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MUNICIPAL MARKETS: FROM FOOD PROVISION TO URBAN CENTRALITY

The reorganisation of cities around the idea of proximity has become central to contemporary urban debate, as a response to the effects of functional fragmentation, car dependency and the loss of everyday urban life. In this context, regular pedestrian access to fresh food plays a key role in territorial equity and social cohesion. This article analyses the local fresh produce market as an infrastructure of the city of proximity, exploring its contribution to daily food supply, urban sociability and neighbourhood centrality. Based on a critical review of the literature on urban proximity, public space and local food systems, the article develops a conceptual reading of the market as an everyday space, characterised by frequent shopping, the logic of "slow time" and the building of relationships of trust between traders and consumers. This approach is complemented by a synthetic empirical analysis of two municipal markets in Lisbon, Portugal, which allows us to contrast models of rehabilitation oriented towards everyday proximity with processes of transformation associated with occasional consumption and touristification. The results show that the contribution of markets to the city of proximity depends less on their physical centrality or the architectural quality of the intervention and more on the preservation of their regular food function and their integration into the daily routines of residents. The article concludes by defending the municipal fresh produce market as a strategic facility for

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МУНІЦИПАЛЬНІ БАЗАРИ: ВІД ПРОДОВОЛЬНОГО ЗАБЕЗПЕЧЕННЯ ДО МІСЬКОЇ ЦЕНТРАЛЬНОСТІ

Реорганізація міст навколо ідеї близькості стала центральною темою сучасних урбаністичних дискусій як відповідь на наслідки функціональної фрагментації, залежності від автомобілів та втрати повсякденного міського життя. У цьому контексті регулярний пішохідний доступ до свіжих продуктів харчування відіграє ключову роль у територіальній рівності та соціальній згуртованості. У цій статті аналізується місцевий ринок свіжої продукції як інфраструктура найближчого міста, досліджується його внесок у щоденне забезпечення їжею, міську соціальність та центральність населення. Спираючись на критичний огляд літератури про близькість міста, його громадські простори та локальні продовольчі системи, стаття розробляє концептуальне бачення ринку як повсякденного простору, який характеризується частими покупками, логікою "повільного часу" та побудовою довірчих відносин між продавцями та споживачами. Цей підхід доповнюється синтетичним емпіричним аналізом двох муніципальних ринків у Лісабоні, Португалії, що дозволяє нам порівняти моделі відновлення, орієнтовані на повсякденну близькість, із процесами трансформації, пов'язаними з випадковим споживанням і формуванням туристичної привабливості. Результати показують, що внесок ринків у близькість міста менше залежить від їхньої фізичної центральності або архітектурної якості втручання, а більше від збереження їхньої регулярної функції харчування та їх інтеграції в повсякденні справи мешканців. Стаття завершується захистом муніципального ринку свіжих продуктів як



building more walkable, relational, and socially inclusive cities.

Keywords: Municipal markets; Proximity city; Food supply; Urban daily life; Sociability

стратегічного об'єкта для побудови більш придатних для прогулянок, взаємопов'язаних і соціально інклюзивних міст.

Ключові слова: муніципальні ринки; близькість міста; постачання продуктів; повсякденне міське життя; соціальні взаємодії.

JEL Classification: A13, A14, D63, D91, I38.

Introduction

The functional structure of the 20th-century city, marked by the separation between living, working, consuming and recreating, contributed to the spatial fragmentation of everyday urban life and to a growing dependence on motorised transport, particularly in accessing essential goods such as food. This urban model, associated with the expansion of large out-of-town shopping centres, has produced a city that is increasingly less walkable, less relational and more unequal in terms of access to basic services (Jacobs, 1961; Gehl, 2010).

In recent decades, this paradigm has been challenged by approaches that advocate a reorganisation of the city around proximity, functional diversity and the enhancement of everyday life. Concepts such as the compact city, walkable city or, more recently, the 15-minute city seek to refocus urban planning on the neighbourhood scale and pedestrian accessibility to essential facilities (Calthorpe, 1993; Moreno et al., 2021). In this context, daily access to fresh food emerges as a central element for urban quality of life, public health and social cohesion.

It is in this context that municipal fresh produce markets are regaining relevance as local city infrastructure. Historically, markets have played a structuring role in the formation of European and Latin American cities, functioning simultaneously as spaces for food supply, social gathering and urban centrality (Braudel, 1985; Zukin, 1995). However, throughout the 20th century, many of these facilities declined, pressured by competition from mass food retail, changing consumption habits and the loss of centrality of traditional urban centres.

Paradoxically, it is in a context marked by the acceleration of urban rhythms, the digitisation of consumption and the standardisation of commercial spaces that the municipal market reveals a renewed relevance. As a place for frequent, small-scale shopping, often promoting nearby food basins and deeply rooted in the territory, the fresh market differs from other supply formats in that it promotes a direct relationship between producer, trader and consumer, based on trust, recognition and the repetition of everyday practices (Hinrichs, 2000; Watson & Studdert, 2006).

In addition to its important economic function, the municipal market can be understood as a relational space, where food shopping is linked to informal socialising, lingering and meeting people. This social dimension brings the market closer to the notion of public space, even though it is a commercial facility, reinforcing its capacity to produce urban life and a sense

of belonging at the neighbourhood level (Low, 2000; Carmona, 2015). In a context of demographic ageing and growing social isolation in urban areas, this relational function takes on particular relevance.

In the contemporary debate on the city of proximity, municipal fresh produce markets can thus be understood as everyday infrastructure, capable of linking access to essential goods, local economies, pedestrian mobility and urban centrality. Unlike other food facilities that are often dependent on cars or located in single-function spaces, markets tend to be located in consolidated urban areas, integrating into networks of street trade, services and public spaces. This allows food shopping to be integrated into daily routines, reinforcing sustainable urban practices and reducing unnecessary travel.

However, the survival of this function is not guaranteed. Recent processes of municipal market rehabilitation, often geared towards restaurants, tourism or occasional consumption, have called into question the role of these facilities as spaces for daily shopping and social interaction. The replacement of fresh produce trading with more profitable uses, increased rents and changes in user profiles tend to remove markets from the daily lives of residents, transforming them into specialised and less inclusive urban destinations (González & Waley, 2013).

Based on this framework, this article proposes to analyse the relationship between the municipal fresh produce market and the city of proximity, focusing on its role as urban everyday infrastructure. The aim is not to discuss markets as heritage or tourist attractions, but to understand how these spaces contribute (or fail to contribute) to pedestrian access to fresh food, neighbourhood sociability and the construction of vibrant urban centres. Through a conceptual approach supported by empirical evidence, the article seeks to contribute to the debate on urban proximity policies, defending the municipal market, beyond its economic function, as a key element in the construction of more liveable, inclusive, and socially dense cities.

The article begins by outlining a conceptual framework that views municipal fresh produce markets as everyday infrastructure in the neighbourhood city. It then presents two contrasting case studies from Lisbon to examine how different regeneration models affect daily use, sociability, and the centrality of neighbourhoods. The final section discusses the implications of these findings for urban policies geared towards proximity and inclusive urban development.

1. The municipal market as a space for everyday urban life

1.1. Food supply and proximity

Daily access to fresh food is a fundamental aspect of urban life, often underestimated in debates on urban planning and form. Throughout much of the 20th century, the reorganisation of the urban food system around large retail outlets contributed to the delocalisation of food supply, making it dependent on cars and disconnected from neighbourhood walking routines

(Pothukuchi & Kaufman, 1999). This process had significant impacts on territorial equity, public health and the quality of daily life, particularly for elderly or less mobile populations, but also had environmental consequences.

In this context, municipal fresh produce markets stand out as local food infrastructure, based on frequent, small-scale purchasing habits that are integrated into daily routines. Unlike the concentrated weekly supply typical of hypermarkets, the market promotes food practices based on repetition, seasonality and adaptation to immediate daily needs. This form of supply favours a closer relationship between consumption and territory, reducing travel and reinforcing food autonomy at the neighbourhood level (Wrigley et al., 2012).

The location of markets in established urban areas, often associated with street trading, public facilities and meeting places, reinforces their ability to function as local hubs within the city. Pedestrian accessibility to the market allows food shopping to be integrated into daily routines, on the way home, to work or to other services, contributing to a more walkable city that is less dependent on motorised transport (Gehl, 2010). In this sense, the market should not be understood solely as a commercial facility, but as an infrastructure of everyday life, whose relevance is measured by the frequency of use and its integration into daily urban rhythms.

1.2. Slow time, repetition, and daily practices

Beyond its functional dimension, the municipal market is characterised by its own temporality, often described as a space of 'slow time'. This temporality does not correspond to inefficiency, but to a specific way of experiencing the city, based on permanence, observation and informal interaction. Shopping at the market often involves brief conversations, choices mediated by the seller's experience and a sensory relationship with the products, practices that contrast with the accelerated, protected and automated consumption that dominates other commercial formats (Oldenburg, 1999; Gehl, 2010).

The daily repetition of shopping practices in the market plays a central role in building stable urban routines. By returning regularly to the same space, consumers build relationships of mutual recognition, familiarity and trust, which reinforce their sense of belonging to the neighbourhood (Lofland, 1998). This repetitive dimension of use distinguishes the market from occasional consumer goods, bringing it closer to other spaces that structure everyday life, such as schools, neighbourhood cafés or squares.

The 'slow pace' of the market is particularly relevant in urban contexts marked by the general acceleration of activities and the growing technological mediation of consumption. It almost becomes reactionary behaviour. While digital platforms tend to dematerialise the shopping experience and reduce social contact, the market preserves a physical and situated urban experience, anchored in physical space and co-presence. This condition contributes to the diversity of urban rhythms and the coexistence of different ways of experiencing the city, which are fundamental elements for urban vitality (Jacobs, 1961).

1.3. Market, sociability and neighbourhood centrality

The social dimension of the municipal market is one of its main contributions to the city of proximity. In addition to being a place to shop, the market functions as a social space, where buying food is intertwined with meeting people, chatting and observing. This everyday sociability, often informal and unscheduled, plays an important role in social cohesion and in building neighbourhood ties (Watson & Studdert, 2006).

Unlike other more controlled commercial spaces, which are uninviting and homogeneous, the market is characterised by the diversity of its users, the overlapping of uses and its permeability to the surrounding urban space. This condition reinforces its role as a neighbourhood hub, capable of generating pedestrian traffic, boosting surrounding commerce, and contributing to the vitality of the adjacent public space (Carmona, 2015). The market thus acts as an urban anchor, not only because of the concentration of supply, but also because of its ability to structure local social life.

In the context of the proximity city, this centrality takes on particular importance. Pedestrian accessibility to the market, combined with the diversity of uses in its surroundings, allows the space to function as a convergence point for everyday activities, reducing the need for long journeys and reinforcing the neighbourhood's autonomy. More than just physical distance, it is the relational density of the market, the intensity of interactions and the frequency of use that sustains its role in the proximity city.

However, this central function is not immune to urban transformation processes. The replacement of fresh produce trading with uses geared towards occasional consumption, catering or tourism tends to profoundly alter the profile of users and the temporality of the space, weakening its connection to the daily lives of residents (González & Waley, 2013). When the market is no longer regularly frequented by the local population, it gradually loses its ability to structure neighbourhood life, becoming a specialised and less inclusive urban destination.

By highlighting the municipal market as everyday infrastructure, a space of slow time and relational centrality, this section conceptually frames the following empirical analysis, where these dimensions will be explored based on specific cases, allowing us to assess how different rehabilitation models reinforce or compromise the role of the fresh produce market in building a city of proximity.

2. Fresh produce markets and local communities: empirical evidence

This empirical analysis does not aim to establish an exhaustive comparison between municipal market models, but rather to illustrate, through two contrasting cases, how different regeneration strategies reinforce or weaken the role of the fresh produce market as a local urban infrastructure.

The selected cases (the Campo de Ourique Market and the Ribeira Market, both in Lisbon, Portugal) show how decisions regarding the programme, management and target audience have a direct impact on daily use, sociability and neighbourhood centrality.

2.1. Daily proximity and neighbourhood centrality: the case of Campo de Ourique Market

The Campo de Ourique Market (*Figure 1*) is a particularly relevant example of a municipal market which, despite a recent renovation process, maintains a functional and social relationship with the daily life of the neighbourhood. Located in a dense, predominantly residential urban area with a strong local identity, the market continues to play a central role in the local food supply, and is regularly visited by residents who mostly travel there on foot.



Figure 1. Campo de Ourique Municipal Market

Source: Lisbon Municipality (<https://informacoeseservicos.lisboa.pt/contactos/diretorio-da-cidade/mercado-campo-de-ourique#gallery-1>, accessed on 21 December 2025).

The market's refurbishment introduced new uses, namely catering, with the aim of increasing the space's appeal and extending its opening hours. However, unlike more polarised interventions, the trade in fresh produce was maintained as a structural component of the programme. This coexistence allows the market to respond simultaneously to everyday needs, such as food shopping, and to social practices, without losing its main function as a neighbourhood food infrastructure.

The spatial organisation of the market plays a decisive role in this balance. The central layout of the food court forces shoppers to pass through the fresh produce stalls, promoting cross-flows and avoiding functional segmentation of the space (*Figure 2*). This configuration encourages

different groups of people to linger and interact, reinforcing the relational dimension of the market and its integration into the daily life of the neighbourhood. Studies on urban markets show that this overlap of uses is fundamental to the economic vitality and social sustainability of these facilities (Watson & Studdert, 2006).



Figure 2. The proximity between the catering area and the fresh produce stalls

Source: Lisbon Municipality (<https://informacoes.servicos.lisboa.pt/contactos/diretorio-da-cidade/mercado-campo-de-ourique#gallery-1>, accessed on 21 December 2025).

From the perspective of proximity to the city, the Campo de Ourique Market shows how frequency of use and integration into daily routines are more decisive factors than isolated programmatic diversity. The regular purchase of fresh food, combined with pedestrian accessibility and links to surrounding street shops, contributes to the creation of a lively urban centre, where the market acts as an anchor for the neighbourhood and not just as a specialised destination.

2.2. Occasional consumption and loss of proximity: the case of the Ribeira Market

In contrast, the Ribeira Market (*Figure 3*) illustrates a rehabilitation process which, despite its economic and media success, has resulted in a weakening of the market's role as a local infrastructure. The partial concession of the building to a private operator and the creation of a gastronomic market geared towards catering and tourism have profoundly transformed the functional and social profile of the space.



Figure 3. Ribeira Municipal Market, Lisbon

Source: Lisbon Municipality (<https://informacoeseservicos.lisboa.pt/contactos/diretorio-da-cidade/mercado-da-ribeira#gallery-4>, accessed on 21 Decenber 2025).

The divide between the traditional fresh produce market and the concession area is particularly evident. The two systems operate almost autonomously, with different audiences, opening hours and operating logic. This separation undermines the idea of the market as an integrated space and significantly reduces the frequency with which local residents use the fresh produce market. Most users of the concession area are occasional visitors, for whom the market functions as an urban destination rather than an everyday facility.

From the perspective of the neighbouring city, this transformation has clear implications. Although the market is located in a central area well served by public transport, its dominant function no longer meets the daily needs of the surrounding neighbourhood. The regular purchase of fresh food has been replaced by sporadic consumption practices associated with leisure and gastronomic experiences. This phenomenon is consistent with processes described in the literature as touristification and gentrification of traditional markets, where economic valorisation occurs at the expense of the social and food function of the facility (González & Waley, 2013).

The change in user profiles and increased economic pressure on traditional retailers have also contributed to the loss of the relational dimension of the market. Relationships of trust and recognition, built up over time through the repetition of everyday practices, have been progressively replaced by ephemeral and standardised interactions. In this context, the market is becoming more of a specialised consumer space than a neighbourhood hub.

2.3. Comparative summary

The two cases analysed show that the contribution of municipal fresh produce markets to the city's proximity depends less on their central location or the architectural quality of their refurbishment and more on maintaining their role as a space for everyday use. The presence of fresh produce markets, pedestrian accessibility, functional integration of uses and frequency of use by local residents emerge as key factors for the urban sustainability of these facilities.

While Campo de Ourique Market reinforces the centrality of the neighbourhood and everyday sociability, Ribeira Market highlights the risks associated with the transformation of markets into urban destinations geared towards occasional consumption. These results reinforce the need to frame interventions in municipal markets within a logic of proximity, recognising them as food and social infrastructures that are fundamental to everyday urban life.

Table summarises the main differences between the two case studies, highlighting how programmatic and management choices directly shape the role of municipal markets as infrastructures of the proximity city.

Table

Comparative synthesis of the two municipal fresh food markets in the context of the proximity city

Analytical dimension	Campo de Ourique Market	Ribeira Market
Dominant function	Everyday fresh food provision	Occasional consumption and gastronomy
Role of fresh food retail	Central and structuring	Residual and marginal
Frequency of use	Regular, embedded in residents' daily routines	Sporadic, linked to leisure and tourism
Main user profile	Local residents	Visitors and tourists
Accessibility	Predominantly pedestrian	Good physical accessibility, limited everyday use
Functional integration of uses	High (fresh food and food services interlinked)	Low (segmentation between traditional market and concession area)
Relational dimension and sociability	Strong, based on repetition and mutual recognition	Weak, characterised by brief and standardised interactions
Relationship with the surrounding neighbourhood	Neighbourhood anchor and everyday centrality	Specialised urban destination
Contribution to the proximity city	Reinforces proximity, centrality and everyday sociability	Weakens the proximity function

Source: compiled by the author.

Conclusion

This article sought to analyse the role of the municipal fresh produce market as a local city infrastructure, based on the premise that daily access to

fresh food is a fundamental aspect of urban life that is often neglected in planning and regeneration policies. By shifting the focus from markets as heritage sites or tourist destinations to their daily functioning, the study contributes to a more situated and socially anchored reading of these urban facilities.

The theoretical framework demonstrated that municipal markets differ from other food supply formats in that they are integrated into the daily rhythms of the city, are accessible on foot, and have the capacity to combine economic and social functions in the same space. As everyday infrastructures, markets operate according to a logic of frequent, small-scale and repetitive purchasing, favouring more sustainable urban practices and a direct relationship between consumption, territory and neighbourhood life. This condition reinforces their role as spaces of "slow time", a relevant counterpoint to the acceleration and dematerialisation of contemporary consumption.

The two empirical cases analysed show that the contribution of markets to the neighbourhood depends less on their geographical centrality or the architectural quality of their renovation and more on the preservation of their daily food supply function. The Campo de Ourique Market illustrates how maintaining fresh produce trade, functional integration of uses and frequency of use by residents can reinforce neighbourhood centrality and local sociability. In contrast, the case of the Ribeira Market demonstrates that rehabilitation processes geared towards occasional consumption, catering, and tourism tend to weaken the proximity function, transforming the market into a specialised and less inclusive urban destination.

These results allow us to draw a key implication for the debate on the city of proximity: proximity is not measured solely in terms of physical distance, but in the intensity and regularity of everyday practices that an urban space supports. A market that is accessible but little used by residents fails to fulfil its function as everyday infrastructure. On the contrary, a market that is regularly frequented, integrated into daily routines and socially recognised contributes significantly to urban vitality and social cohesion.

From an urban policy perspective, it is suggested that municipal fresh produce markets should be recognised as strategic facilities for urban life, rather than merely opportunities for economic or tourist development. Protecting the fresh produce trade, limiting excessive specialisation and paying attention to residents' daily practices are key criteria for ensuring that these spaces continue to serve the local community.

In short, defending the municipal fresh produce market means defending a more walkable city, concerned with short supply chains, more relational and more anchored in the daily lives of its inhabitants. In an urban context marked by inequalities of access, accelerating pace of life and loss of local centres, markets remain discreet but essential infrastructure for building closer, more inclusive and more liveable cities.

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