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Gourmet markets as a commercial gentrification model: The cases of Mexico City and Madrid

Luis Alberto Salinas Arreortua and Luz de Lourdes Cordero Gómez del Campo

Introduction

This chapter argues that some of the urban transformations undergone by Madrid and Mexico City are related to the substitution of a wealthier sector of the population for another that has less purchasing power, the result being the reconfiguration of space through investment and the transformation of consumption practices. These modifications occur within an urban neoliberal context in which cities have to create the proper conditions to attract private investors, thus generating a constant urban competitiveness. While studies on this gentrification process are mostly focused on the relationship between the transformations undergone by residential spaces and the origins of such a concept, there has been little research on commercial gentrification (though see for example González and Waley, 2013).

Commercial gentrification can be understood as a process in which commercial activity is transformed in order to meet the demands of higher-income groups; such a process involves the displacement of some traders and/or products (Salinas, 2016). In other words, the traditional offer of markets is substituted by the new consumption demands of what Peterson and Kern (1996) call cultural omnivores. These transformations are reflected in the emergence of shopping centres and malls and the restructuring of spaces that focus on traditional commercial activity processes which can lead to the displacement of businesses, traders and/or products in an attempt to create new options to satisfy the demands of higher-income groups.

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Markets are part of these traditional commercial spaces that are experiencing transformations to catch up with new the consumption demands described above. Studies that have followed the transformation of markets since the 1990s have been primarily focused on the emergence of supermarkets and on the impact of this process on the decline of traditional markets, which have to compete with these new businesses. There are few studies on the transformation of markets from a commercial gentrification perspective; however, research conducted by González and Waley (2013), who focus on Kirkgate Market in Leeds, England, and Boldrini and Malizia (2014), who focus on the Abasto and Norte markets in Greater San Miguel de Tucuman, Argentina, stand out, analysing as they do the development and implementation of a market model targeted at higher-income groups, especially in the case of *gourmet* markets. Gourmet markets are commercial spaces targeted at casual visitors and tourists rather than local consumers; these markets are also intended to attract a segment of the richest population, which is willing to pay a premium price for having a new 'experience'. These spaces are designed to meet leisure, recreation and selective consumption needs through the adoption of new culinary trends that value healthy, organic and traditional craft production and the provision of 'unique', 'authentic' and 'exotic' foods whose labels are intended to evoke interesting and remote places.

The purpose of this paper is to broaden and stimulate the debate on the emergence of gourmet markets around the globe as the result of the success of markets such as Mercado La Boquería (Barcelona), Mercado de San Miguel (Madrid) and Borough Market (London). By using commercial gentrification as an explanatory framework, it is possible to address the transformation of these markets from a space-based class restructuring perspective.

This chapter is divided into four segments. The first section discusses how the reproduction of gourmet markets can be considered as part of a class process if such a model is intended to attract higher-income and better-educated groups while ignoring

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most of the population. The second segment of this paper proposes that the reproduction of gourmet markets is part of an urban competitiveness strategy focused on the attraction of investors and the generation of spaces targeted at residents and tourists with high purchasing power. The third section discusses the specific characteristics of the reproduction of the 'gourmet' model by analysing the cases of Mexico City and Madrid; this analysis is further developed in the fourth section.

This chapter is based on an exhaustive revision of previous research on gourmet markets and new consumption practices, with an emphasis on cultural omnivorousness. Following this, information released by different public entities such as the Department of Economic Development in Mexico City (through its Protection and Promotion Policy for Public Markets, 2013-2018) and the City Council of Madrid (through its Innovation Plan 2003) was used to study the reproduction of a gourmet market model in Mexico City and Madrid. This exercise also involved the compilation of media reports, particularly from written and electronic sources. Besides, all information collected was complemented with interviews with different key actors, especially with traders from public markets.

Gourmet Markets: are they part of a class-based process?

The success achieved by gourmet markets such as Mercado de San Miguel (Madrid), and Borough Market (London), has provoked an interest to replicate them in different makers around the globe. There are different cities that offer gourmet, craft or organic markets as tourist attractions. This is the case in San Francisco, USA, where one of its main markets, Ferry Building Marketplace, has forged a strong alliance with local producers of artisan foods (Ferry Building Marketplace, 2016); in Valencia, Spain, where Mercat Central does not only offer fresh local products, but also represents a cultural and tourist attraction for foreign visitors and local residents alike (Mercat Central de Valencia, 2012); and in Genoa, Italy, where the Mercato Orientale is

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promoted as a shopping centre that is visited by local users and tourists from over 75 different countries (Mercato Orientale di Genova, 2015). This trend is part of a global process in which highly-educated consumers with high purchasing power have expanded their cultural and culinary experiences in order to consume 'authentic' and 'exotic' products labelled as 'natural', 'organic', 'simple', 'traditional', 'artisan-made' or 'locally produced'; these users want to live a gourmet experience in their local communities and also include this activity in their preferred holiday destinations. These new preferences of consumers have been studied by authors such as Peterson and Kern (1996), who refer to such a phenomenon as *omnivorousness*. This concept describes the existence of 'a segment of the population from western countries that implements and makes choices from a wider option of cultural forms than those available in the past, thus reflecting new values associated with tolerance and weakening the concept of snobbism' (Warde et al., 2007, p. 143). For cultural omnivores, current preferences and traditional values, such as those associated with the French haute cuisine, are no longer the sole references of this trend. This has led to an increase in the provision of products elaborated in different cultural contexts in order to meet the needs of an emergent market, the result being the proliferation of gourmet markets.

However, these new preferences may not be strictly related to the decline in snobbishness, as is claimed by Warde, et. al. (2007), but to a modification in the consumption patterns of elite users. According to Hyde (2014), class distinction and the search for status determine the behaviour of cultural omnivores. In this line, Johnston and Baumann (2007) point out that the access to these new cultural preferences depends on the economic and cultural capital of individuals; this means that the new culinary offer is exclusively targeted at the upper-middle and upper classes, generating the same exclusionary patterns that prevailed when French *haute cuisine* was the only existing gourmet trend.

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When visiting gourmet markets, consumers are able to share that 'authentic' and 'exotic' experience with individuals in other parts of the globe, such as Madrid or London, who are also enjoying these new preferences and culinary habits that connect them with a social class that understands the cultural importance of certain foods and products. These consumers, through social networking channels such as Instagram or Snapchat and travel or lifestyle media, actively promote the exotic nature of these products by labelling them as interesting or unusual and relating them to foreign places and customs or adding adjectives like extravagant, scarce, hard to find and rare. All these features are used to sell the items offered at gourmet markets which, in turn, promote this type of consumption that has been labelled as the 'gourmet market model'. Within this context in our own research we are interested in answering the following questions: what lies behind the 'reproduction' of a gourmet market model? Why do the transformations undergone by traditional markets aim at replicating the aforementioned market models? How is this transformation implemented in different contexts? These questions can be addressed by examining the experiences of cities such as Mexico City and Madrid.

Gourmet Markets and the Competitive Advantage of Cities

During the second half of the twentieth century, the central areas of the main European cities began to experience a gentrification process. Gaja (2001) refers to that phenomenon as the recovery of historic sites, which can be traced back to the late 1960s. This process involved the 'recovery' of historic and/or symbolic places, such as public markets. For instance, the Mercado de San Miguel (Madrid) is located in the space once occupied by the church of San Miguel de Octoes, which stood there from the eighteenth century until 1790, when it was partially destroyed by a fire and then torn down by order of King Joseph Bonaparte (Anasagasti, 1916). This area, which was then used as a public square, contained a market that offered perishable products. By the end of the nineteenth century, and according to the then-new Tourist Plan, this space was used to build an indoor market made of iron that drew inspiration from markets such as

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Los Mostenses and La Cebada, both built in 1875. The new Mercado de San Miguel, which was made of iron and glass, was completed in 1916 (Madrid Histórico, 2003). This market operated successfully until the 1980s when it was forced out of business for ten years as the result of the emergence of supermarkets. In 1999, the market was modernized thanks to resources provided by local traders, the European Union and the Regional government of Madrid; in 2000 it was declared a national heritage monument with the highest protection levels. However, it was not until 2003 that a group of private investors purchased this space and transformed it into a gourmet market. The new establishment reopened in 2009 and became an attraction for tourists and local residents (Mercado de San Miguel, 2013). This market model has been replicated in different cities such as Mexico City and opened its first franchise in the city of Miami in 2015 (La Feria Mercado de San Miguel, 2014).

Today, cities compete with each other to attract new inhabitants and tourists with high purchasing power. They are focused on the development of consumption-related competitive advantages which transform local markets into 'major tourist attractions' (Medina and Álvarez, 2007, p.195). In this sense, the gourmetization of the urban offer in restaurants, markets or food trucks is a response to such a phenomenon.

Against this competitive backdrop, Richard Florida (2003) has suggested that cities should attract the *creative class*, which is the driving force for regional economic development. Florida points out that highly-educated people are attracted by inclusionary places that embrace diversity. Since the 'creative class' is composed of highly-educated people, cities should attract individuals holding higher education degrees. An economically vibrant and internationally competitive city promotes values such as diversity, tolerance, inclusion and cultural enlargement. Competitive cities – focused on promoting themselves to attract investors, residents and tourists – are spaces that offer different, varied, creative, inclusionary, authentic and exotic options for

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capital reproduction. Such a discourse is also found in the reproduction of gourmet market models.

Since gourmet markets are an important component of the commercial and cultural activities to be offered by creative cities, authorities may modify or create new public policies to support the transformation of traditional markets. This promotes an 'an urban imaginary that regards the consumption of gourmet food as an essential component within the creation of an exciting urban experience' (Martin, 2014, p.1880). However, this discourse – which is based on concepts like creativity, inclusion, tolerance and diversity – is only addressed to certain segments of the population. In her paper 'Food Fight' (2014), Nina Martín describes the contrasting experience of immigrants (mostly Mexican), street vendors and Food Truck chefs, in which the latter were able to modify the restrictive policies governing street vending activities in the city of Chicago, thus achieving business success. It seems that the implementation of inclusionary and tolerance-oriented policies is only intended to favour some segments of the population that receive the support of politicians, provided they offer a wider array of options to cultural omnivores.

The promotion of cities also involves the promotion of gourmet markets, which are transformed in order to attract cultural omnivores – either local residents or tourists – by offering an experience associated with concepts such as diversity and authenticity. This is why successful gourmet market models such as Borough Market (London), Mercado de San Miguel (Madrid) or Mercado de La Boquería (Barcelona) –regarded as some of the best markets in the world according to magazines and specialized websites such as Travel and Leisure, The Daily Meal, CNN and Travel Channel– are being replicated in different cities around the globe. These new markets are not only focused on selling the same products offered by their original counterparts, but also on replicating the way these goods are displayed and traded. The gourmet market model has become an export product.

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In his discussion of the visual culture observed at Borough Market (London), Coles (2014) suggests that this place aims at creating an experience based on the production of cultural material through its transformation into a visual economy since 'Borough Market has been designed to look and feel 'market-y'. The different stalls, signage and other visual images generate geographical and imaginary associations with the origins of food and how it should be consumed' (Coles, 2014, p. 520). In the words of this author, Borough Market is a real 'spectacle'. The same approach may be applied to Mercado de San Miguel (Madrid), which has become a tourist attraction that – set within a natural and unique context – offers a particular experience associated with authentic and exotic elements by using local, regional or remote geographical references. This has led to a growing interest in importing and reproducing this model since gourmet markets are capable of increasing the culinary options of competitive cities.

However, the local characteristics of markets and their political and economic contexts affect the reproduction of gourmet market models, which is often only partially achieved. Hence, rather than the full implementation of a model, what we find is that some markets offer gourmet products;; in other words, rather than the adoption of a market model we see a trend for the gourmetization of consumption.

The Reproduction of Gourmet Market Models

In recent years, there has been a steep increase in the import/export of urban policies labelled as successful– including gourmet market models – between cities and countries. The replication of urban policies considered successful such as those of Vancouver, New York or Barcelona in different cities of Europe, Asia and Latin America has given rise to the emergence of an industry of import/export of urban policies from city to city.

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González (2011) refers to this practice as 'urban policy tourism' in an attempt to draw a parallel with traditional tourism in the sense that policy tourism is also based on networks that host visitors in terms of itinerary planning and the provision of experts to inform and guide them through the city. In this sense, both investors and public officials are able to experience the success stories of these places – which have been disseminated by the media, specialized literature, documents, social networks, pictures and exhibitions – *before* implementing them in their respective cities (González, 2011).

However, it should be noted that there is no automatic association between the formulation-implementation and implementation of such policies. In other words, local characteristics (political, economic and social conditions) and the transformations undergone by these policies during import-reproduction processes should be taken into consideration (Peck and Theodore, 2010), since what is successful in one place might not work in another. Such is the case of Mexico City, where private gourmet investors and the local authorities in charge of the administration of public markets in the municipality of Álvaro Obregón travelled to Madrid and expressed interest in reproducing the successful Mercado de San Miguel model without considering the feasibility of its implementation in a completely different economic, political and social environment. In Barcelona, the Institute of Municipal Markets has launched a department of international relations in an attempt to assist the growing number of foreign urban policy-makers and politicians who want to understand the so-called 'Barcelona market model' (Instituto Municipal de Mercados de Barcelona, n.d.).

Ward (2006) points out that imported policies are implemented in real places and require specific strategies in order to succeed. At least this is the result that authorities and private interests hope when they import a 'market model'; However, a given solution may not work in different scenarios. This means that the successful conversion of these initiatives requires more effort than the importation of a strategically modified model that may not ensure the expected outcome. As McCann (2011) suggests, the differential

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access to resources determines the success of each policy, so there is a need to understand the contexts in which they are reproduced, transferred and adopted.

The application of a 'gourmet market' model through the importation of public policies that have worked in one place does not ensure a positive outcome, since they have not been adapted or developed to operate within a given local context; therefore, rather than being imported just because of their success, the implementation of these models should include the analysis of positive and negative impacts as well as a feasibility study.

Gourmet Market Models in Mexico City and Madrid

According to data released by the Secretariat of Economic Development, there are 329 public markets containing more than 70,000 businesses in Mexico City (2013). These markets have witnessed the migration of customers to different outlets such as supermarkets. This phenomenon and the lack of investment in infrastructure and the provision of services have led to 'a significant decline in economic activity and visitor numbers' according to the local economic development agency of Mexico City (Secretaria de Desarrollo Económico Gobierno de la Ciudad de México, 2013 p. 4).

Public markets are an emblematic component of the popular economy in Mexico City, generating 200,000 jobs (Protection and Promotion Policy for Public Markets in Mexico City, 2013-2018, p. 4). This is why the government of Mexico City has listed these markets as 'an economic, urban and cultural priority' (ibid, p. 4) and developed protection and promotion policies that include a modest remodelling budget to attract old and new customers.

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As some mayors and politicians express explicitly, these measures aim to replicate successful foreign models such as Borough Market (London) or Mercado San Miguel (Madrid), implementing the gourmet market concept. According to Leonel Luna, Mayor of the municipality of Álvaro Obregón, the redevelopment of public markets is intended to offer refined products and modernize these spaces, not only through physical renovation, but also through the installation of ATMs and extended service hours. This discourse is based on the premise that there is a need to address the deterioration and decline in the economic activity of these markets as the result of the emergence of supermarkets.

With a budget of USD 500,000–900,000, the City Council of Álvaro Obregón –in conjunction with two private universities (Iberoamericana and Monterrey Tech) – will conduct research on the situation of its 14 markets, which will be then redeveloped accordingly (Montes, 2014). The City Council of Álvaro Obregón is intended to reproduce the gourmet model through the renovation of the Mercado Melchor Muzquiz (Montes, 2014). According to City Council officials, the intervention of Mercado Melchor Muzquiz –commonly known as Mercado de San Ángel and located in an exclusive and tourist area – will serve as a pilot project for the implementation of the gourmet model. Built in 1958, this space was recently renovated as part of the Program for the Improvement of Public Markets. In 2014, a City Council official said that Mercado Melchor Muzquiz –which offers a type of architecture and products that may fall within the gourmet category – ‘may be transformed into an historic, tourist and gourmet centre while yet retaining its nature in a space similar to that of Mercado de San Miguel, Spain’ (Montes, 2014). Despite these intentions, it is not clear whether or not Mercado de San Ángel will become a gourmet market. What is apparent, though, is the intention of this market to offer ‘different’ and ‘exotic’ products to attract higher-income groups.

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In the case of Mexico City, gourmet markets emerged in 2014 after the opening of Mercado Roma, which is located in the neighbourhood of the same name. However, unlike Borough Market –which has been operating for more than 200 years– the space used by Mercado Roma had to be modified, since it was not initially designed to house a market; it is located in a former dance bar that stood there for more than four decades.

Shortly after the opening of Mercado Roma, Mexico City witnessed the inauguration of Mercado del Carmen, the second 'gourmet market'. Located in the neighbourhood of San Ángel, this market is housed in a colonial-era building that was formerly used as an art gallery. Recently, the neighbourhood Colonia Polanco saw the opening of La Morera, a gastronomical centre located at the intersection of Palmas and Mazaryk Streets. Despite not being labelled as a market, this centre is also intended to replicate the gourmet market model. As of today, the new gourmet markets inaugurated in Mexico City are located in spaces that were not designed to house such an activity: Milán 44, Casa Quimera, Mercado Moliere and Mercado Gourmet Samara.

These examples show that, rather than observing the transformation of traditional markets into gourmet markets, there is an emergence of consumption spaces that are being labelled as gourmet markets in order to attract middle and higher income groups. The aspiration of becoming a gourmet market is based on the replication of consumption spaces regarded as successful by the business sector, such as the case of Mercado San Miguel (Madrid). This is explained by one of the founders of La Morera, 'the idea started during a visit to Madrid. The old Mercado de San Miguel was unrecognizable because of its modernized structure and wide array of culinary options' (Forbes Staff, 2015). According to its founders, La Morera was created by drawing inspiration from Mercado de San Miguel.

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There are two trends associated with the generation of the so-called gourmet consumption spaces in Mexico City. On the one hand there is the proposal of entrepreneurs, who focus on the 'staging' of markets. This leads to the generation of the 'gourmet market' concept, which is intended to attract consumers with sophisticated tastes and high purchasing power. These spaces are promoted as markets but they are not regarded as such. Despite lacking the history and the social and economic networks of their traditional counterparts, they pretend they have all these features and operate in spaces that were not designed to house markets; hence the word 'staging'. On the other hand, local governments are focused on transforming traditional markets into gourmet markets; however, the intervention in Mercado de San Ángel has failed to achieve that objective.

Likewise, it is also possible to identify two trends in Spain; On the one hand, local governments aim to renovate and transform municipal markets in order to address the deterioration and decline in economic activity generated by the emergence of supermarkets and new consumption habits and on the other, there are the conditions for the generation of recreational spaces through the concept of the gourmet market and situations that favour the emergence of staged markets.

Apart from addressing their deterioration and decline, these strategies are also intended to transform traditional markets into gourmet-based markets. Inspired by the experience of Mercado San Antón and Mercado de San Miguel (Madrid), Iñigo de la Serna – Mayor of Santander (a city in northern Spain) – is planning to turn the city's Mercado de Puertochico into a recreational and tourist area, which is also intended to become a 'landmark and an energizing force for the neighbourhood' (Lemaur, 2013). The City Council of Santander has allocated 310,000 Euros for the renovation of the public square that surrounds the market; this project also includes the restoration of the inner section of Mercado de Puertochico, which is expected to be completed by 2018.

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In the case of Madrid, municipal markets are expected to meet the new consumption demands through the implementation of different public programmes. In this sense, the Innovation Plan 2003 suggested that municipal markets were showing signs of decline and obsolescence in relation to the new commercial trends. This situation, in which municipal markets were regarded as obsolete, took place before the implementation of further transformations.

The transformation of Mercado San Antón, located in central Madrid, was preceded by the imposition of a discourse based on the deterioration of this market (Salinas, 2016; see also García et al, this book). The new Mercado San Antón included the construction of a tasting area that was not regulated by the then-current legislation; such an initiative was made legal once the inauguration process was over. These amendments show how commercial transformations respond to the emergence of new consumption practices; tasting areas for tourists, spaces for the sale of gourmet products, bars and cafeterias are built in commercial areas targeted to individuals with high cultural and economic capital who prioritize the use of these sites and services over the acquisition of basic food. This is an example of the reproduction of a leisure area that offers 'authentic' options within a marketing context. Meanwhile, the Mercado Los Mostenses, also in a central location, is intended to be transformed, according to the president of Los Mostenses Traders' Association, into 'a market of the twenty-first century' by shedding its traditional, old-fashioned image (Salinas, 2016; but see also García et al, this book for a detailed analysis of this market).

On the other hand, the staging of gourmet markets, as in the case of Mercado Roma in Mexico City, is also being replicated in Spanish cities. In 2012, Madrid saw the opening of La Isabela, which, labelled as a gourmet market, reproduces the experience of Mercado San Antón. In 2015, Puerta Cinegia Gastronómica was inaugurated in the city of Zaragoza; according to its spokesman, José María Ortiz, this market took inspiration from Mercado San Antón (Madrid) since this is the city that witnessed the emergence of

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these spaces that combine food, gastronomy and recreation. 'Though it emerged in Madrid, the origins of this trend can be said to be linked to Mercado de La Boquería in Barcelona' (Puerta Cinegia Gastronómica, 2015).

In Madrid, Mercado de San Miguel – the first of its kind in the city – and the consolidation of Mercado San Antón have served as inspiration for the creation of gourmet markets according to two trends: the transformation of municipal markets and the staging of markets. Some examples of the first case are Mercado Barceló – which is composed of a market, a sports centre and a library – and Mercado de Chamartín – which refers to itself as an 'authentic gourmet market' and defines gourmet markets as: 'those that offer select and exclusive products so that the authentic connoisseurs will find them as perfect as their places of origin, where they are raised, cultivated and collected' (Mercado de Chamartín, 2015).

As for staging markets, they are easily reproduced in places such as Mercado de San Idelfonso, which promotes itself in their website with the slogan 'we are not just another market' (Mercado de San Idelfonso, n.d.) and adopting a street vending approach as in the case of London and New York-based markets. This type of market is also used to launch books and commercial products, hold work meetings, courses, exhibitions, projections, filming and photographic sessions, cooking shows, etc. Another case is that of *Platea Madrid*; located in the former Carlos III cinema and defined as a space for gastronomic recreation, this market had to be renovated in order to house this new type of activity.

The transformation of municipal markets and the staging of recreational and consumption spaces characterize the commercial changes that take place in Madrid. These processes are intended to meet the unique and exotic culinary demands of middle- and higher- income users.

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Conclusions

The gourmet market model is being replicated as part of a trend known as the gourmetization of consumption and as part of an urban neoliberal business strategy designed to meet the new culinary preferences of foreign and local cultural omnivores. As a result, these spaces cannot be accessed by large segments of the population since they are not able to afford gourmet products.

In this sense, traditional markets aim at becoming gourmet markets within a context of urban competitiveness. This has allowed cities to develop consumption-related competitive advantages and emerge as major tourist attractions. The gourmetization of consumption in restaurants, markets or food trucks is a response to such a phenomenon.

In Mexico City, we do not find real evidence from local authorities of the import and reproduction of gourmet market models such as those recognised internationally –ñ there is an intention in their discourses but this is not followed up.. However, though far from replicating such a model, it is possible to observe a gourmetization of consumption habits. Aside from the public authorities , private initiatives have been focused on the staging of urban spaces – which are promoted as markets– in an attempt to meet the gourmet demands of higher-income users. As of today, none of these spaces has been able to replace traditional markets.

Likewise, the Mercado de San Miguel has served as an inspiration for the transformation of other municipal markets such as San Antón. There are also spaces that, as in the case of Mexico City, have been modified to resemble a gourmet market; these spaces are intended for recreation and selective consumption, with the trade of

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basic food being relegated to a secondary role. These commercial markets are run by higher-income groups and targeted to higher-income groups.

In both cities, imported gourmet models have met with different degrees of success, from failed attempts – such as the Mercado Melchor Muzquiz (Mexico City) – to the staging of markets in places that were not intended to house this type of activity –the Mercado Roma (Mexico City) and the Mercado San Idelfonso (Madrid). However, both cases aim at achieving the gourmetization of consumption practices targeted to higher-income groups.

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