

# KEY COMPETENCIES OF TRADERS IN MUNICIPAL MARKETS: CASE STUDY IN THE LIVRAMENTO MARKET OF SETUBAL

## *COMPETÊNCIAS-CHAVE DOS COMERCIANTES DOS MERCADOS MUNICIPAIS: ESTUDO DE CASO NO MERCADO DO LIVRAMENTO DE SETÚBAL*

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### ABSTRACT

**Purpose** – This study aims to analyse the role and importance of trader’s competencies in the context of municipal markets. It is proposed to define the ideal competences profile of traders (ICPT) in a municipal market – Livramento Market of Setubal, Portugal – attending to their key competencies, to assess the degree of similarity between the actual profile of the traders and the ICPT.

**Design/methodology/approach** – A case study was carried out with a quantitative approach through the application of a survey to individuals of the various stakeholders’ groups (N = 36) related to the municipal markets.

**Findings** – The ordering the relative importance of the competencies allowed to obtain the ICPT, highlighting the greater importance of more technical competencies in detrimental of soft competencies. Each of the competence’s profiles identified by the different groups were compared to the ICPT and high percentages of similarity were obtained (greater than 70%).

**Research implications** – This study assists professional associations and managers in the design of local market management models with a focus on competencies, guiding their efforts towards the development of the most relevant competencies for professional practice.

**Originality/value** – Its originality is based on the lack of research studies focused on the analysis of the competences of the players in the municipal markets. The analysis of the central role of a profession that is little valued, and little studied in the national context serves as an anchor for other studies on the competencies of these professionals.

**Keywords:** Municipal Markets. Traders. Competencies Profile.



## RESUMO

**Objetivo** – Este estudo tem como objetivo analisar o papel e importância das competências dos comerciantes dos mercados municipais. Propõe-se definir o perfil de competências ideal do comerciante (PCIC) num mercado municipal – Mercado do Livramento de Setúbal, Portugal – em termos das suas competências-chave, de modo a avaliar o grau de similaridade a esse perfil.

**Design/metodologia** – Recorreu-se a um estudo de caso, consubstanciado numa abordagem quantitativa através da aplicação de um inquérito aos diversos grupos de stakeholders (N = 36) que se relacionam com os mercados municipais.

**Resultados** – A ordenação da importância relativa das competências permitiu obter o PCIC, tendo-se verificado uma maior importância das competências mais técnicas em detrimento das competências soft. Cada um dos perfis de competências identificadas pelos diferentes grupos foram comparados ao PCIC sendo as percentagens de similaridade elevadas (superiores a 70%).

**Implicações da pesquisa** – Este estudo auxilia as associações profissionais e os responsáveis na conceção de modelos de gestão dos mercados locais com enfoque nas competências, orientando os seus esforços para o desenvolvimento das capacidades mais relevantes para o exercício da profissão.

**Originalidade/valor** – A sua originalidade assenta na inexistência de estudos de investigação centrados na análise das competências dos diferentes agentes dos mercados municipais. A análise do papel central de uma profissão pouco valorizada e estudada em contexto nacional, serve de âncora para outros estudos sobre as competências destes profissionais.

**Palavras-chave:** Mercados Municipais. Comerciantes. Perfil de Competências.

## 1 INTRODUCTION

The development of a process that supports the management of local traditional markets involves a deep reflection on their performance, allowing to identify their positive aspects and their weaknesses to create opportunities for improvement.

A positive outcome for the activity of the local markets is largely dependent on the performance of the different groups associated with these markets. Thus, it is essential and a priority that these groups of stakeholders know and internalize the profile of competencies associated with the exercise of their functions.

If previous studies explored this issue for local markets, in general (e.g., Ruivo, 2017; Ravenna, Comiati, Porcu & Popolizio, 2014; Barreta, 2012; Alves & Filho, 2011), there has been less research intervention regarding its players. Among these, traders assume a primary role for the achievement of success in this type of business (Rivas-Cedeño, Almeida-Palacios & Ponce-Villamil, 2019).

Thus, the objective of this study is to analyse the role and importance of the competencies of municipal market traders, in an attempt to define their ideal competencies profile and in order to assess the degree of similarity of the professional to such profile.

In methodological terms, this project research is based on a structured case study proposal (Yin, 2015) for the Livramento Market of Setubal (LMS). The application of a survey, focused on four groups of market players (traders, specialists, customers, and tourism agents), should provide data that allow a comprehensive and integrated view of trader's competencies profile.

This study contributes to improve information that should support decision makers of local markets, in order to establish the design of management models with a focus on competencies development, contributing also to improved working systems that allow the performance of traders to be leveraged to higher levels and, therefore, with a positive effect in the outcome of local markets. Additionally, it also facilitates the development of actions that promote the improvement of the proficiency of traders' competencies.



## 2 LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1 Local Trade

Trade, as an economic activity, has the primary function of enabling the supply of products and services, acting as an intermediary between producers, traders, and consumers. It is, therefore, all activity that is carried out with a professional character through the intermediation of goods and services in the market (GEDES-FLUP, 2000).

Local trade refers to the proximity with the customer, translated into the knowledge of their needs and desires, in the close relationship established between the parties, spilling over from the mere physical proximity, which should not, however, be neglected. Its distinguishing factor is the relationship of mutual trust, enhanced by a greater use of new techniques/technologies, pursuing the profitability of the business, and regenerating the local economy (Zhao, 2018; Barreta, 2012). It is characterised by business and management practices that favour market trends while being close to the consumer (Mogro, 2017). It also includes a sub-sector characterised by a specific set of family business, with a reduced variety of supply, but with products that reflect the identity of the territory in which they operate (Machado & Does, 2018).

The concept refocuses the analysis on the relationships between individuals and groups, constituting themselves as privileged spaces for socializing, sharing and building neighbourly relationships, which that increases the sense feeling of belonging and community. The local trade are part of urban centres that play a fundamental role in the sustainability of territories and their activities (Alexandre, Martins & Harold, 2018).

With the spread and growth of large and modern commercial areas and more recently online transactions, local trade has suffered significant decline of its revenue, with relevant negative impacts in several areas, whether due to the threat of large commercial areas (Balsas, 2000) or by latest innovative forms of trade (Delage, Baudet-Michel, Fol, Buhnik, Commenges & Vallée, 2020). Therefore, in recent years, municipalities have shown a growing interest in preserving and developing this form of commerce, taking actions to revitalize it and restore its relevance in the preservation of identity.

Within the framework of its attributions and responsibilities, it is the municipality's task to promote the development of the territory (Law No. 75/2013 of 12 September). Since local trade is fundamental to the community experience, playing an important role in the employment of resident populations and contributing to the socio-economic development of the regions, it is important for the local action to develop efforts to enhance and promote this type of trade as fundamental spaces in the promotion of dynamic and participatory communities. The municipal markets are characterized by locality (a place for both the rediscovery of local production and for encounters and traditions), authenticity (fresh food and products quality can offer a wide range of consumption experiences, richer and more authentic), sociability (face to face buying and selling sets apart this area as a space for sociability and identity construction), and mitigation (this kind of markets may mitigate situations of gentrification or "touristisation") (Ravenna et al., 2014).

Cities and commerce have a strong relationship of interdependence, so the transformation and change in the shape of the city, tends to be accompanied by various changes in the functions it offers. Although the local trade highlights the traditional commerce, it is increasingly sought and intended to provide it with new competencies (e.g., technical, technological, management, among others) to establish a clear and coherent articulation with the current profile of consumers, towards business profitability and therefore contribute to the regeneration of the local economy (Machado & Does, 2018).

The nature of local trade has changed, the market has demanded new conditions on both,



the demand and supply side. To ensure its economic viability, this type of commerce will have to opt for renewal, revitalisation of its structures and the development of specific strategies that could to attract once again the clientele that was once its own (Zhao, 2018).

The urban markets gain new centrality and is a space of reference in the city structure (Pereira, 2018). The revitalisation of these public spaces creates places of diversity, which contributes to the integration of low-skilled workers (Barreta, 2012). At this level, the development of competencies is fundamental as it contributes to the growth and consolidation of workers and organisations (Sarwoko, 2016). Balancing the competencies held and required by traders, while maintaining the levels of competitiveness, is therefore one of the main challenges in this area.

The aim is to increase loyalty and attract new customers, consolidate the image of the place, make the purchase a playful act and give added value to the products sold there. To achieve this objectives, local traders should increase the competitiveness of their business not only based on economic factors, but also based on a performance criteria supported on better competencies (Ceribelli, Tamashiro, Botelho & Fernandes, 2019; Li, Clark & Sillince, 2018).

## 2.2 Competencies Management

The topic of competencies has been highly studied in the last decades, both, at the level of theoretical and empirical matrix research. Yet even today there are still some divergences related as to its conceptualisation (Freitas & Odelius, 2019). The dominant perspective, however, is to signal the importance of establishing an articulation between individual and professional competencies and the needs established by the existing functions or positions in organisational contexts (Sarwoko, 2016; Ceitil, 2016; Boyatzis, 2008).

Competencies could be defined as the set of behavioural patterns that the holder of a function must present to perform his tasks competently (Woodruffe, 1992), and they comprehend the observable behaviours and actions that people need to present to perform a function effectively rather than the function itself. Such observable behaviours and actions may include personality characteristics, competencies, attitudes, values, motivations, and knowledge (Spencer & Spencer, 1993). According to the behaviorist perspective a competence exists when it is evidenced and manifested through a behavior that can be directly observed and measured. In this sense, competences should be analyzed through behavioral indicators, in the most operational way possible, specifying concrete actions. In this view, some authors (e.g., Silva, 2009) considered this perspective too rigid, reductive, mechanistic, and standardized. On one hand, it does not consider competences as a complex, dynamic and globalizing reality. On the other hand, it focuses on the final product, that is, on directly observable and measurable behaviors, leaving other aspects in a secondary, perhaps less objective, but equally important for the global understanding of competencies, namely: cognitive, affective, social, and relational (Hager & Gonczi, 1996).

In this regard, new approaches have emerged, which are more integrative, comprehensive, and systemic in explaining the constituent elements of competence (Sá & Paixão, 2013). These approaches consider competences as complex combinations of elements (knowledge, attitudes, values, and expertise) often used to understand situations in which individuals are located (context relevance). This perspective also encompasses several other aspects such as values, ethics, the need for reflected practice, the importance of context and the fact that there may be more than one way to be able to exercise it competently (Hager & Gonczi, 1996).

Based on these assumptions, Sarwoko (2016) argues that competencies allow professionals and organisations to develop a greater capacity and strategic vision, which will decisively affect their individual and organisational performance and their strategies for growth and consolidation.



The transition to a competencies management model presupposes a change in the direction of how organisations are managed, with an impact on three specific dimensions: on the importance given to people, relating them to the success of business strategies; on the policies adopted for recruiting and developing the competencies that are needed for the company; on specific training targeted at competencies (Knapik, Fernandes, Sales, 2020; Fleury & Fleury, 2004). For organisations to achieve their purposes, they must transpose their strategic and organisational objectives into the essential requirements needed by professionals of any specific function (Knapik et al., 2020). The adoption of this approach requires the identification, description, and assessment of competencies (Silva, Ribeiro, Alvarez & Caregnato, 2019).

The main objective of competencies-based management is therefore the development of people to its fullness (Le Boterf, 2015). To this end, competence, in this model, is not only a knowledge, a skill or an ability, but also the competence of having initiative and take responsibility for certain work-related situations that a professional may be confronted (Zarifian, 2001). In this model, the competencies focus goes beyond the qualifications prescribed by the function and is directed to the individual, that is, to his or her abilities (knowledge, competencies, and attitudes) and their dedication to the professional exercise (Dutra, 2016).

### **2.2.1 Traders' Competencies**

Nowadays, in the context of their professional activity, traders face a wide range of difficulties and challenges inherent to an increasingly dynamic and competitive markets. The difficulty of small businesses to compete with new, dynamic, innovative businesses, which increasingly rely on qualified human resources with specific and transversal competencies, justifies the development of a set of aggregate measures to promote the success of this activity in the revitalization of the city centres (Ruivo & Carvalho, 2017).

More and more, this type of trade will have to focus on the valuation of its players. Their business must have a systematic focus on improvement of people knowledge and competencies. The role of municipalities in promoting the development of traders only becomes effective when they recognize and assume that traders are the strategic agents driving the business and playing a central role in the local economy. If it is true, that one of the fundamental variables of the business is consumer knowledge, it is no less true that, only with the development and updating of traders' competencies, such knowledge can be more easily objectified. Therefore, it is essential to have a central concern and focus on traders' activities and needs. It is important to know what traders sell but, above all, how they sell, what kind of behavioural patterns they use and what kind of competencies they mobilise.

The trader plays its role, in a more or less formal way, by any person who organizes and sells products and/or services through conventional channels and online, ensuring customer satisfaction. It performs its function in different organisational contexts, namely in companies from different areas of retail activity in the sale of goods and services (Barreta, 2012).

The motivations that underlie any individual to exercise this activity are various, ranging from those who have an effective vocation for this professional area, to those who resort to it as an alternative, in the absence of other options, or even those who exercise it, motivated by issues of generational continuity.

According to the ANQEP (National Agency for Qualification and Vocational Education) Competence Reference, the trade technician is included in the area of expertise 341 (Trade) that corresponds to a level 4 classification. Generally, these professionals are responsible for organizing and selling products and/or services through conventional and online channels guaranteeing customer satisfaction and exercising its function in companies from different areas of retail activity (ANQEP, n.d.).



Traders develop their function in several areas, namely in sales (e.g., assisting and advising customers regarding products or services, carrying out the exhibition and replacement of products at points of sale, organizing and promoting points of sale), management (e.g., organize and execute the administrative procedures inherent to the commercial activity, control the stocks of products sold by the company, control the order management process), and communicate in foreign languages (e.g., communicate and interact in a foreign language in a commercial context) (ANQEP, n.d.).

Traders must keep in mind the specific requirements imposed on health and safety conditions (CMS, 2013). In addition, and to comply with legislation at this level, the trader in traditional markets should make an appropriate use of resources, as well as be assiduous and punctual, respecting customers and ensuring the quality of products and/or services. At the same time, as a way of ensuring that the development of their functions meets the needs of their customers, traders must have sustainability concerns, valuing the so-called eco-products (Jardim & Pavan, 2014).

Taking all these factors into account, traders who work in the local markets should have a set of different competencies of theoretical, psychosocial, and technical scope.

The first focus, on the domain of know-how, is associated with knowledge about, the fundamental characteristics of the trade and services sector, the services and products sold, the rules and regulations applicable, the strategies for commercial promotion and marketing, the specific equipment used in the commercial and management activity (ANQEP, n.d.; Ruivo & Carvalho, 2017; CMS, 2013), or even the knowledge about ecologically based products, the so-called eco-products or green products (Crawford, Byunc, Mitchelle, Thompsone, Jalaludinb & Siranda Torvaldsenb, 2018; Darolt et al., 2016; Jardim & Pavan, 2014).

The second set of competencies are directed to the field of knowledge that corresponds to the attitude of being and behaving in the context. This highlights the need for the trader to have competencies at the level of behaviour and attitude, personal and professional posture, time management, responsibility, negotiation, interpersonal relationship, communication, argumentation, tolerance, and empathy, in other words, assuming the ability to adapt to any public and situation (ANQEP, n.d.; Ruivo & Carvalho, 2017; CMS, 2013).

The third, is focused on the mastery of know-how (corresponding to the practical domain, the application of knowledge already acquired - it is doing something that is already known) and highlight the ability to analyse the specific context and objective of exercising their activity, the ability to perform cash operations, perform quantitative and qualitative product verifications, use sales techniques, handle and pack products, use equipment, functionalities of the commercial service's IT system, analyse documentation on services and products commercialised, apply promotion and marketing techniques for services and products commercialised (ANQEP, n.d.; Ruivo & Carvalho, 2017; Darolt et al, 2016; CMS, 2013).

### 3 METHODOLOGICAL PROCEDURES

When profiling the competencies of traders, in this type of retail format, it is important to consider the opinions of (reference) traders, experts in the field, market managers, individual and collective customers (tourism agents). Their combined vision allows to identify what are the distinctive advantages of traders and the added value that investment in new forms of trade can bring.

Methodologically this research is based in a case study (Yin, 2015) on the LMS. It has an exploratory-quantitative component (Field, 2009), supported by the application of the survey, which aims to identify, describe, and analyse an aggregate set of competencies to the object of the study. The main objective is to define the ideal competencies profile of traders (ICPT) of LMS and, through





it, identify the degree of similarity of the ICPT with the profiles of specialists (ICPTspe), reference traders (IPCTreft), individual customers (IPCTic) and collective customers (IPCTcc).

### 3.1 Livramento market characterisation

As each market is unique and has its own characteristics, it should be considered and analysed according to its specificities and not through standardised models transposed from other realities.

The LMS market is the most emblematic commercial in the city of Setubal, Portugal. A place of retail (mostly food retail), but also of socialisation and sharing of stories, where the tradition of the city is perpetuated in an establishment that has always followed the evolution of times. Founded in 1876, the original building was demolished and replaced by a new one in 1930. The space was then refurbished, adapting it to legal requirements, and in 2011 the LMS reopened, perpetuating a commercial tradition that has accompanied generations of inhabitants of Setubal and visitors.

LMS has 2 floors, but it is on the ground floor that most traders are concentrated, mainly in stalls. There is a bit of everything at the Livramento market: fresh fish, assorted horticultural products, bread, wine, cheeses and sausages, flowers, handicraft items and the daily newspapers. The LMS has a total of 236 traders, distributed among 143 trader-retailers and 93 trader-producers.

The producers maintain an alternating presence in the market and are associated with the fruit and vegetable sector. The retailers have a concessionary and fixed space in the market, being divided between stalls and stores, with 106 and 37 active businesses, respectively. In terms of stalls, the fish sector is the most represented with about 48% of active businesses, followed by the fruit and vegetable sector with about 32%. As for the stores, the most represented business is the butchers with 40.5%, followed by cafes / restaurants (24.3%).

Regarding the characterization of the legal form of the market's businesses, about 82.0% of the activities carried out in the sales stalls take the form of an individual entrepreneur (IE), with approximately 12.0% private limited companies and only 6.0% sole proprietorships. The weight of IE traders in the stalls area, especially fish and fruit and vegetable stalls, is not surprising, as these businesses are mostly family-oriented – most businesses are small.

In terms of sociodemographic characteristics of traders, there is a greater preponderance of females (61.7%) compared to males (38.3%). There is a considerable aging of traders, essentially at the level of producers (90.3% are over 50 years old) but also in the group of traders-resellers (72.6% are over 50 years old), considering that the age group of more than 40 years, the percentage reaches 90.5% of the total number of traders. The percentage of traders under 30 years old is quite residual, not exceeding 2.0%. Most traders have only the 4th years of elementary school education (32.1%), being the most accentuated weight in the group of producers (62.9% of the total). Finally, most traders and traders-producers have high levels of seniority in the market (49.5% of traders have been in the market for more than 30 years; and 69.6% of traders-producers have been in the market for more than 30 years).

### 3.2 Research and procedure techniques

To identify the municipal market traders' competencies profile, it was developed a map of their competencies based on the adaptation of ANQEP's Competencies Benchmark (ANQEP's, n.d.), the Setubal Local Markets Regulation (CMS, 2013) and the studies of Ruivo and Carvalho (2017) and Barreta (2012). Initially 17 competencies were identified and systematized in a survey: knowledge of the trade sector; presentation and enhancement of products to customers; ability to sell products through the use of IT resources and specific equipment in the commercial area; ability to carry out



box operations, opening and closing them; ability to control the quantity and quality of products; ability to package the products sold; knowledge of English or another foreign language appropriate to the commercial activity; ability to communicate, argue and advise on customer service; knowledge of safety, hygiene, and health standards applied to the professional activity and those relating to the products sold; ability to relate to the various interlocutors; knowledge of the products he markets; knowledge of how to handle, store and preserve products; interpretation of product lists, pricing and documentation relating to the commercial activity; after-sales service; stock control, product inventory and registration; time management in accordance with the flow of customers; knowledge of recycling, eco-products and green products.

The survey was subsequently applied to a group of stakeholders (reference traders, specialists and market managers, individual customers, and collective customers/tourism agents) directly related to the Livramento Setubal Market. The survey aimed to assess the importance given by respondents to the identified competencies and then to permit measuring the similarity of the self-assessment carried out by the respondents to such competencies. The survey was applied on paper and after the objectives of the study had been explained. It took place during the pandemic period (SARS-Cov-2 - COVID19) in the month of September 2020. Despite all the constraints associated with the situation of confinement, in articulation with the Municipality of Setubal, it was possible to implement the diagnostic methodology of competencies to a total of 36 market-related stakeholders.

The survey started with a sociodemographic characterization of the respondents. The following questions aim to identify the importance given to each of the 17 competencies identified on a 5 item Likert scale (1 – not important up to 5 – very important). In parallel, there was also an open-ended question asking the participants to identify other competencies that are relevant to the role of municipal market trader, explaining their degree of importance. After the application of the survey, 4 competencies were added to the 17 already identified (education and citizenship, financial management, ability to implement online sales and home delivery, specific knowledge about sector support programmes), in a total of 21 competencies.

For the implementation of the surveys prior authorisation was requested from Setubal Municipality and the Market Manager. Participants were informed, in advance, of the scope and objectives of the investigation, as well as of the confidentiality and anonymity in the treatment of the information, which is done in an aggregated manner, with merely research objectives.

### 3.3 Sample

Given the innovative nature of the study in Portugal, a stratified, non-proportional sample was chosen. The groups to be represented – stakeholders related to the market – were previously defined. The population was subdivided into sub-populations that represent strata, namely the reference traders, the specialists, the individual customers, and the collective customers/tour agents. Subsequently, the selection by convenience of the elements of each stratum was followed. This option was due to the ease of access to the context under analysis and the difficulty in compiling the sample units. Despite the impossibility of generalizing the results, it allows to obtain pertinent information when there are no fundamental reasons that differentiate the individuals in the sample and those that make up the total population.

The sample under study consists of a total of 36 professionals, market related stakeholder groups, previously identified by market management: reference traders (7), specialists (7), individual customers (13), collective customers/tourist agents (9). Respondents were considered individually (not grouped) to ensure the assumption of independent comments. The characterization of respondents is presented in table 1.





Box 1 – Sociodemographic and professional characterization of respondents

Variables		Stakeholders			
		Reference traders	Specialists	Individual customers	Collective customers
Sex	Male	5	5	4	4
	Female	2	2	9	5
Age	Up to 44 years	2	2	4	5
	More than 45 years	5	5	9	4
Qualifications	Up to 4th year or equivalent	2	-	-	-
	9th year or equivalent	3	-	-	-
	12th year or equivalent	2	-	2	-
	Degree	-	5	3	2
	Master's Degree	-	1	7	6
	PhD	-	1	1	1
Occupation	Trader	7	-	-	-
	Businessman/Manager /Director	-	3	3	5
	Senior Technicians	-	2	3	-
	Chairman of the Market Board of Directors	-	1	-	-
	Teacher	-	1	2	-
	Real Estate Consultant	-	-	1	-
	Psychologist	-	-	1	-
	Human Resources Technician	-	-	1	-
	Security	-	-	1	-
	Civil engineer	-	-	1	-
	Chefs	-	-	-	2
	Tourism Technician	-	-	-	1
	Public Agent	-	-	-	1
Seniority	Up to 5 years	1	3	2	-
	6 – 15 years	-	1	4	3
	More than 16 years	6	3	7	6

Source: Stakeholder's survey (2020).

### 3.4 Data processing

To define the competencies profile, the Qute methodology (ROQET, 2012; Brito & Cordeiro, 2020), originally applied to the training context, was adapted to compare the trader's self-assessment with the feedback given by the other stakeholder's groups in the process. For this study, this methodology was adapted to the commercial context, comparing the responses of the reference traders with those of the specialists, individual clients, and collective clients.

To obtain the Ideal Competencies Profile of Traders (ICPT), all responses from the various participants were considered. Data analysis was performed through SPSS/AMOS25, using descriptive statistics (means, standard deviation, absolute values, percentages, and cross tabs). At this level,



each competency was assessed on a Likert scale of 1 to 5 (1 – not important; 5 – very important) and the results per competence were weighted average (WA):

$$WA = \sum (f_i \cdot V_i)$$

Where:

( $f_i$ ) – Observed frequency of each response for each competence.

( $V_i$ ) – Value attributed to competence by each respondent.

Then the Order of Importance (OI) of each competence was calculated (dividing the WA by the number of specialists' respondents – NS; and by the number of reference traders' respondents – NRT; by the number of individual customers' respondents – NIC; by the number of collective customers/tourism agents' respondents – NCC; and by the number of respondents – N). That is:

Order of Importance – specialists:  $(OI) = WA/NS$

Order of Importance – reference traders:  $(OI) = WA/NRT$

Order of Importance – individual customers:  $(OI) = WA/NIC$

Order of Importance – collective customers:  $(OI) = WA/NCC$

Afterwards, the competencies are ordered in a descending relevance from the most important (with higher OI – 1) to the least important (with lower OI – 11), obtaining the ICPT.

To assess the similarity of the assessment made by the different groups of participants to the ICPT, the concept of the Lombardo and Eichinger Competency Development Difficulty Index (2003) was used. The Competencies Development Difficulty Index is given by:

(UNC) The underlying nature of the competence: which concerns the complexity of becoming proficient in the competence.

(RIC) Real importance of the competence: according to the research that emerges from expert assessment.

(PIC) Perceived importance of the competence: as the importance of the competence for good performance and success is perceived.

The ICPT is obtained by applying the following formula:

$$ICPT = \sum (vsPC \cdot viC \cdot OIC)$$

Where:

vsPC – Self-assessment value of proficiency in each competence.

viC – Value of the importance of that competence.

OIC – Order of importance of that competence in the ICPT.

This result will correspond to the Strength of Competence (SC), so placing them in descending order of their SC from 11 to 1 (11 correspond to the highest SC; 1 correspond to the lowest SC) gives the ICPT (SC x=11; SC y=10; SC ...; SC z=1).

To obtain the value of intersection between the OI of each of the two profiles, according to the responses of the groups of participants, their percentage of similarity was obtained comparing both profiles.

## 4 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In this section it is systematised the results concerning the competencies profile of the local market trader, comparing the responses of each of the different groups of stakeholders who responded to the survey.



#### 4.1 Ideal competencies profile of traders

First, an attempt was made to identify the set of competencies that best define the work to be done by traders. This was done by using the weighted average (WA) of each of the 21 identified competencies, which led to the establishment of their order of importance (OI). Since we wanted to identify key competencies for traders, we chose to consider only those which, on average, were above 4.0 on the Likert scale used (i.e., those which were considered by all groups as being “quite or very important” for the exercise of the trader’s function). In this sense, the 21 competencies initially identified gave rise to 11 key competencies, ranked in the following OI (table 2 and graph 1).

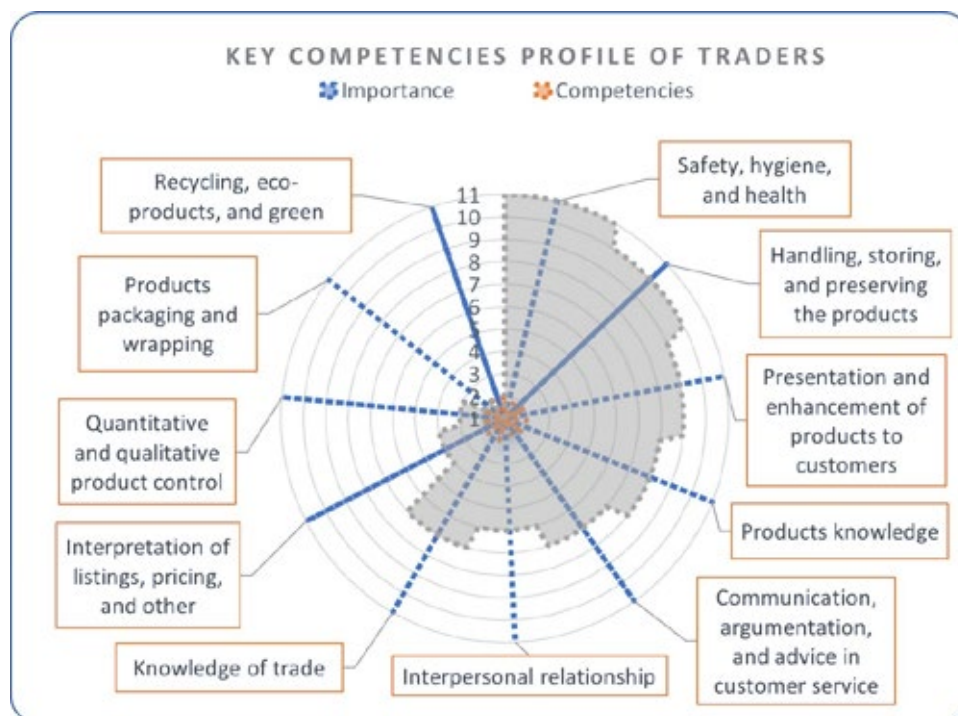
Box 2 – Key competencies of traders

Competencies	N	WA	SD	SC	OI
Safety, hygiene, and health standards	36	4,89	0,319	11	1
Handling, storing, and preserving the products	36	4,72	0,513	10	2
Presentation and enhancement of products to customers	36	4,69	0,577	9	3
Products knowledge	36	4,61	0,494	8	4
Communication, argumentation, and advice in customer service	36	4,49	0,514	7	5
Interpersonal relationship	36	4,44	0,877	6	6
Knowledge of trade sector	36	4,42	0,732	5	7
Interpretation of listings, pricing, and other documentation	36	4,28	0,659	4	8
Quantitative and qualitative product control	36	4,28	0,701	3	9
Products packaging and wrapping	36	4,28	0,815	2	10
Recycling, eco-products, and green products	36	4,25	0,806	1	11

Source: Trader’s survey (2020).



Graph 1 – Key competencies profile of traders



Source: Trader's survey (2020).

The various participants related to local trading at the LMS level, considered that the key competencies for the ideal LMS trader profile, with highest strength of competence (SC), are knowledge of safety, hygiene and health standards (4.89) and the ability to handle, store and preserve products (4.72), thus attaching more importance to a hard dimension of the group of competencies that fall within the field of knowledge as well as know-how, i.e. that bring together the competencies needed to put into practice the technical and specialised knowledge related to the task performance (Darolt et al., 2016; ANQEP, n.d.; ROQET, 2011). Although being strategically considered by some authors, the overvaluation of these two competences may also be associated with the current situation, marked by enormous constraints caused by the Pandemic COVID19, which highlighted the emergence of specific safety, hygiene and health measures (e.g., social distance, wash your hands often with soap and water, use an alcohol-based hand antiseptic, avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth with unwashed hands, avoid close contact with people who are sick, stay home when is sick, coughing or sneezing, protecting your nose and mouth with a handkerchief, monitoring your health, and more).

The least valued competence, with lowest SC, was knowledge about recycling, eco-products, and green products (11th out of 4.25), which in some way comes in line with the opinion of some authors (e.g., Crawford et al., 2018) that consider such competencies as critical and distinctive to the role of the trader in the exercise of their functions. In other words, it is precisely because few respondents value and practice this type of knowledge that transform it into a strategic differential, at a time when it is increasingly consolidating in several domains the perspective that supports a modern vision of strengthening sustainability. The ability to packing and wrapping products, to control products quantitatively and qualitatively, and to interpret lists, pricing, and other documentation, followed as the least value competencies, all with an average of 4.28 (being differentiated in their positioning by the value of the standard deviation).

The soft dimension of competencies was positioned in intermediate places on the scale, confirming the importance given by Ruivo and Carvalho (2017) and by ANQEP (n.d.): the ability to communicate, argue and advise in customer service was in 5th place (4.49) and interpersonal relationships in 6th places (4.44). The relevance given to this type of skills can be associated with the type of relationship that traders have with consumers – more lasting duration. Being a typical market, prone to sustaining closer relationships and, therefore, of a more frequent nature, the relationships maintained with customers tend to be regular, reinforcing the importance of interpersonal skills. Many customers consider local merchants to be an integral part of the community with whom they establish relationships of reciprocity and trust, which translates into buying behaviors and loyalty (Pandey, Khare & Bhardwaj, 2015), establishing an affective commitment to many traditional traders who have frequented over time - interpersonal skills reinforce an affective connection to points of sale, usually established through the contact people and memories of the spaces (Khan, Hollebeek, Fatma & Riivits-Arkonsuo, 2020).

It is also worth noting, the fact that digital skills (such as, for example, the use of computer means and specific equipment in the commercial and optical reading area; the use of offline and on-line channels, controlling the computer order management process, among others) have not been identified by the different stakeholders as key, valuable and distinctive competences for exercising the activity of market trader. Bearing in mind the growing importance of this type of skills (ANQEP, sd; Ruivo & Carvalho, 2017; Darolt et al., 2016) this situation seems to indicate that the respondents may have had a short-term perspective on the exercise of their function, very focused on the present, giving less focus to the prospective analysis on the configuration of the function in the future, more or less distant. This can also come from the sociodemographic characteristics of these professionals, especially those with low level of education, old age and great longevity in the market, which tends to generate a greater lack of knowledge about the true importance of this type of knowledge.

#### 4.2 Ideal competencies profile of the trader from the specialist's perspective

The ideal competencies profile of traders, from the perspective of the specialists (ICPTspe), was obtained by identifying the weighted average (MP) of each skill and defining the order of importance (OI) (table 3).

Box 3 – ICPT Specialists

Competencies	WA	SD	SC	OI
Safety, hygiene, and health standards	4,86	0,378	11	1
Handling, storing, and preserving the products	4,86	0,378	11	1
Products knowledge	4,43	0,535	9	3
Communication, argumentation, and advice in customer service	4,29	0,488	8	4
Presentation and enhancement of products to customers	4,29	0,756	7	5
Knowledge of trade sector	4,29	0,756	7	5
Quantitative and qualitative product control	4,14	0,690	5	7
Interpersonal relationship	4,00	0,816	4	8
Recycling, eco-products, and green products	3,86	0,900	3	9
Interpretation of listings, pricing, and other documentation	3,71	0,756	2	10
Products packaging and wrapping	3,29	0,756	1	11

Source: Specialist's survey (2020).

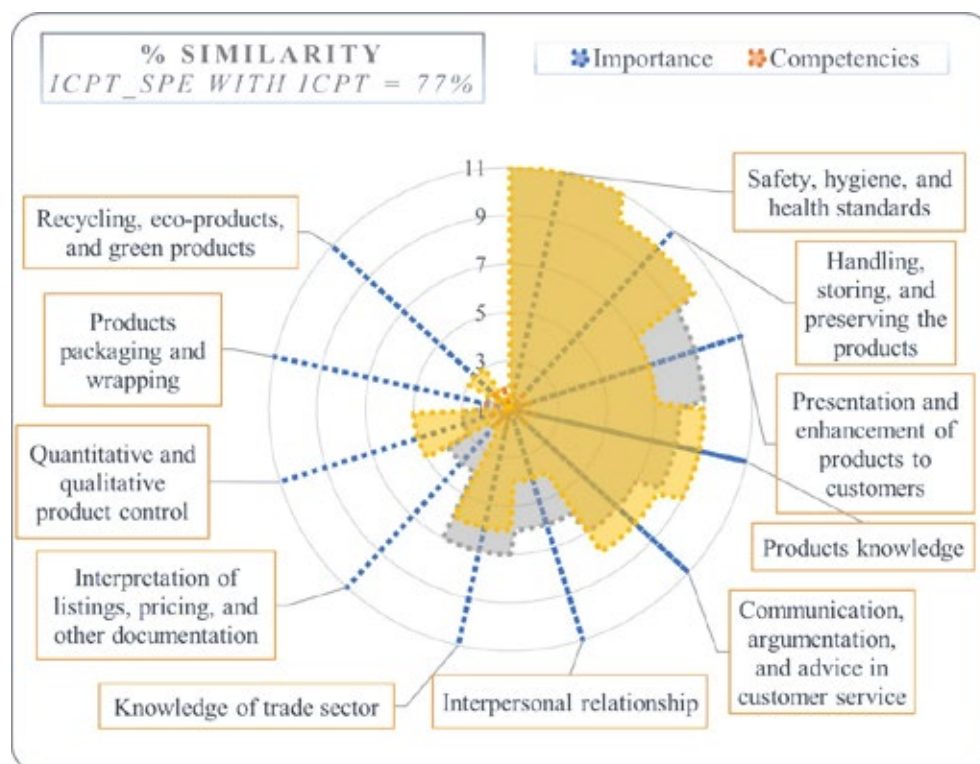


It appears that experts approach the position defined at the level of the ICPT, considering that the most important key competences for the ideal profile of the LMS trader are knowledge of safety, hygiene and health standards and the ability to handle, store and conserve products (both with 4.86), thus giving more importance to a hard skills that fall within the domain of theoretical and also practical knowledge, that is, which group the necessary competencies to put into practice the technical and specialized knowledge related to the performance of a given task (CMS, 2013; ROQET, 2011; ANQEP, n.d.). The packaging and wrapping of the products (3.29) and the interpretation of listings, prices and other documentation related to the commercial activity (3.71), were positioned in the last and penultimate place, respectively.

Soft skills were also valued: interpersonal relationship comes in 8th place (4.00) and the ability to communicate, argue, and advise clients is in 4th place (4.29). We can conclude that, for specialists, hard dimension competencies are critical for the development of the marketer’s activity (Darolt et al., 2016), with soft dimension competencies appearing as more comprehensive and generic, contributing to leverage their professional performance (Ruivo & Carvalho, 2017).

The level of similarity between the ICPT and the ICPTspe was subsequently established by checking the overlapping intersection between the profiles. The percentage of similarity was found to be high – ICPTspe is 77% similar to PCIC (graph 2).

Chart 2 – Similarity between the ICPT and the ICPTspe



Source: Specialist’s survey (2020).

#### 4.3 Ideal competencies profile of the trader from the customer’s perspective (individual and collective)

To define the ideal competencies profile of the trader, the perspective of the customers (individual and collective clients) was also considered (table 4).



Box 4 – ICPT Customers (individual and collective clients)

Competencies	Individual Clients				Collective Clients			
	WA	SD	SC	OI	WA	SD	SC	OI
Safety, hygiene, and health standards	4,92	0,277	11	1	4,78	0,441	9	2
Handling, storing, and preserving the products	4,69	0,630	10	2	4,56	0,527	6	5
Presentation and enhancement of products to customers	4,69	0,630	10	2	4,89	0,333	11	1
Products knowledge	4,54	0,519	8	4	4,56	0,527	6	5
Interpersonal relationship	4,54	0,660	7	5	4,78	0,441	9	2
Communication, argumentation, and advice in customer service	4,42	0,534	6	6	4,56	0,464	4	4
Quantitative and qualitative product control	4,38	0,650	5	7	4,33	0,707	2	11
Recycling, eco-products, and green products	4,38	0,870	4	8	4,33	0,500	1	10
Interpretation of listings, pricing, and other documentation	4,31	0,630	3	9	4,44	0,527	3	9
Knowledge of trade sector	4,31	0,751	1	11	4,56	0,726	5	8
Products packaging and wrapping	4,31	0,751	1	11	4,56	0,527	6	5

Source: Customer's survey (2020).

At this level, some similarities can be identified. First, greater appreciation of hard skills (Darolt et al., 2016) by both groups, reinforcing what has already been previously noted for specialists: safety, hygiene, and health standards (1st place with 4.92 for individual clients; 2nd place for collective clients with 4.78) and presentation and appreciation of products to customers (2nd place with 4.69 for individual clients; 1st place for collective clients with 4.89).

The importance given by individual clients to the ability to handle, store and preserve products (2nd place with 4.69 for individual clients) should also be highlighted. It is also worth mentioning the importance of soft competence related to the ability to communicate, argue, and advise in customer service (6th place with 4.42 for individual customers; 4th place for collective customers with 4.56), which in a way, it shows a privileged positioning of this type of competences more directly related to behaviour and attitude. At the same time, emphasis should also be placed on the lower importance given to competence related to recycling, eco-products and green products (8th place with 4.38 for individual clients; 10th place for collective clients with 4.33), corroborating those who consider this to be one of the differentiating competences of this type of professionals (Crawford et al., 2018; Darolt et al., 2016) - its weak valuation and operationalization make it a true strategic differential.

In terms of differences, emphasis is placed on the lower importance given by collective clients (tourism agents), compared to individual clients, in relation to the ability to control products quantitatively and qualitatively, as well as knowledge about recycling, eco-products and green products (7th and 8th places compared to 11th and 10th places for each group respectively). Emphasis is also placed on the less importance given by individual clients, as compared to collective clients, to the capacity to pack and wrap products as well as to the knowledge of the trade sector (11th against 5th and 8th places for each group respectively).

After taking previous analysis as a starting point, in order to identify the importance of competencies by customers it was calculated the weighted average of responses from the two groups: individual and collective (ICPTcl) (Table 5).



Box 5 – ICPT Clients

Competencies	Clients			
	WA	SD	SC	OI
Safety, hygiene, and health standards	4,86	0,351	11	1
Presentation and enhancement of products to customers	4,77	0,528	10	2
Handling, storing, and preserving the products	4,64	0,581	9	3
Interpersonal relationship	4,64	0,577	8	4
Products knowledge	4,55	0,510	7	5
Communication, argumentation, and advice in customer service	4,48	0,499	6	6
Products packaging and wrapping	4,41	0,666	5	7
Knowledge of trade sector	4,41	0,734	4	8
Interpretation of listings, pricing, and other documentation	4,36	0,581	3	9
Quantitative and qualitative product control	4,36	0,658	2	10
Recycling, eco-products, and green products	4,36	0,727	1	11

Source: Customer's survey (2020).

It can be concluded that competence in the knowledge and application of safety, hygiene, and health standards has obtained the highest average (4.86) and is thus ranked first in the ICPTcl, with convergence of opinion with the group of experts as it is the most valued skill in both profiles. The importance of this skill, of the hard domain, reinforces the postulated by Ruivo e Carvalho (2017) and CMS (2013) for whom this skill is the cornerstone of the quality and efficiency of the function of trader.

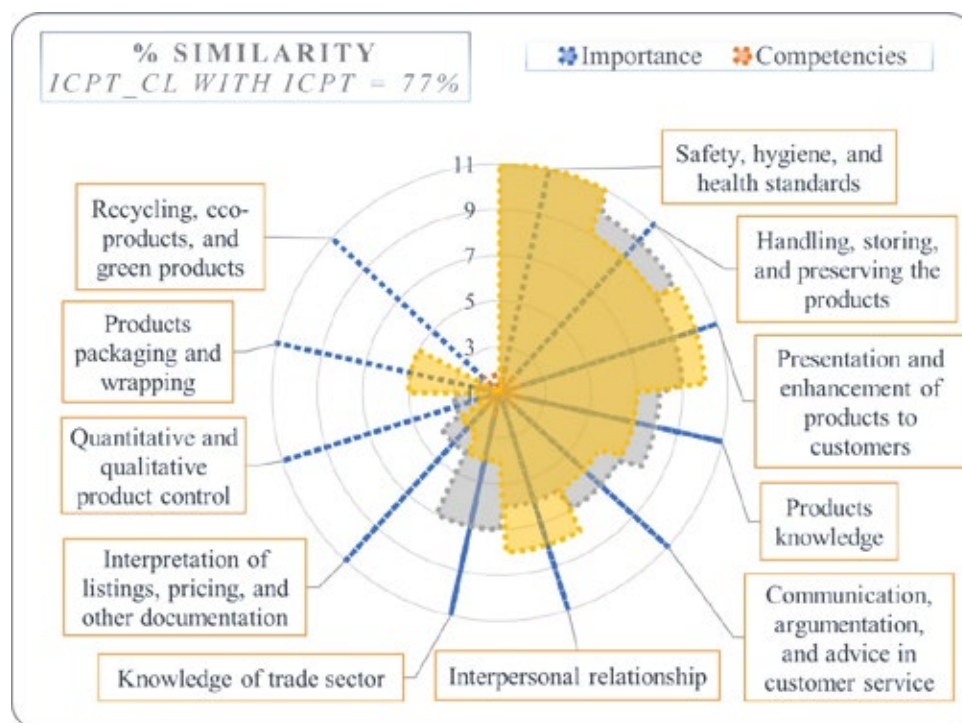
The least valued competence was related to recycling, eco-products, and green products (4.36) which emerges as one of the differentiating competencies of this type of professionals (Crawford et al., 2018; Darolt et al., 2016).

Although less valued than hard skills, soft skills are also representative of the ideal profile of the trader according to customers. The capacity for interpersonal relationships comes in 4th place with (4.64) and the capacity for communication, argumentation, and advice in customer service comes only in 6th place with (4.48). Customers therefore tend to give importance to skills related to the mastery of interpersonal relationships and specially to the relationship that traders have with them. They are, therefore, customers who feel involved and integrated in their community and who tend to make a greater proportion of local purchases in the markets. This involvement tends to be more expressive in the cases of long-term customers, where there are positive and consolidated feelings with the community where they have roots and to which they like to belong (Mullis & Kim, 2014).

The percentage of similarity between the PCIC and the ICPTcl was then calculated (graph 3). The intersection zone between the profiles is – ICPTcl is 77% similar to ICPT.



Graph 3 – Similarity between the ICPT and the ICPTcl



Source: Customer's survey (2020).

#### 4.4 Ideal competencies profile of the trader from the perspective of the reference trader

To define the ideal competencies profile of the trader, the perspective of reference traders (ICPTref) was also considered. Initially, the weighted average (WA) of each skill according to the reference trader was calculated and the respective order of importance (OI) of each skill was established (table 6).

Box 6 – ICPT Reference Traders

Competencies	Reference Traders			
	WA	SD	SC	OI
Safety, hygiene, and health standards	5,00	0,000	11	1
Products knowledge	5,00	0,000	11	1
Presentation and enhancement of products to customers	4,86	0,378	9	3
Handling, storing, and preserving the products	4,86	0,378	9	3
Products packaging and wrapping	4,86	0,378	9	3
Communication, argumentation, and advice in customer service	4,71	0,567	6	6
Interpretation of listings, pricing, and other documentation	4,57	0,535	5	7
Knowledge of trade sector	4,57	0,787	4	8
Recycling, eco-products, and green products	4,29	0,951	3	9
Interpersonal relationship	4,29	1,496	2	10
Quantitative and qualitative product control	4,14	0,900	1	11

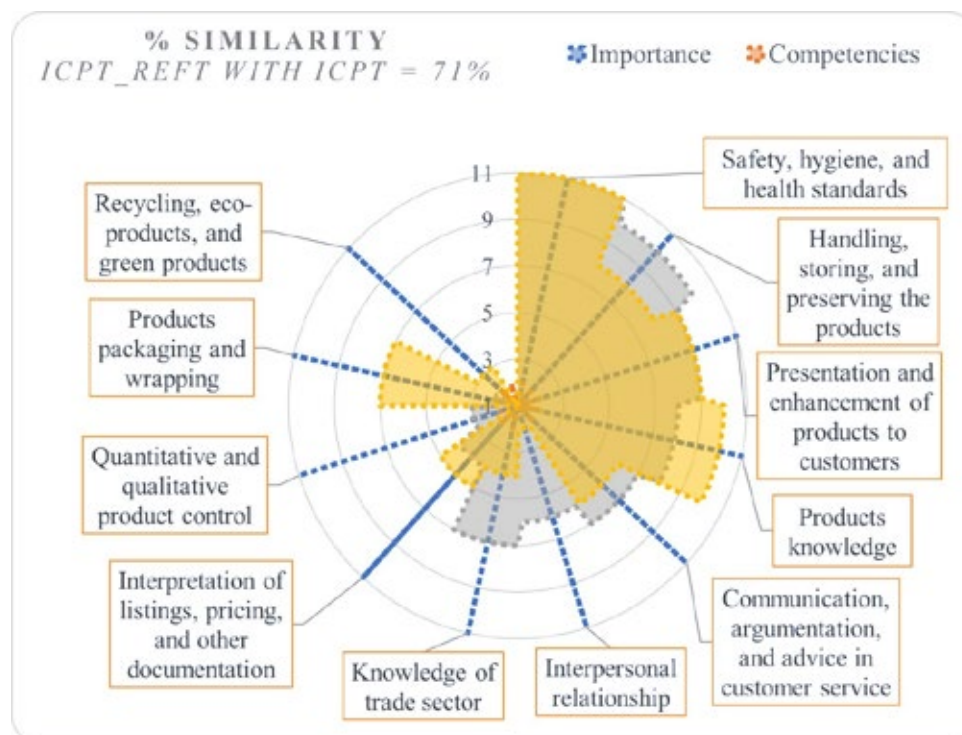
Source: Reference Trader's survey (2020).

In general terms, all reference traders consider knowledge and application of safety, hygiene and health standards and knowledge of products as the most important competencies to perform their function (5.00). Equally important are the presentation and enhancement of products to customers, the handling, storage and preservation of products, and the packaging and wrapping of products. In the opposite pole, the least valued are the ability to control products quantitatively and qualitatively (4.14), interpersonal relationships (4.29) and recycling, eco producer and green products (4.29). The success of the trader's activity is, for reference traders, more dependent on the acquisition and consolidation of a set of technical knowledge related to standards and product knowledge (CMS, 2013), and less on the set of knowledge related to stock management, sustainability (Crawford et al., 2018; Jardim & Pavan, 2014) and socialization, related to the field of interpersonal relations (Ruivo & Carvalho, 2017).

Subsequently, it was analysed the similarity between the ICPT and the ICPTreft (graph 4). The overlap between the profiles is high – ICPTreft is 72% similar to ICPT. Although high, the percentages of similarity between ICPT and ICPTreft are the lowest compared to the other groups of participants.



Graph 4 – Similarity between the ICPT and the ICPTreft



Source: Reference Trader's survey (2020).

## 5 CONCLUSIONS

Given the increasing importance of local markets in cities economy and employment, and due to the lack of research on this topic in the literature, the main objective of this study was to identify and analyse the key competencies of traders in municipal markets. To this end, a case study was carried out at LMS.

Based on literature review and on the application of surveys to different participants, related to the analysed local market, it was intended to develop the ideal profile of the LMS traders, through a collaborative process based on the identification and participation of four distinct groups, contributing with their view to the diagnosis and assessment of competencies (traders, specialists, customers, and tourism agents). After the identification and validation process, 21 profile competencies were initially considered and subsequently an assessment of their importance was carried out, leading to the identification of 11 key competencies for LMS traders.

Through ordering the relative importance of the identified competencies it was possible to obtain the ideal competencies profile of the trader, with results highlighting the greater appreciation of skills, related to knowledge of safety, hygiene and health standards and the lesser appreciation of skills related to recycling, eco-products, and green products. Each of the competency's profiles, identified by the involved groups, was subsequently compared to the ideal competencies profile of the trader, evidencing the high percentages of similarity obtained in this process – over 70%.

In terms of theoretical implications, this study contributes to the construction of an analytical-conceptual tool on the diagnosis and validation of competencies, while at the same time al-

lowing to understand the importance of local market traders. In practical terms, it assists professional associations and those responsible for traditional markets in the design of competence-centred management models, redirecting their strategies towards the development of a set of behavioural patterns (knowledge, skills, attitudes) considered important for the exercise of the trader's function, in such a specific context, leveraging their efficiency and effectiveness to higher levels.

The originality of this study has its basis in the lack of research studies that focused on the analysis of competences of the players in the traditional markets. The study is based on the analysis of the central role of a profession – traders – little valued and studied in a national context, serving as an anchor for other studies on the competencies subject, as well as on the applied and collaborative nature of research based on the participation of the different stakeholder groups in the process of competencies diagnosis.

Since this is a single case study, with a limited sample, it is not possible to generalize the results. As this is an exploratory study, the sample size brings limitations to this study, such as the impossibility of being able to generalize its results. However, these results respond to the objectives of this study, guaranteeing the diversity of perceptions of different stakeholders' groups directly related to municipal markets. Thus, for future research, it is suggested to apply this study on other local markets, which would strengthen the knowledge on the importance of the set of key competencies that were identified. Additional evidence may lead to the validation and the possibility of generalization of these results.

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### Contribution of authors

Contribution	[Author 1]	[Author 2]	[Author 3]	[Author 4]
1. Definition of research problem	√	√	√	√
2. Development of hypotheses or research questions (empirical studies)	√			
3. Development of theoretical propositions (theoretical work)	√			
4. Theoretical foundation / Literature review	√			
5. Definition of methodological procedures	√	√	√	√
6. Data collection	√	√	√	√
7. Statistical analysis	√			
8. Analysis and interpretation of data	√			
9. Critical revision of the manuscript	√	√	√	√
10. Manuscript writing	√			
11. Other (please specify)				

### Conflict of Interest

The authors have stated that there is no conflict of interest.

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