

THE PERMANENCE OF SÃO PAULO'S MUNICIPAL MARKET IN CONTEMPORANITY

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ABSTRACT

In what concerns the Geography of Commerce and Consumption, a new form has been discussed as developed by capitalism to survive – mainly in an instance in which it lives through one more of its structural crisis – which is, the movement that spans the transition of the space of consumption to the consumption of the space, that is, the space itself becomes the principal element to be consumed. From this premise departs a study of the permanence of the Mercado Municipal Paulistano² in front of the transformations that occurred in the Sao Paulo metropolis, in lights of this new capitalist artifice that designates space as central to the extraction of profit.

KEYWORDS: Public Market, Sao Paulo, Metamorphosis, Permanence, Consumption of Space

LA PERMANENCIA DEL MERCADO MUNICIPAL DE SÃO PAULO EN LA CONTEMPORANEIDAD

RESUMEN

En cuanto a la Geografía de Comercio y Consumo, se ha discutido una nueva forma desarrollada por el capitalismo para sobrevivir - especialmente en un momento en el que vive más una de su crisis estructural - es decir, el movimiento que incluye el pasaje del espacio del consumo para el consumo del espacio, es decir, el espacio mismo, se

¹ Masters scholarship from resource FAPESP

² *Paulistano* and *Paulista* refer to of *São Paulo*, the largest metropolis in the Southern Hemisphere

convierte en el elemento principal para ser consumido. Partiendo de esta premisa, se estudia la residencia del Mercado Municipal Paulistano con interés en las transformaciones de la metrópoli, a la luz de este espacio nuevo dispositivo capitalista como puntos centrales para la extracción de lucro.

PALABRAS-CLAVE: Mercado Público, Sao Paulo, Metamorfosis, Residencia, Consumo del espacio.

INTRODUCTION

In the mid-50's, Brasil was intensifying its process of industrialization. In this context, the Southeast, in particular the State of São Paulo was evidence, becoming renowned and named by researchers and scholars as the springboard of the country's economy.

The results of this process did not take long to appear. The city of São Paulo started to receive constant contingencies of immigrants from diverse parts of the country, that came with the aim of being a part of the development, that is, being active agents in the construction of the new engine driving the national economy. Until then, São Paulo grew, always in a frantic rhythm different from the other capitals. In the meantime, the rapid growth unleashed by the migratory movement caused serious consequences to the city. The growth of peripheries and favelas³ became more intense and evident. The city space becomes a space of struggle for social survival.

Among the problems unleashed, is the supply of food to the population. Until the demographic explosions that installed within the city, the instrument of the state supplied the population in its great majority, through the public markets. In addition to the Mercado Municipal Paulistano – also known as Central Market or Mercado – there were also the so called “neighborhood municipal markets”.

³ Shanty town

Up until the 1950's, there were five public markets in the city of São Paulo. All of them are still operational. The oldest operational market is Pinheiros, established in 1910. In 1933, the Central Market appears. Later on, the Kinjo Yamato is established in 1936 (which, according to the website of São Paulo City Hall, functioned at first as auxiliary to the construction of the Central Market), the Market Ipiranga (1940), of Tucuruvi (1949). After the decade of the 50s, other markets appeared. Today, they total fifteen in operation.

However, the interest here is to show how the city of São Paulo was supplied before the demographic explosion and the appearance of supermarkets in the beginning of the fifties. The State, then, provided for the population through the five municipal markets. The rapid growth of the city proportionally increased the demand for food. According to Langenbuch (1971), the city went from near 1.3 million habitants in the forties to near 5 million in 1966.

Even though there were five markets, the great flow of goods departed from the Central Market. The State could no longer guarantee the provisions for the population and seeing the bottleneck of the Municipal Market of São Paulo it created in 1969 the CEAGESP (Company of Warehoused and General Storage of São Paulo) and transferred the function of stocking edible supplies to the Central Market there.

Another important factor that started to modify the supply of goods, as well as the everyday of the city is the appearance of supermarkets. Before the surge of supermarkets, the population would purchase goods basically from the municipal markets, as stated before, and in small establishments such as bakeries, butchers, fruit stands, etc., located throughout neighborhoods across the city, making it where the citizens had to move for them in order to supply their residencies.

The first supermarket in the city of São Paulo was Sirva-se⁴, situated in Consolação Street, established in 1953. It was founded by

⁴ According to the website Marketing Trade Show

[...] Fernando Pacheco de Castro, Raul Borges and Mario Wallace Simonsen, establishing itself as the first well-succeeded supermarket in Brazil, promoting throughout the country the concept of self-service. The franchise was sold in 1965 and incorporated by the group Pão de Açúcar.

The capital, realizing the difficulty of the State in supplying food to the population, found an opportunity to expand through the creation of supermarkets, which represents financial and territorial concentration (PINTAUDI, 1981). The first stores opened in neighborhoods of middle and high class. Later, they disseminated through the city. Today, they exponentially outnumber public markets.

The supermarkets brought with them peculiarities that, until then, were not found in the city. They concentrated different types of merchandise in one single place. As said before, before the supermarket, the regular citizen needed to travel to several storefronts to find goods. With the appearance of the supermarket, the re-supply of a residence could be done from one single place.

Beyond this, supermarkets were commonly installed in roadways of great traffic and easy access, as much to facilitate the logistics of their stocking, as well as to ease access for the population, that, with the widespread use of automobiles and freezers, started to see the supermarket as an option at the time of stocking their home.

In this way, the exponential growth of the city of São Paulo, allied to the spread of the supermarkets, and later, shopping centers, carried deep changes in the dynamic of the public markets. They used to guarantee the stocking of goods to the population, started to give in that function to supermarkets and giant shopping centers, and later, to the great monopolizing franchises.

The aim of this essay was to investigate the ways in which these transformations that occurred in the metropolis modified the public municipal markets. In particular, to study how the Municipal Market of São Paulo is a permanent presence until today in face of the metamorphosis incurred by the city of São Paulo. In this

sense, the study of the Market – as a commercial entity – is necessary, since, according to Pintaudi (2006, p. 1) “[...] the commercial forms (structure and function included) have a duration in time and their movement requires permanent reinterpretation”.

The hypothesis raised was that the Central Market, as a commercial entity, is updated and goes through changes to survive and maintain itself in competition with other entities, like supermarkets and shopping centers, as an example, or else, as space where consumers are attracted to its symbolism, or even its semiotics, dealing then with the consumption of images of or from the space. According to Vieira (2011),

[...] the importance of the space is evident in the transformations of the social relationships and social production. It is important to study how these relationships are processed; in which ways the State intervenes, since the Market is public, that is, it belongs to the State; and what is the logic that capital is used to appropriate uses of public spaces and commercial forms to maximize the profit from the perspective of the consumer space?

Therefore, a bibliographic survey and field research were conducted with the aim of researching and comprehending the permanence of the Municipal Market of São Paulo in contemporaneity.

THE MUNICIPAL MARKET OF SÃO PAULO REMAINS...

“75 years ago
this Market was established
This was a marsh
But the ground was donated
Many important people went through here
Politician, doctor and marketer
Built by immigrants
This giant building
In every part of the world is known”

(part of the poem "Homage to the Municipal Market" by João Miguel Levi, grantee)

Established in 1933, after serving as warehouse for guns and ammunition for the Revolution of 1932, the Municipal Market of São Paulo endures until today. According to Vieira (2011),

Before this date, two other locations with central public markets existed in the city of São Paulo: the first one was founded in 1867 and was located in the Anhangabaú Valley, next to the harbor, and the second was located in the well-known 25 de Março Street.

The market, after its opening in 1933, is still located in the street Rua da Cantareira. Throughout its 79-year history, the Market maintained its architecture preserved. According to the city hall's website,

With an area of 12,600 m², a ceiling height that reaches 16 meters and a sophisticated finishing, its construction brings together several architectural styles. The project, by architect Ramos de Azevedo, explores natural illumination with the use of skylights and glass tiles. The gothic-style stained glass murals were done by renowned Russian artist Conrado Sorgenicht Filho, author also of the stained glass in the Sorocabana Station, Municipal Theater, Largo de São Francisco Law School, Sé Cathedral and more than 300 churches in the country. The colored glass came from Germany and it took more than four years to finish the artwork.

Restorations were performed to improve restoration, as can be observed in the following images. What changed in the market throughout the years, and overall, after the reformations in the year 2004, during the government of then mayor Marta Suplicy, was its function. After the bibliographic survey, and through the interviews with the Market's administration and shop owners (owners of the market's shopping

spaces), it was stated that the Market changed its function. As stated before, the Market was created with the purpose of guaranteeing the supply of goods and edibles of the population of São Paulo. Today, the market is veered towards tourism. According to the administration, tourism is the principal function of the market in actuality, and in this way, the price of goods is priced for tourists. It is noteworthy that the geographical area is the main commodity of tourism. It is precisely this new centrality denouncing the consumption of the space, i.e., the Market's strong role as a tourist attraction today; its space is also a commodity.

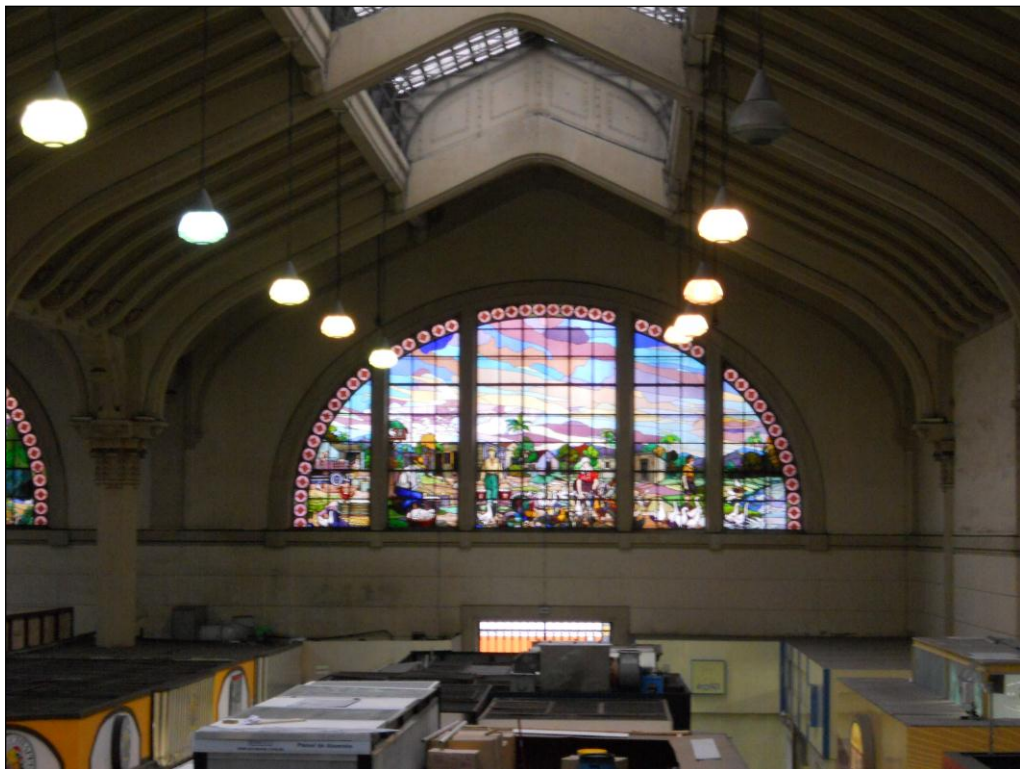


Image 1: Stained glass murals by Conrado Sorgenicht Filho

Source: VIEIRA, A. A. O., 2012



Image 2: Old front

Source: <http://www.cultura.sp.gov.br/portal/site/SEC/menuitem>



Image 3: Current front

Source: VIEIRA, A. A. O., 2012



Image 4: Loading Area

Source: VIEIRA, A. A. O., 2012

To some shop owners, the Market became a mall, dropping its role as a supply center and becoming a tourist attraction. According to one of the Market's original shop owners, the Market today is "fast food", referring to the growth in the number of bars and restaurants due to the construction of a mezzanine in the 2004 restoration. The mezzanine floor contains 2,000 square meters for food. The plan below illustrates the Market today. In 2006, with the support of private initiative, it gained also a Gourmet Space for special events.



Illustration 1: Plan of the Municipal Market of São Paulo

Source: Mercado Municipal de São Paulo Bulletin, year 3, nº 35

According to Vieira (2011),

These changes, as well as the upgrades of the cubicles, gave the Municipal Market a modern flare. The structure remained the same, it was simply restored. The function of the Market was updated. What you see is that the Market was upgraded and revalued, i.e., redesigned to better meet the demands of the contemporary capitalist.

The following photographs show the author's argument above.



Image 5: Elevators and staircases lead to the mezzanine floor

Source: VIEIRA, A. A. O., 2012



Image 6: View of the mezzanine floor

Source: VIEIRA, A. A. O., 2012



Image 7: Mezzanine floor

Source: VIEIRA, A. A. O., 2012



Images 8 and 9: Services

Source: VIEIRA, A. A. O., 2012



Image 10: Modernization of the shopping spaces

Source: VIEIRA, A. A. O., 2012



Image 11: Modern shopping spaces

Source: VIEIRA, A. A. O., 2012

As can be seen, the structure of the market was maintained. The columns and stained glass, for example, maintains its original features preserved. As stated previously by Vieira, one can view the "air of modernity" that the market acquired with the reform. The shopping cubicles are more modern and hygienic. The goods that were previously exposed on stands and bags are now exposed in refrigerated containers with acrylic covers, being exposed in a real showcase:



Image 12: Merchandise exposed in more hygienic containers

Source: VIEIRA, A. A. O., 2012

The Market still retains its function of supplying food, but for an elite public. According to Daros (1995, p. 52),

The Central Market is no longer the only source of supplies of São Paulo, but it continues to be one of the most important and the most traditional, supplying a good part of the network of hotels and restaurants of São Paulo, due to the

excellent quality of their merchandise, the imported goods (from China to Italy), the rare specimens that cannot be found anywhere else in the country [...].

The vast majority of consumers surveyed - between Sao Paulo citizens and tourists - when asked why they buy in the market, the answer was clear: "Because there are products that can only be found here". Some added because the goods they buy are fresh and of good quality. The following photographs illustrate some of the goods to which customers referred.



Image 13: Seasonings and specialty items

Source: VIEIRA, A. A. O., 2012



Image 14: Fruits, from the most common to the exotic

Source: VIEIRA, A. A. O., 2012

Customer service was also a discussion point. Most consumers praised the service. For them the "distinguished service" - making reference to the mediation of the vendor: product-vendor-consumer - is a unique feature of the market.

Still concerning the customer service, patrons were asked why they were not going to the supermarket, since some goods can be found there and for more affordable prices. The answer was unanimous. All responded that in the supermarket there is not a seller to help choose the best product. A consumer has illustrated his answer with an example: "In the supermarket you do not have a salesperson to help you choose the best cod. You do not have someone to teach you how to best salt it. In the Market, you get a cod of better quality than those of the supermarket, and you still have someone to teach you the best way to prepare it. This is crucial; it is the tradition of the Market. " It is noteworthy that the tradition of the market in service and quality, for example, was also added to the capital that has increased value of the goods.

The Market has changed its function, it upgraded, enhanced the delivery of products, added Internet shopping, however, it retained its traditional character of service, merchandise quality and freshness, and perfected them. According to the shop owners, when asked if there was any change in client profile in recent years, responded that all customers, even returning customers, were more demanding. They want even fresher, high quality merchandise and a more differentiated customer service.

What can be observed in the Market – after the bibliographic survey, the interviews and the photographic documentation – was a contradictory movement, not only in its architecture, but overall, in questions linked to its “updating”. Aesthetically one can see the shock between the old and the modern, a result of the process of production and appropriation of the city by the capital, which is put by Souza (2004, p. 31):

The process of production and appropriation of the city of São Paulo knows such specifics in which the old and the modern fight each other in a formal promiscuity leading to absolutely unusual aesthetics. This is the essential characteristic of the metropoli-tan geography in which construction/destruction, public/private, work/capital, configure and specify spaces and Forms well characterized in different historical periods.

After the renovations in 2004, the flow of people – that until then was decreasing, considering the demolition of the Market – increased exponentially. According to the administration of the Market, the crowds can reach sixty thousand in one day during the weekend.

In the meantime, the increase in the flow of people was due mostly to the increase of tourists coming from several parts of Brazil and the world. Due to this, according to the shop owners, there was a decrease in the volume of sales in the past few years, resulting in an inversely proportional relationship, i.e., increasing the number of people and reducing the amount of sales.

One possible explanation would be that consumers that visit the Market today no longer go to supply their homes, they go to purchase differentiated merchandise, those of sporadic consumption that, according to those interviewed, can only be found in the Market; they go to the mezzanine floor to taste the famous delicacies, like the fried cod cake or ham sandwich, for example; they go window shopping, to consume the space.

The fetish of the merchandise reappears in a brutal and scary way. The brands, the marketing, the advertisement (“the best cod cakes”, “best ham sandwich”) and even the displays of the merchandise can seduce the consumer, in such a way that the consumer creates a necessity of consumption of the determined merchandise, in a way that did not exist before, and mostly, that is not needed for survival. Debord (1997, p. 28), explains about the fetishism of merchandise:

The principle of commodity fetishism, the domination of society by “suprasensible things though sensitive,” is fully realized in the spectacle, in which the sensible world is replaced by a selection of images that exist above it, and at the same time made itself recognized as the quintessential sensitive.

The Market continued to be captured by the present society and to specialize itself. To Montenegro (2006, p.57), the city of São Paulo possesses the capacity of

[...] adjusting quickly to the demands of each new period, adapting its materiality and its life of relations. [...] Old forms disappear or gain new functions to attend to the demands of modern activities.

The space of the Market is not only an area of commercialization and consumption: it is a social space. It is observed that there is a passage from the space of consumption to the consumption of the space of the Market. It is evident that this consumption is simply one more way in which capitalism extends its power over all aspects of social life, creating in this way a framework of elements that insert and

maintain the individual caught up in commodity fetishes and illusions. The space appears as merchandise, i.e., it becomes to be consumed as such; furthermore, it is the principal merchandise, because it involves all others.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

It is seen that the city of São Paulo grew exponentially, but that city planning did not accompanied the speed of its growth. In the midst of this acceleration of the process of urbanization, commerce had to become adequate to each change, had that been structural or functional.

In this sense, the hypothesis raised at the beginning of this essay was confirmed, that is, that the Municipal Market of São Paulo went through metamorphosis, it upgraded with the aim of staying in competition with supermarkets and chains. It was redesigned to guarantee its survival in a historic moment where the central value of society points to consumerism. The space of life becomes appropriated as merchandise, in a transition from space of consumption to space to be consumed, and even transforming the individual in merchandise.

According to Vieira (2011),

The Market was misaligned with the development of the forces of production. The action of the State, with the restoration in 2004, was fundamental. The Market went through its greatest transformation, going from decaying supplier to important touristic destination of the city of São Paulo and supplier of differentiated customers, consumers in fine hotels and restaurants.

The Market has not ceased to be a space of consumption, however, ownership of capital is transforming the space, too, in an object of consumption. In this movement, it can be questioned whether the capital, given the inverse relationship (increased flow of people and decrease in the volume of sales) – that is occurring in the Market – predicted that this would happen. What will be the consequences to the Market, as well as for the shop owners as a result of this process?

What is known is that the shop owners, mainly the ones that have been in the Market since its establishment, have a strong initiative to maintain the tradition of the Market – tradition that was passed from generation to generation – even with the modernization of the structure of the shops.

The market has undergone repagination. It was upgraded to resist in time, i.e. from changes in form and also in its content, the market has been modernized, it remained and the change function could be easily noticed. It suffered metamorphosis to meet the changing capitalist demands of contemporaneity.

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