

Market territories and urban centralities: A comparative analysis of public food markets in São Paulo (Brazil) and Santiago (Chile)

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ABSTRACT

This article analyzes, from a comparative perspective, the public markets of São Paulo (Brazil) and Santiago (Chile) as commercial territories and resilient urban centralities in Latin America. Based on a historical-cultural and territorial approach (period from 1850 to 2021), supported by qualitative research using documentary analysis, field observation, and spatial mapping, it investigates how these spaces articulate traditional trade practices, circulation networks, power relations, and local identities. The results show that public markets are spaces of social production of territory, mediating tensions between tradition and modernity, public and private, local and global. The analysis reinforces their role as social institutions that resist contemporary urban transformations, contribute to the consolidation of local food supply networks, and structure urban centralities in their surroundings.

KEYWORDS: food supply; territorialization; urban centrality.

INTRODUCTION

Public food markets are core spaces in the framework of Latin American cities, functioning as food supply, sociability, and cultural identity hubs. Amid urban transformation, the expansion of retail capital, and contemporary migration dynamics, those spaces resist as territories where traditional trade practices, trust-based relationships, and diverse cultural expressions are articulated.

This specific setup – understood as territories of trade based on public markets – can be interpreted as a territorialization process where different social groups appropriate fragments of urban space, and, through everyday practices, build networks of circulation of goods and people, establish power relationships, and produce identity connections associated with those places. In this sense, public markets operate not just as supply facilities, but also as hubs of sociability and spatial organization of urban trade.

Still in the context of contemporary urban transformations, the emergence of new centralities connected to the re-structuring of cities and the expansion of large trade grounds can be observed. Such centralities are frequently produced by the action of different economic and institutional agents, articulated to the capital rationale and to the processes of reorganization of urban activities (Silva; Teixeira; Sposito, 2021).

Free markets and public market grounds represent, historically, means of organization of food supply that structure and enact the production of urban space. Since medieval times, markets have been responsible for articulating farming output with the urban space, promoting the circulation of goods and people. As such, markets have contributed decisively toward the formation of communities and cities. In Latin America, those practices were incorporated into the urbanization process, playing a key role in the constitution of commercial centralities and the reproduction of city life.

The permanent establishment of public markets in central areas of cities, such as in São Paulo and Santiago, reinforces their structural role in the urban territory. Those spaces not only ensure families' food supply, but also function as local meetups, places of cultural exchange and expression of local identities. The physical permanence of markets and the continuity of traditional trade practices contribute toward the maintenance of social connections and the symbolic production of urban space, even faced with the pressures of modernization and commodification.

This study aims at analyzing the formation of trade territories by studying the cases of public food markets in the cities of São Paulo and Santiago from

a comparative perspective, considering historical processes of formation, establishment, and permanence of those urban facilities between the late 19th century and early 21st century. The research was structured around four main methodological axes, triangulated to offer a comprehensive understanding of the processes of commercial territorialization:

- Historical survey: analysis of official documents, old maps, institutional records, and bibliographic sources that contextualize the formation of the public markets in the two cities. Surveyed sources include physical and digital collections of the Public Archive of the State of São Paulo and the National Library of Chile (Memoria Chilena);
- Document analysis: systematic study of legislation, municipal decrees, constitutive statutes (i.e. Estatuto La Vega Central, 1911), and newspaper pieces (i.e. O Estado de São Paulo) showing the processes of territorialization, institutionalization, and urban transformations connected to the markets;
- Field observation: at least ten visits to the markets Kinjo Yamato and La Vega Central (between 2018 and 2022) in different days of the week and times of the day with *in loco* observation, non-participative, oriented by guides (connected to the categories analyzed in this study), with authorial photographic documentation focused on everyday commercial practices, spatial setup, sociability dynamics, and the presence of diverse social groups;
- Spatial mapping: the territorial analysis was supplemented by the elaboration of thematic maps using the online app QGIS 2.0, employing public cartographic databases and historical imagery to identify the locations of the markets, the neighboring commercial hubs, and the food trade centralities formed in their surroundings.

The adoption of those four methodological axes sought to articulate historical, spatial, and social-cultural dimensions of public markets, facilitating a simultaneous understanding of their territorial formation, everyday practices, and urban transformations. The methodological articulation of the approaches enabled an analysis of how those spaces are consolidated as resilient commercial territories, articulating economic, social, cultural, and symbolic dimensions into a historical-territorial perspective. This analytical procedure enabled the observation not only of the internal organization of those urban facilities, but also the relationships they establish with their surroundings and with processes of production of the urban space.

The theoretical framework is based on studies of territory and territorialization, particularly the contributions of Raffestin (1993), Saquet (2007, 2015) and Carlos (2017), who understand territory as a product of social action and the power relationships materialized in space through networks, centralities, and identities. This approach is also consistent with authors such as Schneider (2016), Robles (2014) and Pintaudi (2006), who interpret public markets as social and cultural institutions where economic practices, forms of sociability, and food traditions are articulated with the urban dynamic.

In this perspective, markets not only organize the urban food supply but also operate as spaces for social interaction, memory, and social permanence. In the cities of São Paulo (Brazil) and Santiago (Chile), this dynamic manifests expressively in the cases of Kinjo Yamato and La Vega Central markets, which were historically consolidated as multi-functional urban centralities, articulating traditional trade, cultural diversity, and the presence of social groups that are frequently marginalized in the processes of urban re-structuring.

Results indicate that in both Latin American cities, public markets operate as commercial territories that are able to maintain and reconfigure traditional commercial practices, while also adapting to contemporary urbanization, migration, and consumption dynamics. The analysis then also highlights permanent tensions between tradition and modernity, public and private, as well as between local scales and global processes, revealing the role of those markets in the social production of urban space and in the constitution of centralities that persist and transform over time.

FROM STREET MARKETS TO PUBLIC INDOOR MARKETS: URBAN SUPPLY AND TRADITIONAL FOOD COMMERCE

Street markets and public indoor markets make up a social-cultural reference that operates at once as commercial spaces for regional products as well as commons where social relationships are established. Many urban markets started out as street markets whose permanence materialized as permanent buildings. Food supply in cities has always been a crucial factor in the origins and reproduction of urban space. As a socially-constructed space and the embodiment of the tradition/modernity dichotomy, the street market prevails through the entire range of urban dynamics, from provincial towns to those with services and commerce.

The advent of street markets has been a key factor in enabling regular food supply, with goods on offer responding to prior knowledge of each region's

needs; in the safe circulation of people and goods; as a means of communication that enabled local interaction, which also enabled the formation of communities and towns. Therefore, their importance also encompasses job creation, sociability, exchange, and cultural transformation in various activity areas.

It is also important to point out that street markets originate during the transformations undergone by European feudal societies between the 10th and 11th century, which evolved into the 21st century to take on their current form, as we know it, traversing centuries and continents (Junqueira; Peetz, 2015).

The increasing clustering of people in towns in that nascent era would come to impose profound changes not just in the agricultural food production systems but also in the organization of new supply and distribution circuits. As such, the landscape would be altered by new crops, entire forests would be razed to the ground, and towns would be taken over by new markets and professions related to the food supply system's actions and functions. That was the beginning of the transposition of a typical subsistence economy into a market economy, although one has not come to replace the other either completely or immediately (Junqueira; Peetz, 2015, p. 21).

In line with this analysis, from a historical perspective, street markets started to take on the material form of indoor markets as a trade space where farmers brought their surplus goods to be exchanged or sold (Schneider, 2016). Guàrdia, Fava and Oyón (2010) argue that the new buildings housing the markets were meant to concentrate and regulate the commercial activities taking over town squares and streets in a disordered way. As such, new buildings were seeking urban order and the regulation of trade operations by offering better hygiene elements for their development.

Food commerce and supply are structuring elements of the city; they foster the urban economy and develop the space and its systems of relationships. The market buildings are, by excellence, the structures that make up the organization of the city (Guàrdia; Fava; Oyón, 2010 p. 620).

In the Premodern era, for Schneider (2016), the relationship between farmers and markets was one of alienation, as during this period, they were submitted to feudal servitude. However, with the crisis of feudal regimes, the farmers' relationship with the markets began to take place through city-states.

The surplus goods, which had previously been confiscated in the name of land use, began to be traded or sold to neighboring communities and emerging small towns, which needed food for sustenance, and, in exchange, the peasants purchased manufactured goods. For many peasants, going to the market or selling/exchanging their goods meant something foreign to their daily lives, as their know-how lay in plowing their land and rearing animals; they knew very little about trade, as the vast majority was also illiterate (Schneider, 2016, p. 106).

Contextualizing the importance of markets in Antiquity, Pintaudi (2006) suggests that, in all cultures, this mode of exchanging goods and its periodical or permanent existence was practiced in a defined space and depended on the goods being exchanged, on the need to operate the exchange at a certain frequency, on the feasibility of transit in different historical moments and its relevance for the supply of the city and its surroundings. Montanari (2015), on the other hand, notes the continued existence of markets in light of various factors, mainly the availability and diversity of products of multiple origins:

[...] Rome is celebrated by Imperial Era writers as the largest emporium in the world, where all “local” goods are present at once, with the widest possible variety, with the exact aim of overcoming local boundaries and extending beyond the territory. This syncretic culture means precisely that the table is a universal space in potential: according to each person’s possibilities – from the emperor’s table and down the social scale –, the main goal remains to bring together all kinds of goods, all kinds of places in that one magical central space that is the set table. In the Middle Ages, the Bologna or Milan markets made a name for themselves not so much because you could find “local” foods there, but because of their abilities to define themselves as a place of inter-territorial, inter-regional, and international exchange. For centuries, the Paris market was organized the same way and existed under the same image (Montanari, 2015, p. 136-137).

The supply markets, which are now recognized worldwide, are increasingly resilient social and commercial spaces that re-signify by deploying different commercial and social strategies. Many of those strategies involve adjustments, from commercial offerings down to the transformation of demographic, urban, and social-economic factors involving age, gender, ethnicity and nationality, socioeconomic status of the population living in the surroundings, even eco-biological factors pertaining to urban farming ecosystems (Robles, 2014).

In light of this, the market can be defined as a social institution based on interpersonal trust relationships between seller and client, one that promotes a continuous exchange of knowledge, values fresh food products, and usually, involves closer proximity between sales and production grounds (in comparison with big chains and food farming industries). Those elements define what Robles (2014) calls “market culture”, a culture that stresses the importance of fresh quality foods and of the social interaction between farmer, seller, and consumer. Along those lines, Guárdia, Fava, and Oyón (2010, p. 261) state that “Consumption and safety are, then, primary factors at the base of the social contract that encourages the development of the city.” In that sense, traditional commerce relationships are seen by Pintaudi (2006) as a unique factor:

Public markets, as setups that are still present in the urban landscape, seek to create an image of “tradition” (where new customers can emulate “traditional” behavior). In this place, which could be considered lacking the modern comforts offered by other food commerce enterprises, the act of buying and selling nature’s bounty makes people “feel” closer to it and strive to relate to the place, as it’s been in that locale for a while. At the same time, in a society where everything is subject to the economy, this “tradition” is appropriated and exploitation remains through the culture. (Pintaudi, 2006, p. 98).

The concepts of modern and traditional commerce are also becoming more diffuse and imprecise. In addition to structural and organizational differences, urban mobility is also a central element in this distinction. While modern supermarkets frequently depend on motorized transportation and the logic of concentrated consumerism, public markets remain articulated to pedestrian flow, collective transportation, and everyday proximity circuits. The (Brazilian) category of “hipermercados” (*hypermarkets*) itself, based on the number of registers and/or commercial area, may stop making sense, with the growth of fast delivery electronic commerce, seeing as retail food activities (greengrocers, butchers, and bakeries) have been assimilated by supermarkets and failed to prosper as independent establishments (Cunha; Campos, 2022).

Market power is majorly appropriated by the supermarket, which only competes with establishments in the same scale. On the other hand, in “traditional” markets, diverse traders with similar commercial scale and products share the gains brought on by consumers attracted by the market’s identity or tradition. In those cases, the retail space (for its visibility and accessibility) adds value and provides unique advantages for merchants (Cunha; Campos, 2022, p. 92).

The contrast between traditional and modern commerce is evident when observing several public markets. Those spaces have characteristics such as limited maintenance, low hygiene levels, narrow hallways in precarious conditions, a lack of infrastructure for keeping perishables, and the absence of parking lots. There is, then, a marked difference from modern establishments such as supermarkets, with their computerized systems, wide aisles where shoppers can transit comfortably with a cart carrying the desired wares, clean, well-lit, well-ventilated spaces with a wide-ranging stock, allowing the shopper to buy a variety of items without having to visit different stores.

Kinjo Yamato market in São Paulo (Brazil)

Between the 19th and 20th century, São Paulo experienced rapid growth, coinciding with the consolidation of urban markets. In this regard, it is understood that the city has yet to overcome its heritage losses brought about

by urban renewal projects that abandoned part of its history and the possibilities of cultural interpretation of these spaces. These changes will be discussed below.

The public food supply system in São Paulo is comprised of two kinds of venues: open air markets (*feiras livres*) and indoor markets (municipal markets). Their differences are manifested by the appropriation of time and space (Silva; Vargas, 2020, p. 119).

Figure 1 – Blueprint of the city of São Paulo in 1810, highlighting the historical triangle, as well as the rivers and streams



Source: Key and labels by the authors (2019) over the Imperial Plan of the City of São Paulo (1810 [copied in 1841]) from the Public Archive of São Paulo.

The appearance of public markets does not take place until the second half of the 19th century, with the advancement of urbanization, through the construction of large-scale municipal markets in the big cities. Gradually, the old municipal markets were deactivated or replaced by other food supply facilities. The construction of the first public market in the city of São Paulo started in 1859 and was located at the corner of 25 de Março St and Municipal St (presently General Carneiro St) in the Várzea do Tamanduateí area. The establishment did not open until 1867; it was designed as a “Market Square”

and comprised of a long, narrow pavilion, as well as a large courtyard. In 1907, it was taken down to make space for a new market, which was also demolished a few years later (Reis Filho, 1994).

The maps of the mid-19th century (such as Figure 1) reveal an expressive number of rivers and streams that crisscrossed the São Paulo territory, marking the landscape and facilitating the presence of troopers. The wide-open margins of the Tamanduateí River (Várzea do Carmo) favored the traffic and parking of animals carrying cargo with wares destined for city commerce (Manzoni, 2019). It soon becomes clear, then, that food trade was established at the margins of the river and in the vicinity of the historical triangle (the site where the village named São Paulo originated).

Figure 2 – Photograph of the first Municipal Market on 25 de Março street



Source: Instituto Moreira Salles Collection. Photograph by Marc Ferrez (c. 1880).

It was near the Tamanduateí River then, precisely at the Carmo flood-plain, where the first public markets were located: Mercado Grande (Great Market or 25 de Março), and, attached to it, Mercado dos Caipiras (Peasants' Market). The latter's surroundings were also taken over by a fair amount of commercial activity (Figure 3).

The universe and character of street markets and indoor markets alike in São Paulo evolved over time, but those facilities continued to serve as spaces for the commercialization of agricultural food products (CUNHA; CAMPOS, 2022). This trading post character of agricultural commerce, throughout the historical development of food supply chains, was a feature of the outdoor surroundings of municipal markets. As an example, there was Mercado dos

Caipiras, located next to Mercado Grande (early 20th century), an open-air concentration of groups of traders and small farmers who produced basic goods. This space, according to Manzoni (2019, p. 29), “served as a working-class territory and a common, especially for workers of national origin”.

Figure 3 – Várzea do Carmo and Mercado Caipira, 1890s



Source: Instituto Moreira Sales (IMS) collection. Photography by Guilherme Gaensky (c. 1890).

The area, then crisscrossed by a network of waterways, was furnished with small ports and wharves that served as rest stops for the travelers and as storage for cargo. The most important of those was located on 25 de Março Street, near Porto Geral Alley, serving as point of departure of most farm products, which meant that the area became associated with the activities of distribution and supply. “The first central market in the city was built there, and came to be rebuilt in the 19th century [...] The present Central Market of São Paulo would only be opened in 1933” (Pontes; Mesquita Filho, 2003, p. 142). Those changes pointed to the transfer of the food trade outside of the historical triangle.

About the construction of the Municipal Market (Figure 4), it is important to stress that there was an effort both from the municipality and from other stakeholders to continue pursuing the strategy of rebuilding and renovating the city, imprinting it with an architectural identity, even though the style did not follow the aesthetic movements around the world then. This was a characteristic of the designs produced by the Ramos de Azevedo firm (Figure 5) and pertains more specifically to the expansion of the historical downtown area beyond the original triangle.

The refinement and dimensions of the new Municipal Market design obviate the reason why the construction demanded a long deadline. Figure 4 shows the area marked out for the building during construction in 1927, as well as the dimension of the internal blueprint show on Figure 5. The space was only opened in 1933 (Figure 6), as reported at the time.

Figure 4 – Overview of the vacant lot during the construction of the Municipal Market in 1927



Source: Municipal Public Archive of São Paulo.

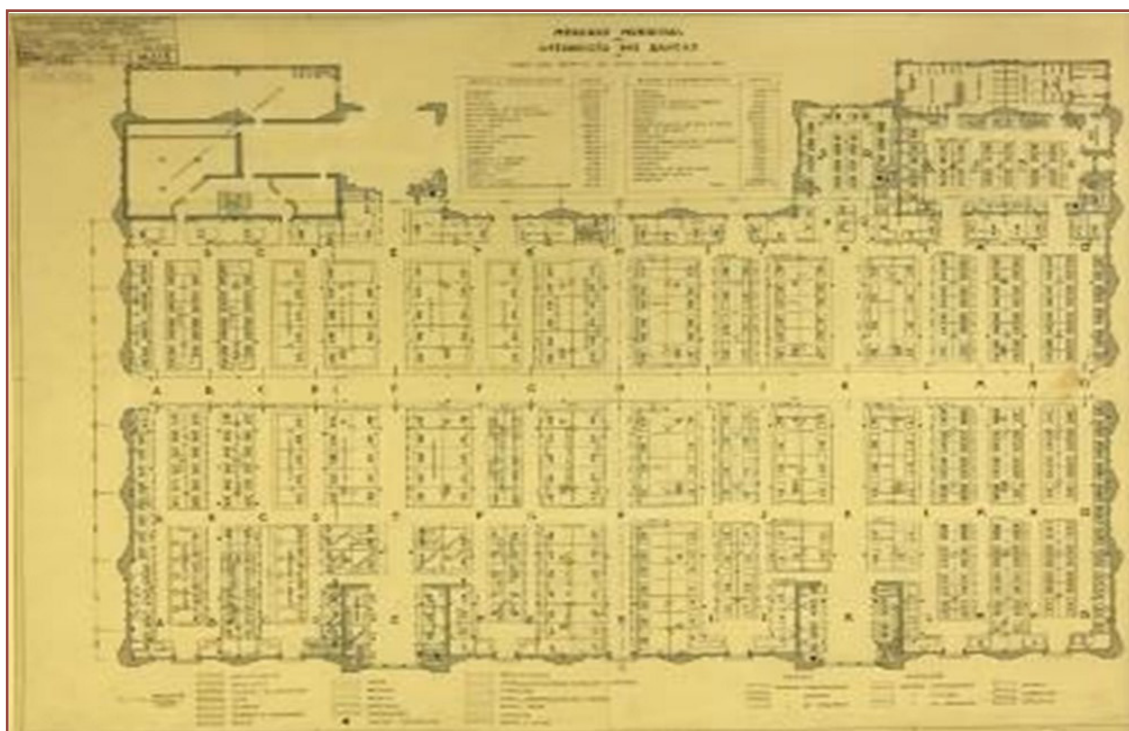
Along with the new Municipal Market begins the history of the Kinjo Yamato Municipal Market, which can be considered an annex of the former with the different aim of providing a home for small farmers that until then were selling their wares at Mercado dos Caipiras or its surroundings. It was portrayed as a “small pavilion” located alongside the 25 de Março Market, and it became known for the trade of fruit and produce from crops cultivated by Japanese immigrants. “To top off their income, those immigrants brought over the surplus from the crops to sell them informally in the downtown area of the São Paulo State capital” (Reis Filho, 1994, p. 122).

A message from mayor Fábio da Silva Prado (1934-1938 term) provides important evidence for the identification of the present location of Kinjo Ya-

mato Market. Published officially by the São Paulo Office of Culture in 1936 and addressed to the São Paulo City Council, it specifically discusses a “food depot”, as follows:

Provisionally at the old Municipal Market, on the corner of 25 de Março and General Carneiro streets, the new food depot [“entrepoto”] is under construction on a large plot, acquired recently and located right in front of the Central Market, with an area of about five thousand square meters. The installation of the produce depot closer to the Municipal Market was a pressing need. Its operation at a distant location resulted in serious disadvantages not just for the merchants but also for the public (São Paulo, 1936, p. 120).

Figure 5 – Photograph of the blueprint with the stall distribution – a Ramos de Azevedo firm design for the Municipal Market (1923)



Source: Photo by the authors (2018). Document available at the Public Archive of São Paulo.

In relation to the expression “Entrepoto Municipal”, Silva (2017, p. 169) points to the 1933 rule – which regulated the General Markets Administration, the police force that was at times in conflict with the Sanitation Office – enacted only in 1935 under the name of “Entrepoto Municipal de Gêneros” (Municipal Food Depot), suggesting an infrastructure designed for wholesale commerce.

In that same year, there were two active depots, one next to the Pinheiros Market and another next to the Municipal Market. In analyzing information about the latter, it is possible to infer the origins of Kinjo Yamato Market:

Located at 377 Cantareira street, in front of the then “new Municipal Market”, it was opened on November 11, 1936. It was meant for the commerce of produce, fowl, eggs, grains, and coal ... It was built on a plot with an area of 4,950 sq. m., with three access points and a total constructed area of 5,517 sq. m. (Silva, 2017, p. 169).

Geographically, the referred area was close to the riverside origins of São Paulo as a village and town, up until the second half of the 19th century, which was advantageous for transportation. Later, due to precarious growth and urbanization, this location stood out as a problem area, as the river flooded regularly (Figure 7). The solution that was found on the first half of the 20th century was to implement large-scale roadwork culminating on the (re)construction of the food supply complex at Cantareira Street and the channeling of the Tamanduateí River, which would not take place until two decades later (Figure 8).

Figure 6 – Cover feature about the opening of the Municipal Market (Mercadão), in 1933



Source: Estadão Collection. Available at: <https://fotos.estadao.com.br/galerias/acervo/sao-paulo-construcao,42407>. Access on: 14 Aug 2024.

One of the commerce hubs that came up after the consolidation of the Municipal Paulistano and Kinjo Yamato markets was the perimeter known as Zona Cerealista (*grains district*), offering mainly grains since the 1920s. Those goods entered the capital via train at the Pari Station and were negotiated outdoors. The practice was propelled by the creation of Bolsa de Cereais (*grain*

exchange), at the São Paulo Commerce Center (Museu da Pessoa, 2016). The traditional trade dynamic – sales by weight – lives on, even though it is now housed in increasingly sophisticated shops and is gaining ground as general food commerce:

In the 1940s, the complex known as Zona Cerealista was already formed: Pari Plaza, Paula Souza Street, surroundings of Santa Rosa Street and Municipal Market. The organization of merchants and money transactions were then secured by the Union and by Bolsa de Cereais, which acted as partners and neighbors. The goods arrived at Pari by train and several wagons would pick them up to be stored in the warehouses next door, and then distributed through the city's street markets that took over the neighborhoods. Many merchants juggled multiple businesses: they were market vendors, sellers at Mercado or warehouse owners at Santa Rosa and Paula Souza, examples of the consistency of this new form of food supply in the city (Museu da Pessoa, 2016, p. 38).

Figure 7 – Flooding of the Tamanduateí River at Cantareira Street (1930s)



Source: Museu da Pessoa (2016, p. 77).

In the 1980s, Brazilian urban food supply systems were marked by the decline of the public supply system, which had until then been sustained by central distribution centers and the traditional commerce network, “represented by municipal markets, street markets, grocery stores, greengrocers, butchers, bakeries and the like”. However, during the transition period, the issue of food insecurity was identified as a mismatch between demand and the limited availability of food products (Júnior; Pinto; Leda, 2016, p. 67).

A research report published in 1983 by IEA – Instituto de Economia Agrícola (*Agricultural Economics Institute*), linked to the State of São Paulo Office of

Agriculture and Supply, shows that the region known as Zona Cerealista was comprised of “a geographically concentrated and relatively heterogeneous population, especially as a result of the diversity of marketed products” (IEA, 1983, p. 2). Furthermore, it encompassed about a quarter of the food wholesale establishments in the state of São Paulo, highlighting the importance of the segment, both due to the volume of transnational products relative to the total marketed in the capital, and (primarily) because it centralized the distribution of fresh foodstuffs originating from the rural areas of the same state toward other states, as well as that of import and export products.

Figure 8 – Channeling works in the Tamanduateí River in the Municipal Market area in 1969



Source: Estadão Collection. Available at: <https://fotos.estadao.com.br/galerias/acervo,sao-paulo-construcao,42407>.

The concentration of commercial practices in that area was always a cause for concern for public authorities, who had been planning to build Terminal Atacadista de Gêneros Alimentícios da Grande São Paulo (*Greater São Paulo Food Wholesale Terminal*) since the 1940s. The change is justified by the fact

that it had caused “a series of problems for businesses and their customers” (IEA, 1983, p. 1):

Among its advantages, the Terminal would centralize trade in modern, well-equipped facilities and improve the scale of buying and selling, the handling of goods, statistical control, and transportation, loading and unloading conditions, as well as reduce costs, particularly of fuel (IEA, 1983, p1).

However, the municipality’s interest also befell on exercising greater economic control over transactions and centralized urban spaces. Moreover, they sought continuity with renovations and reinterpretations, which have been an intrinsic and well-known part of the urban history of São Paulo.

[...] before Big Business entered the essential goods retail sector – such as food trade – it was the government’s role to ensure the relative stability of prices and a steady supply of goods amid the variety of retail establishments that handled the distribution of all kinds of products. In the case of food and essential goods, the State used to build public markets with internal spaces over which competing businesses then fought, trying to guarantee a space for their sales (retail and bulk) (Pintaudi, 2018, p. 172).

Figure 9 – Façade of Kinjo Yamato Market, entrance at the corner of Carlos de Sousa Nazaré and Barão de Duprat streets



Source: The authors (2018).

Kinjo Yamato Market (also called Cantareira Market) was opened in 1936 with the same kind of setup and operation as today (Figures 9 and 10). It remains as a venue for the supply of produce and offers both retail and bulk sales for households and food establishments located mainly in its surroundings (Vieira, 2004; Silva, 2017).

Figure 10 – Hallway in front of the main entrance of Kinjo Yamato Market



Source: The authors (2018).

In 2004, Municipal Decree No. 44.754 established that the Paulistano Municipal Market and Kinjo Yamato Market, together, would thereafter constitute the Cantareira Supply Complex, described in its sole paragraph:

Other activities geared toward visitors may also be established within the newly opened Complex, such as the provision of various services, particularly in the food sector, as well as socio-cultural activities and events in general (SÃO PAULO, 2004a).

Already during the period of development of this research, Bill 367/2017 was enacted, authorizing the concession of certain municipal assets, including some public markets, among them the Mercado and Kinjo Yamato complex. As a result, the São Paulo Municipal Market and Kinjo Yamato Market officially began to be managed by the private sector on June 8, 2021.

The so-called “Novo Mercado Municipal Consortium” is formed by the companies Brasil Realy Consultoria Participações and the Mercado Municipal Investment Fund, and is expected to invest approximately 83 million reais in the two sites within 24 months of the concession being awarded (covering necessary renovations and restorations, with the aim of maintaining and/or restoring the original designs, in accordance with the guidelines of historical preservation entities). This concession will last 25 years and is part of the de-statization plan initiated by the municipal administration (2018-2021), which included other public spaces in the city. The years following the concession of the Cantareira Complex to private initiatives were excluded from the time frame of this study; however, these changes point to a period of institutional transition that still requires monitoring to assess its effects on

the social and economic dynamics of the market; and although it is not yet possible to fully assess its impact on the complex's commercial and social practices, initial processes of physical renovation and expansion of the area's tourism and gastronomy profile are already noticeable.

THE LA VEGA CENTRAL MARKET IN SANTIAGO (CHILE)

In terms of supply systems, the city of Santiago has a large wholesale distribution center for fruits and vegetables (Lo Valledor), as well as a major food market, La Vega Central, located in the city center, and a complex and extensive network of street markets located mainly in the outlying districts of Santiago (Barraza, 2010, p. 47).

The gathering of street vendors of La Chimba dates back to colonial times, when farmers would park their carts in Cañadilla to sell their produce. Since the construction of the Cal y Canto Bridge in the 19th century (Figures 11 and 12), vendors and merchants have set up shop at its entrance and ramps, an area then characterized as a space for consumption and socializing, since, in addition to commerce, there were bars, gambling houses, brothels, and other venues for popular social interaction: this was the origin of Vega del Mapocho, later called Vega Central (Álvarez, 2011).

Figure 11 – Old “De los carros” bridge



Source: Biblioteca Nacional de Chile (s.d.). Available at: www.memoriachilena.cl, access on 11 July 2018.

In this same context, the city of Santiago underwent significant transformations as a result of changes in the La Chimba neighborhood, where La Vega Market is located (Figures 13 and 14). These changes were a consequence of

the straightening of the Mapocho River and the construction of several bridges spanning it. Furthermore, it was possible to observe how this process impacted everyday social life, both by facilitating communication between the two (historically segregated) sides and by mobilizing users and merchants following the publication of a Statute that allowed the purchase of the area by those who carried out everyday activities and commercial practices there, which, consequently, enabled their settlement in defiance of the government's plans.

Figure 12 – Old “De los carros” bridge, in 1880, which would come to be replaced by Cal y Canto bridge



Source: Biblioteca Nacional de Chile. Available at: www.memoriachilena.cl, access on 11 July 2018.

The document that, in 1911, formalized the market and likely paved the way for its construction and legal establishment was *Estatutos de la Sociedad Anónima “La Vega Central”* (Articles of Incorporation of “La Vega Central” Inc.). An excerpt from the introduction to the articles reveals their rationale:

This association, which operates La Vega Market, the only place where suppliers of vegetables and fruits deliver their goods, was born out of the desire of La Vega merchants and property owners in the market's surrounding area to remain in such a central and commercial location as Vega Central, which had brought life and activity to the neighborhood, generating significant economic interest in the surrounding area.

The merchants of Vega Central, their neighbors, and the owners of the districts of Independencia and Recoleta, whose plans were threatened by the relocation of this establishment, proposed the idea of forming a cooperative society to purchase it; to that end, they reached an agreement with the Board of the Vega Frigorific Society, so that this company would facilitate the transaction and divest itself of this business with the solemn declaration that there would be only one Vega, namely Vega Central

on Salas and Andrés Bello Street, purchased from Mr. Nicanor Marambio by the Frigorífica Society (Vega Central, 1911, pp. 4-5, our translation).

Figure 13 – Popular market at the margins of Mapocho River, in 1902



Source: Biblioteca Nacional de Chile. Available at: www.memoriachilena.cl. Access on 11 July 2018.

Figure 14 – Carts at Vega Central in 1912



Source: Biblioteca Nacional de Chile. Available at: www.memoriachilena.cl. Access on 11 July 2018.

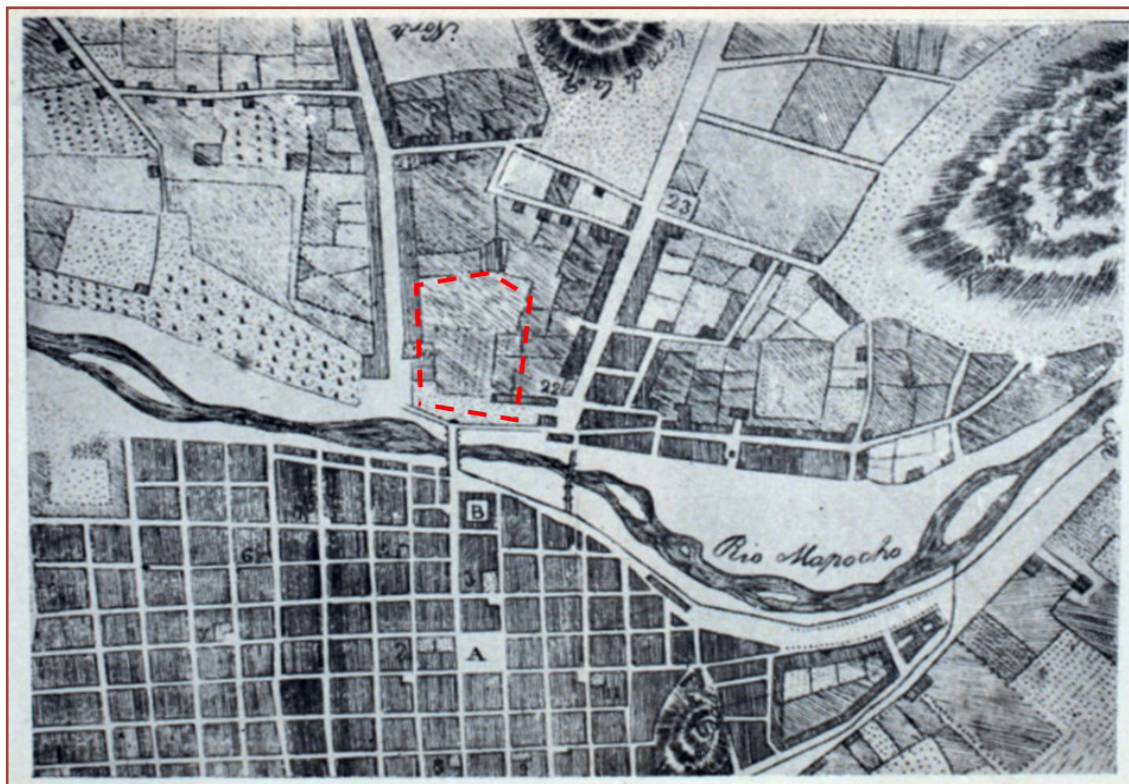
This document emerged in the context of the urban transformations that the government had envisioned for that period. Across thirty pages, it artic-

ulated the concerns of those involved in its day-to-day operations – a testament to the collective effort aimed at ensuring its continued existence – as it lists its shareholders, highlights the region's importance for local supply, and includes all the elements required of a document of this kind. The result of this was the institutionalization of the space.

The La Vega Central public market occupies warehouses and storage facilities on the north bank of the Mapocho River, between the Cañadilla and Recoleta neighborhoods. Construction began in 1895, and the market was opened in 1916 with government support toward its completion. This helped to permanently establish the public market that had already been operating at that location.

As shown in the reproduction of a 19-th century map (Figure 15), the proximity of commercial activity on the other side of the river left its mark, primarily as a geographical boundary, between *la ciudad bárbara* – the term Márquez (2012, p. 29) uses to describe the region known as La Chimba – and the other part of the city of Santiago, located on the opposite bank of the river and referred to as *la ciudad propia* (the recognized/legitimate city).

Figure 15 – Reproduction of the map of the city of Santiago from 1831, highlighting the spot where the markets took place



Source: based on a drawing by Lavín (1947, p. 17).

Thus, understanding the city of Santiago involves examining the structure of the Mapocho neighborhood, which gave its name to the river (now called La Chimba, part of Comuna Recoleta), a neighborhood that differed from the city center due to its rural character (as show in Figure 15). This area was home to those who did not participate in urban social life. On the other hand, Castillo Fernández (2008, p. 15) points out that these characteristics helped “establish the area as a sort of hub”, given that, surrounding it, there were the “so-called bridge of carts” – traversed by street vendors from the former Villa de Renca (now a commune) carrying their goods to the south bank –, the market, opened during the 1860s, as well as “small houses, bars, and brothels” located precisely on the streets of San Pablo, Puente, and Bandera.

This historical characterization of the La Chimba region as a rural area should not be understood merely as a contrast to the urban. Rather, it is a form of urban rurality, marked by the presence of farmers, merchants, and supply chains that directly linked agricultural production to the city’s commercial practices.

As for issues related to the Mapocho River, the La Chimba neighborhood, and the city’s urban history, Castillo (2009) describes the changes that took place in the late 19th century, pointing to the urbanization of the city of Santiago:

During this period, the river was channeled along its urban stretch – between Pío IX and Manuel Rodríguez streets – which involved the demolition of the Cal y Canto Bridge, as well as the construction of buildings, bridges, and public parks. At the same time, this marked the end of a long stretch of shantytowns and the displacement of thousands of residents from the riverbanks to other neighborhoods. This modernization process drastically altered the city’s appearance, as well as the connectivity between the historic center – south of the river – and the La Chimba area – north of it (Castillo, 2009, p. 46).

It was also between 1887 and 1900 that a series of projects and construction works were carried out by the Ministry of Industry and Public Works. These included projects for commercial buildings, such as the La Vega Central Market. These projects were only made possible by the elevation of the land following the channeling of the Mapocho River (Castillo, 2009).

In this context, significant urban transformations began in Santiago, and the La Chimba neighborhood underwent changes resulting from the straightening of the Mapocho River and the construction of additional bridges spanning it. These transformations significantly altered the dynamics of urban circulation and social interaction, particularly by facilitating communication between the two sides and, thus, expanding urbanization into the previously segregated sector of the city that retained rural characteristics.

Figure 16 – Main entrance of La Vega Market



Source: the authors (2018).

Figure 17 – Mercado La Vega Central hallway



Fonte: os autores (2018).

Since then, the La Vega Central Market (Figures 16 and 17) has remained the main hub for fresh food in downtown Santiago, playing a strategic role in supplying the city. In addition to its economic importance, the market is widely recognized by various sectors of society as a space steeped in local and popular identity. Its endurance and vitality reflect not only the strength of the commercial networks that sustain it, but also its capacity to incorporate cultural, social, and migratory practices, establishing itself as a commercial space of resistance in the face of urban transformations and the dynamics of exclusion that characterize the contemporary city.

COMPARATIVE RESULTS: THE FORMATION OF CENTRALITIES AND FOOD TRADE REGIONS

The formation of commercial districts in São Paulo and Santiago is directly linked to the historical establishment of public markets in the city

centers, which were fundamental for the organization of food supply and the development of urban centers.

The markets analyzed operate as nodes in food distribution networks that connect producers, wholesalers, retailers, and consumers across multiple territorial scales. As Schneider (2016) emphasizes, markets are social constructs that emerge from the interaction between economic, cultural, and political actors, and their consolidation is linked to the social production of space; however, urban centrality should not be understood merely as a physical location, but as the result of social processes that generate flows, relationships, and meanings within the urban space.

In this sense, “centrality is a dynamic process that shapes the socio-spatial organization of the urban environment,” characterized by the ability of certain places to polarize the flow of activities and concentrate economic and symbolic activities (Silva; Teixeira; Sposito, 2021). For Vargas (2020, p. 12), the need to create or strengthen centralities highlights the importance given in Municipal Master Plans to the distinction between the tertiary sector and the service sector, from the perspective of urban policies. These plans describe public or private (tertiary) establishments “as generators of flows; by spontaneously attracting other businesses and services, they account for the creation or strengthening of centralities.”

According to Mattos (2010), another distinctive feature of this urban transformation is the emergence of multiple centers resulting from the territorial concentration of activities beyond recreation and dining, which sometimes include hotels and other hospitality facilities. In many cases, these areas have led to the redevelopment and revitalization of certain neighborhoods or areas that had been losing importance until they found this new purpose. “Examples such as Condesa in Mexico City, Vila Madalena in São Paulo, Palermo Soho and Palermo Hollywood in Buenos Aires, Bellavista in Santiago, and Plaza Fochs in Quito” (Mattos, 2010, p. 98).

With regard to this trend, which has gained prominence in the organization and functioning of these cities, Bell (2005) points out that the city’s food spaces and eating habits are shaped by social status and reflected in various ways in the spatial layout. In reflecting on the permanence of ethnic groups, the author notes:

[...] the territorial forces of urban development are transformed into zones of taste with the same precision as the social class maps of the city’s residential districts. So-called ethnic neighborhoods serve as an example of this process. The establishment of immigrant communities in cities often results in the formation

of clusters, ghettos, and districts, Little Italies and Chinatowns. These districts simultaneously reflect the desire for familiarity in a foreign city and the practices of exclusion that keep social groups confined (Bell, 2005, pp. 28-29).

The territorial analysis proposed by Saquet (2007, 2015) has made it possible to understand these processes as resulting from the social appropriation of fragments of urban space, mediated by social relations, circulation networks, local identities, and power relations. Multi-scale character, historical continuities and discontinuities, and the symbolic-cultural character of markets were analyzed as categories and contributed to understanding their consolidation as commercial territories.

Table 1 – Application of Saquet's (2007) territorial categories on the researched areas

Categories of analysis defined by Saquet (2007)	Kinjo Yamato Market – São Paulo (Brazil)		La Vega Central Market – Santiago (Chile)	
	Practices	Characteristics	Practices	Characteristics
(a) Multi-scale character	Population settlement and (im)migrant groups; Food trade practices since the city's founding; Urban infrastructure dynamics.	It's where the city originated; A hub of communication; The formation of centrality.	Changes in immigrant groups and forms of trade.	La Chimba neighborhood on the other side of the Mapocho River (spatial segregation); Boundary between rural and urban areas (until the 20 th century).
(b) Discontinuities or changes and continuities or permanence	Establishment of fresh food sales; Expansion into dry goods (Zona Cerealista); Alternating between retail and wholesale.	Overlapping of the Tamanduateí River with expressways for automobiles; Preservation of the city center; process of concession to the private sector.	Existence of a (migrant) network of Latin Americans seeking work; Primary urban retail supply market (by volume).	Delayed urbanization compared to the other bank of the Mapocho River; Expansion of the area's size.
(c) Symbolic-cultural character	Municipal Property; Successive reinterpretations and overlaps in the region; A focal point for the food culture of (im)migrant groups.	The urbanization process has overshadowed the area's original geographical features; a region where immigrants from the East have settled.	Segregated area; Home to the socially excluded; Community organization for permanence; Expression of Latin American food culture.	Private property area (initially organized by merchants); Incentives to attract other food establishments or commercial hubs.

Source: the authors (2022).

They function as spaces of resistance to urban transformation and the commodification of public space, establishing themselves as commercial territories and urban hubs. The territorialization of these spaces occurs through the social appropriation of the territory, expressed in the daily practices of merchants, consumers, and producers, who establish networks of circulation, power relations, and identity bonds (Raffestin, 1993; Saquet, 2007). In this sense, Carlos (2017) emphasizes that the form of the city is a product of society, and the everyday acts carried out in markets – such as buying, selling, and socializing – are manifestations of the social production of urban space. Their permanence and functionality reveal an urban morphology marked by the juxtaposition of historical periods and traditional practices. In São Paulo, the Cantareira Complex exemplifies this interplay between diverse forms of trade and cultural practices. In Santiago, meanwhile, La Vega Central stands out for its ethnic diversity and the functional segmentation of neighboring markets, reinforcing its symbolic and functional centrality.

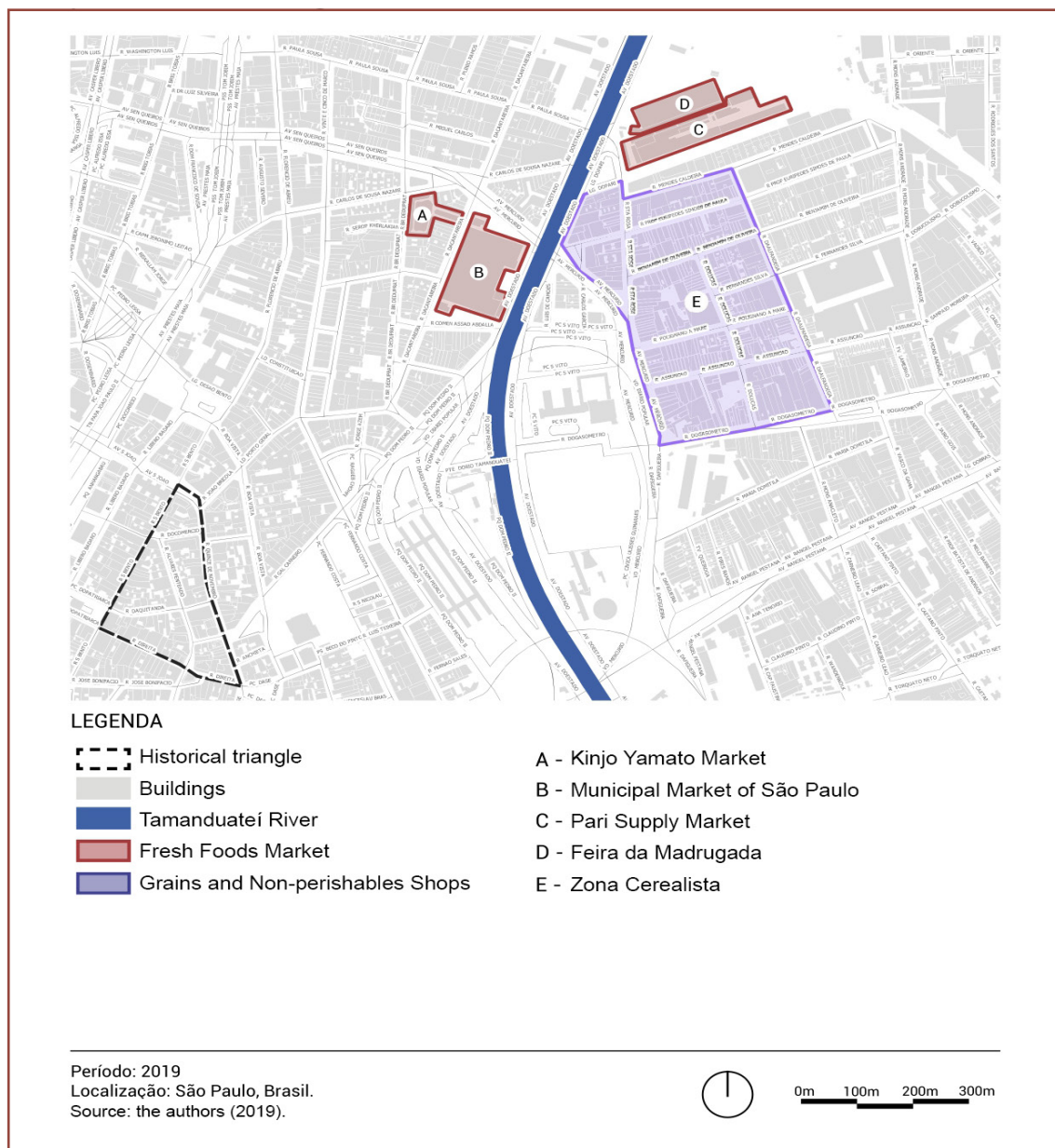
Furthermore, it is worth considering the perspective of resistance to the homogenization of modern commerce. In contrast to supermarkets and shopping malls, which operate according to the logic of standardization and fast consumption, public markets maintain commercial practices based on trust, the proximity between production and consumption, and the appreciation of fresh food. This “market culture”, as defined by Robles (2014), reinforces the role of markets as symbolic territories where knowledge, identities, and ways of life that resist the transformations imposed by urban modernity are preserved. Finally, the consolidation of market territories in São Paulo and Santiago highlights their capacity to resist the logic of urban homogenization and to reinvent themselves in the face of social, economic, and spatial transformations. These spaces remain as points of reference for provisioning, social interaction, and identity, reaffirming their role in the social production of the territory and in the configuration of Latin American urban centers.

The mapping effort focused on the following aspects: the historical origins of food supply in the two cities, the locations of the markets (defined as specific areas for the study and as centrality – focal points – in terms of time and space), as well as other food trade hubs that emerged and remain in the surrounding areas to supply the urban population.

Figure 18 shows the origins of the food trade in the “historic triangle” (dotted line), the Kinjo Yamato Market (A), and four other food markets that make up one of the main supply systems in the central region of the metropolis: (B)

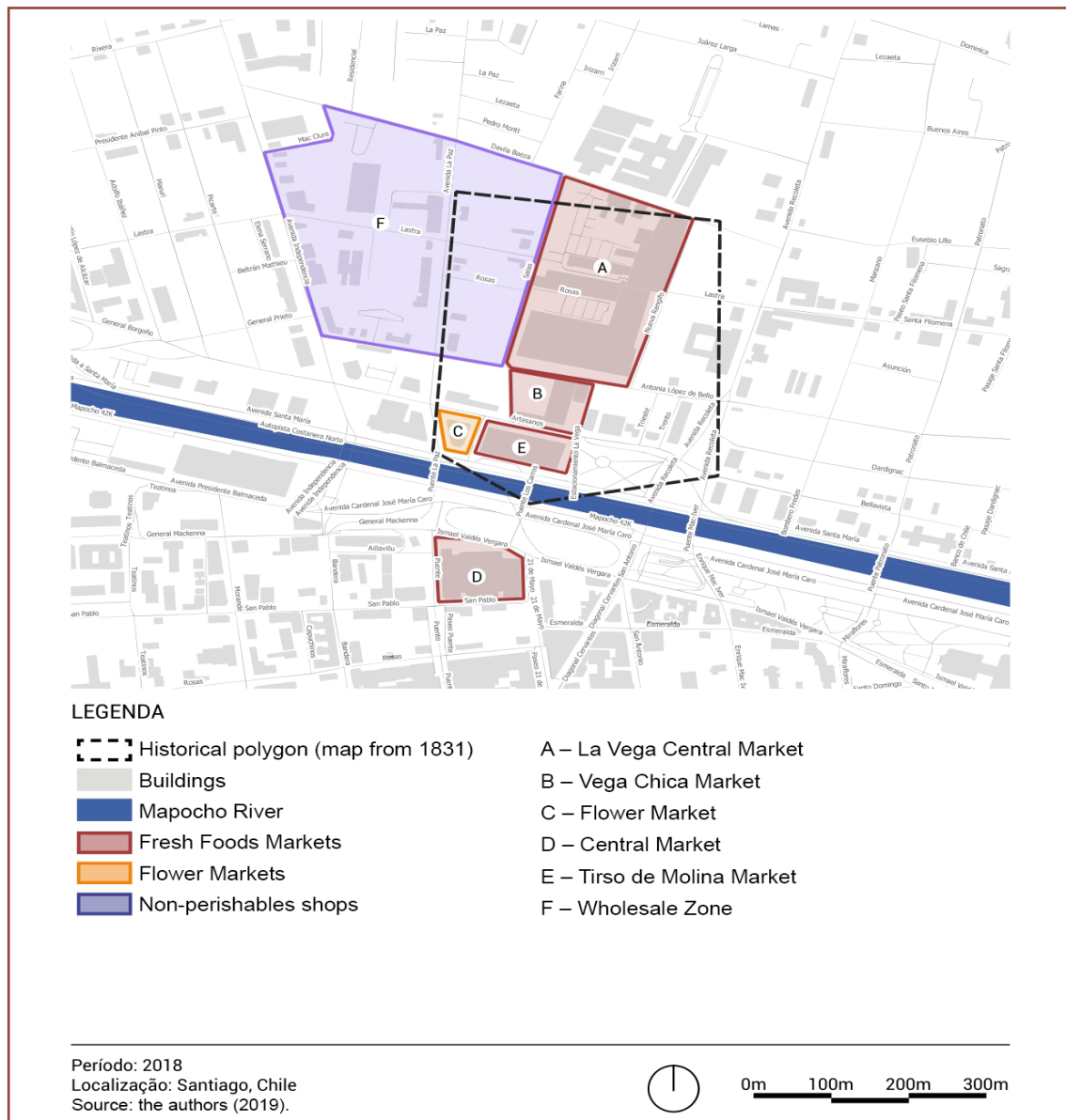
São Paulo Municipal Market, which nowadays offers domestic and imported fruit and other products, as well as a variety of cuisine, and is recognized as an important tourist destination; (C) Pari Wholesale Market, which offers agricultural products wholesale; (D) Feira da Madrugada (*Early Morning Market*), which operates during off-peak hours as a wholesale option for supplying local merchants (especially bars and restaurants); and, finally, (E) Zona Cerealista, which encompasses a large number of stores selling primarily grains and seeds, mostly by weight (wholesale and retail).

Figure 18 – Map of the city of São Paulo in 2019, indicating food commerce spaces – historic triangle perimeter also indicated



Source: the authors (2019).

Figure 19 – Map of the city of Santiago in 2018, indicating commercial food spaces – historical location of Vega Central Market also indicated



Source: the authors (2019).

Figure 19 shows the historical location of food markets (indicated by dotted lines), including (A) La Vega Market and other markets surveyed in the vicinity of the study area, within the boundaries defined by the Cal y Canto Bridge, where commercial activities took place. Consequently, the historical process of territorialization led to the emergence of other markets: (B) the Vega Chica Market, which sells almost exclusively meat and sausages; (C) the Flower Market, which specializes in the sale of flowers; (D) the Central Market, built on the urbanized side of the city of Santiago (separated by the Mapocho River), known as a tourist destination and noted for its selection of restaurants

offering Chilean cuisine and delicacies; (E) the Tirso de Molina Food Market, which, despite offering fresh food, is predominantly occupied by restaurants with diverse Latin American influences; and, finally, (F) the surrounding area, marked on the map as the Wholesale Zone, which mainly offers dry or industrialized foods, whether in bulk or not.

Finally, the mapping efforts identified the Kinjo Yamato Market in São Paulo as a hub for supply networks, alongside other distribution centers such as Zona Cerealista and the Municipal Market. In Santiago, the La Vega Central Market serves as a territorial hub, surrounded by specialty markets and wholesale districts. In both cases, the markets function as spaces of resistance and social production within the territory, reaffirming their relevance as central nodes in the urban food supply chain.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

Public food markets in São Paulo and Santiago transcend their primary function of supplying food, revealing their character as complex commercial spaces that intertwine social, cultural, economic, and political dimensions. A comparative analysis of these spaces allows us to understand how contemporary Latin American cities are shaped by the juxtaposition of traditional practices and modern dynamics, local scales and global processes, as well as permanence and transformation.

The cases analyzed demonstrate that markets constitute ongoing processes of territorialization that go beyond the simple appropriation of physical space. As indicated by the work of Raffestin (1993) and Saquet (2007; 2015), territorialization involves the construction of circulation networks, the mediation of power relations, and the formation of social identities associated with space. At the Kinjo Yamato Market, this dynamic manifests itself in the persistence of commercial communities linked to 20th-century migrations; and at La Vega Central, it is expressed in the collective mobilization of merchants in the face of pressures from urban displacement and city restructuring.

The historical establishment of these markets in central areas was no accident. Their location along the Tamanduateí River in São Paulo and the Mapocho River in Santiago reflects the logistics of transportation and supply that shaped the growth of these cities. After more than a century, however, this centrality is maintained not only by historical inertia but by these markets' ability to continue coordinating supply networks that extend beyond their boundaries. The Zona Cerealista in São Paulo and the wholesale circuits

associated with La Vega in Santiago demonstrate this territorial expansion and the consolidation of integrated food distribution systems.

Another key finding of the study concerns the resilience and adaptability of these spaces in the face of contemporary pressures. In contrast to interpretations that link urban modernization to the replacement of traditional forms of commerce, public markets demonstrate a significant capacity for reinvention. In São Paulo, the concession of the Cantareira Complex to the private sector in 2021 represents a turning point that requires critical monitoring. Although the injection of private investment may enable structural improvements, it also raises questions regarding the preservation of the commercial and social practices that have historically characterized these areas.

In Santiago, meanwhile, the institutional model of La Vega Central represents an important precedent for collective organization. The La Vega Statute, established in 1911, consolidated mechanisms of governance and shared ownership that contributed to the market's survival in the face of pressures to displace and commodify urban space. This experience suggests that collective forms of management can constitute relevant strategies of urban resistance in a Latin American context marked by intensive processes of territorial transformation.

The analysis also suggests that the relationship between tradition and modernity in these spaces should not be understood as an irreconcilable opposition, but rather as a productive tension that characterizes the dynamics of public markets; as Pintaudi (2006) argues, their vitality stems precisely from their ability to incorporate new actors, practices, and demands over time. In this sense, the so-called "market culture," described by Robles (2014) – based on relationships of trust, proximity between producers and consumers, and a focus on fresh foods – coexists with contemporary practices in logistics, communication, and sanitation.

The research also highlights the significant role these markets play in the social production of urban space, in the sense proposed by Carlos (2017): beyond their economic functions, they constitute spaces of memory, identity, and belonging, especially for social groups that are often marginalized in the processes of urban restructuring. In São Paulo, the Kinjo Yamato Market preserves the memory of Japanese migration and other communities that contributed to the formation of the central neighborhoods. In Santiago, La Vega Central symbolizes the persistence of working-class and migrant communities in the face of real estate gentrification and urban exclusion.

The comparative analysis thus demonstrates that public markets remain significant institutions in shaping contemporary Latin American cities. Their continued existence is not an anachronism, but rather an expression of forms of urban organization that coexist with – and, to a certain extent, challenge – hegemonic models of production and consumption. More than mere vestiges of the past, these spaces constitute active territories of resistance and social production of the urban. ●

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