

The Centre–Today’s situation

Mataró, the capital of the Maresme region, has a population of 125,000. It is well connected by railway with Barcelona and also Girona, is passed by the C-32 motorway that crosses the whole of the Maresme region and has the C-60 connecting it to Granollers and direct access to the AP-7 motorway. It has a port of considerable potential and a Tecnocampus (University area, technology and business park) which, along with Eurecat (the former Cetemmsa) form a core of knowledge, research and transfer between university and enterprise. Mataró is also surrounded by municipalities of high purchasing power.

The Mataró General Urban Development Plan of 1996 set the limits for the city’s growth and wagered on a model of quality territorial balance with architectural heritage as a distinctive feature and driving force behind the built-up city, strengthening the city’s strategic position and its centre with respect to the sea and seafront.

Despite this attractive profile, the fact is that the historic district and centre of the city have generally suffered considerable stagnation over the last 10 to 15 years for various reasons. As a result, the city has lost economic and commercial activity.

On the other hand, in recent years Mataró has progressively become a more open destination with a stronger will to attract and has therefore become more of a tourist destination, which has produced a growth trend in the visualisation and recognition of the city and also considerable growth in the number of visitors and tourists positively attracted by the municipality’s resources. This new element in the city’s economic development is also related to the growth trend in the service sector in Mataró.

Given this context, and in order to relaunch the centre as an area that wagers on the quality of life of the citizens and recovers its former activity and dynamism, and to continue offering visitors and tourists the chance to enjoy the environmental, scenic, historic, cultural and commercial attractions of the city, a strategic proposal is being sought to **activate the whole area of the centre of Mataró**.

The Centre- brief historic resume

The historic centre of Mataró stands in the same place where the former Roman city of *Iluro* was built.

Iluro was created as a consequence of the arrival of Romans after the second Punic War (218-201 BC), mainly due to the introduction of a new economic system started by the Romans and based on the exploitation of the plains or “marina”, intensifying the movement of exchange products, and mainly oil and wine. This new activity required an urban centre from where to manage the services, cult and especially the market.

In 1294, Mataró received royal permission or privilege to be able to hold a market every Monday. In those times, the Town of Mataró had no more than six hundred inhabitants, while Barcelona had 30,000 and Girona around 8,000. The city of Vic and the town of Granollers were much larger than Mataró and had long been more important marketplaces. Some think that Mataró gained the status of a ‘Vila’(town) thanks to the concession of the market privilege.

The oldest market in Mataró and, for centuries too, the only market and selling place in the city was the Plaça Gran or Major, a name it was surely given as the first and main square in the early urban development of the town. This market holds a very central place in Mataró’s historic district and also in the sixteenth century walled area, and is connected to the rest of the city by the sea and mountain streets and also the streets giving onto them.

Since mediaeval times, when Mataró was nothing more than a small Romanesque church (today the basilica of Santa Maria), houses under its shelter and a few country houses spread around the area, the significance of the Plaça Gran and the market evolved to be defined as a public area of relating and an area for the exchange and marketing of products, a specialisation which has been maintained over the centuries and still today.

In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the city grew outside the walls following the line of the porches and ancient roads. The basilica of Santa Maria, with the Dolors complex, became the most important building in Baroque Mataró, and the urban section that configures today’s city layout between narrow streets and city squares inside walls.

The 19th-century city saw the change from the manual workers to weavers. The steam industry was built, the railway arrived (the first in Spain) and the Eixample Plan of 1878 provided a response to the growth with the housing and facilities that the new city required.

Between 1892 and 1893 the architects Emili Cabanyes and Josep Puig i Cadafalch designed the present building of the Rengle market in the Plaça Gran, the emblematic element of the city's historic centre.