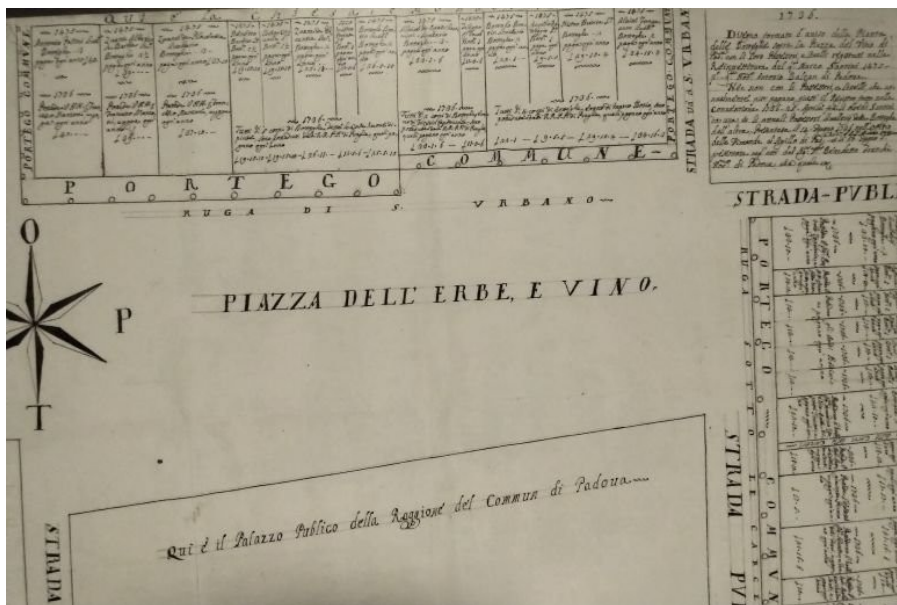


Padua and its markets

A podcast

by

Giulia Becevello, Martina Ghelli, Sarah Spencer, Enrico Valseriati



Intro

Enrico and Sarah

Enrico

Welcome to the podcast "Padua and its markets": A public history and participatory project created by Giulia Becevello, Martina Ghelli, Sarah Spencer and Enrico Valseriati.

Sarah

In this podcast, we will discuss the very particular relationship of Padua and its squares and markets. The market squares, which pulsate with life at the heart of the city, are key elements of the urban structure and the soul of Padua. Above all, the city is known for its ancient University, and for the vitality of its commercial urban spaces, set within and among its historical buildings.

Testified for the first time at the end of the 12th Century, the two main commercial squares of the city, Piazza delle Erbe and Piazza della Frutta, were conceived by the municipal authorities in dialogue with the institutional buildings: firstly, the Palazzo della Ragione, and subsequently the palaces of the Podestà, the Anziani and the civic Council.

During the lordship of the da Carrara family, at the turn of the 15th century, the famous squares of Padua acquired their final form and function: on one hand, the four "platee" of commerce and justice; on the other the symbolic square of the Carrarese lordship, Piazza dei Signori.

The buildings overlooking the city squares underwent various changes during the Venetian domination. Between the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, the new Renaissance dictates led to aesthetic modernizations of the Palazzo del Capitano, the ancient Palazzo della Ragione. The appearance of the famous five Paduan squares, praised by travellers and Renaissance humanists alike, has scarcely changed from the early modern age to the present day. Apart from the architectural exterior of these urban spaces, the most interesting aspect is the continuous use of the squares as places of commerce and markets throughout the centuries: a real rarity, even for a country with such strong commercial traditions as Italy.

Today the squares of Padua- an extraordinary legacy of the Middle Ages- are still urban spaces of strong social interaction and attachment to civic identity. Citizens, students and visitors alike cannot resist a walk under the Salone, the covered market of the city set between the medieval walls of the Palazzo della Ragione, or resist the purchase of meat, fish or vegetables in the same places where men and women of the past wandered and lived.

Yet even this symbol of a historic city today is experiencing a state of crisis, which began before the Covid19 pandemic (it is currently impossible to enjoy social interaction and the freedom to buy and sell at the markets). Amidst the risks of closures and economic difficulties, however, traders and buyers have strongly defended the social role of markets and squares in the urban fabric of Padua, and have promoted a protection consortium, which today brings together 46 merchants.

The Consortium- known as 'Il Salone', presents itself on the official Website as "The oldest covered market in Europe. In its eight centuries of history, the ancient market of the Sottosalone has become the symbol of the city of Padua and a unique place in the world, a meeting point between the passion of the artisans of taste and the unconditional love of consumers".

Faced with a completely uncertain future for the commercial activities of European cities and for

the forms of socialization in urban contexts, we decided to interview traders and patrons of this historic city market to understand what they expect from the future and what solutions can be found to keep the medieval markets of Padua alive.

Interview 1

Enrico and Giulia

Enrico

You are a trader of the Salone. What is the relationship between the city and its markets?

Giulia

There is a very strong link between Padua and its markets, it is a distinctive sign. There is a "market life". The squares are beautiful when they are alive, largely thanks to the markets, which must keep open like other shops during the pandemic. We must cooperate and encourage customers to come to the market. Markets must be treated like bars and shops, now and in the future.

Enrico

Do you feel a connection with a tradition?

Giulia

Tradition exists but it is felt less and less. A lot has changed over the past 30 years. The link with tradition is fading- once there were many participatory parties and anniversaries. With globalization, traditions have been debased, because new people have been included who do not believe in this legacy. It's nice to go to a country and live the traditions of a certain place.

Enrico

What do you foresee for the future of city markets?

Giulia

City markets will shut down, but we need to be confident. We have unfair competition with online sites, which don't encourage people to leave the house and go to the market and to the squares. The Internet is bad for city centers and markets. Aside from food, other sectors are overwhelmed by the Internet and the laziness of citizens.

Enrico

What public interventions are needed for markets to survive even after the pandemic?

Giulia

First of all, do a lot of marketing. It would also be advisable to move parking to outside of the center, with effective public transport that encourages visitors to walk around and through the city. The city, then, must be clean and healthy: when the image of the city is clean, the markets benefit, because it becomes a pleasure to arrive in the city and stroll through the market stalls.

Interview 2 Enrico and Martina

Enrico

As a patron, in your opinion, what is the relationship between the city of Padua and its markets?

Martina

In my opinion, the connection between Padua and the markets is strong, because they are very popular, but I don't go there much because I prefer shop in other stores, in other places.

Enrico

So you would say that the supermarket is more convenient than the market?

Martina

Yes, absolutely, because I can buy everything there, such as household products, frozen foods or clothes, and it is also more convenient in terms of the hours because the market is actually inconvenient for those who do not live in the center.

Enrico

Do you think that the people of Padua hang out at the market?

Martina

Yes, I see a lot of people at the market- I often go there as well, and it is very crowded, especially in the mornings. The fact that it takes place in the most famous and popular squares, which also attract tourists, makes the markets very crowded and busy.

Enrico

Talking about these piazzas, do you perceive the historical tradition of the market of Padua?

Martina

For me, the fact that the market still takes place in Piazza delle Erbe or Piazza della Frutta means that there is a strong tradition and a continuity through the centuries in the places where the market occurs.

Enrico

A question regarding the future of the markets: in your opinion, now that we are in a particular situation from a health point of view, what can be done to make food markets more usable and accessible even during a pandemic?

Martina

Considering the times and the situation, the stands are outside, which is already a healthier environment than indoor stores. In my opinion, they could reduce the number of stands and maybe separate them to space them out, and maybe put plexiglass panels to keep people distanced.

Outro

Sarah

As these interviews have shown, Padua retains a strong connection to its market spaces, but they are nonetheless facing unprecedented challenges as shopping habits change rapidly, with consumers preferring to shop at supermarkets or online for convenience- an issue which has been accelerated by the pandemic. Although the history of these market spaces, and the continuous function they have served throughout the centuries, is a large part of their appeal and Paduan civic identity, these spaces must move with the times if they are to survive. The market squares should work for everyone, but above all, for the citizens of the city itself. As such, we propose the introduction of other attractions into the market squares to revitalise the historic centre of the city. These might include the introduction of more bars and restaurants, a library space with books on Padua's history to enable people engage with the links between past, present and future, and events organised with local institutions, universities and historical societies to draw people in. As was suggested by the interviewee, creating increased parking spaces in the city and improving public transport would enable more people to visit the markets and the additional draws proposed, and keeping the city clean will also encourage people to visit. We unanimously agree that proposals such as the app for il Salone, which considers it almost as a museum- 'il mercato storico'- would be damaging, as these are not dead spaces of the past, but are very much alive, and we hope will remain so long into the future.

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