



CoP Public Infrastructure and Social Services

Example of Good Practice

August 2020
Oikos d.o.o.
Mojca Hrabar
mojca.hrabar@oikos.si

Revival of Local Farmers' Markets

Ljubljana Urban Region

Key words: farmers' market, food supply chain, healthy, local produce, direct sales, household consumption, public events, local associations, public utility

1. Introduction

In Slovenia, towns used to have Farmers' Markets in the past, operating daily or on a specific day of the week depending on the population. Ljubljana, for example, still has four Farmers' Markets run by a Public Utility. The markets are open every day, and the main market is a very popular Saturday shopping spot. However, in many smaller towns, this tradition has been lost due to various factors, such as the competition by large retailers, management issues, restructuring of agriculture and changes of lifestyle. Locally produced food has remained the preferred food choice but without the Farmers' Markets it had to be purchased directly from local farms or sought in specialized fruit and vegetable shops.

At the same time, the population across Slovenia, but particularly in Ljubljana Urban Region has become increasingly urban at least in lifestyle. The areas surrounding Ljubljana are now affected by a marked suburbanization. Many inhabitants of Ljubljana moved out to smaller towns or rural areas within commuting range (typically up to 45 min drive) with more affordable costs of living, bringing more urban lifestyle with them. In Slovenia the locally produced food is highly valued, thus these population and spatial settlement trends along with increased health awareness have led to an increased demand for diverse locally produced food. As Farmers' Markets provide such an opportunity, there has been a trend across the region to establish (or bring back) the Farmers' Markets.

The main drivers behind the trend are the local farmers and the Local Action Groups of LEADER (LAGs), however the municipalities play a role, too in their desire to provide high quality of life. As a result, the activities are mostly led by the municipalities at the initiative of local farmers and LAGs and have diverse management arrangements.

2. Project Intention / Background information

Across the Ljubljana Urban Region, there have been different initiatives for the establishment of local Farmers' Markets. Partially, they are based on the demand of urban inhabitants of the towns which are familiar with Farmers' Markets in Ljubljana and other towns like Kamnik, Vrhnika in the region and possibly shop there on their daily commute. However, there has been also a strong initiative by local farmers: While more input and stronger marketing approaches might be needed than for sales to a retailer or a middleman, direct sales at Farmers' Market have greater return and enable the farmer to be more flexible. Moreover, Farmers' Markets provide a great opportunity to sell the surplus produce that might be not interesting for retailers, due to low volume to the large retailers. Various events such as local festivities and festivals where farmers can set their stalls similar to Farmers' Market have shown that the approach could be successful and that there are both demand and supply for the local produce. The (re)established Farmers' Markets are quite small – unfortunately no data on the volume of sales are available – and held once or twice a week, however they have gained considerable popularity.

Farmers' Markets were (re)established in different ways, combining various initiatives and funding sources. Often, the Public Utility in charge for maintenance of public areas manages the market, providing infrastructure, regulation and other activities, while some municipalities have outsourced the management to local entrepreneurs or private companies. For example, in Kamnik, a town to the north of Ljubljana, the Public Utility runs a small daily Farmers' Market, but has also expanded its operation to one of the main squares on Saturdays where the focus is on local and artisanal products. The main challenge was to provide a suitable space and to establish a solid management of the market infrastructure. Most of the municipalities in Ljubljana Urban Region provided the space on one of the town squares or other easily accessible areas owned by the municipality.

3. Main Description

In the municipalities of Medvode, Domžale, Komenda, Mengeš, Trzin and Vodice the revival of Farmers' Markets has been driven by the LAG "For town and village" and supported by the municipal authorities. The project was supported by the LEADER approach from European Agricultural and Rural Development Fund in 2016. The intention was to join the effort where the municipal authorities provided a space for the Farmers' Market, while the LAG provides and manages the market stalls and support service for the operation. In this way, the project

supported the supply from the local producers to the local consumers in the participating municipalities, thus shortening the food supply chains, reducing the costs and increasing the revenue of local farmers. The municipalities participating in this project have also agreed that the producers could sell their products at the Farmers' Markets in all the participating municipalities, thus ensuring variety of produce and circulation of producers.

Different approaches were taken in each municipality, tailored to the local situation such as the size of the population as well as the demand and the availability of public space that can be easily accessed as well as easily managed. The initiatives were supported by various sources of funding. The most important precondition is that support by Local Authorities, i.e. Municipalities is needed to provide at least a suitable space and basic services to establish a Farmers' Market which provides a pleasant experience for all and complies with the legislation. The establishment of Farmers' Markets is an example of reviving a traditional form of local trade, but in a modern way using contemporary technology and providing multifunctional public space.

The main challenge was to find and provide suitable space and to establish a solid management of market infrastructure. Most of the municipalities provided the space on one of the squares, on a temporarily closed parking area or, as is the case in Mengeš, in the yard of the local Voluntary Fire Brigade. Municipality of Domžale and Medvode, for example, established a dedicated public area which is now used for the Farmers' Market and public events outside of market's operating hours. In Medvode, for example, the area is also used for the occasional flea market, while in Domžale it hosts a number of public events such as local celebrations, cultural events and sport as well as recreational events. Other municipalities are smaller thus the Farmers' Markets operate only on the weekends and to boost their popularity the municipalities and local associations organise various events at the same time.

Currently, there is a variety of management arrangements at the Farmers' Markets in the participating municipalities. In Domžale and Medvode, Farmers' Markets are managed by Municipal Council with the support of LAG, where LAG takes care of the management, maintenance and rental of the stalls as well as of the coordination of the farmers that come to the market. On the other hand, in Komenda the local Tourist Association has assumed this task. The Farmers' Markets in all the municipalities already show economic sustainability and are further gaining in popularity.

However, long term management poses a challenge as the development of Farmers' Markets, especially in the small municipalities where they are currently only organised once a week, might require more resources, both human and financial. It is possible that LAG and the local associations will take on stronger role. They will need to ensure consistent input and management approach which might be difficult to ensure as their membership and interests are quite fluid. In Domžale and Medvode, the two urban centres with the largest Farmers'

Market, the municipal council might consider handing the management over to their Public Utility, similarly to Municipality of Ljubljana or Vrhnika. In this case, there is a risk that the management of Farmers' Markets will not get enough attention among other tasks of the Public Utilities and will start losing their link with local initiatives and local events.

The main social added value of the project is that it ensured a space for local producers to present themselves and sell their produce locally, resulting in higher and more secure income, thus supporting economic viability of farming households. While it took time to ensure diversity of products and high participation both from farmers and consumers, the local Farmers' Markets are popular among the consumers that appreciate locally produced food and direct contact with the producers, and the numbers of consumers are growing. Consumers mostly shop for fresh produce for their weekend and/or weekly meals, but also for staple food for storage (potatoes, apples, for example) or pickling (cabbage, peppers, cucumbers for example), especially in autumn.

It is important to note that each Municipality took a different approach, tailored to the situation and the competences and capacity of local actors. In terms of regional added value, the project enables marketing of local produce across the northern part of Ljubljana Urban Region and shortens the local food supply chain. In addition to the pure economic activity, in all the participating municipalities the Farmers' Market area and activities like "market days", usually a Saturday provide a space for various events, meetings and other public open-air activities, particularly in relation to culture, cultural heritage and tourism. As a result, the Farmers' Markets are not mere revival of the ones that operated in the past, but are providing social added value as a meeting and showcase place of the local inhabitants.

4. 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>

Revival of Farmers' Markets in the Local Action Group area, <https://www.domzale.si/objava/181564>

Vrhnika Farmers' Market, <http://www.kpv.si/pogosta-vprasanja/trznica>

Information on Kamnik Farmers' Market, <https://www.kamnik.info/na-kamniski-zivilski-trznici-je-znova-zazivel-trzni-utrip/>

Information on Mengeš Farmers' Market: <http://www.menges.si/menges-si/prva-stran/prva-obletnica-trznice-v-mengsu/>

Information on Medvode Farmers' Market: <https://www.medvode.si/objava/204468>

Information on Domžale Farmers' Market: <https://www.domzale.si/objava/105885>

Information on Vodice Farmers' Market: <https://www.vodice.si/objava/147580>