

## Prioritizing urban axis to enhance local retail revitalisation



### 1. Igualada RetailLink Project

Igualada's RetailLink project objective is to design an integrated retail revitalisation policy for the city. The first step to do so is to know more about what it is necessary to boost the competitiveness of the retail sector, its development and growth, as well as to know how to improve other services such as restaurants or cultural activities that can be related to retail. The final aim of the project is to agree on a strategy setting the relevant actions to revitalise the retail sector and the city economy as a whole, using an integrated and participative approach.

#### The vision

The project vision is to make the city of Igualada a Catalan retail destination combining retail and leisure offering a unique, specialised and differentiated offer.

#### The context

Located in Catalonia, just 60 km from Barcelona, Igualada, has a population of 38.978 inhabitants within the city and of 70.000 in its catchment area.

Historically, Igualada's economy was mainly based on the textile and leather industries. However, over the past few years these industries have suffered a significant decline due to liberalization processes and the relocation of companies to lower-wage countries. As a result of the economic decline, in April 2015 the unemployment rate in Igualada stood at 18,87%, while in Catalonia it was 16,56%.

To redress this situation and promote economic recovery, Igualada City Council is supporting certain strategic sectors including the leather and textile industries, which are mature sectors and still a major source of employment in the city. Igualada is developing a strategy and actions to position itself as the European Capital of Quality Leather and to drive the textile reindustrialization process in the leather and textile sectors in order to boost and strengthen their competitiveness.

As part of the economic revitalisation of the city, the retail sector is also considered a priority strategic sector as it is closely linked to the above-mentioned fashion industry of Igualada.

Igualada's powerful retail offer comprises more than 600 shops and is complemented by a diverse cultural and leisure offer. Indeed, Igualada's retail appeal is boosted by its entertainment offers as well as by its strategic location in the centre of Catalonia that allows it to attract potential consumers from other neighbouring towns and from the rest of Catalonia.

In addition to the traditional retail offer, Igualada has 3 key elements that differentiate it from other cities:

- **Factory Shops:** The importance of the textile industry in the city has led to several clothing companies opening up their own factory shops in Igualada in addition to selling their products in other locations through their own or multi-brand stores. Prestigious national and international brands from Igualada, such as Punto Blanco, Sita Murt, Escorpion or David Valls, attract shoppers to the city.
- **Outlet Shops:** Igualada has a good number of outlet shops clustered near the city centre, although they are not included in the main retail area. These outlet shops attract customers seeking high quality products.
- **Experimental Stores:** REC.0 Experimental Stores is a new commercial phenomenon based on an innovative retail concept, which emerged in Igualada. REC.0 is a temporary transformation of the industrial area where tanneries are located: for 4 days twice a year, old factories turn into fashion pop up stores where top brands as well as designers sell their stocks at special prices. Desigual, Mango, Ash, Levis, Lacoste, Pepe Jeans are but a few of the brands that take part in this popular retail event.

However, despite its varied offer, the local retail sector has experienced a decline due to the following factors:

- The prolonged economic downturn has led to a reduction in the purchasing power of consumers.
- New consumer habits and the emergence of new distribution channels have had a negative impact on the traditional retail offer.
- Igualada suffers from the competition of larger cities, where consumers are attracted by the wider retail offer in Barcelona and its metropolitan area.

This decline in the retail sector has not only affected the traditional stores but also the factories and the outlet shops established in Igualada. As a result, there has been an increase in the number of vacant retail units as well as a rise in unemployment in the sector.

In this challenging context, the Municipal Council is thus striving to position the city as a reference in the retail world through offering an attractive and innovative shopping experience to attract customers from all over the region.

The City Council is also supporting the retail activity by providing information on grants and other public funding opportunities, by adapting retail regulation, and by offering training to improve business competitiveness.

The local authority has been working to reach a consensus with the different representatives of the retail sector for developing a participative and integrated retail revitalization policy. One result is that the city has been leading the URBACT RetailLink Action Planning Project since 2015. Since then, the municipality has largely implemented actions in collaboration with the retail sector, among them the publication of an Events calendar and the creation of a webpage explaining the town retail offer.

The retail sector is organised around different retail associations:

- Retail Association Igualada Comerç, a non-profit association representing 60% of retailers in the city.
- Retail Association Nou Centre Igualada representing retailers located in the Northern area of Igualada.
- Retail Association Associació de Botiguers del Mercat de la Masuca, linked to the local food market where 60% of the residents in Igualada normally buy.

Fira d'Igualada (Igualada Fair) is another important actor in the city, a non-profit organization aimed at promoting fairs, markets and the retail sector. Nine fairs and more than 20 events are organized by this organization every year.

To ensure a diversified entertainment offer, the City Council Promoted a new cinema in the city centre - the so called "Ateneu Cinema", after the only Cinema in the city closed some years ago. The new Cinema, which opened in 2016 near the city retail's axis, is being used to help retain local consumers in the area.

The municipality of Igualada also organises and participates in the organization of other trade fairs and events such as the BSTIM textile fair, which is co-organized with the Fair of Igualada and the FAGEPI textile group to promote the city's textile industry. Though this kind of industry often has its own outlet shops in Igualada, the BSTIM fair is an opportunity for local retailers to show their products to foreign consumers.

By revitalising the retail sector, the Local Authority is trying to support the competitiveness of an important part of the city's SME's: the retail businesses. The City Council is also committed to revitalising the local retail sector by using leisure and cultural and sports events intentionally linked to retail. While the local retail revitalisation policy has already achieved some of its goals, there is still a clear need to achieve a joint management structure that goes beyond specific promotional activities or the coordination of a few events. This new management structure should include the city retail associations and the City Council. The structure should work for the city adaptation to the retail revitalisation policy needs with an Integrated and Participative (IAP) approach.

With the implementation of the IAP, the retail businesses are expected to be more innovative, competitive and specialised, talents which together can be considered as keys for the promotion of the economic development of the territory.

## 2. The plan

The URBACT Local Group meetings have been useful to identify the retail sector's main needs in the city, as well as the priorities and actions to be taken involving the lead agents, the budget considerations and indicators to assess the results obtained (see table in annex). To promote these changes in Igalada, a number of different things need to happen:

1. Work using an integrated approach –as provided through the URBACT method- on a global long -term retail strategy that contains a clear vision of the city's future.
2. Overcome a situation where the Municipality and the retail associations work separately. Create a common space of collaborative and participative decision-making, based upon the outcomes of the URBACT local Group.
3. Work with partners who are leaders of their respective retail associations to jointly organise working sessions, benchmark good practises and share knowledge.
4. Increase the management skills of those involved in the town and retail centre management to better deal with the cities' economic revitalisation issues.
5. Continue using the URBACT participative method in the future to deal with retail linked policies from an integrated perspective and design systems of sharing knowledge between different municipal departments.



To sum up, the current IAP is a tool to overcome both the lack of cooperation between local stakeholders, including the Council, and the difficulty of aligning their different agendas in a local strategy for retail improvement. The objective is to bring all interests together, public and private, in a common purpose , with a management structure that allows for project monitoring and sustainability.

### Priority objectives

After much work done in the RetailLink Project and many discussions in the ULG meetings, the following key elements to improve the retail sector in Igalada have been identified:

- There is a need to improve the **management skills** in the retail associations.
- The plan should ensure a diverse retail offer so it includes anchors that reinforce the attractiveness of the area. It is important to find a stable balance between the mix of shops and a certain specialisation by zones so that the result enables an intuitive movement throughout the area and, somehow, orientates the consumer.

- The retailers also need better skills to be able to adapt their business to meet the new needs of consumers.
- There is a need to develop and implement joint actions between the municipality and the retail associations.

Three project objectives and the Actions have been agreed upon based on the collaborative work between the Municipality and the city stakeholders in the ULG as substantiated by the work of the present IAP. These are:

**Objective 1: Define and strengthen the commercial axis of Igualada.**

**Objective 2: Expand the training offer addressed to the sector.**

**Objective 3: Increase collaboration between retail associations and the Local Administration.**

After a highly participative discussion, the ULG came up with the following propositions to reach each objective:

**Objective 1: Define and strengthen the commercial axis of Igualada.**

The city of Igualada has different zones where there is an important number of retail business. The retail activity is mainly concentrated in two areas:

- The city centre with four streets with a high concentration of retail activity (the streets of Sant Magí, Argent and Òdena, and the Cal Font Square).
- The northern part of the town, where more people live and where the retail units usually sell products of a daily use.



The Municipal Authority wants to bring together retailers' associations in the territory in a specific but widely inclusive objective: to define a retail area; to adapt it in terms of urban planning; to cover its retail needs; to name it as a whole, generating the internal and external promotion; and, to increase footfall and the number of consumers

The goal is to create a “centre comercial al cel obert” meaning an open shopping mall in the city. To do so, this plan is trying to connect and specialise the different retail axis and the following activities have been identified:

- Create and implement the signage of a “Retail Itinerary” in the city.
- Communication actions in order to promote Igualada’s retail offer to locals and foreigners.
- Increase the pedestrian area surface at the city centre.
- Create an attractive leisure offer in the city.
- Create a customer loyalty service (as a customer card) for the whole local retail.

- Urban rehabilitation (of the buildings, facades) and a general improvement of the environment and elements that constitute the urban space.

### **Objective 2: Expand the training offer addressed to the sector**

Through the participation in the URBACT RetailLink project, the Local Authority and the retailers are committed to upgrading their skills to be able to adapt to the new consumer and retail model based on the content of the RetailLink transnational meetings ([http://urbact.eu/sites/default/files/media/1\\_5\\_new\\_retail\\_trends\\_final.pdf](http://urbact.eu/sites/default/files/media/1_5_new_retail_trends_final.pdf)). The idea is to expand the training offer to increase the capacity of the local retail sector to deal with these new consumer demands.

The City Council and the Retail Associations are trying to improve their own skills to: jointly develop retail revitalisation actions, strengthen management skills to lead the retail non-profit associations, and to help ensure retail businesses are prepared to meet the needs of the “new consumer”. To achieve this specific objective the plan will include creating an annual catalogue with training and learning offer for retailers so that demands can find supply, and training suppliers can obtain more visibility in front of potential market demands.

This activity will be jointly developed between the Town Hall and the Retail Associations and it will probably be financed by a mix of local public funds and enrolment fees.

### **Objective 3: Increase collaboration between retail associations and the Local Administration.**

This objective is based on the need to develop an integrated retail revitalisation policy that should be planned and implemented between the Council and the city retail associations. It aims to create a partnership to ensure that the relevant retail stakeholders participate in the planning and implementation of the retail revitalisation actions.

To achieve this specific objective the following actions have been planned:

- Establish a formal partnership called “Taula de Comerç” (Retail Board) to coordinate all actions and stimulate joint work between the different retail associations and the Council.
- Joint collection of data and indicators: The idea is to use the indicators that are currently being used by the Municipality or the Retail Associations and to share the information amongst the members of the board.

The Retail Board will be initially formed by the current members of the URBACT Local Group:

- The Igualada City Council.
- REC.0 Experimental Stores.
- Retail Association Igualada Comerç.
- Retail Association Nou Centre Igualada.
- Retail Association Associació de Botiguers del Mercat de la Masuca.
- Representatives of the outlet shops.
- Fira d'Igualada (Igualada Fair).

The Retail Board will also deal with the implementation of some of the current IAP actions. The Retail Department of the city is currently studying what the legal status of the board should be.

### **Stakeholders**

- City hall: Economic Promotion Department, Urban Planning Department and Culture, Sports and Environment Department.
- Retailer’s associations: Igualada Comerç i Nou Centre.

- Events and Fairs association: Fira d'Igualada.

## Resources

The Plan implementation will use public and private funding. The Local Authority will also look for funding from other administrations to implement the actions in this plan, such as European, Regional or Provincial funding.

Depending on the action to be undertaken, the resources will come from different sources:

- Administration (public sector) either from the City hall or other institutions, even defining an agreement or creating a public grant.
- The whole retailers (private sector), even as part of the voluntary quotes paid to the different existing associations, or with special contributions to some of the actions.
- Other income might be coming from sponsorships or publicity.

## Indicators

For the specific objectives the plan is using the following result indicators:

### **Objective 1: Define and strengthen the commercial axis of Igualada**

- Footfall in the retail axis.
- Satisfaction level of the retailers.

### **Objective 2: Expand the training offer addressed to the sector**

- Satisfaction level of the people enrolled in the courses.

### **Objective 3: Increase collaboration between trade associations and the Local Administration**

- Number of actions implemented by the new partnership body.

For output indicators, refer to the Roadmap annexed.

## 3. Conclusion

### Learning

Retail entrepreneurs are professionals in the art of selling but most don't have knowledge in the field of urban planning, regulation, or the action capacities of the local administration, etc. It is necessary to do more pedagogy of the relevant aspects of the urban and economic development (mobility, environment, tourism, culture, heritage...) before asking for them to participate in the design of strategies for Action Plans.

To count on inputs from experts with diverse, relevant professional experience and different views (from the public administration and the private sector) has facilitated the development of a common, general perspective and the creation of realistic objectives.

What is believed to be a priority at first not always ends up being so. When defining the main action paths, the differences between what is important and what is urgent becomes more evident, and cleavages can appear amongst stakeholders' priorities. Breaking things down into smaller actions inside the accomplishment of the objectives makes the decision-making process easier, for example, like picking a person in charge, or looking for the adequate resources and defining the most adequate indicators.

Using effective teamwork techniques, and the fact that the groups are made up of people from different backgrounds and fields of work and visions, helps bring transparency and coherence

to the decisions, too. It allows for a general vision –not a partial one- to be established, including the set of possible repercussions, thus making consensus easier.

#### Innovation and transferability

Designing templates of work that include the different paths of action, calendars, responsible person, resources and indicators to monitor and evaluate the results, makes easier both the decision making process and the choice of the right actions to take to achieve each desired objective.

#### 4. Contact Information

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## 5. Roadmap

Objective	Action	Delivery lead/team	Key partners involved	Time	Resources/ Assets	Output Indicator
<b>Define and strengthen the commercial axis of Igualada</b>						
Create and implement the signage of a "Retail Itinerary" in the city	"Taula de Comerç" establishes the axis. The Urban Planning and retail department implement	Cuma (Commission for Urban planning and mobility of the Anoia County)  "Disseny Igualada" (Association of local Designers)		18 months	Local Public Funding	The signage system is deployed
Communication actions in order to promote Igualada's retail offer to locals and visitors	"Nou Centre" and "Igualada Comerç" Retail Associations	Retail Board  "Disseny Igualada"		Ongoing	Private Resources from the retailers	Number of communication actions and campaigns developed
Increase the pedestrian area in the city centre	Retail Board The Urban Planning and Retail Departments implement	Retail Board		June 2018: final decision on the streets of the new pedestrian area	Local Public Funding. Officers of the Igualada City Council	Number of square meters of new pedestrian streets
Create an attractive leisure offer in the city	Igualada Fair – Fira d'Igualada	Public Administration. Retail Associations		Annual Schedule	Music and Dancing schools, theatre groups, Igualada Fair	Number of new leisure activities
Urban rehabilitation (of the buildings, facades) and a general	Retail Board	Public Administration. Retail Associations		First Semester	City Council monitoring	Number of urban rehabilitation actions

improvement of the environment and elements that constitute the urban space			2018	mechanisms // Local Public funding	
Create a customer loyalty service (as a customer card) for the whole local retail	Retail Associations	Private Consultancy services	First quarter 2018 –	Local Public Funding// Private Resources from the retailers	The customer loyalty service is created
<b>Expand the training offer addressed to the sector</b>					
Create an annual catalogue with training and learning offer for retailers	Retail Associations	University and Vocational Training centres	Annual (beginning in 2018)	Local Public Funding // Price per course	Number of courses
<b>Increase collaboration between retail associations and the Local Administration</b>					
Establish a formal partnership, the Retail Board to coordinate all actions and stimulate joint work between the different retail associations and the city hall. Joint collection of data and indicators	City Retail Department	Retail and other associations	On going	On going	Number of actions developed by the new partnership
Joint collection of data and indicators	Retail Board	Private Consultancy services	2018	Local Public Funding// Private Resources from the retailers	Number of indicators collected by the new partnership