

The “Invisible Market”: A Methodological Proposal for Identifying Architecture and Spaces of Commercial Practice in Early Modern Cities (14th-16th Centuries)*

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This article proposes an innovative methodological framework to identify commercial practices and spaces in early modern cities, based on Portuguese sources from the 14th to the 16th centuries, in which the explicit designation of “market” is often absent. Drawing on the concept of the “invisible market”, the research moves away from the search for formal labels and focuses instead on identifying functional indicators of urban commerce through three interdependent levels: technical-architectural vocabulary porch (*alpendre*), arches (*arcos*), air (*ar*), tents (*tendas*) and shop (*boticas*), spatial organisation (location, connectivity, morphology), and regulation (charters, royal decrees, municipal statutes, lease contracts, council records). The method, systematised in tables and replicable, is structured in three stages: lexical survey, contextual reading, and spatial-normative cross-referencing. This approach supports the argument that urban commerce was functionally and legally embedded in the urban fabric, even without being formally designated as a “market”. The article draws on an extensive documentary base, complemented by visual sources, and discusses the limitations, comparative potential, and applicability of the framework in Iberian and Ibero-American contexts. The proposed methodology thus offers a new way to trace commerce in the city and to understand its role in urban transformation, constituting an original contribution to the interpretation of city formation through its commercial spaces and architectures.

Keywords: Early Modern Cities, Economic History, Invisible Market, Commercial Architecture, Urban Regulation, Evidentiary Methodology.

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Abbreviazioni:

ADB = Arquivo Distrital de Beja

AGI = Archivo General de Indias

AGS = Archivo General de Simancas

AHCML = Arquivo Histórico da Câmara Municipal de Lisboa

AHME = Arquivo Histórico Municipal de Elvas

AHMG = Archivo Histórico Municipal de Granada

AMP = Archivo Municipal de Plasencia

ANTT = Arquivo Nacional da Torre do Tombo

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Introduction

At the end of the Middle Ages and throughout the 15th and 16th centuries, Portuguese cities were fully integrated into Atlantic and Mediterranean trade networks¹, actively participating in the circulation of goods, people, and capital that characterised the expanding Iberian world². Products from North Africa, the African Atlantic coast, the eastern Mediterranean, and overseas regions fed a transforming urban economy, accompanied by the regular presence of foreign merchants. However, despite the intensity of this commercial activity, contemporary documents rarely name, describe, or explicitly locate the physical spaces where these exchanges took place.

This absence is not due to the non-existence of such spaces, but rather to a representational regime that describes them indirectly, through a functional vocabulary that tends to dissolve their materiality into the urban everyday. Instead of recognisable market descriptions, the archives offer a fragmented lexicon – shop (*boticas*), tents (*tendas*), porch (*alpendre*), arches (*arcos*), air (*ar*) – which suggests commercial practices that were dispersed and integrated into the urban fabric, without a fixed formal centre.

A striking example of this logic is the Paço da Ribeira, commissioned by King Manuel I in 1510, in a strategic location along Lisbon's riverside front³, connected to Atlantic trade routes. This construction forms part of a broader context of urban reconfiguration promoted by the Crown, in which the proximity between administrative and commercial functions is deliberate. When, in 1580, an anonymous Italian traveller described the building as both royal and mercantile, with the spices of the empire stored in the arches (*arcos*) beneath the king's chambers⁴, the fusion between commerce and power, between architecture and economic function, is clearly revealed (fig. 1). Ultimately, this exposes a structural urban reality that characterises the Portuguese city from the 14th to the 16th centuries: commerce was fully integrated into the urban fabric but represented through scattered functional designations, the spatial and architectural interpretation of which often remains ambiguous.

This silence is not unique to the Portuguese context. It reflects a broader difficulty in urban history studies: the tendency to search for markets where we recognise them today, in squares, buildings or enclosures explicitly named as such, projecting onto the past a functional logic of centralisation that did not always exist, or which was expressed in different forms.

1. L. Sicking, *The Medieval Origin of the Factory or the Institutional Foundations of Overseas Trade: Toward a Model for Global Comparison*, in «Journal of World History», 31 (2020), pp. 295-326.

2. J.-J. López-Portillo (ed.), *The Expansion of Latin Europe, 1000–1500. Spain, Portugal and the Atlantic Frontier of Medieval Europe*, vol. 8, Routledge, New York 2016.

3. N. Senos, *O Paço da Ribeira*, Editorial Notícias, Lisboa 2002.

4. A.H. de Oliveira Marques, *Uma descrição de Portugal em 1578-80*, in Id., *Portugal quinhentista*, Quetzal Editores, Lisboa 1987, p. 231.



Fig. 1 – António de Holanda (attrib.), *View of Lisbon*, frontispiece of Duarte Galvão, *Crónica de D. Afonso Henriques*, c. 1500-1510 (Source: Museu Condes de Castro Guimarães, Cascais, MS MCG-BIB-014).

At this point, it is important to distinguish between the “market” as an authorised economic event, with varying periodicity and its own legal status, and the “market” as a structured physical space. Portuguese sources record the former with precision, through royal charters, taxes, or jurisdictional grants⁵, but rarely document or name the latter. This dissociation between institution and spatiality contributes to the invisibility of the physical structures of urban commerce and forms, precisely, the starting point of the methodological approach.

The literal search for the category of “market” tends to produce an interpretative void. The word appears in acts of establishment, grants, and rights, but rarely as an architectural or topographical designation of a recognisable space. In its place, documents often reveal a set of technical and functional terms – tents (*tendas*), shop (*boticas*), porch (*alpendre*), shop (*loja*), air (*ar*) – which point to commerce spread across various parts of the city. The term *ar*, used to designate the empty space beneath arcades that was subject to

5. V. Rau, *Feiras medievais portuguesas: subsídios para o seu estudo*, Editorial Presença, Lisboa 1982.

leasehold, illustrates well the semantic and material complexity of these urban commercial structures.

This type of representation, also common in other Iberian cities, has received little attention in urban historiography, which often expects to find markets in accordance with modern models. Such expectation produces an illusion of absence: if we search only for centralised and named markets, urban commerce in the 14th to 16th centuries appears invisible, when in reality it was fully present, albeit in less explicit forms. It is precisely this gap between commercial practice and the way it was named or represented that this article takes as a methodological problem. Rather than asking “where is the market?”, the proposal is to analyse how commerce materialises, circulates, and is regulated in the city, even when not designated as such. To this end, it proposes an evidentiary reading based on the intersection of technical-architectural vocabulary, spatial organisation, and normative regulation⁶.

The central hypothesis is that there existed an “invisible market”: a functionally and legally significant presence, yet semantically concealed, whose logic only becomes legible through the combined analysis of lexicon, form, and regulation. By aligning this proposal with Portuguese documentation from the period, the argument is made that this is not a case of absence, but rather of a form of naming that fragments the mercantile function into dispersed and legally controllable units, requiring a specific method in order to be recognised.

By acknowledging that the exercise of urban commerce in 14th- to 16th-century Portugal does not always correspond to formally or architecturally defined categories as named in the sources, this article proposes a methodology focused on the evidentiary reading of commercial practices and their spatial and regulatory expressions. Drawing on royal, municipal, and notarial documentation, the aim is to understand how commerce was inscribed in the city, not as a centralised and named entity, but through a regulated functional dispersal, often expressed by a technical and fragmented vocabulary. This approach will be applied to a series of Portuguese urban case studies, while also being placed in dialogue with Castilian and Ibero-American contexts, in order to explore the relationships between vocabulary, space, and regulation in the economic functioning of the early modern city⁷.

6. This methodology was first developed in D.N. Pereira, *The Market Space of Portuguese Cities: Urbanism and Commercial Architecture, 15th–17th Centuries*, Routledge, London–New York 2025, and is here systematised and extended to the colonial urban contexts of the New World on the basis of new documentary sources and a comparative analytical approach.

7. This article forms part of the research carried out within the project FORUM: Formation and Organisation of Markets in Ibero-American Cities (MSCA GA 101201832, HORIZON-MSCA-2024-PF-01), funded by the European Union (10.3030/101201832). The project is based at the University of Exeter, under the supervision of Fabrizio Nevola.

As will be developed in the state of the art, this research engages with a renewed historiographical debate that places architecture and regulation at the centre of the analysis of urban commerce.

1. State of the art and methodological necessity

Starting from the observation that urban commerce is not always explicitly named in the sources, it becomes necessary to understand how historiography has addressed – or overlooked – the spatial forms of the market and the architectural structures that made it possible. Although historiography recognises the centrality of commerce in medieval and early modern urban life⁸, it has often assumed that such activities were concentrated in squares or dedicated buildings, without systematically questioning how these spaces were constituted, used, or recorded in the sources. The near-automatic association between square and market has become a methodological assumption, projecting onto the past a logic of functional centralisation that does not always correspond to historical reality. This assumption tends to render invisible the forms of commerce dispersed throughout streets, alleys, and ground floors, the identification of which requires a more attentive analysis of the material, architectural, and regulatory traces left in the sources⁹.

This lack of deeper reflection on the spatiality of commerce is equally evident in the field of architectural history. Patrick Haughey, in one of the introductory texts to the collection *A History of Architecture and Trade*, observes that the market is rarely included as an object of analysis in architectural history, despite commercial activity being structurally dependent on the architectural and urban forms that make it possible. As the author states, “architectural history rarely includes the market, even though commercial activity is largely enabled by architecture”¹⁰.

The persistence of this absence may be related to the obstacles identified by Donald Harreld in the context of the city of Antwerp. According to the author, one of the main challenges facing urban history lies in determining to what extent transformations in the use of urban space for commercial purposes during the 16th century stemmed from the emergence of new mercantile practices. Although not entirely modern, these practices were already moving away from medieval models, giving rise to multiple spaces of transaction, not always identifiable through the usual categories of “market”. Within this framework, Harreld asks: «Could the rise of a merchant culture have had a deep impact on the ways in which Europeans viewed the public and private use of space?» By shifting attention towards how space was perceived rather

8. J. Davis, *Medieval Market Morality: Life, Law and Ethics in the English Marketplace, 1200-1500*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2012.

9. D. Nunes Pereira, *The Market Space of Portuguese Cities...*, cit., pp. 26-42.

10 P. Haughey, *Introduction. The Architecture of Trade is as Old as Human History*, in P. Haughey (ed.), *A History of Architecture and Trade*, Routledge, New York 2018, pp. 1-9.

than merely used, this question invites a reconsideration of the very nature of the available sources. What appears in the sources as absence may correspond to a transformation in the ways of conceiving, naming, and describing the market and its spaces, a transformation capable of redefining the codes of its visibility¹¹.

This reading raises a central methodological question for the analysis of the phenomenon: the documentary invisibility of markets may not correspond to an actual absence, but rather reflect a transformation in the ways urban space was recorded, appropriated, and organised. More than an empirical gap, we may be facing a shift in the ways the market was named and represented within the city – a shift that requires an approach capable of capturing its indirect traces, particularly the morphological continuities and architectural structures that, in a diffuse manner, shaped the rhythms of mercantile daily life.

The same difficulty in identifying the market in the sources is highlighted by Mathieu Arnoux, who suggests that many historians may have abandoned the topic precisely because they could not find it explicitly mentioned. Arnoux therefore emphasises the importance of using indirect sources to recognise the existence and organisation of markets beyond conventional designations¹². It is within this framework that the proposals of Donatella Calabi¹³ and Elena Svalduz¹⁴ gain methodological relevance. Both advocate for a reading of the city through architectural forms and their continuities, as a means of identifying the traces of commerce embedded in the urban fabric. By shifting the focus from the “market” as a named institution to built forms and their uses, these approaches pave the way for a morphological analysis that reads architecture both as evidence and as a historical agent. Ultimately, this entails a necessarily indirect method, attentive to the successive layers of occupation, transformation, and adaptation, a method capable of reconstructing a commercial topography often absent from textual documentation.

This line of enquiry also finds support in the typomorphological reading developed by Enrico Guidoni. In his analysis of merchants’ houses in Lazio, the author shows how the *loggia* – a sequence of arches on the ground floor – confers a semi-public status on the space and functions as a mercantile device. Display, shade, continuity of movement, and the transparency of the ground

11. D. Harreld, *Trading Places: the Public and Private Spaces of Merchants in Sixteenth-Century Antwerp*, in «Journal of Urban History», 29 (2003), p. 659.

12. M. Arnoux, *Les marchés médiévaux (XIe–XIVe siècles): entre institution, économie et société*, in F. Bayard, P. Fridenson, A. Rigaudière (eds.), *Genèse des marchés. Colloque des 19 et 20 mai 2008*, Institut de la gestion publique et du développement économique, Paris 2015, pp. 17-36.

13. D. Calabi, *Il mercato e la città. Piazze, strade, architetture d'Europa in età moderna*, Marsilio, Venezia 1993.

14. E. Svalduz, *Architecture and Market Spaces: Padua and the Venetian Mainland in the Early Modern Age*, in E. Svalduz (ed.), *Market Spaces, Production Sites, and Sound Landscape of European Cities: From History to Regeneration*, Padova University Press, Padova 2022, pp. 119-127.

floor are treated as part of the technique of selling. Guidoni's reading is decisive because it teaches us to see the series (modules, openings, supports) as an indication of commercial purpose, even when the texts remain silent regarding the presence of a "market"¹⁵.

Following and expanding on these approaches, Fabrizio Nevola highlights the importance of using different types of sources, from official documents to criminal records, images, and material traces, to understand the central role of streets and public spaces in urban life. For Nevola, streets were not merely places of transit, but true infrastructures for the circulation of people, goods, and information, something confirmed by the legislation of the time itself. This approach connects with the so-called *spatial turn*, which sees space as the result of interaction between social practices and built forms, and has been further strengthened by the use of digital tools such as Geographic Information Systems (GIS), historical cartography, and 3D models, which make it possible to render visible everyday practices absent from traditional sources¹⁶.

It is within this same framework that the questions raised by Derek Keene and the Anglo-European tradition concerning *portici* and *loggias* are situated, transforming the analysis of these architectural elements into an urban problem: where are they located? Are they planned or added later? What customary rights govern their use? How are they connected to circulation and to property regimes?¹⁷

Iberian historiography has also emphasised this relationship between market and built space. Luís García de Valdeavellano, in his study on medieval Castile and León, demonstrates that "market" referred not only to the institution of exchange but also to the physical place where it occurred. This polysemy raises a crucial question – "where does the market take place?" – and underscores the importance of topography in medieval commercial dynamics¹⁸. Although he acknowledges the frequent location of the market in the central square¹⁹, near institutional powers, or outside the city gates in more open areas, the author notes that these spaces have been little studied within the field of historical urbanism. Valdeavellano questions how these spaces, with a long commercial tradition, influenced or gave rise to more stable and

15. E. Guidoni, *I portici nella tradizione urbanistica europea*, in F. Bocchi (ed.), *I portici di Bologna e l'edilizia civile e medievale*, Grafis Edizioni, Bologna 1990, pp. 55-63.

16. F. Nevola, *Sources and Methods for Studying Historical Streets*, in D. van den Heuvel (ed.), *Early Modern Streets: A European Perspective*, Routledge, London-New York 2022, pp. 29-49.

17. D. Keene, *Portici in England*, in F. Bocchi, R. Smurra (eds.), *I portici di Bologna nel contesto europeo*, atti del convegno (Bologna 2013), Luca Sossella Editore, Roma 2015, pp. 199-209.

18. L. García Valdeavellano, *El mercado: apuntes para su estudio en León y Castilla durante la Edad Media*, Universidad de Sevilla, Sevilla 1975, pp. 29, 32, 35.

19. M. Asenjo González, *El comercio: actividad económica y dinámica social en las plazas y mercados de Castilla, siglos XIII-XV*, in «Cuadernos del CEMYR», 9 (2001), pp. 97-134.

permanent commercial locations, and how they contributed to the development and growth of cities²⁰.

On the Portuguese side, Luísa Trindade refined this analysis by demonstrating the polyvalence of the square and the mercantile nature of the public ground floor. In the *Paços do Concelho* (Town Halls), the overlapping of functions is revealing: while the upper floor concentrated the responsibilities of governance, the ground floor opened up to commerce through arcades and porch (*alpendres*), subject to regulated occupation regimes. In this way, municipal architecture functioned as a true mercantile infrastructure²¹.

This line of thought finds a natural extension in the Ibero-American context. The transfer of Iberian urban models, the central square, ground-floor porch (*alpendres*), municipal regulations inherited from the medieval world, to colonial cities did not entail a simple repetition, but rather the adaptation of forms to new economic, social, and cultural contexts²². The *Ordenanzas de Población* or *Leyes de Indias*²³ sought to fix a specific morphology and regulation, but the colonial market was always born of a tension: between royal norms and everyday practices, between indigenous traditions and the imposition of new typologies. In this intersection, architecture became a device of power, delineating social hierarchies and differentiated spaces for Indigenous peoples, enslaved persons, or marginal vendors²⁴.

Bringing Iberian and Ibero-American cases into dialogue confirms the relevance of the proposed framework: the intersection of lexicon, space, and regulation reveals both the persistence of medieval and early modern models and their transformation in colonial contexts. In Portuguese sources, the difficulty in identifying the “market” does not indicate its absence, but rather a different form of recording and regulation. The term appears primarily in legal contexts, while mercantile practice is expressed through functional designations, tents (*tendas*), shop (*boticas*), porch (*alpendres*), arcades, almost always associated with building, usage, and ownership regulations. In this way, ephemeral architectures and the materiality of the ground floor offer a pathway to understanding urban commerce, even when the city does not name it as a “market”.

20. L. García Valdeavellano, *El mercado...*, cit., pp. 29, 32, 35.

21. L. Trindade, *Urbanismo na composição de Portugal*, Imprensa da Universidade de Coimbra, Coimbra 2013.

22. R.L. Kagan, *Plaza and square: perspectives on the city in the early modern Atlantic world*, in F. Andrés Robres, M. Hernández Benítez, S. Martínez Bermejo (eds.), *Mirando desde el puente: estudios en homenaje al profesor James S. Amelang*, UAM Ediciones, Madrid 2019, pp. 365-378.

23. Felipe II, *Ordenanzas de descubrimiento, nueva población y pacificación de las Indias dadas en 1573 en el Bosque de Segovia, según el original conservado en el Archivo General de Indias de Sevilla*, Ministerio de la Vivienda – Servicio Central de Publicaciones, Madrid 1973.

24. L. Fernández González, *Philip II of Spain and the Architecture of Empire*, Penn State University Press, University Park 2021.

This perspective is reinforced by the work of Nevola, who analyses how, in various Italian cities, the presence of *botteghe* (shops) embedded in the ground floor of aristocratic residential buildings was a functional and recurrent solution – even if scarcely visible in official documentation. As the author demonstrates, “The rental income was a vital constitutive element of Renaissance urban architecture,” and palaces frequently integrated shops beneath arcades, with independent mezzanines, rented out to generate income²⁵.

Rather than seeking monumental buildings or squares explicitly designated as markets, the aim is to recognise, within the urban everyday, a dispersed, regulated, and persistent mercantile fabric. In this sense, the Portuguese case aligns with recent historiographical debates, but is marked by its specificity: between the 14th and 16th centuries, urban commerce is rarely expressed through the explicit designation of “market”, but rather through the combination of architectural forms and legal regulations that structured city life.

2. Methodological proposal and integration of the documentary annex

General framework (Tables 1, 2, 3 annex)

The application of the methodological framework begins, first and foremost, with direct engagement with the source, where references to commerce almost always appear in fragmented form – as technical terms, legal expressions, or spatial allusions. It is this lexicon: porch (*alpendre, portales, soportales*), arches (*arcos*), air (*ar*), tents (*tendas*), shop (*boticas*), shop (*loja*), that constitutes the first indication of a mercantile practice and serves as the entry point for analysis. Each occurrence is associated with its spatial context: a street, a square, a municipal building, the ground floor of a house. This double register – word and place – provides the raw material of the study and defines the first layer of the table.

This is followed by a second operation: functional translation. Each identified term is related to the economic or social function that the document states or implies, daily provisioning, retail sale, the exercise of a trade, rent collection. At this point, a distinction is made between what is declared, often in normative formulas or royal prescriptions, and what is practised, discernible only through repeated use or popular resistance. The table reflects this stage by separating functions and practices from patterns of use, thus restoring the tension between norm and lived experience.

The third stage concerns regulation and conflict. No mercantile space was neutral. Porch (*alpendres*), arcades, shops (*boticas*), or tents were subject to leaseholds and contracts, shaped by municipal statutes or royal charters that

25. F. Nevola, *Home Shopping: Retail and Domestic Space in Early Modern Italian Palaces*, in «Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians», 70 (2011), pp. 153-183.

defined dimensions, uses, and penalties. At the same time, they were spaces of dispute: municipalities versus the Crown, tenants versus guilds, neighbours versus merchants. Each regulation reveals an effort to order the urban space and, simultaneously, reveals the resistances encountered by that effort. It is within this framework that the long arc of transformation can be traced. A makeshift wooden porch might, within a generation, become subject to fiscal lease, later rebuilt in stone and incorporated into the monumentality of the square, and finally appropriated by private individuals. The column dedicated to transformations records this trajectory, allowing each case to be seen not as a fixed image, but as part of a continuous process of adaptation, in which commerce settled and was redefined within the very fabric of the city.

Finally, each row of the table ends with a historiographical reading. The aim is not merely to classify or tally occurrences, but to situate them within a broader reflection on urban commerce and its presence in the city space. The final column reveals what the framework allows us to make visible: how regulation could either highlight or conceal certain practices, how architecture functioned both as a support and as a means of control, and how the urban fabric itself was structured around activities that are rarely named as “markets” but lay at the heart of everyday life.

The tables should not be understood as completed inventories, but as analytical tools. When read horizontally, they allow each occurrence to be traced from the term recorded in the source to its interpretation; when read vertically, they reveal patterns that emerge only through comparison across cities and periods, distinct ways of making commerce visible or invisible, of monumentalising or silencing it, of maintaining or transforming practices. It is in this double movement, between detail and regularity, that the method gains strength, opening the way for an urban history built not only from the major, named places, but above all from the small, discreet, regulated, and persistent units that composed the mercantile density of the early modern city.

As Evelyn Welch has observed in the context of Italian cities, in the absence of clearly defined physical divisions, market spaces were often delineated by movable elements (baskets, benches, stalls), visual cues (signboards, goods on display), auditory signals (such as the ringing of bells), and temporal markers (mornings, afternoons, weekly or monthly cycles, Saturdays or Sundays)²⁶. In the central areas of town squares, these movable structures temporarily transformed open spaces into commercial hubs, which would later be cleared to make room for other urban functions.

This implies that the boundaries of the market were as much auditory and transient as they were spatial and regulatory. According to Welch, while these boundaries were ephemeral, they were not devoid of structure or conflict. In fact, they often prompted regulatory responses, such as municipal ordinances

26. E. Welch, *Luoghi e spazi di mercati e fiere*, in D. Calabi, E. Svalduz (eds.), *Il Rinascimento italiano e l'Europa. Luoghi, spazi, architetture*, vol. 6, Angelo Colla Editore – Fondazione Cassamarca, Vicenza-Treviso 2010, pp. 69–70.

that sought to distinguish areas of commerce according to the types of goods sold²⁷.

The chronological sequence that structures the tables responds only to a reading need. In the 14th century, fragmentary traces predominate, fragile and ephemeral structures, scarcely embedded in the urban architecture. In the 15th century, these same structures enter the realm of regulation: contracts, leaseholds, and municipal statutes begin to shape their uses and render commerce more legible. In the 16th century, the process reaches a new level: stone replaces wood, royal intervention reconfigures trading spaces and transforms them into images of power²⁸. Iberian and Ibero-American parallels further show how these models were appropriated, adapted, or contested in different contexts. The chronology serves merely as a guiding thread; interpretation always arises from the intersection of cases, highlighting how concealment, regulation, and discipline coexisted across time and space, shaping multiple and tension-filled urban realities.

3. *From documentary clue to critical reading: practising the methodological framework*

The practical application of the methodological framework always begins with a seemingly minor detail, drawn from a source. It might be a word in a royal charter (*foral*), a clause in a leasehold contract, or a municipal regulation defining how the ground floor is to be used²⁹. Terms such as tents (*tendas*),

27. E. Welch, *De compras en el Renacimiento. Culturas del consumo en Italia, 1400-1600*, Universitat de València, València 2009, pp. 103–104.

28. In 1523, the council of Loulé renewed its efforts, this time dedicating themselves diligently to determining the architectural configuration of the new porch: “Let them make a portal of carved stone with its bubbles and good *lioz* stone and it shall have six arches with five marbles, with their vases and capitals of well-carved stone.” L.M. Duarte (ed.), *Actas de Vereação de Loulé, século XVI, 1522-1527*, Câmara Municipal de Loulé, Loulé 2014, p. 66.

29. This dynamic is clearly demonstrated through a contract, drafted in the *Casa da Fala* (House of Speech) in Portalegre, in which representatives of the council, along with other crown officials, gathered to discuss the construction of new arches in the square at the request of Gomes Afonso, a vassal of the king: “I have a house in the square of this town and it adjoins the square’s *alpendre* [porch], and because, Lords, you will know that in the city of Lisbon, as in other cities and towns, our Lord the King, for their nobility, allows many people to rise in the *ar* [air] and there build their houses, preserving the serviceability of the ground to the council [...], I would like to raise above the said *alpendre* [...] two or three *arcos* [arches] as needed and necessary for my said house [...]. I ask you, Lords, to grant me this air and I will comply very well [...] on condition that this Gomes Afonso cannot at any time claim possession of the *fundo* [i.e., possession of the bottom of the arch] of the *alpendres* and *arcos* thus made, nor benefit from them through his office, unless it remains free to the council, which may do with it what it pleases and make *boticas* [shops] for the council.” ANTT, *Odiana*, liv. 6, “Aforamento do aar de hum pedaço de alpendere da praça da villa de Portalegre...”, cc. 45v-46.

shop (*boticas*), porch (*alpendre*), air (*ar*) are not neutral: each opens a window onto the daily life of the city, linked to a specific space, the street in front of the church, the new square, the ground floor of a municipal building³⁰. These terms make it possible to reconstruct a mercantile geography that documents rarely describe in full. It is from the junction of word and place that the basis for analysis emerges, as organised in the tables that follow.

A royal order to build slaughterhouses at a specific point in the city is not merely an abstract decree: it reveals the need to organise supply, the conflicts between residents and the town council, and the attempt to assert central power over urban life. Likewise, the prohibition of setting up stalls at the door of a shop (*botica*) reveals both the desire to organise street space and the persistence of resistant practices. The analysis then moves into the realm of regulation and conflict. Leasehold contracts, rents paid to the municipality, and municipal statutes defining dimensions and volumes not only reveal how the urban economy functioned, but also the struggles that shaped it: between municipal councils and the Crown, between merchants and neighbours, between tenants and guilds³¹, between royal authority, local power, and the Church³².

The same porch (*alpendre*) that begins as an improvised wooden covering later appears formalised in rental contracts, rebuilt in stone, and integrated into

30. The Town Hall of Guimarães is the result of a renovation that took place between the reigns of King Manuel and King John III. Similar to the Town Hall of Viana do Castelo, its ground floor is comprised of ogival arches that establish a direct connection between the aforementioned squares. The *Tombo do Concelho*, dated 1612, provides details about the new municipal building, noting that “beneath the town hall there is a covered area where cabbages, vegetables, and other goods are sold [...] and on this ground, the *alcaide-mor* (mayor) owns some benches [...] beneath the town hall, to the north, there is a pharmacy, a bench, and another near the arch, towards the east.” A.V. Braga, *Administração seiscentista do município vimarense*, Câmara Municipal de Guimarães, Guimarães 1953, p. 276.

31. The Manueline documentation related to the New Street of the Merchants reveals valuable information about the administration of buildings intended for commerce, particularly highlighting the complex interaction between the property owners and the municipal authorities. An illustrative episode dates back to 1498, when King Manuel I ordered a survey of individuals who rented walls in front of their houses on this Street. Within this context, the case of Álvaro Nogueira stands out. Nogueira, a nobleman from the *Casa Real* (Royal Household), authorized grocers to affix “nails for the display of merchandise” on the walls of his houses located on Nova Street. D. Nunes Pereira, *The Market Space of Portuguese Cities...*, cit., pp. 85-95. P. Pinto, *Resumos e transcrições de documentos relativos à Rua Nova*, in A. Jordan-Gschwend, K.J.P. Lowe (eds.), *The Global City: On the Streets of Renaissance Lisbon*, Paul Holberton Publishing, London 2015, pp. 365-381.

32. Of particular note is the 1471 leasehold granted by King Afonso V to João Álvares, which authorised the construction of porch (*alpendres*) intended to shelter up to two hundred shops (*boticas*) during the annual fair held near the Monastery of Santa Maria das Virtudes in Santarém. This royal act exemplifies the transformation of an informal market into a regulated structure and the transfer of fiscal control from the ecclesiastical sphere to royal authority. ANTT, *Estremadura*, liv. 4, cc. 29v-30.

the monumentality of the square, until eventually, in some cases, it is appropriated by private individuals. This trajectory is part of a broader dynamic of appropriation and reconfiguration of public spaces. As Petrowiste argues in the case of Toulouse, interventions justified by functional or monumental needs could also serve as instruments for shifting municipal control over commercial practices, in favour of private interests³³.

It is within this kind of dynamic that continuities and ruptures between contexts become visible, making it possible to trace the trajectory of occurrences from term to practice and to establish comparisons. It is in this articulation between detail and regularity that the mercantile density of a city becomes apparent, a city rarely designated as a “market”, yet structured around persistent architectural and regulatory devices.

The examples gathered do not exhaust the subject. Many more could be added, scattered across notarial archives, municipal records, and contractual clauses. The methodological effort lies in collecting these minimal traces and articulating them together. Only through the accumulation and cross-referencing of sources does it become possible to see the spaces and architectures of urban commerce take shape. The apparent abundance of examples can be misleading, suggesting that the market was widely documented, when in fact each mention is unique, often indirect, and only comes to light through the patient work of collection and connection. What appears to be abundance is, in reality, the result of an evidentiary reading, without which these traces would remain invisible.

4. Application to specific cases: Lisbon, Elvas, and Beja

The application of the methodological framework to a representative set of Portuguese cities makes it possible to highlight patterns that would be difficult to discern through a linear reading of the sources. The analysis of Lisbon, Elvas, and Beja shows how similar spaces – central squares – assumed different functions: in some cases accommodating and formalising commerce, in others rejecting it and relocating it to other parts of the city.

In the case of Lisbon, the documents clearly reveal a process of transition from flexible, pragmatic municipal solutions to a logic of royal centralisation of commerce. The royal charter of 1478, in which King Afonso V authorises the city council to build a porch (*alpendre*) next to the Ribeira wall, is exemplary: it was a lightweight structure intended to relocate the fruit vendors who had until then occupied Rua da Ferraria to the walled periphery³⁴. The language of the charter – porch (*alpendre*), “fruit”, “arches”, “rent” – clearly reveals its immediate and utilitarian nature. The intervention had no monumental ambition but responded to a daily problem of circulation and supply, while also seeking to create a source of income for the municipality through the enclosure and

33. J. Petrowiste, *Infrastructures commerciales et dynamiques de l’habitat dans le Midi toulousain des XIIIe–XIVe siècles*, in «Archéologie du Midi Médiéval», 34 (2016), p. 223.

leasing of the street's arches. More than the construction itself, it is the underlying logic that matters: an attempt to domesticate spontaneous urban practices by reordering them within a provisional architectural device capable of channelling mercantile flows and inscribing them within a municipal fiscal economy. Twenty years later, in 1498, the provisional logic of the porch (*alpendre*) gives way to a royal programme of another scale. King Manuel orders the construction of two-storey houses with shops (*boticas*) on the ground floor, carefully aligned according to fixed dimensions and linked to perpetual leaseholds³⁵. The detail of the regulations is revealing: width of openings, stone doorways, identical windows, controlled height. It was no longer a temporary shelter, but the integration of commerce into the very architecture of the city, transformed into a stable source of income, a form of spatial control, and an image of urban order.

What had once been flexible and municipal became lasting and royal. In this riverside space, the shift was completed just a few years later, in 1510, when the same site was chosen to house the Paços da Ribeira. The palatial façade, with its balcony of arches, not only dominated the riverside front. Under the arches (*arcos*), spices arriving from the African coast were stored, consolidating the connection between local and overseas trade. Lisbon thus demonstrates how urban commerce, once regulated by the council's provisional solutions, was ultimately incorporated into the architecture and representation of royal power.

In Elvas, documentary analysis reveals an urban programme that deliberately excluded the commercial function from the new square. At the end of the 15th century, the square of Elvas, next to the church of Nossa Senhora dos Açougues, was a small space, overloaded with functions. Butcher stalls, bakeries, and market women's benches were clustered in front of the church, creating a vital provisioning hub, but also a scene of noise, odours, and disorder. In the 1498 *Cortes*, the municipal council acknowledged this centrality while also denouncing the discomfort of a space where daily commerce was entangled with divine service³⁶. The commercial heart of the city thus emerged as both indispensable and problematic. The council's petition to King Manuel (1511) and successive royal orders repeatedly stressed the need to create a broad, noble space capable of hosting bullfights, jousts, and religious ceremonies. The vocabulary of the time reinforced this representative purpose: words like "nobility", "procession", and "festivities" are used. Spatially, the square was organised around the church of Santa Maria and the new Town Hall (*Casa da Câmara*), with no mention of provisioning facilities. A royal charter from 1513 illustrates the extent of this

34. AHCML, *Livro dos Pregos*, doc. 443, c. 296.

35. ANTT, *Corpo Cronológico*, parte 3, b. 1, doc. 30, transcribed by H. Carita, *Lisboa manuelina e a formação de modelos urbanísticos da época moderna: 1495-1521*, Livros Horizonte, Lisboa 1999, pp. 210-211.

36. D.J.J. Alves (ed.), *Cortes Portuguesas: Reinado de D. Manuel I (Cortes de 1498)*, Centro de Estudos Históricos da Universidade Nova de Lisboa, Lisboa 2002, pp. 391-392.

transformation. One side of the square remained empty, the plots left as *chãos* (vacant ground), with no private individuals willing to build³⁷. This lack of interest is telling: had the square been intended for commerce, the plots would have been in high demand for the rents they could generate, as was the case in Beja (fig. 2). In Elvas, however, royal intervention was necessary, mandating the compulsory construction of two-storey houses within one year, under penalty of a fine. The priority was not to stimulate commerce, but to impose architectural uniformity and confer prestige on the central space. While the medieval square of Santiago and Rua dos Açougues continued to concentrate provisioning activities, the new Manueline square asserted itself as a ceremonial space, stripped of everyday functions. The documentary silence on sales structures, the lack of private economic interest, and the royal pressure to regularize façades all converge on the same conclusion: in Elvas, the invisibility of commerce was not an absence, but a deliberate choice, a programmed exclusion in the name of urban representation.



Fig. 2 – Engraving of D. Manuel Square in Beja, showing the butchery at the back, the town hall beside it, the pillory in the centre, and the arcades used by merchants, 19th century (Source: Municipal Archive of Beja).

37. AHME, *Livro segundo das próprias Provizões, Alvarás, Cartas e ordens Régias*, c. 66, transcribed by M. H. Z. Cabeças, *Festas, Urbanismo e Arquitectura: A Praça Nova de Elvas*, Master's thesis in Art, Heritage and Theory of Restoration, Faculdade de Letras, Universidade de Lisboa, supervised by Prof. Maria Alexandre Lousada, 2008, pp. 36-37.

Whereas in Elvas the Manueline intervention resulted in the exclusion of commerce from the new central space, in Beja the logic was the opposite. The square opened by order of King Manuel, between 1500 and 1501, was from the outset conceived as a mercantile infrastructure. The documentation immediately underlines this purpose: butcher stalls (*açougues*) and *fangas* were relocated to the new space, houses were expropriated and demolished to create a regular square, and even a pre-existing street was sacrificed to allow for the composition of a rectangular enclosure. The urban transformation was thus aimed at re-centring and monumentalising the commercial function. The recorded expropriations demonstrate the scale of the operation: eight houses, wine cellars, sheds, as well as the *açougues* and *fangas* themselves, were torn down, with compensation calculated in detail. The goal was not merely to create a noble void, but to replace a dispersed commercial street with an orderly and visible square. Beja's new market was therefore built upon the destruction of the medieval fabric, reorganising provisioning practices into a centralised space. The location of the butcher market, projected at the head of the square, translates the representativeness of commerce into stone³⁸.

The documentation also shows how the merchants themselves became agents of this transformation. Pero Soares, for instance, invested in the construction of houses on the square and secured the privilege of setting up exclusive tents (*tendas*) in front of his façade. These tents, erected at the merchant's expense, generated income both for the owner and for the municipality, which regulated their use³⁹. The square thus functioned as an economic space shared by the Crown, the municipality, and the merchants. The presence of porch (*alpendres*) and arcades, similar to the arches (*arcos*) of Lisbon's *rossio*⁴⁰, (fig. 3) inscribed in the urban fabric a typology recognisable throughout the Iberian world: continuous façades, open to daily commerce, combining practical function with monumental appearance. Unlike Elvas, here the absence of empty plots is revealing: the lots were occupied, contested, and transformed into commercial investment.

The examples of Elvas and Beja clearly demonstrate how the methodological framework enables a dissection of the true mercantile function of central urban spaces. It is not enough to assume, almost automatically, that every square or churchyard corresponded to a market: the current morphology can be misleading, crystallising only the final layer of a long history of uses. It is necessary to return to the moment of their genesis, to trace the

38. ANTT, *Chancelaria de D. Manuel I*, liv. 42, cc. 89v-90; *Odiana*, liv. 7, cc. 63v-64.

39. ANTT, *Fragmentos*, cx. 6, mç. 2, n.º 38: *Requerimento de Pêro Soares para ser isento de foro ao concelho de umas tendas defronte de umas casas que fizera na praça de Beja*.

40. ADB, *Livro 1 da Câmara*, transcribed by M.C.R.J. Páscoa, *Fr. Francisco de Oliveira – A escrita da História Regional e Local no século XVIII*, Master's thesis in Regional and Local History, Departamento de História, Faculdade de Letras, Universidade de Lisboa, 2002, 2 vols., vol. II: documentary appendix, pp. 65-66.

transformations they underwent, and to follow the traces of daily use in order to understand how commerce was inscribed into – or excluded from – urban life. When placed in contrast, Elvas and Beja offer a revealing picture: in Elvas, the new royal space was built in opposition to the market, stripping the central location of economic function in order to assert it as a ceremonial stage. In Beja, by contrast, the Manueline intervention constructed the square as mercantile infrastructure, with butcher stalls, tents (*tendas*), and arcades (*arcos*) designed to organise and monumentalise everyday exchange.



Fig. 3 – Anonymous engraving, Rossio Square with the façade and arcades of the Royal Hospital of All Saints, under which shops were leased, and St George's Castle, before the 1755 Lisbon earthquake, first half of the 18th century (Source: Álvaro Roquette / Pedro Aguiar Branco Collection, SARL).

5. Methodological replicability (Tables 4 and 5 annex)

The strength of the methodological framework lies in its capacity to be replicated in different contexts without losing analytical precision. However, this replication is not automatic: it requires careful adaptation to local vocabulary, institutions, and practices. In Portugal, terms such as porch

(*alpendre*), shop (*botica*), or tents (*tenda*) open the way for analysis. In Castile, we encounter *portales*, *soportales*, *alhóndigas*, *tiendas*, *lonjas*, *cajones*, *mesones*, which, although never designated as a “market” in the architectural sense, fulfilled equivalent functions. The method remains the same: identify the technical term, locate it within the urban space, and cross-reference it with the regulation that surrounds it. Only then is it possible to classify the mercantile function as visible, invisible, or ambiguous.

The Castilian examples demonstrate this versatility. For instance, in Plasencia (1522-1526), the use of the *portales* around the *Casa Consistorial* is mentioned in municipal records as a space heavily frequented by merchants, thus establishing a functional equivalence between institutional construction and daily commercial practice⁴¹. The mere presence of this term indicates that public architecture could serve as the framework for invisible commerce, and the framework applies equally here: we identify the technical term, compare it with its urban location, and verify the local regulation in order to classify the mercantile function as “visible”.

In Badajoz, a private individual’s request to build *portales* was contested by the *ayuntamiento*, which invoked the need to preserve the *anchura* (width) of the square as a collective good⁴². This dispute, recorded in notarial proceedings, reflects not only concerns for the common good but also strategies for maintaining privileges and rental income. The public discourse of *anchura* was instrumentalised to safeguard established private interests.

In Granada, the transformation of former collective provisioning structures, such as the *Alhóndiga*, into shops leased through *censo* contracts shows how a space once used communally was gradually appropriated as a private mercantile device⁴³.

The Ibero-American context makes the logic of this process particularly visible. The lexical diversity that appears in the sources – *portales*, *soportales*, *tiendas*, *tianguis*, *parián*, *zócalo*, *gato*, *baratillo*, *pulperías*, *mesones*, *cajones* and *asientos* – already constitutes a material indication of the existence and density of urban commerce. Each of these terms carries with it its own spatiality, referring to architectural forms, modes of occupation, regimes of use, and regulatory structures that together configure a true mercantile topography of the city.

41. AMP, *Libro de Actas de Acuerdos del Ayuntamiento (1522-1526)*, f. 141r, cited in L.J. Gordo Peláez, *Equipamientos y edificios municipales en la corona de Castilla en el siglo XVI*, tesis doctoral, Universidad Complutense de Madrid, Madrid 2009, p. 193.

42. AGS, *Consejo Real de Castilla*, leg. 20, exp. 5, f. 1r: *Proceso por los portales de Gómez Hidalgo*, transcribed by J.M. González González, *Un documento excepcional para la historia del urbanismo español: el pleito de Gómez Hidalgo por hacer unos portales en la Plaza de San José de Badajoz*, in «Revista de Estudios Extremeños», LXII, 2006, p. 345.

43. AHMG, *Propios y Arbitrios*, libro 1292: *Traslado del apeo de las casas, tiendas y demás bienes de propios de la ciudad de Granada, así como de los castillos fronteros dentro del cuerpo de la ciudad, y en el Albaicín y arrabales (1537)*, transcribed by E. Galera Mendoza, R. López Guzmán, *Arquitectura, mercado y ciudad. Granada a mediados del siglo XVI*, Universidad de Granada, Granada 2008, pp. 108-168.

This lexical multiplicity is more than the mere coexistence of traditions: it reveals an overlapping of urban models in which European and Indigenous ways of making the city are articulated. In 1525, for example, the Cabildo of Mexico City authorised residents to encroach upon the Plaza Mayor in order to build *portales*, an initiative that materialises the desire to transplant the Iberian model of commercial arcades as a device for ordering and rendering commerce visible. Later, in 1573, the Laws of the Indies, by regulating squares equipped with *portales*, confirmed the Crown's interest in associating economic function with the representation of imperial and municipal power through architectural language: "All the surrounding squares, and the four main streets that lead out from them, shall have *portales*, for they are of great convenience to the traders who usually gather here"⁴⁴.

Meanwhile, Indigenous markets, the *tianguis*, predated the arrival of the colonisers and structured the provisioning of cities according to their own rules. Bernardino de Sahagún's *Florentine Codex* clearly describes the robustness and organisation of these spaces. Throughout the sixteenth century, *tianguis* such as those of Mexico, San Hipólito, San Juan, Juan Velázquez, and Santiago Tlatelolco remained active, signalling the persistence of deeply rooted Indigenous commercial practices⁴⁵.

The importance of these markets did not go unnoticed by local authorities. As Barbara Mundy observes, it was precisely the recognition of this economic potential that led the Indigenous cabildo, in the late 1540s, to attempt to build an arcaded building at the north-eastern corner of the *tianguis* of Mexico City. Since the Indigenous cabildo did not have the resources to finance the construction, it ceded the plot of land to Lorenzo de Tejada, so that he would undertake the building of the arcades⁴⁶. Tejada, in turn, requested authorisation from the Spanish cabildo to construct the *portales*. In 1549, Tejada received formal authorisation to build *portales* "beside the *tianguis* of Mexico", but subject to specific obligations. The reading of the minutes of 2 and 6 September of that year reveals the rationale underlying this decision: the *portales* were justified on the grounds of their public utility, both in terms of urban order and decorum – "the policing and embellishment of this city, from which benefit and utility will derive" – and in terms of economic functionality – "so necessary and advantageous for the people who trade, buy, and sell there"⁴⁷. Here, architectural elements, far from being merely ornamental, operate as instruments for regulating and domesticating mercantile space.

44. Felipe II, *Ordenanzas...*, cit.

45. B. Rubio Fernández, *Antiguos Tianquiztli, nuevos Tianguis: cambios en los mercados y el comercio en la ciudad de México en el siglo XVI*, tesis doctoral, Universidad Complutense de Madrid, Madrid 2014, pp. 121-145.

46. B.E. Mundy, *The Death of Aztec Tenochtitlan, the Life of Mexico City*, University of Texas Press, Austin 2018, pp. 157-158.

47. I. Bejarano (ed.), *Actas de Cabildo del Ayuntamiento de la Ciudad de México*, vols. V-VI (1545-1561), México 1889, pp. 270-272.

The consolidation of the *tianguetz* as a vital space for urban provisioning reappears in 1562, when, according to the minutes of 23 October, municipal officials recorded the possibility of building “up to six shops” in the *tianguetz* of San Juan, “without any prejudice whatsoever”, and further recommended the installation of shops “around the said *tianguetz*”⁴⁸. The response of the Cabildo, in granting “this site to the city” and ordering the immediate staking out of the land, reflects the appropriation of mercantile space by municipal authority and its juridical formalisation as part of the public urban domain.

This logic was extended to other *tianguis*, San Juan, San Hipólito, and Santiago, for which royal licences were sought in order to build shops intended for the municipal treasury⁴⁹. The generalisation of the architectural model of the *portales*, far from being merely an aesthetic concern, emerges as an effective device for capturing rents, regulating circulation, and containing commercial practices within the city.

The transformation of the *tianguis* through *portales*, licences, and land surveys should therefore be understood not only as a form of colonial control, but as part of a longer tradition of urban ordering, deeply rooted in the European, and particularly Iberian, urban tradition⁵⁰.

The operation was legitimised through the language of “police” and “authority”, hallmarks of colonial normative vocabulary that sought to frame commerce within a regular, visible, and inspectable architectural grammar. But the *tianguis* resisted this framing. The sources reveal the opposition of the indigenous *alcaldes* and the mercantile community operating there, who insisted on a flexible, plural organisation inherited from ancestral practices. The vibrant space of the market came into tension with the attempt to convert it into a monumental façade of serial arcades. The conflict was not merely architectural: it set two conceptions of the city in opposition – one governed by colonial discipline, and the other rooted in communal uses that continued to shape urban life beyond imposed norms.

In the case of the Ciudad de los Reyes (Lima, Peru), although it shared the Iberian-derived logic of urban and mercantile organisation observed in cities such as Mexico City, the chronology of the consolidation of mercantile spaces reveals a far slower and more negotiated process. Lima’s Plaza Mayor did not emerge as a fully structured square, but rather as an urban space in permanent construction, whose material and juridical definition took shape through successive decisions of the cabildo and the viceregal authority.

The later description by the Jesuit Bernabé Cobo, who arrived in Peru in 1599 and still in the seventeenth century saw the square as “surrounded by humble buildings”⁵¹, with few permanent structures, finds clear resonance in

48. I. Bejarano (ed.), *Actas de Cabildo del Ayuntamiento de la Ciudad de México*, vols. VII-VIII (1562–1584), México 1889, p. 87.

49. *Ibid.*

50. D. Nunes Pereira, *The Market Space of Portuguese Cities...*, cit.

51. B. Cobo, *Historia de la fundación de Lima*, ed. M. González de la Rosa, Imprenta Liberal, Lima 1882, p. 56.

the foundational documentation. Already on 14 September 1535, only months after the foundation of the city, the cabildo itself acknowledged that the sites intended for the principal institutions had not yet been fixed, admitting that “at the time when this city was founded, no plot was designated for His Majesty on which there might be a house of smelting and trade”⁵². The need to assign a specific plot to the cabildo was justified precisely because “there is nowhere else sufficiently suitable where it can be done”⁵³, revealing the initial precariousness of the urban centre and the absence of a spatial structure capable of sustaining administrative and economic functions.

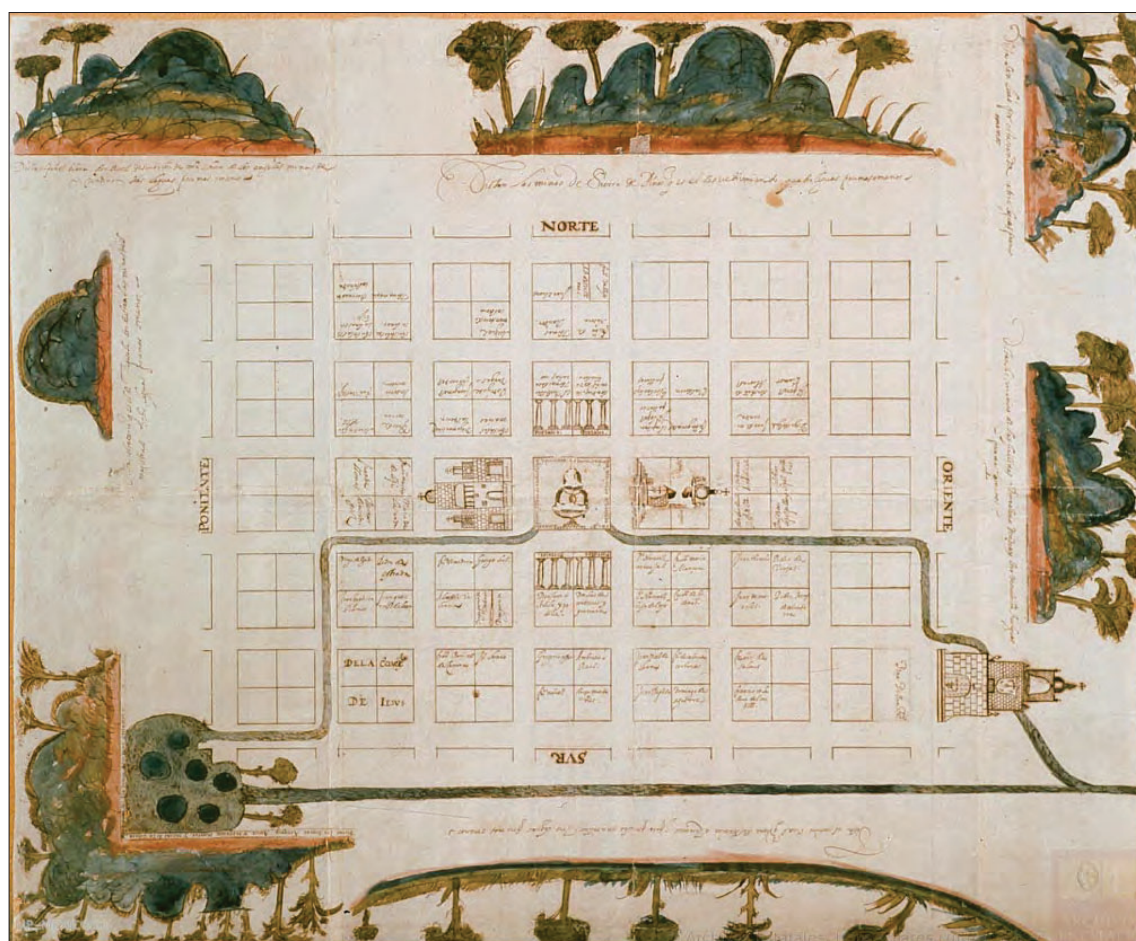


Fig. 4 – Plan of the new settlement to be built in the plains of La Goleta, four leagues from the mines of Nuestra Señora de la Concepción de Sierra de Pinos, probably dated 12 November 1603 (Source: Seville, Archivo General de Indias, MP-MÉXICO, 51).

Although the municipal building began to be erected as early as 1535, its consolidation was slow and marked by provisional solutions. It was only in the 1550s that the cabildo acquired a more stable architectural presence, and it is in this context that the first explicit references to the *portales* appear as

52. B. Lee, *Libros de Cabildos de Lima*, Book 1 (1534–1539), Torres Aguirre – Sanmartí y Cía, Lima 1935, pp. 47–50.

53. *Ibid.*

devices necessary both to urban government and to the municipal economy. On 6 September 1557, the municipal record proposed transforming the ground floor of the cabildo building, which was then still bare earth: “what lies beneath the corridor and the council chamber is filled ground, and it would be very convenient to make a floor, remove the earth, and construct six shops in what lies beneath the chamber, and to make a portal in what falls beneath the corridor”⁵⁴. This passage is revealing: the very building of municipal government was conceived, from an early stage, as a support for shops and a *portal*, articulating administration and commerce within the same physical structure.

A second phase began in 1564, when the cabildo decided to extend the *portales* to the private houses that defined the square. The model adopted was already that of a standardised typology, as can be seen in the order to build “portales with a clear span of fifteen feet, like the one that began to be built at the prison”⁵⁵. The operation rested on a clear institutional logic: the cabildo granted the urban ground and the right to use the upper storey, “the upper part of them to be owned and used by such persons as they may wish”, in exchange for the construction of the *portales* and the guarantee of public use of the ground floor, “the lower part of them to remain freely available at all times”⁵⁶.

In 1570, the intervention took on a clearly political scale, when the Viceroy formally ordered that “portales be built in the public square of this said city”, entrusting their execution to the *oidor* Don Álvaro Ponce de León⁵⁷. The cabildo accepted the order, “as His Excellency commands”, but not without asserting its jurisdiction over the space thus created. It therefore imposed strict conditions on the use of the corridors, prohibiting “any kind of trade, nor benches, nor tables, nor chairs, nor platforms, nor any kind of merchandise”⁵⁸. This clause did not aim to exclude commerce from the square, but to prevent an economically profitable space from being appropriated by private individuals without municipal control. By defending the *portales* as a space belonging to the cabildo, it secured the square as its own domain, from which it could extract rents and exercise fiscal authority.

Subsequent developments confirm this interpretation. After a dispute with the Royal Audiencia, which reaffirmed the public character of the square and its corridors, the cabildo obtained authorisation to lease the *portales* on a temporary basis, under clauses that prevented any transfer of ownership. The viceregal grant of 1599 consolidated this regime, converting the *portal* into a

54. B. Lee, *Libros de Cabildos de Lima*, Book 5 (1553–1557), Torres Aguirre – Sanmartí y Cía, Lima 1935, p. 672.

55. B. Lee, *Libros de Cabildos de Lima*, Book 6, Part 2 (1562–1568), Torres Aguirre – Sanmartí y Cía, Lima 1935, pp. 231–232.

56. *Ibid.*

57. B. Lee, *Libros de Cabildos de Lima*, Book 7 (1570–1574), Torres Aguirre – Sanmartí y Cía, Lima 1935, p. 26.

58. *Ibid.*

fiscal unit – *asiento*, *cajón* – juridically recognised and economically exploitable for the benefit of the city⁵⁹.

In January 1600, municipal officials were appointed to manage the annual leases, fully integrating this space into the economic administration of the *cabildo*⁶⁰. In the case of Lima, the *portales* of the Plaza Mayor thus transformed the square into a fiscal, administrative, and mercantile device.

The technical vocabulary – *tianguis*, *portales* – signals two conceptions of the market in confrontation; the urban position, streets gaining value around this indigenous space, reveals how mercantile centrality structured the city's form; the regulation (concessions, refusals, licences) exposes commerce as a field of conflict between local practices and colonial ambitions. Read together, this material does not merely describe the transformation of a space, but the very cultural and economic negotiation that characterised colonial urbanisation: the attempt to monumentalise indigenous commerce into municipal arcades, community resistance, and the selective appropriation of rents by municipal elites.

In Potosí, Bolivia, the indigenous market known as *Gato de las Indias* was targeted for relocation to make way for a convent. Local opposition, reinforced by the intervention of the Viceroy of Peru, the Count of Alba, ensured that the market remained in its original location until the end of the 17th century⁶¹. Here, the method reveals another facet: not only lexical or architectural adaptation, but the reading of urban disputes as a field of negotiation between colonial powers and indigenous communities.

In the town of Sierra de Pinos (1603), the plan drawn by Gaspar de la Fuente included a central square with *portales* on its north and south sides, integrating the mercantile infrastructure into the city's foundational design, in the style of the Spanish *plazas mayores*⁶². This typological choice demonstrates that in the American contexts, mercantile visibility could be prescriptive: it is not necessary to reconstruct scattered clues, but rather to observe how commerce was embedded from the outset in the urban project (fig. 4). The framework adjusts accordingly: the lexicon already appears in the architectural plan itself, and institutional regulation is incorporated as a foundational clause of colonial urbanism.

In summary, the replicability of the framework lies not in applying it unchanged, but in capturing the lexical shifts required by each context. In the Iberian cases, we find convergent vocabulary and analogous architectural

59. J. Bromley, *Libros de Cabildos de Lima*, Book 13 (1597-1601), Torres Aguirre, Lima 1944, pp. 353–354.

60. *Ibid.*, pp. 371, 401, 557.

61. J.E. Mangan, *Trading Roles: Gender, Ethnicity, and the Urban Economy in Colonial Potosí*, Duke University Press, Durham–London 2005, pp. 161–163.

62. AGI, MP-MÉXICO, 51: *Planta de la nueva población que se ha de hacer en los llanos de la Goleta, a cuatro leguas de las minas de Nuestra Señora de la Concepción de Sierra de Pinos*, ca. 12 Novembre 1603.

devices. In the American cases, the task is twofold: to apply the framework and to reshape it, incorporating local terms, recognising spatial hybridities, and acknowledging political tensions. It is this lexical effort, this active search for regional equivalents, that makes the methodological framework not only applicable but effective and critical on a transnational scale, transforming the “invisible market” into an analytical category capable of illuminating the intersection between architecture, regulation, and practice in the colonial world. Yet the presence of *tianguis*, the vitality of indigenous markets, and local forms of resistance show that colonisation produced hybrid urban forms, neither entirely imposed nor entirely preserved.

6. Final considerations

The aim of this article was to develop tools that help us recognise commerce even when historical sources do not refer to it clearly. The idea of the “invisible market” emerges here as a working hypothesis – invisible not because it did not exist, but because it is often hidden in words, dispersed across functions, or even deliberately omitted.

Urban commerce in the 14th to 16th centuries did not organise itself around a single form. It flows through arcades (*arcos*) and porch (*alpendres*), occupies openings in upper-storey houses, settles in aligned shops (*boticas*) or movable tents (*tendas*), and extends into the interstices of the *ar* leased to the municipality. These small units, almost always discreet, structure the daily life of the city.

The documentation analysed clearly shows that it is in these small units, regulated by land rents, leaseholds, municipal statutes, and contracts, that the city’s true commercial activity is concentrated. The methodological framework proposed in this article was designed precisely to make this fragmented system visible. Its value lies not only in being a technical tool, but in the fact that it forces the cross-referencing of three key aspects: technical and architectural vocabulary, spatial form, and the rules that regulate it. Only when these three dimensions converge, or, at the very least, when two of them articulate coherently, can one affirm the presence of a commercial function.

The applicability of the methodological framework to different Portuguese contexts confirms not only its operational effectiveness but also its capacity for critical interpretation of urban space and its evolving meanings. In Elvas, the exercise revealed a logic of exclusion: a square conceived for ceremony, with no signs of commerce. Beja, by contrast, demonstrates the opposite: a space reconfigured for commerce, with visible interventions and explicit mercantile functions. Lisbon, in turn, stages the moment of transformation: from a temporary porch (*alpendre*) authorised for fruit sales to stone-and-lime shops (*boticas*) integrated into an urban frontage. This is where the comparative strength of the framework lies. Applying the same method across

different contexts reveals that there is no single model. The framework does not always produce the same results, but it allows for the testing of patterns and the highlighting of differences. Portuguese, Iberian, and Ibero-American cities face similar challenges in managing commerce: how to organise street vendors, how to use façades, how to control shops. Yet each city responds in its own way. It is precisely this difference that the methodology helps to uncover.

It is also important to recognise that this methodology has its limits. In the case of this framework, for example, it works well when there are documents and structures that can be cross-referenced, such as laws, contracts, architectural forms, technical vocabulary, and iconography. But such evidence is not always available or easy to identify. In many cases, the documents we have are sparse, fragmented, or simply did not record certain practices because they were informal or short-lived. As such, there is a risk of interpreting as “absence” what is in fact only “invisible” due to a lack of documentation. Moreover, the framework may work better in cities with well-defined and permanent commercial spaces, and less effectively where commerce was more mobile or improvised. Its value, in that sense, lies not only in what it enables us to see, but above all in what it compels us to question.

The “invisible market” is not proposed as a metaphor. It is, rather, a heuristic category, a reading tool designed to interrogate what the sources omit, what the forms conceal, and what the regulations leave unsaid. More than asking *where* the market is, this work seeks to deconstruct the way that very question has been posed. The aim is not to define the market as a pre-existing structure, but to understand how it is constructed, hidden, and transformed in each city, depending on the rules, spaces, and practices involved. This construction is always tied to power, regulation, language, architecture, and everyday life. In short, this text does not aim to provide an answer, but to keep the question open: not *where* is the market, but *when*, *how*, and *why* does it become visible in the city?

Documentary annex

Tab. 1 – Documentary evidence of urban provisioning spaces in Portugal, 14th century.

Table 1

City / Period	Spatial characterisation	Documentary content	Functions and practices	Patterns of use	Regulation	Conflicts and tensions	Transformations	Historiographical reading
Guarda, 1364 / 1395	Market square next to the Church of São Vicente; royal porch with six stalls and an inn; facing Rua Direita; light structure (probably wood/tiles).	«...huu alpendere meu em que suyam as regateiras que vendiam os pescados [...] mandando que se tornem [...] a vender as ditas cousas na dita praça de Sam Vicente [...] e constringades as pescadeiras que vendam os pescados soo o dicto alpendere» (alpendere, inn, fishwives, hucksters, stalls, fair, rented). — <i>Chancelarias de D. Pedro I; Tombo da Beira</i> .	Declared: centralise bread, fish, fruit, and cloth sales in the porch and square. Practised: dispersed sales, popular resistance.	Forced occupation; daily rental; mixed use of fair + provisioning + circulation.	Royal mandate (Chancellery); fiscal leasing by royal almoxarifé.	Resistance of hucksters to selling under the porch; attempt to transfer the fair to Santa Maria → threat of depopulation of houses and inns.	Partial privatisation: leasing of stalls at the fair; royal reconstruction after ruin; space disciplined over time.	The “invisible market” as a device of control: more about fiscal and spatial discipline than monumentalisation; tension between popular mobility and royal centralisation.
Lisbon, 1366	Urban commercial streets (Rua Nova and Rua da Madalena); presence of stalls (shops) and activity of tailors; functional and spatial differentiation.	«...cosiam ante as minhas tendas da Rua Nova e em outros lugares...» «...ora novamente o rendeiro dessa cidade costringe que vão coser à Madalena...» (tailors, stalls, Rua Nova, Rua da Madalena, fine, rented houses, leased, constrained). — <i>D. Pedro I, Alouguia da Baileia, 9 set. 1366</i> .	Declared: regulate location of tailors to Rua da Madalena. Practised: autonomous work near Rua Nova stalls.	High concentration of craft and commercial activity in Rua Nova; attempt at reorganisation by the council.	Royal regulation (decision of the king after consultation with the council and tailors); intervention against abuse by leaseholder.	Conflict between leaseholder/council and tailors; attempt at coercive centralisation vs. professional freedom; loss of economic value for Rua Nova.	Rejection of forced centralisation; reaffirmation of Rua Nova as a legitimate space for craft work; maintenance of functional diversity.	Shows early regulation and resistance in the urban professional space. Illustrates how royal power acted as an arbiter between the council and urban trades. Rua Nova appears as a dynamic and valuable space.
Lisbon, 1384	Shop/portal leased in royal building (almoxarifado of the customs house); shop structure embedded in public ground floor.	«...huu filho de Fernão Esteu, boticario... trazia emprazado huu portal de tenda do nosso almazem... fezo que via tanto por tanto pranches, nem pagou dello anos, acrescentando, segundo nossa ordenança... dito portal torna...» (shop portal, warehouse, lease, almoxarifé, tenant). — <i>Livro 3, Estremadura, fl. 2v</i> .	Declared: commercial use (apothecary/shop) in leased portal. Practised: cloth sales with exhibition at the shop door (commercial attraction).	Controlled occupation; individualised use of module in royal fiscal building; high density due to proximity to customs.	Direct royal regulation: lease subject to approval; redistribution as royal grant; intervention of almoxarifé and treasurer.	Conflict: illicit sale of lease without paying rent; automatic annulment and loss to the Crown.	Transformation: shop reused; granted as a royal favour to André Ruiz (royal squire); controlled privatisation.	Fiscal-commercial nucleus of the city, regulated down to the level of the portal; interlinking of customs house and daily commerce.
Lisbon, 1395	Urban commercial zone with shops occupied by foreign merchants (Genoese, Piacentini), visibly integrated in the city's mercantile fabric.	«...alguns nossos naturais colhem com os mercadores placentinis e jenoeses... e lhes fazem outros muitos desaguisados...» «...tirar das portas das lojas em que tem seus panos e mercadorias os panos verdes...» (foreign merchants, shops, cloths, wares, green cloths, shop door, dishonour). — <i>Chancelaria de D. João I, Porto, 26 jul. 1395</i> .	Declared: royal protection of freedom of display. Practised: cloth sales with exhibition at the shop door (commercial attraction).	High density of trade and coexistence of local and foreign merchants; tension around visibility in public space.	Direct royal regulation; king orders protection of merchants and imposes obligations on council, civil judge and elders.	Conflict between foreign merchants and “natives”; hostile acts, dishonour, violence and restrictions on display.	Reaffirmation of commercial space as plural and Crown-controlled; defence of foreign trade as economic driver.	Document shows royal policy of integrating and stabilising foreign merchants; use of public space as visual instrument of commercial power.

Tab. 2 – Documentary evidence of urban provisioning spaces in Portugal, 15th century.

City / Period	Spatial characterisation	Documentary content	Functions and practices	Patterns of use	Regulation	Conflicts and tensions	Transformations	Historiographical reading
Aldeia de Nogueira, 1402	Pert-urban village/territory of Sesimbra with provisioning activities: butchers, bakers, vintners and fishwives. Institutional solution as a porch (alpendre) to concentrate and regulate sales.	«...na aldeia da Nogueira houve de sempre, e ha ora, carniceros, padeiras, vinhateiros e pescadores que vendiam e vendem viandas sejam vendidas em lugar certo, sob um alpendre que o dito provedor diz que para isso dar na heridade da dita capela.» — Chancelaria régua, Trancoso, 7 out. 1402, vol. I, pp. 470-471.	Declared: protection of local provisioning and chapel rents; Practised: everyday circulation of foodstuffs; spatial fixation foreseen (alpendre).	Continuous use of food-related functions; moderate but essential provisioning density for residents and chapel tenants.	Royal intervention (royal charter); involvement of the chapel; local municipal/judicial authorities engaged.	Conflict between "powerful men of the region" and the chapel's provider, dispute over jurisdiction and rents.	Projected transformation: from dispersed commerce; concentrated under alpendre; institutional consolidation of sales space.	Document exemplifies royal policy of protecting rural provisioning; reveals tensions between commercial centralisation and local networks; highlights the role of fishwives and bakers.
Lisbon, 1403	Commercial area near the campos, market frequented by Jews (spices); presence of fixed tents under lease.	«...quatorze tendas que são acerra dos judeus que vendem suas especiarias.» — AHCML, Livro dos Pregos, doc. 250, fl. 186v.	Declared: leasing of tents by the council; Practised: sale of spices by Jews.	High mercantile density; specialised commerce; strong Jewish presence.	Judicial regulation (correção); royal approval; municipal council involved.	Conflict between private parties and the council; judicial withdrawal of plaintiffs in favour of the council.	Tents returned to council possession; maintenance of infrastructure under public control.	Reveals regulation of spaces linked to specific communities; affirms urban taxation as a municipal instrument.
Faro, 1444	Central urban space under restructuring: ruined houses near butcher stalls and vacant plots; construction of a porch (alpendre) for public sales.	«...os alogues da dita villa som muyto pequenos [...] os chãos devolutos [...] em elles fazer hui alpendre [...] vender as verduras e padeiras suas vendidas [...] será muyto honrosa cousa a dita villa.» — Liv. 24 de Afonso V, fl. 87v; Liv. 27, fl. 84; Livro 4 do Guadiana, fls. 218 e 247v.	Declared: expand provisioning and create a permanent structure; Practised: functional reorganisation of the square.	High functional density; convergence of provisioning, fair, and trade.	Municipal initiative; land donation; construction required within two years; royal approval.	Implicit conflict with private owners; use of incentives and institutional control.	Redevelopment of ruins into provisioning infrastructure; monumentalisation of the square.	Construction of the alpendre as civic ordering; link with Ceuta shows Atlantic integration; proto-global dimension of the project.
Porto, 1457 (boticas of 1419)	Boticas near the fountain of Rua Nova or Rua Formosa; infrastructured space with water supply.	«...boticas que estão ao chafariz da rua Nova da dita cidade.» — ANT, Livro 1 de Direitos Reais, Leitura Nova, Livro 40, fls. 288-289;	Declared: royal property of the boticas; Practised: leasing by the council.	High density; articulation between commerce, public space and main streets.	Royal judgement based on requisition; action of the royal prosecutor.	Direct conflict between Crown and council over ownership and revenues.	Forced regularisation in favour of the Crown; annulment of municipal acts.	Dispute reveals limits of municipal management; reaffirms royal control over urban revenues.
Porto, 1470	Urban portal and loggia in Rua Nova; physical link with arches and pillars; zone of circulation and commerce.	«...emprazou [...] hum portall de huas e nouas casas [...] com hum pedaco de loggia [...] da metade da parede dos arcos.» — Livro 4 de Afonso V, fls. 22-24v.	Declared: perial concession for a cloth shop; Practised: physical adaptation of the loggia.	High density; coexistence of commerce and housing; architectural sharing.	Royal and municipal regulation; charter of Afonso V and municipal approval.	Latent conflict in defining limits and uses (partial closing).	Lease transforms public space into private use; formal compartmentalisation.	Municipal and royal management shape urban architecture; transformation of interstitial spaces.
Santarém, 1471	Land near the monastery, intended for fair porches; division into 200 buyceas for selling cloth.	«...afornamento de hum chão [...] pera em elle fazer huas alpenderaes [...] repartir duzentas buyceas.» — Livro 4 de Estremadura, fls. 29v-30.	Declared: reorganisation of the fair with fixed buyceas; Practised: informal sales in huts.	Intense use on fair days; high mercantile density.	Royal lease with specific clauses; obligation to build and maintain.	Conflict between monastery (previous rent) and Crown (new fiscal structure).	Replacement of huts with formal buyceas; revenue shifted to the Crown.	Royal power transforms informal market into regulated structure; fair moves from religious to royal fiscal domain.
Portalegre, 1472	Central square with porch (alpendre) with stone arches; mixed structure with private houses above.	«...parte com ho alpendre da praça [...] eu me quera alieutuar sobre o dito alpendre [...] muyt bem solhado e hadrilhado.» — ANT, Liv. 6 Odamas, 1472.	Declared: construction above the porch; Practised: mixed use (commerce below, housing above).	Serial occupation under arcades; strong functional density.	Explicit municipal regulation; annual rent in kind; municipal control of ground floor.	Tension over appropriation of ground floor space; defence of public use.	Partial privatisation of upper floor; preservation of municipal control below.	Example of the "invisible market"; monetisation of arcades, semantic fragmentation (boticas, ar, alpendre).
Lisbon, 1478	Extramural, along Ribeira wall; construction of a porch (alpendre) for fruit vendors.	«...fazer de fora dos muros na Ribeira hum boom alpendre ao longo do muro [...] cerrar os arcos da dita rua pera ficar em renda.» — Chancelaria de D. Afonso V, 16 jun. 1478.	Declared: reorganise fruit sales; Practised: expected transfer to covered extramural space.	Seasonal and collective use; medium density.	Royal regulation at municipal initiative; construction and rents borne by the council.	Implicit tension with informal commerce at Fernria; possible resistance.	Reorganisation of commercial space; anticipation of monumentalisation process.	Example of regulation and surveillance in late 15th century; anticipates Manueline reform.
Lisbon, 1486	Central area (Padaria); shops and Paço do Trigo; vacant properties with strategic value.	«...joyas na Padaria das quaes a cidade averia alguma renda o que nam avya por estarem asy despejadas.» — Lisboa, Camara, 7 dez. 1486; autorização régua de 29 mar. 1486.	Declared: leasing to generate income; Practised: commercial reactivation.	Occupation of vacant properties with clear mercantile function.	Royal regulation and municipal management; perpetual lease.	Implicit criticism of previous management; inefficiency or speculation.	Redevelopment of disused properties; reaffirmation of the council as economic manager.	Urban government focused on monetisation of patrimony; commercial recovery.
Elvas, 1498	Square with butcher stalls, bakeries and female street vendors; near church.	«...que se faza pelas razões que dizeis pera a dita cidade aver proveito e escusar despesa.» — Cortes de D. Manuel I).	Declared: food provisioning; Practised: intense daily sales, mainly by women.	Overcrowded occupation; high density; mixture of commerce and worship.	Regulation via Cortes; petition presented to the king.	Conflict between commerce and worship; attempt to relocate butcher stalls.	Proposal to relocate butchers; search for more dignified space.	Case of invisibilisation: religious monumentality imposed over women's commerce.
Lisbon, 1498	Ribeira zone, extramural; regular construction of two-storey boticas along the wall.	«...que se façam sete casas sobradadas [...] com portaes feitos de pedraria [...] com obrigação delle para sempre.» — Corpo Cronológico, Parte III, Maio 1, doc. 30.	Declared: ordering and embellishment; Practised: fixation of commercial activities within architectural organisation.	Dense and regulated occupation; mixed use; high monetisation.	Direct royal regulation; exact prescribed measures; perpetual lease.	Implicit conflict with previous laws and municipal jurisdiction.	Replacement of earlier municipal project (1478) by royal intervention.	Profound reform of Ribeira; symbol of royal re-centralisation; aesthetics and urban taxation subordinated to central power.

Tab. 4 – Documentary evidence of commercial regulation in Castilian towns, 16th century.

City / Period	Spatial characterisation (type of urban space; architectural form / materials / dimensions)	Documentary content (keywords; vocabulary; source)	Table 4				Transformations (appropriation / privatisation; over time)	Historiographical reading
			Functions and practices (declared and practised use)	Patterns of use (occupation; density)	Regulation (type; agents)	Conflicts and tensions		
Plasencia, 1522–1526	Central square with projected town hall “with arcades and corridors”; representative and multifunctional space.	«[...] muchos de los vecinos desta cibdad [...] quieren que se labren la dicha casa con sus portales e corredores [...] porque de los portales se aprovechan mucho todos los vecinos [...] mayormente los negociantes». Vocabulary: <i>portales, corredores, negociantes</i> . Source: Archivo Municipal de Plasencia, <i>Libro de Actas de Acuerdos</i> , 1522–1526, f. 141r, cit. López Martín 1986, pp. 121–122.	Declared: seat of Justice and local councillors. Practised: festive space (attendance at festivals and bullfights); daily use of arcades by merchants and residents.	High functional density; simultaneously political-administrative, festive and mercantile space.	Municipal deliberation on architectural form and functions of the town hall; decision of public investment.	Tension between representative function (council/justice) and intensive occupation of arcades by neighbours and merchants.	Construction of new town hall according to proposed design; mercantile appropriation of arcades as functional extension of square.	Testimony of Iberian model of town halls with arcades as multifunctional civic space (political, festive, commercial), anticipating urban solutions transplanted to the Americas, as in the Plaza Mayor of Mexico City.
Badajoz, 1535	Public square (<i>Plaza de San José</i>); central space for fair and market. Attempt to install arcades (<i>soportales</i>) in front of private houses.	«[...] es donde se faze la feria de los puercos e madera y caballos e otros ganados [...]» (f. 4r); «[...] se vende en ella toda la madera e ganados e bestias e otras cosas que se traen a vender [...]» (f. 4v); «[...] con fazeerle los dhos portales queda la plaza sin anchura nyninguna [...]» (f. 7r). Vocabulary: <i>feria, mercado, madera, puercos, caballos, ganado vacuno, bestias, carretas, soportales</i> . Source: <i>Pleito de Gómez Hidalgo</i> , Autos notariales da Cámara de Badajoz, 1535, ff. 4r–12r.	Declared: petition by Gómez Hidalgo to build arcades as element of prestige. Practised: annual cattle fair; trade in timber and goods; daily use of square for circulation and sale.	Intensive use on fair days and weekly markets; high density of people, livestock and carts.	Licence requested by private individual (Gómez Hidalgo); decision and contestation by Ayuntamiento, councillors and Justice.	Conflict between private benefit (embellishment, rents) and collective interest (maintenance of width/utility of square).	Attempt at partial privatisation of public space; popular resistance; perceived inequality with neighbours already owning arcades.	Opposition to Gómez Hidalgo reflects not only concern for common good but also strategies of maintaining privileges and rents. Public discourse of “width” was instrumentalised to preserve established private interests.
Granada (Bibarrambía / Herrería), 1537	Alignment of one house and three shops in series, in new street opened in Herrería de Bibarrambía; brick-and-a-half walls; 10 varas long by half wide.	«Visitaron e apearon una casa e tres tiendas juntas... en la Herrería de Bibarrambía donde solía ser el Alhondiguilla». Vocabulary: <i>tienda, Alhondiguilla, censo</i> . Source: Núm. 38, fol. 127.	Declared: shops leased by <i>censo</i> . Practised: serial commerce in adapted space.	Modular, continuous occupation; medium-high density (joint use of house + 3 shops).	Notarial and fiscal regulation (annual <i>censo</i> of 4,500 maravedis); official survey (<i>apeo</i>).	Not explicit.	Conversion of collective building (<i>Alhondiguilla</i>) into private commercial frontages.	Paradigmatic case of “invisible mercantilisation”: shows how collective provisioning buildings were converted into private commercial units.
Granada (Albaicín, Carnicería), 1537	Individual shop facing the square, in butchers’ street; brick-and-a-half walls; 2 varas + 2 tercias long by 3 wide.	«Otra tienda en el dicho Albaicín en la plaza, en la calle de Carnicerías, y es carnicería». Vocabulary: <i>tienda, carnicería, plaza, censo</i> . Source: Núm. 113, fol. 156.	Declared: butcher’s shop under <i>censo</i> regime. Practised: specialised sale of meat.	Isolated occupation, but integrated in sectorialised street; high functional density.	Notarial and fiscal regulation (annual <i>censo</i> of 600 maravedis + 8 <i>reales</i>).	Not explicit; but functional framing suggests possible tensions over specialisation.	Maintenance of functional specialisation of street; corporate appropriation of space by butchers.	Example of urban specialisation by trade; concentration of butchers in dedicated street reinforced corporate control of food commerce.

Tab. 5 – Documentary evidence of urban planning and commercial spaces in the New World, 16th–17th centuries.

City / Period	Spatial characterisation (type of urban space; architectural form / materials / dimensions)	Documentary content (keywords; vocabulary; sources)	Functions and practices (declared; practised)	Patterns of use (occupation; density)	Regulation (type; agents)	Conflicts and tensions	Transformations / privatisation; over time	Historiographical reading
Mexico City, 1525	Plaza Mayor; plots around the square; authorisation to extend 21 feet into public space for construction of portales; materials: stone and wood.	Todos los vecinos que ovieren solares en la redonda de dicha plaza pueden tomar cada uno veinte y un pies [...] para que en ellos puedan hacer sus portales» (<i>Actas de Cabildo</i>). Vocabulary: <i>portales</i> , <i>vecinos</i> , <i>solares</i> .	Declared: integration of <i>portales</i> as functional extension of the square. Practised: civic-commercial use of <i>portales</i> by all neighbours.	Uniform concession to all plots: induced mercantile densification and architectural ordering.	Explicit municipal licences issued by the Cabildo; equally applied to all neighbours.	Little apparent tension; collective project of monumentalisation and spatial organisation.	Regulated appropriation of part of the public space; the 21 feet converted into a lasting urban standard.	Foundational act of the Plaza Mayor; normative model in the capital of New Spain.
Ciudad de los Reyes (Lima, Peru)	Plaza Mayor with porches (<i>portales</i>) built progressively from 1561; stone structures with wooden superstructures; regulated street front; spatially dominant in urban grid.	"se habían hecho en la plaza de esta ciudad, habían sido construidos para que los mercaderes y negociantes pudiesen andar por ellos libres del sol [...] los oficiales que vivían y tenían sus casas en dichos portales sacaban los bancos y mesas de su oficio a ellos, lo cual estorbaba a los dichos mercaderes y negociantes". Vocabulary: <i>portales</i> , <i>tendas</i> , <i>tendejones</i> , <i>renta</i> , <i>bancos</i> , <i>mesas</i> . <i>Actas del Cabildo de Lima</i> (1561–1602).	Declared: maintenance of pulcra (urban order) and free circulation. Practised: informal mercantile presence under the portales, later regularised; planned installation of <i>tendejones</i> .	Increasing occupation of the space by both mobile and fixed structures. From artisanal stalls, then licensed shops; culminating in regulated <i>tendejones</i> .	Initially prohibitive (1561–1577); later permissive through licences (1590) and leases (1600). In 1602, a commission was appointed to organise the <i>tendejones</i> . Agents involved: the Cabildo, the Viceroy, and the Royal Audiencia.	Recurrent conflict between municipal norms and everyday practices; persistent occupation of the portales by resident artisans, who extended both their work and their products into the public space; a tension between functional use and institutional planning.	Conversão em infraestrutura fiscal: os <i>portales</i> e, mais tarde, os <i>tendejones</i> tornaram-se instrumentos centrais de apropriação económica do espaço público e de afirmação do poder local. O Cabildo respondeu à ocupação informal persistente tentando reabsorvê-la por meio da regulação e do arrendamento.	The Cabildo conceived the portales as instruments of urban order, designed to ensure free circulation and protect licensed merchants. In practice, however, the space was informally occupied by resident artisans, who extended their work and materials into the public space, creating tension between regulation and everyday use.
Sierra de Pinos (New Spain), 1603	Regular central square, laid out in grid, with portales planned on north and south sides; civil power buildings to the east (Casas Reales, Audiencia, cárcel) and religious to the west (Main Church).	En los lados norte y sur de la plaza se dibujan fachadas con soporales.» Source: AGI, MP-MÉXICO, 51 (plan by Gaspar de la Fuente, viceroy of the Audiencia of Guadalajara, 1603). Vocabulary: <i>plaza</i> , <i>soporales</i> , <i>casas reales</i> , <i>audiencia</i> , <i>cárcel</i> .	Declared: expression of the ideal city for a mining settlement. Practised (implicitly): civic and commercial use under the portales; formal integration of mercantile activity in the square.	Regular, planned occupation; portales on north and south sides prefigured commercial zone, contrasting with institutional axes.	Project designed by royal order (Gaspar de la Fuente), under jurisdiction of the Consejo de Indias; regulation by foundational layout.	No explicit conflict; but codification of layout expresses intentional separation between institutional and commercial functions.	Projected fixation of a common practice (market under portales); from spontaneous to mandatory in colonial urbanism.	Illustration of model transmission: the Crown codified the market under portales as a structural component of the ideal city. The graphic document reveals how Iberian spatial logics were transferred to the Americas as foundational planning norms.
Mexico City, 1604 – <i>Portales of the Tianguis</i>	Project for construction of urban portales around the indigenous tianguis of San Juan; peripheral but highly active space; modular shops with counters facing the street.	"De hacerse el dicho portal redonda en pulcra y autoridad de la ciudad y se hace grande beneficio a la gente del Tianguis [...] (AHCM, 14 Nov. 1604). "Antonio de Cabral [...] le señaló lo terreno para poner sus tiendas para propios desta ciudad." Ana Núñez [...] recibió solar de los alcaldes indios desta ciudad." Vocabulary: <i>portal</i> , <i>tianguis</i> , <i>tendas</i> , <i>propios</i> , <i>mercaderes</i> , <i>oficios</i> , <i>azúeres</i> , <i>mesas</i> .	Declared: improvement of urban order and benefit to indigenous trade. Practised: strategic appropriation of land adjacent to indigenous market for installation of public shops (<i>tiendas</i> de <i>propios</i> of the council).	Indigenous space of high mercantile density (<i>tianguis</i>); attempt to insert urban-fiscal infrastructure (<i>portales</i>).	Initiative of the Cabildo; formal opposition by indigenous couple; counter-grant by indigenous alcaldes (parallel authorities).	Tension between Cabildo project and indigenous urban authority; jurisdictional dispute over urban space; legal resistance by indigenous agency.	Attempt to convert indigenous market into an urban circuit controlled and taxed; project of control and exploitation of indigenous commercial space.	Emblematic case of spatial domination: the Cabildo sought to appropriate indigenous commercial vitality by installing urban portales. The resistance of Ana Núñez and the indigenous alcaldes shows persistence of parallel structures of jurisdiction and community agency in the face of colonial urbanisation.