

Moving marketplaces: Understanding public space from a relational mobility perspective

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ABSTRACT

Research on outdoor retail markets has focused on the diverse ways in which markets constitute public spaces where diversity and social inclusion coexist with conflict and reproduction of inequalities. This approach has prompted existing studies to focus on place-politics in terms of group- and spatially-bounded processes. In this paper, we take a relational mobility perspective to show that markets are not delineated and fixed entities. By approaching them as spaces in-flux, we are sensitive to the ways markets are continuously made and remade anew each operating day. Based on ethnographic fieldwork in four European countries (the Netherlands, Spain, Switzerland and the United Kingdom), we argue that 1) the practice of mobility is key to understand how markets come into being; and 2) a mobility approach opens up new questions regarding (unequal) power relations in the production of public space as it articulates the 'relational politics of (im)mobilities'. Although the locality of markets tends to be emphasised as a sign of quality in governmental and public imaginations, we illustrate that the coming-into-being of markets depends on social, material and institutional relations coming from elsewhere.

1. Introduction

Outdoor retail markets are much more than places of commercial transactions. In policy and academic literatures, they are often framed as social infrastructures, facilitating spontaneous synergies between people of different socio-economic and cultural backgrounds, and giving a sense of the local life and 'soul' of a city (Watson, 2009; Urbact Markets, 2015). For example, the Joseph Rowntree Foundation initiated a research programme on the social value of markets in the United Kingdom (UK), as evidenced by the studies *Markets as spaces for social interaction: Spaces of diversity* (Watson & Studdert, 2006) and *Public spaces, social relations and well-being in East London* (Dines et al., 2006). This interest provoked a recognition by the UK central government in

2009 of markets' local community significance and their inclusive role for diverse social groups.

Gradually, a plethora of market research emerged also outside the UK, in which this academic and governmental discourse of locality and inclusiveness came to dominate urban studies of markets (e.g., Dines, 2007; Hiebert et al., 2015; Janssens & Sezer, 2013; Morales, 2011). These studies took as their object of enquiry specific markets as localities, delimited by the boundaries of particular neighbourhoods or specific organisational structures. Moreover, the value of human encounters that unfold in these allegedly discrete and pre-given spatial entities often went unquestioned with a tendency towards constructing overarching narratives regarding multicultural encounters in markets, which failed to interrogate "the sociocultural context of specific spaces and

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populations [where] textured investigation to make sense of when, where, and how encounters across difference occur" (Watson, 2009: 138).

Although such representations and studies draw attention to the important value of markets, it is also important to recognise that they are predominantly approached from a static and place-based perspective, which conceives of markets as 'bounded containers of value' (Massey, 2001: 16). By so doing, these studies miss to incorporate power-filled social relations and mobility trajectories that extend beyond the physical and organisational boundaries of markets, but nevertheless determine their material, social, political and cultural characteristics (Massey, 1994).

In this paper, we seek to enhance our understanding of markets by applying a mobility lens to explore the diverse ways in which markets are constructed around a 'relational politics of (im)mobilities' (Adey, 2006; Dahinden, 2010). By moving beyond the dominant 'substantialist' (Emirbayer, 1997) or 'sedentarist' (Cresswell, 2002) readings of markets, we argue that emphasising the practice of mobility is key to understand how markets *come into being*. After all, mobilities studies do not merely pay attention to the meanings and doings of mobility, but they rather adhere to a theoretical project that calls for a different way of conceiving of social and spatial relations (Sheller, 2021). From this perspective, we ask how markets are produced by translocal relations and mobility practices. With this question, we particularly focus on the roles of market traders. Through the mobility and presence of traders – their '*territoires circulatoires*' (Tarrius, 2010) – markets are constantly produced and re-produced as public spaces. By exploring how mobilities make and remake markets, we are able to understand the coming-into-being of markets beyond popular territorial representations (i.e., being 'local' sites). In other words, we explore how these specific public spaces rely on translocal, networked spaces.

As will be discussed in more detail in the methodological section, this paper is based on investigations of eight European markets across the Netherlands, Spain, Switzerland and the UK.¹ In each country, we studied an urban and 'not-so-urban' market.² We conducted interviews with institutional stakeholders (government representatives, market managers and associations of market traders and managers), and followed traders during their work activities. We first discuss how markets have been conceptualised as public spaces in contemporary literature. We then outline the mobility approach to the study of markets, together with its critical potential for research on public space in general, and markets in particular. After presenting the methods, we use our ethnographic materials to illustrate how traders build and rebuild outdoor markets through their everyday practices, social relations and mobility patterns. In the discussion and conclusion, we reflect on the implications and limitations of the relational mobility perspective to the study and understanding of public space, and provide insights and ideas for future research.

2. Theories, methods and critiques of existing market research

Markets have existed across the world since towns and cities emerged as centres of trade and commerce, diverse as these have been across time and space (Janssens & Sezer, 2013; Schappo & Van Melik, 2017). In Europe, markets typically occupied the centre of the town – often referred to as the market square – operating as a hub for the

locality and a site for the trade of goods brought in from further afield. With urbanisation growing, many cities saw their outdoor markets move into permanent, covered spaces, often constructed specifically for their use, while the growth of the street and outdoor retail market across the metropolitan landscapes also developed apace.

A growing number of academics has started to consider the importance of outdoor retail markets, not only in economic terms but also in relation to their social and cultural value. Markets have been depicted as quintessential public spaces, where people of different socio-economic and cultural backgrounds can easily interact, thereby fostering forbearance towards others and respect for shared commons (Janssens & Sezer, 2013; Morales, 2011; Watson, 2009). From this perspective, it has been argued that the spatial arrangements of markets – such as the proximity of market stalls, the lack of restraints on entering and exiting the market, and the availability of free places to sit – provide the optimal setting for new encounters, relationships of care and credit to emerge (Dines, 2007). Traders play an important role in enhancing this inclusive nature of markets through their banter, concern for their customers and almost intimate knowledge of some of the daily customers' lives (Watson, 2009). However, there is also evidence of exclusionary mechanisms at the market, where local people resent new migrant traders and customers (Wells & Watson, 2005) and express nostalgia for an earlier imagined time of community and social cohesion (Watson & Wells, 2005). More recent ethnographic studies of markets have also indicated that encounters between people with diverse backgrounds do not necessarily deepen intercultural understanding (Aptekar, 2019; Van Eck, 2021).

This variety of studies has greatly enhanced our understanding of markets as urban infrastructures by celebrating and critiquing the social dynamics of markets and the unequal (discursive) power relations undergirding them. However, they are predominantly place-based studies (Van Melik & Spierings, 2020), approaching markets as fixed and closed localities with clear demarcations in space and time, and with their own distinct spatial designs, economics and social dynamics. Such a fairly "essentialist and bounded" focus (Cresswell, 2002: 12) a priori draws attention to people and institutions in particular localities, thereby obscuring the functions of outside connections and trajectories as forces shaping the identity of markets.

Most of the market studies are indeed ethnographies of either *groups* (market traders or street vendors firmly located in specific locations) or *places* (physically bounded markets in specific locations, such as cities, districts or neighbourhoods). Markets in these ethnographic writings (with notable exceptions such as Coles (2014); Etzold (2016); Low (2014); Schappo & Van Melik (2017)) have been equated with ethnographic locales, with a predilection for their locally-emplaced characteristics that have received most, if not all, of the research attention (Rodman, 1992). *Group-based* ethnographies primarily concern themselves with the modes of conduct, habits, beliefs and interactions of a set of individuals, often based on shared social attributes such as gender, race, socio-economic status or religion (Desmond, 2014). An example is Duneier's (1999) study of homeless African American street vendors selling 'black' books at the sidewalks of Greenwich Village, New York City. His work draws a detailed portrait of the social organisation of this specific *group* at a specific *location* in the city.

Place-based ethnographies, in turn, concern themselves with the social organisation, structures and dynamics of specific localities. For example, De La Pradella's (2006) *Market Day in Provence* is an ethnography of a weekly market in Carpentras, a small town near the French city Avignon. Conceiving of this market as a "distinctly separate social world, confined to very precise places and times", and "nothing less than the sum of [...] unlikely encounters in place" (De La Pradella, 1995: 364, 366), she tried to understand the type of relations that people have in this 'distinctive social world', and how their interactions characterise the intrinsic qualities of a spatially-confined market. Similarly, Watson (2009) conducted an ethnography of eight marketplaces throughout the UK in order to explore the everyday social interactions as they are

¹ Moving MarketPlaces (MMP, see: <https://fass.open.ac.uk/research/projects/moving-marketplaces>). MMP is financially supported by the HERA Joint Research Programme (www.heranet.info) which is co-funded by NWO, AHRC, AEI, SNF and the European Commission through Horizon 2020 [grant number: Hera.2.015].

² We use the term 'not-so-urban' to refer to markets in mid-sized towns and villages, which can neither be considered very urban (dense, diverse) nor very rural.

“enacted in markets which [have] been little recognised by urban analysts and policymakers” (Watson, 2009: 1579, emphasis added).

The view of markets as ‘local’ in the examples discussed above draws on a number of tropes: the local as bounded and delineated, as fixed in time and space, and as knowable from the outside. Although group- and place-based studies have helped to push research on markets forward, they have also adopted (and helped to perpetuate) a substantialist and sedentarist perspective on the social reality of public space. The problem of a ‘substantialist’ (Emirbayer, 1997) way of conceptualising public space is not that locally-bounded groups and places “do not work as ethnographic objects; it is that they work *too well*” (Desmond, 2014: 551, original emphasis). It imposes atomistic categories onto a world consisting of a plethora of translocal interconnections. Substantialist understandings therefore miss the social, economic, political and institutional relations that extend far beyond the physical limits of markets, but which nevertheless constitute their specific nature at specific times (Schappo & Van Melik, 2017). Moreover, these limited representations, or ‘snapshots’ (Emirbayer, 1997), of the structures in which markets are embedded also elide the dynamic processes and mobile trajectories through which these relations are continuously enacted. Indeed, as Foucault (1980: 70) lamented, the “fixed, the undialectical, [and] the immobile” are inherently intertwined in such representations of place. Therefore, substantialist representations also run the risk of morphing into sedentarist representations of public spaces.

In order to overcome these limitations, we outline an ontological ground that starts from the mobilities turn in social science (Adey, 2006; Cresswell, 2010; Sheller, 2021; Sheller & Urry, 2006) which – without de-prioritising that markets are unique and distinct places – emphasises that “all places are tied into at least thin networks of connections that stretch beyond each such place and mean that nowhere can be an ‘island’ ...” (Sheller & Urry, 2006: 209). Put simply, this view of locality stresses its connections with the wider world.

3. Towards a relational understanding of im/mobility in the production of markets

Massey (2001: 16) has argued that the vision of places as ‘bounded containers of values’ is inherently political, as “seeing space as a surface precisely deprives others of their own histories.” As those others simply become figures to be placed within pre-defined places, it obscures the intricate and often uneven ways in which different actors, with their specific translocal relations and mobility trajectories, continuously contribute to the everyday production of these places (Darling, 2009). Following Massey, we argue that markets should not simply be framed and studied as self-subsistent entities which come ‘preformed’ as fundamental units of analysis or targets for policy interventions and campaigns. Rather, research should acknowledge that markets are inherently mobile spaces where flows of people and goods are temporarily ‘throwntogether’ (Massey, 2002). Such a focus on the everyday politics of mobility is quite common in research on street vending practices (e.g., Boonjubun, 2017; Ojeda & Pino, 2019), but hardly used with respect to outdoor retail markets.

With our focus on the coming-into-being of markets we do not approach markets as finalised and static social-spatial entities. We rather start from the apprehensions of space and place that Thrift defines as ‘movement-space’. By quoting Carter (1992), Thrift (2008: 97) writes that movement-space:

“recognises space as folded and animate because everything can be framed as in perpetual movement: the shape of this space is that of a river: not the surveyor’s river which is simply a gap on the map, a frozen interval, but the river as serpentine motion, as an evolving pattern of vortices, expanding and collapsing”.

Yet, as mobilities scholars remind us, a mobility lens does not simply mean that everything is liquid or mobile in equal terms (Urry, 2007; Sheller, 2021). Especially the work of Adey (2006) has highlighted the

relationality of mobilities and immobilities. He provides a critical addition to Thrift’s idea of movement-space. Adey argues that although places are indeed constituted by perpetual movements, they can still appear in stable and immobile statuses. We therefore need to consider all forms of mobilities and immobilities in differential ways: “There is never any absolute immobility, but only mobilities which we mistake for immobility, what could be called relative mobilities” (Adey, 2006: 83). This means that there is an inherent politics in the differences and relatedness of mobilities and immobilities, which Adey has called the ‘relational politics of (im)mobilities’.

Markets, then, should be understood as the temporary and *relative* immobile emplacements of continuously unfolding relations between different sites and diverse mobilities across these sites. From this perspective, Coles (2014) has argued that for a market to become a market, all its social and material elements must continuously be mobilised, emplaced, arranged and re-arranged. He concludes that a market is an “assembly of assemblages” (Coles, 2014: 518). Hence, mobility trajectories and emplacements coexist and inherently constitute each other. This so-called im/mobility perspective challenges researchers to become more sensitive to the “political and power-ridden character of im/mobility” (Schapendonk & Steel, 2014: 264) that shapes the everyday (re-) production of markets in their physical, social, economic and cultural dimensions.

By applying this relational lens, we can expect that the socio-spatial and cultural coming-into-being of markets depends upon a set of critical conditions, among which 1) the different positions that producers of markets take in social space; 2) the social and geographical trajectories of (im)mobilities they develop; 3) their specific configurations of social, economic, cultural and symbolic capital that emerge from these trajectories (Bourdieu, 1985); 4) their encounters with constraining and enabling multi-level regulations; and 5) the associated inequalities in mobility practices that unfold in these translocal contexts. Indeed, Etzold (2016) has shown how the translocal support networks that market traders draw upon, as well as their mobility trajectories between and across different sites in these networks, inevitably shape their capacities in “making new spatial niches that are flexible and fluid, and which serve crucial social and economic functions in the city” (Etzold, 2016: 181).

This relational mobility perspective does not only challenge the ‘local’ gaze in conventional approaches to study markets, but is also more sensitive to the exclusionary mechanisms that feed into the mobility-locality nexus (Dahinden, 2010). Before we illustrate this approach with insights from our ethnographic fieldwork, we briefly outline our research design and methods.

4. Research design and methods

This study is part of an international research collaboration which comprises an ethnographic study of outdoor retail markets in four European countries: the Netherlands, Spain, Switzerland and the United Kingdom.¹ In each country, we look at an urban market (Amsterdam, Barcelona, Zürich and London) and at a market in a not-so-urban context.² In order to guarantee the anonymity of our research participants, we neither mention the specific names of the urban markets, nor do we provide the names of the sites in which the not-so-urban markets are embedded, given the sometimes small number of traders working there.

Adopting a relational ethnographic approach (Desmond, 2014), we study these eight markets not as group- or place-based ethnographic locales, but instead as *entry points* of analysis from where the research field gradually expands by means of following the mobility practices of traders. As such, our research changes from a local ethnography of multiple markets into a translocal ethnography that includes more than the initial eight markets. Consequently, the research is not compelled by the logic of comparison, but instead puts questions to “*emergent* object[s] of study whose contours, sites, and relationships are not known

beforehand, but are themselves a contribution of making an account that has different, *complexly connected* real-world sites of investigation” (Marcus, 1995: 102, emphasis added).

To account for the variability in the cultural, political and institutional contexts that influence both the mobility of traders and their temporal emplacements in markets, we have selected urban and not-so-urban markets in each of the four countries. The selected markets are characterized by different socio-economic and cultural compositions of traders, as well as rules and regulations that pertain to market trading (between and within the countries). Although not-so-urban markets are not necessarily smaller than urban markets (e.g., the not-so-urban market in Spain has a similar size as the market in Amsterdam), the former are often held only once or twice per week, whereas the latter are often held multiple times per week. This means that traders who mainly operate at not-so-urban markets are often compelled to move between different markets in different towns/cities, whereas traders who work and live in cities are often mobile between the same urban markets that are held multiple times per week. It is exactly the differences in these contexts that enabled us to understand what generates the structure and dynamics of particular sets of relations and (im)mobilities that bring markets into being.

In order to methodologically organize the complexity of the coming-into-being of markets, we have made use of two research approaches, encapsulating different methods (Fig. 1).

First, we have applied a relative in situ ethnography of the eight cases (Markets A, B, C, etc.) that concentrates on the everyday practices and interactions that traders have with diverse set of visitors and institutional actors (such as market managers) during their temporary emplacements in markets. The markets are visualized as whirls to highlight the undergoing changes and movements of these places (Breines, Menet, & Schapendonk, 2021). The in situ approach forms a way to come into contact, and stay in touch, with traders and to gain an understanding of their place-making activities. Between the summer of 2019 and spring of

2021, we could not visit the markets regularly every month because of the COVID-19 pandemic, but stayed in touch with traders over the phone instead when we were unable to physically move to the markets. When we were able to visit the market, we stayed for approximately 5 h. During the market visits, we observed the everyday practices on the markets, had repeated talks with traders and market managers, and took notes which we expanded into detailed fieldnotes after having left the market.

Second, and inherently intertwined, we applied an *in movement* approach by actually following traders in their navigation of different localities, as indicated by the arrows in Fig. 1. As outlined elsewhere (Breines, Menet, & Schapendonk, 2021), this following-as-method is not always dynamic and on the move, but also based on forms of relative immobility, such as standing next to traders while helping them selling products from their stalls. Following traders to, from and across markets is thus reliant upon mobilities (across and beyond markets) and relative immobilities (temporary emplacements in markets) that are shaped by diverse rhythms (Cresswell, 2010). Following movements beyond the markets, such as to wholesale markets and storerooms where traders pick up and deposit their products, unhides the performativities, labour practices and oftentimes unequal relations that lie behind the façade of markets but simultaneously contribute to their characteristics and identities.

Overall, we conducted 52 semi-structured interviews with traders and 44 semi-structured interviews with institutional actors, including market managers, government representatives and representatives of traders' and market managers' associations. During interviews with traders, we made use of the same topic list in each of the four countries, covering topics such as the professional background of traders; the type of relations they have developed with customers and other traders; the everyday activities before, during and after a market day; the differences and similarities between different market locations; their support networks; experiences of being mobile; and finally their personal

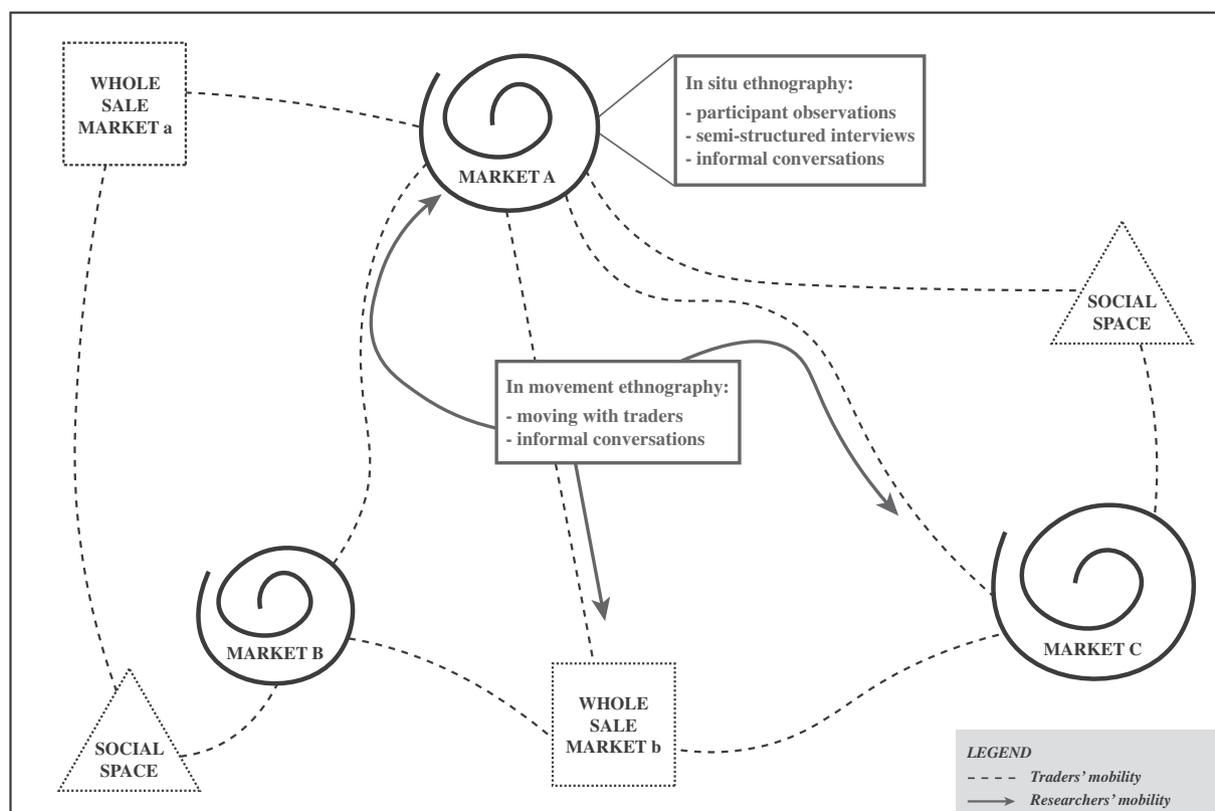


Fig. 1. Visualization of research approaches and deployed methods.

characteristics. For the interviews with institutional actors, we also made use of standardised topics, covering the respondents' assessments of rules and regulations pertaining to markets; the choice of certain policies over others; and the relationship between policies and the everyday activities of traders in and beyond the markets.

Although the effects of the pandemic on marketplaces is the focus of another paper (Van Eck, Van Melik, & Schapendonk, 2020), and most of our data stem from fieldwork activities before the pandemic emerged, we will also briefly discuss below how it has affected the production of markets.

5. Translocal and mobile markets: representations and practices

The markets across the four countries are often represented as 'local' sites in dominant public imaginations, imbued with meaning and eliciting allegiance and support. They are described as local (or at least regional) in terms of the origins of traders and customers and the products sold. Consequently, and echoing academic writings, markets are seen as particularly local events that allow customers to meet each other on market days in close physical proximity. The Love your Local Market (LYLM) campaign in the UK is very telling in this respect. First organised by the National Association of British Markets Authorities (NABMA) as a strategy to celebrate wholesale and retail (street or covered) markets in the UK in 2012, it has grown into a global annual

event held in the month of May, organised in 24 different countries (NABMA, 2020). The locality of markets is strongly emphasised in the campaign. For example, the 2018 edition's theme *Markets: close to your heart* focused on the "idea of proximity of the markets in terms of location, personal contact with traders and with products" (WUWM, 2018).

Local government officials do not only represent markets as 'local' sites in the aim to foster social conviviality and interactions between town and city residents (e.g., see Municipality of Amsterdam, 2018), but they also link it to ideas of ecological sustainability, food security, freshness and quality. Fig. 2 shows how the municipality of Zürich advertises markets as the central nodes of local food systems where residents can buy "vegetables from the region", which would contribute to an environmentally friendly lifestyle.

Yet, as Born and Purcell (2006) critically insist, we should not take such local representations at face value, but rather approach them as particular *goals* that depend on the agendas of those empowered by a scalar strategy that can have a range of outcomes, both good and bad. With reference to the latter, Watson and Wells (2005) have shown how the conflation of locality with community in the Poppy Street Market in London produces nostalgic narratives and collective memories that mask the very real relations on which 'local' markets are based. Upon closer inspection, it indeed turns out that markets might *seem* local and durable to the people who advertise and experience them, but that such



Fig. 2. Advertisement of Zürich's campaign (summer 2019) for an environmentally friendly lifestyle, including a focus on sustainable products sold. Translation: "Zürich climate hero. Pierre buys vegetables from the region" Source: Authors.

representations and imaginations eclipse the diverse ways in which the 'local' is produced and embodied through the translocal relations and mobility patterns of traders and their products (Low, 2014).

Interestingly, many of the implicit relations and ordered mobilities have clearly been revealed by rupturing events, which Cresswell and Martin (2012) have called 'turbulence'. For our market research, as for other mobility-related research (Sheller, 2021), the destabilising situation of COVID-19 has articulated the importance of mobilities in the production of markets. Although the markets in each of the countries were initially closed during the first lockdowns in the spring of 2020, it became clear to governments that markets had a role to play in providing essential foods to the local community. Many were allowed to reopen under strict sanitary conditions and with a limited number of stalls, all of which predominantly provided 'essential' products, mostly food (Van Eck, Van Melik, & Schapendonk, 2020). Upon the reopening of markets, mobility politics clearly unfolded. For instance, only food traders living in our not-so-urban Spanish case were allowed to trade during the lockdown period in order to reduce interregional mobility. During the first partial curtailment of the imposed health measures, when only 25% of the stalls were allowed to set up, the local government followed the same principle of local proximity: traders from the city and its surrounding region were the first ones to recuperate their licenses to sell at the market, followed by the traders from further off regions. The aim to reduce mobility thus reconfigured the 'local' character of the market, and favoured local traders over sellers from further away who were approached as 'potential contaminators'.

The case of the market in Barcelona, in turn, highlighted the trans-local character of its visitors. With tourism coming to a complete standstill, the traders' association launched a strong media campaign during the pandemic to represent the market as a 'neighbourhood market', something which it had never really been as it mainly used to cater to tourists. The interviewed market manager expressed his hope that this would "teach traders" to redraw their attention to neighbourhood residents whose loyalty they now solely relied upon, even if their purchasing capacity is lower than that of tourists.

The COVID-19 pandemic has therefore clearly revealed how markets, while being represented as local, are simultaneously temporary nodes in translocal mobility networks that stretch beyond urban, regional and sometimes even national boundaries. Below, we further substantiate this claim by means of three empirical registers that show how the local appearances of markets are proactively produced through 1) traders' performances, as well as their mobilities 2) within and 3) beyond the physical demarcations of markets.

5.1. Performed locality

We observed interesting discrepancies between the locality of the trader and her/his commodities: 'local' traders can sell 'exotic' products from all over the world, and, vice versa, 'local' products can be sold by seemingly 'non-local' traders. A Dutch cheese seller on a UK market, for example, only sells British cheese, as the demand for Dutch cheese is too limited. He also had requests from people in another market to sell a special cheese that is local to that town, but finds that he is not able to sell that cheese elsewhere because he is moving between markets five days a week. As such, he has to find a balance between offering cheese that is neither too local (specific town) or not local enough (from a different country).

Consequently, 'locality' is not something fixed, but is consciously considered, negotiated and performed. Traders use several strategies to show how 'close' they are to their customers, and often emphasise and re-articulate how markets are different from supermarkets in this social and affective sense. First, we found in different markets across the four countries that the transnational linkages of fruit and vegetables are rendered invisible by displaying them in crates, instead of in their original wholesale packages. Second, traders often perform proximity to their clients by means of the products they give away for free. In one of

the Swiss markets, for example, vegetable traders provide customers with some extra parsley, which is grown in the surrounding regions. Third, as especially became apparent in Switzerland as well, traders attach their family names and residence addresses – often identifiable as Swiss – to their market stalls. 'Locality', here, is stretched to the national level in order to create the idea of authentic products as a sign of quality.

We also found evidence of the conscious production of more trans-local 'locality', where traders do not sell local products, but, as we would like to call it, 'exotic' local products from elsewhere. In our London case, two women whose families came from Turkey, but who proudly assert their Britishness, nevertheless draw on their cultural heritage to sell stuffed Turkish breads thus creating, and exploiting, their family's migrant status to create an 'exotic' product. A similar strategy is performed by a trader who works on a Zürich market and imports fruit from her country of origin, Cameroon. During the interactions with her customers, she often emphasises her direct links to Cameroon, for example by demonstrating her Swiss clientele how Cameroonian fruit have to be cut. Instead of hiding transnationality, traders can thus also emphasise their transnational links on purpose by branding the products as 'exotic'. Also in Barcelona we saw that traders are selling their products through a double strategy: some advertise their localness (e.g., ham, cheese), while others advertise their exotic products (e.g., fruit from all over the world, often sold as juices). These examples illustrate how the representation of markets as being local is actively produced and performed by traders, among others by creating the idea of an 'exotic' local.

5.2. Mobilities at the market

Aside from selling the 'locality' of products, we have also looked at different types of spatial practices through which markets come into being. From this perspective, we were able to observe how markets are continuously produced through hard labour and skills in, across and beyond markets. In this process, market traders are important actors; they arrive early in the morning to set up their market pitches, often consisting of trailers or tables, and dismantle them at the end of the market day. At a microscale level, the infrastructure of the market is constantly being modified and transformed, so that the different areas surrounding the market stalls are in a dynamic process of being refashioned and remodelled. The following excerpt of the fieldnotes taken on a market in Amsterdam illustrates these micro-mobilities "that compose and recompose these becomings" (Adey, 2006: 80) of markets:

At the end of the market day, market traders walk back and forth between their stalls and the delivery vans which are parked at the other end of the market square. Carrying hand trucks with them, they continuously pick up and deposit cardboard pallets, packed with apples, mangos, lemons, tomatoes and mandarins. A man, pushing forward two waste containers on a trolley, tries to avoid the visitors thronging into and out the shops that directly surround the market square. I am standing behind a market stall near the office of the market managers, where a young boy helping his dad is trying to stack the blue baskets of vegetables, which have been emptied out during the day. He immediately stops with this activity when he notices that a group of customers has slowly gathered around the stall. Customers are pulling off plastic bags to fill them with fruit and vegetables. The boy shortly interacts with them, handles the sale skilfully, and resumes his earlier activity. Two male traders who also sell fruit and vegetables immediately next to the boy are trying to fasten the empty fruit baskets with cable tie behind their market pitch. When a customer approaches, he immediately cries his wares: "Two kilos for one euro!" The market manager, walking one of the regulars 'rounds' to supervise the market activities, immediately warns the trader: "I've finally caught you, no shouting!" The trader laughs and retorts: "If you could just help me packing all the stuff,

man!” The men engage in a lively conversation that I cannot hear. Traders almost never stand still.

This illustration clearly supports Coles' (2014) description of a market as an assembly of assemblages, characterized by different ‘perpetual movements’ that continuously relate to, and act on, each other (Thrift, 2008). When we take a step back and approach markets as a whole, the regularity and rhythms of assembling and disassembling may give an initial impression of fixity, while, as we have shown above, the actual practices and performativities behind the scenes are far from fixed.

Moreover, as we focus on outdoor markets without permanent (covered) stalls, the traders in our research are also inherently mobile between markets. Most of the traders do not have a fixed location on the market where they regularly return to. Consequently, what at first sight might look like the same market each day actually consists of different socio-spatial constellations. Most of the traders in Amsterdam, for example, work on different markets in the city during the week. This especially applies to traders who are so-called ‘applicants’. In contrast to ‘permanent stall holders’, applicants do not have the ‘right’ (depending on their length of registration as a trader) to sell their products on reserved market spots that are specifically allocated to them. This means that applicants have to participate in an early-morning ritual each day, during which free market spots that have not yet been occupied by ‘permanent place holders’ are allocated to them by market manager(s). When applicants are too late, or when all free spaces are already occupied, they have to (re-)pack their materials and products, and move to another market in the city, thereby constituting diverse mobility trajectories between markets.

5.3. Mobilities beyond the market

The practices of traders do not only consist of (micro-) mobilities in and between the temporal emplacements of different markets as illustrated above, but they also stretch beyond them. This means that mobile traders – no matter whether their trajectories are rural-urban, urban-urban, or even international – all move through different socio-physical spaces and across administrative boundaries. They are situated, as Etzold (2017: 52–53) writes, in a translocal social field, which includes “quite different social settings and stretches over multiple places, and which is (re)produced by personal relations, organisational networks and systemic interdependencies”.

By following traders beyond the markets where they sell their products, it has become clear that the wholesale market constitutes an important place in the translocal networks of traders (see also Fig. 1). Starting the day at 2.30 am in the morning, one of the UK-based researchers helped a fruit and vegetable trader to pick up his fresh produce before going to the market. Almost five and a half hours of selecting, observing and purchasing fresh produce precedes the actual activity of trading on the market. Moreover, it became clear that wholesale markets are important meeting sites for traders themselves, where they socialise with each other and get help from friends and family members to assemble and transport the products. This help is important, since wholesale markets can be located far away from the homes where traders live, and the markets where they sell. Furthermore, for fruit and vegetable traders who start working at night and continue until the following afternoon when markets close, the interaction with other traders at the wholesale market adds an important social element to their otherwise intense working day:

After dropping off the produce at the market stall, we drive back to the wholesale market for breakfast in the Turkish-run cafe. I sit down with the stall owner and five other guys. The trader has been having breakfast with some of them for 30 years. There is a good atmosphere - laughing and joking. They talk about business, the bad weather, good quality pineapples, and so on. The stall owner explains that if

he doesn't sit down for breakfast to spend time with them, there won't be any time left to sit and relax. The rest of the day is very busy so it's important for him to spend this hour in the morning with his friends.

Through social relations and resources, traders are enabled to be “emplaced at multiple sites” (Etzold, 2016: 170). A Dutch flower vendor who operates at different markets during the week, and even during certain days, illustrates this form of ‘simultaneously situatedness’. Every Friday in the early morning, the trader buys his supply of flowers on an online auction. The wholesale market itself is located 160 km away from his home. To be able to combine his working day at the market with the long journey to the wholesale market to pick up the supply of flowers for the next week, he gets help from family members and employees. After the trader has made his orders, his brother-in-law drives in a big truck to the wholesale market. During the same time period, one of his employees starts setting up the stall at the market where he will eventually join her to sell flowers in the afternoon. Having time left through the help of his brother-in-law and employee, the flower vendor can pick up new bouquets in the morning, which are carefully made by his sister a day earlier.

Both examples illustrate the chains of goods that are embedded in social relations, which stretch over multiple places and quite different social settings (Etzold, 2017). These social relations also stretch beyond national borders, as the following excerpt from an interview with a Senegalese-Spanish trader illustrates:

I buy some of the things in Terrassa [town close to Barcelona] – wallets, belts. Some of the products I sell come from wholesale markets in Barcelona [...] In Africa we buy bags, necklaces backpacks and belt pouches [...] I collaborate with my companions. We have friends [in Africa] who help us with obtaining the products and arranging the paperwork. Here in Barcelona we speak Spanish or Catalan to get stuff. In Africa we have a friend who speaks French or Mandinka in order to get our things here.

The excerpt above makes clear that the translocal networks differ between traders and are highly dependent upon their overall volume and structure of social, economic and cultural capitals. Traders who have less investment capital to hire employees and/or to buy suitable transport vehicles, or those who cannot count on the help of family or friends, are constrained in the possibilities to obtain products or to trade at multiple markets. It is in this sense, as Bourdieu (2018: 107) has eloquently stated, that “[s]ocial space tends to retranslate itself, in a more or less direct manner, into physical space in the form of a definite distributional arrangement of agents and properties”.

Furthermore, the opportunities and decisions of traders to be multiple emplaced at different markets also depend on their perceptions, experiences and embodiments of being mobile. Reflecting on his mobility trajectories, a Spanish trader explained in an interview:

For me, driving is not really tiring because all the markets where I sell are located in this region. [But] people who sell at Granollers, for example, say that it [travelling] is really exhausting, because you have to go there at four in the morning. The market almost occupies the whole city and the streets are narrow. In order to be able to access the market, you have to leave very early. And that, for sure, kills you [és una matada].

It follows that traders endowed with unequal chances of access to markets due to their differences in physical mobility (chances which, as we empirically observe, are defined in relation to the distribution of socially available goods and services), represent a balance of social struggles over what Bourdieu (2018: 110) has called ‘profits of space’, and Adey (2006) has labelled as the ‘relational politics of (im)mobilities’. One trader's mobility that enables her or his appropriation of a stall on the market, is the other trader's slowness: “[s]peeds, slownesses, and

immobilities are all related in ways that are thoroughly infused with power and its distribution" (Cresswell, 2010: 21).

6. Discussion and conclusion

In this article, we have advanced a relational mobility perspective to understand the coming-into-being of public spaces by taking outdoor retail markets as our object of study. By so doing, we have broadened and expanded the horizons of conventional ethnographic approaches to the study of public space, which are often grounded in group- and place-based ontologies and epistemologies. Through our ethnographic data, we have shown that markets are undoubtedly local places that have economic, social and cultural significance to local communities (Janssens & Sezer, 2013; Morales, 2011; Watson, 2009).

Yet, this locality should not be understood in terms of group or spatial boundedness, but instead as a form of *temporal emplacement*. Understanding temporal emplacement necessarily entails an exploration of how different mobilities – such as those of traders, auctioneers, wholesale agents, market managers, food processors, etc. – co-constitute the localities of markets, and, vice versa, how particular material, institutional and symbolic conditions of localities (such as the physical infrastructure, rules and regulations, representations and historical legacies) affect mobilities. Studying these entanglements allows to understand, and ultimately uncover, the (im)mobilities politics and power-ridden interactions behind the facades of seemingly 'local' public spaces, thereby opening up new research questions beyond conventional approaches.

Our ethnographic findings show that the locality of markets tends to be emphasised as a sign of quality in policy and public imaginations. This confirms Thrift's (2008: 4) argument that within both public and academic discourses on place and space, "a hardly problematised sphere of representation" has allowed to take precedence over lived experiences and socio-spatial practices. The production of space has been colonised by institutionalised images and symbols of locality that thereby regulate – and most importantly obfuscate – its actual *translocal* dynamics, usages or occupations. In terms of products sold and transnational networks that traders mobilise, markets are not as local as often imagined. Instead, the coming-into-being of markets depends on social, material and institutional relations coming from elsewhere.

Up to this point, we have been concerned with the theoretical advantages of a relational mobility perspective to the study of public space. Yet, this new approach also brings limitations. Following the mobilities and social, material and institutional relations that run 'into' and 'out from' places necessarily means that the ethnographic sample broadens to include new relations in the mobility networks. We have argued throughout the article that the boundaries of markets cannot be established a priori; if they exist at all, they are discovered throughout the course of fieldwork (Desmond, 2014; Marcus, 1995). In order to methodologically organize the study of multiple mobility trajectories that constitute public space, we have decided to follow the core actors in this process: the market traders. However, future ethnographers could bring together more connections by analyzing other mobilities, such as those of products (e.g., Bestor, 2001) and policies (e.g., Van Eck, Van Melik, & Schapendonk, 2023) that constitute markets. And another fieldwork, in turn, could give more empirically rich accounts of the power-ridden entanglements of (im)mobilities, for example by taking fewer case studies as starting points of analysis.

From here, we must realise how not only markets but also other types of public spaces, such as streets, parks and community gardens, "appear in incredibly mobile and wave-like ways" (Adey, 2006: 91). This position has complications when we depart from the initial position that public spaces are important sites of everyday encounters, social interactions and civic becoming. As the nature of public spaces presupposes *translocal* relations and mobility trajectories that extend beyond their temporary emplacements, it follows that opportunities for equal participation are intrinsically tied to the *translocal* livelihoods of

their everyday producers and consumers. By recognising the unequal power relations inherent to the 'relational politics of (im)mobilities' that lay behind the directly observable dynamics of public space, equal participation in public space becomes centrally a matter of ensuring equity of provision of the means of not only access to place, as Amin (2008) argues, but also of mobility *before* access or emplacement can be reached.

Author statement

Moving MarketPlaces (MMP) has involved 10 people – five established academics and five research fellows. This has been a remarkably collaborative team, where each of the individuals have contributed to the research outputs and discussion in different ways. Rather than follow the usual academic practice of authorship being attributed alphabetically or in proportion to specific contribution, we have decided to publish some of our outputs under the collective author MMP. This decision is to reflect the different and valuable contribution of all team members and also to challenge the individualism of some academic practice.

CRedit authorship contribution statement

Emil Van Eck: Conceptualization, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing, Investigation. **Sophie Watson:** Conceptualization, Writing – original draft, Project administration, Supervision. **Rianne Van Melik:** Conceptualization, Writing – original draft, Project administration, Funding acquisition. **Markus Breines:** Conceptualization, Investigation, Formal analysis, Resources. **Janine Dahinden:** Conceptualization, Methodology, Writing – review & editing, Supervision. **Gunvor Jónsson:** Conceptualization, Investigation, Formal analysis, Resources. **Maria Lindmäe:** Conceptualization, Investigation, Formal analysis, Resources. **Marco Madella:** Conceptualization, Project administration, Supervision. **Joanna Menet:** Conceptualization, Investigation, Formal analysis, Resources. **Joris Schapendonk:** Conceptualization, Methodology, Visualization, Funding acquisition.

Declaration of competing interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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