



# GUIDELINES ON OPEN SPACES OPEN MARKETS



By Annie Sparrt on Unsplash

This document has been authored by Dr. Antoine Zammit and Claudia Chanduvi for studjurban, in collaboration with the Local Councils' Association Malta.

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# 1. Introduction

Open markets comprise vibrant public marketplaces where vendors and shoppers come together in the open or within designated lightweight structures for exchange (whether goods, food, or cultural). Far more than simple venues for commerce, open markets serve as social hubs, economic enablers, cultural assets and attractions for locals and visitors alike. Throughout history and especially in Mediterranean regions, marketplaces have been central to community life, often doubling as the heart of civic engagement and even poetically referred to as the 'soul' of a community.



In Malta, the tradition of open markets runs deep, from village squares bustling on weekly market days to the historic merchant stalls of Valletta. Today, there is a renewed interest in leveraging these markets as tools for sustainable local development in line with the Local Councils' Association's **ResidentFirst** vision. The value of open markets is multifaceted – they are, of course, platforms for economic opportunity, a reflection of the local culture and tourism magnets. Still, they are also important social spaces within a locality. Indeed, in essence, markets serve as social infrastructure, performing the role of open-air community centres where residents forge connections and local identity is strengthened.

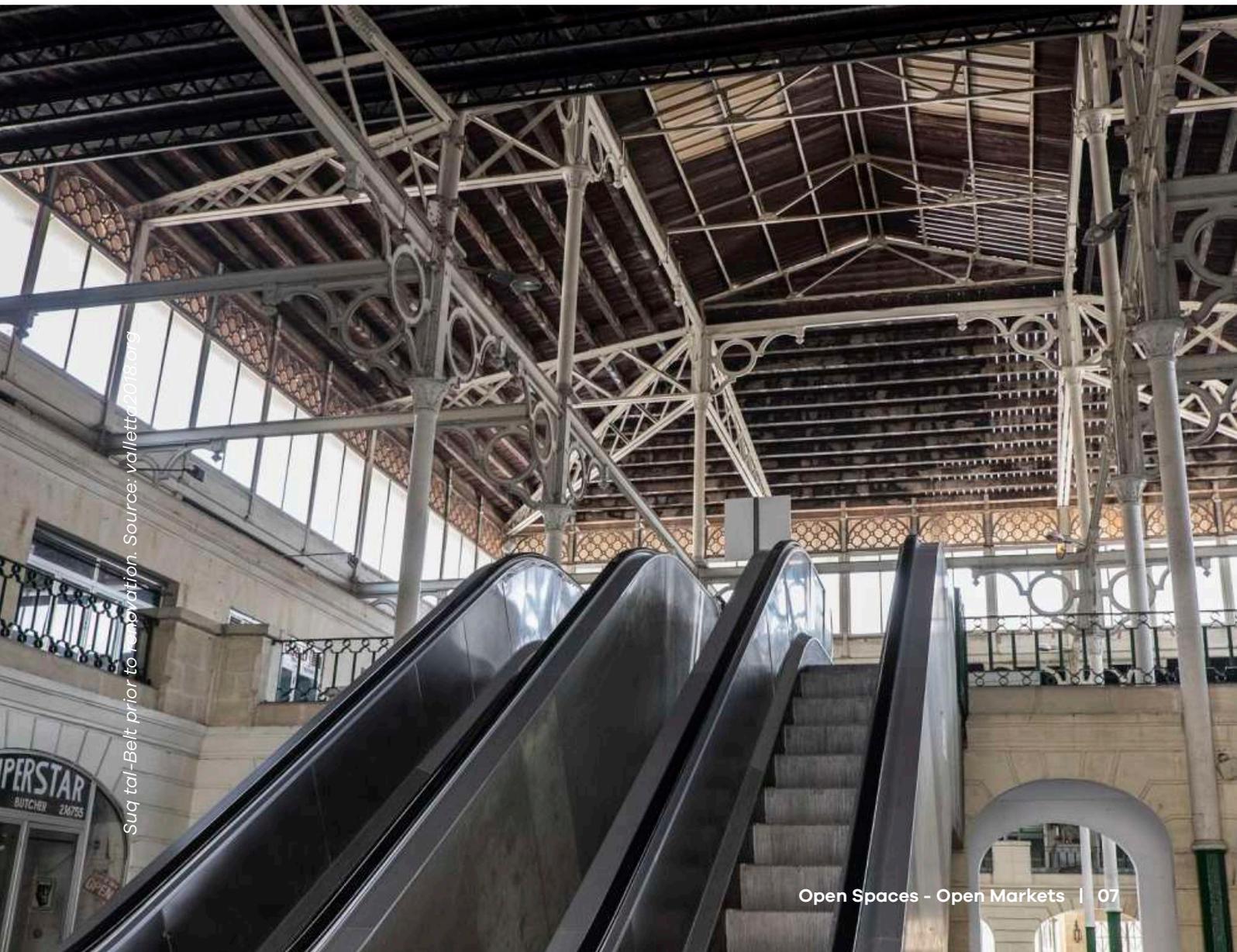
Building on open space re-use principles, further discussed in the LCA's document **3.4 Open Space Re-use**, this document outlines key design principles for creating or retrofitting spaces to host markets, ensuring they are flexible, accessible, well-integrated into our towns and that they do not significantly inconvenience nearby residents.

*Photo by Maria Kovalets on Unsplash.*

## 2. Historical Overview of Open Markets in Malta

Open markets have been part of Maltese life for centuries, evolving from informal bartering gatherings into organised marketplaces that reflect broader historical changes. Malta's own market tradition can be traced to the time of the Knights of St. John. In Valletta's early days, an open marketplace existed in what was known as *Piazza del Malcantone*, where farmers from rural areas would bring their produce daily to sell. This

early market provided structure and shelter for vendors and shoppers, marking Malta's transition from ad-hoc village markets to a more formal urban marketplace. Under British colonial rule, Malta's markets saw significant development. The covered market hall in Valletta, known as *Is-Suq tal-Belt*, was expanded and rebuilt between 1859 and 1861 using a cast-iron structure, reminiscent of London's Crystal Palace and Paris' Les Halles' modern style.



Suq tal-Belt prior to renovation. Source: valletta2018.org



Photo by Mael Balland on Unsplash

Unfortunately, the market hall suffered heavy damage in World War II. It was partially rebuilt in simplified form after the war and continued to operate, though the rise of new shopping habits gradually diminished its prominence by the late 20th century. Beyond Valletta, some Maltese towns and villages have maintained weekly open-air markets since the 19th century. Historical records and local memory point to regular market days in large villages where itinerant hawkers would sell wares from carts or stalls.

These local markets became part of the island's social activity. Every town had its *suq* day, providing residents access to fresh goods and household items in an era when travelling to Valletta was not easy for everyone. By the mid-20th century, Malta's open markets had to adapt to modern pressures. In 1982, the government relocated the primary food market out of Valletta to a new facility in Floriana, aiming to decongest the capital. The historic *Suq tal-Belt* building in Valletta was repurposed after extensive renovation works, retaining the Victorian iron structure and the market building reopened in 2018 as a food hall and market as one of the projects in connection with Valletta's European Capital of Culture designation.

Malta has also introduced new market concepts influenced by global trends. One notable development was the creation of official farmers' markets. Traditionally, Maltese farmers sold their produce wholesale through the central *Pitkalija* market (established in Ta' Qali in the mid-20th century) to grocers or mobile hawkers, who then retailed to consumers. Direct farm-to-consumer sales in an open market format were rare until the late 2000s. These markets symbiotically link urban and rural economies by connecting rural producers directly with urban consumers.

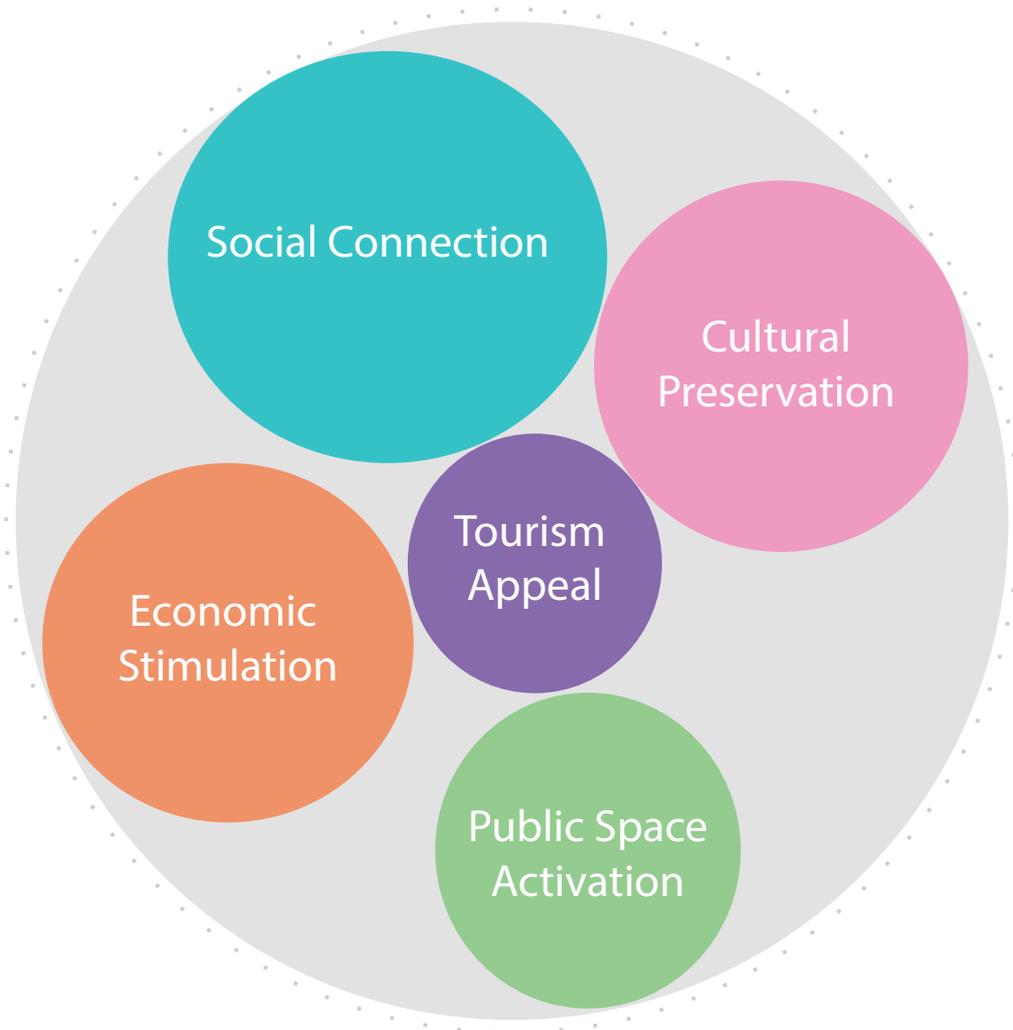
Malta's open markets have continually adapted within evolving urban settings. Markets such as the Sunday fish market in Marsaxlokk — rooted in the village's long-standing tradition of selling the morning catch — and Gozo's daily market at *It-Tokk* in Victoria, which has served generations, show how these spaces have grown into vibrant community hubs in their own right. Open markets have thus remained resilient and culturally significant. Their evolution and enduring legacy underscore their value in Maltese life and offer key insights for Local Councils considering investment in contemporary open markets.

### 3. The Value of Open Markets – Social, Economic, Cultural and Tourism Assets

In the Maltese context, where dense urban living can sometimes erode communal interaction, open markets present an opportunity to reinvigorate public life and put residents first.

Open markets draw diverse groups of people into a shared public area, fostering face-to-face interactions that are becoming increasingly rare in this digital age. As also discussed in the LCA's document *3.2 Historical Heritage, Urban Cores (Hubs) and Piazzas*, a busy market day turns a street or square into a lively public and inclusive gathering place where neighbours and visitors

engage with an important cultural element, conversations spark between strangers and a sense of community is reinforced, where everyone is welcome. One only needs to walk through the Ballarò market in Palermo, Italy to sense how a market can be a melting pot with customers from Sicilian, African and South Asian origin, all interacting in one space. The social fabric woven at markets can lead to greater trust and solidarity in the community. In multicultural localities, markets are often where intercultural exchange happens naturally.



*Illustration by Studjurban.  
Open Markets.*



Open markets are engines of local economic activity and opportunity. They support small businesses, enable entrepreneurship and keep money circulating within the local economy. In fact, public markets are often called the 'ultimate small business incubator'. Vendors can find it relatively easy to get started – one can have a market stall with minimal investment compared to opening a big shop. This creates opportunities for individuals. Newcomers can also join the trade.

Meanwhile, Malta's beloved traditional markets continue to thrive and adapt. The famous *Valletta Monti* (the open-air flea market) has been a fixture in the City for over a century. Shopkeepers in towns like Victoria (Gozo) or Birgu often report higher sales on market mornings thanks to the influx of visitors who come for the market and then visit other establishments.



Photo by Jan Gemele on Unsplash. Photo of a fish market in Palermo.

Markets are living expressions of local culture and heritage. They are often the stage on which traditions play out daily – through food, crafts, language and rituals of commerce. In Malta, open markets encapsulate elements of our intangible cultural heritage – the call of the hawker, the display of local produce or the haggling over vintage local items. For instance, the Marsaxlokk fish market offers more than fresh fish; it offers a glimpse into Malta’s fishing heritage. The stalls laden with *lampuki* and swordfish, manned by fishermen’s families, and the background of colourful *luzzus* in the bay create a cultural landscape that educates younger generations and visitors about Maltese maritime traditions. Markets also inspire new cultural expressions as artisans and makers find a venue to showcase Maltese creativity.



Photo by William Jones on Unsplash. The Monti set up in Valletta.



Photo by Kate Michalska on Unsplash



Photo by Martin Vonk on Unsplash.  
Photograph of Barcelona's La Boqueria market

Tourists have always been drawn to markets for an authentic taste of local life. In the age of experiential travel, a bustling market is often a top attraction. Many European cities are inextricably identified with their famous markets: *La Boqueria* in Barcelona, for example, is billed as the most famous market worldwide and a must-see landmark on La Rambla. Thousands of visitors daily wander its food-laden aisles and tapas bars. While well-managed tourism at markets may bring economic injection that further helps sustain them, tourist popularity can also be a double-edged sword – locals consider Boqueria one of the contributors to overtourism in the city.

If tourist and resident needs are not well balanced, or if the sole focus of these markets becomes the visitor attraction, the value and authenticity of these important cultural assets may become compromised, at the expense of local character and community alienation. While expanding the scope for tourism can be beneficial, it must be carefully managed to ensure that community needs remain at the core.

# 4. Challenges and Opportunities in Malta's Open Markets

Further to the previous discussion, some of the key challenges facing open markets in Malta include:

- **Limited physical space and urban density** constitute a major challenge for open markets in Malta, making it difficult to find suitable areas for stalls, circulation and parking. Village cores are often constrained by narrow streets, heritage restrictions, existing café seating or resident parking, leaving limited space. As a result, Local Councils usually opt for temporary road closures or repurposing underused lots.
- Markets require **logistics** vis-à-vis traffic management, sanitation, utility provision, and protection against adverse weather conditions. They also need appropriate infrastructure because they generate waste and require water, electricity and public toilets. The intense summer heat demands shaded areas for visitors, while sudden

rain or wind can alter market activity. Local Councils must plan for contingencies, including temporary shelters or alternative venues.

- **Regulatory and administrative issues** can delay the establishment of open markets. Local Councils must manage complex processes involving permits, vendor licensing and strict food safety regulations, especially for fresh produce or fish. Moreover, any new market initiatives must comply with existing national legislation.
- **Competition from modern retail** presents a significant challenge. Supermarkets, shopping centres and online platforms offer consistent availability, convenience and a wide product range. In contrast, weekly markets often face issues such as inconsistent vendor attendance, limited product variety and variable quality. Restricted opening hours and a lack of modern amenities can deter people from visiting, as they may find it difficult to shop within the narrow window of market activity.



Illustration by Studjurban.  
Open markets – challenges and opportunities.



Photo by Graphic Node on Unsplash.

Market activities can bring together a diverse range of stakeholders, whose interests may not always align. We have previously outlined the issue of over-tourism and the risk of losing a market's authenticity. Residents might also object to a market for other practical matters, such as noise, litter or congestion. Without effective consultation, such tensions could end a market project before it begins. Communication is vital to ease any initial tensions through collaborative and transparent efforts that remain consistent throughout the market's lifetime. Public meetings should be held in order to share updates, collect feedback and possibly identify joint solutions. In addition, a specific Market Liaison Officer could provide someone in charge to bridge between vendors, organisers and residents and solve complaints in real time.

On a more strategic scale, if feasible, a rotational schedule could be established to position markets in different locations, thereby avoiding a concentrated impact in one area. Indeed, markets need not be confined to the exact location or schedule each week. Local Councils could experiment with night markets in summer, seasonal holiday markets in winter, or artisan markets tied to local events. By aligning markets with the time-specific rhythms of urban life, Local Councils may maximise their success. Local Councils could also coordinate with the Malta Tourism Authority to align market days with specific occasions, such as cruise ship visits.

Markets offer a powerful tool for community revitalisation and placemaking. As further discussed in the LCA's document **3.4 Open Space Re-Use**, temporary interventions, such as pop-up stalls or street furniture, as part of a tactical urbanism strategy, may help test new uses within an urban space. Successful pilot projects could pave the way for more permanent improvements, including potentially more permanent market spaces. Outside such markets' operating hours, the market space may also be used for ulterior purposes.

Open markets align with wider policy objectives around sustainability, local food systems and urban liveability. The EU's Farm-to-Fork strategy and national initiatives from the Malta Food Agency promote direct selling and farmers' markets. Local Councils may access EU funding for infrastructure, training, or promotional campaigns. Market projects can be embedded within broader regeneration bids, making them more feasible financially and politically. In addition, since markets resonate deeply with Maltese cultural identity, Local Councils could capitalise on this by linking them to festivals or seasonal celebrations.

## 5. Key Design Principles for Market Spaces (Creation and Retrofitting)

Designing a space to host an open market or retrofitting an existing public space requires careful consideration of functionality, flexibility and context. A well-designed market can enhance the experience for vendors and visitors equally by ensuring safety and convenience. Some of the more important design principles include:

## Location and Accessibility

In Malta, traditional markets may often be found in town centres, benefiting from high pedestrian traffic. Key accessibility considerations would be to:

- Locate markets near bus stops or within walking distance of residential areas.
- Ensure even surfaces and provide ramps where necessary to accommodate people with disabilities, parents with strollers and the elderly.
- Consider temporary road closures or re-routing during market hours to prioritise pedestrian access for shared streets.
- Allow for vendor unloading near stalls before market hours, with designated off-site parking thereafter.
- Install signage from nearby roads or transit hubs (bus stops, interchange points, Park and Ride areas, etc.) to guide visitors easily to the market.



Photo by Roman Suslov on Unsplash.

## Robust, Multi-Use Design

Market areas should be designed for multiple uses. A robust design (in terms of the flexibility of the space) ensures the space is not underutilised outside of market hours. Design strategies would be to:

- Use collapsible or movable stalls instead of permanent ones; mark vendor pitches with unobtrusive paint or tiles.
- Choose movable street furniture or perimeter elements that do not obstruct market setup.
- Apply temporary adaptations such as installing removable bollards to restrict traffic, as part of a wider tactical urbanism approach.
- Allow space to expand or contract depending on vendor numbers.
- Provide infrastructure such as power outlets, hooks for lighting and water taps and, if required, connection points to the sewerage network.

## Circulation and Layout

Efficient circulation makes markets safe, navigable, and enjoyable. Layouts should support smooth foot traffic and avoid overcrowding. Key elements would be to:

- Provide at least 3–4 metres for primary corridors to support two-way pedestrian traffic for the aisle width
- Provide multiple access and exit points to prevent bottlenecks.
- Use bollards or planters to block vehicle access during market hours and create pedestrian-only zones, while allowing emergency vehicle access.
- Avoid sharp turns or blind spots; aim for loop or U-shaped layouts that encourage browsing as well as vendors' visibility.
- Position stalls facing pedestrian flow; use back-to-back rows or perimeter arrangements.
- Allocate communal areas for food consumption or resting — ideally shaded and with seating to encourage the creation of social zones.
- Include maps and directional signs in various languages to orient visitors and reduce confusion.



Photo by Maria Kovalets on Unsplash, Ascoli Piceno, Italy

## Amenities and Comfort

Well-equipped markets are more attractive to both sides, especially to visitors. Comfort elements should address Malta's climate and basic user needs. Important considerations are to:

- Use trees, tensile canopies, or uniform vendor umbrellas when in an open space to provide shade and protection. Local Councils may decide on standardised tents for cohesive aesthetics throughout the urban space.
- Provide benches or ledges to sit on that do not block aisles for visitors to rest.
- Ensure restroom access nearby as part of a more permanent infrastructure, with clear signage and accessibility features.
- Distribute bins for waste and recycling; designate a collection point for vendor waste.
- As discussed earlier, install water taps, power outlets and connection points to the sewerage network to support vendor operations.
- Use ambient string lights or lamp posts to enhance evening use and safety.
- Provide shared storage facilities nearby (such as repurposed garages) for market equipment and supplies.

# Aesthetic Integration and Heritage Sensitivity

Markets in historic cores should enhance rather than detract from the existing character of the area. Design elements must be sensitive to local identity and heritage. Guidelines include the need to:

- Understand the urban context to provide a compatible design aesthetic that further reinforces local identity and accomplishes a visually harmonious relationship with the urban space.
- Avoid damaging historic paving or facades; use rubber pads under stall legs and secure permissions for any fixture attachments, if unavoidable.



*Photo by Lukas Klein  
on Unsplash.  
Inside La Boqueria market.*



Photo by Steffen Lemmerz on Unsplash.

## Safety and Management Design

Design should proactively address operational safety and simplify ongoing management. Core features are to:

- Use underground wiring or secure cable channels for lighting and equipment to avoid safety hazards.
- Place food stalls using gas on the perimeter; provide extinguishers.
- Include a designated area or plan for emergencies with easy access for ambulances and other emergency vehicles.
- Position a central booth or tent for administration, lost-and-found, and visitor support.
- Post clear market rules, schedules, and organiser contact information that can be accessible for all.
- Use strong paving and good quality materials that resist wear from heavy footfall and vendor vehicles.
- Design surfaces with adequate drainage and support regular cleaning (e.g. slope to drains, nearby water taps).

Key Design Pointer	Summary
Location and Accessibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Locate near bus stops or residential areas.</li> <li>• Ensure flat surfaces and provide ramps for accessibility.</li> <li>• Temporary road closures or re-routing</li> <li>• Vendor unloading zones</li> <li>• Signage from nearby roads or transit hubs</li> </ul>
Flexible, Multi-Use Design	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Collapsible or movable stalls</li> <li>• Implement temporary adaptations</li> <li>• Space for seasonal vendor expansions or contractions</li> <li>• Hidden infrastructure</li> </ul>
Circulation and Layout	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 3–4 meters wide primary corridors</li> <li>• Provide multiple access/exit</li> <li>• Use bollards or planters to block vehicle access</li> <li>• Avoid sharp turns or blind spots</li> <li>• Position stalls to face pedestrian</li> <li>• Communal areas for food or resting</li> <li>• Signs and maps</li> </ul>
Amenities and Comfort	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Shade and protection.</li> <li>• Provide sitting area</li> <li>• Restroom access or portable toilets with accessibility.</li> <li>• Bins for waste and recycling</li> <li>• Water taps and power outlets</li> <li>• Use ambient lighting</li> <li>• Shared storage facilities</li> </ul>
Aesthetic Integration and Heritage Sensitivity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Match local aesthetics</li> <li>• Avoid damaging historic pavings</li> <li>• Material selection to reinforce local identity.</li> <li>• Visual icons</li> <li>• Include traditional elements</li> </ul>
Safety and Management Design	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Underground wiring or secure cable channels for safety.</li> <li>• Provide fire extinguishers.</li> <li>• Central booth for administration and visitor support.</li> <li>• Clear market rules, schedules, and organisers information.</li> <li>• Good quality paving and material that resists wear and facilitates cleaning.</li> <li>• Adequate drainage</li> </ul>

*Open Markets – Key Design Principles.*  
Source: Studjurban.

## 6. Typologies of Open Markets and Applicability in Malta

Locally, open (street) markets (*Monti*) are held in several localities, including Birgu, Birkirkara, Birzebbuga, Mosta, Naxxar, Nadur, Qormi, Rabat, Valletta, and Zejtun. Some more specialised markets are held in Ta' Qali and Marsaxlokk, as detailed below. Open markets come in various forms, each with its own characteristics, target vendors, and audience. Understanding the different typologies of markets may help Local Councils decide what kind best suits their locality's needs and how to plan for each.

## Farmers' Markets (Fresh Produce Markets)

These markets are a direct bridge between the farmers (food producers) and the consumers. The emphasis is on locally grown or made food and shortening the supply chain. One of Malta's most important markets is Ta' Qali Farmers' Market, which opens on Tuesdays and Saturdays. Farmers' markets provide an interesting prospect across Malta, given the national interest in fresh, local produce and the need to support our agricultural community. They can be established strategically to attract a considerable mass of shoppers regularly, such as urban neighbourhoods and village centres. A successful farmers' market abroad is London's Borough Market, which demonstrates that, even in urban settings, such markets thrive by focusing on quality and experience.

Some well-suited localities to host Farmers' Markets, apart from that held in Ta' Qali, include Żejtun, Victoria (Gozo) and Mġarr. Żejtun and Mġarr both have a long-standing agricultural tradition. Żejtun lies in proximity to various farming communities in the South and is relatively central to the southern region. Mġarr already has a strong identity with, and cultural ties to, farming and hosts events like the Festa Frawli (Strawberry Festival) that align well with a prospective market. As the commercial hub of Gozo and surrounded by active agricultural zones, Victoria would provide an ideal location for a Gozitan farmers' market, especially with the prospect of liberating the centre of vehicles and increasing its pedestrian nature.



Photo by Bruno Martins on Unsplash. Inside Borough Market, London.



*Birgu Flea Market. Source: Mindtrip.com*

## Flea Markets and Second-Hand Markets

Flea Markets are focused on the sale of second-hand goods from antiques to collectables and they may be tied to community swap or upcycling initiatives. Portobello Road Market in London illustrates how flea markets can become cultural and tourist landmarks. These markets hold great appeal in Maltese culture, as seen from the success of car-boot sale markets organised by locals. A key success factor is having a critical mass of stalls to attract and retain foot traffic. Local Councils may support these markets with minimal infrastructure by offering public

spaces, basic organisation and low vendor fees. Smaller Local Councils might consider rotating regional markets across different town squares.

An example of the above is Birgu's Fortini Flea Market, held every Sunday morning and possibly Malta's largest and most eclectic car boot sale. The Fortini ground offers ample space for multiple stalls to be set up and organised. The market offers a vibrant mix of second-hand goods, antiques, books, vinyls, toys, tools, and more, drawing a diverse crowd of buyers and vendors.

Some interesting localities for Flea and Second-hand Markets could be Hamrun, Birkirkara, Bormla and Mosta. Both Hamrun and Birkirkara have a strong working-class identity and informal commercial culture. Their main streets already attract street vendors and temporary markets and they are well-connected by public transport. Mosta's weekly market could potentially segment or expand into a more specialised second-hand market in underused urban spaces.



Photo by Chan Tim on Unsplash.

## Night Markets (Evening or After-Dark Markets)

Night markets combine shopping, street food and entertainment in a relaxed and festive atmosphere. Typical features include food stalls, artisanal vendors, live music and decorative lighting, drawing crowds who enjoy socialising in the evening. In Malta, while we lack a strong tradition of recurring night markets, a successful analogy of night-time activity is Valletta's annual arts and culture festival, *Notte Bianca*. Some Local Councils have experimented with summer evening fairs or seaside night markets as part of tourism or community initiatives. These events

indicate there could be a demand and potential to formalise night markets, particularly between late spring and early autumn when evening temperatures are pleasant and locals and tourists alike enjoy being outdoors. In a hot Mediterranean climate like Malta's, evening markets are also far more comfortable than midday events. Night markets must be well-managed in terms of noise and crowd control, with closing times set so as not to disturb local residents. Post-event cleanup is essential to ensure they remain a positive presence in residential areas. Local Councils should coordinate with community officers or police to keep the environment safe and family-friendly.

Night markets in Sliema and St. Julian's could diversify the nightlife beyond bars and restaurants in these localities, particularly in areas that experience a good pedestrian footfall, such as Balluta. A night market in one of Valletta's pedestrianised urban pockets could complement its cultural calendar and seasonal events. Coastal promenades, such as those in St. Paul's Bay and Marsaskala could also offer ideal backdrops for night markets, which would enliven the waterfront beyond the outdoor catering areas.

# Artisan Markets

The past decade has seen a rise in artisan markets in Malta, albeit on a small scale, reflecting a growing creative economy. An example is the *Patches Market*, launched in 2010, possibly Malta's first contemporary artisan market, held at locations like Upper Barrakka Gardens.

If well-curated, artisan markets tied to local crafts and heritage could be held in historical localities such as Mdina/Rabat and Birgu without compromising the preservation needs of their urban cores.

Other more specific markets could include dedicated Fish Markets, which coastal Local Councils should strongly support; informal (often community-driven) Swap Meets / Car Boot Sales held occasionally; and combined markets. Current examples include Marsaxlokk's Sunday fish and open market, demonstrating that combining the two markets may also be highly attractive. Another typology of combined market is the Farmers & Artisans Market (or Eco-Market), which combines organic produce, sustainable goods and crafts. Such markets may serve both to increase environmental awareness and provide a platform for local commerce. Local Councils with green priorities could establish monthly eco-markets featuring organic farmers, eco-product vendors and the participation of environmental NGOs.

A risk assessment must support any decision related to the location of any open market typology to ensure that safety and security hazards are addressed beforehand. Even more importantly, introducing any open market in a locality must be done with due care and consideration of its residents and infrastructure.



Photo by Richard Melick on Unsplash

## 7. Eight Pragmatic Steps for Implementing Successful Open Market Projects



*Illustration by Studjurban.*

Eight steps that Local Councils in Malta could follow to bring open markets to fruition successfully are identified, spanning from their initial concept to ongoing management. Although presented sequentially, some steps could overlap or be revisited as necessary.



## Step 1

# Conduct a Community Needs Assessment and Feasibility Study



Image by Rames Quinerie on Unsplash

- **Distribute** surveys and hold public meetings to gauge resident and local community interest in such open markets and to understand their nature, market frequency, resident concerns and accessibility issues that may arise.
- **Gauge** the willingness of potential vendors (farmers, craftsmen and small businesses) to participate.
- **Research** nearby markets to avoid duplication and to complement, not compete with, existing events.
- **Factor** in seasonality — a summer or holiday market might be an ideal test run before committing to a regular schedule.
- **Identify** potential sites and assess any legal, land use, or logistical issues early, including permits, ownership and compatibility with market needs.
- **Produce** a clear concept document outlining what kind of market is feasible, when it would run, where it would be held and who it would serve and obtain the Local Council members' unanimous support.

## Step 2

# Build a Stakeholder Coalition and Plan Governance



D. Tinieblas on Unsplash

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- **Form** a core group of stakeholders — including vendors, local community members, Local Councillors and local business owners to co-lead planning and decision-making.
  - **Establish** a market committee with diverse voices to foster shared ownership, avoid conflicts and reflect community interests. The committee should be used to draft market rules and policies, including, for instance, product quality standards and environmental goals.
  - **Decide** on a governance model early — whether the market will be Local Council-led, committee-managed, or run by a vendor association – and assign clear roles to each stakeholder.
  - **Involve** potential critics (like shop owners) early, ensuring the market complements existing businesses.

## Step 3

# Secure the Location and Necessary Permissions



Christian Mackie on Unsplash

- **Apply** for necessary permits, such as road closures or event licenses and coordinate with the Superintendence of Cultural Heritage, Transport Malta, Infrastructure Malta and the Malta Tourism Authority as needed.
- **Ensure** insurance is in place — Local Councils should have public liability cover and vendors may need individual coverage or waivers.
- **Assess** and prepare infrastructure, including ground levelling, electricity provision, water access, and sewerage network connection (if possible and if required).
- **Equipment** should either be acquired and rented out to vendors, or they are to bring their own, as long as this is based on uniform and coherent guidance.
- **Plan** logistics for vendor setup zones, customer access and parking facilities, with clear signage and marshals if needed.
- **Communicate** site-use changes early if the chosen location is a shared space (such as a car park that will require temporary closure) and enforce access rules during market hours.

## Step 4

### Vendor Recruitment and Curation



Oline Bohovik on Unsplash

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- **Announce** vendor opportunities and criteria through different local channels.
  - **Aim** for a product mix that reflects the chosen market theme and review applications to avoid product overlap that could hurt vendor sales or that could compete with local businesses.
  - **Confirm** vendor participation early, share setup guidelines and assist with any certifications or permits that may be required.
  - **Organise** a vendor briefing or orientation before launching the open market, to walk through logistics, rules and any relevant expectations in person.
  - **Discuss** contingency plans for weather or low turnout, ensuring vendors know the committee's policies for cancellations or rescheduling.

## Step 5

### Promotion and Community Awareness



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- **Promote** presence on various channels and use the Local Council's communication strategy, further diffusing the market's information at key community locations.
  - **Clear** information should be shared to further ease logistics in the run-up to the open market and the market setup itself.

## Step 6

### Launch Day Execution (Pilot and Adjust)



Mitiadis Frackias on Unsplash

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- **Treat** the market's launch as a trial. Collect feedback by walking around the market during opening to check layout, crowd flow and stall visibility, logging any issues for follow-up.
  - **Market managers** are to be on-site early and easily identifiable, ensuring all amenities function.
  - **Gather** informal feedback from visitors and vendors.
  - **Debrief** with the entire team after the market and adjust plans for the next edition.
  - **Commit** to a pilot period (e.g. 6-monthly editions) to test and refine.

## Step 7

### Ongoing Management and Improvement



Tommy Munoz on Unsplash

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- **Set** a regular market schedule, with prior vendor confirmation, but with the possibility of being flexible in terms of timings and layout. Promotion should be ongoing and targeted.
  - **Maintain** good neighbourliness, primarily vis-à-vis noise, litter and parking concerns.
  - **Collect** data in terms of visitor counts and vendor sales feedback.
  - **Monitor and manage** stall fees transparently, using the income to reinvest in amenities and address the feedback of residents and market users alike.

## Step 8

### Scale Up, Innovate and Integrate



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- **Increase** the open market's frequency or expand frequency or expand it by introducing themed markets. Also, hold annual forums with different stakeholders to keep ideas flowing.
- **Seek** ways of linking markets with tourism itineraries or by offering shuttle trips.
- **Integrate** social initiatives and offer free stalls on rotation to support social inclusion, for instance, for minority groups or NGOs.
- **Seek** EU and/or national funding as applicable (discussed further in the next section).
- **Network** with other markets and look into the possibility of having a "market trail" across different localities.
- **Use** the success of open markets to push broader goals, such as a square's urban regeneration, local business growth and the fostering of local community pride.

The above steps may enable Local Councils to grow their markets into a cornerstone of local life – fulfilling economic, social and cultural needs in line with the broader **ResidentFirst** ethos.

## 8. EU Projects and Funding Programmes (2020–2025) Supporting Open Markets and Public Space Activation

- The **ERDF and Cohesion Fund** are two of the main EU funding sources supporting urban regeneration in Malta. For the 2021–2027 programming period, two priorities stand out as particularly relevant: Cultural Heritage and Sustainable Urban Development. Local Councils interested in such projects — especially those involving piazza regeneration that combines heritage value with improved accessibility — should regularly consult the **Planning and Priorities Coordination Division (PPCD)** for open calls. ERDF funding typically covers most eligible costs, though a local co-financing contribution is required.
- The **European Union's Farm to Fork Strategy**, a core component of the European Green Deal launched in 2020, aims to create a fair, healthy, and environmentally friendly food system. A key objective of this strategy is to promote short supply chains and direct producer-to-consumer channels, enhancing the sustainability and resilience of food systems. In alignment with these principles, Malta established the Malta Food Agency in 2021 to strengthen market access for local farmers and fishermen.
- While Farm to Fork Strategy itself is a policy framework rather than a direct funding programme, it has influenced various funding opportunities under **Horizon Europe** and other EU initiatives. By participating, Local Councils could gain funding for market-related innovations (like an app for zero-waste operations).
- **Single Market Programme (SMP) 2021–2027** is an EU funding initiative designed to strengthen the functioning of the internal market and support small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). While the programme does not directly fund open-air markets, it supports related activities. Some of these supports are channelled through national agencies or specific EU calls targeting SME development or the social economy. The key is to position the market as a local initiative and as part of larger EU goals — promoting food security, small business growth and sustainable urban communities.
- **Interreg NEXT MED** (formerly Interreg MED) is an EU transnational cooperation programme supporting projects across Mediterranean countries. Although Malta has no land borders, it can participate through this framework. Local Councils can join partnerships with European municipalities to co-develop pilot projects. These could include revitalising historical squares into vibrant open markets, launching night markets, or hosting Mediterranean food festivals. The 2021–2027 programme is active, with calls periodically opening.



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- **Creative Europe** supports cultural and creative sectors. Markets that highlight local heritage, craft traditions, or international culture (e.g., through festivals or artist exchanges) are eligible if positioned as contemporary cultural expressions. Local Councils could apply to host market-based festivals featuring local and international artisans, performances, or cultural workshops. Cross-border partnerships with other European towns are often encouraged, allowing shared programming between market towns. The programme is currently active and publishes annual calls for cooperation projects.
- **Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values (CERV)** funds town-twinning initiatives, civic engagement events, and cultural cooperation between EU communities. A Local Council could apply to host a Europe-themed open market event in partnership with twin towns, celebrating multiculturalism through stalls representing different countries and community-led activities. Markets framed as platforms for democratic participation or European identity are particularly eligible. The programme runs through 2027, with multiple open calls each year.
- **New European Bauhaus (NEB)** initiative promotes sustainable, inclusive and beautiful public spaces. Although not a dedicated funding stream, NEB principles are embedded in Horizon Europe and other EU programmes. A Local Council could propose transforming an underused urban space into a well-designed market plaza, incorporating solar lighting, artistic stalls, or eco-friendly landscaping. NEB demonstration projects or community-driven space activations could attract funding or mentorship.
- **European Social Fund Plus (ESF+)** provides training, employment and social inclusion funding. Open markets can become platforms for inclusive entrepreneurship by supporting women, migrants, or unemployed youth in developing small market businesses. In partnership with NGOs, Local Councils can potentially apply for funding to run training schemes. Projects that promote markets as inclusive, accessible business environments are especially aligned. ESF+ is managed partly through national and regional schemes, with rolling calls.

## 9. Concluding Thoughts

Open markets are dynamic spaces where economic activity, cultural identity, and community life intersect. For Malta's towns and villages, they represent a powerful tool to preserve tradition and address contemporary challenges. Open markets are not merely tourist spots for shopping; they foster social connections between locals and visitors, encourage inclusive entrepreneurship and contribute to revitalising public spaces. They are accessible platforms for small producers and artisans, which encourage healthier consumption patterns and strengthen community pride through shared experiences in familiar, local settings.

This document has shown that with thoughtful planning and community engagement, open markets can catalyse wider urban improvement. They align with key policy themes such as sustainability, social inclusion, heritage preservation and public space activation. Through restoring a historic *piazza*, hosting a multicultural food festival, or launching a weekly farmers' market, Local Councils can use markets to deliver tangible benefits that residents see and feel daily.

Crucially, successful markets require collaboration. Local Councils must engage residents, vendors, NGOs and potentially national or EU partners to co-create and sustain these spaces. The eight-step roadmap in this document offers a flexible approach — adaptable to small villages or large towns — that encourages Local Councils to begin from their current position, experiment with ideas and allow markets to develop organically until they potentially have a lasting impact.

Malta's current momentum towards community-oriented urbanism, ranging from pedestrian zones to local festivals, provides fertile ground for open markets to flourish. With access to support, funding opportunities and proven models across Europe, Local Councils are well-positioned to take action. Ultimately, open markets prioritise people, creating spaces that reflect local character, meet everyday needs and foster a stronger sense of place. By championing them, Local Councils can help build more vibrant, inclusive, and resilient communities — one market day at a time.

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