prospects. Pedestrianization is also one of the most important contributors to the expansion of retail activities, since it increases visitors' footfall. Increased retail activities in pedestrianized streets and historic areas drive sales and property prices upwards. Therefore, it is largely welcomed by the local authorities. On the other hand, pedestrianization might produce an unintentional commercial gentrification. Therefore, it is wise to note that feedback mechanisms should be established in the earlier phases of the regeneration plans formulated by municipalities.

In this respect, the regeneration of the historic centre of the Istanbul's Kadıköy district, which started in 2004 and still continues, is worth-noting. In the context of our research, in 2014, 400 surveys were conducted with visitors and shopkeepers and a land-use analysis was completed to identify the changes which had occurred in the past ten years. Then, in 2018, a new

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land-use analysis was carried out to track the changes from 2014 to 2018. Moreover, face-to-face interviews with city council members and the head of trade associations were made in 2018 and 2019. In our case study, the most important achievement of the regeneration scheme was the pedestrianization of the area, the success of which promoted an unintended commercial gentrification which turned into an impasse between local tradesmen, property owners and the municipality. In this paper, the reasons behind this commercial gentrification will be discussed, together with proposed solutions to any problems which might arise, using examples from various developments in other countries.

**Keywords:** Pedestrianisation, Historic Town Centres, Regeneration, Commercial Gentrification, Retailing

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Throughout history, all pre-industrial cities were also pedestrian-cities. The balance between pedestrians and traffic was first interrupted by industrialisation in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and then this separation was further deepened in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In this period, much of the effort of the Modernist architects and planners was focused on the design of healthier environments (sun, space, greenery), and separating pedestrians and cars to provide more 'freedom' to moving traffic (Carmona, et al, 2003, p.21). Conversely, this resulted in pedestrian-unfriendly cities. In Europe, Germany was the first country to introduce pedestrianisation schemes in 1926 in Essen. This idea of attracting customers to car-free environments for shopping was also used by European planners to develop projects such as the Lijnbahn Street in Rotterdam and other war-damaged cities, particularly those in West Germany, in the 1950s. In the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the pedestrianisation schemes were continued to be implemented in Europe, such as in Germany, the Netherlands, the UK, etc. Among these cases, Copenhagen has turned out to be a success story, in which 100,000 m<sup>2</sup> of land in the city centre was pedestrianized between 1960 and 2000 (Gehl and Gemzoe, 2000).

The city centres in Europe and elsewhere entered in a declining status after the suburbanization and deindustrialization of the 1960s and 1970s (Hall, 1998). There also other reasons for this decline, such as physical, economical and functional obsolescence of the building stock, aging buildings, legal issues, etc.; and as shown with examples, in many revitalization schemes, pedestrianisation has been used as a major tool (Tiesdell, et al 1996). According to Wooller (et al, 2012) 'urban regeneration through pedestrianised spaces' helps to decrease car-dependency and increase in physical activity levels. Similar paths were also followed in the UK (Tallon, 2010). Through pedestrianisation, city centres are

expected to regain their popularity, with the increase in the number of visitors, growing sales, and various opportunities for socialization (Gehl and Gemzoe, 2000; Monheim, 2013).

A successful pedestrianisation scheme requires citizen participation; the optimum allocation of space for all users (including residents, operatives, tourists, and traders); management of public parking facilities; provision of access to public transport; adequate demarcation of spaces for loading and unloading; co-ordination of municipal services such as waste collection; cleaning, security, and maintenance; and finding a solution to the various parking and traffic problems which surround and occasionally intrude upon the pedestrianised area (Sastre et al, 2013, p.743). On the other hand, the success of such schemes may also drive gentrification, leading the displacement of current residents and businesses.

In this context, the aim of this article is to analyse the consequences of a pedestrianisation scheme located on the Asian side of Istanbul, in Kadiköy historic centre and retail zone, by focusing on changes in retail structure during the post-pedestrianisation period. The pedestrianised area is the locus of a very important hub for different modes of transportation on the Asian side of the city, and, of equal importance, remains a conservation area and a historic market place.

## **2. PEDESTRIANISATION AS A MEANS FOR REVITALISING HISTORIC TOWNS**

### **2.1. Positive and Negative Aspects of Pedestrianisation Schemes**

Pedestrianization has transportation benefits, such as improved mobility and accessibility, reduced congestion, accidents, increase in public transportation use. Social benefits include, increased sense of belonging, increase in safety, heritage preservation. Environmental benefits include reduced air pollution, fuel and oil saving, noise reduction, more greenery and plantation, and improved microclimate. Economic benefits contain increase in pedestrian footfall, increased sales and rents. Health benefits are unpolluted air, more exercise, fat and calories loss, improvement in metabolisms, cardiovascular system etc. (Soni and Soni, 2016, p.149). The study by Sandahl and Lindh (1995) on Sweden revealed that the attractiveness of the city centres significantly increased with pedestrianisation, which also contributed to the increased the accessibility. As the pedestrianised city centres become more popular, the real estate prices rise in the vicinity as well. Litman, (2014) summarizes the advantages of traffic calming measures such as increased road safety, comfort and mobility for non-motorized traffic, reduced noise and air pollution, and increased property values.

As well as positive aspects, the pedestrianisation also has negative aspects. It is usually inevitable that the small-scale businesses in the pedestrianised areas are

displaced (commercial gentrification). The change to the trade in the area to meet the consumption requirements of the high-income group is called "commercial gentrification" (Rankin, 2008). If the pedestrianisation project achieves success, the real estate prices rise, and the small businesses fail to keep up with this price boom. Thus, they are replaced by the chain stores which can pay the increased rents. Despite the increased sales, the small businesses have to leave the area since they cannot afford the increased rental prices. This puts the shopkeepers in the area in a difficult situation. Consequently, losing their originality and authenticity, these areas become cloned/identical centres. There have been criticisms that the city centres have been turned into monotype cash machines. There is also pressures for the displacement of residential uses in favour of commercial expansion (Tan, 2008).

The efforts to revitalise the historic city centres might possibly end up with two interrelated threats; the first one is the displacement of local and authentic shops with chain stores or higher-end brands; second one is the loss of diversity and variety of the city centres at the expense of chains which provide standardised services together with their standardised logo, colour, etc. (NEF Report 2005). After the popularisation of the area, the increases in shop rents cause the displacement of tenant retail premises. This is the case when the shop ownership pattern does not support ownership. Therefore, the small shops and stores owned by these groups are outcompeted by the big international retail chain stores and eventually shut down.

The economic success of a pedestrianisation scheme is measured by analysing the increase in sales, pedestrians' footfall, and residential/commercial property prices (Hass-Klau, 2015; Sinnett, *et al* 2011; Cömertler, 2007; Kumar and Ross, 2006). There is a wide range of literature analysing the economic dimension of pedestrianisation; however, the research relating the retail/shop-mix changes with that of the commercial property rental changes in the pedestrianised environments are relatively few (Hon-Yip 2014, Chau *et al* 2000).

### **3. PEDESTIANISATION OF KADIKÖY HISTORIC CENTRE**

Kadıköy Historic Centre (KHC) has always been an important node for shoppers, passer-bys and retail activities. During the 19th century, the old marketplace was the centre of the area. From the 1950s onwards, social-economic problems started. The "Regeneration of the Historical Centre of Kadıköy" project was launched under the leadership of the Kadıköy Municipality in 2004. In this context, an association of the tradesmen in the historic centre was also established. In accordance with the decisions of the Board for the Protection of Cultural and Natural Properties, the Municipality of the County of Kadıköy and the ÇEKÜL

Foundation became project partners on 06.10.2004. With the protocol signed upon this partnership, the Regeneration Project for the Historic Centre was launched. The overall purpose of the Regeneration Project for Kadıköy Historic Centre was to 'regenerate' the 'Historic Centre which had gradually been losing its economic, physical and historic significance'. Although the pedestrianisation scheme was not welcomed by all tradesmen in the beginning, after observing its success it has been widely accepted by retail establishments in the area.

### **3.1. Methodology**

The aim of this study is to shed light on the pedestrianisation project in Kadıköy Historic Centre (KHC) and marketplace and its economic consequences with regard to the changing retail uses as a result of the rising shop rents. The survey covers a wide range of questions, from social and physical aspects (such as attractiveness, safety, physical and visual improvements, and user profiles) to economic issues (such as the volume of pedestrians, or sales.).

The pedestrianisation project in the area was started in 2004 and completed in 2009. The first part of our survey was conducted in 2014. The research has a tripartite structure: a land use analysis to identify before and after changes of the pedestrianisation project, a survey of pedestrians and shopkeepers, and interviews with two non-profit organizations which were involved in the revitalization project. The original land use analysis was conducted by the Kadıköy Municipality in 2004. Ten years later, in 2014, the authors conducted another land use survey in the same area to understand the changes that had taken place in the past ten years. Then, four years later, in 2018, another landuse analysis was conducted in order to track the changes after 2014. The results of this landuse study are also presented on a map and a chart.

Within the project area, the boundaries of which are set by the Kadıköy Municipality, there are 317 commercial properties at the ground floor level. The majority of these are members of the Association of the Retailers of the Kadıköy Historic Centre. Among the retail premises visited in the area, a hundred shops agreed to participate in the survey. In this context, a third of the retail premises (100 shops) were surveyed in July 2014. The questionnaires were filled by face-to-face interviews with the shopkeepers. There are also 398 pedestrian surveys completed<sup>1</sup>. The survey was conducted on weekdays and at the weekend; and

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<sup>1</sup> When the size of the universe is unknown, within the limits of  $\pm 0.05$  sampling error and 95% confidence interval, at least 384 surveys should be completed (Yazicioğlu and Erdoğan, 2004, p.50). In the research, 400 questionnaires were distributed, with 398 completed correctly.

took place between 09.00 and 19.00 hours. In order to distribute surveys equally during the day time, in every hour, only 10 people were surveyed.

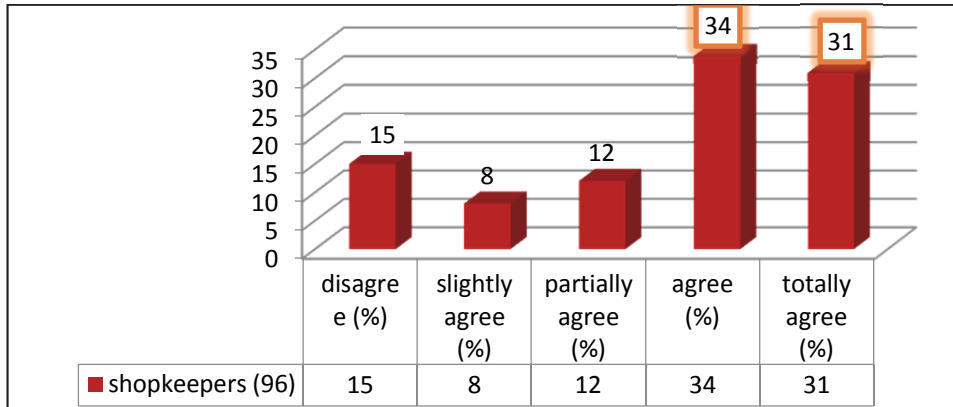
#### 4. THE RESULTS OF THE SURVEYS AND INTERVIEWS

The results of our analysis showed that a great majority of the visitors (65,58%, 216 out of 298 people) is between 20 and 39 years old, i.e., young people. The age group between 40 and 49 is 13,32 % (53 people) and the youngest age group (10 and 19) is 11,31% (45 people). As it can be observed from the Table 1, majority of the visitors (the sum of *agree* and *totally agree*) think that after pedestrianisation property prices increased (45,7%); foreign and local visitors increased (50,1%); area visually and aesthetically embellished (47%); eating and drinking places increased (55,6%). These are recognised as the indicators of the success of the scheme. The increase in property prices is a positive aspect of the pedestrianisation with respect to the owners. However, for the tenant retailers, this indicator of success, turns into a threat; because shop rents also increase with the increase in visitors' footfall.

**Table 1. Visitors' Views about Pedestrianisation / Positive Aspects**

VISITORS' VIEWS POSITIVE ASPECTS	DISAGREE		SLIGHTLY AGREE		PARTIALLY AGREE		AGREE		TOTALLY AGREE	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Area became safer	94	23,9	44	11,2	110	27,9	81	20,6	65	16,5
Property prices increased	59	15,4	41	10,7	108	28,2	114	29,8	61	15,9
Cultural activities increased	64	16,7	42	11,0	119	31,1	94	24,5	64	16,7
Foreign/local tourists increased	50	13,0	55	14,3	87	22,6	118	30,6	75	19,5
Visual & aesthetics beautification	69	17,9	32	8,3	103	26,8	109	28,3	72	18,7
Increased attractiveness	63	16,4	44	11,4	100	26,0	106	27,5	72	18,7
Eating/drinking places increased	35	9,1	45	11,7	91	23,6	121	31,4	93	24,2
Number of car parks increased	88	23,0	56	14,6	83	21,7	101	26,4	55	14,4
Local tourists increased	41	10,7	52	13,5	101	26,3	108	28,1	82	21,4
Foreign tourists increased	59	15,4	44	11,5	80	20,8	85	22,1	116	30,2

This observation of the visitors' is also confirmed by the shopkeepers, stating that the number of shops closed down increased, because they could not afford the increased shop rents. (See Figure 1) One of the consequences of increasing rental values is the displacement of small shops which have difficulty in affording these increases. Sixty-one percent of the shopkeepers (65 out of 96 shopkeepers) *agree* or *totally agree* about the closures of the old and small businesses

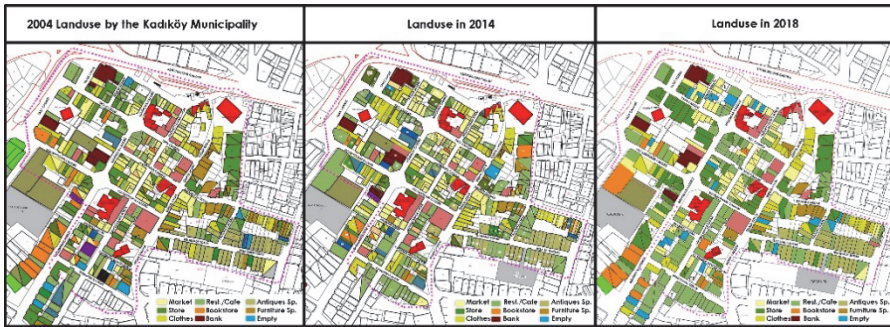


**Figure 1: Shops are closed down after pedestrianisation (Shopowners' views)**

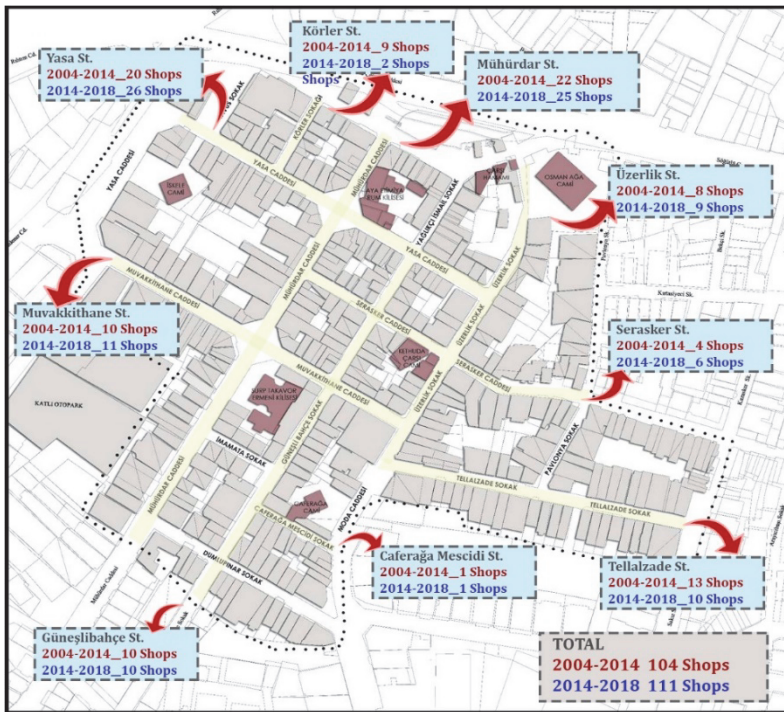
The KHC has always been a prominent centre for the food and drink industry. Mühürdar is the main street, while Muvakkithane, Tellalzade, Serasker and Yasa are also important thoroughfares. In the context of this research, a map showing land-use in 2004 (maintained by the Kadıköy Municipality), was updated in July 2014. From 2004 to 2014, the range of shop-types changed. A third of the shops (108 out of 317 shops) had changed their functions (see Figures 2,3 and Table 1)

An important turning point in the in the pedestrianisation of the KHC was the change in item 10 of the *Law of Obligations* which made it possible to annul the deeds of shopkeepers who had rented the same shop for more than 10 years. The change was amended in July 2014. In the KHC, almost 2/3 of the shopkeepers are tenants, and this legal change worsened their affordability of rents. After this change, it became possible for property owners to ask for higher rents. In 2016, for example, for a 100-m<sup>2</sup> shop, the rent was as high as 30,000 TL monthly<sup>2</sup> (Karakaş, 2016).

<sup>2</sup> As of April 2016, the exchange rate of US \$ 1 equals to 2.8 Turkish Lira, and € 1 equals to 3.1 TL.



**Figure 2: Changing Landuse in the KHC between 2004 and 2018**



**Figure 3. The Change in the shopmix in the KHC (2004, 2014 and 2018)**

In the year 2014, the comparative analysis with 2004, showed that 107 shops changed their functions over 10 years, mostly turning into restaurants and cafes (43%). In that decade, four antiques shops and 10 bookstores were closed. These changes occurred mostly in two main streets, Mühürdar and Yasa.

During the interview with Mr. Mehmet Ecevit from the Board of Directors of the Association of the Retailers of the Kadıköy Historic Centre on November 14, 2016, it was revealed that the area started to be much more popular with pedestrians



soon after its pedestrianisation in 2009. This development spurred entries of many new retailers to conduct business in the KHC, with the assumption that increased popularity would bring higher profits. The emerging demand from the entrepreneurs for retail space to rent consequently created pressure on the traditional, established tenants of this historic retail centre, since owners of shops started to ask for higher rents from their existing tenants.

As mentioned above, the change in the Law of Obligation created an opportunity for commercial property owners to ask for higher rents. An average 70-80 m<sup>2</sup> shop rent increased from 5,000 TL to 20,000 TL. Although new retailers started business with initial enthusiasm in the KHC, and were willing to pay over-the-odds rents, within a short time (mostly after six months) they realized that doing business there had not been profitable enough to compensate for inflated rents. As a consequence, there has been a rapid turnover of ownership in the rented shops.

Another change revealed by Mr.Ecevit during the interview was the loss of retail variety which was related to the upward expansion of retailers to the first and second floors of buildings through displacement of pre-existing residents. The buildings which were once hosting the shop owners' families living on top of their shops started to be deserted by them. Consequently, although the area remains very popular with pedestrians, the demand for retail services has changed in line with a larger presence of drinking/eating and dining activities, rather than the provision of *daily needs*.

In the 2018-landuse analysis, the consequences of this legal amendment became more visible. In four years' time from 2014 to 2018, 107 shops changed their functions. Similar to the previous years, Mühürdar and Yasa streets are the ones with a high rate of change. See Table 2. Also, the rate of change in the shop types became faster. For example, in Mühürdar Street, 25 shops changed their functions in four years (2014 - 2018), while 22 changes took place between 2004 and 2014.

**Table 2: The Consecutive Change in Retailers in the KHC from 2004 to 2018**

STREETS	2004-2014	2014-2018	TOTAL
Muvakkithane Street	10	11	21
Mühürdar Street	22	25	47
Tellalzade Street	13	10	23
Serasker Street	4	6	10
Yasa Street	20	26	46
Üzerlik Street	8	9	17
Körlar Street	9	2	11
C.Mescidi Street	1	1	2
Pavlonya Street	6	2	8
Yağcı İsmail Street	3	3	6
Tavus Street	2	2	4
Güneşlibahçe	10	10	20
<b>TOTAL</b>	108	107	215

Tellazade Street managed to keep its authentic atmosphere with the antique shops, in spite of the changes. In the 2014-2018 period, there are four new antique shops, 21 new retail stores, and 25 new restaurants and cafes were opened, although 3 bookstores were closed.

A striking result was the scale of the changes, that is, on the street level there are 317 commercial premises; and as it can be observed in the Table 2, within 14 years, 215 shops changed their functions. This means that 68% of the shops have gained new functions, mostly in the eating and drinking sector. Many of these new businesses are the “fish and raki” restaurants, which filled a gap in the market after the closing down the fish and raki restaurants in the historical Beyoğlu district in 2011 (Milliyet, 2011; Bilgici, 2017).

#### 4.1. Kadıköy Historical Centre in the Covid19 Pandemic Period

During work on this article, the world has been hit by the Covid19 virus. In order to understand the economic consequences of the pandemic in Kadıköy’s historic commercial centre, we conducted an online connection with the chair of the Association of the Retailers of the Kadıköy Historic Centre, Mr. Ali Geçgel on September 1, 2020. According to Mr.Geçgel:

“Kadıköy historic centre has been going through a difficult period, many shops are turning over their rights, and closing down due to high rents and the absence

of customers. Delicatessens, sweet shops, *halva* shops, and many other similar types of businesses have either closed down or moved to other locations with cheaper rents. Along the Tullalade Street, many antique shops have been replaced by restaurants. The Historic centre has been losing its diversity of shops. Unfortunately, local shopkeepers have not been able to benefit from the support funding of the government; and many of the shops have been subleased. Moreover, since the Bill on the Historic City Centres has not been amended yet, not only Kadıköy, but many other historic cities in Turkey are also in difficulty. Another problem is the inappropriately restored historical buildings, and during the pandemic, this problem has worsened."

According to the chair of the Association of the Retailers, if the necessary steps are not taken immediately, Kadıköy historical centre will be a marketplace serving only the textile and clothing industry, and eating and drinking places. To prevent this, historic shops and businesses along these historic streets and age-old buildings should be listed to conserve their heritage, and their guilds tradition.

## **5. CONCLUSION**

Pedestrianisation schemes contribute to the improvement of the built environment through various outcomes, including increased safety and visual attractiveness. These positive effects lead to an increase in the number of pedestrians passing through, and a further increase in the volume of sales. In such cases, the literature review frequently mentions an increase in property/rental values as a positive outcome (Chau *et al*, 2000, Hon-Yip, 2011).

As our research has shown that the success of the pedestrianisation of the KHC scheme has created a threat, that is, the replacement of many smaller older businesses with domestic and international chain-stores or eating/drinking facilities.

Planning authorities should carefully consider preventive measures to protect the diversity of small individual shops which contribute to the maintenance of an authentic image which may be invaluable for such historic centres and their retail zones. One measure that emerged from our interview with the Association of the Retailers of the Kadıköy Historic Centre is the possibility of controlling business permits. This might indeed be one of the most useful policies to prevent the conversion of the area's image into a mono-functional retail zone, if there is a will to implement restrictions in the licensing of new businesses. An inventory of the retailers can also be prepared, with new business permits given only to new start-ups in the same retail category of the closed premises, rather than the licencing of new eating and drinking places. Moreover, historic shops and

businesses along historic streets and age-old buildings can be listed to conserve their heritage. Family-owned, small businesses, offering a variety of specialized services, can be given local tax exemptions by the municipality. Methods used in the assessment of commercial property can also be regulated to prevent speculative rent increases.

Having concluded in her study on Toronto's three west-central neighbourhoods, Rankin (2008, p. 43-47) proposes three possible solutions to deal with the commercial gentrification: a) "Municipalities can retain some of the shops and stores during and after the gentrification process, and employ the old businesses with low rents in order to preserve the traditional fabric of the area; b) Individual independent retailers can form cooperatives to counter the entrance of the global companies into the area; c) The visitors can show sensitivity and shop at local independently owned stores".

In conclusion, in a pedestrianisation scheme there are many factors which need to be considered. Although mostly positive results, and often very positive results, are achieved after pedestrianisation schemes are introduced, commercial functions in the pedestrianised areas, together with the dynamics of retailing and the tenure status of commercial properties, need to be assessed beforehand. In this respect future studies on pedestrianisation may wish to incorporate more fully these issues in their research agenda.

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