



Tropentag, September 20-22, 2023, hybrid conference
“Competing pathways for equitable food systems transformation:
Trade-offs and synergies”

Understanding the relevance of traditional market networks for local economies and agrobiodiversity on the Peruvian Andes

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Abstract

In face of the urgent need for more sustainable food systems, enabling the provision of diverse foods supplied locally by family farmers is crucial. In this context, local markets are essential spaces for family farmers' economies and key access points for agrobiodiversity. The Peruvian Andes host an ancestral road and market network, the Qhapaq Ñan, that constitute an intra-ecological trade route, in which the exchange of family farmers' agrobiodiversity from diverse geographies occurs. This study proposes a methodological framework for investigating the relevance of traditional market networks funded upon mixed quantitative, qualitative, and cartographic methods. By applying an inductive multi-stepped research approach, we carry out a cross-case comparison of local and regional markets (n=35) located across 11 study regions of the Peruvian Andes. Our results present a market characterisation funded upon geographical-spatial data, estimation of produce shares, produce flows maps, an actor typology, and an agrobiodiversity assessment. Based on this, we identify which of these market types absorb greater levels of family farmers' agrobiodiversity, the socio-cultural functions of markets that support the social fabric, as well as the attributes of markets that go in line with the ecological rationality of family agriculture. Based on our results, we argue that the relevance of traditional market networks lies in their potential to dynamize local economies and enable the persistence of family farmers' agrobiodiversity, if strengthened. We emphasise the need for more proactive policies aimed at promoting localised food provisioning stemming from family agriculture and the strengthening of existing agroecological and traditional market networks.

Keywords: Local food systems, social learning, socio-ecological systems