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Urban Food Markets and the Gastronomic Quarter

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Introduction

The contention of this paper is that in the context of forces of economic and cultural globalisation, and the rise of vast megalopolis design for conviviality is particularly important. However, narrow, technocratic modes of understanding city processes tend to underestimate the issues involved and can actively work against the expression of conviviality. The paper considers the role of urban food markets as a key element in design for conviviality in combating the dystopic urban spaces created by fragmented globalisation. It looks at ways market centred urban places can be regenerated as 'gastronomic quarters' contributing to a socially rich, sustainable urban life.

The paper sets out specific physical design requirements for markets that contribute to a rich urban armature for conviviality centred around local food consumption, exchange and as far as possible production. It argues that the development of gastronomic quarters can support richer social relationships among urban dwellers.

What have we lost urban food markets?

The thrust of the research reported on below is that markets have long been a key urban component in maintaining sustainable forms of production, exchange and consumption of food in and around cities. From pre Roman times, the physical design and location of food markets has been central element, contributing to robust, convivial cities in which public space and engagement is valued.

Until the early to mid 20th century, markets provided a continuous urban function in the centres of cities and towns. Key cultural relationships between state, religious authority and civil society were closely connected in a publicly accessible set of spaces in which the market featured as a central element (Sitte, Kostof, 1991, 1992). Markets were often located in or next to the main place for ritual, government, feast days and other public ceremonies. Markets were practically and symbolically important to the life of the town. The market's creation of one or more 'outdoor rooms', its enclosure, permeability and legibility, as well as its connectivity to the rest of a dense, human scaled town can be seen in actual and idealised town form examples from Roman times onward (Kostof, 1991, Morris, 1995).

(see figure one).

These rules are still pertinent to creating city form conducive to markets yet the design elements that supported markets came close to extinction in the 20th century city. Markets no longer
fitted ideas about what was appropriate for the 'modern' city either as symbols of civic engagement or as venues for consumption. Transformations of settlement and retailing mostly excluded markets but tended to be viewed as inevitable aspects of modernisation (Schmeichen and Carls, 2001). Despite notable exceptions constituted by thriving markets in some European towns, and periodic attempts to revive and redevelop markets in other places, by the post war period many either became derelict or had been demolished. Post-war urban redevelopment schemes on modernist principles identified markets with an outmoded past. Finally the advent of supermarkets proved the death knell for many markets across the UK and Europe.

Public space centred on markets was not just a physical design issue. It had allowed the spatial intertwining of the material, cultural and spiritual dimensions of life. Markets created and reinforced a sense of civic connection. Separating out consumption related activities from other land uses meant losing the design elements that reinforced social interaction. Today it is relatively rare to find new development design which builds houses over shops, arcaded edges to streets, human scaled enclosed squares, lively centres based on food trading or a close physical proximity of market, city government and housing. (See figure two)

So markets lost out to the consumption patterns of both suburbia and the more recent conurbation development of megalopolis (Gortman, Harper, 1990, Gortdeiner, 1994). The dominant mode of consumption has become intensive, chemically dependent production. We are witnessing the rise of genetically modified food and so called 'functional foods'. Much food is heavily processed and packaged, subject to long distance transportation to serve large scale, car dependent retailing. Retailers, as far as possible, externalise environmental and social costs, impoverishing producers, diminishing consumers' tastes, and creating unacceptable 'food miles' and 'foods deserts' through their spatial practices. Italian initiative such as Slow Food and Slow Cities have specifically developed to fight against these negative trends. Elsewhere, the relatively recent growth in the organic food and local food movements are also challenging out of season, out of region' food practices.

Urban design directions

The research suggests that urban design can also help. Useful urban design direction is given by theorists including (most famously) Jacobs (1961) on the connection between mixed use, urban intricacy and economic vitality at local level; Lynch (1985) on urban scale, grain, fit, and access; Trancik (1986) on the importance of enclosure and the public outdoor room; and Lozano (1996) on the problems posed by functionalism in urban form. Many of the designers and design groups who have proposed sets of design qualities also demonstrate the urban condi-
tions necessary to support markets in a general way. Christopher Alexander et al (1977) is notable in specifically proposing design requirements for food markets themselves. The various urban design patterns, qualities, elements, codes and principles developed by designers that encompass notions of vitality, permeability, legibility, sense, fit, robustness, visual appropriateness, richness, personalisation etc are all useful ways to conceptualise the qualities that these public spaces should possess. Most are implicitly supportive of developing or redeveloping markets as outdoor rooms or built structures within properly enclosed urban space. A few designers give direct instructions on how to construct such markets as part of an overall approach to the production of better townscape.

A number of designers refer to the importance of creating good "outdoor rooms" with a proper sense of enclosure created by attention to the three dimensional relationship between buildings and the space between them. The solid-to-void and positive-to-negative space relationships must be right to achieve the correct degree of enclosure, as they were when design was subordinate to a collective realm. We need to learn from traditional city forms which demonstrated an implicit acceptance of the larger order of things; giving cities a sense of place and good "fit" between form and function (Trancik, 1986). This organic quality (Alexander et al, 1987) has been largely lost.

Design research suggests that traditional cities understood these relationships, creating workable and sometimes uplifting public market spaces, while modernist functionalism undermined public space and the fine grain of functions that traditionally go with it. Whereas consumption was once accompanied by opportunities for social interaction and conviviality centred on food, allowing for social ritual and maintaining a sense of community, it is now too often sterile and alienating. Partly as a result of functionalist design, supermarkets and malls have little "sense of place". Cities may have lost their capacity to create public outdoor rooms at the symbolic heart. Suburban and conurbation development is instead characterised by increasing separation of communities by age, class, and ethnicity, while homogenising the shopping experience. At the same time, it is possible to combat these trends in spatial design. Various spatial typologies can be employed to create workable public spaces to create nodes of intensity of activity that are human scaled, mixed use, fine grained and diverse. For sustainability as well as conviviality, they must be accessible as much as possible on foot but also through a variety of public transport modes which also provide good connectivity to other nodes. Proposals such as Transit Oriented Development (Calthorpe, 1989) could link access to transit and to local food.

(See figure three)

Catchment issues are important. It is not entirely clear how big, in either area or population terms, the catchment must be to allow a market to function. This is especially true as farmers

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markets attract "communities of interest" rather than geographical communities. But there are some "rules of thumb" which can act as a guide to what is likely to work at the scale of the urban quarter.

Recent design guidance
A raft of recent design guidance in the United Kingdom has proposed design solutions, which would, theoretically, act positively on making (or remaking) convivial town centres. Guidance covers issues of compact, high density urban form, connectivity and activity concentrated on nodes at the centre of walkable catchments. Public space is seen as the 'glue' that "plays a central role in strengthening communities" (Urban Taskforce Report, 1999). The Urban Compendium meanwhile argues that "the best public spaces often have nodes of activity (with pavement cafes or markets, for example)" and suggests that "market stalls inject colour and life" (2000, 99).

Only the more recent Shaping Neighbourhoods: A Guide for Health, Sustainability and Vitality (2003), takes a step forward in explicitly drawing out the local food relationships and requirements for sustainability. This is crucial to overcome a view implied by much of the recent guidance of markets as pleasant adjuncts to a lively street scene rather than representing a more profound set of urban relationships linked to cultural life, sustainability and local economies.

Urban design guidance documents and masterplans could do more to differentiate between food markets displaying an intricate pattern, human scale, multiple ownership, close relationship of the produce to season and region, surrounded by complex mixed use, and walkable catchments; and those retail arrangements that comprise single or chain ownership, based on mass merchandising, represent many food miles expended, and are surrounded by car based, single land use catchments. A better basis of knowledge about the qualities necessary for a well functioning market should assist in renewing or rebuilding these elements into existing fabric and forming the heart of new urban areas. At least urban design should avoid undermining well-used markets where they exist already.

Just as important as creating the right conditions for markets to thrive is avoiding undermining existing well functioning markets. Greater emphasis in the guidance might help practitioners to avoid destroying existing markets with ill-judged interventions. For example, a recent urban design framework proposed for Spitalfields in London argues for vibrant mixed use while actually proposing new development that would partially obliterates a vibrant mixed use market that is popular and well used. This has provided the policy justification for a scheme that has demolished half the extant market buildings to make way for office development. In another case, at the architecturally interesting Borough Market in inner south London, proposed Thames Link rail infrastructure improvements may
threaten the future of the successful farmers' and wholesale market spaces. (See Figure four)

Findings of primary research: market typologies
To assist designers in the task of protecting and reviving markets, primary research was used to explore the nature of markets and develop them into a series of typologies. The research is based on the methodological assumption that typologies can both delineate different aspects of the urban armature and act as a tool for urban design practice through master planning and other development projects.

Case studies of traditional food markets and newer farmers' markets in places including London and Cardiff in the UK; Dresden in Germany; Paris, Villeneuve-surt-Lor, and Angouleme in France; Rome and Bologna in Italy; New York in the United States; and Adelaide and Melbourne in Australia were explored to demonstrate that markets can be revitalised socially and economically. Their appeal is not limited to niche food retailing for an urban underclass or a rich 'food literate' minority, although the determination of both groups to use markets had kept some alive that would otherwise have faded away.

It is possible to identify some main typologies for market spaces. The primary research demonstrates that markets tend to fall into four main design groupings. Each represents a valid design response to the identified requirements of markets, and having been tested over the long term in cities, should suit a wide range of urban circumstances:

- Open markets in urban squares with space for open stalls (Typology 1)
- Semi-covered market hall structures in urban squares or streets (Typology 2)
- Enclosed market halls in urban squares (Typology 3) and
- Enclosed halls within a perimeter city building block (Typology 4)

It was concluded that to design markets well it is necessary to:

- Find or reuse a location that is walkable for a good proportion of users and encourage use of other access modes (bicycle, scooter, bus, tram, train, and taxi) instead of cars.
- Form markets as the centrepiece of activity nodes within a fine-grained, diverse urban fabric at high enough land use density to support a substantial local catchment or residents and other users.
- Create good outdoor rooms with the appropriate level of enclosure and positive space - provided by surrounding built fabric where the market is in an open square rather than a built structure.
- Ensure permeability, legibility and connectivity by creating human scaled, walkable market areas that relate in scale and texture to surrounding townscape.
- Be supportive to small local shops - well-designed and located
markets attract a range of food related activities that contribute to vitality.
- Revitalise existing good quality buildings and spaces that give opportunities for adaptive re-use. In new and existing buildings provide for visual display, richness and personalisation. Long-life, loose-fit design principles seem especially suitable for markets.
- Provide for servicing (deliveries, waste removal) at grade, by small vehicles rather than large trucks. (See Figure five)

Conclusion
With rising interest in finding the appropriate urban scale for consumption, in an increasing desire for sustainability and social inclusion, and growing support for organic production and artisan produce, urban markets could again become potential anchors for well designed new development and urban renewal areas. A number of towns and cities have refurbished traditional markets or adapted wholesale markets to take on retail functions. As yet there is a shortage of intentionally designed new market spaces to match the rise of new, more sustainable forms of retail such as farmers markets. More focused urban design understanding and effort, that recognises the immense value of urban food markets as centrepieces in gastronomic quarters, would yield better design outcomes in support of convivial cities.

References