

# MARKET CITIES

## MEXICO CITY



Gourmet vegetable and crop stand, produced locally, at “El Mercadito” in Central de Abasto Wholesale Market. Photo by Fundación Placemaking México.

Mexico City’s markets possess an unimaginable cultural richness: since pre-colonial times they have seen the birth of legend and legacy. Always witnessing an infinite number of changes (of currency, products, people...). With the passing of centuries, Mexican markets preserve traditions and encourage innovation and entrepreneurship.

Today, market systems play a fundamental role, as they are the main supply channels for 46% of the Mexico City’s households, not to mention the 280,000 jobs they generate (approximately) in the capital. Moreover, given their cultural relevance, they have an enormous potential to promote social interaction among diverse people: creating connections between vendors and customers, favoring the local economy and creating more resilient communities.

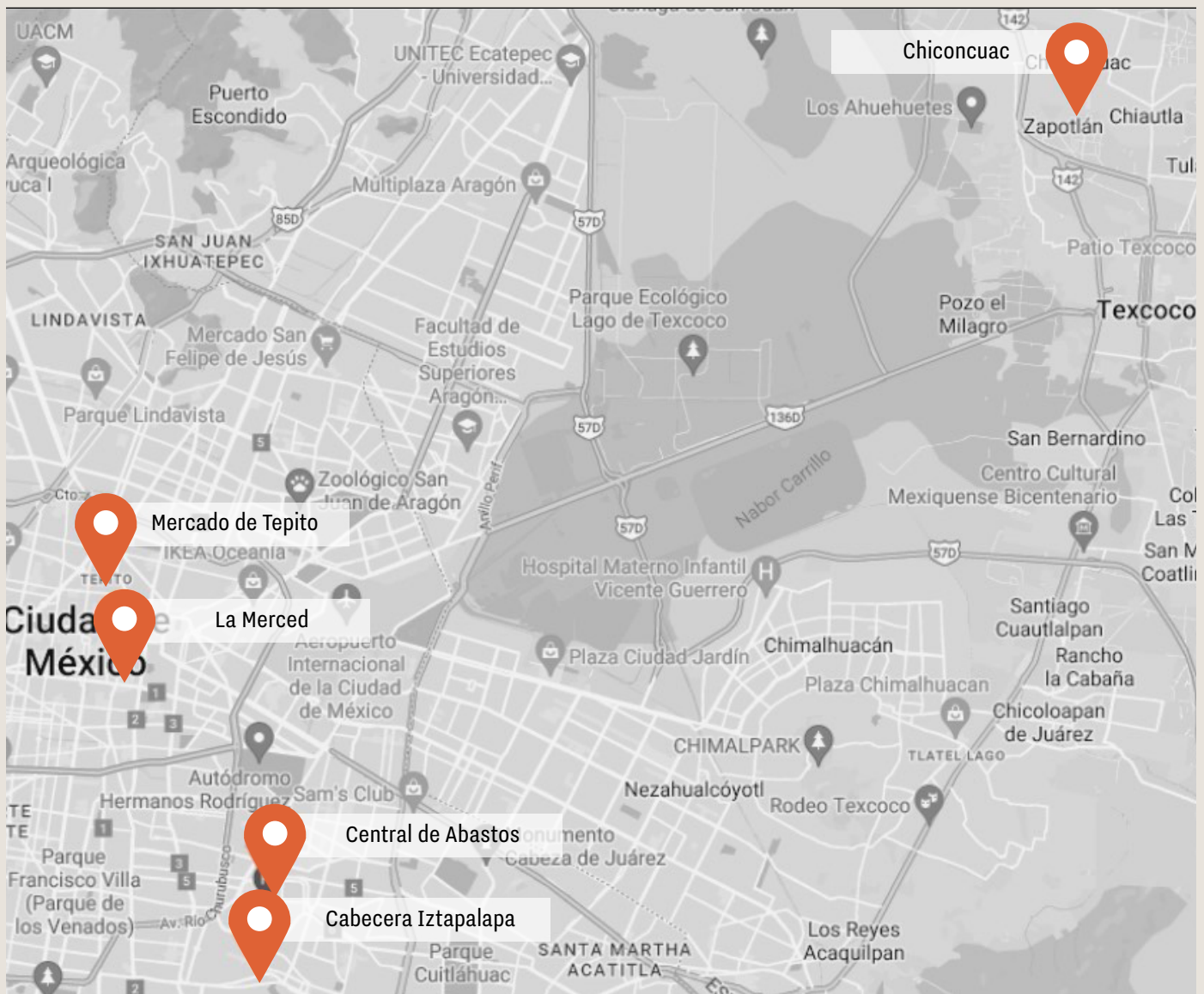
Even with all the benefits they represent, public markets, wholesalers, tianguis and street vendors face several difficulties that threaten the welfare of the businesses that conform them, and make it impossible for these vending sites to become economic and social enhancers of the community.

That said, at Fundación Placemaking México we invited **Steve Davies**, market expert and Co-Founder of Project for Public Spaces and its Market Cities program, to tour some of Mexico City’s most emblematic markets with us. During the visit we met with leaders, vendors, authorities and concessionaires; discovered some of the greatest strengths and areas of opportunity of Mexico’s markets; and asked ourselves how we could develop a program that would benefit Mexico City’s public markets and the communities that sustain them.

Market Cities is a program of Project for Public Spaces that supports a global network of market and civic leaders. Since 1975 Project for Public Spaces has helped over 3,500 communities across 50 countries and all 50 U.S. states imagine their futures and meet their needs through public space. The Market Cities Program poses the question, “What if every city had a market strategy?” and seeks to strengthen the regional systems behind the simple market stall — connecting and supporting a diverse set of stakeholders through research, specialized training, pilot projects, and a network of peers.

Market Cities has developed **7 core principles** to create Cities committed to their markets: “Market Cities” that systematically support the growth of local businesses and trade centers; creating networks of resilience, innovation and community entrepreneurship while connecting urban customers to the rural economies where products are grown, raised and distributed.

Below, we present the learnings we obtained from Mexico City’s markets, thinking about the possibilities of creating a support program that incentivizes their integral development, within the framework of the 7 Market Cities principles.



Mapping of the markets toured during the visit. <https://goo.gl/maps/iDBCJ3P2b8B5FuJQ6>





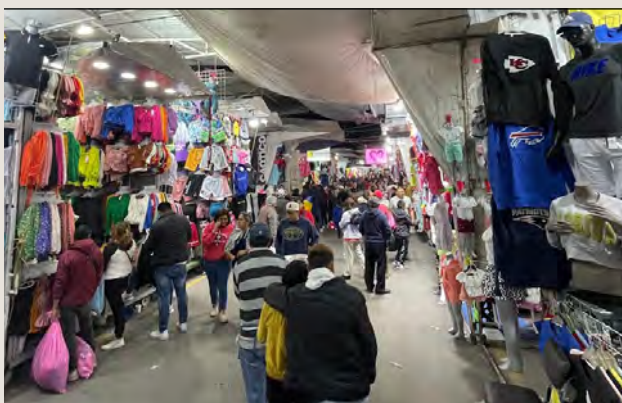
## VARIETY

A MARKET CITY INCLUDES A WIDE VARIETY OF TYPES OF MARKETS IN A CITY AS PART OF ONE MARKET SYSTEM.

**This attribute** refers to the fact that a **Market City** should include a wide variety of market types as part of the city's market system. This includes markets for food, clothing, groceries, supplies, wholesale markets, large and small markets, temporary markets, informal markets, and street vendors.



Warehouse in the fruit and vegetable sales section of the Central de Abastos. Photo by Place Solutions Group, LLC.



The wholesale clothing market in Chiconcuac, State of Mexico, is the largest clothing market in Latin America. Photo by Fundación Placemaking México.



Candy Market in La Merced. Photo by Fundación Placemaking México.

**Mexico City** has an enormous variety of markets. From weekly or fixed street markets and bazaars, to huge indoor public markets such as La Merced, or wholesale markets such as the Central de Abastos. If there is anything, it's the variety: of products, prices, ways of selling and offers. There are 329 indoor market buildings alone in Mexico City, and in one district we visited (Iztapalapa), there are 50 street markets in addition to 20 market buildings. However while there seems to be coordination at the district level to create "one market system," there is no such system city-wide, formal or informal.



Undoubtedly, variety is one of the great strengths of the market system and local commerce in the Mexican capital. There are informal vendors, concessionaires who have had the same premises for generations, leaders committed to their markets, family food stalls and the famous “bullfighters” (who arrive with their products and move from place to place “bullfighting” the authorities). At this point, it is notable that many traders have generations of experience in the same place, which demonstrates the tradition and stability of the market system in the city.



Orlando, leader of the concessionaires of the Mercado Cabecera Iztapalapa, showed us the businesses and explained about their role. Photo by Fundación Placemaking Mexico.

All of these actors are part of Mexico City's market ecosystem and derive their livelihood from the local economy; however, not all have the same opportunities. For example, we were astonished to learn that the rent for a stall in indoor public markets is fixed for the entire city, regardless of the socioeconomic level of the area where it is located and the local budget for maintenance and cleaning of facilities. In addition, rents only cover a fraction of operating costs, which means that the government is subsidizing vendors in markets in prosperous locations.

In this sense, the **next steps** would be to **promote actions for greater equity** and updated public policies and to generate **support for markets with low budgets**, ensuring that all types of markets have opportunities for development.



Vendor of “changuitos” toys, who decided to remain anonymous and works informally, “bullfighting” and dodging the authorities.

Photo by Place Solutions Group, LLC.



## COLLABORATION

A MARKET CITY ORGANIZES DIVERSE PARTNERS AND STAKEHOLDERS WHO ACT TOGETHER TO ACHIEVE COMMON POLICY OBJECTIVES.

**Collaboration** refers to **Market Cities** having markets with supportive communities behind them and stakeholders who collaborate with each other with common goals. When a diverse group of partners can advocate for their markets and businesses in order to create public policies that improve their trading spaces, Market Cities are created. **Potential players** include market operators and managers; advocates for health, community development, local food, agriculture and job creation; philanthropic organizations; and municipal and regional government agencies.



Tomasa, leader of an area of street commerce, showed us the premises she manages.  
Photo by Place solutions Group, LLC.

In Iztapalapa, we met **Tomasa**, one of two women who lead the merchants located around the Mercado Cabecera. She was chosen by other local vendors to maintain order, resolve disputes and represent the interests of her colleagues. Although the external traders are not fully regularized, they contribute to the local economy and are managed by local leaders, demonstrating a **collaborative network among diverse, small-scale, committed actors**.

In this organized informality, Tomasa's role is vital in **maintaining order and ensuring that her peers are represented before local authorities in decision-making**.

Even within the variety and apparent chaos that characterizes **Mexico City's market systems**, there is some degree of organization as hierarchies and informal leaderships are created and operate in the stores on the public streets, outside the public market buildings.

During the visit, we were struck by the number of people from the community involved with their markets and the public spaces that surround them: contributing their time and work to improve their functioning. They are the **stakeholders** committed to the wellbeing of their businesses and communities.

Clearly there is interest on the part of the communities in improving and keeping their markets clean, safe and attractive.



Concessionaire with her flower stand at the Cabecera Market, Iztapalapa.  
Photo by Place Solutions Group, LLC.



With the number of trading zones, tianguis, public markets and wholesalers, we are surprised that no importance is given to creating collaborative initiatives or programs on a large scale: among concessionaires, traders and leaders of different markets.

One of the next steps to consider, then, would be to foster collaborative and supportive networks among market system actors as well as outside partners, especially in the fields of health and economic development. By sharing information, experiences and resources, markets can strengthen each other and enhance their joint development in a meaningful way.



We toured the stalls led by Tomasa. Photo by Fundación Placemaking Mexico.



Tomasa's stall where she sells chicken broth early in the morning. Photo by Place solutions Group, LLC.



## MEASUREMENT

A MARKET CITY MEASURES THE VALUE OF ITS MARKETS AND ANALYZES HOW WELL THEY ARE FUNCTIONING WITHIN A SYSTEM.

**Market Cities** use information about: areas where there is a high concentration or lack of markets; market supply chains; the quality of facilities; and the needs of vendors and the community to analyze ways in which broader and more comprehensive community benefits can be provided, especially to people with low incomes or differentiated disadvantages.

In Mexico City, we saw a successful example of measurement during our visit to the **Central de Abastos (CEDA)**, the largest wholesale market in the world. It is distributed over an area of 327 hectares (around 808 acres). It is estimated that around 300,000 people visit daily and 70,000 employees depend on the market. Around 30 thousand metric tons (about 66 million pounds) of food and commodities are stored daily in the facilities, which have a capacity of 122 thousand metric tons (approximately 269 million pounds).

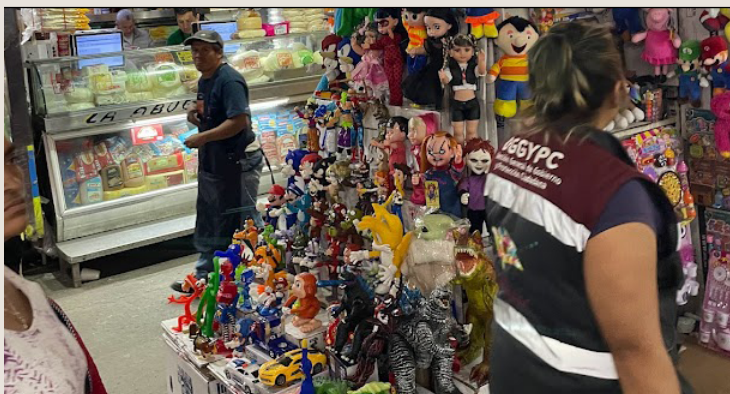


On our tour of Mexico City's Central de Abastos, FICEDA members explained the improvement programs they have in place.  
Photo by Fundación Placemaking Mexico.

During our visit, we learned about the different programs of **FICEDA** (Fideicomiso de la Central de Abastos) and they are an example of how measurement can generate support programs for the communities that live and depend on the market. We discovered that there are physical activation programs, a renewable energy program, another that provides support to families working at the **CEDA** and even a shelter for dogs and cats.

But perhaps the most interesting and successful we learned about is **ITACATE**, the food recovery

program and collection center. Since its inception, the program has recovered 267,995 tons (around 590 million pounds) of food and distributed it to the most vulnerable sectors of the population in Mexico City, with the support of the Secretariat of Inclusion and Social Welfare.



Shops, stalls and vendors in the corridors and halls of the CEDA. Photo by Fundación Placemaking Mexico.

In this sense, it can be seen that the Central de Abasto de la Ciudad de México has experience recovering metrics, statistics and creating improvement programs with the information collected. Nevertheless, both the CEDA and Mexico City's public markets still lack **comprehensive information collection and processing**, which would allow them to avoid and prevent health and safety incidents. It is noteworthy that, a few days before our visit to the Central, a fire of considerable magnitude occurred. Fortunately there were no injuries on this occasion, however, the area of empty containers was damaged and some houses and premises in the vicinity had to be evacuated.

The **next steps** to follow would have to do with the use of data analysis tools that facilitate the prevention of emergency situations such as fires.



Example of electrical installations in the Cabecera Iztapalapa market. Photo by Fundación Placemaking Mexico.

In addition, there is a lack of mechanisms to measure performance and risk factors in public markets and smaller commercial areas. For this reason, we believe that it would be a great opportunity to measure the performance of small and medium-sized public markets to improve their **performance and enhance their growth and success**.







In addition, about **20% of the merchants are natives of Tepito** although, unfortunately, there are fewer and fewer of them. This got us thinking about possible measures that can be taken to prioritize traders and the local economy, especially in markets of this magnitude.



Historic housing near the market. Jacobo told us that the government tried to expropriate them but the community resisted in order to keep their homes.  
Photo by Fundación Placemaking México.

One of the **next steps** would be to create distribution networks that prioritize and support local and affordable products. These strengthen local supply chains and benefit the entire community and improve living standards and community resilience. Similarly, fostering projects that promote the circular economy and focus on sustainable practices, while providing tools for training and business development for local traders, can promote more resilient local trading communities.



## 5.

## EXCELLENCE

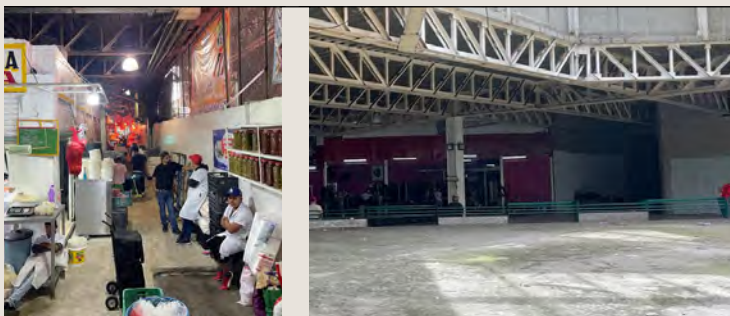
A MARKET CITY INVESTS REGULARLY IN ITS MARKET FACILITIES AND IN THE MANAGEMENT SKILLS OF MARKET OPERATORS.

Excellence in **Market-Cities** refers to there being intentional and informed investment in such things as renovation of existing markets to improve physical infrastructure, incorporating sustainable design features, and building new markets as needed to improve demand or address operational constraints. Also, within this attribute, Market Cities are considered to ensure that market managers have the necessary skills and staff to operate the market efficiently, effectively, and resiliently.



The interior of the main hall of Mercado La Merced. Photos by Place Solutions Group, LLC.

On our visit to La Merced with Jesús, from Atea, we saw two conflicting realities. On the one hand, the market presented a clear investment by the authorities in the reconstruction of the main hall after the 2013 and 2019 fires, with a large roof and newly conditioned with a system for fire prevention and control and an infrastructure that allows natural light to enter and pays homage to the original building. We found it interesting to observe how, almost 9 years and 2 devastating fires later, the central hall of the Mercado de la Merced now presents excellent facilities, although the renovation does not extend into sections of the market not damaged by fire (and still lack sprinklers and fire-suppression systems).



Underutilized, dark, unattractive spaces in the Mercado de Vinos y Quesos de La Merced. Photo by Fundación Placemaking Mexico.

On the other hand, we noticed that the expansion of the Mercado de Vinos y Quesos de la Merced, developed in the 2000s, is almost completely abandoned. The ceilings are low and the space is dark. The upper floor is empty and has clear risk points that increase the likelihood of illegal activities. It is clearly not a place where people want to spend time. Spaces like this in markets should be re-purposed for other community uses, such as health clinics, schools, and multi-purposed meeting spaces, reinforcing the roles of the market as a community center.

The **next steps** to improve the excellence of the markets would have to consider ways to ensure the proper use of the spaces where they are invested, whether through activations or mechanisms that promote a constant flow of vendors and buyers in the public markets.



The street businesses adjacent to Mercado La Merced. Photo by Place Solutions Group, LLC.

On another point, it is also notable that many of the markets and open-air trading areas in Mexico City are overcrowded with people because aisles are too narrow for the number of people, in part because stalls “creep” into the circulation space. Also some popular street markets allow cars and motorcycles to drive right through them, creating a very dangerous and uncomfortable environment. It is therefore necessary to take measures to ensure the safety and accessibility of vendors and customers by creating standards for minimum aisle widths and the temporary or permanent pedestrianization of the streets where markets are located. Updating electrical safety and sanitation protocols and ensuring that they are followed to the letter, as well as the placement of correct signage and the mapping of adequate evacuation routes, are also essential and urgent measures that need to be taken.

Similarly, it would be important to promote investment in technological advances, so that a greater number of concessionaires can accept digital payments, promoting greater transparency and formality in the economy.



Aisles clogged due to lack of exits and access at the Chiconcuac Clothing Market. Photo by Fundación Placemaking México.



## 6.

## OPPORTUNITY

A MARKET CITY SUPPORTS VENDORS, ESPECIALLY THOSE FACING SYSTEMIC INJUSTICES, TO START A NEW BUSINESS OR EXPAND AN EXISTING ONE.



Concessionaire in her shop at the Mercado Cabecera, Iztapalapa.  
Photo by Place Solutions Group, LLC.

**The opportunity attribute** considers the potential that markets have to offer various types of opportunities to the community: to start new businesses, expand and innovate in their products. For this to happen, it is necessary to create support networks that encourage vendors or potential vendors to take advantage of their potential. A market city, then, provides support, training and a safe place for concessionaires, especially those who face systemic injustices or are disadvantaged.



Local nopal producers from Milpa Alta, selling their products at the "Mercadito" in the Central de Abastos.  
On the left, photo by Fundación Placemaking Mexico, on the right, photo by Place Solutions Group, LLC.



Near the flower market of the Central de Abastos, is the "**Mercadito**", local producers can sell their goods directly to wholesale buyers, without having to rely on distributors or third parties. We believe this is a great example of a space that generates opportunities for entrepreneurship and growth for the locals: allowing them to set their own prices, auction their products and take care of their own profits.

It is remarkable that in Mexico there are few places where small farmers can sell their products directly to consumers in an organized way, a concept that is spreading around the globe through the work of such as organizations as the World Farmers Market Association. Even so, local producers provide more than 40% of the food consumed in the country, so an important area of opportunity would be to ensure that there are outlets within public markets that favor small artisans, farmers and producers.

The **next steps** to be taken would be not only to create more places where local producers can market their products, but also to provide training and support services to give them the necessary tools to grow their businesses and ensure a greater equality of opportunities.



## PLACE

A MARKET CITY RECOGNIZES THAT ITS MARKETS ARE PUBLIC SPACES THAT CELEBRATE CULTURAL HERITAGE.

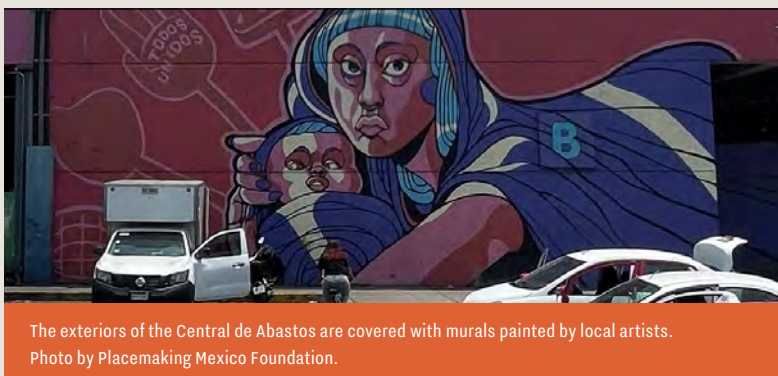
**The seventh and final attribute** considers that Market Cities support the role of markets and local trade networks as active public spaces that support cultural heritage. They do this by ensuring that the places in and around markets are safe, accessible, attractive and inclusive. Market Cities schedule special cultural events and activities, especially promoting healthy and safe food. Placemaking Mexico strives to create public spaces that not only prioritize the safety, accessibility, and attractiveness of the areas surrounding markets but also foster inclusivity and ensure that these vibrant spaces serve as lively hubs for social interaction and the preservation of cultural traditions.



Altar to the Virgin of Guadalupe in the Mercado Cabecera Iztapalapa, maintained by the community of concessionaires. Photo by Place Solutions Group, LLC.

As mentioned at the beginning of this report, markets have enormous cultural potential, especially **Mexican markets**: for their flavors, colors and textures, but most of all, for the history, tradition and community ties that are formed through them. Whether they are open-air trading spaces like the street where Tomasa works, or public markets in historic buildings like La Merced, the richness of Mexico City's markets is ineffable.

For 20 years now, the Mexican government has considered them **Intangible Cultural Heritage**, protecting their legacy. We also saw initiatives by vendors, working groups (such as FICEDA) and community members to make Mexican markets **more livable places, where cultural and social connections are promoted**.



The exteriors of the Central de Abastos are covered with murals painted by local artists. Photo by Placemaking Mexico Foundation.



Miniature community library in the Central de Abastos, organized and managed by the merchants. Photo by Fundación Placemaking México.

Market Cities ensure that markets are inclusive, pleasant, safe places that **boost the local economy, promoting events and creating or encouraging improvements in the surrounding public spaces, ensuring access, comfort and image, the variety of uses and activities, and the possibility of generating meeting points.**





Aerial view of the exterior stores of Mercado la Merced. Photo by Fundación Placemaking México.

Even so, the potential of Mexico City's public markets to create unique shopping experiences that raise awareness and enhance our traditions, not only by offering a variety of products, but also by providing a welcoming, easy to navigate and authentic environment, is rarely taken into account.

We believe that, **as next steps**, there is an opportunity to enhance the cultural, historical and community factor of our markets, through events or activations, such as live music or food tastings, offering pleasant and differentiated shopping experiences that attract tourists and make locals proud.



Vegetable stand at the Mercado Cabecera Iztapalapa. Photo by Place Solutions Group, LLC.

**Markets are the beating hearts of Mexico City's communities and neighborhoods:** a landmark of our history and culture, for more than half a millennium. Getting to know them, assessing them, learning their histories and starting with small improvements is one of many steps we can take to create more livable cities and friendlier societies.

## PROPOSED NEXT STEPS



Steve's visit to Fundación Placemaking Mexico's office.

In Partnership with Place Solutions Group and Project for Public Spaces Market Cities, Placemaking Mexico seeks to create a program with three key components:

1.

**Research:** There is very little data about markets in Mexico City. We would work with university partners to map and assess markets throughout the city, creating a database of markets.

2.

**Advocacy Campaign:** Advocate and educate Mexico City residents as well as the public and private sectors about the value of public markets and the challenges they face.

3.

**Training and Capacity Building;** This could focus on specific stakeholders within the market systems (market managers, vendors, etc) and related issues (food safety, fire safety, merchandising, etc.) Initially, the focus would be one district or area of Mexico City as a prototype.

4.

**Model Market Program:** Work with the city to identify three markets that would serve as “model markets” where new ideas could be tested and implemented. Improvements would focus on low-cost interventions and programming of public spaces.



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