

# Qualitatively assessing urban consumer food practices: The case of Cali, Colombia



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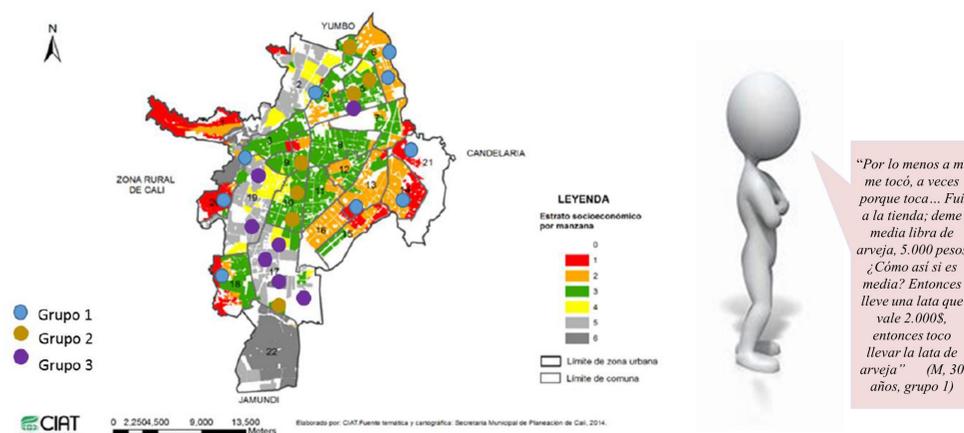
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## Introduction

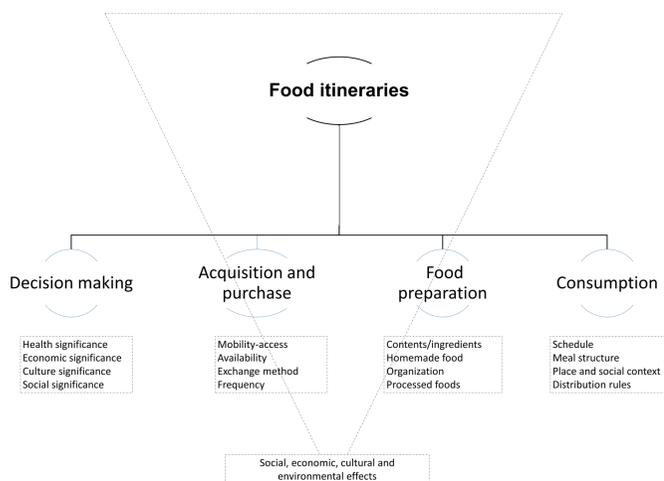
- The nutritional problems faced by the population of low-income countries, the effect of changes in the forms of food consumption, highlight the need to address these problems from different disciplines. The relationships between food availability and the health of individuals materialize in the food model that is structured on socio-economic and cultural bases.
- The understanding of food transitions must then take into account these variables and their influence on the nutritional status from the perspective of the sociology of food.
- In the case of Cali, the objective was to understand the drivers of permanence and changes in food consumption within households of different socioeconomic groups.

Map: Spatial distribution of persons interviewed, by different socio-economic strata



## Scope & methods

- With a comprehensive approach to depth, 45 semi-structured household interviews and food diaries were carried out in 3 socio-economic groups with men and women between 18 and 65 years old.
  - **Group 1** = socio-economic strata 1+2 (15 persons)
  - **Group 2** = socioeconomic strata 3 (15 persons)
  - **Group 3** = socioeconomic strata 4+5 (15 persons)
- The topics addressed were: food practices & food representations. Data analysis was carried out using the *Atlas.ti* tool.
- **Food practices:** Food facts are collected through the speeches of people (what people say they did) or direct observations.
- **Food representations:** The representations correspond to the symbolic sphere, the values, the norms and the perceptions that the actors have about an experience and within a specific context.



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## Results

**Why are urban consumers in Cali choosing ultra-processed foods compared to fresh fruits and vegetables (drivers)?**

- **Healthy:** There are evidences where there are differences in the content of food, where the priority is for children to consume better quality food. However, the preferences of children and young people are directed towards processed and ultra-processed foods and since their composition is sometimes unknown, they are perceived as healthier than natural or fresh foods.
- **Availability:** Food environments play a preponderant role in the explanation of differences in food consumption, the high availability of ultra-processed foods and environments promoting consumption have significant effects on the population's diet, mainly affecting children and young people, who are privileged in the choice of food @home.
- **Longing to consume "modern" foods:** Convenient and delicious

**How do these drivers of unhealthy diets vary among the three defined income groups?**

- **Low-income:** Cheaper - The problems of economic access are visible as the main barrier to achieve healthier food in homes. Unemployment and current labor informality are decisive in the choice of food.
- **Medium-income:** Ease of access and health. They have the possibility of accessing certain products economically and perceive the ultra-processed as healthy and delicious
- **High-income:** The consumption of unhealthy foods is related to the short time available for food preparation (convenience). Changes in the organization of the home, linking women to the labor market.

**Gender differences (women vs men) explaining difference of drivers?**

- Regarding **men and women**, there is a great difference in the perception of healthy foods, in the amount of food consumed and in the importance given to the food prepared in the home. For men, food is necessary to have "energy" to fulfill their daily activities, while women think more about the content of these foods. Women give a lot of importance to food prepared in the home, with natural ingredients, while men do not perceive it with such importance and through them they enter many unhealthy foods into the food basket because they look for delicious and practical products to consume.
- Unlike men, women consider food at home very important, indicating that participating in preparations or taking care of it has a meaning of protection and care for their family. Additionally, men attribute to women the responsibility of preserving and transmitting culinary recipes.

## Conclusions

- In Cali, the changes are related to the incursion of ultra-processed products into household food, both in ready products and in ingredients. In this analysis by socioeconomic group it is possible to show that although all are exposed to these products, the opportunities to obtain and consume natural foods are not the same, as is the power to generate strategies of resistance.
- Transcending the prevailing nutritional approaches and considering social and cultural aspects is necessary to understand the permanences and changes in household food. It is mandatory transdisciplinary work to advance in the analysis of the food system that exposes the multiplicity of factors that are related to current food problems.

## References

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