
FOOD PUBLIC MARKETS AS CULTURAL CAPITAL: GIRONA PROVINCE

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The role of public market halls in European cities has been analysed from several perspectives: as specific places for feeding the city; as public services; as the first public places built specifically for women; as places to control health and taxes on food; as places where the urban-rural relationship can be articulated; as places to control citizens' behaviour; or as places providing local trade within a structure. There are fewer studies exploring public food markets as cultural and social capital with a view to improving the local and new-endogenous economy, an economy which not only involves the environment, but also the sociality linked to the tradition of food production. Research on public markets in small provincial towns is scarce, particularly the role they play in maintaining the urban-rural relationship by providing a local food supply, and also in constructing the rural landscape. This case study concerns the province of Girona and its nine public markets halls. The aim of the study is to explore their role as a public service within the territory and the agricultural landscape, the communication system, the local gastronomic culture and economic culture, this apparently being more resilient and stable than the economy of scale.

Keywords

food market, proximity food supply, culture economy, resilient economy, province of Girona

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INTRODUCTION

Over the past ten years, research on food public market halls has received increasing and renewed consideration by academics, practitioners and scholars. This is a part of contemporary territorial and urban transformation and is related to a renewed sensibility to food quality in terms of ecological and economic sustainability.

Scholars have paid attention to public market halls always taking into account their leading role in the structuring of European cities, albeit with different modalities and temporalities. This concern appears to be in response to an increased awareness surrounding the quality of food production, food consumption and the type of sociality connected to food and gastronomy, as well as a response to the dissipating connection between food systems and ecological systems, brought about by globalization.

From a historical perspective, the literature on the role of public market halls in the construction of urban spaces and sociality emphasises a multiplicity of aspects: the food market as the origin of the city; the food market as the place of connection between the rural and urban areas; public markets as the public services of the modern city which control how to supply the city; the market as new public space for 19th century city women to socialise; the food market as a generator of a complex system of local food retail and gastronomy culture transmission; and the food market as a place to consume and be directly involved in the culture economy¹.

If all these aspects were common to the cities with a large, consolidated system of public market halls, such as Barcelona, our paper would shift from urban to rural market hall research, taking this as a new point of view which attempts to study their relevance in the construction of the rural landscape, as well as modelling the imaginary link to the tourist landscape. Our case study is the system of nine public market halls in Girona province, a region dedicated to multiple kind of tourism² but also to agricultural production.

Historically, markets were basically places for supplying food under public control, which entailed the public policies on food production, processing, distribution and retailing. Today the role of the public food market makes up only a small segment of the entire food supply. However, the market place still deals with the public policies concerning that part of cultural economy that applies to food consumption and quality control. One of our main concerns is to question how the public policies surrounding feeding the population are now mostly related to cultural projects. This tends to react to the contemporary shift in consumer pattern. As Deloitte's research on food value chain ³stated "Modern North American and European consumers are more health conscious than ever before. They are worried about the content of their food, its origin, freshness, and safety. These consumers are increasingly concerned about the sustainability of food production and its impact on the environment. Buying local and the organic food is a growing trend that has taken hold with the modern consumer"

Interpretations of the economic origins of the city and its relationship with the countryside have traditionally shown preference for production activities, an outlook probably originating from the experience of industrial age cities that does not correspond to their historical reality or their current conditions. According to J.R. Lasuén⁴ many of the shortcomings of urban policy are caused by the limitations of its basic assumptions. Among them, the priority given to production activities, this is understood as the production of tangible goods that are easier to measure. For Lasuén, the origin of cities was, in fact, "consumption in common, not joint production". In recent years, there has been evidence of increased attention given to anything that affects consumption, but there are still very few studies giving an insight into this area. Therefore, examining the history of the relationship between markets, cities and the rural territory can be a good exercise for reviewing aspects that significantly affect the problem of economic, environmental and social sustainability⁵.

FOOD HERITAGE, TERRITORIES AND PUBLIC FOOD MARKETS

The emergence of processes involving the relationship between identity, food and terroir has been widely debated since UNESCO listed the Mediterranean diet as intangible cultural heritage of humanity in 2010.

Food identities regarded as selected cultural heritage are set within the sphere of globalization and emphasize “local production structure” processes⁶, along with the establishment of a “common local culture” or, in stricter economic terms, the formation of a local “monopoly rent”⁷. Similar ideas are expressed by the territorialist school. This approach to urban and regional planning defines territory⁸ as a cultural construct which include people, places, as well as landscape, urban features, local knowledge and culture in which the short food chain could have a strategic role in sustaining a “local self-sustainable development” and economy. More specifically, in the case of rural areas, cultural markers can include food, historical sites, landscapes associated with the agriculture. In the same trend, the emergent neo-rural phenomena attempted to control the economy by means of revaluing a place through its cultural identity development⁹.

Girona Province has nine food market halls and more than fifty weekly food markets which could be considered important cultural markers, that opens a question about the relationship between the cultural identity and natural landscape.

Historically, in Catalan rural villages and towns, the intermediary of this fusion of cuisine and landscape was the weekly market. The remark attributed to the Catalan writer Josep Pla: “cooking is the landscape in a pan” clearly illustrates the notion that traditional cuisine is born from the logic of proximity. Each region identified itself with a certain landscape and cuisine. Landscape and cuisine consequently became two of the most widely shared expressions of local identity. The need to examine and rethink the history of the landscape and the food chain, including production, processing and distribution is due to provide elements of analysis and judgment regarding the latent contradictions between economic and social and cultural logic and the limits of the environment¹⁰.

PAU VILA: FOOD MARKETS AND THE COMARCAL¹¹ QUESTION

In his book *Fires i mercats a Catalunya*¹², Lluís Casassas explains how in the 1930s the old medieval system of holding weekly markets was losing its main function, which was to supply food. The main reasons for the transformation were connected to industrialization and the new railway system, both of which changed the relationship between rural and urban areas. The populations of the main industrial cities grew considerably, while those of other localities shrank. The weekly open market system was no longer adequate for supplying cities with populations of more than 10,000 inhabitants, which needed a daily delivery of food and a wider range of merchandising.

In this period of territorial disequilibrium, the role of food markets became critical. The markets became a synonym of a world that was going to be lost, and at the same time a symbol of a cultural identity, which encompassed both human activity and the natural landscape.

Until the 18th and 19th centuries Catalonia experienced exceptional demographic and economic growth. During this period, a dynamic, enterprising, industrial and commercial bourgeoisie emerged. It was a society open to contemporary European urban planning culture, and it managed the relationship between the city and the countryside, with proposals taking in the suggestive idea of Ebenezer Howard’s “garden City”, which he interpreted as a productive urban land on a regional scale.

This political period also introduced new landscape values related to the Catalan identity and nationalistic politics. After the loss of Cuba, the last Spanish colony, in 1898, the Spanish regeneration movement known as the revival, contributed to the resurgence of a renewed nationalistic pride in Catalonia. The Lliga Regionalista Party, formed in 1901, was one of the most significant Catalanist political parties favouring regeneration, and took administrative control of the province of Barcelona in 1908¹³.

The Lliga Regionalista held the power in Catalonia, and in 1913 it established the Mancomunitat institution, a body, which was to co-ordinate the territorial actions of the four Catalan provinces, Barcelona, Girona, Lleida and Tarragona.

In this period, Mancomunitat developed two main plans of action in order to organize the territory: the Catalonia Regional Plan by Rubio Tuduri, Nicolau in 1932 and the regional division of Catalonia, by Pau Vila Daneru in 1931. Both plans sought to bring structure and balance to the city of Barcelona and its surrounding rural areas, and to develop the Catalan Countryside. Farmland was considered a national wealth, and therefore to be protected. Industrialization and urbanization were to be balanced with agriculture and forest protection¹⁴.

The *comarcal* division outlined by Pau Vila clearly emphasised the importance of the market place¹⁵. When defining new criteria to demarcate the *comarques*, Pau Vila took commerce and not production into account, and the *comarcal* division¹⁶ of Catalonia was one of the objectives of the Mancomunitat from 1917¹⁷. This was when they tried to define the natural region they belonged to, but it was not until October 16th 1931 that the Executive Council of the Government of Catalonia approved a Decree, which led to a study of Catalonia's regional structure.

The first objective was to establish the general principles guiding the regional division into *comarques*¹⁸ followed by a second phase, which was to decide the survey questions to be asked in order to define the *comarques*. The survey was sent to all municipalities in Catalonia and asked just three main questions, two of them focusing on the relationship between the citizens and the place where they usually bought food. The questions were as follows: Which region do you think belongs to your people? Which market do you usually go to? Do you go to another market?

The results of the survey led to the first map of Catalonia in which public food markets (open air or covered) were the main pole structure of the region and the main pole of every *comarca*. The culture and social capital of the relationship between rural and urban territory, the territory administration, food supply and local identity was in this way fixed in the territorial idea of *comarca*.

PUBLIC FOOD MARKETS IN GIRONA PROVINCE

Today, the province of Girona has 9 market halls, of which only 4 were built before the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939), and were a consequence of the increased population in the more industrial cities along the new railway route. (Figure 2)

Following the results of the survey regarding open-air markets, Pau Vila determined five *comarques* in the province of Girona. However, the first covered market was not built until the end of the 1930s, when the provincial cities had a population of around 10,000.

Markets in Palafrugell (1901), Sant Feliu de Guixols (1930), Olot (1937-1950-1985-2015), Port Bou (around 1930), were the first market places in the province built using wrought iron, probably following the Barcelona example, which at that time had already had around about 17 market hall. The first local train service of the province was the Flacà-Palafrugell-Palamos line (Fig.3), called *El tren gros*. The train made its first trip in 1887¹⁹ and was primarily used to serve the cork industries located along the route. These were mostly in Palafrugell, and this was where the first market hall of the Girona province was erected.²⁰

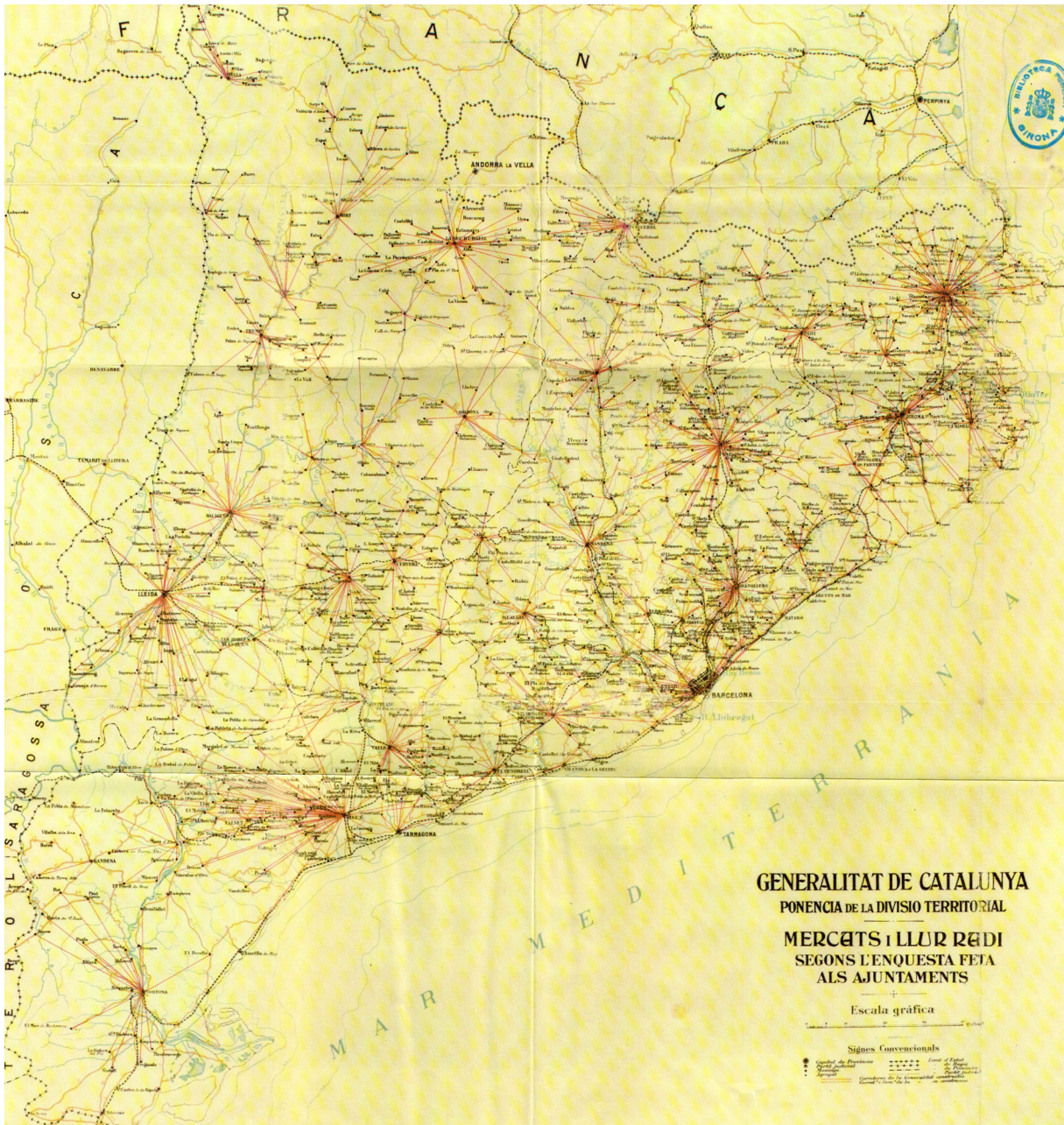


FIGURE 1 Markets and their areas of influence, 1932.



FIGURE 2 Market Halls and year of construction in Girona Province.

Likewise, the train service Sant Feliu de Guixols-Girona was launched 1892²¹ in order to transport cork to the port of Sant Feliu de Guixols or Girona. Both Sant Feliu de Guixols and Palafrugell experienced a significant rise in population and industry. The population in both cities was around 10,000 at the beginning of the 20th century²².

The situation in Olot was similar when its market was built. The Girona-Olot railway was launched in 1898 and the boost in the textile industry expanded its population to 10,000 inhabitants by 1930. It was then that the city council decided to retrieve the idea of constructing a covered market.

The memorandum of the Olot market proposal²³ clearly expressed the reasons behind building the market. There was as need a market in a city with a population of 14,000 inhabitants. A new closed market would provide better hygiene and a solution to weather conditions of the open-air market- rain in winter and high temperatures in summer that that compromised the quality of the meat.

Girona market was built during the Franco dictatorship by the municipal architect Juan Gordillo Nieto²⁴, as part of the project of modernizing the old city, but the idea had already been maturing since the beginning of the 19th century²⁵. Four proposals for a new market hall were presented between 1892 and the start of its construction in 1941 with the main aim of freeing the streets and the square from an open-air market. When Girona Market was finally finished in 1941, the rest of Europe saw the market hall as an old-fashioned formula in comparison to the new emerging retailing systems²⁶.

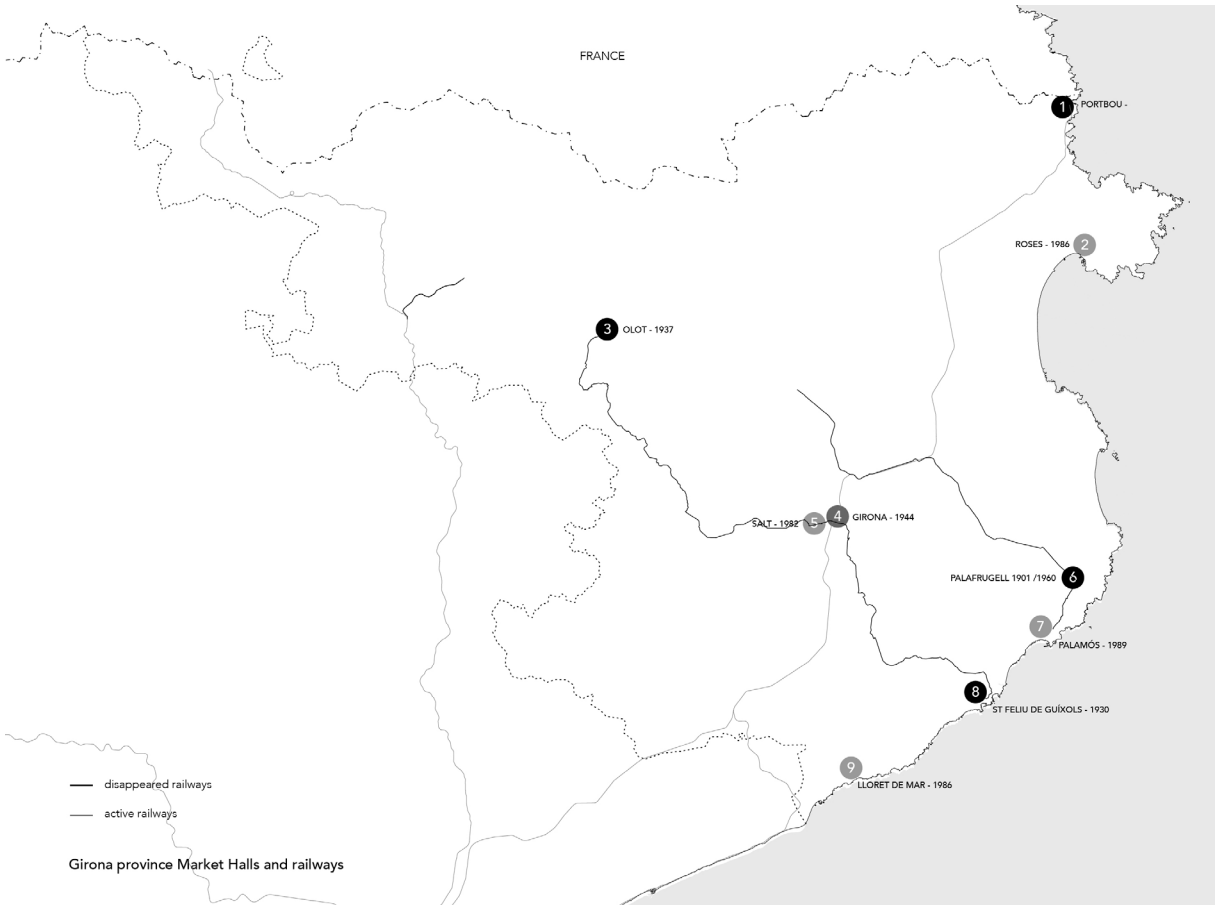


FIGURE 3 Girona province Market Halls and Railways system relationship.

The next generation of Girona Province markets was around the 1980s, within the context of a very different political, economic and social situation. Franco passed away in 1975 and the “transition” to democracy and the modernization of the country, in line with the other European states, began. Mass tourism had begun to change the landscape of the Costa Brava, which was losing agricultural land through abandonment or developments in construction²⁷. This generation of markets was characterized by the construction of 3 market halls along the Girona coast. Food markets in Roses (1986), Palamos (1989), Lloret de Mar (1989) were built around the same time, and were one of the public services offered to citizens by the new democracy. The memorandum of the proposals seem to express the difficulty in finding a role for this market building at a time when direct contact between food producers and consumers was at an end, and supermarkets were about to boom.

For example, the language used in the Roses market project proposal expressed these contradictions. It reports they were working on the “semiologic expression of the market building” as a public building and for this reason they were suggesting historicist architecture²⁸ with some modern elements, such as refrigerators or an outside car park. The report stressed that the main focus of the project was the construction of a public building surrounded by a green public zone, but there was no reference to product quality, or to social, functional or economic aspects in relation to the project (Fig. 4).

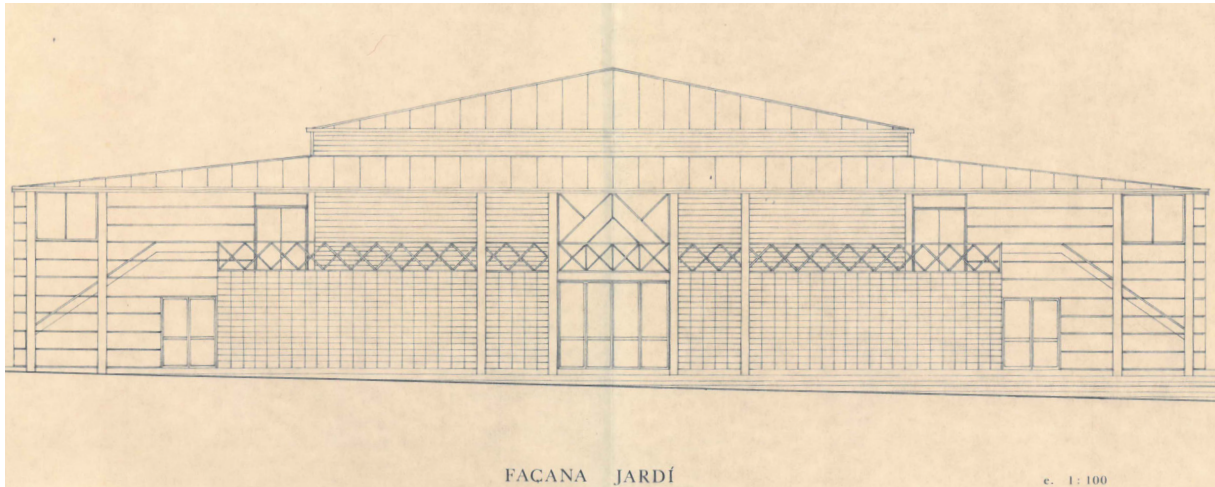


FIGURE 4 Roses Market Hall building project, 1985.

The nine food market halls of Girona Province were not a system, which had been pre-planned as like in Barcelona. They arose out of specific city council policies. Even today, there are no common goals or objectives, which can give value to their cultural capital as link to urban and rural territory.

The situation in the Catalan capital was rather different, with a strong system around 40 markets at the end of the Franco regime. During the 1980s, the market halls in Barcelona recovered their prominent role. The Barcelona Food Facilities Plan (PECAB)²⁹ (Fig.5), which was introduced by the city council, adopted the commercial polarities of the market halls as something to be strengthened. This was in order to restructure a local commercial system. The plan also sought to limit the effects of the megastores that were beginning to acquire great importance in Spain. A sustained policy of modernization of the market halls and their surroundings has been promoted in the city since that time. Their purpose is to revitalize the local commercial structure and, consequently, bring renewed activity to the neighbourhoods.

Despite the example of Barcelona, the nearby Province of Girona did not consider the cultural capital of the market place to be valued as a social space where rural and urban values could come together. It was merely seen, in the case of the Olot and Girona market, as part of the food value chain, able to activate the cultural economy in the food sector.

CONCLUSION

Nowadays nearly all of the markets in Girona province are active. However, apart from the renovated market in Olot, which opened in 2015, and with a new image following the principles of “sustainable”, “organic” and “local”, most of them need to be adapted to the “reflexive modernity”³⁰. They need to acknowledge a society requesting a renewed relationship with food, and which includes both its production and distribution. (Fig. 6)

Knowing how to eat and how to produce food has now become a part of the image of the city and territory, and generates new sources of income. By the end of the 1960s, Catalan gastronomy was receiving growing attention. To recover the Catalan cuisine was a way to claim local identity. The discourse on gastronomy took a new turn at the beginning of the 1990s, when Catalan gastronomy was presented as a candidate for UNESCO heritage. As in other European countries, in Barcelona gastronomy became an economic driver and involved the public administration, but also with the food social movement.

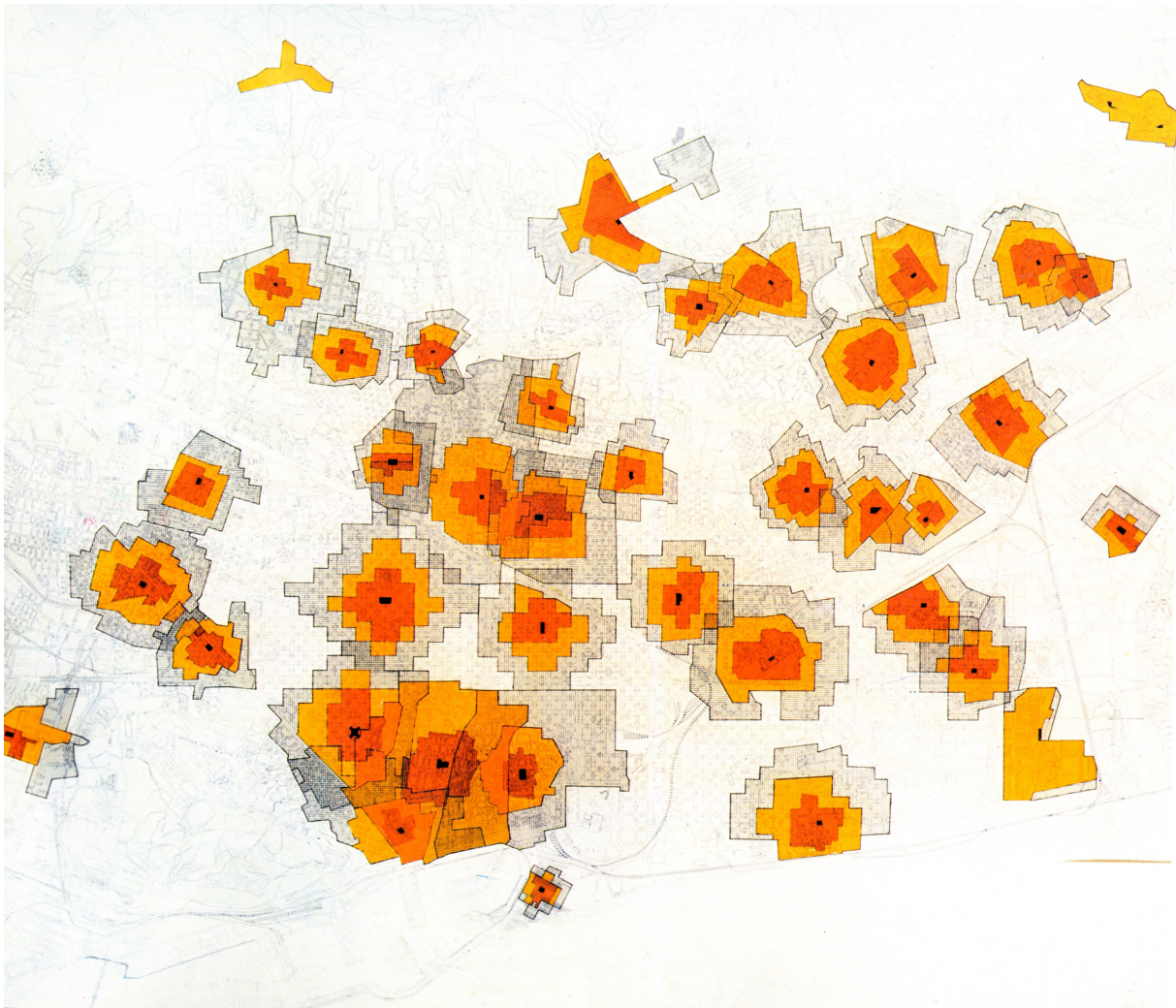


FIGURE 5 Areas of Clientele of Local Municipal Markets according to data from 1983-84 by the PECAB. The three crowns mark the source of 25%, 50% and 75% of the clientele of each market.

In Girona Province the discourse on gastronomy was and is mostly handled by the private sector. If Pau Vila seen in the market institution the identity symbol for the structuring the Catalan *comarcal* system, today the reality is fragmented. Even today, the public food market is still not seen as cultural capital. It is not perceived as something which is not only able to attract tourism, but also able to develop an active and more creative relationship between the territory and its citizens.

Appropriate policies developed at a municipal and regional level could strengthen the cultural role of food markets, and at the same time bolstering the local micro economy, making it more resilient to the cycles of economy of scale.

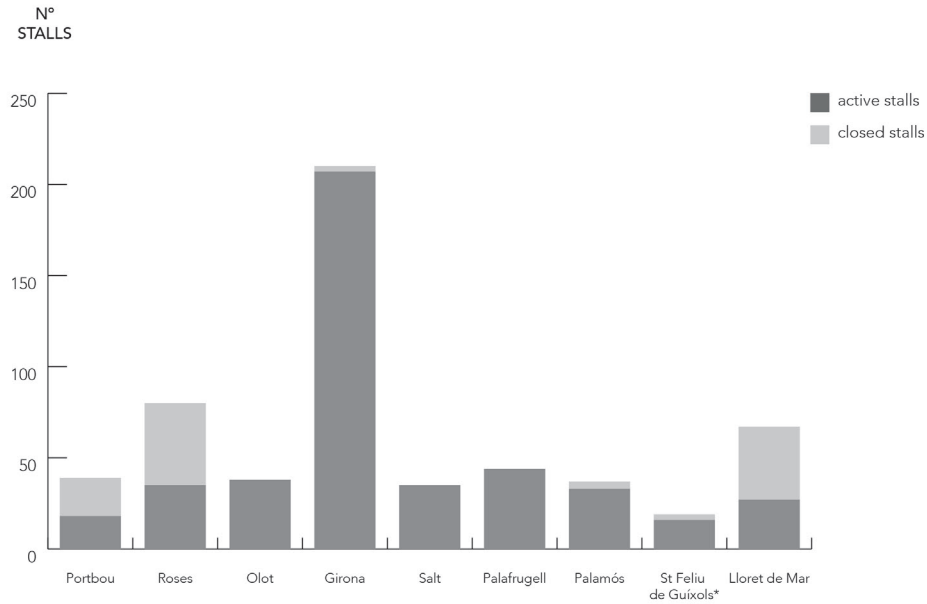


FIGURE 6 Occupancy in Girona province Market Halls, 2016. The image shows that the markets of Lloret de Mar, Roses and Portbou are in crisis and most of their stalls are closed.

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No potential conflict of interest is reported by the authors.

Notes on contributors

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– Endnotes)

- 1 For a comparative view on European city markets, see Manuel Guàrdia and José Luis Oyón (eds.), *Making Cities through Market Halls: Europe, 19th and 20th Centuries*, (Barcelona: Museu d'Historia de Catalunya de Barcelona, 2010). For extended reference on public markets, see also Nadia Fava, Manel Guardia, José Luis Oyón, "Public versus Private: Barcelona's Market Halls System, 1868-1975", *Planning Perspective* 25 (2010): 5-27.
- 2 In Girona Province there is mass tourism mostly on the sea villeges, but also internal tourism from Barcelona looking for rural and mountain landscape and their local food products.
- 3 Deloitte, *The food value chain A challenge for the next century*, (London: The Creative Studio at Deloitte, 2013), retrived: <http://www2.deloitte.com/ch/fr/pages/consumer-business/articles/food-value-chain.html>
- 4 José Ramon Lasuén. *Ciutats*. (Plan Estratégico del Área Metropolitana de Barcelona, 2007).
- 5 Manel Guàrdia, Nadia Fava, José Luis Oyón, *Compact city and public markets*. (Proceedings: Tunia: tripoli: International Conference of the Center for the Study of Architecture in the Arab Region (2a : 2007 : Tunisia).Transactions on the Built Environment, 2009).
- 6 Arijun Appadurai *Modernity at Large. Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*. (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1996): 178 -182.
- 7 José Maria Garcia-Fuentes, Manel Guàrdia-Bassols, José Luis Oyón-Bañales, "Reinventing Edible Identities: Catalan Cuisine and Barcelona's Market Halls", in *Edible Identities: Exploring Food as Cultural Heritage*, ed. Ronda Brulotte, et al. (Surrey: Ashgate, 2014): 159-174.
- 8 Alberto Magnaghi, *Il progetto locale, verso la cosienza del luogo*, (Torino: Bollati Boringhieri, 2000).
- 9 Christopher Ray in his book on "culture economy" pointed out that theory on urban generation often comes from theories of cultural identity. New ruralism, however, is studied less in relation to the identity issue, and more along the lines of integrating a vision encompassing both rural and urban issues. Christopher Ray, *Culture Economies: a perspective on local rural development in Europe*. (Newcastle upon Tyne: Centre for Rural Economy, Dept. of Agricultural Economics and Food Marketing, University of Newcastle upon Tyne, 2001):
- 10 José Maria Garcia-Fuentes, Manel Guàrdia-Bassols, José Luis Oyón-Bañales, "Reinventing Edible Identities: Catalan Cuisine and Barcelona's Market Halls" in *Edible Identities: Exploring Food as Cultural Heritage*, ed. Ronda Brulotte, et al. (Surrey: Ashgate, 2014): 159-174.
- 11 The "comarca" is a local administrative division represented by the comarcal council.
- 12 Lluís Casassas i Simó, *Fires i mercats a Catalunya*. (Barcelona: Edicions 62, 1978).
- 13 Miller Monserrat, *Feeding Barcelona, 1714-1975, Public Market Halls, Social Networks, and Consumer Culture*. (Luisana: Baton Rouge, Louisiana State University Press, 2015).
- 14 Joan Nogué and Joan Vicente, "Landscape and national identity in Catalonia", *Political Geography* 23 (2004) :113-132.
- 15 Catalan markets were still functioning in the 1930s, while in the rest of Europe they had begun their decline.
- 16 The comarcal division is a question that appears in Catalonia in the 16th century, but it was not enforced until 1986. Jesús Burgueño, *Historia de la divisió Comarcal*, (Lleida: Rafael Dalmau, 2003).
- 17 Jesús Burgueño, Una enquesta de la Mancomunitat sobre les comarques naturals (1917), *Treballs de la Societat Catalana de Geografia*, 76,(2013) : 261-287.
- 18 The general principles were as follows: to divide Catalonia into the smallest number of districts possible in order to not multiply the fees; the people of each district could go in one day from in their respective capitals; to try to provide a demographic balance among comarques, in terms of the number of inhabitants.
- 19 Closed in 1956.
- 20 Carles Salmerón i Bosch, *El Tramvia del Baix Empordà: història del ferrocarril Palamós-Girona-Banyoles*, (Girona, Edició d'autor, 1985).
- 21 Closed in 1969.
- 22 Sant Feliu de Guixòs went from 6,500 inhabitants in 1860 to 10,013 inhabitants in 1920. Palafrugell went from 6,328 inhabitants in 1877 to 8,796 inhabitants in 1920.
- 23 Arxiu Comarcal d'Olot, Collection 03.03.02 Plaça mercat.
- 24 Juan Gordillo Nieto was modifying a previous proposal by the architect Ricard Giral, drawn up in 1939, just after the end the Civil War.
- 25 The first proposal was in 1836, at the site of the disentailed Franciscan convent. In 1892, the architect Camploch drew up plans for a new market building, including it in the "Girona extension plan". A few years later, in 1897, Marti Sureda i Vila, a city hall architect, proposed a iron market hall, but the majority of shoppers rejected the proposal. The idea of a new market came to light again at 1929 when the city hall council asked the architect Maggioni to draw up plans. The site was to be on the new bridge crossing the Onyar river. However, this proposal also faced many objections, and was eventually abandoned.
- 26 During the Francoist period, 24 market halls were built in Barcelona in order to control the price and quality of food during the dictatorship, a time when there was a scarcity of food production and distribution.
- 27 Debat Costa Brava Congrès : un futur sostenible (Girona : Col·legi d'Arquitectes de Catalunya, Demarcació de Girona, 2005).
- 28 Projecte Bàsic del Mercat Municipal de Roses, 1985. Pg.3 Societat per el desenvolupament assistencial de Catalunya, Huarte & CIA, Empresa en agrupació temporal. Arxiu municipal de Roses.
- 29 Ajuntament de Barcelona. Pla Especial de l'Equipament Comercial Alimentari de la Ciutat de Barcelona, PECAB (Barcelona: Ajuntament de Barcelona, 1986).
- 30 Scott Lash, and John Urry, *Economies of Signs and Space* (London: Sage, 1994).

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- Figure 2: Map elaborated by Laura Plana.
- Figure 3: Map elaborated by Laura Plana.
- Figure 4: *Projecte Bàsic del Mercat Municipal de Roses, 1985*. Arxiu municipal de Roses.
- Figure 5: Ajuntament de Barcelona. *Pla Especial de l'Equipament Comercial Alimentari de la Ciutat de Barcelona, PECAB*. Barcelona: Ajuntament de Barcelona, 1999.
- Figure 6: Map elaborated by Laura Plana.