

# **Food retailing and the public market system: the Barcelona case, 1876-1936**

Nadia Fava

Universitat de Girona– Girona – Spain

Manuel Guardia

Universitat Politècnica de Catalunya – Barcelona – Spain

José Luis Oyón

Universitat Politècnica de Catalunya – Barcelona – Spain

## Abstract

Covered market buildings, which began to appear in Britain and France in the 19th century and spread to cities of the European periphery, were a shared symbol of urban modernisation. The time cycles of their establishment in each country differed, however, as did the number and location of the markets in the cities and their long-lasting structural effects. This article is a contribution to comparative research between specific urban markets trajectories in nineteenth and twentieth centuries and it aims to juxtapose Southern European food market experiences - particularly the Barcelona case - with West European ones.

Like other big cities of Southern and Central Europe, Barcelona consolidated a sturdy polycentric system of district markets between 1876 and 1936, just when such markets were beginning to decline in “first comers” cities of Britain and France. In the Inter-war period, the market halls of Southern European cities played actually a prominent role in the everyday food trade and as functional and socializing centres in neighbourhoods. They were poles of dense residential and kinship relations for stall vendors, especially women vendors, and foci of a large part of the food retailing business in many neighbourhoods. Barcelona’s particular historical circumstances made the public

covered market system a fundamental element of neighbourhood commerce and a long-term urban asset.

As from the second half of the 19th century, major changes in retailing and in consumer patterns and practices have usually been associated with the introduction of new formats such as shopping arcades, department stores and retail chains. The renovation of traditional markets formed part of this same process but it has aroused much less interest so far. Nevertheless, we believe that municipal markets form an exceptional vantage point from which to consider retailing in the long term since. Though their initial renewal occurred in parallel to the expansion of the new formats, they offer a view that is much less selective and less closely focused on the practices of the middle classes than the more novel forms of retailing. This is because they never ceased to reflect changes in the distribution systems and in consumer patterns in the period under consideration, and because food generally and particularly cheap food was a critical issue in popular consumption patterns. Moreover markets were public spaces where women and especially those of the working class played a highly significant role and were more prominent than in the new commercial formats.

The renewal of the covered markets in Europe went through different cycles and followed different paths, with widely differing features and outcomes in the various countries, regions and cities<sup>1</sup>. Already in the early stages, one may observe two clearly distinct models, one or the other of which would be adopted by the European cities: the English pattern of single-market cities, requiring long trips to the city centre, and the Parisian polycentric model of evenly distributed neighbourhood markets, which is governed by criteria of proximity.

Barcelona's network of public covered markets, created between the opening of the first wrought-iron market hall in 1876 and the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War in 1936, is a notable example of a polycentric system. This paper shows the important place held by the Barcelona food markets in the city's structure organisation. After explaining the decisive role played by the municipal markets in the city's food supply, their key role as neighbourhood socializing centres is presented. Covered markets were also important food retailing hubs for working-class neighbourhoods as the map of the retail food shop

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<sup>1</sup> For a paramount comparative view on European city markets see M. Guàrdia, J. L. Oyón (ED), *Hacer ciudad a través de los mercados. Europa, siglos XIX-XX*, Barcelona 2010 (English translation forthcoming).

locations in 1932 will show. This essential role of the market halls shaped defining structural and long-lasting features of the city. In Barcelona, these features have shown a great resilience and have become an urban asset that remains valuable today, as is highlighted in this paper's afterword.

### ***The Barcelona polycentric market system formation: proximity versus centrality***

The formation of two big new markets in Barcelona, respectively on the plots of two convents confiscated in 1836, was aimed to confine and regulate the vendors who invaded and congested very central public spaces.<sup>2</sup> The traditional *Boqueria* market, which encroached on the *Rambla*, was transferred to a monumental porticoed square built on the plot of *Sant Josep* convent, standing right by the *Rambla* itself, which had become the foremost place of socialisation and consumer activity of the new privileged classes. The new *Santa Caterina* market, on the other hand, in a central but much more working class neighbourhood, adopted the model of Paris's *Saint-Germain* market, by J.B. Blondel (1813-1817), but in a more modest version. These markets were built over an extended period.<sup>3</sup> When they were finished around the middle of the century, they already looked completely anachronistic. England had earlier built numerous markets with a wrought-iron structure and in Paris the immense market of *Les Halles* was in the process of being constructed.<sup>4</sup> For two decades it proved impossible to update Barcelona's market system but, as from the 1870s a process began, that would lead to a second generation of markets. The first two wrought-iron market halls, those of *Born* and *Sant Antoni*, were conceived as a response to the outdated style of the *Sant Josep* (*Boqueria*) and *Santa Caterina* markets and as two genuine symbols of the new urban trends. They followed the European models of new wrought-iron and glass architecture, creating clear spaces that were sheltered from the elements and ideal for looking at

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<sup>2</sup> R. M. García Domènech, 'Mercats de Barcelona a la primera meitat del segle XIX', *Història Urbana de Barcelona, Actes del II Congrés d'Història del Pla de Barcelona*, 6-7, December 1985, Vol. 2. (Barcelona, 1990), 191-207.

<sup>3</sup> As late as December 1848, the *Sant Josep* market hall was signing an agreement with the owners of the *Vicereine's* Palace to arrange the fish-shop area. At the *Santa Caterina* market hall, the works did not begin until 1847. *Archivo Municipal Contemporáneo de Barcelona, Patrimoni Artístic i Ambiental*, "Enderrocament antiga peixateria del mercat de la *Boqueria*, 1835", Box 46.147 /7.50.

<sup>4</sup> B. Lemoine, *Halles de Paris*, 32; García Domènech, 'Mercats de Barcelona'.

goods in an orderly way. These markets took shape as surprising urban “monuments of transitoriness.”<sup>5</sup>

*Born* market opened in 1876 and *Sant Antoni* market in 1882. It was hoped that their drawing power would decongest the more central markets of *Santa Caterina* and *Sant Josep (Boqueria)*, which were dramatically overloaded, but this did not occur and their size eventually proved excessive. The high cost and scant yield of these first two markets reoriented municipal policy towards the building of smaller ones for the various neighbourhoods. Before the aggregation of municipalities in 1897, five wrought-iron markets had already been built in the city of Barcelona and five more in neighbouring towns. A concise initial account of the situation was drawn up in 1900. Of the total of 16 markets in the whole new aggregated municipality, only a few of the smaller ones were held in the open air. The greatest paradox was that *La Boqueria* market, an unfinished porticoed square with simple huts for stalls, was by far the city’s largest, accounting for 40 per cent of the market system’s total revenues. *Santa Caterina* market, which was also in very poor condition, brought in 12 per cent of the revenues. The big wrought-iron markets of *Born* and *Sant Antoni*, on the other hand, despite their large size and cost, hardly reached the figure of 10 per cent.<sup>6</sup>

At the end of the 19th century, British cities –and French ones in a lesser degree– showed undeniable signs of a preliminary stagnation. However in Barcelona –as in many Latin and Central Europe big cities– the building cycle of neighbourhood market halls went on until the 1930s, adopting the forms characteristic of the 19th century and a notably homogeneous layout destined to endure. Indeed, the 1930s provide an insight into the legacy of the long, drawn out 19th century. The guidebooks for visitors to the city published for the Barcelona Universal Exhibition of 1888 mentioned the new

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<sup>5</sup> G. Teyssot, “Habits/Habitus/Habitat” (1996), <http://urban.cccb.org>: “In *Paris, Capital of the 19th Century*, Walter Benjamin has noted how iron and glass were avoided in dwellings while such materials came to be used in shopping lanes, covered markets, pavilions for expositions and railway stations: ‘buildings which served transitory purposes’. Two contrasting modes of subjectivity begin to insinuate themselves into the world of things: on the one hand, the ‘transitoriness’ that determines a sort of man, mobile and nomadic; on the other, the old individualism of the inhabitant par excellence who defends his traditional ‘permanence’ or ‘allocation’... It is certainly true that recent studies, for example on the Victorian country house in Great Britain or on the apartment building during the Haussmann era, tend to qualify Benjamin’s assertion that ‘iron, then, combines itself immediately with functional moments of economic life’”.

<sup>6</sup> M. Guàrdia, J. L. Oyón, ‘La formació del modern sistema de mercats de Barcelona (1874-1921)’, *Quaderns del Seminari d’història de Barcelona*, 20 (Barcelona, 2008), 7-57; N. Fava, M. Guardia, J. L. Oyón, ‘Public versus private: Barcelona’s Market system, 1868-1975’, *Planning Perspectives*, 25 (2010), 5-27; M. Guàrdia, J. L. Oyón, ‘El sistema de mercados de Barcelona’ in *Hacer ciudad a través de los mercados*, 263-298.

wrought-iron market halls of *Born* and *Sant Antoni* among the city's foremost attractions. They were a novelty that set Barcelona on a footing with other major European cities. On the other hand, market halls were conspicuously absent from the guidebooks published for the Barcelona International Exhibition of 1929. The system had grown and been restructured with the designation of *Born* market as a facility for fruit and vegetable wholesalers, but even so the market halls had lost all their allure of modernity and the new neighbourhood markets, based on 19th-century models, were considered irrelevant for visitors. Highlighted in this way was the latent divorce between consumer activity turned leisure –practised in department stores and the most attractive commercial establishments–, and the other face of the city, that of the neighbourhood market halls and retailing fabrics. The location of the shopping arcades and department stores doubtless reflected a centrality-based reasoning, while the daily sale of food tended necessarily to be influenced by local proximity factors.

In this respect, not all European cities followed the same principles on the number, conditions and location of market halls. There were marketless cities, cities with a single big market in the centre, and cities with an entire polycentric system of markets, which were evenly distributed throughout all their districts. In British towns, once market halls had been opened in central locations, the opening of further covered markets proved a failure. Exeter, which had two district markets in two different parts of the city, had to close them down, after a short time, and the same happened in Manchester and Liverpool. The vast majority of new market halls were located in almost the same place where traditional central markets had stood. Moreover, new urban growth was becoming increasingly dispersed and therefore markets struggled to be profitable. These low-density urban sprawl areas were much more apt for the popular grocery shops or the small shopping parades, a process identical to that which had previously unfolded in many U.S. cities since the mid 19th century. Nor can we forget the importance of street markets, as in the case of London addressed by Victoria Kelly in this issue. Numerous central European cities, in Germany, Austria, Hungary, the former Czechoslovakia and the Scandinavian area showed hardly any interest in the

neighbourhood market system and the English pattern of single-market cities was replicated there.<sup>7</sup>

As opposed to a model like the English one in which market halls were only very exceptionally installed in non-central areas and in which, consequently, shopping entailed an increasingly long trip to the centre, the more decentralised Parisian model led to an urban market experience that was much more closely based on local proximity factors. The Parisian polycentric model was subsequently adopted at the end of the 19th century by Berlin and Budapest in a programmed way and by Barcelona, Turin, Madrid and cities of Eastern Europe in a less systematic manner. The key to the success of the district market halls was that they were built in medium- and high-density areas, which meant that a sufficiently large population pivoted around them to make the market hall itself a building that was not only financially profitable but also extraordinarily lively from the social standpoint. Towards 1914, for example, almost all the large popular and working class neighbourhoods of Barcelona, both in the centre and in the industrial suburbs, had a wrought-iron market, and some large suburbs even had more than one. It is not by chance that market hall literature of those countries with dense cities, accustomed by then to the service provided by the new neighbourhood markets, would recall that “a market hall is required for every 20,000 or 30,000 inhabitants so when a city’s population increases beyond a certain limit, the need arises for new markets”. The reasoning behind the market hall as a public amenity cannot be more clearly expressed.<sup>8</sup>

### ***Market halls and food supply***

The consolidation of a wide-ranging market hall system is closely related to the impact of markets on the supply and demand of food. In Great Britain, just as occurred earlier in the United States and Canada, numerous studies have been published on the vitality of grocery shops, butcher’s shops and fishmonger’s in the area outside the market halls.

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<sup>7</sup> J. Schmiechen, K. Carls, *British Market Hall*, 95, 101, 185-87; Tangires, *Public Markets*. For a recent assessment of the urban impact of the European markets: M. Guàrdia, J.L. Oyón, ‘Los mercados europeos como creadores de ciudad’, in Guàrdia, Oyón (ed), *Hacer ciudad*, 11-71.

<sup>8</sup> A. Rovira y Rabassa, *El hierro. Sus cortes y enlaces*, 2 vol. (Barcelona, c. 1900); Word “Mercado”, *Enciclopedia Espasa*, vol. XXXIV, (Madrid-Barcelona, c. 1920-1930); the Italian market manuals in the Interwar period also repeat these criteria: ‘In the big cities a single market hall does not suffice but rather such a number is required that the inhabitants of an area need not travel over 600 to 800 metres along the street to go from their home to the market. There should be one market hall for every 20,000-30,000 inhabitants.’ D. (Donghi, ‘I mercati coperti’, in *Manual dell’architetto*, Turin, 1925, p. 262); also see F. Basile, *I mercati* (Messina, 1940).

It would appear that the same type of growth process took place in Germany but perhaps somewhat later.<sup>9</sup> In any case, the scope of this form of distribution connected with the market halls in both countries appears to vary considerably. While in English cities such as Manchester, public market halls held a notable importance until the middle of the century, subsequently undergoing a dramatic decline to the point that, by around 1870 only 3.6 per cent of the meat, 11.9 per cent of the fish and 16.6 per cent of the fruit and vegetables were distributed there, in other areas of Lancashire the figures for 1920 and 1970 show, according to Deborah Hodson, that “selling in the market halls was still firmly established”. In other industrial cities such as Sheffield, it appears that in 1888 one-half of the population shopped in market halls.<sup>10</sup> This explains why, in contrast to authors who have defended the thrust and positive balance of grocery stores as opposed to the inefficiency of the market halls, such as Scola in the case of Manchester, there are other authors, such as Schmiechen and Carls, who are inclined to postulate examples of cities whose balance is more favourable to the municipal markets. So, not even in the countries which have been studying the history of retailing for years, can a final balance be drawn up owing to the continued lack of conclusive studies.

In any case, as far as we know, the situation in some cities of Southern Europe contrasted sharply with the impact of retail food shops observed in Anglo-Saxon countries. In cities like Barcelona, the municipal market halls played an almost dominant role. If a comparison is made between the points of sale within the market halls in 1921 and the shops outside them, according to the Industrial and Commercial Tax Register of 1932, it may be observed that the market halls comprised about 79 per cent of the city’s overall points of sale in the case of meat, 74 per cent in the case of fish, 60 per cent in the case of fruit and vegetables, and 58 per cent of the total number of establishments devoted to the sale of foods in general. The favourable balance of the market halls in Barcelona compared to the case of Manchester, two cities similar in size, is eloquent and even more significant if it is considered that the British markets began to

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<sup>9</sup> M. Phillips, ‘The Evolution of Markets and Shops in Britain’, in J. Benson and G. Shaw, (ed.) *The Evolution of Retail Systems, c. 1800-1914* (Leicester, 1992); D. Denecke, G. Shaw, ‘Traditional Retail Systems in Germany’, in *Ibid.*; J. Benson, ‘Small-scale Retailing in Canada’, in *Ibid.*; Tangires, *Public Markets*, 201-205.

<sup>10</sup> R. Scola, ‘Food Markets and Shops in Manchester, 1770-1870’, *Journal of Historical Geography*, 1, 1975, 153-168; R. Scola, *Feeding the Victorian City: The Food Supply of Manchester, 1770-1870* (Manchester, 1992); Schmiechen, Carls, *British Market Halls*, 128; D. Hodson, ‘The Municipal Store’.

lose importance in the opening decades of the 20th century.<sup>11</sup> That was also the case of some northern countries, like the Danish cities addressed by Jens Toftgaard in this issue, where only few market-halls materialised and the very idea was abandoned at the end of the nineteenth century.

On the other hand, this discussion cannot be reduced in its entirety to a comparison of the market halls' sales with those of the retailers located outside their walls. Numerous forms of pre-industrial markets which were more unstable and very difficult to quantify, also held their ground, as was the case of street vending. Even in big U.S. cities like New York, street vending was unshakable and continued to function. Relatively substantial percentages of the food supply, especially among immigrants, were channelled through the street market. In London it would not appear that the open-air retail markets always prevented the proliferation of street vendors in their surroundings and numerous enclaves in the city were foci of peddlers in the decades around the mid 19th century. Schmiechen recalls that in London towards the end of the century, for every three vendors in shops there were two street vendors, the latter totalling about 24,000. Street vending was common in Germany, at least until World War I. Even in cities with well-developed market systems like Berlin, the sales in the old open-air markets on streets and squares did not disappear completely, as shown in the beautiful photographs by Heinrich Zille. As recalled by Allan Siegel, on opening its six new market halls at the turn of the century, Budapest had 44 open-air markets where a total of 4,500 to 8,000 vendors did business.<sup>12</sup> In big southern European cities like Barcelona and Madrid, street vending, which sometimes surrounded the new market halls, survived throughout the 19th century, flaring up again in times of crisis, as in the 1930s.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> It should also be noted that other commercial forms, such as those of the consumer cooperatives, played a role of substantial importance in Great Britain from the end of the 19th century (Purvis, M. 'Co-operative Retailing in Britain', in Benson, Shaw (ed.), *The Evolution of Retail Systems*).

<sup>12</sup> A. Siegel, 'Budapest: alimentación, ciudad y evolución de los mercados cubiertos' in Guardia, Oyón, *Hacer ciudad a través de los mercados*, 365-404.

<sup>13</sup> D.M. Bluestone, 'The Pushcart Evil. Peddlers, Merchants, and New York City Streets, 1890-1940', *Journal of Urban History*, 18, 1991, 68-92. The estimates of some distributors attributed a share of between 25% and 40% to street vending in the 1920s (Ibid. 86); D.R. Green, 'Street Trading in London: a Case Study of Casual Labour, 1830-1860, in J.H. Johnson, C.G. Pooley, (eds.), *The Structure of 19th-Century Cities*, (London-Canberra-New York, 1982), 129-151; Denecke, Shaw, 'Traditional Retail Systems'; K.F. Beall, *Kaufleute und Strassenhändler. Eine Bibliographie* (Hamnut, 1975); Ch. Ealham, 'La lluita pel carrer. Els venedors ambulants durant la II República', *L'Avenç*, 230, 21-26; Ibid., *Class, Culture and Conflict in Barcelona, 1898-1937*, (Oxon-New York, 2005); J.A. Nieto Sánchez, *Historia del Rastro*, vol. II (Madrid, 2007), 46-51, 171-193; W. Ranke, *Heinrich Zille photographien Berlin, 1890-1910* (München, 1975), 121-127; for comparison with other contexts, see R. Bromley, 'Working in the



### *Gender as a strengthening factor of the neighbourhoods around market halls*

The presence of women from the flourishing middle and bourgeois classes in the new leisure-consumer spaces and, in particular, in department stores, has given rise to a notable literature.<sup>14</sup> Nevertheless, we know practically nothing about their role in the market halls where there was a predominant presence of women and their visibility was undeniable. Converging at the market halls were women of all social backgrounds, from the servants who were entrusted with shopping to the modest housewives who shopped every day, carefully considering how much each item cost or waiting until the last minute to purchase foods at bargain prices. Montserrat Miller recalls the essential role of Barcelonan women as vendors and owners of market stalls. In the mid 19th century, when there was only one market hall and almost all the vendors worked in the open air, 90 per cent of the stalls were run by women. After the extensive network of market halls was built, on the eve of the Spanish Civil War, despite the unquestionable increase in the presence of men (above all in the stalls that required greater capital, such as meat stalls), about 58.4 per cent of the business permits for stalls in 15 of the municipal market halls were issued to women. As opposed to what happened in other economic activities, municipal laws on market halls allowed women to be the owners of their business and to transfer it under the same rights as men. Women also tended to establish especially close ties with a preponderantly female clientèle, relationships that were in essence an extension of everyday life in the community. On the basis of neighbourhood and family relations, close-knit social networks were established around the market halls. A number of festival elements, created by vendor associations, celebrated the role women played in the social life of the market hall and presented them as the “queens of the market”.<sup>15</sup>

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Streets: Survival Strategy, Necessity or Unavoidable Evil?', in A. Gibert, J.E. Hardoy, R. Ramírez, (eds), *Urbanization in Contemporary Latin America* (Chichester, 1982); J. Benson, 'Hawking and Peddling in Canada, 1867-1914', *Social History*, 18, 1985, 75-83; A. Brown-May, 'A Charitable Indulgence: Street Stalls and the Transformation of Public Space in Melbourne', *Urban History*, 23, 1996, 48-71; S.S. Porter, 'And That It Is Custom Makes It Law. Class Conflict and Gender Ideology in the Public Sphere – Mexico City, 1880-1910', *Social Science History*, 24, 2000, 111-148.

<sup>14</sup> A useful summary of British and North American studies on this subject may be found in R. Dennis, *Cities in Modernity. Representations and Productions of Metropolitan Space, 1840-1930* (Cambridge, 2008), Chapter 6.

<sup>15</sup> M. Miller, 'Las Reinas de los Mercados: cultura municipal y género en el sector del comercio minorista alimentario de Barcelona', in Guardia, Oyón, *Hacer ciudad a través de los mercados*, 299-328. See also M. Miller, *Feeding Barcelona: Public Markets, Food Vendors and Consumer Culture in a Metropolitan Industrial Metropolis*, forthcoming.

*Born* market records relating to the period when it operated as a retail market hall (1876-1921), show that the majority (about 62 per cent) of the people to whom sales permits were granted were women.<sup>16</sup> This situation should apply to the rest of the city's market halls if one considers the extraordinary visibility of women, as both shoppers and vendors, in the abundant photographic documentation on this period. Nevertheless, men usually ran businesses that were more highly capitalised. The situation was indeed quite balanced in the stalls for which the highest prices were paid in auctions and for permits (meat stalls and fish stalls, and some grocery stalls and cafés), but in the rest of the businesses –the more modest stalls mainly dealing in fruit and vegetables (about 42 per cent of the total market stalls, where there were twice as many women than men)– women were clearly in the majority. These women gave the neighbourhood its character. About 60 per cent of all the fruit and vegetable vendors lived in the *Ribera* and *Santa Caterina* area. Indeed, three times as many women as men with this same occupation lived within local area and travelled to work on foot. On the other hand, male fruit and vegetable vendors usually came to work from greater distances, the average length of the home-to-work trip being 2.7 kilometres, about 50 per cent farther than the average for female vendors and even farther than the average for workers of the similarly located large Barcelona factories, which leads one to think that male vendors used some form of mechanised transport.<sup>17</sup>

When *Born* market turned into a central wholesale fruit and vegetable market in 1921 and its stalls became much more highly capitalised businesses, a radical change took place in its gender composition. Over three-quarters of the 150 market stalls came to be run by men, with women being left clearly in the minority<sup>18</sup>. Moreover, if one adds the total absence of women in the field of loading, unloading and transport, the difference with respect to the retail market halls becomes even greater. About 30 per cent of all the male and female vendors at the stalls in *Born* market during its period as a retail market hall were directly related by kin and women were mainly responsible for bringing these family members together around the market hall (see fig1). These relationships did not

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<sup>16</sup> Addresses of men and women stall holders have been mapped from Libro Registro Mercado del Born, Institut Municipal de Mercats de Barcelona Archive (IMMBA).

<sup>17</sup> For a comparison with journey-to-work patterns of the Interwar working-class world see J.L. Oyón, *La quiebra de la ciudad popular. Espacio urbano, inmigración y anarquismo en la Barcelona de entreguerras, 1914-1936* (Barcelona, 2008), chapter 5; J.L. Oyón, 'The split of a working class city: urban space, immigration and anarchism in inter-war Barcelona, 1914-1936', *Urban History*, 36 (2009), 86-112.

<sup>18</sup> Municipal Barcelona Contemporary Archive, Padrón de habitantes, 1945; Mercado Central de Frutas y Verduras, *Indicador* (Barcelona, 1948).

only exist inside the market hall but also with respect to the food establishments on the streets around the market. As suggested by Miller in the case of the *Revolució* market hall in Barcelona, many of the vendors around the market had a complementary rather than competitive relationship with the market and acquiring a stall was ‘a way of horizontally extending the family’s retail business’.<sup>19</sup> This made the market hall a veritable centre of financial inter-relationships, reproducing on a small scale in its surroundings the blend of activities that had previously characterised the old open-air markets. Indeed, this drawing power of retail commerce sometimes resulted in an infringement of ordinances that restricted the sale of certain products within a set radius.<sup>20</sup>

Accordingly, the neighbourhood market halls were true socialising centres. Since each neighbourhood of a certain size had a market hall, most of the male and female manual workers in the Barcelona of the Interwar period had a very close relationship with the market hall: ‘We have always been neighbourhood people –said a regular female shopper at the market hall in *Sants*, a working class suburb of Barcelona– people of a bustling neighbourhood where everyone says hello to you when you walk down the street, where everyone knows about everybody else, and where people socialise at the market hall and strike up conversations in the grocery shops’.<sup>21</sup> The area around the market halls was also a common place of residence for vendors. Over half the stall-holders of the *Santa Caterina* market hall in Barcelona lived in the city’s Old Town and almost one-third of them lived within a one-block radius of the market. More than two-thirds of the male and female vendors of the *Llibertat* market hall lived in the surrounding *Gràcia* neighbourhood, and about 25 per cent within a one-block radius of the market. The map showing the distribution of male and female vendors of the *Born* market in the period 1876-1921 illustrates the dominance of local proximity factors in Barcelona’s market halls (see fig.2).

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<sup>19</sup> Miller, ‘Las reinas del mercado’, 321. These establishments outside the market hall mostly had male proprietors. In 1932, the shops that showed the largest proportion of female proprietors were: egg shops, 55%; salted fish shops, 35%; small game shops, 33%; grocery shops, 26%; low tax-rate food shops, 24%, and children’s clothing shops, 22%, Archivo de la Corona de Aragón (ACA), Matrícula Industrial, 1932 (Industrial and Commercial Tax Register).

<sup>20</sup> For recent food retailing mapping around municipal markets see *Pla Especial d’Equipament Comercial Alimentari de la Ciutat de Barcelona (PECAB)* (Barcelona, 1990); C. Carreras (ed.), *Atlas comercial de Barcelona* (Barcelona, 2003).

<sup>21</sup> Oyón, *La quiebra*, 329.

### ***Food retail geography: the market halls as functional poles***

Besides its role as socialising centres, early 20th century Barcelona market halls played also an important role as neighbourhoods' retailing cores. The concentration of food stalls in many market halls in city centres, and above all in English markets (where they were open for business even on Saturday nights to attend to many working-class families), did not mean that only food items were on offer. Indeed, a great diversity of domestic articles such as cheap ready-made clothing, crockery, cutlery and toys were available.<sup>22</sup> The market's power to draw shoppers on a daily basis was in no way negligible if one also considers the shops that were located around them. In many cities on the Continent, such as Barcelona, with its particular system of markets distributed throughout the city, this influence could also be noted in the outlying neighbourhoods (see fig.3). The interior of these market halls was more strictly devoted to fresh foods, but in their immediate surroundings there were numerous shops dealing in fresh and non-fresh products (salted fish, dried fruit and nuts, or pasta), cheap taverns and cafés, and shops for domestic consumer activity in the broad sense of the term. As will be seen, in Barcelona the markets played an important role in attracting food shops.<sup>23</sup>

A laborious data processing of the Barcelona Industrial and Commercial Tax Register of 1932, permits to plot Table 1a and the graphs accompanying it. They show about 5,000 retail food vending businesses in two spheres of 150 and 300 metres, respectively, centred around the 18 market halls (see fig.3). The number of points of sale encompassed by the two spheres represents about a 32 per cent of the city's total food establishments. By adding these figures to the total number of food stalls inside the market halls (the 58 per cent mentioned above), the figure of 71 per cent of the total of nearly 11,900 commercial food supply points in the city is obtained.

Marked in each column are the percentage proportions in both spheres of the different kind of food shops (and some other domestic articles, such as ready-made clothing) with respect to the total number of shops of the same type in the whole city. As may be seen, the markets had a notable drawing power in the case of some products. Between 24 per cent and 31 per cent of all the establishments selling meat and general food products (grocery shops) which paid a higher tax rate, and those selling fruit and

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<sup>22</sup> Schmiechen, Carls, *British Market Halls*, 166-175; A. Davies, "Saturday Night Markets in Manchester and Salford, 1840-1939". *Manchester Historical Review*, 1, 2, Autumn-Winter 1987, pp.

<sup>23</sup> Guàrdia, Oyón, *La formació*, 24-28.

vegetables or ready-made clothing, were concentrated within the radius of 150 metres around the 18 market halls distributed throughout the city. If one analyses the radius of up to 300 metres, it is found that the aforementioned percentage rises to considerably higher levels of between 40 per cent and 57 per cent. Although it is not so evident, the drawing power of the market halls also stands out with respect to a second group of establishments (between 13 per cent and 18 per cent in the closest radius and between 30 per cent and 39 per cent in the radius of 300 metres), including the meat shops paying lower tax rates, the establishments selling fresh or salted fish and those selling preserved foods. On the other hand, in a third group of food shops the drawing power does not appear to be so strong (9-12 per cent in the closest radius and 20-25 per cent in the more distant one).

Table 1a does not give any evidence of a correlation between retail shop concentration and tax rates hierarchy, which is to say the price of the foods sold. On studying the maps of the distribution of food shops by product, however, a motive based on this aspect may be intuited. In a layer analysis by product absolutely no clouds of dots appear around the market halls of the working-class neighbourhoods when considering the distribution of the most expensive grocery shops and meat and fresh fish shops. However the polarising power is quite strong in the case of products for which a low tax rate was paid, as the lower-range grocery shops, the establishments selling fruit and vegetables and, although less clearly, the establishments which sold the popular salted fish. Actually the relation between social class neighbourhood and polarising power is clear, as is shown in Table 1b. The first group, that of the neighbourhoods with a high food retail concentration around the market hall, encompasses the neighbourhoods of *Barceloneta*, *Horta*, *Hostafrancs* and *Santa Caterina-Sant Pere*. Between 40 per cent and 70 per cent of all the shops of the surrounding neighbourhood in the radius of 150 metres and between 80 per cent and 100 per cent in the radius of 300 metres were situated around the market hall. All these cases were working-class neighbourhoods in the dense Old Town, one working-class suburb (*Hostafrancs*) and one socially mixed suburb as *Horta*. *Barceloneta* was by far the neighbourhood where the drawing power of the market hall was the strongest. Almost 70 per cent of all the food shops in the neighbourhood were grouped around the market hall and nearly 100 per cent of the 95 shops that have been pinpointed were situated in the radius of 300 metres around the market hall. Its special circumstances as a neighbourhood in a peninsular position,

isolated from the rest of the city's historic centre, doubtless accentuated this drawing power (see fig. 4). In a second group, with a 30 to 40 per cent of neighbourhood's shops concentrated in the 150 metres radius, popular and working-class suburbs were predominant, with the two market halls of *Gràcia* in the lead followed by the more working-class neighbourhoods markets of *Poblenou*, *Sant Andreu* and *Sants*. The last one was the well-to-do suburb of *Galvany*. In contrast to the foregoing groups, the third one includes a set of neighbourhoods characterised by their higher level of wealth or at least by their much more mixed character from the social standpoint. This group, comprised two sub-districts of the city's wealthy *Eixample* district (*Ninot* and *Concepció* markets), the well-to-do suburb of *Galvany*, and the socially highly-mixed neighbourhood around the big market hall of *Boquería*. Only one properly speaking working class suburb, *Clot*, is on this list. Finally in a fourth group which reflects the weakest market hall drawing power there was no presence of working-class neighbourhoods at all. Actually, the overall picture is that wealthy areas of the city showed the weakest market hall drawing power. The food retailing fabric of these areas did not appear to be so strongly conditioned by the presence of the market hall as is the case in the more popular and working-class areas.<sup>24</sup> Along this same line, the absence of this type of commerce in the residential areas of highest status, like the area around *Passeig de Gràcia*, is especially significant.

In conclusion, many of the big and dense popular and working-class neighbourhoods were not only served by a municipal market hall but besides attracted abundant food commerce around it. The small-scale food retailing fabric appears to be inextricably linked to meeting the demand of the working class, just as was affirmed by John Benson and Gareth Shaw. In the case of early twentieth century Barcelona, market halls were a relevant polarising factor of food retail distribution. This was also the picture of early nineteenth century New York markets, as Gergely Baics has pointed out<sup>25</sup>.

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<sup>24</sup> For the social characterisation of the Barcelona neighbourhoods in the Interwar period, see J.L.Oyón, *La quiebra de la ciudad popular. Espacio urbano, inmigración y anarquismo en la Barcelona de entreguerras, 1914-1936* (Barcelona, 2008); "The split of a working-class city: urban space, immigration and anarchism in inter-war Barcelona, 1914-1936", *Urban History*, vo. 36, Part 1, May 2009, 86-112.

<sup>25</sup> J. Benson and G. Shaw, 'Conclusion' in *The Evolution of Retail Systems*, 200; G. Baics, 'Is Acces to Food a Public Good? Meat provisioning in Early New York City, 1790-1820', *Journal of Urban History*, May 25, 2012, 1-26; G. Baics, 'Time and Space: Structures of Urban Household Provisioning', *11<sup>th</sup> International Conference on Urban History* (Prague 29 August-1 September 2012). To be more precise Barcelona's picture would be similar to that of the end of the period studied by Baics with a century time span difference.

### *Local food stores: the backbone of neighbourhoods*

Besides the concentration around public market halls, food business distribution showed an alternative and more sprawling layout driven by local proximity factors. It should not be forgotten that only one-third of the food business recorded in tax records was concentrated within a radius of 300 metres around the market halls: there were entire neighbourhoods that stood outside the market halls' spheres of influence.

Firstly, some shopping streets concentrate a substantial number of food vending establishments.<sup>26</sup> On the one hand, the old roads leading out of Barcelona became axes for shops, as was the case with the old Madrid road, which acted as a high street connecting the neighbourhoods of *Hostafrancs*, *Sants* and *Collblanc* (see fig. 5); the road leading to France, which became the high street of Sant Andreu, and the Mataró road between the nuclei of *Poblenou* and *El Clot*. Other streets of more recent origin have a similar formation, as in the case of Bordeta Road, *Taulat* street in *Poblenou*, or *Saragossa* street in *Sant Gervasi*. The building of tram lines there strengthened their drawing power. In the Eixample, the tram exerted the same attraction on streets that were built *ex novo*, such as *Aribau* street or the eastern stretches of *València* and *Majorca* streets. In some cases these streets crossed market hall areas and the commercial establishments extended all along them in a quite linear arrangement (see fig. 5). In contrast to these dense shopping streets, the city's most central thoroughfares (and their immediate surroundings) had no food shops owing to high rents that only a few establishments could afford. This is the case with the most important Eixample axes as *Passeig de Gràcia*. The very rich residential areas in the affluent suburbs of *Bonanova* and *Tres Torres* tell the same story.

Secondly, there were some very notable commercial concentrations in dense popular and working class areas not served by market halls – a very common situation in many European cities but relatively uncommon in Barcelona. This is the case, for example, of the important popular suburbs of *Poble Sec* and *Camp de l'Arpa*, the *Raval* district and the large residential area between *Gràcia*, *El Clot* and the *Hospital de Sant Pau* which, not having any market hall, possessed a very dense network of food shops (see fig 6). In

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<sup>26</sup> G. Shaw, "Recent Research on the Commercial Structure of 19th-Century British Cities", in D. Denecke, G. Shaw, *Urban Historical Geography. Recent Progress in Britain and Germany* (Cambridge, 1988), 236-242.

the *Raval de Santa Mònica* and the *Sagrada Família* areas, respectively, there were two extremely lively street-peddler markets which, after long and unresolved conflicts with the stall-keepers of the market halls and with the municipal authority, finally became open-air markets –the so called *Mercadet* (little market) of the *Raval de Santa Mònica* and the *Sagrada Família market*.<sup>27</sup>

Lastly, the most recently formed working-class areas of the city, the booming suburbs which arose in the Interwar period, were not only bereft of any type of covered market but moreover had a deficient commercial fabric of food outlets. In these young neighbourhoods –that grew to accommodate the most recent unskilled immigration, which was spatially more segregated and of a more homogeneous working-class character– the maps describing the distribution of food shops provide only a very vague profile. Only the maps of the most modest businesses, those of the grocery shops paying the lowest tax rate, of the most simple meat shops, of the fruit and vegetable shops likewise on the lowest tax-rate level or the salted fish shops give a slight idea of their contours. Except for neighbourhoods like the *Hospital de Sant Pau* suburb, where a certain fabric appears to have been generated, the food business was limited to what was strictly necessary.

### ***Epilogue: a long-term urban asset***

The most notable feature of Barcelona food retailing provision is the enduring vitality of the municipal market system, which continues to be a fundamental asset. In contrast to what was common in the other European cities, when a progressive erosion of the markets was being observed in the more dynamic countries, an active policy was unfolding in this area in Spain.

Between 1930 and 1980 the number of market halls rose abruptly from 18 to 41 in Barcelona, forming a system of evenly distributed facilities open six days a week, which also served the new popular neighbourhoods that had arisen in the peripheries. In the so-called Autarchy period, between 1939 and 1959, which was the most depressive and interventionist phase of the Francoist dictatorship, a decided impetus was lent to the building of markets. The gradual liberalization of the economy and the economic

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<sup>27</sup> Ealham, *Class, Culture and Conflict* and 'La lluita pel carrer'. The photographs by Margaret Michaelis and Gabriel Casas are magnificent witnesses to the street commerce in the Raval district.



development of the 1960s did not halt the expansion of the market system, which grew significantly in both Barcelona and Madrid to serve the districts which had arisen with immigration. In contrast to post-war Europe, which incorporated more advanced commercial formulas in unequal competition with the markets, in Spain the selfsame backwardness of the food retail economy allowed a surprising expansion and consolidation of the public market system especially in the case of Barcelona.

In 1955 the requirements and conditions for the possible installation of private markets were being studied. Indeed, the new regulations approved at the beginning of 1956 simplified the introduction of markets of private construction and operation with reversion to the city council in a pre-established time, as opposed to what had happened with the first generation of markets. This whole process laid the foundations for the most active stage in the construction of markets.<sup>28</sup> Between 1957 and 1977, 18 neighbourhood market halls were built in the areas with the least service. The idea was that all the people of Barcelona should have a market hall at a distance of less than one kilometre from their home<sup>29</sup>. Moreover, as from 1966, the possibility of constructing neighbourhood market halls providing car parking space was systematically considered. This circumstance affected both the new constructions of the expanded network of retailer markets and the renewal of the previously existing ones.<sup>30</sup>

In the 1980s, market halls recovered their prominent role from a very different standpoint. At that time the market halls and their areas of influence still attracted the majority of food purchases. The Barcelona Food Facilities Plan (*PECAB*) adopted the commercial polarities of the market halls as foci to be strengthened in order to restructure a commercial fabric that had entered a serious crisis (see fig.7). The plan also sought to limit the effects of the megastores that were beginning to acquire great importance in Spain. A sustained policy of modernisation of the market halls and their

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<sup>28</sup> Administrative Municipal Archives of Barcelona, Municipal Acts-Plenary, 26 July 1955, fol. 120v, and Municipal Acts-Plenary, 28 April 1956, fol. 54: "We currently have 24 market halls (...) and in relation to Barcelona's one and a half million inhabitants they are insufficient to attend to the population since the proportion is of less than one market per 50,000 inhabitants, whereas a healthy supply policy advises the allotting of a maximum of 20,000 inhabitants to each market. For diverse circumstances (...) the supply system in our city cannot be compared to other systems of large European and American cities. For this reason, considering the difficulties which would be entailed by the construction of the large number of market halls required by the public, this insufficiency should be solved by means of private markets, that is to say, by providing access and channels to private initiative as an element of collaboration in the municipal activity".

<sup>29</sup> Administrative Municipal Archives of Barcelona, Municipal Acts-Plenary, 2 February 1967, fol. 156

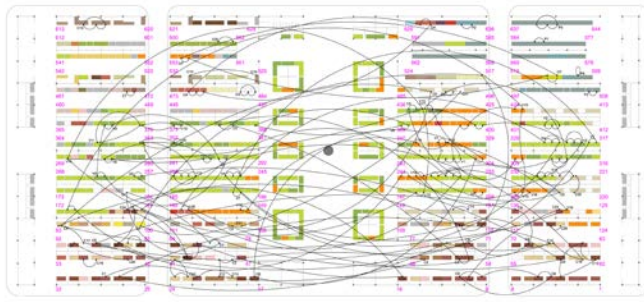
<sup>30</sup> Administrative Municipal Archives of Barcelona, Municipal Acts-Plenary, 4 August 1966, fol. 79 *et seq.*

surroundings has been promoted since then. Their purpose is no longer to contain prices but rather to revitalise the local commercial fabric and, consequently, to bring renewed activity to the neighbourhoods. After a sustained decline since the 1980s, recent information from the Board of Commerce and Consumption of the City Council says that municipal markets retain a share of more than 40 per cent of the total amount of fresh food purchases, and that more than a 90 per cent of total food purchases take place in the same neighbourhood of residence.<sup>31</sup> In this way, in Barcelona the market halls are still today a very active and enduring legacy from the 19th century.

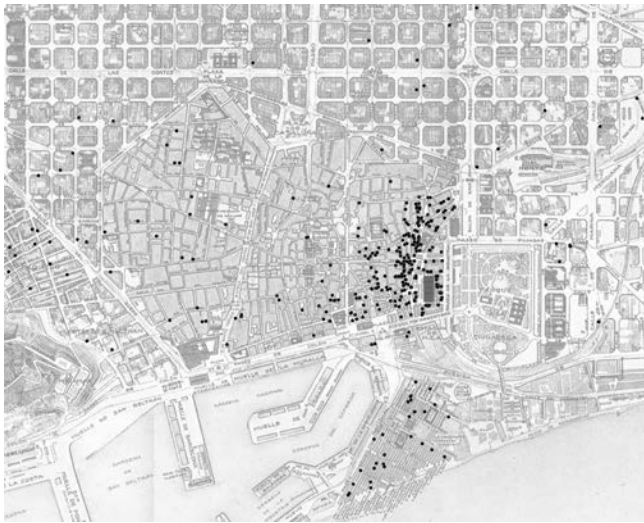
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<sup>31</sup> M. Tarragó, “An axis of the ‘Barcelona model’”, in *Barcelona Metròpolis*, 86, 2012, 59.

## ILLUSTRATIONS



**Figure 1.** Kinship relations inside Born market (1876-1921)

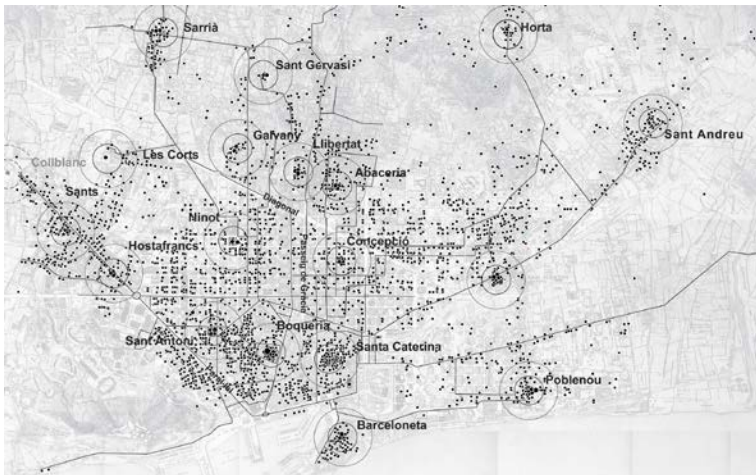


**Figure 2.** Homes of Born market male and female vendors in the central area of Barcelona, 1876-1921.

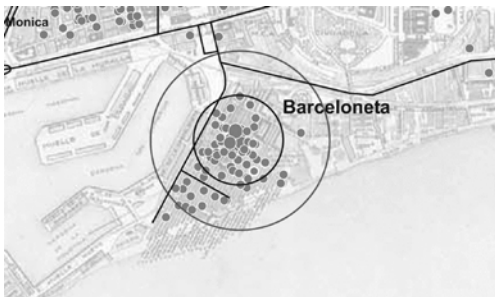
	(a)		(b)	
	< 150 m (%)	< 300 m (%)		
ready-made clothing	30.9	57	Barceloneta	69.5 97.9
grocery shops > 600	30.8	50.8	Horta	> 40 57.1 89.8
fruit and vegetables	27.0	47.1	Hostafrancs	53.8 91
meat shops > 221	24.0	40.4	Santa Caterina	41.7 79.7
meat shops < 221	18.1	34.8	Sarrià	35.2 76.6
fresh fish	15.7	38.6	Llibertat	35.1 70.1
salted fish	13.5	39.0	Abacería Central	33.1 73.5
preserved food > 900	13.9	30.6	Poblenou	30-40 32.4 56.5
preserved food < 900	13.6	38.2	Sant Andreu	31.7 67.6
grocery shops < 600	12.2	24.7	Sants	31.0 66.8
other food shops > 600	11.6	27.9	Galvany	30.3 60.6
other food shops < 600	9.0	20.5	Concepció	28.4 66.2
			Boqueria	20-30 26.6 74.7
			Ninot	30 24.8 47.6
			Clot	24.6 62.3
			Sant Antoni	< 20 19.8 64.6

Les Corts	17.8	64.4
Sant Gervasi	13.6	40.9

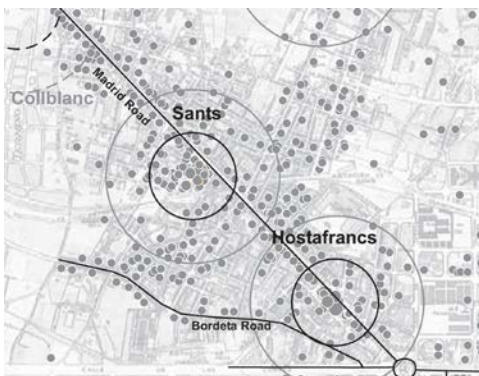
**Table 1.** Distribution of the food shops in the radii around the Barcelona market halls by type of product and by neighbourhood, 1932 (ACA: Industrial and Commercial Tax Register).



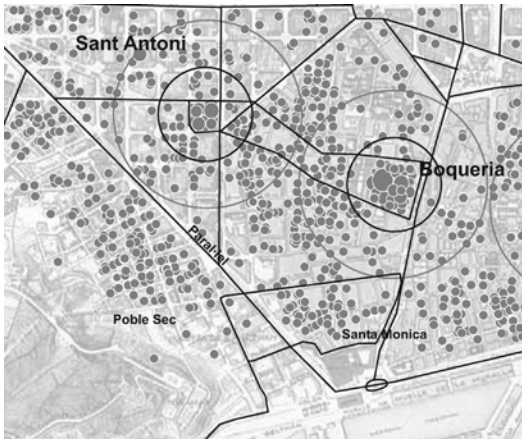
**Figure 3.** Food retailing shops in Barcelona, with the influence areas of the market halls, 1932.



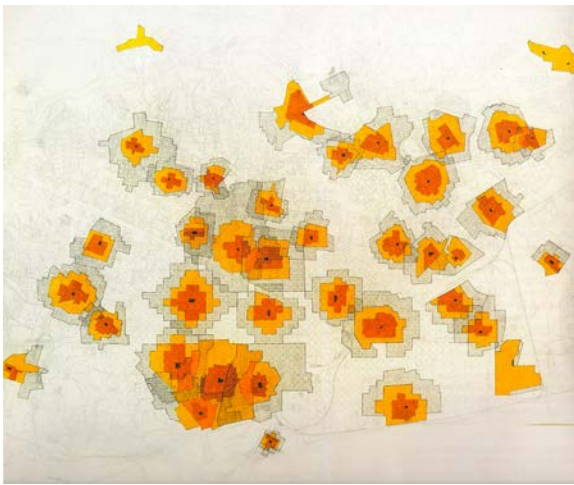
**Figure 4.** Food retailing shops around Barceloneta market hall, 1932.



**Figure 5.** Food retailing shops along Madrid road, crossing the Hostafrancs and Sants market hall areas, 1932.



**Figure 6.** Food retailing shops in the Old Town and Poble Sec areas, 1932.



**Figure 7.** Markets catchment areas (25%, 50% and 75% of costumers), 1985 (*PECAB*)