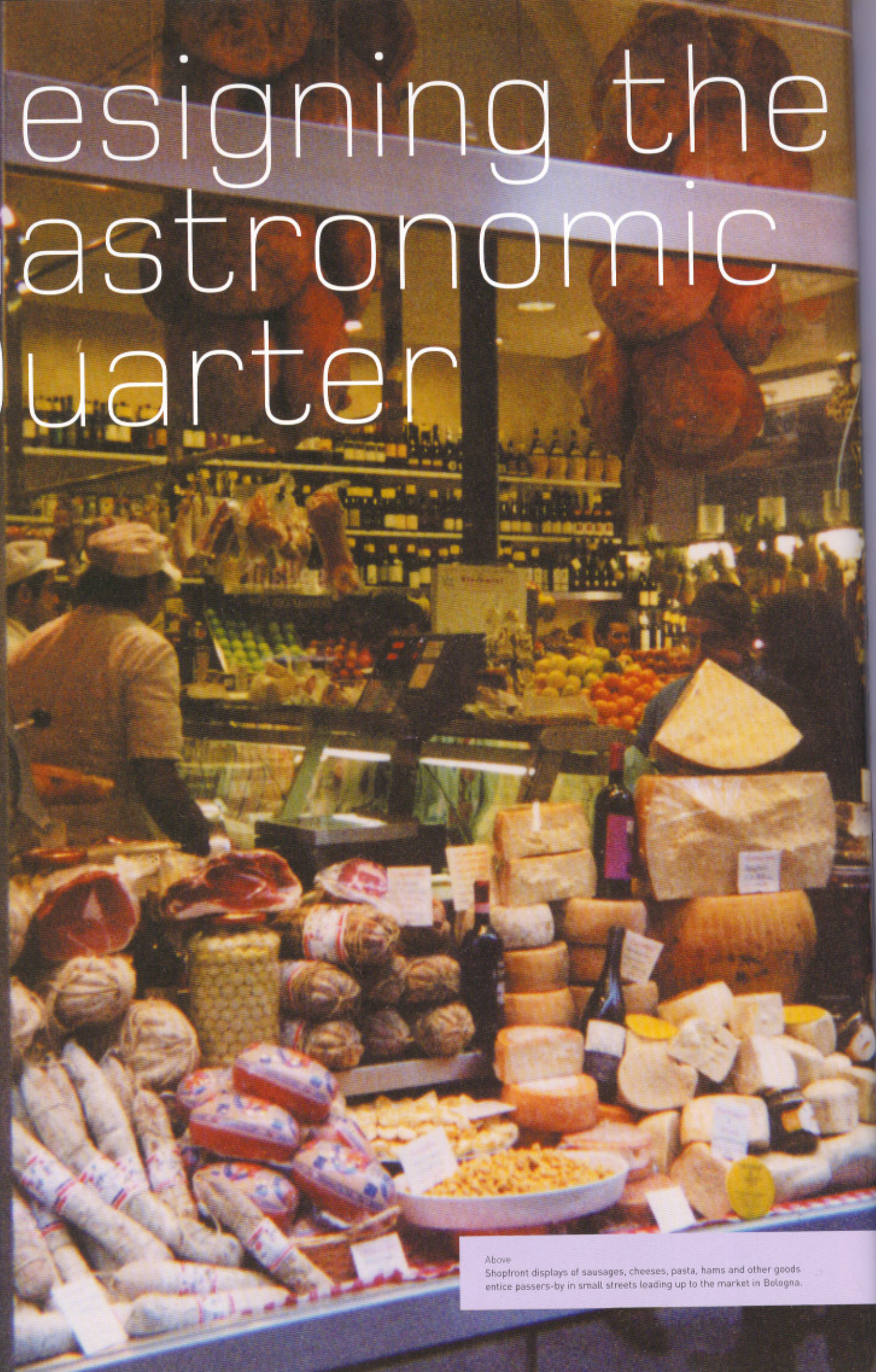


Designing the Gastronomic Quarter



Above
Shopfront displays of sausages, cheeses, pasta, hams and other goods entice passers-by in small streets leading up to the market in Bologna.

Throughout the world, urban gastronomic quarters, centred on fresh-food markets, have been pulled back from the brink of extinction. Susan Parham explains how movements like Slow Food and Slow Cities in Italy, and the international demand for organic produce, have started to challenge the global food network of production and consumption. The growing revitalisation of urban quarters around produce markets not only serves customers seeking fresh produce, food products and lively cafés and restaurants, but also offers valuable lessons in urban design.

The narrow street runs between high building walls and shuttered windows. Here and there, small shopfronts boast intricate window displays of groceries and fresh produce: a hairy, wild-boar leg wrapped in delicate gold-and-white paper, monogrammed packets of pasta and risotto rice, boxes of chickpeas and lentils, tins of tomatoes and tuna *ventresca*, a profusion of salamis and hams hanging from the ceiling, cardboard-stiff salt cod and cheese of all kinds. Pedestrians are bustling along or ambling more slowly, with straw baskets of vegetables, groceries and loaves of bread peeking out. One or two are window-shopping. A young scooter-rider noses impatiently past.

As one rounds the corner the square comes into view. It's a busy scene. Trestle tables are laid out with a profusion of brightly coloured produce. Scents of fruit and vegetables, fish and meat permeate the air. A small three-wheeler van is piled with wooden produce-crates. Walking between the stalls one sees that in this corner are fresh greens of all kinds. Over there are two women selling just one kind of cheese. Here is a stall heaped with mushrooms. And another with fish and seafood laid out on ice.

Behind that row of stalls is a shopfront with an array of pork products. Next to that is a wine shop with a dark, cave-like interior, and beside that a restaurant and café where morning coffee-drinkers are chatting at outdoor tables, reading their papers or just sitting quietly observing the scene. Further along this side is another restaurant, not yet open but making preparations for the lunch trade as tables are set out by uniformed, aproned waiters. Through a narrow opening next to the café can be glimpsed another street running into the square, with a restaurant sign just discernible in the dim light. Above the hubbub you can see that the buildings that edge the square are similar but

subtly varied: of four, five or six storeys; each layer with its tall windowed balconies overlooking the vitality below.

By mid-afternoon, all the market bustle will be over, the trestles dismantled and the market detritus washed away. The square will rest quietly before the evening eaters and drinkers return after work for a glass of wine at the *enoteca* (wine bar), an evening walk, an *aperitivo* and, perhaps, dinner, focusing on what has been good from the market today. You are in Campo dei Fiori, Rome, at the heart of a gastronomic quarter.

Losing Market-Centred Space

This kind of space is now the exception rather than the rule for most urban dwellers. The decline of gastronomic quarters can be traced through the history of the food market. From pre-Roman times until the early to mid 20th century, food markets and their attendant land uses of food and wine shops and eating places provided a continuous urban function at the centre of urban quarters. Food markets were generally located in the place for ritual, government, feast days and other public ceremonies. Markets were practically and

Right
The Campo dei Fiori area in Rome demonstrates a mixed-use building typology at walkable scale around the market. The block typologies are human scaled, with cafés, shops and small business at ground level and apartments above.





symbolically important to the public life of the town. This design typology has been an extraordinarily long-surviving urban presence, a thriving form that attests to the fundamental urban importance of our relationship with food. We have needed food in cities not just to eat to keep alive, but to symbolise our relationship with the town through rituals and feasting at the heart of urban space.

The design rules governing such space gave us fine-grained, mixed land-uses focused on food and drink, and can still help to create convivial city form, but markets and their supporting land uses came close to extinction in many 20th-century cities and towns in Europe. They no longer fitted ideas about what was appropriate for the modern city, either as symbols of civic engagement or as venues for food production, exchange and consumption. From early in the 20th century, transformations of settlement and retailing began to exclude food diversity from cities.

Markets, small shops and city-edge market gardens began to decline. Productive green spaces in cities disappeared. In sharp decline were private vegetable gardens, edge-of-city orchards, fruit trees in streets and a profusion of allotments. By the post-Second World War period, the loss of traditional market halls and outdoor markets, the decline in numbers of allotments in urban areas, and the disappearance of farms and market gardens close to the city tended to be viewed as inevitable

and desirable aspects of modernisation, reaching its apotheosis in the exclusionary zoning patterns of the well-planned city.

Postwar urban redevelopment schemes were on Modernist principles, which meant they were at low densities and car based. They identified markets, their surrounding high-density settlement patterns and proximity to food production, with an outmoded past. Eventually, the advent of supermarkets proved the death knell for many such food-centred spatial patterns across Europe.

All this was perhaps inevitable. Massive increases in the rate and scale of urbanisation marked much of Europe, as it did the rest of the Western world, and meshed nicely with the changing consumption patterns of both suburbia and the more recent conurbation development of the megalopolis in the late 20th century. These changes reflect a particular political economy that has had profound spatial consequences, today reflected in the spread of Euro-sprawl. At the urban conurbation level there has been what Professor Sir Peter Hall calls a spatial resorting in which centripetal forces of urban development have been dominant. Much of the economic and social action now takes place at the edge of town, with food-related urban-fringe activities and land uses largely replaced by low-density housing, business parks, distributions centres, megamalls, and superstore and bulky goods retailing. Many parts of this rapidly expanding megalopolis have no centres based on the public realm, while historic centres have variously declined or become gentrified-living and elite-consumption zones, and sometimes a complex mix of these patterns emerges.

Above left and right
Campo dei Fiori, Rome
 Simple stalls provide fresh, high-quality produce within walkable, civilised urban space. The market, and its related shops, cafés, restaurants and wine bars, attracts both local people and visitors from further afield for the sheer pleasure of the experience of daily life.



Cities and Food Now

These spatial and economic transformations have tended to reinforce unsustainable and unconvivial approaches to urban development that fit a car-dependent, low-density, monofunctional land-use pattern. As for urban development generally, much of the architectural centre of gravity in food terms is in the urban conurbation, where wholesale-food distribution centres sit on major arterial roads and out-of-town supermarkets are located at the apex of dendritic street patterns. The 'exit ramp architecture' of office parks on the urban fringe is marked by their internalised food spaces where employees eat and socialise in the private realm. The roads that connect these spaces to the traditional city are sites for car-based food consumption from supermarkets, fast-food outlets and 'road pantries' located at service stations.

Within the city, the working population lunches at chain sandwich shops and food courts, while their employers may dine in landmark tall buildings – the icons that architecturally brand the expensive restaurants and private dining spaces that surmount them. Many corner shops have been replaced by supermarket-owned chains selling prepackaged and prepared foods.

Our prevailing food-production model reflects and mirrors these changes to where and how we live, work and eat. In the early 21st century, we primarily rely on intensive, chemically dependent and, now increasingly, genetically modified food production, intensive processing and packaging of food, and long-distance transportation, with enormous wholesaling facilities to serve very large-scale, car-dependent industrialised (and now also 'functional' and 'nutraceutical') food retailing. Food companies seek vertical integration from farm to plate, as far as possible to externalise environmental and social costs. And these costs are substantial, including impoverishing producers, diminishing consumers' tastes, and creating unacceptable food miles and food deserts through profit-maximising spatial practices.

Italian – and now worldwide – initiatives such as Slow Food and Slow Cities have emerged to fight these trends and celebrate the quality and uniqueness of the local and regional. Meanwhile, the growth in interest in fair-trade food, organic food, farmers' markets, local food cooperatives, better school food and food poverty projects is also challenging the largely unacknowledged social, environmental and economic costs of out-of-season, out-of-region food practices from the local to the global scale.

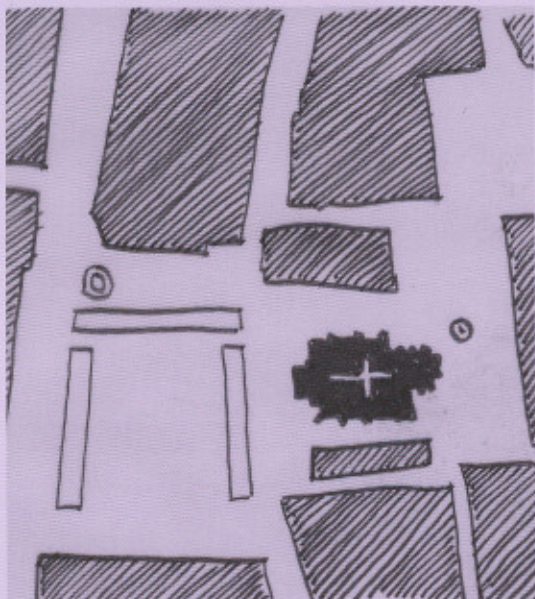
Architectural discourse seems to revel in the dystopic, fragmented nature of the city of the 21st century both in the centre and on the edge. It is exciting to design an upmarket restaurant behind a hidden door on a dark, dirty street; the contrast between private wealth and public squalor adds to the atmosphere.

As yet, though, architectural and urban design responses to the ways food is both purchased and consumed lag far behind these developments. Architectural discourse seems to revel in the dystopic, fragmented nature of the city of the 21st century both in the centre and on the edge. It is exciting to design an upmarket restaurant behind a hidden door on a dark, dirty street; the contrast between private wealth and public squalor adds to the atmosphere. It does not provoke debate about the loss of an acceptable public realm or the way in which that restaurant could have contributed to that realm. The architect who describes the internal space for eating at a business-park office building or a megamall food court as 'just like a street' is ignoring the real food conditions he or she has been party to creating. The restaurant (or private dining room) at the top of the icon building is there to reinforce the power of those able to afford to dine there. It celebrates inequality and gives nothing back to the street.

Designing the Gastronomic Quarter

By contrast, the notion of the gastronomic quarter is intended to tease out some of the spatial dimensions of more enlightened approaches to food in cities. The quarter can include any or all of the following elements and more: market halls and streets, food stalls, cafés, restaurants, bars and food shops, market gardens, productive street trees and other planting, vegetable gardens and allotments. It is likely to be located in dense urban fabric that mixes land uses at a fine grain and emphasises human scale. It can still be found in many European towns and cities, and examples include

Right
The figure-ground of traditional market-centred space in the style of Camillo Sitte shows how closely the marketplace related to other aspects of civic life – church and state. The figure-ground of Nuremberg shows a series of well-connected ‘outdoor rooms’ in which buildings front up to streets and squares to contribute to comfortable height-to-width ratios and a pleasing balance between positive and negative space.



Successful gastronomic quarters tend to exhibit a series of well-configured outdoor rooms – usually urban squares – that demonstrate the appropriate level of enclosure, that is, with height-to-width ratios of built form that are neither too narrow nor too broad, as the figure-ground in the style of Camillo Sitte illustrates.

Below
Market-focused urban fabric, Granada
Just south of the new Granada market hall, a market-focused urban fabric of human-scaled streets and squares has been renovated, introducing simple new paving, landscaping and street furniture with considerable skill and restraint to enrich the daily food-shopping experience.



places that have simply continued for centuries and others that have been revived, revitalised or created from new.

Examples from London, Villeneuve-sur-Lot, Angoulême, Rome and Granada illustrate some of the design approaches that reconnect city design and food relationships for more sustainable, convivial places. With limited space here within which to explore the idea of the gastronomic quarter, the emphasis in this article is on food exchange and consumption within markets and their surrounding areas, but could equally have dealt with the design of the quarter in relation to food production through green space within and on the edge of towns, or with space for 'value adding' processing of produce.

Successful gastronomic quarters tend to exhibit a series of well-configured outdoor rooms – usually urban squares – that

demonstrate the appropriate level of enclosure, that is, with height-to-width ratios of built form that are neither too narrow nor too broad, as the figure-ground in the style of Camillo Sitte illustrates. These outdoor rooms act as positive and vital spaces within the urban fabric. The edges of such spaces are three-dimensional and complex, allowing places for people to pause, sit and contemplate the changing scene. These conditions tend to be found in 'traditional' or 'vernacular' townscape where gastronomic quarters demonstrate a strongly marked sense of place and a good fit between the form of the space and its numerous social, economic and environmental functions. But this does not mean these are nostalgic places, or that other architectural idioms are excluded; simply that new interventions need to demonstrate good manners towards their context.

In Granada, for example, the new market hall, using a Modernist architectural idiom for its built structure, relates sensitively to the surrounding urban fabric.





The market hall helps form one side of an enclosed 'outdoor room', an urban square that provides a foreground to the market's facade, yet is more than just an aesthetically pleasing setting for the market. It is an active place used for produce deliveries and market stalls, supported by simple, elegant landscaping and space to sit or promenade.

The market at Testaccio, in a southern quarter of Rome, takes up a city block in an area configured by a strong rectilinear grid of streets. The semicovered market building does not have any architectural distinction, but is a lively and bustling market space in a quarter that demonstrates some useful urban features, including medium to high housing densities and mixed uses, which support a local catchment for the market. The local building typology is fine-grained and generally configured as cafés, shops, offices and small workshops on the ground floors, typically with multiple entrances to three- to eight-storey housing above. Buildings are contiguous on regular city blocks with strong edges, reinforcing enclosure and contributing to good height-to-width ratios in streets abutting the market.

One of the most important qualities for the gastronomic quarter is accessibility. Successful quarters like Testaccio and central Granada have created locations that are walkable for a good proportion of users and encourage access by modes (bicycle, scooter, bus, tram, train and taxi) other than cars. These quarters are also highly permeable and their human scale is further reinforced by an absence of large servicing or delivery vehicles. In both Testaccio

and Granada, the internal connectivity of the quarter is ensured by creating human-scaled walkable areas that relate in density and texture to the surrounding townscape, while external connectivity is increased by good public transport links to the rest of the city.

Market Halls and Structures

Enclosed market structures are not critical to the success of a gastronomic quarter, as Testaccio demonstrates, but there are some famous examples, such as the Mercat de la Boqueria in Barcelona (one of many across Europe) that give great distinction to their area and are rightly world famous. There are also very many less-distinguished but nonetheless attractive buildings that reinforce the market as being at the heart of the quarter. New or renovated market halls developed in places as diverse as Paris (L'Enfant Rouge), Angoulême, London (Borough Market) and Granada (Mercat Municipal) suggest that variations on the market-hall typology are undergoing an architectural and social renaissance.

Where possible, the gastronomic quarter should revitalise existing good-quality buildings and spaces that give opportunities for adaptive reuse related to food. Both new and existing buildings provide opportunities for market traders to personalise their stalls, raising the visual display of fruit, vegetables, meat, fish, cheese and other produce to a rich and sumptuous level – an enduring delight in market spaces. And long-life, loose-fit design principles seem especially suitable for markets. Cardiff market's 19th-century spaces still work well, while Borough Market in the inner south London area of Southwark next to the Thames has been revitalised after a long period of decline as a wholesale market. The latter is located on the site of an ancient open-air market covered over

Above
New market hall, Granada
 The market hall uses a Modernist architectural idiom for materials and structural elements whilst relating sensitively, in terms of placement, scale and permeability, to the surrounding older urban fabric. Avoiding the temptation to create an 'object' building, the new hall provides not only a new edge to an existing outdoor room, but has been strengthened as an urban element by sensitive refurbishment, in similar materials, of well-enclosed, walkable space around it.



Above

Covered market, Cardiff, Wales The covered market works as both a place and a line-grained element in the pedestrian path system. It forms an enclosed, glass-roofed space – a variation on the ‘outdoor room’ typology – that hides behind the street facade on one side and offers a grand entrance on the other. Although no longer enjoying a profusion of trade in keeping with its architectural grandeur, the market retains some of its fruit-and-vegetable, bakery and meat stalls.



in the 19th century by semienclosed structures of considerable architectural interest and charm. The iron halls, surmounted by sawtooth roofs with extensive skylit areas, are wrapped around and beneath railway bridges, vaults and arches leading into London Bridge station to the east.

As the centrepiece of the gastronomic quarter, the market can be constructed of remarkably flimsy structures. Many food markets successfully rely on basic construction materials where the urban design context is right. In Rome's Campo dei Fiori, and at Trastevere, the market structures are simple stalls that are built and dismantled for each market day. At the centre of each quarter, the daily market of fruit, vegetables, fish and meat is set up on collapsible, portable stalls serviced by small three-wheeler vans that fit the sometimes-medieval streets of the surrounding *centro*. Both these squares, and the local quarters within which they sit, are characterised by dense, medium-rise, mixed-use buildings. In Villeneuve-sur-Lot, basic elements, trestles and umbrellas are easily set up and dismantled while giving a strong structure to the market, which is set in an arcaded *bastide* square that forms a successfully enclosed outdoor room.

Above
Trastevere Market, Rome
This is a traditional produce market that continues to draw a large local catchment and support a range of food shops, bars, cafés and restaurants with apartments above in surrounding streets. The area demonstrates a healthy food-centred urban form that has remained vibrant in the face of competition from supermarket-dominated, car-based consumption.

Catchments: Niche or Nostalgia?

Catchment issues are important but can be complex, as Borough Market demonstrates. In recent years, while its wholesaling function has dwindled, new vitality has been introduced through a farmers' market that has become increasingly popular. There is a growing selection of organic meat, fish, dairy produce, bread, fruit and vegetables, plants, grocery

items and wine on sale. The market supports not only a local catchment of residents but a number of other users from the wider London region, as well as visitors from elsewhere.

As at Campo dei Fiori in Rome, Borough's catchment represents a community of interest as well as a geographical community. Residential development to the south includes modern estates of poor quality, housing a predominantly low-income population. The advent of the market is seen by some here as an aspect of unwelcome gentrification. Its very success is cited as a factor rapidly pushing up house prices in the Borough area and squeezing out traditional communities who could not in any case afford the high prices at the farmers' market. In a context of 'cheap' industrialised food whose externalities are unacknowledged in deleterious environmental or health terms, good-quality market produce is perceived as a luxury commodity, not a right for all. It is tempting to speculate that the growth of successful gastronomic quarters does contribute to gentrification, but the results of these food processes in city space are as yet underresearched, so definitive answers about the positive and negative effects cannot yet be provided.

Borough Market and Campo dei Fiori also attract one of the main criticisms levelled at high-quality markets; that they are gastronomic tourism zones trading on nostalgia about a lost way of life and pandering to the obsessions of wealthy food-literate tourists. It is certainly true that these markets are attractive to affluent tourists. Borough has drawn them to a previously obscure location while the Campo, in the centre of historic Rome, draws a global community of interest yet is also clearly a much-loved local centre. Trastevere, meanwhile, serves a much more local-only population, yet the urban structure in which it sits is remarkably similar to other sites explored here, so its vitality cannot be ascribed to tourism alone.

Catchment issues are closely tied to those of scale, with the gastronomic quarter needing to support small local shops and eating places that are well designed and located for surrounding communities. The range of food-related activities contributes to the quarter's vitality. In and around Campo dei Fiori, at Trastevere and in Testaccio there is a rich selection of individually owned food shops, cafés and bars that both connect with and support the main market. In each case, the daily market helps to support these ancillary land-uses of grocery shops, wine merchants, bakeries, restaurants, bars and cafés on ground floors with offices and housing above. The Testaccio area supports one of Rome's best food shops, Volpetti, on nearby Via Marmorata. At Campo dei Fiori local food shops include the famous Antica Norcineria Viola devoted to pork products. The land-use mix is always highly diverse and fine-grained.



The gastronomic quarter should provide for servicing, including deliveries and waste removal at ground level, by small vehicles rather than large trucks. At Campo dei Fiori, produce is brought into the square by small vehicles. These neither undercut the pedestrian-friendly atmosphere nor disrupt frontages needed for the enclosure of the space in the way that larger trucks do when servicing areas. Boxes on the back of very small vans add to the lively atmosphere and also reflect the predominance of small-scale producers and retailers, historically a characteristic of markets, and implying a fine grain of land use.

All these elements together allow local people to walk, cycle or scooter from home or work daily to enjoy the sensual experience of the market, to buy produce and to socialise. Very fresh food – emphasising season and region – is bought in small amounts that are light enough to carry the short distance home.

Conclusion

Sensitive design can contribute to a convivial food-oriented urban fabric. This is an evolving urban pattern, yet one that draws on long-term, time-tested design arrangements to support

rich social relationships centred on growing, transporting, buying, cooking and eating good food.

Design research suggests that traditional cities implicitly understood these relationships, creating workable and sometimes uplifting public market spaces, while Modernist-inspired exclusionary zoning undermines public space and the fine grain of functions that go with it. Food production on the edges of cities, food exchange at markets and food consumption within the built fabric that surrounds markets were once spatially configured at a human scale. These spatial arrangements were accompanied by opportunities for social interaction and conviviality centred on food, allowing for social ritual and maintaining a sense of community. They avoided the sterile, alienating and unhealthy conditions we now suffer from in much food growing, retailing and eating. The gastronomic quarters that have been surveyed here show some of the necessary design qualities that could be retrieved or built in city space to overcome such dystopic urban environments.

It is possible to combat unconvivial trends in spatial design. Various architectural and design typologies can be employed to create workable public spaces, centred on nodes of intensity of activity around food, that are human scaled, mixed use, fine-grained and diverse. For sustainability and for pleasure, this should be the way forward. ▣

Above
 'New' Borough Market Hall,
 London
 The facade of the 'new' market
 hall has been reassembled
 from the lost food market of
 Covent Garden and, using a
 Modernist-style built link,
 inserted into the complex urban
 fabric of traditional market
 halls close to London Bridge
 station.