

Urban Retail at a Crossroads? Commerce and e-Commerce in the Face of Crisis

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Abstract

The coronavirus pandemic has had a global impact. As a result, urban commercial activity considerably slowed down, suffering from lockdowns, various health restrictions, and a general halt in economic transitions. Based on 40 semi structured interviews with municipal managers and policymakers in 13 major cities with a large population and high commercial densities, this paper examines municipal responses and adaption to this situation in Israel, focusing on the processes, opportunities, and applied tools. We identified four significant changes in the ways municipalities coped with the crisis. First, given the economic challenge, cities realized they must proactively act without waiting for central government assistance. Second, cities updated databases, mapped, and categorized retail to improve their responses. Third, municipalities harnessed existing infrastructure and space, e.g., sidewalks, food trucks, and parklets, to provide onsite tailored solutions. Last, municipal organizational change reflected an important mindset change toward local businesses. Theoretically, we use the Behavioral Change Stairway Model and the Protection Motivation Theory to illustrate how the severity of the covid-19 crisis stimulated a response chain among cities.