

This is the author's accepted manuscript version of a chapter that has been later published as **Gómez Méndez, N. A. (2018) The contested public space of the *tianguis* street markets of Mexico City. In González, S (Ed.): *Contested Markets Contested Cities. Gentrification and urban justice in retail spaces*, London: Routledge, pp. 72 – 85.** The author's version is broadly the same as the published one although it may have minor typographical and bibliographical errors, and it lacks any images. The final published version can be purchased [here](#).

The contested public space of the *tianguis* street markets of Mexico City¹

Norma Angélica Gómez Méndez

Introduction

...given that we are in a public space, if it is public, then everyone can have a piece of the action, am I right?

(Alejandro, Leader of trader organisation in Iztapalapa district, Mexico City, 21/11/2009)

Urban space in large Latin American cities, particularly Mexico City, is full of tension, conflict, experiences of solidarity, cooperation and collective action. These take place in a context of policies of structural adjustment and the liberalisation of markets where urban public space becomes increasingly precarious, unequal, deprived and contradictory. Under this premise of contestation by a large number of actors, the understanding of urban public space requires examination of how it is experienced and used and the demands of those that inhabit it with their diverse and divergent positions (Bourdieu, 1999; Hiernaux, 2013).

The trade that takes place on the streets of Mexico City refers precisely to the debate about how public space is inhabited. Various studies of this kind of informal occupation (Bromley, 2000) have discussed not only the pre-Colombian tradition of selling products on the streets, but that currently the space is contested mostly by those who use it as an alternative source of work (this in the context of the shortage of formal employment and the precarious nature of that which exists). However this alternative source of work implies the occupation of public space for private purposes regulated by a legal framework that did not contemplate its growth, the conditions under which it is carried out, its forms of organisation and collective action, nor the relationship of these organisations with the authorities.

This is the author's accepted manuscript version of a chapter that has been later published as **Gómez Méndez, N. A. (2018) The contested public space of the *tianguis* street markets of Mexico City. In González, S (Ed.): *Contested Markets Contested Cities. Gentrification and urban justice in retail spaces*, London: Routledge, pp. 72 – 85.** The author's version is broadly the same as the published one although it may have minor typographical and bibliographical errors, and it lacks any images. The final published version can be purchased [here](#).

This type of trade has different manifestations that depend on the physical space, the products that are sold and how they are traded (See also Delgadillo, in this book for a discussion of various forms of retail in Mexico City). They include: *tianguis* or flea markets (a movable semi-fixed space on the street every day of the week); 'Concentrations' or market stalls (a fixed or semi-fixed position installed in the same place throughout the week); 'Wheeled' markets (with the same spatial dynamics of the *tianguis* but selling different products); and street traders who regularly sell products in public spaces in a nomadic manner and without a permanent position.

This diversity of types of retail translates into very heterogeneous forms of daily work and street trading, where conflicts are not the same in terms of influencing strategies of income, the degree of organisation required to work in the public space and the demand of rights, which at their most basic can be expressed as the right to work and the right to the city.

This chapter explores in detail one of the types of street trade in Mexico City: the *tianguis*. Their importance originates in their pre-Colombian tradition and as supplier of goods to the working class. In addition the *tianguis* are organised as not-for-profit associations registered with the government authorities and are relatively more formal and stable in their occupation of space. This research uses mixed methodologies, including analysis of documents relating to trade in public space in Mexico City, quantitative data prepared by government institutions and fieldwork which includes life-histories of the leaders of the organisations and interviews with the traders of the *tianguis*. in Iztapalapa, one of the most marginalised and populous municipalities of the city.

The chapter is organised in two sections: the first defines the public space as a territory of power where actors establish strategies of negotiation and organisation in order to appropriate space – of which commerce in the public realm is an expression – and describes the most important factors and characteristics of this activity; the second analyses the quantitative

This is the author's accepted manuscript version of a chapter that has been later published as **Gómez Méndez, N. A. (2018) The contested public space of the *tianguis* street markets of Mexico City. In González, S (Ed.): *Contested Markets Contested Cities. Gentrification and urban justice in retail spaces*, London: Routledge, pp. 72 – 85.** The author's version is broadly the same as the published one although it may have minor typographical and bibliographical errors, and it lacks any images. The final published version can be purchased [here](#).

dimension, internal organisation and political logic of the *tianguis* to demonstrate the ways in which citizens contest and negotiate a place on the public street, expressed in the words of those who work there.

Trade on the streets of Mexico City: the contestation of public space

In the social sciences, a fundamental coincidence can be observed in the debate about public space, i.e. that the experience of public space is characterised by the conflict and coexistence of multiple demands and its social and political actors which generate a constant dispute over the rights of how the space is used and by whom. Ramírez, quoting Sennett, points out that public space 'refers to a wide variety of people representing a cosmopolitan and 'multiform urban public' whose scenario for interaction is the capital city where complex social groups converge' (Sennett, 2011, in Ramírez, 2013, p. 287).

Street traders are social agents in a conflictive environment politicised by the use, distribution and maintenance of a scarce resource, the street. Here many actors come together under the assumption that the State has the monopoly and legal recognition for the administration of the street because it controls the various capital and actors who are involved in other areas (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 2005). Among the most important of these are: the officials and representatives of government who are responsible for implementing the legal framework; the political parties who dispute the space as well as its agents (traders, their organisation and leaders); the formal merchants and neighbours of the *tianguis*. Between these actors, spheres of power and conflict are constructed into which commerce enters and operates. Access to the public street is through the basic elements of leadership and organisations.

For the members of the trade organisations the possibility to occupy public space as individuals is virtually non-existent and it is these social networks, or family connections that are used to facilitate entry into street trade. For the leaders of the organisations their

This is the author's accepted manuscript version of a chapter that has been later published as **Gómez Méndez, N. A. (2018) The contested public space of the *tianguis* street markets of Mexico City. In González, S (Ed.): *Contested Markets Contested Cities. Gentrification and urban justice in retail spaces*, London: Routledge, pp. 72 – 85.** The author's version is broadly the same as the published one although it may have minor typographical and bibliographical errors, and it lacks any images. The final published version can be purchased [here](#).

involvement begins with street trade and is maintained over time: very often leadership is extended and consolidated through family ties because control over the use and distribution of space is, in fact, the reason for the existence of the leader. Organisations have arisen through constituting civil associations and at least in Mexico City this collective model was imposed by the State as a requirement to obtain permission to trade on the streets (Cross, 1998). These organisations were also used by traders and leaders to transform themselves into agents capable of generating social demands².

Street trade is only one part of the complex reality of public space where a fundamental issue is put into play; the right to work and the imperative to engage in a functioning economic activity. This can be seen either as a survival strategy for those who have no access to formal work or as a source of additional income where formal work is financially insufficient. On the other hand this street trade contributes to the distribution and supply of products and services, many of which are basic necessities, and functions as a space for socialising and encounters, representing an opportunity to maintain the vitality of a public space.

Bromley (2000) has already indicated some of the arguments in favour of street trade, some of which relate to the discussion of civil rights: the constitutional right to choose an occupation or business activity, with street trading a part of that right. Street trade also contributes to the development of independent work and functions as a safety valve for the unemployed (Cross and Morales, 2007; Morales and Kettles, 2009), because without this type of activity many turn to crime. Sethuraman (1998) and Maloney (2004) state that this trade is an opportunity for family businesses entrepreneurship and provides flexibility of labour, particularly for women by allowing them more financial independence and greater control over their hours of work in spite of the domestic activities that they undertake such as looking after children and family members (particularly older people), cleaning the home, washing clothes and cooking.

This is the author's accepted manuscript version of a chapter that has been later published as **Gómez Méndez, N. A. (2018) The contested public space of the *tianguis* street markets of Mexico City. In González, S (Ed.): *Contested Markets Contested Cities. Gentrification and urban justice in retail spaces*, London: Routledge, pp. 72 – 85.** The author's version is broadly the same as the published one although it may have minor typographical and bibliographical errors, and it lacks any images. The final published version can be purchased [here](#).

For their part Morales and Kettles (2009) recognise the importance of this trade as a means of supply of basic goods combined with the possibility of building more attractive social spaces: 'Public markets and street vendors can be temporary uses or more permanent responses to consumer demand, economic inequality, and mobility-constrained populations. When properly sited, they provide neighbourhood amenities and can contribute to a positive community image.' (Morales and Kettles, 2009, p. 2).

Definitions and data: the complexity of street trade in Mexico City

Street trade highlights the dispute over public space between the different actors involved (government, traders, leaders, etc.), often because the trader organisations occupy public space without authorisation or without respecting legal frameworks and do not report the exact number of traders. This means that much of the information is not publicly available, or rather that there is a real 'war of numbers' which makes it very difficult to know exactly how many people are engaged in this activity.

The different types of street trade constitute part of the informal sector because they depend on the traders' own resources, are not established as clearly identifiable businesses and do not declare regular accounts to the authorities (Instituto Nacional de Geografía y Estadística, 2013). Additionally they lack social benefits (e.g. health insurance, annual leave), written employment contracts and receive help from relatives in unpaid work.

In the first quarter of 2016 the number of those in employment in Mexico was nearly 51 million people (45% of the total population). In Mexico City 4 million and 140 thousand people (47% of the total population) were registered as in employment (Instituto Nacional de Geografía y Estadística, 2011; 2016). Of the total working population in Mexico, 58% work in conditions of informality while in Mexico City the figure is 50%.

This is the author's accepted manuscript version of a chapter that has been later published as **Gómez Méndez, N. A. (2018) The contested public space of the *tianguis* street markets of Mexico City. In González, S (Ed.): *Contested Markets Contested Cities. Gentrification and urban justice in retail spaces*, London: Routledge, pp. 72 – 85.** The author's version is broadly the same as the published one although it may have minor typographical and bibliographical errors, and it lacks any images. The final published version can be purchased [here](#).

To measure the activities of street traders on the public street, the state uses two distinct typologies: a) business owners and employers or the self-employed traders in permanent locations in markets, squares, shopping malls or semi-permanent locations in *tianguis*. or mobile markets (Instituto Nacional de Geografía y Estadística, 2011) and b) street hawkers without permanent locations (Instituto Nacional de Geografía y Estadística, 2011).

In the first quarter of 2016 there were around 9 million traders in Mexico, of which nearly 7 million are traders in permanent or even semi-permanent locations; the rest are street vendors. In Mexico City, just over 800,000 traders were registered, 77% relate to those with a semi-permanent location, the others are hawkers without permanent location. The significant problem with this data is that it does not identify how many traders are working in the *tianguis* and as we will see below the data, at least in Mexico City, does not match the official reports.

Street trade has different realities, each with specific problems and demands, but all are subject to the regulations for markets which date back to 1951. Since this date, specific rules have been modified in order to create more public space for citizens and eliminate the 'negative effects' of street trade identified by formal entrepreneurs such as: unfair competition, poor quality of products, piracy and tax evasion. Other citizens mention the damage street trade has for the image of the city, problems of vehicular and pedestrian mobility, sanitary problems, corruption and political clientelism which preside over street traders as well as their precarious working conditions.

In addition to the street hawkers, the Mexican government recognises two other types of mechanism for the supply of goods to the working class. The first does not take place on the public street but in shops, public markets and Mexico City's wholesale market, the Central de Abastos (See Delgadillo, this book, for an analysis of covered and municipal markets in

This is the author's accepted manuscript version of a chapter that has been later published as **Gómez Méndez, N. A. (2018) The contested public space of the *tianguis* street markets of Mexico City. In González, S (Ed.): *Contested Markets Contested Cities. Gentrification and urban justice in retail spaces*, London: Routledge, pp. 72 – 85.** The author's version is broadly the same as the published one although it may have minor typographical and bibliographical errors, and it lacks any images. The final published version can be purchased [here](#).

Mexico City). The second refers to all the spaces for trade on public streets which are located mainly in marginal areas (Dirección de Abasto, Comercio y Distribución, 2006) and include:

- *'Concentrations' of small traders*: here entrepreneurs conduct their business on semi-permanent stalls, always occupying the same location on land which is either private property owned by the Mexico City government, or is public (Dirección de Abasto, Comercio y Distribución, 2006).
- *'Wheeled' markets*: these are authorised itinerant markets which are installed in different parts of the city in different locations each day; these markets sell food and household products (Dirección de Abasto, Comercio y Distribución, 2006).
- *Tianguis*: these markets mainly offer essential everyday items and are installed one day a week in semi-permanent positions on the public street with a permit that is granted to the representative, the leader, of an organisation (Dirección de Abasto, Comercio y Distribución, 2004). In 2014, there were 1,303 *tianguis* and 171,820 people working in them in Mexico City (SEDECO, 2014).

***Tianguis* in Mexico City: disputes, negotiations and rights**

Street markets are considered part of the culture and traditions of pre-Colombian Mexico (Martínez, 1985), but most importantly together with the 'concentrations', public markets and 'wheeled' markets they are the means of supply, distribution and marketing of essential everyday items in the outlying areas of the city.

The *tianguis* take place any day of the week in any street or neighbourhood of the city in semi-fixed positions, with metal frame structures roofed with plastic sheeting of different

This is the author's accepted manuscript version of a chapter that has been later published as **Gómez Méndez, N. A. (2018) The contested public space of the *tianguis* street markets of Mexico City. In González, S (Ed.): *Contested Markets Contested Cities. Gentrification and urban justice in retail spaces*, London: Routledge, pp. 72 – 85.** The author's version is broadly the same as the published one although it may have minor typographical and bibliographical errors, and it lacks any images. The final published version can be purchased [here](#).

colours which identify their membership of a particular organisation. In these markets vegetables, fruit, meat, fish, poultry, prepared food, clothing and footwear are sold; Indeed, any type of product can be obtained.

Generally these markets are set up as not-for-profit organisations that must be registered with the tax authorities, have a company name by which it can be identified, must have members (which in this case are workers of the *tianguis*.), hold meetings and have a board. The not-for-profit organisations that represent the traders take care of the permissions to occupy the street and must comply with the legal framework that governs hours of operation, the individual pitches and matters related to safety. This final aspect refers to two areas. 1) Public safety as provided by the state through policing to ensure against theft and violence and 2) Civil protection, also the responsibility of the state, to ensure that citizens' activities are carried out under recognised procedures to deal with risks such as using gas, the existence of emergency exits and that the products are safe.

The legal framework of the tianguis

The legal framework that has regulated the *tianguis*. since 2004 (Dirección de Abasto, Comercio y Distribución, 2004) has been modified several times in order to ascertain the number and characteristics of the workers and their organisations. In addition it is very difficult to establish the exact number of those working in the *tianguis*. For some years now the government of Mexico City has not granted permission for the creation of new *tianguis* or allowed for an increase in the number of sales pitches, but in reality the existing *tianguis* are growing, with leaders granting more permits and more jobs, and are occupying more of the public space. Given that this is illegal, the leaders of the organisations do not report this growth to the authorities.

This is the author's accepted manuscript version of a chapter that has been later published as **Gómez Méndez, N. A. (2018) The contested public space of the *tianguis* street markets of Mexico City. In González, S (Ed.): *Contested Markets Contested Cities. Gentrification and urban justice in retail spaces*, London: Routledge, pp. 72 – 85.** The author's version is broadly the same as the published one although it may have minor typographical and bibliographical errors, and it lacks any images. The final published version can be purchased [here](#).

For example in 2010 the recorded number of *tianguis* was 1420 with 90,000 workers (Asamblea Legislativa del Distrito Federal, 2010). This figure becomes questionable when in an interview that year an official of the municipality of Iztapalapa, one of the poorest in Mexico City, stated that there were 323 *tianguis* and 73,435 traders in that municipality alone and of those only 100 had the necessary permission while the rest were operating illegally although they were tolerated by the authorities. In 2014 the Ministry of Economic Development recorded 1303 *tianguis* with 171,820 people working in them.

To set up this type of market, three groups of actors are necessary: the first is an organisation that has a charter, statutes and regulations, as well as a register of traders giving their name and the type of product they sell; the second are the traders who besides belonging to an organisation are granted permission to trade by the municipality; the third are the neighbours, who must state in writing their acceptance of the installation of the *tianguis*.

The *tianguis* must comply with basic principles of coexistence, security, hygiene and health and safety. The authorities of each municipality must authorise the permits both for the organisation and the traders, and it must designate the areas where the *tianguis* can take place, distribute the sales pitches, regulate their operation, validate the collection of fees for the use of the street and impose fines in the event of any breach of the regulations (Dirección de Abasto, Comercio y Distribución, 2004).

The tax that the government of Mexico City charges the traders for the use of the street according to the Tax Code of 2015 is 830 Mexican pesos per day (US \$0.60) for a semi-fixed position of 1.8 x 1.2 metres. However in Mexico more than half of the traders that are engaged in this work earn on average 141 dollars a month (CONASAMI, n.d.) and although there is a legally-established quota, it is the leaders of the organisations who define them and charge the minimum of at least the equivalent of one or two dollars a month.

This is the author's accepted manuscript version of a chapter that has been later published as **Gómez Méndez, N. A. (2018) The contested public space of the *tianguis* street markets of Mexico City. In González, S (Ed.): *Contested Markets Contested Cities. Gentrification and urban justice in retail spaces*, London: Routledge, pp. 72 – 85.** The author's version is broadly the same as the published one although it may have minor typographical and bibliographical errors, and it lacks any images. The final published version can be purchased [here](#).

The leaders of the organisations do not necessarily work in the *tianguis* and usually those who carry out the daily business of the markets are the 'delegates' whose main functions are collecting fees for the use of space or 'square', regulating the distribution of individual pitches and maintaining order and solving day-to-day problems.

In 2010 there was a new attempt by the legislative body of the City of Mexico to define clear rules to formalise and 'rescue' (in the government terminology) systems of traditional retail channels such as the public markets and *tianguis*, in order to regulate and organize those involved in the street trade (Asamblea Legislativa del Distrito Federal, 2010). To date, though, this initiative has yet to materialise (Gómez, 2011).

This 'rescue' seeks to ensure that traders are not subject to the control of the leaders and that the negotiation to work in the street is between the traders and the government. It is also intended to prohibit the installation of new markets or a rise in the number of traders, the space that they occupy or the type of products that they sell (i.e. to prevent piracy). The positive side of this initiative is that the traders are not subject to the control of the leaders who monopolise relations with the government and decide, often arbitrarily, on who works and how much they pay for the rent of their pitch. The absence of leaders contributes to the reduction of political clientelism, however historically the leaders have had the ability to defend the stability and permanence of the *tianguis* in the public space.

Disputes and negotiations over public space: the daily life of the tianguis

The street trader's experience of occupying the public space reflects a way of exercising the right to work, although working on the street is precarious, unstable and brings in a low income. However, the experience of trading in the street generates a certain belonging to the public space and a sense of ownership over the sales pitch where traders work every day for many years. For many, the *tianguis* are the only economic activity that they have been

This is the author's accepted manuscript version of a chapter that has been later published as **Gómez Méndez, N. A. (2018) The contested public space of the *tianguis* street markets of Mexico City. In González, S (Ed.): *Contested Markets Contested Cities. Gentrification and urban justice in retail spaces*, London: Routledge, pp. 72 – 85.** The author's version is broadly the same as the published one although it may have minor typographical and bibliographical errors, and it lacks any images. The final published version can be purchased [here](#).

involved in, the only thing they know how to do and the idea that 'the street belongs to those that work it' is often spoken of by the traders.

In addition, to be accepted into and to remain working in the *tianguis* demands the acquisition of the necessary knowledge. An example of this is an understanding that it is not the government officials who distribute the spaces but the leaders of not-for-profit associations who, over the years, have established a kind of right and ownership over part of the street. It is the leaders and not the authorities who decide who can operate and under what conditions.

In this section analysis is undertaken in the ways in which traders use, appropriate and contest public space to carry out their economic activity and occupation. This is based on the experiences of some traders in *tianguis* in Mexico City, mainly in the municipality of Iztapalapa, through fieldwork, including participant observation, and interviews.

Interviews with the traders of the *tianguis* reveal the importance of the leaders and of the organisation in the distribution of space, but also for stability in their trade. Some traders with more than 25 years' experience distinguish between *before* and *now* in the entry process of working in street markets: Firstly, before the establishment of traders' organisations and the emergence of leaders, trade in the *tianguis* was extremely unstable due to the constant conflict with the authorities. Besides this most traders were not set up as businesses, did not have permissions and neither had a fixed or semi-fixed trading pitch and were more like ambulant traders. Secondly, with the shaping of the organisation, the leader becomes a central figure.

Two traders of the *tianguis* explain these two stages:

So when we started working here, the authorities came and took away the goods, before everyone fought for themselves. If they took my goods from me the person next to me did not care. But it was in 1995, more or less, when there were already

This is the author's accepted manuscript version of a chapter that has been later published as **Gómez Méndez, N. A. (2018) The contested public space of the *tianguis* street markets of Mexico City. In González, S (Ed.): *Contested Markets Contested Cities. Gentrification and urban justice in retail spaces*, London: Routledge, pp. 72 – 85.** The author's version is broadly the same as the published one although it may have minor typographical and bibliographical errors, and it lacks any images. The final published version can be purchased [here](#).

quite a few of us, a workmate arrived to sell tacos and we decided to form an organisation.

(Rosalío, 28 years old, seller of fried potato chips, 06/04/2006)

Before they took away the stalls and they took everything away from us and they carried off the merchandise, they never returned it, but for some years now agreements were made, over the years things have calmed down, we had many problems with the authorities, but thanks to the support of Mrs Gloria [founder and leader of an organisation in Iztapalapa] and all the traders who are united with her, we have moved forward.

(Paola, 38, seller of fried potato chips, 10/03/2006)

In most organisations the basic function of the leader is to maintain the stability of employment in the public space. To do so the leader acts as the legal representative of the organisation, attends the monthly workshops summoned by the government authorities, must maintain updated information on the number of traders and collect payment every day for the space occupied by the traders. When organisations are large or have *tianguis* in various parts of the city on the same days of the week, leaders designate people or delegates, usually traders from the same organisation, to help in the collection of fees or in the resolution of everyday problems.

The following points explain key aspects of how the *tianguis* work:

- An organisation of traders may have several locations in different neighbourhoods in the city on different days of the week. This can include the sharing of the same space with other organisations as long as they do not coincide on the same day.

This is the author's accepted manuscript version of a chapter that has been later published as **Gómez Méndez, N. A. (2018) The contested public space of the *tianguis* street markets of Mexico City. In González, S (Ed.): *Contested Markets Contested Cities. Gentrification and urban justice in retail spaces*, London: Routledge, pp. 72 – 85.** The author's version is broadly the same as the published one although it may have minor typographical and bibliographical errors, and it lacks any images. The final published version can be purchased [here](#).

- A trader may be working in different locations of the same organisation one, several or all days of the week. At the same time they can belong to several organisations, depending on the *tianguis* and the spatial locations where they have permission and payment of the fee for the pitch.
- An organisation of traders does not have a determined number of members, but it should be at least 100 people as set out in the 1951 regulations of markets, and can have more than 10,000 people. This applies both in Mexico City and in other states of the metropolitan area.
- Membership of an organisation is obligatory by the simple fact that it is the organisation that controls the space. The trader can decide to leave whenever they want but this results in the loss of their pitch (although in many cases it is possible to sell the space on).
- The role of leader is important in the sale of pitches on public space between the traders themselves. While legally no-one can own a pitch on the street, within the organisations, the space has a very high economic value.

Onésimo, a trader from Iztapalapa, has become a member of an organisation that operates several days a week through the purchase of a space from a woman who has left her stall. He explains that in some *tianguis*, although places are not bought from the leader, it is nevertheless the leader who must agree with the sale, because as the agent they informally monopolise the use of space and also make a profit from it: 'Here, for example, I am owner, the lady who was here before me sold it to me, I asked the price and she asked me for 2,000 pesos per metre and between a neighbour and me we bought 4 metres' (Onésimo, 60 years old, seller of belts). After this description he states:

It is not that the leader has to be asked permission to sell but they have to be notified because they have to be given a part of the payment. I paid for two metres and the woman gave the leader 300 pesos. They always get something.

This is the author's accepted manuscript version of a chapter that has been later published as **Gómez Méndez, N. A. (2018) The contested public space of the *tianguis* street markets of Mexico City. In González, S (Ed.): *Contested Markets Contested Cities. Gentrification and urban justice in retail spaces*, London: Routledge, pp. 72 – 85.** The author's version is broadly the same as the published one although it may have minor typographical and bibliographical errors, and it lacks any images. The final published version can be purchased [here](#).

Then that I am the owner is only relative because we are on the public street
but I had to buy the place.

(Interview, 10/11/2011)

On a day-to-day basis the leader or the delegate³ is responsible for collecting the rent from the pitches occupied by each trader, ensuring that the set-up and removal times of the stalls are adhered to and that all traders comply with the health and safety regulations. The *tianguis* should have their own generator for electricity as they cannot use the public network, they should monitor the origin of the goods and, in theory, they should not allow the sale of pirate goods or alcohol and must ensure the safety of customers and traders⁴. However *tianguis* rarely have a generator and 'tap into' existing electricity supplies or ask permission from a neighbour who allows them to connect to their homes. In any case, the delegate ensures that there is an agreement between residents and the traders in order to keep good relations with the community, who are ultimately the main customers of the *tianguis*.

Other important tasks are the resolution of disputes between traders or with the customers and to meet with the authorities when there are inspections. In practice this means accompanying the inspectors, helping to resolve potential fines with the traders and at the end of the inspection inviting them out to eat – which results in a very lax enforcement of the existing regulations.

As with any civil association, there is an obligation to convene meetings where members have the right to participate. However the assemblies rarely take place, in fact, some respondents commented that when they are held they have never been open to all - only those closest to the leader attend and amongst those are the delegates and some traders with strong connections to the leader. When on rare occasions assemblies are open to all, what is discussed are the everyday problems of the organisation.

This is the author's accepted manuscript version of a chapter that has been later published as **Gómez Méndez, N. A. (2018) The contested public space of the *tianguis* street markets of Mexico City. In González, S (Ed.): *Contested Markets Contested Cities. Gentrification and urban justice in retail spaces*, London: Routledge, pp. 72 – 85.** The author's version is broadly the same as the published one although it may have minor typographical and bibliographical errors, and it lacks any images. The final published version can be purchased [here](#).

Another trader says that they have limited experience of assemblies:

They are not interested in having them often, or if they do they are for those in the know because they do not advertise them. When a delegate who was the son of the founder leader was appointed a meeting was called but only those closest to the leader went, they passed the motion and he became elected. They have never invited me to a meeting, there is a lot of secrecy, I imagine that if they have an open meeting to which everyone is invited their situation will become more difficult because everyone will begin to talk to one another and concerns will begin to be raised and they want to keep absolute control.

(Ignacio, 46 years old, clothes seller, 11/02/2009)

The *tianguis'* organisations are characterised mostly by a vertical structure in which authority rests with the leader as legal representative and is accepted by the members, because the leader monopolises the distribution of space and establishes relations with the government authorities. The delegate has the authority that the leader grants them.

Leaders operate as the experts of the organisations because they know how to maintain the cohesion of the group, thanks to the skills they have acquired through daily practice and where leadership is often inherited from parents. This capital guarantees control over trade on public streets and the possibilities of negotiation with the government.

In practice the vertical structure works well for the different agents. Members achieve some stability in the occupation of public space, while the leader maintains ties with the political sphere. For their part leaders gain economic and political capital that guarantees the existence of the organization.

This is the author's accepted manuscript version of a chapter that has been later published as **Gómez Méndez, N. A. (2018) The contested public space of the *tianguis* street markets of Mexico City. In González, S (Ed.): *Contested Markets Contested Cities. Gentrification and urban justice in retail spaces*, London: Routledge, pp. 72 – 85.** The author's version is broadly the same as the published one although it may have minor typographical and bibliographical errors, and it lacks any images. The final published version can be purchased [here](#).

The organisational form of the *tianguis* demonstrates how power relations are established between actors with widely divergent rationales but who coincide on the need to maintain or increase certain forms of capital. The trader leaders and government officials are able to use their political and economic capital to effectively buy, and hence to privatise, public space in Mexico City, although the law does not permit it.

It has been suggested that traders on public streets are strategic actors who learn to adapt to the rules of the game and even resist conflicts with the authorities. However, their scope of action is restricted by economic necessity, which in most cases brings them out to work on the streets with whatever consequences that this has on their working conditions. Additionally, the occupation of public space does not seem to have sufficient political support by those who should regulate it. In the end control over the occupation of the streets by a few, with complicit government authorities, is a very profitable business.

Therefore despite the fact that street trading allows coexistence and an availability of products, it is necessary to highlight the precarious nature of this occupation and the urgent need to discuss how to make trade on public streets a dignified activity that is part of multiple ways of inhabiting the city. As one trader states:

It is not because we like working on the street, not because we want to be superior to someone, but because the same need brings us out here [...] those who have other economic possibilities would not sell things on the street, they would go after a stable job; the most viable option for those of us who don't is the street.

(Ricardo, 32 years old, seller of pre-prepared pizza, 05/04/2006)

This is the author's accepted manuscript version of a chapter that has been later published as **Gómez Méndez, N. A. (2018) The contested public space of the *tianguis* street markets of Mexico City. In González, S (Ed.): *Contested Markets Contested Cities. Gentrification and urban justice in retail spaces*, London: Routledge, pp. 72 – 85.** The author's version is broadly the same as the published one although it may have minor typographical and bibliographical errors, and it lacks any images. The final published version can be purchased [here](#).

Conclusions

This research shows the importance and social and academic richness of an occupation that for many people, not only in Mexico City but in many other cities in the world, is part of everyday life. This way of living is part of our 'everyday' and is symbolic of how public space can be appropriated and inhabited.

Commerce in public streets, particularly in the *tianguis*, shows that these streets are not just places where people trade and satisfy their needs, but also spaces for encounter, of coexistence and of political struggle. They are spaces that for many yield financial resources which allow their survival and for some, like the leaders of the organisations, offer possibilities to join the political arena with the construction of political and social actors who use and monopolise the public space at the expense of all citizens.

Another key aspect is the relationship of the legal framework governing the *tianguis* which defines the rules on how to occupy public space and is the link between citizens and the state. The way in which this framework is applied and negotiated demonstrates the absence of adequate laws for the current conditions of street trading, as a source of work and as an activity that uses the space for private purposes. The inefficient legal framework along with a tolerance of its weak implementation contribute to the power of organisations and their leaders and to the discretion practiced by officials and leaders to occupy the public space of Mexico City.

The formation of organisations starts from the basis that it is only possible to achieve collective goals in relations of power, i.e. only in the recognition, although not necessarily the understanding, of the interdependence of the often divergent needs and interests. The field of the organisations that contest public space is a structure of forces characterised by conflict and negotiation between the agents involved. Agents seek to adapt to the structural conditions

This is the author's accepted manuscript version of a chapter that has been later published as **Gómez Méndez, N. A. (2018) The contested public space of the *tianguis* street markets of Mexico City. In González, S (Ed.): *Contested Markets Contested Cities. Gentrification and urban justice in retail spaces*, London: Routledge, pp. 72 – 85.** The author's version is broadly the same as the published one although it may have minor typographical and bibliographical errors, and it lacks any images. The final published version can be purchased [here](#).

with the types of capital that each one has; in this case, street trader leaders play with their knowledge of the potential for negotiation and conflict with state institutions.

The various definitions and expressions of trade that take place in the streets invite a reflection on the multiple uses of public space and the power relations that are woven into the struggle for the monopoly of its use and distribution. Taking into account previous research one of the aspects that hinders the understanding of this problem is precisely the complexity of social networks that are involved in trade on the public street.

In these networks, links with agents that make up the political arena, together with the existence of informality and illegality of what is traded on the street, generate a type of 'veil of ignorance' on the part of the officials, leaders of organisations and their associates. This equates to not knowing how many people are involved, who they are and how they occupy the public space and has been useful for the Mexican political system. Through a complex network of complicities, discretionary uses of the law and political clientelism with government authorities, including that of Mexico City and its various municipalities, there is an opportunity for the negotiation of political and economic power between leaders of the organisations and those in power, because the traders in public space can generally be converted into votes at election time. This 'ignorance' has prevented the development of public policies and actions relevant to regulation and even improvement of working conditions for those making a living from trading on the city's streets, and has left unresolved the possibility of guaranteeing basic rights for citizens, to work, to mobility and the right to the city.

This is the author's accepted manuscript version of a chapter that has been later published as **Gómez Méndez, N. A. (2018) The contested public space of the *tianguis* street markets of Mexico City. In González, S (Ed.): *Contested Markets Contested Cities. Gentrification and urban justice in retail spaces*, London: Routledge, pp. 72 – 85.** The author's version is broadly the same as the published one although it may have minor typographical and bibliographical errors, and it lacks any images. The final published version can be purchased [here](#).

References

Asamblea Legislativa del Distrito Federal (2010). *Mesa de trabajo de la Comisión de Abasto y Distribución de Alimentos*. Available at: <http://www.aldf.gob.mx/archivo-312054550182d3e999cee61fb34fc18e.pdf>

Bourdieu, P. (1999). Efectos de lugar. In Bourdieu, P. (Ed) *La miseria del mundo*. Argentina: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 119-124.

Bourdieu, P. and Wacquant, L. (2005). *Una invitación a la sociología reflexiva*. Argentina: Siglo XXI Editores.

Bromley, R. (2000). Street vending and public policy: a global review. *International Journal of Sociology and Social Policy*. 20(1-2), 1-28.

CONASAMI (n.d). Comisión Nacional de los Salarios Mínimos. Available from: <https://www.gob.mx/conasami>

Cross, J. C. and Morales, A. (2007). Introduction: Locating street markets in the modern/postmodern world. In: Cross, J. C. and Morales, A. (Eds.) *Street entrepreneurs. People, place and politics in local and global perspective*, Abingdon: Routledge, 1-21

Cross, J. C. (1998). *Informal politics. Street vendors and the State in Mexico City*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Dirección de Abasto, Comercio y Distribución (2004). *Proyecto de Normas para la Operación de Tianguis en el D.F.* Available from: http://www.dgacd.df.gob.mx/normatividad/proyectos/normas_tianguis.html

Dirección de Abasto, Comercio y Distribución. (2006). Directorio de Tianguis. Available from: <http://www.dgacd.df.gob.mx/comercial/canales/tian.pdf>

This is the author's accepted manuscript version of a chapter that has been later published as **Gómez Méndez, N. A. (2018) The contested public space of the tianguis street markets of Mexico City. In González, S (Ed.): *Contested Markets Contested Cities. Gentrification and urban justice in retail spaces*, London: Routledge, pp. 72 – 85.** The author's version is broadly the same as the published one although it may have minor typographical and bibliographical errors, and it lacks any images. The final published version can be purchased [here](#).

Gómez, L. (2011). Busca Sedeco modernizar sistemas de abasto en el DF. *La Jornada*, 24 February. Available from: <http://www.jornada.unam.mx/ultimas/2011/02/24/busca-sedeco-modernizar-sistemas-de-abasto-en-el-df/>

Hiernaux, D. (2013). Tensiones socavadas y conflictos abiertos en los centros históricos: imaginarios en conflicto sobre la plaza de Santo Domingo, Ciudad de México. In: Ramírez, P. (coord.) *Las disputas por la ciudad. Espacio social y espacio público en contextos urbanos de Latinoamérica y Europa*. México: Miguel Ángel Porrúa, 177-198.

Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Geografía. (2011). Censo de Población y Vivienda, 2010. México: Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Geografía.

Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Geografía. 2011. Sistema Nacional de Clasificación de Ocupaciones, SINCO. México: Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Geografía. Available from: http://snieg.mx/contenidos/espanol/normatividad/normastecnicas/SINCO_2011.pdf

Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Geografía. (2013). Informalidad laboral. Presentación técnica. México: Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Geografía. Available from: http://www.inegi.org.mx/est/contenidos/proyectos/encuestas/hogares/regulares/enoe/doc/informalidad_final.zip

Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Geografía. (2016). Encuesta Nacional de Ocupación y Empleo. Consulta interactiva de datos. México: Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Geografía. Available from: http://www.inegi.org.mx/Sistemas/Olap/Proyectos/bd/encuestas/hogares/enoe/2010_PE_ED15/po.asp?s=est&proy=enoe_pe_ed15_po&p=enoe_pe_ed15

Martínez, A. (1985). De la metáfora al mito: la visión de las crónicas sobre el tianguis prehispánico. *Historia Mexicana*. 34(4), 685-700.

This is the author's accepted manuscript version of a chapter that has been later published as **Gómez Méndez, N. A. (2018) The contested public space of the *tianguis* street markets of Mexico City. In González, S (Ed.): *Contested Markets Contested Cities. Gentrification and urban justice in retail spaces*, London: Routledge, pp. 72 – 85.** The author's version is broadly the same as the published one although it may have minor typographical and bibliographical errors, and it lacks any images. The final published version can be purchased [here](#).

Morales, A. and Kettles, G. (2009). Zoning for public markets and street vendors. *Zoning Practice. Practice Public Markets*. Issue n.2, 2-7. Chicago: American Planning Association.

Available from:

<http://urpl.wisc.edu/sites/urpl.wisc.edu/files/people/morales/ZPfeb09.pdf>

Ramírez, P. (2013). El resurgimiento de los espacios públicos en la Ciudad de México. Diferencias y conflictos por el derecho al lugar. In: Ramírez, P. (coord.) *Las disputas por la ciudad. Espacio social y espacio público en contextos urbanos de Latinoamérica y Europa*. México: Miguel Ángel Porrúa, 287- 314.

Secretaría de Desarrollo Económico de la Ciudad de México (SEDECO). 2014. Reporte Económico 2014. Available from:

<http://reporteeconomico.sedecodf.gob.mx/index.php/site/main/192>

Sennet, R. (1978). *El declive del hombre público*. Barcelona: Anagrama.

Sethuraman, S.V. (1998). *Gender, informality and poverty: a global review*. Geneva: World Bank and WIEGO. Available from:

[http://www.eif.gov.cy/mlsi/dl/genderequality.nsf/0/12D2A22FAC60DA74C22579A6002D950A/\\$file/gender_informality_and_poverty%20\(2\).pdf](http://www.eif.gov.cy/mlsi/dl/genderequality.nsf/0/12D2A22FAC60DA74C22579A6002D950A/$file/gender_informality_and_poverty%20(2).pdf)

¹ Original in Spanish, translated by Neil Turnbull.

² This has precedence dating back to the 1950s and Ernesto P. Uruchurtu's term as Mayor of the Federal District (Mexico City) (1952-1966) (Cross, 1998).

This is the author's accepted manuscript version of a chapter that has been later published as **Gómez Méndez, N. A. (2018) The contested public space of the *tianguis* street markets of Mexico City. In González, S (Ed.): *Contested Markets Contested Cities. Gentrification and urban justice in retail spaces*, London: Routledge, pp. 72 – 85.** The author's version is broadly the same as the published one although it may have minor typographical and bibliographical errors, and it lacks any images. The final published version can be purchased [here](#).

³ Delegates are appointed by the leaders, who are generally the traders from the same *tianguis*. They are often children, friends or cronies of the leader.

⁴ Some traders indicated that there was a relatively new problem: groups related to organised crime extorting the payment of fees from leaders of organisations under the guise of 'security' that these groups say they provide. In fact these groups of organised criminals charge the money to ensure they do not 'disturb' traders and customers.