

Retailing and proximity in a liveable city: the case of Barcelona public markets system

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1 ABSTRACT

Retailing and especially food retailing has always been a fundamental element for the organization of the compact and more liveable city furthering the relations of proximity. From the nineteenth century specially the system of public markets acquired very considerable importance and was considered one of the basic service of metropolis in the urban planning policy.

Despite this, liberal policies, new modes of transportation, delivery and selling, along with suburban growth and the relative commercial “sprawl”, arising first in the cities in northern Europe and in the United States, undermined the development and conservation of this traditional public element, associated intimately with the compact city.

In some southern and eastern European cities, markets are still functional landmarks. In Barcelona they have proven their considerable urban potential. In the 1980s, the extensive network of neighbourhood markets were seen as very effective focal points for restructuring a retail sector. Since then, municipal intervention in the reorganization of the city’s markets and their immediate surroundings has formed part of an urban planning vision integrated into the defence of the neighbourhood structure, of close contact and, definitely, of the compact city. Barcelona has a clear policy of limiting oligopolies, and large commercial areas are seen as a threat to the equilibrium that allows for the coexistence of the traditional city and a high population density which helps to support public spending for the construction and administration of public markets, but also to enjoy the derived benefits.

2 INTRODUCTION

Even though livability is primarily a subjective experience, and one of the main questions that planners are concerned with, there is currently a growing consensus regarding the characteristics of a livable city for designing livability.

In fact, cities are now emphasizing the importance of competing on the basis of livability and the quality of life offered, and it is becoming an increasingly important factor in modern business location decisions, especially among high technology and knowledge firms (Richard Florida, 2008).

Standard economic criteria for the livable city comes fundamentally from Mercer's Quality of Living Survey and from Monocle Magazine.

In the first case, they adopt 39 criteria that include safety, education, hygiene, health care, culture, environment, recreation, political-economic stability and public transportation. On the other hand, Monocle Magazine includes some non-scientific criteria, such as safety/crime, international connectivity, climate/sunshine, quality of architecture, public transportation, tolerance, environmental issues, access to nature, urban design, business conditions, proactive policy developments and medical care.

But the criteria adopted by citizens are, at least in part, different. The Livable City Organization has as its goal to help create "new community models that focus on the interconnected relationships among growth issues such as transportation, housing, environment, affordability, neighborhoods, culture and the economy in an equitable and sustainable manner".

But from the early 1960s, economists and planners such as Jane Jacobs, Gordon Cullen, Lewis Mumford and Kevin Lynch, who shared a mainly negative image of suburbanization after the massive construction during the 1950s and 1960s and during the first petroleum crisis in Europe and the United States, were focusing on the change in the meaning of the livability of public space, reclaiming, basically, the missing sense of identity in the territory. More recently, Michael Sorkin (1992) demands a more authentic urban reality, a city based on physical and cultural proximity, beginning an appreciable chapter in the recuperation of public

space. Relations of proximity that not only improve security on the street but also encourage economic and cultural creativity as a consequence of the fluidity of connections.

Our article stresses the idea of the importance of a livable and sustainable society, based on the relation of proximity, as one of the basic criteria of a livable city within the compact city model, linked to its territory. In the nineteenth century, Barcelona markets, as well as those in other European cities, became public facilities that distinguished their different districts and controlled food prices during periods of crisis, maintaining a close relation with local agriculture. Nowadays, cities that continue to have an active market system are at a crossroads regarding the meaning of maintaining markets without falling over to a situation of exclusive gentrification, or an uncompromising “touristization” using the public market just an economical term and for a direct profit forgetting all the important externality in social term. Historically, the experience of markets has been a cross-class experience and essentially popular. Markets can increasingly combine links with the past, new habits and new forms of urban multiculturalism, but for markets to continue this “milestone in understanding human relationships within practices of the neighbourhood, they should never lose their ability to become privileged pockets of sociability, and not to leave aside the ever inexhaustible quality of being genuine sources of proximity, the essential quality, the very stuff of which is made in the city.”

In fact, a description of the implementation of covered markets in European cities, and specifically in Barcelona, refers to very different phenomena that points to a more livable city: a) the social and gender impact (creation of a very powerful source of life and sociability where visibility in the public space of women as buyers and sellers was defining); b) the political-administrative impact (element of strengthening/weakening of the management of urban public supplies, public management versus private or non-negligible source of income in a municipal context of chronic deficit); c) urban impact (new characterization of public space, distribution of new markets in the city and the polarizing role – neighborhood and/or center– in the daily purchases and distribution of retail trade); d) territorial impact (related to more or less industrialized cities or more a developed agrarian economy, relationship with the rail network, selective role in the regional urban network of cities with new markets) e) the economy impact either in term of forcing the day by day selling items but a place where to apply the strategy of the “experience economy” .

2.1 From the traditional market to the market as a commercial facility

Commerce and food sources are elements that structure the city; they foster the urban economy and also develop the place and systems of relations.

Market buildings are the quintessential structures for feeding the city, and they are elements that make up the city organization.

Small scale retail, as Jane Jacobs exposed very well, represents the opportunity to walk and shop in the city, improving security, proximity relations and more employment and economic opportunities to the residents of the area.

Interpretations on the economic base of cities have traditionally shown preference for productive activities. A vision probably induced by the experience of the city of the industrial age that does not respond, to historical reality, or to the current conditions of cities. According to J.R. Lasuén (Lasuén, 2007) , many of the shortcomings of urban policy are caused by the limitations of its basic assumptions. Among them, the priority given to productive activities, understood as production of tangible goods that are easiest to measure. For Lasuén (Lasuén, 2007), the origin of cities was in fact, “consumption in common, not joint production”. In recent years, there are warnings of a growing attention to anything that affects consumption, but there are still few works that enrich our hindsight (Deutsch, 2005). Examining the history of the relationship of markets with cities can be, in this regard, a good exercise for reviewing some aspects that significantly liveability of the city

In his classic thesis, Henri Pirenne (1927) attributed the rebirth of the medieval city to merchant activity and the long distance trade of sumptuary goods. Today, however, we think that the process was fed by the countryside farmers and that the modest trade in local markets boosted the long growth cycle of medieval Europe (Bois, 1991,1992; Guerreau, 1990, Verlhust, 1991). The great commerce and the birth of capitalism would only be later consequences. This original and generating function of local markets is readable in the

shape of the cities of medieval origin. In their growth process, markets were the generator focal point of many cities and the irradiating centre of their commercial fabric. The very morphology of the traditional city, in both the north and south of the Mediterranean, reveals the extent to which markets and the commercial network were, and still are, the backbone of urban structure. Thus, it is not surprising that in their character of universal models, Christaller considered markets the *raison d'être* of cities and structuring agents of the rural world.

Consumption and safety are thus prime factors at the base of the social contract that stimulates city development. Jordi Borja (2008), an urban geographer, emphasizes that “Cities originated to protect and integrate their inhabitants, guaranteeing them minimum standards of security and well being.” Present-day sociologists argue that contemporary “city construction” can be explained to a large extent by the phenomenon of fear (Bru, Vicente, 2005; Davis, 1991): fear of diversity in urban situations where coexistence is the rule and conflicts are often unavoidable; fear of inequality or differences in purchasing power; and fear of uncertainty in all its aspects.

The first market renewal, in the second half of the eighteenth century, was closely tied to new enlightenment attitudes, and to an emerging new “urban knowledge”, that in some way, was anticipated by the ideas of Voltaire (1749) about city embellishment. He thought that it was not only a question of aesthetics, but depended essentially on the development of a set of facilities, based on safe communications, and on the homogenous distribution of markets, theatres and churches.

These ideas were developed in the field of architecture by Laugier and Patte and became part of the progressive medicalization of urban space, and the theory and practice of the Administration or “Police”. Thus, it was an urban type of thought that took form and flight with a revolutionary rupture (Monclús, 1989).

In the France of 1790, manorial rights were abolished. The new liberalizing laws maintained, however, strong public control over the markets governed by the moral imperative of ensuring the livelihood of a growing urban society, and markets became the exclusive responsibility of municipalities.

The expropriation of ecclesiastical plots and those of emigrated nobility allowed new state institutions to substitute the old structures. The centralized organization of the French State made the substitution process unique in its coherence and amplitude. Under the supervision of the Conseil des Bâtiments Civils, a homogenous management technique and a programmed method of evaluation of the need, distribution and construction of spaces were adopted (Teyssot, 1980; Lepetit, 1988). City facilities became signs of institutional and technical modernity and a way to have control over the population, enforcing discipline rather than using the expulsion method. The market spaces and buildings, such as market halls, public granaries, and abattoirs were considered to be facilities, as were prefectures, hospitals, public schools, judicial establishments, jails, police stations, theatres, museums and religious buildings, which since then have been understood as public services.

This idea of the market as a facility was already implicit in the *Parallèle* by Durand (1801) and his *Précis de leçons d'architecture* (1817). It is especially evident in the *Collection des Marchés de Paris* (1813) that the bridge and road engineer, Bruyère, devoted to the markets of Paris. Hence, in his urban inscription, from the smallest markets –constrained by the vicissitudes of the urban fabric– to the newest and most extensive projects designed for the Empire, there is the implicit idea of associating a market with a certain area of influence in the city. The market building appears as an element of centrality and identity for the population. It secures the healthiness of the products on sale and the control of tax payments, and the area reserved for the market leaves the street free for circulation.

Markets were enclosed to leave streets and squares free from the invasion of buyers and sellers, to eliminate obstacles blocking the way and the public gaze, in accordance with the “visibility” ideal and, in these new covered markets, stalls were put in order, circulation facilitated, hygienic conditions guaranteed, and the same ideal of transparency to the public gaze and control found in prisons and hospitals was somehow sought. According to Foucault, Rousseau’s dream was for a transparent society, visible and legible in each of its parts, avoiding dark areas, enclaves of privileges or disorder, and avoiding all obstacles to the public gaze.

In Spain the changes were late in arriving and initially timid. Moreover, in 1834 trade was deregulated and permission was granted to deal in “all the objects for eating, drinking or burning”, except bread. In 1836, the disentailment of ecclesiastical property allowed a set of interventions aimed at adapting the inherited city to the liberal notion of the “service city” (Teyssot, 1980; Le Petit, 1988). The first two markets, San José (now

called Boqueria) and Santa Caterina were designed and built in Barcelona emulating the French experience. San José was in the shape of a monumental porticoed square and the other, which drew its inspiration from the Saint-Germain market in Paris, was in the shape of a porticoed rectangular building surrounding an extensive free space.

For decades, however, three of Barcelona's five markets continued to be held on squares and streets (Domenech, 1990; Guàrdia and Oyón, 2008). The municipal commissions themselves were extremely critical of the serious lack of sanitation, scant functionality and great congestion of their markets in a city with a steadily growing population. Nevertheless, the budgetary difficulties of the municipality prevented any progress.

In the middle of the 19th century, the public granaries still responded to memories of famine in traditional cities. But in the second half of the century, the systematic increase in the flow and the fluidity of exchanges, promoted by the spread of new forms of transport, exerted a decisive influence on the rapid renewal of marketing procedures and on consumer habits. From this time onwards, the problem was no longer hunger caused by a lack of grain supplies. The system became more complex and scarcity resulted in an increase in prices and in the cost of living for the workers in relation to their salaries. Crises caused by supply shortages and cost-of-living increases would become recurrent. Because of this, city life was periodically affected by protests and serious social conflicts. The subject of market security reemerged in terms of availability of goods at a fair price and of public order.

Important changes took place in cities and in retail marketing throughout the nineteenth century. In the early decades, one of the main preoccupations of the city council was supplying basic subsistence. Whereas in latter decades, the abundance of supply was guaranteed and consumption habits had completely changed, the main problem was prices rising over the wages of the working-class. A sign of this change is the progressive vanishing of public granaries.

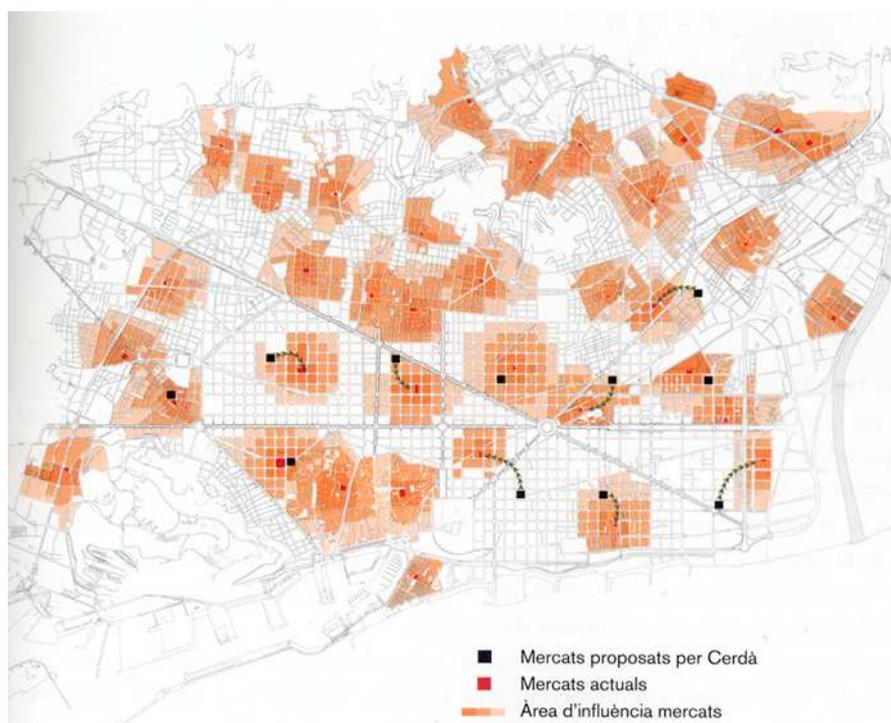


Figure 1. Markets projected by Cerdà; nowadays system market in Barcelona, area of influences of the markets (By Magrinyà, Francesc., Cerdà 150 any de modernitat, Barcelona : Fundació Urbs i Territori Idelfons Cerdà (FUTIC) : ACTAR, DL 2009.)

The proposals and reflections made by Idelfonso Cerdà (1867-1868) clearly heralded a sign of change. In his project in 1859 for the ensanche (extension) of the city of Barcelona, he planned an ambitious system with 12 markets. On the other hand, he himself can be used as an example of an important historical change: the end of the public granaries or grain stores, typical of the traditional city, which marked the passing from a very focused concern about staple food supplies to a situation characterized by greater abundance in which consumer habits changed. In fact, in his "Theory of City Construction" (1859) he conceded great importance to the public granary, while a few years later in his "General Theory of Urbanization" (1867) he wrote: "We

are no longer in the age in which the Public Administration has to keep vast public granaries in the city to meet the subsistence needs of its citizens (...) The freedom of contract encompasses everything, even the basic necessities...”.

But the Cerdà plan was carried out little by little and not exactly according to his project

The period between 1874 and 1900 was that of the effective construction of the first examples of modern wrought-iron market halls. Within the municipality of Barcelona, there had been built before 1888 the markets of El Born (1876), Sant Antoni (1882), Barceloneta (1884), Hostafrancs (1888) and Concepció (1888). To these facilities should be added the markets built in the various municipalities of the plain of Barcelona: Llibertat (1888), Clot (1889), Unió (1889), and Abaceria Central de Gràcia (1892), which would be integrated into the market halls system of Barcelona with the amalgamation of their respective towns in 1897. Most of the new iron markets halls were designed and built by the most important metalworks factory of Barcelona, the Maquinista Terrestre y Marítima.

Accordingly, compared to the cities of Great Britain, France or the United States, in terms of the renewal of the market system, Barcelona was a latecomer, but could maintain and strengthen its system to the present day as a tool of governability.

The markets covered were in the early twentieth century functional poles very important to structure the neighborhoods to city. The concentration of power stations in many downtown markets, especially in the English, where even during the Saturday night market was opened to receive many working families, not confined to any type of food items but household items also included a very varied type, such as cheap clothing items, crockery and cutlery and toys. His ability to attract buyers everyday was not negligible if we study also the stores that generated about him. In many continental cities such as Barcelona this influence is also noted in the neighborhood markets. The interior was more strictly for fresh foods, but in its immediate perimeter shops settled fresh and not fresh (salt fish, nuts or dried pasta), pubs and cheap cafes and shops of domestic consumption in the broad sense as the aforementioned. As Miller suggests the market in case of the Revolution in Barcelona, many of the vendors of those stores established relations of complementarity rather than competition and market stalls acquired "as a way of extending horizontally the commercial business of the family". That made the market a real center of economic interrelations Small-scale breeding environment in the mix of activities they had in their day old open-air markets. Such attractiveness of retail, which is sometimes made against own ordinances prohibiting selling some competitive products in a radio next to butchers and fishmongers ripped to municipalities, was indisputable and, although declining, is perceptible today. The environments of the markets were also a privileged place of residence for sellers. As shown in that same story, over half of the tenderers stop within the walls of Santa Caterina Market in Barcelona lived in the old town and almost a third did so within a block radius of the market, more than two thirds of the vendors or vendors of the Market Llibertat, they did in the Gràcia district with 25% in the radius of the adjacent block. Clearer still was the attraction in the case of wholesale markets. In the central market of the Born, where opening hours very big sudden movements, we have found that half of the largest sellers residing in the blocks closest and only 8% worked in households which suggest that moved using any means of mechanized transport.

2.2 The impact of urban markets: a gender perspective

In case of the food markets we can not forget the importance of to be an public service for the nearly exclusive use of women during the XIX century: a public urban spaces designed for women as buyers and as sellers. Their collective contribution make the markets a space of socialization and cohesion basically interclassist, and a tool of the a top-down administrative strategy in the urban planning procedures(Damyanovic D. ,2009)

Market deserves special mention as gender specific location . In a century that, according to early histories of women in the city, made the seclusion of women in the domestic sphere of their brands in a few places like markets was more dominant presence incontestable women . There is already a remarkable literature on women in the public sphere of consumption of the burgeoning middle class and the bourgeoisie, particularly in department stores (Dennis, 2008), but we know almost nothing about his role in one of the popular public spaces where visibility was unquestionable. In the converged markets women of all social conditions, from the servants who made the purchase on request, to the sellers or the modest housewives buying much every

day after weighing the price or waiting at the last minute to buy food at prices bargain. Montserrat Miller in this volume recalls the vital role of women from Barcelona as vendors and owners of stalls. In the mid-nineteenth century, when there were a covered market and almost all vendors working in the open, the seats were served by women by 90%. After construction of the powerful network of markets, and despite the undeniable increase in the presence of men, particularly in positions requiring more capital, such as butchers, on the eve of the Civil War, 58.4% of the permits to operate 15 posts in the municipal markets were granted to women. Contrary to what was happening in other economic activities, the municipal laws of the market be allowed to own their business and transferred with the same rights as men (men were absolutely hegemonic change in wholesale trade). Women also tended to establish privileged relationships with a largely female clientele, relationships that did not come but to be the extension of everyday relations in the immediate environment: on the basis of neighborhood and kinship were woven around the markets powerful networks of sociability primary based on territoriality. Many festive events generated from the associations' own sales assistants crowned in festive celebrations that structuring social role of women in the internal market, the projected symbolically to the public sphere as "queen of the market."

2.3 A strong system of public markets born from historical weaknesses and lags

Between the years 1930 and 1970, when a progressive erosion of the markets was being observed in the more dynamic countries, an active policy was unfolding in this area in Spain. In the 1930s, it was of a fundamentally theoretical character and was led by the corps of municipal architects and their journal CAME. Here one finds numerous articles with topics ranging from the construction of modern exemplary wholesaler markets, such as that of Frankfurt, to the follow-up of the projects and accomplishments of diverse Spanish cities. One of the aspects to which it lent special attention was that of the initiatives which were undertaken in Madrid in those years, including the project and the construction of the Legazpi central wholesaler market for fruits and vegetables, and the market plan promoted by the architect Ferrero. The proposals in the 1920s and 30s were more modest in Barcelona. The example of Madrid, however, like that of other European cities, shows that the public market halls were far indeed from losing their relevance and that they were the object of a marked typological renovation, associated in part with the use of reinforced concrete.

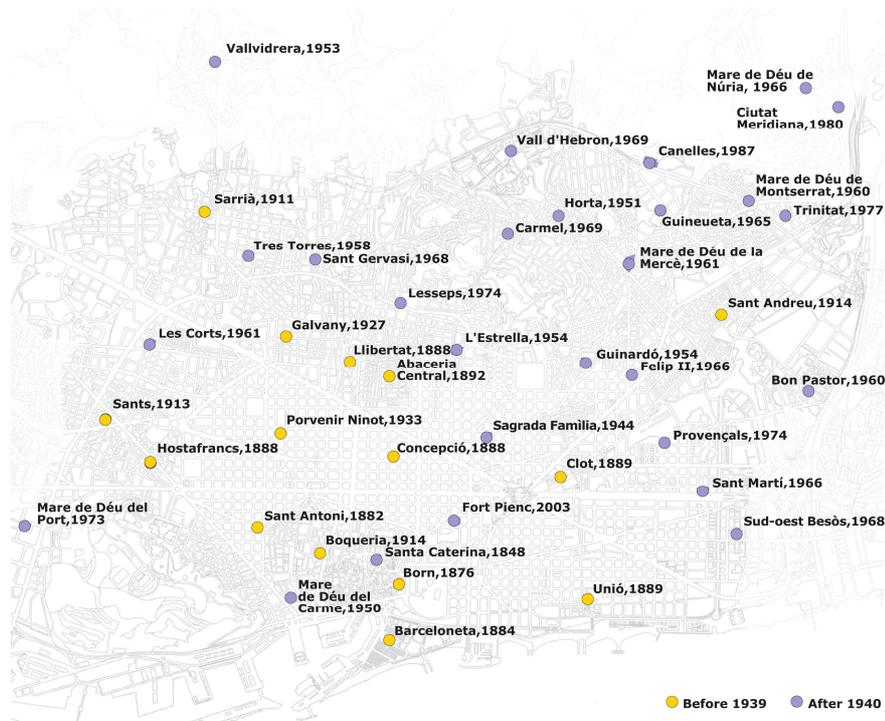


Figure 2. Location and building years of Barcelona market halls. (Source: by authors.)

In the so-called Autarchy period, between 1939 and 1959, which was the most depressive and interventionist phase of the dictatorship, a decided impetus was lent to the building of markets. The gradual liberalization of the economy and the "developmentism" of the 1960s did not halt the expansion of the market system, which grew significantly in both Barcelona and Madrid to serve the districts which had arisen with immigration. In

contrast to post-war Europe, which incorporated more advanced commercial formulas in unequal competition with the markets, in Spain the selfsame weaknesses of the economy allowed a surprising expansion and consolidation of the public market system especially in the case of Barcelona.

The activation of the economy fostered by the Francoist municipal policy in Barcelona entailed a greater private participation. In 1955 the requirements and conditions for the possible installation of private markets were being studied. Indeed, the new regulations approved at the beginning of 1956 simplified the introduction of markets of private construction and operation with reversion to the City Council in a pre-established time, as opposed to what had happened with the first generation of markets. This whole process laid the base for the most active stage in the construction of market halls. The idea was that all the people of Barcelona should have a market hall at a distance of less than one kilometre from their home. Between 1957 and 1977, 18 neighbourhood market halls were built in the areas with the least service. Moreover, as from 1966, “the possibility of constructing zonal market halls and providing parking space” was systematically considered. This circumstance affected both the new constructions of the expanded network of retailer markets and the renewal of the previously existing ones.

With respect to the district markets, in 1975 the municipal records clearly reflect the growing difficulties in completing the network with peripheral centres like the one envisaged for La Trinitat, which became the last of the series. Since the calls for tenders had remained vacant, on 21 January 1975 it was considered that the system which had been applied until then was not possible at La Trinitat market hall because it was not profitable for the contractor. Some city councillors compared the system followed in Madrid since 1930 and the system followed in Barcelona since 1960. Their conclusion was that if the Barcelona system had not been copied, it was because it did not work properly. A commission was charged with studying an appropriate contracting system. The cycle was already closing, however. It had established 40 market halls homogeneously distributed in Barcelona’s small municipal territory of 92 square kilometres. On the basis of these data, the threefold economic, political and urban-model crisis marking the 1970s deprived these markets of all protagonism in the city council’s discussions.

The considerable share of the overall consumption which was held by the zonal municipal market halls built throughout the long cycle of the Francoist city councils could still be observed in 1983. Despite the drop subsequent to 1975, the city’s markets concentrated 53% of the total food consumption per inhabitant. The study served as a basis for the development of the Special Plan on Food Facilities of Barcelona (PECAB, 1984), which adopted the municipal markets and above all their areas of concentration and commercial polarity, where the greater part of the food purchasing acts was concentrated, as its main instruments of action . If the responsibility of the city councils had traditionally been to assure provisioning, in this new stage an overall coherent policy in matters of commerce and consumption was required: it was necessary to “exercise a veritable commercial urbanism” . Within this new context, it was held that the municipal market halls could be its fundamental pillars because it was feasible to turn them into a dynamic, modern, balanced and exemplary commercial sector.

2.4 Markets as tools of urban planning and community development

In Spain during the seventies, in spite of the modernization process, retailing was in a much more traditional stage, if we compare it with other European countries. For example, the impact of new shopping centers was delayed until the period between 1984 and 1996. The crisis of the 70s ate away at the fabric of foodstuff sales, which, in many cases, had become the last refuge of those who had lost their jobs. As a result, the market question arose during the second half of the eighties, when the entire market system had grown disproportionately and reached a point of serious inefficiency. The proliferation of dispersed units was saturating the sector, and the traditional retailing fabric was incapable of adapting.

The impact of the new shopping malls, located in the outskirts of large cities, weakened traditional trade that had given life to urban centers life, was well known. In France in 1973, the Royer law had already begun. It was a very restrictive policy towards new shopping centers, and favorable to small retailing. The law was not expressed properly in city-planning terms; it tried mainly to avoid the crushing of the small companies and the waste of commercial facilities. The attitude has been, since then, more and more restrictive. In Spain, during the eighties, the rapid expansion of the new large retailing centers coincided with the adoption of the restrictive model of French commercial urbanism by the Spanish administration, and in the Catalan community the traditional marketing defense has been very strict. The law of 1987 is, in many aspects, like

the French one. The city-planning policy in Barcelona, developed by the democratic city council from the beginning of the 1980s, did not formerly consider market halls, but established a set of guidelines that in the long-term will favor them. It envisaged the “reconstruction” of the consolidated city, and preferred to think of the city as neighborhoods rather than from a general plan. It vindicated public spaces and collective signs of identity, and proposed precise programmed actions, adapted to the existing morphologies and uses.

In 1990, a Special Plan of Food Retailing Facilities (Pla Especial d'Equipament Comercial Alimentari de la Ciutat de Barcelona, 1990) was approved by the City Council that emphasized, from the city-planning point of view, the importance of fostering traditional food retailing. The municipal markets were the fundamental polarities of proximity retailing, and the main tool to update the whole system. The Special Plan concentrated its proposal on the renovation of the existing market network. In 1991 the Municipal Institute of Markets of Barcelona was created, with the mission to manage, administer and modernize municipal markets, “aiming to maintain their social, civic and cultural centrality” (See Figure 4). They have become another tool in the strategic administration that seeks to unify criteria of sustainability and social cohesion.

From that time, it has provided integrated management and promotion of the Barcelona market halls system, and has not only modernized and renovated the existing markets, but even built some new markets. In fact, markets are inseparable elements of the model of a Mediterranean city: compact, complex, efficient and with social cohesion, which is defended in the documents of the Ministry of the Environment (Libro Verde de Medio Ambiente Urbano, 2001). Barcelona has shown its effectiveness in the revitalization of commercial and social fabric of the consolidated city. Nevertheless, one important aspect of environmental potential has been forgotten, which it has been acquiring in recent decades.

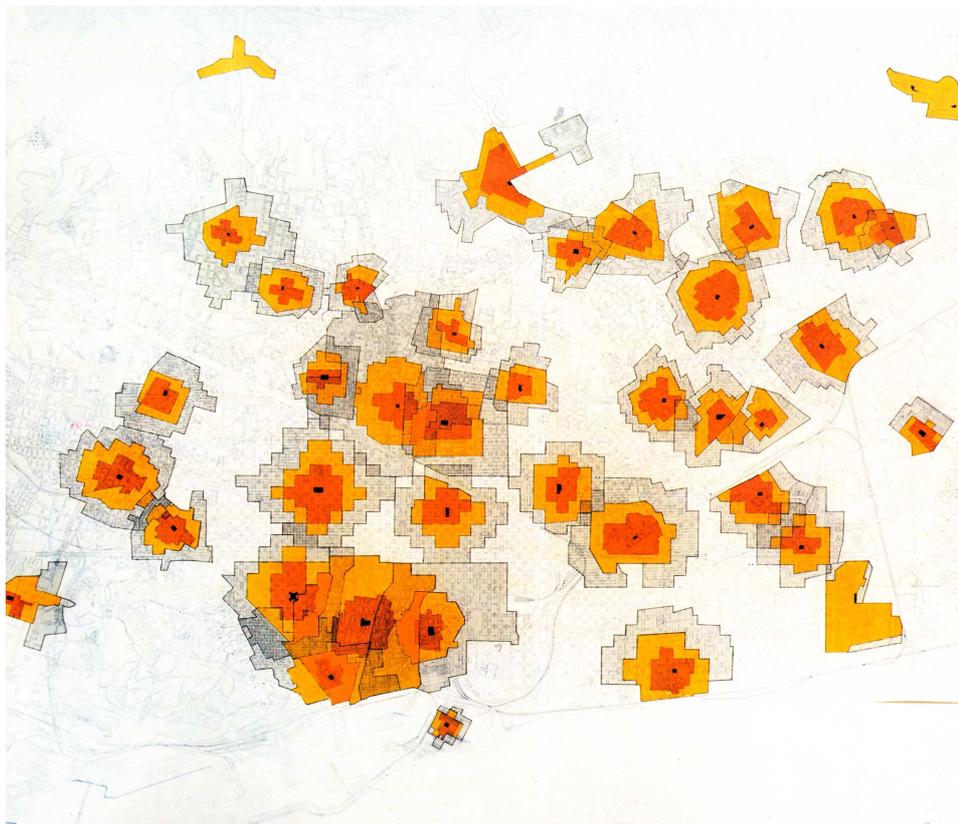


Figure 3. Areas of Clientele of Local Municipal Markets according to data from 1983-84 by the PECAB. The three crowns mark the source of 25%, 50% and 75% of the clientele of each market. (Source: Pla especial d'equipament comercial alimentari de Barcelona, 1999)

In the United States, where the old systems of municipal markets could not withstand the rapid modernization of commercial formulas, some voices have defended, since the 1960s, farmers' markets as “totally functional anachronisms”. Supermarkets were cheaper, but farmers' markets had been able to respond to consumers' desire of fresh products, of high quality and, if they had long been considered as inefficient anachronisms, the energy crisis of the seventies, and growing environmental awareness contributed convincing arguments in their favor. At the same time the emergence of New Urbanism during the 1980s, demanding a walkable mixed use neighborhood and a smart growth (Katz, 1994), has given a new

impulse to the development of the phenomenon of farmers markets as demonstrated by their growth from 1,755 in 1994 to 4,685 in 2008. Open air markets are present today in every country around the world and several arguments are adduced in their defense. In the less developed areas, they are the main source of retailing; in the industrialized world, they are an alternative form of retailing and in some areas they are the only source of fresh produce. They are also a useful help to small farmers, and work “as business incubators and survival safety nets for people on the lower economic rungs”. In the same Western countries in which market halls had progressively vanished, they have had the ever growing support of consumers, and their number has significantly increased in the last few decades. Although they carry little significant weight in quantitative terms, and we are still far from reversing the extraordinary expansion in the radius of exchanges, they are experiences that are headed in the right direction.

3 CONCLUSION

Retailing is a multiform and changing environment, increasingly segmented because consumption depends today more on desires and cultural choices, than on massive “necessities”. Markets tend to recover their traditional character of being an event: a completely different experience from the generic and controlled environment of shopping centers. Moreover, the survival of markets must be a strategic bet to increase diversity, to revitalize city centers, enliven the public space (Moore, 1965) and make the city more livable and sustainable. In the present phase, the experts predict a remarkable contraction of the great commercial centers that at the moment dominate the retailing trade. We can already see, in the United States and England, the phenomena of the “demalling” (Chiesi, 2006). In the United States of America, the time spent in malls has already fallen, and it is accepted that the new online trade, that can guarantee better prices, will cause a retailing concentration in a small number of giants (Harvard Design School, 2001). In addition, the consumption sphere will be filled more and more with ‘leisure’ and ‘experiences’; thus, traditional markets provide good assets (Kooijman, 2006). Face to face buying and selling, the different kinds of fresh, quality products, and the differences themselves between markets, can offer a wide range of experiences, richer and more authentic than other generic formats. If they are appropriately managed, they can revitalize city centers linking them with their own past and fitting, at the same time, new urban multicultural habits; two suitable features in a time of city planning ‘cultural turn’ (Freestone, Gibson, 2006). They can be a planning tool within an urbanism that can adopt different adjectives (strategic, commercial, cultural and so on) but that as a general rule is today “less concerned with the disposition of more or less permanent objects, stable configurations or definite crystallization, and more interested in accommodating processes to adopt strategic guides”.

The experts on the future transformation of cities remark on the importance of the territory in the era of globalization. Markets, and more a system of public markets, “mark” the terrain inside the urban fabric as a space of sociability, security, identity, creativity, diversity and in the end as a mirror of the tendencies of the population as livable city needs.

After the neoliberal excesses and the failure of the market mechanism to address long-term problems, Amartya Sen proposes a return to the roots of economic thought starting with Adam Smith, because “the present economic crisis demands a new understanding of older ideas”. It also seems appropriate to return to the old ways of an organic economy and the law of proximity. In this regard, one of the highlights of farmers' markets lies in their close connection to the farms near to the city and the possibility of returning to less predatory economic forms. It is an option that would provide more local responses, more sustainable habits and a greater "diversity".

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