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Out of Latin America: Medicinal Herbs Production, Trade and Consumption in Chile and Mexico

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Abstract

Medical traditions from the New World have largely contributed to ameliorate European pharmacopoeia with native medicinal herbs, from the fifteenth century onwards. Medical knowledge evolution, based on chemicals, together with recent biology and genetic sciences discoveries, increasingly led by technological advances, tend to minimise that historical contribution. Still, new chronic diseases treatment and evolving healing conceptions are more likely to be less critical to the old ways, via alternative medicines, the same way patients seek for viable alter complements than pills to restore their well being. This search is particularly evident within Latin American populations currently under study by means of comparative ethno-geography and ethno-botany projects, aiming home gardens in Santiago, Chile and the Mexican capital city. Indian descendants are recognised for their faith on ancestral therapeutics, ranging from plant-therapy, animal secretions, and healing powers of medicine men and women. Culture, religion and old cosmological beliefs quest is thus quite imperative to fully explain local options in a global standardised world, where public health is organised and universal medical assistance sought. In order to further understand dynamics and conflicts in medicinal herb production, transportation and trade chains inside great metropolitan areas, the team has been sample researching central urban and gross peri-urban markets, whilst targeting vegetables with double purposes. That's the case with *Chenopodium ambrosioides* for instance, commonly named Paico in Chile and Epazote in Mexico. The herb has wide usage both as food and medicine, for its benefices as a digestive and proved anti-parasites effect. The work is part of a Portuguese Tropical Research Institute interdisciplinary search for ancestral healing and palliative traditions targeting Latin America, along with determined *in situ* preservation efforts backed by *ex situ* genetic reserves conservation, which includes live plant collections available for reintroduction into damaged habitats as well as future medical and pharmaceutical applications.

Keywords: Alternative healing practises, comparative studies, great metropolis, interdisciplinary tropical research, medicinal herbs, medicines dynamics and conflicts, plant conservation