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Public Policies and Local Market Transformation: An Institutional and Socioeconomic Analysis of the Santander Market Square in Quilichao, Cauca, Colombia

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Abstract: The local market of Santander de Quilichao, located in the Cauca Department of Colombia, represents a complex social, economic, and cultural space shaped by multiple public policies related to urban management and local development. This study examines the marketplace as a site where tensions emerge between institutional modernization initiatives and the preservation of traditional, community-based dynamics characteristic of popular markets. The research aims to assess how public policies related to urban renewal and land-use planning have influenced the market's physical layout, functional organization, symbolic meaning, commercial practices, spatial appropriation, and the sustainability of local entrepreneurship. Methodologically, the study employs a qualitative approach, combining participant observation, semi-structured interviews, and photographic documentation with an analysis of development plans and territorial planning instruments. Findings reveal that, despite institutional efforts toward modernization—primarily focused on infrastructure and sanitary improvements—significant gaps remain in the design and implementation of comprehensive public policies capable of aligning economic development with the protection of the market's social and cultural identity. As an original contribution, this research provides field-based empirical evidence from a marketplace in a non-capital intermediate municipality, a context rarely explored in the literature on public policy and traditional markets. Its novelty lies in the integrated analysis of local public policies, popular entrepreneurship, and sustainability, grounded in the lived experiences of market vendors. The results offer valuable insights for designing territorial public policies that promote the sustainable and inclusive transformation of local markets while preserving their social and cultural significance.



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Keywords: Public policy; local entrepreneurship; market vendors; traditional markets; cultural heritage.

公共政策与地方市场转型：哥伦比亚考卡省基利查奥桑坦德市场广场的制度与社会经济分析

摘要：位于哥伦比亚考卡省的基利查奥桑坦德市场是一个复杂的社会、经济和文化空间，由多项与城市管理和地方发展相关的公共政策所塑造。本研究将该市场视为一个场域，在这里，制度现代化举措与维持流行市场特有的传统和社区动态之间存在张力。研究旨在评估与城市更新及土地使用规划相关的公共政策如何影响市场的空间布局、功能组织、象征意义、商业实践、空间占用方式及地方创业的可持续性。在方法上，本研究采用定性研究方法，结合参与式观察、半结构化访谈和照片记录，并辅以发展计划和地域规划文件的分析。研究发现，尽管机构层面致力于现代化，主要集中在基础设施和卫生条件改善方面，但在设计和实施能够将经济发展与市场社会文化身份保护相结合的综合公共政策方面仍存在显著差距。作为原创贡献，本研究提供了来自非首都中等城市市场的实地经验数据，这一背景在公共政策和传统市场的文献中鲜有涉及。研究的新颖性在于结合地方公共政策、流行创业与可持续性的综合分析，并以市场商贩的真实经验为基础。研究结果为制定旨在实现地方市场可持续、包容性转型的地域公共政策提供了重要参考，同时保障其社会与文化价值。

关键词：公共政策；地方创业；市场商贩；传统市场；文化遗产

1. Introduction

Santander de Quilichao, located in northern Cauca, Colombia, borders the municipalities of Caldono, Buenos Aires, Caloto, Jambaló, and Villa Rica, and shares a strategic boundary with Jamundí in the Department of Valle del Cauca.

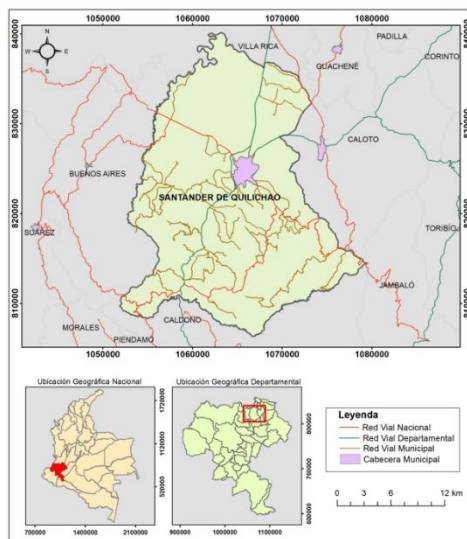


Figure 1. Map of Santander de Quilichao. Source: IGAC.
<https://www.igac.gov.co/>

Its location along the Pan-American Highway - a key transportation artery in Colombia and Latin America - positions it as a significant regional commercial hub.

Within this municipality, the Marketplace and its surrounding central zone serve as a primary commercial nucleus that attracts merchants from various urban and rural areas of the region. Large companies such as Colombina and the “El Paraíso” Industrial Park further contribute to local economic activity, making Santander de Quilichao a strategic center of employment and commercial exchange.

Historically, the Marketplace has been integral to the municipality’s development, functioning as a physical and symbolic landmark since its construction in 1910. Beyond its economic role, the market embodies a space of social interaction, cultural continuity, and community identity.

In such traditional markets, entrepreneurship emerges as a mechanism to invigorate the popular economy and strengthen territorial sustainability. Entrepreneurial activity in these contexts transforms local knowledge, social capital, and creativity into productive initiatives that respond to community needs [1]. As [2] distinguishes, entrepreneurship may arise from necessity-stemming from limited formal employment - or from opportunity, where innovation and strategic market identification drive economic transformation. Understanding these dynamics is crucial for designing public policies that foster inclusive

development in spaces such as the Santander Marketplace.

This study therefore examines the socioeconomic and demographic factors influencing the emergence and consolidation of commercial ventures in this setting. It addresses the lack of systematized knowledge about local entrepreneurial processes and seeks to provide empirical evidence to support policymaking and institutional planning. Ultimately, the research positions the marketplace as a key locus for the articulation between entrepreneurship, public management, and sustainable territorial development.

2. Traditional Markets Amid Global Transformations

Traditional markets have long been fundamental commercial and social spaces, supplying essential goods and shaping local economies and urban structures. Beyond their economic role, these markets carry symbolic meaning, contributing to community identity, cultural continuity, and social cohesion [3].



Figure 2. San Gil Market Square, Santander de Quilichao.
Source: <https://www.alertasantanderes.com>

Recent decades have witnessed global trends toward the modernization and regeneration of traditional marketplaces, often driven by public policies seeking to integrate them into broader urban development strategies. However, these interventions frequently generate tensions between the preservation of traditional practices and the pressures of contemporary urban models. Authors such as [4] refer to this phenomenon as a process of “dequalification” and “requalification,” where markets risk losing their original value while being reinserted into new economic and cultural dynamics.

In Latin America, similar debates arise around urban renewal processes linked to land valorization, displacement, and changes in urban centrality [5-7]. Within this context, the Santander Marketplace faces challenges related to preserving its traditional functions while adapting to institutional demands and urban transformations.

The central question guiding this study is thus: How can the traditional values of the marketplace be strengthened through public policies in the face of

contemporary urban regeneration processes?

Drawing on Weberian principles of heterogeneity, distributive trade, and sustainability, the study analyzes the interplay between cultural preservation and modernization in the specific context of Santander de Quilichao.

3. Public Policies and Marketplace Governance

Public space, in urban settings, is more than a physical area; it is a political, symbolic, and cultural environment where social relations and citizenship practices unfold [8]. Marketplaces constitute strategic public spaces where economic activity intersects with social life, making their management a complex task for local governments.

In Colombia, the constitutional mandate and laws such as [9] and [10] assign municipalities the responsibility of protecting public space and regulating economic activity for collective well-being. These frameworks also empower local authorities to regulate sanitary conditions, commercial practices, and urban coexistence.

Within this regulatory context, the Santander Marketplace represents a multidimensional space where economic dynamism, popular economy, and cultural practices converge. Public policy interventions—through land-use planning, formalization programs, and environmental regulations—play a pivotal role in shaping its transformation.

This article evaluates how these local public policies have influenced the marketplace’s evolution, identifying both institutional challenges and opportunities for the adoption of sustainable practices. Comparative analyses of successful cases in other Colombian territories allow for the extraction of relevant lessons for improving governance and revitalization in Santander de Quilichao.

4. Guidelines and Best Practices for Sustainable Marketplace Management

Effective public policies for local market transformation must integrate principles of sustainability and circular economy. The circular economy seeks to optimize resource use, extend product life cycles, and reduce environmental impact [11]. Within this framework, the marketplace becomes a strategic arena for implementing environmentally responsible practices, such as waste reduction, recycling, and sustainable consumption.

For the Marketplace of Santander de Quilichao, public policies should prioritize:

- Collaborative governance among public institutions, merchant associations, and community groups.
- Strengthening waste management systems,

- particularly through recycling and reuse.
- Supporting local production and short marketing circuits to minimize environmental footprints.
- Implementing civic and environmental education programs.
- Aligning municipal land-use and development plans with circular economy principles.

These strategies would allow the marketplace to evolve toward a sustainable, inclusive, and environmentally responsible urban space.

5. Public Policy Proposal for Circular and Sustainable Management

Despite its centrality in local economic life, the market faces challenges such as inefficient waste management, informal commercial practices, and limited institutional coordination. A public policy focused on circular and sustainable management could address these issues by integrating actors from the public sector, merchant organizations, educational institutions, and environmental groups.

The policy proposal includes:

- Designation of a leading entity such as the Mayor's Office supported by the Secretariats of Economic Development, Environment, and Planning.
- Incorporation of environmental criteria aligned with the Colombian Technical Standard [12], which guides eco-efficient non-residential constructions under the Colombian Environmental Seal (SAC).
- Strengthening interinstitutional cooperation for sustainable infrastructure, energy efficiency, and responsible material usage.

Such policy actions would reinforce institutional commitment to sustainability, eco-efficiency, and urban resilience.

policies on the socioeconomic transformation of the marketplace. The study combines exploratory, descriptive, and explanatory components [13], allowing for a progressive understanding of institutional, social, and economic dynamics.

6.1 Type of Research

- Exploratory: to investigate underexamined aspects of market governance and public policy.
- Descriptive: to characterize socioeconomic and demographic attributes of merchants.
- Explanatory: to identify causal relationships between public policy implementation and market transformation.

6.2 Information Sources

- Primary: semi-structured interviews, surveys, and direct observations.
- Secondary: legal frameworks, institutional reports, and academic literature.

6.3 Sample and Population

The population comprised 1,187 merchants (402 formal; 785 informal).

A representative sample of 291 merchants was obtained using simple random sampling, with a 95% confidence level and 5% margin of error.

6.4 Instrument Design

A 28-item structured questionnaire organized into five thematic categories was validated through expert review and pilot testing.

7. Results

The analysis of public policies and the transformation of the local market reveals a strong interconnection between the socioeconomic and demographic conditions of vendors, the dynamics of popular entrepreneurship, and the role of institutions in shaping this space as a hub of urban and social development. The findings confirm that the marketplace remains a key source of income and social inclusion, particularly for vulnerable population groups such as women, older adults, and small-scale producers, who rely on independent work as an alternative to limited access to formal employment.

From a sociodemographic perspective, commercial activity is predominantly sustained by an adult population, with a high participation of women and long-standing involvement in the marketplace, reflecting extended labor trajectories. The prevailing educational level corresponds to basic and secondary education, which restricts access to technical and professional training related to business management and entrepreneurial development.

Policy / Regulation	General Description	Application or Relevance in the Plaza de Mercado de Santander de Quilichao
Law 9 of 1979 – National Sanitary Code	Establishes the basic standards for the protection of public health in Colombia. Regulates the hygienic and sanitary conditions of food-handling establishments.	Defines the responsibility of territorial entities in the administration and sanitary control of markets. The Mayor's Office must guarantee sanitary conditions, free commercialization, and food security for both vendors and consumers.
Law 99 of 1993 – Creation of the Ministry of Environment and the National Environmental System (SINA)	Creates the Ministry of Environment and organizes SINA. Establishes the principles for environmental protection.	Provides the basis for incorporating environmental criteria into market management, promoting sustainable practices, reducing impacts, and protecting natural resources in the market's urban area.
Law 142 of 1994 – Regime of Public Household Services	Regulates the provision of essential public services, guaranteeing quality, coverage, and efficiency.	Offers guidelines for the proper management of cleaning, water, and energy services used in the market, ensuring a healthy and functional environment.
2019 Policy – National Policy to Prevent Food Loss and Waste	Establishes national strategies to reduce food loss and waste throughout the food supply chain.	Promotes actions to optimize commercial handling and the articulation with donation programs, contributing to sustainability and food security.
National Policy on Sustainable Production and Consumption (2011)	Seeks to transform production and consumption patterns toward sustainable, competitive, and responsible modes.	Serves as a basis to implement circular economy and responsible consumption strategies in the market, fostering eco-efficient practices among vendors and users.
National Policy on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (2012)	Promotes the sustainable management of ecosystems and the conservation of biodiversity, considering their relationship with social and economic dynamics.	Strengthens the relationship between environmental sustainability and market economic activity by promoting the conservation of natural resources and the valuation of ecosystem services.
National Policy for Comprehensive Solid Waste Management – CONPES 3874 of 2016	Establishes strategies for efficient solid-waste management and the transition toward a circular economy.	Enables the establishment of waste separation, recycling, and reuse programs in the market, optimizing environmental management and reducing the ecological impact of local commerce.

Table 1. Applicable regulations for the context of marketplaces in Colombia. Source: Own elaboration

6. Methodology

The research adopted a comprehensive mixed-methods approach to analyze the influence of public

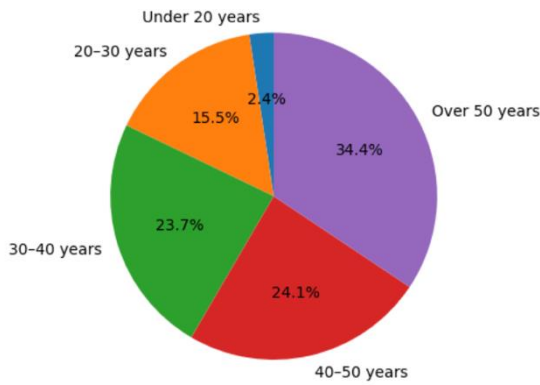


Figure 3. Age distribution of market Vendors. Source: Own elaboration

Socioeconomic and labor conditions are characterized by variable and unstable incomes associated mainly with subsistence activities. Independent work predominates, accompanied by limited access to social security and a strong dependence on daily income generated within the marketplace. Additionally, deficiencies in infrastructure, basic services, and workplace conditions persist, directly affecting quality of life and the sustainability of commercial activities.

The identified enterprises are mostly small-scale units focused on traditional products and basic consumer goods, exhibiting low levels of formalization and limited engagement with institutional support programs. Finally, vendors perceive weak institutional presence and insufficient policy coordination, despite showing a favorable disposition toward modernization and sustainable practices, provided that these processes do not lead to economic displacement or the erosion of the market’s social and cultural identity.

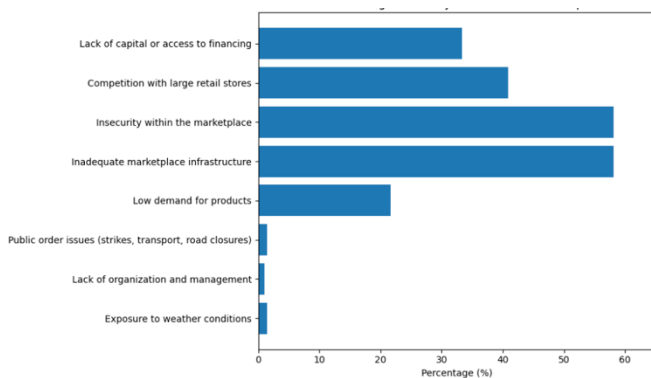


Figure 4. Main Challenges Faced by Vendors in the Marketplace. Source: Own elaboration

8. Conclusion

The study on public policies and the transformation of the local market in the Santander Market Square of

Quilichao demonstrates the deep interdependence between the socioeconomic, demographic, and structural conditions of merchants and the institutional frameworks that shape this space as a key driver of urban, social, and economic development. The findings show that the municipal market continues to function as a territory of opportunity, particularly for vulnerable population groups—such as female heads of household, older adults, and rural producers—who rely on the market as a source of livelihood, social recognition, and economic inclusion through independent work.

The results also indicate that entrepreneurial activities within the market are largely driven by necessity rather than opportunity. This dynamic sustains a subsistence economy marked by high levels of informality, limited educational attainment, and restricted access to credit, technical assistance, or institutional support. Such conditions reflect a long-standing structural deficit in public intervention, manifested in insufficiently targeted policies, inadequate infrastructure, and the absence of business-strengthening programs adapted to the local realities and needs of the market’s economic actors.

Despite these limitations, the market square remains a space of significant social, cultural, and economic value. The perseverance, cooperation, and traditional commercial practices of its merchants constitute a critical form of human capital capable of driving sustainable transformation processes. Accordingly, local public policies must move beyond a purely regulatory perspective and adopt a comprehensive revitalization approach—one that recognizes the market as a public space of inclusion, sustainability, and popular entrepreneurship, aligned with contemporary principles of the circular economy and environmentally responsible management.

In this sense, the findings highlight that the transformation of the marketplace cannot be understood solely as a physical or infrastructural process, but rather as a multidimensional phenomenon that involves social organization, institutional coordination, and the recognition of cultural practices embedded in everyday commercial activities.

The analysis further identified key challenges for the transformation of the local market, including the modernization of infrastructure; the assurance of adequate sanitation, safety, and waste management practices; the progressive formalization of merchants; increased competitiveness in relation to large commercial chains; and the establishment of participatory governance mechanisms among government institutions, merchants, and the wider community. Initiatives such as capacity-building programs, access to microfinance, cooperative networks, and circular economy practices emerge as effective strategies to strengthen entrepreneurial capacity, reduce informality, and promote a more

equitable and inclusive development model.

These challenges reveal the limited articulation between existing public policies and the actual needs of market vendors, reinforcing the importance of designing territorially grounded interventions that integrate economic development, environmental sustainability, and social inclusion.

In conclusion, the transformation of the Santander Market Square requires the coherent articulation of intersectoral public policies that integrate economic, social, and environmental dimensions. Only through participatory public management—grounded in the principles of sustainability, equity, and social co-responsibility—will it be possible to consolidate the market as a vibrant, productive, and resilient public space, capable of contributing meaningfully to local development and to the well-being of the community of the municipality.

From an academic perspective, this study contributes original empirical evidence from a non-capital intermediate municipality, a context that has been scarcely addressed in the literature on public policies and traditional markets. Its innovative value lies in the integrated analysis of local public policies, popular entrepreneurship, and sustainability, based on the direct experiences of market vendors, thereby expanding the understanding of traditional markets as strategic spaces for inclusive local development.

Declarations

Author Contributions

The following statements should be used:

Conceptualization, M.E.A.C. and A.L.C.G.; methodology, M.A.E.C.; validation, M.E.A.C. and S.R.A.; formal analysis, S.R.A.; investigation, M.E.A.C, S.R.A and A.L.C.G ; resources, M.E.A.C. ; data curation, M.E.A.C. and S.R.A. ; writing—original draft preparation, M.E.A.C. and A.L.C.G.; writing—review and editing, S.R.A.; visualization, S.R.A.; supervision, M.E.A.C. and A.L.C.G.; project administration, M.E.A.C.; funding acquisition, M.E.A.C. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

Data Availability Statement

Below are suggested Data Availability Statements (Please select one of them).

- Data available on request due to restrictions, e.g., privacy or ethical: The data presented in this study are available on request from the corresponding author. The data are not publicly available due to the fact that they were provided by participants who stated, through informed consent, that the information could only be used for academic

purposes and must be protected to ensure their privacy.

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Institutional Review Board Statement

The study was conducted in accordance with the Declaration of Helsinki and approved by the Institutional Review Board (or Ethics Committee) of the Universidad del Valle and Institución Universitaria Antonio José Camacho.

Informed Consent Statement

“Informed consent was obtained from all subjects involved in the study.”

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares that there is no conflict of interests regarding the publication of this manuscript. In addition, the ethical issues, including plagiarism, informed consent, misconduct, data fabrication and/or falsification, double publication and/or submission, and redundancies have been completely observed by the authors.

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