

Public markets: rediscovering the centrality of markets in cities and their relevance to urban sustainable development

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Abstract

The importance of this issue lies in the goal of providing knowledge about how to use urban marketplaces to develop low carbon, local supply chains, better and more sustainable urban planning, employment and community.

Markets have existed for millennia as important parts of cities, towns and villages; they have been important engines for the urban growth, while also providing sustainable solutions to accommodate this growth.

Considering global trends such as climate change and resource scarcity, a major challenge for future cities will be to reduce urban footprints. Moreover, cities have to become or remain liveable for their inhabitants and offer social and economic opportunities. This paper will show the benefits of marketplaces in the building of sustainable cities and strong communities. In fact, markets can increase the sense of pride of place, they contribute to a healthy living agenda, they raise awareness about the benefits of buying local products and, thereby, they increase environmental responsibility amongst a wide range of stakeholders.

Keywords: public markets, low carbon economy, urban regeneration, public space.

1 Introduction

Around the world, for centuries, the buying and selling of food took place in public marketplaces open to all. Markets have a very long history and have been key focal points in the centres of European towns and cities for as long as they have been in existence; indeed, many towns are still known as market towns, because they represent important public spaces and spaces of exchange.



Food retailing has always been a fundamental component for the organization of the compact and more liveable city, encouraging the relations of proximity.

The rising of liberal policies, the development of new transportation models, the suburban growth and the relative commercial sprawl weakened the improvement and conservation of this traditional public space, associated intimately with the historical compact city.

At the same time, particularly over the past decade, there has been a continuous growth of specialist niche markets. This indicates that the popularity of the market is by no means in decline and that markets improve the quality of life of communities involved with them.

Scholars and practitioners in the field of urban planning are devoting increasing attention to the urban food system, since this subject do not call great attention from contemporary planners.

In the last years, articles and books argue in favour of planners getting more involved with food issues in the communities. Increased awareness of the connections between food system and public health, infrastructure planning, energy use and other dimensions of urban life continue to draw food issues back into the planners' concern.

Outside the planning field, today's buyers are paying serious attention to food production and consumption and, in this context, public markets offer a year-round alternative to the large scale retail trade, pointing out their benefits back.

Public markets are incomparable economic and social facts that are increasingly being viewed as element to achieve a wide variety of goals. These goals include the access to quality food, the creation of better marketing opportunities for farmers, the improvement of social interaction, the rise of social cohesion, the creation of local employment opportunities, the reset of the urban-rural network, and the improvement of the community economic development.

Despite their heterogeneity, public markets continue to draw attention, especially in the contemporary period when food issues are a prominent popular interest. While public markets are no more the primary sector in the urban food system, they still present a vibrant, local, face-to-face alternative to the increasingly corporatized, individually and unsustainable world of large-scale retail trade and distribution.

2 Public markets: overview and state of the art

Markets have been driving forces and backbones of European cities since their formation. Food retailing has always been a key element in the organization of the compact and liveable city, furthering the relations of proximity and the sense of community (Janssens and Sezer [1]).

Changes in the food system affected the complex structure of the public market, leading to its decline. The twenty-century marked out the rise of the wholesale system and the specialization of sellers and producers. These, related to the development of retail chains, accelerated the public market's decline.

However, markets did not disappear from the food landscape. They tend to recover their traditional character of being an urban fact: a completely different

experience from the generic and controlled environment of the hyper places. Moreover, the survival of markets has shown its power to increase diversity, to revitalize urban centres, enliven the public space (Moore [2]) and make the city more liveable and sustainable.



Figure 1: The market's ecosystem. Author's elaboration.

In the present phase, researchers have shown a remarkable decrease of the large-scale commercial centres. We can already see, in the United States and England, the phenomena of the *demalling* (Chiesi and Costa [3]). In the States, the time spent in malls has already fallen and it is accepted that the e-commerce, that can guarantee better prices, will cause a retailing concentration in a small number of giants. In addition, the consumption sphere will be filled more and more with leisure and experiences; thus, traditional markets provide good assets (Kooijman [4]).

Face to face buying and selling, the diverse fresh, quality products sold, and the differences themselves between markets can offer a wide range of experiences, richer and more authentic than other formats. When appropriately managed, markets revitalize urban centres, linking them with rural world and fitting, at the same time, new urban multicultural habits.

In the globalized world, experts on cities' future transformation underline the importance of territory and identity. A system of markets marks and identifies the space inside the urban fabric as a place of interactions, proximity, identity, creativity and diversity (Guàrdia and Fava [5]).

Although markets generate great footfall and can bring life to a neighbourhood, their economic and social impact has often been undervalued.

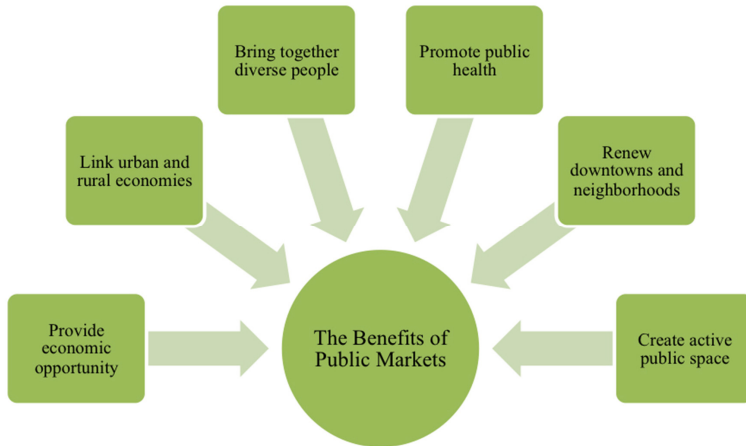


Figure 2: The benefits of public markets. Author's elaboration.

Nowadays, the markets' situation varies considerably. Several factors explain these differences between cities: local laws, retail contest, retail association relevance and roles, market models, logistics, geography and history, etc.

Even within this heterogeneity, markets are still the heart of the city life and play an important role for the retail offer, tourism attraction as well as social/economic cohesion and development of a sense of community.

Local governments have rediscovered or are rediscovering the centrality of markets in their city and their importance to the urban development, their role in jobs creation and entrepreneurship and their importance for the social development of the neighbourhoods.

As stated formerly, markets have a stirring impact on the city: tourism, logistics, real estate or retail development, positive react to these urban events. At the same time, most of the quality of life indicators are influenced, such as social integration, sustainability, availability of km0 products, mobility and employment.

2.1 State of the art: European and non-European project

At the European level, the debate on markets has started only recently. Markets don't have their own space at European level, being mixed with retail, agriculture or other administrative bodies. This is not surprising since many countries, regions and governments show a similar lack of a specific body or department devoted to markets.

However, as the importance given to the markets increases, some projects have already been carried out at European level.

The *Med Emporion Project* supported food markets and market culture, promoting connection and exchange between cities with relevant food markets in the Mediterranean. Research, pilot projects and open activities like Food Festivals helped the creation of permanent links, awareness raising about their social role as important place-makers and improved their quality and services.

The project was an initiative of the cities of Torino, Barcelona and Genova together with the *Conservatoria del Piemonte* and *Conservatoire des Cuisines Méditerranéennes de Marseille* in the frame of the MED Programme of the European Union.

Market trade in market halls is nowadays very similar to what always has been and it is a part of the characteristic Mediterranean way of life, a unique model of healthy diet and lifestyle, based on the consumption of fresh locally produced and commercialized in market places.

The project *Central Markets* aimed to enhance traditional markets by improving their management systems since these are places for commercial distribution and with a strong social impact, producing positive effects in terms of urban development and environmental sustainability. The general objective was to improve markets attractiveness in eight target cities, by developing new and innovative market revitalisation strategies, in order to reinforce and balance the relationship between cities and markets.

The project activities concentrated on the development of concepts and plans, which enabled stakeholders to organise, coordinate and implement long term interventions on market places.

The *Urbact Market Project* was launched in May 2012 and is due to end in February 2015. The project's ultimate objective is to create and implement action-plans using best practice marketplace policies gleaned from European cities, in order to improve and build better cities tomorrow.

Urbact Markets aims to understand and explore the role of urban markets as key drivers of change in terms of the local economic development and regeneration of specific market neighbourhoods and sustainable supply chains with local producers of goods and produce.

Some interesting studies and broader researches are available from the US *Project for Public Spaces*. This non-profit planning, design and educational organization focus on the spin-off benefits of markets. These are numerous, from increasing access to fresh, healthy food to providing important revenue streams; markets positively impact local businesses, governments and residents. But, perhaps most important is the way markets serve as public gathering places for people from different ethnic, cultural, and socioeconomic communities. As one of the few places where people comfortably gather and meet, markets are the neighbourhoods' original civic centres.

The recent resurgence of urban markets is just a beginning. Markets spark urban revitalization, foster community diversity, and improve public health. This is the new era of market cities, with expansive networks to connect people and places; cities with large central markets that act as hubs for the region and function as great multifunctional places, with many activities clustering nearby. Some cities, such as Barcelona and London, offer us important case studies for how markets can function, even in contemporary, globalized cities.

Markets fit perfectly with the new European strategy for smart cities because these places are a tool for developing city and neighbourhood regeneration, job creation, economic dynamism, and local supply chains.



The future of urban markets lies in their role played in sustainable cities, in the way they promote local produce, local mobility, healthy eating, and interaction between farming and city communities, creating spaces of urban centrality and interaction.

3 Urban markets and sustainable development

There is no ambiguity about the fact that both the food system and western diet are unsustainable. In a context of globalization, the western food system has strong impacts on the environment, using resources and depending on petrol.

According to FAO, the food sector accounts for over 30% of global consumer energy demand and produces over 20% of global greenhouse gas emissions. The urban population tends to be out of touch with agricultural production, and the city food culture increasingly moves towards fast food, processed foods, distributed by large centralized supermarket chains that are not rooted in the life of city neighbourhoods.

The current food system cannot meet this growing food demand of cities sustainably. It results in significant environmental impacts, but also social inequity in terms of access to balanced and affordable nutritious food in cities.

A baseline study on food waste shows that there seems to be a lack of awareness of environmental impacts of food waste, as well as a lack of knowledge on how to use food efficiently.

In a world transition with new environmental, economic and social challenges, an unsustainable food supply chain with high demands in oil, fertilizers and resources, is no longer affordable for nations.

Locally grown food is a key element of sustainable cities and formal and informal markets are the primary places where local production meets urban consumption. Local markets create synergies between consumers and suppliers, and restore their relationship. The produce sold can be provided directly from rural areas to the urban consumer, along with transparency and knowledge about the product.

Urban markets overtook the supermarket period, the hyper-places rising and, in the recent years, they rose again showing their ability to move with the times.

The future of markets in the development of sustainable cities lies in two very different but complementary approaches. The first one is related to local food production and km0 products, dealing with farmers' markets development and promotion of green and local brands. The second key sub theme in the field of low carbon economy is the resource efficiency, which incorporates the promotion of sustainable mobility for customers and sellers.

Urban markets could represent a very efficient way to match offer and demand on sustainable food in short supply chain, improving the quality of life, integrating communities into cities, and enhancing urban rural network.

At the global retail conference in New York in January 2014 trend spotters talked about the future of retail and showed pictures of markets, bazaars and high streets. Markets belong to the city, and great markets create urban life. They

support social relations, increase safety in the streets, attract tourists, enhance property values and inspire people in their daily life.

Urban markets show their capacity in the reduction of CO₂ emission, therefore, the intention of keeping and fostering markets in cities, responding directly to basic human needs, can never be retrograde. On the contrary, it is the right way to move towards a sustainable future.

3.1 Markets reinforce rural–urban links

All over the world, urban green areas are a significant source of sustainable food but this potential has yet to be realised. For most of the time, life in the urban environment obscures how dependent we are on natural ecosystems, and how much their quality affects our physical health and mental well-being.

Around Europe, different countries are supporting projects, laws and policies with the aim to revitalize their rural areas. The improvement of the local fresh food reduces the logistics chain and therefore has a greater impact on the greenhouse gas emissions, by reducing the amount of food miles. A recent evaluation conducted by the city of Toulouse figures out that the eco-commerce, on the widest possible basis, would save 130 tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent per year.

Sustaining the existence of farmers' markets and the presence of local producers links the rural world with the city, generating sustainable methods of food production and delivery. In fact, as stated by the London Farmers' Markets Association, marketplaces provide a hub to make it viable to drive to London. They estimate that 50% of the farmers would not be in business if the London farmer' markets had not opened.



Figure 3: Rururban, a European cross-border co-operation project developed within the framework of the MED Program, intends designing a governance strategy for the sustainable and balanced local development of peri-urban territories, by valuing, marketing and promoting the consumption of local agri-foodstuff resources.

In general, local food can be defined as a collaborative effort to build more locally based, self-reliant food economies, in which sustainable food production, treatment, distribution, and consumption are integrated to enhance the social health and the environmental sustainability of the city. It is part of the concept of local purchasing and local economies, the preference to buy local and rather to consume goods produced by retail chain.

Locally produced food is generally considered to be more environmentally friendly because of the minimal processing and because it is produced and consumed in season and locally grown. In addition the energy used to store, refrigerate and transport is also reduced.

The debate on the sustainability of growing local food in large cities of urban areas continues, with some arguing that actually the effects on the environment are marginal or even detrimental and that the real benefits are mostly in terms of education and awareness raising, leading to a more environmentally conscious population. It's true that growing food and non-food crops in and near cities contributes to healthy communities by engaging residents in work and recreation that improves individual and public well-being.

Actually researches and pilot project, developed all over the world, show that farmers' markets and, generally, urban markets are important key drivers of change in terms of sustainable living and sustainable approach to the city. Marketing food directly from *farm to fork* bypasses the intermediaries of the food supply chain, leading to potential benefits. For consumers, direct marketing initiatives provide people with healthy, locally, fresh, and organic food at affordable prices. Through buying locally, consumers give their support to local producers, helping the revitalization of rural economies.

Environmental sustainability has become an increasingly pressing issue. One main focus has been on the reduction of harmful emissions that result from the transportation of goods by purchasing goods closer to their point of origin, buying locally. While not always an option for every type of product, locally grown food is a precious alternative for many to mass-produced or processed foods. Farmers' markets, through their potential to sustain and support the local food system, can contribute to sustainability goals. This means that they are more incline to recognize the importance of relying on locally available resources and identifying interdependencies between local producers and consumers, leading to more sustainable practices.

3.2 Markets and the development of sustainable mobility and transportation

Road transport is responsible for around 86% of domestic transport emissions. Cars account for about half that figure, so we urgently need to reduce the length and frequency of vehicle journeys.

There is an absolute priority to integrate transport and planning in urban areas, to reduce the need to travel. Places need to be well connected, offering a choice of ways to get around. Walking, cycling and public transport must become attractive and easy options.





Figure 4: Making streets fit for people.

Land use and transportation planning influences lifestyle behaviours too. Safer streets encourage walking and cycling and, in broadest terms, they encourage socialization and communication. A research carried out by the University of the West England pointed out that people living on heavily trafficked streets don't communicate unless they have to and heavy amounts of traffic disrupt the sense of community.

Making a car unnecessary should be a primary consideration in choosing or permitting development on any given part of cities. Streets are frequently unpleasant places so becoming places where people can enjoy walking or gathering and sitting needs to be done urgently. Better design raises the quality of life, and creates places where people want to spend their time and money.

The potential influence of markets on health has not been fully recognized, nor has this potential been fully realized. A number of serious health issues around the world, such as obesity, diabetes, cardiovascular diseases, and respiratory diseases, affect people of all ages and socioeconomic classes. These diseases are all related to the quality of food purchased and more and more to the limited exercise.

Markets are very reassuring places, because they give a sense of responsibility for people own health. Always more frequently, citizens are experimenting and reinventing what it means to have a good life thanks to the market experience.

In cities where existing or planned urban markets operate, the future is related to conceiving them as hub of a sustainable system of mobility for consumers and vendors. Sustainable mobility for consumers aims to encourage and facilitate non-motorised forms of transport, like cycling or walking, thanks to the provision of cycle facilities and pedestrian paths. Additionally, dedicated public transport helping people access to markets easily without using private cars should be considered.

Some cities, such as Torino, Barcelona and Florence, discourage the use of cars by reinforcing the urban transport lines. Car-sharing and bike-sharing projects are also available or under development all over the world. Toulouse has electric buses available at the city centre that directly connect to the main markets, which in any event are well served by the underground line.

Sustainable mobility for vendors is related to the reduction of the environmental impact, due to the market cargo and the logistics. The critical last kilometre of the delivery chain fosters many innovations that try to combine small-scale and new transportation systems.

One emblematic initiative is the Parisian *Vers chez vous*, which explore alternatives to delivery trucks that usually increase the traffic congestion. The project supports a water-based transportation to the core of the city, interesting for its low carbon impact and for the potential reuse of existing logistic infrastructures. Additional cargo-bikes and electric vans pick-up goods from the river boat, delivering produces around markets.

Marché sur l'eau in Paris is another project, based on a street market on the riverside. In this case, a riverboat collects fruits and vegetables from rural producers along the Seine, selling them in the weekly farmers' market.

Dublin is studying an electric tram system to transport goods directly from the harbour and wholesaler's warehouses. Something similar happens in Toulouse, using the river to transport the products directly to the city's markets.

These initiatives show how cities are trying to decrease the environmental impacts, generated by capillary logistics. An additional and interesting research undertakes a comprehensive reassessment of the urban goods delivery system, extending consultations with couriers, dealers and urban residents. Cities are looking into the option of setting up nearby urban supply-chain sites, reducing access times to delivery routes and consolidating products for delivery on the basis of their destinations.

4 Conclusion

Markets are a bridge between the rural and the urban worlds: policies for a sustainable territory, reduction of CO₂ emissions, promotion of local and km0 products or the increase of rural areas attractiveness are some of the benefits from this cooperation although all cities need to take actions to improve, communicate and further develop this relationship.

As stated previously, farmers' markets encourage local food security, through the promotion and support of local food production. Through reducing the distance of the food transported, farmers' markets decrease food miles. The distance food takes to travel is directly related to the amount of fossil fuels required to get it there. Since fossil fuels cause pollution and directly impact climate change (Hegrl *et al.* [6]), reducing the distance that food travels translates into environmental, and related socio-economic benefits.

Farmers' markets encourage human wellbeing, through educating consumers about health. When local produce is purchased locally, it is likely to be consumed



sooner after harvest than non-local produce and, therefore, have higher nutritional value when consumed.

Markets are key public spaces that potentially offer opportunities for local economic development and employment, for social interaction and connection, social inclusion, the mingling of different cultures and the building of a sense of local community. As public spaces, they encourage people to gather, make connections, discover their similarities and appreciate their differences.

Some European experiences show that urban planning, considering needs and opportunities of each neighbourhood and taking into account markets as important axis of the regeneration, is a basis for an efficient and sustainable development.

Urban markets distribute, share and procure rural produce inside the city; they provide more sustainable and less carbon intensive delivery systems; they give efficient opportunities to local production; they enable direct links between supply and demand for sustainable food; they facilitate the transition of existing distribution market actors towards greater sustainability and lower carbon intensity, and in fine markets offer and create incredible opportunities for social, cultural, and economic wealth at the local level.

There are no more doubts that food matters and markets are keystones for sustainable development and future sustainable cities.

In the past markets have been fundamental sustainable public spaces; today they still represent vibrant and multifunctional places and in future, with specific measures, they could contribute to answering the needs of neighbours, consumer trends and demands, fostering sustainable cities.

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