

Institution: The Open University

Unit of Assessment: C23 Sociology

Title of case study: Street markets as sites of social interaction and community building

1. Summary of the impact

Watson's Joseph Rowntree funded study on *Street Markets as Spaces of Social Diversity* shifted the dominant view that street markets in Britain were failing economically and that their decline was inevitable. The research brought the importance of markets as spaces of social interaction and community to the fore. The research was used by the National British Market Authorities (NBMA), which represents all market authorities and traders in the UK, who invited her to address two of their national annual conferences, and her conclusions were influential in their initiative '*Love Your Local Market Campaign*' and in local market strategy across the UK. As a result of her role as special adviser to the House of Commons Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) Select Committee on the *Traditional Retail Markets Inquiry*, her arguments were adopted as key elements of the final report.

2. Underpinning research

The initial research on street markets started in 2004 in a London borough, with research funding from the National Everyday Cultures Programme at The Open University. This research led to two articles in academic journals [3.1 and 3.2] and a wider interest in street markets in the UK. As a result, Watson responded to a call from the Joseph Rowntree Foundation on public space as social space, and was awarded a grant (£56,000) for her proposal to research street markets as spaces of social diversity.

This study investigated eight markets across Britain, selected to reflect both different socio-economic populations, and also different town and metropolitan sites. It countered the view that markets were facing an inevitable decline due to the rise of supermarkets and lack of investment, and explored instead the potentiality of markets as public space, and social and economic innovation, where multiple forms of sociality are enacted. Research was conducted in the eight markets during 2004–6.

The research revealed that markets were not just spaces of consumption for many different groups in each of the localities, they were also important sites for vibrant social encounters, for social inclusion and the care of others, for 'rubbing along', and for mediating differences. The research concluded that the social encounters and connections found in markets contradicted pessimistic accounts of the decline of social association in local communities. The research argued that in contrast to the shopping mall, markets provided the possibility for the inclusion of marginalised groups and for the co-mingling of differences where these are increasingly relegated to more private spheres. As such, markets were revealed to be key, but often unnoticed, spaces of the public sphere [3.3].

The research also investigated and explored the social, economic, institutional and design factors that were significant in producing successful markets, and the reasons for the failure of markets in some localities.

The study led to the publication of a report to Joseph Rowntree, published by Policy Press [3.4], which provided recommendations for the successful operation of street markets across a variety of sites and sectors, including local authority markets, privately run markets and farmers' markets. It argued that markets were significant in a number of key government, social, urban and economic policy arenas. The research further revealed that lack of investment, management and strategic thinking led to the failure of markets in local areas, and that where coherent strategies had been put in place, the decline of the market had been turned around. The research led to further academic publications [3.5 and 3.6] and has been taken up in a variety of policy and academic arenas.

3. References to the research

1. Watson, S. and Wells, K., (2005a) 'A politics of resentment: shopkeepers in a London neighbourhood', *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, vol. 28, no. 2, pp. 261–277.
2. Watson, S. and Wells, K., (2005b) 'Spaces of nostalgia: the hollowing out of a London market' (*Journal of Social and Cultural Geography*, vol. 6, no. 1, pp. 17–30.
3. Watson, S. (2006) *City Publics: The (dis) enchantments of Urban Encounters*, Routledge.
4. Watson, S. and Studdert, D. (2006) *Markets as Sites of Social Interaction: Spaces of Diversity*, Joseph Rowntree Foundation and Policy Press.
5. Watson, S. (2009a) 'The magic of the market place: sociality in a neglected public space', *Urban Studies*, vol. 46, no. 8, pp. 1577–1591.
6. Watson, S. (2009b) 'Brief Encounters of an unpredictable kind: everyday multiculturalism in three London street markets', in Wise, A. and Velayutham, S. (eds) *Everyday Multiculturalism*, London: Palgrave, pp. 125–140.

Key grants

2004–6 Joseph Rowntree Foundation, Social Value of Public Space Programme Markets as Social Spaces project, £56,000 awarded to S. Watson

4. Details of the impact

The final report provided recommendations for the successful operation of street markets across a variety of sites and sectors, including local authority markets, privately run markets, and farmers' markets. It argued that markets were significant in a number of key local and national government policy arenas: community development and cohesion, health agendas for better diets and nutrition, economic and social innovation agendas including offering sites for start up businesses, and environmental agendas for reductions in packaging and shopping in the locality by foot as opposed to car journeys to supermarkets at some distance.

The research led to a number of publications as indicated above.

The research was immediately picked up by the National Association of British Market Authorities (NABMA), which is the leading organisation for local authority street markets across the UK. Watson was asked to give the keynote lecture at the NABMA annual conference in 2006. Here she promoted a new agenda for the role of markets beyond their traditional role as commercial and retail sites. Her argument, which became central to NABMA's public platform, was that markets had other roles to play in terms of political and policy agendas for urban regeneration, social and community inclusion and cohesion, healthy eating and nutrition, economic innovation, and the reduction of environmental impact and city liveability. The research was influential in the launch of the *Love Your Local Market Campaign* and in providing the impetus for the regeneration of markets in local areas.

Graham Wilson Chief Executive of NABMA confirmed the significance of the impact of Watson's research as follows:

Sophie Watson was really the first person to undertake research on the social impact of markets. The research was of great significance because it led to a more detailed consideration of the way markets interact with their local communities. Sophie's research was also one of the catalysts for the Communities and Local Government's Committee Inquiry into Retail Markets which produced a detailed agenda for the markets industry to address.

In the period since Sophie's research, we have seen markets linked with a range of policy objectives including healthy eating, culture, tourism, public space utilisation, new start opportunities and regeneration and it is this broader base that has given markets a higher profile and wider appeal. The research was enhanced by the provision of case studies showing what can be achieved and providing good practice guidance for those who want to find new ideas and initiatives. In the last two years my organisation has led the 'Love Your Local Market Campaign' which has focused on new start opportunities but also sought to build affection and support for local markets and provide evidence of the connectivity between the market and the well being of

the local community. Sophie must take credit for giving us the impetus to look at this wider picture.

Watson's invited lecture at the *National Food Markets Conference 2007: From Producer to Consumer* further emphasised the social and public role of markets to market advocates whose focus to date had been on the more nutritional value of markets.

From 2008–9 Watson was a special adviser to the House of Commons DCLG Select Committee's *Traditional Retail Markets Inquiry*. Her role was to highlight the hidden social and community benefits of street markets that had hitherto been unrecognised. She accompanied the Commission on two site visits to Leicester and to two London markets (Annexes 2 and 3 of the final report).

Watson was also a key witness to the Committee. Her arguments were central to the final report *'Can Market Failure: Traditional Markets Survive?'*, presented to the House of Commons DCLG Committee in 2009 (see pp. Ev 4–8). Her evidence and arguments brought a new perspective to the value of street markets in the UK, which has contributed to their regeneration in many local areas.

In 2010, Watson was appointed as expert adviser to Regeneris on the London Development Agency Report on London's street markets. Her contribution to this is evidenced in their report *London's Street Markets*. Her research was also drawn upon in *Markets 21 A Policy and Research Review of UK Retail and Wholesale Markets in the 21st Century* conducted by the Retail Markets Alliance in November 2009. Her work was cited as evidence in a written statement submitted by R. Janssens to the Draft Newham Core Strategy with respect to Newham's strategy for Queens Market.

Watson was invited again by NABMA to remind market authorities and strategists of her arguments at the 2013 Annual Conference. At this event many of the speakers and participants spoke of how they had adopted her recommendations in their strategies for revitalising or rebuilding their local markets. There was now a much wider acceptance of the notion that markets could play a role in revitalising the community and as a social and public space. Her speech was reported on the NABMA website following the conference. Rob Nixon – markets manager for Stoke on Trent Council reports:

Despite recent advances in profile emanating from the likes of the 'Portas' study, markets to a greater extent remain hidden in terms of their role and significance. With over 47,000 micro businesses, their staff and associated supply chains, they are surely an important part of our retail landscape. However I and many people in the industry believe they are so much more in terms of place management. I refer specifically to the part markets play in social interaction and cohesion. Despite their history, countrywide presence and broad reach there remains little in the way of empirical data or theory surrounding retail markets.

This is the reason why your work 'Markets as Sites for Social Interaction' has and remains a staple document for those working in the industry....It is one of the few documents that identifies the humanity of the market environment and in doing so explains why despite the dramatic change in patterns of consumption they survive and in many places prosper.

Watson has been invited to a number of different institutions and events to give lectures on street markets and their implications for public space, and on the methodologies for researching street markets. Her research has had a significant impact on teaching in the City of Vienna where she was appointed in 2011–12 to a Visiting Professorship in SKUOR – The Interdisciplinary Centre for Public Space and Urban Cultures – a post funded in part by the City of Vienna. Her role was to lead student research on street markets in Vienna and Budapest.

She was invited to present her research on BBC Radio 4's *Thinking Allowed* in May 2011 and was also a guest on the programme on 20 March 2013.

Watson's research on street markets is featured on the Charisma Web Site for Consumer Market Studies.

To summarise, through Watson's different activities and roles cited above, markets are now recognised by national and local government, within the market authorities sector, as key sites for sociality, community and public space.

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

1. Chief Executive of the National British Markets Association to confirm her influence on NABMA thinking and strategy, and the initiative of the Love Your Local Market Campaign.
2. Civil Servant working for the Department of Communities and Local Government, Retail markets policy and high street regeneration, Local growth: high streets and regeneration. To confirm her influence on the DCLG select committee and final report findings.
3. Market Manager Stoke on Trent Council to confirm her influence on market authorities strategies across Britain.
4. Director of the Vienna University of Technology, Interdisciplinary Centre for “Urban Culture and Public Space” (SKUOR). To confirm her influence on teaching of international students in spatial planning.
5. Broadcaster of Thinking Allowed, BBC Radio 4 to confirm Watson’s dissemination of her ideas to wider audiences.

Reports

6. *Can Market Failure: Traditional Markets Survive?* House of Commons Department of Communities and Local Government, 2009.
7. Regeneris LDA report, *London’s Street Markets*.
8. *Markets 21, A Policy and Research Review of UK Retail and Wholesale Markets in the 21st Century*, conducted by the Retail Markets Alliance, 2009, (see p. 27).

Websites

9. NABMA website <http://www.nabma.com>
10. Regeneris Website <http://regeneris.co.uk>
11. Charisma Website <http://www.charisma-network.net>