

# Building community markets

by Dr Myfanwy Taylor, Dr Sara Gonzalez, and Frances Northrop

## Traditional retail markets: neglected public spaces in transformation

TRADITIONAL MARKETS, those where you can find food and many other products and services, have been around in our streets and town centres for centuries. Most market charters were granted by the crown in the 11<sup>th</sup> century to form market towns and by the 19<sup>th</sup>



Mrs Kaul Hadeel at her stall in Queen's Market, East London. Courtesy of Friends of Queen's Market.

century most towns had their own municipal market halls. The latest figures, collected by the markets sector (National Market Traders Federation and The National Association of British Markets), show that there are around 1,100 markets across the UK, the majority (82%) run by local authorities. This sector sustains around 57,000 jobs and has a collective turnover of £3.1BN. Academic and policy research has established that traditional markets have positive economic and social impacts in towns and cities and, in particular, for low-

income groups, vulnerable people, migrants, and ethnic minorities. They are open spaces providing access to good quality, healthy and affordable food, opportunities for social interaction, and relatively low-cost trading units.

However, much like the rest of the High Street, markets are going through difficult challenges: the continued rise of online shopping, expensive access to town centres, changing consumer behaviour, and the

expansion of large supermarkets into urban centres. Traditional markets, however, face further challenges. As they tend to be owned and managed by local authorities, austerity has meant cuts to market budgets, neglect, and a trend to privatise their management or simply sell them. It is traditional markets, those more likely to be owned by a local authority, serving a local community, particularly low income and vulnerable groups, which are particularly affected by these transformations.

In contrast, it is new markets that are run privately, often focusing on arts and crafts, specialty food or fashion, attracting younger and wealthier customers, which are growing. This is quite evident in London where research by Cross River Partnership shows that from 2008 to 2014 there was a 20% growth in the number of markets. However, most of this growth was on private markets, in particular, within street food events. Chasing these trends, many local authorities are investing directly, or in partnership with private developers, to redevelop traditional markets; replacing traditional stalls with street food and event areas that are often used for evening events. Examples of these trends include Leeds Kirkgate Market, Bradford, Hull Trinity Market, and Doncaster. These redevelopments are following a trend set by foodie markets such as Borough Market in London or Altrincham Market and street food initiatives such as Kerb or Street Feast. Internationally, the models that circulate of successful markets are those of La Boqueria in Barcelona or the Market Hall in Rotterdam. Instead of places where people come to provision themselves with affordable food and other essential everyday items, these markets are turning towards leisure and tourist functions.

Our own previous research has shown that these combined trends are pushing traditional markets towards gentrification – a process that



tends to translate into higher rents for market traders, higher prices for their products and services, and accompanied by the displacement of traders and customers who cannot afford to shop and work there. This gentrification of markets has particularly negative effects for the most vulnerable groups in our society. Instead of public spaces which can be mobilised for public policy around health, social inclusion, or inclusive growth, markets are in danger of becoming financial assets for investors to extract profit, as highlighted by a recent report from Corporate Watch. As markets become more oriented towards profit extraction, their social and community value is put at risk.

### Alternative approaches

Within this context, our Markets4People research is showing that their social and community value still remains as relevant as ever, and there is a real demand for an alternative approach beyond foodie and gentrified markets. Our research is also beginning to generate ideas and insights for alternative approaches to securing the future of traditional retail markets in the U.K.

The starting point for any proposal must be a good understanding of a specific market's existing economic, social, and cultural role. This involves a broad look at the market, finding out about its role as a space of social interaction and social inclusion, for instance, as well as a retail space. Market operators and others can make use of the customer survey developed by the Markets4People research project, as well as other tools, such as the New Economics Foundation's *Local Multiplier 3*, *Social Return on Investment*, and *Social Impact Assessment*. In our policy briefing, we argued that these tools can help market operators and others build on their achievements in developing an evidence base around markets' economic contribution (e.g. national surveys

and tools for measuring financial performance) by generating an evidence base for markets' social and cultural importance.

At the same time, market operators and policymakers need to build stronger links with the communities that use and value markets. Many but far from all markets have trader associations that play an important role in helping traders to overcome the difficulties all small businesses face in representing themselves in policy debates. Our research has already demonstrated a major appetite from trader groups for more professional dialogue and joint working with operators. While there are no comparable associations for market users, controversial redevelopment plans have led some market users to form campaign and 'friends of markets' groups. These community and campaign groups are likely to have a good understanding of a market's specific role and importance which operators and policymakers may not be aware of. For example, campaigners have highlighted the importance of Seven Sisters Market (in Tottenham, North London) to children and young people, and the importance of Queen's Market as a source of affordable, fresh produce. It's equally important for markets to make links with relevant local authority teams and other

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Photo courtesy of Saif Osmani



Photos this page of Grainger Market, Newcastle upon Tyne.

public and third sector organisations whose goals make the case for investment and to pursue mutually-beneficial initiatives. We are gathering examples of this kind of partnership working through the Markets4People project, such as the embedding of public health goals in the redevelopment of Barnsley Market; the implementation of Rose Voucher schemes (helping low-income families to buy fresh fruit and vegetables through UK markets) in collaboration with the Alexandra Rose Charity; or the provision of exhibition space for charities, as at Newcastle upon Tyne's Grainger Market that has permanent units allocated to Age UK and the Newcastle West End Foodbank.

Operators who understand the holistic community value of their markets and maintain good relationships with traders,

communities, and other relevant organisations, will be better placed to design and deliver improvement plans that enhance markets' social and cultural functions, as well as economic functions. Such improvement plans are likely to be incremental rather than transformative; involve partnership working with traders, communities, and others; deliver long-term affordable rents for traders; necessitate extremely sensitive relocation plans and support for existing traders; and provide space and support for social, cultural, and community initiatives and activities. Going further, alternative management and ownership models offer significant opportunities for trader- and community-operated markets to place social and cultural values at the heart of any market.

Some markets are already run by traders themselves, such as Congleton (Cheshire), Brindlington and Cottingham (East Yorkshire), Dorchester (Dorset), Freeman Street Market (Grimsby, Lincolnshire), Thame (Oxfordshire) and Whitstable (Kent). In other cases, residents, charities, and social enterprises have taken over markets threatened with closure, such as Levenshulme Market in Greater Manchester, or started new markets, such as Acton Market in West London. Working together with Co-operatives UK, The National Market Traders Federation has been providing support and advice to trader groups interested in forming a co-operative for many years. There is considerable scope to further extend and develop this work, enabling traders and communities to take up the opportunities presented by new regulations, funding, and initiatives to support community-led economic development.

### Markets and community wealth building: get involved

There is a growing awareness amongst funders and supporters of community economic development that markets are a great example of businesses that can be not-for-profit, locally rooted, and publicly or co-operatively run. Coupled with the re-energised interest in High Streets and community-led regeneration, these assets of community value (and some are already listed as such) give us a huge opportunity to revolutionise how we protect and support a precious resource that has been in decline across the UK.



In this current climate there is a real opportunity for funders, such as the Architectural Heritage Fund's (AHF) £15M High Streets Heritage Fund, Power to Change's funding for Community Business, and the National Lottery Heritage and Communities Fund to be in a prime position to support community-run market development and operation.

Not only does this meet their social and economic ambitions for places, but also those around environmental sustainability and decarbonisation as the closer these markets are to home the more resilient they can be. It's also the case that community-led regeneration of markets can incorporate more sustainability through their restoration works, as they will not be losing the 20% profit margin usually taken by a private developer.

As this approach grows in popularity and more resources are available to the community development sector, the key will be to enable traditional retail markets across the country to continue to run as a community asset and service, rather than mainly as an attraction for outside visitors. Whilst there will always be a place for markets to be part of a credible visitor offer this should not undermine their important role in the resilience at the heart of a local economy and as a provider of goods and services to people with a range of incomes.

This is why co-operatives, and other democratic models of business ownership,

are an important tenet for owners and market operators in the future. A great example of this approach, currently evolving in Wards Corner and led by the West Green Road/Seven Sisters Development Trust, is the community plan for the Latin Village Market in Tottenham. Supported by the AHF and professional consultants, the Trust is developing a plan for the regeneration and management of a restored market at Wards Corner, in direct opposition to mainstream plans for the land to be compulsorily purchased for a mainstream developer to build a block of flats (none of which will be affordable). If successful this would reflect a step change in the ambitions of traders and local communities to get involved in, not just the operation of the market itself, but also in the reinvestment of profits into the wider community.

This is built on a movement of market campaigns, particularly in London, that have been working tirelessly over a number of years to protect and take ownership of markets for local communities. These campaigns are increasingly getting organised in a network to amplify the need for this activity and to promote these alternative plans.

Later in the year we intend to run a workshop to bring together traders and community groups from across the country to look at how we might connect our efforts, identify what resources are needed, how to marshal them, and how we might amplify the great work that is already happening to inspire others to do the same.