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# Transforming Cities, Negotiating Centrality: Markets and Civic Buildings in Comparative Perspective (XVth c. - XXth c.). An Introduction

Colin Arnaud, Alessandra Ferrighi & Nora Lafi \*

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**Abstract:** »Städte umgestalten, Zentralität aushandeln: Märkte und öffentliche Gebäude in vergleichender Perspektive (15.-20. Jh.). Eine Einführung«. This HSR forum on central urban places in history discusses the spatial interactions between political and commercial centres. The narrative of western modernity we challenge here explains the increasing distance between prestigious political monuments and daily markets with the breakthroughs in hygiene of the last two centuries in western urbanism. On the one hand, the example of Venice shows that the hygiene politics of the 19th century were not that new and that they could also be used for a kind of social segregation. On the other hand, the model of the occidental city as political community and municipal institution must be questioned. For instance, Ottoman towns had developed institutions that represented local groups and which were linked with the markets and their actors. Western influence and colonisation destroyed those institutions, which also had consequences for the city centre. We propose the concept of vertical and horizontal centrality for use in discussions of the multiple dimensions of centrality.

**Keywords:** Urban history, Europe, Middle East, Maghreb, markets, municipal government, centrality, governance, public space.

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## 1. Introduction

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In the pandemic context of 2020–2022, the question of urban centrality has been posed from new perspectives: closed shops, unrented office facilities, and urban finances on the edge of bankruptcy, particularly in smaller towns. The radical developments of e-commerce and working from home are often seen as a potential threat to the very basis of downtowns and historic city centres, which have for centuries been symbolized by attractive offices and retail shops. For the municipalities that supported the central urban retail infrastructures that have vitalized and valorised urban centres, this scenario is highly challenging. However, the possible (yet selective) decline of the commercial function of urban centres might also be viewed as a chance to redefine city centres: less commerce, more functional diversity, more housing and productive spaces, more green spaces, and more space for the community. At the European level, the new Leipzig Charta, signed in 2020, contributed a tentative definition of the principles of contemporary urbanist policies in this sense (Bundesinstitut für Bau-, Stadt- und Raumforschung 2021) following an academic debate on the transformation of city centres (Van Lierop 2020). In Germany, France, Portugal, Spain, and Italy, at the level of both national policies and local municipalities, the debate is older than the pandemic and has been redefined by the changing context. In other geographical contexts, from Asia to North Africa and North America, urban debates on centrality and the definition of urbanity have been recently renewed. They are intimately connected, however, with the discussions of the previous decades. Hence the pertinence of an exploration of the methodologies of urban history.

At the end of World War II, European towns faced huge challenges to the potential vitality of their centres: post-war reconstruction, health and safety, social and spatial inequalities, automobile traffic, excessive commodification and uniformity of pedestrian zones, and either the neglect of historic heritage or its theatricalization for the sake of tourists and not residents. All those issues are often interrelated and entangled, with strong tensions between the rules of the market economy and the agency of political institutions.

The concept of the re-figuration of space (Million et al. 2022) can be useful for analysing such processes of city centre transformation as it acknowledges the simultaneity of changes to various levels (state, city, square) and spheres (social, political, cultural, discursive, praxeological) influencing spatial dynamics. In contrast with linear concepts, the concept of re-figuration is multi-dimensional and relational. It considers not only the architectural renewals but also the effects of subjective representations and redefinitions of space, providing a better understanding of the relations between spatial dynamics and social processes. The modernisation of urban centres through the

separation of political and commercial spheres, a process that is analysed in some of the case studies presented here, can also be read as a re-figuration of space, with the emergence of a new spatial hierarchy.

This highlights the importance of historicizing the re-figurations of urban spaces, and the fact that history is an important factor influencing processes of re-figuration. In this HSR Forum, we have adopted a long-term perspective for analysing the interactions between spaces of commerce and politics within urban centres and their impact on the figurations and re-figurations of centrality.

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## 2. Interdependence and Concurrence between Commercial and Civic Spaces

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On 8 May 1877, Gaetano Tacconi, the mayor of Bologna, decreed the end of the greengrocery market that took place nearly daily on the *Piazza Maggiore*, the central square of the town, site of the biggest church and of both town halls. The greengrocer stalls that chaotically covered the whole square were to be replaced by a permanent infrastructure outside the square (Coccolini 1995, 175). Only some of the greengrocers received booths in a central establishment situated in the old market area between Via Clavature and Via Pescherie. For the rest of the dealers, a provisional covered market was built at the Piazza Aldrovandi. It was closed in 1879, with another then built at the Piazza Malpighi and a definitive structure inaugurated in 1910 in Via Ugo Bassi (Alaimo 1990, 226-7; Sicari 2004, 54-6). All these locations were quite central places in the town, but outside of the medieval market area in which centrality was expressed by the ontological proximity between market activities and municipal power (Arnaud 2018; Boucheron 1998, 541-72; 2011). After these reforms and urban transformations, which were part of the administrative and urban modernisation of Italy following national unification (Zucconi 1999; Bocquet and de Pieri 2002; Adorno 2003; De Pieri 2005; Bocquet 2007; Adorno and De Pieri 2007), the *Piazza Maggiore* hosted a statue of the king and was used for traffic and public events (Prete 2005, 519). The public buildings around it increased in decorum via the clean square, and the new covered greengrocery market gained in cleanliness what it lost in centrality.

This process, which historiography has analysed in particular detail in the case of Italy, affected the urban morphology and functioning of most European cities. Civic buildings have been analysed not only for their architectural qualities, but also as expressions of the nature of local power in its various phases (Tittler 1991; Pérouse de Montclos 2000; Steane 2001; Albrecht 2004; Jong 2006; Stewart 2019; van Kleij 2021). Markets have also been the object of important studies that insist on their role in the definition and spatialization

of centrality in cities, but also on their link with the civic, political, institutional, professional, and social substance of cities (Knaepen, Wilkin and Loir 2019; Stobart and Damme 2016; Romano 2015; Gharipour 2012; Welch 2005; Calabi 2004). This spatial and civic interconnectivity between town halls and markets has been discussed in a historical context for various cities. It constitutes a key element in the interpretation of urban morphology using a perspective that aims to revise mechanistic visions of the relationship between the built environment, power, and society (Arnaud 2018; Beltramo and Calabi 2008; Dürr and Schwerhoff 2005; Rau and Schwerhoff 2004; Igel 2001; Stabel 2000). British historiography has particularly stressed such aspects, notably in relation to central markets in major cities and smaller market towns (Paliser 2006; Casson 2012; Davis 2012, 137-273). German urban historians have also emphasised such dimensions, with the reading of urban organisation and municipal consciousness through the sociality of the markets constituting a major trend (P. Monnet 2004; Fenske 2006; Freitag 2013a, 2013b). In the case of French cities, a seminal book by Boris Bove on medieval Paris analysed the intrinsic institutional, spatial, and sociological relationship between municipal power and the world of markets, guilds, and trade (Bove 2004). The articulation of local power and market organisation in urban history has also provided an alternative vector for readings of centrality that avoid focusing only on central power, with recent studies on medieval Brussels (Charruadas and Vannieuwenhuyze 2019), Paris (Oberste 2018), and Bamberg (Esch 2016) emphasising the role of locality and the civic dimension involved in shaping it. From this perspective, urban monumental and spatial centrality is not a mere projection of the characteristics of central power into the urban space. This alternative vision of centrality is also connected to reflections on the concept of centrality developed by the French school of urban geography and sociology (J. Monnet 2005) as well as to analyses of the concept of the right to the city, with Henri Lefebvre having defined it as a right for popular classes to have access to urbanity and centrality (Costes 2010). The historiography on cities outside of these European examples has also illustrated the importance of such aspects. As for Arab cities of the Middle Ages and the Ottoman era, for example, attention to the organisation of markets and early forms of municipal power has been instrumental in refuting interpretations inherited from the colonial period, which insisted on the alleged absence of civic institutions (Lafi 2019).

In the various regions and cultural areas explored here, when municipal institutions of medieval origins – inserted according to varied modalities and temporalities into diverse ancien régime configurations of the relationship between central and local powers – were reformed in the 19th century, the link between the local civic sphere, urban spatiality, and the very organisation of commerce and power was at stake. As municipalities were linked ontologically to the world of guilds and trade and to their urban spatialization,

modernizing their institutional framework also meant redefining urban identity. In the era of modernisation, which at the scale of city centres often took the form of the construction of a new seat for the municipality and of new markets, the whole relationship between the world of trade (of which the municipality, or merchant's guild, was historically often an emanation) and the city was the object of intense negotiation and pressure. This process could induce forms of morphological dissociation, but also support the emergence of new forms of centrality. A disjunction of the market from the central square and from spaces of power like the town hall can indeed be observed in many European, but also late-Ottoman and colonial towns throughout the process of urbanization and modernisation of the 19th and 20th centuries. This phenomenon can be qualified not only as a cleansing of the city centre, but also as a process of possible gentrification or functionalization of urban spaces, with each space being devoted to a certain function for a certain population. It also mirrors a profound change in the very nature of urban power: whereas during the Middle Ages and the Early Modern Period, the town market and the expression of the local civic power were closely connected, both from a spatial and political point of view, a new conception, rhetoric, and symbolism of municipal power emerged. The zoning processes, as well as historical preservation, of the 20th century enhanced this trend of a functional and social differentiation of the urban space (Zimmermann 2000, 26-9) and the city centre (Storchi and Armanni 2010; Pissourios 2014; Fériel 2015), as classic studies of American central business districts (Murphy 1972) and European cities like Le Mans (Gasnier 1991) or Vienna (Fassmann and Hätz 2009) show. In this process, like for the new market in Bologna, new infrastructure and spatial arrangements for the trade and governance sectors emerged. The construction or renovation of central markets and seats of municipal authority was a moment of redefinition, not only of spatial organisation, but also of the relationship between rulers, notables, guilds and the professional organisations that followed their transition to modernity, power brokers, and the general population. In many cases, both spaces – market infrastructure and spaces of power – were the object of processes of urban renewal.

However, such renewals and transformations did not begin in the 19th century. New town halls and new market facilities have been built in cities since the Middle Ages, and existing structures were constantly modified. In the 15th century, for example, the modernisation of the Bolognese Palazzo del Podestà – one of the town halls on the *Piazza Maggiore* – saw the many “crooked and improper” booths and stalls that occupied the open gallery replaced by fewer, better-built structures (Foschi 1998, 18). The result of the embellishment was a renegotiation between municipal administrations and tradesmen, between the need for political representation and the convenience of daily supply in such a central place.

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### 3. Sanitary or Social Cleaning? Challenging the Narrative of Modernisation

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In the 19th century, renewal policies became an element of the emerging hygienic narratives of the modern city. As seen in the instance of Bologna, sales or market areas became progressively regulated by laws aimed at protecting public health, considered a common good, a notion that itself echoed earlier medieval concepts. Preventing epidemics and endemic pathologies guaranteed good public health and thus promoted productivity and wealth. It was increasingly accepted that uncertain hygiene had to be overcome. Therefore, authorities often decided to improve the city as a whole by demolishing large areas that were considered unhealthy due to the high concentration of residents, the narrowness of the streets, and the lack of drinking water mains and sewers (Bianchetti and Agosti 1992; Zucconi 1999).

At the same time, new structures and utilities, like new markets, warehouses, or slaughterhouses, were being planned and built. Venice, too, underwent major improvements starting at the beginning of the 19th century following the French occupation. Napoleon Bonaparte wanted the lagoon city to have gardens and avenues. He therefore ordered the destruction of the public granaries and fish market at St. Mark Bay, a symbolic space for the city, replacing them with the exclusive royal gardens. In the following decades, the Austrian administration would design and build several new bridges over the Grand Canal after the arrival of the railway (Bernardello 1996).

Buildings meant for commerce, food storage, and processing would become more and more specialised during the 19th century, gaining a “monumental” character, while often being built in fringe areas or as replacements for the old markets. From the fragmentation of the marketplaces, the trend led towards a necessary concentration of the same. In the first few decades following Italian unification, municipal administrations passed new health and hygiene regulation to monitor and manage the disposal or treatment of waste (Giovannini 1996).

This Italian example, examined in these pages through the city of Venice, is evoked here in the wider context of European dynamics, in relation with old traditions of attention to hygiene by public authorities. Some Italian cities had a special office for maintaining the cleanliness of streets and markets since the 13th century. After the drama of the plague around 1350, hygienic concerns became even more important (Geltner 2019). In Venice, the first segregated hospital structure was created in 1423 on the convent island of Santa Maria di Nazareth, also named *lazzaretto* – the denomination would be soon adopted in other towns for similar structures (Howard 1791; Carbone 1962; Brusatin 1981). Following the plague of 1478, the Republic appointed the three *Provveditori alla Sanità* (Superintendents of Health) in 1486. Their

office was located inside the public granaries, the *fondaco* (inn-like warehouse [Concina 1997]), that faced St. Mark's bay and the salt warehouses (Sale Docks). Their very necessary task was to check goods and the behaviour of those selling them in order to prevent the dissemination of contagious diseases (Cosmacini 2005). The central position of places for selling was maintained, as shown by the fish market in Rialto and St. Mark, while the "dangerous" activities, such as glass blowing or gunpowder storage, became increasingly decentralised. The safety, hygiene, and health of the city were addressed by the various government offices in the wake of numerous fires and epidemics. This competence was at the heart of the ideology and practice of local power, with the very interesting particularity in Venice being that the republic was both a local form of government and the central government of a great variety of territories (Panciera 2014; Povolo 2006; Tolomeo and Crevato-Selvaggi 2018). Such historiographic issues have also been discussed in the case of Hanseatic institutions (Pichierri 1997).

Health care offices began to be created, not only in Venice, but in all major Italian cities, for monitoring and prevention purposes. These were followed, in time, by similar institutions in other European regions (Cosmacini 2005). These practices became the basis for the 19th century concept of hygiene. Water and food, the distribution networks, storage, and sales places increasingly became subjects of interest for politicians and city managers, again posing the question of centrality, power, urban transformation, and the civic sphere.

The assumption that the re-figuration of central urban spaces for hygienic purposes has to do with pluri-secular political discourses and practices and with re-negotiations of power relations, with the disciplining role of the state when replacing dirty but popular spaces like the fish market with prestigious but exclusive spaces like royal gardens, challenges the linear narrative of urban modernisation during the last two centuries. These are the kinds of discussions we want to participate in with this forum.

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#### 4. Challenging Eurocentrism

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Another narrative that needs to be discussed is the idea that urban modernity has been transferred to the rest of the world, with consequences for the re-figuration of urban centres according to "western models."

The process of intersection, concurrence, and complementarity of diverse central spaces is not only a pattern of European cities. The urban issue of the coexistence and co-essence of municipal powers, trade, and political centrality is shared in diverse cultural contexts and periods. A short glimpse at political discourses long before the dominance of the "West" can be helpful in providing distance from eurocentrism. In a description of the city of Baghdad



in the 11th century, Khatīb al-Baghdādī reports on a visit by a Byzantine diplomat at the court of the caliph in the new, round capital city in the year 774. As the caliph asks how the Byzantine Patrikios finds his new city, the patrikios answers, “I found it perfect but for one shortcoming. [...] The markets are in the city. [...] As no one can be denied access to them, the enemy can enter under the guise of someone who wishes to carry on trade. And the merchants, in turn, can travel everywhere passing on information about you.” Consequently, the caliph ordered the markets out of the round city to a suburb (Lassner 1970, 61). The case is interesting because the coexistence of market and palace is not discussed on the level of symbolic representation but on the issue of accessibility. The market is presented as an exchange platform not only for goods, but also for information and communication.

Studies of the medieval Arab world show the crucial importance in urban morphology and morphogenesis of this articulation between the seat of central power and market-related functions (Garcin 2000). Historiography, however, has long denied, partially in the wake of Weberian civilizational clichés, the existence of local institutions of a municipal nature. This paradigm has now been deconstructed and a consensus established on the existence and substance of such institutions emanating from the civic sphere of the world of trade, guilds, and religious notabilities (Lafi 2019).

At the heart of this local civic sphere and its institutional expression was the notion of *Hisbah*, a spiritual and civic morale that dealt with market regulation and organisation. The study of *Hisbah* treatises also allows scholars to reflect on the relationship between market organisation, local powers, and the civic sphere in the case of Medieval Islamic cities, from Al-Andalus to North Africa and the Middle East (Lafi 2020). In the case of cities of the medieval Arab world, and, later, of the Ottoman empire, the question of the architectural and spatial manifestations of this dimension needs to be addressed carefully. In contrast with other cultural areas, studies have neglected them. Nevertheless, early research indicates that local powers of municipal nature were embodied in the form of a public building, often governed according to the status of a foundation (*waqf/habous*), or in the form of a house of an urban notable who functioned as the “chief” of the city in diverse local institutional and linguistic guises. Gatherings of and deliberations by the local civic assembly took place in this building (Lafi 2005). This perspective might make it possible to critically discuss what has long been perceived as a characteristic of Islamic cities, i.e., the apparent separation between market areas, residential districts, and enclosed mosques or citadels (Wirth 2000) and to elaborate more complex geographies and spatializations of power in its different forms.

Another important point concerns the urban and political transformations of this medieval legacy under the Ottomans. From the construction of new suqs, often promoted by representatives of the central power in negotiation

with local elites in many cities of the empire between the 15th and the 18th centuries, to the reinterpretation of the rules and practices linked to the *Hisbah*, this period provides crucial hints about both the spatial organisation of cities and the ways local elites negotiated their access to the sphere of local government. In the late Ottoman period, the modernisation of the urban structure, with for example the construction of new markets in the context of a wave of municipal reforms, again redefined the link between urban morphology and ideology. At the point, the relationship between modernity, the urban form, and urban governance in many cities of the broader region was deeply biased by colonial reforms on market organisation and the colonial repression of the local civic sphere and its institutions. Research has illustrated how the imposition of new norms and new forms was part of colonial domination and the separation between a suppressed civic sphere and the organisation of commerce and power in cities (Lafi 2022).

After independence, modernist planning imposed new visions of centrality, sometimes traumatic. Migration from rural areas towards impoverished city centres also changed the social perception of centrality in many post-Ottoman and post-colonial cities from Tunis to Cairo. This sometimes resulted in a reversing of the social values of centrality that had already begun in the late-Ottoman and colonial eras, with elites preferring to settle outside of city centres (Ben Achour 1992 for Tunis).

As we observe here, spatial re-figurations of centrality in Ottoman cities cannot be read only in reference to “Western” cities. Ottoman cities had their own civic institutions and their own criteria for urban reforms that need to be taken in account when analysing processes of modernisation to the present day. In this forum, we question the hegemony of a “Western” model of urban modernity, which helps us to interrogate “Western” modernity itself in relation to urban centrality.

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## 5. Horizontal vs. Vertical Centrality

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The term of centrality in urban geography is traditionally used according to the central place theory of Christaller (von Böventer 1969) or following the considerations of James H. Bird (Bird 1977). Those approaches aim to measure how central a place is. Our approach is different. To be able to compare the dynamics of centrality through different periods and regions, we propose here a conceptual opposition between horizontal and vertical centrality (Arnaud 2018, 244). With those differentiations, we suggest using the concept of centrality to qualitatively characterize central places, i.e., to understand the ways in which the places were central. This endeavour is linked to reflections on centrality, power, and the notion of territory as developed in more recent geographical studies (Georges and Radeff 2002; Claval 2005; Raffestin 2019).

Centrality is horizontal when the central place is inviting, inclusive, and attractive for the great majority of the population. That may be the case not only for daily markets or annual fairs and other sites for public festivities, but also for shopping malls, post offices, stations, public libraries, places of worship, and for many central squares. In the case of horizontal centrality, the motive of centrality is the capacity to attract, gather, and integrate all groups and individuals of a society.

Centrality is vertical when the central place becomes exclusive to an elite, or for privileged, social groups. The central place is highly desirable and of crucial importance for all, but only accessible to the few. Vertical centrality coagulates in space the social hierarchies and practices of domination. The palace or castle of a prince is a good example of vertical centrality, with its limited access and monumental representation of authority. There are also central spaces that are theoretically accessible to all, but their function or their architectural language implies exclusion (Boucheron and Chiffoleau 2004). This may be the case for luxury shops or majestic buildings of financial institutions, universities, and research libraries: they are central and are not inviting, but rather imposing. Many people will not dare to enter them; only people with suitable functions or habitus will feel comfortable using them. Indeed, not only exclusive access, but also gentrification, markers of domination, and monumentalising processes can contribute to vertical centrality.

The aim of this conceptual distinction is not to place cases into rigid, absolute categories (here vertical, there horizontal centrality), but to facilitate relative comparisons (the centrality in one city centre might appear *more* vertical than in another city, for instance). The comparison can be made for two or several cities, or for the same city in different periods. After having displaced the markets to outside of the city centre, 8th century Baghdad and 19th century Bologna were probably characterised by a more vertical centrality than before. In such phases of change, the question is the potential resilience of horizontal centrality. Hence the suggestion here to analyse the civic dimension of the link between markets and the architectural expression of local municipal power. In contrast with monumental expressions of central power in its various local declensions, municipal power – ontologically linked to urban society around the market, the town hall, public space, and the world of trade and crafts – can imply, embody, and express forms of horizontal centrality. These forms must be discussed, as municipal power could also be appropriated by closed oligarchies of various natures according to the time and place. Overall, however, they can constitute, as the present explorations suggest, a fruitful way to examine the link between urban morphology, architecture, the civic sphere, and the spatialization of power. In proposing case studies from different areas and times, the present forum is advocating a methodological challenge to the inertia of Eurocentric interpretations (Lafi 2005).

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## 6. A Mosaic of New Inputs

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The articles gathered in this forum of *Historical Social Research* were debated in a session of the Conference of the European Association on Urban History that took place in Rome in 2018. They deal with the architectural or urbanist renewal of both civic and political buildings and market facilities. Most articles focus on precise buildings or squares. They explain the political background and the social consequences of their modification. Cases from different periods, from the 13th to the 20th centuries, and from different regions of Europe and the Mediterranean are presented. We have deliberately chosen a *longue durée* perspective and the collective development of an approach that transcends the inertia of geographic and cultural boundaries in order to re-examine the existing narratives on centrality and on the transformation of cities discussed above. This was done by examining both the idea of positive modernity, whereby the dirty and old regime city centres were replaced by hygienic, modern, and well-organised inner cities, and the persistence of culturalist clichés on urban governance, transformation, and morphology.

All four papers challenge such narratives in a different way. *Anna Paulina Orłowska* and *Patrycja Szwedo-Kielczewska* examine the commercial topography of three Polish towns – Poznań, Gniezno, and Kalisz – and the influence of fairs on centrality between the 13th and 17th centuries. All three towns had a typical central European layout with a large market square that offered enough space for all trades. Equal access for buyers and sellers as well as the location of the town hall and of other public infrastructure (weighing house, cloth hall, fountain) in the middle of the market square ensured favourable conditions for horizontal centrality. Annual fairs modified this spatial balance via the explosion of commerce they brought for a few weeks: new actors and trades competed with the usual local market actors for the use of central space. Depending on the size of the town, of its market square, and on the dynamicity of its fairs, a shift from horizontal to vertical centrality can be observed, i.e., a greater hierarchy of access to central places for commercial use that led to the exclusion of some trades from the central square and their ejection into more peripheral streets. That was the case in Poznań and even more so in Gniezno, with its small market square and its extremely dynamic fairs that were of international importance for the textile and cattle trades, but not in Kalisz, since its large market square offered enough space for both the local market actors and the medium-sized fairs. The examination of this typology is an occasion to reflect on centrality, its nature, and its transformation over time.

*Stefano D'Amico* observes a shift between the general expectations of Italian cities of the time and the local reality about the decorum of a city centre for early modern Milan. The Italian theorizers of the Renaissance city up to the

16th century required a clearer distance between spaces for politics, trade, and recreation. It was particularly the palace of the prince that had to occupy a central point in the city, but it also had to demarcate itself from the common activities for purposes of ceremony and decorum. Far from hygienic preoccupations, the separation between the seat of political power and the markets aimed to enhance the prestige of a mainly monarchical authority. This programme was implemented in Florence, Venice, Turin, Rome, Palermo, and Naples – where new princely palaces were built away from the markets – but not in Milan. The royal-ducal palace in the cathedral square was never freed from the market stalls in front of it and did not receive adequate renovations for it to showcase royal authority in the city centre. The local elite gathered in the *Veneranda Fabbrica del Duomo*, the institution responsible for the construction and maintenance of the cathedral, which was financially interested in maintaining the market in the cathedral square. The Spanish Empire saw it as more important to maintain peaceful relations with the political actors of Milan and Lombardy than to enhance its prestige in the city. The result of this political constellation was the continuation of a multifunctional horizontal centrality in the cathedral Square in Milan in the early modern period, which particularity invites us to reflect on the articulation of horizontal and vertical centrality.

*Margarida Relvão Calmeiro* depicts urban changes in 19th century Coimbra, the third city of Portugal and seat of its most important university. While the markets and civic institutions were originally positioned in Bartholomeu Square, the 1834 secularisation and public appropriation of numerous religious colleges around the inner city provided new opportunities to reorganise the urban setting. The Santa Cruz monastery and its annexes became the main nexus of the redefinition of Coimbra's centrality. In a long and controversial process, the monastic complex was renovated and reassigned not only as the town hall and seat of other public institutions, but also as the new space for the daily market behind the town hall. In the 20th century, the new urban centre linked old and new quarters while simultaneously reproducing the vicinity of political power and market activities – even if the market was situated not in front of but behind the town hall. This example is key in reflections on the link between market and municipal power, as well as on its morphological evolution.

*Beya Abidi-Belhadj*, in her account of the evolution of the Kasbah of Tunis from the Hafsids period in the late Middle Ages up to the present day, seeks to overcome the simplistic spatial opposition between the *sūqs* around the central mosque in the centre of the medina and the citadel as a closed and isolated seat of central political power. Even if the kasbah remained a distinct area through the centuries and still hosted political institutions, we cannot overlook a progressively better connection between the kasbah and the medina. This process began in the 17th century with the building of the new

residence of the governor at the fringes of the medina, just outside the kasbah, and was completed by the demolition of the walls of the citadel in the 1950's and the opening of the kasbah. This article thus features important reflections on the relationship between the urban space, its categories, and the nature of power.

The articles, when read together, suggest that the link between market and town hall is not automatically lost with modernity or with a modernisation of urban patterns. Despite the missing monumental transformation of the royal-ducal palace of Milan, the city modernised its market squares and administrative buildings during the early modern period. The new centre of Coimbra around the former monastery of Santa Cruz hosted both markets and the municipal administration after the great modernisation of the town in the 19th century, during the same period in which Bologna freed the façade of its town hall from the market. In Tunis, the connection between the *sūqs* and the kasbah was reinforced over the centuries. If we look at English and Polish cities today, we can notice that in some cases the spatial connection still constitutes a crucial articulation of the qualities of the urban space and its civic substance. In Norwich, the market square – which was extensively expanded during the 15th century with a guild hall, a market cross, a municipal inn, and the reconstruction of the parish church by the merchants – has since been modernised, for example with a new city hall from 1938. However, the middle of the square is still filled with numerous market stalls. In Poznan, the old market square does not host a weekly market anymore, but it is regularly filled with market stalls. Ironically, an English tourist commented upon his visit to the main square of Poznan in August 2016 on the TripAdvisor website saying, “The architecture is stunning and well worth a closer inspection. Regrettably, the ambience is spoiled by a myriad of market stalls cluttering every open space, giving the feeling of a medina rather than a quintessential European square.”<sup>1</sup> This is food for thought for our forum seeking to deconstruct cultural clichés.

The articles of this thematic issue also show that local situations never corresponded to a mere transfer of possible models. In 17th century Milan, the negotiation between the different local and royal actors appears to have been more than just an application of Renaissance architectural ideals. In Coimbra, the relocation of the municipal and civic institutions occurred in old colleges that were not demolished and that are still a part of the character of the city. For the Kasbah of Tunis, we see the reverse phenomenon; even though elements of the architectural substance have been demolished and regularly replaced by new buildings, the kasbah never stopped hosting important political institutions.

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<sup>1</sup> F. Glyn, “Great atmosphere. Review of Old Market Square,” in TripAdvisor.com, 2016, URL: [https://en.tripadvisor.com.hk/ShowUserReviews-g274847-d287788-r405408793-Old\\_Market\\_Square-Poznan\\_Greater\\_Poland\\_Province\\_Central\\_Poland.html](https://en.tripadvisor.com.hk/ShowUserReviews-g274847-d287788-r405408793-Old_Market_Square-Poznan_Greater_Poland_Province_Central_Poland.html) (Accessed 6 May 2022).

With this thematic issue, we thus provide inputs for a general discussion of town centres in the disciplines and historiographies of different periods and regions. The result is necessarily fragmentary, but this fragmentary approach can help us all to keep in mind that we need a discussion of the big picture as well as a contextualisation of single case studies.

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All articles published in HSR Forum 47 (2022) 2:

## Transforming Cities, Negotiating Centrality: Markets and Civic Buildings in Comparative Perspective (XVth c. – XXth c.)

Colin Arnaud, Alessandra Ferrighi & Nora Lafi

Transforming Cities, Negotiating Centrality: Markets and Civic Buildings in Comparative Perspective (XVth c. - XXth c.). An Introduction.

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Anna Paulina Orłowska & Patrycja Szewedo-Kielczewska

Infrastructure and Centrality in Town during Annual Fairs. Three Polish Examples (1385–1655).

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Stefano D'Amico

The Governor, the Bishop, and the Patricians: The Contest for the Cathedral Square in Spanish Milan (1535–1706).

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Margarida Relvão Calmeiro

From Boundary to New Centrality. The Transformation of the Santa Cruz Monastery to Accommodate the New Facilities of the Liberal State During the Nineteenth Century.

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Beya Abidi-Belhadj

Transforming and Interpreting the Kasbah: The Negotiation of Centrality in Tunis.

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