Transformation of the vegetable supply chain in Mar del Plata (Argentina) in the face of raising health concerns

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Building sustainable urban food systems

Urban food issues is taking more and more importance in the political agenda

City scale : relevant to build a food governance oriented toward sustainable food systems

Agriculture and food systems have long been polarized in the scientific and the public debate by "conventional versus alternative" models: dual perceptions about the best suited model to go toward the construction of sustainable food systems.

Recent research examines the porosity of both models: intermediary forms and the coexistence of models in local territories is thought as a possible condition to build resilient and sustainable food systems

Argentinean context

Agricultural landscape dominated by agricultural industrial model

Duality between “conventional” model and model oriented toward agroecology

From mid-2000s, rising health concerns

➔ municipal laws voted to prohibit the use of pesticides

Mar del Plata:

- 2nd horticultural belt of the country
- Municipal law on the use of pesticides voted in 2008

➔ **How do current models answer to local food issues?**

➔ **Is the municipal order a lever/a break to sustainable development of the vegetable food chain and of the urban and periurban territory?**



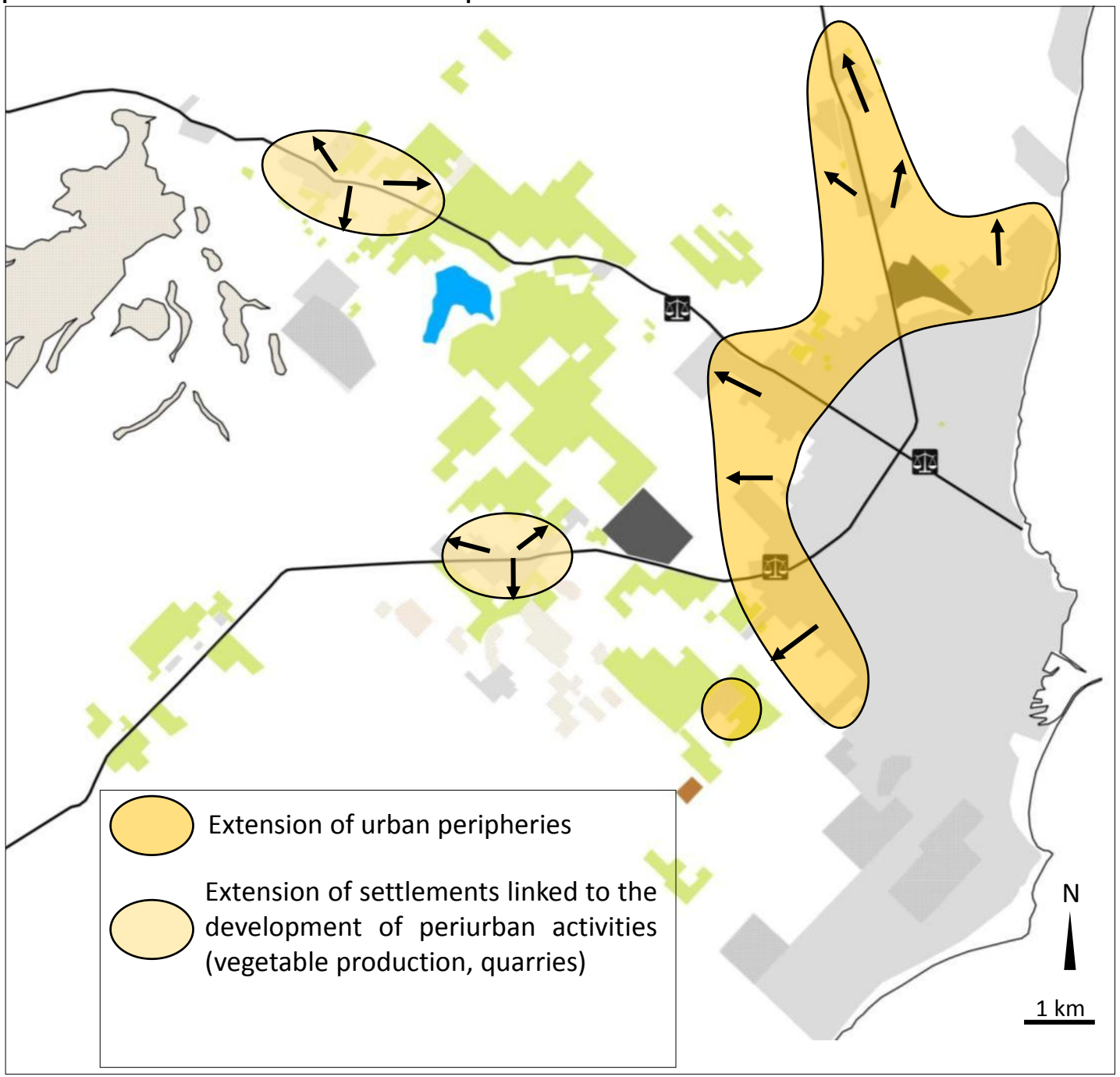

Agricultural belt:
Patchwork of vegetable production and intensive cereals and oilseed crops

Changes in urban and periurban territory

Change of socio-economic profile of periurban dwellers



Spatial expansion of Mar del Plata: new periurban dwellers



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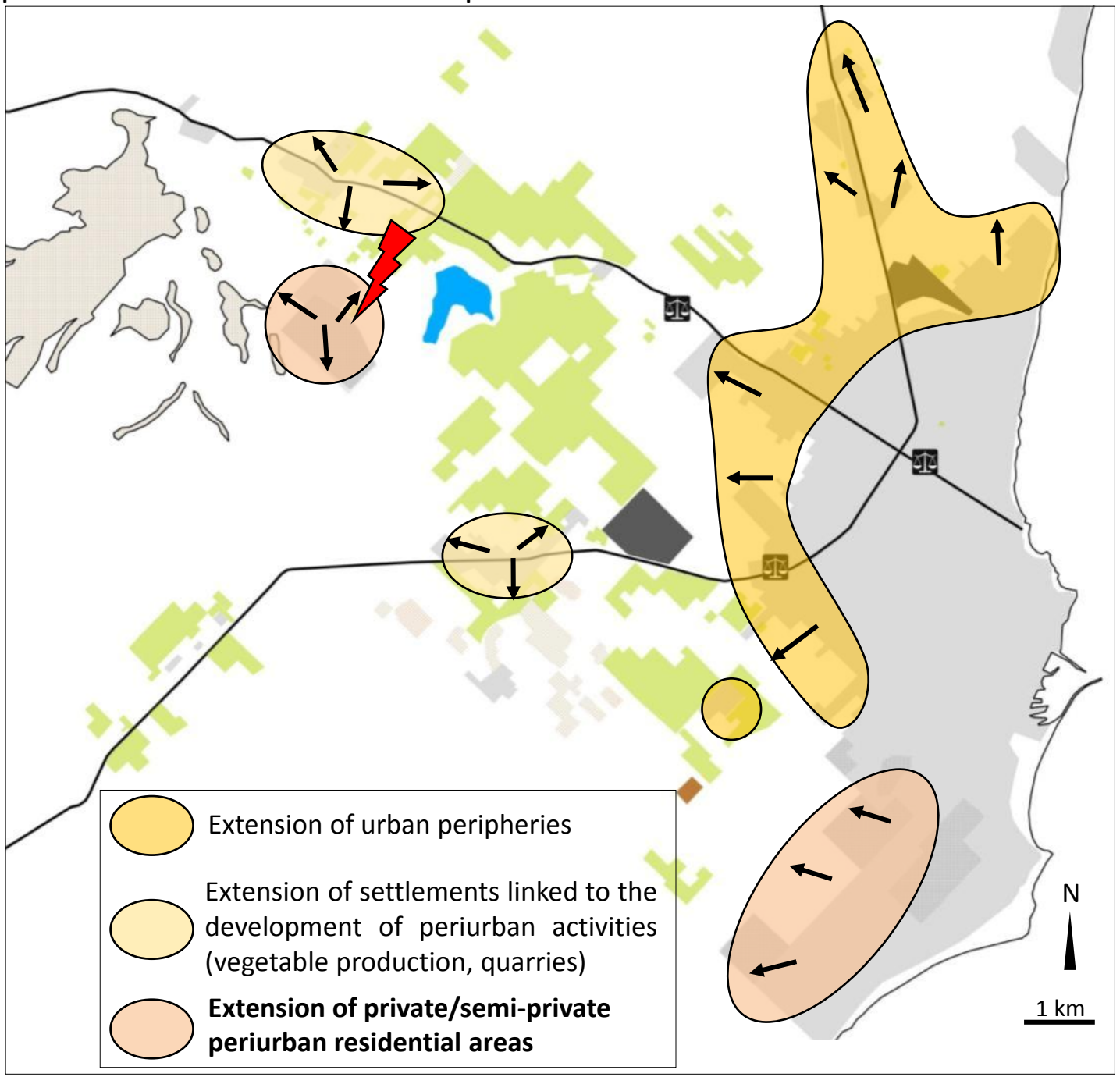

Changes in urban and periurban territory

Change of socio-economic profile of periurban dwellers

Little systematized knowledge on production free from agrochemicals

➔Belief that producing without chemicals is not feasible

➔Some larger farmers moving farther from city

➔Small-scale farmers try to adapt

➔Estate agencies taking advantage of the situation



Changes in the vegetable supply chain

Two « strong » models

Conventional

« Producción agrícola »

Alternative

« Agroecología »



« Conventional » model

Dominant model
Farms from <5 ha farms (mostly Bolivians) up to 70ha farms (European descendants)
Characterized by:

- Use of agrochemical inputs
- Share cropping system
- Marketing activities organized for large volumes
- Produces sold outside the local area

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Share-cropping system (“Bolivian scale”)
➔ impact on input management
Lower use => because of fear of controls
“Quality” of produces based on visual aspects
Important role of private agronomists

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Answers expectations in terms of volumes but engenders strong reactions from civil society associations

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« Alternative » model

Isolated farmers in the “conventional landscape”
Small-scale farming (<2ha)
Characterized by:
- Production free from agrochemical
- Short circuits
- Important links with programs (technical advisors)

Lack of outlets (bottleneck)

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Little/no adapted input in agronomy shops
Few agronomist involved
Individual and informal on-farm tests
➔ Difficulty to extend this model of production

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Closer from the society’s new expectations but is not accessible to the large majority of producers and consumers

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Intermediate/hybrid forms

Many actors do not find their place in conventional or alternative models

Intermediary forms emerge or get a greater legitimacy in the current context of rising health issues

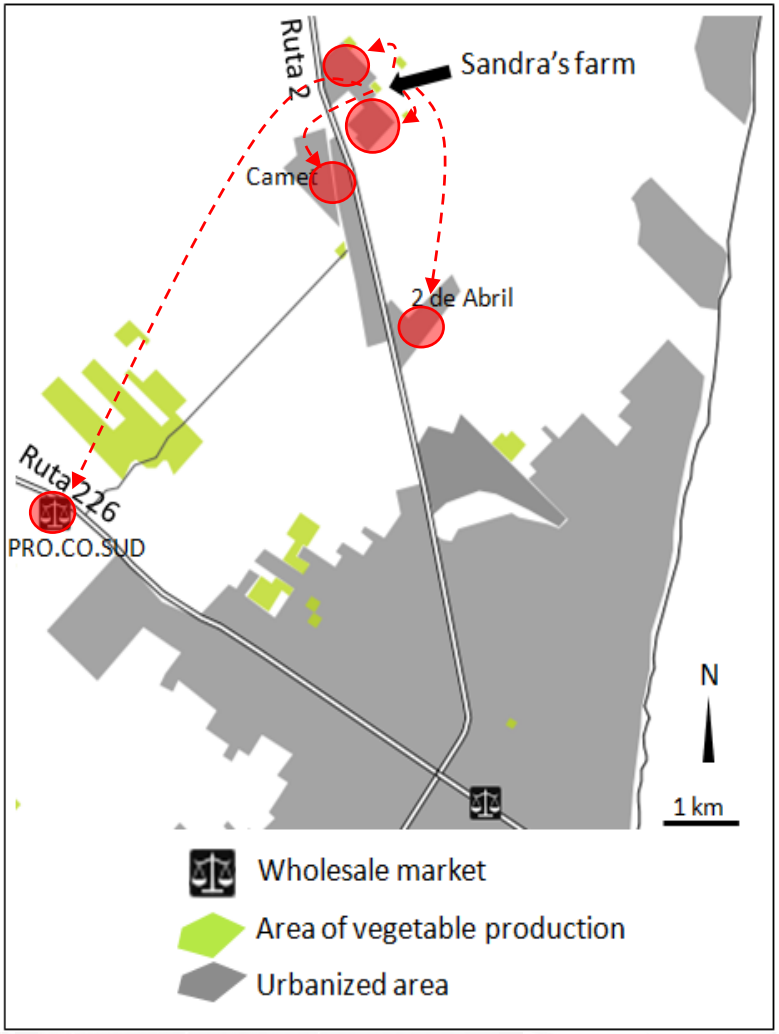


Intermediate/hybrid forms

Example 1

Many small-scale vegetable producers find difficult to get an interesting income through conventional channels

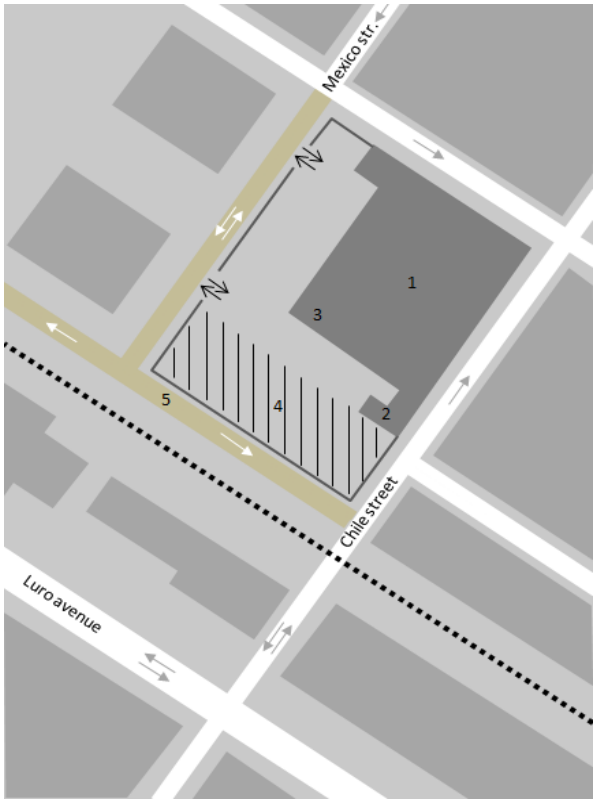
➔ Compromise between conventional and alternative channels
➔ Compromise for farming practices
➔ Compromise for prices






Intermediate/hybrid forms

Example 2



1. Stalls
2. Administration offices
3. Agronomy shop
4. Area owned by the railway company
5. Gravel road used for market's access

A wholesale market
with
complicated location…

Intermediate/hybrid forms

Example 2

… transformed in advantage

Most of producers/retailers operating through this wholesale market are in average of smaller-scale than the ones operating through the two other markets

➔ adaptation of the functionning to this type of actors

Reputation on good quality of vegetables: smaller-scale producers, face to face transaction, anchoring in local food suply

Allows small retailers to exist: impact on vegetable offer within the city

Conclusion

The changes engendered by the municipal order go beyond productive aspects ➔ Small-scale farmers in delicate situation

Municipal order adopted abruptly : break between producers and consumers
But can be a lever to build a concerted policy for urban and periurban planning

Public actors support strong and well identified models. Intermediary forms do not find visibility in that political landscape ➔ they bear more local community's expectations than a political vision

Intermadiary forms = compromises between social, economic and environmental aspects ➔ **the way to sustainable development?**