

Resistances to urban foodification:

Street food and night-time vending in Temuco and Maipú, Chile

Resistencia a la foodificación urbana:

Comida al paso y venta nocturna en Temuco y Maipú, Chile

Resistências à foodificação urbana:

comida de rua e venda noturna em Temuco e Maipú, Chile

Résistances à la foodification urbaine :

alimentation de rue et vente nocturne à Temuco et Maipú, Chili

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Abstract

This article analyses the forms of food resistance developed by nighttime street food vendors in the cities of Temuco and Maipú, Chile. In the context of growing urban foodification, promoted by regulatory policies that favour gourmet gastronomic devices, this study focuses on how the night becomes a condition of possibility for sustaining popular, autonomous and tolerated labour practices. Based on intensive ethnographic fieldwork conducted between 2022 and 2024 with two family-run street vending units, the research examines food-related decisions, territorial bonds and informal nocturnal organisation. The findings reveal that these vendors construct accessible, affective and functional food landscapes, in contrast to stylised consumption models associated with food trucks. Far from reflecting disorganisation, these practices embody a situated, adaptive rationality that contests the normative and aesthetic regimes of neoliberal urbanism. The article concludes that incorporating night as an analytical category enhances our understanding of urban informality and contributes to a more complex reading of spatial and food justice in Latin America.

Keywords: labour economics, urban space, foodification, nocturnality, food

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Resumen

Este artículo analiza las formas de resistencia alimentaria desarrolladas por trabajadores de comida callejera nocturna en las ciudades de Temuco y Maipú, Chile. En un contexto de creciente foodificación del espacio urbano, promovida por políticas de regulación que privilegian dispositivos gastronómicos gourmetizados, el estudio se enfoca en cómo la noche se convierte en una condición de posibilidad para sostener prácticas laborales populares, autónomas y toleradas. A partir de una estrategia etnográfica intensiva, centrada en el acompañamiento prolongado a dos unidades familiares entre 2022 y 2024, se examinan las decisiones alimentarias, los vínculos con el territorio y las dinámicas de organización nocturna. Los resultados muestran que estos trabajadores construyen paisajes alimentarios accesibles, afectivos y funcionales, en contraste con los modelos de consumo estilizado asociados a los foodtrucks. Lejos de representar improvisación o desorden, estas prácticas encarnan una racionalidad adaptativa situada que desafía los regímenes normativos y estéticos del urbanismo neoliberal. El artículo concluye que incorporar la noche como categoría analítica permite ampliar la comprensión de la informalidad urbana y aporta a una lectura más compleja de la justicia alimentaria y espacial en América Latina.

Palabras clave: economía del trabajo, espacio urbano, foodificación, nocturnidad, alimento

Résumé

Cet article analyse les formes de résistance alimentaire développées par des vendeurs de nourriture de rue opérant la nuit dans les villes de Temuco et Maipú, au Chili. Dans un contexte de foodification urbaine croissante, promue par des politiques de régulation favorisant des dispositifs gastronomiques gourmet, l'étude met en évidence comment la nuit devient une condition de possibilité pour soutenir des pratiques de travail populaires, autonomes et tolérées. À partir d'un travail ethnographique intensif mené entre 2022 et 2024 auprès de deux unités familiales, l'analyse explore les choix alimentaires, les liens territoriaux et les dynamiques d'organisation nocturne. Les résultats montrent que ces vendeurs construisent des paysages alimentaires accessibles, affectifs et fonctionnels, en contraste avec les modèles de consommation stylisés associés aux food trucks. Loin d'être des pratiques désorganisées, elles incarnent une rationalité adaptative située, qui conteste les régimes normatifs et esthétiques de l'urbanisme néolibéral. L'article conclut que l'intégration de la nuit comme catégorie analytique permet d'approfondir la compréhension de l'informalité urbaine et de contribuer à une lecture plus complexe de la justice spatiale et alimentaire en Amérique latine.

Resumo

Este artigo analisa as formas de resistência alimentar desenvolvidas por trabalhadores de comida de rua noturna nas cidades de Temuco e Maipú, no Chile. Em um contexto de crescente foodificação urbana, promovida por políticas regulatórias que privilegiam dispositivos gastronômicos gourmetizados, o estudo enfoca como a noite se torna uma condição de possibilidade para sustentar práticas laborais populares, autônomas e toleradas. A partir de uma estratégia etnográfica intensiva, centrada no acompanhamento prolongado de duas unidades familiares entre 2022 e 2024, analisam-se as decisões alimentares, os vínculos com o território e as dinâmicas de organização noturna. Os resultados mostram que esses trabalhadores constroem paisagens alimentares acessíveis, afetivas e funcionais, em contraste com os modelos de consumo estilizados associados aos foodtrucks. Longe de representar improvisação ou desordem, essas práticas expressam uma racionalidade adaptativa situada que desafía os regimes normativos e estéticos do urbanismo neoliberal. Conclui-se que incorporar a noite como categoria analítica permite ampliar a compreensão da informalidade urbana e contribuir para uma leitura mais complexa da justiça espacial e alimentar na América Latina.

Palavras-chave: economia do trabalho, espaço urbano, foodificação, nocturnidade, comida

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Temuco and Maipú, Chile**

Mots-clés : économie du travail, espace urbain, foodification, nocturnité, nourriture

Introduction

In this sense, foodification can be read as a specific expression of broader dynamics studied by critical urbanism: the unequal production of space, the commodification of the urban, and the recomposition of moral hierarchies in public space (Harvey, 1989; Smith, 2002; Theodore et al., 2009). From this perspective, the dispute is not limited to 'what is sold' or 'where to eat', but rather to what modes of inhabiting and earning a living are recognized as legitimate in the city and under what regimes of order, aesthetics, and value.

In Latin America, street vending is one of the most visible and persistent forms of urban informality (Recchi, 2020). Despite its importance for the popular economy, self-employment, and food accessibility, it has been subject to land use policies that place it in constant tension between economic necessity and urban control regulations (Peimani & Kamalipour, 2022). Particularly in recent years, these policies have reinforced mechanisms of symbolic and material exclusion under the argument of 'reclaiming' public space, rendering invisible or displacing historical subsistence practices (Peimani & Kamalipour, 2022; Spire & Choplin, 2018). In this context, street food vending has emerged as a flashpoint in the dispute over the legitimate use of urban space, intertwining work, food, and visibility (Allison et al., 2021).

The rise of gastronomic devices such as food trucks and gourmet fairs—promoted by local governments as symbols of modernization, creativity, and order—has deepened these tensions. This process, described in the literature as 'foodification', involves the reconfiguration of urban taste based on aspirational consumption aesthetics, symbolic sanitization, and the exclusion of popular food practices (Bourlessas et al., 2022). Rather than a neutral transformation of the urban landscape, foodification acts as a form of food gentrification, where certain ways of cooking, presenting, and consuming food are institutionalized as desirable, while others are displaced because they are considered informal, unaesthetic, or unsafe (Bourlessas et al., 2022).

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These transformations are part of a broader framework of urban beautification and privatization of public space policies, which are often presented as technical consensus, but which respond to logics of class, control, and moral selectivity (Crossa, 2016; Spire & Choplin, 2018). In Chile, these policies take the form of ordinances that delimit exclusion zones, impose difficult-to-meet health requirements, and punish the informal use of space, especially during the day. However, these same regulations present temporal ambiguities: the night, less monitored and less regulated, becomes an interstice that enables work practices that would be punished during the day.

This article aims to analyze the forms of resistance through food deployed by nighttime street food workers in two Chilean urban contexts. Based on an ethnographic approach developed between 2022 and 2024, it examines the strategies informal vendors use to circumvent institutional restrictions and sustain accessible, fast, and popular food practices. It is argued that nighttime, rather than simply being a time of day, acts as a space of agency where taste, food aesthetics, and the right to the city are contested.

Although foodification has been extensively discussed in cities in the global North, where it has been associated with urban regeneration, tourism, and creative economies (Hanser & Hyde, 2014; Hernandez, 2011; Loda et al., 2020), its expressions in Latin America have different meanings: they coexist with established popular economies, fragmented regulatory frameworks, and everyday arrangements of tolerance. In this context, observing the cases of Temuco (a medium-sized city) and Maipú (a metropolitan suburb) allows us to explore how the same repertoire of aesthetic and gastronomic regulation materializes unevenly, and how nighttime practices operate as an interstice to sustain popular food provision.

Unlike other studies focused exclusively on the regulation or legitimacy of informal work (Peimani & Kamalipour, 2022), this work proposes to focus the analysis on food as a social and political object. Thus, it seeks to understand how the choice of certain products, the relationship with consumers, and the use of nighttime space constitute a form of material and symbolic resistance to the foodification of urban space. By focusing on the intersection between food, informality, and nightlife, the article contributes to critical urban studies with an analytical proposal that incorporates taste as a dimension of conflict and nighttime as a territory of subaltern cultural production.

Theoretical Framework

Foodification and Food Gentrification: New Frontiers of Urban Consumption

Conceptually, foodification can be understood as an extension of the debate on gentrification into the field of food: if gentrification describes processes of material and symbolic revaluation that reorder uses, users, and meanings of space (Lees, 2012; Smith, 2002), foodification refers to the way in which food operates as a vector of urban valorization, reconfiguring taste, visibility, and conditions of access in public space (Bonotti & Barnhill, 2022). Over the last two decades, a global phenomenon has emerged that has transformed the way food is inserted into processes of urban valorization: foodification. This concept—developed from studies on symbolic gentrification—refers to the transformation of certain traditional food practices into valued cultural products, reinterpreted and aestheticized for a selective consumer audience (Bourlessas et al., 2022; Jiménez-Arévalo & Barrera-Fernández, 2024).

Foodification is not a spontaneous or merely aesthetic phenomenon. It is deeply rooted in urban marketing strategies, neighborhood regeneration policies, and dynamics of social distinction (Bonazzi, 2022; Lütke & Lem-

on, 2021). Local governments, in their eagerness to attract tourism, investment, or the ‘creative classes’, promote gourmet fairs, food truck parks, or food festivals where ‘signature’, ‘fusion’, or ‘sustainable’ cuisine is celebrated. These practices displace or render invisible the historical presence of popular cuisines, often migrant or informal, that do not fit into the narrative of experiential consumption or culinary innovation (Bourlessas et al., 2022).

The installation of food trucks as mobile food vending devices, with attractive designs, formal regulation, and strategic locations, is a clear example of how food can be used as a vector of urban gentrification (Lütke & Lemon, 2021). Instead of recognizing the food diversity of territories, these formats standardize the street food experience, eliminating the relational, territorial, and cultural components that characterize popular practices. As Miewald and McCann (2014) have shown in the North American context, this new food spatiality redefines who can consume, in what spaces, at what price, and under what symbolic codes.

The literature has documented how these types of transformations involve not only a revaluation of real estate, but also a moral reconfiguration of space: the orderly, clean, and visible is preferred over the improvised, saturated, and mobile. This reinforces a politics of taste that legitimizes some forms of work and delegitimizes others (Hanser & Hyde, 2014). Food ceases to be a commodity and becomes a sign of distinction, crystallizing new forms of symbolic exclusion in public space.

From a Latin American perspective, these dynamics can also be read as disputes over urban food provision, where informality expresses not only precariousness but also forms of relative autonomy to sustain popular supply circuits outside of gourmetized devices. In this sense, the food resistance we analyze is not limited to ‘opposing’ food trucks, but rather to preserving accessible and socially functional food landscapes in the face of processes of aesthetic selection, symbolic sanitization, and urban land reorganization that tend to restrict who can sell, what can be cooked, and where (Forero et al., 2023; Vázquez-Medina et al., 2020).

In this scenario, the practice of selling street food at night is a material and political response to these processes. As we will see in the ethnographic cases analyzed, street workers not only offer affordable food, but also resist the everyday and gourmetized logic of urban production. They do so at night, on the margins, through strategies of relative invisibility, restricted circulation, and tolerance arrangements that challenge the institutional apparatus of order.

Street Food and the City: Between Subsistence and Sociability

Street food vending is an ancient urban practice, widespread in many geographical areas, which combines economic, cultural, health, and political dimensions (Caramaschi, 2024). Its relevance lies not only in the number of people who depend on it (in Latin America, it is estimated that millions of informal workers are involved in this activity), but also in the way it structures everyday dynamics of supply, mobility, and encounter (Marras et al., 2014). According to data from the FAO and WHO (2022), more than 2.5 billion people worldwide consume food purchased on the street on a regular basis, making this practice a structural component of the contemporary urban food system.

Street food offers quick, cheap, and relatively stable access to daily nutrition, especially for low-income sectors, students, migrants, and precarious workers. Furthermore, as a form of family entrepreneurship, it requires low initial investment and operates with great flexibility in terms of hours and location, making it a viable alternative to the barriers of formal employment (Recchi, 2020). This flexibility has meant that in times of crisis—economic, health, or political—its presence has increased on the streets of cities around the world.

However, the relevance of street food goes beyond its economic function. As Joassart-Marcelli and Bosco (2020) have argued, these spaces shape food landscapes in which the materiality of food, social identities, migrant memories, consumption practices, and forms of urban sociability are intertwined. They are places where emotional bonds and networks of trust are built that resist the logic of commercial anonymity. Eating on the street is also a cultural gesture: a way of inhabiting public space, marking territorial belonging, and sustaining food practices rooted in local or popular traditions (Bautista-Hernández et al., 2020).

This dimension of street work as a producer of urban life clashes head-on with policies of sanitization and order that, from an official planning perspective, represent it as an obstacle to development. Public space is thus treated as a neutral setting that must be protected from ‘inappropriate’ uses, with street trading being one of the main targets of intervention (Spire & Choplin, 2018). In this way, street food vending is systematically precarious, criminalized, and displaced, despite its social legitimacy and historical persistence.

Regulation of Street Trade in Chile: Between Criminalization and Nocturnal Ambiguity

In Chile, street work takes place within a fragmented regulatory framework centered on the notion of National Public Use Property. Based on the Municipal Revenue Law, the Traffic Law, and the Food Sanitation Regulations, municipalities administer public space and define, with a high degree of discretion, authorized uses and prohibited practices. The concept of a ‘precarious permit’ sums up this logic: it allows for temporary occupations and can be revoked without compensation.

The sale of food is regulated mainly from a rationality of order and safety. The technical requirements of the Food Safety Regulations (hygiene, materials, conservation) are difficult for most informal workers to comply with, which reproduces their illegal status and enables selective controls.

In Temuco, Ordinance 003/2018 (amending 001/2005) combines restrictive perimeters and sanctions, including measures that discourage purchases from unlicensed vendors (Ulloa-Martínez, 2021), and standardizes authorized carts (Municipality of Temuco, 2018). In Maipú, the 2022 update replaces the 1983 ordinance and reinforces the prohibition of unauthorized trade, maintaining demanding requirements and a discourse of ‘recovery’ of public space (Municipality of Maipú, 2022; Vodanovic, 2022).

Enforcement is carried out by multiple actors (municipal inspectors, police, health personnel, Internal Revenue Service, among others), creating an environment of high punishability (Irrázabal González, 2022). At the same time, most ordinances do not distinguish between different times of day, creating an operational vacuum regarding nighttime sales: this does not imply legal acceptance, but it does open margins of ambiguity and negotiation that workers take advantage of to continue their activity.

Thus, the regulatory framework in Chile not only establishes material barriers to street trading but also structures moral hierarchies regarding who can occupy the city, under what conditions, and at what times. These hierarchies are deeply marked by logics of socioeconomic exclusion and by an aesthetic of order that relegates the night (and those who inhabit it while working) to the realm of the transitory, the suspicious, and the informal. It is precisely in this interstice that the practices of everyday resistance that this study seeks to make visible unfold.

Studies of the Night: Alternative Spatialities and Marginal Agency

Night has traditionally been marginal in urban studies. Recent approaches address it as a social and spatial construction, with its own meanings and regimes of control (Hadfield, 2015). Following Melbin (1978), it can be understood as a temporal frontier that reconfigures surveillance and uses, enabling practices that differ from the daytime order.

Studying the night therefore involves observing how the use of public space is reconfigured in conditions of limited lighting, low institutional density, and decentralized rhythms (Petrilli & Vanolo, 2025). This reconfiguration not only transforms the sensory and affective dynamics of the environment but also opens possibilities for the development of activities that would be repressed or controlled during the day. As van Liempt et al. (2015) warn, there is a 'nyctalopia' in urban social sciences: an analytical blindness to the social processes that take place at night, despite their relevance to understanding the full functioning of cities.

From this perspective, night is not a temporal residue or an exception to the daytime urban regime, but a constitutive dimension of the contemporary city. In particular, it allows us to observe how certain groups—street workers, sex workers, collectors, recyclers, undocumented migrants—deploy forms of marginal agency that challenge the official logics of order, progress, and productivity (Ulloa-Martínez and Zavala-Villegas, 2024). These forms of nocturnal occupation are not necessarily rebellious in the classical sense, but they constitute 'infra-political forms of resistance': everyday tactics that allow life to be sustained without openly confronting power but challenging its forms of exclusion (Ulloa-Martínez, 2025).

In this sense, the night is not only a setting for informality, but also a condition of possibility for subsistence practices that require relative invisibility, territorial negotiation, and informal arrangements. As Varani and Bernardini (2019) point out, the nocturnal urban space is constructed through dense relationships between bodies, goods, emotions, lights, and silences, giving rise to alternative landscapes that are rarely considered by traditional urban policies.

Furthermore, the nocturnal dimension reveals the unequal temporal distribution of the right to the city. While during the day public spaces are controlled by surveillance devices, formal commerce, and legitimized consumption, at night these same spaces can be appropriated by social actors who would otherwise be expelled from the urban center. This refers to a form of diachronic spa-

tial justice, where time is also a variable of urban exclusion or inclusion.

In the case of nighttime street work, as will be seen in the empirical sections of this article, nighttime not only reduces the risk of enforcement, but also enables a pragmatic reorganization of space, economy, and social relations. In other words, it is a productive space-time, where other ways of inhabiting the city, building sociability, sustaining networks, and disputing legitimacy are rehearsed.

Methodology

This study was developed using an ethnographic strategy (2022-2024) in Temuco and Maipú, Chile, two contrasting urban contexts where labor informality and regulatory pressure on public space converge. Figure 1 is included as contextual evidence of gastronomic devices promoted by municipalities, to situate the institutional environment associated with foodification.

The fieldwork consisted of intensive monitoring of two-family units engaged in nighttime food sales. The selection was analytical and intensive, seeking territorial contrast (Temuco, an intermediate city; Maipú, a metropolitan periphery) and diversity of products and strategies in response to regulations. Both cases operate without formal authorization, but within margins of informal tolerance that allow for the observation of negotiation, control, and resistance during nighttime hours.

The first case, in Temuco, is located in the vicinity of the Pinto Market, the city's main popular supply center. During the day, this sector welcomes thousands of people, including rural and urban customers. However, at dusk, the area transforms into an informal night market that spreads across avenues, sidewalks, and central medians. In this context, Rosita and her family operate a food cart, purchased after withdrawing pension funds during the pandemic. They sell hot dogs, *sopaipillas*, coffee, and other quick-prep foods, targeting a working and mobile clientele that supplies or sells at the night market.

The second case is located in Maipú, near the Plaza de Maipú. María sells under an awning (*sopaipillas*, pizzas, empanadas, and hot drinks) with the support of her husband. Although the 2022 ordinance reinforced the ban on informal trade in key sectors, her activity continues in the evening and at night, when enforcement decreases, allowing us to observe informal territorialities in a context of active regulation and aesthetic stigmatization.



Figure 1. Events promoted by municipalities. On the left, Temuco, and on the right, Maipú
Source: Own elaboration extracted from municipal websites.

The research combined participant observation, semi-structured interviews, and intensive ethnographic accompaniment. More than 50 nighttime visits were made, both on weekdays and weekends, recording complete routines: setting up stalls, preparing food, interacting with customers, waiting times, conflict resolution, dismantling, and closing. Particular attention was paid to gestures, discourse, and food choices: stall aesthetics, types of food, low-cost strategies, selection of ingredients, and adaptation to the preferences of a clientele that is generally precarious or displaced from formal circuits.

Ethnographic accompaniment, understood as a form of relational immersion and situated observation, was key to accessing domestic and supply spaces, prior preparation routines, family dynamics, and conversations about work, taste, fatigue, and tensions in the face of the gourmet establishments that dominate the daytime urban landscape. This strategy made it possible to construct a dense view of the material, affective, and temporal dimensions of informal night work.

In all cases, verbal consent was obtained and anonymity was protected through the use of pseudonyms. The work was guided by the ethical principles of critical ethnography, with a reflective attitude toward the limits of access and the role of the researcher. This approach allowed us to understand the night as a relational territory of agency and food production, where the senses of taste, order and urban legality are silently disputed.

Results

Night as Opportunity: Work Strategies and Resistance in Everyday Life

For many street workers, nighttime is not simply an alternative time slot, but an enabling condition that allows them to deploy subsistence strategies in a city that restricts their possibilities during the day. The choice of nighttime hours responds both to the decrease in institutional oversight and to the adaptation to the circulation routines of a working-class and popular clientele. This dual dimension—evading control and serving those who also inhabit the city during off-peak hours—shapes a political and practical use of the night.

In the setting of an informal market in Temuco, Rosita and her partner set up their food cart after frustrated attempts to sell during the day, when municipal enforcement was more intense:

We started during the pandemic, after the 10% pension withdrawals, and we were able to buy this cart. I used to work in a butcher's shop, but I got bored [...] I wanted to work for myself, but where we set up at first (outside a construction site in t lasted long, because when the work was finished we had nowhere to go, until we came here, at night. (Juan, interview 2022)

Although the initial motivation was to avoid penalties, the nighttime hours opened up a space for greater work autonomy and connection with a clientele that arrives after other services have closed:

When we arrived here, we didn't know anything about the hours they worked. We just came and settled in without knowing anyone, and we wanted to devote ourselves fully to this, to make a living from cooking, which is what we like [...] Working together on this project was also something that motivated me, because I used to work somewhere else as an employee, but I preferred to become independent together with my husband. (Rosita, interview 2022)

This type of nighttime occupation cannot be improvised. It involves a chain of decisions and tasks that begins many hours earlier: sourcing supplies at wholesale markets, prepping ingredients, organizing transportation, and accurately calculating stock to avoid losses. In the case of Rosita and her husband, the routine begins early in the morning with taking care of their children, and then moving on to the day's preparations:

We have to start early because we make sure the children go to school, and after that we do the shopping or preparations. We coordinate these tasks so that everything goes well when we come back at night, because we have to calculate how much bread, how many steaks, flour, and oil we need to have each day. We get the vegetables right here (at the market). (Rosita, interview 2022)

These practices show that informal night work is not disorderly or spontaneous, but rather the result of an economic and temporal rationality adapted to the restrictive urban context.

Cooking and Selling in the Dark: Food Territorialities and Bodies in Action

At night, street cooking becomes an embodied way of inhabiting the city. The bodies of those who cook, serve, carry, clean, and consume take center stage as the backbone of the popular food landscape. The material conditions of this practice (the cold, the darkness, the precariousness of the equipment) require a set of technical, physical, and emotional skills that shape a situated food territoriality and often cause tensions both in the health of those who work and in the sanitary standards that are often invoked to justify punitive controls.

María, for example, works from a folding table covered with a tarp. Every afternoon, her husband sets up the stall: he installs the oven, heats the oil, and organizes the bottles of juice, bread, sopaipilla dough, and pizza dough that she prepares at home. This arrangement not only follows a functional logic, but also creates a modest yet orderly aesthetic that inspires confidence:

When I went to talk to María, I noticed how organized her table was. When I asked her if she had any particular order, she replied that no, she just arranged things as she thought best. However, she had everything separated, especially the place where she keeps her coins. She also uses a plastic bench to rest from the body aches caused by fatigue and her chronic illnesses. (Field diary, September 2022)

Customers, for their part, recognize the place by its light, aroma, and service. The repetition of formulas, jokes, brief greetings, or the simple gesture of taking an order without speaking create a scene where food is also a bond:

Everyone who comes here knows exactly what we sell; they recognize the aroma of my sopaipillas. Plus, we are always friendly with our customers; we have never had a problem with anyone, we even have regulars (she laughs). (Rosita, interview, January 2023)

At the night market in Temuco, the stalls are distributed according to a functional logic accepted by all: trucks with vegetables in the center, food on the outskirts, next to the street to serve passersby. This organization was not imposed, but built through trial and error, and is maintained thanks to implicit agreements, as represented in the fieldwork sketch (see Figure 2).

These nocturnal food territorialities—made up of bodies, gestures, utensils, and trust—contrast sharply with the sanitized, impersonal, and staged logic of gourmet establishments.

Food Resistance on the Margins: Between Popular Taste and Foodification

One of the main findings of the fieldwork is the way in which night vendors construct a food offering that, although simple, is deeply meaningful. Faced with the rise of food trucks selling 'signature' burgers, gourmet sandwiches, and specialty coffees, street workers opt for accessible, caloric, fast, and recognizable foods. This decision responds not only to the logic of cost or time, but also to a different food ethic: feeding without excluding.

María sums up this idea by explaining that her customers "don't have the time or money to stay" and that her success depends on offering food that can be eaten standing up, without utensils, and that "fills you up": "All my customers here are university students, and they go out to smoke a cigarette or eat something during their breaks, and they always accompany it with a coffee or tea" (María, interview 2023).

Rosita, meanwhile, tried to sell more elaborate dishes—such as casseroles or empanadas—without success. Her customers were not looking for novelty, but certainty.

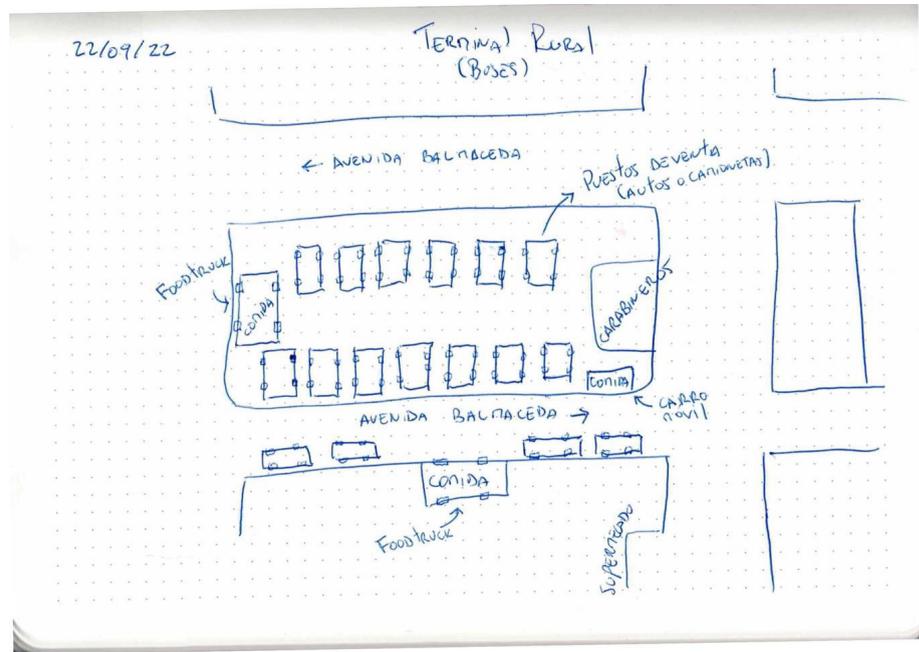


Figure 2. Sketch of the layout of the market in Temuco. Visual note made during fieldwork to record the relative layout of stalls, food trucks, and checkpoints. The diagram is for reference purposes only (not to scale) and is presented as ethnographic input.

Source: Prepared by the author during fieldwork.

So she went back to hot dogs, instant coffee, and freshly made sopaipillas with pebre sauce that she made at home:

When we arrived, we wanted to be different and brought casseroles and more elaborate dishes, but after a while we realized that people wanted something simple that didn't take too much time to prepare. It's not like coming here is like going to the mall (laughs). The people who eat here are the same ones who work or are customers who supply their businesses; they're not people who come to stay [...] but the practice itself made us realize what we had to sell: simple, cheap, and quick things, made with love [...] What could be better? [...] (Rosita, interview 2022)

These food choices not only resist the gourmet model but also reproduce a food system that connects with popular knowledge, tastes, and economies. Instead of aestheticizing food, it is circulated; instead of designing experiences, warmth, satiety, and familiarity are offered. It is in this margin—material, symbolic, and temporal—that a silent but persistent form of food resistance unfolds, asserting the right to inhabit and feed the city from below.

Discussion and Conclusions

The findings of this research show that the nighttime sale of street food in cities such as Temuco and Maipú constitutes a subsistence strategy in restrictive urban contexts, but also a situated form of food resistance. Through the tactical use of the night, workers deploy practices that allow them to sustain popular, autonomous, and tolerated food circuits, in contrast to processes of gourmetiza-

tion that reorganize public space according to hierarchies of taste, aesthetics, and symbolic exclusion. In this sense, foodification operates less as a 'gastronomic trend' and more as a vector of urban reorganization that disputes legitimacy and access in public space (Campo & Arreortua, 2017; Jiménez-Arévalo & Barrera-Fernández, 2024).

In contrast to the models promoted by urban policies—such as themed fairs or food trucks—night stalls assert a different logic, based on accessible food, short wait times, and bonds of trust. The choice to sell sopaipillas, hot dogs, or instant coffee does not respond to a lack, but rather to a relational and territorial rationality that challenges the institutional rhetoric of 'good eating' (Hanser & Hyde, 2014). Far from seeking innovation or aesthetic visibility, these food practices are built in dialogue with regular customers and the material conditions of night work, producing a functional food landscape that does not fit the gourmet standards of urban consumption.

In this context, the night reveals itself as a structuring category. It is not just a temporal margin with less oversight, but a space-time that enables other forms of relationship, corporeality, and urban habitation (Petrilli and Vanolo, 2025). Cooking at night involves managing silences, fatigued bodies, and sustained affections. It is also the setting where visibility is negotiated: a controlled, prudent visibility that avoids conflict and seeks to remain on the margins of restrictive norms (Scott, 2025).

Even so, it is necessary to qualify any idealized reading of these practices. The forms of agency observed do not operate outside of precariousness, but from within

it. The decisions made by those who sell—what to cook, how much to prepare, how to organize the space—are determined by conditions of structural insecurity, gender inequalities, fragile logistical arrangements, and constant surveillance of their permanence. As Crossa (2016) warns, these are forms of infra-political action that do not necessarily transform the system but elude it in its daily functioning. Along the same lines, references to health risks and conditions should not serve as automatic justification for expulsion, but rather as evidence of the need for urban policies that recognize and improve the real conditions of nighttime food provision (FAO & WHO, 2022; Marras et al., 2014).

Furthermore, these practices challenge not only legal norms, but also aesthetic and moral regimes regarding what is considered acceptable in public spaces. Beautification policies tend to expel the popular because it is considered inappropriate or disruptive (Spire and Choplin, 2018), while night vendors sustain an uncodified economy based on repetition, practical efficiency, and territorial recognition. In this context, foodification can also operate as a reordering of urban land and its permissible uses, contributing to territorial selectivity where food functions as a criterion of distinction and valorization (Campo & Arreortua, 2017; Loda et al., 2020).

The ethnographic cases analyzed here show that these forms of selling are neither improvised nor disorganized. There is planning, shared rules, routines, and affections. The informal governance that emerges — in line with what Pita (2012) calls 'tolerated illegalities' — allows for a certain stability to be maintained without direct intervention by the state, albeit in an ambiguous relationship with its presence or absence. This ambivalence helps explain why the night can function as an interstice of tolerance: not because it is 'empty' of regulation, but because it combines selective controls, situational arrangements, and daily room for maneuver.

In short, the sale of nighttime street food is not an urban exception, but a sustained form of producing the city from the margins. By incorporating food as an analytical axis and nighttime as a key temporal category, this work contributes to a more situated reading of Latin American urban informality and the mechanisms through which foodification strains access, legitimacy, and ways of inhabiting public space. Methodologically, although the analysis focuses on two family units, the main contribution is analytical: to identify everyday repertoires of negotiation, tolerance, and resistance that can be explored comparatively in other urban, regulatory, and nocturnal contexts. In future research, it will be relevant to deepen the link between urban regulation, popular economies, and urban social rights—including the dimension of the

right to food understood as daily access to affordable and timely food at night—as well as to examine in greater detail how these mechanisms vary according to local ordinances, enforcement, and center-periphery dynamics.

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