

# GO TRADE project survey

## – Preliminary findings

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## Executive summary

Early findings from research carried out in May-October 2018 by the University of Greenwich in collaboration with the National Federation of Market Traders (NMTF) as part of the GO TRADE project has shown that market traders want to improve their ability to address development opportunities offered by the visitor economy. The survey of over 3,766 respondents included market traders, their customers, local businesses near markets and visitors to town centres in northern France and England (east and south).

Key findings of this study are summarised below:

1. Although the availability of car parking near the market is important to market traders, this was seen as less of an issue by market customers.
2. When asked about the market, customers prioritised the ease for visitors/customers to move around the market from stall to stall, the market's opening hours, the overall service quality offered by the market or safety and security at the market as key to its success and attractiveness.
3. Market traders and visitors to markets in England and France largely agreed that markets are generally not making the best of the visitor economy.
4. There was general consensus among market traders, market customers and local businesses about the need for markets to capitalise on the town centre's evening economy and improve their ability to deliver a unique experience to visitors and tourists as opportunity areas for development. Another area for improvement that visitors and local businesses agreed upon was a need for more events and entertainment to be offered by markets.
5. Visitors to markets were generally satisfied with local shops in the proximity of the market and their overall service quality, though less so with the variety of produce offered by markets.
6. Local business owners and managers saw collaboration between local shops and market traders as important, though this same issue was deemed to be of much less importance by market traders.

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## 1. Introduction

The GO TRADE project is a multi-partner international (England-France) €5.4 million initiative co-funded by the European Union<sup>2</sup> of which NMTF and the University of Greenwich are partner members. The project (start: Jul 2017; end: Mar 2021) interprets markets (both traditional and specialist) as testbeds of innovation for entrepreneurs and as major contributors to tourism destinations through the visitor economy. It also aims to support markets and their host town centres by offering them bespoke business support packages as well as research to investigate the dominant factors affecting their success or failure.

As part of this work, a survey was carried out in 10 traditional urban markets in northern France as well as east and south England. The first phase of this survey was done in May-October 2018, with a second phase of the survey due to take place in January 2020 after the project's interventions have taken place. The survey targeted the following groups:

- (i) market traders;
- (ii) owners of local small and medium enterprise (SME) shops (including restaurants, bars, pubs and cafes but not service businesses such as hair dressers) within a 250-metre radius of the market;
- (iii) customers and visitors to the local market; and
- (iv) visitors to the town centre who had no intention of visiting the market

Figure 1 outlines the geographical scope of this research.

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<sup>2</sup> Source of funding: European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) through the Interreg VA crossborder (England- France) programme.

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**Figure 1.** Outline of GO TRADE survey's geographical context.

The study's aim is to improve current understanding of how market traders in each location viewed their market, its surrounding area and its host town centre. This was then compared to market visitors' and local business owners/managers' views on these three geographical spheres. Finally, a parallel survey was also carried out to investigate reasons why town centre visitors do not visit the market.

This preliminary analysis includes data from the following markets and their town centres:

- Gravesend Borough Market (ENG)
- Great Yarmouth Market (ENG)
- Basildon Market, Basildon (ENG)
- Marché Saint Sauveur, Caen (FRA)
- Marché place Parmentier, Amiens (FRA)
- Marché Maurice Vast, Amiens (FRA)
- Louvigné Local Market, Louvigné du Désert (FRA)
- Lumbres Local Market, Lumbres (FRA)

## 2. The market stall holder’ view

A total of 152 market stall holders drawn from 8 markets in the north of France and England (east and south) took part in this survey. Although a much wider analysis was performed with several other questions asked, Table 1 below summarises their responses to the question outlined below.

Survey question: “As a retailer in this market (using a scale of 1 to 10, where 1 represents “low impact” and 10 equates to “high impact”), how do you rate the following issues in terms of their impact on your business in this market?”

**Table 1.** Market traders’ views (48 issues tested).

<b>Highest rated factors</b> <i>(average value on scale of 1 to 10)</i>	<b>Lowest rated factors</b> <i>(average value on scale of 1 to 10)</i>
1. Level of service quality offered by my market stall (8.41)	1. The town centre’s evening economy (3.36)
2. Satisfaction of customers with my market stall (8.34)	2. The market’s Wi-fi system (3.45)
3. Ease for visitors to move around the market from stall to stall (7.36)	3. Availability of recreational areas near the market (e.g. children’s playground, gardens, park) (3.91)
4. Customers overall level of satisfaction with this market (6.92)	4. Digital marketing of your business (e.g. website, social media) (4.39)
5. Attractiveness of the market (6.74)	5. Events and entertainment offer at the market (4.48)

### 3. The market customer’s view

#### *The market itself*

A total of 1,628 market customers visiting traditional urban markets in France and England (same locations as in section 2) took part in this survey. Although the survey questionnaire filled in by these respondents included several other questions, which gathered information on their socio-economic background, spending habits, how far they had travelled to the market that day, and what their preferred mode of transport was, among other issues, Table 2 summarises their responses to the question outlined below with a specific focus on the market itself.

Survey question: “As a visitor or a customer in this market (using a scale of 1 to 10, where 1 represents “low impact” and 10 equates to “high impact”), how do you rate the following issues?”

**Table 2.** Market customers’ views on the market itself (11 issues tested).

<b>Highest rated factors</b> <i>(average value on scale of 1 to 10)</i>	<b>Lowest rated factors</b> <i>(average value on scale of 1 to 10)</i>
1. Market’s opening hours (7.45)	1. Events and entertainment offer at the market (5.56)
2. Ease for visitors to move around the market from stall to stall (7.31)	2. Ease of access to the market (e.g., signage, street lighting, quality of pavements) (6.15)
3. Overall service quality offered by the market (7.17)	3. The market’s ability to deliver a unique experience to visitors and tourists (6.28)
4. Safety and security at the market (7.14)	4. Attractiveness of the market (6.72)
5. Cleanliness of the market (7.02)	5. The market’s overall variety of offer (6.72)

### ***The area around the market***

When the same respondents (market customers) were asked the same question with a focus on the area around the market, rather than the market itself, they expressed their satisfaction with the shops close to the market and the availability of public transport. However, car parking and amenities available received the lowest rating (see Table 3).

**Table 3.** Market visitors’ views on the area around the market (6 issues tested).

<b>Highest rated factors</b> <i>(average value on scale of 1 to 10)</i>	<b>Lowest rated factors</b> <b>[signifying room for improvement]</b> <i>(average value on scale of 1 to 10)</i>
1. Availability of public transport with stops close to the market (6.56)	1. Availability of recreational areas near the market (e.g., children’s playground, gardens, park) (5.12)
2. Overall service quality offered by local shops close to the market (6.44)	2. General facilities close to the market (incl. public toilets) (5.24)
3. My overall satisfaction with local shops close to the market (6.35)	3. Availability of car parking close to the market (5.37)

### ***The town centre as a whole***

However, when the same respondents (market customers) were asked to rate issues related to the **wider town centre** as part of the same question, they rated highly some factors which could be interpreted as ‘hygiene’ ones (e.g., safety and security, cleanliness), but also included more leisure related ones such as events and the attractiveness of the town centre. Issues which could be classed as indicators of town centre health (e.g., town centre’s evening economy, amount of independent shops, amount of chain stores) or differentiation-based



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competitiveness (e.g., town centre’s ability to deliver a unique experience to visitors and tourists, overall leisure offer) fared less well as shown in Table 4.

**Table 4.** Market customers’ views on the town centre overall (11 issues tested).

<b>Highest rated factors</b> <i>(average value on scale of 1 to 10)</i>	<b>Lowest rated factors</b> <i>(average value on scale of 1 to 10)</i>
1. Overall safety and security of this town (6.37)	1. The town centre’s evening economy (5.24)
2. Events organised by the town centre (6.21)	2. Amount of independent shops in this town centre (5.38)
3. Level of liveability of this town (e.g., connectivity, quality of life) (6.11)	3. Amount of chain stores (franchises) in this town centre (5.71)
4. Overall cleanliness of the town centre (6.04)	4. Town centre’s ability to deliver a unique experience to visitors and tourists (5.90)
5. Attractiveness of the town centre (6.02)	5. Overall leisure offer of the town centre (incl. cinemas, swimming pools, etc.) (5.98)

## 4. The view of local business owner/manager’s and employees

A total of 131 owners/managers and employees of local businesses located within a 250-metre radius of each participating market were surveyed in France and England. As in the case of the survey of market stall holders and market customers, this survey also contained several other questions. However, the results outlined below (Table 5) offer a glimpse into some key findings related to this important stakeholder group.

Survey question: “As a retailer (using a scale of 1 to 10, where 1 represents “low impact” and 10 equates to “high impact”), please rate the impact the following issues have on your business in this location”

**Table 5.** Views from managers/owners of local businesses close to the market (34 issues tested).

<b>Highest rated factors</b> <i>(average value on scale of 1 to 10)</i>	<b>Lowest rated factors</b> <b>[signifying room for improvement]</b> <i>(average value on scale of 1 to 10)</i>
1. Overall number of vacant lots in this town centre (6.30)	1. Availability of recreational areas near the market (e.g., children’s playground, gardens, park) (3.69)
2. The level expendable income of people living in the town centre’s catchment area (6.18)	2. The town centre’s evening economy (3.83)
3. Access to this town centre (e.g. adequate roads, coach, and train stations) (6.17)	3. Events and entertainment offer at the market (4.08)
4. Events organised by the town centre (6.14)	4. General facilities close to the market (incl. public toilets) (4.12)
5. Overall cleanliness of the town centre (6.11)	5. The market’s ability to deliver a unique experience to visitors and tourists (4.33)

## 5. Business support sought by market traders

Market traders were also asked about how confident they were as regards their skills in a number of business activity areas drawn from the enterprise management literature. The responses from French market traders did not vary significantly from those of their English counterparts with the exception of one issue – foreign languages. Table 6 below shows a summary of the key findings.

**Table 6.** Key areas of business skills weaknesses identified by market traders  
 (20 issues tested).

Top 5 business skill weaknesses for English market traders	Top 5 business skill weaknesses for French market traders
1. Exploiting the potential of the night time economy	1. Exploiting the potential of the night time economy
2. Foreign languages	2. Digital skills and competencies
3. Digital skills and competencies	3. Foreign languages
4. Networking	4. Business concept
5. Marketing and sales	5. Networking



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Although the (qualitative) analysis of the reasons why town centre visitors chose not to visit the market that day is still on-going, some of these appear to echo the weaknesses of the market mentioned by market customers in section 3 of this report, namely:

- The market's (lack of) variety of offer (277 responses linked to this)
- The lack of attractiveness of the market (252 responses linked to this)
- (Lack of) Ease of access to the market (170 responses linked to this)
- The market's (lack of) ability to deliver a unique experience to visitors and tourists (22 responses linked to this)

Other visitors mentioned issues such as:

- “Being in town for other reasons” (98)
- “Prefer shopping in the supermarket / other shops / online” (56)
- “Prefer other markets” (56)
- “Opening hours do not suit” (27)

## 7. Concluding remarks

Unlike other studies published to date, including several yearly surveys by NMTF, this study offers a wider perspective of markets in terms of their physical as well as social geography. The market and its traders are no longer treated in isolation to its surrounding area (including local businesses within a 250-metre radius) and its host town centre. Indeed, opinions from key stakeholders such as market customers, neighbouring small businesses and visitors to the town centre with no intention of visiting the market were also gathered in this study to offer a much richer picture of the challenges and opportunities faced by market traders in an era of rapidly changing consumer behaviour trends. Similarly, the transnational (England-France) nature of this study lends itself to relevant comparisons, which the GO TRADE project will add to further through the development of case studies and a historical overview of the development of markets on both sides of the English Channel.

Although this report offers a rather brief outline based on what remains a preliminary analysis of only one layer of the data, it is expected that further analysis will help us to gain further insights into the value of markets for local communities both socially (e.g., places to gather and interact with other people), in terms of health (e.g., as ‘antidotes’ to growing problems such as food deserts) and as attractors for viable town centres able to address the needs of local residents as well as visitors.

In an era of increasing emphasis on digitalisation (e.g. online sales, ‘click and collect’), convenience in the form of one-stop shopping (e.g., supermarkets) and the functional use that town centres have been given for decades (e.g., shopping destinations), markets have important strategic long-term choices to make. They need to start positioning themselves to satisfy the priorities of future generations (e.g., delivering authentic experiences to visitors based on local uniqueness with local produce as part of the wider portfolio of services) and, in doing so, become active contributors to a thriving visitor economy at either regional level (e.g., market towns) or even international level (e.g., globally known markets like London’s Borough Market or Barcelona’s La Boqueria Market). The alternative is for markets and their rich historical heritage to become slowly but surely obsolete through an inability to adapt.

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