

Today's Marketplace

Reengaging Society & The Power of Food

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Abstract: The marketplace has always been a key space for cities, not only for commercial purposes, but also and mostly as an enabler of cultural and social exchange. With the advent of new technologies and the virtualisation of many everyday activities, particularly social activities such as shopping and communicating, many physical spaces could be at risk of decaying and even disappearing, in favour of online platforms. One of this physical spaces is the marketplace. However, rather than decaying, in recent years many markets have been refurbished and others have flourished, carpeting many contemporary western cities. The marketplaces that are blossoming not only provide trade exchange, but enable users to gather together and, by offering many food-based activities, attract people to stay and engage. This paper investigates this contemporary urban phenomenon by looking at the history of the marketplace, the intrinsic relationship between food and cities, and by analysing the city of Madrid and its market-boom as the main case study.

Keywords: urban markets, virtualisation, food, society, design, placemaking

What is the Marketplace?

The marketplace understood as a physical space specifically designed to accommodate commercial as well as social, political and cultural exchange, has played a fundamental role within the urban scenery and has always been one of its core elements. Furthermore, the marketplace, particularly the relationship between food and cities, is key to “creating a sustainable, resilient and convivial future for urban space”². In fact, ranging from sociology, economy and urban theory, many fields have explored the history, evolution and impact of marketplaces on daily life and the human habitat.

Nowadays, with the advent of new technologies and the development of virtual platforms, the physical spaces meant as marketplaces have lost some of their commerce and presence to a new type of mar-

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2. PARHAM 2016.

ketplace, more global, yet completely virtual: the online marketplace. Furthermore, as this new marketplace is online, it does not depend on a physical space to sell from or go to buy to, other than access to the internet, a storage facility, a delivery address, and the knowledge of a relevant online selling platform such as Amazon or Ebay, among many other examples.

The virtualisation of many everyday activities that has taken place in recent years, particularly activities that play a fundamental social role such as shopping, learning and communicating, has consequently impacted our way of life, also questioning the role and identity of the physical urban places intended for these activities. To an extent, extreme virtualisation could cause the disappearance of many types of space, particularly those spaces that Jan Gehl defines as to produce and enable “life between buildings”³ which are essential to place-making⁴.

Although it is possible to speculate that today more than ever, given the virtualisation of numerous social everyday activities, many of the physical spaces that are used for these activities could disappear, a new proneness towards redeveloping these spaces seems to have emerged. In fact, one of the architectural and urban tendencies that characterises contemporary interventions, at all scales, ranging from villages to cities, seems to be seeking the rescue of certain types of space and furthermore, the reinterpretation of their function and use in order to enable their survival and foment social exchange. One of the many examples is the marketplace itself.

Alongside the flourishing of virtual market platforms, in recent years, physical marketplaces have boomed too, carpeting many western cities from London to Madrid via Milan and New York. However, as “the character of the life between buildings changes with the changes in the society situation”⁵ these new or revived marketplaces have also

3. GEHL 2006.

4. Placemaking inspires people to collectively reimagine and reinvent public spaces as the heart of every community. Strengthening the connection between people and the places they share, Placemaking refers to a collaborative process by which we can shape our public realm in order to maximize shared value. More than just promoting better urban design, Placemaking facilitates creative patterns of use, paying particular attention to the physical, cultural, and social identities that define a place and support its ongoing evolution”. See in Repertory 01.

5. GEHL 2006.

undergone a certain degree of change in terms of function, design and purpose. These changes have seen a shift from more trade focused markets to more socially interactive ones and will be hereby further explored. In fact, markets as spaces and places have undergone a great deal of change throughout centuries, and whilst these became spaces to go to, to buy and sell goods, in recent years, they have been redeveloped into spaces that also re-enable gathering and assembly, partly evoking the ancient agora and the roman forum. The main case study for this research is the city of Madrid and its marketplaces, most of which have re-flourished during the past decade.

In order to better understand the changes that the marketplace has undergone and the new type of market that is emerging, the following topics will be treated: a brief history of the marketplace (I), the intrinsic relationship between food and cities (II), Madrid's market revival (III), and an analysis of the new urban marketplace (IV).

A brief history of the marketplace

Marketplaces have been around since the dawn of mankind and it is very hard to pin down a specific moment in time for their birth, yet these places are strongly related with the need to exchange different types of goods. Consequently, if the marketplace is understood as a space to exchange goods, any type of space where such exchanges take place could be considered, to a speculative extent, as a marketplace. In a way, it is possible to argue that the marketplace, if comprehended as a transaction space, also existed during prehistory. However, the origin of a specific, permanent, and designated place, within an urban agglomerate, particularly designed for the exchange of goods is often traced back to the Greek agora. Yet these type of spaces already started to develop in Mesopotamia⁶, the cradle of civilisation nonetheless⁷, thousands of years BC. Furthermore, until roads started to be properly built, the "most extensive trade networks were actually waterways"⁸ and it is not a coincidence that villages and cities flourished mainly along basins. The proliferation of port-based urban settlements saw traders from

6. WHIPPS 2008.

7. MAISELS 1993.

8. WHIPPS 2008.

different parts come together, enabling not only the trade of goods, but also social and cultural exchange, which certainly is a constant and extremely important feature of the marketplace.

During the 8th century BC, with the raise of city-states and better land transport and connectivity, cities started to develop inland too. Consequently, cities grew and particular spaces were designated to trade. Among these, and particularly important, are the ancient Greek agora and, thereafter, the Roman forum, which are clear examples that still stand today and to which the contemporary markets still strongly relate to in terms of use and architecture. Furthermore, as some of these marketplaces have survived through history, in the form of ruins and monuments, they offer a more insightful opportunity to compare, contrast and analyse the history of marketplaces. As for their predecessors, and most interestingly, the agora and the forum were more than spaces merely designated to trade: they were spaces that enabled and allowed social and cultural exchange.

More and more, markets became pivotal to the economy of cities as well as the growth of civilisation. Marketplaces contributed to the blooming of urban agglomerates and towards the end of the Medieval era, during the 11th and 12th centuries, fairs started to develop in many medium-scale to large-scale European cities. Fairs were very large-scale markets that attracted sellers and buyers from all over the place, offering a more varied range of products, as well as the opportunity to purchase and sell larger quantities of goods, particularly when compared to the smaller provincial markets. Transport, location and connectivity were essential to fairs and their success. Again, the mix of different people, kept on enabling extremely high levels of cultural and social interaction and exchange across the continent. During the Renaissance, covered marketplaces started to spread too, further highlighting the marketplace's right and role within the urban-scape.

Towards the end of the 18th century and the beginning of the 19th century, shopping arcades started to develop offering a new type of commercial experience, often analysed as the precursor of today's shopping malls. Shops were clustered around a covered road, indeed allowing for social activities, yet completely distant from the marketplace's ones. Another type of retail experience was the one offered by

small shops, usually specialised in one particular area of produce: meat, grain, or dairy - among others. These shops, which can already be found in ancient Rome, strongly depended on their owner and the shop assistants, as the clients would not usually fetch the products themselves but they needed to be served, particularly as the products needed to be cut and packed. This type of shopping also enabled social exchange where customers would “pause for conversations with the staff or other customers”⁹. However, this type of shopping is very different from the more mass-lead one that derived from the development of supermarkets, where customers started to self-serve themselves and social interaction with shop-owners and assistants was bare.

At the start of the 20th century, cities offered multifaceted retail and trade experiences ranging from shopping arcades, high-end luxury stores, and markets. In London, for example customers could go and shop at the Burlington Arcade, Harrods or Covent Garden, all of which still exist today. Supermarkets and shopping malls also started to develop offering a much more mass-lead shopping experience. Although markets never loss their space within the city, they started to have a wider range of competitors. Furthermore, with the arrival of the Internet and the development of online shopping platforms, markets have further suffered some decline, particularly in terms of social and cultural exchange and interaction. However, during the past decade a new type of marketplace seems to be flourishing around the globe: a marketplace that not only offers customers the opportunity to purchase from its stalls, but it also enables a greater deal of social interaction. In fact, this new type of marketplace encourages people to stay around the market, experience food, have a drink and a bite to eat, rather than only pass by and buy. Among the many examples to be found there are Borough Market and Broadway Market in London, Eataly in Milan, Turin and Genova, but also in New York City and Los Angeles, and Mercado Bom Sucesso in Porto.

Food and cities: an intrinsic relationship

Throughout its history, it clearly emerges that the marketplace

9. HAMLETT 2008.

has always played a key cultural and social role within the urban environment. The new type of marketplace that has developed in recent years is essentially based on social interaction and aims at re-engaging people with each other through food and space. After all, as Adam Smith already stated “corn is necessary; silver only a superfluity”¹⁰. Consequently, food is the fish hook used to attract all types of people and reunite them under one roof and a newly redesigned space that enables consumers and visitors to stay around and gather, rather than merely transit, purchase and leave.

However, whilst nowadays “food [...] matters enormously in making convivial and sustainable places”¹¹, interestingly enough, up until recently, food was not recognised as to play a fundamental role within urban and social shaping¹². Among the pioneer researchers that have tackled the field of food and cities and their intrinsic relationship with the built environment, Dr Susan Parham and Carolyn Steel are certainly key to this investigation. Both authors are concerned with the importance of food in everyday life and furthermore how food shapes our life, at a time in which, particularly in the western world, we give food for granted.

In 2008, Carolyn Steel published *Hungry City*, a book where she sheds light upon the contemporary issues that exist between food and cities, through a thorough analysis of the many processes involved, from producing food to eating it, through a history of alimentation. Furthermore, her insightful research demonstrates how strongly linked food and cities are. In fact, agriculture and urbanisation developed hand by hand and have been core elements of civilisation and its survival. Consequently, the marketplace, as a designated space that, by providing food products, supplies and feeds the city has always been a core element of urban agglomerates, architecturally as well as culturally. Therefore, the marketplace can be understood as the place that enabled exchange between the agricultural world (the producers) and urban place (its main consumers).

Carolyn Steel also analyses the extremely difficult environmen-

10. CANNAN 1925.

11. PARHAM 2016.

12. PARHAM 2016.

tal issues that are deriving from today's way of producing food and their negative impact on our world, where over 6 billion people need to be fed, 1 billion are obese, and over 1 billion are starving¹³. These are facts that must be addressed. Furthermore, she goes on to highlight how nowadays about 80% of global food trading is mainly controlled by 5 multinational corporate corporations¹⁴. How can marketplaces survive in these circumstances and, most importantly, how can they help change the current corporate food production situation? It is important to note, that many of these new marketplaces tend to have a very organic, eco-friendly and local mind-sets and philosophy.

Dr Susan Parham, on the other hand, has theorised in-depth about food and city design since the 90s. Parham explores very closely the relationship between society, space and food, arguing that "urban designers need to recognise and reflect this in their practice"¹⁵, particularly as the spaces that are involved in food processes are not only key to urban development but also to social exchange and interaction, through place-making. Particularly central to her research is the importance of food for urban vitality and social engagement: «Sharing food together allows for a daily physical and social re-creation of the self that is also fundamental to the sense of human connection to others. The physical design of cities can determine the richness of experiences of food and eating [...]. Opportunities for conviviality in the city rely upon an extended set of gastronomic possibilities»¹⁶.

Consequently, marketplaces are essential in offering the above-mentioned connectivity through gastronomic possibilities. Furthermore, Parham also argues that markets have been revived, giving birth to a "hybrid form of food-centred spatial developments"¹⁷. It is this new hybrid form of food-centre that is shaping the new type of marketplace currently flourishing in many cities and that is hereby explored. However, as Parham argues, the contemporary transformation of the marketplace, sees "traditional urban form both underpinned and inter-

13. STEEL 2009.

14. STEEL 2009.

15. PARHAM 2016.

16. PARHAM 1992.

17. PARHAM 2016.

twined with new forms of local sociability¹⁸.

Madrid's market revival

During the last decade, Madrid's market scenery has undergone a great deal of change. Over five markets have been designed or redeveloped and turned into new marketplaces, mainly hosting high quality food stalls and communal spaces where consumers can enjoy tapas, food dishes and drinks, as well as each other's company. These spaces are the trending places to go to and people gather to them either during their lunch breaks, after work or over the weekend, creating a new social and food trend within the city, with its own physical space and identity. These new marketplaces not only attract locals, but also tourists that come to visit the city, further contributing to international cultural and social exchange.

The Market of San Miguel

Historically, this marketplace was demolished by Joseph Bonaparte as part of his urban vision for Madrid, in 1809. Following its demolition, the space survived as a market, specialised in fish trade. In 1835, the market underwent some minor refurbishments, carried out by Joaquín Henri with the aim of tidying the space up, by building some facades in view of covering it. It was not until the early 20th century that a full project was developed for it by Alfonso Dube and in 1916 the market was opened and named Mercado de San Miguel. The cast iron structure designed by Dube, which still stands, is the only one, within the architecture of markets, that has survived up until today, making it an extremely important historical construction. In 1999, the local authority decided to redevelop it with the aim of reactivating it, however their intervention was unsuccessful as it did not manage to compete with the booming of supermarkets and shopping centres. Finally, in 2003 it was purchased by a private society that refurbished it spatially and conceptually, turning it into something more than a shopping square: a gathering place where consumers could actually spend their time eating, drinking and socialising. The market reopened its doors in 2009

18. PARHAM 2016.

and has, since then, been a growing success. This project of reactivation of a historical marketplace, can be seen as the predecessor of the ones that have later on flourished throughout the city of Madrid, shifting the main purpose of markets, from trade to social interaction through food.

Platea

Platea opened its doors in 2014 and is located on the site of an old Cinema space in one of the main squares of Madrid, Plaza de Colón. Its original cinema lead function is recalled through its different gastronomic spaces and experiences. The scale of this revitalising project is extremely large and in fact it spreads throughout 5 floors, comprehending 5,800 square meters of food halls, Michelins restaurants, bars, and a club. Again, the aim is to bring people together through food and hence many spaces have been designated for sharing meals and experiences. Chairs, tables, stands and bars carpet the five floors offering all sorts of beverages and foods. The space has been subdivided into six main areas: el foso, where consumers and visitors can enjoy foods from around the world and patisserie bars; el patio, where tapas and bars can be found; arriba restaurant, a *prêt-à-porter* culinary experience by Ramón Freixa; the stage, which accommodates international performances; el palco, a cocktail bar area; and finally the club. The variety of spaces and diverse range of experiences that Platea offers makes it stand out within the new marketplace industry as the largest gastro leisure experience place in Europe. Again, food and people are at the centre of another recent urban reinvigorating large-scale project in the Spanish capital.

The Market of San Fernando

This market is located in Embajadores-Lavapiés, a historical district of Madrid. It used to be an open-air market and after the Spanish Civil War, the local authority decided to refurbish it and build it into a proper neighbourhood market. In 1944 the new market, designed by Casto Fernández-Shaw, opened its doors. In more recent years the market underwent some decline and some changes including a modernisation project in 2005 that never got carried out due to financial problems and, in 2008, an attempt on behalf of more corporate brands to move



Madrid, external view of the Mercado de San Miguel.



Madrid, the patio of the gastronomic centre Platea.



Madrid, the stage of the gastronomic centre Platea.

into it unsuccessfully. Finally, in 2010 the merchants published the hiring costs for the stands in the market, aiming to attract local initiatives and businesses. Most interestingly, the market is run by the merchants themselves through a union that they have set up. Since 2013, the market hall has been fully functioning and has become an incredibly commercial as well as social space where people come together to shop, eat as well as view all sorts of performances.

San Miguel, Platea and San Fernando are very different from each other, in terms of space and concept, yet they all share an interest in bringing people together through food and they all belong to this new type of hybrid marketplaces that is on the rise, within the contemporary urban scenery. These are some of the many examples of marketplaces in the capital, others are El Mercado de Moncloa, within the main university district of the city; El Mercado de San Antón, located in Malsaña and which includes a roof terrace; and El Mercado de San Ildefonso, inspired by street food markets.

The new marketplace

Having analysed a brief history of the marketplace, it emerges that these places have always played a pivotal role for their cities, in terms of local and global economy, as well as in terms of national and international social and cultural exchange. Despite the changes that markets have undergone throughout history, they have never ceased to exist and their experience, in different levels at different times in history, has always had an intrinsic social component. However, particularly nowadays, the virtualisation of many activities, including shopping, has questioned the role of physical markets, putting their existence at risk. Although physical markets could vanish in favour of online trade platforms, markets have not ceased to exist at all. Furthermore, in recent years, marketplaces have started to be redeveloped and are carpeting many western cities. This contemporary phenomenon is closely linked to the extremely important relationship that exists between food, cities and place-making. In fact, this new type of marketplace is extremely focused on food and gastronomy, in order to bringing people together not only to shop, but actually to gather – fomenting that much longed cultural and social exchange, that characterised ancient marketplaces.

Overall, it is possible to conclude that a new architectural trend is taking place, particularly in western cities and in relation to marketplace typology. This new trend sees the development of marketplaces anew or the transformation of existing marketplaces into a hybrid space that not only enables trade activities, but is also rather centred on social engagement and interaction. These new types of markets are having a positive impact on the local economy of their city, whilst enabling for extremely vibrant and vital gathering urban places. As argued by Jan



Madrid, internal view of the Mercado de San Fernando.



Madrid, internal view of the Mercado de San Ildefonso.

Gehl “urban planning principles and architectural trends of different historical periods have influenced outdoor activities and thus the social outdoor activity as well”¹⁹, consequently, as planners, thinkers and architects, we must be extremely conscious about the power of space on social shaping and place-making, particularly at a time in history in which many social activities and their places are being virtualised.

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Repertorio 01

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Repertorio 02

https://www.ted.com/talks/carolyn_steel_how_food_shapes_our_cities?language=en#t-364564