

# Livable Cities Newsletter



January 13, 2012 Issue 3

## Focusing on food environments

Welcome to the Livable Cities newsletter. This newsletter is used to provide updates and information to the Livable Cities Network. The theme for this edition is food environments.

Please share this newsletter with your partner groups and anyone who might be interested!

## What is the “food environment”?

“Food Environments” refer to what food is available in a community and how people are able to access that food. The food environment plays an important role in encouraging people to eat healthy foods. If all that is available and affordable in a neighbourhood is unhealthy food, the people living in that neighbourhood are more likely to have an unhealthy diet. There are 4 main categories of the food environment:

- **Community Food Environment** is defined as the distribution of food sources including the number, type, location, and accessibility of food.
- **Consumer Food Environment** is defined as what consumers encounter within and around retail food outlets including the availability and price of healthful food choices, and quality of food.
- **Organizational Food Environments** is defined as the availability and price of food in institutions such as schools and workplaces as well as in the home.
- **Information Food Environments** is defined as the information that is available that describes a healthy diet.

Research has shown that each of these types of food environments has an impact on healthy eating.

## Why is the “food environment” important?

Low- and middle-income countries experience a double burden of under-nutrition and over-nutrition. Levels of malnutrition are still high but as economies develop, there is an increasing consumption of energy-dense, highly processed foods. This “nutrition-transition” of eating pattern results in several nutrition-related noncommunicable diseases and these diseases are on the rise throughout the world. NCD prevention strategies will need to address environmental and policy approaches, including the food environment.

## Fresh Markets in Hanoi - an important part of the food environment

Markets have always been at the center of Hanoi's cultural and economic existence. At one time, the city was given another name, *Ke Cho*, or market place, to reflect the important role that market activities play in the city. The markets are part of the historical and cultural identity of the city of Hanoi. With the exception of the new urban areas, all neighbourhoods have fresh markets in the morning that provide residents not only with fresh food at affordable prices, but also with an inviting space for social relationships in neighbourhoods. Market provides opportunities for benefits that extend beyond just the individual. Markets can provide greater linkages between rural and urban communities and provide job opportunities for the poor.



## Fresh Markets are under threat in Hanoi

In low- and middle- income countries, the introduction of the western-style supermarket is impacting the traditional markets and small local retail food outlets and is forcing many to close. Sadly, it is often government policy forcing the closure of traditional fresh markets. In Hanoi, the recent “Draft Plan of the Retail and Wholesale Network” outlines the government proposal to replace traditional markets with supermarkets and shopping centres. The following figures show the physical coverage of the traditional markets today (assuming an 800 metre radius walking shed) and the proposed situation in 2020.



Figure 1: Market Location in 2010 and 800 m walking shed



Figure 2: Market Location in 2020 and 800 m walking shed

The location of retail food outlets is very important in deciding people's access to food as people are strongly influenced by how far they must travel. Distance to retail food outlets is especially important to low-income residents as they are the least likely to have access to motorized transportation.

## 7 Key Arguments for Saving the Markets

Given that fresh markets are vital for Livable Cities, we present here seven arguments why urgent action is needed to change the course of this development.

Nutrition and food safety	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Access to fresh, healthy produce</li></ul>
Well-being	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Satisfaction of shared public space</li><li>• Social vibrancy</li></ul>
Price	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Access to affordable foods</li></ul>
Local economy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Thousands of jobs for local vendors</li></ul>
Cultural ways of life	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Part of Hanoi's historical tradition</li><li>• Distinguishes Hanoi in globalized environment</li></ul>
Social relationships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Social integration</li><li>• Meeting place for informal interactions</li></ul>
Urban-rural relationship	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Markets provide outlet for majority of the region's small-scale, local producers</li></ul>

### Case Study: Hàng Da Market

Hàng Da market was replaced by a modern shopping mall. Although the building still provides space for the fresh market, it is now hidden in the basement alongside the car parking. Vendors at the market are now forced to sublease their spots to others because the lease price is too high to afford. Others still have their stall but have found that the location does not invite customers. As they told us “The market is dead”.

The example of Hàng Da market shows us that economic development and pressure from commercial developers has changed these public spaces into semi-private and private spaces. The development at present indicates that the fresh markets in Hanoi are slowly disappearing in favour of high-end real estate that not only fails to provide income opportunities for the poor, but also decreases availability to fresh and healthy food.



Figure 3: Inside the fresh market. Poorly suited to attracting customers.

## What is HealthBridge Vietnam doing to save the markets?

HealthBridge Vietnam is working with policy makers and professionals to raise awareness about the importance of the fresh markets in Hanoi. They are pushing for policies that value, protect, and preserve the markets. They are also seeking to have the government acknowledge the need to protect the fresh markets from attack by global supermarket chains.

In order to raise awareness and start the policy dialogue, the HealthBridge Vietnam office has prepared the document: *Hanoi - Fresh markets, a way of life and public health under threat*. It can be found on HealthBridge's website at [www.healthbridge.ca](http://www.healthbridge.ca). Look under "Publications" and then "Livable Cities".

## Additional Resources

WHO Healthy Markets website - [http://www.who.int/foodsafety/capacity/healthy\\_marketplaces/en/](http://www.who.int/foodsafety/capacity/healthy_marketplaces/en/)

Project for Public Spaces (PPS) - <http://www.pps.org/markets/>

Nutrition Environment Measurement Survey - <http://www.med.upenn.edu/nems/>

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### Next issue...

In the next issue we will be highlighting the Rio+20 United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development.

### Interested in becoming a Livable Cities Network member?

To become part of the Livable Cities Network, e-mail Kristie Daniel, Program Manager, Livable Cities at [kdaniel@healthbridge.ca](mailto:kdaniel@healthbridge.ca).



HealthBridge's Livable Cities program works in partnership with local NGOs, academic institutions and governments in developing countries. We help local partners identify needs, develop and implement appropriate solutions, apply innovative and sustainable practices, and promote effective policies through research and action.

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