

## No wallet, no worries: Denmark considering cash-free shops

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In Stockholm you can pay a street hawker with a credit card. In Copenhagen you can buy a single shot espresso with your smartphone. In Helsinki, you can go grocery shopping but leave your wallet at home. Scandinavia has long been the most cashless place on the planet. Now Denmark is considering whether to go a step further and allow retailers to ban cash altogether.

The Danish Chamber of Commerce is recommending that shops and services be given the option of going completely cash-free. The proposal needs to be approved by parliament but if it gets the green light, retailers could begin rejecting cash from January 2016.

“We’ve recognised what merchants have been telling us for some time now,” says Sofie Findling Andersen of the chamber of commerce. “Using cash is expensive, because it takes time for salaried employees to handle, and it’s also a security concern. Carrying cash opens you up to attack and even though we have relatively low levels of violent crime in Denmark, this is something business owners and employees tell us they worry about.”

There has been little resistance to the proposal from Danish media, consumers or businesses so far, with the country’s largest supermarket group, Dansk Supermarked, working on a system for cash-free grocery shopping with the mobile money transfer system MobilePay in the near future.

“Customers will be able to swipe their smartphone; scan their food; tap ‘accept’ when they’re done and then just leave,” says Mark Wraa-Hansen from Danske Bank, which runs MobilePay.

Small businesses seem equally keen on going cash-free when weighing up potential costs versus the convenience of the new move.

“So few customers pay with cash anyway now that it’s a bit of a hassle when they do,” says Mette Schmidt, who runs a hairdressing salon in Jutland. “I have to go to the bank to drop off the takings at the end of the day, looking over my shoulder to check there’s no one suspicious around, and then the bank charges me 30 DKK a time to drop off money. It’s easier to be paid by card or MobilePay - as long as my customers are happy and ready to make the change.”

However, change won’t happen overnight, say experts.

“If we look to Sweden, the country leading the way in terms of a cash-free society, we see that plenty of people are still paying with kroner,” says Findling Andersen. “It’s up to customers and businesses to decide which works best for them – if a shop switches to cash-free and they lose a couple of customers, they may decide it’s worth it to make their jobs easier and safer.

There is plenty of evidence to suggest this is the case.

Barista Soren Jensen, 27, says: “It’s much better for us when people pay by card – it’s quicker, simpler and cleaner – cash can be pretty dirty!”

Last year a US study found 3,000 types of bacteria on bank notes.

But opponents of the concept express concerns about loss of liberty. German central banker Carl-Ludwig Thiele recently criticised the Danish government’s proposal, saying that “abolishing cash would hurt consumer sovereignty - the free choice of citizens about their payment instruments”, and citing Russian novelist Fyodor Dostoyevsky’s famous line: “Money is coined liberty.”

While Swedish pensioner groups say elderly citizens may feel alienated or unable to cope with the demands of new technology, Danish pensioners are remarkably sanguine about reliance on smartphones.

“We have one of the highest rates of 60-plus citizens who already shop online and are tech literate, so this shouldn’t be too much of a problem for them,” says Findling Andersen.