Popular infrastructural politics:

Trader organisation and public markets in Mexico City

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Submitted in accordance with the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

The University of Leeds

School of Geography

September 2020

The candidate confirms that the work submitted is his own and that appropriate credit has been given where reference has been made to the work of others.

Acknowledgements

Thank you to my participants in the public markets and trader organisations of Mexico City. This thesis would not be what it is today without your support. Thank you for sharing with me your stories and for letting me discover the fascinating places where you do politics. I have learned a lot through this research and I hope this thesis helps to recognise your endless efforts to preserve the markets.

I would like to thank Dr Sara Gonzalez and Prof David Bell for their work as supervisors. Thank you for your support, guidance, critical comments, and for always encouraging me to push the boundaries. I am very grateful to you for the time and energy you spent reading and commenting on my work. It has been a great experience to work with you.

I would also like to thank the Consejo Nacional de Ciencia y Tecnología (CONACyT) for providing me with funding to complete this doctoral programme through the scholarship under register number CVU 418972. Thanks must also go to the School of Geography at the University of Leeds and its very supportive staff. The financial support I received from the School of Geography was crucial to making of this PhD a very enriching academic experience.

Special thanks to Dr Paul Waley and Dr Michael Janoschka for their encouragement and invaluable comments, particularly in the early stages of my research. Many thanks to Dr Angela Giglia for her generosity. It was a great coincidence to find each other in the field. Thanks also to Dr Martin Purvis for giving me the amazing opportunity to teach four years in a row the Political and Development Geographies seminars. It was a challenging but very fulfilling experience.

I would like to say a special thank you to Yi Min, Marie, Taco, Claudio, Sungje, Oguzhan, Nikée, Antonio, Samadhi, Asa, Tim, Wanyun, Elliot, Rakesh, Míša, Steph, and Marie-Avril. Thank you for making Leeds a wonderful place to live in. Thank you to Laila, Iraide, Violeta, Johaan, Paola, Eduardo, and Khalil too, for always being there, up for a chat or a coffee.

I could not have embarked on this journey without the unwavering support of my family: Maricela, León, and Luis. Love and gratitude to you always.

Finally, Itzelle, I have been extremely lucky to have you by my side. Words cannot completely express how grateful I am for your love and support, but I am sure you already know. Thank you for caring for us and for the countless ways in which show me how beautiful is to be together.

Abstract

Popular infrastructural politics: Trader organisation and public markets in Mexico City

This thesis proposes the concept of popular infrastructural politics to explicate the distinctive political practices and discourses with which market traders participate in the urban politics of Mexico City and influence the production and reproduction of public markets. By capturing the multifaceted and contradictory character of subaltern politics in urban contexts, this concept elucidates why and how trader communities in Mexico City—an estimated population of 70,000 traders—socialise, organise, and mobilise politically to defend a public markets network that comprises 329 commercial facilities. In this sense, the thesis examines the repertoire of political tools that traders use to navigate and challenge long-term experiences of chronic neglect, material deterioration, and economic decline triggered by broader processes of neoliberal urban restructuring. To develop this concept and offer an interpretation of the traders' contemporary political history, this thesis builds on the empirical findings of ethnographic fieldwork in Mexico City and the academic discussions on contestation in marketplaces, popular politics, and infrastructures. Based on participant observation and 31 interviews conducted during seven months' fieldwork, my analysis highlights the traders' political agency in the production of socio-spatial orders at different scales. In particular, it explores the traders' capacity to coordinate politically across the city, negotiate repair and maintenance, and navigate through the interstices of regulatory and institutional frameworks. As a result, the thesis argues that by deploying popular infrastructural politics to defend the public markets, the trader communities in Mexico City reaffirm contradictorily their long-standing socio-political bond and dependency with the state as well as their right to subsistence and political autonomy. In this way, trader communities have secured for seven decades the preservation of the public markets as commercial and political nodes and, therefore, their own reproduction as subaltern urban actors on which the city's supply of food and other basic staples depends. Overall, this thesis provides an empirically-grounded conceptual tool that captures the multifaceted character of subaltern politics revolving around urban infrastructures, and a detailed account of how these contradictory politics confront the dismantlement of public infrastructures in Mexico City.

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Abbreviations

CNOP
Confederación Nacional de Organizaciones Populares
(National Confederation of Popular Organisations)

COABASTO
Coordinación General de Abasto y Distribución
(Supply and Distribution General Coordination Office)

DGACD
Dirección General de Abasto, Comercio y Distribución
(General Office of Supply, Trade, and Distribution)

MC
Movimiento Ciudadano
(Citizens' Movement)

MORENA
Movimiento de Regeneración Nacional
(Movement of National Regeneration)

PAN
Partido Acción Nacional
(National Action Party)

POA
Programa Operativo Anual
(Annual Operative Programme)

PRD
Partido de la Revolución Democrática
(Democratic Revolutionary Party)

PRI
Partido Revolucionario Institucional
(Revolutionary Institutional Party)

PT
Partido de los Trabajadores
(Workers' Party)

PVEM
Partido Verde Ecologista de México
(Ecologist Green Party of Mexico)

SEDECO
Secretaría de Desarrollo Económico
(Economic Development Office)

SICOMPCDMX
Sistema de Empadronamiento para Comerciantes de los Mercados Públicos de la Ciudad de México
(Registration System for the Traders of the Public Markets of Mexico City)

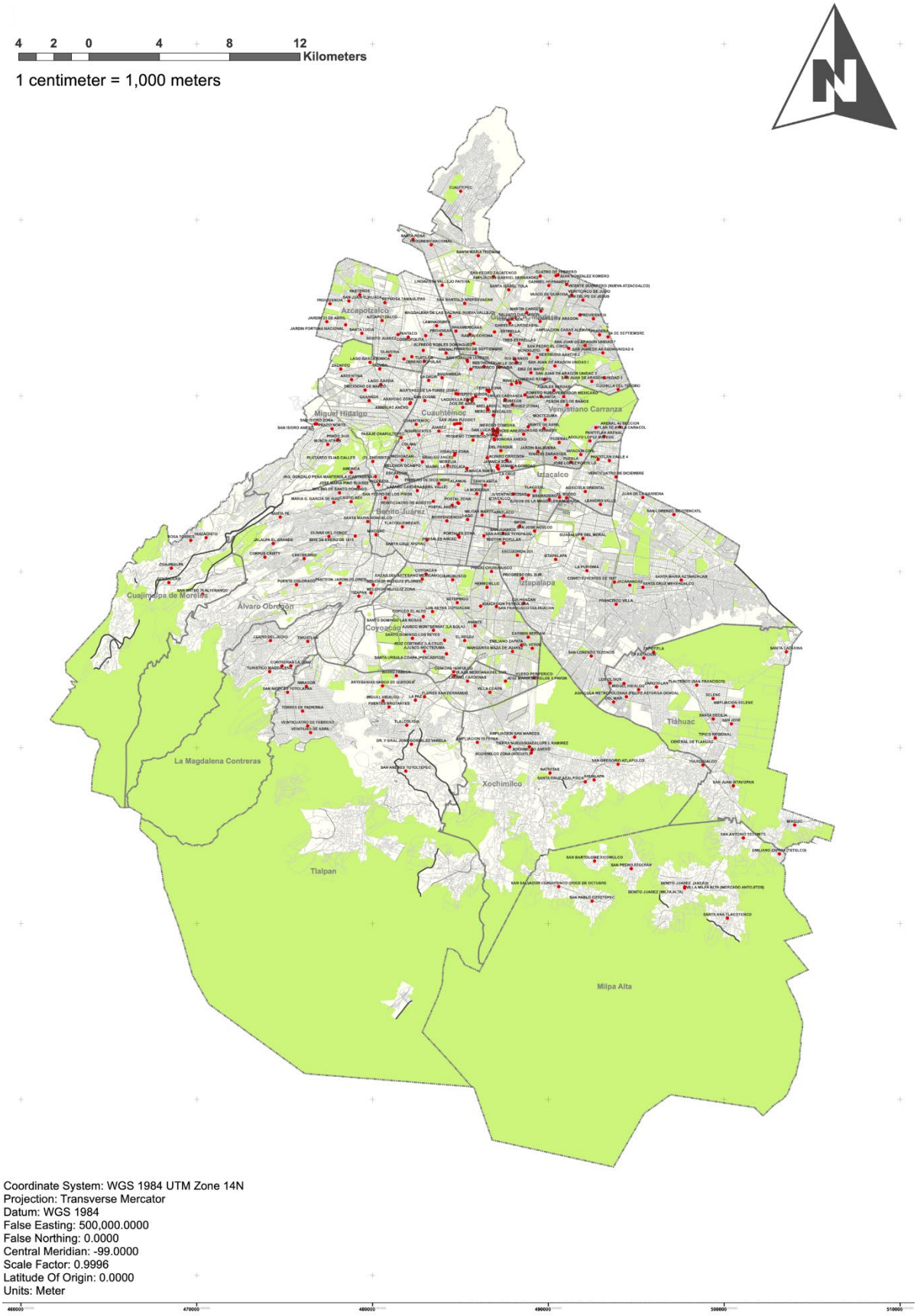
Introduction

The Mexico City public markets network consists of 329 commercial facilities where around 72,000 thousand traders and 200,000 employees work seven days a week all year round (Map 1 and Image 1). The Mexican state built most of these facilities in the 1950s and 1960s, and since then, most traders have been using these spaces to run small-scale, family businesses through generations. Originally imagined as a means to modernise Mexico City and control popular trade practices, particularly street vending, these markets represented a modern public infrastructure to supply the city with food and other basic staples. The construction of this markets network is one of the most extensive state interventions regarding the provision of public retail infrastructure in the country's history. In seventy years, the public markets network has expanded throughout the city at different paces, thus creating a large trader community that is present in all the 16 districts that comprise Mexico City. For this reason, these public markets have played a critical role in supplying the city, structuring community life, and giving thousands of low-income traders access to a well-serviced shelter and a source of income.

At least since the late 1980s, the public markets have experienced different waves of disinvestment, political neglect, and material deterioration, as well as multiple attempts to reform the regulatory and institutional frameworks that guarantee their reproduction. These experiences have come hand in hand with the neoliberalising and democratising processes that have characterised Mexico City in the past four decades. On the one side, the abandonment of the public markets network has unrolled alongside the transfer of the provision of modern retail infrastructure to private corporations, i.e. supermarket companies. On the other side, the transformation of the political landscape in the past 20 years has created a governance framework in which limited budgets and interinstitutional conflicts constrain the mechanisms and strategies to keep the public markets network in good condition. In the face of these processes, market traders have not been passive urban actors, but active advocates of the preservation of the public markets.

Although not always visible or spectacular, the political activism of Mexico City traders is deeply embedded, at least, in seven decades of political history. Given the public markets' origins, the traders have permanently interacted with different categories of state agents, with whom they have developed a multifaceted and often contradictory relationship. Since their foundation, the markets have been part of a political milieu in which traders have been persevering political actors. Initially, they were compelled to create trader organisations and get involved

Map 1. The public markets network of Mexico City



Source: Adapted from SEDECO, retrieved from https://www.sedeco.cdmx.gob.mx/servicios/servicio/conoce-los-329-mercados-publicos-de-la-ciudad-de-mexico [14 August 2020].

Image 1. The public markets of Mexico City

Left to right, top to bottom: Anáhuac Zona Market, Miguel Hidalgo district; Río Blanco Market, Gustavo A. Madero district; 24 de Febrero Market, Tlalpan district; San Pedro Zacatenco Market, Gustavo A. Madero; Villa Coapa Market, Tlalpan district; Medellín Market, Cuauhtémoc district; Miguel Hidalgo Market, Tlalpan district; and José Ma. Morelos y Pavón Market, Tlalpan district. **Source**: Author, 2018.

in party politics through clientelistic and corporatist mechanisms. However, their political socialisation in the past three decades has also been marked by various national and local political transitions, which led to the decline of the PRI as the ruling party in the late 1990s—after 71 years in the presidential office—and the emergence of a competitive and multiparty environment in Mexico City. Built through multiple generations, today the traders possess a repertoire of political tools that is essential for them to navigate and participate in Mexico City's political networks and urban politics. In this sense, traders not only deploy a commercial expertise in the city markets, but a political capital with which they have secured a position in the political spectrum for several decades.

Given the political history of these commercial communities and their complex relationship with the state and the city, this thesis addresses the following research questions:

1. Why and how do market traders organise and mobilise politically in Mexico City?
2. What is the role of the public markets—as state-owned public infrastructure—in traders' political life?
3. How do traders' political practices and discourses impact urban politics and city-making processes?
4. How to conceptualise the traders' political agency as it unfolds from, around, and through the public markets?

The aim of this thesis is, therefore, to examine and conceptualise the traders' political life and repertoire of political practices and discourses as mediated by the state and the public markets in order to recognise and elucidate the instances of their political agency in the city.

To achieve this aim and answer the research questions, the objectives of this thesis are: 1) to explore the traders' political history and its connection with the provision of public markets; 2) to analyse the traders' political practices, discourses, and structures emerging from, around, and through public markets; 3) to investigate the political interactions between traders, officials, and politicians regarding the provision, maintenance, and transformation of public markets; 4) to examine the traders' political leverage in decision-making processes regarding city-making; and 5) to propose a concept that explicates the traders' rich and versatile political practices and discourses.

This thesis conceptualises this repertoire of political practices and discourses as *popular infrastructural politics*. In this way, I capture the multifaceted and contradictory character of the traders' political agency and define the type of politics that they perform around the

production and reproduction of public markets as public infrastructure. In doing so, the thesis sheds light on the ordinary political practices and discourses developed at the margins of the state and mobilised through its interstices. My analysis of these distinctive politics reveals how these practices and discourses permanently intertwine with subsistence practices, popular political traditions, and demands of autonomy and patronage that inevitably revolve around urban infrastructures.

Therefore, equipped with this set of political lenses, the thesis reflects on the socio-material articulations between traders and markets in the face of long-term experiences of political neglect, infrastructural deterioration, and economic decline. Through focusing on the political reasons, strategies, tactics, and mechanisms used by the subaltern urban actors to participate in city-making processes, my research highlights the role of infrastructures in shaping their political life. I investigate how, on the one hand, the public markets inform the traders' popular imageries, moods, and sentiments, and, on the other hand, they mark how traders seek to influence broader urban, administrative, and legislative agendas. Characterised by a clear interest in the political salience of traders and markets in Mexico City, my analysis emphasises their changing character as political actors and political nodes. Furthermore, it also offers an insight into the intricate and conflictive political encounters that determine our experiences as customers, neighbours, or visitors of the public markets of Mexico City. In particular, the thesis delves into the political mediations that shape the markets' public and social character.

Built around my ethnographic fieldwork and relevant literature on contestation in marketplaces, popular politics, and infrastructure, this thesis unfolds around two key aspects that resonate throughout its pages. The first aspect—which responds to the first three objectives—is to unpack the traders' politics in Mexico City by paying attention to the origins, characteristics, and functioning of their public markets network. This involves identifying continuities and differences in the traders' political history, both in discursive and practical terms and vis-à-vis contexts of economic and political transition in which new political actors and dynamics emerge and consolidate. My ethnographic immersion brings to light the traders' socio-political world, and with it, their shared experiences of political socialisation around infrastructure provision, maintenance, and transformation. Moreover, it highlights different instances of organisation and mobilisation in which they negotiate the preservation of 329 commercial facilities. As a political ethnographer, I have been interested in portraying both the public and hidden political relationships that underlie the existence of these public infrastructures in Mexico City. In this case, I unpack the traders' shared political

history in the texture of their language and with a focus on their interests, needs, and aspirations, but also by paying attention to the changing structures in which they champion them. This ultimately allows me to represent their multifaceted encounters with different state agents.

The second aspect—which responds to the fourth objective—revolves around the need to conceptualise the traders' political agency and the constant political flows—of actors, practices, discourses, values, and interests—that converge in the public markets network of Mexico City. In this regard, the thesis proposes the concept of popular infrastructural politics as a means to capture the complexity and diversity of a distinctive political practice through which subaltern urban actors participate in the production of infrastructure and, therefore, of broader socio-spatial configurations. This term, which responds to the interpretive challenges of my ethnographic fieldwork, is the result of a conceptual journey through which I reassembled the insights of the academic literature regarding political contestation in marketplaces, popular politics, and infrastructures. These analytical strands informed the provisional theory with which I conducted my fieldwork, the analysis of the empirical data, and later the development of the concept of popular infrastructural politics. Thus, the thesis bridges contemporary discussions on the politicisation of urban marketplaces and the drivers and characteristics of popular politics with the debates on the political salience of infrastructure. By examining and linking different components of these academic strands, I built a concept and a perspective that both define and explain the complex mix of political practices, representations, and relationships that characterise the traders' struggles in Mexico City's urban politics.

The intention to complement, revise, and refine the conceptual frameworks that we use to understand the political organisation and mobilisation of subaltern urban actors has permeated both my research questions and goals. This intention has mainly involved addressing the multifaceted and contradictory character of popular infrastructural politics, and the concepts' theoretical foundations reflect it. Throughout its chapters, the thesis emphasises the permanent tensions and oscillations underlying the traders' political discourses and actions. It calls our attention towards how subsistence practices intertwined contradictorily with practices of patronage, dependency, autonomy, and dissidence. It also identifies why and how certain forms of domination and emancipation operate through infrastructures, particularly the fluctuating ways in which subaltern urban actors reinforce or subvert these tendencies as they fight for their right to subsistence or resist control and surveillance.

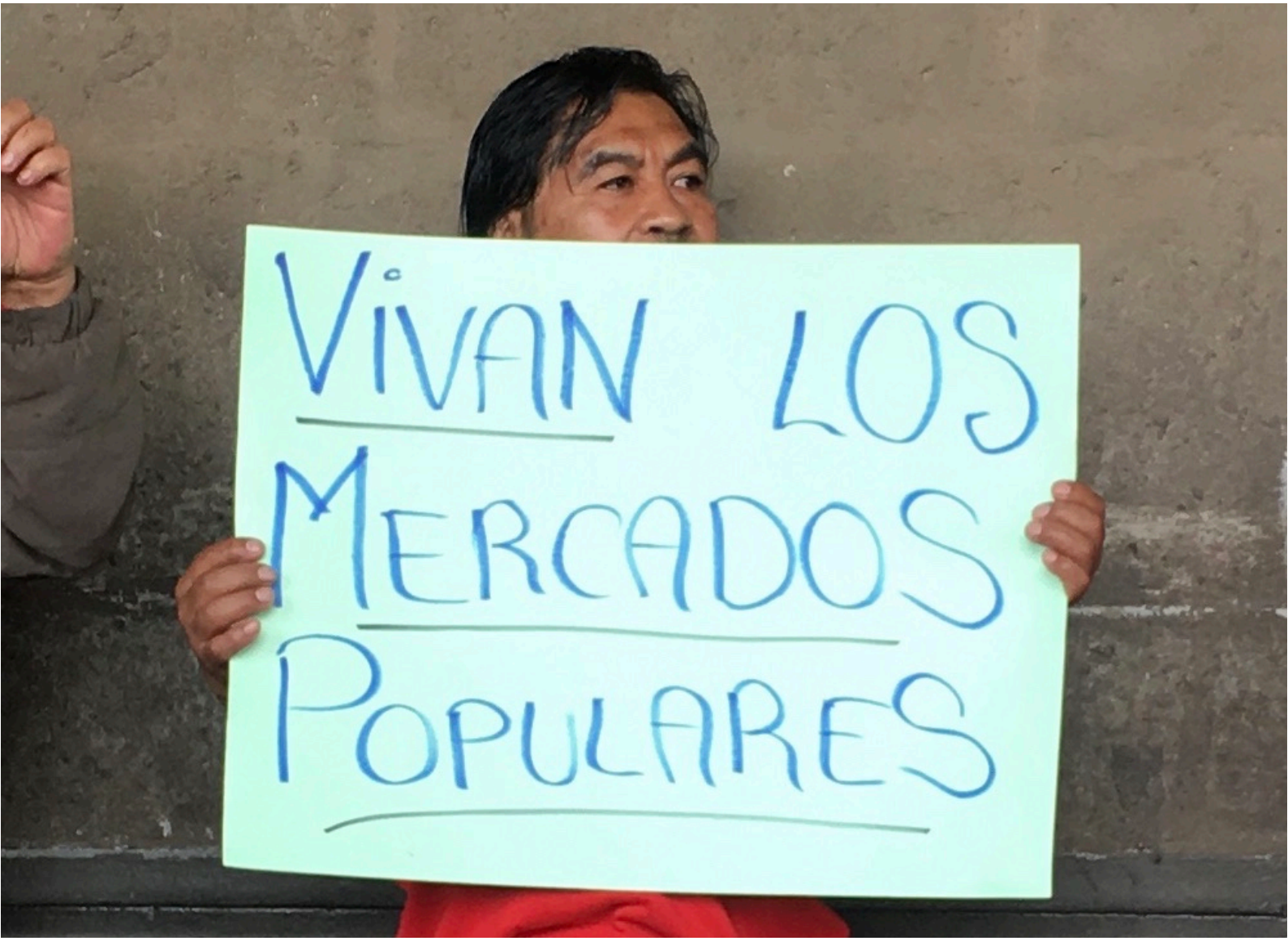
My focus on the rich popular traditions underlying popular infrastructural politics also seeks to raise awareness of the multiplicity of ways in which subaltern urban actors deal with structural economic and political processes and dilemmas in specific contexts. On the one hand, the traders' tensions and conflicting imageries, moods, sentiments, interests, values, and aspirations underlie their tenacity and resolution to protect the markets. On the other hand, they also foreground the traders' wavering relationship with the state, which they simultaneously embrace and reject. The thesis discusses these issues around the multiple organisational, infrastructural, and regulatory battles in which traders deployed popular infrastructural politics while I was conducting my fieldwork. By looking microscopically into these ordinary politics, the thesis offers a representation of a political life that does not come to terms with normative political categorisations.

Overall, the thesis offers an interpretation of the contemporary political history of market traders in Mexico City from the perspective of popular infrastructural politics. In this sense, the thesis tells the story of a large trader community whose long-lasting, multifaceted, often contradictory political practices and discourses keep an extensive public markets network working against the structural economic and political processes that threaten its existence. This story places the political participation of thousands of small-scale low-income traders at the centre of changing economic, legal, urban, and political landscapes. From this perspective, it builds a contemporary account of Mexico City by exploring the transformations of its public markets network. This account is partly the story of Mexico City's rapid urbanisation process, slow transition to democracy, gradual neoliberalisation, and ambivalent relation with popular trade. This story is also a depiction of the never-ending organisational, infrastructural, and regulatory problems that trader communities, organisations, and leaders try to solve through labour-intensive political work. In this sense, this story revolves around the contradictory ways in which traders have prevented the total abandonment, dismantlement, or privatisation of their public markets network. Furthermore, this story shows how the traders' popular infrastructural politics has led to expanding the markets network as a form of public infrastructure whose social value and function are still non-negotiable.

To the extent that this thesis records and interprets the practices and discourses as performed by the traders in multiple political instances, it reveals perceptions and actions whose dissident and heretical nature confront both liberal and more radical sensibilities and expectations. Although in general sympathetic to the traders' struggles, my research was built around discourses and practices that often confronted my political views. But given my interest in understanding the inner workings of these struggles, this thesis avoids romanticising or

demonising the traders' perceptions and actions by contrasting them against normative or orthodox political beliefs. Doing so would have prevented me from examining traders' politics in their own terms and capturing the texture of their political language and reasoning. Instead, the thesis deals with these tensions by addressing the multifaceted and contradictory nature of popular infrastructural politics and their diverse consequences regarding city-making. From a critical realist approach, my research seeks to recognise the socio-economic and political conditions, dispositions, and possibilities of traders' political discourses and practices. Thus, the thesis draws attention to both the entrenched political structures in which traders do politics and the proven political potential of popular infrastructural politics in such adverse circumstances. In particular, the traders' outstanding ability to defend the public markets for the past seven decades (Image 2).

Image 2. Long live the popular markets



Source: Author, 2018.

Outline of the thesis

Taken together, chapters 1 to 3 provide an overview of the conceptual, methodological, and contextual foundations for the analysis that is presented in chapters 4 to 6. The sequencing of the chapters—from theory to methods to context to key elements of the case study—is intended to guide the reader into the analysis, and to show the entanglement of conceptual thinking and fieldwork. The first two chapters highlight the proposed conceptual development delineated in my objectives vis-a-vis the methodological approach and the research conditions that underlay the production of empirical data. In this progression, chapter 3 functions as a pivot in the thesis structure. Firstly, it adds specificity to the formation and use of the concept of popular infrastructural politics in chapter 1. Secondly, it provides with historical and contextual depth the ethnographic research described in chapter 2. Thirdly, it puts into perspective the interpretation of traders' and markets' contemporary politics as analysed in chapters 4 to 6.

The relationship between theory, history, and empirics is, of course, iterative, and in presenting the concept of popular infrastructural politics ahead of the discussion of my fieldwork, I do not mean to suggest that theory-development preceded my work in the field. Rather, my thinking moved back and forth between the concept and the case informed by the traders' and markets' political history. In this sense, taken together, chapters 4 to 6 shed light on the empirical basis of my conceptual discussion. Empirically focused and ethnographically rich, these chapters show the potential of using the concept of popular infrastructural politics as an analytical tool and bring to light the rich, multifaceted, and contradictory political traditions developed by traders from, around, and through public markets. With this general description in mind, I now turn to outline the contents of each chapter.

Chapter 1, *Popular infrastructural politics*, unpacks the components of this conceptual development with which I define the distinctive political practices of subaltern urban actors. The chapter details the conceptual journey that led to the assemblage and formulation of the concept of popular infrastructural politics. In particular, it engages with relevant debates on the contestation and politicisation of urban marketplaces in different cities, the specificities of popular politics, and the structured and structuring powers of infrastructures. By linking these debates, the chapter presents the foundations of popular infrastructural politics and outlines its capacity to explain why and how market traders in Mexico City do politics in, from, around, and through public markets.

Chapter 2, *Researching popular infrastructural politics*, connects the conceptual and empirical sources that inform the thesis. By describing what political ethnography is, the chapter examines the methodological approach used to navigate my field site in Mexico City. It reports who the research participants were and the conditions in which my fieldwork took place. It also outlines the guiding principles with which I analysed the empirical data, and the writing strategy used to present the shared experiences of this trader community around popular infrastructural politics. The chapter also examines some ethical tensions and dilemmas I dealt with when conducting ethnographic research in the political networks of Mexico City.

Chapter 3, *Traders and markets in Mexico City*, explores the origins and development of the public markets network. It analyses the political mediations that determined the implementation of the extensive markets construction programme in the second half of the twentieth century. The chapter highlights how this led to the emergence of traders and markets as new urban political actors and spaces. The chapter traces the main economic, political, and urban changes that have influenced the traders' struggles around markets' provision, maintenance, and transformation. It also explains the main discursive, regulatory, and institutional changes that have transformed public markets' governance, as well as the main factors underlying the markets' political neglect, material deterioration, and economic decline.

Chapter 4, *Coming together to defend the markets*, mobilises the concept of popular infrastructural politics around the formation and functioning of trader organisations in Mexico City. It focuses on the role of organisations regarding the traders' political socialisation and mobilisation. The chapter examines in detail the organisational dynamics prevailing in the public markets network, paying special attention to the trader leaders' political salience and the continuous political work that is necessary to turn the traders' social capital into political capital. It also discusses the type of political landscape that traders have built by multiplying the number of organisations that represent them and by participating in unpredictable ways in such organisations. The chapter thus reveals how traders organise and mobilise to defend the markets.

Chapter 5, *Politics of repair and maintenance*, analyses the political salience of these practices and their centrality in the trades' popular infrastructural politics. In particular, the chapter explores the political mediations underlying the markets' neglect and deterioration as perceived by the traders. While it draws attention to the traders' strategies to secure financial resources, it also sheds light on the selective criteria with which traders, officials, and politicians define the allocation of such scarce resources for repair and maintenance. In addition, this chapter

shows how the infrastructural cycles of material deterioration converge and overlap with the political cycles of repair and maintenance of the public markets network. Thus, the chapter reveals the political struggles that determine the appearance and safety of each public market.

Chapter 6, *Regulating the markets from below*, reveals how the regulation of public markets emerges as one of the main political arenas in which traders mobilise popular infrastructural politics. The chapter shows the diverse strategies with which traders approach regulations and law-making processes—in particular, how they navigate the political networks in which public markets' governance is established. Drawing on different political-legal battles, the chapter examines the instances in which traders defend, negotiate, reject, and circumvent the legal foundations of their relationship with the state. In this way, the chapter highlights why and how traders deploy their political knowledge, skills, and relationships to shape the rules that govern their economic, political, and spatial practices.

The *Conclusion* brings together the key arguments of the thesis and reflects on the implications of traders' political practices and discourses in Mexico City. It thus connects the conceptual, historical, and ethnographic analyses to develop a representation of popular infrastructural politics in the city's public markets network. Therefore, the conclusion assesses the significance of the concept of popular infrastructural politics in light of the undertaken empirical journey, and its relevance for highlighting the participation of market traders in Mexico City's urban politics. This chapter finally considers the potential of the concept to assemblage and mobilise a set of ideas and arguments that can be useful to explicate the complex, multifaceted, and contradictory nature of the political practices and discourses of other subaltern urban actors—in particular when they revolve around infrastructure production and city-making.

1. Popular infrastructural politics

1.1. Introduction

> Infrastructure as text; economy as pretext; politics as subtext.
> Hannah Appel (2018, pp.48–49)

Built on the specifics of an ethnographic immersion (see chapters 4 to 6) and the contributions of existing theoretical developments (this chapter), *popular infrastructural politics* is the main conceptual contribution of this thesis. This notion works as a synoptic idea that explains the complex, multifaceted, and contradictory nature of popular politics revolving around infrastructures. On the one hand, this notion brings together the actors, practices, and spatial processes involved in such politics. On the other hand, it functions as a linking point between different theoretical developments that have contributed to making these politics more legible. The concept itself bridges three conceptual discussions about: a) social class and subordination (*popular*); b) the built environment and its role in social reproduction (*infrastructure*); and c) agency and power relations in urban contexts (*politics*). By clearly stating its main components, I formulated this concept as an entry point to examine contemporary urban struggles spearheaded by subaltern urban actors, in this case market traders. Put succinctly, I understand popular infrastructural politics as the diverse political practices performed by the subaltern in order to influence the logics of infrastructure provision, preservation, and transformation, which ultimately impact their subsistence practices and their relationship with the state.

In this chapter, I analyse the components of popular infrastructural politics having two aims in mind. On the one side, I trace back its theoretical foundations and make explicit the conceptual journey that inspired both my ethnographic immersion in Mexico City and the development of the term. In this sense, this chapter is a recognition of the contributions of those who have already investigated the thorny problems and enriching possibilities of studying popular politics and infrastructures. On the other side, I clarify how I have reframed these discussions around the *popular*, the *infrastructural*, and the *political* to assemble a new concept. Thus, this chapter sheds light on the origins of popular infrastructural politics as a concept that helps to explain why and how the subaltern mobilise in, from, through, and around infrastructures.

Like other conceptual developments that arise from ethnographic research, popular infrastructural politics is the result of a permanent exercise of conceptual revision,

refinement, improvement, and reconstruction entirely mediated by an empirical instance: my fieldwork. Therefore, while writing this chapter I sought to respond to specific interpretive problems around how traders do politics in Mexico City and why their public markets become such politicised infrastructures. From this empirical perspective, this chapter advances the concept of popular infrastructural politics as a useful conceptual tool that helps to make legible actors, practices, and processes in specific historical and geographical contexts. In this sense, popular infrastructural politics is a conceptual development anchored in the socio-political practices and the urban and economic structures discussed in detail in chapters 3 to 6.

Following this empirical focus, I begin the discussion about popular infrastructural politics in the first section of this chapter, *Contested markets, rebellious traders*, where I map the most recent approaches exploring the contemporary politics of markets and traders. In this section, I analyse the central discussions of multiple studies that have conceptualised marketplaces in urban contexts as political spaces and identified the dominant tendencies shaping this politicisation. The section also prefigures the position of the Mexico City case within the broader international debate about markets and traders. Ultimately, this section functions as a point of departure to delineate the conceptual and empirical foundations and contributions of the concept of popular infrastructural politics. To analyse and put together its components, I examine in the second section, *Popular politics*, a body of work focused on the distinctive political practices and discourses of the subaltern. By paying attention to the role of popular imageries, interests, sentiments, and needs in shaping the subaltern's political engagement, I develop an understanding of the *popular* in politics. This account of popular politics also explores the intimate, multifaceted, and contradictory connection between subaltern actors, social reproduction, and the state, as these are critical issues at stake in Mexico City market traders' politics. In the third section, *Infrastructures*, I examine the centrality of this component in contemporary urban politics and the subaltern's everyday life. I specifically explore the political salience of infrastructures, their role in the urbanisation processes, and their increasing role in triggering contestation in cities. By looking into the term infrastructure politics, I examine how infrastructures contribute to the subaltern's political socialisation, organisation, and mobilisation. Overall, this chapter delineates a perspective that resonates throughout the following chapters, where I explore how popular infrastructural politics are performed by trader organisations and communities in, from, around, and through public markets in Mexico City.

1.2. Contested markets, rebellious traders

The study of markets and traders has established a research agenda that explores critical societal problems by examining the transformations of many markets and trader communities around the world from economic, political, anthropological, sociological, geographical, and historical perspectives. Together, these contributions have enriched our understanding of markets as well-established institutions deeply involved in city-making processes due to their long-standing presence in people's everyday lives (Gruzinski, 2012; Anderson, 2011; Randall et al., 1996). By focusing on markets and trader communities, researchers have studied a myriad of societal aspects, including economic practices (Smith et al., 2014), community reproduction (Zukin, 1991; Bell and Valentine, 1997), inter-ethnic relationships (Smith, 1972; Skinner, 1964; Malinowski and de la Fuente, 1957), gender roles (Alexander, 1987), language and meanings (Ayús, 2005), and aesthetics (Buie, 1996). As this selection reveals, markets and traders remain compelling sites and social groups to study the complex nature of social life.

More recently, researchers and activists have focused their attention on marginal markets as spaces where pressing urban, economic, and political processes converge and unfold, transforming trader communities into protagonists of contemporary urban struggles (González, 2018; S. González, 2019). This research on markets and urban contestation has been a primary source of inspiration for this thesis,[1] to the extent that I also consider markets and traders in Mexico City as critical spaces and actors from which and with whom to reflect about politics. In this sense, my interest on how and why market traders perform popular infrastructural politics and engage in urban politics seeks to expand this research strand. I particularly do so by connecting ongoing contestations in public markets with conceptual discussions about popular politics and infrastructures.

I primarily engage with this literature and use it as a point of departure to develop my concept of popular infrastructural politics because it has focused on examining covered markets, which are similar to the ones I studied in Mexico City. This allows me to build connections around the role of infrastructure in the conceptualisation of urban markets as political spaces and the identification of the traders' prevailing drivers of contestation. By examining these core themes in this literature, I also highlight some of the multiple marketplaces in the Global North and South from which various authors have critically approached neoliberal practices in urban

[1] My participation in the Contested Cities network between 2015 and 2016 has also been a key aspect of my interest in developing my research project and this thesis around this analytical strand. Joining the Mexico City node led by Dr Víctor Delgadillo represented an initial opportunity to reflect on markets' and traders' politics.

contexts. Like in many of the works I review here, I adopt a similar interest in the political dimension and in theorising city-making processes from markets and traders' experiences. From this standpoint, I explore the complex nature of the traders' popular politics and drivers of contestation in light of my findings in Mexico City public markets.

1.2.1. Markets as political spaces

In recent years, the concept of *contested markets* has come to condense a critical understanding of contemporary struggles around urban markets in different parts of the world. While there has been a longer lineage of critical work exploring markets around the world, the concept of contested markets for me signals a renewed academic interest in the roles and values of marketplaces. Its impact on the academic literature is visible through multiple contributions both in English and Spanish, particularly with the publication of *Contested markets, contested cities: Gentrification in retail spaces and urban justice* (González, 2018) and *La disputa por los mercados* (Delgadillo, 2016b; see also Delgadillo, 2017b). In this body of work, the term contested markets mainly refers to the covered, indoor, and open marketplaces where traders gather and the urban population accesses food and other basic staples. Given the focus of this thesis on the Mexico City case and its infrastructures, my attention centres on the covered markets as spaces of contestation where structural processes and societal tensions such as inequality, exclusion, speculation, and the reproduction of capital materialise. Developed by critical scholars, the term contested markets emphasises the class, gender, and ethnic struggles that shape the role and value of urban markets. All in all, this perspective sheds light on the markets and traders' political salience vis-à-vis contemporary urban dynamics of domination, resistance, and emancipation.

From this perspective, the emergence of markets as political spaces is directly related to the dominant urban dynamics in which they are embedded, and which traders and local communities welcome or oppose. Contestation under this light is necessarily relational and historical as it is determined by the traders' economic, political, cultural, and social conditions. In this sense, the traders' and markets' political character is not intrinsic; they become political under specific circumstances, particularly those that threaten the very existence of the markets. The campaign to defend the public nature of Leeds Kirkgate Market (UK) clearly illustrates this politicisation. In their study, González and Waley (2013, p.969) emphasise that "markets [in Britain] are being pushed towards the gentrification frontier […] because many of them find themselves in the way of, or surrounded by, big regeneration projects." Following Neil

Smith's (1996) discussion on the *frontier* discourse and practice, the authors show how after a "cycle of disinvestment" and amid the expansion of corporate values, local authorities can precipitate gentrification, thus leading to contestation against displacement of long-standing market stallholders and customers (González and Waley, 2013, p.971).

Against this specific background of retail gentrification, markets emerge as political spaces while the traders' political salience amplifies and becomes more recognisable in the face of displacement. In this type of context, the "confrontational relationship" between authorities and traders also becomes more visible (González and Waley, 2013, p.976), clearly revealing what I have defined as the traders' and the state's conflictive political history. When confronted with the rediscovery of markets' commercial and real estate value, the traders deploy their political skills and dispositions to contain the advancement of these interests. González and Dawson (2015; 2018) have explored this strategic and tactical dimension in the British context, where traders and customers have come together around different campaigns to protect markets against gentrification. What I consider critical in their work is not only that they report on how these campaigns have been doing, but that they also collect what can be read as a repertoire of political measures used by traders and communities to defend the markets. These tactics—which include publicity and media work, strategic alliance-building, research and information gathering, engagement in policy and law making, and protest and mobilisation (González and Dawson, 2015, pp.25–41; for similarities with street vendors' strategies see Brown, 2017)—are both a repertoire of the traders' political socialisation in Britain and an indication of the political and urban environment in which traders deploy it.

In terms of depicting the landscape of contestation that traders produce in Britain, the work of González and Dawson is also revealing. By identifying two types of campaigns: trader- and citizen-led, the authors show the emergence of a twofold political agenda that oscillates between a market- and a city-focused agenda. According to the authors, trader-led campaigns tend to be "relatively local and single-issue focused," while citizen-led campaigns, particularly in London, "have usually linked up to other groups and struggles" (González and Dawson, 2015, p.44). While the former predominantly focus on issues such as abandonment, disinvestment, closure, demolition, displacement, or rent hikes, the latter tends to raise questions about social justice, exclusion, food accessibility and quality, privatisation, gentrification, citizenship, and the right to the city (González and Dawson, 2015, p.5; González and Dawson, 2018, pp.55–56). In this description, the authors signal the structure of what most probably is a diverse political landscape in which different agendas about the markets' function

and value emerge and compete. In the following chapters, I explore how traders deploy some of these tactics in Mexico City and what type of political landscape they create, which will allow me to show how traders produce and negotiate these not mutually exclusive agendas.

This perspective on contested markets set up an international discussion about (retail) gentrification and contestation in European and Latin American markets. Mainly focused on Spain, this research provided a critical perspective on the impact of neoliberal urbanism[2] on public markets in Madrid and Barcelona. This discussion primarily focused on the commodification of traditional commercial spaces (Grad, 2016; Hernández and Eneva, 2016; Salinas, 2016; Rodríguez, 2014), the role of municipal governments and retail corporations in this process (Rodríguez, 2016; García et al., 2016; Hernández, 2014; Maiello, 2014), and the resistance and alternatives developed by traders and neighbours (Hernández and Eneva, 2017). More recently, Guimarães (2019) has explored these issues in Lisbon, Portugal (2019). In parallel, the study of these processes in Latin America centred on Argentine, Brazilian, and Mexican markets and traders, thus contributing to create a rich academic corpus that explicates their political character in different contexts.

In Latin America, these politics have been documented in terms of counter-gentrification practices, resistance, and possibility. In Argentina, for example, Rosa (2017) and Boldrini and Malizia (2014) explore the counter-gentrification strategies against the markets' slow-paced corporate colonisation in two markets located in a North-Eastern province; while Habermehl (2015) shows how Mercado Bonpland in Buenos Aires is an example of alternative popular economic and political practices. In Brazil, De Castro et al. (2016) foreground the gentrification-resistance nexus concerning local and global identity tensions in Belo Horizonte's Mercado Central. Similarly, Hernández and Eneva (2017) examine the resistance movement around Mercado Sul Vive in Brasilia, while Soares (2017) documents the struggles against the implementation of urban neoliberal policies in three markets in Juazeiro do Norte, Ceará. In Mexico, Delgadillo (2016a; Delgadillo, 2017a) focuses on the tensions between traders and authorities in La Merced markets, threatened by state-led regeneration projects; and Gasca (2017) and González and Hiernaux (2017) explore the nexus modernisation-displacement in tourist-centred markets in San Luis Potosí and Querétaro.

[2] Neoliberal urbanism refers to a form of urban restructuring characterised by the privatisation and commodification of cities. This restructuration involves the coordination of state and market strategies to design urban policies that facilitate and maximise profit-making. Neoliberal urbanism is a heterogeneous process, as it adapts to different contexts (González and Waley, 2013; González, 2011b).

Overall, this body of work has contributed to making visible the politicisation of traders vis-à-vis urban neoliberal processes that threaten the existence of markets in different geographical contexts. Notwithstanding that this literature reveals the plurality of experiences around contestation, none of the works reviewed so far has consistently defined the traders' and markets' political salience. In my opinion, this has been achieved in *Contested markets, contested cities* (González, 2018). In this book, González and contributors condense what it means that markets are "spaces for political mobilisation" where traders and allies perform "political micro-acts of resistance" and "forms of 'subaltern urbanisms'." Following Seale (2016, p.12), the authors define markets as *nodes* endowed with contingent and relational attributes and crowded with material and intangible flows consisting of "people, goods, time, senses, [and] affect." Thus, this coming together dynamically shapes the markets' political character as well as their ability to produce and organise these flows.

In this light, I consider that markets can be conceived as *political nodes* where political flows—actors, practices, values, and interests—"come to rest, terminate, emerge, merge, mutate and/or merely pass through" (Seale, 2016, p.12). The work of Habermehl et al. (2018, pp.120–121) shows how, for example, Mercado Bonpland in Buenos Aires functions as a "bridge," "organisational point," "symbol," and "method" to facilitate connections between people, solidarity networks and initiatives, and alternative forms of consumption. Similarly, Schlack et al. (2018, p.39) describe La Vega Central in Santiago de Chile as a site of political convergence, "a populist stage" from where "traders have been actively building relationships with the political class" to consolidate their basic rights and the most vulnerable city dwellers whose subsistence depends on the markets. As for Mexico City, Delgadillo (2018, pp.30–31) examines the voices of La Merced market traders, who confront a large regeneration project, the competition of retail corporations, and the discourses of infrastructure obsolescence. These three examples show how markets produce and organise political flows alongside economic, social, and cultural ones. Moreover, these cases signal some instances of political socialisation and interaction between fellow traders, state agents, and urban communities. As political nodes, markets become complex institutions that influence urban politics and other wider city dynamics. In chapters 3 to 6, I show how these political flows became determinant in the creation of Mexico City's modern public markets, and how they remain decisive factors in their reproduction.

My research thus follows this perspective and defines public markets as political spaces or nodes, and by delving into the specificities of the Mexico City case it seeks to expand and nuance our understanding of these politics. This involves looking into how the markets'

political salience oscillates between market-specific demands and a broader urban political agenda, which might include issues such as social justice or the right to the city, but not only these. Under a political light, thinking of markets as "metaphors for the city" (González and Dawson, 2018, p.55) or "metonyms of urban transformation" (Seale, 2016, p.14) would involve considering how the traders' interests, needs, and aspirations and the markets' materiality project or transcend specific political orders. I adopt this focus in exploring how traders and markets develop their own political order in relation to broader political struggles, debates, and relationships that unfold at different scales in the city. However, while my research analyses similar instances of contestation and resistance around urban neoliberal policies, I explore them against a wider spectrum of political structures and practices. In other words, I look into the multiplicity of political flows that similarly rest, terminate, merge, mutate, or pass through Mexico City public markets to examine the specific terms in which they have been "arenas of contention," as Sara González (2019, p.7) has put it. Together, this understanding of markets and my interest in the multiplicity of political flows prefigure the concept of popular infrastructural politics. Ultimately, it also captures the political salience of both traders and markets. Before introducing the discussion on popular politics, I briefly discuss the drivers of contestation identified in this literature to address key factors impelling traders to act politically.

1.2.2. Drivers of contestation

As aforementioned, markets and traders politicise in specific historical circumstances and, in the past decades, scholars have been recording this mobilisation in different cities around the world, such as Barcelona, Belo Horizonte, Buenos Aires, London, Madrid, Mexico City, Quito, or Santiago de Chile. These authors have shown that in the grip of neoliberal urbanism, traders and urban communities have been contesting city-making processes that threaten the very existence of public markets and, therefore, their livelihoods. As this body of work reveals, most of these traders have been confronting a set of interconnected urban processes, mainly gentrification, gourmetisation, touristification, heritagisation, disinvestment and displacement. As they unfold around two dominant economic and political patterns traders contest, on one side, the disinvestment, devaluation, and underdevelopment that most of their markets have experienced at the hand of local authorities. On the other side, traders resist the new capitalist ventures trying to take advantage of the potentially higher returns that reinvesting and redeveloping such markets can yield. In this sense, the cycles of capital reproduction at the urban scale determine these drivers of contestation and the traders' struggles.

Here I briefly delineate my understanding of these processes to highlight the material and symbolic triggers of contestation, rather than suggest that these exact processes primarily impel traders to organise and mobilise in Mexico City. In the context of this discussion about popular infrastructural politics, the drivers of contestation draw our attention towards the multiple factors influencing trader's political socialisation. As my thesis unfolds around the case study, the main processes, problems, and themes around which Mexico City market trader orbit will become clear. This is a critical point for a markets' network consisting of 329 commercial facilities and thousands of traders, whose experience of some of these processes has been distant or limited, as well as strongly mediated by the traders' political history and the markets' public nature. This poses questions about how governments have implemented neoliberal policies in Mexico City public markets and how traders have contested them. In this vein, chapters 5 and 6 will offer a detailed account of how disinvestment and neglect pervade the markets' infrastructure, and how privatisation and displacement remain latent threats around which the politicisation of markets revolves.

Gentrification and retail gentrification work as the overarching concepts explaining the economic, political, and social pressure as well as the drastic transformation of several traditional markets around the world, for example, Borough Market in London, La Boquería in Barcelona, or San Antón in Madrid. According to González and Waley (2013, p.966), retail gentrification involves three essential phases: 1) subjecting specific commercial areas and facilities to a process of disinvestment; 2) displacing the habitual visitors, customers, and traders; and 3) promoting the redevelopment of these areas and facilities as consumer experiences that fetishise both products and environments. Through regeneration projects, the markets' appearance and social function can change drastically, even becoming the spearhead of gentrification or retail gentrification, as Lacarrieu (2016) and Delgadillo (2016b, p.7) have pointed out. As a global model of urban development, retail gentrification privatises and commodifies traditional marketplaces as part of a wider process of creative destruction of urban landscapes (Zukin, 1991) that implements urban revalorisation strategies based on elitist consumption practices (Hanser and Hyde, 2014).

In the light of this discussion about retail gentrification, processes such as gourmetisation, touristification, and heritagisation reflect the wide range of discourses and practices shaping the markets' regeneration projects. These processes also reveal the different ideologies propelling retail gentrification. Moreover, these processes specify the multiple aims of the revalorisation strategies and the new meanings with which governments and investors want to

imbue the "regenerated" markets. These processes are by no means mutually exclusive; together, they make the gentrification process and its impact on the markets' traditional economic and social functions more palatable, which have been previously associated with the satisfaction of the urban population basic needs at a local scale (García et al., 2018, p.99). A gourmet food-, a tourist-, or a heritage-oriented regeneration process reduces the markets' collective function and amplifies existing urban inequalities and social divisions.

According to Salinas and Cordero (2018, p.87), gourmet markets have become a global model of "commercial spaces targeted at casual visitors and tourists rather than local consumers." These markets are "intended to attract a segment of the richest population, which is willing to pay a premium price for having a new [urban] 'experience'." Following recent debates on exclusionary culinary practices and capitalist urban foodscapes (Johnston and Baumann, 2015, 2007; Coles and Crang, 2011; Zukin, 2008; Jones et al., 2007), authors such as García et al. (2018), Rivlin and González (2018), Mateos (2017), Hernández and Eneva (2016), and Maiello (2014) highlight how gourmetised markets replace fresh affordable produce with fetishised specialised and delicatessen products that mainly satisfy the material and symbolic needs of middle and upper class "foodie" consumers.

Concerning the heritagisation of markets, Delgadillo (2017a) and Lacarrieu (2016) point out that this process involves the classification of sites, buildings, or practices as material and immaterial heritage given their historical value or contribution to a specific culture. This makes specific markets eligible for protection and investment, which local governments and international agencies such as UNESCO or the IDB usually provide. In this context, heritagisation is a global driver of urban regeneration under the premises of heritage preservation, which, ultimately, commodifies the markets "as part of an authentic experience" (González, 2018, p.184) that serves leisure and tourism interests. In this line, Delgadillo (2018), Mateos (2017), and Kingman and Bedón (2018; see also Kingman, 2012) show how heritagisation processes suffuse markets with a sense of artificiality that meanwhile neglect, degrade, and stigmatise long-standing actors and practices that endow the markets with their uniqueness.

In Mexico City, Gasca (2017), Delgadillo (2016a), and myself (Téllez, 2016) have identified four markets that have experienced different state-led forms of gourmetisation: Melchor Muzquiz, Medellín, Tlacoquemécatl, and San Juan Pugibet.[3] In light of the scope of this

[3] Although incorporated as an intended outcome of contemporary policies, the gourmetisation of San Juan Pugibet and Medellín markets was not originally a state-led initiative. As I have shown elsewhere (2016; see also Rodríguez, 2013; Animal Gourmet, 2013), these markets gradually developed vernacular forms of gourmetisation.

process, Salinas and Cordero (2018, p.96) consider that gourmetisation is of limited significance in Mexico City, and that its meagre implementation, if compared with the European cases, reveals the difficulties the government has found to replicate these models of elitist consumption. The heritagisation process in Mexico City markets shows a similar trend, as none of the few markets eligible for protection and investment under the heritage agenda has undergone a successful or lasting regeneration process. For example, Delgadillo (2016a; 2018) recounts how the most ambitious project of heritagisation in La Merced markets failed, while several news reports show that local authorities have limited investment to the restoration of murals on market buildings, as in Abelardo L. Rodríguez market (Gómez, 2008). But even if retail gentrification, gourmetisation, touristification, and heritagisation play only a small direct role in traders' experiences in Mexico City, other urban neoliberal policies and tendencies affect their reproduction as providers of public goods and public services. Most prominently, the expansion of private retail corporations (supermarkets and convenience stores) and the disinvestment that leads to infrastructure deterioration and economic decline. While the former is an expression of coordination between a neoliberal government and private investors, the latter is a deliberate political action to create the economic, material, and social conditions that, for example, justify the alienation of public goods and services, as González and Waley (2013) show regarding retail gentrification. As my emphasis on the traders' political history, views, and practices in Mexico City will reveal, disinvestment and the markets' resultant deterioration can take an unexpected political turn. They can, on one side, reinforce state domination, and yet on the other side, set in motion the traders' popular infrastructural politics.

What is crucial about these different but interconnected processes in terms of popular infrastructural politics is why and how they become drivers of contestation. Whether they appear as latent threats, as in Mexico City, or whether they have materialised some time ago, as in London or Madrid, these processes have triggered the traders' organisation against their most tangible effects: displacement and dispossession, but also, as I discuss later, poor working conditions, infrastructure absence and poverty, and lack of political autonomy. As described in the literature, displacement and dispossession in public markets seem to be "longer term and more progressive" (S. González, 2019, p.5) in comparison with similar experiences in past centuries (Velázquez, 1997; Schmiechen and Carls, 1999). In the face of retail gentrification, gourmetisation, touristification, and heritagisation, market traders and consumers organise to avoid the restructuring of their commercial landscapes and livelihoods. By defending the right to stay and provide and access affordable goods, they challenge disinvestment, stigmatisation,

closure, demolition, eviction, relocation, policing, rent or price hikes, or the implementation of new recruitment criteria (González and Dawson, 2018, 2015; Endres et al., 2018; Delgadillo, 2017a). Since the concept of popular infrastructural politics aims at explaining the markets' and traders' politicisation, the political practices and discourses it defines need to be understood in relation to these drivers of contestation and other prevailing in other social and urban contexts. This is crucial to the extent that, even if only as latent threats, these drivers explain one side of the emergence and consolidation of popular infrastructural politics in places like Mexico City. The other side explaining these politics is at the core of my discussion in the following sections.

1.2.3. Markets' and traders' politics

To conclude this introductory discussion, it is worth emphasising how this literature opened the path to developing the concept of popular infrastructural politics, and how the concept, in turn, complements and expands the understanding of markets' and traders' politics. In general terms, this body of work offers an explanation of the relationship between neoliberal economic and urban processes and the politicisation of markets and traders in multiple cities. By focusing on contestation and resistance, various contributors unveil traders' rebellious character and markets' contested nature vis-à-vis the patterns and tendencies reshaping their materiality and functions. In so doing, this perspective foregrounds the traders' political salience and the markets' emergence as political spaces or nodes, where strategies and tactics are deployed to keep urban markets as "safe havens" (S. González, 2019, p.11). Overall, this awareness of the markets' political life underlies the development of popular infrastructural politics and my interest in expanding our understanding of the broad spectrum of political flows that rest, terminate, merge, mutate, or pass through urban markets.

As a point of departure, the multiplicity of cases brought together under this critical approach to neoliberal urbanism draws our attention towards the shared and the diverse political experiences that traders and markets undergo in neoliberal cities. Moreover, these cases raise questions about the need and possibility of revising and refining our conceptualisation of these political experiences. By proposing the concept of popular infrastructural politics, I move in this direction. Based on the findings of my ethnographic research in Mexico City and on existing politics- and infrastructure-focused literature, I use this notion to capture the multiple ways in which ordinary politics unfold. Thus, I explore the multiple sources, discourses, practices, and structures that predate and inform the traders' political socialisation, and therefore, the politicisation of markets. With this in mind, I turn now to the analysis of *popular politics* to lay the foundations of the

concept of popular infrastructural politics. This discussion will help me to picture the multifaceted and contradictory interests, concerns, sentiments, and needs underpinning the politics of subaltern actors—among which I count the traders—and to characterise the instances of subordination and autonomy in which these politics unfold. In this way, I reflect on two issues already addressed in the literature about markets: the forms of "subaltern urbanism" (Roy, 2011; González, 2018, p.13) that they contribute to creating and the impact of their "marginality" (S. González, 2019) on urban contestation processes.

1.3. Popular politics

Following key contributions of E. P. Thompson, James C. Scott, and Javier Auyero, I understand *popular politics* as the distinctive political practices and discourses developed by the urban subaltern vis-à-vis dominant political actors in order to protect their communities and means of subsistence. These politics arise from subordinate social positions within existing economic and political structures, and they reflect the subaltern's diverse interests, needs, sentiments, and concerns while mirroring the contradictory effects of domination and exploitation upon their livelihoods. In this sense, the notion of *popular* highlights the double foundations of these politics performed by marginal or subaltern groups, whose subordination to dominant actors, particularly the state, plays a key role in shaping their political agency. Therefore, popular politics is a term that recognises the forces that simultaneously constrain and precipitate the subaltern's political socialisation, organisation, and mobilisation in the interstices of hegemonic politics.

My approach to popular politics recognises the contributions of historical and ethnographic research that carefully examines the subaltern's everyday life and the repertoire of political practices that predate the subaltern's involvement in rebellions, revolutions, or other forms of overt contestation. Here I draw on works that have explored the political traditions, interests, needs, and expectations of the working class, the urban poor, peasants, slaves, and serfs, who have experienced different forms of domination and exploitation. By highlighting the concepts that reveal what it means to do politics located at the margins, with limited resources, and under surveillance, this section helps me to delineate critical components that make popular infrastructural politics a synoptic notion. In particular, the analysis of the *popular* and the *political* from the phenomenological approach advanced by these authors helps me to outline the distinctiveness of popular infrastructural politics through the recognition of the subaltern's rich political trajectories. As chapter 2 and the pre-eminence of traders' voices and experiences

throughout the thesis reveal, this phenomenological approach has been crucial not only to developing the concept of popular infrastructural politics, but to design my research and build a narrative in which the case's insights shape the conceptualisation process.

To expand on these concepts, I discuss the main characteristics of popular politics in *Politics at the margins*. Here I focus on the notions of popular imagery, hidden transcript, and mētis[4] to provide an understanding of the drivers of political socialisation among subordinate actors. With these concepts, I highlight the rich traditions, interests, needs, concerns, and aspirations that shape popular politics, especially the role of problem solving, which is at the core of Mexico City market traders' politics. In *Subsistence and political dependency*, I examine the relationship between the subaltern's political and subsistence practices and the increasing role of the state in the subaltern's provision. I specifically look at how the subaltern's right to subsistence intersects with statecraft practices that lead to the forms of political dependency. In these sections, I highlight how this literature portrays markets and traders, as they have had a crucial place in researching popular politics. I conclude the discussion on the contradictory nature of popular politics in *Resistance: The defence of patronage*. Here I consider how the subaltern's struggles materialise around socio-political bonds—patronage—that condense contradictorily the protection of their means of subsistence and subordination to the state. Ultimately, by describing the intricate nature of popular politics, I signal the contradictory character of popular infrastructural politics and the role of infrastructure in shaping a socio-political bond between the subaltern and the state. This will become of great importance in chapter 3, where I delve into the Mexico City traders' and markets' political history.

1.3.1. Politics at the margins

The subaltern and the urban subaltern are central categories in this discussion. In fact, the study of popular infrastructural politics revolves around building a complex understanding of who these political actors are by analysing their practices and discourses. For this purpose, I mainly draw on the conceptual frameworks developed by Thompson, Scott, and Auyero, whose work has been essential to build a nuanced interpretation of both the political agency and subordinate and marginal conditions of the subaltern. By invoking the notion of subalternity, this thesis is thus part of a body of work that has "imported" this notion "from the rural worlds of Gramscian peasant studies" to explore the city as a "privileged site of popular conflict and resistance," as

[4] These three concepts are discussed in *The Making of the English Working Class* (Thompson, 1991), *Domination and the arts of resistance: Hidden transcripts* (Scott, 1990), and *Seeing like a state: How certain schemes to improve the human condition have failed* (Scott, 1998). I discuss them here to reflect on popular politics.

Choplin and Ciavolella (2017, p.314) put it. In general terms, my understanding of the subaltern focuses on the tensions between their subordinated condition and their social and political agency. The conceptual framework and the empirical case on which I base my discussion on popular infrastructural politics are also a means to convey these tensions underlying my understanding of the urban subaltern both as a subject and as an actor. In this sense, I investigate subalternity trying to identify the instances and ways in which the subaltern's "attribute of subordination" (Guha, 1988, p.35 in Roy, 2011, p.226) and "transformative and emancipatory politics" (Choplin and Ciavolella, 2017, p.315) contradict, clash, or complement.

Here I define the subaltern as a population, community, group, or individual whose economic, social, cultural, and political capacities and potentialities have been determined by the subordination they experience at the hands of dominant economic and political actors such as the state, as Auyero has clearly shown throughout his work. The condition of subalternity is thus shaped by the relationships of domination and subordination prevailing in a specific society. For the subaltern, this has meant to experience different forms of inequality, exploitation, deprivation, and exclusion. However, as subalternity is built in relation and against the powerful, subalternity also consists of multiple forms of political agency, as Scott (1985; 1990) shows and Ananya Roy (2011) emphasises by adopting the postcolonial critique to the use of the term. My understanding of the urban subaltern also highlights the conceptual shift that recognises their role as "agent of change" with a "distinct political identity"—popular—and associated with "distinct territories" (Roy, 2011, p.227)—in this case, infrastructures.[5]

My discussion on popular infrastructural politics also addresses the "heterogeneous, contradictory and performative realm of political struggle" (Roy, 2011, p.230) that characterise subaltern politics, in particular, their capacity to "command infrastructure" (Roy, 2011, p.233). Bayat (2000, p.534), for example, has defined the urban subaltern as a historically and geographically grounded category of subjects that comprises a wide range of "marginalised," "deinstitutionalised," and "disenfranchised" urban actors. In his view, the urban subaltern is increasing in diversity and number as a result of the impoverishing effects

[5] Following Solomon Benjamin's (2008) ideas regarding the emergence of a popular political consciousness, Roy (2011, 228) argues that the subaltern's popular politics are a distinctive form of political agency connected to a popular culture. As such, popular politics are politics in their own right, one that "refuses to be disciplined" (Benjamin, 2008, p.719) and creates "a space of politics formed out of the governmental administration of populations" (Roy, 2011, p.228). My discussion on popular infrastructural politics will problematise the tensions between agency and subordination unfolding around the creation of these political spaces.

of global economic and political restructuring programmes. The urban subaltern is thus a fluid category that responds to specific contexts. This heterogeneous and historically grounded composition of the subaltern allows me to identify the traders and markets of Mexico City as subaltern political actors and spaces.[6]

In this light, subordinate urban actors develop a set of political practices and discourses at the margins of society, usually facing multiple economic, social, and cultural constraints, pulling together only a limited range of political resources, and expecting very uncertain results out of their mobilisation. The political socialisation of the subaltern has historically meant challenging the material and symbolic obstacles that restrain their political skills, strategies, and tactics. But even in the most difficult circumstances, these subaltern political actors have developed rich knowledge and practice traditions to confront, as silent resistance or overt rebellion, the political actors and structures that oppress and exploit them. In general terms, these traditions reveal the extent to which politics permeate subaltern actors' lives and illustrate how far they are from being politically passive in contexts of subordination. In the following pages, I discuss the notions of political imagery, hidden transcript, and mētis, among others, to foreground the rudiments of these rich and ordinary but often invisible traditions on which an active political life relies on. Thus, I follow Thompson's (1991, pp.78, 82) focus on the heterogeneous "popular moods" and "popular sentiments" that inform the common experiences and shared interests and aspirations of ordinary people to unveil the neglected political agency of subordinate actors.

The notion of popular imagery emphasises the subjective motivations that trigger and justify the political awakening and consciousness of subaltern actors. If read in terms of Thompson, this popular imagery is the way "in which minority groups [the subaltern] have articulated their experience and projected their aspirations for hundreds of years. […] It is the sign of how men [sic] felt and hoped, loved and hated, and of how they preserved certain values in the very texture of their language" (Thompson, 1991, p.54). This language, Thompson (1991, p.63) says later, needs to be valued in its own terms, removing any assumptions of barbarism and incapacity, instead, acknowledging its more "robust and rowdy features [its] fatalism, [its] irony, […] and [its] tenacity of preservation". If not trivialised, simplified, or underestimated, these popular imageries open the discussion about the material and symbolic foundations of popular politics.

[6] The concept of the subaltern has been generally used in the academic literature to define the identity and economic and political practices of street vendors in different urban geographies (Tehran: Tafti, 2019; Mexico City: Rasmussen, 2017; Calcutta: Bandyopadhyay, 2016; Guangzhou: Huang and Xue, 2011; Baguio Yeoh, 2011). The term, however, has been less used to refer to traders in formalised marketplaces notwithstanding their commonalities, which I will illustrate by exploring the subalternity of Mexico City's traders and markets.

This line of thought emphasises the need to recognise the importance of the subaltern's political traditions in their own right, as they are "active energies" (Thompson, 1991, p.37) that encourage individuals and groups to organise and act politically at different scales.

This recognition involves discerning the multiple constraints shaping the subaltern's political socialisation, particularly their disproportionate reliance "on the knowledge and materials at hand" (Scott, 1998, p.335). While in the first instance this repertoire of resources will appear extremely limiting if compared with those available for the elites, subordinate groups do not simply create an impoverished set of political tools out of their marginal position. On the contrary, the popular imageries that underpin subaltern political traditions result from long-term strategies and tactics based on self-education practices that counteract the different forms of illiteracy that accompany subordination. In *Domination and the arts of resistance: Hidden transcripts*, Scott (1990) condenses this rich political repertoire with three different concepts: public transcripts, hidden transcripts, and infrapolitics. By creating and deploying these three forms of political work, subaltern actors reveal the multiple ways in which they interact with dominant political actors and navigate subordination and exploitation. Thus, however constrained, this repertoire shows how resourceful subaltern political socialisation is and what critical role it plays in helping nonhegemonic actors to hold groups together and mobilise against control and surveillance.

In Scott's terms (1990, pp.2, 3, 79), the public transcript refers to the most open, ritualistic, and stereotypical political interactions between the subaltern and the dominant. By reproducing the public transcript—official discourses and practices—the subaltern show their adherence, or create the appearance of consent, to hegemonic values. As public instances of subordination, the public transcript contributes to naturalising domination. In contrast, the hidden transcripts and infrapolitics describe the "offstage," relatively unmonitored, and even clandestine political discourses and practices developed by the subaltern. According to Scott (1990, p.4), these discourses and practices cover a wide range of speeches, gestures, rumours, gossip, folktales, songs, rituals, codes, and euphemisms that convey the subaltern's objective and subjective motivations that underlie their politicisation. The popular moods and sentiments that the hidden transcripts and infrapolitics condense "are not merely abstract exercises," as they provide the subaltern with "the ideological basis" for political action (Scott, 1990, p.80). Notwithstanding that this pool of political resources is usually deployed behind the scenes—in the margins and away from the powerholders' eye—they occasionally "storm the stage" (Scott, 1990, p.16), thus bringing the subaltern's indignation against the oppression and denigration to the public

sphere. Together, these three forms of political work portray popular politics' multifaceted, and ordinary character, but the hidden transcript and infrapolitics stand out because they draw our attention to the subaltern's less visible political discourses and practices—"the disguised, low-profile, undeclared resistance" (Scott, 1990, p.198).

The third central concept outlining the features of popular politics is mētis. According to Scott (1998, p.313), mētis is "a wide array of practical skills and acquired intelligence in responding to a constantly changing natural and human environment." It is "learned-by-rote" and problem-oriented, as its acquisition does not intend "to contribute to a wider body of knowledge but to solve the concrete problems" of the subaltern (Scott, 1998, p.324). Mētis thus reveals popular politics as valuable, non-technical, and practical knowledge and skills collectively produced by the subaltern in a long-term, contingent, and fragmented but cumulative process of political socialisation at the margins. As this includes the subaltern's political life, they develop a political mētis that involves the production and acquisition of practical knowledge and skills that help them to navigate complex political environments. And in this sense, its complexity as practical political knowledge resembles the complexity of the political structures and interactions the subaltern deal with. For example, this practical salience of popular politics allows the subaltern to: a) keep a group together, b) improvise and adjust tactics and strategies, c) convey needs and aspirations, d) interpret the allies' and opponents' values and gestures, and e) make the best out of limited resources (Scott, 1998, pp.314–315).[7]

As a reservoir of political tools, popular politics is not as homogeneous as it might look. Fuelled by diverse popular imageries, it is instead a diverse political field that gives birth to multiple political organisations and practical solutions. This heterogeneity brings to the fore the competitive character of popular politics, in which active agents contend against each other to build solutions for the subaltern, including the infrastructural ones, as I discuss later. In this light, the subaltern and their leaders emerge as competing problem-solvers, who create a fluid, diverse, fragmented, and non-centralised political landscape. And this is why Thompson (1991, p.39) stresses that popular politics are "made up of collisions, schisms, [and] mutations," which together create a political environment in which solidarity is not always easy to achieve. While Scott (1990, p.131) highlights that this difficulty is a condition among subordinate political actors, such diversity of expressions can propel popular innovation, which keeps producing

[7] Recent research on the urban poor and market traders has expanded this line of reflection. For example, Auyero (2007, p.62) shows how marginal urban political actors "do politics through problem solving" in Buenos Aires and local leaders achieve "a quasi-monopoly on problem solving." Similarly, Clark (2002, p.46) records how trader leaders and organisations in Ghana devote to deal with the markets' "very specific and acute needs."

unexpected solutions to urgent needs and problems "from below and outside" (Scott, 1998, p.332). In chapters 4 and 5, I show the implications of this political diversity and competition among market traders in Mexico City.

This understanding of popular politics relies on the insights offered by the study of extreme forms of subordination (e.g. slavery, serfdom, or dictatorships). However, the conceptual contributions of these studies resonate in other contexts too. Scott himself points out that these overt and hidden discourses and practices remain essential in contemporary subaltern politics, including in those contexts in which democratic procedures, liberal values, and political rights prevail. Regarding the relevance of paying attention to these politics, he argues that "[n]ot so long ago in the West, […] and, even today, for many of the least privileged minorities and marginalized poor, open political action will hardly capture the bulk of political action. Nor will an exclusive attention to declared resistance help us understand the process by which new political forces and demands germinate before they burst on the scene" (Scott, 1990, p.199). In this sense, however widespread the liberal practices of democratic and open political opposition and defiance, offstage ordinary politics continue to be critical sources of subaltern's political autonomy vis-à-vis dominant actors, particularly the state. As I show throughout the rest of this thesis, exploring these forms of popular politics remains fruitful, as it sheds light on the permanent and labour-intensive activities that lay the foundations for bolder and more audacious political actions that defy hegemonic rules.

Before turning to the analysis of the ambivalent relationship between subaltern actors and the state, it is worth briefly showing how traders and markets have contributed to shaping popular politics. Notably, markets and traders have been at the centre of these political subcultures of the socially marginal, as Scott (1990, p.123) calls them. In these contexts, markets and traders appear as spaces of complicity and active agents that create, enact, articulate, and disseminate popular politics. Like other subaltern political spaces, markets can protect certain forms of subaltern socialisation, coordination, and communication that the elites have historically considered dangerous. Also, traders and other subordinate actors can avoid different forms of control and surveillance given the markets' relative autonomy. Citing Bakhtin (1984), Scott (1990, pp.121–123) reflects on how anonymous, marginal, and subordinated groups and individuals have historically gathered in markets, where they can benefit politically from their relatively unmonitored condition.

From this perspective, traders stand out as subaltern actors for various reasons: a) for keeping the markets as autonomous spaces, b) for fighting against state intrusion via the imposition of taxation and other forms of labour and wealth exaction, and c) for being active agents or carriers of popular politics. In this light, traders have been central in cultivating and propagating the subversive themes and political skills that foster a popular dissident culture. Furthermore, trader leaders can be described as popular intellectuals, whose combination of political skills and marginal positions (Scott, 1990, p.124) allow them to understand and piece together both the visions, moods, and sentiments of their peers and those embedded in hegemonic interests and values. In chapters 4 and 6, I discuss in detail the intellectual role of trader leaders and their heretical understanding of existing regulatory frameworks. For now, this account on traders and markets allows me to highlight their crucial role in creating and shaping popular imageries, hidden transcripts, and a political mētis; three key components that I distinctively associate with the notion of popular politics as a distinctive subaltern practice.

1.3.2. Subsistence and political dependency

Subaltern actors deploy popular politics to deal with a wide range of problems and needs, for example, organisational, infrastructural, or regulatory, as chapters 4, 5, and 6 reveal. Given the subaltern's marginal position in the socio-economic structure, many of these problems and needs directly converge around subsistence issues. Consequently, deploying popular politics implies dealing with what Lee (2006, p.414) calls the practicalities, dilemmas, values, and contradictions of making a living and securing the means of subsistence. Since this thesis focuses on the popular infrastructural politics of "subsistence-oriented small-scale traders" (Schrader, 1994, pp.39–40), discussing this connection between popular politics and subsistence is essential. In this section, I examine the centrality of subsistence practices in popular politics and its role in sustaining the contentious but co-dependent relationship between the subaltern and the state. With this analysis, I delineate a key feature of the traders' relationship with the Mexican state, whose political co-dependency is mediated by the role of infrastructure—the markets—in traders' subsistence.

To advance this discussion, I examine Thompson's (1971) and Scott's (1976) interest in understanding why, how, and when those living close to the subsistence line fight for justice and fairness. Focused on the experiences of peasants and the urban poor in moral economies—pre-capitalist and pre-industrial societies—their work highlights the role of "the subsistence ethic" (Scott, 1976, p.3) and the moral principles of generosity, mutual support, and social responsibility

in shaping the economic and political relations between subaltern and dominant actors. In recent years, scholars such as Götz (2015) and Sayer (2015, 2007) have pointed out that these ethical and moral principles remain central in economic and political relations in capitalist societies. Authors such as Wilson (2012; 2013) and Morgan (2015), for example, show how these moralities govern contemporary state and everyday economic practices, while Edelman (2005) highlights the persistent tensions arising around expectations of provision, just prices, and the commodification of essential goods in urban areas. Regarding market traders, Evers and Schrader (1994) and Weiler et al. (2016) show, for example, how small-scale traders circumvent or advocate for these ethics and moralities that orbit around the subaltern's subsistence.

In terms of popular politics, this approach reveals how subsistence becomes a powerful driver of subaltern political engagement, and the term "the right to subsistence" takes such political salience even further. In Scott's (1976, p.176) view, the right to subsistence functions as an "operating assumption" for which "all members of a community have a presumptive right to a living so far as local resources will allow." This presumptive right becomes a claimable "minimal social right" that "tak[es] priority over all other claims" to the extent that what is at stake is the very existence of subaltern groups. On the face of their subordinate position, the right to subsistence is the subaltern's ultimate unresolved problem. Therefore, the popular imageries, hidden transcripts, and political mētis that inform popular politics are all directed towards securing their means of survival.

From this perspective, the right to subsistence activates popular politics against those actions that can jeopardise the subaltern's right to have enough to live. However, since subordination mediates the subsistence of the subaltern, its centrality in popular politics can also lead to forms of political dependency. This is clear when dominant actors, such as the state, control the subaltern's access to the means of subsistence. Under these conditions, the subaltern's right to subsistence is settled under the premises of a socio-political bond vis-à-vis dominant actors. Such a bond helps the subaltern to secure a living, but at the expense of their political autonomy. Domination is naturalised in this way, but not in unconditional ways, as the rebellious character of popular politics reveals. In this vein, Edelman (2005) recognises the preponderant role of the modern state in mediating the subaltern's access to the means of subsistence. In his view, state intervention has been crucial to both considerably rising and sustaining the subaltern's "subsistence expectations" (Edelman, 2005, p.332). In his work, Edelman explains how state actions play a key role for peasants to secure their means of subsistence and have access to land. This state intervention is also relevant in the case of

small-scale traders, whose survival depends on the state-mediated provision and control of markets, as Schrader (1994), Weng and Kim (2016), Endres et al. (2018), and this thesis reveal. Schrader (1994, p.35) even defines markets as "means of exchange" whose access has been increasingly controlled by states.

State mediation in subaltern's subsistence brings back the imprint of subordination into popular politics, and the relationship between the markets, the traders, and the state is a remarkable example of how popular politics oscillate between dissidence and political dependency. In this process, the traders' strategic role as intermediaries has been crucial to shaping state intervention. As Evers and Schrader (1994, p.4) explain, traders are not primary producers but economic actors that use their trading capital to buy commodities and exploit time and space to sell those commodities at a profit. Because of the economic practices and moralities that result from this intermediate position between producers and consumers, traders have been the target of state control and surveillance. More specifically, states have sanctioned the traders' self-interested organisations (Lyon, 2003; Little, 2005), their use of markets as profit-making spaces (Weng and Kim, 2016), and, more generally, the negative effects of their profit-motivated behaviour over subaltern communities (Edensor and Kothari, 2006; Awuah, 1997; Garlick, 1971).

In particular, state intervention has been associated with the possibility that traders' activities jeopardise the well-being of subaltern communities or their most vulnerable members by circumventing the right to subsistence and the ethics of reciprocity, solidarity, and social responsibility. Practices such as price manipulation, goods adulteration, forestalling, speculation, tax evasion, and the commodification of food continue casting a shadow of distrust over traders' reputation (Randall et al., 1996; Wilson, 2012). And this has pushed states to translate producers' and consumers' demands about why "markets should be controlled" and traders "hedged around with many restrictions," as Thompson (1971, p.83) puts it when referring to the people's claims to prevent the traders' betrayal of their moral obligations towards the poor. The critical point around state control and surveillance of traders' commercial life is that it has led to an increasingly state mediation on their subsistence practices. In turn, it has changed the character of their popular politics.

For centuries now, multiple statecraft practices have been targeting markets and traders. Through regulatory frameworks and infrastructural systems, states have made markets and traders more "legible" and "administratively convenient" for control purposes (Scott, 1998, p.3), both in economic and political terms. Price setting, measurement standardisation,

taxation, and infrastructure provision are widespread examples of these state mediations on traders' subsistence. Market traders around the world have experienced the demolition, redesign, and reconstruction of their markets and the enforcement of policing, taxation, and regulatory mechanisms that allow states to exact labour, goods, and services from them. Thus, traders become part of the state's attempts to create "a complete and legible list of subjects and taxpayers" (Scott, 1998, p.69). With these punitive and disciplinary practices, states lay the foundations of the socio-political bond that brings together the traders and the state. In this context, infrastructure provision is a solid reminder of the pervasive presence of the state in traders' life, and of how traders' subsistence has become profoundly mediated by the state.

Ultimately, this brief account of the relationship between the traders, the markets, and the state brings to the fore the traders' subaltern condition and how their political practices are strongly mediated by the ways in which the state takes part in traders' social reproduction. This economic and political dependency has become even more acute for traders given the insecurity, marginality, uncertainty, and stigmatisation surrounding the markets today—as discussed in the first section of this chapter. Given their small amounts of capital, their low profit margins, and their disadvantage vis-à-vis wholesalers and other major retail actors, market traders have come to claim state intervention in order to access goods, equipment, and credit. These claims—framed within the traders' and the state's socio-political bond that secures a living for the former and political control for the latter—seek to prevent or alleviate the traders' precarious or vulnerable condition in a highly competitive economic environment.

Seen from Auyero's (2012b) perspective, the traders have become not only subjects but "patients of the state." Their social reproduction has become deeply interwoven with state institutions and their patronage practices. As with other subaltern actors, the traders' right to subsistence has "become progressively entangled in the state's web of power [which is also] composed of uncomfortable waiting rooms and corridors, ever-changing paperwork, and long and unpredictable delays" (Auyero, 2007, p.60), where the subtle but also blatant lessons of bureaucratic and political subordination take place. In this light, popular politics are closely tied to a state that possesses a double nature: it is both a source of domination and a possibility of survival (Auyero, 2012c, p.156). This state holds moral obligations towards the subaltern that bring together domination and patronage. Taxation systems, regulatory frameworks, and policing and disciplinary mechanisms come hand in hand with resource allocation schemes that also speak of the state's solidarity, reciprocity, and social responsibility.

Under this socio-political pact, small-scale traders can claim state measures to protect their right to subsistence, such as "fair" taxes and subsidies. In exchange, the state demands compliance and quiescence: a "silent submission" for an underfunded, "precarious and limited shield" (Auyero, 2007, p.59), which is even more limited in neoliberal austerity contexts. This dependency to state mediation for subsistence creates spaces for open and offstage encounters and collaborations between the state and the subaltern. Thus, popular politics operates contradictorily, not only against but also in collaboration with the state for the sake of mutual, if unequal, benefits. These encounters occur in the "gray zone of politics," where clandestine, "shadowy ties" are formed (Auyero, 2012c, p.109) between state agents and the subaltern. Here, the encounters of the "gray zone" refer to the less visible, sometimes concealed and secretly held interactions in which popular politics and statecraft practices meet, merge, and diverge. These are the encounters that reveal that the economic and political relationship between dominant and subaltern actors is "not a solid wall" (Scott, 1990, p.14) but an unremitting ordinary struggle over multiple boundaries.

The "gray zone" is the instance in which the state and the subaltern negotiate the terms of subsistence and compliance; the terms of the patronage relationship. As a "murky area where normative [and political] boundaries dissolve" (Auyero, 2007, p.32), the "gray zone" is where the subaltern display the contradictory character of popular politics. In these political spaces, the subaltern can claim their right to subsistence and affirm their political autonomy, but they do so vis-à-vis state agents whose presence is just a reminder of the subaltern's economic and political dependency. In this way, this section highlights the mechanism and the extent to which popular politics are shaped by a political dependency that emerges out of the subaltern's dependence on the state to access their means of subsistence. In chapter 3, I examine this economic and political dependency between the traders and the state as the market network expanded in Mexico City in the 1950s. By paying attention to the role of the state in the traders' subsistence, I trace the emergence of traders' popular politics vis-à-vis statecraft practices of provision and control.

1.3.3. Resistance: The defence of patronage

As a political practice forged at the margins of the state, popular politics unfold amid contradictory forces, ideas, and practices. On one side, popular politics are the product of rich popular imageries, hidden discourses, and practical concerns; on the other side, state domination and political dependency strongly shape their inner workings. At times, popular

politics revolve around autonomy, resistance, and contestation, but the subaltern also negotiates and accepts their subordination and conformity to protect their right to subsistence and solve their urgent problems and needs. These political oscillations foreground the "many forms of [political] engagement between the state and the subaltern" (Auyero, 2007, p.153), which range from the most transgressive forms of protest and activism to the disguised gestures and euphemisms that Scott captures with the term infrapolitics. In different ways, they all defy the status quo and challenge political structures of oppression and exploitation. However, considering the following chapters on the Mexico City case, I conclude this discussion by pointing at how the subaltern also mobilises these multifaceted popular politics to preserve a socio-political bond based on patronage relationships.

As Thompson (1971, pp.77–79; 1991, pp.85–86) points out, the defence of patronage relationships must not be confused with mere consent. In this context, the subaltern mobilise popular politics to protect their right to subsistence and demand that those who exact their labour, goods, and services fulfil the moral obligations of mutual support, solidarity, and social responsibility. When confronted with powerful dominant actors, this struggle to preserve the socio-political bond on which the subaltern's survival depends is a decisive factor. The subaltern's strategies of resistance, contestation, and negotiation then focus, for example, on protecting the role of the state in provisioning them with the means of subsistence that their socio-political bond entitles them to. These less transgressive forms of popular politics (Auyero and Jensen, 2015, p.362) signal the conservative features of subaltern dissident political cultures, which, according to Scott (1990, p.91), "have rarely taken truly radical ideological turns." While this conservatism prevents the emergence of more radical popular politics, it also affirms the patronage relationship that gives the subaltern access to state-mediated means of subsistence. As I discuss in chapter 6, this conservatism in popular politics can even hold back the dismantlement of a socio-political order which, although oppressive, obliges the state to sustain a safety net that protects market traders in Mexico City.[8] Thus, popular politics are closer to what Thompson (1991, p.87) calls "anti-absolutist" politics. "[I]n the interest of safety" (Scott, 1990, p.86), the subaltern cultivate a political repertoire that fights against unrestricted forms of power such as unfair or arbitrary taxes, rents, or regulations, excessive

[8] Regarding markets and traders, some examples presented in the first section contradict the conservative character of popular politics by showing how traders and markets can be drivers of alternative economic and political practices. However, the subaltern's socio-economic constraints that shape popular politics have led authors such as Awuah (1997) or Schlack et al. (2018) to point out, respectively, that market traders do not engage in broader collective struggles or escape the dynamics of hegemonic party politics.

control and surveillance, or, as Auyero (2012b, p.21) notes, the routine humiliations inflicted by state agents through messages of inferiority, uncertainty, and disregard.

By advancing the concept of popular infrastructural politics within the boundaries of this discussion on popular politics, I want to emphasise its multifaceted and contradictory character as part of the repertoire of subaltern political practices and discourses. And thus I suggest that this new term coveys both the rebellious and the conservative political tendencies that subaltern urban actors mobilise when fighting for political autonomy and patronage. Within this framework, popular infrastructural politics also display the subaltern's popular imageries, hidden transcripts, and mētis. Moreover, based on the discussion about the right to subsistence and political dependency, I project the subaltern's ability to politicise their demand for well-being onto popular infrastructural politics, and recognise how the state also permeates this distinctive political practice. In this sense, the foundations of popular infrastructural politics are to be found at the margins of the state, in the interstices of subordination, and in the subaltern's persistent struggles for certainty and safety. Now I turn my attention to infrastructures, the third component of the concept, to examine their role in subaltern political practice and state mediation.

1.4. Infrastructures

I introduced popular infrastructural politics as a distinctive subaltern political practice and as a synoptic term where three issues intersect, those of the popular, the political, and the infrastructural. In this section, I focus on the latter to discuss its political salience and active role in shaping the subaltern's political participation in contemporary urban politics. I investigate why the basic material and organisational structures and facilities that support the reproduction of modern societies draw people into political struggles. More specifically, I am interested in understanding why and how infrastructures—their provision, maintenance, and transformation—have been placed at the heart of subaltern political practice. Although I examine general aspects of infrastructure governance and contestation (and this can refer to roads, dams, railways, ports, industrial hubs, telecommunications, water, energy, or other infrastructural systems), my interest in markets as traditional commercial facilities leads me to look into urban and social infrastructures more attentively.[9]

[9] Recently, Amin and Thrift (2017, p.53) conceptualise cities as the places where infrastructure "is thickest […] its experience most pressing [and] where new kinds of infrastructure have been invented and applied most fully."

By discussing the nodal character of traditional markets and their role in organising and governing political flows at the beginning of this chapter, I prefigured the political salience of infrastructures. In this section, I problematise this argument further to examine what this political salience entails, as markets as infrastructures are generative forces that trigger and combine different forms of politics. To this end, I draw on recent literature that will help me to build an argument around the centrality of infrastructure in popular politics and, therefore, to consolidate my reflection on popular infrastructural politics. Like my approach to popular politics, my understanding of infrastructure's political salience rests on works that emphasise infrastructures' relational, diverse, dynamic, and contradictory political character. By using McGuirk's (2012; see also Baker and McGuirk, 2017; McGuirk et al., 2016) concept of *geographies of urban politics* and following other critical approaches to city-making, I look at the place of infrastructures in a broader political spectrum and their diverse interactions with spaces, objects, actors, and processes. This will help me to delineate how infrastructures support subaltern political and subsistence practices, but also how they convey hegemonic interests and values. In terms of markets and traders, this discussion delves into the underlying processes that make traditional markets to assemble specific "social ecologies" primarily formed by traders, managers, and consumers (González, 2018, p.179).

To introduce this discussion, I explore the critical place of infrastructures in shaping the urban and the political in *Nodes in geographies of urban politics*. Here I look into how infrastructures become interlocked with both city-making processes and subsistence practices, which ultimately allows me to address their political salience in general terms. This broader discussion frames my further analysis in *Double political nature*, where I focus on the contradictory political projects converging in infrastructures. In this part, I examine infrastructures' biopolitical powers, their capacity to materialise hegemonic interests and values, their role in subject formation, and their consequences for popular politics. In *Enablers of popular politics*, I conclude the discussion by highlighting the importance of infrastructures underpinning the subaltern's political socialisation, organisation, and mobilisation. Thus, I outline the infrastructural component to advance the synoptic concept of popular infrastructural politics. Also, in terms of the forthcoming discussion on Mexico City markets and traders, I provide a perspective that captures the contradictory struggles around the public markets' provision, maintenance, and transformation.

1.4.1. Nodes in geographies of urban politics

In this thesis, I understand urban politics as politically mediated space production processes that, responding to specific economic and historical trajectories, involve the implementation and/or dismantlement of specific socio-spatial configurations. In general terms, I follow the idea that urban politics are at their core "some sort of struggle over space, or more specifically, over sociospatial processes," as Deborah Martin concisely puts it (see Ward et al., 2011, p.856).[10] But, since these spatialised politics involve a diversity of political actors, practices, discourses, and processes, I also benefit from McGuirk's (2012) discussion of geographies of urban politics. This notion emphasises the multiplicity, relationality, and the dynamic and contradictory character of different urban political domains and socio-spatial configurations, so it mirrors my approach to popular politics. As a perspective concerned with diverse political ecologies, the geographies of urban politics do not exhaust the understanding of political actors by only looking at dominant political and economic actors and discourses. Instead, it also considers the long-standing and emergent subaltern political actors and their circuits of political action. Moreover, by researching "fluid and performative [urban] arrangements and achievements," McGuirk (2012, p.262) draws our attention to those spaces and objects that shape urban politics. This not only highlights the role of subaltern politics shaping socio-spatial processes but also allows us to address the importance of infrastructures in urban politics.

In the geographies of urban politics, infrastructures gain significance as spaces and objects that play a central role in the implementation and/or dismantlement of socio-spatial configurations. Infrastructures are the spatial forms through which urban politics are enacted, to paraphrase Kevin and Ward (see Ward et al., 2011, p.865). On the one hand, the geographies of urban politics provide the conditions to produce, develop, replace, or destroy infrastructures, thus propelling the urbanisation process in different directions. On the other hand, urban infrastructures are instances of political socialisation, organisation, and mobilisation in the city.

[10] Urban politics have been the focus of attention in multiple disciplines and traditions (Ward et al., 2011; Rodgers et al., 2014), from which scholars have raised questions about their nature and specificity. Scholars that understand urban politics as a subfield in political science have focused on issues of political representation and participation in liberal, democratic urban contexts (Sapotichne et al., 2007). From a more critical perspective, other scholars have defined urban politics as the study of urban governing coalitions, their formation, vested interests, and impact on urban development agendas (MacLeod, 2011; Logan and Molotch, 1987). Within a political economy framework, others have understood urban politics as the analysis of capitalist socio-economic dynamics that govern urbanisation processes (Brenner et al., 2011; MacLeod and Jones, 2011; Swyngedouw, 2009; Harvey, 1973). For McGuirk (2012), all these approaches have greatly contributed to identifying the wide range of actors, practices, discourses, and processes that characterise this political domain; however, she advocates for the concept of geographies of urban politics as a post-structural and post-modern understanding of urban politics that emphasises its multiplicity, contingency, and relationality.

Because of their centrality in the urbanisation process and the politicisation of the city, authors such as Anand et al. (2018) and Amin and Thrift (2017) have emphasised infrastructures' generative powers. Rather than being only the effect of economic and political action, infrastructures are also the cause of economic, social, political, and cultural processes.

Cities are the most telling example of infrastructures' generative powers. Cities are the product of infrastructure concentration and proliferation, and as a result, cities have become one of the most stable and dynamic spaces where infrastructures are produced and disseminated (Star, 1999, p.382). Given their unprecedented proliferation and the extent of their presence in cities (Amin and Thrift, 2017, p.34), infrastructures have become central in urban politics, mainly because of their ambivalent effects on communities, which involve forms of displacement, control, and surveillance but also improved living conditions that result of their networked character (Swilling, 2011, 2014; Easterling, 2016). The construction and operation of 329 public markets in Mexico City is a clear example of the impact of infrastructure on city-making, the urbanisation process, and the politicisation of social life. I discuss this nexus in detail in chapter 3.

Infrastructures are nodes in the geographies of urban politics that connect spaces, objects, people, ideas, technologies, commodities, etc., and by catalysing economic, social, political, and cultural processes, they have increasingly contributed to sustaining everyday urban life. As technical, networked devices more and more embedded in urban assemblages, to use Blok and Farias (2016) terms, infrastructures have become central nodes for social reproduction.[11] In this light, infrastructures' political salience arises from their role as enablers of social life and their increasing importance in supporting subsistence practices in urban contexts. The idea that infrastructures are "living mediation[s] of what organises social life" (Berlant, 2016, p.393), "medium[s] through which" communities are "orchestrated" (Amin, 2014, p.156), or the "prosthetics" through which people "think, act, and feel" (Amin and Thrift, 2017, p.17), foregrounds their importance in mediating the very existence and survival of entire populations.

The description of markets in this discussion on popular infrastructural politics portrays the critical role given the markets' connection with the provision of food and other staples. However, this mediation extends to multiple other infrastructures and the socio-spatial configurations in which they take part. As many studies reveal (Bissell, 2018; Cloke and Conradson, 2018; Watson, 2015; Mattern, 2014; H.F. Wilson, 2013; Rose et al., 2010),

[11] This pre-eminence and embeddedness has led authors such as Latham and Wood (2015) and Angelo and Hentschel (2015) to consider, respectively, that people "inhabit" infrastructures and our "interactional encounters" with infrastructures occur every day.

different forms of sociality such as care, leisure, religion, and learning are deeply tied to infrastructures such as schools, libraries, churches, laundries, museums, and playgrounds. In this sense, given the services, the sense of belonging, and the forms of cooperation that these infrastructures provide and trigger (Klinenberg, 2018; Amin and Thrift, 2017; Askins and Pain, 2011; Amin, 2008), they play a vital role in supporting community life and people's well-being and welfare (Simone, 2004, p.425).

While the role of infrastructures in social reproduction and the urbanisation process underpins their political salience, it is also dependent on how infrastructures respond to specific socio-economic contexts. In the past decades, infrastructure provision, maintenance, and transformation have been remodelled in light of structural economic and political adjustments. More specifically, the implementation of neoliberal policies and austerity measures have transformed infrastructures into "nonspaces" or "zoned byways" (Berlant, 2016, p.408) through enclosure processes which, ultimately, limit their capacity to enable social life. These adjustments, which involve privatisation, deregulation, and profiteering (Amin and Thrift, 2017, p.120), erode infrastructures' social functions, particularly their role as drivers of well-being. In line with this critique of neoliberal restructuring, Fredericks (2018, pp.33, 44) argues that these structural adjustments "have hollowed out infrastructure's function and value." She points out that in neoliberal contexts modernist, state-planned, comprehensive infrastructure models are being dismantled to, in their place, create cheap, fragmented, and labour-intensive infrastructural systems. As Graham and Marvin (2001, p.138) have emphasised, these adjustments produce highly differentiated infrastructural landscapes through practices of splintering urbanism and infrastructural unbundling. The uneven distribution of the benefits and hazards embedded in infrastructures is an intrinsic effect of these adjustments, mainly affecting subaltern urban actors by producing forms of infrastructural destitution.

For the subaltern, this form of inequality materialises as infrastructural absence and poverty (Amin and Thrift, 2017, p.141), and involve the lack of infrastructure provision and the chronic experiences of infrastructure abandonment and deterioration. Both, however, reflect the exclusion experienced by specific urban populations as a result of the neglect, dismantlement, or privatisation of infrastructural systems that help to sustain their livelihoods. These infrastructural conditions make the subaltern's access to water, energy, food, transport, jobs, and leisure more difficult. In different urban contexts, infrastructural absence and poverty contribute to perpetuating the rudimentary, incomplete, overused, or failing character of what Simone (2004, p.425) calls "half-built environments." In these precarious, impoverished, or

deteriorated neighbourhoods, the labour and risks expected to be reduced by infrastructures is devolved on to the subaltern's bodies, as Fredericks (2018, p.92) shows. Their bodies play a crucial role in sustaining fragile, decaying, and hazardous infrastructures through makeshift repairs and occasional maintenance.[12] Compared to the infrastructures for the elite, whose main role is facilitating their everyday life, the infrastructural poverty and absence of the subaltern leave humans to "do the heavy lifting" (Amin and Thrift, 2017, p.19). As already mentioned, governments and investors use the markets' infrastructural decay to promote regeneration processes, which can also become a condition that precipitates political organisation and mobilisation, as I discuss in chapters 3 and 5 regarding the markets' provision and preservation.

In light of this discussion, infrastructures' political salience arises from their generative powers and their influence in the geographies of urban politics. These powers place infrastructures at the core of the dismantlement or implementation of specific socio-spatial configurations. In particular, they are crucial agents propelling the urbanisation process, specifically city-making, enabling complex forms of social life at different scales, and shaping the subaltern's unequal urban landscapes. While the centrality of infrastructures in these three dimensions is crucial for advancing the concept of popular infrastructural politics, I pay special attention to the third issue in the following pages, as it signals the importance of infrastructures in the popular politics of subaltern urban actors. I explore further this relationship in the next section by looking into how infrastructures embody subaltern and dominant political agendas.

1.4.2. Double political nature

By placing infrastructures at the heart of the geographies of urban politics, I recognise their technical and political character and, therefore, their role in materialising and reproducing power relations. This approach involves acknowledging that infrastructures are political resources that convey the interests and understandings of specific social actors regarding the functioning of society. Moreover, infrastructure deployment, Gupta (2018, p.66) notes, "favors one set of political actors over others," but, over time, infrastructures come to incorporate and mobilise competing visions about their function and value. As the most important actors behind both large and small infrastructural projects in modern history, states and private corporations have defined the dominant economic and political agendas that stimulate infrastructure provision (Easterling, 2016). While this has mainly meant subordination to infrastructures'

[12] Fredericks (2018, p.90) calls "salvage bricolage" these makeshift forms of repair and maintenance. In this way, she emphasises the incessant material practices and relations through which subaltern actors tinker, disable, hack, navigate, and manipulate failing, decaying, and hazardous infrastructures in order to keep them working.

biopolitical powers, the subaltern have also developed political identities and organisations that permeate infrastructures with new economic and political agendas.

In this sense, the idea that infrastructures "are political in every way" and "arenas of considerable power struggle" (Amin and Thrift, 2017, p.120) involves delving into such agendas, their contrasting tendencies, tensions, conflicts, and negotiations. More specifically, it involves looking into the politics of infrastructure or infrastructural politics (Anand et al., 2018; Larkin, 2018; Amin and Thrift, 2017; Graham and Marvin, 2009; McFarlane and Rutherford, 2008), which, generally speaking, revolve around the actors, discourses, and practices related to infrastructure design, provision, distribution, management, transformation, and destruction. In this light, the production and reproduction of infrastructures come to the forefront as an arena of political action in which each one these processes becomes subjected to forms of political advocacy and contestation. As already mentioned, the state has played a crucial role in such political processes.

States have been one of the most important sponsors of infrastructure provision and they remain key players in infrastructure governance. Particularly throughout the twentieth century, states led and encouraged the construction of all sorts of infrastructural systems (communicational, military, productive, etc.), with which they increased their capacity to control space, people, and resources (Scott, 2009; Harvey, 2018). In pursuit of their economic and political goals, states have consolidated the nexus power-infrastructure by building alliances with private actors, to jointly exert their "infrastructural power" (Mann, 1984 in Fredericks, 2018, p.32). Through this power, states and allies territorialise specific forms of social life by creating new socio-spatial configurations or ordering existing ones. According to Mukerji (2009, p.206), these infrastructures exercise the "impersonal rule" of state power through destruction and displacement of human and nonhuman populations. Moreover, infrastructures become the "intimate form of contact, presence, and potential" that convey "the morality and ethics of political leaders" (Appel et al., 2018, p.22). In this sense, infrastructures are part of the statecraft practices that simplify and make more legible territories and subordinate actors by imposing classificatory patterns and standardised rhythms into social life. As replicable models built and run in compliance with technical, architectural, regulatory, and managerial standards (Star, 1999, p.381), infrastructures become a "formula" (Fredericks, 2018, p.62) that dominant actors use to reorganise social life and command governance.

As state-provided or regulated infrastructures, public markets play this disciplinary function. Historical accounts on the redesign of public markets at the hands of states (Velázquez, 1997; Schmiechen and Carls, 1999; Endres et al., 2018) show how these infrastructural formulas operate. In essence, these formulas materialise development, efficiency, hygiene, order, and functionality standards that redesign the markets in ways that facilitate practices of profit-making, labour and tax extraction, and political subordination. In chapter 3, I discuss how public market provision in Mexico City contributed to consolidating state power vis-à-vis street vendors by, as Amin and Thrift (2017, p.120) have emphasised regarding other infrastructures, "settl[ing] and habituat[ing]" a social and political regime. Like schools, factories, roads, border checkpoints, and other disciplinary infrastructures, markets have been also built to change and control the economic, social, political, and cultural practices of subordinate groups. In this way, infrastructures mediate the political relationship between the state and the subaltern, making ordinary and disguising subordination practices through the infrastructures' material forms and functioning.

One of these infrastructurally mediated political relationships is patronage, which I have defined as central to understanding popular politics. As a distinctive practice in contemporary political arenas, states not only impose but also exchange infrastructures for political support and compliance. As I reveal throughout the thesis, these exchanges are conflictive and contradictory political transactions that characterise the construction of patronage relationships between the state and the subaltern. As Appel (2018, p.58) and Gupta (2018, p.75) show, infrastructure provision, plus all the inauguration speeches and events revolving around it, function as "ideological acts" that, in turn, work as the "memory of political times." In this light, infrastructures are the material reminders of political pacts that convey states' dominant political agendas. When infrastructures are mobilised to sustain patronage relationships, they materialise the socio-political bond under which the nexus subsistence-subordination operates. As aforementioned, this political use highlights, on the one side, the importance of infrastructures as a means of subsistence and, on the other side, the role of the state as provider of such means. As I discuss in chapters 3 and 5, public market provision in Mexico City inaugurated this type of political relationship between state agents and subaltern market traders. As I highlight later, each market's anniversary and the completion of repair and maintenance works are both a contestation and celebration of that political relationship.

A critical aspect of infrastructures' biopolitical powers is that they propel the emergence of new political subjectivities and governing bodies (Appel et al., 2018; Fredericks, 2018; Easterling, 2016). As a statecraft practice, infrastructures aim at moulding these subaltern

subjectivities and bodies, but, as with markets and trader organisations, they do not become spaces of absolute domination, as infrastructures and their subject formation effect also trigger political organisation, resistance, and rebellion. This is more evident when subaltern actors become political subjects and develop governing bodies through which they organise, appropriate, and influence the functioning of infrastructures. In terms of my argument around popular infrastructural politics, this is the instance in which popular politics converge around infrastructures, thus meeting, merging, and contesting the already embedded dominant political agendas. In this sense, popular politics permeate infrastructures by shaping their meanings with popular imageries and using them as spaces of relative autonomy from whence to advance and disseminate the subaltern's hidden transcripts. While this politicisation of infrastructures involves forms of overt resistance and rebellion, it also reproduces the multifaceted and contradictory relationship between the subaltern and state agents. Therefore, infrastructures can come to embody the "gray zones of politics," and their defence as means of subsistence to signify the defence of patronage. However contradictory, this process brings subaltern political agendas into infrastructure provision, maintenance, and transformation.

If the subaltern's political agenda, on the one hand, invokes the defence of patronage and affirms the impersonal rule of the state, on the other hand, it links infrastructures to the right to subsistence, to political autonomy, and, in the case of markets, to stay and to belong to a trader community. These two coexisting agendas impact the production and reproduction of infrastructures in the first place. Moreover, given their importance in the geographies of urban politics, these agendas have city-scale implications (Staeheli, 2013). By advancing their interests, needs, concerns, and aspirations concerning infrastructure deployment, the subaltern take advantage of their political salience. More specifically, the subaltern demand that states fulfil their part of the socio-political bond, mainly by providing and maintaining the infrastructures that work for the subaltern as means of subsistence or relatively autonomous political spaces.[13] In neoliberal contexts, the defence of infrastructures reflects the subaltern's need to preserve their capacity to enhance people's lives, and to prevent austerity and privatisation measures from dismantling their publicness and social functions. In chapter 6, I explore this form of "refusal of capitalist moral economies" (Fredericks, 2018,

[13] Although I have focused on the contradictory character of (social) infrastructures that play a key role in the sustenance of subaltern livelihoods, authors such as Lin et al. (2017), Degryse (2016), Kenney and Zysman (2016), and Graham and Marvin (2009) have drawn our attention to infrastructures that overtly advance violent, authoritarian, and undemocratic economic and political agendas. These infrastructures, which aim at governing the lives of migrants, prisoners, ethnic minorities, etc., not only control but actively increase the exclusion, precarity, and disposability of subaltern populations.

p.154) and resistance to infrastructural poverty and absence in Mexico City public markets; however, as the works of Castán Broto (2019), McFarlane and Silver (2017), and Auyero and Swistun (2009) reveal, the defence of infrastructures in neoliberal contexts involves a wide range of community struggles to access the basic goods and services on which their subsistence and well-being depend.

This discussion highlights the double political nature of infrastructures, which converges around the multifaceted and contradictory character of popular politics. While infrastructures embody dominant economic and political agendas, their role in subject formation triggers multiple opportunities for the subaltern to develop their own political practices and discourses around infrastructure provision, maintenance, and transformation. In this light, infrastructures condense competing discourses and practices that determine their values and functions. Given that infrastructures become means of subsistence and materialisations of the socio-political bond between the subaltern and the state, they emerge as a central issue in popular politics. Since these connections reveal how infrastructures become drivers of subaltern political socialisation, organisation, and mobilisation, they also underpin the development of the concept of popular infrastructural politics by bringing infrastructures to the centre of contemporary popular politics. I conclude this section by discussing more specifically how infrastructures become enablers of popular politics.

1.4.3. Enablers of popular politics

The political salience of infrastructures foregrounds "essential aspects of distributional justice and planning power" (Star, 1999, p.379) that become visible in the production of specific socio-spatial configurations. In shaping these configurations, infrastructures deploy states' contradictory agendas of development and control and become repositories of hegemonic interests and values, however, in the context of my discussion about subaltern urban actors, they also become enablers of popular politics. In this sense, infrastructures provide the foundations for subaltern political socialisation, organisation, and mobilisation, functioning as political shelters and spaces of relative autonomy. From my perspective, infrastructures are drivers of subaltern political action on the grounds of the need to preserve their materiality and social functions, which is visible when popular politics is organised around the problems of infrastructure provision, maintenance, and transformation. In other words, infrastructural problems become part of the subaltern's interests, needs, concerns, and aspirations. They become a central component of subaltern political agendas, and triggers for new political

imageries, hidden transcripts, and political mētis. At this point, popular politics overlap with the politics of infrastructure and oscillate together between conflicting issues of marginality, patronage, dependency, the right to subsistence, autonomy, and dissidence.

By doing politics around infrastructures, subaltern urban actors influence the formation and functioning of socio-spatial configurations, particularly city-making processes. In this way, infrastructures mediate the popular politics that the subaltern perform, but given the relevance of infrastructures in the geographies of urban politics, these popular politics move from the margins to the centre of the process. As I show later, these infrastructurally enabled politics materialise the contested relationship between the subaltern and state agents, but they also show how the subaltern come to neutralise and subvert the oppressive functions embedded in infrastructures. Through this process, the subaltern's interests regarding infrastructure production and infrastructure come to the front of the dispute, thus confronting infrastructure abandonment, dismantlement, privatisation, and destruction. In this way, popular politics become oriented to protect socially valuable infrastructures and the socio-political arrangements that these infrastructures represent, particularly when they involved the subsistence of subaltern communities.

With this discussion, I have outlined the main characteristics of infrastructures and their importance in popular politics, which in turn to introduce their role in framing the concept of popular infrastructural politics. I have also shown some instances in which popular politics and the politics of infrastructure overlap, but my main goal has been to build a cross-fertilising analysis with which to bridge the emergence of marginal popular politics and the centrality of infrastructures in contemporary city-making processes. At this intersection is where I place the concept of popular infrastructural politics, as it brings together the developments of these approaches and provides a new way to define why and how subaltern urban actors do politics around infrastructures. In the final section below, I revisit my initial definition to show how, after this conceptual journey, the concept of popular infrastructural politics has become richer in meaning, theoretically thick, and a useful conceptual tool to explore the multifaceted struggles that arise from and flow through infrastructures.

1.5. Final remarks

In this chapter, I have discussed the key components of popular infrastructural politics to nuance and provide with conceptual depth my initial definition of this distinctive subaltern political practice. This has involved delving into the literature regarding contestation in urban

marketplaces to reveal the theoretical and empirical points of departure of my conceptual discussion. This examination not only records the worldwide nature of urban markets' contestation and the rebellious character of market traders in multiple cities but provides a number of concepts and examples to explain the politicisation of these actors and spaces. By defining marketplaces as political spaces and nodes, this body of work highlights the political salience of urban actors and spaces that are often represented in depoliticised ways in the public sphere. Moreover, these scholars have documented the economic, cultural, and political patterns functioning as drivers of contestation in urban marketplaces. Thus, analysing this literature has been crucial for two main reasons. On the one hand, it lays the foundations of my interest in exploring further the political practices and discourses of subaltern urban actors and the political salience of urban infrastructures. On the other hand, it contextualises the Mexico City case in the international stage of contestations.

I thus proposed the concept of popular infrastructural politics to explicate the political practices and discourses performed by subaltern actors in order to influence the logics of infrastructure provision, preservation, and transformation. I also highlighted that this political performativity addresses the subaltern's subsistence practices and complex relationship with the state. In this definition, I condensed the key components describing these distinctive politics and indicated the subaltern's reasons behind their deployment. By discussing the concept's main components, I not only brought together the literature on popular politics and infrastructures, but also offer a nuanced understanding of political practices and discourses that need to be seen as multifaceted and contradictory in relation to both the infrastructures and the state. Through this analysis, I have addressed the connections and overlaps between these literatures, and by proposing the concept of popular infrastructural politics I have shown how both analytical strands can be enriched. While this conceptual journey advances key issues regarding the most empirical questions of this thesis, it mainly addresses my concern about how best to conceptualise the traders' agency as it unfolds from, around, and through the public markets

Focusing the discussion on the main characteristics of popular politics brings to light how marginality, subordination, and subsistence influence but not prevent the emergence of rich and complex popular political traditions among the subaltern. In this section, I have been interested in showing how these factors are interwoven in the most visible and public forms of subaltern resistance, contestation, and rebellion as well as in the most ordinary political practices and discourses. While I have highlighted the overwhelming presence of the state in popular politics through economic dependency and patronage relationships, I have also shown

how subaltern actors create a distinctive political space where they develop and mobilise imageries, transcripts, and practices that combine contradictorily their struggles for autonomy and subsistence. By bringing the centrality and double political nature of infrastructures into the discussion, I emphasised their role in enabling and shaping popular politics. This approach to infrastructures also allowed me to highlight that by influencing infrastructure provision, maintenance, and transformation, the subaltern participate in diverse geographies of urban politics and impact broader city-making processes. The political salience and generative powers of infrastructures—particularly those revolving around their reproduction—thus became a central factor in explaining subaltern contestation in cities. Brought together under the concept of popular infrastructural politics, these discussions help me ground the main conceptual proposal of this thesis and frame the multifaceted and contradictory political practices and discourses developed by traders around the public markets network of Mexico City.

2. Researching popular infrastructural politics

2.1. Introduction

> [E]thnography is uniquely equipped to look microscopically at the foundations of political institutions and their attendant sets of practices, just as it is ideally suited to explain why political actors behave the way they do and to identify the causes, processes, and outcomes that are part and parcel of political life.
> Javier Auyero (2006, p.258)

I have pointed out that the concept of popular infrastructural politics is the result of a stimulating dialogue between the conceptual journey outlined in chapter 1 and the fieldwork conducted in Mexico City in January-May and July-September 2018. This means that the actors, spaces, practices, and discourses I interacted with on the ground have been crucial to understanding the conceptual paths I have chosen. In this chapter, I focus on my methodological approach, its practical implications, and the contingencies that shaped my ethnographic immersion in Mexico City, in order to shed light on what my fieldwork involved. On the one hand, I summarise my empirical journey by outlining the context, the techniques, and other practicalities involved in conducting two waves of fieldwork. On the other hand, I discuss some important considerations regarding the ethnographic study of politics. In this sense, my main goal is to show how I operationalised my initial conceptual concerns to produce the evidence that answered my research questions and, ultimately, led to the development of the concept of popular infrastructural politics in the Mexico City context. Thus, in this chapter I examine the political contingencies and expectations encountered and negotiated in a changing research context, and clarify the rationale underpinning my use of ethnographic techniques, my analysis, and my writing strategy.

In the first section, *Political ethnography*, I outline the characteristics of the ethnographic practice that I operationalised for the study of popular infrastructural politics. I specifically examine the foundations of this perspective, its definition of politics, and its contributions to the understanding of existing political realities and its associated political actors, practices, spaces, and discourses. In *Field site: Traders and markets*, I examine my ethnographic journey in Mexico City, its contingencies, and its enriching nature. By describing the political actors I interviewed and interacted with, the political spaces I visited, and the political meetings where I conducted participant observation, I illuminate the circumstances in which the empirical data

was produced. In the third section, *Ethics in a political network*, I focus on different ethical challenges posed by the political context in which my fieldwork took place. Thus, I address some issues concerning how my positionality and the ethics and data management protocols were negotiated in political networks. Finally, in *Building a collective voice*, I explore some key implications of my writing strategy regarding the representation of different political actors and their practices and discourses. Here I reflect on how I build a "collective voice" to emphasise the commonalities that underlie the concept of popular infrastructural politics.

2.2. Political ethnography and discourse analysis

My primary interest has been to examine the ordinary politics performed by subaltern urban actors around infrastructures, namely, the multifaceted expressions of traders' politics regarding the production and reproduction of public markets. I explored these ordinary politics with the research perspective and techniques of political ethnography, which has been essential to advancing the revision, refinement, and reconstruction of my conceptual tools and theories. In this thesis, political ethnography has been a means to test and enrich the "formalisms" (Tilly, 2004)—concepts and hypotheses—that organise our understanding of social life. Moreover, political ethnography has been a tool to examine critically the views of politically active research participants, such as those involved in public markets' reproduction in Mexico City. In this sense, I have used political ethnography to unveil the twists and turns of political subordination and domination, the local popular imageries, sentiments, and moods, as well as the practical concerns and political agendas that transform the markets into political spaces where dissidence, resistance, and compliance converge.

In general terms, political ethnography shares all the key features of ethnography. This means that it is a form of analytic induction that looks for explanatory solutions by interlocking sets of generalisations about multiple aspects of specific cases to solve specific research problems (Becker, 1998, pp.208–210).[14] Like ethnography, conducting political ethnography involves the construction of trust and rapport-based relationships with communities and individuals to explore their reasons, motives, discourses, representations, emotions, and perceptions about their own life worlds (Guber, 2001). In light of my research interests and questions, political ethnography became a valuable research perspective and tool because it brings ordinary

[14] For Auyero, conducting ethnography or political ethnography does not involve a form of "inductivist" or "grounded theory" approach (2007, p.7), as the ethnographer enters the field equipped with a provisional theory that will be revised, improved, or reconstructed (2012b, p.14). In this sense, conducting political ethnography entails acknowledging the role of these theories and their effect on data production rather than assuming that knowledge emerges out of the world and that data is collected (see also Auyero, 2012a; Hurtado, 2005).

people's views to the fore. By highlighting the terms in which people make sense of everyday life, engage in social relations, solve problems, and deal with conflicts, this ethnographic practice makes people's voices a fruitful standpoint from which to expand our understanding of why social life unfolds the way it does. In this context, Scott's (1976; 2009) phenomenological and relational approach resonates with these views on ethnography and political ethnography. He argues that when we pay attention to people's views, we can critically revise the conclusions of deductive approaches and avoid silencing or undermining the good reasons and arguments that people have to explain why and how things happen. In this sense, political ethnography equips researchers with an "attitude" or "sensibility" (Lewis and Russell, 2011, p.400) to approach, gain access to, and immerse themselves in specific empirical instances and socio-cultural and political worlds (Schatz, 2009a; Burawoy, 2003).

Conducting political ethnography involves defining and exploring an empirical instance, as well as "gleaning" (Schatz, 2009a, pp.5–6) and assembling critically the perspectives of multiple sources to develop answers to specific questions—and, as Biaocchi and Connor (2008, p.150) point out, to general ones too. In a similar vein, Narotzky and Goddard (2015; see also Narotzky, 2012; Moore, 2011) show that ethnography helps us to understand the functioning of interconnected historical forces, dominant narratives and counter-stories, bringing to light what Wilson (2013, p.15) has called the "actually existing multiplicities in social, spatial and economic life." Accordingly, by conducting political ethnography, I sought to capture and assemble a multiplicity of voices involved in public market provision while looking into the broader past and ongoing social, political, and economic processes that influence these voices.

Originally seen as an approach to expand the methodological repertoire of political scientists, sociologists, and geographers (Schatz, 2009b), political ethnography effectively reconceptualised politics. Rather than an abstract entity studied from normative and quantitative approaches, politics become diverse, ordinary practices whose "nitty-gritty details" (Auyero, 2006, p.258), "implicit meanings" (Lichterman, 1998 in Auyero, 2006, p.258), and passions and sacrifices (Mahler, 2006) are worth exploring ethnographically. Under this light, conducting political ethnography means delving into "the pace of political action, the texture of political life, and the plight of political actors" (Auyero, 2006, p.258). From this perspective, political ethnography is an approach and tool to explore politics *in statu nascendi* (Kubik, 2009) and to uncover the lived experiences and the insider perspectives of the political (Arias, 2009; Pachirat, 2009; Megoran, 2006). These politics "consists not of big structures and prescribed roles but of dynamic, contingent interactions among persons,

households, and small groups" (Tilly, 2006, p.410). Politics are not only understood as electoral campaigns, party competition, voting behaviour, lobbying strategies, or other liberal political practices. Instead, this definition recognises the coexistence of multiple ordinary politics, and political ethnography has incorporated them into its repertoire of units of observation. As an approach that focuses on how ordinary people relate politically to the state (Auyero and Jensen, 2015; Baiocchi and Connor, 2008; Auyero, 2000), it underlies my ethnographic exploration and analysis of popular infrastructural politics. During my fieldwork in Mexico City, I encountered a diverse set of political actors, recorded their "vernacular understandings of the political" (Benzecry and Baiocchi, 2017), and visited the places where they do politics.

In terms of field site construction, political ethnography involves demarcating a spatially and temporally delimited empirical instance, which expands and contracts depending on the political relations and processes under examination. Therefore, field sites in political ethnography can be heterogeneous networks that connect multiple spaces whose interactions are often unanticipated (Lewis and Russell, 2011; Burrell, 2009). Conducting political ethnography thus resembles the multi-sited and "messy" ethnographies described by Law (2004) and Marcus (1995), as the researcher follows political actors that constantly move from one point to another in a political network. Rather than only focusing on fixed places, people, and objects, political ethnographers also follow unexpected connections, either inside or outside state-dominated settings and in the ordinary (often liminal) spaces where political practices and discourses emerge. This multi-sited and "messy" approach becomes of great importance in connection to my previous discussion on popular infrastructural politics. Given the multifaceted and networked character of popular politics and infrastructures, this flexible understanding of field site construction has been crucial to studying public markets as political nodes and the hidden political encounters between traders and state agents. In the next section, I show how this multiplicity and messiness materialised during my fieldwork.

Since state agents were one of the key actors I approached while conducting political ethnography, I engaged with multiple regulations, policies, and other official documents. As essential components of the relationship between political actors in contemporary societies, I organised and examined these documents, conducting a critical documentary analysis that also informed and complemented my ethnographic immersion in the traders' socio-political world. This critical approach to documentary analysis involved looking at official documents such as laws, decrees, circulars, etc. as products of political relations and specific contexts of political framing (van Hulst and Yanow, 2014). This framing makes these documents operate as

"charters for action" that impose "a legal-rational way of getting things done" (Wedel et al., 2005, p.37), namely, to solve problems in different spheres of social life. Thus, I understood the regulatory and administrative frameworks that govern traders and markets as the result of existing power relations that crystallise in specific socio-political and institutional settings. Based on the principles of critical discourse analysis (Fairclough and Fairclough, 2012; Fairclough, 2003) and the critical approaches to how policy models are shaped and circulate (Holmes, 2015; Lessa de Barros, 2015; González, 2011a), I looked into two central aspects of the relevant regulatory frameworks and other official documents regarding public markets' provision, management, and transformation. In this sense, by conducting critical documentary analysis, I explored these materials as the result of statecraft practices and as objects of negotiation and contestation.

Firstly, I examined the internal logics, structures, connections, and changes of these documents to "increase consciousness of how language contributes to the domination of some people by others" (Fairclough, 2015, p.227). Secondly, I delved into how these documents become "socially operative" and sustain or change social structures by determining "*what to do*" (Fairclough, 2015, p.154, emphasis in original; Fairclough and Fairclough, 2012, p.17). As suggested by Roe (2006, pp.22–27), I scrutinised the reasons and arguments stated in these documents to set priorities and mechanisms for resource allocation, institutional action, and people's participation. In other words, I delved into how these documents set specific courses of action and interaction. While most of this critical documentary analysis was conducted as preliminary work in preparation for my on-site fieldwork, it remained an on-going practice as I recorded how traders, officials, and politicians put these documents in motion. In chapter 7, I show how these documents become socially operative and, therefore, a central part of contestation, resistance, and negotiation practices. This allows me to explore how traders mobilise popular infrastructural politics around regulatory frameworks and engage in what Fairclough (2015, p.150) calls meaning-formation and re-wording processes vis-à-vis state agents.

Political ethnography and critical documentary analysis are the two central approaches and tools with which I conducted my fieldwork in Mexico City and, therefore, they underpin the development of the concept of popular infrastructural politics. More specifically, I operationalised the aforementioned definition of politics to explore what became a multi-sited and relatively messy field site, in which I followed several political connections of the public markets network. As I discuss in the following section, adopting this ethnographic approach involved dealing with significant changes that posed different research, political, and ethical

challenges. Among them, a major challenge was finding/building a vantage point from where to observe and analyse the political actors, practices, and discourses of a 329-market network and, at least, the same number of trader organisations. As an ethnographic practice open to contingency and diversity, I immersed myself in the traders' political world, and the methodological decisions around it underlie the previous theoretical discussion and the organisation of the following discussion about the case.

2.3. Field site: Traders and markets

I conducted my fieldwork in Mexico City in two phases: between January and May 2018 and July and September 2018. During this period, I primarily conducted semi-structured interviews and participant observation in public markets, government offices, and public events, and complemented my documentary research on regulations and policies. My immersion in the traders' socio-political world mainly involved following trader leaders and recording their political practices and discourses vis-à-vis other traders, officials, and politicians. As a dimension not widely researched ethnographically, my goal was "being there" (Lewis and Russell, 2011, p.400), immersed in that political environment to understand why and how market traders navigate the political networks they co-produce. Given the extent of the markets network and the number of trader organisations, I focused primarily on interviewing trader leaders, attending the meetings of two regional organisations and several more of market-level organisations, observing their encounters with political actors, joining their social media conversations, and taking part in their public demonstrations. In general terms, my fieldwork consisted in moving from the frontstage to the backstage of traders' politics and vice versa, which implied a constant negotiation of access given the fact that this socio-political world is mediated by membership status.

As a Mexico City resident, I have been familiar with public markets and their traders for many years, but this familiarity has been limited to the usual economic and social transactions associated with these commercial facilities. In this sense, this fieldwork became an opportunity to look at markets and traders from a different perspective and for getting directly involved in the intense and permanent political activity underlying their reproduction. As I soon discovered, the sporadic political presence of the market traders in the public sphere—usually recorded by the media—only reveals a small fraction of the meaningful political relations that the traders build at a market scale, across the public markets network, and with multiple state agents at different governmental levels. Thus, approaching these commercial actors and spaces

with a political focus allowed me to observe and record first-hand the less visible practices and discourses that speak of their role in the geographies of urban politics. However, accessing and developing such familiarity appeared like a difficult task given that the Mexico City markets network consists of 329 commercial facilities distributed unevenly in 16 districts and more than 70,000 traders who have created a fragmented organisational landscape.

The complexity that this commercial and organisational diversity entails drove my initial decisions about field site construction, as it looked like a vast, unmanageable field site, especially from an ethnographic point of view. My main concern was not only about accessing the markets and the organisations but to find a way to capture ethnographically the political logics permeating this public commercial system. Since my research interests focused on the multiple political relations that shape the markets, I opted to follow Burrell's (2009, pp.190–194) description of the field site as a network. In my context, this entailed a large political and infrastructural network that operates at a metropolitan scale, characterised by political patterns but also by contingent connections that emerge and dissolve constantly depending on existing and new power relations. By looking at markets as networked physical and political spaces, I prioritised the possibility of accessing the network from any point and following the political relations as they unfolded in real time.

In the early stages of my research, I chose seven markets in the same district and their local-scale organisations as my entry point, but once in the field, other, more enriching and meaningful entry points emerged. These entry points were the result of an unexpected encounter mediated by social media, which allowed me to build a fruitful relationship with two trader organisations operating at regional and, sometimes, national levels. Here I name them National Movement and United Traders for confidentiality reasons. As a political node of greater importance, these trader organisations put me in contact with various market-level organisations which would have been difficult to access and follow separately. In this way, I used this as an opportunity to explore these overlapping infrastructural and political networks that pre-existed my study. This was also an example of keeping my approach to political ethnography as open as possible to the existing political relations. Thus, by focusing my attention on large and medium-scale trader organisations, I also had access to several market-scale organisations, and, ultimately, I was able to record how popular infrastructural politics unfolded horizontally and vertically throughout the public markets network.

This new entry point brought new actors, relationships, places, and information into my fieldwork, expanding my immersion in traders' politics and broadening my understanding of what was at stake in this political field. In this case, rather than a local immersion, my encounter with two trader organisations and the multiple trader leaders they bring together transformed my fieldwork into a metropolitan experience. This is also how Giglia (2012, pp.64, 70) defines the ethnographic research conducted in urban contexts such as Mexico City. Having these organisations—and the markets where their members usually gather—as key nodes of the traders' political network, my field site eventually became multi-sited. From these nodes, I literally followed the leaders to several politically meaningful places and arranged interviews and visits to other markets and other meetings to talk about the production and reproduction of public markets. This tactic often involved officials and politicians, who I also looked for, met, and interviewed separately. What I originally imagined as a clearly delimited field site in the southern part of Mexico City became a constant interaction with trader leaders of several public markets mainly located in the city's northeast districts. In this way, this encounter became a critical opportunity to explore ethnographically a vast political and infrastructural network that operates at different scales and with multiple actors. Ultimately, this entry point allowed me to pay attention to how trader leaders "reconcile [the] spatial complexities" (Burrell, 2009, p.189) of their infrastructural network, both navigating the city and its politics across the metropolis.

During my two waves of fieldwork in 2018, I focused my attention on three types of actors and three types of spaces: trader leaders, officials, and politicians, and public markets, government offices, and other politically relevant spaces. As a result, I interacted with and held conversations about public markets and politics with 75 stakeholders, of which I interviewed 31. Twenty interviewees were traders and their allies, that is, advocates of the economic or cultural promotion of public markets. The other 11 interviewees were government officials and politicians when I conducted my fieldwork. I also attended 19 public and private meetings held by either traders, authorities and traders, or politicians and traders, as well as four markets' anniversaries. Additionally, I ran three unplanned "focus groups," which were improvised by trader leaders when they invited other participants to join the interview. These interactions resulted in just over 140 hours of audio recording and a series of field notes. In total, I visited around 39 locations politically relevant for the traders, including 33 public markets and five government offices in seven districts, where traders organise, negotiate, and contest how public markets are governed. Restaurants, cafes, plazas, metro stations, reception areas, corridors, and online messaging groups need to be part of this list of politically relevant spaces, as trader

leaders used them throughout the day to carry out with their political activities. I visited some of these spaces on multiple occasions given their importance for many members of the trader organisations. For confidentiality reasons, I anonymised and pseudonymised these actors and spaces, but the Appendix contains a table with general information about the participants, and the following section offers insights into the ethical tensions underlying the use of these data protection measures. When referring to these interviews in the following chapters, I indicate the context in which specific pieces of information were produced: "I" stands for interview, "M" for meeting, "C" for conversation, and "PE" for public event.

These research participants were all political actors engaged in popular infrastructural politics, therefore, they all had different degrees of familiarity and experience regarding the negotiation of the markets' reproduction in the city's broader political spectrum. In this male-dominated environment, I interacted with 52 male and 23 female political actors. Among these male trader leaders, many founded and have been at the head of local and national trader organisations for several years, even decades. Although I also incorporated a few voices of younger traders, they were only some of the 12 participants whose age ranged between 30 and 40. In contrast, 30 participants were in their forties, 19 in their fifties, and 14 in their sixties.

Given that political leadership depends on the traders' affiliation with a market, leaders tended to merge their political commitment with their commercial activities in different ways. Since leadership is often considered a voluntary job, it is not officially paid by trader communities or organisations; however, there are informal mechanisms to remunerate and reward trader leaders. In this sense, leaders actively involved in trader organisations and urban politics tended to subrogate the operation of their businesses to relatives and employees, which they monitored remotely. Those traders facing unfavourable socioeconomic circumstances ran their business personally during the markets' opening hours and focused on leadership and political participation intermittently after work. Among trader leaders, some had obtained professional degrees in commercially or politically related subjects, while others continuously look for training to complement their political expertise.

Officials and politicians were the other key political actors deliberately contacted as part of my fieldwork, especially those operating at district and city levels and directly involved in public markets' governance; however, I also met some federal-level state agents involved in the traders' political life. Although professional politicians and government officials can have relatively differentiated roles in contemporary societies, either as members of bureaucratic

organisations or political parties, such boundaries were usually blurred among those contacted in Mexico City. In this context, officials and politicians were two indistinct political categories in terms of their practices and interests, a condition that most likely intensified in 2018 because it was an election year. Therefore, I came across low-ranking officials performing administrative tasks in the markets who also worked as political brokers for competing political parties. Similarly, I met high-ranking officials who, in pursuit of candidacies, also performed as professional politicians at events in which public works were delivered for market traders. These officials and politicians tended to be more elusive when arranging interviews, particularly those working at city level, but some offered me support and introduced me to their closest political allies in the markets. This form of support revealed some of the long-term political relationships that traders, authorities, and political parties have built at district, city, and national scale. By incorporating these officials' voices into this thesis, I present some contrasting views regarding the role of state agents in the governance of public markets and, therefore, in shaping the traders' popular infrastructural politics.

In line with the discussion in chapter 1, I defined Mexico City public markets as political spaces that shape their traders' political life and as places where diverse political agendas, discourses, strategies, tactics, alliances, and conflicts converge. I explored the markets' political salience and how the traders politicise the markets' walls, corridors, stalls, and meeting rooms, pushing the use of this public infrastructure beyond its economic and social functions. While conducting participant observation in the markets, I came across traders' most public and most hidden political expressions and activities. On the one hand, I photographed or made notes on the political stickers placed on walls, the posters of party candidates that hung from the ceiling, the minutes of an assembly displayed on a noticeboard, and noted the leaders' whispering on the corridor, the open discussions between traders across stalls, the managers' customary inspection, or a candidate's stopover. On the other hand, I had access to the less public instances that politicise public markets, such as the regular and extraordinary after-hours meetings held by trader organisations for members of the trader community or the closed-door encounters between traders, officials, and politicians.

This experience of public markets, when the gates and stalls are closed for the traders' political life to emerge in its entirety, was one of permanent information sharing, heated discussion, and careful deliberation among fellow traders, allies, and, occasionally, government officials and politicians. By attending these meetings and listening to the traders voicing their demands, interests, and aspirations, I came to understand why and how traders transform public markets

into nodes of political networks at local, regional, and national scales. The public markets I became most familiar with in Miguel Hidalgo and Tlalpan districts, where I attended many traders' ordinary meetings, have been for several years strategic political nodes for these regional trader organisations. But they were not the only ones. I learned that other multiple markets have been playing similar political functions for this and other organisations depending on the traders' political circumstances and needs. In this way, my approach and immersion in the traders' socio-political world revealed the political uses and connections that a 329-public-market network allows at different scales.

One thing became very clear during my fieldwork: that the traders' and markets' political world has been predominantly reserved for direct stakeholders. This means that notwithstanding the markets' public nature, both researchers and the general public face multiple political and institutional obstacles that limit their access to relevant information about the markets' governance structures, mechanisms, and strategies. Traders and officials control access to these relevant dimensions regarding the public administration of public infrastructure, thus raising questions about accountability, transparency, and the markets' publicness. As Giglia's (2018, pp.44–45, 185) recent study on public markets also reveals, access to markets for purposes other than commercial can prove difficult for outsiders, as permissions are mediated by competing powers. As her research and my ethnographic immersion show, accessing the traders' socio-political world involves a constant negotiation with the markets' internal political and administrative structures.

To gain a first-hand understanding of Mexico City public markets' governance as an outsider, I negotiated access with competing trader leaders of local, regional, and national trader organisations and with district and city-level officials and politicians. Building a continual and trustful relationship with some of these key gatekeepers and stakeholders was fundamental to exploring the markets' political dimension with relative ease. This was possible partly because of my university credentials, but also because I clearly stated the purpose of my research and the ethical protocols involved. Notwithstanding, for some traders and officials my presence and involvement in traders' political activities were occasionally seen with suspicion, particularly in the actively changing political environment that I discuss in chapter 4. The occasional mutual discomfort that arose from these researcher-participant encounters was a reminder of the type of political network I was navigating and the sort of political practices and discourses I was studying. Largely mediated by a membership status I did not possess, I was

immersed in the places where hidden transcripts are written and was witnessing how negotiations unfold in the "gray zones of politics" (Auyero, 2007).

By delimiting my field site as a network and conducting semi-structured interviews and participant observation with this diverse group of participants, I explored two overlapping networks: an infrastructural network, formed by 329 public markets, and a political network, formed by trader organisations, officials, and politicians. By deploying political ethnography in this empirical context, I collected a repertoire of empirical materials that portray the multiple problems, concerns, interests, and needs converging in these networks. It is based on the diverse voices and practices of these political actors that I advance the concept of popular infrastructural politics as a way to capture the distinctive character of their participation in the geographies of urban politics. Ultimately, these lived experiences and understandings underlie the revision, refinement, and reconstruction of my conceptual discussion, which responded to the empirical challenges posed by observing politics *in statu nascendi*. The focus and arrangement of chapters 4 to 6 also reflect this permanent attempt to organise and interpret the multiplicity and contingency embedded in my fieldwork. In this case, around the traders' and markets' organisational, infrastructural, and regulatory dimensions.

2.4. Ethics in a political network

Power relations are constitutive of any community, institution, and organisation, and conducting ethnographic research often implies negotiating access to in contexts of tension and conflict. These power relations permeate the experience of building, immersing, and exiting any specific ethnographic field site, but in political ethnography, these power relations are the very object of study rather than contingent processes that can be experienced as obstacles. A focus on other people's political lives means that the ethnographer's central intention is to immerse and navigate those instances of collaboration, agreement, antagonism, and conflict. The political ethnographer seeks to become immersed in a realm full of vested interests, divergent needs, and constant friction that comes hand in hand with emergent forms of solidarity and cooperation for a wide range of purposes. Since these power relations are the central object of political ethnography, their study entails the construction of a researcher-participant relationship that allows for the unearthing of conflicting logics of domination, subordination, autonomy, and subsistence. As I illustrate in this section, the construction of this relationship to achieve such specific research objectives can be a source of tension and potential conflict between the researcher and the participants. Navigating these politics

ethnographically to unveil their features is a matter of uneasy questions and conversations about inequality and asymmetrical political relationships, privilege and subordination, or troubling political practices and discourses.

Although I constantly informed them about the purposes of my research and the ethical and data protection protocols incorporated in its design, the nature of my questions posed ethical and political challenges to myself as a researcher and the participants as political actors directly involved in decision-making and negotiation processes. As politically aware actors with a vast experience in their fields, trader leaders, officials, and politicians allowed me to interview and follow them across the markets network. However, they constantly tested their limits of what they should reveal or not to an outsider. Although this situation did not seriously constrain my research—I was usually welcome, and those agreeing to participate were generally open to sharing their views—these frictions highlighted on different occasions the complex and often conflictive nature of the social relations I was simultaneously navigating and researching. As my fieldwork progressed, I noticed the different effects my focus on politics and power relations had on my interviewees. I found, for example, traders, officials, and politicians carefully pondering the implications of their answers or intentionally diverting conversations towards less intrusive subjects and more official discourses.

For example, these political actors tended to talk about the markets' contribution to national and urban cultures. Although in principle a useful point of reference to understand the attributed value to public markets and their traders, this discourse was used rhetorically to take attention away from more sensitive questions about their political practices, discourses, and relationships. Equally mobilised by traders, officials, and politicians during our conversations and interviews, this discourse converged with literary and mass media depictions of markets, often reproducing their folkloristic and traditionalist tones. To bring the focus back from these diversions often felt like an invasive and uncomfortable task, as it put on the table the need to readdress the goal of my research and my interest in going beyond these well-structured and often rehearsed discourses. As I show later in this thesis, these discourses ultimately revealed themselves as critical components of traders' popular infrastructural politics. They play different political functions vis-à-vis state agents, researchers, and the general public. By praising the markets' most commercially and culturally positive features, traders simultaneously advocate for the preservation of markets and obscure the most sensitive aspects of their political salience.

The production of "useful knowledge," as understood by traders, officials, and politicians, was another instance of ethical and political friction. In several occasions, these political actors emphasised the need for my research to contribute to tackling the markets' chronic political neglect, economic decline, and physical deterioration. While my focus on popular infrastructural politics seeks to raise awareness of the entrenched political logics underlying the markets' and traders' condition and could serve a point of departure to imagine political alternatives to long-standing problems, it did not respond to the most pressing problems these actors were facing. In comparison, their notion of usefulness mainly referred to the provision of more immediate practical solutions to economic and infrastructural problems. Thus, directly and indirectly, different participants posed questions and challenged my research agenda and its focus on the political dimension of markets. For example, when outlining my research focus before an interview, a city-level official minimised the value of my perspective by arguing that an economic approach would be more relevant given the public markets' poor performance in the urban economy. As for the traders, they often asked me about the most commercially "successful" policy models I was aware of to ponder their replicability in Mexico City given the compelling need of economic and infrastructural, rather than political, solutions. As I usually offered a critical approach to these models of gentrified and touristified markets, as presented in chapter 1, this shed light on the political and ethical frictions surrounding the definition of "useful knowledge," especially when discussed with experienced political actors such as trader leaders, officials, and politicians. Although not obvious at first, my understanding of popular infrastructural politics as a problem-solving practice incorporates these concerns about developing solutions; however, it does so by considering the long-standing political mediations governing the production of strategies to tackle neglect, deterioration, and decline.

During some meetings and gatherings, with various attendees, I also became aware of the suspicion and uneasiness that my presence and my research could create. As spaces of relative autonomy kept away from state control and surveillance, and in the context of permanent political tension, where conflicting interests and views are at the core of ongoing disputes, this suspicion could be expected. Without the support of trader leaders and other gatekeepers, and my disposition to answer any question regarding my presence, I could not have conducted participant observation. However, not everybody felt completely reassured with this backup and openness. As an instance of researcher-participants friction, I discovered that it would be difficult to dispel these fears considering that some traders were concerned about the connection between knowledge production and statecraft practices such as taxation. And

although this scepticism revolved around experiences beyond my research, it had an impact on it. For example, during a heated discussion about an official request for information about traders' commercial activities, an attendee addressed my research and me "indirectly" when pointing at the dangers of providing outsiders with information. Arguing that state agents could use it to damage the trader community, this trader advised, while occasionally looking at me, not to share any type of information. Although this was a single event that speaks more of the relationship between the state and the traders, it reveals how uneasy the relationships between researchers and participants can become within a political network.

On a lighter note but still revealing of how ethics in political networks unfold, it is worth commenting on the confidentiality, anonymisation, and pseudonymisation measures used in this thesis. While reading through the informed consent forms and commenting on the data management protocols to protect the traders' sensitive personal data, particularly their names and images, I was often confronted with their permission to use their full personal information as part of my research outcomes. Although this carefree approach might be related to the lack of familiarity with formal data protection protocols in research activities and the long trust-building process in which the participants and I mutually engaged, it also shows how political interests mediate data management. Unlike most of the politicians and officials I interviewed, various trader leaders expressed their preference to be named and photographed in order to gain exposure in what I represent in chapter 4 as a diverse, fragmented, and very competitive organisational landscape, where leaders contend for recognition among fellow traders and authorities. As I became more familiar with this political environment and the interests and risks at play for this close-knit commercial and political urban community, I also became more convinced that I should not link the traders' political opinions and activities with their actual identities, notwithstanding how emphatic they were in suggesting this possibility. But however strict my data protection precepts, this is an ethical question that works both ways, and I found myself occasionally named and photographed as part of the traders' social media activism. While this practice jeopardises some of the intended effects of the anonymisation and pseudonymisation measures, it also brings to the fore how ethical principles and data protection protocols become subsumed by the logics of existing political networks and their protagonists.

2.5. Building a collective voice

In chapter 1, I emphasised how the conceptual foundations of the concept of popular infrastructural politics, and in this chapter, I have outlined the ethnographic fieldwork that

underpins its empirical foundations. In the next chapter, I also show how the notion's conceptual and empirical foundations are also grounded on a historical understanding of ongoing political struggles in Mexico City. As a result, I have assembled various analytic and narrative styles to depict both in abstract and descriptive forms the distinctive ways of doing popular infrastructural politics in Mexico City. As a way of ordering experience and consciously producing meaning, to paraphrase Rapport's (1997, p.45) description of the writing process, my thesis fixes (up to a point) what popular infrastructural politics is in a sequence of thoughts, ideas, and senses that retrieve, amend, and elaborate on the traders', officials', and politicians' political experience. This thesis is then the composition that results from my framing and reframing of empirical materials vis-à-vis theory and methods within specific lines of enquiry (Lichterman and Reed, 2015).

This process mainly involved conducting thematic analysis on interviews, fieldnotes, official documents, and other written materials to discern both the discursive and practical patterns inscribed in the political world revolving around public markets. Performed with the support of qualitative data analysis software for coding (NVivo 12, QSR International), I focused on identifying the different patterns unfolding around traders' political life, particularly those related to their political relations and the instances of political socialisation, organisation, and mobilisation mediated by infrastructure production and reproduction. Thus, the coding and analysis processes allowed me to shed light on both dominant and secondary and even residual themes in traders' political life. The structured account of these diverse themes revolves around why and how traders perform popular infrastructural politics in Mexico City around public markets.

As part of the writing process, I have preserved the multiple political voices involved in my fieldwork to recognise their crucial role in underpinning the concept of popular infrastructural politics and to highlight the specificity of their socio-political worlds. Since these testimonies were originally articulated in Spanish, I translated them into English. Although I replaced their vibrant vernacular tones for more neutral inflexions as part of this process, I sought not to lose their multiplicity and richness in my ethnographic account by interweaving the participants' voices with my analysis and descriptions. By exploring this polyvocality, I intend not to dissociate the more conceptual discussions about popular infrastructural politics from the actual political actors that perform them. In this way, my own analysis and conceptual understanding of politics can be compared vis-à-vis the participants' political epistemologies. Furthermore, by incorporating this diversity into the text, I portray the heterogeneous context in which my research took place and the multiple connections shaping the traders' and markets' political

salience. However, I have avoided creating a disjointed collection of voices and, in looking for a general understanding about why and how traders do politics, I built a *collective voice* that brings together shared issues, discourses, and practices as they were deployed relationally.

I organised these commonalities but also some of the differences around the concept of popular infrastructural politics and its three central themes: organisation, infrastructure, and regulations; thus, bridging empirical materials, analysis, and concepts. This collective voice is a means to unpack the political agency, structures, and relations experienced by a trader community in an extensive public markets network. Since I built this collective voice based on the patterns identified in the analysis process, it allows me to explore the limits of representation of specific political actors, practices and discourses, and to reflect on the scope of popular infrastructural politics as a generalisable notion. Neither this collective voice nor the concept of popular infrastructural politics should be confused with an attempt to capture the essence or substance of these political actors, instead, they should be seen as "realist" descriptions (Allina-Pisano, 2009; Wedeen, 2009) that explain why politics unfold the way they do, and how. This means that, ultimately, popular infrastructural politics acquire their final form and content in specific historical and geographical contexts. In this context, the following chapters imbue the concept of popular infrastructural politics with the specificity of the traders' political life in Mexico City regarding the reproduction of the public markets network.

3. Traders and markets in Mexico City

3.1. Introduction

In line with the need to situate popular infrastructural politics within specific space and time coordinates, in this thesis I analyse traders' and markets' political history in Mexico City. By looking into the mid-twentieth century history and more recent developments, in this chapter I outline the characteristics of Mexico City's geographies of urban politics, trace the origins of the public markets network, and outline the transformations of the institutional and regulatory frameworks that govern them. Thus, I contextualise the practices and discourses discussed in the following chapters while providing an interpretation about how specific economic, political, and cultural dynamics in Mexico City have shaped public markets and trader organisations. Here I explore these specific geographies of urban politics by placing the traders and markets at the centre of the story, looking at how they have become political actors and the markets politicised spaces. My intention is to shed new light on how we interpret the scale of the transformation that public markets and their trader organisations triggered infrastructurally and politically. Mainly based on secondary literature, official reports, and some interviews, this chapter portrays the markets' and traders' political trajectory over the past 70 years, highlighting not only some central characters and crucial events, but also the economic and political processes that have determined their present state.

The first section, *New spaces and subjects*, focuses on the origins of the public markets network and its traders as the product of specific statecraft practices and subject formation processes. I examine how a mid-twentieth century policy changed the landscape of popular trade in Mexico City by deploying new infrastructure, producing new urban subjects, and setting the conditions for the contemporary political practices around public markets to emerge. In *Negotiating provision,* I use my interviews to reconstruct the political relations and mechanisms involved in public market provision in the early 1970s and late 1980s. By emphasising the traders' perspective, I describe the long-term struggles that led street vendors to secure public markets, become market traders, and build a new socio-political bond with the state. In *Marginal markets*, I focus on the economic, institutional, and political processes that led to the markets' physical deterioration and economic decline from the 1980s onwards. I investigate the abandonment of the market provision policy, the expansion of supermarkets and convenience stores, and the changing institutional and political landscape in order to outline the most recent processes influencing the traders' politicisation in Mexico City. In the last section, *Markets*

and traders today, I explore the characteristics of these economic and political actors and their infrastructures with the most recent information available. Ultimately, with this historical account, I analyse the processes that transformed traders and markets into political actors and nodes and, therefore, the conditions in which popular infrastructural politics emerge in Mexico City around a mid-twentieth century public infrastructure network.

3.2. New spaces and subjects

Most of the covered public markets and the figure of the market trader as we know it today are the product of a mid-twentieth century policy whose main goal was to modernise the food supply system and control street vending in Mexico City. From the 1950s, popular trade was revolutionised through massive public investment, changing the appearance and management of the city's informal and fragile commercial infrastructure and the mentality and organisation of its small-scale low-income traders. This unparalleled state intervention set the foundations for a modern urban supply distribution system and transformed the living standards and the legal status of thousands of low-income traders. In this sense, this state action led to the formation of new urban subjects and spaces in the 1950s, and although we tend to define them as traditional to emphasise their connection with the city's history, their origins are fundamentally modern and deeply embedded in Mexico City's urbanisation process (Image 3).

Markets in Mexico City have been the focus of several historical enquiries (Velázquez, 1997; Gamboa, 2009; Castro, 2010; López, 2010; Villegas, 2010; Gruzinski, 2012; Castillo, 2017) that trace their origins and transformations in relation to the authorities' attempts to build a reliable supply system since the sixteenth century. In these historical accounts, the markets stand out for their economic, cultural, and social functions, which simultaneously underpin and reflect the expansion of Mexico City as a powerful urban centre. These works describe the rise and fall of multiple markets; their constant expansion; the plans to modernise them; their changing products; the measures to control and tax the traders; and customers' revolts against hoarding, price increase, and scarcity. In general terms, this literature analyses the markets concerning three of their functions: a) the supply of food and basic staples at city scale; b) the subsistence of the lower classes; and c) the reproduction of culture and identity. To put in perspective the relevance of the 1950s policy that gave birth to 329 public markets, this literature shows that the number of covered markets grew at a slow pace for centuries, and that just before the policy was implemented, only 20 to 40 covered and street markets were serving the city (Meneses, 2011, p.124; Giglia, 2018, p.21).

In the 1950s and 1960s, the post-revolutionary regime[15] was materialising its aspirations of social progress and economic development through infrastructure provision (Ziccardi, 1991). With the support of the National Chamber of the Construction Industry, founded in 1953, the federal government directed public investment in urban infrastructure to the metropolitan areas, thus reshaping the still rural landscapes of Mexican cities. Particularly under the presidencies of Miguel Alemán (1946-1952), Adolfo Ruiz Cortines (1952-1958), and Adolfo López Mateos (1958-1964), and within the period known as the "Mexican Miracle," public markets became part of a developmentalist enterprise. This means that while public market provision was at its peak, the government was also building roads, dams, universities, and many other key infrastructures that contributed to accelerating the urbanisation process. Between 1950 and 1970, Mexico City's population increased from 3.1 million to 6.9 million people, constantly multiplying, just like the markets during those two decades. In this context of infrastructural promise, markets condensed the ideal of a modern country and a modern city, as they not only had stalls but all the basic services including nurseries, offices, and, in some cases, theatres and murals, as in the case of the Abelardo L. Rodríguez public market.[16]

Image 3. Foundational moments and political actors

Commemorative plaque in Sonora Market, Venustiano Carranza district, built during the markets' "golden era." It reads: "Adolfo Ruiz Cortines, President of the Republic, and Ernesto P. Uruchurtu, Mayor of the Federal District, put into service this market on September 23, 1957. **Source**: Author, 2018.

[15] The post-revolutionary period in Mexico began between 1917 and 1920 and extended until the end of the 1960s, following a 10-year armed conflict between multiple ideological and political factions. The post-revolutionary regime involved the formation of a modern nation-state and the country's reconstruction in the interest of economic development. It also involved the consolidation of the PRI as the ruling party.

[16] Inaugurated in 1934, and given its functionality and integral design, this market is considered the prototype that inspired the model of public market that the government implemented in the 1950s and 1960s (PRI, 2015, p.64).

As mayor for 14 years (1952-1966), Ernesto P. Uruchurtu played a key role in this process, as he was in charge of most of the urban policies implemented in Mexico City at a time when the city was rapidly expanding. During his tenure, Uruchurtu aspired to regulate the city's commercial activities on multiple fronts, and while he implemented locally a series of federal actions that regulated price setting (Castillo, 2017), he transformed the creation of a functional public markets network into a central component of his crusade for modernity. Based on two special reports published in 1952 on the situation of the public markets in Mexico City (Zenteno, 2016, p.80), Uruchurtu's government launched a construction programme that materialised the political aspirations of the post-revolutionary regime in the new markets. As infrastructure where multiple political projects converged, the public markets condensed contradictory messages from the very beginning. On the one hand, they encapsulated the long-desired urban modernisation (Jordan, 2013) and the social and progressive ideals of the post-revolutionary regime (Giglia, 2018), but, on the other hand, they revealed signs of the limited protectionism of the Mexican welfare state (Cross, 1998a) and the authoritarian methods used to control the urban poor (Meneses, 2011).

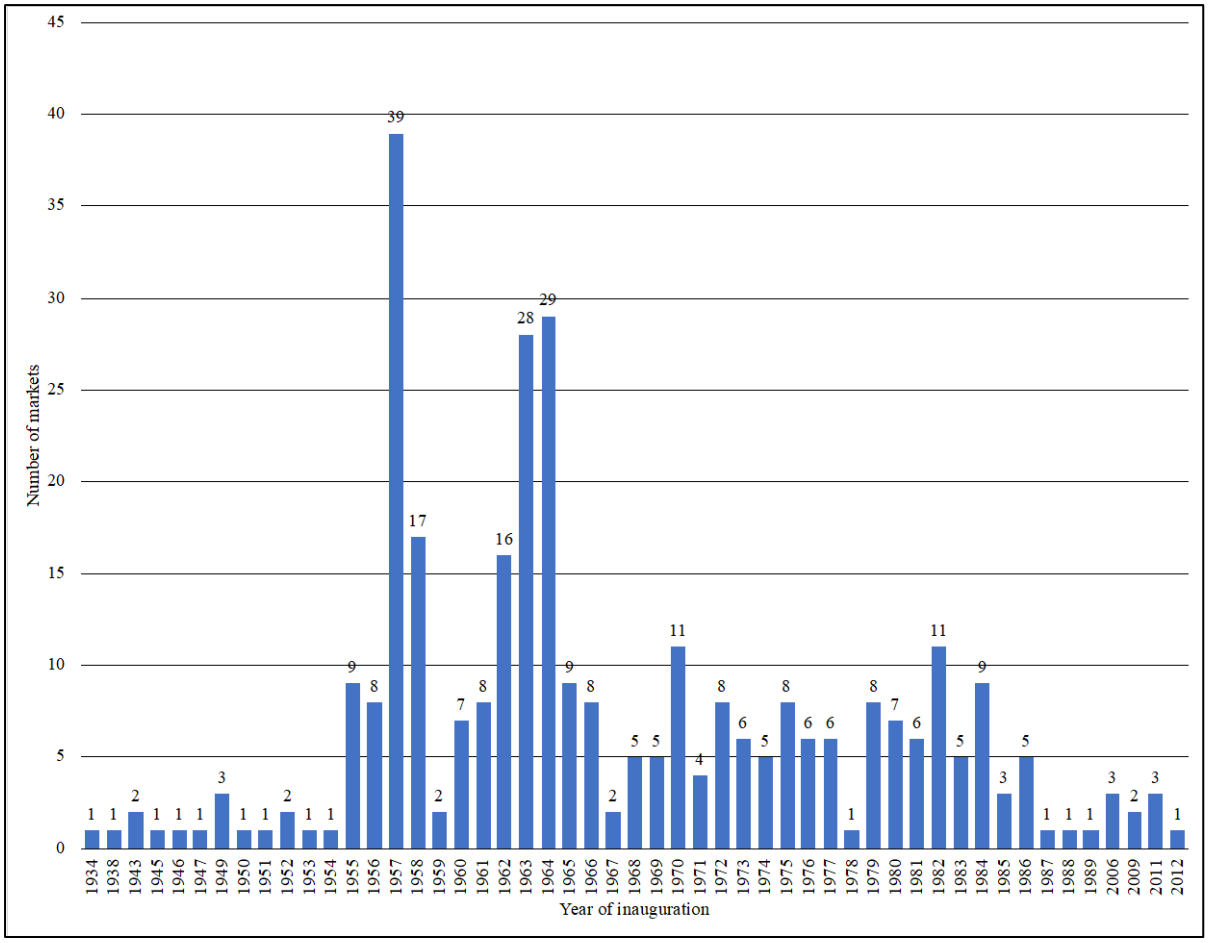
The new, state-owned public markets were self-contained facilities provided with basic water and energy services at subsidised rates, concrete-made stalls, toilets, and, in some cases, nurseries, cold stores, loading areas, scales, rubbish bins, meeting rooms, theatres, and management offices. In 1957, the newspaper *El Nacional* reported that "given the new regulations and nurseries of the new public markets, the traders will have a commercial life in a decent and educated atmosphere, and their children will become the citizens that will dignify Mexico in the future" (Zenteno, 2016, p.126). In this sense, the markets were embedded in the state's urbanising and civilising project; they became a form of the state's "infrastructural power" (Mann, 1984 in Fredericks, 2018, p.32), to the extent that through public markets the state redefined the city's form and structure, and its citizens. Like other state-provided infrastructures, public markets represented a major investment to try to "settle and habituate" (Amin and Thrift, 2017, p.120) low-income, small-scale traders to new different social and political regime.

As Monroy (2005) and Zenteno (2016) have documented, to develop this food supply system, the government invested between four and five million pesos per each steel and concrete market, and around 500,000 pesos per each steel and aluminium version market. In 1954, the newspapers also reported that the government invested a total of 20 million pesos to build eight markets; and that in 1955, the investment amounted 40 million pesos for 10 markets—30 million pesos more than the budget allocated to build schools that year. In 1957, the authorities allocated 55 million pesos more to build 14 markets; of which, 30.5 million were apportioned for

the seven markets located in La Merced. This large-scale infrastructure project increased exponentially the number of public markets in the city in only 14 years, building 170 markets and refurbishing around 30 more, as can be seen in Figure 1. Since public investment in markets' provision continuously decreased and even stopped for almost two decades between 1989 and 2006, Uruchurtu's tenure is considered "the public markets' golden era" (PRI, 2015, p.265).

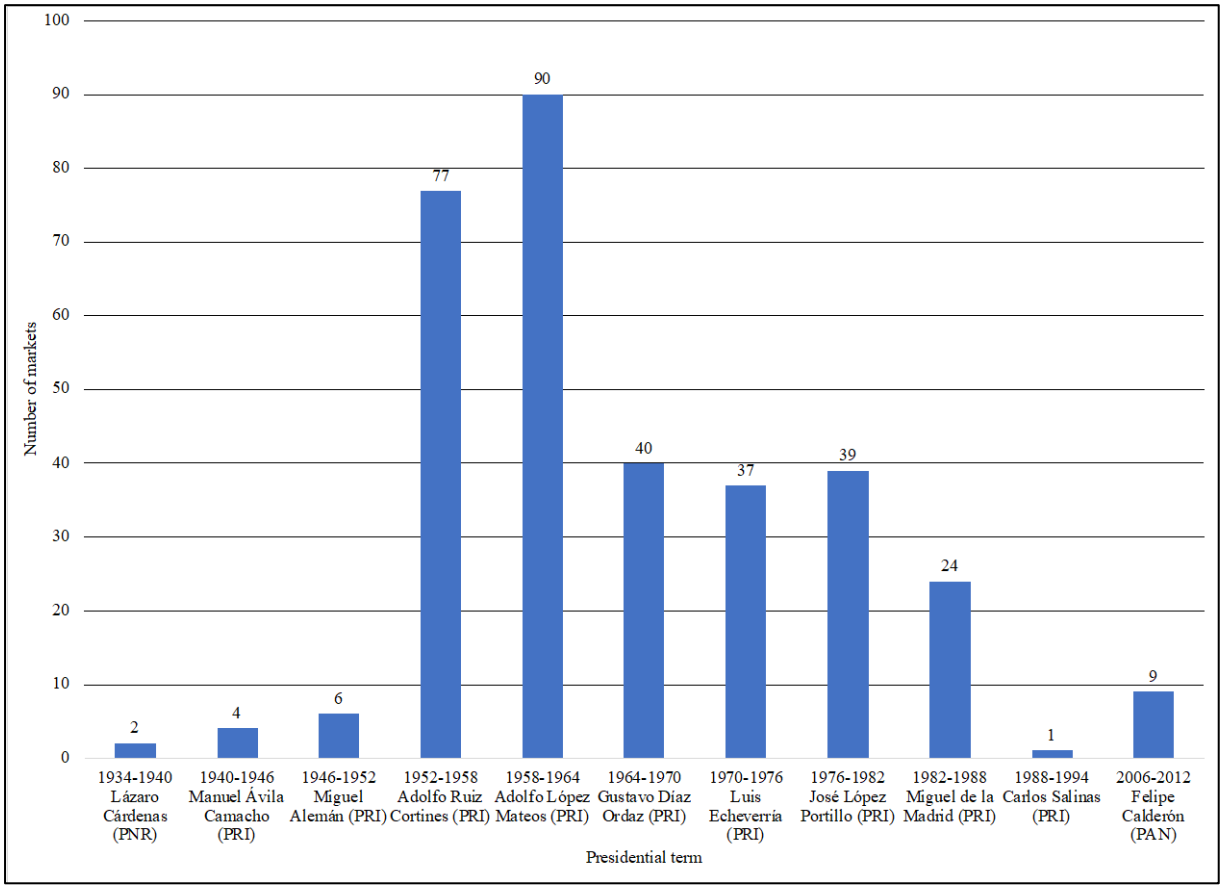
As Figures 1 and 2 show, the expansion of the public markets network until it reached 329 facilities spans several decades and political periods, revealing the oscillations of this long-term infrastructure policy in each presidential tenure. For 40 years, between 1949 and 1989, the PRI-affiliated authorities delivered 313 public markets, that is, 95 per cent of the total. During this period, the construction programme reached three peaks, in 1957, 1963, and 1964, all while Uruchurtu was Mexico City's mayor. For at least two presidential terms (1952-1958 and 1958-1964), public market provision was a political priority in Mexico City (Figure 2). Subsequent governments led by presidents Gustavo Díaz Ordaz, Luis Echeverría, and José López Portillo helped to consolidate this network, at least until 1988, when the construction rate fell

Figure 1. Growth of the public markets network in Mexico City (1934-2012)



Source: Author. Based on PRI, 2019, 2015; CES-CDMX, 2017; Laboratorio para la Ciudad, 2017; and GDF, 2015.

Figure 2. Growth of the public markets network per presidential term (1934-2012)



Source: Author. Based on PRI, 2019, 2015; CES-CDMX, 2017; Laboratorio para la Ciudad, 2017; and GDF, 2015.

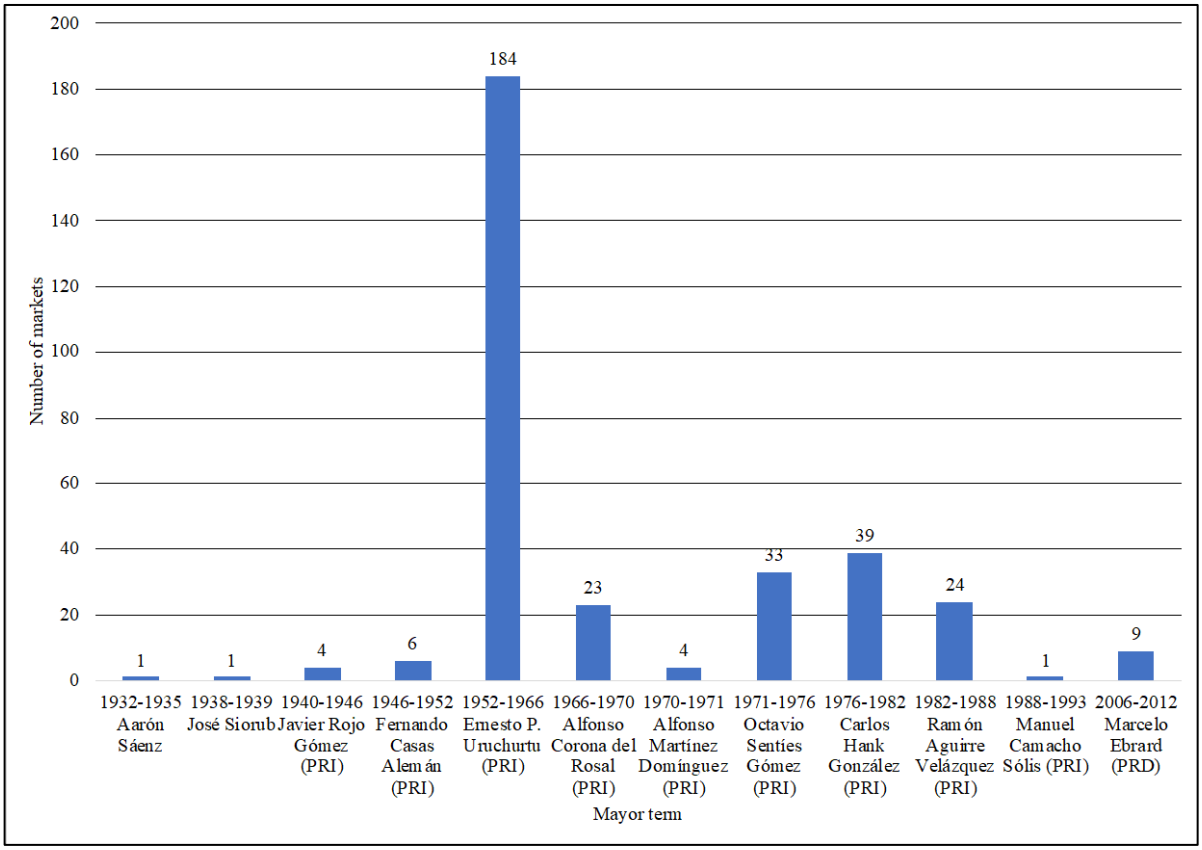
dramatically. As Figure 3 shows, Uruchurtu's long term in office allowed him to lead this urban process and set more than the foundations of this infrastructural network. Most of these markets were built in six central districts: Cuauhtémoc, Venustiano Carranza, Gustavo A. Madero, Álvaro Obregón, Benito Juárez, and Miguel Hidalgo, and although subsequent expansions benefited peripheral districts from the 1960s to the 1980s, central districts still received most of the public investment (Map 2). Altogether, this infrastructure scheme created a total of 72,246 stalls.

These markets revolutionised the city's supply system in less than two decades not only in material terms, as they also intended to transform the mentality and practices of the small-scale retailers in charge of Mexico City's popular trade. The markets' new spatial configuration came hand in hand with new disciplinary measures, such as the 1951 Markets Bylaw for the Federal District, which regulated the subsistence practices of small-scale low-income traders. According to Meneses (2012, p.20), the government relocated 56,090 street vendors in public markets between 1952 and 1964 in an attempt to clear public space and eradicate so-called unhygienic, poorly-equipped, and sometimes unlawful commercial practices. Together, the markets and the new regulations, taxes, and subsidies imposed by the state, contributed to

creating a new political, urban, and legal subject: the market trader. These infrastructural and political processes contributed to shaping on a mass scale what Roy (2011, p.277) identifies as a "distinct [subaltern] political identity," or what I have identified as the nexus infrastructure-subject formation by following the reflection of Appel et al., (2018), Fredericks (2018), and Easterling (2016). In this case, the 1950's Mexico City witnessed the emergence of the popular subjectivity and political identity of the modern market trader. To advance this modernising project of the food supply system, the government sought to transform the traders' ordinary practices, for example, by providing them with uniforms, aprons, and caps—as determined by the Bylaw—to make them embody the dominant social and cultural expectations regarding popular trade. Although contested, these standardising state actions enforced new social patterns in multiple trader communities to create a tolerable, even desirable version of popular trade.

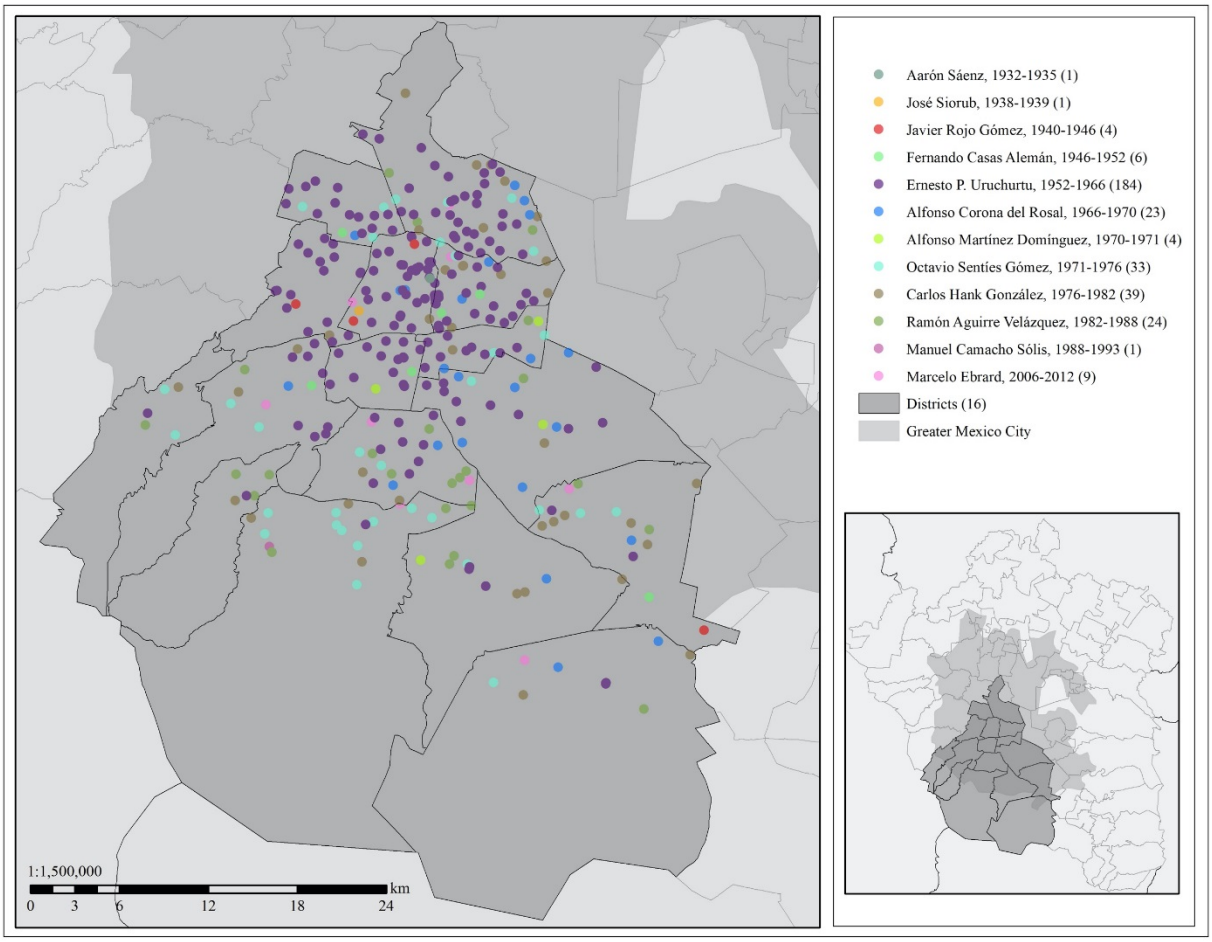
As extensively documented by Cross (1998b), Monroy (2005), and Meneses (2011), the establishment and consolidation of this new urban subjectivity went hand in hand with the expansion of the public markets network. Cross (1996, p.95) describes the relocation of thousands of street vendors in public markets as "one of the most politically volatile actions"

Figure 3. Growth of the public markets network per mayor term (1932-2012)



Source: Author. Based on PRI, 2019, 2015; CES-CDMX, 2017; Laboratorio para la Ciudad, 2017; and GDF, 2015.

Map 2. Expansion of the public markets network in Mexico City (1932-2012)



Source: Author. Based on PRI, 2019, 2015; CES-CDMX, 2017; Laboratorio para la Ciudad, 2017; and GDF, 2015.

in Mexico City. He points out that the scale of this relocation created multiple instances of resistance against the new infrastructural, institutional, and regulatory framework for popular trade, and that, therefore, the state implemented both repressive measures (policing, incarceration, and confiscation) and paternalistic strategies (subsidies, and political and legal recognition) to persuade this large population of street vendors to comply with the new rules. Those who resisted were displaced without compensation; those who complied received the markets and state assurances regarding their new status as market traders.

The political and legal recognition of the market trader is one of the most significant changes associated with the creation of public markets in the 1950s and 1960s. From this point in history, becoming a market trader not only involved complying with new trading practices, but also conforming with the imposed mechanisms of political organisation and participation. In this sense, the 1951 Markets Bylaw (ch. VI) determined the compulsory creation of trader organisations, as it became a pre-condition for markets' provision. Thus, the government intertwined political control and infrastructure provision, using the markets as "bait" to take street

vendors out of the streets (Cross, 1996, p.102; see also Cross, 1998a) and build a corporatist and clientelistic political structure around the ruling party, the PRI. As discussed in chapter 1 regarding the construction of a socio-political bond between the state and the subaltern, the public markets were pivotal creating a patronage relationship between the mid-twentieth century political elite and the traders in Uruchurtu's terms (Davis, 1994; Davis, 1998). The reach of this practice covers today the 329 markets, which have at least one organisation per market; however, as Rello and Sodi (1989, p. 252 in Giglia, 2018, p.32) point out, this estimation falls short given the "500 associations [and the] 50 federations" that they identified in 301 public markets at end of the 1980s. Through market provision, the Mexican state was also politicising under new terms a mass of subaltern small-scale traders, whose political organisation rapidly created a landscape characterised by multiplicity and fragmentation (see chapter 4).

In light of this process, the ruling party's clientelistic and corporatist structures mediated the presence and importance of trader organisations and public markets in Mexico City's urban politics. As Cross (1998a, p.45) notes, trader organisations were for several decades "PRI-sponsored" organisations affiliated to the party's so-called "urban popular sector," the CNOP, and were expected to support the party's political actions in exchange for markets and other state benefits. PRI party members used the public markets as a means to organise and mobilise politically the trader communities, thus making infrastructure provision, maintenance, and transformation a critical component of the PRI's political project.[17] In this context, Cross (1996) and Meneses (2011) show that the government inaugurated most of the markets in the last two years or the first year before and after each presidential election between 1953 and 1988, which suggests that markets became one more political promise to induce specific electoral outcomes. In return for this political salience, market traders had representatives in some decisive political spaces, such as the Advisory Council of Mexico City (Zenteno, 2016, p.116), where they negotiated around markets' provision, stall allocation, traders' organisation, and party life.

This new state-influenced economic and political organisation allowed the trader community to engage and develop relationships and skills that belong to their repertoire of political practices and discourses. In terms of popular infrastructural politics, the long-term implementation of this policy propelled the emergence of markets and traders as new political

[17] For example, February 12th, 1958, is remembered as an emblematic date, as 40,000 market traders attended a rally in support of the PRI's presidential candidate Adolfo López Mateos, precisely one of the most prolific presidential tenures in terms of markets' provision (Figure 2, page 72).

spaces and actors in Mexico City vis-à-vis dominant political actors. And while this mid-twentieth century infrastructural development shaped the traders' economic and political mentality around clientelistic and corporatist structures, it also allowed them to convey their popular imageries, needs, interests, and aspirations in the urban political sphere. According to Cross (1996), the euphoria of the construction programme came to an end when it proved financially and politically unsustainable in the long term. The scale of the project and the volume of resources to keep it working transformed the markets into a financial burden with no major political significance in electoral terms. Cross (1996) argues that once settled in the new markets and legally protected by the organisations, market traders were less keen to comply.[18] As I show in the following section, this long process of infrastructure provision and subject formation created long-standing political structures for the defence of the public markets network, which have allowed traders to deploy popular infrastructural politics not only to obtain new markets, but to keep the legal, economic, and political certainties that come with them.

3.3. Negotiating provision

In this section, I explore the struggles to obtain a public market once the "golden era" had ended. Here I examine why and how, in the face of criminalisation, persecution, and confiscation, two street-vendor communities opted to request a public market to secure a living and gain respectability in their urban contexts. I also investigate how this valorisation of public markets as "safe havens" (González, 2019, p.11) compelled trader communities to demand this public infrastructure notwithstanding the gradually more complicated political process that this request involved. By telling the story of two markets, I show the impact of public markets' scarcity on traders' political experience, and how their long-term struggles against infrastructure absence and for legal and political recognition kept the public markets network growing. By looking into the traders' narratives regarding market provision in the 1970s and 1980s, I show how the markets became a social and political demand powered by trader communities rather than a government imposition. In other words, I illustrate how traders incorporated the markets into their "subsistence expectations" and "presumptive right to a living," to use both Scott's (1976) and Edelman's (2005) expressions. These stories thus show how the political dynamics of infrastructure provision changed, and how the construction of markets and the creation of trader organisations ceased to be a predominantly state-led process, becoming instead a tortuous, long

[18] In 2006, a new ruling party, the PRD relaunched the construction programme (Figure 1, page 71), and more recently, the MORENA-affiliated mayor, Claudia Sheinbaum, announced that her government is planning to increase the number of public markets to 359 during her six-year tenure (Sarabia, 2019).

political journey led by the traders. In this sense, I offer some insights into the emergence of popular infrastructural politics, as the struggles for markets' provision imply both forms of subordination to the state and instances of resistance, contestation, and negotiation.

3.3.1. San Pedro Market

Historical records indicate that the government officially incorporated San Pedro market into the public markets network in April 1972, becoming one of the 14 markets built in the Tlalpan district during the 1970s. Like other markets, its origins can be traced back to the 1950s, when a group of street vendors gathered on the edge of a road away from Mexico City central districts (where measures against street vending had intensified under the government of Ernesto P. Uruchurtu). As I learnt in an interview with one of the main advocates of this market in the 1970s, Agustín (former trader leader, 60-70, I),[19] there were only two or three vendors at the beginning, "but [soon] others came," like Lorenzo (former trader leader, 60-70, I), who in 1959 pushed his cart full of handicrafts all the way to Tlalpan district—around 20 kilometres—to escape "the infamous Uruchurtu." However, the street vending restrictions also reached them there, and their small trader community soon faced confiscations, incarceration, fines, and bribes.

For Julio (trader leader, 50-60, I), constant harassment and vulnerability played a key part in shaping the need for a market, encouraging "the traders to organise and request a market to the district mayor, Dr Gen José González Varela, who was appointed by the president [and] was empathetic towards the working people, as not only did he build San Pedro market but eight more in Tlalpan district." Agustín (former trader leader, 60-70, I) recalls that in 1970, Zeferino, their leader, told him that they should ask for a market because they "have nothing." So, they wrote a petition appealing to the authorities to understand their situation and support them: "We, immigrants, artisans, came to the city to cause inconvenience [as street vendors] because others took our means of subsistence. If we still had them, we wouldn't be here…" Thus, they presented the letter to the district mayor requesting a market for 69 traders, but Dr González Varela told "Zeferino "Your petition is good, but ask a lawyer to write it for you and have it signed by your town's mayor, then bring it to me." With these conditions, the vendor contacted a local politician who agreed to write and sign the petition in exchange for political support.

[19] Basic information regarding the participants' occupation and age range at the time of the interview is provided in parentheses. The context of production of each piece of information is indicated as follows: "I" stands for interview, "M" for meeting, "C" for conversation, and "PE" for public event.

And although the vendors were "down and out," as Agustín remembers, they hired a band and made a floral banner for this local politician's electoral campaign. Then they waited for 20 days.

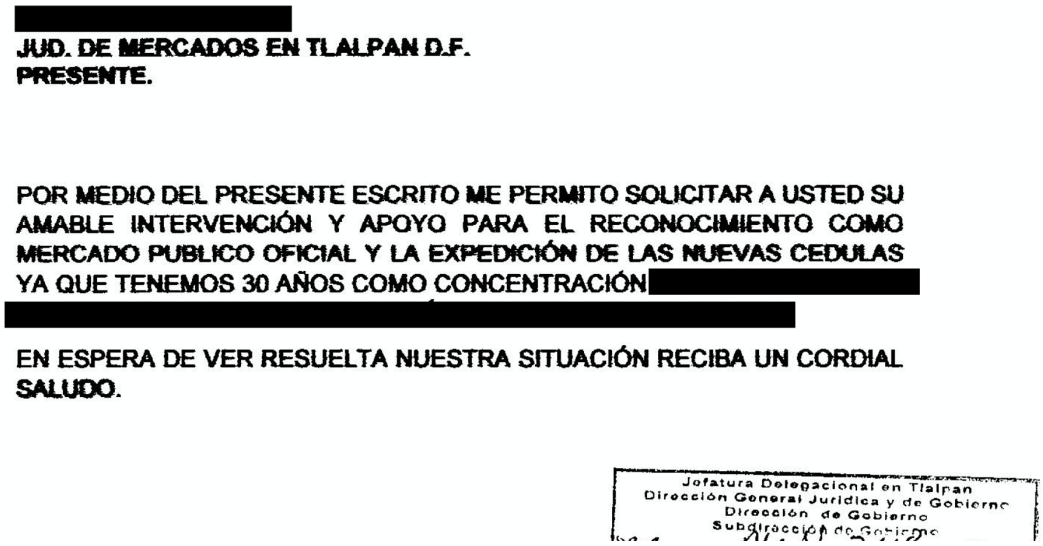
Back in the city, Dr Gen González Varela informed them that he would only be able to build a market for 25 traders and not for 69, and urged them, as the "good shepherd" he was (Lorenzo, former trader leader, 60-70, I), to organise and affiliate to the CNOP and the PRI. He also asked them to find a plot of state-owned land to proceed with the construction. The vendors picked the plot next to the road where they had spent the last ten years selling their products, but the construction process would not start immediately. The district mayor argued that the public funds for the construction were insufficient and that the traders' financial contribution would be necessary to guarantee its completion and their right to stay. 15,000 pesos per vendor was the set amount, and while some easily raised the money, others struggled. For example, Agustín (former trader leader, 60-70, I) recalls, "Moisés alone gave 30,000, Saúl 30,000 more, 15,000 on behalf of Ángel. David raised 27,000, I gave 13,000, Gonzalo 15,000, and Chucho, César, and Carmen 2,000 each." They needed to gather 375,000 pesos, which was a large amount of money in the early 1970s for a 25-member trader community. In the end, the authority accepted a 200,000 pesos deposit and began the construction of 25 kiosks on a 2-hectare plot.

By 2018, San Pedro market had 135 traders and a similar number of commercial units, including a couple of 4-storey buildings instead of kiosks. This social, economic, and spatial transformation became possible because of further political agreements between traders and state agents over the past four decades. In this sense, this case of infrastructure provision reveals the emergence of a long-standing political bond that allowed a small trader community to access a market and avoid the repressive actions of the state. As subaltern actors whose subsistence practices would benefit from this form of provision and legal and political recognition, San Pedro market traders had to learn the bureaucratic and political language of the state and its political networks. In escaping vulnerability and harassment, this trader community transformed the market into a social and political demand and, therefore, into a source of political socialisation. In this light, by negotiating provision in the early 1970s, a small group of street vendors began to build the repertoire of tools and strategies that are part of today's popular infrastructural politics.

3.3.2. Sur Market

The history of Sur market also portrays the traders' long political journeys to obtain a public market and legal and political recognition from the state (Image 4). This case shows how a trader community got involved in popular infrastructural politics in the 1980s, at a time when

Image 4. Long-term struggles for official recognition



[redacted]
JUD. DE MERCADOS EN TLALPAN D.F.
PRESENTE.

POR MEDIO DEL PRESENTE ESCRITO ME PERMITO SOLICITAR A USTED SU AMABLE INTERVENCIÓN Y APOYO PARA EL RECONOCIMIENTO COMO MERCADO PUBLICO OFICIAL Y LA EXPEDICIÓN DE LAS NUEVAS CEDULAS YA QUE TENEMOS 30 AÑOS COMO CONCENTRACIÓN [redacted]

EN ESPERA DE VER RESUELTA NUESTRA SITUACIÓN RECIBA UN CORDIAL SALUDO.

Jefatura Delegacional en Tlalpan
Dirección General Jurídica y de Gobierno
Dirección de Gobierno
Subdirección de Gobierno

Petition presented by a group of traders requesting that the Tlalpan district government intercedes with SEDECO on their behalf to obtain official recognition as a public market. It reads: "Public Markets Office in Tlalpan: Through this letter I request your support and intercession on our behalf to obtain official recognition as a public market and to have new permits issued, as we have been only recognised as *concentración* in the past 30 years. Hoping to see our request fulfilled, kind regards." **Source**: Traders' private archive.

the public markets' construction policy was about to come to a complete halt. According to official records, the government incorporated Sur market into the network in 2011, condensing in this political action more than 20 years of political struggles, vulnerability, subordination, and uncertainty. The origins of this public market and its trader community date back to 1987, when the government relocated a group of street vendors from the vicinity of a public transport interchange. According to Omar (trader leader, 30-40, I), who told me he learnt this story from the market's founders, the vendors resisted the relocation because they would be sent to a "hole," a place "where people didn't use to go," and because the government did not give them any assurance regarding their right to stay. Rather than building a new commercial facility, as in the 1950s, the government only provided the vendors with a place that they adapt to keep on trading, ultimately devolving the cost of building a public infrastructure on to the urban poor.

To make it suitable for trading, the vendors had to remove debris and transform a hole into a flat piece of land where they could put up their stalls. In this way, this trader community began to build a minimal and precarious infrastructure to confront infrastructural absence and improve their working conditions. In contrast to the San Pedro market, where a prevailing experience of market provision shaped the need for infrastructure, this need was introduced by state agents in Sur market. As Omar (trader leader, 30-40, I) recalls, a district government official drew their attention towards that possibility: "Why don't we build here a place where people come, consume, and listen to music?" Thus, informed by this political actor about the

existence of special funds for public markets, the relocated vendors began what Omar calls "the pilgrimage" to obtain legal and political recognition to create a market.

This "pilgrimage" or political journey lasted around 25 years, in which unpredictable bureaucratic and political decisions delayed the vendors' transformation into market traders. As a community specialised in petty trade, their legal recognition involved challenging individual and collective decisions, as Omar (trader leader, 30-40, I) highlights:

> We had to make decisions [and deals] to become a traditional market […] 'You are going to sell cooked food, you, groceries, you, dairy…' That's how it worked […] Trying out businesses. As a community, we took the risk and it worked for some. But we had to comply with the infrastructure requirements […] to get the official number. […] We had to comply with the [public markets'] Bylaw. […] We changed our business [from pirated merchandise to basic staples] and began to comply with the health and safety requirements, and everything else that's required to obtain a trader's pre-permit.

It took them three years to obtain this pre-permit, and the status it granted the traders was, in fact, a continuation of their legal vulnerability and infrastructural poverty. As Omar points out, it was part of the "piecemeal" state strategy to retain its political and spatial control over the traders. By keeping infrastructure provision as a promise and not granting the traders full legal and political recognition, the authorities prevented the vendors from returning to the streets and avoided the responsibilities that characterised market provision decades before. This ultimately produced an economic and political dependency that put traders under state control for decades.

Only after 2011 did the Sur market traders had the legal right to request public funds to improve their infrastructural conditions, but for more than two decades, these improvements depended on their capacity as trader community to allocate part of their income to that purpose and on informal arrangements with the authorities. As a result, when the government granted them official recognition, the traders had already built a concrete-and-steel market and provided with toilets and other basic services. For over 30 years, these traders' struggles also focused on self-providing the facilities that could set the foundations for a public market. It took them over 30 years to capitalise their active political organisation to create a "decent, suitable working place." Unlike the San Pedro market, where the state was actively involved in the construction process, in the Sur market, public investment was considerably low. Omar (trader leader, 30-40, I) remembers that as a trader leader, he negotiated for the construction permit knowing that the authority would not be fully involved in the process. At a meeting, he told the officials: "I just want you to give us the construction permit, I'm not asking for money, just let us build the market. Right now, our market doesn't look like a market. If you

want us to have proper infrastructure—roof, stalls, corridors, emergency exits—well, we need the permit. […] I'm not interested in [public money], just give me the permit." In 2018, Omar considered that "the traders funded 80 per cent of the market's infrastructure," but that now, their struggles continue to obtain public funding for maintenance as, once incorporated into the network, the market became a public good.

These two stories highlight how, in nearly 70 years, the provision of public markets in Mexico City changed from a state-driven process to one led by trader communities who transformed the markets into a social and political demand. San Pedro and Sur markets reveal what Anand et al. (2018) and Amin and Thrift (2017) define as the generative powers of infrastructure. Firstly, because the public markets represented an infrastructural model that encouraged two street-vendor communities to become market traders. And secondly, because these communities engaged in long-term struggles for infrastructure provision that conveyed their popular understanding of the value and purpose of public markets. In face of the gradual decline of the construction programme, traders mobilised for many years, keeping the public markets as an infrastructure model whose materialisation conveys not only the repressive measures against street vending, but also the long-standing needs and aspirations of small-scale low-income traders in Mexico City. At this early stage in subject formation and infrastructure provision, the traders mobilised their needs and aspirations by demanding legal and material certainties. In so doing, these trader communities kept the public markets network growing, both infrastructurally and politically, until it reached 329 commercial facilities and around 70,000 traders. In this sense, by fighting against harassment and vulnerability, the traders developed an intimate political relation with the state while creating a diverse environment to perform popular infrastructural politics. If seen through Roy's (2011, p.277) lenses, these struggles can be described as struggles to make public markets "distinct [subaltern] territories."

3.4. Marginal markets

Once the markets' "golden era" came to an end, the construction rate decreased dramatically, given that only 34 markets (10 per cent of the current total) were built between 1982 and 2012. According to Cross (1998a) and Meneses (2011), this is the result of the construction programme's failure, given that it did halt only temporarily the advance of street vending and, instead, created a financial burden for the government. In this section, I explain the long-term impact that this policy change has had alongside other critical economic, institutional,

and political changes in Mexico City, in particular the emergence of a multiparty political environment and the expansion of private retail companies. I investigate how these changes have restructured Mexico City's urban politics and subjected markets and traders to forms of political neglect, economic decline, and physical deterioration that, ultimately, marginalise them. Here I explore the dynamics underlying the decreasing participation of public markets in the city's supply system—from 80 per cent in the 1950s to 20 per cent in 2013 (L. Gómez, 2013) to 16 per cent in 2018 (Julián, central government official, 50-60, I). By exploring these urban and economic processes, I outline the factors making these Mexican public markets part of the traditional retail spaces that have been pushed to the urban margins globally, as Sara González (2019) has pointed out. Moreover, this focus on the markets' increasing marginality highlights the centrality of political neglect, corporate competition, and institutional failure in traders' popular infrastructural politics.

3.4.1. New urban priorities

In 1966, president Gustavo Díaz Ordaz removed Ernesto P. Uruchurtu from the mayor's office, shifting the government investment priorities from public markets to public transport and therefore changing the configuration of what can be called Mexico City's geographies of urban politics. Between 1966 and 1988, new economic and political actors came to dominate city-making processes and other socio-spatial projects began to determine the state's agenda for urban development. Once appointed city mayor (1966-1970), Alfonso Corona del Rosal reduced public investment in public markets (Figure 3, page 73), as public transport was emerging as a main area of economic and political interest for the government. Only in the period 1969-1970, three metro lines were inaugurated. According to former mayor Carlos Hank González, between 1978 and 1982, this focus on transport continued because the city's "water, drainage, and supply [infrastructures] were, more or less, working" (Revista Mexicana de la Construcción 284, 1978 in Ziccardi, 1991, p.214). In this light, the decline of market provision not only depended on its problematic legacy, as discussed by Cross and Meneses; it also responded to the broader restructuring of the urban economic and political agenda (Davis, 1991; Davis, 1994). In terms of the city's food supply system, the government was facilitating the expansion of corporate, large-scale business schemes dominated by supermarkets as their primary infrastructure (J. Gasca, 2017) and, instead of provisioning public infrastructure for popular trade, it regulated it by authorising the creation of *tianguis*, *mercados sobre ruedas*, and *concentraciones*, which are

different versions of street vending. As such, they lack the infrastructure, services, and subsidies reserved for public markets and operate on a mobile and temporary basis.[20]

The decline of public markets as an infrastructure model is both a rupture with the dominant strategy to regulate popular trade in the 1950s and 1960s and an opportunity for supermarkets, hypermarkets, price clubs, department stores, shopping malls, and convenience stores to gradually proliferate across the city. Although the first supermarket in Mexico City opened in 1958 to serve the urban middle and upper classes (López et al., 2013), this type of retail infrastructure began to increase exponentially until the first half of the 1970s. Between 1970 and 1975, the "self-service stores outnumbered the public markets, growing from 104 to 308 facilities [while the number of markets] reached 282 facilities [250 according to Figure 1]" (Romero, n.d., 65 in Giglia, 2018, p.32). According to Schatan (1982, pp.67–68), in 1975 supermarket companies dominated more than a third of the food sales sector, confirming the consolidation of large national and international interests in the Mexican retail sector, having their total sales grow eight-fold in five years. In contrast, the presence of small-scale retailers in Mexico City shrank from 50 to 44 per cent and their share in the food sector plunged from 50 per cent to 26 per cent between 1970 and 1975 (Schatan, 1982, pp.34–35).

This tendency deepened and intensified in the mid-1980s with the implementation of new policies of economic liberalisation that facilitated the investment of new retail corporations in Mexico City. As López et al. (2013) show, predominantly US-based companies partnered with Mexican retail companies from this decade onwards, strengthening the position of supermarkets in the urban landscape vis-à-vis the public markets. According to López (2013) and SEDECO (2013; see also Mata, 2015), there were 332 supermarkets in Mexico City in 2013, equalling or exceeding the number of public markets in 13 of the city's 16 districts. In 2018, the number of supermarkets increased to 462, and most of them were owned by Wal-Mart, Soriana, Chedraui, and Comercial Mexicana, which, together, controlled 88 per cent of the country's sales floor (15 million sq. m) (Seale & Associates, 2018). The growth of convenience store chains in the city has shown a similar pattern, but in a shorter period. In the past decade, convenience stores have been one of the main targets of traders' popular

[20] A *tianguis* is a food and basic staples' distribution system that operates on one location one or more days per week in the public space, usually in predetermined streets, squares, and parks (GCDMX, 2019a). *Mercados sobre ruedas* ("wheeled" markets) are a mobile distribution system that operates in the public space (streets) one or more days per week following predetermined routes in the city. This system was created in the 1960s to connect producers with consumers, but they predominantly operate as intermediaries these days (Castro, 2018). *Concentraciones* are groups of traders that offer goods and services permanently in public facilities that are not considered public markets (GDF, 2015b; GP-PRI, 2017). All are registered as civil associations.

infrastructural politics because of their rapid expansion. For example, 1,467 convenience stores opened in Mexico City between 2011 and 2013 (Llanos, 2013), deploying one of the most aggressive territorial expansions in the retail sector (Gasca, 2015; Ameth, 2015; Gasca and Torres, 2014). In 2018, the number of convenience stores in the city reached 3,535 units. Together, supermarkets and convenience stores outstrip public markets 11 to 1 (Giglia, 2018, pp.82–83), revealing the extent of the impact of these corporate business schemes on the markets' marginalisation process in economic and urban terms.

While the government left the production of food supply infrastructure in Mexico City in the hands of private investors, it continues managing popular trade with food distribution models that do not represent a direct financial burden for the authorities. Given that the growth rate of street vending increased alongside the implementation of neoliberal policies in the 1980s (Meneses, 2011; Gómez, 2012), the government granted authorisations to create *tianguis*, *mercados sobre ruedas*, and *concentraciones* rather than providing public markets. These options turned out to be the cheaper and more politically viable official solution for trader communities looking for some form of legal and political recognition. In 2009, there were 75,983 traders in 509 *tianguis*, 8,223 in 54 *mercados sobre ruedas*, and 16,084 in 207 *concentraciones* (Gómez, 2012, pp.98–99). A more recent report shows that there were 325 *concentraciones* in 2015 (PRI, 2015, p.317). Additionally, since the 1990s, the government has been building *plazas comerciales*[21] to relocate street vendors, particularly in the Historic Centre of Mexico City (Ortiz, 1994; Cross, 1998a, p.43). These buildings, of which there were 47 in 2011, can resemble public markets in infrastructural terms but do not have the same legal status or regulatory framework (Stamm, 2007; Crossa, 2009, 2018). Together, these alternatives to governing popular trade have marginalised and, paraphrasing Fredericks (2018, pp.33, 44), hollowed out the function and value of public markets as an infrastructural solution.

3.4.2. Changing institutional and political landscape

These urban and economic transformations came hand in hand with some critical institutional and political changes that impacted public markets' provision and management. During the 1950s and 1960s, the Department of Public Markets centralised the markets' administration and exerted direct control over traders' activities, organisation, taxation, regulation, and maintenance (Gobierno de la República, 1951, p.6). This scheme changed with the 1970 law

[21] While in this context *plazas comerciales* means popular commercial facilities provided by the state, the term generally refers to shopping centres, as privately built and run businesses that offer high-end products and services.

Table 1. Public markets' key regulations

Regulation	Key responsibilities
1998 Organic Law for the Public Administration of the Federal District (abrogated and replaced in 2018)	- Determines and specifies SEDECO's powers to formulate, supervise, and evaluate the public markets' policies, construction, and operation.
2000 Internal Bylaw for the Public Administration of the Federal District (abrogated and replaced in 2018)	- Determines and specifies the district governments' powers to build, maintain, renovate, and manage the public markets.
Fiscal Code (annually updated as a decree)	- Determines the traders' taxes for using the public markets (stalls, facilities, water and energy services). - Determines deductions and discounts for advance payment and liabilities. - Monthly taxes are calculated at a rate of 20.19 pesos/sq m per stall (2019) and paid two times a year.
1951 Markets Bylaw for the Federal District	- Determines the markets' public nature and regulates their organisation and everyday functioning (licencing, stall management, trader association, dispute resolution, and sanctions).
2015 Agreement to Establish the Guidelines for the Operation of Public Markets in the Federal District	- Updates and optimises the procedures regarding the public markets' administration (licencing, stall management, district governments' accountability and transparency, public toilets, and car parks).
2015 Catalogue of Businesses	- Updates, homogenises, and simplifies the types of businesses authorised in public markets.
2015 Norms for Seasonal Street Vending	- Establishes the official periods and basic regulations for traders to set up temporary stalls in the markets' surroundings *(romerías).*
2015 List of Official Public Markets in Mexico City	- Establishes public markets' official number, name, and address to determine their eligibility to receive subsidies and other benefits.
2013 Policy for the Protection and Promotion of the Public Markets of Mexico City (2013-2018)	- Identifies the public markets' more critical economic and infrastructural problems. - Defines the general strategies and actions to protect and improve the public markets. - Implemented through the annual Programme for the Promotion and Improvement of Mexico City Public Markets.
2016 Decree that Recognises as Intangible Cultural Heritage the Traditions of Public Markets in Mexico City	- Determines the markets' cultural manifestations subject to official protection as intangible cultural heritage. - Implemented through the Protection Plan
2017 Political Constitution of Mexico City	- Establishes the government's obligations regarding the public markets' infrastructural conditions and the traders' working and legal status. - Guides the elaboration of subsidiary legislation for traders and markets in the recently formed Congress of Mexico City.

Source: Author. Based on SEDECO, 2016; and various issues of Gaceta Oficial del Distrito Federal and Gaceta Oficial de la Ciudad de México.

reform of the city's administration system, which decentralised and democratised some decision-making processes regarding urban governance (de Gortari and Hernández, 1988; Hernández, 2008). This reform allowed Mexico City's 16 district governments to establish their own Markets Offices for management purposes (Giglia, 2018, p.33). Between 1984 and 1994, these local authorities developed their markets' policies hand in hand with the city-level Supply and Distribution General Coordination Office (Coordinación General de Abasto y Distribución, COABASTO), which was in charge of developing new economic, management, and regulatory mechanisms to stimulate popular trade.

As an expression of the government's new approach to popular trade, COABASTO was responsible for authorising the creation on several *tianguis*, *mercados sobre ruedas*, and *concentraciones* and, regarding public markets, it introduced a self-management scheme in 1986 with which COABASTO tried to transfer the markets' management and maintenance costs and responsibilities to trader organisations. Calvo (1995) defined this new system as a "modernising" strategy, however it has not had the expected results, since in 2018 only 24 markets had adopted the scheme (José, trader leader, 40-50, I). In 1994, the Economic Development Office (SEDECO) replaced COABASTO, and its General Office of Supply, Trade, and Distribution (Dirección General de Abasto, Comercio y Distribución, DGACD) now designs new regulations and policies for public markets.

In 1997, amid political reform and democratic transition in Mexico City (Fernández et al., 2001; Becerra, 1998; Valdés, 1998), SEDECO's policy-making and regulatory functions were ratified and the district governments were commissioned to build, maintain, and manage markets (SEDECO, 2013) (Table 1). Additionally, this reform created the Legislative Assembly of Mexico City, whose Commission of Supply and Distribution (Comisión de Abasto y Distribución) (Álvarez, 2005) would be involved in designing new regulations and allocating financial resources for public markets.[22] As a decentralisation process, this transformation brought more governing bodies and official actors into markets' reproduction, redistributing responsibilities among different parties and setting new criteria for cooperation to keep the markets functional and in good condition—Figure 4 identifies most of these bodies and illustrates the intricate institutional framework in which traders do politics.

[22] In 2017, after a long journey to be recognised as a sovereign state of the United Mexican States (Rabell, 2017), Mexico City enacted its own constitution. It determined a series of important institutional changes, such as the creation of the Congress of Mexico City in 2018; however, as for June 2020, the district governments, SEDECO, and the Commission of Supply and Distribution remained in charge of the markets network.

Figure 4. Public markets' core and peripheral governing bodies

Source: Author. Based on interviews, fieldnotes, and official and news reports.

This institutional restructuring, however, led traders and markets to experience long periods of deterioration, economic decline, political neglect, selective investment, and partial repair and maintenance. As Calvo (1995), Castillo (2017), and Giglia (2018) point out, this institutional failure has been a persistent hallmark in markets' history in Mexico City, remaining a relevant issue in recent official and media reports (CES-CDMX, 2017; SEDECO, 2013; Monge, 2001, 1998, 1990). In 2013, after assessing the infrastructural conditions of 160 markets, SEDECO determined that all had inadequate electric, gas, water, and drainage infrastructure and that 11 were critically deteriorated (SEDECO, 2013, pp.16–18). In December 2018, in the face of three devastating fires in La Merced, San Cosme, and Abelardo L. Rodríguez markets, and the revelation that there were fires in 132 markets between 2015 and 2019 (Vaca, 2020), the government commissioned new safety assessments (GCDMX, 2019b; R. González, 2019), thus revealing the impact of long-standing deterioration on markets and the limitations of the existing institutional arrangements regarding their maintenance.

The political reform also restructured the city's political landscape. A new diverse and competitive landscape created instances in which the markets' marginalisation deepened, but also opportunities for traders to challenge political neglect, physical deterioration, and economic decline (see chapter 5 on repair and maintenance). Thus, the 1996 reform simultaneously reinstated Mexico City residents' political rights and gave birth to a multiparty environment that the left-wing Democratic Revolutionary Party (PRD) dominated for almost 20 years (Tejera and Rodríguez, 2015; Pérez, 2013; Canto and Martínez, 2013; Medina, 2009; IEDF, 2009).[23] This political diversity—mainly reflected at district government level and in the legislative body, as the PRD consolidated its position in the city government from 1997 to 2018 (Table 2)—"provided a multiplicity of [new] avenues for influencing local officials" (Cross, 1998a, p.55) and "alternative [forms of political] affiliation" (Tosoni, 2007, p.62) through which traders' have influenced Mexico City's urban politics. However, as authors such as Tejera and Castañeda (2017), Cruz (2017), and Hurtado (2013) point out, this new political environment neither eradicated the clientelistic and corporatist practices associated with the PRI nor changed the traders' conditions of infrastructural poverty.

Table 2. Results of Mexico City elections (1997-2018)

City mayor (% of votes per party)	1997	2000	2003	2006	2009	2012	2015	2018
PAN	16%	33%	--	27%	--	14%	--	12%
PRD	48%	37%	--	46%	--	64%	--	15%
PRI	26%	23%	--	22%	--	20%	--	13%
MORENA	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	47%
Seats per party at the Legislative Assembly	**1997**	**2000**	**2003**	**2006**	**2009**	**2012**	**2015**	**2018**
PAN	2	21	3	4	9	2	5	2
PRD	38	19	37	36	31	38	14	0
PRI	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	0
MORENA	--	--	--	--	--	--	18	29
District governments won per party	**1997**	**2000**	**2003**	**2006**	**2009**	**2012**	**2015**	**2018**
PAN	--	6	2	2	3	1	2	1
PRD	--	10	13	14	13	14	6	2
PRI	--	0	1	0	0	1	3	1
MORENA	--	--	--	--	--	--	5	11
MC	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	1

Source: Author. Based on Tejera and Rodríguez, 2015 and Instituto Electoral de la Ciudad de México, 2019.

Note: Mexico City mayors are elected for six-year terms, while Legislative Assembly representatives (Congress of Mexico City since 2018) and district mayors are elected for three-year terms. Before 1997, district mayors were appointed by the city mayor and no elections were held.

[23] According to IECDMX (2019), there are seven political parties officially registered to compete in local elections: National Action Party (PAN), Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI), Democratic Revolutionary Party (PRD), Movement of National Regeneration (MORENA), Workers' Party (PT), Citizens' Movement (MC), and Ecologist Green Party of Mexico (PVEM). All these parties deploy multiple political strategies in public markets and build political relations with trader organisations. In this sense, party politics' flows constantly rest, terminate, emerge, merge, mutate and pass through public markets, particularly in election years.

This multiparty environment increased political competition and expanded the political debate, and although limited, it has also allowed certain degrees of oscillation in power distribution. Table 2 shows, for example, that the electoral results in 2000, 2015, and 2018 brought new political parties into the city's government apparatus and even a new political transition with the fall of the PRD as the ruling party (Revilla, 2015). For trader communities, this has meant navigating new political cycles, negotiating with raising and falling political actors, and setting agendas and priorities with competing district mayors and congress representatives. In light of these political flows, markets' provision, maintenance, and transformation have been subject to discretionary political decisions and changing policies and government agendas. Under these circumstances, the marginalisation of public markets and their traders has continued notwithstanding the new instances of political participation, increasing or decreasing unevenly across the network in accordance with the agendas and priorities in each political cycle. Partly because of this, traders deploy popular infrastructural politics almost permanently.

The policy changes regarding popular trade, the expansion of private retail companies, the restructuring of public markets' governance, and the political transition of Mexico City have reshaped traders' and markets' reproduction. Together, these processes have contributed to marginalising public markets in economic, political, and social terms, setting new infrastructural, institutional, and political standards to guarantee and govern food supply in the city. As discussed in chapter 1, this marginalisation can have different sources, and in Mexico City, it arises from the economic and political limitations of existing institutional frameworks, which transform public markets into experiences of chronic deterioration, economic decline, and political neglect—which ultimately create hazardous infrastructures, as the fires listed above demonstrate. By failing to keep up with minimal safety standards, the markets' institutional and political frameworks and actors have contributed to reducing the markets' participation in the food supply system. In this context, the traders' popular infrastructural politics have aroused and consolidated while the markets have become what González (2018) and Delgadillo (2016b) call "contested markets," as they oppose the implementation of urban neoliberal agendas. In this case, the expansion of private supermarkets and convenience stores and the state's withdrawal regarding social infrastructure provision, maintenance, and transformation. In the following chapters, I expand on how this marginalisation shapes traders' political socialisation, organisation, and mobilisation, and how these, in turn, challenge infrastructural poverty and absence. Before so, I briefly characterise the contemporary traders and markets of Mexico City.

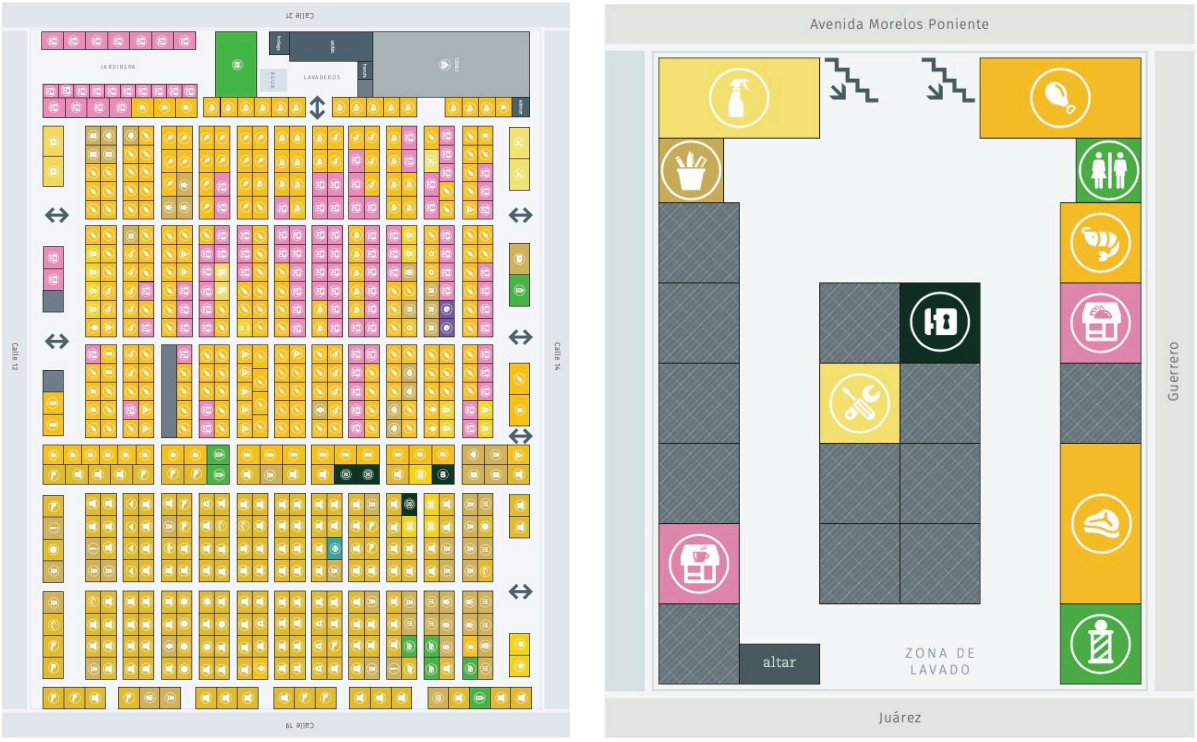
3.5. Markets and traders today

Current knowledge about public markets and traders in Mexico City is incomplete and fragmentary, as both officials and traders do not frequently keep or produce reliable information about the network's condition. On the one side, the official statistical and administrative sources at city and district levels are poor, outdated, and messy. On the other side, the traders rarely keep records and, to my knowledge, have not gathered information about themselves. During my fieldwork (see chapter 2), I realised how entrenched this situation is, to the extent that I faced some political and ethical difficulties producing new knowledge about markets and traders. As I soon understood, the lack of official information is not only the result of the authorities' deficient administration, but also an effect of the traders' resistance to statecraft practices of legibility, control, and surveillance. At the district level, I visited government offices where officials did not have organised and accessible information. At the city level, I submitted a freedom of information request that revealed that the authorities did not have a record of the number of trader organisations operating in public markets up to December 2019, notwithstanding that it is their responsibility.[24] Moreover, the information available on official websites is not consistent throughout district governments, which makes it difficult to trace how and when they invest in the markets. In 2017, SEDECO commissioned a study to partly rectify this situation, which resulted in the publication of one report and a book by a university academic Angela Giglia (2018). In this section, I use these materials and media and other secondary sources to characterise the public markets network.

Giglia (2018, p.62) classifies the 329 markets as follows: 99 are small (≥100 stalls), 148 are medium size (101≥250 stalls), 75 are large (251≥1000), and 7 are very large (1001≥). In total, these markets contain 70,636 stalls (CES-CDMX, 2017), 1,375 less than in 2016, when the authority recorded 72,011 (SEDECO, 2016, p.12) (Image 5).[25] The study shows that 84 per cent of the markets (276) are *traditional* and supply food and other basic staples to the population; and that 13 per cent (43 markets) are *specialised*, either in shoes, handicrafts, furniture, clothes, fabrics, plants, flowers, cooked food, tools, second-hand goods, sweets, pets, toys, costumes, or esoteric products and services (Giglia, 2018, pp.46–48; see also SEDECO, 2013). While most of the traditional markets serve local communities at a neighbourhood scale, some, together with the specialised markets, operate at a metropolitan scale, functioning as wholesale centres and attracting customers from beyond Mexico City (Giglia, 2018, p.49). The study shows that the

[24] By the end of 2019, the Institute of Access to Public Information of Mexico City determined that the city government must keep a record of this information and make it public (Redacción 24 Horas, 2019).
[25] In chapter 6, I discuss the politics of stall grabbing, which can explain this reduction and the fact that 13,540 stalls rarely open, 1,697 are used for storage, and 5,992 seem to be permanently closed (Giglia, 2018, p.45).

Image 5. Multiple socio-spatial configurations



Left: Prohogar Market, Azcapotzalco district (641 stalls). *Right*: San Salvador Cuauhtenco (12 de Octubre) Market, Milpa Alta district (23 stalls). **Source**: Adapted from CES-CDMX, 2017.

markets' weekly income is around 195.5 million pesos, which represents 23.5 per cent and 26.8 per cent of Wal-Mart's and the informal sector's respective estimated turnovers. While each market's weekly average income hits 600,000 pesos, the total income is unevenly distributed across the network: a small market can earn around 3,000 pesos per week while a large specialised market can average 7.6 million pesos (Giglia, 2018, p.61). In 2016, the study estimates, the 329 markets contributed 1.7 per cent to the city's GDP (Giglia, 2018, pp.59–60). In line with previous reports, this one also records the markets' poor infrastructural conditions.

Regarding the market traders, the study reveals that 53 per cent are men and 47 per cent women, that their ages range from 18 to 99 years old, and 75 per cent sell groceries, cooked food, soft drinks, fabrics, shoes, clothes, personal care products, stationery, houseware, and hardware. For Giglia (2018, p.55), the fact that their average age is 59 and that 40 per cent of the traders are between 46 and 60 years old poses questions about ageing, generational change, and the markets' future. Based on a sample of 50 markets, the report shows that market traders work between 7 and 10 hours per day (CES-CDMX, 2017). Besides showing that most traders operate using cash, the report highlights that market traders have barely changed their supply system in the past 30 years, which consists of individual transactions between small retailers and medium-size intermediaries of the city's Wholesale Centre (Central de Abastos). As

Giglia points out (2018, p.68), this situation prevents market traders from directly or collectively negotiating prices and quantities with wholesalers. Based on traders' estimations, the study estimates the markets' annual footfall at 182.7 million customers (Giglia, 2018, p.73).

As mentioned, the number of trader organisations recognised by the authorities remains unknown. SEDECO's commissioned studies highlight the organisations' complex role as gatekeepers and political intermediaries (Giglia, 2018, p.26; CES-CDMX, 2017), but they do not identify their total number or names. In the face of this lack of information, I conducted an exploratory analysis of 152 newspaper reports published between 2006 and 2020 and some recent academic sources (PUEC, 2015a; PUEC, 2015b) to attempt to map the traders' organisational landscape. Although limited in how it represents its diversity, Table 3 identifies some active organisations whose names and leaders are public.

The names column suggests the scale of political representation and participation of these organisations' (market scale, regional, or national); their location (La Merced, Jamaica, or Hidalgo markets); the traders' specialisation (confectionery or flowers): their legal status (A.C., civil associations); their alliances (Nave Mayor, Banquetón, and Corredor Comercial or markets and *concentraciones*); or their political focus (democratic coordination, women, social economy defence, and pro markets). Although the second column only contains eight names, it highlights a few leaders whose political activity and interaction with journalists and researchers make them more visible than others. This column also highlights that leaders can have more than one organisation, as in the case of Fernando García, which is discussed in the following chapter in terms of the multiplication of organisations. The third column sheds light on the instances in which these leaders and organisations become publicly visible.

Although the most updated official and academic information about public markets, trader communities, and trader organisations is also incomplete and fragmentary, it signals the diverse and complex character of this infrastructural and political network. As indicated in the study commissioned by SEDECO (CES-CDMX, 2017), the production of this knowledge is mediated by multiple stakeholders and conflicting interests, which makes difficult to gather reliable information. In terms of this thesis, the traders' reluctance to engage in this knowledge production processes is part of their deployment of popular infrastructural politics, as I indicated in chapter 2. Traders mediate politically these processes and play a key part in shaping what can be known about the socio-economic and infrastructural conditions of the public markets network. And while this situation is an example of the scope of popular

infrastructural politics and traders' capacity to create instances of autonomy and dissidence, it also negatively impacts the governance of this large infrastructure network. Since my research explores the political practices and discourses underlying the production and reproduction of public markets in Mexico City, it also sheds light on the socio-political conditions that prevent the production of better understandings about them.

Table 3. Trader organisations in Mexico City

Organisation	Relevant Member	Context of public exposure
Unión de los Comerciantes Establecidos de la Poligonal de La Merced A.C.	--	Academic study, planning focus (2015)
Mesa Directiva Mercado Nave Menor	--	Academic study, planning focus (2015)
Locatarios Unidos de La Merced en el Distrito Federal A.C.	--	Academic study, planning focus (2015)
Asociación de Locatarios del Mercado de Dulces Ampudia A.C.	--	Academic study, planning focus (2015)
Mesa Directiva Mercado de Comidas	--	Academic study, planning focus (2015)
Comité de Representantes de Locatarios Afectados del Mercado Nave Mayor, Banquetón y Corredor Comercial Merced	--	Academic study, planning focus (2015)
Mesa Directiva Mercado Flores	--	Academic study, planning focus (2015)
Mesa Directiva Banquetón	--	Academic study, planning focus (2015)
Administración del Mercado de Flores	--	Academic study, planning focus (2015)
Unión de Comerciantes en Pequeño del Mercado Nave Mayor	--	Academic study, planning focus (2015)
Coordinadora Democrática de Mercados Públicos A.C.	--	Academic study, planning focus (2015)
Unión de Locatarios del Mercado 105 Merced Flores A.C.	--	Academic study, planning focus (2015)
Coordinadora Nacional Democrática de Mujeres A.C.	Rosa María García	Academic study, gender focus (2015)
Movimiento Nacional del Contribuyente Social 17 de Marzo A.C.	--	Academic study, law focus (n.d.)
Asociación de Locatarios del Mercado de Jamaica	--	News report, support to government's actions (2017)
Asociación Nueva Generación Mercado Hidalgo	Alicia Pérez	News report, protest against supermarket (2020)
Coordinadora Nacional para la Defensa de la Economía Social	Joaquín Vela	News report, protest against law reform (2014)
Federación de Mercados y Concentraciones Populares de Anáhuac A.C.	Humberto García	News report, protest for and against law reform (2013 and 2015)
Frente de Comerciantes del Servicio Público de Mercados	Edgar Álvarez	News report, protest for and against law reform (2015 and 2018)
Fundación Pro Mercados A.C.	Fernando García	News report, protest to demand a market's reconstruction (2018)
Movimiento Nacional del Contribuyente Social 17 de Marzo A.C.	Alberto Vargas	News reports, protests against supermarkets and for law reform (2012, 2016, and 2019)
Organización de Mercados Públicos y Concentraciones del Distrito Federal	Fernando García	News report, protest for law reform (2013)
Organización Mercados Públicos Unidos de la CDMX	--	News report, meeting with candidate (2018)

Source: Author. Based on PUEC, 2015a, 2015b, and *La Jornada*, *El Universal*, *Excelsior*, *Reforma*, and *Milenio* newspapers (various issues, 2006-2020).

3.6. Final remarks

In this chapter, I explored relevant aspects of the past and present of Mexico City public markets, trader communities, and trader organisations to build a historical understanding of their economic and political foundations and developments over the past seven decades. In particular, I have described and discussed the historical conditions under which these commercial communities and facilities emerged, that is, the factors underpinning the traders' contemporary popular infrastructural politics. By revisiting these historical events, I highlighted the long-standing economic, political, and urban dynamics that have determined the markets' and traders' role in the city's political fabric. This account has allowed me to examine the foundations of the complex, dependent, and contentious encounters between the traders and the state, as well as the central role of the markets in creating an infrastructurally mediated patronage relationship. I have also emphasised that traders' popular infrastructural politics arise from the subject formation process associated with the market construction programme in the 1950s. I argued that from this point in history, Mexico City not only had a "modern" food supply system, but also new urban political actors and spaces whose participation in urban politics has been strongly determined by the dominant actors involved in electoral competition or controlling the government's resources.

In particular, the two cases depicting the long-term processes of obtaining markets and official recognition unveil both the traders' tenacious activism and the constant uncertainty created by state agents, put to work in favour of clientelistic and corporatist mechanisms. Thus, the chapter also shows that popular infrastructural politics consolidated alongside broader contradictory political tendencies. On the one hand, the ruling party, the PRI, subordinated trader organisations to its economic and political agendas; on the other hand, it encouraged the formation of political actors who claimed their right to infrastructures and autonomy. In post-1996 Mexico City, trader organisations still deal with their authoritarian origins and fight for infrastructures and autonomy in a multiparty environment and vis-à-vis more democratic and accountable institutions. Under these circumstances, traders have developed a distinctive form of popular infrastructural politics with which they navigate the changing economic, political, institutional, and regulatory landscapes of Mexico City. Ultimately, by mobilising these politics, the traders have reaffirmed the value of public markets as a model of food supply urban infrastructure and have expanded the network across the city, notwithstanding the declining official support and the rapid expansion of corporate retailers in the past 30 years.

In light of these historical processes, traders' popular infrastructural politics have been critical to keeping the public markets network growing and working. By fighting against political neglect, material deterioration, and economic decline, this trader community have prevented the deepening of the marginalisation process that they have experienced for various decades. In this way, and particularly from the mid-1980s onwards, traders have defended the markets against the introduction of economic liberalisation policies and have demanded that the state fulfils its responsibilities towards the subaltern. Altogether, this chapter depicts the markets' transition from a "golden era" to a challenging present, and the transformation of the markets into social and political demands. In the following chapters, I examine in detail why and how market traders continue influencing Mexico City's urban politics through popular infrastructural politics. With this ethnographic exploration, I shed light on the ordinary and often hidden practices and discourses that underlie some of the struggles depicted in this chapter. In this sense, the following chapters expand our understanding of the imageries, interests, concerns, needs, and aspirations deeply rooted in the history of public markets.

4. Coming together to defend the markets

4.1. Introduction

> We teach traders that they have the power and that's what gives us credibility. We don't take money from them, we try, instead, to be good advisers.
> Omar (trader leader, 30-40, I)

> With all respect to the experts, but a good bunch of people and a protest are more powerful than a well-founded petition.
> Valentín (trader leader, 40-50, M)

> There is a latent threat in any place where you can bring people together, whether it is a market or a church.
> Teresa (former central government official and trader leader, 50-60, I)

As discussed in chapter 1, popular infrastructural politics involve the construction of a repertoire of political tools with which the subaltern navigate the geographies or urban politics to deal with the production and reproduction of infrastructures. In light of the traders' history discussed in the previous chapter, trader organisations emerge as the central political tool with which they defend the public markets network and influence broader city-making processes. From this perspective, trader organisations are the long-standing structures for political socialisation, in which trader communities have developed what Scott (1998) calls political mētis. Thus, these organisations stand out as the primary political mechanism through which traders create, adapt, and learn political discourses, skills, and relationships around the markets, and in this sense, they would predate what González and Dawson (2018) have defined as the trader-led campaigns to defend the markets.

Although a product of statecraft practices that remain under state control and surveillance, trader organisations are political entities with relative autonomy, in which traders disclose their hidden transcripts and mobilise their popular imageries— the concealed views, moods, and sentiments outlined by Scott (2009) and Thompson (1991). They are the settings in which traders shape, for example, their heretical understandings of the law, and where they decide how and when they become public, as I discuss in chapter 6. Moreover, trader organisations are the markets' popular governing bodies, namely, the instruments through which the traders influence, vis-à-vis state agents, the markets' provision, preservation, and transformation. In this chapter, I investigate key aspects of their functioning in the Mexico City public markets network, understanding that trader organisations are the main carriers of traders' popular infrastructural politics and that they are essential to making public markets into political nodes. Thus, this chapter contributes to illustrating my interest in capturing the "bulk of political

action" (Scott, 1990, p.199), the "nitty-gritty details" (Auyero, 2006, p.258), and the passions and sacrifices involved in the subaltern's performance of ordinary politics.

As signalled by the epigraphs, reflecting on the political character of trader organisations poses questions about problem solving, mutual support, political representation, conflict, and leadership, as well as political participation and knowledge and skills distribution in grassroots organisations. In the section *Contested markets, rebellious traders* of chapter 1, I examined the contributions of several authors who have addressed some of these issues in contemporary urban markets; however, such themes have not been their primary research focus and, therefore, they offer only a limited understanding of how trader organisations operate politically. Although these themes have been more acutely explored by scholars interested in street vendor organisations (Crossa, 2018; Gómez, 2018; Gómez, 2012; Gómez, 2007; Brown et al., 2010; Little, 2005), authors such as Endres et al. (2018), Weng and Kim (2016), Clark (2002), and Awuah (1997) have looked into these issues regarding indoor market trader organisations. These contributions highlight the organisations' economic, social, and political functions, which range from settling disputes to creating a safety net or negotiating the markets' spatial configuration. Departing from this literature, I examine these issues regarding trader organisations in the context of popular infrastructural politics, focusing on their political salience, their role in traders' political socialisation, and the political and organisational landscape that the Mexico City public markets network engenders. I provide a new understanding of trader organisations in Mexico City as key political tools whose existence revolves around the provision, preservation, and transformation of public markets—issues that ultimately install the presence of market traders in the geographies of urban politics. I rely on the traders' perspective and my ethnographic immersion into their socio-political world to describe and analyse these structures and functions.

In *Politics for problem solving*, I explore how problem solving becomes the organisations' raison d'être and how this influences their political salience. This observation links directly to my initial discussion about the centrality of problem solving in popular infrastructural politics, and here I expand the discussion by highlighting the reactive character of these politics vis-à-vis the emergence of administrative, regulatory, and infrastructural problems that need to be solved. In *A pool of organisations*, I examine the factors behind the proliferation and fragmentation of trader organisations in Mexico City, and how these processes have created a diverse and competitive political environment in which multiple organisations co-exist. By describing the characteristics of this organisational landscape, I delineate heterogeneous instances in which popular infrastructural politics are put into practice. In *Fluctuating participation*, I describe the traders'

changing political engagement with organisations and the factors that they identify as critical in shaping this fluctuation. Seen from the leaders' perspective, my objective is to show how subaltern political participation takes shape in Mexico City's extensive markets network. In *Popular leadership*, I analysed the role of trader leaders as political intermediaries that monopolise knowledge, skills, and relationships within trader organisations. While I look at the internal differentiations this creates, I also highlight the leaders' importance in sustaining the organisations' existence. Finally, in *Calls to unity and mobilisation*, I interpret the traders' permanent cry for unity in a fragmented political landscape as a way to understand the leaders' difficult task of converting the traders' social capital into political capital. I also look at how the threat of mobilisation becomes a powerful political asset for traders to defend the markets.

4.2. Politics for problem solving

The creation of trader organisations in the public markets network of Mexico City is inseparable from the authoritarian, clientelistic, and corporatist political project commanded by the PRI in the 1950s. However, the politicisation of trader communities and their capacity to create grassroots political organisations has deeper roots in their interests, needs, concerns, and aspirations, which I explore in this section in terms of problem solving. As performers of popular infrastructural politics, trader organisations build political relations to access the necessary resources to solve administrative, regulatory, and infrastructural problems that directly threaten traders' subsistence. As problem-solving political organisations, they predominantly unlock administrative procedures, block regulatory changes, or prevent the material deterioration of public markets. In this sense, the nexus between politics and problem solving is crucial to understanding why traders in Mexico City become part of political networks and forge trader organisations as political tools rather than only as economic ones. The centrality of problem solving in bringing the traders together in political terms emerged constantly throughout my fieldwork, showing how it functions as a critical subjective motivation—as an "active energy" (Thompson, 1991, p.37)—that, in this case, contributes to triggering the traders' political awakening. Problem solving is a key reason for traders to approach or found organisations, and therefore trader leaders present themselves as expert problem solvers. This means that traders immerse themselves in a political network not only because they share economic interests or religious and ethnic similarities, as Evers and Schrader (1994) show, but to solve permanently emergent problems. From this perspective, problem solving is a main component in traders' popular political imageries and a driver of cooperation, solidarity, and conflict in trader communities.

Trader organisations in Mexico City have solved the problem of representing politically a large trader community of around 70,000 traders in a 329-market network, across different jurisdictions, and vis-à-vis state agents operating at different scales. Institutionalised through the 1951 Markets Bylaw for the Federal District, trader organisations have become essential for traders to convey their views, needs, concerns, and aspirations through formal and informal channels. These organisations represent trader communities that range from 18 to 4200 members (PRI, 2015, pp.323–341; see also Appendix), and whose composition is marked by multiple differentiations: business type, kinship, religion, political affiliation, geographical location, ethnicity, etc. (Giglia, 2018). In this context, trader organisations have been essential in making legible the complexity of such a large and variegated community, making it easier for members to build more stable political relations both in the markets and with the state. The regulatory framework played a key role in this process, as it determines that traders can create a) market-level organisations (associations) by gathering and affiliating a 100 members, b) regional organisations (federations) by gathering 20 market-level organisations, and c) national organisations (confederations) (Gobierno de la República, 1951).

This neatly tiered model depicted in the regulation is the basic structure for traders to represent themselves legally and politically in the public markets network, but in practice, the traders have created a much more complex organisational landscape. In fact, what and who the organisations represent is a matter of each market's trajectory and the legal and political problems they have faced. For example, Julio (trader leader, 50-60, I) recounts that in the early 1970s, his market had an informal organisation with "24 traders who belonged to 4 or 5 different families." A decade later, Julio's group registered this organisation as a civil association[26] to represent 130 members; however, internal division led 10 traders to opt out from this organisation and found their own. Here, in the same market building, different trader organisations co-exist, developing differentiated political relations with state agents. In a trader community of 1,312 members, José (trader leader, 40-50, I) explains that his market-level organisation coordinates 10 smaller organisations that together represent around 350 traders. Similarly, Antonio (trader leader, 60-70, I) created a regional organisation in the early 2000s by clustering 28 smaller organisations that represented different markets across the city, but which, in turn, only represented a portion of the total traders. This group formalised the

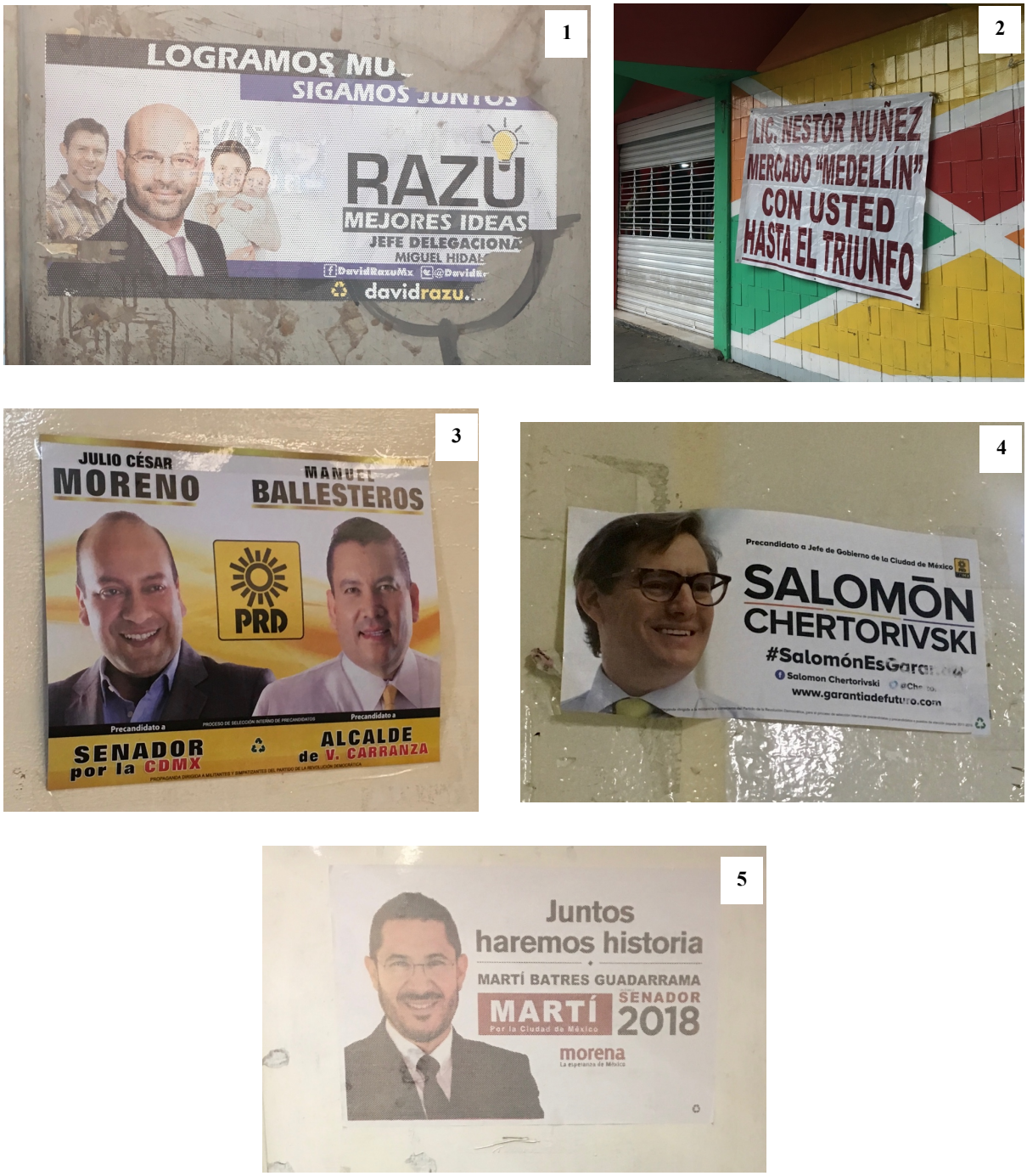
[26] In Mexico, a civil association (A.C.) is a legal figure through which two or more people organise, bound by a memorandum, to achieve one or more shared licit goals of preponderantly non-economic nature (Cámara de Diputados, 1928). Among market traders, this formalisation process entails the legal and political recognition of their organisations as a means to defend the markets.

organisation in the late 2000s under the name National Movement, after proving that it could represent and solve traders' interests and problems.

By doing politics for problem solving, trader organisations challenge the material and symbolic processes that affect their social reproduction, but they do so under economic and political conditions that constrain their actions. Subjected to clientelistic and corporatist practices, trader organisations in Mexico City have built solutions to traders' problems and needs under conditions of subordination. Between the 1950s and 1990s, the PRI exchanged solutions for political support under an authoritarian political project, and in the first decades of the twenty-first century, the traders' politics for problem solving remain conditioned by political affiliation but in what is now a competitive, multiparty environment (Images 6 and 7). In both contexts, problem solving for traders has been a highly politicised activity, bringing them together in trader organisations to negotiate with authorities and politicians that control the available administrative, regulatory, and infrastructural solutions for public markets. The prevalence of this political mediation and the transition experienced in the late 1990s is a central part of the narratives regarding problem solving among the markets' stakeholders. Alfredo (former district official, 40-50, I), who directly dealt with traders' administrative demands in the early 2010s, voices a shared understanding of how the ruling party mediated the access to solutions: "It was a normal that everything was linked to the PRI, that everyone was affiliated to the PRI, and that if something wasn't part of the PRI, it didn't work well." In contrast, today's traders "don't wear any partisan colours," explains Alfredo, "they are very adaptable and work with whoever wins [the elections]. If it's the PRI, the PAN, the PRD, or MORENA, it doesn't matter, they work with them [looking for solutions for the markets]."

As Cross (1998a) projected and Tosoni (2007) argue, this multiparty environment opened new opportunities for trader organisations to negotiate solutions to a wide range of problems while loosening the PRI's authoritarian control over them. This means that from the 2000s, the organisations' politics for problem solving have involved new levels of autonomy compared to previous decades. In this context, problem solving has been partially detached from political affiliation, as Antonio's words (trader leader, 60-70, I) reveal: "We don't have to support any candidate […]. We tell [them that] we'll talk with all of the candidates [and that] we won't fight or support any of them. That's how it works: they have no other option than to believe that we don't have a political affiliation, and thus we don't risk our [political] position." In this way, by navigating the urban politics without adopting a unique political affiliation, trader

Image 6. Navigating the multiparty system in the markets



Traces of party propaganda abound in the public markets, like these stickers, posters, and placard put on their walls in the contexts of the 2015 and 2018 elections. Although legally forbidden, this use of the markets is part of their political salience and a key instance for traders to negotiate with state agents. **1)** 2015 PRD sticker for district mayor candidate (Ing. Gonzalo Peña Manterola Market, Miguel Hidalgo district). A 2006 PAN sticker can also be seen underneath; **2)** 2018 placard expressing the traders' support to a MORENA district mayor candidate (Medellín Market, Cuauhtémoc district); **3)** 2018 PRD poster for district mayor and senate candidates (Zaragoza Market, Venustiano Carranza district); **4)** 2018 PRD sticker for city mayor candidate (Anáhuac Market, Miguel Hidalgo district); and **5)** 2018 MORENA sticker for a senate candidate (Ing. Gonzalo Peña Manterola Market, Miguel Hidalgo district). **Source**: Author, 2018.

organisations maximise their chances of solving problems. In election times, candidates of all parties visit the markets to listen to the traders and receive their petitions regarding their multiple problems. This flexible political strategy for problem solving goes hand in hand with Antonio's idea that all traders should only commit to support the "Party of the Public Markets." Although fictitious, this "party" condenses the idea that traders' interests transcend the fluctuation of political competition and that only this type of imaginary political formation can place problem solving at the heart of traders' politics.

Image 7. Problem solving at the centre of politics

Candidates tour public markets and meet with traders during election times to discuss solutions to the long-standing administrative and infrastructural problems. This placard at Ing. Gonzalo Peña Manterola Market, Miguel Hidalgo district, reads: "The debate is to listen to the ideas and compromises of the candidates for the Tacubaya neighbourhood, as well as to reach an agreement." **Source**: Author, 2018.

Trader organisations do politics for problem solving to settle conflicts among traders, keep track of and expedite administrative procedures, secure funding for repair and maintenance, adapt existing regulations to make them meet traders' needs, and prevent authorities from extort or humiliate traders. In this light, problem solving is ultimately a form of "dignifying the traders' work," as Uriel (trader leader, 30-40, I) puts it, or a way to offer "universal benefits for market traders," as Alfonso (trader leader, 60-70, I) understands the role of trader organisations. However, problem solving regarding these issues is usually approached reactively rather than proactively, thus making traders' popular infrastructural politics a response to processes and actions set in motion by the state or other urban actors. My

participant observation allowed me to record that the organisations' problem-solving agendas were often developed when traders were already facing pressing infrastructural problems, the enactment of unfair regulations, or the implementation of punitive measures that restricted their commercial activities. This reactiveness implies that trader organisations often respond to undesired and unbearable forms of state absence or presence—such as the lack of maintenance or the enactment of new regulations. When recalling his role in the creation of two trader organisations, Virgilio (trader leader, 60-70, I) emphasised how both were reactions to forms of state action or inaction. Firstly, in the late 1990s, his market-level organisation was the result of a struggle against the lack of legal certainty offered by the authority regarding the renewal of their permits. Secondly, in the early 2000s, the "outstanding achievement" of creating a regional organisation resulted from fighting against fiscal reform that would have increased the traders' tax contribution. In this sense, the need to solve specific problems becomes a main driver of political organisation among market traders.

4.3. A pool of organisations

As mentioned in chapters 2 and 3, Mexico City authorities do not keep a systematic record of the number of trader organisations operating in the Mexico City's public markets network, thus limiting our understanding of the traders' diverse, dynamic, conflictive, and fragmented organisational landscape. The list of organisations provided in Table 3 (page 93), and the legal prescription that all market traders were obliged to create organisations hint at the underlying logics of multiplication that characterise organisation formation since the origins of the public markets network. In the past seven decades, there has been at least one registered organisation per market, which totals 329 market-level organisations in 2018. These organisations co-exist with an undetermined number of regional and national trader organisations that also operate in Mexico City. While this figure directly relates to the expansion of the public markets network, my fieldwork suggests that the number of organisations is higher, as multiple socio-political processes in the trader community have triggered their multiplication and proliferation at different scales. Rough assessments made by traders, officials, and politicians alongside my fieldwork indicate that is not unusual to find more than one trader organisation per market, and that this organisational fragmentation is a permanent issue in the public markets network.

This variegated environment replicates at the market, regional, and national levels, producing multiple overlaps in which market-level organisations actually operate at a regional level and so-called national organisations only represent a small number of market-level organisations.

Although the organisations' effective political influence is a matter of discussion, they all contribute to producing a fragmented political landscape with multiple leaders and divergent strategies and tactics. In this section, I examine the co-existence of multiple organisations as an example of how popular politics are made in constant collisions, schisms, and mutations, as discussed around Thompson's (1991) and Scott's (1990) ideas. Specifically, I analyse how conflict and differentiation challenge but also encourage solidarity and cooperation among the subaltern. In this context, I explore how the traders' organisational multiplicity and political changing landscape have created a repertoire of political tools that increases the means through which traders deploy popular infrastructural politics and navigate Mexico City's urban politics.

For the government, this plurality challenges its capacity to make legible the traders in political terms and amplifies the difficulties of governing the extensive public markets network. Instead of having 329 trader organisations as political interlocutors, the city and district authorities find themselves immersed in a much more complex environment. For the traders, rather than an anomaly, this pool of organisations emerges as a critical tool through which they govern the public markets, their problems, and solutions. It is thus a distinctive aspect of their popular infrastructural politics, as it accommodates the political diversity embedded in an infrastructural network. Borrowing Easterling's (2016) expression, this pool of organisations can be defined as a diverse set of popular "governing bodies" for the public markets. The abundance of these political structures—which Rello and Sodi (1989, p. 252 in Giglia, 2018, p.32) estimated in 500 in the late 1980s, when there were 301 public markets—have proved crucial for problem solving. As Virgilio (trader leader, 60-70, I) explains, some of these organisations have specialised and have become "fully focused on fiscal issues [or] the defence of the existing regulations at the city and national scales," like his does. However, he continues, all organisations have to "deal with [the traders'] administrative problems," which pushes them all to operate at the market level and around ordinary problems regardless of their size. This transforms trader organisations into a pool of problem-solving actors to which traders can resort.

Although not entirely free, traders can strategically choose specific organisations to solve their problems, thus recognising the diversity of this political repertoire and assessing the organisations' influence in Mexico City's urban politics. Traders looking for support can attend the organisations' weekly meetings, discuss their problems with their leaders, evaluate the potential solutions, and consider the economic and political benefits or drawbacks implied in joining a specific organisation (e.g. affiliation, reputation, fees, etc.). For example, while following Violeta's (trader, 40-50, M) journey to solve a market-level internal conflict, allocate

resources to repair her market's roof, and fight against a law reform, I recorded her interactions with at least three different trader organisations. Her journey had one purpose: to find the best problem solver. After approaching a so-called city-level organisation, Miriam (trader, 40-50, M), her companion, suggested that she would waste less time if she instead attended the meetings of a larger organisation: "[It's] better to go there directly [as its leaders] are more experienced in that sort of problem [and this city-level] organisation has only a few people." When I asked her about her reasons for joining this specific organisation rather than another one, she highlighted the mutual benefits: Violeta would receive legal and political advice and the organisation would receive her active and regular participation, which would increase the organisation's size and influence. Violeta put it this way: "This organisation was dying; it wasn't as active as [in the early 2000s, but] our support [helped it achieve its] greatest comeback." As a recognition of the possibilities of this pool of organisations, Violeta emphasised that her support for the regional organisation did not imply cutting ties with the city-level one, as it "has a good relationship with the city and district mayors," which made it useful, for example, to negotiate infrastructural solutions. She insisted that she could withdraw this support anytime—as she did before—but given the organisations' current expertise, influence, and political relations, this was the best option.

Given the political meditation around problem solving, trader organisations stand out in this pool according to their capacity to build political relationships with state agents. These partnerships allow the organisations to access valuable resources for problem solving that, ultimately, make them more or less reliable tools as part of the traders' political repertoire. Connections with politicians of all parties, district and city authorities, as well as federal institutions and ministers rank the pool of organisations, as Jesús (trader leader, 40-50, I) suggests: "There are organisations that work very well at the district level […] and they don't think it's necessary to associate with other organisations or work beyond the district level." Others, he continues, "work with multiple district governments [because] they have a broader understanding [of their role]."

The proliferation of trader organisations at different scales shows how traders communities respond to their economic, social, political, or generational differences. While the first organisations were politically functional to make trader communities legible for the state, their multiplication in the following decades speaks more of the traders' internal political dynamics. In Jesús' (trader leader, 40-50, I) words, constant collisions and schisms in large trader communities explain the emergence of new trader organisations: "there are at least three organisations in large markets, and they oppose each other, a hundred traders against a hundred

traders." According to Antonio (trader leader, 60-70, I), this internal division also plays a role in small markets, and therefore, small trader communities also contribute to fragmenting the traders' organisational landscape. When lamenting the lack of unity in an interview, Antonio told: "One day a trader came and said, 'There's an opposition group [in my market] and I don't know what to do.' It's amazing, his market only has 17 stalls and five belong to his family… and there's a division! […] We didn't laugh at him because we understand him, because he lost and is the opposition now." These internal struggles that lead to the creation of new organisations revolve around the control of the market and its resources (stalls, services, subsidies, etc.), but also around the leaders' performance, practices, and discourses. In a context of market provision, Mario (former district official, 40-50, I) remembers that the fact that "one of the leaders had taken the best stalls" in a particular market broke the trader community in two. Similarly, Omar (trader leader, 30-40, I) recalls that he and a group of traders created a new organisation in his market to confront a corrupt leader: "This market was represented by a federation, whose leader, far from supporting the market, was taking advantage of it […] He had no intention of supporting the traders; on the contrary, he sought to obtain economic and political gains from them […] That's what we're still fighting against."

When the state imposed the creation of trader organisations as the official means to obtain legal and political recognition for traders in the 1950s, it tried to unite trader communities around single political structures. However, the proliferation of organisations finds its validation in the traders' regulatory framework, specifically in the fact that there are no legal restrictions on traders creating and formalising new organisations and, therefore, claiming the representation of traders at the market, district, regional, or national scale. In the Mexican context, the constitutional freedom of association has facilitated the creation of trader organisations by overruling the 1951 Bylaw, which stipulates that market-level organisations must have a minimum of 100 members to be recognised. This is visible not only in the 100 public markets (see Appendix) with less than 100 traders, which have at least one market-level trader organisation apiece, but also becomes evident in how traders understand their right to legal and political representation.

Pondering over the diverse organisational landscape that prevails today in the public markets network, Erica (trader leader, 30-40, I) justifies it in a simple way: "The regulations allow it. There can be an administrative committee and [a trader] organisation, and if I don't get along with the committee because I don't like how it works, I can create my own organisation, providing that I respect the Bylaw." As a devoted reader of the regulations, Virgilio (trader leader, 60-70, I) puts it plainly:

> The Civil Code allows us to create organisations with three people [a president, a secretary, and a treasurer]. In this market I have two, but one is a "ghost" [inactive] organisation. Another trader created another one, but it's not as competitive as ours. […] We can talk about the most important organisations in Mexico City, and you can number among ours, MONACOSO, Federación de Anáhuac… [But] they're not forever, and I don't even know how long mine will last, at least while we can fight.

This strategic creation of organisations shows how traders use the existing civil and commercial regulations to build an organisational environment that fits their political needs. These organisations, including "ghost" ones, emerge in the interstices of the state, exploiting in this case its regulatory contradictions. In this way, trader organisations become essential assets for traders to perform popular infrastructural politics. Specifically, traders multiply their repertoire of political tools to negotiate public markets' provision, maintenance, and transformation with specific governments and the mechanisms that formalise their socio-political bond with the state, even if their representativeness is limited and problematic.

The formalisation of trader organisations guarantees legal and political recognition, but not necessarily influence in decision-making processes vis-à-vis state agents. Traders, politicians, and authorities constantly assess the representativeness and influence of trader organisations by evaluating and testing the organisations' social and political capitals, that is, the number of (temporarily) affiliated markets they claim to represent, the size of their protests, and the access to dominant political actors for problem-solving purposes. While recalling his experience negotiating with trader organisations, Raúl (central government official, 30-40, I) states:

> We [the authorities] have to estimate their [political] weight because [trader leaders] come and say that they're presenting demands on behalf of a certain number of markets, but when we reply 'Okay, I'm going to help you, but I need you to help me too [getting the traders' approval for government intervention],' they get stuck because they don't represent what they say and don't get enough support from their fellow traders. That's how we know who's who and what kind of influence the organisations actually have. […] The big organisations are gone, [today's organisations] only represent 50 people […] 10 or 15 in markets of 400, 500, or 600 traders.

This fragmented and underestimated organisational landscape reveals the traders' permanent competition to transform their organisations into representative political tools and effective problem-solving mechanisms. In this context, trader leaders compare organisations constantly, usually evaluating their own positively vis-à-vis their counterparts. Since their popular infrastructural politics revolve around similar issues, they address their differences

in terms of political leadership, history, and experience in a highly competitive environment. Antonio (trader leader, 60-70, I) highlights these comparisons and the linked trajectories of organisations and leaders:

> Right now, other important trader organisations in Mexico City are falling to pieces. Unfortunately, one of the most prominent leaders is sick. Some members of his organisations are still meeting, but they are becoming smaller and now only work at a district level. […] Another leader undermined [the reputation of] his own organisation when he became a [party] candidate, as everybody knew about his corrupt behaviour. Another leader has his own organisation, but he recognises that it's better to be with us.

While the multiplication of trader organisations also multiplies the number of structures through which traders deploy popular infrastructural politics, it reflects the conflictive and competitive organisational environment prevailing in the public markets network. Although these organisations develop forms of coordination and solidarity, they also dispute the control of public markets and other state resources alongside the legal and political representation of trader communities. Their mutual comparisons over representativeness, accountability, transparency, and problem-solving effectiveness, but also the permanent state mediation when conflict arises between organisations, make this antagonism visible.

Thus, the pool of organisations to which traders can resort for problem solving signals the multifaceted character of popular infrastructural politics by highlighting the diverse and fragmented political environment that has emerged around the public markets network in Mexico City. As I have discussed, the multiplication of these organisations not only responds to the growth of the network, but also to traders' internal social, economic, political, and generational differences. This plural landscape includes market-level, regional, and national organisations whose operation, regardless of their classification, revolves around the ordinary challenges of producing and reproducing a trader community and its infrastructural assets, the markets. The multiplication of trader organisations poses questions about how traders use them strategically—as in the case of "ghost" organisations—but also about the representativeness and effectiveness of existing organisations, which reflect the different capacities they have to influence the geographies of urban politics. The permanent assessment they are subjected to by traders, authorities, and politicians regarding their political weight, size, and effectiveness speaks of the uneven distribution of power in the network and the changing capacities for organisations to influence decision making vis-à-vis the state.

4.4. Fluctuating participation

In this section, I analyse the traders' unsteady political involvement in the reproduction of trader organisations. Specifically, I describe how and when traders put in motion popular infrastructural politics in the public markets network and how and when the public markets' political salience materialise as the traders join and leave the organisations' meetings. In this way, this section emphasises the fluctuating character of popular infrastructural politics alongside their reactive, plural, and fragmented features when confronted with problem-solving processes. The fluctuation of traders' political involvement reflects in how trader meetings work and in the lack of participation about which trader leaders usually complain. In this context, the idea of fluctuation highlights the volatile, sporadic, and temporary political involvement that characterises the traders' political commitment but also the strategic use that trader organisations make of public markets as "bridges" or "organisational points" (Habermehl et al., 2018) where people coordinate. While looking at the factors that shape this fluctuation, I also examine how traders' meetings emerge as relatively autonomous spaces in which popular imageries, moods, sentiments—the hidden transcripts—become visible. Additionally, I connect this discussion with the implications of this oscillating politics for the organisations' political structures, leadership, decision-making and conflict-resolution processes. This discussion is relevant because the predominance of fluctuating participation in traders' popular infrastructural politics reveals the lived experience of doing politics in the public markets network.

The traders' fluctuating participation contrasts with past experiences of political involvement, particularly when traders were subjected to the PRI's clientelistic and corporatist practices and all traders were expected to offer their unconditional support to the ruling party. In today's popular infrastructural politics, traders seem to join and leave trader organisations at will and express only a weak commitment towards the organisations, making of this fluctuation a constitutive element of their political practice. This is visible in the trader leaders' awareness of this oscillation, which they learn to navigate by understanding their fellow traders' temporal and spatial political dynamics and recognising the implications this coming and going has in the short and long terms. Antonio (trader leader, 60-70, M), who leads meetings every week and insists that participation should be permanent, reveals the problem-solving foundations of this oscillation by mimicking his fellow traders' reasoning: "When everything seems fine [traders say] 'Why should I go [to the meetings] if there's nothing wrong in my market?' However, once something happens, like an official inspection,

they come back immediately. They come and go, and we're used to it, so they're welcome back. [In the meantime] we [the organisation's leaders] keep working."

Because of this fluctuation, Jesús (trader leader, 50-60, I) calls his fellow traders "opportunistic comrades," as he has seen them join and leave his organisations many times in the past 11 years: "It has happened several times, so I don't take it to heart anymore." However, the fact that many traders are not committed members of organisations is a matter of concern and complaint as well as resignation by those who know that the organisations' influence, legitimacy, and representativeness in urban politics depends, in the eyes of the authorities, on their size and consistency. In the face of the fragmented organisational landscape in which trader leaders struggle to encourage permanent participation, they understand that their fellow traders tour different organisations looking for solutions, and that the organisations' capacity to solve problems increases or reduces the fluctuation. In this regard, Antonio (trader leader, 60-70, M) praises his organisation at a meeting in which the 10 attendees starkly contrasted with the 40 traders that attended a previous session: "I know they will come back because there's no better place to solve [these problems] than this organisation. There's no other place."

Political participation in trader organisations increases and decreases as problems emerge or are solved, making fluctuate the number of traders that approach and engage with different organisations. A new problem will mobilise traders in the fragmented organisational landscape, and finding a solution will make them fall back. Although this fluctuation is often blamed as a negative feature of the trader communities, it also highlights the organisations' cohesive, bridging properties. As political structures whose reproduction relies on a core group of leaders and members, trader organisations operate within time frames that emphasise their latent coordination functions. Although traders' involvement fluctuates and even seems to leave some trader organisations inactive, trader organisations remain in the geographies of urban politics as dormant strongholds that traders (re)activate temporarily to deal with specific problems. In the meantime, the organisations' core members hold weekly meetings regardless of the number of participants to keep these latent properties open and to deal with more ordinary, often less spectacular problems. At one meeting, Jesús (trader leader, 50-60, I) showed me a notebook where he records the attendance and explained to me how it changes according to the traders' political and personal circumstances: "In the beginning, we were 8 or 10 members […] This comrade [pointing at a name in the notebook] lost his sight and hasn't come since then, otherwise, I know he would be here […] In this meeting [pointing at a date], we were more [I counted around 20]. Here's Paco, but he hasn't come, Miguel doesn't come any more [and] the

district government forbid Claudia from joining our meetings […] But we eight are the most persevering, come hell or high water." In this light, the coordinating functions of trader organisations depend on their core members' permanent activism.

Trader leaders also reflect their awareness of this fluctuation by pointing at other factors hindering political participation, for example by highlighting the socio-economic conditions of the majority of traders and how time-consuming the defence of public markets is. For small-scale traders, deploying popular infrastructural politics in trader organisations regularly is difficult to reconcile with their subsistence existence. Even for a committed leader such as Jesús (trader leader, 50-60, I), who also runs a butcher's stall, this is a challenge given the economic implications of his political involvement. In an interview, he said: "I used to go to all the meetings, even to those at 7 a.m. held at the Chamber of Deputies, the Senate, and other district governments. But I stopped because I was told 'This is your debt' […] And well, I told myself that the only way to pay it was coming back to my stall, to be here [in the market], taking care of my business." When I discussed with Virgilio (trader leader, 60-70, M) the challenges of keeping the organisations working, he emphasised the size of the public markets network as a problem, as traders from different markets struggle to attend ordinary meetings after working hours. The rainy evening in which we had the interview, Virgilio excused the low attendance: "[My organisation] has more members, but they couldn't attend due to time constraints, and you know, we all have had other meetings [along the day] and the work [at the market] is quite tiring. Oh, and the distance too. They come from different districts: Gustavo A. Madero, Juan comes from Tlalpan, he comes from Azcapotzalco, and Pablo and Ana from Venustiano Carranza." In this way, Jesús and Virgilio both stress the economic and practical difficulties shaping traders' regular political involvement and commitment in the organisations, showing how they are challenged by the pressure of keeping one's business afloat and reaching the host market for an evening meeting.

Given this fluctuation, trader leaders lower their expectations about developing more stable, long-term membership, thereby limiting the organisations' role to channelling the flux of temporary participants looking for solutions and coordinating their political actions and interactions. As dormant political strongholds whose political weight constantly oscillates, their latent coordinating functions and influence in the urban politics depend on leaders' capacity to keep open their communication channels and political relationships with fellow traders and officials at all scales. Depending on this capacity, particular organisations will have the influence (or not) to coordinate and mobilise traders at the market, district, or city scales,

regionally or even nationally. Although facing the unstable political participation of his fellow traders every week, Antonio (trader leader, 60-70, I) invokes this latent political capacity by emphasising that "whenever necessary," his organisation can bring together and mobilise "around 25,000 traders" in Mexico City, including some from neighbouring states. And if the problem at hand is bigger, "then allies from all over the country come to the city," he continues.

During my fieldwork, the organisations' ordinary meetings were where fluctuating participation became most visible. These meetings are one of the organisations' most basic and systematic socio-political activities, alongside assemblies and protests. In fact, the very existence of the organisation and its influence in the public markets network materialise in these political gatherings, where leaders and traders discuss and deliberate about all sorts of administrative, regulatory, and infrastructural issues regarding the markets—that is, the "ideological basis" for political action, as Scott (1990, p. 80) calls it. These ordinary meetings function as spaces of complicity, where traders mobilise popular imageries, moods, and sentiments. As instances for social interaction, these meetings are crucial for traders to cultivate their political mētis, as leaders and traders display their political discourses, skills, and relationships. These weekly meetings are usually held after working hours, with the trader leaders guiding the conversation about emergent problems, potential solutions, recent interactions with the authorities, new administrative requirements, etc. In terms of the trader organisations' functions, these meetings are essential to collecting new traders' demands and building a political agenda to fight for. The usual attendees comprise leaders and traders from the host market, from the same district as the host market, from other districts, and occasionally politicians and researchers, who cross the city at rush hour to attend a 7 p.m. meeting and transform the host market into a political node where multiple political flows converge. For a 329-market network, these very meetings materialise the idea that markets are "arenas of contestation" (González, 2019), as deliberation and action are debated, and schisms and collisions are commonplace.

As discussed in chapter 1, the development of hidden transcripts is possible in spaces like these meetings. Kept away from the public eye, these meetings are for leaders, traders, and allies of the public markets network to determine strategic and tactical actions regarding the defence of markets. In terms of my discussion about how traders engage in the geographies of urban politics, these meetings are essential events for popular infrastructural politics to emerge. They are all about the production and reproduction of public markets. As Joel (trader leader, 40-50, I) told me at the beginning of my fieldwork, these meetings are the political instances where

"you can understand everything" about the trader community, as they condense the idea of coming together to defend the market and build a collective understanding of the value and role of this infrastructure. These are the spaces "to begin to build connections," Joel said. As ordinary political events, these meetings reproduce the traders' political repertoire, as core political gestures, discourses, practices, and relationships are reproduced in repetitive ways, carrying the traders' political history to the present and structuring their interests, needs, and aspirations. The trader leaders do the critical job as the markets' popular intellectuals by delivering discourses that retrace the traders' and markets' origins, updating traders on urgent issues, promising and building solutions, encouraging actions, and sharing critical knowledge. However repetitive and even monotonous—as some attendees told me they perceived the meetings—these practices are central to building the consistency of trader organisations that deal with fluctuating participation.

The traders' fluctuating participation in their diverse and fragmented political landscape directly relates to their problem-solving interests and needs, but also to the economic implications and the spatial configuration of the public markets network in Mexico City. Trader leaders understand these oscillations and their impact on the organisations' political performance, which increases their competition to be effective and powerful tools for problem solving. This political dynamic is at the heart of the organisations' reproduction in the geographies of urban politics, highlighting their volatile social and political composition but also their latent capacity to bring together the trader community and coordinate actions to defend the public markets. This political fluctuation shows that the majority of traders engage in popular infrastructural politics as a sporadic subaltern practice, which, in turn, core members of trader organisations struggle to mobilise regularly while resigning themselves to the effects of this flexible political environment. With regard to leadership, I examine below the critical role of trader leaders as the most prominent shapers and carriers of popular infrastructural politics.

4.5. Popular leadership

Trader leaders are the public face of trader organisations and public markets in the geographies of urban politics and therefore have a central role in putting in motion popular infrastructural politics. As political mediators, they have a vital role in securing the reproduction of trader organisations, and they do so by building political relations for problem solving. Given traders' fluctuating participation, trader leaders provide these political structures with a sense of continuity, which rests on their role in founding trader organisations and the ways in which

they benefit from participating in multiple political networks. Considering the political history of trader organisations in Mexico City, trader leaders have been part of hierarchical structures that place their discourses and practices in direct relation to dominant political actors, such as authorities and politicians. To use Scott's (1990) expression, trader leaders' political skills and intelligence make them stand out as "carriers" of traders' popular culture, which they use to represent their community vis-à-vis state agents. Thus, leadership grants a small group of traders an advantageous position within a hierarchical structure and the capacity to monopolise political relations, skills, and knowledge to participate decisively in public markets' reproduction. In this section, I analyse the factors that make trader leaders the markets' quintessential problem solvers and the social and political implications associated with this role in trader organisations.

During my fieldwork, I met trader leaders who have been at the head of their organisations for a number of years. Their political mētis—that repertoire of practical political skills and intelligence "learned-by-rote" to lead a group and navigate political networks to solve concrete problems (Scott, 1998, pp.314-315, 322-324)—is the product of these long-standing positions, which have made them skilful practitioners of popular infrastructural politics familiar with how Mexico City's urban politics work. For example, Antonio (trader leader, 60-70, I) became a market trader in 1981 and was elected the market's leader just a couple of years later, which means that he has been in that position for almost four decades. In 2004, he co-founded a regional organisation, of which he has been president since then. Alfonso (trader leader, 60-70, I) joined his market in 2004 and has been a leader in market-level and regional organisations for around 14 years. Adolfo (trader leader, 50-60, C) has been the general secretary of his market-level organisation since 1988; Javier (trade leader, 60-70, M) has been at the head of his market since 1983; Virgilio (trader leader, 60-70, I) has been president of two organisations, one founded in 1996 and the other in 2002; while Bernardo (trader leader, 60-70, C) has been a leader for 30 years. Even the youngest leader I met, Omar (trader leader, 30-40, I), has been consolidating his career both in market-level and regional organisations since 2011 and 2015 respectively, when he co-founded United Traders.

The long careers of these leaders are clear examples of how their political skills and intelligence are developed after years navigating Mexico City's urban politics and counteracting the political illiteracy that has characterised their marginal condition. This subaltern self-education process—built with the "knowledge and materials at hand," as Scott (1998, p.335) reminds us—helps to explain why trader leaders come to be expert deployers of popular infrastructural politics. As their trajectories reveal, they have become expert political actors by building a repertoire of

discourses, skills, knowledge, and relationships with the resources their trader communities have had at hand. In their own words, their trajectories revolve around a standing-out-of-the-crowd narrative, in which doing politics for problem solving has been an essential aspect. As Omar (trader leader, 30-40, I) puts it, trader leaders willing or struggling to represent their fellow traders must navigate, firstly, the markets' internal politics, thus dealing with the complexities of a closed trader community: "Each market is a world, and each market has its protagonist […] First, you stand out from the other 170 traders, and then from [the leaders of the other] 20 markets."

As a process marked by practical imperatives, trader leadership involves developing a hands-on approach to mediate in the markets' social frictions, economic disputes, and conflictive spatial practices. It also includes fighting against stigmatising representations and, invariably, the administrative, regulatory, and infrastructural processes imposed by the state. In this context, trader leaders face a political arena that challenges and forges their political mētis on the way, as a result of a slow and informal learning processes deeply marked by the practices and discourses of dominant political actors. In the face of permanent competition and limited resources to develop political skills, leadership becomes in the eyes of traders the result of a personal commitment against corruption and authoritarianism, overwhelming infrastructural problems, and the traders' "apathy, indifference, and selfishness" (Gilda, trader leader, 30-40, M).

The leaders' preponderant role in markets' governance and the organisations' reproduction relies on their capacity to understand and control more effectively valuable political knowledge, skills, and relationships. Thanks to these resources, leaders become experienced problem solvers, but those less successful or less interested in accumulating these assets remain subject to the leaders' mediation in problem solving. In light of the economic and political benefits that trader leadership involves, the control of political knowledge, skills, and relationships resembles some forms of monopolisation, which the aforementioned long careers illustrate. These leaders not only monopolise these resources, but, through them, the organisations' legal and political recognition; the negotiation of funds for markets' provision, maintenance, and transformation; and the enforcement (or overlooking) of administrative and regulatory measures.

The uneven distribution of political knowledge, skills, and relationships in trader communities is not necessarily an intended action, as trader organisations and authorities have implemented different mechanisms to make accessible the information concerning the traders' and markets' governance (e.g. the relevant documentation is available in SEDECO's website). However, in

a context marked by low schooling levels[27] and a widespread lack of knowledge about the markets' administrative and regulatory frameworks, the trader leaders' control of these assets becomes even more evident. The leaders' accounts reveal that self-learning has played a crucial role in creating this gap among traders. Like Joel, (trader leader, 40-50, I), leaders tend to argue that they obtained these resources by "looking everywhere," as a matter of personal commitment that involved developing their "willingness to learn," as Omar (trader leader, 30-40, I) puts it, or by fostering their "enterprising and restless spirit," as Agustín (former trader leader, 60-70, I) put it to me. However, what underlies this division between leaders and traders is the creation of a particular relationship with and understanding of the state, which comprise an administrative, regulatory, and infrastructural literacy.

Competence in these areas is essential to interacting with authorities and politicians, and building it involves multiple instances of political socialisation in the geographies of urban politics. Omar's (trader leader, 30-40, I) case illustrates this: "I didn't know how to write a petition or who the markets' director was. I didn't know what a director does […], what's the role of SEDECO [or] what a POA[28] is […] I didn't know anything [and] that's why I began to study and collect information." In the geographies of urban politics, trader leaders must succeed in understanding and mobilising the knowledge, skills, and relationships involved in public markets' governance, thus differentiating themselves from their fellow traders. Regarding the monopolisation of political relationships, I recorded how important it is for trader leaders to build this political capital so as to mobilise resources for problem solving. Over the course of their leadership, trader leaders amass political relations across different institutional levels, from local to federal offices and political parties. Since most of these relationships remain remote from the majority of traders, leaders emerge as expert intermediaries in political exchanges. And since dominant political actors validate this role and limit the access to this privileged relationship, the leaders' position becomes relatively secure.

Trader leaders display these collections of political relations (Image 8) because they represent a key part of their repertoire of resources for problem solving and help traders, officials, and politicians to assess the leaders' and organisations' political weight. As an example of the political co-dependency and the patronage relationship that permeates popular infrastructural

[27] The report presented by CES-CDMX (2017) shows through a series of technical cards that most market traders have not completed their primary or secondary courses, and that less than 30 per cent of stallholders have done so.
[28] An Annual Operative Programme (POA) is a short-term governmental plan that determines the allocation of human and material resources for specific actions with which it is expected to achieve predefined goals and objectives. In chapter 5, I discuss the relevance of the POA for the markets' repair and maintenance.

politics, Antonio's (trader leader, 60-70, I) words show how this assessment operates: "[Those traders] understand [the administrative and regulatory frameworks], but they're not [real] leaders […] [The authorities] don't even receive them. Well, they do, but it's the director's assistant who receives them, but not to help them find solutions. [In contrast, and] it's not to brag about it, we're the most serious organisation [and we're] widely recognised by the government." In this way, trader leaders try to consolidate patronage relationships with high-ranking officials and politicians, as they can keep "the doors open for us," which in Alfonso's (trader leader, 60-70, I) case involved attending a gala dinner and having special funds allocated for his market.

Image 8. A display of political relationships

A trader leader's office decorated with pictures of his encounters with officials and politicians. **Source**: Author, 2018 (Blurred for confidentiality purposes).

In a context in which trader leaders develop narratives of self-made trajectories to explain their position in a political structure, most traders are blamed for their fluctuating participation and poor political knowledge, skills, and relationships. During my fieldwork, markets traders were constantly labelled as ignorant and apathetic, and as a "mass" whose attributes reinforce the hierarchical structure in trader organisations. The widespread use of these stigmatising terms serves both leaders and state agents to explain their patronising or disdainful treatment towards traders. For example, in contrast to trader leaders and officials, the "mass" of traders is perceived as "someone without a degree" and "people without a reading habit" (Uriel, trader leader, 30-40, I), as "ignorant people" (Teresa, former central government official and trader leader, 50-60, I), or "unqualified defenceless people" (Erica, trader leader, 30-40, I). Thus, ignorance, apathy, and indifference emerge as descriptors to emphasise the traders' lack of political commitment, involvement, and cooperation, as well as their tendency to delegate problem solving to trader leaders. In light of this "lack of unity and respect towards each other" (Omar, trader leader, 30-40, I), trader leaders and organisations resemble, in the eyes of Alfonso (trader leader, 60-70, I), "teachers and schools." This means that leaders play a fundamental role confronting their fellow traders' social and political attitudes and animating their political socialisation by teaching them how to read regulations, policies, and political events.

Being a trader leader in the Mexico City public markets network mainly involves developing knowledge, skills, and relationships to handle what leaders and officials tend to represent as an ignorant, apathetic, and indifferent trader community. Given the privileged position, trader leaders play a central role in the development and propagation of popular infrastructural politics, as their discourse and practices condense, structure, and mobilise the traders' popular imageries, moods, and sentiments about the markets' production and reproduction. In so doing, trader leaders master the language of the state, acquire the necessary skills to access secluded political spaces, and purposefully bring together parts of a large trader community. In this way, they position themselves as political mediators in search of administrative, regulatory, and infrastructural solutions vis-à-vis state agents and trader communities that more than often bitterly judge their actions, leading leaders such as Antonio (trader leader, 60-70, I) to capture his experience with the following expression: "He who becomes a redeemer ends up crucified." In a diverse and fragmented organisational landscape that is also marked by oscillating political participation, trader leaders become key advocates of unity and mobilisation, which I examine in the following section to explain how trader organisations permanently work to transform traders' social capital into political.

4.6. Calls to unity and mobilisation

A distinctive element of trader organisations in Mexico City is their capacity to temporarily unite and mobilise market traders to make their demands visible and force authorities and politicians to negotiate over specific problem-solving agendas. Unity and mobilisation specifically highlight the political potential of the extensive public markets network and the latent coordinating attributes of a fragmented organisational landscape and its reactive qualities. Unity and mobilisation invoke the more strategic and tactical dimensions of popular infrastructural politics, revealing how political flows converge and emerge in public markets. My ethnographic immersion around these two issues describes the importance of transforming a large trader community—its economic, social, and family ties—into a political force capable of influencing city-making processes in specific geographies of urban politics. In other words, I explore the trader organisations' permanent struggles to convert traders' social capital into political capital to defend the markets and their rights. In so doing, I also show how trader-led campaigns—however "relatively local and single-issue focused" (González and Dawson, 2015, p.44)—can have, at least in the Mexico City context, city-wide impacts.

Unity and mobilisation are central and effective resources in traders' popular infrastructural politics, to the extent that they have become a main concern for the authorities in terms of governability. This concern, which is not part of the government's public discourses, highlights its long-standing political fears regarding how the subaltern engage in Mexico City's urban politics. As a temporary expression of popular infrastructural politics, unity and mobilisation constantly reactivate the public life of trader organisations, making visible in the public sphere how traders "think, act, and feel" through the public markets, as Amin and Thrift (2017, p.17) have emphasised the prosthetic role of infrastructures. Thus, the traders' needs, interests, and aspirations become a central part of their public discourses, which mainly focus on creating opportunities to force the state to fulfil its obligations regarding the reproduction of the public markets network.

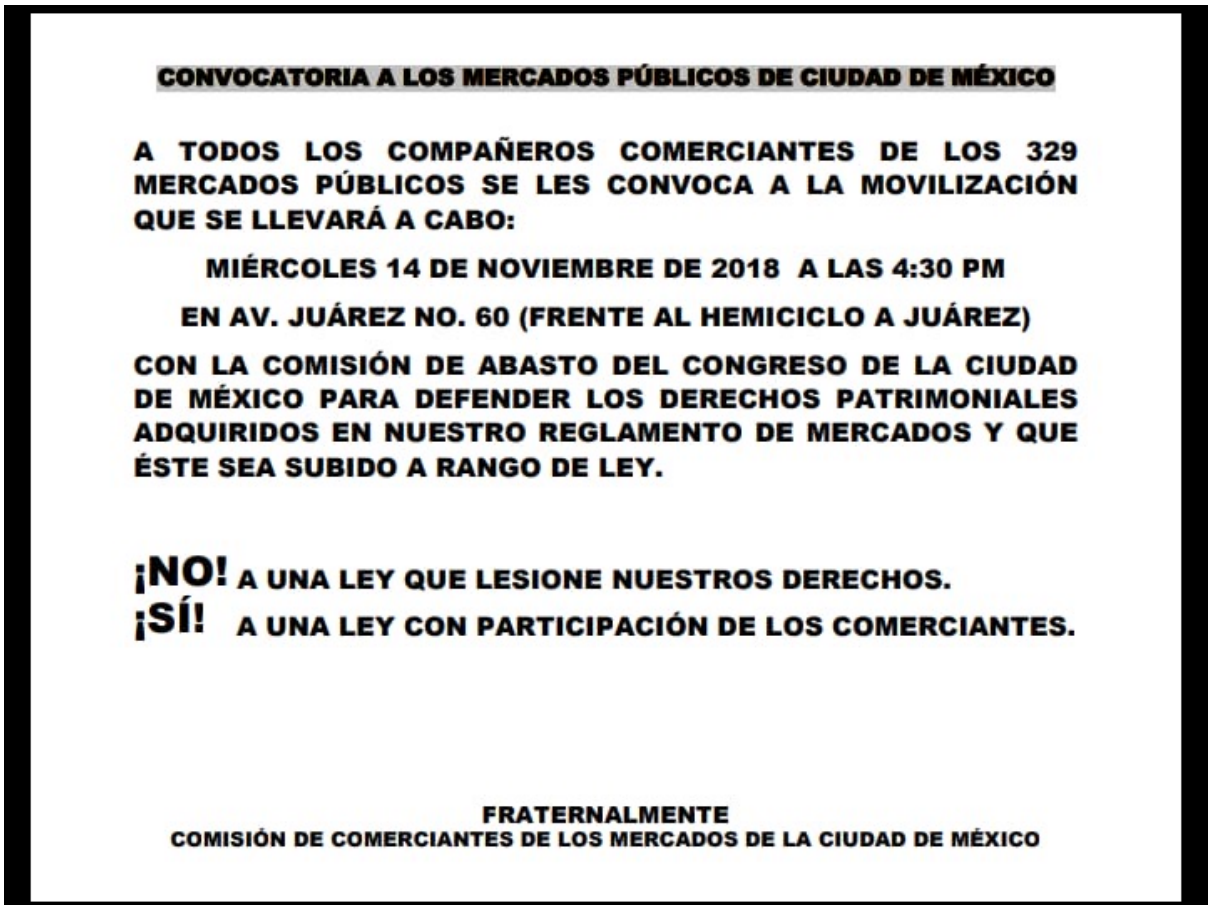
The political value of a large trader community is critical for trader leaders and organisations, who constantly ponder the possibilities of turning more than 70,000 market traders into a stable, united, and committed political group. This conversion of capitals is essential for leaders and organisations to emerge as political intermediaries because, as previously discussed, their influence in urban politics depends on the number of traders and markets they can count as members or allies. For several decades, the ruling parties have capitalised this conversion by

turning trader communities into party members and vote banks through clientelistic and corporatist practices. Subordinated by dominant political actors, the traders' political capital context has been subjected to state and partisan political interests, thus transforming markets into territorial assets from which to disseminate their political agendas. Traders call this political capital "the muscle," a term with which traders convey their vernacular understandings of the political and reveal their awareness of the political implications of coming together. Addressing his fellow traders at a meeting, Armando (trader leader, 40-50, M) emphasised the importance of this capital conversion for those doing politics at the margins with limited resources at hand: "We have no money, but we have the numbers and the social conscience, and we have to take advantage of it"; an idea that Antonio (trader leader, 60-70, I) complements by insisting that having the administrative, regulatory, or technical expertise to defend the markets is not enough: "Even with their experience [in legislative processes], [our allies] couldn't have made it alone. What's necessary for a protest? The muscle, the people, that's what you need and that's what we [the traders] have."

"The muscle" and its political value grew alongside the expansion of the public markets network as a statecraft practice, as I discuss in chapter 3 following Cross (1998a) and Meneses (2011). However, as a subject formation process, the awareness of the political value of "the muscle" came to also represent the traders' interests and needs as subaltern urban actors and not only the political project of dominant actors. For traders, awareness of the value of this socio-political capital comes hand in hand with awareness of the traders' fragmented organisational landscape and fluctuating participation, which ultimately lead to forms of partial and temporary unity and occasional massive mobilisation. In the face of these processes and conditions, bringing together the traders for political purposes is a labour-intensive and challenging activity that involves touring the public markets network and calling for unity and mobilisation. These calls—which have now reached the traders' social media networks (Image 9)—convey the expectations of putting "the muscle" in motion by infusing a sense of solidarity and cooperation among fellow traders.

Having 329 public markets to bring together, the calls to unity and mobilisation emerge as a central component of traders' popular infrastructural politics. It is a political practice that has been performed permanently to challenge the markets' internal divisions and to build alliances at market, district, and city scales. As Jesús (trader leader, 50-60, I) put it, the calls are part of a strategy "to prove that one is not alone, that there is a shared dissatisfaction [with how the markets are managed]," but also to remind traders that they share a long history as a community with similar economic, social, political, and infrastructural ties. In recent years, for example,

Image 9. Call to mobilisation against the reform of the 1951 Markets Bylaw



Calls to mobilisation circulate on different social media platforms. This one reads: "To all fellow traders in the 329 public markets, we invite you to march on November 14, 2018 at 4:30 pm, from Av. Juárez No. 60 to the Congress of Mexico City, to defend the rights inscribed in the 1951 Markets Bylaw. No! to a law that affects our rights. Yes! to a law created with the traders' participation." **Source**: Distributed via WhatsApp Broadcast Lists, 2018.

Julio (trader leader, 50-60, M) and Gabriel (trader leader, 40-50, M) have been trying to overcome their market's internal division, which dates back to the 1970s. In this sense, the calls to unity acknowledge transgenerational (family) conflicts in a closed commercial community, as Julio points out: "We've had this problem since the very beginning [and] we've tried to become brothers, to be a single body with them, but something is missing […] Members of that family have befriended our sons and daughters, but I think unity must be stronger to avoid internal division." These calls are essential not only to bring peace and solidarity to their market, but also to determine its future as a commercial entity, as Gabriel highlights when replying to Julio's idea: "We're like a boat, drifting without direction [because of the internal division], without a clear idea of what we want [for the market] in the next ten, five, or two years."

Unity and mobilisation are a matter of solidarity, legitimacy, and strategy that can be displayed in the public sphere. It is a convenient and effective way to display the traders' power, their commitment to work together, and the possibility of defending the markets as a network and

their rights as a community. Given the multiple state agents involved in public markets' provision, preservation, and transformation (see Figure 4, page 87), and the different scales in which they operate, these calls to unity aim at bringing the traders together at different scales, so that they can interact effectively with local, city, and federal authorities. At the market level, the calls seek to unite from 18 to more than 4000 traders; at the district level, from five to 51 markets, involving 279 traders for the district with less markets and 15,119 for the district with more markets; and at the city level, the 70,000-plus traders comprising the network, plus their families and employees. In this sense, the calls for unity are mainly designed to confront external political forces governing the markets and controlling resources for problem solving. At several meetings, Antonio (trader leader, 60-70, M) made this clear, bringing to light the traders' dissident culture: "The larger the number of people, the better the [authorities'] answer; the smaller, we're screwed. Each trader is protecting his interests, properties, jobs, and family assets, but we can only solve the problem together. The enemy is not among us, the enemy is the authority and we have to force it to give up [and accept our petitions]." Therefore, the calls are also reminders of the benefits that solidarity and cooperation across the network bring when confronted with dominant urban actors that exert forms of political indifference, neglect, and control over subaltern populations.

However partial and temporary, the calls to unity have been effective for coordinating traders' mobilisation as a reaction to urgent and persistent administrative, regulatory, and infrastructural problems. When I interviewed Omar (trader leader, 30-40, I) and Uriel (trader leader, 30-40, I), they highlighted the reactive origins and the political implications of mobilising the trader community:

> Omar: We're like lone wolves. We don't leave our stalls because they are practically our homes. However, if someone affects our interests, we react furiously. [In my market,] we're talking about 7 to 10 people per stall, and all of them came [to the protest].
>
> Ulises: Traders from seven markets came to mine because it was the meeting point.
>
> Omar: Once there, we marched together and made a good [show of] muscle. Only then, [the authorities] said: "Oh, I thought they were just a few." When we occupy public offices and increase the social pressure [on the government], what was difficult to achieve for months becomes easily solved within hours. That's when you realise that social pressure is the ABC [for problem solving].

These young leaders reveal how politically meaningful it is to bring unity to the point of mobilisation to obtain legal and political recognition, respect, and, above all, solutions. Marching, chanting, blocking roads, and occupying public offices emerge as part of traders'

mobilisation repertoire that can compel officials and politicians to create instances for negotiation. In this light, Valentín's (trader leader, 40-50, M) words about how "a good bunch of people and a protest are more powerful than a well-founded petition" describe what is common knowledge in the public markets network. As an experienced leader, Antonio (60-70, M) places mobilisation as a last resort to use within specific political time frames: "I've been thinking that if the representatives of the Legislative Assembly keep giving us sweet talk, we'll have to mobilise people and ask them [loudly] 'What's going on?' […] Let's wait until Friday and let's hope we don't get to that point."

Since the calls to unity and mobilisation challenge the entrenched logics of fluctuating participation and organisational fragmentation, they involve the persistent reiteration of the importance of protesting en masse. Although these calls appeal to the strategic benefits of marching together, they mainly bring to light the political moralities that shape popular infrastructural politics. The calls operate as ordinary speeches that revolve around the need for mutual support and the negative effects of apathy and selfishness among traders and their organisations. These moralities come out as reproaches for the lack of solidarity and commitment, as Valentín's (trader leader, 40-50, M) words reveal when he addressed his fellow traders after a poorly supported demonstration to oppose the construction of a supermarket next to a public market:

> It's great that traders from neighbouring states will come to help us, because local traders are conspicuous by their absence. It's disappointing that [fellow traders] don't support each other, especially those who are facing a problem. We [the leaders] invite you to participate more actively. I know it's sometimes difficult, but let's just talk about [market-level] organisations. They have five or six [core] members, three can go [to the protest] and three can stay [in the market]. If we multiply that by some markets, we can be enough protesting and increase the pressure [on the government]. The main goal of a demonstration is to gather enough people, but if we're just five, [the authorities] will think that we're crazy. So please, think about it. This battle is going to be gruelling and nothing can be achieved if only Antonio and a couple of traders fight it out. Thank you to those who did join the last week's protest.

As this example shows, turnout following calls to unity and mobilisation can be variable and dependent on the nature of the problem at hand and the number of traders affected. Notwithstanding, the recourse to mobilisation has a strong presence in popular infrastructural politics given its potential for disruption, both of the government and the city. Used as a threat, traders' mobilisation gives trader leaders political leverage vis-à-vis state agents. At a meeting with district and city officials regarding the construction of a supermarket, Antonio (trader leader, 60-70, M) reminded the authorities: "For many years, you've known that we [as an

organisation] protest peacefully and cooperate with the government, but this time we're really worried about this problem [as this supermarket would be the first one to be built next to a public market]. So, when we demonstrate outside [this office] on Thursday, we expect to see the authorities that didn't come today [and owe us an explanation]." In line with Antonio's veiled threat, Alfonso (trader leader, 60-70, M) addressed his fellow traders rather than the officials, who could only listen to how he described the organisations' role: "We're an army and we'll try to protect and support you […] We're about to start a war of many battles [against the authorities and the supermarket company] and we cannot leave [this meeting] disappointed [just because we haven't got a definitive answer from the authorities]. We're going to be persistent; we'll give you all the support you need."

Governments do not underestimate these threats, as even small protests disrupt the city. Among both high-ranking and street-level officials, there is a widespread awareness of the impacts of traders' mobilisation in terms of urban governability. Although not publicly acknowledged, concerns about governability mark the authorities' approach to traders' organisation and mobilisation, as they try to prevent them from blocking streets or seizing public offices. For Manuel (former district mayor and representative, 40-50, I), who was in charge of 49 markets, governability revolves around "how to keep the traders quiet and away from the streets", as he recognises that "public markets, as social actors, influence the districts' governability and its territories." Moreover, Rubén (district official, 50-60, I), who constantly monitors the political atmosphere prevailing in his district's markets, highlights the extent of this political consensus about governability. On different occasions, he told me that "In meetings [that involve city and district authorities], in which I have participated, we've been clearly told: 'Governability is our priority […] so, adapt [bend] the rules [if necessary] and prioritise governability.'" Different voices within the government confirm this approach, like Raúl (central government official, 30-40, I), who explained to me how important it is to avoid "stirring up the hornets' nest" by "being polite and looking after the traders," and "agreeing to their demands." Recognising the dormant political power in the public markets network, Alfredo (former district official, 40-50, I) remarked on the need to "do politics [with market traders,] preventing, calling, negotiating whatever they need" to keep "the muscle" at bay.

The official perception of traders' unity and mobilisation as a threat and a risk reveals the salience of these practices in the traders' political repertoire. Thus, the calls to unity and mobilisation emerge as a central aspect in traders' popular infrastructural politics, since, once achieved, even symbolically, it catalyses the organisations capacity to develop political

interactions and solutions to the markets' problems. By calling to unity and mobilisation, traders transform their social capital into political capital so as to influence city-making processes by temporarily placing the markets at the centre of different government's governability agendas. In this sense, "the muscle" becomes a powerful political instrument even when it is dormant, which simultaneously highlights the organisations' latent coordination functions and the traders' reactive politics for problem solving. As trader leaders stressed, unity and mobilisation are critical to force the state to fulfil its responsibilities regarding the reproduction of public markets. Often a last political resort, unity and mobilisation are deemed essential to keeping the public networks working and the traders' rights protected.

4.7. Final remarks

By analysing the characteristics and functions of trader organisations in Mexico City, I have highlighted their central role in developing and mobilising popular infrastructural politics in the public markets network. I have described them as political tools through which traders build and deploy a repertoire of discourses, skills, and relationships to deal with problem-solving issues regarding the administration, regulation, and preservation of 329 public markets. In this sense, trader organisations are carriers of popular infrastructural politics, as they structure and convey the traders' popular imageries, moods, sentiments, interests, needs, and aspiration vis-à-vis authorities and politicians. As carriers of this distinctive political practice, the organisations orbit around the production and reproduction of public markets, which involves positioning themselves as effective problem solvers. In this sense, trader organisations play an essential role to make Mexico City's public markets the type of political spaces and political nodes that I identified by following González's (2018) and Seale's (2016) ideas. These organisations are therefore a primary source of the political flows that rest, terminate, emerge, merge, mutate or merely pass through the public markets.

In light of the pre-existing economic, social, political, religious, and generational differences that permeate trader communities, trader organisations have multiplied and have created an organisational landscape that traders navigate strategically in search of the best solutions to their problems. In this context, trader leaders stand out not only as founders of these multiple organisations, but also as popular intellectuals that dominate the language of the traders who, therefore, play an essential role as political intermediaries. As I have shown, this position foregrounds, on the one hand, their importance as creators and disseminators of the traders'

hidden transcripts and, on the other hand, their dependence on patronage relationships with state agents to sustain their legitimacy as trader leaders.

The functioning of trader organisations and the political landscape that they produce reveals the diverse, multifaceted, and fragmentary character of the traders' popular infrastructural politics. While their ordinary meetings reveal the inner workings and the political challenges involved in organising a large trader community, their public protests show how effective their political actions can be in keeping the public markets network at the centre of contemporary city-making processes. Moreover, the traders' organisational landscape unveils the changing and adaptable political solutions that traders have built for themselves to navigate Mexico City's urban politics, notwithstanding that the organisations were originally a statecraft project. As such, trader organisations and their leadership illuminate the political potentialities inscribed in subaltern urban politics, as they emerge in the margins and the interstices of state power and become shaped by the social, legal, and political resources that the traders have at hand.

Thus, in this chapter, I have introduced one of the main components for understanding how popular infrastructural politics are performed in the empirical instance of the public markets network in Mexico City. As the traders' main political instruments, trader organisations make visible the tensions, contradictions, and possibilities of actually existing popular infrastructural politics. In chapter 5, I continue this analysis by focusing on the political interactions that enable the markets' material production and reproduction, which is the second prominent aspect of this distinctive political practice in Mexico City.

5. Politics of repair and maintenance

5.1. Introduction

> Markets never stop, they are under permanent use and their floors get damaged, their electrical systems deteriorate, and then a never-ending process of maintenance begins.
> Marisol (former district mayor, 50-60, I)

> This area of the market has been in limbo [since the fire] and we don't know when it's going to be repaired [by the government].
> Erica (trader leader, 30-40, I)

In a consolidated public markets network such as that found in Mexico City, repair and maintenance emerge as an essential practice to guarantee its preservation, especially because most of the markets were built at the beginning of the second half of the twentieth century. As discussed in chapter 1 and as highlighted by Jackson (2015), Amin (2014), and Star (1999), repair and maintenance are crucial to preventing the failure and decay of infrastructures, as well as to keep their functionality, value, and meaning across their lifespan. As Fredericks (2018) points out, neglected infrastructures devolve labour and risk on to subaltern bodies, and while this condition might give birth to what she calls "salvage bricolage" to keep them working, it also transforms them into hazardous spaces. This positions the markets' repair and maintenance as one the most important socio-spatial processes structuring the traders-state relationship. In this chapter, I examine the political salience of repair and maintenance in line with these discussions, particularly their centrality in the traders' popular infrastructural politics, as their struggles to secure repair and maintenance reflect their broader concerns about their right to subsistence and their patronage relationship with the state. More specifically, my discussion shows how traders navigate the geographies of urban politics to fight against persistent forms of infrastructural impoverishment caused by decades of poor practices of repair and maintenance. By exploring the political logics underlying the material reproduction of public markets in Mexico City, I shed light on how traders negotiate repair and maintenance to protect their economic, social, and political functions, that is, their role as enablers of social life and popular politics.[29]

[29] I understand repair and maintenance as a series of political, technical, and administrative practices performed to preserve the functionality and good condition of public markets. In line with common definitions of repair and maintenance, these practices aim at "restoring an object or structure to good condition by replacing or fixing [its] parts" or "keeping something in working order [e.g.] a building […] by providing means for equipment, etc." (Oxford English Dictionary, 2020d; 2020c).

While the previous chapter expands on the political features of trader organisations to explain how they have changed and created a specific political landscape, this chapter revolves around the political instances in which traders struggle to protect their markets against chronic and widespread political neglect, material deterioration, and economic decline. As described in chapter 3, these experiences increased in the Mexico City public markets network from the 1980s onwards, when the country and the city entered a new phase of neoliberal economic measures, which coincided with the halting of public market provision; the expansion of non-subsidised forms of popular trade (*tianguis*, *mercados sobre ruedas*, and *concentraciones*); the introduction of the markets' self-management scheme and various attempts to reform the 1951 Markets Bylaw; and the transfer of the food supply infrastructure provision to private supermarket companies. By analysing the political struggles for repair and maintenance, I explore the practices with which traders seek to contain the effects of decades of economic and political marginalisation. In addition, I highlight how traders, officials, and politicians perceive and handle the long-term processes of disinvestment and deterioration, thus offering insights into their role as drivers of political actions, particularly of the traders' defence of the social values and functions of Mexico City's public markets. Given the still weak attempts to implement neoliberal policies that could lead to the gentrification, heritagisation, touristification, and gourmetisation of Mexico City's public markets, this chapter will draw our attention to the primary roles disinvestment and deterioration have been playing in traders' contestation for several decades.

In the first section, *Chronic neglect and deterioration*, I examine the predominantly political explanation for the markets' widespread, poor material conditions by looking at how traders perceive the governments' neglect over the past three decades. In *Negotiating repair and maintenance*, I explore the legal, institutional, and financial frameworks that govern the preservation of public markets and investigate how traders negotiate the allocation of public funds for repair and maintenance with officials and politicians. In *Selective solutions*, I analyse the criteria underlying the allocation of public funds for repair and maintenance, in particular how these criteria contribute to creating an uneven infrastructural landscape characterised by experiences of never-ending deterioration. In *Celebrating public works*, I discuss how politicians, officials, and trader leaders capitalise the completion of repair and maintenance works in public markets, revealing how multiple political flows converge around the fight against deterioration. Finally, in *Paternalism and co-responsibility*, I explore the discourses and practices that call into question the

distribution of obligations regarding the markets' repair and maintenance as a way to analyse the attempts to reform the terms of the socio-political bond between the traders and the state. Altogether, these sections complement the description of the political processes underlying infrastructure provision and reveal that, compared to the regeneration processes studied in other cities, repair and maintenance in Mexico City strengthen and celebrate rather than eradicate the popular features of public markets.

5.2. Chronic neglect and deterioration

In chapter 1, I examined how disinvestment has been used as a strategy to dismantle public markets and advance retail gentrification in multiple cities around the world (e.g. González, 2018); and in chapter 3, I documented that official and media reports have extensively reported the widespread deterioration of the Mexico City public markets network and identified chronic disinvestment as one of its main causes (Vaca, 2020; Giglia, 2018; CES-CDMX, 2017; Castillo, 2017; SEDECO, 2013; Calvo, 1995). In chapter 3, I also show that these processes have characterised the Mexico City public markets network for several decades, not yet having led to overt forms of privatisation or displacement, as has been recorded in other cities such as Madrid, London, or Querétaro (García et al., 2016; González and Dawson, 2015; González and Hiernaux, 2017).[30] In this section, I expand on the political changes that transformed disinvestment and deterioration into chronic and widespread experiences in the public markets network. In particular, I examine why traders, officials, and politicians perceive these processes as a breach of the socio-political bond between the traders and the state. In this way, I highlight how the markets' rusty doors, clogged drainpipes, blown bulbs, peeled-paint walls, broken tiles, and leaky roofs have come to be seen as forms of political neglect and abandonment that, in turn, materialise as a lack of state resources for repair and maintenance.

Since its inception in the 1950s, the public markets' provision programme established the state's obligation to repair and maintain these commercial facilities. Inscribed in the Markets Bylaw (Gobierno de la República, 1951), this obligation has been ratified in subsequent regulations (see Table 1, page 85), thus confirming the terms of the socio-political arrangement between traders and the state regarding the provision and preservation of public markets. As a patronage relationship marked by subsistence practices, traders have the right to demand the allocation of public funds to keep the facilities functional and safe. However, in the past three

[30] Where this has been suggested in Mexico City, such as in La Merced markets, traders and allies have frustrated the regeneration plans (Delgadillo, 2018; Delgadillo, 2016a).

decades, the government has not fully complied with the terms of this legal, administrative, and political arrangement, creating the conditions for traders to experience disinvestment and deterioration as forms of infrastructural poverty. Although the end of the markets' "golden era" in the late 1960s signals a change in perspective regarding the construction programme, as traders and markets were increasingly seen as an economic and political burden for the city, my interviewees associate this political abandonment with the neoliberal governments of the PRI and the party's later defeat. As an example of how infrastructures and their condition function as a "memory of political times" (Gupta, 2018, p.75), Alfonso (trader leader, 60-70, I) remembers that "when the president Carlos Salina took office [1988-1994], [the government began to] neglect the traders, it began to forget [our ties]. And then, when the PRI lost the presidential election [against the PAN in 2000], we became […] orphans, [the government's] illegitimate children." For Manuel (former district mayor and representative, 40-50, I), who implemented repair and maintenance policies in the 2010s under a PRD government, "the PRI abandoned the markets for many, many years," thus endorsing a shared idea about who triggered the deterioration process and for how long it has spread across the markets network.

Although infrastructures experience a continuous process of deterioration that starts as soon as they are completed, interviewed traders, officials, and politicians mainly associate deterioration with this political break-up, the neoliberal turn of the 1980s, and the city's political transition (Image 10). As Mario (former district official, 40-50, I) points out, this has affected the markets—their social value and function—as part of a wider process, since "markets are not the exception, they've been neglected like most of the city's social infrastructure." And even if the regulations have not changed and instead highlighted the importance of markets and other social infrastructures, the ethnographic evidence shows that traders' main concern around deterioration revolves around the government's weak commitment to fulfilling its obligations vis-à-vis trader communities. Under these conditions, repair and maintenance have become irregular and sometimes unreliable practices subjected to limited budgets and arbitrary and selective processes. Deterioration has become a permanent component of the traders' working conditions: based on his extensive experience as a trader leader, Jesús (trader leader, 40-50, I) condemns this situation, stating what the official reports already acknowledge, that, "[t]here are markets with damaged roofs, walls, and water tanks. […] At the very least and first of all, all markets in Mexico City urgently need new electrical, water, and sewage systems. […] It's inevitable, all markets average 55 years old."

Image 10. Traders against chronic neglect and disinvestment

This placard displays together various traders' demands: "National Movement March 17 – Río Blanco Market 53. No more convenience stores, mini-supermarkets, or similar. No more systematic attacks on public markets by the Mexico City government. We demand sufficient resources for our popular supply centres." **Source**: Author, 2018.

Authorities usually describe deterioration in general terms, for example, as "a considerable gap in repair and maintenance" that affects old water and drainage systems, leaky roofs, broken electrical systems, deteriorated walls, poor waste management and unhygienic sanitary facilities (Gestión Estratégica, 2018, p.5). Although this type of general description usually appears in the introductions of public reports, substantial information is not offered about the actual material state of most markets, as records regarding the condition of their multiple components are not publicly available. During my fieldwork, an official shared with me the only detailed report he had at hand about the condition of markets in the Tlalpan district. When I obtained this unique resource, it was already a 5-year-old PowerPoint presentation (Delegación Tlalpan, 2013), and the official had no information about the purpose of the study or the location of the raw data files; he just found the file in the computer of the previous official in charge. As an example of how deterioration is widespread, this report shows that the district's 20 markets were all deteriorating, 10 had not passed pest control, 13 had blocked drainpipes, 11 poor waste management, and 19 poor water quality. Moreover, the report indicates that most public markets lacked energy meters and regulators, and where installed, they overheated. It also shows that the markets' electrical systems were not complying with safety protocols, that water tanks and toilets were in very poor conditions, that roofs needed cleaning and waterproofing. Moreover, the inspectors highlighted that the markets' safety and risk assessments regarding their structural vulnerability were incomplete, and that those available were issued in 1972, 1985, 1987, and 1989. Thus, this report is an example of what deterioration

has become in the past decades in the public markets network. Since similar information for other districts is not publicly available, it takes a visit and a conversation to the markets to perceive the extent and generalised character of this experience of infrastructural poverty.

Over the past decades, continuous political neglect and widespread deterioration in the public markets network have created multiple layers of infrastructural problems that no trader community or district government can easily solve. Instead, traders carry out limited forms of maintenance, such as cleaning their stalls, clearing the corridors, washing the toilets, or sweeping the markets' surroundings. In contexts of abandonment, neglect, and deterioration, these practices can also be defined as "micro-acts of resistance" (González, 2019, p.13), to the extent that they contribute to preserving the public markets. In addition, traders and officials have covered the markets with multiple makeshift repairs and forms of informal and ad hoc "salvage bricolage" to keep the water, electrical, and sewage systems working. This happens mainly because the technical and administrative identification of problems does not immediately translate into solutions, as this depends on the political mediations that I discuss in the following sections. As such, most of the problems aforementioned become what traders, officials, and politicians call "pending issues," even when they are "not a big deal," as Mario (former district official, 40-50, I) considers "removing old roof steel sheets, building some columns, painting, and building a toilet." However, from the perspective of young traders such as Uriel (trader leaders, 30-40, I), long-standing neglect and widespread deterioration have been a permanent experience since he joined the trader community, as these materials problems "have persisted all our lives, [just] like the lack of real maintenance." Under these infrastructural circumstances, the devolution of labour on to the traders' bodies takes multiple forms. Not only must they carry out "salvage bricolage" but also the persistent political work that I describe in this thesis and that traders perform alongside their commercial activities. For a large trader community with no access to social security benefits, and particularly for trader leaders, this parallel or double shifts often take a toll on their health.

Traders contrast their current experiences of chronic neglect and widespread deterioration with those of the so-called "golden era," in which the provision of food supply infrastructure was a state priority and trader organisations had a much more privileged position in Mexico City's urban politics. Given the markets' current state of "ruination"—as Gupta (2018, p.70) describes infrastructures permanently damaged and continuously failing—traders tend to question the dismantlement of the economic, urban, and political structures that used to secure markets' good condition and functionality, and therefore, traders' subsistence. The current economic

and political conditions under which traders access resources for repair and maintenance have made it more difficult to tackle deterioration across the markets network, thus increasing the sense of political neglect and abandonment. By addressing the centrality of the state's neglect to the markets' poor infrastructural condition, traders, officials, and politicians highlight the political roots of deterioration and the importance of popular infrastructural politics to focus its effects on the traders' means of subsistence. In the next sections, I delve into the specificities of the political interactions to access repair and maintenance, partially keep deterioration at bay, and make the state fulfil its legal, administrative, and political obligations regarding the markets.

5.3. Negotiating repair and maintenance

Mexico City market traders navigate a specific regulatory, administrative, and political context to access resources for infrastructure repair and maintenance in ways that reproduce the traders-state patronage relationship and make the former resemble what Auyero (2012b) calls "patients of the state." Similar to Auyero's case studies, trader communities and organisations in Mexico City deal with lengthy bureaucratic procedures, conflictive interinstitutional relationships, changing budgets, and multiple political negotiations to access repair and maintenance. The rules, institutions, and public funds put in place for repair and maintenance reflect the values and meanings that dominant political actors confer to the markets' economic and social functions, and therefore function as reminders of the traders' subordinate position. These bureaucratic instances highlight the ordinary practicalities, dilemmas, values, and contradictions, to follow Lee's (2006) line of thought, that traders must confront to make a living and secure their means of subsistence. To the extent that the public markets are these means, traders deploy their political skills, knowledge, and relationships to minimise the subordinating effects of their condition of patients of the state and maximise the benefits of expectedly limited resources.

In Figure 4 (page 87), I identify the core governing bodies involved in these processes, namely, each one of the 16 district governments, SEDECO, and the Legislative Assembly. This tripartite structure has determined the provision of repair and maintenance for public markets in Mexico City since the 1996 political reform, which decentralised public market governance and conferred specific functions to each governing body. Since then, district governments have been responsible for repair and maintenance works, SEDECO for the design of policies for public markets, and the Legislative Assembly for the annual allocation of funds for these two purposes. In light of this division, the Legislative Assembly allocates the district governments'

annual allowance considering what they have requested in their Annual Operative Programme (POA) which, in turn, may or may not have considered a specific budget for those markets district governments are in charge of. Budget allocation for markets in the POA can be arbitrary and uncertain, as public markets' needs for repair and maintenance can be ignored by the district governments depending on their political and expenditure priorities, as Raúl (central government official, 30-40, I) illustrates:

> I just received two technical reports [regarding two markets' infrastructural problems], which officials write after interviewing the market's manager and the trader organisation, basically asking about their main infrastructural needs. We write these reports for the district governments, informing them about the damage and the priorities […] Unfortunately, district authorities make promises during election times and the better organised markets are the ones that [usually] get support [and not necessarily the ones facing more problems,] [thus responding to] political and economic interests [rather than technical ones].

Under this scheme, trader organisations must lobby for funds with their specific district governments, and if included in the POA and approved by the Legislative Assembly, they can expect the district governments to carry out the repair and maintenance works. Given that deterioration continued spreading across the public markets network under this scheme, the city government created a special fund of 70 million pesos for public markets' repair and maintenance in 2014 (SEDECO, 2013); which increased to 200 million pesos in 2019 (SEDECO, 2019). Under this new scheme, repair and maintenance are allocated on a project basis, for which SEDECO provides 60 per cent of the total costs (up to 20 million pesos) and the district governments the remaining 40 per cent, providing the projects focus on the markets' material improvement. Since only district governments can carry out repair, traders still have to persuade them to submit projects and contribute financially, thus still gatekeeping access to repair and maintenance. In 2014, SEDECO said that only 9 district governments submitted projects for 13 public markets,[31] which exhausted that year's 70-million-pesos special fund and even required that the Legislative Assembly allocated more resources to the district governments to complete the projects, as their repair and maintenance amounted around 150 million pesos (only for 13 markets!) (SEDECO, 2016, pp.39–43). Between 2014 and 2018, the government implemented this programme in 39 public markets, in 2019 in 53 (GCDMX, 2020), and in 2020, district governments presented 64 projects whose total cost amounts 347 million pesos (SEDECO, 2020).

[31] As another example of the extent of deterioration that many public markets experience, the projects for these markets included the repair, cleaning, or refurbishment of floors, façades, roofs, grease traps, lighting, stalls, toilets, and electrical, gas, water, and waste management systems, except for Río Blanco market, which was completely rebuilt as it was badly damaged after a storm in 2014 (SEDECO, 2016, pp.45–74).

Image 11. #NoMoreCollapsedMarkets

This message reads: "Claudia Sheinbaum [city mayor], we urge you to implement maintenance programmes in the public markets.: #NoMoreCollapsedMarkets #WeAllAreMarkets #MarketsMeanFoodSovereignty. **Source**: Distributed via WhatsApp Broadcast Lists, 2018.

Compared to previous decades, this funding scheme for repair and maintenance reverses to some extent the long-standing experiences of political neglect, as it has become the main source of funding to tackle deterioration. However, the technical and administrative paths to access these funds remain politically mediated and highly selective, given that the existing budget remains insufficient for such a large public markets network, leading traders to permanently demand more resources (Image 11). In this sense, trader communities and organisations must negotiate the available resources by deploying popular infrastructural politics, that is, by negotiating in the interstices of existing regulations, interinstitutional relations, and the markets' internal politics. As I discuss in this section, trader leaders prove themselves as effective problem solvers in these encounters, particularly by building less visible, even concealed "shadowy ties" with political actors with whom they negotiate the distribution of public resources away from the public eye—in what Auyero (2007) calls the "gray zone of politics." Ultimately, these relationships and expertise influence traders' capacity to obtain resources for repair and maintenance in a tight budgetary context that cannot solve the infrastructural problems of all 329 public markets. Building these political relationships not only gives access to the available resources, but also

speeds up administrative procedures, and helps to overcome the markets' internal divisions that, occasionally, block the provision of repair and maintenance.

From the traders' perspective, the critical aspect at the district level is "to be part of the POA," as Omar (trader leader, 30-40, I) explained to me his main objectives as a member of a regional trader organisations. This expression, which I heard in different occasions during my fieldwork, captures the importance of being involved in the bureaucratic and political making of the district governments' budget towards the end of each financial year. Not being listed in the POA simply means that the government will not allocate resources and therefore no planned repair and maintenance will take place. As a standard administrative format, the POA is a budget planner whose categories, rows, and columns become politicised when the traders aim at being included under specific headings, as a specific item to which a specific amount of money has been allotted. In the traders' socio-political world, the relevant headings are "Maintenance, conservation, and rehabilitation of commercial infrastructure," or its broader sibling "Maintenance, conservation, and rehabilitation of public buildings," to take the example of the Benito Juárez district (2018b, p.5). As Raúl (central government official, 30-40, I) bluntly puts it: "Those traders that attend the POA meetings [are] the one who get the benefits." In this context, being included in the POA becomes a political promise between the traders and the district government, which acknowledges the markets' needs of repair and maintenance and determines that a certain amount of its annual budget will be allocated for that purpose.

Under the interinstitutional scheme created by SEDECO in 2014, district governments not only provide a project or plan for specific markets but accept to fund 40 per cent of their total cost. However, this commitment still depends on the district governments' political and expenditure agendas, which can change and therefore jeopardise the traders' initial negotiations. As officials in the same district, Diego (former district official, 40-50, I) and Rubén (district official, 50-60, I) highlight how these interinstitutional relations can stall or stagnate repair and maintenance for public markets. Diego, for example, remembers that between 2012 and 2015, when the district and the city governments belonged to the same political party, "the relationship with SEDECO was primarily economic and they contributed financially [to implement the markets' projects]." However, as Rubén points out, once a different party came to govern the district between 2015 and 2018, the priorities changed and "the local authorities stopped sending the financial reports [of the markets' projects] to SEDECO, thus breaching previous agreements [between the traders and the government]. The problem is that SEDECO does not approve new budgets for the districts' markets since then."

Image 12. Interinstitutional tensions

District authorities claim the allocation of public funds for repair and maintenance in Hueso Periférico Market, Tlalpan district. The placard on the left reads: "These public works are funded by the district government. #DontBeCheated." **Source**: Author, 2018.

For traders, this dependence on the district governments' priorities and their interinstitutional relationships with SEDECO can bring repair and maintenance into a political impasse. That is what Joel (trader leader, 40-50, I) suggested when he explained why his district markets did not participate in SEDECO's call for projects in 2017:

> We are again where we began [with no resources for repair and maintenance, and] it's political. [The district mayor] had a terrible relationship with SEDECO. [The mayor] had his own agenda [which did not include the markets as a priority], and since it didn't coincide with SEDECO's agenda [which had the markets as a priority], well, he simply didn't support [our] efforts [to submit projects and secure resources].

In Virgilio's (trader leader, 60-70, I) terms, navigating the politics of repair and maintenance and these impasses appears as if traders are trapped in a political minefield, in which conflictive interinstitutional relationships and contrasting political interests block the flow of resources for public markets (Image 12). "Why are they [the officials and politicians] fighting, upset, divided? We don't know and we don't want to know, but we suffer the consequences. If we ask SEDECO [for support], the district government turns its back on us. If we go to the district government, SEDECO looks right through us." In this sense, while this institutional scheme has allocated

more funds for repair and maintenance, its tripartite character opens new fronts of political tension that traders must navigate to secure resources against the deterioration of their markets.

In a financial context in which the official means of repair and maintenance are scarce and politically mediated, negotiating these means often involves traders bringing other political actors into play. As discussed in chapter 4, trader leaders and organisations build a repertoire of political knowledge, skills, and relationships to defend the public markets network. When these components of popular infrastructural politics come into play around repair and maintenance, traders exploit their shadowy ties with state agents to channel financial resources or speed up administrative procedures that secure public works in their markets. As Marisol (former district mayor, 50-60, I) explains, this brings the traders' political expertise to the fore:

> In some markets, the traders have a broader understanding of what [officials and politicians] do and what their administrative powers are. [For example,] traders negotiate [with representatives of] the Legislative Assembly, [and] even [those of] the Chamber of Deputies, to obtain funds for their projects. [Traders negotiate to restrict the use of] these funds [only for the] markets' improvement, so they have a specific purpose [and district governments cannot use them for something else]. Many political actors who control and access [supplementary] financial resources [in the government], and even markets have been rebuilt thanks to the traders that strive for these additional funds.

As discussed in *Popular leadership* (chapter 4), experienced trader leaders know who in Mexico City's urban politics can unlock these resources, and if successful, their organisations can channel extra funds for specific markets. However, having secured these funds does not necessarily mean that repair and maintenance works are going to proceed, as trader leaders and organisations still have to negotiate with their fellow traders. In the tripartite funding scheme already mentioned, it is established that each repair and maintenance project must be approved by at least 70 per cent of the respective market's traders (SEDECO, 2019). In badly deteriorated markets, setting repair and maintenance priorities becomes a site of conflict and dissent that trader leaders and officials not easily overcome. In this context, the markets' diversity and the limited representativeness of trader organisations emerge as central themes influencing repair and maintenance. Raúl's (central government official, 30-40, I) experience negotiating the implementation of the projects illustrates this point:

> [As an official,] you can have the leaders' support for the projects, but they're only 10 or 15 people, while in the markets you meet 400, 200, or 100 traders, and not everybody agrees with the projects. So, you can negotiate repair and maintenance with the leaders, but later, in the market […] the majority of traders says "No" and thus, secured funds [for the markets] vanish because traders reject the projects.

The markets' internal tensions—which materialise in the multiplication of trader organisations and expressions of dissent against dominant trader leaders—can render the aforementioned legal, administrative, and political journeys for repair and maintenance meaningless. For trader leaders, this is a context to call for unity and challenge their fellow traders' stance on the allocation of public resources, as Antonio (trader leader, 60-70, I) highlights regarding a project to replace his market's main façade:

> I needed to know what my fellow traders were thinking because you can't simply impose [the project]. […] So, I took the architectural plans with me and brought them to the market for everybody to see them. [Thus, in an assembly, I told the traders] "You have to decide if we proceed or not with the project." [As a leader] you can make it happen, but you need to find the way. However, if the traders are divided, it doesn't make any difference how much you've done [to have the project and the resources], those who oppose you will block [their implementation].

In Antonio's market, the façade was replaced, but repairing or replacing a roof can be more challenging given the need to stop the market's commercial activities. When touring the 700-trader market Esperanza (district official, 50-60, I) is in charge of, she enthusiastically showed me the roof the government began to replace in 2008. Told from the official perspective, her opinion about how repair and maintenance were achieved in this market emphasises the financial and political challenges deterioration brings about:

> Isn't [the roof] beautiful? This is the result of [the market's management] efforts. […] Obviously, you cannot repair everything in one go because there's never enough money and [the district government] has to get it first […] The traders didn't want to vacate the markets for the works to start and sought legal protection […] They thought the government wanted to evict them and sell the market, but I convinced them [that that wasn't true.] As I told you, it's really difficult to make any change in the market [including repair and maintenance] but when I die, I will know that I somehow contributed to [improving] the market.

In this sense, discourses and practices of repair and maintenance are subject to multiple layers of legal, administrative, and political negotiation that revolve around the widespread conditions of deterioration and the lack of financial resources. Under these circumstances, the limited available funding mechanisms for repair and maintenance demand that traders mobilise their political knowledge, skills, and relationships to participate in budgetary decision making, secure interinstitutional collaboration, access additional funds, and get around the markets' internal divisions. Thus, allocating repair and maintenance to specific markets involves dealing with several layers of gatekeeping practices that can delay, speed up, or even halt the process. In the face of the uncertainty and arbitrariness that characterise these processes, trader leaders must stand out for their tenacity and perseverance, as their role as problem solvers depends on

how effectively they navigate these multiple mediations year after year to be part of the POA. In this sense, negotiating repair and maintenance revolves around the possibility and challenges of negotiating the incorporation of public markets into the changing political agendas.

5.4. Selective solutions

During my fieldwork, traders, authorities, and politicians made clear that negotiating repair and maintenance operates under a central premise: there are not sufficient resources to deal with the extent and pace of deterioration in the public markets network. After decades of disinvestment and deterioration, public markets' stakeholders have normalised the lack of resources for repair and maintenance. In this scenario, not even the special fund created in 2014 can deal with the multiple infrastructural problems pervading the public markets, since it has only solved some problems in 156 markets in six years. As a result, traders, officials, and politicians have become increasingly aware of the selective procedures involved in repair and maintenance and the partial nature of the solutions offered by the authorities. Thus, traders have come to understand that accessing repair and maintenance is not only a matter of long waiting times, but one in which the solutions will only cover a portion of the multiple infrastructural problems that markets have faced after decades of neglect. In several interviews, traders and state agents alike described the political mediations involved in choosing not only which markets but also which specific problems need to be repaired in light of the financial constraints and the extent of the deterioration experienced. These accounts brought to light how partial repair and maintenance is unable to keep at bay the markets' deterioration. For traders, this has meant that while the government allocates resources to fix the roof, the electrical or water systems are left unattended for several more years, sometimes to the point of breakdown. In this section, I explore further how trader leaders and state agents negotiate the terms of this selectivity in political encounters that open opportunities for cooperation but also the unequal distribution of scarce resources.

The experiences of selective allocation of solutions to infrastructural problems in public markets show that it operates around, at least, three main aspects. The first is the result of the diverse political landscape created by the multiplication of trader organisations, whose power and influence in the geographies of urban politics affects the distribution of resources across the network. The second are the assessments of the markets' deterioration or hazardousness, with which traders and authorities determine priorities for allocating resources to prevent a disaster. The third operates at the market level, specifically around the decision over which specific infrastructural problems need to be tackled and which ones will be left aside for a

Image 13. One repair at a time

Other layers of deterioration remain pending repair and maintenance under a new roof. In Sonora Market, Venustiano Carranza Market, for example, not all the original roof built in the 1950s was replaced due to the lack of resources. These works began in 2008. **Source**: Author, 2018.

longer time (Image 13). These three aspects of the selective allocation of solutions revolve around the limitations imposed by the history of chronic neglect and the lack of resources to implement a comprehensive plan of repair and maintenance throughout the public markets network. In terms of my discussion about popular infrastructural politics, it is important to point out how traders engage in political practices that contribute to producing an infrastructural landscape in which infrastructural poverty is continuously experienced in different parts of the markets network. As traders and officials told me in multiple conversations, district governments leave entire portions of the markets network abandoned for long periods, and those markets that do receive attention are only repaired and maintained partially.

In each process of repair and maintenance, these three layers of selectivity operate together, limiting the construction of solutions and the allocation of resources through political negotiation. While all markets face different levels of deterioration, not all trader organisations and communities have the same tools to demand repair and maintenance. They approach the government in different and unequal terms, and those organisations able to represent, unite, and mobilise more effectively vis-à-vis state agents are the ones that can bring repair and

maintenance to their markets. As mentioned, this means that trader leaders are acknowledged as legitimate political actors and can attend relevant meetings (such as the POA) and monitor the status of administrative procedures and petitions. This political condition operates as an underlying criterion of selectivity for repair and maintenance, as not all trader organisations have such access to decision-making processes and therefore, their markets can be left deteriorating while others receive more resources. As Marisol (former mayor, 50-60, I) points out, this selectivity is based on a political exchange in which political affiliation and governmentality play an important role:

> When you are in the government, you realise that you only have [a small budget] for public markets, so you have to set your priorities, which is a crucial part of the government's relationship with the markets. Although this is about how the district government satisfies the traders' demands, there is, of course, a political condition. [You ask the traders] "Tell me, are you going to support me [my government]?," because [they] also have their political methods: they can [for example] organise and occupy your offices. So, you tell them: "Okay, we're going to support you [by allocating resources], but I want you on my side. This is going to be a relationship to support each other and together we'll build solutions." It's a political relationship.

While this political relation can be mutually beneficial to the government and some trader organisations, they are particularly problematic for the rest of the markets network, as not all trader communities have the political resources to engage in this type of interactions. In this light, the organisations' capacity to build a patronage bond between the state and the traders lies at the heart of the problem of who controls the resources and which markets receive repair and maintenance.

This political mediation narrows down the number of markets that will benefit from resource allocation for repair and maintenance but, given the insufficiency of these funds and their limited impact at a market scale, traders, officials, and politicians must apply the second selective criterion. Although not a principle given that governments and traders can ignore the markets' technical reports on deterioration when allocating resources—as noted by Raúl in the previous section—the markets' precarious condition and the risks this entails can become key parameters to determine which facilities will receive repair and maintenance. This became clear during an interview with Omar (trader leader, 30-40, I) and Uriel (trader leaders, 30-40, I), when they explained to me how they negotiate which markets, out of the 10 their organisation represents, will be repaired and maintained in a specific financial year. As a powerful organisation operating at a district level, its leaders have had access for several years to the meetings in which the POA is negotiated and have, therefore, reached agreements about

the amount of money that the government will invest in public markets. When the legislative body confirms the budget, district-level authorities convene with Omar and Uriel to resolve which markets will receive repair and maintenance.

As they explain the process, it consists of a meeting in which they are often urged to prioritise "only five out of the 20 problems" (Omar, trader leader, 30-40, I) that they have identified, and to choose the markets in which these five problems will be solved. Given these restrictions, these trader leaders must evaluate the material conditions of the markets they represent, in particular, the type and extent of deterioration and the safety risks and problems it poses to the trader community. In their case, as Omar (trader leader, 30-40, I) says, to "prioritise the most badly deteriorated markets" is essential, notwithstanding that they "know [all the markets] have the same problems," since, ultimately, as Uriel (trader leaders, 30-40, I) stresses, they "don't want a market destroyed." Thus, another selective process starts, one in which the traders must prioritise markets and problems according to their levels of deterioration and neglect. As these two leaders explained to me, these financial and political constraints have pushed them to allocate resources on a rota basis among the markets they represent, which involves a form of solidarity to deal with both major and minor repairs. Uriel illustrates this point when he says that "[Last year] that market was our main concern [because its roof was badly damaged], but this [financial] year we'll fight [to get the resources] to repair another market that's in a similar situation."

Constrained by the infrastructural and financial conditions of the public markets network, trader organisations, authorities, and politicians tend to appeal to these selective criteria to allocate repair and maintenance. These political dynamics around the preservation of public markets ultimately produce cycles of deterioration and repair and maintenance that—depending on the influx of financial resources and the organisations' political skills—increase or decrease the experience of infrastructural poverty in trader communities. At a network level, this selectivity in repair and maintenance means that only a limited number of markets in each district receive financial resources to fix pipelines, walls, and roofs, while the rest is left unrepaired. The allocation of resources for repair and maintenance at the district level offers a clear example of this selectivity and how the fluctuation of the annual budget expands and shortens these cycles of deterioration for specific markets. In Table 4, I illustrate how this selectivity unfolds across several districts producing an infrastructural landscape in which a small number of markets are repaired and maintained each financial year. The table also shows the uneven allocation of public funds in different districts and how the amounts can oscillate each year as well as the number of markets that benefited from the provision, thus also

Table 4. Number of markets repaired per financial year (2016-2018)

District government	Number of markets per district	Budget 2016	Number of markets repaired	Budget 2017	Number of markets repaired	Budget 2018	Number of markets repaired
Álvaro Obregón	16	26.6	2	17.8	2	5.7	1
Benito Juárez	16	5.9	8	43.2	--	49.0	5
Cuajimalpa	5	4.4	1	4.6	1	13.3	2
Cuauhtémoc	39	62.1	7	61.8	8	47.5	5
Gustavo A. Madero	51	40.1	15	--	--	17.1	12
Magdalena Contreras	5	0	0	1.3	4	35.1	3
Miguel Hidalgo	19	19.4	14	44.8	14	20.6	13
Milpa Alta	9	--	--	0.2	9	4.6	1
Tlalpan	20	12.6	11	13.0	10	8.7	10
Venustiano Carranza	42	50.5	6	82.9	15	11.6	5

Source: Author. Based on Delegación Álvaro Obregón, 2016, 2017, 2018; Delegación Benito Juárez, 2016, 2018a, 2018b; Delegación Cuajimalpa, 2016, 2017, 2018; Delegación Cuauhtémoc, 2016, 2017, 2018; Delegación Magdalena Contreras, 2017; Alcaldía Magdalena Contreras, 2018; Delegación Miguel Hidalgo, 2016, 2017; Alcaldía Miguel Hidalgo, 2018; Delegación Milpa Alta, 2018; Delegación Tlalpan, 2016, 2017; Alcaldía Tlalpan, 2018; Delegación Venustiano Carranza, 2016, 2017, 2018b.

Note: All budgets are in millions of Mexican pesos. Although public funds implemented in public markets must be published quarterly online by district governments, not all reports are available. For this reason, I have only included 10 out of 16 districts in this table. The blank cells also reflect the incomplete and fragmentary character of this information when available, which mirrors the lack of information addressed in chapters 3 and 4 regarding the number of trader organisations in Mexico City. Although the government significantly increased the special fund for repair and maintenance since 2019, the budgetary limitations represented in this table have prevailed in the past three decades.

suggesting how the cycles of deterioration and repair and maintenance take place across time. Additionally, it hints the large amount of resources that would be necessary to implement a comprehensive repair and maintenance programme in Mexico City.

When analysed in detail, these expense reports reveal new layers of selectivity at the district level, for example that the same public markets receive resources over two or more allocation rounds, as in the case of Cuajimalpa or Tlalpan. While the annual budgets already highlight the level of priority that public markets have together in a specific district, the distribution of these resources per market signals the levels of deterioration, trader organisations' capacity to channel funds into their markets, and the inequalities that this produces among trader communities. Sometimes, district governments do not allocate funds (as reported in Magdalena Contreras), sometimes they are so small that markets receive only tens of thousands of pesos (as reported in Milpa Alta), but most generally, the funds are just enough to cover at least in part the actual repair and maintenance needs.

This selectivity at the market level, in which specific problems are solved over others, brings to light the trader communities' internal tensions and emphasises the sense of arbitrariness around how available resources are used. This is a critical aspect in terms of how infrastructural

poverty is experienced in public markets, where partial repair and maintenance leaves multiple fronts of deterioration open. This has been widely recorded in official reports and the media, as shown in chapter 3, but traders' testimonies reveal how resource allocation can overlook what traders perceive as pressing infrastructural problems. In their opinion, what is repaired and maintained seems to be based on arbitrary political decisions rather than technical ones, through which the authorities try to maximise their limited resources with visible or cheap public works. I explore further the political uses of repair and maintenance in the next section, but the key point here is about how the chosen works can produce a sense of incompleteness, unnecessariness, and dissatisfaction among traders. I met several traders like Jesús (trader leader, 40-50, I) throughout my fieldwork who think that the authorities' repair and maintenance projects might be "good-intentioned," but they usually are "poorly designed and planned" and rarely respond to traders' needs.

That is the case of Erica (trader leader, 30-40, I), who told me regarding her market's new façade that she "would've preferred that the authorities had repaired the market's interior and done something more functional […] something that the traders' had [really] needed [to have repaired, like the stalls, corridors, or toilets, etc.]." Similarly, but highlighting the experience of infrastructural poverty surrounding the selectivity of repair and maintenance and its political mediation, Julio (trader leader, 50-60, I) told me that in the early 2000s, the district authorities visited his market and announced "We're going to change the floor, […] install new drainpipes… but only in half of the market." Although he told the officials that there were "more pressing problems" in the market, that the floors had just been fixed, and that an unfinished drainage system would remain incomplete indefinitely due to lack of resources, he had to welcome the investment. "Otherwise," he emphasised, "the funds would've been allocated somewhere else," and thus, he would have deprived his market of public works. At a market level, these decisions about which infrastructural problems are tackled first and which ones are left aside for some time underlie the experience of permanent deterioration, which means that they are never in good condition.

Compelled by decades of material deterioration, lack of resources, and political mediation—all of which have been naturalised—traders, officials, and politicians engage in selective practices of repair and maintenance. This selectivity operates around three overlapping aspects: the capacity of trader organisations to negotiate with the state agents that control the financial resources for repair and maintenance; the levels of deterioration and their associated risks in specific markets; and the decision-making process over which specific problems need to be

solved at the market level. Together, these selective criteria produce cycles of deterioration and repair and maintenance that contribute to creating an uneven infrastructural landscape at the network and the market level. In this sense, not only multiple markets across the city experience abandonment at the same time, but services or structures in each market are left neglected until the selective practices allocate resources to repair and maintain them. Given the infrastructural consequences of this selectivity, the politics of repair and maintenance are a permanent activity, shaped partly by the annual fluctuations of resource allocation and partly by the unrelenting deterioration process. In the face of the multiple difficulties to access repair and maintenance, traders are sometimes pushed to accept almost any public works that the authorities offer—as Julio's testimony suggests—and to celebrate when these works are delivered.

5.5. Celebrating public works

In this context of lack and want revolving around repair and maintenance, when these are delivered and completed, there is reason to celebrate. Officials, politicians, trader leaders, trader communities, and customers come together around the market for a special occasion that places repair and maintenance at the centre of a political display. The completion of long-awaited and much-needed public works condenses the political journey I just described, thus representing a temporary success over the political origins and mediations of material decay. As Harvey (2018, pp.94–95) points out, infrastructure inaugurations are public rituals that stage infrastructures as events which, in turn, extol the achievements of the state. In the case of Mexico City public markets, the event itself is the markets' (partial) restoration which—as discussed in chapter 1 regarding the infrastructures' embedded political agendas—functions as an "ideological act" (Appel, 2018, p.58) that confirms the traders-state socio-political bond.

The completion of repair and maintenance works reaffirms the patronage relationship and the state's moral obligations regarding the urban subaltern. In these occasions, the state re-emerges as provider, trader leaders as problem solvers, trader organisations as effective political tools, and trader communities as the main beneficiaries of these politics. Thus, these celebrations close and open the material and political cycles that undermine or support the reproduction of public markets. As a public political spectacle, repair and maintenance—however partial or incomplete—foreground the centrality of public markets in the geographies of urban politics through discourses—public transcripts (Scott, 1990)—that hardly disguise the political conflicts and the power relations underlying public markets' reproduction. In the end, the markets' stakeholders have a reason to celebrate: they can capitalise these restorations politically.

Image 14. The beginning of a new cycle

Traders, officials, politicians, and the public are brought together to celebrate the completion of repair and maintenance in Romero Rubio Market, Venustiano Carranza district. The new façade became the background of a political event that lasted around 5 hours. **Source**: Author, 2018.

During my fieldwork, I attended some of these massive events, but two were particularly revealing about how they condense the politics of repair and maintenance. During the 56th anniversary of Zaragoza and Romero Rubio markets, traders, officials, and politicians celebrated the completion of public works that enhanced the markets' façades, roofs, stalls, and lighting and water systems at a cost of 14.9 million pesos (Delegación Venustiano Carranza, 2018a; Barreto, 2018). The combination of the anniversary and the delivery of public works made more visible how celebrations become political encounters in the public markets network. In both cases, what the master of ceremonies described as comprehensive repair and maintenance projects became the proof of what had been achieved politically. The markets, festooned with streamers and balloons, were the background and the centrepiece of public events in which authorities, politicians, and trader leaders toured the markets praising the works while a larger audience waited in the street, in front of a stage, for the speeches and the music to begin (Image 14). As in other political performances, those involved in the politics of repair and maintenance were introduced one by one, and their speeches conveyed the promise, gratitude, devotion, and loyalty invoked throughout the political process. As an instance that magnifies the visibility of political actors, these celebrations were also an opportunity to criticise those who opposed the projects and acknowledge those who supported them.

These introductions work as an exchange of deference between political actors that unveils the multiple layers of negotiations shaping repair and maintenance. Each political actor acknowledges the role of the others, in particular their commitment and hard work. As a performance, it conceals the nitty-gritty details of these interactions that take place in the "gray zone of politics," where traders, officials, and politicians negotiate the terms of their relationship while negotiating the allocations of public funds to specific markets and projects. Instead, their display revolves around notions of collaboration and mutual support. Each takes the floor, one at a time, according to their political weight. In this case, Manuel (former district mayor and Legislative Assembly representative), Esther (Legislative Assembly representative), Mónica (district mayor), and Rodrigo (trader leader) speak first, before Jorge, who is a former district mayor and the senior political actor on the stage. Ultimately, they all speak of the political relationship that mediates the preservation of the markets:

> Manuel: Let me thank the traders that year after year go to the district offices and present a petition [and] thanks to the district mayor [Mónica] too for paying attention to the markets.
>
> Esther: The market was repaired thanks to this great team [referring to those on the stage] and thanks to the efforts of the former district mayor [Jorge].
>
> Mónica: I invited the representatives [of the Legislative Assembly], our friends [Manuel and Esther] […] If we [in the district government] hadn't work hand in hand with them, we wouldn't have completed these works.
>
> Rodrigo: Mr Jorge, on behalf of the traders I want to thank you for your wholehearted support. Without it, these beautiful works wouldn't have been completed […] Mr Manuel, dear friend. Mrs Esther, thank you very much. Thanks to you, we got these works.

Given the partial and incomplete character of most repair and maintenance works in the public markets network, the state of partial deterioration cannot be avoided. But rather than frame this as a problem, the gatekeepers of repair and maintenance transform it into an issue of forthcoming political agendas, as infrastructural problems to solve in the next financial cycle. Tackling other fronts of deterioration at the market level is treated as a political promise revolving around infrastructure, and it signals the new political cycle around repair and maintenance. And while Esther (representative, 40-50, PE) firstly apologises: "We [the officials and politicians] cannot repair all markets because there are 43 [in this district]. But we're repairing all of them thanks to this great team," and, secondly, reasserts her commitment: "This is not an 'It's-fixed-and-that's-it' situation. No, we have more long and medium-term projects for the markets, for example, that all of them become sustainable […] We must have

rainwater collection systems [because] they are going to help us […] to meet the markets' water needs." However, Mónica (district mayor, 40-50, PE) clarifies that this is possible to the extent that the patronage relationship remains intact between the traders and the officials and politicians in charge of the government: "We have to preserve our markets. [We know] it's the government's responsibility, and I accept it. […] We're going to have a second phase [of repair and maintenance works] in this market because we received more petitions about what you need. Our commitment is unshakeable. If you keep working with [voting for] us, if you keep trusting us, we'll keep working for you." In this way, those directly involved in the negotiation process confirm their position as political intermediaries, gatekeepers in infrastructural processes, and main political beneficiaries of the outcomes of these processes.

In addition, these celebrations and the promises about future repair and maintenance are important reminders of the infrastructural obligations between traders and state agents. During these events, the political personalities standing on the stage constantly made the audience aware of the multiple difficulties involved in resource allocation and the need to value the work done. Presenting themselves as effective problem solvers and team players, trader leaders, officials, and politicians stress that the traders must make good use and take care of the market. Jorge, Esther, Manuel, and Elvira repeatedly appealed for responsibility and encouraged these trader communities in Zaragoza and Romero Rubio markets to make sure that these public works last as long as possible. In so doing, these political actors also addressed the traders' responsibilities, like Elvira (representative, 40-50, PE): "I want you to really take care of this market because it serves this neighbourhood and many others"; Esther (representative, 40-50, PE): "Today we're celebrating, but the celebration must be permanent because of this beautiful market. We have to preserve it, and that's with the efforts of all of you"; or Jorge (former district mayor, 50-60, PE): "I'm really happy. Last night I passed in front of this market and it looks spectacular. I couldn't believe it, it looks beautiful. Take care of it."

By celebrating public works of repair and maintenance, trader leaders, officials, and politicians terminate spectacularly one cycle of political interactions that revolve around the markets' most recent history of chronic neglect and widespread deterioration. As part of the public transcripts that characterise the relationship between the state and the traders, these political displays conceal the conflictive aspects of their encounters, particularly around the selective nature of decision making regarding the allocation of limited funds. Although staged in a way that allows dominant political actors to capitalise repair and maintenance for their own benefit, these celebrations are great opportunities to prove the efficacy of the traders' popular infrastructural

politics. Notwithstanding the unremitting experience of infrastructural poverty, trader leaders confirm that the repertoire of political tools they have at hand helps them to successfully navigate the political mediations that affect the reproduction of public markets in Mexico City. Ultimately, those involved in the process converge publicly around the call "Long live the markets!" While these open expressions celebrate the markets' material restoration, they also reaffirm the trader leaders' commitment and the authorities' and politicians' obligations regarding the interests and needs of trader communities. Sometimes, the intermediaries of repair and maintenance capture these political encounters in commemorative plaques, such as the ones unveiled in the Zaragoza and Romero Rubio markets, which read as follows: "Venustiano Carranza. Together, we are the best district. The public markets are drivers of our economy, therefore the district government renovated and modernised the Zaragoza Market, our market. The renovation of the façade, roof, and lighting improves the traders' conditions so that they can offer a better service to the people of this district." Written in a self-congratulatory tone, these plaques transform ordinary repair and maintenance works into outstanding events in the markets' history—which are only exceptional when seen in the light of the network's deterioration, financial constraints, and chronic neglect.

5.6. Paternalism and co-responsibility

The politics of repair and maintenance revolve around the defence of the legal-political framework that binds the state to preserve the public markets in good condition. In this sense, the political journey from the acknowledgement of deterioration to the celebration of public works updates the patronage relationship between the state and the traders. By mobilising popular infrastructural politics around repair and maintenance, the traders re-negotiate the state's obligations regarding their subsistence by demanding the preservation of the public markets. As discussed in chapters 1 and 3, the terms of this socio-political bond have been constantly contested with the implementation of urban neoliberal principles in the provision and management of public services. More specifically, the contestation of this bond in the public markets network dates back to the mid-1980s, when the government decelerated the construction programme, introduced the self-management scheme, and, ultimately, transferred the provision of modern food supply infrastructure to the private sector. In this way, the demands of repair and maintenance of the existing public markets network have become central for the traders to preserve the 1950s foundational bond. In this section, I discuss how repair and maintenance have also become a focal point to call into question the patronage relationship by invoking notions of paternalism and co-responsibility.

The considerable dependency on state resources to preserve the public markets network has been crucial to defining the relationship between the state and traders as a form of paternalism. Used extensively among the markets' stakeholders in a derogatory way, the term describes in negative terms the traders' reliance on and demand for public funds for repair and maintenance. Rather than focusing on the rights and obligations that revolve around the subsistence of Mexico City trader communities—as I have described their patronage relationship with the state—the term paternalism as mobilised by traders, officials, and politicians questions the use of public funds with which the state effectively subsidises the public markets' commercial activities. In this context, the critical focus on paternalism plays an important part in attempts to redefine the legal, moral, and political conditions under which public markets have been provided, repaired, and maintained in the past seven decades.

Such tension around paternalism and the traders' entitlements as subaltern urban actors is clearly presented by Jesús (trader leader, 40-50, I) and Alfonso (trader leader, 60-70, I), who highlight this point around repair and maintenance. As is visible in their testimonies, a central aspect of this criticism against paternalism revolves around the perception and self-perception of trader communities as permanent claimants of state support. In terms of how popular infrastructural politics are displayed, Jesús' and Alfonso's words shed light on the conflicting ways in which traders understand their rights and attitudes towards dominant political actors and their discourses:

> Jesús: That the authority must provide [repair and maintenance, it] is an obligation stated in the [federal] constitution […] Moreover, we're entitled to those services because we pay taxes […] It's like when you have a child. If I want to see him grow, I must provide him with education, clothes, food, all the means for his development, to make him what I'd like him to be. If you [the government] want public markets to maintain their function, you have to take care of them and meet all their basic needs: repair and maintenance, management…

> Alfonso: Traders have become opportunistic [and] paternalistic. We want the government to pay for everything [and] don't want to collaborate in any way [regarding the market's repair and maintenance]. Instead, we say "Tell the district government [to come and fix the lighting, the pipelines, the drainage]." I have a different approach; I think we must invest in the market; we don't even pay rent.

For several decades, the authorities have been representing the public markets network as a financial burden because of the volume of resources it demands and the small returns it provides through taxation.[32] In their perspective, public markets are also bottomless pits whose political

[32] In light of the bad debts that traders accumulate after several years of not paying for their permit fees—expected in two instalments every year—or other services, the Mexico City central government regularly cancels them or

returns are not even significant, thus deepening the negative representations of repair and maintenance as paternalistic practices. This sort of financial and political awareness led Mario (former district official, 40-50, I) to ask rhetorically: "Why should I take care of them? Why should I invest in them [when it looks as if I'm throwing away public funds]? […] This doesn't benefit me at all, not even in electoral terms [because] they don't give you many votes anymore." This representation is so pervasive in the public markets network that I also heard trader leaders mobilising in conflicting ways this idea that undermines the public markets' value and the state's responsibilities towards the traders. And while Alfonso (trader leader, 60-70, I) presented it as a fact: "The 329 markets are the authorities' burden," it allows Jesús (trader leader, 40-50, I) to envision its possible consequences: "We're perceived as a nuisance, and if authorities could, they had demolished the markets by now and authorised the construction of shopping centres instead."

These views on the relationship between traders and the state have raised questions about who should repair and maintain the public markets network and under which scheme. In 2018, the questions and discourses on the government's side were similar to those posed by Ángel (central government official, 50-60, I): "Who should modernise [the markets], the district or the central government? How can I empower the traders to take care and develop their businesses? How can we end paternalism and the idea that the government must maintain the markets, [that is] the spaces that give [the traders] an income?" While Angel's questions illustrate the shared idea that paternalism must end because it has "spoiled [the traders] by giving [them] everything" (Jesús, trader leader, 40-50, I), they also signal the government's need to transform the traders' mentality regarding their participation in repair and maintenance. As an opinion shared and mobilised by officials and politicians but also by trader leaders—as discussed in the previous chapter around how leaders represent their fellow traders—this change involves cultivating a sense of co-responsibility among market traders, who are often blamed for being passive, lacking initiative, and not taking proper care of the markets.

As I illustrated with the cases of Sur and San Pedro markets, traders have historically shared the responsibility for building, expanding, and maintaining the public markets network, often contributing with financial resources to complement the fixing of legal, administrative, and

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offers substantial discounts (e.g. Vargas, 2019; Ramírez, 2017; GDF, 2005; GDF, 2000). According to Raúl (central government official, 30-40, I), Manuel (former district mayor and representative, 40-50, I), Jesús (trader leader, 40-50, I), and Valentín (trader leader, 40-50, M), these cancellations and discounts have created a "culture of non-payment," in which traders intentionally avoid taxation and actively seek, through trader organisations, that the government writes them off. According to Virgilio (trader leader, 60-70, I), there is no record of any trader whose permit had been withdrawn by the government for not paying the fees or services.

infrastructural problems. Regarding repair and maintenance, this co-responsibility is presented as a transfer of the financial burden to the traders, who the authorities and politicians expect to contribute in light of the governments' financial limitations. Mario (former district official, 30-40, I) simplifies these appeals to co-responsibility with the following example:

> It's not a big deal to send a group of workers to paint the market, the façade. It's not a big deal to send a technician to check the electrical system and ask the traders to contribute with 200 pesos to have it repaired. I used to avoid the administrative procedure and tell the traders: "The government has no money [to buy tools or spare parts], but if you're prepared to contribute, I can send the workers and we fix the problem." I'm not talking about millions of pesos; each trader would only contribute with 200, 500, 1000 pesos, and in the end, everybody was happy. It was more a matter of will than of coordination.

This contemporary call to co-responsibility claims to challenge the paternalism entrenched in public markets network by creating quick and less bureaucratic infrastructural solutions, but simultaneously, it ignores the legal and administrative framework and redistributes in practice the costs of repair and maintenance. As it is based on the idea that trader communities are opportunistic and irresponsible, the discourse of co-responsibility tends to overlook—just like the notions of paternalism, burden, and opportunism—the central role of trader communities in creating and expanding the network, as I highlighted in chapter 3 regarding infrastructure provision. In this sense, these representations also ignore the ordinary maintenance practices, the "salvage bricolage," and the permanent political activism through which traders have fixed the markets' infrastructural problems. By focusing on the notions of paternalism and financial burden, some trader leaders, officials, and politicians fail to value the routine practices with which the majority of traders try to keep the markets clean, tidy, and safe. Moreover, these representations tend not to take into account the individual and collective financial contributions that trader communities have built to facilitate and expedite the governments' repair and maintenance works.

Given that these financial contributions affect the traders' income and profit, this approach to co-responsibility and the transfer of a portion of the financial burden to trader communities remains highly problematic. Thus, although trader leaders have also been critical of paternalism, they constantly fight and defend the socio-political bond that impels the state to take care of the markets. In addition, to reduce the effect of these contributions in the traders' finances, trader leaders and organisations have negotiated to control other revenue sources for repair and maintenance, such as the markets' toilets, which are legally controlled by district

governments.[33] The markets' toilets have thus become a point of tension around how to generate funds for repair and maintenance amid discourses of paternalism and co-responsibility. By demanding and securing the control of the toilets, trader organisations and communities increase their possibilities to contribute financially to repairing the markets without affecting the traders' incomes and profits. If successful in obtaining the permit to control the toilets, trader organisations can access additional resources with low costs—as the water supply is covered by the district government—and allocate specific resources to tackle specific infrastructural problems. Although the accountability and transparency regarding the use of these funds is disputable, the control of the toilets is presented as an effective mechanism to overcome deterioration without the participation of the authorities. Omar (trader leader, 30-40, I) advocates for the traders' control of the toilets:

> We have always said that when traders control the toilets, the markets are in better conditions. Why? Because they can use these auto-generated resources for maintenance. In theory, it's the authority who should be implementing these resources in the markets, but they don't do it. I have demonstrated so, I have told them "We have built 80 per cent of this market's infrastructure." […] So, the resources that we generate in this market, instead of taking them to the city's Treasury, we implement them [directly] in the market's maintenance. If we need to paint it, we use that money. For example, if we need to fix an electrical problem that costs 23 thousand pesos, instead of asking each trader to contribute with 1000 pesos, we can take it from the [toilets] fund and fix the problem.

Similarly, Jesús (trader leader, 40-50, I) negotiated with his district government the control of the toilets' revenues for a short period of time, at least until his organisation collected enough money to fully repair his 45-year-old market's toilets. As he put it: "I think that back then [the authority] trusted me, so [the organisation] controlled the funds and we renovated the toilets." In both cases, Omar and Jesús brought a different sort of co-responsibility into practice and the notion of paternalism into question by negotiating politically the legal and administrative framework that govern the markets.

The contradictory approaches to paternalism and co-responsibility that traders, officials, and politicians mobilise reveal the tensions underlying the socio-political bond that have kept the public markets working despite the widespread deterioration. By examining the discourses about paternalism and co-responsibility that permeate the discussion about repair and maintenance, I have shown that they signal different attempts to redistribute the financial cost

[33] Customers and sometimes traders must pay a small fee to use the markets' toilets (from four to five pesos), which is collected by the district governments under the label of "auto-generated" (Datanoticias, 2019). These resources can be used at the discretion of the government and are not necessarily used for the markets' repair and maintenance, which has been a traders' persistent demand.

of keeping the markets in good condition. While the authorities demand significant participation by the traders, the traders try to avoid the impact of these costs on their incomes and profits. Because of their focus on the traders, these discourses tend to stigmatise them and fail to recognise their active economic and political role in preserving the network. Traders do not simply reject these notions, as they have incorporated them contradictorily into their discursive repertoire, mobilising them while also fighting to preserve the legal, administrative, and political mechanisms that have helped them to secure funds for repair and maintenance.

5.7. Final remarks

In this chapter, I have explored the political mediations that determine the repair and maintenance of public markets. To show why and how the traders place repair and maintenance at the heart of popular infrastructural politics, I have examined the political discourses and practices that permeate the cycles of deterioration and (partial) restoration of the public markets network. My focus on the political factors triggering deterioration and hindering repair and maintenance from the traders' perspective reveals the existence of a political arena in which, vis-à-vis officials and politicians, these subaltern urban actors dispute the material reproduction of the markets. The structure of this chapter presents in a schematic way this political journey and how traders display their political knowledge, skills, and relationships to secure and allocate public funds to fix multiple infrastructural problems. In so doing, the traders not only engage in political encounters where they negotiate the available resources, but also navigate Mexico City's urban politics, looking for more resources that guarantee the improvement of their working spaces.

Throughout this chapter, I have emphasised that the politics of repair and maintenance mostly revolve around experiences of lack and want because of the widespread deterioration in the public markets network and the limited funds to tackle it. This sheds light on the challenges of doing politics at the margins to keep an extensive infrastructure network working and in good condition. It also brings to light the subordination under which popular infrastructural politics are deployed, but also the persistent activism that traders perform to make the state fulfil its legal, administrative, moral, and political obligations. In this sense, the politics of repair and maintenance have consolidated as a focal point in popular infrastructural politics, particularly since the late 1980s, the period where the traders locate the government's first attempts to renounce its responsibilities towards Mexico City's trader communities. And although these political practices have contributed to creating an uneven infrastructural landscape marked by

the selective criteria that allows the allocation of limited resources, they have been crucial to keeping the markets functional in contexts of widespread neglect. Considering the worldwide struggles against neoliberal urbanism and its capacity to transform public goods and services into "nonspaces" (Berlant, 2016, p.393), the traders' efforts to access repair and maintenance are clear examples of tireless, ordinary campaigns against long-standing austerity measures.

As previously discussed, the concept of popular infrastructural politics captures the contradictory practices and discourses shaping the relationship between the subaltern and the dominant political actors. Repair and maintenance emerges as an instance of the "gray zones of politics," in which traders negotiate vis-à-vis officials and politicians within, outside, and beyond the prevailing administrative and regulatory frameworks. The negotiation of the POA, the control of the toilets' revenues, and the celebrations of public works are clear examples, but also show the conflicting ways in which traders mobilise the discourses of paternalism and co-responsibility, as they can blame their fellow traders for their lack of responsibility and the markets' deterioration while demanding that the state complies with its obligations regarding repair and maintenance. In this sense, this focus on the practices to preserve the markets' very materiality shows how traders, by deploying popular infrastructural politics, transform the technical and administrative aspects of repair and maintenance into a political issue of great importance. As indicated at the beginning of the chapter, the importance of repair and maintenance lies in how they condense the tensions around the socio-political bond—the patronage—that has structured the relationship between the state and the traders since the 1950s.

In chapter 6, I focus on the political-legal battles in which traders mobilise popular infrastructural politics to the reform of the socio-political bond that underlies repair and maintenance. Additionally, in the interest of delving further into the contradictory nature of these politics, I also examine how traders challenge state control and surveillance at the market level and its implications for the wider network.

6. Regulating the markets from below

> The authority says "the law is to be brought into effect"; however, the law is flexible.
> Alfonso (trader leader, 60-70, M)

> If the district government tries that all traders comply [with the stall allocation rules], the district would be thrown into disarray, there would be clashes.
> Rubén (district official, 50-60, I)

6.1. Introduction

Popular infrastructural politics permanently revolve around the mechanisms that control the provision, functioning, maintenance, and transformation of infrastructures. Among these mechanisms, regulations are of great importance in determining the roles of the infrastructures' governing bodies and the interactions between their stakeholders. As discussed in chapter 1 regarding the double political nature of infrastructures, these regulations primarily convey the economic and political projects of dominant actors. When state-provided and managed, these regulations are part of the statecraft practices that transform infrastructures into "impersonal" mechanisms of state power (Mukerji, 2009) as well as into the "formulas" with which dominant political actors organise social life and command governance (Fredericks, 2018, p.62). In this sense, the regulations become key components that rule both the infrastructures and the populations that work and live around them. However, since infrastructures not only convey disciplinary agendas and, as in the case of public markets, they also incorporate and channel the interests, needs, and aspirations of the subaltern, the regulation of infrastructures is contested and negotiated permanently. In this light, the subaltern put the regulatory frameworks at the heart of their political struggles, making of this infrastructural dimension one of the key issues to deploy popular infrastructural politics.

In this chapter, I investigate why and how public markets' regulations are one of the main political arenas in which traders display their repertoire of political tools. This allows me to show how the contradictory nature of popular infrastructural politics unfolds around the "urban law," that is, the "policies, legislation, decisions and practices" (Brown and Mackie, 2017, p.2) that have contributed to making markets and traders political spaces and subjects since the 1950s. By presenting five cases of political-legal contestation and negotiation, I examine how traders permeate law-making processes with popular imageries, moods, and sentiments that ultimately influence how rules are written, enacted, reformed, neglected, or rejected. In this sense, rather than looking for juridically correct interpretations, I follow Scott's (1976, p.161)

advice about grasping "the texture of popular language" as a means to understand the subaltern's "dissident culture" (Scott, 1990, p.91) and "anti-absolutist" politics (Thompson, 1991, p.87). As a highly conflictive political arena, these legal struggles reveal the central place of regulations in traders' popular imageries: they are a matter of permanent reflection and action. Moreover, I look anthropologically into "the constellations of actors, activities, and influences that shape policy decisions and their implementation, effects, and how they play out" (Wedel et al., 2005, p.39) in trader-led campaigns to defend the markets. In words of Mahadevia and Vyas (2017, p.119), this could be described as part of the traders' "judicial activism" with which the subaltern "challenge […] persistent, unpredictable and often violent" state actions. The five sections of this chapter reveal how, by deploying popular infrastructural politics around regulations, the traders consolidate their multifaceted and contradictory relationship with the state. On the one hand, their interpretations of the rules help them to keep the markets as relatively autonomous spaces and public services. On the other hand, traders strengthen the socio-political bond that entitles them to state protection while compromising the markets' public character. Overall, this chapter reveals how market traders have become skilful political actors in law-making processes and how, by storming the stage with their popular infrastructural politics—to use Scott's (1990, p.16) expression—, they blur prevailing notions of legality and illegality, formality and informality regarding the management and use of public markets.

In the first section, *1951 Bylaw: Rights and identity*, I explore the traders' defence of the main legal instrument that regulates the public markets in Mexico City. I focus on the conflicts around the Bylaw's obsolescence and currency and their impact on traders' identity. In *Legal updates: Fill the gaps*, I examine what my interviewees presented as a successful update of the public markets' administrative regulations. This section highlights how the traders' involvement in law making translates their political agenda into new rules and interinstitutional relations. In *Freezing the animal welfare reform,* I analyse the traders' political negotiations to adapt the content or delay the enactment of new regulations. This section discusses how traders build alliances and develop expert knowledge to challenge the state's law-making practices at different scales. In section four, *Face up to stall grabbing*, I analyse how traders have circumvented the rules of stall allocation and created a dynamic, unauthorised outlet for the buying and selling of market stalls. Specifically, I explore how traders relate contradictorily to the 1951 Bylaw by simultaneously defending their right to subsistence and undermining the markets' public character. Finally, in *Eroding official sanctions*, I examine how traders have

constantly transformed their relationship with the state by undermining officials' sanctioning powers and implementing self-regulation mechanisms at the market level. Together, these sections complement the in-depth description of popular infrastructural politics by shedding light on the multiple regulatory trajectories that they can have in Mexico City's urban politics.

6.2. 1951 Bylaw: Rights and identity

In chapter 3, I described the 1951 Markets Bylaw for the Federal District as a disciplinary mechanism that shaped the creation of the modern public markets network and its organisational landscape, as discussed in chapter 4. In these chapters, I also illustrated how this regulation played a crucial role in the emergence of the market traders as new urban subjects while remodelling the representations and practices of popular trade in Mexico City—particularly street vending. As a foundational document, the state used the Bylaw to set the legal, managerial, and political principles of public markets' governance, and it has been a central component of the traders' popular infrastructural politics. In light of the expansion of this food supply network, this legal document has been decisive in differentiating public markets from other types of popular trade. Thus, the Bylaw created a new category of commercial actor and space. It also involved new forms of state recognition, both legal and political. To be ruled under the Bylaw meant being part of the public market network. For several decades, complying with the Bylaw has been a focal point among those aspiring to be part of the network, as Omar (trader leader, 30-40, I) demonstrates when recalling the conditions that had to be met to have Sur Market officially recognised in 2011: "We became [an official] market [because] we complied with the Catalogue of Businesses [only selling food and basic staples], the health and safety protocols, the corridors formation […] with everything the government required to grant us the permit […] We were required to have infrastructure, roof, stalls, corridors, emergency exits. So, I told [my fellow traders]: 'Respect the Catalogue of Businesses, keep clear the corridors'."

The 1951 Bylaw is a 101-article document that regulates the functioning of public markets in the Federal District (officially recognised as Mexico City in 2017). It is divided into eight chapters that contain definitions and rules regarding the public markets' everyday functioning, the scope of the authorities' powers, and the traders' rights and obligations. Table 5 offers an overview of the Bylaw's content and highlights key elements that transform it into a disciplinary mechanism and a contemporary charter of rights. For decades, its key items have structured the socio-political bond between the traders and the state, determining their everyday

Table 5. Overview of the 1951 Markets Bylaw for the Federal District

Chapter	Key items
I. General dispositions Articles 1-25	- Defines public markets as a service provided and regulated by the government - Designates the authorities' functions and powers (e.g. maintenance) - Determines the traders' basic rights and obligations - Establishes the basic rules for the markets' everyday functioning
II. Permits and cancellations Articles 26-34	- Stipulates the conditions for traders to obtain a permit (*empadronamiento*) - Distinguishes between permits for permanent and temporary traders - Establishes the permits' annual renewal - Limits to one the number of permits that each trader can have
III. Permit transfer and change of business type Articles 35-45	- Defines the procedure for permit transfer to other traders (*traspaso*) - Establishes the procedure to change the stalls' business activity (*cambio de giro*) - Forbids all permits transfers and change of business type without authorisation - Forbids to let and sublet the stalls
IV. Stalls in public markets Articles 46-62	- Specifies the prohibited goods, services, and practices - Limits trade in public markets to food and basic staples - Indicates the grouping of stalls according to their commercial activity - Determines the procedure to lease markets' toilets and cold stores to concessionaires
V. Stalls outside public markets Articles 63-76	- Establishes the conditions to install stalls outside public markets
VI. Trader organisations Articles 77-81	- Determines the traders' right to organise in associations, federations, and confederations - Establishes that organisations must register before a notary - Requires that authorities keep a record of these organisations
VII. Dispute resolution Articles 82-96	- Establishes the authorities' right to decide over traders' disputes
VIII. Sanctions Articles 97-101	- Determines the penalties for not complying with the rules (fines) - Establishes the conditions for permit cancellation and stall closure

Source: Author. Based on Gobierno de la República, 1951.

interactions in and around the public markets. As the table shows, these interactions revolve around critical and ordinary issues, such as the markets' public character, the traders' organisation, or the traders' obligations. Since its publication, none of its articles has been changed, so it remains the main regulatory tool of the public markets network.

Partly because of this, the 1951 Bylaw has increasingly become one of the main objects of contestation in the public markets network, as the government has attempted to reform or replace these rules on several occasions. According to Virgilio (trader leader, 60-70, I), traders "have heard of [many new] bylaw proposals and, subsequently, law initiatives" in the past 30 years, all of which, he considers, "have fallen short of the [1951] Bylaw." This coincides with the introduction of the self-management scheme in the late 1980s, which, according to Calvo (1995), was a first attempt to "modernise" the public markets system. However, for Virgilio, this is the first attempt through which the government has tried to reform the 1951 Bylaw:

> At the end of the 1980s, [the government] tried to change the Bylaw, arguing that the city had changed, that there were new laws, and so on […] So, when the Assembly of Representatives was created [in the 1980s], [the representatives] wrote a new bylaw with the help of their advisers, but it didn't pass. [Years later] another representative found that draft, revised it, and said 'I can enact it.' It's a copy. Then, [the draft] gets to the Legislative Assembly [in the 1990s], but it wasn't the traders' proposal. So, if we check these initiatives, we'll find that they're very similar. […] That's what [the representatives] do, they present these markets bylaw initiatives without taking [the traders' opinions] into account.

The fact that these legislative initiatives have failed and the 1951 Bylaw remains in effect is tied to how traders have contested multiple legislative processes. In the past 20 years, traders have deployed their popular infrastructural politics to block the enactment of these initiatives, which can be seen as part of a persistent "rediscovery" of the markets' value by different political parties, to follow González and Dawson's (2015; 2018) idea about how markets have recently become the centre of new urban agendas. The most recent attempt, in October 2018, was led by PRI representatives, and after five days of negotiations and mobilisation, the traders made them withdraw it (Stettin, 2018). While Table 6 describes some of these initiatives, it also shows the government's continual legal activism to reform the 1951 Bylaw in the past two decades. In this table, I highlight the key reasons stated for developing these initiatives and the key changes they propose. Although Virgilio considers that these proposals are "copies" of previous versions, a detailed analysis reveals that there are important differences, for example around the democratisation of trader organisations, the inclusion of traders in official decision-making processes, the implementation of disciplinary mechanisms, or the approaches to repair and maintenance. Where similarities and repetitions can be found, they revolve around the rationale for reform and the definition of markets and traders, and mobilise discourses about the obsolescence of the 1951 Bylaw, the markets' public character, and the traders' legal figure. These three issues have been central in triggering the traders' opposition to the initiatives.

As the "Rationale for reform" row shows, the notion of obsolescence has been at the centre of the government's legislative activism. For several decades, officials and politicians have become the main advocates for reform by emphasising the obsolescence of the markets' main regulatory instrument. They primarily consider that the 1951 Bylaw is inadequate to deal with the economic competition and the social and infrastructural problems that traders and markets face in contemporary Mexico City. The argument usually unfolds like this: "Alongside the evolution and modernisation of the retail sector, the backwardness [*rezago*] of the regulations increases the disadvantages of the markets vis-à-vis the [current] competitive environment. This situation motivates the need to legislate and contribute to the

Table 6. Initiatives to reform the 1951 Markets Bylaw for the Federal District

	1997	1998		2002	2005	2010		2017
Party	Multiparty	PRD	PRI	PRI	PVEM	PAN	PRD	PRI
Name	Iniciativa de ley de mercados públicos del Distrito Federal	Iniciativa de ley de mercados públicos del Distrito Federal	Iniciativa de ley de mercados del Distrito Federal	Iniciativa de decreto de ley de mercados públicos en el Distrito Federal	Iniciativa de decreto por el que se crea la ley de mercados y comercio ambulante para el Distrito Federal	Iniciativa con proyecto de decreto por el que se crea la ley de mercados públicos del Distrito Federal	Iniciativa de decreto de ley de mercados públicos del Distrito Federal	Iniciativa que crea la ley de mercados públicos de la Ciudad de México
Rationale for reform	- Obsolescence of the regulation - Growing competition in the retail sector - Need to modernise the public markets - Need to democratise traders organisations - Avoid legal ambiguity - Markets' deterioration	- Eliminate legal loopholes - 1950s governing bodies does not exist - Guarantee the markets' preservation - Eradicate corruption	- Obsolescence of the regulation - Eradicate corruption - Guarantee the markets' preservation - Growing competition in the retail sector	- Obsolescence of the regulation - Markets' economic decline - Abandonment and deterioration - Strengthen markets' social function - Make markets competitive	- Obsolescence of the regulation - Eliminate legal loopholes - Provide legal certainty to the traders - Protect consumers' rights - Markets' deterioration	- Obsolescence of the regulation - Eliminate legal loopholes - Eradicate corruption - Growing competition in the retail sector - Need to democratise traders organisations	- Obsolescence of the regulation - Growing competition in the retail sector - Markets' deterioration - Eliminate legal loopholes	- Obsolescence of the regulation - Markets' economic decline - Abandonment and deterioration - Make markets competitive
Definition of markets and traders	- Reaffirms the markets' inalienable, imprescriptible, and nonseizable character - Defines traders as "stallholders" *(locatarios)* - Permits must be renewed annually	- Reaffirms the markets' public character - Revenues can be obtained by renting parts of the markets - Defines traders as concessionaires (*permisionarios*) - Permits must be renewed annually	- Reaffirms the markets' inalienable, imprescriptible, and nonseizable character - Defines traders as "rights holders" (*titular de derechos*) - Permits must be renewed annually	- Reaffirms the markets' inalienable, imprescriptible, and nonseizable character - Government must provide energy, water, and security - Defines traders as "rights holders" (*titular de derechos*) - No need to renew permits as they have no expiration date	- Reaffirms the markets' inalienable, imprescriptible, and nonseizable character - Defines traders as "traders with a fixed stall" (*vendedor con puesto fijo*) - Permits must be renewed every three years	- Revenues can be obtained by renting parts of the markets - Traders are defined as "rights holders" (*titular de derechos*) - Permits have no expiration date (*vigencia indeterminada*) - Permits must be renewed annually	- Reaffirms the markets' inalienable, imprescriptible, and nonseizable character - Defines traders as concessionaires (*concesionarios*) - Permits are "concessions"	- Reaffirms the markets' inalienable, imprescriptible, and nonseizable character - Defines traders as concessionaires *(concesionarios)* - Permits as "concessions" - Permits must be renewed every three years
Key regulatory and institutional changes	- Allows multiple organisations per market - Specifies the powers of SEDECO and the district governments - Creates the traders' General Assembly and Executive Committee - Updates the business catalogue - Specifies the grounds for permit cancellation - Specifies penalties and updates fines - Allows traders to have up to three stalls	- Specifies the powers of SEDECO and the district governments - Specifies the grounds for permit cancellation - Specifies penalties and updates fines - Bans street vending and supermarkets in the markets' surroundings - Creates new funding schemes - Creates a social security scheme for traders - Diversifies taxation according to business type	- Promotes traders' role in markets' management - Limits the role of markets' official managers - Updates the business catalogue - Specifies the powers of SEDECO - Creates the traders' General Assembly and Executive Committee - Promotes self-management to guarantee maintenance - Allows each trader to have up to three stalls	- Promotes self-management to guarantee maintenance - Allows traders to appoint representatives in district governments - Creates the Programme of Construction, Preservation, Modernisation, and Supply - Promotes the reactivation of the markets' nurseries - Updates the business catalogue - Allows traders to control the markets' toilets and nurseries	- Transfers regulation to the Finance and Government offices - Appoints officials for law enforcement - Determines that traders must provide parking for consumers and hire their own security staff - Establishes that traders must maintain and repair the markets	- Allows the operation of anchor stores (banks, pharmacies) - Allows events and activities to attract customers - Updates the business catalogue - Simplifies administrative procedures - Establishes that toliets revenues must be used in the markets	- Allows the use of card payment methods in the markets - Regulates *concentraciones* as public markets - Specifies the grounds for permit cancellations - Specifies penalties and updates fines - Establishes that trader organisations have economic goals - Sanctions traders like private businesses	- Promotes self-management to guarantee maintenance - Allows traders to appoint representatives in district governments - Creates the Programme of Construction, Preservation, Modernisation, and Supply - Updates the business catalogue - Appoints officials for law enforcement

Source: Author. Based on ARDF, 1997; GP-PRD, 1998, 2010; GP-PRI, 1998, 2002, 2010; GP-PVEM, 2005; and GP-PAN, 2010.

markets' development, since their Bylaw dates from 1951 and, after 46 years, it has become obsolete" (ARDF, 1997, p.19). From the state agents' perspective, the obsolescence of the Bylaw has played a key role in the markets' deterioration, as, in the opinion of Raúl (central government official, 30-40, I), "it hinders […] progress because traders stick to that 1951 mentality. It's hard to do more [meaning improving the markets] because the traders are still attached [to that mindset]."

As the "Key regulatory and institutional changes" row shows, the elements that trigger the need for reform have led multiple political actors to envision markets' governance differently. Although some of these initiatives introduce changes that, at first glance, bring benefits to the markets, traders have consistently opposed them. Even when they reaffirm the 1951 markets' public character and barely change the procedures to obtain and renew permits—as the "Definitions of markets and traders" row reveals—traders have successfully challenged their enactment on several occasions. For this, traders have good reasons that emerge out of their understanding of the value and function of the 1951 Bylaw, but also of their interpretation of legislative initiatives developed to advance other interests than the traders'. In these political-legal battles, traders deploy popular infrastructural politics to advance a clear legislative agenda that meets their needs, interests, and aspirations. Thus, in the past 20 years, traders have expressed their valid legal and political reasons to oppose the new laws, revealing how they have engaged with expert knowledge and translated their understanding into politics that react against what they experience as anti-democratic law-making processes.

Traders who advocate for the 1951 Bylaw tend to highlight that its reform threatens the economic, social, political, and material foundations of trader communities. In their view, defending the Bylaw means preserving their rights, regardless of the obsolescence of some of its articles or its limitations in terms of solving administrative or infrastructural problems. The defence of the Bylaw emphasises its most valuable aspects, in particular what traders consider its capacity to protect the socio-political conditions that underlie the reproduction of markets. As discussed in chapter 1 regarding the defence of patronage as resistance, the defence of the Bylaw can be described as an example of the conservative features of popular infrastructural politics, which traders develop alongside counter-privatisation arguments in a similar fashion as Rosa (2017) and Boldrini and Malizia (2014) have shown in other Latin American marketplaces. In this context, defending the Bylaw translates into defending gained rights and into preserving the dominant legal order around the markets rather than subverting it. This conservatism in traders' political practices ultimately revolves around preserving their means

of subsistence, as other examples will show. This defence involves developing counterarguments, which trader leaders convey most effectively by invoking the markets' history and other regulations that they consider support their views on the law. These strategic interpretations are, for example, mobilised by Alfonso (trader leader, 60-70, I) and José (trader leader, 40-50, I), who portray the importance of the Bylaw's origins, intentions, and content:

> Alfonso: If you read the Bylaw, [you'll find that] it benefits [the traders]. It was made to protect us. It's untouchable, or almost untouchable, because some ignorant representatives have tried to change it. What we [the traders] want is just an update… an update, not its alteration […] It was written in 1951 [in Miguel Alemán's presidential term], [then president] Adolfo Ruiz Cortines kept it, and [president] Adolfo López Mateos, who inaugurated [my] market, did the same and completed the markets' project.
>
> José: What we want is to preserve the principles of our [1951] Bylaw because, although it seems old, it's from nineteen fifty-something, it's functional. […] I think that the Bylaw should be the basis [of any new law.] Perhaps it's necessary to change some terms because [the] names [of some institutions] have changed, but I do think that [the 1951 Bylaw] should be the keystone.

The traders' opposition to reform is not completely inflexible, but it is uncompromising with respect to introducing major changes in the Bylaw's content, particularly regarding state protection. The key argument here is that "the Bylaw was well made [and none of] the seven law initiatives [that the authorities] have presented to replace it is convincing," as Antonio (trader leader, 60-70, I) states. In the same vein, but with the intonation of a zealous advocate, Virgilio (trader leader, 60-70, I) says that "the people who wrote the [1951] Markets Bylaw were visionaries," and although he initially "estimated that the Bylaw's merits could last for a hundred years, from [19]51 to [20]51," he now believes that "since we're still using it, it can serve one, two, or three hundred years more."

A key aspect of these struggles to preserve the 1951 Bylaw revolves around the traders' legal definition and their responsibilities regarding the markets. The 1951 Bylaw defines them as "permanent traders" (*comerciantes permanentes*), "who have obtained a permit [*empadronamiento*] to trade indefinitely [*por tiempo indeterminado*] in a fixed place that can be considered permanent [a public market]" (Gobierno de la República, 1951, art. 3). In article 31, however, the Bylaw indicates that permits must be renewed annually for free. According to officials and politicians interviewed during my fieldwork, this definition has led to misinterpretations, particularly around the legal consequences of the term "permanent." Similarly, in an attempt to eliminate legal loopholes, the legislative initiatives have introduced new definitions:

> Stallholder: It is the natural person to whom the public administration of the Federal District has granted the rights via a permit (*cédula de empadronamiento*) to trade in the public markets in his capacity of concessionaire (*permisionario*) (GP-PRD, 1998, p.152).
>
> Concessionaire: The person who holds a concession (*título de concesión*) to exploit a stall in a public market (GP-PRD, 2010, p.182).
>
> Stallholder: The natural person who holds a concession (*título de concesión*) granted by the government to trade personally, continually, regularly, and permanently goods and services in a public market in Mexico City (GP-PRI, 2017).

In chapter 5, I analysed how the notion of co-responsibility is shaping the traders-state relationship regarding repair and maintenance and the markets' revenue sources. In the legislative arena, the initiatives delimit powers and responsibilities, for example, by authorising SEDECO to rent the markets' advertising spaces and privatise the waste management and the refrigeration systems (GP-PRD, 1998, p.149); by promoting the self-management scheme for traders to take charge of the markets' maintenance and operation (GP-PRI, 1998, p.18); or by appointing inspectors that can enforce law compliance (GP-PVEM, 2005, pp.17–18).

Concerned about their potential negative effects, traders have opposed these changes and prevented the transformation of the definitions that give them legal identity and status. The ongoing discussion about what legal figure best represents the traders is a political arena in which traders advance terms such as "permanent trader" (*comerciante permanente*) and "usufructuary" (*usufructuario*) but challenge "concessionaire" (*concesionario*) or any other name that poses a risk to their right to use the stalls, stay in the markets, and receive subsidies "indefinitely." From the perspective of those who oppose these reforms, the 1951 Bylaw protects these rights. In the texture of his own language and in a dissident, unorthodox way, Virgilio (trader leader, 60-70, I) showed me the relevance of this discussion when he handed me a compilation of the public markets' regulations, asked me to read "carefully" the definitions, and then presented his interpretations. For Virgilio, traders are not concession holders (*concesionarios*), but usufructuary rights holders (*usufructuarios*).[34] In

[34] Although the Oxford English Dictionary (2020e; 2020b; 2020a) shows that the terms usufructuary and concessionaire refer to a temporary right to use and reap the profits of a property owned by a government, commercial organisation, etc., Virgilio's redefines them to build an interpretation that highlights the traders' concerns, needs, and interests regarding the 1951 Bylaw.

his own words, this means that they are "partners of the government to provide a public service in the markets."

Against the official interpretations,[35] Virgilio argued that "traders do not have concessions because of how they are granted and their characteristics. [Unlike permits,] you have to sign a concession certificate, pay a deposit; concessions are temporary and revocable […] If the government says, 'I want you to leave,' even with a 20-year concession, well, you have to leave. And if you don't leave, the authorities can evict you. That's a concession." Expanding on this argument about why permits are not concessions, Virgilio highlighted "in its third article, [the 1951 Bylaw] calls us 'permanent traders,' and, we think that this entitles us to a permanent usufruct." Moreover, he emphasised, "public markets are permanent spaces [for permit holders to trade] indefinitely. Indefinitely means two things: that the government does not state a permit termination date, and that we're not obliged to stay in the market our entire life." In this sense, traders can "exploit usufruct lifelong while the concession is temporary and its termination unilateral." As usufructuary rights holders who "are in full possession [of the stalls and the markets]," he states, "traders can transfer or inherit [them]" and "the government cannot evict us." By recalling that "traders haven't heard of any eviction in 67 years," Virgilio strengthens his argument about why their permits are not concessions, as the terms to terminate a concession have not been implemented in the markets.

In this light, the defence of the 1951 Bylaw revolves around the traders' rights and legal status vis-à-vis the state and the markets. Regardless of the content of new initiatives, the defence of the 1951 Bylaw embodies a struggle around the double political character of the traders' popular infrastructural politics. On the one hand, they organise and mobilise to defend the patronage relationship, and, on the other hand, they fight for autonomy. Both struggles converge contradictorily in these political-legal battles to preserve and reform the Bylaw. The continual attempts and the persistent rejections over the past 30 years reveal the contentious nature of these discussions and the value and functions that traders confer to this mid-twentieth-century regulation. As I have shown, this is an instance of conflict in which the traders' concerns and ideas about the function of the law have played a critical role in rejecting and blocking multiple top-down law-making processes. In the following section, I look to these political-legal battles from a different perspective, one in which the traders mobilise their

[35] Based on the Law of the Property Regime and the Public Service (GDF, 1996, artt. 16-32 and 75-104), Raúl (central government official, 30-40, I) and Rubén (district official, 50-60, I) argued that traders can only be concessionaires, and that only by preventing the reform of the 1951, traders have been able to maintain this legal loophole. Raúl and Rubén insisted that this legal loophole has led the traders to believe that they own the stalls.

popular infrastructural politics to make a series of administrative regulations to meet their economic and political needs and interests.

6.3. Negotiated updates: Fill the gaps

The preservation of regulatory hierarchies, as in the struggles around the 1951 Bylaw, is a key theme that illustrates the implications of the traders' direct involvement in law-making processes. In this section, I explore how the update of administrative regulations was transformed into the legitimation of traders' businesses that were operating informally or illegally in public markets and into the redistribution of powers between central and district authorities to tackle corruption, mismanagement, and manipulation in district governments. To introduce this issue, I explore the political implications regarding the publication of the 2015 Catalogue of Businesses (GDF, 2015a) and the implementation of the SICOMPCDMX (Registration System for the Traders of the Public Markets of Mexico City) in 2014. As part of a broader regulatory process that led to the enactment of four administrative regulations in 2015 (Table 7), these two examples illustrate how traders successfully incorporate their economic and political agendas into new regulations.

According SEDECO (2016, pp.21–24), these regulations represent a milestone in the markets' legal history, since "a serious, deep, and rational revision" showed that "for 62 years, only three regulations governed the markets' operation: the 1951 Bylaw, the 2002 Norms for seasonal street vending, and the 2010 Guidelines for the Operation of Public Markets." In line with the need-for-reform discourse, SEDECO advance the "harmonisation, update, and

Table 7. 2015 updated administrative regulations

Regulation	Key responsibilities
2015 Agreement to Establish the Guidelines for the Operation of Public Markets in the Federal District	- Updates and optimises the procedures regarding the public markets' administration (licencing, stall management, district governments' accountability and transparency, public toilets, and car parks).
2015 Catalogue of Businesses	- Updates, homogenises, and simplifies the types of businesses authorised in public markets.
2015 Norms for Seasonal Street Vending	- Establishes the official periods and basic regulations for traders to set up temporary stalls in the markets' surroundings *(romerías).*
2015 List of Official Public Markets in Mexico City	- Establishes the public markets' official number, name, and address to determine their eligibility to receive subsidies and other benefits.

Source: Author. Based on SEDECO, 2016; GDF, 2015a, 2015b, 2015c, 2015d.

contextualisation" of these regulations "to strengthen the markets' competitiveness [and] to eliminate uncertainty, inaccuracy, and fragmentation regarding the government's functions." However, as I will show, the traders' active participation in the process allowed them to regularise their commercial activities and rebalance their political position vis-à-vis the district governments.

According to my interviewees, the negotiation and enactment of these legal updates became possible because of the leadership of Salomón Chertorivski as head of SEDECO between 2012 and 2017. During this period, SEDECO created a favourable political environment for traders to engage actively in law-making processes, as this institution advocated continuously for the markets' improvement.[36] As a result, not only did SEDECO publish the 2015 administrative regulations and created the SICOMPCDMX, but also the Policy for the protection and promotion of the public markets of Mexico City (2013-2018) and the Programme for the promotion and improvement of the Public Markets (SEDECO, 2013; SEDECO, 2019), with which SEDECO allocates annually the special fund for repair and maintenance (as discussed in chapter 5). Furthermore, in 2016 SEDECO published the Decree that recognises as an intangible cultural heritage the traditions of public markets in Mexico City. This legal activism in favour of trader communities was complemented by SEDECO with a series of training programmes on marketing, legality, and entrepreneurism, which, altogether, contributed to creating a favourable environment for collaboration between traders and state agents.

This political stance on trader communities was presented by Raúl (central government official, 30-40, I) as a priority during this period. When Chertorivski took office in 2012, Raúl remembers that SEDECO officials were told to stick to this general message when meeting traders: "Let's sit down, let's listen to your needs, and let's create regulations based on those needs and the problems you face every day." This approach created a political space for traders to participate directly in developing these regulations, as Antonio (trader leader, 60-70, I) recalls: "[Chertorivski] invited us to contribute to the Catalogue of Businesses [and] our organisation and three others wrote the guidelines for markets' operation, including the manual. This manual determines the paperwork [that traders and district officials have to deal with] to request changes in the market. It specifies the requirements, such as birth certificates, national

[36] Salomón Chertorivski emerged as a "unique" political figure in trader leaders' accounts. For several of my interviewees, he had been a committed advocate of the traders' rights and a respectful official and politician as head of SEDECO. His advocacy for the markets was widely recorded by the media and the traders. In 2018, when I was conducting my fieldwork, he was campaigning as city mayor pre-candidate for the PRD-PAN-MC alliance, for which he got support from different trader communities, who invited him to rally at the markets (D'MAYOREO, 2017; López, 2017; Aguilar, 2017; El Universal, 2017).

identity cards, proof of address." Given the history of chronic neglect and subordination, this inclusion built a political road for mutual benefit. On the one hand, SEDECO advanced its agenda of administrative modernisation, and, on the other hand, the traders regularised their businesses and negotiated the creation of a centralised system to monitor and prevent corruption and mismanagement in the markets.

Although framed as a process of administrative modernisation, the enactment of this new regulatory framework did not affect the position of the 1951 Bylaw, thus focusing only on secondary regulations. When discussing the relevance and limitations of this update, Antonio (trader leader, 60-70, I) clarified that "the guidelines do not pass over the Bylaw, they only specify how to proceed [in administrative terms]."[37] This allowed traders to incorporate their economic and political agendas into the decision-making process from the very beginning. In particular, the amendment of the Catalogue of Businesses is central to understanding how traders' economic and political interests became part of these administrative rules. The update of this Catalogue aimed at simplifying the lack of order in the categorisation of business types, which, according to SEDECO (2016, p.36), amounted to 25,000 types, and according to Antonio (trader leader, 60-70, I) to 58,000. As Antonio shows, the traders' participation was crucial to making the classification process easier by defining 108 business types:

> When we began to write the guidelines, we found out that there were more than 58,000 business types. Before [this Catalogue], if you were selling fruits but you wanted to sell eggs, you had to request it to be added to your permit. […] There was a fellow trader with 17 add-ons. [In the past,] there was a Catalogue with around 90 business types. If you wanted to innovate, let's say, selling mobile phones, having a laundry, the authorities would give you the business type 77. This business type was not official, it was for businesses that emerged out of the laws of supply and demand, but it was never published officially.

In addition, SEDECO (2016, p.36) states that this update simplified and made more flexible the bureaucratic process of authorising new business types into the Catalogue: "This is a flexible Catalogue. If a business type is licit and does not breach any law, it can be incorporated for the benefit of the public markets' competitiveness, specialisation, and potential." Both for SEDECO and the traders, this update made more flexible the introduction of new business in the markets and, more importantly, it regularised commercial activities that were already

[37] Months after its publication, the Frente de Comerciantes del Servicio Público de Mercados de México, led by Edgar Álvarez, rejected these new regulations claiming that its content violates the 1951 Bylaw and demanded new negotiations with the authorities. A key point of their demands revolved around the permits' expiration date and renewal, which they claimed should be stated as "indefinite" (Notimex, 2015).

Image 15. Rebalancing power relations

Information campaign to remind the traders—and the authorities—of the rules governing administrative procedures. This poster in Anáhuac Market, Miguel Hidalgo district, reads: "Dear trader, permit issuing and renewal regarding the stalls in the public markets are: in person and free of charge." **Source**: Author, 2018.

operating without authorisation and tackled the arbitrariness in the authorisation process controlled by district government. With the new options included in the Catalogue, traders can specialise in any of the following products: automotive parts; organic products (divided into multiple categories in the list); piñatas; bags and purses; eggs; perfumes; fodder; cabinetmaking; Yucatec food; international food; jewellery; and baby equipment (GDF, 2015a, pp.35–43). In terms of popular infrastructural politics, the Catalogue emerges as a dynamic political arena in which traders negotiate their autonomy to adapt their businesses to changing consumption patterns. Just a year before the publication of the 2015 updates, the traders negotiated the list of allowed businesses, including for the first time the following activities and products: internet café, mobile phones, photography, electrical appliances, and opticians (Valdez, 2014). As in 2015, the adaptations of this list involved the regularisation of commercial activities already operating in the markets.

Similarly, traders have improved their political position vis-à-vis district governments by updating the Guidelines for the Operation of Public Markets. The new guidelines have played

a key role in rebalancing the relationship between traders, district governments, and central government. Traders' participation in the Guidelines' elaboration gave SEDECO a more active role in permit-issuing, stall transfer, and business-type change. By championing discourses of administrative efficiency, SEDECO and the traders enforced accountability and transparency on 16 district governments (Image 15). According to Rubén (district official, 50-60, I) and Antonio (trader leader, 60-70, I), the new guidelines simplified and homogenised what was previously:

> Rubén: [the] arbitrary implementation of administrative procedures [by district governments]. There were districts such as Xochimilco or Venustiano Carranza where low-rank officials used to issue or authorise the permits. You can imagine the levels of corruption. Now there is only one person in charge of these procedures, the [district's] General Director of Government and Legal Affairs […] It's a general rule applied citywide [and] has brought some fresh air into the markets' regulations.

Since,

> Antonio: before [the update], only the district governments were entitled to issue permits. They had the power to do whatever they wanted, but not anymore. Now it's a tripartite decision, and SEDECO definitely has to intervene [in the process]. With SEDECO's support, it's possible to prevent [district authorities] from extorting money from the traders.

Specifically, traders negotiated the creation of the SICOMPCDMX, a single electronic registration system to keep a record of the traders and make more transparent and efficient the administrative procedures regarding permit requests (GDF, 2013, p.3). Operated by the 16 district governments, but controlled and monitored by SEDECO, this administrative system transformed SEDECO into a more active political intermediary in trader-district government relations by addressing issues of accountability and transparency. For Raúl (central government official, 30-40, I):

> [SEDECO] created the system to scrutinise the district authorities' procedures, and to increase traders' awareness [of their rights]: 'Hey, your request is now being processed using this [electronic] system and the application forms that we designed, which have different security controls.' We worked on this regulation with the consensus of the traders and focused on their needs, since they've been facing different problems at the district level.

José (trader leader, 40-50, I) mirrors these views but explicitly addresses the economic and political tensions revolving around these administrative changes. From his experience, the new guidelines have been crucial to deterring the corruption, mismanagement, and manipulation that subject trader communities to the arbitrariness and unpredictability of district officials:

> SEDECO reformed the guidelines and issued new application forms for permits. They are barcoded and printed on security paper. Each code indicates a different district [and SEDECO officials can identify each procedure (Image 16)]: 'Ah, these permits were requested in Venustiano Carranza district and involved this type of businesses,' […] 'How much money [did] they extort?' This is the type of control SEDECO was looking for, to know how much [district governments] were extorting per procedure. That's what we really needed to deal with, to bring the district governments under control with the new application forms, to know how many procedures they do and how much they extort from the traders. Because all district officials say that they don't charge for these services, but they do! If you want to transfer your stall, they will tell you 'Yes, you can, but, you know, you'll have to give some money to the markets' manager and the Markets Office chief if you don't want to have any problem.' And it's the same when you want to change your business type, or even when you want to renew your licence.

Thus, what was presented by the authorities as an administrative modernisation became a crucial opportunity for traders to incorporate their economic and political agendas in a set of secondary regulations. These agendas materialise the potential of traders' popular infrastructural politics in defining the limits of reform by rebalancing their position vis-à-vis state agents. By exploring how the 2015 Catalogue of Businesses and the SICOMPCDMX changed, I show how traders move from fierce opposition to reform in the case of the 1951 Bylaw to active involvement in law making, thus protecting or challenging the existing socio-political order in two different legal registers. In this context, traders advanced their concerns about the practices through which district governments control them economically and politically, and contributed to transforming another institutional actor, SEDECO, into a political intermediary whose advocacy for accountability has benefited the traders. In the next section, I examine how market traders navigate political networks to deter law enactment and negotiate favourable terms in law-making processes that involve the closure of public markets.

Image 16. Keeping an eye on district governments

Article 8. A code and a number will be allocated for each permit issuing, renewal, or a 90-day authorisation procedure. It will be assigned as follows: the first letters refer to the district government, the last letter refers to the type of procedure, and the following digits refer to the petition number. This will be limited by the number of traders registered in each district. The codes and numbers are:

	Code Assigned		
District	**Issuing**	**Renewal**	**Autorización**
Álvaro Obregón	AOC 000001	AOR 000001	AOA 000001
Azcapotzalco	AZCC 000001	AZCR 000001	AZCA 000001
Benito Juárez	BJC 000001	BJR 000001	BJA 000001
Coyoacán	COYC 000001	COYR 000001	COYA 000001
Cuajimalpa	CUJC 000001	CUJR 000001	CUJA 000001

The introduction of new administrative protocols, such as the use of specific codes per procedure, was the main mechanism to prevent corruption at the district level in the 2015 update. **Source**: Adapted from excerpt, GDF, 2015b.

6.4. Freezing the animal welfare reform

Over the past 20 years, discussion about animal protection and welfare has become more relevant in federal and local legislative agendas, particularly in Mexico City. During this period, non-governmental organisations and political parties have passed a series of legislative initiatives and campaigned to increase the public awareness regarding animal rights (GP-PVEM, 2013; ALDF, 2014; ALDF, 2015; ALDF, 2017a). These laws and campaigns have denounced animal trafficking, bullfighting, dogfighting, cockfighting, circuses, dolphinariums, and other forms of neglect, abandonment, and violence against animals. In recent years, these campaigns and legislative initiatives have become more critical about how animals are commercialised legally, particularly in public markets. In this sense, this legislation has posed several challenges to well-established commercial practices in public markets, particularly to those specialised in animal trade, such as Nuevo San Lázaro, Emilio Carranza, Robles Dominguez, and Sonora markets. In this section, I explore how traders deployed popular infrastructural politics to freeze simultaneously two legislative initiatives that explicitly banned the commercialisation of animals in public markets. By looking at how traders navigate federal and urban political networks, I emphasise the contexts in which traders built political alliances, lobbied strategically, engaged in expert-knowledge production, and capitalised institutional time frames to temporarily prevent the enactment of new animal protection and welfare laws. Thus, I capture the political capacity of trader communities to handle what Thompson (1971, p.83) recognised as the external demands to control marketplaces and "hedge [traders] around with many restrictions." In this struggle, the external demands seek to impose on traders what are considered progressive moral and legal obligations towards non-human species.

During my fieldwork in 2018, the regional trader organisation I worked with held several meetings to discuss the PVEM's (Ecologist Green Party of Mexico) latest attempts to reform the General Law of Ecological Balance and Environmental Protection in the Senate and MORENA's (Movement of National Regeneration) initiative to change the Law of Animal Protection for the Federal District in the Legislative Assembly of Mexico City. When I joined the discussion, the traders had just marched to the Senate on February 6th to demand the dismissal of the federal initiative (MONACOSO, 2018) and had engaged in permanent negotiations with Mexico City representatives and the local animal protection agencies. Traders' concerns about the initiatives revolved around four main issues. Firstly, that the PVEM was proposing similar changes in both the federal and the local legislation with the

intention "to strictly ban animal trading in private homes and public and street markets […] by removing district authorities of their faculty to issue authorisations on the matter" (GP-PVEM, 2016, p.42; see also ALDF, 2014; Notimex, 2014). Article 25 of MORENA's proposal indicated the strict prohibition "to sell live animals in public markets or in any other premises that do not comply with the requirements in article 28" (GDF, 2017). Secondly, that these proposals introduced the legal figure "domestic fauna" (*fauna doméstica*) to equally protect wildlife species and those bred for companionship (pets) (GP-PVEM, 2016, p.19), while MORENA's initiative changed "living animals" to "companion living animals" (GP-MORENA, 2017, p.18). Thirdly, that governments would "prohibit the display of domestic animals in animal stores, which, instead, could be done using printed or digital catalogues" (GP-PVEM, 2016, p.20). Fourthly, that authorities would "establish the minimum infrastructural, technical, and operational standards for traders to keep animals in acceptable conditions" (GP-PVEM, 2016, p.46; see also Cámara de Diputados, 2016).

For Nuevo San Lázaro, Emilio Carranza, Robles Domínguez, and Sonora markets, these regulations involved critical commercial and infrastructural challenges, as they have specialised in so-called "companion living animals" and face multiple regulatory and financial limitations to transform the markets' stall-based spatial configuration. When advocating for animal welfare and the prohibition of animal trade, the PVEM (Partido Verde, 2017) has emphasised these limitations, arguing that "people that sell animals [in public markets] have inadequate [infrastructural] conditions, and [given their lack of] expert knowledge, they risk the animals' health and make them suffer." Moreover, the party argues that under these conditions, "pets are treated as commodities rather than as sentient animals." As part of a political stance that condemns popular animal trade, PVEM representatives in Mexico City have targeted public markets, to the point of claiming that the party will fight "to close down all [animal] trade establishments, including public markets," as "animals are exhibited in dreadful conditions" (ALDF, 2017b; see also Pezet, 2017).

In this sense, traders have mobilised not only against the initiatives presented by these state agents, but also against the representations of public markets as examples of disregard for animal welfare and non-compliance. During my fieldwork, I recorded how this opposition led to the formation of an alliance among the four markets directly affected, other members of the public markets network, and their allies in the animal breeding and distribution chain, as the call to mobilisation reveals (MONACOSO, 2018). All of them came together around the trader organisation led by Antonio, which transformed the public markets into crucial

political spaces from which to advance a different regulatory agenda regarding animal welfare. In this space, traders, breeders, and veterinarians built a collective strategy to stop the enactment of these initiatives. In this context, the trader leaders deployed popular infrastructural politics around a shared interest and mobilised their political knowledge, skills, and relationships to defend a way of making a living: being a trader. And while trader leaders taught themselves the specificities of animal trade and legislation, the traders emerged as "the muscle" to confront the initiatives.

During the meetings, the trader organisation specialised in fiscal issues adopted a new political cause and incorporated it into its main lines of discourse and action, embedding this legal struggle in the core problems of popular infrastructural politics. One of these problems consisted in understanding the impact of these initiatives not only on the four markets, but on the entire markets network. Under this light, the prohibition became an action that challenged the traders' anti-absolutist stance, as they define it as a biased and unfair political decision that threatens the public markets' commercial autonomy. So, traders mobilised under the slogan "If they close one market, they can close them all" (Antonio, trader leader, 60-70, M). In line with the discussion on how traders call to unity and mobilisation, this slogan addressed the need to support the specialised markets in their fight for the withdrawal of the initiatives, as any legislative change would create new threats for the whole network and trader community. In a strategic move, these traders gathered around the slogan "No to Prohibition! Yes to Regulation! Save Popular Trade!" Thus, they emphasised their opposition to the government's absolutist approaches to animal trade in public markets and demanded regulatory measures that, as Jesús (trader leader, 40-50, I) puts it, "do not mess with" traders' activities and spaces. This meant that, in light of the public markets' financial and infrastructural limitations, the rules should be adapted to the traders' reality, just as Adán (trader leader, 40-50, M) argues: "[the government] regulates excessively and doesn't […] consider the real conditions in which traders work. [The authorities] don't realise that to regulate does not mean to block [the economic activity and that the rules must be made in a way that] the citizens will be able to comply with them." From this perspective, the absolutist approach of the initiatives does not consider the conditions in which popular trade is performed, and imposes severe regulations that threaten its entire operation.

In addition, traders consider that these initiatives mainly target popular trade to benefit large pet corporations such as Petco and Maskota, whose capital reserves and independent

operation allow them to more easily comply with the proposed regulations.[38] At a meeting with central and district government officials regarding the Law of Animal Protection for the Federal District, Antonio (trader leader, 60-70, M) highlighted this issue:

> Public markets are the most fragile, they're only four. In the original legislative proposal, these large pet corporations were not allowed [to sell animals], but now the proposal is only about public markets and street vending. So, we think that there's a [hidden] agreement [between the government and these companies] for these transnational corporations to control the pet retail sector. [These initiatives] affect [small-scale] pet supplies traders, and these large companies only sell imported products, they don't sell Mexican products. […] Our main concern [as market traders] is to be taken into account [by the authorities] so that we don't lose our source of income, because many depend on [the retailing of pets and pet food and accessories]. I know it's important to take care of the animals, but it's evil that these laws do not take into consideration how they affect the human beings [the traders].

From this perspective, these initiatives can put the public markets out of business given the multiple difficulties that they would face if they had to comply with more strict standards regarding animal welfare. As Joel (trader leader, 40-50, I) critically recognises:

> This is a situation of great concern for the traders [because] these companies are organised, clean, and keep the animals healthy […] whereas the public markets… If you got to the markets, you'll see that the situation is bad. The animals are not kept or exhibited in good conditions, the stalls are too small, you cannot even walk. For the traders that's okay, but for the animal rights activists, that's something that the animals don't deserve.

As traders are constantly challenged by the ethical and political implications of how animal trade is actually performed in the markets,[39] traders deploy their repertoire of political tools to challenge initiatives that question their commercial practices. A critical aspect of this political-legal battle against the animal welfare initiatives was how they built and used their political relations and how they monitored the unfolding of broader political processes to freeze the enactment. To challenge the federal law, traders drew upon their political allies considering that they would be willing to support their cause. In this context, the traders met representatives from different political parties, but a key ally from the PRD was essential to bring the traders' agenda into the Senate to block the PVEM initiative. At a meeting with

[38] Petco and Maskota are an American and a Mexican pet and pet supplies retailers that have been operating in Mexico since 2013 and 1994, respectively. As different sources reveal (El Financiero, 2019; Arteaga, 2018; Celis, 2019; Ramírez, 2016; Mares, 2015; P. Gómez, 2013), in the 2010s, these companies have developed aggressive expansion plans to increase and consolidate their presence in the sector.

[39] During my fieldwork, I visited some of these public markets, but given the ongoing conflicts and the prevailing distrust between traders, officials, and animal rights activists, I was asked to avoid recording anything related to how animal trade is performed. Although the legal and infrastructural challenges are different for each one of these four markets, I could attest the multiple difficulties for traders to meet their obligations regarding the animals' well-being.

traders, Luis (representative, 50-60, M) emphasised his long-standing relationship with the organisation's leaders and his commitment to defending the markets. In the following excerpt from his speech, I highlight how traders' and officials' interests converge, and how, ultimately, the representative championed the traders' interests and needs:

> The PVEM is not a real green party, it was banned from the Global Greens organisation because of its anti-human rights campaigns [supporting the death penalty in Mexico]. And now they want to prohibit animal, pet trade in public markets. It's indefensible. […] What we know is that they're trying to benefit large pet companies that aim at controlling this retail sector. If we remember their previous initiatives, like banning the use of animals in circuses, you know what happened, it was a disaster. They said it was to prevent cruelty to animals, but those animals ended up abandoned, ill, and only the businesspeople in the entertainment industry benefited from that law. We've blocked the PVEM's initiative to ban dolphinariums in the Chamber of Deputies, because they want to ban the small ones, not the big ones. So, the PVEM is protecting the big businesses, and it's the same with the prohibition to sell pets in public markets. […] To enact this initiative, the PVEM needs 50 per cent plus one vote. So, in the Senate, there's a risk that it passes, as they can get the votes from the PRI and some PAN representatives. […] But don't worry, we, the PRD, have an agreement with some PAN and MORENA representatives to block this possibility. […] I'm going to try to convince the PAN representatives to vote against this initiative. […] But the PRD parliamentary group is going to oppose the initiative in the Senate, and I'm here to ratify our commitment to support you until the end. Be sure about that.

As part of this process to freeze the federal and local initiatives presented by the PVEM and MORENA, traders revealed a strategic understanding of the wider political cycles shaping the 2018 general election. In particular, traders were constantly assessing their political position vis-à-vis the results of the elections and the end and beginning of the legislative terms. In this context of change, the traders discussed their agenda regarding animal rights and public markets considering how the election would reorganise the political networks in which they had been and would be negotiating the initiatives. The traders' concerns regarding these political time frames revolved around the representatives' deadlines to vote on the initiatives, so they should stay vigilant until the end of the legislative term. At a meeting, Antonio (trader leader, 60-70, M) and Armando (trader leader, 40-50, M) illustrate the strategic character of this understanding around this specific political-legal battle:

> Antonio: [The end of the legislative term] is the right moment and we must take advantage of it. And the elections are approaching [in July 2018]. […] I was thinking that if the Legislative Assembly representatives make us wait and do not make clear their position [regarding the initiatives], we'll have to demonstrate in front of their offices. And they won't like that because their [political] bosses are going to give them a talk because they will have the angry people on them [in election time]. I hope we don't have to do that, but let's wait until Friday. […] Besides, the end of the legislative term is also

> approaching, it's a matter of days, and we have to be vigilant because they could approve the initiatives without us knowing. Remember, if they're not enacted before April 30th, we can rest easy.
>
> Armando: We have to take advantage of all we have done at the federal and local levels as soon as the new legislative terms begin. We can present our initiative of animal protection in the Legislative Assembly and wait to see if [a new representative] revives the federal law, because once this term ends, any initiative that was not discussed is going to be dismissed. […]

By freezing these initiatives, the traders delayed a legislative process that would directly affect how animal traders in the public markets network make a living. This postponement of how animal rights are enforced in popular trade shows how traders challenge new regulations and associated representations by mobilising their repertoire of political tools. In particular, they deploy their political relationships to advance their interests and needs in official instances. Given the markets' financial and infrastructural conditions and the social and economic configuration of popular animal trade, traders are aware of the high probabilities of seeing these initiatives reactivated sooner than later. As in the case of the 1951 Bylaw, these probabilities keep the traders' popular infrastructural politics active, because, as Armando (trader leader, 40-50, M) warns his fellow traders: "I can guarantee you that in no more than two years things will change [regarding the legislation on animal welfare], whether we want it or not. The problem for us is how we want that change to happen." In fact, they did not have to wait that long. As soon as the new legislative term began in October 2018, MORENA representatives presented a new initiative that aimed at banning animal trade in public markets (GP-MORENA, 2019).[40] In December 2019, market traders and allies mobilised, demanding the withdrawal of the initiative and their incorporation into the law-making process (Hernández, 2019), and after a couple of hours, they successfully delayed the reform of the animal welfare legislation once more (MONACOSO, 2019) (Image 17).

To complete this analysis of the traders' instances of contestation around regulations, I explore further their contradictory relationship with the rules and the authorities in the following sections. Here I look into how traders challenge the normative expectations around the publicness the markets while defending their autonomy and right to subsistence in the interstices of the state.

[40] The initiative was also an attempt to harmonise the federal and local legislations and create the Commission for Environment Preservation, Climate Change, and Ecological and Animal Protection to enforce more effectively the regulations (Congreso de la Ciudad de México, 2019b; Congreso de la Ciudad de México, 2019a; Congreso de la Ciudad de México, 2019c; Congreso de la Ciudad de México, 2019d).

Image 17. The muscle against the initiative

Market traders and allies mobilised on December 3rd, 2019, to stop what was the latest attempt to enact the reform of the Law of Animal Protection for the Federal District. The call to mobilisation invited all traders who sell living animals by stating: "If the initiative is approved, it will prohibit the traders from selling fish or any other animal. This initiative also prohibits selling meat in the public markets of Mexico City. Imagine the markets without butchers, poulterers, or fishmongers." **Source**: Mercado Zacatito, retrieved from https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=747699379042138&set=a.125741431237939 [16 August 2020].

6.5. Face up to stall grabbing

Although echoing the concept of land grabbing (Borras and Franco, 2013; Mollett, 2016), I use the term stall grabbing to refer to a much more restricted practice tending to the monopolisation of larger numbers of market stalls in the hands of small number of market traders. Unlike land grabbing, stall grabbing is not performed by large corporations or a phenomenon of global consequences. Rather, it is performed by subaltern urban actors and is both profit- and subsistence-oriented. Like land grabbing, however, stall grabbing is a form of spatial control that can limit the social benefits of collective ownership. Stall grabbing would be closer to what Bayat (2000, pp.545–546) calls "quiet encroachment," in the sense that it is a "silent, protracted but pervasive advance of the ordinary people on the propertied and powerful in order to survive and improve their lives" and a "quiet, largely atomized and prolonged mobilization […] without clear leadership, ideology or structured organization." However, unlike quiet encroachment, stall grabbing impacts the public character of Mexico City markets, and

therefore, its struggles and gains are not necessarily at the cost of "the state, the rich and the powerful" or beneficial for the "creation of the 'urban commons'," as Bayat (2000, p.546) and Gillespie (2017, p.7) have pointed out respectively. In this sense, stall grabbing better reflects the multifaceted and contradictory nature of popular infrastructural politics.[41]

"The stalls belong to the Mexico City government and the traders' permits are only concessions that the central government issues through the district governments." This was Antonio's (trader leader, 60-70, I) assertion when we talked about the markets' public nature. And according to Rubén (district official, 50-60, I), these permits do not grant traders the "right to own the stalls," but only "to use, exploit, or operate" them temporarily as established in the Law of the Property Regime and the Public Service (GDF, 1996, art. 87). In this light, both markets and stalls are public goods owned by the state. However, as the markets' "basic economic units," as Joel (trader leader, 40-50, I) calls them, stalls materialise much more than public goods. They have come to embody the traders' right to infrastructure, a source of income, and a shelter. Originally standardised in design, market stalls are not defined in the regulations, and their current form and size reflect the multiple stories of adaptation to traders' needs. Raúl (central government official, 30-40, I) estimates that one "can find stalls from 150- to 2.5-sq. m," and all are valuable assets whose management reveals tensions in terms of how traders circumvent existing regulatory frameworks, in particular, the 1951 Bylaw and the 2015 Guidelines for the Operation of Public Markets, by performing what could be called stall grabbing.

Stall grabbing is a practice that involves the development of an unauthorised outlet for market stalls, in which market traders sell them to anyone interest in buying. Stall grabbing also involves the tendency among traders to conceive the stalls as private assets rather than as state-owned public goods. As a spatial practice, stall grabbing involves multiple forms of infrastructure adaptation. For example, to create the 150-sq. m commercial unit mentioned by Raúl, traders must have merged several 2.5-sq. m stalls. This practice bypasses the existing regulations that establish the markets' public nature and determine stall allocation, thus overwriting these principles and mechanisms with the stalls' market value. In particular, traders circumvent the 1951 Bylaw, the 2015 Guidelines for the Operation of Public Markets,

[41] The concepts of popular infrastructural politics and quiet encroachment are not mutually exclusive, but their differences highlight the tensions around the economic, social, and political outcomes of the subaltern's performativity. As a concept concerned with the repertoire of political practices and discourses developed at the urban margins and through the interstices of the state, popular infrastructural politics can clearly encompass quiet encroachment as one among other political practices. In this case, quiet encroachment allows me to emphasise how traders command infrastructures in atomised but pervasive ways.

and the 1996 Law of the Property Regime and the Public Service, which together determine the stall allocation mechanisms (Gobierno de la República, 1951, artt. 32, 35-45; GDF, 2015b, artt. 30-34, 48-52; GDF, 1996, art. 86). According to these regulations, market traders are only entitled to one permit and one stall,[42] to transfer their permits to others—family members in the first place—free of charge and subject to authorisation. In addition, they cannot merge or sublet stalls or create monopolies (*monopolios familiares*) (GDF, 2015b, art. 14).

However, traders set prices for the stalls based on their commercial potential, which depends on the markets' location and the stalls' size, material condition, location within the market, and type of business granted. In various interviews and conversations, traders mentioned the existence of this unauthorised outlet for market stalls but were often cautious about revealing the details of its operations. On one occasion, a trader told me that even a small stall in La Merced market can worth around two million pesos given the markets' commercial value. Notwithstanding this caution, this outlet is publicly known, and an exploration of real estate websites can illustrate how this outlet operates and the factors influencing stall price setting. Contrasts between prices can be stark, as they express the differences and inequalities underlying the distribution of markets across the city and the estimated value of a stall according to the markets' location, for example, if in a poor neighbourhood (Table 8).

Table 8. Prices in the market stalls outlet

District	Market	Stall dimensions	Price	Specifications
Arenal, Azcapotzalco	Arenal Market	8 sq. m	190,000	Two merged stalls in the Fruits and vegetables zone
San Juan Tlihuaca, Azcapotzalco	San Juan Tlihuaca Market	9 sq. m	185,000	--
Roma, Cuauhtémoc	Medellín Market	--	1,200,000	Food zone
Roma, Cuauhtémoc	Medellín Market	24 sq. m	750,000	Butchers' zone
Cuchilla del Tesoro, Gustavo A. Madero	Cuchilla del Tesoro Market	9 sq. m	225,000	Two merged stalls
Anáhuac, Miguel Hidalgo	Anáhuac Market	9 sq. m	580,000	Two merged stalls in the Poultry zone
Felipe Ángeles, Venustiano Carranza	Unidad Rastro Market	8 sq. m	350,000	Two merged stalls in the Food zone
Jamaica, Venustiano Carranza	Jamaica Market	10 sq. m	400,000	Two merged stalls

Source: Author. Based on Vivanuncios, Mercado Libre, and Metros Cúbicos websites (2019).

[42] Some initiatives to reform the 1951 have proposed that traders could be entitled to have up to three stalls under one permit, which aims at regularising and limiting stall grabbing under a new criterion (see Table 6).

For example, a "recently renovated" stall in the food zone of Medellín Market in the middle-class Roma neighbourhood, "an optimum location," is sold for 1.2 million pesos (Vivanuncios, 2019). In the same market, a permit holder sells a 24 sq. m butcher's stall with two refrigeration chambers for 750,000 pesos. In contrast, two merged 4 sq. m, "all-documents-in-order" stalls located in the fruit and vegetables zone in Arenal Market are sold for 190,000 pesos combined, while a "six-month-investment-return" 9 sq. m stall in San Juan Tlihuaca Market is sold for 185,000 pesos. These last two markets are located in low-income neighbourhoods in Azcapotzalco district (Mercado Libre, 2019c; Mercado Libre, 2019b). In this context, the adverts highlight the markets' public character as an added value for potential buyers. For example, a stall in Unidad Rastro Market is presented as "great business opportunity" for 350,000 pesos, to the extent that "in public markets [traders] don't pay for energy and water" (Metros Cúbicos, 2019). Similarly, "the advantage" of buying a two merged 9 sq. m poultry stall in Anáhuac Market for 580,000 pesos rests on the fact that, in addition to receiving water and energy subsidies, "taxes do not exceed 4,000 pesos annually" (Mercado Libre, 2019a). As Jesús (trader leader, 40-50, I) points out, the value of stalls is deeply embedded in the intimate relationship between the traders and the market, because, as "traders say, 'What you pay for a stall is what you will pay for a year renting premises outside [the market].' The difference is that [the market] is stable. It's like buying yourself a stable job with social benefits included [the subsidies]."

As examined in chapter 3, traders—individually and collectively, as families—took the "opportunity" to control more than one stall from the very beginning of the public markets network. In this way, the practice of grabbing stalls has been present for several decades in the network, putting family bonds, economic interests, and political negotiations before the prevailing regulations. In so doing, traders unveil the multifaceted and contradictory relationship they have with regulatory frameworks that they defend in other instances, such as the 1951 Bylaw. Julio's (trader leader, 50-60, I) story is revealing in this regard, since his family has increased its stock of stalls since the 1970s. He joined the market in the 1980s using his wife's permit—she is the market founder's daughter and at the time had already four stalls. Taking advantage of his market's expansion in the late 1980s, he had a stall allocated: "It was my father-in-law who applied and got nine new stalls. He was so generous and gave one stall to his son, one to his wife, and one to me." Later, in the mid-1990s, various traders were selling stalls in Julio's market. Now a father, a former leader, and with some savings, he took this opportunity on behalf of his family and got some stalls "transferred" to him:

> This stall belonged to Lorenzo, who transferred it to me. Now it's my daughter's […] This one was Lorenzo's too, he asked if I wanted it and I accepted. These other two belonged to Ramiro, Lorenzo's brother, and he transferred them to Teresa, my wife's elder sister. […] At first, Lorenzo's brother offered me three stalls! […] but I couldn't afford them… I remember to have paid my monthly instalments religiously for one or two years. [I know] the Bylaw states that a trader cannot have more than one stall. So, what do we do […] what did I do? When I got a new stall, I registered it under my mother's name, and when my daughter reached the legal age, I asked my mom to transfer the permit to my daughter, and so we went to the district office [to regularise our legal status].

Stall grabbing has had different impacts on the markets' public character. While it has undermined state control over these public goods, it has emphasised the autonomy of trader communities and the role of trader organisations as the markets' central governing bodies. In terms of popular infrastructural politics, stall grabbing reflects how some traders appropriate and control portions of the markets and the network by advancing contradictory interests and notions of what the markets and stalls are. Thus, stall grabbing recasts, on the one hand, the government's authority and responsibilities regarding the administration of the markets' basic economic units, and, on the other hand, the traders' internal tensions and conflicts. Julio's (trader leader, 50-60, I) experience offers an extreme example of these disputes. In the 1990s, while he was building his own stock of stalls, the García family was also strategically expanding its own, as they transformed a 25 sq. m stall into a 600 sq. m three-storey building. "They began to build that 'monster' when I became leader, so, I had to stop them […] When I denounced them to the authority and it intervened, they left the construction incomplete for around six months. […] They still hate me for that […] but this building was too much."

In other markets, stall grabbing has led to forms of monopoly that challenge the legal and political foundations of public investment, as Diego (former district official, 40-50, I) highlights: "One family is the owner of this market [in Tlalpan district] and it's understandable why the government doesn't want to invest, as it will be for the benefit of one family." Or, as Teresa (former central government official and trader leader, 50-60, I) suggests, it also impacts the markets' social and economic functions, as in a Coyoacán market, where "one trader has 25 stalls but keeps open only 4 and uses the others for storage." In these cases, traders navigate the interstices of political and legal structures to control stalls throughout the network, defying the "one permit, one stall" policy. Not visible to outsiders, these grabbed stalls create networked conglomerates within the markets, sometimes specialised, as Teresa (former central government official and trader leader, 50-60, I) explains: "[These traders] have permits in [multiple] markets in Benito Juárez, Coyoacán,

and Tlalpan districts. [For example,] Rosa has 17 stalls specialised in cleaning products, including five in La Merced Market." Raúl (central government official, 30-40, I) describes patterns hard to spot as an outsider:

> If you visit the public markets, you will find commercial chains, but they are businesses only well-known within the network. You'll see 'Juana's Kitchen' or 'Sandra's Kitchen' in different markets […] These people have capital [to invest in the markets]. [Recently,] in Portales Market, traders mobilised because these [investors] had four new kitchens approved by the district government. They own kitchens in [Benito Juárez] district and others.

The extent and persistence of stall grabbing has been normalised and legitimised by the state through regularisation processes similar to those applied to cancel traders' bad debts. In line with the official's concerns about governability in the public markets network, Mario (former district official, 40-50, I) simply rejects the idea of sanctioning stall grabbing: "No way, if you apply the rules and sanction stall merging**,** you trigger a revolution." Instead, he explains, "You regularise. Simple and straightforward […] If a trader merged two stalls, you give him two permits. You don't have to worry if it's for a hairdressing or a vegetables stall, [what's important is that] the trader has been regularised. Thus, you avoid creating bigger problems." While permit regularisation becomes critical for authorities to keep their records updated, it legitimises stall grabbing and allows traders to avoid sanctions for selling and buying stalls. For those who bought a stall but have no permit, or for those who have changed business type without following the official procedures, the regularisation periods become an opportunity to bring back legal certainties. In so doing, stall grabbing challenges the ideological, legal, and political foundations of public market provision, as it commodifies a state-owned public good. By bringing together family ties and economic interests, traders circumvent the rules of stall allocation and negotiate the regularisation of a practice that transforms the spatial configurations of individual markets and the uses and management of the entire public markets network.

As an instance of popular infrastructural politics, stall grabbing emphasises how traders navigate the interstices of the regulatory and institutional frameworks building new economic and political dynamics around the markets' basic economic units. How the stalls are managed and commercialised reveals the extent to which trader communities emerge as critical markets' governing bodies that bypass the governments' use of their provisions for markets' governance. In the last section, I continue this discussion by looking into how traders have undermined the authority of official inspectors and the implementation of prevailing sanctions to, instead, develop their own sanctioning mechanisms.

6.6. Eroding official sanctions

The officials and politicians that I interviewed represented public markets in Mexico City as places where regulations cannot be enforced and where authorities have been defeated in their attempts to keep the markets in order. Esperanza (district official, 50-60, I) held this opinion, and when I visited the market in which she works as assistant manager, she emphasised that markets are a "public nuisance," traders "lawbreakers", and that they operate in "complete chaos." These ideas contrast with the expected socio-spatial order established in the 1951 Bylaw, which revolves around keeping records, organising stalls, implementing opening and closing times, and determining obligations and sanctions regarding the everyday functioning and physical state of the markets. In this section, I focus on the tensions between traders and state agents around these ordinary rules and how traders' popular infrastructural politics have undermined the sanctioning powers of market managers (*administrador*) in the past 20 years. In addition, I investigate the role and value of sanctions in the public markets network in the face of the weak position street-level bureaucrats[43] have in the markets vis-à-vis market traders and their organisations. In terms of the importance of regulations in traders' politics, this ordinary dimension depicts the restructuring of traders-state everyday encounters, posing a question about who commands governance in public infrastructures and how. Ultimately, these battles against the officials' sanctioning powers taking place in law-making processes and at the market level speak of the traders' interest in keeping markets as relatively autonomous spaces—where permanent and direct state control and surveillance can be kept at bay.

According to the 1951 Bylaw, sanctions in the public markets network could only be imposed by the Department of Public Markets, the Police Department, and the Direction of Traffic and Transport (Gobierno de la República, 1951, artt. 5, 97-101).[44] With the decentralisation process, sanctioning powers were later transferred to the district governments, which appointed market managers. According to my interviewees, these managers were all-powerful state agents when the PRI was the ruling party. While for Julio (trader leader, 50-60, I) the managers "were the most important link between the traders and the government," for Manuel (former

[43] Lipsky (1980, p.3 in Auyero, 2012b, p.7) defines street-level bureaucrats as public employees that "interact directly with individual citizens in the course of their job" in order to teach them the workings of state power. In this section, I show how these lessons on state expectations and citizen obligations fail.

[44] The sanctions established in the Bylaw (Gobierno de la República, 1951, artt. 97-98) comprise: a) fines between 5 and 250 pesos; b) seizure of stalls, boxes, baskets, cages, etc.; c) the permit's definitive cancellation; and e) arrest for up to 15 days. To apply these sanctions, the authority will consider: a) the seriousness of the situation; b) the record of criminal conduct; and c) the economic and personal condition of the offender.

district mayor and representative, 40-50, I), they "were the [markets'] lords and masters," which he illustrated as follows:

> It was said that if you were appointed market manager of La Merced Market, you should give the district mayor a new car as an acknowledgement, just because you were sent to the city's largest public market. As a market manager you had the power to close down stalls, change business types, [and] authorise other procedures. They were the power in the markets, and they enjoyed it. […] They could get anything for free and saw themselves as the markets' owners. As in *Herod's Law* [a film portraying political corruption in Mexico], they set the rules. They knew how to subjugate the traders and bend the law.

According to Virgilio (trader leader, 60-70, I), the managers used to control access to the 1951 Bylaw and keep it away from the traders to avoid them to know their rights and the authorities' actual powers. This allowed managers, as Antonio (trader leader, 60-70, I) recalls, "to interpret the Bylaw for their own benefit," thus subjecting law enforcement and sanctioning to arbitrary and corrupt mechanisms (mainly favouritism and bribes). For Esperanza (district official, 50-60, I), who became a market manager in the 1990s when the PRI was in power, "she was respected" and her role "was more honourable" because traders "did respect the authority […] and the institutions." As she explains it, market managers could enforce order by threatening the traders: "It used to work just to say, 'I'm going to close down your stall.' [As manager,] you could [also] set the fines."

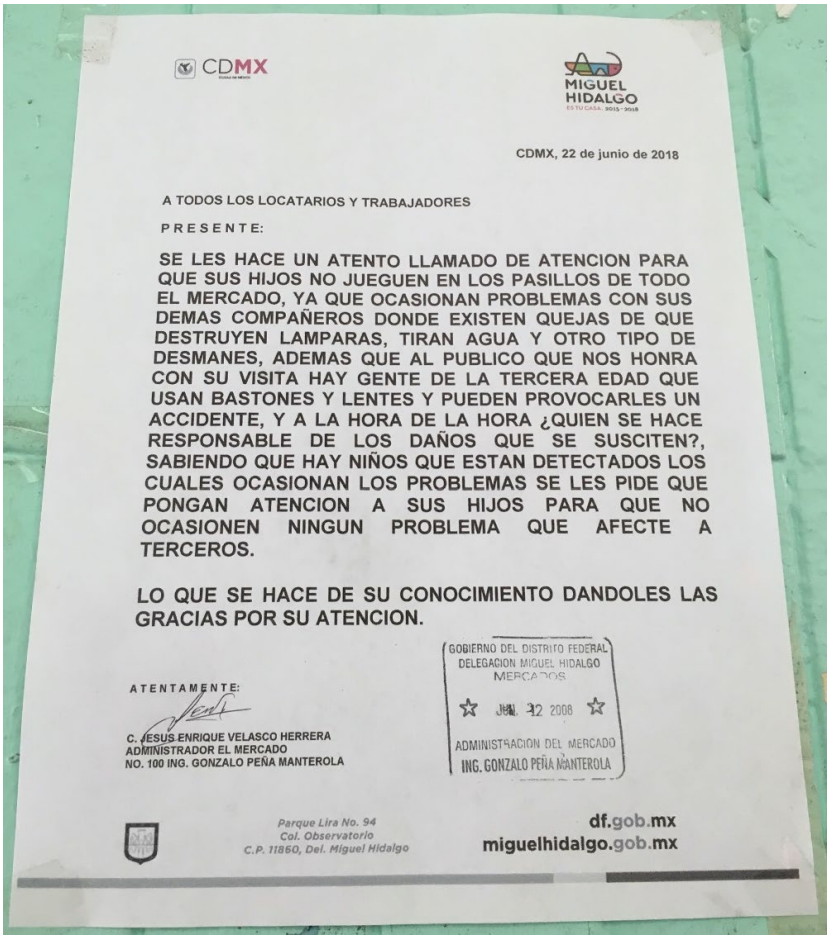
However, the managers' privileged position in the markets changed 20 years ago, when the left-wing PRD won the elections in Mexico City. According to Esperanza, one of the most critical changes that undermined the managers' sanctioning powers was the enforcement of the Law of Administrative Procedures of the Federal District (GCDMX, 2018) and the Bylaw of Administrative Verification of the Federal District (GDF, 2010). These legal instruments regulate the administrative procedures, actions, and visits through which Mexico City officials enforce other regulations, thus subjecting market managers to the principles of legality, transparency, impartiality, and self-control. From then, Esperanza recounts, "when the PRD won, our hands were tied, and that's why markets are a complete chaos, because we can't proceed. […] They took the managers' powers away […] and the traders are not fools, [they began to say:] 'You cannot close down my stall anymore'." In 2015, the managers' sanctioning powers were even more clearly defined in the Guidelines for the Operation of Public Markets. Firstly, a high-ranking district government official, the Director of Government and Legal Affairs, was appointed Market Manager (*Administrador*), and market managers, such as Esperanza, were appointed Assistant Market Managers (*Auxiliar*) (GDF, 2015b, art. 7).

Secondly, the regulation establishes that Assistant Market Managers are "not authorised to deal with any request or impose any sanctions [against] the traders, but to inform the Market Manager of any deficiency or misconduct in the public markets" (GDF, 2015b, art. 11). Moreover, this article explicitly indicates that the Assistant Market Managers must not: "perform administrative procedures on behalf of the traders; ask them for any type of remuneration; authorise [stall] renovations, business type changes, [or] the use of [markets'] common areas; coerce the traders." While these political-administrative decisions aimed at eradicating corruption and extortion, they effectively changed the correlation of power within the markets by stripping market managers of their authority to sanction traders. As Teresa (former central government official and trader leader, 50-60, I) puts it, managers became "decorative figures."

To some extent, my visit to Esperanza's (district official, 50-60, I) market and the tour she gave me illustrate this transition. During my visit, we took a walk in the market, and as we were passing the stalls, she called the traders to order in several occasions: "I need you to clean your stall, please!"; "Miss, turn down the music!"; "What about that garbage? Is it yours or theirs?"; "Who authorised you to sell there? That's the loading area!"; "Hey Juan, why haven't you cleaned here? Please, sweep it"; "Could you please take these boxes into your stall? It's dangerous if there's an earthquake." Each one of these calls referred to the ordinary rules and traders' obligations inscribed in the 1951 Bylaw and the 2015 Guidelines, but her calls went unheard and the traders paid little attention and remained indifferent. The situation was particularly revealing in light of her words regarding the respect she was used to when all her powers were in place and given her advocacy to have them restored. Although these ordinary rules concerning the public markets' socio-spatial order and everyday functioning have been difficult to enforce for decades, the political-legal reform that undermined the managers' original functions also undermined the role of sanctions (Image 18). In the 2015 update, no sanctions section was included, leaving intact the criteria determined in the 1951 Bylaw. Traders are aware of the unenforceable character of these sanctions, fines, and threats, which materialises in the prevalence of stall grabbing and the unauthorised modification of stalls, but also in the debt cancellations and the regularisation periods that the government frequently offers.

In light of this situation, trader leaders and organisations play a key role in enforcing a socio-spatial order in the markets, but appealing to moral and political principles to convince the traders of the need of complying with these ordinary rules. Reading the lack of compliance in political terms, trader leaders insist that respecting the socio-spatial order is a strategic matter

Image 18. A call to order



CDMX

MIGUEL HIDALGO

CDMX, 22 de junio de 2018

A TODOS LOS LOCATARIOS Y TRABAJADORES

PRESENTE:

SE LES HACE UN ATENTO LLAMADO DE ATENCION PARA QUE SUS HIJOS NO JUEGUEN EN LOS PASILLOS DE TODO EL MERCADO, YA QUE OCASIONAN PROBLEMAS CON SUS DEMAS COMPAÑEROS DONDE EXISTEN QUEJAS DE QUE DESTRUYEN LAMPARAS, TIRAN AGUA Y OTRO TIPO DE DESMANES, ADEMAS QUE AL PUBLICO QUE NOS HONRA CON SU VISITA HAY GENTE DE LA TERCERA EDAD QUE USAN BASTONES Y LENTES Y PUEDEN PROVOCARLES UN ACCIDENTE, Y A LA HORA DE LA HORA ¿QUIEN SE HACE RESPONSABLE DE LOS DAÑOS QUE SE SUSCITEN?, SABIENDO QUE HAY NIÑOS QUE ESTAN DETECTADOS LOS CUALES OCASIONAN LOS PROBLEMAS SE LES PIDE QUE PONGAN ATENCION A SUS HIJOS PARA QUE NO OCASIONEN NINGUN PROBLEMA QUE AFECTE A TERCEROS.

LO QUE SE HACE DE SU CONOCIMIENTO DANDOLES LAS GRACIAS POR SU ATENCION.

GOBIERNO DEL DISTRITO FEDERAL
DELEGACION MIGUEL HIDALGO
MERCADOS
JUL 12 2018
ADMINISTRACION DEL MERCADO
ING. GONZALO PEÑA MANTEROLA

ATENTAMENTE:

C. JESUS ENRIQUE VELASCO HERRERA
ADMINISTRADOR EL MERCADO
NO. 100 ING. GONZALO PEÑA MANTEROLA

Parque Lira No. 94
Col. Observatorio
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Signed by the manager of Ing. Gonzalo Peña Manterola Market, Miguel Hidalgo district, this call to order reads: "To all traders and workers: This is a kind request for you to prevent your children from playing in the market because they cause trouble. There are complaints about your children destroying the lamps, wasting water, and other excesses. Furthermore, they can hurt our customers, especially the elderly, and when this happens, who is going to be held responsible? Since some children have been identified as troublemakers, you are compelled to keep an eye on them." **Source**: Author, 2018.

for trader communities because by keeping it they can avoid conflicts with the authorities, which can ultimately coordinate interinstitutional actions to implement sanctions. As these state actions are nonetheless a permanent concern, trader leaders constantly remind their fellow traders of the need to keep the corridors clean and clear, to dispose of refuse properly, to not use the common areas for storage, to not sell prohibited goods, etc., because, as Julio (trader leader, 50-60, I) points out: "[Non-compliance] is a latent risk, as it can be taken as an excuse [by the authorities] to come one day and say: 'Let's cancel his permit, let's get rid of this market.' For this reason, we're always urging our fellow traders to fulfil their commercial and administrative obligations and responsibilities." In other cases, trader leaders have imagined their own mechanisms to make traders comply with a certain socio-spatial order. For example, to compel traders to open their stalls early, Lorenzo (former trader leader, 60-70, I) thinks that his market's organisation "should fine [them if they] open after 8 a.m." Similarly, Omar (trader

leader, 30-40, I) considers that fines should be imposed for "not attending an assembly." Regarding stall grabbing, for example, César (former trader leader, 60-70) has suggested a new set of sanctions to prevent traders in his market from selling stalls to outsiders. He considers that the trader organisation or a council of elders should "determine if a transfer must proceed. We intend that if someone wants to sell, it has to be to people from our hometown. […] So, if the council doesn't authorise, the transfer doesn't proceed."

These self-imposed rules to build a specific socio-spatial order emerge in a context in which street-level bureaucrats were stripped of their powers as a result of traders' popular infrastructural politics. To this point, the relationship between traders, managers, and rules—particularly sanctions—has created the messy and variegated environment associated with popular trade in public markets. This situation represents a critical political challenge for trader communities, because by undermining the function of managers and sanctions and by only partially being able to enforce a new order, they have contributed to keeping alive their markets' representation as chaotic, hazardous, and polluted places.

6.7. Final remarks

In this final chapter, I have examined five political-legal struggles in which market traders have been actively participating in the past 20 years. These five sections capture the traders' multifaceted and contradictory relationship with the regulatory and institutional frameworks that govern their commercial activities and facilities. By discussing the role of legislative initiatives in traders' mobilisation and how traders relate to the markets' main regulatory layers, I show the traders' popular infrastructural politics in motion, unfolding around law-making processes in which they display multiple interpretations about the value and function of the rules. In particular, the chapter reveals five instances in which traders defend, reform, reject, and circumvent specific regulations to protect their economic and infrastructural interests and to advance their political and administrative agendas. To describe these political-legal battles, I have emphasised the traders' popular interpretations that inform their participation in law-making processes, in particular how traders engage with expert legal knowledge that they imbue with their popular imageries. In this sense, I have discussed the traders' interests, concerns, needs, and aspirations as they contest the orthodox understanding of the rules, and as they confirm dissident views of what the law should protect and under which conditions and mechanisms.

These multifaceted approaches to the rules revolve around two central aspects of the traders' popular infrastructural politics: their identity and subsistence. These two drivers of the traders'

legal activism lead their struggles towards the defence of those regulations that allow them, on the one hand, to be legally and politically acknowledged and, on the other hand, to access and secure their means of subsistence—the markets, the stalls. As each one of these sections reveals, traders' popular infrastructural politics unfold in the interstices of dominant regulatory frameworks and law-making processes, which allows traders to bend and subvert the official definitions. In this way, they reinvent the rules that govern the markets and themselves and challenge a dominant political-legal arena in which officials and politicians are permanently confronting their commercial and infrastructural practices.

As a political-legal domain in which traders negotiate with multiple state agents, law making is an instance in which traders deploy their repertoire of political tools at length. What is at stake in the legislative reforms or the enforcement of rules and sanctions emphasises their need to put in motion their political knowledge, skills, and relationships to avoid a drastic change in the terms of their socio-political bond with the state. While this bond mainly revolves around patronage when referring to the 1951 Bylaw, the other political-legal battles reveal the high importance of fighting against the rules that threaten the traders' economic and political autonomy. Ultimately, this fight for autonomy results from trading and organising around the public markets network in Mexico City, and its impact reaches multiple scales of urban politics, as these regulations not only concern the traders. In this sense, by negotiating the 2015 update, freezing the animal welfare reform, carrying on with stall grabbing, and undermining the authorities' sanctioning powers, traders foreground the anti-absolutist character of their popular infrastructural politics. As I have shown by quoting some of the regulations, this anti-absolutist approach embedded in traders' political practices and discourses challenges the conventional definitions of the markets as public goods and services, and highlights the centrality of this networked infrastructure for traders to develop political strategies that secure their social reproduction as subaltern urban actors at the margins of the state.

Conclusion

The aim of this thesis has been to examine and conceptualise the traders' political life and repertoire of political practices and discourses as mediated by the state and the public markets in order to understand their political agency in Mexico City. This project has been led by four main research questions that interrogate: 1) the reasons and drivers of political socialisation, organisation, and mobilisation in a large trader community; 2) the role of public markets—as state-owned infrastructure—in these processes; 3) the impact of these practices and discourses on city-making; and 4) the best way to abstract this political agency as it unfolds from, around, and through infrastructures. The thesis answers these questions by proposing the concept of popular infrastructural politics. In turn, each chapter adds theoretical density, methodological clarity, historical depth, and ethnographic detail to my understanding of these distinctive politics. The sequencing of the chapters has followed a theory-methods-case study structure in order to simultaneously consolidate and use the concept of popular infrastructural politics and to explicate the political actors, objects, practices, and discourses under study.

Chapter 1, *Popular infrastructural politics*, answers the question of how best to conceptualise the traders' political agency as it emerges from, around, and through the public markets. By exploring three analytical strands focused on contestation in urban marketplaces, popular politics, and infrastructures, the chapter develops and presents popular infrastructural politics as the main conceptual contribution of this thesis. Defined as the political practices performed by subaltern actors to influence infrastructure provision, preservation, and transformation, popular infrastructural politics reveals how the (urban) subaltern's economic and political practices intertwine with the production and reproduction of (social) infrastructures, and therefore with urban politics and city-making processes. This chapter has also contributed to raising awareness of the rich, multifaceted, and contradictory nature of these politics by emphasising how urban marginality, the state, and the biopolitical powers of infrastructures mediate the subaltern's political agency.

Chapter 2, *Researching popular infrastructural politics*, has not only provided an account of the methodological approach and the circumstances that underlay my research. It has also responded to a more general concern about how to investigate ethnographically the complex relationship between subaltern urban actors, infrastructures, and the state. By highlighting the advantages of conducting political ethnography, this chapter has provided the methodological approach to explore popular infrastructural politics in *statu nascendi*. Given its focus on the

vernacular understandings of politics, this approach has allowed me to emphasise the need of capturing the multifaceted and contradictory nature of the participants' political practices and discourse. The chapter has also emphasised the possibilities that this ethnographic approach offers to identify and analyse collective experiences by extrapolating the interpretation of economic, political, social, and infrastructural experiences from node to network.

Chapters 3 to 6 have provided the elements to answer the rest of my research questions by grounding the concept of popular infrastructural politics into specific economic, social, political, and urban instances. These chapters provide new insights into: 1) the reasons and mechanisms driving traders' political organisation and mobilisation in Mexico City; 2) the role of public markets in shaping traders' political life; and 3) the influence of traders' political practices and discourses in urban politics and city-making processes. Chapter 3, *Traders and markets in Mexico City*, has provided the historical context that helps to explain the traders' and markets' contemporary political salience. It has highlighted the need to trace back the political history of subaltern (urban) actors, in this case, to understand the emergence, development, and changing character of popular infrastructural politics. This chapter has thus contributed to recognising the long-term processes that allow subaltern urban actors to build repertoires of political tools and distinct political identities and territories that convey their imageries, interests, needs, and aspirations.

In turn, chapters 4 to 6 have shed light on the multifaceted and contradictory character of popular infrastructural politics by giving a detailed account of how traders: 1) create a specific organisational landscape; 2) fight for repair and maintenance; and 3) contest regulatory and institutional frameworks. These chapters have offered a fresh look at the traders' political practices and discourses revolving around the production and reproduction of the public markets network of Mexico City. Taken together, chapters 4 to 6 have ultimately offered a glimpse of the traders' political life as it emerges from, around, and through the public markets. Chapter 4, *Coming together to defend the markets*, has therefore examined the hierarchical, diverse, dynamic, and fragmentary political structures and the skills, knowledge, and relationships that underpin traders' popular infrastructural politics. Focused on the inner workings of these politics, the chapter has offered a detailed representation of why and how traders organise and mobilise. Chapter 5, *Politics of repair and maintenance*, has brought into light how these ordinary infrastructural practices are deeply engrained in the reproduction of the socio-political bond between the traders and the state. The chapter has shown too how repair and maintenance structure traders' struggles against infrastructural poverty and emerge as a focal

point of their opposition to long-standing austerity measures in Mexico City. Finally, chapter 6 has explored why and how popular infrastructural politics revolve around law making and institutional design. It has revealed how traders' politics impact the urban politics and influence city-making processes by challenging the city's regulatory and institutional frameworks.

This study of popular infrastructural politics has also produced important insights and posed new questions regarding the Mexico City case and the broader utility of the concept. In the first section, *Popular infrastructural politics in Mexico City*, I will present my main conclusions about the impact of popular infrastructural politics on the public markets network and the urban politics of Mexico City. In the second section, *Mobilising popular infrastructural politics*, I will present the concept's main contributions to the relevant literatures previously discussed and some key ideas about the use of the concept to examine the politics of other subaltern actors as they emerge, develop, and consolidate around infrastructures.

Popular infrastructural politics in Mexico City

> You don't get what you deserve, but what you can negotiate.
> Omar (trader leader, 30-40, C)

Although traders have not got what they deserve, as Omar believes, they have been able to negotiate important decisions about the public markets. As this thesis shows, what the traders have been able to negotiate in the past seventy years is no small achievement, especially considering the marginality that they have increasingly experienced in the past three decades. This capacity to negotiate has impacted Mexico City in multiple economic, social, political, and infrastructural ways, as the traders have not only kept the public markets working but have also consistently made the state to comply (however unwillingly) with its obligations. This has granted the traders a relevant position as subaltern urban actors in Mexico City's urban politics, to the extent that they have been deploying a repertoire of political discourses and practices that revolve around the preservation of the public markets' function and value. In this particular context, the concept of popular infrastructural politics has come to condense this distinctive political agency and the multiple achievements of a large trader community.

As this final section shows, popular infrastructural politics has also been a crucial analytical tool to: 1) outline the shared political experiences of a heterogeneous collective; 2) connect and interpret the traders' political history; 3) study the interwoven political identities of traders and markets; 4) identify the tensions underlying the traders' political life (e.g. autonomy and patronage); 5) distinguish the interests, values, needs, and aspirations shaping the traders'

struggles; and 6) acknowledging the role of the traders' multifaceted and contradictory politics in preventing the dismantlement of the public markets network.

By conceptualising the traders' political life in terms of popular infrastructural politics, this thesis has foregrounded the shared political experience of more than 70,000 small-scale low-income traders. The concept condenses a set of political practices and discourses built collectively from, around, and through 329 public markets, which have functioned as commercial-political nodes for several decades. The term recognises this collective experience as a political tradition that has involved the participation of several generations of traders, who have contributed to shaping a diverse repertoire of political tools in a long, contingent, and fragmented but cumulative process. Applied to Mexico City, the concept invokes the networked nature of the traders' political socialisation, organisation, and mobilisation by bringing to light the critical role of the public markets in shaping this collective experience. Political discourses and practices regarding the production and reproduction of public markets circulate in this infrastructural network shaping the shared the need of defending the markets. As mentioned, these commonalities do not presume homogeneity, but a fragmented organisational landscape where the shared interests, values, needs, and aspirations are subject to new interpretations and adaptations.

Popular infrastructural politics has also functioned as a means to describe a distinctive political history. The concept connects the traders' and markets' past and present to allow new interpretations about their origins, development, increasing marginalisation, and persistent struggles. The concept thus builds on a sense of continuity and adaptation that helps to emphasise the changing character of the traders' political agency and position in the city's political ecology. Digging into the history of popular infrastructural politics from the traders' perspective has been critical to emphasise the continual amalgamation between infrastructure provision and subject formation. By highlighting the historical dimensions of these popular infrastructural politics, the thesis has illustrated how this trader community has learned to navigate the city's politics by adapting to new economic, political, and urban landscapes.

Under this light, popular infrastructural politics has foregrounded the co-constitution of the traders' and public markets' political identities at a specific point in time, when they became new categories of subaltern urban actors and spaces in Mexico City. In telling this story through the lenses of popular infrastructural politics, the thesis has revealed the contradictory forces shaping the emergence of these subjects and spaces. It has specifically shown that public

markets have not only been an imposition deployed by the state as a disciplinary measure, but also the very foundation of the traders' political agency. The concept of popular infrastructural politics thus describes the resilience and soundness of this intimate connection on which the traders' and markets' political salience depend. In this way, the term speaks of a distinctive socio-material assemblage that keeps shaping the social, commercial, and political life of Mexico City.

Popular infrastructural politics has served to emphasise the underlying tensions shaping the traders' political life. By pointing at how traders fight for both autonomy and patronage, the concept shows the multifaceted and contradictory nature of their political engagement with both the markets and the state. These tendencies co-exist in popular infrastructural politics, and their contradictions do not make traders' politics inoperative, but exceptionally tactical. These tendencies are both meaningful and fruitful for traders to the extent that they meet a major goal, that of protecting their right to subsistence. Popular infrastructural politics in Mexico City are therefore an instance of conflict, as it oscillates between the defence of their socio-political bond with the state and the demands of political autonomy, economic freedom, and legal malleability. This thesis has shown how the traders' condition of subordination—their compliance and submissive attitudes—and their capacity to develop dissident and subversive discourses and actions shape contradictorily their relationship with the state and the city. The demands for repair and maintenance, the commercialisation of stalls, and the erosion of the officials' sanctioning powers are just some examples of this.

The concept has also been essential to highlight the traders' infrastructural expectations and aspirations as well as other aspects of their popular imageries, interests, values, and needs. This thesis has shown that traders' struggles for the markets embody their struggles for their right to subsistence. Performing popular infrastructural politics to keep the markets working reflects the long-standing struggles to preserve one, if not the most important, pillar of their subsistence. In this light, the importance of the markets rests on what they provide for the traders, and we have seen, the markets are shelters, sources of income, spaces of belonging, and sites of political and legal recognition. Losing the markets would jeopardise their economic and political position in Mexico City's urban politics, as well as their access to well-serviced infrastructures that have, notwithstanding the abandonment and deterioration, contributed to improving the traders' working conditions. As a way to capture the traders' subjective motivations for political action, popular infrastructural politics has helped to unveil discourses and practices that are not part of mainstream politics.

Although not often part of mainstream political arenas, this thesis has shown that traders' popular infrastructural politics have become ineluctable for the state and the city in different ways. Their distinctive politics to produce and reproduce the city's 329 public markets have often had city-wide and nation-wide impacts, as the traders strive to influence key law-making and planning processes. In this sense, their politics, even if restricted to markets' issues, can become of regional or national importance. This, partly, because of the markets' networked character and the political possibilities arising from one of the largest trader communities in the country. Notwithstanding their increasing marginal position, limited resources, and organisational fragmentation, the Mexico City traders have developed a repertoire of political tools with which they have influenced multiple other city-making processes. The legislation on animal welfare protection is one example, but this trader community has also been involved in nation-level tax exemption agreements for low-income, small-scale traders, and has had an important role in slowing down the expansion of retail corporations in the city. All these while defending the markets.

In this sense, popular infrastructural politics has brought to light the traders' active role in creating the public markets network. Firstly, by expanding the markets' construction programme initiated by the state and, secondly, by preventing its termination when the authorities began to transfer the production of retail infrastructure to corporate actors. By performing popular infrastructural politics, the traders soon transformed the public markets into a subaltern social and political demand. Traders thus became able to exploit this state-owned infrastructural formula to their advantage, making markets a source of certainty and stability in contexts of precarity, dispossession, and exclusion. The gradual consolidation of the public markets network is therefore a traders' triumph, in which their views about the function and value of these commercial facilities has been essential to make the state continue, however reluctantly, with the construction programme. Thus, by mobilising their popular infrastructural politics, the traders have contributed to preventing the complete abandonment of the construction programme and avoiding the dismantlement or privatisation of the public markets network.

Moreover, this distinctive political practice has contributed to developing a subaltern critique of the prevailing economic, political, and urban tendencies in Mexico City. The traders have become of great importance to preserve—not without contradictions—the markets' public character, thus opposing the dominant urban neoliberal agenda that characterises Mexico City's retail sector. By defending the public markets, the traders have been challenging practices and discourses of austerity, privatisation, modernisation, and competitiveness that threaten their right to subsistence and the city's public food supply system. This is not a small achievement

given the rapid expansion of corporate retail systems and the shrinking municipal budgets aimed at building or maintaining public markets. This has been achieved by a large trader community that has built—over the course of seven decades, at the urban margins, and through the interstices of the state—a political practice that helps them protect the city's public markets network.

Mobilising popular infrastructural politics

I have mentioned that popular infrastructural politics is the product of an iterative relationship between conceptual thinking and ethnographic research to deal with the interpretive challenges of a specific empirical instance. The concept was therefore devised to conceptualise the political life of Mexico City' traders and markets, but also to revise, refine, and complement the reviewed approaches on contestation in urban markets, the politics of the subaltern, and the infrastructures' political salience. This second purpose raises questions about the utility of the concept beyond this thesis' case study. Until now, the concept has proved useful to define the multifaceted and contradictory political practices and discourses that traders deploy to influence the provision, preservation, and transformation of public markets. Considering this productive use of the term, I now turn to emphasise the significance of popular infrastructural politics in building a perspective and a sensibility that can help researchers to explore other instances of subaltern political organisation and mobilisation from, around, and through infrastructures. I will revisit this potential in light of the concept's contribution to the literature on contestation in urban markets, the politics of the subaltern, and the infrastructures' political salience.

Developed in the spirit of cross-fertilising existing discussions on popular politics and infrastructures, the concept refines and complements both lines of thought in different ways. It does so by looking microscopically into the entanglements of political subordination and agency among subaltern actors and infrastructures. On the one hand, it brings popular political traditions into infrastructural processes and, on the other hand, it places the infrastructures' generative powers at the heart of subaltern political practices and discourses. As a concept that highlights how actors, objects, and processes relate, popular infrastructural politics makes visible how multifaceted and contradictory popular imageries, values, interests, needs, and aspirations permeate the production and reproduction of infrastructures. Similarly, it emphasises the role of infrastructures' biopolitical powers in popular politics by indicating their capacity to enable subaltern political identities.

Looking critically into these literatures' points of convergence, popular infrastructural politics directs our attention to the conflicts and tensions shaping both popular politics and

infrastructures. The term thus builds a perspective and a sensibility that take into account the contradictions arising from the subaltern's political practice and the deployment of infrastructures. On the one side, it sheds light on how compliance, submission, control, and surveillance reveal the subaltern's condition of subordination and the dominant political agendas embedded in the built environment. On the other side, it focuses on the dissident, heterodox, and transformative tendencies created by the political agency of subordinate groups and the infrastructures' capacity to enable and facilitate social life. By linking these tendencies, popular infrastructural politics unveils the productive powers of subordinated political agency by showing how they generate complex socio-spatial orders through which they dispute their survival and identity.

Popular infrastructural politics also revises, refines, and complements the contemporary study of contestation in urban markets. The concept expands and nuances the understanding of politics in these commercial nodes by exploring the broader repertoire of political tools produced and mobilised from, around, and through marketplaces. Popular infrastructural politics looks into the multiplicity of political flows shaping the markets' and traders' political life, including the most spectacular forms of contestation and resistance but also the most ordinary political practices. By dealing with a broader repertoire of political practices and discourses, the concept draws our attention to the ordinary—often hidden—activities through which traders command infrastructure and become involved in the geographies of urban politics. In this way, the concept connects resistance and contestation with the conflicting practices and discourses with which traders negotiate the function and value of marketplaces.

Developed around the Mexico City case, the term brings into the literature on traders, markets, and politics the insights of one of the largest public markets network in Latin America. This highlights the special attention that popular infrastructural politics gives to the diverse historical trajectories and the double political nature embedded in contemporary marketplaces. My approach thus identifies the contradictions incorporated in state-provided, managed, or regulated marketplaces, particularly how they become conveyors of the subaltern's economic, social, and political demands. In this vein, popular infrastructural politics portrays the traders' political agency in their complex and contradictory nature by analysing the conflicting interests, values, needs, and aspirations that traders mobilise around the markets. The concept thus brings into this analytical strand an emphasis on the generative powers of the contradictory forces shaping traders' political involvement. In this way, rather than producing an idealised or a despairing representation of subaltern political practices and discourses, popular

infrastructural politics seeks to examine relationally the political potentialities and limitations of doing politics from, around, and through infrastructures, in this case, marketplaces. In the interest of exploring this diversity, my approach also complements the analysis of the traders' drivers of contestation. By placing the markets' infrastructural nature at the heart of the traders' political organisation and mobilisation, popular infrastructural politics recognises the role of ordinary practices such as repair and maintenance in triggering such political processes.

Given its more general attributes regarding the politics of subaltern actors and the production and reproduction of infrastructures, popular infrastructural politics can be used to study, describe, and explain similar instances of political engagement. This means that the concept is not restricted to the analysis of large networks of state-owned, managed, or regulated infrastructures in which groups of organised subaltern actors play a direct and critical role in governing their provision, preservation, and transformation. Grounded in other histories and geographies, the concept can illuminate the political agency of subaltern populations, communities, groups, and individuals as it interlaces in multifaceted and contradictory ways with different types of infrastructures, including those created against and beyond state powers. Wherever we find these socio-material encounters, we can ask if a distinctive form of popular infrastructural politics has arisen from them. Cities would be a vantage point to explore these encounters and their politics given their current capacity to concentrate infrastructures and subaltern populations.

Open to revisions, refinements, and reconstructions, popular infrastructural politics is a concept concerned with the diverse repertoire of political tools developed by subaltern actors. Other political contexts can therefore provide new insights into these repertoires as they emerge, consolidate, and disappear alongside the rich popular political traditions that imbue infrastructures with subaltern functions and values—above all, the right to subsistence. To the extent that states remain a central actor in infrastructure provision, management, and transformation, the study of popular infrastructural politics will have to consider how their political agendas influence the relationship between infrastructures and the subaltern. However, special attention must be given to how privatisation and modernisation processes redefine the presence of popular cultures and politics in infrastructure governance. A clear example is the implementation of bus rapid transit systems in many cities around the world, which have disciplined and even eradicated the subaltern political practices and discourses that used to participate in urban transport governance. As this thesis shows, these tendencies have consistently failed in the public markets of Mexico City, where popular infrastructural politics

are still one of their central components. However, it would be essential to investigate in other contexts how popular infrastructural politics have been repressed, tamed, or muffled in order to alienate subaltern actors from infrastructure governance.

The concept can also be a useful analytical tool to explore experiences in which the relationship between subaltern actors and infrastructures leads to more or less structured forms of political engagement. Popular infrastructural politics could be adapted to capture the wide range of political interactions that a wide range of subaltern actors develop with infrastructures. This could comprise the struggles of peasant and indigenous communities to determine the function and value of dams or the political dealings of waste collectors to govern waste disposal systems. It can also include the hawkers' political strategies to keep selling in metro networks or the students' campaigns for clean, safe, and accessible public university buildings. It could help to the study of the struggles of local communities for community centres, clinics, schools, sport facilities, and other public infrastructures that enable their social reproduction. It could also contribute to exploring more vulnerable or fragile socio-material assemblages in which survival and political practices converge, such as those developed by the urban poor to control and exploit traffic lights and road congestion points for petty trade.

The concept can therefore be extended to other instances in which the generative powers of infrastructures and the subaltern's political agency enable the emergence of long- or short-term cumulative processes of political socialisation, organisation, and mobilisation that influence urban politics and city-making processes at different scales. These potential uses of popular infrastructural politics would ultimately contribute to recognising and bringing to the fore the heterogeneous political actors that fight to have a say about the function and value of the built environment. For this built environment to be socially just, then it will have to be built, maintained, and transformed taking into account the complex, multifaceted, and contradictory values, interests, needs, and aspirations of those who do popular politics at the margins.

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Appendix

Table 9. List of participants

Pseudonym	Role-Position	Age Group
Adán	Trader leader	40-50
Adolfo	Trader leader	50-60
Adriana	Trader leader	30-40
Agustín	Former trader leader	40-50
Alejandro	Politician	40-50
Alfonso	Trader leader	60-70
Alfredo	Former district official	40-50
Andrés	Trader leader	50-60
Ángel	Central government official	50-60
Angelina	District official	40-50
Aníbal	District official	30-40
Antonio	Trader leader	60-70
Armando	Trader leader	40-50
Bernardo	Trader leader	60-70
Camila	Trader leader	50-60
César	Former trader leader	60-70
Daniel	Trader leader	40-50
Diego	Former district official	40-50
Elisa	Trader leader	60-70
Elvira	Representative (CoD)	40-50
Érica	Trader leader	30-40
Ernesto	Trader leader	50-60
Esperanza	District official	50-60
Esther	Representative (LA)	40-50
Fausto	Trader leader	40-50
Félix	Representative assistant (LA)	40-50
Florián	Trader leader	50-60
Gabriel	Trader leader	40-50
Gilda	Trader leader	30-40
Graciela	Trader leader	40-50
Gustavo	Trader leader	40-50
Héctor	Historian	60-70
Heriberto	Trader leader	60-70
Javier	Trader leader	60-70
Jesús	Trader leader	40-50
Jimena	Central government official	40-50
Joaquín	Trader leader	30-40

Pseudonym	Role-Position	Age Group
Joel	Trader leader	40-50
Jorge	Former district mayor	50-60
José	Trader leader	40-50
Julio	Trader leader	50-60
Karina	Representative assistant (LA)	30-40
Lorenzo	Former trader leader	60-70
Lourdes	Trader leader	30-40
Luis	Representative (Senate)	50-60
Manuel	Former district mayor and representative (LA)	40-50
Marcelo	Trader leader	40-50
Marcial	Trader leader	40-50
Marcos	Trader leader	40-50
Mario	Former district official	40-50
Marisol	Former district mayor	50-60
Marta	Former trader leader	40-50
Miriam	Trader leader	40-50
Mónica	District mayor	40-50
Omar	Trader leader	30-40
Paloma	Trader leader	50-60
Patricio	Central government official	50-60
Paulo	Trader leader	50-60
Pedro	Trader leader	40-50
Rafael	Elected representative (CoMC)	60-70
Raquel	Trader leader	30-40
Raúl	Central government official	30-40
Regina	Trader leader	50-60
Renato	Trader leader	30-40
Rocío	Trader leader	50-60
Rodolfo	Politician	60-70
Rodrigo	Trader leader	50-60
Rubén	District official	50-60
Teresa	Former central government official and trader leader	50-60
Ulises	Trader leader	60-70
Uriel	Trader leader	30-40
Valentín	Trader leader	40-50
Violeta	Trader leader	40-50
Virgilio	Trader leader	60-70
Zacarías	Former trader leader	60-70

Note: LA: Legislative Assembly; CoD: Chamber of Deputies; CoMC: Congress of Mexico City.

Table 10. List of the public markets of Mexico City

Inauguration	Official number	Name	Stalls	Type	Location (district)
1934	16	Abelardo L. Rodríguez (Zona)	246	Touristic Traditional	Cuauhtémoc
1938	158	Colima	57	Traditional	Cuauhtémoc
1943	114	Francisco Sarabia	119	Traditional	Cuauhtémoc
1943	196	Prado Sur	23	Traditional	Miguel Hidalgo
1945	178	Mixquic	102	Touristic Specialised	Tláhuac
1946	153	Michoacán	35	Traditional	Cuauhtémoc
1947	46	Clavería	98	Traditional	Azcapotzalco
1949	48	6 de Enero de 1915	116	Traditional	Álvaro Obregón
1949	29	Lago	103	Traditional	Benito Juárez
1949	903	Del Parque	106	Traditional	Venustiano Carranza
1950	174	20 de Abril	272	Traditional	Venustiano Carranza
1951	179	San Juan Ixtayopan	79	Traditional	Tláhuac
1952	66	Pequeño Comercio	84	Specialised	Cuauhtémoc
1952	232	San Isidro Zona	51	Traditional	Miguel Hidalgo
1953	200	Santa Cruz Meyehualco	146	Traditional	Iztapalapa
1954	94	Zacatito	182	Traditional	Miguel Hidalgo
1955	83	Abelardo L. Rodríguez (Coronas)	151	Specialised	Cuauhtémoc
1955	13	Insurgentes	225	Touristic Specialised	Cuauhtémoc
1955	10	2 de Abril	128	Traditional	Cuauhtémoc
1955	77	San Juan Pugibet	361	Traditional	Cuauhtémoc
1955	78	San Juan Arcos de Belem	399	Traditional	Cuauhtémoc
1955	34	Villa Zona	938	Traditional	Gustavo A. Madero
1955	75	Plutarco Elías Calles (El Chorrito)	361	Traditional	Miguel Hidalgo
1955	79	Monte Athos	63	Traditional	Miguel Hidalgo
1955	42	La Paz	141	Touristic Traditional	Tlalpan
1956	234	Panteón Jardín (Flores)	14	Specialised	Álvaro Obregón
1956	76	Mixcoac	476	Traditional	Benito Juárez
1956	90	Lázaro Cárdenas (del Valle)	440	Traditional	Benito Juárez
1956	91	Hidalgo Anexo	428	Specialised	Cuauhtémoc
1956	9	San Lucas	254	Traditional	Cuauhtémoc
1956	18	Hidalgo Zona	975	Traditional	Cuauhtémoc
1956	32	Tacuba	1231	Traditional	Miguel Hidalgo
1956	88	18 de Marzo	335	Traditional	Miguel Hidalgo
1957	35	Azcapotzalco	546	Traditional	Azcapotzalco
1957	201	Portales Anexo	125	Specialised	Benito Juárez
1957	30	Portales Zona	599	Traditional	Benito Juárez
1957	49	1 de Diciembre	244	Traditional	Benito Juárez
1957	97	San Pedro de Los Pinos	192	Traditional	Benito Juárez
1957	89	Coyoacán	464	Traditional	Coyoacán
1957	1	Lagunilla Ropa y Telas	1043	Specialised	Cuauhtémoc
1957	3	Lagunilla Varios	344	Specialised	Cuauhtémoc

Inauguration	Official number	Name	Stalls	Type	Location (district)
1957	4	Lagunilla San Camilito	75	Specialised	Cuauhtémoc
1957	5	Martínez de la Torre (Anexo)	339	Specialised	Cuauhtémoc
1957	23	Tepito Fierros Viejos	661	Specialised	Cuauhtémoc
1957	36	Tepito Varios	562	Specialised	Cuauhtémoc
1957	60	Tepito Ropa y Telas (Granaditas)	709	Specialised	Cuauhtémoc
1957	2	Lagunilla Zona	573	Traditional	Cuauhtémoc
1957	7	Martínez de la Torre (Zona)	600	Traditional	Cuauhtémoc
1957	8	Juárez	454	Traditional	Cuauhtémoc
1957	14	Tepito Zona	522	Traditional	Cuauhtémoc
1957	96	Isabel La Católica	165	Traditional	Cuauhtémoc
1957	72	Anáhuac Anexo	280	Specialised	Miguel Hidalgo
1957	11	Anáhuac Zona	412	Traditional	Miguel Hidalgo
1957	33	Tacubaya (Becerra)	512	Traditional	Miguel Hidalgo
1957	93	Lago Garda	319	Traditional	Miguel Hidalgo
1957	99	Escandón	249	Traditional	Miguel Hidalgo
1957	151	Lago Gascasónica	374	Traditional	Miguel Hidalgo
1957	52	Merced Ampudia	151	Specialised	Venustiano Carranza
1957	101	Merced Nave Menor	647	Specialised	Venustiano Carranza
1957	103	Merced Paso a Desnivel	77	Specialised	Venustiano Carranza
1957	104	Merced Comidas	218	Specialised	Venustiano Carranza
1957	105	Merced Flores	110	Specialised	Venustiano Carranza
1957	106	Merced Anexo	186	Specialised	Venustiano Carranza
1957	107	Sonora	407	Specialised	Venustiano Carranza
1957	108	Sonora Anexo	271	Specialised	Venustiano Carranza
1957	235	Jamaica Nuevo	1312	Specialised	Venustiano Carranza
1957	241	Merced Paso a Desnivel Gómez Pedraza	75	Touristic Specialised	Venustiano Carranza
1957	15	Jamaica Zona	562	Traditional	Venustiano Carranza
1957	102	Merced Nave Mayor	4200	Traditional	Venustiano Carranza
1957	109	Merced Baquetón	449	Traditional	Venustiano Carranza
1957	44	Xochimilco Zona (Xóchitl)	447	Traditional	Xochimilco
1957	377	Xochimilco Anexo	968	Traditional	Xochimilco
1958	133	Melchor Múzquiz (Flores)	34	Specialised	Álvaro Obregón
1958	43	Melchor Múzquiz Zona	327	Traditional	Álvaro Obregón
1958	67	Tizapan	128	Traditional	Álvaro Obregón
1958	82	José María Pino Suárez	200	Traditional	Álvaro Obregón
1958	112	Postal Anexo	49	Specialised	Benito Juárez
1958	111	Postal Zona	247	Traditional	Benito Juárez
1958	113	Independencia	226	Traditional	Benito Juárez
1958	108	Merced Mixcalco	920	Specialised	Cuauhtémoc
1958	110	San Joaquín (Anexo)	275	Specialised	Cuauhtémoc

Inauguration	Official number	Name	Stalls	Type	Location (district)
1958	17	Beethoven	792	Traditional	Cuauhtémoc
1958	22	San Joaquín Zona (Peralvillo)	477	Traditional	Cuauhtémoc
1958	24	Morelia	156	Traditional	Cuauhtémoc
1958	98	Cuauhtémoc	85	Traditional	Cuauhtémoc
1958	81	Villa Comidas (Viejo)	209	Specialised	Gustavo A. Madero
1958	54	Estrella	124	Traditional	Gustavo A. Madero
1958	39	Iztapalapa	200	Traditional	Iztapalapa
1958	65	Jamaica Comidas	66	Specialised	Venustiano Carranza
1959	227	Jardín 23 de Abril	154	Traditional	Azcapotzalco
1959	221	Santa Isabel Tola	67	Traditional	Gustavo A. Madero
1960	19	La Dalia	421	Traditional	Cuauhtémoc
1960	185	Pueblo de San Juan de Aragón	64	Traditional	Gustavo A. Madero
1960	132	Magdalena Contreras (La Loma)	90	Traditional	Magdalena Contreras
1960	41	Central de Tláhuac	148	Traditional	Tláhuac
1960	165	Morelos	912	Traditional	Venustiano Carranza
1960	214	Plan de Ayala Caracol	96	Traditional	Venustiano Carranza
1960	115	Nativitas	296	Touristic Specialised	Xochimilco
1961	135	Bramadero	278	Traditional	Iztacalco
1961	139	Tlacotal	273	Traditional	Iztacalco
1961	131	Escuadrón 201	306	Traditional	Iztapalapa
1961	95	Argentina	964	Traditional	Miguel Hidalgo
1961	394	Villa Milpa Alta (Mercado Antojitos)	23	Specialised	Milpa Alta
1961	40	Benito Juárez (Milpa Alta)	207	Traditional	Milpa Alta
1961	395	Benito Juárez (Anexo)	207	Traditional	Milpa Alta
1961	21	Moctezuma	526	Traditional	Venustiano Carranza
1962	31	Santa María Nonoalco	106	Traditional	Álvaro Obregón
1962	224	San Juan Tlihuaca	168	Traditional	Azcapotzalco
1962	47	24 de Agosto	265	Traditional	Benito Juárez
1962	119	Santa María Nativitas	97	Traditional	Benito Juárez
1962	155	El Reloj	90	Traditional	Coyoacán
1962	171	Churubusco	157	Traditional	Coyoacán
1962	37	Cuajimalpa	128	Traditional	Cuajimalpa
1962	56	10 de Mayo	390	Traditional	Gustavo A. Madero
1962	38	Iztacalco	102	Traditional	Iztacalco
1962	147	La Cruz	249	Traditional	Iztacalco
1962	233	San Isidro Anexo	38	Specialised	Miguel Hidalgo
1962	55	Granada	148	Traditional	Miguel Hidalgo
1962	124	América	307	Traditional	Miguel Hidalgo
1962	26	Romero Rubio	639	Traditional	Venustiano Carranza
1962	148	Ignacio Zaragoza	428	Traditional	Venustiano Carranza

Inauguration	Official number	Name	Stalls	Type	Location (district)
1962	183	Federal	103	Traditional	Venustiano Carranza
1963	173	Cristo Rey	118	Traditional	Álvaro Obregón
1963	268	Pantaco	41	Specialised	Azcapotzalco
1963	125	Arenal	198	Traditional	Azcapotzalco
1963	126	Prohogar	641	Traditional	Azcapotzalco
1963	138	Cosmopolita	135	Traditional	Azcapotzalco
1963	143	Nueva Santa María	126	Traditional	Azcapotzalco
1963	247	Providencia	143	Traditional	Azcapotzalco
1963	276	Pasteros	122	Traditional	Azcapotzalco
1963	59	La Moderna	181	Traditional	Benito Juárez
1963	6	San Cosme	533	Traditional	Cuauhtémoc
1963	45	Ramón Corona	458	Traditional	Gustavo A. Madero
1963	53	Río Blanco	454	Traditional	Gustavo A. Madero
1963	57	Emiliano Zapata	301	Traditional	Gustavo A. Madero
1963	58	Gertrudis Sánchez	215	Traditional	Gustavo A. Madero
1963	70	Vasco de Quiroga	212	Traditional	Gustavo A. Madero
1963	71	Tres Estrellas	122	Traditional	Gustavo A. Madero
1963	116	Ampliación Casas Alemán	192	Traditional	Gustavo A. Madero
1963	117	Martín Carrera	241	Traditional	Gustavo A. Madero
1963	123	Vicente Guerrero (Nueva Atzacoalco)	386	Traditional	Gustavo A. Madero
1963	145	Panamericana	430	Traditional	Gustavo A. Madero
1963	156	Fernando Casas Alemán	222	Traditional	Gustavo A. Madero
1963	188	San Bartolo Atepehuacan	159	Traditional	Gustavo A. Madero
1963	189	San Pedro Zacatenco	111	Traditional	Gustavo A. Madero
1963	109	Militar Marte	158	Traditional	Iztacalco
1963	120	San Andrés Tetepilco	207	Traditional	Iztapalapa
1963	25	Unidad Rastro	717	Traditional	Venustiano Carranza
1963	85	Puebla	281	Traditional	Venustiano Carranza
1963	140	Álvaro Obregón	211	Traditional	Venustiano Carranza
1964	163	María G. García de Ruiz	97	Traditional	Álvaro Obregón
1964	137	Santa Lucía	150	Traditional	Azcapotzalco
1964	141	Victoria de las Democracias	177	Traditional	Azcapotzalco
1964	167	Benito Juárez	123	Traditional	Azcapotzalco
1964	177	Reynosa Tamaulipas	216	Traditional	Azcapotzalco
1964	122	Tlacoquemécatl	109	Traditional	Benito Juárez
1964	130	Prado Churubusco	117	Traditional	Coyoacán
1964	20	Melchor Ocampo	517	Traditional	Cuauhtémoc
1964	28	Bugambilia	201	Traditional	Cuauhtémoc
1964	50	Carrera Lardizábal	131	Traditional	Gustavo A. Madero

Inauguration	Official number	Name	Stalls	Type	Location (district)
1964	62	Salvador Díaz Mirón	150	Traditional	Gustavo A. Madero
1964	69	Gabriel Hernández	214	Traditional	Gustavo A. Madero
1964	73	Progreso Nacional	274	Traditional	Gustavo A. Madero
1964	121	San Juan de Aragón Unidad 1	190	Traditional	Gustavo A. Madero
1964	127	Maximino Ávila Camacho	130	Traditional	Gustavo A. Madero
1964	161	Bondojito	181	Traditional	Gustavo A. Madero
1964	164	Santa Rosa	167	Traditional	Gustavo A. Madero
1964	176	Santa María Ticomán	119	Traditional	Gustavo A. Madero
1964	204	San Juan de Aragón Unidad 7	190	Traditional	Gustavo A. Madero
1964	218	San Juan de Aragón Unidad 2	193	Traditional	Gustavo A. Madero
1964	219	San Juan de Aragón Unidad 3	108	Traditional	Gustavo A. Madero
1964	87	Agrícola Oriental	344	Traditional	Iztacalco
1964	134	Juventino Rosas	208	Traditional	Iztacalco
1964	202	Santa Anita	117	Traditional	Iztacalco
1964	63	Santa María Aztahuacan	106	Traditional	Iztapalapa
1964	172	Prado Norte	122	Traditional	Miguel Hidalgo
1964	150	Pensador Mexicano	156	Traditional	Venustiano Carranza
1964	159	Jardín Balbuena	133	Traditional	Venustiano Carranza
1964	187	Aviación Civil	124	Traditional	Venustiano Carranza
1965	180	Avante	101	Traditional	Coyoacán
1965	300	Los Reyes Coyoacán	104	Traditional	Coyoacán
1965	255	El Rodeo	68	Traditional	Iztacalco
1965	128	Sector Popular	221	Traditional	Iztapalapa
1965	129	Progreso del Sur	135	Traditional	Iztapalapa
1965	191	San Juanico	108	Traditional	Iztapalapa
1965	252	Abraham Del Llano (Nopalera)	87	Traditional	Tláhuac
1965	209	Adolfo López Mateos	211	Traditional	Venustiano Carranza
1965	238	Pantitlán Arenal	143	Traditional	Venustiano Carranza
1966	27	Álamos	269	Traditional	Benito Juárez
1966	157	Xotepingo	124	Traditional	Coyoacán
1966	237	Ajusco Moctezuma	232	Traditional	Coyoacán
1966	259	Educación Petrolera	78	Traditional	Coyoacán
1966	160	Juan González Romero	201	Traditional	Gustavo A. Madero
1966	208	San Lorenzo Xicoténcatl	105	Traditional	Iztapalapa
1966	213	La Purísima	121	Traditional	Iztapalapa
1966	904	Luis Preciado de La Torre	132	Traditional	Venustiano Carranza
1967	206	Apatlaco	131	Traditional	Iztacalco
1967	294	Jacarandas	86	Traditional	Iztapalapa
1968	142	Obrero Popular	125	Traditional	Azcapotzalco

Inauguration	Official number	Name	Stalls	Type	Location (district)
1968	205	San Felipe de Jesús	269	Traditional	Gustavo A. Madero
1968	186	Culhuacán	109	Traditional	Iztapalapa
1968	322	San Antonio Tecomitl	83	Traditional	Milpa Alta
1968	197	Aquiles Serdán	222	Traditional	Venustiano Carranza
1969	236	San Francisco Culhuacán	235	Traditional	Coyoacán
1969	212	Leandro Valle	197	Traditional	Iztacalco
1969	230	Juan de La Barrera	174	Traditional	Iztapalapa
1969	239	Guadalupe del Moral	118	Traditional	Iztapalapa
1969	248	Santa Cecilia	61	Traditional	Tláhuac
1970	181	Olivar del Conde	188	Traditional	Álvaro Obregón
1970	154	Santa Úrsula Coapa (Pescaditos)	268	Traditional	Coyoacán
1970	86	San Juan Curiosidades	176	Touristic Specialised	Cuauhtémoc
1970	74	Palacio de Las Flores	133	Touristic Traditional	Cuauhtémoc
1970	136	Providencia	193	Traditional	Gustavo A. Madero
1970	242	Pradera	106	Traditional	Gustavo A. Madero
1970	223	Sifón	156	Traditional	Iztapalapa
1970	226	San Lorenzo Tezonco	196	Traditional	Iztapalapa
1970	182	San Pedro Atocpan	20	Traditional	Milpa Alta
1970	240	Unidad Kennedy	182	Traditional	Venustiano Carranza
1970	190	San Gregorio Atlapulco	136	Traditional	Xochimilco
1971	175	Santa Cruz Atoyac	101	Traditional	Benito Juárez
1971	118	Pantitlán Calle 4	271	Traditional	Iztacalco
1971	243	Constituyentes de 1917	184	Traditional	Iztapalapa
1971	382	Ampliación Tepepan	60	Traditional	Xochimilco
1972	250	Laminadores	148	Traditional	Azcapotzalco
1972	347	Copilco El Alto	68	Traditional	Coyoacán
1972	336	San Juan de Aragón Unidad 4 y 5	232	Traditional	Gustavo A. Madero
1972	246	San José Aculco	121	Traditional	Iztapalapa
1972	253	Los Olivos	94	Traditional	Tláhuac
1972	274	Artesanías Vasco de Quiroga	132	Specialised	Tlalpan
1972	289	Miguel Hidalgo	72	Traditional	Tlalpan
1972	245	Valle Gómez	203	Traditional	Venustiano Carranza
1973	228	Jardín Fortuna Nacional	71	Traditional	Azcapotzalco
1973	229	Ajusco Montserrat (La Bola)	233	Traditional	Coyoacán
1973	334	Ejidos de La Magdalena Mixhuca	104	Traditional	Iztacalco
1973	244	San Salvador Cuauhtenco (12 de Octubre)	23	Traditional	Milpa Alta
1973	320	Torres de Padierna	58	Traditional	Tlalpan
1973	380	Guadalupe I. Ramírez	25	Specialised	Xochimilco
1974	194	Tlatilco	155	Traditional	Azcapotzalco
1974	258	San Mateo Tlaltenango	32	Traditional	Cuajimalpa
1974	198	24 de Diciembre	203	Traditional	Iztacalco

Inauguration	Official number	Name	Stalls	Type	Location (district)
1974	192	Zapotitlán	67	Traditional	Tláhuac
1974	264	Calzado La Central	172	Specialised	Venustiano Carranza
1975	266	Puente Colorado	43	Traditional	Álvaro Obregón
1975	262	Rosa Torres	159	Traditional	Cuajimalpa
1975	193	Magdalena de Las Salinas (Nueva Vallejo)	86	Traditional	Gustavo A. Madero
1975	211	Tlaltenco (San Francisco)	117	Traditional	Tláhuac
1975	267	Fuentes Brotantes	26	Touristic Specialised	Tlalpan
1975	263	Villa Coapa	167	Traditional	Tlalpan
1975	285	San Andrés Totoltepec	51	Traditional	Tlalpan
1975	406	Tlalcoligia	70	Traditional	Tlalpan
1976	279	Corpus Cristi	87	Traditional	Álvaro Obregón
1976	330	Ma. Esther Zuno de Echeverría	90	Specialised	Gustavo A. Madero
1976	272	Campestre Aragón	137	Traditional	Gustavo A. Madero
1976	286	Flores San Fernando	76	Specialised	Tlalpan
1976	265	Lázaro Cárdenas	72	Traditional	Tlalpan
1976	1011	Mirador	90	Traditional	Tlalpan
1977	413	Jalalpa El Grande	61	Traditional	Álvaro Obregón
1977	291	Francisco Villa	104	Traditional	Iztapalapa
1977	100	Ing. Gonzalo Peña Manterola (Cartagena)	700	Traditional	Miguel Hidalgo
1977	323	San Pablo Oztotepec	74	Traditional	Milpa Alta
1977	251	Comidas Huipulco	23	Specialised	Tlalpan
1977	282	Isidro Fabela	60	Traditional	Tlalpan
1978	302	25 de Julio	249	Specialised	Gustavo A. Madero
1979	369	Molino de Santo Domingo	94	Traditional	Álvaro Obregón
1979	329	San Pedro El Chico	51	Traditional	Gustavo A. Madero
1979	345	San Miguel Iztacalco	90	Traditional	Iztacalco
1979	359	Del Mar	111	Traditional	Tláhuac
1979	350	San Nicolás Totolapan	32	Traditional	Tlalpan
1979	403	Dr. y Gral. José González Varela	58	Traditional	Tlalpan
1979	381	Lic. Octavio Sentíes	40	Traditional	Venustiano Carranza
1979	383	Ahualapa	33	Traditional	Xochimilco
1980	340	Santo Domingo Los Reyes	35	Traditional	Coyoacán
1980	216	Paulino Navarro	110	Traditional	Cuauhtémoc
1980	338	Cuchilla del Tesoro	128	Traditional	Gustavo A. Madero
1980	356	Agrícola Metropolitana (Felipe Astorga Ochoa)	44	Traditional	Tláhuac
1980	372	Selene	112	Traditional	Tláhuac
1980	283	Arenal 4a Sección	199	Traditional	Venustiano Carranza
1980	346	Peñón de Los Baños	101	Traditional	Venustiano Carranza
1981	354	1 de Septiembre	244	Traditional	Gustavo A. Madero
1981	254	Miguel Hidalgo	48	Traditional	Tláhuac

Inauguration	Official number	Name	Stalls	Type	Location (district)
1981	358	Santa Catarina	51	Traditional	Tláhuac
1981	901	Nuevo San Lázaro	78	Specialised	Venustiano Carranza
1981	278	Santa Juanita	107	Traditional	Venustiano Carranza
1981	378	Santa Cruz Acalpixca	50	Traditional	Xochimilco
1982	378	Huizachito	8	Traditional	Cuajimalpa
1982	277	Ampliación Gabriel Hernández	78	Traditional	Gustavo A. Madero
1982	365	24 de Septiembre	78	Traditional	Gustavo A. Madero
1982	404	4 de Febrero	120	Traditional	Gustavo A. Madero
1982	405	Cuautepec	74	Traditional	Gustavo A. Madero
1982	170	Turístico Magdalena	39	Touristic Specialised	Magdalena Contreras
1982	1002	Típico Regional	26	Specialised	Tláhuac
1982	371	San José	48	Traditional	Tláhuac
1982	373	Emiliano Zapata (Tetelco)	24	Traditional	Tláhuac
1982	203	Emilio Carranza	126	Traditional	Venustiano Carranza
1982	146	Tulyehualco	118	Traditional	Xochimilco
1983	339	San Juan de Aragón Unidad 6	169	Traditional	Gustavo A. Madero
1983	366	Alfredo Robles Domínguez	61	Traditional	Gustavo A. Madero
1983	352	José López Portillo	352	Traditional	Iztacalco
1983	261	Tihuatlán	38	Traditional	Magdalena Contreras
1983	381	Tierra Nueva	74	Traditional	Xochimilco
1984	199	Adolfo Ruiz Cortines (La Cruz)	95	Traditional	Coyoacán
1984	301	Santo Domingo Las Rosas	105	Traditional	Coyoacán
1984	311	Margarita Maza de Juárez	102	Traditional	Coyoacán
1984	368	Hermosillo	45	Traditional	Coyoacán
1984	366-1	Lindavista Vallejo Patera	86	Traditional	Gustavo A. Madero
1984	316	24 de Febrero	124	Traditional	Iztapalapa
1984	382	Santa Ana Tlacotenco	19	Traditional	Milpa Alta
1984	1001	Ampliación Selene	71	Traditional	Tláhuac
1984	393	Hueso Periférico	102	Traditional	Tlalpan
1985	319	Emiliano Zapata	47	Traditional	Coyoacán
1985	383	Cerro del Judío	91	Traditional	Magdalena Contreras
1985	384	Contreras La Cruz	96	Traditional	Magdalena Contreras
1986	162	Santa Fe	177	Traditional	Álvaro Obregón
1986	303	Carmen Serdán	116	Traditional	Coyoacán
1986	374	Zapotitla	104	Traditional	Tláhuac
1986	391	José María Morelos y Pavón	56	Traditional	Tlalpan
1986	379	Ampliación San Marcos	91	Traditional	Xochimilco
1987	394	Contadero	78	Traditional	Cuajimalpa
1988	1012	21 de Abril	65	Traditional	Tlalpan
1989	394	24 de Febrero	53	Traditional	Tlalpan

Inauguration	Official number	Name	Stalls	Type	Location (district)
2006	407	Centenario	86	Traditional	Álvaro Obregón
2006	408	San Bartolomé Xicomulco	61	Regional	Milpa Alta
2006	409	Minillas	225	Specialised	Venustiano Carranza
2009	414	Bazar del Artesano Mexicano	550	Specialised	Coyoacán
2009	363	Pasaje Chapultepec	45	Specialised	Cuauhtémoc
2011	412	El Verde	176	Traditional	Coyoacán
2011	410	Ferroplaza	84	Traditional	Gustavo A. Madero
2011	392	Plaza Mexicana del Sur	79	Traditional	Tlalpan
2012	411	La Estación	70	Traditional	Tláhuac

Source: Author. Based on PRI, 2019, 2015; CES-CDMX, 2017; Laboratorio para la Ciudad, 2017; and GDF, 2015.