



Rural-Urban Outlooks: Unlocking Synergies (ROBUST)

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Snapshot: Expressions of Urban – Peri-Urban – Rural Relationships

Ljubljana Food Market

Ljubljana Urban Region, Slovenia

1. Brief Description

Ljubljana has a vibrant food market in the city centre, famous also for its architectural design by Jožef Plečnik. Ljubljana Food Market has a long tradition and a Saturday morning visit is a favourite weekend pastime. There are several sections of the food market: the open air area with designated stalls where fruits, vegetables, herbs, flowers and similar are sold, and the “covered” area with fish shops, various butchers, bakeries and similar shops are located. In addition to regular sales, each Wednesday is dedicated to organic products and on Fridays in the summer, the market hosts “Open Kitchen” event – an open-air culinary event where various restaurants offer samples of their food. The Ljubljana Food Market also occasionally hosts various events, such as “Countryside in the City”.

No estimates have been made to what extent the food sold at Ljubljana Food Market is locally produced in the region, but it is likely to be high because the vendors can sell only their own produce (tropical fruits and vegetables are an exemption, but there are no rules on the share of it) and because priority is given to small-scale producers. The latter was achieved by establishing an easily accessible large-scale food market on the outskirts of the city where large producers can sell their produce in large volumes at smaller costs (time/salary of the vendor, distribution and parking). Due to the local produce and sales of organic products it can be said that Ljubljana Food Market is the centre of the sustainable food systems in Ljubljana Urban Region.

Ljubljana Food Market is managed by a Public Utility (Javno podjetje Ljubljanska parkirišča in tržnice, d.o.o.). Besides the main Food Market in the city centre, the Public Utility operates food markets in four other locations in the Ljubljana suburbs (Moste, Bežigrad, Koseze and Žale). Most of the smaller towns in Ljubljana Urban Region did not have the tradition of a food market and the inhabitants may have made a shopping trip to Ljubljana Food Market on Saturdays. However, recently some of the towns (for example Domžale, Vodice) have started to establish their own food markets that operate on a monthly or weekly basis and provide an opportunity to the local farmers.

2. Questions and/or Challenges

- > To what extent does the Ljubljana Food Market provide opportunity to local farmers from Ljubljana Urban Region?

There is high interest for the sales spots (stalls, shops) at Ljubljana Food Market and vendors come from across the country. Small-scale farmers are preferred, but there may not be enough control over the actual origin of products; it happened in the past that local vendors sold intensively produced products from elsewhere, including foreign countries. An insight into pricing, system of renting of spots (both in the central location and in other food markets in the suburbs), control of quality and origin would show to what extent the Food Market is attractive and economically viable to local farmers.

- > What are the factors that local farmers consider when deciding whether to sell the produce at the Ljubljana Food Market?

There might be other factors at play that influence the participation, such as availability and accessibility of loading/unloading areas, parking location and cost for the vendors' vehicles, vicinity of banks, etc. Among the advantages of the Ljubljana Food Market are:

- high volume of potential buyers which often have higher purchasing power, especially tourists,
- well established and transparent procedures for renting a stall,
- good maintenance and cleanliness of the market area,
- high level of quality control, which provides advantage to the compliant farmers selling their own produce,
- good informal network of vendors who support each other.

Disadvantages are mostly related to the competition and supporting infrastructure:

- Expensive rents of stalls (compared to the markets in other cities and towns),
- Very limited loading/unloading area with regulated time (limited opportunity for unloading during the opening hours, thus they have to assess very well how much produce to unload in the morning),
- Expensive parking in the surrounding areas for the vehicles of the vendors,
- Competition with farmers from entire Slovenia.

- > How do farmers from rural areas cooperate to facilitate the sales at Ljubljana Food Market?

The farmers, including the small-scale farmers from the hills on the fringes of Ljubljana Urban Region, cooperate for better sales at Ljubljana Food Market. Cooperation takes different forms, from joint selling, alternation at selling to sales of several farmers to compliment the selection. Sometimes there are larger initiatives behind the cooperation, such as Jarina. A variety of systems of cooperation and sharing of the earnings has emerged.

- > What preference do the shoppers have for locally produced food and shopping at the food market?

In general, people in Slovenia value locally produced, possibly organic food from small farms, and like to buy produce directly from farmers, especially from the gardens just south of the city centre which have provided the city with fresh vegetables for decades, if not centuries. Many people who shop at food markets tend to have their favourite vendor, however there are several factors at play in the decision-making process, such as the credibility of the vendor – whether it is clearly labelled on the stall that he/she is from a farm, seasonality of products and similar. Other factors may include price, competition in local shops and similar. Organic food is popular, but there seems to still be little awareness in the difference between “homegrown” product and a certified organic product.

Proximity of the vendor’s farm might also be a factor that influences shopping decisions and preferences, but it is not clear how strong is this factor compared to the others.

3. Main Insights

3.1. Indications of the application of the new concept of 'New Localities'

Ljubljana Food Market might play a strong role in the rural-urban interactions not only across Ljubljana Urban Region, but across the country. Nowadays the vendors come from across the country, though it is possible that the shoppers prefer the local ones, partly because their farms and farming practices can be checked during weekend outdoor activities. The Food Market is important for at least the following two reasons:

- It provides an opportunity to obtain better income (in cash) from direct sales of products,
- It indirectly displays the current situation and trends in farming and helps to provide motivation for diversification and/or shift in a vendor’s farm orientation.

It can be said that the Ljubljana Food Market is a rural locality being hosted by a city. Direct food shopping at local vendors provides for face-to-face interaction between the farmers and inhabitants of urban areas. Moreover, the farmers provide information on activities

that are perceived as rural, such as farming and gardening – for the latter, the vendors of seedlings are an invaluable and much appreciated source. Such interaction is important as it improves the understanding of modern farming and life in the rural areas and helps to break the stereotypes about both. No particular mapping of sources of the Food Market supply and interactions between vendors and shoppers was done so far.

Initiatives empowering the local farmers are very important as they provide local cooperation that can overcome the real and/or perceived obstacles to selling their produce in urban areas.

3.2. Insights related to the broad area of 'Smart Development'

The main issue of smart development in the context of Ljubljana Food Market is developing systems to track the demand and provide suitable supply. The farmers selling at the Food Market (most of which are small) are trying to match the demand by the urban dwellers and to follow the food trends. Most of them are only approximately tracking the sales and sometimes take orders from the regular clients. Tracking might be better in cases where a vendor sells the produce of several farmers, either through an organized initiative or not, because the earnings have to be shared adequately and the goods that were not sold returned to their owner. So far, the initiatives and farmers' associations have not focused on any smart development approaches specifically for food markets. It is possible that the newly established food markets in smaller towns in Ljubljana Urban Region are more innovative and are using some new approaches.

At Ljubljana Food Market all the vendors must identify themselves and their source(s) in their application for renting a stall. They prove that they are selling their own products by providing an excerpt from the register of agricultural holdings and a printout of LPIS. Organic farmers have to submit a copy of their organic farming certificate, while farmers who sell products from their supplementary activity on the farm (e.g. food products such as jams, cured meat, pickles, biscuits or some traditional handicrafts) need to submit a copy of their permit for supplementary activity.

As many shoppers develop strong preferences and relationships with selected vendors, some of them might build on that and visit the vendor's farm and buy a variety of products directly from there. This might stimulate the vendors to develop further activities on farm, such as gastronomic and recreational tourism, petting zoo for urban children, food processing etc. Such diversification might bring farming to a new level, introduce the use of modern technology (for example, ICT, processing and packaging technology), help to at least stabilize if not improve farm income and generate new development ideas. Moreover, it can change and possibly increase the interactions between rural and urban areas. Such linkages between vendors and shoppers might be rare, but they might have disproportionate effect.

In Slovenia, there is a strong tradition to have a garden and produce your own food, as long as you have a patch of land. As a result, many houses in urban areas have their own vegetable gardens and there is a scheme for publicly-owned vegetable gardens that is used

mostly by inhabitants of apartment blocks. Urban gardening on the scale known in large cities is not practiced, however new initiatives for pooling the resources, using and sharing new technology and selling the surplus might develop and it is likely that the Ljubljana Food Market will be one of the first point of sales.

3.3. Other insights that could be relevant for further work

It can be said that Ljubljana Food Market contributes to improved economic and social relations. It offers the opportunity to farmers for direct sales of their produce while to the urban inhabitants of Ljubljana it provides access to locally produced food and opportunity to interact with farmers and learn about farming and rural areas. Historically, there has been strong control over the quality and origin of produce by the city authorities that is sold on the market and it continues to this day (performed now by the Public Utility that operates Ljubljana Food Market which checks whether the produce sold matches the registration of agricultural holding); a public scale is still available to verify the weight of the product sold. The fact that Ljubljana Food Market is quite highly controlled system helps to generate trust between consumers (mostly urban dwellers) and producers (mostly from rural areas).

Tourism is also a strong feature of Ljubljana Food Market as it is located in the centre near most of the Ljubljana sights. The increasing number of tourists in the city has affected the dynamics of the Food Market too: it is livelier during the week than it used to be in the past and the vendors are improving their language skills. Tourism may also affect the structure of the sales in tourist season versus off-season and sales during the week versus sales on Saturday when local inhabitants dominate. It is possible that the opportunity to cater for tourist demand is driving innovation in sales and marketing. Solutions might range from packaging details to food sampling and might be already known in very touristy cities abroad, but they might be new in the context of Slovenia.

4. Data Sources and Indicators

The Public Utility that operates Ljubljana Food Market does not follow particular indicators, only the information on the vendors and their participation, and makes estimates of number of people shopping at the Ljubljana Food Market. Some additional information can be gathered, such as the share of the produce that farmers sell at the Food Market, the volume of sales and earnings, number of joint initiatives etc. Besides the Public Utility, the main source of information could be the farmers themselves and their associations.

Variables and datasets from European and national data systems on population, agriculture and food production in Ljubljana Urban Region could be used to provide the contextual information on farming, gross value added and income of farming households in Ljubljana Urban Region.

Table 1 Data / Indicators for Ljubljana Food Market

Data / Indicator	Source
Number of the farmers selling their produce at Ljubljana Food Market	Public Utility
Location and structure of the farmers selling their produce at Ljubljana Food Market	Public Utility
Volume of sales of locally produced food by type	Public Utility, farmers
Share of farm's products sold at Ljubljana Food Market in total farm production	Public Utility, farmers
Number of tourist visitors to Ljubljana Food Market	Public Utility , The public institute Ljubljana Tourism (Zavod za turizem Ljubljana) https://www.visitljubljana.com/si/turizem-ljubljana/
Number and type of initiatives for shared/joint sales at Ljubljana Food Market	Public Utility, Jarina cooperative, City Council of Municipality of Ljubljana
Number, size, type of farming and number of livestock on farms in Ljubljana Urban Region	Statistical Office of Republic of Slovenia, https://www.stat.si
Earnings from farming and economic size (ESU) of farms in Ljubljana Urban Region	Statistical Office of Republic of Slovenia, https://www.stat.si
Gross added value on farms in Ljubljana Urban Region	Agricultural Institute of Slovenia, https://www.kis.si
Structure of farms in Ljubljana Urban Region	Agricultural Institute of Slovenia, https://www.kis.si , Chamber of Agriculture and Forestry
Population in Ljubljana Urban Region (by settlement, by age group, education, household structure)	Statistical Office of Republic of Slovenia, https://www.stat.si
Migrations of inhabitants of Ljubljana Urban Region	Statistical Office of Republic of Slovenia, https://www.stat.si

5. Critical Appraisal of Data Use

Most of the data will need to be gathered from farmers, their associations and initiatives. It is likely that the data on volume of sales and types of products sold at Ljubljana Food Market could be gathered only directly from farmers. Collection of data would therefore involve interviews and surveys.

The data available at the Public Utility, Ljubljana Tourism and farmers' initiatives are detailed and probably quite accurate, however they will likely need some more work as they are unstructured and need to be processed for use in large databases.

The Agricultural Institute of Slovenia and the Agency of Republic of Slovenia for Agricultural Markets and Rural Development contain a wealth of information, including detailed information on structure and production on farms. However, it has yet to be seen whether they are allowed and willing to share this information for research purposes beyond the national analysis of agriculture, such as ROBUST, and how can they extract the data for farms that sell their produce in Ljubljana Food Market.

6. References

European Commission (2010) Europe 2020: A Strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth. <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ.do?uri=COM:2020:FIN:EN:PDF>

Public Utility that manages the Ljubljana Food Markets: <http://www.lpt.si/trznice>

Tourist information on Ljubljana Food Market:

<https://www.visitljubljana.com/sl/obiskovalci/aktivnosti/nakupovanje/glavna-trznica/>

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