

Municipal markets hall: a network of proximity spaces

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Cities have always taken shape alongside major expansion or redevelopment projects through smaller-scale interventions repeated over time, forming a recognisable network within the urban fabric. This practice has only recently regained importance, engaging local authorities and influencing design culture. Rather than large-scale services, we are thinking of smaller-scale initiatives, amongst which covered municipal markets play a strategic role.

Developing from a long-standing tradition of periodic markets, street trading, and the permanent sale of specific product categories, they were standardised at the beginning of the last century, primarily to enable the retail sale of essential goods at controlled prices.

In many cities, they have taken the form of a network of small, distinctive buildings spread across the area. Beyond their architectural quality, these buildings have figuratively defined focal points that have structured social relations, the urban fabric, and the shared use of parts of the city. Often accompanying the progressive expansion of cities, they have reflected the specific characteristics of the resident population, even though they have lost their effectiveness over time.

For several years now, a process of regeneration has been underway, starting with the restoration of the buildings themselves. This process aims to trigger the revitalisation of the urban fabric and the communities that inhabit it through participatory processes. The idea is to build a system of activities around commercial functions that are deeply rooted in the local context. These processes are implemented through small-scale interventions that engage with existing buildings, using lightweight, often reversible installations and equipment designed in close consultation with users.

Against the backdrop of a historical review, this contribution seeks to address these issues by comparing the policies and projects of several European cities with the Milanese experience and design research developed in the Interior Architecture Studios at the Politecnico di Milano.