

URBAN CONSERVATION CHALLENGES OF TRADITIONAL HISTORIC MARKETS: CASE STUDY OF PALERMO, ITALY

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ABSTRACT

The main conservation challenge of historic cities – as living urban systems – is to create equilibrium between modern needs and traditional image without compromising the physical historical texture. Open urban spaces were considered the main planning nuclei of cities historically, functions of these spaces vary between political and religious but are mostly connected with commercial activities, some eventually turning into open street markets. Then, with the change in public lifestyles and shopping behavior, these open markets start to shrink from the main city spaces into some defined places, normally inside the old parts and historic center of the city. Historic markets with traditional street vendors reflect the quality of urban life in the historic city center, they are considered to be one of the main tourist attractions and are a key element of defining the historic city identity. However, these markets and vendors are creating a negative poor image of the historic city. They cause pollution due to solid wastes, smells and noise. Above all, they produce crowding which blocks transportation within historic zones along with many other urban problems. Palermo is the capital of Sicily in southern Italy, and it has one of the oldest and biggest historic centers around the Mediterranean basin. The historic center is not only rich in monuments and architectural heritage, but also with traditional street markets, which shape the image of Palermo as historic living fabric. Although these markets survived the difficult history of Palermo, they suffer from many urban problems historically until today. This paper studies the challenges facing traditional markets as intangible heritage, using Palermo historic markets as a case study.

Keywords: traditional markets, street markets, Palermo, Italy, conservation, historic cities.

1 INTRODUCTION

The physical urban fabric of any historic district consists of number of monuments, heritage building, modern buildings and open spaces. People gave life to historic cities by their daily needs along with traditional activities. Livability of Historic cities depends on the relation between the historic urban fabric and people activities. Along history open urban spaces were the main planning nuclei of cities, they had various functions; between political and religious, these functions mostly connected with commercial activities. Outdoor markets were one of the main functions in public spaces even if these spaces planned to be markets or they turned – in certain times – into open street markets.

Market are accessible public spaces where people gather in regular bases to buy and sell goods and products besides engaging in community life and activities [1]. Markets had a long history as main part of cities, places for business, and centers of urban social life. In addition, they work as low cost restaurants that provide inhabitants with affordable food and other products, they reflect seasonal products, landscape and climate of the region [1]–[3]. Along the history, markets were an important indicator of city prosperity and vice versa. Street markets were very important to the city self-image and an indicator of healthy growing economy. Therefore, city planners along the history were keen on providing markets places

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with suitable shelters for sellers and buyers to promote goods and fresh food exchange. Local authorities established markets regulations, constructed buildings and allocate spaces for markets, along with monitoring market activities to control food quality, prices and available food quantities. Gathering many sellers in one place has many advantages, as it creates competition between venders, consumers could choose between wide range of prices and qualities, and authorities could control and monitor all activities [4].

Recently, Markets take place in leftover spaces, often excluded from the official planning of public open-space systems [1]. They struggle between expanding and decline in terms of numbers of vender and products quantities, this happens normally with seasons changes, but also this could be due to economic and social changes [1], [3]. Moreover, Consumer shopping behavior has changed widely in the recent years. As result of the increasing of online shopping and mega shopping centers; in one hand street markets start to be outdated, on the other hand, there is a growing appetite for traditional and local products along with the desire to get close contact with producers [2, p. 6], [5].

2 TRADITIONAL MARKETS

The word market derived from the Latin work "*Mercatus*" which is the place for trading, buying and selling [6]. According to oxford dictionary, markets are public places where people gathering on regular bases to buy and sale of goods, livestock, and other products [7]. The main character of markets is the direct contact between customers and buyers and sometimes producers. Local traditional market still survive and even growing nowadays in many cities especially touristic destinations.

These markets mostly take place at weekends, when consumers have free time. They create opportunities to explore, and talk to other people [5]. According to the National Association of British Market Authorities (NABMA) report 2009, Traditional retail markets are forming about 53.4 per cent of total markets in the United Kingdom and they hosted about 81.8 of total retail business compared with, farmers' and wholesale markets and Country markets [2, p. 5]. Local markets started to change their image from places for cut-price and counterfeit products to places to represent local identity and opportunity for local businesses to try new ideas along with reviving public life in historic zones [5], [8]. Traditional markets suffer from many threats; like economic and social decline along with physical dangers [1].

2.1 History

Markets existed since early Bronze Age when humans engaged in trading. Open public markets were main element of cities in most ancient civilization. Across the Mediterranean, there was a network of markets where they traded many products; these markets connected by trading routes according to geographical circuits [9], [10, p. 245].

In antiquity, markets were located – in most cities – near the city center, surrounded by alleys where skilled handicrafts and artisans had their workshops [11, p. 224]. While in Middle East, markets took the shape of bazar or "*Souq*" which consists of number of alleys mainly near the city gates and sometimes connect between two opposite gates of the city [12].

In ancient Greece, the market or "*Stoa*" designed as covered walkway surrounded with colonnades, and the marketplaces or "*Agorai*" was part of most cities near the city center, operated within the Agora, where sellers gather in clusters based on types of goods they sell. In Roman cities, trading took place in the forum, as the markets for food and other products located near the forum while other livestock markets located near the gates or on the city Perimeter [13]. In England starting from the twelfth century, local lords created markets and fairs for towns, and they collected fees in return. These markets organized so that each city

open its market in one different day, while fairs held in certain days in the year – mainly associated with religious festivals [14].

During the middle ages in Europe, trading in markets were using movable stalls covered with arcades. Between the thirteenth and fifteenth centuries, regional markets usually take place every week or twice a week, while larger cities normally have daily markets. With time, permanent shops start to replace daily markets, forcing peddlers or itinerant seller to move to less important spaces in the city [15].

During the age of discovery in Europe, Markets were more international, with imported goods from different places around the world. With time, particular products became typical products with certain places and associated with them, and some markets earned a reputation for providing special products, which guarantee the types and quality of products. This helped markets to create an early version of branding [9].

In the Middle East, markets were located on cities perimeters near city gates, connected with trading routes. Over time, markets start to integrate into the city urban pattern as covered area inside the city walls to provide protection for people. Markets were the main places for both trade and social interactions [12, pp. 1–50].

2.2 Classification of traditional markets

Street markets have different classifications based on many points:

- Area covered (local, regional, national and international markets).
- Duration (short period mainly for food and long period for different durable goods).
- Products they offer (food markets, specialty markets, vintage markets or mixed).
- Frequency and recurrence (Permanent markets “operate every day – every day plus specified main day”, while other markets are held ones or twice a week, others are periodic markets with less frequent on special days like festivals and sessions).

2.3 Local traditional markets as intangible heritage

Cultural heritage definition according to The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), changed widely in the recent decades to include inherited traditions and living expressions, such as “skills to produce traditional crafts, social practices, rituals and festive events”, beside monuments and collections of objects [16]. Traditional markets as places for gathering and social activities considered as valuable Intangible Cultural Heritage resources in historic cities. Street markets are the places where contemporary and traditional practices mixed with living conditions to create the identity of the place. Traditional markets activities, which are mix between inherited traditions from the past along with contemporary urban and rural practices form type of intangible cultural heritage where all diverse cultural groups of the society have the right to participate into it.

Traditional markets as intangible cultural heritage are important for the transformation of knowledge and skills from one generation to the next, along with the economic and social values of these markets as catalyst of urban regeneration and main factor of livability of historic districts [16].

3 THE CASE OF PALERMO TRADITIONAL MARKETS.

Palermo is the capital of Sicily Island in Southern Italy. The city has extraordinary cultural and architectural heritage, the city has strategic location centralized in the Mediterranean basin. Phoenicians founded Palermo in 736 BC, Ancient Greeks named it as “*Panoremus*” which means “always fit for landing in”.



Palermo was part of the Roman then the Byzantine Empires, for more than ten centuries. The Arab ruled the city for more than two hundred years, and they made it the capital during the Emirate of Sicily. Palermo became capital of the Kingdom of Sicily after the Norman domination. Later it was part of the Kingdom of Two Sicilies along with Naples until unification of Italy (1860). According to Eurostat Palermo central area population is about 700 thousand inhabitant, while population of its urban space is about 855 thousand inhabitant, and the metropolitan area has about 1.2 million inhabitant [17], [18].

3.1 Palermo historic center

Palermo occupies a coastal plain surrounded by hills. The city historic center is about 2.50 square kilometers area and with about 30,000 inhabitants, making it as one of the largest European historic centers. The rich architectural heritage of the historic center include monumental churches, palaces and heritage buildings in various styles that range between Romanesque, Gothic and Baroque. Currently most of Palermo historic center buildings' are aristocratic monumental palaces dated to the nineteenth century. Most of them transformed into a complex mix of multiple subdivisions with height extensions and addition [17], [19].

3.2 Palermo historic street markets

Palermo is a city that could tell its history through the identity of its urban spaces. Traditional markets of Palermo are one of the main resources of its urban fabric. These markets are one of the most visited tourist attractions of the Sicilian capital. In addition to being a tourist attraction, the markets still play their rule – against the development and growth of mega shopping centers – as commercial supply for residents [20]. Street markets in Sicily are the main authentic door to the past. Not only they are places to sell and buy, but also it is living museums of Sicily, they are places for “visual eating and drinking” [21, p. 11], they present the way to preserve traditions of the Sicilian people. Historic markets of Palermo (Fig. 1) located in the very heart of neglected neighborhoods of the historic center. Although the endless events and changes along the history of the city buildings, the city street markets continue to stay alive. They represent the main intangible city heritage. They reflect the city's traditional image and sustain livability of the historic center during day and even night. These markets hosts many social activities beside commercial ones.

3.2.1 Vucciria street market

Located in the “Loggia” neighborhood, between “Via Roma”, “Piazza San Domenico”, “Via Cala” and “Corso Vittorio Emanuele”. It is the most famous markets of the Palermo. Its name derives from the French “*bucherie*”, which describes the place of slaughter and sale of meat [22]. The Vucciria market used to be the commercial heart of the city, even with its small space it was full of goods from everywhere, merchandise of all kinds, and busy life, which was typical of a city like Palermo. In fact, the term “Vucciria” in local Sicilian language means confusion and noise [23], and the Sicilian idiom “*i balati ra Vucciria 'un s'asciucanu mai*” [24] means “The Vucciria floor never dries” reflects how the market used to be very active place. One of the most important Sicilian painting by “Renato Guttuso” done in 1974, named “La Vucciria” (Fig. 2(a)) which is a representation of the city active market. It is a big painting of the market (300 x 300 cm), reflects the spirit of Vucciria market as place for all products and all people.

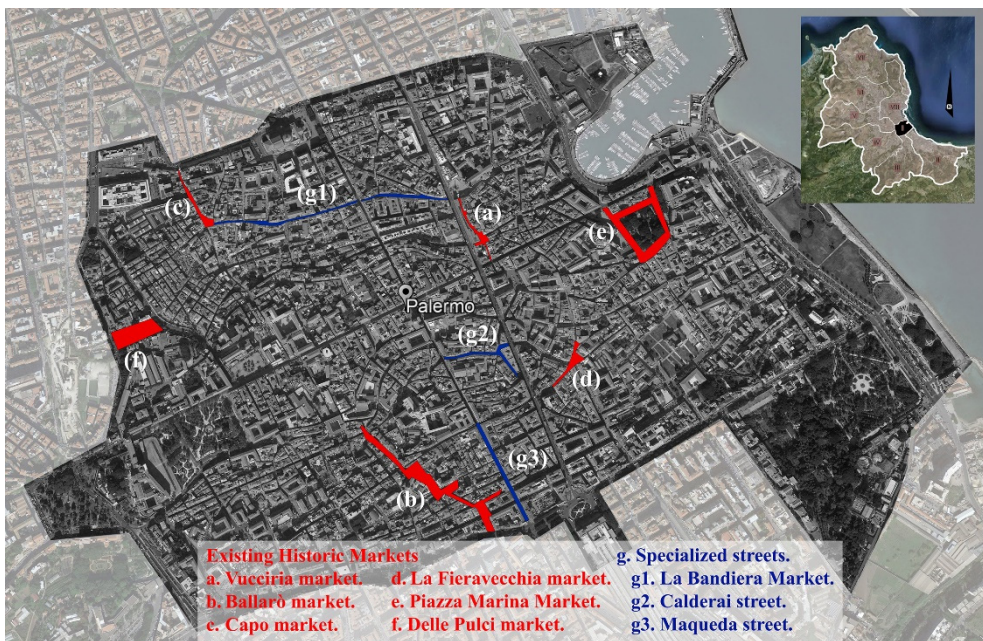


Figure 1: Map of Palermo historic center indication the main historic street markets. (Source: Author. Base map from Google Earth and Palermo Municipality.)



Figure 2: (a) Oil paint on canvas “La Vucciria” by “Renato Guttuso” (1974), currently in “Palazzo Chiaramonte-Steri”, University of Palermo; (b) Old photo of Vucciria market showing the typical daily activities of Palermo; and (c) Photo of Vucciria market during evening and night, as it turns into place for nightlife. (Source: (a) University of Palermo, www.unipa.it; (b) Stanzione [22]; and (c) Morelli [24].)

Vucciria is no longer the market it used to be – full of people, activities and life (Fig. 2(b)) – especially during the day hours. However, during the evening the area transforms into area for nightlife for typical Sicilian street food and social activities (Fig. 2(c)) [22], [24].

3.2.2 Ballarò street market

The Ballarò Market is the oldest and most characteristic historical market in Palermo, dated back to the Arab period in Sicily [25]. The market starts from “Casa Professa” to “Corso

Tukory”, “Porta Sant’Agata” along the ancient narrow alleys. The market started originally in the street “del Popoloso” in the district “Kemonia dell’Albergheria”. In 1468 the Senate of Palermo enlarged the market by adding to the long narrow plaza towards the Church of the Carmine Maggiore where located “Piazza Carmine” the main market plaza. The market continues in “Via Collegio di Maria al Carmine” then “Via Chiappara” towards “Via Maqueda” through “l’Arcò di Cutò” until it reaches the current “Corso Tukory”.

The name Ballarò probably derives from “*Balhara*”, the name of an ancient village near “Monreale” from where the merchants came to the market [21, p. 103]. Ballarò market now is much more active than current Vucciria market. It is still a kind of medieval marketplace. It stands up against any sort of social evolution. The market features not only vegetables, fruits, fish and meat but also includes every sort of local Sicilian products [23].



Figure 3: Photos of Ballarò Market. (a) Vast range of products offered in simple colorful way; (b) “Sword fish heads” with mix of particular seafood and fish types. (Source: Author.)

3.2.3 Capo street market

The Capo is a large area in the district “Monte di Pietà” which was the Arab district “*Seralcadio*” or “*sâri-al-qadi*” means Kadi Road. The area served primarily as a place for the pirates and slave merchants “*Schiavoni*”. By the thirteenth century, the area was included inside the city walls, and became a busy and prosperous artisan neighborhood, taking the name of “*Caput Seralcadi*”, from which the current name of Capo derives [21, p. 117].

The capo area contains several markets; the main are cloth and foodstuffs markets, which are always very crowded. At the margins of these markets, there are also specialized activities, such as sale of chandeliers, furniture and gold. The food market at “*Bocceria della Carne*” occupied the area above the “Via Maqueda”, bounded by the streets of “S. Isidoro”, “Candelai” and “Judica”. The Bocceria was the slaughterhouse of Palermo and its center was plaza “dei Caldomai”. In 1837, the “*Bocceria della Carne*” was demolished, following the construction of the New Slaughterhouse, near the mouth of the “Oreto” River. While the cloth market consists of “S. Agostino” street and, beyond “Via Maqueda”, from “Bandiera” street. It was the road axis of the ancient medieval district of “*Seralcadio*”. The Capo market runs along the axis constituted by the streets of “Porta Carini” and “Beati Paoli” up to “Corso Alberto Amedeo”. The area has large gaps in the urban fabric, due to demolition and renovations of many buildings [21, p. 117]. Even Capo is quite like the Ballarò market, as a major place for agricultural food products. Nevertheless, this lively market has an image as place for the poor [23]. This may result due to the ancient image of the district as place of pirates, and slave traders.

3.2.4 Fieravecchia market “Lattarini”

Located in “Rivoluzione” plaza in “Tribunali” district. The area historically named “Fieravecchia” which means the old fair. The market established in 1340 by King Peter II of Aragon. The “Lattarini” street has Arabian origins, the name driven from “*Suq el Attarin*” or Spice Market, and in fact, the area was known for the sale of spices and drugs. In the sixteen century with the planning interventions, the plaza connected to plaza “Porta di Termini” with wide straight street “via Garibaldi” where most important palaces of Palermo were built [21, p. 107]. Following the world wars and due to the massive destruction, the area start to lose its importance as food market, leaving some small commercial activities like fabrics, leather, bags, suitcases and military supplies distributed in the plaza, Lattarini, and “Alessandro Paternostro” streets [26], [27].

3.2.5 Piazza Marina market

Marina plaza is located at the end of “Corso Vittorio Emanuele” or “Cassaro” street, near Palermo waterfront. The plaza created about 1200 when the water that was covering the area withdrew. During medieval ages, the area was called “*Platea Maritima*”, later changed to “*Piano della Marina*” which was used for centuries. The plaza was the main place for the executions and torture operated by the Inquisition Court, which was located in “Chiaromonte-Steri” palace. At the center of the square today stands the public garden, built by “Gian Battista Basile” in 1864–1866, called “Villa Garibaldi”, the garden is home to some of the largest “Ficus” trees in Europe [28]. Around Villa Garibaldi, especially on weekends every Saturday and Sunday morning, the place turns into flea market where sellers of old and used objects gather to display antiques and rare old items. Around mid-day, the market slowly starts to close.

3.2.6 Piazza Peranni antique market “Mercato delle Pulci”

Since the post-war period, “Peranni” plaza hosted the antiques market, which is the main destination for those looking for antique furniture and rare pieces. The Flea Market in “Papireto” or “*Merkato delle Pulci*” presents furniture, vintage tiles and other pieces from the Baroque to the Art Nouveau, it is dated back to 1949 [29].



Figure 4: Photos of Palermo flea markets. (a) Around villa Garibaldi in Piazza; and (b) The Antique Market “Mercato delle Pulci” in “Piazza Peranni”. (Source: Author.)

3.2.7 Specialized commercial streets

Beside the historic street markets of Palermo, the city still has the Arabian effect of some commercial street dedicated to one type of product as kind of “souq”. One example is

“Bandiera” street that hosts clothing and textile market even in shops on the ground floors or in the street. Another example is “Calderai”, which is dedicated to the plumbing and kitchens supplies and equipment’s. The beginning of “Maqueda” street hosts many small shops dedicated to the many ethnic groups already present in this district, especially from North Africa and the Indian region.

3.3 Problems facing Palermo historic markets

Historic markets as parts of the historic city urban fabric suffer from main issues which facing the historic center in general and the whole city. Moreover, each markets of Palermo Street markets is suffering from particular problems due to type, location and activities.

3.3.1 Traffic, road conditions and parking

Traffic is one of the main problems affecting the quality of urban open spaces in historic districts in general. Moreover, with street markets there is a mutual effect between markets and traffic. Streets of Palermo historic centers are very narrow, and street with markets are mainly pedestrian as it is almost impossible to use them for motor vehicles. However, this rises another problem of providing necessary services for goods transportation and waste disposal. Providing adequate parking spots for users in another issue within the historic center, as parking is not allowed in most of the main streets of Palermo historic center; this converts side streets and any open spaces into parking plot.

This could be clearly seen in “La Fieravecchia” and “piazza Marina” markets, as the area totally converted into parking plots, making it very difficult for circulation of both traffic and pedestrians (Fig. 5(a), (b)). Palermo markets depend on the use of small Motor Tricycle for goods transportation and even as movable stalls, and sometimes used by local guide as amusement ride to take a tour inside and around the historic center (Fig. 5(c), (d)).



Figure 5: Photos of Palermo Historic center. (a) “Via Sant’Anna” towards “Piazza Sant’Anna ai Lattarini” from “via Roma”; (b) From via Maqueda towards “Palazzo Marchesi” showing the using of side street and the plaza as parking; and (c), (d) The use of “Motor Tricycle” for goods transportation and as amusement for tourists. (Source: Author.)

3.3.2 Acoustic and noise

One of main characters of Palermo markets is the noise and loud sounds of the market activities – sometimes even during night with music and dancing – like in the Vucciria market. This may be a problem for anyone visiting the historic center, but these noisy activities are one of the main characters of Palermo traditional image, and many people who live in the markets areas prefers to live with this background voices [21, p. 11].

3.3.3 Cleaning, waste management and environmental pollution

Some of Palermo markets especially Ballarò and Capo markets has another problem concerning cleaning and solid wastes disposal. This makes the market full of mix of odd smells, which may be familiar for local people and even considered as part of the whole image of the market [23]. However, this could be a problem for visitors who want to try local street food. Another point is the solid wastes disposal, which is a big issue in all Palermo, but much more in the historic market, this make it a must to operate the food markets mostly during the morning until mid-day, this gave the chance for moving out the solid wastes Especially the fish and vegetable markets.

3.3.4 Crime and abusiveness

The main historic markets of Palermo “Vucciria Ballarò and Capo” are very crowded; this raise problems of security, as the markets could be places for thieves and pickpocketing.

3.3.5 Urban transformation

Some historic markets like Vucciria market has lost its previous rule as food market, and turned into a place for nightlife [21], [23]. This kind of transformation itself is not harmful, as it keeps the historic market alive, but it needs a degree of monitoring to avoid unwanted activities and provide the required degree of security and safety for user.

3.3.6 Deterioration of heritage buildings and urban pattern gaps

As result of urban transformation and some interventions, some part of the historic fabric start do dissolve leaving gaps inside the historic zones, especially in Capo area [21, p. 115]. Moreover, the degradation of the heritage building and the need for maintenance and restoration gave a poor image of historic markets [17], and this is reflected on the overall image of Palermo historic center.

3.3.7 Lack of services and absence of tourist signs

Palermo historic center consider one of main tourist destination in south Italy, is has plenty of attractions. Although Palermo markets are one of the main destinations in Palermo, but there is not enough tourist information to guide visitors throw the markets. It is not easy for foreign visitor – especially who do not speak Italian – to have a tour in Palermo historic markets without local guide.

3.3.8 Accessibility: Lack of public transport and absence of pedestrian and cycling areas

Palermo historic center in general suffer from inefficient public transportation system in terms of frequency and variety. Moreover, cycling within the historic center is quite hard due to pavement condition of most historic streets and using pikes in the crowded historic markets is useless.

3.3.9 Economic transformation

Palermo markets as most of traditional markets around the world are affected with the changing in shopping behavior. Shopper prefer mega shopping mall and online shopping rather than traditional way of shopping, this badly affect some types of markets especially flea markets like “Mercato delle Pulci” in “Piazza Peranni” where Sales shrank dramatically during the recent few years [29]. However, traditional markets still have their way of mixing life with shopping, and this attracts number of visitors that help these markets to survive.

3.4 Reviving Palermo historic markets

The efforts to revive the historic center of Palermo expanded for decades, trying to conserve the very rich architectural heritage of the city. Adding to this the city administration tried to keep the historic center alive by attracting visitors – both local and tourists – by creating various types of activities within the historic center. Some of these interventions aimed to revive the city historic markets by connecting them to the city life and people's daily activities.

3.4.1 Pedestrian islands markets

There is a strong relation between Palermo markets and pedestrianization. Where, all streets hosting historic markets turned into pedestrian zones, as it is impossible to access the cars [20]. To connect the existing pedestrian routes of street markets with the historic center and the whole city, Palermo municipality started to create events during weekends and public holidays to connect the city markets with people and regional traditional producers (mainly food products). The city administration start to turn the main historic center streets (via Roma, Via Maqueda and beginning of via della Libertà) – reciprocally during weekends – into Pedestrian Islands full of activities, and invite regional and local venders and traditional food producers to exhibit their products. This helps to remind people with local qualities they can find in traditional markets [30], [31].

3.4.2 The street of markets project

Palermo Historical Center hosts a number of separated street historic markets. Each market is acting alone against many problems. The proposed project consists of three thematic routes to cross the historical center of Palermo. Each route consists of a series of micro-interventions for the rehabilitation of the urban fabric. One of the thematic routes is connecting the remaining fragmented markets into a serious of living street markets. The project aims to enhance functionality and tourist use of the markets and serve as a driving force for the development of local economies related to crafts, commerce and tourism [20].

3.5 Conclusion

Palermo city has a rich historic center, not only with architectural heritage, but very rich with intangible living heritage as well. Historic traditional markets of Palermo considered as the main living heritage of the city, and they suffer from many problems even more than the architectural heritage. Each market in Palermo has its own style, characters and conditions that make it particular and different from other markets. Palermo markets face their problems, act and operate in fragmented way without organizing together.

All the urban problems facing Historic market in Palermo gave them a poor image, this image reflected on the historic center and the whole city. To revive the historic markets, the negative image must be inverted; restoration of the physical heritage must be accompanied with urban regeneration, trying to meet modern needs without overwhelming the authentic values of the past. Efforts to revive the historic markets of Palermo are still not enough and there is a need for active management plan and special management organization to operate the city street markets system as whole. Palermo markets managed to survive along the city very tough history and economy difficulties, and they have many potentials to survive for the future generations.





Figure 6: Photos of the main Palermo historic center streets during weekend events where there turned into pedestrian islands with street venders exhibit their local products. (a) Via Maqueda; and (b) Via Roma. (Source: (a) Napoli [30]; and (b) Rotolo [31].)

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